

BEYOND TODAY®

A Magazine of Understanding

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HOW YOU CAN HAVE

A Lasting Marriage

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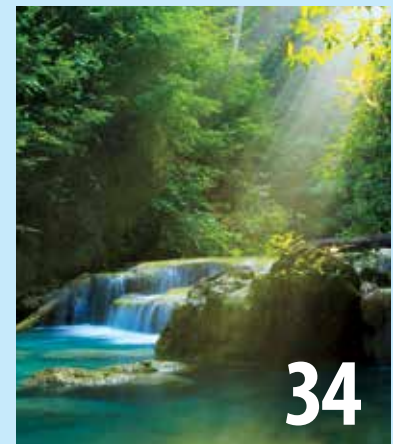
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Scott Ashley
Managing editor

Why Does Marriage Matter?

In addition to my responsibilities as managing editor for *Beyond Today*, I also teach college-age students and serve as a volunteer pastor. In those capacities (plus being married to a wonderful woman for 42 years!) I've learned a lot about marriage. What are some things I've learned?

Although it was several decades ago, I remember counseling a young couple the night before I officiated at their wedding. I was new to it, as this was the first wedding I would perform. Together we read Ephesians 5:22-33, where the apostle Paul gives marriage instruction for husbands and wives.

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord," Paul tells wives (verse 22). "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her," he tells husbands (verse 25). "A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh," he tells both (verse 31).

We discussed these verses at length, noting what a high standard God sets for both partners in a marriage.

Then in the next verse—as often happens when I'm deeply contemplating the meaning of a particular passage—I saw something I'd never quite understood before.

Concluding his discussion of marriage, Paul writes, "This is a great mystery, *but I speak concerning Christ and the church*" (verse 32, emphasis added). In hindsight this is obvious, but at that moment I grasped for the first time a truth that had been clear to Paul when he wrote about marriage—that *marriage exists to teach us about our relationship with Jesus Christ*.

Let that sink in.

Marriage is much more than a social arrangement, a physical and emotional pairing, or a financial partnership. It's also a *learning and growing experience* meant to help instill in our lives character lessons and spiritual truths that would be difficult to learn any other way. While we might learn these things intellectually on our own, through marriage we learn them through *experience*—a much deeper level.

What are some of these lessons?

In a world that today esteems marriage far too lightly, *marriage teaches commitment*. What does it say about commitment when roughly half of all first marriages end in divorce (with far higher percentages for subsequent marriages)? Or, even worse, that so many couples choose to live together without even bothering to marry at all?

Jesus Christ showed His commitment to us by offering the

supreme sacrifice—not just emptying Himself of the glory, might and splendor He shared with God the Father before coming in the flesh, but also giving His very life and assuring us He will never leave nor forsake us (Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 7:25-27; Hebrews 13:5).

He is the living example of the kind of commitment partners should share in marriage—and the perfect example of the kind of commitment we should have toward Him.

A second lesson is that *marriage teaches us there are things more important than ourselves*. As the saying goes, "It's not about you!" Even the most stubborn people usually—though

not always—learn that the universe doesn't revolve around them. Jesus Christ, to carry out His and His Father's great plan, came in the flesh to die as a common criminal to "bring many sons to glory" in the family of God (Hebrews 2:10-13).

If a marriage is to last, the husband and wife must at some point learn that it's not about him or her, but about *them*—

together—and about "esteeming others better" (Philippians 2:3-4). We have no greater role model in this than Jesus Christ (verse 5).

A third lesson is that *marriage teaches sharing and sacrifice*. It's commonly assumed that marriage is a 50-50 proposition. And while most people might view it that way, a truly loving marriage is *100-100*—meaning *100 percent giving to the other person*. When marriage partners are focused on the needs, happiness and well-being of the other person, it's remarkable how well they'll get along! Neither is focused on his or her own wants above the other, but on sharing and sacrificing.

And what an astounding example of sharing and sacrifice we have in Jesus Christ who gave everything, including His own life, that we might share eternal life with Him in the family of God, when "we shall be like Him" as glorified, immortal children of God (Romans 8:29; Hebrews 2:11; 1 John 3:2; 2 Corinthians 6:18).

To sum all this up, *marriage teaches us to love*. And what is God's defining characteristic that His children should emulate? "God is love . . ." (1 John 4:8, 16). Love is outgoing concern for others—the opposite of self-centeredness.

Marriage is indeed one of God's greatest gifts to us. Shouldn't we be treating it that way? **BT**



Scott Ashley

The institution of marriage is in deep trouble. About half of all marriages end in divorce, and many couples don't bother to even get married at all. What are they missing? What are the keys to a lasting marriage?

by Jerold Aust

Attending a wedding is one of the most exciting, encouraging and happy events people can experience. When we receive the invitation, we begin to plan what gift we might give the couple. We go on to share our thoughts about the bride and groom and how we wish them all the happiness in the world.

A wedding portrays a confirmation of joy in the marriage union. Who doesn't want this for all married couples? Wouldn't it be wonderful if all brides and grooms had happy and productive marriages for the rest of their lives? We all wish this, but sadly it often doesn't come to pass.

"Researchers report that approximately 50 per cent of first marriages, 76 per cent of second marriages, and 84 per cent of third and subsequent marriages fail" (Larry Russell, "Why Marriages Fail and What to Do About It," FocusontheFamily.ca). Many people enter holy matrimony unprepared. Some couples seek counseling before marrying, but even that is no guarantee a marriage will blossom into a long-lived union.

Is the institution of marriage for this life only, or is it designed to last forever? Could the marriage union picture something greater than what we know—something perfect and divine? That, my friends, would truly be heavenly bliss.

Enduring after the honeymoon

Consider the story of Daniel and Dawn, a couple who enjoyed a wonderful first six months after they were married. After a few months, they thought their bliss would last all their lives! They had met on a volleyball court, quite by accident. When Daniel saw Dawn, he suddenly had difficulty focusing on the game his team was winning.

Dawn, on the other hand, seemed well-composed and exchanged greetings with everyone on the court. Time passed, and Daniel finally got up the courage to ask Dawn for a date. They went dancing and fell in love. About a year later, they were married.

For the first six months of their marriage, Daniel and Dawn did everything they could to serve each other. There wasn't a cross word between them. Instead, they complimented each other—often. This was a marriage made in heaven—so they thought.

One day, Daniel mentioned to Dawn that she might consider another way of doing something in the house. Dawn broke down and cried. Daniel felt terrible and tried to console her. Slowly, incrementally, their honeymoon period began to fade. They began to realize later that marriage is more than the honeymoon, as both began to see things in each other they had overlooked before.

From that time on, though, they set themselves to look at

each other's strengths and minimize any perceived weaknesses. They eventually became happy parents and even happier grandparents. Is this your story too? Or perhaps things haven't gone so well—or you have yet to experience marriage.

Know that marriages can indeed be happy and healthy. It takes marriage partners showing tender loving care toward each other. Successful marriages are built on *sacrifice and service* to one another. This is difficult because we look more to our own wants and needs than we do to those of others. Yet God didn't intend for it to be as difficult as we might make it. He desires that marriage be a union of utmost focus and care, and great happiness, with His help.

Marriage established by God

The very first marriage is found in the Bible in the book of Genesis. Here's the account of the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, being brought together:

"But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:20-24).

Becoming "one flesh" is the operative phrase here, for it

God didn't intend for marriage to be as difficult as we might make it. He desires that it be a union of utmost focus and care, and great happiness!

describes the purpose and goal of the institution of marriage. Remember this!

God, not man, established the marriage union at creation. By Him marriage exists, not only for now but forever. The word *forever* is used deliberately. When we come to understand that the marriage union typifies the oneness of God the Father and Jesus Christ and human beings, then the concept of marriage takes on much deeper meaning (compare John 17:11).

Committing to love beyond infatuation

A man and woman often assume that the bliss they feel before marriage will automatically continue throughout their lives. They don't realize that God formed us in such a way to be initially drawn to a potential spouse. We call it

A romantic scene featuring the silhouettes of a man and a woman in profile, facing each other and kissing. They are positioned in the foreground against a vibrant sunset background. The sun is a bright, glowing orb just behind the couple, creating a lens flare effect. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to warm oranges and reds near the horizon. The overall mood is intimate and tender.

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chemistry, and in fact it is.

Dr. Pat Love has written: “The delightful influence of infatuation makes us dangerously inclined to make decisions we may later regret . . . It is important, though, to realize that infatuation is merely the earliest stage of love. Do not mistake this temporary power surge for a permanent condition, or confuse it with true love” (Pat Love, *The Truth About Love*, 2001, p. 31). We will see more about this shortly.

In any case, as we’ve already seen, the honeymoon period eventually fades. This is inevitable. God determined in our makeup to allow this process to take place in marriage, and for good reason. He has a great purpose for human beings—that we learn and build godly character in order to share eternity with Him in His family forever.

When a honeymoon fades, a young couple suddenly begins to face the truth about true love—involving each partner respecting, loving and serving the other. Now the newly married husband and wife can get down to working on their marriage in order to make the marriage work. The marriage union can be cultivated and brought to a deeper love. God can and will help you in this.

Other people offering sound counsel can help too. There are of course many publications on the subject. You might, for example, read Dr. John Gottman’s book *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (2015). We also offer a free Bible study guide, *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*, at the end of this article.

What about cohabitation or living together?

Before going further, we should consider the fact that many today think the way to head off marital troubles is through a trial run of cohabitation or living together before marriage—often even maintaining this lifestyle and never marrying.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops reports: “It’s no secret that many couples are cohabiting, that is, living together in a sexual relationship without marriage. Currently, 60% of all marriages are preceded by cohabitation, but fewer than half of cohabiting unions end in marriage.

“Many couples believe—mistakenly—that cohabitation will lower their risk of divorce. This is an understandable misconception, since many people are the children of divorce, or have other family members or friends who have divorced. Other reasons for living together include convenience, financial savings, companionship and security, and a desire to move out of their parents’ house” (“Cohabitation,” ForYourMarriage.org).

According to an article at the nonpartisan Pew Research Center: “Changes in marriage and childbearing have reshaped the American family over the past half-century. Adults are marrying later in life, and a rising share are forgoing marriage altogether. The rise in unmarried people, in turn, has contributed to increasing shares of U.S. births outside of marriage and children living with an unmarried parent” (Gretchen Livingston, “Family Life Is Changing in Different Ways Across Urban, Suburban and Rural Communities in the U.S.,” June 19, 2018, emphasis added).

James, a university instructor, was surprised when some of his students spoke freely about cohabitation as if it were a new



The honeymoon period eventually fades. And that’s okay. God designed this process to take place in marriage for a reason.

and wise lifestyle. Of course, people have lived in such relationships throughout history, but not to the degree we see today of being so commonplace and even an expected relationship step.

Does God regard this as wise? His Word tells us, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). In fact, God declares all sexual relations outside of marriage to be sin.

What is so important about marriage?

Still, many ask: Why marry someone if you can cohabit with him or her? Given what various circumstances may reveal, the disparities of perspectives, and desire to maintain or improve one’s economic situation, doesn’t this make sense?

Yet God desires and established marriage because it involves a covenant commitment that provides oneness. The apostle Paul explained how human marriage is to parallel a higher, divine-level relationship:

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

“So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’” (Ephesians 5:22-31).

Paul further notes: “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (verses 32-33). While the earthly marriage relationship is only for this physical life, it represents a higher spiritual marriage between Christ and His people that will never end. (For more on this, see “A Higher Purpose in Marriage” below.)

Obviously there’s more to human marriage than the “love cocktail,” the chemistry that brings a man and woman

together. Yet this is an important step that God has provided to bring a man and woman together as one to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). “And why one? He seeks godly offspring” (Malachi 2:15). God designed marriage and family to facilitate moral upbringing in His ways (Deuteronomy 6:6-7), with the ultimate goal being to bring billions of children into His divine family (Hebrews 2:10).

“Falling in love”

Of course, God designed the process of bringing couples together in the first place. It starts with an emotional attraction, as is well recognized even in medical science.

Dr. Pat Love writes: “The brain is an incredible creation; it begins working long before your birth and doesn’t stop until you fall in love. The infatuation syndrome is truly an example of Mother Nature at her finest [or rather, as we understand, the handiwork of the Creator God]. All the predictable behaviors

A Higher Purpose in Marriage

Is close human companionship, reproduction and child-rearing all there is to marriage? Or was there a greater goal or purpose behind its institution?

Amazingly, the human marriage union, divinely designed and instituted by God (Genesis 2:24), was meant to portray, in physical type, the marriage between Jesus Christ and the Church, the assembly of God’s called out and spiritually converted people, also known as true Christians or saints.

The apostle Paul shared marital instructions for a good and healthy marriage in Ephesians 5. And toward the end of the chapter, he provided a glimpse of the ultimate fulfillment of the marital relationship: “For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. *This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church*” (verses 30-32, emphasis added).

The great mystery is that the human marriage union is a precursor to Christ’s marriage to His Bride, the Church (2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 19:7-8). And there’s more to this great mystery.

Heavenly Jerusalem and marriage

Jesus shows us that the ultimate fulfillment of our marriage to Him, the Lamb, leads everyone to the New Jerusalem, which will come down from heaven. The



apostle John described a vision of that future in which an angel told him: “‘Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God” (Revelation 21:9-10).

This highlights the saints’ part in the New Jerusalem, but we also know that this heavenly city to yet come down will include the salvation of all of willing humankind for all time: “But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all” (Galatians 4:26). This includes the salvation of all humanity who will ultimately follow God (see 1 Timothy 2:4; Romans 11:35; John 3:16-17).

The saints of the Church of this age are the “firstfruits” of a much greater harvest of human lives (see James 1:18), the greater ingathering to take place during the 1,000-year period of Christ’s coming reign over the nations and the last judgment period to follow (Revelation 20:4-6, 11-13).

Scripture shows that Christ is now preparing a place for the saints and eventually all mankind (John 14:2) in the heavenly Jerusalem, the mother of all God’s spiritual children, for all time.

Marriage is forever!

The marriage union of oneness was designed for human beings in covenant with one another and God, and it will be ultimately fulfilled when all human beings who desire to be saved will enjoy a perfect oneness in covenant with Jesus Christ and the Father (see 1 Corinthians 15:22-28; Revelation 21:22). This is what earthly human marriage is meant to depict.

The marriage union of oneness experienced in our physical lifetime today is a type of humankind’s ultimate marriage to Christ that will never end (Ephesians 5:31-32). So by the design and will of God, the divine institution of marriage is forever! Again, not the particular marital unions of today but marriage itself. (Still, we will no doubt remain close to our earthly spouse and others we are close to in this life throughout eternity in God’s divine family.)

Be sure to learn more about what God intended in the marital union in our eye-opening free study guide *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*.

that accompany the falling-in-love experience are brought on by a naturally orchestrated, drastic change in brain chemistry . . . Our brain becomes saturated with a love cocktail comprised of PEA [phenylethylamine] and several other excitatory neurotransmitters, including dopamine and norepinephrine . . . Infatuation is nature’s way of getting you to meet, mate, procreate, and produce healthy offspring” (pp. 28-31).

This represents what we call “falling in love.” Bells ring. Whistles scream. Suddenly two are in love! The taste for food and drink diminishes. Other material desires dissipate. Remember that God’s instruction to a man and woman was to multiply and fill the earth? This is how it all begins. God has ingrained within us the drive to marry and have children. Thunderstruck, we throw logic to the wind. Wisdom can wait, right?

This initial feeling is often misunderstood as the way a marriage will continue “til death do us part.” When it doesn’t, some jump ship, sometimes into “shark-infested waters.” Not a good move.

