

BEYOND TODAY®

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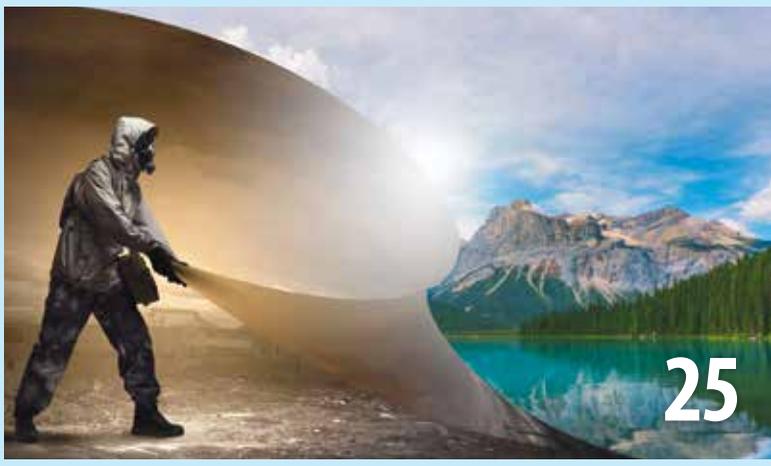
100 YEARS OF COMMUNISM **THE FAILED REVOLUTION**

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BEYOND TODAY

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Scott Ashley
Managing editor

The Problem With Human Government

We live in a dangerous world of growing chaos. North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un recklessly launches missiles and threatens his neighbors, spending millions of dollars on nuclear weaponry while his own people starve.

Iran likewise threatens nearby countries as it continues research and development of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles to deliver them.

The Middle East remains a dangerous neighborhood, with tens of thousands of deaths in the last year in the Syrian and Iraqi civil wars, with thousands more killed in Afghanistan. Thousands more have died in the last year in the Mexican drug war, and more than 66,000 Americans died of drug overdoses.

In oil-rich Venezuela, the socialist government of Nicolás Maduro recently suspended constitutional rights following an economic collapse that has led to citizens being reduced to eating garbage and stray animals to survive.

You'd think that after several thousand years of civilization, humanity would be better than this. But no. Humanity's greatest advancements seem to be in developing newer and more efficient ways of slaughtering one another.

The failed system of communism, subject of several articles in this issue, illustrates how power can corrupt men and minds to the point that the unthinkable becomes not just doable, but historical fact. Communist governments in Russia, China, North Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Cuba and Eastern Europe executed, starved or tortured to death countless numbers of their own citizens. Estimates range from a low of about 10 million to highs approaching 150 million.

Socialist governments—such as the National Socialist (Nazi) Party of Germany—have killed millions more of their citizens. A new term was coined for this—*democide*, meaning murder by government!

Every form of human government has failed to some extent—though obviously some more spectacularly than others. Clearly human government has its problems. But why? What's at the heart of it all?

A major part of the problem is *spiritual*. The world

today is not God's world—*far from it!* God's Word, the Bible, tells us that *Satan the devil* is “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4). As such, this evil and rebellious spirit being reigns over the earth today!

God's Word reveals that “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19)—meaning it is under Satan's powerful influence and control. This evil spirit being “deceives the whole world,” having duped mankind into following *his* ways rather than God's (Revelation 12:9). So we shouldn't be surprised that human government has been dysfunctional throughout human history!

But it will not always be this way. God fully knows the problem, and He promises a coming far different world—a world *beyond today*.

That far different world will begin at the return of Jesus Christ, as foretold in Revelation 11:15: “Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign

forever and ever” (English Standard Version).

Jesus Christ will reign with absolute power, but rather than corruption, that power will lead to *worldwide blessing*. Notice this prophecy in Isaiah 2:2-4 (New International Version):

“In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains . . . Many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD . . . He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.’ The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

“He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”

The vision of this astounding future is what drives *Beyond Today* magazine. It's the hope we proclaim in a confused and chaotic world. It's a vision we want you to share as we help you learn how you, too, can be a part of that incredible future God has planned for you and the world! **BT**



Exhibit at the Gulag Museum in Moscow.



Why is *Beyond Today* taking note of the 100th anniversary of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution that gave rise to the Soviet Union? What are we to learn from an openly atheistic movement whose leaders were complicit in and responsible for the deaths of millions of people through genocide, starvation, war and forced relocation to labor camps?

In 1983 U.S. President Ronald Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as an “evil empire” and correctly predicted its demise, which came eight years later. When it unraveled and collapsed, Western nations were both stunned and relieved that this could happen to this powerful empire that appeared to be so enduring and immovable.

The Bolshevik Revolution helped define the world of the 20th century. It led to the advent of the first socialistic government, which soon expanded into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The Soviet Union aggressively spread communist ideology to Eastern Europe, China, North Korea and Southeast Asia. At the same time, it enslaved its people behind an “iron curtain” of a tightly controlled political, economic and cultural system.

My Russian connection

In 1967, on the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution, I was invited to travel on a six-week visit to the USSR as a translator and photographer. Since my first visit I have traveled to this vast land dozens of times and have worked with Radio/TV Leningrad, youth tours, churches in Estonia, Sabbath-keeping groups in Western Ukraine, and disabled children in the Chernobyl area of Ukraine.

My parents came from the Soviet Union. My mother was born near Kharkov, Ukraine, during Stalin’s regime, and my father in a part of Poland that is now Ukraine. In Germany’s 1941 invasion of the USSR, the Germans forcibly took young people from the lands they conquered to work in German factories. My father also spent time in a concentration camp.

My parents met in Germany. When the war was over in 1945, they found themselves in the hands of hostile Russian troops who looked on many of the young workers in Germany as collaborators with the enemy, even though they had no choice in being there. In the immediate chaos that ensued, my parents were able to escape from their Russian occupiers to Hannover, located in Allied-occupied Germany. They found their way to a refugee camp, where they married. I was born in 1947, and in 1949 we all found a new home in the United States.

Having lived in the Soviet Union and suffered abuse, the specter of war and death left indelible scars on my parents. A most notable period was the year 1933, the year of the “Holodomor,” the Ukrainian genocide. Six million people in Ukraine starved to death as grain was forcibly taken from people who lived in the breadbasket of the USSR to quell resistance to Joseph Stalin’s Soviet Union.

My mother, who was eight at the time, recalled stories of her household hiding grain in the walls to survive. Horror stories of people dying all around were still vivid in her

memory. Their bodies would be taken out of their homes and placed in the street to be picked up as garbage.

My mother was finally able to go back and visit her parents after being away from them for 27 years. My father never saw his family again, many of whom perished in World War II.

How could such an inhumane government with such cruel leaders ever come to be? Let’s review how the October 1917 Bolshevik Revolution occurred. What were some of the hopeful expectations, and what went wrong?

The road to Russian revolt

Several events in the beginning of 20th-century Russia led to this milestone revolution—with the confluence of economic oppression, exploitation, World War I and the glittering promises of Marxism-Leninism.

For hundreds of years the czars ruled Russia as absolute monarchs. The last czar was Nicholas II. During his reign, in 1905, tens of thousands of workers went on strike. Their living conditions were unbearable, as they worked 13 hours a day, were paid very little, lived in tiny cramped apartments and had no rights.

On Jan. 22, 1905, a protest march of striking workers went to the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, the residence of the czar. Their list of grievances and demands included freedom of speech, workers’ rights and increased pay, better pay for women, shorter workdays, and representation in government. These workers were beginning to form what were called “*soviets*,” representative bodies of the workers.

What happened? “Bloody Sunday” is what happened! The workers thought they would be able to approach the czar and start a dialogue. They were dead wrong. Instead, the Imperial Guard fired on the unarmed petitioners. Hundreds were killed and wounded. The czar was not in the palace when this happened, but he had issued orders to fire on the demonstrators.

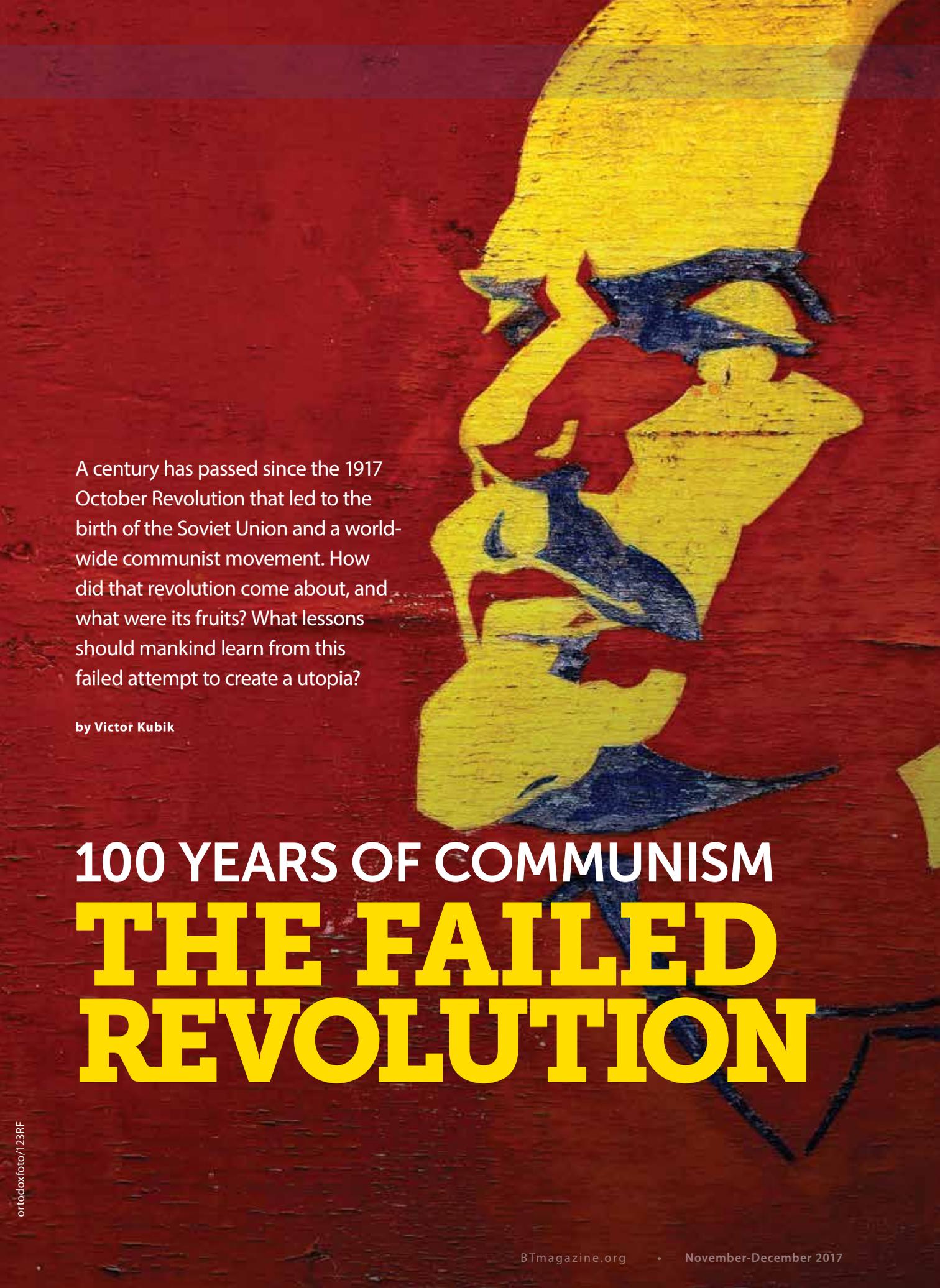
The massacre provoked public outrage, and a series of strikes spread quickly through industrial centers of the Russian Empire. This set in motion events that would culminate in the Bolshevik Revolution 12 years later.

The wave of unrest that followed the atrocity is now known as the Russian Revolution of 1905, as it led Czar Nicholas to relent and issue the October Manifesto in which he made a series of promises. One was to give the people the right of representation similar to that in Great Britain, where parliamentary democracy worked alongside the monarchy. In this representation, named the Duma, the Russian people would supposedly share power with the czar.

The first Duma was a very awkward mixture of workers and peasants. While they were to “share” power with the czar, the czar never really saw himself in any less position than he had been before. The first demands called for universal suffrage, radical land reform, release of all political prisoners and much more. This arrangement wasn’t going to work. The czar dissolved the first Duma in June 1907, escalating tensions.

World War I and the end of czarist rule

A further cause of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution was World War I, which began in 1914. The turmoil it created



A century has passed since the 1917 October Revolution that led to the birth of the Soviet Union and a world-wide communist movement. How did that revolution come about, and what were its fruits? What lessons should mankind learn from this failed attempt to create a utopia?

by Victor Kubik

100 YEARS OF COMMUNISM **THE FAILED REVOLUTION**

within Russian society helped lead to the overthrow of czarist rule.

In World War I, Russia was allied with Romania against Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. The war was a disaster for the Russians, who suffered 10 million dead and wounded. The Ottoman Empire blockaded the south, and Russia was short of supplies and food. Prices soared, bringing the nation to a critical impasse.

This led to a revolution in early 1917 in Petrograd (renamed in 1914 from “St. Petersburg” so that it sounded less German).

Fifty thousand Petrograd workers went on strike. The city was soon shut down as they tore down statues of the czar. Nicholas tried to stop the protests, but the army was now more sympathetic to the revolutionaries, and the czar’s regime fell apart. In March, Czar Nicholas abdicated and was placed under house arrest. This marked the end of the Russian monarchy. The Duma, which was first created in 1905 to share power with the czar, was now back and in complete power. (Nicholas and his family would be executed in 1918, after the Communists took over in 1917’s October Revolution.)

Communism or Marxism-Leninism

Another reason for the October Revolution was the extraordinary success of Marxist philosophy, which was espoused by an aggressive minority. It was named after Karl Marx, a Prussian-born political theorist, sociologist, journalist and revolutionary socialist of the previous century.

Karl Marx saw the world as divided between the working class and property owners. Those of the working class labored for wages but never got ahead because they didn’t own what they created. These were the common people known as the proletariat. On the other side were the bourgeoisie—the property owners, artisans and merchants. The business owners were the ones who really made most of the money. Ownership alone gave them the right to capital. And this was perceived as what split the world. Marxism viewed the world through glasses where everything was colored by property, money and ownership.

Marx saw the solution as *communism*. Those of the proletariat would eventually wake up. They would elect socialistic governments whose resources would be shared for the betterment of all.

Communism isn’t a government. It is a stateless system where everybody shares. Its motto, coined by Karl Marx, is “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” The concept is that everybody will give and take what they want, and it will somehow work out.

However, this wouldn’t happen on its own. It needed a catalyst. Here’s where Marxism-Leninism entered. Vladimir Lenin, who headed the final October Revolution, was the first dictator of the Soviet Union who took Marxism one step further.

What was needed, Lenin thought, was a dictatorship of the proletariat to facilitate class warfare. A political party was needed to represent the interest of the workers, and by including the military it could enforce the socialism necessary to creating eventual communism.



Scenes from the 1917 Russian revolution that led to a communist takeover.

By the time of the czar’s overthrow in 1917, Russia’s fight against Germany in World War I was going badly. Lenin, who had been a revolutionary living in exile because he led protests against the czar, was about to become one of the most influential persons of the 20th century.

People were upset and rioting because of conscription, a bad economy and starvation. The Bolshevik party, which was very small—only 20,000 members at this time—favored getting out of the war with Germany. Lenin’s party was no longer banned in Russia, and in April 1917 the Germans provided him safe passage home from Switzerland by train, hoping he would succeed in gaining power and leading Russia out of the war.

After Lenin’s arrival in Petrograd, intrigue and chaos ensued from a bewildering array of political, military, social and national groups. The Bolsheviks failed in a summer coup, and Lenin fled to neighboring Finland.

Then the military tried to take over the provisional government. Alexander Kerensky, the provisional leader, fell back on the Bolsheviks to defend him. The Bolsheviks were the soldiers, many of them navy officers and workers. So Kerensky was now indebted to the Bolsheviks. Lenin, the Bolsheviks’ leader, came back from Finland, and by autumn the Bolsheviks saw their opportunity.

The October Revolution

Now came the finale. The Bolshevik takeover turned out to be bloodless. Many people didn’t even take it seriously, viewing it as more political jousting for control of the government.

But this revolution was well planned and executed by Lenin and his cohort Leon Trotsky. With the control of the soviets and by taking majorities in major cities, they voted through the soviets to dissolve the provisional government and created, with Lenin as the dictator, the Russian Soviet Republic.

The people were supportive of the new regime because it came through on its promise to get out of the war with Germany. Russia proceeded to sign a peace agreement with the Germans on March 3, 1918—in which Russia ceded a

lot of territory to Germany.

But the Russians were thrown out of the frying pan and into the fire. A civil war raged for five years, in which about 8 million people died. The Bolsheviks ultimately won. The Communist Party was established as the sole governing party (and remained so until it was abolished in 1991). The USSR was formed in 1922.

