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“A House Divided Against Itself Cannot Stand”

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.” Aspiring senatorial (and later presidential) candidate Abraham Lincoln opened one of his most famous speeches with these words in 1858. He intended it as a stark warning that the ideologically deeply divided nation could not continue on its course.

His warning was prophetic, as less than three years later the nation tore itself apart in a bloody four-year civil war that took hundreds of thousands of lives.

Two decades earlier, as a much younger man, he proclaimed his concern for the future of his country: “At what point shall we expect the approach of danger? By what means shall we fortify against it? Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant to step the ocean and crush us at a blow? Never! . . . At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer: If it ever reach us it must spring up amongst us . . . If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen we must live through all time or die by suicide” (Lyceum Address, 1838, emphasis added throughout).

This warning was also prophetic, and a generation later the nation came perilously close to dying by suicide. More than 600,000 men died in battle or from wounds and disease. It was by far the bloodiest war in the nation’s history.

Abraham Lincoln, like so many U.S presidents up until recent generations, was a student of the Bible. When he was growing up, as was the case in many American households, books were rare and the Bible was often the only book many families possessed. Lincoln himself said of the community schoolhouse he attended, “We had no reading books or grammars, and all our reading was done from the Bible.”

President Lincoln’s words often echoed those of the biblical writers and prophets. His warning about “a house divided” was taken directly from the words of Jesus Christ (Matthew 12:25; Mark 3:25; Luke 11:17). It’s not surprising, then, that the Bible greatly shaped his thinking, including how he viewed the nation.

In one of the darkest periods of the Civil War, he issued a “Proclamation Appointing a National Fast Day” on March 30, 1863. His words strikingly apply to our day: “We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God . . .

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

Lincoln did not hold back on telling it like it is. As president, he felt a deep responsibility to his country. He didn’t want to see it perish, devoured by war and destruction from within.

We at Beyond Today believe and feel the same. We are deeply grateful for the abundant physical blessings God poured out on the United States of America, including those extending back to its roots in Great Britain before the nation was even founded.

We are also deeply grateful for the spiritual blessings God bestowed, such as the spiritual roots of the nation and the faith of its Founding Fathers (described in this issue). We so appreciate the blessings of being able to freely worship God and share His truth through the pages of this magazine, our Beyond Today TV program, our many study guides, our Bible study course, our website and the freedom to gather to worship Him and learn His truth at weekly Sabbath services.

But we are also compelled, as was President Lincoln, to speak out on the grave national sins that threaten those blessings and freedoms—which we see being withdrawn day by day. We have a God-given responsibility to speak to the modern nations and tell it like it is, and we do.

We hope and pray that you will have ears to hear and, most importantly, a heart to heed and seek God. Take to heart the words of Abraham Lincoln and Scripture—repent, turn to God and pray for mercy for the nation!
My dear mother was a child of the American South. Decades ago, on visits to Alabama to see relatives, we always stopped at the site of the Battle of Shiloh, one of the bloodiest conflicts of the American Civil War. “Those poor boys,” she would mourn, “bleeding to death in this pond.” She would blame “those Yankees” for being where they shouldn’t be. She remembered times when the cultural divide split the nation into two warring halves. She wanted me to understand and never forget.

I think about her stories when today I hear statements that America is again deeply divided in ways that could lead to another civil war. Indeed, some feel that we are already fighting that war along political, cultural and social fronts and that, in time, without healing, we could very well see division occur with states opting out of the union.

Polls indicate that more than two thirds of Americans perceive strong threats to the continuing existence of American democracy as we currently know it. They feel that a civil war could erupt and that only a strong leader could either prevent or lead the country out of the crisis.

Where might “irreconcilable differences” lead?

Partisan politics highlight this divide. A 2022 Pew Research poll found a majority in both parties view members of the other party as “more immoral, dishonest, lazy, unintelligent, and close-minded than other Americans.” Curiously, 40 percent of Democrats and 43 percent of Republicans belong to their party because “they oppose the other party’s values” and not because they stand for what their party represents.

Political scientists refer to this level of polarization as “negative partisanship,” in which political factions draw together more out of hatred of the other side than a common sense of purpose. This negative partisanship explains more than a political divide in the nation today.

A functional political process should lead to resolution of conflicting ideas. In the best of times there’s a better chance of accomplishing this. When I say “best of times,” I’m referring to a period of 60 or more years ago. Partisan politics in America has always been raucous, but at the end of the vote the differing factions sought to reach across the aisle and make a clear path forward for the good of the country.

Yet that was when there were clearly shared values and a commitment to form a common community. That was also a time when there was a commitment to the idea of America as laid down in the nation’s founding documents.

But that has changed. The presidential election of 2000 appears to have marked the emergence of irreconcilable differences in the body politic, beginning the slide to our place today. That election had to be decided by the Supreme Court, ending in the election of George W. Bush. It seems that from that rancorous election the country entered an era of political acrimony that has only accelerated to the present crisis.
Polling data from the University of Chicago Institute of Politics show sobering results: “About three-quarters (73 percent) of voters who identify themselves as Republican agree that ‘Democrats are generally bullies who want to impose their political beliefs on those who disagree.’ An almost identical percentage of Democrats (74 percent) express that view of Republicans.” A similarly lopsided majority of each party holds that members of the other are “generally untruthful and are pushing disinformation.”

“I’m ready for them”

The same poll revealed that “more than one in four Americans are so alienated from their government” that they believe it may “soon be necessary to take up arms” against it.

It seems that from the rancorous election of 2000, the country entered an era of political acrimony that has accelerated to the present crisis.

When a large and growing number of Americans feel their government is corrupt and rigged against them, it’s hard to see a way back from the abyss. There is a growing feeling of incompatibility. And in some regions of the country, the talk is that the only answer may be secession.

Anger over public policy has caused a fourfold increase in people who feel armed force is justified to advance political interests. This sentiment is held by nearly equal percentages of both Republicans and Democrats—roughly a third of each.

Sales of guns and ammunition have skyrocketed in recent years, an alarming rise considering there were already more guns in America than people. With scenes of rioting in cities, whole neighborhoods taken over by radicals and even police precincts being abandoned by law enforcement, people fear there will be no one to answer their call for help when, not if, rioters advance on their neighborhoods.

When you watch televised accounts of such events, like that of a suburban couple in St. Louis, Missouri, in 2020 defending their home from an invading pack of protestors, you begin to get the feeling the nation is turning into an armed camp. While sitting at dinner in the home of a close relative, he pointed out to me his self-defense plan, which included a brick and stone barricade at the edge of his patio pool angled perfectly to allow him to defend the half-mile-long road approaching his rural home. “I’m ready for them when they come,” he told me.

Abortion: a great polarizer

Arguably the most polarizing issue of the last half-century has been abortion. Since the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion in all 50 states, we have witnessed tens of millions of babies torn from the wombs of their mothers. While the prevalence of abortions grew, so too did a growing opposition led by churches and citizens with a conscience.

A person’s stance on abortion determined whether he or she could be elected to political office or appointed to the Supreme Court. In June 2022 the Supreme Court, ruling in a new case, announced its decision to overturn the Roe v. Wade decision and turn the issue over to individual states. It was a welcome event for those who value the sanctity of human life. But the divide only grew wider.

The impact of the reversal is still taking shape. Abortion will not disappear. It is now up to the states to legislate and regulate. Some have and will pass anti-abortion laws while others have and will pass pro-abortion laws.

Corporations in states with stricter limits on abortion will include as part of employee health-care packages benefits to travel to a pro-abortion state to obtain an abortion as a “health benefit.” Some companies have ended maternity leave and maternity benefits, replacing them with paid abortions. It’s clear where these corporations’ interests lie.

We have entered uncharted territory with this decision. Along with all the other cultural upheavals, we seem to have entered a dark time. The world order we have known is showing its rot. It could soon shatter, and the condition of America will determine the future.

Will we see armed conflict?

Are we at a moment where armed insurrection could erupt in America? A survey of headlines and events in recent years leads any observer to answer yes, it is possible that some kind of civil war could erupt. The heated political environment could easily turn violent—especially when some are deliberately trying to escalate matters. Apparent weaponization of government agencies against political opponents exacerbates fears and the will to resist what is increasingly viewed as illegitimate force.

Count in the increase in overall crime, mass shootings, murders, carjackings, civil unrest in major cities and diminishing police protection, and we have a picture of a nation in severe distress, with many believing they must take the protection of themselves and others into their own hands. America seems to be on a volcanic fault line waiting for something to explode.

But the question is, will we see armed conflict on the scale of the great Civil War of the 1800s where an actual secession of southern states led to armed conflict and the deaths of more than 600,000 Americans? I don’t think so—at least not in that way. The conflict will likely manifest itself differently. Let’s consider what has already happened. That may give us clues to the future.

New mandates leading to chaos?

I have written in these pages that
what we’ve seen in the past three years have been dress rehearsals for bigger events to come. I wonder if we’ve seen what a breakdown in order in America might look like. The past may just be a prelude to the future.

First, we saw an unprecedented shutdown of American society beginning in March 2020. Airports shut down as passenger flights ended. Schools and businesses closed. The lights went out in the great entertainment areas like Times Square in New York City. Professional sports venues were shuttered.

This happened around the world in response to the Covid pandemic. Beyond the shutdown was the fact that people so quickly, without discussion or debate, went along with the mandates, assuming it to be for the public good. Yet hindsight has called into question the radical steps taken by governments.

What if a future crisis, another pandemic or civil crisis, led to a shutdown? Would people across America submit to this again? What if some regions (such as “blue states”) went along with a federal government mandate while other regions (so-called “red states”) refused?

This would highlight a stark divide within the nation. How would the central government react? Would federal troops be called out to enforce its mandates? Some regions would not take kindly to the presence of armed soldiers enforcing regulations opposed by the majority of people there. Resistance, both passive and likely armed, would be the response. There could be bloodshed.

American presidential elections in recent years have seen narrow margins of victory. What if a duly elected leader were attacked or assassinated by someone aligned with the opposite faction? How would that leader’s supporters react? Could it incite massive civil unrest or even retaliatory killings?

Imagine the chilling effect that would have on the general public. Fear and suspicion would set in. We might not see armed insurrection; rather we would see pockets of resistance spring up. Some cities or regions in rural areas might become armed camps or might declare themselves “seceded from the union.”

In 2020 we saw a defined urban section of Seattle cordoned off for several weeks as people declared it a separate zone from the city and would not allow in police, fire or emergency personnel. Law enforcement, handcuffed by a progressive city government, stood by helpless to intervene. What if this happened on a larger scale across the nation in response to political disagreement?

**As in the days of Noah**

A massive natural disaster such as a hurricane or earthquake could spark unrest along with imposition of emergency mandates creating cascading effects. In 2005 Hurricane Katrina hit southern Louisiana bringing massive destruction to New Orleans and surrounding regions.

By itself the hurricane wreaked enormous devastation. But government reaction at the city, state and federal level compounded the problem. It took years to recover. While cries of incompetence, neglect and even racism rose from many quarters, peace and stability were restored, and people pulled together to rebuild. It was a different time. Would it be the same today?

