July-August 2012

The Good News

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING



What Makes a True Leader?

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BEYOND TODAY
UNDERSTANDING YOUR FUTURE

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What Made Them Great?



One of America's most famous landmarks is Mount Rushmore, a testament to four of the nation's most renowned presidents. What made them great leaders?

As the nation's first president, George Washington was a remarkable figure. As a young man of 20, he wrote his own book of prayers expressing his faith and devotion to God. He turned down the offer to become king of the new nation, wanting to see the nation carry through its experiment in forming a new kind of government and not repeat the mistakes of so many monarchies.

He viewed God and His Word as indispensible to carrying out his office, saying, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible" (quoted by William Federer, *America's God and Country: Encyclopedia of Quotations,* 2000, p. 660).

A second figure on Mount Rushmore is Thomas Jefferson, the nation's third president and author of the Declaration of Independence, which reads: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. That they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

What can we learn from such men? We live in a world suffering greatly from a crisis in leadership, so in this issue we examine what makes a true leader.

In his second inaugural address in 1805, he declared: "I shall need, too, the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our forefathers, as Israel of old, from their native land and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessities and comforts of life, who has covered our infancy with His Providence . . . and to whose goodness I ask you to join with me in supplications" (ibid. p. 327).

Abraham Lincoln, America's 16th president, also holds a place of honor on Mount Rushmore. Known as "Honest Abe," he once wrote: "I believe the Bible is the best gift God has given to man. All the good Saviour gave to the world was communicated through this Book" (ibid., p. 338).

Even though most of his presidency was consumed in a bitter civil war, he instituted the first annual national day of thanksgiving to God, which has been celebrated ever since as Thanksgiving Day. Sadly, Lincoln was assassinated not long after beginning his second term. His widow later recalled that at the very moment he was shot, he was telling her how much he "wanted to visit the Holy Land and see those places hallowed by the footprints of the Saviour" (ibid., p. 391).

The last of the four presidents on Mount Rushmore is the nation's 26th, Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt. Like the others cited above, he held God's Word in high regard, saying, "A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education" (ibid., p. 540).

In his second inaugural address in 1905 he said, "No people on earth have more cause to be thankful than ours, and this is said reverently, in no spirit of boastfulness in our own strength, but with gratitude to the Giver of good who has blessed us" (ibid.).

What can we learn from such men? A great deal. We live in a world suffering greatly from a crisis in leadership, so in this issue we examine what makes a true leader. When we consider the traits of great leaders such as these, we see that a common denominator is their humility and a heart of service to others arising from a deep respect for God and His Word. Sadly, much of the world has forgotten (or never known) that this lies at the heart of true leadership!

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor

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What Makes a True Leader?

What characteristics distinguish a true leader from someone merely occupying a leading position? What makes a person a true leader? ***by Jerold Aust***

This is a year for electing the president of the United States. So it's a fitting time to explore the qualities of true leadership.

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and presidential biographer Dr. James MacGregor Burns, who received his Ph.D. in political science from Harvard, wrote a highly influential book in 2010 titled *Leadership,* which is thorough, incisive and instructive on many levels. He precedes his prologue with a few notable quotes, including one from Franklin Roosevelt, U.S. president from 1933 to 1945:

"The Presidency is . . . preeminently a place of moral leadership. All our great Presidents were leaders of thought at times when certain historic ideas in the life of the nation had to be clarified . . . That is what the office is—a superb opportunity for reapplying, applying in new conditions, the simple rules of human conduct to which we always go back. Without leadership alert and sensitive to change, we are all bogged up or lose our way."

What a contrast to the mudslinging we typically see in election campaigns. Attempts are made to malign opposing candidates in a variety of ways. Denigrating stories regarding a candidate may be researched and exploited or even invented by the opposition's supporters. While the not-so-subtle attacks don't necessarily emanate from the candidates themselves, they might affirm their approval.

Some of the supporters engaged in such tactics constitute the political brain-trust strategizing a hopeful candidate's bid for the highest office in the world. Other supporters supply the essential finances to catapult their candidate to victory, making it possible for the candidate to hire persuasive specialists extraordinaire. Is this what true leadership is all about?

The stakes in any U.S. presidential election are high since the winning candidate will occupy the most powerful position on earth—able to palpably affect the lives of

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hundreds of millions of Americans as well as the people of other nations of the world and their standards of living. Is such power and influence the key to leadership?

More to the point, does seeking and obtaining a position of leadership—along with the authority, responsibilities and decision-making that accompany that position—make someone a leader? Or is there more to it than that? Just what constitutes a true leader?

George Washington's commendable leadership

Burns addresses transformational leadership, the back cover of his book summarizing his assessment "that the best leaders are those who inspire others to come together toward the achievement of higher aims." A few U.S. presidents have come close to this definition of good leadership.

George Washington was perhaps the most effective leader of all U.S. presidents. Among America's founding fathers, Joseph Ellis, another Pulitzer Prize-winning author, reckons him "the Foundingest Founder of them all" (*His Excellency: George Washington,* 2004, p. xiv).

Ellis extolls Washington in an unusual way. He lists the areas of the human condition that placed Washington in a secondary role to other brilliant contemporaries of his time—then easy to find—yet concludes that all his contemporaries agreed that he was the superior leader.

Ellis' research shows that Benjamin Franklin was wiser than Washington, Alexander Hamilton more brilliant, John Adams better read, Thomas Jefferson more intellectually sophisticated, and James Madison more politically astute. Yet all of these stellar figures acknowledged that George Washington was their unquestioned superior.

As Ellis relates, one defining event revealing Washington's superior leadership qualities was his fearless role in rallying troops in 1755 during the French and Indian War.

The story goes that British forces accidentally confronted a large detachment of French and Indians, who spread themselves out in a semicircle and fired on the British, including Washington. His Virginia troops were trapped in a relentless crossfire and were nearly wiped out. The commander in chief for the 13 British colonies, General Edward Braddock, bold and stubborn, attempted to rally his men but was cut down with wounds to his chest and shoulder.

Washington came forward to rally the troops, riding back and forth among their remnants, and had two horses shot out beneath him—and his coat pierced by four musket balls. He escaped without a scratch and saved many lives by risking his own. This occasion showed him to be a man of courage in the face of a lost cause and earned him the moniker "man of destiny"—well before his later great endeavors.

Does seeking and obtaining a position of leadership—along with the authority, responsibilities and decision-making that accompany that position—make someone a leader? Or is there more to it than that?

Not all leaders display good leadership

Washington's leadership qualities compared to more recent political antics in the city that bears his name highlight the fact that the terms leader and leadership aren't always synonymous.

Of course, the whole span of human history makes it clear that not all leaders practice selfless leadership.

You don't have to be a Harvard graduate to list at least some of the most tyrannical and infamous leaders of the past century, including Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse-tung and, more recently, Saddam Hussein. Many millions of innocent people lost their lives under the manipulation, control and resulting satanic carnage such tyrannical figures perpetrated against humanity.

These were all extreme cases of a problem Jesus Christ described: "In this world the kings and great men lord it over their people, yet they are called 'friends of the people'" (Luke 22:25, New Living Translation).

Indeed, they went even further in self-exaltation, addictively morphing themselves into the insane and corrupted attitude of the Roman emperor Vespasian—who, perhaps motivated by his flair for theatrics, exclaimed on his deathbed in A.D. 79 that he felt himself becoming a god.

All of these took after the unseen figure who was ultimately their spiritual leader—the one the Bible calls "the ruler of this world" and "the god of this age" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Corinthians 4:4). These various tyrants—and especially the chief tyrant Satan the devil—all aptly demonstrate the point that not all leaders display good leadership.

Power politics vs. godly perspective

Some still quote Machiavelli—the Italian Renaissance philosopher whose book *The Prince* is famous for its conception that in statecraft the ends justify the means—as the quintessential lexicon of wielding power, including through political persuasion and influence.

Burns, however, points out limitations in such a model: "Because power can take such multifarious, ubiquitous, and subtle forms, it is reflected in an infinite number of combinations and particularities in specific contexts. Even so, observers *in* those contexts may perceive their particular 'power mix' as the basic and universal type, and they will base elaborate descriptions and theories of power on one model—their own.

"Even Machiavelli's celebrated portrait of the uses and abuses of power, while relevant to a few other cultures and eras, is essentially culture-bound and irrelevant to a host of other power situations and systems. Thus popular tracts on power—how to win power and influence people—typically are useful only for particular situations and may disable the student of power coping with quite different power constellations" (p. 16).

Nevertheless, among the notable quotes preceding his prologue, Burns shares a

telling observation from Machiavelli that remains relevant to politics today:

"A prince will never lack for legitimate excuses to explain away his breaches of faith. Modern history will furnish innumerable examples of this behavior, showing how the man succeeded best who knew best how to play the fox. But it is a necessary part of this nature that you must conceal it carefully; you must be a great liar and hypocrite. Men are so simple of mind, and so much dominated by their immediate needs, that a deceitful man will always find plenty who are ready to be deceived."

This advice is as applicable in our time as it was in Machiavelli's—for the immoral pursuers of power who would take advantage of it. Television viewers filled daily with media banter, especially in an election year, are quite susceptible of being misled.

Of course, Almighty God, who has the most power in all the universe, in no way approves of the misuse of power and influence, especially through lies and hypocrisy. God the Father Himself exhibits perfect, righteous leadership—as does His Son Jesus Christ.

The Bible says that God created man in His own image (Genesis 1:26-27) and that we should be emulating His righteous approach. Yet history shows that man has followed the lead of Satan, with self-absorbed leaders taking themselves too seriously and going to all lengths to achieve fame and honor for themselves.

To degrees, this is true even of many who are generally decent people who want to help others. Part of the reason many leaders fail to display good leadership is that they have a myopic and distorted view of themselves—becoming all the worse as they gain more power.

In the words of a famous maxim, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" (Lord Acton, 1887). Scripture warns, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). The problem lies in the human heart: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9).

Clearly God knows that men can exercise great power over those they rule—to positive or negative effect depending in large part on their real motivation: "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan" (Proverbs 29:2).

God warns against selfish leadership and instructs in true, unselfish leadership. Every





"When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan."

person needs to honestly assess his or her actual motives.

Seven common missteps of selfish leadership

Here are some typical errant tactics of leaders who are too self-absorbed. These can overlap, and they do not represent all the wrong methods of selfish leaders.

- ***Schmoozing.*** A schmoozer is one who chats up people to persuade them or gain favor, business or connections. He doesn't follow Shakespeare's dictum from *Hamlet* to its intended conclusion: "To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man" (Act 1, scene 3).
- ***Politics.*** Years ago, I read a communication article in a law journal that focused on politics as violence. The idea wasn't that politics *does* violence but that it *is* violence. Political chicanery takes advantage of others to promote oneself. Worldly politics hurts everyone. Human history could be chronicled from the perspective of violence through human politics.
- ***Playing favorites.*** A true leader might well enjoy the company of some more than others, but he still intends and strives to treat everyone with fairness and equity. On a personal level Jesus gravitated to the apostle John naturally (John 13:23), but He also treated all with godly love (Matthew 22:39).
- ***Playing to personalities.*** When Jesus returns to the earth, He will make decisions regarding issues on the basis of God's laws, bringing justice and fairness: "He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth" (Isaiah 11:3-4). In today's world, judgments are based on outward appearances, on clever arguments and on who has power (compare James 2:1-7).
- ***Deception.*** Human beings are given to deception, shading the truth, spinning and coloring the facts. The apostle Peter said that Jesus was without guile or deception (1 Peter 2:22).
- ***Hypocrisy.*** Hypocrisy is feigning to be what one is not—or to believe what one does not. He leads others astray in order to gain advantage over them or to elevate himself.
- ***Hiding true feelings.*** Many years ago, I got into an elevator with an instructor of the Christian college where my children attended. He told me that they were very transparent—that they were what they

Photos: Wikimedia

appeared to be. Jesus highly complimented one of His disciples, Nathanael, for *his* transparency at their first meeting, declaring, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, *in whom is no deceit!"* (John 1:47, emphasis added).

Seven characteristics of a true leader

How, then, is a true leader identified? The following characteristics—again, not comprehensive—are taken from scriptural teachings and biblical examples.

- ***True leaders begin with humility.*** Humility is the singular key to divine knowledge, spiritual understanding and godly wisdom. Without humility, one cannot be taught. If one is not teachable, he or she cannot learn and grow. Godly wisdom, riches and honor begin with humility toward our Creator, Sustainer and Savior (Proverbs 15:33; 22:4). Only a humble person can be taught God's words of eternal life to then be able share them with others.
- ***True leaders love people.*** God has placed human beings on the earth to learn to love Him and each other, unconditionally. If we can learn the great lesson of loving our neighbor, encapsulated in the last six of the Ten Commandments, then we are indeed true leaders of and for God.
- ***True leaders are inclusive.*** This is in accordance with God's creation of all people in His image and His intent to save everyone who does not ultimately reject Him. If the inclusive leader sees some who are shy or passive, he tries to bring them into the group and encourages them to share themselves with others.
- ***True leaders serve others.*** God intends all true leaders to serve others, not to seek to be served by them. Jesus said He came to serve, not to be served—and we are to follow His example (Luke 22:26-27; 1 Peter 2:21-23). Anyone who understands God's purpose for humankind knows that serving others is the sure road to spiritual and everlasting success. God will ultimately raise human beings who unconditionally and faithfully serve others to His level of existence forever.
- ***True leaders aren't envious of others.*** Envy can and will consume a person who aspires to lead others for the wrong reasons. Often people go through their entire lives not realizing that they are envious of others' successes, though others may see it. Envy is defined as resentment against another believed to enjoy an advantage with a desire to have that same advantage. Envy doesn't come from God but the god of this world, who is consumed by his envy of humankind's ultimate destiny (Job 1:8-11; 1 Corinthians 6:3; Hebrews 1:13-14).
- ***True leaders value and strive for good character.*** Good character is difficult to come by because it does *not* come naturally. It comes through self-denying sacrifice in serving God and others (Matthew 16:24-25)—persevering even through hardship (Romans 5:4). True character comes from God (James 1:17). It's learned (Hebrews 5:14) on a daily basis (2 Corinthians 4:16) by striving to overcome the evil downward pulls of one's human nature with God's help through Christ (Galatians 2:20).
- ***True leaders emulate great leaders.*** True leaders are made, not born. Indeed, truly great leaders follow the greatest of all leaders ever born, Jesus the Christ, the very Son of God the Father. He led the way in loving others and laying down His life for them—as He also expects of us (John 15:12-14). This is where daily Bible study and prayer come into play. True leadership is available only in and through God's Word.

The perfect true leader

Every four years, God allows people in the United States to learn the hard lessons of presidential partisan politics. Each party extols its candidate and promotes deleterious, harmful stories about its rival, chauvinistically. We need to recognize that the way of the world is highly corrosive and destructive—while *God's* way of serving and sacrificing for others is constructive and healing (Hebrews 8:1-12).

In an illuminating book titled *The Leadership Lessons of Jesus: A Timeless Model for Today's Leaders,* authors Bob Briner and Ray Pritchard write:

"In the Jewish society of that day—as in most societies of every generation—there was a huge emphasis on power, position, prestige, and titles. 'Who's number one?' is still the operative question. At that point [when His disciples disputed among themselves about this], he could have rebuked them again, but instead he chose this moment for an unforgettable teaching experience. 'To be first, you must be last!' [See Mark 9:33-35.]

"None of Jesus' leadership lessons may seem more paradoxical than the servant/leader concept, which is, in fact, the very essence of both his leadership example and his leadership teaching. The concept of the servant/leader is difficult for many to grasp today, in part because our leadership literature espouses just the opposite, glorifying a different kind of leader altogether. Literature extolling Atilla the Hun, telling us, 'You don't get what you deserve, you get what you negotiate,' and generally teaching a me-first, in-your-face, slash-and-burn leadership style is the norm.

"Think about it. If you're leading a company and you put your employees, colleagues, and customers first, you are on the road to success. On the other hand, if the bottom line comes first no matter what, you are likely headed for abuses and disaster. Actually, the lessons of Jesus only *seem* to be paradoxical. They are, in fact, clear-eyed, ultimately workable, and eminently practical. Best of all, they work in time and for eternity" (2008, pp. 182-183).

God calls the weak of the world to become spiritually strong so as to lead and teach the rest of humanity God's true way of living, which leads to life everlasting! "God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God" (1 Corinthians 1:27-29, NLT).

At Christ's second coming, when He sets up His glorious Kingdom on earth at Jerusalem, He will also establish His then-immortal saints, true leaders all, as ruling judges under Him of human beings and angels (1 Corinthians 6:2-3) and as His priests (Revelation 5:10) who will teach all humankind in the right way to live (Isaiah 30:20-21; Daniel 12:3).

Jesus Christ possesses the thoughts and actions of a true leader, the loving ingredients of what makes a true leader. By following Him, you too can become a true leader in a world that cries out for good, true leadership! ***GN***

Learn More



Who was the greatest leader ever born, and what lessons can we learn from His example and life? The real story of Jesus Christ is considerably different that what most people think. How well do you understand it? To learn more, request or download your free copy of *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* today!

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Leaders of American History: A Legacy of Respect for God & the Bible

Past leaders of the United States often expressed sincere devotion to God and Christian principles—in contrast to today's marginalization of biblical faith. ***by Noel Hornor***

The framers of the U.S. Constitution believed that it involved miracles. The author of a book titled *Miracle at Philadelphia: The Story of the Constitutional Convention May to September 1787* wrote: "Miracles do not occur at random, nor was it the author of the book who said there was a miracle at Philadelphia in the year 1787. George Washington said it, and James Madison. They used the word in writing to their friends: Washington to Lafayette, Madison to Thomas Jefferson" (Catherine Drinker Bowen, 1986, p. xi).

These and many others among America's past leaders displayed humility before the Creator God of the Bible, realizing their helplessness apart from Him. Abraham Lincoln, one of the giants of American history who served as president during the Civil War of the 1860s, declared, "I do not care whether God is on my side; the important question is whether I am on God's side, for God is always right" (quoted by Erwin Lutzer, *Is God On America's Side? The Surprising Answer and How It Affects Our Future,* 2008, p. 72).

Yet times have changed. Many leaders today are often reticent to openly proclaim trust in God except in carefully nuanced rhetoric—or they are openly hostile to biblical values. This is part and parcel with the decline of the culture.

What is the United States like in the 21st century? One writer lamented a decade ago: "We laugh at God's law. Literally. Tune in virtually any TV or cable channel, and see how long you can listen until somebody mocks what God has said is good.

"The more pointed the mockery gets, the more raucous the laughter. Chastity, fidelity, and heterosexuality are targets of derision. God's name can still be mentioned on TV and in the movies, but it's far more likely to be heard (even on the news) in a blasphemous context than any other way" (Joel Belz, "Where Is God?" *World,* Oct. 5, 2002). And the situation has worsened since this was written.

If you took a survey, many would say that America is still a Christian nation. But to see things more clearly, we should compare the country's current attitudes and biblical underpinnings, or lack thereof, to those of the nation's leaders at its founding and in the centuries since.

Founders' outlook toward God and the Bible

As mentioned, the Founding Fathers of the United States believed that God was present at Philadelphia—and they saw His handiwork in the process of forming the country. During the Constitutional Convention, "at a particularly fierce period of debate in late June 1787, when agreement seemed distant, Benjamin Franklin spoke up. In a passionate, intelligent, and measured tone, Franklin reminded the Convention of what God had done for America thus far" (Jon Meacham, *American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation,* 2006, p. 88).

Franklin stated: "In the beginning of the contest with Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayers in this room for the divine protection! Our prayers, sir, were heard; and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a superintending providence in our favor" (quoted by Meacham, p. 89). He then called for regular prayers in the Congress.

A few years later in 1790, Franklin wrote to Yale University President Ezra Stiles, stating, "As to Jesus of Nazareth, my Opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think the System of Morals and his Religion, as he left them to us, is the best the World ever saw, or is likely to see" (quoted by William Federer, *America's God and Country: Encyclopedia of Quotations,* 2000, pp. 250-251).

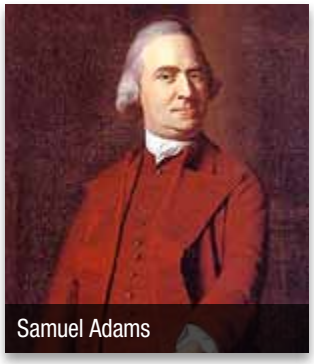
The premier Founding Father was of course George Washington, known as the "Father of his country." He led American forces during the Revolution, headed the Constitutional Convention and served as the

first president of the republic for two terms.

When Delaware Indian chiefs brought three youths to be trained in American schools in 1779, General Washington had an aide write these words to them: "Congress will look upon them as their own Children . . . You do well to wish to learn our arts and ways of life, and above all, the religion of Jesus Christ. These will make you a greater and happier people than you are. Congress will do everything they can to assist you in this wise intention" (quoted by Federer, p. 644).

On entering the presidency, "Washington took office by putting his hand on a Bible and declaring 'So help me God'" (Steven Waldman, *Founding Faith: How Our Founding Fathers Forged a Radical New Approach to Religious Liberty,* 2008, p. 160).


The 1787 Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia


Samuel Adams

And near the end of his time in office, he wrote an open letter, known as his "Farewell Address," that warned the American people of the political dangers they must avoid if they are to remain true to their values. "George Washington argued that 'of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports'" (Robert Putnam and David Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us,* 2010, p. 443).

Another major figure in the founding of America, though not so well-known today, was Samuel Adams—second cousin of second U.S. president John Adams—who was eulogized as the "Father of the American Revolution." He eventually became the governor of Massachusetts.

Samuel Adams declared: "I conceive we cannot better express ourselves than by humbly supplicating the Supreme Ruler of the world . . . that the confusions that are and have been among the nations may be overruled by the promoting and speedily bringing in the holy and happy period when the kingdoms of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ may be everywhere established, and the people willingly bow to the sceptre of Him who is the Prince of Peace" (quoted by Federer, p. 24).

John Adams' son John Quincy Adams, the sixth president of the United States, later stated of the founding era, "From the day of the Declaration [of Independence] . . . they (the American people) were bound by the laws of God, which they all, and by the laws of The Gospel, which they nearly all, acknowledge as the rules of their conduct" (quoted by Federer, p. 18).


