BEYOND TODAY



Raising Moral Children

Society's Slide Into Sexual Immorality 8

When Will Peace Come to the Middle East? 12

What Is the *Real* Gospel of Jesus Christ? 19

Introductory Issue

Contents

Introductory Issue

Cover article

Raising Moral Children
Is proper child-rearing a lost cause in today's world? With so many pressures on the family, where can parents go for help in bringing up children to have strong and proper moral values? In a world where values are often questioned and undermined, is there a source to which parents can turn for guidance?
by Jerold Aust
6



Articles

8
Society's Steady Slide Into Sexual Immorality
We are now five decades into the sexual revolution that began in the 1960s. What has been the impact on society? What are the implications for the future?
by Noel Hornor

12
When Will Peace Come to the Middle East?
Why does it seem that the Middle East is in constant turmoil, perpetually on the brink of another outbreak of terrorism or war? What are the roots of the ancient antagonisms there? Will this troubled region ever see peace?
by John Ross Schroeder

16
Armageddon: The End of the World?
For many, Armageddon conjures up images of a nuclear cataclysm, perhaps the end of the world or of civilization as we know it. In biblical context, however, Armageddon can ultimately be seen as a cause for hope.
by Jerold Aust

19
What Is the *Real* Gospel of Jesus Christ?
The word "gospel" means "good news." But just what is the gospel? You need to discover for yourself the good news of what the Bible really says!
by Bill Bradford

22
Bible Answers for . . . Coping With Stress

26
The Smallest of Beginnings
A set of Jesus Christ's parables about small beginnings gives us important insights into the Kingdom of God.
by Darris McNeely

28
Mini-Study: Are We Living in the "Time of the End"?
What does the Bible teach about the time of the end? Are we in it?

Columns

24
Follow Me . . .
An Invitation to Eternity
"Follow Me." What does this invitation from Jesus Christ involve? What does it require? Are you willing to join Him on the journey?
by Robin Webber

Cover photo: A strong family is the basis for a happy life. Photo ©Getty

What's Behind Our Name?

What's behind the *Beyond Today* name? Quite a lot! Jesus Christ's message of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15) had two key time dimensions. One was the present, as He told His listeners to right now "repent, and believe in the gospel" (verse 15).



This means that all those who hear that message need to change their lives and thinking, turning their backs on the way that seems right and natural to us but in the end leads only to suffering and death (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

In other words, we need to "seek the LORD while He may be found, [and] call upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55:6). This is what "repent" means—to *change* from our own ways to living *God's* way of life. We need this exhortation to change now "while it is called 'Today'" (Hebrews 3:13) because we have faith in what God says about tomorrow—about the world and our lives *beyond today*.

Christ's message of the Kingdom of God also had a distinct *future* element to it. His message was, after all, a continuation of the biblical prophets who had gone before Him—men like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and others whose messages offered hope of a new world and a new age *beyond today* when the Messiah would return to earth and establish a world-ruling divine kingdom, the Kingdom of God!

Notice Acts 1:6-8. After Jesus had been killed and raised to life again, He appeared to His disciples. They asked Him if He would then establish the Kingdom at that time. His response? "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

They didn't realize then that the Kingdom for which they longed lay far in the future. Almost 2,000 years later, His followers still await its coming. We await the coming Kingdom, a Kingdom *beyond today*.

We derive our message and mission from the charge Jesus gave to His disciples that day. Our message is still that of God's great plan and purpose for you and all humanity. It's the message about why you were born, why you are here, and the astounding future your Creator has planned for you if you are willing to change your thinking and your priorities from the here and now to begin planning for your future *beyond today*.

In coming issues we'll open up God's Word to help you understand it—what it teaches about topics relevant to your life, lessons we should learn from the people, places and events recorded within it, and what its prophecies reveal about where our chaotic and confused world is heading.

All of these elements tie in with our name *Beyond Today*. We're dedicated to sharing with our readers the Bible's great hope of a world *beyond today* when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

We look forward to having you with us on this journey. And continue to join us in praying to God, "Your Kingdom come!"

—From the Editors

Raising Moral Children

by Jerold Aust



"When I grow up, I want to be just like my dad," the boy in the television commercial reassured us. The scene showed a proud father and son sitting together under a large oak tree. Each time the father moved, his son imitated him.

The ad closed with the father reaching into his pocket for a cigarette and lighting it. The camera closed in on the little boy as he picked up a small twig, placed it between his fingers and raised it to his mouth just as his hero, his father, had done.

The voiceover finished the scene with, "When I grow up, I want to be just like my dad."

Our children are getting an education. But who—and what—is doing the educating? What good and bad influences are hard at work in the minds of our children, forming and shaping them? Are you the guiding force in shaping your child's thoughts and moral standards? If not, how can you become the primary influence in the life of your child?

Being a parent is a complex responsibility. In many families both parents hold down jobs, trying to keep up with the needs of family, house, car and so many other things. The pressures can be staggering. It's no wonder so many parents feel overwhelmed when they consider their child-rearing responsibilities—and the world our children are inheriting. Such is symptomatic of the moral malaise we face.

Just how bad is it? What are some of the problems parents face today? What can we do about them?

Rise of the antiheroes

Chicago Tribune columnist Robert Davis, in an article titled "Naughty as They Wanna Be," asked, "Have we lost the capacity to be shocked by language?"

Davis wrote about the vulgarity of the times, using a well-known basketball star's often crass attitude as an example. The player "stood up before 200,000 sports fans… and millions more in the radio and television audience and blatantly drawled the dreaded four-lettered adjective," he wrote.

Unsplash/Allen Taylor



Is proper child-rearing a lost cause in today's world? Where can parents go for help in bringing up children to have strong and proper moral values?

"The sports fans gave him a wild ovation. What the heck is going on these days, anyway? Is nothing forbidden? When did smutty talk and dirty pictures turn up over the airwaves and bandwidths with impunity?"

Who gets hurt by such behavior? Civilization itself suffers. Our children do. We all do. Sadly, when shocking becomes common, it no longer startles anyone.

Is it too late to face the issues of morality and values head on? Some think we must assert ourselves in this critical area or we will be overcome by smut, filth and increasingly shocking behavior—that parents with high values will be swept overboard into a sea of amorality. What will become of our children then? What lies ahead for the new generation?

Take God seriously

Observers are divided on the issues, and chaos fills the vacuum. Some courageously stand up for right and worthy values, but many people simply don't appear to care whether good values and morals are practiced.

Then there are those who adamantly argue that no one has the right to determine the values or morals that should serve as a society's blueprint for living. "Who do you think you are?" is a common knee-jerk reaction by some.

Others take the question another step: "Who do you think you are? God?"

Let's briefly explore the latter question. Notice its implication. The question assumes there is someone who can determine human values and morals—the Supreme Being.

How does acknowledging a higher power, God, fit with better child-rearing?

God sets concrete standards. We can know where God stands on the issues facing civilization itself. Some parents look beyond human reason to God's transcendent principles for parental guidance.

American television news commentator Ted Koppel, in an address to the graduating class of Duke University, made this observation: "What Moses brought down from Mount Sinai were not the Ten Suggestions. They are commandments. *Are,* not *were.* The sheer brilliance of the Ten Commandments is that they codify in a handful of words acceptable human behavior, not just for then or now, but for all time."

Mr. Koppel had a point. If God's values were merely to be regarded as 10 suggestions, then secularism and situation ethics rule the day. But, if they are based on eternal commands given by the eternal God, then we're dealing with transcendent values, applicable to all people for all time.

God made us and knows how we think (1 Samuel 16:7; Hebrews 4:12-13). He created us from the dust of the ground (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7). He owns us (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). He intended mankind to choose between good and evil, to "choose life" by honoring God's values, which lead to eternal life (Deuteronomy 30:19-20; Matthew 19:16-17).

The human mind isn't automatically equipped with a moral compass (Jeremiah 10:23). God's Word is our moral compass, serving as the operating manual for human behavior. The Bible's laws serve as the moral compass for humanity; its morals and values transcend human thinking (Isaiah 55:6-9). Those laws are guides, signposts for human thought (Psalm 119:105).

God's values can help parents bring up happy, secure, successful children. Parents can have the knowledge and assurance to guide them in bringing up moral children. Right values can help inoculate children against the immorality and amorality poisoning civilization.

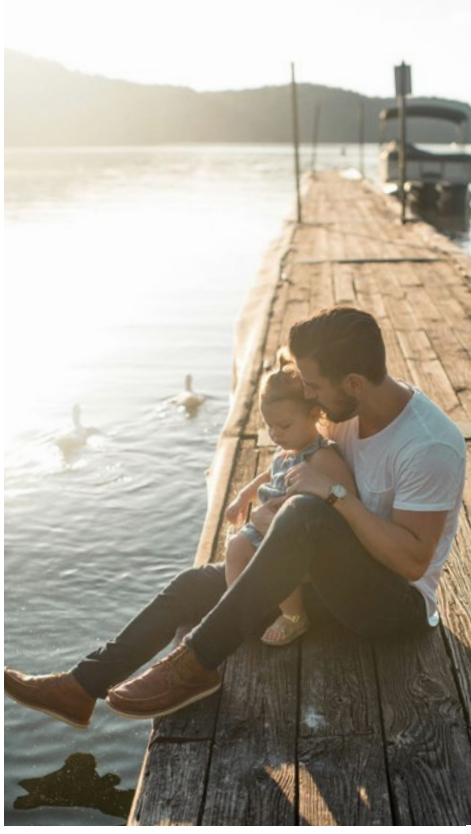
Breaking the cycle

Parents have a vital role in educating their children, not just by what they say, but by *what they are.*

What is most important in shaping a child's mind—words or example? A small boy who follows his father's lead to the point of mimicking smoking with a twig is following his dad's example. Good words help, but actions carry more weight.

How do children think? Some researchers believe that a child's pattern of thinking is mostly set by the age of 3. Pressure from other people, including peers, affects even babies.





> God's values can help parents develop the knowledge and assurance to guide them in bringing up moral children.

Babies and other youngsters are especially susceptible to others' examples; therefore their thinking processes soon have the imprint of this world's ways, as someone might form letters on a soft clay tablet. Their little minds come equipped with the basic powers to recognize and learn, but are otherwise empty and ready to be filled with knowledge, both good and bad.

What an incredible responsibility this places on parents! Consider what you have seen in watching parents interact with their children. Sometimes this is pleasurable, especially when parents are so obviously interested in their children. At other times it's uncomfortable and discouraging, such as when parents show little interest in their offspring and react to them with hostility. A parent's example is indelibly imprinted on his or her children.

We live in an era of parents speaking to their children with demeaning, self-destructive phrases: "You're stupid!" "You idiot!" These terms show frustration and selfishness on the part of parents. Why would adults use such language with their children? All too often it's because that's the way their parents talked to them. Society accumulates habits, attitudes and practices—particularly in family relationships.

"For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments" (Exodus 20:5-6).

The Second Commandment, referred to here, points out that the perpetual breaking of God's life-giving laws—as well as the painful fruit of such choices—is handed down from generation to generation. God doesn't have to punish; punishment is self-inflicted when we reject His way of life, and the resulting attitude is passed from parents to children.

However, this biblical passage also hints that the cycle can be broken. Parents can break the rhythm of self-destructive habits and behavior by honoring and obeying God.

We can improve on the old saying, "Do as I say, not as I do." But it takes effort and hard work. It also takes vision, a perspective of valuing God's instructions to guide parents in effectively rearing their children. Moral children don't just happen.

Foundation for a moral child

The most important key to raising a moral child can be summarized in one word—*example*. The power of parental example knows no bounds.