What if another such natural disaster struck and, given the fragile condition of the nation today, the social fabric of a region was ripped apart? What would happen in other cities? Would there be reactions triggered by hate and latent unrest? I think about the death of George Floyd in May 2020 in Minneapolis and what that incident sparked across the country. A ripple effect tends to develop in these cases. It happened in 1968 with the assassination of Martin Luther King when riots erupted across the country. Again, we learn from the past and can project into the future.

Most people would try to go about living a normal life. Note I said “try.” That is our present situation. Most Americans are trying to go about living a normal life. That’s normal. The problem is the norms are changing, perhaps irrevocably.

I heard a pertinent quote recently: “Every norm of the present life is being attacked.” That’s true. Most see it. Many are unnerved. We are in a time of civil disturbance but are continuing on, trying to live a normal life.

Jesus said this would be the case: “But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,
and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:37-39).

As in Noah’s day, the norms have changed, people are divided and judgment is coming.

**Dishonoring the natural order of life**

The overturn of Roe v. Wade’s license to murder unborn babies was a welcome and needed decision by the Supreme Court. But the rot remains. Abortion is still legal in the majority of states. The culture was changed by a half-century of a cultural holocaust. While many jurists praise the Supreme Court for returning to the states, and to the people through their elected representatives, the prerogative to make laws governing the social compact, the horror of the 49-year legalization of infanticide has warped the moral compass of a people.

The 2015 Supreme Court decision on same-sex marriage, Obergefell v. Hodges, has piggybacked on the moral decline and divide, creating an America where those who hold the line for the biblical definition of marriage and human life are considered outcasts. Where Roe legislated on the sanctity of human life, Obergefell undermined the moral basis of society.

While its legal premise is nonexistent, it is the spear thrust at the heart of a sane, stable and natural society to devastating effect. Healthy civilizations do not treat the biblical definition of marriage and family as a “choice.” Stable marriages balance a culture, honor God and provide a nurturing environment for bringing up the next generation of children. Same-sex marriages dishonor the natural order of life. They violate the eternal spiritual law of God. They are a death sentence for mankind, another manifestation of cultural suicide.

Those who identify as Christian must accept their part in the decline of the biblical marriage and family. Divorce rates among those who claim to be Christian have for many decades been high. Cohabitation without the commitment of marriage has also been high among this group. Long before same-sex marriage became legal, the institution of marriage had already been undermined by those who should have been stalwart examples.

Abortion and same-sex marriage, and now the growing influence of the LGBTQ+ movement, have hollowed out the moral center of the United States and other Western nations. Political polarization has deepened in recent decades. Government overspending has worsened the economy, bringing back rates of inflation unseen for 40 years. Confidence in the federal government is at historic lows.

All these and many other factors have led to the great division we see in America today. At its core it is a division over the cultural foundation and direction of the nation. Some hold to the principles and values on which the nation was founded, even as others deny and defy those same principles and values (see “America’s Forgotten Christian Heritage” beginning on page 12).

America’s divide has created a question among the nations as to whether it can be relied on as an ally to guarantee stability. The result is the emboldening of other nations like China and Russia to assert their national agenda. Russia has invaded Ukraine. The world holds its breath, expecting China to take over Taiwan, fulfilling its long-held desire to reunite the island state with the mainland.

The question hangs over the world: Can a divided America be relied on? This is what is at stake with the current internal problems facing the nation.

**Is America committing suicide?**

Some say the only country powerful enough to destroy the United States is America itself. Abraham Lincoln thought the same. In an 1838 speech he said: “At what point shall we expect the approach of danger? By what means shall we fortify against it? Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant to step the Ocean and crush us at a blow? Never! . . . At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide” (Lyceum Address, emphasis added).

As divided as America may be, it is still the strongest nation in the world by any measure. All things being as they are, the nation can, and might, continue in this role for a good while longer. The Roman Empire lasted hundreds of years while torn by internal division. However, that was the ancient world, and many factors are different today. And yes, Lincoln guided the nation through the Civil War and the republic survived. The nation went on to become the single greatest nation of all history. Americans today are the inheritors of all that story.

But there is a difference between Rome and America today—and between America at the time of Lincoln and America today. The difference is in the role God has placed America in at this time for the greater spiritual purpose He is working among the nations. The United States will maintain that role only as long as God allows. (For more information on America’s divine purpose, request or download our free study guide The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy.)

Much has been written about how America was founded by men who believed in divine providence and the God of the Bible. The Pilgrims landed on these shores in search of religious freedom, and many of them looked at the land before them as a type of the Promised Land into which God brought the ancient nation of Israel under the leadership of Moses and Joshua. The Judeo-Christian roots of the nation are well documented (again, see “America’s Forgotten Christian Heritage” beginning on page 12).
This part of America’s story is true but should be understood within God’s purpose and what blessings can occur when a people believes and follows even a fraction of the true Word of God. America has never been fully “one nation under God” in the most complete sense. Yet in spite of its faults and foibles, it has been a blessing to all the nations in many ways. The world has been a better place because America and its English-speaking brother nations have existed (again, see our free study guide just noted).

What God said to ancient Israel has application today: “For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day? Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life” (Deuteronomy 4:7-9).

What lies ahead for America?

America has increasingly refused to heed that wise advice from its Maker. Our grave national sins are a shame and an embarrassment. Those who stand up for God and biblical values are increasingly ridiculed and, more and more often, literally persecuted and silenced.

No one is coming to save America in the here and now. God will not rescue the nation at this point from coming calamity. We have defied His laws and stood too long at the altars of idolatry. Like ancient Israel, the decay and rot has spread throughout our national body.

Isaiah’s words sum it up: “Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward. Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment” (Isaiah 1:4-6).

Bible prophecy reveals that the United States will fall, a victim of its own sins, rebellion and divisions. This will be an early stage in the time of unparalleled turmoil that will envelop the world in the years leading up to the return of Jesus Christ. He described this time as one of “great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24:21).

But that’s not the end of the story. Jesus will then personally intervene, when humanity is at the brink of extinction (verse 22), to save us from ourselves. He will establish God’s Kingdom on earth, bringing 1,000 years of peace to the world (see the September-October 2022 issue and our free study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom*).

What lies ahead for you?

This is your time to know what you should do. It is the moment to seek the God of truth and worship Him in spirit and truth with all of your being. Reliance on the traditional view of God and of what the Bible says will not save you from what is coming!

Make a difference in your community with the people over whom you have influence. There are trends and issues you will not turn back. You will not solve the problems. You can make a difference in your realm, but you will need to understand the greater purpose God is working out.

God places responsibility with each individual to take a stand for righteousness. Change yourself. Rescue yourself from the growing sins devouring the nation. Of course, you can’t do that alone. You need to look up. Keep your foremost allegiance above the divisions of this world by living “the first and great commandment” (Matthew 22:37-38)—“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” Those who heed are the ones God will bless and eternally reward!
Americans are losing cohesion with one another, with politics and societal values becoming more and more polarized. Where is this leading?

by Mike Kelley

Today nearly everyone has become acutely aware of the huge and growing divide between Americans on cultural issues. We could quote statistics without end documenting the growing acceptance of immoral behavior among large sections of the populace while others remain staunchly resistant.

The recent Supreme Court overturn of Roe v. Wade, the court’s 1973 decision that made abortion legal across the country, has starkly revealed Americans’ ideological split over this issue. The changes in American K-12 education that allow teachers in many school districts to divide children between “the oppressors and the oppressed” has sparked backlash among millions of American parents.

We see the growing rift among the states. Newscasters, pundits and others point out that liberal and liberal-leaning “Blue America” covers the American Northeast, the West Coast and a few interior states such as Illinois, Colorado and New Mexico. The rest, mostly the Midwest, Southeast, Plains states and most of the Mountain states, are now classed as conservative-leaning “Red America.”

Michael Podhorzer, a longtime political strategist for labor unions who heads the liberal Analyst Institute, says the two blocs should be thought of as “fundamentally different nations uneasily sharing the same geographic space.” He further writes: “When we think about the United States, we make the error of imagining it as a single nation, a marbled mix of Red and Blue people. But in truth, we have never been one nation. We are more like a federated republic of two nations: Blue Nation and Red Nation. This is not a metaphor; it is a geographic and historical reality” (Michael Brownstein, “America Is Growing Apart, Possibly for Good,” The Atlantic, June 24, 2022).

Yet the division is becoming more pronounced. As conservative commentator Pat Buchanan recently wrote: “For a nation, a country, a people, a democracy to endure, there needs to be a broad consensus of belief, culture, custom and politics . . . We are a country whose people have a diminishing confidence in almost all of its institutions, from big business to the churches, universities and media” (“How, When, Do We Come Together Again?” Aug. 15, 2022).

Is the country again becoming a “house divided,” as Abraham Lincoln, using imagery from Jesus Christ, asked during the American Civil War? And where will this take us?

Parallel institutions

The growing divide is prompting the rise of parallel institutions. Social media restrictions and censoring have given rise to new, more conservative, social media platforms like Parler and Gettr. The nation has always had church-owned private schools, but now we see them exploding in numbers as more and more parents recoil from anti-religious and immoral teachings in public schools.

Conservative universities such as Hillsdale College and overtly religious schools attract more interest as parents revolt against the lax moral attitudes and socialist policies of most of what passes for higher education in America today.

Following the old marketing advice of “Find a need and fill it,” enterprising entrepreneurs have started conservative alternatives to the increasingly liberal mainstream media. Rupert Murdoch launched Fox News in the mid-1990s, which almost immediately enjoyed success. Conservative newspapers soon followed, such as The Epoch Times in 2000 and the Washington Examiner in 2004, the latter launched as a direct competitor to the liberal Washington Post. They join
other established conservative media outlets such as Breitbart, Human Events and The Washington Times.

When first launched, social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter were hailed as the ultimate platforms for the free exchange of ideas. But it’s since become obvious that free expression on them is severely restricted by liberal progressive censors. Efforts to launch conservative social media sites have met with limited success so far, although sites such as previously mentioned Parler and Gettr, as well as Gab, do allow for expression of all viewpoints and are slowly growing.

**Mass migrations: voting with their feet**

For centuries, mass migrations of people have occurred primarily for economic and political purposes. And we see that now with the recent “Great Migration” of Americans moving from liberal states to conservative states. States with heavy tax burdens, strangling regulations and high crime resulting from lax law enforcement and prosecution are steadily losing residents to states avoiding these problems.

*Forbes* magazine reported that even before the Covid pandemic, California, New York, New Jersey, Michigan and Illinois lost more than four million residents between 2010 and 2019, with most moving to Texas, Florida, Tennessee, Ohio and Arizona, all characterized by having conservative governments, business-friendly policies and relatively lower tax rates (“America’s Mass Migration Intensifies as ‘Leftugees’ Flee Blue States and Counties for Red,” March 17, 2021).