Lenin was viewed by supporters as a champion of socialism and the working

socialism had brought. I was afforded the opportunity to witness this. At the time, I was a 19-year-old student in California. The managing editor of *The Plain Truth* magazine and his wife and I joined a group of historians for a six-week trip to more than half of the republics of the USSR. This resulted in a five-part magazine series called *The Unfinished Revolution*.

The Soviets spiffed things up for the benefit of us curious foreigners. Notably,

with the ideology of communist thought. Immediately evident were huge billboards praising the system with such slogans as “Glory to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union” or “Glory to Labor.” This was to extol the victory of the proletariat in a purportedly classless society.

Large portraits of leaders were displayed everywhere. Most notable by far was Lenin. The Soviets were also into naming buildings and cities after their leaders or historic events. Russia’s second-largest city, Petrograd, was now renamed Leningrad. My mother’s hometown was renamed Pervomaysk (“first of May”) in honor of International Workers Day, again celebrating the proletariat.

We were told by our hosts that theirs was a young country only 50 years old then, while the United States was almost 200 years old.

Life in the “workers’ paradise”

The people there were isolated from the West. The vast majority of trade was with Eastern European nations behind the Iron Curtain. Prices were strictly controlled by the state. What any given item was priced in one area was exactly the same in another. If it was an item that the government felt the people needed, the cost was affordable. For example, the government wanted the people to have televisions and radios so that it could talk to them, so it made certain that prices were within reach.

On the other hand, if the item was something personal, such as a man’s suit, the cost could be several months’ wages. I saw a chocolate bar for sale, but the price was about seven or eight times what we’d pay in the United States. I bought one to see what it was like. The chocolate was already getting old from being unsold for so long. I asked our guide why the chocolate was so expensive. He told me that perhaps it was because it was “purer.”

There was no real marketing of products and certainly no competition. If there was a brand name, it was the only one per product. In Moscow, the only brand of beer was “Moscow Beer.” Consumer items were obviously scarce. We were puzzled how such a system that promised so much to the people was so deficient in filling needs, yet was able to launch the first satellite into orbit around the earth and send the first man into space.

Communication from the government

The entire psyche of the nation was saturated with communist ideology, evident in the huge billboards praising the system.



Propaganda sign in Russian in 1967.



Teen in communist Young Pioneers in 1967.

class, while critics emphasized his role as founder of an authoritarian regime responsible for political repression and mass killings.

His successor Joseph Stalin was one of the most ruthless despots in all history, turning on his own people and being responsible for the deaths of tens of millions.

In communist ideology, the dictatorship of the proletariat was to be temporary because the ideals of communism were eventually supposed to take over, with the state then withering away. But that never happened. Those who took power *stayed* in power.

My visit to the USSR in the jubilee year

Fifty years after the October Revolution, in 1967, the Soviet government cracked open its doors a little from its isolationism. Its officials wanted the world to see what

on one of the most famous boulevards in Russia, Nevsky Prospect in Leningrad, the buildings were repainted and truly looked majestic and festive.

While the Cold War was raging, blustery political statements always seemed to be coming out of the Kremlin. This was muted when the Russians wanted us to see their country. Even more important than the historical focus of the trip were our observations of Soviet life where we were allowed interaction with the people.

We had an overall guide, a sullen sort, who was with us the entire trip. Then in each of the cities we would be met by local guides and historians who would talk about the historical significance of each area we visited.

It was evident from the outset that the entire psyche of the nation was saturated

was constant propaganda, telling the people how great things were in their “workers’ paradise.”

A typical TV program would be a boring documentary about a factory foreman commenting on plant production. These programs were very uninteresting to the people. But what a contrast when on one Sunday afternoon at our hotel a soccer game was playing on TV—the lobby was packed with cheering people!

Only the government was allowed to disseminate information. Shortwave programs from BBC, Voice of America, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty were banned and jammed. On cathedrals we noted inverted V antennas which broadcast interference on foreign broadcast frequencies. Soviet leaders clearly didn’t want their citizens to know what was happening in the West. I recall my parents sending family photos to their siblings in Ukraine. All mail was censored. If my parents in the United States included photos showing the home where we lived or our family car, those pictures would be removed.

On the other hand, free literature touting the magnificence of communism was plentiful and everywhere.

Religion was decried for its failures and historically corrupt clergy that often collaborated with or were under the control of the monarchy. Out with all religion!

Karl Marx wrote: “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.” With the exception of a few churches that remained open to allow for the few ignorant souls, churches were closed.

The famous Kazan Cathedral was now the “Museum of Religion and Atheism.” This was proudly noted, and we were encouraged to visit. The displays started out with early primitive man looking up in awe to the moon and stars. Exhibits explained that man began to worship these objects.

As you proceeded through the displays, you saw the formations of organized religion for the purpose of national control and governance. Abuses of religion were highlighted, notably the Christian conversion in 988 of the entire city-state of Kievan Rus. A painting portrayed the city’s population being marshaled into the Dnieper River for a mass baptism. Alongside were depicted the dire consequences for those who refused.

The display continued to what was then the present, noted to be a time of enlightenment in the USSR. It showed rockets being launched into space with people watching in awe. We noted the full circle, as the final display had similarities to the first museum scenes showing primitive man awed by the heavens.

No photos were allowed to be taken during our trip at airports, from planes or at train stations. Our guide monitored us closely and would raise his hand if we were taking photos of something “illegal”—which might have been poorer neighborhoods that our tour bus passed through.

We were to stay with our group at all times. Once, however, the editor and I slipped off on our own for the entire afternoon while in Uzbekistan. We walked into a park of “culture and rest” and casually entered the administration building. The administrators acted like they had never seen foreigners before. We spent the afternoon engaged in lively and enlightening talk and sharing. We thoroughly enjoyed the experience. When we came back to the hotel, our head guide scolded us and told us to *never* do that again!

We were taken to visit several “Young Pioneer” camps. All youth were required to be indoctrinated by the state, which controlled the hearts and minds of its subjects. This started with Little Octobrists up to age 9, then the Young Pioneers to age 14, and finally Komsomol, the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League. Admission for membership to the Communist Party was an honor, with only 15 percent of the population being party members.

Later visits to the USSR

Since my first visit to the land of the USSR in 1967, I’ve traveled there a few dozen times more on church and humanitarian missions. I have also had a memorable reunion with my parents’ families. In 1988, still the Soviet era, we had a gathering of uncles, aunts and cousins of both sides in my mother’s hometown of Pervomaysk, Ukraine.

It was eye-opening and moving to meet for three days with family I had never seen and mostly would never see again. We talked about their families, their work and their gardens. They most liked chatting about their children. They spoke of their hopes for their children’s future. They hoped very much that their children’s lives would be better than theirs.

They were very curious about everything we did in the United States. They wanted to know how much money we made and how big our houses were. They wanted feedback about what we thought of them.

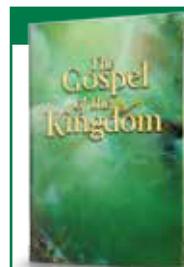
Economics, communist-style

I received a lesson in economics as understood under communism from my cousin. I explained how business is done in the United States. When we talked about how things were produced and sold, he quickly responded that this kind of economy is exploitative. Buying and reselling for profit was an absolute no-no.

He brought up the example of a man catching a fish. To sell the fish to another person for resale was, from a communist perspective, immoral. This was *speculation*, a word uttered contemptuously and in their society severely punished. The one buying the fish was in that case looked on as being exploited. The proper thing, it was thought, would be for the one who caught the fish to sell it to the consumer. Then, it was argued, no one would be taking advantage of anyone. But to produce and then sell to a wholesaler who might sell it to a retailer was unthinkable and illegal.

The government was the only employer in the nation. There were no private enterprises. Farms were collectivized. Working on these collectives was lackluster, inefficient and unstimulating. Why work hard? Why care?

However, the government did allocate small plots to each



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family to raise produce. These thrived! When it was theirs, people produced, and produced a lot.

Construction of new buildings was shoddy. People didn't have any incentive to make their work stylish or take pride in it.

Alcoholism was rampant among both men and women. As people became bored and hopeless, they found solace in vodka. Life expectancy decreased to the mid-40s. This system founded in godless Marxism-Leninism was not working.

The series of articles we produced after 50 years of communist rule was called *The Unfinished Revolution*. Now, after 50 more years, we can safely say that this was a *failed* revolution. That is the epitaph on yet another system of government authored by the deceptive

The other was *perestroika*, or rebuilding. The people definitely saw the need for this. Everyone I talked to about these subjects in the USSR seemed resigned to the fact that it would take a long time—maybe 20 years—to rebuild. There was no sense of urgency or enthusiasm to make it work. It was too little and too late.

Not long after, in 1991, the empire imploded. Just as it had started out bloodlessly, it imploded in the same manner. The world marveled. My friends in western Ukraine said that the system needed a bulldozer to level it before being rebuilt.

While the ideals of sharing and friendship (they called each other “comrades” or friends) and equality were spoken of, a greater, more dominant aspect of human behavior overrode the sincere innocence

the Soviet Union, was onto something when he introduced *glasnost* and *perestroika*—because the Bible actually speaks about a far greater *perestroika* that will include the rebuilding of all nations.

First, however, there must be a *glasnost*, a dialogue between man and God. The world today is in darkness because it has rejected God. A *glasnost* has already been established between God and the Church that His Son Jesus Christ is building.

And notice what the apostle Peter says of the future in Acts 3:18-21: “But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. *Repent* therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the *times of restoration* of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (emphasis added).

A rebuilding of the world is coming! But it will be nothing like the failed attempts by human beings to create manmade utopias.

The ideals of Marxism have failed. Communism in the USSR failed. While China, Vietnam, Laos and Cuba officially claim to be communist states, the country that adheres most strictly to communist principles is North Korea—not a shining example as it starves its own citizens to produce weapons of mass destruction to threaten its neighbors.

A time is coming when man will no longer look to fallible human messiahs and political systems to solve our problems, but will say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths” (Micah 4:2).

That coming time—when the Kingdom of God will be established on the earth—is God’s sure promise and great hope for mankind.

As we look at the flawed and failed systems mankind has created over 6,000 years of human experience, and the ongoing dangers our world faces today, let us always fervently pray, “Your Kingdom come!” **BT**

A rebuilding of the world is coming! But it won't be like the failed attempts by human beings to create manmade utopias.



A huge bronze statue of Vladimir Lenin lies toppled on the ground in Chernihev, Ukraine.

being, Satan the devil, who has “weakened the nations” (Isaiah 14:12).

When visiting the Soviet Union before its collapse, we saw the signs of an unraveling empire. Mikhail Gorbachev, then president of the Soviet Union, recognized well the stagnation, apathy and rot. He introduced two concepts. One was *glasnost* or openness, which was a policy of frankly discussing economic and political realities. While straightforward in our thinking, this wasn't something the Russian people were used to in a society that did not permit that kind of thinking.

of goodness. While the knowledge of God dimmed, allowing lying, stealing and killing to become acceptable, the values of productive work and socially acceptable behavior gradually became lost as the national psyche rotted.

On so many occasions we saw the complete disinterest among service workers such as waiters to act civilly. Why should they have? There was no incentive to do better. Doing better just got you into trouble.

A coming time of openness, rebuilding

Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of

The Soviet Union: The Dream and the Reality

I grew up in the Soviet Union and experienced it firsthand. The system was founded on the dream of a worker's paradise where all would share and every need would be met. So why did it fail?

by Natasha Teague

On Dec. 26, 1991, I woke up in a state of disbelief. On the previous day, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, the eighth and final leader of the Soviet Union, resigned and handed over power to Russian President Boris Yeltsin. That evening at 7:32 p.m., the Soviet flag was lowered from the Kremlin for the last time and replaced with the pre-revolutionary Russian flag.

For the first time in 69 years—since Dec. 30, 1922—there was no more Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). I suppose the shock would be like waking up one morning to find that the 50 states had declared independence from the United States and separated.

No more country? Our whole country, our life and our culture was based on Marxist socialism. It began with the Russian Revolution of 1917 and subsequent five-year Russian Civil War.

A revolution that changed world history

The Bolshevik Party under Vladimir Lenin dominated the coalitions of workers' and soldiers' committees (known as *soviets*) that called for the establishment of a socialist state in the former Russian Empire. In the USSR, all levels of government were controlled by the Communist Party. And the party's Politburo, with its increasingly powerful general secretary, effectively ruled the country. Soviet industry was owned and managed by the state, and agricultural land

was divided into state-run collective farms. The 1917 October Revolution had a huge impact on world history, particularly on the social and economic development of the world. And the influence was twofold:

First, the revolution brought about a new socialist state, the Russian Soviet Republic, and after the Civil War the Soviet Union emerged. Before that, there were no socialist states.

With the revolution came the one-party system and the introduction of a planned economy. By 1917, the Russian economy had been devastated. The harsh conditions of World War I and the lack of attempts by the czar, Nicholas II, to change the situation in favor of the people, led to revolt.

The power base of the Bolsheviks were workers in large industrial centers. The first decree was "On Peace," which pulled Russia out of the war. The second decree, "On Land," transferred land plots into the hands of those who cultivated them—the peasants.

So from the first, the Bolsheviks won over the hearts of the masses. The Russian Revolution was regarded as a triumph for those of the poor working class over their wealthy masters. The USSR initiated an eight-hour work day, gave women the vote, instituted free medical care, pensions and care for the elderly, and set a goal of eliminating illiteracy.

A second major effect of the revolution and the formation of the USSR was that the emergence of this system strongly

influenced social and economic development in Western countries and indirectly led to the emergence of social welfare states.

How? The European bourgeoisie realized that if they did not make concessions to the workers' movement, an explosion similar to what occurred in Russia might happen in their own countries. In turn, many European socialists, seeing the consequences of the October Revolution, began a struggle for workers' rights. Ultimately this workers' struggle led to the emergence of the kind of welfare state model that now dominates Europe.

Started with the aim of providing for all

It was said that the Soviet Union was creating a paradise for workers. Everyone was to be treated equally, and the wealth was to be shared. The trouble is that when people regard everything as theirs, they can justify theft because, after all, it all belongs to the people. Also there is no incentive to work hard. Those who work hard get *more* work, and those who don't work hard get *less* work.

Also, the centrally planned economy was not built on competition or efficiency in providing what people actually wanted, but instead was a system of deception. Those in charge wanted only positive economic reports. Therefore production was always up. Figures were modified to put any institutions, factories, farms or the military in a good light. It didn't matter if you used 30 workers to build a product that needed only one.

And, of course, workplace theft was



The author with her father in 1961.



Young Natasha in a Russian winter.



Natasha playing dress-up at age 7.



The author picking mushrooms at age 11.

I lived in the Soviet Union for 41 years, and my memories of my life and growing up there are mostly very good.

a common way to supplement meager incomes. Shortages of many basic products led to a huge black market. With the lack of availability, average people were forced to live very simply. While they were not caught up in the materialism of those in the West's "consumer society," this was not by free choice but by totalitarian government restriction.

The "workers' paradise" contrasted and came into conflict with another ideal: The good of the whole country was to come before that of the individual.

People were more than proud of their country; they truly *loved* their country. Stalin was able to justify his cruel dictatorship as merely a means of

furthering the revolution and helping the workers. The rise of the KGB, the state security and intelligence agency, included massive propaganda efforts to control information and justify Stalin's actions.

Again, a culture of deception became ingrained in the system. The truth was changed or hidden if it showed failure. Even if someone on a lower level gave a negative report, as it was passed up the chain of command, it was doctored and modified to make it acceptable. An unacceptable report could mean a trip to cold and distant Siberia or your disappearance. Especially during the time of Stalin, the closer you got to the

top, the more vulnerable you became to his paranoia.

Life in the Soviet Union

Of course, the experiences of everyone in this vast empire were not the same. I lived in the Soviet Union for 41 years, and my memories of life there are mostly very good. I grew up in a very nice family that was loving and intelligent. We lived near the city center of Gomel in Belarus ("White Russia"), which borders Poland and Ukraine.

Our neighbors were friendly and family-oriented. Children played at each other's houses, and parents watched out for them. I never saw anyone drunk or ill-mannered. Later in life I learned that people who grew up in factory neighborhoods faced these problems, but I never saw them.

I had a very happy childhood, and since my mother was a housewife and my father was a retired air force pilot, they spent a lot of time with me. They gave me their time and their love. Almost every day we went to visit museums, parks, the river and forests. We also had a little *dacha*, a small cottage (with no electricity) with a garden plot. We canned fruit and vegetables for the winter. As a little child, I remember sitting under a tree and eating an entire two-gallon bucket of cherries. The taste was heavenly!

My father taught himself how to garden by reading books. He was a voracious reader. We grew up with large volumes of art, science and especially geography. He was also a news addict. We would listen to the radio several times a day. Of course, the news was always good—good crop reports, good progress in industry and space technology, good *everything*.