When a father and mother consistently set the standard for their children, their offspring reap the enduring benefits, as will *their* sons and daughters after them. The values and morals instilled in children when they are young become their compass, the foundation for the decisions they will make.

God gives basic instructions for how to build a moral family structure. His instructions to parents are clear: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today [primarily the Ten Commandments, listed in the previous chapter, Deuteronomy 5:6-21] shall be in your heart.

"You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise

Photos, left to right: Unsplash/Hana El Zohiry and Caleb Jones. Getty/jacoblund



up" (Deuteronomy 6:5-7). In short, the home is to be a values-driven, morals-oriented institution in which the father and mother are the teachers, instructing their children in God's way of life. No human effort can improve on God's model for moral teaching.

Knowing these guidelines is half the battle. *Doing them* is the rest. For parents to rear moral children, they must act from the heart, from clear and decisive convictions. External conformity or ceremony isn't enough. Sooner or later children will see through their parents' pretensions.

Parents who raise moral children realize how important their examples are. They also realize that to truly love their children they must live for their children, putting them high on their list of priorities.

William Bennett, former U.S. secretary of education, provides us with these words: "Moral education—the training of heart and mind toward the good—involves many things. It involves rules and precepts—the dos and don'ts of life with others. It involves explicit training in good habits [and] the example of adults who, through their daily behavior, show children they take morality seriously" (*The Children's Book of Virtues*, 1995, p. 5).

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Scan the code or visit ucg.org/btii to find it.

By conscientiously striving to set the best example possible for your child, you can bring up a moral child in today's world. Perhaps the acid test of a good parent is to ask a simple question: Would you be happy if your children grew up to be like you? BT

Turn Knowledge Into Practice

We live in a secular, selfish society. Self-sacrifice is out, while self-gratification is in. Our children pick up on this, being constantly exposed to it. To counteract this unfortunate circumstance, right values must be taught and lived in their presence. Here are some questions you might ask yourself to see if you are effectively instilling proper values in your children:



• Are you involved in your children's lives? Some children say they would rather give up a parent before they would be willing to give up watching television or using their computers or video games. This doesn't say much for parental involvement.

Studies show that children have greater intelligence when parents regularly spend time with them. Involvement comes when you talk with your children, take the time to put them to bed, pray with them, help them with homework, drive them to their activities, etc.

Children need father *and* mother and a proper relationship with both. A friend said to me that he spent so much of his formative years with his mother that he considered his father just a long-term houseguest with spanking privileges.

• Do you cheer your children's successes? It's natural for a father to support and identify with his son, but what about his daughter? A daughter, too, must emotionally understand her father's concern for her welfare and success in life. Parents can make a dramatic difference in positively shaping their children's future when they take the time to applaud and work toward their successes.

• Can the children count on you? Do you keep your promises? Children take parents at their word. Kept promises mean a lot to them. It sometimes requires sacrificing our time and resources to keep them, but the effort will be worth it.

• Do you tune out your children? Children need their parents' attention, especially when around other people. If we fail to give them our attention, they may resort to other means, including acting, dressing or grooming themselves in outrageous ways.

• Are you understanding in a conflict? Sometimes children want to do something to which their parents are opposed. In such cases parents should be honest and open with their children, explaining why they feel the time or situation is not right or why the action is inappropriate. Parents may feel the child is too young or that it's not safe for him or her. Explaining your reasons for refusing a request can strengthen a relationship with those you love.

• Do you and your spouse back each other up in parenting? Parents need to agree on household rules and maintain them. If the children try to get either parent to bend on the rules, both parents should remember their agreement made to each other and refuse such a request. Children gain a sense of security from living with two adults who love and support each other.

Society's Steady Slide Into Sexual Immorality

We are now many decades into the sexual revolution that began in the 1960s. What has been the impact? What are the implications for the future?

by Noel Hornor

Sex is everywhere. It permeates the movies and the television programs we watch, the music we hear, the magazines and books we read, the talk shows we listen to. Society, it seems, is obsessed with sex.

Perhaps never has society had access to so much knowledge about sex but understood so little about it. Seldom have people suffered so much through sexual ignorance.

Herpes is also back with a vengeance. As many as one in six Americans aged 14 to 49 is infected with the virus. In 2018, it was estimated that 26 million contract a new sexually transmitted disease in the United States each year, costing some $16 billion in health care expenses.

Of course, sexual behavior is only one measure of a nation's moral standards, but it's a crucial one.

After the revolution

The sexual revolution has been with us for many decades now. *Newsweek* magazine documented the sweeping change that began as far back as 1967: "The old taboos are dying. A new, more permissive society is taking shape…And, behind this expanding permissiveness is…a society that has lost its consensus on such crucial issues as premarital sex…marriage, birth control and sex education" (Nov. 13, 1967, p. 74).

After the many years of the sexual revolution, society has lost sight of right and wrong when it comes to sex.

We need to understand what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior in the eyes of God. The Bible instructs that we should abstain from premarital sexual involvement and practice monogamy in marriage. Any sexual conduct apart from the marital union is biblically defined as immoral and sinful.

Clearly, many modern nations have fallen far short of this godly ideal. Statistics show that adulterous behavior is out of control. Most studies conclude that between a fourth and half of American husbands and wives will commit adultery at some point during their married lives.

Adultery is family-obliterating behavior that destroys the very heart of society, with devastating consequences for children. From 1900 to 2000, the divorce rate increased 700 percent, with most of the rise in the last few decades of that century.

By current estimates, only a little over half of all American children under the age of 18 live with both married biological parents.

Teen sexual behavior

Equally disturbing developments are the levels of premarital sexual activity and pregnancy in Western nations.

How many American teens are engaging in sex? According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), almost half of American high school students admit having had sexual intercourse.

The CDC reported a few years back that one in four sexually active U.S. teen girls has at least one sexually transmitted disease. It was also estimated that every day in America 10,000 teenagers contract a sexually transmitted disease, and that about half of all new STD infections occur in people between ages 15 and 24.

What does this level of promiscuity mean in terms of premarital pregnancy?

A shockingly high number of U.S. births are illegitimate. In 1960, only 5 percent of American babies were born out of wedlock. Today it's greater than 40 percent.

Troubling trends, frightening future

The costs and implications of these trends are truly alarming. Each year more than 400,000 American teenagers become pregnant, most of them out of wedlock. The majority of these new mothers end up in poverty,



Unsplash: Jonathan Borba

> Adultery is family-obliterating behavior that destroys the very heart of society, with devastating consequences for children.

dependent on government handouts. According to the Institute for American Values, the problem costs American taxpayers *$112 billion a year* for anti-poverty, criminal justice and education programs, plus lost tax revenues.

This epidemic of illegitimacy has spread to other Western nations. In Sweden, Norway, and France more than half of all babies are born out of wedlock. In England and Scotland, it's about half. As a result, a permanent underclass is developing in many European cities.

What do these trends portend? Not only have moral standards for many of the current youthful generation been deconstructed, but seeds have been planted that threaten to sprout into a harvest of much greater evil and suffering.

A major concern of law-enforcement officials in America is the rise of a new breed of criminals. They are generally males in their teens or early 20s and are violent far beyond the criminal classes of past decades. They are often driven by explosive anger and marked by callous indifference to human life. Such people, sociologists note, are almost always from single-parent homes.

Can any objective person doubt that permissiveness is engendering a problem of major proportions? The words of the ancient Hebrew prophet Hosea aptly describe such cause and effect: *"They sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind"* (Hosea 8:7, emphasis added throughout). The hurricane-force winds of violence, cruelty and crime batter modern society. When large portions of a nation behave irresponsibly, its social structure must deal with the inevitable serious—and sometimes catastrophic—consequences.

Many Americans are concerned about the future of their nation. Polls repeatedly show that a majority of Americans believe the United States is in a moral and spiritual decline.

But will they do anything nationally to stop the slide? God's directive to all people is clear. He *"commands all men everywhere to repent"* (Acts 17:30). God's Word shows that unchecked moral decline leads to eventual national destruction. Those familiar with the Bible realize that it foretells dire consequences for any person or country that persists in immoral behavior (Proverbs 29:1).

An overlooked sex survey

Other sources also warn of the devastating effects of moral depravity. The record of history is clear. English anthropologist J.D. Unwin extensively studied 86 societies across 5,000 years of history. After his death in 1936 the results of his research were published under the title *Hopousia: The Sexual and Economic Foundations of a New Society*.

Unwin studied cultures and empires from the standpoint of their sexual behavior. In particular he was interested in their prenuptial and postnuptial behavior. He noticed a correlation between such behavior and what he termed a nation's "expansive energy." We might refer to this as the ability to remain productive and maintain a position of influence and leadership among other nations.

He stated that "expansive energy has never been displayed by a society that inherited *a modified monogamy or a form of polygamy"* (*Hopousia*, 1940, p. 82).

Unwin discovered that "in human records there is *no instance* of a society retaining its energy after a complete new generation has inherited a tradition which does not insist on pre-nuptial and post-nuptial continence [sexual self-restraint]" (pp. 84-85).

He concluded that "the evidence is that in the past a class has risen to a position of political dominance because of its great energy and that at the period of its rising, its sexual regulations have always been strict. It has retained its energy and dominated the society so long as its sexual regulations have demanded both



> The paths of history are strewn with the ruins of empires and nations that ignored God's principles, especially in the areas of sex, marriage and family.

pre-nuptial and post-nuptial continence…*I know of no exception to these rules"* (p. 89).

Bluntly speaking, Unwin's point was that nations gain prominence when they keep their sexual drives in check both before and after marriage. They remain strong as long as societal and marital bonds are strong. When those barriers fall, a society's days are numbered. As Unwin put it, he knew of *"no exception to these rules."*

Awareness of God's sovereignty

Can any permissive society successfully defy the record of history? Are any nations exempt from the same sins—and their inevitable consequences?

American culture has largely dominated the world since the end of World War II. Many nations have wanted to follow America's example of prosperity and progress. Tragically, too many of them follow the U.S. example of immorality as well.

The United States leads the world in many categories of sexual excess. In premarital pregnancies its pace is almost twice that of other Western nations. But that difference does not necessarily reflect a higher standard of morality in the other countries. It reflects America's ambivalence about contraception and abortion.

Does any nation truly live by a moral standard that pleases God? Consider the observation of Psalm 14:2-3: "The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none that does good, no, not one."

History shows that wayward nations have suffered for their conduct. God often allows the natural consequences of sin to overtake a people. "Your own wickedness will correct you, and your backslidings will reprove you," He warns (Jeremiah 2:19).

Most people believe it's anachronistic to think of God as intervening in world affairs and correcting nations. Yet the living God does at times intervene according to His purpose. Ultimately He alone determines the fate of nations. God has the power to deal with empires and emperors. The Roman governor Pontius Pilate spoke to Jesus of his power to crucify or release Him. But Christ informed Pilate, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:11).

In times past nations and their leaders were generally more aware of God's sovereignty over their affairs and freely acknowledged that truth. Often they viewed God as their benefactor. For instance, America's founding fathers recognized God, mentioning Him four times in the Declaration of Independence.

Those same men were convicted that a nation's laws and standards should be generally based on the Bible. James Madison, the chief architect of the U.S. Constitution, said: "We have staked the whole future of the American civilization… upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves… according to the Ten Commandments of God" (quoted by Benjamin Hart, *Faith & Freedom: The Christian Roots of American Liberty,* 1988, p. 18).

Abraham Lincoln, while calling for a national day of fasting and prayer during the American Civil War, said: "We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been

Photos: Unsplash. Left to right: Kristina Flour, Gianfranco Grenar

preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God…And we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own . . . It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness" (quoted by William Federer, *America's God and Country Encyclopedia of Quotations,* 1996, pp. 383-384).

