

# *The* Good News

May-June 2014

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

## If a Man Dies, Will He **LIVE AGAIN?**



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UNDERSTANDING YOUR FUTURE

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## A Race Well Run



Months ago when I planned this issue's cover theme of "If a Man Dies, Will He Live Again?" I had no idea it would hit home in such a personal way.

If you've been a *Good News* reader for long, you've no doubt read the work of John Ross Schroeder. John was a key figure with *The Good News* for almost 20 years and a respected writer and journalist long before that.

John died on March 8, 2014, in Oxford, England, four days after suffering cardiac arrest while returning home from a press event in London. John was 77 and still going strong.

Some of John's work for *The Good News* appeared under his byline, but much didn't. He wrote more than a thousand articles over the years, but also wrote the Questions and Answers section of the magazine, compiled our Letters From Our Readers, and wrote many of the items in the Current Events and Trends section. He also contributed greatly to a number of our study guides and



**"I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness . . ."**

*Bible Study Course* lessons. His writing has touched the lives of literally millions of people over the years.

John traveled widely over the years as an accredited journalist, especially in Europe. His knowledge of European and Middle East history added a great deal to his articles on history and Bible prophecy.

In his later years he also pastored congregations in Northern Ireland and East Sussex, and that experience added another dimension to his writing. He and his wife Jan were an effective team in our British Isles office near their home.

John was a humble servant who dedicated his life to sharing the gospel—the good news—of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God to all the world, and his work was known to readers in nearly every country of the world.

And further, John *lived* that hope every day. He regularly called or e-mailed me with ideas for articles to better engage readers and convict them of the need to seek God and dedicate their lives to their Creator. On those few occasions when he wasn't working at his desk, he took projects with him so he'd always have something to read or work on.

His dedication to God and His work reminded me of another wholehearted servant of God, the apostle Paul. Nearing the end of his life, Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:7-8: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his glorious return" (New Living Translation).

Our friend John likewise ran his race well. As with Paul, his crown awaits him on that great day of Christ's return when he will rise to live again forevermore!

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor

# The Good News

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# If a Man Dies, Will He **LIVE AGAIN?**



It's the great question: If you die, will you live again? You need to settle the question in your mind. And you can! Learn the good news from the Bible that answers this question!

*by Darris McNeely*

In more than 40 years as a minister I've stood at the graveside many times committing the dead to the earth. I've buried my mother and father. I've stood with parents and buried their infant children. I've carried friends and mentors to the darkness of the grave. And every time I have opened the Bible to explain what it all means to those saying farewell to their loved one.

Those words have given comfort and understanding to the mourners at the darkest, most painful moment of their lives. There is hope in the power of Scripture to lift an eye and heart as we read key verses that explain the hope laid out in the Bible.

These passages answer that crucial question: Is there life after death? Let me take you through these scriptures to show the power that comes from the Holy Bible, the Word of God.

### Job's question

I always start with the key question in the book of Job: "If a man dies, will he live again?" (Job 14:14). To me there's no better spot from which to begin answering a mourner's questions.

Here, where the man Job sits on a heap of mental and physical misery, comes the plaintive cry. His children are dead. His body is wracked with boils and sores. His wife is so distraught she tells him to "curse God and die" (Job 2:9). No help there!

Job's question and cry comes out of a direct appeal that God would hide him in the grave and shelter him from divine wrath, pleading, "Appoint me a set time, and remember me!" (Job 14:13).

Job then asks the great question in the next verse and immediately provides the answer: ". . . All the days of my appointed time will I wait, *till my change come*" (verse 14, King James Version, emphasis added throughout). And he further states, "*You shall call, and I will answer You; You shall desire the work of Your hands*" (verse 15).

This is an amazing passage! Job clearly knows something about the purposes of God. His words speak to the meaning of so many other scriptures. It is uncanny—so much so that the volumes of commentary on this unusual story and book fail to grasp its connection to other parts of the Bible that explain God's purpose for human life.

Job understands that a change lies in store for him. He knows that this series of unimaginable tragedies he's going through is under God's supervision. And he knows

that he is destined for the grave—that this is part of a life process that has a purpose and an end.

But beyond that lies a staggering truth—that he will wait in the grave until his *change comes*, when God will call and from the grave Job will answer that call!

The epitaph that the American author, inventor and statesman Benjamin Franklin wrote for himself echoes a similar sentiment:

**The Body of  
B. Franklin  
Printer;**

**Like the Cover of an old Book,  
Its Contents torn out,  
And stript of its Lettering and Gilding,  
Lies here, Food for Worms.  
But the Work shall not be wholly lost:  
For it will, as he believ'd, appear once more,  
In a new & more perfect Edition,  
Corrected and Amended  
By the Author.**

"A new and more perfect Edition" is how Franklin put it in describing how he believed his body would "appear once more" beyond the grave—a body new and perfected by its original author, God.

Yes, God does have a purpose for us. Our lives are not random. Those who have studied Scripture and looked honestly at the physical creation understand this truth.

### The scriptural key

Job's statement ties in with another key scripture in Genesis 1:26-27: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

I look at this passage as the key to the great question posed at the beginning of this article. *Man is created in the image of God*, not of one of the animals in creation. Adam's descendants—which include *you and me*—were created to complement the God family, with the potential to become part of that family!

This passage tells us that we were created "in the image of God"—a phrase that involves more than physical form and shape. It also speaks to *spiritual character* and *becoming like God* in thought and action. God has put us human beings in

"earthen vessels" (2 Corinthians 4:7)—temporary physical bodies—with the potential to be molded and shaped into a treasure like the glory of God.

That is why we were created, and that is our purpose in life!

### Jesus Christ's teaching about life after death

The question "If a man dies, will he live again?" leads naturally to statements Jesus Christ made in the Gospel of John. Christ was challenged over healing a man on the Sabbath and chose to answer by stating the Father's love for the Son and works done through the Son: "For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will," said Jesus (John 5:21).

Going on a few verses He said: "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live" (verse 25). What an astounding statement—"the hour is coming . . . when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live"! This sounds remarkably similar to what Job said some 2,000 years earlier.

And Jesus went on to say: "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment" (verses 28-29, English Standard Version).

When I read these words of comfort to a room full of mourners you can hear a pin drop. They resonate clearly and begin to give hope at the darkest moment: "The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live"!

They are among the most powerful words in Scripture. They're at the core of belief for one who follows Christ. If we believe Jesus was sent from the Father, bore witness of Him, died for mankind's sins and was resurrected as He foretold, *then we must believe there will be a day when the dead will live*.

### What did the apostle Paul teach?

Next I turn to one of the apostle Paul's earliest writings, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14. To a group of believers facing the untimely deaths of friends, Paul wrote these words: "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died



and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.”

Notice here that Paul describes death as being like a “sleep” from which the dead will awaken!

The key is in Paul’s statement, “*If we believe that Jesus died and rose again . . .*”

We must believe this and know beyond doubt that Jesus rose from the dead.

Paul goes on to describe a vivid picture of

Jesus Christ’s coming descent from heaven at the sound of a great trumpet, when “the dead in Christ will rise first” (verse 16).

Here is the resurrection at the sound of a great trumpet blast. The age-ending events are announced by many great signs, and the resurrection of the dead at Christ’s appearing is the centerpiece. What great comfort these words give (verses 17-18).

Those in Thessalonica who heard this

would have been deeply moved and encouraged at the powerful imagery of the resurrection. Every time I read this I am riveted by the meaning and God’s astounding promise! So are those who gather to mourn at a time of death. God in His love and tender mercy inspired Paul to write such heart-lifting words.

### “In a moment, in a twinkling of an eye”

As powerful as these words are, there is another passage I read to mourners. In a chapter that many call the Resurrection Chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, Paul explains how the Kingdom of God is inherited by those who are transformed by a resurrection: “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but *we shall all be changed*—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, *and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed*” (verses 51-52)

Here the words of Job are brought full circle. Job said he would wait till *his change* would come. Paul gives the answer for all who seek to know the answer to whether one would live again. The change for Christ’s true followers will come at the moment of the last trumpet sound, and *by an instantaneous change from flesh to spirit, and those among them who are already dead, “asleep,” will be raised and changed then too.*

These verses form a powerful message of hope for those who mourn the death of a loved one. I’ve witnessed the transformative power of these words countless times through the years. They are so complete, so stunning in their simplicity—yet so clear in their truth that they lift an audience, for one moment at least, beyond themselves into a glimpse of what God’s glory offers ultimately to all of mankind.

I’ve learned through so many of these moments in so many funeral homes and at so many gravesides across the midwestern and southern United States that it’s best to

## When “Goodbye” Comes Too Suddenly

Benjamin Franklin said that “in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.” For every person there is a point of first coming to life, and there is a certain point in which, barring Jesus Christ’s return in the near future, we will die.

When we’re young, we rarely think about dying. We imagine a long life in front of us with time for



### Take the opportunity now to tell the ones you care about that you love them.

our dreams, aspirations and desires. Death seems a long way off.

I myself never faced the death of a close loved one until I was an adult. So while growing up, death seemed like something that happened to old people who had lived long and well.

But now I’ve been to many funerals. And the recent death of someone I didn’t even know hit me hard. He died suddenly and unexpectedly. Why did this death impact me? Because *he was my*

*age.* I realized that it could have been me. It could have been my husband. I’m not ready to die now, just as you likely are not. Or what if it was my sister or my brother? I’m not ready for them to be gone either.

We all know that our physical lives will end, but we do not know when that end will come for us, or for any of our loved ones. It could happen in an instant through an accident or health crisis. It would in that case be too late to say “Goodbye” or “I love you.”

So, what should we do?

Take the opportunity *now* to tell the ones you care about that you love them. Call up a distant friend and say that you’re thinking of him or her. Write a card to a loved aunt and tell her that you miss her. Tell Mom and Dad before you go to bed that you love them and appreciate all that they do for you.

Do it *today.* Don’t wait until tomorrow or next week or next month. It may be too late. Life is short—“for man also does not know his time,” as Ecclesiastes 9:12 tells us. Redeem the time now and stay connected to those you love and care for.

There is coming a time when the scripture will be fulfilled, “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying” (Revelation 21:4).

We won’t have to worry about saying goodbye then. But until then, stay in contact with those you love. Tell them you love them. Spend time with them. Call them. Send them a note. You’ll be glad you did!

—Gayle Hoefker

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just read the words and let them do their healing work.

That is, I think, how God intended them to be given and understood. The power of the living Word of God, “sharper than any two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12), pierces through the heavy shroud of death that lies over the heart at the time of the passing of a loved one.

These words begin the process of healing the heart. There is opened the opportunity for one to look on Jesus Christ and believe that He burst the bonds of death and lives today at the right hand of God, holding the power of life in His hands. Jesus Christ has defeated death and waits for the time when death itself will be cast from man’s presence (Revelation 20:14).

There is a living hope of life after death, through a resurrection at the appearing of Jesus Christ—the glorious second coming. This truth is found in the Bible in countless passages.

Those I’ve quoted in this article form the basis of my few remarks I am called upon to make during a funeral service. It’s always a high privilege to speak these holy, inspired words. Years of experience prove to me their power to give comfort and begin the healing of sorrow and pain. This of itself provides me with further proof that what they promise is certain.

But what proof do *you* need? Read these words in your Bible. Study them on your knees and ask God for understanding on this most basic of subjects. Then do one more thing. Go deeper into the Bible in this matter with our free study aid *What Happens After Death?* (see below).

Find the proof and come to know the truth on this question. There is hope! You can know the answer to the question Job asked—“If a man dies, will he live again?” **GN**

## Learn More

To learn more about this crucial subject, be sure to download or request *What Happens After Death?* You can write for a free printed copy at the address nearest you as listed on our inside cover of this magazine, or go online to request or download a copy. If you have a Kindle or iPad you can download and read it on your device as well. Everything we offer is free to interested readers.



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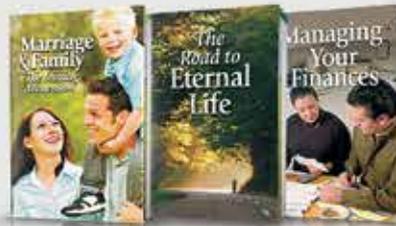
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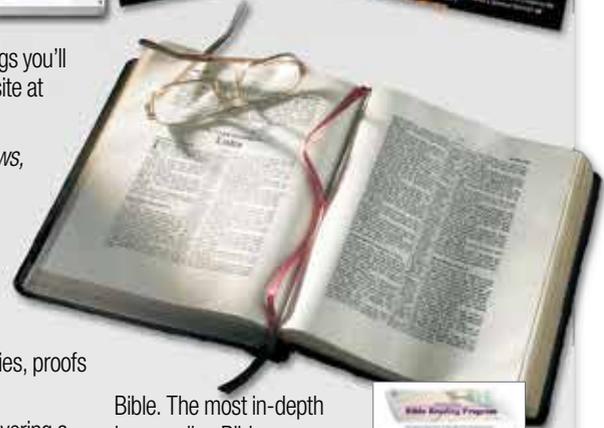


French and Dutch, to name a few (and feel free to share them with a friend overseas).

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# Will I Go to Heaven When I Die?

The idea of going consciously to heaven at death seems comforting. But does that make it true? The Bible's answer may astonish you!

by Steve Myers

**F**unerals are sad experiences. It's heart-breaking to pay your final respects to someone you knew and loved.

Perhaps you've had to say farewell to a mother or father, laid to rest a brother, sister or perhaps say goodbye to a spouse or best friend. Have you wondered: *What's happened to them? Where have they gone? Why do I doubt?*

You may feel unexpected emotions such as shock and disbelief—making it difficult to accept what's happened.

You desperately want to know the truth. Supposing the person is safe and looking down from heaven is just not enough. You're skeptical, not completely satisfied with mere speculation. And you think: *What about me? What will happen to me when I die?*

You need to know what God has said. Is there a sure word from Him that will help you?

## Going to heaven at death—truth or empty hope?

Sometimes you have a need to believe, especially at those times in life that force you to think about your mortality. We all know that in the end no one beats death. But it's one thing to know it in the back of your mind, and something else to come face to face with it.

When you're looking in the face of death, the idea of heaven can seem comforting. It can seem beautiful—but does that make it true? Is it just wishful thinking, or can you know the facts? Is it just a matter of faith?

Now here's what may be surprising: What the Bible says about death and heaven is probably quite different from what you may think you know or what you believe.

So how can you be sure of what you believe? The majority of Americans and Britons still believe in life after death.

According to a Gallup poll, 81 percent of Americans and 55 percent of Britons say they believe in going to heaven.

We want to believe that our loved ones who have died are okay and that we'll be okay. So surveys show that most people are confident, or at least they have a feeling, that life doesn't end at the grave.

## Only Jesus has gone to heaven

How would you answer this question: Where do your ideas about heaven come from? Most Christians would say they come from the Bible. Yet some have an image of floating on clouds. Some believe they'll be given wings like angels. Others believe that they'll gaze into the face of God for eternity.

Yet did you know that none of these are what the Bible actually says is in store for us? None of these are ideas that God has given us in the pages of His Word. It's time to examine your concept of death and your belief in going to heaven!

Don't just believe what someone else has said, or what a Sunday school teacher may have taught you, or what a church or religion says, or what this article says. Why not? If it's not based on the truth, what good is it? So don't believe any person's opinion—believe your Bible! You must believe *what God says in the pages of His Word*. That's the challenge today. Are you willing to look at what Scripture actually teaches? That's where our understanding of life and death must come from—the Word of God!

Notice what is stated in John 3:13 (emphasis added throughout): *"No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven"*—and that one Being is Jesus Christ, who has returned to heaven!

Now that may be startling to you—but the Bible here is clear and plain. How does what it teaches here compare with what

you've thought was true? If you look in the New International Version, it renders the statement as, *"No one has ever gone into heaven."* The Message says, *"No one has ever gone up into the presence of God."* God's Word Translation says, *"No one has gone to heaven."* The only exception is Jesus Christ Himself!

Jesus' disciple Peter echoed this sentiment in Acts 2: "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day . . . *For David did not ascend into the heavens*" (verses 29, 34).

So Jesus' disciples did not teach that life beyond the grave meant going to live forever in heaven. Jesus Himself never promised that Christians would go consciously to heaven at death!

Hebrews 11, speaking of great men and women of faith of past ages, tells us that they are still awaiting their future reward of being made perfect in God's Kingdom: *"And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise . . . that they should not be made perfect apart from us"* (verses 39-40).

## Death compared to sleep—that is, temporary

So why haven't they yet received the promise of eternal life? And if they aren't in heaven, where are they?

When Jesus' friend Lazarus died, Christ's reaction was very telling. Jesus Himself said, *"Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up."* Then His disciples said, 'Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.' However, *Jesus spoke of his death*, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, *"Lazarus is dead"* (John 11:11-14).

That tells us something important. How does Jesus Himself describe death? He doesn't say that people who died immediately went to heaven or hell at death. He simply compares it to *sleep*.

So let's think of that comparison for a moment. When someone is in a deep sleep,

they have no awareness of the passing of time or any knowledge of events that are occurring while they're asleep. It's like they're unconscious. They're oblivious to circumstances. So throughout the Bible, we see that it describes the dead as figuratively in a state of sleep. They're unaware. They're waiting in the grave.

King Solomon confirmed the fact that death is like a deep, unconscious sleep: "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 where you are going*" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Just before that he wrote, "For the living know that they will die; *but the dead know nothing*" (verse 5).

So it becomes clear that the Bible consistently teaches that good people don't go to heaven or anything like heaven at death—instead they sleep in the grave. *All of the dead—the good and the not-so-good alike—wait in the grave.*

you see? You'd see a world of pain. You'd see a world of war and grief. Imagine watching your loved ones—seeing their shortcomings, seeing their blunders, watching them go through terrible trials, seeing their sinful acts—witnessing a world of evil! Would that be paradise? *No.* That



## How does Jesus Himself describe death? He doesn't say people who died immediately went to heaven or hell at death. He simply compares it to *sleep*.

Now that's quite a change in perspective! We don't have to be overwhelmed and consumed by grief because we're told that even in death there is hope. As the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, "I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, *concerning those who have fallen asleep*, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope." So instead of the chilling thought of our loved ones having ceased to be, we're told that we can be comforted. We can be encouraged by thinking of them as being asleep in Christ!

### A greater promise than heaven as commonly imagined

Think of the common concept of heaven. Supposedly heaven is where you, your best friends and your relatives go after you die. Many believe that their departed family members are looking down on them from paradise.

But if so, have you ever wondered what that paradise would really be like? Would it really be a place of perfect happiness? Would it really be a place of ideal joy and bliss? Imagine if it were true: How could it really be heavenly?

Imagine if you were in heaven, looking down and seeing this world. What would

would be torture and misery. Rather than some dreamy paradise, it would be your worst nightmare!

The Bible reveals a much greater truth and fate for those who die. Let's see again what Jesus Himself taught.

Since the dead are waiting in the grave as if asleep, what are they waiting for? When and how will they be awakened from that sleep?

