

BEYOND TODAY®

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"THE WAR TO END ALL WARS"

Why Can't We Find Peace?

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BEYOND TODAY®

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Scott Ashley
Managing editor

How Will War End?

During World War I many German soldiers marched into war with their imperial motto *Gott Mit Uns*—“God With Us”—emblazoned on their helmets and belt buckles. Priests, pastors and chaplains on both sides encouraged the men to fight in their side’s righteous cause, proclaiming it was God’s will that they emerge victorious.

At home, the Anglican bishop of London, Arthur Winnington-Ingram, declared this “a holy war” and urged British soldiers to “kill Germans . . . not for the sake of killing, but to save the world, to kill the good as well as the bad, to kill the young as well as the old . . . As I have said a thousand times, I look upon it as a war for purity, I look upon everyone who died in it as a martyr” (quoted by Philip Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade*, 2014, p. 71).

In Germany, pastor Dietrich Vorweck rewrote the Lord’s prayer to say:

*Our Father, from the height of heaven,
Make haste to succor Thy German people.
Help us in the holy war . . .
Lead Thy German Reich to glorious victories.
Who will stand before the conquerors? . . .
Lord, Thy will be done! . . .
Smite the foe each day with death and tenfold woes . . .
Lead us not into the temptation
Of letting our wrath be too gentle
In carrying out Thy divine judgment.* (quoted on p. 13)

Such pleas apparently went unanswered as millions died or were permanently maimed on muddy, bloody battlefields in four years of fighting during which the border barely moved.

“A striking commentary on the war was offered by Britain’s Harry Patch, the last soldier to have fought in the war’s trenches and who died in 2009 at the age of 111. He felt the war had not been worth a single life . . . He recalled seeing half-savage dogs fighting over biscuits taken from dead men’s pockets and wondering, ‘What are we doing that’s really any different? Two civilized nations, British and German, fighting for our lives.’ In summary, he commented, ‘What . . . we fought for, I now don’t know’” (pp. 2-3).



British soldiers gather for a religious service near the front lines during World War I.

This is not to say that World War I was without result. Four empires fell, the world’s first communist state came into being, the world that existed before 1914 was destroyed and the stage was set for even greater carnage in the Second World War. One effect that continues to this day is that millions of people lost their faith in a God who could allow such indescribable suffering.

But God is not uninvolved or uncaring. He cares deeply about His creation, about His children of all nations and races. One of the Bible’s best-loved passages tells us, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). And God will bring about offering the opportunity for salvation to all mankind—just not in the way most people expect. As explained in this issue, God is not offering salvation to the entire world now. Nor is He trying to end human suffering now.

He knows that human beings the world over must learn some very painful lessons before being willing to admit that “the way of peace they have not known” (Romans 3:17, quoting Isaiah 59:8).

Why do we not know the way to peace? Because “there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). The way that seems right to our thinking has led to generations of bloody wars in which we have learned to kill each other in increasingly efficient ways!

But it will not always be this way. As also explained in this issue, a time is coming in which Jesus Christ, as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, “shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people . . .” (Isaiah 2:4). As a result, “. . . 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” (same verse).

This is describing the coming Kingdom of God—the same Kingdom for which Christ tells us to pray, “Your kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10). We hope you’ll join us in that prayer. Read this issue to learn more about the need for that Kingdom and how it will come! **BT**



"THE WAR TO END ALL WARS"

Why Can't We Find Peace?

On the 100th anniversary marking the end of World War I, we still see a world mired in conflict and often on the brink of even greater war. Many of today's problems can be traced to that conflict. If we are to understand the way to peace, we must first understand what leads to war.

by **Darris McNeely**

My father served in World War II. He brought home a lot of baggage, some emotional and some literal—old uniforms, medals, maps and lots of pictures.

I remember once picking up his service Bible and opening it to find a poppy pressed between sheets of wax paper.

“Where did you get this?” I asked.

“In Flanders field,” he replied, and he began to recite the sobering poem written during the *First World War*.

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

I was taken aback as I heard the words pour out of his heart. This was the only poem I ever heard him speak. It must have been deeply meaningful to my dad for him to commit this poem to memory.

“In Flanders Fields” is a haunting war poem about the dead speaking to the living, pleading not to be forgotten. To study the poem closely you hear the dead saying to the living:

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.*

Listen closely. The dead are urging the living on toward more fighting and, tragically, more death.

As a child I remember veterans wearing artificial poppies on the streets of my hometown each Nov. 11. I have one of these in my office, purchased in Canada a few years ago.

The Great War was a voracious killing machine. Millions of soldiers and civilians died! Yet horribly, the armistice of 1918 did not end the killing.

I look at the poppy not as a pro-war symbol, but as a poignant reminder of the folly and tragedy of war, especially World War I.

“The Long European War”

The ultimate sacrifice made by all the war dead from all time should cause us to consider both the causes and the legacy of war.

As we begin, let’s consider a new definition of terms. It has been customary to refer to the war that began in 1914 as World War I, having supposedly concluded in 1918, and the next world war of 1939-1945 as World War II. Yet to properly understand what began in 1914 we should consider using a term coined by some historians, “the Long European War.”

This decades-long conflict in effect began in 1914 and lasted until 1989 with the end of what has been called the Cold War. We are still living with the effects of the events of this 75-year span today. I will use the terms interchangeably in this article, but keep in mind that the world wars of the

20th century are better viewed as one continuous war with temporary truces at intervals.

Let’s first consider the human cost of this long conflict’s first phase known as World War I or the Great War—which many then called “the war to end all wars.” When the guns fell silent on Nov. 11, 1918, some 9 million soldiers were dead. An additional 21 million were wounded, many maimed for life. It was impossible to tally the additional millions of civilians who died of starvation or disease.

For 52 horrendous months this war was a voracious killing machine. Germany alone lost a man *virtually every second* of the war.

But the armistice didn’t end the killing. Russia tore itself apart with a civil war leading to a Communist dictatorship that resulted in tens of millions killed over the next 20 years. The war was also a major factor in the great influenza pandemic of 1918-1919 that killed between 20 and 50 million people worldwide, far more than the war itself killed (see “Spanish Flu—The Pandemic That Changed the World” beginning on page 14).

Immediate fighting ended, but conflict remained

The armistice brought an end to the killing, but it did not bring peace. One of the most revealing books on this subject is David Fromkin’s *A Peace to End All Peace* (1989). Fromkin focuses on the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the war’s impact on the Middle East, particularly the creation of its modern political divisions at the Paris Peace Conference, held in 1919-1922 by the victor nations.

Understanding the story of how the nations of Syria, Jordan and Iraq were formed is to understand much of the current conflicts impacting this region today. As the book title says, the aftermath of this fighting did not bring peace to the Middle East. Instead it perpetuated conflict.

For hundreds of years the Ottoman Empire kept a fragile peace in the Middle East. I use the term “peace” in the sense that a centralized autocratic

government can by brute force impose order over a region with deep ethnic and tribal loyalties. In spite of the peoples’ common religion (Islam) and common language (Arabic), there were, and are, deeply divisive issues perpetuating conflict.

But with victory in the war, Great Britain and the other Allies forever ended Turkish rule of the Middle East. In its place they created countries similar to those of Europe but without local agreement. The geographic lines of the new states were drawn without adequate understanding of the ethnic and religious tensions.

As an example, look at the lines of the state of Jordan. You see straight lines, some almost at right angles to each other, with no connection to the reality on the ground. The warring factions in Syria today bear brutal testimony to the diplomats’ failure nearly a century ago.

Failure in redrawing the Mideast map

Fromkin points out that European politicians assumed the secular state model of Europe could be imposed on a region

whose roots went deep into history on the belief of sacred law. The Quran, the sacred book of Islam, gives birth to Sharia law. Radical Islamists believe modern democratic states have no legitimacy. This is of course particularly true with the state of Israel, the Jewish inhabitants of which they wish to drive into the sea. But the Islamists are also opposed to secular Muslim states headed by secular rulers, which is why they have often tried to overthrow moderate Muslim governments.

At stake, writes Fromkin, is “the question of whether the transplanted modern system of politics invented in Europe—characterized, among other things, by the division of the earth into independent secular states based on national citizenship—will survive in the foreign soil of the Middle East” (pp. 563-564).

Modern secular government has not put down roots in most nations of the Middle East. Western-style democracy is merely a surface structure masking deep ethnic divisions. Modern democratic forms of government are alien to large portions of the Muslim population. Democracy cannot be imposed by armed force. It must start in the hearts and minds of the people and prevail after long periods of testing, debate and discussion.

In more recent times, the modern Middle East created by the events of the Long European War has been convulsing since the Arab Spring of 2011. Not only have governments been toppled amid civil uprising and war, but millions of refugees have spread north and west into Europe. The massive human migrations have disrupted Europe in a surprising if not ironic reversal. European diplomats created a hodgepodge of unsustainable nations in the Middle East almost a century ago; now many people from these nations are within Europe’s borders creating massive disruption there.

The truth is, European leaders of the World War I era failed to understand the power of Islam over the hearts and minds of people. A case can be made that today’s leaders still don’t understand the power of religion in general, not just Islam, as a force in history and among people. Secular policies and humanistic thinking have never replaced the power of religion to offer meaning and hope to people.

Just as the dream of Alexander the Great of a Hellenized world (that is, one permeated with Greek culture) was eventually absorbed into the earlier traditions and ideologies of local regions such as those of Babylon and Egypt, so too will any plans to plant a radically different culture throughout the Middle East. Bible prophecy shows us that politics in the Middle East and the world are shaped by powerful spiritual forces little understood or recognized by the human mind (Revelation 16:13-14).

World War I created seismic shifts in the Middle East that still reverberate today. Fromkin concludes his insightful book in stating that the questions opened up in redrawing the map of the region after the war “are even now being contested by force of arms, year after year, in the ruined streets of Beirut, along the banks of the slow-moving Tigris-Euphrates, and by the waters of the Biblical Jordan” (p. 565).

Increasing godless culture

The devastating human carnage of World War I that killed



The Middle East before World War I—largely devoid of borders.



British troops march through Mesopotamia, today’s Iraq, in 1917.

World War I created seismic shifts in the Middle East that still reverberate today. Leaders of the era, like today, failed to understand the power of religion over the hearts and minds of people.

off millions of young men in the prime of life deepened an already existing crisis in religious faith. Centuries of Enlightenment thinking had already eroded the hold religion held over people.

The expansion of scientific and technical knowledge had placed man at the center of moral thought, removing the need for and reliance on God. Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution cast doubt on the Bible’s account of man being a unique creation from the hand of a Creator. Karl Marx’s ideas of socialism, coupled with Sigmund Freud’s studies on psychoanalysis, altered the way people related to each other and further pushed God and biblical values out of the picture.

The Great War or World War I accelerated existing trends toward atheism, nihilism and the denial of God. This was not a new human phenomenon. In his first-century letter to the church at Rome, the apostle Paul described the world of



Australian soldiers wait out a gas attack in Ypres, Belgium, in 1917.

his day as one that had cast God out on the street. Even then people could see the clear proof of God's existence through the natural world, but they refused to recognize it or bow in humble thanksgiving and submission to Him.

God allowed man to wallow in his own moral filth, believing lies as truth and reaping the fruit of their rejection of Him as Creator. Paul's conclusion: "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, *God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting*" (Romans 1:28, emphasis added throughout unless otherwise noted).

The war changed the way people looked at the world and at themselves. Before it began in August 1914, the world was full of hope and possibilities, a truly golden period of globalization in which goods and services, ideas and culture were shared and traded far and wide. But afterward hope was drained, and the effect of lost times and a lost generation reoriented everything.

In *A World Undone: The Story of the Great War, 1914 to 1918*, G.J. Meyer illustrates this through the change in poetry after the war. In the prewar world poetry still mattered to people. Both the good and bad, it popularly expressed people's inner thoughts and perceptions. Newspapers then received hundreds of poems each day.

As the nations took up arms and men went off to war, the poetry of the time expressed lofty thoughts of patriotism and glory. But soon the death, the mud of the trenches, the poisonous gassing and the simple horror of a new kind of warfare became widely known, and the mood changed. As Meyer says, the "literature came to a stop, appeared to be dead for a while, and then started up again on an entirely new plane" (2006, p. 544).

This is illustrated by two poems. One by Rupert Brooke written in 1914 speaks grandly of death for one's country as noble:

*If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England.*

A few months after writing this, Brooke died on a hospital ship from a mosquito bite that had become infected. He was 27 years old.

Contrast this with a poem written later in the war by Wilfred Owen. Describing the look of a dying soldier flung onto a wagon he writes:

*If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin,
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs . . .
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old lie: *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*
["Sweet and fitting it is to die for one's country"].*

Owen's poems were a major voice then and now for critics of war. Meyer concludes: "The war really did change *everything*: not just borders, not just governments and the fate of nations, but the way people have seen the world and themselves ever since. It became a kind of hole in time, leaving the postwar world permanently disconnected from everything that had come before" (p. 544, emphasis in original).

Understanding the deeper, unseen war

"In Flanders Fields," which I quoted from earlier, should not be read as a glorification of war but as a sober wakeup call to the insanity of war. We have yet to fully grasp the far-reaching impact this world conflagration ignited. The demons of war were unleashed, bottled up for a time only to be let loose again in what is known as World War II, lasting from 1939 to 1945. The seeds of every major conflict since can be found in what began in 1914.

Yet we need to understand what was going on here on a deeper level—in fact, on a spiritual level.

Psalm 2:1-3 asks: "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, 'Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.'"

Here is a summation of history. Kingdoms, nations and peoples have made plans apart from God and His purpose. The wars and subsequent suffering are the fruit of a spirit of hostility and anger against God, against the idea of a Supreme Being who claims a moral certainty in all He does and all He has revealed to the world.

The nations rage and set themselves in battle against each other. Humanity has been enslaved by long annals of wars. Jesus Christ warned that increasing "wars and rumors of wars" would be a sign of the times leading to His second coming. And yes, there is coming another period of world war that will dwarf anything we've seen previously. It will be so deadly, so devastating, that if not for God's direct intervention, *human extinction would be the result* (Matthew 24:21-22).

Years ago I heard a story, whether apocryphal or not I don't know, about a Himalayan monk who lamented the loss of his gods. "They all went to Europe in 1914 and have not returned," he told a traveler.

