

# BEYOND TODAY

Help for Today, Hope for Tomorrow

January-February 2016



## The Handwriting on the Wall:

A WARNING FOR TODAY

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# BEYOND TODAY

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**Scott Ashley**  
Managing editor

# More Good News With a New Name

**W**ith this issue we start a new chapter in the history of this magazine. For the last 20 years we've been *The Good News*—a title that, while appropriate, was not distinctive enough due to several other magazines having the same name. Our new name, *Beyond Today*, links us more closely with our *Beyond Today* television program and Internet websites.

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

This means that all those who hear that message need to change their lives and thinking, turning their backs on the way that seems right and natural to us but in the end leads only to suffering and death (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). In other words, we need to "seek the LORD while He may be found, [and] call upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55:6). This is what "repent" means—to *change* from our own ways to living *God's* way of life. We need this exhortation to change now "while it is called 'Today'" (Hebrews 3:13) because we have faith in what God says about tomorrow—about the world and our lives *beyond today*.

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

Notice Acts 1:6-8. After Jesus had been killed

and raised to life again, He appeared to His disciples. They asked Him if He would now establish that Kingdom. His response? "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

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

So although our magazine name is new, our mission and message are not. They are timeless. The message is still that of God's great plan and purpose for

you and all humanity. It's the message about why you were born, why you are here, and the astounding future your Creator has planned for you if you are willing to change your thinking and your priorities from the here and now to begin planning for your future *beyond today*.

We'll continue to open up God's Word to help you understand it—what it teaches about topics relevant to your

life, lessons we should learn from the people, places and events recorded within it, and what its prophecies reveal about where our chaotic and confused world is heading.

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

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







# The Handwriting on the Wall

What did that strange message mean for the king of Babylon long ago? What should it mean for you today? You need to understand!

by Darris McNeely

**T**he party in the king's palace in Babylon ran late into the night. The food was abundant and the wine flowed freely. Drunkenness and lack of judgment reigned.

Out of nowhere the fingers of a man's hand appeared and began writing on the wall of the room. Intoxicated by the splendor of the king's palace, the lords and ladies present had no idea of the danger of the moment.

The king and all those present became so frightened they broke out in sweat and staggered at the sight of a disembodied floating hand that was writing out a coded message on the plastered wall. When finished, the words MENE MENE TEKEL UPHARSIN stood in stark relief before the eyes of the astonished guests.

What was this strange message? What did it mean for the

king of Babylon? What does it mean for our world today?

## A world in confusion

Look around at today's world. Are we big enough or great enough to rise to the challenges of our time? Consider what is facing the nations.

The Middle East is aflame. Iran seeks to develop nuclear weapons. Their goal will continue in spite of a recent treaty promising that "Iran's nuclear program will be exclusively peaceful" and that "Iran will under no circumstances seek, develop, or acquire nuclear weapons."

This is the same nation whose leaders incite its people to chant "death to Israel" and "death to America." Its fundamentalist Shiite Muslim leadership sponsors terrorism throughout the Middle East in Syria, Iraq and Yemen.

No leader in the Middle East believes this recent agreement with Iran will lessen the tensions of the region. Clear-thinking leaders believe Iran will continue plans to develop weapons of mass destruction—and when successful, it will use them to further its apocalyptic mission. It is not a matter of *if* but *when*.

Europe is going through a very rough period. The European Union has faltered in its plan to grow an ever-closer utopian union among the nations of Europe, a region that has seen so much war and strife in the last century. The goal of peace through economic and social cooperation has fallen on a critical moment with the economic instability of Greece. EU leadership will be forced to correct this flaw—if not now, then at some point in the future.

We can gain great insight into what these major world events mean by understanding the story of the handwriting on the wall. Just as God was moving among the nations to rearrange the power structure 25 centuries ago, so He is moving to accomplish His purpose in history among the nations today. There is a higher, spiritual purpose behind today's headlines.

But are we—you and I—big enough people to rise to the challenge of the day? Are we big enough to see the handwriting on the wall of our times and listen to its meaning? We live in very serious times. We have to be able to read the handwriting on the wall just like Daniel did on that night in Babylon so long ago.

### The night the lights went out in Babylon

The biblical book of Daniel is a story of kingdoms at war during one of the most crucial periods of world history. The prophet Daniel lived at a moment of great change and upheaval. He was an intelligent young Jew taken captive to Babylon during one of Nebuchadnezzar's invasions. He found himself promoted to a key role in the court of the king of Babylon, capital of the Chaldean Neo-Babylonian Empire that spread across the Middle East.

Daniel spent his adult life working in the courts of power of two kingdoms—the kingdom of Babylon and later the kingdom of Persia. God gave Daniel the gift of understanding to interpret dreams and prophecies and even the strangest of sights—the handwriting of a floating hand that appeared in the banquet room of Belshazzar, the last Chaldean king of Babylon.

When we look at the events of that night we witness God's gift to this devout and righteous prophet, a man who stood before great kings and testified of the glory and majesty of the God of heaven. Daniel's example shows us what kind of person it takes to rise to the challenge of great moments in history. Here we see the power of the Spirit of God moving not only on the face of the earth, directing the course of nations, but in the noble life of one who humbly seeks to do God's will.

On that fateful night, a hand appeared from nowhere and wrote on the wall of the king's banquet room in front of hundreds of drunken guests. When the king saw this, "his face turned pale with fright. His knees knocked together in fear and his legs gave way beneath him" (Daniel 5:6, New Living Translation).

He cried out: "Whoever can read this writing and tell me what it means will be dressed in purple robes of royal honor and will have a gold chain placed around his neck. He will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom!" (verse 7, NLT)—third because Belshazzar was second, coregent with his father Nabonidus, who was away.

None of Belshazzar's trusted counselors were able to interpret the handwriting on the wall.

Then in walked the queen—this being evidently either his mother (wife of Nabonidus and daughter of Nebuchadnezzar) or his grandmother (the widow of Nebuchadnezzar). She said to him: "There is a man in your kingdom who has within him the spirit of the holy gods. During Nebuchadnezzar's reign, this man was found to have insight, understanding, and wisdom like that of the gods. Your predecessor, the king—your predecessor King Nebuchadnezzar—made him chief over all the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers of Babylon.

"This man Daniel . . . has exceptional ability and is filled with divine knowledge and understanding. He can interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means" (verses 11-12, NLT).

### Daniel interprets the vision

Daniel was called in. He was offered the great reward of honor, wealth and status for interpreting the handwriting. What Belshazzar did not understand was that Daniel was not a man who could be flattered or influenced by these symbols of power.

Daniel had stood before this king's predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel had actually warned that prior king—a

Look around at today's world.  
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powerful and temperamental dictator—that if he did not humble himself before the God of heaven he would become like an ignorant beast of the field, reduced to eating grass with the barest scraps of clothing on his body. This happened, and Belshazzar knew it did. But Belshazzar had not learned the lesson.

Daniel told Belshazzar: "You have proudly defied the Lord of heaven and have had these cups from his Temple brought before you. You and your nobles and your wives and concubines have been drinking wine from them while praising gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone—gods that neither see nor hear nor know anything at all. But you have not honored the God who gives you the breath of life and controls your destiny!" (verse 23, NLT)

Belshazzar was not big enough for the challenging times of his day. That very night the armies of his enemies captured mighty Babylon. A new empire replaced Babylon at the top of



the nations. This was foretold by God through the prophet Isaiah about 150 years earlier. Daniel was at this moment announcing to the Babylonian king that the God of heaven was in charge of history and was setting a new kingdom at the head of all the others.

What did the handwriting on the wall say? What should we learn from its message? And what is the message we need to take with us today?

We are living in a period of great change in today's world. Nations and power structures are realigning. Weaknesses are being exposed. Cultural shifts are taking place that are shocking to many. Where is it leading, and what does it mean?

### **An ancient message for today's world**

In the night's drunken revelry, Belshazzar had ordered the gold and silver vessels once used for a holy purpose in God's temple in Jerusalem brought into the room. These cups and bowls were then used as props in a mockery and affront to God. There is a point where God determines a culture has gone too far to allow it to go on.

When the hand appeared, it wrote the following words on the wall of the banquet room: *MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN*.


Daniel turned to the king and gave the interpretation of the inscription: "MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; PERES [*peres* is the singular form of *upharsin*]: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

These words were a listing of weights and monetary units. God was numbering, weighing and dividing out units of money in a graphic display of displeasure with the greatest empire of the time. Babylon, the great city and kingdom, a fierce and violent nation, had been examined by God and found unworthy of continuing. It was brought down and given to a new kingdom, that of the Medes and Persians.

Why was money used here as a symbol of examination and judgment? It was appropriate. Babylon was a wealthy nation that traded across the world of its day. Wealth and money had flowed into the city, making it the center of international finance. Babylon was a city that saw money flow into it like great gushing streams of water. The prophet Jeremiah described it as a city "abundant in treasure" (Jeremiah 51:13).

The Babylonian Empire was finished as a world power. Its influence would continue to flow through history and remains very much with us today. But in this moment there was a change of power.

Even then the king did not understand. Belshazzar commanded Daniel be clothed with purple, the symbol of royalty, and a chain of gold be put around his neck and to be proclaimed the third ruler in the kingdom. It was an empty gesture by a king who was completely out of touch with reality.



**The time is now for you to be like Daniel! The time is now to read the handwriting on the wall of our time and seek to understand the will of the God of heaven!**

That very night the king was killed, and the Medo-Persian Empire took over. Babylon had been weighed and found wanting.

Can we read the handwriting on the wall for *our* times? Can we discern what is happening among the nations of *today's* world and see God's hand moving through history? Nations and regions of the world are in turmoil. Danger is on the horizon. The cultural shifts occurring in America and other parts of the world should cause grave concern. Do we have what it takes to stand up—to rise to the occasion and meet these challenges?

### **The handwriting is on the wall today**

In many ways, life is pretty good for most in the Western world. Americans enjoy the highest standard of living ever known. The poorest among us live like kings compared to people in other parts of the developing world. And yet even in the midst of the world's wealthiest period we have pockets of people who lack the basics and suffer from poverty. The social and economic problems we face in America and other nations are real in how they affect people's lives.

We see racial strife erupting in the major cities of America, reflecting deep-seated anger stemming from a social structure that is not balanced or in line with the values of godly biblical teaching.

There is a reason for this. We as a society have cut ourselves off from God. We have not wanted to keep God and His laws in the center of public life. There has been a steady erosion of biblical values and teachings for more than 50 years.



If you want to understand the reason behind the major events of recent times, the breakdown in whole segments of society and the headlong rush into a moral meltdown, look no further than three key events shaped by the United States Supreme Court. America's highest judicial body has issued landmark rulings in three areas that reflect the country's decline in the eyes of the God of heaven.

In the early 1960s the Supreme Court issued two rulings regarding prayer and Bible readings in public schools. In the first, the justices ruled that official prayer had no place in public education. A year later, the court declared school-sponsored Bible reading and recitation of the Lord's Prayer unconstitutional.

While the decisions didn't rule for or against personal expressions of faith, they were part of a period of cultural change that continues to this

day. The court ruled on a matter of great spiritual importance for a nation blessed with a unique place in the world—a place made possible by the God of heaven.

Then in 1973 the Supreme Court decided another significant landmark case, *Roe v. Wade*. This case legalized abortion in all 50 states. It sanctioned the taking of an unborn life, labeling murder a right guaranteed by the 14th amendment to the Constitution.

Since 1973 more than 50 million abortions have been legally performed in the United States alone. When a government does not protect its unborn life, it deserves the judgment of the God of life. That judgment is coming, and sooner than we might think!

The third of these rulings by the Supreme Court came in June 2015 with the legalization of same-sex marriage. In this ruling the court made up a sweeping right that same-sex marriage is guaranteed by the Constitution. Let's be plain about this highly charged issue: The United States Supreme Court has stepped beyond its temporal bounds into the spiritual realm of defying the God who created man, woman and marriage.

The court decreed that the divine institution of marriage as defined in the Bible as a sacred union between a man and woman—the only biblical definition of marriage—is superseded by its human reasoning and judgment. Human law now sanctions as marriage a relationship that God never intended—in fact, one that He in fact specifically forbids!

With these rulings America has crossed a line. We have gone from a ruling against prayer and Bible reading in public schools to sanctioning the killing of the unborn to ruling against the

biblical definition of marriage. In a little more than 50 years these decisions have taken us down a path of open public defiance of God in our most elemental parts of life.

We as a people grope blindly, trying to see our way forward, not knowing that we are poor and blind and miserable and naked. And now we wait, wondering when God will act with a fire of judgment upon us.

### Will you read the handwriting on the wall?

I wonder just where God might be in His evaluation of our world today. Does He see our state of affairs and pause in thought, determining it is time to put a stop to this?

I don't know when that might occur, but I do know that you and I must come to a place and time in our lives when we must act to stand in opposition to sinful society, turning toward God and changing our ways.

Are we big enough for the challenge of our times? For you and me, the challenge is to turn away from this world and begin to live by the teachings of the world to come, the Kingdom of God. That in itself determines whether we can face the challenges with the only power that makes a real difference—God's Spirit and the teachings of the Kingdom of God.

Daniel in his day at Babylon stood for the Kingdom of God in the midst of the raging wars of the kingdoms of Babylon and Persia. For Daniel the choice was clear. God's Kingdom—along with the way he had known since a child—was the only right choice. The God he served was the one true God who lives, unlike the gods of stone and wood and metal he saw in the temples of Babylon.

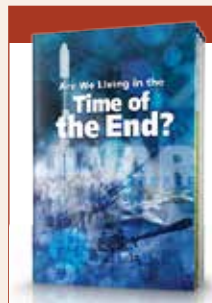
For Daniel, the collapse of his own nation of Judah was done at the will and the hand of his God and served a greater purpose. The gods of Babylon were empty and worthless, unable to hear or see and clearly unable to prevent the demise of Babylon.

The time is now for you to be like Daniel! The time is now to read the handwriting on the wall of our time and seek to understand the will of the God of heaven!

The king and lords and ladies of Babylon were not great enough for their time. Are you up to the challenges of our time? Too many tread endless circles of mediocrity and accept shabby lies and fictions of today's culture as truth. The result is that we build our lives on shifting sands. When the winds of difficulty blow, they may not stand. It is a sobering thought.