The same report cited Denver as a prime example of a major city with liberal, progressive leadership that failed utterly to stop the riots that took place in the summer of 2020, causing millions of dollars in property damage. Many migrated to outlying suburbs and towns where they felt safer.

Of course, many more have since moved in the face of Covid restrictions, skyrocketing crime and transgender promotion.

Academia has taken notice of these patterns, realizing them as a sign of the growing political divide in America. *Forbes* quotes Bruce Desmarais, a political science professor and associate director of Penn State University’s Center for Social Analytics, which conducted a study on the issue. He terms it “a geographic form of polarization.”

The question often arises: Do the immigrants bring the progressive attitudes of the states they left, or do they reject those attitudes and adopt the prevailing political attitudes of their new homes? Studies suggest it is more the latter. The Penn State study indicates that people prefer to live in ideological “silos” where they interact with those who think as they do.

**Corporations fleeing blue states**

Corporations have joined this migration, with a steady stream abandoning blue states and moving their headquarters and operations into red states. As some pundits have pointed out, America seems to be dividing into the more prosperous, high-growth states versus those entering what could be long slides into economic decline.

Over the past three years, corporate and tech powerhouses such as Tesla, Hewlett Packard, Remington and Oracle have joined hundreds of other companies leaving Illinois, California, New York and New Jersey. Their destinations? Texas, Tennessee, Arizona and Florida, where lower taxes, lower costs of living and business-friendly policies are proving irresistible magnets.

The states left behind face eroding tax bases, and some try to make up for the loss by raising taxes on those remaining—which pushes out yet more people and businesses. Wirepoints, an Illinois-based economic research group, reports that Illinois has lost population for the last 21 years straight, with 114,000 leaving the state in 2021 alone. These exiting populations have cost the state more than $25 billion in lost tax revenue, contributing to 21 consecutive years of state budget deficits.

Two states, Texas and Florida, are major beneficiaries of the Great Migration and exemplify the growing cultural and political differences between red and blue states. Texas’ low taxes and business-friendly policies helped it rapidly recover jobs lost during the pandemic. Its economy, built on a strong base of energy, manufacturing, technology, finance and health care, has seen almost 250 corporate relocations since 2015.

Florida, which has enjoyed two decades of net in-migration, saw a population influx of 624,000 new residents in 2020 alone, more people than the population of Wyoming and almost as many as Vermont. These new residents, and dozens of corporate transfers, grew the state’s total income by more than $40 billion in 2020, and nearly $197 billion over the past two years.

Could America split into two nations, as it did in 1861? That seems unlikely, though a recent poll by the University of Chicago’s Institute of Politics found that 28 percent of Americans believe the U.S. government is corrupt and that citizens may ultimately have to take up arms against it. Yet that’s looking far down the line.

It seems more likely that America will *de facto* become two ideologically distinct “nations” with one set of borders and one flag. States with more conservative populations would form a great mass, largely between the two coasts. Those with liberal progressive views would largely occupy the coastal areas, except for the south Atlantic and Gulf Coast. In Congress, both “subnations” would agree to support the armed forces, continue the use of a common national currency and support the other functions of a common federal government.

Of course, there are people who...
An Ancient National Divide

By the 930s B.C., ancient Israel had enjoyed decades of prosperity and greatness under King David and his son Solomon. After Saul’s death, David had united the Hebrew tribes and subdued the Israelites’ enemies.

Taking advantage of problems plaguing the country’s larger neighbors, Solomon expanded the kingdom to the Euphrates River in the north, increasing Israel’s territory by more than 50 percent. Egypt and Mesopotamia, Israel’s most powerful rivals at the time, were experiencing power vacuums and internal turmoil.

The Egyptian pharaoh even gave his daughter to Solomon in marriage, “a concession almost without parallel in Egyptian history, since it was a candid admission to the world of Egypt’s weakness” (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. 2, p. 915). In partnership with Hiram, the Phoenician king of Tyre, Solomon built a fleet of merchant ships that sailed unmolested through the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. In this powerful alliance, Israel under Solomon was the dominant partner.

But Solomon knew the source of his power and success: he looked to God, as his father David had. On becoming king, Solomon prayed for an extra measure of wisdom, knowledge and understanding to rule the nation (1 Kings 3:8-9; 2 Chronicles 1:8-12).

Solomon’s power, wealth and reputation for wisdom became known throughout the Middle East. Potentates came to seek his guidance and advice. The Queen of Sheba was one, wanting to “test him with hard questions . . . and when she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that was in her heart” (1 Kings 10:1-2).

Yet, despite Solomon’s affluence and understanding, this idyllic situation was not to last. The Bible records that he turned from God in his latter years, largely due to the influence of his hundreds of wives and concubines, many of them foreigners (1 Kings 11:3-4).

Israel entered into a downward spiral. Solomon began building altars and temples for his pagan wives and instituted the worship of their gods. As he turned from God, God began to turn His back on him, sending enemies to challenge him, as 1 Kings 11 records.

The most powerful and influential of these enemies was Jeroboam, a “mighty man of valor” whom Solomon had made overseer of much of his labor force. As the prophet Ahijah revealed, God would divide Solomon’s kingdom after his death, and Jeroboam would reign over 10 of the 12 tribes (1 Kings 11:29-32).

Ahijah’s prophecy was fulfilled. Jeroboam sought refuge from Solomon in Egypt. But shortly after Solomon’s death he returned. Now spokesman for the northern 10 tribes, he approached Solomon’s son and new king Rehoboam, asking that Israel’s tax load be lightened. But Rehoboam listened to his younger advisers, who counseled him to actually increase the tax load, and the northern tribes rebelled.

Israel’s reply to Rehoboam summed up the people’s frustration and anger: “What share have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Now see to your own house, O David!” (1 Kings 12:16). The northern tribes revolted, leaving only Judah and Benjamin, the two southern tribes, along with many Levites who had no tribal territory, still under Davidic rule. Thus the most powerful nation in the Middle East at the time split.

Today, as we enter the third decade of the 21st century, America is still the world’s most powerful country. But we should ask: Do we see a rift developing that will tear it apart?

Division leads to destruction

The Bible tells the story of how ancient Israel near the height of its power split into two nations, Israel and Judah (see “An Ancient National Divide” above). These two nations continued to drift farther apart, especially in religious and cultural matters, at times warring against each other. Both nations languished under wicked rulers, though Judah had a few righteous ones.

The northern kingdom of Israel continued for about 200 years until a resurgent Assyria conquered the country and carried its people into captivity. The southern kingdom of Judah struggled on for more than a century following until the Babylonians invaded and took most of the population away into captivity.

Today, America’s division into two nations under one flag is ongoing and appears likely to continue. The differences will further weaken the nation, making the country more vulnerable to foreign enemies, as happened to ancient Israel. But will it suffer the same fate as ancient Israel—the nation destroyed, its people in captivity to foreign powers?

Your Bible shows that this will indeed happen. We would do well to remember Christ’s own words: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand” (Matthew 12:25). We would be wise to prepare for this eventuality.

Learn More

What are the powerful forces at work driving America apart? Where and how will it end? Believe it or not, Bible prophecy provides the answers! Download or request our free study guide The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy to learn more!

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The wall of the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., features a series of eight massive paintings illustrating key events in the founding of America. One of these depicts the Pilgrims who were first on the Speedwell before transferring to join others on its sister ship the Mayflower. Prominent figure William Brewster holds open the Bible to the clear words “The New Testament of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Above them on the sail are written the words “God with us,” shortened from the Pilgrim motto, “In God we trust, God with us.”

Of course, “In God we trust” is America’s national motto even today—imprinted on all U.S. currency and coins. Yet new polls reveal that trust in God and in the Bible have plummeted in recent years. But this result has been a long time coming—the end of a leftist, secular humanist agenda to banish God from the public sphere.

For many decades we have seen a concerted effort to play down the role of the Bible and religion in early America. Now things have gone much further, with the nation’s founders denigrated as evil racists. Of course, they were not perfect men, even by the world’s standards. But they established a nation that has overall been a great blessing to the world.

Yet as they would be first to point out, this achievement was not their doing but God’s. They regularly acknowledged Him and, along with the wider populace, sought out His direction and blessing. Let’s take a closer look at the Christian underpinnings of America’s founding and consider the depths to which the nation has now sunk—and what that means for the future.

Restoring the Sovereign

The Pilgrims and other Puritan settlers sought to construct a model Christian society. Conrad Cherry, in his 1971 book *God’s New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, states: “They believed that, like Israel of old, they had been singled out by God to be an example for the nations (especially for England). With their charter and company in America, the Puritans could in effect construct a republic independent of an English crown that had not allowed them the freedom of their experiment at home” (p. 27).

Setting up and spreading the Kingdom of God, as they understood it, was central to their national purpose. The 1643 Articles of Confederation for Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Plymouth and New Haven declared,
“We all came into these parts of America with one and the same end and aim, namely, to advance the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to enjoy the liberties of the gospel in purities with peace.”

To this end, the Puritans set up a theonemocratic state—one based on the laws of God as found in the Bible. The 1644 New Haven Charter was written with the following stated purpose: “that the judicial laws of God, as they were delivered by Moses . . . be a rule to all the courts in this jurisdiction . . .”

Fast-forward a century to the Continental Congress deciding to break away from British rule, the group signing a world-changing document “appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world . . . with a firm reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence.” That document, the Declaration of Independence, meant independence from Great Britain but direct dependence on God.

Unbelievable as it may seem today, the United States of America was formed not as a secular republic but one recognizing God as its unseen Ruler. In The Nature of the American System, R.J. Rushdoony writes: “The concept of a secular state was virtually non-existent in 1776 as well as in 1787, when the Constitution was written, and no less so when the Bill of Rights was adopted. To read the Constitution as the charter for a secular state is to misread history, and to misread it radically. The Constitution was designed to perpetuate a Christian order.”

As the Declaration of Independence was being signed, Samuel Adams, who was the driving individual behind the American cause, stated it clearly: “We have this day restored the Sovereign to whom all men ought to be obedient. He reigns in heaven, and from the rising to the setting of the sun, let His Kingdom come” (quoted by Peter Marshall and David Manuel, The Light and the Glory, 1977). No one in the room objected.

The faith of the Founding Fathers

Many have tried to argue that the Founding Fathers were mostly deists. Deism is the belief in an impersonal God who set everything in motion but does not actively intervene in His creation. However, M.E. Bradford in A Worthy Company proves that up to 52 of the 55 framers of the Constitution were professing Christians.

On July 4, 1821, John Quincy Adams, the sixth president of the United States, declared: “The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: it connected, in one indissoluble bond, the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity. From the day of the Declaration . . . they [the American people] were bound by the laws of God, which they all, and by the laws of the Gospel, which they nearly all, acknowledged as the rules of their conduct.”

George Washington, the “Father of Our Country,” spoke in his 1789 inaugural address of “my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the universe, who presides in the councils of nations, and whose providential aid can supply every human defect, that His benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the people of the United States a government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes . . .”

