

The Good News

May-June 2012

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

What Would a **Nuclear Iran** Mean for the World?

The Middle East: Focus of End-Time Prophecy **8** • The Coming of a New Babylon **22**
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Because so many people today fail to take religion seriously, it's hard for them to understand those who do. A classic example is Iran, where the risks couldn't be higher since *nuclear weapons* are at stake.

Shiite Muslims—the overwhelming majority in Iran—believe that following Muhammad's death, leadership of the Muslim world was to be passed down through his descendants. Each successor was known as an *imam*—Arabic for “leader.” The 12th of these imams was born in A.D. 868 or 869 and disappeared without a trace about five years later. But that's far from the end of the story.

A branch of Shiite Muslims believe that this 12th imam survived and has been in hiding ever since, waiting until the time is right to emerge and lead Islam again. These believers are commonly called “Twelvers” because of their belief in the imminent reappearance of this 12th imam in a time of global chaos.

Many Muslims also believe in the coming of a figure they call *al-Mahdi*, meaning “the [divinely] guided one,” who will lead Islam

How do you negotiate with people whose desire is to start a global war so that their messiah will come to save them and win the war for them?

to its rightful place as the one true religion in the world. Common among Twelvers is belief that the 12th imam and the Mahdi are one and the same and that *they have a religious duty to initiate the period of world chaos from which the 12th imam/Mahdi will emerge*. They also believe that Jesus Christ will return alongside the 12th imam/Mahdi—but as a Muslim who will help convert the world to Islam.

What should be profoundly disturbing to Western leaders is that *Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei are fervent adherent of Twelver beliefs*. Sound too far out to believe? Notice these concluding remarks from Ahmadinejad's address to the United Nations on Sept. 22, 2011—less than a year ago:

“A [bright] future . . . will be built when humanity initiates to tread the path of the divine prophets and the righteous *under the leadership of Imam al-Mahdi, the Ultimate Savior of mankind . . . He will come alongside with Jesus Christ* to lead the freedom and justice lovers to eradicate tyranny and discrimination, and promote knowledge, peace, justice, freedom and love across the world.”

Of course, he fails to mention that this period of “peace, justice, freedom and love” will be due, he believes, to the establishment of Islam as the dominant religion by “Imam al-Mahdi” in accordance with the Koran's instruction (Suras 2:193; 61:9) after a period of worldwide turmoil that his devotees are expected to initiate.

So while Western governments pursue endless rounds of fruitless negotiations trying to convince the Iranians to abandon pursuit of nuclear weapons, Iran's leaders play for time until the moment is right to deal with what they call “the Great Satan” (the United States) and “the little Satans” (Israel and Britain) and to initiate the period of global chaos they're sure is coming. How do you negotiate with people whose desire is to *start a global nuclear war* so that their messiah will come to save them and win the war for them?

While this kind of news is alarming and even terrifying, we can be comforted that Jesus Christ *will return*—and in a very powerful way. He will set this world aright and bring world peace—just as your Bible promises. He will redeem this world from the clutches of Satan and the deceptions of false religion, including Islam. And, contrary to Islamic belief, Christ will *not* return with the 12th imam.

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor

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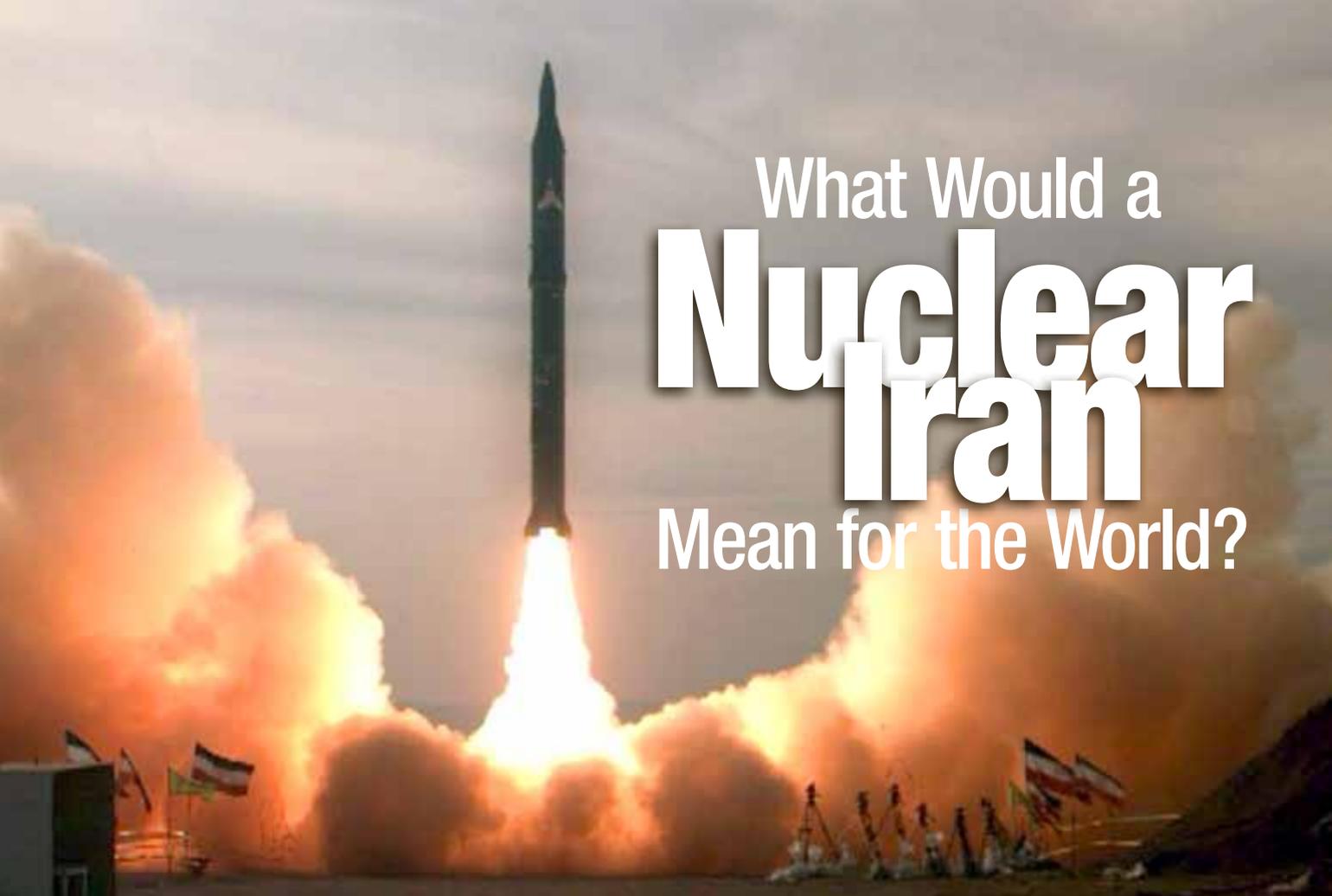
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What Would a Nuclear Iran Mean for the World?

At an undisclosed location, Iranian military forces launch a surface-to-surface missile said to have sufficient range to reach any part of Israel.

While politicians and pundits debate what to do about the matter, Iran continues its pursuit of nuclear weapons, threatening Israel and the world. How does the Bible guide us in understanding Middle Eastern events and gaining a proper global perspective?

by John Ross Schroeder

Many hundreds of blog, newspaper and magazine articles have been published about how to stop Iran from obtaining a nuclear bomb. Sanctions and diplomatic pressure have failed to deter Iran's leadership.

During a recent discussion on British television among various opinion makers, it was actually seriously suggested that if Britain were to abandon its own nuclear armaments, this unselfish act would help encourage Iran to cease and desist from creating its own nuclear capability.

The same argument was made by the liberal left during the Cold War standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union in the decades following World War II—that American unilateral disarmament would have led the Soviets to follow suit.

Apparently some influential liberal observers still think along these lines. The drophead of an editorial in the *International Herald Tribune* says, "By cutting its nuclear arms, the U.S. will have more credibility in its efforts to contain others' nuclear ambitions" ("Reshape the Arsenal," March 13, 2012).

This questionable supposition has also been articulated by Hans Blix, the former United Nations weapons inspector, who indicated that Western military intervention in Iran would only bring the West disaster. His formula for peace envisions a nuclear-free Middle East—meaning *Israeli* nuclear disarmament.

The onerous media debate over the issue has ceaselessly droned on for several years. Conservative observers tell us that we are drawing ever closer and closer to that dreaded time when Iran will in fact possess a nuclear bomb. As a *Financial Times*

editorial put it, "The intractable problem of Iran's nuclear ambitions—and the threat to an increasingly alarmed Israel—*appears to be reaching crunch point*" (March 6, emphasis added throughout).

Yet not a few liberal commentators believe that this assessment is more about Israeli politics than the physics of mass destruction and that a military solution will prove unnecessary, dangerous and potentially disastrous.

So the West remains trapped in a proverbial *Catch-22* dilemma. There seems to be no viable way out. The options are precious few—and all very risky. Analysts speak of "a least bad option."

Is the situation really that dire? What does it mean for Israel, the prime target of Iranian threats? What does it mean for the world? Where does America stand on the issue? And where can we find the best perspective on where events in the Middle East are headed?

Will America face matters squarely?

A well-informed take on the stark dangers we now face in the Middle East was recently published in *The Wall Street Journal*. In their article titled "America's Iranian Self-



Deception,” the director and the research manager of the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute wrote: “Americans are being played for fools by Iran—and fooling themselves. There is no case to be made that Iran is *not* pursuing a nuclear weapons capability. *There is no evidence that Iran’s decision-makers are willing to stop the nuclear program in exchange for lifting sanctions or anything else*” (Frederick Kagan and Maseh Zarif, Feb. 27, 2012, emphasis added throughout).

Another piece in the same *Wall Street Journal* issue also addressed the Iranian dilemma. Titled “Wishing Upon Iran,” it carried the drophead, “U.S. spies hold out hope the Mullahs [the ruling Islamic clergy] won’t build a bomb.”

But the article’s conclusion proves more telling: “President Obama has misjudged Iran at every turn—starting with his assumption that the mullahs would negotiate with him because he wasn’t George W. Bush, that he would engender goodwill by downplaying Iran’s stolen election in 2009, and that sanctions would make them bend. Wishful intelligence thinking won’t deter Israeli leaders from defending their interests any more than it will stop Iran from obtaining weapons of mass destruction.”

A third *Journal* article begins with a quote from the president, stating, “I try not to pat myself too

The West remains trapped in a proverbial *Catch-22* dilemma. There seems to be no viable way out. The options are precious few—and all very risky.

much on the back,’ President Barack Obama immodestly told a group of Jewish donors [to his election campaign] last October, ‘but this administration has done more in terms of the security of the state of Israel than any previous administration’” (Dan Senor, “Why Israel Has Doubts About Obama,” March 6, 2012). The article goes on to point out that others view the matter quite differently.

Those who value the existence of the state of Israel sincerely hope that the following headlines that appeared the same day in the *Daily Mail* and *The Daily Telegraph* are genuinely reflective of the U.S. administration’s resolve: “We’ll Always Stand With You Over Iran, Obama Tells Israel,” and “Military Action Is No Bluff, Warns Obama.”

The threat from a nuclear-armed Iran

What would Iran having nuclear weapons mean?

Closing the Strait of Hormuz: A Serious Iranian Threat

Tehran has coveted complete control over the narrow Strait of Hormuz—only 24 miles wide at its narrowest point—for many years. How important is this crucial Middle Eastern waterway? About 20 percent of the world’s oil exports—and more than a third of all oil shipped by sea—passes through this narrow chokepoint bordered by Iran and Oman. Estimates for 2025 run as high as 60 percent.

Disrupting or closing this vital waterway would most likely put a stranglehold on the world economy, leading to skyrocketing gasoline prices and a probable worldwide economic downturn if not outright recession. And Iran need not completely blockade the strait militarily—attacks on a few tankers with anti-ship missiles, submarines or small attack boats could accomplish the same end by making shipping oil prohibitively expensive due to sky-high insurance costs.

issued a warning to the European Union. “We have the power to halt oil supply,” he said, “down to the last drop” (quoted by Herman).

If this actually happened, blackmail of other nations would most likely be the order of the day, and Iran isn’t afraid to use this threat. It’s no secret that the United Nations is largely impotent when it comes to passing effective sanctions directed at changing Iranian behavior—not least in part because China, needing Iranian oil to fuel its economy, and Russia, an ally of Iran, are two of five UN Security Council members wielding veto power over such actions.

And the Strait of Hormuz isn’t the only area in which Iran maintains a stranglehold over a large part of the global energy supply. American journalist Robert Kaplan wrote in *Foreign Policy* magazine: “Virtually all of the greater Middle East’s oil and natural gas lies in this region [the Persian core, stretching

from the Caspian Sea in the north to the Persian Gulf on Iran’s south]. Just as shipping lanes radiate from the Persian Gulf, pipelines are increasingly radiating from the Caspian region to the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, China, and the Indian Ocean” (“The Revenge of Geography,” May-June 2009, p. 105).

Continuing in the same article: “*The only country that straddles both energy producing-areas is Iran . . . The Persian Gulf possesses 55 percent of the world’s crude-*

oil reserves, and Iran dominates the whole gulf . . . a coastline of 1,317 nautical miles, thanks to its many bays, inlets, coves, and islands that offer plenty of excellent places for hiding tanker-ramming speedboats.” Iranian influence over such valuable natural resources remains a persistent worry to the West and the world. The stakes run very high in the highly volatile Middle East!





The possibilities appear almost too terrible to even contemplate.

As an editorial in *The Sunday Times* of London pointed out, the British foreign secretary sounded the alarm in mid-February: “William Hague was stating the obvious when he said . . . that an Iranian nuclear bomb would lead to ‘a disaster in world affairs’” (“Slowing the Countdown to War,” Feb. 19).

The rest of the editorial highlights the unacceptable dangers the Western nations, and Israel in particular, would have to face. Iranian leaders consider Israel a “one-bomb” nation. That is, Iran would need only a single nuclear bomb to wipe the state of Israel off the map. In spite of the territorial gains of the 1967 War, Israel remains a tiny country geographically (less than 10 miles wide at its narrowest point). Iranian threats to exterminate this small nation have occurred far too often to not take them seriously.

Clearly an Iran-Israel nuclear war

Iranian leaders consider Israel a “one-bomb” nation. That is, Iran would need only a single nuclear bomb to wipe the state of Israel off the map.

would devastate the entire region and greatly imperil the world economy. Author Jerome Corsi stated in the concluding chapter of his book *Why Israel Can't Wait: The Coming War Between Israel and Iran*: “Still, in the final analysis, Israel is a ‘one bomb’ state such that one atomic bomb, even of a relatively low yield, detonated successfully over Tel Aviv, Israel’s business, banking, and telecommunications center, would destroy the modern Jewish state as the world knows it” (2009, p. 102).

Nuclear blackmail a serious danger

The *Sunday Times* editorial mentioned that Iran had joined forces with al-Qaeda as well. It also stated that “even without such a [nuclear] weapon, Iran is already the biggest destabilising force in the Middle East. It rarely behaves like an ordinary hostile state. Its internal divisions mean the regime itself is unstable and acts accordingly.”

We should also consider Iran’s persistent sponsorship of the terrorist groups Hezbollah and Hamas, which have long threatened Israel—using the client state of Lebanon and the Palestinian Gaza and

West Bank groups respectively. Another way of putting it is that “Iran runs an unconventional, postmodern empire of substate entities in the greater Middle East: Hamas in Palestine, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Sadrist movement in southern Iraq” (Robert Kaplan, *Foreign Affairs*, May-June 2009).

Considering Iran’s long track record of support for terrorist groups and movements, if Iran were to develop nuclear weapons it’s not difficult at all to conceive of the theocratic state sharing these deadly weapons with groups who have little regard for life and little to lose in carrying out their deadly aims.

Another worrisome scenario with a nuclear-armed Iran is the threat of nuclear blackmail hanging over anyone within range. Other regional powers have long recognized Iran’s desire for hegemony over the area and its prized energy resources. For this reason Egypt, Turkey and Saudi Arabia have all declared that

if Iran gets the bomb, they too will be compelled to develop or acquire nuclear weapons lest Iran hold them hostage for whatever its leaders desire.

For the same reason, a nuclear Iran also has grave implications for Western military powers, especially the United States. American military assets in the region, such as U.S. troops and bases in the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and United Arab Emirates (UAE), will find themselves in close missile range and imminent danger as soon as Iran successfully develops a nuclear warhead. U.S. options will be quickly and severely constrained then—a point seemingly lost on American leadership.

Appeasement or preemptive strike?

Harvard professor Niall Ferguson summed up Western options in his column in *Newsweek*, concluding: “War is an evil. But sometimes a preventative war can be a lesser evil than a policy of appeasement” (“Israel and Iran on the Eve of Destruction in a New Six-Day War,” Feb. 6, 2012).

He listed five reasons that have been given as to why Israel should refrain



The Crucial Human Element in the Current Crisis

Human beings make up nations and national groups. And human leaders inevitably possess highly individual personalities, legacies and backgrounds. To imagine that these factors never influence even crucial national decision-making would be highly unrealistic.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu descends from a family acutely aware of the past persecutions of Jews. His brother Jonathan died rescuing Israeli hostages from terrorists. His father, Benzion Netanyahu (age 102), has specialized in studying the Spanish Inquisition. He titled his masterwork *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain*. In it he “argued that the Inquisition followed a traditional pattern of anti-Semitism: systematic persecution, he has argued throughout his career, is always preceded by campaigns of vilification and dehumanisation meant to ensure the eventual elimination of Jews” (Jeffrey Goldberg, “The Most Dangerous Game,” *The Spectator*, March 10, 2012).

London’s chief rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, has remarked on how anti-Semitism, usually directed against individuals in times past, has in more recent years morphed into antipathy toward the state of Israel.

The Israeli prime minister remains painfully aware of his awesome responsibility not just to the nation of Israel but to the global Jewish community. Any military action against Iran would bring profound costs of many types in its wake. Yet the lives of 6 million Jews (not to mention more than a million Israeli Arabs) are also at stake. This was the number of Jews who perished in the Nazi Holocaust.

Benjamin Netanyahu not only assesses the complexities of the current crisis situation with his advisors, but he also remains acutely conscious of Jewish history in general, and that of Israel in particular, founded in 1948. He has written a very good book about the nation of Israel, *A Place Among the Nations*.

Consider the gift that the prime minister gave to President Obama at the onset of their recent meeting. “It was a copy of the ancient Scroll of Esther which tells the story, now commemorated during the holiday of Purim, of how the Jewish people narrowly escaped annihilation at the hands of a perfidious [treacherous] Persian ruler” (ibid.). Persia is today called Iran. “Netanyahu is many things. Subtle is not one of them” (ibid.).

The apostle Paul exhorted Timothy (and us) to pray for our national leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Do we carry out this sobering responsibility, especially in these times of great international unrest?

from preemptively attacking Iran. The first four are Iranian retaliation through closing the Strait of Hormuz and terrorist proxies, Muslims setting ablaze the entire region, skyrocketing oil prices severely disrupting the world economy, and the strengthening of Iran's leadership.

And the last one is: "A nuclear-armed Iran is nothing to worry about. States actually become more risk-averse [risk-avoiding] once they acquire nuclear weapons."

Professor Ferguson then countered each of these arguments. He pointed out that two American aircraft carriers are already present in the Persian Gulf, with another likely slated to join them. He also stated that

lating disciple of the realist school of diplomacy . . . because it has finally acquired weapons of mass destruction?"

Ferguson went on to say: "The single biggest danger in the Middle East today is not the risk of a six-day Israeli war against Iran. It is the risk that *Western wishful nonthinking allows the mullahs of Tehran to get their hands on nuclear weapons.* Because I am in no doubt that they would take full advantage of such a lethal lever. We would have acquiesced in the *creation of an empire of extortion.*"

Surprisingly, political leaders and analysts alike seem unable or unwilling to address the terrifying implications of the

Geographically, the Bible is a Middle Eastern book. The centerpiece of biblical prophecy will occur in the Middle East—although Central Europe also assumes significant prophetic importance, particularly in the books of Daniel and Revelation. Yet Jesus Christ will return to Jerusalem, descending to where He earlier ascended from, the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:9-12).

So the focal point of end-time events is right here. "Thus says the Lord GOD: '*This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the nations*'" (Ezekiel 5:5). Jerusalem symbolizes both the city and the whole country.

No other territory on this planet has aroused such incendiary religious passions. While much of God's true plan and purpose for human beings has already been acted out in the Holy Land, portions of the Middle East have been the geographical setting for grievous spiritual idolatry and all of its tragic consequences.

You can read much more about what Bible prophecy reveals in the



The U.S. Navy aircraft carriers USS *John C. Stennis* and USS *George H.W. Bush* pass through the Strait of Hormuz.



An Iranian Republican Guard boat harrasses shipping in the straits.

religious beliefs of Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the mullahs he answers to (see "Ahmadinejad's Apocalypse," page 2).

Jerusalem—focal point of end-time prophecy

Regardless of how matters fall out over the short term, we can know where events are headed over the

long term—giving us much-needed perspective on current events.

For instance, we can know that a Jewish political entity will remain in Jerusalem and the land of Israel no matter what Iran succeeds in doing. The latter chapters of the book of Daniel even present the Jews of the end time as reinstating sacrifices in Jerusalem—to be cut off by the invasion of a revived Roman Empire 3½ years before the return of Jesus Christ (see our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* for details). Thus, Iran will not wipe Israel from the map. However, the Jewish state could still suffer serious devastation.

many Muslims, most being of the Sunni branch of Islam in opposition to the Iranian Shiites, would not be genuinely upset if Iranian nuclear ambitions were checked. He contended that the Saudis would release more oil into the world market to keep prices down. And he put forward the unlikelihood of Iran's leaders being in a stronger position after severe military humiliation.

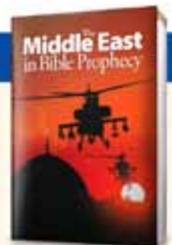
He ridiculed the notion that nuclear arms will make Iran's leaders suddenly responsible by saying: "We're supposed to believe that a revolutionary Shiite theocracy is overnight going to become a sober, calcu-

articles "The Middle East: Focus of End-Time Bible Prophecy," beginning on page 8, and "The Coming of a New Babylon," beginning on page 22.

Continue to watch world events in the Holy Land and the broader Middle East. Prophesied events will powerfully impact our lives no matter where we reside on this troubled planet. It's ever more urgent that we humbly turn to God for help and deliverance during these disturbing times. **GN**

Learn More

Download or request your free copy of the booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. It focuses on the fact that the Middle East region will be where the crucial events of end-time prophecy culminate. This eye-opening booklet will give you a much clearer picture of where current trends are really headed. And be sure to read the section "What Should You Do?" on pages 74-75, which explains the steps you can personally take to ensure your own salvation.



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The Middle East: **FOCUS OF** End-Time Prophecy

We often see the Middle East catapulted to the forefront of news programs around the world. Even faraway nations are deeply affected by what happens in this volatile region. You need to understand what has been prophesied to occur there and why.

by Peter Eddington and John Ross Schroeder

The bloody civil war in Syria and the threat of war between Iran and Israel have rightfully heightened awareness of the fragility of peace in our world, and in particular the Middle East. Events in this historic land are destined to affect the lives of everyone on earth.