The time is now to take action. The time is now to see the handwriting on the wall and rise to a higher calling and a higher way of life. The time is now to seek the God of heaven and live!

The handwriting is on the wall. Can you read what it says and move to change your life? **BT**



### LEARN MORE

Where is our world headed—and more importantly, *why*? Why is our world in so much never-ending turmoil? What does it all mean—and what does it mean for you? You need to understand the answers. Be sure to download or request our informative study guide *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*

[www.BTmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.BTmagazine.org/booklets)



# Can We Read the Handwriting on **OUR WALL?**

**T**he story in Daniel 5, in which a hand appears out of nowhere during Belshazzar's feast and writes a message announcing his downfall, has inspired both music and art. To read the account is a peek into a night in Babylon when the king and elite partied themselves and their city into the hands of another king, Cyrus of Persia.

The vision has vivid lessons for each of us today—lessons that can help us meet the challenge of this time and this age in world history.

Belshazzar was an unpopular regent put in charge of Babylon by his father Nabonidus. For reasons unknown Nabonidus had left the city for several years and was an absentee king. Historians debate why he left this most critical city of the empire. Some propose that he was away fighting battles on other fronts. Others believe he was a mystic who, after making religious reforms by replacing the chief gods of the city with another single deity, traveled to Arabia seeking religious enlightenment.

This latter possibility is interesting in light of the witness of the one true God given to King Nebuchadnezzar by the prophet Daniel. Like an earlier Egyptian pharaoh, Akhenaton, who overturned the chief gods with a monotheistic god, was Nabonidus upsetting the established religious order of Babylon and incurring the wrath of the religious and financial class?

We don't know the reasons for Nabonidus' absence. But the fact that the queen came into the scene and reminded Belshazzar that Daniel, a man in whom was divine wisdom, tells us the influence of God through Daniel was enduring and deeper into the royal court than one might think. God's witness through Daniel impacted Babylonian life.

Daniel's interpretation of the handwriting revealed the kingdom was numbered and finished, weighed and found wanting and divided into the hand of the Medes and Persians. This warning gives us a measuring stick for our lives today.

Babylon had received a unique witness of God through Daniel. Little did Nebuchadnezzar and his successors realize the significance of taking this Jewish captive into the inner circle of Babylonian government. Daniel stood toe to toe with the great king and on several occasions explained in clear terms that there was a God whose power and purpose would always far exceed that of the king.

Babylon had a witness but did not change its ways, and in time God's judgment brought the downfall of the kingdom and its deliverance into the hand of another. Babylon's time in history had come to an end.

Times of political crisis and moments of great societal change call for individuals to recognize how to respond and rise to the challenge. We are in such a time today!

Great events are reshaping the Middle East. Millions of immigrants, the most since World War II, are flowing from the region into Europe. This massive influx of people threatens the

established order of the European Union.

Couple this with increased terror attacks on Europe, like the Nov. 13 attack in Paris, and a severe national security issue is created. More attacks will come. At some point a response will be triggered that will lead to a reshaping of the world order. A leader capable of restoring order will emerge. No one among the present European leaders seems capable of standing up to this crisis.

America's historic role of bringing order to chaos is fading. America continues its shift to a culture that no longer recognizes the God of the Bible or His commandments and teachings. With last year's Supreme Court decision to legalize same-sex marriage, the nation crossed a line from which there is no turning back. Human law in a land that should know God has denied the supreme law of the Kingdom of God. The current field of political leaders are not up to the times.

These and other examples show increased antagonism

**Will you stand against the culture of today's modern Babylon? Will you seek the wisdom of the Holy God as Daniel did?**

toward any who would argue for the rule of God in any part of modern society. With the majority of Americans shifting to acceptance of immorality, we are moving toward a climate where teaching God's standard of moral behavior will bring direct opposition, even from the law of the land. We have entered a time when God will be seeking those who "sigh and cry over the abominations" plaguing our society (Ezekiel 9:4).

Will you stand against the culture of today's modern Babylon? Will you seek divine wisdom just as Daniel did?

Daniel gives us an example to follow in our time. He refused to compromise with God's instruction in the face of convenience and temptation. He wasn't afraid to talk about God and explain the will and purpose of the true God even when it could have cost him his livelihood and even his life.

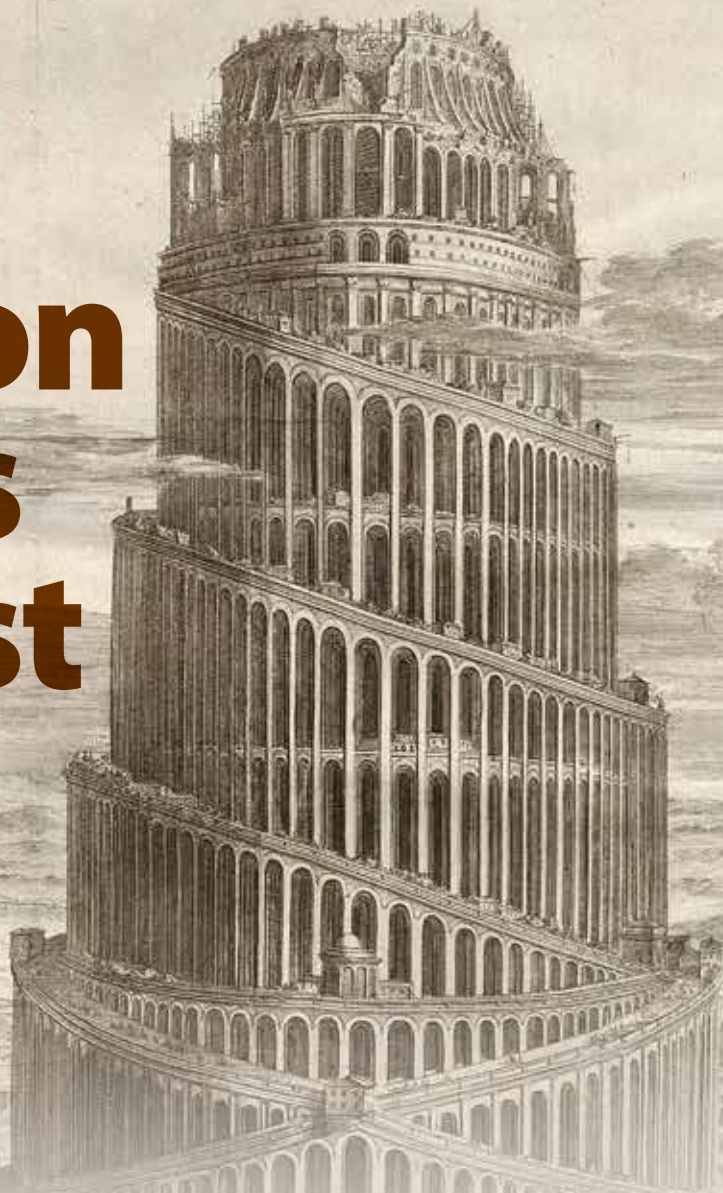
He prayed three times a day and wanted to understand the times of his life and how they fit into God's plans for the nations. By living a lifetime of faith, Daniel gained insight into life, his own life and God's plan for all nations.

Here's a vital lesson to take away from this story: We are writing a story on our own wall of life each day—by our words, thoughts and actions. We must see God's hand in history and in our lives. A day is fast approaching when we will be numbered and weighed.

Will we be found faithful? It's a crucial question to ponder as we see world events moving the nations to a time of judgment! **BT**



# Babylon Stands Against God



Bible prophecy shows a coming superpower called “Babylon the Great” will rise to dominate global events before Jesus Christ returns. God says to His people, “Come out of her . . . don’t take part in her sins.” What does this mean for you?

by Darris McNeely

**C**ould your religion—your faith—withstand the great deception prophesied to come upon the world?

The Bible contains a fascinating and mysterious book of prophecy titled Daniel after its author. In this book we see an outline of history that carries down to our time—today’s world.

Through the story of the prophet Daniel, we also see how one person could keep faith toward God in the middle of an ungodly culture and society called Babylon.

Our world today resembles this

ancient culture of Babylon more than we realize. By looking at the story of Daniel, we can understand how we can maintain faith in God in the midst of a modern Babylon. Today more than ever we need the lessons of Daniel’s experience to understand the world around us and to live by God’s teachings.

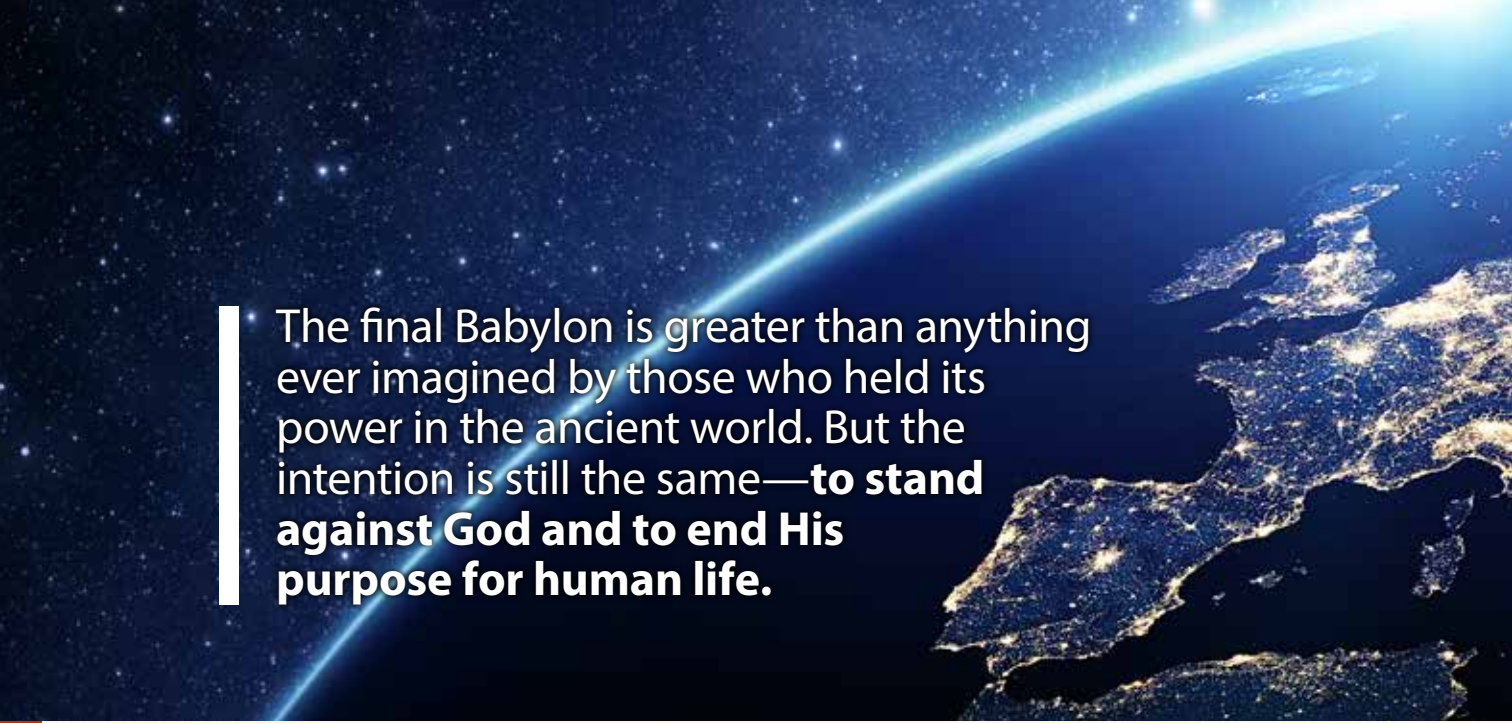
Daniel’s story begins with the invasion of the kingdom of Judah and his deportation to Babylon. Babylon was the capital of the world’s most powerful nation. Along with the best minds and talents in Jerusalem, Daniel found himself thrust by God’s will and his own faith into a key position in the

court of Nebuchadnezzar II, one of the most intriguing figures in history.

God gave Daniel insight into visions and dreams. Daniel wisely used his gifts to glorify God while not giving in to the temptations of Babylonian culture. Let’s understand what the Bible tells us about this ancient city and the empire called Babylon. We’ll start at the beginning of the story, in Genesis.

## The story of a man and his city

It begins with a man called Nimrod, who is mentioned in Genesis 10. The Bible tells us only a little about him: “Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be



The final Babylon is greater than anything ever imagined by those who held its power in the ancient world. But the intention is still the same—to stand against God and to end His purpose for human life.

a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, ‘Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD.’ And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel” (Genesis 10:8-10).

Let’s dig into what the Bible says about Nimrod. He was a man who rose above his peers and contemporaries and became, as it says, a mighty hunter before God. “Before” in this case is negative—in the sense of being “in God’s face,” challenging Him.

And Nimrod’s claim to fame as a mighty hunter may imply more than simply being an accomplished slayer of animals—though he may have proved himself a strongman through such pursuits, gaining glory for himself. This role no doubt characterized his rule—the rule of a *tyrant*.

God’s ideal of a leader is that of a shepherd, not a tyrant. A shepherd guides and shields those in his care. A shepherd is a kind, caring and attentive leader who lovingly looks over a flock to preserve and to keep them, not hunt them and kill them and exploit them. Nimrod originated a system that acts as a predator of people.

Babel was the *beginning* of his kingdom—a kingdom that expanded into an empire.

Babel—or Babylon—is both a city *and* a system that the Bible shows endures throughout human experience. It enslaves the bodies and souls of men into a complex mesh of economics, politics and religion. Nimrod chained others to his wicked and greedy ambitions. In him we see the roots of what Babylon becomes. Babylon will rise again in the end time to dominate the world in one final attempt to build a “city” or *system* that defies the purpose of God.

### Reaching defiantly to the heavens

Genesis tells us another story about the city founded by Nimrod. It involves the famous Tower of Babel.

“Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar [or Mesopotamia], and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.’ They had

brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.’

“But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, ‘Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.’

“So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth” (Genesis 11:1-9).

Here we see the gathering of people together—one language, one speech. A civilization begins to develop in brick and stone. They say, “Let us build a city, and a tower whose top reaches to heaven.” That is a symbol of a human desire to exalt itself through culture above God.

