KINGDOMS AT WAR
POWERS OF THE UNSEEN WORLD

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Big News About The Good News

For more than 20 years The Good News has been bringing readers the same good news—which is the meaning of the term “gospel”—that Jesus Christ brought when He walked the earth 2,000 years ago. He came “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’” (Mark 1:14-15).

We hear that same message—the message of the Kingdom of God that Jesus Christ will establish throughout the world following His return to the earth, and how you and I now, through repentance and belief in that Kingdom, submit to the rule and way of life of the King of that Kingdom.

We know that God is working out His plan, and it will come to pass exactly as He sees fit. We look forward to a world and a way of life beyond today.

That is a truly life-transforming message, if we allow our Creator to bring it within us to change us from the inside out. It is also a message of great hope, because although we live in a time of great turmoil and trouble, “if God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).

We know that God is working out His plan, and it will come to pass exactly as He sees fit. We look forward to a world and a way of life beyond today.

And that leads to some big news about The Good News. Beginning with the next issue, we are changing the name of The Good News to Beyond Today to reflect this hope and mindset. This move is also to better distinguish our publication from others using the name “good news” and to link our magazine more closely to our Beyond Today television program and Internet websites.

You’ll still be receiving the same eye-opening articles you’re used to from The Good News, but in a new, more eye-catching package.

The same staff will still be working hard to bring you what our readers have regularly told us they like best—what they need to make both the Bible and the world around us make sense.

We’ll continue to bring you in-depth analysis of God’s plan and purpose for you and your loved ones. We’ll show how Bible prophecy sheds light on the troubling and dangerous trends shaping our world and where these are ultimately taking us. We’ll continue to explain God’s Word in clear, down-to-earth language to help you understand and act on it as it reveals.

We’ll give you revealing studies about what the Bible teaches about various topics relevant to your life, and explain lessons we can learn from the lives of biblical characters. Most important of all, we’ll show you how to become the kind of person God wants you to be. All of these tie in with the name Beyond Today. We want to share with readers the hope of a new world beyond today—a world in which “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). We also want to help you learn how to start living by the values of that Kingdom and begin experiencing its blessings now.

You don’t need to do anything to continue to receive this renamed and refreshed magazine. Your subscription will continue as before with no charge.

We look forward to having you with us as we turn the page on a new chapter with this magazine. We also hope you’ll continue to join us in praying to God, “Your Kingdom come!”

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor
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The prophet Daniel had been fasting and praying for three weeks. He wanted to understand a divine message God had delivered to him. Drained of strength and energy, he opened his eyes and made out the image of a man standing before him. The figure blazed with the light of the sun and the gleam of gold, jewels and fire. His voice was loud, strong and commanding.

Suddenly a hand touched Daniel. His body began to tremble. The angelic figure addressed him by name: “O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you” (Daniel 10:11).

The being continued: “Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. But the Prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I have been left alone there with the kings of Persia. Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come” (verses 13-14).

This was quite a revelation!

Living in a time of monumental change
Consider today’s headlines: “Russia Invades Ukraine,” “ISIS Advances in Middle East,” “Iran Close to Developing a Nuclear Weapon,” “Terrorists Massacre Hundreds,” “Scandal Brings Down Government”—and on and on they go.

All of these events tell of a world going through a period of monumental change. Big events are happening on the world scene that are reshaping much of the global order. What does this mean? How are we to understand what happens in the world in light of what the Bible tells us about a God who guides human history? Above all, what does it mean for you, your family and your daily life?

It can be frightening and upsetting. Wars and events may seem far away and irrelevant. Yet these events impact your life more than you might realize. And it’s vital that you discern the times in which we live—to understand what it means in the light of Bible prophecy and God’s purpose for human life.

A spirit world behind the scenes
What we learn from the story we just read in Daniel is there is more to this world than we see with the eyes and take in through our other senses. As Shakespeare put into the mouth of Hamlet, “There are more things in heaven and earth . . . than are dreamt of in your philosophy.” Daniel was trying to understand the events of his time and world when God gave him a little glimpse behind the scenes to show him this truth. Notice how this is presented in Daniel’s story.

Daniel’s prophecy gives us a glimpse into these powers of the unseen world.

Daniel continued: “Then the one who looked like a man touched me again, and I felt my strength returning. ‘Don’t be afraid,’ he said, ‘for you are very precious to God. Peace! Be encouraged! Be strong!’

“As he spoke these words to me, I suddenly felt stronger and said to him, ‘Please speak to me, my lord, for you have strengthened me.’

“He replied, ‘Do you know why I have come? Soon I must return to fight against the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia, and after that the spirit prince of the kingdom of Greece will come. Meanwhile, I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (No one helps me against these spirit princes except Michael, your spirit prince)” (verses 18-21, New Living Translation, 2013).

This translation adds the word “spirit” to clarify what is being spoken of—powerful spirit beings. Whether we realize it or not,
we’re told here in Daniel. We see mentioned a “prince of Persia” and a “prince of Greece.” These unseen powers from the spirit world control the physical kingdoms of Persia and Greece in this physical world.

These evil spiritual powers influence the actions and politics of nations even today. In Daniel’s day that meant the political, military, economic and cultural atmosphere of those nations or kingdoms were actually manipulated and shaped by powerful unseen spirits. And as we see from this passage, these beings were determined to try to thwart the will of God—though unsuccessfully.

God had a message for Daniel that ultimately showed the future history of the region for several hundred years—and then into our modern world and the times just ahead of us today. The message revealed to Daniel foretold events that would lead up to and include the threshold of the coming intervention of Jesus Christ into the affairs of this world and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Daniel was astounded by what he was shown. This section of the Bible is one that opens our eyes to the details of history. God guides and directs the nations according to His purpose for humanity and the world. He knows the end from the beginning, and no power on earth or in heaven will prevent Him from bringing all of history to the conclusion He has foreordained (Isaiah 46:9-11).

And this little-understood key opens the door of understanding for us. Step back a minute and consider what this means for your life!

The personal struggles of life

We all have our struggles with life. Jobs we may not be happy with. Relationship problems with our mates or with our children. We may be uncertain about how the economy will affect our lives. We may be anxious about the future.

Do you look at the incessant political fighting in society, with events at times spiraling out of control? I watch the news and sometimes wonder if we’ll ever get back to a stable world scene in this age.

The world can become so distressing that the best thing to do is to take a step back and ask: “Is something else going on that I don’t see or understand? Is there more here than meets the eye?” The answer is yes, there often is.

The Bible tells us the struggles of life can sometimes involve spiritual elements we don’t even see. Notice these revealing words by the apostle Paul in the book of Ephesians: “A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. Therefore, put on every piece of God’s armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm” (Ephesians 6:10-13, NLT, 2013).

This is not a modern-sounding idea—that we might struggle against wicked unseen powers and that these powers are behind some of the frustrations of life at the individual level as well as the highest levels of world affairs.

But that is what the Bible says! And it’s time you begin to read the Bible with deeper understanding and learn what God’s purpose is for your life!

Three keys to being a Daniel

Here’s how it’s done. Here are three keys to being a Daniel in a time when kingdoms are at war and powers of the unseen world rule our planet.

● First, understand the gods of this world have no love for you.

The Bible shows us there is a “god of this
The Good News

Hidden From Human Senses

We look at our world and rightly wonder, What’s going on? We see horrible things happening, suffering and brutality unimaginable to our eyes and senses. We watch terrorist groups rise in the Middle East and Africa where they brutalize whole populations into fear. They behead and torture captives—showing no shred of decency or humanity.

What we are witnessing is pure evil. What we see being done to helpless people is not ultimately of man. We are seeing works of spiritual wickedness being done through men who use religion and politics as coverings for unspeakable acts against their fellow human beings.

You won’t read about this aspect of events in news accounts nor hear government leaders or their spokespeople talk about it in such terms.

I watch a lot of news programs and read a lot of history books. Every day I read the reporting and commentary of many intelligent and knowledgeable people who understand a lot about what happens around the world. But I don’t find in any of this an understanding of why the wars and suffering that afflict this world take place. I don’t find in their sources the spiritual understanding that something invisible—something from the powers of the unseen world—is involved in the headlines and events shaping today’s world.

We have to go to the Bible to understand the spiritual dimension that impacts big events in our world every day. These same forces can be at work in your life—prompting and provoking you to anger, to envy, to crippling emotional weaknesses that keep you down and hold you back from a productive, happy and balanced life.

You need to understand that there is something you can do with this knowledge. You can make a difference in your life for the good. But you have to step back from the busy, unfocused direction you have each day and take a new look at God, this world and what makes the world work.

Do what Daniel did. Take a step back. Go to God in focused prayer and even fasting. Daniel wanted to know the why of his day. His nation had been defeated, uprooted and removed to Babylon. He was living in a strange and alien culture. Everything about Babylon was different from the familiar life he had known in Jerusalem.

Here’s the point: His personal world had changed, and everything he could see and understand about the bigger world was changing as well. Daniel found himself at the center of that story and he wanted to know why.

Daniel decided to take it to God in a focused time of prayer and fasting. He got his answer, but he got a lot more! God also led Daniel to a profound insight in a way that teaches us how to approach our world. You can get a handle on your life and be like Daniel and his friends—people who walked with God in the midst of a world that didn’t know Daniel’s God and didn’t wish to honor God in any way. Everything about Babylon’s culture was designed to rip faith from a person and replace it with false gods who could neither see nor hear nor speak!

Daniel set his mind and heart to resist Babylon’s culture. He determined to maintain the faith of the true God and not lose sight of who he was, nor the teachings and faith he had learned from his youth. And the God who helped Daniel to see and understand his world can likewise help us to see and understand how to do this today!
king of Babylon. Not only that, but he was also in line, to be trained as a civil servant in the government. He was intelligent and met all the criteria the Babylonians used to select their best and brightest.

The king’s court was full of food, wine and delicacies, a place of physical pleasure. The Babylonians valued eating and drinking and obviously didn’t follow biblical restrictions on what they ate. For Daniel this wasn’t an option. He knew God set certain standards in what to eat. God’s law had determined how he would live, and there would be no compromise in his mind.

So after hearing the requirements for his training in the ways of Babylon, “Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief of staff for permission not to eat these unacceptable foods” (Daniel 1:8, NLT).

Daniel set his heart and mind not to compromise with teaching and laws he knew to be from God for the sake of convenience or to just go along with the times. Daniel could’ve even reasoned, “God no longer cares—maybe He was overthrown by the Babylonian gods or was never real to begin with.”

But Daniel didn’t rationalize like this. He held firm to his faith. He held firm to the life he knew, even down to the food he ate. And God honored his faith. At the end of the 10 days the chief of staff allowed for the physical examination of Daniel and his friends and found they appeared healthier than others who had eaten the Babylonians’ food. King Nebuchadnezzar interviewed them and saw that they were fit and ready for work. God gave them the help and the gifts needed to excel in service to Babylon.

What is the lesson? Set your mind to resist the culture of this world when it conflicts with the culture of the Kingdom of God. Don’t compromise in the face of adversity.

● The third key from Daniel’s example is to seek God’s wisdom and understanding.

King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. None of his counselors and staff could interpret what it meant. This was no ordinary dream. As the story is related in Daniel 2, it was a dream that foretold world history from that time down to our day and beyond. It shook the king’s view of his world, and he knew he had to pull every shred of meaning from it.

It’s hard for us to understand something like this today, but this ancient king knew his dream was significant—almost unfathomable. It held an important message.

When no one from the king’s inner staff could interpret the dream, it came to Daniel’s attention, and he stepped forward to say that with a little time he could explain the meaning of the dream.

Daniel returned to his home and consulted with his closest friends “that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret” (verse 18). The secret was then revealed to Daniel, and he delivered it to the king.

The point here is that we need to seek God’s wisdom and understanding to discern the times in which we live.

Our need to seek godly wisdom and understanding

Spiritual powers are at work behind the scenes in today’s world. Much more is going on behind today’s headlines than what we read or see.

Just as Daniel wanted to understand the world of his day, so you should want to understand the world you live in today. You can understand what God is doing in today’s world and what that can mean not just for your understanding of our modern world but how to make a better life for yourself today.

God’s hand is guiding events in this world even when we might see only disorder and confusion. He can take that same hand in your life and help guide you to peace and a settled mind. He is not a remote and distant God, but a close and personal Creator ready to guide your life today.

Reach out to Him, just as Daniel did, and come to better understand our times! GN
What’s the source of so much sorrow and suffering in our world? God’s Word reveals surprising details about a spiritual dimension—the angelic world—and an evil being and his cohorts who are the enemies of God and those who follow His ways. by Scott Ashley

What’s the primary cause lurking behind the suffering and tragic circumstances that afflict so many people? The Bible reveals that a powerful, intelligent and vastly influential being actively orchestrates the wickedness that dominates our planet. The Bible most often calls him the devil and Satan.

You may have wondered whether he really exists. After all, to many the devil seems like a fairy-tale character—grotesque, blood-red creature with horns, a pointed tail and bat’s wings who carries a pitchfork and inhabits an infernal region of ever-burning flames. Because he is typically depicted so fancifully, it isn’t surprising that few take the idea of a devil seriously.

Finding a reliable source of knowledge
To find the answers, we need reliable, accurate information on the spirit world. Only one source can reveal to us the information we can find nowhere else. That single dependable source is the Bible. Beyond it, everything concerning Satan and the spirit world is only mythology and speculation.

It shows us that Satan is an incredibly powerful spirit being with a pervasive influence over humanity. Along with his cohorts—called demons or evil spirits—he is mentioned frequently in the Scriptures. He shows up from beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation.

A central theme of the Bible is that the devil is the enemy of all humanity. The very name Satan, the designation the Bible uses most for this evil being, helps reveal his malicious intent. God calls things what they are. Satan is a Hebrew noun meaning “adversary”—the enemy, opponent, antagonist or foe. The verb forms of the noun mean to “accuse,” “slander” and “be an adversary” (Anchor Bible Dictionary, Vol. 5, 1992, “Satan,” p. 985).

The other term the Bible most often uses to describe this being, devil, is similarly revealing. Devil is translated from the Greek word diabolos, the root from which we get the word diabolical, used to describe something wicked or sinister. Diabolos means “an accuser, a slanderer” (W.E. Vine, Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, 1985, “Devil, Devilish”).

Jesus Christ says Satan is “a liar and the father of it” and that “there is no truth in him” (John 8:44). The Bible reveals the enormity of his lies and their impact, with the apostle John stating in Revelation 12:9 that he “deceives the whole world.”

Satan’s origins revealed
But where did the devil come from? Did God purposefully create an evil being? To understand Satan’s origin, we must go far back in time, before human beings existed. Genesis 1:1 tells us that “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” However, the Bible doesn’t tell the whole story in one or even several verses. We find more details elsewhere in the Bible, in this case in the book of Job.

When Job, beset with terrible calamity and suffering in spite of being a very devout follower of God, began to question God’s judgment, God responded with pointed questions to help him realize he didn’t have the wisdom to question God. In His response, in the form of questions to Job, God revealed some details about His creation of the earth.

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?” God asked Job. “Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? . . . On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the
Verses 5 and 6 discuss the Flood of Noah’s time and the later fiery destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. But before this, in verse 4, we read that “God did not spare the angels who sinned,” but thrust them down into Tartarus [a condition of restraint], and delivered them into chains of darkness, being reserved for judgment” (Modern King James Version). When did these angels sin, and what was their sin?

Again, we must look at other verses to find the answer. Jude 6 gives us additional details: “And the angels that did not keep within their original authority, but abandoned their proper sphere [or “assigned place” (Good News Translation)], [God] has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for the Judgment of the Great Day” (Complete Jewish Bible).

We saw earlier that at the earth’s creation all the angels were happy and joyous, singing and shouting together. Obviously, then, it was at a later time that some sinned—destroying the wonderful harmony and cooperation they had once enjoyed. What was the nature of their sin? They did not keep within the limits God had set for them but abandoned their assigned place. They rebelled against their Maker, the Creator of both the physical universe and the spirit world of angelic beings!