Before World War I (1914-1918) the Middle East was dominated by the Turkish Ottoman Empire, which enforced a level of peace throughout the region. This vast conglomerate included territories of the modern states of Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan and Israel. At one time this empire presided over extensive lands in both North Africa and Southeast Europe.

The Turkish Empire might have continued were it not for World War I. Early on it

wasn't clear which side the Ottomans would support. Both the British and the Germans sought the Sultan's support. But ultimately he decided to back Germany, a fatal decision that led to the birth of many new nations—and seemingly wars without end.

Let's look at the astounding historical and end-time story of this crucial region, laid out millennia ago in the Bible. In projecting forward through these end-time events, we'll see the crescendo building toward the time of Armageddon.

A coming superpower

Events in Europe and the Middle East will affect the entire world, and at the outset we should all realize that we are now in transition between this age of man and a wholly different utopian world to come. But mankind will make a last-ditch attempt to

establish a global power, apart from God, just before Jesus Christ returns to establish the Kingdom of God and begin His benevolent divine rule on planet Earth.

Just a few years before He returns, bringing His coming government to be headquartered in Jerusalem, a powerful kingdom of men will arise—a stunning superpower with roots in the ancient Holy Roman Empire.

This rise of a final mighty kingdom of men will constitute the last resurrection of a long series of attempts to establish a European-centered superstate dating back to the time after the fall of Rome in A.D. 476. It will mark the final futile effort of deceitful and rebellious men to establish their version of peace on earth apart from the Creator God.

Jerusalem's crucial background

Today the state of Israel is surrounded by hostile nations that wish to bring its existence to an end. The Bible long ago foretold this would happen (see Psalm 83:3-5). To understand where events are heading, you need to understand something of Israel's historic and prophetic background.

In the Bible the name Jerusalem not only stands for the geographical city itself, but is often used symbolically for the peoples of Israel as a whole. This historic capital remains the most contested city on earth, having fallen to invading forces more than 20 times throughout its recorded history.

The territory on which the state of Israel, including Jerusalem, sits was once ancient Canaan, the land to which God sent the patriarch Abraham some 4,000 years ago. It lies at the crossroads of three continents—Asia, Africa and Europe. And of course the Holy Land is considered sacred by three world religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

More than 2,500 years ago, God revealed to the prophet Daniel that the land of His people would be fought over throughout the coming centuries. To understand the global implications, we need to examine Daniel 11, the Bible's longest continuous prophecy, which covers events in the region from Daniel's day up to the coming return of Jesus Christ.

The first 35 verses of Daniel 11 give us the historic background and constitute an accurate, detailed account of what would befall the people of Judah in the Holy Land in the centuries following. The prophecy foretold that they would be caught up in a conflict between the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt to

The Middle East and Bible Prophecy in Daniel 11



The rise of the Roman Empire led to its absorbing the kingdom of the early kings of the North in Daniel 11. This prophecy also foretells that a new Roman Empire is to rise as a new

end-time superpower that will invade the Middle East as part of the final fight for global dominance.



With the overthrow of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, those two countries

appear to be on the road to Islamist rule. In the end time, a provocation from the final king of the South will lead to an invasion of Egypt and Libya.



Ptolemy Soter, one of Alexander's generals, inherited part of his empire and reigned from Egypt. His dynasty would produce the early kings of the South. In the end time, Egypt

will be invaded by the end-time king of the North.



The division of the empire of Alexander the Great among four of his generals after his death in Babylon in 323 B.C. set the stage for a series of long-running conflicts for control of the Middle East that would continue until Christ's return.



Seleucus, one of Alexander's generals, inherited part of his empire and reigned from Syria. His dynasty would produce the early kings of the North—one of whom, Antiochus Epiphanes (pictured), would be notorious for his persecution of the Jewish religion. The kingdom of the king of the North was later absorbed into the Roman Empire, with that power then becoming the kingdom of the North in the latter parts of Daniel 11.



The king of the North and King of the South were designated as such due to their geographic relationship to Jerusalem and the temple. In ancient times these empires fought for control of the Holy Land, and Daniel 11 foretells that a new end-time superpower, led by the final king of the North, will take control of the Holy Land.



the south of Judah and the Seleucids of Syria to the north.

The rulers of these kingdoms were descended from two of the four generals who divided the Greco-Macedonian Empire after the death of Alexander the Great, whose exploits were foretold earlier in the book of Daniel. These two generals were the original “king of the North” and “king of the South” mentioned in Daniel 11—followed by later prophesied rulers who assumed control of these regions. You can read about the historical fulfillment of the first 35 verses of Daniel 11 in our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.

Verses 36 through 39 suddenly fast forward in time. These passages are not only historic but also prophetic for our time. Verse 40 makes a clear jump to “the time of the end,” as we will see.

The time of the end

Who was this king of the North during the period just before Jesus Christ was born into the world? In 65 B.C. Seleucid Syria was swallowed by the Roman Empire. In effect that empire became the kingdom of the North. This is the key historical transition that enables us to understand how this prophecy applies to the time of the end. Thereafter the king of the North referred no longer to the Seleucids of Syria, but to the rulers of the Roman Empire and their successors.

Daniel 11:36-38 describes the actions of the Roman emperors and their successors, leading down through time all the way to the final charismatic leader of the end time.

Now read Daniel 11:40: “*At the time of the end* the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through” (emphasis added throughout).

This refers to events still to come. Clearly another outbreak of the age-old conflict will yet engulf the Middle East in modern times. But the conclusion will be quite different from anything that has happened before, because *these events will lead directly to Armageddon and the second coming of Jesus Christ*.

This crucial end-time conflict will center on Jerusalem and the Holy Land, the historic real estate God gave to the children of Israel through Abraham, Moses, Joshua and King David. “Thus says the Lord GOD: “This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the nations and the countries all around her” (Ezekiel 5:5). Recall that the Holy Land is at the crossroads of three continents. This description is both symbolic and in its biblical sense geographic.

The final kings referred to in Daniel 11 are powerful geopolitical rulers who will come from both the north and the south,

with forces trampling all over the present state of Israel and the Jewish people.

Revelation complements Daniel

At the time of the end, we see in the prophetic biblical books of Daniel and Revelation that a new global superpower will arise. We discover further details of this end-time power in Revelation 17. Just as the prophet Daniel saw various beasts that represented dominant powers that would arise after him, so the apostle John saw a vision of a prophetic beast power that would dominate the world as the end of this age of man under Satan's influence draws ever closer.

“So he [an angel] carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns” (Revelation 17:3).

The revealing angel explained to the apostle John the meaning of the seven horns: “The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour [a relatively short time] as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast” (verses 12-13).

Notice that the next verse reveals that the time setting is the second coming of Jesus Christ: “These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings,



and those who are with Him [the resurrected saints] are called, chosen and faithful” (verse 14).

Four dominating world empires

The beast referred to in Revelation 17 constitutes another view of the last of the four great empires of Daniel 7.

During his time in Babylon, Daniel recorded a vision of “four great beasts” (Daniel 7:3). These gentile empires would dominate the Middle East and have a major impact on the region. These dominant empires were, in chronological order, Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylonian Empire, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greco-Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great and finally the Roman Empire.

Attempts made over the centuries to revive the power and might of the Roman Empire are prophesied to culminate in the revival of the end time. The final successor empire will strive, as others have, to restore the European unity Rome achieved more than 2,000 years ago.

It will once again become a powerful, dictatorial system in alliance with and supported by a great false church, depicted in Bible prophecy as a beast with horns of a lamb but speaking like a dragon and as a rich and powerful prostitute having immoral relations with world leaders (see Revelation 13:11-12; 17:1-7).

The fourth beast of Daniel

Since the fourth beast described in Daniel 7 exists at the time of Christ’s return, as does the beast power John saw in Revelation 17, both prophecies dovetail—speaking ultimately of the same end-time resurrection of the Roman Empire.

It is true that the original Roman Empire fell centuries ago. But few realize that European leaders such as the Emperor Justinian, Charlemagne, Otto the Great, Charles V, Napoleon, Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler all tried to revive the Roman Empire in various forms over the centuries. One final revival yet remains.

The final resurrection, like the earlier Holy Roman Empire, will be centered in Central Europe. It appears that the European Union (EU)—though now experiencing major difficulties within its eurozone (the group of countries using the euro as common currency)—may possibly be its beginning in embryonic form.

That is *not* to say that all the current EU nations will be a part of the final configuration. It will be an alliance of the 10

“kings”—leaders of nations or regions—referred to above. They will combine to form a powerful military force that will directly involve itself in the Middle East.

This end-time king of the North spoken of in Daniel 11 certainly appears to refer to the final ruler of this European-centered superpower. But to understand who the king of the *South* might be, we should first briefly review the history and thinking of the peoples of the Arab world.

Understanding the Arab world

The Arab peoples are largely descended from Ishmael (a son of the biblical patriarch Abraham). They have long dreamed of unity. The warring tribes of Arabia were initially united by Muhammad through a new religion called Islam. A united *Ummah*, or worldwide community of Islamic believers, has been a constant dream down through the centuries. Yet unity has eluded the Arabs for the last 750 years. Only in the last 50 years have they been independent of foreign control.

A fundamental aspect of Islamic teaching is that Islam must become the dominant religion of the entire world. Several attempts have been made to bring about Arab unity. Sudan’s Muhammad Ahmad ibn al-Sayyid (1844-1885) proclaimed himself the Islamic messiah, the *Mahdi* or divinely “guided one” chosen to unite Muslims and defeat the infidel. He ultimately failed to achieve this mission but had greater success than secular leaders have had.

Then Egypt’s President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956-1970) formed the short-lived union with Syria called the United Arab Republic (1958-1961). Saddam Hussein of Iraq imagined himself to be another Saladin (1138-1193, Muslim leader during the Crusades) and sought to unite the Arab world against Israel and the United States. But American military power brought his downfall and death. Even Osama bin Laden achieved considerable success in uniting many Muslims against America and the West, but he was eventually driven into hiding, found and killed.

Yet many Muslims still believe that another Mahdi is prophesied to appear during a coming time of tumult to ensure Islam’s final victory over all other religions. Currently the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his cohorts would desperately like to bring about the appearance of the final Mahdi to accelerate end-time events, as he sees them.

Of course, Scripture remains the ultimate guide in helping us to understand the real significance of these historic events and what they portend for the future.

Identifying the king of the South

As noted earlier, the initial mention of the king of the South in Daniel 11 referred to the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt. However, the prophecy later shows us that an *end-time* king of the South will rise up to challenge an end-time king of the North. And in doing so, this southern ruler will unwittingly set in motion a cascade of events leading to unimaginable carnage before Jesus Christ returns to the earth and stops the human race from being wiped out (see Matthew 24:21-22).

Notice again Daniel 11:40, a crucial passage bringing needed perspective to these climactic events: “*At the time of the end* the king of the South shall attack [“push at,” King James Version] him, and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind . . . and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through.”

The end-time power from the South will provoke the northern ruler into launching a major military invasion into Egypt (verse 42). After this time, the king of the South is no longer a factor in Bible prophecy. Clearly this invasion by the European-centered Beast power will prove decisively victorious as he even brings forces into Israel.

Note verses 41-43: “He shall enter the Glorious Land [the Holy Land], and many countries shall be overthrown . . . He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape. He shall have power . . . over all the precious things of Egypt; also the Libyans and Ethiopians shall follow at his heels.” This military invasion and occupation extends from Israel into North Africa.

“But news from the east and from the north shall trouble him” (verse 44). This passage appears to be a reference to a massive army described in Revelation 9 that will challenge the king of the North.

The “kings from the east”

How do we tie these events together? The Bible speaks prophetically of the “kings from the east.” It tells us that near the time of the very end of this age of man, the great Euphrates River will be dried up “so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared” (Revelation 16:12).

Tied together with Revelation 9:16, this passage describes the movements of mas-

Egypt in Bible Prophecy

The key Middle Eastern prophecy of Daniel 11 clearly states that “the land of Egypt shall not escape” the military invasion by the king of the North (verse 42), launched in retaliation to provocation by the leader of an end-time Muslim alliance known as the king of the South (verse 40).

Currently Egypt finds itself in news headlines because of the “Arab Spring,” which in Egypt brought the fall of the Mubarak government and the ascent of fundamentalist Islam. The West depends on Egyptian stability because roughly 30 percent of the world’s oil passes through the Suez Canal. There are also well-founded fears that Egypt’s stable relationship with the bordering state of Israel may be seriously threatened, the breakdown of which could lead to another Mideast war.

America gives about \$2 billion to Cairo annually, mostly in military aid—though that is in jeopardy now with Islamists set to gain considerable control of the next Egyptian government. And another key question is who will ultimately gain control of the high-tech U.S. armaments already in Egypt, including many advanced tanks and jet fighters? Will they



fall into the hands of a future regime hostile to the West, the United States and Israel in particular?

Thankfully, whatever may lie ahead during this age of human misrule, in the end the Egyptians are going to experience a brilliant future following the second coming of Jesus Christ. They may have some hard lessons to learn at the beginning of Christ’s 1,000-year reign (see Zechariah 14:18-19), but the Hebrew prophet Isaiah shows that ultimately all will be well.

Isaiah says of that time, “In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the LORD at its border” (Isaiah 19:19). Then he goes on to explain what caused this to happen: “For they [the Egyptians] will cry to the LORD

because of the oppressors, and He will send them a Savior and a Mighty One to deliver them. Then the LORD will be known in Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day” (verses 20-21). Indeed this will be a time when all nations and peoples will know the true God “from the least of them to the greatest of them” (Jeremiah 31:34).

Then “there will be a highway from Egypt to [Egypt’s ancient enemy] Assyria . . . and the Egyptians will serve [God] with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria—a blessing in the midst of the land, whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, ‘Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance’” (Isaiah 19:23-25). All nations will finally be at peace with one another.

Today’s news reports tell us that the adherents of Coptic Christianity in Egypt are suffering enormous persecution in the wake of the Arab Spring and the overthrow of the secular Egyptian government that for the most part protected their rights and safety. But in the world to come, all peoples, including the Egyptians, will flourish—as true religious worship accompanies universal peace and prosperity. To learn more, request or download our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

—John Ross Schroeder

sive armies that will confront the coming European-centered superpower not long before the return of Jesus Christ to this earth.

These armies could consist of a multinational military force including such Islamic nations as Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia.

They could also consist of other Asian troops from the Far East including soldiers from Russia, India and China. The Bible is not specific. Certainly the vast numbers necessary for such massive armies are there in Asia. And possibly Far Eastern armies could act in concert with Islamic forces in this final showdown for global control.

(We do see from Ezekiel 38 and 39 that, soon after Christ’s return, forces from Iran and Central Asia will be joined with Russia, China, India and Southeast Asia in another invasion of the Holy Land—prophesied to fail. So it may well be that they will, not long before that, be joined together in the invasion at the time of Christ’s return.)

This leads to what is commonly, but erroneously, called the battle of Armageddon. We see from Revelation 16:14, 16 that military forces gather at Armageddon—the massive plain stretching out before the hill of Megiddo in northern Israel. The actual battle takes place about 55 miles south of Megiddo at Jerusalem (Joel 3:12-14).

With Christ descending to Jerusalem, the enemy armies will turn from engaging one another and will together go to confront Him—and they will be utterly defeated (Revelation 19:19-21; compare Zechariah 14:1-4, 12).

What does this mean for you?

All the maneuvering, destruction and devastation at the time of the end will take the lives of more than a third of the human race. Jesus Christ must return to save mankind from itself or these cataclysmic conflicts would leave no human survivors. But He does guarantee that He will come back to earth in the nick of time (Matthew 24:21-22). He will cut short the wholesale destruction brought on by a rebellious mankind.

The Middle East regularly produces crucial events that cause many observers great concern. Bible prophecy shows that the Middle East and Europe will be the global center of world attention in the years ahead. Events in the Middle East will trigger the final crisis at the end of this evil age.

Jesus Christ commanded all of us: “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

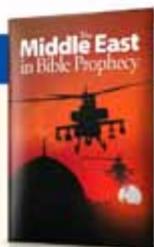
on the face of the whole earth” (Luke 21:34-35).

Most people will be caught completely unaware. Ignoring the signs of the time foretold in Bible prophecy, they will find themselves in the position of the inhabitants of Sodom just before it began to rain fire and brimstone from heaven, and like the antediluvian world just prior to the great Flood of Noah’s time, which drowned the world (see Luke 17:26-30).

But Jesus Christ tells us in Luke 21:36, “*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.” **GN**

Learn More

Be sure to read our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* to learn more about the events described in this article. It explains in more detail how and why the Middle East will be the place end-time events culminate, giving you a better picture of where the Western and Islamic nations are really headed. Request or download your free copy today.



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Current Events & Trends

by John Ross Schroeder and Jerold Aust

Persecution of Christians in Britain

The persecution of Christians in the developing world has increased rapidly during the last decade. A graph accompanying a recent *Newsweek* article bore the notation, "Terrorist attacks on Christians in Africa, the Middle East and Asia increased 309% from 2003 to 2010"—a mere seven years (Ayaan Hirsi Ali, "The Global War on Christians in the Muslim World," Feb. 13, 2012). But one wouldn't normally expect religious mistreatment in the English-speaking, democratic Western world. Nonetheless, raw persecution is now rearing its ugly head in Britain.

Most realize that the secular establishment has not been friendly to Christianity, and church attendance in Britain has been in decline for decades. Based on recent statistics, an article in *The Sunday Telegraph's Seven* magazine titled "What's Next for This Year's Child?" presents a metaphorical baby exclaiming, "By the time I'm an adult, there's a 70 per cent chance

that I'll be a non-believer" (Paul Kendall and John Hind, Feb. 18-19, 2012).

The current climate in Britain becomes more evident from statements by political leaders, such as Baroness Warsi, Conservative Party co-chairman. A Muslim herself, she wrote prior to leading a British delegation to the Vatican: "Faith has been neglected, undermined—and yes, even attacked—by governments . . . My fear today is that a militant secularism is taking hold of our societies. We see it in any number of things . . . religion is sidelined, marginalised and downgraded in the public sphere. It seems astonishing to me that those who wrote the European Constitution made no mention of God or Christianity" ("We Stand Side by Side With the Pope in Fighting for Faith," *The Daily Telegraph*, Feb. 13, 2012).

Former Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey warned in a forthright *Daily Mail* feature article: "For

the Christian faith is now being increasingly marginalised in this country—as a shocking court case this week has illustrated . . . Since the September 11 attacks, we seem to have become obsessed with not upsetting British Muslims, while successive pieces of legislation means the rights of homosexuals now seem to trump those of everyone else . . .

"Sadly, I could take you to many countries in the world where brave Christian minorities are facing dreadful persecution. *What's happening here is that Christians are being pushed into the background by a secular establishment that seems to be embarrassed by the fact that Britain is a Christian country*" ("As a Judge Bans Prayer at Council Meetings, a Former Archbishop of Canterbury Warns That Our Faith Is Under Siege," Feb. 10, 2012, emphasis added throughout). (Sources: *Daily Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *Newsweek*.)

Europe will ultimately come together

Currently there appears to be a lull in the forces that would propel Europe toward full integration. Fairly recent newspaper article titles reflect this general perception among veteran journalists. For instance: "Europe Says Goodbye to Solidarity" (*Financial Times*, Feb. 23, 2012); "Europe's 'Proud Empire' Is Entering a Cul-de-Sac of History" (Feb. 17); "The European Project Is Splitting Apart at the Very Core" (*The Sunday Telegraph*, Feb. 18).

Journalists speak of the old-world disorder and of what European Union (EU) leadership can do to halt decline and dissolution. Clearly Germany is concerned. German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the "de facto leader of Europe," has been inviting other European Union leaders to the palace retreat in Meseberg—Germany's version of America's Camp David—to discuss Europe's debt and urge closer ties (Nicholas Kulich, "A Village Where Europe Can Take a Stroll and Plot Its Future," *The New York Times*, March 15, 2012). So there remains every indication that the German nation will ultimately provide the civil leadership needed to bind Europe together more tightly.

But this aim won't be met through civil leadership alone. The religious element in unifying Europe certainly should not be carelessly overlooked. This vital aspect has long been and remains under discussion. Late last year Jonathan Sacks, Britain's chief rabbi, wrote an article about how religious leaders "of all faiths must help to restore morality to the world of finance in order to regenerate the economy and society" ("Chief Rabbi Urges Pope to Work Together to Save the Soul of Europe," *The Times*, Dec. 12, 2011).

British historian Norman Davies, was interviewed by *The Wall Street Journal*. He also laments the sad state of European affairs but thinks things can be turned around. The interviewer informs us: "As befits



Angela Merkel, the "de facto leader of Europe," has been inviting other EU leaders to the palace retreat in Meseberg—Germany's version of America's Camp David—to urge closer ties.

an historian of Europe, Mr. Davies is still holding out for a savior—a modern-day Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours or King Sobieski riding into Vienna [both of whom pushed Muslim forces back from overrunning Europe]. But he notes, "if there is a savior, a politician who emerges with a clear vision, it'll come from somewhere quite unexpected" (Raymond Zhong, "The Emperor of Vanished Kingdoms," Feb. 25, 2012).

Indeed the Bible speaks in its final book of a coming charismatic political leader known, along with his dominion, as "the beast." He will be in partnership with a religious leader and system known as "the false prophet" and "Babylon the Great." These two leaders will together weld Europe into a spiritually deluded superpower that will astonish the world and its inhabitants (see Revelation 13, 17).

You can read more about their role by requesting or downloading our free booklets *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* (Sources: *Financial Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Times* [London], *The Wall Street Journal*.)

Is China the solution to Western economic woes?

In the text of a graphic titled "Stepping Up to Buy," *The Wall Street Journal* noted: "Chinese state-owned and private enterprises are pouring investment money into the U.S., into industries such as auto parts, real estate, and oil and gas. The number of deals, and their overall value, has climbed steadily in recent years" (accompanies "In the Heart of the Rust Belt, Chinese Funds Provide the Grease," Feb. 11, 2012). Fairly recently, in Saginaw, Michigan, the Chinese rescued from ruin a substantial automotive company—that city's largest employer.

But America is far from the only target. The teaser for an article in *Time* magazine by Vivienne Walt titled "Feasting on Europe" stated, "As the euro-zone crisis deepens, China is angling for the union's most prized firms" (Dec. 19, 2011). The article explained that while China may currently be a small player in Europe, that is quickly changing.

Yet historians, journalists and academics remain somewhat skeptical about the viability of Chinese assistance long-term. Harvard professor and historian Niall Ferguson is only one. His London *Sunday Times* feature article of March 11 was titled "Get Ready to Be a Slave in China's World Order." The drophead starkly stated, "We think Chinese money is the answer to our problems, but the reason the country [China] is prospering is hard work—very hard work—and it will expect it from us too."

A review by Oxford economics professor Paul Collier of the 2012 book *Why Nations Fail*, by two U.S. academics, offered this advice in its title: "Don't Look to China for Economic Salvation" (*The Observer*, March 10). (Sources: *The Observer*, *The Sunday Times* [London], *Time*, *The Wall Street Journal*.)