The Tower of Babel represents a cultural unity where people work and create together. A tower that “reached to the heavens” shows their effort to defy the plan and purpose of God.

God could not allow this act of defiance. He confounded the language in order to scatter the people. What did God see in the hearts of these people creating this tower? It was an effort to defy Him and thwart His plan through a global effort to harness human wealth and skills.

Here in Babel is the seed of a system that spans the history of mankind into our day and beyond. Babylon, the city and the empire that rose from it, represented society in opposition to God’s way of life. It would continue to grow to become a great empire that would one day break the walls of Jerusalem and burn the temple built to honor God.

It’s important to remember Nimrod and Babel. He is not the last figure in the Bible who will defy God in this





manner. A similar ruler will appear again at the time of the end.

### Daniel stands against Babylon

Let's fast forward to the time of Daniel and look at the character of this prophet. Daniel found himself among the Jewish captives transported to Babylon after an invasion by Nebuchadnezzar's armies. Nebuchadnezzar was a tyrant, the spiritual heir of Nimrod. He commanded armies and the political, religious system that grew out of the culture Nimrod founded. Babylon was the larger, more powerful version of Babel. Daniel would need strong faith and courage to stand against this culture.

Daniel was taken to Babylon to be trained as a civil servant in the government. The king's court was full of food, wine and delicacies—a place of physical pleasure. The Babylonians valued such feasting and didn't follow biblical restrictions on what they ate. For Daniel, this was not an option. He knew God had certain standards in what human beings are to eat (see Leviticus 11). God's law had determined how he would live, and there would be no compromise in his mind.

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" (Daniel 1:8, New Living Translation).

Daniel set his heart and his mind not to compromise with teaching and laws he knew to be eternal and unchangeable for the sake of convenience or to just go

along with the times. Even in the face of the lavish temptations of Babylon, 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.

Later, when Daniel heard the king had a dream no one could interpret, he asked for time and opportunity to know the dream and its meaning. With his friends, Daniel sought "mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret" (Daniel 2:18).

This is quite a contrast in attitude to that of Nimrod, the tyrant who stood before God and defied His sovereignty. You and I need to be like Daniel!

### Discern your times like Daniel

Daniel was a righteous man who was caught up in a period of great world upheaval. Instead of being overcome by the rapid changes happening in his life, he leaned into the wind and doubled down on his faith and belief in the great God. Instead of giving in to the lights and the glamor of Babylon, he remembered the grace and humility of Jerusalem—the city God chose. He chose to stand firm in the faith of his fathers and obey God rather than man.

Beyond that, he wanted to understand what this great empire and city called Babylon meant to the world. To use a term Jesus used, Daniel wanted to "discern" his time. He wanted to understand the current events and trends of his day. He went to God in prayer, asking for wisdom and insight into these events. And God gave Daniel that understanding.

God can give *you* that same under-

standing! The news today is filled with events that are reshaping the world we once knew. How do we understand this in light of what the Bible teaches and foretells? We do what Daniel did! We go to God in prayer, and we study the Bible to understand what's happening in the world. Daniel would pray three times a day and ask God for understanding about the events in his day (Daniel 6:10). And God gave him an understanding about world history down into our time and to the coming of Jesus Christ.

Why does it matter that we discern our time? Because the Babylon we see from the time of Daniel is prophesied to have another life, a modern form that will emerge from the midst of today's world!

### The Babylon of the future

God gave to Daniel the understanding and interpretation of a dream by King Nebuchadnezzar. The king dreamed of a giant statue made from different materials (Daniel 2). The gold head of the image in that dream represented Babylon. The head directs the body. Babylon is an age-long system continuing to impact today's world.

*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* says this about Babylon: "Babylon is . . . understood as the archetypal head of all entrenched worldly resistance to God. Babylon is an age-long reality . . . Babylon, the mother of all harlots, is the great source and reservoir of enmity to God . . . which gives power and authority to false gods . . . She is the antithesis of the virgin bride of Christ, the holy city, the New Jerusalem, the kingdom of God" (p. 338, "Babylon (NT)").

Kingdoms are at war today flowing out of the story of Babylon we see in the book of Daniel. We can pick up the story in Revelation 17, where we see a set of coming events that form the concluding chapter of the story of Babylon the Great.

In Revelation 17, we are told of a time in the future where the world is at a critical juncture of greed, war and human incompetence. The global systems of commerce and government are on the verge of catastrophe. Currency and economic structures will collapse if something is not done.

At the moment when armies are poised to gather and people can do nothing but

blaspheme God, we see that something emerges that promises to preserve and protect the global world order.

The apostle John sees in vision a woman riding a beast (Revelation 17:3). This woman symbolizes a false church, a religious system that has influence over political governments throughout history. The Beast here is a political system.

What does this mean? Briefly, we are looking at a biblical description of a combination of church and state that existed from ancient times. The multiheaded “Beast” ridden by this woman represents a historic relationship between a religious and political system through the centuries up to today. Here John is seeing this system in its final appearance. It’s a global power that will astound the world.

It might seem like this scene is an impossibility when we look at the way our present world is structured. In Europe, religion is not the great power depicted here. Yet religion is not dead in Europe, and it’s certainly not in other parts of the world. Religion rules the Middle East with the rise of militant Islam and its impact around the world.

Daniel’s example of faith in Babylon of old is a lesson for us as we face the coming Babylon the Great. Just like Nimrod’s Babel, the end-time Babylon will stand against God.

### Babylon rules over a broken world

How will this end-time Babylonian system come into power? The Bible reveals there will be a crisis so great that it shakes the world with fear. Out of this moment someone steps forward offering a solution to the world crisis. A powerful combined political and religious system emerges. It will deceive the entire world.

The book of Revelation describes the culmination of this time symbolically: “And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:13-14).

What does this all mean? The dragon here is a symbol of Satan, the great deceiver of mankind. God rips the curtain aside and shows the real power behind the turmoil of the nations—both today and at the end. The nations of the world are at war because of the powerful spiritual forces that war against God and His purposes on earth.

This final Babylon the Great is larger than anything ever imagined by those who held its power in the ancient world. But the intention is still the same—to stand against God and to end His purpose for human life.

*What, then, does all this really mean for you?* What the Bible reveals about the future is of course fascinating. And it’s important to be aware of and educated about it. But why should you be concerned?

This knowledge should motivate you *to holy conduct*. You need to fill up your life with God so you’re not deceived. Jesus wants you to understand this lesson: “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame” (Revelation 16:15).

Jesus Christ tells us *to consider our spiritual condition*. If your spiritual life isn’t rooted in strong biblical teaching and faith and good moral conduct, you stand in danger of being

caught in the web of this end-time deception!

### Prepare for Babylon now

Do you think you have the ability to stand against the deception of this final hour? Don’t be too sure! You may consider yourself to be a good person, right with God and a follower of Jesus Christ. But many sincere religious people today lack the kind of conviction and courage based on sound biblical teaching that will withstand this deception!

Your religious belief may not be strong enough to keep you from the deception of this hour. Your religion could be a part of this end-time system! You need to understand this—you could become a part of this system *without knowing it*.

This end-time Babylon is Satan’s final attempt to destroy the human creation and end God’s eternal purpose. Yet God will allow this deception to go only so far.

God says to any who will hear and understand, “Come out of her my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Revelation 18:4).

Will you hear and come out? Will you be like a Daniel in the midst of a modern Babylon and determine to obey your God regardless of the cost?

Babylon the Great as described in Revelation is an attractive culture. And it is developing today before our eyes. We are living in the midst of that emerging system. In fact, in many ways it is already here—a modern Babylon that continues the age-long work of Satan.

We live in the most prosperous time in all human history. Our global economy has produced technological marvels beyond our wildest imaginations. But don’t let yourself be lulled into accepting the moral, cultural and spiritual values of the Babylon described in Revelation.

Today we are being conditioned towards tolerance and acceptance of lifestyles and immorality that directly contradict biblical teaching. Don’t be deceived into compromising what God commands!

Like Daniel, who resisted the temptations of Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon, we must remain faithful to God. Again, God tells His people to come out of this false system or face its judgment.

Will you make the choice to come out of Babylon and live a godly life in today’s world? What are you doing with the understanding you have? Are you looking for a church that follows biblical teaching? Isn’t it time to be sure that what you believe and practice is truly based on the Word of God?

Make the commitment to worship God according to biblical truth rather than human tradition. Take time to study the Bible and get to know the true God. Honor Him the way He wants to be honored, not through the traditions created by men! **BT**

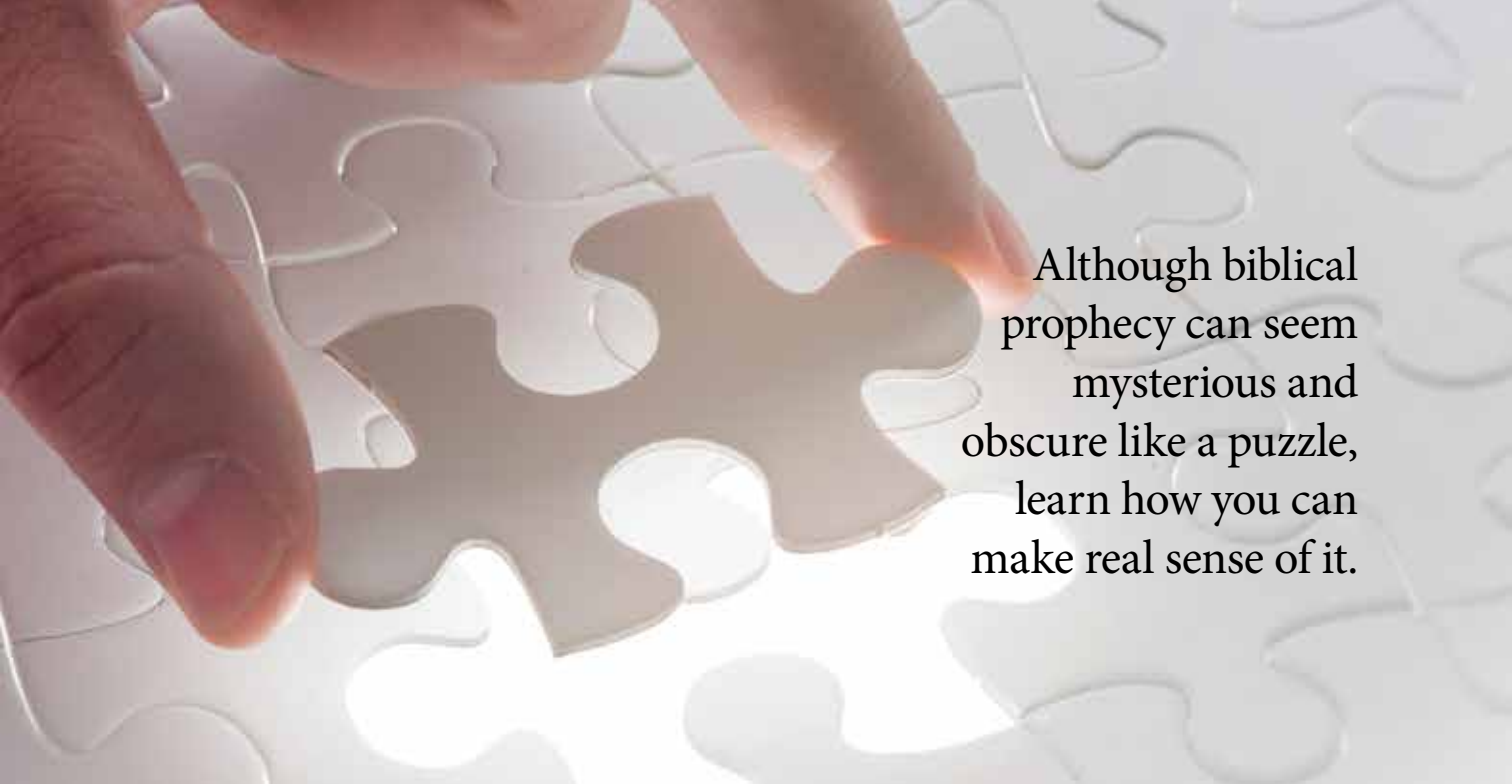


**LEARN MORE**

Our world is changing right before our eyes! You need to understand what Bible prophecy reveals about coming major shifts on the world scene. Be sure to download or request our eye-opening study guide *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.

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Although biblical prophecy can seem mysterious and obscure like a puzzle, learn how you can make real sense of it.

# The Bible's Prophetic Puzzle— Can You Put It Together?

by Gary Petty

**H**ave you ever tried to put together a puzzle with hundreds of pieces? By themselves, the various shapes and colors make it almost impossible to know how they fit together. You might be able to separate all of the straight edges and put together the frame, but you would have no idea what the puzzle is supposed to look like.

But if we have an image of what the puzzle is supposed to look like—or even a partial picture—we can begin to sort through the pieces and understand how they fit together.

Because biblical prophecy is revealed in pieces of different shapes and colors, it is the source of all kinds of speculation. However, the Bible contains some panoramic images showing how the prophetic pieces fit together.

## **One of the Bible's most cryptic prophetic puzzles**

One of these prophetic images appeared in a vision to a Babylonian king almost 2,500 years ago. This vision is recorded in the biblical book of Daniel.

This prophecy spans events that have already happened, but also foretells the headlines of our world today!

Daniel's story begins with him as a young teenager living in Judah. His family was socially important. When the Babylonians, a powerful people from what is now Iraq, invaded Judah in 605 B.C., they took the best and brightest of Judah's youth back to Babylon to be indoctrinated into their way of life. Daniel was among the young people deported to this land so strange and foreign.

Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, had a horrible nightmare. He called together all of his sorcerers and astrologers and demanded that they tell him the meaning of the dream. But he wanted them to first describe his dream. When they couldn't, the king threatened to have them all killed.

Then some of Nebuchadnezzar's advisors told him of a Jewish youth named Daniel who was blessed by his God. Daniel was summoned. He prayed to God, and He revealed Nebuchadnezzar's dream—both in details and meaning.

## **Nebuchadnezzar's vision**

Daniel's revealing of the meaning of this vision is the foundation for understanding subsequent Mideast history and end-time prophecy. Subsequent chapters in Daniel

and Revelation simply add more details to this vision. Daniel described the dramatic vision to the Babylonian king:

“You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image’s head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

“You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (Daniel 2:31-35).

Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was filled with vivid images of a giant statue. Let’s look at the five different elements of the image of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and start to understand what it all means.

God allowed Daniel to see in a vision a statue in the shape of a man with head, arms, torso and legs. First Daniel described the statue’s appearance. The head of the image was crafted of fine gold. The chest and arms were made of silver—a less valuable material than gold. The statue’s belly and thighs were of bronze. Finally, the legs and feet of the statue were made of a mixture of iron and clay.

Daniel then announced to the king that God had revealed to him this dream and that it was divinely inspired. He explained to the awestruck king that the image was a prophecy of four successive empires.

### The dream explained

“This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you are this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth” (Daniel 2:36-39).

From our present historical vantage point, we know that the Babylonian Empire was indeed followed by three other empires.

Understanding the historical background of this imperial succession is critical to understanding what the book of Daniel is telling us today about Bible prophecy.

After describing the vision and the dream to Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel explained the individual symbols. He said that the statue’s head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar himself and the Babylonian Empire. This empire existed from 605-539 B.C.

In 539, it was suddenly taken over by the Persian Empire. That means that the chest and arms of silver from Nebuchadnezzar’s dream represented the Persian Empire.

The Persian Empire in turn fell to the Greek Empire, represented by the statue’s belly and thighs of bronze. The Greek Empire was a powerful force in the ancient world from 332 B.C. to 63 B.C.

Now these three kingdoms—Babylon, Persia and Greece—are all mentioned by name in the book of Daniel. The fourth is not. But following the pattern of the prophecy wherein each kingdom



In a puzzling dream Nebuchadnezzar saw an image that represented a series of four successive empires—Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome.

is immediately succeeded by the next one, we can actually discover the identity of the fourth empire. The Greek Empire was supplanted by Rome.

### A prophecy for the future

We have Daniel’s prophetic description, then, of the fourth empire: “And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay.

“And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay” (Daniel 2:40-43).

This fourth kingdom is the Roman Empire—but it is very important to understand that this part of the prophecy has not been *completely* fulfilled. This fourth empire of Daniel 2 fills in an important piece of the prophetic puzzle by leading us to the fifth element. It tells of future events!

Now let’s look at the most important fifth element of this prophecy: “And in the days of these kings *the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.* Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain,



and its interpretation is sure” (Daniel 2:44-45, emphasis added throughout).

Who are the “kings”—the rulers—of this prophecy?

Notice—they are kings who exist at the last days of the Roman Empire. It says they are destroyed at the second coming of Jesus Christ!

### Final Roman revival when Christ comes in power and glory

Let’s look again at what Daniel was inspired to say about the feet of the image. The 10 toes of these two feet represent 10 rulers. Daniel said that it is in the days of these 10 rulers that Christ returns to set up God’s Kingdom on earth.

This is a vitally important prophecy about the time before the second coming of Jesus Christ!

Biblical prophecy reveals that there is coming an attempt to restore the Roman Empire. This union will involve 10 rulers. It will have the strength and power of the Roman Empire but the weakness of not really being a complete union. There will be disharmony over national identities and cultures.

This piece of the prophetic puzzle warns us to keep a close watch on events happening in Europe.

Now let’s look at the book of Revelation, where the apostle John records prophecies of the events leading up to the return of Jesus Christ. These prophecies supply details of the time foretold in the image of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. Here’s how John described Christ at His return:

“Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses . . . And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:11-16).

The prophetic pieces of the image of Daniel 2 tell us of a stone that destroys the fourth empire. This stone is none other than Jesus Christ!

### What this means for you

You and I live in an evil and corrupted society where all human attempts to govern with justice and goodness fail. We live in a world of violence, war, poverty, crimes, dysfunctional families and billions of people living without purpose and meaning.

If you want your life to be filled with God’s purpose, then you’re going to have to *do something*. You must be preparing for the return of His Son to establish His Kingdom here on earth.

So what is it you must do?

First, *you must repent of your sins*. You are going to have to do more than simply accept Jesus as your Savior. It is absolutely true that there is no salvation without the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that paid the death penalty all of us deserve before the righteous God.

But committing yourself to living by every word of God and obeying His commandments in every aspect of your life is a vital key often overlooked. We’ve read here in Revelation where Jesus

Christ is returning as King of Kings and Lord of Lords! When He returns, He will be gathering together those who are already submitting to Him as King!

It is an empty Christianity that accepts Jesus as Savior but then continues rejecting Him as King by failing to obey His words. In fact, it is not authentic Christianity at all!

So the second way you must prepare for the fifth element of Daniel 2—the Kingdom of God—is *to commit every day to the values and laws of God’s coming Kingdom*. Begin each day by asking God to guide your steps. Search the Bible to discover His steps for your life. You may be surprised that many of your assumptions about the teachings of Jesus Christ are actually different from what He taught.

Authentic Christianity is a purpose-filled adventure. It involves daily commitment, obedience and living in a close relationship with our coming King. It includes anticipating His return and trusting in God’s goodness, even in times of stress.

God is calling people to turn away from this evil world’s ways. You’ve been given an opportunity to respond to Him and be prepared for the coming of the King of Kings!

### Live for your King today

The ways of the coming King aren’t reflected in tepid, immoral, half-hearted religion. God will accept nothing less than *absolute commitment* to Him and His Kingdom!

Much of the prophecy of the image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream has already been fulfilled. This should give you a sense of confidence in the authenticity of biblical prophecy. It should furthermore inspire you to realize that the future prophecies of the Kingdom of God will also happen!

God is calling people to turn from this evil world’s ways. You have been given an opportunity to respond to Him and be prepared for the coming of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Don’t take this opportunity lightly. Ask God to open your mind and heart to His truth!

How will you respond to this glorious opportunity?

Will putting this puzzle together change your life by motivating you to surrender your life to God?

Are you willing to commit your time, effort and resources to be prepared for this future God has revealed?

Or are you willing to walk away from what God is offering to you? It’s up to you! **BT**



### LEARN MORE

You need to understand what the prophecies of the Bible reveal about the future of our world—and what it all means for you and your loved ones! Be sure to download or request our eye-opening study guide *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. A free copy is waiting for you!

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## Why we watch world events—and why you should too

Jesus told His followers that they are to watch—first their own spiritual state, but also the world around them for the signs He pointed to “of the end of the age” (Matthew 24:3).

Jesus’ parable of the 10 virgins in Matthew 25 shows our need for watchfulness and the dangerous spiritual consequences of failing to be alert and vigilant. Jesus’ call to watchfulness and alertness is why *Beyond Today* is committed to helping you keep informed of impor-

tant world trends, events and conditions.

Jesus said, “Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching” (Luke 12:36). *Beyond Today’s* focus in covering and explaining world news, politics and cultural trends isn’t the mere human element in why the world is the way it is. Instead our mission is to direct attention to the invisible spirit element behind the big news and challenging circumstances of our world and where they are heading

in light of Bible prophecy.

God doesn’t want us to fear or be carried away by the world around us. A Christian should be working on overcoming the world, as Christ did (John 16:33). That’s why we put the spotlight on the spiritual and biblical relevance of the headlines. The Bible is the source of help for today and hope for tomorrow. Watch world events and stay close to God, and He will give you both help and hope.

### Russia-Turkey conflict escalates in Syria

Syria’s civil war is a quagmire not only for supporters of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Syrian revolutionary fighters, but also for other nations that have become embroiled in the conflict. The United States, along with its NATO allies, is in favor of Assad stepping aside and allowing a new government to be established. Russia and Iran openly support Assad’s regime. ISIS is taking advantage of the chaos to push its agenda of brutality.

To add to the mess and add yet another layer of difficulty to the Gordian knot of international relations, Turkey shot down a Russian fighter jet that it says ignored warnings and violated its airspace. Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his anger amid claims that the jet’s instruments show it was firmly in Syrian airspace at the time, running a legitimate strike mission against ISIS forces. This event has the potential for lasting ramifications internationally, as Turkey is a

key NATO member. NATO allies already have a tense working relationship with Putin’s Russia.

*The Wall Street Journal* reports on Putin’s threat of consequences for the lost jet: “Russian President Vladimir Putin tore into Turkey over the downing, saying the jet fighter was carrying out strikes on Islamic State militants in Syria, including Russian natives, and posed no threat to Turkey. The downing was ‘a stab in the back, carried out by accomplices of terrorists,’ he said . . . ‘Today’s tragic incident will have serious consequences for Russian-Turkish relations’” (Dion Nissenbaum, Emre Peker and James Marson, “Turkey Shoots Down Russian Jet Fighter,” Nov. 24, 2015).

Russia immediately upped the ante, sending advanced S-400 anti-aircraft missiles to a Russian base in Syria just 30 miles from the border with Turkey, moving a naval missile cruiser closer to the Syrian coast, and announcing that Russian bombers will now be accompanied by fighter escorts on their missions.

It’s easy to see how Syria’s civil war could spread further conflict far and wide, with so many world powers focused on the conflict. (Source: *The Wall Street Journal*.)



A video still shows a tail of fire from a Russian Sukhoi SU24 shot down by Turkish F16s in the area of the Turkish-Syrian border. The jet crashed in Syria.

### Jerusalem to be surrounded by armies

In a region defined by Islamic sectarian violence, anti-Semitic violence, anti-Western violence, foreign invasion and intervention, and bloody regime changes, Israel is typically an oasis of relative peace, freedom and stability.

Israel’s primarily secular government has created a state built on concepts more commonly associated with Western democracies. Its national character often makes the country stick out like a sore thumb among its increasingly chaotic neighbors. With such a high profile, Israel is a little country with a big impact on the world. This impact does not go unnoticed, and nations around the world take interest in Israel—both in its strategic position and in its historic, religious and political significance.

One of Jesus Christ’s most striking prophecies hinted at the wide interest Israel will draw in the time leading up to His return. Teaching about the very last days before His return, He told His disciples to watch

Israel and the interest other nations show in it as a sign of His coming: “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near” (Luke 21:20).

Jesus said that before Jerusalem ultimately falls we can be aware of what’s coming when we see armies encompassing the city. While we’ve yet to see this happen, many prominent world armies are closing in on an area not far away from Jerusalem.

The American, European, Russian and Syrian militaries, along with Syrian revolutionaries and ISIS insurgents, all have a foothold in Syria—Israel’s neighbor to the north. Other world powers are also looking to the Middle East as a place of interest (see “China to



take more active role in Syrian crisis” on the next page).

As world interest—and increasingly the armed forces of many nations—descends on the areas surrounding Israel and Jerusalem, Christians should vigilantly watch and pray for discernment.



## German opinions changing about refugee influx

In September more than 200,000 mostly Muslim refugees entered Germany—some fleeing from war-torn areas in their homelands, but many simply seeking a better economic future. German Chancellor Angela Merkel surprised her nation and those watching worldwide by claiming there was “no upper limit” to helping those seeking asylum in their peaceful country.

Many of the refugees are fleeing Syria, where the civil war has been blazing since 2011. Chemical weapons were even used at one point, raising the

international community’s ire. Syria is dealing with fighting on many fronts. There is an uprising against President Bashar al-Assad, and there are those who are fighting against ISIS.

After seeing the masses arrive, German public opinion about Merkel’s decision is changing. A big concern for Germans is how the new refugees will assimilate into their nation. *The Economist* recently reported, “Germans worry whether Muslim refugees will accept German norms of sexual equality, secular-

ism and Germany’s special responsibility towards Israel and Jews” (“Merkel at Her Limit,” Oct. 10, 2015).

The Nov. 13 terrorist attacks in Paris have put the nation on high alert because of the influx of refugees already accepted. *The Wall Street Journal* reports, “The Paris attacks have jolted Germany into considering greater military involvement in the fight against Islamic State, despite public opposition to abandoning its largely pacifist foreign policy” (Anton Troianovski, “Germany Reconsiders Military Intervention in Wake of Paris Attacks,” Nov. 16, 2015).

The cultural differences between the incoming refugees and a modern nation like Germany will have an impact on many aspects of the European nation. Germany has been one of the most financially sound members of the EU. How will the influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees impact the nation that has bailed out other nations? How will the culture of progressive Germans and fundamentalist Muslims clash?

We see in Daniel 11 that there will be a push by the king of the South against the king of the North at some point. Could what’s happening now be setting the stage for animosities between the regions of Europe and the Middle East? (See “Europe at a Crossroads: What Lies Ahead?” beginning on page 20.)

We look to God and His coming Kingdom for a time of peace. When all peoples of the world come to worship God and His Son Jesus Christ in spirit and truth, there will be peace and restoration of all things. (Sources: *The Economist*, *The Wall Street Journal*.)



Hordes of refugees and migrants, mostly from Syria and Iraq but also from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, pass through Slovenia on their way to Germany in late 2015.

## China to take more active role in Syrian crisis

The nearly five-year-long Syrian civil war continues to burn with no real progress made by either Bashar al-Assad’s regime or by the grassroots rebel movement. The conflict has notably drawn the United States, Russia and others into the conflict. ISIS has taken full advantage of the chaotic situation and has pushed hard into Syria. A new and very powerful agent may be entering the fray, at least diplomatically for the present.

Bloomberg reports that “The violence swirling out from Syria in recent weeks is pressuring China to step off the sidelines and take a more active role in international efforts to stem the conflict” (Ting Shi, “China Pulled Further Into Syria Crisis as Terrorism Threat Grows,” Nov. 22, 2015).

China’s growing interest in the Syrian conflict follows on the heels of the murder of a Chinese captive by ISIS. It’s remarkable that such a relatively small and loosely organized group of extremists can draw the attention of the world’s great powers. As these powers converge on the Middle East they’re brought into

conflict not only with Islamic extremists but with one another, competing for influence and strategic positioning.

Eastern interest in Syria and the Middle East is interesting because of a prophecy in the book of Revelation concerning an invasion of the region by eastern forces. In the revelation given to John, Jesus showed Him a future time when “the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East” (Revelation

16:12).

**As these powers converge on the Middle East they’re brought into conflict not only with Islamic extremists but with one another.**

What is the way that’s prepared for them? It’s the way to the land of Israel, where armies will gather for a climactic battle:

“Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon” (verse 16). Much must yet take place before these last events before Jesus’ return, but the current crisis is a good reminder of how easily world attention can turn to one location. (Source: Bloomberg.)