Infatuation is only the first step to a true or lasting love. When the honeymoon is over, that’s when true love begins. True love takes dedicated work, exercising conscientious efforts to care for your spouse. This isn’t always easy. If it were, everyone would do it. There would be no divorce.

Why isn’t this easy? Because human flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41; 2 Corinthians 12:9), and corrupted human nature through Satan’s influence makes us even weaker and resistant to what’s right (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 8:7; Ephesians 2:2). These are hard thoughts to accept, though they are nevertheless true.

How then can we go beyond the honeymoon stage and keep our marriages happy and healthy? Here are some actions that may seem small, but God said that if we’re faithful in small things, He will give us greater things.

Five ways to build a good marriage

Let’s consider some practical ways to enjoy the blessings of a good working marriage. The five pointers listed here are a good starting point. With further thought and study, you can make your own list to include many more.

1. *Be each other’s best friend.*

Is your spouse your best friend? If so, you might already be doing what follows here.

Be creative about making time for each other. Spend time together at home and wherever you go—and time alone with each other when you can. If you have young children, it may be a challenge to go out on dates. But try to find times for that, perhaps lunch or dinner out, maybe asking close friends or family to watch your kids. During these dates, leave the problems behind and focus on what you love and like most about your husband or wife. This is no time to argue or compete. Ask about your spouse, what his or her goals are and how you can serve as a better partner. This works.

Marriage is not a 50/50 proposition. God expects us to give *100 percent* to one’s marriage partner. Your husband or wife is



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the closest to you of all people—who has your back at all times. Show kindness, sensitivity and generosity in little ways. Give your husband or wife your attention, consideration and love. Next to God, make your spouse the center of your world—again, your best friend!

2. *Help and provide for each other.*

One way to deepen your friendship is by helping to meet each other’s needs and wants.

Husbands, if your wife asks or even hints about some needs around the house, like cleaning out the garage or a room in the house, or for help in the kitchen after a meal, set yourself to do these things.

With our demanding society and job requirements, it’s easy to work eight hours and then come home and crash, asking

your wife to bring you a cold drink and serve you dinner in front of the television. If you want a happier marriage, try fulfilling your wife's wishes around the house. And take her out shopping—for herself. As actor John Candy said in the 1987 movie *Planes, Trains & Automobiles*, "Like your job; love your wife."

Wives, if your husband asks for something in the home that might improve it and you can accommodate that, try to do so. Your husband might not talk much about his desires, but that doesn't mean he doesn't think about them.

Find ways to help meet your spouse's needs and longings. He or she has likely already hinted about them. Showing love for one another in this way will help keep loving feelings alive. God tells us, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life" (Proverbs 13:12).

3. *Comfort each other.*

At times, one or both of the partners in a marriage will feel badly about some circumstance. It might be deeply traumatic, such as the loss of a family member or friend. As the closest friends to one another, husbands and wives are there to help and comfort one another always, especially during hard times.

Of course, our foremost reliance in everything is on God. And we should be praying to Him for help and guidance, each spouse praying for one another, as well as husband and wife praying to God together. You might also consider asking friends or a good counselor about ways to comfort your spouse through difficulties.

Do not sell short the opportunity to comfort your spouse in times of stress or grief. Ask God to help you provide the comfort he or she needs during challenging times.

4. *Have fun together.*

Of course, marriage is not just about sharing the hard times—it's also about enjoying good times together.

An important way to deepen a loving friendship with your spouse is to take the time to have fun together. It's the gift that keeps on giving. People love to laugh, a wonderful activity that's healthy for us in our marriages.

One husband said his wife always seemed to laugh *at* him, not necessarily *with* him. He took it in stride: "There's no extra charge for laughing at me!" He told her that if he'd known how funny he was, he would have been a comedian. She said he already was! Be grateful for the small gifts God has given you, and try not to take yourself too seriously.

And find fun things to do together, whether just the two of you or with family and friends. It could be playing cards, dancing, bowling, dining out, sporting activities, shopping, jigsaw puzzles, taking walks, sharing a hobby, entertaining others, playing video games, visiting attractions, to name but a few.

You can even have fun in the two of you sitting down at the table and jotting down activities you can enjoy together. Enjoy one another's company and make some good memories.

5. *Be sweet to each other.*

Something most wives want is for their husbands to be sweet to them. "Sweet" here might sound feminine to many men, but it just means treating someone with caring and sensitive kindness. Speak to and treat your spouse in a thoughtful and endearing way. That's being sweet.

Can a man be sweet? In a book of the Bible devoted to love between a man and woman, we see the man saying to the woman, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me" (Song of Solomon 2:10, New International Version). And he offers much more praise besides—as the woman also does to him.

Husbands and wives should call one another by such endearing terms and let each know how precious they are to the other—speaking words of love and praise. This does not mean saying sweet words in the ear to get what we want. We should say sweet words of honor to our spouses and mean them.

One husband remarked that his wife wanted to hear him say something sweet to her more than once, and even at least once a day. That's not asking too much. Successful marriages are built in part on saying kind and sweet words to each other.

Remember, then, to be your husband or wife's best friend, to help and provide for each other in even little things, to comfort one another, to have fun together and to be sweet to each other. These are vital ingredients to a happier and healthier marriage—to make your marriage last through this physical life and, in maintaining covenant commitment and care, helping prepare you for life in the ultimate spiritual marriage relationship with Christ that will continue on forever. **BT**





LEARN MORE

God's Word has a great deal more to say about marriage and family—and you need to know it! We've compiled much of its guidance into a free study guide, *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*. Download or request your own copy today!

BTmagazine.org/booklets

What Is God's Family Model?



As the family goes, so goes a nation.
The family model undergirds all peace-
loving societies. It was instituted by God for
a grand purpose and will live on forever!

by Jerold Aust

In leaving office the 40th U.S. president, Ronald Reagan, highlighted where great national changes come from: “Let me offer lesson number one about America: All great change in America begins at the dinner table” (Farewell Address to the Nation, Jan. 11, 1989).

Additionally, Pope John Paul II had offered a similar lesson in Perth, Australia, about the importance of the family: “As the family goes, so goes the nation, and so goes the whole world in which we live” (Homily, Nov. 30, 1986).

Has the family model changed in recent history? The Pew Research Center reports: “The classic nuclear family, the kind imprinted on the American imagination by TV shows like *Leave It to Beaver*, has been left behind. In 1960, 37% of households included a married couple raising their own children. More than a half-century later, just 16% of households look like that” (Jens Krogstad, “5 Facts About the Modern American Family,” *PewResearch.org*, April 30, 2014).

What about today’s families? How many families do you know that exhibit Christian characteristics such as presented in Scripture? The apostle Paul counseled: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord” (Colossians 3:18-20).

Just what is the best family model? And to what does the human family ultimately point? Let’s explore the family model from a few perspectives—families of old, families today and the Bible’s family model.

Discerning good family qualities amid changing values

Stop and think for a moment about some of the families you’re acquainted with. What are some of the more outstanding characteristics you’ve observed? How many families appear to have it all together?

Can you remember what made you feel a particular family was a stable and successful one? Was it because a peaceful atmosphere pervaded interactions? Was it that family members laughed together a lot or said “Please” and “Thank you” often? Did you leave their presence wishing you had what they had but felt unable to describe or emulate their example?

A great many people look to media portrayals of families, whether in dramas, sitcoms or even the news, but what is considered typical or ideal has certainly changed. Media reflects societal change but is also a driving force in it. Should that be our template for a happy, productive and healthy family?

Do modern television characterizations of the family model trump time-tested values and concepts of a strong family? Well-intentioned and sincere people quote media as if it were

the gospel truth on various subjects. Of course, the Bible is gospel truth; media isn't. Entertainment media is increasingly involved in politics while eyeing the almighty dollar. Its purveyors don't just report the news; they make or remake the news. And the mainstream news media often does the same.

The media industry is motivated by big money, amorality or making up one's morals on the fly, and the gullibility of well-meaning viewers who can be influenced to accept what can become a new normal.

Modern Family vs. Father Knows Best

Let's observe the cultural shift that has occurred by comparison. First consider a present-day television family model—that of the show *Modern Family*. The Wikipedia entry on the program gives this description:

Modern Family is a mockumentary family sitcom that revolves around three different types of families (nuclear, step, and same-sex families) living in the Los Angeles area, who are interrelated through [patriarch] Jay Pritchett . . . [who] is remarried to a much younger woman, Gloria . . . with whom he has an infant son . . . and a son from Gloria's previous marriage . . .

"Jay's daughter Claire was a homemaker, but has returned to the business world . . . She is married to Phil Dunphy, a realtor and self-professed 'cool dad.' They have three children . . . a stereotypical ditzy teenage girl . . . a nerdy, smart [girl, and] . . . the off-beat only son. Jay's lawyer son Mitchell and *his husband* Cameron Tucker have one daughter."

The term mockumentary is fitting. Such a production uses a fictional setting to analyze and parody current issues. What's concerning is the power of the media to introduce and help establish a new societal norm. How does this so-called new norm compare with the old family norm?

Many modern family models have become quite warped. Does the Bible offer any examples that can serve as humanity's idyllic family model?

Of course, families from time immemorial have lacked God's high moral standards, many failing in providing vital godly instruction, as God commanded ancient Israel (see Deuteronomy 5:29; 6:6-7). Even so, biblical values were a major influence in America until several decades ago.

And when one considers how the family model has changed in more recent times, the entertainment model of those past decades can be loosely considered a good one. Take, for example, the old TV family production *Father Knows Best*. Author and fatherhood coach Elliott Katz wrote the following in a *USA Today* column just before Father's Day a couple years ago:

"The TV show *Father Knows Best* has come to symbolize the stereotyped gender roles of the 1950s. The father, Jim Anderson, worked as an insurance agent while his wife, Margaret, stayed home. Their three well-behaved children . . . loved and respected their parents . . . In each episode Jim came home and dealt with problems . . . [And] following their father's wise advice, the problems were resolved.

"Over the past decade when the role of fathers is discussed,

Father Knows Best is often cited as reflecting gender roles so out of date there isn't anything today's father could learn from the show. I disagree. As I watch the show today, I see important lessons for fathers that address common complaints wives have about husbands. These complaints include not paying enough attention to what is going on at home and not helping sufficiently with parenting—the kind of tensions that can lead to breakups.

"Jim Anderson was a very involved father. In each episode, he was aware of situations at home that needed to be dealt with, and he dealt with them. Though it might be unrealistic to portray a father as being able to solve every problem, the important lesson for today's fathers is that Jim stepped forward and got involved. He didn't ignore what was going on in his home and expect his wife to handle it" ("Father Knows Best, Even in 2016," June 16, 2016).

Modern critics are usually somewhat sarcastic and condescending regarding older family models like this. But as Katz notes, there remains much of value here.

Older does not necessarily mean outdated, and that is especially true with certain godly examples passed down from ancient times.

Scriptural example: Abraham and Sarah

God's Word, the Bible, gives us no example of a perfect human family—as people are flawed and limited, and even great people of faith struggled with family issues impacted by their own sins and the problems of the culture in which they lived. Nevertheless, there are examples of a godly family model in the Bible we should learn from and follow in many respects.

Let's briefly explore the example of the early patriarch Abraham and his wife Sarah. This couple showed some high-quality characteristics rarely seen today.

Abraham and Sarah exemplified true faithfulness to God despite their human weaknesses. And God worked with them, remaking them into a good family model that echoes through four millennia.

Despite some shortcomings as a husband and father, Abraham's obedience, faith, hospitality and effective intercession were exemplary. God said of him, "For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice" (Genesis 18:19). And furthermore: "Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Genesis 26:5).

He was human and susceptible to the weakness of the flesh. But above this, he exhibited godly character and worked at putting God first in His life, coming to be called the friend of God and father of the faithful (James 2:23; Romans 4:11).

When God first told Abraham that he would have children, Sarah led him to try to rush things along by a surrogate mother—a situation that later resulted in Sarah becoming jealous and behaving harshly (Genesis 15-16). Later, when God told Abraham that Sarah would bear him a son, she initially laughed because of their advanced age (Genesis 18:10-15).

Building Godly Families: Aspects to Strive For

Let's consider some solid characteristics of the godly family model:

- The father is the leader of the family. His responsibility includes caring for his wife as Christ cares for the Church (Ephesians 5:23).
- The mother is his suitable help (Genesis 2:18), and together they set the best example for their children while teaching them the way of God (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).
- Father and mother should work in harmony to train their children in God's way.
- Children follow their parents' good example, since actions speak louder than words. Kids learn more from what their parents do than what they say.
- Parents should avoid belittling their children, publically and privately, lest you discourage them (Colossians 3:21).
- Parents should encourage their children to strive for excellence in character, in their studies and in their future profession.
- Parents should sacrifice for each other and for their children.
- As with all members of the Church, husbands and wives should submit to one another in humility, patience and love (Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5).
- Parents should always make time for their children since the greatest gift parents can give to their children is themselves and their time. Life passes by quickly; there's no time to waste (Ephesians 5:15-16).
- Parents are stewards for future sons of God, as God said of Abraham (Genesis 18:19).
- Parents should not curse or swear. Children will take to swearing because they are impressed with and by their parents and will view cursing as acceptable.
- Parents should turn their children to God who has given human beings life on His earth and sustained us with His bounties.
- Parents should always tell their children that they love them and that they will stand by them and be there for them for the rest of their lives. This is very important.
- Parents should read the Bible to their children and pray with them daily.

Yet it was through faith that Sarah received the ability to have a child past childbearing years (Hebrews 11:11-12). She became a model of inner beauty through a precious gentle spirit and of devoted submission to her husband in marriage (1 Peter 3:1-7). And she and Abraham together raised a godly and obedient son, Isaac.

Such qualities of character and family life transcend time, location and culture. And what we see in the family life of Abraham and Sarah is typical of the best families in the Bible.

Although there are other good examples of families in the Bible, there's a particular family model pre-

Every human being must come to understand this fact: God, through His wisdom and love, instituted the family unit. He is the Author of the perfect family model. He created the first man and woman, united them as one flesh, and exhorted them to be fruitful and multiply, to have children (Genesis 1:27-28; 2:23-24).

Of course, not all married couples are able to have children—and God understands that. There are nonetheless many blessings and much to be gained and learned in the marriage relationship, which pictures a higher spiritual reality (see “A Higher Purpose in Marriage” on page 7).



Parents should make time for their children since the greatest gift they can give to their children is themselves and their time.

sented in Scripture that's being formed now to ultimately become the perfect family of God forever! Are you a part of the godly family model now being remade more fully in God's image?

Human family a type of God's spiritual family

God the Father and Jesus Christ His Son are now creating Their family model through human beings who desire to honor Them. This model began with Them. As the Son of God and man, Jesus loved and honored His Father with all of His heart, mind and soul. This is the key to the godly family that puts God first in everything.

Still, producing and rearing children is a major reason for the creation of marriage. Malachi 2:15 states: “But did He not make them one . . . And why one? He seeks godly offspring.”

God further tells us to train our children in His ways (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; see Proverbs 22:6) and that children are a heritage from Him (Psalm 127:3). Indeed, all children belong to God—and He has placed them in our care to raise them properly (see “Building Godly Families: Aspects to Strive For”).

The best family model on earth, at this point, is found in the New Covenant Church of God: “. . . But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in



at present, because human beings are not perfect. God works with us who are imperfect and flawed people in order to perfect or mature us in His holy way of life. This leads us to God’s grand goal of His future family.

God’s ultimate family in Heavenly Jerusalem


We catch a glimpse of the final and ultimate state of God’s family in the vision the apostle John was given of the New Jerusalem, the Holy City that God the Father will bring down from heaven to the earth:

“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away . . . Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

“And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away’” (Revelation 21:1-4).