In 1787, James Madison, the “Father of the Constitution” and fourth president of the United States, said: “We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future . . . upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to sustain ourselves, according to the Ten Commandments of God.”

John Adams, a loud Christian voice in the early United States and its second president, believed that the nation should be governed by the Bible, writing: “Suppose a nation in some distant Region, should take the Bible for their only law Book, and every member should regulate his conduct by the precepts there exhibited. Every member would be obliged in conscience to temperance and frugality and industry, to justice and kindness and charity towards his fellow men, and to piety and love, and reverence towards Almighty God.

“In this commonwealth, no man would impair his health by gluttony, drunkenness, or lust . . . No man would steal or lie or any way defraud his neighbour, but would live in peace and good will with all men—no man would blaspheme his maker or profane his worship, but a rational and manly, a sincere and unaffected piety and devotion, would reign in all hearts. What a Eutopia, what a paradise would this region be” (Diary, Feb. 22, 1756).

The religious views of revolutionary America’s “Renaissance man,” Benjamin Franklin, are fiercely debated today. Many have stated that Franklin died a deist. But this is simply not true. While it’s clear from his Autobiography that he adhered to deism in his early years, he became disenchanted with it later in life.

In his famous speech to the Constitutional Convention on June 28, 1787, Franklin violated a fundamental tenet of deism—God’s non-involvement—when he said: “…The longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been
assured, sir, in the sacred writings, that ‘except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.’ I firmly believe this…” He followed this with a proposal to hire a clergyman to open every session of Congress with prayer.

It should be noted that none of the Founding Fathers has been so misrepresented as Thomas Jefferson, who’s also charged as being a deist. Yet this is the same Jefferson who concluded his second presidential inaugural address by saying, “I shall need . . . the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our fathers, as Israel of old, from their native land and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessaries and comforts of life.”

In 1815 he stated: “We are not in a world ungoverned by the laws and the power of a Superior Agent. Our efforts are in His hand, and directed by it, and He will give them their effect in His own time.” Clearly both Franklin and Jefferson believed in a personal, intervening God, and they both were supportive of the Christian religion.

Jefferson’s phrase about a “wall of separation between church and state” has been wrested from its context. He was speaking to a Baptist audience and was likely referring to a similar phrase by early Baptist leader Roger Williams—the “wall” referring to protecting the Christian church from the ravages of the world, not protecting the state from influence by Christian principles. The Founding Fathers did not want the establishment of a national state church, but they very much wanted the involvement of God and Christian believers in the governance of the country.

In an 1892 U.S. Supreme Court case, *Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States*, the justices reached this decision: “Our laws and our institutions must necessarily be based upon and embody the teachings of the Redeemer of mankind. It is impossible that it should be otherwise; and in this sense and to this extent our civilization and our institutions are emphatically Christian.”

Reaping national blessings—and curses

As a result of so many in early America relying on God, the nation experienced great blessings. We find this principle laid out by God in 1 Samuel 2:30: “. . . Those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed.” But the strong morality and devotion to God that characterized the early United States were not just happenstance. God brought it about as a necessity.

As explained in our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*, America was destined to separate from Great Britain and become a great nation in its own right, helping to fulfill the promises to the biblical patriarch Abraham of national blessings and of being a great blessing to the world (be sure to request your free copy).

This required that America have high moral standards and a devotion to the God of the Bible. God would not pour out His wonderful national blessings on a despicable populace that would misuse and squander all His gifts. Of course, there were problems and sins among the people, but not the widespread immorality and contempt for God we see today.

God turned the hearts of the early Americans toward Him to a significant degree so that He could bless them. We find a similar instance of this in Scripture, when Judah’s King Hezekiah sought to restore the worship of God after a period of idolatry and rebellion. As we’re told, “the hand of God was on Judah to give them singleness of heart to obey the command of the king and the leaders, at the word of the Lord” (2 Chronicles 30:12).

And so God did with the United States—which was richly blessed and in turn became a blessing to the world at large. But that was then. Today many Americans have rejected any sense of godly morality. They have increasingly turned away from Him, rejecting Him from having a role in their lives or society as a whole. Many outright blaspheme Him. So where does that leave America today?

Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 both start with a list of wonderful blessings that God would bestow on Israel for remaining faithful to Him in obeying His laws. But then these chapters move to list terrible curses for unfaithfulness and disobedience. Be sure to read these chapters with a mind toward where America has been and the road it is now heading down.

The curses read like many of today’s headlines. Many other sobering prophecies foretell terrible destruction to come as a consequence of our national sins. Again, see our free study guide and take heed.

We should pray for the nation and other nations—that all will come to repentance. But realize that they are set on a course they are unlikely to turn from until prophesied end-time calamities strike, which they assuredly will. But you can heed God right now and make sure that you personally are obedient to Him. As He promises, “Those who honor Me I will honor.”

As Thanksgiving approaches, reflect on the amazing origins of America as a God-honoring nation and be thankful for our blessings. But also grieve over the terrible wrongs we see. And pray for the day when the true Kingdom of God will come with the return of Jesus Christ and untold blessings will overflow the world.
A World in Chaos as America Fractures

As the United States becomes increasingly divided, the effect is felt around the globe in the form of frail leadership, further division and turmoil among the nations.

by Peter Eddington

Widespread societal division is not limited to America. We’re seeing it throughout the world—particularly in Western nations such as U.S. allies Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand. And the upheaval is made worse by the rifts in America leading to its mishandling of global politics and economics, resulting in loss of respect on the world stage.

What will this mean for the world going forward?

Loss of confidence in the world’s policeman

Over the last three centuries there have been two primary leaders of the West—the British Empire and the United States. Through these great national powers, law and order have been promoted and to varying degrees maintained throughout much of the world.

For example, slavery of all forms was first outlawed around the world by the West—Great Britain and shortly thereafter by the United States. And we have seen the flow of global trade made free by these two great powers enforcing open sea lanes and gates in critical locations around the world, facilitating the transport of food, goods and services to all nations.

The prosperity of the 20th and 21st centuries has in large part been enabled by these two global “policemen” putting down threats of war, threats of naval blockades and threats of terrorism. This has allowed free trade and the world’s nations to prosper.

But what happens when we defund the police? What happens when global policing is weakened and seen as powerless? Crime, instability, terrorism, hunger and chaos ensue.

Respect for U.S. power and intervention is quickly waning. The monumental bungling of America’s withdrawal from Afghanistan—with Americans and supporters and many billions of dollars’ worth of military equipment and a vast airbase left behind to the Taliban and their Chinese allies—was a turning point in history for the worse.

Enemies of the West no longer feel so strongly the need to avoid confrontation with America and its allies as they don’t fear swift retribution or resolve to see it through. Nations disobey the global rule of law almost with impunity. They feel freer to do as they please. The global policeman has been defunded—in an ideological sense.

This is rooted in U.S. division at home. The political divide that is causing chaos across the U.S. electoral system has migrated into cities and towns throughout the nation, causing unrest, spiking crime, violent protests, rioting and murder. And this has been followed by increasing instability and chaos among Western allies.

In 1953 political cartoonist Daniel Fitzpatrick drew what has become a famous piece titled “As America Goes So Goes the World.” Two outstretched arms are depicted on each side of the U.S. Capitol Building reaching out over the world, one holding a torch of freedom shining with the words “Civil Liberties” and “Civil Rights” and the other holding a ball and chain. The message is that as the United States promotes freedom, so will the world enjoy more freedom. But as America becomes oppressive and personal liberties and freedoms are taken away, the effect will be felt around the globe.

Failure in leadership bringing severe repercussions

Chaos in the world is quickly increasing because of a lack of godly American leadership. The abolition of biblical values stateside is causing ripple effects around the world.

Many pundits have concluded that with stronger American opposition to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it wouldn’t have happened. Russia
would not have risked such involvement against the West. But America is now seen as weak and ineffectual.

The conflict has exacerbated an energy and food crisis around the world. Since the United States recently adopted policies abandoning its energy independence and making it more dependent on other nations, it’s no longer in a position to successfully discourage war—but rather has to buy more oil from despotic regimes in Saudi Arabia, Russia and Venezuela. And with Europe depending heavily on oil and gas from Russia, it also is hamstrung in deterring the Ukraine-Russia conflict.

All eyes are now on China’s possible moves to take over Taiwan—taking advantage of America’s weakened role. Besides diminishing U.S. ability and determination to act as needed, America is effectively over a barrel, with so many supply lines of critical goods based in China. It even appears that a number of leading U.S. politicians have been personally compromised by the Chinese, making the nation less likely to take needed actions or go beyond a show of resistance.

Worse still, much of the military help and intervention we see in Ukraine and perhaps Taiwan and other venues may not be so noble as proclaimed but engaged in to drag out conflict for financial gain in supporting the increased power and wealth of the military industrial complex—or even to further aims of those seeking international turmoil to upend global political systems.

In any case, sanctions against Russia are not constraining its invasion of Ukraine. Energy exports continue. Weakness, confusion and short attention spans strengthen the view that the West lacks the resolve to oppose military aggression.

The global energy crisis—caused in part by Russia thumbing its nose at America and the West—has directly translated into increased inflation and the spiking costs of food and basic supplies. The shortage of fertilizer, needed to grow crops, is a direct consequence of the war in Ukraine—as is the lack of sunflower oil needed for cooking across the globe.

Ukraine is the world’s biggest exporter of sunflower oil, but the Russian invasion has made farming, producing and shipping of its cooking oil all but impossible—发送ing global prices higher and shoppers from all corners of the world scrambling for limited bottles.

Everyone is being impacted by the failure of global leadership by the United States and its Western allies.

Amid the crisis the “solution” steps forth

A coming solution to worsening global crisis in the absence of wise and stable Western leadership is not what you may think. A “fix” is going to be found that will seem marvelous and wonderful. The world will find a “savior” to heal the chaos.

Who will step forward as that longed-for savior? As Bible prophecy reveals, a “beast”—a political power with the characteristics of a fearsome animal—will come to the fore. The world will then seem to be back in control under the hand of this new global policeman.

The charismatic leader of this political power, also called the Beast, will be supported by a vast religious system led by a false prophet that “performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men” (Revelation 13:13). “Those who dwell on the earth will marvel . . . when they see the beast” (Revelation 17:8).

It will be amazing! This new global superpower will bring what seems to be stability and economic security. “The merchants of the earth [will] have become rich through the abundance of her luxury” (Revelation 18:3). But the rule of this Beast and the accompanying false prophet will be short—just a few years. What seemed to be the savior of mankind will suddenly go horribly wrong. Instead, it will turn out to be an oppressive, dictatorial global government that makes things even worse. In the end, it will have to be stopped by Jesus Christ to save the world from total destruction.

The fall of this beastly rule will be sudden: “‘For in one hour [a very short time] such great riches came to nothing.’ Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, ‘What is like this great city?’ They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate’” (verses 17-19).