The only bad news was about what happened in the West. The United States was our enemy, and news was propaganda. I could never imagine moving to the West. We were insulated from the outside and convinced that we lived in the best country with the best of everything.

Growing up in the USSR did not include any belief in God. We never read the Bible, never said a prayer. In fact, one of the favorite songs declared that we succeeded not because of heroes or God, but through the power of the people alone.



Still, I grew up under a strong moral system. Looking back, I think this was a legacy from the Russian Orthodox Church, not totally godless underpinnings. From grade school on we were taught moral values. We joined youth groups, somewhat like the Cub Scouts, which stressed the need to make good grades, be clean and well dressed, show respect for the elderly and love the country.

We engaged in community projects like cleaning school classrooms or decorating the graves of fallen soldiers. Later, around 11 years of age, we joined the Young Pioneers, and again good moral conduct and love of country were stressed.

Badges of honor and pride in national achievements

In the Young Pioneers we all wore red ties to school. We were very proud of this. At home every day we ironed the ties—they were silk—to make them look beautiful and tidy. All my classmates were solemnly received into Pioneers in the Palace of the Pioneers, which was formerly the palace of Prince Paskevich, one of Russia’s most famous military commanders of the 19th century.

One boy from our class wasn’t a good student and was not accepted into the Pioneers at the same time the rest of us were.

Today, even though I still have some nostalgia for my life in the USSR, if anyone asks me if I want to go back, the answer is no.

It was a shame, and he was very upset. I even remember a moment when someone first put the tie on me and how happy and excited I was to finally become a Young Pioneer.

Later I was among the first five or six students from 110 pupils of the same age group chosen for the Komsomol or Young Communist League. The regional committee conducted a special examination for admission. A commission of several people took turns asking each of us questions. We were asked about our studies and behavior (although they had documentation on each of us), the history of the USSR, the history of the Second World War, politics in the world, and so on. We were all worried we would not be accepted.

But then we all were handed the badge bearing the likeness of Vladimir Lenin. From that point forward we stopped wearing Pioneer ties and only wore the Komsomol badge. The next day I went to school very happy and proud that I was worthy of being a Komsomol member.

We all were very proud of our country—of Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space, our ballet, our theaters and cinema, our achievements in world sports, the great contribution of our country in the victory of the Second World War, and much more.

A lot of stress was put on education. Tutoring was provided by teachers after school at no direct charge to pupils, and special attention was given to the brightest and to those who were struggling to pass. All education, including university, had no tuition, and dorms were affordable. If you passed exams, you were given a stipend to live on. The better you did academically, the more money you were given. My brother, who studied to be a Ph.D. in economics, made all As and received the Lenin Stipend, which was equal to what an engineer made.

Nostalgia over lifetime security and provision

One reason that many who lived under the Soviet Union look back on it with nostalgia is because everyone—the sick, the elderly, the poor—had cradle-to-grave security to the extent that state budgetary constraints were able to provide. Unlike the West, you didn’t have to worry about not having a job, a certain level of rationed health care, your education, the cost of basics like food and clothing, certain items like televisions and radios, your retirement, your pension. Those who look back with nostalgia see a life without economic stress.

It’s hard for people in a free market society like ours in today’s West to understand the underlying morals of communism. The state was the employer. You could have a plot of land and grow food for your own use or to sell. But it was seen as immoral to acquire something someone else made and resell it for profit. Quality was not emphasized. *Quantity* was the issue. Everyone had clothing, factory goods and the necessities for subsistence.

Over the 69 years of the Soviet Union, the people became strongly bonded together and commonly tried to help each other and do good things for the country. We felt a brotherhood.

My father was born in 1916. He was the oldest of three children in a family living in a small village. When he was five, his father died of pneumonia. It was a difficult time, but the Soviet system paid for the three children’s educations. Two became air force pilots, and one a teacher. All three children

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in my family received university educations.

The sad reality

At the same time, the government hid information or lied to us and caused a lot of harm. For instance, I lived 60 miles from Chernobyl when the nuclear reactor there blew up. We only found out about it two weeks later because Western scientists were alarmed by the rising radiation rates in their countries.

The prevailing winds blew radioactive particles all over us. My three-year-old son and I ate contaminated food and drank contaminated milk. The rate of thyroid cancer there was and still is astronomical.

The government of Belarus still denies the continued danger. Heavy concentrations of radiation remain in the forests of Chernobyl. Every time there is a forest fire, the wind blows radioactive ash over my home city of Gomel and beyond. In the region of Gomel, with a population of 1.4 million, deaths by cancer increase by 1,000 people each year. That is to say, if 5,000 die this year, 6,000 will die next year, and 7,000 the year after that.

Today, even though I still have some nostalgia for my life in the USSR, if anyone asks me if I want to go back, the answer is no.

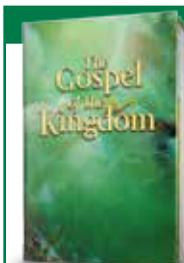
Why did communism fail when it aimed to provide abundantly for everyone? A friend, a chemistry professor who grew up in the Soviet Union, offered this explanation:

The Bolshevik Revolution was based on the ideal of social justice. It began with a lot of people who were romantic revolutionaries and dreamers. But after a short time, the pragmatic revolutionaries took over and killed off the dreamers. They took power and introduced their own concept of social justice. When the rulers fight for power, they must give some lip service to social justice or people will not support them. But in the end, the pragmatists always take power from the dreamers.

My friend noted that after revolution a society returns to a normal state of order and that revolutionaries then use brutal force to hold on to power.

Yet it should be realized that even what the dreamers of communism dreamed up in the first place was fundamentally wrong. It was not wrong to long for a world that ensures that everyone is adequately helped and provided for. But to call for achieving this through state takeover of wealth and redistribution, as communist thinkers did, was a call to break God's commandments against stealing and covetousness on a massive scale. Any such venture is doomed to failure from the start.

Thankfully a world is coming where all people will receive security and care through obedience to God's laws rather than trying in vain to find utopia by living in violation of them. 



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Today's Economic Systems: **Are They Biblical?**

Are communism, socialism and today's capitalism endorsed in Scripture? Plus, what does the Bible explain is the astounding future of government on earth?

by John LaBissoniere

Many in the Christian community today align themselves with the political right or left. Some are conservative-leaning, preferring less government involvement and greater social and economic freedom. Others are liberal-progressive, leaning toward governmental control of social and economic matters. Some believe the Bible teaches socialist income equality by pointing to what Christ told a young man in Matthew 19. Some even conclude that Acts 2 and 4 endorse a communal or socialistic economic system.

Are such ideas correct? Where does the Bible stand on basic socioeconomic concepts and methodologies? Before examining these and other biblical passages, let's first review Dictionary.com definitions of three of the 20th and 21st century's major economic systems, which also involve form of governance—communism, socialism and capitalism.

Communism: "A system of social organization in which all economic and social activity is controlled by a totalitarian state dominated by a single and self-perpetuating political party."

Socialism: "A theory or system of social organization that advocates the vesting of the ownership and control of the means of production and distribution, of capital, land, etc., in the community as a whole."

Capitalism: "An economic system in which investment in and ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange of wealth is made and maintained chiefly by private individuals or corporations."

Flaws of governing and economic systems

In his early writings, communism's founder Karl Marx put forward the theory that the communist governing and economic structure would develop into an advanced form of socialism. Yet, over the past 100 years this ruling experiment proved to be a dismal failure. Although communism still exists today in nearly its original soviet-style form in North Korea and Cuba, other former communist governments, such as China and Vietnam, have morphed into hybrids that include elements of socialism and capitalism.

Communism has been denounced as an authoritarian, atheistic system that disallows personal freedom, is dominated by secret police surveillance, government propaganda, censorship and a centrally controlled economy, which fails to meet its people's needs.

Socialism often receives criticism because it disabuses the concept of private property rights, demands redistribution of

wealth by government coercion, impedes innovation, restricts individual freedom and leaves the door open to dictatorial rule.

Capitalism, as it's often practiced, is viewed as flawed by many as a system of elite, moneyed privilege and class rule that encourages greed and profit over people and is dominated by special interests at the expense of average citizens. Corruption and cronyism among business and government, along with currency manipulation—one of the biggest fraud and theft operations in history—interfere with free enterprise and free exchange on which capitalism is supposed to be based.

Yet we should be careful not draw some kind of moral equivalence between even corrupted capitalism and state socialism and communism. The former, in spite of serious problems in the way it's been practiced, has still managed, because of underlying free market principles, to create wealth on a large scale and improve the lives of untold numbers of people.

In contrast, socialism and communism have not created new wealth on a large scale and have kept whole populations in poverty, the promises of fair distribution being broken by those in power taking the greater share. Worse, governments practicing socialism and communism have been behind the largest-scale mass murder the world has ever seen—either through wars of conquest or slaughter of their own citizens.

The fact is, all the economic and political systems of man's devising and implementation are, in various ways, not in line with what God presents in the Bible.

Jesus Christ's view of human government and wealth

What was Jesus Christ's position on mankind's governing structures, which have a major impact on economics? When on trial, Jesus told the local Roman administrator Pontius Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). In other words, His Kingdom was not of or like the governing ideologies or systems of this age of human misrule. But in a future time, beginning at His second coming, God's perfect government will be established on the earth to lead and guide all nations.

Before getting into this further, let's note some scriptural instances, including two referred to earlier, that refute the idea that the Bible offers support for various humanly conceived forms of social and economic governance.

For example, some people believe Jesus taught that socialistic income redistribution is something Christians should promote. They point to Christ's words to a rich young ruler as validation. Jesus told the young man, "If you want to

be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Matthew 19:21). After this encounter the young man “went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions” (verse 22).

The young man’s particular reaction expressed the very essence of the story. Because he cherished his wealth above God, Jesus told him to give it all away. Christ’s words are not an instruction advocating socialist income redistribution. Rather, it’s a vital lesson about how making one’s physical wealth more important than serving and surrendering to God can choke off one’s spiritual growth and development.

Nowhere in the Bible do we find that God condemns wealth or the gaining of wealth. In fact, a number of notable biblical figures were highly affluent and financially successful. For example, Genesis 13:2 tells us that Abram, later renamed Abraham, “was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.” Also, King David was wealthy, and his son Solomon became exceedingly prosperous (1 Kings 4:20-28). Some New Testament Christians such as Philemon were quite well off.

To illustrate an important spiritual lesson, Jesus employed the concept of increasing wealth through proper investments in His parable of the talents. In Matthew 25:14-30 Christ told

passage was *an entirely voluntary sharing* on everyone’s part. In addition, there is no indication anywhere in the New Testament that a communal economy became the norm.

During Jesus’ ministry He didn’t teach His disciples to sell what they had and distribute it to others who were less well off. However, He personally set the example as to what they should do. When He encountered poor, hungry and suffering people, He did what He could to help with the means He had available. Of course in His case, as the very Son of God, His means were often supernatural and extremely powerful.

The Gospels record multiple miraculous healings that Jesus performed, especially for poor and needy individuals. The purpose was to express His, and by extension His Father’s, intense love for Their supreme creation—human beings. Christ’s example to His disciples of love, service and sacrifice for others left a lasting impression. Within the limits of their ability and resources, they too served others generously, and in doing so they truly honored God (Matthew 25:40; Acts 3:6).

Notice that there was no administrative edict, no coercion or demand for compliance, as would be found in communist and socialist systems. In Christ’s example, we witness only an intense personal willingness to serve and care for others *from the heart*—motivated by God’s love and His Spirit (John 13:34).

And that’s the message for Christians today. Jesus’ actions were so extraordinarily meaningful and significant that they can reach down through

time via the pages of the Bible, to affect us—if our minds and hearts are open and receptive.

The Bible’s social and economic system revealed

As has been discussed, the Bible does not condemn wealth and prosperity, especially if it is used properly and righteously to serve one’s family, one’s neighbor and God’s work. Producing wealth creates jobs, which enables others to properly support themselves. Producing wealth enables one to have the means to help and assist others, which God repeatedly encourages in His Word. Luke 8:3 compliments several wealthy women who helped financially support Jesus’ ministry.

Neither does the Bible advocate redistribution of wealth or a reduction or elimination of people’s personal liberty, such as communist and socialist systems do. Forced redistribution of wealth—government taking from one person to give to another—is actually a form of stealing and a violation of the eighth of the Ten Commandments.

Yet the Bible also doesn’t support any kind of capitalism that is rooted in deception, greed and theft and, as is all too often the case, dominated by special-interest influence and cronyism. These also are violations of God’s commands.

What the Bible *does* support is a society and economy based on private property, freedom of choice, personal initiative, free enterprise and *especially* unselfishness, generosity and compassion.

Although that kind of system has not yet been fully tried—*it is coming!* Its initiation will occur at the time of Jesus Christ’s second coming. From His global headquarters in Jerusalem, it will then spread throughout the entire world.

The Bible has multiple references describing that absolutely

All the economic and political systems of man’s devising and implementation are, in various ways, not in line with what God presents in the Bible.

a story about a wealthy man who was preparing to take a trip to a distant country. Before leaving, he gave some of his assets to each of three servants, with the instruction that they should work to increase the size of the investments through diligent effort and wise money management.

While two of the servants prudently doubled their money, the third servant hid his money in the ground. On returning home, the wealthy man praised the conduct of the two servants but was highly displeased with the actions of the third (Matthew 25:27). As in the previously discussed story, the foundational lesson of this parable is that Christians must strive diligently to develop their spiritual aptitudes.

Does Scripture advocate communism?

Some people believe that the early Church endorsed a socialistic economic system by practicing a form of communism. As mentioned earlier, they base this idea on descriptions in the book of Acts. One states, “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need” (Acts 2:44-45; compare Acts 4:32-35).

Does this teach that Christians should practice a collectivist communal lifestyle and economic system? The answer is no.

Many of these converts were visitors from areas outside of Jerusalem and from foreign lands. Since they desired to learn much more about Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God from the apostles, they chose to stay in Jerusalem for a while. Unlike communism, which demands and commands citizen participation, and confiscates wealth from those who produce the most, the sharing of resources described in this

amazing time. It will encompass a period of a thousand years, a millennium, of splendid peace and prosperity for all people—unequaled in human history.

God will use the physical descendants of Israel as a model nation to show how He will teach, work with and bless the entire world. He will offer every person full, divine knowledge of Him and His generous, loving ways through His unparalleled gift of the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Scripture gives us several important indications as to the economic structure of God’s coming Kingdom on earth. The cornerstone of His economy will focus on land ownership, just as it did in ancient Israel (1 Kings 4:25).

This new Millennial economy will value and preserve private property since “everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid” (Micah 4:4). All families will have the opportunity to improve and preserve their land—similar to how God instructed Adam and Eve to care for the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15). Numerous family-owned farms will generate astonishingly plentiful yields (Amos 9:13; Joel 2:24; 3:18).

Blessings from working, tithing and sharing

Another godly economic criterion to be taught in the Millennium is simply that of *working* for a living. To give some background about this vital point: God had expressed to His physical nation of ancient Israel the principles of helping those who were poor. To provide a means for the needy to feed themselves, landowners were instructed that when they harvested their fields they should leave the corners untouched so the underprivileged could gather the gleanings (Leviticus 19:9-10).

It was the responsibility of able-bodied poor individuals to go into the fields to gather their grain, rather than simply have others provide them sustenance without any effort on their part.

The apostle Paul explained this same basic model to members of the Church when he wrote, “*If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat*” (2 Thessalonians 3:10, emphasis added throughout). Also, Paul instructed the brethren at Ephesus that everyone should “labor, working with his hands what is good, *that he may have something to give him who has need*” (Ephesians 4:28). God expects us to work to generate income—but also to be generous to others who are in genuine need.

An additional economic principle to be taught in our Creator’s future new age of prosperity will be *tithing*—which simply means giving back to God 10 percent of one’s increase (Leviticus 27:30; Deuteronomy 14:22). Since government operations require expenditures—even in God’s coming society—that’s where the tithing will come into play. Everyone will delight in tremendous blessings when they pay to God His tithe. Indeed, when people give their best to God, as is due Him, He will consequently give it back to them many times over.

Proverbs 3:9-10 explains, “Honor the LORD with your possessions and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine.” Contrasted with the oppressive taxes of today, tithing operates more like an equitable flat tax that actually encourages initiative. This is because unlike man’s current system wherein people are essentially *penalized* for being productive—some paying half or more of their earnings in taxes—this won’t happen in the Kingdom of God.

Even during the Millennium, however, there will be some people in rare instances who will experience difficult times financially. For them, God has provided a wonderful and reliable economic support system designed to prevent them from descending into severe poverty.

In such situations, God says in Deuteronomy 15:7-8: “If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother. But you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs.”

God’s government will work for everyone

Those who borrow money out of need will not be saddled with interest payments—which means people will not take advantage of other’s hardships. Also, there will be a release from borrowed debt every seventh year, which will give people a new, debt-free beginning (Deuteronomy 15:1-2).