While reviewing accounts of the beginning of this terrible war, I am struck again at how avoidable it all appears to have been. Leaders and nations watched while an aggressive Germany armed itself and grew ever more belligerent. In the fateful summer before hostilities broke out, there were frantic efforts to stay the dogs of war, but these proved futile. One reads the accounts and has to wonder why no one could summon the

moral and spiritual qualities to halt the frenzy. Was something else at work—something unseen to the human eye?

Revelation 16, which concerns a yet-future conflict, provides the answer. At a coming time of world turmoil, the prophesied crisis at the close of this age (see Daniel 12:1), *a gathering of armies is summoned by spirits from the realm of evil*. Notice: “Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon [Satan], out of the mouth of the beast [a powerful dictator], and out of the mouth of the false prophet [a great religious leader falsely claiming to represent God]” (verses 12-13).

Throughout history certain leaders have not spoken their own words or acted out their own plans, but have been agents of demons, carrying out the designs of the god of this age, Satan the devil (2 Corinthians 4:4). History books fail to discern this. No theory of geopolitics considers this revealed truth. But without this dimension of understanding it is impossible to really discern the past, present and especially the future.

When we look at the Long European War are we really seeing a larger spiritual war behind the scenes? Are we not looking at the impact of an unseen spirit world acting on human nature and turning the hearts of man against his fellow man? *We are*. Without this understanding, mankind remains ignorant of the underlying foundation of this world and how it really works. Understanding of not only the past legacy of war, but also of what lies ahead, is found in this truth of the Bible.

Notice more from this end-time prophecy of the book of Revelation: “*For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty . . . And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon [that is, Megiddo in northern Israel]*” (verses 14-16).

Setting the stage for the final battle

The saddest legacy of man’s history of war is that *more war* lies in the future. Nations have not understood the fundamental change of the human spirit required to quench the flames of anger, suspicion and hatred that erupt into conflict and bloodshed.

What we have just read is a prophecy of the final battle when the kings and rulers of the earth set themselves against God. The ending of this battle will indeed be “the war to end all wars.” God “shall break them with a rod of iron” and “dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel” (Psalm 2:9).

As I write this, U.S. President Donald Trump has spent two days in Brussels during this year’s NATO summit. He made headlines by his insistence that NATO member states live up to their agreement to spend 2 percent of their gross domestic product on military preparedness. His point was that it is not fair for the United States to be spending the largest proportion of money both by percentage and dollars to the defense of Europe while prosperous countries like Germany spend far less than their agreed-on share as they run up huge trade surpluses with America.

While his point is certainly valid, watching this I had

to wonder whether the president or any of his advisors understand European history. Calling for Europe to increase its arms spending is a recipe for another conflict. History teaches that nations that build vast armaments eventually will use those weapons in a war. Again, the principle of “unintended consequences” is at work. And yes, Europe will rearm and play a dominant role in a final worldwide conflagration that will threaten to annihilate all life on earth. (See “Europe providing for its defense: unintended consequences?” on page 18. And to learn more, download or read online our free study guide *The Final Superpower*.)

A global superpower led by Satan through evil leaders

Revelation 13 gives us more background on the “Beast” and “False Prophet” that are led by demonic spirits to a climactic battle at Jesus Christ’s return.

The term “Beast” in this chapter initially refers to an end-time geopolitical superpower which, among other things, has



Understanding of the causes of our past legacy of war, and also of what lies ahead for humanity, is found in the truth of the Bible.

the devil as the unseen force behind it (verse 4), leads people to worship Satan the devil (verse 4), is diametrically opposed to God (verses 5-6), persecutes and overcomes God’s faithful people (verse 7) and wields power over much of the earth (verse 7).

The “Beast” also refers to a specific individual, the political dictator over the Beast empire.

This chapter also refers to “another beast” with the appearance of a lamb though speaking like Satan the dragon (verse 11), which performs miraculous signs that deceive much of the world and lead them into allegiance to the Beast (verses 12-14), using the power of this state to persecute and kill those who refuse to go along (verses 15-17). This refers to a false religion and its leader.

This individual is also presented as the miracle-working False Prophet (Revelation 19:20), allied with the political dictator, who uses the authority of a great worldwide religion to advance their mutual interests (symbolized by an immoral, fallen woman riding a beast in Revelation 17:1-6). Together

they lead an alliance of 10 “kings” or rulers of nations or groups of nations that together form this coming end-time superpower (verses 12-13).

Putting these prophetic pieces together, what we are seeing is the next phase of a millennia-old European dream of uniting the nations of Europe under a common government with the common goal of ruling the world—just as we saw in World Wars I and II.

And these efforts will indeed lead to another world war—one unlike anything witnessed in all of human history!

God’s intervention to save us from ourselves

Understand that it is not just military devastation that will plague the world at this time ahead of us. Chapters 6, 8 and 9 of the book of Revelation describe events that will take the lives of literally billions of people through warfare (6:4; 9:1-18), famine (6:5-6), disease (6:8) and horrifying natural disasters (8:7-13).

As the military powers of the world gather in the Middle

As the militaries of the world gather in the Middle East and the fate of humanity hangs in the balance, rescue will come from an unexpected source!

East and the fate of the human race hangs in the balance, rescue for the world will come from an unexpected source! Yet that source will not at first be welcome.

Revelation 19:11-21 describes what will happen then: “Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.”

This is none other than the returning Jesus Christ! But now he comes to earth not to offer His life as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind, but as conquering King who will put an end to all human rebellion against God!

“And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

“Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, ‘Come and gather together for the supper of the great

God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.’

“And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.”

A world of peace at last

With the last great human armies wiped out here and in a subsequent battle that will follow not long after, as described in Ezekiel 38-39, peace will at last begin to settle over the entire earth. A magnificent prophecy from Isaiah 2:3-4 describes how peoples from all over the world will begin to learn and practice God’s

way of peace. Jerusalem, long the center of conflict, will be the center of God’s truth and way of life:

“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. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

Sadly, World War I was not the war to end all wars. Neither was the Second World War a generation later. The world will see more Flanders Fields before it sees the end of war.

If we were to rewrite the lines of the poem “In Flanders Fields,” we might have the dead say to the living: “*Stop the quarrel with the foe. Lay down your arms. Beat your spears into pruning hooks and your swords into plowshares. Instead of learning war, learn the way to peace!*” The words of the prophet Isaiah would be a better epitaph for the dead from any war of the past.

I often wonder if my father looked at the poem he quoted from the perspective of peace rather than fighting. An uncle of mine once told me, several years after my father died, that when the Korean War broke out in 1950 the U.S. Army was looking to draft veterans from World War II. My uncle and my dad were talking about the prospect of their being called up to serve.

“They’d better bring three men to get me,” my dad said, “because I’m not going back.” He had seen enough of war, watched enough men die and saw enough bodies buried. He wanted no more.

Now, 100 years after the end of the so-called war to end all wars, we wait for the day when *peace* is learned—not war. Can you imagine it? How comforting is the truth that this will really happen—and that God tells us how it will come about! BT



LEARN MORE

Over the centuries mankind has fought for peace, longed for peace and prayed for peace—but all in vain. Will we ever see peace? If so, how will it come about? Download or request your free study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom* today!

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Will We Ever Achieve PEACE?

Can our leaders ever negotiate peace? Can we experience it in our personal lives? What will it take for the world to finally know rest?

by Rudy Rangel

For the second time this year, I wasn't sure how to feel when I saw U.S. President Donald Trump smiling and shaking hands with an international foe—this time with Russia's Vladimir Putin after some tense meetings with America's European allies. The previous time came a couple months before in a meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un that stunned many.

Thinking about these encounters gives rise to larger questions about achieving peace in the world.

President Trump's meetings with Kim and Putin

In the earlier get-together, it was strange to see the camaraderie between the most powerful man in the world and a rogue dictator, with slaps on the back as among old pals. Not just any rogue dictator, but one who has severely oppressed and harmed his own people and had recently made threats against the United States as well as neighboring East Asian nations.

Prior to this the United States had slapped sanctions on North Korea because of its refusal to end its nuclear program. President Trump had chided Kim, mocking him as "Rocket Man" for his continued attempts to develop long-range nuclear-capable missiles, even ones to reach the U.S. Pacific coast. Back in January President Trump tweeted that while Kim has a nuclear button on his desk, "I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!"

Despite this history a meeting was arranged for these two to sit down and discuss the denuclearization of North

Korea along with some other peacekeeping topics. And after much politicking, the meeting even being called off and later rescheduled with a different venue, it actually happened.

Many in the media and opponents of Mr. Trump quickly derided him for even deigning to meet with Kim. Fast forward to President Trump shaking hands with Putin, another bad guy on the world scene. The two conducted a joint press conference after their private meeting. There was an immediate backlash to Mr. Trump's apparent acceptance of Putin's adamant denial of Russia's interference in the 2016 U.S. election. President Trump was asked why he had more trust in the Russian president than in U.S. intelligence findings. Most pundits were not satisfied with his answer.

Since taking office, Mr. Trump's tactics have not been those of a typical politician. He stated in the press conference: "I would rather take a political risk in pursuit of peace, than to risk peace in pursuit of politics. As president, I will always put what is best for America and what is best for the American people."

President Trump left the Singapore meeting with Kim saying "we got everything" we wanted. Yet press analysts have said that the document signed was vague and that we shouldn't put a lot of confidence in it.

Personally, after everything has settled I can say that I'm grateful for a peaceful meeting. It's better than the alternative. I'd like to give the president the benefit of the doubt and recognize his meeting with a madman as a chess play to keep peace in the world.

The president noted on July 15 on Twitter: "There hasn't been a missile or rocket fired in 9 months in North Korea,

there have been no nuclear tests and we got back our hostages. Who knows how it will all turn out in the end, but why isn't the Fake News [by which he means the mainstream media giving a slanted presentation of the news] talking about these wonderful facts?"

The same goes for the benefits of meeting with Putin on friendly terms. After Mr. Trump reaffirmed in a July 16 tweet that he has great confidence in his intelligence people, he said, "However, I also recognize that in order to build a brighter future, we cannot exclusively focus on the past—as the world's two largest nuclear powers, we must get along!"

Yet even in a best-case scenario of complete nuclear disarmament by North Korea and positive relations between Russia and the West, it all still feels like a Band-Aid rather than a permanent solution to the conflict in the world. There is still a great deal of global unrest. In my lifetime I've seen how things can change very quickly on the world scene. As America learned the hard way, one terrorist attack can forever change the safety and security of a nation for decades.

Why is peace between the nations so elusive? Will we ever achieve peace? Can we achieve it by negotiations and politicking? Can we simply elect the right people to just fix everything and rid ourselves of the unrest?

Ongoing war—right up to the end

When in history can we find times of peace? The Pax Romana—the period of relative peace and stability of the Roman Empire during its height—comes to mind. But even that was only within the confines of the empire to a certain extent, and only because Rome conquered and oppressed

Why is peace between nations so elusive? Will we ever achieve it? Can we achieve peace by negotiating or politicking or electing the right people?

subject peoples, which did not seem so peaceful to all of them. Is that the high water mark of peace, the best we can hope to achieve?

Regrettably, we see in Bible prophecy that there will be war right up to the end of this age. When Jesus Christ returns, appearing in the sky on a white horse, it will be in the midst of an ongoing global war, and the nations' armies will turn to fight Him!

"Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war . . . And I saw the beast [an evil dictator], the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army" (Revelation 19: 11, 19).

Jesus will be coming to bring restoration to the earth, but only after He unleashes judgment on a generation whose every thought is evil. It will be a one-sided battle, with Jesus defeating them all in a display of great power.

The armies at this prophesied event are not like ancient forces who fought with swords, shields, spears, and bows and arrows. These will be the most powerful armies humanity has ever seen.

Jesus describes the kind of firepower the armies of the world will be capable of in stating: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened [cut short from running their course], no flesh would be saved [alive]; but for the elect's sake [the sake of God's chosen people] those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:21-22).

This can seem scary, right? In reading scriptures like this, one can become overwhelmed with anxiety about what is foretold to happen. And from the headlines it's easy to see a lot of reasons people would fear.

It's not just the nukes in North Korea or tensions with Russia that are alarming. Other places in the world are producing frightening scenarios that go beyond local borders and have us all on edge.

The Middle East, for example, is always in some turmoil. Iran, despite recent agreements, still wants to become a nuclear power. We have seen terrible dictators in Africa committing genocide against their own people. We are in desperate need of peace!

The disciples asked Jesus about the end of the age and what it would be like. Jesus warned that there would be wars and rumors of wars, confirming that we won't solve these problems ourselves. He then told them: "See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet" (Matthew 24:6).

The prophesied armies will wield enough destructive force to annihilate the entire world. Jesus will have to intervene at that time so we don't destroy ourselves!

This sounds bleak. It makes peace talks sound futile. Still, we aren't to be troubled by these things. Those of us looking to God shouldn't live a life of fear, waiting for the shoe to drop and the world to erupt

on us. God is fully aware of what is happening, and He will allow the terrible events ahead to continue only temporarily. He will intervene when the time is right. Until then we can be comforted by what Jesus told His disciples: "See that you are not troubled."

Corrupted nature behind human warfare

Given that war is so costly, destructive and wasteful, why does it continue?

Since the time of the Garden of Eden the human race has rejected God. Satan used a tactic on Adam and Eve that was very appealing to our human desire for knowledge. He told them, "You will be like God, knowing good and evil." Full understanding, knowledge and wisdom are what Satan said the results would be for eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Part of the deception of Satan is that we can make everything right on our own. All of the wars and rocket attacks and political posturing can be put right if we just talk to one another and work it out. We can do it—or so we imagine. All we have to do is shake enough hands and compromise with our neighbors and we can achieve peace.

But that's part of the lie. We took of the forbidden tree because we wanted to know as God does and determine things for ourselves. We think, "We've got this . . ." Let's just get behind the right candidate, join peace protests or push to have the United Nations step in. Satan has fooled us into thinking we are capable of achieving peace without God directing us. It's just not true.

The Bible states: "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war" (James 4:1-2). Where we have our corrupt human nature, which is influenced by Satan, we will have wars—period.

Where does that leave us? Do we end up in an ever-escalating world of violence? That is not what God desires for us.

What is the battle for a Christian?

