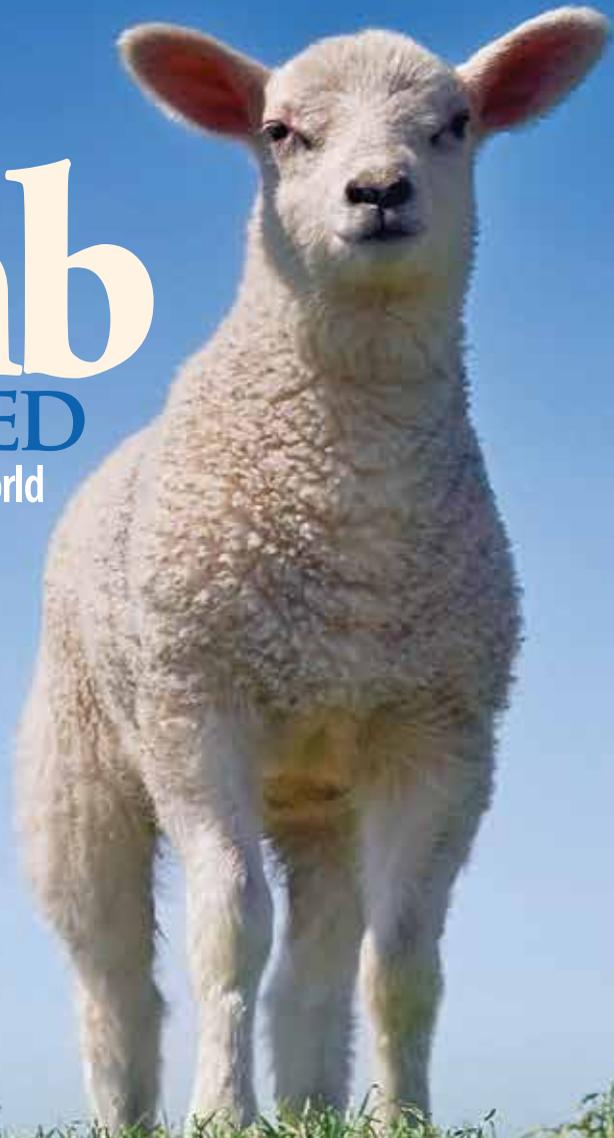


BEYOND TODAY[®]

March-April 2017

THE Lamb FOREORDAINED Before the Foundation of the World



Jesus Christ: The True Passover Lamb 9 • God's Blueprint of Salvation Revealed 12
Good Friday–Easter Sunday: It Just Doesn't Add Up! 16 • What's Ahead for Israel? 24

BEYOND TODAY

FEATURE ARTICLES

- 4 The Lamb Foreordained Before the Foundation of the World**
Holiday traditions fail to deliver on the essential desires of the heart. How can these be found? Only in truth, through the Lamb who was slain, Jesus Christ.
- 9 Christ the True Passover Lamb**
The Bible often refers to Jesus Christ as “the Lamb of God” and “our Passover.” What does this mean?
- 12 God’s Blueprint of Salvation Revealed**
God designed a system of salvation for all human-kind. This amazing knowledge can change your life!
- 16 Good Friday–Easter Sunday: It Just Doesn’t Add Up!**
Can we reconcile three days and three nights in the tomb with a late “Good Friday” crucifixion and burial and an early “Easter Sunday” resurrection?
- 20 Putin and Russia’s Push for Power**
What’s going on in Russia under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin?
- 24 What’s Ahead for Israel?**
What does the future hold for Israel, and how will peace in the region finally be achieved?
- 27 Why Brexit Matters for Europe and for You**
Britain’s vote to leave the European Union shocked the nation’s and the continent’s political elites. What does it mean for Britain and Europe?
- 31 A Little Child’s Prayers Matter to God**
God wants a relationship with your children. So are you teaching them to pray?
- 32 That You Love One Another**
John 13 records some of the final lessons Jesus gave His disciples the evening before His death. What should these actions mean to His followers?
- 34 He Got on the Boat Anyway**
Life is about choices. When the chips are down and the stakes are high, what choices will we make?
- 36 Taking Hold of the Divine Nature**
When we draw on God’s nature placed within us, we can continue to grow in the development of His wonderful attributes.



4



24



31



32

DEPARTMENTS

- 18 Current Events and Trends**
An overview of events and conditions around the world
- 38 Letters From Our Readers**
Readers of *Beyond Today* magazine share their thoughts
- 39 Beyond Today TV Log and Office Listing**
Beyond Today TV airtimes and worldwide contact information



Scott Ashley
Managing editor

The Greatest Sacrifice

What act would demonstrate the greatest power imaginable? We can be awestruck by mankind's greatest engineering marvels—towering skyscrapers, enormous dams, rockets that can take human beings into space. And then there are the ancient masterpieces like the pyramids of Egypt, the Great Wall of China and the Roman Colosseum.

Incredible as these wonders are, they come nowhere close to the greatest demonstration of power ever, which was *the creation of the universe*. What kind of power does it take to bring an entire universe into existence *out of nothing*?

It's ironic that even Darwinian evolutionists, who reject any role for a divine Being, start with the premise of an already existing universe and hospitable planet complete with laws of physics and chemistry already in place. After a century and a half of trying, they still can offer no rational explanation for a universe that came from nothing!

Yet the Bible reveals how our universe came to be: *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1, emphasis added throughout). Here the Bible reveals what science cannot tell us. It reveals a divine Creator who brought the universe into being *from nothing*.

Psalm 33:6 explains it this way: *"The LORD merely spoke, and the heavens were created. He breathed the word, and all the stars were born"* (New Living Translation).

That, my friends, is power!

For years scientists had estimated the number of galaxies in our universe at around 100 billion. A few months ago a group of astronomers recalculated the existing data and increased their estimate to *two to three trillion* galaxies—*20 to 30 times* as many as previously thought! Such numbers are almost beyond human comprehension.

The Bible also explains who this Being is who created the universe: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made through Him, and without Him*

nothing was made that was made" (John 1:1-3).

The apostle John here tells us that "in the beginning"—a reference back to Genesis 1:1—*two* divine Beings existed, one called "the Word" and the other called "God." In verse 14 John further explains that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us," and that this "Word" through whom all things were made was *the One who became Jesus Christ*. This is further confirmed plainly in Hebrews 1:2 and Colossians 1:16-17.

Yet, astoundingly, in the greatest act of humility and sacrifice of all time, this Being who brought the universe into existence *gave up that astounding power* to offer His life as a sacrifice to pay the penalty for your sins and mine.

As the apostle Paul explains in Philippians 2:5-8: "Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in

obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross" (NLT).

The Word, the divine Being who would later become the One we know as Jesus the Messiah, was God on the same level of existence with the Father. But by choice He willingly emptied Himself of this glorious existence of majesty, splendor and power in the greatest act of humility of all time.

And because He willingly gave this up to become the sacrifice for all mankind's sins for all time, God the Father has "elevated him to the place of highest honor" and placed Him in authority over all things—*"that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord"* (NLT, verses 9-11).

Every year at this time, the biblical Passover commemoration reminds us of what He gave up for us. The articles in this issue will help you better understand and appreciate that greatest sacrifice ever! **BT**



No matter how astounding some of mankind's greatest marvels are, nothing comes close to the creation of the universe!

Scott Ashley

The Lamb Foreordained *Before* the Foundation of the World

Holiday traditions are popular and attractive, but they fail to deliver on the essential desires of the heart. How can these be found?
Only in truth, through the Lamb who was slain, Jesus Christ.

by Darris McNeely

As I begin to write this article, the last echoes of the Christmas season are fading. As you are reading this article, much of the world is centering on the annual Easter celebration.

Amid this year's Christmas season it dawned on me why no one today cares about the pagan origins of both these holidays, even though it's common knowledge that both are rooted in rituals and practices that had nothing to do with Christianity or the Bible.

People keep these festivals, I realized, seeking to receive hope and joy in their lives. Whether the holidays have religious significance or are only a sentimental idea based in commercialism, I think people are looking to fulfill a deep hole in their lives that the modern world cannot fill. That they seek it through ancient pagan forms, and fail, is the tragic truth of our modern times. True hope and joy will not be found in anything less than the reality of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the Lamb of God who was foreordained from before the foundation of the world.

The unbiblical teachings of Jesus being born in the dead of winter and then killed on a Good Friday and resurrected a day and a half later on a Sunday morning actually hide the critical truths of God, His purpose for human life and why Jesus was born into human flesh, lived

that concludes the Bible, Revelation. Obviously this is a major theme of this prophetic book about the future of humankind!

Jesus was announced at the beginning of His ministry as the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world (John 1:29, 36). And 1 Peter 1:19-20 tells us we are redeemed, bought back from death, "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" and that He "was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest [revealed] in these last times for you."

Revelation 13:8 similarly refers to, as often translated, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

What is meant by the phrase "the foundation of the world"?

This world inhabited by human beings dates from the book of Genesis where we find man created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) and especially the world, or society, that begins when Adam and Eve took from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil found in their garden home (Genesis 2:9).

It has been a world where sin has reigned, leading to suffering and death. Sin separates man from God. Sin robs us of hope and joy. The foundation of our world dates from this event in the garden when Adam and Eve rejected God and chose to go their own way. We live with the tragic results in the unending wars, crime, suffering and death we see all around us in this world.

We find the phrase "foundation of the world" in several places in the Bible. We should note in 1 Peter 1:19-20, just quoted, that Jesus as the Lamb who would offer His own blood in sacrifice was "foreordained *before* the foundation of the world."

In this one word used here, *before*, we find the trail to fully understanding the source of hope and ultimate joy that comes from the knowledge of what God is doing with human life and where we all fit in the purpose God is working out here within the physical realm.

Before this age

God gives us only brief glimpses into what went on before the foundation of the world that is now inhabited by the physical creation of animals and human

The astounding truth is that there were and remain *two divine Beings* who existed "in the beginning," *before* the universe was created!

a sinless life and then suffered and died so that man might be redeemed to God.

The truth of the resurrection is also covered over by a false narrative called Easter Sunday. You need to understand the bright hope and joy contained in the meaning of Jesus being the Lamb destined to be slain from the very beginning.

"The precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb . . . foreordained"

The New Testament mentions Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God in 31 verses—26 of those being in the book

beings created in His image. This refers to whatever existed and whatever happened before the Genesis story—before the beginning, before there was time as we understand it.

We measure time by the orbit and revolution of the earth in conjunction with the sun and moon. But there was a “time” when these and the rest of the physical universe *did not exist*. Science has generally settled on the idea of a “big bang,” a beginning moment when the universe came into existence. The effect of this event can be measured. But what existed and what happened before that moment *cannot* be seen nor measured.

The Bible, however, gives us understanding of what “was”—what existed—in that period.

What “was” in that period was the Word and God. John 1 puts it this way: “In the beginning was the Word, and Word *was with God*, and the Word *was God*. He was in the beginning with God” (verses 1-2). Here is revealed the astounding truth that there were and are *two* divine Beings who existed “in the beginning.” John calls one of them “God” and the other “the Word”—although “the Word was God” also. (Later we come to know them in the Bible as God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son.)

This corresponds with Genesis 1:26, where more than one divine Being is also revealed: “Then God said, ‘Let *Us* make man in *Our* image, according to *Our* likeness . . .’” Both the apostle John and the book of Genesis present *two* divine Beings as existing “in the beginning.” This is the clear teaching of Scripture.

What was Their purpose and plan?

We How did these two Beings exist? We can begin to understand by looking at John 17:24. Here, not long before His crucifixion, Jesus prays, “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; *for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.*”

God and the Word, both uncreated, existed in eternity in a loving, unified relationship. Between Them was complete unity of purpose. Such words as *harmony, unity, cooperation, concern, care* and *mutually benefiting* applied to these two Beings in this realm of prehistory outside of and before time as we know it.

Another way to understand this existence is the *absence* of conflict, hatred and envy—all the *human* characteristics that lead to the suffering we see in the physical realm. Such evil, or sin, did not exist between God and the Word. This is the glorious state within which they existed—spirit, uncreated, with splendor, majesty and eternal life inherent within Themselves.

So much of human experience is defined by suffering. The peace and harmony and goodwill we seek among nations are sadly lacking. Yet this is the essence of the existence God and the Word shared. To put it in one word, it is *love* that was their seamless bond. “*God is love,*” we are told in 1 John 4:8 and 16. It is who and what They are and share in a glorious spirit existence apart from us.

But most importantly for us—incredibly—it is *what they decided to share*.

The hinge of history

At some point “before the foundation of the world” these



two Beings came to the most momentous decision of all eternity. They decided *to share this glory*. They determined to extend spirit life, the essence of Their existence, *beyond Themselves*.

It would be done through a unique creation of beings made in the image of God—like Him in significant ways, yet composed not of spirit but of physical created matter. These far lesser, physical beings, called human, would have the potential to share in the glorious spirit existence of these eternal Beings, God and the Word. Through a process called *redemption* or *salvation*, a path would be established by which the human creation could choose to enter the glory of a spiritual relationship and existence with God.

But bringing to existence additional beings sharing in this glory could not be done without one of the two electing to divest Himself of this glory to create the path of salvation. Which of the two would do this? How did they determine who would do this? We are not told in the Bible. We only know *what* occurred. In this knowing we have the revelation of the most selfless, giving and loving action in eternity.

Remember what we read earlier about Jesus as the Lamb who would offer His blood being foreordained from before the foundation of the world. The Word, who would later become Jesus Christ, was predetermined from this point of decision to be the way by which humanity could attain to the glory of eternal life.

But the price would be staggering. It would require the eternal, ever-living Word becoming flesh and living a perfect life as a human being. It would require experiencing all the temptation we experience in this life (Hebrews 4:15). But most of all it would require this perfect Being to suffer, shed His blood *and die* for very imperfect human beings.

The Word, through whom God created the worlds and mankind in it (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2), would be the path by which the creation could be brought into oneness with God. This is a weighty theological concept for modern minds unaccustomed to such thought to grasp. But

it is what we need to understand as we think about God and the purpose of life being worked out here on earth. The false teachings surrounding Christmas and Easter do not begin to cover such concepts—in fact, they *obscure* them.

God chose to become man

John 1:14 tells us that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” The Being known as the Word had decided well before this to become part of the physical order—to become flesh, to become human.

The moment of decision, this hinge of history before human history, when it was determined that the Word would become the Lamb, set a course, a purpose that is unalterable.

From timeless eternity the Word and the One who would

The price would be staggering. It would require this perfect Being to suffer, shed His blood and die for very imperfect human beings.

later be known as God the Father (called “the Ancient of Days” in Daniel 7:9, 13, 22) decided that at a certain point the Word would enter physical time and space and live as part of the created order—as a human being made of the dust of the earth.

This was a supremely unselfish decision by the Word. The apostle Paul was inspired to write about this in Philippians 2:5-8: “You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross” (Philippians 2:5-8, New Living Translation).

The Word had an equal status with God but willingly, by choice, emptied Himself of this glory. It was the greatest act of humility. Because He did this, the Father has placed Him in authority over all things—“that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow” (verse 9).

The incarnation—God became flesh

The act of the Word becoming flesh is recorded in the Gospels. While it is traditionally focused on during the Christmas season, regrettably it is poorly understood from many perspectives. Jesus Christ was not born on Dec. 25 in the dead of winter. This is a well-known fact attested by many Bible scholars. But as I pointed out at the beginning of this article, most people simply do not care. We are living through a period of “fake news,” and the Christmas traditions are among the most fake of all news!

The significance of Christ’s birth is something for us to contemplate every day of our lives and not just once a year. Not only is it one of the great hinges of history, but it opens our personal door to a richly purpose-filled life that transcends our moment in time.

God recorded the facts of the events to show us the deep significance of the Word becoming flesh. When our minds

look into the real reason for this event we probe the deepest mystery of the universe.

In Matthew’s account an angel appears to Joseph in a dream and tells him, “Do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:20). God the Father caused the impregnation of Mary by His Holy Spirit and through this miracle accomplished this critical part of the eternal purpose.

The announcement to Mary adds more: “And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God’” (Luke 1:35).

The idea of a virgin giving birth is very difficult for modern minds to grasp and believe. Many theologians have rejected the clear biblical teaching while still trying to explain faith. But this event, the conception of the divine Word to become flesh and blood in the womb of a virgin, demonstrates God’s commitment to share His glory with humanity.

The Bible shows seamless continuity from the movement of the Word into the womb to birth as Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary and adopted son of Joseph. As an adult Jesus would tell the Jews, “Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58). This is a clear reference back to the God who appeared to Moses at the burning bush, who when asked His name replied to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM . . . you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:14). He was, in fact, the God who interacted with human beings before His physical human birth.

Jesus existed and exists from eternity, uncreated, and was God with God the Father in the beginning. This is the key to our hope—God becoming flesh and dwelling among mankind.

Uncreated Spirit was placed into the womb of created flesh in this incarnation. Jesus is called the “only begotten” (John 1:14, 18), meaning He is the only one to have started human life in this manner. This was the first and only time in all eternity this has happened. God became man, Spirit became flesh, so mankind made of flesh might have opportunity to become spirit and share in the glory of God. This is God’s eternal purpose for human life!

We all desire to have hope and to live a life of joy and confidence. At the beginning of this article I noted that people keep the holidays of Christmas and Easter seeking joy and hope. No matter whether their motive is religious, secular or purely nostalgic for a time and place that never was, each year when these holidays come around it stirs something within people—a craving for meaning and something or some purpose beyond them.