That same American president mentioned in a personal letter to an elderly lady in September of 1862: "Yet we cannot but believe that he who made the world still governs it" (quoted in *The Life and Writings of Abraham Lincoln,* 1940, pp. 727-728).

Lincoln's words ring true today. God is the great giver of national blessings (James 1:17). Lincoln also said in 1838 that "if destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher" (quoted by David Barton, *The Myth of Separation,* 1989, p. 70). He knew that nations can self-destruct.

God and morality

The paths of history are strewn with the ruins of empires and nations that ignored God's principles, especially in the areas of sex, marriage and family. Historians Will and Ariel Durant quoted Joseph de Maistre in their book *The Lessons of History:* "There is no significant example in history, before our time, of a society successfully maintaining moral life *without the aid of religion"* (1968, p. 51).

Syndicated columnist and author Georgie Ann Geyer wrote, "I have come to the conclusion that it is impossible to have a moral community or nation without faith in God, because without it everything comes down to 'me,' and 'me' alone is meaningless."

She further warned: "Today Americans have stopped acting in terms of their own moral, ethical, religious beliefs and principles. They stopped acting on what they knew was right—and the 'me' has become the measure of everything. However, moral societies are the only ones that work. If anyone thinks there is not a direct and inviolable relationship between personal integrity in a society and that society's prosperity, that person has simply not studied history . . . Great moral societies, built upon faith in God, honor, trust and the law, blossom . . ."

The 19th-century French historian Alexis de Tocqueville is said to have written that "America is great because America is good. If America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great" (quoted by Federer, p. 206).

De Tocqueville saw strengths in the United States of the early 19th century. But what would he say about the America of today? Could he single out any nation on earth today for its goodness?

Is there any country on the globe that God could commend? "Those who honor Me I will honor," God said, "and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Samuel 2:30). Which modern nation has a way of living that honors God? Do not our mounting troubles testify to our dishonor of the God who made us?

The message of the prophets

The message of the biblical prophets was similar to the warnings of more recent social critics: Societies that cast aside their moral underpinnings will ultimately end up on the scrap heap of history. We need only look at the collapse of such great powers as Assyria, Babylon and Greece to see that a nation's preeminence can vanish into history.

The prophets of old warned the kingdoms of Israel and Judah that oblivion would befall those countries that sought their own agenda rather than God's purpose for them. A national obsession with sex, leading to a searing of moral consciousness, would lead to decline and fall.

God told Jeremiah the prophet to "go down to the potter's house" (Jeremiah 18:2). He wanted him to learn a lesson that he was to pass on. "'O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?' says the LORD. 'Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!'" (verse 6).

Nations are like clay in the hands of God. He calls on people everywhere in all countries to repent (Acts 17:30-31), to radically alter their conduct.

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What are the reasons behind God's laws about premarital and extramarital sex? Read our free Bible study guide *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension.*

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God's message to the young, still virtuous King Solomon of Israel, before his appetites led him away from God, remains the greatest hope of nations in need of mending their ways of life:

"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). BT

When Will Peace Come to the Middle East?

by John Ross Schroeder

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem," urged Israel's King David 3,000 years ago (Psalm 122:6). Seeking a peaceful solution to the Mideast problem is the concern, if not the prayer, of many world leaders.

But peace in the Holy Land has, over the centuries, been in remarkably short supply. The area remains plagued by stubborn antagonisms that baffle and dispirit virtually anyone who hopes for satisfactory solutions to age-old problems.

The trend over recent years dramatizes the problem. It seems that every time Israelis and their neighbors are within reach of an agreement that might let the two sides live in peace, talks break down over longstanding issues or a new wave of violence again leaps into the headlines. Thousands have been killed and injured by bullets, knives, stones, rockets, Molotov cocktails and explosives strapped around the waists of suicide bombers, some only in their teens.

In one of many tragic incidents, several Israeli schoolchildren were mutilated and two of their teachers killed when their armored school bus was shattered by a remote-controlled roadside bomb. Some Palestinian young people have also been killed in the most heartbreaking of circumstances, bystanders caught in the wrong place at the wrong time in bloody crossfires.

Ancient antagonisms are so great that political leaders are sometimes straitjacketed by their constituents. After Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak offered groundbreaking concessions on control over the West Bank and Jerusalem in 2000, many Israelis thought he had gone too far.

Having lost so much support, Barak called for early elections, hoping to salvage a way to remain in power. Prospects weren't promising, however, since polls immediately showed he would lose to virtually any other potential candidate. And lose he did.

Meanwhile, Ehud Barak's counterpart at the time, Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat, himself long compromised by his support of terrorism, feared assassination by Palestinian hard-liners if he accepted anything less than complete Muslim control over disputed areas of Jerusalem. Prospects for peace remain dim in an area in which disputes have long been settled by sword, bullet and bomb.

Terrorism and other violence are not the only threat to peace in the Middle East. The foibles and follies of human nature transcend time, geography and political borders.

Why is peace so elusive in this troubled region? And will it ever come?

Oil and age-old antagonisms

Let's begin an assessment of the region's problems by surveying the background behind the present situation.

Oil is the primary fuel of the civilized world, the lifeblood of the world economy. Fifty percent of known crude-oil reserves lie buried beneath the sands of the Middle East. Such is the strategic importance of those Mideast countries that compel the attention of the world.

Oil is the real king (or all-powerful sheikh) in the Middle East. One of the reasons the Western powers fought in the 1991 Gulf War was to prevent Saddam Hussein from asserting control over the precious black-liquid reserves of his neighbors, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Oil is invariably the unseen player in the Persian Gulf region.

But far more fundamental than petroleum reserves are the area's age-old antagonisms. Ancient territorial ambitions continue to assail the region. Many of its countries have long-standing disputes that have alternately smoldered and cooled along with the prevailing political climate.

The conflict between Iraq and Iran is one example. In the 1980s the two neighboring countries fought an eight-year war, killing more than a million people, only to settle their border dispute under the pressure of Western presence in the Gulf.

The mere existence of Israel remains an issue in many quarters. Over the years Muslim leaders and groups have repeatedly called for the armed "liberation" of Jerusalem from Israeli control and forcible elimination of the tiny nation. Since its founding in 1948, Israel has fought numerous wars and lesser conflicts.

Yet has war solved any of these dilemmas permanently?

Where it all began

Perhaps more than any other spot on the globe, in the Middle East the past meets the future. No other human conflict is so firmly rooted in antiquity.

The Bible shows that the Middle East is where mankind consciously began to make its spiritual way in the world. It is where man was first given the understanding that he is not just a physical creature but one with abstract and

intangible longings, emotions and needs. As the early chapters of Genesis show, religion—true and false—began in that storied area.

The Middle East is the home of three world religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These belief systems have significantly influenced the way we understand life and death, good and evil, right and wrong.

Yet the three faiths have their profound disagreements and divisions. Fundamentalist revolutionaries lobby for extremist solutions to territorial problems. Modern Israel has periodically claimed the biblical boundaries of Judea and Samaria. Jihad—holy war—is a recurring Arab cry. Indeed a holy war is not out of character for the Christian tradition, either, when we remember the Crusades, in which untold thousands of Muslims and Jews, as well as some Christians, were slaughtered.

In today's chaotic and confused world, the Middle East is not the source of spiritual enlightenment God intended it to be. Instead, the atmosphere there has been marked by armed conflict, hostility and, most of all, misunderstanding.

Serious physical and spiritual problems will last into the foreseeable future. With unbridled killing permeating the Mideast landscape, breaking the Sixth Commandment remains all too common. Arms proliferation is the dominant tendency in the region. No one knows when the buildup of weapons will explode into yet another war.

Israel to be an example

As recorded in the Bible, God told ancient Israel that its people were to serve as a good example to other nations. He presented them with an unparalleled system of laws that, if adhered to, would have provided peace and justice for all its citizens.

God meant for other nations to see for themselves the blessings and wisdom that would naturally stem from Israel's way of life and voluntarily choose it for themselves.

Notice Moses' words concerning the laws God gave to Israel: "I have taught you statutes and laws, as the LORD my God commanded me; see that you keep them . . . Observe them carefully, for thereby you will display your wisdom and understanding to other peoples. When they hear about all these statutes and laws, they will say, 'What a wise and understanding people this great nation is!' What great nation has a god close at hand as the LORD our God is close to us whenever we call to him? What great nation is there whose statutes and laws are so just, as is all this code of laws which I am setting before you today?" (Deuteronomy 4:5-8, Revised English Bible).

Those laws, if studied and applied, would lead to greater peace in the Middle East. The region desperately needs such genuine biblical and spiritual solutions.

Conflict in the cradle of civilization

Meanwhile we need to understand the area's history. Since antiquity the Middle East has been a center of the world's attention. All nations are tethered to its geopolitical swings because it encompasses the fundamental story of man. To comprehend the present we must, as always, examine the past.

We should not forget that the Bible, in its geographic



Unsplash/Toa Heftiba

origins, springs from the Middle East. The Garden of Eden lay in the area of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Genesis 2:10-14, New International Version). God called Abraham in Mesopotamia, the land between these two ancient watercourses.

How ironic that the cradle of civilization should often be the site of hatred, hostility and conflict. Yet it's not so ironic in the light of the history recorded in Genesis. How many realize that today's Middle Eastern antagonisms are rooted in events described in the Bible's first book?

After all, nations are nothing more than families grown large. For instance, much of the Arab world stems from Ishmael, the son of Abraham through Sarah's handmaid Hagar.

An ancient passage of biblical wisdom advises us to "look unto Abraham your father" (Isaiah 51:2). Three major faiths trace their ancestry back to this patriarch. Yet historically the offspring of Abraham have split into bitterly feuding family factions.

This legacy of broken families has led indirectly to today's problems in the Middle East. Battles between brothers are a recurring theme: Cain murdered Abel; Ishmael was banished in a family dispute; Jacob and Esau struggled for their father's blessings; 10 of Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. On it goes, even to the present.

The saga that began in Genesis is spilling over into our time. In the 1991 Gulf War an Egyptian woman's three sons were engaged in battle—one in the Egyptian army, one in the Saudi forces and another as an Iraqi solder. Her greatest fear was that one son might kill his brother. How little has changed!

The Bible and cycles of war

No war brings permanent peace. All too often, fighting only assures another war—and much suffering en route. Real peace is something that must be built when the battles have stopped and the participants pause to comprehend the futility of their conduct.

But spilled blood begs for vengeance from the bereaved, and on we go again. World War I (supposedly the war to end

> Three major faiths trace their ancestry back to this patriarch. Yet historically the offspring of Abraham have split into bitterly feuding family factions.

all wars) begot World War II, which led to the Cold War. Not surprisingly, the Iraq War of 2003-2011 also grew in the soil of belligerence and aggression, as did the 1991 Gulf War before that. And that war was preceded by the eight-year Iran-Iraq War, which helped spawn Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

War stands discredited as a permanent solution to conflict. As Basil O'Conner said while chairing the National Conference of Christians and Jews, "The world cannot continue to wage war like physical giants and to seek peace like intellectual pygmies."

Yet there could be real hope based on our common ground. True understanding of the roots of a problem is a step towards a solution, and God has not left humankind without solutions. Christians, Muslims and Jews share in some elements of their spiritual inheritance. All three religions agree on some of the principles and truths of the Bible and highly esteem such figures as Abraham and Moses.

Spiritual principles in common

Biblical principles could act as a bridge of understanding. Consider just three major spiritual precepts: We are instructed to love God (Deuteronomy 6:5), love our neighbor (Leviticus 19:18) and treat others as we would have them treat us. These three spiritual principles are enjoined in scripture sacred to Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

But in the Middle East the highest ideals of three faiths are largely awash in secular struggles for power, land and oil. Idealism is lost in the compromises wrought by greed and expediency. The same old desires for expansion and revenge submerge the lofty heights of a potentially devout life. However, if we are ever to work out our differences, we must implement the basic principles on which these three major religions agree.

