The Good News

How Will Prophecy Impact You?

A
s a student of both history and the Bible, I’ve always found prophecy to be a fascinating intersection between the two.

I’ve explored the ruins of the ancient hilltop city of Samaria, capital of the powerful kingdom of Israel, captured by Assyrian invaders just as foretold by God’s prophets (2 Kings 17:5-18). I’ve been to the desolate hill of Shiloh, which God foretold, the entire kingdom of Judah would become like if the people didn’t heed His warnings to repent (Jeremiah 7:12-14). Sadly, they refused and suffered the consequences of their rebellion.

I’ve visited Bethlehem, the town where the prophet Micah foretold would be the birthplace of the greatest Man of all time, One who would forever change human history—Jesus the Messiah (Micah 5:2).

Not far away is Jerusalem, where His enemies plotted and executed Him, and where many a prophecy was given and fulfilled—including the destruction of the magnificent temple built by Herod the Great of which Jesus said, “Not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Matthew 24:2). Overlooking the city, I’ve marveled at the Mount of Olives, from which Christ ascended into the sky and to which He promises to return (Acts 1:9-11).

In the northern part of the country I’ve walked the dusty paths of Megiddo, from which the end-time (but misnamed) “battle of Armageddon” gets its name, and the ruins of Capernaum and Bethesda, towns where Jesus conducted much of His ministry and which He declared would perish for their unbelief (Matthew 11:21-23).

Further afield, I’ve visited the Greek island of Patmos, where the apostle John received the visions of the book of Revelation, which describes human history from that time up through the return of Jesus Christ and beyond. And in Turkey I’ve journeyed to the seven cities of Asia Minor to which Jesus Christ sent prophetic messages regarding His people down through the ages up until the end time (Revelation 2–3).

I’ve also seen the ruins of two ancient superpowers—Egypt, which Ezekiel foretold would be brought low and never again attain its former greatness (Ezekiel 29:12, 15), and Rome, prophesied heart of an empire that would rise to rule the known world before collapsing (to later be resurrected in the end time).

I’ve also been privileged to visit museums in Jerusalem, Cairo, Amman, Istanbul, London and Chicago where one can see artifacts that, like the many locations listed above, bear silent witness to various aspects of the fulfillment of Bible prophecy.

Regrettably, many people doubt Bible prophecy. But in my travels I’ve seen too much compelling evidence for its dead-on accuracy to ignore its truthfulness and crucial message for our times.

Much prophecy has been fulfilled. Much remains to be fulfilled. But the most important aspect of prophecy for you and me is how it impacts our lives—a theme explored in the first two articles in this issue.

Students of Bible prophecy also recognize that much prophecy is given in symbols—where God commanded that certain things be done in representation of events to come later. That’s another theme explored in this issue, wherein we show that God’s festivals proclaimed in the Bible reveal how He will work out some of Scripture’s more amazing prophecies to bring to pass His plan for the salvation of mankind.

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor

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Council of Elders: Carmelo Anastasi, Scott Ashley, Bill Bradforth, Roy Carrell, John Elliott, Dustin McNeely, Mark Mickelson, Nino H. Seles, Don Ward, Robin Webber (chairman)

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Media operation manager: Peter Eddington

Managing editor: Scott Ashley

Senior writers: Jerold Aust, Tom Robinson, John Ross Schroeder

Copy editors: Milan Bricic, Tom Robinson

Art director: Shaun Venish

Circulation manager: John LaBlasioniere

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NORTH, SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA

United States: United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 Website: www.GNmagazine.org E-mail: info@ucg.org
Canada: United Church of God—Canada, 144 Station D, Bécancour, ON J6X 1K1, Canada.
Phone: (819) 614-1234 Fax: (819) 614-1239 Website: www.ucg.ca
Caribbean islands: United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 Website: www.GNmagazine.org E-mail: info@ucg.org
Spanish-speaking areas: Iglesia de Dios Unida, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 Website: www.ucg.org E-mail: iglesia@ucg.org

EUROPE

Benelux countries (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg): P.O. Box 93, 2800 All Gouda, Netherlands
British Isles: United Church of God, P.O. Box 705, Watford, Herts, WD19 6FZ, England
Phone: 020-8386-8467 Fax: 020-8386-1999 Website: www.goodnews.org.uk
Eastern Europe and Baltic states: Head Church, Pri 62, 50002 Tartu Postliner, Estonia
France: Eglise de Dieu Unie—France, 127 rue Amelot, 75011 Paris, France
Germany: Vereinte Kirche Gottes/Gute Nachrichten, Postfach 30 15 09, D-53195 Bonn, Germany.
Phone: 0228-945463 Fax: 0228-945463
Italy: La Buona Noftria, Chiesa di Dio Unita, Casella Postale 187, 24121 Bergamo Centro, Italy
Phone and Fax: +39 035 452537 Website: www.labuonanoftria.org E-mail: info@labuonanoftria.org
Scandinavia: Gudis Enade Kyrka, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027 E-mail: norden@ucg.org

AFRICA

Cameron: United Church of God Cameroun, BP 10322 Beisseuguere, Douala, Cameroon
Phone: (237) 75 65 92 11 Website: www.ucg.org/cameroun

Malawi: P.O. Box 32517, Chichewa, Lilongwe, Malawi
Phone: 011 660 851 Website: www.ucg.mw

Nigeria: United Church of God—Nigeria, P.O. Box 2285 Somoelu, Lagos, Nigeria
Phone: 08133233193 Website: www.ucg.nigeria.org E-mail: nigeria@ucg.org

South Africa: United Church of God—Southern Africa, P.O. Box 1181, Tzaneen 0580, South Africa
Phone: +27 12 751 4204 Fax: +27 (0)186 752 4737 Website: www.ucg.org.za E-mail: UnitedChurchOfGod.SA@gmail.com

Zambia: P.O. Box 23076, Kitwe, Zambia
Phone: 021 226076 E-mail: zambias@ucg.org

Zimbabwe: P.O. Box 928, Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe
Phone: 0773 240 041 E-mail: zimbabwe@ucg.org

PACIFIC REGION

Australia and all other South Pacific regions not listed: United Church of God—Australia
GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld, 4001, Australia
Phone: 07 55 202 122 Website: www.south-africa.ucg.org

New Zealand: United Church of God, P.O. Box 22, Shortland St., Auckland 1140, New Zealand
Phone: Toll-free 0508-463-763 Website: www.ucg.org.nz E-mail: info@ucg.org.nz

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

ASIA

All except Philippines and Singapore: United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax: (513) 576-9795 E-mail: info@ucg.org

Philippines: P.O. Box 81840, DCCPO, 8000 Davao City, Philippines
Phone and Fax: 63 82 224-4444 Cell/Call: +63 918-904-4444 Website: www.ucg.org.ph E-mail: info@ucg.org.ph

Singapore: United Church of God, GPO Box 535, Singapore, 8001, Singapore
Website: www.ucg-singapore.org E-mail: info@ucg.org.au

ALL AREAS AND NATIONS NOT LISTED

United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.
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Much of the Bible is prophecy. Many of its books are prophetic, even some of those we don’t normally associate with prophecy. Many of God’s greatest servants, including Jesus Christ, were prophets. So what does God want us to learn from prophecy? by Scott Ashley

Prophecy reveals who and what God is.

Another way to express this would be to say that prophecy reveals God’s greatness and power—power such that He is able to reveal the future.

The Bible begins with a testament to God’s awesome creative power: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). The verses that follow describe how He set the heavenly bodies in order, separated land from ocean, populated the planet with plants, birds and sea and land creatures—His creative acts then culminating with the first human beings, Adam and Eve.

Many other biblical passages describe God’s power, glory and majesty. (To learn more, request or download your free copy of our booklet Who Is God?) And in Isaiah 42, He connects His creative power with His ability to reveal the future long before it comes to pass:

“This is what God the Lord says—the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: ‘...I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols. See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you’” (verses 5, 8-9, New International Version, emphasis added throughout).

No one or nothing can compare to God in his might and majesty. No other can speak and bring galaxies, stars and worlds into existence! No other can create living beings from nothing! And no other can declare what will happen before it takes place!

As human beings, we are used to thinking in the three dimensions of breadth, height and depth, and so to a limited extent can grasp God’s great creative ability in those dimensions by viewing the world around us.
Exploring God’s Word

But how does prophecy fit into that?
In one sense prophecy could be viewed as God exercising His creative power in yet another dimension, that of time—foretelling the future and then bringing it to pass when, where and how He sees fit. His abilities certainly far surpass anything human beings are capable of!

• Prophecy reveals that God exists and that the Bible is His revealed Word.

Throughout the centuries, men and women can and have denied the reality of God, preferring to believe that He doesn’t exist. This is nothing new. In the first century the apostle Paul wrote that people “did not like to retain God in their knowledge,” since accepting His existence interfered with acting out their selfish and evil desires (Romans 1:28-32).

Today, however, people elevate denial of God to an art form—particularly in their efforts to explain away scientific evidence, such as the unbelievable complexity of DNA and the fine-tuning of the universe and our planet for the existence of life. (To learn more, download or request our free booklet Life’s Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?)

So how do they deal with Bible prophecy? Here, too, critics sidestep the plain evidence and offer all kinds of convoluted reasoning to explain it away. But God offers this challenge to any who would doubt Him: “This is what the LORD says—Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God. Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come—yes, let him foretell what will come . . . Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me?” (Isaiah 44:6-8, NIV).

Indeed, history itself is a witness that God foretold many events hundreds and thousands of years before they happened, then brought them to pass exactly as He said (see “What Are Some of the Bible’s Major Fulfilled Prophecies?”).

God is so sure of what He foretells that He has put it in writing well ahead of time where it can be easily disproven if it doesn’t come to pass. Yet time and time again, what He has written has taken place just as He foretold! (To learn more, download or request our free booklets Is the Bible True? and You Can Understand Bible Prophecy.)

The Bible is unlike any other religious “holy book” in many respects, but one enormous difference is that the Bible alone contains hundreds of prophecies that have been fulfilled just as they were recorded years ahead of time—and with hundreds more waiting to be fulfilled.

In Ezekiel 33:33 God tells us why He revealed the future to His servants and told them to write it down: “And when this comes to pass—surely it will come—then they will know that a prophet has been among them.”

• Prophecy shows that God is in ultimate control.

Not only can God reveal the future well ahead of time, but He can also bring to pass what He has foretold. In Isaiah 46:9-10 He declares plainly that no one or no thing can remotely approach His power, using prophecy as an example:

“Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come” (NIV). He ends this statement saying, “My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please” (NIV).

Clearly, only God can do this.

It’s conceivable that some human beings with the latest and most powerful supercomputers—or with lucky guesses!—might make some accurate predictions about the future (though we have enough difficulty just predicting the weather a few days

What Are Some of the Bible’s Major Fulfilled Prophecies?

The Bible contains literally hundreds of prophecies that have been fulfilled. Dozens have been fulfilled just regarding the Messiah, Jesus Christ, including the place of His birth (Micah 5:2), the timing of His public appearance (Daniel 9:25), His betrayal for the price of a slave, with that money then used to buy a plot of land (Zechariah 11:12-13), and His death by scourging and crucifixion (Psalm 22:16-17).

What are some of the hundreds of other biblical prophecies that have been fulfilled historically?

• Israel would suffer enslavement in Egypt, but be freed and established in their homeland, the Promised Land (Genesis 15:13-16).

• The kingdom of Israel would be split into the separate kingdoms of Israel and Judah as a result of Solomon’s sins (1 Kings 11:29-37).

• The people of Israel would be defeated and exiled in national captivity because of their sins (Deuteronomy 28:25, 36-37, 47-52).

• Nineveh, capital city of the Assyrian Empire, would be captured and destroyed (Nahum 3:1-19).

• The ancient Egyptians would lose their national superpower status and never again rule over other nations (Ezekiel 29:15).

• The nation of Judah would be defeated and exiled to Babylon for its sins (Jeremiah 25:11-13).

• The Jews exiled to Babylon would be allowed to return to Jerusalem after 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11-12).

• The ruler who would allow the Jewish exiles to return and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple would be named Cyrus—known to history as Cyrus the Great (Isaiah 44:28–45:6, 13).

• The Babylonian Empire would fall to the Medes (Daniel 5:25-31).

• The Babylonian Empire would be followed by the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great, and the Roman Empire (Daniel 2:31-40; 7:15-17, 19; compare 8:20-22).

• Jerusalem and its temple would be destroyed not long after Jesus Christ’s earthly ministry was completed (Matthew 23:37–24:2).

• Most of the original apostles would be persecuted and martyred (Matthew 23:34; John 15:20; Luke 11:49).

• God’s Church would faithfully carry on its commission of proclaiming the gospel to the nations and teaching those whom God calls all that He has commanded (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).
The Good News

The message of every prophet of the Bible is that if you listen to God and heed His warnings and change, you can avoid the terrible times prophesied to come on our world.

great phase of Bible prophecy.
The overall lesson? God is in complete and ultimate control, raising up and striking down kings and empires according to His plan and to fulfill His purpose!

• Prophecy reveals the consequences of obedience and disobedience.

A theme found again and again in Bible prophecy is that choices and actions have consequences. One of the biggest mistakes individuals or nations can make is to assume they can act as they wish without those actions eventually catching up with them.

Paul summarized this very well in Galatians 6:7: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”

Two long chapters of the Bible—Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28—spell this out clearly. They’re commonly known to Bible students as the “blessings and curses” chapters. They’re called that because they describe in considerable detail what happens when a nation chooses to obey and honor God (blessings) and what results when a nation turns its back and disobeys Him.

“Now it shall come to pass,” begins Deuteronomy 28, “if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God . . .” (verses 1-2).

The chapter goes on to describe blessings of agricultural and other material abundance, illness and confusion, oppression by foreigners and invaders, natural disasters and more.

“Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies,” God declares (verses 47-48). The warning continues with graphic and sobering details of what happens when civilization and moral standards begin to completely break down, leading to utter depravity. Leviticus 26 presents the same outcome.

Sadly, the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah failed to heed these warnings, and they stand as a stark example to nations such as the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and others who’ve been greatly blessed by God but now increasingly deny Him and trample His laws and Word underfoot. Their fate is likewise spelled out in prophecy if they refuse to turn from that treacherous path!

• Prophecy reveals God’s will—that He wants all to receive His gift of salvation.

There’s no question that much of Bible prophecy is grim and at times frightening. It’s a sobering subject for the reasons described above—God wants us to understand the painful consequences that will follow from choosing the wrong way and the blessings that come from obeying Him. Just as a wise parent warns his children of the pain that will result from disobedience, so does God warn us as His children.

God doesn’t want any of us to suffer. In one of the Bible’s great books of prophecy, Ezekiel, He says: “Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’” (Ezekiel 33:11).

But the prophecies of the Bible almost always end with hope and good news. This is because, as Paul told Timothy, God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

And Bible prophecy reveals how that wonderful truth will play out! To understand more fully, request or download our free booklets What Is Your Destiny? and The Gospel of the Kingdom, and be sure to read the article “The Next Age for Man—What It Will Be Like,” beginning on page 17 of this issue.

• Prophecy reveals God’s plan for humanity.

Bible prophecy reveals that God is working out an incredible plan here below—a plan for how He will bring us to salvation and eternal life in His divine family! Notice a few key prophetic statements from His Word that hint at the marvelous future awaiting those who surrender their lives to Him now:

“I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:18). Don’t spiritualize this away—He means it literally!

“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2-3). God’s promise is that as His divine children, we will be like the glorified Jesus Christ!

“Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6). Few realize this truth, but God’s plan for us is to serve Him as priests and to reign with Jesus Christ when He establishes the Kingdom of God on earth! (To learn more, request our free booklet What Is Your Destiny?)

• Prophecy should motivate us to repent and turn to God.

In Jeremiah 25:4-5 we see Jeremiah himself summarizing the message of God’s prophets to His people: “The LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets . . . They said, ’Repent now everyone of his evil way and his evil doings . . .’”

We see that another of God’s purposes for prophecy is to urge humankind to
How Are We to Prepare for Momentous End-Time Events?

God’s Word contains many prophecies about dangerous and deadly events that will devastate the world in the days leading up the return of Jesus Christ. It also has words of serious warning to those who believe God and have ears to hear. Notice what God tells us to do, considering the seriousness of the times in which we live:

“Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation [lack of restraint] and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:34-36, New American Standard Bible).

“Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time is. It is like a man, away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert” (Mark 13:33-35, NASB).

“Therefore, be on the alert—for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, at cockcrowing, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all, ‘Be on the alert!’” (verses 35-37, NASB).