God sent His Son to earth with a mission. He was to live perfectly as an example to His followers. He also came to establish His Church, His Spirit-led group of followers in this age—to continue the work He began. After He died, was resurrected and ascended into heaven, His followers continued on. Those of His Church don't live by the same mentality as those around them. They strive to live by the lifestyle that is expected in God's coming Kingdom.

Yet believe it or not, Christians are still at war. Not the wars we read about in headlines and news feeds. Rather, our battle rages on in the spiritual realm: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12, English Standard Version). Satan and his demons are always trying to influence God's people into sinful corruption.

The battle of a Christian is to spend a life of over-coming the very nature Adam and Eve succumbed to in the Garden. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal [of physical flesh] but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). And: "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3).

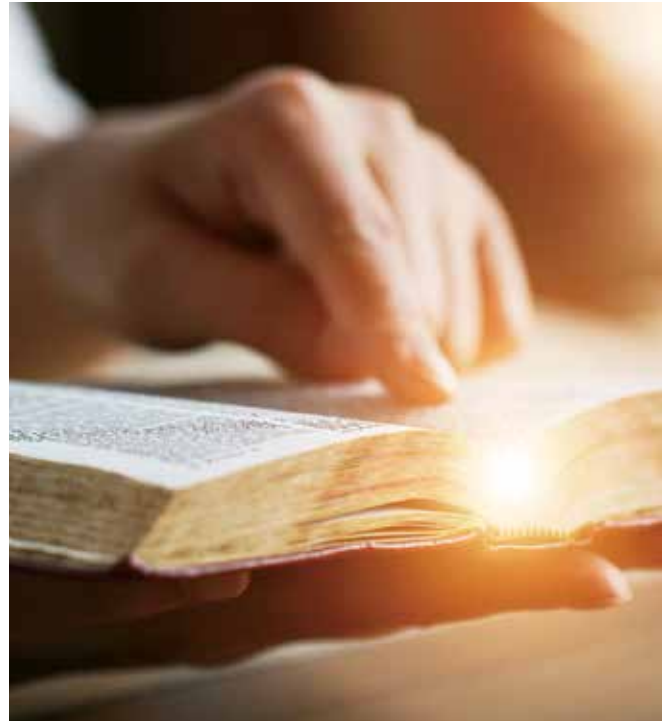
This does not sound like a peaceful calling—but overcoming these hostile spiritual forces *does bring peace*. It's a peace that will affect you on a very personal level. It's a peace God is calling you to today.

Jesus was the chief ambassador of a new world that is coming. He is going to establish a Kingdom of peace and will usher in a new era without war and fighting. The seeds of that Kingdom are being sown today, and the people whom God is working with are living examples of that peace to come.

"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. *And let the peace of God rule*

in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful" (Colossians 3:12-15, emphasis added).

Letting the peace of God "rule" in your heart is an interesting way to describe how we should be living and overcoming. The Greek term here gives the sense, from related usage, of our



Knowing God, knowing His truth and living by His Word brings wonderful assurance, comfort and real peace.

yielding to the call of an umpire in sports. An umpire knows the rules and makes judgments in situations. Yielding to God's peace means submitting to His laws, which define His way of life of outflowing, loving concern, leading to peace.

From inner peace to world peace

When we yield to God's peace we can live free from fear—free from the fear of what we see on the world scene. We can also live free from the fears we have in our personal lives. Yielding to God's rule gives a peace that surpasses understanding (Philippians 4:7). If you have fears about finances, health problems or interpersonal issues, you can let the peace of God rule in your heart.

But to experience this peace, you have to yield to Him in all areas of your life. You have to make God and His coming Kingdom your priority.

Jesus promised this peace to His followers: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

Jesus differentiated the peace He offers from the peace we can achieve on our own. When we read about the wars and

political wrangling in the world today, we can see that the peace of God is absent. We can see that leaders are putting their own selfish interests first and don't really know the way to peace in international dealings. When it comes to maintaining peace in our world today, it typically comes because one nation's military might is stronger than the adversary's.

When Jesus said, "My peace I give to you," He wasn't offering something superficial. He was offering something that only the God of peace can offer. How, then, do you acquire this peace?

Peace is an element of "the fruit of the Spirit." Before ascending to heaven Jesus instructed His disciples to go into all nations preaching all they had learned, making disciples and baptizing them (Mark 16:16-18; Matthew 28:19). The repentant who were baptized would receive the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands by a minister of God (Acts 2:38; Acts 8:14-18; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6-7; Hebrews 6:1-2).

Yielding to the Spirit gives you the power to grow in all the attributes it produces: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another" (Galatians 5:22-26).

In receiving the Holy Spirit you begin seeing these attributes in your life. You can harness and take on these powerful characteristics by the power of this amazing gift. It still takes work on your part—striving to overcome your own nature as well as the influences of the corrupt culture around you.

But success comes only with God's help through Christ. And in giving your life to God you receive a peace you weren't capable of before. Knowing God, knowing His truth and living by His Word brings wonderful assurance, comfort and real peace.

This will ultimately be the pathway to peace and salvation for all mankind!

In the future, Jesus at His return will gather all those who are His and set the world straight. He will lead the nations into peace. There will be no more of the politicking we see today—no more incitement to nations fighting one another. We will have a perfect King reigning supreme.

The prophet Isaiah gives us an amazing picture of that time to come: "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse [the Messiah, Jesus], who shall stand as a banner to the people; for the Gentiles [all nations] shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11:9-10).

Then at last there will truly be world peace. What a beautiful future we have ahead of us! **BT**

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Spanish Flu

The Pandemic That Changed the World

On the heels of World War I, the most deadly war in human history up to that time, came an even deadlier killer—an influenza epidemic that killed millions. Does Bible prophecy indicate we may see such epidemics again?

by Ben Light

This year marks 100 years since the end of what was called “the war to end all wars.” From 1914 to 1918, following the assassination of the Austrian archduke Franz Ferdinand, humanity found itself embroiled in a conflict the likes of which the world had never seen. It was to become the deadliest human conflict in history thus far, killing approximately 16 million, and wounding 25 million more.

Sadly, it would be eclipsed only a few decades later by World War II, but at the time no one had experienced anything like World War I before.

After four long years of bloody conflict, the war ended on Nov. 11, 1918, afterward marked annually as Armistice Day. However the deaths didn’t stop. In fact, it was only the beginning.

A deadly killer—the 1918 Spanish Flu

In the early months of 1918, people in Europe, the United States and Asia began getting sick with an illness that brought on fevers, nausea, body aches and diarrhea. Initially, the first wave of the illness was relatively benign, and most individuals who contracted it recovered. The disease was discovered to be a form of influenza. And, as expected, when the normal flu season ended things seemed to improve.

That improvement was short-lived, however. As the late spring and summer months went on and the fall of 1918 began, a second wave of influenza had begun to spread. By

October and November the entire world was dealing with the repercussions.

What set this second wave apart from the first was its virulence and the rapid onset of death in those who contracted the illness. Some who came down with this variant of influenza died within hours of exhibiting symptoms, their skin turning blue and dark spots appearing on their cheeks. Their lungs filled with a frothy red fluid, and they suffocated to death.

Around the world, the numbers infected by this insidious virus and the numbers who died after contracting it grew rapidly, and a curious thing was discovered—this particular variant of influenza *disproportionately killed people in the prime of their life.*

While most illnesses tend to cause higher mortality rates in the very young and the elderly, the 1918 Spanish Flu outbreak was different. The highest mortality was found in populations aged 15 to 44, the people who would seem to have been more able to successfully survive the illness.

In fact, so many in this demographic died between 1918 and 1919 that *the U.S. life expectancy was lowered by 12 years.*

As the virus spread around the globe, it infected an estimated 500 million people—a *third* of the world population in 1918. There were few areas around the world that hadn’t been affected by the virus, and few families that hadn’t been impacted. When the dust settled at the end of 1919 and the

early months of 1920, *between 20 and 50 million people had lost their lives in this pandemic.*

The actual death toll numbers are impossible to ascertain since most countries weren't able to keep accurate records due to the large numbers of those who died, but all historians agree that *the virus killed more than the war did.*

The war itself certainly contributed to its spread as large-scale worldwide troop movements, importing of mercenary soldiers from every corner of the world, and the cramped and highly unsanitary wartime conditions helped contribute to the rapid spread of the virus in the late summer and early fall of 1918.

Some historians actually credit the Spanish Flu and its spread with weakening the Central Powers and helping to lead to the Nov. 11 truce.

Certainly the virus had changed the world.

The world is not ready

As I write this article, I'm sitting in seat 10C on a Boeing 737-800 on my way back home from Los Angeles. On this plane are approximately 160 individuals who just passed through one of the busiest international airports in the country, LAX, at some point in time today. Some likely made connecting flights from other parts of the world on their way back to or through our flight's destination of Portland, Oregon.

In the row behind me a woman has been coughing for the past five minutes. Those aerosolized droplets will intermingle

could carry the illness home, coming down sick in a few days and spreading it to family members or coworkers.

This same scenario is duplicated hundreds of thousands of times each day around the world. According to the website FlightRadar24, the day of this flight, July 10, saw a record number of flights tracked around the world—204,147 total. When we consider the sheer number of personal interactions the individuals on those planes experienced, it's not hard to imagine how quickly something could quickly spread to become a worldwide pandemic.

Ebola—a case study in how quickly diseases could spread

In 1918, when the Spanish Influenza outbreak spread around the world killing tens of millions of people, instantaneous air travel wasn't a factor. A person could not be in Seattle one minute and 12 hours later land in Amsterdam, or vice versa. In 1918 travel by ship was the primary means of international travel—which took time. Today, with modern transportation, a person can be exposed to a disease in one location and ultimately transport it to anywhere in the world by hopping on a flight.

For example, between 2013 and 2016, the Ebola virus spread throughout Western Africa, infecting more than 28,000 people and killing more than 11,000. The epicenter was the city of Gueckedou, a border town in Guinea that's a major trading center along a regional crossroads leading into Sierra Leone and Liberia.

On Dec. 6, 2013, a 2-year-old boy contracted the disease and died, but not before he infected his grandmother and 3-year-old sister. Two mourners who attended his grandmother's funeral contracted the disease and carried it home to their villages where it began to slowly spread. A health worker who helped treat the grandmother and sister carried it to another village where more and more people began to be infected.

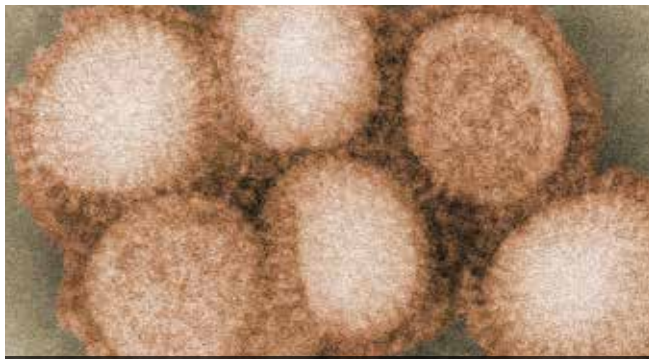
Before long, Guinea, Sierra Leone and a number of other West African countries were experiencing large-scale Ebola outbreaks. Typically Ebola outbreaks in Africa are smaller and isolated and able to be brought under control in a matter of months. This time, however, the virus continued to spread, and instead of remaining localized it was spread for the first time by air travel.

In early July of 2014, Patrick Sawyer, a Liberian-American, contracted Ebola after his sister died from the disease in Liberia. He boarded a flight to Nigeria, and became ill and began to exhibit

symptoms on the flight. Upon landing at Muhammed Murtala Airport in Lagos, he collapsed and was rushed to the hospital where he later died.

While he was in the hospital, the disease spread to a nurse and doctor who treated him there, both of whom died, as well as to others he came into contact with. Over a three-month period, 20 people had become infected, including Mr. Sawyer, and eight had died.

Another individual, Eric Thomas Duncan, a Liberian national, boarded a flight from Monrovia, Liberia, to Dallas, Texas. While he didn't exhibit symptoms on the plane, he became ill once he had landed and was admitted to a hospital



H1N1 version of the Flu virus magnified thousands of times.

A virus can change the world. Some historians credit the spread of Spanish Flu with weakening the Central Powers and the end of World War I.

with the cabin air and circulate through the aircraft, potentially infecting those with compromised immune systems or who are otherwise worn down and more susceptible to infection down the road.

Personally, I feel fine. However, as I went through Los Angeles today, I came into contact with dozens of people—any of whom could potentially be vectors for contagious disease. Each person on this plane has a similar story: Throughout their travels, wherever they may have been and are going, they also came into contact with dozens of people, who had been in contact with dozens of other people, and at every interaction there is the potential to spread disease. They may not exhibit symptoms now, but they



a few days later. He infected two of the nurses who treated him before he too died from the disease. Similar situations occurred in England, Italy and Spain with passengers who traveled to those countries by air during the 2013-2016 outbreak.

In an attempt to prevent continued transmission, many West African countries restricted travel to and from Ebola-infected areas. This slowed down the spread. Eventually the measures worked, the disease burned itself out and no new cases were discovered. West Africa's outbreak was declared over on June 9, 2016.

As frightening as the Ebola outbreak of 2013-2016 was, particularly for West African countries, most epidemiologists agree that Ebola isn't likely to become a pandemic. It isn't virulent enough, and if proper quarantine and protective precautions are taken, the disease is relatively manageable.

Nightmare scenario—another flu pandemic

A disease that keeps epidemiologists awake at night is H7N9 Influenza. H7N9 is a variant of avian flu that has broken out in Asia several times over the past several years. Influenza viruses are notorious for their ability to mutate within hosts, and through the waves of outbreaks, the virus has mutated to the point that it can be transmitted from birds to people, and then to other people.

In a recent outbreak, of those who contracted H7N9 Influenza 88 percent got pneumonia, 75 percent ended up in intensive care, and 40 percent died. In a fifth wave of outbreaks in China in 2017, the virus demonstrated resistance to antiviral drugs typically used to treat influenza, and a worrisome mutation has allowed it to now spread easily by air.

A 2017 study that examined this strain, published in the journal *Cell Host & Microbe*, illustrated the potentially devastating effects if H7N9 were to continue on its present course. The study found that this particular strain had mutated into a highly pathogenic form of the virus that spread easily by air and was highly lethal.

Dr. Michael Osterholm, the director of the University of Minnesota's Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, stated: "*The study is another very stark reminder that we could be sitting on top of a global time bomb with H7N9. There are large gaps in pandemic preparedness, and if H7N9 triggers a pandemic, the vaccine would play a limited role*" (emphasis added throughout).