The answer to that question is one of the great revelations of Scripture. God's promise of the resurrection of the dead truly brings us hope. It is not just a resurrection to life, but to a life of meaning and purpose with Jesus Christ here on earth, ruling for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4). This all begins with the return of Christ, at which point His faithful followers are resurrected (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

The Old Testament patriarch Job understood the gravity and full meaning of this future resurrection. Notice what he said in Job 14:14: "If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, *till my change come*" (King James Version). Job understood that he would one day be resurrected.

Even more importantly, he understood that a *change* would occur. This same

change is described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 as a change from mortality to immortality—from physical, mortal flesh to immortal, glorified spirit. That is what the coming resurrection of the dead in Christ is all about—not an aimless eternity in heaven, but a real change to becoming like Jesus Christ (1 John 3:2).

### Change your life now to be part of the change at the resurrection

This is the wonderful truth of God's plan for His people. It's God's purpose for your life. The Bible speaks clearly of a resurrection and a change from physical life to spiritual life. Understanding how one can have a part in that resurrection is so very important to having an understanding of what our life today is about and certainly a genuine hope for the future.

It tells us *how we need to live right now*. Our understanding of and belief in God's plan should make a difference in who we are and how we live our lives. Jesus clearly showed us what our priorities in life should be: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

When you look to the truth of the Word of God instead of human tradition, *you can have hope*. You see that death, like sleep, is *not permanent*. You see that there will be an awakening and a change to an incorruptible life with Jesus Christ as your King!

This beautiful picture of the future is not a figment of your imagination. It comes directly from the Bible—the Word of God.

When you look to the one true source, the source of all things, you find incredibly good news. The time will come when the dead in Christ will be resurrected from sleep to immortal life at Jesus Christ's return to earth.

So be faithful. Look forward to His return! **GN**

### Learn More

In this brief article we've only scratched the surface of what God's Word says about where we go when we die. You really need to know the answers! We've provided a detailed look at what Scripture says in our free study guide *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* Download or request your free copy today!



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# Is Hell Real?

For Christians who believe in a God of love, the concept of an ongoing hell can be disturbing and difficult to understand. What the Bible truly teaches about hell may surprise you! *by Beyond Today host Steve Myers*

**A**re you afraid that a friend or someone you know is in hell, burning now and forever in fiery torment? On the other hand, you might not be too worried about the thought of your enemies burning in hell.

Perhaps you don't buy into the concept of going to hell at all. Some think it's mere superstition. After all, if God is a Being of great love, why would He condemn people to suffer horrendous agony in hell forever?

Even for a great many who consider themselves Christians, hell can be disturbing and difficult to understand. What the Bible teaches—the truth—is much simpler.

## Many believe in a perpetual fiery hell

Millions of people believe their enemies and even some of their loved ones are burning in the fires of hell right now. A recent survey found that the majority of Americans believe in a fiery hell. The belief is not just one held by Americans. In Britain and Australia, more than three out of 10 surveyed professed a belief in hell. About the same number in Canada accept hell as real.

Many believe that hell is a real place where bad people who have led sinful lives receive eternal punishing. But many struggle to understand how a loving Creator God would condemn His creation to eternal torment. How could that be love?

What are the facts from the Bible about hell? Does God's Word describe it as a real place, or something symbolic? Is it just plain fiction, or is hell something else altogether?

Did you know that early Christians did not believe in the idea of an ever-burning hell? It wasn't a teaching of Jesus or the Bible! We'll explore exactly what Jesus did teach the early Church about hell and judgment. First, let's investigate where the idea of fiery, eternal torment in execution of

judgment of sinful life *actually* came from.

## Dante's *Inferno*

In the early 1300s, the noted Italian poet Dante Alighieri penned an imaginary description of hell in his work *The Divine Comedy*. The beginning section of that epic poem is known as the *Inferno*—the Italian word for hell.

This one story is probably most responsible for the commonly held notions of hell today. How could this one story about hell form and shape what millions believe?

In his poem, Dante imagines that the



Dante and Virgil view the torments of hell as imagined in Dante's work *The Divine Comedy*.

ancient Roman poet Virgil takes him on a guided tour through hell.

At the entrance gates to Dante's hell is an ominous inscription that ends, "Abandon all hope, you who enter here" (*Inferno, A New Verse Translation*, Dante Alighieri, ed. Elio Zappulla, Canto III, p. 39).

Virgil tells Dante about the journey through hell: "I'll be your guide, and you

will follow me, and I will lead you through a world of pain where dead souls writhe in endless agony and clamor, as they cry, to die again" (Canto I, p. 24).

Dante is led through nine circles of hell—various compartments and levels of torturous afterlife. He writes about what he envisions: "So in the ditch, far down below the arch on which we stood, there bubbled viscous pitch . . . I only saw the bubbles rise and burst, the huge mass heave, contract, heave, and contract repeatedly" (Canto XXI, pp. 189–190). He looks to see someone condemned to this level: "The sinner plunged into the pitch [and] they pricked the sinner with a hundred prongs" (Canto XXI, pp. 190–191).

Dante sees souls locked in searing fiery tombs, people boiling in blood and rained on by fire. Malicious demons jab, poke, whip and beat those who are lost. These sinners are buried head first, but suffer even more misery as scorching flames burn their feet.

Nevertheless, this isn't the fate of all. Others are frozen in a lake up to their heads to suffer the agony of stinging, bitter cold—only able to move their chattering teeth.

Dante created stunning, unforgettable visual images that became etched into people's minds. He played on our worst fears. The gripping scenes he imagined captured the attention and horror of the world—we see this expounded in movies and other popular culture centuries later.

So effective was this one story about hell in its horrid depiction of Dante's ideas of punishment for the sinner that this poem, rather than the Bible, molded and shaped the thinking of the world. Don't forget, it was a time very different from today. There were no Bible bookstores, and there certainly wasn't a Bible in every home (the movable-type printing press wouldn't be invented for almost another century and a half).

No wonder people believed it to be true. Even though Dante's work barely has any reference to actual Bible passages, it became the benchmark of what people would believe about the afterlife. *The*



*Catholic Encyclopedia* even calls it “the Sacred Poem.” Dante’s *Inferno* seemingly became the standard of what hell is like and who would go there.

### But the story is fiction!

It’s important to remember, though, that the *Inferno* is *fiction*—fantasy and imagination! It’s a made-up story—it’s pretend, with no factual evidence! This poem is not literal. It’s not even *close* to a factual interpretation of the Bible’s teachings regarding hell! What it describes is not at all what Jesus taught about the fate of sinners!

Dante wrote *The Divine Comedy* as an allegory, an imaginary poem. It reflects the politics and history of the Italy of his day.

However, that didn’t change the incredible impact it had on people’s ideas of what hell must be like. It stirred up and reinforced the belief that there must be blistering punishment for the incorrigibly wicked in an ever-burning hell.

Sadly, many have come to believe Dante’s

descriptions are more or less accurate. Yet they are not!

This may be shocking but, according to the Bible, there is no hell as commonly conceived. The kind of hell most people believe in is not real, nor is it referenced in the Bible. I hope you will not misunderstand: The Bible *does* teach that there will come a judgment for every human being, but it does not teach that any judgment will end in eternal fiery torment.

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,” the apostle Paul wrote, “that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

So what exactly is the ultimate punishment for unrepentant sinners?

Many ideas are floating around out there. The Barna Research Group reported: “While there is no dominant view of Hell, two particular perspectives are popular [in the U.S.]. Four out of ten adults believe that Hell is ‘a state of eternal separation from

God’s presence’ (39%) and one third (32%) says it is ‘an actual place of torment and suffering where people’s souls go after death.’ A third perspective that one in eight adults believe is that ‘Hell is just a symbol of an unknown bad outcome after death’ (13%)” (Barna.org, Oct. 21, 2003).

These are just a few of the many ideas about hell. Does the Bible teach that any of these ideas are accurate? *No*.

### What the Bible actually teaches about hell

Notice this short but powerful scripture: “For the wages of sin is *death*, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23, emphasis added throughout).

Did you notice the contrast described in this verse? What do sinners earn? They earn *death*, not eternal life in hell. On the other hand, God’s gift is eternal life through our Savior Christ Jesus. So God’s plain teaching is “the wages of sin is *death*,” not “eternal life in torment.” Simple but true—yet so many are confused over this truth!

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Notice how clearly Scripture describes this. God says: “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*” (Ezekiel 18:4). A few verses later, God repeats this, giving it emphasis: “The soul who sins *shall die*” (verse 20).

This is significant! It’s a major difference between what God says and what so many people believe. God tells us that *souls can die*. The Bible plainly says that you don’t automatically go on living forever as an immortal soul either in heaven or in hell!

Jesus himself taught, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

There is something significant in this famous verse that you may have missed. Jesus tells us that without His sacrifice, *we die—we perish*—we do not live forever in separation. To “perish” does not just mean to stop living, but to *be destroyed*, or “to come to nothing”—to cease to exist. In no way does it mean to have eternal life in torment.

You may not have realized that this is what Jesus taught. So take this challenge: Are you willing to be honest with yourself and look at the facts of the Bible and consider that your current understanding is in error?

### Hellfire ends existence of the unrepentant

Here’s another passage God inspired that you should review. It gives insight into the truth about hell:

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming *shall burn them up*,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘that will leave them neither root nor branch . . . You shall trample the wicked, *for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this*,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Malachi 4:1, 3).

Will there be punishment for the wicked? *Yes*. Is it an ever-burning hellfire? *No*. As their punishment, evildoers will quickly burn, not in eternal torture but in a merciful, quick penalty. Unrepentant sinful people will not be tormented forever. Instead, they will be *totally burned up*—destroyed and reduced to ashes.

That may sound surprising to you. But that’s what the Bible teaches! Those who willingly and willfully reject God’s way of life will simply cease to exist; they will not suffer forever.

Yes, the Bible does say that those who choose not to repent of their evil attitude and sin will be punished by fire—but not the

mythical hell of human imagination. The Bible shows that God is a God of mercy and love. The wicked will be consumed by fire once, quickly, and then forgotten. *They will not be tortured for all eternity*. They will receive their eternal punishment (they will cease to exist), but not eternal punishing. Again, their death, their eternal punishment, will last forever, but not the punishing.

So God is indeed the God of great mercy, wisdom and righteous judgment. You don’t have to be bogged down with fabricated traditions. Instead, you can take comfort and be encouraged by what Jesus really taught in the pages of your Bible.

There is much more to consider on the subject of hell. The following section examines some specific questions to help you understand more deeply.

### Understanding what Jesus teaches about hell

Someone might say to you: Wait a second, didn’t Jesus teach about hell? What about Matthew 10:28? It says: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

What is the hell to which Jesus referred? Jesus said people would not suffer everlasting torment. In our English language Bibles, *hell* in this case is translated from the Greek word *gehenna*, which refers to a valley just outside Jerusalem. *Gehenna* is derived from the Hebrew term *Gai Hinnom*, which means the Valley of Hinnom (Joshua 18:16).

This was what we today would refer to as the city dump—where garbage, trash and refuse were thrown and consumed in the fires that constantly burned there. The carcasses of dead animals—and the bodies of dead, despicable criminals—were also cast into *gehenna* for disposal. Jesus used this location and what took place there to help us understand the fate the unrepentant will suffer in the future—which, as we saw above, is to be *burned up* by fire.

God will destroy the wicked, but without proper historical understanding, many people draw incorrect conclusions and have misconceptions about this verse. If you lived in Jerusalem at the time of Christ, what would come to your mind when Jesus mentioned *gehenna*? You would naturally think of the “city dump” where trash and dead bodies were burned up.

Jesus uses *gehenna* to describe what the Bible elsewhere calls the lake of fire. God can destroy—annihilate—both the body and soul (physical conscious being rather than immortal soul) in this *gehenna*. When

God destroys an incorrigible person in this *gehenna*, the resulting death is eternal.

And when are the wicked punished? *When* does this punishment take place? Does it happen immediately at death? *Gehenna* is the word Christ used to refer to what Revelation 20:10 and verses 14-15 call “the lake of fire.” It brings “the second death”—permanent, eternal death. This is a reference to the final fate of the wicked. “The second death” means one receives the eternal death penalty, with no possibility of resurrection to eternal life! Those who have sealed their minds never to repent or surrender to Jesus Christ will be totally burned up—*destroyed*.

Revelation 21:8 says, “But the cowardly . . . and all liars shall have their part in the *lake which burns with fire and brimstone*, which is *the second death*.” Ezekiel 18:4 says, “The soul who sins shall die”—again, the soul is not immortal.

So yes, there is coming a time when Jesus will make those who ultimately refuse to repent take personal responsibility for their actions, meaning for them the lake of fire or second death. But it will not be an eternity in agony!

### Hope and mercy

There is hope: “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

There is no contradiction with God; He truly is a God of mercy and love. Those who willfully reject His way of life will be cast into a hellfire to be burned up. They will not suffer forever in hell or somehow be tortured for all eternity.

We can all be thankful for God’s justice, His fairness and His plan of salvation through Christ! **GN**

### Learn More

It’s impossible to cover all the details of this biblical truth in one short article. For this reason we’ve prepared a much more detailed study guide that goes into many more scriptures to help you get the whole picture. Download or request your free copy of *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* today!



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# A Trip to Hell and Back

Do you know the truth about “hell” as described in the Bible? Come along on a journey with someone who’s been there and returned!

by Scott Ashley

**Y**ou’ve probably heard the expression “a cold day in hell.” In my case it was true. It was literally a cold day when I visited hell—a cloudy, occasionally drizzly day for which I found myself not dressed warmly enough.

Traveling light, I had brought only lightweight summer clothes because the weather around Jerusalem had been warm. So putting on an extra shirt and buying a cheap umbrella from a marketplace vendor, I set off to explore hell.

## A firsthand look at biblical sites

For years—ever since I’d learned of hell’s exact location and how to get there—I’d wanted to visit the spot. Traveling with me was fellow *Good News* writer and *Beyond Today* TV host Darris McNeely. Together we were determined to visit hell, regardless of the chilly November weather.

For several days we had been immersing ourselves in biblical history and culture as we visited a number of places associated with Jesus Christ’s ministry and the early Church. With our trip drawing to a close, we wanted to see as much as we could of the archaeological remains of Jerusalem dating back 2,000 years to the time of Jesus and the setting of the Gospels.

Starting the morning at the southern end of the Temple Mount—the gigantic platform built by Herod the Great where once stood the magnificent temple that Jesus and His followers visited—we walked up the broad, majestic staircase that thousands of worshippers ascended to enter the temple area in Christ’s day. (Darris had actually helped to uncover the steps here at an archaeological excavation many years earlier.)

We explored the remains of some of the numerous pools where 3,000 believers were baptized on the Pentecost Holy Day (seven weeks after Jesus Christ’s resurrection) as described in Acts 2. We marveled at the

evidence of the Roman destruction of the temple in A.D. 70—the massive limestone blocks that Roman soldiers had dislodged and pushed from the top of the temple platform onto the city streets some 70-80 feet below.

But knowing our time was limited, we left the temple area and started the long walk down the Kidron Valley toward the southern end of the city of Jerusalem. We wanted to learn more about another location Jesus had mentioned repeatedly in the Gospels and to see it firsthand. So, walking a dusty and potholed road that followed a centuries-old path, we steadily descended toward our destination—hell.

## Ancient notions of visiting hell

The idea of people actually visiting hell—and returning—has been a subject of fascination for ages. In ancient biblical times, the inhabitants of the land of Canaan thought that caves and springs were entrances to the underground habitation of gods and goddesses who lurked there during the cold winter months before reemerging in springtime.

Across the Mediterranean Sea, the ancient Greeks, and later the Romans, developed elaborate ideas about this unseen underworld. In *The Odyssey*, the epic work by the Greek poet Homer, his hero Odysseus visits “the abode of departed spirits,” a gloomy world of murky darkness where he meets, among others, the disembodied spirits of his dead mother and the heroes Agamemnon, Achilles and Ajax.

Achilles, who in the story rules in this realm of the dead, recognizes Odysseus and laments that he would rather have stayed on earth as the most impoverished slave than rule over all the spirits in this dreary and depressing underworld. Homer referred to this place as the “house of Hades.”

Later writers expanded on these ideas with their own versions, creating an elabo-

rate mythology about unseen worlds where departed spirits go after death.

## Plato's idea of a place of eternal punishing

The famous Greek philosopher Plato popularized several concepts that would greatly impact later ideas about hell. Most notable were the ideas of the immortality of the soul and that at death the soul would go to hell as a place of eternal punishment or to heaven as an eternal reward.

In his well-known work *The Republic* (written about 400 B.C.), Plato describes an individual who sees what happens to people in the afterlife: “There were two chasms in the earth [and] two other chasms in the heaven above. In the intermediate space there were judges seated, who bade the just, after they had judged them, ascend by the heavenly way on the right hand [to heaven] . . . And in like manner the unjust were commanded by them to descend [to hell] by the lower way on the left hand.”

Plato goes on to explain that those sent to the underworld for punishment are to suffer tenfold for each wrong they have done in this life, while those rewarded with a heavenly afterlife similarly receive “the rewards of beneficence and justice and holiness . . . in the same proportion” (quoted in *The Masterpieces and the History of Literature*, Julian Hawthorne, editor, 1906, Vol. 5, pp. 76-77).

Surprisingly, these ideas about hell, heaven and the immortal soul *originated not in the Bible*, but with ancient pagan Greek writers! Centuries later, early Catholic thinkers such as Justin Martyr, Tertullian and Augustine—who were enamored with Greek philosophy—incorporated these and other pagan ideas into Catholic theology.

## An imaginary trip to hell

Probably the most impactful and far-reaching “journey” to hell took place in the imagination of the medieval Italian poet



Dante Alighieri (ca. A.D. 1265-1321) in his three-part work *Divine Comedy* (“comedy” in this context meaning a story with a happy ending). In this fanciful work Dante journeys through hell, purgatory and heaven, guided by the long-dead Roman poet Virgil. The part about hell is titled *The Inferno*—the Italian word for *hell*.

The descent of Dante and Virgil into hell in



Many of our ideas of hell come from the imagination of the medieval Italian poet Dante Alighieri.

the *Inferno* begins outside Jerusalem, where an inscription over the entrance ends with the words “Abandon all hope, you who enter here.” The two then descend through the various levels or circles of hell where sinners are punished in a manner befitting their sins.

Gluttons, for example, must live in stinking slime under a continuous icy rain. Heretics are eternally tortured in burning tombs. The violent are consigned to a river of boiling blood and fire, shot at with arrows because of the violence they showed in life.

Others are whipped by demons, submerged in boiling tar, buried head first with flames licking at their feet, and dismembered by a sword-wielding demon only to be healed so they can be hacked apart again. Satan is confined at the very lowest depth of Dante’s imaginary hell.

Yet Dante never intended his work to be taken literally. The story even has him encountering a number of contemporary political and religious figures in hell (he placed the then-current pope and two recent predecessors there). However, his descriptions of hell did reflect Catholic theology of the time, and became a kind of template for how many people would view hell from that point forward.