China—an ominously powerful country

Niall Ferguson is a China watcher. During a recent interview with Philip Sherwell in *The Sunday Telegraph*, he “discussed a resurgent Chinese nationalism that ‘is almost intimidating in its intensity’ as the world undergoes a shift of financial and political power from West to East” (“China’s Got the Whole World in Its Hands,” March 11, 2012).

A key point from the interview was this: “Why does this matter for the rest of the world? For one thing, Ferguson sees unnerving echoes in that mixture of shrill nationalism and overseas ambition of Germany a century ago.”

The piece continued, “China is already devouring two-fifths of the world’s coal, zinc, aluminium and copper.” It further noted that the country has £2 trillion in reserve and is the West’s largest creditor—owning a substantial share of American debt. It also pointed out that China’s economic output may surpass the United States by 2016.

Militarily, as various news sources reported in early March, Beijing’s plans include an increase in defense funds of 11.2 percent. This comes at the same time that the United States foresees major cuts in manpower and conventional armaments—and also apparently wants to cut its nuclear weaponry substantially.

To understand what truly underlies America’s geopolitical preeminence slipping away, request or download our free booklets *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. (Sources: *The Sunday Telegraph*, Associated Press, Reuters.)

American religious freedoms undermined

We reside in a culture of contraception. Supposedly, in order to cope with the reality of our sinful plight and its horrendous consequences, some liberal voices maintain that the real contraceptive scandal is that people are not using them more. As an article teaser in the London *Times* stated: “If we can’t stop teenagers having sex, we can stop them having babies. That means firing the contraceptive big guns” (“Hard Cases Mean Hard Choices. Like Implants,” Feb. 11, 2012).

Forcing coverage of birth-control means in violation of people’s moral values is viewed by a many as unconstitutional.

Under provisions of Obamacare (the U.S. health insurance law put forward by the administration of President Barack Obama), the federal government will require that health-care coverage include contraceptives for the obvious purpose of birth control along with free sterilization and medications that can and will induce abortions.

A column drophead in *The Economist* boldly declared that “the president picks an unnecessary fight with the mighty Catholic Church” (“Obama’s ‘War on Religion,’” Feb. 11, 2012). Official Roman Catholic doctrine opposes all of these practices, yet

enterprises owned or controlled by the church (or by other religious institutions) would be compelled to provide employees with such coverage. Even if changed to having only insurance companies provide such coverage, many insurers who are Catholic would be acting against conscience. Moreover, all individuals are effectively being required to purchase such coverage.

Church officials regard these aspects of Obamacare as a direct attack on the religious freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

And indeed, forcing the coverage of birth-control means in violation of people’s basic moral values is correctly viewed by a great many as blatantly unconstitutional. In fact, merely forcing individuals to enter into contract and pay for health insurance, whether independently or through their and employers, is deemed unconstitutional by a large part of the country—and the case is currently before the U.S. Supreme Court.

This matter, particularly the issue of government trampling over religious freedom, causes the gravest concern to many if not most American citizens. Furthermore, dressing up abortion by using such phrases as women “exercising their reproductive rights” is clearly repugnant to many with moral views based on the Bible.

The birth-control debate remains just one more aspect of the intense moral battle Americans are waging against each other along several fronts. Our free booklet *The Ten Commandments* spells out the behavior God requires of human beings. (Sources: *The Economist*, *The Times* [London].)

Syria’s part in a new Middle East

Former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan pressed the embattled government of Syrian President Bashar Assad to accept a peace plan that would impose an immediate cease-fire between Assad’s forces and rebels, deliver humanitarian aid to Syria’s beleaguered people and force the government into dialogue with the opposition. The plan won endorsement of the U.N. Security Council, including Russia and China, who had blocked tough resolutions in the past. But Assad held firm, shelling suburbs of the capital, Damascus (“An End to Violence?” *Time*, April 2, 2012). Things may not stay this way, though.



In trouble: Bashar and Asma al-Assad of Syria

The ultimate reformation or fall of Syria’s dictator and government is part of a greater geopolitical rearrangement. Who could have fathomed the fall of major players across the Middle East? First Iraq, then Egypt, followed by Libya, and now Syria’s Assad teeters on the cusp.

Certainly there could be operatives from different nations helping to depose longstanding governments. But secret ops can only do so much. Beyond this, random and extreme forces can change a planned

strategy, negating the most brilliantly laid-out plans.

But there’s more. This world is presently ruled by great unseen forces under one referred to in the Bible as “the ruler of this world” and “the god of this age” (John 14:30; 2 Corinthians 4:4). This being, Satan the devil, who “deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9), currently holds sway over the earth’s kingdoms (Matthew 4:8-9). Yet even he can’t do anything without God allowing him to for the time being. God is the one who ultimately determines who rules: “He removes kings and raises up kings” (Daniel 2:21). The ancient Babylonian emperor Nebuchadnezzar learned that God can bring down a ruler filled with pride (Daniel 4:32).

As mentioned elsewhere in this issue of *The Good News*, Scripture shows that a great Muslim confederation will come to dominate the Middle East, its ruler identified in prophecy as “the king of the South” (see Daniel 11:40). The successive toppling of Mideast dictators, of which Syria’s leader may well end up a casualty, could be part of a domino effect precipitating the rise of the final king of the South.

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. This eye-opening program offers you a perspective so badly needed in our confused world—the perspective of God’s Word. Visit us at ucg.org/beyond-today/daily!





Behind the Headlines

Will Iran Again Influence a U.S. Presidential Election?

More than 30 years ago, Iran's theocratic regime influenced the result of the U.S. presidential election. Once again, Iran is set to be a major factor in an American election. *by Melvin Rhodes*

Iran could once again determine the outcome of the U.S. presidential election. It happened in 1980. It could happen in 2012.

Prior to 1979 Iran was an ally of the United States, using its military power to take care of Western interests in the Persian Gulf. Then, early in 1979, the pro-Western Shah of Iran was overthrown, and Iran's monarchy was replaced by a revolutionary theocratic state under the direct rule of Islamic ayatollahs.

During the upheaval of the revolution, American embassy staff were held hostage by revolutionaries in contravention of all international norms and agreements. Their captivity lasted 444 days. After failed attempts to negotiate a release, the U.S. military attempted a rescue in April 1980. The mission failed—with the loss of eight American lives and two military aircraft.

This military venture and the failed negotiations over a long period contributed to the defeat of President Jimmy Carter in the 1980 U.S. presidential election.

Carter was perceived as weak in the face of Iranian intransigence, while the one who defeated him, Ronald Reagan, was seen as being willing to do whatever was necessary to end the hostage situation without further American humiliation. It was no coincidence that the Iranians released the hostages only minutes after Reagan was sworn in as the new U.S. president.

Today, the current U.S. president, Barack Obama, is perceived by some as weak on Iran. While the Iranians move toward acquiring nuclear weapons, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warns of the growing threat to both Israel and the West from Iran, President Obama has strengthened sanctions but has seemingly done little to meet

the danger of a nuclear-armed Iran.

That, or other developments with Iran, could have significant impact on the coming U.S. election in November—and on the world at large.

Oil access and fuel prices

If Iran attacks Israel or a U.S. target in the Middle East in the months ahead, it could powerfully influence the American election. The same would be true if Israel attacks Iran. Even continued unease could influence the outcome of the election, as instability raises the international price of oil, increasing the cost at the pump, a major issue in American politics.

Higher fuel prices means *everything* is going up, especially food. (Ironically, neither gasoline nor food is included in the official U.S. inflation figures, as both are considered seasonal.)

Iran has repeatedly threatened to block the narrow Strait of Hormuz, through which about 20 percent of the world's oil is transported in giant tankers. All it would take is attacks on a few to cause insurance costs to skyrocket, likely bringing shipping to a halt in that area. Of course, this would automatically spike the price of oil around the world, inevitably contributing to global economic chaos and possible worldwide recession.

The New York Times reports: "Iran and the West have been at odds over its nuclear program for years. But the dispute has picked up steam since November 2011, with new findings by international inspectors, tougher sanctions by the United States and Europe, threats by Iran to shut the Strait of Hormuz to oil shipments and Israel [having] signaled increasing readiness to attack Iran's nuclear facilities" ("Iran's Nuclear Program," March 8, 2012).

And a recent article in *Newsweek* highlighted the fact that Iran, battling international sanctions against the country, has hit back by imposing its own sanctions on six European countries. Europe is more dependent on Iranian oil than the United States, though any negative effect on Europe would also impact the United States, as the world price of oil determines U.S. gasoline prices.

Interestingly, Iran's sanctions were imposed on France and five of the so-called PIIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain)—countries already struggling to cope in the eurozone debt crisis. The article, written by Harvard history professor and noted author Niall Ferguson, speculated that Iran's goal is to bring these countries down, which would have a ripple effect globally, toppling the international economic system:

"Energy dependency has geopolitical consequences—like reducing your leverage in any row with an oil exporter. If even the rumor of an Iranian export ban could send the price of oil above \$120 a barrel, what would a full-scale showdown between Iran and Israel do? Answer: it would inflict yet more economic misery on Europe, which gives Brussels a big incentive to avoid such a showdown" ("Iran Uses European Oil Dependence as Blackmail on Nukes," Feb. 20, 2012).

Iran's widespread influence

While the West is preoccupied with the impact Iran's nuclear program could have on Western countries and Israel, nations in the Middle East have wider concerns, going back over 13 centuries.

While most Muslims are of the Sunni branch of Islam, most Iranians are of the Shia branch. The feud between these branches goes back to the seventh century. As Shiites are a minority, an Iranian nuclear power would, at last, give them the upper hand over the majority Sunnis.

This possibility is leading Sunni Muslim

nations in the Middle East such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt to contemplate nuclear weapons of their own to deter an Iranian attack. In an extremely volatile region, the existence of multiple nuclear powers may well, in a short period of time, lead to nuclear war.

Iran is not isolated among Islamic nations. The Iranians dominate an arc of countries that extends both northwest of Iran and eastward. It now includes Iraq, which has a majority Shia population—a

extends to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Indeed, in February, the leaders of all three countries met. As the latter two are theoretically U.S. allies in the war against radical Islamists, their meeting should be a serious warning to the United States. The meeting was given little attention by American media.

Furthermore, Iran's influence is not limited to the Middle East. It extends to Venezuela and Cuba, close neighbors of the United States. There has even been specula-

increase further with the growing tension in the Middle East. European countries are already in recession—and any increase in the price of oil could tip them into a deeper economic crisis.)

Of course, President Obama's perceived failure to deal with Iran thus far would not be the only way Iran could factor into the U.S. election. If he decides to take military action against Iran shortly before the election, as some maintain he will, that might sway the vote his way—many Americans being wary of "changing horses in mid-stream," as the saying goes. There is, however, no evidence as yet of such a strategy on his part.

A coming Mideast clash

As detailed in our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*, the Bible foretells the coming clash of "the king of the South," from what is today the Islamic world, and "the king of the North," leader of a revived Roman Empire composed of a union of nations centered in Europe.

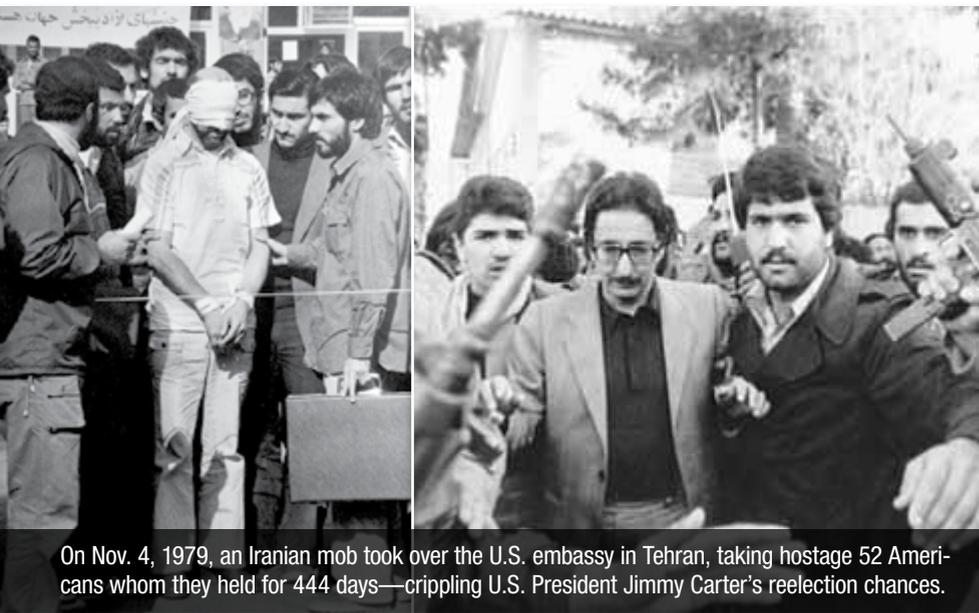
Daniel 11:40 prophesies, "At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships . . ." The "time of the end" referred to is the period immediately prior to Christ's return. The wording here, written in Aramaic in the sixth century before Christ, implies a major military force hitting back at the territory of the king of the South.

The North is portrayed as responding to an action of the South. The king of the South will "attack" the North or, as the King James Version of the Bible renders this, "push at" the North.

The "push" may imply something other than a direct military attack on Europe. It could be terrorist actions. Or it could be an economic threat. Blocking the Strait of Hormuz or otherwise choking off the West's oil supplies would certainly come into this category. Europe is far more dependent on Middle Eastern oil than the United States. It's also possible that American reluctance to take needed military action could be a cause leading to European intervention.

This is not meant to identify Iran as the king of the South—for the southern power may well rise from the majority Sunni Arab nations. Yet Iranian actions could be a catalyst for this.

Continuing in Daniel 11, the prophet states, ". . . and he [the king of the North] shall enter the countries, overwhelm them,



On Nov. 4, 1979, an Iranian mob took over the U.S. embassy in Tehran, taking hostage 52 Americans whom they held for 444 days—crippling U.S. President Jimmy Carter's reelection chances.

population previously kept under control by its late president Saddam Hussein, a nominal but mostly irreligious Sunni Arab. The new democratic system established by U.S. and coalition nations resulted in the majority Shia gaining dominance. And they naturally look to fellow Shiites in Iran.

Saddam Hussein had also kept Iran in check in the region. His removal and the long war in Iraq have resulted in Iran emerging as a much stronger regional power—one of the worst possible outcomes for the West.

Syria's beleaguered regime is dominated by the minority Alawites, a sect of Shia Islam. In the current crisis, Iran naturally supports the status quo. If President Bashar al-Assad is overthrown, it is likely that a majority Sunni government would replace him. This would go against Iran's interests and sever its land connection with Hezbollah, a terrorist group it sponsors in Lebanon. Iran also supports and influences Hamas, a terrorist group that operates in the West Bank and rules Gaza. Hezbollah and Hamas are virulently anti-Israel.

In the other direction, Iran's influence

tion that Iran intends to aim its first nuclear devices at America's East Coast, launching missiles from one of the two countries.

And Iran's increased military power has support from two old enemies of the United States—Russia and China. Any action against Iran by the United States could result in a clash with either one or both of these nations.

With all this in mind, it's surprising that Iran isn't the number one issue in the U.S. election. Of course, there's still time for that to happen. While the economy is the top issue in the United States right now, when Iran impacts the U.S. economy in a bigger way it could have a major impact on the election. If, for example, gas rose to \$5 a gallon (approximately \$1.25 per liter), the psychological blow could greatly influence the vote.

(As this magazine is an international magazine, it should be stated that \$1.25 per liter would be the envy of most consumers around the world. On a recent visit to the United Kingdom, I noticed that the price was closer to \$2.25 or £1.40 a liter—about \$9.00 per U.S. gallon—an amount likely to



and pass through. He shall also enter the Glorious Land, and many countries shall be overthrown” (verses 40-41).

The North’s counterstrike leads to forces of this European leader invading and occupying various nations of the Middle East. The “Glorious Land” is another term for the Holy Land.

When asked, “What sign will there be when these things are about to take place?” (Luke 21:7), Jesus told His disciples, “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near” (verse 20).

Jerusalem is at the heart of Bible prophecy. It has been well-documented that Iran’s leadership is intent on destroying the nation of Israel, and various other Muslim leaders have proclaimed this desire this as well. Bible prophecy shows that Jerusalem will be at the very center of the end-time events that lead to Christ’s return.

In a prophecy about this period of time, God spoke these words through the prophet Zechariah: “For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem” (Zechariah 14:2). And also: “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” (Zechariah 12:2-3).

The reference to “a cup of drunkenness” shows that nations will be irrational and unpredictable in their manic desire to destroy the Jewish nation of Israel. This describes accurately the insanity of the Iranian regime—an intent few in the West can fully appreciate.

Leaders seeking global conflict

The theocratic nature of this Islamic state needs to be better understood by Western nations.

The hatred and self-destructive tendency in the leadership is tied in with the expectation of the return of the 12th imam of Shia Islam, who is destined to lead the Muslim faith. About 85 percent of Shia Muslims are *Twelvers*. They expect the imminent return of the 12th imam, who disappeared in the ninth century. Many believe that they must stir up trouble in the world to hasten his return. Western countries are not dealing with a rational power when they deal with Iran’s current leadership.

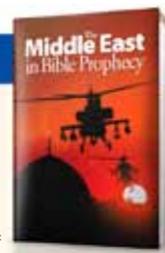
It’s interesting to note that Twelvers are expecting the return of the 12th imam, the Mahdi or “[divinely] guided one,” a messianic figure, at the same time that conservative Christians are expecting the second coming of their Messiah, Jesus Christ. Twelvers believe the Mahdi will work with Jesus—whom they consider to be a Muslim who will force Christians to convert to

Islam—to establish a just and perfect universal society.

It should be clear to all that Iran is set on an intransigent course and cannot be dealt with in the same way other nations are treated. Whether or not Iran attacks Israel or the East Coast of the United States, or simply continues to stir up trouble as opportunity presents itself, remains to be seen. But increased tension is likely, and Israel or the United States may take military action in the shrinking window of time before Iran acquires nuclear capability.

Whatever the case, Iran’s theocratic regime could turn out once again to be a powerful factor in this year’s U.S. presidential election. **GN**

Learn More



Why is it that the Middle East so often dominates our headlines? It’s not only the birthplace of three major religions, but also the home of ancient hostilities and hatreds and the source of the lifeblood of the world’s economy—oil. How will all these factors play out in the end time? You need to know! Request or download your free copy of *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* today!

Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our website.

www.GNmagazine.org/booklets

How Can You Understand the Rapidly Changing World Scene?

The staff that produces *The Good News* magazine obviously plays no role in determining either Israeli or American foreign policy. We have no crystal ball to foresee day-to-day or month-to-month occurrences. What we do bring to our readers is basic prophetic insight, based on the Bible, making assessment of significant global events and trends much easier.

We are well aware that today’s news indicates that our world may be on the edge of economic and political chaos. Earlier this year, an article in *Fortune* magazine on a different subject stated: “Too much is happening in the world. Politically, economically, and culturally momentous news is occurring on every continent seemingly every day, and it’s overwhelming for the hapless citizen striving to stay on top of it all” (Geoff Colvin, “A World in Chaos? That May Be a Good Thing,” Jan. 23, 2012).

An important role of *The Good News* is to help readers separate the wheat from the chaff in implementing Jesus Christ’s instructions of Luke 21:36: “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.” This is part of the end-time prophecy Christ gave on the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem. It summarizes the traumatic events that will take place prior to His second coming.

Between one fourth and one third of the Bible is prophecy. If we choose to ignore or seriously neglect such an extensive portion of God’s Word, we are

depriving ourselves of crucial understanding of our modern world. After all, the prophet Amos did tell us, “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

Today we have the prophets and Christ’s apostles as well as the prophetic sayings of Christ Himself in the Gospel accounts. The apostle Peter wanted Christians to “*be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandments of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior*” (2 Peter 3:2, emphasis added). Portions of the apostolic writings were prophetic, including of course the book of Revelation.

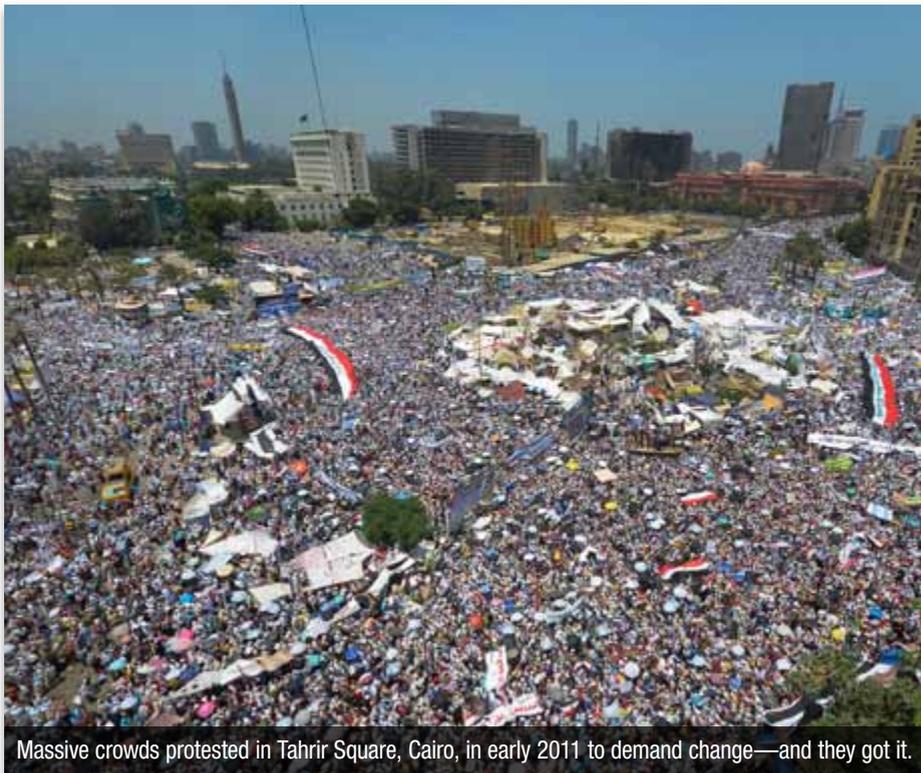
For many years *The Good News* has been analyzing and explaining the changing world scene in the light of Bible prophecy, focusing in particular on three major prophesied trends—ongoing unrest in the Middle East setting the stage for a final devastating war, the rise of a new superpower centered in Europe, and the moral, spiritual, economic and geopolitical decline of the United States and the major English-speaking nations.

It’s no coincidence that all three regularly dominate our headlines. All were long ago foretold as key developments reshaping our world before the return of Jesus Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to usher in the coming Kingdom of God—another key message regularly emphasized in the pages of *The Good News*.

—John Ross Schroeder and Scott Ashley

Who Will Dominate the Middle East?

As America pulls out of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, other powers are rushing in to fill the vacuum. Domestic, regional and global forces are all vying for influence. Where are events in the ever-volatile Middle East headed? *by Rod Hall*



Massive crowds protested in Tahrir Square, Cairo, in early 2011 to demand change—and they got it.

With the shifting sands of the Middle East and North Africa, the United States appears to be losing its ability to shape events in the region. Things are certainly looking bad for the state of Israel. In fact, with so many contending over this region, things are looking bleaker and more dangerous for everyone.