But for many the hope each year goes unrealized. A frenzy of holiday spending and buying leads to a mountain of debt when we really need to be indebted to God the Father and Jesus Christ for something we could never earn and never buy.

Jesus said the truth shall make us free. It is only God’s eternal spiritual truth that can free us from the shackles of fear, uncertainty and ignorance placed on us by false

knowledge, the “fake news” of today’s world.

Saved by His life

The Easter traditions of rabbits, eggs and the Good Friday–Easter Sunday scenario (which cannot fit with Jesus’ statement in Matthew 12:40 that He would be in the tomb three days and

Resurrected, ***the Word had returned***—the fully realized Lamb of God who was foreordained to be slain from before from the foundation of the world!

three nights) are more counterfeits that only hide the joy-filled truths embedded in the events of the week of Christ’s death and resurrection as told in the Gospels.

Let’s go back to 1 Peter 1:19-20, which we read earlier. It states that we are redeemed by the blood of Jesus the Lamb, Him being foreordained to this role before the foundation of the world. His death was the fulfillment of the anticipated event. No more was mankind without a means to be reconciled with God.

Now sin could be forgiven through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and sin’s sure penalty of death (Romans 6:23) was removed by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God in our place. Through repentance and faith in this sacrifice, a new opportunity opened for all. Access to the presence of God in heaven is possible (Hebrews 4:14-16). But that’s not all.

Jesus was resurrected after three days and three nights in the grave. When the women went to the tomb at dawn on the first day of the week, they found the stone rolled away and an empty tomb. The angel announced to them, “He is not here; for He is risen, as He said” (Matthew 28:6). By the power of the Spirit the Father resurrected Jesus and restored Him to the glory They once shared (Ephesians 1:19-20).

Before His death Jesus asked the Father to return Him to the “glory which I had with You before the world was” (John 17:5). Scripture tells us Jesus had to ascend to the Father (John 20:17), which would be in fulfillment of the wave-sheaf ritual that foreshadowed this event (see Leviticus 23:10-14). This occurred on the day after His resurrection and must have been a magnificent moment in eternity. The Word had returned! He returned the fully realized Lamb of God who was foreordained to be slain from before the foundation of the world.

While no scripture details this, we can logically piece together what happened and what could have been the exultant

moment when He who had been the Word, the Christ, the slain Lamb now restored to glorious immortality, came to the Father to receive “dominion and glory and a kingdom . . . an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away” (Daniel 7:14).

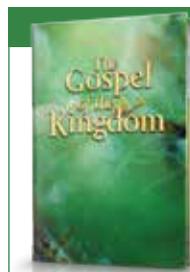
We can imagine Jesus Christ coming to the throne of glory “with His own blood [entering] the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12) and angelic voices shouting, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and blessing!” (Revelation 5:12). This exultant moment must still echo in eternity!

A glimpse into God’s throne room

In Revelation 4 and 5 we see recorded a vision of the throne of God in heaven. There we see angels and other spirit beings who apparently fill key roles in implementing and monitoring God’s purpose and activity throughout the universe. At the center of all this lies a great sea of crystal glass with a throne upon which sits One who lives for ever and ever, the Father.

And standing there is a Lamb appearing as though it had been slain. The multiple horns and eyes He appears with here seem to represent the power and penetrating vision of the Spirit of God gathering all the knowledge of the world. By His sacrificial life He is worthy. Mankind’s redemption price has been paid, and we await the moment when the eternal plan of God moves into its next phase, bringing both judgment and rescue.

For the Lamb who was foreordained to be sacrificed before the foundation of the world, time and eternity are ever present in this scene. Creation waits for the unveiling of the glory of God in this world when the Lamb who was slain will come to the earth a second time to reveal God’s purpose to all mankind and offer God’s gift of salvation to all! 



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Christ the True Passover Lamb

The Bible often refers to Jesus Christ as “the Lamb of God” and “our Passover.”
What does this mean? What are we to learn from it, and how should it affect our lives?

by Milan Bizic

Every year at this time the Christian focus becomes the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, along with His resurrection to life and then rising to sit at the throne with the Father in heaven. This sequence of events is the center of Christian faith, giving hope for eternal life and the abolition of sin and death in the world.

What’s easy to miss, though, is the ancient Hebrew context of Jesus’ sacrifice in the biblical festival of Passover. It’s a mistake to think that the Passover was simply a Jewish feast that happened to coincide with Jesus’ crucifixion.

The Passover, with all of its history and symbolism, is actually the centerpiece of Christ’s offering of Himself and subsequent ascension to the throne of God to serve as High Priest and Intercessor. By thinking about this central event in the Christian faith in the same way that Jesus Himself thought about it—as the ultimate fulfillment of what was practiced every year in the Passover—we can gain a much deeper and richer perspective on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and on what it means for Christians today.

The Lamb of God—from the Exodus to the crucifixion

During this season you’ll likely have opportunity to see Charlton Heston in full beard and desert garb in his role as Moses, prophet to the Israelite people in their oppression in the land of Egypt. The famous Hollywood classic *The Ten Commandments* gets airtime every year because it’s the story of the Passover, and Jews and Christians alike look back to the Exodus and remember the thrilling account of the plagues, Israel’s flight and the parting of the Red Sea.

The Exodus is just a part of the entire message of what the Passover is all about. The main symbol of the Old Testament Passover, the sacrificial lamb, points us in the

right direction. God instructed the Israelites in detail about what to do with the Passover lamb:

“Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover lamb. And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you” (Exodus 12:21-23).

The Passover lamb was sacrificed, its blood painted on the doorposts of the Israelite houses, so that God would *pass over* those homes and spare their firstborn children. The act of the lamb’s sacrifice and the blood covering the household was directly tied to the salvation of the people. It is within this context that we find Jesus’ work on earth.

Just before Jesus of Nazareth began His ministry in the early first century, He sought out His cousin, John the Baptist, who was baptizing people in the Jordan River. As Jesus approached the shore, John looked at Him, gestured to his followers and said: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

In this declaration John foretold and explained the role Jesus would have as Israel’s Messiah in His first coming—a role far greater than any of His followers at the time would have imagined!

Fast forward about three years from John’s proclamation of Jesus as the Lamb of God, and His disciples would see a fulfillment of their Master’s identity as that Lamb as He was tortured and crucified. (God’s plan for salvation actually goes much further back than Jesus’ crucifixion, the Israelite

Exodus from Egypt, or even the creation of the universe. To get the rest of the story, read “The Lamb Foreordained Before the Foundation of the World” beginning on page 4.)

Before we get back to the eternal lesson of the sacrifice of Jesus, we need to talk about how we commemorate this central event in Christianity.

The Easter problem

By far the most common way that those who identify as Christians seek to honor Jesus as their Savior is by commemorating His resurrection on Easter Sunday.

But there are big problems with Easter itself, including its traditional origins in extrabiblical celebrations (search for “Easter” at ucg.org/learnmore or download or request our free study guide *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*). Even without the problems of Easter’s pagan throwbacks and unbiblical trappings (such as rabbits and eggs—ancient fertility symbols), there are deeper, fundamental theological problems with how Easter presents the meaning of Jesus’ sacrifice and resurrection.

When Easter Sunday is celebrated instead of the Passover, the biblical context is stripped from the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the richness of the entire biblical narrative of God’s plan of salvation for all mankind is watered down and lost. The apostles recognized how important it was to remember Jesus’ sacrifice in the context of the biblical Passover, and the apostle Paul’s instructions to the church in Corinth prove it.

Paul delivered specific instructions to the mostly gentile church in Corinth on how to commemorate Jesus’ death: “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; *do this in remembrance of Me.*’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. *This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me*’” (1 Corinthians 11:23-25, emphasis added throughout).

This is clearly not an Easter celebration or service. Paul wasn’t instituting something new or coming up with a new way to honor Christ. He was looking directly back to what *Jesus Himself did* on Passover night, where He affirmed Himself as the Lamb of God and gave instructions on how to honor His sacrifice as the Passover Lamb.

Easter loses the deep meaning and symbolism embedded in what Christ Himself was doing and teaching His disciples—in which He told them, “*Do this in remembrance of Me.*” It ignores His explicit instruction on the proper context for commemorating His death and substitutes in its place something totally different—a supposed celebration of His resurrection that actually is loaded with symbols adopted from ancient fertility rites!

What does this mean for you and me? What Paul wrote earlier in the same letter points us in the right direction: “Indeed Christ, *our Passover*, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

Commemorating the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus Christ



through the symbols of bread and wine as His body and blood is a responsibility Christians should take very seriously. Easter ignores the biblical context of why Jesus instituted these symbols. Because of this it also misses the boat in helping us see where the sacrifice of Christ will eventually take us.

Next we’ll see how the Passover imagery of the Bible points to a glorious and hopeful future that we should be looking to right now.

The Lamb of God—from here to eternity

To really understand the depth and breadth of Christ’s sacrifice for us, we need to look not only to the past but to the future. We’ve seen that Jesus’ followers recognized His identity as the fulfillment of what was symbolized in the Passover in Egypt by the lamb that was killed to save the people. He fulfilled His role as the sacrificial Lamb by offering His life for us so that we could repent of sin and be freed from death. Yet Jesus’ role as the Lamb of God didn’t end when He died. His sacrifice, though made once, is ever available to give freedom.

And where does the Bible’s narrative of the Lamb of God take us? *To the very end.* Jesus is referred to as the “Lamb of God” or the “Lamb” repeatedly in the book of Revelation—the last book of the Bible, which takes us *far into the future.*

The apostle John was given an incredible vision of a time when the people of God would come before the throne of God. Here is what he saw: “I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and *before the Lamb*, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, *and to the Lamb!*’ . . .

“Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?’ And I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’ So he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in *the blood of the Lamb . . . for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters.* And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes’” (Revelation 7:9-17).

The reality is that, at His crucifixion, Jesus’ role as the Passover Lamb was only beginning. He was raised from the

dead and ascended to the throne of God where He currently sits as our High Priest and Intercessor before God the Father (Hebrews 8:1). His continued ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18) is what gives us hope that we can be forgiven of our sins through acknowledging those sins and repenting before God. This is the only true hope that we can hang our faith on, and only God can provide it through the sacrifice of the Lamb!

The biblical thread of the Lamb goes straight through to the end of the book—and the end of God’s plan for mankind. The end of John’s vision takes us to a time in the future when God’s plan of salvation for mankind is complete and God begins a new creation:

“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Revelation 21:1). Notice John’s description of the new creation: “But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and *the Lamb* are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. *The Lamb* is its light” (verses 22-23).

Jesus’ role as the Passover Lamb of God, sacrificed for your sins and mine, continues on today and has *eternal* significance. No wonder Jesus instituted the New Covenant Passover ceremony for Christians to observe every year in His honor! No wonder the apostles continued in this practice and taught the Lord’s commandment so faithfully!

Here’s a question to ask yourself as you ponder the life and death of Jesus Christ, as well as His continuing role as the Passover Lamb: Will you faithfully follow His commandment as well?

The slain Lamb lives

As Jesus’ body was taken down, wrapped and placed in the tomb, His disciples must have wondered what it all

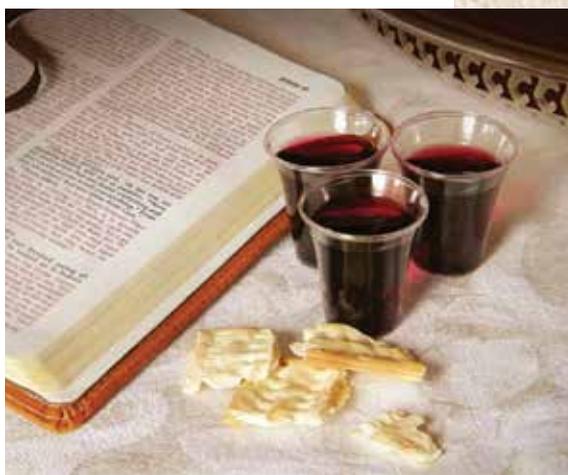
meant. Here was the one who would be Messiah—the Savior and King—*dead*. What did it mean for His teachings? What did it mean for the strange and touching meal He shared with them the evening before? What did it mean for *them*?

Doubt, fear, anger—all of these emotions and more must have filled the scattering disciples in the hours after the crucifixion.

But Jesus did not stay in the grave. He did not stay dead! His body did not “see corruption” (Psalm 16:10). He was raised by the Father to eternal life and accepted to dwell at the throne of God. And He is alive today, interceding for His people and actively living in them through the Holy Spirit (Galatians 2:20).

The Passover ceremony He instituted that momentous spring calls all this and more to our attention. It points us to the future time when God will redeem the whole creation and His people will live with Him for all eternity.

Jesus is the Passover Lamb of God,



and He was sacrificed for you and for me. Just as we have been given the awesome privilege of knowing this truth, we have also been given an awesome responsibility to worship our Lord God in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

Will you respond to that responsibility by worshipping God in the way and at the time that He directs? The Passover is that time, while Easter cannot claim to be. I hope you’ll choose to honor your Lord and Savior as the Passover Lamb, just as He intended! 

How is the Passover Ceremony Commemorated Today?

The biblical observance of the Passover is a memorial of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins. The original Passover was a reminder of how God spared the firstborn of His people from death in Egypt. As the ultimate fulfillment of what the Passover pictures, the New Covenant Passover reminds us that Christians are saved from sin’s penalty of eternal death by Christ’s sacrifice as the Lamb of God.

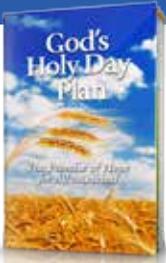
Members of the United Church of God, publisher of *Beyond Today* magazine, approach this period of the year with deep spiritual introspection, recognizing the

enormity of that sacrifice. We commemorate the Passover with a solemn service based on the instructions of the apostle Paul and the New Covenant Passover ceremony that Jesus instituted as recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The Passover service begins after sundown the night before Passover day on the Hebrew calendar, according to Jesus’ example. The service starts with a brief explanation of its purpose and

readings from the Gospels. Then, following Jesus’ example and instructions in John 13, Christians wash one another’s feet.

This is followed by an explanation of the symbols of the Passover, unleavened bread and wine, which represent the body and blood of our Savior. Each baptized member of the Church eats a small piece of the unleavened bread and drinks a small cup of the wine, showing acknowledgment of and need for that sacrifice. After further readings from Jesus’ teaching on that last night before His arrest and crucifixion, the service is concluded. (See Exodus 12; Leviticus 23:5; Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:22-24; 1 Corinthians 11:23-28.)



LEARN MORE

How much do you know about God’s annual holy festivals—including the Passover? What does it teach us about Jesus Christ and His sacrifice as the Passover lamb? Be sure to download or request your free copy of our study guide *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

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God's Blueprint of SALVATION Revealed

God designed seven distinct annual festivals that together portray a system of salvation for all humankind. This amazing knowledge can change your life now and forever.

by Jerold Aust



If God is trying to save the world today, why are there only 2 billion Christians among 7 billion people on earth? Something surely seems wrong with this picture.

On the other hand, if God *isn't* trying to save the world at this time, does He have a plan to offer salvation to everyone? If God has a plan to save mankind—at least the vast majority—what is it, and how can we know that plan?

Jesus revealed that in this age, many would be called but only a few would be chosen (Matthew 20:16; John 6:44). Yet the apostle Paul declared that God wants to save all mankind: “He wants everyone to be saved. He wants them to come to know the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4, New International Reader’s Version; compare John 3:17). Can these scriptures be reconciled?

God’s Word shows us that He has a blueprint for salvation that’s revealed through His festivals—His feasts and the Holy Days among them—found in the Bible (Leviticus 23). Yet few Christians know about them. Why is this?

The Bible says: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God . . . But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, *for they are foolishness to him*; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:9-10, 14, emphasis added throughout).

These verses explain why most Christians don’t know God’s plan of salvation. Most simply don’t care enough to learn what God reveals. If they did, they would study His

Word and do as He says—and obeying God would then bring understanding (Psalm 111:10). If, as part of doing that, they faithfully observed God’s annual festivals while accepting the Bible for what it says, they would come to know what these occasions are meant to portray.

Today God’s feasts are neglected, and His plan remains a mystery to mankind (see Romans 16:25-26). Yet God will one day unveil His system of salvation so that the whole world will have proper understanding (Isaiah 11:9; Hebrews 8:10-11). A major way this will be accomplished is through requiring all nations to observe God’s festivals—as we see in particular regarding the Feast of Tabernacles in Zechariah 14:16-19, which describes how *all* nations will be led to celebrate this feast after Jesus Christ’s return.

Yet you can gain needed insight today through carefully studying God’s Word and living according to what He reveals. As part of that, God tells us to observe a series of seven yearly festivals—these together presenting God’s synergistic system of salvation for all. (To learn more, search “How to observe God’s festivals” at ucg.org.)

Synergy, system and the symbolism of seven

Before addressing these feasts, let’s look briefly at what’s meant by the terms *synergy* and *system* and then consider the symbolism of the number seven in Scripture.

Synergy is the interaction of elements that when combined produce a total effect that is greater than the sum of the individual elements and contributions. For example, in physiology it is the cooperative action of two or more muscles and nerves that contribute to human mobility.