The chief rabbi of Great Britain and the Commonwealth succinctly illustrated what is desperately needed in an article in *The Times* of London. "The message is clear," he wrote. "You cannot have peace without communicating, without dialogue between faiths, between nations and races . . . Religion must once again become the principal communicator to bridge divisions."

Hope in a fresh biblical perspective

The Middle East has the potential to serve as a positive example. The apostle Paul crisscrossed this area several times, spreading a way of life that embraces the tenets of two major religions, though he saw the two as one. Problems can sometimes emerge in the context of commonality. What do we share, and how do we make the most of our common ground?

Humanly speaking, the only other option is catastrophe. Armageddon would soon be at our door. Weapons are deadlier by the day; terrorists and rogue regimes covet menacing nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

The ancient words of Moses ring in our ears: "I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19). This should be an anthem for humanity.

An even broader perspective compels our consideration. We are all of the same species, made "of one blood," as Paul reminded the men of Athens (Acts 17:26). The breathtaking view of our planet from space reminds us that we have a common home. Clumsy border disputes must seem bizarre from God's vantage point.

Somehow we have to turn our genetic and geographic intimacy to our advantage. Selflessness—the key to everything from the welfare of the planet to solving the bloodstained conflicts of the Middle East—is an art that must be learned.

As many concerned observers agree, certain essential priorities must be put before selfish interests. We desperately need a new vision, a new way of thinking based on biblical principles.

Promise of peace to be fulfilled

Whatever happens in the meantime, our only permanent hope lies in the pages of the Bible. According to its words, what began in the Middle East will also end there. Scripture prophesies a great end-time conflict involving Arabs, Jews and Europeans (see Daniel 11-12 and "The North-South Struggle for the Middle East" on page 15). The final conflagration will finish only with the return of the King of all kings, Jesus Christ (Revelation 19:11-21).

Then, the Holy Scriptures assure us, human values will change for the better. God's great law of love will be practiced in Jerusalem, and nations will flow to the new world capital to learn to live by it (Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-4). Jerusalem, the city of peace, will finally live up to this grand distinction.

Oil, land and politics will cease to be the primary focus of interest. One geographic fact will dominate the globe: The spiritual headquarters of the divine Ruler of the earth will be in the Middle East. From there the reigning Jesus Christ will look after the best interests of all countries, peoples and races. Representatives of many lands will then flow to Jerusalem, not to wage holy war, but to learn the way to peace.

At that time all people in the Middle East will surrender their lives to their Creator. Muslim means "one who surrenders himself [to Allah]." Arabs and Israelis alike will yield their lives to the one true God, giving up their narrow biases, prejudices and selfish interests.

These former enemies, and many others, eventually will become one with each other and, most importantly, with God. The Middle East will again be the land of promise, a place from which peace and true spirituality will be spread to the entire globe.

But such a radical transformation will take a new spirit and new heart (Jeremiah 31:31). It will require a fresh burst of spiritual energy directly from God. This is what Jesus brought us at His first coming. What began at Bethlehem and Nazareth will gradually spread to the entire world when He returns to earth a second time to rule all nations. BT

The North-South Struggle for the Middle East

In ancient times, the kings of the great civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt dreamed of controlling the entire Middle East. Invariably their path to conquest ran north and south through the Holy Land, the narrow land bridge between Eurasia and Africa.

Whether it involved Babylonian, Assyrian or Persian emperors from the north or Egyptian pharaohs from the south, the threat to the inhabitants of this crucial strip of land at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea was almost constant. Throughout history, the Holy Land often changed hands.

Around 536 B.C., in the third year of the reign of the Persian emperor Cyrus the Great, an angel delivered to the Hebrew prophet Daniel a prophecy of what would happen in years to come (Daniel 10:1, 14). At that time Persia, under Cyrus, was the dominant power in the Middle East.



Bust of Antiochus Epiphanes, the cruel ruler who tried to stamp out the Jewish religion in the second century B.C.

Daniel was told of three more prominent rulers of Persia (Daniel 11:2) who would arise. The prophecy further mentioned the rise of a ruler of great dominion whose kingdom would be divided into four parts (verses 3-4). Combining this with another prophecy in Daniel 8, we find that this ruler was Alexander the Great. After he died his empire was partitioned into four kingdoms, each ruled by one of his generals. The two major kingdoms were Egypt under Ptolemy to the south of Judah and Greater Syria under Seleucus to the north.

The remainder of Daniel 11 focuses on the north-south divide. It details events in the reigns of successive Seleucid and Ptolemaic rulers—referred to as the king of the North and king of the South respectively—with control of the Holy Land passing back and forth between them several times. Receiving the most detail is the reign of an evil Seleucid Syrian king named Antiochus Epiphanes.

Antiochus was a "tyrannical oppressor who did his utmost to destroy the Jewish religion altogether" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary,* 1985, Vol. 7, p. 136). He instituted laws that forbade the practice of the Jewish religion under penalty of death. Those who held fast to God's commandments were often brutally murdered. As foretold by Daniel, he desecrated the Jerusalem temple by erecting a massive statue of the pagan god Zeus in it and offering swine on the altar (Daniel 11:31).

Daniel's prophecy then shifts to New Testament times. In 65 B.C. the Romans took possession of Syria, and the Roman state thus became the kingdom of the North. Rome also later annexed Judea.

Verses 36-39 appear to show the Roman emperor proclaiming himself divine and later honoring and expanding the power of a previously unrecognized "god" in a high religious office, the former occurring early in the succession of Roman emperors and the latter commencing with Constantine the Great in the fourth century. The honoring of this false religion would progress through various resurrections of the western part of the Roman Empire until the end time.

That brings us to the next verse: *"At the time of the end* the king of the South shall attack him . . ." (verse 40, emphasis added). But who will the northern and southern powers be at the end of the age? The western part of the Roman Empire has been revived several times—by Justinian, Charlemagne, Otto the Great, Charles V, Napoleon and the Hitler-Mussolini Axis. At the 1947 Treaty of Rome, which brought the European Economic Community into existence, the signers were, according to former NATO Secretary-General Henri Spaak, *"consciously recreating the Roman Empire once more."*

Thus it appears that today's European Union, which traces its roots to that starting point, is paving the way toward the final revival of the Roman Empire that the Bible elsewhere prophesies. It will be led by a dictator of whom Antiochus Epiphanes was a forerunner.

But what about the *southern* ruler? Though the Eastern Roman, or Byzantine, Empire continued until 1453, Egypt was separated from this northern power during the Arab conquest of 639 to 642 and became an integral part of the Muslim world, a huge empire stretching from southwest Asia across North Africa and including the Holy Land.

The struggle between north and south never really abated. Charlemagne's grandfather prevented Muslim armies from taking control of Europe in 732. The 11th through 13th centuries saw the Crusades, launched by European Christendom in the north, to regain the Holy Land from the Muslim powers of the south.

From around 1250 Egypt was ruled by Mamluk sultans until the Ottoman Turks seized it in 1517. With the fall of the Ottoman Empire toward the end of World War I in 1917, Egypt became a British protectorate. In 1937 it finally gained its independence. Since then various attempts have been made to unify Muslims of the region—some led by political or military leaders and others by religious or populist leaders who want to see the reestablishment of the *caliphate,* a worldwide united community of Muslims living under Islamic law. Islamic terror groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and ISIS have called for this, as did Osama bin Laden. More recently the Islamic State has declared itself a caliphate and called for Muslims worldwide to support it.

We also find a prophecy of an Arab confederacy in Psalm 83. Dedicated to wiping out Israel, it comprises "the tents of Edom [including Palestinians and some of the Turks] and the Ishmaelites [Arabs in general]; Moab [central Jordan] and the Hagrites [other descendants of Ishmael's mother Hagar]; Gebal [modern Jubayl in Lebanon or perhaps a mountain region of Jordan], Ammon [the environs of Amman, Jordan], and Amalek [a branch of Edomite Palestinians]; Philistia [the Gaza Strip] with the inhabitants of Tyre [southern Lebanon]" (verses 5-7).

It seems, then, that the final king of the South will be the leader of a coming Muslim confederation encompassing at least several Arab nations as indicated in Daniel 11. When the king of the North invades the Holy Land, he will conquer Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia, though "Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon"—the ancient names for what is today the kingdom of Jordan—"shall escape from his hand" (verses 40-43).

In light of these prophecies and continuing developments in this region, it's vital that we keep our eyes open regarding this ever-volatile area.

—Tom Robinson

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Armageddon

The End . . . of the World?

by Jerold Aust

What does the Bible really say about Armageddon? It tells us that the last great battle of this age of human misrule will take place in the Middle East. The armies will gather at a place Scripture calls Armageddon. So, not surprisingly, Armageddon has come to portray our worst nightmare—the end of the world.

Some Bible scholars claim that Armageddon is prophesied to destroy civilization as we know it. More detailed speculations speak of it as a battle of cataclysmic proportions, possibly a nuclear war that will annihilate mankind. Even U.S. presidents have spoken of Armageddon in such terms. That Armageddon is named in the Bible (Revelation 16:16) and that it serves as the prelude to "the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (verse 14) deserves our concern and attention.

The meaning of Armageddon

Scholars explain that Armageddon is the Greek form of the Hebrew words *har Megiddo,* meaning "hill of Megiddo." Megiddo was a significant fortified town in the Holy Land in ancient times. The area has quite a history. Excavations of Megiddo have revealed 20 layers of occupation dating from the fourth millennium B.C. to about 450 B.C. The site is about 18 miles south-southeast of the Port of Haifa in northern Israel and about 55 miles north of Jerusalem.

Megiddo's strategic location gave it greater importance than its size—a mere 13 acres within the city's ancient walls during the time of Solomon—would suggest. Megiddo overlooked the narrow entrance to Israel's northern mountains from the Plain of Megiddo—also known as the Valley of Jezreel or Esdraelon—a level expanse some 20 miles long and 14 miles wide.

This locale, especially the area of the Plain of Megiddo, was militarily important because it guarded part of the easiest route across the Fertile Crescent, which stretched from Mesopotamia to Egypt. Throughout ancient history, the great powers of Mesopotamia—Assyria and Babylon—contended with Egypt for control of this area.

The territory of the ancient kingdom of Israel was at the crossroads of three continents—Africa, Europe and Asia. Bounded on the west by the Mediterranean Sea and on the east by the Arabian Desert, this relatively small area between sea and desert was the strategic land link between the three continents. So important, so desirable, so coveted was this narrow land bridge that ancient armies frequently and regularly battled for control of it.

In modern times the Arabian Desert has been prized for its great oil reserves. In ancient times parts of the territory of Israel were coveted for their militarily crucial passes. Megiddo guarded one of those passes. More than 200 battles have been fought at or near there (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary,* 1981, Vol. 12, p. 551). One scholar calls the area "the battle ground of the centuries" (Merrill Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary,* 1966, "Armageddon").

What about the future of Megiddo, or Armageddon? Does the Bible reveal anything about this strategically vital area?

Prophecy of Armageddon

Although Armageddon is mentioned in the book of Revelation—"And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon" (Revelation 16:16)—Scripture says nothing about armies actually attacking each other there. It does indicate, however, that armies assemble on the Plain of Megiddo, apparently using the large, level area as a staging ground to prepare for a great battle. But who is being gathered, who is gathering them, and for what purpose?