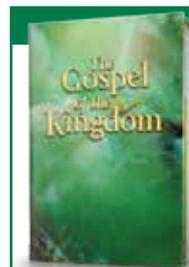
Under God’s righteous government, those who lend to others in need will know in advance that they may not get their money back. And yet there is a great blessing in one’s willingness to help others. Deuteronomy 15:10 tells us, “You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, *because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand.*”

Jesus likewise said to “lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great” (Luke 6:35). Those who lend money to others in need will be rewarded because any financial help they provide to the poor will be viewed as if they are giving it to God. Proverbs 19:17 explains, “He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, and He will pay back what he has given.”

The biblical social and economic policies that Jesus Christ will institute at the beginning of the Millennium will be crucial in guiding how people conduct themselves and cooperate with others. It will commence with an astounding change in the hearts and minds of people through the power of God’s Holy Spirit—from selfishness to genuine outgoing concern, profound generosity and deep empathy toward all others (Ezekiel 11:19-20).

For the first time, people will begin to grasp that God-ordained methods will not only bring wonderful financial security to themselves and their families, but to all people everywhere. So unlike today’s economic and governmental systems, God’s way will work perfectly for every person at all times.

Therefore, since this world and its ills and problems will soon pass away into history, let’s be aware of issues regarding today’s human governments but not be consumed by this. Rather, let’s concentrate our attention on the wonderful future God has in store for us and all humanity. It’s coming soon! Are you preparing spiritually for its arrival? 



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Humanity has tried many forms of government and economic systems, but none have brought lasting peace and plenty for everyone. That will change in the coming Kingdom of God! Learn a great deal more in our free study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

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Russia's Influence on America and the World

The communist revolution that began in Russia 100 years ago ultimately swept up many nations in its grip. And although the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Russia's influence on America and the rest of the world continues in ways few people realize or admit.

by Scott Ashley

Long before the November 2016 U.S. presidential election was even held, news reports began circulating that Russia was trying to influence the election. Such reports reached a frenzy level in the months after Donald Trump unexpectedly won the presidency, but more recently have died down after a year of concerted digging produced no hard evidence of Russian interference.

While the truth about possible Russian election meddling may never be known, there's no doubt that Russia, like most other significant world powers, has long tried to influence the rest of the world to its advantage.

Some of those efforts, such as invading other nations by force, have been evident and overt. Other efforts—such as those we'll review here—have been much more subtle, but just as dangerous in the long run!

Russian goal of world domination

Long before the communist revolution swept Russia, Karl Marx, one of the intellectual architects of communism along with Friedrich Engels, wrote: "The policy of Russia is changeless. Its methods, its tactics, its maneuvers may change, but the polar star of its policy, *world domination*, is a fixed star" (emphasis added throughout).

When Russia became communist, it indeed tried to dominate the world through *spreading* communism. After the 1917 revolution, other former territories of the Russian Empire banded together in 1922 to form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). To expand its influence, the Soviet Union established communist fronts in many countries through workers' unions, youth and sports organizations, humanitarian aid groups, and the like.

During this same period, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Joseph Stalin, a former seminary student turned ruthless hardcore communist, consolidated power. His goals to transform Russia led to millions being sent to prison camps and executed, and millions more dying by famine.

After helping defeat the Axis Powers in World War II, the Soviet Union gained control over much of Eastern Europe,

where it installed communist governments in many countries. The USSR also strongly supported openly communist movements in Central and Western Europe and again established many communist front organizations around the world through unions and youth, women's and peace groups.

As conflict grew between the West and the Soviet Union along with its Eastern Bloc satellite nations, the Cold War began—a decades-long period of tension and rivalry that occasionally saw "hot" wars break out between the major powers' proxies, as in Korea and Vietnam.

In 1949 the Soviets won a major prize when China fell to Mao Zedong's communist revolutionaries—leading to the execution of 1 to 2 million landlords and the later deaths by starvation of some 45 million in Chairman Mao's "Great Leap Forward" social reformation.

"We will bury you!"

Cold War tensions grew ever more strained as Russia (and later China) developed atomic bombs, followed shortly by

"The policy of Russia is changeless. Its methods, its tactics, its maneuvers may change, but the polar star of its policy, *world domination*, is a fixed star."

much more powerful hydrogen bombs. Relations between East and West hit bottom in late 1956 when, at a reception at the Polish embassy in Moscow, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev boasted to a group of Western diplomats: "Whether you like it or not, history is on our side. *We will bury you!*"

When Khrushchev spoke those words, a third of the world's population lived under some form of communist government.

In addition to the Soviet Republics, the following countries would become communist at some point in their history: Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Croatia, Cuba,

the Czech Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, East Germany, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Hungary, Laos, Mongolia, Montenegro, Mozambique, North Korea, Poland, the Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, Vietnam and Yemen.

The Soviets were hard at work on their goal of a world dominated by communism. For many, it appeared that Khrushchev's boast might well come true!

And this is where the history of Russian attempts to influence America and the West get really interesting.

Defeating the West by other means

With the Soviet Union and the United States armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons, both sides knew that an all-out war was out of the question. Both recognized that nuclear war was unwinnable because much of the world would be annihilated in a nuclear holocaust.

So the Soviets turned to other methods that had proven successful in the 1920s and 30s—infiltrating the West through communist front groups, organizations and agents. Such efforts had never really ceased during intervening years; now they simply intensified.

On March 26, 1947, J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (or FBI), who had been fighting communist influence since 1919, addressed the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities. He warned of widespread communist efforts to infiltrate American society—specifically through Hollywood movies, radio entertainment, labor unions, the federal government and various front organizations.

He noted that in the previous few years the FBI had investigated almost 6,500 cases where government employees were suspected of being involved in organizations advocating the overthrow of the U.S. government, resulting in almost 2,000 employees resigning or being discharged.

He warned that even government programs were being used as fronts to advance communist/socialist aims. He cautioned that even religion and education were fertile fields for the advancement of communist ideology:

“I do fear so long as school boards and parents tolerate conditions whereby communists and fellow travelers, under the guise of academic freedom, can teach our youth a way of life that will eventually destroy the sanctity of the home, that undermines faith in God, that causes them to scorn respect for constituted authority and sabotage our revered Constitution.”

In 1959 Hoover published a book titled *Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism in America and How to Fight It*. In the foreword he warned: “There is no doubt that America is now the prime target of international communism . . . But we may not learn until it is too late to recognize who the communists are, what they are doing, and what we ourselves, therefore, must do to defeat them.”

Predictions of a transformed America and transformed world

In 1958, as Hoover was writing *Masters of Deceit*, another book titled *The Naked Communist* was published. Its author, Cleon Skousen, was a police chief, attorney and former FBI agent who had spent much of his FBI career studying

communist ideology, methodology and infiltration, much as Hoover had. The book was quite popular, and over time sold more than a million copies.

What is remarkable about *The Naked Communist* is a section in which Skousen listed 45 “current communist goals.” Having researched communism for years as an FBI agent, Skousen was highly familiar with its aims, plans and methodology. His list was so prescient that it was read into the Congressional Record on Jan. 10, 1963.

Space doesn't permit listing or commenting on all 45 goals. Interested readers can find them online, in Skousen's book, or in the 2011 book *The Naked Truth: The Naked Communist—Revisited* by James Bowers. However, we will examine a few of the listed goals here—*keeping in mind that these were published almost 60 years ago*.

Communist goals attained on the international scene

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, it's obvious that a number of the goals on the list would not ultimately be achieved. But it's astonishing how many *were* achieved in such a short time!

- Number 7 on the list, for example, was “*Grant recognition of Red China. Admission of Red China to the UN.*” From 1945 to 1971, the Republic of China (now referred to as Taiwan) was a charter member of the United Nations and one of five permanent members of the Security Council. But in 1971, the communist dictatorship the People's Republic of China was given UN membership as well as the Security Council seat (and accompanying veto power) of the Republic of China—with the latter being unceremoniously kicked out of the UN, the only nation ever so expelled!

- Number 44 on the list was “*Internationalize the Panama Canal.*” After it was opened in 1914, the Panama Canal was hailed as one of the seven wonders of the modern world, benefiting all nations. But in 1977, after relentless pressure from U.S. President Jimmy Carter and Panamanian dictator Omar Torrijos, the U.S. Senate abolished the treaty under which America controlled the canal, leading to gradual transfer to Panama in 1999. While Panama now owns the canal, who owns and manages the ports that control traffic through the canal? Two Chinese companies with strong ties to the communist Red Chinese government!

- Number 43 on the list was “*Overthrow all colonial governments before native populations are ready for self-government.*” While freedom is a great blessing, freedom given or gained at the wrong time or too early, without proper preparedness, can end up becoming a curse.

The list of countries given independence since 1958, when Skousen wrote these words, includes many nations that have been wracked with wars, corruption, famine, civil unrest and virtually every human-caused curse imaginable—mostly due to the fact that they were nowhere near ready for or capable of self-government. Most are far worse off today than when they were governed by other nations.

Transforming America and the West from within

The three geopolitical goals listed above certainly weakened the international standing of America and the West. But equally if not more damaging were the goals aimed at

weakening Western society from within. Let's notice a few:

- Number 28: *"Eliminate prayer or any phase of religious expression in the schools on the ground that it violates the principle of 'separation of church and state.'"* In 1962 and 1963 the U.S. Supreme Court removed prayer and Bible reading from public schools, ending practices that had been common for almost two centuries since the nation's founding. These decisions in effect expelled God not only from America's public schools, but from public life. The framework of public school curricula shifted to a nihilistic, evolution-centered viewpoint, with devastating impact on the lives of millions of schoolchildren.

- Number 40: *"Discredit the family as an institution. Encourage promiscuity and easy divorce."* The family is clearly under assault from every direction. The 1960s saw a major cultural revolution in the United States. Birth-control pills largely removed one of the major consequences of extramarital sex, and rates of premarital sex skyrocketed. From 1958, when Skousen listed these goals, until 1990, divorce rates more than doubled. Now roughly half of U.S. marriages end in divorce. The divorce rate has flattened in more recent years, but only for the simple fact that many couples today never bother to marry at all!

- Number 25: *"Break down cultural standards of morality by promoting pornography and obscenity in books, magazines, motion pictures, radio, and TV."* This goal has been so thoroughly accomplished that a majority of Westerners are no longer aware of a time when entertainment *wasn't* saturated with sex, nudity, profanity, bathroom humor and gore. Pornography is now so widespread on the Internet and electronic devices that some researchers have estimated that the average age of first exposure to pornography is *eight*.

- Number 26: *"Present homosexuality, degeneracy, and promiscuity as 'normal, natural, healthy.'"* Before prayer and Bible reading were banned in U.S. schools, it was common for a certain level of morality to be taught. How that has changed! Today many school systems pass out free condoms to students (with sex education classes giving graphic demonstrations on how to use them). Some schools have outraged parents by giving classes on homosexual and lesbian sex, transgender exploration, and generally encouraging any and all kinds of sexual exploration.

- Number 17: *"Get control of the schools. Use them as transmission belts for socialism. . . . Soften the curriculum. Get control of teachers' associations. Put the party line in textbooks."* In addition to examples such as those above, public schools' educational curricula have been radically changed in recent decades as leftist-leaning teachers and administrators have consolidated control.

Schools and universities have indeed become "transmission belts" for socialist ideas to the point that clear majorities of Americans under age 30 now view socialism positively and do not support capitalism or free enterprise. And while U.S. education spending is the highest in the world at around \$12,000 per student, American students rank only barely above the middle in science, math and reading skills compared to other civilized countries—with scores stagnant or declining.

Many students graduate from high school unable to read

or requiring remedial classes in college. Armed guards and police are a fixture at many schools. All this in a nation that for decades was a model for the world!

What is the source of your values and beliefs?

The world today, human society, is not God's world. The Bible tells us that *Satan the devil* is "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4). This evil being is the one who reigns over earth today! He deceives all of humanity into following his ways rather than God's (Revelation 12:9). God tells us that "The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one"—under Satan's powerful influence and control (1 John 5:19).

It was certainly under Satan's influence that Karl Marx, the human mastermind behind communism, said, "My object in life is to *dethrone God* and destroy capitalism." He also said, "The first requisite for the happiness of the people is *the abolition of religion*." We should not be surprised that an ungodly, *anti-God* system like communism should hold millions in its grip—or that it would seek to expand that influence over the entire world. Like many other forms of human *misrule*, it's had a powerful spiritual influence at work behind it.

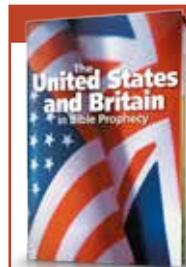
While the Soviet Union itself collapsed a generation ago in 1991, the tentacles of communism remain alive and well in

"We may learn too late to recognize . . . what they are doing, and what we ourselves, therefore, must do to defeat them."

the socialist tentacles that have spread throughout Western governments. And as Vladimir Lenin himself put it, *"The goal of socialism is communism."*

Let us not forget that one of last year's major U.S. presidential candidates was an avowed socialist who ran on a socialist platform. A recent survey by the American Culture and Faith Institute showed that 40 percent of all Americans now prefer socialism to capitalism. Obviously many have forgotten the backward, crumbling economies and failed socialist and communist governments of a generation ago and fail to see the danger of the direction America and the West are headed.

The *Beyond Today* magazine and TV program are dedicated to teaching the *only* right, true and lasting values—the values of mankind's Creator as revealed in His Word, the Bible. It's our responsibility and pleasure to share and explain these values—the values of a coming world *beyond today*—to all who will hear and heed. We hope and pray that *you* will be among those who hear and heed! 



LEARN MORE

What's behind the shocking decline of American values and culture? Does Bible prophecy give us any explanation? You need to understand the story revealed in Scripture! Download or request our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* today!

BTmagazine.org/booklets



Return to bitter U.S.-Russian rivalry

In the wake of the U.S. presidential race last year there were accusations that President Trump had colluded with the Russian government during the campaign. But if Trump and Putin had colluded as was claimed, it hasn't worked out for their relationship since then.

As the *Financial Times* points out: "So far from improving under Mr Trump, US-Russian relations are now as bitter as at any time since the height of the cold war. Realising that the Trump administration will not be able to lift sanctions, the Kremlin resorted to a mass expulsion of US diplomats in response to an earlier expulsion of Russians by the Obama administration" (Gideon Rachman, "Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin Could Destroy Each Other," Sept. 11, 2017).

Rather than blossoming friendship, we're seeing a renewed rivalry between national powers. The United States has been the dominant world power for many decades now. Other nations are yearning for that spot, Russia one of the chief among them.

As we begin to see geopolitical shifts, we can remember that, beyond all this, the return of Jesus Christ will usher in a new government that will be a kingdom of peace. His government will destroy all broken governments and broken relationships. It's that coming Kingdom we herald in *Beyond Today*.

The political realm in America is a messy divide causing hate and even violence today. Other nations are also experiencing turmoil and difficulty. As we read the news and try to make sense out of the confusion of "who did what to whom" headlines, we can have comfort that all of this will go away and a new era of peace and prosperity will be ushered in by the King of Kings. (Source: *Financial Times*.)



Potential North Korea conflict may lead to worse scenarios

In regards to East Asia, all eyes continue to be on North Korea's frequent nuclear and ballistic tests and Kim Jong Un's even more frequent threats to unleash terrible violence at any moment. The question continues to be: Will all this lead to direct conflict between the United States and North Korea? The potential for destruction is unthinkable. But there is perhaps an even more chilling scenario that a North Korean conflict could produce.

A recent piece by Harvard political scientist Graham Allison in *The Atlantic* shines a light on the possibility: "Amid the exchange of threats between North Korea and the United States, ongoing North Korean nuclear and missile tests, and U.S. talk of 'all options,' there is growing concern about the real possibility of war with North Korea. What many have not yet reckoned with is an even darker specter. Could events now cascading on the Korean Peninsula drag the U.S. and China into a great-power war?" ("Can North Korea Drag the U.S. and China Into War?" Sept. 11, 2017).

Allison compares the current situation to the unlikely scenario that led to World War I. All it took was one isolated incident in a remote part of southeastern Europe to send the entire world into a tailspin of war and destruction.

One relevant lesson is that even seemingly small events can create ripples that



travel throughout the world and cause enormous unforeseen consequences. This has been the case in many of humanity's most world-changing moments. It all points to the fact that there is a God who directs and guides mankind's storyline, pointing us in the direction that ultimately leads to breaking our self-reliance and making us realize our complete dependence on Him for survival. (Source: *The Atlantic*.)

Looters take advantage of hurricane victims

We saw three massive hurricanes in September. Harvey landed on the southern coast of Texas, Irma plowed through the Caribbean and moved north through Florida, and Maria devastated Puerto Rico. As some residents returned after evacuating, they found their homes had been broken into.

And it wasn't just homes: "Nine people were arrested after they were caught on camera by a crew of a TV station breaking into and looting stores during Hurricane Irma in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, according to police" (Gayathri Anuradha, "Looters Caught On

Camera in Florida During Irma," *International Business Times*, Sept. 11, 2017).