Last year's so-called "Arab Spring" saw dissident groups of vastly different overall aims coming together to remove dictatorial regimes. But that temporary unity based on sharing a common enemy is already beginning to unravel.

Where are the geopolitical changes in the region headed? Let's consider five factors

underlying the major power shifts underway.

Islamists dominate newly elected parliaments

Post-uprising elections have swept political Islamists into office. These have garnered the vast majority of seats in parliaments in Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco and Kuwait.

The same will likely occur in the upcoming Libyan elections, where Islamist strains run through almost all parties. And Yemen's new Muslim president will likely be joined by Islamists coming to power in parliamentary elections.

Egypt's presidential elections scheduled for May 23 and 24 may see the Islamists' newfound political power in parliament at

work as kingmakers push for their selected candidate. Furthermore, Islamists in parliament are determined to curtail the president's powers in the next constitution, giving more say in the running of the country to the legislature they now dominate.

(The interim caretaker prime minister and cabinet the military rulers installed are expected to relinquish power this summer. But the diminishing of the military's power in dominating the government is expected to be a gradual process.)

In Egypt and elsewhere Islamists are winning because they have the most organized networks to mobilize voters, are the most trusted public or political groups, and have a track record of challenging oppressive or autocratic regimes.

Muslim Brotherhood offshoots in Libya and Syria, where they have suffered persecution from the government for decades, recently established political parties in anticipation of future elections.

Cairo-based journalist John Bradley, author of *After the Arab Spring: How Islamists Hijacked the Middle East Revolutions* (2012), argues that the Islamist groups that have taken power in the Middle East are here to stay—with dire prospects for liberal democracy anywhere in the region. Asked in *Zócalo Public Square* online magazine whether some Islamist groups have already peaked, giving room for secular agendas to grow in the future, he responded:

"The opposite is true. It's secularism and liberalism that have peaked in the Arab world. Remember, [Iraq's] Saddam Hussein was a secularist, as was [Yemen's] Ali Abdullah Saleh, [Egypt's] Hosni Mubarak, [Libya's] Colonel Gaddafi, and [Tunisia's] Ben Ali. It's therefore not difficult to understand why most Arabs now associate secularism and liberalism with corruption, torture, tyranny, poverty, and a lack of dignity . . . That's the vacuum now being filled by political Islam. What will happen in the long-term nobody can predict. But the medium-term belongs to the Islamists" ("What Moderate Islamism?" March 4, 2012).

This does not bode well for the West in



general and Israel in particular. Islamists in general are more hostile than secularists to peace with Israel and are supportive of Hamas, the terror organization now governing the Gaza Strip.

Sunni Crescent vs. Shiite Crescent

Regional geopolitics pit the powerful “Sunni Crescent” led by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates against the beleaguered “Shiite Crescent” states—Iran, Iraq and Lebanon.

Barry Rubin, director of global research in the International Affairs Center in Israel, sizes up the strategic battle for influence in *The Jerusalem Post*: “The new Middle East strategic battle is heating up, and this is only the start. It has nothing to do with Israel and everything to do with two more serious lines of battle: Arabs versus Persians [of Iran] and Sunni versus Shia Muslims . . .

“The real struggle is over who will control each Muslim majority country and who is going to lead the Middle East . . . The Sunni Arab position was stated very clearly by Amr Moussa, a veteran Arab nationalist and candidate for Egypt’s presidency: ‘(The) Arab Middle East will not be run by Iran or Turkey’” (“The Region: The New Middle East’s Internal Divisions,” March 4, 2012).

Rubin later clarifies what is emerging: “What we are seeing again, for the first time in three decades . . . is an Egyptian bid to lead the Arabic-speaking world and even the whole region. On this point, Egyptian leftists, nationalists and Islamists are united.

“And in the first round, the battle over control of the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, Egypt won and Iran lost.” (See “Hamas’ Shifting Allegiance Reflects New Mideast Dynamics” on page 19.)

Egypt is the largest Arab country, with a population of 83 million, and has long had a major influence on the region. Now

that Islamists have won 72 percent of the seats in the lower house and nearly as many in the upper, this fundamentalist orientation will likely be a major influence on the growing number of Islamic governments in the region.

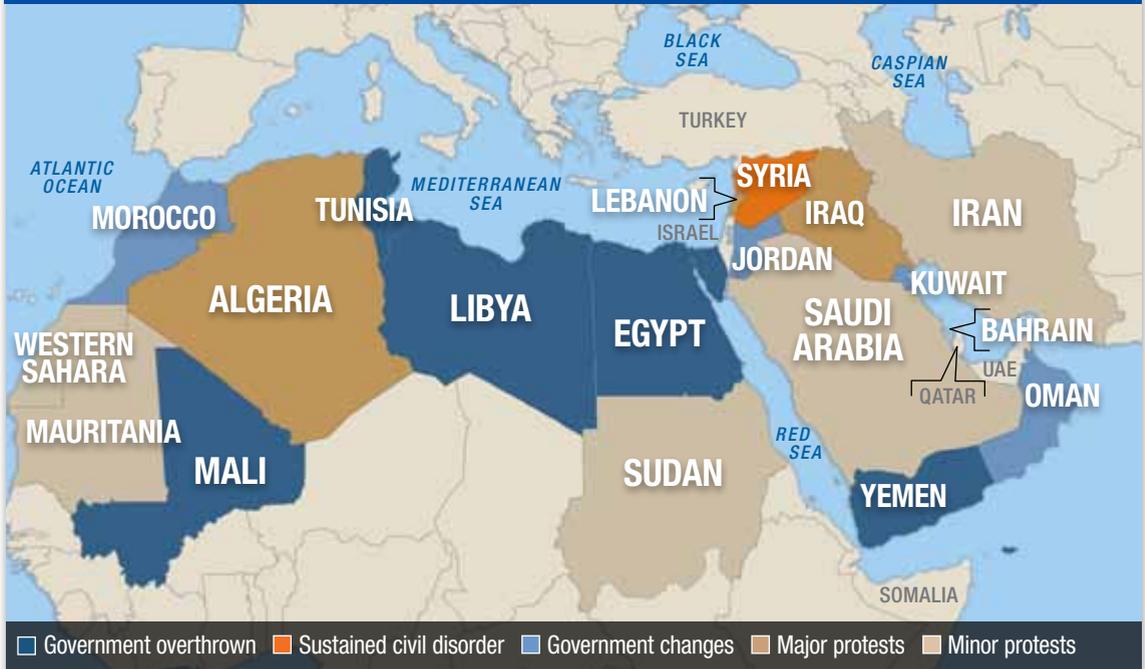
Regional geopolitical jockeying

As Hamas and Egypt push for regional

opposition in Syria, counterbalance Iranian sway in Iraq and influence the rise of political Islamists, particularly in Egypt and Syria. But analysts don’t see it making much headway.

Stratfor also explains how Iran affects Saudi Arabia’s push for regional dominance: “Iran’s regional expansion will be felt most deeply by Saudi Arabia. The Saudi

Turmoil Sweeps a Crucial and Deeply Troubled Region



In addition to the regional forces vying for dominance in the Middle East, the Arab Spring has sparked a global tussle as well—particularly between the United States, Russia and China.

influence, other regional players are doing the same. In its annual forecast, the global intelligence service Stratfor (Strategic Forecasting) pointed out that Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia are involved in a dance for dominance in the shifting political sands of the region:

“Iran’s efforts to expand its influence will be the primary issue for the Middle East in 2012. The U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq has rendered Iran the pre-eminent military power in the Persian Gulf . . . Turkey, Iran’s natural regional counterweight, is rising steadily, albeit slowly” (“Annual Forecast 2012,” Jan. 20, 2012).

Turkey, the report states, will continue to face significant challenges to its regional ascendancy due to instability near its borders. It continues its efforts to mold an



Photos: Wikimedia, map by Shaun Venish

Hamas' Shifting Allegiance Reflects New Mideast Dynamics

Egypt's new parliament is already changing the Egyptians' relationships with their neighbors across their northern border—Israel and the terrorist organization Hamas, which runs the Gaza Strip and is vehemently opposed to Israel's existence. Hamas has been acting as a proxy for Iran, a Persian Shiite state, but being an offshoot of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood it is Sunni Arab and identifies more with the Arab world.

Now Hamas is trying to take full advantage of the changes in Egypt and the rise of Islamists in the region. It is trying to present itself as a pragmatic and reconcilable political alternative to the Fatah party, which controls the West Bank. There is an ongoing struggle between the two for leadership of the recently formed Palestinian unity government.

Hamas is trying to be a resistance movement, reform agent and loyal opposition to Fatah all at the same time. It is working to bolster its relationships with Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

But there is still division in the ranks. For example, some leaders recently said that in the event of a war between Iran and Israel, Hamas would not back Tehran. But a few days later Foreign Minister Mahmoud Zahar refuted that statement, saying that Hamas would respond "with utmost power" to any "Zionist war on Iran."



Hamas campaigns for political power in Ramallah in the West Bank.

Time magazine reports on changes underway in the organization: "[The Feb. 28] announcement that the Hamas leadership has officially relocated from [Iran-aligned] Damascus, and its public declarations of support for the Syrian rebels, suggest a dramatic political break with Iran—and with it the end of any illusion Tehran might have harbored of exerting influence in the new revolutionary Arab mainstream . . .

"Hamas' options and prospects have been altered by the revolutionary tide that has swept aside some key Arab autocracies and empowered Muslim Brotherhood organizations that remain

Hamas' natural political kin. The Palestinian public is solidly behind the Syrian rebellion, in which the Muslim Brotherhood is a key element" ("Hamas Signals Break With Iran, but Is That Good for Israel?" Feb. 29, 2012).

George Washington University professor Nathan Brown, an expert on Arab politics, has a commentary at the website of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace with the title "Is Hamas Mellowing?" (Jan. 17, 2012). He writes:

"Over the past few weeks, as Palestinian reconciliation efforts have inched forward, some of Hamas's leaders have provoked interest by apparently staking out new positions. They have not only agreed to enter the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), thus participating in a body that signed the Oslo Accords with Israel, a pact the group has long opposed [since it means ultimately recognizing the Jewish state], but also committed themselves to 'popular resistance,' an alternative to the armed activity through which the group gained international notoriety.

"But for every tentative step by one leader, there is a restatement of old positions—sometimes in very pugnacious form—by another. What is happening to the movement? Is Hamas mellowing? No. Or at least not yet."

royals now doubt that the United States has the ability or the willingness to fully guarantee Riyadh's interests. Adding to Saudi Arabia's vulnerabilities, the Gulf Cooperation Council states fear that if Iran is not contained within Iraq, it will exploit continued Shiite unrest in Bahrain and in Saudi Arabia's Shia-concentrated, oil-rich Eastern Province."

Saudi Arabia is leading efforts to shore up and consolidate the defenses of Gulf Cooperation Council members to try to ward off the threat posed by Iran. But those efforts will not be a sufficient replacement for America's role as a security guarantor.

Stratfor goes on to examine the tug-of-war underway in Iraq and Syria: "The effects of Iran's expansion efforts will be most visible in Iraq and Syria. In Iraq, Iran's main challenge is to consolidate Shiite power among several competing groups.

"As Iraq's fractured Shiite leadership tries to solidify its influence with Iranian support, Iraq's Sunni and Kurdish factions increasingly will be put on the defensive.

This ethno-sectarian struggle and the security vacuum created by the U.S. withdrawal will degrade Iraq's overall security conditions.

"Meanwhile, Turkey will attempt to contain the spread of Iranian influence in northern Iraq by building up political, economic, military and intelligence assets."

The fight in Syria is really two contests in one. It's a struggle between Syrians over the nature of their government and society, but it's also a regional rivalry between Iran and its adversaries, as Stratfor explains:

"In Syria, the ultimate goal of Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United States will be to disrupt Iran's Shiite arc of influence by trying to crack Syrian President Bashar al Assad's regime. However, without direct foreign military intervention, the Syrian regime is unlikely to collapse."

Even the normally feeble 22 nations of the Arab League took unprecedented actions in calling for the Assad regime to leave and hosted a "Friends of Syria" meeting to try to gain support for boycotts and

possible military assistance.

The League pushed hard for a resolution from the United Nations Security Council calling on Assad to step aside, but even a watered-down version calling for a cease-fire and talks was blocked by Russia and China.

Also, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Jordan are all calling on Assad to go. But as of this writing they remain ambivalent about direct military action, although Saudi Arabia is providing some arms to the rebels.

Syria's ties to Iran complicate its status in the Middle East's power balance. The two countries are commercial partners, have signed a mutual defense agreement and in the past have supported the terror groups Hezbollah and Hamas, which act against Israel. As pointed to above, the tie to Iran is undoubtedly a major factor in the Arab states calling for Assad's departure.

Unlike the other Arab Spring uprisings, Syria's rebels do not reflect a sweeping cross-culture movement. There is still a large segment of the populace remaining



loyal to Assad, so the fighting is likely to be protracted.

Writing in *Foreign Policy*, journalist Nir Rosen explains the Islamic base of the revolt in Syria: “Syria’s uprising is not a secular one. Most participants are devout Muslims inspired by Islam. By virtue of Syria’s demography most of the opposition is Sunni Muslim and often come from conservative areas. The death of the Arab left means religion has assumed a greater role in daily life throughout the Middle East” (“Islamism and the Syrian Uprising,” March 8, 2012).

Big stakes for the big powers

In addition to the regional forces vying for dominance in the Middle East, the Arab Spring has sparked a global tussle as well. It has become a springboard for big-power geopolitics among the world’s greatest military powers—America, Russia and China.

Two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the West has yet to adjust to the post-Soviet reality, and Russia has not settled on its relationship with the rest of the world. And China’s growing economic and military prowess means it has a greater need for vital Middle East oil but also the means to secure what it needs.

Syria has emerged as a key battleground for a Cold War–style tug-of-war between these powers. Russia sent warships to discourage foreign intervention in Syria. China has sent emissaries to Syria to try to broker a cease-fire deal and is being drawn more deeply into Iran’s confrontation with the West. And America has less and less influence in the region.

Syria is often called Russia’s last remaining ally in the Middle East. The relationship between them goes back four decades. It formed the centerpiece of the Soviet position in the region during the Cold War, the Soviets then equipping and training the Syrian military.

Moscow today continues to arm and politically shield the Assad regime. The Russians are intent on keeping their only military base outside the old Soviet Union in Syria’s Mediterranean port of Tartus. In addition, Russia is thought to have major economic interests in Syria, including arms contracts and plans for nuclear energy cooperation.

But America seems equally determined to see a pro-Western regime in Damascus. This has created diplomatic tensions with Russia and China who oppose measures that could lead to military intervention or

forced regime change in Syria.

Russia sent at least three guided missile frigates—reportedly loaded with anti-aircraft and anti-ship missiles—to Syria. Russia’s main interest in blocking UN sanctions against the Assad regime is to prevent NATO intervention in Syria and to keep the country in its sphere of influence.

The threat of nuclear attack and proliferation

Just as Russia’s approach to the Middle

odds with America and the West for much of that time.

Israel sees the prospect of a nuclear Iran that calls for its annihilation as an existential threat. Israeli leaders maintain that a decision to strike Iranian nuclear facilities will have to occur by the time Iran is on the verge of shielding these facilities from attack—what they call the “zone of immunity.”

Some experts oppose an attack because they claim that even a successful strike



The guided missile destroyer *Admiral Chabanenko* was part of the Russian navy flotilla that visited Syria.

Syria has emerged as a key battleground for a Cold War–style tug-of-war. Russia sent warships to discourage foreign intervention in Syria. China has sent emissaries to Syria to try to broker a cease-fire deal. And America has less and less influence in the region.

East is at a turning point, Iran seems as determined as ever to move ahead with its nuclear program in defiance of America, Israel and the rest of the West—and the broader world. Even Russia and China oppose Iran getting a nuclear weapon.

Iranian society 33 years ago was steeped in revolutionary fervor. Today it suffers from revolutionary fatigue. This is one reason Iran’s 2009 uprising did not have the same durability as the popular uprisings that have unsettled and unseated numerous Arab dictatorships. People may aspire for revolutionary ends, but there’s no romanticism about it and a limited appetite for it.

Iran has been a quasi-theocracy since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. It has been at

would, at best, delay Iran’s nuclear program for only a few years.

Many experts believe the greatest threat associated with the Iranian nuclear program is that it might trigger a regional nuclear arms race that would be deeply destabilizing and would dramatically increase the risk of a weapon falling into irresponsible or fanatical hands.

The president of the United States, Barack Obama, has said that nothing is off the table when it comes to preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, after meeting with Obama, acknowledged that differences still exist in the Israeli and American timetables for

contending with the Iranian nuclear program, as reported by *The New York Times*:

“Mr. Netanyahu reiterated the point he had sought to make forcefully in Washington: that if Iran did not change course, Israel, which considers a nuclear Iran a threat to its existence, would not allow itself to be in a position where its fate was left in others’ hands” (“Netanyahu Says U.S. and Israeli ‘Clocks’ Differ on Iran’s Threat,” March 9, 2012).

Negotiation efforts are underway to try to come to a diplomatic solution. The six-power talks with Iran include the United States, Russia, China, France, Britain and Germany. Obama was hoping talks would help quiet the “drums of war.” But others think the Iranians’ agreement to these talks is just a false show of cooperation while their nuclear development still goes on.

Reuters news agency reports on the U.S. stance: “‘Military action is the last alternative when all else fails,’ [U.S. Defense Secretary Leon] Panetta told the annual policy conference of the biggest U.S. pro-Israel lobbying group, AIPAC. ‘But make no mistake, when all else fails, we will act’” (“Obama Says New Iran Talks Should Calm ‘Drums of War,’” March 6, 2012).

Regional transformation will lead to what is foretold

What all this adds up to is that these multilayered shifting sands of domestic, regional and global forces blowing through the Middle East and North Africa are changing the region more dramatically than at any time in the last half century.

The factors underlying the major power shifts carry long-term effects, creating a dramatically different Middle East than what this generation has known.

And there’s another source to help us see what’s happening. Bible prophecy reveals how all these shifting forces will eventually play out.

The Arab Spring uprisings, in the short term, have focused the Arab world’s attention on the changes swirling around them and away from their longtime nemesis—Israel. But, as prophecy lays out, the persistent hatred of Israel will in the long run grow exponentially as Islamic influence grows. Prophecies indicate that a more united group of Arab nations, perhaps sparked by religious zeal, will focus their rekindled hostility toward Israel.

This hostility will grow to a major crescendo leading to all-out war as we approach the end of this age. Psalm 83 contains an

intriguing prophecy that shows a number of Middle Eastern countries forming a confederation of nations determined to cut off Israel from being a nation (verses 3-8).

Out of this region will arise a strong end-time leader Daniel the prophet calls “the king of the South”—successor to the ancient Greek rulers of Egypt (Daniel 11:40). This ruler, probably backed by other Islamic nations joined in confederacy with him, will start the cascade of terrifying events leading to a massive war with the power and ruler the Bible refers to as “the king of the North”—successor to the ancient Greek rulers of Syria.

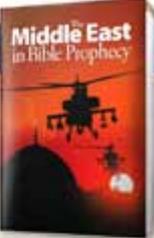
This power is synonymous with the final revival of the Roman Empire referred to in Scripture as the Beast—which will consist of a brief union of 10 nations (Revelation 17:12-14).

The forces of the North, Europe at this time, will sweep down through the Middle East in a major military counterattack that will overthrow the southern power and occupy key portions of the Middle East (Daniel 11:40-41). (See also “The Middle East: Focus of End-Time Bible Prophecy” beginning on page 8.)

Ultimately, however, this European power and other eastern forces arrayed against it will resist the return of Jesus Christ as coming King and will suffer utter defeat (Revelation 16:12-14; 17:14; 19:11-21). (Our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* gives more details.)

In the meantime, Jesus tells all of us to stay on the alert to events heralding His coming (Matthew 24:42; Luke 21:36). One major indicator we should be watching for is the rise of a unifying force and leader in the Middle East. Keep your eyes and interests fastened on significant developments in this critically important region. **GN**

Learn More



Download or request your free copy of our booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. It focuses on the fact that the Middle East region will be where the crucial events of end-time prophecy culminate. This eye-opening booklet will give you a much clearer picture of where current trends are really headed. And be sure to read the section “What Should You Do?” on pages 74-75, which explains the steps you can personally take to ensure your own salvation.

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Who’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*, various booklets (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, sharing the truth of God’s purpose and plan for us as taught by Jesus Christ.

The United Church of God has congregations and ministers around the world. In these congregations believers assemble to be instructed from the Scriptures and to fellowship. For locations and times of services in your area, contact us at the appropriate address on page 2. Visitors are always welcome.



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The Coming of a New Babylon

The European debt crisis still simmers. Are we seeing a geopolitical development long foretold in Bible prophecy emerging before our eyes? What exactly is occurring with this world crisis?

by Beyond Today host Darris McNeely

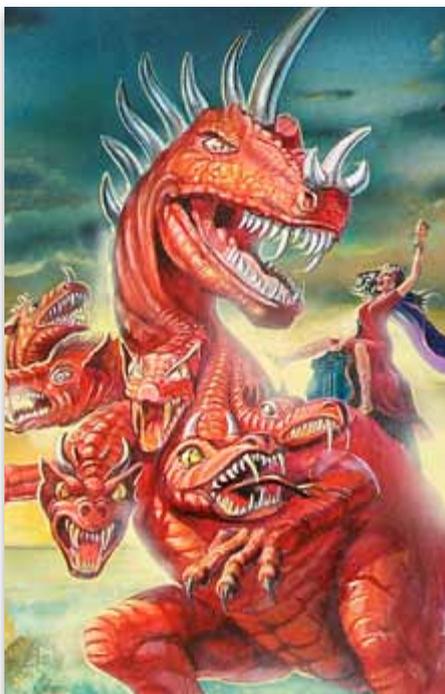
For more than a generation the publishers of *The Good News* magazine have focused on Europe and the Middle East from the perspective of Bible prophecy. The scriptures of Revelation 17 and 18 in particular have been applied to the developing European Union as a fulfillment of a revived Holy Roman Empire—symbolized as a “beast” with a woman riding its back, a union of politics and religion described as “Babylon the Great” that exists for a brief time.

But with the latest economic crisis in Europe revealing fundamental flaws in the EU, is it time to reassess this explanation? Is it possible for Europe to become the kind of dominant power described in the Bible? Let’s take another look at what prophecy reveals and address this key question: Where will this system called “Babylon the Great” come from?

The strange prophecy

Revelation 17 describes the unusual vision the apostle John saw—an end-time power symbolized as a beast ridden by a woman. He saw a “great harlot who sits on many waters” (verse 1). In prophetic symbolism, the waters and seas here represent “peoples, multitudes, nations and languages” (verse 15, New International Version).

This woman rides on “a scarlet beast . . . full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.” On the woman’s forehead “a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH” (verses 1, 5). This woman is shown to have several unsavory attributes as she interacts with the Beast power and its peoples. John’s



In the book of Revelation, a fallen woman is used to symbolize an apostate church or religious system. Similarly, animals or beasts are prophetically symbolic of human geopolitical powers.

attention is fixed on the woman as he considers the wide range of her impact.