Those being gathered appear to be two political and military coalitions—"the kings of the earth and of the whole world" (verse 14) and "the kings from the east" (verse 12), from east of the Euphrates River. These leaders aren't necessarily "kings" as we use the word today—the original word means ruler, leader or commander. We might use descriptions like president, prime minister, chancellor or general to refer to such leaders today—though literal kings could also be meant.

At this point in the future, many heads of nations will have banded together to support the mighty "beast" power mentioned in Revelation 13 and 17. In describing this confederation of peoples, nations and rulers as a beast, God is likening this enormously powerful alliance to an animal driven by ungodly instincts and motivations.

Those constituting this alliance "are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast" (Revelation 17:12-13). The book of Revelation shows that demonic spirits performing miraculous signs will influence these leaders to gather their forces "to the battle of that great day of God Almighty . . . to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon" (Revelation 16:13-16).

Why will the armies of these nations gather at Armageddon? Apparently these military powers will invade the Middle East for a showdown over who will control the world. However, instead of fighting *each other,* they will change course at the return of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to fight *Him!*

We don't normally think of people actually daring to




The Plain of Megiddo, also known as the Valley of Jezreel or Esdraelon, stretches into the distance before Tel Megiddo (foreground). The ancient fortress city, viewed from above at right, controlled access to a vital pass through the mountain highlands of northern Israel.

go to war against God. People war against other people. But the Bible reveals that men will actually try to fight the returning Jesus Christ (Revelation 17:14). These end-time dictators and demagogues covet rulership of the world, and they hope to succeed through their immense armies and destructive weapons—weapons powerful enough to destroy all life from the planet!

God knows that unless He sends Jesus Christ to intervene in human affairs at that critical juncture, *"no living thing could survive"* (Matthew 24:22, Revised English Bible, emphasis added throughout).

Satan and Armageddon

Behind the scenes another powerful leader figures prominently in gathering the armies to Armageddon. Satan, as "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4), will have deceived all nations (Revelation 12:9). As the adversary of humanity (1 Peter 5:8), his avowed purpose is to deceive and destroy the human family. The massive armies that will arise in the end time will, to him, seem the ideal vehicle for accomplishing such incredible destruction (compare Isaiah 14:12, 17).

But what the nations won't know, and Satan won't accept, is that God allows him to deceive such arrogant leaders into thinking that this decisive battle will enable them to take control of the world!

God Himself will enter into battle with those deceived nations bent on destruction (Zechariah 14:1-3). He will prove that *He* is all-powerful, not Satan nor those whom he deceives. And God will not allow man to completely destroy the human race (Matthew 24:22).

With this background, we can better understand the purpose of Armageddon when we read how the armies will be gathered "to the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (Revelation 16:14).

The prophet Zechariah also describes this climactic time: "Behold, the day of the LORD is coming . . . For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem . . . Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east" (Zechariah 14:1-4).

Military forces gather

The Expositor's Bible Commentary offers another insight into Armageddon: "It is surprising that no one has suggested taking *magedon* as deriving from the secondary sense of the Hebrew *gadad* that means 'to gather in troops or bands.' The simple way in Hebrew to make a noun from a verb is to prefix a *ma* to the verbal form. Thus we have *maged,* 'a place of gathering in troops,' and the suffix *o,* meaning 'his,' yielding 'his place of gathering troops.' This is almost equivalent to the expressions in vss. 14, 16—'to gather them (the kings and their armies) for the battle on the great day of God Almighty'—and would allude to the prophetic expectation of the gathering of the nations for judgment" (p. 552).

In Joel 3:9-10 God depicts these rulers and their preparation for invasion and warfare: "Proclaim this among the nations: 'Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up [to Jerusalem, verses 12, 16-17]. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, I am strong.'"

This prophecy indicates that the leaders will disrupt societal needs, converting facilities for manufacturing agricultural implements to produce armaments and munitions.

The armies will gather near Armageddon, almost filling the surrounding plain, and continue their deployment throughout other areas of the Holy Land. But the actual battle will take place some 55 miles south of Armageddon, around Jerusalem.

In truth, that great battle will not be much of a contest. God will allow the armies to gather at Armageddon so that, in the end, there will be no question that He rules supreme. By permitting Satan, his demons and deceived human leaders to stir up nations to pit their massive forces against Him, God will allow those armies who would resist Christ's rule to close in on Jerusalem—only to be destroyed in their battle against Him.

Armageddon, therefore, becomes a symbol of a great battle, not between mighty nations and military alliances, but between the forces of good and evil. That climactic battle will be fought at and around Jerusalem.

The battle is joined

The Bible describes that time of earth-shaking events as "the day of the LORD" (Isaiah 2:12; 13:6, 9; Jeremiah 46:10; Zechariah 14:1)—the time during which God will intervene in human affairs to put an end to man's rebellion against Him.

Continuing the prophecy recorded in Joel, God says:

Photos, from left: Scott Ashley, israeltourism/Wikimedia

"Let the nations be wakened, and come up [to Jerusalem] to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow—for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision" (Joel 3:12-14; compare with Revelation 14:15-19).

Jesus Christ will deal with these massive armies at His return: "Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations . . . He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Revelation 19:15). Birds gather to feed on the remains of those who war against Jesus Christ (verses 17-18, 21).

Apparently the carnage isn't limited to the area immediately around Jerusalem. Revelation 14:20 indicates that it will extend for some 200 miles.

Armageddon—prelude to peace

Jesus Christ will then come to be recognized as humanity's Savior and Deliverer, its King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 17:14; 19:16). Mankind will soon recognize the futility of rebellion against God.

The prophet Malachi also spoke of God's supreme authority: "For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles [nations]; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 1:11).

God will come to be acknowledged as Supreme Ruler of mankind. For millennia Satan—the god of this world—has palmed himself off as the god of mankind (2 Corinthians 4:4; 11:14). However, God has prophesied that one day He will fulfill His plan for mankind, for which He created the earth.

When this happens, the human family will enjoy unprecedented peace and unparalleled prosperity on earth. This peace has been promised to mankind for thousands of years (2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:2; Isaiah 11:1-10).

Armageddon, while a symbol of the destruction of the forces of evil, is also a prelude to humanity's salvation. It is then that human misrule will face its end. At Armageddon the greedy, power-mad demagogues of that time will be gathered into one place so that Christ can put an end to the misery they have wrought on mankind!

Armageddon signals the end of fear, pain, destruction and untimely death. Sadly, there is simply no other way for mankind to learn its lesson. God must finally step in, intervening in human affairs to force peace on this foundering world (Revelation 19; Zechariah 14; Joel 3).

Christ will then replace this world's social, economic, political, educational and religious systems and build a world based on God's ways (Daniel 2:44-45).

How to understand mankind's future

God has given to mankind important annual festivals that unlock the mystery of our future. For example, the Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:23-25) foreshadows the return of Jesus Christ "with a great sound of a trumpet" to vanquish the armies gathered against Him (see Matthew 24:30-31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Revelation 11:15).

The symbolism of the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16; 23:26-32) reveals that Christ will bind Satan, preventing him from influencing humanity (Revelation 20:1-3).



Megiddo was at the crossroads of several ancient invasion and trade routes (indicated in red) in ancient Israel. Megiddo overlooks the Plain of Megiddo or Jezreel Valley, which Bible prophecy indicates will be the gathering place of massive armies just before Jesus Christ's second coming. Those armies will fight the returning Christ near Jerusalem.

Map by Shaun Venish

The seven-day Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:33-43) depicts 1,000 years of peace and prosperity that will envelop the earth and its inhabitants (Revelation 20:4-5; Isaiah 11).

The Eighth Day (Leviticus 23:36, 39) signifies the time when all who didn't know the true God will be resurrected to learn His truth and receive their opportunity for salvation (Revelation 20:11-12; Ezekiel 37). To learn more, request our free study guide *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

Armageddon is not the end of the world. It's a gathering place for enormous armies, where deceived human leaders are summoned to enter into a decisive battle with God at Jerusalem.

Rather than marking the annihilation of mankind, Armageddon is the preface to 1,000 years of peace and prosperity for all. Humanity will live on—for what begins at Armageddon establishes Jesus Christ as supreme ruler on earth and over all nations. The earth will then become immersed in peace and prosperity in the Kingdom of God! BT

DIVE DEEPER

To learn more about the incredible events that will precede Jesus Christ's return and the future God has prophesied for humanity, find our free study guides *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*, *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. **Scan the code or visit ucg.org/btii to find them.**

What Is the *Real* Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Is the gospel a message about Jesus Christ, or is it a message He brought and taught? Did you realize that Christ's gospel includes not only how God will save the human race from exterminating itself, but how we have an incredible destiny in the Kingdom of God?

by Bill Bradford

When Jesus Christ came to live on earth as a human being, He brought with Him a message called "the gospel." What was this message Jesus taught?

Many have been taught that the "gospel," the "good news," is the story of Christ's life, birth, earthly activities, death and resurrection—and that He died to "save" us. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 are often used to support this definition of the gospel of Christ: "I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand . . . unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

But is this the full definition of the gospel message Christ preached?

As we shall see, Christ's gospel includes much more than simply the story that His life and death lead to our salvation. It more broadly presents what salvation really is and how God intends to save the human race from its present dilemma, and it reveals our glorious destiny in the Kingdom of God.

Christ's message: "The gospel of the Kingdom of God"

Let's first look at the message Christ Himself proclaimed while on earth. Mark records for us, in Mark 1:14-15, the message Jesus preached during His ministry: "Jesus came to Galilee, *preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,* and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. *Repent, and believe in the gospel*'" (emphasis added throughout).

Mark says this gospel is about *the Kingdom of God,* and this is the gospel we are commanded to believe in. The word "gospel" literally means "good news." Jesus brought as His gospel the "good news of the Kingdom of God."

Matthew also records for us the subject matter of Jesus Christ's preaching. In Matthew 4:17 he writes, after recording Jesus' temptation by the devil: "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Matthew's term for the content of Jesus Christ's preaching is "the kingdom of heaven," referring to the same message. Jesus began preaching the message of God's Kingdom from the very beginning of His ministry.

Luke also confirms that Jesus preached the Kingdom of God, noting that Christ said, "Because for this purpose I have been sent" (Luke 4:43).

Luke's account continues in Luke 8:1: "He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings [the gospel, or good news] of the kingdom of God." Later Jesus sent His 12 disciples to preach this same gospel of the Kingdom (Luke 9:2). After that, He sent 70 others, instructing them to speak also of the Kingdom of God (Luke 10:9-11).

After His death and resurrection, but before He ascended to His Father, He "presented Himself alive" to the apostles, again "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

Paul describes his own preaching in Ephesus as relating to "the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8). He discussed that Kingdom in most of his letters to individual churches. He referred to himself and his companions as "fellow workers for the kingdom of God" (Colossians 4:11). When Paul met the Jews in Rome, he preached to them about the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ (Acts 28:31).

It is noteworthy that Paul used the Old Testament Scriptures—"the Law of Moses and the Prophets"—to preach the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ (Acts 28:23). The Bible has a consistent message from the beginning of the Old Testament to the end of the New Testament concerning the Kingdom of God. The Bible is also clear why Jesus Christ brought this message of the Kingdom of God.

A literal kingdom to rule over the earth

What is the Kingdom of God? Is it the Church? Is it something that resides in the hearts of Christians?

Let's begin in Daniel 2. It becomes apparent, when we read Daniel 2:28-44, that the Kingdom of God is a *literal kingdom* that has not yet been established on earth. In this passage we see that Nebuchadnezzar, king of ancient Babylon, had a dream in which he saw a huge image of a man. This image consisted of a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet a mixture of iron and clay.

Daniel, a prophet of God in Nebuchadnezzar's court, interpreted the king's dream for him. Through God's

inspiration, Daniel revealed that the four parts of this image were actually four successive world empires. By God's inspiration Daniel identified the first of the kingdoms, the head of gold, as the Babylonian Empire (Daniel 2:38).