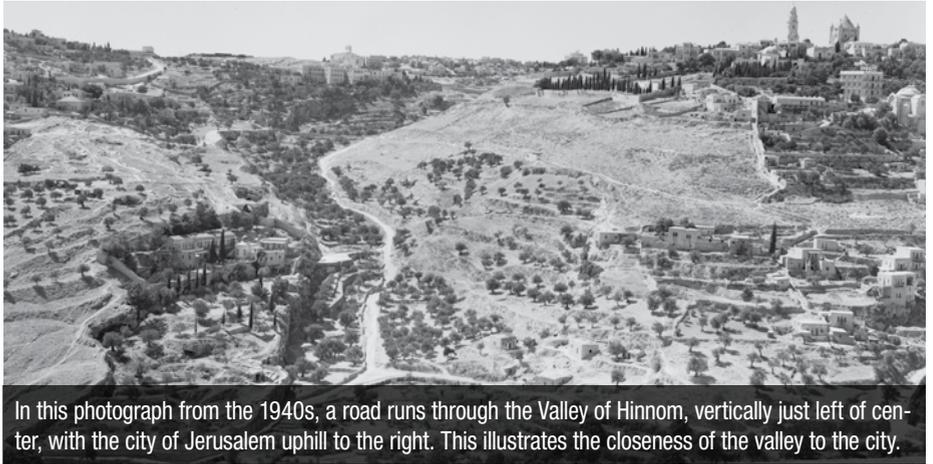
The idea of hell as a place where Satan and his demons torment the damned for all eternity became a central tenet of Catholic

belief, and from there it passed on into the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches and still later into Protestantism. Even Muhammad, founder of Islam, adopted these basic ideas about hell as a place of eternal torture in his new religion. Other faiths, too, have some variation of hell among their teachings.

But as we have seen, many of the common concepts about hell came from sources out-

side the Bible. What does the Bible itself say? (Lawrence Richards, 1985, p. 336).

Hebrew word translated “hell” throughout the Old Testament. It refers to “the state and abode of the dead; hence the grave in which the body rests” (William Wilson, *Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies*, “Hell,” p. 215). The *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* explains, “Thus there are no references to eternal destiny but simply to the grave as the resting place of the bodies of all people”



In this photograph from the 1940s, a road runs through the Valley of Hinnom, vertically just left of center, with the city of Jerusalem uphill to the right. This illustrates the closeness of the valley to the city.

side the Bible. What does the Bible itself say?

### Three different “hells” in Scripture!

To understand the truth about hell—and what prompted my journey that cold day in Jerusalem—we need to peel away the layers of myth and manmade ideas and understand what the Bible writers meant by “hell” in their original context. After all, if we don’t understand what the words meant to the original writers, how can we hope to understand what they should mean for us today?

With just a few minutes of research you can learn that four different words are translated “hell” in the widely used King James Version of the Bible. Surprisingly, three of the four have nothing to do with the common idea of hell! For this reason, many later Bible versions translate these words differently—and more accurately—or simply leave them untranslated altogether.

Why do they do this? The translators recognize that many readers will see the word “hell” and automatically assume the common idea of an ever-burning place of eternal torment, when they know this was never the intent or meaning of the original words!

So what are the words translated “hell,” and what do they really mean?

#### The first “hell”—Hebrew *sheol* and Greek *hades*

What we commonly call the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew (with a small amount of Aramaic). *Sheol* is the

(Lawrence Richards, 1985, p. 336).

Many modern Bible versions, reflecting the true meaning of *sheol*, now translate this word as “the grave” or simply leave it untranslated. Such righteous, godly men of faith as Jacob (Genesis 37:35), Job (Job 14:13), David (Psalm 88:3) and Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:10) knew that they were going to *sheol* at death. These men of God wouldn’t have been going to an ever-burning place of torment. Clearly *sheol* means the grave, not a place of everlasting torment for the wicked!

The equivalent of *sheol* in the Greek language of the New Testament is *hades*, which also refers to the grave. Despite the appearance of the word *hades* in Greek mythology to refer to an underworld realm of shadowy consciousness after death, this is not the biblical sense of the word.

In the four New Testament verses that quote Old Testament passages containing the Hebrew word *sheol*, *hades* is used for *sheol* (Matthew 11:23; Luke 10:15; Acts 2:27, 31). As with *sheol*, *hades* is translated “the grave” or “death” or simply left untranslated in newer Bible versions. It in no way means or refers to a place of fiery torment.

#### The second “hell”—Greek *tartaroo*

A second Greek word, *tartaroo*, a form of *tartaros*, is also translated “hell” in the New Testament. It is used only once in the Bible, in 2 Peter 2:4, where Peter refers to the present restraint or imprisonment of “the angels who sinned”—fallen angels, or demons.

The *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* explains in its entry on “Heaven and Hell” that *tartaroo* means “to confine in Tartaros” and that “Tartaros was the Greek name for the mythological abyss in which rebellious gods were confined.” Peter used this metaphoric term in the Greek language of the day to show that the sinning angels were “delivered . . . into chains of



Ancient tombs dot the hillsides of Jerusalem's Valley of Hinnom—the literal *gehenna*.

darkness, to be reserved for judgment.”

Peter's point is that these fallen angels are now restrained on earth by God while awaiting their ultimate judgment for their rebellion against their Creator and destructive influence on humanity. Note also that *tartaroo* applies only to demons. Nowhere does it refer to a fiery hell in which people are punished after death.

As with *sheol* and *hades*, some more recent Bible versions leave it untranslated rather than misleadingly render it as “hell.”

### The third “hell”—Greek *gehenna*

We've seen that the first “hell” mentioned in the Bible is simply the grave, referred to by the Hebrew word *sheol* and the Greek word *hades*. And the second “hell,” referred to only once in Scripture, is *tartaroo* or *tartaros*, referring to the restraint of the fallen angels or demons on the earth. The third “hell” of the Bible, then, must surely be the hell in which the wicked will face eternal torment!

Or maybe not.

Remember my journey to hell? This last of the three biblical “hells” was my destination—so I could tell you about it firsthand.

The last of the words translated “hell” in the Bible is the Greek word *gehenna*. As a number of Bible reference works explain, *gehenna* comes from the Hebrew *Gai-*

*Hinnom*, meaning “Valley of Hinnom.”

This deep valley lies immediately to the south of the ridge on which Jerusalem was constructed, then curves to the city's southwest and west. It's mentioned as the border between the ancient tribes of Judah and Benjamin in Joshua 15:8 and 18:16.

But how did this valley come to be connected with the idea of a fiery hell?

### A personal exploration of hell

Today *gehenna*—the ancient Valley of Hinnom—is a park-like setting on the outskirts of Jerusalem, an area of relative peace outside the hustle and bustle of the city. The day we visited, we had the valley mostly to ourselves, except for several Arab women and their children harvesting olives from the olive trees dotting the valley floor.

Scrambling up the steep slopes, we explored a few of the ancient tomb entrances that dotted the hillside to the south.

The Bible records that terrible things had happened in this valley. As *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* states: “The valley was the scene of the idolatrous worship of the Canaanite gods Molech and Baal. This worship consisted of sacrificing children by passing them through a fire . . . and into the hands of the gods (Jer[emiah] 7:31; 19:4-5; 32:35). These practices were observed during [the period of the kings of Israel and Judah] under the reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh who themselves sacrificed their own children (2 K[in]gs 16:3; 21:6; 2 Chr[onicles] 28:3; 33:6)” (David Noel Freedman, editor, 1992, Vol. 2, “Gehenna,” p. 927).

Putting an end to such abominable idolatry, the righteous King Josiah defiled the valley, making it ceremonially unclean so such vile practices would not take place there again (2 Kings 23:10). Because of its evil reputation, the valley, located downhill from Jerusalem's walls, later became the city garbage dump. Waste and refuse—along with the bodies of dead animals and criminals—were dumped and consumed by the fires that burned there continuously.

Now the meaning and significance of *gehenna* starts to become clear. *Gehenna* is used 12 times in the Bible, with 11 of those instances recording the words of Jesus Christ (the 12th is from His half-brother James). When Jesus spoke of *gehenna*, His listeners (who lived in Jerusalem or traveled there regularly) knew very well what He was referring to—a fire that *consumed everything thrown into it*, including human beings. He warned that this destroying fire would be the fate of those who stubbornly refuse to repent

of their wickedness (Matthew 5:22, 29-30; 23:15, 33; Luke 12:5).

### Gehenna and the lake of fire

But when will this take place?

*Gehenna* clearly isn't burning up the wicked right now. This fiery fate lies in the future, when the incorrigibly wicked will be incinerated in an all-consuming fire that will reduce them to ashes (Malachi 4:1-3). The book of Revelation calls this “the lake of fire,” with those cast into it then experiencing “the second death”—not torment for all eternity (Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 14-15; 21:8).

In the time frame outlined in the Bible, this follows 1,000 years of Christ's reign on the earth (Revelation 20:1-6) and a resurrection to physical life of all those who have never known God and His ways (verses 5, 11-13). Those resurrected at that time will have the opportunity to learn God's ways, repent and receive His gift of eternal life.

Some, regrettably, will reject that gift. Of them the Bible says, “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (verse 15). Those who willfully choose to reject God's way will not be allowed to continue living in the misery their rejection of God and His way of life will bring. Scripture shows that they will *die*—they will cease to exist, not live forever in torment.

As we've seen in this article, a closer look at the words translated “hell,” coupled with an understanding of what Jesus Christ meant when He spoke of a fiery fate for the wicked, shows that the traditional view of hell as a place of eternal torment simply isn't found in the Bible. And our great God, far from being a sadistic being who would condemn human beings to an eternity of torture, is instead a God of mercy who, as we read in 1 Timothy 2:4, “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

How thankful we should be to learn and understand the truth! **GN**

### Learn More

Many more scriptures further explain the points touched on in this article, showing that the common ideas about hell don't line up with the Bible. We invite you to download or request our free study guide *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* A free copy is waiting for you!



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# Current Events & Trends

by Milan Bizic, Peter Eddington, Darris McNeely and Rudy Rangel

## A prayer for Jerusalem is a prayer for world peace

On March 23, 2014, thousands of Palestinians marched to show support for Hamas leadership. This is a boon for the self-stated cause of Hamas—to destroy the state of Israel. Hamas, which governs the Arab residents of the Gaza Strip, has close ties to violent terrorist organizations of the region.

For those who read and trust in the Bible, it should come as no surprise that humanity does not hold the solution to the long Israeli-Arab conflict. Step back from geopolitics for a moment and think about the human element at play. People on both sides of the line are living in fear day to day. A mortar shell or missile could land on their home at any time.



The simple and powerful message of one of King David's psalms is more relevant today than when it was written thousands of years ago: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Psalm 122:6). Take some time out of your day and follow David's example. Get on your knees and pray to God for the peace of Jerusalem.

You won't just be praying for a city. You'll be praying for every Israeli and Arab man, woman and child who has to face another day of fear and violence. You'll be praying for their safety and for their emotional well-being—that these people under the thumb of history and prophesied conditions will have a normal life today and into the future.

And praying for Jerusalem is more than asking for momentary peace today. It is a plea for the ultimate peace to come. Jerusalem has a bright future that starts when Jesus Christ returns. As the Lord states: "I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the Lord of hosts, the Holy Mountain" (Zechariah 8:3).

Even Israel's current enemies will share in this peace: "In that day Egypt and Assyria will be connected by a highway. The Egyptians and Assyrians will move freely between their lands, and they will both worship God. And Israel will be their ally. The three will be together, and Israel will be a blessing to them. For the Lord of Heaven's Armies will say, 'Blessed be Egypt, my people. Blessed be Assyria, the land I have made. Blessed be Israel, my special possession!'" (Isaiah 19:23-25, New Living Translation).

Praying for peace in Jerusalem is more important than just finding an end to the violence of today. A prayer for Jerusalem's peace equals a prayer for world peace and the coming of God's Kingdom of peace on earth.

## Rewriting history

A recent article in the *Financial Times* reported: "In January Vladimir Putin presided over a meeting designed to produce a new standardised history book for use in schools. The Russian president complained that many current textbooks are 'ideological garbage' and 'denigrate the Soviet people's role in the struggle with fascism'" (Gideon Rachman, "How Wars Can Be Started by History Textbooks," March 17, 2014).



Vladimir Putin

This sounds like it's straight out of George Orwell's novel *1984*, wherein one of the slogans of a fictitious political party is: "Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past." Governments rewriting their own history books to stir up national pride is not something that is new under the sun.

Okay, so what if these textbooks are rewritten? What does this really do in the grand scheme of things? When government leaders control knowledge, they control the citizenry's perception of reality. This systematic misinformation can be the catalyst for future conflicts. There's not a whole lot an individual can do about that. So where do you turn for truth?

The Lord Jesus Christ said this about truth: "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). There is an undeniable truth, and that truth is the Word of God. No governmental systems we see around us are pure in their actions. We look to the future when Jesus will return to set up a government like no other:

"Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever" (Isaiah 9:7, emphasis added).

True judgment and righteousness is coming. Don't let the actions of governments hinder your view of what's right and the ultimate future we await. (Source: *Financial Times*.)

## Ukraine: Feeble U.S. Stand Allows Russian Imperialism

The United States increasingly appears impotent to affect policy and outcomes in other nations, even when national interests are at stake. One only needs to witness the events unfolding in Ukraine where Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula following the popular ouster by the Ukrainian people of Prime Minister Victor Yanukovich, seen by most as a puppet of Russia.

In the autumn of 2013, Ukraine was about to conclude a trade pact and other arrangements with the European Union that would draw Ukraine closer to the West. But Russian President Vladimir Putin offered cheaper natural gas (Russia supplies 70 percent of Ukraine's natural gas) and other incentives to keep Ukraine and its 46 million people tied to Russia.

Despite widespread opposition, Yanukovich took the Russian deal, spurning the desires of many Ukrainians for closer ties with Europe. A popular uprising forced him from office in February. Russia reacted quickly, moving troops into the Crimean Peninsula with its largely Russian-speaking population. In a March 16 referendum to decide if Crimea's citizens wanted to become part of Russia or remain part of Ukraine, a huge majority—almost 97 percent—voted to break away from Ukraine and merge with Russia.

Within hours, Russia recognized Crimea's "independence." In response, the United States and

Europe threatened economic sanctions, which did not seem to faze Putin. Commenting on the situation, *The Wall Street Journal* referred to the tepid U.S. response: "Though he didn't intend it, the U.S. Secretary of State was summing up the difference between the current leaders of the West who inhabit a fantasy world of international rules and the hard men of the Kremlin who understand the language of power" ("Welcome to the 19th Century: Putin and the New Bonapartes See a Weak and Retreating West," March 17, 2014).

In addition to annexing Crimea, thousands of Russian troops were stationed at the Ukrainian border with Russia, adding to the tension of the situation.

Other Eastern European nations are also worried, but none more than Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, known as the Baltic States. Long a part of the Russian Empire, they broke away from the Soviet Union as it dissolved in 1990. These nations have been watching Russian moves with increasing worry. Estonia, in particular, has a large Russian-speaking population. Russia has signaled "concern" over supposed mistreatment of that Russian-speaking segment, as it did earlier with the ethnic Russian population of Crimea.

One is reminded of 1938, when Adolf Hitler annexed the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia, with its large

German-speaking population. As Putin has done with Crimea, Hitler defended his actions by claiming that German-speaking Czechs were being mistreated.

Again, these events show the diminished power and prestige of the United States. But they also seem likely to spur Europe on to protect itself militarily rather than rely on the United States. Bible prophecy has much to say about both of these things (send for or download *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* and *The Final Superpower* to learn more). (Source: *The Wall Street Journal*.)

## Scarcity drives Nigerian gunmen to murderous raids on local villages

On March 16, 2014, gunmen on motorcycles raided at least four Nigerian villages. They opened fire on residents and burned homes to the ground. Agence France-Presse reported in a story that appeared in *The New York Times*: “The state’s police chief, Hurdi Mohammed, who gave a toll of 30 dead, said the violence was carried out by ethnic Fulani herdsmen, who have been blamed for scores of deadly raids in the region” (“Scores Reported Killed in Village Raids in Nigerian Land Conflict,” March 14, 2014). The report stated that this was not religious strife, but contention over resources and land.

It’s often easy to dismiss a story like this that happens on the other side of the world in a small village. What insight can we gain from Scripture? There will come a time in the future, right before the return of Jesus Christ, when resources will be scarce.

In fact, one of the four horsemen depicted in the book of Revelation represents this scarcity: “When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, ‘Come and see.’ So I looked, and behold, a

black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius [a day’s wage], and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine [such luxury items being in short supply]’” (Revelation 6:5-6).

This imagery shows how the price of scarce resources will be carefully measured to anyone who wishes to buy. Many Western countries have long

## What insight can we gain from Scripture? There will come a time in the future, right before the return of Jesus Christ, when resources will be scarce.

feasted on the abundance given by God though the promises of Abraham. (For more understanding of this topic request your free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

Before the Western world starts to see more of those blessings from God withdrawn, look into your Bible and seek Him. Seek a relationship with Him so that you will have understanding and faith as the prophetic events written in the pages of your Bible unfold. (Source: Agence France-Presse.)

## Australia concerned about land purchases

Some officials in Australia are voicing concerns over the large amount of Australian land being bought up by Chinese investors. *The Wall Street Journal* reports that “Chinese investors spent almost 6 billion Australian dollars (US\$5.4 billion) on real estate during the 12-month period ending in June 2013” (Jason Chow, “Australia Is Worried Too Many Chinese Are Buying Homes There,” March 18, 2014).

Australia’s main concern is that these invest-

## These investment purchases are pushing the Australian middle class out of the buying market.

ment purchases, which often leave the properties sitting unused and empty, are pushing the Australian middle class out of the buying market. Whether or not foreign real estate investments are the real root of the problem, it’s clear that Australia, along with the United States, is feeling the

pressure of foreign economic influence.

Thousands of years ago God made a promise to a man He called His friend—Abraham—and nations that would descend from him. Those promises included prosperity and assured national sovereignty (Genesis 17:1-8). To Abraham’s descendants God expanded and explained the covenant relationship.

God declared that He expected a standard of conduct and self-governance—and the promises were conditional based on these standards (see Deuteronomy 28). Among the penalties for not respecting the standards of God is the warning that outside nations would enjoy the fruits of the work of a people who have forgotten their God.

Australia and its fellow English-speaking nations certainly fit the bill of peoples who have forgotten their God and are feeling the squeeze of outside influence.

Time will tell if it’s too late for these nations to wholesale return to God, but it’s certainly *not* too late for *you* to turn to God and experience the joys of a deep relationship with Him and His Son Jesus Christ. Don’t follow the lead of the nations—live faithfully starting today! (Source: *The Wall Street Journal*.)

## Smoking rates higher among poorer people

Why do poorer people smoke at higher rates than wealthy people? It may be that smoking gives some pleasure and meaning to an otherwise average life. Or in the end it may be no more than that they’re just bored.

*The New York Times* recently highlighted the disparity between smoking rates in poorer and wealthier areas of the country—4 in 10 in poorer areas and 1 in 10 in wealthier areas. The data was compiled by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation and released in March of this year. “The national smoking rate has declined steadily, but there is a deep geographic divide [between pockets of affluence and impoverished areas of the country]” (Sabrina Tavernise and Robert Gebeloff, “In a New Divide, Smoking Is Becoming a Habit of the Poor,” March 25, 2014).