Benjamin Franklin


George Washington, U.S. president 1789–1797

Leaders in the Pre–Civil War and Civil War Eras

Daniel Webster was a leading statesman in the decades before the Civil War who served as a U.S. congressman and senator and as secretary of state for three different presidents. A great orator, he stated in a speech on Dec. 22, 1820:

"Our ancestors established their system of government on morality and religious sentiment. Moral habits, they believed, cannot safely be trusted on any other foundation than religious principle, nor any government be secure which is not supported by moral habits . . . Whatever makes men good Christians makes them good citizens" (quoted by Federer, p. 669).

Andrew Jackson became the seventh president of the United States on March 4, 1839. After his inaugural address, "Jackson closed with a prayer—for order and for guidance, for himself and for the Union.

"As president, he said, he would depend 'on the goodness of that Power whose providence mercifully protected our national infancy and has since upheld our liberties in various vicissitudes [or fluctuating circumstances],' and hoped 'that He will continue to make our beloved country the object of His divine care and gracious benediction.' . . .

"He was playing the role of national pastor . . . leading the largest possible flock. He bowed once more to the people, and . . . kissed a Bible" (Jon Meacham, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House,* 2008, p. 61).

On another occasion, Jackson said of the Bible, "That book, sir, is the Rock upon which our Republic rests" (quoted by Richard Lee, editor, *The American Patriot's Bible: The Word of God and the Shaping of America,* 2009, introduction).

Then we come to Abraham Lincoln, the country's 16th president. It was "his belief that this nation is the fulfillment of the Creator's plan to give democracy to all people" (Philip Ostergard, *The Inspired Wisdom of Abraham Lincoln: How Faith Shaped an American President—and Changed the Course of a Nation,* 2008, p. 20).

Lincoln read the Bible in his youth and throughout much of his life. "Marching into the chasm of the Civil War, Lincoln immersed himself in the Bible, which he called 'the best gift God has given to man'" (Michael Beschloss, *Presidential Courage: Brave Leaders and How They Changed America 1789-1989,* 2007, p. 121). In his

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second inaugural address near the end of the war in 1865, he made 14 references to God, several biblical allusions and direct quotations from Psalms and Matthew.

Earlier in life, Lincoln had been a skeptic along with his roommate back in Springfield, Illinois, Joshua Speed, who became a lifelong friend. In 1864, Speed came to stay overnight where Lincoln resided just outside Washington, D.C., during the Civil War.

"Recalling Lincoln's old complaints about religion, Speed was now startled to find the President in his bedroom, absorbed in his Bible. He told Lincoln, 'If you have recovered from your skepticism, I am sorry to say that I have not.'

"'You are wrong Speed,' replied Lincoln, 'Take all of this book upon reason that you can, and the balance on faith, and you will live and die a happier and better man'" (pp. 121-122).

Presidents in the early 20th century

Theodore (or "Teddy") Roosevelt, 26th president of the United States for two terms from 1901 to 1909, was the youngest in the nation's history. "Taught by his pious Dutch Reformed father, he had started memorizing the Bible at age three . . . He once told a Bible study group, 'It is a good and necessary thing to be intelligent. It is a better thing to be straight and decent and fearless.' For Roosevelt, a good Christian must not be greedy for earthly rewards" (p. 153).

"Theodore and [his wife] Edith taught all the children, girls as well as boys, the importance of obedience . . . Both Theodore and Edith believed in robust righteousness . . . and the Biblical passages they cherished, most notably one about doing justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with your God.

"There was a quotation from [poet Robert] Browning that Theodore hammered into the children early in support of the New Testament injunction [in James 1:22] about being 'doers of the word and not hearers only'" (Herman Hagedorn, editor, *The Free Citizen: A Summons to Service of the Democratic Ideal, by Theodore Roosevelt: Selections From His Writings and Stories From His Record,* 1958, pp. 18-19).

On Sept. 8, 1906, Teddy Roosevelt said: "You are not going to make any new commandments at this stage which will supply the place of the old ones. The truths that were true at the foot of Mt. Sinai are true now. The truths that were true when the Golden Rule [Jesus' command to "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (see Matthew 7:12)] was promulgated are true now" (p. 22).


Franklin Delano Roosevelt, U.S. president 1833–1945

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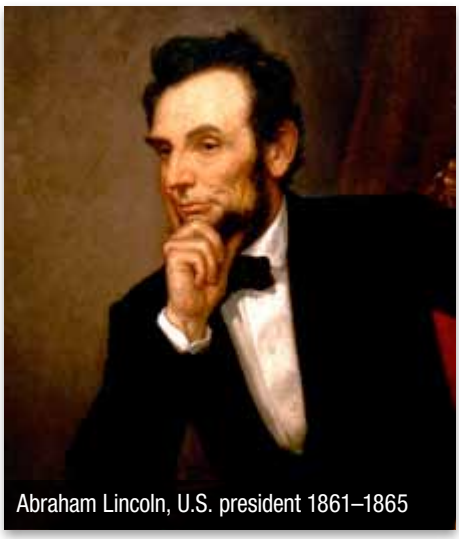
—Theodore Roosevelt

Soon after leaving office he said this as part of his thoughts about the founding of the Boy Scouts of America: "No man is a good citizen unless he so acts as to show that he actually uses the Ten Commandments, and translates the Golden Rule into his life conduct—and I don't mean by this in exceptional cases under spectacular circumstances, but I mean applying the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule in the ordinary affairs of every-day life" (*Boy Scout Handbook,* 1st edition, 1911).

Woodrow Wilson was the country's 28th president—from 1913 through World War I until 1921. Prior to becoming president, he said on Oct. 1, 1911, while governor of New Jersey:

"There are great problems, ladies and gentlemen, before the American people. There are problems which will need purity of spirit and an integrity of purpose such as has never been called for before in the history of this country. I should be afraid to go forward if I did not believe that there lay at the foundation of all our schooling and of all our thought this incomparable and unimpeachable Word of God . . .

"No great nation can ever survive its own temptations and its own follies that does not indoctrinate its children in the Word of God" (quoted by Hugh Hewitt, *Searching for God in America,* 1996, p. 325).


Abraham Lincoln, U.S. president 1861–1865


Theodore Roosevelt, U.S. president 1901–1909

World War II leaders

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), whose time in office of 12 years was the longest of any president, was president when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, bringing the United States into World War II.

Shortly afterward he drew a contrast with the contempt for the human race shown by the enemy Axis powers: "In his January 1942 State of the Union message, weeks after Pearl Harbor and the Nazi declara-

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tion of war, FDR said, 'We are inspired by a faith that goes back through all the years to the first chapter of the Book of Genesis: 'God created man in His own image.' We on our side are striving to be true to that divine heritage'" (Gelernter, p. 212).

Roosevelt also stated, "An ordering of society which relegates religion, democracy and good faith among nations to the background can find no place within it for the ideals of the Prince of Peace. The United States rejects such an ordering, and retains its ancient faith" (quoted by Hewitt, p. 355).

Most remarkable is when Roosevelt by broadcast led the entire nation in prayer at the time of the D-Day invasion of Europe on June 6, 1944. He said, in part:

"Almighty God: Our sons, pride of our Nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our Republic, our religion, and our civilization, and to set free a suffering humanity . . . They will need Thy blessings . . . We know that by Thy grace, and by the righteousness of our cause, our sons will triumph . . . Some will never return. Embrace these, Father, and receive them, Thy heroic servants, into Thy kingdom . . .

"And for us at home . . . help us, Almighty God, to rededicate ourselves in renewed faith in Thee in this hour of great sacrifice. Many people have urged that I call the Nation into a single day of special prayer. But because the road is long and the desire is great, I ask that our people devote themselves in a continuance of prayer. As we rise to each new day, and again when each day is spent, let words of prayer be on our lips, invoking Thy help to our efforts . . .

"And, O Lord, give us Faith. Give us Faith in Thee . . . With Thy blessing, we shall prevail over the unholy forces of our enemy . . . Lead us to the saving of our country, and with our sister Nations into a world unity that will spell a sure peace . . . Thy will be done, Almighty God" (from the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum).

Harry S. Truman succeeded to the presidency when FDR died on April 12, 1945, and led the nation to victory over the next several months. He afterward stated: "Now that we have preserved our freedom of conscience and religion, our right to live by a decent moral and spiritual code of our own choosing, let us make full use of that freedom . . . If men and nations would but live by the precepts of the ancient prophets and the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, problems which now seem so difficult would soon disappear" (quoted by Hewitt, pp. 357-358).

Post–World War II and the future

America won its greatest foreign war by the grace of the Great God of Heaven. What has happened since? Napoleon Bonaparte said, "The most dangerous moment comes with victory." America received God's help when it, along with its Allies, won World War II. Yet since World War II, the nation has become overconfident spiritually and has slid into a trough of immorality.

There have been a few high points of principled leadership since World War II. Ronald Reagan, president during the 1980s, was a visionary who looked to restore American greatness, especially through returning respect for God and morality to public life. And he stood for resisting the godless forces of international communism bent on world conquest.

What was part of the reason for President Reagan's success? "Reagan was in fact a determined Christian, which he owed to his late mother . . . who taught her son that everything was part of God's 'Divine Plan.' . . . The President took the Bible literally. Of Jesus, he wrote a friend, 'Either he was what he said or he was the world's greatest liar.' He felt that but for his belief in God, he would be 'scared to death.' . . . Reagan also believed that the Messiah's second coming would be preceded by Armageddon, the end of the world" (Beschloss, p. 285).

Indeed, a time of terrible trial and upheaval for the world is certainly coming —and, tragically, it will spell terrible consequences for the United States of America. For despite the high points, the overall trend has been an erosion of morality throughout the land and in the nation's highest offices.

It was more than half a century ago that the following words were written: "We have become increasingly convinced that moral values are mere conventions . . . and changing with time" (Pitirim Sorokin, *The American Sex Revolution,* 1956, p. 145). While the slide has been going on for a long time, it is increasing in velocity now.

As things get worse, laws are ignored or modified to reflect public morality. This should not be! The moral laws of the Bible are intended for all men everywhere for all time. Jesus said, "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). Truth does not change. That which God condemned as sin millennia ago is still sin, and sin brings consequences.

A nation cannot scoff at the biblical commands regarding morality or that nation will continue to decline. "There is no example of a community which has retained its high position on the cultural scale after less rigorous sexual customs have replaced more restrictive ones" (Sorokin, pp. 110-111).

What will be the price for America for casting the Bible and its values aside? Unbeknownst to most, this nation is descended from the ancient biblical nation of Israel. The ancient kingdom of Israel was crushed in the 700s B.C., its people carried away into captivity by the Assyrian Empire. Over time they lost their identity and eventually came to be known in history as "the lost 10 tribes." Yet they were never truly lost, and through them God carries out His promises to Abraham (read the fascinating story in our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*).

Like its ancient ancestors, America will go into captivity too if it does not repent. The pages of history are strewn with the debris of fallen empires and nations. We will be no different if we do not wake up and repent.

America's heritage of Christian morality does not give the nation a pass. Rather, it makes the nation even more accountable. Yet God promised that if a nation that practices evil turns from its wicked ways, He will relent from bringing punishment on it (Jeremiah 18:8). Yet America's leaders do not seem willing to make the needed changes—and the same is true for other nations of the world.

What should individuals do if their nation as a whole does not repent? Each one must personally take steps to examine his or her own life and commit it more fully to God. God says that He will judge every person according to his own ways and that those who repent will not suffer ruin (Ezekiel 18:30).

This promise is in your Bible! Will you personally give God and His Word the respect they are due? ***GN***

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by John Ross Schroeder and Jerold Aust

Europe: to separate or form a superstate?

What's the best course for Europe to take to emerge from its ongoing crisis? The editors of *The Economist* magazine and Harvard financial history professor and *Newsweek* columnist Niall Ferguson tell us that a federal superstate is the only viable way out of a horrendous financial disaster in Europe.

An *Economist* lead editorial asked, "What will become of the European Union?" ("The Choice,"



May 26, 2012). It answered: "One road leads to the full break-up of the euro [the single currency of 17 of the 27 members of the European Union], with all of its economic and political repercussions. The other involves an unprecedented transfer of wealth across Europe's borders and, in return, a corresponding surrender of sovereignty. Separate or superstate: those seem to be the alternatives now."

Niall Ferguson put this dilemma much more emphatically in an interview with Ben Laurance in Britain's *Sunday Times:* "'It's too late to unravel the single currency,' he says. 'People talk about that as if that option existed, and it simply doesn't. It's an illusion to think you can just kick Greece out without unleashing a real nightmare of contagion through the banking systems of the peripheral [European] countries" ("One Nation (Under Germany)," May 20, 2012). Only the Germans have the financial wherewithal to save the euro and the "European Dream."

Ferguson continued: "The complete descent into disrepute of national political elites makes the case for federalism." Witness, as he pointed out a little earlier in a *Newsweek* article he wrote, France electing a champagne socialist as president on promises of taxing the rich up to 75 percent of their income and a lower national retirement age, as well as Greece electing a ragtag coalition of disparate splinter groups. Also Spanish fiscal policies have resulted in 50 percent of youth being unemployed ("Niall Ferguson: The European Farce," May 14, 2012).

As Ferguson went on to say, "The national politics of continental Europe is collapsing and that's paving the way towards a federal solution." He now believes that the presently plodding German political machine will finally act swiftly "when the chips are down" (ibid.)—despite the conclusion of his *Newsweek* article: "Here, then, is the twist in my tale of national character. For two generations, the Germans really did want to take over Europe—by force. But today, when they could do so peacefully, they can't be bothered." Of course, as we've seen at several stages, European events can be fast-developing.

The title of another article in *The Economist* pointed out that a federal Europe would inevitably result in "An Ever-Deeper Democratic Deficit" (May 26, 2012). Ultimately in practical terms, sovereignty will be shifted to a tough, bureaucratic central authority—in Brussels but most probably eventually in Berlin.

Based on an understanding of end-time Bible prophecy, *The Good News* has been forecasting the emergence of a new European superpower with incredibly strong global tentacles reaching around the world (see Revelation 13; 17-18). For further understanding, download or request our free booklets *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* (Sources: *The Economist, Newsweek, The Sunday Times* [London].)

Endless summits and the decline of the West

Philip Stevens, senior columnist of the *Financial Times,* observed: "Not so long ago consecutive summits of the western powers would have called the world to attention. Nowadays, these gatherings call attention only to how fast and far the west has fallen. If one were looking for a metaphor for a decade of decline, there have been few more telling than the latest summits of leaders of the G8 nations and Nato" ("Summits That Cap the West's Decline," May 24, 2012).

There is increasing divisiveness. Stevens continued, "Ten years on, Europe is in the grip of the nationalisms it thought had banished."

And there is also increasing decadence despite economic turmoil and decline.

The Wall Street Journal recently borrowed from Shakespeare by titling an article on the latest eurozone conference "Much Euro Ado About Nothing." The text of the article began, "A meeting of eurozone leaders that wasn't designed to decide anything didn't actually decide anything" (Simon Nixon, May 24, 2012).

This should come as no surprise, since these "confabs" are often just a pretext for politicians and staffers living it up at taxpayer expense.

Yet despite the ongoing decline, Stevens concluded: "The West is not finished. These nations remain by far the richest on the planet. For every tale of woe about gridlock in Washington there is a story of American enterprise and ingenuity. Billions of people around the world would give anything for what the Europeans call austerity."

However, he ended his article with this complaint about how the decline is being managed: "What is so maddening is that the leaders who gathered in Washington and Chicago seem so determined to make the very worst of it."

Yet even in present circumstances, never forget the long history of Europe. (Churchill didn't, and England benefited.) It was fraught with empires and dictatorships that carried on for significant periods despite ethnic division.

We should remember Rome. We should also recall the Austro-Hungarian Empire with its longtime emperor Franz Josef (reigned 1848-1916). Like the Turkish Ottoman Empire, it only ended as a result of World War I (1914-1918). Marshal Tito actually united several Balkan nations at the time of World War II into Yugoslavia, which grew in ethnic tension in the decade after his death in 1980, ultimately breaking up in 1991-1992.

It usually takes a hugely charismatic leader to unite countries that have been in serious conflict over time. And the Bible foretells that just such a personality will arise in Europe and bring order out of chaos—though at enormous cost. Request or download our free booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled.* (Sources: *Financial Times, The Wall Street Journal.*)

Greek exit imminent?

Will Greece exit the European common currency zone? "Several newspapers, including the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Financial Times Deutschland,* are reporting that euro-zone finance ministries are making contingency plans in the event of a Grexit, as the media has dubbed the eventuality" ("Greece and the Common Currency: Euro Zone Developing Grexit Contingency Plan," Spiegel Online, May 24, 2012).

Germany is losing its patience with Greece. "German Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich hinted at his country's growing frustration. 'We're not willing to pour money into a bottomless pit,' he said . . . 'Anyone who wants to see help and solidarity from us has to accept that we expect from that country a certain amount of seriousness and a certain amount of reasonableness" ("'Pay Your Taxes': Greeks Furious Over Harsh Words From IMF and Germany," Spiegal Online, May 28, 2012).

There appears to be a growing majority in Greece who want to become financially sound, and some in Greece say that most Greeks want to pay their taxes.

Your Bible reveals the underlying troubles in holding the European Union and any subsequent form together: "And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay" (Daniel 2:42-43).

Conflict works against the drive toward integration and unity. But increased integration will yet come. (Source: Spiegel Online.)

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The rise in children born outside of marriage

Back in 1992, then-Vice President Dan Quayle was widely ridiculed in the media for denouncing the trend of women having children out of wedlock and taking aim at its affirmation by the TV sitcom *Murphy Brown*—about a divorced news anchor of that name played by actress Candice Bergen.

He had stated in a family-values speech in the run-up to the year's presidential election: "Bearing babies irresponsibly is simply wrong. Failing to support children one has fathered is wrong and we must be unequivocal about this. It doesn't help matters when prime-time TV has Murphy Brown, a character who supposedly epitomizes today's intelligent, highly paid professional woman, mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone and calling it just another lifestyle choice" (Speech to the Commonwealth Club of California, May 19, 1992).

Quayle's contention that single parenthood should be discouraged mushroomed into a significant campaign controversy. But 20 years on, his speech seems prophetic. Isabel Sawhill, co-director of the Center on Children and Families at the Brookings Institution, wrote recently in *The Washington Post:* "The number of single parents in America has increased dramatically: The proportion of children born outside marriage has risen from roughly 30



percent in 1992 to 41 percent in 2009. For women under 30, more than half of babies are born out of wedlock. A lifestyle once associated with poverty has become mainstream" ("20 Years Later, It Turns Out Dan Quayle Was Right About Murphy Brown and Unmarried Moms," May 25, 2012).

Sawhill goes on to show that traditional marriage is very good for children in a number of ways. And her research showed that "if individuals do just three things—finish high school, work full time and marry before they have children—their chances of being poor drop from 15 percent to 2 percent."

She concludes: "But in the end, Dan Quayle was right. Unless the media, parents and other influential leaders celebrate marriage as the best environment for raising children, the new trend—bringing up baby alone—may be irreversible."

Those behind *The Good News* magazine seek to promote strong marriages and families. Our free booklets *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension* and *Making Life Work* highlight biblical practices that result in happy marriages, responsible children and sound family finances. Request or download a free copy of each. (Source: *The Washington Post.*)

"Election Armageddon" coming to America?

Steve Forbes, editor-in-chief of *Forbes* magazine, stated that the upcoming November elections in the United States will be "the most ideological presidential election in American history" and that "the outcome of this contest will profoundly impact the kind of country the U.S. is going to be" ("Election Armageddon," May 7, 2012).

Will traditional capitalism prevail, or will America choose to go even further down the dangerous road of socialism? Never before has the country faced such a clear-cut choice.

Already, nearly 50 percent of the U.S. population resides in a household where at least one person received a benefit check from the government in the first quarter of last year. As the baby-boom generation gets older, percentages like this one are likely to increase substantially (see Phil Izzo, "Half of U.S. Lives in Household Getting Benefits," *The Wall Street Journal,* May 26, 2012).

To make up the difference, the pressure to increase the tax burden on the already burdened working taxpayer greatly intensifies. And as more people become dependent on the government, the government becomes increasingly more powerful in controlling people's lives.

Mr. Forbes wrote bluntly, "Barack Obama and the extreme left know that if he loses the White House their dream of a government-dominated America à la France and Italy goes with him."

But perhaps even more disturbing is the prospect of further hostility against the Bible by the administration in a second four-year term. Researcher David Barton, an expert on America's religious and constitutional heritage, has catalogued this anti-biblical treatment in detail in an article titled "America's Most Biblically-Hostile U.S. President" (WallBuilders.com, Feb. 29, 2012).

The latest examples consist of "attempts to require Catholics to go against their own doctrines and beliefs." Yet the facts also show that neither Protestants nor Jews have escaped the various slams against the Bible.

It bears remembering that ancient Israel rejected the rule of God Almighty and opted instead for rule by a human king. Following God's directions, the Hebrew prophet Samuel carefully explained to the people the perils in choosing a worldly system of national government (see 1 Samuel 8).

Still the Israelites freely chose it and subsequently suffered all the consequences Samuel indicated would come on them. Today the American people find themselves in the driver's seat. What will their choice be? What road will they take? (Sources: *Forbes,* WallBuilders.com, *The Wall Street Journal.*)

Cheating undermines higher education

As reported by William Chase in *The American Scholar,* "Every study over the decades has concluded that cheating at American colleges and universities is rampant" ("A Question of Honor," Spring 2012). Most likely partially due to widespread cheating and dishonesty, students are "learning less all the time."

"'American higher education is characterized,' sociologists Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa said last year [2011], 'by limited or no learning for a large proportion of students'" (ibid.). Cheating remains the mortal enemy of proper learning.

Chase further comments: "Today, lots of students cheat. They use the work of others. They buy essays. They plagiarize. Still, even though the Web makes cheating easier than ever before, and thus more prevalent, the phenomenon of cheating is nothing new."

He asks: "What would it take to transform classrooms throughout the United States into arenas of moral practice? How would American education look then?"

Better parental examples and right moral teaching, both at school and in the home, would be good starters. Since cheating usually begins in high school or even earlier, it certainly helps if students enter higher education with a clean record.

If only every young boy and girl were taught the Ten Commandments from early childhood! Why not request or download our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*? (Source: *The American Scholar.*)

How can you make sense of the news?

