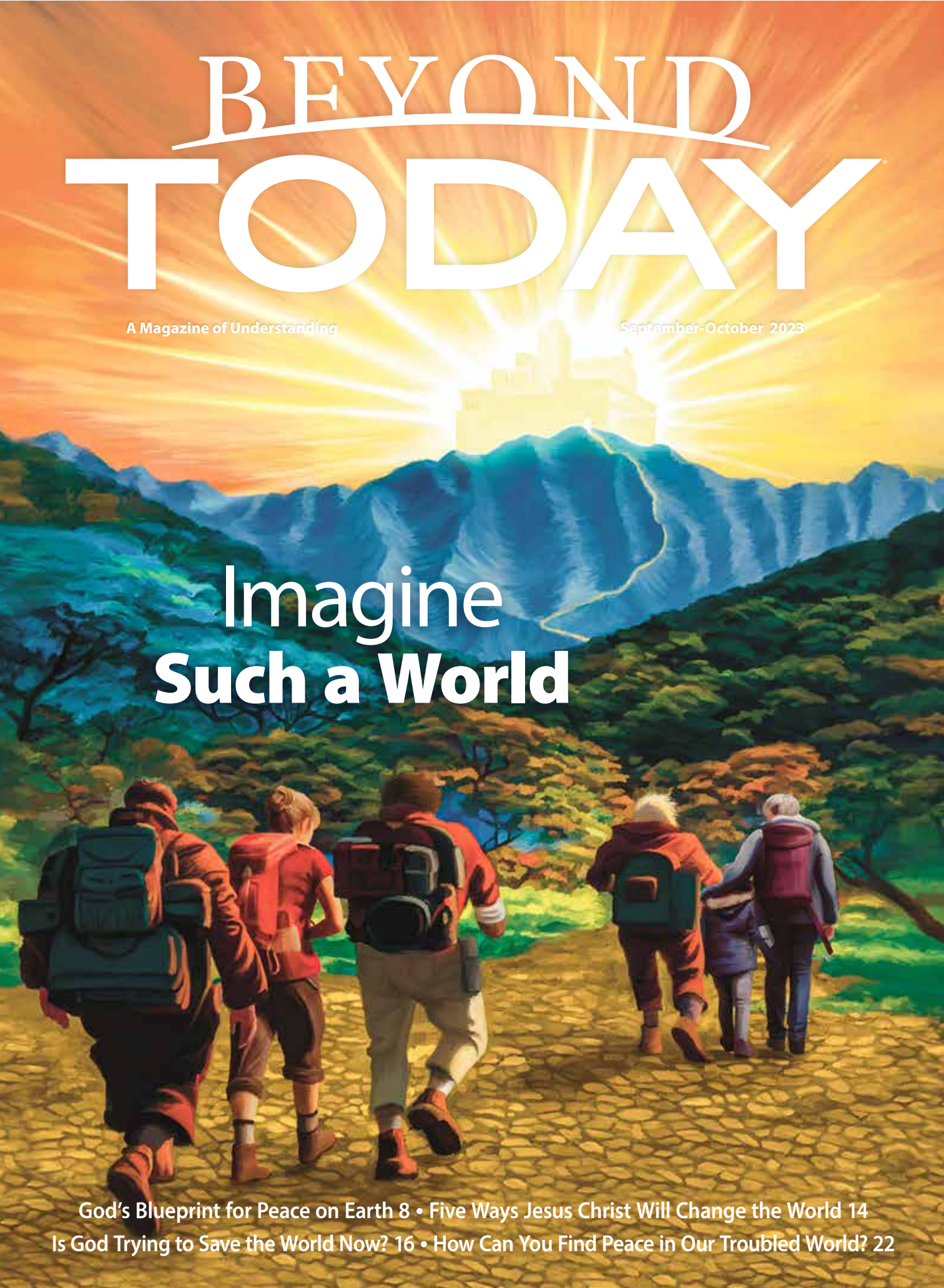
BEYOND TODAY

A Magazine of Understanding

September-October 2023



Imagine Such a World

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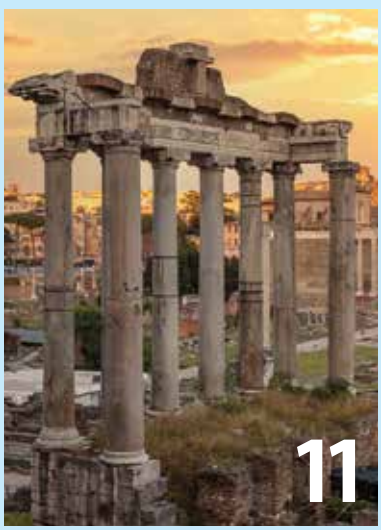

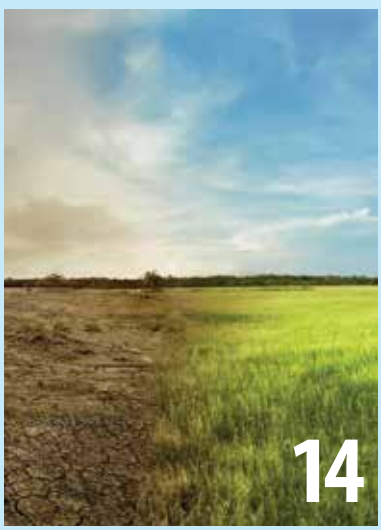



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Scott Ashley
Managing editor

"I Am Become Death, the Destroyer of Worlds"

As I write this, the movie *Oppenheimer* is one of the biggest box-office draws in the United States. The subject is Dr. Robert Oppenheimer, often referred to as the "father of the bomb"—the first atomic bomb.

The movie (though not recommended due to some objectionable material), charts the development of the Manhattan Project, the pivotal and massively expensive race to build the world's first nuclear weapon before Nazi Germany could beat the Allies to it. Both sides knew the winner of the race would likely win the Second World War—which is exactly what happened.



Dr. Robert Oppenheimer, left, led the pivotal effort to develop the atomic bomb, first tested July 16, 1945.

Oppenheimer, a complicated and complex genius, was put over the project. He recruited the world's best scientific minds to come together to build a device unlike anything the world had ever seen.

No one was actually sure it would work, even up to the point of the first test detonation at White Sands, New Mexico. Some harbored a very real concern that the first atomic explosion could set off a chain reaction that would ignite the planet's atmosphere and spread around the world, extinguishing all life on earth.

At its peak, some 130,000 workers were involved in the project at more than 30 different sites. The cost of the project was staggering—some $2.2 billion at the time, worth about $24 billion in today's dollars.

Reflecting on the fearsome power unleashed by the first successful atomic bomb detonation on July 16, 1945, and the massive casualties produced by the two bombs dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki less than a month later, Oppenheimer came to oppose the development and use of nuclear weapons.

He later recalled his thoughts on witnessing that first blast: "We knew the world would not be the same. A few people laughed [in relief at the successful test], a few people cried. Most people were silent. I remembered the line from the Hindu scripture . . . *'Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.'*"

Now opposed to the weapons he had helped create, Dr. Oppenheimer spoke out against development of the hydrogen bomb, which the United States was in a race to develop before the Soviet Union could build one first. Because of his opposition and his left-leaning political views and associations, he was ostracized by the military and political leaders who had formerly championed him.

Dr. Oppenheimer's story holds important lessons for us today. When people work together, they can accomplish great things and make astounding scientific advancements. But at the same time, those advancements and accomplishments are all too often put to evil uses. They have often led to new weapons of war designed to kill ever-larger numbers of human beings in ever-more-efficient ways—like the 100,000 to 200,000 who died at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

How is this relevant for our day? Asked about the conditions that would precede His second coming, Jesus Christ foretold that *mankind will be brought to the brink of extinction.* His shocking response is recorded in Matthew 24:21-22: *"It will be a time of great distress, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and will never be again.* If that time of troubles were not cut short, *no living thing could survive;* but for the sake of God's chosen it will be cut short" (Revised English Bible, emphasis added).

To bring the human race to near-extinction will likely involve not only nuclear arms, but possibly even worse weapons. To echo Oppenheimer's fears, if not for God's direct intervention to save us from ourselves, *humanity will become destroyer of its own world.*

But God's Word offers great hope—hope of an astounding new world where weaponry will become a thing of the past: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:4).

Be sure to read the articles in this issue to learn how that astounding new world will come about and what it will be like. And join us in praying as Jesus Christ instructed, *"Thy kingdom come!"* BT



Imagine Such a World



Beyond the chaotic darkness of today's society, a beacon of hope brightly shines. A new age is coming to set right all that is wrong. Can you see it? Hold on to the vision.

by Rick Shabi

Most everyone would agree we live in a world that has changed in many ways over the last few years. Societal norms that existed for centuries have been abandoned. Alliances are being formed that hearken back to darker days and times of the Cold War. Freedoms that have marked modern democracies are being challenged even in the very same nations that introduced those freedoms to the world.

All these changes have led to confusion. What's going on? Where is this headed? What kind of world will my children inherit? We find ourselves asking, "What is the truth?"—even in areas that have not been in question before.

Wouldn't it be nice if the confusion could go away and all the world could be at peace and in perfect harmony? Wouldn't it be nice if everyone knew the real truth about matters—and if our world leaders were all of one mind, dedicated to serving the people entrusted to their care, improving their lives and bringing them together? Wouldn't it be nice to know that there are real, workable answers to the global problems we face today and that those are being used to bring about the world we all long for?

Just imagine a world where there is unity and universal happiness and joy, with all motivated by love for each other.

Join me as we imagine such a world.

Envisioning peace, safety and faithfulness

Imagine a world where there was no war, anywhere on earth. There have been a few times in the history of mankind where there was no actual war being waged, but even then the "winds of war" were blowing, with one nation or tribe working on plans to take over another.

Imagine a world where the climate was perfectly under control. There would be no damaging and deadly

hurricanes, tornadoes or forest fires—and no talk of rising sea levels or rising temperatures that might threaten the existence of mankind.

Imagine a world where dreaded diseases like cancer, heart disease, COPD and Covid were gone, and where the threat of global pandemics did not exist. Imagine a world without endless advertisements for the latest pharmaceutical "wonder" drug, with people everywhere enjoying full health.

Imagine a world where children could play safely in the streets without parents wondering where they were or who might come by and nab them. The sound of children playing and laughing would fill the air and bring joy to all those who hear it.

Imagine a world where children could go to school while their parents are fully aware of what they're being taught. The basics of education like reading, writing and arithmetic would be key subjects of the day, children learning concepts that will improve their lives as they gain skills for the future.

Imagine a world where all people know there really are only two genders—male and female. Men and boys know they are male, and girls and women know they are female, and they grow up appreciating their identity and the vital roles in life each fulfill.

Imagine a world where there is no divorce, where the nuclear family is intact, where Mom and Dad love each other, are faithful to each other and are committed to staying with each other for life, their children enjoying all the benefits of growing up in loving homes.

Yearning for liberty, abundance and harmony

Imagine a world where addictions to drugs, alcohol or other substances were so well counseled and worked with that people had lasting recovery. Imagine a world free of fentanyl and opioids and of substance abuse altogether.