As the poor smoke more they also suffer more of the health consequences—ultimately living shorter lives. The comment of a 51-year-old laborer sums up the trap of nicotine addiction. While many of his friends have died of lung cancer he continues to smoke but says, “I want to see my grandson grow up.”

That dream alone should be enough for the man to stop smoking. You wish it could be the catalyst. People who live life on the edge see no further problem with puffing their life away on “smokes.” A fatalistic view of life coupled with no hope for a better quality of life creates a vacuum. Cigarettes are often an attempt to fill that vacuum.

Education campaigns highlighting the health dangers of smoking help, but in the end for a person to quit smoking it often takes a health scare—their own or someone else’s—to quit. But until you have a central purpose for living right in the center of your life, habits that destroy life will always be a crutch to fill the gap. Find your life’s purpose and fill your life with meaning.

To learn more about this subject, read our article “Smoking and Health: The Often-Overlooked Key”—online at [www.ucg.org/christian-living/smoking-and-health-often-overlooked-key/](http://www.ucg.org/christian-living/smoking-and-health-often-overlooked-key/). (Source: *The New York Times*.)



## How can you make sense of the news?

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





Allied Supreme Commander Dwight Eisenhower addresses U.S. paratroopers before they board their aircraft to participate in the D-Day invasion.

# 70 Years After D-Day: From Power to Impotence

Seventy years ago, an American-led Allied invasion on the beaches of Normandy marked the beginning of the end of the grip of tyranny over Europe. In little more than a year, the United States would emerge as a superpower and world policeman. Contrast that to today, when that superpower is in retreat—its influence and power rapidly declining. *by Mike Kelley*

In the early morning grayness of June 6, 1944, lookouts manning scores of German artillery emplacements above the Normandy beaches of northern France saw the unbelievable sight of nearly 6,000 Allied ships of all types and sizes steaming toward them. Shocked as they were, they knew what those thousands of ships meant: The long-expected Allied invasion of Adolf Hitler's fortress Europe had begun.

A short time later, at about 6:30 a.m., the drop-down doors of hundreds of landing craft opened out as ramps into the surf and more than 160,000 British, American, Canadian, French and Polish troops stormed ashore in what was the largest seaborne invasion in world history. Attacking on a

45-mile stretch of five beaches designated Utah, Omaha, Sword, Juno and Gold, the Allied troops faced obstacles unlike nearly any encountered by invading troops in the history of warfare.

They attacked what military experts agree were the most formidable defenses ever constructed in modern warfare. Hitler had placed Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, the famed "Desert Fox" of North Africa, in charge of the German defensive effort. His "Atlantic Wall," an elaborate array of concrete gun installations, bunkers and pillboxes, allowed considerable interlocking fire that could be devastating to any attackers. Fortunately for the Allies those defenses, despite four years of effort, were still incomplete.

The Allied troops waded ashore into withering German machine-gun fire. Those who made it to the beach ran a gauntlet of land mines and barbed wire. While on the beach their only cover was the steel landing obstacles that offered little protection from German gunners. On Omaha beach, soldiers of the U.S. 1st and 5th Ranger battalions soon became pinned down, huddled under the 100-foot-tall chalk cliffs at Point du Hoc. The U.S. First Army commander, General Omar Bradley, seriously considered pulling them off the beach, a move that would have crippled the attack.

In actuality, Operation Overlord, as the invasion landings were code-named, began just after midnight on June 6 when some 24,000 glider-borne troops from the U.S. 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions parachuted behind the German front lines. Their mission: to protect the flanks of the invading troops, secure bridges and main roads, and prevent the Germans from bringing in reinforcements from the north.

The airborne landings were at best a mixed success. Many gliders missed their landing zones, some men parachuted into swamps

and drowned, while others were shot as they slowly drifted to earth. But the partial success they achieved made the difference.

And in spite of all odds, the invasion succeeded. By nightfall the invading troops had secured small beachheads on all five beaches. These were the first of an oncoming wave of Allied troops over the next two weeks. The Allies advanced and didn't stop until they got to the heart of Germany.

American resolve on the world scene, as displayed at that time, is not so easily found today. Clearly something has changed!

### **Did God play a hand in those events?**

June 6, 2014, marks the 70th anniversary of D-Day. Virtually all of the men who stormed ashore that awful day 70 years ago are dead, but a small handful, men in their late 80s and 90s, will visit those Normandy beaches for perhaps the final time to commemorate that important victory.

Despite the enormous cost of more than 9,000 Allied soldiers killed and wounded on

the main German commanders, he refused to order the movement of troops to the south.

Could those thousands of extra troops have made the difference? Could they, as Hitler vowed, have thrown the Allied troops back into the sea?

Weeks after the landings it was revealed that a dispute between German commanders had kept most of the German panzer tank divisions away from the landing zones. By the spring of 1944 the Allies ruled the skies over France, and Rommel wanted most of the 10 panzer divisions near the beaches to minimize their exposure to Allied air attacks while in transit.

However, panzer commander General Leo von Gehr wanted the divisions kept closer to Paris. Hitler ordered what turned out to be a bad compromise: A few Panzer divisions would be at the beaches, but most would be kept inland.

Similarly, most of the *Luftwaffe's* aircraft had been relocated far from the coast to defend Germany's heartland from American

Secrecy might have been lost, and German defenses would be even stronger.

Storms and high seas arrived with the first days of June. Eisenhower had planned the invasion to coincide with the full moon of June 5. But June 4 was an especially stormy day. Forced to delay the invasion, Eisenhower huddled with his staff. His chief meteorologist, J.M. Stagg, forecast *a brief break in the weather for June 6*. Though some of his officers disagreed, Eisenhower made the fateful decision: The attack would take place on June 6.

As it turned out, the bad weather unexpectedly weakened German defenses. Viewing the winds and stormy seas, the German commanders concluded that no one in his right mind would launch an invasion under such conditions. Senior officers ordered their troops to stand down, and many of them were away for the weekend. The *Luftwaffe* canceled normal reconnaissance flights, which would have given them advance warning of the invasion.

Even Rommel, the supreme German commander, overworked and exhausted from overseeing efforts to finish the formidable coastal defenses he anticipated being completed in a few weeks, decided to return to Germany for the weekend to visit his wife on her birthday—June 6. He also wanted to make a personal visit with Hitler to plead once more to have the German tank divisions repositioned to the coast rather than held in reserve far to the rear where they would be too far away to make a difference.

### **A "great crusade" hung in the balance**

Much has been written about seemingly miraculous events that turned the tide of World War II. Historians have long referred to the Miracle of Dunkirk, where calm seas allowed an evacuation that saved more than 300,000 British troops from annihilation or capture in May 1940 while heavy fog grounded German planes.

Others have pointed to the extremely fortuitous instance of the British navy finding and sinking the dreaded German battleship *Bismarck* in May 1941.

Did God Himself intervene to clear the seas and skies enough on June 6 to permit the glider and seaborne landings, yet have this come amid terrible weather to make the German defenders think no attack would be forthcoming?

One has to pause and consider. Had D-Day been delayed, would Hitler have caught on to the deception? Would he have transferred thousands of troops, guns and tanks from

## **Over the decades since America emerged from World War II as the world's leading national power, she has played its leading role with decreased effectiveness.**

that day, D-Day was a success. But many do not realize that it could easily have been a disaster. As supreme commander of Allied forces that day, U.S. Gen. Dwight Eisenhower knew as well as Rommel that if the invasion could be stopped at the beaches, it might be fatal to the Allied cause.

Over the decades, many have wondered if God had a hand in that historic day.

Let's look at the evidence. To begin with, Eisenhower and British General Bernard Montgomery, who commanded the land forces, successfully misled Hitler and the German High Command into believing that the invasion would take place across the narrow part of the English Channel at Pas de Calais. Over the previous year, they had planned and pulled off an elaborate ruse using fake guns, tanks, coded messages and other diversions to convince the German *Fuehrer* that a totally fictitious First U.S. Army Group was poised behind the cliffs of Dover for the attack.

When the landings took place, Hitler believed they were only a diversion from the main attack that he still believed would occur at Pas de Calais, 100 miles to the north of Normandy. Despite the urgent pleas of Rommel and General Gerd Von Rundstedt,

and British bomber attacks and weren't a factor when the invasion commenced.

Rommel had earlier told his aide: "The war will be won or lost on the beaches. We'll have only one chance to stop the enemy and that's while he's in the water . . . struggling to get ashore. Reserves will never get up to the point of attack and it's foolish even to consider them . . . the first twenty-four hours of the invasion will be decisive . . . for the Allies, as well as Germany, it will be the longest day" (quoted by Cornelius Ryan, *The Longest Day: June 6, 1944*, 1959, pp. 27-28).

Would the outcome have been different had those forces been deployed near the beaches?

Weather and the timing of the invasion were other crucial factors. Eisenhower and Montgomery knew the invasion had to take place in a narrow window of opportunity: A full or near-full moon was needed for glider pilots to see their landmarks, and successful beach landings required high spring tides to clear as many of the German defensive obstacles as possible.

That narrow window presented itself only from June 5 to 7. The Allied generals knew that missing that window would force them to put off the invasion for at least two weeks.



Pas de Calais to Normandy? Would he have made good on his vow to drive the invaders back into the sea?

On the day of the invasion, Eisenhower sent a message to the airborne and seaborne troops: “You are about to embark upon the great crusade, towards which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you . . . Let us all beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.” He also carried in his pocket a second message—one to be read in case the invasion failed.

Years later, in referring to his agonizing decision to postpone the invasion from June 5 to June 6, Eisenhower said this: “If there were nothing else in my life to prove the existence of an Almighty and Merciful God, the events of the next twenty-four hours did it” (quoted by John McCollister, *God and the Oval Office*, 2005).

## A superpower emerges victorious

Seven decades have passed since D-Day. With its success, which from a human perspective was by no means guaranteed, Hitler’s Nazi grip on Europe was reduced to less than a year. By mid-May 1945, Berlin lay in ruins, Hitler was dead, and the war in Europe was over.

Many don’t realize that your Bible had foretold the national power and prestige that America and Britain, historical allies, experienced over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. Was there any prophetic significance to Anglo-American victory in World War II? Surprising as it may sound, ancient Israel was the forerunner of our modern English-speaking nations of the United States and many of the British Commonwealth nations. (To learn more about this, request or download our free study aid, *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

Two parallel biblical passages, Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, prophesied blessings or curses that would come on Israel for either obedience or disobedience to the divine laws God put in place. For example, Deuteronomy 28:7 speaks of great military victories if the people would obey and honor their Creator: “*The LORD will cause your enemies who rise up against you to be defeated before your face; they will come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways*” (emphasis added throughout).

The United States emerged from World War II as the world’s leading national power. Tyranny had been defeated, and the country

even embarked on a massive and generous rebuilding plan to help its defeated former enemies get back on their feet.

America assumed the role of the world’s policeman, and in the bipolar world of the Cold War era, the United States was the clear leader of the free world—pitted against its totalitarian rival, the Russian-led Soviet Union.

## America quickly losing power and influence

Over the decades since, America has played its leading role with decreased effectiveness. Despite trillions of dollars spent and tens of thousands of lives lost, the result of U.S. conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan has been stalemate or a negotiated peace that eventually turned to victory for America’s enemies.

Past decades saw a willingness of the United States to go to the mat for its national interests. President John F. Kennedy faced down Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in October 1962 during the Cuban missile crisis, ordering Soviet missiles to be taken out of Cuba. Yet only recently America has seen its power and ability to influence outcomes checkmated in Syria, in Iran, and most recently in Ukraine, where many in the province of Crimea pushed the secession of the province to be annexed by Russia (see “Ukraine: Feeble U.S. Stand Allows Russian Imperialism” on page 16).

What has changed from the earlier period of American resolve to the present?

In late February U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel submitted a proposed fiscal 2015 defense budget that would reduce U.S. military personnel to about 450,000, the smallest since 1945. It would also reduce the U.S. Navy to its smallest size in decades. Despite these proposed cuts, the U.S. military would yet remain the world’s most powerful—though Russia and China, seeing American weakness and withdrawal, are vigorously updating and expanding their military capabilities.

Again we ask, what has changed?

## A return to the Cold War?

The United States has had little power to influence the outcome of the situation in Crimea, which for all intents and purposes is now effectively part of Russia. Notice what God prophesied about the modern descendants of ancient Israel, who today include the major English-speaking nations: “*I will break the pride of your power*” (Leviticus 26:19). Though it still has the world’s largest military, U.S. willingness and ability to use that mili-

tary seems to be stymied around the world.

Recently suffering a humiliating withdrawal from Iraq and leaving that nation divided with parts of it taken over by radical Islamists, and now facing a similar withdrawal in Afghanistan, how is it that the world’s greatest military power has essentially been fought to a draw by insurgents whose weaponry consists of AK-47s, rocket-propelled grenades and improvised roadside bombs?

America’s sliding morals, national scandals and increasing disregard of God’s law has brought consequences. Again, while Moses pointed out the blessings for obedience, he was also inspired to write about the consequences of disobedience:

“*The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them; and you shall become troublesome to all the kingdoms of the earth*” (Deuteronomy 28:25).

We are commanded to watch and give heed to what is taking place around us (Matthew 24:42). At this time we have no way of knowing in full where the Ukrainian crisis will lead. But the stark reality of international events of recent weeks is stirring millions in the Western world to a renewed concern that the Cold War of decades ago has returned. An NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll during the week of March 10 revealed that 72 percent of Americans now view Russia as a threat, up from just 26 percent a few months ago.

As we reflect back on the amazing events of 70 years ago, we should ponder the years to come.

The God who created mankind has a plan for how these events will finally play out, and you need to learn more about that plan. And you need to know where the English-speaking peoples are identified in your Bible and what God has in store for them. **GN**

## Learn More



The United States has undergone a rapid transformation in recent decades, following the pattern of the British Empire before it. Believe it or not, this was foretold in the pages of your Bible! To learn the truth about this fascinating story, download or request our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* today!

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# Searching for Eden in the Middle East



Why do nations and peoples collide in the Middle East? Why is the home to the long-ago Garden of Eden today the home to so much sorrow and suffering? Will the region ever resemble Eden again? The surprising answer is yes! *by Peter Eddington and John Ross Schroeder*

Imagine walking into the Garden of Eden for the very first time! It's always a topic of interesting conversation when we imagine Adam and Eve living in such an idyllic setting. They had a perfect climate—to the point that not even clothes were needed for them to be comfortably warm. And we read about those magnificent animals dwelling in perfect peace with them!

Eden has come to represent the perfect idea of paradise. Adam and Eve were placed in a luxuriant garden, a kind of paradise. The English word *paradise* can be traced back the ancient Persian word for an enclosed garden, a beautiful setting common to royalty where anyone might want to live. In this beginning, human beings were at peace with nature, not fearing bad weather or wild animals. It was a perfect setting to prepare them for their ultimate destiny in the family of God.

However, something happened in that garden that forever changed the course of human history! And it wasn't pretty. Adam and Eve took fruit from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil. After that, humanity descended deep into another

world, filled with sin and trouble.

A destructive cycle of disobedience to God became embedded in their children and grandchildren—all the way down to you and me today. The gravity of sin led to the needed sacrifice of our Lord and Savior in order for humanity to regain any hope of the original intent of the Garden of Eden—eternal life in the family of God.

Does God plan for a return to *paradise*? Will the intent behind the Garden in Eden ever be restored?

## Where was Eden?

Note in Genesis chapter 2 a few details about the location of this garden fit for royalty:

“The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed . . . Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which skirts the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold . . . The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which goes around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is

Hiddekel; [or *Tigris*] it is the one which goes toward the east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates” (Genesis 2:8-14).

Where are the Tigris and Euphrates rivers on our modern world map? Historically, the area is known as Mesopotamia—as part of the larger Fertile Crescent. It is often dubbed the *cradle of civilization*. The Tigris-Euphrates Basin is shared by Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Kuwait. Most of us think of this area as the Middle East.

The location of the Garden of Eden is generally believed to have been in the area of what is today Iraq and neighboring countries. Some Bible scholars feel it could have been near the Persian Gulf, either on the north side near Basrah or along its western coast in Kuwait or Bahrain. Others locate it in the north near Mosul, or to the northeast near Tabriz in Iran. In any case, it's in the area of the Middle East, and it leads us to a very big question.

Will paradise ever be restored?

## Paradise lost—now a region of turmoil and want

What do we see happening in the area of Mesopotamia today as we turn on the news, read the newspaper or check the latest Twitter feeds? It's nothing like we see pictured as *paradise*! Rather, it's a hotbed of ethnic strife, war, religious confusion, violence, unhappiness—and a warped sense of who and what God is. Where is the Garden of



Eden now? Where is paradise?

*It's gone.* Paradise has been lost! Peace among the nations and peoples of the “fertile crescent” is now elusive. Look at a brief summary of some major, tragic events from the wider region of where once stood the Garden of Eden.

The recent fall of Fallujah in Iraq to al-Qaeda-inspired fighters shows that many American and British lives lost in this century's first decade have tragically been in vain. The blurb beneath the headline of a *USA Today* article on losing Iraq stated that “a nation once seen as a great hope in the Middle East is unraveling, as al-Qaeda sinks its teeth in, and a bloodied America wonders what could have been” (Oren Dorell, “U.S. War Gains in Iraq Now Lost or Threatened,” Jan. 12, 2014).

The many billions of U.S. dollars spent to modernize Afghanistan didn't stop its government's decision to release more than 70 enemy combatant prisoners, who promptly assaulted American and British soldiers. A column by Christina Lamb in the London *Sunday Times* was titled somewhat cynically “Our New Afghan Mission Is to Tiptoe Away and Hope Nobody Notices” (Dec. 22, 2013). Yet, she went on to comment, “Which mission? After 12 years of war there is still total confusion.”

Insufficient water is becoming a growing regional problem in Egypt because a dam is being constructed on the Blue Nile River in Ethiopia, substantially cutting the main Egyptian water supply. The Euphrates and Tigris rivers of “Eden” fame are seeing reduced flows, severely cutting water supplies in Iraq and Syria.

Middle Eastern countries waste enormous amounts of money on competing armed forces and modern military hardware in hopes of containing bordering nations that are doing the same. Other serious difficulties in several Mideast countries include inadequate schools, falling birth rates and repressive governments. And as Middle East expert Daniel Pipes wrote in a *Washington Times* piece earlier this year, “Efforts to overthrow greedy tyrants lead to yet-worse ideological tyrants (as in Iran in 1979) or to anarchy (as in Libya and Yemen)” (“The Middle East Mightily Resists Efforts to Prod Modernization,” Jan. 23, 2014).

The Middle Eastern nations also lead the world in the use of the great moral plague of our time—pornography. Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and their neighbors lead the world in Internet searches for all subjects connected with pornography. Perhaps the

most disturbing is searches for child pornography. According to WikiIslam.net, the top five nations in this category are Pakistan, Syria, Iran, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

And so we again see that Eden, our image of paradise, is no more. We see anything but peace and hope in the region today. But there *is hope of it being restored!* We'll get to that in a moment.

### Jerusalem a heavy stone

The Bible often represents the city of Jerusalem as symbolic of the nation of Israel (or Judah) as a whole. Geopolitically

## Ethnic, religious and political tensions now dominate the Middle East. Prophecy shows that no nation on the globe can escape the effects of what the Bible says will happen there.

the Bible primarily focuses on the Middle East and the city of Jerusalem. Particularly during the last 100 years, this region has stubbornly housed ethnic tensions that constantly stir anew. Scripture tells us the Middle East is destined to affect the lives of all of humankind. But why?