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Behind the Headlines

The Queen's Diamond Jubilee—A Look Back at 60 Years

As Britain and the Commonwealth celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, the festivities overshadow the dramatic changes that have taken place during the last 60 years. ***by Melvin Rhodes***

I'm writing this from South Africa, where it all began on April 21, 1947. The members of the British royal family were on a "thank you" tour of South Africa and southern Rhodesia, two nations that were part of the British Empire, both of which had contributed greatly to the war effort in World War II. Princess Elizabeth turned 21 on the tour while visiting Cape Town, from where she addressed the peoples of the empire and Commonwealth—these still all together after six years of war:

"I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong" (quoted by Sally Bedell Smith, *Elizabeth the Queen: The Life of a Modern Monarch,* 2012, pp. 37-38). A deeply religious woman, Elizabeth would work to follow Christ's admonition, "Whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your servant" (Matthew 20:26).

Five years later, Elizabeth's father King George VI died and she became queen, ironically while on another visit to Africa. At the time, she reigned over the greatest empire in history. Now, 60 years later, the monarchy endures, and Queen Elizabeth's subjects are celebrating her Diamond Jubilee in various parts of the world.

Yet the empire is no more—one of the big changes during her reign, the true context of which is vital to understand.

Surprising stability in a world of unrest

The U.S. newsmagazine *Time* published a special commemorative issue on the royal family, which made the following observation: "Governments topple and institutions fail, but Britain's constitutional monarchy maintains its quiet popularity. As the indefatigable Queen celebrates 60 years on the throne, the House of Windsor looks secure, surprisingly so."

The stability of the British monarchy is amazing—more than 1,000 years of monarchy! The present political system has been in place since 1689, a stability and continuity that no other great power has come anywhere near achieving. That stability has also been shared by 15 other realms over which the queen is head of state, principally Canada, Australia and New Zealand. She is also head of the Commonwealth of Nations, a 54-country grouping of former British colonies.

Other countries notice this stability, especially nations which have seen a great deal of turmoil.

In 1908 the queen's great-grandfather, King Edward VII, met with Russia's last czar, Nicholas II, a close relative, on the czar's yacht in Russian waters. It was to be 86 years before another British monarch visited Russia. In the interim, Russia had three revolutions, a prolonged civil war, famines, the Great Terror, and seven decades of communist rule.

Commenting prior to the queen's historic visit to Russia in 1994, the Russian newspaper *Izvestia* made the following perceptive comment: "The monarchy is unshakeable. No matter what happens in the country, the British know that there is an institution that will survive any difficulty" (quoted by Smith, pp. 382-383).

Great respect for the queen

In Britain one finds little respect for those in government. In contrast there is a great deal of respect for the queen, who has devoted her life to their service—and continues to do so at age 86!

"The arguments against the monarchy as antidemocratic and backward-looking have been overwhelmed by the Queen's dependable and consistent presence—what David Airlie, her former Lord Chamberlain, calls 'the sheet anchor in the middle for people to hang on to in times of turbulence'" (Smith, p. 502).

Britain today is greatly diminished from the country's position when Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne during Winston Churchill's peacetime administration. But the monarchy gives the country international influence it otherwise would not have.

"'The Commonwealth is very much her legacy,' said Brian Mulroney [former Canadian prime minister]. 'For her it is a major achievement and platform.' Without the Queen's leadership and example, 'many of us would have left,' said Kenneth Kaunda, the former president of Zambia . . . Through her own sources of information, she came to know more about the issues and concerns of Commonwealth countries, particularly in Africa, than her government's top officials" (Smith, p. 495).

She is also credited with encouraging member countries to restore democracy when they deviate into military or dictatorial rule.

Commenting on a G-20 summit of the world's most important leaders, Mulroney made this observation: "The Queen knows when she enters the room she is the most compelling head of state in the room. She is number one even though her country is not number one" (quoted by Smith, p. 491).

The resilience of the British monarchy is amazing. A century ago almost all the countries of Europe had a monarch. Today, few do. Why has the British monarchy not only survived but thrived during the last 100 years? The answer can be found in the Bible.

The biblical origins of the British monarchy and empire

As explained in our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy,* the origin of the British people goes back to the ancient nation of Israel. And shocking

though it may be to learn, the monarchy of Britain is in fact a continuation of the dynasty of Israel's King David—a dynasty God said would rule in all generations (Psalm 89:3-4). For the amazing story, check out our free online publication *The Throne of Britain: Its Biblical Origin and Future* (both available at www.ucg.org/booklets).

The British Empire was a fulfillment of an ancient prophecy in Genesis 48 that the biblical patriarch Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, would become a multitude of nations and a great single nation:



A century ago almost all the countries of Europe had a monarch. Today, few do. Why has the British monarchy not only survived but thrived during the last 100 years? The answer can be found in the Bible.

"Bless the lads; let my name [Israel] be named upon them" (verse 16). "He [Manasseh] also shall become a people and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother [Ephraim] shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations" (verse 19).

The prophesied multitude of nations was to be fulfilled by Britain and her scattered colonies, all united by a common loyalty to the crown. The great single nation, Manasseh, broke away from the crown and became the United States of America, eventually the most powerful single nation in world history.

"And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh" (verse 20). The British Empire was to be powerful before the United States reached its ascendancy.

And how great this empire was in its heyday! Today is only the second time in British history that a monarch has celebrated a diamond jubilee. The first time was in 1897 when Queen Victoria, Queen Elizabeth's great-great grandmother, celebrated hers. What was the empire like then?

"It was the largest Empire in the history of the world, comprising nearly a quarter of the land mass of the earth, and a quarter of its population . . . The sixtieth anniversary of her accession to the throne was being celebrated as a festival of imperial strength, splendor and unity—a mammoth exhibition of power, in a capital that loved things to be colossal . . . The nineteenth century had been pre-eminently Britain's century, and the British saw themselves still as top dogs" (James Morris, *Pax Britannica,* 1968, pp. 21-22).

Many Britons were aware of their prophetic identity in the Victorian era, and it was a commonly held belief in the trenches in World War I.

Stability masks profound change

Major change has since followed. Fifty-five years after Victoria's jubilee, when Elizabeth became queen, most of the empire was still ruled from London. Now, 60 years later, almost all of it has gone, diminishing Britain's power and influence considerably. At the same time, Britain's economic position has dropped significantly. National decline has been constant under Elizabeth's reign.

A second very significant change followed the loss of empire and continued economic decline. In 1971, the United Kingdom's parliament voted to join the European Community (now the European Union). Jan. 1, 2013, will be the 40th anniversary of Britain's membership.

At the time of joining, the British people were assured that the Community was purely an economic union that would boost British business. This was very deceptive, as the Treaty of Rome, signed by the six original members in 1957, pledged all member nations to form "an ever closer union." Membership has changed Britain substantially and threatens to do so even more in the future. Many British people resent this and want to pull out of the EU. There is little support for the euro, Britons preferring to keep their own currency, the British pound.

A third change inevitably followed Britain joining Europe—the weakening of Commonwealth ties, including the military ties that had helped Britain win the two world wars. Sixty years ago, with the exception of Canada, the other nations of the empire did most of their trade with Britain; their currencies were also tied to the British pound. The prophesied strength of Britain was to be as "a multitude of nations." Now that Britain has no empire and the Commonwealth is greatly diminished, this strength is gone.

A fourth significant change in the last 60 years is that the roles of Britain and Germany have been reversed. After losing two world wars to Britain and its democratic allies, Germany today is the greatest economic power in Europe, a position held by Britain 60 years ago. For centuries British foreign policy was based on staying out of European affairs unless a Continental nation and leader became too powerful (such as Napoleon, Kaiser Wilhelm and Adolf Hitler). Rather, Britain would concentrate on her empire. Today, Britain is a lesser nation in a Continental union dominated by Germany.

A fifth major change is in the makeup of the British population. During the queen's reign, Great Britain has become a multiethnic nation, with millions of people entering the country, mostly from former colonies. It's too early to tell if this multicultural experiment will work, but it has clearly altered Britain. The real test could come during the economic downturn that is now afflicting the country.

Another big change may lie soon ahead—when Scotland votes on independence in 2014. If the Scots vote to break away from England, it can only weaken both countries.

The most major change of all

But the seventh and greatest change has been the decline in religious beliefs and the subsequent breakdown of the traditional values the British once exemplified.

British author Peter Hitchens wrote of this in 2000 in his book *The Abolition of Britain: From Winston Churchill to Princess Diana,* in which he contrasted the country at the time of Churchill's funeral in 1965 with the country 32 years later at

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the time of Diana's funeral.

In 1965, the British were proud of their history and accomplishments. Most considered themselves Christians, and religious education was compulsory in schools. Divorce was rare, family life sacrosanct. Young people riding buses would stand to allow the elderly to sit. Great deference was paid to members of the royal family, and men respectfully removed their hats as Churchill and his retinue passed by, appreciative of his victorious leadership of the country in World War II.

By the time of Diana's funeral in 1997, there was a general rejection of traditional biblical moral values. Worse, there was not even an awareness of them!

It wasn't like this until fairly recently. The 60s were the great reforming decade.

At one time and for hundreds of years Great Britain was a biblically literate nation. Historian Benson Bobrick wrote about this in his 2010 book *Wide as the Waters: The Story of the English Bible and the Revolution It Inspired,* his title taken from a poem about John Wycliffe, the first man to translate the Bible into his native English over six centuries ago.

"Only in England was the Bible in any sense a national possession . . . Englishmen carried their Bible with them—as the rock and foundation of their lives—overseas . . . Beyond the shores of Albion [a poetic name for Britain] it fortified the spirit of the pioneers of New England, helped to shape the American psyche, and through its impact on thought and culture eventually spread the world over, 'as wide as the waters be'" (p. 12).

"By royal injunction, the Lord's Prayer and the 10 Commandments in English were to be taught sentence by sentence on Sundays and holy days throughout the year; at least one sermon on the Gospels was to be preached every quarter . . . ; and every parish church in England was to 'set up in some convenient place' a copy of the English Bible accessible to all as 'the very lively Word of God'" (p. 151).

A writer at the time described people's enthusiasm for the newly available Bible: "It was wonderful to see with what joy the book of God was received . . . Everybody that could bought the book and busily read it; or got others to read it to them, if they could not themselves; and divers among the elderly learned to read on purpose. And even little boys flocked among the rest to hear portions of the Holy Scriptures read" (pp. 151-152).

From loving God's Word to loathing it

When did all this change? Historian Jacques Barzun wrote: "It did not cease for 350 years: 1900 was the first year in which religious works (at least in England) did not outnumber all other publications" (*From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life 1500 to the Present,* 2003, p. 10). January of the following year was the end of the Victorian era.

Church attendance has been dropping ever since. Ironically, for the nation that once led the world in sending missionaries into pagan lands, Britain is today the home of more websites devoted to atheism than any other country!

The result is the breakdown of marriage and family life and a growing lawlessness that led to serious rioting in the summer of 2011. The country also has a major drinking problem, the consumption of alcohol (and drugs) reflecting the emptiness of lives devoid of religious belief and purpose.

All of this has contributed greatly to the country's financial problems as governments pick up the tab for all the social programs necessary to at least try to clean up the mess. (To be fair, these problems are endemic throughout the Western world for the same reasons.)

The biblical book of Deuteronomy contains a prophecy in chapter 28 that is applicable here. The descendants of Israel (which today includes the British, Australian, Canadian and American people) were promised great blessings for obedience, but serious negative consequences for disobedience. Some of those consequences are now coming to pass. Unless there is a heartfelt repentance, no doubt the others are sure to follow.

By contrast, on June 2, 1953, Queen Elizabeth was crowned in a deeply religious ceremony that reflected the country's Christian heritage. In the ceremony "she pledged to honor the laws of Great Britain, its realms, territories and possessions, and 'maintain the Laws of God'" (Smith, p. 84).

"'The real significance of the coronation for her was the anointing, not the crowning,' said Canon John Andrew, a friend of the royal family and senior chaplain to the 100th Archbishop of Canterbury. 'She was consecrated, and that makes her Queen. It is the most solemn thing that has ever happened in her life. She cannot abdicate. She is there until death'" (Smith, p. 85).

Further changes ahead for Britain

When she does eventually die, there will be further changes, reflecting Britain's diminishing role. It's unlikely that Prince Charles will succeed his mother as head of the Commonwealth. If Commonwealth members choose an African dictator to fill the role, the Commonwealth's commitment to democracy will cease. It is also likely that Britain, confronted with serious financial problems, will no longer be willing to bankroll the organization. At the same time, some of the Commonwealth realms might opt to replace the queen with a figurehead president appointed by their respective parliaments.

At the time of her coronation, there was much talk of a "second Elizabethan age," the first having been a time of England's rise to greatness following the Protestant Reformation.

Elizabeth I (1558-1603) laid a solid foundation for the country to build on. By not marrying and leaving no heirs, her closest relative, James VI of Scotland, inherited the throne of England, thereby uniting the two kingdoms under one monarch. She also helped secure England's independence as a Protestant country separate from Rome. Additionally, it was a time of increasing prosperity.

The reign of Elizabeth II will be looked on as a time when these were reversed. This is not to say it's her fault, as she, unlike her namesake, is a constitutional monarch with very limited power. But the fact remains that the country has declined greatly during the six decades of Elizabeth's reign.

Without her, it's doubtful the country would have held together as well as it has. Throughout the long period of decline, the British people have always had the queen to look up to, a revered figure who has consistently put the country first, always doing her duty in a humble and graceful way. She will be sorely missed when the time comes. ***GN***

Learn More



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The Crisis of Global Leadership—**Where Will It Lead?**

World events continue to muddle on without any clear sense that leaders hold the key to effective solutions. Threat of large-scale war in the Middle East looms large. Europe's economic crisis could lead to collapse of the present eurozone. Will these events set the stage for another type of leader to emerge? ***by Darris McNeely***

As I write, leaders of the G-8, the world's leading economic nations, have finished another summit meeting. This one was hosted by U.S. President Barack Obama at Camp David, the presidential retreat in the hills of Maryland near Washington, D.C.

These meetings accomplish very little. They usually end with an agreed-upon statement meant to sum up discussions. While the latest spoke of an "emerging consensus" and promised to promote growth among the economies of Europe, it seems that very little of concrete specifics will come from the summit.

Meetings like these demonstrate more than anything else a critical lack of leadership among today's world leaders. Leaders meet, but crises continue to simmer, costing the lives of thousands and stifling any progress toward positive solutions for the growing problems of our world.

The economic challenges facing Europe and America continue with no real solution in sight. European leaders have met repeatedly for months trying to resolve the eurozone financial crisis created by the debt-ridden economies of member states like Greece, Italy, Ireland, Portugal and Spain.

The United States' economy is trying to rise out of a recession brought on by the near-collapse of Wall Street in September 2008. The razor-thin economic recovery threatens President Obama's reelection chances. Should Europe slide into further trouble with a default by Greece, the fallout could hinder America's economic recovery.

Has the thought occurred to you that what we are watching among today's world leaders is *a massive crisis of leadership?* Meeting after meeting is held to discuss the European debt crisis or to work out a solution to a diplomatic problem in the Middle East. Summits are held, and conferences are arranged. Plans are made, but the problems persist. Real and lasting solutions do not materialize.

Why is this? What could be the outcome of such a lack of leadership on the world scene?

List of crisis points

A look around today's world scene shows multiple crisis spots. The "Arab Spring," the wave of protest and revolution in the Middle East and North Africa that began last year, continues to develop.

Last year the Egyptian uprisings threw out President Hosni Mubarak after 30 years in office. Whoever replaces him will preside over the most populous Arab state and a host of social problems needing a firm hand and practical solutions. Egypt's military is the real power within the state, and whoever sits in the presidential office may face an

Photos: Wikimedia

uneasy relationship with the military leadership. This reality may yet result in further conflict, keeping the nation in a state of uncertainty.

The fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood made significant gains in parliamentary elections. Long a major social support group, the Brotherhood has had to walk a delicate tightrope between its religious fervor and practical necessity. Islamic fundamentalism in Egypt is a force waiting to be unleashed under the right conditions.

No strong leader appears to be in line to lead Egypt forward during this time of transition.

Iran's nuclear ambitions herald another crisis waiting to explode. Each week brings rumors of Israel's preparations to launch a preemptive attack on Iran to knock out its nuclear facilities. Questions about how this could be done and what the fallout would be for the region are many.

What would be the response of the United States, Israel's principal ally and support on the world scene? President Obama has not demonstrated a firm commitment of his administration to the entire peace effort within the region. It appears there is a major leadership vacuum surrounding this impending action.

World leaders meet and talk and make plans, but the problems around us persist. Real and lasting solutions never seem to materialize.

Syrian crisis and proxy intervention

The world's response to Syria's crisis is another example of leadership failure. Opposition forces to President Bashar al-Assad's regime have been unable to accomplish a regime change, and thousands of civilians have been slaughtered in the months-long civil war.

Empty calls from the United Nations to stop the atrocities have failed to produce any solution. Syria has been given cover by China and Russia—in effect a pass to wage war on its citizens to keep the current regime in power. No one from any major world power has demonstrated the leadership necessary to stop this senseless and brutal action by a government against its own people.

It appears that Washington and other nations can only funnel money and arms, the mother's milk of war, into this conflict. The Syrian conflict grows worse with each week. It has spilled over into Lebanon, with partisan Islamic factions working against each other, the Syrian Assad regime and Israel. Some insurgent Syrian groups have identified Israel as the enemy. Should they gain control, Syria would represent an even more hostile nation against Israel's interests in the region than it does now.

America seems engaged in a proxy war with its support of these small groups allied against a common enemy. Such alliances never work in the long run. The old adage "The enemy of my enemy is my friend" is not a secure foundation on which a world power can operate.

The lesson of Afghanistan in the 1980s is an example. America supported Afghan insurgents against the Soviet Union, supplying them with arms and money. When the Soviets were beaten back into retreat, American support withdrew as well, leaving a vacuum in which Osama bin Laden could base his al-Qaeda operation, which eventually attacked the United States on 9/11.

Alliances bought with weapons of destruction and money will not endure. The prophet Jeremiah spoke to Jerusalem about its alliances with other nations, which in God's sight were wrong to the point of being immoral. He used the term "lovers" for these allies, denoting a false relationship based on greed or lack of trust in God. For Judah and Jerusalem this violated the covenant with God. For the United States it violates a relationship with God based on the promises to Abraham—a covenant still in effect and governing the role of America in today's world.

Jeremiah 30:14 says, "All your lovers have forgotten you; they do not seek you; for I have wounded you with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of your iniquities, because your sins have increased." Because America has not demonstrated godly leadership among the nations, God will allow its "lovers," allies gained essentially through bribery, to turn on her, causing further grievous wounds. This is a high cost for a lack of godly leadership.

Lack of leadership worldwide

America will not be the only nation to suffer from treachery and faithlessness because of flawed alliances. Even decisive leadership emerging in the midst of a vacuum will falter and suffer defeat.

Today's crisis in leadership will open the door to a coming power that Bible prophecy describes as "the beast"—the term denoting both a political empire and its leader. This political power will likely emerge on the world scene at a time of seemingly unsolvable crisis. Its leader will have the answers! People will support him to the point of what the Bible describes as "worship." Notice what the book of Revelation says:

"Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion [showing the powers of historic empires represented by these symbols in Daniel 7 combined in it].

"The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?'" (Revelation 13:1-4).

This "beast" leader and system receive power from the dragon, a symbol for Satan the devil (Revelation 12:9), "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Later in the book we see more specifics about the beast: "The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour [a short time] as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast" (Revelation 17:12-13).

Ten kings cede authority to one supreme leader to solve a world crisis in leadership. This leader will be idolized by people as the one leader who can bring order among the nations and ensure the continuation of a period of global expansion and prosperity. Some event will trigger his rise at a moment when no one else has the answer to a crisis that threatens world order.

Can this happen today?

Reading this biblical prophecy raises the question: How could this happen today? How could one person be granted such

power and status described by these prophecies about this powerful personality?

The answer is that it could easily come about, even in a world as interconnected as ours. Even with a jaded and skeptical public, where government and traditional authority structures have been challenged, eroded and replaced, there is still opportunity for such a person to rise.

Keep in mind that this person works with extraordinary help from spiritual forces that are unseen and whose existence and influence are not realized in our modern skeptical society. This beast power will work with the aid of the "rulers of the darkness of this age" (see Ephesians 6:12). That is why he will be accorded near god-like status.

I can imagine such a leader as one who promises to preserve the good life the world has enjoyed. Since the end of World War II the world economy has risen to extraordinary levels of wealth. Everyone, even the poorest, have benefited by a rise in a general standard of living. Threaten this system with collapse, and people will put their trust in anyone who can promise to sustain and protect their lives and livelihoods—if only this person were given the authority to implement his programs.



Imagine a leader who promises to preserve the good life the world has enjoyed over the past several decades. With the system threatened with collapse, people will put their trust in anyone who can sustain it.

Lesson from history

Adolf Hitler is often seen as the most evil leader of the 20th century. His plan to conquer Europe, and then likely the world, and his effort to exterminate the Jews through a Holocaust continue to impact our world and our thoughts to this day.

The fact that he acquired the power, support and heart of Germany, one of Europe's most cultured and civilized nations, and then used its resources to plunge the world into war, is still studied and examined by historians. And the fact that it happened is a lesson to us that something like it can happen again.

Hitler, through a legitimate ballot of the nation, became chancellor of the German Republic on Jan. 30, 1933. It was thought that the National Socialist (Nazi) Party could restore Germany to its rightful place of power within Europe. The country's defeat in World War I, the humiliating "peace" and war reparations imposed by the Allied powers, and subsequent economic problems had brought the German people to the point where they were willing to turn control over to a former vagabond from Austria.

Though he held the political power of the state, it was not great enough for Hitler to achieve his vision. He quickly set out to take *complete* power. He needed a controlling majority in the Reichstag, Germany's elected parliament, but was 70 seats shy. Through clever maneuvering, Hitler was able to call for new elections set for March 5. Yet the Nazi Party still needed to win the votes. So what happened?

On Feb. 27, six days before the election, a fire broke out in the Reichstag, the building that housed the parliament. Hitler and his henchmen seized on this incident to incite opposition against all other political elements that opposed him. Though others were blamed, all available evidence points to the Nazis themselves as the ones behind the arson. The fire became a convenient means to an end.

Hitler was able to secure a decree "for the Protection of the People and the State," and seven sections of the constitution guaranteeing individual and civil liberties were suspended. Vast power was granted to Hitler to bring other parts of the state in line. Fear gripped the electorate, and people were urged to vote for the Nazi Party to ensure peace and liberty.

However, when the March 5 vote was tallied, Hitler's party was still several seats short of the majority it needed. One more step was necessary to secure complete power.

