

# BEYOND TODAY®

A Magazine of Understanding

January-February 2018

HOLY  
BIBLE

## In Our Modern World, Can We Trust **the Bible?**

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# BEYOND TODAY



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**Scott Ashley**  
Managing editor

# Rejecting God's Great Gift to Us

**F**or a nation founded by Bible believers, America has come a long way—and definitely not in the right direction.

The settlers of the Plymouth Colony of Massachusetts, before they stepped ashore in late 1620, signed the Mayflower Compact in which they proclaimed that they had “undertaken, for the Glory of God, and advancements of the Christian faith,” their voyage to plant their colony in the New World.

More than 150 years later, when delegates representing the 13 American colonies proclaimed their independence from Great Britain, they signed a document containing some of the most famous words ever written: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that *they are endowed by their Creator* with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (emphasis added throughout).

Few today realize that the Declaration of Independence actually *concludes with a prayer*. In the last paragraph the signers acknowledged that they were “*appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World* for the Rectitude of our Intentions” and embarking on their dangerous course toward building a new nation “with a firm Reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence” as they struggled to free themselves from rule by the British crown.

In spite of the efforts of revisionists to rewrite history, most of America’s Founding Fathers were members of the mainstream churches of their day. They made their beliefs clear in statements such as these:

“*I have examined all religions, and the result is that the Bible is the best book in the world.*”—John Adams

“*I have always said and always will say that the studious perusal of the Sacred Volume will make us better citizens.*”—Thomas Jefferson

“*It is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor.*”—George Washington

But in recent decades the United States has experienced profound change, much of which can be traced back to U.S. Supreme Court rulings. In 1962 the court banned



Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson draft the Declaration of Independence, which ended with a prayer to God.

school prayer. The following year it prohibited devotional Bible reading in public schools. The results should’ve been easily predictable.

Although the Bible remains a perennial bestseller, people simply don’t read it. Not even half of American adults can list the four Gospels. Few can name more than two or three of the 12 apostles. Nearly half of all Americans hardly ever open a Bible, and only a quarter regard it as the actual Word of God. A majority can’t list even half of the Ten Commandments—which certainly helps explain why as a nation Americans no longer obey them!

It’s no wonder that America is rapidly *becoming another Sodom and Gomorrah*. Millions of couples openly live together rather than bother with getting married. By legalizing same-sex marriage, America has perverted the very *meaning* of marriage. Through abortion, the nation has killed tens of millions of unborn babies—more than the entire population of most countries. Our prisons are filled to overflowing.

*We are reaping what we have sown.*

More than 150 years ago U.S. President Abraham Lincoln wrote words that even more strikingly describe the nation today: “We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven . . . We have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown. *But we have forgotten God* . . . Intoxicated with unbroken

success, *we have become too self-sufficient . . . , too proud to pray to the God that made us.*”

President Lincoln wasn’t afraid to tell it as he saw it. And he called on the nation to turn to God: “It behooves us, then, *to humble ourselves* before the offended Power, *to confess our national sins*, and *to pray for clemency and forgiveness.*”

*Humble ourselves—confess our sins—pray for forgiveness.* This is a key message of *Beyond Today* magazine and our TV program. Like Abraham Lincoln, we feel a deep responsibility to our country to tell it like it is.

This is why we firmly uphold the inspiration, accuracy and authenticity of the Holy Bible. In this issue we explore some of that evidence.

Don’t be like the half of Americans who hardly ever open the Bible. *Read God’s Word. Love God’s Word. Live God’s Word!* **BT**

*Scott Ashley*



# The Bible:



The opening of a Bible museum in the U.S. capital is stirring criticism among biblical skeptics. What do rising attacks on the Bible say about the values of modern culture and living a godly life?

by Darris McNeely

**I** teach a class about biblical doctrine to young adults at the Ambassador Bible College at our offices in Ohio. One of the topics I cover each year is the truth about the Bible as the Word of God. We explore the question: Is the Bible what it says it is—the revelation from the Creator God and a book of ultimate truth on which we can stake our lives? It's rewarding to take the students through the proofs that assure us of the reliability of the Bible.

Sad to say, this portion of the class is much needed because the Bible has been attacked by skeptics and critics through the ages. A Roman emperor tried to obliterate all trace of Scripture in his day. Yet it has never been destroyed. It has survived all attempts to discredit, debase and debunk it. It's truly a joy to teach young minds that they can rely on this Book as an inspired source of guidance for life.

I've been wryly amused by a few recent articles describing the newly opened Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C. Critics and skeptics of the Bible appear to be fearful of any effort that seeks to establish the value of the Bible for modern minds. It seems the more they attack, deride and denigrate the authority of God's enduring Word, the more resilient it is revealed to be.

Reading these articles stirred my interest to visit the Museum of the Bible to see firsthand how the Bible is presented and whether the fears expressed by these article have merit. What I found was fascinating. (See also "A Visit to the New Museum of the Bible" beginning on page 8.)

The new multimillion-dollar state-of-the-art museum has as part of its mission "to invite all people to engage with the history, narrative, and impact of the Bible." This is a revision of its original mission as stated in 2010, which was "to inspire confidence in the absolute authority and reliability of the Bible."

Did pressure from critics lead to this alteration? The backers of the museum are evangelical Christians who have accumulated tens of thousands of archaeological artifacts from the Middle East, many of which shed light on the background, cultures and history of the biblical story.

Visitors to the Museum of the Bible will see displays that will give them, as the museum stated it in its original mission, "confidence in the absolute authority and reliability of the Bible." Anyone who visits the museum will be exposed to the text of Scripture and can walk away not only with confidence, but a newfound familiarity with the Bible.

# Controversy at the Nation's Capital

## The matter of biblical archaeology

A recent article at *Science* magazine's website was quite critical of the museum, as one might guess from its headline: "Can the Museum of the Bible Overcome the Sins of the Past?" In addition to impugning the integrity of the museum owners and staff, and the artifacts themselves, the author quoted one archaeologist as saying that if "archaeology is being used as a means of proving the historicity and accuracy of the biblical text, that is extremely problematic" (Lizzie Wade, Oct. 16, 2017).

Yet as the museum was being constructed, *Biblical Archaeology Review* magazine published two articles by Purdue scholar Lawrence Mykytiuk demonstrating that archaeology is a viable proof of the historicity and accuracy of the biblical text.

The first article, in the March-April 2014 issue, was titled "Archaeology Confirms 50 Real People in the Bible." The follow-up article, in the May-June 2017 issue, was titled "Archaeology Confirms 3 More Bible People," as in the intervening time three more individuals mentioned in the Bible had been confirmed by archaeological discoveries.

Both articles describe the artifacts or inscriptions discovered by scholars that confirm the existence of these people mentioned in the biblical text. They include Israelite kings, Mesopo-



The Museum of the Bible features a recreation of part of the village of Nazareth as it might have looked in first-century Galilee.

Visitors to the Museum of the Bible will see displays that will give them, as its original mission stated, "confidence in the absolute authority and reliability of the Bible."

tamian monarchs and various other lesser known people—all verified by artifacts that place them in the right place at the right time according to what is presented in Scripture.

Some give remarkable verification of the Bible's story (see "A Clay Tablet's Astounding Testimony" on page 6).

In fact, several exhibits at the Museum of the Bible provide archaeological evidence confirming the biblical story of the Israelite occupation of the Holy Land. Evidence of towns built by Israelites during the united monarchy under King David, such as Khirbet Qeiyafa, are presented through an exhibit provided by the Israeli Antiquities Authority. This ancient city was excavated near the site of David's encounter with Goliath, and its strong fortifications protected it during years of conflict along the Israelite-Philistine border.

The Museum of the Bible's connections with Israeli archaeology provides visitors with some basic exposure to the knowledge and research that sheds light on the biblical story and confirms the historical truth of its record. This is an effective counter to today's increasing secular attacks against

God and His holy Word.

## Fear of Bible influence in the national conversation

The museum is financed by the same family that owns the U.S.-based Hobby Lobby chain of craft and decorating stores. It is located within view of the

United States Capitol building and near the buildings of the Smithsonian Institution in downtown Washington.

The proximity to the seat of American political power caused one writer, in an article on the website of the liberal British newspaper *The Guardian*, to express the fear that "this edifice could represent the coming out, again, of evangelical America. I can assure you the museum is going to become a convening platform for conservative Christian activism" (quoted by David Smith, "Inside the Sprawling, Controversial \$500m Museum of the Bible," Oct. 16, 2017).

American evangelical Christianity has in the past been an influential voice in U.S. politics. It was the driving force behind the Moral Majority movement of the 1980s, which was credited with a role in electing Ronald Reagan to the presidency. Its political influence has declined in recent years as America has drifted in an increasingly secular direction.

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence is an evangelical Christian, and his supporting role in President Donald Trump's administration is carefully watched (and often demonized) by those who



desire to push religion further from the American public square.

Of course, we can certainly expect those pushing against Judeo-Christian influence in society to be in opposition to the half-billion-dollar Museum of the Bible. This multimedia experience will no doubt draw millions of visitors. And those who take the time to examine its hundreds of exhibits likely will develop a deeper appreciation of the Bible as a book that has dramatically shaped history and nations and lives.

The Bible is a unique book that makes many direct statements to its authenticity as the authoritative revelation from the Creator God of the universe. It contains profound understanding and wisdom about many aspects of life. The Bible alone reveals the truth about God and His purpose for creating human life. Only within its pages can we find true answers to our questions about God, who and what man is, and the purpose for human life.

Most importantly, it provides guidance and direction as to how we should live. So it shouldn't be surprising that the inauguration of a museum dedicated to telling its story and encouraging interest and inquiry should invite skeptical reporting from today's media.

### Strange accusations of hiding agenda

Notice another comment in the *Guardian* article from an atheist taking direct aim at the museum's mission. It quotes Nick Fish, national program director of an atheist group that promotes strict separation of church and state, as saying, "With many of these religious 'museums,' the tendency is to dress up evangelism and dogma with a veneer of academia to lend an undeserved cloak of neutrality."

An "undeserved cloak of neutrality"? That's a bit of a stretch! Sponsoring a museum dedicated to the Bible makes a certain statement in itself. And those behind it are known to believe in the value and authenticity of the Bible. Any who accept and believe the Bible are people with a "dogma," which is by definition a set of principles rooted in an authority regarded as true.

There does not seem to be any attempt to "cloak" the intention behind the museum—except perhaps for the watering down of the initial mission statement, as mentioned previously. But this is clearly not to the point of "neutrality."

Those who will put a half billion dollars of their own money behind this effort cannot remotely be accused of being neutral. They have taken a stand for their belief. They are not neutral, and any clear-thinking person visiting the museum will understand that before going through the doors.

In fact, I am sure many visitors will find their half-formed assumptions about the Bible, in many cases based on distortions arising from a hostile and uninformed media culture, *challenged*. And that will be a good thing!

### A divided, wayward nation needs the Bible—and to take heed

Sadly, I was struck by the apparent fear expressed by the authors of the articles referred to above and those they quoted. They seem to fear the existence of religion—of people holding a faith in God and the Bible—especially when it comes to the echelons of government.

I mentioned that U.S. Vice President Mike Pence is an evangelical Christian. But it should be noted that according to a recent Pew Research Analysis, more than 9 in 10 members of

## A Clay Tablet's Astounding Testimony

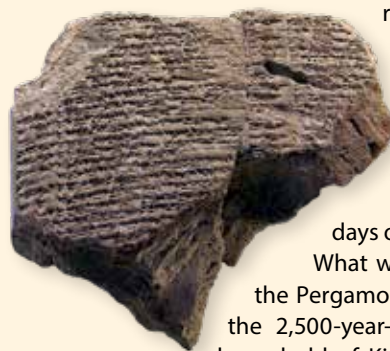
A few years ago I was touring the famous Pergamon Museum in Berlin, which contains many artifacts excavated in the ruins of ancient Babylon. My German guide pointed out a clay tablet covered with cuneiform text. Next to it, in German, was an explanation of the text, which mentioned one of the last kings of Judah, Jehoiachin, also known as Jeconiah.

During his reign, according to Scripture, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar besieged and looted Jerusalem and took Jehoiachin and most of the rest of Jerusalem's nobility captive to Babylon. A few years later Jerusalem was destroyed (2 Kings 24:8-25; 25:1-11).

After nearly four decades of imprisonment in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar's son and successor Evil-Merodach (or Amel-Marduk)

released Jehoiachin and gave him an honored position at the Babylonian court.

"And as for his provisions, there was a regular ration given him by the king, a portion for each day, all the days of his life" (2 Kings 25:30).



What was the tablet on display in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin? It was the 2,500-year-old shopping list for the household of King Jehoiachin, mentioning him by name and listing the food provided by the Babylonian king who had bestowed honor on him!

There, among hundreds of other artifacts in the museum, was a piece of living history proving once again the biblical story is real history! This is just one of many such examples. And how many artifacts that corroborate more of the biblical record are yet to be unearthed in the lands of the Bible?

Skeptics will point to the lack of hard proof for people such as Moses or Abraham as evidence to support their personal belief that the Bible is not true. Yet it should be realized that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. And could it be that physical evidence yet exists within undiscovered ancient libraries or other caches of objects and records from that time that, when discovered and properly analyzed, will yield additional information on that period and again confirm the biblical record to be true? This is why I find the criticism of and attacks on the Museum of the Bible to be so absurd.



### LEARN MORE

Can we really believe and rely on the Bible? We've prepared an in-depth, eye-opening study guide that gives you the answers from history and several scientific fields. Download or request your free copy of *Is the Bible True?* today!

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

# Can We Trust the Bible on Christ as the Only Way?

the current U.S. Congress describe themselves as Christian. This compares with 7 in 10 American adults who claim various forms of Christianity as their faith.

Will the Museum of the Bible be a “convening platform” in the center of the nation’s capital for people of faith to effect a change in the country? Should Americans who have no faith or are anti-faith fear a resurgence of a “moral majority”-like evangelical presence in American politics and culture?

What Americans should fear is the judgment of God on a nation that was settled and founded by men and women who believed in the Bible and the God it reveals. America has put the name of God and quotes from the Bible on its currency, its seals and many public buildings of its capital. America has invoked the name and the blessings of that God. Yet its current state of affairs does not reflect the teachings of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

What Americans should fear is the judgment of God on a people who have used His name in vain and failed to live up to their calling to be a light to the world. On the walls of the memorial to President Thomas Jefferson are these words of warning: *“God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God? . . . I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that His justice cannot sleep forever.”*

What Americans should fear is the judgment of God invoked by Abraham Lincoln and placed on the walls of his memorial: *“The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”* When a people call on God to bless their efforts and do not live up to the Word of God in their lives, His judgments as given through His prophets are on their heads. We are at a moment in the American story where it is past time to consider the words of the biblical prophets. God’s judgment hangs over the nation.

Clearly America is divided. It is divided over politics, foreign policy, taxation, wealth redistribution, gender issues and much, much more. Some are now saying the republic has not seen such a rift in their lifetimes, or even since the days before the American Civil War.

At stake in this culture war is the very identity of the nation and its purpose among the nations. No one person, religion, political party or respected leader

**T**he Bible teaches that repentance from sin with faith in Jesus Christ is the only path to salvation and eternal life. It shows the apostle Peter boldly proclaiming that salvation can come only through the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:10, 12).

Moreover, Jesus Himself is recorded as having said: “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved” and “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 10:9; 14:6).

Can we confirm the validity of this testimony? The New Testament is of course based on the Old Testament—and it affirms much that is proclaimed in the Old Testament. But how can we know that this witness, the whole Bible, is true? What reasons are there to believe that the Bible is the Word of God, as it claims to be? Individually, our personal relationship with God as we seek and follow Him can serve as strong subjective evidence. However, there are several areas of objective evidence as well.

Among the numerous objective proofs are the fulfillment of Bible prophecy, the scientific accuracy of the Bible and the confirmation of the biblical narrative by archaeology.

● **Fulfilled prophecy:** One of the most powerful and compelling reasons to believe the Bible is that God has accurately foretold the future throughout history. God Himself offered this as definitive proof of His sovereignty, saying through the prophet Isaiah, “I am God and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done” (Isaiah 46:10).

Among this evidence are the detailed prophecies in the book of Daniel about the rise and fall of world empires, which were fulfilled in amazing detail over the course of centuries. You can read about the fulfillment of these and many other amazing prophecies in our free study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.

Additionally, Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled dozens of highly specific prophecies when He came as the Messiah in the flesh, and these prophecies were written by numerous authors over more than a thousand years leading up to His human life! A list of Jesus’ prophetic fulfillments can be found in our free study guide *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.

Throughout the history of the people of ancient Israel, God repeatedly foretold their future and brought it to pass. You can find more information about God’s interaction with them and promises concerning them in our free study guides *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* and *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

● **Scientific accuracy:** Another reason to trust in the Bible is the startling accuracy of what it says in light of science, despite having been written thousands of years before modern discoveries.

For example, the article “God and Astronomy” in our January-February 2017 issue explains the Bible’s consistency with astronomical realities long before they were discovered, including a starting point for the universe, the spherical shape of the earth and the fact that our planet is not held up by anything in space. While other ancient religions included many myths and incorrect statements about the universe, the Bible is strikingly accurate.

● **Historical corroboration:** It is also important to note that history and archaeology overwhelmingly support the biblical record. The list of people, places and events of the Bible that have been verified by archaeology in modern times is nothing short of staggering (see the lists on pages 13 and 14 of this issue).