Imagine a world where food and water are in abundance in every nation and every region of the world. Famines, droughts, food shortages caused by war or poor governmental decisions are a part of the dark history of the past. Throughout Asia, Africa, South America and everywhere else, food would be grown and harvested in fields worked by local workers. Fruits and vegetables would have rich, robust flavor—forgotten in the mass production days of the past.

Imagine a world where all families have their own home and land they enjoy and use. Gone would be crammed-together dwelling places where green space is difficult to find, and the homelessness that plagues so many cities today would be no more. The wonders of the earth and soil would be better appreciated as people see plants and trees growing and producing food, with our children learning what a blessing and miracle our planet is.

Imagine a world where crime and violence are nonexistent. There would be no fear of mass shootings in the "most unlikely" of places. Schools and other public gathering places would be completely safe. And if someone starts to do something harmful, there is swift preventative intervention.

Imagine a world with no need for elaborate security systems to protect our homes, our assets or our identities. All theft would be curtailed, and people would respect each other's property.

Imagine a world where envy and jealousy gave way to goodwill toward others. How would that affect all society in every nation and locale around the world? Can you imagine a world where everyone was happy for the successes of his neighbor, and where nations were not envious of another nation's prosperity?

Imagine a world where leaders were dedicated to rightly serving the people under their jurisdiction. Ulterior motives for public service and corruption, whether profiteering or an appetite for power to "lord it over" one's town or nation, would not be the norm. Instead, a true and pure attitude of service would characterize all public servants. Just imagine such a world.

Imagine a world of such peace that even animals are at peace with each other—a world where wolves and lambs, lions and deer, snakes and young children can coexist in harmony.

Could it ever be?

Amazingly, this world is in fact described in many prophecies throughout the Bible, as we often relate in the pages of this magazine and as we focus on in this issue in particular.

As you gain more perspective through learning of God's wonderful promises of the age to come, let this vision continue to occupy your thoughts. Think about the things that, to you, would make for a better world where people everywhere are happy and growing in love, respect and genuine care for each other.

Keep imagining this world where the needs of everyone are met and people learn to work hard and build into their lives the practices that result in true happiness, contentment and the right sense of purpose—a world where there is certainty in the way, the truth and the life.

Is such a world possible? The answer is absolutely *yes*. In fact, beyond the confusion, chaos, war, strife, unhappiness, misery and hopelessness we see today, the world we have been imagining here *will* emerge, and you can be part of it.

Yet how will this come about, and how can you be part of this tremendous change that will happen?

To discover that, read on to the next article, "The Vision Made Real," and continue through other articles in this issue. May God help you to capture the vision—and let it shape the direction of your life! BT

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The Vision Made Real

How will the beautiful picture of world peace and joy become reality? What stands in the way, how will change happen, and can change start now?

by Rick Shabi

In the preceding article, "Imagine Such a World," we envisioned a world of perfect peace and abundance—one everyone would dream of, with life full of good things.

You might think such a world could never exist, but it *can,* and it *will.* Let's consider how and the part you can play in making this a reality for you, your family and mankind, giving your life purpose, meaning and energy.

What prevents a better world?

First, though, let's think a moment about what makes this world the way it is.

Is it lack of technology or education? Is it an environment not fit for mankind to live in? Is it because God didn't give us the prowess, skills, talents and an earth that could be worked with, developed and molded into something that can benefit everyone?

Or might it be that the world is the way it is because of mankind's character—the way we do things and the reason for that?

Might we consider that "human nature" is what makes the world an unfriendly place? Could it be that man is deeply selfish, envious, prideful, violent, vindictive, unfaithful, contentious, unwilling to work with others unless it's his "own way"? (See Galatians 5:19-21.)

The previous article imagined a world in which even the animals will live in perfect peace with each other and mankind. What must change for that to happen? Yes—*the very nature* of the animals will need to change from one of predation and conflict to one of getting along with all other species.

This is also meant to reflect what is needed in human society.

The problem that holds humankind back—that keeps us from having peaceful, unifying, productive, loving societies in every region around the world—is *who man is, the human nature in all of us.*

The sad reality of man's corrupted nature

This problem goes all the way back to our first human parents in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve sinned and came under the influence of Satan the devil—a choice they made, as has all humanity since.

Just think what people have done to each other down throughout history. They have killed each other, hated each other, committed unspeakable atrocities and inflicted unbelievable torture on each other, sometimes in the name of religion, always in the name of selfishness, jealousy or a quest for power or to take from someone else to have for themselves.

Mankind's governments and leaders have been responsible for murdering many millions in the name of their ideas, their "truth." How many have died in wars over the course of human history, all fought in the name of "I want that"? (See James 4:1-2.)

It was not God's desire for mankind to live this way. We have all suffered the consequences of wrong choices.

Even in marriages designed by God to bring about joy, fulfillment, and happy children and families, people yield to their own lusts. Sexual unfaithfulness and perversities emerge, ruining families and creating chaos. Children are left with emotional scars that last for a lifetime, and they learn not to expect

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or hope for a better time.

Man's nature is responsible for the heartbreak, misery, suffering, and emotional and mental illnesses that result from the injurious treatment of fellow man, with people satisfying their own desires while lacking concern for their victims.

Such is the reality of our world.

So the question is, what will it take to bring about a new world filled with happiness, harmony and abundance for all?

That world and its benefits are available and attainable, but there must be action from *you*.

Looking to the right Man with real solutions

The world becoming the utopia that it will be requires loving leadership dedicated to providing the right resources and training for the well-being of all people.

There is one Man who loved mankind so much that He gave His life for the sake of everyone. He and His followers pointed to the better world He wanted people to enjoy—a time of refreshing and restoration of all things good.

> You can experience true joy, purpose, peace and fulfillment now, even before Christ returns and restores all things to this earth.

That Man knows the way to a better world. He knows what real truth is, and He knows the way to a life that is full and rewarding for every man, woman and child, regardless of background, ethnicity or place of origin. There is no partiality with Him. He indeed is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

If you can imagine the perfect leader, it is Jesus Christ, and He has already proven Himself to be the right Man for the job.

He will return to earth as He promised (verses 3-4). For now, He remains in heaven with God the Father, waiting for the Father to send Him back to rescue human beings from the sure destruction they would otherwise bring on themselves under the sway of Satan.

The apostle Peter called on people to repent "that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:19-21).

Jesus will not initially be welcomed by a hostile world but, as foretold, will teach people and lead them into healing, liberty and righteousness: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to comfort all who mourn . . . that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD" (Isaiah 61:1-4).

Ultimately God the Father, through Christ, will bring an end to human woes: "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

A transformed nature—which you can experience today

Do you hear what Christ will do when He returns to this earth? He will bring about a transformed world. But it necessitates a change of *human nature*. Only through changing what man is on the inside can the surrounding world experience the peace and fulfillment God has promised.

It starts with belief in Jesus Christ, which includes submission to God and His ways, accepting His sacrifice and committing to follow God in true repentance and baptism, after which God will give His Holy Spirit, making us partakers of God's very nature (Acts 2:38; 2 Peter 1:4). In that future age, God will pour out His Spirit on the world at large (Joel 2:28). God's Spirit in us leads to love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness and the other spiritual fruit listed in Galatians 5:22-23.

But you don't need to wait for that time, because you can experience that joy, purpose, peace and fulfillment now, before Christ returns and restores all things to this earth.

How is that possible? Christ Himself tells us what we need to do: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

Repentance has a deep meaning that most churches in this world do not adequately teach. You need to know what Christ said and meant if you want to experience what God wants us to have and enjoy. To learn more about what Christ said about repenting, download or request our free study guide *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.

Continue to imagine; continue to believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is true, and it truly is the hope for a better future for all mankind! BT

LEARN MORE



In proclaiming His gospel or good news message, Jesus Christ pointed to a time when He would directly rule the world on behalf of God the Father—bringing peace and righteousness. To better understand, download or request our helpful study guide ***The Gospel of the Kingdom.*** A free copy is waiting for you.

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The Bible's Holy Days: God's Blueprint for Peace on Earth

History proves mankind doesn't know true peace. Yet God promises it will come. How? A series of biblical festivals shows how He will bring permanent peace to the entire world.

by Jerold Aust

When a mighty angel announced the birth of Jesus Christ to shepherds watching over their flocks, a multitude of angels joined in praising God and expressing God's desire for peace among human beings: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men" (Luke 2:14).

This far-reaching angelic proclamation provides an incredible promise of permanent peace on planet earth. But how will it come about?

The sad reality of this world is that the history of humankind is a chronicle of wars. Some researchers have concluded that in all of recorded human history, the world has experienced only about 30 years of "peace," when no war was being waged.

Your Bible, in James 4:1-2, reveals where human conflicts begin: "What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Isn't it the whole army of evil desires at war within you? You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous for what others have, and you can't possess it, so you fight and quarrel to take it away from them" (Holman Christian Standard Bible).

But this is only part of the story. In addition to the greed, jealousy and selfishness inevitably leading to conflict between human beings, an invisible interloper constantly incites human warfare. Jesus Christ described this evil being, Satan the devil, as "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44).

This influence and the selfish, carnal hearts of human beings are why Jesus Christ foretold that humanity would continue to experience increasing wars and rumors of wars (Matthew 24:6-7).



God used the sound of a blown trumpet to signal His Feast of Trumpets, which pictures the return of Jesus Christ at "the last trumpet."

Conditions will get far worse, culminating in the time when humanity will come to the brink of extermination. In Jesus' words, "Unless that time of calamity is shortened, not a single person will survive . . ." (Matthew 24:22, New Living Translation).

Thankfully, there's good news on the horizon! That time *will* be cut short. And God has ultimately promised permanent peace for all humanity, never to be withdrawn or contested, through Christ Jesus.

The way His eternal peace will be brought to earth is revealed throughout Scripture and in four little-understood biblical festivals—the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles and the final Eighth Day.

These four festivals fall in the autumn of the year in the northern hemisphere, where the Holy Land sits. God's eternal peace is guaranteed through Christ in the symbolic meanings of these festivals, which embody God's coming peace on earth.

Trumpets *announces* peace

This festival season begins with the Feast of Trumpets, which proclaims the return of Christ to at last establish His reign over the entire earth.

God used the sound of a blown

John Theodor/iStock/Getty Images Plus

trumpet to signal His Feast of Trumpets: "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'In the seventh month [of the Hebrew calendar, overlapping September and October on our modern calendars], on the first day of the month, you shall have a Sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation'" (Leviticus 23:24).

This loud noise was used to herald imminent war (Amos 3:6). Older American movie "westerns" often depicted 19th-century U.S. cavalry soldiers charging their enemies to the sound of a bugle. This blaring sound is a rousing call to arms.

The intervention of Jesus Christ in world affairs will begin not with peace, but with terrible calamity and war. Revelation 8–9 and 11 present the blowing of seven trumpets during the Day of the Lord, in which disasters and war will come on a scale never before seen.

With the last trumpet will come a wonderful announcement: "Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever'" (Revelation 11:15, English Standard Version).

It is at the last trumpet that the servants of God from this age will be resurrected and changed into immortal beings, crowned then to reign under Christ over the world (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Revelation 5:10; 20:4, 6).