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Worlds Apart: Nations Aligning East vs. West

Besides physical, geographic divisions, our world is beset by political, racial, religious and ideological differences that set the nations apart from one another. Wikipedia’s entry on the “East–West Dichotomy” states: “In sociology, the East–West dichotomy is the perceived difference between the Eastern and the Western worlds. Cultural and religious rather than geographical in division, the boundaries of East and West are not fixed, but vary according to the criteria adopted by individuals using the term . . . Conceptually, the boundaries are cultural, rather than geographical, as a result of which Australia is typically grouped in the West (despite being geographically in the east), while Islamic nations are, regardless of location, grouped in the East.”

This dichotomy is very easy to see in our world today. And each side of that is further subdivided. The West has the Anglosphere nations that cooperate in what’s called the Five Eyes alliance (FVEY)—with Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States as parties to the multilateral UKUSA Agreement, a treaty for joint cooperation in signals intelligence, the origins of which are traced to World War II. Another giant alliance in the West is that of the European Union, which is greatly challenged by nations to the east living in accordance with Eastern ideology.

The great divide between East and West has huge implications when it comes to a footing for war. We are seeing this barrier becoming more pronounced through the war in Ukraine, with Ukraine supported by the West and Russia supported by China and other Eastern nations. And this divide grows deeper and more dangerous by the day.

The real solution will at last arrive

Yes, Jesus Christ will return to remove this ungodly world leader and all resistance to divine rule to provide the real solution to mankind’s suffering—the Kingdom of God. Jesus’ return to establish His Father’s Kingdom is beautifully described in Revelation 19:11-16:

“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. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself . . . And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses . . . And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”

And so, to bring peace, joy and hope to humanity, through Christ and His heavenly forces, “the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image” (verse 20).

Further, the apostle John explains the glorious future of those once persecuted and murdered under the Beast’s evil global rule: “Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4).

Yes, those faithful to Christ who do not show allegiance to the Beast’s evil economic system and false religious edicts will be vindicated and receive immortal life at Jesus’ return.

The whole world under the leadership of its true Savior, Jesus Christ, will then have the opportunity to enjoy lives filled with peace and hope—they, too, being offered immortal life in the family of God with access to the water of life, symbolizing God’s Spirit and unending blessing. God will then say: “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son” (Revelation 21:6-7).

This is our exciting destiny! You, too, can inherit all things that God the Father and Jesus Christ have to offer. It’s an eternal, immortal life with no more tears or sorrow. May we all continue to pray “Your Kingdom come” and live righteous lives in preparation for that day!
Elizabeth’s reign ends, new era begins

While many knew the death of Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain was imminent, the news still struck hard the world over when it came on Sept. 8, 2022—especially for those in England and the nations around the world that have their “roots” and continuing alliances and ties with that nation. Her funeral on Sept. 19 was the biggest live TV event ever, with more than half the world’s population watching.

Queen Elizabeth was a unique world figure. The world will not see such a leader again in terms of longevity of reign, or perhaps even character, in this age. Only when Jesus Christ returns to take His throne will there be a more steady, enduring “monarch.” His reign will last forever, and He will rule with perfect righteousness and justice.

Praise from around the world poured in for the Queen. In an article posted the day she died titled “A Devastating Loss,” British columnist Melanie Phillips summed up the magnitude of the Queen’s reign and her passing poignantly and eloquently:

“She held the country together because of the way she effaced herself to become the quintessence of duty and selfless service to her people, a symbol of unity and true inclusion. We watched the way she conducted her great office—her calmness, her strength, her fortitude, her kindliness and humility—and we felt soothed and reassured that, in looking at her example, we were gazing at ourselves as a nation in the mirror she held up to us. She loved us with a deep devotion; and in return we loved her.

“It’s impossible not to feel that her passing marks not just the loss of a unique public servant and a great soul, but also the loss of a Britain that belonged to a different era—a Britain of strength and resilience, a Britain of self-restraint and grounded pragmatism, a Britain of true tolerance and gentleness, a Britain whose passing we also most deeply mourn.”

Queen Elizabeth was that type of servant leader that commanded the respect, for the most part, of everyone around the world. But what happens now? What does the future hold for Britain and the rest of the world as this monumental event in history—the death of the longest-ruling monarch in British history—still sinks in?

Before looking ahead, let’s take a look back at Britain’s past, which is unique and unparalleled in human history. England is a relatively small nation, in terms of square miles, comparing to the U.S. states of Oregon or Alabama in size. Yet it is big in historical importance. From this small nation emerged the greatest empire in human history. At one time in the early 1900s, Britain controlled about 25 percent of the earth’s surface, with around 450 million subjects. (The global population at that time was only about 1.6 billion).

No empire has ever had been perfect or done things exactly right. Human nature and war bring with it unspeakable atrocities. Every single civilization and government of man has in its history events which they should regret. War and the human way are not of God but of Satan (James 4:1), so they will always be mixed with pain and suffering.

But the British Empire was different from other empires. It is called the “benevolent” empire by some historians because there was a marked difference between Britain’s rule and that of other governments. British colonies tended to improve life for their subjects and make them more prosperous. They didn’t plunder resources and seek to impoverish people to keep them subject. They weren’t automatic like world empires that went before them. That’s the way of the gentiles (Matthew 20:25).

By contrast, Britain was, in a physical sense, a blessing to the nations. The British built; they improved the people’s lot. When Britain “freed” her colonies and turned them back over to local rule, in almost all cases the nations fared far worse. Just look at what the thriving economies of Africa, called “the jewels” of the continent—such as Rhodesia and South Africa—have deteriorated into today, after British rule was removed.

History shows that no empire was a bigger blessing to the earth than the British Empire, and there has likewise been no single nation in the history of the earth that has been more benevolent and giving than the United States of America.

In the wake of the death of the Queen, it would be good to read our free study guide titled The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy to better understand and more deeply appreciate the blessings God has given through these peoples. That study guide also notes the significance of the British throne. For more on this, we have an online-only exposition titled The Throne of Britain: Its Biblical Origin and Future you may wish to study (see ucg.org/booklets for both publications).

As the reign of Charles III commences, fractional issues divide people. Charles himself has been a strong advocate of the “Great Reset” agenda of the World Economic Forum, of supranational governance.

In any case, prophecy reveals that a time of trouble and anguish lies ahead for the British and American peoples and the whole world, but that will thankfully be followed by the triumphant return of Jesus Christ.

Let’s reflect on what is happening and continue to grow closer to God and each other, as His will is.

50 million trapped in modern slavery

A

United Nations report “found that approximately 50 million people around the world are trapped in forced labor or forced marriage…(according to) the report, entitled ‘Global Estimates of Modern Slavery’. The number of people in such dire situations has jumped 25% from the previous report five years ago. The issue is not limited to the developing world: More than half of all forced labor and a quarter of all forced marriages occur in upper-middle-income or high-income countries. The U.N. notes that the true number is likely far greater, particularly among marriages involving children ages 16 and younger.” (The Blaze, Sept. 12, 2022).

The number is greater when we consider all the people being trafficked for various reasons and vastly greater when we add in populations effectively enslaved to totalitarian regimes, such as in China and North Korea. And then there are people around the world who consider themselves free but are effectively enslaved to a corrupt political and economic system in various ways. And beyond that, the whole world is in bondage to sin and Satan.

Let’s all pray for the coming of the ultimate Liberator—Jesus Christ. In Him is true freedom (Luke 4:16-21, John 8:32, 36).
Europe faces crippling energy crisis

Europe is in the midst of a devastating energy crisis. People are seeing their energy bills skyrocketing, and with winter settling in they’re facing the choice of buying food or heating their homes. European economies are crashing because there is no consumer spending, as people have no money to spend. And it’s all because of the green energy fantasy and the self-imposed Russian oil and natural gas embargo due to the Ukraine conflict. This could be a crisis of the first magnitude, leading to riots in the streets and governments falling.

A Bloomberg columnist wrote a piece this summer titled “Listening to European Electricity Traders Is Very, Very Scary,” in which he noted that “keeping the lights on this winter will be a lot more challenging than European governments are admitting . . . Increasingly, the word ‘emergency’ and ‘shortages’ are being used, with [talk] . . . focusing on when, rather than if, a crisis will hit” (Javier Blas, Aug. 26, 2022).

In many ways, it’s already here. A Business Insider headline announced, “European natural gas prices continue to climb and are now about 10 times more than usual ahead of key winter months” (Aug. 19).

The German Chambers of Industry and Commerce note that German companies are increasingly unable to access energy supplies on the market, leading to economic shutdown. Large numbers of people in Germany are now turning to wood to heat their homes, with Google searches for firewood exploding, so much so that supplies have been diminishing. In Poland, homeowners have had to stand in line for days to buy coal (Reuters, Aug. 27). France has announced energy rationing for the winter. “The UK is planning for several days over the winter when cold weather may combine with gas shortages, leading to organized blackouts for industry and even households” (Bloomberg, Aug. 9).

There is even a fear of “permanent deindustrialization from spiralling electricity and gas prices” (“Metal Producers Group Warns EU Leaders ‘Worsening Energy Crisis’ Is ‘Existential Threat to Our Future’” (Zero Hedge, Sept. 8). With people out of work, it will be even more difficult to pay for needs. It’s further pointed out that “the problem with an energy crisis is that it’s actually an everything crisis. In a world where virtually every industry relies on energy in some form, runaway inflation is an inevitability” (“Europe’s Natural Gas Shortage Could Trigger a Food Crisis,” OilPrice.com, Sept. 12).

Germany is imposing curbs on cities’ nightly illumination in this encroaching literal darkness. And the nation is preparing for civil unrest (“German Officials Warn of Draconian Energy Regulations, ‘Extremists’ Fueling ‘Mass Protests and Riots’” (Zero Hedge, Aug. 15).

A populace facing freezing and starvation is a recipe for total chaos. Murtaza Hussain of The Intercept tweeted, “If you turned the electricity off for a few months in any developed Western society, 500 years of supposed philosophical progress about human rights and individualism would quickly evaporate like they never happened.” It reminds one of the adage that “there are only nine meals between mankind and anarchy” (William Jacobson, “Finnish economist: ‘I am telling you people that the situation in Europe is much worse than many understand,’” Legal Insurrection, Sept. 7).

German diplomats laughed at President Donald Trump when he warned in a 2018 U.N. speech: “Germany will become totally dependent on Russian energy if it does not immediately change course. Here in the Western Hemisphere, we are committed to maintaining our independence from the encroachment of expansionist foreign powers.” They’re not laughing anymore, especially when policies intended to punish Russia have so completely backfired, another headline even declaring: “China Is Aggressively Reselling Russian Gas to Europe” (Zero Hedge, Aug. 31). On the other hand, some see the devastation being wrought as intentional, with the aim of drastically remaking society.

Sadly, the current U.S. administration has not continued in the policy of energy independence and will follow in Europe’s footsteps if it doesn’t turn things around (Helen Raleigh, “Germany’s Green Energy Follies Are a Warning to the United States,” The Federalist, Sept. 14).