No other religious book even comes close to the Bible on its scientific and historical accuracy, or the immense number of fulfilled prophecies it contains.

Given the weight of evidence supporting the Bible as the Word of God, we can trust what it says about how to live our lives, how to enter into a relationship with God and how to receive eternal life. The Bible clearly states that repentance with faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to receive salvation. And that’s how we can know that Christianity is indeed the one true religion.

For more proof of the authenticity and reliability of the Bible, be sure to send for or download our free study guide *Is the Bible True?*

—Steven Britt



The Museum of the Bible features thousands of Bible-related items and artifacts from Bible times spread over eight floors.

has been able to stand up and command any sizeable following to correct the decline the nation has experienced over recent years. President Trump's election in November 2016 and his stated desire to make America great again have not brought people together around a common cause. As we have pointed out in recent issues of *Beyond Today*, this division is crippling America's role as a leader in the world.

While there can certainly be much value and help in a museum dedicated to the Bible, it's much more vital for all of us to delve into the Bible itself—to read what it says and live by its words. Scripture makes strong comments about America's problems, including false religion that bears little resemblance to the true teachings found in the Bible.

And while we applaud the effort to highlight the importance of the Bible, we will also not shy from showing what God reveals is true worship and true religion. We wish this museum would highlight not only the historical accuracy and reliability of the Bible, but also prominently display the *fundamental truths* of the Bible—the truth on which any faith, any church and any nation must be built.

### It is written!

At the end of all the debate and discussion, it is left for each of us to prove the Bible true and then choose to live by every word contained in its pages.

Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, showed the value of Scripture as a key to dealing with life's temptations in His direct confrontation with Satan the devil. Matthew 4 and Luke 4 record a monumental confrontation between Jesus and Satan over who would be worshipped, God or the devil. Satan threw three tests at Jesus—hunger, pride of life, and power.

Three times Jesus confronted the devil's temptations with Scripture. "It is written," Jesus responded as He quoted the scriptures that not only strengthened His resolve to resist the devil but to rebuke and counter the power of the fallen Lucifer. On the third temptation Jesus added, "Away with you Satan!" and with that command "the devil left Him" (Matthew 4:10-11).

Today's culture has drunk deep of the skeptical spirit evidenced here by Satan. The devil sought to undermine Christ's faith with the small, two-letter word "*if*." Christ resisted and overcame any doubt by the use of Scripture. This is the same Scripture available today to each of us. We cannot expect to resist the satanic culture of this world apart from a thorough knowledge, respect for and use of the Bible.

Use the tools we freely make available to you through the *Beyond Today* magazine, TV program, website and study guides to help you have confidence in the Bible as God's revealed Word! **BT**

# A Visit to

**B***eyond Today* writer and presenter Darris McNeely and I visited the brand-new Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., just a week after it opened—and we were very impressed with the quality of the exhibits and the size and grandeur of the museum. It encompasses eight large floors and is situated very close to the national mall memorials and Smithsonian museums.

The museum tastefully represents the history of Scripture considered holy by the Jewish and Christian faiths. Numerous displays hold ancient manuscripts, Bibles, scrolls and fragments of the Word of God.

Exhibits include a number of videos depicting the history of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, the story of the New Testament, and the lives of several biblical authors. These are very professionally done, and honor the words of God they convey. Many theaters and video displays nicely illustrate the stories and themes of the Bible. Several restaurants and eateries help you keep your energy up—since to see everything in the museum can take a 10-hour day or more!

### Very worthwhile exhibits overall

Here are some of the positive highlights you can expect to encounter at the museum:

The contribution of the Israel Antiquities Authority is a big plus for the museum. This allows for original artifacts from biblical times to be on display, some even from the time of ancient Israel in the 12th century B.C.

Original fragments from the Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrate the accuracy of Scripture as passed on to us today. Additional facsimiles and reproductions of many of the Qumran scroll pieces add to what can be studied and verified.

Visitors are able to walk through a recreated first-century town of Nazareth, including a synagogue with a person in period dress giving an animated talk. The importance of the Sabbath was especially stressed, pointing out that Jesus, His disciples and the early Church kept the seventh-day Sabbath. (It wasn't until the fourth century that the Roman Emperor Constantine enforced changing the Sabbath by commanding that people work on Saturday, the seventh day of the week, and rest on Sunday, the first day.)

The archaeological and extra-biblical evidence for characters from the Bible is on display—showing these people truly existed in spite of skeptics' claims. One of the best portions gives evidence of the life of King David and his reign.

Visitors will be surprised to be reminded of how much music, even more recent music, is inspired by Scripture. And to follow, an exhibit shows how a large portion of our cinematic world has biblical themes. The Bible has had a big impact on Western culture.

Entrance to the museum is free, but donations are gratefully accepted. However, some special exhibits do have fees to enter. One such item is a motion ride (like you experience at theme parks) that takes riders—with high-speed ups and



# the New Museum of the Bible

downs and twists of motion—on a tour of all the buildings and monuments of the nation’s capital where Scripture is quoted. Afterwards, on reflection, *you know* there is no doubt about America’s religious foundation and heritage. At its core is the fundamental belief in the Creator God of the Bible! It’s emblazoned across the city—to the chagrin of many non-believers.

The museum does good service in melding science and the Bible. The two are compatible and not mutually exclusive. Much of science is shown to have been rooted in a scriptural worldview, and when properly compared the Bible and science are in sync.

The contribution of the Israel Antiquities Authority is a big plus for the museum. This allows for original artifacts from biblical times to be on display.



Among the items on display in the Museum of the Bible are fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls and a record mentioning King Nebuchadnezzar.

### A few negatives

There really is not much that can be said against the museum. But here are a few points to make note of:

A strange and perhaps unnecessary display includes the influence of the Bible on modern fashion. Quite honestly, it seemed out of place.

In the lobby and lower galleries, several displays and exhibits are not directly related to the formation, content or broad impact of the Bible, and in fact concern *extra-biblical traditions*. These include “Stations of the Cross” by Gib Singleton, “Christmas Illuminated” from the Bavarian State Library, and reproductions of art and books from the Vatican Library. I would prefer to see actual

biblical teachings and traditions presented rather than traditions and concepts that developed after the Bible was written, many of which are contrary to Scripture, like Christmas celebrations and the Trinity.

### Another plus—no major Jesus images

One of the major criticisms levied against the Museum of the Bible has been its lack of images of Jesus. And it’s true—there are no giant portraits of Jesus, corresponding statues, or stained glass or classic art pieces. I’m actually very happy about that!

Why? For one, devotional portraits and statues of Jesus conflict with the Second Commandment against using images of God in worship—and that includes Jesus. And for another, the common de-

pictions of Jesus are not accurate. In fact, they are very misleading. It is known and widely accepted among historians and biblical scholars that Jesus did not have long hair and was not an emasculated, effeminate man as typically shown in ancient and modern artwork.

No, Jesus looked like a common Jewish man of His day—so much so, in fact, that He could not be picked out of a crowd (John 18:4-8; 7:10-12). If He were the only man around Judea with long hair, He would have been immediately noticed! So, in visiting the museum, it was good to see that the historical record was not besmirched by false depictions of Jesus that would have distracted from the biblical messages being conveyed.

Lending support to what I’m saying, the museum correctly depicts Jesus’ disciples with short, dark hair (not long hair), just like other Jews of the day. Men did not wear long hair in Judea in the first century!

Moreover, sensitivity toward concerns over Jesus’ portrayal is apparent in the fact that throughout the museum in videos and reenactments of Jesus’ life, He is shown tastefully from behind, and with full-length clothing and head covering. You really cannot see His face or what He looked liked.

So, all in all, and despite the criticism given by some visitors, it was a pleasant surprise to find an absence of what would most likely have otherwise been misleading and improper images of Jesus.

That being said, there is no doubt that when studying the exhibits of the Word of God in Scripture, you “see” God everywhere!

### Put it on your D.C. bucket list

The Museum of the Bible is certainly worth visiting—especially if you’re one who respects and believes the Word of God. It’s a very tasteful and honorable representation of Scripture.

The museum contains plenty of space for future additions, and is able to host special exhibits from other prestigious institutions from around the world. It will be interesting to see new exhibits added as the years progress and as science and archaeology uncover yet more evidence of the veracity of Scripture.

—Peter Eddington



# HOLY BIBLE

## Can We Believe the Bible?

Clear evidence exists that the Bible is indeed a genuine account of real persons, real places and real events recorded centuries ago and preserved for us today. What is some of that evidence?

by Scott Ashley

**T**he Bible was written over a span of many centuries by several dozen authors living on three continents. Its pages record thousands of details, including people, places, events, customs, dates and geographical features.

While archaeology—the study of the material remains of ancient peoples and cultures—can reveal a great deal, it has its limits. In the lands of the Bible, for example, literally thousands of ancient sites are known that have never been excavated. And of those that have been excavated, it's typical that only one to five percent of a site has been excavated, even after sometimes decades of study and digging. Thus, much remains buried and undiscovered.

Furthermore, as we might expect, many remains of the ancient world simply haven't survived. Any material that *can* decay *has* decayed (with rare exceptions, such as some remains found in extremely dry desert climates). Because of this, artifacts of fabric, wood, leather, bone, parchment and papyrus are rare.

Typically, whatever could be reused was reused. And valuables were not left around to be buried under accumulating dust and debris but were kept more safely and passed on to others. Palaces, temples and wealthy homes, where the most significant articles would have been, were kept clean, leaving less to later find. New building in ancient cities was often done

on top of previous razed construction, and sometimes this razing removed remains from prior occupation.

It's also known that many if not most ancient cities and towns of the Middle East were destroyed by fire during earthquakes or warfare. Often invaders looted or deliberately destroyed objects of significance in the areas they conquered.

So the bottom line is that the physical remains we have from biblical times that might testify to the truthfulness of the Bible are relatively rare. Only a fraction of a fraction of ancient remains have been recovered, much less studied and analyzed.

### Critics' distorted views of the Bible

Faced with such scarcity, critics of the Bible jump on *absence of evidence* to argue that this is *evidence of absence*—i.e., that because evidence has not yet been found to support parts of the Bible, this is evidence that the events never happened.

Such reasoning, of course, is inherently flawed. Just because evidence *hasn't been found* doesn't mean that evidence *doesn't or never existed*. But this doesn't stop critics such as author and “evangelical atheist” Richard Dawkins from making such comments about the Bible, in this case the Gospels:

“The gospels are not reliable accounts of what happened in the history of the real world. All were written long after the death of Jesus . . . Nobody knows who the four evangelists were, but they almost certainly never met Jesus personally.





This stone slab found in Caesarea Maritima on the coast of Israel bears the name of Pontius Pilate, who had Jesus crucified.

## Ancient artifacts such as statues, inscriptions, seals, coins and clay tablets clearly verify the existence of dozens of individuals mentioned in the Bible!

Much of what they wrote was in no sense an honest attempt at history” (*The God Delusion*, 2006, p. 96).

Similarly, the late atheist Christopher Hitchens wrote regarding the earliest books of the Bible: “Long before modern inquiry and painstaking translation and excavation had helped enlighten us, it was well within the compass of a thinking person to see that the ‘revelation’ at Sinai and the rest of the Pentateuch was an ill-carpentered fiction, bolted into place well after the nonevents that it fails to describe convincingly or even plausibly” (*God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, 2007, p. 104).

It’s especially interesting that Hitchens states that “excavation” (presumably referring to archaeological digs) has “helped enlighten us”—as though he believes archaeological findings actually support his argument that the Bible is a record of “nonevents,” or things that never happened. In reality, nothing could be further from the truth!

Few are aware that writings of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus and several Roman historians and government officials from the first and second centuries specifically discuss Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, Jesus’ half-brother James, various Jewish and Roman leaders, and the basic beliefs of the early Church of God.

This is quite remarkable if, as Dawkins proposes, “the gospels are not reliable accounts of what happened” and are “in no sense an honest attempt at history.” Does Dawkins propose that these well-attested early historians were also fabricating their accounts?

### What does the evidence really say?

Unlike the supposedly “holy” writings of other religions, *the Bible is rooted in real history*. It discusses real people,

real places and real events. And that history can be verified through archaeology as well as independent historical records.

Artifacts such as statues, inscriptions, seals, coins and clay tablets from archives verify the existence of dozens of individuals mentioned in the Bible (see “Does Archaeology Confirm the Existence of Specific People Mentioned in the Bible?” on page 13).

As one who has studied archaeology for many years (and participated in my first archaeological excavation at age 13), I know what archaeology reveals about God’s Word. I’ve also spent days in museums housing the best collections of Bible-related artifacts in the world, traveled repeatedly to the lands of the Bible, visited the excavations of most of the major sites mentioned in Scripture, and met a number of the most notable archaeologists working today.

Again and again I’ve seen evidence that confirms what prolific author Erwin Lutzer states in his work *Seven Reasons Why You Can Trust the Bible*: “Every month new archaeological discoveries are made . . . Our understanding of biblical life and times increases year by year. And so does our confidence

that the Bible is a book rooted in the soil of Middle East history, and its accounts have the marks of credibility. The Bible’s geography, chronology, and its description of the rise and fall of empires all conform to the data of secular history” (1998, p. 74).

### Eye-opening trip to Greece

Typical of such evidence is what I was privileged to see on a recent trip to Greece. It’s not every day that you come face to face with hard evidence of the authenticity of specific individuals and events mentioned in the pages of the Bible, but I was able to do so a number of times on this trip.

Evidence of major world figures mentioned in the Bible is to be expected, as in the case of the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus (27 B.C.-A.D. 14), who was emperor when Jesus Christ was born (Luke 2:1-6). I saw beautifully preserved busts of him in several museums, which is no surprise since Greece, like the Holy Land, was part of the Roman Empire during his reign.

Another major figure I saw several busts of is Alexander the Great. While not directly named in the Bible, he was explicitly foretold in Bible prophecy. He was the “notable horn” and “first king” in a vision recorded in Daniel 8 of a goat symbolizing the Greco-Macedonian Empire that, under his leadership, vanquished the Persian Empire and ruled most of the known world of its day (verses 5-7, 21). Alexander is one of several notable figures whose coming and historical role was foretold in the Bible well in advance.

While Bible critics argue that it’s easy to insert such notable figures into a false narrative, as these critics claim biblical writers have done, it’s much harder to argue that a relatively minor government official mentioned in passing in the Bible is part of a fabricated story when an inscription bearing the person’s name is found in the exact right place at the exact right time in history!

One such individual is “Erastus . . . the city’s director of public works” in Corinth, mentioned in passing in Romans



An inscription mentioning the biblical figure Erastus (Romans 16:23) appears in ancient Corinth in the foreground stone pavement.



The author stands on the bema or "judgment seat" of Corinth, where Paul was brought before the proconsul Gallio (Acts 18:12-18).

16:23 (New International Version), where the apostle Paul sends the greetings of various Church members in Corinth to fellow Christians in Rome.

In 1929, archaeologists excavating a paved area close to the theater of Corinth discovered a large inscription that reads, "Erastus in return for his aedileship laid [the pavement] at his own expense." An aedile was one responsible for public buildings, streets, markets and activities—i.e., a "director of public works," just as described in the biblical reference to him.

The inscription dates to the middle of the first century A.D.—right in the time frame in which Paul wrote his letter to the Romans in which Erastus is mentioned (A.D. 57-58). It appears that the Erastus of the inscription and the Erastus of the letter are one and the same—showing Paul was writing about real people at a real place in real time!

### "The judgment seat" of Gallio

But that's not the only archaeological evidence from Corinth that strongly supports the authenticity of the biblical record. Not far away amid the city's ancient ruins is the remains of another large public gathering place, an open plaza in front of a large raised stone platform. Most archaeologists identify this platform as a *bema*, a place where government officials spoke and local magistrates issued their rulings before the public.

Let's notice what happened to Paul when he was in Corinth, as recorded by Luke in Acts 18:12-18: "When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, 'This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.'"

"And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, 'If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters.'"

"And he drove them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things. So Paul still remained a good while" (emphasis added throughout).

The strategy of Paul's opponents backfired. Rather than shutting down his teaching and preaching, the ruling proconsul Gallio dismissed their accusations and allowed Paul to continue. Having legal protection, Paul then stayed in Corinth for some time, continuing his teaching and serving the Church members there.

What is interesting about this account is the mention three times of the "judgment seat," or *bema* in Greek, meaning a raised platform on which someone stands to make a public speech. Anyone who visits Corinth today can see, in a prominent part of the city ruins, the very structure mentioned here to which Paul was brought! (For more such structures found in other locations, read "Biblical Buildings and Structures Discovered by Archaeologists" on page 14.)

So the existence of such a structure, one mentioned only in passing, has been verified as being in the very time and place the Bible locates it!

And of course that's not all. I saw much more physical evidence of the accuracy of the biblical record on this trip—including the Areopagus or Mars Hill in Athens (still identifiable today almost 2,000 years after Paul's visit there as recorded in Acts 17), the Athenian forum (or "marketplace") where he taught, and the statues of multitudes of gods and goddesses worshipped by the Athenians and their neighbors to the west, the Corinthians.

It's both sobering and satisfying to see such incontrovertible evidence of the Bible's authenticity. It is indeed a genuine account of real persons, real places and real events recorded centuries ago and preserved for us today.

### Much, much more evidence supporting the Bible

As enlightening as this trip to Greece was, it was merely

People don't want to acknowledge the truthfulness of the Bible because to do so means an obligation to live by what it says!

scratching the surface of the vast amount of physical evidence supporting the Bible. Considering the limitations of the archaeological record discussed earlier, it's astounding how much evidence has been found that *does* support the accuracy of the Bible.