The German government was arranged so that a measure of prestige and honor was held by the president, Paul von Hindenburg, an old and venerated general. Through a carefully orchestrated public display of humility and subservience, Hitler paid homage to the old leader before the assembled parliament. All fear and suspicion of Hitler, his party and his tactics were forgotten in a moment.

Two days later the parliament passed what was called an Enabling Act. By this short document, parliament ceded power of legislation, control of the Reich budget, approval of treaties with foreign states and the initiating of constitutional amendments to Hitler and his cabinet for a period of four years.

This single act, by a legitimately constituted body of elected officials, formed the legal basis for Hitler's dictatorship. From March 23, 1933, until his death by his own hand in an underground Berlin bunker in May 1945, Hitler was the undisputed Fuhrer, the leader. His takeover was accomplished within 60 days of first assuming office—a stunningly short time. Through the cleverest of intrigue, a vile man was

Photos: Wikimedia

The Continuous March of Folly

"Know, my son, with how little wisdom the world is governed." With these words, a little-known Swedish chancellor during the strife of the Thirty Year's War of the 1600s, Count Axel Oxenstierna, effectively put forth a maxim that explains much of the crisis in today's world leadership.

And in the words of America's second president, John Adams, "While all other sciences have advanced, government is at a stand; little better practiced now than three or four thousand years ago."

I encountered these quotes while reading famed historian Barbara Tuchman's *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam,* a masterfully insightful book written in 1984. Tuchman chronicled the folly of governments from the ancient world to more modern times.

Misgovernment, she wrote, is of four kinds. First is *tyranny or oppression,* of which history provides so many well-known examples. Second is *excessive ambition.* Among those cited is Germany's twice-attempted rule of Europe by a self-conceived master race. Third is *incompetence or decadence.* Czar Alexander II, last of Russia's Romanov dynasty, is a prime example. Finally she lists *folly or perversity.*

History is full of examples of each of these kinds of misgovernment. Common to all, it seems, is the unbridled lust for power that, once attained, can result in disastrous consequences that endures for generations. There is a principle from Scripture that confirms the long-lasting effects of doing wrong, both personally and collectively: "The LORD is long-suffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation" (Numbers 14:18).

Tuchman retells the biblical story of Rehoboam, son of Solomon, who succeeded his father in the 10th century B.C. to the throne of Israel, a nation composed of 12 tribes descended from the patriarch Jacob.

Rehoboam was determined to continue Solomon's heavy burden of taxation despite pleas from representatives of the people who sought relief and fairer treatment from government. His act of folly led to the threat of secession by the 10 northern tribes who gathered around the town of Shechem, the political center of the revolt. Rehoboam immediately traveled to Shechem to confront the rebellion. When met by a delegation and after hearing their demands for a new wage and work contract, he asked for three days to consult with advisors and return with an answer.

Rehoboam, young and energized with the sense of power and authority, heard two completely contrary sets of advice. His older counselors advised renegotiation of terms and to "speak good words to them." More good will would be gained, they said, and "they will be your servants forever" (1 Kings 12:7).

Rejecting this course, he turned to his younger advisors, men he had grown up with—of his own generation. Seeking the favor of the young king and falling into the habit of obsequious counselors to this day, they advised against any new contract provisions.

You can imagine some young speechwriter offering this slogan for which Rehoboam would be forever known: "Whereas my father put a heavy yoke on you, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges" (verse 11).

Upon hearing this speech, the northern 10 tribes instantly broke off talks and moved to form a separate nation, no longer tied to the royal house of David—the dynasty of rulers descended from David. "To your tents, O Israel! Now, see to your own house, O David!" became the rallying cry (verse 16).

All other attempts at reconciliation were rejected, and a new nation was formed. The tribes selected a man named Jeroboam to be king. He reigned for 22 years, and there was continual strife between him and Rehoboam the entire period. After a 200-year period of decline and religious apostasy, the 10-tribed nation of Israel was taken captive by the Assyrian Empire and disappeared into the mists of history, to emerge at length in a modern form.

The kingdom of Judah lived on, eventually overtaken by Babylon. The descendants of that nation are the Jewish people—some of whom now dwell in their ancient homeland under the flag of the state of Israel. Even today the land is not without conflict, as the Jewish state must contend with the claims of indigenous Arabs and the enmity of surrounding Arab nations, resentful of their presence, their prosperity and their heritage. The consequences of Rehoboam's folly has left its mark through almost 3,000 years of history.

Human lust for power seems to be a prime cause of misgovernment within leaders—the will of one person to exert rule over others, no matter what form that may take. If John Adams' insight about government is still true—and current events and trends make it evident it is—then we should not expect this world to dramatically change in that respect, no matter what any politician might promise. "Hope and change" is still an ephemeral vision.

Yet times will ultimately change. Isaiah foretold the coming of One who will bring that change—the greatest Leader who was ever born, of the lineage of David, who will soon return to this earth to rule:

"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Until then the burden is on each of us, with His help, to monitor our character, curb our ambition, avoid corruption and mature emotionally. Doing this will help us develop the character of a leader like Jesus Christ.

given honor and seized the control of the German nation (compare Daniel 11:21).

Could history repeat?

Could something similar happen today? Of course it could—as people fail to learn the lessons of history. The folly of today's leaders threatens the wealth and stability of a vast global network of wealth and power that has been building for decades.

No one wants to see it end. The philosophy of "let the good times roll" expresses a driving need for a culture saturated in a visual aura of wealth, glamor, power and status. No one wants their security, both present and future, threatened.

Look around at today's world. No one leader stands out as a person with such talent, ability and ideas to bring nations together to ensure the continuation of the present world order.

How long will the leadership drought continue? Crisis after crisis continues while no one with large ideas steps forward with the agenda to effect solutions. But at some point there will be one crisis too far.

Until then, events continue to muddle forward. Band-aids are put on very large problems, providing only temporary relief. And while no one stands out today with the grand ideas and talent to lead whole groups of nations, a day will come soon when events will bring forward the person described in these prophecies.

The present world order cannot continue indefinitely. Changes will occur. And when they do, you will see unprecedented leadership emerge that will astound the world. ***GN***

Is America Sliding Into **Permanent National Decline?**

Although some observers are still predicting a substantial national recovery, a more sobering factual analysis clearly points in the opposite direction. Did the Bible foresee America's rise to world leadership and its subsequent national decline more than two millennia ago?

by John Ross Schroeder

What we call the American Dream is fading into the distant sunset. The relatively few encouraging signs—such as the shale oil and gas bonanza—are being overshadowed by many disturbing trends in the opposite direction.

Why is this great nation, with seemingly so much promise for the future, heading inexorably into a box canyon of so many sorrows with no apparent way out? Are we ourselves as a people the basic cause by the way we are currently conducting our lives?

A serious sign of decline

Many citizens vaguely realize that our massive debt difficulties lie at the heart of our present national plight. Several years ago Fareed Zakaria, the editor of *Newsweek International,* observed:

"The U.S. savings rate is zero; the current account deficit, the trade deficit and the budget deficit are high; the median income is flat; and commitments for entitlements are unsustainable" ("The Future of American Power," *Foreign Affairs,* May-June 2008, p. 29).

Since then matters have worsened. British author Edward Luce stated of the years 2009 to 2011: "Median household income fell during that period by an astonishing 6.7 percent" (*Time to Start Thinking: America and the Spectre of Decline,* 2012, p. 272).

Two other authors jointly warned of tough days ahead if we don't mend our financial habits soon: "The United States is fast approaching a historic turning point; either it will act to get its fiscal house in order, thereby restoring the prerequisites of its primacy in the world, or it will fail to do so and suffer both the domestic and international consequences" (Roger Altman and Richard Haass, "American Profligacy and American Power," *Foreign Affairs,* November-December 2010).

Former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski stated that our flawed financial framework "is a systemic time bomb that threatens not only the American *but also the global economy* because of its risky and self-aggrandizing behavior" (*Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power,* 2012, p. 47, emphasis added throughout).

As if to emphasize the point, in mid-June *The Washington Post* reported: "The recent recession wiped out nearly two decades of Americans' wealth, according to government data released Monday, with middle-class families bearing the brunt of the decline. The Federal Reserve said the median net worth of families plunged by 39 percent in just three years, from $126,400 in 2007 to $77,300 in 2010. That puts Americans roughly on par with where they were in 1992" (Ylan Mui, "Americans Saw Wealth Plummet 40 Percent From 2007 to 2010, Federal Reserve Says," June 11, 2012).

America's standing in the world

In his second inaugural speech in January 1997, U.S. President Bill Clinton proudly stated, "At the dawn of the 21st century . . . America stands alone as the world's indispensable nation" (quoted by Brzezinski, p. 44).

In August 2000 the next president George W. Bush added, "*Our nation is chosen by God and commissioned by history to be a model for the world*" (ibid.). How accurate when we truly understand its biblical legacy and historic role! But more about that later.

Twelve years have whipped by since. How is America doing now? Many people of other nations still want to leave their ancestral homes, immigrate to America and eventually become U.S. citizens. They still believe that America is "the land of the free" as well as "the land of opportunity."

And truly all Americans should thank God regularly not only for the astounding national blessings He has bestowed on the country, but also for His merciful patience as the nation continues to seriously neglect facing and dealing with its enormous challenges and obvious shortcomings.

You may recall German Chancellor Angela Merkel's address to a combined session of the U.S. Congress in November 2009. She talked of her "'passionate' commitment to 'the American dream'" (p. 45). This now de facto leader of Europe pointed out how the United States provides "the opportunity for everyone to be successful, to make it in life through their personal effort" (ibid.).

But the gap between perception and reality grows wider by the day. Increasingly America has lost its number-one status in the world in many different fields. Several Asian nations in the Far East have already passed America or are fast catching up in many categories of endeavor—China and India in particular.

The surprising genesis of American freedoms

Even America's matchless freedoms are now seriously threatened by an ever-encroaching federal government—presently attaching more and more socialist, regulatory and bureaucratic impediments to the nation's free enterprise system, engine of its economic growth.

But to truly understand the legacy of these hard-won freedoms and gain a better handle on some of the factors behind our current national afflictions, we must momentarily reach back into ancient biblical history.

The great prophet and judge Moses strongly advised the ancient Israelites: "Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations. Ask your father and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you . . ." (Deuteronomy 32:7). What was his point? That understanding history is supremely important. We must learn from it to avoid repeating past mistakes.

How Long Does America Have?

From Genesis to Revelation the Bible is full of godly warnings. Prior to punishing His people, God has always warned them beforehand of His intentions. Tragic occurrences normally come *after* people have first been warned.

God remains supremely patient and merciful, but for our own long-term good even His patience has limits. When will America's point of no return arrive? When will the dreaded tipping point occur? Let's look at what God has done in the past.

In Noah's time, the Creator gave people 120 years to repent of their utter wickedness (Genesis 6:3, 5-7). Noah was "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5), and so he must have warned his contemporaries of the calamity to come. Even the progress in building the great ark itself should have served as a stark warning. But with the exception of Noah and his family, that entire generation took no heed and perished in the waters of the great Flood.

Jonah was sent to the Assyrian capital city of Nineveh to warn its inhabitants that it would be overthrown in 40 days because of their sins (Jonah 3:2-4). Remarkably, however, the people repented, so God mercifully relented and spared the city. He expressed His merciful concern to Jonah for the welfare of its more than 120,000 inhabitants (Jonah 4:11).

Our Creator repeatedly sent His prophets to both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah long before eventually sending both nations into national captivity. Jesus Christ warned His own first-century generation of the Roman sacking of Jerusalem that would come in an initial form some 40 years later (Luke 21:20; 23:27-31).

How much time does America have? God remains very patient and merciful even when He sees a whole nation going terribly wrong. Ideally, He wants national repentance (see 2 Peter 3:9). He offers this promise: "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Although God's mercy endures forever, it sometimes takes a different track. The time can come when it is simply too late.

Late in the history of the kingdom of Judah, our Creator instructed Jeremiah *not* to pray for the nation's people (Jeremiah 7:16; 11:14). He told him that it would be "for their good" (Jeremiah 14:11). Only a devastating invasion and national captivity would wake them up to see their sins. They had crossed the line. God's mercy had reached its limits, and He decided to act before they grew even more corrupt and degenerate.

What, then, if America fails to repent and suffers the inevitable devastating consequences? If you're an American, where does that leave *you?*

Recall that God blessed and miraculously protected the prophet Daniel and his three friends right in the midst of Judah's captivity in Babylon. If you really repent, forsaking your breaking of God's commandments and turning to God with your whole heart, He will look after you as well (Luke 21:34-36).

That means fighting against human nature, for we are great procrastinators. We put off until tomorrow even the most basic of our spiritual necessities. But God clearly warns us: *"Seek the* LORD *while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.* Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6-7).

To understand much more, download or request our free booklets *The Ten Commandments* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*

How much truer today! If we are to truly grasp the significance of America's legacy, knowledge and understanding of even the nation's distant past becomes absolutely essential.

America's history doesn't begin with the Declaration of Independence, or the War for Independence, or the landing at Plymouth Rock, or the establishment of the first colonies in the New World. Its history really begins much earlier—in the book of Genesis with the call of Abraham.

It extends through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob through to Jacob's son Joseph, who had two sons named Ephraim and Manasseh. The descendants of the latter would migrate to America from Britain. The major elements of this fascinating story are told in our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy,* with abundant evidence from both God's Word and secular history.

The patriarch Jacob foretold of his son's progeny in Genesis 49:22: "Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well. His branches run over the wall." Verses 23 through 26 relate more about these manifold divine "blessings of heaven," as does Moses in Deuteronomy 33:13-17.

The patriarch Joseph's example

Joseph, one of the 12 sons of Jacob (or Israel, as Jacob was renamed), exceeded his 11 brothers in both character and leadership.

During his 13 years of captivity and slavery, Joseph learned to rely on God and remain faithful to Him through trying circumstances, including rejecting the sexual advances of his master's wife. Afterward he became, in effect, the prime minister or governor of Egypt, managing its governmental and commercial affairs with great diligence, skill and competence.

He had overcome the effects of the loss of his mother Rachel in early youth. Joseph also forgave the great sin of his brothers, who sold him into slavery and deceived their father as to what had really happened.

Even without realizing their ancient roots, many of his descendants followed Joseph's basic example of obedience and industriousness, leading to the birth and growth of a strong, Bible-based nation. But in recent years much has changed. If our peoples only knew that Joseph was their great ancestor, hopefully that fact alone would sober and help turn them from their embarrassing profligacy towards righteous and productive lives.

American knowledge in a broad range of fields has grown beyond all expectations, particularly scientific and technological prowess. We have sent men to the moon and unmanned spacecraft to the outer edges of our solar system and beyond, but as a nation we are ignorant of the most basic historic and spiritual truths that could help deliver us out of our great problems. This country desperately needs that crucial knowledge of our biblical roots—where we came from and where we are surely headed.

American dominance under serious threat

Can the United States accommodate a restless world that is rapidly gaining on previously unchallenged American preeminence? The United States has successfully exported its brand of capitalism to many other countries. It has served as a business model for aspiring nations. Now they are catching up with and passing us.

Fareed Zakaria warns that America may be forced to "watch as the rise of the rest produces greater nationalism, diffusion and disintegration, *which will slowly tear apart the world order that the United States has built over the last 60 years"* (p. 43).

Since World War II, America has both guided and policed the world in general. This

is the legacy of its great ancestor Joseph. But now its growing economic problems are undermining American power and prestige throughout the world, forcing America to increasingly abandon this vital role.

What would the world be like without U.S leadership? Some observers are rightly worried about the possibility of a post-American scramble for power and influence.

Will some other coming superpower step into the gap and behave as altruistically as Britain and America have conducted themselves in their turn, acting to keep the peace in a world that otherwise might resemble a global Wild West?

Consider how the United States and Britain defeated German militarism in World War I and Nazism in World War II and stalled the march of communism in the 1950s and 60s. More recently they have expended enormous treasure and lives in battling against terror and militant Islam, also helping topple such dictators as Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi.

Who would step in to take America's place as the dominant world power? Would it be China? Russia? Could it possibly be a European superstate that many believe will never see the light of day, having forgotten European history during the last 2,000 years?

In fact, Bible prophecy does tell us that a ruthless European-centered dictatorship will yet appear on the world stage that will even challenge the authority of God Himself.

This is but one reason why the decline of the United States should be of great concern to every person who takes the Bible seriously. For it would mean a very dark future for humanity around the globe. ***GN***

"I Will Break the Pride of Your Power"

"Economies can be rebuilt, armies can be repopulated, but once a nation's pride is gone it can almost never be restored" (Michael Savage, *Trickle Down Tyranny*, 2012, p. 1). These words are powerfully reminiscent of what God told the people of ancient Israel if they persisted in their sins: *"I will break the pride of your power"* (Leviticus 26:19).

For those with eyes to see, the strength of this powerful biblical passage is finding its greatest fulfillment in our time.

Both Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 constitute the "blessings and curses" chapters of the Bible. The blessings are for obedience to God, while the curses are for *dis*obedience. Both chapters are prophetic.

Prophecy is often dual in nature. What is foretold may find fulfillment in two or even more occasions (see our free booklet *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*). There are many dual prophecies that have been fulfilled to some degree in the past but still await greater fulfillment in the future.

Has God already begun to break the pride of American power?

In mid-April Kwasi Kwarteng, a Conservative Party member of the British Parliament, wrote, "The Arab Spring, the threat of Iran as an emerging nuclear power, the continuing violence in Syria and the American reluctance to get involved there, have all signaled *the weakness, if not the end, of America's role as a world policeman"* ("As Britannia Ceased to Rule, So Will America," *International Herald Tribune,* April 18, 2012).

Whenever we scan the national headlines, we see repeated warnings that the prophecy of broken pride in America's national power is beginning to be fulfilled—and may be on the verge of accelerating with frightening speed if the nation doesn't take drastic steps to repent and change its self-destructive course.

America and the Decline of the British Empire: A Comparison

The accompanying article points out that the American nation is largely descended from one of the sons of the biblical patriarch Joseph, Manasseh. But Joseph had a second son, Ephraim, whose descendants spread the British Empire around the world (again, see our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*).

Notice these remarkable words from *Newsweek International*'s editor Fareed Zakaria about the role of the once-great British Empire: "In fact, Britain has arguably been the most successful exporter of its culture in human history. Before the American dream, there was an 'English way of life'—one that was watched, admired and copied throughout the world. And also thanks to the British Empire, English spread as a global language, spoken from the Caribbean to Cape Town to Calcutta" ("The Future of American Power," *Foreign Affairs,* May-June 2008, p. 20).

This year marks the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth, 60 years on the British throne. It is a far cry from June 22, 1897, which marked Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee—when *one fourth* of humanity around the globe, 400 million people, celebrated a holiday to mark the occasion throughout the world in an empire "on which the sun never set."

At the time, many believed the British Empire would last forever. It did not.

Bled dry economically by two enormously costly world wars in the first half of the 20th century, Britain had little choice but to gradually surrender its empire without a fight.

What lessons does this hold for America in terms of the British experience? Zakaria further stated, "No analogy is exact, but the British Empire in its heyday is the closest any nation in the modern age has come to the United States' position today."

Kwasi Kwarteng, Conservative Party member of the British Parliament, made this comparison: "America's position today reminds me of Britain's situation in 1945. Deep in debt and committed to building the National Health Service and other accoutrements of the welfare state, Britain could no longer afford to run an empire . . . Deficits and debts have been more damaging to dreams of empire than any genuine shift in ideology" ("As Britain Ceased to Rule, So Will America," *International Herald Tribune,* April 18, 2012).

Britain's Boer War in South Africa (1899-1902) conjures up parallels with Iraq and Afghanistan today. The British won out in the end, but sustained heavy losses in both manpower and prestige. America has gotten by in an overall sense, but being bogged down in these two Middle Eastern nations for such a long time with no clear victory, plus the massive costs in money and manpower, have been highly damaging.

Following the British example will be no easy task.

During the last 60 years or so, Britain has played a fairly good hand in overseeing its own decline. The country has cooperated with the sudden rise of America to world leadership and become a reliable ally the United States could really count on. With little protest, Washington quietly took over many British naval bases in the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific.

But it will not be an easy task for Americans to follow suit in their hearts and minds. Decline will not sit well, and accommodation to other nations will prove very difficult. America has been so strong for so long, and its people holding such a pampered position, that inevitable decline in their standard of living will be an ugly, messy and dangerous affair.

It also doesn't help that, as former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski pointed out in his 2012 book *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power,* "The uncomfortable truth is that the United States public has an alarmingly limited knowledge of global geography, current events and even pivotal moments in world history" (p. 52). *The Good News* magazine strives to help fill this critical knowledge gap to help readers understand where the world—and this nation in particular—is going.

Has America **Lost Its Way?**

America's leaders are making history—but not in a good way. Rejecting biblical values that long strengthened the nation, some are now pursuing a treacherous path earlier leaders warned of long ago.

by Scott Ashley



Photos.com

On May 9, 2012, President Barack Obama made history. In a television interview, he became the first sitting U.S. president to announce his support for marriage between homosexual couples.

I wish I could say that Americans were shocked to hear the news. Regrettably, few seemed surprised at all.

Many thought it was only a matter of time before President Obama revealed his true views. After all, when running for a seat in the Illinois legislature in 1996, he had openly supported gay marriage, stating that he favored legalizing homosexual marriages and would fight efforts to prohibit them.

His public positions took a different turn when he campaigned for higher office. When running for the U.S. Senate in 2004, he took a more mainstream position, stating, "My religious beliefs say that marriage is something sanctified between a man and a woman."

Running for nationwide office as he sought the White House in 2008, he similarly said: "I believe that marriage is the union between a man and a woman . . . For me as a Christian, it is a sacred union."

Yet those words soon rang hollow. In 2011 he declared his view that the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act, which defined marriage as between one man and one woman and had passed both houses of Congress with overwhelming majorities, was unconstitutional and ordered the U.S. Justice Department to stop defending it in court.

That same year he pressed the U.S. armed forces to stop enforcing restrictions on homosexuals serving openly in the military—a practice dating back more than 200 years to George Washington's Continental Army.

Still later in 2011 he directed the U.S. State Department to use American foreign aid programs and agencies to support homosexual organizations in other countries, to coerce foreign governments into accepting and promoting gay rights, and to encourage homosexuals in other nations to seek asylum in the United States.

To many, Obama's recent announcement was evidence that, with elections looming in November, he had chosen to court the vote of various liberal constituencies (and the financial support of wealthy gay donors) and embrace a position millions of Bible believers consider repugnant—in spite of holding what he professed to be Christian beliefs.