The thieves in Florida weren't hitting grocery stores because they were desperate and seeking food for survival. Most of the looting was from sporting good stores. Men were seen leaving the stores with their arms full of shoe boxes.

Police departments from Miami to St. Petersburg and all through Florida reported arresting looters as people were evacuating the state for safety.

It's a sad commentary for America. Sure, we have

seen the heroism and work ethic of people helping others during these natural disasters, but we also see stories of greed and taking advantage of an already horrible disaster.

"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves" (2 Timothy 3:1-2, New International Version). This warning of the apostle Paul about the end of the age is just the beginning of ill characteristics he goes on to describe. We do live in a world where men love themselves, where greed and self are number one. This news about looting during and in the aftermath of the hurricane shows just that. (Source: *International Business Times*.)

Moscow demonstration displays strength of Chechnya in Russia

The semi-autonomous Chechnya region of Russia has been a source of conflict and consternation in the country since the First Chechen War over 20 years ago. The Sunni-Muslim-majority region has sought its independence from Russia several times in the last two decades, and minor insurgencies from small separatist groups have taken place occasionally in the last decade. Currently Chechnya enjoys a tense and unsteady peace with greater Russia.

Demonstrations and protests are a familiar occurrence within Chechnya itself, as groups often protest the Russian government and other international bodies. But a Chechen protest in Moscow is a different matter entirely. Yet, in response to the horrific religious violence in Myanmar, or Burma, that's exactly what happened when hundreds of Chechens gathered in the Russian capital.

"And what was more striking than the mobilization of protesters itself," writes Karina Orlova in *The American Interest*, "was that they remained unmolested by Russian police—as if the protests were happening in a normal liberal democ-

racy, not Russia. Thousands of people were arrested during the large (and legally authorized) anti-corruption rallies in Moscow and St. Petersburg in March.

"Recently, police even arrested a lone protester standing in Red Square holding a plain white piece of paper in his hands. But hundreds of people convening in the center of Moscow shouting 'Allahu Akbar!' and 'Buddhists are terrorists!'—protesting without an official permit but at the invitation of Ramzan Kadyrov [head of the Chechen Republic]—failed to rouse the police to action" ("Will Chechnya Detonate Russia?" Sept. 6, 2017).

The lack of response has prompted observers to question whether Putin's typically hardline response to dissent stops at Chechnya's borders. Undoubtedly the Russian president is unwilling to risk another explosion of violence in Chechnya, especially if it would spill out of the region and into the rest of Russia. Chechnya remains a volatile presence in the otherwise controlled sphere of Russia's influence. It's a region to watch in coming months. (Source: *The American Interest*.)

Child-soldier recruits increasing

The Middle East and North Africa have been ravaged with war and corruption for as long as we can remember. Terrorism and violence is a part of everyday life in these parts of the world. This disparity and conflict has led to more children being involved in the fighting.

According to *The Guardian*, "The number of children recruited to fight in conflicts across the Middle East and North Africa has more than doubled in a year, UN analysis has found" (Karen McVeigh, "Child Soldier Recruits Double in One Year in Middle East and North Africa," Sept. 11, 2017).



Demobilized child soldiers in Africa.

The article continues, "The agency [Unicef] said in the past it had witnessed children working as porters, guards or paramedics, but it was now seeing them take on more active roles, carrying guns, manning checkpoints and being trained as paid soldiers."

These nations' infrastructures have been decimated. Lack of good hospitals, clean water and sanitation facilities have left so many children in need. These children are working as paid soldiers and sealing their future without education or hope of escaping conflict.

The end time was foretold to be a time of cruelty and recklessness. Children wielding weapons and having the power of life and death over one another sets us up for such circumstances. It's heart-rending knowing about indoctrination by evil at such an early age for these children. It's hard to imagine what kind of mind they will grow up to have, with the harshness of war so familiar. It's time for prayer to God to bring His Kingdom of peace. (Source: *The Guardian*.)

Drones used for help following massive hurricanes

When you hear the word "drone," you probably at best think of photographers or filmmakers using drone-mounted cameras to take dramatic shots of natural wonders. At worst you probably think of what we call "drone strikes," where military targets are destroyed using drone-mounted weapons. They've become a symbol of modern warfare.

Among the various stories out of Texas and Florida following hurricanes Harvey and Irma making landfall in the United States, one showed a very different side of the use of drones. NBC News reported: "Dozens of unmanned aerial vehicles were deployed in Houston in response to Hurricane Harvey, and UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicles] are expected to be out in full force across Florida in coming days. Experts say UAVs will likely play an even bigger role in relief efforts when future storms or earthquakes hit.

"Drones can perform critical tasks as disasters unfold, including spotting people in need of urgent help. Evidence suggests drones may have certain advantages over traditional search-and-rescue efforts—including speed" (Matthew Hutson, "Hurricanes Show Why Drones Are the Future of Disaster Relief," Sept. 9, 2017).

In a time of suffering, such as following large-scale natural disasters like hurricanes, it's inspiring to see people rallying to help others in their time of need. It's also inspiring to see technology like drones being used for a humanitarian and healing purpose, rather than the typical use as machines of war.

News like this reminds us of a time to come pictured in Isaiah 2:4: "He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." God speed that day! (Source: NBC News.)

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



The Balfour Declaration: One Hundred Years Later

Do you know the story of how a little-known document issued in Great Britain 100 years ago helped set the stage for a key fulfillment of Bible prophecy?

by Darris McNeely

“**T**hose stones are the most important find you have made here this summer.” My Israeli dig supervisor was pointing to the large Herodian building stones that had formed the foundation of King Herod’s expansion of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Those stones were tangible proof of the first-century monarch’s rule over the Jewish state.

They stand today as evidence for any visitor to see that the biblical and historical record is true. There was a Jewish state in the land in the first century, ruled over by Rome. In spite of attempts to deny it and rewrite history, a Jewish temple stood on the mount. All of this is a critical piece of proof that helps establish the legitimacy of the state of Israel.

The year was 1971, and I was a student volunteer working to clear away 2,000 years of accumulated debris at the base of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. This was only four years after the Israelis gained control of the Temple Mount in their lightning-quick victory in the 1967 Six-Day War.

Israeli archaeologists were racing to dig through nearly 20 centuries of rubble and expose the historical record of a Jewish presence in Jerusalem. At the time I didn’t realize the importance of this political fact. But I do now!

Why is the existence of the state of Israel important to you as reader of *Beyond Today*? Why does it matter?

It matters because the modern state of Israel is one of *God’s markers of His promises*, both physical and spiritual, in today’s world. The Jewish state is a remnant of a once-larger group who held the promises God made to Abraham.

That a remnant of the people God chose for a special purpose still exists in the land promised to Abraham is a sign to all mankind that God *will* fulfill the greater spiritual promises of that agreement. You need to understand not only *how* the state of Israel came to be but also *why it is a critical dimension of understanding God’s purpose and plan*.

The promise of a Jewish homeland

Nov. 2, 2017, marks the 100-year anniversary of a public

letter sent to a prominent British Jew, Lord Rothschild, by Arthur James Balfour, the British foreign secretary. The letter, thereafter called the Balfour Declaration, committed the government of Great Britain to the creation of a “national home for the Jewish people” in what was then called “Palestine,” the biblical land of Israel.

Palestine at this time was a part of the crumbling Ottoman Empire. Allied leaders recognized that with the conclusion of World War I the map of the Middle East would be redrawn, and governance of lands would be distributed among the Allied nations. Great Britain was laying claim to Palestine and committing itself to allowing further Jewish immigration into that area.

Here is the critical text from that 1917 document: “His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.”

The Balfour Declaration was debated and discussed in the years after its issuance. Some questioned its legitimacy, and subsequent British governments even ignored its intent. Sympathizers with Arab claims to the land rejected the right of Great Britain to promise the land to the Jewish people.

However, the League of Nations included the text of the declaration in its 1922 grant of a Palestine mandate to Britain, thus granting legitimacy among the international community to what Great Britain promised. In 1947 the United Nations General Assembly by resolution endorsed the division of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and the other Arab. Thus a line of international legitimacy can be drawn from 1917 to 1948.

On May 14, 1948, the state of Israel declared its existence as the first Jewish state in the land since the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the loss of Jewish sovereignty beginning

in A.D. 70. Neighboring Arab nations immediately attacked Israel, beginning a long period of war, peace agreements and failed efforts to reconcile the Arab and Israeli interests in the region.

The promises to Abraham

Today the state of Israel is the only stable democratic nation in the Middle East. To maintain its precarious existence it must remain constantly on alert to terrorism, military attacks

Land by Moses and Joshua. Ancient Israel grew strong under King David and Solomon and later fractured into two nations, the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah.

However, both nations came to a point where they were weakened and eventually overcome and deported by the stronger nations of Assyria and Babylon. The Bible details Israel and Judah's decline and fall and specifically and repeatedly shows it was due to sin and breaking of the agreements made by the people's forefathers with God. History shows the kingdom of

Judah, what we can refer to as primarily a Jewish state, came to a conclusion in or about 587 B.C. when the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem and took most of the Jews captive to the area of Babylon (2 Kings 25:7-11).

But the story of the presence of God's people in the land does not end there.

The return to the land

The Jewish state was restored in part during the time of the Persian king Cyrus the Great. Persia took a different national policy toward captive nations by allowing people to remain in their land.

Nehemiah 1 contains Cyrus' decree allowing Jewish captives to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple to God and inhabit the city (Nehemiah 1:1-4). The story of the return of this remnant of Israel is told in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and of the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Through much difficulty the Jewish state was reborn and endured through the Persian and Greek periods and into Roman times. It is a remarkable and little understood portion of the biblical record.

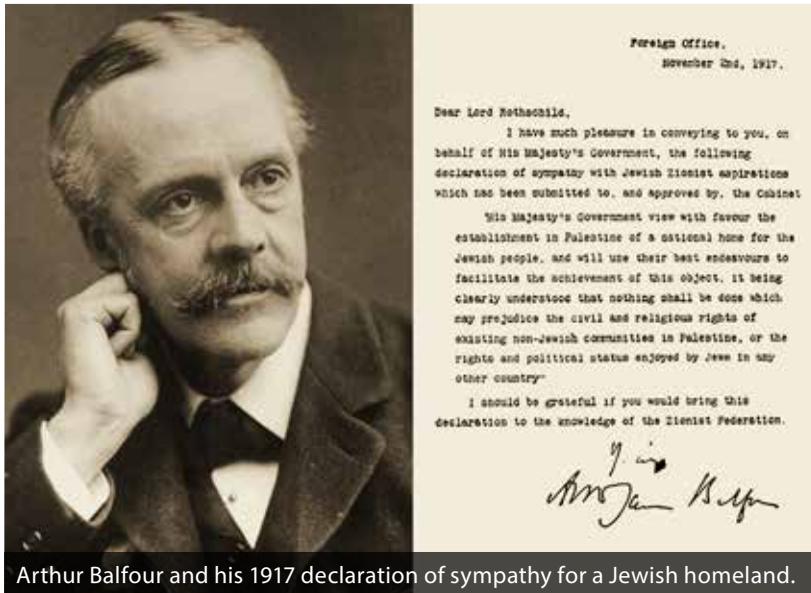
As foretold far earlier through the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 44:24-28, God directed through Cyrus the return of Israel to the land during

this period. God's plan was linked to the presence of His people in the land promised to Abraham.

Prophecies concerning Jesus Christ's first coming are found throughout the Old Testament, even to the naming of the city in which He would be born (Bethlehem). He was born of the line of David, a Jew. All this had to occur as foretold, and the place where this would happen would be in the land promised to Abraham, the ancient land of Israel. God restored a Jewish state in the land to fulfill messianic prophecies and provide the environment for the birth of both His Son and His Church.

We read of this through the New Testament Scriptures. The presence of the people of Abraham in the land is clear. We read the incontrovertible evidence in the Bible. What today's archaeologists have unearthed in the land proves this fact beyond doubt. It is only political scheming that attempts to deny this truth.

The Jewish state lasted until A.D. 70, when Rome destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and dispersed many Jews after a revolt that had begun a few years earlier. From A.D. 70 to 1948, although there was a scattered Jewish presence in the



Arthur Balfour and his 1917 declaration of sympathy for a Jewish homeland.

The legitimacy of the Jewish state is a serious matter. Yet most don't understand the **historic and prophetic role** the state of Israel fills in the plan of God.

and political hostility from neighboring states and even the at times vague and fickle support from America, the first nation to acknowledge Israel's existence.

As my archaeological experience in Jerusalem from years ago testifies, the legitimacy of the Jewish state is a serious matter. Yet most do not understand the historic and prophetic role the state of Israel fills in the plan of God. Let's review that.

The book of Genesis records a dual promise to Abram—later known as Abraham—that included possession of the land now called Israel and a vast multitude of descendants. The promise also contained a spiritual dimension that was fulfilled in another of Abraham's descendants, Jesus Christ.

Through Him is the promise of spiritual salvation to all races and peoples regardless of their physical descent. These promises to Abraham are at the heart of that part of the Bible we call the Old Testament and are expanded in the New Testament through the message of and about Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God.

The physical promises to Abraham's descendants began to be fulfilled when the 12 tribes of Israel were miraculously delivered from Egyptian slavery and brought to the Promised

land, there was no sovereign nation here composed of the descendants of Abraham through Israel and Judah, those who held the Abrahamic blessing promised centuries before by God.

What does this mean for today?

Fast-forward to our modern times and we can begin to understand why the state of Israel is important to the purpose of God and why the Balfour Declaration of 100 years ago was a key step in this story.

The Bible contains prophecies of the time of the end, prior to Christ's second coming, that must include a Jewish state—a remnant of the ancient nation of Israel—in Jerusalem and the land of Israel.

One prominent prophecy was made by Jesus Christ Himself on the Mount of Olives—His Olivet Prophecy in Matthew 24. In answer to the question from His disciples, “What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3), Jesus began to list a number of events.

In verse 15-16 He said, “When you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place . . . , then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.” His disciples knew what He was referring to. This was a reference to an event in 168 or 167 B.C. when the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the Jerusalem temple by offering swine’s blood on the holy altar. He ended for a time the daily sacrifices at the temple and sought to stamp out all presence of the faith of God among the Jews. He didn’t succeed, but he did for a time impose a kind of a holocaust on the nation.

In referring to these events, Christ was saying there would be a similar end-time occurrence. For this to happen as Jesus foretold, there would have to be in Jerusalem a restored system of sacrifices on a consecrated altar as described in the biblical laws of the Old Testament. This of necessity would require a Jewish presence and a form of the faith as practiced under that ancient system. *This could not happen without a Jewish national state in that land.*

Jesus referred to the prophet Daniel. In the prophecy of Daniel 7 we find what is called the “70 weeks prophecy,” which gives amazingly precise information about the holy city and the coming of Christ at His first appearance and even to His second coming. It is an intricately complex prophecy but includes unmistakable references to “sacrifices and offerings” and “abominations” and “one who makes desolate.”

Taken together with Christ’s statements, it is understood that this prophecy stretches from the sixth century B.C. to the time of Jesus Christ’s return. Again, the presence of sacrifices can only be possible within the context of a restored Jewish state in the land.

A key event of prophecy

Many other prophecies referencing Jerusalem and Judah can be understood and fulfilled *only with an end-time Jewish state in the ancient land.*

The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 is a key event in not only modern history but also prophetic history. It is a signpost in the long story of God working with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the 12 tribes of Israel, as part of His grand purpose to bring salvation to all nations through

Abraham’s promised “seed,” Jesus Christ (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:16).

While salvation, the passage to immortal glory in the family of God, is a promise for all people, God chose to work through the family of one man to make this possible. Jesus Christ was born as a descendant of Abraham, and His sacrifice and resurrection are the means for forgiveness of sin and the path to eternal life.

Israel and Jews have been connected to not only Great Britain but America as well. The three are connected by bonds that go deeper than modern history. They are connected through the promises made by the Creator God to Abraham, the father of the faithful. Those promises, both spiritual and physical, are sure and just. Space here does not permit a complete explanation of this truth, but you can read about it in our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

Many sense this connection to a certain degree, feeling it is of God. It causes people to feel that as Israel goes, so goes America. Does God favor and protect Israel and America? The question has been raised by the eminent American scholar Walter Russell Mead. In a piece for *The American Interest* on May 25, 2011, titled “The Dreamer Goes Down for the Count,” he wrote about relations between the two nations. Mead glimpsed that the connection between the two is indeed something special.

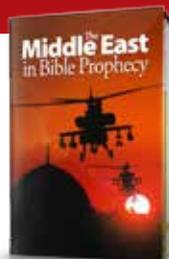
He wrote: “The existence of Israel means that the God of the Bible is still watching out for the well-being of the human race. For many American Christians who are nothing like fundamentalists, the restoration of the Jews to the Holy Land and their creation of a successful, democratic state after two thousand years of oppression and exile is a clear sign that the religion of the Bible can be trusted.”

