



BEYOND TODAY

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What Makes a Nation Great?



Scott Ashley
Managing editor

I love my country. But that doesn't mean I'm not embarrassed by it at times.

Recent years have been particularly shameful as the U.S. government has heavy-handedly tried to force other nations to change their laws to accept and even promote the homosexual and transgender agenda. American embassies and diplomats overseas were co-opted and used as pawns to advance an anti-biblical, ungodly agenda—essentially forcing our own sin in this regard on others who wanted no part of it.

Meanwhile, the full weight of the federal government was brought to bear against U.S. schools that refused to open up restrooms, dressing rooms and locker rooms to confused boys who thought they were girls and girls who thought they were boys. This was thankfully reversed recently.

On the religious freedom front, no wedding photographer, cake baker, florist or wedding-venue operator was safe from being sued out of business for exercising their constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion, freedom of association and freedom of expression by declining to participate in homosexual weddings. Government officials and agencies were often eager participants in these anti-freedom, anti-religious onslaughts against American citizens.

The country I grew up in is getting harder and harder to recognize. More and more I can identify with the biblical prophet Jeremiah, called “the weeping prophet” because he shed tears over the sins and deplorable spiritual condition of his nation and the consequences of rejecting God.

How does God view such things? This is the perspective we provide in each issue of *Beyond Today* magazine and each *Beyond Today* television program. Often these views—like those expressed above—are not politically correct. And we get our share of cancellations and hate mail as a result. But we must remain more concerned with what *God* thinks than what people think (Ephesians 6:6).

What would He say about the state of the nation?

“*Godliness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people,*” wrote Solomon under God’s inspiration (Proverbs 14:34, New Living Translation, emphasis added throughout).

“We have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God . . . we have become too self-sufficient . . . , too proud to pray to the God that made us.”

—Abraham Lincoln



America has been exalted and blessed beyond measure, for reasons explained in the lead article in this issue. But can America remain great? Several chapters in the Bible, notably Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26, describe the blessings that come on a nation for obedience to God and the curses that result from disobedience.

There was a time when national leaders were familiar with God’s Word and understood this. For example, in March 1863 U.S. President Abraham Lincoln issued a “Proclamation Appointing a National Fast Day” in which he urged the nation to repent and turn to God.

His words are strikingly appropriate for our day: “We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown. *But we have forgotten God . . .*

“We have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, *we have become too self-sufficient . . . , too proud to pray to the God that made us.* It behooves us, then, *to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.*”

President Lincoln felt a deep responsibility to declare God’s truth to his country. So do we at *Beyond Today*. For that reason we look beneath the surface to see the news behind the news—the factors that are profoundly affecting the nations of the world.

God’s inspired Word contains many prophecies describing the direction the world is headed and why. Most revolve around the basic truth mentioned above—“*Godliness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.*”

Will America remain great? Look around you. Read the articles in this issue and ask how these things apply to you. And ponder Abraham Lincoln’s warning to humble ourselves, confess our sins and pray for forgiveness—*before it’s too late.* **BT**

Scott Ashley



WILL AMERICA REMAIN GREAT?

The campaign slogan “Make America Great Again” catapulted candidate Donald Trump into the world’s most powerful office. Yet, though diminished in recent years, America is already great in important respects—but for how long?

by Darris McNeely

When Donald Trump in his U.S. presidential campaign issued the call to “make America great again,” it would have been more accurate to say “make America as great as it was”—since the country has not yet actually ceased to be great.

By every measure of modern superpower status the United States of America is a great nation. America is unrivaled as the world’s sole superpower. It has the world’s largest economy. The American military can project its power anywhere in the world to influence policy, wage war and aid in humanitarian relief. Politically, the world still looks to America for leadership in defending freedom, promoting humanitarian values and opposing terror and tyranny.

It’s vital that we understand the Source of this national greatness. America is a great nation not due to its own efforts, but *because God made it great*—as part of the unfolding of His plan for mankind through the ages.

America is great not because of any innate goodness of its people, but because it inherited the blessings God made long ago to a man named Abraham. This biblical patriarch, a pioneer of faith in God, was given a promise for his descendants of national blessing, power and prestige, along with a spiritual promise

fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of his preeminent descendant Jesus Christ. Both promises are still alive and working in today’s world.

America, blessed with the modern manifestation of the physical dimension of these promises, will remain great as long as God wants America to remain great. The fate of this powerful nation, called by some “the last best hope for mankind,” is entirely in God’s provenance. No president, current or future, determines the ultimate destiny of the United States. America’s future is in the hand of God.

Understand this and you understand a fundamental reality behind world affairs.

Realize this, too: When America is no longer the world power that it now it is, we will live in a very different world. When God removes His blessing and protection from this land, the world will enter a darker and more dangerous time. We who produce this magazine love America and pray for its president and other leaders. But we understand the nation’s spiritual condition. And we know that unless there is a huge change, America’s future will not be great—but instead a great tragedy.

A critical moment

The world was stunned in last year’s U.S. presidential

election. Counter to all predictions, Donald Trump won election over a candidate many thought would easily defeat him. His inaugural address then promised a new beginning for America, as he vowed to make good on all his promises to repair the economy, rebuild infrastructure and, in his mind, restore America to the greatness it once held. President Trump began a four-year term that could turn out to be one of the most decisive in American history.

America and the world stand at a critical juncture. Change is sweeping across the nations, arousing uncertainty and fear. Radical Islamic terrorism threatens the current geopolitical order as nations react to the impact of ISIS, al-Qaeda and massive immigration spawned by war in the Middle East. Vast cultural changes undermine traditional moral teachings about family, sexuality and gender. All of this has created a seismic shock wave rolling through society with devastating impact.

What should you understand at this critical moment in human experience? And what steps should you be taking to not just understand but to change your life to be prepared for the time when America is no longer great?

Ancient origins and prophecies of future greatness

Let's look at the beginning of America's story, starting with—in no doubt a surprise to many—Abraham in ancient Mesopotamia. At a time when men did not travel beyond their immediate environs nor held dreams of a life beyond what birth bequeathed, this man heeded God's command to leave his home and ventured into a new land and a new life.

What steps should you be taking to not just understand but to change your life to be prepared for the time when America is no longer great?

In Genesis 12 this singular man of faith, at first called Abram, obeyed the command of God, with God having told him: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-3).

Abram obeyed God, and the story was underway. God later changed his name from Abram ("exalted father") to Abraham ("father of many"). To his son Isaac and grandson Jacob, God repeated and expanded the promise. Abraham's descendants would be a vast innumerable grouping of peoples. They would possess the gates of their enemies, a promise of modern global power beyond the immediate land of promise and stretching into the modern world. When Jacob laid his hands on the two sons of his son Joseph, conferring both his name (Israel) and the physical promises of a single great nation and a company of nations (compare Genesis 35:9-11; 48:8-19), the stage was set for the future.

None of these promises were fulfilled in the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah. While they had some periods of regional strength under leaders like David and Solomon, they

came nowhere near to fulfilling the national greatness and power God promised to Abraham and repeated to Isaac and Jacob. If God was faithful to His promises, we have to look elsewhere and to a different time to see how these came to pass.

God's promises fulfilled

Through this thread of promise and blessing God gives us the foundation to understanding the modern world and the role of America and the English-speaking nations in shaping the events of our time. While these promises were expanded and repeated to Abraham's descendants, it is in Jacob's blessing to Joseph that we have the key sign for the modern fulfillment of these promises.

In Genesis 49 Joseph is described in the last days as a "fruitful bough by a well" whose "branches run over the wall" (verse 22)—a nation that would spread far beyond its beginnings as a vine extends its branches outward in all directions. The prophecy describes Joseph's descendants contending with attacks by enemies who are stirred against his dominant role, but Joseph is made strong "by the Mighty God of Jacob" (verses 23-24).

God's help is promised along with the "blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb" (verse 25). Joseph, the one separated from his brothers, is shown to possess incredible blessings of his fathers. These blessings are vast, nearly unlimited, "to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills" (verse 26).

Jacob's prophecy points to "the last days" (verse 1). When we look at the modern world only one nation, or grouping of nations, fits this description. It is not the Jewish people, though they are Israelites too. Rather, the description fits only America and the major English-speaking nations who share a common ancestry. By any standard of measurement, Great Britain and then America sprang to the front of the pack of nations and have led the world during the last two and half centuries. The role of the English-speaking nations during this period has been to lead the peoples of the world along an ascending path into what the great British Prime Minister Winston Churchill called "the broad sunlit uplands."

Life-saving and life-enhancing advances in science, medicine, agriculture, economics and law have been nurtured in the lands inhabited by the English-speaking nations. More Nobel prizes, beneficial patents and technological advancement have sprung from these nations than from any other group in history. Other nations can pursue their destiny free from tyranny, and many people are alive today, because of the vast blessings given to the English-speaking nations by the God of Abraham.

You can dismiss this truth if you like. But you would be denying the clear evidence readily seen by an honest study of historical fact. Author Andrew Roberts' 2006 magisterial work *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples Since 1900* chronicles this story with unmistakable detail. He opens his book with this quote from Professor Deepak Lal, a British economist who was born in India: "If one reflected on the most important events of the last millennium compared with the first, the ascent of the English-speaking peoples to predominance in the

world surely ranked highest” (p. 1).

In Roberts’ view “the English-speaking peoples would remain the last, best hope for Mankind. The beliefs that they brought into the twentieth century largely actuate them yet; their values are still the best available in a troubled world; the institutions that made them great continue to inspire them today. Indeed, the beliefs, values and institutions of the English-speaking peoples are presently on the march” (p. 2).

Values rooted in God’s Word

The traditional values of the English-speaking nations are rooted in the Bible. It is no coincidence that the translation of the Bible into English and its propagation around the world by first Great Britain and then America was a key factor in promoting the values that have made these nations great.

In 1848 British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston justified government action by saying, “I hold that the real policy of England is to be the champion of justice and right . . . not becoming the Quixote of the world [a reference to the literary figure Don Quixote fighting imaginary enemies], but giving the weight of her moral sanction and support wherever she thinks justice is, and wherever she thinks that wrong has been done” (quoted by Roberts, p. 6).

Palmerston’s words still drive American policy among today’s nations. The 2003 invasion of Iraq to liberate the nation from the dictatorial rule of Saddam Hussein and end his support of terrorism can be traced to this sentiment. American lives and resources have been committed to the cause of freedom and liberation for generations.

These values, policies and virtues that have made America great did not come from human reason, ancient philosophy or Enlightenment values. They were first revealed in Scripture. The great law given through Moses to the nation of Israel embodied personal freedom, economic freedom and responsibility, and moral and spiritual laws that have been the true foundation for the English-speaking nations.

A sculpture of Moses with the tablets of the divine law on the frieze atop the east side of the U.S. Supreme Court building does more than acknowledge the monumental role of a great lawgiver. It stands as a stark warning to America today that it must acknowledge its biblical foundation and carry on in its covenant obligation to obey God’s Ten Commandments. The same God who gave national promises to Abraham revealed this law to Abraham’s descendants through Moses. Failure to live by God’s law is at the heart of America’s growing problems that threaten its very survival!

Four great assaults—and the biggest threat

Roberts’ book about the English-speaking nations shows four assaults since 1900 that sought to remove their great-power status. The first two were the two World Wars of the 20th century, both led by a militaristic Germany. The third was the effort by the former Soviet Union to create a global communist state based on Marxist-Leninist doctrine. All three failed largely due to the role played by America.

The fourth assault is ongoing today. It is the effort by radical Islamic fundamentalism to overturn the “great Satan” of America and Western culture along with it. This terrorist threat accomplished something none of the three previous

assaults did—a direct attack on the American mainland on Sept. 11, 2001, killing nearly 3,000 people.

An American-led invasion of Afghanistan immediately after that attack and subsequent actions have not ended this decades-long scourge. Today the war on terror continues. Radical Islamic terrorism is considered by some to be America’s greatest threat, especially given the possibility of Iran developing nuclear weapons. And well it might be, but for another reason which most do not understand.

The spiritual blindness and lack of will by far too many in America to identify the mortal threat posed from radical Islam, uncontrolled immigration and, above all, moral sin is a deadly cancer spread throughout the body, rendering it incapable of discerning right from wrong and discerning the path out of the wilderness. The country has very little understanding or recognition of how it came to be great—by the hand of God. Having essentially abandoned a firm, biblically based moral center, most Americans no longer give serious consideration to the source of their great blessings.

America’s leading role in question

When President Trump vows to “make America great again,” he has in mind returning the nation to its preeminent post–World War II role of economic and political power. His emphasis is on jobs and the American economy, what he has called an “America first” approach. His stated desire is to rebuild American military forces, and his first budget has added more than \$50 billion to accomplish this goal.

President Trump has also called on Europe to shoulder more of the burden in its own defense. His comments about the NATO alliance and the European Union have left many in Europe wondering where American policy toward that critical part of the world is headed. Stability in Europe is a valuable commodity. The World Wars of the 20th century started there. Keeping the peace of that region is in the world’s best interest.

In question also is America’s position in Asia. China’s growing role is causing its neighbors to reexamine their historic relationships with each other and America. The Philippines, long an American ally in the region, has indicated it may shift to a closer relationship with China. China’s role in Asian stability is critical, given the tensions with Japan and the nuclear capabilities of North Korea.

America’s role in both Europe and Asia is critical to the balance of power and peace in today’s world. America’s role in both regions has been critical to maintaining world order and peace since the end of World War II in 1945. If American influence in these two regions continues to diminish as it did during the Obama administration, the world will be facing historic change. Without the stabilizing influence of America in these regions, there will be no peace.

With the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, which had led Roberts’ third-listed assault on the English-speaking peoples, many thought that history as it was had ended. It was imagined that conflict and war could ease and a liberal, enlightened democratic world order could be created, with America leading this continual imperium.

Subsequent events in Asia, Europe and the Middle East, however, have proved this geopolitical theory wrong. As so often happens in the progression of history, power vacuums

lead to great turmoil, with the darker aspect of human nature coming to the fore. It could lead to a desire for a strong leader to emerge and restore order to a world descending into chaos.

The question on the table right now is this: Does America have the strategic will to remain the world's stabilizing influence it has been for more than 70 years? We have not really delved into the Middle East in this article, but the continuing instability in that region will impact all other nations—and, again, America's role has been large and indispensable to maintaining order. You cannot ignore or overestimate the importance of America to the world.

America right now is still a great nation. But it suffers from great internal problems that, if not dealt with, will lead to it having neither the character nor the will to exercise its leadership role in the world. America must face the truth that it has forgotten and ignored the God who made it great in wealth, power, status and influence, placing the nation in grave peril (compare Deuteronomy 8:11-20). God made America great, and only He will alter its historic role. It's time for an honest assessment and examination of this problem.

Again, it's only when *God* decides America's leading role on the world stage is over that it will be over. No president or political party will be able to turn the tide of spiritual history that is in the hands of the God of Abraham. What does this mean?

With moral plummet, judgment looms

More than 40 years ago America began a precipitous slide from its long-established moral center by removing God from the public square. In 1962 the Supreme Court outlawed prayer in public schools. The next year the court banned Bible readings in public schools as well.

Then followed the rest of the 60s—a decade of social upheaval and sexual revolution. Then the Court again made a landmark ruling, legalizing abortion—the murder of the unborn—in 1973. Since then almost 60 million abortions have been carried out in the country, with an entire generation of children denied the right to life.

In 2015 the Supreme Court recognized same-sex marriage as legitimate. Through these court rulings America has removed God from public education, from the womb and from the sacred institution of marriage. Step by step the nation has thumbed its nose at God and slouched toward the spiritual condition of biblical Sodom and Gomorrah.

How much more must happen before God removes His protective hand over America and lets the tide of history return with a vengeance? The words of the biblical prophet Hosea accurately describe the English-speaking nations today:

“Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel, for the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: “There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed.

“Therefore the land will mourn . . . My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge . . . The more they increased, the more they sinned against Me . . . They set their heart on their iniquity . . . So I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their deeds” (Hosea 4:1-9). Just as God punished ancient Israel for its sins, He will punish its modern descendants for their persistent disobedience.

Proof of God and His promises to greatly bless all nations

History bears witness that America and the English-speaking nations have been a blessing in the modern world. Their scientific advancements, democratic ideals and generosity have made life better for many who have suffered from disease, human misrule and simply because of where and when they were born.

It's easy to dismiss the plight of the human condition with disbelief and to deny the existence of God. But the same God whom many deny reveals Himself as the God who blessed Abraham's descendants with unparalleled physical and spiritual blessings. His existence is demonstrated in the fact that America is great not because of what Americans themselves have done, but because God has blessed the nation and its people.

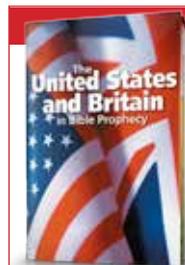
Today it's fashionable to blame America for many of the world's problems and to want to see America taken down a notch. And America certainly has not been a perfect example in all its dealings. But as Roberts says in his book, it has been a “most decent, honest, generous, fair-minded and self-sacrificing imperium” (p. 648). When measured against the yardstick of world history, this is obviously true. And the fact that America exists today should be seen as a sign from God that He intends to extend His promise of spiritual and physical blessings to all nations and peoples through Jesus Christ.