Perfection at last—with no more troubles!

This is the supreme family model that Almighty God through Christ Jesus will bring about. And since God’s desire is to save all people (1 Timothy 2:4), He will ultimately accomplish bringing multiple billions into His divine family model in the New Jerusalem—as the stars in the sky and sand on the seashore.

The family model today was instituted by God and is a type of the ultimate divine family God has planned for all humankind—a family that will last forever! 

all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:15-16).

The apostle Paul showed that God is building His growing family here on earth: “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the *household of God*, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, *grows into a holy temple* in the Lord, in whom *you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit*” (Ephesians 2:19-22; see also 3:14-15).

God, through Christ Jesus, is remaking His called-out ones in this life to become His holy family forever! He reshapes our thinking, speaking and actions to be transformed into His way of life (Romans 12:2).

No family on earth today is perfect, and that includes God’s spiritual family



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Sex, Sin and the Pursuit of PURITY

What you can do to flee wrong thinking and influences
and strongly pursue a life of true, godly purity?

by Gary Petty and Steve Myers

It's a beautiful sight to see a crystal clear river, lake, or even an ocean. Just look at the water and you can see straight down to the bottom. There is no silt, no debris—just clear, clean water.

Our minds can be like that water. If we pursue what's good, our minds can be like crystal clear water, with nothing polluting them.

But it can be a struggle for all of us to be consistent Christians—to maintain purity in our minds. What can we do? There are practical things that we can do to sustain godly purity or to attain purity when we've fallen short.

You try to attend church services every week. You listen to the sermons. You may read of biblical examples illustrating the kind of person you're supposed to be.

You know what's right, but why so often does wrong seem acceptable? Maybe it's not things that look blatantly evil, but those things we tend to justify, ignore or convince ourselves aren't really that bad.

You might say: I don't cheat on my spouse. But maybe you look at a little porn. Yet that's not *really* cheating, right?

Or you might think: I'm not an alcoholic. But maybe you drink a bit too much at times. It's not *really* that big of a sin, is it?

Societal influences around us are powerful. Human nature impacts our choices. And we may end up giving in to thoughts and actions we shouldn't—and then all too often rationalizing our behavior. The lines blur between right and wrong, between our immediate wants and what God commands for our good.

How can we be more consistent as Christians? "Can right and wrong be partners? Can light have anything in common with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14, God's Word Translation).

Can we be marginal Christians and still claim to truly be

Christian? Is there a happy medium between doing what's right and sin? God says *no*. And all of us need to develop clear thinking on this matter and strive with His help to remain pure!

Resist compromising

Here's a paraphrase of God's instruction in this context: "So leave the corruption and compromise; leave it for good," says God. "Don't link up with those who will pollute you. I want you all for myself. I'll be a Father to you; you'll be sons and daughters to me" (verses 17-18, The Message).

We're told that such compromise is not acceptable to God. We can't be okay with things that pollute us or simply try to ignore them. A little pollution is still toxic. We're constantly challenged by impurity that surrounds us.

Impurity comes in so many different forms. You may be someone who views pornography on the Internet. Perhaps you're a young mom who watches "mildly" scandalous movies while your children sleep. Or maybe you're a grandmother who reads racy romance novels.

Again, these are all very different activities, but they're all forms of the same thing—*impurity*. Even though we may think it's minor, don't be fooled. The Word of God describes it as a very serious problem. Notice what the Bible says: "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people" (Ephesians 5:3, New International Version).

We must remove every bit of these things from our lives! What's more, it's not enough just to oppose evil—we must also *do good*. We have to replace these negative activities with the positive ones. We have to *change our mind*, transform

our thinking, so that our actions will be different.

Tinted streams

Here's another way to think of it, returning to our opening analogy of clear water: Our minds can be compared to a river, with thoughts that flow through it like the water in a stream. Have you noticed that waterways have interesting features? They have many different colors.

Take China's Yellow River, for instance. Why is it called yellow? It crosses a plateau that's blanketed with almost 1,000 feet of fine, yellowish wind-blown soil that it picks up along the way.

The Rio de la Plata is a brownish color. That's because of sediment the river has carried from the Parana and Uruguay rivers. It flows into the beautiful blue waters of the South Atlantic Ocean.

The Sava River in Slovenia has a water color that's always murky gray-green. This color comes from certain minerals in the riverbed.

And then there's the Black River in Alaska. It gets its name-sake dark color partly because of organic material it flows over.

What's the connection with the way that we think?

Just as these rivers are colored by the substances they pick up as they flow along, so are the streams of our minds. Our thoughts are shaded by the material we channel into our minds. Just as a river is tinted by what it touches, so *our minds are affected by what we see, by what we read and by the things we hear.*

Evil—pornography, immoral or immodest people, bad language and the like—can taint our thinking, and more so with

Just as a river is tinted by what it touches,
so our minds are affected by what we see,
by what we read and by the things we hear.

more exposure. If we're not careful, as with that tinged river water these things will stain our minds to an off color. Instead of clean, clear thoughts, they'll turn cloudy, yellow, black or green! It becomes a silty mess that separates us from the kind of person we really want to be.

Flee the ways of this world

We know we should avoid all things that stir up wrong thinking and attack our spirituality. So when an immoral or wicked thought enters our minds, no matter how small, *we must wash it out immediately.* Yet it's difficult because we live in a world overflowing with evil!

Like those rivers that run, we have to be Christians who run. What does that mean? Again and again the Bible instructs us that we should run. What are we running from? We're told to *flee sexual sin, flee idolatry, flee the love of money and desire for material things, and flee youthful lusts* (1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:14; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:22).

So if we are true people of God, we have to keep on fleeing—continually be on the run. We must constantly run from wrong influences and environments and circumstances conducive to sin!

The original Greek word for "flee" in the cited passages is *pheugo*. In fact, the word "fugitive" derives from that word. So

the Bible doesn't simply compare us to a sprinter running on a track. We have to be like someone who is *running to escape a pursuer.*

Think of it this way: Sin is chasing us, and we have to run. Like running from an attacking enemy, or running from a dangerous animal—we *have to run from the ways of this world.* In fact, not just once in a while, not occasionally, not just every so often. Rather, at all times Christians must be runners. We can't stand still. We must flee those things that would taint us and corrupt us. And of course, it's possible to succeed!

Overcoming addiction to sin

Being distracted by wayward pleasures around us is a common affliction for many people today. Let's be honest with ourselves. Let's not label them simply "pleasures"—they are sin! Being distracted by *sin* is a common affliction today. All too often, we justify ourselves when we do what's not right.

Here's the challenge: We have a tendency to convince ourselves that all is fine. We think: "Well, I'm not as bad as some people. Certainly, I'm not as bad as that guy there. I'm not addicted like he is." So we kid ourselves and try to minimize the issue—reasoning that some things we do are just "little sins," not "big sins."

But Jesus Himself said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34). It's true that not every sin leads to an automatic addiction. But think of this: We are all addicted—not just to this sin or that, *but to sin itself.*

We're told that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9, English Standard Version). You see, our normal, natural, everyday heart is extremely sick and addicted to sin. So what can we do?

Even though all Christians should be runners, it's not enough just to flee from evil. While continually running from wrong, we must also constantly be running toward what's right. "Turn away from what is sinful. Do what is good. Look for peace and go after it" (1 Peter 3:11, New Life Version).

God gives us the pattern. He tells us again, in other words, "See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all" (1 Thessalonians 5:15).

Pursue what is good

Yes, there are things coming after us—sins that are out to get us—that we must avoid. But there's something ahead of us that we want to catch. Scripture is clear that we must continually be pursuing, constantly chasing, always running *after what's right.*

As Christians, we're not only fleeing from the negative but we're replacing that negative by pursuing the positive and chasing what's godly—the good things.

In a nutshell, our life is not just running from what's wrong, it's running toward and replacing it *with what's right.*

The lesson is: If we stop running from what is evil, *it's going to catch us.* If we stop pursuing what is righteous, *it will elude us.* So it's not just a lesson for those addicted to drugs, alcohol, porn or anything else. In this life, we as Christians will never

be at a point where we've run so far that we've finally outdistanced what's wrong. And it's also true that we'll never be at the point where we've fully captured what's right.

How do you think God feels toward those who strive to run from sin and pursue righteousness? He "loves the one who pursues righteousness" (Proverbs 15:9, New Revised Standard Version, emphasis added). That's what Scripture says. He loves those who strive to catch what is good in their lives.

We have to ask ourselves: What do I pursue? Where do I direct my energy? What is it that occupies my mind? Is life simply about success, promotion and possessions? You see, that's the question: Are we really chasing what's spiritual?

Paul told Timothy to pursue "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, [and] gentleness" (1 Timothy 6:11). Said another way, we should pursue "peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

That's the sign of a Christian—shown both by what they run *from* and by what they run *after*. Most importantly, we should realize that *God has not called us to fail but to succeed*. He is on our side! We can overcome even those so-called "little" sins. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6, NIV). That's a promise! God can and will help us to overcome.

The blessings are worth the effort

When we repent, and commit ourselves and our thinking to God and trust in Him with a faithful heart, He guarantees to help us through the struggles and the obstacles of life. "Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31:6).

God tells us to be passionate and say "yes!" to the good things—because it's worth it! Just think of the emotional benefits—freedom from the guilt, freedom from emotional wounds that would scar us for life, freedom from worry, fear and anxiety.

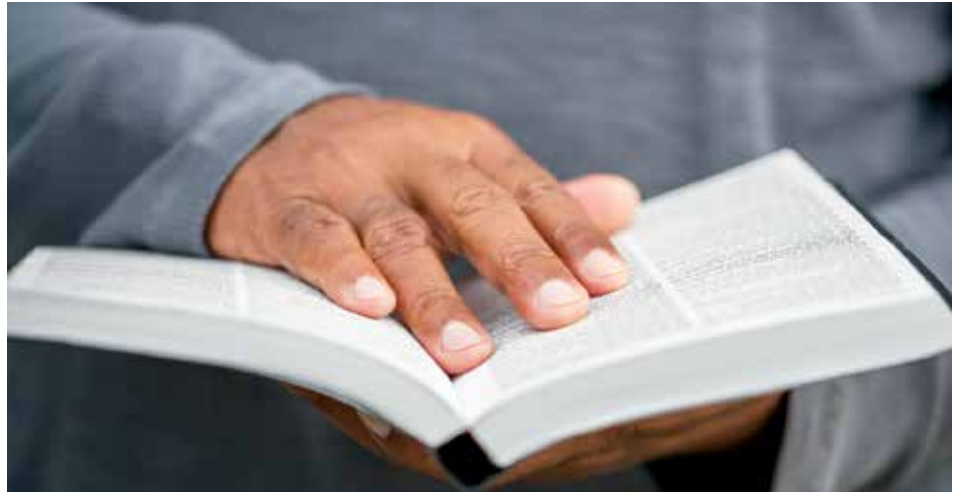
The blessings don't stop there. When we pursue purity it changes our relationships. It changes our values. It transforms our character and even changes how we view ourselves.

Most importantly, *it changes our relationship with God*. We no longer have to be marginal Christians. We can have a pure conscience before God. We see His perfect, clear will for our own life, and we're motivated to have a right, pure, growing relationship with Him in every way. That's the kind of purity that's within reach. You don't have to feel that you're out there on your own with no help. God is there and ready and willing to help you!

There is no perfect Christian, and none of us can do this

ourselves. In fact, Paul said, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1).

A sacrifice was killed. So a living sacrifice just means that we dedicate every bit of our lives to learning and growing in becoming Christlike and in doing what's pleasing to God. Paul goes on:




How do you think God feels toward those who strive to run from sin and pursue righteousness? "The LORD loves the one who pursues righteousness," He says.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). The renewing of our mind requires God's Spirit. We can get discouraged. We're all addicted to sin in one form or another, but we can overcome sin through the power of God's Spirit dwelling in us.

There is real hope. You don't have to kid yourself that wrong choices are not really sins or that somehow "living in the gray area" is okay. We can't honestly claim to be Christian if we live in constant compromise between wrong desires and purity. "All those who focus their hopes on Him and His coming seek to purify themselves just as He is pure" (1 John 3:3, The Voice).

Let's be dedicated to stop hurting ourselves and wholeheartedly seek what's best. We can have clean, clear minds, free of debris and silt, and have crystal-clear waters of a pure heart. God assures us that with His help and guidance, change is possible.

Let's make it our aim to run from anything and everything that leads to wrong and to instead pursue what is good and godly! 



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The War on Marriage & Family

Forces are at war in the world attacking marriage—which in turn threatens the survival of the family. You need to know what the battlefields are in this warfare and what God would have you to do about it!

by John LaBissoniere

It's often been noted, and rightly so, that the family is the central building block of human civilization. And the vital foundation of the family is the solid and secure marriage of a man and woman who are fully bonded together in mind and heart for a lifetime (see Romans 7:2). Marriage also unites parents with any children they may have, providing a solid foundation for the stable development of the next generation.

When the underpinning of the marriage relationship is strong and secure in individual marriages, it portends great blessings and advantages for the future of society. However, when the basis of family and marriage begins deteriorating, the entire society experiences the ruinous effects, threatening its very existence.

Sadly, we are witnessing this very state of affairs in nations around the world today. This is because there's an all-out war being waged against marriage and family, inflamed by the sinister unseen spiritual forces of Satan the devil and his demons.

We are currently witnessing the greatest attempt ever made to subvert the institution of marriage, one that threatens to annihilate the traditional family. Indeed, right now multiple millions of men and women are allowing themselves—either by choice or ignorance—to fall into a nefarious trap that will bring only suffering and sorrow. The battlefields in this warfare are many, and you need to know where they are, what they portend for society and what God would have His faithful people do.

The combat zones in this war include several harrowing frontlines of advancing corruption and destruction, such as the sexual hook-up culture, cohabiting couples, the prevalence of divorce, the normalization of homosexual behavior and same-sex marriage, transgenderism and efforts to completely eliminate gender identity. We will examine each of these so you will be better informed as to what's going on—and what God's Word says about it.

God's divine purposes for marriage and family

The marital union is both a natural and divine institution established by God (Genesis 2:24). He created marriage and family so that human beings could learn to love one another as He loves them (Ephesians 5:25-33).

When our eternal Creator designed sex (see Genesis 1:27; 2:18, 24), He intended it as a pure and wonderful way for a husband and wife to express love for each other and intimately bond together in the matrimonial relationship. It is also a means for a couple to conceive and bring children into a warm, tender and joyful family relationship (Genesis 1:28; Malachi 2:15).

Also, when God created human reproduction through sex in marriage to populate the earth, it included His ultimate intention to bring “many children to glory” (Hebrews 2:10, New Living Translation). He is in fact adding members to His family by providing the potential for people to eventually receive eternal divine life in His coming Kingdom (Romans 8:16). Further, the devoted relationship between a husband and wife is meant to reflect the loving relationship between Jesus Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:31-32).

Therefore, considering what marriage and family portray spiritually, we should see that God has designed the sexual relationship *only* for a husband and wife in a steadfast, loving, lifelong marriage (Genesis 2:24). Any sexual liaison outside of what God originally intended in marriage debases, dishonors and corrupts the vitally important family relationship (1 Corinthians 6:15-20).

The troubled world in which we live

The Bible calls the acts of premarital sex and adultery *sin*—the breaking of God's commandments (1 John 3:4). God will not allow into His Kingdom any who do not repent of such sins (1 Corinthians 6:18; Hebrews 13:4; Revelation 21:8). So at creation, the Eternal God set in motion His holy purposes for



marriage and sex. Anyone attempting to contradict or work outside of His flawless aims will bring severe penalties on themselves.