Such a position is definitely *not* in line with Christian teachings from the Bible, as we will see. And it comes after other assaults on traditional religious values. As America and its leaders increasingly defy God and oppose godly morality, the country faces dire consequences.

Government forces employers to violate religious beliefs

The president's advocacy of homosexual marriage followed on the heels of another far-reaching step that those who accept the authority of the Bible find abhorrent.

In January the Obama administration announced that "Obamacare" regulations for church-affiliated institutions such as hospitals, charities, schools and universities will require employers to include coverage for contraception in their employee health insurance plans.

Although the president had been briefed beforehand about concerns that the mandates violated long-held religious freedoms, his administration chose to authorize them anyway. An immediate outcry arose, particularly from Catholic leaders who support their church's position of avoiding the use of contraceptives for birth control.

Initially the White House appeared to backtrack, excusing religious institutions from having to pay for contraceptives for their employees and instead forcing their insurance providers to pay for them.

But church officials weren't fooled, as the move meant the institutions would still have to pay for practices that violated their long-held beliefs—the only difference being that they would now pay for the required contraceptives through higher payments to their insurance companies rather than directly. And many institutions, being self-insured, simply had no other option than to comply with regulations that required them to contravene their beliefs.

Owners and executives of insurance companies who hold strong religious convictions also found themselves in an impossible position—now being forced by federal mandate to cover practices they consider not just morally repugnant, but sinful.

So objectionable were the new requirements

that, as of this writing, more than 40 Catholic dioceses and organizations, including the University of Notre Dame, have filed religious-freedom lawsuits against the federal government to try to reverse the new regulations. Two other Catholic universities announced that they have dropped their student health-care plans rather than comply with the contraceptive requirements that violate their religious beliefs.

To be clear, this is not just a Catholic issue. Religious leaders of many faiths recognize this as a clear assault on religious freedom, which is why many non-Catholic plaintiffs have joined in lawsuits to overturn the government's actions.

Employers ordered to pay for abortion-inducing drugs

Most abhorrent of all, however, was the fact that the new government regulations also required coverage for "morning after" pills—drugs that, taken up to several days after sexual relations, lead to spontaneous abortion of any fertilized embryo.

This is, plain and simple, *chemically induced abortion*—the destruction of human life, which Christians who accept the Bible's teaching reject as murder. (To understand the true biblical perspective on abortion, be sure to read our reprint articles "The Abortion Quagmire" and "America's Child Sacrifice" at www.GNmagazine.org/reprints.)

Make no mistake: *These actions are a clear assault on the religious beliefs and practices of millions of Americans.* Agencies of the United States government, at the direction of the president, are requiring American citizens to engage in actions that violate their conscience and directly contradict long-established Christian beliefs.

If this is allowed to stand, one shudders at the thought of what else government could require citizens to do.

Does Scripture support same-sex marriage?

Those who draw their values from the Bible find President Obama's explanation that his faith and that of his wife Michelle as "practicing Christians" is the motivation for his support of homosexual marriage to be baffling. It boils down to "the Golden Rule," the president explained, meaning "how we treat other people . . . treat others the way you would want to be treated."

The Golden Rule is certainly scriptural (Matthew 7:12), but it doesn't negate the many clear biblical teachings about marriage and homosexual activity. The Bible contains dozens of passages on marriage, and nowhere is the institution described as anything other than between a man and a woman. (Recall that, as noted above, Obama himself had earlier stated that he viewed marriage as between a man and a woman based on his Christian beliefs.)

Marriage is first mentioned in Genesis 2:24, right after the creation of Adam and Eve. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh," it tells us.

Quoting from Genesis, Jesus Christ upheld marriage as being between a man and a woman, saying: "From the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mark 10:6-9).

Other passages such as Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-7 show that marriage was never intended as anything other than between a man and a woman. The pattern was established with the first marital union, which again was between Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve or Eve and Evelyn.

What does the Bible say about homosexual behavior?

Scripture is also very plain in its teaching about homosexuality, in spite of the efforts of many to distort or ignore the clear meaning of passages. Let's notice a few:

"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination" (Leviticus 18:22; compare 20:13).

For those who mistakenly argue that this was only Old Testament instruction inapplicable today, notice what *New* Testament writers say.

Jude, the half-brother of Jesus Christ, listing examples of the certainty of God's judgment against those who refuse to turn from their sinful ways, wrote: "In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire" (Jude 7, New International Version). Sodom, of course, gave its name to the homosexual act of *sodomy,* and to its practitioners, *sodomites.*

The apostle Paul wrote of some who denied God: "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools . . . Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie . . .

"Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the

Christian in Name Only?

Political leaders aren't the only hypocrites when it comes to claiming to be Christian while acting far differently. For years America prided itself on being a Christian nation (see "Leaders of American History: A Legacy of Respect for God and the Bible," beginning on page 8). And while the nation may still claim this, the lives of its people tell a far different story. Consider a few facts that reveal how far the country has fallen:

- More than 40 percent of all U.S. births are out of wedlock, and among women under 30 it's well over half.
- Excluding miscarriages, 22 percent of all pregnancies in the United States are ended by abortion.
- By age 45, an estimated 30 percent of American women will have had an abortion.
- Almost half of all marriages end in divorce, and divorce rates are almost the same among those who call themselves Christian.
- Marriage and family are the building blocks of society, yet barely half of all adult Americans (51 percent) are married, and an ever-increasing number choose to simply live together outside of marriage.
- Nearly half of all Americans (48.5 percent) live in households receiving some kind of government aid. More than a third live in households receiving food stamps, subsidized housing, welfare or Medicaid.
- Although 85 percent of U.S. households own a Bible—and most have more than one—more than half (54 percent) cannot name its first five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy).
- Almost half of Americans (46 percent) say they read the Bible only once or twice a year.
- A majority of Americans (60 percent) can't name the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and an even greater number (63 percent) can't name more than half of the Ten Commandments.

As Matthew 7:20 tells us, "By their fruits you will know them."

same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion" (Romans 1:21-27, NIV).

Paul wrote plainly about homosexual practices: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, *nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,* nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, emphasis added throughout).

Rome and Corinth, the cities to which Paul wrote these two passages, were well known for their sexual perversions. God's Word never presents such behavior as acceptable, but instead strongly condemns it. And the passage above from Jude holds up Sodom and Gomorrah as an example of the divine punishment that, unless repented of, awaits all those who practice such sins.

(We should note, however, that Scripture also holds out hope to those who repent of such sins, as Paul notes in 1 Corinthians 6:11. For those seeking to turn from such lifestyles, we offer hope and encouragement at our sister website, breakingfree.ucg.org.)

What did Jesus say?

Some excuse such clear passages by saying that Jesus Christ nowhere condemned homosexual activity. Those who make such statements reveal not their knowledge of Scripture but their ignorance. In Matthew 5:17-19, Jesus plainly said that no one should think that He was doing away with even the smallest part of the laws of God (such as the passages from Leviticus quoted above).

They also fail to comprehend who and what Jesus Christ really was. Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 that Jesus Christ was the "spiritual Rock" that accompanied the Israelites in the desert after their departure from Egypt. He also explains, as the apostle John did in John 1:3, that Jesus Christ was the same divine Being who, as God with the Father, created the universe and everything in it (Colossians 1:16-17; Ephesians 3:9; Hebrews 1:2).

As the divine Being who interacted with Moses on behalf of God the Father (John 1:18), Jesus Christ Himself was the very LORD God who in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 *gave* the laws forbidding homosexual activity! (To see further proof, request or download our free booklets *Who Is God?* and *Jesus Christ: The Real Story.*) So to say that Jesus Christ never addressed the subject or never condemned homosexual behavior is to simply reveal one's lack of understanding of biblical truth.

Can we change or ignore God's Word?

God is very clear about what He thinks of those who ignore His Word or twist it to their own ends. Notice His plain statements: "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," and "Whatever I command you, *be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it"* (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32).



"I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever."

—Thomas Jefferson,
U.S. President 1801-1809

He repeats these words in principle at the very end of the Bible in Revelation 22:18-29: "If anyone *adds to these things,* God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone *takes away* from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life . . ."

Regrettably, all too many politicians—and not a few self-proclaimed religious leaders—do just that, endorsing as "personal freedoms" acts that God condemns as abominable sins.

Such individuals don a religious guise when it suits their political ends, while at the same time disdaining what the Word of God says about the repugnant sins they endorse.

Warnings from one of America's founding fathers

Seeing how far the nation has drifted from God, is it any wonder that America is experiencing such great setbacks as its enormous explosion of debt, its retreat from inconclusive, un-won wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, severe economic difficulties and ever-growing social problems?

There was a time when the nation's political leaders understood the biblical truth that "righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (Proverbs 14:34, NIV). And as believers in God and His Word, they felt a duty to warn their people of the consequences of sin and rejecting God.

Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States, saw the danger that would arise when a nation loses sight of God and turns its back on Him.

"God who gave us life gave us liberty," he wrote in 1781. "And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the Gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with His wrath?

"Indeed, *I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever"* (quoted by William Federer, *America's God and Country: Encyclopedia of Quotations,* 1994, p. 323).

Jefferson understood the eternal truth that we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7)—and because God is just, it's inevitable that His justice *will* eventually be carried out.

"Too proud to pray to the God that made us"

Another who understood this truth is one of the nation's most famous presidents, Abraham Lincoln. Long before his election to that office, he spoke in words echoing the lessons of history: "If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher" (1837, quoted by Federer, p. 375). He well understood that many a nation is destroyed from within before it is vanquished from without.

Could that happen to the United States?

When the nation was in the throes of the Civil War and in mortal danger, President Lincoln proclaimed a national day of fasting and prayer that the nation might be saved. Part of his proclamation read: "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

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as no other nation has ever grown.

"But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious Hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and 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 to feel the necessity of [God's] redeeming and preserving grace, *too proud to pray to the God that made us!"* (quoted by Federer, pp. 383-384).



"If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher."

—**Abraham Lincoln, U.S. president 1861-1865**

Where do we go from here?

Lincoln's words describe the present-day United States all too well. We've been blessed beyond measure. We've accumulated wealth and power unmatched in any single nation in history. But we have indeed forgotten the Source of those blessings, and in our conceit and arrogance we've concluded that it's all our own doing and we don't need God.

Obey His laws? Forget it—they're so horribly outdated. Study His Word? No way—too boring, too out of touch. Accept His Word for what it says? Of course not—we know better; we'll make up our own rules.

So, ignoring His Word, we've slaughtered 70 to 80 million unborn infants through abortion, and now the nation's highest elected leader has openly committed himself to redefining marriage, the primary building block of civilized society.

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil

Centuries ago the great Creator God confronted another nation whose political leadership had grown corrupt and comfortable when it came to rejecting His Word and the sins that had debased that nation.

Through the words of the prophet Isaiah He thundered: *"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil,* who substitute *darkness for light and light for darkness . . .*

"Therefore, as a tongue of fire consumes straw and as dry grass shrivels in the flame, so their roots will become like something rotten and their blossoms will blow away like dust, *for they have rejected the instruction of the LORD of Hosts, and they have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.*

"Therefore *the LORD's anger burns against His people . . . His anger is not removed, and His hand is still raised to strike"* (Isaiah 5:20-25, Holman Christian Standard Bible).

We should learn a crucial lesson from history from these words and those of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln. God was patient, but eventually His patience ran out. The kingdom of Judah, to whom these words were written, finally grew so corrupt and degenerate that they suffered a devastating national downfall and captivity at the hands of mighty Babylon. Crushed and shattered, the kingdom never came close to recovering its former power.

Whether its people realize it or not, America is treading a treacherous path, defiant or ignorant of the growing danger. Unless the nation and its people heed the lessons of history, and the abundant warnings of God's Word, history will soon repeat itself.

One can despise the Word of God for only so long before reaping the tragic consequences! ***GN***

Learn More



Why does it seem that America's problems are growing deeper by the day with no easy way out? Why is the world's lone superpower over recent decades now facing challenges everywhere it turns? You need to understand the answers that were foretold long ago in Bible prophecy! Request or download your free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* today!

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

www.GNmagazine.org/booklets



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

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

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

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, sharing the truth of God's purpose and plan for us as taught by Jesus Christ.

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



For additional information, visit our website:

www.ucg.org

What Are **Ahmadinejad's Aims?**

What's really behind Iran's nuclear program? Is something much bigger at work, something that becomes clear when we look more deeply into the Iranian president's religious beliefs? And does the Bible provide us with understanding regarding the future of the war-torn Middle East? ***by Scott Ashley***

When it comes to international relations, few things are more important than understanding the thinking of the other nation's leader—particularly if the situation is or has the potential of turning hostile.

Misunderstanding or underestimating one's opponent can prove deadly. We need only look at British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's declaration of "peace for our time" after his Munich meeting with Adolf Hitler less than a year before the onset of World War II, or America's woeful unpreparedness that brought a devastating Japanese surprise attack on the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor.

Both led to enormous loss of life that might have been avoided had British and American leadership shown more perception in understanding the mind-set of their adversaries.

In more recent times we might consider Osama bin Laden's declarations of war against the United States in 1996 and 1998, which preceded al-Qaeda's terror attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon in September 2001.

The title of Bin Laden's first declaration—"Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places" (referring to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia)—revealed a great deal about his mindset and intentions. So did the signatories of the second—"World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders."

It is critical that we not misunderstand the thinking of those Muslims who have dedicated themselves to *jihad*—religious war against their enemies. Judging by their actions, many Western political leaders fail to understand their thinking also—much to the peril of their nations.

Nowhere is this more evident than in a country repeatedly making headlines these days—Iran. As Western leaders continue with more fruitless rounds of negotiations over the Iranian nuclear program, a dose of reality is very much in order. As German President Joachim Gauck said when meeting Israeli President Shimon Peres May 29, 2012: "I'm very concerned about Iran's nuclear program. It represents not only a concrete danger for Israel but for the whole region and potentially even for us in Europe" (quoted by Rachel Hirshfeld, "German President Warns: Iran Threatens 'New Shoah,'" Israel National News, May 30, 2012).



Photos, from left: Photos.com, Wikimedia

What are the real objectives of Iran and its president with respect to Iran's nuclear program?

So what are the real objectives of Iran and its president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, with respect to Iran's nuclear program?

Peaceful pursuit of nuclear power and research?

Iran, of course, claims that its nuclear program is solely for energy production and to produce radioactive isotopes for medical research. Yet as some commentators point out, this is untruthful on its face for several reasons, namely:

- Iran sits atop a veritable ocean of cheap oil, making expensive nuclear power for its own use wholly unnecessary.
- Iran is vastly accelerating production of 20 percent enriched uranium (which, with further refinement, can be used for nuclear bombs), when all that's necessary for nuclear power production is uranium enriched to barely a sixth of that amount—3.5 percent.
- Iran already has far more uranium enriched to 20 percent than it could use in many years of medical research.
- Iran has gone to enormous expense to construct its supposedly benign nuclear facilities in hardened shelters, many of them deep underground or inside mountains to make them safe from possible military attack.
- Iran has gone to great lengths to conceal its "peaceful" nuclear research facilities from outside eyes, acknowledging the existence of several only after they were revealed by other governments, and for years has refused to allow international inspections.

If you think none of this adds up, you're right.

So what's going on?

Fruitless efforts to stall enrichment

We must first realize that negotiations over Iran's nuclear program have been ongoing for almost a decade now. And how much progress have Western nations and international agencies made toward halting or reversing Iran's nuclear efforts? *Zero.*

In fact, Iran is much further along than it was before negotiations started. Although the United Nations Security Council has passed multiple resolutions demanding that Iran suspend nuclear enrichment programs, Iran has ignored them.

Note that over recent months:

- The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has repeatedly reported

Iran to be noncompliant with nuclear nonproliferation treaty requirements to which it is a signatory.

• The IAEA has issued a report detailing how Iran has conducted research and experiments geared toward producing nuclear weapons, including mastering the extraordinarily difficult task of properly detonating such a device and how to mount a nuclear warhead on a missile.

• The IAEA learned of the existence of a "large explosive containment vessel" at an Iranian military complex near Tehran, concluding that this was part of Iranian efforts to develop a nuclear device.

It's evident that the Iranians have used the bait of continued negotiations to buy time to make further advancements in their nuclear program. They look at the example of North Korea, which followed a similar path of negotiation and denial right up until it detonated a Hiroshima-sized underground nuclear warhead in May 2009.

So what are the Iranians' intentions?

"One nuclear bomb inside Israel will destroy everything"

Iran's former president Hashemi Rafsanjani, Ahmadinejad's predecessor, was considered a *moderate* leader. But regarding nuclear weapons and Israel, he said: "If one day, the Islamic world is also equipped with weapons like those that Israel possesses now . . . the use of even one nuclear bomb inside Israel will *destroy everything.* However, it will *only harm* the Islamic world. *It is not irrational to contemplate such an eventuality"* (emphasis added throughout).

Rafsanjani was saying that if the Islamic world acquired nuclear weapons, a nuclear confrontation with Israel would be worth it. His reasoning was that while an Israeli nuclear strike might kill many millions of Muslims, that would only "harm" the vast Islamic world and not destroy it, whereas Israel, being so small—less than 10 miles wide at some points—would, by just one bomb, no longer exist.

And he concluded that such thinking, being willing to sacrifice millions of Muslims to exterminate the Jewish state, is not irrational!

Threats to exterminate Israel

What about his successor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad? He's made no secret of his hatred for Israel. Since assuming office in August 2005, Ahmadinejad has made repeated threats to eliminate the Jewish state. Notice a few:

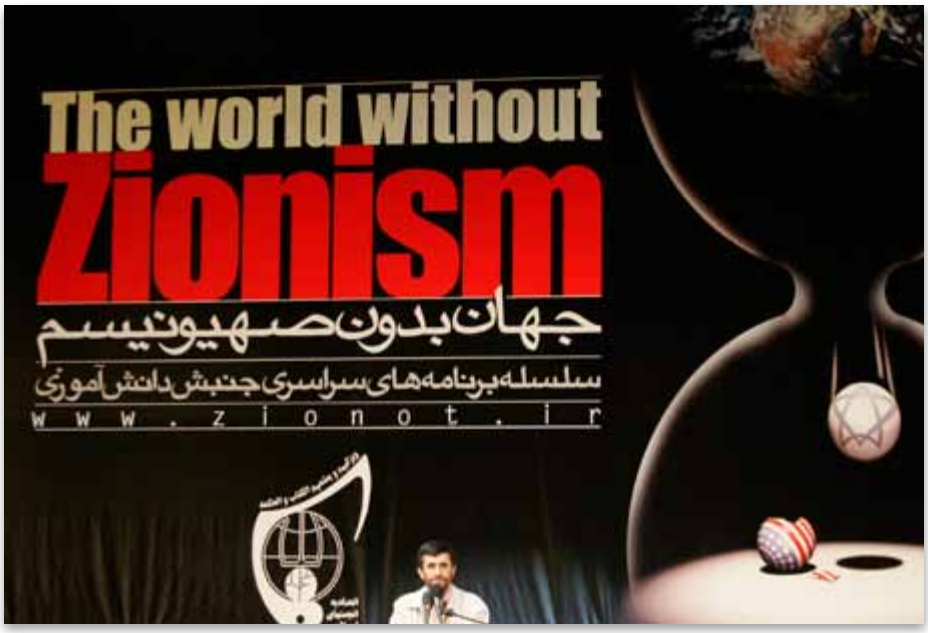
"Israel must be wiped off the map" (2005).

"The United States and the Zionist regime of Israel *will soon come to the end of their lives"* (2007).

"This regime [Israel] *will not last long . . . This regime has no future. Its life has come to an end"* (2009).

"Israel is the most hated regime in the world . . . With Allah's grace, *this regime will be annihilated,* and Palestinians and other regional nations will be rid of its bad omen" (2010).

"I am telling you that a new and greater Middle East will be established *without the existence of the U.S. and the Zionist regime* [Israel]" (2011).



Ahmadinejad's remarks confirmed the message of the banner: "Is it possible for us to witness a world without America and Zionism? You had best know that this slogan and this goal are attainable, and surely can be achieved."

The two "Satans"—America and Israel

Ahmadinejad regularly refers to Israel as the "little Satan," and to the United States as the "great Satan." To him and his cohorts, a "Satan" is two things. It is an adversary as well as an evil spiritual entity. Ahmadinejad views the United States in both ways.

In his mind the United States is evil because its values and morals corrupt the entire world. (As pointed out in "Has America Lost Its Way?" beginning on page 25, in this he is largely right—America has grown spiritually bankrupt and is no longer a Christian nation that reveres the Bible.)

And as the world's foremost military power and supporter of Israel, the United States is an adversary and the major obstacle that prevents Islam from achieving its true destiny as the religion that is supposed to rule over the entire world. Therefore, in his mind the two "satans"—the United States and Israel—must be eliminated.

Does Ahmadinejad really believe this? At a 2006 Iranian conference with the theme "The World Without Zionism," he spoke onstage in front of a large banner showing an hourglass with grains of sand falling to the bottom, depicting time running out. Clearly visible in the hourglass was a large falling grain painted with a Star of David, symbol of Israel, showing that its time is over.

At the bottom of the hourglass was a grain that had *already fallen* and been broken. It was painted with a U.S. flag. The unmistakable symbolism of the banner was that *the United States has to be brought down before Israel can be brought down.*

His remarks confirmed the message of the banner. He said: "Is it possible for us to witness a world *without America and Zionism?* You had best know that *this slogan and this goal are attainable, and surely can be achieved."*

Pars/AbacaUSA.com

The "great Satan" must fall first. Then with its backer and patron out of the way, the "little Satan" will be no problem.

Iranian threats to the United States and Israel

Does this sound too outlandish to contemplate?

In a May 27 *Washington Post* article titled "U.S. Officials Among the Targets of Iran-Linked Assassination Plots," Middle East and national security specialist Joby Warrick cited U.S. officials in pointing out a "campaign by Iran-linked operatives to kill foreign diplomats in at least seven countries over a span of 13 months." Targeted officials included six Israelis, two Saudis and several Americans. "Iran-backed Hezbollah militants or operatives based inside Iran" were the common link in the plots.

The Iranian state-controlled FARS News Agency has recently run some extremely inflammatory statements by Iranian military officials directed toward the United States and Israel.