A rebellion against God

In Isaiah 14 we find more information. This chapter makes reference to the angelic rebellion, identifying its ringleader. It gives us important details we could learn of in no other way.

In verse 4 God addresses the “king of Babylon.” In Isaiah’s time the city-state of Babylon was emerging as the major power in that region of the world. Its king was a warmonger, expanding his empire through brute force. He enslaved, plundered, and devastated the nations around him. (In context, this passage has dual meaning, in that it also refers to an end-time tyrant who will rule over a final global empire referred to in Revelation 17 and 18 as Babylon the Great.)

The philosophy of the king of Babylon here is satanic—acquiring wealth and power at the expense of others, gaining it through violence and bloodshed. The king of Babylon thus exemplifies Satan and his characteristics. Indeed, as we will read more about later, Satan is the real power behind the throne of the world’s kingdoms (compare Luke 4:5-7; John 12:31; Revelation 12:9; 13:2).

In verse 12 the subject shifts from the physical king to a ruler who is yet higher. Many scholars recognize that the original language of this passage is in the form of a lament, a reflection of God’s mourning and sense of great loss due to the events being described:

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High’” (verses 12-14).

Who is this being who dares to exalt himself above the other angels of God (stars symbolize angels, Revelation 1:20), to challenge God Himself as ruler of the universe?

The Bible reveals more details

In Ezekiel 28 God gives us the answer. This chapter is written much like Isaiah 14. God begins by discussing a human ruler, then shifts to the spiritual power behind the earthly throne—the behind-the-scenes ruler who controls the kingdoms of this world.

In Ezekiel 28:2 God addresses the “prince of Tyre.” Tyre, a coastal port city north of ancient Israel on the Mediterranean Sea, was famous as a major trading center. Its rulers had grown haughty and presumptuous because of their wealth and influence. In verses 6-10 God tells this ruler that because of his arrogance, his might and wealth would fail and he would be overthrown.

But notice in verse 12 that God begins to address “the king of Tyre” rather than the prince. This figure is the true ruler, the real power behind the throne. In fact, God’s description of this “king of Tyre” makes it clear that He is speaking to no physical human being!

“You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: the sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your tymbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created” (verses 12-13).

No mortal man could accurately be described as being “the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.” This entity was brought into being with instant perfection and wisdom—unlike human beings who must develop in maturity and wisdom (the only exceptions being Adam
and Eve). This being had also been “in Eden, the garden of God.” Other than Adam and Eve, no people had been in the Garden of Eden. God had expelled them, after which He placed an angel there specifically to prevent anyone else from entering (Genesis 3:24).

Fall of a superangel

In the next verse God mentions some of the history of this being: “You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones” (Ezekiel 28:14).

What do these remarkable statements mean? What is a “cherub who covers”? Hebrews 8:5 tells us that the tabernacle established through Moses—the portable sanctuary the Israelites carried with them in their desert wanderings—was “a copy and shadow of what is in heaven” (NIV). In Exodus 25:18-20 we find that God instructed the Israelites to make a representation—a physical model—of His throne for the tabernacle they would carry with them in the wilderness. At either side of the “mercy seat,” which represented God’s throne, was a golden cherub with wings extended to cover the mercy seat. The two cherubim, fashioned out of gold, represented real angelic beings—the great superangels whose wings cover God’s throne.

The being God addressed through Ezekiel is called the “cherub who covers,” indicating that he had once been one of the great angels depicted in the model of God’s throne. God gave these angels the awesome distinction of serving at and covering the very throne of God in heaven! Many other scriptures say that God “dwells between the cherubim,” showing that these wondrous creatures accompany and serve Him at His seat of power (1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chronicles 13:6; Psalm 80:1; Isaiah 37:16). This magnificent being apparently held a position of high honor and distinction in God’s angelic realm.

God also says to this cherub, “You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you” (Ezekiel 28:15). Like the description in Isaiah 14, this passage describes a being created mature, not a man. This being was extraordinary, perfect until he sinned, beginning with pride in his own beauty and splendor, which corrupted his wisdom (Ezekiel 28:17).

“. . . You were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian [or ‘covering,’ NKJV] cherub, from among the fiery stones” (verse 16, NIV). This once marvellous being sinned and was expelled from God’s throne, cast away in disgrace.

Choosing to rebel against God

Satan’s sin of pride and vanity ultimately led to outright and open rebellion against God. Isaiah 14:13-14, which we read earlier, states: “You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars [angels] of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High’” (NIV).

This powerful spirit entity decided to challenge God for control of the universe! What had been an amazingly beautiful, immensely talented spirit being with great responsibility in God’s angelic order became, through his rebellion against Almighty God, a reprehensible, despicable creature. Thus, God did not create the devil. Rather, what God created was a magnificent and perfect being. But later, this powerful being, by his own will, became the devil and Satan—the adversary, slanderer, accuser and destroyer. He made himself the enemy of God and humanity!

The immense powers he had used in God’s service were turned not to serve God, but to try to thwart God’s purposes. This creature remains an enormously powerful spirit being, but now his powers are used for wicked, destructive ends.

As we’ve seen, so vain and proud did he become that he thought he should be ruler of the universe. His enormous talents and abilities led him to believe he was equal to, if not better than, God Himself. His thinking became corrupted. He rebelled against God and tried to overthrow Him. By his rebellion against his Creator, he transformed himself into Satan the devil.

Other angels join the rebellion

Satan was not alone in this rebellion. Millions of other angels joined him in rejecting God’s authority and leadership. We find this symbolically described in Revelation 12:3-4: “And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon . . . . His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.” Verse 9 identifies this dragon as Satan. As we saw earlier, the Bible uses stars as a symbol for angels (Revelation 1:20). This apparently indicates that a third of the angels followed Satan in this rebellion and were cast down to the earth with him.

The attempted takeover of heaven was, of course, not successful. Two thirds of the angels remained loyal to God and thus constituted a more numerous force. More importantly, God is omnipotent—all powerful—and cannot be overthrown.

Jesus said that Satan “[fell] like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). It seems likely that this titanic struggle is what brought about the chaotic and wasted condition of the earth described in Genesis 1:2. As mentioned earlier, God then renewed the surface of the earth in preparation for human habitation, as described in the rest of Genesis 1. Yet to aid His purpose in developing righteous character in human beings, God allowed Satan and his minions to remain on the earth for the time being. Thus Satan was allowed to tempt Adam and Eve in the garden.

The Bible refers to Satan and the other rebellious angels as evil spirits, unclean spirits and demons. They are fallen angels—who had plummeted from their purpose of serving God and humanity (Hebrews 1:13-14), reduced to hatred and bitterness toward God and His holy purpose for humanity.

Causes of humanity’s problems

When we understand the magnitude of Satan’s deception, we can better grasp the roots of so many of humanity’s problems. Collectively we have had thousands of years to experiment with governments, philosophies and ways of living, so why have we been unable to solve our problems? Why do so many difficulties persist year after year, century after century? Satan has effectively deceived the world throughout history by influencing human beings to cut themselves off from God’s guidance. He has led us into wanting to do things our own way, to rely on ourselves rather than God as the ultimate authority.

Although God is always in ultimate control, the Scriptures make it clear that He is not to blame for the world’s many chronic problems. They tell us that Satan is the true “ruler of this world.”

The Scriptures make it clear that God is not to blame for the world’s many chronic problems. They tell us that Satan the devil is the true “ruler of this world.”
The Bible makes it clear that civilizations and societies are influenced by Satan. The apostle John writes that “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19). Through his influence Satan has deceived the whole world (Revelation 12:9). The entirety of civilization has been seduced by this cunning being through his persuasive deception and insidious lies.

The result has been thousands of years of human anguish, misery and suffering. Deceived by his lies, people have willingly adopted Satan’s way of life rather than God’s way. The result of following Satan’s way, which through his deception appears fine and well and quite natural to most people, is predictable: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25, New International Version).

Satan’s deception is so complete, so pervasive, that the Bible calls him “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4). The apostle Paul, in the original Greek, identifies him as the theos—the god, the one who is worshipped—of this eon, this age, this period in history.

Consider the magnitude of Satan’s influence over humanity—so great that most of mankind unknowingly worships and follows the devil as its god. That is the incred-ibly deceptive that reality explains so many of the troubling paradoxes we see in the world around us.

Paul explained that as a result of Satan’s hold on humanity, most people do not believe the truth of the Bible. They do not understand the gospel—the good news—of God’s plan for mankind.

As he stated in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.”

Unseen World” beginning on page 4.

Of course, these are but subordinates under the devil. In an attempt to lead Jesus astray in Matthew 4:8-9, Satan offered “all the kingdoms of the world and their glory”—as they were truly under his domination (compare Luke 4:5-7).

Although we cannot see Satan, his influence is powerful and pervasive. The devil thereby spiritually influences humanity to reject God and God’s law. Under this influence, “the mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit itself to God’s law, for it is unable do so” (Romans 8:7, Holman Christian Standard Bible).

Separated from God, man chooses to go his own way with devastating results. Under Satan’s influence, humanity has rejected God’s revelation and guidance and built societies and civilizations on wrong foundations. But it will not be that way forever!

Satan’s reign will come to an end

Satan will not always dominate planet earth. Bible prophecy reveals that an astounding series of events will shake our world as never before and usher in a new age—a 1,000-year era under the reign of Jesus Christ in the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:10; Luke 21:31).

This good news of the coming Kingdom of God is at the heart of Christ’s teaching: “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’” (Mark 1:14-15).

The transition from Satan’s domination of the earth to Jesus Christ’s rule will be neither easy nor painless. The prophet Daniel describes it as “a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then” (Daniel 12:1, NIV).

The world, Christ said, would grow increasingly dangerous as His return nears. “It will be a time of great distress,” He warned, “such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and will never be again. If that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could survive; but for the sake of God’s chosen it will be cut short” (verse 21-22, Revised English Bible).

Satan will not relinquish his kingdom without a fight. As the time of Christ’s return draws near, we can read this sobering warning in Revelation 12:12: “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.” Many prophecies go on to detail a frenzy of destruction directed at God’s Church, at the people of Israel, at humanity as a whole, and at the returning Jesus Christ.

This coming end of Satan’s rule over the world will mark the end of “this present evil age” (Galatians 1:4). With the battle for control of the earth over, it will at last be time for a new age to begin!

Jesus Christ will usher in a literal kingdom, the Kingdom of God on earth. Notice Revelation 11:15: “Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying: ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever’” (NIV).

Revelation 21:4 tells us what the world will be like when Satan’s influence is no more: “[God] will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away’ (NIV).

Is there really a devil? Yes. Absolutely. And other demons besides. But God assures us the time is coming when Satan, his demons and their works—the physical suffering, misery, mental anguish and mourning they bring—will be no more.

May you have the wisdom, strength and love for God’s truth and His ways to resist Satan’s deceptions and be there to see that wonderful day! GN
The eternal God has designed and planned an amazing future civilization for you and all people. Discover when it will come, what it will be like and why it’s the best news you could ever hear!

by John Labissoniere

Human society is confused, distressed and in disarray. Some fear it is likely on the brink of disaster. The troubles individuals, families and nations experience seem to multiply each day. Many have no real hope of finding genuine peace, prosperity and security. Yet something marvelous and exciting will take place—but not through human strength or effort. The Eternal God offers you and all people this guarantee: He will bring about the most positive, fulfilling and magnificent future you could ever imagine!

With this sure promise on the horizon, Jesus Christ explained that, for the time being, distressing times will persist and even grow worse. He told His disciples that conditions on the earth just prior to His second coming will parallel those of the patriarch Noah’s era: “But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:37).

What occurred during that period? “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5, emphasis added throughout).

Further describing the age just prior to Christ’s return, the apostle Paul wrote: “There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good” (2 Timothy 3:1-3). NT)

Rescuing a remnant of humanity

As the end of the age approaches, relationships between nations will grow exceedingly toxic and vindictive. This will lead to the most savage and devastating firestorm of war, violence and brutality the world has ever seen. It will be so horrible that unless Jesus Christ comes to earth to put an end to the escalating death and destruction, all men, women and children would perish (Matthew 24:9, 21-22, 29).

Besides physically rescuing a small remnant of humanity at that time, Christ will terminate the cruel, depraved influence of Satan the devil. This malicious being and his corrupt demon cohorts will be cast into an abyss where they can no longer corrupt human minds or incite hatred and violence (Revelation 20:1-3).

When Christ brings the warfare and destruction to an end, our planet will still lay in utter ruins. The devastation of civilization will be nearly total—the progress of generations virtually wiped out. If not for His timely and merciful intervention, humanity’s legacy would have amounted to absolutely nothing!

What is God’s blueprint for humankind from that point forward? Building literally on the ashes of a spent, shattered society, Jesus Christ will create an entirely new civilization and infrastructure. He will begin implementing His plan by first comforting and healing the bewildered and terrified survivors of the just-ended period of global catastrophe.

With the assistance of His newly resurrected, immortal saints, He will provide these beleaguered, pitiful individuals with immediate physical needs—including food, shelter, clothing, fresh water and medical care (Ezekiel 34:12-16; Matthew 6:11; Malachi 4:2). He will assure each of these weary, mourning people that they are safe and no longer need to live in fear (Isaiah 44:8).

A divine, benevolent government and world peace

Jesus Christ will also help them understand that genuine peace has finally arrived and a new, divine, benevolent government will serve and support them (Revelation 11:18; Isaiah 9:6; Jeremiah 33:16). Over a period of time these people, who had suffered intense misery and tragedy, will begin rebuilding their physical and mental health and strength. The Lord says, “I have seen their ways, but I will heal them; I will

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guide them and restore comfort to Israel’s mourners” (Isaiah 57:18, New International Version).

Significantly, Jesus will provide people the true knowledge of His caring and serving way of life (Isaiah 2:3). “For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).

God will grant each person repentance and the extraordinary gift of His Holy Spirit (Acts 11:18; Jeremiah 31:33). “I’ll place my spirit within you, empowering you to live according to my regulations and to keep my just decrees” (Ezekiel 36:27, International Standard Version). With the human spirit joined with God’s Holy Spirit, each person will be motivated with a sincere and deep desire to love and obey God and truly care for others (Galatians 5:22-23; Philippians 4:13).

Throughout the 1,000 years of Jesus’ reign as Sovereign over the Kingdom of God on earth, His giving, generous and gracious style of living will set the pattern for all relationships between people (Revelation 20:6; Psalm 111:4; Luke 10:27). With society directly and personally guided and governed by Christ, tremendous peace—previously unknown to humanity—will comfort and cheer everyone (Isaiah 9:7; Psalm 119:165).

Contributing to this heart-stirring condition is the fact that education in warfare and war itself will be utterly abolished (Psalm 46:9-10; Micah 4:3). “Violence will disappear from your land; the desolation and destruction of war will end. Salvation will surround you like city walls, and praise will be on the lips of all who enter there” (Isaiah 60:18, New Living Translation).

Citizens of God’s earthly government will live serenely and be relieved of all anxiety. Conflict between races and peoples will be entirely eliminated as former enemies work together in complete accord (Isaiah 19:24-25). Peacefulness will not only be the way of life for all people but it will also govern the animal world: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them” (Isaiah 11:6).

Parents will be freed from all apprehension in knowing that their children are safe in every situation. “The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain” (Isaiah 11:9).

The desert will blossom like a rose

Deserts and former wastelands will turn green and lush as rainfall reaches them regularly and in the right amount (Leviticus 26:4). “The wilderness and the dry land will be glad. The desert will rejoice and blossom like a rose” (Isaiah 35:1, World English Bible).

Rain showers at the proper time will make it possible for this new, fertile, productive land to become available for eventual human habitation (Isaiah 54:3). Besides suitable precipitation, springs of water will also bubble up from the ground creating clear, sparkling streams and gracefully flowing rivers (Isaiah 41:18).

Many desolate, ruined cities and towns will be renovated as young families journey there to build homes and farms (Ezekiel 36:9-10; 34-36). Moreover, Jesus Christ will give people their own land to cultivate and enjoy. “Everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken” (Micah 4:4).