On similar trips to Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey (the "Asia" of the Bible) and Italy, as well as in museums around the world, I've been privileged to see scores of biblical sites, proof of the existence of dozens of biblical figures, and a number of specific structures, customs and practices mentioned in the Bible. Some of the more compelling finds include:

- A stone slab inscribed with "Pontius Pilate, prefect of Judea" and mentioning the Roman Emperor Tiberias dating to the first half of the first century, found in 1961 at Caesarea



# Does Archaeology Confirm the Existence of Specific People Mentioned in the Bible?

**O**n virtually every page of the Bible you will find the name of a person or place. Since the Bible claims to be real history, its credibility rests on its historical accuracy. If the people, places and events mentioned in the Bible are part of factual accounts, we should expect to find evidence to support those accounts. So what does the evidence show? Do archaeology and history confirm the Bible?

As archaeologists have excavated the ancient lands of the Bible, they have uncovered inscriptions and other evidence that prove the existence of dozens of persons mentioned in the Bible. Historians poring over ancient records have found still more.

Among biblical figures whose existence has been attested by archaeology or other preserved ancient records are the following:

## Old Testament

Adramelech, prince of Assyria  
Ahab, king of Israel  
Ahaz (Jehoahaz), king of Judah  
Ahaziah, king of Israel  
Apries, pharaoh of Egypt  
Artaxerxes I, king of Persia  
Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria  
Azaliah, scribe  
Azariah, grandfather of Ezra  
Baruch, scribe of the prophet Jeremiah

Hophra (Apries), pharaoh of Egypt  
Hoshea, king of Israel  
Jehoash, king of Israel  
Jehoiachin, king of Judah  
Jehoram, king of Israel  
Jehu, king of Israel  
Jehucal (Jucal), court official  
Jerahmeel, prince of Judah  
Jezebel, wife of Ahab, king of Israel  
Johanan, grandson of the high priest Eliashib  
Josiah, king of Judah  
Jotham, king of Judah  
Manasseh, king of Judah  
Menahem, king of Israel  
Merodach-baladan, king of Babylon  
Mesha, king of Moab  
Meshullam, father of Azaliah the scribe  
Nebo-Sarsekim, Babylonian official  
Nebuchadnezzar II, king of Babylon  
Nebuzaradan, Babylonian official  
Necho II, pharaoh of Egypt  
Nergal-sharezer, king of Babylon  
Neria, father of Baruch the scribe  
Omri, king of Israel  
Pekah, king of Israel  
Rezin, king of Aram  
Sanballat, governor of Samaria  
Sargon II, king of Assyria  
Sennacherib, king of Assyria  
Seraiah, court official of Zedekiah  
Shalmaneser III, king of Assyria  
Shalmaneser V, king of Assyria  
Shaphan, father of Gemariah the scribe  
Sharezer, son of Sennacherib  
Shebna, royal steward of Hezekiah  
Shelemiah, father of Jehucal (Jucal)  
Shishak, pharaoh of Egypt  
Taharqa, pharaoh of Egypt  
Tiglath-Pileser III, king of Assyria  
Uzziah, king of Judah  
Taharqa (Tirhakah), pharaoh of Egypt



This portrait of the Assyrian monarch Tiglath-Pileser III was found in his palace at Nimrud 26 centuries after his invasion of Israel in 733 B.C.

Balaam, Moabite prophet  
Belshazzar, coregent of Babylon  
Benhadad, king of Aram  
Cyrus II, king of Persia  
Darius I, king of Persia  
David, king of Israel  
Esarhaddon, king of Assyria  
Evil-merodach, king of Babylon  
Gedaliah, governor of Judah  
Gemariah, scribe  
Geshem, Nabatean dignitary  
Hazeel, king of Aram  
Hezekiah, king of Judah  
Hilkiah, high priest

Some critics have argued that the biblical books were written much later and that such names were added to make the accounts merely *appear* authentic. Others have suggested that people important to stories of later times were surreptitiously inserted into earlier accounts. How, then, can they explain biblical figures whose existence has been proven by archaeological finds placing them in the exact times and locations in which they are described in the

Bible? And, as seen from this list, this has happened dozens of times with persons ranging from kings to court officials to commoners!

Again and again as archaeologists have excavated the lands of the Bible, the evidence they've uncovered has verified that the Bible is a truly authentic and accurate ancient record.

(Adapted from our free study guide *Is the Bible True?* To download or request your free copy, visit [ucg.org/booklets](http://ucg.org/booklets).)



This ancient Assyrian stele shows King Sennacherib praying to his gods.

Xerxes I, king of Persia  
Zedekiah, king of Judah

## New Testament

Annas, high priest  
Antonius Felix, procurator of Judea  
Aretas IV, king of the Nabateans  
Augustus Caesar, emperor of Rome  
Caiaphas, high priest  
Claudius Caesar, emperor of Rome  
Erastus, public official in Corinth  
Gallio, proconsul of Achaia  
Herod the Great, king of Judea  
Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea  
Herod Agrippa I, king of Judea  
Herod Agrippa II, king of Judea  
Herod Archelaus, tetrarch of Judea  
James, half-brother of Jesus  
Jesus Christ  
John the Baptist  
Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea  
Porcius Festus, procurator of Judea  
Quirinius, governor of Syria  
Sergius Paulus, proconsul of Cyprus  
Tiberius Caesar, emperor of Rome

Maritima on the coast of Israel (where the ruling Roman procurators lived at the time of the Gospels). Of course, this is the same Pontius Pilate who, as recorded in the Gospels, condemned Jesus Christ to be crucified.

- An ornate stone box dating to the first century and bearing the name “Joseph, son of Caiaphas,” discovered in a priestly tomb near Jerusalem in 1990. This same individual, a high priest, played a major role in the conspiracy of the Jerusalem religious leadership to have Jesus executed by crucifixion.
- The skeleton of a man crucified in the first century found in a Jerusalem tomb in 1968. Still piercing the man’s heel bone was a large iron nail that had bent and couldn’t be removed after death. The remains were proof that crucifixion was practiced as described in the Gospels almost 2,000 years earlier.

Interested readers can search for “Bible and Archaeology” on our website at [ucg.org/learnmore](http://ucg.org/learnmore) and find a great deal more, including a biblical book-by-book description of significant archaeological finds relating to the Bible. Another good source is the recently published *Zondervan Handbook of Biblical Archaeology: A Book by Book Guide to Archaeological Discoveries Related to the Bible* (November 2017), which details a great many Scripture-related artifacts.


### God’s Word stands sure


In light of so much clear evidence, it’s unfathomable that so many continue to deny the clear evidence—yet they do. This is partly explained by Romans 8:7: “The mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit to God’s law. Indeed, it is unable to do so” (Christian Standard Bible). People don’t want to acknowledge the truthfulness of the Bible because to do so carries with it an obligation to live by what it says!

In spite of the fallible opinions, excuses and rationalizations of men, God’s Word stands sure. As Isaiah 40:8 tells us, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.”

Today’s cultural battle over the Bible was well summed up decades ago by noted author and professor Bernard Ramm: “A thousand times over, the death knell of the Bible has been sounded, the funeral procession formed, the inscription cut on the tombstone, and the committal read. But somehow the corpse never stays put.

“No other book has been so chopped, sliced, sifted, scrutinized and vilified. What book on philosophy or religion or psychology . . . of classical or modern times has been subject to such a mass attack as the Bible? With such venom and skepticism? With such thoroughness and erudition? Upon every chapter, line and tenet? The Bible is still loved by millions and studied by millions” (*Protestant Christian Evidences*, 1957, pp. 232-33).

We at *Beyond Today* encourage you to continue loving and studying the priceless Word of God. We’re glad to be with you on this journey, and glad to help guide you along the way! 



**LEARN MORE**

This article barely scratches the surface of the many proofs that the Bible is indeed the inspired and true Word of God on which we can rely. To learn much more, download or request a free copy of our study guide *Is the Bible True?*

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

## Biblical Buildings and Structures Discovered by Archaeologists

Archaeologist Bryant Wood, research director of Associates for Biblical Research and editor of the archaeology magazine *Bible and Spade*, lists a number of manmade structures mentioned in the Bible that have been identified and excavated. Following are some of the most interesting:

- The pool of Gibeon where the forces of David and Ishbosheth fought during the struggle for the kingship of Israel (2 Samuel 2:12-32).
  - The royal palace at Samaria where the kings of Israel lived (1 Kings 20:43; 21:1, 2; 22:39; 2 Kings 1:2; 15:25).
  - The water tunnel beneath Jerusalem dug by King Hezekiah to provide water during the Assyrian siege (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:30).
  - The royal palace in Babylon where King Belshazzar held the feast and Daniel interpreted the handwriting on the wall (Daniel 5).
  - The royal palace in Susa where Esther was queen of the Persian king Xerxes (Esther 1:2; 2:3, 5, 9, 16).
  - The royal gate at Susa where Mordecai, Esther’s cousin, sat (Esther 2:19, 21; 3:2, 3; 4:2; 5:9, 13; 6:10, 12).
  - The foundation of the synagogue at Capernaum where Jesus performed miracles and taught (Mark 1:21-28; John 6:25-59).
  - The house of Peter at Capernaum where Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law and others (Matthew 8:14-16).
  - Jacob’s well where Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman (John 4).
  - The Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem, where Jesus healed a crippled man (John 5:1-14).
  - The Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem, where Jesus healed a blind man (John 9:1-4).
  - The tribunal at Corinth where the apostle Paul was tried (Acts 18:12-17).
  - The theater at Ephesus where the riot of silversmiths occurred (Acts 19:29).
  - Herod’s palace at Caesarea where Paul was kept under guard (Acts 23:33-35).
- (“Have Any Man-Made Structures Mentioned in the Bible Been Unearthed by Archaeologists?” *ChristianAnswer.net*, 1996).

In addition to these, recent excavations in Jerusalem have tentatively identified parts of the following structures:

- David’s palace, which he had built in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:11).
- Solomon’s fortifications for the city of Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:27).
- The defensive wall constructed under Nehemiah after the Jewish exiles’ return from Babylon (Nehemiah 3; 4:1-6). (See also “Naboth’s Vineyard and a Latrine in Lachish” on page 15.)



# Naboth's Vineyard and a Latrine in Lachish

Time and again, the accuracy of the biblical record is corroborated by archaeological discoveries. We report here on two recent findings in Israel to that effect, both covered in the November-December 2017 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*—one the winepress of a famous vineyard and the other an intentional defilement of a gatehouse religious shrine.

## A winepress at Jezreel

The first concerns the property of a man named Naboth during the wicked reign of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel in Israel in the 800s B.C.

We're told in 1 Kings 21 that Naboth had a vineyard that sat next to a large building of the king at Jezreel. This building is typically referred to as a "palace," but more properly seems to have been a military installation—"probably the main mustering station for Ahab's chariot

said Ahab's house would be repaid in this plot of land. Jezebel was then killed at Jezreel.

Remarkably, in 2012 archaeologists discovered an area of exposed limestone bedrock next to ancient Jezreel that appeared to be an early winery installation—and excavations that began the next year showed it to have been a large winery complex. "The excavated winery complex covers approximately 130 square feet and consists of a treading floor 34 square feet and two vats each c. 14 square feet and more than 3 feet deep" (p. 54). Excavators stated that "based on comparisons with nearby wineries and the absence of evidence for a beam or screw press (which were later innovations), we believe that it most likely dates to the Iron Age" (ibid.)—fitting with the time of Ahab.

The discovered winery was also on the east side of Jezreel, the side from which Jehu approached, and close

tors believe the God of Israel was worshipped. While God called for a central place of worship and sacrifice—the tabernacle and, in later times, the temple—many in Israel and Judah persisted, contrary to God's instruction, in maintaining various locations of worship and sacrifice throughout the land known as "high places."

The particular gate chamber at Lachish "was divided into two rooms. 'In the smaller room, two stone altars with horns were placed opposite a plastered niche' (Saar Ganor and Igor Kreimerman, "Going to the Bathroom at Lachish," p. 60). "Each altar had four horns. Seven of the horns had been intentionally cut off with a sharp object" (ibid.).

Excavators found in the room "a large squared stone lying on its side. The stone was well-carved and fashioned into a seat . . . and in the middle is a hole connected to the front with a channel. [The excavators]



Photos, from left: Excavators work at a winepress that appears to identify the site of the vineyard of Naboth, who was murdered for this property, as recorded in 1 Kings 21;

an archaeologist points to when an ancient altar found at Lachish was defaced; diggers remove a stone toilet that was used to defile the shrine where the altar was found.

force" (Norma Franklin, Jennie Ebeling, Philippe Guillaume and Deborah Appler, "Have We Found Naboth's Vineyard at Jezreel?" p. 52). Ahab wanted the adjoining property, but Naboth refused to part with his ancestral land for money or another vineyard. Jezebel told a sulking Ahab that he was the ruler and that she would gain the vineyard for him—which she did by having Naboth falsely accused and stoned to death. God then sent the prophet Elijah to inform Ahab there would be severe consequences for this crime.

Later in 2 Kings 9 we see mention of this place again. After Ahab died, his son Joram reigned in his place, with Jezebel now the queen mother. Joram, wounded fighting in what is now Jordan, returned to Jezreel. Then God had Israel's army commander Jehu anointed king and sent him to strike down the house of Ahab. Jehu sped back to Jezreel. He would have been approaching from the east. When watchmen saw him coming, Joram went out to intercept him "and met him on the property of Naboth the Jezreelite" (verse 21). Jehu slew Joram and had his body cast into Naboth's field, noting that God

to the highway on which he would have traveled. It's also pointed out that "the rich soil of the agricultural terrace just north of the winery [where the vineyard accompanying the discovered processing area would have been] was recently analyzed and found to be suitable for viticulture [growing grapes], while in contrast the fields to the west were found to be better suited to growing olives" (ibid.).

So archaeology and scientific analysis attest to an Iron Age vineyard on the northeast side of Jezreel—right in line with what's stated in the Bible.

## A toilet in a gatehouse shrine

The second discovery supports what the Bible has to say about religious reforms during the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah in the 700s B.C. as well as a method of desecrating shrines in use by Israelites at the time.

In 2016, archaeologists working at Lachish, southwest of Jerusalem, completed the excavation of a six-chambered Iron Age city gate. In one of the gate chambers they discovered a gate-shrine where excava-

have identified this to be a stone toilet" similar to others found elsewhere in Israel dating to the period of the kings of Israel and Judah (ibid.).

The defacing of the altar horns and the placement of a toilet in the room were evidently meant to defile the shrine, making it unfit for use. The Bible attests to such practices when King Jehu had the shrine of Baal destroyed in the city of Samaria and made into a latrine: "They smashed the sacred pillar and wrecked the temple of Baal, converting it into a public toilet" (2 Kings 10:27, New Living Translation).

This desecration at Lachish fits with Hezekiah's purge of idolatrous worship throughout the land as he sought to centralize worship at the temple in Jerusalem (see 2 Kings 18:4). Once more, archaeology confirms the history recorded in Scripture. We see that it's accurate and reliable in every detail. For more such proof, be sure to download or request our free study guide *Is the Bible True?* There are many reasons for us to trust in all that this greatest of all books has to tell us!

—Tom Robinson

# WHAT IS HELL?

Most people are sure they will either go to heaven or hell when they die. But just what is hell anyway? And are these ideas based on the biblical truth about hell?

by Steve Myers

**W**hat do you think happens to bad people when they die? Or maybe let's take morals out of the equation. What happens to people who aren't Christians after they die? Do they burn forever in a fiery hell?

That's what a lot of Christians assume. But think about it for a minute. Why would God punish people forever in hell like that? After all, life's pretty short. So is it fair that the penalty for a brief lifetime of misbehavior earns an *eternity* of torture and pain? Doesn't eternal, conscious torment in hellfire seem excessive? Why would a loving God do that?

If you're a thinking person, you can't take it lightly. These and other questions about the doctrine of hell are puzzling to many Christians, and they must be answered. There are many incorrect ideas out there taught by Christian churches.

Did you know that the Bible says there is no hell as most people understand that term? Now before you put the magazine down in frustration, let me explain what I mean. The Bible *does* use the term "hell" in English translations—but not for an afterlife of unending torment. Scripture does teach that there will be judgment for every single human being—and ultimate punishment for those who refuse to repent. But what is that ultimate punishment?

Let's explore key questions related to the concept of hell, examining what the Bible has to say about it and how it relates to the nature of God, and what lies ahead.

## Does a traditional hell match God's character?

*Eternal torture. Endless agony. Infinite affliction.* That is what so many believe about hell. But the Bible doesn't teach that! If that's your view of hell, I hope you'll take the challenge and study what the Word of God truly says. Let's discover what Scripture actually teaches and realize it's something

quite different from the traditional view of hell.

A recent poll has shown that a third of Americans believe that hell is "an actual place of torment and suffering where people's souls go after death." Many people have never taken the time to think more deeply about hell and to study God's Word to compare what they've been taught to what the Bible really says. Have you accepted the challenge to do just that?

A common Bible-based Christian teaching is that God loves everybody. So why do so many think that a loving God has created an ever-burning hell? Some even believe that righteous, saved people will actually be able to observe the sufferings of the wicked forever.

Imagine that! By that kind of reasoning, parents would witness the unending suffering of their own children and delight in it. Husbands and wives would somehow feel joy in seeing their unbelieving spouses tortured forever. And here's

**Could a loving God vengefully torment people, ceaselessly, for all time, without end?**

the worst part: *This idea of hell depicts God as sadistic, cruel and merciless.*

Can this concept of hell possibly be true? Let's remember something that's critical as we consider the mistaken idea that unsaved people are tortured for all eternity.