The next two kingdoms are identified in Daniel 8:20-21, which records a later vision that foretold the second and third empires. These two kingdoms are named as "the kings of Media and Persia" and "the kingdom of Greece." History has confirmed that the Babylonian Empire was succeeded by the Medo-Persian Empire and the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great.

In chapter 7 the four kingdoms are pictured again, this time as four beasts. The vision in this chapter characterizes the empires as wild animals, foretelling that their method of rule and domination would be cruel and oppressive. The fourth kingdom featured in chapter 7 is described as especially cruel.

We know from history that Alexander's Greek kingdom was divided and ultimately succeeded by the Roman Empire, the latter depicted here as challenging the very authority of God and persecuting His saints (Daniel 7:25). This entity is shown in vision as having 10 horns (verse 7), which are 10 extensions or resurrections of the fourth great empire to arise.



> "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed … and it shall stand forever."

These resurrections of this fourth kingdom continue through history to our day, and the final resurrection is depicted as existing at Jesus Christ's return (verses 8-14).

It is in the days of this fourth kingdom that God will replace these earthly kingdoms with His Kingdom, according to Daniel's prophecies. "And in the days of these kings [10 rulers of the end-time revival of the Roman Empire] 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" (Daniel 2:44).

We see that the fourth kingdom, Rome, continues to rule in various forms until Christ returns to establish His Kingdom here on earth.

God's Kingdom—foretold repeatedly in Daniel—is the same Kingdom Jesus Christ spoke about. There can be no mistake about the nature of the Kingdom of God. The four kingdoms described in Daniel 2, 7 and 8 ruled over people and lands. They were to be world empires with dominion and power to rule, warring against and conquering other nations. They had kings, governments and laws. They were literal kingdoms, whose ruins are visible to this day.

So, too, will the Kingdom of God be a literal sovereignty ruling over the whole earth. Daniel 2:44 makes this inescapably clear.

This Kingdom was the subject of Jesus' gospel. Jesus will return to the earth and establish the Kingdom. He will be the *King* of the Kingdom of God under the Father. "Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, *'The kingdom of this 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).

Entering the Kingdom

When Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God, He said it was "at hand" and commanded people to repent and believe the good news about this Kingdom (Mark 1:14-15).

His Kingdom is something we must enter (Mark 10:23, 25). Jesus warned of obstacles that can prevent our entrance into the Kingdom (Matthew 5:20; 19:23-25; Mark 9:47; Luke 18:17; John 3:5).

Jesus was at that time inviting people to repent so they could enter the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:15). His parables described what the Kingdom is, when it would come and how a person could enter it; and He clarified the requirements for and obstacles to entering it.

When does a person enter the Kingdom of God? Upon conversion, Christians become children of God and heirs of the Kingdom (Romans 8:16-17). But they will not inherit the Kingdom until the Kingdom comes.

Paul explains: "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:50-52).

Many people stop reading after the first four verses of 1 Corinthians 15, thinking they describe the entirety of the

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gospel Paul preached. But by continuing to read the chapter, we see clearly that there is much more to the story. Paul goes on to explain more about the resurrection from the dead and entrance into the Kingdom of God. We "inherit," or enter, that kingdom "at the last trumpet" (verse 52), the great blast that signals Christ's return to rule the earth forever (again, see Revelation 11:15).

Salvation through Jesus' life, death and resurrection is indeed a part of the gospel message, but it is not exclusively (as many assume) the gospel message. Jesus Christ died, was buried and was resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:1-4) for a reason—so we could have everlasting life in the Kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5, 16).

We can accept Jesus' command to repent and believe this gospel message. We can turn to God for forgiveness and reconciliation through Jesus Christ and begin to live by the laws of the Kingdom of God as taught by Jesus Christ. Those who refuse to live by God's holy laws will be refused entrance into the Kingdom of God and eternal life (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5).

Entering the Kingdom of God is synonymous with salvation. Thus, without understanding what the Kingdom of God is, people don't understand what salvation is.

Human beings not in the Kingdom

This resurrection from the dead is to take place when Jesus Christ returns at the last trumpet to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, taking over the world's nations.

The people who are then resurrected from mortality to immortality will have entered His Kingdom. The people who remain in the nations of the earth who are not changed into spirit then will not yet be in the Kingdom of God because they are still mortal (human), but they will be *ruled by* the Kingdom of God. The rule of the Kingdom of God on earth will consist of the reign of Christ and of His followers then raised to eternal life (Revelation 20:4-6).

Jesus Christ will return to set up His Kingdom on earth with His resurrected saints so that all may receive eternal life in the Kingdom of God. God's desire is that everyone have the opportunity to escape death and inherit the Kingdom, each in one's own time (1 Corinthians 15:20-26).

DIVE DEEPER

Where is our world headed? How will God deal with our world's chronic problems? How does that tie in with Jesus Christ's message? Find the answers in our free Bible study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom.*

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The message Jesus brought is called, appropriately, the *good news* of the Kingdom of God. It really is good news, the most wonderful news imaginable for mankind. Jesus Christ is asking you to believe that good news and "seek first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33).

This publication proclaims the same message Jesus and His apostles proclaimed. Look for more articles in *Beyond Today* magazine explaining the teachings of Jesus Christ about the coming Kingdom of God and what you should do to enter that glorious Kingdom! BT

Are There Other Gospels?

The Bible calls the gospel "the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14) or simply "the gospel of the kingdom" (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14). But the biblical writers used other names for it as well. For instance, the Bible speaks of the "gospel of Christ" and the "gospel of God." Do these names refer to various messages or different gospels? As we will see, these are other terms for the same message preached by Jesus Christ.

For example, the term "gospel of God" simply means that it was a message of good news that originated with God. The apostle Peter tells us that the gospel was sent from God through Jesus Christ. Notice Acts 10:36-37: "The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached."

It was in Galilee that the gospel of the Kingdom of God was first preached after John the Baptist's ministry had ended. It was this same gospel that Peter says God sent to the children of Israel by the preaching of Jesus Christ. Hence we see the term "gospel of God" and also the words the "gospel of Christ."

The gospel of God is God's gospel. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel Jesus brought as God's messenger.

In a similar manner, Paul sometimes uses the term "my gospel" (Romans 2:16; 16:25; 2 Timothy 2:8). This does not mean it originated with Paul, nor was it a gospel about Paul. It was a message he received directly from Jesus Christ. "The gospel which was preached by me . . . came through the revelation of Jesus Christ," he said (Galatians 1:11-12). The term "my gospel" makes sense because he was the one preaching it.

What about "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24)? From the beginning we are called by grace, then justified by grace and also saved by grace. The "gospel of grace" is another appropriate term for the same gospel Jesus preached.

The good news of the Kingdom is also called "the gospel of your salvation" (Ephesians 1:13). Since the gospel of the Kingdom of God is about your entrance into the Kingdom of God, which is synonymous with salvation, there is no conflict with the other terms for the gospel.

In Revelation 14:6 it is called "the everlasting gospel." Why? Because God's Kingdom was planned even before the first man was created. "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (Matthew 25:34). And God's Kingdom itself will last forever (Psalm 145:13; Daniel 4:3, 34; 7:14, 27; 2 Peter 1:11).

"The gospel of peace" is also used to describe this gospel (Romans 10:15; Ephesians 6:15). Peace is an important result of the preaching and establishment of the Kingdom. Prophesying of God's Kingdom, Isaiah said, "Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:7).

These words and phrases all describe the same gospel. The writers of the New Testament simply used terms that emphasized various aspects of the same wonderful message. Jesus came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15), continued to preach it throughout His ministry (Acts 1:3) and taught His disciples to preach the same message (Matthew 10:7). Although the words to describe it varied, the message was and is the same.

Bible Answers for . . .
Coping With Stress

If you're like most of us, you're feeling stress from circumstances in your life. Sometimes the stress we face feels unbearable. But even daily stress can take a toll. Medical professionals warn us that stress is a killer. It's a risk factor for heart disease, strokes and many other diseases. With the impact stress can have on our lives, it's important to have a biblical perspective on how to cope.

The Bible is a guidebook for dealing with life. God has provided us with this manual about how life works. We hope you'll see that the Bible contains practical solutions to the issues and challenges we all face, including the challenge of stress. And we encourage you to contact us if you would like additional information or would like to talk personally with one of our ministers.

Facing a challenging world

How would you describe the world we live in today? Challenging, fast-paced, dangerous, unstable, immoral? The apostle Paul describes the last days as "perilous times" (2 Timothy 3:1). What are the results? Stress! We can find ourselves feeling anxious and apprehensive about how the challenges of the world will affect us personally, leaving us stressed out.

A number of people were asked to write down some of the things that cause stress in their lives. Here are a few responses:

"The most stressful things for me are dealing with my health issues, paying bills and feeling worthless because I can no longer do what I used to do."

"I tend to worry over a matter. What if this happens or what if that happens, or how can I solve this? So I worry over problems—real or not real—the job status, money, my anger that comes at times."

"I take on things that I feel I can't handle. I don't know how to say 'No' and say, 'That's too much for me right now.' I stress over everything!"

"It's very hard for me to not be able to please everyone. This causes stress in my life."

So where do we turn first for help? Again, the Bible is God's instruction manual for life. It provides the answers and gives us comfort, peace and hope for a brighter tomorrow.

Let's consider some specific biblical principles that can help us cope with stress.

▶ Does God show us how to reduce stress?

"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

When negative experiences and situations are coming at you and it seems overwhelming, stop, take a deep breath and focus on something lovely and good. Overcoming stress starts with the ability to control our thoughts. We need to focus on the positive, uplifting things of God.

▶ Can God help when our problems seem overwhelming?

". . . Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

"Jesus looked at them and said, 'With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible'" (Mark 10:27).

Even if *we* can't change something, *God* can. Do we believe that? Have you ever thought about asking God to help you change a situation that is causing you stress?

▶ How can I find comfort in dealing with the trouble and stress in my life?

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, *who comforts us in all our tribulation,* that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4, emphasis added throughout).

God promises to comfort us in our times of stress. How about trying to be a comfort to someone else who may be going through greater difficulties than you are? Giving comfort or helping someone in another way usually brings satisfaction and joy to the giver. "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving" (Acts 20:35, Good News Translation). Part of coping with stress is learning to put it in the right perspective.

▶ Can I expect my life to be more peaceful if I ask God for help?

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful" (Colossians 3:15).

God's plan is to bring peace to a troubled world at the return of Jesus Christ. We can have that peace now if we follow His plan for peace. It involves a lifestyle change and a change in our hearts. Peace is part of the fruit of God's Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

▶ Is there hope even if I feel like I've reached my limit in a very serious, stressful situation?

"Every test that you have experienced is the kind that normally comes to people. But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm; at the time you are put to the test, he will give you the

strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way out" (1 Corinthians 10:13, GNT).

Consider biblical examples of people facing severe trials. Whatever the trial, when they asked God for help, He provided the strength and help for them to bear it. Jesus Christ Himself was "in agony" and "His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" as He prayed before His crucifixion (Luke 22:44). God strengthened Him, and God will strengthen us as well when we ask.

▶ Why do I have to put up with so much stress in my life? Why doesn't God just take it away when I ask Him?

"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12-13).

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

We need to believe there is a reason for our trials and that God is in control. God is not far off and unconcerned. He really is working in our lives to transform us from what we are into what He wants us to become. We need to accept trials and tests and understand what they are doing for us.

▶ What is the ultimate purpose of my stressful trials?

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

"But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you" (1 Peter 5:10).