Indeed, we see such disastrous outcomes occurring in people's lives throughout society. The breaking of God's holy laws involving sex and marriage has created an alarming firestorm of family breakdowns, severe unhappiness, physical and mental health afflictions and financial losses. In total disregard of God's pure intention for sex, it has regrettably become cheap, common and anything but special in today's world.

Movies and television shows constantly push the concept that permissive sexuality in any form is not only acceptable but desirable. Viewers incessantly receive the ill-conceived, destructive message that sex between any consenting adults is physically and emotionally enjoyable and can occur without "strings." Sadly, huge numbers of people believe this terrible lie and are suffering intensely as a result.

Let's examine several specific societal developments that are undermining marriage and family. Also, from the perspective of perfect Holy Scripture and helpful secular sources, we'll assess the pernicious toll these developments are taking on individuals and society.

Today's "hookup" culture

A hookup culture, according to Wikipedia, is one that "accepts and encourages casual sexual encounters, including one-night stands and other related activity, without necessarily including emotional bonding or long-term commitment. It has also been called nonrelationship sex, or sex without dating."

In research on such casual sex, Kinsey Institute researcher Justin Garcia and his associates from Binghamton University stated that "hookups are part of a popular cultural shift that has infiltrated the lives of emerging adults throughout the Westernized world" ("Sexual Hookup Culture: A Review," National Center for Biotechnology Information, June 1, 2012, p. 171).

While this has become commonplace and increasingly accepted, what are its injurious effects in people's lives, particularly those of high school and college age? According to Dr. Susan Krauss Whitbourne, Professor Emerita of Psychological and Brain Sciences at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst:

"Hookups pose a significant threat to the physical and psychological health of these young individuals. In addition to the known risks of contracting STDs, developing unwanted pregnancies, and being raped or otherwise assaulted, people who engage in casual sex may suffer emotional consequences that persist long after the details of an encounter are a dim memory. On college campuses, where brief sexual liaisons are prevalent, unanticipated results can jeopardize a student's career. In the workplace, the results can be just as disastrous, if not more so" ("How Casual Sex Can Affect Our Mental Health," *Psychology Today*, posted March 9, 2013, emphasis added throughout).

Jim Daly, president of Focus on the Family, wrote: "When we discuss the growing trends of young people engaging in the 'hookup culture'—we often speak of the damage it does to

girls. There's good reason for that, obviously—young women often feel great pressure to go along with certain behaviors and later pay a high price for it in terms of sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy and emotional wounds.

"But what about the young men? The hookup culture . . . causes them to have a low and inhumane view of sexuality (often from pornography) which then hurts their general life skills for years and years to come . . . A boy who takes part in random sexual acts doesn't learn what is good, healthy, respectful and God-ordained. He's being conditioned for underperformance, as he won't be able to exercise self-control or a desire to pursue well in other areas of his life. His chances



God plainly states that He *hates* divorce since it is a scourge that tremendously harms individuals, families, communities and society in general.

to build and lead a home later on are also negatively impacted . . . A boy's ability to enter into a safe, trusting relationship—of any kind—is atrophied" ("The Hookup Culture Also Hurts Our Boys," *Daily Focus*, Sept. 10, 2013).

Cohabitation—living together outside of marriage

Another crippling societal development subverting marriage is cohabitation, which involves couples living together and having a sexual relationship without being married. Regrettably, this has become so prevalent in society that few people give it a second thought.

In 2001 the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University of New Jersey conducted a comprehensive study of cohabitation. Its 20-page, highly documented and footnoted report concluded that: "Despite its widespread acceptance by the young, the remarkable growth of unmarried cohabitation in recent years does not appear to be in children's or the society's best interest. The evidence suggests that *it has weakened marriage and the intact, two-parent family and thereby damaged our social wellbeing, especially that of women and children*" (David Popenoe and Barbara Defoe, "Should We Live Together? What Young Adults Need to Know About Cohabitation Before

Marriage,” The National Marriage Project, 2002).

The report noted that a nationwide survey that year found that two thirds of young adults believed that moving in together before marriage was a good way to avoid divorce. The American College of Pediatricians commented on this mistaken notion as part of a comprehensive report on the overall effects of cohabitation:

“Contrary to the current perception of many adolescents and young adults who view cohabitation as a substitute for marriage or as a stepping stone to a more secure marriage, studies show that *cohabiting unions are more likely to dissolve than marriages that were not preceded by cohabitation. Cohabiting unions are more likely to involve infidelity and also more likely to involve violence.*

“Furthermore, children, whether born prior to, during, or after parental cohabitation, *are at increased risk for negative [outcomes] including premature birth, school failure, lower education, more poverty during childhood and lower incomes as adults, more incarceration and behavior problems, single parenthood, medical neglect and chronic health problems both medical and psychiatric, more substance, alcohol and tobacco abuse, and child abuse. Cohabiting women are also more likely to choose to end their child’s life prior to birth*” (“Cohabitation: Effects of Cohabitation on the Men and Women Involved,” American College of Pediatricians, March 2015).

Beyond these troublesome conclusions, it’s vital to note that God’s Word describes such living arrangements and relationships as inherently wrong and patently immoral. This is because sex outside of marriage is completely contrary to the way of life God requires of us (Matthew 15:19-20; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21).

The epidemic of divorce

Tragically, divorce has reached epidemic proportions in many industrialized nations. For example, Divorce.com reports the following divorce rates for first-time marriages: United Kingdom, 53 percent; United States, 49 percent; Canada, 45 percent; France, 43 percent; Germany, 41 percent; Netherlands 41 percent.

Although the results of marital breakups differ in severity, there are similarities in the pain involved. For example, various aspects of a couple’s identity are lost after divorce—such as where one lives, what school the children will attend, and the friends, neighbors and relatives with whom the couple had associated.

Women often experience greater financial distress following divorce since they often are awarded custody of the children and are responsible for most household expenses. This may mean moving to a smaller residence, having less spending money and living paycheck-to-paycheck without an emergency fund. According to the *American Sociological Review*, women often do not fully recover from financial losses unless or until they remarry (“The Effect of Marriage and Divorce on Women’s Economic Well-Being,” 1999, Vol. 64, pp. 794-812).

Also, due to the emotional stress of divorce, a woman’s physical health can be at great risk from threats such as heart conditions and cancer. Divorced women often experience higher levels of anxiety, depression, anger and loneliness that can last for years.

A paper titled “The Influence of Divorce on Men’s Health,” published in the September 2013 issue of the *Journal of Men’s Health*, stated that after divorce men are more prone to deep depression and to abusing alcohol and drugs. The suicide risk for a divorced man is 39 percent higher than that for a married man. It was also stated that divorced men are at higher risk for physical health problems including cancer, heart attack and stroke.

Besides the aftereffects of divorce on the former husband and wife, their children will also suffer greatly. The *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development* states: “Numerous studies have found that parental separation and divorce is associated with a range of negative outcomes for younger children and adolescents across various domains. Parental separation/divorce is associated with academic difficulties, including lower grades and prematurely dropping out of school, and greater disruptive behaviors. Children and adolescents who experience the divorce of their parents also have higher rates of depressed mood, lower self-esteem, and emotional distress” (Brian D’Onofrio, Ph.D., “Consequences of Separation/Divorce for Children,” 2011).

The same source goes on to state: “Parental divorce is also associated with negative outcomes and earlier life transitions as offspring enter young adulthood and later life. Children of divorce are more likely to experience poverty, educational failure, early and risky sexual activity, non-marital childbirth, earlier marriage, cohabitation, marital discord and divorce.”

Similarly, the Marriage and Religion Research Institute published a comprehensive 48-page report on the subject, stating: “Divorce . . . permanently weakens the family and the relationship between children and parents. It frequently leads to destructive conflict management methods, diminished social competence and for children, the early loss of virginity, as well as diminished sense of masculinity or femininity for young adults. It also results in more trouble with dating, more cohabitation, greater likelihood of divorce, higher expectations of divorce later in life, and a decreased desire to have children.

“Paul Amato, professor of sociology at Pennsylvania State University summed it up: divorce leads to ‘disruptions in the parent-child relationship, continuing discord between former spouses, loss of emotional support, economic hardship, and an increase in the number of other negative life events’” (Patrick Fagan and Aaron Churchill, “The Effects of Divorce on Children,” Jan. 11, 2012).

It’s no wonder that God plainly states that He *hates* divorce, since it’s a scourge that tremendously harms individuals, families, communities and society in general (Malachi 2:16; see also Matthew 19:3-9).

Homosexual behavior and same-sex unions

The subject of homosexual behavior and same-sex marriage (or gay marriage) has been hotly debated in many countries. Over the past several years, “marriages” of same-sex couples have been recognized by law in 25 nations. Among these are Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Certainly legislators and judges in democratic countries, under the consent of the governed, have the freedom to pass



or uphold laws they believe are correct, including statutes regarding homosexual issues. However, just because something *can* be done does not inherently make it okay in the eyes of God. Also, just because something is accepted in society, such as homosexual behavior now is, does not mean it is in any way good, healthy or desirable.

Let's look at it this way: When God created the earth and all life on it, He said "it was *very good*" (Genesis 1:31). But the perfect way in which He established things *at that time* is *not* how we find them now. Why? Because when sin entered the world through the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, *everything changed*.

What was perfect became contaminated. And since then, the world has existed in a corrupted condition. Our first parents sinned by deciding *for themselves* what was right and wrong in eating fruit from "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-6).

From that time forward each succeeding generation has followed the same unwise and harmful example by *also* doing *what seemed right in their own eyes* (Proverbs 14:12; 21:2). Taking that pathway throughout history has resulted in mountains of anguish and misery that the world has heaped on itself—prodded by the devil's nefarious influence (Genesis 3:3-24; 1 John 5:19; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2; Revelation 12:9). All of this must be considered when we appraise the relative "goodness" of anything, including decisions by lawmakers and judges to approve same-sex marriage as law.

The only way to know if something is truly right is to examine it in the revealing bright light of God's Word. For example, concerning even the wording of the phrase "same-sex marriage," we need to realize that *only* our Creator has the right to define the marriage relationship.

And regarding homosexual activity itself, the Bible plainly labels it as sinful (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Of course, we should show compassion to those who have same-sex attraction and who struggle with temptation to pursue this lifestyle and are striving to avoid sin with God's help.

Much research has revealed just how perilous and destructive this lifestyle can be. For example, on March 9, 2016, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services placed the following on its website: "Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) have been rising among gay and bisexual men, with increases in syphilis being seen across the country. In 2014, gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men accounted for 83% of primary and secondary syphilis cases where sex of sex partner was known in the United States. Gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men often get other STDs, including chlamydia and gonorrhea infections."

Also, on April 5, 2018, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services posted this statement on its website: "In the United States, gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM) are the population most affected by HIV [human immunodeficiency virus, which causes AIDS]. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 67% of people diagnosed with HIV in 2015 in the United States were gay and bisexual men."

In addition Healthline.com reported in July 2016: "Depression

affects LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender] people at higher rates than the heterosexual population, and LGBT youths are more likely than heterosexual students to report high levels of drug use and feelings of depression. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is the third leading cause of death among people age 10 to 24 in the United States. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths in grades 7-12 are twice as likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers."

Despite the terrible damage it brings, the homosexual lifestyle is increasingly accepted and even promoted. Television programs in the United States overwhelmingly depict it in a positive manner. Last year the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) boasted on its website: "Of the 901 regular characters expected to appear on broadcast scripted primetime programming this season [2017], 58 (6.4%) were identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer. This is the highest percentage GLAAD has found in the history of this report."

A child who grows up having seen the homosexual lifestyle portrayed positively throughout his life will certainly be inclined to view it as normal and not harmful.

On May 2, 2016, international speaker and biblical scholar Dr. Michael Brown stated this on his website: "Children in elementary schools will be exposed to the rightness and complete normality of homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgender expression . . . Opposing views will be branded as dangerous and homophobic, to be silenced and excluded from the classroom. Middle schools, high schools, and colleges will go out of their way to encourage both the celebration of homosexuality and deep solidarity with gay activism . . ." This trend is certainly accelerating in schools throughout the land!

Homosexual behavior, which not long ago was labeled as immoral in many nations and subject to legal punishment, is now essentially exempt from public censure. If someone dares criticize it, he or she may be accused of promoting "hate speech." Nevertheless, homosexual activity and all other sexual activity outside of proper marriage between a man and woman are severe violations of God's instructions, as is made crystal clear in the Bible (see 1 Timothy 1:9-10).

Normalizing transgenderism and eliminating gender identity

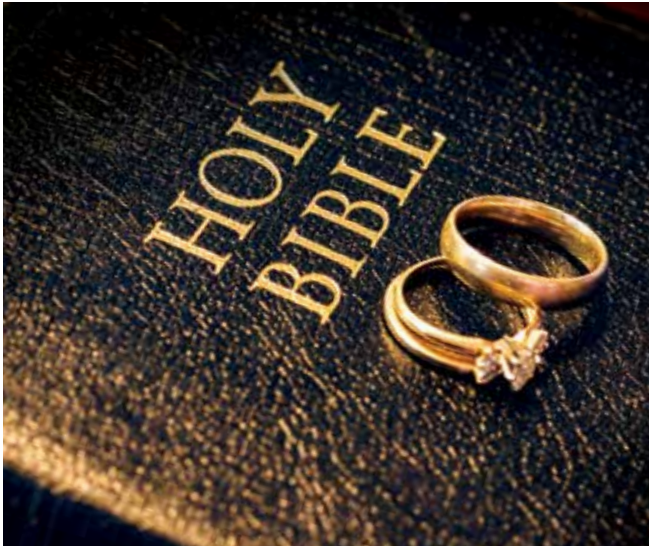
The online *Cambridge Dictionary* says the adjective transgender is "used to describe someone who feels that they are not the same gender (= sex) as the one they had or were said to have at birth." It essentially refers to men who view themselves as women and women who view themselves as men.

Some go even further in pressing for non-binary genderism, gender fluidity or even the abolition of gender altogether. Some activists contend that gender has no real validity—that the concepts of male and female are merely societal constructs. According to an article at *Curiosity.com*: "Postgenderists argue that the abolishment of gender would, in fact, be freeing, and would rid society of traditional gender roles and expectations that are largely detrimental to society" ("What Would a Post-Gender World Look Like?" March 28, 2016).

Even though some people may think or feel they are of the opposite gender from the way they were born, or desire

to be something undefined in terms of gender, we again return to the fact that when God created human beings He gave each distinct sexual identity as either male or female. Good psychiatric science understands that even though people may think they hold a different sexual identity, these are really abnormal feelings and are symptomatic of deeper psychological problems.

For example, in writing about his 40-year study of people



The only way to know if something is truly right is to examine it in the revealing light of God’s Word. *Only our Creator* has the right to define the marriage relationship.

who had gender confusion issues, Paul McHugh, M.D., former chairperson and distinguished professor of the Department of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, wrote:

“Gender dysphoria—the official psychiatric term for feeling oneself to be of the opposite sex—belongs in the family of similarly disordered assumptions about the body, such as anorexia nervosa and body dysmorphic disorder. Its treatment should not be directed at the body as with surgery and hormones any more than one treats obesity-fearing anorexic patients with liposuction.”

He went on: “The treatment should strive to correct the false, problematic nature of the assumption and to resolve the psychological conflicts provoking it. With youngsters, this is best done in family therapy” (“Transgender Surgery Isn’t the Solution,” *The Wall Street Journal*, June 12, 2014).

In discussing the current drive in the culture to cater to transgenderism, Dr. McHugh wrote: “The idea that one’s sex is fluid and a matter open to choice runs unquestioned through our culture and is reflected everywhere in the media, the theater, the classroom, and in many medical clinics. It has taken on cult-like features: its own special lingo, Internet chat rooms providing slick answers to new recruits, and clubs for easy access to dresses and styles supporting the sex change.