These are dark times, but the world is poised to be plunged into much greater darkness. Economic woes and their terrible fallout will ultimately lead to a radically changed arrangement of the world order. Read our free study guide The Final Superpower for a look at where things will eventually end up. And do what you can to prepare for coming hard times, above all looking to God to help you make it through.

More Americans smoke marijuana than cigarettes

According to a new Gallup poll, more Americans smoke marijuana than they do cigarettes. “Sixteen percent of Americans say they currently smoke marijuana with 48% of respondents sharing that they have tried it at some point in their life—the highest rate ever recorded by Gallup. Last year, 12% of respondents said they used marijuana . . . Gallup’s poll finds that marijuana use was higher among adults between the ages of 18 and 34 with 30% responding that they smoke pot and 22% consume marijuana edibles. These numbers are significantly lower in both categories for adults 35 to 54 years old (16%) and Americans 55 and older (7%)” (Fox5 New York, Aug. 30, 2022).

About half of Americans see the drug as having a positive impact, while half see it as negative. Yet 68 percent think it should be legal.

How can you make sense of the news?

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

Many who say they’re Christians don’t really follow the teachings of Jesus Christ as presented in Scripture. How does your life align with what God’s Word instructs?

by Lewis VanAusdle

Though slipping in overall percentage, Christianity remains the world’s largest religion with around 2.4 billion adherents—about 30 percent of the globe. Yet it’s severely divided, with widespread disagreement on interpretation and acceptance of the religious text it’s based on. In America, the largest professing Christian nation, the majority of Christians (58%) say the Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything in it is to be taken literally, while 25 percent say it should be interpreted literally (“Fewer in U.S. Now See Bible as Literal Word of God,” Gallup, July 6, 2022).

The fact is, no matter which country we are from and what those around us believe, we as Christians need to look to God’s expectations for us—and these are found in the Bible. How does this vital resource, which is indeed the Word of God, define a Christian?

Christians have faith in Christ

In Romans 10:9 we are told “if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).

When a man from Ethiopia learned from the deacon Philip of Christ’s fulfillment of prophecy in dying for our sins and asked what he needed to do to be baptized, Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may” (Acts 8:37). The man answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (same verse). The man expressed faith in who Christ was and in Christ’s sacrifice for his sins.

The Bible clearly states that we are saved by the grace of God “through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). Without faith we cannot be called Christians. The faith we have is a gift from God that begins with our calling from Him.

Christians abide in God’s Word

The Bible is our guide in life. Its message leads us to faith (Romans 10:17). Jesus Himself said that His disciples abide in His Word, which came from the Father (John 8:31; 12:49). Christians are those who study and actually do their utmost to live by God’s Word in its entirety as their guide for life (see John 17:6, 17).

This fact is made abundantly clear in the book of James. James was inspired to ask the question, “But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” (James 2:20).

Abiding in the Word of God requires acting on our biblical faith. Christians must “be doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). We must follow the example of Jesus Christ in life and “walk just as He walked,” becoming obedient to the Word of God and its commandments (1 John 2:3–6).

Christians repent of their sins

In preparation for Christ’s ministry, John the Baptist preached a message of repentance. Many people came to him to be baptized and have their sins forgiven by God. Besides confession of sin, a vital aspect of repentance is beginning to live a life of obedience to God, or, as John explained to the unrepentant Pharisees and Sadducees who came to him, we must “bear fruits worthy of repentance” (Matthew 3:8).

Part of walking as Jesus walked is striving to live a life without sin. Christians must be willing to turn from their sins, changing the way they live.

The Father and Christ demonstrated supreme love for us in Christ’s death in our place for our forgiveness. We demonstrate our love for Them, and our acceptance of that sacrifice, by repenting of our sins and living a changed life of obedience. Jesus told His disciples: “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10).

Christians are committed to God

Repentance is a prerequisite to baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands of Christ’s ministry (see Acts 2:37–38; 8:17; 2 Timothy 1:6–7).

Sins separate us from God (Isaiah 59:2), and to have a relationship with Him those sins must be forgiven by Him and rejected by us. Christians must commit their
Christians live the Way

Before his own calling to the truth, the apostle Paul zealously hunted and persecuted the people “of the Way” (see Acts 9:2). This description of Christ’s followers shows a group of people on a spiritual journey along a spiritual path.

The disciples were later called “Christians” (Acts 11:26)—apparently by others but they soon embraced the name, referring as it did to the fact that they were followers of the Way led by Jesus Christ.

He is the head of the Church of God, which means He directs the way we go, how we live our lives and what kind of people we are supposed to be. Christians live according to the way of life Jesus Christ has taught and shown through His words and example.

Christians show the love of God

Jesus came and died for our sins, showing the great love both He and His Father have for mankind. We show our love to Them by keeping Their commandments (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3). We are called upon and expected to show that love toward one another. Jesus commanded us to “love one another” as He first showed us love (John 13:34). And He pointed out this characteristic as an identifier of His followers, stating, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (verse 35).

Of course, the Bible also makes it clear that Christians will not always live up to what we are called to, but they continue repenting and striving to live according to God’s way with His help (Romans 7:14–8:4; 1 John 1:8–2:2).

What should be clear is that belief and profession alone do not define a true Christian. James 2:19 reminds us that even the demons, rebellious angels under Satan, believe in God.

Jesus asked the question, “Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). We must not only call Jesus our Lord but actually accept Him as Lord—as Master and Ruler—of our life. And we must then live as He has called us to, following what the Bible, the Word of God, says about what it truly means to be a Christian!

As it was for the first Christians, repentance from sin and baptism are a prerequisite to receiving God’s Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands.

Christians are guided by God through the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the power that proceeds from God the Father and from Jesus Christ. It is the projected essence, mind and life force of God through which God the Father is creating His spiritual family. His children are those who live according to guidance He gives through that Spirit.

Through the indwelling of God’s Spirit we can truly be changed from the inside out. Christians are connected to God through the Holy Spirit and live according to that Spirit (Romans 8:6–9).

In fact, we are directly told that only those with that Spirit, who are led by it, truly belong to Christ as God’s converted children (verses 9, 14).

As it was for the first Christians, repentance from sin and baptism are a prerequisite to receiving God’s Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands.
Being Thankful to God at All Times

Gratitude keeps in mind God’s gifts and care for us, building our reliance on and devotion to Him. What are some of the things we should be most thankful for?

by Becky Sweat

With the American Thanksgiving holiday approaching, I decided to read William Bradford’s journal, Of Plymouth Plantation. In it, this governor of the Plymouth Colony shares his account of the Pilgrims’ voyage to the New World and the early years of their settlement.

The Pilgrims endured many hardships. The two-month voyage aboard the Mayflower was grueling and treacherous. Many of the passengers became extremely ill with scurvy and pneumonia. In their weakened condition, they arrived at their destination right at the start of winter. The shelters they constructed did not keep them warm, and they had little food left over from their ship’s provisions. By the end of winter, disease and malnutrition had taken the lives of nearly half of the colonists.

Still, they kept their focus on God and remained grateful. Bradford wrote in his journal that after disembarking from the Mayflower, “they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of heaven, who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean.” He noted that even after all the illness and death, those who survived continued to thank God for “his loving kindness, and his wonderful works.”

Their attitude exemplified the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:18: “In everything give thanks.”

Admittedly, this verse can seem like a tall order. It helps to understand that we are being exhorted not to give thanks for everything, but in or during all circumstances. God does not expect us to pretend that the trials we experience aren’t painful, or that all the troubles we’re seeing in the world are somehow positive developments. Clearly the Pilgrims weren’t grateful for the deaths, illnesses and harsh living conditions. But through all the suffering, they still saw God’s hand at work among them.

For me, reading Bradford’s journal was a good reminder of the importance of continually being thankful to God, even in the face of adversity.

To sustain this mindset, we need to remind ourselves of God’s magnificent attributes, acts of love and promises, as revealed in the Bible. These are things that we can always cling to, that do not come and go depending on our personal circumstances or current events. In particular, reflecting on the following biblical truths has helped me maintain an attitude of gratitude.

Jesus Christ gave His life so we might live

Jesus sacrificed His life so our sins could be forgiven, making it possible for us to be reconciled to God.
Father and inherit eternal life (John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:18). We can face our days with hope, knowing that God is involved with us personally and that this life isn’t the end of our existence.

God’s rule is supreme

Whether we’re experiencing economic crises, pandemics, food shortages, wars or some other national or global emergency, God is still on His throne (Psalms 47:8-9; 103:19). He sees what’s going on and will intervene as He judges best. He won’t allow anything to happen to thwart His overall plan for us. While Satan is presently “the ruler of this world” (John 14:30), it’s only because God has granted that to him for a limited time within the scope of God’s ultimate purposes.

God’s plan cannot be thwarted (Proverbs 19:21; 21:30; Job 42:2). While God does give us free will and latitude to make our own decisions, He knows how to respond appropriately so that His purposes will go forward.

As supreme Ruler of the universe, God’s power is infinite. His love for us, trustworthiness, justice, fairness, patience, goodness, mercy and wisdom are all integral to who He is. We can put our total confidence in God’s righteous rule and leadership.

God will provide our needs

When we ask God for help, He will meet all of our needs, both physical and spiritual (Philippians 4:19). The solutions He provides may not always be what we had in mind, but God will take care of us. That includes providing sustenance (Matthew 6:31-33), protection (Psalm 91:2, 5-7), healing (James 5:14-16) and guidance and direction (Proverbs 16:9). Even when we get into trouble, God will give us the resources we need to make it through those times (1 Corinthians 10:13).

God won’t abandon us

As long as we haven’t rejected God, He will not fail or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; Psalm 37:28; John 14:18). God has a great vision for what we can become, and He will finish the work He has started in us (Philippians 1:6).

Trials are growth opportunities

All human beings face difficulties, setbacks and challenges. Without a relationship with God, problems are just a source of frustration and distress. But when we’re seeking God’s involvement in our lives, He will bring forth good from the storms we face. Hardships can show us where we fall short spiritually, stir us to pray, drive us to study the Bible and help us to develop godly character.

James 1:2 says to “count it all joy when you fall into various trials.” The suffering itself isn’t what’s joyful, but rather knowing that God is our Master Potter and that trials are a tool He uses to help shape and prepare us for His Kingdom. It’s a blessing to be able to see life’s problems as growth opportunities instead of suffering without purpose.

Eternal rewards will far surpass present suffering

God will grant eternal rewards to those who endure in His ways amid suffering. James 1:12 calls these rewards the “crown of life,” and Romans 8:17 adds that we will be glorified with Christ. The Bible does not tell us everything these rewards entail, but Romans 8:18 assures that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” Any pain we have to endure in order to be in God’s Kingdom will be worth it (see also 2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

Jesus will return to establish the Kingdom of God

We do not have to hope against hope that somehow technology or science will come up with solutions to the world’s problems, or that the “right” politicians will get into power. The Bible assures us that God the Father will send Jesus Christ to the earth to establish His Kingdom (Daniel 2:44; Micah 1:3; Matthew 24:30; Revelation 1:7, 19:16), which is the only way to lasting peace and harmony.