The Bible proclaims that "*God is love*" (1 John 4:8, 16, emphasis added throughout). That's His character, His personality, His nature. It always has been—and it always will be. We are consistently reminded of this throughout the Bible: "Because the LORD loves you . . . Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments" (Deuteronomy 7:8-9).



Centuries later the apostle Paul also wrote about the wonderful, distinctive qualities of the character of our Father: “But God, *who is rich in mercy*, because of *His great love* with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:4-5).

From the beginning of the Bible to its end, God’s essence—His very being of love—is described repeatedly. At the beginning of the book of Revelation we’re told: “Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come . . . and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him *who loved us* and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 1:4-6).

Do these passages harmonize with the idea that a loving God will punish people in a hell of unceasing torture and misery? Does it seem reasonable that the penalty for a short lifetime of offense should be agonizing torment that is never-ending?

Why would a loving God send people to hell forever? We’re told, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but *is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish* but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

That is the heart of God—He wants the best for everyone. He even tells us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44). Yet the traditional view of hell would have us believe that God vengefully torments evil people *for all time*—not just for a few decades or even a few centuries but for *infinite* time without end! The perception that God sentences people to eternal, ceaseless torture is so disgusting that it has even turned some away from belief in God.

#### What’s the biblical view of hell?

Here’s a familiar passage—one that you may have memorized. It’s where Jesus Himself taught, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Is there

something significant in this famous verse that you may have missed?

What happens to us without the sacrifice of Christ? Jesus said *we die*. We *perish*, we do not live forever. In fact, the word “perish” doesn’t mean just to stop living, but to be destroyed, or “to come to nothing”—to cease to exist. That’s a huge difference between what God says and what so many people believe. The Bible tells us that you don’t automatically go on living forever, either in heaven or in hell. Jesus says that we do not have eternal life already in us but that we need to be *given* everlasting life.

Here’s another powerful passage that reveals this same great truth. “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Did you notice the contrast described in this verse? The penalty for sin is *death*, not eternal life in hell. Death means cessation of life—not conscious separation from God, as many try to redefine it. Those who sin, or disobey God, don’t earn continual torture. They don’t earn unending pain. They don’t earn everlasting agony. They earn *death*. Their life *ends*.

But on the other hand, to the repentant, God gives *the gift of eternal life* in the Kingdom of God through our Savior Jesus Christ. You see, we don’t have eternal life naturally. We don’t have an immortal soul. Eternal life—eternal conscious existence—has to be given to us. That’s why we need to understand God’s plain teaching that “the wages of sin is death”—not a life of ceaseless suffering.

Notice how plainly and consistently Scripture describes this fact: “Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; *the soul who sins shall die*” (Ezekiel 18:4). A few verses later, God repeats this—giving it emphasis: “The soul who sins *shall die*” (Ezekiel 18:20).

This is significant! What a difference between what God says and what so many believe. God tells us that souls can *die*. Have you ever heard that before? Do you realize that the Bible teaches that souls stop living? Jesus Christ said: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him [God] who is able to

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# Four Different Words Translated “Hell” in English Bibles

None of the words translated “hell” in English Bibles refers to a conscious afterlife of endless torment. In fact, Scripture states that there is no conscious awareness in death, but that we must be raised to conscious existence in a future resurrection (see Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10; Daniel 12:2; 1 Corinthians 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). So what do these words translated “hell” mean?

First is the Old Testament Hebrew *sheol*, which is equivalent to the New Testament Greek term *hades*. Both these words are used in Scripture in reference to the grave—to burial in the earth.

Next is the Greek term *tartaroo*, which occurs in only one verse (2 Peter 2:4). It refers here to the present condition of demons, rebellious angels, being restrained or imprisoned *on the earth*.

Last is the word *gehenna*, the New Testament Greek form of the Hebrew *Gai Hinnom*, the Valley of Hinnom than ran along the west and south sides of Jerusalem. During biblical times of terrible apostasy people were burned here in pagan sacrifice—and it became a place to burn garbage. This term was used by Jesus in reference to future judgment in the lake of fire that will ultimately burn up the wicked. There is no sense here of a fire burning and torturing forever.

To learn more about these words and how they are used in Scripture, and more about what the Bible has to say on this subject overall, be sure to send for or download our free study guide *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*

—Tom Robinson

destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). So there is a “hell” of sorts—but it results in *total destruction* of body and soul, not merely life in torment while forever separated from God. (See “Four Different Words Translated ‘Hell’ in English Bibles” above.)

Here’s the thing: God must sustain life—all life belongs to Him. Souls are actually what we are. According to His Word, we *are* living souls or beings. We don’t *have* a soul that is somehow separate from our mind and body. Now what happens to the sinner—the soul—that will not repent? Again, the Bible plainly says that sinners don’t automatically go on living forever in the punishment of hell. Instead, *they die*.

## God’s justice is perfect

In recognizing that the biblical idea of hell isn’t eternal conscious torment, we need to be cautious we don’t fall into the other ditch of thinking there is no ultimate punishment for the wicked. Because God is love, does any kind of punishment at all contradict His character? *Absolutely not*. Unrepentant sinners will be punished—but fairly and impartially. And not in the kind of eternal hell in which most people believe.

The Bible foretells God’s judgment on the wicked. As punishment, the hardened, unrepentant sinner will be thrown into a lake of fire and will be *burned up*—no eternal torture, just a merciful, quick death penalty. This is the real hellfire. The unrepentant wicked will not burn forever in this fire. Instead, they will be totally and completely burned up—destroyed and reduced to ashes by the flames of the lake of fire.

Have you ever read this Bible passage? “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, *all who do wickedly will be stubble*. And the day which is coming *shall burn them up*,” says the LORD of hosts, ‘that will leave them neither root nor branch . . . You shall trample the wicked, for *they shall be ashes* under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Malachi 4:1-3).

God’s Word is clear: Those who ultimately choose not to repent of their wickedness and sin will be punished by fire—but not the mythical hell of men’s imagination. It’s not an ever-burning hellfire. It’s not eternal, conscious isolation from God. It’s not unending emotional, mental or physical torment. It’s not everlasting shame, regret or pain. It is final capital


punishment that brings *the end of life*—in fact, the end of *existence*, utter annihilation, with conscious awareness never to return.

## The truth about hell displays God’s mercy

God respects human choice. Because of His loving character and intent that we be like Him, He doesn’t force belief on anyone. Instead He wants us to willingly choose His way. The desperately wicked will be punished not because God refuses to forgive them. It will be a conscious choice on their part to refuse God’s mercy and not repent. Since the wicked will not choose His way, they will be consumed by fire and be no more. They won’t be tortured for all eternity. In fact, God loves them so much He wants their suffering to end.

There is no contradiction. God is a God of mercy and love. He mercifully puts those who reject Him, the Source of all life and all goodness, out of their misery. God is the God of great wisdom, mercy and righteous judgment. When it comes to the topic of eternal punishment and hell, that is the most important thing to remember: *God is a God of mercy and love*.

Hell is a controversial and often misunderstood subject. What’s the truth? Your Bible clearly states that the wicked will be consumed—destroyed by fire. They will no longer exist. They won’t suffer in eternal conscious torment. When God’s plan for humanity is complete, there will be no more crying, no more tears, no more sorrow, no more pain (Revelation 21:4). The final death of the hopelessly wicked in a lake of fire is a loving act of God’s justice and mercy.

We can all be thankful for His fairness and great plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. He’s planned a wonderful future for those who love Him and accept His mercy. I hope you’ll choose to learn more about it! 



## LEARN MORE

This article has only scratched the surface of what the Bible really says about hell. It’s crucial that you understand the truth! To learn more, download or request our free study guide *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*

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# God's Challenge to Trinitarianism

Belief in the Trinity is the hallmark of orthodoxy. It is so strongly held by many churches that to deny it, in their view, is to not be a Christian. Do you understand what the Bible really says?

by Don Ward

**T**he belief that God is a trinity of three persons in one being is the hallmark of Christian Orthodoxy. But have you really examined the claim? It may shock you to learn that the so-called hallmark of Orthodoxy, Trinitarianism, the belief that God exists in His eternal being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, *is not found in the Bible*—and in fact the doctrine is one of Satan's greatest deceptions!

Why would I make such a shocking statement? Simply stated, it is because classical Trinitarianism obscures the purpose of human existence and what human beings were created to become in the Kingdom of God.

The very first article of faith is to believe that God exists: "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6, King James Version). In other words, a person must believe that God exists and that He always has our best interests at heart.

There are, of course, skeptics who don't believe in the existence of God, but most people in the Western world profess some kind of belief in the God of the Christian Bible. God is said to be uncreated, eternal and invisible. Jesus states in John 4:24 that God is spirit.

But what about the origin of Jesus, the Son of God? How did He come into existence? Classical Trinitarianism holds that God the Father eternally generates the Son, and that the Father and Son eternally generate the Holy Spirit. Theologians refer to this closed system as *the triune God*—"triune" meaning "consisting of three in one." They further assert that all three—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—mutually participate in the

being and action of the other.

As you can see, the triune Godhead is a closed system—no one can enter into that "eternal model." (To clarify, the word "Godhead" means Godhood—existence as God with divine nature—and has nothing to do with the modern word "head.") If the Godhead is closed, how can human beings become children of God and members of His family, as stated in 2 Corinthians 6:18? And what about the incarnation of the Word—the Son of God being born in the flesh? Remember, classical Trinitarianism holds that the Father is eternally generating the Son in heaven.

The incarnation and resurrection shatters the Trinitarian paradigm.

One can readily see the dilemma this poses. How can there be a Son in heaven and one on the earth? How is the "essential nature" of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit preserved when the Word is made flesh? If any of the divine persons is altered or taken out of the

is effectively a *fourth* being that enters the equation—three in heaven and one on the earth until later rising to heaven.

Theologians have vainly attempted to explain away their dilemma by appealing to the distinctions in the Godhead. That is, the Son as one of the persons in the Godhead was made flesh, suffered and died for the sins of the world.

But how can this be so since, by Trinitarian doctrine, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit each fully participate in the being of each other and the action of each, thus ensuring the oneness and indivisibility of the Godhead? Regardless of theologians' attempts to get around this quandary by emphasizing distinctions in the Godhead, they are hopelessly entangled in a series of contradictions.

The logical outcome of insisting that all three persons fully participate in the being of the other is what is labeled *patripassianism*—that is, the notion that God the Father suffered and died with

**Critically, insisting that all three persons fully participate in the being of the other means that *God the Father died with Jesus the Son!***

model, the whole paradigm is shattered. Yet Trinitarians contend that the Father continued to generate the Son in heaven even while He was begotten in Mary's womb and during all the time He lived on earth in the flesh.

If this classical model of the Godhead of eternal generation in the heavens were true, then the incarnation would introduce a *second* Son—one Son being eternally generated in heaven and another Son existing in the flesh on earth. Thus according to the Trinitarian model, the Son on earth

Jesus the Son for the sins of the world.

Explanations of ways of existing as God or emphasizing distinctions in the Godhead cannot negate the fact that according to this doctrine, if one of these three dies, they *all* die.

Sadly, this doctrine reduces Jesus Christ to mere human flesh that died for the sins of the world. Moreover, proponents of this doctrine are in essence saying that God gave a part of Himself to Himself, a mere mortal, since the eternally generated Son continues to be generated by the Father

in heaven. Yet Christ cried out on the cross, “Father, into your hands I commend My spirit” (Luke 23:46).

### How does Jesus’ resurrection fit the Trinitarian view of God?

The Trinitarian paradigm is further shattered by the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Trinitarians insist on a body-only physical resurrection in an attempt to preserve the Trinitarian model of the Father eternally generating the Son.

Their insistence on a fleshly resurrection denies Christ’s resurrection as a life-giving spirit: “And so it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual” (1 Corinthians 15:45-46).

The Scriptures clearly reveal that the resurrected Christ is a separate and distinct entity from God the Father, as He now sits at the Father’s right hand. The apostle Peter said: “Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul [His being] was not left in Hades [the grave], nor did His flesh see corruption.

“This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand . . .”’” (Acts 2:29-34).

Trinitarian theologians have recognized that the resurrection of Christ as a life-giving spirit would introduce a fourth person into the Godhead. So they insist that Jesus’ resurrection was a restoration of His human bodily life, now eternally preserved—implying that only Jesus as a human being died since, according to Trinitarianism, the Father is eternally generating the Son.

This denies the death of the Son on the cross and implies that He resurrected Himself rather than being resurrected by the Father (Romans 8:11).

One can also readily discern the inherent contradictions contained in the doctrine of the trinity as proponents attempt to explain the origins and oneness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

### Origin of the Word

What do the Scriptures reveal concerning the origin of the Son of God? Is the One who became the Son of God in the flesh a created being? If He is not a created being, how and when did He come into existence?

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle John clearly explains the origin of the Word or, in Greek, *Logos*, the Being who became Jesus Christ. John 1:1 states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The three simple clauses here serve to illustrate the eternal existence of the *Logos* as opposed to a created being:

- In the first clause, “In the beginning was the Word,” the Greek term translated “was” is a “to be” verb having the sense of “existed.” The *Logos* existed “in the beginning,” an obvious allusion to Genesis 1:1. At the very beginning of

creation, the *Logos* already existed.

- In the second clause, the same word for “was” is used to describe manner of existence in terms of a relationship. That is, the *Logos* was *with* God, showing Him to be *distinct from* God and at the same time in *fellowship with* God.

- The same verb for “was” is used in the third clause to help define the character or essence of the *Logos*—“and the Word [*Logos*] was God [*Theos*]” (Joel Green, Scot McKnight, Howard Marshall, editors, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, “Logos,” 1992, p. 483).

John clearly identifies two entities, the Word (*Logos*) and God (*Theos*). Furthermore, John forcefully proclaims that the Word *was* God (*Theos*). Moreover, he asserts that the *Logos* had a personal relationship *with* God. The chronology is emphasized in verses 1 and 2. That is, the Word who was “in the beginning” was also “with God.” The repetition in verse 2 of the fact that the Word, and none other, was with God in the beginning emphasizes His existence and relationship with God in eternity. Since God created all things through the Word, the Word did not come into existence as a creation of God. The Word already existed—He was already in existence at “the beginning” of creation.

If no other scriptures were available, the simplicity and force of these words make it clear that the Word is uncreated—coeternal with God (*Theos*).

John repeats the *Logos*’ role in creation in John 1:10 by asserting, “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him . . .” The Greek word translated “was made” is *egeneto*, from the primary verb *ginomai*, meaning “to become, i.e. to come into existence, begin to be, receive being” (*Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*). Thus it was through the Word that the world came into existence.

But the most dramatic proof of the preexistence of the *Logos* is the declaration that the *Logos* was made flesh and dwelt with humankind (John 1:14). If the *Logos* had no preexistence, then God the Father merely created a *new* being to become the only begotten Son of God to die for the sins of the world. But as noted above in John 1:1, the Word who existed coeternally with the Father is the One who became flesh.

### The *Logos* identified in the book of Revelation

The book of Revelation is declared in the first verse to be a revelation God the Father gave to Jesus Christ for His servants. Jesus then sent it by an angel to the apostle John (Revelation 1:1). John’s salutation that follows is from God the Father, who is and was and is to come, and from Jesus Christ, the firstborn from the dead (Revelation 1:4-5).

After the salutation, John is given a vision of the Son of Man walking among seven golden candlesticks. This One declares that He is “the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last” (verses 10-17). Thus Jesus Christ equates His eternity with that of God the Father. These passages clearly parallel the “I AM” declaration of Jesus in John 8:58, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” Jesus thus irrefutably proclaims co-eternity with the Father.

Moreover, John is given a vision of Jesus Christ coming in glory as King of Kings and Lord of Lords: “Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and



makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God” (Revelation 19:11-13).

Here the Father reveals to all the world that Jesus Christ is “The Word of God,” the same Being who was with God the Father in eternity. He is the One who emptied Himself of His glory and took on the form of flesh as Immanuel, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23)—the incarnate Word who died for the sins of the world and who is now alive forevermore.

### The Logos empties Himself of glory

The Father and the *Logos* determined that the Word would give up His glory so He could reconcile sinful humanity to God the Father and begin a new order of beings—that is, spirit-born sons of God through a resurrection from the dead.

As the apostle Paul proclaims, this plan of salvation existed before God created humankind. He writes of God “who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began” (2 Timothy 1:9).

Thus the Word had to empty Himself of His glory and take on the form of flesh so sinful humanity could be reconciled to the Father, the Word then being returned to glory as the firstborn from the dead (Hebrews 2:9-10; Revelation 1:5). His becoming the *firstborn* from the dead shows that others will obviously follow (see also Romans 8:29; Hebrews 2:10).

Paul makes it very clear that the eternal *Logos* gave up His glory and took on the form of a servant to act as our Savior. Paul writes of Him, as translated in the New King James Version: “who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:6-8). So it was through the *Logos* being willing to give up His glory that He could take on the form of a man.

But, the skeptic may ask, do the above verses prove that the *Logos* existed with the Father? The key word is found in verse 6: “. . . *being* in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.” The Greek word translated “being” is a form of *huparcho*, which means “to begin, to come forth, hence to be there, be ready, be at hand” (*Thayer’s*). Thus the Word *was already* in the form of God *before* taking on the form of a man.