Under the reign of Jesus Christ and His saints, peace will come to the earth. Moreover, the last trumpet further announces Jesus Christ coming in righteous warfare against those who oppose Him. And unlike past wars, this one will lead to the snuffing out of human warfare and the threat of human annihilation.

The Feast of Trumpets thus begins the countdown to permanent peace.

Atonement *secures* peace

People on earth will need a great display of power and judgment from Jesus Christ to cease from the destructive course they are on. And this will happen as Christ wages righteous war against the massed armies surrounding Jerusalem, dispatching them like grapes in a winepress (Zechariah 14:1-3; Revelation 14:14-20; 19:11-21).

Yet stopping humankind from going to war is not enough. God must also stop the unseen source of human wars operating behind the scenes—Satan the devil, the adversary or enemy of humankind (1 Peter 5:8). The Day of Atonement pictures Christ incarcerating Satan and the demons for 1,000 years, a time known as the Millennium (Revelation 20:1-3).

Satan, the great deceiver of mankind from whom emanates the perverted thinking that leads to conflict and violence, who palms himself off as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), is behind all human wars.

Satan knows the ultimate rewards God intends for human beings, and he hates us because of that. He knows God promises us the gift of eternal life, to be made divine, as God's very sons and daughters (2 Corinthians 6:18; Hebrews 2:10), and to judge both human beings and angels (1 Corinthians 6:2-3). Satan also knows that angels were created to be ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:13-14).

Envious and hateful of God, Satan as the destroyer opposes God, attempting to thwart His plan to make human beings divine (compare Isaiah 14:12-14; 1 Corinthians 15:49; Hebrews 2:10; 1 John 3:2; Jude 6).

God gave detailed instructions for the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 and 23:27-32. In Israel's physical tabernacle and temple worship system it involved two goats to symbolically bear sins in judgment—one sacrificed in representation of Christ's sacrifice and the other driven into an uninhabited wilderness in representation of the devil being at last banished.

Think of the word *atonement* separated into its parts: *at-one-ment*. To be "at one" carries the sense of being "in harmony" or "in concord." Jesus' last prayer to the Father was all about human beings becoming at one with God the Father and Christ Jesus (John 17:21-23), both in this life and the next. This will be accomplished for the world at large after Christ's return—when people at last accept Him as Savior, receiving His atoning sacrifice, and when Satan and his demons are locked away.

As commanded in Leviticus, the observance of this Holy Day requires a total fast, going without food or drink, for 24 hours.

Fasting is effectively a gift from God—a method that enables human beings to humbly draw closer to Him and, in the right frame of mind, seek His intervention in breaking the influence of Satan over us. Jesus' disciples asked Him why they couldn't remove demonic influence from someone on a particular occasion. He answered, "This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:21).

Fasting in this sense and the Day of Atonement look forward to the judgment of Satan and the demons—as it relates to their incarceration for 1,000 years and as a foreshadowing of their final judgment and removal after the 1,000-year period, immediately before the White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:10).

The Day of Atonement prophetically marks the time when Jesus Christ begins to establish His glorious and permanent peace throughout the earth, with absolutely no opposition from evil spirits.

Tabernacles *is* peace

The Feast of Tabernacles, which follows a few days later, depicts and reflects the unprecedented peace and unparalleled prosperity humanity will one day experience.

God codified this great feast of peace, as He did all His annual festivals, in Leviticus 23 (see verses

33-43). The Feast of Tabernacles lasts for seven days, a number in the Bible that relates to completion and perfection. Christ will for 1,000 years teach and transform human beings, lovingly ruling over them and leading them to perfection or maturity so they can receive God's gift of eternal life (Hebrews 8:10-12).

The pervasiveness of God's peace will rapidly promote unparalleled prosperity, as spelled out in scriptures like the following:

"They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain [His global realm], for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

"Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid" (Micah 4:3-4).

"'Behold, the days are coming,' says the LORD, 'When the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it'" (Amos 9:13).

"And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles" (Zechariah 14:16).

The Feast of Tabernacles is here the Feast of Peace—with all humanity coming to keep this great festival specifically depicting God's coming peace on earth.

The fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles will bring about God's promise to humankind heralded by the angels at Jesus' birth: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men."

At the end of this glorious time, Satan will be released for a brief period to deceive the nations anew—and, sadly, he will succeed in leading a great multitude into mounting a final battle against Christ and His saints. But this final attempt at war will be short-lived as God sends fire to consume those involved in the assault. Satan and his demons will be taken out of the picture for good (Revelation 20:7-10), and peace will be restored.

The Eighth Day *continues* peace

The glorious peaceful setting of the Millennium won't end with this satanic rebellion. There's one more annual festival that projects even greater news beyond what the Feast of Tabernacles represents!

God has planned a much greater harvest of human beings beyond the Millennium, referred to in your Bible as the time of "the rest of the dead" (a *second* resurrection following the *first* resurrection of the saints at Christ's return) as well as the White Throne Judgment (see Revelation 20:4-6; 11-13). It correlates with a festival immediately following the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles called simply the Eighth Day.

According to Leviticus 23, we are to observe "the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD . . . On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation . . . You shall keep the feast of the LORD for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest" (verses 34, 36, 39).

This Eighth Day, a separate festival from the Feast of Tabernacles, symbolizes the ultimate gathering in of the greatest harvest of human lives into God's keeping, including all who have ever lived and died from the time of Adam to Christ's return.

God reveals aspects of the fulfillment of this Holy Day in Ezekiel 37:1-14, describing the ancient Israelites' resurrection to physical existence, and Revelation 20:11-13, which shows that they, along with those resurrected of all nations, will be judged from God's Word. At long last, these vast numbers of people who never understood God's truth will have the opportunity to learn it and make the choice as to whether or not to follow Christ and be saved.

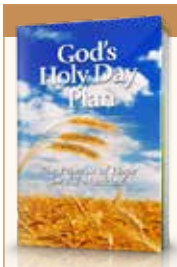
Jesus Christ's 1,000-year reign and His White Throne Judgment reign are equally set in great beauty, peace and prosperity. The setting is the same, yet the people are different—now including all the others who have ever lived.

As all learn to follow God's ways and, for those who remain faithful, are ultimately transformed into Christ's divine likeness, this wonderful day to come continues God's peace on earth, His will toward mankind.

God's will is to *share* His peace

God is all about peace. He is the "God of peace" (Romans 15:33; Philippians 4:9). Jesus Christ is the "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). He told His disciples, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27). And God offers His peace still today: "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

You, too, can enjoy and exhibit God's peace on earth by learning about and keeping all of God's holy festivals, including the festivals that portray the wonderful and exciting world that is coming. Why not join us in observing the Feast of Tabernacles? His Feast of Peace portrays the promise of the ages—the promise of a world at peace! BT



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Most people are unaware of God's Holy Days and festivals found in the Bible, yet Scripture shows that Jesus Christ, the apostles and the early Church celebrated them. You need to learn what they mean for you! Request or download your free copy of ***God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*** today!

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A Kingdom That Will **Stand Forever**

Kingdoms, dynasties and empires, indeed all nations, eventually collapse and come to an end. Others arise to take their place, and they too fall. Yet the Bible reveals a coming Kingdom that will never end. And you can prepare now to be part of it!

by Darris McNeely

A new book title recently caught my eye—*The Habsburg Way: Seven Rules for Turbulent Times*. It's written by a descendant of the great European dynasty dating back to the 13th century. The Habsburgs ruled over a great portion of Europe and four other continents.

At its zenith the dynasty's dominions included vast parts of the Americas, including California. Yet this great world power came to an end in the aftermath of World War I. Surviving family members keep the name alive through such books. But it's a name of the past, largely unknown by today's generation—one among the many influential empires that once existed.

Today's "empires" will also disappear. America in its role as world superpower can be called an empire. China seeks to extend its global power in a bid to replace America at the top. Russia asserts itself on the world scene, seeking restoration of the power it once was under the old Soviet Union.

Other nations such as Iran, India, Turkey and Saudi Arabia all seek to rise in their regions as powers that count. Empires and kingdoms still exist in fact, though they may not use the term. All will, in time, come to the same end as the Habsburgs and the others. They will cease. They will be replaced. But with what?

Human history has its glory and its futility. Every kingdom has ended, to be replaced by another. Studying the rise and fall of empires clarifies the words of Solomon: "That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). But the Bible reveals a coming Kingdom that will stand forever. And the good news is that you can prepare to inherit that Kingdom by changing your life today!



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> Every past kingdom has ended, to be replaced by another. But the Bible reveals a coming Kingdom that will stand forever!

One kingdom after another

The prophet Daniel interpreted a dream for the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. The ruler of an empire that rose in the Middle East at a pivotal moment of history was frightened by visions and dreams as he lay sleeping. Of all the wise men in the king's court, Daniel, a young Hebrew slave recently brought from Jerusalem, was the only one who could interpret the meaning of the dreams. Daniel told the king the God of heaven was revealer of secrets and through him would reveal to Nebuchadnezzar what would happen in the latter days, the end of the age (Daniel 2:28-29).

Daniel proceeded to explain the dream of a humanlike image composed of four parts from top to bottom, each of a different metal—gold, silver, bronze and iron, with the bottom section of the fourth part an unstable mixture of iron and clay. The four metal parts represented

a succession of empires—Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, with the toes and feet of the image being the end-time revival of the Roman system (see our study guide *The Final Superpower*). This interpretation is given further detail through Daniel's own vision recorded in chapter 7. It represents a remarkable vision of world history from the sixth century B.C. to the time of Christ's second coming.

All these kingdoms rose and fell, and many more besides, including that of the Habsburgs referred to earlier. It's what happens to all these kingdoms at the end of Daniel's interpretation that is the key for you and me. History is a record of suffering, corruption and waste punctuated by hope, aspiration and God. God has guided human history according to His purpose, and there is something in that purpose little understood by those who despair of the sad record. Daniel's final point in this story fits you.

Not left to others

Daniel focuses on the fourth part of the image, the portion made of iron. This fourth kingdom would break and crush all the others. But the feet and 10 toes, composed "partly of potter's clay and partly of iron," represent a strong but fragile union, its disparate peoples not adhering well to each other.

This final empire, called "Babylon the Great," will meet its end when God intervenes in history to bring an end to human misrule of the world, portrayed by a stone smashing the image. Here is how Daniel describes this event:

"And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure" (Daniel 2:44-45).

Like the literal earthly kingdoms of the image, this Kingdom God establishes—the stone cut without hands (verse 45)—will also be a literal kingdom set on this earth. The Kingdom of God, foretold throughout Scripture, will come to earth with Jesus Christ and replace the kingdoms of this world.

Notice the statement that "the kingdom shall not be left to other people." What does that mean? It means the Kingdom will not be left to the Habsburg dynasty of Austria. It will not be left to the Romanov dynasty of Russia. It will not be inherited by the Windsor dynasty of Great Britain. It will not be left to those who when faced with God's judgment "blasphemed . . . and did not repent of their deeds" (Revelation 16:11).

To whom will it be left? Who will inherit this everlasting Kingdom? Daniel later records, "Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints [those set apart] of the Most High" (Daniel 7:27).

Listen to what Jesus Christ says He will do, having separated out His true followers: "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in'" (Matthew 25:34-35).