Indeed, the “religion” of the Bible *can* be trusted—as *the truth*. When connected to events in the modern world, we achieve a deeper level of understanding. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 was a key step in creating today’s state of Israel. It is well worth noting at this centenary point.

The state of Israel today sits in a precarious yet important juncture of world affairs. Few understand the role of the Jewish state from the dimension described in this article.

Fifty years ago one observer peered through the fog of misunderstanding and commented on the importance of Israel. The moral and social philosopher Eric Hoffer wrote: “As it goes with Israel so it will go with all of us. Should Israel perish, the holocaust will be upon us” (“Israel’s Peculiar Position,” *The Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1968).

Although Israel faces many enemies, we need not fear that the state of Israel will vanish. The Bible shows it will play a key role in the time leading up to the return of Jesus Christ! 



LEARN MORE

Why is the Middle East in such constant turmoil? The fact that this region would be a tinderbox was foretold centuries ago by the biblical prophets. Where are events heading? To learn what the Bible says, download or request your free copy of *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.

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Living the Dream

What Will It Be Like?

Over the centuries mankind has tried to build human utopias, but all have failed. One day all of humanity will be living a life that many can only dream about today. How will that come about?

by Peter Eddington

Have you ever heard the phrase, “Living the dream”? It’s used when someone experiences what other people can only dream of. “The dream” is an ideal lifestyle. It usually has to do with riches, leisure and lack of worries.

Stereotypically it often involves a nice house, a fast sports car, a yacht and a beautiful wife. The scenario is this: Go to school, get a job, work-work-work, buy a nice house, buy a nice car, find the perfect wife or a rich husband, work-work-work, travel the world, raise some smart kids, maybe with nannies and private schools, and then pass one’s fortune on to them. For many, living the dream has become a consumer contest measuring success only by comparing what we have and can afford with that of others around us.

Wikipedia describes the American Dream as “a national ethos of the United States, a set of ideals in which freedom includes the opportunity for prosperity and success, and an upward social mobility achieved through hard work . . . regardless of social class or circumstances of birth.”

Many would agree with that description. But it’s not always as wonderful as it might look from the outside. Some people use the term “living the dream” *sarcastically*—often in answer to the rhetorical question, “How’s it going?” The reply is usually given when it’s quite obvious that you have a terrible job, a rusted-out car and are just as broke as the next person—“*I’m livin’ the dream!*”

Living the dream, or living a nightmare?

So is most of the world’s population living the dream? Are

the Christians in Iraq, Egypt and Syria living the dream as they’re relentlessly persecuted and attacked? Are the homeless under freeway bridges living the dream? What about the average person in your town struggling to earn a living and provide for his or her family?

What about those living in countries torn by war and strife? What about the North Korean people who starve while their leader builds nuclear warheads and missiles? What about all the attempts through history to build utopias on earth that have always been miserable failures?

Just how is humanity doing so far in “living the dream”?

It’s a sad statement, but the vast majority of humanity regularly chooses to eat the fruit of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” mentioned in the book of Genesis. Most of humankind decides that they will choose for themselves what is right and wrong—whatever they feel is best and in their own interest.

Look around you. Our world today reflects this choice in its multiple contradictory religions, starvation, plagues, violence, war, conflict and broken hearts and minds. For all too many, their dreams have given way to living nightmares!

But this is not humanity’s ultimate destiny. Let’s examine how a type of utopia that will succeed in truly benefiting everyone will be established and prolonged on our planet, and what it will be like!

The Doomsday Clock

Jesus’ disciples knew even 2,000 years ago that the world was getting worse and worse, and would finally reach a point

where evil and selfishness would crescendo to a final climax. Jesus told them He would return to begin a new age of peace. So they asked Him, “When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3, New International Version).

Jesus’ answer was global in its scope, but one phrase caught their ears: “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” (verses 21-22, emphasis added throughout).

This is Jesus Christ’s *doomsday scenario*. It is a fact that the world would be destroyed *except for* His intervention.

Even those who are irreligious believe in the possibility of worldwide devastation. The Doomsday Clock is a well-known symbolic clock face, representing a countdown to possible global catastrophe. The symbol with its movable hands has been maintained since 1947 by the members of the Science and Security Board of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. The closer they set the clock to midnight, the closer the scientists believe the world is to global disaster.

At its inception in 1947, during the Cold War, the clock was started at seven minutes to midnight. It’s been subsequently advanced or backed up according to the perceived state of the world and nuclear war prospects.

In 2012 the clock was moved from six minutes to five minutes before midnight due to several factors—stalled negotiations to reduce nuclear arsenals in the United States and Russia; expansion and modernization of nuclear stockpiles in China, Pakistan and India; improperly secured nuclear materials worldwide; and continuing construction of nuclear power plants without foolproof safety features.

Then in 2015 it was ominously moved forward again to *three* minutes to midnight. And earlier this year it was even advanced another half-minute as the scientists’ board announced, “The probability of global catastrophe is very high, and the actions needed to reduce the risks of disaster must be taken very soon.”

They are warning that the future of humanity is at stake! Jesus Christ identified the time of His return as a time when *human extinction was possible*.

But He promised He wouldn’t let that happen! The world will indeed see massive global catastrophe. But the good news is that, before we can destroy ourselves, *the story will dramatically change*.

Standing on the Mount of Olives

When you pray for God’s Kingdom to come (as we are instructed to do—Matthew 6:10), do you imagine in your prayers Jesus Christ actually planting His feet in Jerusalem, *on the Mount of Olives*?

I picture in my mind’s eye the passage in Zechariah 14:4 where we’re told that “in that day [the end time] His [Jesus’] feet will stand on the Mount of Olives . . .”

But it’s not just an Old Testament prophecy. The New Testament tells us the same thing in the account of Jesus Christ

ascending to heaven: “And while they [the disciples] looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? *This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner* as you saw Him go into heaven.’ Then they returned to Jerusalem *from the mount called Olivet*” (Acts 1:10-12).

This tells us Jesus Christ will literally return to this earth—to the most highly contested piece of real estate we know as Jerusalem! In the same way the disciples saw the risen Christ ascend into the clouds from the Mount of Olives on the city’s east side, He will return through the clouds to earth, but this time with power and great glory, descending onto that same mountain.

This will be the biggest news story in history!

Bible prophecy describes in detail the time of great distress, or great tribulation, that will envelop the earth at the end time.

Living the real dream requires servant leaders, not only the faithful ones listed in Scripture, but all people who will overcome and endure to the end.

Wars, disasters, famines and disease epidemics will ravage the population before Jesus finally does descend to the Mount of Olives to save humanity from extinction!

And then, finally, *a new day will dawn*—a day fresh with the promise of peace and fulfillment, of joy and purpose, of happiness and accomplishment. The nightmares of history will fade, and the dreams of mankind will begin to come to life. And it will begin with Jesus Christ standing on the Mount of Olives. This is a major step towards humanity at last being able to *live the dream*—the *right* dream in the *right way*!

Living the dream

A famous quote attributed to the Buddha says, “Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, *concentrate the mind on the present moment*.”

But this is a very short-sighted religious goal in life—just live for the moment! No, the Creator of the universe has *so much more* that He is offering us if we will follow Him.

Walt Disney said: “You can design and create, and build the most wonderful place in the world. But it takes people to make the dream a reality.” We could add that *it takes God to make the dream a reality*. It takes God *to transform the world*. It takes God *to live the dream of eternity*.

Jesus Christ promised to return and not simply to *clean up* the corruption of ongoing earthly rule, but to *completely replace* all the powers of this world with a new and perfect government—one that truly serves the people—with humanity being led to truly live the dream as God intended.

This is more than just “day one” after an election or a coup, but a complete, astounding, “out of this world” intervention by the Kingdom of Heaven—which will then be brought to earth and imposed on a desperate population in need of relief from its own corrupt human nature. In other words, man is going to be saved from himself, by none other than mankind’s very Creator!

This is what we ultimately dream of! This is what we pray for. This is what we long for. This is what we imagine—with Christ descending on the Mount of Olives along with His resurrected followers, His faithful saints, who will have been caught up to meet Him (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

The entire earth will become refreshed and restored after the Father sends Jesus back: “That He may *send Jesus Christ*, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the *times of restoration of all things*” (Acts 3:20-21).

As Jesus Christ plants His feet on the Mount of Olives, we will see the beginning of the time of refreshing, the time of restoration, that the apostle Peter and all the holy prophets had proclaimed. This will truly be “living the dream”!

This will not be a restoration of some idyllic golden age of man’s self rule, but a restoration of the perfect government of God that had been lost when the first human beings rejected Him in the Garden of Eden.

Living the dream requires Christ-like leaders

In the human realm, even the best of leaders are too often stymied by red tape, corrupt bureaucracies and humanly insolvable problems. And sadly, too many of them also get trapped in the web of corruption and scandal.

Political corruption is rampant in our world. It’s the use of power by government officials for illegitimate gain. Forms of corruption vary, but include bribery, extortion, cronyism, nepotism, patronage, graft and embezzlement. Corruption may facilitate criminal enterprise such as drug trafficking, money laundering and human trafficking.

But God has been working with certain people today to form in them His own righteous character so that He can make them *incorruptible* in every way at Christ’s return. Those who have been faithful, some even to being killed as martyrs, will be changed or “raised incorruptible,” with divine power and immortality at that time. These will be Christ’s new rulers and teachers on the earth. We read about this amazing resurrection to eternal life in 1 Corinthians 15.

These resurrected saints of God will then assist Christ in fairly, mercifully and effectively serving those who survive the catastrophes of the end of this age of human misrule under the influence of Satan.

With the power and love of the Creator behind them, as Christ-like leaders God’s servants will be able to clean up the corruption and cut through the Gordian knots that have had humanity in a stranglehold.

Living this dream requires servant leaders, not only the faithful listed in Scripture, but all people who will overcome and endure to the end.

War colleges shut down

In New York City, outside the United Nations buildings, a famous sculpture given as a gift by the Soviet Union of a man beating a sword into a farm implement captures the longing of humanity for peace—and hints at the way it will truly come.

The inspiration for the statue—and the true hope for disarmament, peace and life that humanity can now only dream about—comes from a beautiful prophecy in Isaiah 2 that is repeated in Micah 4. Note the version in Micah:

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the

mountain of the LORD’s house [God’s government] shall be established on the top of the mountains [other governments], and shall be exalted above the hills [smaller governments]; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths . . .’

“They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid . . .” (verses 1-4).

What a wonderful vision! Finally disputes between nations will be resolved without resorting to the horrors of war. At last, nations will be forced to disarm, but they will soon realize they have nothing to fear, since their neighbors will all be disarmed as well.

War colleges will be shut down and military forces disbanded. No longer will there be medals of valor for soldiers showing bravery on the battlefield, even to the loss of their own lives. Instead of investing the best minds and greatest resources into developing weapons of mass destruction, nations will be able to invest in making life better for all their citizens!

Today some of the most impoverished nations in the world import inordinate amounts of arms at great cost. Gone will be these wasteful arms races, and today’s dangerous neighborhoods—like in the Middle East, where 40 percent of arms exports go—will be peaceful at last.

Through Christ’s new world government, peace will spread by education in “His ways,” including “the way of peace [which] they have not known” (Isaiah 59:8).

Paul described some of the elements of this way of peace in his letter to the Romans:

“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone . . . If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink . . .” (Romans 12:16-20, New International Version 1984).

You see, *the way of peace is an attitude!* Many other biblical passages detail the attitude and approach of the peacemaker. How would you measure up against this high standard? Are you preparing to be a peacemaker in your eternal life to come by exercising this aspect of God’s character in your life now? Are you turning the figurative “swords” of your life into “plowshares”?

Rebuilding and renewing the dream

After the most devastating wars in human history that will precede and culminate at Jesus’ return, there will be an incredible amount of cleanup and rebuilding to do. But this time the rebuilding will be done in a permanent, sensible and sustainable way. Cities will be clean and safe. Villages and farmlands will be productive and beautiful. Picture these scenes from the words of the prophet Amos about the age to come:

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “When the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it . . . They shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them” (Amos 9:13-14).

Even Jerusalem, the most fought-over piece of real estate in history, will finally live up to the meaning of its name as a city of peace and safety: “Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing” (Zechariah 8:4-5).

A world without war will be incredibly better than today’s world. But there will not be mere absence of war. The whole world will know true peace—resulting from following God’s way of peace. This will be fantastic almost beyond human imagination!

God promises that a rebuilt world of peace and prosperity will come! It’s what mankind has always wanted, but has never been able to achieve.

The spiritual Jarvik 7

Why haven’t we found peace on earth yet? Science and technology haven’t brought it. All the experiments in various governmental and economic systems over centuries haven’t moved us any closer to peace—but seem to draw us ever nearer to destruction.

The fact is: *God’s way has never been fully tried in this world.* But why not? What is needed?

Have you ever heard of the Jarvik 7? It was the first artificial heart to be successfully implanted in a person back in 1982, named after Robert Jarvik of the design team.

This device, placed inside patient Barney Clark, caught the attention of media around the world. If you saw a photo of it, you’d be surprised at how primitive it looks now! But amazingly, it worked, and was small enough to fit inside Barney’s chest cavity.

Today’s version of the device is the SynCardia CardioWest Total Artificial Heart, designed for permanent heart replacement but only approved for temporary use as a bridge to heart transplantation. It has been implanted in more than 800 people.

What does this have to do with not yet finding peace on earth? The problem lies with the human heart, spiritually speaking. As Jeremiah 17:9 states, “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.*” All people need to receive a new heart—a spiritual heart transplant, in a manner of speaking!

And this is what will happen. As God says: “*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh*” (Ezekiel 36:24-25, NIV). This is a figurative picture of God replacing hard, stubborn hearts with *softened, yielded* hearts—a new attitude of being willing to humbly follow and obey Him.

We’re further told: “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel *after those days* [in the age to come], says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My

people” (Hebrews 8:10; quoting Jeremiah 31:33).

This promise of a new heart is not only to the descendants of Jacob or Israel, but to all nations!

“For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him” (Romans 10:11-12; quoting Isaiah 28:16).

In God’s perfect plan of salvation, He has made it possible for us to have a new heart—one capable of living His way of love, obeying His laws, being filled with His Holy Spirit, which is how His loving character is poured into our hearts (Romans 5:5). This will not be a Jarvik 7 mechanical heart, but a heart that can be *influenced and led by the Spirit of God*.

Living the dream requires a *change of heart*, a spiritual heart transplant. And along with God’s Spirit, this process requires *repentance* or turning from a life of sin—not merely seeing the need for forgiveness and conversion, but actively and humbly seeking God’s mercy and fully committing to a life of change. It includes faith in God and acceptance of Christ’s sacrifice to pay the penalty for one’s sins and the sins of the whole world.

The dream comes alive

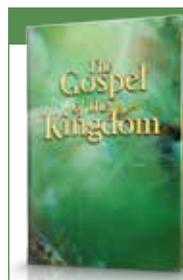
The nine aspects of the fruit of God’s Spirit listed in Galatians 5 are building blocks in producing God’s heart and mind within us. Imagine a world where these are growing and spreading everywhere: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law” (verses 22-23).

Imagine having neighbors like that! Imagine people having coworkers, supervisors, teachers and government workers who always treat them that way—God’s way! What a wonderful world that will be! What an incredible future is ahead!

Jesus Christ is coming with the Kingdom of God to lead the world in these ways. Everyone has a choice—a choice between life and death, good and evil, and between God’s Kingdom and Satan’s. Right now mankind has chosen Satan’s way—symbolized by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

But soon a new Kingdom will be here, not ruled by chaos and self-will, but by a King who loves peace and will reign in loving service to all mankind. Wars will cease, as nations come together as family to worship God in spirit and in truth. Sickness and disease will be cured, and the streets will be filled with joy and laughter.

This will truly be living a life that many can only dream about today. God’s sons and daughters will help bring this about—they will help humanity make the universal changes needed to truly *live the dream!* 



LEARN MORE

The Bible has a lot to say about the world transformation that will take place after Jesus Christ’s return to earth. Prophecy after prophecy tells us of these amazing changes. To learn more, download or request our study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. A free copy is waiting for you!

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Why Is the Perfect Government So Elusive?

The search for the best government has occupied mankind for thousands of years. And still, no one would ever call any of the systems in place today ideal.

by Steven Britt

Philosophers come up with utopian ideas, promising a better society. With all of the effort that's gone into this problem, why can't we put together a government that everybody is *happy with*, let alone one that's *perfect*?

It turns out the reasons that no one can agree on or execute a perfect government are very basic.

Human ideas about government clash with God's way

Libertarianism and communism are two government systems on opposite ends of a spectrum. Most modern governments fall somewhere in between.

Libertarians embrace individual freedom as the highest priority. They argue that the government should only serve to enforce agreements between people and prevent people from forcing their will on others.

In the extreme, libertarians may argue that *no* government is necessary. The private sector could maintain security better than any government, they would argue. They base their ideas on "natural law," which defines right and wrong based on whether an action violates the rights of someone else. Otherwise, anything goes.