Many today are concerned that nuclear war will wipe out mankind, and while we know turbulent events are ahead of us, Matthew 24:22 promises us that these times will be cut short and that humanity will not destroy itself.

Gratitude is always the right attitude!

Of course, being thankful “in everything” includes the good times too—when we have material blessings like a stocked pantry, a nice home, good health and financial gains, as well as family and friends. Thanking God for the abundance in our lives helps us remember that He is the One who ultimately provides us with everything we have.

When times are tough, we should thank God for His unwavering promises, like those mentioned here, and also remember specific ways He’s intervened in the past. That’s what the Pilgrims did, and it helped them persevere and trust God more fully.

This kind of gratitude will help us too. Thanking God gets our minds off all the negativity in this world and helps us focus on what has eternal value, reminding us to rely on God’s ongoing helpfulness and kindness and to be faithful to Him.
Christmas Before Christ?  
The Surprising Story

Most people know the Bible doesn’t direct us to celebrate Christmas. Does it make any difference as long as it’s intended to honor God and bring families together?

by Jerold Aust

At this time of year it’s fairly common to see programs like the one titled “Christmas Unwrapped: The History of Christmas,” which aired on the A&E (Arts & Entertainment) cable television channel. The promo for the program read:

“People all over the world celebrate the birth of Christ on December 25th. But why is the Savior’s nativity marked by gift-giving, and was He really born on that day? And just where did the Christmas tree come from?

“Take an enchanting journey through the history of the world’s favorite holiday to learn the origins of some of the Western world’s most enduring traditions. Trace the emergence of Christmas from pagan festivals like the Roman Saturnalia, which celebrated the winter solstice.”

This program addressed the fact that Santa Claus is fictitious and that Christmas and its trappings emanate from pagan Roman festivals, as many other sources corroborate.

Is there more to these ancient traditions and practices than meets the eye? And, more important, does it make any difference whether we continue in them?

Celebration of the sun god

It may sound odd that any religious celebration with Christ’s name attached to it could predate Christianity. Yet the holiday we know as Christmas long predates Jesus Christ. Elements of the celebration can be traced to ancient Egypt, Babylon and Rome. This fact certainly calls into question the understanding and wisdom of those who, over the millennia, have insisted on perpetuating its observance throughout the Christian world.

Members of the early Church would have been astonished at the customs and practices we associate with Christmas being incorporated into a celebration of Christ’s birth. Not until centuries after them would His name be attached to this popular Roman holiday.

As Alexander Hislop explains in his book The Two Babylons: “It is admitted by the most learned and candid writers of all parties that the day of our Lord’s birth cannot be determined, and that within the Christian Church no such festival as Christmas was ever heard of till the third century, and that not till the fourth century was far advanced did it gain much observance” (1959, pp. 92-93).

As for how Dec. 25 became associated with Christ’s birth, virtually any book on the history of Christmas will explain that this day was celebrated in the Roman Empire as the birthday of the sun god. For example, the book 4000 Years of Christmas says: “For that day was sacred, not only to the pagan Romans but to a religion from Persia which, in those days, was one of Christianity’s strongest rivals. This Persian religion was Mithraism, whose followers worshiped the sun, and celebrated its return to strength on that day” (Earl and Alice Count, 1997, p. 37).

Not only was Dec. 25 honored as the birthday of the sun, but a festival had long been observed among the pagan nations of celebrating the growing amount of daylight after the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year. The precursor of Christmas was in fact an idolatrous winter festival characterized by excess and debauchery that predated Christianity by many centuries.

Pre-Christian practices incorporated

This ancient festival went by different names in various cultures. In Rome it was called the Saturnalia, in honor of Saturn, the Roman god of agriculture. The observance was adopted by early Roman church leaders and given the name of Christ (“Christ mass,” or Christmas) to permit pagans converting to Christianity to continue in their former practices, helping to swell the number of nominal adherents of Christianity.

The tendency on the part of third-century Catholic leadership was to meet paganism halfway—a practice made clear in a bitter lament by the Carthaginian theologian Tertullian.

In A.D. 230 he wrote of the inconsistency of professing Christians, contrasting their compromising practices with the pagans’ strict adherence to their own beliefs: “By us who are strangers to Sabbaths, and new moons, and festivals once acceptable to God [referring to the biblical festivals spelled out in Leviticus 23, which they failed to embrace], the Saturnalia, the feasts of January, the Bru-
None of the symbols, traditions or even characters, like Santa Claus, has any basis in biblical teaching. So where did they come from?

malia, and Matronalia are now frequented; gifts are carried to and fro, new year’s day presents are made with din . . . Oh, how much more faithful are the heathen to THEIR religion, who take special care to adopt no solemnity from the Christians” (Hislop, p. 93, emphasis added throughout).

Failing to make much headway in converting the pagans, the religious leaders of the Roman church began compromising by dressing the heathen customs in Christian-looking garb. But, rather than converting them to the church’s beliefs, the church largely converted to non-Christian customs in its own practices.

Although the early Catholic Church at first opposed this celebration, “the festival was far too strongly entrenched in popular favor to be abolished, and the Church finally granted the necessary recognition, believing that if Christmas could not be suppressed, it should be preserved in honor of the Christian God. Once given a Christian basis the festival became fully established in Europe with many of its pagan elements undisturbed” (Man, Myth & Magic: The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mythology, Religion, and the Unknown, Richard Cavendish, editor, 1983, Vol. 2, p. 480, “Christmas”).

Celebration wins out over Scripture

Some resisted such spiritually poisonous compromises, but it was not enough: “Upright men strove to stem the tide, but in spite of all their efforts, the apostasy went on, till the Church, with the exception of a small remnant, was submerged under Pagan superstition. That Christmas was originally a Pagan festival is beyond all doubt. The time of the year, and the ceremonies with which it is still celebrated, prove its origin” (Hislop, p. 93).

The aforementioned Tertullian wasn’t alone in objecting to compromise. “As late as 245 Origen, in his eighth hom-ily on Leviticus, repudiates as sinful the very idea of keeping the birthday of Christ as if he were a king Pharaoh” (The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th edition, Vol. 6, p. 293, “Christmas”).

Christmas was not made a Roman holiday until 534 (ibid.). It took 300 years for the new name and symbols of Christmas to replace the old names and meaning of the winter festival, a pagan celebration that reaches back so many centuries.

No biblical support for Santa Claus

How did the mythical Santa Claus figure enter the picture? Here, too, many books are available to shed light on the origins of this popular character. “Santa Claus” is an American corruption of the Dutch form Sinterklaas or Sint-Nicolaas, a figure brought to America by the early Dutch colonists (The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th edition, Vol. 19, p. 649, “Nicholas, St.”). This is often said to refer to St. Nicholas, bishop of the city of Myra in southern Asia Minor, a Catholic saint honored on Dec. 6.

He was bishop of Myra in the time of the Roman emperor Diocletian, was persecuted, tortured for the Catholic faith and kept in prison until the more tolerant reign of Constantine (ibid.). Various stories claim a link from Christmas to St. Nicholas, all of them having to do with gift-giving on the eve of St. Nicholas, subsequently transferred to Christmas Day (ibid.). Yet the link is questionable, and other suggestions have been proposed.

In any case, we might wonder how a bishop from the sunny Mediterranean coast of Turkey came to be associated with a red-suited man who lives at the north pole and rides in a sleigh pulled by flying reindeer.

Knowing what we’ve already learned about the ancient pre-Christian origins of Christmas, we shouldn’t be surprised to learn that Santa Claus, too, is nothing but a figure recycled from ancient pagan beliefs.

The trappings associated with him—his fur-trimmed wardrobe, sleigh and reindeer—reveal his connection to the cold climates of the far North. Some sources trace him to the ancient Northern European gods Woden and Thor (Earl and Alice Count, pp. 56-64). Others trace him even farther back in time to the Roman god Saturn and the Greek god Silenus (William Walsh, The Story of Santa Klaus, pp. 70-71).

Was Jesus born in December?

Most Bible scholars who have written on the subject of Jesus’ birth conclude that, based on evidence in the Bible itself and knowledge of the climate of the Holy
Land, there is no possible way Christ could have been born anywhere near Dec. 25.

Again we turn to Alexander Hislop: “There is not a word in the Scriptures about the precise day of [Jesus’] birth, or the time of the year when He was born. What is recorded there implies that at what time soever His birth took place, it could not have been on the 25th of December. At the time that the angel announced His birth to the shepherds of Bethlehem, they were feeding their flocks by night in the open fields. . . . The climate of Palestine . . . from December to February, is very piercing, and it was not the custom for the shepherds of Judea to watch their flocks in the open fields later than about the end of October” (Hislop, p. 91, emphasis in original).

He goes on to explain that the autumn rains beginning in September or October in Judea would mean that the events surrounding Christ’s birth recorded in the Scriptures could not have taken place later than mid-October, so Jesus’ birth likely took place earlier in the fall (Hislop, p. 92).

Further evidence supporting Jesus’ birth in the autumn is that the Romans were intelligent enough not to set the time for taxation and travel in the winter. And it would have been quite hazardous for Joseph and his expectant wife Mary to have made the trip from Nazareth to his ancestral home of Bethlehem so late in the year. As recorded by Luke, Mary delivered Jesus in Bethlehem during the time of census and taxation—which, again, no rational official would have scheduled for winter.

**What difference does it make?**

The Bible gives us no reason—and certainly no instruction—to support the myths and fables of Christmas and Santa Claus. They are contrary to the ways of Christ and His holy truth. “Learn not the way of the heathen,” God tells us (Jeremiah 10:2, King James Version).

Professing Christians should examine the background of the Christmas holiday symbols and stop telling their children that Santa Claus and his elves, reindeer and Christmas gift-giving are connected with Jesus Christ. Emphatically they are not! God hates lying (Proverbs 6:16-19; 12:22).

Christ reveals that Satan the devil is the father of lies (John 8:44). Parents should tell their children the truth about God and this world’s contrary and confusing ways. If we don’t, we only perpetuate the notion that it’s acceptable for parents to lie to their children.

God specifically commands His people not to do what early church leaders did when they incorporated idolatrous practices and relabeled them Christian. Before they entered the Promised Land, God gave the Israelites a stern warning to not worship Him with pagan practices: “Take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them [the inhabitants of the land], . . . and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’

“You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods . . . Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it” (Deuteronomy 12:30-32).

Many centuries later the apostle Paul raised up churches in many gentle cities. To the members of the Church of God in Corinth, a Greek city steeped in idolatry, Paul wrote: “. . . What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial [or Wickedness personified, here in reference to Satan]? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?

“For you are the temple of the living God . . . Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.’ . . . Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 6:14-17; 7:1).

Instead of approving of any notion of church members renaming and celebrating customs associated with false gods as now Christian, Paul’s instructions were clear: They were to have nothing to do with such practices. He similarly told Athenians who were steeped in idolatry, “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

God alone has the right to decide the special days on which we are to worship Him. Jesus Christ plainly tells us that “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). We cannot honor God in truth with false practices adopted from the worship of false gods.