Farms and gardens will flourish as never before: “The LORD says, ‘the time is coming when there will be all kinds of food. People will still be harvesting crops when it’s time to plow again. People will still be taking the juice from grapes when it’s time to plant again. Wine will drip from the mountains and pour from the hills’” (Amos 9:13, New Century Version).

Families will experience blessing after blessing as they raise abundant crops, fruit trees and healthy livestock (Isaiah 30:23). As a result of God’s perfect master plan, each person will live in good health, be prosperous, have plenty to eat and feel comfortable and deeply fulfilled (Jeremiah 31:12).

Spiritual, moral and ethical guidance and instruction

Not only will Jesus Christ make it possible for people to live in peace, safety and enjoy great physical abundance, but He will give them indispensable spiritual, moral and ethical guidance and instruction. Assisting Christ in this crucial task will be God’s resurrected, faithful and wise divine sons and daughters who will serve as teachers, administrators, judges and leaders (2 Corinthians 6:18; Isaiah 30:20).

They will diligently coach each person in God’s way of life—the foundation of which is the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 10:4). If anyone drifts away from following these vital guidelines they will be quietly, yet firmly corrected. “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left” (Isaiah 30:21).

By obeying God’s teachings, individuals and nations will have a solid foundation for cooperation as they work at harmoniously serving one another.

Then, after 1,000 years of phenomenal peace and prosperity, the next phase of God’s plan will commence (Revelation 5:10). All people who had lived in past ages, having not known the truth of God, will be resurrected from their graves to physical life. They will be given their very first opportunity to obtain divine salvation (Ezekiel 37; Revelation 20:11).

Jesus Christ will offer each of them the gift of His Holy Spirit so that they will not only fully comprehend spiritual knowledge and be able to follow God’s ways, but will have the prospect of obtaining eternal life (Acts 2:38; Isaiah 65:20-24).

The best news you could ever hear

As these individuals look back on their former physical existence, they will realize their previous way of living simply didn’t work compared to the prosperity, tranquility and joy they experience in God’s bright and exciting new age. As a result, the vast majority will choose to worship Him, obey His commandments and later be transformed into immortal spirit beings in His divine family (Ephesians 3:15; Hebrews 2:10).

Finally, the Eternal God has designed the most positive, exciting and marvelous future for you, your family and all humanity. Built literally on the ashes of a shattered, failed human society, Jesus Christ will initiate an entirely new civilization and infrastructure. Indeed, it’s the best news anyone could ever hear! GN

Learn More

The message of the coming Kingdom of God was at the heart and core of the gospel—the good news—that Jesus Christ taught. This article gives the broad outline of the wonderful good news of that coming Kingdom. But God’s Word reveals much more! Download or request our helpful study aid The Gospel of the Kingdom. A free copy is waiting for you!

Contact any of our offices listed on page 39, or request or download it from our website.
Wait! You Just Said: Jesus Was Not Born on Dec. 25!

You probably realize Christ was not born on Dec. 25, and you may not think it’s important. But it really does matter. And it really is important that you not celebrate that day as His birthday!

**by Darris McNeely**

Don’t you think it’s about time you stopped living like a Roman? Maybe you don’t think you live like a citizen of the greatest empire of the ancient world. But you do if you celebrate Dec. 25 as the birthday of the divine Savior. If you call yourself Christian, then it’s time you started living like a citizen of the Kingdom of God and not the kingdom of ancient Rome. And a citizen of the Kingdom of God does not celebrate Christmas day as the birthday of Jesus Christ.

It’s commonly acknowledged today that Jesus was not born on Dec. 25. You can easily find this in many resources on the Internet (and see “Christmas Before Christ? The Holiday’s Origins Unmasked” beginning on page 16). Even many churches readily admit this truth and openly tell their membership the facts.

I recently had an experience that opened my eyes to how easily sincere religious believers gloss right over this core fact. It was eye-opening. Let me tell you about it.

**Echoes of a pagan past**

Some colleagues and I recently went on a study tour of Italy, visiting sites connected with the story of the apostle Paul and the early Church. While visiting the ruins of a farm villa in southern Italy, the childhood home of Poppea, Emperor Nero’s wife, our guide was telling us what everyday life was like for a Roman.

By the first century A.D., Rome had declared no less than 80 days as holidays. The most important of these holidays was Dec. 25, the birthday of the sun, at the culmination of a several-days-long festival called the Saturnalia. Coming in winter, this festival of lights, food and revelry was a very popular occasion for all citizens. The year’s darkest period was the perfect time for a party!

As our guide described this festival he asked the group, “Did Jesus have a birthday on Dec. 25?” “Absolutely not!” he quickly answered. I caught a glance at a number of fellow travelers, all of whom were Bible-believing folk, and saw they were nodding their head in agreement.

He continued: “The text shows it was warm and there were sheep in the field. In the winter months the sheep are all indoors and not in the field.” He went on to say, “But,” he said, “if this new God we are serving is the big God then let’s put His birth date on Dec. 25 and make it a big celebration.” So they did. The rest is religious history.

Today we have a term for that—syncretism. It means a blending of ideas to create something different or new. In this case they blended a thoroughly pagan idola-trous winter festival into their version of Christianity.

Never mind that a straightforward reading of the biblical account of Christ’s birth shows it was not in the dead of winter. Never mind that a little digging into the history behind the Gospel accounts points to His birth being in the fall of the year. Never mind that the New Testament gives no command to observe His birth as a festival or holiday of any kind. Never mind, as my tour guide was saying, that Jesus was not born on Dec. 25 or anywhere close to that date.

Never mind these things because syncretism says we can do whatever we want when it comes to worshipping God!

**A syncretized Christianity**

What I already knew that day in Italy was dramatically reinforced by the open admission of a very smart and sincere teacher. It started me thinking about how much like the Romans people are today when it comes to religion. Rome borrowed the gods and goddesses and religions from Greece, Egypt, Babylon, northern Europe and other nations. They mixed them together in their version of “faith” and went on living their lives.

The church that succeeded to Rome’s position of power syncretized in adopting many of the pagan days, chief of which was Dec. 25 and the Saturnalia festival. To their concept of Jesus Christ they gave the biggest holiday and brought in elements of the sun god to complete an image of a new god made in their image.

Paganism was baptized with a form of biblical religion, and the new church was off and running. False doctrine, a triune god and completely foreign forms of worship became accepted teaching and practice, and ultimately the tradition to which succeeding generations of church teachers would subscribe.

Christmas today is a mixture of false religious teaching and commercialism. Throw in some new age abstractions and you have a perfect holiday that adapts itself to just about any culture on earth today. Even non-Christian nations like China and Japan have parts of the Christmas traditions attached to Dec. 25. They may not care about the religious symbols, but they do observe some form of the holiday in parts of the countries. Japan does a booming retail business during the Christmas season.

So what does all this mean for us in our modern world? Christmas is the world’s single biggest and most lucrative holiday.
Sales during the Christmas season determine the commercial viability of many businesses. Eliminating Christmas would mean a severe economic slump for many sectors of the economy. This commercialism isn’t going away despite the sentiments of those who desperately want the religious message to prevail.

In fact, Christ cannot be “put back into Christmas,” as many call for, because He never was in Christmas in the first place! Further, Jesus wants nothing to do with a holiday deeply rooted in pagan worship to which His name was vainly attached. The fact that most people do not care about this truth makes it all the more serious when we consider what God says about such customs!

God doesn’t accept syncretized worship

Isaiah the prophet addressed this same kind of matter to Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah in the seventh century B.C. Judah had adopted customs and worship traditions contrary to what God had given to them at the beginning of their national history.

In the first chapter of Isaiah God states the problem with idolatry and forgetting who He was to them. With verse 12 He calendar completely different from the one God gave to His people for all time. Holidays like Easter and Christmas, to name only two, are steeped in pagan origins and symbols. God hates these days. They have no place in a biblically defined Christian form of worship!

The people of Isaiah’s time did not listen to the warning. In time God completely drew back His hand of blessing from them, and they were invaded by a foreign power. Their time on the world stage drew to a close. Their national sovereignty ended. The same will happen today to any nation that claims God’s name yet insults that name with the indignity of pagan trappings. America, Canada, Australia and Great Britain, along with other nations, will be judged by God for this and other sins.

Christmas and other pagan days presented as Christian celebrations are an abomination to God. Let’s paraphrase Isaiah’s words to hear what God says and feels about this: “I have had enough of your pious worship and take no delight in what you offer of your life for Me. You presume to appear before Me with something I value. Your offering and worship is empty and meaningless. Your religious celebrations mean nothing to Me. They trouble Me. I turn My eyes away and do not see. Though you make many prayers, I do not hear them. Your way results in death and not life” (Isaiah 1:12-15).

This sounds harsh and judgmental to a modern ear. So be it. It is far less than the reality God visited on Israel and Judah for their sins. God’s direct judgment on the nations has always been fair and not without warning to give anyone who hears the truth to repent.

It’s time to choose: Follow God or follow pagan traditions

Earlier I mentioned the home of Poppea, Nero’s wife. The home was near Pompeii and Mount Vesuvius. It was covered with volcanic ash in the devastating eruption of A.D. 79.

The home we were in had been excavated, and you could still see the effect of the lava and ash that had covered the villa. That place and that event were a reminder to me that no culture—neither pagan Rome nor our neo-pagan world today—is exempt from judgment. Rome and its empire eventually went the way of all empires. Its time of power was eclipsed by the God of history whose determined purpose moves forward toward the day of final judgment (Acts 17:26, 31).

Our tour guide acknowledged that Jesus wasn’t born on Dec. 25, the time of celebration following the end of the ancient Saturnalia. In his few words he admitted what is commonly known today among those interested enough to have looked into it. But he then moved on to another subject as if it didn’t matter. I wanted to say, “Wait—do you realize what you just said?”

Can you grasp what this fact means? How can you stand before God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ and defend worship that is effectively meaningless and even defiant? It doesn’t matter how sincere you are. No matter how well-intentioned your Christmas celebration is, worshipping Him with practices taken directly from paganism is an abomination to God.

No matter how warm and family-oriented your festival is, it is futile and empty before God. Even if you don’t care, He does. He is a God of righteous judgment, and He commands all who hear the truth to repent—to put away such pagan trappings and begin to worship Him in the joyous meaningful manner He designed from creation. God is also merciful, and He desires us to worship Him in humility and sincerity.

It is time to stop living like a citizen of ancient Rome and begin living like a citizen of the coming Kingdom of God. This holiday season, you should turn things around and begin worshipping God in spirit and in truth. God is waiting to receive your sincere worship in spirit and in truth and hear your prayers! GN

No matter how well-intentioned your Christmas celebration is, worshipping Him with practices taken directly from paganism is an abomination to God.
Most people know the Bible doesn’t mention—much less sanctify—Christmas. Does it make any difference as long as it’s intended to honor God and bring families together? by Jerold Aust

The precursor to Christmas was an idolatrous winter festival characterized by excess and debauchery that predated Christianity by centuries.

The precursor to Christmas was an idolatrous winter festival characterized by excess and debauchery that predated Christianity by centuries. an ancient pagan festival that has devolved through much of the world as Christmas.

Members of the early Church would have been astonished to think that the customs and practices we associate with Christmas would be incorporated into a celebration of Christ’s birth. Not until several centuries had passed would Christ’s name be attached to this popular Roman holiday.

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

As for how Dec. 25 became the date for Christmas day, virtually any book on the history of Christmas will explain that this day was celebrated in the Roman Empire as the birthday of the sun god.

Explaining how Dec. 25 came to be selected as the supposed birthday of Jesus, the book 4000 Years of Christmas says: “For that day was sacred, not only to the pagan Romans but to a religion from Persia which, in those days, was one of Christianity’s strongest rivals. This Persian religion was Mithraism, whose followers worshiped the sun, and celebrated its return to strength on that day” (Earl and Alice Count, 1997, p. 37).

Not only was Dec. 25 honored as the birthday of the sun, but a festival had long been observed among the heathen to cel-
How Did Santa Claus Enter the Picture?

How did Santa Claus enter the picture? Why is this mythical figure so closely aligned with the Christmas holiday? Here, too, many books are available to shed light on the origins of this popular character.

“Santa Claus” is an American corruption of the Dutch form Sinterklaas or Sint Nicolaas, a figure brought to America by the early Dutch colonists (see The Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th edition, Vol. 19, p. 649, “Nicholas, St.”). This name, in turn, is said to stem from St. Nicholas, bishop of the city of Myra in southern Asia Minor, a Catholic saint honored by the Greeks and the Latins on Dec. 6.

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

How, we might ask, did a bishop from the sunny Mediterranean coast of Turkey come to be associated with a red-suited man who lives at the North Pole and rides in a sleigh pulled by flying reindeer? Knowing what we have already learned about the ancient pre-Christian origins of Christmas, we shouldn’t be surprised to learn that Santa Claus, too, is nothing but a figure recycled from ancient pagan beliefs.

The trappings associated with Santa Claus—his fur-trimmed wardrobe, sleigh and reindeer—reveal his origins from the cold climates of the far North. Some sources trace him to the ancient Northern European gods Woden (or Odin) and Thor, from which the days of the week Wednesday (Woden’s day) and Thursday (Thor’s day) get their designations (Earl and Alice Count, 4000 Years of Christmas, 1997, pp. 56-64). Others trace him even farther back in time to the Roman god Saturn and the Greek god Silenus (William Walsh, The Story of Santa Claus, pp. 70-71).

The tendency on the part of third-century Catholic leadership was to meet paganism halfway—a practice made clear in a bitter lament by one of the early Catholic church fathers, Tertullian.

In 230 he wrote of the inconsistency of professing Christians. He contrasted their lax and political practices with the strict fidelity of the pagans to their own beliefs: “By us who are strangers to Sabbaths, and new moons, and festivals [the biblical festivals spelled out in Leviticus 23], once acceptable to God, the Sabbath, the feasts of January, the Brumalia, and Matronalia, are now frequented; gifts are carried to and fro, new year’s day presents are made with din, and sports and banquets are celebrated with uproar; oh, how much more faithful are the heathen to their religion, who take special care to adopt no solemnity from the Christians” (quoted by Hislop, p. 93).

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

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

Celebration wins out over Scripture

Some resisted such spiritually poisonous compromises. “Upright men strove to stem the tide, but in spite of all their efforts, the apostasy went on, till the Church, with the exception of a small remnant, was submerged under Pagan superstition. That Christmas was originally a Pagan festival is beyond all doubt. The time of the year, and the ceremonies with which it is still celebrated, prove its origin” (Hislop, p. 93).

The aforementioned Tertullian, for one, disassociated himself from the Roman church in an attempt to draw closer to the teachings of the Bible.

He wasn’t alone in his disagreement with such trends. “As late as 245 Origen, in his eighth homily on Leviticus, repudiates as sinful the very idea of keeping the birthday of Christ as if he were a king Pharaoh” (The Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th edition, Vol. 6, p. 293, “Christmas”).

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

Was Jesus born in December?

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

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

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

Further evidence supporting Jesus’ birth in the autumn is that the Romans were intelligent enough not to set the time for taxation and travel in the dead of winter, but during more-favorable conditions. Since Joseph’s lineage was from Bethlehem, and since he had to travel from Nazareth in the winter, the likelihood of his birth occurring in December is entirely ruled out.

Further evidence of the early church’s awareness and practice of the Christmas birth date is that in 316 Emperor Constantine ordered the celebration of Christmas to be held on December 25, the birthday of the Roman goddess Mithras, whose festival was celebrated on that same day. Since the Christian church was a powerful part of the Roman government, it is quite likely that Mithraism, which was venerated by many people in the empire, had faded or disappeared by then.

The ancient pre-Christian origins of Christmas, we shouldn’t be surprised to learn that Santa Claus, too, is nothing but a figure recycled from ancient pagan beliefs.
Galilee to Bethlehem, and since his expectant wife Mary traveled with him, it would have been nearly impossible for the two to make the trip in the winter.