“It is doing much damage to families, adolescents, and

children and should be confronted as an opinion without biological foundation wherever it emerges” (“Transgenderism: A Pathogenic Meme,” *Public Discourse*, June 10, 2015).

Likewise, Dr. Richard Fitzgibbons, trained in psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania and serving as director of the Institute for Marital Healing near Philadelphia, wrote: “Transsexuals and sex-change operations are receiving a great deal of attention. Young people may seek treatment for transsexual attractions at an early age *even though these attractions may go away on their own*. Psychological conflicts have been identified in these patients and their parents and may be successfully treated.

“There are serious risks associated with sex change. They include the risk of *depressive illness and suicide*. Physicians and mental-health professionals should know these risks *and the regrets of those who have been through sex-change operations*. These patients and their families also should be informed of other treatment options” (“Transsexual Attractions and Sexual Reassignment Surgery: Risks and Potential Risks,” Institute for Marital Healing, Nov. 1, 2015).

Stand strong in a corrupt world

Our great Creator has blessed humanity with the wonderful benefit of marriage and family. When the foundation of the matrimonial relationship between husbands and wives is strong and secure, it heralds great advantages for the future of society at large. However, when the groundwork of family and marriage is destabilized, the entire society experiences the injurious effects and places its very survival at stake.

Sadly, we are witnessing this very situation today in what amounts to an all-out war against marriage and family.

Since dangerous, lawless forces are at work in our midst, we must remain vigilant in guarding against an increasingly immoral and degenerating society (Matthew 24:12; Romans 1:28-32). Therefore, let us not put our trust in the words and ideas of men, but in what the Supreme Authority of the universe reveals through His Word, the Holy Bible (2 Samuel 22:31; Philippians 4:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Thankfully God the Father will soon send His Son, Jesus Christ, to deliver the world from its self-destructive path and will heal the hearts and minds of all people (Isaiah 9:6-7). As we stand strong in the truth of God’s Word today, let’s prepare for a magnificent new world ahead where righteousness will rule forever! **BT**



LEARN MORE

The trends affecting Western society today are part of something bigger—a spiritual struggle for the future of the world! To better understand how this is foretold in the Bible, download or request our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

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Catholic Church under fire for decades of abuse coverups

Catholic bishops gathered in Rome in October 2018 “for a synod in a moment in which ‘the Church faces perhaps its gravest crisis since the Protestant Reformation in the form of the worldwide clerical sexual abuse scandals,’ according to veteran Vatican analyst John L. Allen, Jr. . . . who heads up the Catholic online news outlet *Crux*” (Thomas Williams, “Report: Catholic Church Faces Gravest Crisis Since ‘Protestant Reformation,’” *Breitbart News*, Oct. 3, 2018).

Just prior, the church was “rocked by the revelation that 3,677 children, mostly boys, fell victim to sexual abuse in Germany, implicating well over a thousand clerics over the past few decades. The new figures come from an official report commissioned at the German Bishops’ Conference in 2014, released in [late September 2018]” (Damien Sharkov, “Catholic Church Abuse Scandal: Over 3,600 Victims Revealed in New Report,” *Newsweek*, Sept. 25, 2018).

This followed news that “more than half of the Netherlands’ senior clerics were involved in covering up sexual assault of children between 1945 and 2010” (“Pope Francis Rocked by Dutch Child Abuse Scandal,” *Euronews*, Sept. 17, 2018).

In August the pope visited Ireland amid the outrage there, as “Ireland has had one of the worst records of abuse in the world . . . A series of government-mandated inquiries over the past decade . . . concluded that thousands of children were raped or molested by priests and physically abused in church-run schools while bishops covered up for abusers” (Doug Stanglin, “In Ireland, Pope Francis Meets With Catholic Church Abuse Survivors,” *USA Today*, Aug. 25, 2018).

The Washington Post reports that “in Australia, sex abuse in the Catholic Church has been so pervasive that thousands of people may be eligible for compensation. A five-year national inquiry into the abuse found that 7 percent of Australia’s Catholic priests were accused of abusing children between 1950 and 2010” (Siobhan O’Grady, “Despite Scandals, Australia’s Catholic Church Stands Firm Against Reporting Child Abuse Revealed in Confession,” Aug. 31, 2018).

It’s a serious problem in America as well. “Lawsuits by abuse victims have so far forced dioceses and religious orders in the United States to pay settlements totaling more than \$3 billion, and at least 19 have filed for bankruptcy protection” (Tom Gjelten, “The Clergy Abuse Crisis Has Cost the Catholic Church \$3 Billion,” *National Public Radio*, Aug. 18, 2018). This is dating back to the 1980s.

A *Newsweek* article reports that “BishopAccountability, whose mission is ‘documenting the abuse crisis in the Roman Catholic Church’ . . . says that there



Pope Francis in St. Peter's square crowd.

are also payouts involving over 8,600 cases of assault survivors abused by a member of the clergy dating back to the 1950s. The largest known payout amounted to over \$600 million in 2007 . . . issued on behalf of 221 priests and other church employees accused of abusing and victimizing over 500 people” (Emily

Zogbi, “The Catholic Church Has Paid Nearly \$4 Billion Over Sexual Abuse Claims, Group Says,” Aug. 25, 2018).

BishopAccountability says it has documented that “settlements involving 5,679 persons . . . are only one-third of the 15,235 allegations that the bishops say they have received through 2009, and they are only 5% of the 100,000 U.S. victims” (ibid).

The same article reports that a Pennsylvania grand jury released a document on August 14 detailing cases where more than 300 priests in the state “have been accused, credibly, of abusing over 1,000 children over the course of 70 years.”

The Catholic Church has been wrought with sexual scandal for decades now, so this is perhaps not so shocking to many. What is shocking is how long it has taken for allegations to come forward or be uncovered if formerly buried and legal action taken. How has something so heinous been hidden for six decades?

It’s horrible that the Catholic Church was able to hide all of these abuse cases for so long. Today, though, is a quite different world than 1945. The Roman Church isn’t seen as the pinnacle of authority it once was. It’s being forced to defend its image like never before because of the Internet and global communication.

Bible prophecy shows that a powerful church centered at Rome will play a role in end-time events before the return of Christ. It will be interesting to see how the Catholic Church will increase in political influence despite accusations like this. How will it handle such scandals going forward? (Sources: *Breitbart*, *Newsweek*, *Euronews*, *USA Today*, *Washington Post*, *NPR*.)

Weather reporter personifies fake news in hurricane coverage

First, our prayers go out to those who have suffered and lost so much during the recent hurricane that hit the East Coast of the United States in mid-September. Florence was a devastating weather disaster that caused considerable destruction and death.

During the coverage of the storm, many of the news reporters were out in the wind and rain to show the intensity of the storm. This is not new. For many years TV reporters have been on location during hurricane landfalls for great video of them braving the elements to bring the live story from the heart of the action. But all is not always as it seems. During Hurricane Florence one reporter was caught pretending to keep his balance against heavy wind, as two locals casually strolled by in the background—revealing the deceptive embellishment.

“The reporter, Mike Seidel, used dramatic movements to seemingly keep his balance during a live shot

on Friday. But then, two men enter the frame behind him and seem to have no trouble walking around” (Alex Langone, “Weather Channel Reporter Gets Called



Out for Struggling Through Florence While Locals Stroll By,” *Time*, Sept. 16, 2018).

The idea of fake news has been a bone of contention among many—and rightly so. In this instance, yes, the hurricane was dreadful and caused catastrophic

damage. Yes, the storm caused flooding and death. Yet, when this reporter was live, he could have simply said that the storm has yielded a bit of a break. Instead, for the camera’s sake, he leaned into the slight wind to give the impression of a fierce storm at that moment.

Some media outlets have been backed into a corner in terms of credibility. In the pursuit of ratings or being first to report a big story, something has gotten lost. Regrettably, truth has been the victim. As Isaiah 59:14 states, “Truth is fallen in the street.” Jesus said: “If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won’t be honest with greater responsibilities” (Luke 16:10, *New Living Translation*).

Each time a report embellishes for the sake of ratings, sources lose credibility—as they should. We live in a world of enough lies without more deception being presented as “news.” (Source: *Time* magazine.)

Does an “Arab NATO” lie ahead?

Daniel 11:44 describes an end-time attack of a force led by one called, from the perspective of Jerusalem, the “king of the South” against another called “the king of the North.” As explained in our free study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*, these are successors to a line of other rulers in these roles starting in ancient times. The final northern power will be based in Europe, while the attacking southern power will arise in a region that has long been Islamic. Psalm 83 also foretells a confederacy of Arab and other peoples of the Middle East against Israel.

Knowing this makes a meeting planned for January 2019 of leaders of America and several Arab states an interesting matter to watch. In September 2018 the American Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met six of his counterparts from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), as well as Egypt and Jordan. The stated goal is a coalition of Arab states to counter the growing influence of Iran in the region. The name of this proposed alliance is the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA). Plans call for the January meeting to be presided over by U.S. President Donald Trump.

Calls for such an Arab coalition are not new. They date back to the 1950s when Egypt’s President Gamal Abdul Nasser presided over a United Arab Republic, but it didn’t last. No more recent Arab coalition has been successful. Past efforts were aimed at containing and defeating Israel, but all failed or were humiliated in wars

with the Jewish state. Today the common foe is not Israel but Iran. Iran has projected a disruptive influence in an arc stretching from Afghanistan westward to the Mediterranean Sea. Seeking to revive ancient glory, Iran is seen as the critical threat to all the prospective nations in this new proposal.

The proposed Arab alliance would not be a small insignificant military power. Saudi Arabia is well supplied by America with the latest missiles and aircraft. *The Economist* reports that, even excluding America, the alliance’s annual defense spending would exceed \$100 billion and it would command over 300,000 troops, 5,000 tanks and 1,000 combat aircraft (“NATO for Arabs? A New Military Alliance Has Dim Prospects,” Oct. 6, 2018).

The strategic consequences of such a force could destabilize the region. George Friedman, writing in *Geopolitical Futures*, stated: “If this alliance actually works, then the Arabs go from being a divided and mutually hostile people to a united and potentially powerful entity. There’s a very real chance this could threaten both Turkey and Israel. Since both countries have large militaries, this could wind up, in the worst case, as an Arab power surrounded by non-Arab powers (Israel, Turkey and Iran)” (“Creating an Arab NATO,” Oct. 1, 2018). The stakes are high when such a power is considered in the volatile neighborhood of the Middle East.

An Arab NATO is a remote and problematic idea. But it could come together. If it does, the world could be a step closer to the fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy. (Sources: *The Economist*, *Geopolitical Futures*.)

Supreme Court battle shows severe government dysfunction

U.S. Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh was one of the most highly qualified candidates ever. A *cum laude* graduate of Yale University, he worked as a law clerk for both an appeals court judge and a U.S. Supreme Court justice, as well as staff lawyer for U.S. government offices and the White House.

For 12 years he served as a U.S. Court of Appeals judge, part of that time also teaching at the law schools of Yale, Harvard and Georgetown Universities. The American Bar Association standing committee on the federal judiciary unanimously gave him its highest possible rating. Over the course of his career he went through six separate FBI background checks, none of which raised concerns. In his private time he coached a girls’ basketball team, tutored at a school and served meals to the homeless.

Yet when he was nominated in July to fill the seat of retiring Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, liberal senators and organizations immediately opposed him, claiming he was unqualified (though his credentials far surpassed those of some sitting left-leaning court justices).

As part of the U.S. Senate’s “advice and consent” role mandated by the U.S. Constitution, Judge Kava-

naugh met for hundreds of hours with senators, who were given more than a million pages of documents, hundreds of Kavanaugh’s previous legal rulings and more than 6,000 pages he submitted in response to nearly 1,300 questions. Yet in spite of providing reportedly more documentation than all previous Supreme Court nominees combined, some demanded more. Senate hearings degenerated into something of a circus, with demonstrators repeatedly interrupting and dozens being arrested.

Then, with hearings finally concluded and a vote to be taken, three women emerged alleging 30-year-old never-reported sexual crimes and misbehavior by Judge Kavanaugh dating back to his teen years. The legal standard of “innocent until proven guilty” was promptly thrown out, with multiple Democrat congressmen and leftist organizations, media pundits and celebrities pronouncing him guilty—even though a demanded FBI investigation interviewed all named supposed witnesses to the events and found that not one had ever seen such actions.

After several more days of suspense, demonstrations, accusations and media-fueled hysteria, Judge Kavanaugh was confirmed to the Supreme Court in a

highly partisan 50–48 vote, with all but one Democrat voting against him.

Why does such deep division exist in American government? The bottom line is *differing views of the nation’s future*. The Supreme Court, by such decisions as banning Bibles from school classrooms, outlawing school prayer, legalizing the murder of the unborn through abortion and redefining marriage by legalizing homosexual marriage, has injected itself into major moral, religious and ethical issues of the day.

Conservatives would like to see many of these decisions reversed, or at least subjected to popular vote. Liberals, unable to advance such goals at the ballot box, have been forced to rely on left-leaning judges to enact their agenda. Thus the nomination of the conservative Kavanaugh was met with all-out obstruction by liberals. And the battle may not be over. Should Democrats take control of the U.S. House of Representatives in November elections, leftists are already calling on them to impeach both Justice Kavanaugh and President Trump so they can no longer stand in the way of the liberal agenda.

Stay tuned as the battle continues. The stakes for the nation are very high.

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The Decline of the American Male

Western society is shifting in major ways. One of the most dramatic changes is the decline and disappearance of needed masculinity.

by Mike Kelley

Sometimes changes in the culture of a nation can be dramatically illustrated by a single event. Such was the case earlier this year in May when the story of Michael Rotondo briefly grabbed national attention.

Rotondo, a 30-year old man in upstate New York, had moved back into his parents' home eight years ago after losing a job. After living at home and refusing to pay rent or assist them in any way to keep up the house or pay any expenses, his frustrated parents finally resorted to going to court to have their son evicted. For them, it was the last straw after repeated requests to have him move out failed.

During this time of parent-enabled idleness, Rotondo managed to father a son out of wedlock. That son, now five years old, became the object of a custody battle with the child's mother, and Rotondo later admitted that his anti-eviction battle with his parents was part of his overall strategy to garner media attention that he hoped would help him win that custody battle.

In court, Rotondo made the outlandish assertion that his parents' demand that he move out was "outrageous" and that *he was entitled to live there*. When he demanded six more months of rent-free asylum, the court sided with his parents and ordered him to move out within two weeks. Once evicted, he disappeared into obscurity.

While this ludicrous event grabbed attention in the same manner as tabloid journalism, it also cast the spotlight on yet

another aspect of deteriorating national character—the sad decline of the American male.

A far cry from the biblical example

What has happened to men today? A growing tide of books, blogs, lectures, social media posts, and magazine articles points to the growing wimpiness and whiny immaturity of males in America. More and more, men are seen as weak, indecisive, fearful, childish, effeminate, inept creatures, no longer certain of their proper role in society. One hears terms like wuss, sissy, snowflake and others not suitable for print to describe men, especially younger men.

While this new model of maleness can be ascribed to men of all ages, the evidence shows it especially predominates among those in their 20s and 30s.

Before going farther, let's take note of the first of several biblical passages that bear on masculinity. Ancient Israel's King David demonstrated aspects of the character and values of maleness that God values. After all, God referred to David as "a man after My own heart" (Acts 13:22).

The Old Testament books of 1 and 2 Samuel are largely devoted to the life story of this man of great faith who in his youth took on dangerous wild animals and brought down a giant enemy warrior—and who went on to endure many trials, rising from personal failures to continue in God's ways.