But the Bible advocates laws that extend beyond natural law. Any enforcement of God's laws that reach into someone's personal life would be unacceptable in libertarian thought.

Libertarians suggest that each person should be his or her own ultimate authority. But God requires absolute submission to *His* authority. (It should be noted that some libertarians accept divine authority in their own personal lives but do

not believe that what people think about this should be imposed on others, particularly by state power.)

On the other end of the spectrum is communism, which seeks to enforce equality of wealth by limiting individual freedom. This is done primarily by taking money from people who *have* and giving it to those who *have not*. As Karl Marx put it, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need."

Many communist philosophies are explicitly atheist. They argue that religion makes people accept inequality and the suffering that comes with it. And other communist ideals further violate the values found in God's Word.

In purest form, communism would abolish private property and money. Instead, everything would be owned by the

INo human government escapes this problem, because human beings generally rely on our own understanding instead of God's.

government and shared evenly among the citizens. (Although, as we have seen from 100 years of communism in practice, the communist ruling elites inevitably enjoy special privileges and a far higher standard of living than their countrymen.)

God's laws do support a "social safety net" for the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28-29; Leviticus 19:9-10). Yet this was apparently a voluntary personal obligation, not a system enforced by government authority—or forced redistribution of income. Instead, it appears that people not following their duty might face community censure and would have to answer

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to God. We should also consider that the Bible repeatedly shows that it is God's pleasure to bless certain people with abundance, especially those who are generous toward others. This is a problem for communists, since God doesn't evenly distribute wealth or abilities.

Yet Paul taught that "[God] has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens" (Romans 9:18). That teaching conflicts with the central message of equality found in communism.

Boiled down to their essence, both communism and libertarianism are fatally flawed. In both cases, the problem stems from not accepting and valuing the standards of God. No human government escapes this problem, because human beings generally rely on our own understanding instead of God's. Any *perfect* government must be compatible with God's Word, but the philosophies of this world are at odds with the Bible in one way or another.

The heart of man is corrupt

Even if a government is well designed, it's still subject to human nature. Jeremiah 17:9 states, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Every human government is subject to the leadership of fallible men. As a result, corruption has ravaged every government in history.

To limit the damage of corruption, modern governments divide power by checks and balances. But ultimately, even this does no more good than putting a Band-Aid on cancer! Even in democratic governments, leaders are not chosen for their integrity or righteousness, but for their ideology.

Even if society did elect godly leaders, they'd still be mere human beings, subject to human weakness. However, God has a plan to establish a perfect, corruption-free government that will finally help enforce peace throughout the world!

God's plan for perfect government

God *does* have a plan for perfect government over the entire earth. What does it entail? Notice these three passages of Scripture:

- Revelation 11:15: "Then the seventh angel blew his



trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (English Standard Version).

Other verses confirm that Jesus will literally rule over human beings on the earth (see Zechariah 14:16-19; Revelation 20:4-6). He will take over all nations for their ultimate good. Government will no longer be the business of men giving in to corruption, greed and just plain bad ideas. Instead, Jesus Christ and His perfected followers will reign over the earth with holy, righteous character!

- Isaiah 2:3: "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."

God's system will be based on *His* laws—there will be no more squabbling between men over what's right or wrong, fair or unfair. Shortsighted philosophies will no longer exalt their proponents'

I God has a plan to establish a perfect, corruption-free government that will finally help enforce peace throughout the world!

favorite values above all others. Everyone will be subject to the *best possible* set of rules for a healthy society.

- Ezekiel 11:19-20: "I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God."

God's Spirit moves people to obey His laws, and Joel 2:28 reveals that God's Spirit will be given to *everyone*. Jeremiah 31:33-34 confirms that everyone will "know the LORD" when Christ reigns as King. Not only will the government be free from corruption, but the *people* will be inclined to live righteously, treat each other fairly and deal honestly, like never before seen in human history!

Notice that while God's government will serve to enforce, it's really the *change in the heart of man* that will bring peace on earth. *Perfect, righteous, holy character* is what will make lasting peace. Given the track record of man's governments, this revolutionary change can't come quickly enough! **BT**

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Why Some Christians *Don't* Celebrate Christmas

Many feel that Christmas marks Christ's birthday and that it honors Him. After all, can 2 billion professing Christians be wrong? At the same time, some few Christians don't observe Christmas, believing that Jesus didn't sanction it and that it dishonors Him. Who is right—and why?

by Jerold Aust

One day, years ago, someone asked me why I celebrated Christmas. “The Bible says to,” I responded. “Somewhere in the Gospel of Luke, it speaks of the nativity scene. An angel told some shepherds that were keeping their sheep in the fields at night that the baby Jesus was born in Bethlehem. I think they went to see Jesus at that time.

“That was the first Christmas! And that's why I celebrate Christmas, because the Bible supports Christmas, the birthday of Jesus Christ.”

“That's not true, and here's why,” my friend replied.

I soon learned that the Bible didn't teach Christmas. I also found that its origins have nothing to do with the Bible. It was an important lesson about things I'd long assumed to be true.

Just because some 2 billion people observe Christmas—roughly 1 billion Catholics and another billion in Protestant faiths—does that make it right? Does it really matter one way or the other?

Why do so many people celebrate this holiday?

If you were asked, “Why do you celebrate Christmas?” how would you respond? Many would say Christmas honors the birthday of Jesus. Others feel that Christmas is a good Christian family get-together. Many do it simply because they've always done it.

Christmas can appear tantalizing to the eye and ear. People appear happy, generous, full of good cheer. Twinkling lights decorate many houses. Santa Claus and his reindeer are pictured as poised to lift off from snow-covered front yards or rooftops, although in the southern hemisphere and tropics there is no December snow. The colorful, peaceful-appearing Christmas scene can be intoxicating and addicting.

Shoppers pack stores, browsing for gifts they hope to buy at bargain-basement prices. Soaring strains of “White Christmas,” “Silent Night” or “Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer” resonate everywhere.

The December weather of the northern hemisphere might be frightful outside, but the feeling and warmth inside is delightful. Christmas trees with twinkling lights and bright, sparkling ornaments create a mystical and glowing environment. Entire families want to experience the special mystery that only comes with the Christmas season. There is no religious holiday quite

like it for the vast numbers everywhere who celebrate it.

Was Jesus really born on Dec. 25?

But stop and ask yourself: Was Christ really born on Christmas Day? After all, the Bible nowhere tells us the day of His birth.

In fact, most credible secular historical writings tell us that Christmas, more than 200 years after Jesus' death, was considered sinful: “As late as A.D. 245 [the early Catholic theologian] Origen . . . repudiates as sinful the very idea of keeping the birthday of Christ” (*The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition, 1910, Vol. 6, p. 293, “Christmas”).

In A.D. 354, a Latin chronographer mentioned Christmas, but even then he did not write about it as an observed festival (*ibid.*).

There is no biblical evidence that Dec. 25 was Jesus' birth date. In fact, the Bible record strongly shows that Jesus *must not* have been born then.

For example, Luke tells us that the shepherds were keeping their sheep in the fields at night when Jesus was born. “And she [Mary] brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger . . . Now there were in the same country *shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night*” (Luke 2:7-8, emphasis added throughout).

But late December is Judea's cold and rainy season. Would shepherds actually keep their fragile flocks out in the open fields on a cold late-December night near Bethlehem?

No responsible shepherd would subject his sheep to the elements at that time of year when cold rains, and occasional snow, are common in that region.

“The climate of Palestine is not so severe as the climate of this country [England]; but even there, though the heat of the day be considerable, the cold of the night, from December to February, is very piercing, and it was not the custom for the shepherds of Judea to watch their flocks in the open fields later than about the end of October” (Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, 1959, p. 91).

Luke also tells us that Jesus was born at the time of a census ordered by the Roman emperor (Luke 2:1-3). The Romans were brilliant administrators; they certainly would not have ordered people to journey to be registered at a time of year when roads

would have been wet and muddy and traveling conditions miserable. Such a move would have been self-defeating on its face.

The belief that Jesus was born on or around Dec. 25 simply has no basis in fact, even if untold millions of people have accepted it without question. As the famous playwright George Bernard Shaw said, “If 50 million people believe a foolish thing, it’s still a foolish thing.”

Does Christmas really honor Christ?

If the Christmas holiday is an important celebration to honor the birth of Jesus Christ, why is it nowhere mentioned in the Bible? Why didn’t Christ instruct His closest followers, His 12 chosen apostles, to keep Christmas? Why didn’t they institute or teach it to the early Church?

Before you answer, consider that Jesus gave great authority to His 12 apostles, assuring them that they will hold positions of great importance and responsibility in His Kingdom (Matthew 18:18; 19:28; Luke 22:29-30). But since Jesus never taught His apostles to keep Christmas, nor did they ever teach it to the Church even though they had years of opportunity to do so, shouldn’t that make us question whether Christmas is something Jesus really wants or appreciates?

So how did Christmas become such a widespread practice if the Bible doesn’t sanction it, if Christ didn’t observe it, and if He never taught His disciples and the early Church to celebrate it?

True origins of Christmas

Most people never stop to ask themselves what the major symbols of Christmas—Santa Claus, reindeer, decorated trees, holly, mistletoe and the like—have to do with the birth of the Savior of mankind. In the southern hemisphere summer climate of December, few people question why they observe a Christmas with northern hemisphere winter scenery!

The fact is, and you can verify this in any number of books and encyclopedias, that all these trappings came from *ancient pagan festivals*.

Even the date, Dec. 25, came from a festival celebrating the birthday of the ancient sun god Mithras. (If you’d like to learn more about the origins of the many customs and symbols associated with Christmas, request our free study guide *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*)

Jesus never told His followers to celebrate Christmas, but He did warn us not to adhere to false, man-made religious doctrines: “And in vain they worship Me, *teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*” (Mark 7:7). The truth is, Christmas and other unbiblical religious holidays arising from pagan religious practice constitute vain or empty worship.

The Catholic Encyclopedia indicates that the Christmas season came from an ancient festival that occurred at the time of the winter solstice. Interestingly, the previously noted Origen, despite the early period in which he lived (ca. 182-251), never even mentioned it (*The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967, Vol. 3, 1967, and “Christmas and Its Cycle,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1913, Vol. 3, “Christmas”).

Tertullian, another Catholic theologian who lived at about the same time (ca. 155-230), referred to compromising



What do the major symbols of Christmas—Santa Claus, decorated trees, mistletoe—have to do with the birth of the Savior of mankind?

Christians who were beginning to join in the pagan winter festival celebrated in the Roman Empire, which eventually evolved into what is now Christmas:

“The Saturnalia, the feasts of January, the Brumalia, and Matronalia are now frequented; gifts are carried to and fro, new year’s day presents are made with din, and banquets are celebrated with uproar; oh, how much more faithful are the heathen to *their* religion, who take special care to adopt no solemnity from the Christians” (Tertullian in *De Idolatria*, quoted by Hislop, p. 93).

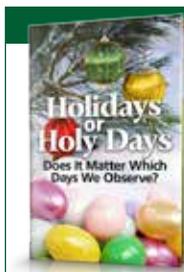
In time Catholic religious leaders added solemnity to this pre-Christian holiday by adding to it the Mass of Christ, from which it eventually came to be known by its common name of “Christmas.”

A matter of whether, not what

The purpose of *Beyond Today* magazine is to share with you the living truth of Jesus Christ. A true Christian cannot decide *what* he will obey, only *whether* he will obey God’s truth.

We strive to publish God’s pristine truth; people who read that truth have to decide what to do about it and whether they will honor it. Our commission from Jesus Christ is to teach the truth of God and to welcome as disciples and fellow workers those few who hear and *obey* the truth. We hope the truth about Christmas starts you on the road to true happiness and God’s purpose for you.

History shows that Christmas does not represent Christ. It



LEARN MORE

Would you like to learn more about the Christmas holiday’s unusual origins? We’ve created an eye-opening study guide, *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*, to help you learn the truth! Download or request your free copy today!

BTmagazine.org/booklets

Christians Who Don't Celebrate Christmas? **Here's Why**

Why do some Christians not celebrate Christmas? Here are the reasons some gave for kicking the Christmas habit:

"I cannot find Christmas in the Bible, nor can I find that Jesus Christ told us to observe Christmas. Santa Claus is a lie that some people teach their children every year. For that matter, Christmas is false since it has nothing to do with Christ or His birthday.

"Beyond this, business people, who make most of their income during this time of the year, have increasingly promoted Christmas. Well-meaning people go in debt during Christmas time to give gifts to other people, which in turn motivates other people to give gifts to them. It makes no sense to keep a religious holiday that is not biblical, that Christ never sanctioned, that promotes lying to children, that puts people in debt and that blinds people to what Christ really taught."

P.A., Georgia

"It is a historical fact that Christmas is not the day or the season when Christ was born. So why observe a day that is a lie? Most people do not want to admit this fact. For example, how does the use of Santa Claus depict the birth of Christ? How does the Christmas tree depict Christ?

Celebrating Christmas violates at least the First, Second and Third Commandments of God's Ten Commandments. Observing a pagan holiday is a sin. God condemns the worship of pagan gods.

"The Bible does not command people to observe the birth of Christ as a holiday. This day, Dec. 25, is the date that has been observed for centuries as a pagan holiday in honor of the pagan sun god. God commands those who want to serve Him not to observe pagan holidays or any custom that breaks His holy laws."

D.S., California

"Our family traditionally celebrated Christmas on Dec. 24. We then followed up with a family day on Dec. 25. One day I had a strong desire to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, which I thought I had been doing up to that point.

"I began to think of the songs we sang, 'O Tannenbaum' or 'Oh! Christmas Tree.' I had been singing to a tree as though it were alive and had some strange power. We decorated it and placed our gifts below the tree as though the gifts and good feeling emanated from and through the tree.

"I thought about the words to 'Silent Night, Holy Night,' a truly beautiful piece of music. I wondered about shepherds and their flocks in the fields on a lovely evening at the end of December. But this was a contradiction. December was a very cold time

of the year, and sheep wouldn't be in open fields during that time.

"The Christmas stories about Santa Claus and the shepherds in the fields on Christmas Eve were false. I found out that Jerusalem has rain and cold that time of year and that it sometimes snows in the region. Sheep are sheltered in the winter-time, not left out in inclement weather.

"I discovered that the Christmas tree and its ornaments and giving of Christmas gifts come from ancient Roman festivals. The gifts our children had asked of Santa Claus created a financial burden on us. The lies about Santa Claus and his flying reindeer were misleading our children.

"Also, the Bible tells us it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). During Christmas time, I saw little joy in giving and I saw children always expecting to receive. I have come to understand that godly blessings come from carefully obeying God. This is why I don't keep Christmas."

B.B., Canada

"God tells us to avoid the ways of the ancient pagans. Though modern Christianity observes Christmas, this is where it came from. To be frank, Christmas is a lie. Christmas is a substitute for righteous behavior. It makes people think they are doing good things for God, which somehow does Him service."

A.H., Australia

misrepresents sound biblical teaching and is in opposition to God's truth. God wants us to worship Him in *truth* (John 4:23-24), *not fable*.

In Deuteronomy 12:28-32, God told His people to worship only in the ways He commanded, telling them, "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; *you shall not add to it nor take away from it*." He explicitly ordered them not to copy or adopt the religious practices of the pagans, calling such practices "*abomination[s] . . . which He hates*."

Yet hundreds of millions of men, women and children observe Christmas without knowing or caring about where it came from. They assume that 2 billion Christians can't be wrong or that it doesn't matter how we worship God so long as our intentions are good. But why should we think we honor God or please Him when we worship contrary to His commands?

Crucial questions only you can answer

The crucial question is, do we worry more about what others

think or about what God requires? Also, can other human beings give us salvation? If honoring God's truth determines our salvation, then why honor men above God?

Jesus Christ said to those who appeared religious but denied the power of His true teaching, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and *do not do the things which I say?*" (Luke 6:46; compare Matthew 7:21). Since Christ is opposed to Christmas, why would any thoughtful Christian observe it?

Walking in Jesus' footsteps in a world that doesn't is never easy. But it is much better and eminently more rewarding than following the empty ways of the world.

God tells us in 1 John 2:15-17: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but *he who does the will of God abides forever*." **BT**

The Sin of Lying

Lying—almost everybody does it and for a variety of reasons.
But how does God view it, and what can we do about it?

by Victor Kubik

When I was in the third grade, my father gave me a subscription to *National Geographic* magazine for my birthday. He wanted me to see beyond my immediate world to a much greater realm.

From that time in 1955 to the present, my family and I have not missed an issue of *National Geographic* except for the three years I was without much money in college. *National Geographic* opened my eyes to our planet in the way my father wanted it to in the fields of geography, archaeology, anthropology, biology and much more.