**What difference does it make?**

The Bible gives us no reason—and certainly no instruction—to support the myths and fables of Christmas and Santa Claus. They are tied to the ways of this world and contrary to the ways of Christ and His holy truth. “Do not learn the way of the Gentiles,” God tells us (Jeremiah 10:2).

Professing Christians should examine the background of the Christmas holiday symbols and stop telling their children that Santa Claus and his elves, reindeer and Christmas gift-giving are connected with Jesus Christ. Emphatically they are not! God hates lying. “These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren” (Proverbs 6:16-19).

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

Can a professing Christian promote a pagan holiday and its symbols as something that God or Christ has approved? Let’s see what God thinks about people using customs and practices rooted in false religion to worship Him and His Son. We find His views clearly expressed in both the Old and New Testament.

God specifically commands His people not to do what early church leaders did when they incorporated idolatrous practices and relabeled them Christian. Before they entered the Promised Land, God gave the Israelites a stern warning: “Take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them [the inhabitants of the land] . . . and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’” (Deuteronomy 12:30-32, emphasis added throughout).

Many centuries later the apostle Paul traveled to and raised up church congregations in many gentile cities. To the members of the Church of God in Corinth, a city steeped in idolatry, Paul wrote: “What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God . . .” (1 Corinthians 6:15).

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

Instead of allowing members to rename and celebrate customs associated with false gods, Paul’s instructions were clear: They were to have nothing to do with them. He similarly told Athenians who were steeped in idolatry, “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

God alone has the right to decide the special days on which we should worship Him. Jesus Christ plainly tells us that “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).

We cannot honor God in truth with false practices adopted from the worship of non-existent gods or demons posing as gods.

Jesus said: “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Mark 7:6-7). With God no substitutes are acceptable. It makes no difference that Christians mean well when they observe Christmas. God is not amused or pleased.

The knowledge of how to honor Almighty God, who made us, preserves us and gives us eternal life, has been made available to you. Will you honor God or follow the traditions of mankind? GN
How much are you willing to follow Jesus Christ’s example? As the apostle John tells us, “Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6, New Living Translation).

So why wouldn’t you want to follow Jesus’ example? Jesus worshipped on the Sabbath—Friday sunset to Saturday sunset—and He told us that we should too.

But many have a tendency to say things like: “Well, the Sabbath was an Old Testament thing,” or “The Sabbath has nothing to do with salvation,” or “We have liberty and aren’t restricted to a particular day of the week,” or “The Sabbath was changed from Saturday to Sunday.”

Before you jump to conclusions, I’d like you to notice a simple verse that carries so much meaning. It’s found in Hebrews 13:8. It says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (emphasis added throughout).

Here’s why this passage is so important: It tells us that, before any physical creation, a Being called “the Word” existed. It also tells us that the Word was with God, a physical being. That should immediately get our minds working on making a connection.

Here’s the key: The Word is the One who became Jesus Christ—they are one and the same. He was with God—meaning God the Father. And we find that the Word was also called God!

So not only are we told that the Word became Jesus, but we’re also told what He was doing. He was making—or creating—all things in accordance with the perfect will of the Father. Not just some things, but all things were made through Him!

The Sabbath was holy from creation

Genesis 2:1 tells us: “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from
all the work of creating that he had done” (New International Version).

Let’s ask ourselves:

Who made the heavens and earth? *The Word did—the One who became Jesus—as directed by the Father.*

Who made the seventh-day Sabbath? *The Word did—the One who became Jesus.*

Who blessed and sanctified the seventh-day Sabbath? *The Word did—the One who became Jesus.*

Who rested from all His work on the seventh-day Sabbath? *The Word did—the One who became Jesus.*

Who made the seventh day holy? *The Word did—the One who became Jesus.*

This is a vital key to understanding the true Sabbath and why it should be important to you. Before Noah, before Abraham, before Moses, and long before the Old Covenant, the Word—the One who became Jesus—created the seventh-day Sabbath. It wasn’t just any day. *He blessed it, and He set it apart from every other day.*

Do you see how important it is to God? He designated Friday sunset to Saturday sunset as holy time (in the Bible, God counts time from “evening to evening”—sundown to sundown—as shown in Leviticus 23:32 and Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31).

When something is holy it means that it is something special and precious to God. He made the Sabbath unique, and He told us all to remember this wonderful time that He designed.

Not only did it become holy time, but we find Jesus, the Word, setting an example for all mankind—for you—to follow. What did He do? He *rested.* He rested from the work of creation.

The Sabbath is still holy

Remember the scripture we began with—Hebrews 13:8. It says that Jesus is “the same yesterday, today and forever.” Looking back to “yesterday,” we find that Jesus created the Sabbath as holy time at creation.

Since the Scripture must be true—that Jesus is the same—what do we find as we go forward through time?

Let’s move forward from creation into the future, to after Jesus Christ returns to the earth. We find Isaiah prophesying about worship on the seventh-day Sabbath: “From month to month and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all humanity will come to worship me, says the Lord” (Isaiah 66:23, Common English Bible).

Isn’t that amazing? It may even surprise you. Jesus our Savior says that the Sabbath is the day He designed for worship. He made the Sabbath at creation. And millennia later, after He returns to earth, it’s still holy as the day of worship for “all humanity.”

Remember what *holy* means. This weekly day of worship is incredibly special and precious to God. He loves it, and He wants you to love it too. The Sabbath of worship and rest He created was not just any day of the week—and it certainly was not Sunday.

But here’s the part that may be truly unexpected: Who will worship God on the Sabbath day? Isaiah prophesied it wasn’t just a Jewish day of worship. It wasn’t made only for the Israelites. It was designed for *humanity*—for you and for me—for everyone. Isaiah tells us that the seventh-day Sabbath continued to be holy from creation and still is the time for worship for all people.

In fact, this wasn’t the only place where Isaiah mentioned this idea. He also speaks to you and me—to people who believe in God and want a closer relationship with Him. He instructs us what we should do.

Do you know what he said? He prophesied that all people who love God will come to worship on God’s Sabbath and serve Him and that the temple of God would be called “a house of prayer for all nations” (Isaiah 56:6-8).

Jesus taught that the Sabbath of the Bible was made by God for the benefit of all humanity, not just the Jews.

The Sabbath is for you

Here’s a question: When you hear the inspired Word of God, do you allow it to guide you in what you do? Perhaps we should all ask: If I want to follow Jesus, when should I worship?

Many people have many ideas about the Sabbath and how to worship, but the Bible makes plain what’s right and proper—what you could call authentic worship.

Is there a particular day of the week that comes to mind when you hear the word “Sabbath”?

We already know that the Word—the One who became Jesus—created the Sabbath day as a day of rest and worship at creation. He verified it thousands of years later in Isaiah’s prophecies. So should you follow your own tradition—your opinion—or should you follow Jesus’ example?
Let’s look back into the first century A.D. We find Jesus—the Word—is made flesh. He’s called Immanuel, “God with us,” God in the flesh (Matthew 1:23). Jesus Christ was walking the earth. While this is still in the past, if Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever, we should find Jesus remaining “the same.”

So what was Jesus’ regular practice? How did He honor God? What day did He observe? The Bible records Jesus’ own routine custom at the start of His ministry: “So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read” (Luke 4:16).

We shouldn’t minimize this. It was Jesus’ regular custom to worship on the Sabbath! What day of the week was that? Ever since that time and for centuries before, the weekly cycle has been followed. Time has never been lost. And don’t forget, Jesus knew the right day—because after all, He established the day of rest and worship at creation. Now we see that He validates and confirms it. Christ not only remembered the Sabbath day, but He kept it holy, from sunset Friday through sunset Saturday.

**The Sabbath was never changed**

Now here’s a tough question: Did Jesus set His example of Sabbath worship so we don’t have to? Should we just disregard the way that Jesus worshipped? Sadly, that’s what many ministers teach today!

But Jesus never once told His disciples to ignore His example. He never once said any church or any person has the authority to transfer the Sabbath to Sunday. In fact, He taught just the opposite. He said, “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me” (John 12:26).

This is the same Jesus who was the Word, the One who created the Sabbath. Jesus set it apart as holy and told us to follow Him—to live like Him, to think like Him, to worship like Him.

So no wonder He emphasized the point by saying something remarkable. In Mark 2:28 we find He said that He is “Lord of the Sabbath.”

What day of the week is the Lord’s day? According to Jesus Christ, it’s the seventh-day Sabbath! It’s not Sunday or any other day of the week. Jesus clearly tells us that He is Lord of the Sabbath day. His day of worship is the Sabbath!

He is consistent (Malachi 3:6). We’ve seen that yesterday, Jesus as the Word created the weekly day of rest and worship—the seventh-day Sabbath—lasting from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset.

**The Sabbath was made for all mankind**

Today Jesus is still Lord of the Sabbath. Some might argue that Jesus only observed the Sabbath because He was a Jew. After all, what else would you expect a good Jew to do other than keep the Sabbath day? Let’s think about that for just a moment.

In this same section of Scripture, in Mark 2:27, we find something that so many Christians miss. It’s a crucial key to understand the truth about proper worship.

Jesus says, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” If you read over that phrase quickly you might miss the point. You could think that the Sabbath was for Jews only—a burden. But wait! The meaning becomes clear when you understand the definition of the word “man.” The Sabbath was made “for man.”

The word Christ used means all of mankind, not just the Jews or one single person. The word is translated differently in other versions. By comparing them, the meaning becomes crystal clear. The New Revised Standard Version states, “The Sabbath was made for humankind.”

Jesus emphasized just how important the Sabbath is for all people everywhere. He said, “The Sabbath was made for the good of human beings” (Mark 2:27, Good News Translation). It wasn’t made just for the Jews and then done away with or replaced by Sunday, it was “made to benefit man” (The Living Bible).

So contrary to what most churches teach, Sabbath worship was not somehow altered or annulled. Jesus is consistent. He’s constant. He’s the same. He said that “the Sabbath was made for the good of man” (Bible in Worldwide English). It was the day “made to help people” (Expanded Bible). It was “made to meet the needs of people” (New Living Translation, 2013). It wasn’t exclusive to one group of people or for just a limited time only. It was the same yesterday and today as well. “The Sabbath was made for the good of people” (Contemporary English Version).

Even now authentic Christians take Jesus’ words to heart and follow Him by observing the seventh-day Sabbath, Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. They worship on the same day that Jesus did. This isn’t a “Jewish Sabbath.” It’s the Christian way of observing the true Sabbath over which Jesus is Lord. And Christian means one who follows the example of Jesus Christ, who lives as He did.

**Choose to follow Jesus’ Sabbath example**

I hope you’ll determine to find out about this authentic Sabbath that Jesus designed for you. The Word of God shows that Jesus created, verified and observed the seventh-day Sabbath, and He taught us that we should follow His example.

If you still have doubts about which day is the Christian Sabbath, remember that in the future the Sabbath will be observed by all people during the reign of Christ over all nations (Isaiah 66:23).

Moreover Hebrews 4 explains that Christians should be observing the seventh-day Sabbath today (see our free study guide Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest).

So let’s remember the Sabbath. It looks back to creation and reminds us of our Creator. In the present, we keep the seventh day holy, and we consider the One who has delivered us from the bondage of sin. And finally, the Sabbath looks forward to the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God, when there will be true rest for all humanity!

We’re all left with a choice. What should you do now?

Get out your Bible! Start to study into the true Sabbath day. God’s Word will guide you to the point where you’ll have to make a decision. Will you live by “every word of God” as Jesus directed?

There is no doubt that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. By observing the seventh-day Sabbath, Jesus proved He is the same yesterday, today and forever. Follow Him!

And of course, the United Church of God, publisher of this magazine, has hundreds of Sabbath-keeping congregations that meet on Saturday across the United States and around the world. Go to www.ucg.org/churches to find a congregation near you.

Call one of our pastors or visit with our members. They’ll help you discover more about the biblical command to keep God’s Sabbath holy! GN

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*Learn More*

The Bible has much more to say about God’s day of rest and worship, the weekly Sabbath. We’ve prepared a free study guide, Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest, to help you learn more about this observance. Download or request your free copy today!

Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our website.
Setting the stage for European–Mideast conflict

The lengthy prophecy of Daniel 11 speaks of ongoing conflict between rulers to the north and south of the land of Israel, with verse 45 referring to an end-time King of the South pushing at a final King of the North. A power from the Middle East will launch some sort of attack against Europe that arouses a retaliation and occupation of a large part of the Middle East, including Israel, by European forces.

While these specific events are yet to happen, current events in the region help us understand how this scenario could come to pass. Two recent developments may play into this.

First is the massive wave of refugees out of Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan into European Union (EU) states. More than a million have come, and tens of thousands continue to arrive every day. They made their way through Turkey and the Balkan states, and for a time in August they collected in Hungary. Not content with their reception, many began walking toward Austria, seeking to cross into Germany and other EU countries.

The open borders of the EU proved to be a means for passage that began putting pressure on the receiving nations, none of which were prepared to take in refugees in such staggering numbers. Germany said it would take 800,000. Hungary refused, stating that such a humanitarian crisis would cause the borders of Europe to collapse.

Germany at first welcomed refugees, seeing an opportunity to erase remaining vestiges of its World War II reputation for mass genocide. German Prime Minister Angela Merkel openly welcomed them.

But the inevitable backlash started, and the historic German discontent with foreigners began to erode her support. European handling of this crisis is testing current arrangements and perceptions of the EU at a vulnerable moment. Combined with the debt crisis in Greece and a real possibility that Great Britain might withdraw from the union, this influx of refugees has brought the EU to a turning point. Order will have to be maintained or the present union will not continue.

The second event to understand is Russia’s twin placement of troops and materiel in Ukraine and Syria. The first is a direct effort to undermine NATO and keep Ukraine out of the EU orbit. The other, troops and planes in Syria, is an effort to rattle the EU, keeping the refugee crisis alive and upsetting any diplomatic effort from the West aimed at ending the four-year-long civil war there.

Russia does not have the military or economic power to do much more than it has, but the long-term effect of both will show the weakness of the current political leadership in Europe and the United States. The world is experiencing a power vacuum in the Middle East. Russia will not dominate the region, but it could further stir the religious and sectarian conflicts that will create a new order in the Middle East.

With Iran on the rise in the region and the collapse of a century of regional boundaries and power structures, a new Middle East is poised to emerge. Again, Bible prophecy shows an emergent power called the King of the South to arise and “push,” by military, economic or other means, at what is called the King of the North, a European-centered power, provoking a massive retaliatory response. We may be seeing a lead-up to these events in today’s headlines. God foretold what will ultimately occur centuries in advance.

To learn more about what will happen between Europe and the Middle East, be sure to send for or download our free study guide The Middle East in Bible Prophecy.

A third intifada?

We are not merely on the verge of another Arab uprising against Israel. It’s already here. The Atlantic’s Adam Chandler recently reported: “In recent months, amid failed peace talks, continued fallout from the latest war in Gaza, politically motivated riots and car attacks, deadly rock-throwing and deadly responses to rock-throwing, stabbings, fatal arson and shootings, clashes at holy sites, the expansion of settlements and price-tag attacks, the rhetorical canceling of both previous peace deals, and the future peace process, the answer seems to increasingly be this: A Third Intifada is here and it doesn’t resemble the previous two” (“Ready or Not, the Third Intifada May Be Here,” Oct. 7, 2015).

The Middle East is always a focus in this publication. Much of Bible prophecy revolves around this part of the world and the nations it comprises. It’s a contentious area because three major religions claim their origin in the Holy Land. In Zechariah 12:2 we see that God foretold continuing conflict over Jerusalem before Jesus’ return: “Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem” (King James Version).

We’ll see how the current uprisings will play out as contentions continue. Chandler’s Atlantic article continued: “Owing to the violence, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu canceled a trip to Germany where he was set to celebrate 50 years of Israeli-German relations. ‘We are still in the midst of a wave of terror,’ Netanyahu said . . . “We have known worse times than this and we will also overcome this wave of terrorism with determination, responsibility, and unity”’ (ibid.). (Source: The Atlantic.)