We go through stressful trials for a reason: God is working with us! He was working with Joseph when he was at the bottom of a well and when he was in an Egyptian prison. Joseph had a reason to be stressed out. When Daniel was in the lion's den, he too had a reason to be stressed out. When Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego were facing their fiery trial, they also had a reason to be greatly stressed.

But they kept going and obeying God! They faced their doubts and fears. They didn't collapse in self-pity and cease to trust in God. When you come to realize that there is a divine purpose for your trials, then the stress of dealing with them should diminish.

▶ Can I have confidence that God understands my stress?

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35, 38-39).

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

Whatever trial you're going through, it cannot separate you from the love of God. He understands! Jesus Christ knows what it's like to be human. He loves us.

Ask God to help you learn the lessons He has for you. Ask God to help you build His character through your trials. There's nothing wrong with expressing to Him that you're having trouble and that you need His help. He wants you to trust Him and to rely on Him for help! BT

Apply These Tips Now

We face many types of stressful situations, but this list can give you some practical guidelines to apply in your own personal situation. Some of these helpful suggestions are from Helpguide.org.

Look through this list, pick three things you feel could help you this week and try them out. Next week you might want to pick one or two more ideas to try.

- Learn to say "No."
- Shorten your "to do" list by removing the "shoulds" and keeping the "musts." Drop tasks that aren't truly necessary to the bottom of the list or eliminate them entirely.
- Learn what is really important in life and set those things as your priority (see Luke 10:38-42).
- Learn to delegate to others when you can. Read the story of the advice Moses received from his father-in-law Jethro in Exodus 18:13-24.
- Do not say or do things that consistently irritate someone. Know when to be tactful and respectful about certain subjects (see Ephesians 4:31-32).
- Express your feelings instead of bottling them up. If something or someone is bothering you, communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way.
- Be willing to compromise your wishes (not your values) if compromise will help solve the problem.
- Look at the big picture. Get things in perspective. How important will it be in the long run? Will it matter in a year? Is it really worth getting upset about? If not, focus elsewhere.
- Connect with other people, especially positive people. A strong support system will help shield you from the effects of stress.
- Set aside time in your daily schedule for rest and relaxation. Don't allow other things to get in the way. This is your time to recharge your batteries. Meditate on godly things. Listen to peaceful music. It's amazing what 10 minutes of that can do for you.
- Make time every day for leisure activities that you enjoy. Take a walk; smell the roses; laugh. The act of laughing helps your body fight stress in a number of ways (see Proverbs 17:22).
- Exercise regularly and incorporate healthy practices into your lifestyle—eating well, getting adequate sleep and reducing caffeine or sugar intake.
- Practice good time management. Setting your priorities right includes "making the most of your time" (Ephesians 5:16, New American Standard Bible)—especially making absolutely sure you make time for family and, above all, for building a personal relationship with God.
- Live by a budget. So many people struggle with financial problems. Develop a budget and live by it.

Again, pick out several of these items to try this week and in the coming weeks. You may be pleasantly surprised at how your stress level goes down!

An Invitation to Eternity

"Follow Me." What does this invitation from Jesus Christ involve? What does it require? Are you willing to join Him on the journey?

by Robin Webber

Nearly 2,000 years ago a couple of fishermen were going about their own business casting nets into the Sea of Galilee in hopes of their next big catch.

Andrew and Peter were steadily plying their trade, as their ancestors had before them. Their life was not complex, but it was nonetheless demanding. The men cast their nets with an expertise developed since childhood and would pull them in with patience and precision.

Their day was almost done—or at least they thought so, but little could they know that the familiar rhythm of life was about to abruptly change.

A man of Galilee whom they had known and spoken with before was standing by the shore. Speaking to them, His words were a curious blend of invitation and command—*"Follow Me."* He went on to declare that He would make them "fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). Indeed, these two initial words would not only alter two lives but alter the course of history.

The book of Matthew describes their response by stating, "They immediately left their nets and followed Him" (verse 20). They dropped their nets and handed over their past, present and future to the man on the shore.

The first recorded words of Jesus Christ to Peter were "Follow Me." Peter would hear these words more than once. Little could he realize where the journey would lead. In time Peter would have to come to fully face himself and further let go of the "nets" of life.

Are you willing to go the same way?

"Follow Me" is the ever-present guiding echo that encases the journey of a Christian pilgrim as he or she navigates the challenges of a world that's turned from God. *Akoloutheo,* the root Greek word translated "follow," brings forth a variety of definitions that convey companionship based on union or likeness. Thus it gives the sense of "one going in the same way" (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words,* 1985, New Testament section, "Follow").

In the Gospels this word is used 77 times of following Christ. It's been said that if God says something once it's important. What then is the significance when the concept of "following" Jesus is given 77 times?

Of course, the command for this spiritual journey is easy to read, but it's challenging to undertake. And it's intended to be just that—*challenging.*

In contemplating the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, we realize that it's humanly impossible to abide by its tenets without supernatural help. Christ lifted the bar so high that it cannot be raised higher. A full and honest read of Jesus' words reminds us that He never said it would be easy, but rather that it would be worth it. But it comes at a cost! God still expects each of us to "leave our nets."

Excuses to avoid the invitation

After his initial conversation with Peter, Jesus would further explain to others what it meant to "follow Me." The formula never changes as the account in Luke 9:57-62 bears witness: "Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, 'Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.'"

It is here that Jesus engages the earnest would-be disciple to fully consider what demands the future might bring and to prepare for a life quite unlike the one he's been living.

"Then He said to another, 'Follow Me.' But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.' Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.'"

This man was not talking about attending a funeral right then. He seems to have had either unfinished business at home with an ailing aged parent who was not yet deceased or, if the parent had actually died, perhaps a complicated inheritance that would take time to sort out. (Or it could be a reference to the year-long Jewish mourning period of that day, after which bones of the deceased were reinterred in an ossuary or bone box.)

In any case, Jesus was not demeaning the dead or genuine responsibility to one's family duties. Rather, He was making a demand statement on the would-be follower to hand over his present life into the care of God's providence.

"And another also said, 'Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.' But Jesus said to him, 'No one, having put his hand to the plow,



Peter and Andrew immediately left their fishing nets to follow Jesus.

> This column is designed not only to guide you to open the pages of your Bible, but to encourage you to "get out of the boat" and follow Jesus Christ without reservation.

and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.'"

This third individual was not talking about a quick trip back to say goodbye to some guests who'd just stopped by. Instead, while considering a life of following Christ, he wanted to take time to visit his past associates and cuddle up to a known world of companions he would be required to put behind him.

Here, among three would-be followers, Jesus offers a profound and gripping message to those who would be granted the gift of eternal life by our Heavenly Father and follow Christ into eternity.

As the stunned followers begin to understand the depth of His challenge and invitation, we can almost read Jesus' lips in discerning what He was basically saying: "My message is this: When My call comes, you are to drop your nets immediately just like My friends Peter and Andrew. My desire and prerequisite for companionship with Me is surrendering your past, present and future and handing it over to Me in faith and confidence that My perfection is always going to trump your human best."

The apostle John recorded Jesus' expectations in these terms: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27).

Will you drop nets or drop anchor?

You may have heard God's call for years now, just as much as Andrew and Peter heard the voice of Christ come over the water. But instead of coming to the proverbial shore and dropping your nets, you have dropped anchor where you are, at a safe distance from commitment to Someone offering something far greater than yourself.

Let me make it very plain: There is a profound difference between simply knowing who Jesus Christ is while safely viewing Him from a distance and walking step by step with Him towards eternity.

This column, titled "Follow Me," is designed not only to guide you to open the pages of your Bible, but to encourage you to open the doors of your heart to "get out of the boat" and prepare to "drop your own personal nets," whatever issues they may be, and follow Jesus Christ without reservation.

Perhaps the voice of "Follow Me" is best heard in the story of a man whose plane crashed in a deep jungle. There he was stuck in the bush until he came on a hut in a clearing. A native man appeared from out of the hut. The forlorn pilot asked the man if he could get him out of there, and the man confidently responded, "Yes."

Thus, they began the journey. Hours went by as the native man forged ahead, slashing away with his machete at the tangled brush in front of them. Finally, the anguished pilot frustratingly cried out to the man, "You said you knew the path out of here to rescue. Where is it?"

DIVE DEEPER

What does it mean to have faith? The Bible tells us that we are to live by faith, but what does that mean? How did the many figures of the Bible live by faith? Discover the answers in our free study guide *You Can Have Living Faith.* **Scan the code or visit ucg.org/btii to find it.**

The guide slowly turned around. And with a smile on his face and a piercing gaze into the pilot's eyes, he calmly proclaimed, *"I am* the path."

With this story in mind, may this and future columns help us in our journey to always look to and heed Jesus' call of "Follow Me." As we remember, He never said it would be *easy,* but He did say it would be *worth it.* We must always trust in Him to lead us. The same One tells you this very moment in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." BT

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Lessons from the Parables:

The Smallest of Beginnings

A set of Jesus' parables about small beginnings gives us an important insight into the Kingdom of God.

by Darris McNeely

Every winter the woods next to my home settle into a winter sleep. A few last leaves cling to bare tree limbs. Bushes and shrubs are trimmed back and prepared for the next season of growth. What looks like a dormant landscape around my home conceals a deeper cycle of life that is preparing to spring once again from the earth a few months later to dazzle me with beauty, wonder and joy. Nature never rests. Life continues moving forward.

Jesus gave a number of parables, and those about seed and sowing in particular give important insight about the present, dynamic and inexorable force of the Kingdom of God. It adds another dimension of understanding to God's unfolding purpose.

A force planted

In other articles in this parables series we've focused on Christ's descriptions of the Kingdom as a seed sown in the fields of life. But His teachings further present the Kingdom of God as a powerful force that, when dramatically revealed, will fill the entire world.

In Matthew 13 Jesus illustrates the Kingdom by comparing it to two very small elements. "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed," He said, "which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches" (verses 31-32).

Mustard seeds are very tiny. If you try to hold a bunch in your hand they can easily fall out. Hundreds can cover only a small space in your palm. Indeed they are the least of the seeds, but when grown the plants can grow to 10 to 12 feet high and provide shelter and support for birds perching on their limbs. Quite a large output from such a small beginning!

Immediately following this saying, Matthew records another similar parable involving an even smaller element: "Another parable He spoke to them: 'The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened'" (verse 33).

Leaven is an agent, typically a yeast spore, that permeates a lump of dough, causing it to expand and soften. The spore is even smaller than a mustard seed, virtually invisible yet capable of expanding and multiplying and filling the whole ball of dough, making the dough many more times its original size.

Let's consider what we have in these two parables.

First, we have instruction about the Kingdom of Heaven continuing on from all the other parables Jesus gave in this section. One point is clear from these parables: The Kingdom of God is multifaceted and multidimensional. It takes several illustrations to understand its scope.

Second, these two parables show the very small beginnings of that Kingdom. A mustard seed is tiny, smaller than the head of a pin. It's hard to imagine something so small growing over time into a large plant. And leaven reaches into every part of a lump of dough and transforms the product. Jesus is giving profound insight into how the Kingdom of God works.

Small beginnings

Just how small did the Kingdom begin? Consider the circumstances of Jesus' birth. The accounts in the Gospels portray a very small and humble beginning. Born into a young family from Nazareth, Jesus' birth was in the smallest of villages (Bethlehem). The circumstances of the birth were meager. It was quite a small start for the King of Kings.

Jesus' ministry started small and in the smallest of places. Galilee was the backwater section of an obscure part of the Roman world. Christ ventured no farther than Jerusalem with His message—and then only a few times, the majority of His time being spent in Galilee.