A *system* is a set of interacting or interdependent

component parts forming a complex whole. BusinessDictionary.com gives this definition: “An organized, purposeful structure that consists of interrelated and interdependent elements. These elements continually influence one another to maintain their activity and the existence of the system . . . to achieve the goal of the system.”

How does this tie in to the number *seven*? As used in Scripture, seven has its literal numeric sense but also often figuratively refers to spiritual perfection and completeness or wholeness.

As biblical scholar E.W. Bullinger, who produced *The Companion Bible*, explains regarding the number seven in the Bible, it “stamps with perfection and completeness that in connection with which it is used. Of time, it tells of the Sabbath, and marks off the week of seven days, which, artificial as it may seem, is universal and immemorial in its observance among all nations and in all times. It tells [further] of that eternal Sabbath-keeping which remains for the people of God in all its everlasting perfection” (*Numbers in Prophecy*, 1979, p. 168).

Amid the modern Christian world, there are some who recognize that God’s weekly Sabbath is on the *seventh* day—Friday sunset to Saturday sunset—not the *first* day of the week or Sunday (see Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11; 16:22-26; 31:13-17; Luke 4:16; Acts 13:42, 44; Hebrews 4:4-11). Yet very few actually observe the seventh-day Sabbath God gave, instead following unbiblical human custom (compare Matthew 15:9).

God established the weekly seventh-day Sabbath and a system of seven annual feasts—with seven annual Sabbaths or Holy Days among them—because these symbolize, in overview, God’s full plan to bring humanity, all who are ultimately

responding to the progression of God’s great spiritual harvest of human beings.

The early spring barley harvest at the time of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread commenced with the wave-sheaf offering that symbolizes Christ our Savior, as just mentioned. The Feast of Weeks or Pentecost in late spring was “of the first-fruits of wheat harvest” (Exodus 34:22), depicting God’s saints (all His true followers) spiritually harvested in this age.

Finally, the “Feast of Ingathering” (same verse)—another name for the Feast of Tabernacles—celebrated the great agricultural harvest of late summer and autumn. This foreshadowed the great harvest of mankind when vast numbers will come to salvation during the 1,000-year reign of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment period to follow (see Revelation 20:4-13; Ezekiel 37:1-14).

Let’s briefly consider the seven annual feasts one by one.

The Passover

God’s system of festivals begins with a key starting point—the Passover (Leviticus 23:4-5). The name “Passover” refers to the night when God sent a plague of death on the Egyptian firstborn but passed over the houses of the Israelites who had put the blood of sacrificed lambs around their doors, sparing them from death (Exodus 12). Those slain Passover lambs were symbolic of Jesus Christ being sacrificed as our Passover Lamb. As the apostle Paul wrote, “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7).

The Israelites were protected under the cover of the sacrificial lambs’ blood. Today, those whom God has called to be

part of His Church are covered by the shed blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, which washes away their sins and spares them permanent death (John 1:29; 3:16-17; Acts 22:16; Romans 6:23—and see also “Christ the True

Passover Lamb” beginning on page 9).

Without the fulfillment of Passover, none of the feasts following it could be fulfilled. Jesus died for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 John 1:7) so we could die to our sins and begin a new, transformed life patterned after His life (Romans 6:1-11).

The Passover, then, is the beginning of God’s annual feasts. All feasts that follow the Passover are built on that foundation. They would not exist apart from what it portrays.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

Immediately following the Passover is the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6-14). Bread without leaven typifies the humility and holiness that Christ teaches His disciples to exhibit. Leavened bread dough puffs up. Jesus and Paul likened leaven to sin and hypocrisy (Matthew 16:6; Luke 12:1; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8). God wants us to overcome sin that weakens and can destroy us.

Christ’s disciples remove leaven from their homes for seven days and eat unleavened bread for seven days, considering what it represents spiritually. Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Christians must figuratively ingest God’s Word—internalizing it so it becomes part of them.

These seven feasts of God are distinct yet interdependent. Succeeding feasts build on previous ones—with all reinforcing one another.

willing, into eternal salvation in His Kingdom.

Seven steps to saving the world

God is a God of order: “God wants everything to be done peacefully and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:33, Contemporary English Version).

The seven individual yearly festivals representing parts of God’s salvation plan for all humankind are, in stepwise progression, the Passover, the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles, and the Eighth Day.

These seven feasts of God are distinct yet interdependent. Succeeding feasts build on previous ones—with all reinforcing one another. But the order is important. The Passover comes first, representing Christ’s offering of Himself in our place. This is followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, during which a special offering of a sheaf of grain (Leviticus 23:9-14) ultimately looked forward to Jesus being raised to be accepted as the first of God’s harvest of human lives into His divine family (see John 4:34-38; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

Furthermore, the annual feasts align with the three harvest seasons of ancient Israel (see Deuteronomy 16:16)—each cor-

Since we cannot make ourselves holy (and God demands holiness), God the Father views us as holy through the resurrected Christ Jesus (see Colossians 3:4; Ephesians 2:4-6). Thus, we must take in Christ and put out sin—becoming holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16).

And recall that it was during this festival that the wave-sheaf of the first of the barley harvest was presented to God—representing Christ as the beginning of the spiritual harvest of humanity.

The Feast of Pentecost

The Feast of Weeks is so named because it comes seven weeks after the day of the wave-sheaf offering (Exodus 34:22; Leviticus 23:15-22). The day also came to be called Pentecost, meaning “fiftieth” in Greek, as people are specifically told to count 50 days to it (verse 16; Acts 2:1).

This feast, which anciently centered on the wave offering of two leavened loaves of the firstfruits of wheat, pictures the presentation before God of His people in this age as spiritual firstfruits (see Romans 8:23; James 1:18). It further represents the conversion of God’s people through the Holy Spirit, which was given to the early Church in a powerful way on the day of Pentecost, anticipating yet later fulfillment in this age (Acts 2:1-4, 17).

Pentecost points to the first harvest of humanity in God’s plan for salvation, with expectation of a later harvest ahead.

The Feast of Trumpets

The events that accompany the later harvest of humanity in God’s system of salvation are represented in the festivals of Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles and the Eighth Day. Introducing these is the Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:23-25). A blowing of trumpets by a watchman in Old Testament times warned of an approaching army and imminent war (Ezekiel 33:2-4). The Feast of Trumpets looks ahead to God’s intervention in human affairs, without which we would otherwise annihilate ourselves (Matthew 24:21-22).

The fulfillment of this feast will include a number of major events: the Day of the Lord, when angels will blow trumpets followed by cataclysmic upheaval (Revelation 8-9); the crowning of Jesus Christ as King of Kings and His return to save mankind from annihilation (Revelation 11:15; Matthew 24:22); the resurrection at the last trumpet of the righteous who have lived and died before this time, immediately followed by the change of the living saints to immortality (1 Corinthians 15:50-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17); and the pouring out of the seven last plagues, which will include the destruction of tyrannical leaders and their military powers (Revelation 15-16).

In short, the Feast of Trumpets portrays both the calamity and the jubilation that will come when Jesus Christ intervenes to take control of the world and reign on earth.

The Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement is an occasion of drawing near to God through fasting (Leviticus 23:26-32). In ancient times it involved a ceremony in which a goat “for the Lord” was slain

and another goat was banished to the wilderness (Leviticus 16). The slain goat represents Christ’s sacrifice, through which the world will be reconciled to God at Christ’s return.

The banished goat symbolizes the removal of the spirit tyrant of this world—the incarceration of Satan and his demon cohorts for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1-3). Satan, originally an archangel who rebelled against God (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:11-17), is now the god of this world and its kingdoms (2 Corinthians 4:4; Matthew 4:8-9) and the great unseen power behind despotic oppressors of mankind.

Isaiah prophesied the fulfillment of the meaning of the Day of Atonement: “He [Satan] who struck the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he who ruled the nations in anger, is [now himself] persecuted and no one hinders. The whole earth is [finally] at rest and quiet . . .” (Isaiah 14:6-7). God further charges that Satan “did not open the house of his prisoners” (verse 17)—that is, the human race whom he

God designed seven distinct festivals that combine into a synergistic system of salvation for all humankind. How remarkable is the plan of God!

enslaved through sin and suffering throughout history.

With physical and spiritual tyrants removed, the earth and its inhabitants can finally enjoy peace and prosperity (Isaiah 11:9), symbolized by the Feast of Tabernacles to follow.

The Feast of Tabernacles

The Feast of Tabernacles is a joyous festival of seven days in which the Israelites were to live in temporary dwellings—with an Eighth Day following as an added feast (Leviticus 23:33-44). The Feast of Tabernacles will be fulfilled in the future reign of the Prince of Peace, Christ Jesus, on the earth (see Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:9-10). For 1,000 years (Revelation 20:4) Israel and all nations will live in unprecedented peace and unparalleled prosperity (Micah 4:1-4; Amos 9:13-14).

As noted earlier, this feast celebrates the fall ingathering harvest (Exodus 23:16), which symbolizes the harvest of untold millions of people in the age to come.

Amazingly, this doesn’t mark the end of God’s great ingathering harvest of human lives. That remains for the fulfillment of the Eighth Day that follows the Feast of Tabernacles. Again, all of God’s feasts are interdependent.

The Eighth Day

The Eighth Day feast (see Leviticus 23:36, 39) is connected to the previous seven days, but its themes go beyond. Its fulfillment will be like that of the Feast of Tabernacles in many respects. Both festivals portray a global Garden of Eden (see Ezekiel 36:35; Isaiah 11:6-9; 51:3; 65:20, 25).

Yet the Eighth Day celebrates the last and greatest of all spiritual harvest periods. It includes the resurrection to physical life of all human beings who lived since Adam without receiving the opportunity to be saved. This will be their day of salvation (see Revelation 20:11-13; Ezekiel 37:11).

This general resurrection is called the Great White Throne Judgment, as Jesus Christ will then sit in judgment on “a great

white throne” (Revelation 20:11-13). *Great* here may encompass the scope of this judgment—involving great numbers of people resurrected, perhaps many billions strong. *White* would seem to denote brilliant light or Christ’s righteousness. *Throne* presents Christ as the uncontested Sovereign. And regarding *Judgment*, Christ will judge people out of the Holy Bible, just like the judgment God’s Church undergoes today (1 Peter 4:17; 2 Corinthians 11:32-33; John 12:48).

This judgment is not an immediate *sentencing*, but rather an *evaluation* that takes place over a long period of time. “And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books [the books of the Bible] were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books [of the Bible], according to their works” (Revelation 20:12).

The Eighth Day feast depicting the Great White Throne Judgment is the culmination of the great system of salvation for all mankind, for all time. The seven distinct feasts of God coalesce in His synergistic system of salvation.

For all mankind through the ages—and for you today

The apostle Paul writes about the culmination of God’s plan of salvation, looking from this age to the next:

“In Him we [of the Church in this age] have redemption through [Christ’s] blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, *that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ* [in the 1,000-year period and the Great White Throne Judgment], both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him” (Ephesians 1:7-10).

Yes, Almighty God designed seven distinct festivals that combine into a synergistic system of salvation for all human-kind. How remarkable is the plan of God—and the system of feasts He’s given us to keep it in mind! Along with the apostle Paul, we too can exclaim, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Romans 11:33).

God’s seven annual festivals are commanded to be kept each year. They represent and depict His blueprint for the salvation of all mankind—including *you*. So why not start observing them? (To learn more, search “How to observe God’s festivals” at ucg.org.)

If you choose to keep God’s annual feasts, you will come to know the mystery of life and God’s ultimate purpose for you—to enjoy immortality in His divine eternal family forever. Begin today to keep and enjoy God’s system of life-giving feasts! **BT**

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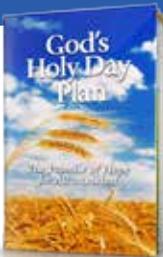
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Good Friday—Easter Sunday: It Just Doesn't Add Up!

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

by Scott Ashley

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

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

Traditional view doesn't fit

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

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

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

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

Moreover, Scripture is plain that Jesus *had already risen* before Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early Sunday morning, arriving “while it was still dark” (John 20:1-2). So in reality, *no* parts of Sunday could be counted as a day, as Jesus was *already resurrected* well before the break of dawn. It just doesn't add up!

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

So which is it? Is something wrong with Jesus Christ's words, or is something wrong with the traditional view of when and how long He was in the tomb? Let's carefully examine the details from the Gospels. When we do, we uncover the real

story of how Jesus' words were fulfilled *exactly as He said!*

Two Sabbaths mentioned

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

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

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

Was the day after Jesus was crucified a weekly Sabbath, or one of these annual Holy Days? Is there a way to know?

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

In that year this high day on the biblical calendar must have fallen on a Thursday (meaning it began on Wednesday night at sunset). We can confirm this by looking at the details in the Gospel accounts, which show us that *two* separate Sabbath days—one the “high day” and the other the weekly Sabbath—are mentioned. You can follow along in the accompanying chart.

Luke 23:55-56 tells us that the women, after seeing Christ's body being laid in the tomb just before sundown, “returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils” for the final preparation of the body. They would not have done such work on a Sabbath day, weekly or annual, since it would have been considered a Sabbath violation. This is verified by Mark's account, which states, “Now *when the Sabbath was past*, Mary Magdalene,

Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices [which they could not have purchased on a Sabbath day], that they might come and anoint Him” (Mark 16:1).

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

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

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

Sign of the Messiah

After the women rested on the regular weekly Sabbath, they went to Jesus’ tomb early on the first day of the week (Sunday), “while it was still dark” (John 20:1), and found that He had *already* been resurrected (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:2-6; Luke

24:1-3). Jesus was not resurrected at sunrise on Sunday morning. When Mary Magdalene arrived “while it was still dark,” she found the stone rolled away and the tomb already empty!

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

While no one witnessed Jesus’ resurrection (which took place inside a sealed tomb), to fit His words and the biblical evidence it had to have happened three days and three nights from Wednesday near sunset until Saturday near sunset—with Jesus leaving His tomb at the end of the weekly Sabbath.

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

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

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

The Biblical Chronology of Jesus Christ’s Burial and Resurrection





Two marches underscore America's culture war over abortion

Over the course of a week, two significant marches hit the streets of Washington, D.C.—the Women's March on Jan. 21 and the annual March for Life on Jan. 27. Each march attracted hundreds of thousands of demonstrators, and each attempted to promote public awareness of their cause as each claimed social justice as its main goal.

The actual goals of each march, however, could not be more different, and the immense gulf separating

others" (Meghan Keneally, "More Than 1 Million Rally at Women's Marches in US and Around World," ABC News, Jan. 22, 2017).

While marchers protested various aspects of the American political and social landscape, including vehement criticisms of new U.S. President Donald Trump, much of the rhetoric focused on abortion rights:

"The march was originally unfocused in its mission,

abortion—legal and a societal norm.

Just six days later Washington, D.C., was host to yet another massive demonstration, and again the focus was abortion. This time, however, at the annual March for Life, demonstrators gathered with the common goal of raising awareness of the struggle against abortion.

Much like its pro-abortion counterpart march, the March for Life saw a diverse group of interested Americans descend on the nation's capital: "Every year the March makes evident just how phenomenally young and vibrant the pro-life movement is, bolstered by students who travel from hundreds of colleges, universities, and high schools all across the country, often sleeping on buses overnight or driving for two days straight" (Alexandra Desanctis, "Huge, Diverse Crowd Marches for Life in the Nation's Capital," *National Review*, Jan. 27, 2017).

These two marches, and their associated social movements, highlight the increasingly massive gulf separating Americans in terms of moral compass and views of what even constitutes justice and truth.

God spoke through His prophets in the land of Israel to that nation at that time, and they cried aloud for truth and justice to prevail in a society that had rejected God's standards of morality and right. Micah's message to his nation rings true in our ears today as well: "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

Those who recognize the intrinsic value of human life as given by God continue to pray that the nation's laws will once again recognize the sanctity of God-given life. (Sources: ABC News, *The Washington Post*, *National Review*.)



demonstrators from each march serves effectively to underscore the massive divides in American culture regarding the status of the unborn and what constitutes such fundamental concepts as life and choice.

First was the highly publicized Women's March, which hit cities around the United States in addition to the main demonstration in Washington, D.C. "The Washington rally alone attracted over 500,000 people according to city officials. It was easily one of the biggest demonstrations in the city's history . . . The rally featured speeches from women's rights activist Gloria Steinem, Planned Parenthood President Cecile Richards, Madonna, actresses Ashley Judd and Scarlett Johansson and director Michael Moore, among

but . . . [became] more and more defined by a progressively liberal agenda. Planned Parenthood [was] the biggest sponsor of the march . . . [The week before] the march's organizers released a platform and list of principles calling for 'open access to safe, legal, affordable abortion and birth control for all people, regardless of income, location or education'" (Perry Stein, "Is There a Place at the Women's March for Women Who Are Politically Opposed to Abortion?" *The Washington Post*, Jan. 18, 2017).

It is beyond ironic that a demonstration of hundreds of thousands claiming to be fighting for equality and justice is built on keeping the continued abuse of power against the human rights of the unborn—

Combatting "fake news"—do you have a part?

Early last year the term "fake news" wasn't a part of our vocabulary. Sure, there were satirical news and websites that had obvious fake news, but it was for fun and entertainment. Then this new idea of fake news spread across Facebook and other social networks. A good portion of this fake news was shared as legitimate. Some say that this helped Donald Trump win the presidential election in the United States, although that's probably not the case.