We see increasing activity on the world scene. Nations are waging for power. Western nations are feeling the effects of struggles in the Middle East and emerging economies. Russia’s movement into Syria is another move on the world’s geopolitical chessboard. (Source: The Guardian.)
**Turkish-Kurdish tensions reach boiling point**

After initially remaining uninvolved in the West’s struggle to contain Islamic State militants in the Middle East, Turkey recently announced that it would be supporting U.S. and NATO airstrikes against ISIS targets in Syria and Iraq. What initially came as welcome news, however, was soured by the reality that Turkish forces seemed more interested in engaging Kurdish targets than ISIS militants. The Kurds, for the record, have to this point been one of the West’s strongest regional allies in containing and combatting ISIS.

Turks and Kurds have a long and violent history with one another, but the most recent flare-up has the potential for far-reaching and long-lasting consequences for the nation of Turkey. Germany’s Der Spiegel magazine reports on the increased violence in Turkey’s troubled and divided eastern region:

“The killing continues, especially in Cizre and in other places in the overwhelmingly Kurdish inhabited southeast. And it won’t allow itself to be stopped again so quickly. Several municipalities have broken away from Turkey and declared autonomy. There, young Kurds with Kalashnikovs, Molotov cocktails and stones are calling the shots. Trenches and barricades made of rocks, rubble and car tires are meant to prevent the advances of security forces that are no longer simply responding with tear gas, but also with live ammunition and snipers” (Hasnain Kazim.

“‘We Want a Massacre’: Turkish-Kurdish Tensions Escalate as Election Looms,” Sept. 17, 2015).

Many in the country, especially Kurds, are placing blame for the violent eruption on Turkish President Recep Erdogan: “Critics argue that Erdogan . . . consciously pushed the country into chaos in order to portray himself as a strong leader. He is risking a civil war, they claim, in order to win the Nov. 1 elections” (ibid.).

Whether or not Erdogan or other leaders are engineering a civil war in the country, the human toll has been and will continue to be large with intense violence. In an already unstable region, a weaker or divided Turkey opens the door for insurgents like ISIS to take further root.

**Chinese espionage against America**

The Chinese are stealing secrets from America. Of course, every nation conducts its own bit of espionage against other nations. Earlier this year there were allegations that the United States tapped the cell phone of German Chancellor Angela Merkel. But with no significant evidence, the Germans dropped their investigations.

Spying seems to be a practice that is assumed and not talked about. There also seems to be some guidelines. Recently The Wall Street Journal reported: “[President Barack Obama] said the Chinese government—like the U.S. government—engages in traditional spying against foreign nations, which he acknowledged is a common practice. But he said he has told the Chinese, ‘That is fundamentally different from your government or its proxies engaging directly in industrial espionage and stealing trade secrets, stealing proprietary information from companies. That we consider an act of aggression that has to stop’” (Damian Paletta, “Obama Vows to Press China on Computer Attacks,” Sept. 16, 2015).

**St. Louis fire highlights danger of nuclear stockpiling**

Nuclear bombs as weapons of mass destruction are front and center in public attention once more with the Iranian nuclear agreement, North Korea’s much-publicized nuclear program and the ever-present threat of black market and secret proliferation to extremist groups.

Earlier in 2015 the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved the world Doomsday Clock up to three minutes to midnight, reflecting the dangers of nuclear proliferation and the potential of nuclear weapons falling into villainous hands. A recent development in the heart of the United States, though, serves as a chilling reminder of the atomic legacy of the 20th century.

A landfill in the St. Louis, Missouri, area has contained a smoldering fire underneath its surface since 2010. A burning landfill is, in the best circumstances, not good for a community. But this is far from the best circumstances. Jim Salters of U.S. News and World Report wrote:

“Beneath the surface of a St. Louis-area landfill lurk two things that should never meet: a slow-burning fire and a cache of Cold War-era nuclear waste, separated by no more than 1,200 feet. Government officials have quietly adopted an emergency plan in case the smoldering embers ever reach the waste, a potentially catastrophic event that could send up a plume of radioactive smoke over a densely populated area near the city’s main airport” (“St. Louis Plans for Catastrophic Nuclear Event,” Oct. 6, 2015).

It’s a scary prospect for St. Louis residents and a reminder to all of us of the dangers of nuclear weaponry. We’re still dealing with the results of nuclear development, both from waste and from potential warfare. (Source: U.S. News and World Report.)

**How can you make sense of the news?**

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

RIGHTIOUS
ANGER

America’s abortion debate is a window on one of the country’s deepest spiritual crises. When we see injustice, brutality and sin on this scale, we rightly get angry at the evil. How can we ensure we’re experiencing godly, righteous anger instead of destructive, carnal anger? by Milan Bizic

Why should abortion—and the merchandising of the body parts of murdered babies—fill us with godly, righteous anger?

Every day I read at least some news, so I spend my fair share of time feeling sad or shocked or simply perplexed at the things seemingly regular people do to other seemingly regular people. Thankfully, information saturation hasn’t numbed me to human suffering, and I can still get shocked and upset by what I see. I really wish there was enough good news to offset the bad, and I really wish I could walk away from a news report feeling happy and hopeful for everyone whose stories I read and hear about. It doesn’t happen very often.

Every now and again I read a story that goes beyond the everyday shock and awe at the darker sides of human nature. You probably had the same reaction when you read about it or watched the videos that were shared around. I’m talking about the revelation that representatives of Planned Parenthood, the United States’ largest abortion provider, were caught on video bartering over body parts from aborted children.

Sure, I was shocked. I felt stunned and sad. But I felt another emotion as well—something deeper and rawer than sadness or shock. I was angry.

Was it right for me to be angry? Should you be angry about abortion? Is it possible to be angry in a godly way? I’ll come back to America’s abortion crisis, but first let’s lay some groundwork on the complex concept of righteous, godly anger.

God’s anger is righteous

We don’t often think of anger as a Christian emotion—and for the most part, that’s probably a good thing. Christians are to be defined by their relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. They are measured by the character of Jesus Himself. And He perfectly modeled self-control, patience and mercy. But He was also capable of anger when the situation called for it.

All four Gospels record Jesus’ anger at the moneychangers in the temple for profaning God’s holy house. Maybe when you think about our Savior shouting, flipping over tables and using a makeshift whip to drive animals out of the temple it makes you uncomfortable. Maybe you have a difficult time reconciling this very real image of Jesus with other very real images of Jesus defending the weak, healing the sick and taking up the cause of the poor.

If we honestly and humbly read the Bible, though, we’ll see that this instance of Jesus’ life is 100 percent, entirely consistent with His righteous character as it’s displayed throughout the Bible. The author of Hebrews gives us an essential truth about Jesus: He is “the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). That means the same godly character that produced anger at the temple moneychangers also produces great mercy every day. The same godly character that commands care for widows and orphans commands justice and judgment on those who reject God’s way.

Psalm 7:12 tells us, “God is angry with the wicked every day.” It should come as no surprise then that God is very angry at the senseless killing of helpless children. We shouldn’t be shocked that God is angry that people are profiting from the killing of His precious children. We also shouldn’t be afraid to feel some of that anger ourselves and to “sigh and cry” over the evil actions we see (Ezekiel 9:4).

When we read about callous violence and injustice, it’s right to be angry. We need to tread carefully however. Anger is a powerful and potentially very destructive emotion that, in the wrong context, wrong frame of mind and wrong spirit, can wreck our spiritual lives and cause us to hurt others.

Is your anger righteous?

Christianity is all about becoming more and more like God as Jesus modeled His righteous character for us to follow. It’s important that we keep close tabs on our thoughts and actions to make sure that we’re following His lead and not the pulls of the flesh and allowing human nature to dictate our responses. That’s why we need to constantly examine ourselves to make sure we’re staying on the “straight and narrow.” How do we know if we’re right or wrong in being angry at something?

Many scriptures show us there’s a vast gulf separating righteous and unrighteous anger. In the very beginning of mankind’s history, Cain’s anger drove him to murder his own brother (Genesis 4:8). Unfettered anger—or misdirected anger—can lead us to great sin. God Himself tells us that it is...
Godly, righteous anger is about justice, not revenge.

are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren” (verses 16-19).

A second aspect of godly anger is that it isn’t quickly or easily kindled. God’s anger at sin isn’t explosive. He’s not a “walking time bomb” like some people are.

No one likes to be around other people who have a reputation for their quick tempers. Sometimes people with explosive anger can be very dangerous. God Himself testifies to His slow temper: “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth” (Exodus 34:6).

If we want to cultivate only righteous anger, we need to follow His lead, being “slow to wrath” (James 1:19). In fact, this quality of God is one of the fruits of His Holy Spirit that develops in us as we grow close to God and He begins producing His character within us. Paul wrote that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23, emphasis added). Notice here self-control—another essential trait of those who don’t sin in anger.

A third factor in godly, righteous anger is that it’s about justice, not revenge. Do we get angry at people and hope for the time when they “get theirs”? If I’m being honest, I have to admit that sometimes my anger over horrific events like the mass slaughter of infants gets me going down this path.

But that human desire for punishment isn’t even remotely related to God’s promise of true justice for the innocent and the guilty. Paul tells us that we should “give place to wrath, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Romans 12:19). Wait for God’s time of judgment and justice.

God will ultimately deal with evildoers. And it helps to always keep in mind what God is well aware of—that people are misled in their thinking and actions by a powerful malevolent spirit—Satan the devil (see 1 John 5:19 and “An Evil Spirit World: Where Did It Come From?” beginning on page 8).

Why be angry about abortion?

Back to the Planned Parenthood controversy: Why should abortion—and the merchandising of the body parts of murdered babies—fill us with godly, righteous anger?

Consider that our society—our culture—is murder, wholesale, the most precious and helpless among us. Psalm 127 tells us that children are a gift from God. They are precious to Him and should be to us. They’re not a burden, not a negative consequence, and certainly not a “parasite” in the womb as some characterize the unborn.

To say that we can choose to, at any point in a nine-month window of time, kill the next generation of the human family—all potential members of the divine family of God—is a great evil and a curse. We should be furious at the very notion.

Let’s be honest: Almost all abortions, by some estimates more than 99 percent, are performed for the reason of convenience. The baby was conceived at an “inconvenient time” for the parents. No one has yet explained why a child can be given the death penalty because of the circumstances of their conception.

A fairly conservative estimate—based on numbers collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—puts the number of legal abortions performed in the United States since the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973 at approximately 51 million. That’s 51 million lives cut short, 51 million untold stories, immeasurable potential thrown away and sacrificed to the false god of convenience and personal choice. Does that make you angry? It should.

Godly anger should lead to repentance

It should make you angry because, as Ezekiel warned Israel, sin twists people’s lives (Ezekiel 7:13, New Living Translation). The sin of murder through abortion twists the lives of those affected. And on a bigger scale, the widespread acceptance and support of abortion and organizations like Planned Parenthood twists the moral fiber of a people. If America’s national conscience can tolerate the dismembering of a child and the merchandising of its body parts, what can’t it tolerate?

There’s one last element to godly, righteous anger, and it’s the most important element. The anger that comes from God should convict us to change and become more like Him. It should motivate us to fix our problems and turn toward the mercy and love God desperately wants to extend to us.

God doesn’t want people to suffer the bad consequences that sin produces, and He doesn’t want any nation to suffer these consequences either. God is patient and “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:8).

It’s not too late for those whose lives have been twisted by the sin of abortion to repent and live by God’s high standard of respect for the sanctity of life. And, while it would require a great miracle, it’s also not too late for America and other countries where abortion is legal to experience a nationwide repentance and to turn away from this sin.

God is waiting with arms wide open to accept those who turn away from sin to seek Him. Will America respond? Will you? GN
IRAN and the Threat of EMP Attack

In the wake of the Iran nuclear deal, the question looms about what Iran might do once it acquires nuclear weapons. Some are sounding the alarm about a dangerous scenario that could fatally wound a nation in an instant. by Tom Robinson

In the wake of the announcement of the nuclear deal with Iran, in which the Shiite Islamic state is allowed to continue its nuclear program, the Iranian regime was exultant. At a military ceremony on Aug. 30, 2015, the Iranian defense minister boasted:

"Today, Iran has attained such status that the superpowers have surrendered to it, because of its majesty, its steadfastness, its resistance, and its unity. Despite their great pride, the regime of the arrogance [the West, led by the United States] sat humbly behind the negotiating table and obeyed the rights of the Iranian nation" (quoted in “Iranian Regime Celebrates Its Victory in the Nuclear Agreement,” Middle East Media Research Institute [MEMRI], Sept. 4, 2015).

Furthermore, “a top Iranian general told troops preparing for a massive military drill . . . that ‘the U.S. and the Zionists should know that the Islamic Revolution will continue enhancing its preparedness until it overthrows Israel and liberates Palestine’” (quoted in Paul Alster, “Iran Thumbs Nose over ‘Threat’ to Israel and Liberates Palestine’,” Middle East Media Research Institute [MEMRI], Sept. 4, 2015).

Meanwhile, former U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney warned in a Wall Street Journal op-ed piece that “the Obama agreement will lead to a nuclear armed Iran, a nuclear arms race in the Middle East and, more than likely, the first use of a nuclear weapon since Hiroshima and Nagasaki” (“Restoring American Exceptionalism,” Aug. 28, 2015).

It’s certainly horrific to imagine Iran or some other power or group using atomic weapons on the tiny Jewish state of Israel or on America on the other side of the world. But it might end up far worse than we imagine.

Worse than nuking a city?

A commentary in The Wall Street Journal several years ago by Brian Kennedy, at the time a member of the Independent Working Group on Missile Defense, stated: “Think about this scenario: An ordinary-looking freighter ship heading toward New York or Los Angeles launches a missile from its hull or from a canister lowered into the sea. It hits a densely populated area. A million people are incinerated. The ship is then sunk. No one claims responsibility. There is no firm evidence as to who sponsored the attack, and thus no one against whom to launch a counterstrike.

“But as terrible as that scenario sounds, there is one that is worse. Let us say the freighter ship launches a nuclear-armed Shahab-3 missile off the coast of the U.S. and the missile explodes 300 miles over Chicago. The nuclear detonation in space creates an electromagnetic pulse (EMP).

“Gamma rays from the explosion . . . generate three classes of disruptive electromagnetic pulses, which permanently destroy consumer electronics, the electronics in some automobiles and, most importantly, the hundreds of large transformers that distribute power throughout the U.S. . . . Lights, refrigerators, water-pumping stations, TVs and radios stop running. We have no communication and no ability to provide food and water to 300 million Americans.

“This is what is referred to as an EMP attack, and such an attack would effectively throw America back technologically into the early 19th century . . .

“Common sense would suggest that, absent food and water, the number of people who could die of deprivation and as a result of social breakdown might run well into the millions. Let us be clear. A successful EMP attack on the U.S. would have a dramatic effect on the country, to say the least. Even one that only affected part of the country would cripple the economy for years” (“What a Single Nuclear Warhead Could Do,” Nov. 24, 2008, emphasis added throughout).

Effects of an EMP weapon detonation

The effects of an EMP detonation depend on several factors. One is altitude. The Heritage Foundation, which has long tried to draw people’s attention to the seriousness of the danger, estimates that a single EMP detonation at an altitude of 300 miles over Kansas would affect virtually the entire continental United States.

At a height of 120 miles, an EMP burst would affect most of the continental United States except for the coastal states. At a 30-mile altitude, it would devastate eight to 10 states (see the graphic at right).

Other key factors are how powerful the weapon is and distance. The more powerful the weapon, the greater the electromagnetic surge and thus the greater the damage. And the closer the detonation to electrical devices, the greater the power of the electromagnetic pulse.

Missile-defense experts warn that a relatively cheap way to inflict terminal damage on a nation as large as the United States would be
to detonate three or four medium-yield EMP weapons evenly spaced at a suitable altitude above the country—a capability likely within reach of Iran and other players like North Korea within a relatively short time.

Experts warn of the likelihood that many electrical devices within line of sight of the detonation of an EMP weapon, unless specifically shielded, would be rendered immediately inoperable. This includes electrical components of motor vehicles, trains, aircraft, ships, computers, TVs, radios, phones, appliances, lights, pumps, generators, medical equipment, power tools and the like.