Many prophetic passages of the Bible provide a telling backdrop to the chaotic events we witness on a daily basis in the Middle East—tragic occurrences that shed light on the loss of the hopes and dreams God had for Eden.

The prophet Zechariah spoke of a time when Jerusalem would become a hotly contested piece of real estate. We see this coming to pass in many ways today as we reach the end of the age:

“The burden of the word of the LORD against Israel. Thus says the LORD: . . . ‘Behold, I will make *Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness* to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem *a very heavy stone for all peoples*; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it” (Zechariah 12:1-3, emphasis added throughout).

### Middle East: focus of end-time prophecy

The Middle East is destined to play a big role in the fulfillment of many end-time Bible prophecies just prior to Christ's second coming (please see our free online study aid *Seven Prophetic Signs Before Jesus Returns* on our website at [GNmagazine.org/booklets](http://GNmagazine.org/booklets)).

Ensuing events will climax in a horrendous time of world troubles *never before*

*experienced in human history.* We get a glimpse of this in Jesus Christ's prophecy recorded in Matthew 24: “For then there will be great tribulation, *such as has not been since the beginning of the world* until this time, no, nor ever shall be” (verse 21).

Clearly ethnic, religious and political tensions now dominate the Middle East. Prophecy shows that no nation on the globe can escape the effects of what the Bible says will happen there. However necessary they were deemed at the time, the military incursions both the United States and Britain have made into this remarkable region have

clearly shown that, as Pipes observed, “Maladies run so deep in the Middle East . . . that outside powers cannot remedy them.”

### The Middle East is sick, but healing is coming

Observing this region's extremism, despotism, hatred and violence, Daniel Pipes labeled the Middle East as the “*sick man of the world.*” Yet Bible prophecy indicates that this entire Middle Eastern region will, during Christ's magnificent reign, become another “Garden of Eden,” showing the way of peace to the rest of the world! It's hard to imagine that today, isn't it?

What can be most encouraging to us is to know that such an Eden-like paradise is *not too far off.* It will happen during “the times of restoration of all things” spoken by the apostle Peter in Acts 3:19-21. He wrote about a time when the earth would be “refreshed” and when all things would be *restored* to their original intent. These prosperous “times of refreshing” (verse 19) will be instituted by Jesus Christ Himself after His return to the earth.

Yes, there is a definite plan for the ideals of Eden to be brought back. And yes, right in the middle of it all, Jerusalem is where Jesus Christ will bring this hope and joy back to humankind!

We have been on a tragic ride these past 6,000 years since Adam and Eve first sinned. And we have all followed suit. We're all to blame! It's time for a true, godly paradise to be restored.

Our world, the Middle East in particular, is moving even further from any kind of paradise—from any kind of Eden. And it

affects all of us, whether we like to believe it or not. It's easy to sit in the comfort of our modern homes and block out world conditions from our minds. But that doesn't mean they'll go away! It's going to take a strong force, a godly force, to get our world back to an Edenic condition.

So what is our hope? When will an Eden-like realm be restored to our ailing planet?

### Israel regathered to follow God

There must first come the restoration of *all 12 tribes of Israel* as one nation under the reign of the Messiah, as foretold again and again in the writings of the prophets. This is a *prerequisite* to *all nations* learning to follow God. After Jesus Christ's return to Jerusalem to establish His Father's Kingdom, the end-time *survivors of the tribes of Israel* will experience an unprecedented *regathering*.

Notice this vital prophecy from the book of Ezekiel. And note, this has *not yet happened*. It's prophetic. This has never before taken place—but it soon will!

“Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Surely I will take the *children of Israel* from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and *bring them into their own land*; and I will make them *one nation in the land*, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be *king over them all*; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again” (Ezekiel 37:21-22, emphasis added throughout).

As end-time prophecies about Israel unfold, these people will come to understand God and His expectations of them in a way they have never known before. The descendants of the lost 10 tribes of the northern kingdom will discover they are not gentiles, as so many mistakenly believe today. As humbled people, they will turn from their evil ways and seek the true knowledge of God. *The house of Israel and the house of Judah will unite again as one nation under Jesus Christ—their reigning King.*

The prophecies of Ezekiel point to the dramatic reunion of those of “lost Israel” with their brothers from Judah. This unified nation will comprise both the Jewish people—the descendants of the ancient kingdom of Judah—and the descendants of the other 10 tribes. Those of the so-called lost tribes of the northern kingdom, including the British and American people, will have repented of breaking the laws of the covenant, *including God's Sabbath and Holy Days*. And the Jews of the southern kingdom *will have acknowledged Jesus* as the true Messiah.

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Finally, modern descendants of both kingdoms, for the first time in almost 3,000 years, *will reunite* as one nation. But they won't be the last. Peace and an Eden-like paradise will eventually envelope the entire world.

### All nations will see Eden

As their King, Jesus Christ will immediately begin establishing a close working relationship with *all* people. As the righteous reign of Jesus Christ extends from Jerusalem and the surrounding Middle East, an idyllic, Eden-like civilization will flourish and spread. Peace and hope will return to old Mesopotamia!

In fact, God promises to restore the land to be like Eden: “For the LORD will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; *He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD*; joy and gladness will be found in it” (Isaiah 51:3). And: “The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by. So they will say, ‘This land that was desolate *has become like the garden of Eden*; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited” (Ezekiel 36:34-35).

Moreover, peace will return to the animal realm: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the young lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den” (Isaiah 11:6-8).

And this peace in nature will also represent peace among all peoples, as the next verse tells us: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain [the Kingdom that will overspread the world], for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (verse 9).

Other passages show rivers of waters going out from Jerusalem to water the earth and give life to trees for the healing of the nations (see Zechariah 14:8-9; Ezekiel 47:1-12). This symbolizes God's truth and Spirit extending out to a parched world and bringing amazing transformation—producing awesome physical abundance

as well as spiritual conversion.

### Playing your part: The cusp of a new age

But just knowing what God has revealed about the future is not enough. With knowledge comes *responsibility*. To benefit from what we have learned, we must *act on it*.

God inspired the writings of men like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel *to make us think*, to cause us to *consider our future*, to stimulate us to *assume responsibility* for our character, behavior and destiny. The end-time and millennial prophecies that God gave through Zechariah and others are certainly sobering, but also inspiring for all of us who look forward in faith to their fulfillment. The original intent of the Garden of Eden will be restored.

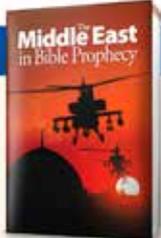
Over the years, there have been many counterfeits to God's vision of paradise. Many have tried to find paradise, but mostly in all the wrong places. Without God, paradise is *impossible*. Without God, paradise is *deceptive*.

Phillips Brooks was a noted American clergyman and author who briefly served as Bishop of Massachusetts in the Episcopal Church during the early 1890s. He is quoted as saying, “Live such a life, that if every man were such a man as you, and every life a life like yours, this earth would be a *paradise*.”

And so, by extension, if every man lived a life like God does, this earth would be like a Garden of Eden! We are on the cusp of a great new age. Today, God is preparing a people, a small group of truly faithful believers, who are forerunners of a *paradise* soon to come to the earth. You have the opportunity before you to become a part of this group.

As Revelation 2:7 promises us, “To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the *midst of the Paradise of God*”! Rest assured, paradise is coming back! Will you seize your opportunity to inherit this future? **GN**

**Learn More**



Why is the Middle East so often in the headlines? What's behind this region's ancient antagonisms and long history of conflict and violence? What does Bible prophecy indicate lies ahead? You need to know!

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# Noah: The Rest of the Story

The recent movie *Noah* presents a horribly distorted view of one of the Bible's great heroes of faith. What's the true story that you may have never heard or considered? *by Mario Seiglie*



**Y**ears ago, Paul Harvey, a famous U.S. radio commentator, ended his talks with the words, “And now you know the rest of the story.” He had just given a side of the news or a personality or historical event that was not well known.

Recently the movie *Noah* has been in the news. The film has a big-name director, popular leading actors and lots of drama to draw viewers into the theaters. Studios invested millions in hopes that the movie would become a big Hollywood hit.

Reviews have been highly negative in terms of biblical accuracy. Moreover, the biblical story has been grossly distorted with Gnostic and other arcane elements and made into a huge Hollywood melodrama.

Many fictional parts have been added, especially the many scenes with mythical rock creatures (supposedly fallen angels) who actually build the ark (with wood from a miraculously grown instant forest) and save Noah from a small army that tries to

capture the ark. Further distorting the story, Noah is portrayed as an angry, tormented and murderous man, in complete contradiction of the Bible's description of him as a righteous and godly person.

Perhaps the only redeeming value of the movie would be if people are motivated to read the Bible for themselves, recognize actual parallels between Noah's and today's age, wake up from their spiritual lethargy and turn to God.

As the latest fad, the movie *Noah* will come and go. But more important is this question: What does the story of the real Noah have to do with us? Surprisingly, it can teach us a great deal. Let's look at seven little-known facts about Noah that can change our lives for good!

## 1. Noah “walked with God.”

What does the Bible mean when it says that Noah “walked with God” (Genesis 6:19)? In fact, we find several righteous men mentioned in the Bible who “walked with

God.” The first one listed was Enoch (Genesis 5:22). Later, Abraham and Isaac are described the same way (Genesis 48:15).

Later still, David is described as having walked with God, and we're given additional information about what this actually means. The Bible records David's son Solomon saying to God, “You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because *he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You*” (1 Kings 3:6, emphasis added throughout).

Lastly, we have the parents of John the Baptist, Zacharias and Elizabeth, who “were both righteous before God, *walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*” (Luke 1:6).

So “walking with God” means having a daily, lifelong relationship with God, obeying His commandments and following His way of life.

Regrettably, the movie *Noah* doesn't mention at all that Noah had an intimate and lifelong relationship with God. In the movie he only has vague clues about what the Creator wants. Yet this is one of the key points of the story about Noah and why God spared him and his family from the Flood.

So the first lesson we can learn is this: Are we walking with God? His commandments are still there to be kept, and they can establish, along with His grace that Noah received (Genesis 6:8), a lifelong relationship with God that will bring many blessings for several generations to those who love Him (Exodus 20:6).

## 2. Noah preached God's way of life.

Another fact about Noah that many don't realize is that he was a *preacher of righteousness*.

The Bible tells us that God “did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a *preacher of righteousness*, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly” (2 Peter 2:4).

What is the biblical definition of righteousness? It is given in Psalms 119:172, the psalmist here praying to God, “For *all Your*

*commandments are righteousness.”*

Noah was not some silent bystander while his society morally crumbled around him. Instead, he faithfully proclaimed God’s way of life. But sadly, no one heeded his words and warnings. Eventually things worsened to the point where “the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was *only evil continually*” (Genesis 6:5).

Just as a rotten apple will rot the entire barrel of apples, so society had corrupted itself to the point no healthy apples were left—except for Noah and his family.

Sadly, society today is reverting back to

cal calendar. Remember, the Bible says he “walked” according to God’s laws and ways.

We read in Genesis 2:3 that God established the Sabbath for Adam and Eve right after He created them, setting up the weekly cycle of seven days, with the seventh being the day of rest. There were also months and years to keep track of according to the moon and sun.

As we’re told in Genesis 1:14: “Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for *signs* and for *seasons*, for *days and years*’” (English Standard Version). The word translated “sea-

God’s Sabbath from week to week as Noah surely did? (To learn more, download or request our free study aids *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest* and *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.)

### **5. Noah followed the biblical food laws.**

Here is another surprising discovery—that Noah kept the biblical food laws. Actually, the idea that there was only one pair of animals of every species in the ark is false. As we will see in the Bible, the animals were first divided into “clean” and “unclean” creatures, and there were *seven pairs* of clean animals but only *one pair of unclean animals* that entered the ark.

You can read it for yourself: “Then the LORD said to Noah, ‘Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before Me in this generation. Take with you *seven pairs of all clean animals*, the male and its mate; and *a pair of the animals that are not clean*, the male and its mate; and *seven pairs* of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive on the face of all the earth” (Genesis 7:2-3, New Revised Standard Version).

Many Bible translations recognize that the original Hebrew wording refers to *seven pairs* of “clean” animals—i.e., those fit for human consumption as designed by God—and only one pair of “unclean” animals—those God designated as not fit for human beings to eat. Why the difference in numbers?

It’s likely that Noah and his family would need a large enough number just after the Flood to breed, raise and eat—and to make sacrifices with. Also, clean animals are typical prey for predators—so the higher number of clean animals would ensure the survival of both. Regardless, it’s obvious that Noah knew which animals were clean and unclean, and he knew better than to eat the unclean animals, since only one pair was needed to keep those species alive.

The lesson to learn here is: Are you willing to follow Noah’s example and keep the biblical food laws? In fact, throughout the Bible you cannot find any example of any man or woman of God who ate animals God designated as unclean. (To learn more, download or request our free study aid *What Does the Bible Teach About Clean and Unclean Meats?*)

### **6. Noah and his family were a tiny minority obeying God in the midst of an evil society.**

As history shows, sometimes the major-

## **As the latest fad, the movie *Noah* will come and go. But more important is this question: What does the story of the real Noah have to do with us?**

the kind of immoral conditions that existed in Noah’s day, just as Jesus Christ foretold would happen (Matthew 24:37).

The lesson to learn is this: Are we listening to Noah’s successors today? God’s messengers—true ministers of Christ—teach and proclaim the need for biblical righteousness as Noah did. They declare God’s message to keep all of God’s commandments, to learn how to properly live in God’s grace, and to spiritually prepare for the coming Kingdom of God.

### **3. Noah was in his middle years when the Flood came.**

Most movies about Noah show him as an old man preparing the ark, but the Bible doesn’t describe him in that way. Indeed, Noah lived for 350 years after the Flood (Genesis 9:28).

People lived much longer before the Flood, and Noah lived to the age of 950 years (Genesis 9:29). Actually, he was in early mid-life when he built the ark, and still had a third of his life ahead of him.

So one of the few things the movie *Noah* did get somewhat right was depicting him as a strong, vigorous man and not an old, doddering man.

The lesson to learn here is to carefully check out what we read or see with what the Bible actually says. As Paul said, “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

### **4. Noah kept God’s calendar and Sabbath.**

Another little-known fact about Noah is that he kept God’s Sabbath and the bibli-

cal calendar. Remember, the Bible says he “walked” according to God’s laws and ways. We read in Genesis 2:3 that God established the Sabbath for Adam and Eve right after He created them, setting up the weekly cycle of seven days, with the seventh being the day of rest. There were also months and years to keep track of according to the moon and sun.

As we’re told in Genesis 1:14: “Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for *signs* and for *seasons*, for *days and years*’” (English Standard Version). The word translated “sea-

sons” here means “appointed times”—used in Leviticus 23 for God’s festivals. Thus some Bible versions translate it this way in Genesis 1:14—for example, “sacred times” in the New International Version and “religious festivals” in God’s Word Translation. We see in the book of Genesis (and throughout the rest of the Bible) that the faithful people of God followed the seven-day week, which had been revealed since the time of Adam and Eve.

Notice what is said about Noah in Genesis 8:10-13: “And he waited yet *another seven days*, and again he sent the dove out from the ark. Then the dove came to him in the evening, and behold, a freshly plucked olive leaf was in her mouth; and Noah knew that the waters had receded from the earth. So he waited *yet another seven days* and sent out the dove, which did not return again to him anymore.

“And it came to pass in the *six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month*, that the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and indeed the surface of the ground was dry.”

*The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament* notes on the Genesis 8 passage, “The seven days constituted the week established at the creation, and God had already conformed to it in arranging their entrance into the ark (Genesis 7:4, 10).”

This passage also clearly shows that Noah understood years, months, weeks and days, and carefully kept track of time while he and his family were shut up in the ark.

The lesson to learn here is: Are we keeping



ity is wrong. This was certainly the case in Noah's day. Of all those who followed their different religions, only Noah and his family were right.

It would have been easy for them to become discouraged. After all, the only true "church" at the time consisted of those in Noah's household. And thanks to Noah's faith and righteousness, we are alive today—for we are all Noah's descendants through his three sons and daughters-in-law.

As Hebrews 11 so aptly notes, "By faith *Noah*, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he *condemned* the world and became heir of the *righteousness which is according to faith*" (verses 6-7).

The lesson to learn is: Are we looking for God's true Church, a minority who are

weapons of mass destruction that more nations are rapidly acquiring.

Jesus Christ prophesied there would be a parallel between Noah's day and the end time. He said, "And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all . . . Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed" (Luke 17:26-30).

Jesus was talking here about life as usual with no expectation of destruction and not directly about people living wayward lives. Of course, the waywardness must also be parallel or there would be no unexpected divine judgment.

Our times are indeed like Noah's day in that both are characterized by rampant

limited impact on human society over the centuries. Still, the world has nevertheless become extremely vile and defiant of God—parallel to Noah's day in many respects.

### So what can we do about it?

Jesus Christ tells us: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:33-36).

What He is telling us here is that we should be like Noah—not letting ourselves follow the wrong crowd and live sinful lives. Rather, we should "walk with God," establishing an enriching relationship with Him by being obedient and submissive to His will and fellowshiping with like-minded people.

We should also help proclaim God's true way of life, based on His commandments and our faith in Jesus (Revelation 14:12). We should be watching what is taking place in the world and society around us so we will not be caught napping when God decides to directly intervene in world affairs, which could be quite soon.

And like Noah, we should not be discouraged at being a small minority in the midst of an increasingly degenerate world. Believe me, just like in Noah's day, God will also save those who faithfully walk with Him.

So now you have heard "the rest of the story" about Noah and the lessons we can learn from Him and the momentous events of his life. The question to ponder is: What will you do about it? **GN**

## We live in a society that is rapidly becoming very similar to Noah's in two fundamental ways.

diligently striving to obey God in a world that is drifting ever farther from Him? You will have to find the Church through its teachings, which conform to God's Word.

### 7. Noah left us an example for the end time.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for us, we live in a society that is rapidly becoming very similar to Noah's in two fundamental ways.

First, Noah's day was filled with abject violence and an increasing disregard for human life. As Scripture says: "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence . . . And God said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth'" (Genesis 6:11-13).

Hardly any place on earth is now safe from violence. We lock our doors and realize the respect and security that was commonplace a generation or two ago is no longer there. Around the world, jails are overfilled with the vast numbers of criminals. Making matters worse, to make room for newly convicted lawbreakers, many felons are let out to again roam the streets.

Crime is rampant, and with the increase of drug trafficking, more lives are endangered than ever. Nations are bristling with weapons, and we have already had two world wars in the past century. No one wants to consider what World War III will look like, considering the sophisticated

immorality. "God looked at the world and saw that it was evil, for the people were all living evil lives" (Genesis 6:12, Good News Bible).

This was the second characteristic of Noah's day that would also manifest itself before Christ returns to the earth.