Our world today is cut off from the true knowledge of the God of Abraham. This is why we see the untold suffering of people in war, famine, pestilence, poverty and spiritual deception. Yet God has not condemned the world's people to a future without hope. The only true hope this world has of experiencing the kind of blessings promised to Abraham's descendants—which in total far exceed what America has thus far experienced—is through the promise of Jesus Christ's return as King of the coming Kingdom of God.

America, the single greatest nation ever, is living proof of God's promise and intent to lift all nations and peoples to an exalted position of peace and prosperity. God will reverse mankind's chaotic and war-torn history and create a paradise on earth under the righteous rule of Jesus Christ. The message of *Beyond Today* is a clear call to understand today's world in considering what God is doing to guide the course of history to His prophesied conclusion.

America is yet a great nation, and all mankind has benefited from God's commitment to His promise to the man we know from the Bible named Abraham.

The only way for America to remain great is through a return to God and His laws. While the nation may not make that correction, *you can*. We live in a critical time and moment. Are you willing to hear God's warning and turn to Him to change your life? **BT**



LEARN MORE

How did Britain and the United States rise from a tiny island nation and a handful of coast-hugging colonies to become the most dominant powers in world history? Learn the astounding truth in our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

BTmagazine.org/booklets

How to Make the World GREAT AGAIN

The world was once a paradise. But that paradise was dashed, and humanity has suffered ever since. Thankfully, God has a plan to make the world great again—and you can have a part!

by Peter Eddington

U.S. President Donald Trump ran for office with the stated intention to, in the words of his campaign slogan, “*make America great again!*” He’s caught quite a bit of criticism for putting his country first.

Of course, *all countries wish to be great*. And all national leaders should do their best to ensure that their countries are the greatest they can be. Who doesn’t want their nation to be successful, prosperous and great?

Prosperity and greatness

Unquestionably, the United States of America is the most powerful nation militarily, and the most affluent economically, that the world has ever seen. No wonder so many immigrants push through the country’s borders, legally or illegally, for a chance at a better life.

In general, those in the English-speaking nations are better off in many ways than most of the world’s population. Many blessings have been showered on the United States, Canada, Britain, Australia and New Zealand. But these nations are also seeing a great moral decline—with the shunning of God and biblical values in the public arena—which does not bode well for their future.

Sadly, as we look at humanity in general we see gut-wrenching poverty, hunger, violence, hatred, war and disease. So we ask, broadening focus beyond America—which many would say is already great, relatively speaking—what would it take to make *the rest of the world* great? Is it remotely possible to make the *whole world* great?

Can social media make it happen? Facebook boasts a page titled “Make the World Great Again.” Its mission is “2 unite as 1 big happy family in hopes of making our lives meaningful again!”

Of course, I ask this in jest. It’s going to take far more than a mere social media posting, Facebook page or widespread media campaign to bring about such change.

However, the solution is actually quite straightforward and not all that complicated.

Jumping on the bandwagon

Since President Trump’s bold proclamation about making America great again, a lot of people have jumped on the bandwagon and used the phrase towards making their own lives great. Other nations and countries are doing the same.

For example, an Associated Press report early this year stated: “Hungary’s prime minister says there is an opportunity for the European Union to adopt reforms that will ‘*make Europe great again.*’ Prime Minister Viktor Orban said at a conference in Brussels . . . that the EU should abandon its federalist aims because only strong member states can guarantee the bloc’s success” (“Hungary Leader Orban Says It’s Time to Take Trump Seriously,” Jan. 26, 2017).

It’s become quite a popular catchphrase! Everyone wants their country, their continent, to be great. It’s interesting that the word “*again*” is often added. This presupposes that conditions in the nation or the world were great sometime before.

Can we go back to a period in history when the world was



all names. None attacked him, or bit off his head, or clawed open his face. *It was paradise!*

Eden has come to represent a kind of *paradise* or perfect environment to us. Wouldn't we all like to live in paradise? Adam and Eve were placed in a luxuriant garden. In the beginning human beings were at peace with nature—not fearing bad weather or wild animals. This was a perfect setting to prepare human beings for their ultimate destiny in the family of God.

But what became of it?

Something happened in that garden that forever changed the course of human history! And that something wasn't pretty. It was terribly ugly.

Two trees in the garden

As prelude we are told that “out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The *tree of life* was also in the midst of the garden, and the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*” (Genesis 2:9, emphasis added throughout).

Among the trees of the garden were two that were especially notable—the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And God told them not to eat of the latter. Understanding the importance of these trees is critical to seeing how the world can be made great again—like the Garden of Eden once more!

How do we get back to paradise? It all has to do with the story of the two trees!

Sadly, Adam and Eve decided they would figure out for themselves what was right and wrong. Shunning God's instructions, they took for themselves the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which was forbidden to them (verses 16-17; 3:1-19).

“Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the *tree of life*, and eat, and live forever’—therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life” (verses 22-24).

Everything suddenly went horribly wrong when Adam and Eve disobeyed

God and sinned—and the problems didn't end with them.

Choices have consequences

As we understand from these and later scriptures, the way of disobedience to God became embedded in their children and their grandchildren—*all the way down to you and me today!*

The gravity of humanity's sin led to the needed sacrifice of our Lord and Savior in order for us all to regain any hope of the original intent of the Garden of Eden with the tree of life—which is eternal life in the family of God.

Now, ever since that fateful time, our world has been cut off from sufficiently full knowledge of God and His plan for us. Humankind no longer has direct access to that tree or to God. We can see the results of that all around us.

The tree of life is introduced into the biblical narrative in the first chapters of Genesis, and we see it again in the final book of Revelation. Amazingly, what we see in between these two books, the rest of the Bible, is the story of humanity living by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—and oh, how it shows that!

Our world today

We obviously don't have the Garden of Eden any longer. What is our current situation?

Sadly, we see the results of humankind taking from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—deciding for ourselves what is right and what is wrong—instead of having access to the tree of life.

The majority of humanity lives in poverty, is ravaged by social unrest and war, is hungry, is poorly clothed, and does not have access to clean drinking water. Corrupt governments and political officials keep their subjects pushed to the limits of abject poverty. The wealth and freedoms of the major English-speaking nations and other Western countries are the exception, not the rule.

Jesus Christ told us it would be like this. In fact, He said that without God's intervention *we would all eventually destroy ourselves*. Notice this prophecy He gave shortly before His crucifixion and resurrection:

“Now as He [Jesus] sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these

great? When all was good? When all was prosperous? When there was no war? When there was plenty of food for all? When the whole earth was peaceful?

We haven't experienced it in our lifetimes, or those of our parents, or grandparents, yet at one time the world was great! But we have to go as far back in human history as we can to learn of this period.

The Garden of Eden: when the world was great

What was God's original intent for our planet? We're told that it was created “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Everything was perfect and worked together in harmony. The trees were pleasant to the sight and good for food.

Do you ever wonder what the Garden of Eden was like? Have you imagined Adam and Eve living in an idyllic setting—with a perfect climate, to the point that not even clothes were needed for humankind to be comfortably warm. And how about all those magnificent animals dwelling in perfect peace with Adam? God even brought the animals to Adam and asked him to give them

things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

"And Jesus answered and said to them: 'Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name . . . and will deceive many [thus false religion, even false Christianity]. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences [or disease epidemics], and earthquakes in various places. All these are the *beginning* of sorrows'" (Matthew 24:3-8).

Jesus warned that these are *only the beginning!* We are told that pestilence, war, hunger and false religion will permeate the world until Jesus Christ finally returns. And what we see in our world today is only "the beginning of sorrows." Conditions will grow far, far worse before they get better!

As Jesus foretold almost 2,000 years ago, *we are headed down a terrible path of destruction.*

Failed states

The first and absolutely essential task of any government is to establish a public order based on the rule of law that enables people to live in peace and security. Those countries that do not establish order have in recent times been referred to as "failed states."

A failed state has several attributes: central government being so weak or ineffective that it has little practical control over much of its territory; failure to provide public services; widespread corruption and criminality; refugees and involuntary movement of populations; and sharp economic decline.

The population living in failed states represents a significant swath of our world's population. It's quite clear that while many of the Western nations of our world are considered comparatively "great," billions of others definitely do not live in great circumstances. In fact, many live in subhuman conditions—a far cry from the original intent of the Garden of Eden!

The four horsemen of the Apocalypse

As we look more at our current world situation, note a parallel account to Jesus' prophecies of Matthew 24 in Revelation 6 with the infamous "four horsemen of the Apocalypse." The first two represent false religions and widespread war. The next two are described beginning in verse 5:

"When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, 'Come and see.' So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, 'A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.'" This horse represents famine and shortages, with the prices of basic needs and luxuries skyrocketing.

"When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, 'Come and see.' So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades [the grave] followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of

the earth" (Revelation 6:5-8). This horse represents disease epidemics (that so often follow war and famine) along with other disasters.

What Jesus told His disciples, and what we see prophesied in the book of Revelation, is that there is coming a time when sorrows will increase and the horsemen of famine and plague will ride with even greater terror. War and false religion will permeate our globe. At this point the nations of this world will be looking not for greatness, but for just the basics of human survival!

It seems rather bleak, then, for much of humanity today and for the whole world in the not-so-distant future. So we must ask: Will paradise ever be restored? Just how can the world be made great again?

Do what God says and be blessed

Alexis de Tocqueville was a French diplomat, political scientist and historian. He is well known for his work *Democracy in America*, first published in two volumes (in 1835 and 1840). He traveled to America in the 1830s to discover the reasons for the incredible success of this new nation, and he stated the following in his book:

"Upon my arrival in the United States the *religious* aspect

Every nation and every person wants to be **great**. But it's not going to happen by fanciful wishing. It can only come from God

of the country was the first thing that struck my attention; and the longer I stayed there, the more I perceived the great political consequences resulting from this new state of things . . . Not until I went into the *churches* of America and heard her pulpits aflame with *righteousness* did I understand the secret of her genius and power . . . The safeguard of morality is *religion*, and morality is the best security of law as well as the surest pledge of freedom" (emphasis added).

So De Tocqueville saw the connection between religion, security, morality, freedom and law. Here is where it leads us, and it's quite simple: *All nations must follow the Creator's instruction manual, and they must have the tree of life offered to them.*

In Revelation 2:7 Jesus states: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who *overcomes* I will give to eat from the *tree of life*, which is in the midst of the *Paradise of God.*"

We see here that the tree of life is what brings us back to paradise. Yet notice—it requires *overcoming*. But overcoming what?

We read more about this in the last chapter printed in your Bible. Look there and see. This concerns the time of the new heaven and new earth introduced in chapter 21, when the heavenly city, New Jerusalem, will descend to the earth with God the Father to dwell with us.

Revelation 22:2 states: "In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the *tree of life*, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the *healing of the nations.*"

So the tree of life is what will lead to humanity being healed

and our world turned into paradise again. It requires this connection to God. But there is a major requirement, and again it's about *overcoming*.

Verse 22 tells us: "Blessed are those who *do His commandments*, that they may have the right to the *tree of life*, and may enter through the gates into the city."

Here we see that access to the tree of life requires *obedience to the commandments of God*. It requires putting sin out of one's life and overcoming our own selfish desires. And the tree of life enables us to have a relationship with God, His Spirit joining to our human spirit—leading eventually to our eternal life as spirit beings ourselves (Romans 8:11-30; 1 Corinthians 15:42-53).

How to be a great nation

What makes a nation great? Look at these words from Deuteronomy 4 that Moses spoke to the Israelites in the wilderness before they crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land. These words tell us how to be a *great people*, how to be a *great nation*:

"Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that *you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God* which I command you . . . Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess.

"Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely *this great nation* is a wise and understanding people.' For what *great nation* is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what *great nation* is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are *in all this law* which I set before you this day?" (verses 1-8).

Did you notice how many times "great nation" is mentioned in that passage?

Following God is what makes a nation great. Keeping His laws and righteous judgments is what makes a great nation. A nation that "has God so near to it" will be awesome! And by extension, this is how to make the world great again! *Following God* is what will make the world great again! That will happen when Jesus Christ returns to establish the Kingdom of God on earth to rule the nations.

God's Kingdom will not be a failed state. It will be the most successful government ever seen. It will be strong and effective, it will control its territory, it will provide the best of public services, there will be no governmental corruption, refugees will no longer flee its borders, and the economy will burgeon!

It takes much more than mere knowledge, however, to produce lasting peace and cooperation. A *spiritual change* in people is necessary. It will be that spiritual change in the people that will inspire entire nations to want to emulate it. It's a change of spirit, a change of heart. It's having God near. It's having access to the tree of life and not deciding for oneself what is right and what is wrong.

A warning to you and me

But now, notice the next verse in Deuteronomy 4, because in it is a warning for you and me: "Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life . . ." (verse 9). We must take heed and never forget what we have seen and what we have been given. Don't depart from the truth of God all the days of your life.

Those truly called by God the Father, who become converted and filled with His Spirit, and who live a life of obedience to His law, have been given the tools necessary to become great in God's family. We have received the promise of the gift of eternal life. Spiritually we are already rich—no matter our economic, social or health circumstances. Spiritually we are not in poverty, confusion, unhappiness or strife. And one day this will extend to everyone who has ever lived.

It seems that every nation, every people, and every person wants to be great again. You can do an Internet search for almost any country and see the people's wish to be great again. But it's not going to come about because of some fanciful wish. It's only going to come from God, and only by our being led to obey His commandments and laws. That's how, as we read in Deuteronomy 4:6, "*this great nation is a wise and understanding people.*"

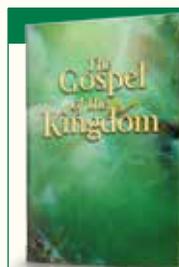
Back to the tree of life

The world at one time was created perfectly, with the tree of life existing in the Garden of Eden. But because of the sins of Adam and Eve and every person since, our world today is barred from access to that tree, and men and women have decided to determine for themselves what they think is right and what is wrong, still in effect taking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

But very soon Jesus Christ will return and give access to the tree of life once again to all of humankind—and this will truly allow all nations and all peoples to be great. But it requires a change of world government, overcoming sin and giving obedience to the law of God.

Yes, there is a definite plan for the ideals of Eden to be brought back, to make the world great again. Sadly, man has been on a tragic ride these past 6,000 years since Adam and Eve first sinned. And we have all followed suit. We're all to blame! But God intends to rescue us.

Our dream of a utopian, almost impossibly ideal world will come true in His time—soon. Godly paradise will be restored. This is how the world will be made great again. It's all about God's intervention, helping us to reject the choice man made between the two trees in the Garden of Eden and to instead make the right choice! 



LEARN MORE

The Bible begins and ends with a picture of paradise. The gospel—the good news—that Jesus Christ brought was about how that paradise will be reestablished, and how we can be a part of it. To learn more, download or request our free study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

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North Korea a bigger threat than many imagine

North Korea is the perennial pariah of the Far East, the subject of continuous sanctions and international ire. Its supreme leader, Kim Jong-un, grandson of modern North Korea's founder Kim Il-sung, is known for his outrageous and inflammatory public threats toward neighbors Japan and South Korea and toward its international arch-nemesis, the United States.

Popular response to North Korea and its leader is typically characterized by mockery and disregard, as with U.S. Senator John McCain's recent dismissal of Kim Jong-un as a "crazy fat kid." Yet McCain further called him extreme and irrational and a person who could start a world war, China being the only one who can control him—and that China had better do so or face economic penalties (*Daily Mail*, March 29, 2017).

Given the lack of gravity with which the West often regards North Korea, public perception is that the



rogue state poses no real threat. But the reality is that the unpredictability and instability of North Korea's government, combined with its formidable military manpower and arsenal, means that any threat must

be treated as real and dangerous.

"Thanks to one of the largest standing armies on the planet—with over 1.2 million men under arms and another 7.7 million in reserve—and with chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons carried by over 1,000 missiles, Pyongyang has the capability to kill millions of people and start a conflict that could quickly escalate into the next global catastrophe" (Harry Kazianis, "After North Korea Attacks: An Ominous Asian Future Imagined," *The Week*, March 31, 2017).

This grim picture of a possibly horrific future serves as a needed reminder that, apart from God's sustaining mercy, the world stands on a knife's edge, and immense destruction is possible at any time. Thankfully God has a plan for mankind that does not involve mutually assured destruction and the end of the world. Get to know the wonderful future you have in God's Kingdom and His plan to save mankind from itself in our free study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. (Sources: *Daily Mail*, UPI, *The Week*.)

Germany struggles to police terror suspects

After being hit with several small yet high-impact terror plots in the past couple of years, Germany is trying desperately to control its imported and home-grown terrorist threats. A multitude of factors makes isolating threats and controlling them incredibly difficult, however. Even when German intelligence and law enforcement identifies individuals with terrorist links and inclinations, a lack of corroborating evidence means the state often cannot act to prevent future incidents.

Law-enforcement officers are aware of the need to strike a balance between prudence in surveillance and overreach: "Because the objective justification for such decisions is often so difficult to identify, police officers and domestic intelligence agents are calling for clear guidelines on how classifications are to be made and what measures follow from those classifications. 'We urgently need a nationwide approach,' says a source at the Office for the Protection of the Constitution.