“Let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:6-11).

“Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you” (Revelation 3:3).

God’s Word gives us plenty of direction so we can be spiritually prepared for these events: “Let us not sleep . . . Watch and be sober . . . [Put on] the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation . . . Be on guard . . . Keep on the alert . . . [Pray] in order that you may have strength to escape all these things . . . Hold fast and repent . . . ”

The apostle Paul vividly describes mankind’s attitude, approach and outlook in the end time: “But be certain of this, that in the last days . . . men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, uplifted in pride, given to bitter words, going against the authority of their fathers, never giving praise, having no religion, without natural love, bitter haters, saying evil of others, violent and uncontrollable, hating all good, false to their friends, acting without thought, lifted up in mind, loving pleasure more than God” (2 Timothy 3:1-4, Bible in Basic English).

At the end of this age, men and women will be utterly selfish and self-absorbed. They will be blind to the increasing danger signs all around—and taken by surprise. If we do not follow God’s instructions to be sober-minded, watchful and alert; we run the risk of falling asleep and being spiritually unprepared—and we will suffer the consequences of our neglect!

(This is adapted from our free Bible Study Course. You can download lessons or sign up for free at www.ucg.org/tsc.)

Learn More

The United Church of God, publisher of The Good News magazine, has produced several eye-opening booklets to help you better understand Bible prophecy. Key among them are You Can Understand Bible Prophecy and Are We Living in the Time of the End? You need this vital information. Download or request your free copies today!

Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our website.
Suddenly you’re forced to flee a hotel room in a foreign land with only seconds to awaken, pull on some clothes and get out. You don’t know if you will return, and you don’t know what awaits on the street. What do you take with you? More than you might ever imagine.

I had to face this question one night in Amman, Jordan, in November 2005 when terrorists attacked three nearby hotels with explosives. My hotel was not targeted, but we had no way of knowing that at the time. At 11:00 p.m. a loud knock at my door aroused me from sleep, and a hotel employee shouted to guests to wake up, get dressed and evacuate into the street. Not knowing what might happen, all we could do was hurriedly throw on some clothes and move.

In such an emergency what do you take with you? Maybe you’ve thought about this as a “what if” question to determine what you value or what things are most important to you. In my case that night I had seconds to answer the question. At that moment it was simple—I grabbed my passport and airline tickets. I didn’t not know if I would return to that hotel room, and I was scheduled to fly home the next day. More than anything, I wanted to be on that flight!

The question of what you would take with you if you had to flee your home at a moment’s notice is something to consider at a deeper level. True, you might take with you something irreplaceable or what you value most of all. Some people say they would take a Bible. Others say they would grab their family photo albums containing pictures that could never be replaced. In the era of digital pictures this may have changed. Perhaps now many would grab their computer or smartphone.

So what would you take with you under such circumstances?

While the physical item you pick up says something about what you value, let’s consider that when such a time might strike, the one item all of us would take with us as we flee in a time of emergency would be the set of values we live by—our character.

When such a moment strikes, we are what we are—the sum of all our experiences and choices—and that will determine how we react to a crisis.

Character—righteous or otherwise—is what we will take with us when we walk into a trial or emergency. The kind of person we are determines how we handle any period of distress.

It’s this intangible quality that lies at the heart of biblical warnings about a coming time of distress like none before it—the Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord prophesied to befall the world just prior to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

“Watch and be sober”

The apostle Paul warned fellow Christians of this in what is possibly his clearest and most cogent passage of prophecy: “But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

“But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those..
who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.

“But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-10).

Here in this well-known passage Paul emphasizes being prepared. When it is least expected—things seeming normal in a period of peace and safety—great distress erupts in this future time of judgment unleashed by God on all the world. Unexpectedly, like a thief in the night, the world changes quickly and dramatically into something different from any previous period of history.

What could trigger this? Perhaps a terrorist attack that brings a swift, greater-than-expected reaction by a large power, triggering a massive war drawing in many nations.

Perhaps an economic meltdown that threatens to bring down the world economy and with it the way of life all have grown accustomed to. Unprecedented actions may be taken to keep the economy functioning. We could see massive realignment of nations and international finance into one centralized authority, with widespread cooperation. What at first appears benign to many becomes an oppressive controlling power resulting in mankind’s most challenging period.

Specific Bible prophecies speak of the events of this period as sudden and on a scale never before experienced at any time in history (Daniel 12:1).

And as Paul described it, it will be sudden and unexpected like “a thief in the night.” Encountering a thief in the night is frightening. Such an event is without warning and immediately tests one’s resolve, courage, training and resourcefulness. We all will react based on how we may have prepared ourselves in advance for such an occurrence.

So what do you do when something of this magnitude strikes?

**How bad could things get?**

There is a whole preparedness industry that helps people plan for catastrophe. Bomb shelters can be built and stocked with food, water and supplies to (hopefully) allow people to survive a time of such crisis.

These go far beyond a commonsense plan to be prepared for a hurricane or tornado or other major weather-related problem. One should be prepared to endure a few days of inconvenience due to power outages or damage from such an event. But to think about preparing for and enduring through a major crisis like a nuclear attack is another matter. Can you ever be fully prepared?

A few years ago a fictional work was published with the title *One Second After*. It told the hypothetical story of an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) weapon detonated over the United States, knocking out all electricity. In the book’s scenario, anything that runs on electrical power stops, destroyed by the EMP from the detonation of a nuclear bomb at a certain point in the atmosphere. The EMP does not directly harm biological life but destroys the entire electrical grid and anything connected to it—and anything else that runs on electricity.

![Holy Bible](Image)

**The life that begins two seconds after a world-changing event will be lived according to something inside, something called character.**

The story was fictional but based on fact. Scientists and military experts have long warned that this is possible and that precautions should be taken to deal with such an attack in advance. Any nation with a nuclear bomb and the means to deliver it could theoretically create this event.

*One Second After* focuses on what happens to life in a small town in North Carolina after an EMP weapon is detonated. Within 30 days more than half the town’s inhabitants are dead as food runs out and people starve. Motorized vehicles don’t run because their electronic circuitry is ruined. Trucks can’t deliver food. Refrigerated food is either eaten or spoiled and no more can be produced because tractors can’t plow, plant or harvest and the electrical grid is destroyed.

Without electricity, vital medications soon run out and can’t be replaced. One of the book’s characters dies within weeks when her unrefrigerated insulin supply loses its effectiveness and runs out. People on heart medication or powerful drugs to control other disorders suffer unimaginably when their medications run out. The entire health-care system breaks down with fatal consequences.

In the story the fabric of society unravels. People kill to survive. Large, unruly gangs begin to roam through the towns pillaging for food. Towns have to mobilize armed citizenry to protect themselves. It’s brother against brother, neighbor against neighbor.

The novel paints a sobering and graphic picture of what could happen should such an attack occur in our modern world. Without electricity, civilization as we know it comes to an abrupt and grinding halt. Death from famine, disease and conflict occurs within weeks. The apocalyptic scenarios depicted in movies become reality.

**Two seconds after**

The book is titled *One Second After* to illustrate the point that one second after a “thief in the night” event occurs, everything changes. The life once known is gone. One has to grope for a way forward. The life that begins in the next second, two seconds after the event, will be lived according to something inside, something called character. It is beyond anything physical that defines us. Character is of the spirit. It cannot be seen or measured by anything we necessarily have in our possession.

The night in Amman when I had to leave the hotel room because of a bomb scare, I took a passport and airline ticket. In that sudden emergency I grabbed and took with me these things that were physical, useful and practical. But when something like that described by Paul occurs, “a thief in the night” event, tangible items will not be enough.

I am going to need something different to survive such an experience. Life will be so precarious, so on a razor-thin balance, that it will require us to react in ways that...
demonstrate spiritual courage and resourcefulness. Survival will require a spiritual capacity that has been developed in advance through conscious decisions to act and live in a godly manner based on the holy teachings of the Creator.

The apostle Peter described exactly what needs to be done: “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:11-13).

Peter had already debunked the scoffers who say such things will never happen. He referred to the time of Noah and the Flood that came as God’s judgment on a wicked world that refused to accept the holy knowledge of God. And willful neglect of God is at the heart of the events to come (verses 3-7).

**Such times as these**

We live in such times. Knowledge of God is being pushed from the public discussion at such a rapid rate that those of us who have lived long enough to have known a different time, when at least outward lip service to a godly defined morality was widespread, are shocked.

The recent rulings by the United States Supreme Court on same-sex marriage prompted a young colleague to come to me and say: “Now I finally understand why you baby boomers are so incensed at the changes in the same-sex marriage issue. You’ve lived long enough to have known a different time when it wasn’t generally accepted by the public.”

Today’s world is moving rapidly to a point where presenting the knowledge of God as recorded in Scripture is considered not only out of date and irrelevant but even “intolerance” and “hate speech.” The time is coming when to speak what God plainly teaches in the Bible will be so vilified that those who do so or stand up for doing so will be hounded into silence.

Peter says to those who will hear—those living in the prophetic end times—to become people of holy conduct and godly character. There is coming a new world where only righteousness dwells. The bridge to that world, during the calamitous times ahead, will be walked by those who have put on faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love (2 Peter 1:5-7).

The message we at The Good News offer is simple and straightforward: How do you prepare for any coming time of peril such as that foretold in Scripture? *Get your life in order now.* Study your Bible to find the way God wants you to live and a lifestyle that He will accept in the worsening times to come. Make God and His truth the anchor of your daily life and your refuge. Do this and you can expect God to shield you and protect you with His divine covering in the day of trouble. Set your deepest affection and desire on God and He will help you.

**Watch and understand**

Are you a student of Bible prophecy who is interested in end-time events? Do you watch this present world and see things building to another crisis, perhaps the crisis at the close of this age, and wonder whether you will be accounted worthy to escape the events of the last days (Luke 21:36) and be ultimately saved through the grace of God? Likely you are, and that’s why you read *The Good News* and have read to this point in this article.

Listen carefully, then, to what Peter says. He writes that the prophetic word is confirmed and is “as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19).

Prophecy should stir you to walk in the light of God’s Word, producing change in your life that prepares you for the intense period of judgment that lies ahead.

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**Prophecy should stir you to walk in the light of God’s Word, producing change in your life that prepares you for the intense period of judgment that lies ahead.**
The Bible’s Prophetic Festivals: Revealing God’s Plan of Salvation

God gave seven annual festivals that present the work of Jesus Christ in saving humanity. It’s vital that all of us learn of them and what they teach.  

As His Word the Holy Bible reveals, the Creator God made human beings with the intent of their becoming part of His family—billions of children joining God the Father and Jesus Christ in glory forever, sharing Their nature and character.

However, from the time of the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, mankind has been led astray by the rebellious fallen angel now known as Satan the devil. Under his influence, all people have sinned—disobeyed God—and come under the resultant penalties, ultimately death (see Romans 3:23; 6:23).

So is humanity lost beyond recovery? Has God’s plan to produce His family been thwarted? By no means, for God had already established a plan to save His precious children before they even existed.

The Bible presents God’s awesome plan of salvation. Spanning ages, it encompasses their need for forgiveness of sin on through to the time when salvation will be offered to all who have ever lived. The major steps in this plan are revealed through the biblical festivals God’s Word instructs us to observe (laid out sequentially in Leviticus 23). And through these annual commemorations we learn the key role Jesus Christ performs in mankind’s salvation.

The Passover

Exodus 12 introduces the Passover lamb as a means of redemption for the ancient Israelites in Egyptian slavery. When God sent a plague of death on the land of Egypt, the blood of the sacrificed lambs around the doors of the Israelite houses allowed the Israelites to be spared. This occasion was to be observed every year on the same day it occurred in early spring as a memorial (see also Leviticus 23:4-5). Yet the sacrificed lamb without blemish more importantly served as a representation of Jesus Christ, who was without any spiritual blemish of sin.

The New Testament reveals that Christ was killed on the very Passover day and that He is “our Passover, sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7). Indeed, He is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Through His sacrifice we are by God’s grace forgiven of sin and ultimately spared from sin’s penalty of death.

Today Christians are commanded to observe the memorial of the Passover yearly at the same time by drinking of the cup of the New Covenant and eating unleavened bread in remembrance of Christ’s incredible sacrifice. By doing so, we solemnly and thankfully remember the Lord’s death until He returns (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). This festival pictures the start of God’s plan of redemption—the washing away of our sins by the very blood of Jesus Christ.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

So, being forgiven of sins by God’s grace through the sacrifice of Christ, are we entitled to go on sinning?

Paul asks, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” (Romans 6:1). In other words, do we just stay the way we are and continue our sinful habits while expecting God to look the other way? Paul answers emphatically: “Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (verse 2).

Rather, in deep appreciation of what God has done and is doing for us through His Son, we continue to repent of our sins and live a changed life. As we come under God’s grace and mercy, we must continue to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

The Days of Unleavened Bread immediately follow the Passover (Leviticus 23:5-8). Historically, the seven days of this festival commemorate the time that the freed Israelites departed from Egypt and its godless ways.

For a Christian living under the New Covenant, these days reveal the convicting truth that we must leave our sinful ways and work to overcome sin. We cannot continue in sin!

Yet, unlike the Israelites of old, we have a new and better way to accomplish this spiri-

by Vince Szymkowiak and Tom Robinson

Thinkstock
The Good News

The Feast of Pentecost

...us the great mystery of the gospel, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day, as the scriptures say. He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom He went on to appear also to the twelve. Afterward He appeared to the apostles as they were gathering together, except for Judas, who had betrayed Him, and James, the son of Joseph, and Simon the Zealot. And in their presence the Lord commanded them, saying, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever不信 will be condemned. These signs will accompany those who believe: power to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to drive out demons. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’

The major steps in God’s plan are revealed through the biblical festivals. And through these annual commemorations we learn the key role Jesus Christ performs in mankind’s salvation.

The Feast of Trumpets

Leviticus 23:23-25 commands God’s people to observe “a sabbath rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets.”

Trumpets had great meaning for the Israelites. They were used in the calling of special assemblies (Numbers 10:1-10) and to sound the alarm for war (Jeremiah 4:19). Moreover, God had come down in a manifestation of power at Mount Sinai to reveal His law with the blaring of a trumpet (Exodus 19:16-19).

Scripture also prophesies that trumpets will serve as heralds of great future events soon to take place on the earth. The book of Revelation tells us that seven trumpets will be sounded by angels to announce awesome end-time events. The first angel’s trumpet will announce a great plague of hail, fire and blood, which will destroy a third part of the earth’s vegetation (Revelation 8:7).

More trumpet blasts will be heard, culminating with the seventh and last trumpet (Revelation 11:15). This trumpet announces the return of Jesus Christ to the earth and the establishment of His glorious Kingdom over all nations.

We are also told by the apostle Paul that this trumpet will signal the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the transformation of all Christ’s followers from physical flesh to glorified spirit existence (1 Thessalonians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 15:50-52). Jesus Himself said that His chosen people will be gathered at the “great sound of a trumpet” (Matthew 24:31).

As we observe this festival of Trumpets today, we are to keep in mind the great events that will soon take place on the earth, culminating in the return of Jesus.
Christ and the resurrection of the saints.

The Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:26-32) is mentioned in the New Testament in Acts 27:9, where it is called “the Fast,” as marginal notes in many Bibles today affirm. It was thus familiar to New Testament Christians as a day they still observed with fasting.

This Day of Atonement, on which we are to fast, is called “a sabbath of solemn rest” (Leviticus 23:27-32). The ancient rituals for the day are explained in great detail in Leviticus 16. A central ceremony involved two goats, one sacrificed in representation of the Lord and the other called in Hebrew azazel, meaning “goat of departure.” Some early translators used the word “scapegoat,” thinking the goat escaped free. The word has since come to mean one who is innocent made to bear blame. Neither sense fits here.

In some other translations, such as the New Revised Standard Version, the Hebrew word Azazel is used, some maintaining that Azazel is the name of a demon.

Some claim that the Azazel goat represents Jesus Christ just as the first goat, but this is an illogical interpretation once we understand the fate of the Azazel goat. Leviticus 16:22 tells us, “The goat shall bear on itself all their [i.e., the Israelites’] iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he [the suitable man chosen for the task (verse 21)] shall release the goat in the wilderness.”

This goat was not allowed to return to dwell among humanity. It was driven away and banished. This is the exact opposite concept of the role of Jesus Christ, who as Immanuel—meaning “God With Us” (Matthew 1:23)—has promised to always be with us. He tells us He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). So, in contrast to the goat of departure, Jesus will be with us always.