The coming Kingdom will be given to those who in this life have internalized the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. They are the disciples who gave everything for the pearl of great price, the Kingdom of God. They are those who are called, chosen and faithful (Revelation 17:14) in a world where faith has been abandoned. It will be given to a group who love truth as embodied in the life and teachings of Jesus—those who choose to turn from a world of lies and embrace truth.

You can be part of this group

The Bible calls those of this group "firstfruits," a productive yield beginning a spiritual harvest among humanity (James 1:18). Notice how they are described in the book of Revelation, depicting the end of the age. Here spiritual deception has gripped the world. War has ravaged nations. Famine and pestilence have sown fear among the earth's survivors. All that was once known has given way to another empire, the final world empire with all its empty promises and hopes. But there is a group of people who have resisted. They refuse to worship lies and deception.

> God is preparing people who will inherit His Kingdom. You can be part of that Kingdom if you accept Jesus Christ as Savior and King.

These are said in Revelation 14 to be undefiled and spiritual virgins, set apart from the wrong ways and

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worship of the surrounding world (verse 4). "These are the ones who follow the Lamb [Jesus Christ] wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God" (verse 5).

Today God is preparing this group called "firstfruits to God and to the Lamb." It is composed of people who dare to resist the current culture that says good is evil and evil is good. They defy a woke, progressive world that rejects the natural order of creation. They value God and obey the teachings of Jesus. By resisting the ways of this world and embracing the laws and way of the world to come, the Kingdom of God, they prepare to inherit that Kingdom that will not be left to others.

And *you* can be part of that group if you choose to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and King, committing to live by the teachings of the coming Kingdom. But *you must choose.* You must choose to believe the Bible as God's revealed instruction. You must believe the Bible has a claim on your life.

Your life has significance and meaning. There is a reason you have read this far into this article and this issue of *Beyond Today.* Embrace the fact of the Kingdom of God as a real "empire," a literal kingdom that Christ will establish at His return to earth. That is what Daniel saw and foretold. God is preparing the people who will inherit that Kingdom and will with Christ begin to set in place a culture and society based on biblical truth.

We invite you to learn more about this amazing future. Jesus' intervention in world affairs is the event to change all history. It will set humanity on the path to the final chapter of mankind's eternal purpose on this earth. You can prepare now for that time! BT

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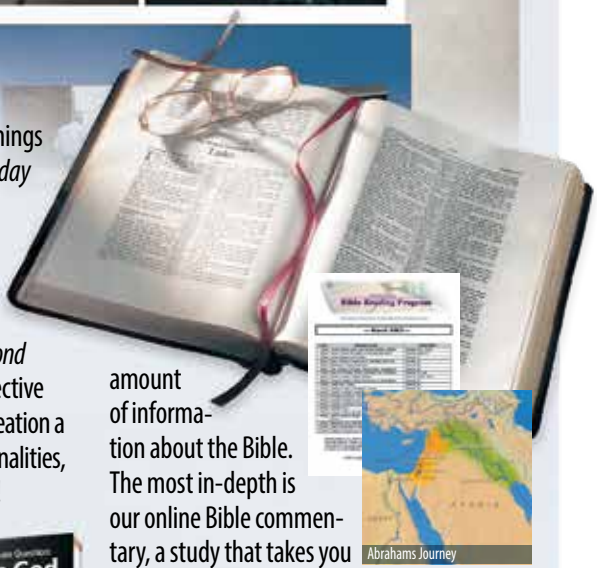



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Five Ways Jesus Christ Will Change the World

Coming soon—the spectacular and glorious return of our Savior returning as King of Kings to establish the Kingdom of God throughout the earth! Here are just five of the changes His rule will bring.

by Don Hooser

During the 1,000 years following Christ's return to reign, known as *the Millennium,* the world will experience an amazing metamorphosis to an idyllic state! Some changes will take considerable time, but eventually worldwide conditions will be sublime, creating a paradise on earth.

While there will initially be a need to deal with widescale resistance due to people having been misled by the devil, Jesus will succeed in carrying out the will of His Father in leading all nations to follow God.

God desires to save people and shower great blessings on them. And so He will. After Jesus' arrival, He will change things for the better in countless ways! Following are just five specific ways He will fundamentally transform the world.

Earth's revolutionary regime change!

At Christ's second coming, by far the most important event will be the resurrection to eternal life of all the saints, His true followers of this age, who have been faithful to God to the end of their lives (Mark 13:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Another revolutionary event that will transform the world will be that "the ruler of this world"—Satan the devil—"will be cast out" (John 12:31). The devil and all the demons will be bound, or imprisoned, so they will no longer be an evil influence on the world (Revelation 20:1-2).

Jesus will be "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (Revelation 19:16). He will institute a new type of leadership—a leadership based on serving others. His rulership will be based in justice, love and service. The resurrected saints will assist Jesus in ruling and teaching the human beings living during the Millennium (Revelation 1:5-6). Jesus will be the High Priest (Hebrews 8:1).

The specific ruling positions of a few resurrected saints are already spelled out in Scripture. Under Christ, King David will be king over all the Israelites (Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 37:21-25). And Jesus promised that His 12 apostles will rule on "thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28). From here and elsewhere in the Bible, it's implied that great people of God such as Abraham, Moses, Elijah and Paul will also have high positions in the government of God's Kingdom.

Indeed, the government of the world of that time will be wonderful, virtually the opposite of what it has been in this evil age!

The healing of people and the planet

Right after Christ returns, vast numbers of people will still be suffering many traumatic effects of terrible end-time violence, diseases and other disasters. People will immediately need food, clothing, shelter and the opportunity to be reunited with loved ones. Many will have serious physical injuries and health problems plus mental and emotional scars. People's bodies, minds and hearts will need healing!

During His earthly ministry, Jesus regularly demonstrated His great love and compassion for everyone. Bible prophecies tell us of the miraculous healings that our Savior will offer when He returns. Read Isaiah 35!

This chapter also speaks of future physical improvements to the earth, including its soil, water, climates and vegetation. Much of earth's land has been unfit for farming and even for a healthy habitat. That will dramatically change. Much more of the earth will have fertile soil, appropriate amounts of water, a temperate climate without

destructive extremes of weather, and beautiful scenery!

Ezekiel 36:33-38 says that the world will become like the Garden of Eden, cities will be rebuilt, and there will be a population explosion: "I will increase their men as a flock" (verse 37).

People will love and live by the Bible and God's laws

Hosea 4:6 says: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge . . . You have forgotten the law of your God." But after Jesus' return, people will be taught to study and love God's Word and to "live . . . by every word of God" (Luke 4:4). God's Word is the starting point and foundation of all knowledge, so humanity will have the greatest burst of enlightenment ever! Light will replace darkness! Isaiah 11:9 tells us, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain [God's global dominion], for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."

Everyone will be taught to live by God's Ten Commandments and enjoy the countless benefits! Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible, and every one of its 176 verses is devoted to praising God's laws. Just think, obedience to each one of the Ten Commandments will bring about major, far-reaching benefits for humanity! And then think of what a different world it will be when people are living by *all ten* of these broad commandments in their full, intended meaning. Society will be so much more moral, enlightened and civilized than ever before!

There will be one worldwide religion—*true biblical Christianity!* Just think of the spiritual like-mindedness of a world in which everyone will live by the Bible's instruction. Just think of how different such a world will be!

Worldwide peace will soon prevail

At last, true peace, unity and harmonious relationships will soon prevail throughout the world. People will become guided by the Golden Rule and the two great commandments—to love God and to "love your neighbor as yourself." Troublemakers will be replaced by peacemakers!

Just as Jesus exemplified during His earthly ministry, everyone will be treated with respect without favoritism, regardless of gender, race or any other natural differences.

Wars will cease. Military hardware will be "beaten" into farm implements. "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:2-4).

Amazingly, even the creatures we today call "wildlife" and consider dangerous will be gentle and harmless! (See Isaiah 1:6-9.)

Worldwide peace won't be achieved all at once. It will take time for the resurrected saints and other godly leaders to teach and enforce the "way of peace" to the far reaches of the earth. But worldwide peace will soon prevail!

Personal freedom will bring happiness and prosperity

One of the Bible's many themes is freedom and liberty. The most dramatic demonstration of that is the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt. And a greater one will accompany Jesus' return (Isaiah 11:11; Jeremiah 16:14-15). Moreover, Jesus is coming as the Savior for the whole world! First of all, consider the spiritual freedom. Forgiveness of sins is liberation from guilt and condemnation. Resurrection to immortality is liberation from the limitations of our physical human bodies and the downward pulls of human nature.

In addition, Jesus will bring about the greatest worldwide personal freedom since Adam and Eve sinned. Freedom will be provided and protected for every human being in the world as long as he is striving to live according to God's commandments through Christ.

God obviously loves variety! He created human beings with many different talents and interests. So, during the Millennium, everyone will happily be free to pursue whatever ethical occupation one wishes to. There will be many entrepreneurs! There will be great prosperity and progress because of the free enterprise economy.

A fundamental aspect of human freedom is the ownership of private property. A prophecy in Micah 4:4 tells us that "everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree"—that is, the person's *own* vine and tree. And it must be this person's land as well!

Some people wrongly think of God and Jesus as selfishly dictatorial. Actually, Jesus taught the opposite. He taught that He is committed to being a *servant* to all people (see Luke 22:24-27).

May God's Kingdom come soon!

We have no way of knowing just how soon Jesus will return, but the awful end-time events prophesied in the Bible are accelerating. It is critically prudent that we become and remain spiritually prepared!

This is just a brief summary of five major ways Jesus will change the world. And there will be many more ways. These are wonderfully exciting to anticipate!

Please remain faithful to God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, for then you will have a glorious life with Them and all God's people that will last forever and ever! BT



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We've only scratched the surface here of changes Jesus Christ will bring to the world when He comes to rule. To see more, request or download our free study guide ***Christ's Reign on Earth: What It Will Be Like.*** A copy is waiting for you!

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Is God Trying to Save the World Now?

Salvation means being delivered from harm, loss or destruction. When used in a spiritual sense it means to be rescued from the penalty of sin. Since all people need salvation, is God offering it to them today, or has He set in motion a strikingly different and far better plan?

by John LaBissoniere

Many sincere individuals who profess Christian values have been taught that unless all people accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior during their physical lifetime today, they have no chance of receiving spiritual salvation. But when you consider that, according to a 2018 Pew Research study, Christianity in its various forms represents just 32 percent of the earth's population, is there any real hope that most people will turn to Christ?

Also consider that in past ages the vast majority of the earth's inhabitants never even heard of Jesus Christ or practiced Christianity. Yet, just like you and me, those billions of people were made in God's image (Genesis 1:27). When we contemplate the biblical precept that all people must "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" to be saved (Acts 16:30), how could it be fair that those multitudes have lost out on the opportunity for salvation and eternal life due to no fault of their own?

Because of this great dilemma, some Christians have suggested that the observance of *any* decent religious principles ought to be acceptable for people to attain salvation. However, such reasoning does not square with Holy Scripture. In referring to the centrality of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for sin, Acts 4:12 explains that "there is *no other name under heaven* given among men by which we must be saved" (emphasis added throughout).