While many devices could be left undamaged, the cumulative impact of many interdependent devices failing over huge regions would be catastrophic. The result would be unimaginable chaos and vast loss of life.

Iran’s intention to stage an EMP attack

Former CIA director James Woolsey and Peter Vincent Pry, who served on the Congressional EMP Commission, have been outspoken about the EMP threat. Woolsey relates in a Washington Times article: “The Congressional EMP Commission estimated a nationwide blackout lasting one year could kill anywhere from two of every three Americans by a low estimate up to nine of 10 Americans by starvation and social disruption.” This is astoundingly serious and sobering.

Woolsey goes on to say that “‘Death to America’ is more than merely an Iranian chant—Tehran’s military is planning to be able to make a nuclear EMP attack . . . An Iranian military textbook, recently translated by the Defense Intelligence Agency’s National Intelligence University . . . ironically titled ‘Passive Defense’ (2010), describes nuclear EMP effects in detail. It advocates in more than 20 passages an EMP attack to defeat decisively an adversary.

“The official Iranian military textbook advocates a revolutionary new way of warfare that combines coordinated attacks by nuclear and non-nuclear EMP weapons, physical and cyber-attacks against electric grids to black out and collapse entire nations . . . Because EMP destroys electronics directly, but people indirectly, it is regarded by some as Shariah [Islamic law]-compliant use of a nuclear weapon [for mass killing].

“Passive Defense” and other Iranian military writings are well aware that nuclear EMP attack is the most efficient way of killing people, through secondary effects, over the long run. The rationale appears to be that people starve to death, not because of EMP, but because they live in materialistic societies dependent upon modern technology” (“‘A Shariah-Approved Nuclear Attack,” Aug. 19, 2015, emphasis added throughout).

For example, Woolsey quotes a 1998 Iranian article on EMP attack that stated: “If the world’s industrial countries fail to devise effective ways to defend themselves against dangerous electronic assaults, then they will disintegrate within a few years . . . American soldiers would not be able to find food to eat nor would they be able to fire a single shot.”

Obviously, as Woolsey points out, “The Iranians have done more than just think about EMP attack.”

In fact, “the Congressional EMP Commission found that Iran has practiced launching missiles and fusing warheads for high-altitude EMP attack, including off a freighter. Iran has apparently practiced surprise EMP attacks, orbiting satellites on south polar trajectories to evade U.S. radars and missile defenses, at altitudes consistent with generating an EMP field covering all 48 contiguous United States. Iran launched its fourth satellite on such a trajectory as recently as February 2015. A single nuclear weapon would complete the list of requirements” (ibid.).

Dr. Pry warned in an op-ed at Israel National News earlier this year: “For the first time in history, a failed state like Iran could destroy the most successful societies on Earth . . . An Iran with nuclear missiles can topple the existing world order . . . without firing a shot . . .

“The mere capability to make an EMP attack, the mere threat that a rogue state like Iran can inflict Assured Destruction on the United States using a single warhead, cancels the credibility of U.S. security guarantees . . . Iran with nuclear missiles is a world crisis comparable to the Islamic conquests against Christendom during the Dark Ages, the rise of Nazi Germany, or the Soviet threat during the Cold War.”

In the Iran nuclear agreement, the subject of Iran’s program to develop intercontinental ballistic missiles wasn’t even addressed. Iran already has missiles capable of striking any nearby enemy in the Middle East or as far as southeastern Europe. An obvious question is why they feel a need to develop missiles which can carry warheads to other continents—unless the intended target is the United States, which they repeatedly characterize as “the great Satan”?

Iran, North Korea and the merchants of death

Yet the problem is not just Iran. More Middle Eastern states now want to develop nuclear weapons as a counterweight to Iran—and some of these states could fall to Islamic extremists and terror groups. And Muslim Pakistan, with its own arsenal of dozens of nuclear warheads, is a tempting takeover target for Islamic fundamentalists both within the country and in neighboring Afghanistan.

Dr. Pry and Woolsey pointed out in a Wall Street Journal piece last year: “In 2004, the EMP Commission met with senior Russian military personnel who warned that Russian scientists had been recruited by North Korea to help develop its nuclear arsenal as well as EMP-attack capabilities. In December 2012, the North Koreans successfully orbited a satellite, the KSM-3, compatible with the size and
The Iran Nuclear Deal: Spiritual Blindness at Work?

As more and more details of the Iran nuclear negotiations unfolded over recent months, the questions grew more and more puzzling. Why were the world’s leading powers so eager to cut a deal with an Iranian regime that:

• Has been the world’s foremost sponsor of terrorism,
• Repeatedly threatens to eliminate Israel,
• Routinely refers to the United States as “the great Satan” (and supports mass rallies where people chant “Death to America!”),
• Has leaders who believe they are divinely destined to initiate a period of worldwide upheaval that will lead to their version of fundamentalist Islam attaining dominance over the entire world.

The Western powers’ surrender to Iranian negotiating demands were equally puzzling. Why did major Western leaders so eagerly line up behind the United States to sign off on an agreement that:

• Provides a dictatorial regime a windfall of more than $100 billion (frozen when Iran took over the U.S. embassy in Tehran in 1979 and imprisoned all embassy personnel for 444 days),
• Relieves economic sanctions (imposed by the UN Security Council due to Iran’s refusal to suspend its nuclear programs),
• Bans American and other Western personnel from inspections of Iranian sites (and allows Iran to do its own inspections of its nuclear facilities)—especially if they really are entirely for peaceful purposes as Iran claims?
• In light of such facts, why would anyone support such an agreement with a foreign power with such a track record?
• Some reasons are evident. The European participants in the agreement appear to be motivated mostly by economic greed. They see lifting of sanctions on Iran as a way for European companies to enter a potentially lucrative business market, and they gain access to Iranian oil.
• Russia, long familiar with the Middle Eastern adage “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” sees an opportunity to strengthen an enemy of the United States as an opportunity not to be missed, and it sees a huge market for advanced Russian military hardware.
• Some believe U.S. President Barack Obama is motivated primarily by a desire to add a notable foreign policy landmark to his presidential legacy, and possibly another Nobel Peace Prize to cap his career.

In any case, what is really at the heart of the matter? The Bible reveals deeper issues—spiritual issues that lie beyond normal human perception.

• God’s Word reveals a spiritual dimension to international affairs where unseen spirit beings are at work behind the scenes shaping the world in profound ways (see “Kingdoms at War” beginning on page 4 and “What Are the Origins of the Evil Spirit World?” beginning on page 8).

• When we see things on the international stage that make no sense on the physical level—such as an international agreement like this that defies all logic and common sense—it is virtually guaranteed that something profound is taking place on the unseen spiritual level, a spiritual dimension revealed in the Bible where spirit beings and forces shape the world to their own ends.

• On the physical level, it makes no sense to provide the world’s greatest sponsor of terrorism billions of dollars and a clear path to nuclear weapons—yet that is exactly what world leaders have done! Spiritual forces are at work.
• Albert Einstein once defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over again while expecting a different result. World history has repeatedly shown that appeasing dangerous tyrants—think Adolf Hitler—leads to only greater demands and ultimate disaster.

Spiritual blindness and drunkenness

Another factor ties in closely with this. It’s an additional spiritual component that the Bible calls “drunkenness.”

The biblical prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel all used the same term to describe the irrational decision-making of leaders and people who have forsaken and rejected God. They lose their ability to think rationally and reason properly because they have turned their backs on the source of true wisdom.

Notice one such passage in Isaiah describing this spiritual blindness: “Go ahead and be blind. You are stupid, but not from wine! You stagger, but not from liquor! For the Lord has poured you a spirit of deep sleep. He has closed the eyes of your prophets and visionaries . . . ‘And so the Lord says, ‘. . . Because of this, I will once again astound these hypocrites with amazing wonders. The wisdom of the wise will pass away, and the intelligence of the intelligent will disappear.’ What sorrow awaits those who try to hide their plans from the Lord, who do their evil deeds in the dark! The Lord can’t see us,’ they say. ‘He doesn’t know what’s going on!’ How foolish can you be?’ (Isaiah 29:9-16, New Living Translation, 2013).

• Why are people who certainly should know better—especially prominent leaders—caught up in such self-destructive blindness? The answer is simple. God says it’s because they “have removed their hearts far from Me” (verse 13).

A deeper spiritual issue is at work in the Iran treaty. Western leaders have been hell-bent on securing this deal, largely at the behest of President Obama. In the words of the biblical prophets, it is as though they have all become “drunk” and cannot discern the reality of the threat and the dangerous times we live in. Our world will grow only more dangerous as leaders and people become ever more spiritually blind and intoxicated due to sin.

• May you have the wisdom and courage to heed your Creator and turn to Him before it’s too late!

—Scott Ashley

weight of a small nuclear warhead. The trajectory of the KSM-3 had the characteristics for delivery of a surprise nuclear EMP attack against the U.S.” (“The Growing Threat From an EMP Attack,” Aug. 12, 2014).

Dr. Pry sternly points the finger in his Israel National News piece at the larger powers bearing responsibility: “World chaos from nuclear missile-armed Iran and its partner North Korea is enabled deliberately by their silent partners—Russia and China. In order to survive, the West must wake-up to the reality that Iran, North Korea, China and Russia are all rogue states tacitly allied against the West, working together to topple the existing world order . . .

“Russia and China have deliberately proliferated missile and nuclear technology to Iran and North Korea to raise proxy nuclear missile threats against the U.S. and its allies on the theory that ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’ and to promote world chaos. The real merchants of death live in Moscow and Beijing.”

He goes on to quote Gen. Douglas MacArthur: “The history of the failure of war can almost be summed up in two words: too late. Too late in comprehending the
deadly purposes of a potential enemy. Too late in realizing the mortal danger. Too late in preparedness. Too late in uniting all possible forces for resistance. Too late in standing with one’s friends.”

Pray then reiterates: “The West must understand that Russia and China are not our friends and do not share our vision for a stable, peaceful world order. They are enabling the Iranian and North Korean nuclear missile programs to foster world chaos and, if necessary, our extinction.”

And amazingly, unhappily, the United States government and other Western allies are enabling this as well.

What Scripture reveals

We would do well to keep in mind some important details from Bible prophecy when considering the dire threat of an electromagnetic pulse attack.

First, the Bible does reveal that America and other modern nations of Israelite descent will see massive devastation in the end time (see our free booklet The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy to understand this heritage). In Ezekiel 6:6 God tells the Israelites that “in all your dwelling places the cities shall be laid waste.”

When Ezekiel wrote this prophecy, the kingdom of Israel had already been defeated by the Assyrian Empire and taken into exile well over a century earlier, so this prophecy never applied to ancient Israel. It refers to their end-time descendants, who will be punished for their grave national sins and rebellion against their Creator.

Second, it is evident that the death toll for all of this devastation will not be as high as the 90 percent some predict for a worst-case scenario EMP attack. But it could be in line with lower estimates. The indication for the last days appears to be that one third of the Israelites will die of disease and famine. Another third will fall by the sword or military attack, and another third will be scattered in fleeing the sword of invasion (Ezekiel 5:12).

Famine from lack of food and non-functioning distribution and transportation systems along with diseases accompanying malnutrition and unsanitary conditions would be one major result of an EMP attack. The scattering and captivity of survivors that other passages mention could be a result of outside forces taking advantage of a devastated nation.

Third, while the massive destruction the Bible portrays would appear to be the result of nuclear weapons (such as a third of mankind being killed as described in Revelation 9:15), there is still an indication of working electronic communication the world over just before Christ returns.

We find this in Revelation 11, where God’s end-time two witnesses are killed in martyrdom. Verse 9 says: “And for three and a half days, all peoples, tribes, languages, and nations will stare at their bodies” (New Living Translation). This was not possible before the advent of modern electronic communications. Yet this verse shows that some such communications will be functioning at the very end immediately before Jesus Christ’s return. This would seem to mean that any EMP warfare in the last days will be limited and not shut down whole continents.

What does it mean for you?

Of course the biggest details of prophecy to keep in mind are that the devastation it records is not the end of the story. While end-time events will be truly horrifying, a wonderful world will follow Jesus Christ’s return to establish the Kingdom of God over all nations.

No longer will one nation threaten another, nor nations spend billions of dollars on such horrifying weapons. Humanity will finally learn the way to peace, not endless war.

As for you, we hope you’ll take very seriously the sobering developments we see in the headlines daily. We live in increasingly dangerous times, just as foretold by Jesus Christ and the biblical prophets. But the good news is that you can escape or endure the terrible times ahead and be part of God’s Kingdom forever—if you are willing to trust in and submit to God now! GN
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The Sabbath in History and Prophecy

Learn the inspiring story of a group of people who found—just by reading the Bible—that they must keep the seventh-day Sabbath.

by Beyond Today host Darris McNeely

Imagine yourself opening a Bible for the very first time. You begin to read. And as you do, you read where God says, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8).

You also read where Christ and His disciples kept the Sabbath day, and you see that it says Jesus is the “Lord of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28).

What do you do? Do you follow Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath?

This is exactly what some people have done when faced with the clear teaching of Scripture. It’s what followers of Christ will be doing when He returns.

In her book The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time, author Judith Shulevitz makes an interesting observation: “Whenever people begin reading the Book [the Bible], they start keeping the Sabbath. And when they keep the Sabbath they read the Book” (2010, p. 2).

That’s exactly what happened to a group of believers in Transylvania in the 1500-1600s. Faced with what the Bible itself says about the Sabbath day, they realized they had no choice but to obey God by keeping the Sabbath as He commanded.

The Bible on the hinge of history

Life in medieval Europe was nothing like life in today’s world. Imagine that your life is completely and totally ruled by other people. Kings, princes, governors and priests dictate where you live, what you do for a living and what you believe.

Now into the darkness of your life comes a bright, burning light—the Holy Bible, translated for the first time into your own language. You start reading the Bible and realize that much of what you’ve been taught doesn’t match up with what God says. What do you do?

What about those Christians in Transylvania that I mentioned before? What did they do?

In their search for truth they discovered one of Christianity’s darkest secrets: Sunday worship (on the first day of the week) is a man-made—not God-made—tradition, and the seventh-day Sabbath was observed by Jesus and His apostles. What’s more, it meant that they, too, needed to keep the Sabbath.

In large part their story is defined by their leader, a man named Andreas Eossi. He was a nobleman, rich in real estate, who owned three whole villages, along with other, smaller estates. In many ways he was a sad man with a very sad life. His wife and all three of his sons died prematurely, leaving him wealthy but lonely. On top of that, Eossi’s own health was poor. He couldn’t even walk.

To fill his time and to heal his mind, Eossi read the Bible. His studies led him to a deep conviction that the church establishment was wrong to have changed the Sabbath from Saturday, the seventh day of the week, to Sunday, the first day of the week.

Soon Eossi led a flourishing and growing group of Sabbath-keepers in Transylvania. At the peak of the movement thousands of Sabbatarian Christians were living and teaching in the forests and mountains of Eastern Europe.

Persecution for Sabbath-keeping

But all wasn’t fine and peaceful for these believers. The Transylvanian Sabbath-keepers had limited protection from the Muslim-ruled Ottoman Empire to the east. But the supposedly Christian church authorities persecuted them for their biblical beliefs. In 1595, sabbatarianism was outlawed by the political and religious establishment.

Once their Sabbath-keeping became well known, Eossi and his followers came under intense persecution. They faced the confiscation of their property and real estate, their writings were collected and burned, and in many cases they were put in prison and beaten for their determination to keep the Sabbath holy. The persecution from both Catholic and Protestant authorities would only worsen over time.

When the persecution came for the rest of the Sabbatarian community in the mid-1600s it came quickly and somewhat unexpectedly. Even though Sabbath-keepers were often threatened with punishment if they did not publicly renounce their Sabbath-keeping, it was rare for the authorities to follow through on their threats. When the religious establishment finally did move on the Sabbatarians, they dealt quickly and harshly with them.