In direct contrast to Jesus Christ, it is Satan who will be banished from the face of humanity. At Jesus’ return, the devil will be apprehended and cast into a bottomless pit (Revelation 20:1-3)—and later taken out of the picture for good (verse 10).

The Day of Atonement pictures the wonderful time when humanity at large will repent and accept the atoning sacrifice of Christ, as pictured by the first goat, and Satan will be banished, as pictured by the driving away of the second goat. We will be given complete victory over the devil through Jesus Christ.

The Feast of Tabernacles

The next annual festival, the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:33-36), was celebrated by the ancient Israelites with makeshift shelters, recalling their transitory dwelling when they left Egypt and made their way to the Promised Land.

Also called the Feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23:16; Deuteronomy 34:22), this festival celebrated the late summer and early fall harvest in the land of Israel. In a spiritual sense it represents the great ingathering of God’s spiritual harvest of mankind following Christ’s return. Indeed, this feast looks forward to the time of the earthly rule of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Himself observed this feast during His ministry and told others to do so as well (John 7:8-14). The Bible even states that instead of being done away, this feast will be observed by the gentile (non-Israelite) nations during Christ’s reign over the earth (Zechariah 14:9, 16-18).

Scripture tells us that the resurrected saints will reign with Christ. Revelation 20:4 says: “And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them . . . And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (compare Daniel 7:27).

The wonderful truth is that when Christ returns, true Christians from this age will rule under Him as kings and priests (Revelation 5:10; 20:6)—leading the rest of the world into God’s ways.

The Eighth Day

Immediately following the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles is another Holy Day or Sabbath—referred to in Scripture simply as “the eighth day” (Leviticus 23:36, 39). This day pictures the most joyful of all events yet to take place in God’s great plan.

We should consider that the celebration of the ingathering of all humanity is not complete with the 1,000-year reign of Christ. For what about all those who died in this age who were not called as part of God’s firstfruits? There will yet remain billions of people from this age who are not saved. So are they forever lost?

Many Bible students realize that one day we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). What most don’t realize is that for those who died without the true knowledge of the plan of salvation, the time will come when they will be resurrected to physical life and given their first opportunity to really understand God’s plan and make an informed choice about it.

Revelation 20:11-15 speaks of this time yet to come 1,000 years after the “first resurrection” (verse 6), when “the rest of the dead” will in a second resurrection be restored to life (see verse 5). Ezekiel 37:1-14 describes the same period—a time when those who seemed doomed with all hope lost (verse 11) will be raised to life again. They will be astonished to find out that God will offer to them His Holy Spirit (verse 14) and give them the opportunity to really know for the first time just who the true God is (verse 13).

This vision, then, speaks of the time when all humanity who never sufficiently understood God’s truth will at last come to know it. It will be at this time that they will have to decide whether or not they will serve God. In other words, their salvation is dependent on whether or not they will choose to accept Jesus’ shed blood for their sins and serve God faithfully once they come to know Him.

This will be a time of judgment in the sense that the new lives of these multitudes will be under evaluation. Those who stay on the right path with God’s help will be saved. Those who ultimately reject God are the only ones who will be condemned in the end. Undoubtedly, most of humanity will make the right decision to obey Him and continue in His ways.

God, in His great wisdom, has a plan to offer everyone who has ever lived an opportunity to inherit eternal life. He is calling some to repentance now, and the rest He will call during the millennial reign of Christ and the second resurrection period that follows.

If you have read this far and are coming to understand God’s great plan, perhaps you are being called at this time. May God help you to respond to His call to receive Jesus Christ and follow His ways—including observance of these important festivals that show the way to eternal salvation in God’s family! GN

Learn More

God’s Word contains much more detail expanding on the meaning of each of these biblically commanded festivals. Far from being obsolete and outmoded, they actually reveal, step by step, God’s great plan for the salvation of mankind! You need to understand how all this will be accomplished. Download or request your free copy of our booklet God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind.

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

www.GNmagazine.org/booklets
Bugle calls have appealed to me since watching a lot of cowboy movies as a kid. The plots were often similar: Everyone on a wagon train was about to be slaughtered by Indians. The tension was terrible. Then, at last, the exciting climax of the movie—the rising sound of the bugle call signaling “Charge”! The U.S. Cavalry came galloping over the ridge just in time to save the wagon train!

The use of trumpets and bugles to send signals has a long history. In Old Testament times, it’s fascinating to see how ancient Israel used trumpet calls for numerous orders and announcements.

Few people realize that one of the seven annual festivals commanded by God is called the Feast of Trumpets. But why? Notice God’s command:

“And in the seventh month [corresponding to our September/October], on the first day of the month, you shall have a holy convocation [a commanded worship assembly]. You shall do no customary work. For you it is a day of blowing the trumpets” (Numbers 29:1; see also Leviticus 23:24; emphasis added throughout).

In the original Hebrew here, no trumpets are actually mentioned. Rather, the phrase “blowing of trumpets” has been translated from the single word teruah, which signifies the making of a loud noise or clamor. It is sometimes translated “shout,” as made by human voices (e.g., Joshua 6:10). It’s also rendered “alarm” in association with the sound of the shofar or ram’s horn (Jeremiah 4:19).

A form of the word also refers to sounding an alarm with metal trumpets or hat-sotserot (Numbers 10:9—silver trumpets in this case). In Psalm 98, the word is rendered “shout joyfully,” and applies to loud singing as well as blowing metal trumpets and the ram’s horn in celebration (verses 4, 6).

Numbers 10:1-10 relates the uses of the two silver trumpets of the tabernacle, including calls to assemblies, announcing special occasions and events such as holy days and sacrificies, and for alarms of war, as mentioned. Interestingly, the shofar was used for some of the same purposes. One distinction, however, was that only the priests were authorized to blow the silver trumpets.

Thus, making a loud noise, particularly through the ram’s horn and other trumpets, can be celebratory as well as a dire warning—like a tornado siren. Both aspects are part of the important meaning of this Holy Day.

A mighty trumpet announces the second coming of Christ

The Feast of Trumpets holds special excitement because it initiates the autumn festival season of four festivals. As with all the annual feasts, we need the New Testament to fully understand the meaning and symbolism.

Most interesting is what the Bible reveals about trumpet calls in connection with future prophesied events—events pointed to by the Feast of Trumpets!

Scripture tells us that an earth-shaking trumpet call will announce the most important and exciting event that will ever happen to humanity—the second coming of Jesus Christ! This will be the great climax and turning point of all history!

Note how Jesus described His future return: “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of

The Feast of Trumpets, one of the Holy Days of the Bible, pictures future times of both sadness and gladness—essential steps leading to the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth! by Don Hooser

Most biblical “trumpets” were shofars, made from animal horn—like this one from a kudu.
heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:30-31).

Another great event: the resurrection of the saints

Another major event that happens at Christ’s return is the resurrection of God’s faithful servants, the saints.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament frequently use the word “saints” to refer to the faithful followers of God. In the New Testament, they are also called the “elect,” those selected or chosen (as in Matthew 24:31).

The apostle Paul wrote: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ [the saints who have died] will rise first. Then we [saints] who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

The resurrection of the saints to glorified spirit life to “reign with” Christ is called in Scripture “the first resurrection.” A second resurrection will follow 1,000 years later for “the rest of the dead” (Revelation 20:5-6).

The 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians is largely about the resurrection of the saints—see particularly verses 12-13 and 20-23. Paul then goes on to describe this resurrection in verses 42-44: “So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.”

Then Paul states when this resurrection will occur: “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep [meaning not all in this resurrection will be dead in the grave when Christ returns], but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (verses 51-53).

Is this a “secret rapture”? Absolutely not. The popular idea of a “rapture” is a little bit of truth mixed with lots of errors. Christ will return “with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). It will be anything but secret!

While many of the saints will be protected during the end-time Great Tribulation (see Revelation 12:12-17), this will be on earth, not in heaven. In fact, the reward of the saints is not that of going to heaven at death, as so many think. It will be eternal life in the Kingdom of God, which Christ will establish on the earth when He returns (Matthew 5:5; 6:10; Revelation 5:10).

Those who are a part of the first resurrection will rule with Jesus Christ here on earth. Eternal life in the Kingdom of God will then be offered to all those who inhabit the earth. (To learn more, request or download our free booklet Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach? and You Can Understand Bible Prophecy.)

A scroll sealed with seven seals

Many people have a very limited perspective of Jesus Christ. They think only of His first coming as the suffering Savior and as the Lamb of God. But He, along with the Father, is a God of justice and judgment as well as a God of mercy and forgiveness. When Jesus comes the second time, it will be as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” to punish those who are in rebellion against God (Revelation 5:5). That will be essential to prepare the way for true peace on earth.

The end-time sequence of events is pictured as Christ unrolling a scroll by breaking open its seven seals one by one (Revelation 5). The sequence of the seals is the same sequence of events Jesus described in His prophecy about His return recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. These are crises that will be growing in frequency and intensity leading up to that time.

The opening of the first four seals unveils what are commonly referred to as the “four horsemen of the Apocalypse,” representing false religion, war, famine and death by pestilence and various disasters (see Revelation 6:1-8). The fifth seal represents the persecution of God’s people and the Great Tribulation, when God will use gentile nations to punish the nations that are the modern descendants of ancient Israel (Revelation 6:9-11; Matthew 24:21; Jeremiah 30:7). Then “immediately after the tribulation” will be heavenly signs with the opening of the sixth seal (Matthew 24:29-30; Revelation 6:12-16).

The seventh seal: the Day of the Lord

The heavenly signs of the sixth seal announce the Day of the Lord, with fearful people crying out: “For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (verse 17). Likewise, the prophet Joel tells us that the heavenly signs will happen just “before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord” (Joel 2:31). So the period of the seventh seal that follows in Revelation is the Day of the Lord. (Except for a few inset chapters, the book of Revelation is organized quite sequentially.)

The Day of the Lord is the time of God’s major intervention on the earth. This age is Satan’s “day,” when “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19). The Day of the Lord begins when Christ begins to take back control and mete out calamitous judgment on the rebellious nations that defy God.

Joel says, “The day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?” (Joel 2:1; see also verses 1:5; 2:1; 3:14). The Day of the Lord is also called, as we saw in Revelation 6:17, “the great day of His wrath.” Numerous other prophecies describe the fierce wrath of God against the forces of evil during the Day of the Lord. The opening of the “seventh seal,” which is the Day of the Lord, reveals “seven angels” with “seven trumpets” (Revelation 8:1-2). Each trumpet blast announces terrifying calamities that will afflict rebellious mankind. The blowing of these trumpets apparently takes place over the course of a year, since Isaiah 34:8 refers to this time as the “Day of the Lord’s vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion.” And one trumpet plague takes five months, as we’ll see in a moment.

This year comes at the end of the time of terrible tribulation and concludes with the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection. Given the seven warning trumpets over this period, it would seem that the Feast of Trumpets pictures all of it, not just Christ’s return and the resurrection at the end—though these events at the end following the final trumpet are certainly the high point.

Be assured that while Jesus Christ is sending plagues and other punishments on the earth, He will be protecting His faithful followers (although He will allow some to be martyred). To them He promises, “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (Revelation 3:10; see also 7:3).

The blowing of the seven trumpets

After each of the first three trumpets, devastating destruction befalls the earth (Revelation 8:1-11). The fourth trumpet announces a time of great darkness (verse 12).

When the fifth angel sounds, a mighty...
army suddenly comes on the scene with great power, including power that will be used against its enemies “to torment them for five months” (Revelation 9:1-12).

When the sixth angel sounds, a giant army of 200 million comes from the east, resulting in the deaths of a third of mankind (Revelation 9:13-21). One would think that all the survivors would then have enough sense and fear of God to repent of their sins, but not so—“they did not repent” (verses 20-21).

When the seventh angel sounds, he is announcing events both wonderful and terrifying. The wonderful events are the coronation of Jesus Christ as King of Kings, His return to rule all nations and the resurrection of the saints—at the last trumpet” (1 Corinthians 15:52). And the terrifying events are a series of seven last plagues, as we’ll see.

Revelation 11:15-18 proclaims: “The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah [or Christ], and he will reign for ever and ever.’ “And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: ‘We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.’

“The nations were angry, and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people who revere your name, both small and great—and for destroying those who destroy the earth’” (NIV).

The warning in the seventh trumpet

Note what follows in Revelation 15:1: “Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.”

Revelation 16 goes on to describe the seven last plagues. The first is a terrible affliction on people, the second is on the sea and its creatures, and the third is on all the rivers and springs of water. The fourth plague is on the sun, which creates scorching heat. The fifth plague is darkness and extremely painful sores.

Again, in spite of the terrible pain and suffering, the prophecy recounts in advance that these people “did not repent of their deeds” (Revelation 16:9, 11). Yet even these stubborn people will have an opportunity for salvation. After dying and being resurrected a thousand years later, they will at last be receptive to Christ’s teachings.

The sixth angel announces a vast army coming from the east led by Satan and his demons. They “go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:12-14).

“And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon” (Revelation 16:16). Armageddon means Mount or Hill of Megiddo. This place northwest of Jerusalem has been a gathering place for armies numerous times in the past. Other scriptures show that the actual “battle of that great day of God Almighty” will be in and around Jerusalem.

The seventh angel announces incredible cataclysms! “And there were noises and thunders and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth . . . And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great” (Revelation 16:18, 21).

Then comes the Commander and His heavenly cavalry for the final battle!

The triumphant return of Jesus Christ

Revelation 17 describes a powerful and evil worldwide system called “Babylon the great.” Its armies and the armies of its enemies are about to fight each other when they instead turn to fight against the returning Jesus Christ. Verse 14 says, “These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.” Revelation 18 goes on to describe the fall of this system called Babylon.

Revelation 19 begins with scenes in heaven. Then verses 7-9 refer to “the marriage of the Lamb” to “His wife,” the Church, and “the marriage supper.”

Then we read of the awesome arrival and conquest by Jesus Christ and His armies! “Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war” (verse 11).

“And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses” (verse 14).

“And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (verse 16).

The remainder of the chapter tells how all who will have tried to make war against Him will be killed.

God reveals more about the great final battle in Zechariah 14. Here are portions of that chapter: “Behold, the day of the LORD is coming” (verse 1). “For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem (verse 2). “Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations” (verse 3).

“And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east” (verse 4). “Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You [some translations say “Him”]” (verse 5).

The symbolism of the Feast of Trumpets

So what does the Feast of Trumpets picture? It portrays everything that happens from the angel blowing the first trumpet to Christ conquering His enemies at the time of His return. It warns of global catastrophes and war and yet, at the same time, celebrates the coming of Jesus Christ as King and the raising to life of His followers. This paves the way for peace on earth at last as Jesus sets up His Kingdom and begins to rule the world! The next three annual Feasts explain the rest of the story.

The Feast of Trumpets is a Holy Day on which members of the United Church of God, publisher of The Good News, will have church services in many locations around the world. This festival is a time of rejoicing before God, as it depicts a time when our Creator will dramatically intervene in world affairs for the good of mankind. It will be a time of joyful worship as we review what this day pictures in the plan of God.

This Holy Day stirs excited anticipation for the time when, as Zechariah 14:9 puts it, “the LORD shall be King over all the earth”! GN
The next age is just around the corner, but the vast majority of people have never heard of it. And most who have heard of it don’t really understand what it entails. by Bill Bradford

The next age is unique in mankind’s history

The Bible explains that there will be an age of 1,000 years—known to many as the “Millennium,” Latin for “1,000 years”—that will be completely different from anything that’s ever come before.

This 1,000 years will provide everything mankind has only dreamed about. Strive as we may to achieve it, human beings will not produce this next age of ourselves. It will be done by God for us and will demonstrate that His way is right after all.

The apostle John recorded his vision of this future time following Christ’s return in Revelation 20: “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while” (verses 1-3).

We then read about a warning message being sent out to the nations of the world that “Babylon” is about to fall (verse 8). This name signifies a great governmental and religious system rooted in ancient Babylon that exercises a great deal of control throughout the world. The Bible describes it being led by Satan through deception. Revelation lists seven vials or bowls, symbolically containing the final plagues to be poured out on the corrupt system controlling the nations. Chapter 16
describes these final plagues.

In chapter 19, we have the armies of the nations, marshalled by an individual called “the Beast” who sits at the head of the Babylonian system. He is shown moving toward Jerusalem, where he and his armies will attempt to defeat Jesus Christ. These armies will of course be destroyed. Jesus will then begin to reign over the nations of the earth.