In addition, Jesus said: "I am the door. If anyone enters *by Me,* he will be saved" (John 10:9). Indeed, He said He is the *only* way to God: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. *No one comes to the Father except through Me*" (John 14:6). As 1 Timothy 2:5 attests, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the Man Christ Jesus.*"

Considering the weight of these scriptures, you may have wondered about the immense disparity between what they plainly state and what many Christians have readily accepted—that all people must be saved *today.* Given the importance of this matter, could it be time for *you* to examine it from an *entirely different perspective?*

This means *questioning the premise* of the belief that everyone must accept Jesus Christ in their physical lifetime today or be denied salvation. What if you asked the following question: Is God *really* trying to save all people right now, or does He have a far different, and far better, plan for humanity?

There is no unfairness with God

In further surveying the words of Jesus Christ, we find Him stating, *"No one can* come to Me *unless the Father who sent me draws him,"* and then reiterating, "Therefore I have said to you that *no one* can come to Me *unless it has been granted to him by My Father"* (John 6:44, 65). God the Father must open people's minds to truly accepting and following His Son. This means it's not possible for someone to decide on his or her own to become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

We can see this in what Christ said about His speaking in parables. Perhaps you've thought this was meant to make His teachings clearer to the general public. But the truth is that He often *concealed the deeper meaning* of the parables so those in the general populace could *not understand* lest they turn in repentance prematurely —ahead of God's timing for them.

Note that after Jesus delivered the parable of the sower and the seed to a large crowd, He told His disciples *in private,* "To *you* it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; *but to those who are outside,* all things come in parables, so that 'seeing they may see and *not perceive,* and hearing they may hear and *not understand;* lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them'" (Mark 4:10-12).

Again, the Bible reveals that God the Father allows *only* the people He individually calls to understand the truth, in contrast to the vast majority who do not fully comprehend it. Yet it's vital for you to understand that there is absolutely no unfairness with God (Romans 9:14). He will not deny *anyone* the opportunity to be



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> If all people must "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" to be saved, how could that be fair to billions who never heard of Him through no fault of their own?

offered salvation *in due time* (Romans 10:9; Ephesians 2:8-9).

As 1 Timothy 2:4 says, God "wants *everyone* to be saved and to understand the truth" (New Living Translation). And 2 Peter 3:9 states, "The Lord is *not slack* concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, *not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*" God will accomplish this promise and commitment in the manner and time *of His choosing* (Isaiah 46:10-11).

But some may sincerely ask, "Why can't *all* people be granted salvation immediately?" The answer is that God, in His perfect wisdom, is carrying out an extraordinary spiritual plan for the benefit of humanity that is unfolding *over more than one age.*

During this present age, which began with the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden nearly 6,000 years ago, God is allowing human beings to try every conceivable method of living that *they* believe will bring fulfillment, happiness and prosperity—including innumerable government, social, religious, education and economic systems.

But why is God permitting this to take place? It's so that when He does offer all people spiritual salvation in the age to come, they will have fully and finally come to the profound realization that their humanly designed experiments in ways to live have brought them overwhelming frustration, suffering, agony, grief, spiritual emptiness and death (see Proverbs 14:12).

After having experienced so much turmoil and tragedy for generation after generation, they will willingly and readily turn their hearts and minds toward their Creator and diligently follow *His* way of life—which He designed for their perfect benefit.

God will remove humanity's spiritual blindness

Although God has allowed the vast majority of humanity to be spiritually blind at this time, He is calling a small number of people to become disciples of Jesus Christ *now* (compare Luke 12:32). Those who answer this call and wholeheartedly commit themselves to Christ, accepting His sacrifice as payment for their sins and dedicating their lives to following Him in return, are acting in accordance with God's way of life and developing His very nature and character.

Then, at Christ's second coming they will serve with Him as resurrected spirit beings in governing God's earthly Kingdom for 1,000 years, a time called the Millennium, and beyond (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; Revelation 5:10; 20:4-6; Ephesians 3:15).

Unlike the upset and chaos found in today's world, all of the earth's inhabitants living during that future millennial period will dwell in magnificent peace and righteousness. God will remove people's spiritual blindness so they will be fully capable of understanding the truth about Him and His marvelous way of life (John 12:39-40; Isaiah 25:7; 29:18; 32:3-4).

It will be a delightfully amicable, fulfilling and productive period, which the world will have never previously experienced. All of this will be possible because "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

But what about the other billions of people who lived and died throughout all the previous centuries and never had the opportunity to know Jesus Christ or follow God's way of life? Revelation 20:5 states that the rest of the dead will live again when the 1,000 years are finished. The vast numbers of unconverted people from all history will then be resurrected *to physical life* and be given God's Holy Spirit so they at last can have the opportunity to know Him, having their minds and hearts opened to the truth of the Bible (see Acts 2:17).

Through His prophet Ezekiel, God says of people who will be raised to life again at that time: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments

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and do them" (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

The Israelites of past ages will then be raised up (Ezekiel 37:1-14), as will people of all other nations, with many learning hard lessons at that time (see Matthew 11:20-24; 12:41-42).

God may be calling you at this time

That marvelous event following the Millennium is sometimes called the Great White Throne Judgment. In an amazing dreamlike vision, the apostle John described that future era by writing:

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened [evidently the books of the Bible now opened to their understanding]. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books" (Revelation 20:11-12)—that is, an evaluation period over the course of a new physical lifetime, not immediate sentencing to condemnation, as many think.

This will not be a second chance for salvation, as many would portray it. Rather, this will be the *first* opportunity for these masses of people to, through Jesus Christ, really understand the truth of God and live by it.

In summary, the Bible reveals that God is *not* trying to save the world right now. For 6,000 years He has allowed human beings to experiment with countless humanly designed ways of living so they may ultimately come to the firm realization that such behavior could *never* bring true happiness and fulfillment.

Ultimately, God will open their minds and hearts to His true way of life and offer them the gift of salvation. But for *now,* He is calling only a few people to become disciples of Jesus Christ. These are growing in character and preparing to govern with Him as resurrected spirit beings in God's coming Kingdom and divine family.

Are you coming to grasp this? God may be calling *you* to become one of Christ's true disciples. If so, are you willing to answer His call? An astonishingly wonderful future awaits if you do! BT

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How Do We **Make God Real** to Our Children? Part 2

In our roles as parents, nothing could be more important than leading our children into a loving relationship with God. But how can we do that? Here are additional practical steps to guide the process.

by Joy Jones



As parents, nothing could give us more pleasure and satisfaction than to see our children develop a close and loving relationship with their Father in heaven. But how can we make God real to them? What steps can we as parents take to help them know God is real and come to know Him?

In the last issue of *Beyond Today (*July-August 2023) we covered four ways parents can help make God real to their children. Now we'll examine three more important approaches you can apply in fulfilling this crucial and rewarding responsibility.

Show them God is part of your family

I asked my daughter Sarah recently how she would answer the question, "How did your parents make God real to you?" We were taking a walk, and I was mulling this article over and over again in my mind, so I asked for her thoughts. She was quiet for a moment, and then she simply said, "He was never absent."

Keep the Lord your God present in your home at all times—no absences. Make Him a seat at the table, a place in the car, a space in the bed for them to snuggle up to. Fill their earliest memories with who He is and the love He has for them.

In James 4:8 we are told, "Come near to God and He will come near to you" (New International Version).

Include God in every aspect of your life. Treat Him as the guiding member of your family. As you go through your days, "remember" Him in your conversations with your children. It doesn't have to be formal or handled like a school lesson. Simply allow Him to always be there. Just as you would share your thoughts with your children, share their Heavenly Father's thoughts with them. If He is always present, then He will never be absent.

My son Isaac, age six, said to me recently, "Mom, I have two dads." Curious to see where he was going with this statement, I asked him what he meant. "I have two dads," he said again. *"God and Daddy."* Hearing him say this, I let out the breath I was holding and whispered a silent "Thank you!"—grateful that even at six years old he realizes that God loves him and that He's a loving Father.

Help them see God through you

At the very beginning of the Bible, we are told that mankind was made in the image of God. Genesis 1:27 tells us: "So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female he created them" (NIV).

We were made for God's glory. In Isaiah 43:7 God speaks of "everyone who is called by my name, *whom I created for my glory,* whom I formed and made" (English Standard Version).

We were made in the image of God, created for His glory. We are to strive to reflect Him in all that we do and say. As parents, our children's first contact with God will most likely be through us. We can read them His Word, help them to memorize Scripture and pray with them every night, but if we are not striving to walk

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out our faith and reflect God in all that we do and say, then all our teaching will come to nothing. We have to walk the walk.

In Exodus 20:16 we are told, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (ESV). What is false witness? We often simplify it down to telling a lie, but it's more than that. To "bear false witness" is to misrepresent someone. It's conveying a different story about who they are. Those looking at them see something other than the truth because of the deception.

Do we do this with God?

Could we possibly be living in a way that's contrary to what we say we believe? Might we go home from church services and speak poorly about the pastor or other members? Or perhaps set our Bible aside and not get it out for another week? Yes, it's possible for us to "bear false witness" against our Creator.

Our children are always watching. What are they seeing?

Do our children see that our lives mirror what we teach them we believe? Do they see that we strive to do the best we can to live out our faith? When we fall or fail, do we repent, apologize and get back up to continue onward? As the apostle Paul said in Philippians 3:12, "Not that I have already reached the goal or am already fully mature, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus" (Christian Standard Bible).

The weight we carry as parents is immense, but we are not left to do it alone. We have the very Spirit of God to support us: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8:26, New Revised Standard Version).

Welcome their questions

When our children are small, and they ask us for the 10th time, "Why?" we often find ourselves resorting to the phrase so many parents before us have said in exasperation, *"Because I said so!"*

That may work when our kids are small, but as they grow they will begin to question more deeply, especially when it comes to God. For a parent, this can be terrifying. We might fear that if they're asking questions they are perhaps doubting God. We might think that if they question or doubt what we've taught them about God, that could lead to abandonment of the faith we've tried so hard to instill in them.

But rather than fearing the questions, we should welcome them. Let them learn to ask their questions at home and see that you will do your best to answer them. You may not always have a ready answer, and that is okay.



When those moments come, be honest. Let them know that you will need to study to better answer them. Seek help from others. The ministry in God's Church is there to help serve as shepherds to both you and your children.

Show your children that we are to be praying for answers. As Jesus taught: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8).

The great patriarchs of faith Abraham and Moses both questioned God when they didn't understand His decisions. At times, they "contended" with God. They agonized over questions they presented to Him. Rather than that destroying their faith, their faith was strengthened.

Questions have the potential of helping our children form their faith, as they learn to "prove all things" and "hold fast that which good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21, King James Version).

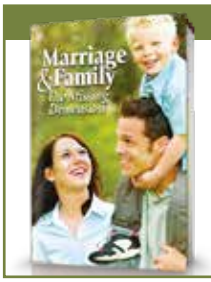
As parents, we want our homes to be a safe haven in which our children can sharpen their spiritual muscles. Let them ask. Be prepared to answer, and welcome the dialogue. In time, you will both be stronger for it.

Putting the pieces together

For years I have told my children that they have been issued the most priceless of invitations, an invitation into the family of God. They have been issued this invitation because of God's Holy Spirit that abides in their parents as a result of being baptized into the Body of Christ (see Acts 2:38-39; 1 Corinthians 7:14).