"A new working paper by two economics professors, Hunt Allcott of New York University and Matthew Gentzkow of Stanford University, is the first major study to have a data-driven crack at this topic. Though they do not estimate the impact of fake news directly, their findings suggest that for it to have been pivotal, each fake article would have had to have an impressively large effect on voters" (Nathan Olivarez-Giles and Deepa Seetharaman, "Facebook Moves to Curtail Fake News on 'Trending' Feature," *The Economist*, Jan. 25, 2017).

Regardless of the impact on that election, Facebook is determined to eradicate the spread of fake news across its platform. "Now, Facebook will take into account the 'historical engagement' of a particular publisher—how long a publisher has maintained a presence on the social network—which it hopes will prevent newer

fake news sites from generating traffic through Facebook" (ibid.).

Of course, while there is a lot of news floating around that should properly be labeled fake, we need to realize that this has become a way for progressives to promote liberal mainstream media as "authentic" while disparaging or getting rid of news from a conservative or liberty-oriented perspective, which often must circulate through alternative media.

The reality is that the bias among the mainstream media and refusal to cover stories that reflect badly on the left is just another form of fake news.

We should of course be wary of news on social media—but also of entities such as Facebook promoting some stories and burying others. Even some fact-checking websites have a political agenda behind them.

The fact of the matter is that fake news has been around for a long time—from all over the political spectrum. And with the growth of social media the problem is being helped in some ways and made worse in other ways. This is something we must look out for every day. There is certainly a lot to sift through. Christians need to be careful to try to make sure they are not sharing a false report. God condemns circulating a false report (Exodus 23:1), but sharing fake news also reflects negatively on our personal credibility. (Source: *The Economist*.)

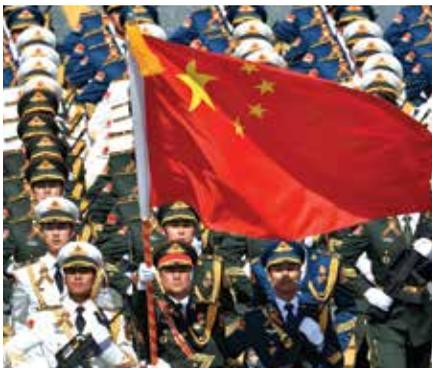


Tensions between West and China continue to grow

While in the United States most media attention is on various domestic political skirmishes like the immigration issue, abortion and presidential executive orders, the international scene is also alight with controversies and political maneuvering. Of perhaps prime importance from an international relations perspective is an emboldened China and the antagonism between the West and the giant of the East.

According to a column in *The National Interest*: “Kim Darroch, the British ambassador to the United States, recently told a Washington think tank that Britain will send aircraft carriers to the Pacific once they become operational in the 2020s. Four Royal Air Force Typhoon fighters, which arrived in Japan in October for joint exercises, are scheduled to fly over the South China

Sea . . . Naturally, Beijing warned that these moves could threaten relations between China and Britain” (Michael Peck, “Is Great Britain Preparing for a War With China?” Jan. 7, 2017).



Is potential armed conflict between China and the West an impossibility? Apparently not to Chinese officials: “China is preparing for a potential military

clash with the United States, according to an article on the Chinese army’s website. ‘The possibility of war increases’ as tensions around North Korea and the South China Sea heat up, Liu Guoshun, a member of the national defense mobilization unit of China’s Central Military Commission, wrote on Jan. 20—the same day as President Donald Trump’s inauguration” (Evelyn Cheng, “US-China War Increasingly a ‘Reality,’ Chinese Army Official Says,” CNBC, Jan 29, 2017).

A U.S.-China war is a terrifying prospect for the entire world, as both nations are nuclear powers with large armies and navies. Collateral damage to other nations would be unavoidable, making any potential conflict a global concern.

For a Christian, concern over the fates of our nations today should inspire us to greater yearning for the coming of God’s Kingdom in all its fullness. Jesus’ reign on earth will be marked by all nations coming to learn peace instead of war—a far cry from our world as it is today. (Sources: *The National Interest*, CNBC.)

Britain’s EU exit expected to proceed, but it may be a long slog

In a June 2016 referendum, 52 percent of the British people voted for Brexit—Britain’s exit from the European Union—leading to the resignation of Prime Minister David Cameron, an advocate of Britain staying in the EU. Incoming Prime Minister Theresa May wanted to move ahead with triggering Article 50 of the EU’s Lisbon Treaty to begin a two-year negotiated departure, but Britain’s supreme court ruled in January 2017 that this had to be approved by Britain’s parliament.

Though Brexit had been opposed by both houses of parliament, the House of Commons on Feb. 1 voted 498 to 114 to allow May to initiate the negotiations. Yet the bill still faces further scrutiny in the Commons and House of Lords before becoming law, and there could be some challenge in the latter and from amendment proposals (BBC News, Jan. 24 and Feb. 1, 2017).

Many want to remain part of Europe’s single market. And “there are also demands for greater involvement from the devolved parliaments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, with the latter two voting in June for Britain to remain in the EU” (AFP, Jan. 31, 2017).

Scotland’s first minister was even “implicitly . . . restating her threat to hold a second independence referendum if the UK government does not produce a Brexit plan acceptable to Scotland” (“Sturgeon Tells May Time is ‘Running Out’ to Get Brexit Plan Acceptable to Scotland,” *TheGuardian.com*, Jan. 30, 2017).

May’s government hopes to have parliamentary approval by March 7 to then trigger Article 50 at an EU summit March 9-10 (though she’s set a deadline of March 31). That would start the two-year process, but the European Commission negotiator “has said the talks must be wrapped up by October 2018 to give the EU and

national parliaments time to ratify the final agreement” (ibid.).

Yet some have pointed out that negotiating with the EU will be a difficult slog, wherein Britain may be rather unhappy with the terms. Britain’s former Minister of State for Europe Denis MacShane says “a political exit from the EU in 2019 is likely, but it will be many years and at least one if not two general elections before the full separation is achieved” (“Breaking EU Up Will Take Time to Do: Brexit Will Go on for Years,” *CityAM.com*, Jan. 25, 2017).

Malta’s prime minister Joseph Muscat, “whose country is a traditional British ally and currently chairs EU councils, said London should probably seek a transition deal . . . to phase in over several years its exit from the EU’s single market once Britain leaves the Union, probably in 2019. But, he warned, the EU would only offer that if Britain accepted that the rules in any transitional period continued to be enforced by EU courts—a provision that Prime Minister Theresa May might find hard to square with the demands of many in her Conservative Party to ‘take back control’ from Brussels.

“‘It’s not a transition period where British institutions take over,’ Muscat told a news conference. ‘But it’s a transition period in which, say, the European Court of Justice is still in charge of dishing out judgments’” (“EU Must Control Any UK Transition Deal After Brexit—Malta,” *Reuters*, Jan. 12, 2017).

While some EU leaders and bureaucrats may want to make the break with Britain as swift as possible, others may want to make it very unpleasant for Britain as both punishment and to dissuade other countries from trying to break with the Union—increasingly seen as a possibility with the rise of populist and nationalist sentiments throughout Europe.

For some biblical perspective, see “Is a British exit from the European Union required to fulfill Bible prophecy?” on page 29. (Sources: Agence France-Presse, BBC News, *CityAM.com*, *TheGuardian.com*, *Reuters*.)

How can you make sense of the news?

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





PUTIN

and Russia's Push for Power

What's going on in Russia under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin?

by Victor Kubik

Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. A former lieutenant colonel of the once-feared KGB secret police, the current president of the Russian Federation heads up what *The Economist* magazine calls a *mendocracy*—a society ruled by liars. Following a meteoric rise to power as Boris Yeltsin's national security adviser, Putin has reigned atop Russia's government since 1999.

In the past few years, Putin has vividly grabbed world attention by dramatically transforming Russia's behavior and in the process destabilizing whole regions. What have we seen? CIA-supported evidence of cyberwarfare against the United States. An invasion of the former Soviet Georgia. The illegal seizing of Crimea in the Black Sea. Provoking aggression on Ukraine's eastern border. Expansion of mobile nuclear weapons in Eastern Europe.

And that's just for starters. While provocatively parading flagship elements of the Russian Navy through the English Channel earlier in 2016, Putin's Russia established a key military base in chaotic Syria, supporting Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and helping to perpetuate a complex and bloody civil war that has cost the lives of half a million people—including thousands of innocent children.

Contrast this current massive instability with the time when Putin first rose to power. When the Soviet Union dramatically collapsed a little over a quarter century ago, the Russia that emerged from the ashes of the Soviet Communist Party astonishingly appeared to be a new cooperative friend in the world community. Not so today. The world is again on edge about Russia's agitation and aggression.

"Iciness and controlled contempt"

How has this come about, and why should we care? Twisting

a phrase from President Donald Trump's election campaign, Putin appears to be set on a path to make Russia great again.

Critical hints of Putin's nature that appeared early on have meaning for us today. Following is an important backstory.

In 1999, NATO had gone to war collectively, for the first time in history, in the Kosovo War. American B-52 bombers were pounding areas of Yugoslavia. A shaky cease-fire was subsequently declared, surprisingly engaging Russia.

As the embers of war cooled, a major Russian tank force suddenly destabilized the already-wobbly Kosovo peace. Ambassador Strobe Talbott, then U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, was in Moscow and called for an emergency meeting with then-Russian President Yeltsin to try and set things right. Talbott was told that Yeltsin was "indisposed." As he later wrote, "I knew what that meant: the Russian president's alcoholism was perhaps the worst-kept secret in the world."

Denied a meeting with the Russian president, Talbott was ushered in to meet Vladimir Putin, who had rocketed to power in Moscow from an obscure post as deputy mayor of St. Petersburg. Talbott's impression of Putin was not good. He recorded his first meeting with Putin in *Politico* magazine: "His manner was superficially cool, professional, and courteous, but iciness and controlled contempt were just under the surface" ("The Making of Vladimir Putin," Aug. 19, 2014).

Here's the main takeaway from Talbott's first encounter: "What really struck my colleagues and me was the aplomb, smugness and *brazenness with which Putin lied*" (ibid., emphasis added). Eight weeks after Talbott's meeting, Yeltsin stunned the world by appointing Putin as prime minister and designating this former KGB lieutenant colonel as his successor.

Putin formally rose to the all-powerful Russian presidency on December 31, 1999, when Yeltsin resigned, later winning his

first presidential election in 2000 with 53 percent of the vote.

Initially he embraced his predecessor's friendly approach of Western cooperation. During his first decade in power, Russia's economy boomed for eight straight years. Russia's gross domestic product (GDP), as measured in consumer purchasing power, increased by an incredible 72 percent. Putin was hailed as an economic savior, bettering the day-to-day life of the Russian people. The result was a very high approval rating by the Russian people, a level he has largely continued to enjoy.

But Putin's negative character traits like lying, first seen publicly in the Kosovo negotiations, have since resurfaced many times. Following the global economic near-collapse of the Great Recession, Russia has since once again become a paranoid, belligerent, insensitive and badly behaved bully.

A new escalation in tension—fueled by Russian state-backed cyber-hacking—erupted in 2016 between the United States and Russia. Today, aggressive rhetoric keeps everyone on their toes with threatening speeches from key Russian leaders punctuated with reminder statements like “Remember, we're nuclear.”

What's next?

In 1990 the Russian-led Soviet Union or Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) had a total population of 286 million. When it finally collapsed and Mikhail Gorbachev resigned, the former superpower's population was reduced overnight to 148 million. Since then Russia's population has actually further declined by about 5 million people. A non-Soviet Russia lost good access to the Baltic and Black Seas, and importantly lost its sole warm water military port, which it later recovered with the 2014 Crimea invasion.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the Russia that emerged from the ashes appeared to be a new friend to the world community—not any more!

Today Russian pride stings from humiliation. The former republics of the Soviet Union now smugly require visas for Russians to visit their previously Soviet-enslaved countries. The proud Russians are not letting this escape their attention.

The decaying relations between Russia and United States today have followed a serious decline. Relations were at their very best after Bill Clinton became president in 1993. Clinton wanted a friendly and stable Russia as a foreign policy show-piece. Yeltsin needed American financing to avert economic disaster. It was the best of all worlds, and it worked for a time.

In the 1990s Clinton suggested that Eastern European countries join NATO, and Yeltsin did not object. But today this formerly friendly Russia now threatens NATO with sword-rattling nuclear exercises.

Under a quasi-democracy and later in the early days of Putin's presidency, windfall gas and oil production from Siberian reserves was transferred to private enterprise. Production rose to where Russia briefly became the largest exporter of oil in the world, at one time surpassing even powerhouse oil exporter Saudi Arabia. An energy-hungry Europe became a welcome customer, along with the closer Chinese market.

Now, with current Russian belligerence, it's important to

understand that a new class of economic strata exists. In the 1990s a new class of wealthy oligarchs arose from the ashes of the former Soviet Union. Some even quickly became billionaires, an unheard-of status in Communist Russia. With the relaxing of former Communist restrictions, Russians were then able to travel and be seen all throughout the world. These “New Russians” were investing heavily outside of Russia, notably by buying real estate in New York, London and other places.

But this wealth came at a price. The Russian economy became increasingly dependent on crude petroleum priced well above \$100 a barrel, an economic vulnerability that sent the Russian economy spiraling further into deep recession after oil prices collapsed in 2014. Russian reforms earlier allowed it, in 1998, to join with the influential G7 (Group of 7) nations—the United States, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Japan and Italy—as the G8. However, with the 2014 invasion of Crimea, Russia was kicked out of the group, which is again the G7.

Yearning for the past

Today, many older Russians feel deeply wounded from the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the loss of population, resources and influence. Russia is basically a second-world nation that bristles with deadly nuclear weapons and highly advanced military forces.

In spite of current economic troubles, Putin remains bent on pursuing the path of restoring Russia's greatness. And, given his continued popularity levels, he still has the Russian people behind him. On occasion Putin's national approval rating has topped 80 percent.

For 15 years in a row he has been named Russia's “Man of the Year.” For several years now a popular calendar displays Putin across all 12 months of the year. Some images are glamour photos, including a popular photo of a shirtless 60-year-old Putin

riding a horse. Russia has indeed created an all-new cult of personality, in spite of his major setbacks in Western diplomatic and national circles.

Shortly after “liberating” Crimea in the Black Sea and restoring Russian's lost warm-water port, Putin made it clear in a public address that he was reestablishing Russia's place in the global order. Other nations had to accept what Putin saw as obvious: Russia is and will remain an independent and active participant in global affairs.

Putin cares not that his invasion of both the Crimea and eastern Ukraine are condemned by the Western powers, whom he views as largely toothless.

With Russian hegemony unchecked, Putin has been effectively emboldened to expand further. Now he is taking dangerous gambles and creating an environment of hostility that is bringing on angry reaction from Europe and the Middle East. Tense European nations work to avoid a massive nuclear confrontation, which would be devastating to civilization as we know it.

Russia spends between \$50-66 billion annually on its military, which is the largest in Europe. Defense analysts note that Putin's shrinking economy (which contracted by a painful 3.7 percent last year) cannot sustain this level of expenditure.

Under Putin, Russia has invested heavily in hypersonic technology, including the PAK-DA hypersonic stealth bomber that is only a few years away from prototype production. That could be put on hold in 2017.

Perhaps the proposed cuts in Russian defense spending will lead to a closer relationship between Putin and President Trump. Yet such a relationship would not be universally well received in many international circles.

Relations between Russia and China remain tense along their common border, which runs 2,615 miles. Over the years occasional firefights between Russian and Chinese soldiers have broken out. There's no love lost between these two countries. China's population is 10 times that of Russia, and China also possesses advanced nuclear weapons and missile delivery platforms.

However, for the moment the Chinese are quiet as they buy a lot of Russia's Siberian petroleum. Also, the two *are* partners in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and China's president last year spoke of forming an alliance between Russia and China against NATO.

As this is being written, Putin has backed off on further incursion into Ukraine, beyond what his armies presently occupy in the east. It remains in an uncertain ceasefire, with multiple daily violations. It could flare up again at any time.

A surprising source of inside information

In the days and years to come, the world scene will be dominated by not only nations vying for recognition, but leaders driven by dangerous bravado. As history shows, pride and bravado often make national leaders careless. Dire international consequences can arise from underestimating formidable power.

Given Putin's background, what is his future focus for the world? Before we consider that, allow me to explain a few things. As you may have discerned, as a *Beyond Today* writer I pay close and intense attention to these matters (see "A Deep and Personal Interest" on page 23). As I have served nearly half a century as a Christian minister, you may also wonder why I and others write on geopolitical topics, particularly in a publication that primarily addresses biblical and spiritual topics.

I invite to you consider this important fact: The Holy Bible chronicles in deep detail the affairs of human government and how people should treat each other. The Bible speaks authoritatively on matters that have and should influence the daily conduct of government. You've likely read for yourself how the American Founding Fathers openly spoke of the influence and impact of biblical teachings.

The Bible is also plain about how God Himself intervenes and blesses nations whose citizens collectively seek and obey His ways. Whether ancient or contemporary, nations who follow God are supernaturally blessed. Nations—and the people who make up those nations—who openly scorn and trample divine principles revealed in the Bible will ultimately find themselves subject to divine wrath.