## 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!](http://ucg.org/beyond-today/daily!)





## When Terror Strikes: Where Is God?

In Paris and San Bernardino, people were going about their everyday lives. Little did they know that within a matter of minutes, dozens would be killed or maimed in vicious terrorist attacks. What do we need to learn from these horrific events?

by Victor Kubik



**M**y heart goes out to the families of the 130 people ISIS terrorists massacred in Paris Nov. 13. They attacked unsuspecting civilians in one of the swankiest districts in Paris. Most of the victims were in a concert at the Le Bataclan Café—one of Paris' most legendary clubs. Others were enjoying a peaceful dinner at several restaurants when horror suddenly struck.

Less than three weeks later a husband-and-wife terrorist team targeted a local government training event and holiday party in San Bernardino, Calif., killing 14 and injuring 22.

The terrorists achieved their goal of horrifying the local population and the world. The media attention they received is certain to inspire others to continue such attacks on “infidels” in the West. What happened in Paris and San Bernardino could happen in any Western city at any time.

The French vowed a “merciless response” and immediately began airstrikes against ISIS strongholds in eastern Syria. U.S. President Barack Obama pledged further efforts to defeat the Islamic State. But even if successful, will that bring lasting peace? Is more war only treating the symptoms of a complicated state of affairs in which the world finds itself?

Pope Francis called the Paris massacre part of a “piecemeal Third World War.” King Abdullah of Jordan made a similar reference to World War III. When terror strikes, world reaction varies from outrage to grief, horror and revenge—even to “Where is God in all this?”

Where was—or is—God in all of this? That’s a very good question and one we should focus on most. Most people ignore God and do as they please—until a tragedy strikes, and then they think about and blame God for what’s happened.

Western nations have drifted farther and farther from seeing the existence and sovereignty of God.

That’s ultimately why we are seeing these horrors and will continue to see them. As we settle from the shock we must understand the underlying causes that few want to talk about, much less do anything about.

### **A world unprepared**

Terror attacks such as these have brought the convoluted Mideast violence closer to home, and we wonder how safe we are. Where will the next promised strike be? How can we be safe?

Syria is a nation that has exploded, spewing its poison across the whole world. More than 200,000 have died in a complex civil war with strange alliances that involve the most powerful nations of the world. Refugees are pouring out by the hundreds of thousands, with terrorists among them.

The world is unprepared for what’s happening in the worst way possible—having turned from the ultimate source of security.

At one time America’s presidents confidently and reverently sought God’s guidance. President Dwight Eisenhower began his 1953 inaugural address with an open prayer to God. He beseeched the Almighty to “give us, we pray, the power to discern clearly right from wrong, and allow all our words and actions to be governed thereby . . . so that all may work for the good of our beloved country and Thy glory.”

President Ronald Reagan took the words of 2 Chronicles 7:14 as the theme for both of his inaugurals. That verse poignantly

reads: “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (King James Version).

Instead, among its many other sins, America has thrown God and prayer out of its schools, killed more than 50 million children through abortion and condoned unnatural marriages and lifestyles condemned by the Bible.

What is the outcome—the consequence—for nations embracing such deeply ungodly actions? “Your life will constantly hang in the balance. You will live night and day in fear, unsure if you will survive” (Deuteronomy 28:66, New Living Translation).

A day of reckoning is swiftly coming on this world. Unless people take action—individually and collectively—terrible things are in store. Paris, 9/11 and San Bernardino are but the beginning of sorrows.

### **The just shall live by faith**

The ancient prophet Habakkuk pleaded with God to heal a sick nation. Prophets were sent to talk sense to the nation, but the people would not listen—as it is today. God’s response to him was not what Habakkuk wanted to hear.

Because of Judah’s lifestyle and godlessness, God foretold that the nation had to go through trauma induced by violent neighboring nations. These ultimately destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, and the nation went into captivity. But Habakkuk stated that in the midst of national calamity, survival for the just was by faith: “The just shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4).

The apostle Paul quotes this passage three times in his writings, underscoring that Christians live and survive by deep and abiding trust in God.

Jesus Himself tells us about the chaotic events preceding the end of the present age: “Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near” (Luke 21:28). What good news!

God offers us all a solution: “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19). You and I can choose what we want to do and what course of action we will take. *But we cannot choose to escape the consequences of our choices!*

### **The time is now!**

The time is now for you personally to wake up to what is happening and what has been prophesied to come. The time is now to come to repentance before the God of the universe, who is offering you salvation—in your life now and for all eternity!

As the events of Paris and San Bernardino show, we live in deeply troubling times, and they will not just get better on their own. Our mission here at *Beyond Today* is to strongly preach a message of repentance, telling the world to turn from its sinful way of life, which is bringing all these calamities.

God promises security and safety for those who follow Him. As He tells us in Psalm 34:8 (New International Version), “Blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.” **BT**

# CROSS AT A EUROPE'S ROADS

## What Lies Ahead?

Europe may be waking up to a new reality—that waves of Muslim immigrants and Islamic terror attacks are transforming the continent before our eyes. Does Bible prophecy indicate where events might be heading?

by Scott Ashley

**A**ll over Europe, average citizens seem to be waking up to the reality of their situation far better than the political elites that run their countries.

In Germany, pepper spray has disappeared from stores as buyers worried about waves of migrants emptied the shelves. In Sweden, angry arsonists set fire to 17 existing or planned immigrant housing centers in October and November. In Austria, citizens concerned about the flood of refugees have bought tens of thousands of handguns and rifles in recent months, and stores are running out of shotguns.

Support for anti-immigration political parties is growing more widespread. British voters are so fed up with the European Union's open borders policy that Britain may soon elect to leave the EU altogether rather than continue to be subject to invasion by thousands of non-European migrants.

Anti-immigrant voters have already replaced governments in Poland and Croatia, and made huge gains in Sweden, France, Denmark and Greece. In Germany, support for Angela Merkel, who opened the nation's doors to 1.5 million migrants, is plummeting.

Clearly the ground is shifting in Europe. Much like the United States, where voters are increasingly frustrated and turned off by their political leaders, Europeans are looking for alternatives to a political establishment viewed as more and more out of touch with the average man on the street.

These trends were well under way even before nine jihadists using automatic rifles, hand grenades and suicide-

bomb vests slaughtered 130 people and wounded hundreds more in Paris restaurants and a concert hall the night of Nov. 13. An attack at a soccer stadium was thwarted; otherwise the casualties would have run far higher. In a particularly callous act, the gunmen singled out and shot disabled people in an area of the concert hall set aside for wheelchair users.

Particularly unsettling are the identities of the killers. Most were French or Belgian citizens born of Muslim-immigrant parents. At least two others were among the waves of immigrants who entered Europe by boat via Greece only six weeks earlier, and two others remain unidentified. Throughout Europe, people are deeply concerned about what these things mean for their lives, their countries and their future. The continent is changing before our eyes.

Where could these trends be heading? Does the Bible give us any indication?

### Insights from Bible prophecy and history

The 11th chapter of the book of Daniel gives a detailed prophecy of events in the Middle East that began in Daniel's day and continues down to events that take place at the return of Jesus Christ to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. Much of the prophecy concerns individuals called "the king of the North" and "the king of the South." These denote leaders of geopolitical powers to the north and south of Jerusalem, the focal point of Bible prophecy, but they have a connection to both the Middle East and Europe.

Originally these terms applied to the successors of Alex-





Stunned police and forensic teams survey the damage at a Paris concert hall where Muslim terrorists massacred 89 people on Nov. 13, 2015.

under the Great, whose vast empire was divided up among his chief generals after his death. The two major resulting kingdoms, centered in Syria to the north of Jerusalem and Egypt to the south, would be the key powers Daniel’s prophecy would center on for the next several centuries.

Most of this prophecy was fulfilled many centuries ago between the time of Alexander the Great and the rise of the Roman Empire. But in verse 40 the prophecy jumps forward to our day, “*the time of the end*” before the return of Jesus Christ.

What is this verse describing? We need a good grasp of history to understand.

In the 600s and 700s A.D. the new religion of Islam spread from the Arabian Peninsula across much of the Middle East, as well as through Egypt and across North Africa. Over time Muslim conquerors captured Spain and invaded France, and later took over large portions of southeastern Europe. Along the way they also invaded and held portions of Italy, and in A.D. 846 Muslim raiders attacked Rome itself and plundered the original St. Peter’s Basilica, at that time outside Rome’s protective walls.

Another wave of Islamic expansion in the 1100s vastly expanded the territory under Muslim control to include most of the northern third of the African continent, much of the Indian sub-continent, a large swath of southeastern Europe and part of what is today southern Russia and some of the former Soviet republics.

For centuries the Islamic world was ruled by a series of *caliphs*—an Arabic term meaning “successor,” in this case a religious and political successor of Muhammad, founder of Islam and considered its greatest prophet. The territory over which the caliph ruled was known as a *caliphate*. This system existed until 1924, when it was abolished in the aftermath of World War I with the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the last embodiment of the caliphate.

Throughout Islam’s history its leaders have desired to see Muslims worldwide unite under a caliphate and establish Islam in what they see as its rightful place as the dominant religion of the world. In recent decades al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden called for the reestablishment of a caliphate, as has the Muslim Brother-

hood (which spawned al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups).

In June 2014 the Islamic State, formed out of the rubble of the Syrian civil war and the collapse of central authority in Iraq after the withdrawal of American troops, declared itself a new caliphate with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as its caliph.

Thousands of Muslims from around the world have flocked to Syria and Iraq in support of this long-held Muslim dream to reestablish the caliphate. (The world also has seen the Islamic State’s vision of a new caliphate as it has instituted Islamic law in the territories it controls and its fighters have butchered any who stand in its way.)

Many Muslims also believe in the imminent coming of an individual they call the *mahdi*, a messiah-like Islamic figure who will arise in the end time and lead Muslims in ridding the world of evil and converting it to Islam. Some also believe the mahdi will be accompanied by Jesus Christ (called Isa by them), whom they believe to be a Muslim who will forcibly convert Christians to Islam.

### Obstacles standing in Islam’s way

But for these goals to succeed, several obstacles must be removed. One is the modern state of Israel, which is why this tiny nation has been the target of unrelenting hostility from the Islamic world ever since its establishment in 1947. This is also why Iran, whose leaders and millions of its citizens believe in the mahdi, calls repeatedly for Israel’s elimination or annihilation.

Another obstacle is the United States, often referred to as “the great Satan” in the Islamic world, and Britain, often called “the little Satan” (along with Israel). This is why Islamic terror groups regularly call for attacks and *jihad*—“struggle” or holy war—against America.

But another obstacle standing in the way of Islamic conquest is *Europe*. Perhaps you have been puzzled by Islamic terrorist

As they see it, this ages-long struggle will not end until Europe—the land from which the Crusades originated—is vanquished and converted to Islam.

leaders such as Osama bin Laden and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi referring to European and American soldiers as “crusaders.” This sounds bizarre to Western ears, but in the Islamists’ view the Crusades of centuries ago *never really ended*.

As they see it, the recent American-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are simply another phase in the Crusades, and this ages-long struggle will not end until Europe—the land from which the Crusades originated—is vanquished and converted to Islam.

### Calls for Islamic conquest of Europe

Several Muslim leaders have openly called for such a conquest of Europe and spelled out how this can be accomplished—by force if necessary, but also by Muslim immigrants simply moving in and taking over (through political pressure and high birth rates).

Muammar Gaddafi, leader of Libya before he was overthrown and executed in 2011 by even more radical elements, said this: “There are signs that Allah will grant Islam victory in Europe—

without swords, without guns, without conquests. The fifty million Muslims of Europe will turn it into a Muslim continent within a few decades.”

Yunis al-Astal, member of the Palestinian parliament and a Muslim cleric, boasted the following in a sermon aired on Hamas-run Al-Aqsa TV in 2008: “Very soon, Allah willing, Rome will be conquered . . . as was prophesied by our prophet Muhammad. Today, Rome is the capital of the Catholics, or the Crusader capital, [but it] will be an advanced post for the Islamic conquests, which will spread through Europe in its entirety . . .”

As recently as Sept. 11, 2015, Muslim imam Sheikh Muhammad Ayed spoke in Jerusalem’s Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest site in Islam, saying: “Soon, we will trample [the Jews and Christians] underfoot, Allah willing . . . Throughout Europe, all the hearts are infused with hatred toward Muslims . . . But . . . we will breed children with them, because we shall conquer their countries—whether you like it or not, oh Germans, oh Americans, oh French, oh Italians, and all those like you. Take the refugees! We shall soon collect them in the name of the coming Caliphate.”

Islam’s holy book, the Quran, praises migration as a way to spread Islam to new lands. Surah 4:100 reads: “He that leaves his home in the cause of [Allah] shall find many a refuge in the land and great abundance” (Dawood translation).

While hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees have made the arduous and risky journey to seek refuge in Europe, wealthy Muslim nations like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman have accepted only a relative handful. *Why?* These countries’ leaders fear terrorists among the refugees who could pose trouble for their own regimes as in Syria. And the dirty little secret is that *these nations want to see Muslim refugees overwhelm Europe.*

Yes, Islamists clearly have designs on taking over Europe, and it’s not something that they see as centuries off in the future. They’re openly talking about it *now*.

### Conflict between north and south

Now let’s read the prophecy in Daniel 11:40: “And *at the time of the end* shall the king of the south *push at him*: and the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over” (Daniel 11:40, emphasis added throughout).

This tells us that “*at the time of the end*” a king of the south will “*push at*” the king of the north. Who are these prophesied figures, and what does this mean?

The king of the South most likely will be a Muslim figure, since the lands to the south of Jerusalem are overwhelmingly Muslim and have been for centuries. As noted earlier, many Muslims desire and expect an Islamic messiah, the mahdi, or a new caliph to arise to unite Muslims in their struggle against the West. Either of these are likely possibilities.

The Arab world also has a history of populist leaders such as Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden and Muammar Gaddafi who saw themselves as leaders of the Arab or wider Muslim world.

Any such leader would naturally want to see Islam take over Europe, just as we are seeing now with massive Muslim immigration, high birth rates, and random violence and terror attacks to cow Europeans into submission.