Germany's experiences are not unique. The rest of the European Union, the United Kingdom and the United States all struggle with tracking, classifying and surveilling individuals suspected of extremist ties or behavior.

We may not see intricately planned, large-scale terror attacks like that of Sept. 11, 2001, but the newer brand of low-tech, impromptu attacks involving knives, vehicles and improvised weaponry in crowded urban spaces may prove to be even more effective at spreading fear and disrupting everyday life in the West.

"The potential threats of today, it seems, are not generally college-educated attackers like the 9/11 perpetrators in Mohammed Atta's circle, who spent years planning the attacks on New York and Washington. For today's IS- [or ISIS-] inspired attackers, a driver's license, a knife or an ax are sufficient" (ibid.). As citizens demand protection, law-enforcement and intelligence agencies will need to adopt new methods to challenge the ever-changing face of terror. (Source: *Der Spiegel*.)

'Otherwise nobody has a clue'" ("Targeting Terrorists: Germany's Dilemma in Dealing with Islamist Threats," *Der Spiegel*, March 23, 2017).

Assad believes some refugees are "definitely" terrorists

In America there's much contention about accepting refugees from the Syrian Civil War and other evils in the Middle East. Immigration has become another hot topic for political banter. Regardless of the debate, there is certainly a risk to bringing strangers in. And it doesn't matter how many background checks are conducted—some with evil intent will slip through the cracks. Of course, a more stringent vetting process would catch more dangerous people than a loose process does.

Yahoo News recently posted an exclusive interview with the president of Syria, Bashar al-Assad. He said there are terrorists coming into Western countries among the refugees.

In the exclusive interview at the presidential office

in Damascus, Assad said President Trump's freeze on admitting refugees from his country—part of an executive order that has drawn widespread protests and is being challenged in federal court—"is an American issue" on which he would not take sides. But asked if some of those who fled are "aligned with terrorists," Assad quickly replied, "Definitely" (Michael Isikoff, "Exclusive: Syria's Assad Tells Yahoo News Some Refugees Are 'Definitely' Terrorists," Feb. 9, 2017).

The embattled Assad is not a man to be trusted in all such matters, but in this case he's right. It's false to believe that every person claiming to be a refugee is legitimate. We can see from the news coming out of England and Europe



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad

that it just isn't true. Terrorists can easily use the cloak of "refugee" to infiltrate Western nations.

Assad also noted that "you don't need a significant number to commit atrocities" (ibid.). He followed up by saying that the 9/11 attacks were conducted by just a few men.

Though throwing open national doors to any and all refugees may seem humanitarian on the surface, governments must protect their own citizens too. We all have a responsibility not to just foreigners but to our neighbors and our own families. This should not be

an excuse against helping where we are able to. But we must also guard against those who would do harm. (Source: Yahoo News.)

Polygamy still illegal—but for how long?

In Salt Lake City this year, protesters took to their capitol to speak out against the bigamy laws in Utah. The U.S. Supreme Court recently denied hearing a case that left the state's current laws untouched. Polygamy still remains illegal, and those involved in polygamous relationships are in violation of those laws.

"I am not a criminal," proclaimed Joe Darger, a Utah man who has three wives and helped organize the rally. "If you commit adultery, that's not a felony. It's only a crime when you have a family and you pretend to be married" (quoted by Michelle Price, "Polygamous Families Protest Bigamy Law at Utah Capitol," Associated Press, Feb. 10, 2017).

Though God did not specifically prohibit polygamy in the Old Testament period, this was not His ideal for marriage. Jesus Christ showed from Genesis the

original intent as one man united with one woman (Matthew 19:1-6). Being the husband of one wife was a requirement for ordination to the position of deacon or elder in the Church (1 Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6).



It will be interesting to see what happens in the coming years. In a society in which nearly any kind of sexual relationship is celebrated, it's frankly surprising that polygamy remains illegal. As one quote in the article said, "If we were gay, we'd be OK."

The U.S. government had no problems opening the doors to same-sex marriage, which clearly violates the Word of God. And it seems only a matter of time before polygamy and many other types of marital arrangements are legalized. Confusion abounds when we don't rely on understanding from God, the Source of wisdom.

To understand God's true intent for marriage, be sure to send for or download our free study guide *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*. (Source: Associated Press.)

EU president says won't punish UK for Brexit

In late March British Prime Minister Theresa May sent a formal letter to the head of the European Union stating that the United Kingdom will be officially withdrawing from the EU. The British citizens voted to leave in 2016, and now the government is making it official. The process will still take a few years along with a negotiation period.

The head of the rotating EU presidency, Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat, said recently that the EU would not be punishing the UK for leaving the European Union: "We will not be punitive. Brexit itself is punitive enough" (quoted by Adam Withnall, "EU Tells UK: 'We Will Not Punish You. Brexit Is Punishment Enough,'" *The Independent*, March 31, 2017).

Said with true supranationalist elitism. The EU and most of the world has denounced the Brits for exiting the European Union. Leaving the EU goes against the globalist advancements of the last few decades. For a country to hold tightly to its national identity and sovereignty is seen as a conceited and self-centered lack of concern for the well-being of the rest of the world. The United Kingdom and the United States are beginning to be viewed as outsiders to the rest of the world.

Despite the talk of not punishing Britain, this may not end up being the case. For one, Muscat is a supporter of Britain, and the EU presidency will change. For another, the whole European Union may change in major ways over the next several years—ending up quite inimical to Britain.

These are developments we must continue to watch, as we see global powers shifting and the stage being set for the end of the age. The Bible does talk about the rise of a European empire that will demand submission from others. Is what we are seeing on the news today a prelude to that? Time will tell. (Source: *The Independent*.)

Iran rally protests Trump, America

Earlier this year President Donald Trump put Iran "on notice" concerning its nuclear program. Iranian leaders balked at this warning, and Iranian citizens took to the streets in protest.

"Hundreds of thousands of Iranians rallied on Friday [Feb. 10] to swear allegiance to their clerical leaders and reject U.S. President Donald Trump's warning that he had put the Islamic Republic 'on notice,' state TV reported . . . They carried 'Death to America' banners and effigies of Trump while a military police band played traditional Iranian revolutionary songs" (Parisa Hafezi, "Hundreds of Thousands Rally in Iran Against Trump, Chant 'Death to America': TV," Reuters, Feb. 10, 2017).

Some in the West also oppose U.S. attempts to keep Iran from becoming a nuclear power. It's an unnerving time, with powers trying to emerge and shift into predominance on the world scene. Some are so resentful of U.S. power and affluence that they prefer to see America humiliated even if it means a threat to global stability and civilization itself—as an Iran with nuclear weapons is exactly that (search for "nuclear Iran" at ucg.org to learn more).

It will take God's Kingdom of peace being established throughout the earth by the returning Jesus Christ to bring about a lasting solution to what we see in the headlines every day. (Source: Reuters).



A huge mural on a Tehran building reads "Down With the U.S.A."

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



“**F**ake news” became a part of our vocabulary in late 2016 when it was used to try to influence the U.S. presidential election campaign. Here’s the story behind one such story:

“It was early fall, and Donald J. Trump, behind in the polls, seemed to be preparing a rationale in case a winner like him somehow managed to lose. ‘I’m afraid the election is going to be rigged, I have to be honest,’ the Republican nominee told a riled-up crowd in Columbus, Ohio. He was hearing ‘more and more’ about evidence of rigging, he added, leaving the details to his supporters’ imagination.

“A few weeks later, Cameron Harris, a

tive web-based news magazine, ran an article titled “16 Fake News Stories Reporters Have Run Since Trump Won” (Daniel Payne, Feb. 6, 2017).

The article reads: “It has become a regular part of our news cycle, not distinct from or extraneous to it but a part of it, embedded within the news apparatus as a spoke is embedded in a bicycle wheel.

“Whenever you turn on a news station, visit a news website, or check in on a journalist or media personality on Twitter or Facebook, there is an excellent chance you will be exposed to fake news. It is rapidly becoming an accepted part of the way the American media are run.”

Let’s note a few examples.

even asked anyone in the White House if the bust had been removed. He simply assumed it had been because ‘he had looked for it and had not seen it’” (ibid.)

Fake news: travel ban led to death: “On January 31, a Fox affiliate station out of Detroit reported that ‘A local business owner who flew to Iraq to bring his mother back home to the US for medical treatment said she was blocked from returning home under President Trump’s ban on immigration and travel from seven predominately Muslim nations. He said that while she was waiting for approval to fly home, she died from an illness’ . . . The story spread so far because it gratified all the biases of the liberal media elite: it proved

Is Fake News New?

by Jerold Aust



new college graduate with a fervent interest in Maryland Republican politics and a need for cash, sat down at the kitchen table in his apartment to fill in the details Mr. Trump had left out. In a dubious art just coming into its prime, this bogus story would be his masterpiece.

“Mr. Harris started by crafting the headline: ‘BREAKING: Tens of thousands’ of fraudulent Clinton votes found in Ohio warehouse.’

“‘At first it kind of shocked me—the response I was getting,’ Mr. Harris said. ‘How easily people would believe it. It was almost like a sociological experiment’” (Scott Shane, “From Headline to Photograph: A Fake News Masterpiece,” *The New York Times*, Jan. 18, 2017).

Embedded fake news

Fake news hasn’t slowed down since the election. If anything, it may have grown worse. *The Federalist*, a conserva-

Fake news: transgender suicides rose due to Trump win: The article continues: “After Trump’s electoral victory on November 8, rumors began circulating that multiple transgender teenagers had killed themselves in response to the election results. There was no basis to these rumors. Nobody was able to confirm them at the time, and nobody has been able to confirm [them] in the three months since Trump was elected . . . The stories hyping this idea garnered at least nearly 100,000 shares on Facebook alone, contributing to the fear and hysteria surrounding Trump’s win.”

Fake news: MLK Jr. bust removed: “On January 20, *TIME* [magazine] reporter Zeke Miller wrote that a bust of Martin Luther King Jr. had been removed from the White House. This caused a flurry of controversy on social media until Miller issued a correction. As *TIME* put it, Miller had apparently not

that Trump’s ‘Muslim ban’ was an evil, racist Hitler-esque mother-killer of an executive order.

“There was just one problem: it was a lie. The man had lied about when his mother died. The Fox affiliate hadn’t bothered to do the necessary research to confirm or disprove the man’s account. The news station quietly corrected the story after giving rise to such wild, industrial-scale hysteria” (ibid.).

The *Federalist* article went on to list many other similar examples of sloppy, biased or downright false reporting designed to discredit the new presidential administration.

Has the United States become so jaded by our affluence that we value the magic of technology more highly than basic human kindness and decency? Could it be that the pervasiveness and anonymity of social media encourages some to manipulate and destroy others for profit?

Is there something about the human condition that helps to expose this phenomenon?

Why do people make up fake news?

The Bible reveals why human beings make up fake news. Fake news is at once simple and complex—simple because it comes from one source and complex because that one source can unpredictably conjure up many socially unacceptable thoughts.

Scripture reveals that our minds and hearts are corrupt: “The human mind [including the heart or feelings] is the most deceitful of all things. *It is incurable*. No one can understand how deceitful it is” (Jeremiah 17:9, God’s Word Translation, emphasis added throughout).

Jesus said to His disciples, “If you then, being evil [that is, having the corrupted nature contrary to God that is common to man], know how to give good gifts to your children . . .” (Matthew 7:11). The apostle Paul lamented the human condition: “I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate” (Romans 7:15, New Living Translation).

Fake news embodies the evil part of human nature. “It is not what people put in their mouth that makes them wrong. It is what comes out of their mouth that makes them wrong” (Matthew 15:11, Easy-to-Read Version).

Surprisingly, fake news didn’t begin with human beings. It began with an unseen power that makes use of deceitful and indirect methods to lead humanity down a path to destruction, deceit and death.

Who originated fake news?

Fake news began with and is perpetuated by the god of this world. Satan is very angry at you and me. His devious, scheming goal is to destroy humanity by motivating us to do his dirty work: “The god of this world has *blinded the minds* of those who don’t believe. As a result, they don’t see the light of the Good News about Christ’s glory” (2 Corinthians 4:4, GW).

Satan didn’t start out that way. He was originally an honored, high-ranking angel. But he went rogue. He rebelled and became Satan, meaning adversary or enemy, the destroyer of all things (see Ezekiel 28:12-19). God exposes Satan as the serpent (Genesis 3:1), the dragon, the devil (false accuser, Revelation 12:10), and “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2).

Lucifer became narcissistic and corrupted himself (Ezekiel 28:12-18). He rebelled against God and tried to throw Him off His throne (Isaiah 14:13-14). Instead, God threw Satan back to the earth and constrained him here (Luke 10:18; Jude 6). Now, since Adam and Eve chose to follow him in their sin, Satan rules over the kingdoms of men until Christ returns (Matthew 4:8-9; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Isaiah 14:16-17; Revelation 20:1-3).

Since Satan couldn’t remove God from His throne, he turned his anger on God’s creations—the earth and its inhabitants. If you can’t destroy the Creator, then destroy His creation.

Universal fake news

The originator and perpetuator of universal fake news is Satan, who substitutes imitations of God’s good news with a

fake version. Listen to God’s warning through the apostle Paul: “For if he who comes preaches *another Jesus* whom we have not preached, or if you receive *a different spirit* which you have not received, or *a different gospel* which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!” (2 Corinthians 11:4).

Paul further tells us that “. . . Satan . . . transforms himself into an angel of light” (verse 14).

But Satan is *not* an angel of light; he is the prince of darkness (Colossians 1:13) who blinds most of this world to Christ’s glorious good news (verse 26).

His falsehoods include, but are not limited to, the promotion of celebrations such as Christmas and Easter and worshipping on Sunday, the first day of the week (rather than the biblically commanded seventh-day Sabbath). Yet Jesus Christ and His disciples never observed or taught these. As even the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* admits:

“The earliest Christians did not immediately dissociate themselves from the observance of the Jewish feasts [actually *the Lord’s* feasts of Leviticus 23]. Many references in the N[ew] T[estament] indicate that Jesus and His disciples, as well as the early Palestinian Christian communities [that is, God’s Church as referred to in the book of Acts and other New Testament letters], observed the Sabbath and the major annual [biblical] festivals” (1967, “Early Christian Feasts,” Vol. 5, p. 867; see also Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, 1959, pp. 93-97, 103-104).

Fake news as a lie

God’s Ninth Commandment condemns lying (Exodus 20:16). Jesus brands Satan a liar and the originator of lying (John 8:44). Lying is sin, which God hates (Proverbs 6:16-19). Those who persist in this sin will ultimately suffer permanent death in the lake of fire (Romans 6:23; Revelation 21:8).

Satan’s propagation of fake news has corrupted humankind from creation, and he is dedicated to the annihilation of human life (Isaiah 14:6, 17; Matthew 24:21-22; Revelation 12:9, 12). God’s good news, in contrast, is healing, hopeful and peaceful, and it leads to everlasting life.

The good news is that fake news will be gone after Jesus Christ establishes the Kingdom of God on earth following His return. Christmas, Easter and so many of today’s major religious beliefs, which are contrary to God, will become forgotten history (Mark 7:7; Isaiah 66:23). Humanity will then keep God’s holy laws and Sabbaths (Hebrews 8:10-11) that liberate us (James 1:25) from spiritual hoaxes and reveal God’s master plan of salvation for all humankind.

God’s good news will overwhelmingly triumph over Satan’s lies and fake news: “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). **BT**



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The influence of Satan the devil on the world has been enormous, leading humanity into sin, suffering and death. The Bible even calls him “the god of this age.” But his reign is coming to an end! Learn the whole story in our free study guide *Is There Really a Devil?*

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Is Our Mass Media Leading Us Astray?

Mass media wields tremendous power and influence over today's society and culture. And often that influence is not good. In fact, it's much like the false prophets of ancient biblical days.

by Mike Kelley

For millions of people, the day begins with grabbing the TV remote and flipping on the news channels. It's easy to do with our 21st-century proliferation of news channels and sources.

While Jesus Christ told His followers to watch and be alert to world conditions (Mark 13:35), a fixation with news and news watching can easily become a virtual addiction. Constantly following the news may make you feel connected, but what are you actually seeing and hearing? And more importantly, how does it affect your ability to properly discern the truth behind these events?

Television has replaced newspapers as a source of news over the past quarter century, along with the Internet and social media more recently. The respected Pew Research Center for Journalism and Media reports that seven in ten people in the United States watch broadcast TV news programs, both local and network, and nearly four in ten watch the cable TV news channels ("How Americans Get TV News at Home," The Pew Research Center, Oct. 11, 2013).

A drawback to TV news is that it often presents news and opinion in 30-second "sound bites" rather than the in-depth coverage text can provide. Reading a newspaper or newsmagazine requires mental effort many no longer want to expend. Newspaper readership peaked in the early 1990s and has been declining since. Thousands of newspapers have ceased publication, while others are only a thin shell of what they used to be.

Today's media anchors and reporters are listened to by millions and held in high regard, some as virtual royalty. But are they objectively speaking the truth? Or are they espousing a particular worldview held by most reporters and editors today that tends to color the news?

A worldview that distorts reporting

Several decades ago journalism students were taught to report the news in a clear, unbiased, straightforward manner. Political motivations, personal values and the like had no place in the newsroom. Reporters were taught to bring out both sides of an issue when reporting a story. *Opinions* were reserved for the *opinion pages*, not the news reporting.