You need to understand what the Bible has said about nations historically and prophetically, including international alliances that arose before and others that are still yet to come. Around a third of the Bible relates to issues of prophecy, of authoritatively foretelling the future. A key to understanding Bible prophecy is realizing that much of it reflects the collec-

tive results of breaking God's law, which includes lying and fostering national diplomatic untruths.

A key end-time prophecy

Prophetically the Bible speaks from what geographical directions contemporary superpowers of today will ultimately collide in battle. The grandest of all prophetic collisions are those of "kingdoms" (a phrase used commonly in the Bible to refer to specific national governments or nations) coming to fight one another from the north and the south, and others coming from the north and east. The geographic center of these prophecies is the Middle East—specifically Jerusalem. You may have heard of a place called Armageddon in the Bible, the hill of Megiddo and its adjoining plain north of Jerusalem, where invading armies will eventually gather (see Revelation 16:12-16).

Here is one of the notable Bible prophecies to be fulfilled in the future time of the return of Jesus Christ. Many Bible passages should be carefully studied to completely understand what is to come, but here we find a short summary, with the Bible referring to compass directions from the perspective of Jerusalem and the Holy Land (modern Israel):

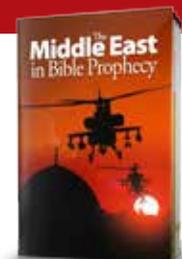
"At the time of the end [the time shortly before and leading up to the return of Christ] the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through. He shall also enter the Glorious Land [the Holy Land, today's state of Israel], and many countries shall be overthrown" (Daniel 11:40-42, emphasis added throughout).

What the Bible reveals here is the definite and specific alignment of nations who exist in areas to the north and south of Jerusalem. From the north a massive army will come from what we understand will literally be the final revival of the ancient Roman Empire, this time centered in Europe (northwest of Jerusalem).

If you're a regular reader of *Beyond Today*, you know that we have been tracking that potential coming geopolitical union for many years. Some current NATO countries appear to be among those of this prophesied final alliance. These NATO countries presently help maintain a balance of power against a militarily reawakened and aggressive Russia.

The book of Daniel, just quoted, reveals much about the final assembly of national armies and alliances and future battles they will fight. This book, coupled with other critical biblical passages, foretells a northern alliance of nations that will be "troubled" by activity from the east. Could that involve Russia?

Jesus Christ directs all of us to study these things carefully. The Almighty God has a specific plan that is presently unfolding, and He reveals it through the pages of the Bible. Importantly, the Bible lists specific events that signal the coming end



LEARN MORE

Where are today's dangerous trends taking our world? How will it all end up? Does Bible prophecy give us any indication? You need to read our free study guides *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. Download or request your free copies today!

BTmagazine.org/booklets

of this age of human misrule and the return of our Savior Jesus Christ. As Jesus Himself said, “When you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!” (Matthew 24:33).

Continuing, Jesus firmly noted about the time of His return and the final sequence of events, “Of that day and hour no one knows . . . but My Father only” (verse 36). However, we can discern the times and the general events that indicate the time is short. This is why Jesus specifically warns us to “watch”—to be alert and spiritually vigilant (verse 42).

Is the stage being set?

When he campaigned for office, Donald Trump made statements that led some to worry that the United States would become isolationist, leaving Europe to defend itself. In 2016 the United Kingdom voted to pull out of the European Union. That accelerated fears that NATO itself could collapse.

As Putin’s Russia continues its renewed belligerence, will that help galvanize Europe into the more powerful union the Bible shows it will be? Could a worried Germany lead a European effort to assemble a continental military that could be armed with its own nuclear weapons? Again, the Bible gives us specific markers for which to watch in observing these events.

The Bible does show Russia and other major powers from the east eventually coming against Europe and the Middle East. (To learn more, please download or request our study guides *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* for more detailed explanation.)

What’s the point of prophecy?

As we contemplate Putin’s future actions and how they could bear on the fulfillment of the foretelling passages of the Bible, let’s consider the actual point of biblical prophecy. Bible prophecy is much more than charts and graphs and speculation.

Biblical prophecy has one overarching purpose—to encourage and direct us to focus on the greatest future event of all time, which is the return of Jesus Christ.

This time Jesus will come as a conquering Messiah, as King of Kings. When He returns to earth in power, Jesus will set up the very real (not allegorical) Kingdom of God. That divinely led government will replace all human governments (Revelation 11:15). As opposed to portraying a wrathful God who lashes out, prophecy gives us real hope that our loving God will not permit humanity to perish at its own hands. The Bible reveals that at the precise moment when all seems lost, God will intervene and intervene mightily.

Biblical prophecy portrays an active, caring and powerful God who has a timetable for humanity. Prophecy shows that He is in charge of events. It shows how God will pour out His love for all with the final defeat of death and all evil, whether it be from Russia or any other country.

We live in dangerous times. But we need not fear. God remains in control. We do need to be on spiritual high alert, as Jesus Himself directs us: “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass” (Luke 21:36).

President Putin is indeed focused on making Russia great again—but at the expense of neighboring countries and anyone who stands in his way. However, it is God who will have the final word! **BT**

A Personal and Deep Interest

Why should Christians and those living in the West be concerned about Vladimir Putin and Putin’s Russia? Allow me to make a personal point. I’ve followed Russian, Eurasian and Eastern European matters with deep interest for decades. Through the pages of this magazine and various humanitarian efforts, I have long written and spoken of the need to be vigilant and to seek peaceful change. Why? Because I have firsthand knowledge of what is going on and what may soon come to pass in this region.

As regular readers of *Beyond Today* may recall, my Ukrainian parents were teenagers in the Soviet Union who were forced by the



A Ukrainian refugee family whose home was destroyed in fighting shows food donated by LifeNets.

Germans in the 1942 Barbarossa offensive to work as slave laborers in factories. After the war they became refugees in a United Nations camp in Allied-occupied Germany. In 1949, as international war refugees they found a new home in the United States. I was then two years old.

All of my immediate family members became citizens of the United States while living in Minnesota. As you can imagine, none of them forgot the mind-numbing atrocities first forced upon Ukrainians by German Nazi armies, then by Russian policies of lethal starvation under Stalin.

My family understands the character flaws that led to people like Putin. Most importantly, over time I was able to study the Bible and learn exactly why and how despotic nations like Russia can wreak such havoc. As a minister of Jesus Christ for nearly half a century, I humbly understand how certain mindsets can horribly twist the free will granted to us by God.

I’ve been privileged to gain much insight since 1967, when I first began traveling to Russia and its now-former republics working with both humanitarian and church groups. And I’ve journeyed there many times since. I traveled with historians through many of the Soviet republics during the 50th anniversary of the 1917 October Revolution. And I subsequently led educational tours to Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and Volgograd, some with American elected officials.

My interest in informing people about Russian and potential Russian ambitions stems in part from my direct experience with formerly persecuted religious groups in Ukraine. For more than two decades I and others have supported a children’s clinic in Chernihev, a city situated a very short distance from the Russian border and Chernobyl, the site of the legendary nuclear disaster. We have also peacefully helped refugees from Russian-induced fighting in eastern Ukraine with food and clothing. Through the children’s clinic we have helped rescue more than 400 children from the stricken cities in the eastern Donetsk and Lugansk provinces.

My life’s work helping people in Ukraine and Russia, and also in Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, have all contributed to the worldview I share here. I write this so readers will know that I hold more than a mere academic interest in Russia and its current destabilizing nature.

—Victor Kubik

What's Ahead for ISRAEL?

Even as the intractable Palestinian-Israeli conflict continues amid relentless calls for peace negotiations, the Bible reveals that a major military peril will come from an unlikely source. What does the future hold for Israel, and how will peace in the region finally be achieved?

by John LaBissoniere

On Dec. 23, 2016, the United States government chose to abstain in a vote on a United Nations Security Council resolution that condemned Israeli settlements in “Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem.” The resolution, which passed in a 14-0 vote, stated that Israel’s settlement activity constituted a “flagrant violation” of international law and had “no legal validity.”

The vote was denounced immediately by Israel. A senior Israeli official accused the Obama administration of abandoning the Jewish state by its refusal to block the resolution through its veto authority, as America had done with numerous prior resolutions.

However, the Palestinian National Authority (PA) was pleased by the results of the vote. General Secretary of the Palestine National Initiative Mustafa Barghouti stated, “This is a victory for the people and for the cause, and it opens doors wide for the demand of sanctions on settlements” (CNN, Dec. 24, 2016).

Reaction by many U.S. Republicans, Democrats and various Jewish leaders was sharply critical of the U.S. action. On Dec. 24 Donald Trump, then president-elect, tweeted, “The big loss yesterday for Israel in the United Nations will make it much harder to negotiate peace.”

Outgoing Secretary of State John Kerry explained in a speech on Dec. 28 that the Obama administration believed settlements were an obstacle to peace. He stated that a moratorium on Israeli settlement growth on the West Bank would make it easier for Palestinian negotiators to reach a compromise position. However, Israel had previously tested that theory in November 2009 when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu imposed a 10-month freeze on new housing construction. The result was that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas remained inflexible and refused to negotiate.

While the acrimony over the UN resolution indicates that conflict rather than peace will continue in the immediate days and years ahead, what does Bible prophecy explain will ultimately take place? What’s ahead for Israel?

Before answering these questions let’s review important

facts about the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Why the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?

A century ago this year, in the Balfour Declaration of November 1917, Great Britain became the first world power to endorse the establishment in the Holy Land of a “national home for the Jewish people.” After a long series of events that followed, Israel declared its independence in 1948. Since then the tiny nation, comparable in size to New Jersey (the fifth-smallest U.S. state), has been under steady assault and intense pressure by hostile neighbors and other foreign powers.

The core problem regarding tensions between Israelis and Arabs is that it’s widely held among Muslims that Jews have no legitimate claim to the Holy Land. Sharia (Islamic law) states that non-Muslims, including Jews, are not permitted to have rule over what is considered Muslim territory. So to recognize Israel as a “Jewish state” is categorically impossible.

To illustrate this point, Hamas, the militant fundamentalist Islamic organization that rules Gaza, states in its charter that “the Islamic Resistance Movement regards Palestine as an Islamic Waqf [an inalienable religious endowment] consecrated for future generations until Judgment Day.” Also, Abbas, head of the PA government over the West Bank, stated on Egypt’s Dream2 TV on Oct. 23, 2011, “I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again: *I will never recognize the Jewishness of the state, or a ‘Jewish state’*” (emphasis added throughout).

So exactly how is Israel to make peace in a “two-state” solution when leaders of the other would-be state deny Israel’s right to exist?

While Muslims claim the Holy Land and Jerusalem as their own, this is clearly contradicted by history. Jerusalem was in fact made the capital of the Jewish people by King David in about 1000 B.C., some 16 centuries before Muhammad began the religion of Islam after receiving his first supposed revelation in 610 A.D. Archaeological evidence abundantly testifies to the long Jewish presence in Jerusalem way before Islam’s founding.

What about the Palestinians?

The ancestors of what are today called Palestinians never



actually occupied Jerusalem until it was taken from the Crusaders in Saladin's wars of conquest in 1187 A.D.—more than 2,000 years after David made it Israel's capital. Additionally, there has never been a "Palestinian" people owning a land of "Palestine." For centuries leading up to the end of World War I, the Holy Land was part of the Ottoman Empire, ruled from Turkey. From 1920 to 1948 it was administered by Britain as part of a League of Nations mandate and called "Palestine"—named after the ancient Roman Empire's designation for the area.

Additionally, at no time was Jerusalem ever the capital of any Arab or Muslim entity. Even when the Jordanians occupied much of Jerusalem and the surrounding area from 1948 to 1967, they never sought to make it a Muslim capital. Furthermore, prior to the Six-Day War of 1967, the Arabs in the West Bank were considered Jordanians and those in Gaza were considered Egyptians because Jordan and Egypt ruled those territories.

In light of all this, it's not difficult to understand why a peaceful resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has remained out of reach. Although the recent UN resolution condemned Israel's building of "settlements" in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the underlying problem is Israel's right to govern the Holy Land. Again, this is considered totally unacceptable to most Muslims.

In this regard, how does Israel actually govern as a Jewish

has been made of the Arab refugees who fled the land of Israel in the 1948 and 1967 wars. However, little is ever mentioned about the similar number of Jewish refugees forced to leave everything behind in Arab countries, who were welcomed to Israel. Additionally, Palestinian refugees have never been welcomed into the fellow Arab nations to which they fled, nor have they been given basic citizenship rights in these nations.

Perpetuating contention

As a result of all this, the Palestinians and allied Arab and Muslim countries have perpetuated the contentious situation rather than acting in good faith to resolve it. For example, Israel discovered in December 2000 following the Camp David II Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations that even proposing trading "land for peace" does not work. In this instance Israel had offered to surrender 95 percent or more of the land the Palestinians demanded, only to be completely rebuffed.

To further aggravate circumstances, Arab land sales to Israelis in Palestinian Authority-controlled territories are outlawed and *can be punishable by death*. This feeds into the narrative, threatened repeatedly by Arab political leaders, that any future "Palestinian" state will be Jew-free—i.e., *ethnically cleansed* of Jews and other non-Muslims.

In addition, intransigence against any peace settlement with Israel was obvious on a grand scale when Israel withdrew from the Sinai Peninsula in 1982 and the Gaza Strip in 2005. Terrorist attacks against Israel didn't stop as a result of these unilateral "land for peace" Israeli withdrawals, but in fact intensified.

Such steps accomplished nothing because, again, the issue is *Israel's very existence*. This is made clear in both the Palestinian National Covenant and the Hamas Charter, which call for violent *jihad* until Israel is no more.

For example, Article 9 of the Palestinian Covenant (1968) states: "Armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine. This is the overall strategy, not merely a tactical phase. The Palestinian Arab people assert their absolute determination and firm resolution to *continue their armed struggle and to work for an armed popular revolution for the liberation of their country* and their return to it."

While Palestinian National Authority leaders disavow this and similar articles in discussions with Western leaders, the troubling fact remains that the legally required vote to remove these official positions has never been taken—leaving them still part of the Palestinian Covenant.

Also, Article 13 of the Hamas Charter states: "So-called peaceful solutions, and the international conferences to resolve

Grim as the chance for peace appears, what does the Bible tell us will occur in the future? What is to become of the state of Israel?

state—compared to all its neighboring Arab states? Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East where all citizens, including its Arab inhabitants, enjoy full legal rights. Israel has Arab government officials, Arab judges and an Arab supreme court justice. It is one of very few countries in the Middle East where Arab women have the right to vote and have legal standing equal to men. Arab citizens of Israel generally have more rights than the Arab inhabitants of most Arab countries!

In contrast, while the term of PA President Abbas actually ended in 2009, he has refused to authorize elections since it could result in him being removed from power. He simply refuses to leave office. Moreover, Hamas, having won elections in Gaza in 2006, has not allowed voting since that time. So which of these undemocratic government entities should Israel sit down with to negotiate "peace"—especially since both have long supported and actively engaged in terrorism?

As an interesting note about the contrast in governing methods between Israel and surrounding Arab states, much

the Palestinian problem, are all contrary to the beliefs of the Islamic Resistance Movement. *There is no solution to the Palestinian problem except by Jihad* [armed struggle against unbelievers]. The initiatives, proposals and International Conferences are but a waste of time, an exercise in futility.”

Furthermore, Article 15 states: “When our enemies usurp some Islamic lands, *Jihad becomes a duty binding on all Muslims*. In order to face the usurpation of Palestine by the Jews, we have no escape from raising the banner of Jihad.”

While this is a grim scenario regarding any chance for peace under current circumstances, what does the Bible tell us will occur in the future? What is to become of the state of Israel? Although there will continue to be tension and outbreaks of terrorism and violence in the region, Scripture reveals that a major military peril will come from an unexpected source.

What does Bible prophecy indicate about the future?

Bible prophecy explains that in the years ahead, a reincarnation of the ancient Roman Empire will arise in Europe. Revelation 17 explains that an end-time coalition of 10 leaders of nations or groups of nations will emerge in Europe led by a tyrant known in biblical language as “the Beast.” This powerful leader is also described in Daniel 11 as the last in a succession of rulers designated as “the king of the North.”

Various prophecies tell us that, in response to an action or attack precipitated from what Scripture describes as a final “king of the South”—likely a coming leader who will unite much of the Muslim world—this restored Roman Empire will “at the time of the end” launch an invasion into North Africa and the Middle East (Daniel 11:40).

Daniel’s prophecy reveals that many nations in that area will then be totally overrun and subjugated by the Beast’s military forces. This includes Arab countries as well as modern-day Israel, which will be vanquished just as Judea was conquered around 2,000 years ago by the ancient Roman Empire (verse 41). How all this will come about we don’t yet know, but tremendous geopolitical changes will take place in the future. These could very well result in having the shield of protection that the United States has always provided Israel utterly removed.

Jesus Christ prophesied that at the end of this age, Jerusalem and its environs will undergo horrible, destructive times. The city will be “surrounded by armies” during these coming “days of vengeance” (Luke 21:20-22). There will be “great distress” in the land, and people will be forced into captivity and slavery as Jerusalem is “trampled by Gentiles”—non-Israelites (verses 23-24). The prophet Daniel described this dreadful period as “a time of trouble”—the worst in all of world history (Daniel 12:1). Jesus said the same, calling this period the time of “great tribulation” (Matthew 24:21).