There is one thing left to happen, however, before Jesus Christ can successfully rule. The devil will be locked away, as we just read from Revelation 20, to remove his influence over mankind for the rest of the millennial period.

**A literal period of 1,000 years**

The next few verses mention the 1,000 years and describe specific conditions that will exist.

Revelation 20:4 refers to those who sit on thrones, stating that they will live and reign with Christ during the Millennium. The authority of judgment is given to them because they are loyal to Jesus Christ. These are His faithful followers, who refused to compromise the way of life God revealed to them, even to the point of being willing to lose their lives.

The book of Daniel also foretold that a literal kingdom would be given to the saints—that is, the sanctified ones or those set apart, the true and faithful servants of God: “Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him” (Daniel 7:27).

Those faithful individuals who rule with Christ over all nations at that time will have had to overcome the world in this age. As Jesus promises: “He who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations . . . [and] to him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne as I also overcame, and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Revelation 2:26; 3:21).

Only those who will not be conformed to the ways of this world, but rather overcome the world though Jesus Christ, will be the ones who will “sit on thrones” and judge or rule the earth with Him.

Only those who are living by God’s Word in the Bible, obeying His laws, are qualified to administer the rule of Christ and His laws through His righteous government.

**First and second resurrections**

Returning to Revelation 20, we are told in verse 6: “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”

The saints, also called firstfruits of God, will be resurrected to immortal spirit life in what the Bible calls the “first resurrection.” But if there is a first resurrection, does that mean others will follow?

The book of Revelation continues with an amazing and little-understood truth. Verse 5 answers the question of what happens after the Millennium. The “rest of the dead” will live again in a judgment where they will have an opportunity to know God and His Word. Amazingly, people who have not heard or sufficiently understood the truth of God, not having been called in this age, will be called in a future age—specifically when the 1,000 years are finished.

Resurrected, they will stand before the Lord, with the books of the Bible opened for them (verses 11-12), meaning they will at last understand the Scriptures. In this age the books of the Bible have been closed to their proper understanding. So this is an opportunity for all those who have never heard the plan of salvation to hear and understand.

While Scripture says of those in the first resurrection 1,000 years earlier that the “second death has no power over them,” Jesus Christ’s faithful followers, who refused to compromise the way of life God has revealed to them, will live and reign with Christ during the Millennium.

**Satan released—why?**

Revelation 20 also mentions the devil being released at the end of the Millennium—an enigma to many: “Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison, and go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea” (verses 7-8).

Verse 9 says, “They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.”

What is happening here? Why does God allow Satan out of the bottomless pit, where he was confined 1,000 years earlier, to go out and deceive the nations again?

The picture becomes clearer when you understand that the world at this time will be one in which the devil has been locked away for 1,000 years. The people who will live into the Millennium will have experienced the terrible tribulation of the same is not said here. These people, the vast majority of those who have ever lived, are resurrected as physical human beings, subject to experiencing a second death if they pursue wrong choices. But they can also repent and turn to God and be granted the same gift of eternal life that those raised to eternal life in the first resurrection were given.

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end of our age. They will form the basis of the world’s population during this 1,000-year period.

The people who will be born and live during this time will not have experienced the devil’s rule and deception over the world. All they will know will be what they were told. As generations are born in this 1,000-year period, the only world they will know will be God’s world.

His release will follow a world at peace

We have a clear picture of this age in some of the great millennial prophecies in Isaiah 2:2-4: “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’”

In the coming 1,000-year age, it will not be long until there are no false teachings and religions. People will know God’s ways well and will happily live by them.

This period of time will be remarkable—1,000 years of peace. People will be taught God’s laws and will enjoy the fruits and prosperity of God’s reign and His ways.

We have an extraordinary picture of fierce wild animals not harming people or eating their traditional fare of weaker animals. The famous line, “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat . . . the lion will eat straw like the ox,” are literal scenes of a world at peace (Isaiah 11:6-8). And they also depict peace among human beings, as is clear from the next verse.

Verse 9 concludes, “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

The devil will lead multitudes in rebellion

Again, though, why would God allow the devil out to again deceive the nations? Let’s consider this. The world will for the first time be without Satan’s deception. It will experience 1,000 years where people will not have known Satan’s lies and propaganda. This is a very good thing, but since this will be a time of salvation for all mankind, and God has intentions for them to be in His Kingdom forever, they must learn to choose right in the face of temptation or misleading.

Will they be able to successfully resist? Absolutely! However, just like people today, many won’t be able to withstand the appeal the devil will make to their basic selfish desires. If a person hasn’t made a firm choice to always choose God’s ways of love, obeying His law, then they will be susceptible to this kind of temptation and deception. Obviously, some people at that time won’t make the right choice to be faithful to God and Jesus Christ.

What might that deception entail? It will likely be the same line Satan threw out to Eve to turn her against God. It goes like this: “God isn’t telling you everything. You can have so much more and be so much more if you’ll just follow me and do things my way.”

People will be influenced by these thoughts. They’ll become angry and rebel against God’s good government. People will believe they can do better for themselves.

Rebellion against God’s righteous reign will spread among a significant part of the population. They are referred to as Gog and Magog, the international rebellion here being likened to a great force amassed against Christ’s reign early in the Millennium (see Ezekiel 38-39). Just like his attempt to derail God’s redemptive work today, Satan’s plan for God and Magog will fail. God’s way works best. The self-serving way of competition brings only violence and harm to all. God will have no choice but to mercifully destroy those who rebel against Him.

The world prepared for the second resurrection

At this point the devil will be removed permanently, never to deceive and tempt anyone again. Then God will be ready to proceed to the next phase of His plan. The earth will be restored to a beautiful garden able to support the billions who will be raised in the second resurrection period mentioned earlier.

When they are brought back to life, the truth of God will be made clear to them, and they can learn God’s ways and freely believe in them without the deceptions of the devil to turn them away. In their previous life they had already experienced the devil’s deception. Now they will have their first opportunity—not a second chance—to attain salvation as others have before them. (To learn more, see “The Bible’s Prophetic Festivals: Revealing God’s Plan of Salvation,” beginning on page 11.)

The Millennium soon to come is going to be an exciting period for man. The age in which we now live will end in human failure. But in the next age man will succeed because of the righteous and caring leadership of Jesus Christ. The barriers to success will be removed, including the reign of the devil.

You should know that this next age is a vital step in God’s plan to bring salvation to all of mankind. It’s celebrated in the observance of the biblical Feast of Tabernacles. The United Church of God, which publishes this magazine, observes this commanded festival in anticipation of this coming age of peace and plenty. We understand the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles is necessary to help us prepare for the role Jesus Christ is offering us to be kings and priests who will reign with Him to make the world the place it should be.

Are you preparing for the next age? GN
In 2005 I worked as a volunteer at a shelter for people displaced by Hurricane Katrina. We tried to console confused, hungry, frightened people who had been picked off the roofs of their houses in New Orleans and transported to San Antonio, Texas.

One young woman sat on a cot staring aimlessly. In obvious shock, she ignored the activity swirling around her. I stopped, leaned down and asked her if I could help. She looked up with eyes filled with despair and asked, “What happened to my baby?”

I never knew what happened to that woman or if they ever found her baby. Since that time I have often thought about how human life can be degraded by the destructive force of natural disasters. Even more disturbing is the reality of how easy it is for human beings to devalue each other. It’s vital that we maintain the right perspective.

Civilization’s thin veneer revealed in disasters

Working in a shelter for victims of Hurricane Katrina was a study in how the veneer of civilization hides the possibility of chaos. There were many encouraging examples by scores of volunteers who simply showed up and worked, at times without supervision, to unload trucks of food and water, set up cots and assist the tired and hungry refugees.

Yet there was no way to be totally prepared for the human tragedy that began to trickle into the shelter. Having lost their homes and possessions, the refugees were bused to the shelter, stripped of their filthy clothes, allowed to shower and pick through some donated used clothing, then given a bottle of water and a slice of pizza.

Underneath the attempts to supply basic human needs was a current of chaos. People were lost, confused and angry. “Where am I?” “Why did the levees fail?” “Why have the state and federal governments let us down?” “When will I get to go home?” “What happened to my baby?”

In one instance a policeman was guarding a room full of supplies, including stacks of blankets. He had been instructed not to allow any refugees into the room. A small group of men demanded blankets for their children who were cold. The policeman refused. The standoff was escalating toward possible violence before a volunteer worker explained that the blankets were used and needed to be checked for lice.

One day I received a call from a government worker who was working at another shelter in another city. Her voice trembled as she told me how some refugees had procured guns and that there was fear of a riot. It didn’t take long for civilized behavior to disappear when the basic blocks of civilization—food, water, clothing and shelter—disappeared.

Natural disasters give a glimpse into the weakness of the veneer of civilization. Underneath the thin covering is a boiling pot of chaos. We see how thin that veneer is every day in crime, violent entertainment, war, euthanasia—all examples of how human beings devalue each other. Under stress, the cheapening of other people can collapse into violent anarchy.

A study done a number of years ago in Britain concluded that it’s a nation just “nine meals from anarchy.” An article in the Daily Mail reported on the estimation that it would take only “nine meals—three full days without food on supermarket shelves—before law and order started to break down, and British streets descended into chaos.” The article went on to say: “A far-fetched warning for a First World Nation like Britain? Hardly. Because that’s exactly what
happened in the U.S. in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. People looted in order to feed themselves and their families” (Rosie Boycott, “Nine Meals From Anarchy—How Britain Is Facing a Very Real Food Crisis,” June 7, 2008).

In other words, Britain, like all civilized countries, is only 72 hours from chaos. How quickly would people devalue other human beings to justify stealing money, food, clothing or a blanket?

**Becoming desensitized to depravity**

Here’s another example of our thin veneer of civilization from Europe. Prostitution has been a sad reality in society throughout history, an ugly side of human nature. This practice degrades both the institution of marriage and womanhood. It is demeaning for a woman to sell her body as a commodity to be used without consideration of her worth as a human being.

In November 2012, the city of Zurich, Switzerland, legalized drive-in “sex boxes.” The Telegraph reports that these “garage-like boxes will have roofs and walls for privacy, and easy access for cars.” Michael Herzig, a representative of Zurich’s social welfare department, stated: “The women will be better protected from attack, and it will also mean better business for them. With the women right by the sex boxes there is no ‘travel time’ so they can deal with more customers. It’s a better business model than standing on the street” (Matthew Day, “Zurich to Open Drive-In Sex Boxes,” Nov. 29, 2012).

Switzerland is viewed as highly civilized, its people taking pride in their tolerance and humanity. Yet for many in Zurich it doesn’t seem degrading for a woman to sell her body in a government-supplied “sex box”!

Stories like this are disturbing—or they certainly ought to be. Yet through movies, television, radio, music and 24-hour-a-day news, all of us are being desensitized to the great moral issues of our time.

We must guard against that. For all great moral issues are concerned with God’s purpose for humanity and the value of each individual. All moral issues eventually deal with our value as human beings.

**Our need to feel moral gone awry**

Why should you, personally, care about the great moral issues of our time? As long as people leave you alone, let’s just all get along and not judge each other, right?

For many people there is a general sense that the only evil is being intolerant of others. From this viewpoint, there are very few totally evil acts, except maybe to promote the idea that there is absolute good and evil, which is seen as intolerant extremism.

Here’s a trait concerning your human nature you need to understand: Unless you’re totally amoral, you want to feel that you’re basically a good person. You want to experience high self-esteem about your moral decisions.

If you want to feel that you are a good person, what makes up your moral center? What criteria do you use to decide what is good and evil? How hungry would you have to be before you beat your neighbor to death for a morsel of food? In the midst of chaos, how long would it take you to become barbaric? Only 72 hours?

The desire to feel moral has led many to a very warped sense of morality. Consider the following example.

In California a truck filled with live fish on the way to market crashed, and 1,600 pounds of bass spilled onto the highway and died. According to an Associated Press release, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) asked for a memorial to be erected along that stretch of road “to remind drivers that all animals—whether they’re humans, basset hounds, or bass—value their lives and feel their pain.”

Another spokesperson for PETA announced: “They [the bass] were on their way to slaughter, which is of course pretty hellish. To suffer an accident on the way and be left in the middle of the street is unthinkable.”

So for some people the death of a group of fish and the use of fish as food exemplify one of the great moral issues of our time. I’m not supporting cruelty to animals, but elevating the life of fish to the value of human life originates in the same perverted moral center as those who support slavery, abortion, euthanasia and genocide.

That may sound harsh, but it brings us back to a central aspect of true morality: What is the purpose and value of a human being?

**True morality vs. self-made morality**

The message that the Bible was inspired by God to teach human beings their moral center is derided by secular humanists, the “enlightened” educational community and, sadly, many in today’s pulpits.

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**UNITED STATES NATIONWIDE CABLE TV**

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View on various cable channels (check local listings) and on ch. 373 (satellite) DirecTV.

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**CABLE AND BROADCAST TV**

(Consult your local TV/cable guide for a channel in your area.)

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**CANADA NATIONWIDE CABLE TV**

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See local listing for the channel in your area.

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**AUSTRALIA**

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See local listing for the channel in your area.

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The Bible reveals that the Creator God sent His Son to free us from evil and teach us the way of goodness and happiness. The book of Hebrews states, “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself [Jesus Christ] shared the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Notice that Jesus Christ came to earth as a human being because we are “children.” Children of whom? Children of God! The great moral truth of our time, and of all time, is that God formed human beings because He is creating a family. That’s why you were born! This truth must become the guiding light for all of your moral decisions.

You were created “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27). You were designed to have the same moral center as your Creator. When you have a right relationship with God, you will experience a genuine sense of goodness. When you don’t have the proper moral center, you will create your own sense of morality to feel good about yourself. When we make up our own sense of morality to feel good about ourselves, we’re just covering our barbarism with veneer.

Supporting a memorial for dead fish feels moral. It feels spiritual to someone who doesn’t understand the unique purpose for human life. Defending the “right” of a woman to “control her own body” by aborting her unborn fetus feels liberating and moral—at least until you substitute the words “child of God made in the image of God” for the word “fetus.”

Many times what human beings make up as morality is the facade that hides our barbarism with veneer. Supporting a memorial for dead fish feels moral. It feels spiritual to someone who doesn’t understand the unique purpose for human life. Defending the “right” of a woman to “control her own body” by aborting her unborn fetus feels liberating and moral—at least until you substitute the words “child of God made in the image of God” for the word “fetus.”

The apostle Paul wrote: “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves [that is, deeply selfish], lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control [pursuing the philosophy of ‘If it feels good, do it’], brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!” (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Self-made morality gives human beings a great sense of self-esteem and feeling of being spiritual. As lovers of ourselves, our self-made sense of good and evil is just a veneer over a hollow form of godliness. Only the Creator of life has ultimately determined what is either good for life or destructive for life. God wants to save you from the destructive consequences of wrong moral choices. He wants to save you from the chaos of the world around you by dealing with the chaos inside of you!

The basis of moral decisions

Where do we begin to understand God’s instructions for the most basic of moral decisions? Where in the Bible would you go to begin to learn how to change your sense of right and wrong from a veneer to a moral center?

You can begin to understand the great moral center God wants in your life from two short biblical passages.

A man came to Jesus and asked Him, “‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ Jesus said to him, ‘“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:36-40).

You will never understand who you are until you understand who your Creator is and why you were created. Until you submit to your Creator God with all your heart, soul and mind, you will continue to create false concepts of right and wrong so you can feel good about yourself—and your life will continue to be chaotic. This commandment is the most ignored teaching given by Jesus Christ. You may praise God, sing to Him and claim to be a believer, but are all of your emotions, energy and thoughts dedicated to obedience to Him as your Father?

The second passage to help you begin to form a moral center is found in Exodus 20:1-17 (reiterated in Deuteronomy 5:1-22). These verses record the only time in all human history that God spoke to an entire nation and explained basic morality. We call them the Ten Commandments.

Do you actually know what’s listed in them? What about the Second Commandment, which forbids the use of images in the worship of God? Do you kneel down before statues of Jesus and Mary?

What about the Fourth Commandment concerning the seventh-day Sabbath? If you observe Sunday (the first day of the week) as your day of worship you’ve done nothing more than follow a mannmade sense of morality.

What about the commandment against “bearing false witness”? Are you totally honest in your business dealings? The Tenth Commandment forbids coveting. Do you even know what coveting means?

You see, the reason we live under a facade of civilization is because in many cases we are living under a facade of religion and morality. It’s time for you to explore your moral center and discover God’s purpose in your life!