On his deathbed David instructed his son Solomon, who

would be the next king, to “be strong and show yourself a man” (1 Kings 2:2, English Standard Version). David’s life was a life of action, courage and boldness. He knew his son would need these same qualities to effectively lead the nation.

Surprising measurable lack of manliness

The decline of maleness is widespread. Popular culture derides the limp handshake, yet a recent study shows this to be a growing reality—that millions of men just can’t get the grip on things that men once had!

The results, published in the *Journal of Hand Therapy*, revealed that men’s hand strength has fallen drastically in recent decades. The North Carolina study of nearly 250 men from millennial, Gen X and Baby Boomer generations showed that *hand strength, as measured by gripping force, among men has decreased significantly over the past 30 years* (as reported in the *Waterloo Region Record*, Aug. 28, 2016).

It is telling that the same study found this was not the case among millennial women, whose grip strength was found to be virtually unchanged from 30 years ago. That brings to mind a current TV commercial for a popular motel chain that portrays an attractive, confident young businesswoman giving a firm double handshake to an older male colleague, who appears duly impressed.

Back in 2007 the *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism* reported that men’s testosterone levels plummeted 17 percent from 1987 to 2004, or *about 1 percent per year*. The

“A majority of this generation consists of formally educated, but spoiled, soft post-adolescents, who will struggle to be self-sustaining as adults.”

study found that not only were men losing testosterone as they aged, a normal occurrence, but men from later eras had substantially lower testosterone levels than their predecessors at the same age. A man who turned 65 in 2002, for example, had much lower testosterone levels than a man who turned 65 in 1987.

The same study showed an overall reduction in men’s reproductive health and cited several factors for this disturbing trend, including sedentary jobs, poor diet and lifestyle choices.

A May 2012 *Forbes* article titled “A Generation of Sissies” lamented the societal links between our changing culture and the demise of the American middle class.

“In recent decades,” wrote the author John Marriotti, “American parents have raised a ‘Generation of Sissies’—of spoiled, lazy, pampered and over-rated youth, youth who are highly educated, but in things that the world doesn’t value very much (and thus won’t pay for). The top 25% may be as good, as bright, as motivated as ever, and will likely be as successful as ever. The vast majority of this generation consists of formally educated, but spoiled, soft post-adolescents, who will struggle to be self-sustaining as adults . . .

“Members of this ‘Generation of Sissies’ have been the victims of being coddled, babied, pampered, misled, misguided, and under-educated so badly that their ‘take care of me’ upbringing cannot be sustained as they move into adulthood. The parents, who did this, also share in the responsibility for

the failure of America’s educational system.”

Marriotti went on to place blame for the decline in American competitiveness on indulgent parents and an educational system in which “everyone gets a trophy just for showing up.” Clearly, the effects of America’s penchant for maintaining children’s tender self-esteem over everything else are finally coming home to roost.

Education and entertainment lead the war against men

Further evidence of the changing role of younger American males can be found in the steadily declining enrollments of college-age men. Many sources verify what every college instructor knows: *Men are avoiding the classroom*.

An August 2017 article in *The Atlantic* cited U.S. Department of Education figures showing that men now make up only 44 percent of students in American colleges and universities, a major reversal from the late 1970s when men made up 58 percent of college enrollments. Currently men make up slightly more than one third of college graduates, and the percentage has been dropping nearly every year.

And while it’s true that college is no longer seen as the sure route to a successful career it once was, it’s also true that a nation’s leaders tend to come from the ranks of the more highly educated. What, then, does this say about men’s roles in leading America in the future?

It might say what God told His people more than 2,700 years ago through the prophet Isaiah: “As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people, those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths” (Isaiah 3:12)

Entertainment also comes in for its share of the blame, and the

portrayal of men in television and other media has shown a marked change over the past 40 years. Gone are rugged male roles such as those portrayed in TV Westerns, or portrayals of caring, wise, decisive fathers popularized in 1960s-era TV programs such as *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver*.

Well before the end of the 90s those types were replaced by softer, gentler types, or roles that portrayed men—especially fathers—as inept bumbles, lovable idiots who, without the influence of their smart, decisive and efficient wives, would wreak havoc in their own households. Sensitivity became the watchword—John Wayne and Clint Eastwood were out.

TV does influence society, and who knows to what extent various popular programs provided role models for today’s younger men?

Gender neutrality?

Certainly one of the most insidious evils of our time is the widespread belief in educational circles that there are no significant differences in the mental and emotional makeup of boys and girls. Modern education has swallowed this fallacy hook, line and sinker, and it too has contributed to the de-masculinization of males.

Today in many school systems boys undergo indoctrination that begins as early as kindergarten that they should be more like girls, and vice versa. In the most recent edition of her book

The War Against Boys: How Misguided Policies are Harming Young Men, author Christina Sommers ties these efforts to the culture of denial about the lack of male academic achievement that pervades American schools.

“Although many educators recognize that boys have fallen far behind girls in school, few address the problem in a serious way,” says Sommers. “Schools that try to stop the trend, through boy-friendly pedagogy [or teaching method], literacy interventions, vocational training, or same-sex classes, are often thwarted. Women’s lobbying groups still call such projects evidence of a ‘backlash’ against girls’ achievements and believe they are part of a campaign to slow further female progress.”

She discusses how the myth of “gender sameness” works to systematically deny boys the help they need to progress in an educational culture that is increasingly stacked against them.

“To address the problem, *we must acknowledge the plain truth: boys and girls are different.* Yet in many educational and government circles, it remains taboo to even broach the topic of sex differences. Gender scholars and experts still insist that the sexes are the same and argue that any talk of difference only encourages sexism and stereotypes. In the current environment, to speak of difference invites opprobrium [or denunciation], and to speak of boys’ special needs invites passionate, organized opposition” (2015, pp. 1-2, emphasis added throughout).

Some areas carry this attitude to absurd lengths, such as Wisconsin’s new law that seeks to indoctrinate kindergarten age boys about the dangers of “toxic masculinity.” Boys are taught there are no differences in the sexes and that what is important is sensitivity training and greater appreciation of the feminine side of life.

Across the nation in schools everywhere, boys are taught that feelings of aggressiveness, assertiveness and decisiveness are wrong. But let us ask: Was Jesus Christ acting “overly masculine” when, angered at the crass commercialism taking place in the Jerusalem temple, He quickly made a whip of cords and drove out the moneychangers? “How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!” He thundered (John 2:16, New International Version). One can almost see His face contorted in righteous anger as He flailed away, frightening the livestock and their greedy sellers.

Was Jesus Christ in need of “sensitivity training”? No doubt many today would think so!

Proper biblical examples

We could go on and on in describing the problem, but let’s stop and turn to what the Creator of human beings says about masculinity.

His instructions began at creation, when God told the first man to have dominion over the earth and all its creatures and to tend and keep his environment (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15). At creation, man was told to subdue, to oversee, to administer, to rule, to care for and protect. The fact that man has corrupted this role throughout human history is certainly true, but it cannot be denied that Adam and his descendants were told to be decisive, assertive and to rule over the earth.

As a chronicle of thousands of years of human history,

God’s Word is replete with examples of men who lived masculine lives. While probably only a teenager, David wasn’t afraid to take on the giant Goliath. Noah defied his neighbors and friends for 120 years to build the ark in which he and his family were saved. Abraham showed courage and determination as he followed God’s instruction to uproot his household and relocate to Canaan. He later led a private army to rescue his captured nephew Lot.

Moses, educated in the pharaoh’s court, according to ancient sources became not only a scholar but a general commanding the Egyptian army. God used his talents to defy the



God’s Word is replete with examples of men who lived masculine lives. While probably only a teenager David wasn’t afraid to take on the giant Goliath.


pharaoh and lead ancient Israel out of Egyptian slavery.

Moses, coming to the end of his time to lead the nation of Israel, anointed Joshua to be his successor. Notice his instructions to the younger man: “*Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the LORD swore to their ancestors to give them . . . Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged*” (Deuteronomy 31:7, NIV)

The apostle Paul’s instructions to the elders of the Church at Corinth included this telling passage: “*Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong*” (1 Corinthians 16:13, ESV). Paul, who himself endured beatings and stoning for the faith, knew it took courage and fortitude to be a follower of Christ in the early days of the Church within the Roman Empire.

These are proper manly examples that young men need to learn to emulate.

The war against males is now far advanced, and the forces promoting it are close to declaring victory. *It has changed society, but it does not need to change us.* Nowhere in God’s Word can we find support for the widespread modern belief that men need to be softer, more effeminate, more in touch with their “inner child” and similar nonsense. Today’s younger men should take David’s advice to Solomon: “Be strong and show yourself a man!” **BT**



Was Jesus Born on Christmas Day?

Most people assume that Jesus was born on Dec. 25. After all, that's the day millions of people celebrate as the date of His birth. But evidence shows that's simply not the case. And this is only one of many problems with this holiday!

by Mario Seiglie

Tradition tells us Jesus was born on Dec. 25, commonly called Christmas Day. But we also know tradition can be wrong. For centuries, tradition taught the earth was flat and that all the stars and planets revolved around it. It took many years of careful scientific examination to change traditional thinking on the solar system to a view based on verifiable truth.

Similarly, the tradition that Jesus Christ was born in the dead of winter has also been found to be without solid evidence—in consideration of what the Bible and other historical sources reveal. Yet we know tradition is hard to undo—witness how the names of the 12 months of the Roman year are hopelessly confused, but are still kept in this way. September is the ninth month in our calendar, but it actually means “seventh month” in Latin. October is the 10th month, but it means “eighth month,” November is our 11th month, yet it means “ninth month,” and December means 10th month, but it is the 12th month on our calendar.

The observance of Christmas Day has also become a tradition of men—and it turns out that this tradition is based on a false foundation. Let's examine the evidence.

Evidence Jesus' birth wasn't in winter—the Roman census

The first evidence in the Bible that Jesus was not born anywhere near Dec. 25 was given by Luke when he wrote: “And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

“Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her

firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger” (Luke 2:1-7, emphasis added throughout).

There are Roman records of censuses dating from A.D. 20 until about 270. “In the New Testament the Roman enrollment [census] is mentioned in connection with the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:2) and again in a passing reference to the revolt of Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:37). It appears that the Romans took a census every fourteen years for the purpose of levying taxes” (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1982, Vol. 2, p. 105).

The point to consider is that the Roman authorities did not take the census during wintertime, when it was cold, rainy and muddy, and slick roads made travel dangerous. The normal time would have been after the harvests were reaped in late summer to early autumn and before the late autumn rains and coming of winter, when people could return to their birthplace and not disrupt the agricultural cycle of planting, tending and harvesting crops.

In his book *Holy-Days and Holidays*, author Cunningham Geikie affirms this census “could hardly have been at that season [of winter] . . . for such a time would surely not have been chosen by the authorities for a public enrollment, which necessitated the population's traveling from all parts to their natal districts, storms and rain making journeys both unsafe and unpleasant in winter, except in especially favorable years. Snow is not at all uncommon at Jerusalem in the winter months, and I have known it so deep that people lost their way outside the gates” (“Christmas at Bethlehem,” 1968, p. 405).

Luke's account of the Roman census argues strongly against a December date for Christ's birth. For an agrarian society, a late summer to early autumn census was much more likely. A census in the dead of winter makes no sense because it would've been largely self-defeating!

Shepherds were out in the field at night

Luke goes on to say about Christ's birth: “Now there were in

the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord'" (Luke 2:8-11).

So the shepherds around Bethlehem were pasturing their flocks *outdoors at night*. This is another indication that it was not mid-December, when the weather was normally at its coldest and the shepherds would've more likely kept their flocks penned up in shelters at night. The common practice in Judea was for shepherds to keep their flocks in the open fields from April to October, but in the cold and wet winter months they brought their flocks back home and protected them from the inclement weather.

Some Bible commentators have argued for shepherds in the fields at night in December, but others have ruled it out, which appears far more reasonable. *The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible* notes: "These humble pastoral folk are out in the field at night with their flock—a feature of the story which would argue against the birth's occurring on December 25 since *the weather would not have permitted it*" (1971, p. 676).

Adam Clarke's Commentary adds: "And as these shepherds had not yet brought home their flocks, it is a presumptive argument that October had not yet commenced, and that, consequently, our Lord was not born on the 25th of December, when no flocks were out in the fields; nor could He have been born later than September, as the flocks were still in the fields by night. *On this very ground the nativity [birth of Jesus] in December should be given up*. The feeding of the flocks by night in the fields is a chronological fact, which casts considerable light upon this disputed point" (note on Luke 2:8).

We will return to this matter of the shepherds in the fields in a moment.

Why it's difficult to find admissions for the pagan origin of Christmas

Before going further, we should recognize that despite convincing biblical and historical evidence for Jesus' birth

not being anywhere near Dec. 25, there is strong desire, even among a number of Christian scholars, to reinterpret the evidence in favor of the winter Christmas.

The late Adventist historian Samuele Bacchiocchi warned in this respect in a Dec. 22, 2002, article titled "A Look at the Date and Meaning of Christmas," stating: "The adoption of the 25th of December for the celebration of Christmas is perhaps the most explicit example of Sun-worship's influence on the Christian liturgical calendar. It is a known fact that the pagan feast of the *dies natalis Solis Invicti*—the birthday of the Invincible Sun, was held on that date.

"Do Christian sources openly admit the borrowing of the date of such a pagan festivity? Generally not. *To admit borrowing a pagan festival, even after due reinterpretation of its meaning, would be tantamount to an open betrayal of the faith. This the [church] Fathers were anxious to avoid . . .*

"The commemoration of the birth of the Sun-god was not easily forgotten by Christians. Augustine and Leo the Great strongly reprimanded those Christians who at Christmas worshiped the Sun rather than the birth of Christ. Therefore, it is well to keep in mind that in the investigation of the influence of the Sun-cults on the Christian liturgy, *the most we can hope to find are not direct but indirect indications*. This warning applies *not only for the date of Christmas but for that of Sunday as well.*"

The "temple sheep" theory

Returning to the matter of shepherds in the fields with their flocks by night, one argument that tries to place this in winter is sometimes referred to as "the temple-sheep theory."

This view was popularized by Alfred Edersheim, a 19th-century Jewish convert to Christianity and a well-respected scholar in matters of first-century Jewish life. In his famous book *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Edersheim wrote this concerning the account of the shepherds in the fields at night:

"This *Migdal Eder* ["the tower of the flock"] was not the watchtower for the ordinary flocks which pastured on the barren sheep ground beyond Bethlehem, but lay close to the town, on the road to Jerusalem. A passage in the Mishnah

leads to the conclusion, that the flocks, which pastured there, were destined for Temple-sacrifices, and, accordingly, that the shepherds, who watched over them, were not ordinary shepherds.

"The latter were under the ban of Rabbinism [Jewish rabbinic ruling], on account of their necessary isolation from religious ordinances, and their manner of life, which rendered strict legal observance unlikely, if not absolutely impossible. The same Mishnaic passage *also leads us to infer*, that these flocks lay out all the year round, since they are spoken of as in the fields thirty days before Passover—that is, in the month of February, when in Palestine [the land of Israel] the average rainfall is nearly greatest" (Book 2, chap. 6, 2000, p. 131).

From this passage some scholars come to the conclusion that specially selected shepherds would be out in the open in December taking care of sheep chosen for the Passover sacrifice.

While the explanation might sound plausible, a more careful look at the sources in the Mishnah—Jewish oral tradition later set down in writing in the centuries after Jesus—does not support this conclusion. Notice that even Edersheim couched his words with phrases such as "A passage in the Mishnah *leads to the conclusion . . .*" and "The same Mishnaic passage *also leads us to infer . . .*" He clearly was not certain of what he was stating.