In the perspective of the Roman Empire, Jerusalem was not considered a cultural center. Rome, Athens and Alexandria featured more prominently on the political and cultural radar of that world. To the Romans, Jerusalem was a city of fanatics and seditious Jews, best kept in check by a legion of troops and pliant vassal kings like Herod and his family.

Jesus taught the message of the Kingdom of God from the beginning of His ministry. Mark 1:15 records Jesus coming into Galilee saying: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." Jesus came from God to proclaim this greatest of



Unsplash/Artem Makarov

messages and make it known to His followers.

He not only preached the gospel of the Kingdom in what He said, but He lived it, showing by example what life could be like when the teachings and commandments of the Kingdom are followed. Yet again, this started in a very small corner of the world.

The beginning of a small Church and work

Though many thousands were impacted by Jesus' message, the number of people who endured as His true followers was limited. The Church indeed grew, but compared with the general population it remained quite small. Nevertheless, the seed of the Kingdom was planted. It began very small, then grew in stages.

But the Kingdom of God did not come to fill the entire earth—then or now. The Church Jesus founded would always be a small flock (Luke 12:32), unrecognized and often persecuted by the world. Still, the seed of the Kingdom was definitely planted by Christ. And today it continues to grow, waiting for the time of the great harvest.

Mark's Gospel prefaces the parable of the mustard seed with another parable of Jesus: "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come" (Mark 4:26-29).

The seed of the Kingdom today grows in small and imperceptible ways. It was first planted by Christ and then taken to the world by His apostles and Church. However, it wasn't long before many were turned away from the true gospel to "a different gospel" (Galatians 1:6).

Bearing fruit for the harvest

Today Jesus Christ's gospel message about the Kingdom of God is not fully understood by most people. Yet it continues to be revealed in the pages of the Bible. It bears fruit in the lives of those called and chosen by God. It is proclaimed to the world by God's Church. You are reading it in this magazine and hearing it when you view our *Beyond Today* TV program.

The seed of the gospel can be planted in your life and begin to bear fruit. The decision is yours. Understand that when you taste the "heavenly gift" and "the good word of God and the powers of the age to come" (Hebrews 6:4-5), your life will be changed forever.

Through the seed of God's Holy Spirit, a force is placed within you that is like that grain of mustard seed or leaven. It will grow from a seed and potentially permeate every part of your life. It will transform your life as nothing else can. It is the most powerful force in the universe. When put to use it is transforming!

When Jesus Christ appears in glory, that Spirit will be the means by which God will transform your body to a spirit body sharing His glory (Romans 8:11; Philippians 3:21). This is the story greater than any you have heard. This is the truth of the Bible and the hope we have to rise above this life in hope of the world to come.

God wants to start small in your life and have His work in you grow into something far greater than you could have imagined!

Will you let Him? BT

DIVE DEEPER

What exactly is the message Jesus Christ taught? He built on the message of the Hebrew prophets before Him of a coming divine Kingdom to be established over the entire world—but also the good news of the purpose of our existence and how we can become part of that Kingdom! Get our free study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom* to learn more about this Kingdom and what it means for you! **Scan the code or visit ucg.org/btii to find it.**

Are We Living in the "TIME OF THE END"?



This article is the first of a mini-study series titled "Bible Prophecy and You." We all wonder about the future, especially when we have financial or other personal problems and the global news is so gloomy. And in the face of worsening conditions it's possible to become terrified and paranoid.

But God has not left us in the dark! Amazingly, more than a quarter of the Bible is devoted to prophecy! Why has God revealed so much about the future? Because He wants His followers to become spiritually prepared and to thereby also have peace of mind.

In this series of studies you'll learn about fascinating prophecies that have already been fulfilled—in fact, fulfilled perfectly—and a great deal about important prophecies that will have a great impact on your life in the near future. You'll see what a huge benefit and blessing it is to understand Bible prophecy!

This first study asks if we are living in what Scripture calls the time of the end or the last days. The answer is, *Yes, we are!* This is both bad news and good news.

It's bad news—or *sad* news—that mankind's troubles and suffering will continue to get much *worse!* But it's also *good* news—in fact, *great* news—because it means that Jesus Christ will soon be returning to earth to solve *all* of mankind's problems and bring peace and prosperity for everyone!

In the meantime, you need to know what to do to be spiritually prepared for what is foretold to happen in these terrible times ahead.

What the Bible means by "the time of the end"

During the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, He promised that He would come again—the next time to establish His Kingdom on earth. But He also warned that before His return, mankind's evils and suffering would dramatically increase, ending in "great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21).

Two seemingly opposite trends were to occur in the end time. On the one hand, interest in some kind of apocalypse would skyrocket. ("Apocalypse" comes from a Greek word meaning *revelation* or *unveiling,* but it has come to have a popular meaning of end-time cataclysm.) On the other hand, Peter said that "scoffers will come in the last days"—people who don't believe or respect the Bible (2 Peter 3:2-4).

The period leading up to and during the final tribulation is addressed many times in the Bible. It is referred to with such phrases as *the time of the end, the end time, the end of the age, the latter days, the last days* and *the day of the Lord*. The Bible gives us a great deal of information about the end time, especially in the book of Revelation and the other prophetic books.

The phrase *end of the world* appears in several places in the King James Version of the Bible. However, modern versions correctly translate this phrase as "the end of the age" (as in Matthew 24:3).

Our merciful Creator loves all people, and that's why He mercifully gives us advance notice of what to expect (Amos 3:7). Let's now get an overview of His warnings about the end time.

▶ Just what is *this age?*

"Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from *this present evil age,* according to the will of our God and Father" (Galatians 1:3-4, emphasis added throughout).

In the New Testament, "this age" refers to the era of human misrule from the sin of Adam and Eve to the second coming of Jesus Christ. Paul called it *"this present evil age."*

That's because Satan is "the god of this age" and "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19). The age "which is to come" (Ephesians 1:21) begins with Christ's return to resurrect His followers and to establish His Kingdom on earth (1 Corinthians 15:21-26).

▶ What did the disciples ask Jesus about the end time, and what was His answer?

"Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?'" (Matthew 24:3).

Many people don't realize that Jesus was also a prophet—in fact, history's greatest Prophet, foretold by Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18; Acts 3:20-24). When asked about the signs of His "coming, and of the end of the age," Jesus answered with a lengthy



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> "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be."

prophecy of shocking end-time trends, such as wars and devastating natural disasters (recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21). We look at details of this prophecy in other lessons.

▶ What is one present world condition that indicates we are in the end time?

"And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:22). The New English Bible helps clarify: "If that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could survive . . ."

While the time of "great tribulation" referred to in verse 21 is not here yet, the threat to life on earth exists now. Until the 1940s, there was no possible way, humanly speaking, for all human life to be annihilated. That became possible with the invention and proliferation of nuclear weapons. The development of modern chemical and biological weapons has added to the ways all human life can be destroyed.

So it's greatly comforting to know that Christ promised to intervene to prevent worldwide destruction! (In other lessons, we take note of additional evidence that we are in the end time.)

▶ What will be the great climax of the end-time suffering?

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matthew 24:29).

"The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD" (Joel 2:31).

The time of "great tribulation" culminates in the "day of the Lord." Jesus' warning and other biblical prophecies (Matthew 24:21; Daniel 12:1; Jeremiah 30:7) tell us that the tribulation period will be the *worst* period of disasters and suffering the world has *ever* experienced.

Bible prophecy warns us that the period leading up to the Great Tribulation will be a time of increasing religious deception, religious persecution, demonic miracles, extreme natural disasters like devastating storms and earthquakes, economic distress, famines, disease epidemics, violence of all kinds, intense conflicts in the Middle East, localized wars plus great regional wars, and other terrifying events and threats. These events will be further explained in other lessons.

But there is real hope beyond all of this! Prophecy is gloom and doom for those who won't submit to God. But a measure of fright at dire circumstances is a healthy thing when it motivates us to put our faith in God! Keep reading, and you will learn a lot of *good news*—the good news about how God wants to guide, protect and bless you and give you eternal life if you respond to Him.

▶ Why will God allow humanity to bring all this suffering on itself?

"And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.'

"If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

"Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:5-11).

Humanity has chosen to reject God's rule and way of life to instead follow the way of self-centeredness and deciding for oneself what is right—the way that leads to suffering and death (see Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). Mankind is set on

God desires that all people would be saved—that not one should perish but that all should come to repentance. Be assured that every person who has ever lived will eventually have his or her opportunity to learn and live by God's truth.



"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

"In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Psalm 56:11).

God's people don't need to be fearful of the conditions in the world, for God is our protector and Great Shepherd!

He is always with us, and even the thought of death need not terrify us because we know He will resurrect us to eternal life!

For more about being "counted worthy to escape all these things," see the "Apply Now" section below.

the path of self-destruction, yet God will intervene, first to chasten, then to save humanity from itself.

When God "chastens" (punishes) mankind, He does it *out of love* to teach us to repent of our sins and to turn to Him willingly. God wants His children to be those "who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12).

DIVE DEEPER

To learn much more about prophecies of the end time, including evidence that we are already living in the end time, be sure to request our free study guide *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* **Scan the code or visit ucg.org/btii to find it.**

▶ Can we have God's blessings and protection during the end time?

"Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36).

"The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment" (2 Peter 2:9). The Bible gives us many examples of God miraculously protecting His people or providing a way of "escape" during times of danger. We can expect to see many such miracles in the future! At other times, some of God's people have died as martyrs because of their beliefs.

Keep these two comforting scriptures in mind:

▶ Is there hope for our loved ones who have not had any interest in the Bible?

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

"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" (2 Peter 3:9).

So yes, there is hope! God "desires *all* men to be saved" and is "not willing that any should perish but that *all* should come to repentance." Be assured that every person who has ever lived will eventually have his or her opportunity to learn and live by God's truth. God's great plan of salvation will be accomplished through more than one resurrection period, as is explained in other studies in this series, available online. BT

Apply Now

Read and ponder Luke's account of Jesus' prophecy of the end time in Luke 21, and then focus on how Jesus concluded in verse 36. "Watch" means to be spiritually on the alert.

We are to watch (pay close attention to) world events in light of the Bible's teaching, and watch our own attitudes and actions to make sure we stay close to God and remain on the right path.

Start by picking one prophesied world event and one personal weakness to watch and pray about today.

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BEYOND TODAY

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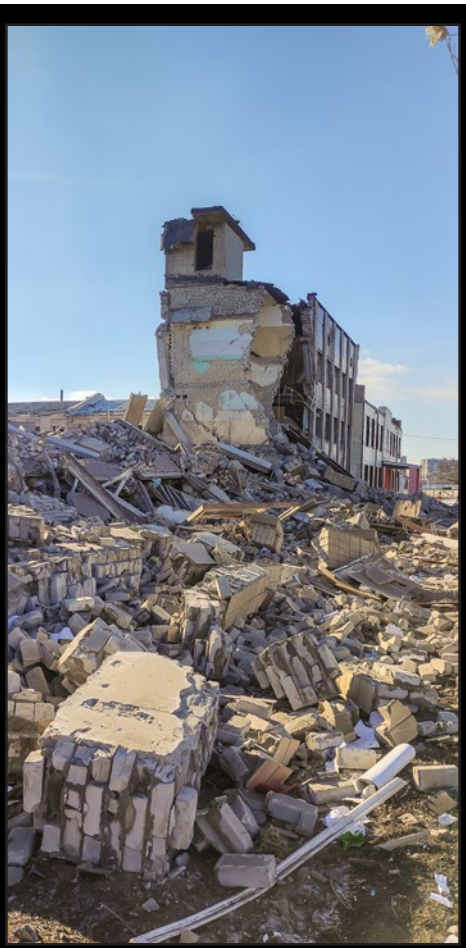



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Then another.

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And join us in praying, **"Your Kingdom come!"**