### Who is the end-time king of the North?

And who is the king of the North in this prophecy? Again, we

need historical background to understand.

Anciently, the lands of the kings of the North were absorbed into the Roman Empire. Other prophecies in Daniel chapters 2 and 7 describe a series of empires beginning in Daniel’s day and lasting until the time of the end of man’s self-rule on earth. History makes it clear that these were, in order, the Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman Empires.

These prophecies show that the last of these—the Roman Empire—exists in a resurrected form at the time of Jesus Christ’s return (Daniel 2:42-44; 7:23-27). While Muslims have dreamed for centuries of a united Islamic world, so too have Europeans longed for a unified European state. Some even describe their goal with the term “United States of Europe.”

In the centuries since the fall of the Roman Empire, various kings, emperors and despots openly proclaimed their desire to rebuild that dream. The current European Union (EU) was born of this desire decades ago, and it is a major economic power by any measure, rivaling America in important respects.

And Bible prophecy also reveals that a new European-centered superpower will become a reality—possibly as an outgrowth of the current European Union, which in its current form appears too politically weak and divided to continue indefinitely under its current pressures.


This new superpower is depicted prophetically in Revelation 17 as a creature with 10 horns representing an alliance of 10 leaders of nations or groups of nations who “give their power and authority” to another leader called “the beast” (verses 12-13).

The time setting for this is just before Jesus Christ’s return (verse 14), as this union “will make war with the Lamb.” The leader of this end-time superpower and the king of the North appear to be one and the same, as the king of the North also comes to his end in this same time frame—“the time of the end” (Daniel 11:40, 45).

### Keys trends to watch

To sum up, this prophecy gives us the following keys to look for:

- Efforts to unify the Muslim and/or Arab world under a single caliphate or leader.
- Continued efforts from the Islamic world to take over Europe via violence or migration or both.
- Shifts in European thinking toward anti-immigration leaders and parties, culminating in greater European unity and military and economic power—and ultimately in a coming military invasion of Egypt, Libya and Israel that sets the stage for a new world war that will threaten humanity with extinction.

We live in increasingly dangerous and sobering times. Those of us at *Beyond Today* are here to help you navigate these troubling waters. Continue reading *Beyond Today* so you can be better prepared for what lies ahead—and join us in praying to God always, “*Your Kingdom come!*” 



### LEARN MORE

This article has only briefly outlined the major historical trends that are leading up to an inevitable clash of civilizations in the days just before Jesus Christ’s return. We urge you to download or request our helpful study guides *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* to learn more!

[www.BTmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.BTmagazine.org/booklets)





Sobering headlines repeat the same sad story: Policemen are shot and killed, many by ambush, while others accuse them of brutality and excessive force. What does this say about American society?

## A Dangerous New Trend:

# POLICE UNDER ATTACK

by Mike Kelley

**F**or many years, the answer little boys would give when asked what they want to be when they grow up has been “I want to be a policeman.” They recognized that the police are protectors, friends, the people who put their lives on the line every day to protect society.

Today, however, the police officer’s job has suddenly become much more dangerous. Police are themselves under fire, battling growing resentment and distrust by large segments of a society they are sworn to protect.

In late August, Harris County (Texas) sheriff’s deputy Darren Goforth was ambushed and killed at a suburban gas station. While fueling his patrol car, a lone gunman walked up to him and shot him in the back of the head, then shot him repeatedly as he lay dying. Goforth, 47, left a wife and two children.

One week later, New York Police Department officer Brian Moore was shot to death when he stopped to investigate a man suspected of carrying a gun on a New York street. Just 25, he left a wife and two small

children. The young officer had already been awarded two medals for meritorious service.

Near Atlanta, Fulton County police officer Terrance Green was killed in another ambush-style attack by a man who assaulted a group of officers after having “gone on a rampage” throughout south Fulton County, Georgia.

### “War on America’s police officers”

Through early November, 2015 witnessed the slaying of 34 police officers. September was a particularly deadly month, with seven officers giving their lives in the line of duty.

“War has been declared on America’s police officers,” says Milwaukee County Sheriff David Brown.

Across the country, police feel themselves under fire, their role in society maligned, their safety threatened. Speaking for the Fraternal Order of Police, which represents more than 300,000 police officers, FOP President Chuck Canterbury said, “It’s almost a radical rhetoric causing officers to say, ‘Wait a second, I’m out

The shooting of an African-American teenager in Ferguson, Missouri, in August 2014 set in motion a wave of anger and hostility toward law-enforcement officers and agencies across the nation.

here to serve the public. I saved a little old lady from a purse snatching. I gave CPR on the highway and saved somebody. Now, I'm a villain?" (quoted by Ed Payne and Artemis Moshtaghian in CNN, "Attacks Leave Police Feeling Under Siege," Sept. 4, 2015).

Across the United States, a string of highly publicized confrontations between police and mostly minority youth has ignited a wave of animosity against law enforcement and law enforcement officers. Major American cities are the battlegrounds, where police themselves feel threatened. A sinister piece of graffiti painted on the side of a Houston building near the Harris County police station showed a picture of a police officer with a gun pointed at his head.

Hollywood has piled on, with celebrities such as movie director Quentin Tarantino calling cops "murderers" over the recent media-hyped shootings in minority neighborhoods. Sadly, the Hollywood police haters and rabble-rousers seem to get no end of publicity in a celebrity-obsessed nation.

### The Ferguson effect

Observers have noted the long-standing distrust and animosity between police and largely African-American inner city youth, especially young men. Those simmering tensions exploded after the August 2014 shooting of Michael Brown, a young African-American man shot by Ferguson, Missouri, police officer Darren Wilson. Brown had just robbed a convenience store, and evidence showed that he attacked Wilson just before he was shot.

Brown's death touched off a wave of racial violence in Ferguson's minority community, resulting in night after night of widespread violence, burning and looting. Confrontations with police produced dozens of injuries to both rioting citizens and the police, tens of millions of dollars in property damage, and more than 100 arrests.

Now, what is being called "the Ferguson effect" has caused police to be far more cautious, especially when operating in minority neighborhoods. The *Wall Street Journal* reported this effect in chilling terms:

"Almost any police shooting of a black person, no matter how threatening the behavior that provoked the shooting, now provokes angry protests . . . Arrests in black communities are even more fraught than usual, with hostile, jeering crowds pressing in on officers and spreading lies about the encounter" (Heather McDonald, "The New Nationwide Crime Wave," May 29, 2015)

### Police more cautious, crime rates up

Across the nation, some mayors and officials in cities with heavy minority populations have themselves accused police of racial bias and excessive use of force. In New York, Mayor Bill De Blasio alleged the New York Police Department used excessive racial profiling, a charge echoed by many minority mayors across the nation.

Faced with criticism from city hall, the media, popular culture, and minority communities, police everywhere



report being more cautious and reserved in their responses. One example: In many cities, officers now wait in their patrol cars for backup before confronting crime suspects.

Police cautiousness has emboldened criminals, leading to a spike in crime rates across the nation. After falling for two decades to just over 300 in 2014, murder rates in New York City more than doubled during the first six months of 2015. In Baltimore, gun violence rose more than 60 percent compared to the same period last year—its 43 homicides in May 2015 the deadliest month since 1972. Statistics show this pattern across the country in 2015.

### What's behind it?

Events in inner-city neighborhoods have shown that the right provocation can fan smoldering embers of resentment into a full-blown blaze. But is this a new development or something that has been growing for years?

History has a way of repeating itself. With the rise of highly emotional racial conflicts in the late 1960s, police began to hear themselves referred to as "pigs," an epithet that continued in inner-city neighborhoods long after the violence subsided. White college students picked up the term, screaming it at police who were called to keep order in often-violent protests against the Vietnam War.

We can add the effects of modern mass media, whose ranks today are filled with the products of modern Western education, which denies the existence of any moral



authority, and, therefore, challenges all authority.

And we have seen incidents in which law-enforcement officers have acted rashly, unwisely, abusively or even criminally, leading to unnecessary injuries and deaths. Some have been charged with and convicted of murder, manslaughter and assault, among other crimes.

Advancing their own media narrative, television news coverage of the Ferguson incident and others too often demonize police officers, painting pictures of alleged “police brutality” while totally ignoring barrages of rocks and debris hurled at officers, accompanied by taunts and threats. And usually agitators are in the background egging on the crowd.

The picture of growing disrespect and hatred toward police and authority figures is impossible to ignore. But is there an even deeper, more fundamental cause?

Few recognize, and even fewer will acknowledge, the sinister ultimate cause behind today’s violence and disrespect for authority. Your Bible identifies a powerful and evil adversary who, incredible as it may sound, casts his influence over all mankind today. “You He made alive, who . . . once walked according to the course of this world, according to the *prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience . . .*” (Ephesians 2:1-2, emphasis added throughout).

This being has the world under his sway, influencing millions in attitudes of rebellion and strife (1 John 5:19; Revelation 12:9). Write for our free booklet *Is There Really a Devil?* to learn more about this being and his influence on the world.

### The prophesied solution

Human beings, it seems, have always had a problem with authority, which gives rise to the question: What should be our attitude towards authority and authority figures? The apostle Paul addressed this issue in his letter to the church in Rome:

“Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil” (Romans 13:1-3, New American Standard Bible). Paul went on to exhort the young pastor Timothy to give thanks for “all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

Thankfully, despite today’s violence, your Bible proclaims a soon-coming time when people will live at peace, a time when God’s law will guide all of humanity. Study the prophecies of Isaiah 2:2-4, 9:6-7, 11:6-9, and 35:5-7. It also foretells the time when Satan, this great adversary, will be restrained—no longer able to influence mankind:

“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having . . . a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years . . . and shut him up . . . so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished” (Revelation 20:1-2).

At that time, when God’s long-foretold Kingdom is

Recently, many have cited a rise in resentment against police and authority figures as the cause of the wave of anti-police violence. What should be our attitude towards authority?

established on earth, Satan’s influence will be replaced with attitudes of cooperation, giving, and true justice for all. Notice in particular what the prophet Isaiah foretells of Christ in Isaiah 11: “The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. . . with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth” (Isaiah 11:2-4, New American Standard Bible).

Millions who today feel, whether rightly or wrongly, that they are denied justice will be treated fairly. The entire world will respect authority and live secure, peaceful lives under the supreme law of God, which will ensure justice, peace and tranquility. God speed that day! **BT**



**LEARN MORE**

Why does it seem that the national problems of the United States grow worse, with no solutions in sight? The answer, astoundingly, was foretold thousands of years ago in the pages of your Bible! You need to read our eye-opening study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

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# The Chance to Be Unlimited

New Year's resolutions, although well-intentioned, may actually distract us from something far more important—the awesome future God has planned for us!

by Debbie Werner

**I**t happens every year around this time. We're bombarded with human interest news clips, blogs and Internet ads, commercials and radio soundbites, all focused on one thing—setting New Year's resolutions. In doing so, some people strive to change the focus of their lives and form better habits.

Showing a commitment to personal improvement is a positive goal. Yet resolutions in this regard are in many ways often shortsighted.

Consider the top New Year's resolutions from 2015, obtained through a U.S. survey by Nielsen:

- Stay fit and healthy
- Lose weight
- Enjoy life to the fullest
- Spend less, save more
- Spend more time with family and friends

Most of these likely stem from coming down from the highs and excesses of the holiday season. Such goals are admirable in themselves, but they all have a very finite and

limited focus. They deal with the relatively short span of time you and I get to walk this earth. Yet we have been made for something far greater.

Resolutions point to what we like to spend our resources on—our time, energy, money and mental bandwidth. Fitness, weight loss, pleasures and money will get us only so far. None of them have the ability to bring true satisfaction in life.

Recent studies have demonstrated that the Millennial generation values experiences and relationships more than physical possessions. Spending more time developing relationships with others has longer term value, but it is only half of the relationship story. We need to clearly see that primary focus should be on developing a relationship with our Creator.

## Lessons from a very wise man

Solomon is known for having been a very wise man. He possessed smarts, wealth and power (1 Kings 3:10-13). People came to him for help in solving difficult problems or to learn from him what he knew. His kingdom overflowed



with wealth. He had it all—the riches and notoriety and power that so many throughout history have dreamed of achieving.

Despite having it all, we can see his disappointment with this physical life by reading the book of Ecclesiastes. Time after time he shows that physical life can and should be enjoyed when it is well lived. Hard work is satisfying. Food and drink provide pleasure. Relationships enhance quality of life.

But read this telling verse: “All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet his soul is not satisfied” (Ecclesiastes 6:7). Solomon recognized the same general sense of emptiness that results from solely physical pursuits. The excitement eventually fades. Everything we see, touch, feel, taste and hear is temporary.

Solomon raises the question: What should we build our lives around if everything we see will cease to exist at some point? He answers at the end of his message: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). If Solomon made something like a New Year’s resolution, we know what his would have been at this point!

Our central purpose is to learn to obey God. After all, He is the One who created us, setting the framework for our existence and any future we may have beyond this physical life. And He desires to give us experiences in this life that will help build our relationship with Him.

### Physical blessings will result

God relates to us as a Father. He cares about our physical lives in addition to our spiritual potential. Does that mean our lives will always be easy? *No*. We will each deal with the challenges that result from the natural stages and circumstances of life, including our own decisions. Removing all consequences only prevents us from learning the lessons we should. God wants us with Him in eternity too much for Him to soften every blow that comes our way!

However, He does promise to bless us for the *right* decisions we make—namely, following His laws and principles. God’s statement to the Israelites thousands of years ago still rings true today: “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess” (Deuteronomy 30:15-16).

Keeping God’s commandments is a key element in experiencing satisfying relationships and an abundant physical life. So many of life’s penalties can be avoided if we just strive to obey the Ten Commandments. Obedience pays off now and in the future!

### Think in an eternal frame of mind

Years ago during a class I took on the fundamentals of theology, our wise instructor advised all of us students to learn to “*think in an eternal frame of mind*.” In all my years of schooling, that statement has stuck with me the most. It reminds me, especially when I’m in the middle of a difficult time or am faced with what seems to be an overwhelming decision, where my ultimate focus really should be.