They have been offered this precious invitation through us, but we cannot accept it *for* them. We can teach them about it and display its beauty to them, but we can't accept it on their behalf. They will have to choose to one day accept it or deny it. We can't take this step for them.

What we *can* do is lay the groundwork while they are young to make the invitation as accessible as possible. We can help them learn to hear their Father's voice, love His Word and talk with Him in prayer every day. We can point out His faithfulness, reflect God in our example and welcome their questions when they come. By doing these things, we will help our children be well on their way to knowing God, seeing Him as real in their lives! BT



LEARN MORE

The Bible contains many principles for bringing up happy, well-adjusted children who have a relationship with God. We've compiled much of its advice in our free study guide *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*. Download or request your copy today!

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Who's Behind Beyond Today?



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



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



We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message Jesus Christ brought—the wonderful good news of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; 8:1). That message truly is good news—the answer to all the problems that have long plagued humankind.

Through the pages of this magazine, on the airwaves of our TV show, and in dozens of helpful study guides (also free), we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and threaten our very survival.

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

The United Church of God has congregations and ministers around the world. In these congregations believers assemble to be instructed from the Scriptures and to fellowship. For locations and times of services in your area, contact us at the appropriate address on page 31. Visitors are always welcome.

For additional information, visit our website:

ucg.org/learnmore

How Can You Find Peace in Our Troubled World?

The news is often bleak, and life can be difficult. Peace may seem out of reach, but it's not. You can experience it today.

by Becky Sweat

It's easy to be calm when major troubles or worries aren't keeping us up at night. But these days, most of us have a lot on our minds.

Our world is plagued by violence, corruption, social unrest and economic uncertainty. We worry about food shortages, bank failures, natural disasters, disease outbreaks, government overreach and the potential threat of artificial intelligence. This is on top of personal trials with health, our job or relationships.

We all yearn for inner peace. But how can we possibly achieve that? It helps to understand what peace really is. It's not merely an absence of disturbances or conflict. True peace of mind is not contingent on circumstances. We can find it even in the midst of trauma and upset. Ultimately, it's a matter of looking to God for strength and guidance and seeing our situations more from His perspective. Here are six specific ways to gain peace of mind.

1. Cast your cares on God.

The starting point is to call on God through prayer. The Bible says, "Give all your worries and cares to God" (1 Peter 5:7, New Living Translation). Thinking we can handle things on our own will keep us from seeking God like we should.

A friend of mine learned this lesson when her husband was unemployed for two years and they came close to losing their house and having to file for bankruptcy. "We didn't feel any peace until we realized, after we'd done everything we could on our end to stay afloat financially, how much was *not* in our control and how much we needed to trust God for the outcome," my friend related.

Whatever is worrying us or weighing us down should be handed over to God, who will address the difficulties and needs of His followers in the very best way. He may not immediately fix or remove our concerns, but Psalm 50:15 says that God will deliver us if we call on Him. We do need to do our part to get through difficulties, but always look to God to take care of all the issues that truly are beyond our control. Just knowing that we don't have to rely on our own abilities and resources to solve our problems, and that God will make up for where we lack, is extremely calming.

2. Meditate on God's promises.

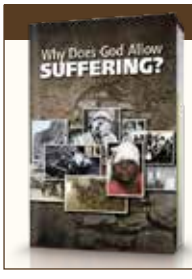
We should remind ourselves of the many promises in the Bible for God's protection, deliverance and care for those who serve Him in the way He asks. The Bible tells us God will not fail or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; Psalm 37:28; John 14:18). God will finish the work He has started in us and will not give up on us (Philippians 1:6). When we ask God for help, He will meet our needs (Philippians 4:19).

This includes providing sustenance (Matthew 6:31-33), refuge (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). By clinging to these precious promises, we can be at peace, no longer controlled by our fears and anxieties.

3. Reflect on God's works.

It's helpful to think about instances in the past where we could see the hand of God in our lives. We should all be able to recall times when God opened doors and intervened for us, bringing about solutions to stressful situations. For example, there might have been a time amid difficult economic circumstances when you landed just the right job or when the ideal property suddenly came on the real estate market after many months of searching, or when a personal health crisis miraculously improved, perhaps overnight. Remind yourself of how these events unfolded.

LEARN MORE



Why do bad things happen? Why is the world plagued with so many terrible problems? Will God set things right? How can we cope? Our study guide ***Why Does God Allow Suffering?*** can help make sense of it all. Download or request your free copy today.

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We might also reflect on ways God intervened in history, like how the Native Americans assisted the Pilgrims in their settlement of America or how the Allied forces were rescued at Dunkirk during World War II. Such stories can be very inspiring.

Of course, the Bible records many miraculous interventions by God, everything from the Israelites' deliverance at the Red Sea to how Daniel was protected in the lions' den. Directing our thoughts to God's amazing acts of intervention will push worrying out of our minds.

4. Face the facts.

We should dwell on what's constructive, right and good, as we're told in Philippians 4:8. But that doesn't mean we should ignore or refuse to acknowledge what's unsettling or unpleasant. Being truly at peace requires facing reality. We can't create pleasant circumstances



> True peace of mind is not based on circumstances. We can find it even in the most difficult times.

by just ignoring what's happening, pretending things are better than they are, or simply thinking "happy thoughts."

Being well-informed about the situations we face helps us to plan, strategize and be prepared for possible difficult outcomes (Proverbs 22:3; 27:12). We'll be less frantic and calmer if we're ready for what's coming. In facing the world scene, the Bible tells us what to watch for in terms of prophetic events, in part so we can be prepared physically and spiritually. In introducing His prophecy of troubling world events that would occur before His return, Jesus Christ said, "See that you are not troubled" (Matthew 24:6). Being aware of what will occur helps us to be at peace with what is happening.

Refusing to acknowledge the negative realities of this life—perhaps not even allowing ourselves to watch the news because it's so unpleasant, or maybe spending a lot of time in the digital entertainment realm to "escape" the real world—may temporarily make us feel good. But it sets us up for being caught off guard or overtaken by potentially serious troubles.

5. Surround yourself with uplifting people.

The Bible warns us that "evil company corrupts good habits" (1 Corinthians 15:33). We can't help but be influenced by the company we keep. If we mostly associate with people who are negative, chronic worriers or easily disturbed, we'll likely become that way ourselves.

We should spend most of our time with upbeat individuals who are living their lives as constructively as they can and with a hope-filled mindset. If we find ourselves fretting about something, we need to be able to talk to people who will listen to our concerns and not pretend things are rosier than they are, but who will still see the positives of the situation and help steer us toward solutions. If we're not thinking clearly, they'll tell us, and will also assure us they'll pray for us. This helps us stay calm and maintain a more "I-can-get-through-this" attitude.

6. Remember God's "big picture."

Recently a friend who received a serious cancer diagnosis expressed to me, "Well, if this is what God thinks I need to go through in order to be in His Kingdom, then so be it." She was totally at peace with the health crisis she found herself in.

She knew that the circumstances we face right now will ultimately work together for good purposes—that God is using our trials to build in us the experience, character and wisdom necessary to be in His Kingdom (Romans 8:28; 5:3-4; Isaiah 64:8). God knows what's best for us. He is focused on eternity, not just the here-and-now. We need to cultivate that same mindset (Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Doing so not only strengthens us when going through personal setbacks, but it also fills us with hope when we hear news coverage and commentary about all of society's problems. The suffering over mankind's history serves as a huge testimony to just how much we need Jesus Christ to return to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. Know that He *will* return (Matthew 24:30; Revelation 11:15; Daniel 2:44; Micah 1:3-4) and that when He does the world's troubles will be solved. Things may be bad now, but they will get better, and we don't have to look to fallible human beings to try to make this world a better place.

As long as we remember these truths, keep our focus on God's Kingdom, continue to walk in His ways, and trust God to do what needs to be done to carry out His plans, we will find peace—even in this increasingly troubled world! BT

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Where Are We Now in Bible Prophecy?

In a world growing more confusing and dangerous by the day, does Bible prophecy offer crucial understanding and insight?

by Darris McNeely

We regularly receive questions asking, "Where are we in the flow of Bible prophecies?" It's a good question—to which there could be many answers.

Jesus was asked essentially the same question by His disciples near the end of His ministry. They wanted to know when key events foretold by Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel would happen.

Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 record His response. Here we find both details and major trends that must come to pass before the end of this age. Jesus cautions patience in expecting His return and the establishment of His Kingdom, telling His followers, "See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet" (Matthew 24:6).

Jesus is essentially telling us, "Be patient and watch." It is the patient waiting with endurance while having a sharp understanding of the world that will give us the answer to where we are in the timeline of events leading to His second coming and the dawn of the new age of the Kingdom of God.

Three major prophetic trends, starting with the Middle East

In *Beyond Today* magazine we present a biblical worldview of geopolitical events based on major prophetic trends we learn from the Bible, especially three key components.

First, we watch what is happening in the Middle East regarding the state of Israel. Jerusalem is the ground zero of Bible prophecy. It is where Jesus focused, such as in warning, "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near" (Luke 21:20).

The armies that gather to fight at the end of the age gather at Jerusalem, in "the valley of decision" (Joel 3), pointing evidently to the Kidron Valley between the city's east side and the Mount of Olives. Christ will return to this mountain from which He ascended after His resurrection (Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:9-11).

From a geopolitical perspective the Middle East has greatly impacted the world in the last century. With the discovery of oil in the Arabian Peninsula and the world's growing dependence on fossil fuel, what happens in this region has a major impact on the world.

Today the threat of nuclear weapons is used to advance extreme religious ideology. The land of Israel is usually the focus when regional threats of war and strife erupt. Israel is determined to preserve its presence on the land promised to Abraham's descendants millennia ago.

Look at your news feed anytime you see something about Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia or other Middle Eastern states. Learn their names and look at a map of the region. Examine a globe or world map and see the strategic location of the Middle East in relation to other nations. So much of world history and end-time prophecy involves this area.

The rise of Babylon as a final Roman Empire

A second key component of our geopolitical worldview is the prophesied rise of a system the Bible calls "Babylon the great." The center of this coming world system is Europe. Europe's historic role as a seat of world power, along with it being the cradle of Western Christendom, are central to understanding not only Western civilization but the prophetic flow of the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation.

Over the centuries Europe nurtured the union of political, economic and religious power that centered on the growing role of the Roman Catholic papacy and the political realm called the Holy Roman Empire. With the crowning of Charlemagne in A.D. 800 there began a church-state union that rose and fell, continually reinventing itself through the ages. Europe, in all its revivals, is the only world empire to contain the seeds of its resurrection in the ashes of every collapse. The continent significantly shaped the modern world.

We will yet see one more revival of this ancient system. Revelation 13:3 shows that the entire world will be astounded when it watches the rise of a newly revived Roman Empire: "And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the

beast." Its power and authority will greatly impact the entire earth.

For more than 27 years *Beyond Today* articles and television programs have helped readers understand the background to the European Union, which has become a world economic power with a currency to rival the dollar. At present, the United States is still the most significant nation in the world, with Europe nowhere near challenging America's role. The current EU is far from the end-time juggernaut described in the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. But it is still a major power, and events in Europe have triggered a rise in spending for armaments and military defense.