A look at the verses in the Mishnah shows the sheep being discussed are unattended or lost sheep found in the area, not those pastured by shepherds.

The Mishnah passage referred to, *Shekalim* 7:4, states: "An animal that was found between Jerusalem and Migdal Eder, or a similar distance in any direction, the males are (considered) burnt offerings. The females are (considered) peace offerings. Rabbi Yehuda says, those which are fitting as a Pesach offering are (considered) Pesach offerings if it is thirty days before the festival."

Rabbi Joshua Kulp, writing in an online study of the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem, explains this passage: "Thirty days is the period of time before Pesah [Passover] in which the sages began to teach the laws of Pesah and hence at this time *people began to set aside animals for use as a Pesah offering*. One who *finds* such an animal may use it

as his own personal Pesah sacrifice. If the owners come and claim the animal, then *he must pay them its value but he may keep the animal.*”

So it appears that Edersheim was mistaken in his speculation that this Mishnaic passage referred to sheep being specially pastured for the temple in this area year round, as it actually had to do with lost sheep being found in this area.

There is no mention here of special

apocryphal writings such as the Infancy Gospel of Thomas and the Proto-Gospel of James. These texts provide everything from the names of Jesus’ grandparents to the details of his education—but *not the date of his birth.*

“Finally, in about 200 C.E., a Christian teacher in Egypt makes reference to the date Jesus was born. According to Clement of Alexandria, several different days had been proposed by various Christian groups.

Surprising as it may seem, Clement doesn’t mention December 25 at all. Clement writes:

“There are those who have determined not only the year of our Lord’s birth, but also the day; and they say that it took place in the 28th year of Augustus, and in the 25th day of [the Egyptian month] Pachon [May 20 in

McGowan cites Clement of Alexandria as giving three different dates for the birth of Christ, none of which come even close to December 25. He then speculates on three different dates for the death of Christ.

The same author then recognizes the pagan influence of December 25 after Emperor Constantine’s adoption of Catholic Christianity, noting: “From the mid-fourth century on, *we do find Christians deliberately adapting and Christianizing pagan festivals.* A famous proponent of this practice was Pope Gregory the Great, who, in a letter written in 601 C.E. to a Christian missionary in Britain, recommended that local pagan temples not be destroyed but be converted into churches, and that pagan festivals be celebrated as feasts of Christian martyrs” (p. 4).

But the incorporation of a Dec. 25 pagan festival as Christmas is then denied: “At this late point, Christmas may well have acquired some pagan trappings. But we don’t have evidence of Christians adopting pagan festivals in the third

century, at which point dates for Christmas were established. Thus, it seems unlikely that the date was simply selected to correspond with pagan solar festivals. The

December 25 feast *seems to have existed* before 312—before Constantine and his conversion, at least” (ibid.).

McGowan is quite tentative when he asserts that Christmas Day was established in the third century, and speculates a Christian group called Donatists could have observed it, but there is no direct historical evidence about this.

He then presents the “conception/death theory” as justification for the date of December 25 being chosen for Christ’s birth. He claims: “There is another way to account for the origins of Christmas on December 25: Strange as it may seem, the key to dating Jesus’ birth *may* lie in the dating of Jesus’ death at Passover. This view was first *suggested* to the modern world by French scholar Louis Duchesne in the early 20th century and fully developed by American Thomas Talley in more recent years. But they were certainly not the first to note a connection between the traditional date of Jesus’ death and his birth.



There is no mention of special shepherds out at night tending their sheep in winter—it’s just an attempt to justify the date of Jesus’ birth occurring in winter.

shepherds out at night tending their temple sheep in the winter. This is simply a speculative attempt to justify the date of Jesus’ birth being reckoned in late December.

The conception/death theory

Another scholarly theory poses that Jesus was *conceived and later died on the same day of the year!* This theory shows how far people are willing to go to justify the Christmas date. The theory was mentioned in the December 2002 issue of the magazine *Bible Review* in the article “How Dec. 25 became Christmas” by Andrew McGowan.

He begins by admitting: “The earliest writings—Paul and Mark—*make no mention of Jesus’ birth.* The Gospels of Matthew and Luke provide well-known but quite different accounts of the event—although neither specifies a date. In the second century C.E. [Common Era or A.D.], further details of Jesus’ birth and childhood are related in

our calendar] . . . And treating of His Passion, with very great accuracy, some say that it took place in the 16th year of Tiberius, on the 25th of Phamenoth [March 21]; and others on the 25th of Pharmuthi [April 21] and others say that on the 19th of Pharmuthi [April 15] the Savior suffered. Further, others say that He was born on the 24th or 25th of Pharmuthi [April 20 or 21].”

“Clearly there was great uncertainty, but also a considerable amount of interest, in dating Jesus’ birth in the late second century. By the fourth century, however, we find references to two dates that were widely recognized—and now also celebrated—as Jesus’ birthday: December 25 in the western Roman Empire and January 6 in the East (especially in Egypt and Asia Minor) . . . The earliest mention of December 25 as Jesus’ birthday comes from a *mid-fourth-century Roman almanac* that lists the death dates of various Christian bishops and martyrs” (pp. 1-2).

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“Around 200 C.E. Tertullian of Carthage (same time as Clement and Origen) reported the calculation that the 14th of Nisan (the day of the crucifixion according to the Gospel of John) in the year Jesus died was equivalent to March 25 in the Roman (solar) calendar.

“March 25 is, of course, nine months before December 25; it was later recognized as the Feast of the Annunciation—the commemoration of Jesus' conception. Thus, Jesus was *believed* to have been conceived and crucified on the same day of the year. Exactly nine months later, Jesus was born, on December 25” (pp. 5-6).

One problem with this theory is that Tertullian nowhere mentions the conception of Christ and only gave the equivalent date in the Roman calendar of Christ's death. As we have already seen, Clement of Alexandria had three different dates for Jesus' death.

Tertullian wrote: “And the suffering of this ‘extermination’ was perfected . . . under Tiberius Caesar . . . in the month of March, at the times of the passover, on the eighth day before the calends [1st day] of April [i.e., March 24 or 25]” (*An Answer to the Jews*, chap. 8).

And even if Tertullian thought Christ's death had been on March 25 of the Roman calendar, he clearly did not tie it to Jesus' conception or birth. That task would later fall to fourth-century writers and those of later centuries who would try to justify the Dec. 25 date for Christ's birth—a time admitted by Church historians when paganism had already crept into the formation of the Catholic Church's feast days.

The Bible certainly does not mention such an outlandish idea. But, as we have been warned, clever theories are advanced to justify the date of Dec. 25 for Jesus' birth. By taking a closer look, we can see the “conception/death theory” as just another far-fetched

speculation borne out of desperation to justify a Dec. 25 observance of Christ's birth.

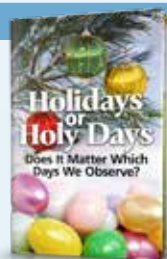
Don't be “turned aside to fables”

The apostle Paul warned Timothy that false teachers would appear presenting fables and traditions of men but that he should stick to biblical truth. Paul admonished him: “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

Don't be deceived by clever theories based on the wayward traditions of men. A quick Internet search will show that Dec. 25 was chosen as the date of Christ's birth not because of any biblical or historical evidence, but because this was the entrenched observance of the birthday of the sun-god!

And this is far from the only problem with this holiday. What does a jolly fat man in a red fur-trimmed suit riding in a sleigh pulled by flying reindeer (loaded with toys made by elves living at the North Pole!) have to do with the birth of the Son of God? The answer should be obvious—*nothing!* But this and related imagery clearly reveal the unbiblical, ungodly, pre-Christian roots of this celebration.

Instead of following man-made traditions and holidays condemned in the Bible, why not keep the biblical feast days that God commanded and that were observed by Jesus Christ, the apostles and the early Church? You'll be surprised at how they can transform your understanding of the Bible! **BT**



LEARN MORE

Few people ever stop to think about why they do some of the things they do, such as celebrating Christmas on a day when Jesus Christ *could not have been born*. Have you ever looked into this holiday and other popular celebrations? Download or request our free study guide *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*

BTmagazine.org/booklets

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You could not have put it better. I pray God give you strength and inspiration in sending the message to us and the world.

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It’s amazing to learn about the works of God. It will take more than a physical lifetime to learn. I can hardly wait until the Kingdom of God is here.

From the Internet

“The Race for Immortality”

It is very foolish for individuals to think that they can have immortality without God being involved. This is a very good article that gives us much food for thought.

From the Internet

Grateful for *Beyond Today*

I don’t remember the last time I said this, so I would like to take this opportunity to thank you once again for sending me *Beyond Today*. Every issue gives me more to learn and grow from. Please continue sending me copies of the magazine. I pray that God will continue to bless your church and the good work that you are doing.

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Thanks for all the free information you provide to readers around the world. I must admit that you are elevating my understanding of God’s plan for mankind, and the current and future events leading to Christ’s second coming. Please keep up the good work for the gospel to reach the ends of the world. Thank you, and may God bless you.

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Reader in Canada

This is just a short note of thanks for all of the written material that I have received over the years! I do enjoy *Beyond Today*

magazine. God bless all of your good works.

Reader in Canada

How do I observe God’s Sabbath?

How do I keep the Sabbath day holy? What do I do all day, and what about my kids? I have three children ages 3 and under. How do I care for them and still rest? I’m so confused about this, but God has put it on my heart, so I want to do it. Please help me if you can. Thanks.

From the Internet

The command to keep the Sabbath holy may sound a little vague. The Sabbath is a day where we forget about our own wants and desires and we make extra time to study God’s Word. We can also take extra time to pray to God and to meditate on His words. It is a day on which God commands us to rest from our usual work. It is a day God has set apart—made holy—and given us to mentally and physically take a break from the world.

When it comes to family and resting on the Sabbath, sometimes it can be challenging. Mothers still have to make sure that their children’s needs are met even on the Sabbath. But the Sabbath can still be special for all family members.

Some parents make the Sabbath special for their children by such things as preparing special meals, singing songs together and doing Bible studies together. With younger children it would probably be easier to start out with something simple. You can talk about the Sabbath and about God with your children. As they grow up you can involve them in preparing for the Sabbath. Keeping the Sabbath doesn’t mean that children can’t have fun, but for some it does take some getting used to. You can find many family Bible studies at ucg.org/members/family-study-guides.

You can also find a helpful article on our website written by a young mother with young children. She writes about preparing for the Sabbath, and expresses her challenges, especially when she first became a mother. She learned to use the other six days of the week to start preparing for the Sabbath. It’s called “Sabbath Rest for a Mom—Using the Preparation Day Wisely.” You can search for it by its title at ucg.org.

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“Inasmuch!”

In following Jesus Christ, we must learn to love and care for others by seeing everyone as He does.

by Robin Webber

For six years now this column has been devoted to our responding to the clarion and intimate call of Jesus Christ to “Follow Me” (see Matthew 4:19; John 21:19-22). In this two-word invitation, the living Christ greets and encourages His disciples along life’s journey to remind and refresh us to stay the course and emulate Him in thought, word and deed—towards not only God, but one another here below.

We need to consider what lens Jesus viewed others through that allowed such sensitivity and caring. How important is it that we use the same lens? It’s *all-important!* Inasmuch as we adopt this principle is the degree to which Christ will acknowledge our discipleship as genuine—and for doing so we will receive our Heavenly Father’s blessing.

The jolting wake-up call

We discover surprising repercussions of this perspective in Matthew 25 at the end of Jesus’ teaching on the Mount of Olives a few days before His death and resurrection—a message begun in chapter 24 with world conditions leading up to the time of His second coming and concluding here with a needed one-on-one personal admonition to His followers.

In depicting a future time of divine judgment that will distinguish between what Scripture refers to as sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-33), Christ has this to say to encourage some and awaken others:

“Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me’ (verses 33-37).

It is “the righteous,” or “the sheep,” within this setting who effectively respond (to paraphrase verse 37), “What? When did all this happen?” And the King, Jesus Christ, will answer and say to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, *inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me*” (verse 40, emphasis added throughout).

Jesus goes on to chide and judge those on His left hand, “the goats,” by proclaiming, “Depart from Me,” citing their lack of sensitivity and care when confronted with the same circumstances (verses 41-46). He doubles down on the specific cause for such judgment in verse 45: “Assuredly, I say to you, *inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.*”

It’s very personal with Christ

Now, let’s intensify our examination of this passage (verses 31-46) and note some astounding conclusions. First: This is

all very personal with Christ. He 13 times here speaks of “Me” (Himself) in relationship to “the least of these.” It’s as if He’s placing His nametag around the neck of all those whom His followers will ultimately meet.

He deliberately personalizes our encounters with others in 25 times here referring to “you.” You and I bear responsibility for our approach toward and encounters with others. And consider that this is in each case a one-on-*two* encounter. How you treat another person is not merely singular, but plural in the sense that Christ not only self identifies with each of these individuals as the recipient of treatment, but He says that “the least of these” are “*My brethren.*”

Twice in this eye-opening and heart-awakening passage, Christ uses wording translated into the English term “inasmuch as” as the great balancer of judgment. The dictionary defines this term as “in the degree that” or “in view of the fact that” (Merriam-Webster.com). Jesus is plainly stating that our concern for others is a direct reflection of our concern *for Him*. And our disdain or indifference towards the plight of others creates distance not only from others but *from Him*.

At this juncture you might be saying to yourself, “I’m a compassionate person, and when I see people in hard circumstances, I do try to do something charitable for them if but for the moment.”

And of course that is well and good, but I wish to expand your insight on the totality of what Christ is saying here. I’m addressing something beyond random acts of charity and perceived goodness on our terms and timing. I’m speaking about being a witness for Jesus Christ in a darkened world that has been spiritually starving and languishing since humanity rejected God in the Garden of Eden.

Today our world is increasingly afflicted by an epidemic of meaninglessness—infected by a culture of secularism devoid of the Author of life. Humanity is locked in a prison of its own making based on its decision to reject the loving sovereignty of God to mold people’s lives in His image. Yet that remains God’s purpose.

Looking through the lens of God’s great purpose

Through what lens did Christ view others? We see it right in the beginning of Scripture. The first four words in Genesis 1 form the engine that pulls the rest of the train of Scripture. “In the beginning God . . .”! Not you, not me—God! And that same God declared His great decision to bring us all into existence, saying, “Let us make man *in Our image, according to Our likeness*” (Genesis 1:26).

And this was to become reality. The next verse tells us, “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (verse 27).

Yet the divine blueprint laid out before us here goes beyond



We live in a target-rich environment for showing dignity and respect toward God's special creation made in His image.

man's initial creation. God's purpose is to ultimately move from a physical creation of clay to a new creation of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 5:17)—for us to be truly like Him. Thus, man is made in the image of God and demands our total respect. We must honor what God is doing or is yet to do with every other person made in His likeness.

Genesis informs us that humanity did not appreciate this incredibly special creation of being in God's likeness. Regard for human life evaporated after the time of Adam and Eve, the pre-Flood world becoming "filled with violence" (Genesis 6:13) and people's thoughts "only evil continually" (verse 5). It must have been a murderous society!

We see further indication of this after Noah and his family left the ark. God made a covenant that focused on the preciousness of His special creation: "Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; [Why?] *for in the image of God He made man*" (Genesis 9:5-6). God made it clear that those created in His image are to be handled with care.

Now you might be saying: "But how does this apply to me? I haven't taken anyone's life!" The reality is that you don't have to literally murder or destroy people to snuff out their lives and make them "the walking dead." More than 3,500 years ago Job pleaded with his friends, "How long will you torment my soul, and break me in pieces with words?" (Job 19:2).