God’s Word is full of mind-blowing promises He has made to those who follow Him. We have the opportunity to become

## We should seriously evaluate our personal and family priorities to see if we are directing our lives toward the Kingdom of God.

children of God (Romans 8:16-19; Hebrews 2:10-11). And, as if that isn’t enough, we will be given honors and responsibilities within His Kingdom (2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12). If we obey Him now, we will have the opportunity to serve and help others through these future leadership roles.


Though we have this huge potential ahead of us, it doesn’t mean the path will be easy. Remember the things occupying the minds of most people around this time? Sports, entertainment, finances, vacations? You’ll hear more conversations around the water cooler about losing weight and saving money than you’ll ever hear about how we can fulfill our spiritual potential.

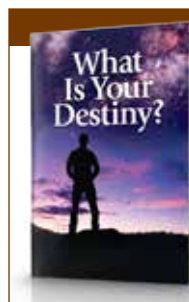
No wonder thousands of years ago Jesus Christ stated: “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). It might seem like pursuing New Year’s resolutions to get fit or save more would never lead to this “destruction” Christ spoke about. But if those are our highest and furthest goals, this is where we’ll end up!

### Resolve to live eternally

God calls us to push aside the physical desires and pulls we experience. It’s a tough pursuit, but He asks each of us to “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1-2).

Instead of being focused on physical goals, we must strive for something more. Jesus knew this would be highly difficult, so He prayed that we would have minds and hearts concerned with the bigger picture (John 17:9-17). The Son of God actually prayed for us! It’s an amazing and moving truth, and it should motivate us to strive for a higher calling.

We need to seriously evaluate our personal and family priorities to see whether we’re choosing to direct our lives toward things that are temporary or to building the character and relationships that will last into the Kingdom of God—*forever*. Let’s each choose to invest our energy in thinking and living with an *eternal* frame of mind! 



### LEARN MORE

God offers you the opportunity to be unlimited—to live an existence far above the mundane existence of this world with all of its problems and worries. How does the Bible describe that existence, and how can you attain it? Download or request our eye-opening study guide *What Is Your Destiny?*

[www.BTmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.BTmagazine.org/booklets)

# The Smallest of Beginnings

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

by Darris McNeely

**I**t's mid-December, and the woods next to my home are settling into a winter sleep. The last leaves are clinging to bare tree limbs. Bushes and shrubs are trimmed back and prepared for the next season of growth. What looks like a dormant landscape around my home conceals a deeper cycle of life that is preparing in a few months to spring once again from the earth and dazzle me with beauty, wonder and joy. Nature never rests. Life continues moving forward.

Before we leave this series of parables about seed and sowing, Jesus gave another set of parables that gives important insight about the present, dynamic and inexorable force of the Kingdom of God. It adds another dimension of understanding to God's unfolding purpose.

## A force planted

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

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

the air come and nest in its branches" (verses 31-32).

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

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

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

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

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

Second, these two parables show

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

## Small beginnings

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

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

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

Jesus taught the message of the



The seed of God's Holy Spirit, placed within you, is the most powerful and transformative force in the universe.



Kingdom of God from the beginning of His ministry. Mark 1:15 records Jesus coming into Galilee saying: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” Jesus came from God to proclaim this greatest of messages and make it known to His followers.

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

### The beginning of a small Church and work

Though many thousands were impacted by Jesus' message, at the end of His life

only a few more than a hundred disciples endured (see Acts 1:15). The Church indeed grew, but compared with the general population it remained quite small. Nevertheless, the seed of the Kingdom was planted. It began very small, then grew in stages.

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

Mark's Gospel prefaces the parable of the mustard seed with another parable of Jesus: “The kingdom of God is as if a

man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come” (Mark 4:26-29).

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

### Bearing fruit for the harvest

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

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

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

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

God wants to start small in your life and have it grow into something far greater than you could have imagined! Will you let Him? **BT**

### LEARN MORE



What exactly is the message Jesus Christ taught? It was a continuation of the message of the Hebrew prophets before Him of a coming divine Kingdom to be established over the entire world—but also the good news of the purpose of our existence and how we can become part of that Kingdom! Download or request our free study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom* to learn more about this Kingdom and what it means for you!

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# Coping With Stress

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

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

## Facing a challenging world

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

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

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

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

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

I stress over everything!"

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

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

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

### ► Does God show us how to reduce stress?

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

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

### ► Can God help when our problems seem overwhelming?

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

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

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

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

"Blessed be the God and Father of our

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Every test that you have experienced is the kind that normally comes to people. But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm; at the time you are put to the test, he will give you the strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way out" (1 Corinthians 10:13, GNT).

Consider biblical examples of people facing severe trials. Whatever the trial, when they asked God for help, He provided the strength and help for



them to bear it. Jesus Christ Himself was “in agony” and “His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” as He prayed before His crucifixion (Luke 22:44). God strengthened Him, and God will strengthen us as well when we ask.

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

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

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

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

become. We need to accept trials and tests and understand what they are doing for us.

### ► What is the ultimate purpose of my stressful trials?

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

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

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

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

stress of dealing with them should diminish.

### ► Can I have confidence that God understands my stress?

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

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

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

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

## Apply These Tips Now

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

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

- Learn to say “No.”
- Shorten your “to do” list by removing the “shoulds” and keeping the “musts.” Drop tasks that aren't truly necessary to the bottom of the list or eliminate them entirely.
- Learn what is really important in life and set those things as your priority (see Luke 10:38-42).

- Learn to delegate to others when you can. Read the story of the advice Moses received from his father-in-law Jethro in Exodus 18:13-24.

- Do not say or do things that consistently irritate someone. Know when to be tactful and respectful about certain subjects (see Ephesians 4:31-32).

- Express your feelings instead of bottling them up. If something or someone is bothering you, communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way.

- Be willing to compromise your wishes (not your values) if compromise will help solve the problem.

- Look at the big picture. Get things in perspective. How important will it be in the long

run? Will it matter in a year? Is it really worth getting upset about? If not, focus elsewhere.

- Connect with other people, especially positive people. A strong support system will help shield you from the effects of stress.

- Set aside rest and relaxation time in your daily schedule. Don't allow other things to get in the way. This is your time to recharge your batteries. Meditate on godly things. Listen to peaceful music. It's amazing what 10 minutes of that can do for you.

- Make time every day for leisure activities that you enjoy. Take a walk; smell the roses; laugh. The act of laughing helps your body fight stress in a number of ways (see Proverbs 17:22).

- Exercise regularly and

incorporate healthy practices into your lifestyle—eating well, getting adequate sleep and reducing caffeine or sugar intake.

- Practice good time management. Setting your priorities right includes “making the most of your time” (Ephesians 5:16, New American Standard Bible)—especially making absolutely sure you make time for family and, above all, for building a personal relationship with God.

- Live by a budget. So many people struggle with financial problems. Develop a budget and live by it.

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

# Learning to Love All Over Again

If you're not as close to God as you once were, you can return to Him.

by Robin Webber

**B**ack in the mid-1960s the Righteous Brothers sang a song titled “You’ve Lost That Lovin’ Feelin’,” the lyrics begging that the loving feeling would return. Probably many of you, either back then or more recently listening to golden oldies stations, have had spontaneous sing-along moments to the mournful “gone, gone, gone, woah” that ends the chorus.

The Bible speaks of another love seemingly on the wane—in the words of the ascended Jesus Christ addressed to His followers at Ephesus late in the first century. He’s concerned that they’ve lost their “first love” (Revelation 2:4). He’s sensed they have lost their yearning for responding to His invitation of “Follow Me” given so long before.

Apparently the very real storms of life had taken their toll over the years. Most of the original apostles were dead, dear friends had departed the faith, the Roman emperor Domitian was persecuting them, and Jesus had not returned. Zeal and enthusiasm were naturally affected.

They had made the spiritual tactical error of basing their life’s actions and thus crafting their spiritual bank account on external events rather than their internal heart-centered relationship with God.

Sound familiar? Christ’s words are not simply a message in a bottle washed up on our 21st-century shoreline. For it’s an ageless chal-

lenge for Spirit-led human beings to maintain that vital spark of first love.

## Christ knows exactly where we are

Perhaps right now you feel so alone and wonder why your Christian walk has seemingly come to a halt. Maybe you feel deflated.

But Christ doesn’t leave us with a mournful “gone, gone, gone, whoa.” He presents a different tune, and He wants you to as well. Revelation 2:1 reminds us that He “holds the seven stars in His right hand” as He “walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands”—referring symbolically to His presence and care in the midst of His Church.

It’s a heavenly amplification of Jesus’ earlier words during His earthly ministry in which He stated, “This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day” (John 6:39).

He knows exactly where we are and exactly what spiritual condition we are in and how to help us grow in a loving relationship with God the Father and Himself—not based on mere feelings, but specific actions empowered by the Holy Spirit.

It’s a part of the Christian experience to fall in love again and again with the same God and come to know Him more intimately than ever before.

## What is “first love”?

So what is “first love,” spiritually

speaking? It’s the excitement of our minds and hearts opening up and being led by God’s Spirit—book by book, story by story, truth by truth.

It’s the excitement and passion experienced upon realizing what God the Father has done for us in Christ that we did not deserve and could never earn by our own human merits.

It’s embracing His revelation formerly blocked by deception or tradition or personal suspicion.

It’s realizing our need for God and our need to follow Him wherever He might lead—and becoming committed to that.

It’s more than fleeting infatuation, because God plainly requests and expects our all—for He’s given *His* all, and His Son told us right up front to “count the cost” before engaging (Luke 14:26-27).

Beyond that, it’s the joy in coming to understand the fullness of the gospel—that God not only sent His Son a first time, but that Jesus Christ is coming back to rescue humanity from itself (Matthew 24:21-22) and to establish the Kingdom of God here on earth (Isaiah 2:1-4).

It’s possessing faith in God as a sure partner, trusting that “He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6) and that He will fulfill His purposes (Isaiah 46:10).

It’s a sense of well-being in what He is to us—a Shepherd in whom we shall not lack (Psalm 23:1) with a

plan “to bring many children into glory” (Hebrews 2:10, New Living Translation).

### Three steps to regaining it

But now, Christ doesn’t bemoan the matter of His people’s current spiritual state (“gone, gone, gone, woah”) but offers three specific steps requiring our personal introspection and action to regain how we felt in our “spiritual youth” as a basis towards a maturing and lasting love.

These steps are revealed in the exhortation of Revelation 2:5: “[1] Remember therefore from where you have fallen, [2] repent and [3] do the first works.” Let’s consider these three steps and put them into play.

**1. Remember.** One of the worst human habits is to forget to remember! We all do it. We can so easily get stuck in a self-made room of solitary confinement, lamenting, “Nothing could be worse, and I feel so alone.”

God redirects our thoughts in Hebrews 10:32, saying, “But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated . . .”

God is telling us: *Go back—think! Remember where we started together. Remember when life seemed purposeless. And then I knocked on the door of your heart. You opened your life to Me, and I said I would be your God, and you would be My child* (Revelation 21:7). *I said I would never leave you nor forsake you* (Hebrews 13:5). *And I’m still here. I’m waiting. I Always will. Please remember—I love you!*

**2. Repent.** This means to change—by turning around and going the opposite way from our corrupt human nature and desires. Again, “remember” where and when the invitation of “Follow Me” first found you and how zealous you were in needing to repent in so many ways.

It was more than turning our spiritual man inside out like the proverbial pair of socks. It was becoming a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). But with life coming at us, perhaps we’ve settled for a “spiritual status quo,” thinking we know

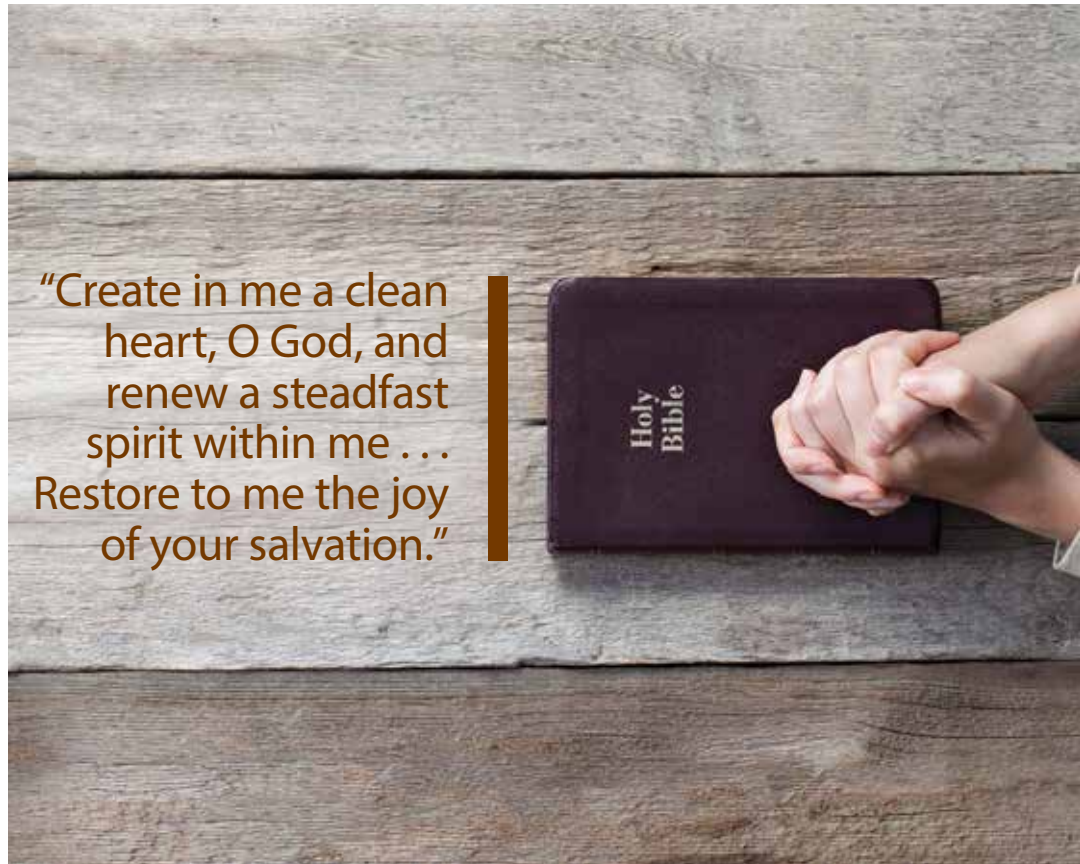
all the ropes—just doing the minimal, not building on God’s deposit.