The apostle Paul elaborated on what that evil society would look like at the time of the end: "But know this, that *in the last days* perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Doesn't this sound like today's society? The evidence is undeniable. Our families are bombarded with violence and immorality through the media and the Internet. Marriages are breaking up more than ever—that is, if couples decide to marry in the first place. People are obsessed with self and care little about God or what He thinks!

Granted, it is not quite so bad as in Noah's day, when God decided to wipe out the whole world except for eight people. But people of Noah's day lived many hundreds of years so that their evil became worse and worse over that time. Our shorter lives of today provide a check on that evil. Furthermore, the Bible has had a positive though

### Learn More

The story of Noah is a powerful warning about the kind of people we are to be in a world that has turned its back on God. As happened in Noah's day, horrifying events will overtake the planet and devastate its population. Where will you find yourself as these events unfold? To learn more, download or request our free study guide *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*



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# Pentecost: The Power of God in Our Lives

Are you stuck in the rut of this world? Jesus Christ offers you spiritual power that can transform your life. *by Darris McNeely*

**P**icture this: You're in church, the temperature drops, and a sudden gust of wind comes through the windows. Papers start flying everywhere. You see what looks like flickering tongues of fire over the heads of the other people. Everyone looks around in shock. No one has seen anything like this before!

Does this sound strange? It's actually happened! We find a scene like this described in the Bible, in the book of Acts, chapter 2. It takes place on the day of Pentecost, one of God's annual Holy Days.

What does the event that took place on this Holy Day teach us about God's purpose for you? Change is something God wants and expects from us (Romans 12:2). However, He doesn't expect us to do it alone. Neither does He expect us to rely on a lot of self-help ideas and techniques. He provides a tool and a guide for us to truly change, because God wants us to live successful, positive lives.

He promises us the help (John 14:26) that we need to transform our lives into the vibrant, happy lives we desire but often find so elusive, if we are truly seeking change.

The dramatic events of Pentecost in Acts, with tongues of fire descending on Christ's disciples, is a miracle that paved the way for us to make changes—the most critical and lasting changes in our life—the kind of change that leads to eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

What is it that Jesus said would create this kind of dramatic change, and how did it work in the life of one of His followers?

## Transformed by the promised Helper

Jesus Christ promised His disciples the help they would need to live transformed lives. He said, "The Father is sending a great Helper, the Holy Spirit, in My name to teach you everything and to remind you of all I have said to you" (John 14:26, The Voice). Here on the night before His death, Christ revealed the promise of the Holy Spirit to His disciples. This is recorded in

the Bible for all future Christians.

One disciple listening on that very serious evening before Christ's death would



**Peter's denial of Jesus Christ was a turning point in his life. He would begin changing and in the end would be a different person through the power of the Holy Spirit.**

be an example of the transformation that was coming through "the Helper." It was the apostle Peter. Peter would sink to despair and then recover and help lead the greatest beginning in history, the beginning of the Church that Christ promised He would build. Peter would stand up before a crowd and deliver a powerfully eloquent sermon that would in turn change thousands of human lives.

However, on the night before His death when Christ was arrested, Peter acted in a very cowardly manner that sent him into deep remorse (Luke 22:56-60).

Peter's cowardly action, at the most critical moment of Christ's earthly life, would highlight the underperforming life Peter had been living. It's a powerful lesson for all of us to learn. You see, God cares so much that we succeed that He carries us far more through life than we might realize. God carried Peter that night to enable him to recover later.

Jesus foretold that Peter would betray Him when pressured. He had said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me" (Luke 22:31-34).

Those are strong words to say to a close friend, and sadly, what Christ warned of happened. After Christ's arrest and while He was being shuffled between the Jewish and the Roman authorities, Peter, who was following nearby, did exactly what Jesus said he would do.

We read that Peter went out and wept bitterly after denying Christ the third time, hearing the rooster crow, and seeing Jesus gaze at him (verses 60-62). Later events would prove that this was going to be, and indeed was, a turning point in Peter's life. Peter would begin changing and in the end would be a different person. The power

of the Holy Spirit would change his life.

## Lives transformed

In Acts 2 we see that Peter was changed—powerfully transformed from the proud yet cowardly friend he had been to Christ. He stood up among the disciples and a multitude and delivered an inspired message to thousands who were astonished at the sight of the disciples speaking in many different



languages (Acts 2:14-15).

The power that transformed Peter and the other disciples is available to you today. Christ promised this power, and you can have it in your life as well!

Peter stood with the other apostles and called on the audience to listen carefully to his words. He did this under the influence of the Holy Spirit, which God sent to him and the other disciples on Pentecost. The scene there in Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts, was the beginning of what was foretold by the prophet Joel, who wrote that God would pour out His Spirit on mankind (Joel 2:28).

The result of the Holy Spirit coming to man would be transformed lives in those who would hear and respond. Men and women of all times would have opportunity to call on God. And His Spirit of love, peace and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7) would provide clear-minded thinking to help create a life as God intended—a life fashioned and molded in the image of Christ.

Listening that morning, the crowd was stunned to hear that the Jesus of Nazareth whom they had seen and heard was the One sent from God to show them not only the Father but also how to live as His children. Those who had watched Christ teach the masses, heal the sick and the disabled, and command evil spirits to leave the mentally tormented were now learning that they had seen God walking among them.

## The Helper brings hope

Peter's message that morning was full of hope. It was a message that God can restore the years that were lost. That's why Peter was inspired to quote from a prophet of Israel's past. The promise of the Holy Spirit is a promise from God to provide the help to recover from the ravages of sin and its destructive effects on the lives of all of us.

Christ's teaching and example revealed a way of life filled with joy. It showed how to live before God and among people. It showed the only way to build a solid relationship with God.

What about you and your life? Are you ready to give up the way you've been living? Are you ready for a change? Are you at the point where you're ready to learn a new and a different way? Do you desire a relationship with God?

Peter's message had a profound effect on his listeners. They were worried. They were thinking. And they were realizing just how seriously flawed their lives really were. They were no different than us in coming to see

that there was a gaping void in their lives that needed to be dealt with, one that could be filled with joy and hope and meaning. They were hearing a new message, and for the first time they saw a way forward out of the tiny little traps of the life they were living.

For the first time, they were hearing words that truly made sense. They were hanging on a positive message that could frame the remainder of their lives. Nevertheless, there came a moment where they had to act and decide. It was similar to the

## God holds out to us a promise of transforming power. We can receive that power that enables us to deal with all of the challenges of everyday life with peace and confidence.

moment Peter had when he denied knowing Jesus and was then struck by the turn of Christ's head and His penetrating gaze.

Peter came to the decisive moment in his message and said, "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).

When those words penetrated their minds, "They were cut to the heart, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37).

## Repent and be baptized

They each essentially felt Christ looking at them, as He did at Peter on the night that He was betrayed. Today, Christ is looking at us with a look from which we cannot turn away. What, then, do we do?

Peter had their attention. He said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38-39).

On this Holy Day, this festival called Pentecost, the Church began with the gift of the Holy Spirit given to humanity. God began to give His Holy Spirit of power to those willing to change and look into the eyes of Christ and admit, "I am a sinner who needs forgiveness and help." Pentecost, marking the giving of the Holy Spirit to humankind, is the beginning of a transformation that can produce the quality of life that represents the Kingdom of God.

God holds out to each of us a promise. It is the promise of a transforming power, the power of His Holy Spirit. We can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit of power that enables us to deal with all of the challenges

of everyday life with peace and confidence.

That promise begins with a desire to change how we live. Do you have that desire? Do you want to change your habits? Will you come to see that your life, no matter how honest, no matter how sincere, no matter how good, is still insufficient? You see, we have all fallen short of the mark of righteousness—the true godly life—that God through Peter summoned people to live (see also Romans 3:23; 12:2).

To receive God's Holy Spirit we must

*repent*, which means to change and turn to a life based on God's law as exemplified by Jesus. This change begins inside you, winning over the desires of self and personal interests that crowd out a godly life.

## The challenge for you and me

Here is the challenge. Christ is looking at us, as He did Peter, and in His eyes is the summons to follow Him, to become a disciple, one who wholeheartedly desires to walk in His footsteps and do what He taught and practiced.

It is the opportunity to change your life—the opportunity to pull out of the rut that entangles you in a world that has missed this summons of Christ to a new way of life—a tried and proven way that works. That way is based on God's eternal law, found in the pages of your Bible.

Receiving this look from Christ requires a response. Peter melted in despair on the night of Christ's arrest and ran. But the story doesn't end there. He returned, learned from the experience, and went on to accomplish great things by the power of the living resurrected Christ within him—the power that is the Holy Spirit.

Peter called on others to do the same. That message is before you right now. The challenge is to turn around, face Christ, and meet His gaze. Turn toward God and let your eyes meet Him in willing obedience and surrender of your life to Him.

## Be transformed

You can change, and your life can be transformed by this power. It is the power of the Holy Spirit given on that day of Pentecost. Christ said He would not leave His disciples without help, a comforter sent from the

Father. On Pentecost He dramatically fulfilled His promise. The Holy Spirit came on the disciples, and the Church of God began. To be part of *that* Church it is important to understand and observe this Holy Day.

Once you admit, “I need God’s Holy Spirit,” the process begins. If you are at this point, then God is working with you! John 6:44 tells us that the Father has to draw you to Christ. Once that process begins and we recognize that need, God draws us or calls us, and then we have to do something about that calling.

He calls us into a life of *transformation*. That means we have to repent and be baptized, just like the people in Acts 2. In fact, that is exactly the kind of lesson Peter talked about on Pentecost.

*Repent* is a word people don’t always understand today. It’s also a hard word for a modern mind to conceptually fathom. Repent from what? Repent of what? What does that mean? Romans 8 explains that repenting means changing from a physical perspective to try to embrace a spiritual frame of mind. Paul said we should have the mind of Christ. Where are we going to get the mind of Christ? We need God’s Spirit to change our perspective to Christ’s way of thinking.

So we have to change our thinking. That’s what repenting is all about—changing our way of thinking from our own self-centered way to *God’s* way. Once we do this, Galatians 2:20 describes this change as being “crucified with Christ” while we still live—the difference being that Christ is now doing the living within us!

When we make this commitment to change, we repent and are baptized—symbolically putting to death the old person and rising from the water of baptism to a new life. In this we pledge to put away the physical and become transformed into thinking and living God’s way. And for that

we need the Holy Spirit. *God* gives us His Spirit—we cannot work it up. We have to repent and be baptized and have hands laid on us by a true minister of God to have the gift of the Holy Spirit given to us (see Acts 8:17; 2 Timothy 1:6-7).

### The Holy Spirit—the power to transform your life

The Holy Spirit is a power—the power of God sent as a gift, a Helper, from the Father. It is something God gives to us as a gift as we repent and obey Him (see also Acts 5:32). That’s different than how most religious people will look at the Holy Spirit, and yet it truly is God’s power that will work within and through us. What is the role of God’s Spirit in our life today?

Once we’ve received God’s Spirit, it’s His power in our life to change our life. It gives us the opportunity to draw closer to God, to have a spiritual relationship with Him, to understand more about what His will and His purpose for us is.

God’s Spirit helps us to understand His Word so we can read the Bible with much deeper understanding. When we begin to do that, then we will see the need to change further, and where and what we need to change in our lives. We will see the shortcomings in our life, and through God’s Spirit we can overcome. The Holy Spirit is the power that helps us to *truly change*. It convicts us. It works with us. It helps us to see where we need to realign our lives with God’s way.

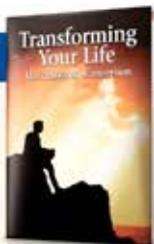
One of the most encouraging descriptions the Bible offers about the Holy Spirit is what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 1:7, cited earlier: “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” Obviously God’s Spirit is a serious gift—an uplifting, transformative gift. It is important, it is available, and it is something you need to think seriously about incorporating in your life if you’re ready for a true change—a change that involves God in your life.

The day of Pentecost represents the only way we can really change our lives. We need the power of God’s Spirit working within us to be the kind of transformed people God wants us to be.

Remember Peter: With the help of God’s Spirit, he went from being an underachieving disciple to becoming a bold apostle of Jesus Christ and a representative of the Kingdom of God. You too can experience this change in your life with the power of God’s Holy Spirit through the miracle that happened on the day of Pentecost! **GN**

## Learn More

Many people have serious misconceptions about what the Bible says about conversion, salvation and God’s Spirit. This article has touched on key points, but God’s Word has much more to say. Download or request our free study guide *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* today!



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# Who’s Behind The Good News?



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

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

We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message Jesus Christ brought—the wonderful *good news* of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; 8:1). That message truly is good news—the answer to all the problems that have long plagued humankind. Through the pages of *The Good News*, dozens of helpful study guides (also free) and our *Beyond Today* TV program, we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution



and threaten our very survival.

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, shar-

ing the truth of God’s purpose and plan for us as taught by Jesus Christ.

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# How Can God's Spirit Transform Us?

We will never make it spiritually on our own. We need God's help through His Spirit to succeed. The Bible presents several analogies to help us see how His Holy Spirit is used in our lives. *by Victor Kubik*

**C**hristianity is about *change*—conversion. A true Christian is a convert in an actual sense, being a person who with God's help has changed his or her thoughts and actions to live the much higher standards taught by Jesus Christ.

The keynote address of Christ's ministry included the action step of *repent* (Mark 1:15). On Pentecost, the day Christianity was launched, Peter preached boldly about the life and death of Jesus Christ. The crowd responded with, "What shall we do?" The answer from the apostles was similar to the message at the start of Christ's ministry: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

A Christian's assignment in life is this: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but *be transformed by the renewing of your mind*, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1-2, emphasis added throughout).

Also, in Ephesians 4:24 we are admonished to "*put on the new man* which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness."

## Are you up to this task and duty?

You may be overwhelmed as you come to see where you need to be. You may be enslaved to your wrong habits, hatred, ill will, greed, selfishness and addictions. You may lack the willpower to change.

Christ knows this well. But He promises to give *power* to Christians to overcome and truly be converts. Just before returning to heaven He told His original disciples, "But you shall *receive power* when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). That happened 10 days later on the day of Pentecost. On that Holy Day, 3,000 were baptized, and they were "on fire" for God. They became new persons in Christ, and they were motivated!

Jesus did not leave His followers wonder-

ing *if* we could succeed or have the help we need to make the changes! He knows exactly what everyone needs, and He is ready to give it to you. One reason people fail to overcome and make lasting changes in their lives is that they try to overcome their human weaknesses on their own—not recognizing their dire need for constant help from God through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the power and the essence of God—not a third divine person, as many people believe. The Spirit of God is

Spirit. In Luke 11:13 Jesus said, "If you then, being evil [referring to human sinfulness], know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

Let's look at how the Bible describes the Holy Spirit and its function and use to you. God's Word likens His Spirit to several things—wind, fire, water, oil and light—to help us better understand how that Spirit can work to transform our lives.

## Wind and fire—symbolic of power

The giving of the Holy Spirit to the Church on the festival of Pentecost, as earlier mentioned, was an open manifestation of power, as described in Acts 2:

"When the Day of Pentecost had fully



**God's Word likens His Spirit to several things—wind, fire, water, oil and light—to help us better understand how that Spirit can work to transform our lives.**

never prayed to or identified as a personage in Scripture, as God the Father and Jesus Christ are. (See our free study guide *Is God a Trinity?* for a thorough examination.)

The power and function of the Holy Spirit has been diminished because so many have misunderstood what it is and its application to a Christian's life. Part of what's lost is the energy the Spirit can give you.

By understanding the characteristics of the Holy Spirit we tap a power source. The Holy Spirit becomes the way and the answer for making needed changes in thought and action. The result is a transformed life.

God greatly desires to give His children His

come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a *rushing mighty wind*, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, *as of fire*, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (verses 1-4).

We know how powerful wind can be. We witness the awesome power of tornadoes and hurricanes or typhoons. Winds can turn windmills to produce electricity. Such manifestations of power in the natural realm serve to represent the ultimate kind of

power—the Holy Spirit of God.

In speaking with Nicodemus, a Jewish leader, Jesus said, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

Fire provides another illustration of power. In fire there can be great fury and heat. Fire can also give comfort and warmth. A small spark can ignite a forest. A blast furnace can reach temperatures of 2,500-3,000 degrees Fahrenheit (about 1,400 to 1,600 degrees Celsius). A nuclear reaction unleashes tremendous amounts of energy. A refining furnace can turn ore to iron. It can refine gold by removing impurities. How fitting an analogy to the Spirit that executes transformative functions in our lives as well!

### **Water—permeating us with power and life**

Jesus in a festival message made a declaration about the Spirit of God: “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying: ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow *rivers of living water*.’ But this He spoke *concerning the Spirit*, [which] those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37-40).

Water is a powerful transmitter of power. Energy traveling hundreds of miles per hour can produce tidal waves that can wreak great destruction. Water can be delivered under a lot of pressure and perform a lot of work. Water can grind away stone and carve canyons over time. Water flowing into turbines below a dam can produce large amounts of electricity as well. Likewise, the Spirit flows, produces power, permeates and cleanses.

Water is the essence of life. Life exists on our planet because of water. Water is in every living cell. Water fills everything in nature. And so does the Spirit of God, which is everywhere, as David understood. He wrote: “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast” (Psalm 139:7-10, New International Version).

The Holy Spirit should permeate every cell, thought, nook and cranny of our lives—our marriage, our work, relationships, *everything*—just like water in nature.

Water refreshes and renews. It quenches

thirst. Gentle rain makes crops grow. After a drought, rainfall makes everything live.

### **Oil—representing fuel and energy**

Luke 4:18 compares the Spirit of God to oil: “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has *anointed* Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind.”

Jesus is given the Holy Spirit, symbolized by the oil of anointing to perform these services to man (see also Acts 10:38).

The type of oil spoken of in the Bible is olive oil. This oil is a source of fuel and energy. It removes friction and brings peace. It is a fuel that brings energy and light. Matthew 25:1-10 is a parable in which God’s people require a supply of oil to keep their lamps burning—bringing us to the next analogy.

### **Light—radiating God’s greatness and overpowering darkness**

The Holy Spirit shines forth God’s greatness and power. It is “the Spirit of glory” (1 Peter 4:14)—or “the Spirit of shining-greatness” (New Life Version).

And by it we are “enlightened,” with “the Father of glory” giving to us “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:17-20).

A light can be a flickering flame, a light-house or a blazing sun or galaxy. Light overpowers darkness and reveals truth and reality. The Holy Spirit turns on a light of understanding in the mind.

### **Other analogies that teach about God’s Spirit**

There are other analogies where the Spirit of God is likened to breath—that breathes in life. The Spirit of God is life itself: “The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life” (Job 33:4). Jesus also said, “It is the Spirit that gives life” (John 6:63, Easy-to-Read Version).

How about this picture? “The hand of the LORD came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many

in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry. And He said to me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’” (Ezekiel 37:1-6).

The answer is *yes*: “So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude” (verse 10, New Revised Standard Version). God tells these resurrected people, “I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live” (verse 14). So not only would they receive physical life, but also true spiritual life.

And the Spirit serves as a deposit or down payment, so to speak, on our receiving eternal life: “You were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise . . . [as] the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:13-14).

The Holy Spirit is further likened to a *mind*: “Now God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit [at work in us], because the Spirit intercedes for the saints [true Christian believers] according to the will of God” (Romans 8:27).