Recent decades have seen a dramatic change in journalistic approaches and ethics. Today many journalists feel free to inject their biases, personal belief systems and political views into news coverage. That a bias exists is now obvious to many observers and much of the public. It's also well documented, even by the news industry itself.

The Pew Research Center in 2004 undertook a nationwide survey of 547 local and national reporters, editors, and executives. It showed that 34 percent of the national press identified as liberal, as opposed to 7 percent identifying as conservative (with "moderate" as the largest category). Liberal identification among national press types had shot up from 22 percent in 1995, and this trend has only continued.

After the 2008 U.S. elections, it was revealed that the Democratic Party received total donations of more than \$1 million from 1,160 employees of the three major broadcast television networks (NBC, CBS, ABC), while the Republican Party received just under \$143,000 via 193 donations ("Obama, Democrats Got 88% of 2008 Contributions by TV News Executives, Writers, Reporters" *The Washington Examiner*, Aug. 27, 2010).

"And the thing is, conservatives have a point. Study after study has shown that the mainstream media leans left, and that, as economists Tim Groseclose and Jeff Milyo have written, 'an almost overwhelming fraction of journalists are liberal'" ("Conservatives Are Right: The Media Is Very Liberal," *Fortune*, Nov. 2, 2015).

Factors behind a liberal bias

Why do so many in the mainstream media have these biases? The reasons are many. To begin with, most of today's seasoned journalism veterans went to college during the turbulent times of the late 1960s and early 1970s and got caught up in the antiestablishment, left-wing causes so prevalent at the time. This formative period of great social upheaval heavily influenced their thinking and values.

Consider also that the major U.S. news organizations are concentrated in the East and West Coasts, clearly the strongholds of American liberal and progressive thought. Today *more than one in eight* journalists live and work in New York City alone, and a recent article in *The Atlantic* published a map showing that *fully half of today's journalists* live and work in the Washington, D.C.-to-Boston corridor ("U.S. Media's Real Elitism Problem," *The Atlantic*, Nov. 19, 2016)

That growing coastal concentration of liberal thinking has helped to change the very culture of journalism. Numerous sources have pointed out that *the media have become an elite unto themselves*. Generally well educated, proud and often self-righteous, many of today's journalists consider it their duty to shape opinion in ways they consider politically correct.

To their embarrassment, much has been made of the mainstream media's utter failure to believe that Donald

Trump had any real chance of being elected president in November 2016. As one observer noted, “It is very possible that reporters . . . dismissed Trump and Sanders because journalists couldn’t possibly fathom the deep, seething, often unspoken economic discontent that afflicts so many Americans and that has helped fuel both the Trump and Sanders movements” (Neal Gabler, “The Mainstream Media’s Big Disconnect: Why They Don’t Get Middle America,” *BillMoyers.com*, April 23, 2016).

Many made no secret of their contempt for the Republican nominee and considered it their duty to work toward his defeat. Jim Rutenberg, long-time columnist for the venerable *New York Times*, put it this way: “If you view a Trump presidency as something that’s potentially dangerous, *then your reporting is going to reflect that. You would move closer than you’ve ever been to being oppositional.* That’s uncomfortable and uncharted territory for every mainstream, non-opinion journalist I’ve ever known, and by normal standards, untenable” (“Trump Is Testing the Norms of Objectivity in Journalism,” *The New York Times*, Aug. 7, 2016, emphasis added throughout).

Did you grasp that? A major columnist for one of America’s oldest and most respected newspapers seemingly approves of the deliberately biased, non-objective coverage of an American presidential candidate who does not share the views of the mainstream media—a situation he says would be “untenable” by normal standards.

Yet the claim that this is outside the norm and “uncharted territory” is farcical, for the mainstream media has for a long time given quite slanted

Reporters used to be taught to bring out both sides of an issue when reporting a story. *Opinions* were reserved for the *opinion pages*, not the news reporting.

coverage in favor of liberal candidates and in opposition to conservative ones. It’s true, however, that this hasn’t seemed so unabashed before.

Modern media meets an ancient parallel

The mainstream media’s contempt for the value system that still motivates millions is open for all to see. Media elites make no secret of their open support of abortion, gay marriage, militant feminism, economic redistribution, suppression of Bible-based beliefs while promoting contrary faiths, and other liberal progressive values.

They oppose the sovereign rights of nations while espousing one-world views that call for open borders and free movement of all people throughout the world regardless of background. It’s head-scratchingly puzzling to see reporters lament the deaths and maiming of innocent people in terror attacks on Western soil and then see them in the next minute attack government efforts to restrict immigration from failed nations that churn out such terrorists by the hundreds and thousands.

Increasingly, Western journalists see their mission as selling these views to an often-reluctant populace.

But this is not without precedent. Many of those who believe in the Word of God and what it says for us may be surprised to learn that parallel conditions existed in ancient Israel. Much of the Old Testament record is a history of our ancient forebears and the times they lived in.

Was there a class of elites in the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah who took advantage of the trust of the people to deceive them, to promote ideas that would eventually lead to the ruin of the nation?

Notice what the prophet Isaiah had to say about conditions of his time: “Childish leaders oppress my people, and women rule over them. O my people, your leaders mislead you; they send you down the wrong road” (Isaiah 3:12,

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New Living Translation).

With the passing of King Solomon and the split of the kingdom into the smaller kingdoms of Judah and Israel, national leadership was maintained by mostly evil kings and false prophets promoting one another. Following the bad advice and lead of this ancient elite class, both nations eventually went into foreign captivity.

Israel and Judah, for the most part, listened to the wrong voices—those who denigrated the law of God and instead turned the people to a form of ancient multiculturalism, adopting religious and cultural practices and customs from the pagan nations around them. We might term it *religious liberalism*. In simple terms, it was the worship of other gods and adoption of foreign religious customs and practices. And what was the result?

Just as today's media trash traditional values, those prophets led the people to a set of false values in opposition to God's law—though God warned, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil" (Isaiah 5:20).

The false prophets advocated new and degenerate cultural norms, including promiscuity and homosexual activity. The rituals at pagan places of worship typically involved sex with either female or male prostitutes, depending on one's proclivities or desires at the moment (see 1 Kings 14:24 and 2 Kings 23:7, New International Version).

Instead of strong national defense based on trust in God to fight their battles (Exodus 14:13; Deuteronomy 1:30; Nehemiah 4:20), Israel relied on alliances with the nations around them

Just as today's media trash traditional values, false prophets in the Bible led the people of God to a set of false values in opposition to God's law.

for national security. The allies often proved unreliable, even treacherous, as we see today.

Today millions believe in "reproductive rights," a modern form of infanticide. Ancient Israel and Judah, following the norms of the pagan nations around them, practiced an even more horrible form of infanticide. Ancient false prophets condoned the sacrifice of infants to the pagan god Molech and others. Thousands and thousands of innocent children were sacrificed, with many cast into fiery furnaces to be burned alive in one of the most gruesome deaths ever developed by evil, Satan-inspired human beings.

We see a parallel today in the media's overwhelming support of abortion, leading to the slaughter of millions of innocents. Since the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* U.S. Supreme Court decision, an estimated 58 million unborn American children have been sacrificed on the altar of convenience.

We see ample evidence of these false prophets' religiously liberal influence over the nation in the Bible. By the time of King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, at least 450 of them held sway over public opinion in ancient Israel (1 Kings 18:22). Israel had abandoned God's law and sank into idolatry and immorality.

A national crisis had developed, and it was time for a showdown. Should the people continue to follow the path of

multicultural religious liberalism or turn back to the God who brought them into the Promised Land?

Elijah summoned thousands of Israelites to a test to determine the true God who should be obeyed. Notice what he told them: "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). The rest of 1 Kings 18 records how the true God made Himself unmistakably real to the people.

Results of heeding the false prophets' lies

We have one of the clearest indications of what these false prophets taught from the book of Jeremiah, who prophesied in the southern kingdom of Judah from about 626 B.C. until after the fall of Jerusalem around 587 B.C. In Jeremiah 23, this man of God excoriates these false prophets for their teachings:

"The prophets of Samaria . . . prophesied by Baal and led My people Israel astray" (verse 13, New International Version).

"The prophets of Jerusalem . . . commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his wickedness" (verse 14, NIV).

"From the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has spread throughout the land" (verse 15, NIV).

"The prophets . . . speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD" (verse 16, NIV).

The book of Jeremiah describes a nation in decline, a nation that had already lost much of its liberty and yet stubbornly refused to repent of its evil ways. Rather than heed Jeremiah's repeated calls for a return to God, the nation continued to

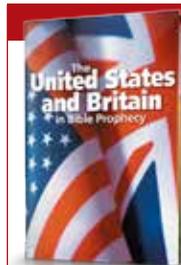
listen to and heed the wrong voices. "Has a nation changed its gods, which are not gods? *But My people have changed their glory for what does not profit*" (Jeremiah 2:11).

Historians have drawn parallels between America and the Roman Empire, and we can also draw parallels between America and ancient Israel and Judah. Just as false prophets in Israel of old caused

God's chosen people to forsake the laws and values He had given them, so today's media elites sway public opinion towards a humanistic, godless mindset. Sadly, the record shows they have largely succeeded.

Listening to the wrong voices brought Israel and Judah to disaster. And listening to those wrong voices today is leading to America's decline that will end in similar disaster.

In these tumultuous times, all of us must make a choice. Will you choose to follow the masses as the nation continues its downward moral slide, or will you swim against the current? It's time to understand the agenda of today's self-appointed prophets in our mainstream media agenda, and learn instead the source of real truth—God's unshakable Word! [BT](#)



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What's behind our moral decline? Rejecting God's laws has led to an epidemic of promiscuity, sexually transmitted diseases, abortion and broken homes. What's going on, and why? Download or request our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

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America's Deep Government Division

CAN IT BE SOLVED?

Why is there such a great political divide in the United States and in other nations? What does this have to do with human rule in general and the future of government?

by John LaBissoniere

An important historical tradition typically follows each American presidential election. After the balloting results are tabulated and a winner declared, those who voted for the losing candidate, although disappointed, admit defeat and come together to support the new national leader.

Although opposition to every new chief executive inevitably arises, most citizens and even politicians of the opposing party willingly grant him a reasonable “honeymoon” period at the beginning of his administration so he can start enacting the agenda he ran on. However, that has certainly not been the case following the election of President Donald Trump. Congressional opponents have gone to unprecedented lengths to obstruct his efforts, and the media and political activists have waged an unceasing campaign to undermine his credibility and administration.

What's behind this unusual situation? The absence of a grace period in this instance is the result of several factors, including a highly contentious election campaign, a severely divided electorate and a biased “mainstream media” sympathetic to the political left.

These dynamics have contributed to a great deal of scorn, animosity, obstruction and accusations of fraud. Consider the following from the first hours of the new administration:

- Politicians and various mainstream media organizations denouncing the president's inaugural address as “dark” and “gloomy.”
- On Inauguration Day a violent leftist demonstration against the president occurred in Washington, D.C., and additional protests took place in other U.S. cities.
- The day after the inauguration a “Women's March” in the capital drew more than 500,000 people protesting President Trump's election. This was accompanied by similar demonstrations the same day in other U.S. cities and in locations around the world, together involving more than 3 million people.
- The U.S. Senate, which is responsible for confirming

the president's cabinet choices and other administration appointees, has been hindered by Senate Democrats who have greatly delayed the process. In some cases they went so far as to boycott hearings to prevent votes on appointments.

- Anonymous government insiders illegally leaked to the media transcripts of private conversations between the president and other administration officials and foreign leaders. Although the sources have yet to be determined, the Trump administration has postulated that they came from government agency employees loyal to the previous administration. Later someone else illegally leaked President Trump's 2005 income tax return to the media.

- Political opponents and media outlets have continued to accuse the president and his staff of collaborating with Russian authorities to manipulate the presidential election process, implying that this caused Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton to lose. Although no evidence of collusion has been presented, major media venues continue clamoring to find perpetrators so as to delegitimize the election results.

Rebuffing some of these attacks and accusations, President Trump, during a Feb. 17 press conference, accused the mainstream media of speaking “not for the people but for the special interests and for those profiting off a very, very obviously broken system.” He further accused the media of “dishonesty” and creating false, unsubstantiated narratives and inventing “fake news” to undermine his administration.

What's behind all the contention?

What is actually behind all the rancor and contention? Why such intense resistance? Why do the forces allied against the president appear so determined to defeat his administration before it can even get off the ground?

The fundamental reason is the great division between the political left and right in America. Under former President Barack Obama's administration, a significant number of liberal domestic and foreign policies were enacted, with government programs and staffing to carry them out.

President Trump made plain throughout his election campaign his firm intention to roll back many of his predecessor's executive orders and legislative programs.

This distresses President Obama's former supporters, including many sympathetic devotees in the media. As a result, we are witnessing a huge power struggle to embarrass, obstruct and defeat President Trump and his governing agenda.

President Trump, meanwhile, campaigned on promises to reduce the influence that powerful lobbyists, financial donors and interest groups have had with federal government legislators and bureaucrats for many years, to scrap unfair international trade deals and to significantly reduce crushing corporate tax rates. In his view, these have injured businesses financially and exported jobs overseas at the expense of American workers.

In a portion of his inaugural address, President Trump summed up his view: "For too long, a small group in our nation's capital has reaped the rewards of government, while the people have borne the cost . . .

"The establishment protected itself, but not the citizens of our country. Their victories have not been your victories. Their triumphs have not been your triumphs, and while they celebrated in our nation's capital, there was little to celebrate for struggling families all across our land. That all changes, starting right here and right now, because this moment is your moment—it belongs to you."

During his election campaign, Trump further pledged to end illegal immigration by enforcing the nation's immigration laws and building a wall along the country's southern border. He also promised to aggressively apprehend and deport violent criminal aliens. He also assured voters he would contend forcefully with the threat of Islamic terrorism, destroy the horrific Islamic State (ISIS) and its offshoots, rebuild the depleted U.S. armed forces and reassert American influence in the world.

Threats to a liberal legacy

President Trump further promised to support the coal and oil industry as well as to cut burdensome federal regulations—many of which have been imposed without legislative authority by unelected government bureaucrats. He said he planned to repeal and replace the failing Obama-era healthcare law and downsize bloated government departments and agencies so they will become more fiscally responsible.

In addition he pledged to promote parental school choice, strongly support law-enforcement officials, launch a crackdown on violent crime and eliminate government subsidies funding abortion clinics.

These goals threaten many decades of liberal influence in generating expensive, highly regulatory "big-government" federal policies and programs. The president's plans also alarm entrenched government bureaucrats and outside special interest groups that have no desire to see changes that would affect their power, influence and financial interests. As a result, the forces of obstruction appear determined to use every means possible to undermine and halt the president's goals.

It's important to note that no previous administration ever had complete support from the entire electorate in executing

its agenda. This is a natural and expected consequence of the two-party system. What is different this time around is the level of sheer venom, anger and obstructionism from political opponents and so many in the mainstream media no longer hiding their bias and outright contempt in their reporting (see "Is Fake News New?" beginning on page 14 and "Is Our Mass Media Leading Us Astray?" beginning on page 16).

The bigger picture of human government

Yet, beyond the current state of affairs arising with the new president, let's take a look at the bigger picture of human government. Mankind's long and often painful history shows plainly that no humanly devised governing system has ever worked perfectly or even very well. Many governments have proved to be tyrannical, and others merely managed to keep some serious problems from growing worse.

Speaking in general about human rule, political philosopher Thomas Paine, a major influence in the American Revolution, wrote, "Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state, an intolerable one."

The renowned former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill echoed the observation of others in stating that "democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

But why does this situation exist? Why is governing such a difficult challenge? Why does it so frequently bring contention and unsatisfactory, even disastrous, results?

The fundamental problem involves our corrupted nature as human beings. People have a capacity for some good and will sometimes seek and do right, but for the most part their hearts are deceitful and selfish, leading to evil. Is it any wonder, then, that our governments routinely turn out the same way?

The framers of the U.S. Constitution were wise enough to understand that people are fallible and can often be self-centered, corruptible and even despotic. Consequently these men set up a governing structure designed to restrain people's baser qualities through a system of "separation of powers." These "checks and balances" were intended to limit the power of the three major branches of the government (executive, legislative and judicial) so as to prevent, or at least limit, the misuse of power.

Mankind's most basic problem

But it's critical to note that no form of human government is capable of solving humanity's underlying problem, which is its aversion toward obeying divine law.

The apostle Paul explained this critical problem when he wrote: "The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Romans 8:7, New International Version). Since this is true about God's commandments, it certainly applies to lesser, humanly instituted laws, rules and regulations.

A leading factor in this human predisposition toward lawlessness is the unseen, powerful influence of Satan the devil, whom Scripture labels as "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4). The Bible describes him as the "prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2, World English Bible).

Considering this biblical fact, it ought not to be a surprise that there has been, and continues to be, so much conflict

in virtually every form of human government.

Human government can't solve mankind's basic problem

Is a resolution to this problem possible? Can divided, contentious government be replaced with something far better? The answer is *yes*—but it cannot be found *in improved human politics or a new generation of human leaders*.