Now, how could the Word exist in the form of God and not be God? If one accepts Paul’s assertion that He took on the form of a man, one must also accept that He existed in the form of God.

Furthermore, where some versions translate that He “did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,” the Greek for “robbery” is a form of *harpagmos*, meaning “a thing seized or to be seized” or, as some render it, “something to cling to” (New Living Translation). What this means is that He did not consider equality with God something to hold on to, but instead *let it go*—voluntarily relinquished it—when He *emptied Himself* of His former glory.

Clearly this means that equality with God was something the Word already had. And His giving up of His glory is the greatest act of servant leadership the world has ever witnessed. Moreover,

His willingness to give up the glory He shared with God the Father is one of the principal reasons the Father has exalted Him and placed Him over all things (Ephesians 1:20-22).

### Christ’s testimony of glory He shared with the Father


Before giving His life for the sins of the world, He asked the Father to restore to Him the glory He had with the Father before the world existed (John 17:5). The force of this request in the Greek language is undeniable. Before the “world” (a form of the Greek *kosmos*, meaning the arrangement of the universe) “was” (Greek *einai*, referring to existence), Christ shared this glory with the Father. Any attempt to dismiss this as only prophetic as to what would happen after Jesus’ resurrection is not in keeping with Christ’s clear words.

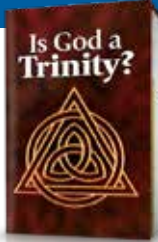
Why would Jesus Christ ask the Father to restore something He had with the Father before the world was if He never experienced it in the first place? If He had never experienced this glory, it seems He would have asked the Father to glorify Him with a *different* glory, rather than the glory He previously had *with* the Father.

Clearly the preexistence of Christ is affirmed in this verse. It is clear from the Scriptures that Christ came to the earth and gave up that glory He had with the Father. But following the end of His human life, Jesus, who died for the sins of the world, was raised from the dead—glorified—and now sits at the right hand of the Father, restored to His former glorious existence.

So the fact that Christ was glorified at the resurrection in no way contradicts the understanding that the Word did not exist in a glorious, divine state before He came to the earth. As Paul explained in Philippians 2, the Word had already existed in glory before He emptied himself of His glory and took on the form of a man.

In the flesh He was divine in the sense that He was the same One who had always existed before His incarnation, still having His divine identity as the Word. He was also the *monogenes*—the unique Son of God (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18), begotten of the Father and filled with the Holy Spirit, having the same perfect righteous character of God. In His humility He took on the form of a man so He could die for the sins of the world and usher in a new order of beings through becoming the firstborn of the dead when the Father raised Him from the dead.

So we see that through God’s love, grace and mercy the Trinitarian model of a closed system is shattered by God’s great purpose for creating humankind. God the Father and Jesus Christ offer us eternal life in the glorious Kingdom of God. We can share in the glory of the Father and Son in the Kingdom of God, transformed into glorious radiant spirit beings like them—being now, in the words of Romans 8:17, “heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.” 



#### LEARN MORE

Since the word “Trinity” appears nowhere in the Bible, where did that idea and teaching originate? History reveals the answer, and it’s quite surprising! To learn more, download or request our study guide *Is God a Trinity?* A free copy is waiting for you!

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# A World in Need of Rescue!

## SEVEN GRAVE DEVELOPMENTS



A number of existential threats are leading mankind to the precipice of destruction. Thankfully, all these will be stopped in their tracks by a returning Jesus Christ.

by Mario Seiglie

**W**e live in a time that can be called the technological age—a period of stunning discoveries, constant scientific breakthroughs and yet appalling and frightening evils. What does this mean? Where is all of this headed? What does the Bible say about it?

Like the Greek mythical story of Pandora, who out of curiosity opened the forbidden box of secrets and unleashed destructive plagues, we see the scientific world delving unrestrained, whether out of curiosity or the pursuit of fame or profit, into more perilous fields of scientific endeavor. Now that the world is largely connected via the Internet, the pace of scientific discovery—and its accompanying dangers—is accelerating.

As the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* commented this year: “One of the purposes of the *Bulletin* was to respond and offer solutions to the ‘Pandora’s box of modern science,’ recognizing *the speed at which technological advancement was occurring, and the demanding questions it would present*” (2017 Doomsday Clock Statement, University of Chicago, emphasis added throughout).

Here we will look at seven modern dangers that, if unchecked, could bring destruction to human civilization. These seven menaces, among others, are converging and producing a harmful multiplier effect on society. Indeed, all seems too far gone on a runaway course, so that only God can save us.

Such factors are leading to a period foretold by Jesus Christ of unprecedented peril and suffering: “For in those days *there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever*

*shall be*. And unless the Lord had shortened those days, *no flesh would be saved*; but for the elect’s sake, whom He chose, *He shortened the days*”—that is, He will prevent events from running their course to where they would go if not stopped (Mark 13:19-20).

Yes, there is hope for mankind. God *will* intervene in world affairs to save humanity from the great corruption and destruction these hazardous innovations are fomenting. He *will* also protect His own followers while these events are happening.

Here, then, are seven great dangers mankind is facing.



### Proliferation of nuclear arms

After a lull during the Cold War (1945-1991), now, with a more permissive, information-laden and war-weary world, numerous nations—some quite unstable—are acquiring nuclear bombs. Currently there are more than *15 thousand* nuclear weapons in the world’s arsenal, enough to destroy all people from the face of the globe. In fact, scientists calculate that most of mankind and the ecosystem would largely be destroyed by using *only a hundred nuclear bombs*, or less than 2 percent of this total!

Writing for Global Zero, an organization committed to eliminating nuclear weapons, Ryan Rastergar reports: “A 2014 report published in the journal *Earth’s Future* found that even *a regional war of 100 nuclear detonations* would produce 5 teragrams of black soot (that’s 5,000,000,000 kg!) that would rise up to Earth’s stratosphere and block sunlight. This would produce a sudden drop in global temperatures that could last *longer than 25 years* and temporarily destroy much of the Earth’s protective ozone layer.



“This could also cause as much as an 80% increase in UV radiation on Earth’s surface and destroy both land and sea-based ecosystems [including the plant and animal life within them] potentially leading to global nuclear famine” (“How Many Nukes Would It Take to Render Earth Uninhabitable?” GlobalZero.org, July 9, 2015).

Nuclear proliferation, the spreading of nuclear arms among nations, is becoming more widespread. Atomic weapons used to be limited to a small, exclusive club—the United States, Russia, China, Great Britain and France. Then, a few more joined the group—India, Pakistan and Israel. But now, North Korea, an unstable dictatorship, also possesses them, and Iran will likely join this fraternity soon. Who knows how many other neighboring countries, feeling threatened by these new nuclear upstarts, are preparing their own nuclear programs as self-defense?

This is affecting the political and military stability of Asia, the Middle East, Europe, America and other parts of the world—for the intercontinental missiles North Korea is developing can potentially reach almost every continent.

This is not doom-and-gloom talk. This is the reality of what many scientists and political leaders are constantly stressing. That famous doomsday clock in Chicago, where scientists record how close mankind is to a human-caused global catastrophe, has been advanced in 2017 to *two and a half minutes to midnight* (it was six minutes to midnight as recently as 2010).

The scientists in charge warned: “During the past year, the need for leadership only intensified—yet inaction and brinkmanship have continued, *endangering* every person, everywhere on Earth. *Who will lead humanity away from global disaster?* . . . The probability of global catastrophe is *very high*, and the actions needed to reduce the risks of disaster must be taken very soon. In 2017, we find the danger to be *even greater*, the need for action *more urgent*” (*Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 2017 Official Statement, pp. 3, 8).

This dire situation is especially the case since North Korea has stepped up its nuclear threats, Iran is close to developing its own nuclear bombs, global terrorism is multiplying, political instability is widespread, and nuclear accidents are becoming increasingly possible as more impoverished nations acquire them. The “nuclear genie” is out of the bottle, and no one has been able to put it back in. And now these “nuclear genies” are appearing in so-called rogue states!



### Biological weapons

The second greatest menace to mankind are the biological weapons being produced. With advances in biology, more manmade viruses are being created that can propagate around the world, by intentional or unintentional means, causing deadly diseases that could wipe out the human race.

“For the past 50 years or so,” relates Steven Block in *American Scientist* magazine, “the world has lived under the shadow of atomic weapons, threatening a ‘nuclear nightmare’ that would bomb us back to the Stone Age. The recent revolu-

tion in molecular biology may have incidentally unleashed a new threat to a peaceful night’s sleep with ‘living nightmares’: genetically modified viruses and microorganisms that could be used to develop new biological weapons.

“Biological weapons have been called ‘the poor man’s atom bomb.’ By any measure, the economic outlay required to develop offensive bioweapons capabilities is significantly less than that of a nuclear program” (“The Growing Threat of Biological Weapons,” January 2001).

Recently, Bill Gates, one of the founders of Microsoft, warned, “All these advances in biology have made it far easier for a terrorist to recreate smallpox, which is a highly fatal pathogen, where there is essentially no immunity remaining at this point . . .

“Whether the next epidemic is unleashed by a quirk of nature or the hand of [a] terrorist, scientists say a fast-moving airborne pathogen could kill *more than 30 million people in less than a year*. So the world does need to think about this” (quoted by Sarah Knapton, “Bill Gates: Terrorists Could Wipe Out 30 Million People by Weaponising a Disease Such as

We are in a time of tremendous progress, but also great moral and spiritual regression. We must protect ourselves and our families from the perils around us.

Smallpox,” *The Daily Telegraph*, April 19, 2017).

In the book of Revelation, deadly diseases and other scourges are depicted in the end times as a fourth horseman riding upon the earth. It’s stated: “I looked, and there was a *pale green horse!* Its rider’s name was Death, and Hades [the grave] followed him. They were given authority *over one-fourth of the earth* to kill people using wars, famines, *plagues*, and the wild animals of the earth” (Revelation 6:8, International Standard Version).



### Genetic engineering

Genetic engineering on human beings, animals, bacteria, viruses and even foods, through gene editing and cloning, can unleash serious unintended consequences that could potentially destroy much of life as we know it. So far, 22 different animals have been cloned, including cats, dogs, goats, horses and monkeys—and human beings may not be far behind.

“Genetic engineering is a revolutionary new technology” notes Ronnie Cummins, “that is still in its early experimental stages of development. This technology has the power to break down *the natural genetic barriers*—not only between species—but *between humans, animals, and plants*. Randomly inserting together the genes of non-related species—utilizing viruses, antibiotic-resistant genes, and bacteria as vectors, markers, and promoters—permanently alters their genetic codes” (“Hazards of Genetically Engineered Foods and Crops,” *In Motion*, Aug. 29, 1999).

When God created life on earth, He established genetic walls to keep distinct kinds of creatures from mixing and creating aberrant copies of themselves. Different species have a wide variety of adaptability in order to survive environmental

changes, but there is a genetic barrier they can't naturally cross.

For instance, Genesis 1:24-25 states: "Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth the living creature *according to its kind*: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, *each according to its kind*'; and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth *according to its kind*, cattle *according to its kind*, and everything that creeps on the earth *according to its kind*. And God saw that it was good."

The genetic barriers between differing creatures allows each to reproduce "according to its kind." The principle is also found in Leviticus 19:19: "You shall keep My statutes. You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. You shall not sow your field with mixed seed."

But now mankind has found ways to break down genetic walls and combine diverse genetic codes. What will be the outcome? It's too soon to tell, but we are seeing more strange lab experiments creating weird creatures and plants, such as chimeras (human cells mixed with animal embryos), glow-in-the-dark cats, poisonous cabbages, and banana vaccines, to name a few, and the cloning of human embryos is already a reality.

In his famous 1932 novel *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley warned of what genetic engineering could one day produce—artificially designed and cloned test-tube babies—all programmed to fit a rigidly supervised society, which turns out to be a spiritual and moral aberration. We are just beginning to travel down that road, and indications are we will continue to do so—unless Jesus Christ intervenes in time.



### Artificial intelligence

Computers are becoming so powerful and are being given such decision-making capabilities that they are gradually becoming more independent of their programmers.

Elon Musk, of SpaceX and Tesla automobile fame, who uses artificial intelligence in some of his cars, warned that artificial intelligence is "potentially more dangerous than nukes [nuclear weapons]," imploring all of humankind 'to be super careful with AI [Artificial Intelligence],' unless we want the ultimate fate of humanity to closely resemble Judgment Day from Terminator [a Sci-Fi movie]" (Sebastian Anthony, "Elon Musk Warns Us That Human-Level AI Is 'Potentially More Dangerous Than Nukes,'" *Extreme Tech*, Aug. 4, 2014).

He later added, "Competition for AI superiority at national level [is the] most likely cause of WW3 [World War III]" (quoted by James Poulos, "Are We Being Softened Up for Artificial Intelligence?" *Orange County Register*, Sept. 10, 2017, p. 4).

In fact, just recently two robots, called "bots," actually created a way of communicating with each other without the help of people—the first sign of computer independence.

"At one point, the researchers write they had to tweak one of their models," notes Adrienne LaFrance, "because otherwise the bot-to-bot conversation 'led to divergence from human language as the agents developed their own language for negotiating.'"

"They had to use what's called a fixed supervised model

instead. In other words, the model that allowed two bots to have a conversation—and use machine learning to constantly iterate strategies for that conversation along the way—led to those bots *communicating in their own non-human language*" ("An Artificial Intelligence Developed Its Own Non-Human Language," *The Atlantic*, June 15, 2017).

An even more shocking AI achievement occurred recently when a computer named "AlphaGo Zero" improved its learning abilities in an Asian game called "Go" (somewhat similar to chess) without the aid of human beings.

As *The Economist* magazine noted: "AlphaGo Zero discovered the standard *joseki* [Go moves] taught to human players. But it also discovered, and eventually preferred, several other [moves] that were entirely of its own invention . . . The result was a program that is not just superhuman, but crushingly so . . ." ("Going Places," Nov. 21, 2017, p. 77).

The danger is of losing control of such machines, like a Frankenstein monster that eventually turns against its own creator. Some computer scientists dread the day when a super-intelligent computer with self-learning abilities and a will to win connects to the Internet and uses it as a data bank to begin making decisions for itself and possibly even controlling

God will not allow these great dangers spreading around the world to destroy humanity. Instead Jesus Christ will return and save us from ourselves.

such things as electrical power plants, banking, and nuclear arsenals, thus effectively holding the world hostage.

Despite these threats, the most powerful governments and corporations are in a mad rush, because of the profitable "first move advantage" they would have, to come up with the first computer with artificial intelligence to match or outperform a human being.

The Bible warns us that in the last days two characteristics would be evident that would produce a knowledge explosion—worldwide travel and a multiplying of information. As Daniel 12:4 says: "But you, Daniel, keep these words secret, and seal the book until the end times. Many will travel everywhere, and knowledge will grow" (God's Word Version).



### The dark side of the Internet—undermining morality

Another invention that is having a profound effect on humanity is the Internet. It truly is a two-edged sword—it can provide a lot of useful information, but there is a dark side that has a corrupting power like nothing else ever made. Unfortunately, according to statistics, 30 percent of Internet content is pornography.

It is so easy to morally defile people by making available sinful content, especially to unsuspecting youth. We are just in the beginning stages of this worldwide Internet that includes many pernicious uses, such as pornography, online gambling, identity theft, hucksterism and even sex trafficking.

We are gradually returning to a condition God saw in Noah's day, but now the violence and corruption, through modern technology, have reached a new level. Back then, "the



LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that *every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually* . . . The earth also was *corrupt* before God, and *the earth was filled with violence*" (Genesis 6:5, 11).

How close is society now to fitting the apostle Paul's description of the end-time civilization? He foretold: "You should know this, Timothy, that *in the last days* there will be *very difficult times*. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good.

"They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly" (2 Timothy 3:1-5, New Living Translation).

Sad to say, this portrait of society is becoming more the norm today. What would the world look like now if it had the Internet 100 years ago? How much more spiritual corruption would there be? The moral decline so far is quite evident and alarming in just these few years the Internet has become virtually universal. This is another "genie" that's out of the bottle. And because of its popularity and addictive power, people will not want to put it back in the bottle despite the enormous moral and spiritual damage being done. As Christ said, "But as the *days of Noah* were, so also will *the coming of the Son of Man be*" (Matthew 24:37).



### Permissive drug culture—the decline of morality and family

Just recently, due to a rise in permissiveness, we have seen an upswing in the legalizing of natural and synthetic drugs in most of the world. Marijuana is in the forefront of this societal shift, but once its legalization and use spreads, it will be easier to market more potent drugs as well.

There is also an enormous epidemic of opioids—drugs derived from opium, such as morphine and heroin—affecting the Western world as more synthetic drugs come on the market. At no time in known history has society had so much access through technology to so many hallucinogenic and addictive drugs. More governments are simply giving in to the popular demand to decriminalize their use, thus allowing widespread propagation and commercialization.

As Ecclesiastes 8:11 states, "When a crime is not punished quickly, people feel it is safe to do wrong" (NLT). The present measures by such governments are not truly limiting the problem, but are allowing it to get worse.

Just as 2 Timothy 3:13 prophesied, "evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."



### Widespread alternative lifestyles—moral degeneration

In June 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court, in a landmark decision, legalized same-sex marriage, which prior to this had been banned in the United States under federal law. Virtually all the legal moral safeguards to preserve the traditional family are now gone. The floodgates have opened to every kind of alternative lifestyle, and most

of the world is following suit.