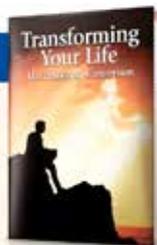
Jesus Christ on the night before His death promised to give His disciples what He called the Helper, the Holy Spirit, to help them bring into remembrance the things He had taught them: “The Father is sending a great Helper, the Holy Spirit, in My name to teach you everything and to remind you of all I have said to you” (John 14:26, The Voice).

We see, then, that the Holy Spirit’s varied characteristics are abundantly illustrated. They are all connected with enabling the nature of God in you. God wants you to be freed of what you are and transformed into a new creation in Christ. The Holy Spirit will clean, purify, enlighten and breathe eternal life into you.

As 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 states: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” **GN**

## **Learn More**

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Follow Me

# Hope Beyond the Moment

In helping others to trust in God despite their past, it's important to recall where God found us and maintain a humble spirit. *by Robin Webber*

**T**he crowded people had listened intently to the man speaking to them. They were drawn to him like a magnet and hanging on every word. Now everything suddenly died down. The silence was deafening. Faces were framed in dumbfounded gazes, and eyes were glistening with tears in the morning sunlight. One eyewitness described to Luke, the author of this account, that the listeners were “cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37).

Their lives had ground to a halt at what was spoken. Something terribly wrong had occurred weeks before, and they were liable. It was like a “hit and run” accident you just became aware of—and you were the driver.

## “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

All of a sudden someone uttered what everyone felt: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (verse 37). What had the apostle Peter said that Pentecost morning in Jerusalem (verse 1) that stunned them into such a desperate reality?

He had boldly informed and chastened them as follows: “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, *you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;* whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it” (verses 22-24, emphasis added throughout).

He further linked this Jesus to David’s words concerning the Messiah or Christ (meaning “Anointed One”)—God’s promised deliverer (verses 25-35). Peter’s indictment inspired by the Holy Spirit would precisely pound away with one more chilling reminder: “Therefore let all the house

of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, *whom you crucified*, both Lord and Christ” (verse 36).

They had killed the Messiah—God’s prophesied gift to His chosen people! In the greatest sense, they realized their lives were forfeit in the hands of God.

It’s into this abyss of despair that God enters through Peter’s utterance and gives hope to the hopeless beyond the moment. It’s in this segue between the anguish felt by the crowd and what Peter would next share that we discover a powerful example of how to respond to Jesus’ admonition of “Follow Me.”

It’s here in the space between verses 37 and 38 that we need to linger and learn about ourselves before sharing the gospel with others. God’s voice through Peter presented a choice that day by offering something unexpected. The same choice lies before all of us.

## The unexpected gift

The blunt reality was that the audience deserved nothing from God, and they now knew it. Along with the Romans, they stood guilty for killing God’s Son—who was sent to deliver not only Israel, but ultimately all humanity.

Scripture of old spoke of “an eye for an eye” and life for life. But rather than the earth opening up as in prior times or further verbal fireworks, God inspires Peter to say this: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (verse 38).

Peter told them that God offered them a gift. What? Yes, a gift! Talk about the unexpected landing in your lap. They couldn’t have imagined such an offering.

The price tag on this particular gift? Unimaginable! They couldn’t afford it in multiple lifetimes. There was no way to pay it back or earn it by anything performed here below. But they could show their

appreciation by *repenting*, meaning unconditionally surrendering to God’s sovereign will and dedicating themselves to changing the course of their lives by following in the footsteps of Christ’s example.

That Pentecost turned out to be an amazing day, as 3,000 people were baptized (verse 41) into the name (Matthew 28:19) of the same One they bore responsibility for killing. This was more than the day designated as the birth of the Church. It marked the birth of a *revelation* that God has a gift for each of us.

Christianity at its basic level is about a gift—something that comes unexpectedly into our lives in God’s timing and way that, when fully understood, takes our breath away. As a matter of fact, it takes our *heart* away, and we are given a new one to replace it (Ezekiel 36:26).

## Peter had himself faltered

Again, the annual festival of Pentecost is about more than the birth of the Church. It’s about the birth of a foundational approach we must personally incorporate that underlies why people responded to God’s message through Peter.

I’m talking not about what he said (you can read Acts 2 for yourself) but *how* he said it. It’s not what rolled off His tongue but what was spoken from his heart that was on full display and so compelling to the crowd. Peter spoke to dying men as one who’d been a “dead man walking” himself. You can’t just put this on! You wear it from the inside out. It’s you—warts and all.

Weeks before, Peter had tightened the noose around his own neck by his words spoken to Christ. Jesus had warned him: “Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:31-32).

Peter didn’t get it then. He came right back saying, “Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death” (verse 33). Was Peter sincere? Absolutely. But he was not ready for the prime time Christ had in store for Him beginning that Pentecost.



Confronted with the awful reality that he had denied his Master and Rabbi, Peter “went out and wept bitterly.”

Jesus replied, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me” (verse 34).

Hours later, after Jesus’ arrest, these same two men would make eye contact for a brief moment in a courtyard outside the high priest’s residence. Luke records what happened when Peter denied Christ the third time as the rooster crowed: “And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times’” (verse 61)

That momentary locking of eyes with hearts on full display must have seemed like eternity to Peter. He knew what he had done, and he now fully knew what he was. Luke concludes, “Peter went out and wept bitterly” (verse 62).

Peter was experiencing a crash course in coming to realize that God didn’t send His Son to make good men better, but to allow “dead men walking” to truly live for the first time (see Romans 6:11, 13). He realized that we are not sinners because we sin, but we sin because we are sinners! Jesus understood this corruption that had happened to His creation and loved us anyway. And He looked beyond Peter’s vain bravado, as well as his moral collapse, and offered Him a future—“when you have returned,” He had told Him!

### Hope going forward while remembering where we were

Peter’s fellow apostle Paul explained such hope beyond our human moments

for Christians to understand, embrace and share with others by stating:

“Hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God” (Romans 5:6-9, New Revised

Standard Version).

Like Peter and Paul, those who follow Christ today always cherish the fact that their sins have been forgiven, but they never forget where God found them at the bottom of a dark well of their own making.

This helps us to remain humble, drawing other people in to likewise follow God rather than driving them away with a “holier than thou” attitude.

Jesus spoke of these different attitudes in describing how “two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’

“And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:10-14).

### When a man comes to himself

Which of the two men do you think Peter emulated on the day of Pentecost? The man who touted all he had done or the man who realized he was a “dead man walking” apart from God’s grace?

Perhaps on that occasion Peter fondly remembered the story shared by Christ

when the Pharisees and scribes complained about Him, saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:1-2).

The religious folk of that society (not pagans or atheists) had taken one look around at the crowd surrounding Jesus and must have blurted out in loathing indignation, “What are they doing here?” Jesus would reply with a trilogy of parables building on one another and ultimately spoke about the prodigal son, the young man who had that awakening moment of “Oh no, what have I done?” and “came to himself” (verse 17).

Now, *Peter* was on stage, and sinners were all around *him*. He knew them, because he had been one of them, and yet he’d been given the privilege to “have returned” even after his fall.

Shakespeare once wrote, “He jests at scars that never felt a wound” (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act 2, Scene 2)—that is, only those who’ve never been hurt make light of what others have suffered. Peter had been wounded by his own deeds, and he understood his audience.

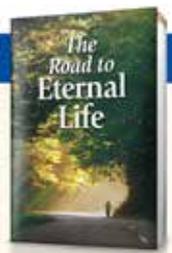
It was now his turn to heed Jesus’ initial call of “Follow Me”—not merely by what would be said, but how it would be conveyed with a transformed heart soaked in humility. He was ready now to describe the gift and how to unwrap it with faith-filled personal surrender.

Such a message and the underlying tone in which it was given is needed more than ever. Today and every day there’s someone asking that same question: “What shall we do?” Peter’s reply on behalf of God in Acts 2:38 never changes.

Let’s consider the pause between the question asked and our answer given. *What you are* will speak much louder than *what you say*, but both can be used together to God’s glory and offer hope beyond the moment! **GN**

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# Lessons From the Parables

## Lazarus and the Rich Man: Attitudes and Consequences

What is your attitude toward wealth and possessions? Through one of His parables, Jesus Christ showed that our attitudes toward such things can have eternal consequences. *by Darris McNeely*

**W**hat happens to a rich person who loves his money more than his neighbor and laughs at those less well off? What happens to a nation that glorifies such attitudes? Plenty. We live in times when this is happening all around the world. A day is coming when all such abuses will be judged.

Almost daily we hear stories of how the rich and powerful get ever richer and more powerful. We're awash in global wealth, yet the wealth will be concentrated in fewer hands as we near the end of this age. Meanwhile, the poor will get poorer by comparison. The abuses will get to the point where economic slavery will sap the life from many (Revelation 18:13).

Jesus had no qualms in confronting such attitudes. He spoke a parable to warn us not to love money more than people. He confronted religious leaders who were lovers of money, telling them that "what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:14-15).

He went on to speak a parable that is often misunderstood to be a proof that dead people either go to heaven or to hell at death. Yet that is not the point of the parable of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16. A proper perspective of greed and cynicism and the judgment of God is the point. Let's see what we can learn from what Jesus taught.

### A story to convey spiritual lessons

Luke 16:19 begins the parable. Remember this is not an actual story but a parable, which is told in allegorical manner to convey spiritual truth.

This parable of the rich man and Lazarus is one of the most dramatic and pointed of

the parables. It's the only one where the main character is given a name, perhaps in part to make it more personal for each of us reading this. Real people are impacted by our actions. We have it in our power to be a force for good. This story should motivate us to take a deep hard look at the legacy we're building each day.

The parable begins by telling us, "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day" (verse 19). This man dressed in the finest clothes and ate well every day of the year. Nothing is wrong with these pursuits in and of themselves. But this man was not willing to share his wealth. He lived by the "zero sum" rule—he wanted the whole pie for himself. None of it could be shared with others because, in his twisted way of thinking, that would leave less for him.

This week I heard that Microsoft founder Bill Gates regained the title of world's richest man—his net worth this year soaring to more than \$70 billion. Mr. Gates' wealth grows even as he is working very hard to give much of it away through his Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. At least he and other billionaires realize their wealth can do much good to alleviate pain and suffering among the world's poor. I find it a remarkable story that a fabulously rich man works full time to give away his money and then sees it continue to multiply.

The rich man in this parable personifies an attitude of hoarding: "I have what is mine, I worked hard for it and no one gets a penny, lest I have less than what I had."

Christ contrasts the rich man to the poor beggar named Lazarus who was wracked with sores and reduced to being laid at the gate of the rich man hoping any amount of

charity would come his way. Neither the wealthy tycoon nor anyone else gave him an ounce of care.

### Decisions and attitudes have lasting consequences

Both beggar and rich man died. Here is where the story takes an imaginative turn to provide a larger lesson about judgment and eventual accounting for one's actions. Lazarus is judged faithful, and in being carried to "Abraham's bosom" he receives an inheritance along with faithful Abraham and others who follow Abraham's example of faith. That inheritance is here on earth as the Kingdom of God—established when Christ returns and begins His rule.

The rich man, we are told, dies and is buried. However, seeing Abraham and Lazarus, he cries out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame" (verses 22-24)

Christ is telling us there will be a day of judgment for the wicked, and it will include a fiery, if brief, torment. Peter describes this event in 2 Peter 3:10 when "the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up."

But this is an experience that will come at the end of human history and not at the time of one's death in this age. The wicked do not go into a hell that burns forever. Christ is describing a time when our thoughts and actions will be judged, which should make us all examine ourselves today while we have opportunity to correct our course.

### All will ultimately face judgment

This is brought home in the next statement Abraham makes in the parable: "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are

tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us” (Luke 16:25-26).

Judgment is a concept polite people don’t want to talk about. It’s uncomfortable to be told you may one day have to account for your actions and deeds. Modern philosophies tend toward tolerant, nonjudgmental approaches to people and lifestyles. Relativism is a foundation of the religion of modernity. The idea of a judgment, or an account-

burning hell fire or the bliss of heaven as the punishment or reward of humanity at death. Michelangelo, for all his talent, was still overly influenced by the medieval theology of the Roman Catholic Church.

### The gulf born of greed

What led to the great gulf—in this life and in the judgment—between Lazarus and the rich man in this story? The short answer is greed and cynicism. An attitude of callous indifference to a brother’s suffering was not changed even when the suffering

reporter describes skits that lampoon politicians, celebrities, the middle class and themselves as well as their own greed and cynicism—which was their way of admitting they are greedy and cynical.

These are the people running the finances the United States. They are part of the establishment elite, and what they do is mirrored by the other political and cultural elites of the nation.

Do they remind you of the “rich man” in the parable? They should. They represent the attitude Christ is condemning. As long as a person holds the attitude of this rich man, he stands in danger of a growing “great gulf” not just between him and his fellow man, but between him and *God*. That’s a key personal lesson we can take from this parable.

### Hearing Moses and the prophets

The parable concludes with the plaintive cry of the rich man asking Abraham to send a warning to his father’s house for the sake of his five brothers. Abraham says, “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them,” and “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead” (verses 27-31).

Moses and all the Old Testament Scriptures, and even the New Testament for that matter, carry enough teaching and direction to tell us how to manage our money and possessions to effectively take care of ourselves and others—to share and care for the poor. Learn the lesson now, and avoid the greed that puts us into this parable in the role of the rich man.

How can you put the lessons of this parable to use? Here are three things you can apply today:

1. *Don’t hoard your stuff.* Give away what you don’t really need or use. Do you have clothes hanging in your closet that you didn’t wear at all this past season? Think about donating them to someone who needs them or a charity that serves the poor.

2. *Get in the habit of sharing what you can spare.* For example, the change you get back each time you go through your local fast food drive-through—maybe dump it in the bin below the window and let it help someone going through a crisis. Look at it as a way of leaving the corners of your field for someone in need (Leviticus 23:22).

3. *Use all your wealth to honor God.* Use it for you and your family and to help others as you are able. This approach reminds us that, as James 1:17 tells us, God is the source of every good and perfect gift. **GN**



## The rich man lived by the “zero sum” rule—he wanted the whole pie for himself. None of it could be shared with others because, in his thinking, that would leave less for him.

ing for personal actions, is ironically *not* tolerated. Yet the Bible shows us there will be a day of judgment and that for God’s elect, judgment is on them even now.

Several years ago while on trip to Rome I visited the Vatican and saw the famous Sistine Chapel. This place where popes are selected is dominated by the larger-than-life 16th-century painting of *The Last Judgment* by Michelangelo. This depiction, supposedly based on Scripture, is meant to strike viewers with a fear that they might wind up with those on the left hand who are descending into the fiery abyss of hell to be tormented forever by fiendish demons.

The scene is meant to get your attention. It does—and it instills fear as only a Renaissance-style depiction of the Bible can. The beauty of the art, however, is marred by the theologically imperfect idea of an ever-

man lay each day in plain sight of the rich man. The rich man would do nothing to change. He consumed and hoarded his wealth with no thought of obligation toward others.

There’s a lot of that in the world today, as there has been in every age. I recently read of an annual fraternal gathering of America’s financial elites in New York City. The Kappa Beta Phi is a fraternal organization of Wall Street’s leading executives from the major banks, equity firms, brokerage houses and other major corporations. Their motto, *Dum vivamus edimus et biberimus*, is Latin for “While we live, we eat and drink.”

A reporter surreptitiously crashed their annual gathering. What he saw and wrote about is actually quite sad. Beyond a very nice, expensive dinner and the usual laughing and drinking you would expect, the

# Letters From Our Readers

## Feedback from around the world

I have completed your *Bible Study Course* and found it to be a truly enlightening experience. I am 85 years old and have always had faith in God, but now I am awakened to the works necessary if I am to become a true Christian. Thank you for that knowledge.

*Reader in Western Australia*

Thank you for all of your excellent works. I'm really inspired by them. Every month I receive your *Good News* magazine, and I read it with all my attention. May God bless all of your endeavours for the salvation of the lost world.

*Reader in Pakistan*

I have read and am reading a number of your free booklets. From my observations, the United Church of God is a church like none that I have ever seen before, a church that is taking proactive steps in following the example of the early Church and not just saying empty words. From my readings, I have realized that most modern-day churches have forsaken God's law and are instead following doctrines and festivals invented by men under the pretense that Christ came to abolish the law, which is contrary to what He said Himself (Matthew 5:17-19).

I no longer want to follow that path. I want to align myself spiritually with people who are committed to following the Word of God in its entirety. I was wondering if you have established a fellowship so I could join in and fellowship with you as well. I will patiently await your response. Thank you very much.

*Reader in Ghana*

*The Good News* is always informative and enlightening about the reality of God, but the January-February issue is a wonder, a marvel by itself. I have seldom seen so much valuable teachings and knowledge in a single magazine.

*H.M., Davao City, Philippines*

## Beyond Today TV program

I watch the *Beyond Today* TV program in Columbus, Ohio, but when I got up to watch the program this morning your show was not on. Can you tell me which channel you were switched to? Thanks!

*Reader, Internet*

*Thank you for your interest! March 23 was our final airing on WGN America. Beyond Today now airs exclusively on the ION Television network. To see where you can view our program on the ION Television network, please use their channel finder in the upper right corner of their website at [www.iontelevision.com](http://www.iontelevision.com). If you are not able to view our program on ION, our Beyond Today programs are posted online and can be viewed at [www.BeyondToday.tv](http://www.BeyondToday.tv).*

Gentlemen, I have to say that your *Beyond Today* TV program is getting better and better than ever! Your commentators are superb, and your subject matter is right on! You are doing a fabulous job, better than any other speakers on TV, or anywhere else I might add. I am so happy I found the United Church of God; your publications are great and chock full of accurate information. I look forward to attending one of your seminars when possible. Thank you all.

*Reader, Internet*

## Visit *The Good News* on Facebook

Are you on Facebook? If so, visit our *Good News* magazine page. See what other readers are saying. Find links to interesting articles and Web commentaries. Become a *Good News* magazine Facebook fan!

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

*- K.T., Good News magazine Facebook fan*



[www.facebook.com/GoodNewsMagazine](http://www.facebook.com/GoodNewsMagazine)

I would just like to thank you again for your *Beyond Today* TV program and to say that I look forward to it every week. Also to thank you for the truth that so many churches don't tell. Thank you also for the many books you have sent and the Bible course. I would like to ask for the booklets *The Final Superpower, Is There Really a Devil?* and *You Can Have Living Faith*. Enclosed is a small donation to help with the costs. Thanking you all.

*Reader in Queensland, Australia*

## Donating a wee bit

I sincerely thank you for your magazine and booklets. They help me immensely with my studying of my Bible, which is my most precious possession in this life. I live in rural Victoria, Australia, and would like to send you a donation. Thank you, and may God bless all of you that work so hard on all that you do.

*Reader in Australia*

I don't remember when *The Good News* began arriving in my mailbox, and back then I read it only sporadically. But the explanations provided about understanding the Bible caught my attention. Then I noticed your Bible Study series of 12 lessons, and during this process I learned enough to want more. Your booklets have been a Godsend for me.