A tale of two department stores

The shelter for survivors of Hurricane Katrina I mentioned earlier was set up in an abandoned department store. A week later the shock and exhaustion of the refugees was replaced with apprehension about their future. The shelter supplied three meals a day, along with abundant used clothing. Hundreds of people slept on cots, walked the streets around the shelter or watched football on donated televisions. Many displayed a growing sense of boredom.

A short time after that first night in the shelter, I was walking through a different kind of department store. It was an exclusive shop celebrating a grand opening. Violinists played music while well-dressed patrons received coupons for free roses and waited in line to pay $300 for leather purses. A perky clerk asked if I wanted a whiff of fashionable cologne.

What a contrast! I couldn’t help but think of the odor of people who had been trapped in humid attics trying to escape rising floodwaters. But this led me to thinking about the fact that I was actually strolling through the facade of civilization—a razor’s edge from chaos.

The greatest moral truth of all time is the reality that the purpose for human life is that God is creating a family. Seek Him and you won’t have to fear chaos. He will be the center of your life, directing you to His ultimate purpose come what may! GN
In late May Europe’s Champions League football (soccer to Americans) final was decided at London’s Wembley Stadium. What was unusual about it was the fact that two German teams were the finalists. All other European countries’ teams had been eliminated.

The British newsmagazine The Economist reported: “The symbolism was powerful. For the first time in its 58-year history, the final of Europe’s most important football contest was a wholly German affair. From the football pitch to politics to the economy, Germany has become Europe’s most powerful country” (“Europe’s Reluctant Hegemon,” June 15, 2013, emphasis added throughout).

The Financial Times, in an article titled “Germany Shows How to Score on and off the Football Pitch,” attributed Berlin’s success to well-thought-out strategic tactics, showing that winning emerges from long-term planning whether in sports or finances (May 25-26, 2013). This piece also clearly demonstrated that the United Kingdom (fourth globally in GDP) suffers when compared with Germany in almost all economic statistical categories.

Since Germany remains the geographic, strategic and economic center of Europe, should the world be anxious about where Berlin may be headed in the future?

German dominance still a big concern

Professor Brendan Simms, author of the recently published book Europe: The Struggle for Supremacy, From 1453 to the Present, also wrote an article in the British New Statesman. His magazine piece begins: “A spectre is once again haunting Europe—the spectre of German power. The past five years have coincided with a remarkable increase in the influence of Germany, which has so far weathered the world economic crisis well” (“Cracked Heart of the Old World,” March 15-21, 2013).

More recently, the Financial Times stated that “Berlin’s primacy is a reality that cannot be wished away. The challenge is how to make it beneficial for everyone” (Mark Mazower, “German Fear of History Jeopardises Europe’s Future,” July 19, 2013).

The New Statesman issue itself bore this headline on the cover: “The German Problem: From Bismarck to Merkel, Why Europe Will Always Fear Berlin.” Below it were photos of previous powerful German leaders Otto von Bismarck, Adolf Hitler and Helmut Kohl, plus current German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

British newspaper headlines reveal concern and even anxiety about Berlin’s intentions. The following headlines are not the work of trashy tabloids, but are from serious newspapers—the Financial Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Sunday Times, the International Herald Tribune, and the Daily Mail. They underscore Professor Simms’ concerns:

• “Germany Too Powerful for Europe”
• “The Crisis and Making of a German Europe”
• “Germany Calls the Shots”
• “Merkel’s Jibe at [French President] Hollande Opens Franco-German Split”
• “Could Germany Spark Another War?”
• “The Week the Fourth Reich Began”

These headlines reflect a trend that began to come to the fore with the onset of the economic recession of 2008. They also reflect history.

Simms, professor of international relations history at Cambridge, writes of Germany dominating European geopolitics for more than 600 years and predicts its continuing to do so.

He also writes in his New Statesman
article: “Above all, over the past three years, there have been widespread calls for Germany to take the lead in resolving the escalating euro crisis. The foreign minister of Poland, Radek Sikorski, spoke for many when he remarked, in a speech in Berlin in 2011: ‘I fear German power less than I am beginning to fear German inactivity.’” Chancellor Angela Merkel was judged for what was perceived as her reluctant, half-hearted interventions.

Simms further comments: “To historians, none of this is new. The Germans have always been either too weak or too strong.”

Hence Winston Churchill’s wry observation during the heat of the world crisis in the 1930s, “The Hun is either at your feet or at your throat.” Today a world leader would not use such blatant language even to describe events that may eventually lead to German domination of Europe economically, politically and finally militarily.

Longstanding hostility against Germany

In the 21st century, anti-German sentiment remains strong in some places. One tactic used by Italy’s discredited Silvio Berlusconi to launch a political comeback was verbally attacking Berlin. When Chancellor Merkel last visited the city of Athens, Greece, she had to have the protection of thousands of policemen.

These feelings have strong historic roots, particularly when one remembers that two world wars with Germany marred the first half of the 20th century.

I first became acutely aware of hostility to Germany during my early life in South Texas. Surnamed Schroeder, I’m a second-generation German on my father’s side. Both of my paternal grandparents were born near Oldenburg, Germany. My mother’s roots were English and Scottish.

Prior to my parents’ marriage in 1927, she insisted on a prenuptial agreement involving my father never speaking a word of German (his first language) to any future children. He never did. My mother’s strong feelings were informed by her parents’ response to Germany’s role during World War I (1914-1918).

Further, as Simms writes, during the 1930s and 1940s “the German problem was also at the heart of European domestic politics. In France, the question of how society was to be organised against Germany underlay almost every domestic crisis.”

Nation stronger following reunification

After World War II ended in 1945, Germany was divided into two nations, with Bonn as the capital of the western Federal Republic. East Berlin remained the eastern capital. In the wake of the collapse of the Berlin Wall in late 1989, Germany was reunified in 1990.

Yet the late British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher unpopularly spoke out against German reunification before it happened. There is little evidence that she ever changed her mind. Like Churchill before her, Thatcher deeply grasped the enormous genius, power and potential of the German peoples.

Reunification has meant a much stronger Germany, fully capable of leading all of Europe. The enormous increase both in territory and population was bound to have its long-term consequences, not to mention regaining the traditional capital of Berlin in 1999.

The city of Berlin has undergone a substantial program of rebuilding, refurbishment and renewal—including constructing perhaps the newest, finest and largest railway station in the world, several stories high. In recent years the results of reunification have been manifested for all to see.

A historian’s warning

A. J. P. Taylor was one of Britain’s pre-eminent historians and an authority on the subject of German unity and reunification. He noted regarding Germany that while “throughout modern times Europe has been composed of independent states . . . One power has tended to predominate or at least to be stronger than others” (Europe: Grandeur and Decline, 1967, p. 7).

Professor Taylor viewed the German nation from the standpoint of a British citizen who had seen his country go to war with Berlin twice within a half century. Those two wars brought 10 years of devastating conflict with much economic deprecation and many lives lost on both sides.

So he concluded: “What is wrong with Germany is there is too much of it. There are too many Germans, and Germany is too strong, too well organised, too well equipped with industrial resources. The greater Germany is a very recent appearance, created overnight by Bismarck and completed only by Hitler” (p. 121).

Taylor further stated, “The German problem, past and present, is the problem of German unity.” And he minced no words by saying that “the harsh truth of German history is that the solution of the German question cannot be found within Germany. Partition cannot be maintained as a permanent policy, yet a united Germany will keep Europe in apprehension” (pp. 165-166).

He also made this stark controversial prediction: “A Germany free from foreign control will seek to restore the United Greater Germany which Hitler achieved in 1938; nor will democracy prove an automatic safeguard against a new German aggression” (p. 165).

Of course, today’s Germany does not necessarily fully bear out Professor Taylor’s statements. It remains a fully functioning democracy at present. Yet the euro crisis clearly brought to light the enormous—and some would even say oppressive— influence that Berlin can bring on less influential southern European countries.

The European Union and Germany’s position within it

There is little doubt among many observers that the European Union (EU) and the euro in particular are on trial. German author Ulrich Beck writes in his book German Europe: “Fifty-five years after the signing of the Rome Treaties, which brought the European Economic Community into being, its successor [the EU] is making desperate efforts to prove to the world and to itself that it can withstand the severest test in its history” (2013, p. 10).

The countries of Southern Europe feel exploited. These relatively economically weak EU states have experienced (and are periodically experiencing) angry street protests and bouts of aggressive behavior by disturbed citizens. Immigrants and refugees remain particularly vulnerable.

In this disturbing context, “Angela Merkel, Germany’s chancellor since November 2005, is now the longest-serving national leader in the European Union. Her country is more dominant in the EU and the euro zone than ever” (“Germany and the Euro:

Beck notes: “Angela Merkel is widely regarded as the unceremonial queen of Europe. If we inquire into the basis of her power we become aware of one characteristic feature of her effectiveness: her tendency not to act at all, to decide the time is not yet ripe, to act at a later date—in short, to procrastinate. In the European crisis Merkel delayed taking decisions from the very outset” (p. 47).

Merkel recognizes that she has to protect her national political power. She has to, as Beck quotes Der Spiegel, “defend German money and German competitiveness in world markets” to survive in office (p. 48).

National electability as German chancellor does not mesh well with Berlin’s central role as the European Union’s builder and main financier. Yet Merkel “faces a huge and continuing problem: the euro crisis. This is the big test for her political legacy” (“The Merkel Method”).

What sticks in the throat of other European countries is Berlin’s expectation that they should adopt German methods of economic austerity and other financial strategies in solving their debt and growth problems.

This overall problem was underscored in the *Financial Times* article mentioned earlier: “Berlin’s 21st century conception of hegemony is about forging a set of rules and continuing problem: the euro crisis. This is the big test for her political legacy” (“The Merkel Method”).

Germany in prophecy: an unwitting agent of punishment

What are Berlin’s real intentions? Again Ulrich Beck observes: “We perceive once again that Germany’s rise to the position of the leading power in ‘the German Europe’ is not the consequence of a secret master plan, cunningly conceived and adroitly executed” (p. 54). He believes that the status in which Berlin finds itself has come about as an unplanned “conspiracy” of circumstances and dovetailing events rather than emerging due to the sinister plotting of a cadre of actual conspirators.

A passage in the Bible tends to confirm this supposition. God’s Word presented the ancient Assyrians as a God-ordained punisher of the nation of Israel, ultimately carrying the northern 10 tribes into national captivity in the late 700s B.C. because of their incorrigible wickedness.

There is often duality in the fulfillment of Bible prophecy, an earlier prototypical fulfillment followed by a later ultimate fulfillment, showing that on occasion history does indeed repeat itself.

The publishers of *The Good News* have often pointed out evidence that the descendants of ancient Israel today comprise such countries as the United States, Britain and several specific nations of the British Commonwealth—and that, like their ancestors, these modern nations are repeating their sins and rejection of their Creator. (To learn more, download or request our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

History, coupled with certain passages in the Hebrew Bible, also tends to indicate that the German peoples are most likely descended from the ancient Assyrians.

With these points in mind, a passage in the book of Isaiah makes a lot of sense in our modern times: “Woe to Assyria, the rod of My [God’s] anger and the staff in whose hand is My indignation. I will send him [the nation of Assyria] against an ungodly nation [Israel] . . . Yet he does not mean so, nor does his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and cut off not a few nations” (Isaiah 10:5-6).

An ancient pattern of national judgment

Historically God has used gentile (non-Israelite) countries to punish His people for their sinfulness and rejection of Him. For instance, the Philistines punished Israel several times during the time of the Judges as they drifted from God.

After Israel became a strong nation under King David and his son Solomon, God dealt with King Solomon’s idolatry by dividing the nation into two separate kingdoms after his death. Then the wayward 10 tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel suffered punishment from the Assyrians, who invaded and took them into national captivity in foreign lands, where they eventually lost their identity and came to be known to history as “the lost 10 tribes.”

The kingdom of Judah, made up mainly of two of the 12 tribes of Israel, failed to heed the lesson of their brother tribes to the north and were invaded and exiled in King Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon more than a century later.

God later restored a portion of Judah to its own land, and the returning Jews rebuilt the city of Jerusalem and a new temple. But in A.D. 70 the armies of the Roman General Titus vanquished Jerusalem and all but ended the stay of the Jewish peoples in the Holy Land for many centuries.

What Bible prophecy shows

Many passages from the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation fit together to show that a new world superpower will emerge centered in Europe. In prophetic language it is called “the Beast.” This end-time world power will dominate the globe, as Revelation 13 shows. A group of 10 nations or groups of nations will give their power to a European-based charismatic dictator also called the Beast. *The Good News* has published this basic prophetic message for years.

One nation will dominate this ominous alliance of countries. Both the Bible and history coupled together with current events and trends show that most likely that nation will be Germany.

Jesus Christ tells us all to watch and pray so that these prophesied events do not take us by surprise: “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare to all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:34-36).

These end-time events will affect the whole world, as Jesus Christ Himself foretold in His lengthy prophecy recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. One of the purposes of *The Good News* magazine is to warn about this world crisis to come and to give people hope by publishing the good news of a vastly different and better age of peace and prosperity that will follow.

What should you do? Heed the Bible’s warnings by making needed changes in your personal life and living as God tells you to. Observing the Ten Commandments would be a good beginning! GN

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To better understand what will happen as foretold in Bible prophecy, download or request our free booklets *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy, The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* All give key information to help you understand where the world is headed and why! Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our website.
Disappointment and disorder: the Middle East a prime example

End-time events continue to escalate. The trends of our time regress steadily from bad to worse. Yet another decade of pronounced world disorder seems inevitable. Massive protests are growing in numbers and intensity at crucial points around the world. They call it people power. On the whole things have not yet gotten completely out of control. But when world trends do get far worse, what do you think will happen in the streets?

The Middle East is a prime example of a region afflicted with administrative confusion and governmental disorder. In Egypt the Arab Spring did not lead to the free democratic visions of many in the West. Islamist President Mohamed Morsi’s new administration soon began to return to dictatorial methods of government. The Egyptian military placed him under arrest, and new riots soon ensued with deadly violence in Cairo resulting in considerable loss of life.

While the military now holds the power, it should be remembered that Islamists took 75 percent of the vote in the 2011 parliamentary elections. In fact, some analysts believe the coup deposing Morsi will lead to more Islamist supporters becoming radicalized (“Egypt in Turmoil: Salafists Gain Strength Amid Political Chaos,” Der Spiegel, July 16, 2013).

For those who think the military will put the march to Western-style democracy back on track, think again. As Caroline Glick writes in The Jerusalem Post: “The voices of liberal democracy in Egypt are so few and far between that they have no chance whatsoever of gaining power, today or for the foreseeable future” (“Israel’s Reviled Strategic Wisdom,” July 4).

Besides the high support for the Islamists, she goes on to say: “it is clear that their opponents are not liberal democrats. They are a mix of neo-Nasserist fascists, communists and other not particularly palatable groups. None of them share Western conceptions of freedom and limited government. None of them are particularly pro-American. None of them support maintaining Egypt’s cold peace with Israel.”

Next door in Libya, Western liberation and Gadafi’s demise was soon followed by the country descending into armed chaos.

Turning to Syria, prospects of peace and stability seem very far off. Even if President Bashar al-Assad is turned out of office, a strong possibility persists that at best this will turn out to be the lesser of two evils. Keeping jihadists at bay may become very difficult. A retired general has warned the United States that military involvement will only be the thin end of the wedge. Events in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq back him up.

Iraq continues to be plagued by terrorist bombings often with severe loss of life, still suffering from the age-old Sunni-Shia conflict. Both American and European political and diplomatic influence remains on the wane. Washington and Brussels have experienced frustration after frustration, as their advice has been regularly rebuffed in Mideast capitals. Two years ago U.S. President Barack Obama asked Assad to step aside. Yet he remains in office.

Now we are pinning our hopes on the agreed resumption of the on-again, off-again Israeli-Palestinian peace dialogue. Perhaps some fruit will yet emerge from Secretary of State John Kerry’s considerable efforts, but only the second coming of Jesus Christ to His new world capital of Jerusalem will truly change the destiny of the Middle East. Until that time we seem to be moving steadily toward Armageddon. You may wish to download or request our free reprint article “Armageddon: The End of the World.” (Sources: Der Spiegel, Financial Times, The Jerusalem Post, Time.)

Japan: a determined military revival

As one soldier put it: “For Japan to remain an independent country, defense is indispensable. . . . I would like to be the shield to protect Japanese people” (quoted in “As Tensions Rise, Pacifist Japan Marches Into a Military Revival,” The Wall Street Journal, July 18, 2013).