Elsewhere in the book of Revelation, a woman is used to symbolize God’s people collectively—ultimately His true Church

(compare Revelation 12:17; 19:7). Since the woman in chapter 17 is depicted as a prostitute, it’s clear she represents not the faithful Church, but an apostate church or religious system.

Similarly, animals or beasts are prophetically symbolic of human geopolitical powers—see, for example, Daniel 7, where different creatures prophetically represent the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greco-Macedonian and Roman empires.

This woman, called Babylon the Great, is shown riding this enormous beast figure over a succession of epochs. The biblical symbolism here is of a church-state union, the woman representing a religious entity and the Beast a major geopolitical power.

History shows the most potent and far-reaching combination of church-state power was that of the Holy Roman Empire. This complicated and longstanding empire began in Europe in the eighth century and lasted in various forms until the 19th. Its zenith came during the time of the Spanish Habsburg emperor Charles V. His empire not only covered much of Europe but also extended to North and South America.

Symbols represent a coming end-time superpower

Revelation 17 shows the last revival of this political power. The 10 horns of the Beast represent rulers who for a short time give their power and authority to the Beast, which will both “make war with the Lamb,” the returning Jesus Christ, and turn and hate the harlot and “make her desolate and naked, [and] eat her flesh and burn her with fire” (verses 12-16).

This woman is also described as “that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth” (verse 18). She is further identified as sitting on “seven hills” (verse 9, NIV). Only one city sits on seven hills, has “reign[ed] over kings of the earth” and is closely identified with a major religious system—Rome.

What we see described here is a power yet to arise in its final form on the world stage that exerts far-ranging political and



religious influence over people in all nations and ethnic groups.

When this system arises it will astound the world in a way no modern power has done. No other empire in modern times has combined military and economic power with the added element of religious influence and control as described here.

The religious power, represented here as a fallen woman, has relations with “the kings of the earth” described as “fornication” (verse 2) or “sexual immorality” (English Standard Version). This immoral relationship, having no holy covenant of marriage, implies instability and faithlessness. It may seem good for the moment but never produces a satisfying relationship—not least because often the partners are using each other for their own ends.

This woman is also said to be “drunk with the blood of saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (verse 6). Clearly this woman, while appearing to be noble, wise and wealthy, leaves a wake of human misery that cannot be covered over and excused with false righteousness.

From where could this power arise?

Where do we find such a power developing in today’s world?

Consider how our present world has been transformed just since World War II.

When it ended, two dominant powers stood astride the world—the Soviet Union and the United States. The German-led Axis powers that plunged the world into total war had been defeated. Subsequent years saw relations between the two great victors settle into a Cold War that came to an end in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since then the United States has been the sole world superpower, albeit reluctantly.

Since 9/11 America’s attention has been focused on the Middle East with near-simultaneous invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. The War on Terror has sapped American money, energy and morale. The outcomes have been questionable at best, with U.S. troops now gone from Iraq and the last in Afghanistan waiting to be extracted.

A recent killing rampage by an American soldier directed at Afghan citizens has heightened the tension on both sides with calls for an even quicker pullout of American soldiers. The psychological toll of the last decade is yet to be tallied.

The 2008 economic collapse and subsequent recession has also impacted America’s economic role in the world. If the United States cannot be counted on, some have reasoned, then prepare for a change. And make no mistake—*change is coming*.

The point to understand is this: America is the preeminent world power on which the present world order hinges. No one seriously doubts or argues this. But the signs of power being shifted are growing ever more evident—and, again, no one can seriously deny this.

America’s days as the controlling power in world circles are numbered. Bible prophecy is clear on this point. So with the sunset of American power, who will take its place?

Will it be Europe?

The European Union has been going through a major test of its viability with the Greek debt crisis. At stake is the viability of the entire EU project as it presently exists. Without a full economic union it has become clear that there is no true “union,” and without a unified fiscal policy controlled by a central authority the present debt problems of the member states will inevitably continue.

Germany is by far the strongest economy within Europe. Its fiscal stability has been the guarantee behind the financial firewall that is keeping the fragile EU together. No other EU member state can begin to take on this role—and that is the unspoken problem and fear. No one desires to see the present German economic dominance to advance to another stage of control.

The crisis in Europe is still simmering. Greece has received a series of bailouts, not without pain. Spain, Italy and Austria have received credit downgrades. Democratically elected leaders have been replaced in some countries. German Chancellor Angela Merkel is being accused of leading Germany and Europe down the wrong path. What can be done?

Germany is the leading manager of this crisis, and in truth is the one country that is responsible for the current situation.

Germany pushed hard for the single currency but, like all other EU members, did not want to give up sovereignty to another authority. The result was a single currency, the euro, without effective political union.

What some predicted more than 10 years

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ago has now come to pass—a massive debt crisis with no effective way to manage and remove it. One observer describes it as “a machine from hell.” Many see a need for political union, but at the same time it’s the most feared of solutions.

The *Financial Times* of London puts it this way: “The current crisis shows that Greeks, Germans and Italians do have one important thing in common—a deep aversion to ceding control of their national budgets. The result is that the euro is in a dangerous and unstable position. The actions that are being urged on Germany are unreasonable. But Germany’s own solution—structural reform now, political union later—is unworkable” (Gideon Rachman, “Germany Faces a Machine From Hell,” Feb. 14, 2012).

The fear of a strong Germany controlling the future of Greece or any insolvent European country immediately evokes words like “Auschwitz” or “Nazism.” Behind the scenes, leaders are very worried about the outcome. The crisis simmers, waiting for a bold solution from somewhere.

As things stand, Germany is seemingly the only nation that can steer Europe back into calm and stable waters. Watch for some further crisis to appear and create the right conditions for a group of core nations to cede political and operational control to a power that can right the ship. It *will* come, and when it does it will reshape Europe and possibly the world scene.

Here’s the point

Historically, the only world region that fits the description of the power foretold in Revelation 17 is Europe. No other region in history has provided the narrative for a combination of political, economic and religious power that impacts so much of the world. No other region today can come close to providing the elements of this prophecy. *None*.

I realize that much is made about the post-religious nature of Europe. It is true



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that secularism has a dominating influence on European culture right now. But religion in Europe is not dead—far from it. Everywhere you go in Europe you see signs of the religious past and you even see signs of a religious present.

A few months ago I stood in St. Stephen’s Cathedral in Vienna’s city center. It was an early Friday evening as people were leaving work and hurrying into the weekend. I watched the vast cathedral fill up with people coming and going for confession and quick prayers. Young and old streamed by me within the church. I thought, “This place is alive with activity!” I am reminded of the inscription on a cross in front of the Habsburg Palace: *Christus Hoffnung Europas* (“Christ the hope of Europe”).

At some point a crisis will arise whereby

religion will be offered as the only solution for the stability of the world order. This is what we see in Revelation 17, a crisis so large that a core group of leaders will cede authority to a central power. This power will emerge vastly different than any other we see today—yet be firmly rooted in ancient and medieval tradition. Imbued with the power of popular religion, it will offer what seems the only viable hope of human survival and prosperity.

For a moment in time, the most critical in all history, the world will follow. It will end as all other have, but not before it ushers in a time of global trouble unlike anything ever seen before in human history (Matthew 24:21-22).

We are seeing the world shifting and the beginnings of new alignments in power and influence. A new “Babylon” will emerge. *Now* is the time to understand the words of this prophecy and heed the warning of God

found in Revelation 18:4: “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.” **GN**

Learn More

The biblical book of Revelation is filled with puzzling symbols and images. What does it all mean? Is there any way to find out? The publishers of *The Good News* have produced a free booklet to help you understand what this mysterious book is all about. Request or download your free copy of *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* today!



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GOD, Science & the Bible

Ossuary verdict: Experts testify to its authenticity

Almost 10 years have passed since the world of Archaeology was stunned by the announcement of the discovery in Israel of a limestone burial box for bones inscribed in Aramaic with the words “James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus.” The implications of the find, soon known as the James ossuary, were enormous—if authentic, the first-century artifact might well be the earliest known archaeological evidence yet discovered referring to Jesus of Nazareth.

Although the names “James,” “Joseph” and “Jesus” were fairly common in the first century and have been found individually on a number of such bone boxes, these names being spelled out together in the same exact familial relationship given in the Gospels makes it virtually certain that the complete inscription refers to those mentioned in the Gospels.

While it’s fairly common for such Aramaic inscriptions to mention the name of one’s father, mention of one’s *brother* is very rare—found in only one other case, and only where the brother was notable or widely recognized. Thus the probability that this inscription refers to Jesus of Nazareth seems conclusive.

The ossuary’s existence was first announced at an Oct. 21, 2002, press conference in Washington, D.C., held by the Biblical Archaeology Society and the Discovery Channel. This was followed shortly by a detailed article in *Biblical Archaeology Review* magazine by André Lemaire, an expert in ancient Middle Eastern inscriptions and chairman of the Hebrew and Aramaic philology and epigraphy section at the Sorbonne in Paris, who had translated the lettering on the artifact.

By its very nature the bone box could be dated to around Christ’s time since such ossuaries were used only from about 20 B.C. up to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70. According to Jewish custom at the time, bodies were first sealed in caves or tombs, and after decomposition the bones were transferred to these carved stone boxes—sometimes bearing an inscription identifying whose bones were inside, but often not.

Before the discovery was made public, Hershel Shanks, editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, had the James ossuary examined by lab experts from the Geological Survey of Israel (GSI) to ensure that it was genuine and not a modern forgery.

As with other artifacts of this sort, the ossuary was covered with a thin coating of mineral accumulation called a patina, which develops on stone over centuries. A modern forgery would lack such a coating, or show evidence that it had been artificially created and applied, and would likely show modern tool marks.

After examining the ossuary microscopically, the GSI scientists concluded in their report published in *Biblical Archaeology Review* that “the patina does not contain any modern elements (such as modern pigments) and it adheres firmly to the stone. No signs of the use of a modern tool or instrument was [sic] found. No evidence that might detract from the authenticity of the patina and the inscription was found.”

In addition to Professor Lemaire, Shanks also

In 2003 the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) announced its conclusion that the inscriptions had been faked. And in December 2004 Oded Golan, an Israeli collector of biblical-era artifacts and owner of the James ossuary, was charged with heading a forgery ring responsible for the artifacts in question.

Then, with a flurry of headlines denouncing it as a fake, the ossuary disappeared from public view, and an excruciatingly long court trial began.

In Israel, trials are not decided by jury but by a single judge. Due to the complexity of the issues involved, the case was given to a judge with a degree in archaeology. Few anticipated that the trial would last more than five years, involve 138 witnesses and produce 12,000 pages of court transcripts. When the case ruling was handed down on March 14, 2012, it was 474 pages long.

The judge cleared all defendants of charges of forgery. Although he didn’t rule on the authenticity of the artifacts themselves, it was evident that the Israel Antiquities Authority had overplayed its hand.

In spite of enormous expense and effort, the IAA was unable to prove any of its allegations of forgery. Every allegation of the artifacts’ inscriptions being forged was countered by expert witnesses from a number of scientific fields testifying to their apparent authenticity.

At one point even the lead IAA archaeologist spearheading the accusations of forgery was forced to admit on the witness stand that the ancient patina covering the James ossuary extended into parts of the letters of the words “brother of Jesus”—the very part of the inscription alleged to have been forged in modern times.

So where does that leave us?

As is the case with any artifact not uncovered in a scientifically controlled excavation, we will never be able to prove with 100 percent certainty that an artifact is genuine. But the number of experts who have testified about the James ossuary, and their impeccable credentials, should certainly give critics pause.

In any case, the finding of ancient artifacts has added much to the list of “infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3) regarding the authenticity of the biblical record. We can choose whether we accept the evidence or not. *The Good News* will continue to report on discoveries relating to the Bible so you can judge for yourself. As a starter, request or download your free copy of *Is the Bible True?* It’s an important first step in addressing these issues in your mind.

—Scott Ashley



With a flurry of headlines denouncing it as a fake, the ancient ossuary, bearing the inscription “James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus,” disappeared from public view and an excruciatingly long court trial began.

had the inscription examined by Professor Joseph Fitzmyer, an expert on the first-century Aramaic language and a preeminent Dead Sea Scrolls scholar. Both concluded the inscription was genuine.

Shortly afterward, the ossuary was shipped to the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada, where it was exhibited and examined by a different panel of experts who also concluded it was authentic.

However, because the ossuary had been removed from its ancient burial spot and purchased from an Arab antiquities dealer rather than having been found in a professionally supervised archaeological excavation, concerns remained about its authenticity.

Rumors began to spread that, although the ossuary itself was a genuine first-century artifact and the words “James, son of Joseph” were authentic, a forger had added “brother of Jesus” to the end of the inscription in hopes of drastically increasing its value by associating it with the Jesus Christ of the Bible.

Rumors also circulated that inscriptions on a prized artifact in the Israel Museum, as well as on a recently discovered plaque thought to describe repairs to the ancient Jerusalem temple constructed by the biblical King Solomon, were also modern forgeries.



The Good News: The Story Behind the Magazine

With this edition, *The Good News* has reached a special milestone—our 100th issue! When we first started this magazine 17 years ago in the autumn of 1995, we didn't know what the future would hold—especially since we were committed to offering it free to any who requested it. But we've held firm to that commitment, and today *The Good News* goes to more than 400,000 subscribers.

Drawing on writers from around the globe, *The Good News* is published in English, Spanish, German, French, Italian and Portuguese and is mailed to 189 of the 196 recognized countries of the world.

But who is behind the magazine? What is its purpose? What is it all about?

A magazine built on a message

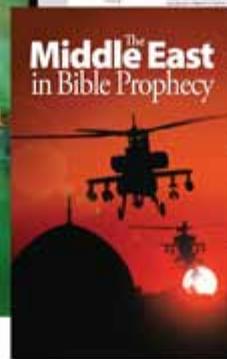
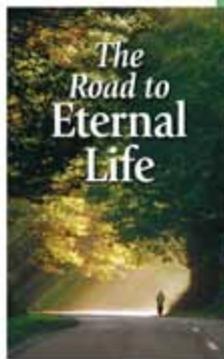
When Jesus Christ began His ministry, He “came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel’” (Mark 1:14-15). That same message clarifies what *The Good News* stands for in a world filled with a bewildering variety of religious beliefs, customs and opinions.

Many people ask hard questions: What is the ultimate purpose for human life? Why does so much evil plague the world? Why doesn't God put a stop to violence and war? Will He ever bring about long-lasting peace, and how?

The world desperately needs answers to these and other important questions.

Do answers exist? *Yes*. The message Christ brought—the gospel of the Kingdom of God—provides the answers and solutions that few have heard or understood. And this is the message of *The Good News*—a message desperately needed in a world of wars and disagreements that continue to escalate just as Jesus foretold.

Religion as a whole has failed to provide solutions to mankind's dilemmas. Part of our



mission is to fill that gap, to make available hope and solutions that faithfully and accurately reflect the teachings of the Bible.

We see from Scripture that the collective mission Christ has given His true followers is twofold. First, it is to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom of God throughout the world (Matthew 24:14). Second, it is to teach people the truth Jesus Christ brought that they may become His followers—His disciples—as they learn that truth.

Scripture is clear that, just as Jesus commissioned His apostles to share the gospel—the good news—of the coming Kingdom to be established on earth at His return, so has He commissioned His followers today to continue that mission. The United Church of God, publisher of *The Good News*, takes very seriously that responsibility of proclaiming to today's world the same gospel Jesus preached.

Using today's tools to teach the truth

To carry out Christ's commission to proclaim the gospel message, we utilize many tools.

Most prominent is what you hold in your hands—*The Good News* magazine, published six times a year and mailed to hundreds of thousands of subscribers. The magazine is sent free of charge, anywhere in the world, to anyone who requests it.

While *The Good News* is devoted to covering key news events and trends, it is a

newsmagazine with a difference. It covers the news from a much different perspective—that of the Bible, God's Word—affording insight and understanding you won't find in other publications.

Our articles are written from an all-important biblical perspective on a variety of subjects—prophecy, marriage and the family, Christian living, history, science, lives of individuals mentioned in the Bible, scriptural teachings and analysis of societal and world trends.

The scriptural understanding of God's purpose and plan for mankind, and His working out of that plan on earth, gives us the edge in explaining *why* our world faces the many problems that threaten our peace and safety. When we understand why certain events take place, and why people think and act as they do, it's much easier to see where we are going and what lies ahead.

Speaking of conditions before His return, Jesus Christ said our planet will experience “a time of great distress, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and will never be again” (Matthew 24:21, Revised English Bible).

So while we proclaim the good news of the imminent return of Jesus of Nazareth, at the same time we often report on the negative consequences of human behavior leading to the very conditions He described.

Following Jesus' example, part of our purpose is to highlight the lessons mankind





To carry out Christ's commission to proclaim the gospel message, we utilize many tools.

The Good News primary writers and editors



Scott Ashley, managing editor of *The Good News*, has overseen planning, writing, editing, reviewing and production of the magazine since its first issue in 1995, as well as 34 accompanying books and booklets and a 12-lesson Bible Study Course. He and his wife Connie live in Arvada, Colorado. He currently pastors United Church of God congregations in Denver, Frisco and Colorado Springs, Colorado.



Melvin Rhodes, a regular writer on international affairs, was born in the north of England. Between 1975 and 1990, he and his wife Diane lived in England, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Ghana. Since 1990, they've lived in Michigan. He pastors the Lansing, Michigan, congregation of the United Church of God. He has three grown children and five grandchildren, with two more expected in September.



Darris McNeely grew up in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, and spent more than 38 years in the ministry before moving to Cincinnati, Ohio, to work full-time on *Beyond Today TV* and to write for *The Good News* and other media efforts of the United Church of God. He and his wife Debbie have two adult children and four grandchildren.



Jerold Aust is a longtime minister, speaker and writer with a graduate degree in communication. As a senior writer for *The Good News*, he has conducted a number of interviews with international scholars and national figures and was interviewed twice by *Fox News* commentator Alan Colmes. He and his wife Mary Ann have one son, one daughter and three grandchildren. He also pastors church congregations in Mobile, Alabama, and DeFuniak Springs, Florida.



Robin Webber has lived most of his life in Southern California. He and his wife Susan have three grown daughters and six grandchildren. A longtime and avid student of history, He writes the recurring "Follow Me" column for *The Good News* and pastors several congregations in Southern and Central California.



Tom Robinson works from his home near St. Louis, Missouri, as a senior writer and copy editor for *The Good News* magazine and writer/editor for accompanying booklets on many biblical subjects. He is also copy editor for its sister magazine for teens and young adults, *Vertical Thought*, and primary writer and editor of our online Bible commentary at <http://bible.ucg.org/bible-commentary>. He and his wife Donna are parents of a young daughter and son.



John Ross Schroeder, a frequent and longtime commentator on geopolitical matters in Europe and the Middle East, is a native of Texas who has lived near London since 1976. John is a member of the Foreign Press Association in London and also oversees church congregations in Britain and Northern Ireland. He and his wife Jan have three grown children and two grandchildren.



Roger Foster has contributed many articles to *The Good News* as well as writing booklets on a variety of biblical teachings. Over a long career he has pastored congregations all across the United States. He currently lives in San Antonio, Texas, and pastors a congregation in Corpus Christi. He and his wife Janice have three grown sons, seven grandchildren and one great-grandchild.



is writing in its self-centered way of living and to warn of where this way is leading. But more than that, our intention is to illustrate the need for an alternative way of life—the godly way of life Jesus revealed and personified.

Beyond the bad news, we present this way of living that would eliminate all of mankind's problems. We also explain from Scripture that under the coming rule of Jesus Christ, God's way will become universal—and humanity will at last know true and lasting peace.

The world of today is indeed filled with bad news. Yet the future holds incredible promise—Christ's return to establish the Kingdom of God (Daniel 7:13-14), ushering in a wonderful world of peace, prosperity and plenty during which all people will at last learn to live God's way of life. This truly is good news!

More tools for understanding

We also produce a sister magazine, *Vertical Thought*, which is geared for teens and college-age readers. Published quarterly, this magazine features articles to help young people deal with the pressures and pitfalls of their world with a God-centered approach. Its asso-



ciated website, VerticalThought.org, includes a question-and-answer section in which young people can receive personal answers by e-mail from ministers and others trained and experienced in working with youth.

We also offer dozens of booklets, also free, that cover a wide variety of biblical topics in greater detail. Interested readers may request any of them from our regional offices around the world or from our website, GNmagazine.org/booklets.

Another valuable tool for learning about what the Bible teaches is our 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*, which covers the major themes and teachings of Scripture.

A weekly television program, *Beyond Today*, airs in cities across the United States

and several other countries. Featuring several hosts who regularly write for *The Good News*, the program covers topics like those found in the magazine, though at times in greater depth. (For schedule information or to watch programs online, visit www.BeyondToday.tv.)

Recognizing that people increasingly seek information on the Internet, we also make extensive use of this important tool to reach an even wider audience.

Since many people have questions about the Bible and how to best apply it to everyday life, we have a letter-answering staff available to reply to questions from anyone. These can be sent through postal mail to any of our regional offices or by e-mail to info@ucg.org.

We also offer other publications exclusively on the Internet. For instance, *Virtual Christian Magazine*, an e-magazine (electronic magazine), offers a variety of biblically based articles 10 times a year. You can find it at VCMagazine.org

"Equipping the saints"

The publishers of *The Good News* diligently strive to implement the biblical mandate for "equipping the saints"—that is, preparing members of the "body of Christ"



to fulfill their calling as God's servants now and as His eternal family in the coming Kingdom of God (Ephesians 4:12).

Today, the United Church of God, an International Association, is striving to practice "the faith which was *once for all* delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). To accomplish this we have committed ourselves to living, as Jesus taught, "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

We strive to live by the same divine instruction that Jesus, His apostles and the early Church followed, very aware that this sharply distinguishes us from most of what is today called Christianity, which no longer follows the Church described in the book of Acts as its model.

Accept the Challenge

Our greatest challenge for this age is to live as God commands, to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom of God throughout the entire world, to make disciples in all nations and to care for the disciples God adds to His Church today (Matthew 28:19).

We value God's plan to save every individual who will yield to Him. Every individual, regardless of race, national origin or gender, will, in accordance with God's plan, have the opportunity to be called by God and to hear and respond to the good news of the Kingdom of God and to the testimony of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. What people learn about God's ways today may help them come to repentance with less difficulty at that time.

Therefore, the gospel of the Kingdom of God is a message directed to all of mankind. God's plan explicitly provides for every human being from every nation to eventually have an opportunity for membership in His family—according to His timetable and will.

As Peter said, "How true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:34-35, New International Version).

Jesus Christ is now preparing, in His role as our High Priest, a people who will serve in His coming Kingdom (John 14:1-3). He foretold that for His followers' sake

the terrible times ahead will be cut short and humanity will be saved from extinction (Matthew 24:22). Because of their faithfulness now, they will share in Christ's future rule over the earth (Revelation 3:21).

You, too, can choose to become a part of the work of God, a helper in proclaiming the eternal message of His Kingdom. The gospel of the coming Kingdom of God holds forth the only lasting solution to humanity's problems. The United Church of God remains firm in its commitment to fulfill its part in that proclamation—making known the noble and awe-inspiring purpose for human life! (To learn more, request or download our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*)

Why *The Good News* Has No Subscription Price

For more than 16 years *The Good News* has given its readers insight and understanding into how a world of such incredible technological achievement and advances can at the same time be afflicted with seemingly unsolvable age-old problems. If you've been reading long, you might be coming to see that humanity's problems are *spiritual* in nature and thus require *spiritual* solutions.