The only answer is one of which the vast majority of people have never heard. It is *the Creator's direct involvement in human affairs through His perfect government*—the Kingdom of God here on earth! Coupled with that will be every person being given the opportunity to receive God's Spirit—His divine nature and essence—which will change them through

This lengthy process has demonstrated that all humanly designed governments are incapable of equitably guiding and serving their citizens.

godly love and willing obedience (Romans 5:5; 8:4; Titus 3:5).

To help grasp why this is so critical, it's important to understand that God has, over the centuries, allowed people and nations to form and experience every conceivable governmental and economic system. This lengthy process has demonstrated, time after time, that all humanly designed governments, including our modern democracies, are utterly incapable of equitably guiding and serving their citizens (Jeremiah 10:23; 17:9).

When people govern themselves without God's direction, failure has always been the result (Romans 3:10-18). We see proof of this throughout history in the incessant evil, anguish, poverty and warfare that has always afflicted humanity.

Our Creator wants everyone to finally grasp that without His spiritual instruction and leadership, our way of life—deciding for ourselves what is right and wrong—leads only to suffering, inequity and injustice (Matthew 7:13). As Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25 explain, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

God's perfect government is coming

So when and how will God set up His government on the earth? Prophetic passages in the Bible explain that relations between nations will worsen severely near the end of man's rule, with "wars and rumors of wars" dominating the news (Matthew 24:6). The situation will reach a final, critical moment when world events will become so horrifyingly dangerous that unless something miraculous transpires, all life on earth will be completely wiped out (verses 9, 21-22).

However, just as mankind stands on the brink of annihilation, Jesus Christ will return to earth in overwhelming power to prevent that from happening (verse 30; Revelation 19:11-16). He will do so out of total love for all people and because His loyal, obedient disciples will be living through that frightful period (Matthew 24:22).

Not only will Christ save humanity from total destruction, but He will also set up God's perfect rule throughout the world (Matthew 6:10). It will be perfect because He will take over the reins of government from human beings and will rule

in righteousness as King of Kings with the assistance of His resurrected followers (Revelation 19:16; 1 Thessalonians 3:13).

At the same time, Satan the devil and his demonic cohorts will be imprisoned in "the blackness of darkness" so they can no longer corrupt humanity (Revelation 20:1-2; Jude 13). Then, at last, the world will be freed from its long enslavement to ignorance, violence and misgovernment influenced by the devil (Romans 8:21).

This will also be the precise time when God's glorious spiritual family begins its wonderful work in God's overall plan. Again, Christ's followers from this age, those who are alive when Christ returns or are resurrected from the dead at that time, will be transformed into glorious spirit beings (1 Corinthians 15:50-54; Revelation 3:5). They will govern on the earth as kings and priests under Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Revelation 20:6).

With the world at large being offered God's Holy Spirit then, all people will finally be able to have

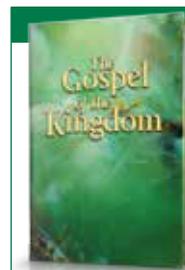
their selfish human thoughts and attitudes replaced with a sincere willingness to love and obey God and genuinely care for others (Romans 8:5-8; 2 Peter 1:4). Also at that wonderful coming time, Jesus and God's now-transformed family of divine spirit beings will bring magnificent changes to the world.

The earth's wildernesses areas will be fully transformed into gorgeous, productive lands (Isaiah 41:18 51:3; Amos 9:13). The nature of wild animals will be altered so they become fully tame (this is meant literally but also represents peace among nations) (Isaiah 11:6-9). People will experience God's loving compassion through miraculous healings (Isaiah 35:5-6). Humanity will no longer suffer the cruelty and devastation of war (Micah 4:3). Hurt and destruction will cease as the knowledge of God fills the entire world (Isaiah 11:9). Can you visualize this breathtaking future age?

God's government of perfect peace and righteousness will produce blessings forever (Isaiah 9:7). God is not only showing what His perfect future government will bring, but He is offering *you* the opportunity to be a part of it as a member of His very own divine family!

Beginning at Jesus Christ's second coming, mankind will no longer endure human government with its monumental inadequacies, corruption and inevitable disappointments. This is because He will set up the ideal government—which is God's very own!

In the end, the future of government on earth is indeed bright! But it won't be by human effort. The solution to divided, contentious government is coming! Will you choose to be a part of what God has planned for you and all humanity? [BT](#)



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IMMIGRATION

What Does the Bible Say?

Our news headlines are often filled with reports about immigrants and immigration. But a key perspective is missing—what the Bible says on the subject!

by Steven Britt

Immigration has been a hot-button political issue in the United States dating back to the nation’s founding. America, like all other countries, controls and limits who may enter its territory, for how long, and on what terms, and these restrictions are a part of the laws of the nation.

In recent decades, millions of people from Latin America have bypassed this legal process, earning them the controversial designation of “illegal aliens.” Over the last year, the legal immigration of Muslims from Arab nations has come to the forefront due to the large number of refugees from the prolonged Syrian civil war and terror attacks by Islamic extremists in many Western nations.

Many are concerned that potential terrorists could infiltrate America or other Western nations under the guise of being refugees, while others are moved by compassion for those legitimately seeking to build a new life.

Advances in communication technologies make it possible for us to see the plight of people in other countries as never before. It’s natural to empathize with people and to want to help them when we’re daily bombarded with videos of starving children.

Having this reality brought so vividly to life in the minds of the average person is a driving factor in the attitudinal shift on immigration policy today. Many people praised President Obama’s 2008 statement that he considers himself a “citizen of the world,” and this idea was the premise of the immigration policy he pursued.

These and other immigration issues have led some to question the legitimacy of immigration law altogether. What gives nations the right to deny entry to people who are trying to make a better life for themselves? Should nations have laws limiting people from crossing their borders? Should anyone have the right to become a citizen of another nation if he or she wants to? Nations face a delicate balance between having compassion,

maintaining the rule of law and protecting their citizens.

But what’s missing in the immigration debate is a *true biblical perspective*. The Word of God is a vital resource in informing our opinion on the topic of immigration. The Bible explains the source of our modern troubles, shows how nations have struggled with these same issues from ancient times, and provides insight into God’s expectations today.

We presented some of what it says on the matter in a previous article (see “The Immigration Threat” in our September–October 2016 issue). Now we’ll look at more of what Scripture reveals.

Different types of immigrants in the Bible

The law of God does not give a comprehensive set of immigration guidelines, but it does include some specific commandments that can guide our understanding of God’s view on immigrants and immigration.

In simple terms, an immigrant is a person who moves to another country with the intention of living there indefinitely. Most English Bible translations do not include the word “immigrant,” but typically use a combination of the words “stranger,” “alien,” “sojourner” and “foreigner.”

Leviticus 24:22 states, “You shall have the same law for *the stranger* and for one from your own country” (emphasis added throughout). While some take this to mean that we should strive for a borderless world, a careful study reveals a distinction that is obscured by modern Bible translations.

Consider the following verse in light of the command to have the *same law* for the stranger and the native born: “At the end of seven years, you shall have a release of debts . . . Of *a foreigner* you may require it; but you shall give up your claim to what is owed by your brother” (Deuteronomy 15:1-3).

Simple logic dictates that there must be a difference between the “stranger” of Leviticus 24:22 and the “foreigner” of Deuteronomy 15:3, despite the fact that the two English

words seem indistinguishable.

The “stranger” of Leviticus 24:22 is the Hebrew word *ger*, while the “foreigner” of Deuteronomy 15:3 is the Hebrew *nokriy*. Other passages show that the *ger* and the *nokriy* were held to different standards:

“You may not eat anything that dies of itself. You may give it to the alien [*ger*] who is within your gates, that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner [*nokriy*]” (Deuteronomy 14:21).

Recognizing the difference between the *ger* and *nokriy*, it becomes clear that this verse does not mean “either give it to an immigrant or sell it to an immigrant.” Rather, it delineates between *two classifications* of foreign people living in the land. This clearly shows that God’s law for Israel did not mandate a “citizen of the world” philosophy that treated citizens and non-citizens with equal status.

Different rights for different types

Any time a positive command is made in the Bible regarding the rights and privileges of an immigrant, the word *ger* is always involved—not *nokriy*. The *ger* had the same access to biblically mandated assistance as other poor social groups such as widows and orphans, including the right to gather what was left in the fields after the harvest (Deuteronomy 24:19-22) and to receive a portion of the tithe given to the poor every third year (Deuteronomy 26:12-13).

Numerous passages reiterate the command to show justice and mercy to the stranger (Leviticus 19:33-34, Exodus 23:9), and these are without exception directed toward the *ger* rather than the *nokriy*. On the other hand, any time the law *restricts*

life meant that he was fully abandoning identification with his previous home. Those willing to make the commitment to fully assimilate into Israel in this way were granted full citizenship and became “as a native of the land” (Exodus 12:48).

From these commands it’s clear that the *ger* enjoyed a special protected status that was not afforded to the *nokriy*, and this status required keeping the Sabbath as a minimum level of assimilation. The *ger* could achieve the full rights of citizenship by becoming circumcised and worshipping the God of Israel.

The bottom line is that under biblical law, only the *ger* was granted beneficial citizen rights, including the right to permanently live in the country, but with those rights came obligations to assimilate into Israelite society, culture and religion.

The exclusion of these rights from the *nokriy* did not mean that Israel could legally deny him or her basic standards of human decency. Rather, it shows that the Israelites were not obligated to grant equal status to every foreign person living among them.

Further, God sternly warned the people of Israel against approving, accepting and adopting the culture, religions and religious practices of the nations around them, knowing this would corrupt the nation (Leviticus 18:24-30; Deuteronomy 12:28-32; 18:9).

The biblical origin of nations with borders

A shallow reading of the instruction in Leviticus 24:22 that there be one law for the stranger and Israelite alike could lead to the false conclusion that God’s will is for all nations to have open borders and the “same law” for everyone, admitting all people regardless of their background, beliefs or intentions.

We have shown that this was not the express command of God’s law, but the Bible also sheds light on other fundamental questions relevant to the discussion. How did immigration come to exist? What rights does a nation have to enforce its borders? Should countries have borders in the first place? For that matter, should we even have separate nations?

The Bible describes an ancient time when this modern vision of a borderless world was a reality. Prior to the events of Genesis 11, there were no nation states. The whole world was united as one people and one culture, and even spoke the same language. Those of that time infamously came together to build the Tower of Babel in defiance of God. Because of their disobedience, God miraculously intervened to alter the course of human history:

“Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth” (Genesis 11:9).

The differentiation of humanity into separate language groups drove them to live in different places, and over time they grew apart culturally. Acts 17:26 confirms that God “has determined [mankind’s] preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord.”

Deuteronomy 32:8 states plainly that God “set the boundaries of the peoples.” God’s direct intervention precipitated

Jacob’s family immigrated to Egypt as refugees from famine, but they sought permission from the pharaoh to do so first.

the rights of a foreigner, such as in Deuteronomy 14:21 and 15:3, it is directed towards the *nokriy*, who did not have legal status in the land.

The Bible gives no explicit guidelines for how *ger* or *nokriy* status was defined and administered, although the distinctions in rights are clear.

Through examination of the Scriptures we find some actions associated with those who qualified for the rights of a *ger*. A stipulation for the *ger* is found in the Ten Commandments, where we see that the *ger* was expected to keep the Sabbath holy by not working (Exodus 20:10). Sabbath observance was one of the defining cultural hallmarks separating the people of Israel from the surrounding nations, as the Bible said it was to be (Exodus 31:12-17).

Those classified as *ger* or *ger'im* (plural) were also allowed to make offerings to God at the tabernacle, but only provided that they did so “just as you do”—that is, they could not introduce their own religious customs into their worship of God (Numbers 15:14).

A *ger* could even choose to celebrate the Passover (Exodus 12:48-49) on the condition that he circumcise himself and his sons. Like the Sabbath, circumcision set Israel apart from other nations, and for a *ger* to show such devotion to God’s way of

the existence of multiple nations, and this reality persists to this day.

Every country has some form of government that exerts control over its territory, and immigration involves the movement of a person between two lands that are ruled by different political authorities. Paul outlined the attitude that God's people should have toward world governments as follows: "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God" (Romans 13:1).

Continuing in Romans 13, Paul explained that these authorities have a God-given responsibility to uphold justice and enforce order by punishing evil within their jurisdiction.

But as we know, history is replete with examples of governments that pervert justice and commit unspeakable atrocities. In Paul's time, the world-ruling Roman government was guilty of many such evils. Yet Paul still honored its rulers and officials as being set in place or appointed by God.

He taught that Christians should obey the laws of human governments except when these directly conflicted with the law of God (for example, Daniel was right in refusing to cease praying to God in Daniel 6).

Followers of God throughout history have shown respect for the laws of the land, including immigration laws.

Examples of immigration in biblical history

An instructive biblical case study on immigration is found in the family of Jacob, also called Israel, migrating to Egypt to escape a famine. In the ancient world, famines—usually caused by regional drought—were a somewhat regular natural occurrence that caused people to migrate to other areas. The family of Israel arrived in Egypt under circumstances similar to that of those seeking refugee status today, and the process they went through gives insight into the immigration customs of the time.

What's relevant to today's immigration debate is that Israel sought legal permission from Egypt's ruler before entering the land: "And they said to Pharaoh, 'We have come to dwell in the land, because your servants have no pasture for their flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now therefore, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen'" (Genesis 47:4).

This exchange demonstrates that the accepted practice even in ancient times was to obtain legal permission from the government. Moreover, we observe in Genesis 47:6 that their stay came with terms specifying where they would live, what their profession would be, and that some of them would serve Pharaoh directly. The word for "dwell" in Genesis 47:4 is *gor*, from the same root as *ger*, discussed above, and this is how Israel became "strangers" or *ger'im* in Egypt.

The family of Israel at that time was large enough to be its own community, with a total of 70 people divided among 12 family units. They had no apparent intention of integrating into Egypt's pagan culture, which developed into mistrust with eventual disastrous results.

Exodus 1 gives the cautionary tale of how the Israelites' isolation from Egyptian society and continued population growth created friction with their hosts that reached a critical point when the politics of Egypt took a sudden turn and a new

ruler came into power: "And he said to his people, 'Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us'" (Exodus 1:9-10).

What followed was the harsh enslavement of the people of Israel. The indiscriminant killing of sons born to the Israelites was the turning point of oppression when God determined to intervene. He delivered Israel out of slavery in Egypt and thoroughly punished the Egyptians who had shown such malice toward an enclave of people descended from peaceful legal immigrants.

While nations do have authority that is appointed by God, that authority is limited by the command to uphold justice. The king of Egypt had the right to determine whether the family of Israel could enter and live in his land, and he could have refused Israel's request to settle there if he chose. He also exercised the right to restrict where they could live and what their occupation would be, as well as to draft some of them into the service of his government.

By contrast, the later king of Egypt had no right to enslave the vast community descended from these people and murder its children. Rather than legally negotiating and giving them the choice of whether to stay on new terms, he bypassed any legitimate process out of fear and hardness of heart. This is the full context and weight of the command later given to Israel: "You shall not oppress the stranger . . . because you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 22:21).

Still more on what the Bible says about immigration may be found by searching on the Internet for these recommended articles: Rick Lanser, "What Is God's Perspective on Immigration?" biblearchaeology.org, Jan. 28, 2017; James Hoffmeier, "Jeff Sessions Got It Right on Immigrants and the Bible," ReligionNews.com, Jan. 10, 2017 (Hoffmeier has also written a book on the subject: *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible*, 2009.)

Immigration in America today

Today the United States maintains three basic classifications—citizens, permanent residents who hold green cards, and temporary visitors who are granted visas. Green card holders may work and travel freely, and are allowed to apply for full citizenship after five years, granting them the privilege of voting among other rights.

Students, tourists and foreign workers are issued temporary visas that allow them to pursue preapproved activities. For example, someone with a tourist visa cannot enroll in a university, and a student visa does not confer the right to seek employment. Visas automatically expire after a predetermined period, after which one can apply for a new visa, leave the country, or else be in violation of the law.

It's also illegal to enter the United States as a non-citizen without a visa. Those who do not follow the law put themselves at risk of being forcibly removed from the country or otherwise punished.

In 1986, President Ronald Reagan granted amnesty to more than 3 million people who had illegally entered the country from the border with Mexico. This allowed them an opportunity to obtain legal visas while absolving them

of punishment for their unlawful entry.

However, illegal immigration has continued because of the ongoing lack of security at the nation's southern border. According to data from the Pew Research Center, more than 11 million unauthorized immigrants live in the United States today, and many feel that another amnesty program is not the answer.

Even legal immigrants who have obtained citizenship can find themselves in jeopardy under extreme circumstances. The Japanese internment during World War II is a dark period in American history. By an executive order from President Franklin Roosevelt, 110,000 Japanese immigrants living in America were forced to relocate to prison camps out of fear that they would carry out attacks against America. Over half of these legal immigrants were United States citizens.

Eventually, it was ruled that the incarceration of American citizens without due process was unconstitutional, and the internment ended in 1945. It took decades of fallout for the injustice of the internment to be fully acknowledged. In 1976, President Gerald Ford issued a formal apology and vowed that such a mistake would never be repeated. Remaining survivors of the internment were granted \$20,000 each in compensation in 1988.