Imagine a scenario where a large-scale outbreak of highly infectious, drug- and vaccine-resistant H7N9 influenza breaks

out in China. Beijing has the second-busiest airport in the world. More than 94 million people traveled through it in 2016, an average of 258,000 per day. Exposed and carrying the virus, those infected land in one of the 260 different cities that have nonstop flights out of Beijing. How many dozens of other people would each of these passengers come into contact with upon landing? The results could be catastrophic.

A study carried out by Johns Hopkins University earlier this year simulated a new pathogen—one no more dangerous than other known pathogens—that could be spread by coughing. The study concluded that governments are woefully underprepared for such an outbreak that could kill up to 900 million people, more than a tenth of the world's population.

Prophetic implications: Deadly epidemics to come

For years people have wondered what the end times before Jesus Christ returns will be like. In Matthew 24:3, Jesus' disciples asked Him directly: "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and the end of the age?"

Then, throughout Matthew 24, He described the conditions that will usher in the end of the age and His coming. He described religious deception, wars and rumors of wars, famines, pestilence and earthquakes. He went on to state in Matthew 24:8 that these are the beginning of sorrows or of "birth pains" (New International Version). He goes on to describe persecutions, false prophets, lawlessness and the love of many growing cold.

As we look at the world around us, there have been wars and rumors of wars. We have experienced famines, earthquakes and, of course, pestilences in the past.

Did Jesus Christ return after World War I and the influenza outbreak of 1918? *No*—which tells us that what is ultimately being described in Matthew 24 is still *yet* to occur. There will be wars and rumors of wars between now and the return of Jesus Christ. There will be religious deception, ongoing famines, earthquakes and pestilence.

The four horsemen of Revelation

We should understand World War I and the 1918 influenza outbreak in terms of birth pangs, as we just noted in Matthew 24:8. As human labor begins, the contractions start, and they increase in frequency and intensity until the point of birth. Likewise, these events in the early 1900s, and even before that, were the beginnings of the contractions, and they will increase in frequency and intensity as we get closer to the return of Jesus Christ.

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In the prophetic book of Revelation, the apostle John recorded visions from God given through Jesus Christ in which the conditions of the end times were revealed. Through a series of scrolls and seals, John was provided witness to the events of the end time, with some elements literal and some symbolic.

In the first part of Revelation 6, Christ reveals four horsemen loosed on the earth that bring the events described in Matthew 24:7-8 to fruition. As they ride, each provides a different aspect of Matthew 24—religious deception, war, famine and plague, including disease epidemics and natural disasters, accompanied by death.

Verses 1-2: “Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, ‘Come and see.’ And I looked, and behold,

in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.’” This illustrates a time of scarcity and extremely high food costs—and thus famine for many.

Verses 7-8: “When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, ‘Come and see.’ So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades [the grave] followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.”

The pale horse presents the sickly color of those with disease. We further see killing by war, famine and deathly plague. The beasts here could include animals as carriers of disease, such as rats and mosquitoes, and perhaps even microscopic pathogens.

Frightening times ahead, but hope beyond that

As we see here, these four horsemen combined were given power over a fourth of the earth. If you take the current population of this planet, roughly 7.6 billion—one fourth equals nearly *two billion* people dying by warfare, famine, plagues of diseases and natural disasters and the beasts of the earth. By this point, the intensity and frequency of the birth pangs will have increased significantly in the events leading up to the return of Jesus Christ.

Prophetically, the Bible indicates a coming time of great difficulty to engulf our planet—a time like no one has ever seen before, nor will ever see again. It will be a time God will have to cut short or no flesh would be saved alive (Matthew 24:21-22). Included in that difficult time will be terrible pandemics that will cause

great destruction across the globe—pandemics that together will far surpass the death tolls of the 1918 influenza outbreak.

Although our world today is vastly more technologically advanced, that ironically sets the stage through modern transportation and globalization for such pandemics to spread with astounding speed. All it will take is one “patient zero” somewhere in the world to begin the process, and when the dust settles *billions* could be dead.

Our modern technology has also enabled people to weaponize pathogens in biological warfare. Thus some of the terrible pandemics to come may be man-made.

We can take heart, however, in spite of the catastrophes to come, that the same God who has foretold these horrible conditions has also told us of the wonderful Kingdom age that will follow. It is in the promises of the coming Kingdom of God that we place our hope.

When the tribulation is over, Jesus Christ will return triumphantly, and the Kingdom of God will be ushered in to rule over all nations.

Even though all of the prophesied difficulties will get worse and worse—deception, wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes and other disasters—we have no need to worry. We can put our faith in the promises of our great God who is sending Christ to save us! **BT**



Through modern transportation, our technologically advanced world sets the stage for pandemics to spread with astounding speed.

a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.” This is the religious deception Jesus spoke of—a conquering false Christianity, a distortion of the image of Christ returning on a white horse later in the book.

Verses 3-4: “When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, ‘Come and see.’ Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword.” This is clearly war.

Verses 5-6: “When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, ‘Come and see.’ So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales

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What does Bible prophecy reveal about the time of the end? What is foretold to happen, and when? Why will these things come to pass? To learn more, download or request our free study guide *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*

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Battle over U.S. Supreme Court vacancy

On June 27, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy announced his retirement, creating the second Supreme Court vacancy of Donald Trump's presidency. Given the court's history of narrow rulings on controversial issues, replacing two judges in a relatively short period of time can have a tremendous impact on American society.

President Trump has selected Brett Kavanaugh, a D.C. circuit court judge, as his nominee. Both Republicans and Democrats are wary of Kavanaugh's credentials as a Washington insider, and his record is now being scoured for clues as to how he might rule on key political issues, with rampant speculation as to what the ramifications may be.

Roe v. Wade, the 1973 ruling that legalized abortion throughout the United States, is perhaps the most controversial court decision in American history. Conservatives have long hoped for the opportunity to nominate Supreme Court judges who would overturn it, allowing each state to choose its own laws to either allow, restrict or outright ban abortion.

The particular focus on abortion this time around comes not only from the already narrow margin on the court that Kavanaugh could upset, but also Mr. Trump's

statement during a 2016 presidential debate. When asked if he wanted to see *Roe v. Wade* overturned, Trump plainly said, "I am putting pro-life judges on the court" ("The Final Trump-Clinton Debate Transcript, Annotated," *The Washington Post*, Oct. 19, 2016).

The makeup of the Supreme Court plays a major role in the national morality. What the court declares legal becomes increasingly acceptable—even if it is utterly detestable according to the highest court of Almighty God.

Activist judges adhering to liberal-progressive ideology—and even somewhat conservative justices who have gone along with them—have helped to push the national morality farther and farther from biblical morality. Against that, staunchly conservative justices who take a constructionist stand of interpreting the Constitution with its amendments according to original intent could perhaps help to slow the liberal transformation of the country.

Of course, justices who might impede or reverse



Brett Kavanaugh

the progressivist agenda are intolerable to those on the left—particularly since they would expand the conservative presence on the court and threaten the continuance of unfettered abortion. Thus, liberal-progressives will do all they can to block any shift to the right on the court.

Moreover, the Democrats are still smarting from Republican senators refusing to allow a vote on former President Barack Obama's late-term nomination of Merrick Garland to fill the vacancy that President Trump later filled with conservative Neil Gorsuch. The left declares Trump's appointment illegitimate. In fact, many desperately declare the whole Trump presidency to be illegitimate as they go apoplectic over any hint of leftist governance being rolled back.

As Christians, we pray for all of our government leaders to uphold justice according to God's Word (see Deuteronomy 16:19). Sadly, it appears that the problems are too far gone, and the leftist agenda too entrenched, to be thoroughly undone by man. And even if it could, that would not be enough. We must understand that even the best possible human governance would fall far short of what is truly needed.

We should all earnestly pray for God's Kingdom, looking ahead to the truly righteous Judge, Jesus Christ, who will finally rule the world with equity. (Source: *The Washington Post*.)

Europe providing for its defense: unintended consequences?

President Donald Trump's midsummer trip to Europe for NATO meetings received a lot of publicity for his straight talk to other alliance partners. Mr. Trump insists all other member nations pay their agreed-on share of expenses to maintain the alliance. Each NATO member nation is expected to spend a minimum of 2 percent of its Gross Domestic Product on defense spending. The United States is spending close to 4 percent, while some states are paying only token amounts. This must change, said Mr. Trump.

The terms of the pact aside, we might ask: Does anyone read history anymore? Who really thinks a fully armed Europe is a good idea? Every time this has happened in the past, war has broken out and millions have died. We can already see a strategic buildup of arms to counter Russian threats. America has sold Ukraine powerful weapons to counter Russian aggression. Some Baltic States have state-of-the-art weapons put there to discourage Russia from reasserting control over what was once part of the Soviet Union.

NATO has been a major factor in maintaining peace in Europe for more than 70 years. It's an important alliance, and America's oversized role deserves much of the credit for the peace. But with calls for Europe to share more of the defense burden, we should again recall what history shows—that an armed Europe

usually descends into war. And when this happens the whole world gets involved. There can be unintended consequences to many actions on the world scene.

Europe has enjoyed the umbrella of American protection since 1945, the end of World War II. While the United States did the heavy lifting, Europe developed the art of diplomacy as a means of projecting what is called "soft power." Yet some feel there is already afoot a shift in posture that in time would radically alter Europe's voice in the world.

Writing in *The Atlantic*, Reihan Salam, executive editor of *National Review*, outlined a future scenario of European interventionism beyond its borders: Just last month, nine of Europe's NATO members declared their intention to work together on a 'European Intervention Initiative,' or 'EII,' that is being championed by French President Emmanuel Macron. Since the start of his presidency, Macron has been touting the idea of a pan-European security force capable of intervening in crises in North Africa and the Sahel [the region along the south of the Sahara], and it appears to be inching closer to reality" ("The Coming Split in NATO," July 12, 2018).

Europe would first have to significantly invest in military capability to project hard power, something it does not presently possess. Salam adds: "If Europe is

to truly share in the burden of ensuring global security, it will have to pool its resources and replicate some of America's existing capabilities. In short, the training wheels will have to come off."

A more muscular Europe would provide a counterpoint to American power, an unintended consequence unseen at present.

Bible prophecy foretells a Europe-based power attacking North Africa and the Middle East in response to a provocation that threatens to destabilize the world. Daniel 11:40-43 is not describing American troop movements. It is describing a power not yet on the radar screen for most today. Understanding this future threat requires revelation from God and honest evaluation of history with a biblical worldview.

Noted historian Barbara Tuchman's Pulitzer Prize-winning classic about the start of World War I, *The Guns of August*, is well worth reading. It reminds us that fully armed nations with guns pointing at each other will go to war. Amid worsening threats, we should reflect on Psalm 2, which says the nations rage and leaders plot vain things against God. God offers wisdom and sound counsel from His Word, but for now it is mostly ignored (verses 1-2, 9-10). Even in the midst of peace, we should recognize that it's a very hard condition to maintain. (Source: *The Atlantic*.)

Socialism: failure or the future?

Several decades ago Venezuela was one of the bright spots of the world economy. Blessed with some of the world's largest oil reserves and a stable democracy, it was well positioned for a prosperous future.

Today the picture is far different. "Blackouts are a near-daily occurrence, and many people live without running water . . . schoolchildren and oil workers have begun passing out from hunger, and sick Venezuelans have scoured veterinary offices for medicine. Malaria, measles, and diphtheria have returned with a vengeance, and . . . millions of Venezuelans [are] fleeing the country" (Keith Johnson, "How Venezuela Struck It Poor," *ForeignPolicy.com*, July 16, 2018).

The country's murder rate is among the world's highest. Oil production has plunged to a 28-year low. The inflation rate may hit 1 million percent this year. Food is so scarce and expensive that Venezuelans lost an average of more than 20 pounds in body weight in 2017.

What went wrong? In a word, *socialism*.

In the 1970s, Venezuela's leaders nationalized its oil industry, creating a government monopoly and driving away foreign investment and technological know-how. In 1999 self-proclaimed Marxist Hugo Chavez was elected president and began creating his version of a socialist paradise, nationalizing more industries and spreading around the oil wealth to gain popular support. After his 2013 death, he was succeeded by Nicolás Maduro, who essentially became a socialist dictator.

To those who have studied history, Venezuela's sad current condition comes as no surprise. It followed a well-worn pattern that has brought untold misery to millions of people. What is sadly ironic is that while tens of thousands of Venezuelans have fled to the United States, scores of U.S. politicians advocate socialist policies that would lead America down the same disastrous path. (Source: *Foreign Policy*.)

Islamic State diminished but still deadly

The Islamic State or ISIS has been severely crippled and effectively defeated in some areas thanks to the efforts of the U.S.-led coalition fighting against it and loss of local support, yet it continues to act to spread terror in attempting to regain power.

Reuters reported on July 24, 2018: "Months after Iraq declared victory over Islamic State, its fighters are making a comeback with a scatter-gun campaign of kidnap and killing. With its dream of a Caliphate in the Middle East now dead, Islamic State has switched to hit-and-run attacks aimed at undermining the government in Baghdad . . .

"Disarray among the [Iraqi] security forces has allowed Islamic State to stage a comeback, according to military, police, intelligence, and local elected officials. They said poor coordination, meager support from the central government, and a culture of avoiding responsibility are hindering efforts to contain the group" (Ahmed Aboulenein, "Islamic State Makes Comeback in Iraq With Switch to Guerilla Tactics").

Hisham al-Hashimi, an expert on ISIS advising the Iraqi government, puts the number of active ISIS fighters in Iraq "at more than 1,000, with around 500 in desert areas and the rest in the mountains" (ibid.). It's



further noted that al-Qaeda once held sway over Iraqi Sunni areas until the 2006-2007 surge campaign and that "its remnants hid in the desert between Syria and Iraq and later turned into Islamic State. Some officials fear an even more radical group could emerge if there are gaps in security."

Many attempts to track down and kill ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi have failed as of this writing, and the group is still active in other Arab states. "In Egypt, it is concentrated in the sparsely populated northern Sinai desert. It holds no territory but con-

ducts hit-and-run attacks. Islamic State has tried to rebuild in Libya through mobile units in the desert and sleeper cells in northern cities" (ibid).