After 70 years of relative pacifism, Japanese leaders seem determined to transform the country’s military capacity, freeing it from constraints imposed after World War II. Tokyo is going to increase defense spending due mainly to possible hostilities with both North Korea and China. Underscoring this determination was the August 6 launch of Japan’s largest warship since World War II, a $1.2 billion helicopter carrier.

U.S. response has been mixed. America fears that remilitarization will worsen Japan’s relationship with China. Yet Washington needs both Japan and Australia as allies in the Pacific region.

Although China and Japan are in a protracted dispute over the ownership of certain adjacent islands, “China needs to buy Japanese products as much as Japan needs to sell them” (“Mutual Assured Production,” Foreign Affairs, July-August 2013). Boycotting Japanese products might endanger the Chinese economic miracle. So mutual economic interests may keep the peace, at least for a time.

Biblical prophecy indicates that both China and Japan will likely play a role in end-time prophecy, perhaps as part of “the kings of the east,” whose forces invading the Middle East will lead to Armageddon (Revelation 16:12, 14). (Sources: Foreign Affairs, The Wall Street Journal.)

Revisiting the Iranian nuclear threat

Will a surprising turn in Tehran, bringing an ostensibly more moderate president to the fore, slow down Iran’s march to possess a nuclear bomb? Not according to The Economist, which states below an article headline, “Neither Iran’s election, nor sanctions nor military threats are likely to divert it from the path it is on to getting nuclear weapons” (“Iran’s Nuclear Programme: Breakout Beckons,” June 22, 2013, emphasis added throughout).

The same magazine stated in its lead editorial: “A friendlier president becomes a trap as well as an opportunity. He may offer the chance of building better relations through engagement and the gradual lifting of sanctions. But Iran could take advantage of this inevitably slow process to build a weapon” (“Persian Power: Can Iran Be Stopped?” June 22).

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, speaking about the Iranian President-elect Hassan Rouhani, stated: “His strategy is be a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Smile and build a bomb” (Face the Nation, CBS News, July 14).

The Times of London reported, “A huge new underground labyrinth uncovered by Iranian dissidents is being scrutinised by British and other Western intelligence agencies to determine whether it could be used for nuclear enrichment” (“Alarm Over Iran’s New Underground Complex,” July 12). Also this site (confirmed by German intelligence as well) has been watched by the British government for some time to determine whether it could be used for enrichment. It has been judged “unlikely to be innocent” (ibid.).

Meanwhile Israel casts a wary eye over most of its neighbors. There are even reports that Saudi Arabia is aiming missiles at both Iran and Israel (“Desert Missile Base Is Aiming at Iran and Israel, Say Analysts,” The Times, July 11). The new talks between Israel and the Palestinians are taking place in the shadow of a Middle East apparently headed towards Armageddon.

You need to gain an insightful historic and prophetic perspective of this critical area of the globe. To understand the vital background to today’s events, download or request our free booklet The Middle East in Bible Prophecy (Sources: CBS News, The Economist, The Times [London].)
The royal family today and tomorrow

The world is abuzz about the newborn son of Britain’s Prince William and Duchess Kate—George Alexander Louis or Prince George of Cambridge, third in line to the British throne after Prince Charles and Prince William. His birth on July 22, 2013, dominated the media and captured the world’s attention.

Prior to the birth, it was speculated that this could serve as a boost to the economy and national pride. “Richard Cope, director of trends at the global market research firm Mintel, says the possibilities abound for using the royal birth to economic advantage. ‘These kinds of events do raise...people’s sense of pride,’ Cope said. ‘It makes them enjoy being British.’ And they make people all over the world curious about kings and queens and castles...While a royal birth isn’t a typical economic event, things have a way of morphing in the social media age” (“Baby Bounce: Royal Infant May Help UK Economy,” Associated Press, June 12, 2013).

Not since the late 1900s have there been three males in line for the crown of England. In the world of royalty, this is unusual, even for Britain. The English love their royals; it echoes past greatness and speaks to a much greater royal line for the future. (Read online or download our free e-booklet The Throne of Britain: Its Biblical Origin and Future at www.ucg.org/booklets to learn more.)

The Bible speaks about the future King of Kings and Lord of Lords of divine royalty. When He returns, He will reign on the earth as the sovereign power of eternal royalty (Revelation 19:16), and His resurrected saints will also be of eternal, divine royalty (Revelation 5:10). Royalty today then becomes a symbol of a future divine royalty, promised to selfless servants of God and man. Spiritual perspective gives purpose and a goal worthy of pursuing divine royalty. (Source: Associated Press)

Detroit: only one of America’s debt-ridden cities

The financial demise of Detroit proved no surprise to those watching the news on a regular basis. At one time America’s fourth most populous city hosting automakers General Motors, Ford and Chrysler, the Motor City has lost 63 percent of its population since 1950. Although there are some signs of renewal in its inner city, downward trends have been obvious for decades. Crime, government corruption, financial scandals plus dysfunctional family life have all played their role in Detroit’s slide into bankruptcy.

But as The Economist recently pointed out beneath a recent headline: “It’s not just Detroit. American cities and states must promise less or face disaster” (“America’s Public Finances: The Unsteady States of America,” July 27, 2013).

The Financial Times added, “While Detroit is an extreme example of urban decay, its predicament sheds light on similar problems that afflict a number of US cities” (cover teaser for “Detroit: Descent Into Despair,” July 26).

Time magazine revealed that Birmingham, New Orleans and Philadelphia are among the foremost examples of cities with serious debt obligations in the millions (Aug. 5). Primary blame has been assigned to pensions, but society having gone awry in its fundamental relationships between people must figure heavily in such severe debt problems.

City governments wind up footing the costs of sin—both social and monetary. And ultimately, individual taxpayers and private business pick up the tab. As the Economist article concluded, “America’s dynamic private sector is carrying on its back an unrefomed Leviathan. Detroit is merely a symptom of that.” (Sources: The Economist, Financial Times, Time.)

Western nations have witnessed a pronounced shift to acceptance of same-sex marriage as a legitimate lifestyle. This has been coming for a while. As nations changed their laws to legalize homosexual behavior, what has followed became inevitable. Biblical laws that have held sway for millennia have been carelessly cast aside by people who think they know better than God. This overall movement has even started to spread to nominal Christianity.

Christian ministries previously devoted to helping homosexuals to abandon their lifestyles are giving up the fight. For instance, Exodus International has closed its doors after nearly 40 years and even half-apologized for its previous efforts. A few even appear to misrepresent biblical teaching on the matter.

A USA Today column points out that Christian opposition to homosexual lifestyles “has based its position on an authoritative text that has not undergone any revisions of late—the Bible, aka the word of God” (“Some Christians Shift on Gays,” July 17, 2013). But it then argues that following the Bible’s message of tolerance and acceptance rather than denouncing sinful behavior should be the way forward.

Of course, we must have love and kindness toward all people. But part of love is informing people they need to repent of sin! Because God does not change (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17; Hebrews 13:8), neither does His Word. Nor does it allow excusing principles of living peaceably and kindly do away with people’s need to stop disobeying God and start obeying Him—or with His Church’s need to proclaim that to everyone. God says of those who give in to such thinking, “You have strengthened the hands of the wicked, so that he does not turn from his wicked way” (Ezekiel 13:22).

The law God gave through Moses explicitly condemned homosexual behavior. And Jesus Christ did not come to abrogate God’s law (Matthew 5:17; Luke 16:17). Moreover, He commanded people to repent of disobedience and told His followers to continue this call to repentance—though striving with God’s help to make progress in reforming themselves first. The apostle Paul upheld the biblical teaching on homosexual behavior in three different New Testament books.

Of course, approaching others in this regard should be as kind as possible. But the mere suggestion that others are doing wrong is often taken by them as judgmental, mean-spirited or even hateful. Furthermore, it’s often necessary to give a serious warning to shake people enough to even care. That is what God does in the Bible—though His mercy is vast.

A major themes of Psalm 103 is God’s merciful forgiveness (verses 3-4, 8-14). That is one reason Jesus Christ died for our sins, making forgiveness and reconciliation to the Father possible. If God’s intent was to abrogate His law and by fiat cast it aside, then Jesus Christ would not have needed to die!

Christians who obey God’s laws are facing a time of great trial and persecution. Nonetheless, God says that Jesus Christ will rescue His own by bringing a new world of unparalleled peace. But in the meantime, we have to both contend for and hold fast to the original faith once delivered to the saints ( Jude 3-4). This is what God requires! (Source: USA Today)

How can you make sense of the news?

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

Why do you believe and think the way you do? Years ago I was confronted by this question when it came to religion. What I discovered led me to another momentous question: Would I change the spiritual course of my life or continue following the crowd?  

by John LaBissoniere

In my youth it seemed like my father was always instructing my brothers and sisters and me on matters of character and decision-making. Especially as we entered our teenage years, he frequently told us to not just “follow the crowd.”

He would often voice this when we fretted about what “all our friends” got to do and we couldn’t. Maybe they could stay out until 1:00 a.m., go to unchaperoned parties or have fun at other “popular” activities. Dad always told us, “Just because others do something doesn’t mean you should too!”

As a self-employed businessman, my father often challenged conventional wisdom. He taught us to analyze what we read, heard and thought about doing. We didn’t always appreciate his advice, but as we grew older its value became clear. In fact it helped me to examine my thinking about religion.

Comparing beliefs with the Bible

Like many people, I grew up attending a mainstream church. As a boy I simply assumed that what I was being taught was right. I never questioned that church’s teachings. However, in my early 20s I was challenged to compare my beliefs with what the Bible actually taught.

I began studying such subjects as the seventh-day Sabbath, the immortal soul, heaven and hell, the Trinity, and traditional Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter. While examining what the Bible says about these and many other topics, I discovered glaring conflicts with my church’s long-established doctrines and traditions.

In addition, I learned that God holds each individual accountable for his or her spiritual decisions and actions. In other words, a person can’t justify bad or unwise choices and behavior with the excuse that his religious organization believes or acts a certain way. God doesn’t look on people as members of groups, but as unique individuals who are responsible for our own choices.

In fact I learned that God, as the One who created us, knows intimately and unquestionably what’s best for each of His children (Isaiah 29:16). He wants us to live joyful, abundant lives (John 10:10).

Our first parents, Adam and Eve, refused to follow their Father’s instructions. They wanted to decide for themselves what was good and evil. The tragic result of their choice was suffering and their ultimate deaths (Genesis 2:16-17).

Life and death, blessing and cursing

Later, God gave each person in ancient Israel the same choice (Deuteronomy 30:19). He told them to “choose life” by obeying His laws. They rejected His counsel. The result was enormous suffering and heartache. They preferred to “follow the crowd” of the surrounding nations that lived by their own rules (see 2 Kings 17:15).

God repeatedly warned His people to not make that fateful mistake (Deuteronomy 18:9). Through Moses He said: “Don’t do something just because everyone else is doing it. If you see a group of people doing wrong, don’t join them. You must not let them persuade you to do wrong things—you must do what is right and fair” (Exodus 23:2, Easy-to-Read Version).

Besides learning this, I came to see that little has changed since the days of ancient Israel. Nearly all people have made this same decision to decide for themselves what is good and evil. Humanity’s tragic, painful history demonstrates that this approach just doesn’t work. I discovered that lying in wait to take advantage of our disastrous choices is Satan the devil. He’s the original defiant sinner and hater of God (1 John 3:8). By choosing to ignore God’s perfect way of life, people have set themselves up to be deceived and manipulated by this great “dragon” (2 Corinthians 4:4; Revelation 12:9).

The whole world enticed by the devil

I learned just how pervasive the devil’s...
influence is. It’s so overwhelming that the Bible says that “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19, emphasis added throughout).

And what’s the world like as a result? In the battle between good and evil throughout the centuries, it’s not hard to see that evil has been winning (Isaiah 59:4, 7-8).

To make matters worse, the Bible plainly reveals that since the whole world has been deceived by the devil, this also includes Christian churches and those who profess Christianity.

Many deceived by lawless pretenders

When Jesus’ disciples asked Him about the signs of His second coming, the very first thing He cautioned them about was to “take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying that I am Christ; and shall deceive many” (Matthew 24:4-5, King James Version).

Jesus warned His disciples about bogus ministers who would present themselves as Christian. He said they would be figuratively dressed “in sheep’s clothing.” These treacherous individuals would decoy as “ravenous wolves,” who would exploit people for their own purposes (Matthew 7:15).

The apostle Paul said that even though these crafty people would appear caring and virtuous, they would actually be lawless pretenders. He wrote: “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Can all the churches be right?

It’s stunning to realize just how deep the deception is. According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, there are 41,000 Christian denominations and organizations around the globe. Each teaches its own version of the truth. It’s just not logical to think that all of them could be correct!

Should there be any question that the many biblical warnings and prophecies about counterfeit Christianity have come to pass?

Not only was I astounded by this concept, but God opened my eyes to another vitally important truth. Jesus referred to people who would pretend to have the truth: “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness’” (Matthew 7:22-23).

Worshipping in vain

Jesus said of religious practitioners in His day, “In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9). Worshipping God apart from doing what He says to do is a vain exercise. Most who profess Christianity today don’t realize that in large part they’re out-of-sync with biblical teachings. In fact, they are really conforming to humanly devised religious ideas, beliefs and practices.

The apostle John explained that unless a person obeys God he can’t understand genuine truth: “He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4).

So how can someone really know Jesus Christ? It’s through His words that are carefully revealed in the pages of the Bible (Hebrews 4:12). In referring to Himself as the One who saves us, Jesus said, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

Jesus was the impeccable example of one who zealously “chose life” by diligently carrying out His Father’s will in everything (Matthew 26:39). Christ said that He is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

And what was this “way” He talked about? His mission was to encourage people to repent of sin while announcing the government or Kingdom of God. He said He will establish the Kingdom on earth at His second coming (Mark 1:14-15). He carried out His duty not only in what He said but in what He did. He lived “the way” of the Kingdom Himself. Specifically, He lived in complete obedience to the very laws He’ll enforce in His coming global administration (John 15:10).

Living by every word of God

Unlike today’s world of lawlessness and selfishness, the Kingdom of God will be a shining example of true righteousness. The Bible defines righteousness as keeping God’s commandments (Psalms 119:172). Jesus Christ’s way of life guarantees abundant peace and prosperity for everyone.

Most excitingly, you and I don’t have to wait until Christ’s return to live the way of the Kingdom. We can do it now by repenting of our sins, accepting Jesus Christ as our Savior and striving to live by every word of God (1 John 3:4; Luke 4:4). If we do, we’ll be just as innovative and unconventional as Jesus was when He walked the earth.

After I had been introduced to all of this amazing knowledge, I was challenged by another critical question: Would I be willing to act on what God showed me? The apostle James wrote that we must be “doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving” ourselves (James 1:22).

Real faith and courage needed

So there I stood at a spiritual crossroads.

I could have decided to remain in my “comfort zone” and simply ignored what I learned. But if I had, I wouldn’t have been true to myself. Most importantly, I wouldn’t have been true to my Maker and Judge.

Recalling my father’s advice, I decided that following the crowd wasn’t an option. Instead, I chose to follow and obey Jesus Christ with all my heart, soul and mind (Luke 10:27). Doing so liberated me from false ways that have no biblical foundation (John 8:32). Jesus said that those who desire eternal life must “enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it” (Matthew 7:13).

So what about you? If you’ve been reading The Good News or watching the Beyond Today television program, you may recognize that what you read and hear comes from the Bible. These teachings are often very different from traditional Christian doctrines, customs and practices.

In the same way that I took up the challenge many years ago, are you willing to examine your thinking and beliefs in comparison to what the Bible actually says? Are you prepared to make changes in your life to reflect what it really teaches? It takes genuine faith and courage from God to not “follow the crowd.” What choice will you make? GN

Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our website.
At various times I’ve had this recurring dream. I would be somewhere out in public and find myself missing one or more pieces of clothing. From my reading about dreams I learned that I am not alone in such dreams. It’s a bit unnerving until I wake up and realize it’s only a dream.

I don’t know the psychological reason for such a dream, and I don’t really care. I’m not someone who desires to go out of the house naked, and I generally think it’s a rather bad idea. But I’m reminded of being found without adequate clothing by one of Christ’s parables.

In the parable, Jesus tells of a king who prepares a great marriage feast for his son. None of the first round of invitees is willing to come, and a second group is invited. While everyone who comes is sitting at the tables enjoying the occasion, one man is singled out for attention because he does not have on the right garments.