Our problems are, at heart, *of the heart*. Under the influence of Satan the devil, mankind has rejected God's revelation and persisted in doing

things our own way—a way that seems right to us, but ultimately leads to death (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). In seeking to please ourselves, we have forsaken God's revelation for how we should live.

The Bible describes two basic ways of life. We could summarize them basically as the way of *give* and the way of *get*. One focuses on serving *self* and one focuses on serving *others*. God is the greatest of givers. James 1:17 tells us, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father . . ." Giving expresses His way of love, and "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16).

Since *The Good News* was first started in 1995, we have always offered it at no charge to all who ask. We share it freely in accordance with Christ's instruction, "Freely you have received; freely give" (Matthew 10:8). This great undertaking—sharing these biblical truths with hundreds of thousands of subscribers in six languages and reaching into nearly every country around the globe—is made possible by the tithes and offerings of those who believe in this message of hope and voluntarily contribute so this message of the true gospel may reach all nations.

We do not solicit funds, but we welcome into our growing family of coworkers those who have joined us in this "give" way of life and who wish to help share this message of hope and truth throughout the world.

Like the members of that early Church, we remain fully committed to proclaiming the message of the coming Kingdom of God and Christ's pivotal role in it. Likewise,

based on criteria vital to the well-being of the other members of the Church.

Jesus Himself, explained the apostle Paul, "gave some to be apostles, some to be proph-

of the world's church organizations, strives to establish congregations around the world in which God's people can assemble and receive guidance in godly living and service. These congregations are served by ordained pastors trained to accurately teach and explain the Scriptures and to counsel those who request personal guidance. These pastors are often assisted by other dedicated men and women in helping congregations reach their full

The Church Jesus built is commissioned not only to feed His sheep, but to prepare these followers for greater works of service to God and their fellow man.



we remain fully committed to preparing a people to serve as Christ's helpers in that Kingdom.

We sincerely encourage you to examine in much greater detail the message Jesus taught. If you are interested, be sure to request our free booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom* and *What Is Your Destiny?* They are available through our office nearest you or our online literature library at GNmagazine.org/booklets.

One of the key charges Jesus gave was "Feed My sheep" (John 21:17). He has given His Church additional shepherds—a human ministry—to guide, feed and encourage the growth of those God calls into the Body of Christ. As we see from Paul's instructions to Titus and Timothy, God appoints ministers

ets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, *attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*" (Ephesians 4:11-13, New International Version).

The Church Jesus built is commissioned not only to feed His sheep, as He commanded, but to prepare these followers for greater works of service to God, their families, their communities and their fellow man. Jesus placed great emphasis on serving others (Matthew 20:26-28).

For these reasons the United Church of God, though smaller in numbers than many

potential in serving others—as opportunity, need and resources permit.

Our congregations meet in various cities around the world. Regional offices in the Americas, Europe, Africa, Asia and the South Pacific serve members and support Church operations in their respective areas. They are also responsible for distributing the Church's publications and handling other requests and inquiries within their particular regions.

A home-office facility near Cincinnati, Ohio, serves as a support hub for operations in the United States and all the associated worldwide operations of the Church. From this location a dedicated staff supports the Church's daily operations in carrying out its mission throughout the world. **GN**



Assistance Programs Offering a Hand Up, Not Just a Handout

In addition to sharing biblical teaching and the hope of the coming Kingdom of God, the publishers of *The Good News* support practical programs to improve the lives of many. *by Victor Kubik*

The focus of *The Good News* magazine is to proclaim the good news of the soon-coming Kingdom of God to all mankind. But this does not negate the need for helping people now.

Jesus Christ healed the sick and comforted the afflicted, and commands that we be compassionate to others. For more than a decade *Good News* readers have engaged in humanitarian works to help the disadvantaged and vulnerable. Economically, we are not created equal in this world, and some, recognizing this disparity, want to help make a difference in the lives of others.

Recognizing suffering and poverty is an important first step. But it's not until we do something to alleviate it that God takes notice. Jesus warned of merely saying "Be warm and filled," but not taking action (James 2:16; Matthew 25:34-46).

Large, well-known organizations such as the Red Cross have specific missions to be the first response to disaster. Yet these agencies leave a lot of smaller gaps where people need a hand up to help bring them out of dependency to self-sufficiency.

This is why the United Church of God, publisher of *The Good News*, officially established a Good Works program in 2004. To be more effective, the church partnered with LifeNets, an incredibly efficient charity a number of church members were already involved in, where a very high percentage of all amounts donated goes to the people being helped. Both have independent as well as partner projects, depending on the needs.

Promoting a hand up, not just a handout

LifeNets develops programs offering practical assistance that promotes the well-being and self-sufficiency of disadvantaged people. These programs expand in impact by encouraging those receiving assistance to "pay it forward" by helping others.

Through LifeNets' support for agricul-

ture and animal husbandry we have seen quantum changes in the lives of very poor people in Zambia, Kenya and Brazil.

Several years ago disease in central Zambia wiped out entire herds of cattle. People were left with no milk for their children, no draft animals for plowing their fields, unimaginable poverty and potential starvation. Entire communities were without common medicines. Children regularly died from malaria and other diseases.

In 2000 LifeNets started a program to restore cattle to needy communities. It

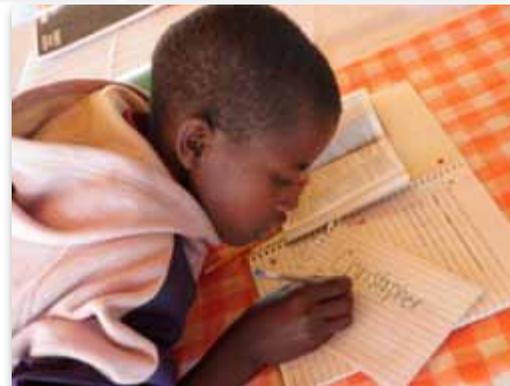


required giving basic veterinary training and animal care to recipients to minimize the risk of future loss of animals to disease.

Drilling water wells has become a regular project of LifeNets. Clean drinking water is vital for human survival, but it's a shrinking resource in many poor countries.

In many areas people, mostly women, spend a large part of each day making many trips carrying large containers to fetch water from distant sources. By drilling wells within communities, we have brought fresh, clean water for drinking, cooking and washing to communities.

In the United States a unique wheelchair matching program has existed for 10 years. Through the LifeNets website we have used the Internet to match wheelchair



donors with those needing them, greatly benefiting the lives of hundreds of people.

Education to overcome poverty

Education is a key route out of poverty.

LifeNets and the Good Works program have supported scholarships for young people to receive an education or specialized training in Guatemala, El Salvador, Peru, Chile, South Africa, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Ukraine and the Philippines.

These scholarships have given lifelong benefits to young people who otherwise may have been relegated to the misery of unemployment and poverty. This also helps their communities—since scholarship recipients in these poor countries can then

become pillars in the fabric of their society.

LifeNets' largest project has been the construction of a primary school in Migori, Kenya, which is now accredited by the Kenyan government. LifeNets has also constructed clinics and other schools in Africa and Ukraine and has supported orphan and street children programs in Ukraine.

The Good Works program has also provided Bibles, church buildings and vehicles for necessary transportation for scattered congregations, as well as supporting staff

we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:9-10).

Many other biblical injunctions similarly instruct us to care for those who are needy. The apostle Paul helped with collections for famines. Scripture repeatedly encourages special attention to widows and the fatherless.

Great natural and man-made disasters in the world require immediate and often ongoing help. LifeNets actively helped

The publishers of *The Good News* support projects to improve the lives of others around the world.

Top row, from left: Small business startup assistance helped this Malawi man who processes and sells honey; aid for this Malawi man to purchase land for growing crops encourages self-sufficiency. *Middle row:* This water well and pump provide fresh water for a community of 100 in Malawi; cattle purchased for Brazilians will be a big help in moving people out of poverty; computer training in Zambia helps young men and women develop marketable skills; this neonatal clinic in Malawi provides vital services for mothers and babies; scholarship programs help promising students get an education which helps both them and their communities. *Bottom row:* English-literacy classes help youngsters in Zambia; this rehabilitation center near Chernobyl in Ukraine helps children with nerve dysfunctions.



to assist in training and educational programs in Zambia, Nigeria and Guatemala.

"Let us not grow weary in doing good"

The Bible clearly speaks of opening our heart and resources to the poor and encourages us to help those in need: "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:17-18).

The apostle Paul speaks about helping not only our own, but those whom we know have needs: "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as

victims of the 9/11 New York City terror attacks in 2001, the 2004 Asian tsunami disaster, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and the devastating Japanese earthquake and tsunami last year. Many stories of assistance are documented on the LifeNets website (LifeNets.org).

The Good News endorses the work of LifeNets and the United Church of God Good Works program and their wonderful record of providing direct assistance to so many to improve their quality of life.

Some of you may be looking for good, efficient charities to help disadvantaged people. You can find out more about LifeNets at www.LifeNets.org (and also subscribe to its eNews) and about the Good Works program at goodworks.ucg.org. **GN**

Imprisoned and Faithful

Do you feel imprisoned by afflictions and hardships that seem to have no end? If so, how can you stay faithful to God and His way of life?

by John LaBissoniere



Imagine for a moment you can see a few years into the future. You learn about a man named Paul who is deeply troubled. His job had disappeared as the economy collapsed two years earlier. Unable to obtain new employment and after his jobless benefits expired, he and his wife Stacy, who had also lost her job, could no longer pay their mortgage.

As a result their house was foreclosed on, and they were forced to sell or give away many of their possessions and relocate to a small apartment. Then it wasn't long before the couple exhausted their savings and had to move again. Now homeless, they are dependent on minimal government benefits and the charity of others for their food and shelter.

Paul and Stacy are not alone in their calamity. With the global economy in severe crisis, millions of others around the world also face previously unimagined hardship. Yet this fact does little to comfort the disheartened couple. Having been faithful Christians who had devotedly prayed, studied the Bible and attended church, they felt certain God would protect them from

severely traumatic circumstances. But now they are profoundly bewildered and anxious about their dismal state of affairs.

Facing an austere future of poverty and adversity, Paul and Stacy feel utterly imprisoned by their harsh situation, which has no end in sight. Expressing serious doubts about their faith, they ask themselves hard

questions: How could this possibly happen to us? Where is God when we need Him, especially after we have been faithful for so long?

Another Paul

We'll return to Paul and Stacy's story shortly, but let's first shift our focus to another man also named Paul.

Although he lived in a different time and place, he too encountered significant and unanticipated troubles. He too had faithfully served God and the Church for many years and then found himself imprisoned for a prolonged period of time—literally so, in his case.

Who was this man? He was the apostle Paul of the New Testament. Let's briefly review his story.

Being educated from his youth in the traditions of the Pharisees, a Jewish religious party, Paul grew into a man of steadfast conviction (Acts 22:3). Consequently, when encountering what he and the other religious authorities believed to be heresy, he vigorously opposed it and relentlessly persecuted its adherents (Acts 22:4-5).

However, in about A.D. 34, while undertaking a mission to root out apostates in Damascus, he experienced an incredible vision directly from Jesus Christ. This miraculous event led to Paul's deep repentance and conversion (verses 6-16).

He then spent much of the next 22 years preaching and teaching the good news about Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God. Even though he endured great persecution and many trials during that period, nothing really seemed to slow him down or halt his progress for very long (2 Corinthians 6:4-5, 11:23-27). But in A.D. 57, after having concluded his third apostolic journey, an event occurred that would effectively stop him in his tracks.

Interestingly, Paul already sensed he would face something unprecedented in his ministry. While en route to Jerusalem for the Holy Day of Pentecost, he told the Christians of Ephesus, "And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me" (Acts 20:16, 22-23).

Was Paul fearful and worried?

What were Paul's feelings regarding what could lie ahead of him? Did he fear the future? He continued, "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (verse 24).

Paul arrived in Jerusalem and within a few days faced virulent opposition from the religious authorities, who now considered him a rebellious, profane and dangerous troublemaker (Acts 21:28). As Paul was worshipping at the temple, he was dragged out, the incited multitude becoming so violent that Roman soldiers were sent in to quell the tumult (verses 31-36). The Roman commander then gave Paul the opportunity to explain his beliefs to the people, but soon they again erupted into a furor, shouting for his death (Acts 22:22-23).

The commander quickly ordered him

to be brought into the military barracks to extract the truth from him through scourging (verse 24). But as the soldiers prepared to beat Paul, he pointed out that he was a Roman citizen. Immediately they withdrew from him since they knew severe penalties could be inflicted on anyone who even bound a Roman citizen without adequate justification (verse 29).

The next day Paul was allowed to appear before the Jewish chief priests and their council to again try to explain his position (verse 30). However, subsequent events led to further hostility (Acts 23:10). Fearing Paul could be severely injured or killed, the commander ordered his troops to shield him once more.

The Lord stood by him

Now, can you imagine what Paul might have been thinking just before being rescued from the mob? *Maybe this is the end! Maybe it is my time to die!* Nevertheless it wasn't his time to die, because “the following night the Lord stood by him and said, ‘Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome’” (verse 11).

Although God revealed this to him, Paul likely never imagined he would spend nearly the next five years in Roman captivity. After so many years of freely preaching the gospel, establishing local congregations, working with new converts and training Church leaders, perhaps he wondered: *Why am I restrained and imprisoned? Is my work over? Is God done with me?*

Even though Paul might have contemplated such questions, he eventually came to understand the reason for his situation.

Writing much later as a prisoner in Rome he stated: “But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear” (Philippians 1:12-14).

So Paul realized that even while incarcerated, he could still be used effectively by his Savior.

Overcoming hopelessness

Let's now return to Paul and Stacy's story. As you recall, they lost nearly everything and, as a result, felt utterly imprisoned by their arduous situation. However,

in due course, even though their physical circumstances had not improved much, they were successful at conquering their nearly hopeless feelings.

How? By prayerfully recalling the examples of the apostle Paul and other Bible figures who faithfully endured and triumphed over what appeared to be intractable difficulties (see Hebrews 4:16; 11:32-40). With God's help, Paul and Stacy reestablished their faith in Him. They also took comfort in the Scriptures and the vital promises held out for everyone who remains obedient and devoted to God (Romans 15:4; Hebrews 11:13).

Perhaps we could say, then, that the trials of Paul the apostle and of Paul and Stacy are illustrations of the seemingly unbearable struggles we all may and do experience. Traumatic, unexpected events may tend to leave us feeling boxed in and abandoned (Psalm 38:21; 119:8). However, as the apostle Paul demonstrated by his words and actions, our Heavenly Father can be relied on for help in every situation, no matter how problematic or wearisome (Psalm 91:1-16).

Paul's example shows us that even though we experience difficult events and may not see the reasons for our troubles or any apparent way out, God will help us endure (1 Corinthians 10:13). Whether we suffer a long, debilitating illness, lose a loved one to death, see a career end much earlier than expected, experience an economic reversal leaving us faced with harsh financial conditions or any other similar circumstances, we can be confident that God will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

A crown of righteousness awaits

Paul wrote the biblical book of 2 Timothy while imprisoned in Rome. Even though he knew his physical life was swiftly nearing an end, he remained entirely secure in God's ultimate salvation.

Notice his words as he looked beyond his current circumstances: “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Paul's inspired words can offer us vibrant hope and comfort when we encounter any difficulty (2 Corinthians 1:8-9; 2 Timothy

3:11). He encouraged the young evangelist Timothy to “endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” while being “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:1-3).

We too can hold firmly to those powerful words, especially when we face trials that appear overwhelming (Psalm 142:7; Daniel 6:27).

God helps us remain faithful

As we travel the road to the Kingdom of God, we may encounter significant dilemmas and troubles we could never have anticipated (Matthew 7:13-14). Yet the Bible is filled with admonitions to remain faithful and obedient to God and His way of life while seeking the “pearl of great price” (Matthew 13:45-46).

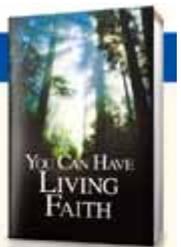
If you and I are doing so, we can be assured that God will help us complete our spiritual journey, even if we sometimes feel imprisoned by severe trials that have no obvious way out (Isaiah 26:3; 43:5). As Paul wrote, “I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns” (Philippians 1:6, New Living Translation).

Finally, let us allow the following words from Paul to encourage us to remain confident, obedient and faithful no matter what untenable predicament we encounter. He wrote: “I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:11-13, NLT).

So, can you endure prison-like calamities, afflictions and hardships yet remain faithful to God? With His strength, assurance and guidance, *absolutely*. **GN**

Learn More

What does it mean to have faith? And what is faith, really? The Bible tells us that we are to *live* by faith, but what does that mean? How did the many figures of the Bible live by faith? Discover the answers in our free booklet *You Can Have Living Faith*. Request or download your free copy today!



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our website.

www.GNmagazine.org/booklets



The Biblical Feast of Firstfruits

How It Explains a Great Mystery



A little-understood festival commanded in the Bible helps us understand a key aspect of God's plan and why most of the world doesn't know or understand Him. *by Bill Bradford*

God has a plan. But when sceptics look at the sorry state of world conditions, many of them doubt the existence of God. After all, they reason, how can you have a God who created the heavens and earth, put man on the earth and then left the human race to fend for itself?

Is there any truth in this?

God is doing more than what people suppose. As we'll see, He has an ordered, step-by-step plan to bring peace to the world and at the same time offer salvation to mankind in the most extraordinary way—a way that will give each person who has ever lived the best opportunity to fulfill that purpose.

It may not look like that now, but the Feast of Firstfruits, or Pentecost as it's called in the New Testament, has a meaning

that transcends anything you might have ever thought about.

Contrary to a popular belief, God *is* involved in human affairs—and a lot more than you might think. This ancient festival God gave Israel helps us to understand just what it is that He's doing—and why it seems to many that He is doing little or nothing to save humanity right now.

Origins of the Festival of Firstfruits

Shortly after giving the Ten Commandments, God gave Israel another command: "Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread . . . and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labours which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year . . ." (Exodus 23:14-16).

At this Feast of Harvest, also called the Feast of Firstfruits or Weeks, the Israelites were to offer the firstfruits of the late spring wheat harvest in the Holy Land (Numbers 28:26; Deuteronomy 34:22). Months later they celebrated another festival, called the Feast of Ingathering or the Feast of Tabernacles. This came at "the end of the year"—the end of the agricultural cycle of the year at summer's end in the Holy Land—when the people gathered in all the harvest.

These festivals were commanded. And because of what God intends for us to learn from His festivals, they are still to be celebrated by God's people today. We should also understand that when a person observes the festivals of God today, he is not just commemorating God's blessings in the agricultural harvests of the Holy Land. He is celebrating and learning about something far more important—God's very purpose and plan for the salvation of mankind!

A spiritual harvest and spiritual firstfruits

God's Word speaks of two kinds of

harvests. One is the agricultural harvest mentioned above. But that represents *another* harvest—the far more important *spiritual* harvest.

Notice Jesus Christ's words in Luke 10:1-2: "After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. Then He said to them, 'The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.'"

Jesus is likening the spiritual harvest to an actual grain harvest. In John 4:35-36 He said to His disciples: "Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life . . ."

The harvests surrounding the biblical feasts of God were in fact designed to teach us about the *spiritual harvest* that Jesus came to earth to sow the seeds of and that He and His disciples began to reap. As there was an earlier and later harvest in the Middle East, so too are there two phases of the spiritual harvest.

The apostle James says that God's people are "a kind of *firstfruits* of all he created" (James 1:18, New International Version, emphasis added throughout). This helps us see that those with whom God is working now are understood to be "firstfruits." Firstfruits are the *first* of what is being produced. This implies there are *other fruits* to be harvested later.

This isn't God's world or God's time

Have you ever wondered why the Christian religion has not resolved the world's problems? Why hasn't it prevailed over other great world religions and false philosophies?

One would expect the work of Jesus Christ, coming from God, would bring in an era where the great movement of Christianity would prevail and usher in a time of peace. After all, it is a teaching of the Christian Church that the Kingdom of God would expand from that small beginning and that the power of God would be manifest to the world in His disciples that followed.

So why hasn't that happened?

There is a simple answer in the concept of "firstfruits." You see, God's intention was never to convert the world to Him during "this present evil age," as the apostle Paul refers to our time (Galatians 1:4). Have you ever considered that if that's what God

had intended, He would certainly have succeeded in doing so?

The fact is, God intends to convert the world at large at a *later* time. That time, foretold by the prophets, is when Jesus Christ will return to the earth and establish His Kingdom. Notice how different it will be: "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.

"Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:2-3).

This isn't a picture of today's world! Our world is a place where the nations ignore the great Creator God who made them. Our world is a world where we go to war because we can't resolve our problems any other way.

assistance of his saints. Here is a future world where *all nations* will seek the true God. The religions of the world and the best efforts of man have failed to produce anything remotely like this picture. This vision for mankind is clearly yet future!

God isn't converting the world now

This brings us to the firstfruits. The whole concept of firstfruits is that *God is not converting the world now*. We are in an age where the world is still being ruled by Satan the devil. Paul even calls the devil "the god of this age" who has spiritually blinded the minds of most of humankind at this time (2 Corinthians 4:4; Revelation 12:9).

Let's be clear. Jesus Christ is not going to change the world in the time in which we live now. He did not establish His Church to turn the world to Him today.

There is a period of time between His first coming, in which He established His Church, and His future return to the earth. When He returns, He will resurrect His saints to immortality. He will return at the



Surely if Almighty God had intended to convert the world to Him during this age, He would have succeeded in doing so. That hasn't happened, so what *is* going on?

Notice what Isaiah prophesies next of the world under Jesus Christ's reign: "He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (verse 4).

Again, this is not a description of the world today. This is a description of a world ruled by Jesus Christ, having received His Kingdom and administering it with the

seventh trumpet as noted in Revelation 11:15: "Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever'" (English Standard Version).

Only when Jesus comes back will the world turn to Him—and then only after the world has endured untold suffering. It seems it will take terrible, earthshaking events to bring people to the point where



they will willingly turn to their Creator on a large scale.

The world will not destroy Christ's Church

But God leads a relative few to turn to Him today—in the present age. It is during this period between Jesus' first and second comings that He has been building His Church, made up of the firstfruits. Jesus said, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades [the grave] will not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

Since this is not God's world, His Church has come under attack since its inception—including by governmental and religious persecution from without and by wolves and false teachers from within. But because Jesus is the Head of His Church, it would nonetheless prevail.

Those in His Church are helped by Christ to overcome the world as *He* overcame the world. That is, in the face of pressure exerted by the world, they are helped to faithfully hold to Christ's teachings. His Church has brought to the world the same gospel Jesus brought—the gospel of the Kingdom of God. But His Church, while it was to exist during this age, was not meant to be a prominent religious or political force over the centuries.

Those God calls for His great purpose through the teachings of Christ will spiritually prepare themselves for His coming. God's great purpose for those of His Church, also called firstfruits, is that they attain entrance into the Kingdom of God. His Church exists now for the key purposes of proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom and to prepare those whom God places in His Church for their roles in that Kingdom.