Just recently in Colombia, the first marriage among *three men* has taken place, called a polyamorous relationship. Where will all of this end? No one knows for sure. It is just the beginning of this "social experiment," and the traditional family unit, something historically upheld, is now being replaced by a multitude of alternative lifestyles.

God sent a reminder to mankind about keeping His laws and not destroying the family in the last days preceding Christ's return. He warned in Malachi 4:4-6: "Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb [Mount Sinai] for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet [in reference to an end-time preparatory work like that of John the Baptist, who also came in the spirit of Elijah (Luke 1:17)] before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. *And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.*"

Indeed, Christ described the growing wickedness of the end-time society: "And as it was in the days of Noah [before the Flood when the world was filled with violence and corruption] . . . as it was also in the days of Lot [before perverse Sodom was destroyed] . . . Even so *will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed*"—at His glorious return (Luke 17:26-30).

### Where are these trends leading?

Again, we find ourselves witnessing tremendous progress today, but also great moral and spiritual regression. Consequently, we must do our part, protecting ourselves and our families from the perils around us, staying spiritually strong and praying for Christ's Kingdom to come soon.

Thankfully, God will not allow these seven great dangers now spreading around the world to ultimately wipe out the human race. Jesus will intervene. And in the age to come under His reign, the nightmares of nuclear arms, biological weapons, genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, the dark side of the Internet, permissive drug culture and aberrant alternative lifestyles will be things of the past.

As Micah 4:3-4 said about Christ's coming Kingdom of peace, joy and righteousness: "He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; 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. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken."

Let us trust that the day of this millennial description is not too far off in the future and that we can be part of it! **BT**



### LEARN MORE

We are seeing dramatic changes unlike any seen previously in human history. Where are these taking the world, and why? How do these tie in with Bible prophecy? To learn more, download or request our free study guide [Are We Living in the Time of the End?](#)

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## Egypt faces growing terrorism danger

While the entire Middle East continues to struggle against the spread and violence of Islamic extremism, the Egyptian government of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi is fighting back an increasingly tense and dangerous situation in its eastern region.

While the area of Sinai is best known as the setting of ancient Israel's Exodus from Egypt, it's now becoming known as a hotbed of terrorism and sectarian violence, with several different extremist groups, including ISIS, conducting operations in the peninsula. So far Egyptian forces have been unsuccessful in holding back the surge, which is pushing closer to the country's population centers.

*The New Yorker* points out: "Egypt's situation is reminiscent of the U.S. experience in Iraq and Afghanistan. Egyptian forces hold military bases, operate checkpoints, and carry out periodic patrols in armored convoys—but they can't control much of the countryside. Sisi may reign as the most powerful strongman among the rulers of the more than twenty Arab countries. But his strategy in Sinai, so far, is not working" (Robin Wright, "Egypt Is in Trouble, and Not Just From ISIS," Nov. 27, 2017).

Despite some severe setbacks in the past year, Islamic extremism in its various organizations—ISIS, al-Qaeda and the like—is alive and well in its native

Middle East and North Africa. On Nov. 24, 2017, a Sufi Mosque in northern Sinai was the target of a brutal attack that left more than 300 dead and at least another 100 injured, making it the worst terrorist attack in the country's history.

Time will tell whether Egypt will recover from its disastrous last seven years, kicked off by 2010's Arab Spring. (Source: *The New Yorker*.)



## Old dangers continue to threaten Israel

One might think that recent severe blows to ISIS' reach and influence in Syria would be good news for the Jewish state of Israel, which shares its northeast border with Syria. However Middle East politics are rarely as simple as they seem, and ISIS' retreat and the strengthening of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's embattled regime may lead to difficult times ahead for Israel.

Israel's troubles have persisted since its founding in the spring of 1948. Within hours, a coalition of Arab states declared war on the fledgling country and invaded on multiple fronts. Nine months later, Israel emerged victorious and has been fighting for its right to exist ever since. Now, in all the shuffling and power shifts currently under way in the Middle East, the old threat of a hostile coalition may arise again.

A recent *Geopolitical Futures* article points out: "Israel's biggest fear isn't invasion by one enemy; it has the military and advantageous geography to resist any single invader in the region. The country's nightmare scenario is a well-coordinated invasion by multiple powers. (Had the coalition of Arab states that attacked

Israel in 1948 been better coordinated, it might have defeated Israel.)

"The civil war in Syria, therefore, was actually the silver lining in the [2011 Arab Spring] uprising in Egypt for the Israelis. At the same time that Israel

**Israel's biggest fear isn't invasion by one enemy, the nightmare scenario is a well-coordinated invasion by multiple powers.**

was dreading the return of past demons in Egypt, its enemies to the north were suddenly incapacitated" (Jacob Shapiro, "In Israel, Danger Is on the Horizon," Nov. 28, 2017).

A new invading coalition is the nightmare scenario for Israelis, because there might not be much that could be done if it became a reality. Currently Israel is looking to Saudi Arabia to be an unlikely ally against their mutual enemy in Iran, but any pan-Arab coalition against Israel could include Saudi Arabia as a key member.

While currently in a fairly secure position, the forecast is, as always, sobering for the state of Israel. (Source: *Geopolitical Futures*.)

## Time on video game: All play and no work?

A recent study reveals that young men without college degrees are having a hard time justifying taking available jobs and turning to something else. "Economists from Princeton, the University of Rochester and the University of Chicago say that [besides some remaining weakness in the economy] an additional reason many of these young men—who don't have college degrees—are rejecting work is that they have a better alternative: living at home and enjoying video games" (Ana Swanson, "Why Amazing Video Games Could Be Causing a Big Problem for America," *The Washington Post*, Sept. 23, 2016).

The 2008 recession not only affected the housing industry but jobs as well. Each month there are reports on how the job market is doing and what projections look like for the upcoming months. Many of these young men who were struggling are now making the choice to remain unemployed: "The researchers are not merely saying that young men, out of work, are turning to video games. They're saying that increasingly sophisticated video games are luring young men away from the workforce" (ibid.).

This will have an effect on their long-term careers and success in life. Rather than gaining job experience and moving up the ladder in their 20s, that process is pushed off until later, hurting not only their future families, but the overall job market as well. (While video game play has increased for those with college degrees as well, employment figures for this group appear unaffected so far.)

Such devotion to video games is an extreme case of pleasure-seeking. Everyone in a first-world society is susceptible to this kind of instant gratification, whether it be through video games, social media, binge TV watching or other avenues.

The Bible warns of a time when men will be "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:4). Nearly a quarter (22 percent) of men who have less than a bachelors degree have found themselves on a potentially dangerous path of self-involvement with shallow rewards. The United States has been blessed tremendously, yet abundance often too easily leads to an apathy toward what it takes to become and remain personally successful—hard work, determination, resourcefulness and grit. (Source: *The Washington Post*.)



## Is the Philippines the newest front in the war on terror?

Member states of the U.S.-led coalition to fight the Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria are quick to crow the defeat of the group and the return of stability to the region. While it's too early to claim a full victory, there is also the issue of affiliate groups outside the Middle East. Some groups are fully associated with ISIS with personnel and material support, while others are ISIS-inspired and eager to pursue the deadly goals of the parent organization.

Now foreign policy experts are looking ahead to the future of Islamic radicalism, and they see

### Foreign policy experts see the Philippines as a prime target for further incursion by Islamic radicalism.

the Philippines as a prime target for further incursion.

A *Foreign Policy* article assesses: "The Philippines is likely to remain a ripe target due to its large Muslim population, the presence of pre-existing radical Islamist violent and nonviolent fringe movements, the permissiveness of its formal and informal financial systems, weak local institutions, and a leader in Duterte who is heading an administration that has overseen a crisis in Marawi that has resulted in dozens of civilians killed and hundreds of thousands displaced" (Patrick Johnston and Colin Clarke, "Is the Philippines the Next Caliphate?" Nov. 27, 2017).

Radical Islam and its accompanying violence are not merely regional phenomena in the Middle East. Extremism is an international scourge capable of spreading thousands of miles away from the source. And it seems the increasingly unstable land of the Philippines may provide fertile ground for ISIS-style action in coming months. (Source: *Foreign Policy*.)

## U.S. recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's capital

On Wednesday, Dec. 6, 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump fulfilled a major campaign promise in announcing that the United States was officially recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and that he was ordering that plans be made to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

The announcement was immediately decried by various world leaders, many claiming this will ignite further regional conflict—though that seems likely to come no matter what. And of course, it remains to be seen if the embassy relocation will actually happen since a few years have been given for planning and construction that may end beyond the current presidential term.

It's about time that the U.S. government obeyed its own law in this regard. Congress passed a law to do this back in 1995, and it passed overwhelmingly—93-5 in the Senate and 374 to 37 in the House of Representatives. Yet it allowed the president a six-month waiver for national security reasons, and that waiver has been used by past presidents every six months for 22 years! It's really a disgrace. The call to relocate was reaffirmed this past year in the Senate by a vote of 90 to 0 on June 5, 2017.

James Phillips of the Heritage Foundation wrote, "The long-delayed, symbolic move addressed a historic injustice: Israel is the only country in the world not allowed to choose its own capital" (Heritage.org, Dec. 7, 2017)—or at least to have its choice respected.

Frankly, the recognition should have come with

Israeli statehood in 1948. The reason this has taken so long is because of longstanding Western concession to Islamic violence and the idea that acknowledging Jewish claims to Jerusalem will impede peace negotiations.

Yet Daily Wire editor Ben Shapiro said on Fox News, Dec. 6: "What President Trump is doing is not just a recognition of reality, it's also an act of political usefulness, because all of the negotiations that have been happening for the past 20 years . . . have been preconditioned on stupidity, that Israel was going to give up its eternal capital, which is insane. In order to understand how dumb that is, you have to think that for Israel, Jerusalem is about 1000 times more important than Washington, D.C. is to the United States" (quoted at DailyWire.com).

Of course, the Bible repeatedly declares Jerusalem as the focal place for the people of Israel and Judah: "For David said, 'The LORD God of Israel has given rest to His people, that they may dwell in Jerusalem forever'" (1 Chronicles 23:25). And "Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD" when Jesus reigns over all nations (Jeremiah 3:17). But before then, the city will be the center of world conflict (Zechariah 12:1-3). May we all be sure to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Psalm 122:6).

To learn more about where events in this region are headed, download or request our free study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. (Sources: The Heritage Foundation, Daily Wire.)

## Systematic abuse in Venezuela

The *Financial Times* recently reported on the abuse that prisoners are allegedly receiving in the South American socialist dictatorship of Venezuela:

"Venezuela's security forces asphyxiated, electrocuted and sexually abused prisoners and forced them to eat food full of cigarette ash, insects and excrement during this year's crackdown on anti-government protesters" (Gideon Long, "Venezuela Accused of 'Systematic' Abuse of Prisoners," Nov. 28, 2017).

In hearing a horrific description like this, we might assume it must refer to a localized instant in one prison. Yet that's evidently not the case here. The

report continues, "The combination of widespread brutality, systematic abuses including torture, and the guaranteed impunity with which they are being committed suggests government responsibility at the highest levels."

The situation is awful. Thankfully, change will ultimately come. *Beyond Today* proclaims a message of hope of salvation through Jesus Christ and the coming Kingdom of peace that He will usher in at His return. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords will establish a fair and right system of government unlike anything the world has ever seen. (Source: *Financial Times*.)

## How can you make sense of the news?

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



# When Respect Is Gone, Rebellion Prevails

We must learn to practice honor and respect for those in authority—even if we disagree with them.

by Janet Treadway

**A**s I've watched repeated looting, rioting and burning, including cars being set on fire, my heart has sank. Those involved didn't get the verdict, the decision, the policy or the president they wanted, so they decided to destroy innocent people's places of business, destroying people's livelihoods. Neighborhoods, businesses and lives have been ruined—ruined—and for what?

Where did all this anger and destruction come from? It's not ultimately about the verdict or election results. The real cause behind all this destruction is Satan. He is the author of destruction, and when a mind is directed by him, there is no sound reasoning. People become his tools for destruction.

Satan is the supreme rebel who encourages rioting. He was the first rioter! Think about that. He encouraged the fallen angels to rise up and join him in fighting against God. Pride was Satan's downfall! He looked and beheld his own beauty. He felt he could do a better job than God. So he inspired a third of the angels to rebel and join him in the fight against God. Satan didn't respect God and His authority, so he encouraged rebellion! (see Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:11-17; Revelation 12:4).

While able to start a revolt, Satan had no chance in his attempt to take over God's throne. Now he works hard to deceive and influence mankind to join him in his rebellion against God by stirring up disrespect and division.

The opposite of rebellion is respect and honor. First, you must respect God, who is in charge of the universe. And then you must treat others right by showing them respect and honor. That means no matter how much you disagree with those in charge, you will do no harm to them or their possessions.

Did you know that God requires us to show respect to those in authority? The apostle Paul states in Romans 13:1-5 (New Living Translation):

"Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God. So anyone who rebels against

authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished.

"For the authorities do not strike fear in people who are doing right, but in those who are doing wrong. Would you like to live without fear of the authorities? Do what is right, and they will honor you. The authorities are God's servants, sent for your good.

"But if you are doing wrong, of course you should be afraid, for they have the power to punish you. They are God's servants, sent for the very purpose of punishing those who do what is wrong. So you must submit to them, not only to avoid punishment, but also to keep a clear conscience."

We should all be showing respect for all those in authority! That would include schoolteachers, leaders, employers, presidents and, yes, the police. That can be hard at times when we see corruption and unfairness, but here is the key. We can pour our hearts out to God regarding those we might feel are abusing their authority.

Notice that showing respect will help us to lead a quiet and peaceable life! Paul wrote to Timothy: "I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and

**We can have peace knowing that God is in charge of the leaders He is allowing to rule, and in His time He will take care of it if a change is needed!**

all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Savior" (1 Timothy 2:1-3, NLT).

Wow! We have peace only when we understand that God is in charge of the leaders He is allowing to rule, and that in His time He will intervene if a change is needed!

Isaiah 40:28 says: "Have you never heard? Have you never understood? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding" (NLT).

So show proper respect to those in authority, pray for them, and receive God's blessings! **BT**



# THE Fear of God

## —Seven Attributes

The Bible speaks often of the need to fear God.  
But what does this mean? What should it look like in our lives?

by Mario Seiglie

**W**hat does the Bible mean when it mentions fearing God or the fear of God? It's an extensive subject, one that is mentioned more than 300 times in Scripture.

As we know, fear can be either a positive or a negative emotion. A healthy fear will keep us out of trouble and danger. This is especially so with a cautious and holy awe and reverence toward God. Yet there is also a cowardly type of fear that holds people back in the wrong way, which the Bible condemns. Both kinds are found abundantly in God's Word. And it's vital to know the difference between the two kinds of fear and to develop the right kind while avoiding the wrong.

### An example of the wrong kind of fear

We have a biblical example of the wrong kind of fear when, as the Israelites were on the verge of entering the Promised Land, 10 of the 12 spies sent in brought back a pessimistic report. Their report was so discouraging that the people became filled with fear and discouragement to the point that they were ready to rebel against Moses and return to Egypt!

The account is found in Numbers 14:1-4: "So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, 'If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?'"

Because of the negative report, the people were ready to quit, return to Egypt, and again become slaves. Remember, this was the generation that had recently witnessed the mighty miracles of the plagues on Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea. They had been led by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night and had witnessed the awesome display of power at Mount Sinai. They were being miraculously fed and sustained in the wilderness! But when faithless fear gripped their hearts, they forgot about God's presence and promises and wanted to give up.

### The right kind of fear which Joshua and Caleb had

On the other hand, two of the spies had the right kind of fear—Joshua and Caleb. This is the type of fear that deeply respects God and His promises.

They told the congregation: "The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, 'a land which flows with milk and honey.' Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them" (verses 6-9).

God would reward the living faith of these two young men. While all the rest of that generation were not allowed to enter the Promised Land, Joshua and Caleb were able to go in because they had "a different spirit," meaning the right attitude of trusting in God (verses 24, 38).

So it's very important to distinguish *godly* fear from the cringing and paralyzing fear that abandons faith. In fact, God says that if we allow cowardly and faithless fear to dominate us, the kind of fear that makes us shirk from godly duty and responsibility, we simply won't be in His Kingdom.

As God said, "But those who are *full of fear* and *without faith*, the unclean and takers of life, those who do the sins of the flesh, and those who make use of evil powers or who give worship to images, and all those who are false, will have their part in the sea of ever-burning fire which is *the second death*" (Revelation 21:8, Bible in Basic English, emphasis added throughout).

### The primary words translated "fear" in the Bible

Two main words in the Bible describe fear, whether good or bad. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *yirah* is most often translated "fear." In the New Testament, it is the Greek word *phobos*, from which we get the English word *phobia*—an extreme or unreasonable fear of something in particular.

The biblical King David, who had a way with words, wrote a lot about the fear of God. He used the word *yirah* once to describe a normal fear of being persecuted. He said, "*Fearfulness* and trembling have come upon me, and horror

has overwhelmed me” (Psalm 55:5). However, the majority of times he used the word *yirah*, he meant it as a positive fear of God that included deep reverence for Him and His Word.

For instance, he exclaimed: “Blessed is the man who *fears the LORD*, who delights greatly in His commandments. His descendants will be mighty on earth; the generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches will be in his house, and his righteousness endures forever” (Psalm 112:1-3).

With this background, let’s look at seven attributes of godly fear in the Bible.