"In Syria," as Reuters further pointed out, "Islamic State still holds some territory but has suffered militarily." Yet the day after this was written the group staged a significant attack there. As National Public Radio (NPR) reported on July 25: "Suicide bombers struck an open-air market and other targets in the southern Syrian city of Sweida . . . The four attacks killed dozens of people and injured dozens more . . . in a region where the government has been fighting ISIS militants" (Bill Chappell, "ISIS Suicide Bombings Kill Dozens, Setting Off Intense Fighting in Syria").

The first attack was from a motorcycle bomber striking just after dawn, with more suicide bombers coming later. "Overall . . . more than 150 people were killed during the day, including at least 62 civilians and more than 90 locals who joined in the fight against ISIS" (ibid.).

Back in Iraq, as the Reuters report goes on to say, Sunni tribesmen who helped U.S. and Iraqi forces against al-Qaeda are now saying they need help "as Islamic State claws its way back . . . Shammar tribal chief Ali Nawaf . . . says he has 1,400 men ready to fight but they need help from the government in Baghdad. 'Either the government sends more forces, or we raise Daesh [ISIS] flags. If we don't plug this hole now, entire cities will fall,' Nawaf said."

ISIS itself may not make a successful comeback, but another dangerous group or movement could rise from its ashes—as has happened before. An eventual caliphate is not out of the question. And in any case, terrorism remains an awful scourge.

Many of the leading nations' intelligence agencies have been able to thwart hostile plans by these and other radicals in the past years, but not all of them. The harsh reality is that such attacks require only a few individuals, which make them difficult to prevent.

We pray that God will bring relief and comfort to those who are suffering in this ongoing evil. We also pray that Jesus comes soon to establish His Kingdom of peace. God is fully aware of the atrocities that happen in our world and will intervene when the time is right for mankind to have a receptive heart to His judgment and teaching. (Sources: Reuters, NPR.)

How can you make sense of the news?

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



Jesus Christ's 1,000-Year Reign on Earth

We live in a deeply troubled age. Yet a magnificent, 1,000-year period of peace and prosperity is coming. What does this mean for you?

by Darris McNeely

The Bible foretells a 1,000-year period when Jesus Christ will create on earth a world of peace and justice without war and suffering.

The book of Revelation contains the astonishing story explaining why our world contains so much evil and how a new age will come—not by the hand of man but by the direct intervention of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

On the prison island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, the apostle John received an astonishing vision that has fascinated and perplexed many. Is this prophecy just an old man's meaningless dream that couldn't possibly come true? Or is it the sure Word of God? Can this mysterious book really be understood? Does it hold answers for us today? You can know, and the answers will give you hope!

A world in chaos

Are you tired of bad news? Are you frustrated with the anger, division and conflict we see around us today? There has been a lot lately. In the Middle East we see a world aflame with rioting, overthrow of governments, and the threat of nuclear weapons in the hands of religious extremists and unstable dictators.

Our world is going through a period of volatility, producing fear and uncertainty about the future. We wonder what lies ahead for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren.

People need hope in the future—hope that problems can be solved, hope that life will get better. Without hope people wither in despair and often turn to destructive behavior for escape. God understands that you and I need hope every day, and He has provided that hope in His revealed Word, the Bible.

Beyond Today is about hope. We give understanding and help for living by God's purpose and will. We have learned that the Word of God is the only sure source for lasting hope in this often-chaotic world.

A thousand years of peace

There is a biblical truth that promises a world of peace and prosperity for all. It is the scriptural teaching of the 1,000-

year reign of Jesus Christ on earth, often called the Millennium. The word "millennium" is a Latin word that means 1,000 years. The Bible describes this millennial age as a time of peace and harmony on earth. This teaching is not something invented by human imagination.

The truth of Christ's reign on earth connects with some of the Bible's earliest statements. It is found in virtually all the Hebrew prophets. And it continues to hold the imagination of many in spite of attempts to undermine and explain it away.

God's promise of His 1,000-year reign on earth stands as a symbol of hope for all mankind. A study of the sayings of the Scriptures and a review of efforts to overturn this teaching help us to understand our world and the promised peace of the Kingdom of God.

In the book of Revelation the apostle John records that after the second coming of Jesus Christ, the saints will reign with Him for 1,000 years. Here's what it says: "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands.

"And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years . . . blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4, emphasis added throughout).

There you have it! This passage in Revelation provides the capstone to a teaching that begins in the writings of the Hebrew prophets. It's a summary of many other biblical descriptions and promises about the millennial age, a peaceable Kingdom.

The hope of Israel of a transformed world

God through His servants foretold this period repeatedly. It was the hope of Israel's prophets throughout much of the nation's history, especially during periods of decline and captivity.



“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.”

This same hope was shared by the apostles as they questioned Christ about the restoration of Israel’s ancient kingdom. Before His ascension to heaven, His disciples asked Him, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). The disciples eagerly expected to see the Messiah’s rule begin at that time. They knew the promise of a restoration foretold by so many of the prophets.

The prophet Isaiah had offered a very clear picture of this future when he wrote of a time when Israel would be reunited under one Ruler and the knowledge of God would cover the earth (Isaiah 11:1-10). This was written during the period of Israel’s decline, but it pictures the future Millennium. Notice what that prophecy says about peace in nature and among all people:

“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. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (verses 6-9).

Isaiah’s words have crystallized the idea of the Millennium. What is described here is a complete change in all parts of this world—a time when the nature of wild animals will be changed. A child will walk among them in safety with no fear. And this passage further shows, in light of the last verse here, that even the nature of man will be changed!

Think about this for a moment. The deception that has gripped the world will be turned back. The knowledge of God’s plan will spread throughout the human race. This is going to happen, and it will only happen through the return of Jesus Christ to earth!

A time without war

Isaiah wrote another long section of prophecy foretelling a time of world peace when war will be neither learned nor waged. It’s worth reading in its entirety:

“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 [speaking of God’s place of rule being at the apex of all nations]; 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. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isaiah 2:2-4).

Ancient Israel never experienced this type of society. Nor has any other nation in the history of the world. Think about that for a moment. This scene that we just read out of the book of Isaiah provided the inspiration for a statue that stands at the United Nations building in New York City.

Ironically that statue was a gift from the Soviet Union back in 1959. The bronze statue represents the figure of a man holding a hammer in one hand and in the other a sword he is beating into a plowshare. It symbolizes man’s desire to put an end to war and to convert destructive weapons into productive tools for the benefit of all mankind.

This scene remains unfulfilled. No nation in history has brought it to pass. Wars and conflict continue to rain death down on towns and villages, killing and disrupting the lives of many. Refugees pour into other nations looking for safety and a place to rebuild shattered lives.

The Kingdom is real and coming

The expectation of 2,000 years ago in the Holy Land was that a Messiah would overthrow Roman rule and restore an Israelite kingdom. Many who followed Jesus Christ, including His closest disciples, believed He was the One who would restore the kingdom to Israel. They later came to understand that this restoration would come later with Christ’s future return to establish God’s Kingdom over the whole world.

Beginning near the end of the first century, this truth of God’s Kingdom on the earth came under severe attack. The integrity of Christ’s teachings was corrupted by heresy. The Roman government killed many Christians, including Christian leaders. The apostle John was exiled on the prison island

of Patmos. A great confusion about the Kingdom of God erupted within the Church.

At the height of this crisis, John received Christ's revelation affirming the truths of the triumphal establishment of the Kingdom of God. The knowledge of the Millennium, the future 1,000-year reign, gave the Church during those years great encouragement, as it always has done for those who look to God for their hope and read this truth in the Scriptures.

During that tumultuous time the teaching of the literal Kingdom of God on this earth became mixed with forms of heresy, and it was discredited by many in the second, third and fourth centuries after Christ. The concept of a literal, earthly reign of Christ on this earth was being challenged and rejected by many.

In spite of Christ's instruction there were misguided attempts to predict the time of His return.

Theologians who were influenced by Greek thought began teaching that the Kingdom was not literal, nor was it future, but it was only a vague spiritual metaphor. And the Kingdom became subject to many wild interpretations. The false teachers said that such scriptural references as those we've just read were meant to be understood as mere symbolism and allegory—not to be taken literally.

In the midst of these heresies, many still held to faith in a coming Kingdom as vital truth delivered through the apostles from Jesus Christ. The histories show us that a scattered remnant of faithful people holding to the "faith which was once for all delivered" (Jude 3) continued to teach the truth of Christ's 1,000-year reign on earth.

By the fifth century A.D., the doctrine of the Millennium was overwhelmed by the teaching of one man, Augustine of Hippo. Augustine was the most influential theologian of the early Catholic Church. He taught that the Church was the Kingdom of God on earth. His false teaching replaced the biblical teaching that God would intervene in history, establishing a literal Kingdom on this earth, a Kingdom that would never end.

The removal of this central teaching of Christ and His Church had profound impact. What historian Edward Gibbon called "the ancient and popular doctrine" was in large part rejected. Gibbon wrote: "But when the edifice of the church was almost completed, the temporary support was laid aside. The doctrine of Christ's reign upon earth was at first treated as a profound allegory, was considered . . . as a doubtful and useless opinion, and was . . . rejected as the absurd invention of heresy and fanaticism" (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Great Books edition, 1952, p. 188).

Overcoming false kingdoms

Now let's pause, and let me ask you something. What was the result of the loss of this critical biblical teaching? It was a big loss, and it meant everything.

It meant that the *church* was now considered the Kingdom of God, acting and working with the authority of Christ. It meant that any political power that it joined with would wield

immense influence over the hearts and the minds of men. It meant the formation of a spiritual and political tyranny that was not of God. This was a false and gravely heretical teaching! The Western world of Europe was plunged into a period that history calls the Dark Ages. It was as if the lights went out on learning and the advancement of culture on all fronts. Historian William Manchester describes the period as a "portrait . . . of incessant warfare, corruption, lawlessness, obsession with strange myths, and an almost impenetrable mindlessness" (*A World Lit Only by Fire*, 1992, p. 3).

To be blunt, whenever people have tried to create the biblical Millennium on the earth in their own way by politics and their own form of religion or philosophy, it has always failed.

The only way the Kingdom of peace prophesied in the Bible will come about will be by the direct hand of God as He inter-

After Christ returns, endless war will disappear.
Families will grow stronger, and nothing will deny the
Kingdom's long-held promise of **peace on earth.**

venes in history and saves all mankind from extinction. No project of man will bring about a utopian society!

Put your faith in the King and hope for His Kingdom

It is vital that you understand Christ's message of the coming Kingdom of God today. The Bible reveals that a world of peace will result from the return of Jesus Christ. Nations will seek the way of God. Fear will be banished from among the peoples of the earth as godly righteousness guides international relations.

After Christ comes back, endless conflicts will disappear, and the art of war will be lost. Families will grow stronger with each generation. At that time, there will be nothing to deny the Kingdom's long-held promise and hope of bringing peace on earth.

As we've seen, the teaching of the coming Kingdom of God is found throughout Scripture, from the Old Testament on through to the book of Revelation. Christ's last words on the subject are the clearest and plainest in the Bible regarding the initial era of this coming rule. Jesus Christ, the One through whom the book of Revelation came, says there will be a period of 1,000 years during which the resurrected saints will reign with Him in a just and benevolent Kingdom on this earth. And this will lead to a more amazing future still!

Will you take Christ at His Word? Will you believe what He said? The millennial rule of Christ, an idea older than time, will endure and ultimately transform the world! **BT**

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Shocking Teachings of Jesus: The Kingdom of God

Many think the gospel message is solely about Jesus as Savior. But this is untrue. Do you understand the biblical truth about the gospel?

by Steve Myers

What would you say is the central message Jesus taught? Have you ever considered that fundamental theme? Did Christ focus His teaching on a specific subject?

You might be surprised to find that His gospel message wasn't just "Invite Me into your heart and be saved." It's also startling to realize that He didn't say you'll go to live with Him in heaven when you die.

If you're to understand the point of Jesus' teaching, His message and His mission, you need to be sure you understand the gospel—the good news—that Jesus Himself actually proclaimed. It is vital to know what He preached!

So what exactly *is* the gospel Jesus brought and taught? It seems like a simple enough question, but most don't give it much thought. Did Jesus simply preach about Himself? Did His primary message center only on Him being the prophesied Savior?

Most realize that Jesus preached the gospel. That word *gospel*, as well as the Greek word it's translated from, means "good news" or the "good message"—but what exactly is that good message? Can you explain it?

If you fail to understand Jesus' central message, you will fail to grasp the whole point of His teachings, the reason for His coming and why He promises to come again. You'll also fail to comprehend dozens of vital prophecies throughout the Bible. Jesus' true message ties all of these things together in a theme that's truly good news and that has great implications for you, for your future and for the entire world!

The gospel of the Kingdom of God

Jesus Himself described His purpose and the message He brought: "I must preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God in other towns, too, because that is why I was sent" (Luke 4:43, New Living Translation).

His message was *the good news of the Kingdom of God*. Do you know what He was talking about? This Kingdom is the

focus of Jesus' message, yet it has often been misunderstood or even ignored.

Here's another shocking thought that may surprise you: The major subject of Jesus' preaching was not about going to heaven at death. Imagine that! He taught that you won't go to live in heaven when you die, but instead that you will be resurrected in the future and that *heaven is coming to earth*. The heart and core of His teaching was the Kingdom of God, and the good news—the gospel—is that *the Kingdom of God would be established right here on earth*.

The Kingdom wasn't just a minor part of His teaching. Jesus emphasized it right from the very beginning of His ministry: "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel'" (Mark 1:14-15).

Jesus' teaching focused on the gospel, a message of good news, of His coming Kingdom. You see here that right from the very start He wasn't talking about a heavenly existence after death. Instead, He taught that people must believe that *He would come again and establish God's government*. He also said there's a requirement in order to enter that Kingdom of God—*repentance*.

Did you know that Jesus did something powerful after the crucifixion and resurrection that emphasized the importance of His teaching about the Kingdom of God? He appeared to His disciples, "being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). Jesus wanted to stress to His followers that the Kingdom is coming to this earth. He was assuring them that God's plan was on track!

A personal call to the Kingdom

Some have reasoned that since we're to have Jesus in our hearts, then the Kingdom of God also exists only in people's hearts as well. A confrontation Jesus had with some of the

Pharisees has been used to promote this misguided idea.