On May 20, 2012, FARS released an article titled "Top Commander Reiterates Iran's Commitment to Full Annihilation of Israel." It began by stating, "Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Hassan Firouzabadi said threats and pressures cannot deter Iran from its revolutionary causes and ideals, and stressed that *the Iranian nation will remain committed to the full annihilation of the Zionist regime of Israel to the end."*

It further quoted Iran's supreme religious leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as saying, *"The Zionist regime is a real cancerous tumor that should be cut and will be cut,* [Allah] *Willing."*

A May 26, 2012, FARS article titled "IRGC Lieutenant Commander: Iran Can Target All Enemy Bases in Region" quoted Iranian Brigadier General Hossein Salami as saying, "Today, there is no base in the region lying outside the reach of the Iranian missiles."

His point was that not only Israel, but U.S. land, naval and air bases in nearby Afghanistan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and the Persian Gulf are within Iranian missile range (and would effectively be held hostage should Iran acquire nuclear weapons). The article went on to boast of the range and firepower of Iran's latest missiles.

"Iranian Navy Able to Deploy Vessels Three Miles off New York Coasts"

An April 28, 2012, FARS article titled "Iranian Navy Able to Deploy Vessels Three Miles off New York Coasts" included the following statements:

"'Our naval forces are so powerful that we have a presence in all the waters of the world and, if needed, we can move to within three miles of New York,' The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy Commander Rear Admiral Ali Fadavi said Tuesday . . ."

"IRGC naval commanders said in July 2011 that they would expand their mission into the Atlantic Ocean, and that the country had equipped a number of its vessels with long-range ballistic missiles."

What is particularly troubling about these statements is the fact that some U.S. military planners and intelligence specialists are convinced that Iran has already conducted naval test launches for an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) missile attack once Iran acquires nuclear capability.

What does this mean?

Is Iran planning an EMP attack?

A little-known byproduct of a nuclear detonation is that it emits an electromagnetic pulse—a powerful burst causing rapid changes in electric and magnetic fields that, while leaving human beings, plants and animals untouched, overloads and destroys any unshielded electrical equipment within hundreds to thousands of miles.

In practical terms, this means that any computerized technology developed since the 1970s is shut down permanently. This would include virtually all computers, electrical appliances, phone systems, radios, televisions, satellites, the Internet, the electrical power grid, water systems, sewer systems, motorized vehicles, trains and aircraft. Modern life as we know it would cease to exist in an instant. And with the infrastructure of a vast region completely collapsed, the overwhelming majority of people there would be dead of starvation and disease within months.

How might the Iranians—or other nuclear armed enemies, even terrorists—pull off such an attack? The simplest scenario is that they might load a nuclear device onto a cargo freighter and sail it near or into a major port city such as New York City, Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco or Seattle and then detonate it. There is little or nothing anyone could do to stop it.

However, while the EMP from a ground-level detonation would be quite devastating to a large metropolitan area, its effects would be limited to that area by the curvature of the earth. With altitude, an EMP can affect a much larger region.

Thus, a variation of the above idea is to hide a launcher and nuclear-tipped missile on a freighter, then launch it from miles off the U.S. coastline to create an electromagnetic pulse high above the United States. Depending on the altitude and yield of the blast, up to a third of the country could be devastated by a single warhead!

U.S. and other intelligence agencies have monitored Iranian missile launches from cargo ships in the Caspian Sea in which the missiles detonated in the lower atmosphere. Initially they were thought to be failed launches—until the sobering reality hit that they were near-perfect exercises if the goal is a successful EMP missile attack.

Again, the United States has no effective defense against such a scenario.

Invitations to convert to Islam

In the Koran, Muslims are encouraged to invite non-Muslims to convert to Islam, a practice known as *dawa* (sometimes spelled *dawah*). It's based on Koranic passages such as the following (quoted from the Dawood translation):

"Say: 'This is my path. With sure knowledge I call on you to have faith in [Allah] . . .'" (12:108).

"Call men to the path of your Lord with wisdom and kindly exhortation. Reason with them in the most courteous manner" (16:125).

"Prophet, We [Allah, using the royal plural even though Allah is understood to be singular] have sent you forth as a witness, a bearer of good tidings, and a warner; one who shall call men to [Allah] by His leave and guide them like a shining light" (33:45-46)

"And who speaks better than he who calls men to the service of [Allah], does what is right, and says: 'I am a Muslim'?" (41:33).

But there is a flip side to this practice. The Koran says that if one rejects that invitation to convert to Islam, he will suffer the consequences of that rejection, which is divine punishment from Allah. Notice these passages from the Koran:

"If they [nonbelievers] pay no heed, know that We [Allah] have not sent you to be their keeper. Your only duty is to give warning" (42:48).

"Whether We [Allah] let you glimpse in some measure the scourge We promise them, or call you back to Us before We smite them, your mission is only to give warning: it is for Us to do the reckoning" (13:40).

"[Allah] has sent forth His apostle [Muhammad] with guidance and the true Faith [Islam], so that he may exalt it above all religions. Sufficient is [Allah] as a witness. Muhammad is [Allah's] apostle. Those who follow him are ruthless to the unbelievers but merciful to one another" (48:28-29).

"[Allah] and His apostle [Muhammad] are under no obligation to the idolaters. If you repent, it shall be well with you; but if you pay no heed, know that you shall not be immune from [Allah's] judgment. Proclaim a woeful punishment to the unbelievers . . . When the sacred months are over slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them" (9:4-5).

Ahmadinejad invites the world to convert to Islam

In several speeches to the United Nations General Assembly, President Ahmadinejad has openly urged the gathered world leaders to convert to Islam. But because Western news reporters and government officials are oblivious to the practice of *dawa,* they had no idea what he was doing—that he was carrying out an obligation for Muslims before initiating further steps.

Here's part of what he said in his 2009 speech to the United Nations: "We emphasize that *the only path to remain safe* is to return to monotheism [Islam] and justice, and this is the greatest hope and opportunity in all ages and generations. *Without belief in Allah and commitment to the cause of justice and fight against injustice and discrimination* [in other words, accepting Islam], *the world structure cannot be put right."*

Lest you think that's an aberration, he said essentially the same thing in his UN addresses in 2007, 2008, 2010 and 2011, which you can find on the Internet. So in his mind, Ahmadinejad has fulfilled this obligation to invite enemies to convert to Islam before they suffer Allah's judgment. So if Iran does successfully develop nuclear weapons, he has already warned the entire world—through his UN addresses—by repeatedly inviting them to convert to Islam and submit to Allah.

Ahmadinejad's belief in a soon-coming Islamic messiah

We also need to realize that Iran's president, and much of the nation's leadership, adheres to a branch of Shiite Muslim theology that believes in the imminent appearance of an Islamic messiah, called *al-Mahdi,* who will lead Islam to its rightful place as the dominant religion in the world. *Al-Mahdi*'s followers believe that it's their duty to bring chaos to the world, and out of this chaos will come a clash of civilizations between Islam and the West from which Islam will emerge victorious.

So how does this belief play out in the real world? It means that Ahmadinejad will likely never voluntarily enter into any meaningful agreement to restrict Iran's nuclear program. It means that any agreements are only to be used to play for time, which is exactly what we've seen for a number of years now, until Iran becomes a full-blown nuclear power.



Ahmadinejad has told us his intentions—to pave the way for *al-Mahdi* to lead Islam to victory over the entire world.

Does Ahmadinejad really believe this? Let me quote again from his speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2011, less than a year ago. These were his opening words:

"In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful, all praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Universe, and peace and blessing be upon our Master and Prophet, Mohammad, and his pure household, and his noble companions and on all divine messengers. Oh, Allah, *hasten the arrival of Imam al-Mahdi and grant him good health and victory and make us his followers and those who attest to his rightfulness."*

Thus, in his statement to the United Nations Ahmadinejad claimed to be speaking in the name of Allah and Islam and prayed before all the world for the quick arrival of *al-Mahdi* and his "victory." What victory? Victory in leading Islam to be the dominant religion over all nations!

Sadly, most government officials and news reporters are blind to what he was really saying, so you haven't heard this reported in the news. But that's exactly what he meant. You can be sure that all the representatives of the Muslim nations sitting there, who understand Islamic theology, knew *exactly* what he was saying.

Ahmadinejad's view of a world united under Islam

He closed his UN speech with these words: "Through international cooperation, diligence and efforts by committed world leaders and governments and through insisting on the realization of justice and the support of all other nations, we can expedite the building of a common bright future.

"This movement is certainly on its rightful path of creation, ensuring a promising future for humanity. A future that will be built when humanity initiates to [tread] the path of the divine prophets and the righteous *under the leadership of Imam al-Mahdi, the Ultimate Savior of mankind and the inheritor to all divine messengers and leaders and to the pure generation of our great Prophet* [Muhammad].

"The creation of a supreme and ideal society with the arrival of a perfect human being [al-Mahdi] *who is a true and sincere lover of all human beings, is the guaranteed promise of Allah.*

"He will come . . . to lead the freedom and justice lovers to eradicate tyranny and discrimination, and promote knowledge, peace, justice, freedom and love across the world . . .

"Today nations have been awakened. With the increase in public awareness, they no longer succumb to oppressions and discriminations. The world is now witnessing, more than ever, the widespread awakening in Islamic lands, in Asia, Europe, and America. These movements are ever expanding their spirit everyday and influence the pursuit of the realization of justice, freedom and the creation of a better tomorrow.

"Our great nation stands ready to join hands with other nations to march on this beautiful path in harmony and in line with the shared aspirations of mankind. Let us salute love, freedom, justice, wisdom, and

Photo illustration by Shaun Venish/Wikimedia/NASA

the bright future that awaits humankind."

Ahmadinejad is here stating exactly what he believes: That *al-Mahdi* will appear soon, that he is the ultimate savior of mankind, that he is the successor and descendent of Muhammad, and that he will establish peace on earth through Islam becoming the supreme religion on earth. He also notes that Iran stands ready to lead the march on this path toward a very different world united under Islamic rule.

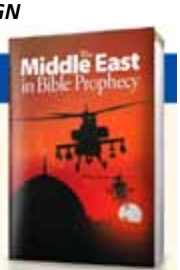
He lays out his beliefs for the world to see. But without an understanding of the background of Islam and his beliefs, non-Muslims have no idea what he's really saying.

So what will happen if or when Iran finally successfully develops nuclear weapons? He's told us. He's given the world the invitation to convert to Islam. He's told us his intentions, which are to pave the way for *al-Mahdi* to come and lead Islam to victory over the entire world. These are Ahmadinejad's aims for Iran and the world.

As readers of *The Good News* know, we present a very different view of the future that God has in store for our world. Through the pages of the Bible, we are encouraged by the wonderful and magnificent age that Jesus Christ says lies ahead for the whole world, a future far different from the dangerous visions of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

A Messiah will indeed come, but it is the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ, who will intervene and bring this world peace. "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). And then, as the apostle John wrote in Revelation 11:15 (English Standard Version), it will be proclaimed, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." ***GN***

Learn More



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

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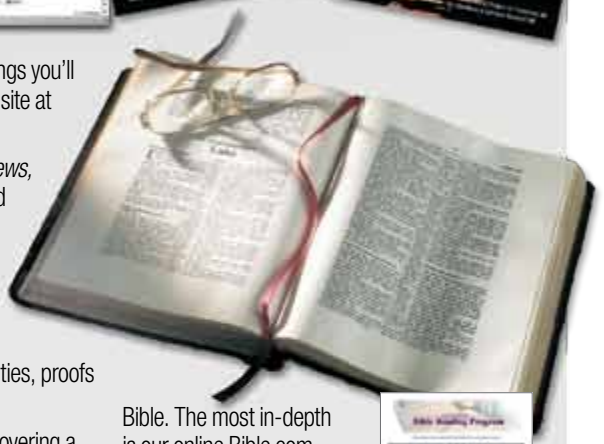
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BEYOND TODAY
UNDERSTANDING YOUR FUTURE

Chasing the **Good Old Days**

Reflecting on the "good old days" can bring back warm thoughts and fond memories. But could longing for a lost past diminish the joy of the present and the hope of what God has in store for your future? ***by* Beyond Today *host Gary Petty***

Sometimes you hear people talk about the "good old days"—a time when life was simpler, more carefree, without the troubles and confusion of today's world.

Do you ever long for the "good old days"?

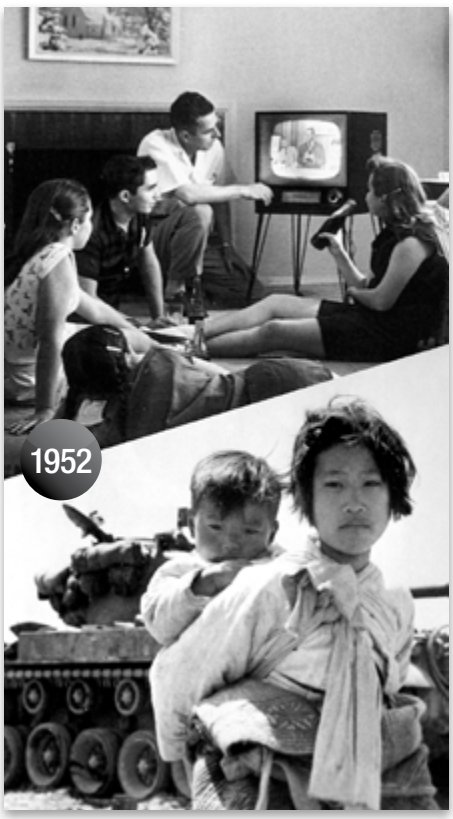
When the "good old days" were depends on your frame of reference. Some would argue that the good old days were the 1930s, when life was simple and the country was built on church and family values.

Others might say it was the 1950s, when everyone seemed to enjoy a rapidly growing standard of living. Still others might look back on the 1980s as a time of prosperity and rejuvenation of national pride.

Were the good old days 1952? Postage stamps were only 3 cents, pocket-sized transistor radios hit retail stores and *Singin' in the Rain* was one of the top movies. Of course, for the thousands suffering and dying in the Korean War, those days weren't so good.

Maybe you fondly remember 1964. The Beatles were all the rage, and John Wayne was a popular movie star. Science promised a future of leisure, with plenty of prepackaged food and no disease. But then maybe you remember the fear you experienced as a child as you and your classmates practiced getting under your desks in case of thermonuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. Some of you may remember having to sit in the back of the bus because of the color of your skin.

Or maybe the good old days were 1996. That's when the *Dilbert* comic strip became popular and you could afford a personal computer to join an estimated 45 million people surfing the net. But since that time, have crime, poverty and war been eradicated?



Whatever time we may harken back to as the "good old days," for many other people they were anything but.

When I was a teenager we used to watch the television program *The Waltons*. The storyline was about a large family living in the 1930s and 1940s. To me their lives seemed wonderful—school was fun, everyone in the community worked together, and every problem was solved in an hour.

But the reality of the time depicted in the program was something different. The 1930s witnessed the Great Depression. Although *The Waltons* touched on the poverty and unemployment, the reality for millions of people was much harsher.

I remember my father telling us about how during the Depression he, along with his mother and siblings, were put out on the street because they couldn't pay the rent. World War II soon followed—a horrendous time when some 60 million people died. For hundreds of millions of people, those "good old days" weren't so good.

When we lose purpose and hope in the present, and the future seems unclear or bleak, we tend to look to the past for the comfort of lost goodness. We want to believe in a less complicated time when people really did love each other and human nature was basically good.

The truth is that human nature, and the human condition, have always been a mixture of good and evil. The good old days were never as good as they seem.

Do present financial uncertainties, family problems, political chaos, loss of spiritual purpose and deterioration of morality throughout society have you longing for some lost good old days? Here are three steps you can take to allow God to make *today* meaningful and help you grasp the future He is offering you beyond today.

Step 1: Seek God's future for your life.

The problem with a rose-colored, distorted view of the past is that it prevents you from working toward the future God wants for you.

When I was a young boy I was hiking with some friends. We were walking up a ravine that was used at night by drunks to sleep off their intoxication. Suddenly one of the boys dropped to his knees and shouted, "Money!" He found another coin, then

Photos: Wikimedia



another. Soon all three of us were down on the ground scurrying around digging up coins that had fallen out of the pockets of the drunks. Before long we had filled our pockets with dozens of quarters, dimes and nickels in an exciting treasure hunt.

For some time after that, I tended to walk with my head down, looking for coins. But then I had to relearn walking while not looking at the ground. Because in looking down, hoping to relive a past moment, I might find a dime or quarter now and then—but think of all the sunsets I would miss, all the people I would never meet, all the accidents I would experience running into things.

That's the sad reality of what it's like to live in the past, hoping to somehow recapture the good old days. To deal with nostalgia you must accept that God has a *future* goal for your life and that this future depends on your decisions now.

Jesus Christ taught about His future return to reward His followers in a parable about sheep and goats (true followers who love God and neighbor are represented as sheep while those who only *claim* to love God and neighbor are represented as goats). The promise of the parable to the true followers is this: "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (Matthew 25:34).

The future is already planned! The question God is asking is: *How much do you want His future?*

God wants to clean up the mess in your life. The Creator of life wants to teach you how life works. He has a purpose for you, but first you're going to have to admit that *your ways don't work.* You have to ask God to show you the wrongness of your actions and thoughts and reveal to you the right way to live as shown in the Bible. Only then can you receive the future He wants to give you!

Step 2: Seek God's purpose in your life now.

God has an awesome future planned for all those who seek Him. This brings us to the next step on this road to eternal life—*you must seek God's purpose in your life now.*

The apostle Paul traveled to Athens and faced a group of some of the most scholarly philosophers of his day. He was challenged with explaining to these Greco-Roman thinkers steeped in polytheistic idolatry a concept about God and His purpose for human beings that was totally new to them.

Here's what Paul told them: "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

"And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'

"Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.

"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 17:24-31).

God created human beings because He wants children to be with Him in His family for eternity. When you turn to God, and submit to His purpose in your life, you can have a Father-child relationship with Him now. The apostle John wrote, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

If you want this future, a promise to be like God and see Him as He is, then you must dedicate your life to acting and thinking like a child of God. In the next verse John wrote, "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (verse 4).

Jesus Christ, as your older brother, must become your model of behavior. You must spend time in prayer asking God to guide your life to prepare you for His future and

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be willing to obey His instructions.

Step 3: Don't allow present difficulties to sidetrack you from the future God is planning for you.

Are you allowing today's problems to rob you of your present peace of mind and hope for the future?

It's not just the big problems of life that keep us from living in anticipation of God's future—problems like illness, loss of jobs, death of a loved one—but the day-to-day grind of the little problems that can wear us out and sidetrack us from God's purpose.

I once read about a tree in Colorado that scientists were investigating because it had survived for an estimated 400 years. It had been struck by lightning on multiple occasions and survived drought, avalanches and storms. Finally it succumbed—not to any of these major threats to it, but because a horde of tiny insects destroyed the tree from the inside out.

We can allow the horde of daily inconveniences and problems to drain our emotional and spiritual strength, or we can begin to see life's difficulties as opportunities to be taught lessons from God so that His purpose can be fulfilled in our lives. When God is in charge of your life you can begin to see problems as opportunities to trust that He will bring about what is right and best for you as His child (Romans 8:28).

When were the good old days?

Imagine a storm raging outside your home. The wind is howling, tree limbs cracking, and cold rain pelting the roof. You and your family sleep in warmth and comfort, safe from the weather. Later, you could look back on that time as the "good old days."

Now imagine a group of fishermen out on a lake in the same storm. They are soaked and freezing. The mast is broken. The boat is taking on water with each crash of a wave. They look into each other's faces and without words share the terror that they are all going to die.



Sometimes the good old days are found in the storms God calms.

One of the men shouts out that someone is walking toward them—someone walking on water! Peter perceives it is Jesus Christ and jumps out of the boat, and for a few moments he actually walks on water too. After Jesus saves the sinking Peter, they climb into the boat and with a few words the Son of God calms the storm (Matthew 14:24-33).

Years later no one who slept soundly in safety and warmth remembers that night, but for the fishermen in the boat there are many occasions when people ask them to tell the story of when they were in a terrible storm and Jesus saved them. Parents retell the story to children. All agree that they wish they could have been there and that those were the good old days.

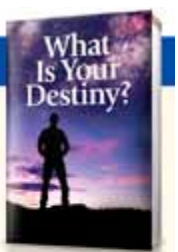
No matter what anyone else was doing that night, the place to be was in a sinking boat in the middle of a gale. You might have been shivering with cold and terrified, but you watched Jesus walk on water and through the power of God calm the turbulent sea.

It is often like that in life. Many times it is when we're most hopeless and frightened that God becomes most real to us. Sometimes the good old days are in the storms God calms.

If you're allowing God to fulfill His purpose in your life now, then there's no better time to live than *right now*—even with your difficulties and problems—because God is preparing you for His future.

God wants to clean up your life. He wants you to turn to Him as the source of life and as your Father. He wants you to be His child forever in His Kingdom. This is His future for you. The question being asked of you is this: Do you want His future by living His purpose in your life today? ***GN***

Learn More



If you don't know where you're going in life, it's likely you won't end up there. What kind of future does your Creator want for you? Exactly why are you here, and where are you going? Where *should* you be going? You need to learn the crucial answers right from your Bible! Be sure to read our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?* Request or download your free copy today!

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An ancient fortress slowly yields its secrets

Khirbet Qeiyafa, also known as the Elah Fortress, is the site of an ancient city about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem. It sits on a ridge overlooking the Elah Valley along what was, in the time of the biblical kings Saul and David, the border between the Philistines and the kingdom of Judah. Archaeologists have been exploring it since 2007—and they're increasingly glad they have.

One unusual aspect of the site is that it shows only two short periods of occupation—one thin layer dating to the Hellenistic period (332-141 B.C.) and an extensive but short-lived Iron Age settlement dated to 1050-970 B.C.—the time of King Saul and King David.



Excavations at Khirbet Qeiyafa have revealed extensive fortifications, including this defensive gateway on the western side.

Such limited occupation with major construction is quite rare in an area where many cities were built, destroyed, and rebuilt again and again over thousands of years. As such, it is something of a "snapshot" of conditions at the time of Saul and David. What does this "snapshot" show, and why is it important?

The view many Bible critics long held was that Kings Saul, David and Solomon were mythical figures invented by Israelites to enhance their history. When the 1993 discovery of the Tel Dan stele with its inscription referring to the "house [dynasty] of David" proved David's existence, the argument then shifted to dismissing the biblical record of him as a king over Judah and Israel, with critics arguing that he was nothing more than a local tribal leader of no real significance, and that the kingdoms of Judah and Israel didn't exist as states until centuries later.