## 1 <sup>THE</sup> Fear of God is a gift from Him

Genuine fear of God accompanies real conversion and comes from yielding to Him and receiving His Spirit. Notice how Isaiah 11:1-3 describes some of the qualities of the Messiah, Jesus Christ:

“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, *the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD*. His delight is in the fear of the LORD, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears . . .”

The apostle Paul also shows that God is involved in our having a proper fear and respect of Him while we do our part in this. As Paul points out, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*; for it is God who works in you both *to will and to do* for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13).

## 2 <sup>THE</sup> Fear of God produces godly humility

When someone truly fears God, it makes the person yield to Him—no matter what. This person is in awe and properly trembles before God and His Word—for it’s not a passing thought. As David wrote, “Let all the earth *fear the LORD*; let all the inhabitants of the world *stand in awe* of Him” (Psalm 33:8).

Through the prophet Isaiah, God showed He desires this kind of attitude from us: “But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit [that is, humbly repentant], and *who trembles* at My word” (Isaiah 66:2).

We see this in Noah, who showed a respectful fear of God when he received the daunting instructions to build a huge ark. As Hebrews 11:7 tells us, “By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, *moved with godly fear*, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is *according to faith*.”

Proverbs 22:4 points out the blessings that result from this type of reverential attitude toward God: “By *humility and the fear of the LORD* are riches and honor and life.”

This kind of fear recognizes how small we are before the infinite majesty of God and keeps us from thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to. It further helps us to be considerate and not haughty toward others, especially when speaking about our faith and beliefs. As Peter explains, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, *with meekness and fear*” (1 Peter 3:15).

## 3 <sup>THE</sup> Fear of God instills obedience

The fear of God creates a deep desire to obey and please Him above all things, not wanting to disappoint Him and also taking into consideration having to give an account of ourselves before Him. So godly fear is more than mere respect for God. It goes far deeper, acknowledging there is a reckoning that will take place.

As Paul wrote: “Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, *to be well pleasing to Him*. For we must *all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, *the terror* [or fear, the Greek word *phobos* used here] *of the Lord*, we persuade men . . .” (2 Corinthians 5:9-11).

David understood the connection between the fear of God and obedience when he wrote, “*The fear of the LORD* is the *beginning* of wisdom; a good *understanding* have all those who *do His commandments*” (Psalm 111:10). This obedience and reverence toward God also made David want to fellowship with others who had this same godly fear. He declared, “I am a companion of *all who fear You*, and of those who *keep Your precepts*” (Psalm 119:63).

This fear of God led David to dedicate one of the Psalms to obeying the Fourth Commandment—to rest on and honor the Sabbath day. Notice the superscription at the beginning of Psalm 92 followed by the first verse: “*A Song for the Sabbath Day*. It is good to give thanks to the LORD, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High.”

And note what the *Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament* states about this verse: “The Sabbath is the day that God has hallowed, and that is to be consecrated to God by our turning away from the business pursuits of the working days . . . and applying ourselves to the praise and adoration of God, which is the most proper, blessed Sabbath employment. It is good, *i.e.*, not merely good in the eyes of God, but also good for man, beneficial to the heart, pleasant and blessed.”

God’s way of life can be summed up by this verse: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: *Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all*” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

## 4 <sup>THE</sup> Fear of God develops godly courage

Another attribute that the fear of God produces is godly courage.



David again expressed it well: “The LORD is my light and my salvation; *whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?* . . . Though an army may encamp against me, *my heart shall not fear*; though war may rise against me, *in this I will be confident*” (Psalm 27:1-3).

When you fear God more than man, then you will fear man less than God. We see an example of this when the apostles went before the powerful Jewish leaders and were threatened with violence if they continued preaching about Jesus. Peter and the other apostles responded, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). They then received a beating and were told to cease speaking in the name of Jesus, but they didn’t back down—they continued to do the right thing before God!

Paul also encouraged his young fellow minister Timothy to have godly courage and to avoid cowardly fear. Paul exhorted him: “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands [this being the means to conferring God’s Spirit and authorization to spiritual office]. For God has *not* given us *a spirit of fear*, but of *power* and of *love* and of *a sound mind*” (2 Timothy 1:6-7).

## 5 THE Fear of God helps us avoid sin

Another quality that accompanies godly fear is the shunning of sin and following God’s way of righteousness.

As Proverbs 8:13 tells us, “The *fear of the LORD* is to *hate evil, pride and arrogance and the evil way* and the perverse mouth I hate” (Proverbs 8:13). Proverbs 16:6 later adds, “In mercy and truth atonement is provided for iniquity [lawlessness]; and by the *fear of the LORD* one departs from evil.”

Paul admonished the Christians in Corinth when he wrote, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness* of the flesh and spirit, *perfecting holiness in the fear of God*” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

We should strive for and never lose that godly fear that causes us to flee from sin and its deadly consequences!

## 6 THE Fear of God builds & encourages godly leadership

One of the requirements to serve God is to rightly fear Him. Moses, following the wise advice of his father-in-law, set up leaders with the following qualities: “able men, such as *fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness*” (Exodus 18:21).

Jehoshaphat, one of the righteous kings of Judah, did the same. “He set judges in the land throughout all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, and said to the judges, ‘Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment. Now therefore, *let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take care and do it*, for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, no partiality, nor taking of bribes’ . . . And he commanded them, saying, ‘Thus you shall act *in the fear of the LORD*, faithfully and with a

loyal heart’” (2 Chronicles 19:5-9).

Those who possess godly fear will resist the urge to take advantage of others by abusing their positions of authority. The Jewish ruler Nehemiah recorded an excellent example of this when he wrote: “But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people, and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Yes, even their servants bore rule over the people, *but I did not do so, because of the fear of God*” (Nehemiah 5:15).


On the other hand, there is a wrong type of fear that is not appropriate for leadership. We see this when God told the Israelites through Moses: “The officers shall speak further to the people, and say, ‘What man is there *who is fearful and fainthearted?* Let him *go and return to his house*, lest the heart of his brethren *faint like his heart*’” (Deuteronomy 20:8). We see here that those who lack faith and are faint-hearted can discourage others and create instability, which indicates they are not fit to lead God’s people.

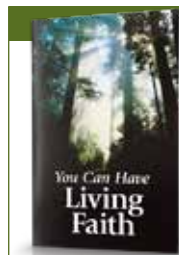
## 7 THE Fear of God leads to loving God & those like-minded

The early Church was characterized by godly fear and love that led to an affectionate fellowship among the brethren. As Acts 9:31 describes: “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria *had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord* and in the *comfort* of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.”

So the *fear of God* must grow into the *love of God* in us and toward other Christians. The apostle John showed we should avoid having cowardly and paralyzing fear and worry, and that we should instead have confidence in God’s love toward us and of our love toward God and to those who truly fear Him.

As John wrote: “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have *boldness* in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is *no fear in love*; but *perfect love casts out fear*, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:16-19). We see here that godly fear and love expel the wrong type of fear.

In sum, may we all develop that vital and proper fear of God that leads to loving Him and others and avoid cowardly fear by putting God first in our lives. This is what the Bible means in telling us to have the fear of God! 



### LEARN MORE

What does it mean to have a close and faithful relationship with God? How can we build such a relationship with our Heavenly Father? Be sure to download or request our free study guide **You Can Have Living Faith** to learn more!

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

# "Amen. Even So, *Come, Lord Jesus.*"

Recalling our journey through the garden settings of Scripture, do we deeply desire a close relationship with the Father and Christ now and forever?

by Robin Webber

Over this column's last three entries we have traveled through three unique garden settings from Genesis to Revelation, all systematically designed to highlight God's ageless desire: "I will set My sanctuary [or set-apart place] in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle [or dwelling] also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Ezekiel 37:26-27; compare Revelation 21:3).

God's initial intention from the first Adam in the Garden of Eden to the second Adam, Christ, in the Garden of Gethsemane, to the eternal garden setting in Revelation 22 is seamless: He desires a personal relationship with His special creation—and that includes you!

Last time, as we explored the ultimate garden-like setting of the New Jerusalem come down from above (Revelation 21-22) with God and the Lamb's presence front and center, I left you with the invitation to embrace the reality that eternity isn't simply a destination, but a way of traveling forever in heeding Christ's call of "*Follow Me.*" Let's continue, then.

With all the highs and lows described in the book of Revelation—the persecution of the Church, the rise and fall of Satan-led empires, God's just judgment on a world gone astray, and the garden setting of the New Jerusalem—the apostle John was inspired to write: "And the Spirit and the bride [the Church] say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17).

The living Christ declares, "Surely I am coming quickly" (verse 20). To which John yearningly responds: "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (same verse).

Do we echo the same sentiment? Do we really want Christ to come? Not only in the future as promised, but living out that desire *in our lives now* as we anticipate existing with Him and the Father one day in that final garden of eternity? And how do we, to quote leadership expert Stephen Covey, "begin with the end in mind"—every day in every way?

## Must show desire for Christ and the Father to come

The first two lines of the model prayer Jesus Christ taught to His disciples, referred to as "the Lord's Prayer," offer a key. Consider that the following words show both reverence and expectation: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed [or treated as holy] be your name, *Your kingdom come, Your will be done* on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9, emphasis added throughout).

Many of us have sincerely recited these lines in times of dire

circumstances. Yet how does our Heavenly Father above know such entreaty is not merely a last resort of frustration, rather than the starting point of our existence every day? Talk is cheap. Our witness is shallow if we are not *living* our prayers now.

When we appear before Jesus at His return, His first question isn't going to be about what we knew, but about *what we did* with what we knew! Knowledge is of no value unless you put it into action! Jesus bluntly stated, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but *he who does the will of My Father in heaven*" (Matthew 7:21).

When Christ says, "Follow Me," and we accept that priceless invitation, He wants more than our talk. He wants us to walk the walk toward that eternal last garden—not merely as a destination, but a *way of traveling here and now* in the arena of choices we make every day.

Let's break this down into three important aspects of demonstrating our desire for Christ and the Father to come to us every day and forever—requiring our total surrender and participation in that process.

## In spirit and truth

We proclaim "Come" when we heed Christ's words that God has called us to worship Him in spirit and truth: "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24).

Three key concepts leap out of Jesus' clear statements:

1. "The hour is . . . *now*," not just later!
2. God looks at our *inward motivations*. He plainly states in Jeremiah 17:10: "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings."
3. Proper inward motivation in following the Father and Christ is not optional. *It's a must*. Otherwise we are merely echoing the accent without a trace of the core language that God desires to be expressed from our hearts.

We therefore check and bring under examination not only *what* we are doing, but also *why* and *for whom*.

Let's be honest. The greatest transmitter call letters in our world are *W.I.I.F.M.*—standing for "What's In It For Me?" This is totally opposite from God's *modus operandi* proclaimed by the apostle John towards the end of his spiritual journey: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world





## God's intention from the first Adam in the Garden of Eden to the eternal garden setting in Revelation 22 is seamless.

does not know us, because it did not know Him" (1 John 3:1).

The difference is tangible—on open display toward God, ourselves and others—when we express God-like love toward others, having outgoing concern away from us with no strings attached. This must be our response to Jesus' invitation to follow Him—exhibiting selflessness just like the One who "did not come to be served, but to serve" (Matthew 20:28).

Let's appreciate that such love is not ethereal or out of our grasp—and that it leads us to the next step.

### By our obedience

We proclaim "Come" and express desire that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven when we obey His law as defined by His commandments. These present God's way of life in action.

As 1 John 5:2-3 tells us: "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. *For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.* And His commandments are not burdensome."

God has never done away with His law, but He has firmly granted us the realization that keeping the law doesn't save us. After we repent of breaking God's laws, His grace, which includes forgiveness through faith in Christ's sacrifice, does save us! (Ephesians 2:8). But we cannot be saved if we are not committed to obeying God's laws, which are a reflection of His perfect mind and character. The law instructs us how to live before God and with our fellow man.

By God's transcendent design, His law is ultimately *spiritual* in nature. As the apostle Paul writes, "For we know that the law is spiritual" (Romans 7:14). It's no longer written by the finger of God on stone, but to those who surrender to Him He inscribes it their hearts, as He promises: "I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them" (Hebrews 10:16).

Is this a different script from the giving of the commandments in Exodus 20? No! The apostle James likewise wrote: "So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:12-13).

What does this mean? How does mercy triumph over judgment? Mercy triumphs over judgment when we judge ourselves and repent of our sins—the transgressing of God's law (1 John 3:4). Then, recognizing that we have been the recipients of God's mercy and forgiveness, we show mercy and forgiveness toward others.

It's an echo of Jesus' prior teaching 30 years before when He stated regarding outward observance of the law not to neglect "the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone" (Matthew 23:23).

### Through the special life from God in us

We can only begin to proclaim "Come" and perform God's will on earth as it is in heaven when we accept and abide with that special life from God that resides in us—by the Father and Christ living in us (John 14:23).

This is the only way to keep pressing forward. Let's fully understand that this world is our tour of duty—one continuous assignment after

another of waging spiritual warfare. Jesus prayed to our Father, "I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one" (John 14:15).

And we must remember that we are not alone in this. Jesus made a promise to His followers long ago on the night of His betrayal: "I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you" (John 14:18). Yet at times of darkness in our lives we can forget that promise.

That's why the apostle Paul used a scriptural megaphone to blast the message not only into the ears and hearts of the church members in ancient Corinth, but to wake up all of us today to this reality as well: "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you . . . ?" (2 Corinthians 13:5). What a powerful homing device to draw upon toward guiding us to the ultimate eternal union with God the Father and Christ!

Yes, the same *generous* spiritual essence of the One who personally walked and talked to Adam and Eve in the first garden. Yes, the same *obedient* One who in the later garden called Gethsemane taught us to commit ourselves to move beyond our personal desires to express, "Not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).

We desire that God the Father and Christ come into our lives today in anticipation of Their later coming to dwell with us here for eternity.

The Old Testament patriarchs didn't always know where God was leading them. They didn't put their faith in knowing where X marks the spot, but towards the Lord who was guiding them. Isn't that what the apostle John was expressing for all of us when He proclaimed, "Amen [so be it]. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

Until that day when we meet in that ultimate garden by the grace of God, let's continue the journey to which we have been invited by the One who said to us, "*Follow Me!*" **BT**



### Response to "Living the Dream: What Will It Be Like?"

In the November-December issue of *Beyond Today*, the article "Living the Dream: What Will It Be Like?" stated that we need a change of heart, that we need to be "fully committing to a life of change." This was profound to me! And in the "Letters From Our Readers" section, a lady mentioned that she started to change her way of thinking. God is changing people's hearts and minds—awesome! Very biblical! Thank you so much for the insights in this magazine. May God richly bless all who take part in contributing to it!

*Reader in Tennessee*

### Fans of *Beyond Today*

I wish very much to renew my subscription. It is very important to stay in tune with God and His words. There are other people who are interested in your magazine, so I give it to them after I finish reading and studying it. I pray that God blesses your ministry to continue to the end. Please keep Seychelles in your prayers, we're facing turbulent times. Yet even with all the problems, people are hesitant to learn the truth.

*Subscriber in Seychelles*

I'd like to say you are a blessing to my life and marriage. *Beyond Today* and your sermons brought my wife and me back together. You all have proven to me that a lot of what God had already led me to conclude through study (such as the nature of God not being three in one, the truth about heaven and hell, and much more) is true. Thanks to the hosts of *Beyond Today* and all your ministers I listen to before bed, I know how to back up my beliefs from the Bible. I don't have a congregation near me, unfortunately. The closest is two hours' drive and we have no car. But as soon as we get one I will be driving two hours every Sabbath. I promise that. You all are just so amazing to me.

*From the Internet*

### Asking for help in defending the Sabbath

A friend of mine who goes to another Christian church doesn't keep the biblical Sabbath or feast days. I asked her why she keeps Sunday when it's clear the biblical Sabbath is on Saturday. She answered that Jesus said to love God with all your heart, and to love your neighbor as yourself, and that is all that is required. So, she says that if she does that, she is keeping the commandments. What is the best way to respond to her? Thank you so much for your attention and any feedback you may give.

*From the Internet*

*Thank you for your question. Your friend is right in saying that our responsibility is to love God with all our heart, mind and soul, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus indeed called those the two great commandments (Matthew 22:37-39). But He went on to say, "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (verse 40). Those two commandments don't negate the other commandments, but are simply a broad summary of what the rest of the commandments communicate. In other words, the Ten Commandments (and the other laws of God) show us how we fulfill those two commandments.*

*Jesus Himself said in the Sermon on the Mount: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but*

*to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matthew 5:17-18). Some have misinterpreted His statement about coming to fulfill the law as meaning He obeyed the commandments so that we don't have to. But His teaching right after this (verses 21-48) shows clearly what He meant—that not only must we strive to keep the letter of God's laws, but we must keep them in their full spirit and intent.*

*On another occasion, a rich young man asked Him, "What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16). Jesus replied that if he wanted to enter into eternal life, he should keep the commandments. When the rich young man further questioned which commandments he should keep, Jesus specifically pointed him to the Ten Commandments as well as the broader command about loving our neighbor as ourselves (verses 17-19).*

*If you search our website at [ucg.org/learnmore](http://ucg.org/learnmore) you'll find much more information about the biblical Sabbath day and God's commandments.*

*These are good starting points, but when talking to your friend again, please keep in mind that she may not be open to what you have to say. Be willing to let the subject go if she's not receptive. You can't force somebody to understand what seems so clear to you, so just pray that God opens her mind in time. Our free study guide *The New Covenant: Does It Abolish God's Law?* gives a thorough explanation of this subject. Search for it at [ucg.org](http://ucg.org) or request it from one of our offices on page 39.*

### Searching for a United Church of God congregation

I receive your e-mail newsletter and want to know how I can get to one of your church congregations. I live in the Netherlands and have been looking for a church that teaches my beliefs. I have been listening to your teaching, and I am happy with it. I hope to be with brothers who love God's word of truth.