Understanding the firstfruits

Once more, those who are being prepared for the great purpose of reigning with Jesus Christ are the firstfruits. The firstfruits are the first of God's great harvest of those being brought to salvation.

Note that Jesus' parable of the talents tells of those entrusted with their master's goods and the responsibility to make good use of them—producing a profit or increase. This corresponds to those who are called now—given God's blessings, particularly His Word and His Spirit, which grow in the lives of those to whom they are given.

At one point after teaching, Jesus said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes" (Matthew 11:25).

Consider this meaningful statement (and compare Luke 8:10). God has clearly *hidden* His truths from some people. Not everyone is given this precious truth during this age. The vast majority of people—even many who claim to be Christians—don't understand God's great purpose.

It's generally not understood by most sincere churchgoing Christians that they are *not* going to heaven as disembodied souls when they die. The reality is that the dead are not conscious and await a resurrection (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10; Daniel 12:2). Jesus Christ will come a second time and resurrect those who "sleep in Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 4:14), the true Christians who die in this age, and they will assist Him in a 1,000-year reign on the earth (Revelation 20:4, 6). It is through His righteous rule that peace will come, and all people will then come to know God. The world does not know the true God now.

The rest are not lost

God can certainly make His message known if He so chooses. So why would people believe that most are lost if they are not "saved" now during this age?

The fact of the matter is simple: God is not calling everyone now. But just because they haven't been called in this age doesn't mean that they are excluded from an opportunity to achieve the great salvation God offers.

God is dealing with those Scripture calls His "elect" in this age (Matthew 24:22, 24, 31; Romans 8:33; 11:7). They are called during this age of the devil's rule. This is why they have to overcome or prevail.

Jesus says to them, "He who overcomes, and keep my works until the end, to him will I give power over the nations" (Revelation 2:26) and "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Revelation 3:21). They must also endure to the end to be saved (Matthew 10:22; 24:13).

The great 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ and His saints on earth will be a time when all mortal human beings then living will receive the opportunity for salvation in a world where the devil is locked away (Revelation 20:1-4, 6). These will include those who live on after the terrible events at the end of this age into the next age, the age when Christ and His saints, the firstfruits, will bring God's way of life through the administration of His law to the entire world.

People's lives will be so affected by Christ's reign over this earth that, as Jeremiah prophesies: "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jeremiah 31:34). Unlike today, this will clearly be a time of salvation for everyone.

What about "the rest of the dead"?

The rest of the dead (Revelation 20:5, 12) will be resurrected after the 1,000 years are over. This also takes place in a world in which Satan has no influence, having been removed for good. They will "stand before God" and for the first time will have the opportunity to be properly instructed in God's wonderful truth. Led to following God's ways that they were ignorant of or didn't understand during the age in which they lived prior to Christ's second coming, they will at last find true forgiveness of their sins through Jesus Christ. This is not a *second* chance for them. It is their *first* opportunity to be saved. The wonderful and gracious truth of the matter is that they are not lost.

Let's make this as plain as we can. Those who have been blinded during this age, which includes the vast majority of humanity throughout history, *are not lost*. They have *never had* their *first* opportunity to be saved.

This answers a question that deeply troubles so many: How can God condemn the billions of people—including babies and children who have died before they matured—who never so much as heard the

Learn More

God reveals a series of festivals in the Bible. Few know about them, even though Scripture is clear that Jesus, the apostles and the early Church observed them. What did they know that we don't? The answer we discover is *lots* when we come to know the meaning of these festivals and what they teach about God's plan! You need to learn more. Request or download your free copy of *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. And while you're at it, also be sure to read our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*



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name of Jesus Christ or even knew about the true God?

Again, the answer is simple. God isn't calling everyone now, and neither has He condemned them. *Everyone* will have a fair and generous opportunity to turn to their Creator who gave them life and who also paid a high price for them in Christ's sacrifice.

At this time God is calling only the firstfruits—those who are called first—those who attain to salvation in a world ruled by the devil. Because they are called now, God has a special duty for them to serve with Him to bring the truth of salvation to all people in later ages.

What you should do

You ought to ask yourself: "How much do I know about all this?" If you say, "I am not blinded," then you have some decisions to seriously consider. You are faced with the question: "What will I do with God's generous offer to be part of His firstfruits?"

You won't hear this in mainstream Christian churches. Only the true Church of God has taught how God's great plan unfolds to include all people. Very few even understand what salvation really means. Fewer yet understand the concept of firstfruits. And it is impossible to attain to a salvation you know very little about.

But if you understand that God is calling and preparing His firstfruits, you need to look into God's great purpose for you and all mankind. We are a special creation, made to have a relationship with God that will extend for all eternity.

God has no interest in leaving anyone out. God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). But the opportunity to become part of the firstfruits of God's harvest is special. It's not easy, to be sure, but when something like this comes along you wouldn't expect it to be easy.

You ought to also first take a good look at the Feast of Firstfruits or Pentecost. The Church of God, in obedience to His instruction, will be observing this day as well as each of the festivals God commanded. All of them explain vital steps in His plan of salvation for mankind.

Think about the calling of God. Ask yourself: Am I being called to something special? Do I have a purpose? Is there something truly great about my existence that the world has failed to tell me about?

The answer to all three questions is a resounding *Yes!* **GN**



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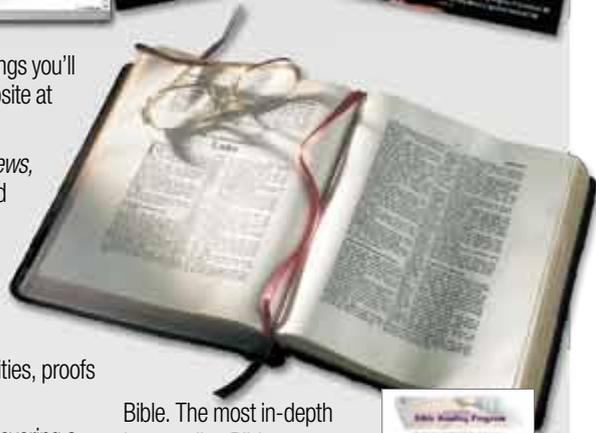


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Seeing What God Sees

Jesus Christ's encounter with a blind man holds important lessons for us as to what it means to accept His invitation of "Follow Me."

by Robin Webber

It was the end of the fall festival in Jerusalem, on a special Sabbath day, with the normally clamorous street stilled of commotion. There was a man here, blind from birth, who was able to hear the relaxing sounds of the Sabbath in a way those who see do not. His hearing was naturally acute to compensate for lack of seeing eyes.

As he listened, he could now hear a group of people coming his way—disciples accompanying their teacher, from the sound of them. Little did he realize that his life was about to change forever.

But that the works of God might be fulfilled

Scripture tells us what happened next in John 9:1: "As Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth." The time

assignment—something they can do after He performs what only He can do. And we see this here. The man obeyed, washed himself and miraculously came back seeing.

How did this come to be?

The man's neighbors had a hard time processing this life-changing moment when he got home. "Is this the beggar?" they asked. Some thought it was him, but others said, "It looks like him." So he announced to them, "It's me!"

Naturally, they asked, "How did this come to be?" The man explained: "A man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash. So I went and washed and received sight'" (verse 11). The now-seeing man knew that a wonderful man had done

The now-seeing man knew that a wonderful man had done something beautiful for him. But this was only the beginning of a story that would powerfully affect his life.

had come for a special and extraordinary teaching moment.

Jesus' disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" The common assumption of that day was that such a disability was a curse due to sin.

Jesus responded, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him." Yes, Jesus knew exactly what he was going to do with this man to glorify God.

At this point, Jesus bent over and spat on the ground and made a little mud with his saliva, then smoothed it over the man's eyes. Then He told the blind man to go to the Pool of Siloam south of the temple to wash himself. So often when Christ begins to work with people, He gives them an

something beautiful and miraculous for him and gave him full credit.

But this was only the beginning of a story that would powerfully affect the formerly blind man's life.

The amazed neighbors got the man to come with them to share his story with the Pharisees, religious teachers who ran the synagogues. But the reaction of these authorities no doubt shocked the man. They belittled the miraculous healing, sneering that this couldn't be of God because it was done on a Sabbath day.

At that time, man-made religious codes prevented care for the disabled on the Sabbath other than making them comfortable in their plight. In mixing the spittle with the clay, Jesus had knowingly snapped a trip wire of dos and don'ts that thwarted

doing good on the Sabbath. Even so, the now-healed man simply repeated his story: "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see."

The authorities put another squeeze play on him, demanding, "What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?" The man responded with an answer obvious to him, but which the others couldn't see: "*He is a prophet.*"

The disbelieving authorities then pulled the man's parents into this drama, demanding that they explain how their son could now see. The parents, realizing that a wrong answer could immediately bring severe consequences, carefully shifted the question, saying, "Ask him; he's an adult and can speak for himself."

Though I was blind, now I see!

The religious authorities continued to badger the man, now isolated from parental and neighbor support, to break him of his story. They scornfully depicted Jesus as a sinner and one apart from God. The formerly blind man replied, "Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see."

They continued to bully and belittle the man, but he refused to back down. His final statement proclaimed, "If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing." His religious persecutors roared back, "You were completely born in sins and you are teaching us?"

John 9:34 tells us, "And they cast him out." They left him where they thought they had found him before Jesus touched his eyes. In their warped form of religious superiority they saw him as a man born in sin unable to break free. And, now those thinking they were doing God a favor "cast him out" from the synagogue, the place of community worship (compare verse 22). It was easier to brand the man a sinner and liar than accept the uncomfortable truth.

It's here that one man's story, every man's story, plays out to full and complete measure. When others have failed to stand by him—be it natural family, neighbors or religious community—it's here where we find



Obeying Jesus Christ's instruction, the blind man went to the pool of Siloam, washed and miraculously gained his sight.

Jesus Christ doing His most intimate work.

Remember, Christ had departed the scene much earlier. Now, John records, "Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him . . ." (John 9:35). It's here that we once again have revealed a God who literally *seeks after us*. He not only saw the blind man at the beginning of the story, but now He searched him out and looked on his needs. When the man was cast out of the Lord's place of worship, the Lord Himself came to his rescue!

Simple truths and practical steps

But now a question follows from Jesus. It's the same inquiry made of each of us that face Him: "Do you believe in the Son of God?" The man answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?"

Jesus responded, "You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you."

The man exclaimed, "I believe!" and worshipped Jesus (verses 36-39). Beautiful!

This story displays the marvelous and realistic pathway of how to respond to Christ's invitation to "Follow Me." This divine request and requirement is neither ethereal nor mystical but rather has simple truths and practical steps as revealed in this example.

As we step forward on our personal pilgrimage, let's be reminded first of all that

God the Father and Jesus saw us first, even in our blinded spiritual state, and chose to specifically deal one-on-one with us just like the blind man.

God doesn't care what the rest of the world thinks about us, but remembers what Christ did at Golgotha for each of us He is calling today (John 6:44). The reality is that all of us at times have brought issues to the fore that seem hopeless or cursed. And yet, God says through Christ that He can take our current plight—be it physical, emotional or spiritual—and, as with the blind man of our story, use it to bring Him glory and honor.

Secondly, remember that *each of us* has a story—the story of how God has worked in our

lives. It may not be as dramatic as the story of the blind man or Paul being struck blind on the road to Damascus, but we have a story. We don't need to embellish it—just simply remember it and hold tightly to it at all costs.

The blind man was challenged three specific times about his story, but it always came back to the same simple facts. Never denying God's entrance into his personal darkness, he told it like it was.

As we hold firmly to what we know, be prepared to grow in awareness of just whom it is we follow. John 9 isn't just about a healing. It explores what it means to experience God at new levels. The healed man started by calling Jesus "a Man" in verse 11. When pressed, he progressed to a new level as he called Jesus "a prophet" in verse 17. By verse 38, he is proclaiming Jesus as Lord and worshipping Him.

God's intervention in our lives and our corresponding conversion is not simply an event. It includes a growing awareness and appreciation of just who has entered our lives—or, again, just whom it is we follow.

Thirdly, let's remember that Jesus "saw a man who was blind." It reminds us that God the Father and Christ will come into our lives and continue to work in our lives in Their way and in Their perfect timing—

often when we least expect it.

When He does intervene, He will at times do things we don't necessarily understand—like using the equivalent of spit and mud and then telling us to go where He tells us to go and do what He tells us to do. There is a figurative Pool of Siloam waiting out there for each of us. When God speaks to us through His Word, *obey it!* And leave the consequences to Him.

Prepare to answer one simple question

Fourth and finally, let's understand that following God in our day can be a lonely business. When God begins to guide us by His Spirit (Romans 8:14) don't for one moment think everyone is going to be thrilled. They won't be. But remember: The Good Shepherd knows where every member of the flock is!

We worship a God unknown in all other religions—the true Shepherd who loves His flock and actually seeks after us for our good. Let's embrace and grow in the reality that God's Spirit will never lead us to where God's grace will not keep and uphold us.

As we strive to continue on the journey laid out before us by the One we follow, let us prepare for one basic spiritual reality: We will continue to be challenged at various times and ways throughout our lives with the same simple question Jesus asked the man He had healed—"Do you believe in the Son of God?"

Our answer will be evident by our actions, person by person and deed by deed.

Nearly 100 years ago, the remarkable deaf and blind author and activist Helen Keller uttered a simple truth when asked, "What is the greatest calamity?" She answered, "To have eyes and not see." The story of the blind man of John 9 gives us eyes to see what God sees as we continue the quest of responding to Jesus' invitation of "Follow Me." **GN**

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Will the Dead Live Again?

Is there life after death? If so, how is that possible, and what will it be like? Will it last forever?

Most people believe in some kind of life after death. Some, however, accept the hopeless idea that this life is all there is—that there’s nothing afterward and we just cease to exist. It’s a terribly depressing thought to think we will never again see loved ones who’ve died—and that we ourselves will one day be gone forever.

A Christian in Washington tells this story:

“When I was 12 years old, my lovable little brother, Roddy, who was 3½, suddenly died. This was absolutely devastating to me, my parents and my other brother. My world was turned upside down with grief. That was over 50 years ago, and I still get choked up when I talk about my brother and what happened.

“The tragedy worked for good in that it made me begin to think seriously about life. If there was a way to see Roddy again, I longed to discover that way. However, I remained in the dark spiritually until many years later when God began to open my eyes to understand the Bible. What a thrilling ongoing education it has been ever since! And each time I have lost another loved one, it has further increased my determination to be there for the great ‘family reunion’ in the next life!”

Let’s delve into the pages of the Bible to see what it has to say on this deeply personal but universally important subject of life after death.

The Bible’s teaching on life after death

The patriarch Job asked, “If a man dies, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14). The good news of Scripture—the fabulous news—is YES, he will!

Let’s now see what the Bible has to say about the hope for life after death through a “resurrection,” which means “rising again” from the dead.

► What is the one greatest hope promised in the Bible?

“. . . In hope of *eternal life* which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began” (Titus 1:2, emphasis added throughout).

This reference (and many other scriptures) shows that the magnificent hope for mankind is *eternal life*! This is what “God, who cannot lie, promised before time began.” Hope is not merely a “wish”—hope is a desire that is fully expected because of solid evidence.

► What was God’s purpose in sacrificing His Son Jesus Christ?

“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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:16-17).

God’s ultimate sacrifice demonstrates the greatest love that could be imagined. Although everyone dies, God does not want

anyone to “perish” forever. He wants everyone to have “everlasting life”!

► Is God offering immortality to mortal human beings?

“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 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. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (1 Corinthians 15:50-54).

In this entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 15—often called “the resurrection chapter”—the apostle Paul gives us considerable understanding of a future resurrection. We are all mortal—physically, we all will die. So far, only God has immortality (see 1 Timothy 6:16). But God is offering immortality to all mankind!

► What was the stunning event that led the disciples to unshakeable hope?

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).

The empty tomb—the resurrection of Christ—was proof to Jesus’ disciples that God can raise the dead to life! It gave the disciples powerful motivation to preach this good news (see Acts 4:2, 20, 33; 8:4). Plus it led them to truly understand Jesus’ promises that God was offering eternal life to all mankind (John 10:28).

► All people have sorrows, but what is the worst kind of sorrow?

“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.

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

“Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

The worst kind of sorrow is that of people who have *no hope* for the future. God will *awaken* us in a *resurrection* from the dead. The resurrections will begin with the second coming of Christ!



The beautiful metaphor of sleep emphasizes the fact that the first death is temporary and that everyone who dies will be awakened again by God in the future!

As Paul states in the above quote, this hope gives us our greatest comfort.

► What is the present state of the dead?

“He [Jesus] said to them, ‘Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up’” (John 11:11).

John goes on to relate how Jesus raised Lazarus from death to life (John 11:12-45). In the Bible, death is often referred to as *sleep* (Job 14:10-12; Psalm 13:3; Daniel 12:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:15)—a total lack of consciousness (Psalm 6:5; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10).

The beautiful metaphor of sleep emphasizes the fact that the first death is temporary and that everyone who dies will be awakened by God in the future! This understanding of the present state of the dead is much more comforting than all the unbiblical and erroneous ideas about a disembodied afterlife in supposed bliss or torment.

When someone dies, family and friends often suffer with regrets and feelings of guilt about things they had said or done, or things they neglected to say or do. But God doesn’t want us to beat ourselves up about the past. He wants us to repent of our sins and look forward to our reunion in the next life, when we will have plenty of opportunities to sit and talk with our loved ones.

► What does the Bible say about grieving over the death of a loved one?

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).

And Paul’s words quoted earlier: “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” (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

It’s normal and healthy to grieve when we lose the companionship of a loved one. Those who repress grief rather than expressing it suffer more emotional problems in the long run. But healthy grieving depends on facing the reality of death.

In today’s humanistic culture obsessed with prolonging human life, many people avoid preparing for death or even discussing the topic. Feeling it’s taboo to even say the word “died,” people will use a euphemism like “passed away.” Denying death makes it harder for people to grieve and support one another and heal.

Those who truly understand the Bible still of course feel and express grief when their loved ones die because they miss them, but they don’t feel fear and despair because their hope and faith give them great comfort. As noted earlier, right after explaining about the promise of the resurrection, Paul said, “Therefore *comfort one another with these words*” (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

(During a time of grief, it’s important to avoid two common and serious mistakes. Don’t try to “drown your sorrows” with alcohol or drugs. And don’t neglect your sleep and good nutrition. Getting sick will only greatly add to your stress.)

► When resurrected to eternal life, what will we be like?

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:1-3).

Just as children of human beings are also human and enter the family of the parents, “children of God” become part of the glorious family of God. “We shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2)! There will be more about God’s gift of eternal life in future lessons.

Apply what you’ve learned now

Carefully read all of 1 Corinthians 15, the “resurrection chapter.” Think deeply about what you read and *think big!* Think of *all eternity* stretching out before you! And after we have lived for millions of years and look back on this human life, think of how short it will seem!

Read Romans 8:18 and 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 to see how we will view the sufferings of this life. We will see what a very small sacrifice it was to prepare for the endless paradise of eternal life!

Learn more about what happens after death

Although many know that the Bible teaches there will be a resurrection of the dead, common beliefs about immediately going to heaven or hell at death have greatly confused the issue. But Scripture is quite clear when we look at what it *actually* says as opposed to what so many *think* it says!

The publishers of *The Good News* have produced an eye-opening booklet on the subject, *What Happens After Death?* Request or download your free copy today! **GN**





The Lesson of the Brown Paper Bag

Long ago I learned an important lesson that's stuck with me ever since. And soon the time is coming when the entire world will be blessed as everyone comes to learn that same lesson! *by John LaBissoniere*

It was a cold, gray day as I shuffled home from school on a January afternoon in 1959. Even as snow began swirling about me in the blustery Wisconsin wind, it felt good to escape the confines of my stuffy fourth-grade school classroom.

As I turned the corner and began walking up the street to complete my five-block journey home, there on the sidewalk in front of me lay a crumpled little brown paper bag. Nothing seemed unusual about it—just a simple, small lunch sack, the kind my mother often gave me to take to school. But rather than kick it out of the way or just ignore it, I picked it up to look inside.

As I opened it, my eyes widened with surprise and excitement—there in the bottom lay a \$20 bill! Of course, \$20 may not seem like much today, but in 1959 it had about the same buying power that \$150 does now.

This was an amazingly huge sum, especially to a 10-year-old unaccustomed to seeing such a large bill! As I pulled it from the bag, I began sprinting home to show my mother this incredible treasure. Running breathlessly through the back door into our house, I shouted, “Mom, you have to see what I found!”

As my mother listened carefully to my story and the plans I had to spend my newfound wealth, she burst my bubble. “John,” she said, “It’s very likely the person who lost this money is searching for it. Shouldn’t we try to return it to its rightful owner? Why don’t we call the police to ask what we should do?”

Reluctantly I agreed since I knew she was right. After all, my parents had always instructed my brothers and sisters and me to be honest and truthful and to do what was correct.

Mom then called the police department, and an officer recommended that we bring the money to the station. He explained that it would be kept in a vault for six months and then, if unclaimed during that time, returned to us. Indeed, no one claimed the money in that period, so we returned to the police station to retrieve it.

This minor event from my formative years made a big impact on me. My mother could just as easily have said, “Finders-keepers,” and the money would have been mine immediately. But, being a woman of character with a desire to teach an important lesson in proper values to one of her children, she gave me a critical lesson about being concerned for and caring about others.

So why tell you this story? Because it’s not simply a narrative about me finding a \$20 bill in a little brown paper bag and my mother’s advice and our actions. Rather, there’s a bigger principle involved with a critical message for our day and time.

A selfish world

It’s no secret that our world is in serious trouble. The news is often filled with reports of people’s disregard for one another. We hear of endless episodes of corruption, deceit, dishonesty, immorality, crime, rape and murder. There are constant threats of violence, terrorism and warfare. Millions live in hopelessness, discouragement, fear and worry. Hatred, hostility and antagonism are the regular companions of people everywhere.

But why? Why do we find ourselves in this state of affairs?

The answer is that too often people don’t really care about others or do what is right. As an example, I read a news report about an owner who mistakenly entered the wrong price for fuel into the computer at his rural convenience store. He mistakenly left the “3” off the price of \$3.59 per gallon. The owner

estimated that 50 to 75 customers filled up before the mistake was discovered, costing him more than \$4,000.

Of all those who had fueled their vehicles, only one—an 18-year-old young man—was honest and truthful enough to return later and pay the full amount. But what about the scores of other people who bought the fuel? Undoubtedly they must have known something was wrong, but they had no interest in doing what was right.

We see other such incidents, showing widespread disrespect toward others, repeated day after day throughout the world. The wise biblical admonition known as the Golden Rule is constantly disregarded: “Do to others as you would like them to do to



My mother, being a woman of character, had a desire to teach an important lesson in proper values to one of her children and gave me a critical lesson about being concerned for and caring about others.

you” (Luke 6:31, New Living Translation). In other words, people commonly ignore what I would call “the lesson of the little brown paper bag.” They look out for themselves and their interests while ignoring the hurt, loss and injury of others.