Various prophecies reveal the length of the occupation of Israel and the region. An angel disclosed to Daniel that it will be “a time, times and half a time”—3½ years (Daniel 12:7; see also Revelation 11:2). Prophecy indicates that besides the “children of Judah,” other modern-day descendants of the ancient house of Israel—including the United States, Britain and other countries—will suffer total humiliation and national defeat as a result of their sins (Hosea 5:5). But the Bible focuses significant attention on Jerusalem. It will be the epicenter of a

supreme battle for global domination (Zechariah 14:1-2).

As the conflict worsens, humanity will find itself on the razor edge of total annihilation. But then, the Eternal God will intervene in global events suddenly and mightily (Revelation 11:15). Jesus Christ will return from heaven with a massive angelic army, joined by His resurrected followers, to save humanity. The Bible reveals that at His second coming the world’s great armies will break off their attacks against one another and will instead concentrate their destructive energies against Jesus Christ in a final cataclysmic battle for world domination.

The result will be what the Bible calls “the battle of that great day of God Almighty,” often incorrectly described as the battle of Armageddon—that being the place where armies will gather just before (Revelation 16:14-16). Jesus will stop the monstrous destruction and suffering inflicted on the world by the Beast and his allies. He will utterly annihilate their armies and will deliver Jerusalem and the surrounding areas from his control (Joel 3:9-15; Zechariah 14:1-4).

Israel will dwell safely

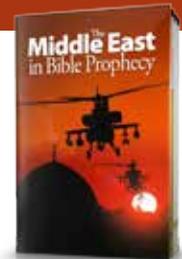
The Jewish people will at last recognize Jesus Christ as the Messiah—and will deeply mourn and repent, then being given God’s Spirit (Zechariah 12:10-14).

Moreover, Christ will gather the remnants of all the 12 tribes of Israel to the Promised Land from captivity and slavery and will establish God’s government over the entire earth (Jeremiah 23:3-8; Daniel 2:44). Jerusalem will become His global headquarters and will serve as a brilliant example of truth and righteousness (Jeremiah 3:17; Zechariah 8:3).

The prophet Zechariah reveals that eventually people of all nations “shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD” (Zechariah 8:22). Also remarkably, “In those days, ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you’” (8:23). Besides that, God prophesied through Jeremiah the joyful condition of the Jews and their brother nations during that coming, amazing period: “In His days *Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely*” (Jeremiah 23:6).

But between now and then, before all these breathtaking events transpire, God foretells that we will see intense conflict and great sorrow in Israel and neighboring countries and throughout the entire world: “And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it” (Zechariah 12:3).

Nevertheless, following that terrible time, Jesus Christ will establish true peace in Israel and all nations. Let us look forward to and pray for the fulfillment of that wonderful day! **BT**



LEARN MORE

The ancient conflicts of the Middle East are more complex than what we have space to describe in an article. For a more complete picture of why peace is so elusive, and what lies ahead, download or request your free copy of our study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.

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Why Brexit Matters for Europe and for You

Britain's vote to leave the European Union shocked the nation's and the continent's political elites. What's behind it? And what does it mean for Britain and Europe as a whole?

by Dan Taylor

We live in deeply unsettling times. Look around the world. The political backlash unleashed by Britain's "Brexit" vote to leave the European Union (EU) last summer has continued with the election of Donald Trump as U.S. president in November. Other upcoming elections in Europe may shake the continent even more.

The results have sent shock waves through the ruling elites. What's going on? Many pundits define this political revolution as brazen acts of anti-immigration nationalism. Is that really the case? What was behind the British exit vote and what does it portend for the future of Europe and the rest of the world?

More importantly, why should it matter to you?

A vote against immigrants, globalism and the political elites

Immigration into Britain from other EU countries as well as the war-torn Middle East and Africa the past few years no doubt served as a spark for those wanting Britain to leave the EU. But those who voted to leave the EU also voted against the nameless, faceless, unaccountable bureaucrats in Brussels who have been imposing seemingly unreasonable policies and strangling their sense of national sovereignty.

With every terrorist attack, with every job loss, with every report of a social welfare system straining to provide for the seemingly endless stream of immigrants as well as citizens, many British "have nots" had had enough.

As CNN International Diplomatic Editor Nic Robertson wrote: "For many in the UK . . . they see a rich upper class that has grown ridiculously rich, intertwined with a political elite in their pocket . . . The argument of political leaders that immigration benefits the economy is lost on the 'Leave' supporters because they don't feel they see the benefits" ("A Look at Brexit: Why Are the Brits Thumbing Their Noses at Europe?" CNN.com, June 24, 2016).

While the new economic elites in London and other gentrified urban areas of Britain have become wealthy, as in America's major urban areas and high-tech rich coastal cities, the middle and working classes have seen their opportunities and those of their children shrinking at an ever-increasing rate. The same is true throughout the Western world.

Jim Tankersley, economic policy writer for *The Washington Post*, further observed: "The forces driving those populist

uprisings, both against E.U. bureaucrats in Brussels and elected officials in Washington, are complex and intertwined . . . Across the West . . . the rise of populism corresponds to a decline in the income share held by the broad middle classes of those countries . . . With the Brexit vote, the populist movement can already claim a victory: It has won a clear reversal from the economic-integration trend of the past decades" ("Britain Just Killed Globalization as We Know It," WashingtonPost.com, June 25, 2016).

But were anti-immigration sentiments and economic fears the only reasons for Brexit? Concludes Nic Robertson's CNN analysis: "The message from the shires of England is that they no longer trust their leadership. A divide has opened; centers of cosmopolitan wealth are at odds with their council estate and country-living cousins. It is not about wealth, it is about history—about who the British think they are."

The reluctant partner

Though Britain was on the winning side in World War II, the decades following saw the once-proud nation struggling. The British Empire was gone, and the nation went through a time of economic turmoil. Many looked to the continent with envy as the European Coal and Steel Community began to prosper. But entry into what became the European Economic Community (EEC) would not be easy. Twice the British were denied membership (1963 and 1967) because then-French President Charles de Gaulle doubted Britain's political will to fully integrate. He would prove to be right.

Nevertheless, on January 1, 1973, the British Union Jack was raised in Brussels—signaling the entry of the United Kingdom into the European Economic Community. In 1975, 67 percent of British voters endorsed the UK's membership in what they saw as a free trade zone called the EEC.

Fast forward 43 years to June 23, 2016, and in a dramatic turn of events, 52 percent of British voters elected to leave the European Union in stunning victory for those backing Brexit. Why did this remarkable development take place?

Britain's distinct history at play

We've already seen the role of immigration and Brussels's bureaucracy. One of the greatest stumbling blocks to British integration into the European Union, however, was Britain's distinct history. Britain has never quite thought of itself as

European (see “The Ancient Brits Leave Modern Europe” on page 30).

Europe was always “the Continent.” Britain’s legal traditions are its own, rooted in the 13th century and earlier, and are distinct from the Continent’s Roman law and Napoleonic code. Britain had been a premier world power with global trade connections of its own through its Commonwealth.

British foreign policy with respect to Europe had always been a matter of shifting alliances and sheer military force to contain the power and influence of its European Continental rivals. From France of the Middle Ages, the Dutch mercantilists, Imperial Spain, Bourbon and Napoleonic France, Czarist Russia or Germany, Britain had successfully held at bay its rivals time and again.

Nonetheless, the lure of the prosperity that the EEC (later the EU) was experiencing throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, compared to the economic turmoil of a Britain in economic decline, proved too much to resist. But for many the rosy picture of untold prosperity for all failed to materialize.

Andrew Gilligan, London editor for *The Sunday Telegraph*, observed: “At the beginning, Britain—though one of the less prosperous members—was the second-biggest net contributor to the EEC, behind only the far richer Germans, pouring large sums into subsidising French farmers, butter mountains and wine lakes [or huge stockpiles] through the Common Agricultural Policy. Not until 1984, 11 years after joining, did Margaret Thatcher secure a permanent two-thirds rebate. ‘They say it’s their money, and I say it’s mine,’ she remarked at the Brussels summit in March of that year.

“Yet this significant victory involved loss as well as gain for Britain: Thatcher’s grating personal negotiating style permanently damaged relationships between her and the other European leaders. She thought they were hypocritical, attacking her as ‘not a good European’ for opposing a system from which they benefited. They thought she didn’t understand what Europe meant to them: their countries, devastated by war, had been given lasting peace and prosperity” (“The EU: So Where Did It All Go Wrong?” *Telegraph.co.uk*, December 30, 2012).

But while Thatcher’s Britain did not seem to understand what Europe meant to those on the Continent, the same could be said of those on the Continent not understanding what Britain meant to the British people.

Another problem was that the ramifications of EU membership had been misrepresented in Britain. British citizens had been promised no “erosion of essential national sovereignty.” But, as Andrew Gilligan states in his *Telegraph* article, “This, as many have conceded, was quite untrue: European law did and does override British law, and more and more of it was coming down the tracks from Brussels.”

A reluctant partner to totalitarianism

By the late 1980s and early 90s it became obvious to the EU that Britain would always be a reluctant partner at best when the British opted out of the single currency to retain the Pound Sterling instead. Meanwhile, a steady erosion of British sovereignty to the powerful EU bureaucracy that was largely unelected and largely unaccountable to the member states helped create fertile ground for those advocating an exit strategy for Britain. That strategy took the first decisive step on

June 23, 2016, when British voters elected to leave the EU.

David Pryse-Jones, a conservative British writer and commentator, gives some interesting insight on additional motives for Brexit: “The EU was a good idea in 1945, but it has long outlived its initial purpose of reconciling Germany and France. What stands out is that heads of state and politicians in Europe have been surreptitiously building a much wider political entity . . . The EU has developed into something never seen before in the world, an oligarchy with soft totalitarian symptoms.

“Conflicting national interests and global economic factors lead inexorably to the hardening of these totalitarian symptoms . . . There is only one way out of this predicament, and that is to amalgamate all the nation-states of the EU into a genuine federation, with political and fiscal unity that is even more unpopular and alarming.” In other words, the continent was developing into a United States of Europe.

Pryse-Jones concludes, “The British perceive that this empire *must end in full-blown totalitarianism or catastrophic failure*, and their vote shows that they want no part of either” (“Why Britain Was Right to Leave,” *NationalReview.com*, June 24, 2016, emphasis added throughout).

What lies ahead for Britain and the EU?

So where do Britain and the EU go from here? As British Prime Minister Theresa May outlines her plans for Brexit and a new relationship with the EU, we’ll see much discussion of how long this exit will take and what future trading relations between the two will look like (see “Britain’s EU exit expected to proceed, but it may be a long slog” on page 19).

All is not gloomy for Britain as the nation begins to chart a new, independent course. Luke Coffey, a research fellow specializing in transatlantic and Eurasian security at a Washington, D.C.–based think tank, gives this insight: “For many in the UK, the decision to leave the EU was a no-brainer. The UK is the world’s fifth-largest economy. It is a member of the 53-nation Commonwealth. It has a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and has a ‘special relationship’ with the US.

“It has one of the most capable militaries in the world and possesses nuclear weapons. The UK trades more outside the EU than it does with the EU (and will continue to trade with Europe after it leaves the EU). Even though fewer than 6 percent of UK businesses trade with the EU, all have to implement the EU’s red tape and regulation” (“Brexit: A Wake Up Call for the EU, but Will It Listen?” *Yahoo News*, June 24, 2016).

As Britain plans to leave the EU, what about those nations that remain? Britain leaving means the EU loses a moderating force that focused on minimizing further power transfers to Brussels. The EU will also have gaps in its defense capabilities. As a result, France and Germany have lost no time in



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Is a British exit from the European Union required to fulfill Bible prophecy?

While it appears that Brexit will proceed, we should realize that it's not a foregone conclusion that Britain will actually exit the European Union. And even if it does, it may still be significantly entangled and subject to EU rules.

A number of factors could impede or halt the process. It's already been stated that it could take years. The political landscape could shift. A huge portion of Britain still wants to be in the EU, and EU leaders often just rerun elections until they get the result they want.

These and other factors could conceivably stall the exit process. It is not beyond possibility that Britain could end up in a kind of limbo for a while, with the EU treating them as a pariah while still extorting money and materiel from them and forcing them to follow EU regulations. Europe could keep Britain in a holding position while continuing its own further integration—with anticipation of Britain eventually leaving being used to say that it doesn't have a say in European affairs even though it's technically still in the EU.

Bible prophecy reveals that a final revival of the Roman Empire called the Beast will ultimately arise in Europe—perhaps emerging from the current European Union or a reformed version of it (see our publication *The Final Superpower* at ucg.org/booklets to learn more). Prophecy also reveals that this empire will play a major role in the destruction of the nations descended from ancient Israel, foremost among these being Britain and the United States (see our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* for more about this). While prophecies of Israel and Judah's destruction had partial fulfillment in ancient times, they will have greater fulfillment later.

Many who are aware of what Scripture says will befall these nations think Britain must leave the European Union for the Beast power to rise and become an enemy to Britain—and they view Brexit as something that must happen to fulfill prophecy. But prophecy is not so clear here.

It could be that Britain would remain in the European Union—either trapped within it or tied to it in some way—until the Beast power is formed. It could be that the British would then make a last push at separation—at which point the Beast turns on them. The fact is, we do not know exactly how this will all shake out. We only know that Britain will eventually end up devastated.

Some argue that Britain has to be on the exterior of this coming superpower to be crushed by it. But consider the pattern of the former destructions of Israel and Judah. Ancient Israel was already ruled by and part of the Assyrian Empire when it was crushed. Judah was already ruled by Babylon before it was crushed. And Judea was already ruled by Rome when it was crushed.

Why must it be different in the end time? Of course, maybe it will be. Maybe Brexit will succeed well before the final emergence of the Beast power. We just don't know. What is important is that we keep our eyes on events in Europe as we get ever closer to the crisis at the end of this age—with our expectations rooted in Scripture.

—Tom Robinson

putting forward plans for further military and even political integration.

A document titled “EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy” outlines a new military thinking within the EU. The white paper states: “We, as Europeans, need to take on a greater responsibility for our own security . . . We need to be ready and able to repel, respond and to protect ourselves against aggression, provocations and destabilization.”

Where can this new military thinking lead? Britain's position within the EU was that no EU army was needed. However, with Britain's impending exit, European military and defense leaders are actively exploring such steps as a common European military headquarters and joint military forces.

And going further, a new EU without Britain leaves wide open the door for the push to take the next step to political union. *Daily Express* reporter Nick Gutteridge adds the following:

“The foreign ministers of France and Germany are due to reveal a blueprint to effectively do away with individual member states in what is being described as an ‘ultimatum.’ Under the radical proposals EU countries will lose the right to have their own army, criminal law, taxation system or central bank, with all those powers being transferred to Brussels . . .

“In the preamble to the text the two ministers write: ‘Our countries share a common destiny and a common set of values that give rise to an even closer union between our citizens. We will therefore strive for a political union in Europe and invite the next Europeans to participate in this venture’” (“European SUPERSTATE to Be Unveiled: EU Nations ‘to Be Morphed Into One’ Post-Brexit,” Express.co.uk, June 29, 2016).

Coming: A new world order

It is not yet clear if other EU members may follow Britain and vote to opt out should key players seize the chance to create a United States of Europe. But we have been writing about a new European-centered superpower for decades.

The Bible indicates that an end-time, powerful superstate will rise up to astound an unsuspecting world. The superstate, symbolically called “the Beast,” will be an imposing union of 10 leaders of nations or groups of nations that will coalesce as one final revival of the ancient Roman Empire (Daniel 2:37-45; 7:15-27; Revelation 13:1-8; 17:8-18).

These leaders will relinquish their own national sovereignty to become part of this end-time superpower: “These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast” (Revelation 17:13). They will promise peace, prosperity and security through a new world order, but at the price of political, economic and religious freedom.

This new world order will affect the whole world by setting the stage for the catastrophic time when humanity will face extinction without God's direct intervention (Matthew 24:21-22).

As we begin to see the fulfillment of end-time prophecies, what will we do? What will *you* do? These prophetic events should motivate each of us to examine our spiritual condition in the light of God's Word. An understanding of prophecy ought to lead us to repentance and to truly seek and serve God.

Britain's vote to exit allows the EU to begin a new chapter for Europe. It is well worth keeping an eye on! **BT**

The Ancient Brits Leave Modern Europe



The shock waves have died down, but the effects will continue. The British people voted to leave the European Union, and it came as a great surprise to many, including even the British government under then-Prime Minister David Cameron. But the roots of this decision actually go back centuries.

William Shakespeare, in his work *Richard II*, expressed so very well the essential feelings of the British people about their unique island home, which they fervently believe was given to them by God:

*This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands,—
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm,
this England.*

Of course, many other peoples feel the same way about their homelands, and why shouldn't they? This is who they are, the inheritance from their hard-working fathers, the lands of their youth, the very soil that sustained them, for which their families, friends and neighbors fought. Why should such proud history be lost? Would it not be ungrateful to turn one's back on such hard-won treasure?

Brexit is not a repudiation of Europe, far from it, but more a love of family, of hearth and home and history. Strange as it might seem, the English, Welsh, Scots and Irish are all originally of one stock that came to these

island countries in waves over a long period of time. There were the Celtic Cymric and Gaelic invasions, the Anglo-Saxon and Danish and Norman, finding their way over land and sea until they found their resting place and put down roots in this fertile land. They are brother nations in one family home, different but the same; squabbling, but having mutual respect.