In fact, levels of spending are at levels not seen in more than 30 years, since the end of the Cold War. A big factor in that is the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. NATO countries realized the need to take on more responsibility for their defense.

Among the EU nations, Germany is currently the largest supplier of money and arms to Ukraine. This is second to America, which supplies more money and weapons than anyone. The political and economic realities of Europe are complicated. Germany and other EU states are heavily dependent on Russia to supply their vast energy needs. But any land war in Europe is significant to world stability. Russia's actions have been a wakeup call, showing European nations that they are responsible for their own defense and cannot rely on the United States.

History teaches us we should seek to understand these events. Bible prophecy and Jesus Himself warn us to watch such matters and consider them with a biblical worldview.

The removal of the Abrahamic blessings

A third major prophetic theme we follow in *Beyond Today* is the astounding role played by America and Great Britain. These nations, their peoples, and by extension much of the world's inhabitants, received their prosperity by the divine design of the God who blessed the patriarch known as Abraham. The promises in Genesis that set Abraham and his descendants in a unique position in the Bible story and human history spread wings through time and came to rest upon these two nations.

This understanding of the Bible, prophecy and history is little grasped today. But honest history combined with the spiritual discernment of this promise brings a profound perception of the plan and purpose of God. Not only do history and Bible prophecy come alive with meaning, but this allows us to recognize the dangers of current trends that are disrupting our present world order.

Perhaps the one trend leading us straight into a moral spiral is the LGBTQ+ hysteria that seeks to reorder the natural order of marriage, family, sexuality and gender—all gifts given by God. But now America is exporting this deadly poison. Each June, with growing fervency, the nation is force-fed a diet of "pride month" propaganda meant to wear down our sensitivity to immorality of "Sodom and Gomorrah" proportions.

The endgame is not merely social acceptance of queer behavior or gay rights. It goes much further. The underlying objective is the total annihilation from the public arena of religious freedom and *Bible-based religion in any form.* This is demonic in its intent. Our generation has seen nothing like it. Read the Genesis 19 account of the people of Sodom breaking down the doors of Lot's home to get a picture of where we are heading.

This is the battleground on which the destruction of America is being fought. Any nation that follows this perverse lead will suffer God's judgment. We monitor this awful trend in *Beyond Today* because we understand the true "why" of America.

> A perverse spirit has seized America, and it is now leading the world away from God. This is a time to stay close to God and watch with patience.

We have forgotten God

This year marks the 40th anniversary of a powerful speech given by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the great Soviet dissident. After receiving the Templeton Prize, he told the story of the words he heard from old people telling him why the evil of communism took over Russia: "These things are happening, these great disasters have befallen Russia, *because men have forgotten God.*"

Sadly, a perverse spirit has seized America, and it is now leading the world away from God. This will bring to pass major prophetic events preceding the end of this age and the return of Jesus Christ.

This is a time to wait and watch with patient endurance. "Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12). May you watch and heed! BT

LEARN MORE



To understand where these major prophetic trends are leading, download or request our free study guides *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy, You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*

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Nearly half of Americans have a chronic disease

Almost half the people in the United States are beset with chronic, or ongoing, illness—and the number is expected to rise above half by 2030.

An expanding elderly population, with people living longer and ultimately contracting some ailment, might seem to the cause. Yet that's not the only age group seeing an increase. Surprisingly, "more than 40 percent of children and adolescents currently have at least one chronic illness, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)" (Autumn Spredemann, "Nearly Half of All Americans Have a Chronic Disease," The Epoch Times, May 30, 2023).

The financial costs are enormous. "Of the nation's $4.1 trillion annual health care expenditures, chronic diseases account for 90 percent . . . more than $3 trillion dollars of annual direct costs alone." That's more than $6,000 annually per patient. As one doctor noted, "That doesn't even take into account indirect costs such as time off work for the patient and their caregivers" (ibid.). Of course, the strain goes far beyond money—to both individuals and the whole nation.

While illness is a result of the human condition since our first parents were cast out of the Garden of Eden, there are many steps we can and should take. As another doctor noted, "The vast majority of chronic diseases in the United States



are related to lifestyle choices, and contributing factors include dietary choices, lack of regular physical activity, [and] mental-emotional stress."

According to the CDC, "the main factors contributing to this subset of 'lifestyle diseases' include tobacco use, poor nutrition, being overtly sedentary, and excessive alcohol usage." The problem also correlates with a sharp rise in ultra-processed food consumption over the past two decades.

Yet in some cases not much can be done on the physical side. But there is something that everyone can and must do on the spiritual side—turn to God for help and healing. Indeed, God told the ancient Israelites: "If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians [who held them in captivity]. For I am the Lord who heals you" (Exodus 15:26).

This and the blessings and curses found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are major clues to the chronic diseases plaguing today's leading nations. That's not to say that individuals are at fault in their particular maladies, as God allows even very faithful people to undergo lengthy health trials, as was evidently the case with the apostle Paul. But in national terms, there would be far less diseases if society were generally more obedient to God. We look forward to the day when Jesus Christ will reign and the world at large will receive peace and healing (Isaiah 35:3-6).

Sexual relationship test-driving not the road to happiness

Many have the idea that people should spend their 20s focused on school, career and having fun while trying on multiple sexual relationships, perhaps cohabiting when more serious, but putting off marriage until much later. "But the sociological research shows that this is not the best approach when it comes to marriage" (Paola Belletti, "Research Shows That Marrying Relatively Young Without Living Together First Results in the Most Durable Marriages," Aleteia, Jan. 24, 2023).

Psychologist Galena Rhoades, University of Denver research professor and director of the Family Research Center, coauthored the *Before I Do Report* for the National Marriage Project. She points out: "We generally think that having more experience is better . . . But what we find for relationships is just the opposite. Having more experience was related to having a less happy marriage later on" ("Galena Rhoades Discusses How Prior Relationships Are Related to Marital Quality," YouTube, qtd. by Belletti).

Dan McLaughlin in a *National Review* article ("Study: Marry Young, Marry Your First, Stay Married," July 17, 2022) quotes from a *Deseret Magazine* piece by sociology professor Brad Wilcox, director of the National Marriage Project, in noting: "Many young adults today believe cohabitation is also a pillar of successful marriages, one reason why more than 70% of those who marry today live together before marriage. But the conventional wisdom here is wrong: Americans who cohabit before marriage are less likely to be happily married and more likely to break up. Couples who cohabited were 15% more likely to get divorced than those who did not . . ." ("Perspective: The Surprising Case for Marrying Young," June 21, 2022).

Furthermore, it's often thought that people in their mid-20s aren't ready to settle down and commit and should wait until their 30s or later. Wilcox counters, "Our analyses indicate that religious men and women who married in their twenties without cohabiting first . . . have the lowest odds of divorce in America today" (qtd. by McLaughlin). He notes that religious singles probably have the advantage over secular peers of having access to a pool of relationship prospects who share their family focus.

Wilcox concludes: "The conventional wisdom holds that spending your twenties focusing on education, work and fun, and then marrying around 30 is the best path to maximize your odds of forging a strong and stable family life. But the research tells a different story, at least for religious couples. Saving cohabitation for marriage, and endowing your relationship with sacred significance, seems to maximize your odds of being stably and happily married."

Of course, there does need to be a certain level of maturity and stability—and a right spiritual focus. To learn more about that, download or request our free study guide *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension.*

Diseases rise with open U.S. borders

A study published by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) revealed 159 new cases of leprosy in 2020, doubling the number of reported cases over the past decade. The state of Florida accounts for the most cases, with others found in California, Louisiana, Hawaii, New York and Texas ("CDC: Researchers Suggest Leprosy May Become Endemic in Florida," Breitbart, July 31, 2023).

"Leprosy, otherwise known as Hansen's disease, is a 'chronic infectious disease' . . . Researchers believe 'prolonged person-to-person contact through respiratory droplets is the most widely recognized route of transmission'" (ibid.).

The leprosy of the Bible is often regarded as a broader category of skin diseases, but Hansen's disease would fit in that category—though biblical leprosy may have been a more contagious strain than what we see in modern times.

It's surprising to find the disease in the United States, as it's been one of the neglected tropical diseases affecting poorer nations.

The study noted that in Spain an increase in leprosy contracted locally rather than abroad accompanied a rise in immigration, pointing out, "The number of international migrants in North America increased from 27.6 million persons in 1990 to 58.7 million in 2020." And more recently America has seen the largest ever influx of people across the southern border.

It's further reported that "a separate study by the National Institute of Health found a high prevalence of tuberculosis (TB), hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus, and human immunodeficiency virus among refugees and migrants . . . Last year, border control encountered more than two million migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border, many of who were from Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua, CNN reported" (ibid.).

And as these come in droves to the border, "as a result of scant access to basic sanitation and overcrowded living conditions, infectious diseases such as measles, cholera, tuberculosis, chickenpox, scabies, respiratory infections, rashes, and eye infections have all been reported."

Furthermore, on June 6, a *New York Post* headline announced "CDC warns of deadly bacteria with 50% fatality rate that has been declared endemic to the U.S. Gulf Coast." It lives mostly in the soil, yet primarily in subtropical and tropical climates. "People are typically infected by the bacteria through open wounds or by inhaling the germs during a strong storm" (ibid.). And now it's been carried up from the south and deposited in the United States.

If that's not enough, another *New York Post* headline informs us "Malaria found in US for first time in 20 years, alarming officials" (June



26, 2023). The alarm is not over the very small number of cases but that the cases were locally acquired in Texas and Florida. Evidently people who were infected with the malaria parasite came into the U.S. and were bitten by mosquitos that then carried the malaria parasites to other people.

As the influx of illegal immigration continues to be facilitated by the current U.S. administration, these problems will no doubt get worse—along with the fact that God said He would bring judgment on national sins in the form of various plagues. There will certainly be much more to come.

Military developing drone swarm defense

A story posted at SpaceWar.com reported that "the Air Force Research Laboratory, or AFRL, conducted a demonstration, April 5, 2023, of its high-power microwave counter drone weapon . . . as it engaged a swarm of multiple targets" ("AFRL Conducts Swarm Technology Demonstration, May 17, 2023).

The microwave beams were successful in disabling and dropping the targets. It's further noted that "as the dangers from drone swarms evolve, leaders from across the Department of Defense are working closely to ensure we are exploring different technologies like directed energy to support the needs of the warfighter in the future against such threats."

In the book of Revelation, the apostle John was given a vision of what are apparently modern war machines, yet described from a first-century vantage point and vocabulary. In Revelation 9:3-12 we are told of "locusts" and "scorpions" emerging from the smoke of the abyss moving loudly like chariots with many horses.

It's been speculated that the "locusts" could be attack helicopters, yet they might alternatively refer to newer swarming drone weapons. The "scorpions" with stings in their tails might be a reference to modern mobile missile launchers, or perhaps they could refer to mounted beam weapons. The fact that they cause terrible pain without killing for a while might also refer to modern pain beam weapons, though it could also refer to something like chemical nerve agents.