This is certainly a self-centered, selfish outlook, but it goes much deeper than that. All too often people want to decide for themselves what is right and wrong. They want to live by their own rules, values and standards. This attitude can be deadly because, as

God's Word tells us twice, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

A "way of death"? To be sure, it's an approach that guarantees distressing, miserable results that can and do end in destruction.

Those consequences are summed up in Hosea 4:6, where God says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." What knowledge? The knowledge of obedience to God's eternal, spiritual laws expressed in the Ten Commandments and in other statutes outlined in His Word, the Bible.

Living laws

These timeless, divine laws are designed to benefit each individual as well as his neighbor. They're not just "religious instruction" reserved only for churchgoers. Rather, our Creator God set in motion living laws that govern all human relationships. If these laws are broken, they bring severe penalties resulting in suffering. If they are diligently obeyed, everything good is produced.

While human beings have discovered the unseen laws of science that control our physical universe, such as the law of gravity, they often refuse to recognize that there are invisible laws governing interactions between people. Some of these laws can be discovered by trial and error, but all of them are categorized and made plain through God's revelation in the Scriptures.

The first four of the Ten Commandments explain how to give respect and honor to God. The remaining six can be summarized as outgoing concern for the good and welfare of others. Once again, we might call this "the way of the little brown paper bag."

The reason human relationships are often in turmoil is that people habitually reject this giving, caring, thoughtful way of life and choose instead the way of selfishness. As a result, they are not in harmony with their Creator's laws, which are designed to help everyone successfully interact with each other.

If people break these instructions, the penalties consequently break them, just like trying to thwart the physical law of gravity. This simply means that God's living laws contain natural enforcement—penalties for their disobedience and rewards for obedience.

When people obey God's laws they not only help themselves and others, but they show esteem and reverence toward their Creator. Sadly, people often won't recognize or acknowledge those divine pronouncements and persistently and stubbornly attempt to determine good and evil on their own.

Is it any wonder then that mankind's

decision-making process, using human reasoning apart from God's revelation, has produced crushing discontent and suffering down through time? The prophet Jeremiah summarized humankind's dilemma when he wrote, "O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).

The way to peace and happiness

Considering the often-dismal record of human relationships, is society simply doomed to continue along a path of anguish and adversity? Is it even possible that people can come to learn how to live at peace with one other?

The fact is, there is a way that can lead to happiness and peace for everyone. Contentment and success can be attained and people can learn to really care for one another. Does this sound too good to be true? It isn't. Anyone who is willing to search for those qualities can discover and implement them.

When people are given the knowledge of God and come to understand His laws and His plan and purpose, they must personally and individually take it to heart! They must turn from going their own selfish way and begin to follow God.

The apostle James explains that doing so requires profound repentance, careful obedience and faith. "So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls. But don't just *listen* to God's word. You must *do what it says*. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves" (James 1:21-22, New Living Translation, emphasis added).

God wants you and me to really listen to Him and then do what He says. Why? Because it's for our own good and the good of others and because it honors Him as our Creator (Deuteronomy 30:19). He wants us to live by His Word because it is the foundation of all knowledge. The Scriptures are designed "to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15).

A new day will dawn

We can obtain that very wisdom and enjoy its great blessings both in this life and the next. But we must continually and deliberately focus on going God's way, even as the world as a whole persists in traveling down its old, weary road to destruction. Actually, we can be on the leading edge of an exciting new day that will dawn for all humanity!

Jesus Christ announced the coming of that

time with His wonderful news of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 24:14). In that day He will return to earth to establish God's righteous government (Revelation 11:15; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

From that time forward humanity will finally end its long journey of stumbling from bad to worse as we try to decide right from wrong for ourselves. Instead, people will actively be taught the laws of God in a reorganized global system of right education. "Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem'" (Isaiah 2:3).

Every aspect of life will be changed in that coming new worldwide government based on God's commandments. Prosperity, joy and happiness will be the result of true, godly knowledge being carefully taught and observed. "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9). You and I can have a part in that impending awesome future! We can help Christ rule in justice, morality, generosity and selflessness (Revelation 5:10).

Although the \$20 bill and the little brown paper bag I found on that cold January afternoon in 1959 are long gone, the lesson my mother instilled in me continues to this day. I'm glad I've had the opportunity to share it with you. I encourage you to take it to heart and act on the knowledge of God.

Together, let us prepare now for the wonderful coming time when everyone everywhere will deeply care about the needs and feelings of others and will strive to always do what is right. What a marvelous time that will be. I hope to see you there! **GN**

Learn More

Many people badly understand the Ten Commandments, viewing them as a harsh list of restrictive dos and don'ts. In doing so they miss the whole point and purpose of God's laws—that they are designed to bring great blessings not just to those who commit to obeying them from the heart, but to *everyone*. Be sure to read our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*. And to learn more about the coming Kingdom that Jesus Christ will establish on earth at His return, request or download your free copy of *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our website.

www.GNmagazine.org/booklets

Letters From Our Readers

“Planet Earth: Lucky Accident or Master Handiwork?”

I found your latest issue in my workplace break room. I appreciate your efforts in dealing with the science/evolution issue, but notice that you did not address the creation date problem. This is a serious flaw in any examination of the controversies related to science and the Bible. As long as a sizeable and vocal portion of Christians claim that the universe and life on earth are only a few thousand years old, then biblical Christianity is “dead on arrival” as far as educated nonbelievers are concerned.

B.G.B., Melfa, Virginia

You are right that this issue poses a considerable challenge to some. The question of the earth's age is discussed in considerable detail on pages 62-63 of our free booklet Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe? It's likewise addressed on pages 16-17 of our free booklet Is the Bible True? Interested readers should request or download these two publications.

The new Good News

The new Good News magazine is wonderful! I love the focus on Christian living and the mini-Bible feature. It is even more loaded with priceless good news for all people.

B.W., Internet

Every issue of your magazine is a joy to receive. I especially enjoyed the new columns in the latest issue. I save each magazine on the shelf with my Bibles, dictionaries and all the booklets you have sent me. I've been doing a study on heaven, soul, spirit and what happens when you die. Your booklets have been a great help to me in searching for the relevant scriptures. I am enclosing a small donation and will try to do so more often. I could never afford the books covering all the information you've sent me. Please send me your booklet *Is God a Trinity?* I want to understand and learn all that God wants me to know.

P.T., Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

I have just received the March-April edition of *The Good News*. My compliments go to the editorial staff because it is an outstanding accomplishment. It is very, very good. I was attending a study group last night and I started to quiz our lecturer about a lot of information I had gotten from your magazine. As a result a number of people came up to me at the end of the lecture and wanted to know why I was such a studious man. I explained about the magazine to them.

Reader from New South Wales, Australia

Thank you for your publications. At our house we get many magazines and other letters and brochures. Many we simply cannot read because of time constraints. But let me assure you that yours are always given priority. A contribution is enclosed.

C.K., Mifflintown, Pennsylvania

I have been getting *The Good News* magazine and have ordered and received several booklets. I have never understood more clearly than I do now when reading your information. The Bible has always been difficult for me to understand, and you focus on very important matters, always following with

Bible verses. Now I feel as though I can understand more and become even closer to God. You are appreciated!

B.M., Springfield, Missouri

Why not enroll in our free 12-lesson Bible Study Course?

Beyond Today

I love watching *Beyond Today*. Please continue to send that beloved magazine *The Good News*. Enclosed is a donation check.

J.M., Kennewick, Washington

I have been watching the *Beyond Today* TV program on a regular basis. As your commentators have pointed out, life today seems chaotic, but it is unfolding as was predicted by the prophet Isaiah. It is always beneficial to study the Bible, but I also need Christian fellowship to strengthen me. Could you suggest a local church that I could begin to attend? I am presently looking for a new church. Thank you for your efforts to promote Christ in an unbelieving world.

Reader from Ontario, Canada

We have passed on your request to our regional representative. We also suggest that you ask for our free booklets The Church Jesus Built and This Is the United Church of God.

I have received *The Good News* and have read it from cover to cover. *Beyond Today* is absolutely great. I am enclosing my contribution for the year 2012. Keep up the good work. You are appreciated.

Reader from Yukon, Canada

Is God a Trinity?

I look forward to receiving your literature as it provides a lot of real information. I also want to thank you for the booklet that I recently received called *Is God a Trinity?* I have found it fascinating. I have always doubted and questioned the idea of a Trinity as I was taught it in Sunday school. I could never quite accept it.

Reader from Queensland, Australia

What Does the Bible Teach About Tithing?

I watch your weekly *Beyond Today* show, and this week's message on tithing is one that I need to pay more attention to, even though I am incarcerated right now. I would very much like it if you would send me a copy of the booklet you've advertised called *What Does the Bible Teach About Tithing?* Even though your message on tithing was clear, a more in-depth study would be an asset in my life.

Reader from New Brunswick, Canada

After having read your booklet on tithing, I have come to realize that unwittingly I have been guilty of breaking the commandment that says, “Thou shalt not steal.” I was brought up to be honest—you don't lie, cheat or steal. I thought of myself as being fairly honest. Now I have come to realize that by not tithing, I am actually stealing from God. So I'd best be mending my ways.

R.W., Iowa Falls, Iowa

Spreading the gospel of God

A week ago while at a restaurant, a friend who works there gave me three booklets: *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*, *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* and *You Can Have Living Faith*. They were left on the table to be thrown away. I have read through the Bible numerous times, but found these very informative and enjoyable to read. Enclosed is a little gift to cover the postage of any other booklets that you might have available to send me.

G.D.T., Charleston, Illinois

Thank you for *The Good News* magazine. I look forward to each issue, and the other materials you send are wonderful too. I was baptized as a baby and accepted Christ at age 14. But shortly thereafter I stopped attending church. I never stopped praying, but I defiantly stopped listening and am ashamed of many things I did during those years.

Despite all that, God has blessed me and my family time and time again. Off and on I have tried to find a church that I felt comfortable with and whose message was acceptable to what I felt in my heart. Your publications, and more importantly your beliefs, have brought me back. Now I read every day from

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



Questions & Answers

Q: The issue of keeping the Sabbath causes me great concern. I know what the Bible says, and I want to follow God's Word, but our church worships on Sunday, as all churches seem to. I am worried about not following God's Word.

A.G., Southampton, England

A: All of us should be concerned about whether we are following God's instructions or not. God offers encouragement for those who sincerely want to obey Him. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah He says, "This is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite [remorseful] in spirit, and trembles at my word" (Isaiah 66:2, English Standard Version).

The apostle Paul clearly stated that we are to obey God's law: "For it is not the *hearers* of the law who are righteous before God, but the *doers of the law* who will be justified" (Romans 2:13, ESV, emphasis added throughout).

The apostle James, half-brother of Jesus Christ, made the same point that we must be *doers* of God's law: "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves . . . But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:22, 25).

God also gives clear instructions not to change the form of worship He lays down in Scripture: "Whatever I command you, *be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it*" (Deuteronomy 12:32).

Jesus Christ firmly challenged the Pharisees for altering God's laws and substituting their own traditions and interpretations (Matthew 15:7-9; Mark 7:6-13). He made it very clear that such practices did not have His approval.

With specific regard to the seventh-day Sabbath, Jesus stated of Himself that "the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath" (Luke 6:5). As the Creator on behalf of God the Father, Jesus was the One who created the Sabbath (John 1:1-3, 14; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16). He commissioned His Church to preach the gospel, but that mission does not include any authority to change God's commandments. Instead they were to follow His obedient example and teaching (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus clearly stated, "I have kept My Father's commandments" (John 15:10).

With that established, we can now address who usurped the authority of God the Father and Jesus Christ and taught that God's seventh-day Sabbath had been transformed to Sunday.

The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine (Peter Geiermann, 1957) specifically states on page 50:

"Q. Which is the Sabbath day?

"A. Saturday is the Sabbath day.

"Q. Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?

"A. We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church, in the Council of Laodicea, transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday."

Clearly, keeping holy God's seventh-day Sabbath (observed from Friday sunset until Saturday sunset) has been replaced by Sunday worship in mainstream Christianity. Indeed Catholic writings confirm the basis for this substitution being the belief that the Church had the authority to overrule the very words of God. But by what authority? To quote the same source:

"A. The Church substituted Sunday for Saturday by the plenitude of divine power that Jesus Christ bestowed upon her" (ibid.).

Later, Protestant groups split away from the Catholic Church, but they mostly followed Rome's lead in accepting Sunday.

Yet Christ commissioned His disciples to teach obedience to God's law, not to alter it. When confronted by Satan, Christ answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, *but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*'" (Matthew 4:4). God, at Mt. Sinai, spoke the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath commandment.

Throughout the book of Acts, the New Testament Church consistently met on the Sabbath day (Acts 13:14, 27, 42, 44; 16:13; 18:4). Clearly the early Church followed the example that Jesus Christ had set (Luke 4:16). Notice the phrase "*as His custom was.*" Down through the centuries the true Church has followed biblical instruction and example by observing the seventh-day Sabbath.

The New Covenant did not amend the Ten Commandments. Indeed Jesus Christ strengthened and magnified them as prophesied in the Old Testament (Isaiah 42:21). The command to "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8) points us back to Creation, identifying God as our Creator and the one who made the Sabbath day by resting on it (Genesis 2:1-3).

As shown in Hebrews 4:4-10, it also points forward to the coming millennial Sabbath rest when Jesus Christ reigns on earth in the Kingdom of God. The Greek word *sabbatismos*, translated "rest" in verse 9, literally means "a Sabbath-keeping," "a Sabbath rest" or a keeping of a Sabbath" (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, "Rest").

Many church organizations today have lost sight of these facts and reject the Sabbath. But as Jesus said of the religious leaders of His day: "They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch" (Matthew 15:14). We must not follow those who have rejected God's explicit commandments and substituted human tradition in their place.

None of us can alter the beliefs and practices of the world around us. But what we can do is strive to obey God to the best of our ability. As Christ's apostles said, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Inevitably this will put us at variance with many religious practices, customs and traditions of men. But if we want to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ and obey God, we must bring our lives into line with the true teachings of the Bible.

And it should be noted that not all churches worship on Sunday instead of the Sabbath. A sizable number, though still a small minority, worships on the Sabbath in accordance with God's instruction. The United Church of God, which publishes *The Good News* magazine, has hundreds of congregations around the world that observe God's seventh-day Sabbath.

For more information on how and why the Sabbath was replaced by Sunday and how to observe the true Sabbath today, request or download our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest*. Also helping explain the story is *The Church Jesus Built*.

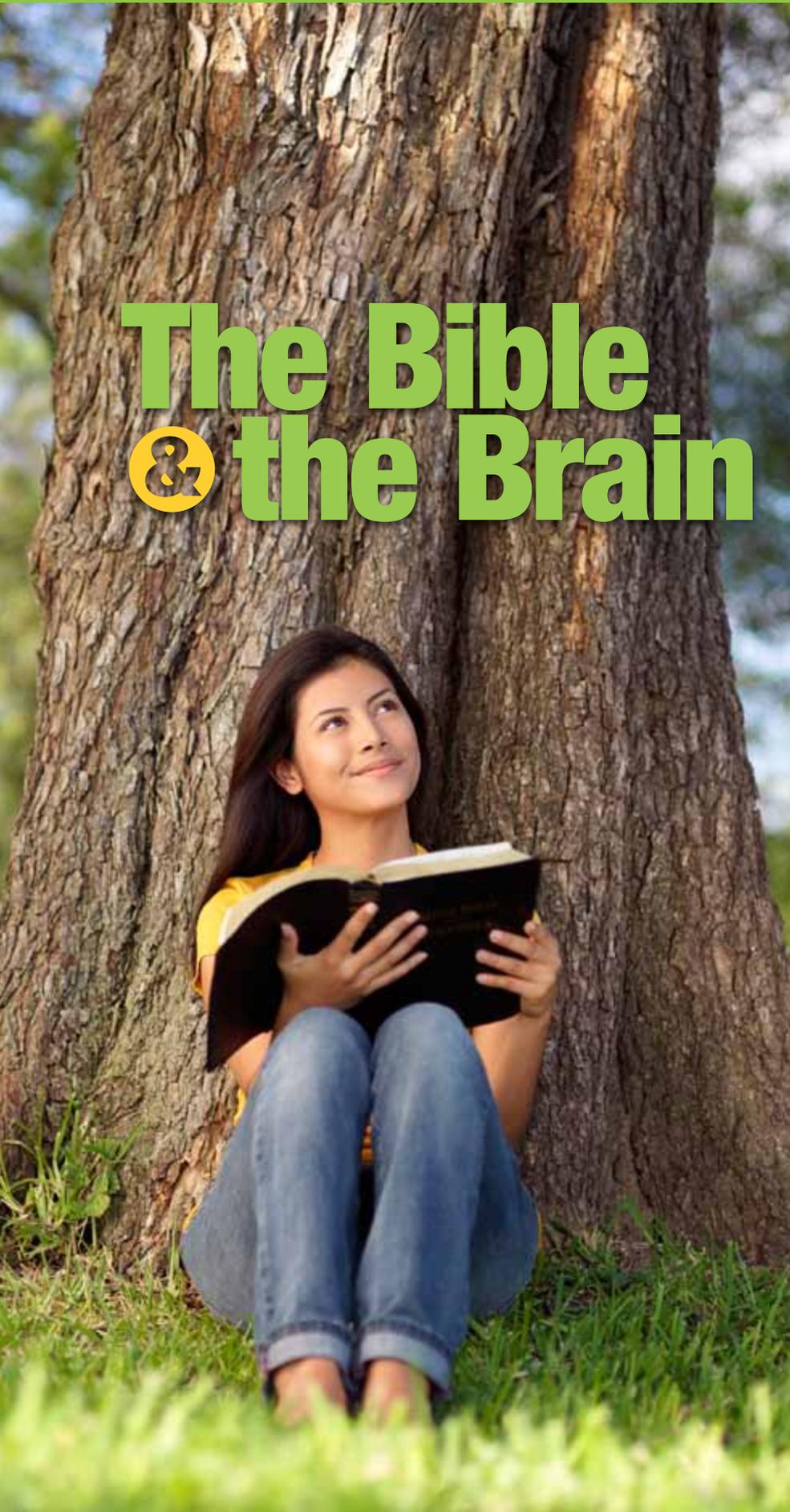
Those interested in finding a Sabbath-observing congregation near them can check our website at www.ucg.org/congregations.

God's Holy Word, and your work helps me greatly in understanding it. I wish I were closer to one of your congregations, as I would like to attend. Please find enclosed a small donation to assist with your work.

L.G.J. Chester, South Carolina

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 gninfo@ucg.org (please be sure to include your full name, city, state or province, and country).

The Bible & the Brain



You can read your way to a better working brain—and build moral character at the same time.

by Frank Dunkle

This may be an embarrassing admission for a grown man, but I have a box full of old comic books that I refuse to throw out, sell or even give away. I've been saving them for years to give to my son when he is old enough to read. But has reading become so out-of-style that he won't even bother with them when the time comes? We live in the digital age! Why read when audio and video clips are available anywhere, anytime? And *what* should we read?

The need to read

All of us need to read. Not only can it be fun, but it's good for our brains! Our brain processes information obtained from different media in different ways. It remains fairly passive when dealing with video on a screen, but when you read, your brain kicks into high gear and works in an entirely different way. In a book on this subject titled *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, author Neil Postman asserts that the way your brain works while reading is not just *different*, it's *better*.

Reading requires interactive, intellectual involvement. Watching a screen does not. It's as simple as that.

Comic books beat television!

We can help our brains even more by purposely managing what we put into them. Believe it or not, reading comic books helps our brains more than watching television! And a variety of reading helps far more.

This is important to think about for those of us who live in areas where summer vacation from school will soon begin. When class assignments no longer force you to read certain things, will you spend the vacation months feeding your brain a good variety of intellectual food?

A recent study of academic achievement found that over summer break many students tend to lose much of the academic progress they gained during the school year. A statistical analysis presented in Malcolm Gladwell's book *Outliers: The Story of Success* showed two good ways to prevent intellectual loss in our brains. They are:

- Continue going to school during the vacation period—a solution that would probably not be very popular with most students.

- Actively work your brain on your own throughout the vacation. Activity programs at camps and museums and visits to historical sites and nature preserves provide great opportunities.

Or you can *read!* It's an inexpensive and easy way to develop and preserve your brainpower and be on top of your game when school restarts.

School vacation reading list

Good summer reading includes a variety of material. Visit your local library or bookstore and stroll up and down the aisles to begin building your list. Find some novels, perhaps action-adventure or high drama—being careful of course to avoid anything that glorifies immorality or promotes wrong values.

A self-improvement book could be useful, as might a how-to manual. Works based on scientific or social research, such as those referenced above, can be quite interesting. And don't forget to include some poetry. Good poetry can lift your spirits, and its rhythms are—you guessed it—good for your brain!

Finally, let me suggest one more book to add to your school break reading list that truly has something for every taste and is truly for everyone. It's *the Bible*.

Read the Bible

The Bible already has all the genres I just mentioned, and it has the benefit of also being the Word of God that can lead you closer to Him. Do you like high adventure? How about a story in which the son of a king plots to overthrow his father? The story of King David and his son Absalom is filled with political intrigue and family tension, and it reaches a climax with a tumultuous battle. It's all there in the book of 2 Samuel.

Do you want to read some great self-improvement tips? The book of Proverbs is just what you need. In it King Solomon, the wisest man to ever live until Christ, gives a wealth of inspired advice on how to organize your life, avoid painful lessons, get the most out of life, get along with other people and love God.

Speaking of other people, if you want to explore some of the great philosophical questions of all time, devote some time to the books of Job and Ecclesiastes. What

makes for a happy life? Is there life after death? Why do good people sometimes suffer, while evil people seem to prosper? The answers are right there.

While you're in that section of Scripture, you'll notice that the book of Psalms is a large collection of lyric poetry written in several different styles. In the quest for other biblical poetry, most of Exodus 15 is a song of triumph to celebrate deliverance from slavery. Likewise, Judges 5 records the lyrics of a song celebrating victory in battle. The previous chapter gives the prose version of the story. Think how beneficial it would be for your brain if you analyzed and compared the two versions.

Of course the Bible also provides lots of *my* favorite type of reading—biography and history. You can read the life stories of famous people like Moses, King David, the apostle Paul and, of course, Jesus! The books of Joshua and Judges are full of military history, not to mention some stories of individual heroics that were captivating enough to make me put the comic books aside years ago.

Along with reading the Bible, you can also read material to help you understand it better—such as this magazine. The publishers of *The Good News* also produce a magazine for teens and those of college age, *Vertical Thought*, as well as many free booklets you might add to your reading list. One you can use as a study guide about the Bible is called *How to Understand the Bible*. It and other booklets are available on request or to read online at www.GNmagazine.org. Still, as helpful as biblical literature is, it's no substitute for reading Scripture itself, the very Word of God.

The best reading

That brings us back to where I started. Compared to watching videos on the computer and television, even reading comic books seems like too much work for most people looking for entertainment. But remember, reading is good for your brain, and a better brain will give you advantages in school, your career and just about every aspect of your life.

Reading anything will give you a cerebral advantage. But reading the Bible, and material to help you understand it, will make you a better person. This doesn't need to be the only thing on your reading list. Enjoy a variety of good reading, but make sure to include a lot of the best and most important reading of all—the Bible. **GN**



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