And they respect their squabbling cousins too—the French, Dutch, Belgians, Scandinavians and others on the continent of Europe—and are more than happy to trade with them and interact in so many different ways.

But they do not wish to lose their identity, nor for their friends in Europe to lose theirs. Yet they are afraid that was exactly what was happening—they were becoming, as it were, one common country.

There may well be highly intellectual people throughout Europe who think that such amalgamation into one homogenous whole is no bad thing. But the heartfelt conviction of common people is that it is wrong, and quite unnecessary—why couldn't they just have a Common Market, which was the idea they accepted in the first place?

The fear now is that other nations will feel the same way and also elect to leave. It is a question of distinct identity and of sovereignty. The Brits are feeling that all the rules and regulations are coming from outside their parliament, and they would just as soon govern themselves. Economic cooperation is not the issue, for it provides for a free exchange of goods and services and a healthy and enjoyable variety all around, to everybody's benefit.

Sure, there have to be rules and regulations regarding tariffs and exchange rates, etc., but a total immersion into one

all-encompassing political entity, a United States of Europe, is outside British sensibilities, as it might well be beyond the desire of other nations. Time will tell.

But there is a source of news, written in advance, that does not auger well for the immediate future. Trouble is in store because the related peoples of Britain, Europe, the United States and elsewhere have forgotten where they came from.

They forget God at their peril. It is He who provided the Brits with this beautiful, bountiful homeland set in the silver sea. It is He who has overseen the course of their history, expanding their influence into the vast British Empire and Commonwealth, giving them favor in many lands—so that they and others might learn, eventually, that it is He who sits above the circle of the earth, with men like grasshoppers (Isaiah 40:22).

He removes kings and sets up kings (Daniel 2:21). From one man He made all the nations, that they should inherit the whole earth, and He marked out their appointed times in history and the bounds of their lands (Acts 17:26).

The happy breed of men who came to inherit the "sceptred isle" came little by little over land and sea, over many centuries, which makes for fascinating history since the ancient people from whom they derive were reputed to have been lost—having vanished from their original homeland following defeat and deportation.

You may read more about this in our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. And our study guide *Why Were You Born?* explains vital truths which have been obscured for centuries. Request them today, and they will be sent to you without charge.

—George Carter



A Little Child's Prayers Matter to God

God wants a relationship with your children. So are you teaching them to pray?

by Janet Treadway

I recently bought a doll for my little granddaughter, Stella Rose. Someone made the comment that it reminded them of the Cabbage Patch Kids dolls. That comment brought back some awesome memories.

Years ago, when my daughter Michelle was 4 years old, Cabbage Patch Kids dolls were very popular. All of her friends had them, but we couldn't afford to buy her one. They cost \$45 at the time, and we could barely put food on the table, so we certainly did not have that kind of money to buy a doll. I told my daughter to pray about it, and she did.

The very next weekend, my daughter had not one but two Cabbage Patch Kids dolls given to her! One doll was given to her at church by her friend's mom, and the next day she received one from her grandmother. Both were brand-new and different from each other. Now, 36 years later, my daughter still has those dolls! To us those dolls symbolize how much God cared about her and her sweet little request when she was a child. I consider those dolls a gift from God!

God values our children so greatly that Jesus demonstrated it in a lesson to His disciples: "He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me'" (Matthew 18:1-5, New International Version).

When people brought little children to Jesus for Him to pray for them, His disciples rebuked them and sent them away. But Jesus corrected them: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there" (Matthew 19:13-14, NIV).

He went on to command His disciples: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:10, NIV). God wants a relationship with our children, so we need to teach them to pray!

Here are some examples of how we can teach them:

- Start with giving them examples in the Bible of how valuable they are to God.
- Tell them to talk to God just like they do to Mommy and Daddy.
- Teach them through example by praying with them.
- Encourage them to pray for their friends and family.
- Teach them to thank God for all the things they have.



- Share with your child the times God answered *your* prayers.
- Teach them that they can talk with God all day long and that He is always there for them.
- Remind them to always ask God for protection for themselves and their family throughout the day, and for God to protect their minds.
- Tell them it's okay to ask God for personal blessing, like my daughter did with the Cabbage Patch Kids doll.
- Teach them to ask for wisdom. Read them the story about Solomon, how he desired wisdom above any material things, and God blessed him with both.
- Most of all, teach them how special they are to God and that He wants them to talk to Him.
- Teach them that sometimes God answers our prayers in ways we don't expect or understand, but He always knows what is best for us.

Romans 8:28 states, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (NIV).

My daughter Michelle is a praying woman to this day! She knows that God answers prayers. Sometimes those prayers aren't answered as quickly as with her dolls; her prayers for a child weren't answered for eight years. But she prayed with conviction knowing that God knew what was best for her.

So teach your children to pray, because they matter to God! **BT**

That You Love One Another...

John 13 records some of the final lessons Jesus gave His disciples the evening before His death.

What did these actions mean to them? And what should they mean to all His followers?

by Ben Light

Peter looked down at Jesus. For the past three and a half years, he had followed Him all over Judea. He had left his boat, his nets and his occupation behind and had become one of His disciples. He had learned firsthand of the gospel of the Kingdom of God and had seen the many miracles wrought by His hands. Now, his Lord had removed His outer garments, wrapped a towel around Himself and knelt down before him. He began to unfasten Peter's sandals. The basin of water nearby spoke volumes about what He intended to do.

He had watched as Jesus had washed some of the other disciples' feet, and now here He was kneeling before *him*. He had to say something.

"Lord, are you washing my feet?!" Peter blurted out.

He knew that Jesus was the Son of God, and he understood that He was the prophesied Messiah or Christ they had been waiting for. Jesus was his Lord! He was Peter's Teacher and his Master! Yet here He was, kneeling before Peter like a lowly servant—preparing to wash his feet. It just wasn't right.

"What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this," Jesus answered.

Peter didn't get it, deeply meaningful as it was.

The Master's example of serving

As they had followed Christ throughout Judea, they had walked along the dusty roads, and much of the time their feet were filthy. Some houses didn't receive their message, and the disciples had been instructed to shake off the dust from their feet as a testimony against them. Those who received them willingly often provided them a place to wash their feet, with sometimes perhaps a slave or house-servant to do it *for* them.

That the Messiah had taken the position of such a lowly slave was unacceptable. He was a King, not a servant.

"Lord, you shall never wash my feet!" Peter protested.

"If I do not wash you, you have no part with me," Christ replied softly.

"Lord, not my feet only, but my hands and my head also," Peter insisted.

"He who is bathed need only wash his feet . . . And you are clean, but not all of you." Peter didn't know what He meant by that. Realizing that Jesus would not be deterred by his protests, he relaxed and let his Teacher begin the task.

Jesus took Peter's foot in his hands, unfastened the sandal and gently lowered his foot into the basin. The cool water gave Peter a start, and as Christ began to cup His hands and wash Peter's feet—wiping the dirt from them gently—what thoughts went through Peter's mind?

His protests tonight perhaps reminded him of the time that Jesus had told him and the other disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem and suffer at the hands of the elders and chief priests. Christ told them He would suffer and be killed, then raised the third day. Peter pulled Him aside and started to rebuke Him, letting his Master know that he would never let that happen. He wouldn't stand for it!

But Jesus had corrected him sharply and told them all that those who would come after Him must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him. If they desired to save their life, He said they would lose it, but if they lost their life for His sake, they would find it.

Deny himself . . . lose his life for the sake of Christ . . . Peter had puzzled over his Rabbi's words.

Jesus began to dry Peter's foot with the towel, bringing him back to the present. Jesus unfastened Peter's other sandal and began to wash the grime from his other foot.

A lesson from a child

The memories, one would imagine, came flooding back.

Once, as they had all traveled to Capernaum, Peter and the rest of the disciples had gotten into an argument about which of them would be the greatest in the Kingdom of God. They argued over who was the most important, or who would be the leader under Christ.

Jesus must have overheard them, because when they arrived at their destination, He asked what they were arguing about. Peter and the rest of the disciples had remained silent. They didn't want to admit that they had been arguing about which one of them would be the greatest.

The road to Capernaum wasn't the first time, nor was it the last time they had argued about that topic. In fact, it came up again this very evening.

Christ had sat down with them after arriving in Capernaum and told them that if a person wanted to be first, he must be last and the servant of all. He then brought a child before them and told them that whoever received a child such as this in His

name would be welcoming *Him* and the Father who *sent* Him. Whoever humbled themselves as this little child was humble would be the greatest in the Kingdom.

“Blessed are you if you do them”

Jesus dried Peter’s foot, picked up the basin and moved on from one disciple to the next, washing their feet and wiping them dry with His towel. Perhaps he saw a hint of sadness in Christ’s eyes when He knelt to wash the feet of Judas Iscariot, their money keeper.

When Jesus had finished washing all of their feet, He stood



up, laid aside the towel and put on His outer garments. He then sat down with His disciples.

“Do you know what I have done to you?” Jesus asked them.

Peter and the rest of the disciples were likely still stunned at what had just happened.

“You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet,” Jesus explained.

He continued: “For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is He who is sent greater than He who sent Him.”

Their Master had provided the 12 with an incredible example of humility and service. If anyone were owed special treatment, or if anyone were worthy of worship or greatness, it was Him. Yet He had lowered Himself to the position of a slave and washed the feet of His disciples, those whom He loved.

Jesus had said it Himself—the servant isn’t greater than the Master. Nor is He who was sent greater than He who sent Him.

And Jesus had taught the need for serving in leadership before. When the mother of James and John had requested that her sons sit at Christ’s right and left hand in His Kingdom, what was Christ’s response? That the gentile kings lord it over their subjects, but that this was not to be so among them. Jesus’ disciples were not to be concerned with greatness or position. Instead, they were to focus on serving others.

“If you know these things,” Christ stated, “blessed are you if you do them.”

A shocking turn of events

Jesus continued: “I do not speak concerning all of you. I know

whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.’”

Peter no doubt recognized the words of the psalmist and wondered what Christ was insinuating.

Jesus went on: “Now I tell you before it comes that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.”

He appeared troubled and then stated, “Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.”

Peter and the rest of the apostles looked around at each other in shock. The room grew louder as the disciples began to question Christ and one another about this stunning statement.

Each was asking, “Lord, is it I?” Peter looked up and caught the eye of John, who was nearest to his Lord, and encouraged him to ask Jesus of whom He was speaking.

Christ answered, “It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.” Dipping the bread, Jesus handed it to Judas Iscariot, who asked Him, “Rabbi, is it I?” Jesus replied, “You have said it.” He then told Judas, “What you do, do quickly.”

Judas moved to the door and disappeared into the night.

Peter’s mind probably began to race. What had Christ meant by betrayal? And where was Judas off to at this time of night? Some assumed that as the money keeper he must have been getting provisions for the feast days that would follow, or maybe he was making a contribution to the poor, as was customary.

An example for Christ’s disciples to follow

Christ had other urgent things to say: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Peter likely reflected on this new commandment in light of the evening’s lesson of the foot-washing. The disciples’ Master had personally demonstrated the kind of loving, humble attitude of service He expected of His followers, and now told them they must have that same giving and serving attitude toward one another. This attitude of selfless love and service, He said, would show all others that they truly were His followers.

Jesus’ actions and words were to help them see that being a disciple of Jesus Christ isn’t a position of power and authority. It is a life of *willing service*. It requires a person to humble himself and to view the needs of others as greater than his own. If the Messiah—the Son of God—was willing to humble Himself by showing His love to His disciples in such a way, how much more should Peter humble himself and become a servant to all?

His Master had set the example tonight, and He expected His disciples to follow. It wasn’t enough to simply know it. Peter and the others were expected to follow through and live this way, actively showing their love to others through serving.

Peter was still processing the lesson as Jesus told him his personal commitment as a disciple would be challenged. And Jesus had still more troubling and astonishing things to say.

As it got later, and Jesus’ words became more alarming and pressing, Peter wondered what the night would yet bring, and what other important lessons would await. Jesus assured them it would all work out. While their faith would be challenged in ways they could not yet comprehend, they had to continue in what He had shown them to truly prove to be His followers. **BT**



He Got on the Boat Anyway

Life is all about choices. When the chips are down and the stakes are high, what choices will we make?

by Scott Ashley

He got on the boat anyway. Over the last year that phrase has been repeatedly running through my mind. Why? Because it so encapsulates what God expects of us.

A year ago my wife and I and nearly 80 others were blessed to be able to tour a number of biblical sites in Turkey, including the seven cities mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3. One afternoon, a few of us took a side trip to the ruins of the city of Miletus, the next large ancient port south of the city of Ephesus along the west coast of Asia Minor.

There's not a lot to see at Miletus, since the city has been ravaged by time and earthquakes over the last 2,000 years. Most notable are a nicely preserved Greco-Roman theater, an enormous bath complex built in the late second century with funds donated by the wife of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius (the emperor at the beginning of the movie *Gladiator*), and the remains of a monument commemorating the victory of Octavian over Mark Antony and Cleopatra in the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C., which set the stage for Octavian to become Caesar Augustus and set the Roman Empire on its path to greatness.

The monument stood at the head of the primary harbor of Miletus, and a main street ran from there into the heart of the city. As our small group stood at that spot and tried to envision what the ancient harbor would've looked like, a thought struck me: *The apostle Paul would've walked within a few yards of this very spot.*

I've been to a number of cities that Paul visited—Jerusalem, Rome, Ephesus, Caesarea Maritima and Puteoli—but none had the emotional impact of standing on this spot in Miletus. Why? Because of what happened here and the example it leaves for us.

Paul's visit to Miletus

Paul's visit to Miletus took place near the end of his third and final recorded journey. As his trip was nearing its end, he "decided to sail past Ephesus . . . for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost" (Acts 20:16).

Because time was tight, Paul bypassed Ephesus, where he had stayed for two years earlier on that same journey (Acts 19:10). No doubt he had forged many dear friendships in Ephesus, and had he put into port there he would've spent days with those friends and wouldn't have had enough time to make it to Jerusalem for the Holy Day of Pentecost.

So he did the next best thing. He stopped at the next major port south of Ephesus and sent word for the Ephesian elders to come meet him there (Acts 20:17).

It had to be an emotional reunion, for they hadn't seen each other for months. No doubt tears of joy were shed as they met there in Miletus. But these would soon be replaced by tears of deep sorrow.

The suffering of a servant

Paul's path since his miraculous conversion more than 20

years earlier had not been an easy one. He had gone through the school of hard knocks and graduated, then gone back for more. Having grown tired of having to defend himself against enemies and false ministers who had boasted about how great they were in comparison to him, Paul let his record speak for itself:

“I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea.

“I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers . . . I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not.

“I have worked long and hard, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:23-28, New Living Translation).

Paul had suffered a great deal. People hated him and had tried to kill him for the message he taught. They would keep trying, and he knew it. He also knew that division and apostasy would come after he was gone. So Paul felt compelled to leave these elders a sobering message.

Paul’s last words to the Ephesian elders

That sobering message echoed in my mind as I stood there at the harbor of Miletus and thought about Paul’s last meeting with his fellow workers and friends. I reflected on his last words to them:

“You know that from the day I set foot in the province of Asia [in western Turkey] until now I have done the Lord’s work humbly and with many tears . . . I never shrank back from telling you what you needed to hear, either publicly or in your homes. I have had one message for Jews and Gentiles [or other nationalities] alike—the necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus.

“And now I am bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. I don’t know what awaits me, except that the Holy Spirit tells me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead. But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God. *And now I know that none of you to whom I have preached the Kingdom will ever see me again*”—that is, until that Kingdom comes (Acts 20:18-25, NLT, emphasis added).

His words to them were both shocking and sobering. Paul then gave them both a work and a warning, telling them to feed and care for God’s flock entrusted to their care and warning that some among them would rise up to steal God’s sheep for themselves—a pattern that, tragically, has been repeated all too often over the years to the shame of men who loved power more than they loved God’s beloved flock.

Through God’s Spirit, Paul knew that his time of serving God as he had was nearing an end. Instead of being able to freely travel and teach God’s Word, suffering and imprisonment now awaited him. And he knew that in all likelihood

he would never see these dear friends again.

Echoes of One who had gone before

In many ways Paul’s words to his friends at Miletus remind me of the words of another Rabbi who had earlier gathered His friends to leave them with a last, impassioned message. That had taken place in Jerusalem, where Paul would now go to meet his fate as he followed in the footsteps of His Master.

Life is all about choices. Jesus of Nazareth faced many choices during that last journey of His life as “He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). Christ knew what lay ahead—suffering, imprisonment and death. He could’ve turned aside at any point, but He didn’t. Why? To fulfill His Father’s will, following the desire They both shared of eternal life for you and me. Jesus chose *others*, not Himself.

Paul, when it came time to make a choice, took the same path. He likewise knew where it would ultimately lead him—to suffering, imprisonment, and in the end, death. He never wavered, for he knew that he had been bought and paid for with a price, and that his life was no longer his own (1 Corinthians 6:20; Galatians 2:20).

He got on the boat anyway

Acts 20:36-38 records the end of Paul’s visit with his beloved friends at Miletus: “And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.”

It’s a deeply moving and heartbreaking scene, one that in many ways sums up the life of that deeply motivated and converted man. Knowing what lay ahead, *he got on the boat anyway*.