In almost every case the Sabbath-keepers’ property and possessions were confiscated, leaving them homeless and destitute. The once large and booming Sabbatarian communities of Eastern Europe all but disappeared after the widespread persecution. Sabbath-keepers were forced into obscurity, hiding among pockets of other minority Christians, keeping the Sabbath in secret, always fearing they would be found out.

Times have changed. Most people are not hounded and persecuted for keeping the Sabbath today. When I began to learn about the Sabbath and to keep it, it did create a
The medieval Sabbath-keepers in Transylvania realized that the Sabbath is a biblical key to unlocking the mystery of the coming Kingdom of God on earth with Jesus Christ as Lord.

major change in my life and relationships. But I experienced nothing like these people in Eastern Europe.

The story of these men and women who kept the Saturday Sabbath in history is fascinating. It was a time of religious awakening. The Sabbath is a window into hope.

What these people saw through the Sabbath truth was a glimpse into the long-prophesied Kingdom of God. Their own writings reveal this insight. As they read Jesus’ teachings on the Sabbath, they saw the Kingdom of God. They saw the Sabbath as a sign between the Creator and His chosen people. They believed that as they kept the Sabbath, they entered a covenant relationship with the same God who delivered the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt and made them a nation.

This leads us back to an earlier thought. As people read their Bible they discovered the truth of the seventh-day Sabbath. People were reading the Bible to gain an understanding about God and His purpose for their human life. They were looking for meaning amid their poor, bleak existence.

In a dark world, the Bible was a dawning light breaking on a confused and deceived European culture. Some few, and these people in Eastern Europe were among them, came to see the teaching of the Sabbath and embraced its teaching as part of their life. The Sabbath began to define their relationship with God and their entire life’s work.

They saw that by keeping the commandments on which God made a covenant with Israel, they themselves entered a spiritual covenant with God. This New Covenant was a better covenant with better promises. It was a covenant based on grace through Jesus Christ, the same God who made the first covenant, and who came to earth and died for our sins, who was resurrected and lives today as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

As they kept the Sabbath, they gained understanding and hope of the coming Kingdom of God. They saw that the rest that exists for the people of God through the Sabbath was a critical key to understanding the fullness of the coming Kingdom of God.

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They realized that the Sabbath is a biblical key to unlocking the mystery of the coming Kingdom of God on earth with Jesus Christ as Lord. You really cannot understand this truth without proper knowledge and understanding of the Sabbath day.

Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath. He kept the Sabbath, and He taught us how to keep it today. He taught us how to enjoy a fuller life by observing the Sabbath. Far from doing away with the Sabbath, Jesus showed us how to live in the world of the Sabbath and improve the quality of our lives.

When we properly observe this day to God, we make a spiritual connection that is real, honest and true. It’s the foundation of the only meaningful relationship that can endure and see one through the challenges and trials, highs and lows, triumphs and tragedies of this mortal life.

When Christ said, “I am the way, the truth and life” (John 14:6), He was showing the way forward through this uncertain life.

**The Sabbath is a window into spiritual rejuvenation**

To enter the world of the Sabbath is to enter a dimension where God dwells. Keeping the Sabbath by worshipping and fellowshipping with others of like mind is being with God and Christ in spiritual fellowship. It’s a solution to the restlessness of our modern lifestyle.

All of us understand the stresses and strains of this life. But not everyone understands a vital key to getting in sync with God for the help to cope and manage the extreme stresses of today’s culture. Keeping God’s Sabbath is a missing element in successful living. To enter the world of the Sabbath is to enter the world of God.

There is another point that all Sabbath keepers, past and present, learn as they read the Bible. They come to understand that there is continuity between the Old and the New Testament. They understand how the two tell a complete story of God’s grace and offer of salvation through Jesus Christ. They understand how to put the Bible together. They also understand prophecy and how key prophecies of the Old Testament and the New Testament are yet to be fulfilled in the future.

Here is the challenge: **Prove God by beginning to keep His Sabbath**, the seventh day. Step out in living faith and prove what the Bible says about the Sabbath is true! In one remarkable statement in the book of Isaiah God says: “If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord’s holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights” (Isaiah 58:13-14, New International Version).

**Live by the way of God’s Kingdom today**

God’s Kingdom is coming to the earth, and Christ will rule over all. In the book of Daniel we find a remarkable prophecy that tells us when this will occur. The Kingdom the Messiah will set up “will not be left to other people” (Daniel 2:44). Who are those who receive the Kingdom of God? The book of Revelation says it’s “those keeping the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17). Will you be among them?

You will find the same truth that people for centuries have found. You will find the Sabbath is a key feature of the Word of God. And you will find the same choice they found—to keep the book open, and to keep reading. We hope you will make the change and begin to walk with God on His Holy Sabbath.

“You must observe My Sabbaths. This will be a sign between Me and you for generations to come” (Exodus 31:13).

The Sabbath is a key to the Kingdom of God. The New Testament book of Hebrews says, “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God” (Hebrews 4:9, NIV). Jesus and His followers kept the Sabbath, and His followers still do today. God commands us to pause and reflect on His way of life. Take a break from the fast-paced action of this world. Experience a rejuvenation of the mind and grow closer to Him! GN

Use our search tool so you can find information on any subject you want—marriage, family, biblical teachings, current events, prophecy, you name it. Feel free to download all these so you can study them in depth, or request your own printed copies.

You’ll also find answers to frequently asked Bible questions, helpful study guides on dozens of biblical topics, and much more! You can also listen to or download sermons, presentations and TV programs done by many of The Good News writers. We hope you’ll visit us today to discover what you’ve been missing!

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**Learn More**

God’s Word reveals a great deal more about God’s day of rest and worship, the weekly seventh-day Sabbath. We’ve prepared a free study aid, Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest, to help you learn more. Download or request your free copy today!

**www.GNmagazine.org/booklets**
In Everything, Give Thanks

by Amber Duran

The last time my mother saw me I wore a hand-me-down red Kentucky t-shirt and blue running shorts. This isn’t my normal garb, but these were the first items I found after I got the call.

In the early hours of a Tuesday morning, I was jolted awake by a phone call no one ever wants to receive. After taking a turn for the worse, my mother was asking for us—her kids.

We piled in our vehicle—my husband, brother and sister-in-law—and walked the bathed-in-blue hallways of the hospital to my mom’s room.

She had her moments of recovery that made me think she might make it through this one. But it was only hours later that she went into full organ failure.

What to say in those final moments?

In the mere minutes I had with her before she died, I tried to warm her cold hands with mine. The machines keeping her alive kept a steady tone—Beep. Beep. Beep. Air was forced in and out of her lungs, something she could no longer do on her own.

She couldn’t open her eyes, and the doctors told us she was totally unaware. But when we spoke, her heart monitor would spike.

She could hear us. But what do you say? I could feel the silence weighing on me. I needed to say something. Everyone talks about last words and how important they are, but I didn’t have anything profound to say. All that I could express was thanks.

I thanked her for being my mother for 26 years as I wept by her bedside.

My brother was there, too, stroking her forehead and whispering in her ear, “It’s okay. You can relax now. Shh, just relax.”

In seconds, she let go, and the nurses silenced the machines before telling us, “She’s gone.”

It was my first very real, up-close-and-personal experience with death. My mom had been sick for a while, though. I had time to think about her dying and how I would handle it, but thankfulness was probably the last thing I thought I would feel.

But if you think about it, that may be the most natural thing a Christian can feel. Even in the most mournful moments following my mom’s death, I knew, because God has called me into knowing His merciful plan, that I had so much to be thankful for.

As Christians, that hope we have in God’s coming Kingdom is priceless and something we can never lose. It is what keeps us grounded in unstable times.

When Scripture tells us to give thanks in everything, it doesn’t just mean in pleasant times (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Though that can be hard to wrap our minds around, it’s a vital lesson in thanksgiving.

The Bible doesn’t hide the fact that trials happen to us all, but how we handle those trials shape who we are and, ultimately, determines our happiness.

If we can be content and thankful when we experience pain or loss, then there won’t be a moment in life we can’t handle. Whatever state we are in, we must learn to be content (Philippians 4:11).

This kind of contentment, of course, can only come from our Heavenly Father. It’s not a natural human response to appreciate or love trials. When God’s Spirit lives in us, though, it’s a different story.

Difficult times help us count our blessings

Often, as was the case with me, it’s in the difficult times that you can truly see and count your innumerable blessings and draw closer to God.

You see, it’s when we are at our lowest that our hearts are moldable.

When Paul talks about God calling the weak of the world and not the high and mighty, it’s for a reason (1 Corinthians 1:26). Even David said it was when he was brought low that God helped him and worked with him (Psalm 116:6).

I find comfort in God’s plan of salvation, knowing that my mom and the entire world will know more than the pains of this physical life. They—we—will all know true peace when God’s way is the only way.

No, my mom won’t be sitting with us this Thanksgiving dinner or the many dinners to come, when our table is filled with children she never got to meet.

She’s no longer here.

But instead of dwelling on the emptiness I could feel or the great sense of loss, I choose to thank God that I’m alive, that I’m healthy and, most importantly, that I will see my mother again. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we will be changed and reunited (1 Corinthians 15:52).

The last time my mother saw me, I wore a hand-me-down red Kentucky t-shirt and blue running shorts.

The next time we see each other, her pain and mine over losing her will be gone, and we will both be clothed in fine linen, white and clean (Revelation 19:8). There’s nothing I could be more thankful for than that. GN
Beyond the Impossible

Making Peace

What can a letter to a slave owner about his runaway slave teach us about healing broken relationships? The answer is that it can teach us a great deal! by Robin Webber

Do you remember the childhood rhyme “Humpty Dumpty”? The words went: “Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the king’s horses and all the king’s men couldn’t put Humpty together again.”

But for some people these words are more than a rhyme. For them it describes the reality they’re dealing with at this very moment.

When it comes to human relationships, we may be a shattered Humpty Dumpty or we may be “all the king’s men” who feel helpless in putting relationships back together again. “Impossible!” may be the word that sticks in your mind and digs the hole deeper like a grave in your heart. Thus we just stare at the cracks and fissures that separate us from other people rather than seeking hope in God’s answers.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God” (Matthew 5:9). Peace isn’t manufactured in the vacuum of wishful thinking. It has to be made—one word, one heart, one godly motive, one person at a time. And it will cost someone—the peacemaker who puts his or her own skin in the game and heart on the line.

“But,” you might be saying, “it’s too late!” No it’s not. You have merely resigned yourself to failure too soon. The whole of Scripture reveals otherwise—that man’s extremities are but the beginning of God’s opportunities to work in us and through us.

So how do we learn to make peace beyond the seemingly impossible? How do we adhere to Jesus Christ’s encouraging admonition of “Follow Me”?

One man’s petition to pick up the pieces

We find Jesus’ pathway to peace in one man’s expression of loving concern towards another in encouraging him to pick up the pieces and restore a broken relationship. It’s the story of three men who are all Christians. But here lies the rub—one was a prisoner, one was a slave owner, and one was his runaway slave.

It’s the story of the apostle Paul, a prisoner in Rome, a slave owner named Philemon, and a slave named Onesimus. Here we discover the practical application of the wisdom expressed in Proverbs 25:11: “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.” Here we find the spiritual reality in our human world that living “in Christ” is the key to making peace beyond the impossible.

How impossible was the situation confronting these three men? The Roman Empire in which they lived had approximately 250 million inhabitants. It’s estimated that one fourth to half of the population were slaves. Some worked in quarries or in the galleys, some were household servants, and some were teachers and even government bureaucrats, but all were slaves.

Aristotle, the noted Greek philosopher, reasoned in his treatise Politics that a slave was “a piece of property” and “a tool for action” who belonged to others. This accepted cultural classification and driving economic force was kept intact by brutal force.

It’s here in Paul’s letter to Philemon that the apostle must break those bonds of fear and bring the runaway slave Onesimus and the slave owner Philemon back together again in a classic “Humpty Dumpty” mess.

Paul begins his letter in verse 1 by reminding Philemon that Paul himself is lacking freedom, since he is a “prisoner of Christ Jesus” and not merely of Rome. This is the beginning wake-up call to Philemon to understand that nothing happens apart from God’s will—even Paul’s physical limitations.

Although he is a prisoner, Paul offers blessings and gifts not from himself but from God to the slave owner. He offers the blessings of God framed in the two great greetings of the ancient world—“grace” (charis in Greek), used by Hellenistic people, and “peace” (shalom in Hebrew), but here translated into Greek as eirene, which

Paul wrote his letter to Philemon encouraging him to accept his runaway slave Onesimus as a brother—and had Onesimus hand-deliver the letter to Philemon.

as eirene, which speaks to reconciliation among men.

This is how Paul begins and will end his letter, framing his petition within the book-ends of God’s gifts. He reminds Philemon that God has continued divine involvement in a life that might have stormy moments and not merely calm waters, but that the answers will be forthcoming to maintain an inner peace no matter what may come our way.

He goes on to share what Philemon and his family have graciously done by having the local church congregation meet in their house (verse 2) and that their reputation is one of “love and faith . . . toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints” (verse 5, emphasis added throughout).

But Paul makes it plain that such good is “in Christ Jesus” (verse 6). There’s something at work here beyond mere human kindness. Now Paul is going to stretch Philemon far out of his comfort zone. Remem-
ber Paul’s words about Philemon’s “love and faith . . . toward all the saints”? Philemon is about to find out how encompassing “all” really is!

Moving bodies or heart

It’s only in verses 8-10 that Paul makes his appeal (not complaint) with gentle wisdom: “Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love . . . for my son [figuratively speaking] Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains” (New International Version).

Paul recognized that he had to move more than bodies on this one—he had to move hearts!

He shares with Philemon an incredible turnaround in Onesimus’ personal life. Onesimus, whose name literally meant “profitable,” only now is truly living up to it and is mutually beneficial to both Paul and his concerned master—so much so that Paul is “sending him back” and tells Philemon to receive this man whom Paul now calls “my own heart” (verses 11-12).

Paul is putting “skin in the game”—laying his own heart on the line. The apostle mentions he would actually like to keep Onesimus with him, but it’s Philemon’s decision alone, and anything must be by his consent, without compulsion and strictly voluntary (verse 14).

Paul then adds words that bring to mind Romans 8:28, which states, “All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” He proposes to Philemon: “Perhaps the reason he [Onesimus] was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good—no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord” (verses 15-16, NIV).

Here Paul stretches Philemon’s mind and heart beyond the momentary inconvenience and the challenges that might lie ahead.

How do we come at life?

For Onesimus to go back to his owner and for Philemon to accept him was incredibly challenging in that time period. Reclaimed runaway slaves could be beaten, branded with the letters “FUG” (meaning fugitive, from the Latin fugitivus), or even killed, some by crucifixion. After all, slaves were only a “tool” according to Aristotle, and the system had to be maintained by fear.

Onesimus had everything to lose. Philemon, on the other hand, could be ostracized by his fellow citizens if he dealt too leniently with the runaway. His family or career could be put in jeopardy.

There’s always a human risk and spiritual challenge in heeding Christ’s words of “Follow Me”—not only then, but also now as we seek solutions as to how to put back together the “Humpty Dumpty” of broken or scarred relationships.

It’s in his appeal towards Philemon as a “beloved friend and fellow laborer” (verse 1), “brother” (verse 7), Onesimus as a “son” (verse 10), and once again Philemon, now as “a partner” in receiving Onesimus “as you would me” (verse 17), that we see the language, tone and revelation summed up elsewhere in Paul’s words: “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew [Paul] nor Greek, there is neither slave [Onesimus] nor free [Philemon], there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26-28).

The reality at that time in the Roman Empire made it impractical for Paul and the fledgling fellowship of Christians to confront the exterior culture and circumstances affecting these two men. But their personal culture in which they chose to approach and deal with one another certainly could be transformed in recognizing that God through Christ is doing something miraculous.

God truly is creating a new identity and new path forward in how we come to life and how we deal with those “Humpty Dumptys” moments that paralyze us and prevent us from moving forward. Paul spells it out in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

Paul, the human bridge between two estranged men, begins to conclude by saying to Philemon, “Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord” (verse 20). Previously Paul had been refreshed by Philemon’s previous reputation, but now the apostle is asking to be newly refreshed by how Philemon will respond to his appeal for reconciliation.