Jesus said: “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Mark 7:6-7). Even if Christians mean well when they observe Christmas, that does not make it okay. God is not amused or pleased!

The knowledge of how to truly honor God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ has been made available to you. Will you live by the revealed truth of God or follow the wayward traditions of mankind?  ■
Readers with thankful feedback for our work

I want to thank you for all you’ve done in my life. Before I started reading your publications, I’d attended a Baptist church most of my life and never had been taught anything about the Kingdom of God—only about being saved and that you go to heaven or hell. Sure, we’d studied the Bible, but nothing was ever explained to me like I’ve learned from reading and rereading your books and online publications. I’ve worn out my printer by printing out the Bible study notes from your website. You have truly opened my eyes, and with God’s help, I plan to keep learning what He’s showing me.

From the Internet

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I just finished your study guide God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind. Wow! I am very interested in learning more and finding a minister near me, please. Thank you so much!

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Looking for a church to visit

I am looking for a congregation where they will consider and love the commandments of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I have a great desire to start keeping the Feasts as Jesus taught us. Unfortunately, in my country I did not learn to keep these ordinances, which are in the Scriptures as an instruction for us.

From the Internet

We do our best to be a church that loves the commandments of Jesus Christ, and we’d welcome anybody looking to visit. Go to ucg.org/congregations to find the closest congregation to you. Feel free to reach out to the pastor and let him know you’re interested!

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Many Bible students have taken note of Jesus Christ’s “I am” revelations about Himself in the Gospel of John. He said, “I am the bread of life,” “I am the light of the world,” “I am the door [or gate],” “I am the good shepherd,” “I am the true vine,” “I am the resurrection and the life.” “I am the way, the truth, and the life” and, even more profoundly, simply “I AM” (John 6:35; 8:12, 58; 15:1; 10:7, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6).

But He also gave important self-disclosures in third person, such as this one in Mark’s Gospel: “Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28). The Greek word for Lord here is kurios, meaning one who has power, authority and ownership in a matter.

The matter addressed is the seventh-day Sabbath, the term originating in a Hebrew verb meaning to cease or desist. God had given a loving command to pause from six days of work and personal pursuits and transition into a unique 24-hour realm of time, from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday, that He created for our spiritual, mental, emotional and physical well-being (Exodus 20:8-11; Mark 2:27).

Yet most professing followers of Jesus do not observe the weekly Holy Day He observed and proclaims as His to oversee. Did you realize that the four Gospel writers devote more space to what Christ taught regarding the Sabbath than to any other particular subject?

Rather than abolishing the Sabbath commandment or transitioning its observance to another weekday, as so many think, Jesus displayed how God in human flesh would observe such holy time—in line with His declaration that “the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). He was at that time correcting the misuse of the Sabbath. Religious leaders had added nonbiblical regulations that made it burdensome rather than the loving blessing God intended it to be.

A New Covenant disciple will grow in understanding that observing the seventh-day Sabbath is connected to Jesus’ declaration, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” How many people have simply lost their way in life? The seventh-day Sabbath provides us a compass to point to what God has done in the past and why, what He is currently doing in the present and how, and the incredible future He has planned for everyone made in His image and likeness.

God grants us this grace-filled compass of time to anchor us in the shifting sands of society and our personal lives, helping us to stay on course in heeding Christ’s call of “Follow Me.”

Remembering and identifying with our Creator

The seventh-day Sabbath reminds us of where we came from and by Whom. Where the Ten Commandments are listed in Exodus 20, the fourth (in verses 8-11) states: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the

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seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you nor [others under your authority] . . . For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them [including human beings in His image (Genesis 1:26-27)], and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath and hallowed it."

This divinely designated time of the week takes us back to our roots, reminding us that we were created for a purpose and not merely by accident of evolution. It calls to mind the truth that we are not alone, that we worship an awesome and loving Creator who doesn't want us to live accidentally but with design and purpose to honor and glorify Him and love our fellow man.

With the Old Testament origins of the Sabbath, some say, “Well that was then, and this is now.” But who is the great “I Am” (Exodus 3:13-15) who gave Moses and the Israelites the Ten Commandments? The answer is given in John's Gospel, where Jesus said He is the “I Am” (John 8:58)—besides His cavalcade of other “I Am” declarations.

Further, John opened His Gospel by taking us back to the beginning of creation, where we see two divine Beings, God and the Word who was also God—later to be known as God the Father and Jesus Christ—and also that everything was made through the Word who became Christ (John 1:1-3, 14). The apostle Paul adds that “all things were created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16)—which includes the Sabbath!

**Jesus was the God who gave us the Sabbath**

Thus, Jesus is the very Creator of the Sabbath on behalf of the Father—and He’s also the one who commanded Israel to observe it at Mt. Sinai. As Paul stated regarding the people’s reliance on God as their Rock and Deliverer: “All of them ate the same spiritual food, and all of them drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that went with them, and that rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:3-4, God's Word Translation).

The preincarnate Christ was giving a liberated people more than simply physical food and water. He was providing them with spiritual sustenance to link them with the Creator God, who had a purpose for them.

And this wasn’t just for the ancient Israelites. Have you ever considered that when God initially created the Sabbath and gave it to Adam and Eve, there was no Israelite, no Jew, no gentile? There were simply two human beings made in His image, and He gave them a gift—a piece of Himself. Genesis 2:3 tells us: “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it [set it apart as sacred], because in it He rested [Hebrew shabath, meaning “cease, rest”] from all His work which God had created and made.” It’s also forward looking, as we will see.

The prolific religious writer N.T. Wright described it this way in his book Simply Jesus: “The sabbath was the day when human time and God’s time met, when the day-to-day succession of tasks and sorrows was set aside and one entered a different sort of time, celebrating the original sabbath and looking forward to the ultimate one.

“This was the natural moment to celebrate, to worship, to pray, to study God’s law. The sabbath was the moment during which one sensed the onward movement of history from its first foundations to its ultimate resolution. If the Temple was the space in which God’s sphere and the human sphere met, the sabbath was the time when God’s time and human time coincided. Sabbath was to time what Temple was to space” (2011, p. 136, emphasis in original).

Those who understood that a holy God had given a holy people a holy day for a holy purpose would understand that the seventh-day Sabbath was an identifying symbol of a relationship between the God of creation and a called-out and delivered people. They would embrace the power and wonder of Exodus 31:13, where God told Moses, “Speak also to the children of Israel, saying, ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that
you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.”

Only God can make things holy, but—as the Fourth Commandment prescribes—we are to “remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,” as we seek to experience God’s presence within this temple in time.

**Defining the present life of a Christian**

The seventh-day Sabbath not only reminds us of God’s formation and ordering of His physical creation, but it refocuses us on what He’s doing here and now in a current and awesome spiritual creation, which is yet to come to full fruition. The Fourth Commandment ultimately speaks to plural creations—yet in motion towards a common future.

Deuteronomy 5:12–15 is instructive in this regard. Here, in a reiterated listing of the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath commandment is not tied alone to the original creation, but to a deliverer God who not only brought the cosmos into being but continues to interrupt human history, now to liberate an enslaved people, granting them freedom and making them new and holy to Him (see Leviticus 11:44).

And here He reminds Israel of old as well as those within the Body of Christ, “the Israel of God” today (Galatians 6:16), “And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out . . .” (Deuteronomy 5:15). Observance of this commandment is a weekly reminder of the time of transition from a “living death” to living fully for an intervening Creator who is not merely a “First Cause” but the ongoing Sustainer of His divine purpose for humanity. Christ’s followers have been set free from their pasts, Scripture describing a converted person as “a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Paul speaks of this further in Romans 6:17-18: “But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, is now our Master, and we are now liberated from the penalty of sin, from the dominance of Satan’s influence, free to love God and those made in His image, free to utilize the God-given spiritual tools of His guiding Spirit—a new heart and mind (Hebrews 8:8)—to maintain freedom from the pulls of our human nature and the siren song of human society.

Every seventh day, once a week, we are able to rest from our physical labors and the stress-filled stranglehold of society and take time to be nourished by God’s Word and to appear before Him in worship, praise and song, as was the regular custom of Jesus and the apostle Paul in obedience to the Fourth Commandment (see Luke 4:16; Acts 17:2).

**Pointing to a better future for all humanity**

The apostle Paul in Romans 8:22 gives voice to the cries of the initial creation gone astray that “groans and labors” under “the curse” humanity brought on itself in Eden (Genesis 3:13-19). And yet, God is going to again intervene and establish His peace on earth. The seventh-day Sabbath is a weekly reminder and signpost to that eventful time yet ahead.

It is of note that Hippolytus of Rome in the early third century wrote the following in a commentary on the book of Daniel: “And 6,000 years must needs be accomplished, in order that the Sabbath may come . . . For the Sabbath is the type and emblem of the future kingdom of the saints, when ‘they shall reign with Christ,’ when He comes from heaven, as John says in his Apocalypse.” It was understood early on that the seventh-day Sabbath provides a small picture of God’s Kingdom.

The initial six days of the working week expressed the vast difference between man’s restless world and the perfection of God’s day—the seventh day, symbolizing the world yet to come—a return to Eden. The Sabbath represents the 1,000-year period mentioned in Revelation 20:4-5, thus connecting the first book of the Bible with the final one in presenting a God who never ceases His spiritual work to redeem humanity!

When Jesus says, “I am . . . the life” (John 14:6), this is the liberating life that the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6-7), the Lord of the Sabbath, will bring for all people when His intervening Kingdom interrupts and replaces the kingdoms of man (Daniel 2:44; Revelation 11:15).

When Jesus offers us the incredible privilege of personal discipleship in calling to us, “Follow Me,” He offers an important parameter in John 8:31-32: “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Abiding in His words is not merely sticking our noses in the Bible, but obeying His words and following His example as the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Lord of the Sabbath. As the great “I Am” of Scripture, He inspired Moses to write, “ WHATSOEVER I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it” (Deuteronomy 12:32).

What will you do now that you have read this column and have come to discover that a holy God has given a holy people a holy day for a holy purpose? 

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**LEARN MORE**

The most ignored of God’s Ten Commandments is the fourth, which tells us to keep the seventh-day Sabbath holy. Discover what the Bible says about the Sabbath in our eye-opening study guide: Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest. A free copy is waiting for you! BTmagazine.org/booklets
Where did the Christmas holiday come from? How did it begin, and why? Does it really honor Jesus Christ and celebrate His birth, or is there more to the story that most people don’t know?

Did you realize that historians (and the Bible) agree that Jesus Christ wasn’t born anywhere near Dec. 25?

Did you know that this particular date was well known for its pagan religious celebrations long before Jesus Christ was born?

What does a jolly old man in a fur-trimmed red suit (who supposedly lives at the North Pole and is assisted by elves!) have to do with the birth of the Son of God? And what’s up with the flying reindeer pulling a sleigh?

How much do you know about the origin of the Christmas tree? How did holly come to be connected with the holiday, and why is mistletoe supposedly good for kissing?

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