“But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless” (Matthew 22:11-12). It doesn’t say he was naked, but he was missing something. He did not have on the right garments.

Why is the matter of proper dress at a wedding so important? It’s important because the man was making a statement against what the marriage feast represented. His presence was an intolerable offense.

“Because of the interest shown in a modern royal wedding, it’s hard to understand in this parable why some would reject the invitation. But it says, “‘They were not willing to come’ (verse 3). Even when the event was described—a menu of prime rib, steaks and all you can eat, and dancing to a full orchestra under the stars on the palace grounds—they still wouldn’t come.

The king’s servants, sent to encourage them to attend, were seized by them and treated in a shameful manner, showing great dishonor to the king. The wrath of the king was kindled to a white-hot fury: “But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city” (verses 7-8).

The marriage feast would still go on, regardless of the fact that those invited would not attend. The king decreed that the invitation go out “into the highways,” giving people everywhere from all walks of life, “both good and bad,” opportunity to attend the marriage of his son and the planned festivities. This was an unprecedented invitation. People from all nations were given opportunity to choose to come, or not, to the marriage feast. In this parable is profound teaching.

A calling to salvation

God’s calling or invitation is not a light matter. The calling to salvation, pictured here by the glory of a marriage feast, is a beautiful, precious and once-in-a-lifetime matter. It’s why the garment, or lack of one, was such an issue for the king.

The garment is important to understand. And the attitude of the guest in not wearing the garment is also important. Let’s first look at what the garment represents.

This is where it gets easy because the Bible tells us exactly what the garment of this parable means. Revelation 19 states: “And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself...”
In Jesus’ parable, the man who refused to wear a wedding garment was bound, taken away and cast into outer darkness.

“Then He taught them many things by parables . . .” (Mark 4:2).

Every morning we get out of bed and dress for the day. We put our clothing on one piece at a time, starting with undergarments and progressing to shirts and pants and skirts. Character is likewise put on one piece at a time—one action at a time.

Some things are easier than others. If you have had anger issues for years, it can be very hard to change to a calmer, less agitated nature, but it can be done.

If you are filled with pride and lacking humility, just a single intense trial can reshape the self-image to a flattened, less inflated one. Ask anyone who has lost a job or gone through a life-changing event.

Character can be altered. But it requires that we have a deep desire to change.

Researchers who study the mechanics of human behavior have concluded that a person will be more likely to change a behavior when an emotional level is reached. Another way to put this is that we change when the heart is touched. It’s usually only then that lasting change can be created in a person’s life. Thus, one must come to the point where he or she has a desire to change for any hope of a new “garment” to be worn.

And with that desire we must also have commitment to follow through.

**Willful defiance**

With this in mind, we return to the guest at the supper who was found to be lacking the right garment. This man did not have on the right garment by choice. Knowing what was required, he nonetheless willfully chose to come to the marriage feast without wearing the right clothing. Further, he was determined not to put on these garments.

He was defiantly opposing the king and all the king represented. He was opposing everything the marriage feast represented. He was also aligning himself with the opposition—those who had initially refused to accept the invitation. Here was a willfully defiant attitude of the deepest kind.

When confronted by the king he had nothing to say. There really was nothing for him to say. He knew the consequences of violating the dress code.

The king’s pronouncement is chilling: “Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’” (Matthew 22:13). It is a severe penalty. The outer darkness indicates a time of judgment.

God will judge the world in righteousness, and all who hold defiant attitudes like the one described here will face a time of reckoning.

The judgment comes for not wearing the right garment—or having a frame of mind that God cannot reach. It is an awful matter to consider. This is one of the harder aspects of Christ’s teaching. It is sobering to consider and realize that our actions have consequences. In our modern ways of thinking we’d like to pretend that our choices and actions don’t matter all that much and that everything is relative, but this parable shows that simply isn’t true.

**Many are called, but few are chosen**

The parable concludes with a statement from Christ that “many are called, but few are chosen” (verse 14). The word “chosen” here applies to those who not only receive a call, but willingly choose to come, being sure they are dressed with the right garment, and remain committed to the Kingdom of God. To them the Kingdom means everything. They are willing pay any price, make any sacrifice, and remain committed for life to God and His values.

In this parable the king represents God the Father and the king’s son is of course Jesus Christ. Those invited to the marriage feast are those God invites to prepare now, in this lifetime, for His Kingdom, which will be established on the earth when Christ returns. To accept this invitation is to become a “lifer.” You are in for the duration, with no intention or option of quitting. This Kingdom, this feast, becomes your all.

I wake up from my dreams relieved to not be found out in public naked. How about you? Are you missing a garment while thinking you are all dressed and ready? This parable is a wake-up call for all of us to make sure we wear the right garments of godly righteousness! GN
E arly in His ministry, Jesus Christ highlighted a spiritual quality that would permeate the heart of those heeding His personal invitation of “Follow Me.” He plainly stated, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7). He also stated at the same time that we should not be condemning of others (Matthew 7:1-2). It’s easy to ponder such lofty ideals, but how do we maintain a merciful and uncondemning outlook?

Let’s face the plain facts: We are far too often ready to point the finger at others for some wrongdoing, but not quick to judge ourselves first. An attitude of mercy toward others can flow from awareness of the mercy we ourselves need. Jesus was confronted by a situation where others were quick to condemn while not addressing their own sinful attitudes—and He justly turned the tables on them, literally saving the life of an otherwise condemned person in the process.

Let’s consider what happened—and what our own attitude should be when faced with the sins of others.

Caught in the very act!

We start by joining Jesus early in the morning as He is teaching within the temple complex in Jerusalem (John 8:1). Just the day before, on the seventh and last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, He had stirred up the crowd by proclaiming: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37-38). A springboard for this declaration was a ritual performed during the Feast—the water-pouring ceremony at the temple altar, which reached its height on the seventh day.

Many marveled at Jesus’ words, in which He essentially proclaimed Himself to be the Messiah and the Lord God of Israel, the source of the living waters of God’s Holy Spirit. Others, however, were offended and “wanted to take him, but no one laid hands on Him” (verse 44).

Now on the next day, He is once again sharing words with an audience in the temple complex—this day being the sacred Eighth Day festival immediately following the Feast of Tabernacles.

It is here on a Holy Day, in a holy setting, that Jesus’ enemies spring what they think is a foolproof trap to try to discredit and condemn Him before the multitude.

As Jesus is teaching, the scribes and Pharisees thrust a woman caught in adultery right in front of the gathered crowd. (John 8:2-3). They proclaim before all that she had not merely been caught in adultery, but “in the very act” (verse 4). This leaves little to the imagination and even less for any possible defense from the frightened woman.

They demanded of Jesus: “Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?” (verse 4). The poor woman was only a pawn in a greater game. Their actions weren’t about punishing her, for John explains that “they were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him” (verse 6, New International Version).

They had Him between a rock and a hard place. If He agreed that she should be stoned to death, He would be upholding their position and contradicting His reputation for forgiveness and compassion. But if He said she should not be punished, they would charge Him with contradicting the law.

While the scribes and Pharisees press their case, Jesus stoops down and writes on the ground with His finger as if He doesn’t even hear them (verse 6). Is it possible that Christ may have been sharing matters known but to Him, as the Son of God, about those with stones in their hands?

A further possibility is presented in our online Bible commentary notes (at www.ucg.org/brp) on Jeremiah 17: “Those who depart from the Lord, ‘the fountain of living waters,’ shall be ‘written in the earth’ (verse 13). This apparently refers to being written in sand, which signifies no permanence at all—as opposed to being ‘written in heaven’ (Luke 10:20) in the ‘book of life’ (Revelation 13:8; 20:12, 15).

“Perhaps Jeremiah 17:13 explains why Jesus, after declaring Himself the source of living waters (John 7:37-38) and being rejected as such by the religious leaders of His day (verses 45-53), ‘wrote on the ground’ when these religious leaders came to entrap Him the next morning (8:1-9).”

Knowing the scriptural reference, these Bible scholars would have been very disturbed at Jesus’ action here even if they didn’t see what He was writing.

Christ then rises and utters one of the most memorable sayings ever spoken: “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first” (verse 7). Jesus did not dismiss what the woman had done, but He focused attention on the accusers. Why?

Let’s first understand that the One the Israelites knew as God in the Old Testament period was the same divine Being who came to earth as Jesus Christ (see John 1:1-14 and our free booklet Jesus Christ: The Real Story). And He had given Israel a just legal system—that included executing adulterers. So what was the problem with the proceedings here?

One problem some have pointed out is that they did not fulfill the requirement found in Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22 that both the man and woman caught in adultery were to receive the same punishment. Where was the man? It’s possible that he had escaped and was on the run. But
condemned by their own consciences.

A stark contrast in mindset and approach

At this point an amazing portrait is etched in word. Jesus gently inquires: “Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?” (verse 10). She responds, “No one, Lord.” He then replies, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more” (verse 11).

From a legal standpoint, with no witnesses the case was automatically dismissed. The woman was free to go. But Jesus still had an important message for the woman. Jesus did not dodge the subject of sin, for He mentioned it twice. He was well aware that the woman was guilty, but He chose to grant her a future. This was in no way “cheap grace” or winking at breaking God’s commandments. In granting mercy, He did not lower the bar but raised it even higher by telling her to stop sinning—to repent and turn her life around.

He was basically saying: You have a second opportunity. I have given you a new life! Cease from the way of sin. I’ll be with you going forward, but don’t look back and find yourself once again where I found you. The “rivers of living water” spoken of by Christ the day before were swirling all around her at that moment.

What a stark contrast here between the teachers of the law and the One who came to clarify its intent. Jesus was prepared to forgive and restore the woman while still upholding the integrity of the law. Those who brought the woman forward did so hostile to Christ and with a preset attitude of condemnation in their minds and hearts.

Furthermore, their preconceived outcomes for the woman and Christ justified any available means to accomplish their evil intentions. Worse, these people stood guilty before the law themselves yet were quick to condemn others. Their inability to extend mercy to others or to see their own need for God’s mercy was striking.

The choice set before us

The lessons for us today should be clear. Forgiveness and mercy versus condemnation and judgment is a choice continually set before us. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day had elected to condemn an individual on the very festival days that were designed to remind them of God’s personal deliverance from bondage in Egypt (Leviticus 23:22-23) and His personal redemption towards them to give them a future.

Rather than accusing and condemning others, we should look at our own spiritual state and cry out for God’s mercy. And in receiving it, we should cease from sin and extend mercy to others. This does not mean that we should excuse sin in others. But we need to get ourselves right with God before considering the standing of others, as Jesus also said earlier (Matthew 7:1-5).

Let’s remember another handwriting of old on a wall in Babylon (Daniel 5:5) that shook the audience of that day in saying, “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin” (verse 25), part of which Daniel interpreted as meaning, “You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting” (verse 27).

That message is not simply directed to a pagan king of old but is an ageless statement that applied to us before God’s calling made possible a new life in Christ through His sacrifice.

Mercy is an incredible gift. Have you ever considered the difference between justice and mercy? Justice is what we squarely deserve for what we’ve done, but mercy is what we don’t deserve and yet is freely given.

The story of the woman brought before Christ that day is in many ways the story of each of us, too. Just as that woman stood guilty, condemned by her actions and decisions and yet unexpectedly and undeservedly offered a new lease on life, so do we now face the same choice. What, then, will we do?

If we turn our lives around and commit to Christ’s inviting directive of “Follow Me,” we can experience more incredible handwriting not etched on a wall or scratched in dirt. We can have God’s law written in our hearts and have our names inscribed in the Book of Life forever!

Let’s be ever grateful for the mercy we have been shown and “pass it on”—just like it was given to us. You won’t have to wait long for the opportunity in the target-rich environment of the people you encounter every day.
How Does God Identify Himself?

People wonder and speculate about God but often neglect to go directly to Him and let Him introduce Himself! God reveals Himself through two great methods. The first is His written revelation, the Bible. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible is the book by God and about God!

The second method is the evidence of creation, because it was “God who created all things through Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:9, emphasis added throughout). Not only is every creature evidence and proof of a genius Creator, but every creature gives us insight into the mind and power of the Creator.

That’s what Paul meant when he said: “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they [who would deny God] are without excuse” (Romans 1:19-20, English Standard Version).

In this study we focus on many of the wonderful things we learn about God by reading His written Word, the Bible, which is His masterpiece of self-revelation. Hopefully it will whet your appetite to read the entire Bible so that you can learn much, much more about Him.

Then as you get into the habit of studying the Bible and praying every day and putting God’s Word into practice in your everyday life, you will be forming a deep, personal relationship with God. You will be going beyond getting to know about God. You will be getting to really know God as your Father and Friend.

This study focuses on key scriptures in the Bible where God reveals highly significant things about His nature and actions.

A breakthrough in understanding

Consider the story of the righteous man Job in the biblical book that bears his name. This story relates the spiritual transformation of Job from a man who knew a great deal about God to a man who really came to know God in a personal and intimate way.

This book is highly thought-provoking. For most of the book, Job and his friends are stating what they think they know about God, but their limited views fall far short of understanding the great mind, purposes and plan of God. After God talks with Job, Job has a major breakthrough in understanding.

Job said: “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6). Job came to see God in a deeper way with the eyes of faith and spiritual understanding. Job was ashamed of accusing God of mistreating him during his ordeal, and he deeply repented. When he said, “I abhor myself,” he meant that he despised his self-justification and implications that God had been unjust and uncaring.

Job apparently came to realize more deeply that everyone’s life includes suffering and that suffering is a means to spiritual growth. Job surrendered to God’s will, having become assured that God is the sovereign Lord of the universe, has perfect understanding and always does what is best for us in the long run. We must trust Him.

Has anyone ever seen God?

Almighty God is Spirit and, in His usual glorified state, is invisible to the human eye (Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 3:17; Hebrews 11:27). That partly explains why John said, “No one has seen God at any time” (John 1:18).

But how should we interpret that since the books of the Old Testament give many accounts of God appearing to people?

Notice that the second half of John 1:18 shows that John was talking about God the Father, not God the Son, Jesus Christ. Also Jesus said, “Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God [referring to Himself, Jesus]; He has seen the Father” (John 6:46).

These verses point to the fact that the God who appeared to people during Old Testament times was the One who later became Jesus Christ!

Prior to Jesus’ birth as a human being, John refers to Him as “the Word” and as “God”: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Later John wrote, “And the Word became flesh [when He was born of Mary] and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (verse 14).

In a future study we will thoroughly prove that the God who appeared to people in Old Testament times was the Word who became Jesus Christ, not God the Father. In this study, we merely want to establish that fact to prevent any confusion.

However, when we discuss the nature or character of God, we make no distinction between God the Father and God the Son because They are identical in nature and character (see John 10:30; 14:9; 17:11, 22).
So although we don’t literally see God with our eyes (and won’t until Christ’s return to earth), we can perceive and better understand His nature, character, purposes and goals. That is the purpose of this study.

What is God’s first role with respect to our very existence?

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27).

“You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth” (Psalms 104:30).

“For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:11).

Notice that every Sabbath day is a reminder that we are created beings and a reminder of who our Creator is! That has many implications, including the fact that God is the Owner and the Supreme Ruler over His creation, and He is dedicated to providing the best possible care of His creation. We can also learn many things about Him by observing His creation, as we are told in Romans 1:18-23.

Consider that God also created all the laws, including the laws of science and mathematics and the spiritual laws.

When did creation take place? There is often confusion over this question. God’s original creation of the universe and planet earth was evidently prior to the time of Adam and Eve’s creation. But eventually the earth suffered a cataclysm and all life was destroyed. Genesis 1:2 apparently should read, “The earth became without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep” (the word typically translated “was” here is properly rendered as “became” in other verses).

Then the rest of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 are describing God’s re-creation of the world about 6,000 years ago. As Psalm 104:30 words it, God sent His Spirit to renew the face of the earth.” These two phases of God’s creation will be thoroughly explained and proved in a future study.

What single word best defines God’s character?

“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:8, repeated in verse 16).

“Jesus said . . . “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”” (Matthew 22:37-39; quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18).

Love defines God’s nature, and love is what He most wants to see in the character of His children. Therefore, it’s no surprise that His greatest commandments are to love— to love God and to love other people.

What are some other words that define God’s character?

“For the Lord is good, . . . You [God] are good and do good” (Psalms 100:5; 119:68).

“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

When you read the Bible, notice how often you see the words savior, save, saved and salvation. Notice also synonymous words and like deliver, delivered and deliverer. When God began to announce the Ten Commandments, He introduced Himself this way: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6). The miraculous liberation of the Israelites from Egypt illustrates God’s plan to miraculously deliver all people out of slavery to sin. And every Sabbath day is a reminder of God’s role as Savior (Deuteronomy 5:15).