He encourages Philemon forward by stating, “Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say” (verse 21).

“Therefore”

Paul concludes this personally handwritten letter (verse 19) by echoing the opening—“the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit” (verse 25). He reminds Philemon that God’s initiative, invitation and involvement in his life is nothing he could earn or achieve on his own—it’s a gift.

It’s good to be reminded where God found us, while we were in slavery to sin (Romans 6:17, 20, 22). Now it was time to pass it on to Onesimus! Paul, now imprisoned where he could lose everything, including life itself, must’ve recognized that one of the greatest forms of slavery is being stuck in the past, paralyzed in the present and petrified of what might occur in the future. He appealed to Philemon to think in a way foreign to our human nature.

Paul wrote his letter to Philemon encouraging him to accept his runaway slave Onesimus as a brother—and had Onesimus hand-deliver the letter to Philemon.

Christ knew that we would need all the help that we could receive from above in dealing with the “Humpty Dumptys” of life here below. That’s why He left us with a promise: “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

With such promises in place, I leave you to fill in the blanks as you allow God to write His story in you, making possible the impossible, as you continue to heed Christ’s calling of “Follow Me!”

“My sheep Hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).
Anna Wagner Keichline was born in 1889 and grew up in Bellefonte, Pennsylvania. At an early age she demonstrated remarkable aptitude in art and wood crafting. To help develop these talents, her parents prepared a small home workshop and equipped it with a variety of carpentry tools.

By age 14 Anna won first prize at a county fair for designing and building a small table out of oak. An Oct. 18, 1903, Philadelphia Inquirer article stated that Anna's prizewinning table showed craftsmanship “comparable to that of a highly skilled mechanic.” It further noted, “Such a liking has she taken to industrial art that Miss Anna Keichline expects to make it her life study.”

After graduating high school in 1906, Anna advanced toward her goal by registering at Pennsylvania State College (now Penn State University) as the only woman enrolled in the mechanical engineering program. The following year she transferred to Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, to pursue a degree in architecture.

Among the first women to practice architecture

Graduating in 1911, she became the fifth woman to earn a degree from Cornell and was among the first women in the United States to practice the profession. Throughout her career Anna designed buildings in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Washington, D.C. These included private homes and apartment buildings, a school, an automobile dealership, a theatre, a church and many other commercial structures.

Besides designing buildings, Anna was also a prolific inventor and was awarded several U.S. patents. For example, in 1924 she patented the “K-Brick,” which was a forerunner of today's standard concrete block.

Although Anna was a gifted inventor, her unique architectural designs were the mainstay of a vibrant and highly productive career. Her successful, pioneering work was honored in 2002 by an official Pennsylvania historical marker placed in her hometown near one of her notable architectural creations.

Architecture requires intelligent planning

Just as it was in Anna Keichline's time, successful architects today must be highly proficient in planning, engineering and communicating their unique ideas to clients. From the smallest house to the tallest skyscraper, functional, safe and economical architectural creations require intelligent planning and careful implementation through to a project’s completion.

While these are basic requirements for human architects, they are of supreme importance to the Eternal God as the Master Architect of all things visible and invisible (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16). From start to finish, He has planned meticulously every detail of His perfect architectural blueprint (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40).

He says: “From the beginning I revealed the end. From long ago I told you things that had not yet happened, saying, ‘My plan will stand, and I’ll do everything I intended to do’” (Isaiah 46:10, God’s Word Translation).

As you observe the stars sparkling in the night sky or view images of galaxies photographed by the Hubble Space Telescope, a question obviously arises: What was God’s purpose in designing and constructing the vast universe? And equally important, why did He create humankind?

Part of the answer to the first question is that God fashioned the universe to display His awesome majesty and power (Psalm 8:1). “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Psalm 19:1, New International Version).

God is creating His own family

But why did God create you and all humanity? The Bible provides the clear, exciting answer: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God” (1 John 3:1). The Lord Almighty is in fact developing His own family and seeks to share His life and creation with His offspring (Ephesians 3:15; Hebrews 2:10).

Having formed you in His exact image, it is His desire that you and all others have a special, Father-child relationship with Him throughout eternity (Genesis 1:26-27; 2 Corinthians 6:18). Scripture explains: “But one has somewhere testified: ‘What is man that You remember him, or the son of man that You care for him? You made him lower than the angels for a short time; You crowned him with glory and honor and subjected everything under his feet.’” For in
The Church is not a physical structure, but an assembly of people, few in number, whom God chooses to call out of human society (Matthew 16:18; 1 Corinthians 3:9). Through repentance, obedience and baptism, He gives them His matchless gift of His Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

As new disciples, they begin a rewarding life of growing in character and helping to spread the good news of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God (Matthew 28:19; 2 Peter 3:18). Like Abraham, they too anticipate the time when they will govern with Christ as kings and priests in God’s coming government on earth (Revelation 1:6).

God does not forget or neglect anyone

While the eternal God is working with these few individuals, He certainly does not forget or neglect the multiple billions of other people around the world. Although every one of them will eventually have the opportunity to become a child in God’s spiritual household, He has chosen to work with them in a different manner. This involves what they experience during their lifetimes, and most importantly, how they later apply what they learned.

While God desires that all people would choose to obey His commandments, which are designed for their good, He has given them freedom to decide whether they will or will not (Deuteronomy 30:19).

He has an important purpose in granting human beings free will. He wants everyone to ultimately grasp that without His instruction and guidance, their way of life—deciding for themselves what is right and wrong—leads to only suffering and destruction (Matthew 7:13). “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

To help people comprehend this critical lesson, God has, over the centuries, allowed nations to form and experience every conceivable governmental and economic system.

Through this lengthy process He is demonstrating that all humanity designed governments, including modern democracies, are utterly incapable of equitably and uprightly serving and guiding their citizens (Jeremiah 10:23; 17:9). In a perceptive observation about human rule, the renowned World War II-era British prime minister Winston Churchill wrote: “Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others.”

When individuals and nations govern themselves without God’s direction, failure is always the result (Romans 3:10-18). Evidence of this has been witnessed throughout history in the evil, anguish, poverty and warfare that has afflicted humanity relentlessly.

God is planning a wonderful future for you

However, God will allow these terrible conditions to exist for only so long. The situation will reach a final, defining moment near the end of human rule on earth when relationships between nations will grow so dangerous as to threaten human extinction (Matthew 24:9, 21-22).

But just before man reaches this point of self-extermination, Jesus Christ will return to the earth in overwhelming power to prevent it from happening (Revelation 19:11-16). He will do so out of infinite love for humankind and because His loyal, obedient brethren will be living through that frightful period (Matthew 24:22).

Not only will Christ save humanity from destruction, but He will set up the Kingdom of God on earth (Matthew 6:10). Jesus will take over the reins of government from human beings and will rule as King of Kings with the assistance of His resurrected saints (Revelation 19:16; 1 Thessalonians 3:13). Then the next electrifying phase of God’s architectural plan will begin.

Returning to Anna Keichline, as one of the first women to enter and master the architectural profession, she carefully planned and implemented her projects through to completion. While this is fundamental for successful human architects, it is of paramount importance to the Eternal God as Master Architect of all things.

Not only has He designed the perfect blueprint to wonderfully transform human society, but He has also designed an exhilarating future for you and all people. How well are you preparing now to become a member of God’s coming divine family? GN
New name for the magazine

I was very pleased to read of your decision to go with the new title Beyond Today for your magazine. Your board of directors has carefully and prayerfully analyzed the best direction to take, and I am confident our Heavenly Father will bless your efforts immensely. I want to be a part of that good work! Enclosed is my offering to help cover the costs of publishing and mailing the magazines.

Subscriber in Michigan

Thanks for your encouragement! Beginning with the next issue, the name will change from The Good News to Beyond Today. Readers can find more details in the editorial on page 2 of this issue.

Grateful for the magazine, TV program and videos

I enjoy reading your Good News magazine and viewing your Beyond Today program. Very uplifting, inspiring and professional—great spiritual food. Thank you for providing this excellent service.

From the Internet

Here’s to a courageous group of people steadily obeying and pleasing God by doing His will, and following the instructions laid out in the Holy Bible for all peoples at all times. Thank you.

Subscriber in Oklahoma

Thank you for being a blessing to me and every person watching your Bible study videos and sermons; they are highly appreciated.

Viewer in South Africa

We’re glad you appreciate and learn from them! Our Bible studies are available online at BeyondToday.tv (click the “Webcast” tab), and our sermons are available at www.ucg.org/sermons.

Thanks so much for the publications you sent me. I came in contact with your magazine many years ago in a friend’s house, and subsequently made a request to receive it. When I received some of your booklets, I studied them all. In particular, I had special interest in The Middle East in Bible Prophecy and The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy. I hail from Borno State, Nigeria, which is the epicenter of Boko Haram. A number of my relations were killed by this group. As a Christian I asked, “Why?” Your publications gave me the biblical answer. Keep up the good work. May God bless your ministry.

Reader in Nigeria

Request for booklet from prison

I am currently incarcerated in Louisiana. At my last institution I read your booklet The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy and was astonished by its teaching. Because the booklet belonged to someone else, I was unable to bring it with me when I transferred here. I have told many people about it, and it has stirred a lot of interest at this prison. Since there are no publications from your church at this prison, can you please mail me a copy of The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy and The Book of Revelation Unveiled?

Reader in Louisiana

Looking for a congregation

I would like to know if you can refer me to a strict, uncompromising church. I like your mission statement. It is critical that every true Church of God has a discipleship program in place to help facilitate the spiritual growth and development of its believers. I am hungry and thirsty to be a member of a true Bible-teaching church. I anxiously await your response. Thank you kindly.

Reader in Brooklyn, New York

I stumbled upon your Beyond Today program and was so glad to find somebody on TV truly preaching and teaching God’s Word. Can you send your TV schedule and your church’s location?

Viewer in Texas

Appreciates abundant website information

I am so grateful for the abundance of information you have on your website. I am “hungry and thirsty” for God. Your website seems limitless with clear, broken-down examples for me to better understand Scripture and connect it to my life. God bless you!

Internet reader

We’re glad you found our study guides helpful. Those you requested are on their way to you.

Looking for a congregation

I want to know if you have a group here in Riyadh, so that I can enjoy and learn your teachings!

Reader in Saudi Arabia

Appreciates abundant website information

It is a pleasure to let you know that I have been to your website and have been so much attracted to learn more for our spiritual growth here. Indeed it is good work done, and you are going to be a blessing to many who have not seen the light especially here in Kenya and other parts of the world.

Internet reader in Kenya

One important aspect of keeping God’s festivals is, wherever possible, to assemble with others who also celebrate them. The United Church of God observes God’s feast days throughout the year. Contact us at the address listed in the front of this magazine or at www.ucg.org/churches to find out more about when these festivals are being observed and where.

Wondering how to keep God’s festivals

I would like to request the booklet God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind. I watched the Beyond Today presentation about them and would like to know how to celebrate them.

Viewer in Christchurch, New Zealand

I have read your booklet God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind. I would love to learn more of what I need to do for each of the festivals that God wants us to observe. Is there any way I can learn what to do on each of these Holy Days that would please God? Thanks!

From the Internet

Blaspheming the Holy Spirit?

My mouth dropped at your Beyond Today program “Is God a Trinity?” Do you deny the Holy Spirit? Because if you do, that is the only sin not pardonable. God mentions Himself, His Son, and the Holy Spirit separately. When you believe in the saving grace by God through his son Jesus, you will receive the Holy Spirit, which guides us to be like Jesus. How can you not see the Trinity?

Viewer in Toronto, Canada

Visit The Good News on Facebook

Are you on Facebook? If so, visit our Good News magazine fan page. See what other readers are saying. Find links to interesting articles and Web commentaries. Become a Good News magazine Facebook fan!

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

-K.T., Good News magazine Facebook fan

www.facebook.com/GoodNewsMagazine
Questions & Answers

Q: How does a person receive the Holy Spirit, and how does that tie in with baptism?

A: The apostle Peter summed up how we receive the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Notice that receiving God’s Spirit involves a process. First, Peter says we are to “repent.” To repent means to change your mind and heart to turn toward God. It means realizing that you have sinned, that sin exists in your life, that you regret those sins and that you want to leave that way of life behind to follow God from that point forward. But repentance is not a one-time event; it’s a way of life. It means constantly turning away from sin and the temptation to sin to wholeheartedly surrender in obedience to God. Obeying God is a key requirement. Acts 5:32 tells us that God gives the Holy Spirit “to those who obey Him.” After we take that first step of repentance, we must then be baptized. Being fully submerged in water makes for a powerful metaphor: We are burying the old person in a watery grave, and the new person who comes up out of the water is a new creation (Romans 6:3-4; 2 Corinthians 5:17). Being baptized means we are inviting God to live in us through His Holy Spirit so He can help us make this lifelong change and commitment to follow Him in all we do.

After a person comes up out of the waters of baptism, a minister of Jesus Christ lays hands on him or her and prays for God to grant the person the gift of His Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17; Hebrews 6:1-2). If the person has truly repented, God then gives His Holy Spirit—and no, it doesn’t come down like a dove or with tongues of fire, these signs for others being unique instances in Scripture. The baptized person probably won’t feel dramatically different after coming out of the water or after having hands laid on his or her head. We know we have received God’s Spirit because we can lean on God to help overcome the negativity of the world, to shoulder the worst disappointments, to continue on in the face of opposition, and to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18) as we study to make God’s Word an integral part of our lives.

Notice that with God’s Spirit, we can do all these things. Receiving that Spirit does not make us perfect. In fact, we may even become discouraged at times as we see additional sins in our lives and other areas that we need to change! We all make mistakes and stumble and fall at times. But leading a life of repentance means we can and should depend on the transforming power of the Spirit of God every single day to acknowledge those mistakes and then fix them.

If you are thinking about baptism and see this need to make changes in your life, the United Church of God has ministers around the world who can assist you and answer your questions. To find a congregation or minister near you, go to www.ucg.org/churches. Our ministers can give you good counsel and guide you through the process of deciding when the time is right for you to accept God’s gift of salvation by being baptized.

For more on this topic, be sure to download or request our free study aid Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion at www.GNmagazine.org/booklets, or contact our office nearest you listed on page 2 of this issue.

We do not deny the Holy Spirit when we teach from the Bible that it is not a member of a Trinity. God is a family presently consisting of God the Father and Jesus Christ. They are adding to that family by calling human beings to become like Them in the process of conversion. This happens through the power of the Holy Spirit, which is given to a person at baptism and will guide him or her into becoming like Jesus Christ, just as you stated (see also the Q&A above).

But the Holy Spirit is not a separate, conscious entity—rather, it is the power, mind and essence of God. We offer a thoroughly researched study guide on this subject titled Is God a Trinity?—available for free at www.ucg.org/booklets. We urge our readers to thoroughly examine what the Bible actually says—and does not say—about the Trinity (a word, incidentally, found nowhere in the Bible).

Support for spreading the Word of God

Your magazine gives so much helpful information for me in my Christian walk. Thank you for putting out a magazine that has spread the Word of God so well. My prayers are that you’ll be able to keep on sending the magazine to people. I’ll be sending a check at the end of the month.

Wisconsin subscriber

My wife and I are not members of the United Church of God. We would like to be, but the closest congregation to us is not close to where we live. We would like to send in our tithes to the United Church of God. Today I am sending our first check. We have learned much from your booklets and try to share with everyone that we can.

Readers in Georgia

I have Christian friends and relatives who hunger and thirst after righteousness, and your publications have been so helpful in directing them to the scriptures that answer so many of their questions. Seeing their excitement in putting the pieces together is exciting for me as well, and strengthens my faith. There is so little I can do physically. Perhaps God has given me more time after surviving two life-threatening health incidents to plant a few seeds of knowledge in the hearts of others. I will happily be including the United Church of God in my list of tithing recipients.

Subscriber in Wisconsin

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