And this is where the findings at Khirbet Qeiyafa prove significant.

As noted earlier, Khirbet Qeiyafa is on the hotly contested border area between the Israelite kingdom and Philistia, the major rivals of Saul and David's day. The city was clearly constructed as a fortress—defended as it was by a massive wall 12 feet wide.

Site excavators Yosef Garfinkel of Jerusalem's Hebrew University and Saar Ganor of the Israel Antiquities Authority state that the "massive construction" of such defenses, including 10-ton blocks and an estimated *200,000 tons* of stonework to build the walls, "proclaim the power and authority of a centralize[d] political organization, namely a state" ("Khirbet Qeiyafa: Sha'arayim," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures,* Vol. 8, article 22).

In other words, the argument that an ancient Israelite state under a monarchy didn't come into existence until centuries later is rubbish—since the construction of such a fortress city would've required the backing and resources of a national power to make such an undertaking possible.

Says Professor Garfinkel: "This is the first time that archaeologists uncovered a fortified city in Judah from the time of King David . . . Thus, various suggestions that completely deny the biblical tradition regarding King David and argue that he was a mythological figure, or just a leader of a small tribe, are now shown to be wrong" (quoted by Rob Waugh, "Ancient Relics Are the First Definite Sign of the Bible's King David," *The Daily Mail,* May 9, 2012).

Garfinkel goes on to cite powerful evidence that the Elah Fortress is indeed Israelite rather that Philistine: "Over the years, thousands of animal bones were found, including sheep, goats and cattle, but no pigs. Now we uncovered three cultic [religious] rooms, with various cultic paraphernalia, but not even one human or animal figurine was found. This suggests that the population of Khirbet Qeiyafa observed two biblical bans—on pork and on graven images—and thus practiced a different cult [religion] than that of the Canaanites or the Philistines" (ibid.).

Another intriguing find is an ostracon, a pottery fragment bearing a written inscription. While scholars have yet to agree on the wording on the broken fragment, some feel it is the oldest Hebrew inscription yet discovered.

Can this site be identified with a biblical location? A clue to its identity was the discovery of a second city gate. This is the only site in the territory of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel yet discovered to have two gates. This unique feature led Garfinkel and Ganor to propose that this is the biblical city of Shaaraim (Joshua 15:36; 1 Samuel 17:52; 1 Chronicles 4:31-32), a name that in Hebrew means "two gates."

So in brief we have the existence of an Israelite fortress town, located in an area the Bible describes as being hotly contested by the Israelites and Philistines, constructed by what had to have been a significant national power, dating right to the time of Saul and David—all right in line with the scriptural record.

—Scott Ashley

Seal with biblical name found in Jerusalem

Archaeologists excavating near Jerusalem's Temple Mount south of the Western Wall have discovered an ancient stone seal bearing the name *Matanyahu*—or "Mattaniah," as it appears in most English-language Bibles. It's been dated to near the end of the First Temple period (8th to 6th century B.C.).



The seal, made of semiprecious stone and of a type commonly set in signet rings, was used to stamp letters and other documents with the owner's name. The Hebrew inscription reads, "Belonging to Matanyahu Ben [son of] Ho . . ."—with the last portion missing.

In Hebrew, *Matanyahu* means "giving to God"—the ending *yahu* denoting God's divine name *Yahweh,* presented as "LORD" (with small caps) in most English Bibles. Nine different men named Mattaniah are mentioned in the Bible, the most notable being the individual appointed king of Judah by the Babylonians who had his name changed to Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:17). He later rebelled, bringing about the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish exile to Babylon.

As near as we can tell, this seal belonged to a Mattaniah other than those mentioned in Scripture, since none of them had a father whose name began with "Ho . . ." as found on the inscription.

The find is nevertheless significant since it proves the name Mattaniah was in use in the kingdom of Judah at the exact time and location specified in the Bible, thus undermining critics' claims that the Bible was fabricated centuries later than it purports to have been written.

And as reported in our free booklet *Is the Bible True?* and previous issues of *The Good News,* seals and seal impressions of a number of individuals mentioned in the Bible *have* been found where the identification *is* precise—confirming again the accuracy of Scripture.

—Scott Ashley

Photos, from left: Wikimedia, Clara Amit/Israel Antiquities Authority



Broken Laws, Broken Dreams

On a cold wintry day in November 1993, my daughter and I experienced one of the saddest days of our life together, a day that will be etched in our minds forever. ***by Janet Treadway***

Just walking into the funeral home and seeing so many teenagers sent a chill through our bodies that matched the cold outside. There must have been at least 200 or more teens in the room. Usually when you see a large gathering of teens it would be for a pep rally or party, but not today. They were here to say their final goodbye to their special friend, Kevin. (Names have been changed for the sake of privacy.)

As my daughter Michelle and I got closer, I noticed Kevin's brother (who survived the accident) and two sisters to the right of his coffin. One had only to look at their faces to see the horror and shock of disbelief that this event was really happening—that their brother Kevin was dead and lying in a coffin.

As I looked over to the left, I saw his parents sitting on the front row and reached out to hug them. I was at a loss for words. What could I say that would take their pain away? There were no words to reach for, no magic expression to make everything seem okay. How do you bury your 17-year-old son? How do you let go and say goodbye to your precious child?

It was clear to me as I looked around the room of people sobbing, young and old, the question going through their minds. It was the same question going through mine. *Why?* Why did this happen to Kevin? He was only 17. He had his whole life ahead of him. *Why?* Not long afterward I was to ask myself the same question once again. The answer in both cases provides a powerful lesson for us all.

Another night, another story

Some months later the question of *why* surfaced again at the graduation ceremony of my son David. Something happened that brought the whole audience to their feet with resounding applause.

The applause was for one of the seniors, Brady, who had been in a serious accident a year earlier that left him unable to walk. Brady was determined to walk again, and he struggled the whole year for this special night. When Brady's name was announced to receive his diploma, he slowly got up and struggled a few minutes to get his balance on his crutches.

There was dead silence in the audience as he took his first step forward. We were all afraid that if we made one sound he would come crashing to the floor. All were drawn in as we watched Brady move slowly forward, the entire audience seeming to silently cheer, "Come on, you can do it!"

As he made it to the front of the room, Brady reached out and took his diploma. The silence was broken as the audience jumped to its feet with resounding applause. The applause went on for a few minutes as we all shared in the victory of a young man who had gone through so much the year before. For Brady to be able to get up and walk on this occasion of receiving his diploma seemed to be a miracle.

Reality hits home

As the applause faded and I sat back down, my thoughts went back to Kevin whose funeral we had attended only a few months earlier. Kevin would never realize that dream of graduating. This was also to be the year that he would have received *his* diploma. Yet he wouldn't experience that pleasure.

The question came to mind once again: *Why?* Why did tragedy strike twice? Why did this have to happen to two young men who had their whole lifetime ahead of them?

The answer is simple and sobering: *Laws were broken that changed their lives and the lives of their families forever.*

We all tend to think that we are indestructible—that bad things will never happen to us. We especially think this way when we are young, but as we get older experience tells us differently. The longer we live, the more funerals we attend. The reality that we are made of dust and will return to dust becomes very clear.

Young people love to take chances and believe they can't get hurt. You've no doubt heard things like "It couldn't happen to me" or "I won't get caught." And maybe things like "So what's the big deal with traffic laws? Everybody breaks them" or "What's the big deal with trespassing? I'm not hurting anyone, am I?" No big deal—or is it?

So what happened to Kevin and Brady?

Recklessness on the road

Kevin grew up with my daughter Michelle. They played together, started their school years together and were best friends. As a teenager, Kevin had a lot of friends. He had a job and a great relationship with his family. His hobby was rebuilding cars with his dad.

But one fateful night took that all away.

Our family moved away when Kevin was 10, so we lost touch with him and his family until that night when terrible circumstances brought us together. One evening while I was watching the late news, the announcer said that there'd been a serious accident and that emergency workers were searching for a teenager who'd been thrown from the car.

One boy made it out okay, and they were looking for his brother. At first, it was thought that the young man got out as well and was perhaps stumbling around in the woods in a daze. When they announced his name, I was in shock. The next day all hopes of his being found alive were dashed when they discovered his body in the river tangled up in some weeds, dead.

Kevin had just finished rebuilding a car with his dad and decided to try it out with his brother. Rounding the curve at 90 miles an hour in a 25-miles-per hour zone, Kevin lost control of the car, which then went over an embankment. The impact from the accident threw Kevin into the river, where he soon drowned. His brother managed to

crawl out and survived. But Kevin's life was gone—his dreams dashed due to a few moments of bad judgment.

Ignoring warning signs

Brady's story was different but with tragic results as well. He attended a different school, where he was very popular, had many friends and was highly involved in sports. Brady loved basketball and played on the school team. His dream was to become a basketball star. Another one of his loves was skiing, and he belonged to a ski club.



One day, instead of going to basketball practice he decided to go with some friends to a nearby ski slope. While skiing, they came to a slope where a sign warned against skiing there. Instead of heeding the danger, they decided to ski there anyway. They pulled the sign up, and Brady was the first to go down. He struck a tree and was severely injured.

Brady broke his neck, and the doctors first thought he would never walk again. Brady struggled with painful therapy for a whole year—not to ski or play basketball but just to take that walk down the aisle to receive his diploma. The decision Brady made on his ski trip changed his life forever.

Laws for our good

Broken laws, broken dreams. Laws are there to protect us from such tragedies as befell Kevin and Brady. So what's the big deal? Ask Brady what the big deal is. Ask Kevin's parents what the big deal is, since they will never see him fulfill his dreams. Kevin's family is left behind to pick up the pieces.

Kevin will never be able to experience the joys that we all take for granted. Brady will live with the effects of his spur-of-the-moment decision for the rest of his life. Brady and Kevin are only two examples of the many people who are suffering as a result of broken laws.

Brady and Kevin chose to ignore a law. It's too late for them, but not too late for you.

While the world's governments often overregulate, many human laws and warnings have nevertheless been put into place to protect us and others from harm, such as speed limits, not drinking while driving, wearing seat belts and more. And there are even greater laws that are commanded by our Creator for our good. You can read some of them in Exodus 20. They're known as the Ten Commandments.

If obeyed, they will give us much happiness and peace of mind. God, our loving Father, states in Deuteronomy 5:29, "Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!"

Notice again what it says—*"that it might be well with them and their children . . ."* If we could only realize how frail we are, and see that many of man's laws and all of God's laws are there to *protect* us and others—not make life hard for us.

Proverbs 3:1-2 says, "My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you." God tells us that we will have length of days and years with abundant life if we will keep His laws! Brady and Kevin chose to ignore a law. It's too late for them, but not too late for you.

Strive to take to heart the importance of keeping God's Ten Commandments and showing respect for man's laws. Understand that they are there to benefit you and others. "What does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?" (Deuteronomy 10:12-13).

Why keep God's laws? *For your own good.*

Let us all learn from the tragedies of Kevin and Brady—from the effects that come from broken laws—so our dreams will not be broken! Keep God's laws for your good! ***GN***

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Many people hold misconceptions about the Ten Commandments and God's other laws. They think they are restrictive and harsh and prevent us from having any fun. But nothing could be farther from the truth! God's laws are designed to be a blessing for us. And indeed they are, reflecting the mind of our Creator God who loves us deeply and wants only the best for us. You need to understand! Download or request your free copy of the booklet *The Ten Commandments* today!

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Glorifying God With Our Little

How can we be used by God in obeying Christ's instruction to "Follow Me"? It starts with three simple steps. ***by Robin Webber***

Often when beginning our faith journey in heeding the call of Jesus Christ to *"Follow Me,"* we remain unsure of our human footsteps regarding what lies ahead.

Just like any road map, it looks like straight black lines towards experiencing eternity in God's realm, but experience tells us from other roads we have traveled that those seemingly linear lines are full of bumps, dips and curves along the way.

As we spiritually buckle up for the journey, our hearts may be firm, and we sincerely desire to heed our Heavenly Father's calling, but our knees may be shaking and even a bit wobbly. Starting out on the narrow path to life (Matthew 7:13-14), we may even be pondering, "Will I have what it takes to stay on that narrow path behind the lead of the Good Shepherd?"

Let's be blunt: None of us have what it takes on our own or it would merely be by our works. Never, ever forget—it's about what *God* is performing in us and not we of ourselves. But, once we have surrendered our past, present and future to His perfect will, where would He have us start in faith-filled responsiveness to His invitation?

It's as simple and yet as challenging as three simple steps:

Be available.

Be open.

Be willing.

That's it? That's all? Indeed it is! Sad to say, even veteran Christians have often lost their way because they've forgotten these three basic steps of how to respond to Christ's call to *"Follow Me."*

So whether we're novices on this journey or an old-timer at the end of our rope with worry and doubt, let's allow the Good Shepherd to "prepare a table before us" to understand these three vital steps towards eternity in an event that happened long ago on a hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee.

Viewing through the eyes of Christ

Let's go up to the top and see what's happening. It's here where the view is best, because it's through the eyes of the Master as captured through the lens of chapter 6 of John's Gospel.

It's here that Jesus of Nazareth looked down and saw a crowd surging slowly up the hill toward Him and His disciples. He humanly sighed but spiritually smiled at what was coming His way. It was many of the same people He left behind earlier. They found Him again!

He had just left them by boat on another shore of the lake after a long day of teaching. He needed a break to recharge—after all, He was human too. But the massive crowd had traveled several miles seeking after this man who taught so profoundly and performed miracles for those without any hope. Many were on their way up to Jerusalem for the Passover, but now they detoured up a hillside to understand more.

This little boy is God's poster child to remind us that age, size and substance are never out of bounds when it comes to serving God.

Jesus must have been deeply moved with compassion on such a swarm of humanity seemingly driven by something they couldn't yet fully comprehend but nonetheless desired to obtain. John says the number was 5,000, yet Jesus wasn't focusing on numbers but determining a need. His desire was to care for them both spiritually and physically.

He asked one of the 12, Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" (verse 5). He asked Philip specifically because his hometown of Bethsaida was nearby. He replied, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little" (verse 7).

Basically, Philip responded that it would cost a half-year's wages to make a dent in the hunger of this crowd, and even then they couldn't really do it in this remote place on such short notice.

But as John notes, Jesus asked the question as a test, because He already knew what He was going to do (verse 6). Christ had already moved to the future in His heart and mind, and He was going to invite the disciples and the Passover pilgrims to join Him there. But He needed a human instrument untarnished from the facts and figures on the ground.

As Jesus surveyed the human landscape round about them, the disciples wondered what would happen next. Perhaps they wondered, as we do at times, "How did we ever get here? What now?"

One who's available, open and willing

And "what now" began to unfold before them. Jesus smiled as He saw Andrew moving toward Him through the crowd. While some of the disciples were overwhelmed with the facts on the ground, Andrew went out looking for a solution. And he found one, even if ever so small in the form of a boy with a modest amount of food. Jesus smiled, because His answer was on the way.

Andrew introduced a boy available, open and willing for service: "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish." But even Andrew's hopefulness was betrayed by the reality on the ground staring them in the face. He added, "But what are they among so many?"

It's here that Jesus swung into full action mode. So often when a miracle was in the works, He gave His followers an assignment. He told the disciples, "Make the people to sit down!"

Then, the young boy who was open and willing placed his own lunch into the hands of this special Man in the middle of the crowd. The lad looked up as the Rabbi thanked and praised God who had



The boy brought forward the modest amount of food he had with him—five barley loaves and two small fish.

provided the fish and loaves.

The boy watched as this Man of Nazareth began to personally distribute this miraculous meal package to His disciples for distribution. This was indeed hands-on! The food kept on going out and going out until everyone was full. The root Greek word for "filled" in verse 12 gives the sense of fully satisfied. Everyone took as much as he or she wanted—no rations here!

A teaching moment, for then and now

And then, Christ provided one more teaching moment for His skeptical disciples: "Gather up the fragments that remain," which came to 12 full baskets (verse 12).

Imagine the disciples lugging their baskets up the hill with bread fragments spilling out. If they hadn't learned their lesson before, they now had this to contemplate. Jesus' add-on instruction no doubt reinforced what He wanted them to learn. Years later they would remember this simple story with profound implications regarding the first three tangible steps of following Christ wherever He leads.

Let's appreciate that Jesus always knows exactly where He is going and what He is about at all times, now and then. He was not on that isolated hill by mistake, but by design. Sure, He humanly needed a rest, but God never wastes time or a miracle. He is never boxed into a corner but is opening doors to further perform His purpose and desire for us.

The boy came forward and made available the little he had. Barley, being inferior to wheat for making bread, was a diet staple among the poor. But the youngster was willing and trusting to hand over all he had, no matter how meager, to Jesus Christ for His purpose.

How often do you and I stand unmovable along the highway of life because we don't think God can use us to satisfy His glory? You know how it goes—"I'm too dumb," "too small," "too old," "too young," "too heavy," "too poor," or "too much" or "too little" of whatever else. Thus, we never hand over anything into His service to be used but simply stay hidden in the crowd of humanity. This little boy is God's poster child to remind us that age, size and substance are never out of bounds when it comes to serving God.

The powerful lesson in this story

Consider this for a moment in regard to our personal encounter with Christ: If we give Him nothing, He has nothing of us to use. If we're not doing anything, how can we expect Him to bless it?

But the powerful lesson in this story is if we give Him whatever we have, even if it's just a little and what others might consider ordinary, then He can take our little and make it much to His glory.

How so, you say? Jesus would again magnify the boy's willing offering of food the very next day. This time not simply to placate empty stomachs, but fill the souls of those who would follow Him by declaring, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die" (John 6:50). Indeed, Christ "knew what He was going to do" (John 6:6), but He desires to use our availability, openness and willingness to prepare the way.

The little boy who met Jesus that day stands behind a long line of people who made themselves available, open and willing to serve God's purpose even though humanly they had nothing to offer. But that's all right with God. Consider Sarah, Hannah and Elizabeth with empty wombs that bore fruit. Consider Gideon with a measly army of 300 men. Consider Ruth, the Moabite widow with no desired pedigree who became an ancestor of Jesus—the One through whom all of us may become part of God's family.

These are people who would now knowingly smile at the apostle Paul's words found in Philippians 4:6-7 that remind us, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Indeed, this kind of peace that bears lasting results moves beyond the mere facts on the ground that can stifle our call to glorify God in all we do.

So what are you holding onto and not offering to God because of self-imposed isolation from service toward His glory in you?

Allow me for a moment to fill in for Andrew and help connect you to your God-given destiny. Sure, there are smarter, noisier, flashier human tools all around us that God might use, but that's not the starting or ending point in gaining God's attention and experiencing His grace. Just ask Philip. Just ask the lad with his lunch.

Being "in the know" only gets you so far with God. Let's understand that each of us has been given a story by our Maker. Each of us has been given His Word. It's not how much you know about His Word, but how much you put it into practice when it comes to those moments of taking those first three steps of being 1) available, 2) open and 3) willing to serve Christ whenever, wherever and however He might guide us.

By the way, that previously mentioned line is still forming behind the little boy for those who understand that *our* little becomes *much* in God's hands toward His glory. ***GN***

Learn More

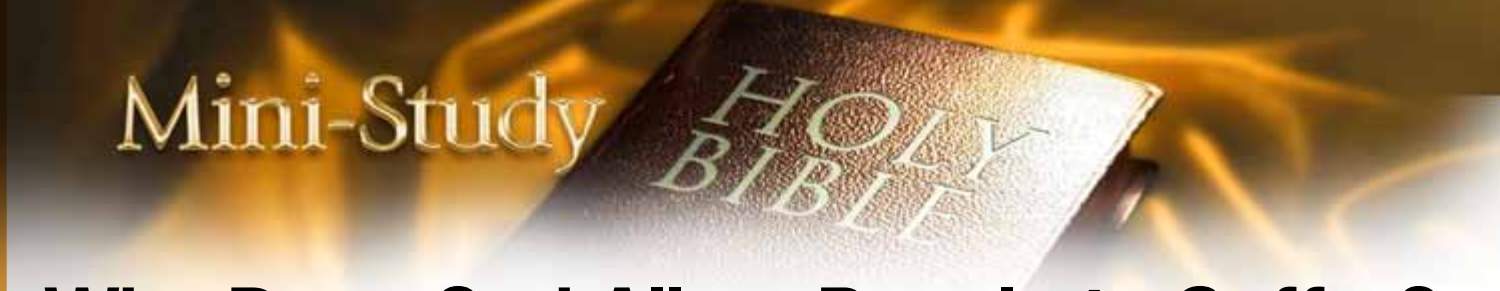


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Why Does God Allow People to Suffer?

As we've watched a loved one suffer or experienced excruciating pain ourselves, we have all faced the profound question: How could a loving God allow this? Why do innocent people go through terrible trauma? Why do some people die so young? Why is our world filled with so much evil, death and suffering?

This mini-study looks at these important questions that have troubled people throughout the ages. God does not ignore our heartfelt pleas for understanding. His answers are real, hopeful and life-changing!

Some overall perspective

At the outset we need to realize what God's desire for us is—and that there is another in the spirit realm who does not wish us well.

▶ What does our loving God want for His human children?

"I [Jesus Christ, as the Father's representative] have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me [Jesus Christ], because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18).

"You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).

Many scriptures show that God wants only the best for us. He wants us to enjoy the joyous benefits of being His children forever!

▶ In contrast, how does the Bible describe the intentions of the enemy of God?

"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, . . . I will be like the Most High.' Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit" (Isaiah 14:12-15).

"You [men who wanted to kill Jesus] are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44).

"So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world . . . 'Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time'" (Revelation 12:9-12).

The Bible describes one of God's angels, Lucifer, rising in rebellious pride against God and choosing evil rather than God's good way. Satan's momentous choice was the starting point of evil and the suffering that comes with it. Sin is the ultimate cause of suffering. Now Satan wants nothing more than to thwart God's plan and destroy our trust in God's goodness.

It's about choices

The terrible suffering that exists in the world is the result of wrong choices that have been made.

▶ How did Satan influence our first human parents?

"Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, "You shall not eat of every tree of the garden"?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, "You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die."'

"Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate" (Genesis 3:1-6).

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned . . ." (Romans 5:12).

Satan has been deceiving humanity from the beginning, and he influenced Eve and Adam to follow his own wrong choice. By choosing to decide for themselves what they thought was good and evil, they were ignoring the only true source of that knowledge.

Satan has helped us build a society that too often redefines sin as acceptable. But even when we don't realize something is wrong, it still brings the automatic consequences of suffering and death.