The apostle James wrote that while we use our tongue to praise God, we sadly use the same tongue to also "curse people who are *made in the likeness of God*" (James 3:9, English Standard Version).

We are all brothers in sharing this likeness. And Jesus declared that not only actual murderers but "whoever is angry against his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment," with expressed disdain being even more perilous

(Matthew 5:21-22).

The apostle John wrote, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" (1 John 4:20).

Christ saw others in the likeness of Himself and the Father for the purpose for which these others were made—the lens through which we must also see them. And as God loves them, so must we—else we are not caring for what the Father and Christ care for and are thus not loving Them and trusting in what They are doing.

Keeping the needed focus

We live in a target-rich environment for showing dignity and respect toward God's special creation made in His image and must allow that to be our starting point of connection.

It's well established that physical touch plus verbal and emotional connections are vital to infants. Without it they simply don't thrive. But are grown-ups that different? Yet sometimes those closest to us—be it our spouse, children, coworkers, fellow congregants—are those who sense the most distance from us and feel

"least," not in Christ's lens but in our eyes.

Are people difficult? Even those closest to us? Absolutely! And relationships can be—well—*messy*. But we need the same starting point Christ had in moving into the lives of others. Recognize that we are all made in God's image—including the person you may have challenges with right now—and always remember that Christ has already died for all mankind. And even though most people right now don't really know Him or understand what He has done for them, that doesn't take us off the hook of Christlike responsibility. In fact, that is why they need our mercy and compassion!

What is it with human nature that too often forgets to remember? Well, let's focus here. Do we remember where Christ picked us up along the way and offered us dignity and assurance and granted us an inner peace we never experienced before? Yes, when we were famished for a life of meaning and struggling along "doing our own thing" apart from God? How was that working out? It wasn't.

And then we received a calling from our Heavenly Father (John 6:44) and a personal invitation by Jesus Christ of "Follow Me." We weren't ignored, put on hold, looked down on or looked past to something more attractive. God chose to favor us, and a nametag was placed around us declaring each of us part of "My brethren." It doesn't get better than being in the very family of God!

Are you or I ever difficult? Of course, but God loves and cares for us still—looking to what He intends for us. And so must we love and care for others, looking to them as the focus of God's loving care with the ultimate purpose He made them for. If we really love Him, then we'll also love them.

After sharing time with me reading this column and *inasmuch* as we've explored the heart of Christ through His own words, it's my greatest hope and God's sincerest desire that you will look at other human beings in a new light, through the same lens as that of Jesus Christ! **BT**

The Millennium *and Peace on Earth*

In this 14th lesson in the “Bible Prophecy and You” series, we consider these questions: What’s the future of planet earth? Will we ever have *real peace*? If so, how will it come about? And what does the Bible say will happen after Jesus Christ returns? Will the whole world become Christian? And just what is “the Millennium”?

The Bible contains *many* prophecies about the future of mankind and the future of this planet. In this lesson, we’ll get a grand overview of that future.

Scripture is full of promises that someday there will be peace on earth. And it is full of specific prophecies about the healthy and happy state of the world during the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ! Following is part of a message from a United Church of God member in Washington state:

“Ever since years ago when I first began receiving literature from the Church of God, it’s been wonderful learning what the Bible *really* teaches! In the church I grew up in, we were taught lots of things that aren’t true! I was so trusting that I assumed that everything I heard must be true!

“The real truth is so much more logical and inspiring than anything I heard before. To know that God didn’t change His mind about which day of the week is the Sabbath. That Jesus will be coming back to earth and not just to visit but to *stay* and set up His Kingdom! And to know how everyone will have a real opportunity to learn God’s truth. I’m hoping and praying for the day when they’ll all understand at least as much as I understand.”

God’s truth is far more wonderful than any fiction!

From the beginning of time, countless stories, fantasies and fairy tales have been written by authors who were imagining some kind of paradise or utopia. And almost every religion has ideas about what life will be like after death. But once you really understand what the Bible reveals, you’ll see that no one has ever envisioned any life as beautiful, as joyous and as meaningful as the truth about God’s plan for humanity!

In the last several lessons, we learned about the traumatic events that will take place before Christ’s return, including the Great Tribulation, the Day of the Lord and Armageddon.

All of that is a necessary part of God’s plan to bring humanity to repentance. And that prepares the way for Jesus Christ to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. Then during the Millennium, Christ will teach all humanity the way to eternal life.

In the last lesson, we also learned that when Christ returns to earth, He will glorify all the saints (His true converted followers of this age) in immortality—resurrecting those who have died and transforming those still living (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). It is through this resurrection and change that the saints will “inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50-54).

► Where will Christians live during the coming reign of Christ?

“Blessed are the meek, *for they shall inherit the earth*” (Matthew 5:5).

“On that day the LORD will become King *over the whole earth*—the LORD alone, and his name alone” (Zechariah 14:9, Christian Standard Bible).

Jesus said the meek will inherit *the earth*. It is also clear that the saints will ultimately inherit all things, including the whole universe and heavenly realm (Revelation 21:7). Yet they will reign with Christ on the earth, as we will later see more about (Revelation 5:9-10). In fact, the heavenly city of God will ultimately come down to the earth as our perpetual home. Yet even before that, the earth during the reign of Christ and His saints will be wonderful.

What can be more appealing than planet earth once all its problems are solved? Think of this marvelous showcase of God’s creation without any evil-doing, without any natural disasters and without any man-made disasters. We can think of it as “heaven on earth”!

Jesus directed us to pray, “Your kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10). He meant for us to pray for God’s Kingdom to *be established over the entire earth*.

A long time ago, an archangel decided he would “ascend into heaven” to replace God (Isaiah 14:13). With that rebellion, he became Satan the devil. Ever since then, it is Satan who “deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). One of his



Scripture is full of promises that someday there will be peace on earth and specific prophecies about the state of the world during the reign of Jesus Christ.

lies has become a part of most religions—the lie that people will go to live in heaven when they die. This idea actually is derived from ancient paganism, not the Bible! (To learn more, download or request our free study guide *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*)

► After Christ’s return, will there still be human beings on the earth?

“And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles” (Zechariah 14:16).

“I will multiply men upon you [the land of Israel], all the house of Israel, all of it; and the cities shall be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt. I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bear young; I will make you inhabited as in former times, and do better for you than at your beginnings. Then you shall know that I am the LORD” (Ezekiel 36:10-11).

“Those who come He shall cause to take root in Jacob; Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit” (Isaiah 27:6).

Although much of the world will perish during the horror of the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord, many millions will yet survive. “Everyone who is left of all the nations . . . shall go up from year to year to worship the King [Christ]” (Zechariah 14:16).

Then, under Jesus Christ’s peaceful rule, there will be a population explosion as countless babies will be born throughout most of the Millennium!

God will choose Israel once again to be the model of a nation obedient to God (Deuteronomy 4:5-8), and this time Israel will live up to that calling. But many prophecies regarding “Israel” during the Millennium will apply eventually to all humanity, especially as people are spiritually converted and become part of the “Israel of God” (Galatians 3:27-29; 6:16).

► What will be the job of the saints after they are resurrected?

“Then I saw thrones, and the people sitting on them had been given the authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony about Jesus and for proclaiming the word of God . . . They all came to life again, and they reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

“This is the first resurrection. (The rest of the dead did not come back to life until the thousand years had ended.) Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. For them the second death holds no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4-6, New Living Translation).

“And they [angelic beings] sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are you [Christ the Lamb] to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by Your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth’”

(Revelation 5:9-10, English Standard Version).

In Revelation 20, we learn that the resurrection of the saints at Jesus Christ’s return is called “the first resurrection.” They will then be immortal, so there will be no possibility of them dying again (experiencing a “second death”). Their purpose will then be to assist Christ in teaching and ruling the world. “They shall be priests [teachers and intercessors in spiritual matters] of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (verse 6).

The word *millennium* means a thousand years, but it’s often used specifically of the 1,000-year reign of Christ and the saints, usually spelled in that case with a capital “M.” Christ and the saints will live forever, not just a thousand years. But after a thousand years, a new period will be ushered in with the *second resurrection* (as will be explained in the next lesson).

We see in Revelation 5:9-10 that the saints will *reign*—bear rule as *kings*—with Christ on the earth. As such, they will be assisting the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (see Revelation 19:16).

► What will be the most important step in removing evil influences from the world?

“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must

be released for a little while” (Revelation 20:1-3).

“And he [another angel] cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, ‘Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!’” (Revelation 18:2).

Satan will be bound for a thousand years—restrained so he can have no influence on the world. “Bottomless pit” is a translation of the Greek word *abyssos*, meaning “without bottom,” from which we get the word “abyss,” used for an extremely deep chasm. At the end of the Millennium, Satan will be released “for a little while” but then will be put away forever.

To understand more about what the Bible says about Satan and the demons, download or request our free study guide *Is There Really a Devil?*

► Is that part of the prophetic meaning of the Day of Atonement?

“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls [referring to fasting] . . . It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest” (Leviticus 23:26-27, 32).

“And when he [Aaron the high priest] has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place, the tabernacle of meeting, and the



What can be more appealing than planet earth once all its problems are solved? Think of the marvelous showcase of God’s creation!

altar, he shall bring the live goat [in contrast to the other that was slain in representation of Christ’s sacrifice]. Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man.

“The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an unin-

habited land . . . This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all” (Leviticus 16:20-22, 29).

God’s Holy Days reflect stages in God’s plan of salvation. As we saw in the last lesson, the Feast of Trumpets pictures Jesus Christ’s return at the last trumpet. Next, the symbolic meaning of the Day of Atonement builds on the meaning of the Passover. As the Passover pictures our individual reconciliation with God made possible by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Day of Atonement pictures the time when the invitation to be reconciled with God will be extended to all humanity.

Furthermore, this Holy Day pictures the transition time between Christ’s second coming and the beginning of world peace. Therefore, a critical part of the fulfillment of the Day of Atonement will be the binding of Satan and the demons. This is shown in the detailed symbolism of Leviticus 16, as explained in our free study guide *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

► What is the prophetic meaning of the Feast of Tabernacles?

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, saying: “The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it. For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it . . .

““You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God”” (Leviticus 23:33-36, 42-43).

Initially the Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23:16; 34:22), celebrated the completion of the final harvest season in the Holy Land. This final harvest season and the command for Israelites to dwell in temporary dwellings as the Israelites did after leaving Egypt on their way to the Promised Land help us see the prophetic meaning of this festival.

As later prophecies spelled out the timetable of God’s plan, it became evident that this Feast pictures the coming Kingdom of God, of which the Promised Land was a type. It also symbolizes Jesus Christ’s future dwelling with His people on the earth for a thousand years, at which time a much larger

harvest of human beings will take place and be brought into God’s family.

For Christians today it also pictures leaving this world and its ways to sojourn with God in preparing for a permanent home with Him—looking forward to the fulfillment of this in the Millennium, a period of dwelling with God while yet awaiting the permanence of the new heavens and new earth (as we’ll learn more about later).

Many prophecies throughout the Bible describe how the whole earth will be renewed and beautified during this time. Describing this period, called the Millennium because of its thousand-year duration, the prophet Isaiah said: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them” (Isaiah 11:6).

God’s command for us to observe His annual festivals is an essential factor in helping us understand and remember His plan of salvation for all of humanity. And these are times of rejoicing as we grow in understanding and appreciation of the wonderful future God has planned for all mankind. For further explanation, see our free study guide *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

► Will there be peace on earth in that age to come?

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 9:6-7).

“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” (Micah 4:3-4).

“Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing’” (Zechariah 8:4-5).

These inspiring prophecies show Jesus Christ, the “Prince of Peace,” bringing this elusive dream to reality. Not only will there be peace between nations, but cities will be safe and peaceful, even Jerusalem!

► What city will then be the capital of the world?

“At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts” (Jeremiah 3:17).

“Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3).

“Zion” was the name of the mountain ridge on which Jerusalem was built and is often used as a synonym for Jerusalem. Jerusalem at last will truly be “the holy city” and will live up to its name, which means “possession of peace.”

► What famous people will rule the 12 tribes of Israel?

“Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it. For

it shall come to pass in that day,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘That I will break his [the enemy’s] yoke from your neck, and will burst your bonds; foreigners shall no more enslave them. But



Many prophecies throughout the Bible describe how the whole earth will be renewed and beautified during this time.

they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them” (Jeremiah 30:7-9).

“David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children’s children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever” (Ezekiel 37:24-25).

“So Jesus said to them, ‘Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel’” (Matthew 19:28).

God will *raise up*—resurrect—David. God says He will reunite Israel into one nation and “David My servant shall be king over them.” Remember that Jesus Christ will be King over *all the world*. David will rule Israel under Him. And under David will be the 12 apostles reigning over the tribes of Israel.

► Will it be a time of health, healing, abundance, prosperity and joy?

“The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing . . . They shall see the glory of the LORD, the excellency of our God.

“Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, ‘Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you.’

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; in the habitation of jackals, where each lay, there shall be grass with reeds and rushes” (Isaiah 35:1-7).

“If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall last till the time of vintage, and the vintage shall last till the time of sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely.

“I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid; I will rid the land of evil beasts, and the sword will not go through your land” (Leviticus 26:3-6).

There are *many* Bible prophecies about the physical conditions in the world of tomorrow. People will be healed of their sicknesses, injuries and disabilities! Everyone will learn good health habits and how to prevent health problems. People will have healthy children and healthy livestock. There will be no famines, food shortages or disease epidemics!

There will be much more arable land, and agriculture will be highly productive. There will be gentle rain in due season. There will be abundance and prosperity. Everyone who submits to the laws of our loving God will be greatly blessed! “They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isaiah 35:10).

► Will people all over the world be taught the truth of the Bible?

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:2-3).

“And though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers will not be moved into

a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left” (Isaiah 30:20-21).

As we previously read, the immortal saints under Jesus Christ will be priests and teachers who will spread out over the world to direct all education. Isaiah 30:20-21 speaks of these “teachers.” In addition, peoples from all over the world will come to Jerusalem to learn God’s “ways,” “paths,” “law” and “word,” and then they will take that knowledge back to their nations (Isaiah 2:1-3).

Before long, all with teaching responsibilities, including parents, will teach the truth. God says of that time, “No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them” (Jeremiah 31:34). After a while, “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).

God truly “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

You may have noticed quite a few references in this lesson to the book of Isaiah. It has more messianic and millennial prophecies than any other book. Yet many additional prophecies of the Millennium are found throughout the Bible.

God has blessed us with a clear vision of the fabulous future He has in store for us! May we have the focus, dedication and determination to walk in His paths. May we become disciples of Christ now so we’ll be ready when He returns to help Him teach the rest of the world those paths!

Apply now

Think about how different the Millennium will be compared to the world today. Write down three evils in the world today that you are especially eager to see abolished by Jesus Christ. Next, write down three of the wonderful conditions prophesied about the Millennium that you are especially eager to see come to pass. Then during the coming week when you are praying “Your kingdom come,” think of those six reasons you are especially eager to see it come! It will put more heartfelt meaning and fervency into your prayer.

And to learn more about the promise of this coming Kingdom and how you may have a part in it, download or request our free study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. 📖



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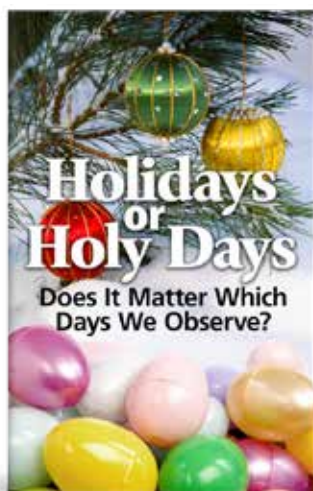
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