Today, there are 3.3 million Muslims with U.S. citizenship, and there is mounting concern for what may happen if even a small percentage of them become violently hostile. Since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, America has experienced more than 100 additional deaths and hundreds more injuries in attacks carried out by Muslim American citizens, converts or immigrants.

These practical fears are driving the current debate on immigration. How many people can—or should—Western nations safely provide refuge to? What level of scrutiny is appropriate when accepting refugees from countries known to harbor Islamic extremists?

The future of immigration

The coming Kingdom of God is the only true solution to today's immigration and refugee crisis. When all nations have come under the glorious rule of Jesus Christ, having put away their foolish ambitions and turning from all false religions to worship the true God, there will be no more war to force people from their homes.

Isaiah 19:19-25 indicates that the great diversity of peoples and cultures in the world today will continue to exist. Their customs must necessarily be changed to instill God's value system and to eliminate any trace of the worship of other gods, but they will remain distinct peoples.

For today, the most important thing we can do as Christians is to pray for the coming of God's Kingdom and that our current leaders will exercise sound moral judgment. America's leaders must recognize the necessity of maintaining the rule of law if we expect to continue to provide a safe haven for anyone, and most people agree that major reform of the American immigration system is needed.

One hopes the debate will bear out an improved legal process that helps those truly in need without compromising the stability of the nation or the safety of its citizens. **BT**

Challenges Immigrants Face

The life of immigrants, whether by choice or by circumstances beyond their control, is difficult. In addition to the normal hardships of life, they are frequently met with exclusion and distrust in their new home, and this is why God commanded specific protections for them (Exodus 23:9).

My wife and I, both Americans, have been living in Tel Aviv, Israel, for more than a year while I continue postdoctoral studies. Given the temporary nature of our stay, we would fall under the biblical category of *nokriy*. Despite the heavy Western influences on Israeli culture, we have learned firsthand that life in a foreign land can be stressful.

Aside from dealing with the ordinary hassles of moving to a new place, culture shock creeps in. Everything is *different*—the money, the language, the food, the standards of politeness, and a million little things that take a cumulative toll on the psyche. With the looming presence of cryptic Hebrew and Arabic characters at every glance and the sound of numerous unintelligible spoken languages, a task as simple as buying groceries can become intimidating and time-consuming.

On a recent flight to Israel, I spoke with a young woman whose family fled from instability in Iraq during the mid-1990s. They sought refuge in neighboring Saudi Arabia, but found themselves in a hostile environment. Saudi officials took everything of value from them, including her mother's jewelry. She recalled how several refugee women and young girls she knew were raped.

Eventually her family was extracted from Saudi Arabia by American human rights workers. Extended family members also resettled in America, but the resettlement program scattered them throughout the country. Her father had only \$500 to his name when they arrived.

It is sobering to realize that they had a far better outcome than most refugees in the world. Refugees in America are eligible for citizenship after five years. She has become a *ger* in the United States (using the biblical Hebrew term explained in the main article here), and she enjoys the full rights and privileges afforded to every American citizen.

Her story is shared by hundreds of thousands of Americans today. According to estimates by the United Nations, more than 20 million people throughout the world have been forced from their homes by war, with 4.5 million refugees from the recent Syrian civil war alone.

Most Syrian refugees have found temporary homes in the neighboring Muslim states of Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq, sparking intense debate within those countries about whether to allow such massive numbers of them to permanently settle there.

About 1 million Syrian refugees have traveled through Turkey into Europe seeking permanent resettlement, having given up any hope of returning to their homes. Canada has taken in more than 40,000 of them, while the United States has absorbed more than 16,000.

With so much hardship in the world, many feel a moral obligation to admit as many refugees as possible, irrespective of the potential danger and long-term effects on a nation's culture and stability. Every Western nation is currently undergoing its own internal debate as to how many refugees it is able and willing to take in and on what terms. **BT**

Artificial Intelligence

THE COMING THREAT

Mankind is threatened with extinction in several fronts. Now, some warn, comes another potentially deadly menace—artificial intelligence.

by Mario Seiglie

It's the stuff of science fiction, with several movies and TV shows having depicted nightmarish scenarios with computers turning rogue—such as Hal 9000 from the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Skynet from the *Terminator* movies and the warring artificial intelligences of the CBS drama *Person of Interest*.

Could computers become so powerful and independent as to absorb the information on the Internet and eventually control man's nuclear weapons, electric power grids, water and food networks, and potentially hold human beings hostage to do their bidding? It's a disturbing thought—and maybe not quite as far-fetched as it once seemed.

Cyberwarfare has been in the news a lot lately. Whether by hacking, leaking or malicious software attacks, cyberwarfare (the use of computers to invade, damage, or steal information from other computers) has become more common around the world. Witness the Iranian nuclear program suffering a serious setback from a fierce computer virus in 2010 and the leaks of damaging political documents during the 2016 U.S. presidential election campaign. All of this is possible because of constant geopolitical struggles, increased reliance on computer systems and the near-ubiquitous Internet.

Yet these are only symptoms of a growing threat—the rapid advance of AI, or artificial intelligence. What

is artificial intelligence? It refers to a computer program reaching the point where, as *The New Oxford American Dictionary* states, it can “perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and translation between languages.”

History of AI

Artificial intelligence has been around since rudimentary computers were invented during World War II to help break secret military codes. The cyber revolution has led today to smartphones being thousands of times more powerful than the computers used to put a man on the moon! And it has significantly advanced the progress in AI.

Back in 1969, the IBM 360 computers used by NASA could hold approximately *six megabytes* of information. By today's standards, a 32-gigabyte memory stick or card, widely available for less than \$20, has more than *5,000 times* the data storage of all those huge IBM 360 computers, each worth in their day more than \$3 million! And today's average smartphones have at least 16 gigabytes, or more than *2,500 times* more storage than those NASA IBM computers.

The incredible computing power at our disposal today goes to show how rapidly we are being driven by a vast technological revolution. As *The Economist* magazine recently noted, “The McKinsey Global Institute, a think-tank, says AI is contributing to a

transformation of society ‘happening ten times faster and 300 times the scale, or roughly 1,000 times the impact’ of the Industrial Revolution” (June 25, 2016, p. 3 of Special Report Section, emphasis added throughout).

Deep learning

We are experiencing the dizzying pace of the computer age, as access to and affordability of computers and information increases with each passing year.

In recent years, AI has reached a remarkable breakthrough. Researchers managed to copy an aspect of how the brain functions through its neural network. It's called “deep learning,” and now computers can not only perform analysis faster than ever on data sets of unprecedented size, but they take a step further by weighing *the value* of the data. In this way they “learn” as they accumulate more successful results, simulating how neural pathways are strengthened in the brain during learning.

“Deep learning,” says *The Economist*, “allows systems to learn and improve by crunching lots of examples rather than being explicitly programmed, [and] is already being used to power internet search engines, block spam e-mails, suggest e-mail replies, translate web pages, recognize voice commands, detect credit-card fraud and steer self-driving cars” (p. 4).

So far, such increases in AI functions

have not posed a credible threat to mankind, but as the capacity of AI is multiplied, it can eventually begin to control the decision-making process that used to be the exclusive domain of human beings. And it appears, according to leading scientists and industry leaders, that such a possibility is not too far off in the future.

Warnings from eminent thinkers

Due to this rapid AI progress, some of the brightest technological minds have issued dire warnings about its deadly potential.

In 2014, tech billionaire Elon Musk, founder of the famous Tesla series of electric cars and of SpaceX, which sends rockets to the space station, warned the rise of artificial intelligence was “potentially *more dangerous than nukes*” (p. 13).

Mankind is already facing many dangers that could lead to extinction. Now comes this new existential threat built by the very beings it could eventually destroy.

[nuclear weapons]” (p. 13).

He later added: “I think we should be very careful about artificial intelligence. If I were to guess like what our biggest existential threat is, *it’s probably that*. So we need to be *very careful* with the artificial intelligence. Increasingly scientists think there should be some regulatory oversight maybe at the national and international level, just to make sure that we don’t do something very foolish. *With artificial intelligence we are summoning the demon*” (quoted by Matt McFarland, “Elon Musk: ‘With Artificial Intelligence We Are Summoning the Demon,’” *The Washington Post*, Oct. 24, 2014).

Earlier this year Musk issued another warning. In an interview he stated: “One of the most troubling questions is artificial intelligence . . . You can have AI which is much smarter than the smartest human on earth. This is a dangerous situation.”

Part of the problem, he explained, is the unpredictability of where such developments could lead. “One way to think of it is imagine you were very confident we were going to be visited by super intelligent aliens in 10 years or 20 years at the most. Digital super

intelligence will be like an alien” (Zoe Nauman, “End of the World as We Know It,” *The Sun*, Feb. 16, 2017).

Stephen Hawking, the famous astrophysicist, also expressed his concern, stating, “The development of full artificial intelligence could spell *the end of the human race*” (Rory Cellan-Jones, “Stephen Hawking Warns Artificial Intelligence Could End Mankind,” BBC News, Dec. 2, 2014).

Bill Gates, co-founder of Microsoft, added: “I am in the camp that is concerned about super intelligence. First the machines will do a lot of jobs for us and not be super intelligent. That should be positive if we manage it well. *A few decades after that though the intelligence is strong enough to be a concern*. I agree with Elon Musk and some others on this and don’t understand why some

people are not concerned” (Peter Holley, “Bill Gates on Dangers of Artificial Intelligence: ‘I Don’t Understand Why Some People Are Not Concerned,’” *The Washington Post*, Jan. 29, 2015).

The concerns are significant enough that earlier this year “Hundreds of scientists and technologists have signed an open letter calling for research into the problems of artificial intelligence in an attempt to combat the dangers of the technology.” Signatories included Musk, Hawking, representatives from Google and major AI companies, and academics from the world’s major universities.

The letter warns that “it is important to research how to reap its benefits while avoiding potential pitfalls” and cautions that “our AI systems must do what we want them to do” (Andrew Griffin, “Stephen Hawking, Elon Musk and Others Call for Research to Avoid Dangers of Artificial Intelligence,” *The Independent*, Jan. 12, 2017).

AI becoming more common—and dangerous

So we are just at the beginning of the “deep learning” AI revolution. Already, what appeared to have been science fiction just a few years ago is

slowly becoming a reality. AI-powered driverless cars now being used in some areas have generally proven safer than vehicles with human drivers (though there have been crashes).

We can interface on the computer with AI virtual assistants such as IBM’s Watson, Apple’s Siri, Amazon’s Alexa, Microsoft’s Cortana and Google Now. At the same time, there are serious privacy issues with the amount of information about people these services are collecting. In fact, many users are unaware that a lot of what they say in the privacy of their homes may be heard by their smart devices and stored online. A recent Wikileaks revelation was that some TV sets can be hacked by spy agencies and turned into listening devices without the owners’ knowledge.

But of most concern, as some point out, is the potentially much more dangerous side of this AI revolution.

As James

Barrat, an expert in the AI field, notes: “Semiautonomous robotic drones already kill *dozens of people* each year. Fifty-six countries have or are developing battlefield robots. The race is on to make them *autonomous and intelligent* . . . AI is a dual-use technology like nuclear fission. Nuclear fission can illuminate cities or incinerate them. Its terrible power was unimaginable to most people before 1945. With *advanced AI*, we’re in *the 1930s* right now. We’re *unlikely to survive* an introduction as abrupt as nuclear fission’s” (*Our Final Invention: Artificial Intelligence and the End of the Human Era*, 2016, p. 21).

Russia is now developing drone submarines (“Russia Tests Terrifying Unmanned ‘Drone Submarine’ Capable of Carrying Nuclear Warheads Within Range of the US,” *Daily Mail*, Dec. 8, 2016). What if such were ever put under the control of AI decision-making?

Cyber Tower of Babel

Clearly, there is a desperate worldwide race among top technological nations to build this first cyber Tower of Babel, where mankind would again be on the threshold of gaining too much power and unleashing a danger it probably could not control.

In the previous occasion when humanity marshaled all its efforts in a grand self-promoting venture, the cry was: “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth” (Genesis 11:4).

When God saw what people were proposing to do as they obtained more knowledge and technology in a unified way, He said: “Now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech” (verses 6-7). God’s timely intervention put a temporary stop to the advancing technology that threatened man’s own welfare and even survival.

Now scientists are calculating when we will reach the stage of AGI, or Artificial General Intelligence—the level of human-like intelligence capable of reasoning and thinking without the need for problem-specific programming.

As Barrat explains: “Right now scientists are creating artificial intelligence, or AI, of ever-increasing power and sophistication. Some of that AI is in your computer, appliances, smartphone, and car. Some of it is in powerful QA [or question and answer] systems, like Watson. And some of it, advanced by organizations such as Cycorps, Google, Novamente, Numenta, Self-Aware Systems, Vicarious Systems, and DARPA (the [U.S.] Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) is in ‘cognitive architectures,’ whose makers hope will attain *human-level intelligence*, some believe *within a little more than a decade*” (p. 17).

From the level of AGI, scientists and military experts hope to reach ASI, or Artificial Super Intelligence, where a computer will be immeasurably smarter than human beings. If such were to happen, the proverbial genie would be out of the bottle and it would be very hard to put it back in.

Elon Musk has already warned that AI in the wrong hands would become a real nightmare. As *The Economist* article relates, “His Tesla cars use the latest AI technology to drive themselves, but Mr. Musk frets about *a future AI overlord becoming too powerful* for humans to control. ‘It’s fine if you’ve got Marcus Aurelius as the emperor [a humane Roman emperor], but not so good if you have Caligula [a bloodthirsty one],’ he said” (p. 4).

If this newfound and immense AI power falls into the wrong hands, will it be used to control people? Could an evil system use this new AI power to control people with *digital codes and even work permits*? Revelation 13 describes a coming time of totalitarian state control, in a modern Babylon, regarding who is able to conduct commerce, which would seem to require significant monitoring of every person—but we will have to wait and see how this is actually implemented.

The spirit in man

There is one catch that will no doubt impede anticipated advancement as man plunges headlong into building ever-more-powerful intelligent computers to try to copy and then exceed the human brain. It is the fact that human intelligence is a product of the human brain working in union with the *spirit* in man—something that cannot be physically duplicated.

The Bible reveals this non-physical component within human beings that gives them the capacity for abstract thought, emotions and consciousness, telling us, “There is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding” (Job 32:8). (For more on this, enter “spirit in man” in the search bar at ucg.org.)

Here is a formidable barrier to machines ever attaining the level of genuine human intelligence and thinking. A great many scientists think man is just a physical entity with no spirit component, so that copying and then surpassing his mind is an achievable goal, albeit a formidable one.

Nonetheless, even if a computer never attains conscious self-awareness, scientists believe they can *simulate* man’s intelligence. Given enough information, computing power and real life examples, a computer could eventually “act” like a human being, creating what some might consider a semi-life form. Such may not be too far off on the horizon.

Your Kingdom come!

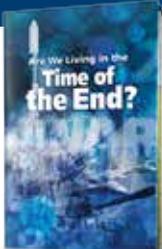
Mankind is already facing many dangers that could lead to extinction—nuclear weapons, deadly chemical weapons, and human-engineered or naturally occurring disease epidemics. And now comes this new existential threat built by the very beings it could eventually destroy.

But just as with the Tower of Babel, God said He would intervene in the end time and not allow the human race to eventually extinguish itself. As Christ promised, “Unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved [alive]; but for the elect’s sake [that is, the sake of His followers] *those days will be shortened*” (Matthew 24:22).

When will this happen? We don’t know for sure, but we already see some conditions the Bible said would be present at the time of the end of this age. As we read in Daniel 12:4, transportation and knowledge were to be vastly increased in the time leading up the return of Jesus Christ. Thanks to the technology revolution, travel and information have increased exponentially in recent times, fulfilling the prophecy of these conditions.

What can we do in the meantime? As already seen, we should not lose hope. We should love God’s truths more than ever, help get out the good news of God’s coming Kingdom, and pray for that Kingdom to come and bring an end to man’s dangerously worsening misrule of the earth.

As Jesus Christ reminded us to pray daily: “Come and set up your kingdom, so that everyone on earth will obey you, as you are obeyed in heaven” (Matthew 6:10, Contemporary English Version). This will be the ultimate solution to man’s dangerous delving into AI and other technological pursuits than can end in catastrophe. **BT**



LEARN MORE

Many Bible prophecies describe the lead up to Jesus Christ’s return as a time when human existence itself will be in peril. You need to know why—and how God promises to intervene! Download or request your free copy of *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* today!

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May the Force (and More) Be With You

Many people, confused by the conception of God as a Trinity, don't really understand the nature and purpose of the Holy Spirit. What is God's Spirit, really? And what can it do for you?

by John Miller

My apologies to *Star Wars* fans: What follows is not an analysis of the spiritual significance of a major element of the film series. The reference in this case comes from a *Christianity Today* article that plays off the films with the subheading “The Holy Spirit: May the Force Be with You?” This article expressed concern at increasing numbers of people who view the Holy Spirit as a force and not a person (Kevin Emmert, “New Poll Finds Evangelicals’ Favorite Heresies,” Oct. 28, 2014).