Lately, however, *National Geographic* has meandered into the world of ethics and morality. And, while using scientific and empirical methods of investigation and measurement, the writers and editors ignore the very real factor of godly absolutes regarding behavior and the cause and effect of conduct. So it is with an article titled “Why We Lie” in the June 2017 issue.

The *National Geographic* story purports to show that lying is a natural part of life. Some may falsely and dangerously derive some sense of ease or justification from this. The author points out that social science researchers and neuroscientists understand that unchecked lying—the telling and sustaining of false witness—is today recognized as “a deeply ingrained human trait.”

The author doesn’t try to assert that lying is somehow a good thing. But he confirms a dreadful truth: “Lying, it turns out, is something that most of us are very adept at. We lie with ease, in ways big and small, to strangers, co-workers, friends and loved ones.”

The pervasiveness of lying

No one is immune from lying. It makes no difference whether one is a scientist, a journalist, a business professional, a college student, a spouse, a city worker or even, yes, a Christian. Almost everyone lies, sometimes several times a day.

Sometimes the lie is a small “white lie,” made to try to make someone feel better. Sometimes it appears as deliberate deceit or self-deception, papering over important issues. Sometimes it’s an elaborate and complicated series of lies, such as what convicted fraudster Bernie Madoff cooked up to bilk billions of dollars from people. Sometimes lies are mixed with truth to produce the Internet phenomenon widely recognized today as “fake news.”

We all need to understand and remember that telling a lie is often not a simple thing. Sometimes people become deluded. They get to the point where they don’t even know that they’re telling or passing on a lie. Others lie deliberately to advance their careers or social standing. A good deal of research

exists that shows that people inflate or outright lie about their accomplishments and past achievements on social media profiles on LinkedIn and Facebook.

How does God view lying?

If lying is so bad, why does it happen?

Those of us with a biblical orientation know full well that lying is so terrible that it is one of the acts specifically condemned in the Ten Commandments. “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor” is how the Ninth Commandment reads in the King James or Authorized Version (Exodus 20:16).

Throughout the Bible, lying is condemned as sin. In fact, an ominous verse declares that for those who never repent or change from habitual and willful lying, their prophesied fate lies in eternal destruction in the fearsome lake of fire (Revelation 21:8).

That fact should get everyone’s attention! But, even *that* doesn’t stop people. Large or small, lying still happens everywhere, every day.

Where does this lying come from?

Jesus Christ reveals to us that Satan himself is the father of lies, stating that the devil “was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is *no truth* in him . . . For he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44, emphasis added throughout). Satan delivered the first lie recorded in the Bible when he deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden—a lie that intentionally led her to death, thus making this also murder, as Jesus said.

Why do people lie?

As we come out of the ways of this world (2 Corinthians 6:17), it’s important to think about this to avoid lying!

What do people lie about? Summing up recent research, the *National Geographic* article notes that 22 percent of people lie to cover up a personal transgression. About 16 percent use lying and deception to gain financial benefits or an economic advantage. Another 15 percent of all lies are told for personal advantage more generally—to create benefits beyond money.

About 14 percent of lying is centered on avoidance or getting out of something. About 8 percent of lies are told to bolster a positive image of ourselves. The remainder of lying is split up between making people laugh (telling tall tales), trying to hurt people, trying to simply be polite and not hurt someone’s feelings, and other miscellaneous reasons.

While it may seem small and innocent at the time, lying brings terrible costs to society and life. It *hurts* people. Lying and deception destroy trust, the social glue that makes things work better in human society. Lying annihilates relationships.

Who's Behind Beyond Today?



Lying costs billions of dollars in business, government and organizational life. And when one starts lying to oneself, even more terrible things can happen.

The author of the *National Geographic* article further recognizes that given current trends, human beings don't have much hope: "What then might be the best way to impede the fleet-footed advance of untruths into our collective lives? The answer isn't clear."

The answer may not be clear to secular social scientists, but for those of us who have yielded to God and His way of life, *the answer is abundantly clear!*

Lying is part of corrupt human nature. It is *not* part of God's nature. "Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal truthfully are His *delight*" (Proverbs 12:22).

Seek God's help to change

We can delight God through the transformation of our lives with the help of His Holy Spirit (Romans 12:2). The transformation process involves our awareness of, and the confession of, our weaknesses. Think before you speak. Are you intending to deceive or shade the truth? Is what you're trying to convey really the truth? If not, it's a sin to say it!

The capacity and ease of telling a lie is something that every Christian must fight against every day for the rest of his or her life! The Bible clearly states that "*all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). This represents a powerful reason why the prohibition against lying appears directly in the Ten Commandments.

God gives us the means to overcome and be victorious against this insidious human trait if we ask Him to help us with awareness and with developing good habits of always telling the truth.

If we lie, we should immediately repent and seek forgiveness. We should face the fact that even Christians can fall prey to this spiritual malady. As the apostle Paul instructs us, "*Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds*" (Colossians 3:9).

It is indeed encouraging to note that the Greek word often translated "overcomes" in the book of Revelation can also be translated "is victorious." That means that with the help of God through His Holy Spirit, we can overcome and be victorious in *all* things, including casting off the damaging and hurtful trait of lying.

It's tough work, but it's worth it! As the apostle John writes in Revelation 3:21 as rendered in the New Living Translation, "*All who are victorious will become pillars in the Temple of my God, and they will never have to leave it.*"

Let us never weary of overcoming and seeking that eternal victory! **BT**

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

And those people have a common goal—to proclaim



the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all the world as a witness and to teach all nations to obey everything Christ commanded (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).



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

have long plagued humankind.

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

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

The United Church of God has congregations and ministers around the world. In these congregations believers assemble to be instructed from the Scriptures and to fellowship. For locations and times of services nearest you, contact us at the appropriate address on page 39. Visitors are always welcome.

For additional information, visit our website:

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How can a Christian truly change and stop sinning? The Bible offers a great deal of practical help and encouragement. To learn more, download or request our study guide *Tools for Spiritual Growth*. A free copy is waiting for you!

BTmagazine.org/booklets

Three Gardens With One Purpose—the Culmination

The biblical story begins, transitions and ends with life in a garden.

In this third part in a series, we consider the last setting.

by Robin Webber

In the previous two “Follow Me” columns (in the July-August and September-October editions of *Beyond Today*), we saw that two unique bookend garden settings frame the biblical story of God and man—spanning from the Garden of Eden in Genesis to the ultimate paradise setting at the end of Revelation. The former is underlined by man’s rejection of God’s way. The latter, the focus of the present column, presents a spiritual atmosphere underscored by our Heavenly Father’s incredible desire to reconcile humanity to Himself through Jesus Christ.

Last time we spent time with Christ in the pivotal in-between garden of Scripture called Gethsemane—recognizing that His resolve here in Jerusalem’s shadow established our ability to move forward with hope to enter the final garden setting we now probe.

Jesus’ great decision in Gethsemane ultimately reopens the door to what God initially desired at the original Eden for all—a personal relationship with Him. Here, Jesus, the “last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45), reversed the first Adam’s errant example by crying out: “Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me, nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will” (Mark 14:36).

This verbal commitment was made real just hours later as He was crucified and then lay dead for three days so that we might live forever.

It’s with this steady focus that, despite the horrific agony of His scourging and crucifixion, He visualized the “joy that was set before Him” (Hebrews 12:2). In fact the previous night He stated with utter confidence: “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3).

His invitation to His disciples to continue with Him was underlined by a promise. It’s the ultimate expression of Christ’s personal appeal of “Follow Me.” Let’s now peek into the culmination of that promise in the garden at the end of Scripture.

A pure river of water of life

In Revelation 22 we are ushered into a garden-like setting to consider the immortal life with God granted to the faithful in the ultimate Eden.

Here in the New Jerusalem that will come down from heaven we discover “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (verses 1-2).

Consider for a moment that this was initially heard or read by audiences that didn’t have water coming through a faucet and others who lived in semi-arid lands in which water was precious. It indeed sounded like paradise. This picture of purity and abundance recalls the description of a river that flowed through the original Eden (Genesis 2:10).

But there’s a greater ingredient to be understood regarding this river—it’s spiritual! Psalm 46:4-5 speaks of it too: “There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved . . .”

We just read that its source is the very throne of God and the Lamb. Recall Jesus’ words in John 7:37: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” John says that He was speaking of the Holy Spirit (verse 38). Yes, *water is life*—a very apt symbol of God’s transformative and life-giving Spirit!

Let me illustrate. Further up in California from where I live lies a man-made wonder—the agricultural splendor of the great Central Valley. Much of America’s fruits and vegetables are raised in this semi-arid bowl of earth 450 miles long by 60 miles wide. What makes this horn of plenty possible is the integrated aqueduct and irrigation system that transforms a vast dry region into a green carpet of life that at times touches the furthest horizon.

There are signs along the freeway throughout this valley stating, “Where water flows, plants grow.” So true! Where water touches, there is life. One inch away there is nothing but dry and crusty soil.

We should think about that when it comes to how we heed Christ’s call of “Follow Me.” Being merely *close* is simply not adequate to sustain His existence in us. There’s a vast difference between *observing* a life-giving agent from even the shortest distance and allowing it to not only *touch* us, but *saturate* every fiber of our existence—which was dead, yet is now made alive by God’s grace to remain vibrant in worship of Him.

The tree of life, and no more curse

This vision in Revelation reveals that the tree of life



or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.”

The centerpieces of the garden

But what makes this all possible? It's the eternal centerpieces of this restored Garden of Eden.

In many a park today you can see a centering fountain or memorial statue, often from which the park is named. Here, forever, the centerpieces are God and the Lamb (verses 3-5; compare 21:22-23). God has always desired to be in the midst of His children, whether it was Adam and Eve, the children of Israel, the early Church, or we today.

God the Father initiates our calling to come into personal relationship with Jesus Christ, as Jesus stated: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44). And then it is only through Christ that we can come to the Father (John 14:6). They must both be at the center of our lives—as of the eternal garden setting.

Right next to the Father is the Lamb—Jesus Christ. One thing for sure is that our Heavenly Father was always front and center in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. After all, He fully acknowledged, and exemplified for us who would heed His

call of “Follow Me,” what fed His existence: “My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing His work” (John 4:34, New Living Translation). That labor would take Him from being

a young craftsman in Galilee to becoming “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Is there any wonder that Jesus is forever defined as the Lamb of God, both in heaven and on earth, now and always? So often we think of Jesus as being the sacrificial lamb on the altar of Golgotha. But here in this garden setting He is still called “the Lamb,” as He is 27 other times in Revelation!

It's an abiding part of *who He is*—reminding those who desire to enter this last garden and be part of its holy environment that to live in Christ before our Heavenly Father, we must die to self-centered life and offer ourselves in living sacrifice to God on a continual basis (Romans 6:5-6).

A look ahead

Having considered this last garden, there is still more to explore. So I invite you to join me next time as we come to grasp that this future garden, this new heaven and new earth, this Kingdom of God in its fullness, is not merely a destination or a touch point in eternity alone, but additionally something far grander that God desires for us to internalize even now.

Eternal life is ultimately expressed not in terms of place or space, but intimate relationship with the Father and Christ. As Jesus prayed on the last night of His human life, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

So join me next time as we explore the journey set before us and come to embrace the reality that eternity isn't simply a destination, but a way of traveling, now and forever, as we heed Christ's call of “Follow Me.” **BT**

“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”

remains in the garden's midst. There's no mention of angels blocking the pathway to it, as happened after Adam and Eve chose to eat of the wrong tree (Genesis 3:24). Instead, access is open to those who obey God: “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Revelation 22:14).

Jesus promised earlier in the same book that those who in faith emulate His obedient example of “not My will, but Your will be done” will receive this reward: “To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7).

In the vision of this paradise in Revelation 22 there is no mention of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It will have no place or space here. Its purpose will then be over.

People who live in this final setting are those who, having faced the choice between both trees, representing self-ruled life versus God-ruled existence, chose and continued in the latter. With God's help, they ultimately endured in their decision to partake of the tree of life and not the forbidden tree.

That forbidden tree, the way of choosing for ourselves what is right and wrong, brought mankind under a curse. Yet notice the stunning announcement in verse 4: “And there shall be no more curse.” Imagine it! This summarizes what was stated in Revelation 21:4—that there will be no more tears, death, sorrow, crying or pain!

Not only is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil granted no space, but there will be no deceiving serpent in this setting. Revelation 21:27 tells us, “But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination



“When Discouraged, Reflect on God’s Miracles”

I have so much to thank God for. I have been a widow twice, and both times I was so worried that I wouldn’t be able to support and take care of myself. But remembering times my mother told me that we can do nothing without God, and other teachings from the Bible, I have survived and can even help others sometimes. God works in my life daily, and I am so grateful for His help and love. Without it I know I wouldn’t be where I am. I love Him with all of my heart.

From the Internet

“Seven Prophetic End-Time Markers”

Excellent article. Well organized, and the timeline flows in a succinct and easy to understand manner. Thank you investing the time, prayer and study to complete it.

From the Internet

I have read “Seven Prophetic End Time Markers” and “Are You Preparing for Christ’s Return?” Very interesting articles. Besides being spiritually prepared, what else can we do to be prepared? I have been told that during this time Christians who are not following the devil would have to flee (Matthew 24:20). If so, how should we prepare? Should we have a place in the wilderness or mountains with food and water stored?

Reader in Arizona

The Bible records many ways by which God protected His people in the past, but does not reveal specifically how, where, when or even all of whom He will protect in the end. We must have confidence that He will reveal what we need to know at the right time.

In the meantime, our focus must be on the spiritual preparation for Jesus Christ’s return to establish the Kingdom of God. In Luke’s version of this same prophecy Jesus gives His hearers a warning with some guidance: “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. 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 21:34-36).

Jesus says we are to be watchful and to pray that we may be considered worthy to escape all the calamities preceding His return. If we look at Matthew’s account, we are instructed not to go back for physical possessions: “And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes” (Matthew 24:18).

Consider how God led Israel through the wilderness for 40 years: “So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years” (Deuteronomy 8:3-4). God provided all the necessary items they needed to survive physically.

To be watchful applies to awareness of our own spiritual or moral condition, but can also apply to a good understanding of the prophecies God has made available. With these thoughts in mind, and in light of recent natural disasters like hurricanes, wildfires and earthquakes, we do think it’s wise to have some supplies on hand for emergency

situations. We also recommend reviewing our study guide You Can Understand Bible Prophecy if you have additional questions. You can read, download or request a copy online at UCG.org/booklets.

Readers respond to Beyond Today

I have been studying with the Mormons for a few years now. I recently learned of your church, and began reading your material more and ordering your study guides. I have learned a lot about God through the material. I enjoy your material and also feel as though I’ve become closer to God through your teachings. I live only about 45 minutes from Cincinnati, so I think I will be paying your home office congregation a visit!

From the Internet

Thank you very much for your materials. You are a blessing to me. Does *Beyond Today* air on a TV station near me?

Reader in Washington

Our full TV station listing is on page 39 and can also be found online at BeyondToday.tv/stations. Please also note that in addition to some local TV stations in various cities, we are on the Word Network nationwide on cable and satellite television. Further, all of our TV programs have dedicated Beyond Today apps on Roku, Apple TV and Amazon Fire TV. They are also all available on YouTube and on our website, BeyondToday.tv.

This is the most amazing thing I have ever found in my life. I stumbled through Methodism for many years. My husband of five years introduced me to keeping the Sabbath from the Seventh-day Adventists. But I noticed that no one kept the Holy Days. In the United Church of God, I have finally found my home with God. As Jesus said, “The truth shall set you free.” A UCG minister in New England baptized me into the death of Christ and a new life this year, and immediately I started to change my way of thinking. I have a long way to go, but I know now that I am right where I am supposed to be. Thanks to God for giving me the strength to endure all these years.

Subscriber in Maine

Beyond Today has opened my eyes. I was in the dark, and now I see the light.

Subscriber in England

I have just finished reading your Bible study aid *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. I was truly amazed to finally understand the symbols John used as they were revealed to him by our Savior. I keep every booklet I have received from your wonderful Church. I value them for the truth they hold, and many times I have told my daughter what I have learned through your excellent literature. She never questions what I tell her but listens intently. Many thanks for these wonderful booklets.

Reader in California

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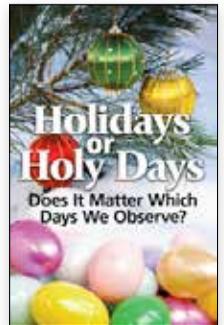
HO, HO, HOAX!

Where did the Christmas holiday come from? How did it begin, and why? Does it really honor Jesus Christ and celebrate His birth, or is there more to the story that most people don't know?

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

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

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



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

Few people know why they believe or do the things they do—especially when it comes to their religious beliefs and practices. If you want to discover the real facts about the strange history of this popular holiday, request your free copy of *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?* This eye-opening booklet is waiting for you!

In this free booklet you can discover the shocking truths about several of the world's most popular holidays. Perhaps even more surprising is how they came to be connected with Jesus Christ! For your free copy, visit our website or contact any of our offices listed on page 39.

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