He could’ve turned around. He could’ve gone with them back to Ephesus and continued his work there. The whole of Asia Minor lay before him, where he could’ve gone anywhere. *But he didn’t*. Paul followed the example of Jesus Christ, who took that final, fatal trip to Jerusalem anyway, knowing the price He would pay.

Life is about choices. Perhaps none is so great as whom we will ultimately serve—God or ourselves. And God’s Word tells us that as times grow harder and as the days grow darker, the consequences of our choices will grow ever more serious.

When the chips are down, knowing what lies ahead, *will we have what it takes to get on the boat anyway?* 



The author stands at the head of the ruins of the ancient harbor of Miletus, where Paul gave an emotional farewell to the Ephesian elders.

Taking Hold of the Divine Nature

When we draw on God's nature placed within us, we will continue to grow in the development of His wonderful attributes.

by Robin Webber

Have you ever lost your keys, or maybe your purse or wallet, and gone on a scorched-earth rampage searching through your house, garage or car?

If so, why has this happened? We probably got so distracted or preoccupied that we forgot where we put them. Our world can then become rather shaken up. In such moments, my wife always smiles and reminds me, "They don't have legs." That's true! They must still be here. Even so, till I take hold of them they remain so near yet so far!

In a sense, the same can be said for what our Heavenly Father has done for us through Jesus Christ by placing His divine essence of life—His Holy Spirit—inside us for safekeeping. This condition is not one with legs to walk away, so to speak. But we can become humanly distracted or preoccupied with the cares of this world and forget the powerful reality of God having lovingly placed His Spirit in our hearts and minds (see Ezekiel 36:25-27).

In the past three issues of *Beyond Today*, this column has been exploring this reality based on Jesus' incredible promise, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18).

Christ's early followers, having received the Holy Spirit, were able to live as if Christ had never left them. His presence was felt. But some became distracted along the way, and the apostle Paul had to remind them: *There are no legs here!* The divine presence was still there with them. "Don't you know that Jesus Christ dwells in you?" he pointed out (compare 2 Corinthians 13:5).

The Spirit of God isn't something we have to search for in the different compartments of our life. If we have repented, surrendered our lives to God, been baptized and received His Spirit, that Spirit is at the core of our being—in what Paul called "the inner man" (Ephesians 3:16). It is always there to draw upon—this vital resource of the "divine nature," as Peter referred to it (2 Peter 1:4), from which flows the wonderful attributes of godly character.

Grabbing hold not by accident but design

So how do we handle times of distraction or preoccupation with the passing matters of this life and draw on the Spirit of God? Allow me to share a verse that

always brings me back to the basics. It's very graphic and tangible—*gripping*, one might say!

It's Philippians 3:12: "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me."

The Son of God has grabbed hold of you and me—not out of desperation but by design—so that we may grab hold of faith that is not by accident but design. This isn't merely having faith towards Him, but it's so you and I exercise the identical faith of Christ in how we grab hold of—lock onto—the divine nature of Him and our Heavenly Father.

Once again, as in the previous issue's column titled "The Spirit-Led Sacrificial Life," let's understand how we can tighten our hold on the embedded preciousness of God's Spirit—the divine nature—leading us to exercise His outflowing attributes.

As we saw before, the apostle Peter presents vital elements of the divine nature to lay hold of in his words found in 2 Peter 1:5-8. My previous column focused on the first three elements, and I said there were more to follow. We came to understand our response to God's grace—that is, to His favor and the gift of salvation that starts with and proceeds from Him—this requiring unconditional surrender on our part and continued devoted response based on the daily sacrifice of self.

The apostle Peter spoke in verse 5 of zealous *diligence* and believing *faith* that establishes the courageous *virtue* of moral excellence that bears witness to other people that they are encountering something different here—something exceptional—the life of Jesus Christ dwelling in a person here on earth.

But again, there's more—so let's go further in how we can knowingly tighten our grip on what God desires.

Hallmarks of expressing the divine nature

Again in verse 5, Peter describes how we are to utilize God's Spirit-nature that imparts *knowledge* to His followers.

This knowledge, divine in origin, is practical for daily living. It's a knowledge that allows us to understand first causes, as well as the end results of our decision-making.

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would convict us of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment (John 16:8-9).

It's a knowledge that comforts us with the assurances of the Psalms—that “the LORD is My Shepherd; I shall not want”—but likewise teaches the wisdom of the Proverbs and of James in how to walk daily in a world with the minefields of Satan's traps and the snares of corrupt human nature. It's the mind of Christ living in us (Philippians 2:5) that enables us “to refuse the evil and choose the good” (Isaiah 7:15).



The Son of God has grabbed hold of you and me—not out of desperation but by design.

When we apply revealed knowledge to real-life situations, we are next asked in verse 6 of 2 Peter 1 to take hold of ourselves and exercise *self-control*. That means each of us personally. The Greek here, from the root word *egkrateia*, suggests we “get a grip” on ourselves. We hear that expression today as an admonition to think clearly. But God means it in the broader sense of taking control of how we think and live.

We can never handle the facts until we handle our feelings. How often have we done something because it just felt good rather than do the good for God? *Feeling* good and *doing* good are two different creatures with two different outcomes.

Maintaining self-control in turn demands that we draw upon what's mentioned next in 2 Peter 1:6, the *perseverance* or steadfastness (standing fast in resolve) engendered by God's Spirit that grants us a patient knowing eye to the future. It speaks of being able to see beyond the obstacle-ridden mountains of events before us and with spiritual grit hold on—as much as when it speaks of how Christ “who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

Walking towards humanity and not away

Have you ever considered how much easier life might be if there was no dealing with other people? Of course God didn't grant us to partake of the divine nature to become a hermit, but to walk through this life while focused upward toward Him and also before us on earth to address the needs of others who cross our path.

Christianity is not developed by inculcated theory but *by practice*. And God has granted us a target-rich environment of people to deal with who are sometimes unlovable—perhaps starting with ourselves if we are honest and allowing God's Spirit to convict us.

The next adorning attribute in 2 Peter 1:6 of *godliness* does not cut us off from man. To the contrary, Jesus said that how we treat *others* is how we treat *Him* (Matthew 25:40, 45). The apostle John asked a probing question: “For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (1 John 4:20).

This guides us toward how to offer the next quality Peter lists, special *brotherly kindness* with fellow spiritual family members (2 Peter 1:7). At times the closer the relationships, the more we can take one another for granted or conversely allow sparks to fly.

Paul reminds us, “Let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). Peter elsewhere likewise combined these two qualities of godliness and brotherly kindness in imploring us: “Honor all people. Love the brotherhood . . .” (1 Peter 2:17).

All of the incredible qualities listed in 2 Peter 1 are predicated on and point toward the ultimate attribute of the divine nature, which firmly knits together expressions of diligence, faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness and brotherly kindness. It's the exclamation mark that comes at the end—*love* (verse 7).

God is defined by this quality, as we're told that “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). It's not a self-love, but an outflowing, outgoing concern that moves away from self with no strings attached. In fact, it's devoid of selfishness.

That love knocked on the doors of our life when we were spiritually asleep. Scripture tells us, “We love Him, because He first loved us” (verse 19). Who went first? God did! Who is to follow wherever He leads us through the seasons of life? We are!

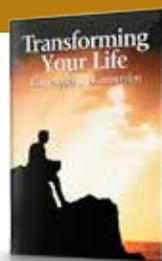
The promise with a premise

So where do we go from here? Christ promised He would come to us, and He has for now by Spirit, and will come to us in the fullest sense at His second coming.

By His mercy and love, our Heavenly Father gave His Son to us that He might not merely return to us, but based on the premise that we would heed His call of “Follow Me” and partake as full shareholders of the embedded essence of the Holy Spirit—the divine nature.

These valuable keys to your life need not remain a mystery or lost. Our Heavenly Father has not called us to be so near yet so far. His promises have not walked away from us, but He asks us to walk towards them! **BT**

LEARN MORE



To learn more about how to unconditionally surrender your life to Him and receive the Spirit of the divine nature enabling you to live for Him and others—request or download our free study guide *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.

BTmagazine.org/booklets



Impacted by teaching on relevant topics

I just wanted to compliment Robin Webber on his article “The Spirit-Led Sacrificial Life” in the January-February issue. It was a well written, emotional piece of art. I feel sorry for people who do not have God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in their lives. May God bless you always.

From the Internet

I could tell you are blessed by the message you preach as I read your website. Your article “Does God Pick Presidents?” impressed me a lot. I wish I could pay to have your ministry come preach this and other messages here in Kenya, as we prepare for our elections in August.

Reader in Kenya

Wondering about articles on political topics

I have been receiving *Beyond Today* magazine for the past four years, and as a result I have learned a lot. However, why do you always include politics in your magazine—especially American politics? Do politics and the gospel mix?

Subscriber in South Africa

Thank you for your feedback. You raise a very good question to consider. We are an international organization and aim to include an international perspective in our literature and other materials as much as possible. But, being based in the United States and having the majority of our readers there, no doubt the U.S. perspective comes through more than most.

Because of the prominence of North America on the world stage, what happens in and to America impacts a lot of the world. America is the world’s largest economy with the biggest military footprint, and it has the largest cultural influence on the world—for good and for bad. Therefore, we are naturally going to emphasize U.S. news.

Many issues that are often seen as merely political are in fact moral issues of right and wrong—including the positions of leading political figures and the general populace. In the Bible we see God’s prophets, and Jesus Christ Himself, warning of the sins of the nations and how that will impact national blessings and future judgment. These messengers of God addressed national and religious leaders, indicting them for their failed spiritual and moral leadership and example.

So it’s appropriate to address politics in preaching the gospel and God’s call to repentance. While the gospel transcends the world’s politics, in getting people to understand and focus on the Kingdom of God we often have to show the folly and faults of human government.

With this in mind, when we discuss political issues, we strive to keep it in the context of warning against sin and impending judgment for rejecting biblical standards and values while also providing a geopolitical context to prophecy and the biblical narrative. Our goal is to draw a clear distinction between the two and emphasize the message of the Bible without adopting a worldly ideological philosophy.

We pray this is helpful to you.

Wanting to observe God’s festivals instead of man’s holidays

I’m wondering when the Holy Days that we should be celebrating are and how to celebrate them. In one article you mentioned Pass-

over, the Feast of Tabernacles, etc. I was raised—and have been raising my own kids—to keep the traditions of Easter and Christmas, without knowing their pagan roots. I now feel a great sense of worry and anxiety that I have offended my Savior, Jesus Christ, and God.

From the Internet

We’re glad to hear you’re interested in the biblical Holy Days. Search “how do Christians observe God’s festivals” on ucg.org to find a short explanation of each festival with additional information on how to take the next step. As for your worries about Easter and Christmas, once God has called us through His truth, it’s our responsibility to respond to that calling. It takes a lot of courage to leave those traditions behind, but it’s worth it. Please feel free to reach out to one of our pastors in an area close to you if you would like some support and guidance. You can find a list of our congregations and pastors at ucg.org/congregations.

Looking for a congregation

Can you please help me to find a United Church of God congregation in my area? I have been searching for a true Bible-teaching, Jesus-preaching, Word of God Church to worship in. I am so tired of all of the prosperity churches and false teachers that are out here. I thirst and hunger for the true Word of God.

Reader in Wisconsin

I have had a question for a while now that has troubled me: Why do most churches continue to worship on Sunday instead God’s appointed seventh-day Sabbath? I have been afraid to attend church, since worshipping on Sunday is a man-made tradition. I deeply want to keep the Sabbath day holy and worship God. Please help me to the right answer. My relationship with God is very important, and I want to obey Him in every way.

From the Internet

We’re glad to hear you have a deep desire to keep the Sabbath. We have many congregations of people who worship together on the Sabbath, and you can look to see if any are near you at ucg.org/congregations. However, for those who live in remote areas or places with no other Sabbath-keepers around, they must choose to observe the day on their own at home by themselves or with their family.

*Worshipping God with a group of fellow believers is indeed wonderful, but if that’s not a possibility, think about ways you can set the day apart and worship on your own. The United Church of God, publisher of *Beyond Today* magazine, offers a live Sabbath webcast at ucg.org/webcast as well as hundreds of video and audio recordings of sermons at ucg.org/sermons/all. You should also consider spending extra time in prayer and meditation, studying the Bible, reading or watching study material and singing songs of praise and worship. God rejoices whenever anybody earnestly seeks Him (Luke 15:10; Hebrews 11:6), so even if you are the only one in your household, neighborhood, town or country, He will honor your sincerity and obedience.*

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

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NORTH, SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA

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

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

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

Phone: (905) 614-1234, (800) 338-7779 Fax: (905) 614-1749 Website: ucg.ca

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

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

Spanish-speaking areas: Iglesia de Dios Unida, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.

Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 Website: ucg.org/espanol E-mail: info@ucg.org

EUROPE

Benelux countries (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg): P.O. Box 93, 2800 AB Gouda, Netherlands

British Isles: United Church of God, P.O. Box 705, Watford, Herts, WD19 6FZ, England

Phone: 020-8386-8467 Fax: 020-8386-1999 Website: goodnews.org.uk

Eastern Europe and Baltic states: Head Sõnumid, Pk. 62, 50002 Tartu Postkontor, Estonia

France: Église de Dieu Unie—France, 127 rue Amelot, 75011 Paris, France

Germany: Vereinte Kirche Gottes/Gute Nachrichten, Postfach 30 15 09, D-53195 Bonn, Germany

Phone: 0228-9454636 Fax: 0228-9454637

Italy: La Buona Notizia, Chiesa di Dio Unita, Casella Postale 187, 24121 Bergamo Centro, Italy

Phone and Fax: (+39) 035 4523573 Website: labuonanotizia.org E-mail: info@labuonanotizia.org

Scandinavia: Guds Enade Kyrka, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027

E-mail: norden@ucg.org

AFRICA

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

East Africa, Madagascar and Mauritius: United Church of God—East Africa

P.O. Box 75261, Nairobi 00200, Kenya E-mail: kenya@ucg.org Website: ucgeastafrica.org

Ghana: P.O. Box AF 75, Adenta, Accra, Ghana E-mail: ghana@ucg.org

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

E-mail: malawi@ucg.org

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

Phone: 8033233193 Website: ucgnigeria.org E-mail: nigeria@ucg.org

South Africa: United Church of God—Southern Africa, P.O. Box 1181, Tzaneen 0850, South Africa

Phone: +27 79 725 9453 Fax: +27 (0)86 572 7437 Website: south-africa.ucg.org

E-mail: UnitedChurchofGod.SA@gmail.com

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

Zimbabwe: P.O. Box 594, Mutare, Zimbabwe Phone: +263 773 920 614

E-mail: zimbabwe@ucg.org

PACIFIC REGION

Australia and all other South Pacific regions not listed: United Church of God—Australia

GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia Phone: 07 55 202 111 Free call: 1800 356 202

Fax: 07 55 202 122 Website: ucg.org.au E-mail: info@ucg.org.au

New Zealand: United Church of God, P.O. Box 22, Shortland St., Auckland 1140, New Zealand

Phone: Toll-free 0508-463-763 Website: ucg.org.nz E-mail: info@ucg.org.nz

Tonga: United Church of God—Tonga, P.O. Box 518, Nuku'alofa, Tonga

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All except Philippines and Singapore: United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH

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Philippines: P.O. Box 1474, Makati CPO, 1254 Makati City, Philippines Phone: +63 (2) 804-4444

Cell/text: +63 918-904-4444 Website: ucg.org.ph E-mail: info@ucg.org.ph

Singapore: United Church of God, GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia

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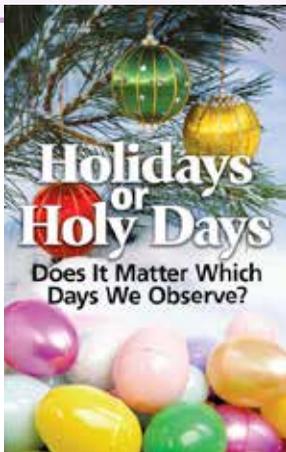
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How Much Do You Know About *the Real Easter Story?*

How much do you know about the origin of Easter and its popular customs? Take the following short quiz to assess your knowledge!

- 1 **TRUE** Easter didn't originate with Jesus Christ's resurrection, but had been celebrated for many centuries prior.
 FALSE
- 2 **TRUE** Rabbits and eggs have nothing to do with Christ's resurrection, but are holdovers from ancient spring fertility celebrations.
 FALSE
- 3 **TRUE** Easter gets its name from an ancient fertility goddess.
 FALSE
- 4 **TRUE** Pagans celebrated the supposed resurrection of their false gods in the springtime many centuries before Jesus Christ.
 FALSE
- 5 **TRUE** The word *Easter* appears only once in the King James Bible—and that one time is a mistranslation of the Greek word for *Passover*.
 FALSE
- 6 **TRUE** Neither the apostles nor other members of the early Church celebrated Easter.
 FALSE
- 7 **TRUE** Celebrations such as Easter are condemned in the Bible.
 FALSE



The correct answer to all of the above questions is *true*—and you can verify most of these answers with a quick look through several good encyclopedias. Or, for an in-depth look at the real Easter story as revealed by history and the Bible, request your free copy of our study guide *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*

Too many people go through life thinking they are honoring Jesus Christ through popular celebrations such as Easter. But before you celebrate Easter again, why not consider what Jesus Himself thinks about this holiday? As a serious Christian, don't you think it's time you considered His point of view?

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