The article quoted a study by LifeWay Research that asked evangelical Christians whether they agreed or disagreed with, or didn't know concerning, the statement, “The Holy Spirit is a force, not a personal being.” Then 51 percent agreed. When the poll was updated in September 2016, 56 percent agreed that the Holy Spirit was a force rather than a person (Caleb Lindgren, “Evangelicals’ Favorite Heresies Revisited by Researchers,” *Christianity Today*, Sept. 28, 2016).

This is surprising, given that evangelicals generally identify with denominations that consider God to be three coequal persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—a litmus test for orthodoxy.

Is the Holy Spirit a person or personal being? The answer, as revealed in the Bible, is *no*. God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son are personal beings. But the Holy Spirit is not. (Our free study guide *Is God a Trinity?* discusses the origin and fallacy of the Trinity doctrine.)

So is the Holy Spirit a force? Yes, but there's more to it than that. Restricting the Holy Spirit to “the force” that may be “with us” significantly limits the Spirit's scope and work.

The essence of God is Spirit

The Holy Spirit is much more than merely a force. The Holy Spirit is the very essence of God. It speaks to God's power to act throughout the universe and in the affairs of men. It expresses His immeasurable love for mankind and the immutable nature of the truth He set in motion to govern the universe and human relations.

“*God is Spirit*,” Jesus declares, “and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth” (John 4:24, emphasis added throughout). So Spirit is what God is or consists of—His essence. As man consists of flesh, so in a similar manner God consists of Spirit. Spirit and flesh are two very different substances constituting the essential nature of two very different life forms—eternal God and mortal man (compare John 3:6).

When we understand that God the Father is Spirit and that God the Son is Spirit, when we comprehend that Spirit is what God the Father and Jesus Christ consist of, the picture becomes clearer: There are two, not three, who are “God.” From the eternal past there was always God and the Word who was *also* God; and these two became the Father and the Son when the Word came in the flesh as Jesus Christ (John 1:1-5, 14). “I and My Father are one,” Jesus declares (John 10:30)—not literally one divine Being, but two Beings completely unified as one in thought and purpose (compare John 17:11, 21-23).

And yes, the Holy Spirit is God's power, but it is also the very essence and presence of God—of both the Father and Christ. In that sense the Spirit is personal—not a person itself but the means by which God lives among and within us, giving us unity with God.

On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus prayed for this unity to grow and expand: “Holy Father, keep through your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are . . . I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us” (John 17:11, 20-21). Did you grasp what He asked here? Jesus requests of the Father to share with us the Spirit that They Themselves are so that *we may become as They are!*

Thus, both popular concepts of the Holy Spirit, whether a person of the Trinity or a mystical force, have been upstaged by God. He is and has so much more to offer!

Use it or lose its effectiveness

The Holy Spirit is the gift of God's divine nature—His “spiritual DNA,” you might say—given to empower us and connect us to Him. But we have to use it or lose its effectiveness. We see this poignantly expressed in what the apostle Paul wrote to the evangelist Timothy.

Paul calls to remembrance the genuine faith that dwelt first in Timothy's grandmother. And Paul remains persuaded that this faith still dwelt in Timothy (2 Timothy 1:4-5). What encouragement or exhortation can he give to Timothy? Paul gets right to the point: *Use the gift! Stir it up!* “Therefore, I remind you to *stir up the gift of God*,” Paul implores Timothy, “which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (verse 6).

Then Paul contrasts fundamental human nature with the nature of the gift of God: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (verse 7).

Fear vs. power. Fear vs. love. Fear vs. sound-mindedness. The gift of God's Spirit has unhealthy fear outnumbered three to one. But fear is a cruel master that holds millions captive and prevents them from reaching their God-given potential.

Fear fools us. God's Spirit provides us soundness of mind, because it is of the truth. Fear handcuffs us. God's Spirit liberates us, because it is of the love of God. Fear paralyzes us. God's Spirit empowers us, because it is of the supreme Power of the universe. Paul extolls the greatness of the divine gift. It has fear outflanked and outranked on every level.

The essence of God is Spirit, which Paul describes to Timothy in terms synonymous with force, godly character and right thinking—power, love and soundness of mind.

While these attributes of God are not all-encompassing, they were, in Paul's inspired opinion, what was necessary to stoke the fires of faith in his friend and fellow minister.

We should expect no less today.

God's Spirit of power—force

God's Spirit of power is described in the Bible as an energy that flows—compared with wind, water, oil and fire. The Spirit of power is a force to be reckoned with. Perhaps nowhere in the Bible is this more evident than its display of wind and fire on the day of Pentecost.

Luke recounts the story: "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind . . . Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them" (Acts 2:2-3).

What a dramatic display of supernatural pyrotechnics! What a powerful show! But God is not a showman; He is in the growth and people-changing business—and changed people help instill growth and transformation in the lives of others.

Let's notice what happened next: "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (verse 4).

The outcome of the Spirit's power was immediate and tangible. The multitude was first confused and then amazed. Through the power of the Spirit, Galilean fishermen became linguists speaking the languages of those who traveled to Jerusalem from as far away as Asia, Rome and Libya.

"Look," the pilgrims from afar exclaimed, "are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our language in which we were born?" (verses 7-8).

But the miracle had its detractors. "They are full of new wine," some mocked. The claim was as fake as those who reported it. New wine on Pentecost in late spring? Around 9 a.m.? Not probable.

Peter transformed by this new power

This brought Peter to his feet: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. For these are not drunk as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day [about 9 a.m.]" (verses 14-15).

Then he proceeded to connect the effect with the cause, quoting a prophecy of the book of Joel about the end time that had some degree of initial fulfillment when Peter spoke, God having said: "I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young

men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy" (verses 17-18).

With cause connected to effect and with Spirit-imbued courage, he unapologetically engaged the fascinated crowd: "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him . . . you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death" (verses 22-23).

Where was Peter's spirit of fear that had caused him to deny his Lord on the eve of the crucifixion? How could he now publicly defend Him and courageously tell the people their sin?

What had changed? Peter's fear had been displaced by

The day began with about 120 disciples receiving the Spirit, and now about 3,000 more became partakers of the divine nature.

the power of the Spirit. "This Jesus," Peter continued, "God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear" (verse 33).

The resurrected Jesus had returned to the Father in His glorified state. God the Father and Jesus the Son were now pouring out the essence of Their being on people in this dramatic display of power, which produced outcomes that could be seen and heard.

Then Peter spoke to the heart of the matter: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (verse 36).

His courage created conviction that cut to the hearts of his hearers: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" they asked.

The spirit of power spreads

Peter knew the answer because he himself had just experienced it: "Repent [change], and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (verse 38).

About 3,000 people who heard repented and were baptized (verse 41).

The day began with about 120 disciples receiving the Spirit, and now about 3,000 more became partakers of divine nature. These 3,000 were connected to the oneness of the Father and Son, answering Jesus' prayer: "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us" (John 17:20-21).

Peter was doing with the power of the Spirit what Timothy was not doing to the degree he needed to. Peter was using it effectively. He leveraged its power, which imbued him with the courage to act, and his action produced outcomes on Pentecost that forever changed people and the world.

The power of the Spirit is limitless. It overshadowed and impregnated the young virgin Mary so she could give birth to the Son of God. You can read the story in Luke 1. Five of the

ten virgins awaiting the bridegroom in one of Jesus' parables in Matthew 25 failed to have with them the oil representing the Spirit and were locked out of the wedding feast.

Jesus describes the power of the Spirit as waters flowing from the believer's heart: "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). So empowering is the authentic belief in Christ that "rivers of living water" will flow from the believer's heart. It enables empowered believers to grow, produce and give beyond their physical capability.

Is the Holy Spirit the power of God? The story of Pentecost, the virgins' oil to power the lamps, and the promise of living waters flowing from believer's heart deliver a resounding "Yes!"

But the Holy Spirit is not just God's power. Again, there is more.

God's spirit of love—His character

It is a mistake to think that the Holy Spirit begins and ends as God's power. It limits the work of that Spirit in our lives to bring us to our destiny, just like the Trinitarian dogma of a closed system containing three persons in one being excludes us from our destiny.

God's Spirit is also a spirit of love. The Bible even says that "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). This defining characteristic of God casts out fear and produces fruit.

Stated another way, power is not the only thing God poured out on the day of Pentecost. Paul explains in his letter to the congregation in Rome: "Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Romans 5:5, New Revised Standard Version).

Hope that "does not disappoint us" is an undeniable antidote for fear and despondency. But the aged apostle John provides an even more direct connection in this regard: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18).

The Spirit of love poured out into the believer's heart produces a hopeful and fearless believer who courageously acts consistently with God's character—*love*. This is not a theoretical theological construct. It is the practical reality of a Spirit-filled life that produces outcomes the Bible calls "fruit."

"Love suffers long," Paul writes to the church congregation in Corinth, "and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil" (1 Corinthians 13:4-5).

Imagine being able to both give and receive these outcomes! You can because that is the Spirit's promise, but there is more.

Love "does not rejoice in iniquity [or sin], but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (verses 6-8).

The Spirit of love never fails to cast out fear. The Spirit of love never fails to produce outcomes beneficial to a neighbor who is shown love and to the one who shows love to him.

We must understand that the Holy Spirit is not just a force that empowers us to act. Rather it fills us with the love of God, His very nature and character. The Spirit of love is indispensable for a fearless relationship with God and man and the basis for a growth-oriented, productive life.

But Paul says there is more.

God's Spirit of sound-mindedness—truth

The Spirit of sound-mindedness is also described in the Bible as the Spirit of truth.

Truth is the basis for sound-mindedness because the cause of a debased mind is the suppression or rejection of truth. Paul tells us the Romans "suppress[ed] the truth in unrighteousness" even though "God [had] shown it to them" (Romans 1:18-19).

Their suppression of truth had consequences: "God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting" (verse 28).

Truth by definition is immutable and cannot change. Truth is sound. Thinking grounded in truth produces a sound mind, but there is more—the Spirit of truth (bringing sound-mindedness) is gifted to us by God.

Listen to what Jesus promised about the Spirit of truth on the night before He died:

"I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper . . . *the Spirit of truth*, [which] the world cannot receive" (John 14:15-17).

"But when the Helper comes, [which] I shall send to you from the Father, *the Spirit of truth* . . ." (John 15:26).

"*The Spirit of truth* . . . will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

Jesus promised *the Spirit of truth* to guide the minds of His followers into the soundness of "all truth." He delivered that gift on Pentecost, and the promise extends "to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38-39).

Much more could be said about the Spirit of truth, but we come back to the questions we addressed in the beginning:

Is the Holy Spirit a person or personal being? *No*.

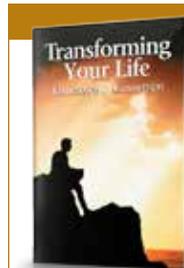
Is the Holy Spirit a force or power? *Yes*, but there is more to it—*much* more.

By giving us the Holy Spirit, God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son are giving the essence of Themselves to us so that we may partake in the divine nature, fulfilling their desire that we may all be one in Them, as the Father is in Christ and Christ is in the Father (2 Peter 1:4; John 17:21).

If you are already a recipient of this divine gift, then heed the admonition of Paul to Timothy and stir it up. If you want to know how to do that, read Paul's instructions to Timothy in the letter.

If you have not yet received the Holy Spirit, then respond to the message of Peter: "Repent [change your thinking and stop disobeying God], and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Whatever the case, it is your responsibility to act. May the force (and more) be with you! 



LEARN MORE

What does it mean to live a life led by God's Holy Spirit? How do we receive that Spirit, and what does it do for us and in us? To better understand, download or request our free study guide *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.

BTmagazine.org/booklets

The Ever-Present Presence of the I AM

The One who has always and forever existed remains ever near. He cares for you and stands knocking at the door, inviting you to invite Him in.

by Robin Webber

Many of us have watched Cecil B. DeMille's classic movie *The Ten Commandments*, starring Charlton Heston as Moses. Remember the scene at the burning bush at Mount Sinai where he experiences the divine presence of the Great Deliverer of Israel and hears His voice?

Moses humbly asks how to answer the Israelites when they ask the name of the God of their fathers who has sent him. The deep, resonating voice responds: "I AM THAT I AM. Thou shalt say, 'I AM hath sent me unto you'" (see Exodus 3:13-14, King James Version). The Hebrew could also mean "I shall be what (or who) I shall be."

This is related to the name God gave immediately afterward—*YHWH* (perhaps pronounced Yahweh), which is difficult to translate into English. Its general meaning is "He Is"—or "He Was, Is and Will Be"—having the sense of Self-Existent or Ever-Existent, "the Eternal." The name is often represented in English Bibles by the word "LORD" (set in capital letters), as it is here (verse 15).

The Great Deliver who said He would deliver Israel (verses 7-10) figuratively hands His calling card to Moses to hold on to the rest of his days, defining Himself essentially as "Always."

Nearly 1,500 years later Jesus of Nazareth, in walking the paths of Judea and Galilee, directly identified Himself as the One who spoke to Moses in shockingly telling the Jews of His day, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58). Moreover, the One whom Moses and the Israelites followed in the wilderness was called the Rock (Deuteronomy 32:3-4, 15, 18), and the apostle Paul tells us, "That Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:3-4).

Thus, the One later born as Jesus was the "Always" who personally interacted with the Israelites as God. The "I AM" who beckoned Israel to follow into the wilderness toward a land of promise is the same Jesus who invites us today with the call of "Follow Me" (John 10:27)—towards the ultimate land of promise, eternity in the Kingdom of God.

In the midst of His followers

But there are times we lose sight of this revelation regarding the One our Heavenly Father has granted to be our immediate and personal Deliverer. Then our cry goes out, "God, where are you when I really, really need you—like right now?!" Yet God said He would never leave us (Hebrews 13:5).

We all need to be reminded at times what makes God what He is. Above His being ever-present, all-knowing and even all-powerful, He is ultimately and undeniably *all-loving*. In fact, the simplest scriptural definition for God is this: "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16, emphasis added throughout).

The one who wrote this, the aged apostle John, was given an opportunity, in a vision, to see the resurrected Jesus Christ and to be powerfully encouraged that, no matter what our condition here might be, Christ, the I AM, is in position to care for our needs.

At a time when the Romans were dramatically persecuting the Church in the late first century A.D., John was reassured that Jesus was and is the living Head of the Church (see Ephesians 1:22-23). Under such severe persecution it would be easy to think that Jesus was a myth, or that He was just one more distant deity whose attention was only drawn through obeisance and continual appeasement.

The apostle records, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,' and 'What you see write in a book . . .'" (Revelation 1:10-11). He then refers to the seven churches of Asia Minor that were being challenged (also representing the whole Church through history).

John next says: "Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man . . . The seven lampstands . . . are the seven churches" (verses 12-13, 20).

The imagery is striking. Here the ascended Jesus Christ is not sidelined or disinterested in the challenges facing His followers, but is directly "in the midst of" them and what they are experiencing. And Jesus conveys a vital message to John intended for the Church then and for us today: "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades [the grave] and of Death" (verses 17-18).

Here we have the ever-present presence of the ascended and exalted Lord Jesus Christ whose consistent self-disclosure, whether as the man from Nazareth or as a glorified being, is "I AM." He proclaims that He is the One who lives forever and who has experienced the worlds of life and death, both placed into His forever hands.

And He tells us, "Don't be afraid!" He's saying He's here

with us now, as much as He was “in the midst of” the fiery furnace in Babylon with Daniel’s three friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego after they refused to worship an idolatrous image (Daniel 3:25). If even King Nebuchadnezzar could see a fourth person with them in the fire whose form “was like the Son of God” (Daniel 4:25), perhaps this column will help open *your* eyes.

At times we are seeking God from outside of the challenges we are going through rather than recognizing He’s right in the midst of those challenges with us. Our Heavenly Father, who is the ultimate Revealer (Revelation 1:1), desired the ever-present presence of His Son in the lives of those personally called by Him (John 6:44, 65) to be fully understood and appreciated.

Bearing a cross—but of whose making?

At this point it’s incumbent to remind ourselves that Jesus

created by our own stubbornness, foolishness or simple rebellion against God’s laws? Every decision has a consequence. Only you can answer this question for yourself—and perhaps this means being completely honest with yourself for the very first time.

No matter the origin of our personal burden, God wants to share His presence with us and provide a means to experience Him and for us to know that He doesn’t want to be marginal to our challenges but at the epicenter of our existence, as we exist to perform His will.

What might possibly be hindering us from experiencing the blessing and comfort of His presence? Unrepentant sin can hinder our ability to experience God’s presence. Isaiah 59:1-2 speaks of God’s extensive desire to love us, but also what can stymie experiencing Him. The prophet says: “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.”

Beyond the impact of sin, our busy lives can hinder our sense of God’s presence because there’s too much of everything else going on. Too much noise. Too much traffic. Too much confusion. Too many thoughts running rampant in our minds. Too much anxiety!

There’s a reason God says, “*Be still* and know that I am God . . . !” (Psalm 46:10). The apostle Paul speaks to a “simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3), and we experience that profound simplicity in His presence when we stop our world—*just stop it!*—and reorder it to His and our Heavenly Father’s glory and honor.

Don’t just knock—answer the knocking

It’s time we focus on “the double knocking” that Scripture tells us about. What’s that? We may be aware of one part of this equation, but not the other. You may be familiar with Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:7: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” It’s a wonderful invitation towards seeking God’s presence, but it’s on our terms and timing.