*Reader in the Netherlands*

I am in search of a Bible-based church that teaches Holy Scripture. My search began in 2001. Will you contact me to give me more information about United Church of God services?

*Reader in Florida*

Thank you so much for your magazine. I have been receiving it for about two years, and it has caused me to question many of the practices of the church I currently attend. It appears that there is no United Church of God in my area of Virginia, but reading your magazine is giving me true insight into God's plan and how we should live.

*Subscriber in Virginia*

*Interested readers can find a list of all our congregations at [ucg.org/congregations](http://ucg.org/congregations). If the closest one is several hours away, we recommend that you find the congregations closest to you and make contact with the pastor there. It is possible he may be aware of others meeting together in a location closer to you than what we have listed.*

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Published letters may be edited for clarity and space. Address your letters to *Beyond Today*, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A., or e-mail [BTinfo@ucg.org](mailto:BTinfo@ucg.org) (please be sure to include your full name, city, state or province, and country).






## Where Are the UNITED STATES & BRITAIN in Bible Prophecy?

**W**elcome to the ninth lesson in the “Bible Prophecy and You” series.

This lesson will explore some of what the Bible foretold about the rise to prominence of two great nations of modern times.

Much of Bible prophecy is about the end time—the period leading up to the return of Jesus Christ. And it actually has a lot to say about some of today’s most important nations. Yet the Bible doesn’t refer to these by their modern names. Thus if we are to understand many end-time prophecies, the major players must be identified.

Today, the world’s lone superpower is the United States of America. In the 19th century, the superpower was Great Britain, the largest empire in the history of the world. Are these nations ignored in the Bible? How could that be, when the Bible gives us so many other details about the end time? Actually, as you will see, end-time prophecies refer to these nations more than any others!

Today, many people are unaware of how Britain once dominated the world.

At the height of its power, the British Empire included Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East. It comprised nearly a quarter of the land mass of the earth and a quarter of its population! As a famous saying went, “the sun never set” on the British Empire!

There is not room here to describe just how powerful the influence of Britain and America on world history has been.

Highly significant is the fact that the British and American people—blessed with religious freedom—have been the primary instruments in spreading the Bible to most of the world. They brought about the King James Version of the Bible, many other English translations and thousands of translations in other languages. Plus they have generously supplied the financial resources and laborers to bring Bibles to all parts of the world.

So, where are the United States and Britain named in the Bible? The answer to this question is a major key to understanding Bible prophecies. It enables us to understand how many prophecies have already been fulfilled perfectly, and enables us to understand what to expect in the end time.

This is a big subject. For a more complete explanation and historical overview, we encourage you to read our in-depth study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. Here we can only cover the basics.

### **The story begins with God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**

First, let’s consider the story of God’s amazing promises to Abraham and his descendants:

**The birthright blessings of Israel were fulfilled in the rise of the British people and the United States. No wonder they’ve felt like brothers—they descended from brothers!**

God called Abram (Abraham’s original name) to leave his homeland and to live a life based on faith in God and God’s promise of a glorious permanent city (Hebrews 11:8-10). (We learn in Revelation 21:2 that the city will be New Jerusalem.)

God’s initial promises to Abram, at age 75, are in Genesis 12:1-4. When God said, “And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” He meant two things. Through Jesus Christ, the preeminent descendant of Abram, all people would be blessed spiritually. And through many of Abram’s other descendants, people around the world would experience physical blessings of peace and prosperity.

As Abram showed faithfulness, God kept expanding His promises. He said Abram’s descendants would be so numerous they would be like the stars of the sky. Even though Abram’s wife Sarai (Sarah’s original name) was unable to conceive



children, God promised Abram that his descendants “will come from your own body.” Abram believed God, “and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:4-6).

Then after waiting 11 years, at Sarai’s suggestion, Abram made a very bad decision to father a child by Sarai’s servant Hagar. So Hagar gave birth to Ishmael when Abram was 86 (Genesis 16:15-16).

Then when Abram was 99, God appeared and made a highly significant covenant with him and his descendants. At that time God changed his name to Abraham, meaning “father of multitudes” (of many nations), and changed Sarai’s name to Sarah, meaning “princess” (Genesis 17:5, 15). The next year, Sarah at last gave birth to Abraham’s son Isaac when she was 90 and Abraham was 100 (Genesis 17:17; 21:1-5).

Many years later God severely tested Abraham’s faith by telling him to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac. When God saw that Abraham would have willingly obeyed, God further expanded His promises to him (Genesis 22:16-18).

God’s promises were passed along to Abraham’s son Isaac (Genesis 26:4), then to Isaac’s son Jacob (Genesis 28:3-4, 13-14), and then to Jacob’s son Joseph and his sons (Genesis 48:15-16, 19-20). God changed Jacob’s name to Israel, meaning “prevailer (or prince) with God” (Genesis 32:28, King James Version), so his descendants are known as Israelites.

This much of the story sets the stage for the rest of this lesson.

## Jacob’s family grows into the nation of Israel

Often nations start out from a family that expands to become a tribe or clan, and then further grows into a nation. The “table of nations” in Genesis 10 shows us the many descendants of Noah who became the ancestors of tribes and nations. Later passages show how Jacob, whose name was changed by God to Israel, and his 12 sons became the forefathers of all Israelites—“the twelve tribes of Israel” (Genesis 49:28).

When Jacob (Israel) and his extended family migrated to Egypt, they numbered only about 70 (Exodus 1:5). Over time, “the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty” (1:7). There they “became a nation, great, mighty, and populous” (Deuteronomy 26:5; compare Genesis 46:3)—the nation of Israel. And God miraculously brought this “nation from the midst of another nation [Egypt]” (Deuteronomy 4:34).

“A mixed multitude [of various other ethnicities] went up with them also” (Exodus 12:38). God welcomed foreigners into Israel as long as they agreed to honor Him and live by His laws (Exodus 12:48). Clearly God wanted His people to primarily identify themselves not so much by their ethnic connections as by their spiritual connection—being “the people of God” (Judges 20:2).

When God “chose” the Israelites, it was not favoritism, and it was not because they were righteous (Deuteronomy 9:6). They were chosen before they were born, via God’s promises to Abraham concerning his descendants.

God chose them to become “holy” to serve as a model nation to teach the rest of the world to live by God’s laws so these other nations would also receive His blessings (Deuteronomy 7:6-8; 4:6-8). But for much of the Israelites’ history, they instead were a very bad example spiritually, and God has had to punish them time and again.

The Bible’s geographical focus is on Jerusalem and the surrounding Promised Land. That explains why nations in the vicinity of Jerusalem are the ones that are mentioned most prominently in the Bible.

## Tracing the promised blessings of national greatness

Let’s now take note of some important prophecies and their fulfillments.

### ► When God appeared to Jacob (Israel), what promise did He add to the previous promises?

“Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him. And God said to him, ‘Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name.’ So He called his name Israel. Also God said to him: ‘I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body’” (Genesis 35:9-11).

God said “a nation and a company of nations” would proceed from Jacob. In the last couple of centuries, what single nation and “company” or group of nations of common heritage have been the most powerful? The clear answer is the United States of America and the British Commonwealth. The short space in this lesson doesn’t allow for many proofs of that fact. For thorough proof of this fulfillment from the Bible and from history, we again encourage you to read our study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

### ► Did the birthright blessing go from Jacob to Joseph?

“Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel—he was indeed the firstborn, but because he defiled his father’s bed [in having relations with Jacob’s concubine Bilhah], his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that the genealogy is not listed according to the birthright; yet Judah prevailed over his brothers, and from him came a ruler, although the birthright was Joseph’s” (1 Chronicles 5:1-2).

“Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity and the excellency of power. Unstable as water, you shall not excel, because you went up to your father’s bed; then you defiled it . . .

“Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; his branches run over the wall. The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot at him and hated him. But his bow remained in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob . . . by the God of your father who will help you, and by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb.

“The blessings of your father have excelled the blessings of my ancestors, up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers” (Genesis 49:3-4, 22-26).

After Reuben was disqualified, Jacob pronounced the birthright blessing on his son Joseph. The blessing included major promises that the descendants of Joseph would be fruitful, prosperous and powerful. Jacob announced that “the scepter shall not depart from Judah,” a reference to the fact that God would establish a dynasty of kings descended from



## The Bible's many end-time prophecies of "Israel" often refer to the United States, Britain and related English-speaking people.

Judah—that of David—from which would ultimately come the Messiah (Genesis 49:10).

That dynasty ceased to rule in the Holy Land when the Babylonians invaded Judah in the sixth century B.C. But it never died out, having been transferred ultimately to the British Isles! Christ at His return will thus come to a throne that still exists. (For the amazing story, search at [ucg.org](http://ucg.org) for our e-booklet *The Throne of Britain: Its Biblical Origin and Future*.)

### ► Did the birthright blessing—plus the name "Israel"—then go to Joseph's two sons?

"And he [Jacob] blessed Joseph, and said: 'God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth . . .

"But his father refused and said, 'I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.' So he blessed them that day, saying, 'By you Israel will bless, saying, "May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!"' And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh" (Genesis 48:15-16, 19-20).

Shortly before Jacob (Israel) died, he pronounced special birthright blessings on Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. He prophesied that Manasseh's descendants would become a "great" nation and that Ephraim's descendants would "become a multitude of nations" (verse 19). In essence, Jacob was adopting his grandsons as his own sons (verse 5). He said, "Let my name [Israel] be named upon them" (verse 16).

Passing on the name Israel is highly significant. There are many end-time Bible prophecies about "Israel," and this lets us

know that they can refer to the descendants of Joseph and his two sons. In fact, only a few prophecies of "Israel" refer to the descendants of *all* of Jacob's sons.

The blessings on Ephraim were fulfilled in the rise of the British Empire and Commonwealth (a "company" or "multitude" of nations). The blessings on Manasseh were fulfilled in the rise of the United States of America. No wonder the British and American people have felt like they are brothers—they descended from brothers!

### ► In Moses' blessing on the descendants of Jacob (Israel), what did he prophesy about Joseph?

"And of Joseph he said: 'Blessed of the LORD is his land, with the precious things of heaven, with the dew, and the deep lying beneath, with the precious fruits of the sun, with the precious produce of the months, with the best things of the ancient mountains, with the precious things of the everlasting hills, with the precious things of the earth and its fullness, and the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush.

"Let the blessing come 'on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers [this quoting Jacob's earlier prophecy].' His glory is like a firstborn bull, and his horns like the horns of the wild ox; together with them He shall push the peoples to the ends

of the earth; they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh'" (Deuteronomy 33:13-17).

The greatest material and geopolitical blessings were to go to the descendants of Joseph.

### ► After Solomon's death, did Israel split into two kingdoms?

"Now it happened at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite met him on the way; and he had clothed himself with a new garment, and the two were alone in the field. Then Ahijah took hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. And he said to Jeroboam, 'Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: "Behold, I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and will give ten tribes to you . . ."' (1 Kings 11:29-31).

"Now it came to pass when all Israel heard that Jeroboam had come back, they sent for him and called him to the congregation, and made him king over all Israel. There was none who followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only. And when Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah with the tribe of Benjamin, one hundred and eighty thousand chosen men who were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, that he might restore the kingdom to Rehoboam the son of Solomon" (1 Kings 12:20-21).

Just as God's prophet Ahijah foretold, the northern 10 tribes seceded from Israel and kept the name Israel. They became the kingdom, or house, of Israel. The southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin, along with part of Levi, became known as the kingdom, or house, of Judah. Those of the house of Judah became known as "Jews." It might seem surprising, but the first time "Jews" are mentioned in the King James Version of the Bible, they are *at war* with Israel (2 Kings 16:5-6).

The Israelis of the modern nation of Israel are mostly Jews.

When the Bible speaks of *Judah* in the end-time, it is referring to this present-day nation of Israel and other dispersed Jews.

## ► Why did the house of Israel become known as the *lost 10 tribes of Israel*?

“Then the king of Assyria carried Israel away captive to Assyria, and put them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed His covenant and all that Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded; and they would neither hear nor do them” (2 Kings 18:11-12).

When the northern 10 tribes continued to rebel against the dominant Assyrian empire, the Assyrians besieged their capital city Samaria (around 724-722 B.C.). After Samaria fell, the Assyrians deported most Israelites to far-off places where they eventually adopted the languages and cultures of their new environments.

Furthermore, since these 10 tribes had previously abandoned the keeping of God’s Sabbath and Holy Days, they no longer had those identifying signs (Exodus 31:13). Many of their descendants continued to migrate, mostly in a westerly direction toward what is now Europe. God was fulfilling His promise of sifting the Israelites through other nations but keeping them intact (Amos 9:9). But because they had lost their original identity, many historians have thought that they were completely assimilated into other peoples or died out.

In contrast, when those of the house of Judah were taken captive to Babylon more than a century later, they retained their language and beliefs, including Sabbath-keeping. And when later permitted, some of them returned to Judea (which the Romans much later renamed *Palestine*). Thus, a large part of the Jewish people never lost their identity.

## ► What are some proofs that the Israelites did not cease to exist?

Jesus said He was sent “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). Jesus told His disciples to go preach “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:6). Many years later, the apostle James addressed his letter “to the twelve tribes . . . scattered abroad” (James 1:1). Obviously, Jesus and James expected to reach descendants of all 12 tribes. While most historians haven’t actually tried to “find” the so-called “lost tribes,” even dismissing the notion out of hand, some historians who’ve made the effort have been able to trace the Israelites’ migrations.

Biblically speaking, one of the greatest proofs that the 10 tribes of northern Israel did not cease to exist is found in Ezekiel 37:15-28. There it mentions that when the Kingdom of God is set up on the earth, God will bring the descendants of the northern 10 tribes of Israel back to the Promised Land and will unite them to the two tribes that made up “Judah”—Judah and Benjamin.

If the northern 10 tribes were ultimately assimilated by other nations and disappeared, their descendants could not be brought back to the Promised Land at this time. But, as God promised in the book of Amos, He would not forget the northern 10 tribes of Israel, and neither would He allow them to be absorbed by other nations to the point of ceasing to be an

identifiable people (again, see Amos 9:9). He has faithfully kept this promise!

## ► When God spoke to Abraham, what did He mean by “in Isaac your seed shall be called”?

“But God said to Abraham, ‘Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called’” (Genesis 21:12).

It will come as quite a surprise to many that the descendants of Isaac, or Isaac’s sons, became known, among other things, as “Saxons” (search for “Linguistic Links: What’s in a Name?” at [ucg.org](http://ucg.org)). Of course, the English-speaking British and American peoples are called Anglo-Saxons.

## ► When did the descendants of the brothers Ephraim and Manasseh separate?

In colonial times, God inspired many descendants of Manasseh to relocate from Britain and other European countries to America. As a result of the American Revolution, the two brothers became separate politically—though they have worked together often since in ways that have been a blessing to the world. Sometimes you will hear the phrase “13 tribes of Israel.” That is when the descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh are being counted as two different tribes, with Manasseh as the 13th tribe. (It’s interesting to note that the number 13 was prominent in early American history, as there were 13 original colonies that became the first 13 states.)

The Bible’s many end-time prophecies of “Israel” are often referring to the United States, Britain and other related people. End-time prophecies of “Judah” refer to the modern state of Israel and other dispersed Jews. With this knowledge, you will be able to understand the many end-time prophecies concerning Israel and Judah. Sadly, many prophecies warn of God’s judgment and punishment to come on both Israel and Judah for their disobedience to His Word and His laws. But there are also many other prophecies of how Israel and Judah will later be restored to greatness and roles of leadership.

We hope this short lesson has whetted your appetite to read much more about the astounding evidence of the origins of the British and American peoples and the prophecies of events that lie ahead! Future lessons will identify other nations.

## Apply Now

Read the amazing blessings pronounced by Jacob on the descendants of Joseph in Genesis 49:22-26. Then read the amazing blessings pronounced by Moses on the descendants of Joseph in Deuteronomy 33:13-17. Think about how significant and generous these promises are!

If you live in a country that has been a recipient of these blessings, give heartfelt thanks to God for His love, faithfulness and generosity in bestowing all those blessings! God’s faithfulness in these physical things is a reminder of His faithfulness in spiritual things. We can all be thankful for that!

And be sure to download or request our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* to learn a great deal more!





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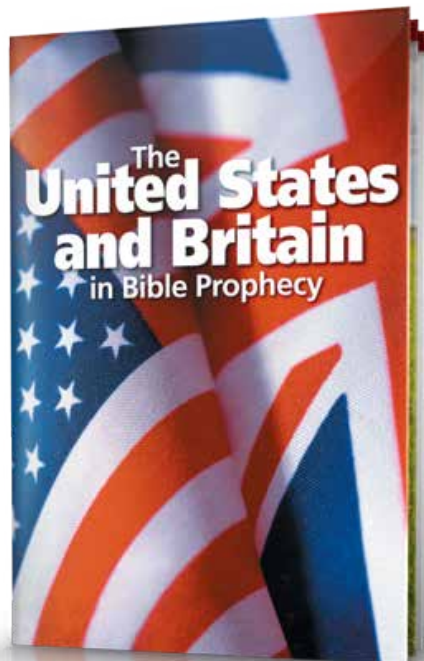
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