But let's read it carefully: "Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, "See here!" or "See there!" For indeed, the Kingdom of God is within you'" (Luke 17:20-21).

Now let's think about that for a moment. Who were the Pharisees? They were religious teachers of the day who generally opposed Jesus and were often portrayed as His enemies. So what can we conclude? Christ was definitely *not* saying that the Kingdom of God was in them!

What was He saying, then? The Greek phrase *entos humon*, translated "within you," would be more accurately translated "in your midst" (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, "Within"). The Kingdom of God was plainly not in the hearts of the Pharisees who withstood Christ, many even wanting to kill Him!

What Jesus was telling them was that as *the King* of the Kingdom of God, He was *right there in their midst* expounding His message and doing the work of the Kingdom. But what did they do? They rejected Him and despised His gospel of the Kingdom. They outright rejected Him and His return as King!

In the future the whole world will be utterly shocked when Jesus Christ returns to the earth. That's what the Bible foretells. That's when the Kingdom will truly be in the midst of all mankind!

Now the best part is that *you can get a head start*. Jesus can personally be *your King* now. Christ as King of the Kingdom can be in your life today, if you will learn and believe what He actually taught, repent of sin and obey His teaching!

The Kingdom and our place in it was right at the heart of Jesus' message: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). Everyone needs to seek God's Kingdom *now*. It should be everyone's primary goal, the central focus of your life. God's wonderful Kingdom holds the solution to your personal challenges and for all mankind's problems and dilemmas. No wonder Christ constantly taught about it!

When you begin to understand, you'll find it jumps out at you throughout the Bible. Notice Luke 8 where Jesus "began a tour of the cities and villages of Galilee to announce the coming of the Kingdom of God" (verse 1, Living Bible).

I'm sure you see there's little doubt that Jesus taught with a forward-looking perspective. He wanted all to look to a time of hope, beyond our personal problems, beyond the stressful condition that this world is in. Since God rules over all creation, the Kingdom exists now in part, but Christ looked beyond today to a time when the entire world will be submitted to God's rule!

An earthly Kingdom

Some are shocked to find that Christ's teaching about the Kingdom of God was actually building on the message God had revealed centuries earlier through the biblical prophets. God inspired these men of old to write of a coming world-ruling government. That's a literal Kingdom in which the Messiah would administer God's law and His way of life—a way that will bring peace and prosperity to humanity.

Here's an example from the prophet Daniel: "I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. *Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed*" (Daniel 7:13-14, emphasis added throughout).

So we see this isn't something just in people's hearts. It's not about going to heaven at death. It's a *literal* Kingdom, an empire, a government to come under the direction and authority of Jesus Christ that will rule over all the peoples of the earth. Mankind's corrupt governments will all be destroyed (see Daniel 2:44). There will be no more crooked rule, no more fraudulent systems of men. Jesus will return and change all of that!

The prophet Isaiah was also inspired to write many prophecies about the Kingdom of God. You're probably familiar with this one: "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" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Isaiah pictured a powerful Savior and Ruler who will save and lead all nations from Jerusalem at His return. After the Kingdom of God is established on earth, Jesus will bring a time of true world peace. It will also be a time of great spiritual awakening to God's truth for all the nations—when, as Isaiah 11:9 says, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea"!

When will Jesus bring the Kingdom?

After Jesus' resurrection, His disciples had one burning question for Him: "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). They knew that a big part of Jesus' mission involved restoring a literal Kingdom on earth, prompting their question to Him. He promised to be the Ruler of that godly realm and that the disciples will rule under Him.

Perhaps a similar question comes to your mind. When will Christ return and establish the Kingdom of God? In Revelation 11:15 we read that this Kingdom will be established at the prophesied seventh and last trumpet: "Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever'" (English Standard Version).

We are drawing ever closer to that time when Jesus will return and set up that government!

This world is in desperate need of God's rule. In fact, Christ taught that He will return at the most pivotal time in history, when humanity will stagger on the brink of annihilation. In His shocking prophecy of Matthew 24, He tells us He will intervene at a time when this world is in crisis, "a time of great distress, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and will never be again," when conditions will be so terrible that "if the time of troubles were not

cut short, no living thing could survive” (verses 21-22, Revised English Bible).

The rest of His prophecy here, and also in the parallel accounts in Mark 13 and Luke 21, are like reading today’s headlines. Terror, earthquakes, killings, persecution, war, hunger, disaster. God doesn’t want you to be unaware of the seriousness of the time in which we live. Jesus said that the final events leading up to His return “will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth” (Luke 21:35).

Jesus makes it clear that this will be the most horrifying and deadly period of mankind’s history, with relatively few surviving. After these painful lessons, humanity will finally be humbled and willingly submit to Jesus’ reign as King.

Coming: a changed world

We desperately need good news. The best news is the gospel message of Christ’s coming world-ruling Kingdom! Humanity will at last see a world of peace, a world with happiness, a world with clear purpose. Jesus will finally put an end to war and other violence, starvation, disease and every other form of suffering.

Your Savior *will* come. He will return from heaven to save and take over the world. This isn’t just good news, it’s *great* news—and the only hope for a world that’s rushing straight-forward to destruction!

Are you sick and tired of the evil world we live in? So is God! He wants us to enter His eternal Kingdom as His children, resurrected to eternal life in His family. God says, “I will be a

The prophet Daniel wrote: “Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High.”

Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:18). How wonderful that time will be!

If we’re to enter that Kingdom, God must transform us from physical and mortal existence to life that is spiritual and immortal. Paul wrote that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:50-53).

Can you imagine it? And the process towards this future

begins today. God wants us to learn His laws and live His ways right now, in this life. You can have a different life, a better life, right now—living the way your Creator designed you to live!

Then, when ultimately transformed in the future, “the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:43). If you’re willing to repent and believe and live under God’s rule now as He commands, He extends to you the opportunity to live forever sharing in His immortal glory!

Can you catch the vision of what God has in store? Just imagine it! God gives eternal life to those who will live and reign with Christ in the coming Kingdom. They will be “kings and priests to our God . . . reign[ing] on the earth” to help teach and bring others into this eternal Kingdom (Revelation 5:10). Now that’s a promise! Jesus guarantees it.

As the prophet Daniel had written: “Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him” (Daniel 7:27). We see that Jesus the King will return and establish God’s government right here on earth, and we as His people will have a wonderful part in it!

Called to live according to the Kingdom now

It’s not good enough to just *know* these things. There’s more. All of this brings us to this question: What should we *do*?

Christ taught, “But he who endures to the end shall be saved”

(Matthew 24:13). So how will you endure?

First, your life must be guided by a

goal, a godly vision of the future. You must receive the Kingdom and accept it right now to enter it later. Now’s the time to prepare. If you’re to endure the troubles that lie ahead, it’s going to require spiritual strength. Right now you can have the laws of God’s Kingdom written in your heart and in your mind, and you can have the King of that Kingdom live in you to help you obey His laws. If you truly want the future that Jesus proclaimed, you must begin living by its terms today!

So don’t wait. Now is the time to develop a much deeper relationship with God. Remember: Spiritual strength comes from our Savior, the source of strength. Make Jesus Christ the King of your life *right now!*

Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God constantly. The gospel of that Kingdom holds the key to understanding our world’s troubles and to their true solution.

Don’t forget, Jesus said, “Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand.” *Now is the time to change.* Seek God’s guidance and help. Stop the sin in your life. Get spiritually ready. Choose His rule in your life now as you look forward to His coming rule beyond today.

Take His message to heart and “believe the gospel.” Be dedicated and make the choice to be fully committed. Follow His teachings. Follow His commandments. Follow in His footsteps so that you will be part of that great Kingdom! **BT**

LEARN MORE



Many people misunderstand Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom of God. Yet this is a theme that runs throughout the entire Bible. What is it all about? To learn more, download or request a copy of our free study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom* today!

BTmagazine.org/booklets

No Man Left Behind

Billions of men, women and children have lived and died without ever knowing the true God or His way of life. What happens to them? Are they condemned to an eternity of suffering in hellfire? Or does God have a plan in which no one is left behind?

by Peter Eddington

Have you heard of the U.S. Army Ranger Creed? Here's part of what it declares: "Surrender is not a Ranger word. *I will never leave a fallen comrade* to fall into the hands of the enemy and under no circumstances will I ever embarrass my country" (emphasis added throughout).

Similar language can be found in the U.S. Army Soldier's Creed, "I will *never leave a fallen comrade*," as well as the Airman's Creed, "I will *never leave an Airman behind*."

A noble concept

Never leave a fallen comrade. This noble concept deserves further exploration.

It should be pointed out that this ideal has not been very well fulfilled. Many soldiers in various wars *have* been left behind and not rescued or not even had their remains recovered in some cases. This is one of the most tragic aspects of man waging war on his fellow man.

Joseph Douglass, Jr., who held positions at the U.S. Department of Defense and various national defense corporations and taught at the Naval Postgraduate School, has stated that the U.S. government betrayed literally thousands of American prisoners of war (POWs) and soldiers missing in action (MIAs) who were left behind after every war America fought in the 20th century, from World War I to Vietnam.

In assessing the available research, Douglass concluded that as many as 2,000 Americans were left behind after the Vietnam War; 5,000 to 8,000 after the Korean War; 1,000 throughout the Cold War; and, staggeringly, between 15,000 and 20,000 after World War II.

The principle of *leaving no one behind*—no matter the cost—is deeply embedded in military honor. Those in uniform believe that no stone will be left unturned to get them home if they fall into enemy hands. This is one promise that spurs soldiers to fight even harder for their country.

One of the most dangerous—and revered—missions of the Vietnam War was the U.S. attempt to rescue 65 American POWs held at North Vietnam's notorious Son Tay prison. A 116-plane air armada, composed of fighters, gunships and

helicopters, flew hundreds of miles over mountainous territory at treetop level to the prison camp—just 23 miles from Hanoi, then one of the most heavily defended areas in North Vietnam.

As the assault force attacked the camp—killing more than 100 North Vietnamese guards in the process—the raiders discovered that the prisoners had been moved, and they were forced to return empty-handed. Yet when the POWs learned of the attempt, *morale soared*.

According to one report, *the POWs no longer felt abandoned or forgotten*. Though unsuccessful, the raid illustrates the kind of extraordinary effort those serving expect their nation to make for them. (See also "The Medal of Honor Awarded to William Swenson" on page 28.)

A core principle of the gospel message

How does this relate to your understanding of God's plan of salvation?

There is a core principle of the gospel message that is lost in today's religious landscape, being not well known or taught in most churches.

How far would you go to rescue a fallen brother? How far would *God* go?

Well, the Bible gives us the answer! And it's a true pearl—a diamond of understanding—of which we must not lose sight.

Most of the Christian world is taught that if people are not saved before they die, if they have not accepted Jesus Christ as Savior, then they will perish or be lost forever. In fact, most churches teach that people not saved before they die will burn in an excruciating hellfire for eternity—billions of people lost to unending torment! To put it bluntly, this would mean billions of men and women *left behind*.

But, as the apostle Peter tells us, "The Lord . . . is longsuffering toward us, *not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9). God's desire is that *no one* be left behind, left out of His plan.

One of the most well-known scriptures states, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16).

God so *loves* the world! He considers the human beings He has created to be His future family, His children. He wants to know us and dwell with us forever. It's all about a loving, godly, divine relationship!

The rescue mission

So, how will all those men and women who never accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior—or, in the case of billions of people, *never even heard of Him*—be regathered to prevent so

never seeing death. The water here signified God's Holy Spirit, which would help people to live by what was commanded, the requirement stated in John 8.

What did Jesus mean by teaching that all who were thirsty could come to Him, be refreshed and never see death? How and when would this happen?

Within six months of this, Christ's own countrymen pressured the Roman authorities to execute Him. This was actually a vital stage of the rescue mission—for Jesus to die and be res-

urrected to take away the world's sins and then lead people to repentance and change through the Holy Spirit.

But what of those who'd already died—and those who did not come to repent after Jesus' death, not having proper understanding?

Less than 40 years later the temple and all its ceremonies, including those described above, were brought to an end at the hands of the Roman legions. And since then, while some have followed Christ, *billions of people have died without repenting of their sins*, without being baptized, without being filled with the Holy Spirit, and in many cases not ever hearing the name of Jesus Christ, the only name by which we must be saved (see Acts 4:12).

It appears *they and those who lived before have been left behind* in the ash heap of history, never rescued. Or have they?



What will happen to all those who have died through human history without ever hearing the name of Christ? Are they lost? Has God abandoned them?

Pinpointing the future stage of the rescue mission

God's promise to pour out rivers of living water, His Spirit, on all of humanity

has not yet taken place. Billions have died *without their deepest spiritual needs met*. So when will they be refreshed by the life-giving power of God's Spirit? When will those men and women seemingly *left behind* be rescued?

The answer is found in putting together numerous passages, including these from the Gospel of John, concerning what Jesus said at the end of the biblical Feast of Tabernacles and on the important Eighth Day festival immediately following. Notice what happened.

First from John 7: "On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, [which] those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (verses 37-39).

And then in John 8: "Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them . . . [and Jesus said] 'Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word *he shall never see death*'" (verses 2, 51).

Jesus in John 7 stood where all could hear Him and drew a lesson from the water that was poured out on the temple altar during a special ceremony on that day, revealing that all who were thirsty could come to Him and be refreshed—*forever*—

has not yet taken place. Billions have died *without their deepest spiritual needs met*. So when will they be refreshed by the life-giving power of God's Spirit? When will those men and women seemingly *left behind* be rescued?

The prophet Joel gives us the answer: "And it shall come to pass afterward [referring to the end time] that *I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh*; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will *pour out My Spirit in those days*."

"And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass that *whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved*" (Joel 2:28-31).

When are those days? As we see here, they will commence at the time of the return of Jesus Christ—after the heavenly signs that precede His coming (see Matthew 24:29-30; Revelation 6:12-17).

But what about all those billions who died in ancient times and never had their deepest spiritual needs met? When will they be refreshed by the life-giving power of God's Spirit? The answer is deeply satisfying.

God's great plan—no man left behind

God has a plan to rescue the billions of wounded and dying people of this world through Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul also referred to this yet-future event:

"I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew . . . And *so all Israel will be saved*, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins'" (Romans 11:1-2, 26-27).

However, amazingly, *not only the descendants of Jacob* (or Israel), but all who have never had a chance to drink from the living waters of God's Word and His Holy Spirit will be given the opportunity to do so!