Growing up I was very involved in church activities. As my children grew we were a family at church every Sunday until, in high school, school activities lured us away. In all those years I never heard the explanations of the Word of God as I have learned them through *The Good News*. I cannot find the words that would tell you how much your ministry has helped me, and the wee bits of money I send do not remotely express my genuine thanks.

*Reader in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan*

## Seeking locations of church congregations

There are many that talk a good message, but not too many who actually live it out. Thanks for *The Good News*. Since I started to read this lovely magazine I learned a lot of things that my pastor didn't teach about at the pulpit. Indeed your magazine is the eye-opener. It continues to greatly minister to me and stirred me in a way no book has ever done.

Subjects that I found more powerful are God's seven annual Sabbaths and the truth about His weekly Sabbath day. I'd like to know more about this good news. I will be thankful if you can send me a copy of *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Really Matter Which Days We Observe?* I would like to fellowship with you, because I've found out that since I've read and learned about God's seven annual Sabbaths I need to change from attending worship services on Sunday to Saturday. Please send me your nearest church address where I can attend services.

*Reader in South Africa*

It is a Godsend that I came across the [www.ucg.org](http://www.ucg.org) website. I have been doing lots of reading due to the vast of information that is on your site. I need your recommendation on finding a local church that follows the Word of God. I have been celebrating Christmas, Easter, etc., which are non-biblical, but I have a hard time finding a church to worship that does not follow those ancient rituals. Please help me find a local church. Thanks so much for your consideration.

*Reader, Internet*

Thank you in the name of our precious Lord Jesus Christ. I've been searching my whole life to find God and a church that doesn't give me their version of the Bible. I would like to know if you have any churches near. We want to get started right away. Thank you for your work in our Lord.

*Reader in Pennsylvania, USA*

*We have given these readers the location of our closest minister and congregation. For locations and times of services in your area, contact us at the appropriate address on page 2. Those with Internet access can find a complete list of congregations and contact information at [www.ucg.org/churches](http://www.ucg.org/churches).*

Published letters may be edited for clarity and space. Address your letters to *The Good News*, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A., or e-mail [ginfo@ucg.org](mailto:ginfo@ucg.org) (please be sure to include your full name, city, state or province, and country).



# Questions & Answers

**Q: Are the four “blood moon” eclipses falling on biblical feast days in 2014-15 an indicator of end-time events, as some say?**

*Reader, Internet*

A: While there are many signs that we are in the last days leading up to Jesus Christ’s return, this does not appear to be one of them.

Several evangelical ministries teach that four upcoming lunar eclipses in 2014-2015 that coincide with biblical festivals—along with two solar eclipses—could signify that important prophetic events are imminent. The idea emerged from thinking that the prophecy in Joel 2:31 of the sun being darkened and the moon turning to blood before the end-time Day of the Lord perhaps denoted solar and lunar eclipses.

A lunar eclipse occurs only at the time of the full moon, when the moon’s orbit places it on the opposite side of the earth from the sun. Usually the moon at this time is above or below direct alignment with the earth and sun, but sometimes it is in alignment so that the earth’s shadow is cast over the moon, either completely in a total lunar eclipse or only partially. A solar eclipse occurs only at the invisible new moon, when the moon is between the earth and the sun, at times of direct alignment.

In a lunar eclipse, light from the sun passing around the earth is filtered through the earth’s atmosphere as it travels toward the moon. Many colors of the light spectrum are more readily filtered out than red. The term “blood moon” comes from the copper- or reddish-colored appearance of the moon during some lunar eclipses. But depending on atmospheric conditions, the eclipsed moon can have a range of colors, so there is no way to really know if *any* of the upcoming eclipses will be blood moons.

Lunar eclipses are actually rather common. There were 229 in the 20th century—81 of them total eclipses (as recorded at NASA’s eclipse site, [eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov](http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov)). So in trying to find some significance among them, attention was turned to a relatively rarer occurrence—a lunar tetrad, a series of four total lunar eclipses spanning two years, with six lunar months from one eclipse to the next. And it was noted that, even more rarely, the eclipses in such tetrads at times correspond to the spring feast of Passover and the autumn feast of Tabernacles.

Yet this is perhaps not so remarkable as it sounds. Biblical months begin at the new moon, when solar eclipses can occur. And the festivals of Passover and Tabernacles always occur at the time of the full moon, when lunar eclipses can occur. Indeed, many lunar eclipses fall at the time of Passover and Tabernacles every century. And these feasts are exactly six lunar months apart, just as needed for tetrads to fall (of course, tetrads of eclipses can fall across any months that are six months apart).

In the 20th century there were five lunar tetrads—two coinciding with the biblical feasts. However, some centuries have more or less or even none. Between the years A.D. 1 and 2000, there were 54 tetrads, of which seven corresponded to the feasts. While that might sound extremely rare, 7 out of 54 is about 13 percent—close to what random average would yield.

The seven tetrad periods corresponding to the feasts from years 1 to 2000 were A.D. 162-163, 795-796, 842-843, 860-861, 1493-1494, 1949-1950 and 1967-1968. Some have seen a tie-in here to major events in the history of the Jewish people. They note that in 1492 the Jews were expelled from Spain and Columbus discovered the New World, which would later become a haven for them. In 1948 the Jewish state of Israel was born. And in 1967 the Israelis defeated their enemies in the Six-Day War. However, note that the associated tetrads *followed* these events, sometimes by

a year or more. So how did they herald these things?

Moreover, there were *no* monumental events attached to the first four tetrads. Consider also that the *most significant events* in Jewish and world history *have no tetrads associated with them*. From 100 B.C. to A.D. 100 there were *no* lunar tetrads, feast-related or otherwise, and it was in this period that Jesus Christ lived and died and was resurrected, the New Testament Church began and Jerusalem was destroyed.

We should also note that these feast eclipses don’t always exactly correspond to the biblical festivals. Sometimes they fall a day or two off from the festivals as they fall on the Hebrew calculated calendar.

As for the two solar eclipses in 2015, the first, a total one on March 20, is supposed to correspond to the first day of the sacred year, Nisan 1 on the Hebrew calendar. But it actually comes the day before on Adar 29. The second eclipse, a partial one on Sept. 13, comes not on Tishri 1, the Feast of Trumpets, but the day before, Elul 29. This is to be expected since a solar eclipse comes at the exact conjunction of the sun and moon, when the moon is invisible to us because its dark side is facing us, while the new moon or new month on the Hebrew calendar comes shortly after when the first crescent is visible.

The March 20 solar eclipse will be visible in clear skies only in the far North Atlantic and Arctic Oceans, while the Sept. 13 one will be visible only in the area around Antarctica, with the sun not much dimmed because it is not a total eclipse. Neither will be visible from the focal point of Bible prophecy, Jerusalem.

In fact, of the lunar eclipses in the 2014-15 tetrad, the first three will not be visible from Jerusalem at all. Only the last will be visible from there if the skies are clear—less than half of it as the moon sets on the horizon.

As to Joel 2:31, it mentions the sun being darkened and the moon turned to blood, but nothing about this happening four times in a row. Indeed, the passage must refer to more than mere eclipses. The previous verse mentions “blood and fire and pillars of smoke”—which seems a logical way for the sky to be obscured and the moon to be reddish-colored. Verse 10 shows devastation darkening the sun and moon as well as the stars—the latter of which would not be darkened by eclipses.

In Matthew 24:29, Jesus said that these heavenly signs would occur immediately after the Great Tribulation (verses 22-29)—and Revelation 6:12-13 shows them following that time of martyrdom of God’s people as well (verses 9-11) and immediately preceding the Day of the Lord (verse 17). And so the solar eclipses and lunar tetrad of 2014-15 *cannot fulfill* these prophecies of the sun being darkened and the moon turned to blood—because the Great Tribulation has not even started, much less concluded.

Some, admitting this, still maintain that the tetrad must indicate something big. Yet the first four feast tetrads of those listed above did not seem to indicate anything. And those claimed to be associated with major events concerning the Jewish people came, for the most part, *after* those events—which in parallel would mean that big events associated with the 2014-15 tetrad would have already happened (though the Six-Day War came between the first two eclipses of the coincident tetrad).

The world *is* poised for major events, so significant events might well happen in 2014-15. But there is no way to know what they would be, if anything, on the basis of the lunar tetrad.

For clearer, biblical indicators of the end time, please download or request *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* at [www.GNMagazine.org/](http://www.GNMagazine.org/) booklets.



A tragic court case brings home the ugly reality of some dysfunctional family relationships. What is God's solution? *by Janet Treadway*

**R**ecently I watched with near disbelief a video recording of a court proceeding concerning a New Jersey high school senior who was suing her parents. The girl claimed her parents essentially abandoned her, mostly because she wouldn't break up with her boyfriend. She moved out of their house two days before she turned 18 and had been living with her best friend's parents.

In a lawsuit, the girl asked a court to have her parents pay the outstanding tuition for her private high school, pay her living and transportation expenses for the foreseeable future, use money from an existing college fund to pay for at least some of her college education and pay her legal bills. She also asked for \$651 weekly to cover her living expenses.

The judge pointed out that she had been suspended from school twice, had a problem with drinking alcohol and had been removed from being a cheerleading captain. The judge went on to tell her and those assembled in the courtroom, "What kind of parents would [your parents] be if they didn't set down some strict rules?"

The judge ruled against the girl, cautioning that the case could lead to a "potentially slippery slope" of claims by teenagers against their parents.

The courtroom video also briefly showed her parents, who were sobbing. My heart ached as I watched them weep. It was painfully difficult to watch the girl's mother

crying, being a mom myself.

How many of us mothers lay awake at night worrying over our children, even when they are adults? This girl's parents had reportedly provided her with the best schools and even bought her a new car. They simply wanted her to abide by their rules for her own good while she lived under their roof.

Sometimes parents have to make tough choices, as was the case regarding this teen. Now she has deepened the wounds to an even greater degree by taking her parents to court. I'm reminded of Proverbs 10:1: "A wise child brings joy to a father; a foolish child brings grief to a mother" (New Living Translation). Certainly, these parents' joy was taken away as they sat in court being accused and sued by their own daughter.

This story reminded me of what is prophesied to happen in our world as it enters the last days before Jesus Christ's return: "In the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful" (2 Timothy 3:1-2, NLT).

Moreover they will "lack normal affection for their families" (verse 3, God's Word Translation) and be "treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (verse 4, New International Version). Doesn't this sound like a lot of our headlines?

What does God have to say about honoring one's parents—and what can we do to

carry out His will in this regard?

#### God's command about honoring parents

God tells us to honor our parents so we will be blessed with a long life. He placed so much value on honoring parents that He included this in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:12). Notice the reiteration in Deuteronomy 5:16: "Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live long, and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you" (NIV).

Later the apostle Paul repeated this command: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother—which is the first commandment with a promise—that it may go well with you and that you enjoy long life on the earth" (Ephesians 6:1-3, NIV).

Notice that honoring parents is the only command in Scripture that promises long life as a reward. Those who honor their parents are blessed. In contrast, those with a "depraved mind" and those who exhibit ungodliness in the last days are characterized by disobedience to parents (Romans 1:28, 30; 2 Timothy 3:2).

God was so serious about our need to honor our parents that in Leviticus 24:15 He issued a command that anyone who cursed their father or mother was to be put to death. That may sound heartless, but it's not directed toward younger children. It covers those old enough to know what they are doing and to be held accountable for their actions. Consider what a danger to society someone would be who had so little respect for others that he would curse his own parents. Someone so

lacking in decency and respect for societal norms would eventually be a danger to those around him—as God well recognized.

Honoring our parents holds valuable lessons that apply on several levels. It's the fabric of our everyday life. If we disrespect our parents, then we are also disrespecting God. When we don't honor our parents, that lack of thankfulness and gratitude can lead us to attitudes of bitterness, resentment and anger. When we allow other things to become excuses for not honoring our mothers and fathers, we make it easy for other things to come between us and God.

Jesus set an outstanding example on how to love, care and honor. John 19:26-27 records how He showed love and concern for His mother in one of His final actions as a human being. Here at the end of His physical life, while suffering great pain, Jesus asked John, His friend and follower, to look after His mother Mary.

### Positive ways to honor our parents

How can we show honor to our parents? Let's note seven specific ways.

1. *Pray for your parents.* How many children—regardless of their age—actually pray for their parents daily? A great way to start honoring your parents is by praying for them. It's not easy being a parent. Many times, through stress and pressure, parents can make mistakes—but they're still your parents. A strong relationship with your parents starts with praying for them and asking God to help them and to help you show love and respect.

2. *Put yourself in their shoes.* Reverse the role in your mind and look at how much they have done for you. Evaluate the decisions they've made by asking yourself, "How would I handle this if I was the parent of a teen?" Seek to understand their stresses from working, paying the bills, putting food on the table, running you to different activities, etc.

Imagine you're the one walking in your parent's shoes. In *Freaky Friday*, a 2003 movie remake, an overworked mother and her daughter who did not get along somehow switched bodies. Each was forced to adapt to the others' life for that one day. As they adjusted to their new personas, they began to understand each other more.

3. *Seek to understand.* Realize that your parents are not perfect any more than you are. Try to *give* understanding as much as you want to be understood.

4. *Think before you speak.* Words spoken through anger can do much damage. Whenever you reach a boiling point, stop and think before you say something you'll regret later.

That goes for parents as well as their children.

5. *Remind them that you care.* You don't know what tomorrow will bring, so show love and appreciation for all that your parents do for you. Tell them that you love them (it melts a parent's heart every time).

6. *Learn to forgive.* Remember that we are all human and make many mistakes along the way, but forgiveness is a vital tool for keeping a healthy relationship intact. As the famous author C.S. Lewis pointed out, "To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you" (*The Weight of Glory*, 1947, p. 125). His words echo those of Jesus Christ, who said, "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:14-15, NIV). Forgive!

7. *Show appreciation for all your parents do for you and have done for you.* William Arthur Ward, a widely quoted writer of inspirational maxims, said, "Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it." Gratitude can start with simple things like a hug, saying thanks and offering to help without being told. Sit down and write a nice note with a list of all the nice things your parents do for you all day long.

### Love and respect brings God's blessing

You may not agree with your parents all the time, but love them and respect them and God will bless you for it. (I'm writing about normal, imperfect parents who are genuinely trying, not those who are abusive—that's another topic.)

In the United States this year, Sunday, May 11, is Mother's Day, and Father's Day is the next month on Sunday, June 14. But don't wait for this annual occasion to honor your parents. Let every day be Mother's Day and Father's Day—a time to celebrate and give thanks to your parents by showing them honor, so that your life will be blessed.

For some parents, this may be a painful time because of strained relationships with their children. If you're a parent who's had a broken relationship with your child, never give up praying for him or her! Keep in mind the story of the prodigal son found in Luke 15:11-32. God will make it right in the end.

There will be no teens taking their parents to court in the coming Kingdom of God. We are God's children, and He loves us very much. The commandment to honor your father and mother was put in motion for a purpose—for your good, and to learn how we will live for eternity in God's family! **GN**



# Vertical Thought.org

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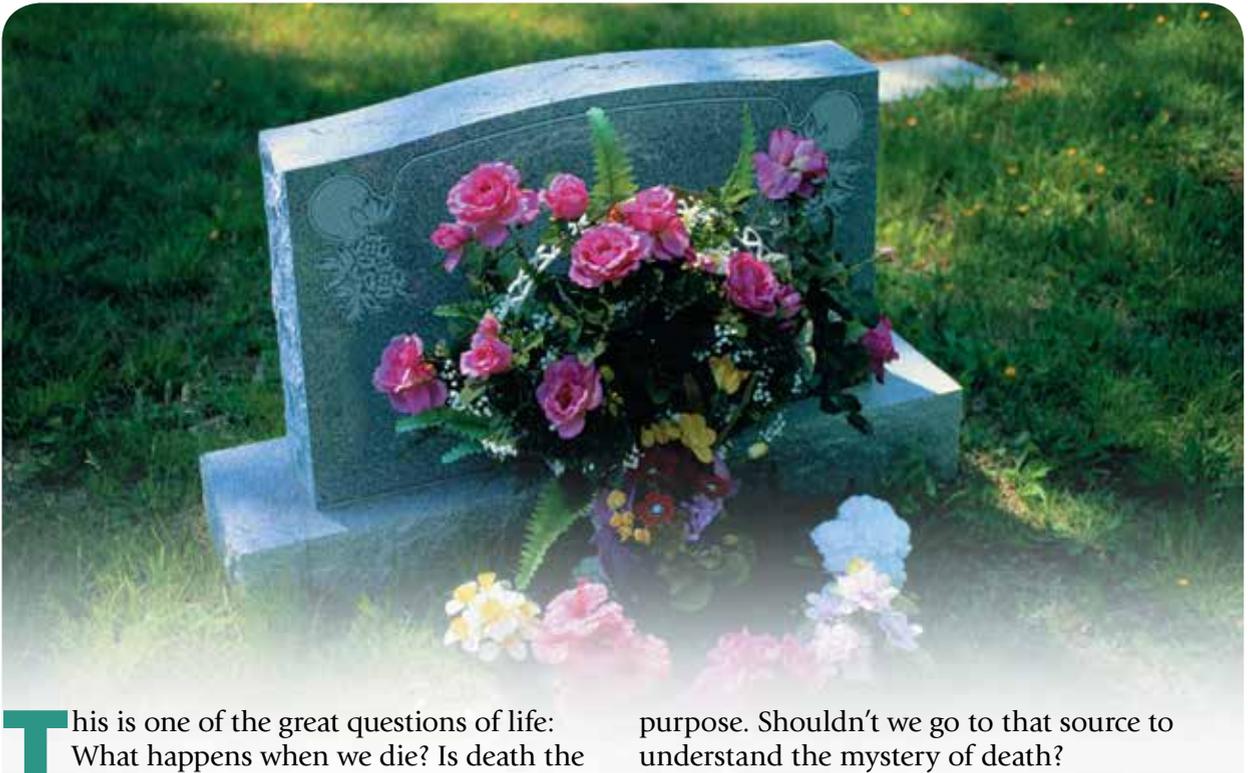
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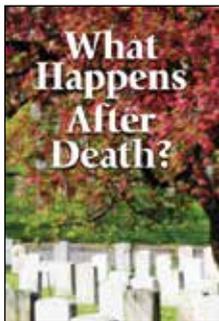
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# What Happens After Death?



**T**his is one of the great questions of life: What happens when we die? Is death the end of human existence and consciousness, or do we continue on in some other place or state of being? Do we go to a place of everlasting reward or eternal torment? Are we destined to be reincarnated, coming to life again in a different body in a seemingly endless cycle of living and dying? Will we ever see deceased loved ones again? Is there somewhere you can go to find the answers?



In spite of centuries of research, science cannot tell us when, where or how life began. Only one source tells us how life began and for what

purpose. Shouldn't we go to that source to understand the mystery of death?

The Bible tells us exactly what happens after death. It tells us what happens to those who have done right and wrong and reveals the fate of the billions of people who have never known God and His way of life. Most churches claim to teach what the Bible says—but what does it really say? You need to discover the answers yourself. You'll be shocked when you find out what the Bible really teaches about what happens after death!

*What Happens After Death?* will help you understand the incredible truth about this great mystery. For your free copy, contact any of our offices listed on page 2 or visit our website.

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