Let me be clear—Scripture always speaks to the seasons of our spiritual journey: Initial revelation, repentance, return, revival, renewal, restoration and, ultimately, resurrection!

Each season has a reason and a purpose to help us comprehend God’s great love, patience and incredible reach into our

deliberate action taken by us toward God and toward others. God’s love in us by its nature is outward, out-flowing, away from immediate self-interest. It “does not seek its own” (1 Corinthians 13:5). Yet in loving outwardly we ourselves are also blessed.

God’s ways are not theory, but the keys to life. There’s an old Asian proverb that states, “I see and I forget, I hear and I



“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me . . . Restore to me the joy of your salvation.”

lives—and for us to continually surrender those portions of our lives yet opposed to Him.

If your love affair with God has waned then it’s not on *His* end, but *yours*. Beginning today, ask Him sincerely: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast [committed] spirit within me . . . Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit” (Psalm 51:10, 12).

God wants you to be close to Him again.

**3. Do the first works.** The bottom line is that love isn’t a feeling. Instead it is

remember, but I do and I understand.”

Isn’t that what God implores us to consider in James 1:22—“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only . . .?”

Life is in the doing! What’s holding you back from your love affair with God? Are you afraid, bewildered, confused? Any spiritual recovery towards regaining our “first love” lies on the other side of the panic that “*you feel*.”

Christ knew well that the road of good intentions down here would be pockmarked with feelings when He extended the invitation of “Follow Me.” His invitation still stands! **BT**





### “Kingdoms at War: Powers of the Unseen World”

I truly appreciate the work that you within the United Church of God are doing! Keep storing up riches in the heavens; doing the work of our Lord and of our Heavenly Father is certainly not going unnoticed!

*From the Internet*

I found your November–December 2015 issue very informative. I believe this is your best issue thus far.

*Subscriber in New York*

### “Wait! You Just Said: Jesus Was Not Born on Dec. 25!”

Jesus was born on Christmas! If you can prove He wasn't I will be glad to listen.

*From the Internet*

*A quick search of the Internet will show why Dec. 25 was chosen as the supposed date of Jesus' birth. For proof that Jesus wasn't born on Dec. 25, please read our free Bible study guide Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe? You can download or read it at our website [www.ucg.org/booklets](http://www.ucg.org/booklets) or request a copy to be mailed to you. It explains why Jesus Christ was definitely not born on Dec. 25, as well as how the Christmas holiday and its traditions are rooted in ancient pagan practices.*

### “Abortion and Planned Parenthood: A Cause for Righteous Anger”

The issue of the murder of preborn babies in their mothers' wombs is such an abomination to God, and it defies comprehension for every morally minded person. It is so wicked and so satanic. Yet strangely most Christian preachers and pastors seem silent on the issue. Why? Who speaks for these poor little babies? If not Christians, then who? God, please intervene in this horrific world and put a stop to all this madness!

*From the Internet*

### “Follow Me: Making Peace Beyond the Impossible”

Thank you so much for writing this article! Surely God inspired you to write this! This article is the answer to my prayers. Now I know how to deal with my situation more effectively and with confidence that comes from God—not by my strength, nor my ability, but through God's Spirit of grace and peace. May God continue to use you and all the writers at [ucg.org](http://ucg.org) to strengthen the flock. May God bless the work you do!

*From the Internet*

### Please accept my donation

Thank you for sending me a free subscription to your magazine. As a token of my thanks and appreciation, I wanted to send you a short note enclosing a donation to help defray the cost of your free magazine. My mother was a Seventh-day Adventist, but I am Baptist. I used to watch your program on TV Sundays but was disappointed when I tuned in and you weren't there. I will try to find out what TV channel you are on.

*From the Internet*

*Thank you so much for your kind and generous donation. To find out when our Beyond Today program airs, a complete station listing is available at [BeyondToday.tv/stations](http://BeyondToday.tv/stations). And as always, every episode is available to watch online for free at [BeyondToday.tv/archives](http://BeyondToday.tv/archives).*

This is my first time reading your magazines and I just want to say that it is truly a blessing. You have completely opened my eyes, and once I get situated and start working again I would love to donate money.

*From the Internet*

### Trying to find a congregation

I love the teachings of your Church! They all make sense to me. I'm trying to find a United Church of God congregation or a seminar that is close to me, but I can't seem to find one. Do you know if there is one being planned to open in my area or a seminar that is coming to my town? For now I'm still a practicing Lutheran, but I'm going to start your online Bible study, and I listen to sermons you post online.

*From the Internet*

*We appreciate your enthusiasm for finding a local congregation. There is always the possibility of a congregation in your area in the future if there are enough people committed to this way of life to merit establishing a congregation. And it's entirely possible that we have other people living near you who share your convictions. We recommend that you contact our nearest pastor to discuss these possibilities. You may also wish to arrange to meet with him. His contact information can be found at [www.ucg.org/churches](http://www.ucg.org/churches).*

I am so happy that there is a church that actually celebrates the biblical Holy Days! I was beginning to think I was mad for wanting to observe these days, as it had been put in my heart to keep them. So my question is, do you celebrate Easter, Good Friday or Christmas? And where can I find a church in Durban, South Africa?

*Subscriber in South Africa*

*We're glad to hear your enthusiasm for God's truth! To answer your first question, we do not celebrate Easter, Good Friday or Christmas, as they are not biblical, and Easter and Christmas have roots in pagan customs which God rejects. To answer your second question, we do have a congregation in Durban. Please visit [www.ucg.org/churches](http://www.ucg.org/churches) to find the information for the pastor there.*

I live in Istanbul and I am a Christian Turk. Thank you so much for the television sermons. I enjoy listening to them very much. It is good spiritual food and also at the right time. Is there a congregation or any meetings in Istanbul that I can attend? Please keep me posted and God bless you all. God be with you and keep you safe. Thank you again.

*Viewer in Istanbul, Turkey*

*We're glad to hear that you enjoy and benefit from our online sermons. Regrettably, we do not have any groups who worship together in Turkey. However, in addition to our online sermons, we also have regular weekly live Sabbath webcasts as well as biweekly Bible studies. Both can be watched live, but are also archived to be viewed later. The Sabbath webcast can be found at [www.ucg.org/webcast](http://www.ucg.org/webcast) and the biweekly Bible studies at [www.ucg.org/beyond-today/webcast](http://www.ucg.org/beyond-today/webcast). We offer these as a service to viewers like you who live in areas with no congregation nearby.*

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## Q: Are New Year celebrations pagan in origin?

*From the Internet*

A: Simply put, the answer is yes—New Year celebrations did originate in paganism. In the earliest days of the Church (the first and second centuries after Christ) there were no such celebrations as Christmas and New Year’s Day.

*The New Catholic Encyclopedia* states: “According to the hypothesis . . . accepted by most scholars today, the birth of Christ was assigned the date of the winter solstice (December 25 in the Julian [Roman] Calendar, January 6 in the Egyptian), because on this day, as the sun began to return to northern skies, the pagan devotees of Mithra celebrated *dies natalis Solis Invicti* (birthday of the invincible sun)” (1967, Vol. 3, p. 656).

Those customs carried over in the observance of Christmas (with its many traditions and practices steeped in paganism), and the “birth” of the “new year” of the sun. This is why the Roman calendar in use today designates Jan. 1 as the beginning of the new year as opposed to God’s designation of the spring month of Abib or Nisan on the Hebrew calendar as the beginning of the year (Exodus 12:1-2).

Much of the symbolism associated with New Year’s celebrations

today has very definite pagan origins. Kissing at the moment of transition to the next year is rooted in pagan sexual practice and superstition. And evergreen wreaths associated with Christmas were originally part of the pagan Calend celebration of Jan. 1.



Because we live in this secular society and most of the world operates according to the commonly used Roman calendar, it’s common to think of a new calendar year as beginning Jan. 1. Yet involvement in the celebration of that is not appropriate.

That said, one should be careful not to become too judgmental if, for example, someone is viewing a football game or parade at that time of year—as opposed to actually celebrating a New Year festival.

If you’d like to learn more, many resources are available that show the pagan origins of New Year’s Day celebrations. You can find related material in reference encyclopedias and online research resources as well.

## Q: Where did Valentine’s Day come from? Is it wrong for a Christian to celebrate it?

*From the Internet*

A: *The World Book Encyclopedia* tells us regarding Valentine’s Day: “The customs connected with the day . . . probably come from an ancient Roman festival called *Lupercalia* which took place every February 15. The festival honored Juno, the Roman goddess of women and marriage, and Pan, the god of nature” (1973, vol. 20, p. 204).

For the people of ancient Rome, the festival of *Lupercalia* was an annual ritual believed to ward off evil spirits and increase fertility. *Lupercalia* (also known as *Februatio*, from which comes the month name February) was popular among many of the new converts to the fast-rising Catholic Church.

As the book *Celebrations: The Complete Book of American Holidays* notes, “Everywhere that [mainstream] Christians came into power they immediately adapted the holidays and customs of the people to their own creed” (Robert Myers and Hallmark Cards editors, 1972, pp. 50-51).

Such was their course of action with this festival of *Lupercalia* at the end of the fifth century. While Pope Gelasius officially condemned the pagan Roman festival and banned its observance, many of its accompanying practices quickly appeared in a newly established holiday added by him to the official church list of feast



**Eros, the Greek god of erotic love, became Cupid in Roman culture—and remains a popular figure today on Valentine’s Day.**

days in A.D. 496—St. Valentine’s Day.

Soon, people were no longer looking to obtain fertility by being beaten with strips of animal skin called *februa*. Instead, they turned their focus to St. Valentine, the patron saint of “engaged couples and anyone wishing to marry” (*Celebrations*, pp. 48-49), whose actual identity is even murkier than what connection he bore to romance.

What amounted to a renamed, refurbished *Lupercalia* then picked up steam, gradually adapting itself into the Valentine’s Day we know today, which included the added elements of Valentine cards and Cupid, the Roman god of erotic love.

Friendship and sending cards are wonderful things, and God is not opposed to romance at the right time in the right way. But does the pagan religious history of Valentine’s Day taint the modern practices? What does God have to say about observing pagan traditions, renamed or not?

“When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess . . . do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’ You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods . . . Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it” (Deuteronomy 12:29-32).

Though the practices of *Lupercalia* have been repackaged and dressed up in the form of Valentine’s Day, these verses indicate they remain just as detestable as they have always been in our Creator’s eyes. Instead of pagan days and practices, our focus should be on the festivals God has given us in the Bible, which point us toward His amazing and incomparable plan for all of humanity.

For more information, be sure to download or request our free Bible study guide *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?* from our website at [www.BTmagazine.org](http://www.BTmagazine.org) or from our office nearest you listed on page 39.

# Are We Living in the “TIME OF THE END?”

**W**elcome to this new mini-study series titled “Bible Prophecy and You.” We all wonder about the future, especially when we have financial or other personal problems and the global news is so gloomy. And in the face of worsening conditions it’s possible to become terrified and paranoid.

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

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

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

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

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

## What the Bible means by “the time of the end”

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

Two seemingly opposite trends were to occur in the end time. On the one hand, interest in some kind of apocalypse would skyrocket. (“Apocalypse” comes from a Greek word meaning *revelation* or *unveiling*, but it has come to have a popular meaning of end-time cataclysm.) On the other hand,

Peter said “scoffers will come in the last days”—people who don’t believe or respect the Bible (2 Peter 3:2-4).

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

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

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

## ► Just what is *this age*?

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

In the New Testament, “this age” refers to the era of man’s self-rule from the creation of Adam and Eve to the second coming of Jesus Christ. Paul called it “*this present evil age*.”

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

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

“Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and







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

will be shaken” (Matthew 24:29).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3).

Many people don’t realize that Jesus was also a prophet—in fact, history’s greatest Prophet, foretold by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15, 18. When asked about the signs of His “coming, and of the end of the age,” Jesus answered with a lengthy prophecy of shocking end-time trends, such as wars and devastating natural disasters (recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21). We will look at details of this prophecy in future lessons.

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

“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. *And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved*; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened” (Matthew 24:21-22).

The New English Bible helps clarify verse 22: “If that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could survive . . .” Until the 1940s, there was no possible way, humanly speaking, for all human life to be annihilated. That became possible with the invention and proliferation of nuclear weapons. The development of modern chemical and biological weapons have added to the ways all human life can be destroyed. So it’s greatly comforting to know that Christ promised to intervene to prevent worldwide destruction! (In future lessons, we’ll learn additional evidence that we are in the end time.)

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

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens

Thinkstock

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



ness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:5-11).

Humanity has chosen to reject God’s rule and way of life to instead follow the way of self-centeredness and deciding for oneself what is right—the way that leads to suffering and death (see Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). Mankind is set on the path of self-destruction, yet God will intervene, first to chasten, then to save humanity from itself.

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

► **Can we have God’s blessings and protection during the end time?**

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

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

Keep these two comforting scriptures in mind:

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod

and Your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4).

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

God’s people don’t need to be fearful of the conditions in the world, for God is our protector and Great Shepherd! Even the thought of death need not terrify us because we know He will resurrect us to eternal life!

For more about being “counted worthy to escape all these things,” see the “Apply now” section below.

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

“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to

come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3-4).


“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

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

**Apply now**

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

We are to watch (pay close attention to) world events in light of the Bible’s teaching, and watch our own attitudes and actions to make sure we stay close to God and remain on the right path. Start by picking one prophesied world event and one personal weakness to watch and pray about *today*.

To learn much more about prophecies of the end time, including evidence that we are already living in the end time, be sure to request our free study guide *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* 





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# BEYOND TODAY LIVE

# AMERICA

## THE TIME IS NOW

### Darris McNeely

is a longtime pastor who now serves as content editor for *Beyond Today*. He is also an instructor at Ambassador Bible College.



### Steve Myers

is pastor of the Cincinnati East congregation of the United Church of God. He serves as an instructor and dean of faculty at Ambassador Bible College.

**Gary Petty** is an author and pastors the Nashville, Murfreesboro and Jackson, Tennessee, congregations of the United Church of God.



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