It's not entirely clear, but we should again remember that John was writing from the perspective of never having seen any kind of modern technology, so it makes sense that he would describe what he saw in terms familiar to him. To help in understanding more of the imagery in this book, download or request our free study guide *The Book of Revelation Unveiled.*

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!



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For Such a Time as This!

Would a person placed in a position in life to help bring God's intended deliverance, to serve His will, step up and act even amid difficulty and peril? It's a decision we all face. Will you stand for God's purposes?

by Robin Webber

Some 2,500 years ago a woman was challenged with a life-or-death decision—to step forward for her God and people or stand still and hope for personal survival.

In the decisive moment between stimulus and response came a message from the kinsman who had raised her: "If you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:13-14).

Mordecai's timeless wisdom provoked righteous action from his adoptive daughter, now Queen Esther, leading her to plead for God's covenant people before her husband, a pagan ruler. She did not succumb to the lamenting inaction of "coulda, woulda, shoulda." Instead, she embraced the call of a greater Kingdom beyond the Persian realm.

How does this recorded event relate to our personal discipleship in Christ as we confront this life's challenges?

Deciding and acting for the Kingdom—now!

In answering that question, we need to recognize *the ultimate Kingdom* that has come our way and is now knocking on the door of our hearts for such a time as this. Jesus announced in His preaching, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel [or good news]" (Mark 1:15).

He was saying the inauguration of the new world age has arrived in vital respects—so get a mind and a heart that fits it! It is to this eternal Kingdom, yet to fully come to the earth in God's perfect timing, that we "have come . . . for such a time as this."

Again, we are not yet there in totality. Jesus prayed to His Father regarding His true followers still living amid this evil world: "Sanctify them [set them apart] by Your truth. Your word is truth. As you have sent Me into the world, I have also sent them into the world" (John 17:17-18). God's Word would galvanize believers into action.

So why here, why now, why you and me? The training for life in that ultimate Kingdom is *now,* here below, with help from above!

It is here we stand in the doorway of decision-making with Esther as to whether we listen to our fears or listen to the greater spiritual Mordecai—Jesus Christ, as He bids us, "Follow Me." Consider two basic truths observed by Austrian psychologist and holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl: 1) "Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose"; and 2) "Decisions, not conditions, determine what a man is!"

God has not called us to live in the twilight zone of indecision, for indecision is itself a decision that does not glorify God.

Stepping up to play our part for the Kingdom

Let's consider five needful and decisive steps to walk alongside Esther, with Jesus Christ as our partner, to meet God's future for us and glorify Him in so doing.

Step 1: Rather than stagger at a world gone awry, we ought to stagger at God's having chosen us to grant us His gift of grace (John 6:44, 65; Ephesians 2:8) for such a time as this. The apostle Paul, during a personal challenge, was reminded by the risen Christ, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9). God's grace—His inexhaustible bestowal of favor both in life and death—is sufficient for whatever comes our way.

Step 2: To quote noted author Steven Covey, an expert on success, "Begin with the end in mind." God Himself has laid out the ending and is working toward it: "I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure'" (Isaiah 46:9-10). And He wants us to work toward this end too.

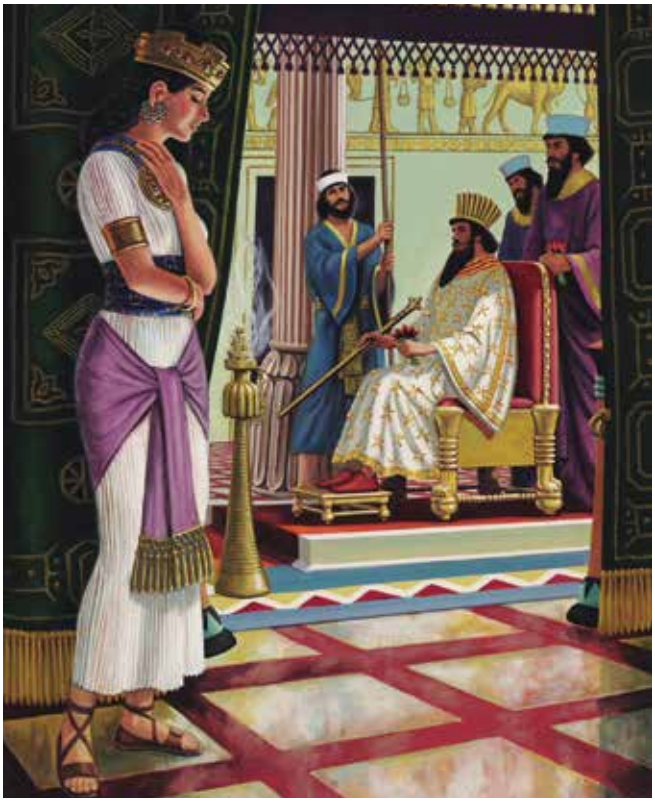
This was the embedded heart-set of Him who says, "Follow Me." He is the same One who "for the joy that was set before Him [the *future*] endured the cross [the difficult *now*], despised [or disregarded] the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

This needs to be more than just our worldview or outlook. We need God's ageless vision to guide us through our present times of trouble and challenge. For a disciple of Christ, to "begin with the end in mind" means to take each breath of life remembering that God is a

guiding presence molding us as His new spiritual creation into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Step 3: "Cut out the noise!" So many voices come at us every day and in every moment that can strangle and then devour our entire attention. They are distractive, addictive and not only time-consuming but *life*-consuming.

Jesus as a human being in the physical realm would occasionally call "timeouts" and remove Himself from the crowds following Him. So many people today have their eyes and hearts addictively glued to their smartphones that they don't have time to "consider the lilies of the field" (Matthew 6:23-34). Psalm 46:10 tells us, "Be still and know that I am God." For "such a time as this," a choice lies before us as to whether we will stay glued to our smartphones to see what people are saying and doing or take the next decisive step and see what *God* is saying and doing for our long-term well-being.



> Queen Esther did not succumb to inaction, but instead embraced the call of a greater Kingdom beyond the Persian realm.

Step 4: Treasure God's Word and "don't leave home without it," keeping its daily influence tucked away and locked in the recesses of our heart. Calling God's Word "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path," the writer of Psalm 119 maintained, "I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep Your righteous judgments" (verses 105-106).

God's Word is not only a "homing device" as to where we are in the moment, but also a "spiritual GPS" to where God waits for us to meet Him. A Bible not opened on a daily basis might as well be lost in a closet full of everything else you are not using. How can we continue to "walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith" (Colossians 2:6-7), if we do not hear the Voice that comes to us through the Word of God?

Step 5: Value and take time to *stop everything* to pray to our Heavenly Father. If we are not talking to Him, that means we are alone talking to ourselves—like an unsound person on a street corner having the most animated solo conversation with himself and going nowhere!

Jesus not only instructs His disciples on *how* to pray, but He left us with His expectation of "*when* you pray . . ." (Luke 11:2). Our Heavenly Father's ears are attentive and open to our prayers (1 Peter 3:12). Jesus had such confidence in stating, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me . . ." (John 11:41-42).

It's when we live in the world of prayer that we know "the Lord is at hand" and can follow Paul's encouragement to "be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding [better than the facts on the ground], will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:5-7).

It is "for such a time as this" that we physically walk through the kingdom of man. But it is "for such a time as this" that we have been called by God's grace to come *now* to a better Kingdom, standing for what's right as we follow the spiritual footsteps of the One who says, "Follow Me."

The door of decision-making is before us, both for the here and now as well as for the future. Like the prophet Isaiah, we have received a great calling and invitation from above: "And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?'" (Isaiah 6:8).

Will we respond like Isaiah? "Then I said, 'Here am I! *Send me.*'" BT

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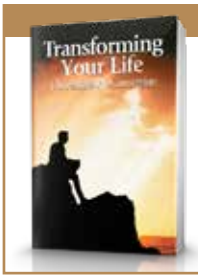

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Response to "The Uniqueness of the Human Body"

I very much appreciate this article and especially hope it reaches many young people. It would be a helpful tool for combatting so much misinformation put forth as truth. Thanks much for making it available.

From the Internet

"How Do We Make God Real to Our Children?"

I love this article so much! We live in a society that does not value God or parents and too often parents abdicate their role of teacher to someone else. Too many parents believe they are better off letting someone do the teaching when the best possible person is the parent. Thank you for giving some pointers on how to go about laying that foundation for teaching the children God has given to us.

From the Internet

Part 2 of this article, with more pointers, begins on page 19 of this issue.

"A World Embracing Evil"

Thank you so much for all you are doing. I love your magazine and am enjoying your articles of truth. Indeed it is "a world embracing evil." Not to despair, Jesus will return, and He does not fail His promises. So be encouraged and keep up the good work.

Subscriber in Tasmania

You recently published a request from a former subscriber not to send any more of your literature. The writer of the email rebuked your teachings as not of God but of Satan. I wanted to comment that this person is wrong for saying such a thing about your publications. Your literature is all from the written Word of God. *Beyond Today* published the truth only. Thanks for the great work that you do for all Christians. Sincerely, a very avid reader of *Beyond Today*.

Subscriber in Canton, Ohio

Thank you for the new issue of *Gute Nachrichten* [the German edition of *Beyond Today*] magazine. I am so glad that you are reporting on Satan's influence in your magazine. Sometimes I get the impression that his existence is no longer even a teaching among Christians. In the European Song Contest there are music groups that clearly worship the devil. I can't even watch that show anymore because the images get stuck in my head. Thank you for enlightening us about this influence.

Subscriber in Germany

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I really enjoy *Beyond Today* magazine. It gives a good understanding of the Bible and highlights information not found elsewhere. I highly recommend this magazine to all.

– K.T., Facebook fan



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I can only congratulate you on this courageous and stirring issue. Would it be possible to receive 5-10 more copies of this issue so that I can pass them on to selected friends and acquaintances? Of course, I would be happy to make a small contribution towards expenses for this.

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Comments from around the world

I like the helpful info you provide in your articles. I'll bookmark your website and check again here regularly. I am quite sure I will learn many new things right here!

From the Internet

I have been reading a lot of your material for a number of years now and appreciate what the church and all your people do for me.

Subscriber in Queensland, Australia

Thank you with much appreciation for sending *Beyond Today* magazine to us. Your magazine's Christian informational and helpful articles on world events and history are beyond expectation.

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Thank you for teaching the Bible the way it should be. Most churches now seem to water everything down to suit their own members. I regret I cannot find your program on TV.

From the Internet

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Just a short note to thank you for your TV programs and the magazines you so kindly send. Please keep sending them. We are sending a small donation to help with your great work for our Creator God.

Subscribers in Victoria, Australia

Appreciation for free Bible study guides

I have received several of your booklets and find them to be excellent Bible study helps. Currently, my major Bible focus centers on the book of Revelation. I'm also digging deeper to learn more about God's holy Sabbath and how it is that many mainline Christian churches trample all over it, despite it being one of the Ten Commandments. I've yet to read where God changed His mind or amended the Ten Commandments. So far as I know, God's day of rest was a gift to His creation, a day for the appreciation, respect, worship and dedication to God by all His creation.

From the Internet

I just want to thank you so very much for the literature that will be coming to me! I have so many questions and hope your literature will help me understand and answer a lot of my questions! God bless you!

From the Internet

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