" . . . Even us whom He [God] called, not of the Jews only, *but also of the Gentiles* [all nations]? As He says also in Hosea: 'I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, "You are not My people," there they shall be called sons of the living God'" (Romans 9:24-26).

God will freely offer *all peoples of the earth* the opportunity for eternal life, and it comes about through a physical resurrection to human life. The apostle John writes, in an astounding prophetic vision inspired by Jesus Christ, this same opportunity for salvation for all those *who have already died* who were not yet saved.

After referring to the resurrection of Christ's followers at His return to reign with Him for 1,000 years, John writes: "But the *rest of the dead* did not live again until the thousand years were finished" (Revelation 20:5). And so, we see here that people who have already died apart from a relationship with God through Christ will be restored back to life. They will then have the truth of God opened to them—will have the living waters of God's Spirit made available to them—for the very first time!

Notice what happens with them: "And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And *another book was opened, which is the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades [the grave] delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works" (verses 12-13).

This scene unfolds at the end of the Millennium, the coming 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ on earth. The dead who stand before their Creator are all those who died never really knowing or accepting the true God. They finally have the Book of Life opened to them, meaning they now have opportunity to be recorded in it among the listing of those who are saved.

Like Ezekiel's vision of dry bones recorded in Ezekiel 37, these people emerge from their graves as physical human beings and begin to know the true God and have the opportunity to embrace the awesome future He has planned for them—that of being sons and daughters in His family.

The other books (*biblia* in Greek, from which we get the word *Bible*) opened to them are the Scriptures, the source of the knowledge of eternal life. Finally all will have an opportunity to fully understand God's plan of salvation.

This physical resurrection is *not* a second chance for

The Medal of Honor Awarded to William Swenson

You've likely heard of the Medal of Honor, the highest decoration awarded in the U.S. military. More than 3,400 Medals of Honor have been awarded to the nation's bravest soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines and coast guardsmen. What does it take to receive one of these medals? Often it's awarded because a soldier *would not leave a comrade behind*—or for heroic efforts to save a life.



Take note of this story about U.S. Army Captain, now Major, William Swenson. He was issued the U.S. Medal of Honor on October 15, 2013. Here is a quote from a portion of his official citation, which you can easily find online with a quick keyword search:

"Captain William D. Swenson distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as embedded advisor . . . during combat operations against an armed enemy in Kunar Province, Afghanistan on September 8, 2009.

"On that morning, more than 60 well-armed, well-positioned enemy fighters ambushed Captain Swenson's combat team as it moved on foot into the village of Ganjgal for a meeting with village elders . . . Surrounded on three sides by enemy forces inflicting effective and accurate fire, Captain Swenson coordinated air assets, indirect fire support and medical evacuation helicopter support to allow for the evacuation of the wounded.

"Captain Swenson ignored enemy radio transmissions demanding surrender and maneuvered uncovered to render medical aid to a wounded fellow soldier . . .

"With complete disregard for his own safety, Captain Swenson unhesitatingly led a team in an unarmored vehicle into the kill zone, exposing himself to enemy fire on at least two occasions, to *recover the wounded and search for four missing comrades*. After using aviation support to mark locations of fallen and wounded comrades, it became clear that ground recovery of the fallen was required due to heavy enemy fire on helicopter landing zones.

"Captain Swenson's team returned to the kill zone another time in a Humvee. Captain Swenson voluntarily exited the vehicle, exposing himself to enemy fire, to locate and *recover three fallen Marines and one fallen Navy corpsman*. His exceptional leadership and stout resistance against the enemy during six hours of continuous fighting rallied his teammates and effectively disrupted the enemy's assault.

"Captain William D. Swenson's extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service."

Yes, saving wounded comrades and never leaving a man behind is embedded into the military honor system. And God has a similar plan, yet of far greater scope and sacrifice, to provide salvation to every human being who is ultimately willing to be saved!

salvation. For these people it is their *first* opportunity to really know the Creator. This judgment will involve a period during which they will enjoy the opportunity to hear, understand and grow in God's way of life, and to have their names inscribed in the Book of Life (Revelation 20:15). During this time billions of those who have lived and died throughout human history will for the *first* time have access to eternal life!

A far-reaching plan—even for the residents of Sodom!

This shows how deep and far-reaching are the merciful judgments and plan of God. Jesus Christ spoke of the wonderful truth depicted by this day of judgment (or evaluation, not immediate sentencing)—this time when no man will be left behind—when in the book of Matthew He compared three cities that failed to respond to His miraculous works with three notoriously evil cities of the ancient world.

Here is the ultimate story of “no man left behind.” God promises to remember and to raise to life again these fallen human beings of thousands of years ago!

We noted earlier that even with the best of intentions and most valiant efforts, modern military forces have not been able to recover every one of their soldiers. Fallen comrades have still been left behind.

In contrast, the plan of God is not only well-intentioned, *but perfect!* Every person will have the opportunity to repent before God and receive salvation—even those who died without the needed understanding. They will be remembered and resurrected to be given this opportunity. Here it is referred to by Jesus Himself in Matthew 11:

“Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: ‘Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon *in the day of judgment* than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades [the grave]; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that *it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment* than for you” (verses 20-24).

The inhabitants of ancient Tyre, Sidon and Sodom—cities that had incurred the anger of God for their depravities—*will be resurrected to receive mercy in the day of judgment.* Things going “better” for them does not mean they will be in a less-intense tier of burning hell than the later city inhabitants will be in. It will be better for them because they will have less to repent of when presented with God's truth.

They will then be rescued. They will be brought home. They will learn to repent! They will be offered the living water of God's Holy Spirit. This is what Revelation 20 is talking about.

These cities of old had no opportunity to know God. But God will resurrect these people and include them in the time of evaluative judgment after the 1,000-year reign of Christ—when even those who lived in bygone ages will be reconciled to God. And Matthew 11 shows that they will receive the truth with gladness and repent! This is the wonderful gem, the wonderful message of God of hope for all of humanity!

It will be a time of *universal knowledge of God*, beginning

with the time of Christ's 1,000-year reign and following in the last judgment period. “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them” (Hebrews 8:10-11).

And Isaiah 11:9 tells us that “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” All nations will know the truth.

During the last judgment period, the resurrected citizens of these ancient cities Christ mentioned, and countless more like them, will experience their opportunity for salvation. They will not be left behind in the dust of time. And the *saints of God—who are resurrected at Jesus' return* (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)—*will be part of the rescue mission* if they stay faithful and endure until Christ's coming. They will be part of seeing God's plan through to the end of the Millennium, when at last all the dead will be resurrected to be offered salvation.

The enemy will not prevail. The saints will join Jesus Christ in ensuring that no willing man or woman will be “left behind.”

Why? Because God want's to build His family and have a relationship with *all* people!

No willing person left behind

The plan of God to rescue all of humanity, even those who died without a relationship with their Creator, *will* come to pass. *All* will be cared for, and those who are willing to submit their lives to a righteous, just and loving God will be saved.

What is the fate of those who died with no real knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Son of God? What hope is there for the billions of people who have lived and died without the needed knowledge of God's purpose? The ultimate hope is that no *willing* man or woman will be left behind. God will not allow them to be lost forever. Some will finally refuse, reject God and perish—by their own informed choice. Yet the vast majority will accept and be saved.

Thankfully, the Scriptures show that the world is not cut off without any remaining hope. Just like ancient Tyre, Sidon, Sodom, Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, God will not leave the billions of unsaved human beings of all time behind but will bring them back to life and give them their opportunity for eternal salvation.

This is a core principle of the gospel message that is lost in today's religious landscape—a unique understanding that very few grasp today. Now you know it! Allow God through Jesus Christ to rescue you—and be part of His rescue mission to save all who are ultimately willing! **BT**

LEARN MORE



What is the fate of those who died without ever really knowing God or hearing the name of Jesus Christ, the only name by which we must be saved? Are they lost forever? To learn more, download or request our free study guide *What Happens After Death?* today!

BTmagazine.org/booklets



In response to July-August issue

I just received the July-August 2018 issue of *Beyond Today* magazine. I really liked the articles dealing with evolution and the war against God. I am a creationist and spend much of my time reading scientific articles by creationist organizations. Apologetics is my favorite subject area. My Bible study group is made up of mainly older people who have an excellent understanding of the Bible, but no understanding of apologetics or why it is so necessary to be able to answer the critics or to help our young folks know the truth and how they're being lied to.

Reader in New York

Grateful for publications

I have the honor to ask your kindness in sending me a printed copy of *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*, Arabic version. I will also download it electronically. Thank you.

Reader in Algeria

I just want to take this opportunity to thank you so much for sending me the *Beyond Today* magazine. It's a real pleasure to receive. It has been both inspiring and encouraging to me and a real blessing. Thank you for your kindness. The Lord continue to bless you and the ministry in mighty ways.

Subscriber in New Zealand

Greetings! I found the latest edition of *Beyond Today* very informative, adding to my understanding and challenging my thinking. Every blessing as you continue this ministry.

Subscriber in Australia

Seeking a group of people with whom to worship

Thank you so much for your program. It's wonderful! Where is your nearest church to me? Thank you very much, God bless you all.

Reader in Australia

I just wanted to tell you how much your magazine has kept me from feeling alone in the world of false religions. Since my childhood my faith in our Heavenly Father has been challenged, but my church at that time was standing right with the Lord's holy inspired words. It was almost 30 years later that my childhood church turned away from the truth.

I wanted to express my sincere thanks for your magazine and

broadcasts. It is so refreshing to hear the gospel the way I feel the Lord intends it to be today and forever. God bless you for your outreach and for doing the good works of the Heavenly Father.

From the Internet

I have been doing research and wondering if there is a church that teaches the actual way of the Bible. So far it seems like you are the closest I have found. I do not know how to celebrate Passover or the other Holy Days. I'm trying to live my life as God wants me to live it, and be around the right people that I'm meant to be around, staying away from mankind's wrong ways. Thank you.

Reader in Kentucky

I'm wondering what kind of church observes the Sabbath and Holy Days. We go to a Baptist church but they celebrate secular pagan holidays. We are desperate to find a church where we can worship with like-minded Christians who observe biblical Holy Days. As Christ's return approaches, we want to be found living in the way He would have us live. Any information would be greatly appreciated! Thank you!

From the Internet

*We have many congregations in the United States and around the world. You can find a complete list, or search by location, online at ucg.org/congregations. Interested readers may also wish to read our free study guide *The Church Jesus Built*. We hope to see you soon!*

Sending donations as thanks

I have requested quite a few of your study guides, and I would like to give a donation for these. Please advise how I do this. Thank you so much for your work, and God bless you.

From the Internet

Thank you very much; we are excited about this order of literature, as we have been watching your programs on YouTube. We are living in South Africa and would like to know where we could make a donation.

Reader in South Africa

Please accept this donation for a year's subscription of your magazine. I don't know how much it actually costs to publish, but I'm sure it's probably much more. I have learned so much and have been blessed by all of your literature. Thank you all again so much for your materials and how God is using them to reach others. Your magazine provides the history, the politics, the prophecies, and the Bible to back it all up.

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Grandparents Who Are *Grand*

Grandparents raising their grandchildren for different reasons is on the rise. I call them heroes because they are sacrificing to give their grandchildren the best opportunities they can.

by Janet Treadway

An American national holiday often skipped over is Grandparents Day, observed on the first Sunday after Labor Day in September (other countries may celebrate a similar day on a different date).

This is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate all our grandparents do or have done for us. We might send cards, flowers or gifts to show appreciation for their love and support.

And how we love and appreciate them! Grandparents have a special love, patience and experience to pour out on their grandchildren. I know as a grandparent that I love my grandchildren dearly.

Sadly there is a new, growing generation of grandparents we need to pay special attention to—*grandparents who are raising their own grandchildren*.

Filling a sadly growing need

For various reasons, a major one being children having drug-addicted parents, nearly 3 million grandparents find themselves raising their own grandkids.

We see it all too often in the news—clips of parents being arrested, sometimes having to get out of a car while on drugs even with their kids inside. So the children have to be placed in a safe home somewhere.

To keep children from going to foster care, many states would rather have a relative care for them. Grandparents taking on this responsibility save the nation about \$4 billion a year, according to the nonprofit Generations United.

In my home state of Ohio alone, for every one child placed in foster care there are 20 kids being cared for by relatives—most often by grandparents.

I myself know people who have stepped up to the plate and are raising their grandchildren. I call them heroes because they are keeping their grandchildren from

being placed into the foster care system. I grew up in foster care myself as a child, and I know what that is like.

These special grandparents have become the parents to their grandchildren. They get up every day and make the kids breakfast, organize their activities and help with homework in the evening.

So many grandparents have given up their retirement, and some have suffered financial loss, in caring for their grandchildren. They have started the child-rearing process all over again, but this time at a much older age. Many aging grandparents are also dealing with their own health issues.

Grandparents who have become parents a second time around need support! They need encouragement. They need resources. Here are some points to help if you are raising your grandchildren.

Ask God for help and encouragement

God must look on you in a very special way because of the sacrifices you are making. Rely on His promises.

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.

“Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:28-31, English Standard Version).

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet

your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” (Matthew 6:25-27, ESV).

God will help you every step of the way! Always ask Him for encouragement. He loves you, your grandchildren and, yes, your children who are not now able to parent.

Look for other help and resources


If you are a grandparent raising your grandkids, you can find a lot of organizations that can point you in the right direction for getting advice and help. Here are a couple of web links with lots of tips and advice:

- helpguide.org/articles/parenting-family/grandparents-raising-grandchildren.htm
- sixtyandme.com/resources-for-grandparents-raising-grandchildren/

Find people who also have children the age you are raising. Take part in all the activities with your grandchildren that you can.

All of us should be aware of those in our church congregation who are raising their grandchildren. If you have children, try to sometimes include the kids being raised by grandparents in your outing, like a trip to the zoo.

Look for ways to give the grandparents a much-needed break. And most of all, pray for these awesome grandparents.

So thank you to all the incredible grandparents out there for all the love you shower on your grandkids, and especially for those grandparents who are raising their grandkids. It is a huge, life-changing sacrifice, though it comes with many rewards too. When things seem most difficult, always remember that you are giving these kids a second chance in life. That really makes you “grand”! 