Now let’s notice what Jesus later said in Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” The reality, then, is that Christ is *also* knocking on the door—the door of our heart—the entrance to our existence. And we must be aware enough of His presence to open the door—over the roar of self and the deafening torrents of this increasingly godless culture swirling around us.

So the knocking goes both ways. The major difference is that Christ continues knocking. His presence is ever-present. The One who identified Himself as “I AM” is “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). He is always there for us, and His abiding words remain ever-present to those who accept His invitation of “Follow Me.” As He tells us, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

Did you hear that knocking again? It’s time to answer the door! **BT**



Christ is also knocking on the door. And we must be aware enough of His presence to open the door.

never said being His disciple would be easy, but He did say *it would be worth it*.

From the beginning Jesus was brutally honest when He told those who would accept His invitation of “Follow Me” the commitment that was required: “Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27). This referred to bearing the weight of one’s own instrument of execution, which of course Jesus did literally toward His own sacrificial death for the sins of the world.

But He showed us how we are all, in a figurative sense, to carry the burdens of our life in self-sacrifice and, like Him, to ultimately commit our spirit to our Heavenly Father (see Luke 23:46) no matter what comes our way. The reality of the Christian life is this: Before you bear a crown, you will have to bear a cross—yet not alone!

The big question at this juncture might concern the nature of the cross we are bearing. Is it a heavy weight borne for righteousness’ sake, or is it a self-made, earthbound burden



March-April *Beyond Today* feedback

Just to add my opinion on the subject of articles about political topics in the letters section of the last issue: I like and appreciate those types of articles! They are always the first ones that I read when I receive a new issue. It doesn't matter if we like or don't like politics, they are always intertwined with our daily life.

Subscriber in Ontario

In the article "God's Blueprint of Salvation Revealed," published in the last issue, you quote the statement: "Many are called, but few are chosen." The scriptural references you cite for this quotation are Matthew 20:16 and John 6:44. The only mainstream translation that makes that statement in Matthew 20:16 is the King James Version, and it is wrong. And in John 6:44, that statement is not made. The only legitimate reference for that statement would be Matthew 22:14, and is the only one in the NT.

From the Internet

Thank you for your comments and question. In Matthew 20:16, the New King James Version states, "So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen." Some other translations, such as the New International Version, do not include the last sentence. These follow an academic reconstructed text based on certain ancient manuscripts. The majority of ancient New Testament manuscripts do contain the sentence. This is one of the minor differences in ancient copies of the New Testament.

Since Jesus also made the same statement in Matthew 22:14, with no manuscript differences here, we can be confident it was part of His teaching. What He was saying was that God calls many people, but not everyone responds. That should be evident by the condition of many in the world today—they profess to be followers of Jesus Christ, have a Bible in their homes, and may even read it occasionally. However, they do not follow God's instructions for how to live.

Only a relatively few people are willing to obey God according to Scripture. Many are called, but to be chosen by God, they have to show willingness to live a life of obedience to Him and submission to His will. Jesus said as much by telling a rich young ruler, "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17). God's gift of salvation is free—but we are expected to live a life worthy of that gift.

In the other scripture reference, John 6:44, Jesus said, "No one can

come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." This shows that it is God the Father who calls or "draws" us to Jesus Christ—no one is capable of coming to Christ unless the Father actively calls him or her. He then allows each person to decide whether to follow Christ—which means a willingness to obey God's laws. If people decide not to obey Him, then they are among the many who are called but not chosen. If they decide to obey Him, then God chooses them, and if they remain faithful, Christ will "raise them up" when He returns (Revelation 17:14; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Read the Questions & Answers section on page 35 and search "How do people truly know if God is calling them?" at UCG.org for more on this topic. We hope this has been a helpful explanation.

Happy to help the work of *Beyond Today*

As a regular donor to your work, I hope and pray that God continues His blessings on everyone who is preaching the gospel of the coming Kingdom. I appreciate your magazine and all the study aids that I have received. They give joy, hope and nourishment to my soul. Thank you for your prayers, and may God richly bless each and every one of you for preparing the people of God.

Reader in Ontario

Expressing gratitude for *Beyond Today* TV

Your *Beyond Today* TV program "Dabbling With Demons" was absolutely outstanding in presentation quality and content. I had somehow missed it when it originally aired, but saw it today and am deeply grateful for the message. It is very timely with suicide by young adults and teenagers on a horrifying rise. The fact that your presenters are also pastors with years of experience adds to the quality as well. Please convey my gratitude and best wishes to Gary Petty for this program, as well as to the other presenters.

From the Internet

Thanks from around the world

I have just received my copy of the January-February issue of *Beyond Today*. I find the many topics very interesting and appreciate the amount of research that was put into writing them.

Subscriber in Guyana

I would like to express my gratitude. I received my second issue of *Beyond Today*, and the magazine is very educational, inspiring and spiritually uplifting. I have to reread most of the articles in order to get the points, but it is a real gift and blessing for me. God bless you!

Subscriber in Uganda

Seeking to keep the Sabbath and God's other festivals

Who can I contact about joining and becoming a member of a United Church of God congregation in my area? After attending many churches in my 62 years, God has shown me that the Sabbath day is most definitely Saturday, and the majority of the world is in denial. When I read over the Ten Commandments—and especially number four—it makes me wonder why almost all the world refuses to follow it. Thank you and may God bless us all.

From the Internet

I would like more information on how to celebrate the biblical

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

—K.T., Facebook fan



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Q: How do I truly know if God is calling me?

From the Internet

A: Jesus made it clear that no one can come to Him unless God the Father draws him (John 6:44, 65). And the apostle James later told us that as we draw near to God, He will draw near to us (James 4:8). The apostle Paul pointed out that we are called by the gospel—the good news of the Kingdom of God (2 Thessalonians 2:14).

It's further noted that our understanding must be "enlightened" or "illuminated" (Ephesians 1:18; Hebrews 6:4; 10:32). And the revelation of the things of God must come through His Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 1:9-14). Jesus told His disciples that this "Spirit of truth" was working *with* them and would later be *in* them at the time of their conversion (John 14:17).

Additionally, Psalm 111:10 says that "a good understanding have all those who do [God's] commandments," and Acts 5:32 tells us that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him. Moreover, it is God who gives us the desire to repent and live according to His will (2 Timothy 2:25; Philippians 2:13).

What we see from all this is that God uses the gospel message to draw us to Him, giving us initial understanding through His Spirit and a desire to change—and then, as we respond in obedience, God gives us increasing understanding and conviction to walk in His ways.

One of the signs God may be calling you is that you are beginning, however gradually, to understand the Scriptures with a depth and dimension you never experienced before. You are starting to learn the mysteries of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 13:10-11)—and you are growing in conviction that you need to respond and act on this understanding. Perhaps you have even begun to respond in certain ways, resulting in God increasing your understanding even further.

Nothing is more important than God's calling. Consider the majesty and greatness of what it means. The apostle Peter referred to this magnificent calling in his first letter:

"You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Peter's inspired description of the Christian calling helps us to

comprehend the majesty of God's salvation. This great calling is made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins and the forgiveness He made freely available.

And this forgiveness was not for us to continue practicing sin as a way of life, but in repentance to cease from that and obey God. Jesus' preaching of the gospel was accompanied by a call to action and faith: "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14-15).

As already mentioned, if God is calling you, you will have awakened to the need for change in your personal life—to bring it into line with the godly standards and values shown in the Scriptures, "to live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (Ephesians 4:1, New International Version).

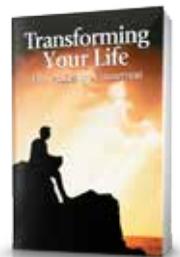
The promises of God should inspire faith—deep trust in God. And the more we study God's Word, the more faith is built in us (Romans 10:17). Repentance in faith will at length lead to being baptized and receiving the Holy Spirit in us (Acts 2:38) for far greater empowerment to change, understand and remain faithful. Then we must, with God's ongoing help, continue to grow spiritually throughout our Christian life.

Hopefully you are drawing near to making such a commitment. But even if not, you can still start drawing closer to God, asking for His help to lead you in following His ways and committing to following His instructions from the Bible as explained in *Beyond Today* magazine. And God is certainly patient in working with you.

Still, regardless of whether you feel you are being called right now or not, God's requirements still stand—and they stand for you. As Paul told a Greek audience steeped in idolatry: "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31).

The evidence is there for all of us—if we will but see. May God help *you* to see—and to act.

To learn more about responding to God's call, living a life worthy of that calling and how that leads to eternal life in the Kingdom of God, be sure to request or download our free study guide *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.



feast days. I just don't know what to do on these days, but the Holy Spirit has placed it on my heart to start to incorporate this into my life. I live in the Los Angeles area and would also like to attend a feast-keeping church in my area.

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Great news—there is a United Church of God congregation in your area! We keep God's feasts and would gladly welcome you to come visit. You can find the location of the closest congregation at ucg.org/congregations.

Keeping God's festivals is one of the most inspiring things you can do as a Christian. God has imbedded His step-by-step plan of salvation

*for all humankind into their meaning—a metaphorical road map that reveals how He will offer all mankind the gift of eternal life. Search "How do Christians observe the biblical festivals?" on ucg.org to learn more. Interested readers may wish to download or request our free study guide *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.*

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Jesus Christ

THE GREATEST PROPHET

W

elcome to the seventh lesson in the “Bible Prophecy and You” series.

Bible prophecy centers on Jesus Christ.

The last lesson in this series pointed to the Old Testament prophecies that foretold many, many details of His first coming—of His birth, life, death and resurrection. The next lesson will focus on prophecies of His *second* coming, which will be the *grand climax* of world history!

But *this* lesson focuses on Jesus Himself being the greatest prophet who ever lived. A prophet is one whom God has sent to speak for Him—declaring His will and judgment in the present and what is yet to come. Jesus proclaimed both.

First of all, He is the member of the God family who directly inspired all the prophecies we find in the Bible. We could call the apostle John a prophet because he wrote the book of Revelation, but the book is actually “the revelation of Jesus Christ,” given to Him by God the Father, which John merely recorded (Revelation 1:1).

In addition, Jesus during His earthly ministry personally proclaimed approximately 100 prophecies—amazing, as most people today don’t even think of Jesus as a prophet. A great many of His teachings were prophetic! And His startling prophecies clarify many other Bible prophecies, especially those of the end time.

The Prophet in Moses’ place

Jesus of Nazareth was in fact the great “Prophet” earlier foretold by Moses.

After being delivered from slavery in Egypt and wandering

in the wilderness for nearly 40 years, the Israelites were ready to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land. On this occasion, God inspired Moses to summarize what they had experienced and what God had taught them. That summary is the book of Deuteronomy.

Moses reminded the Israelites that God was not permitting him to go into the Promised Land because he had impetuously not followed God’s specific instructions in dealing with the nation on a particular occasion (Numbers 20:7-12; Deuteronomy 3:23-28).

The Israelites must have felt pretty nervous at the idea of facing many new challenges and dangers without Moses, who had led them for 40 years. To reassure them, God did three things. First, He reminded everyone that He, the Lord, was in charge and that He personally would lead and protect them (Deuteronomy 31:8).

Second, He inaugurated Joshua to take Moses’ place and said, “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you” (Numbers 27:18-20; Joshua 1:5).

Third, God gave Moses and the nation a prophecy that someday there would be another prophet like Moses. God said, “I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him” (Deuteronomy 18:18).

At times during the ministry of Jesus, people guessed that He was the promised “Prophet” (John 6:14; 7:40). After Jesus’ resurrection, Peter and Stephen both declared that Jesus was indeed “the Prophet” foretold through Moses (Acts 3:20-23; 7:37).

What Jesus foretold

By some counts, Jesus Christ gave approximately 100 recorded prophecies of the future during His ministry. Many were about His eventual return to the earth and other end-time events.

Many others were about what would happen soon after He spoke—His arrest, trial, suffering, death and resurrection. In part, He was trying to prepare His disciples for all that would come. But more than that, His prophecies combined with their exact fulfillments constitute further proof that He was exactly who He claimed to be.

Let's now take note of several important prophecies Christ gave and their fulfillments.

► Did Jesus prophesy specific things about His disciples?

“Now as they were eating, He said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.’ And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to Him, ‘Lord, is it I?’ He answered and said, ‘He who dipped his hand with Me in the dish will betray Me. The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.’

“Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, ‘Rabbi, is it I?’ He said to him, ‘You have said it.’ . . .

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.” But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.’

“Peter answered and said to Him, ‘Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times’” (Matthew 26:21-25, 31-34).

Here Jesus foretold that Judas Iscariot would betray Him, that all His disciples would scatter and that Peter would deny Him three times. These were all fulfilled exactly (Matthew 26:47-50, 56, 69-75).

► Jesus pronounced “woe” on three cities of His day. What happened to them?

“Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: ‘Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.

“And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades [that is, into the ground]; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you” (Matthew 11:20-24).

Jesus preached in and did mighty miracles in three towns where almost everyone reacted with disbelief. Then Jesus “began to rebuke the cities,” saying, “Woe to you . . . !”

Today, almost nothing remains of those three towns. *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* says: “This has been

strictly fulfilled. In the wars between the Jews and the Romans, Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum, etc., were so completely desolated that it is difficult to determine their former situation” (note on verse 23).

The people who lived in those towns will someday have their opportunity to repent and receive salvation, but the fate of those towns is testimony to the accuracy of Jesus' pronouncement.

► Did Jesus foresee the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem?

“Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, ‘Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down’” (Matthew 24:1-2).

“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:20-24; compare 23:27-31).

The destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by the Roman army under Titus was a first fulfillment of this prophecy. Another destruction will take place in the future, as the Olivet Prophecy is primarily about the “end of the age” (Matthew 24:3).

► Did Jesus foretell He would die and be raised to life in three days?

“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ Then the Jews said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?’ But He was speaking of the temple of His body” (John 2:19-21).

“We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands’” (Mark 14:58).

“And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31).

At times, Jesus said He would rise “*in* three days” or “*within* three days,” which means no more than three days. At other times, He said “*after* three days,” which means no less than three days. Taken together, these statements show that it would occur *right at three days*.

► Did Jesus announce that His body would be in the tomb for “three days and three nights”?

“Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’ But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks

after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:38-40).

Jesus had performed many public miracles, and yet the hostile Pharisees still asked for another “sign.” At that point, Jesus did not entertain them with another miracle, but He gave them the ultimate sign and proof that He was who He said He was—the Messiah and Son of God. He said that after He died, He would be “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

The popular idea of a Friday afternoon crucifixion and Sunday morning resurrection does *not* add up to three days and three nights! The truth is that Jesus died and was entombed on a Wednesday afternoon and was resurrected on the following Sabbath (Saturday) afternoon. For a full explanation and proof of this, search for “Good Friday—Easter Sunday” at ucg.org/learnmore.

► Did Jesus promise that He would come to earth a second time?

“. . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3).

“For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38).

“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Luke 12:40).

“Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Luke 21:27).

Jesus repeatedly referred to His second coming in His statements and parables. As earlier mentioned, the next lesson will focus on prophecies of Christ’s second coming.

► Did Jesus prophesy terrible deception in the future, especially in the end time?

“And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying [that] I am Christ; and shall deceive many” (Matthew 24:4-5, King James Version).

“Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many” (verse 11).

“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it” (verses 23-26).

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:15-23).

Jesus began His Olivet Prophecy about the end time with the words, “Take heed that no one deceives you,” and then repeatedly warns of deceivers. Some deception is done in His name, by those calling Him Lord and claiming to be Christian and yet teaching against the Bible. What does Christ think of those who masquerade as His followers while preaching and living contrary to the truth? At the time of judgment, He will say to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Matthew 7:23).

► Did Jesus indicate that many in the end time will be saying that this is the end time?

“And He said: Take heed that ye be not led astray: for many shall come in my name, saying [that] I am he; and, The time is at hand: go ye not after them” (Luke 21:8, American Standard Version).

Jesus warned that a seemingly endless variety of individuals will claim that He is the Christ, but they won’t be teaching the truth. Today we see religious and secular leaders saying that we are approaching the end of the world as we know it, but with widely divergent messages about what we should do. Could this be Satan’s way of creating so many counterfeit messages that it becomes difficult for most listeners to tell who is teaching the truth of the Bible?

► Did Jesus promise that He would build His Church?

“. . . On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades [the grave] shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

Jesus promised He would build His Church, and He did. He also promised, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). The Church began with power from God, as described in Acts 2. It has continued on in spite of incredible opposition from Satan and many other enemies. Even with periodic persecution and martyrdom of true Christians, the Church has survived and continues to do God’s work of preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God and teaching and caring for those God has called. We will cover much more about the Church in other lessons.

Apply now

Read the very important 24th chapter of Matthew, Jesus’ Olivet Prophecy—though it actually continues through chapter 25 with three prophetic parables. This is an extended prophecy of the major trends and events leading up to the second coming of Christ. Plus it is very spiritually sobering and instructive.

Write down the things Christ asks us to do as we prepare for the times of trouble and the wonderful Kingdom of God Christ will bring when He returns. And read our free study guide *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* for a thorough explanation of this prophecy. **BT**



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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

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

E-mail: norden@ucg.org

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

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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

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

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