▶ Even though God gives us free will, does He tell us what choice He wants us to make?

"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess.

"But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land . . . I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (Deuteronomy 30:15-19).

By giving us the freedom to choose, God gives us the opportunity to develop His righteous character, something we couldn't develop if He always forced us to make the right choice. One of the great lessons we should learn in life is that right choices ultimately lead to good results while wrong choices ultimately lead to sadness and suffering.

▶ Since sin causes suffering, does that mean the person who is suffering is always responsible for his or her own suffering?

"And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish'" (Luke 13:2-5).

Sadly, sins have consequences that often affect not just the sinner, but those around him or her as well (see Deuteronomy 28:15-20). In a world that has chosen to reject God (Matthew 23:37), Satan is pulling the strings, allowing trials and suffering to come on everyone regardless of their degree of culpability. So we should never judge the victims of suffering, but should be aware of our personal responsibility to repent and turn to God. In addition, the Bible refers to some troubles as random acts of "time and chance" (Ecclesiastes 9:11).



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What can you do today to lighten someone's load, to comfort or encourage someone? Perhaps a visit, phone call, card or gift would help.

Looking ahead

God allows suffering at this time as part of the great plan He is working out—helping us to grow as we look to a brighter future.

▶ Does suffering bring about any positive results?

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6-7).

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2-4).

Many scriptures point out the end results of trusting God and enduring through difficulties. Like the refining process for precious metals, the heat of trials produces beautiful, godly character that can be achieved in no other way. The Bible tells us that even Jesus Christ learned through the things He suffered (Hebrews 5:8-9).

▶ What does God promise His people?

"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29).

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us . . . And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:18, 28).

Read and meditate on these fantastic promises and take them to God in prayer. Ask for the way of escape, the rest, the lightening of the load and the perspective that He promises. He has all power, and His thinking is far above our thinking, so He can make seemingly hopeless situations work out for our good in the long run.

▶ What does God want us to do for others who are suffering?

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

Jesus Christ was willing to suffer the trials of His human life in order to help us (Hebrews 2:17-18). He wants us to follow His example of loving service to those facing trials.

▶ Will all suffering eventually end?

"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

What a wonderful time to look forward to!

Apply what you've learned now

God is the "Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). God wants us to not only feel for others, but to look for ways to comfort them. For example, James tells us "to visit orphans and widows in their trouble" (James 1:27).

What can you do today to lighten someone's load, to comfort or encourage someone? Perhaps a visit, phone call, card or gift would help. Perhaps providing a meal or mowing someone's lawn could show you care as well as meet a physical need. Pick at least one thing and start on it today. ***GN***

Learn more about the subject of suffering



Scripture contains many more relevant passages and examples on the important subject of suffering and the root cause behind it, Satan the devil. Be sure to download or request the free booklets *Why Does God Allow Suffering?* and *Is There Really a Devil?* for a more detailed study of these crucial topics.

Letters From Our Readers

"The Middle East: Focus of End-Time Prophecy"

I just read your article in the May-June issue on the Middle East. It was wonderful. I imagined a *Good News* subscriber reading that for the first time and having all those biblical prophecies explained. It is really convicting and I just wanted to say, "Great job."

Reader from Queensland, Australia

"Ahmadinejad's Apocalypse"

The article on page 2 of the May-June *Good News,* "Ahmadinejad's Apocalypse," was interesting and informative, which gets to the heart of what Iran is intending to do.

R.C., Portsmouth, England

For further insights, be sure to read "Ahmadinejad's Aims for Iran," beginning on page 29 of this issue.

"Remembering the Titanic: Lessons for Our Day"

I'm still reading the March-April *Good News,* and today I read the article on the *Titanic,* making the parallel with what's coming. I was blown away. It's hard for me to picture—to get it into my head, the disaster that's ahead—and not that far ahead. I'm a senior citizen, born at the beginning of World War II. I was not in the military and never experienced combat. I've never gone hungry or been in a serious natural disaster. I've lived my whole life in the United States and always had all of life's necessities. But I have seen the movie *Titanic.* Between that and your article, I now have a much better picture of what can change and happen in a heartbeat. Thank you so much for the wakeup call.

S.H., Prescott, Arizona

"Assistance Programs: Offering a Hand Up, Not Just a Handout"

I received your 100th issue of *The Good News.* I was very much blessed when I went through its pages. "Offering a Hand Up, Not Just a Handout" attracted me more than any other article. I am an Ethiopian by birth, who fled my country in 1999 because of political unrest and lived in Nairobi, Kenya for five years. Now I am residing in Portland, Oregon, as I settled in the United States as a refugee. I find that churches are helping disadvantaged ones in the form of handouts. I am always against this temporary assistance. Although it is helpful in a time of emergency, it doesn't give a lasting solution. Rather it encourages the beneficiaries to be dependent.

S.G.A., Portland, Oregon

The Good News

Please renew my free subscription to *The Good News.* I think this publication is very informative, especially concerning news from the Middle East and other locations. While most news sources are covering and promoting the garbage that is destroying morals and intelligence in our society, *The Good News* keeps us thinking.

K.R., Lisbon, Ohio

I received your January-February *Good News* on May 19. During these few days I have read the entire magazine word for word. I must compliment your editorial staff for such lucid, precise, historically factual and well-researched articles. I feel that this issue and others should be read by all heads of state and their advisers in the entire world. Humanity very often forgets the lessons of history. This results in catastrophic events and enormous tragedies along with obliteration of cherished human values and the destruction of nature's resources.

D.C.J., India

A friend gave me a copy of your *Good News* magazine that someone had left in a restaurant. You really do your homework. I would like to sign up for a regular delivery in my home. Your website is good too, but the magazine works better for me.

J.E., Dexter, Oregon

My son would give me his copy of *The Good News* and I would read the magazine from cover to cover. Lately he has been passing his copy to friends. It is time for me to get my own subscription, so when I am through reading all of it, I have a copy to pass on to friends. A donation is enclosed to help your endeavors.

J.R.E., Elm Springs, Arkansas

I want to thank you for *The Good News*, which I have received for the past several years. I am sending you a donation to help pay for some of your expenses. You are doing a great work.

Reader from Alberta, Canada

We want to thank all our coworkers, donors and readers for their kind support. Readers should feel free to ask for their own subscription to The Good News.

Beyond Today

Thank you for the subscription to *The Good News* magazine and the booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Which Days Should We Observe?* I am a regular viewer of your *Beyond Today* television program. May God continue to bless you that the good work may continue, both by magazines and the television programs.

Reader from Quebec, Canada

Bible Study Course

Thanks for your free Bible course lessons and your immeasurable help to readers to build a relationship with the Almighty God. I must let you know that your booklets and magazines have also really helped me to get a lot closer to God. I do appreciate the lengths you go to enable people to receive the good news of the Kingdom of God. The Bible indicates that givers never lack.

J.A.C., Valencia, Spain

I am enjoying the *Bible Study Course* although it takes me a while to get through the lessons. I would really like to keep receiving the lessons after lesson 4. I would also like to express my thanks and my commendation for this course. As a new starter to true Bible study, it's great to have this structured approach to reading the Bible.

S.A., Isle of Man

Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension

I just wanted you to know that the booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension* had great information and that I enjoyed reading it. It was when I gave it to my daughter (and she read it) that I saw a complete change in her and how she deals with family trials.

I'm still amazed! I haven't seen her so happy in her marriage of 15 years and how she responds to problems now is so encouraging. She is fairly new to see the excitement of learning God's way and how the Word really works for a joyful life. Thank you for the literature you offer. It truly changes lives.

S.I., N. Babylon, New York

Booklets help readers

I would like to thank you for the free booklets. I once was a person who was afraid to pick up the Bible for fear of not understanding it. I had been feeling like God was knocking at the door of my heart, but thanks to your help with the booklets, I have opened that door. I now have no fear and read the Bible with understanding. I have passed along your reading material to friends and neighbors.

M.H., Fouke, Arizona

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

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



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Questions & Answers

Q: I am really struggling right now to find work. I have a severe back problem, which keeps me from doing construction work. I am also unable to collect unemployment, unable to find work and have a mortgage on my house and bills to pay. While I know I am not alone, and that self-pity will not get me anywhere, it does get hard—which is why it was so encouraging to read your article "Work: It's More Than Just a Job" in the January-February issue. There were such wonderful reminders of how God takes care of us but also requires us to work hard to find work.

Reader on the Internet

A: We are saddened to hear of your financial and health trials. God allows us to be tested by difficult circumstances that come upon us, sometimes through no fault of our own. But God can use these situations to increase our faith, patience and compassion for others (James 1:3; 1 Peter 1:7).

Learning to rely on God through hardship while doing our part in faithful obedience helps prepare us for God's coming Kingdom (Romans 8:28). The apostle Paul learned that "we must through many tribulations enter the Kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

It's helpful to recall a little-known biblical passage that can be quite encouraging in difficulties hard to fully understand. The prophet Habakkuk received news so terrible that it took away all of his strength. He felt as though there was no way he could go on. But then his outlook changed. As he explained:

"When I heard this message, I felt weak from fear, and my lips quivered. My bones seemed to melt, and I stumbled around . . . Fig trees may no longer bloom, or vineyards produce grapes; olive trees may be fruitless, and harvest time a failure; sheep pens may be empty, and cattle stalls vacant—but I will still celebrate because the LORD God saves me. The LORD gives me strength. He makes my feet as sure as those of a deer, and he helps me stand on the mountains" (Habakkuk 3:16-19, Contemporary English Version). Thinking about God's promises bolstered his faith.

And consider further: The several analogies about crops are ways to illustrate the trial of losing one's income. Since seed for the next year's crop came from this year's harvest, crop failures also symbolized a seemingly hopeless future. Similarly, as long as a rancher had some livestock, he could survive by eating the meat. Any remaining animals he could use for breeding stock to build up his herd again. Empty pens, however, meant there was no obvious way back from financial collapse apart from reliance on God. Yet Habakkuk had faith, knowing that God would take care of him.

Please also keep the following passage in the book of Psalms firmly in mind. King David experienced many trials during his life, but he relied on God. He wrote, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19).

Sometimes faith requires a lot of patience. The apostle James asks us to "take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful" (James 5:10-11).

Recall that severe trials came on Job that deeply perplexed this righteous man. But God used these afflictions to raise Job's level of spiritual understanding and his relationship to his Creator to a much higher level. His divine deliverance was accompanied by abundant blessings of every kind.

God will deliver you if you continue to put your trust and faith in Him. To learn how faith can be increased, request our free booklet *You Can Have Living Faith.* We are praying that you will continue to have the faith to carry on, always seeking God's will in these difficult matters. We will ask our Creator and Helper to rescue you.

Thank you for your message, and we are glad to learn that *The Good News* article about work was helpful. Please keep in touch and let us know how you are faring.

I love all your booklets. I have learned so much and have been given so much understanding and knowledge. All have helped with my walk with Jesus and God. Every booklet has such powerful meaning, which always makes me want more as I walk on my journey to heaven one day.

Reader from Ontario, Canada

You may want to download or request our free booklet titled Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach? *and the companion booklet* What Is Your Destiny?

Observing God's festivals and Holy Days

We are new to celebrating God's Holy Days. We are just learning and need some information. We need to know which days are Sabbath days during the festivals, so my husband can request time off work. If you can help me with this, it would be greatly appreciated.

M.M., Internet

Our free booklet God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind *will explain this fully. In brief, the first and seventh days of the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread are annual Sabbaths or Holy Days, on which no occupational work may be done. Likewise, the first day of the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles is an annual Sabbath—as is the Eighth Day immediately following. Other single-day festivals except for Passover are annual Holy Days as well—including Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement. You'll find dates for all of these on pages 28 and 29 of the booklet mentioned above.*

Moved to practice tithing

This letter is due to a lump sum of money I recently received. During my prayer and fasting on how to handle this award money granted to me, God informed me as to where I should send my tithe.

In January of 2011 I underwent surgery, leaving me quite immobile for many months. Since I could not do much during that period, I dedicated my time to my greatest entertainment, reading the Word of God. While reading, your free booklets took up most of my time. In every booklet I took notes and directed myself to the Bible.

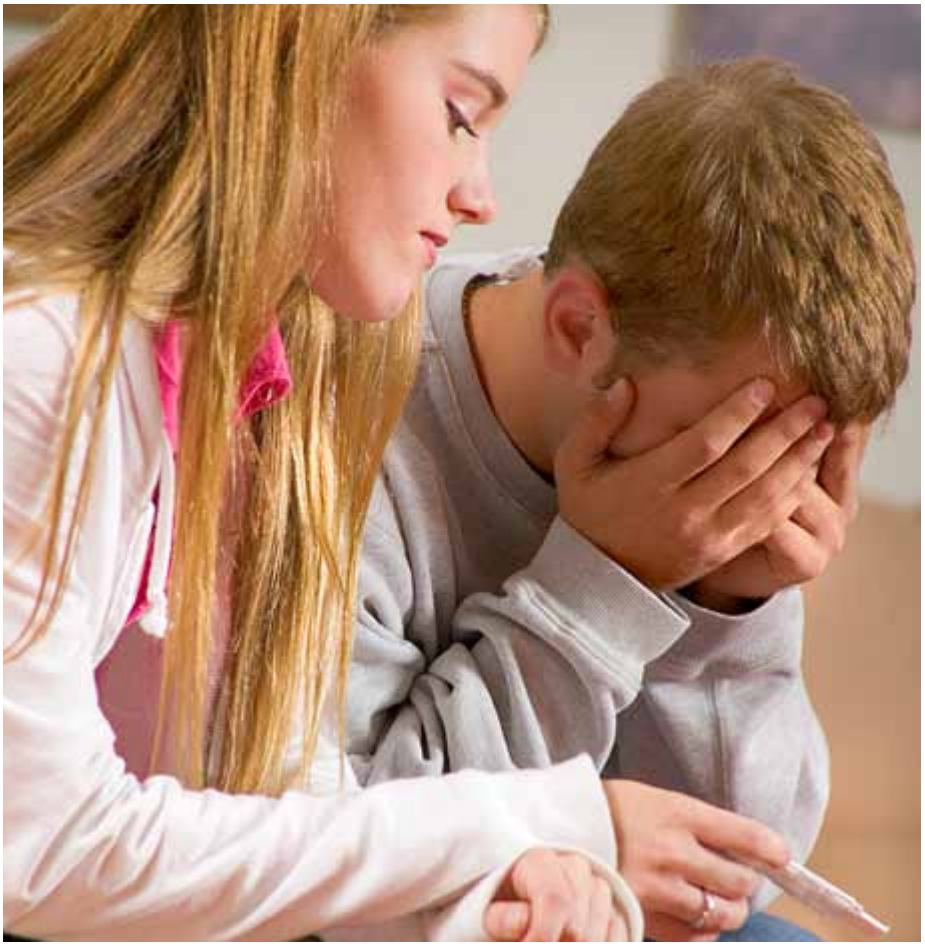
The Bible tells us to "Prove all things," so I did. In every opinion your booklet writers backed it up with scriptures that proved to be true. Thank you so much for all the free material. Previously, being without work and in the condition that I was in, I would not have been able to purchase even one of your booklets. Your work is truly faithful and obedient to God and I consider your church a blessing in my life. So I too would like to be a blessing to others, but most of all obedient to God and His Word in Malachi 3:10.

M.R., Florida

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

Sex and the Young Christian

Sex sells in the popular culture, and many young Christians are buying. But outside the right context, sex brings consequences. What does the One who designed sex say on the matter? ***by Dan Dowd***



Sex. The very word fires up strong emotions. The world constantly popularizes and perverts sex in books, magazines, movies and "entertainment" in general.

Our culture is prideful of its sexual openness. Premarital and extramarital affairs of every variety are no longer "shameful" but are now celebrated.

Religious or not, 86 percent of unmarried young adults (ages 18-29) in the United States have had sex, 78 percent have had sex in the last year, and 55 percent are in a current sexual relationship. Almost 7 percent of teen girls (ages 15-19) become pregnant each year, amounting to more than 400,000 live births annually just in America. The most recent study (2002) shows that three quarters of all unplanned pregnancies are to single women age 29 and younger (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, "The Fog Zone," 2009). And statistics are similar in other Western nations.

Of course, unplanned pregnancies are only one of the consequences of wrong sexual thinking by young men and women in society today. It should be obvious that the prevalent attitude about premarital and extramarital sex in the culture around us leads to many problems.

The sad news is that Christians may pretend to hold the moral high ground on sex, but even young Christians are buying into the message that sex outside of marriage is okay. Many still do see sex outside of marriage as wrong, but they are viewed by many others as archaic and out of touch.

Is the belief that sex should be reserved for marriage too rigid? The right question to ask is: What is *God's* view about sex, and what should our response be?

Is sex sin?

God's Word, the Bible, is very frank about sex. God inspired the recording of certain wrong examples of sexual behavior: King David committed adultery with Bathsheba; Lot had a wrong relationship with his daughters; Samson had a wanton eye and lustful attitude toward women, which cost him his eyes and his life. These illustrate the severe consequences that can come with sex outside of marriage.

Sex itself, which God designed, is not a sin. It's the *misuse* of sex that's sinful.

Here's what God intended for marriage and sex—which must be in that order:

In the beginning He made humankind male and female—for a reason (Genesis 1:27).

He made the first two human beings, Adam and Eve, husband and wife—that is, "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

He blessed them and told them to fill the earth with their family—which implied and required sex in marriage (Genesis 1:28).

The sexual union in marriage is meant to be "honorable" (Hebrews 13:4).

We know that God was talking about a sexual union because he inspired Paul the apostle to write that a sexual relationship outside of marriage brings about a similar—but immoral—one-flesh union (1 Corinthians 6:16).

Again, sex itself is not the problem. God in His divine love gave mankind this powerful, wonderful relationship. The problem is when something designed for our good is used selfishly and wrongly. God tells us to wait for our sexual relationship until the right time in our own marriage: "Do not

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let love be moved till it is ready" (Song of Solomon 2:7, Bible in Basic English). It isn't ready, and it isn't righteous, until the wedding vows are exchanged!

Sexual hormones and divorce

Very powerful hormones are released during the sexual bonding God built into marriage. If an individual engages in sex outside of marriage, those hormones are still triggered, but the bonding effect divinely intended for just one mate of the opposite sex is tragically minimized and weakened.

The longer this behavior continues the harder it becomes for a person to commit to a marriage partner for life. And so, sexual immorality contributes to the high divorce rate as evidenced in Western nations. Even those who profess to follow the Bible divorce at roughly the same rate (about 32 percent of first-time marriages) as those who have no Christian connection ("New Marriage and Divorce Statistics Released," Barna.org).

Sex and abortion

Another downside to the wrong use of sex is that almost half of women in the United States will abort at least one baby at some point in their lifetimes. Those who profess Christianity in America are also involved, since 28 percent of women getting an abortion identify themselves as Catholic, and 37 percent identify themselves as Protestant.

This means that in America alone women who identify themselves as Christian contribute heavily to the approximately 1.2 million abortions per year ("Characteristics of U.S. Abortion Patients," Guttmacher.org, May 2010).

Keeping sex sacred

From the statistics we can see that too many "Christians" also engage in wrong sexual behavior. What can we do to find sexual purity in our lives and families?

God gave sex to mankind not only to procreate, but to build a strong marriage relationship as a sacred union—a special and unique physical relationship illustrating for us the mystery of the relationship between Christ and those in His Church (Ephesians 5:30-32). Why profane something so beautiful and holy?

Calling wrong behavior sin may seem uncomfortable, but it gets the point across to yourself and others. Practice and expect behavior that follows God's standards. Of those teens and young adults *not* having sex before marriage, 41 percent of girls and 31 percent of boys gave as a reason for their abstinence that sex outside of marriage was "against my religion or morals" (Pregnant Pause Blog, TheNationalCampaign.org, October 2011).

If you are engaged in wrong sexual behavior—*stop.* This is the first step to *repentance*—meaning to think differently, to change your mind and actions. Jesus told a woman who was caught in adultery to "go and sin no more" (John 8:2-11). He says the same thing to us now. Remember that God will forgive us when we repent and sincerely desire to change.

Rule your sexual desires and express that desire only when the time comes in the holy setting of your own marriage—as God intended. Although sex can drive powerful emotions and desires, there is no record of anyone dying because they didn't have sex! As with any sin, we must rule our desires so we don't suffer the consequences of that sinful behavior. God told this to Cain, but Cain had filled himself with so much misdirected anger that he ignored God, murdered his brother Abel and suffered the severe consequences (Genesis 4:3-12).

The world sells a message of unrestricted sex and that it is not sin. Don't buy it! Reject films, shows, comedy or other entertainments that glorify illicit sex or that ridicule marriage and family. Reject any involvement in pornography. Get counseling help if you need it. Jesus Christ loves you and wants you in His family in the Kingdom of God.

For deeper understanding of sex and the marriage relationship, request and read our free booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension.* You will find a more comprehensive discussion of what God designed and intended within our marriages and families. ***GN***

The world's trying to sell you a message about the excitement of unrestricted sex. Don't buy it!



If you like reading our articles for teens and young adults in *The Good News,* be sure to take a look at our companion magazine, *Vertical Thought,* at **www.VerticalThought.org.**

This magazine is specially written for our younger *Good News* audience. Each issue is packed with helpful insight and eye-opening articles guiding today's young people in getting the most out of life—both now and in the future.

You'll uncover lots of fascinating facts, meet many interesting people, discover what's really going on behind the scenes in our world, learn answers to your questions and find practical, down-to-earth guidance on all kinds of subjects.

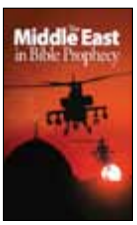
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Why So Much Unending Conflict in the Middle East?

Why has the Middle East been the center of so much conflict over the centuries? Why is it torn by hatred and bloodshed today? What are the roots of these problems, and how will they be solved?



Astonishingly, this history of conflict was prophesied thousands of years ago in the pages of your Bible. In Zechariah 12:2-3, God foretold that Jerusalem would be "a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples," driving them mad in their conflicts over the land of Israel and its ancient capital. Could any words better describe the futile efforts for peace in this strife-torn region?

But the Bible reveals so much more. Its prophets foretold the rise and fall of empires and kingdoms that would rule this region. Egypt, Israel, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome all came and went—but a great end-time conflict will eclipse them all and bring humanity to the brink of extinction.

When will this happen? Can we know how will it come about? Be sure to request your free copy of our eye-opening booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* to understand these crucial events!

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