The angel that appeared to Joseph told him that Mary’s child should be called Jesus (meaning Savior) “for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

The word salvation is used to refer to the various steps that God takes to save us, but our ultimate salvation will be our resurrection from mortality to glorious immortality (1 Corinthians 15:50-54).

Is God the supreme example of grace, mercy and generosity?

“The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy” (Psalm 145:8).

“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19; see also 1 Timothy 6:17; James 1:5).

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with loving-kindness and tender mercies” (Psalms 103:2-4).

Our gracious God not only provides all our needs, but also bestows on us the gift of grace. The apostle Paul often used the Greek word translated grace to refer to all the spiritual gifts that God offers humanity, including the forgiveness of sin and the offer of eternal life. God’s grace is truly amazing and awesome—it is gracious generosity greater than our minds can comprehend!

The Old Testament writers often used the Hebrew word hesed when referring to a primary characteristic of God. There is no single English word that adequately translates the profound meaning of this word. It is variously translated as “mercy,” “merciful kindness” or “loving-kindness” (which is how it is translated in Psalm 103:4),
though it also connotes covenant loyalty or faithfulness. The committed love aspect is perhaps best captured in the word devotion.

**Is our merciful God also a God of justice?**

“He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD” (Psalm 33:5).

“For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing” (Deuteronomy 10:17-18).

We live in an unjust world, and often life isn’t fair. That makes it all the more wonderful that we can rely on a God who is completely just and fair.

A central question is this: Since everyone sins and the penalty of sin is death, how can God save us and still be a God of perfect justice? It is because Jesus Christ took our place and suffered the death penalty for each of us. Jesus died to fulfill God’s justice and thereby made it possible for God to offer mercy toward all humanity—showing both the gravity of sin and God’s great love for us.

**Is God omnipotent (all-powerful)?**

“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust’” (Psalm 91:1-2).

“Ah, Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You” (Jeremiah 32:17).

“I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You” (Job 42:2).

“And what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:19-20).

The word Almighty literally means “all-powerful.” One of God’s names is El Shaddai, which is often translated “God Almighty.” All of Psalm 91 is inspiring, for it describes the complete confidence we have if we are trusting in God. After all, God can easily protect us no matter how great the dangers are.

God also has supreme spiritual power to defeat Satan the devil, to transform the worst of sinners, and to resurrect mortal human beings to become immortal glorified saints in the coming Kingdom of God.

**Is God omniscient (all-knowing and all-wise)?**

“Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite” (Psalm 147:5).

“God . . . knows all things” (1 John 3:20).

“O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether” (Psalm 139:1-4).

“The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works” (Psalm 33:13-15).

“Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Luke 12:6-7).

God not only knows everything that is taking place in all the seemingly endless universe, but He is in ultimate control over it all. How comforting to know we have a Creator and Provider who will never forget us or overlook our needs and prayers!

**Is God omnipresent (present everywhere at once)?**

“‘Am I a God near at hand,’ says the LORD, ‘And not a God afar off? Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?’ says the LORD; ‘Do I not fill heaven and earth?’ says the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:23-24; compare 2 Chronicles 2:6).

“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell [in the grave, or in the ground], behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me” (Psalm 139:7-10).

“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

God can be everywhere at once because His Spirit—His projected power, mind, life and essence—is everywhere. So the help and understanding that God sends by His Spirit are just as effective and perfect as if God were standing right beside us.

God’s Holy Spirit also serves as His eyes and ears to give God perfect and total awareness of everything in every place. Hence, God’s Spirit provides two-way communication.

**Last but not least, does God claim all authority and lordship?**

“God, who made the world and everything in it, . . . is Lord of heaven and earth” (Acts 17:24).

“For the Lord Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth . . . God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne” (Psalm 47:2, 8).

“You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3).

“You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him” (Deuteronomy 13:4).

God is the sovereign power over all the universe (see also Genesis 14:19, 22; Matthew 28:18). Everything was created by Him. He expects complete loyalty, reverence and obedience. We must not allow anything in our lives to rival God. He must always come first, as Jesus stated in Matthew 22:37, quoted earlier.

**Apply Now**

What are other qualities and characteristics of God? Write down as many as you can think of. Think about what God is like, what He has done, what He is doing now and what He promises to do. Also take time to reflect on all that you have written down. And in your prayers in the days ahead, spend time thanking God for all that He is to us and all that He does!

Also, be sure to download or request your free copy of our booklet Who Is God? People have many questions and misconceptions about who and what God is, and this booklet will show you the answers right from the pages of your Bible. To really understand God, you need to read this booklet! GN
“Five Keys to a Happy Marriage”

Marriage is a serious and sacred vow before God and man. It is precious and should not be taken lightly: a lifetime commitment of love, pain, sorrow, happy times—and a roller coaster of events throughout one’s life. It takes selflessness, patience, communication and respect for each other. For marriage to work, both spouses need to share and work together to fulfill common dreams and goals for the family. Marriage is ordained from God the Father. Knowing that he is hers and she is his alone brings trust (which should not be broken) and dependability on one another with God first in each partner’s life.

Reader on Internet

“The Boston Marathon Bombing Opens a Window on All Time”

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Unfortunately, we have not followed this instruction and we now see the consequences of turning our backs on God. I lived through terrorism in Rhodesia [now Zimbabwe]. Three of my friends were killed in a commercial airplane brought down by a terrorist missile. I lived through terrorism in South Africa. My uncle and aunt were murdered by terrorists on their farm in Natal. And now terrorism is on the increase here in America. Will we learn our lesson and return to God?

D.S., Roanoke, Texas

“Be of Good Cheer”

Thank you, Mr. Webber, for this article. I have found all of your sermons and writings to be very encouraging. Thank you for taking the time to prepare everything from God’s Word. Please keep up the hard work and serving God as you do!

C.G., Zephyrhills, Florida

The Good News

Your magazine is so greatly appreciated. I read and reread it. In these times when the devil is trying to confuse people and then divide and conquer, your articles explain and expound the truths of the Bible.

I.P., Weyauwega, Wisconsin

Your Good News magazine saved my life. And then your Bible Study Course introduced me to biblical truths. Your beautiful booklets also showed me how to understand many obscure meanings. Through your good work I was restored and led to know the important truths for myself personally, and also geopolitically. I am filled with gratitude. I wish I could match my gratitude with equal monetary donations, but this is not possible—at least not yet.

Reader from Saskatchewan, Canada

I chanced upon an old copy of The Good News at a friend’s house. Fortunately for me the copy was a little worn out and had been consigned to the disposal corner. I took it home and found its contents so incisive and thought-provoking. As a Christian, it fortifies and refines what one believes. I would be grateful if you could add my name to the subscription list.

E.N.K.-B., Ghana

I want to thank you for doing such a tremendous job with The Good News magazine. My husband and I attend a non-denominational church that is far too often afraid to speak about the subjects that line every issue of your magazine. My understanding of the Bible and who God is has grown in ways that are astonishing, thanks to The Good News. I look forward to every issue with eager anticipation and devour it the day I receive it.

J.K., Jefferson City, Missouri

You may wish to request our free booklet The Church Jesus Built.

Beyond Today viewers from Australia

I have been watching your Beyond Today TV program for several months now. Your talk on Bible prophecy is interesting and up-to-date with world events. I would very much appreciate it if you would send me The Good News magazine.

Viewer from Victoria

I love your Beyond Today program and watch it every Wednesday. I always learn something new from it. I like the honest and practical way your ministers explain the Word. I would like to request the free Bible Study Course that was offered. I am so grateful for this generous offer, as it would help me greatly in using this time to grow closer to God and Jesus—and to learn Their will as a “baby Christian.” Thank you so much for your time in reading this letter and for your awesome Beyond Today program.

Viewer from Queensland

I would just like to say how much I have enjoyed your Beyond Today television program. It is certainly a wake-up call for Australia, and also the world. I think things are going to go from bad to worse, so I really enjoy watching your program. Please pass on my sincere thanks for the free booklet you are sending me as it’s not very often you get something for free these days. I am very grateful to your church for supplying this need.

Viewer from New South Wales

Jewish reader appreciates our literature

I previously wrote to you that even though I am Jewish, I love to read your articles. I am learning things about Jesus that I never knew before. I truly appreciate the fact that you send me so much literature, and get so little in return. I would love to send more money, but I’ve just had spinal surgery and have been out of work for a few months. I can’t thank you enough for what you are doing for me, and people like me. There is so much darkness in this world and your articles are shedding light into it. Please accept my very small love gift to hopefully cover some of the costs for your wonderful booklets and magazines.

J.J.R., Covington, Kentucky

We deeply appreciate your comments, and are praying for your full recovery.

Help for prisoners

I want to thank you for the blessing you have been to so many of us who are incarcerated. Your wonderful teachings and free materials have changed the face of Christianity in prisons. This has guided so many into a more ultimate and proper faith. I can’t speak for all the states, but most of us in the Colorado Department of Corrections make only 60 cents a day. So your materials coming without cost to us is huge. Each magazine and/or pamphlet is passed around to dozens of others, producing a 30-, 60- and 100-fold harvest. What’s more, many after studying send them to family members outside.

N.S., Canon City, Colorado

Enquiries about Sabbath services

I am so grateful for your booklets and the Bible Study Course. My husband has been enjoying them too. I am so happy that he is finally begging me to read them. We are Christians as I was a former Catholic. But something always seemed wrong about the Good Friday and Jesus’ rising on Sunday tradition. I always knew that the days counted were not equal to the three days and three nights. I want you to know that we will be supporting your ministry. You are helping us to learn about the Sabbath and how we should celebrate it and attend services. Are there ministers here in the New Orleans area?

M.T.C., Marrero, Louisiana

My husband and I have been watching Beyond Today and donating to it for a couple of years. We are not actual members of your church, but we would like to attend some of your services in the Detroit area.

Reader from Michigan

We send inquirers the contact numbers of our area elders. Please telephone or e-mail them and they will be glad to answer any questions you may have. In the meantime, be sure to ask for our free booklet Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest.

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).
hat our world needs right now is a real, living Superman—a rare superhero whose strength of power equals his strength of character.

No, I’m not talking about the comic-book superhero. As good and as powerful as he is, we know that he’s not a real person. I’m talking about the original “Man of Steel”—the real, living Messiah.

**Jesus Christ compared to Superman**

While all analogies ultimately break down, there are striking parallels between Superman and the Son of God. Here are 10:

- Both were only sons sent to Earth by their heavenly Father.
- Both had dual natures—celestial and earthly.
- Both did not fit into society and were misunderstood by people.
- Both were imbued with tremendous, supernatural powers.
- Both had a strong moral code and an unselfish, heroic character.
- Both were raised with strong values by simple and upright parents.
- Both were strong, masculine men.
- Both had a sense of purpose and destiny that started to be fulfilled around age 30.
- Both went through a period of training and maturity before they started their heroic careers.
- Both were saviors or messianic figures—symbols of hope for the people of Earth.

The screenwriter for the recent blockbuster movie *Man of Steel*, David Goyer, said, “We didn’t come up with these allusions of Superman being Christ-like, that’s something that’s been embedded in the character from the beginning” (quoted in “Man of Steel: The Top 20 Reasons Why Superman Is Jesus,” Metro.co.uk, June 11, 2013).

Film director Zack Snyder likewise stated, “I think the relationship between Jesus and Superman is not a thing we invented in this film, it is a thing that has been talked about since the creation of Superman” (ibid.).

**The true Messiah—more inspiring than Superman!**

The real story of the true Messiah, properly understood, is more inspiring than Superman mythology any day of the week.

You and I live in a world of constant trouble and danger. Terrorism and war are daily realities in our present world. Crime, suffering and evil figure into our daily news headlines. Where is “Superman” when we need him most?

If there ever was a time in our planet’s history when we needed more hope, it is now. This partly explains the success of superhero movies.

For some people, Superman is way cooler than Jesus Christ. Superman wears a fancy cape and always appears to save the day, while Jesus seems to allow suffering and doesn’t always prevent the car accidents, tornadoes, floods, wars and terrorist attacks so often in the news. To some He doesn’t seem as relevant to our world.

The fact is, many people don’t know who the real Jesus Christ is. They don’t know what in the world God is doing—and why He continues to allow evil and suffering. Why hasn’t He intervened yet?

**Mythology that obscures Jesus Christ**

Christ’s true identity has been buried and hidden under several layers of myth and tradition. Some even go so far as to deny that He really existed, supposing that Jesus is just as much a fictional creation as Superman.

For many who believe He really existed, He has often been stereotyped as a teacher of good moral truths, but one who was a long-haired, effeminate weakling. Some even consider Him effectively a loser.

He was killed by the Roman and Jewish authorities 2,000 years ago and is still portrayed as hanging on a wooden cross,
dead and helpless. If He couldn’t even save Himself, how could He possibly save us? Some have even irreverently suggested that Superman could beat up Jesus.

Let’s get one thing straight: Jesus Christ is alive today! Yet Superman only lives in the imagination of his fans. He is, at best, a Christ-like figure. That is as different as night and day. One is real, while the other is fiction.

So what is the real story of the origin of Jesus Christ, the true Superman?

**Origins of the true Messiah and the ultimate villain**

God, both the Father and the Word who later became the Son of God, Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3, 14)—eternally existed long before there ever was a universe, long before there ever was a single angel, demon or evil spirit, are presentlycarrying out their evil work of deception and destruction among human beings. They chose to increase the size of their family of divine, immortal spirit beings by creating mortals after Their own image and likeness, endowed with free will.

Before this plan was put into action, however, one of God’s leading angels, referred to in the Latin translation of Isaiah 14 as Lucifer, became filled with pride and vanity and drew a third of the angels into rebellion against God (compare verses 12-15; Ezekiel 28:11-15; Revelation 12:3-4, 9).

He led a cosmic coup d’état in a vain attempt to seize control of the reins of the universe. But, no match for the forces of heaven under the command of Jesus Christ, he was kicked out of heaven and thrown down to planet Earth (Luke 10:18), where he and his fallen cohorts, now known as demons or evil spirits, are presently carrying out their evil work of deception and destruction among human beings.

To destroy Satan’s work and rescue humanity, God sent the Word to Earth to supernaturally conceived and born of a virgin and raised by a faithful, upright couple to be the Light for humanity and to announce the coming Kingdom of God. He would then have to resist evil, defeating Satan’s twisted way of life, to live a sinless life, and then suffer and die to pay for the sins of all mankind (see Matthew 1:18-25).

He will come back as the ultimate powerful “Superman” this world has been waiting for all along—the only One who can truly stop crime, war, terrorism, starvation, corruption and all the evils in our society.

Yes, He will be faster, stronger and greater than the comic-book Superman. He will be “the real deal”—the real Man of Steel. As much as we may love the Superman character, we only have one true Superhero, Jesus the coming Messiah. But more than that, He will be the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He will rule the world in total righteousness, justice, peace and prosperity.

Your ticket—not to the movie but to the real event

God loves you and me. He cares about this planet and its inhabitants—every last one of us. He is not willing that any should perish. At His first coming, He sent Jesus to save us from the penalty of sin, which is misery and ultimately death. At His second coming, He will send Christ again to literally save us from ourselves. At that time, the world will be standing at the brink of nuclear annihilation and global catastrophe.

That’s better than any Superman story, don’t you think? Because, unlike the comic books or the movies, this is the real story!

To know more about the original Man of Steel, request or download our free booklet Jesus Christ: The Real Story. GN
What is God doing here below? What is His purpose and plan for all of us? Is there a way we can know what His plan is and how we fit into it?

What about all the people who have lived and died through the ages without ever having heard of God, the Bible and Jesus Christ? Are they doomed to the grave with no hope?

Most people keep Christmas and Easter, thinking these are the holidays God wants us to observe. Yet you can search through the entire Bible and you won’t find either celebrated there.

But in the Bible God does reveal seven festivals that teach us His plan for humanity through the ages. The Gospels record Jesus and His followers observing these festivals. He was crucified on one of these festivals, Passover, and its symbolism foretold His death nearly 15 centuries before it happened.

The New Testament Church was founded on another of these biblical festivals, the day of Pentecost. The book of Acts plainly records the apostle Paul and the Church keeping these biblical festivals, and Paul wrote of how to keep them.

So why are these Holy Days, kept by Jesus, His apostles and the early Church, almost universally ignored by most people today?

These are important questions, and you need the answers. Be sure to request and read this eye-opening booklet today!