More Than Sparrows

God values and cares deeply for even little birds that people may give little thought to—every single one. How do you think He feels about you?

by Robin Webber

Jesus Christ was always up front and honest about the challenge involved in accepting His personal invitation of “Follow Me.” He said, “Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:14). He pointed out that “many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14). Further, He addressed those who would truly believe He is the Son of God and follow Him in life and death as but a “little flock” (Luke 12:32).

A takeaway from these passages is that genuine discipleship under the living Christ is at times a lonely business in terms of human companionship. Jesus Himself stood alone after His arrest when His disciples all fled into the night. So, is this sobering scenario all there is to contemplate, or is there more to consider in responding to Christ’s invitation of “Follow Me”?

Is anyone up there?

In *Beyond Today* magazine we point out current events in the light of Bible prophecy and straightforwardly deal with the titanic events rumbling about us and ramping up in this age of man growing increasingly farther from God.

Prophecy lays out in a “macro” sense the coming of the Kingdom of God under Christ when He returns to earth. Yet if we are not careful we can lose sight of and hope in the fact that God likewise deals with His “little flock” in a “micro” sense here and now. Amazingly, our Heavenly Father and the risen Christ are able to sort us out from 7.6 billion people on six inhabited continents in a world spinning out of control!

Yet as followers of Jesus Christ we feel alone at times and may wonder: *Why me, God? Why now?* Is anyone up there watching or listening? Does God even care? Has He forgotten my devotion to Him? We can all at times figuratively join the prophet Elijah on his rock bench in his darkened cave and jointly mope that somehow God’s eye is no longer on us (compare 2 Kings 19).

While *Beyond Today* proclaims significant truths of biblical prophecy and doctrine, these are of no value unless we have living and knowing faith that God lovingly cares for us in a world beset by vast tectonic cultural shifts and larger-than-life personalities. God wants you to realize His devoted care for you—and to see that dealing with macro events as well as intimately caring for your personal micro-existence is what God is all about!

Christ goes small to share God’s huge interest

I would like to ask you a question before going any further. Have you ever seen a sparrow you didn’t like? They are tiny, cute, jumpy, chirpy and seemingly created to make us smile. God must have enjoyed creating them because, after all, He

made so many of them. In fact, about a dozen are flitting away outside my window even as I write. Yet these small birds can go unnoticed by some folks in our 24/7 world of hustle and bustle—though watchful birds of prey take particular notice of them.

Psalm 102:7 describes a seemingly forlorn condition as being “like a sparrow alone on the housetop.” But is this one, or any of us in difficulty, truly alone?

It’s by reference to the tiny sparrow that Jesus addresses our gnawing concern in a thoughtful and direct manner to show that nothing escapes God’s loving attention regarding those called according to His purpose. Ever the masterful Teacher, He draws on a common marketplace transaction His contemporary audience would have understood.

We’ll come to see that God attentively views these most fragile of creatures as an example of His care for us who are made in His very image. We might say that people are like sparrows, yet of far greater worth!

Matthew 10 captures Jesus’ encouraging words to His disciples: “Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will” (verse 29). This is incredibly encouraging. Nothing occurs apart from what God allows, and even the little ones don’t “fall” to the ground apart from His awareness and concern. But this is only part of what Jesus said in this regard.

“Not one . . . is forgotten before God”

Luke 12:6 gives an expanded perspective, recording Christ saying: “Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God.” Not one is “overlooked” (Common English Bible) or “uncared for” (Amplified Bible, Classic Edition).

Here the Western mind can be hindered, because Jesus is utilizing Jewish rabbinical tact in offering a question with the answer embedded in it. Why does He hammer home this point of not being overlooked or neglected?

Combining the two Gospel accounts we come to see that one coin of the day bought two sparrows, and that two coins would buy five sparrows. But wait a minute—the math doesn’t match up. Shouldn’t it be just four sparrows in Luke? Yes! Until we realize that spending two coins instead of one would bring an extra sparrow into the deal, one not necessarily figured in and in a sense overlooked. Yet God overlooks none. He cares about all of them.

But now let’s take it a step further in defining God’s acute observation of our comings and goings before Him. Jesus is really making a larger point about human beings here. In both places, He immediately follows with: “But the very hairs of your



Yes, a loving God truly does care. Indeed, every one of us is important and highly valued in the eyes of God.

head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:30-31; Luke 12:7).

God takes great notice of us in minute detail, being intimately concerned with and caring for us. Jesus elsewhere said: “Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Matthew 6:26; compare Luke 12:24).

God’s deeply caring focus on us was earlier expressed in the Psalms. David wrote: “How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can’t even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand!” (Psalm 139:17-18, New Living Translation).

Yes, a loving God truly does care and continually remains attuned to men and women like us who sometimes feel lost in the shuffle of the vast drama of historical events or become internally mired in the quicksand of personal despair that pulls us down into an abyss of loneliness.

We are not the first and won’t be the last in this dilemma. I’m reminded of the well-known 19th-century American poet Walt Whitman, who penned his broodings as America was expanding in industry and population while the individual was seemingly being crowded off the page of valued existence.

He put it this way: “O me! O life! of the questions of these recurring, of the endless trains of the faithless, of cities fill’d with the foolish . . . What good amid these, O me, O life? Answer: That you are here—that life exists and identity, that the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse” (“O Me! O Life! *Leaves of Grass*, 1892).

Indeed, every one of us is important and highly valued in the eyes of God.

Little yet the apple of God’s eye

Let’s consider for a moment that in first-century Judea,

in which the Roman eagle was prominently displayed before conquered people, Jesus would counter that dynamic symbolism with the simple and yet profound care God has for one of the gentlest and neediest of His works—the sparrow. Today, in the realm of sports, teams are given names like Raptors, Falcons, Eagles, Hawks. *Sparrows* is not a typical moniker!

And yet it’s here that we learn the meaning of the apostle Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 1: “But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are . . .” (verses 27-28).

And why? The next verse supplies the key: “. . . that no flesh should glory in His presence” (verse 29). We are all very small before God!

Yet the great God of heaven and earth, the One who calls Himself our Heavenly Father, continues to call a “little flock” in this day and age to “contribute a verse” as “the powerful play goes on”—a personal verse we can write only through our life’s surrendered actions tangibly declaring that *His* story is greater than our own.

This personal “verse” is underlined by daily living faith in His attentive love that ultimately supersedes our darkest moments of unbelief. In such vulnerable moments we need to take heart in the words of 2 Chronicles 16:9: “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.”

King David endearingly personalized this reality when he wrote, “Keep me as the apple of Your eye [that is, the pupil or center of vision]; hide me under the shadow of Your wings” (Psalm 17:8). Truly, we need to know we are not alone.

I hope you will never again look at a sparrow in quite the same way. We’re even told in Psalm 84 that sparrows and swallows find a home and nest at the altars of the Lord, at the tabernacle and temple of God (verses 3-4)—and how much more so should we!

Here’s an action item for you: Watch a little bird. And when you do, stay focused for a while. Yes, focus! And realize that God is looking at you even more intently in that same moment. After all, people are like sparrows in being noticed and cared for by God, yet in an even greater way. But mark this difference in the observing: You will move on in a world that doesn’t stop, but God never takes His eyes off of you.

God deeply cares for you (1 Peter 5:7). It’s all part of an amazing love story—of a love affair started by Him and punctuated by the invitation from God’s Son of “Follow Me.” This invitation is ongoing with an incredible promise to us who, like the sparrow, are not neglected or forgotten. As Jesus said in John 6:39 (NLT), “And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day.” **BT**

Armageddon & The Day of the Lord

This is now the 13th lesson in the “Bible Prophecy and You” series. “Armageddon!” Many people have heard scary predictions or speculations about Armageddon, but what does it mean?

Here is a definition from the *American Heritage Dictionary*: “The scene of a final battle between the forces of good and evil, prophesied to occur at the end of the world.”

The dictionary also has a second definition because “Armageddon” has become a common metaphor: “A decisive or catastrophic conflict.” But what does the Bible say about it?

Most people are also confused about the meaning of “the Day of the Lord.” Will it last for one day, one year, for many years or for all eternity? When will it start? When will Christ return? And what are the prophetic seals, trumpets and plagues described in the book of Revelation?

We’ll delve into finding the answers to these and other questions.

The Bible has many prophecies of the end time. Right now, it may seem that their fulfillments are proceeding at a slow pace, but the time will come when they will be happening in rapid-fire succession!

While Jesus Christ said we should stay aware of “the signs of the times,” He made it clear that we should stay focused, like Him, to “do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” (John 4:34). As we await the second coming of Christ, instead of allowing ourselves to become distracted, we should serve God in such a way that Christ, when He returns, will say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21).

What Does the Bible say about the Day of the Lord?

This lesson is based on the foundations laid in the last five lessons. If anything in this lesson is unclear, it may help to review previous lessons in this “Bible Prophecy and You” series in recent issues of *Beyond Today*, especially lessons 8 to 12.

The book of Revelation gives great insight into how these subjects tie together and describes the sequence of end-time trends and events. For a good understanding of Revelation, we highly recommend that you read our free study guide

The Book of Revelation Unveiled.

► What does the Bible mean by “the day of the Lord”?

“Wail, for the day of the LORD is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will be limp, every man’s heart will melt, and they will be afraid. Pangs and sorrows will take hold of them; they will be in pain as a woman in childbirth; they will be amazed at one another; their faces will be like flames.

“Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine.

“I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold . . . Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger” (Isaiah 13:6-13).

The Day of the Lord usually refers to a time when God and Christ are powerfully intervening in the world to punish evil. This is also called “the great and dreadful day of the LORD” that will come “upon all the nations” just before Christ’s second coming (Malachi 4:5; Obadiah 1:15, emphasis added throughout). Sometimes the term is nearly synonymous with “the time of the end,” which was explained in Lesson 1.

However, occasionally it has a dual fulfillment. Isaiah 13 begins with a warning of how God will punish Babylon, which most likely refers to its destruction in Old Testament times (verses 1-6). But verses 9-13 are obviously more specifically describing the end-time “day of the LORD,” when God will cause spectacular heavenly signs and “will punish the world for its evil.”

Furthermore, starting with the beginning of Christ’s future intervention, the Day of the Lord can in one sense be considered to last forever because God through Christ will forevermore rule the world. Never again will Satan be “the ruler of this world” (see John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

► Do synonymous phrases for Day of the Lord usually

show that it will be a time of awesome and dreadful punishment?

“Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it . . . Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger” (Isaiah 13:9, 13).

“For it is the day of the LORD’s vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion” (Isaiah 34:8).

“Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 5:5).

Clearly the Bible uses several other expressions for the Day of the Lord, including “day of His fierce anger,” “day of the LORD’s vengeance” and “day of the Lord Jesus.”

► What is the relationship between the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord?

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and



Terrifying heavenly signs will occur “immediately after the [great] tribulation of those days.”

then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:29-30).

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

Jesus said the terrifying heavenly signs will occur “immediately after the [great] tribulation of those days.” And through Joel, God said these heavenly signs will occur “before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.” So chronologically speaking, the Great Tribulation comes on the world scene before the Day of the Lord (compare Revelation 6:12-17).

As we saw in Lesson 11, during the Great Tribulation enemy nations will punish, through war and captivity, the United

States, Britain and other nations whose people are largely descendants of the ancient Israelites.

The Day of the Lord will be direct punishment from Jesus Christ on *the rest of unrepentant humanity* (Revelation 16:9), especially the nations that are a part of the political, religious and commercial “Babylon the Great” and anyone else who opposes Christ (Revelation 17:5; 18:2).

► When will the Day of the Lord begin?

“To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn . . .” (Isaiah 61:2).

“For the day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of My redeemed has come” (Isaiah 63:4).

The Bible doesn’t clearly answer when the Day of the Lord will begin. However, in Bible prophecy, the word *day* can sometimes represent one year (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6).

Furthermore, other scriptures seem to indicate that the Day of the Lord will begin one year before Christ returns. For example, we read in Isaiah 34:8, “For it is the day of the LORD’s vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion.” Also, in Isaiah 61:2, “the acceptable year of the LORD” seems to be equated with “the day of vengeance of our God.”

We saw in the last lesson that the Great Tribulation will begin 3½ years before Christ returns. It appears that the last year of that period will be the Day of the Lord. So it seems that the first 2½ years display Satan’s wrath, followed by a year of God’s vengeance.

We know for sure that “the servants of our God” will be protected from the “harm” that Christ will pour out on the earth during this final period (Revelation 7:3; see also 3:10 and 12:14-17). *Many scriptures* assure us of God’s desire and power to protect His people.

► What do the seven “seals” of Revelation represent?

“And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals” (Revelation 5:1).

The first rule of Bible interpretation is to let the Bible interpret itself. A comparison between the seven “seals”

and the sequence of events Jesus foretold in the prophecy He gave on the Mount of Olives, His Olivet Prophecy, in Matthew 24:4-9 gives us a clear understanding. Here is a very

brief summary of what the opening of the seals portray:

- 1st Seal (Revelation 6:1-2; Matthew 24:4-5): Increasing religious deception of false Christianity.
- 2nd Seal (Revelation 6:3-4; Matthew 24:6-7): Wars increasing in frequency and devastation.
- 3rd Seal (Revelation 6:5-6; Matthew 24:7): Food shortages and famines increasing.
- 4th Seal (Revelation 6:7-8; Matthew 24:7): Plagues such as disease epidemics and natural disasters increasing and becoming more deadly.
- 5th Seal (Revelation 6:9-11; Matthew 24:9): Increasing persecution of Christians climaxing in the Great Tribulation.
- 6th Seal (Revelation 6:12-16; Matthew 24:29): A great earthquake and terrifying heavenly signs.

• 7th Seal (Revelation 6:17; 8:1-2, 6; Matthew 24:30): Day of the Lord (“the great day of His wrath”), including the seven trumpet plagues.

► **What are the seven trumpets of the seventh seal (the Day of the Lord)?**

“When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets” (Revelation 8:1-2).

The opening of the seventh seal includes seven angels blowing their trumpets one by one. After each trumpet blast, there is a cataclysmic event. The first four are described in Revelation 8:

- Destruction of vegetation (verse 7).
- Devastation of oceans and sea life (verses 8-9).
- Devastation of rivers and fresh water (verses 10-11).
- Sun, moon and stars darkened (verse 12).

The fifth trumpet “plague” is described in Revelation 9:1-12. Quoting from our study guide *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*: “The director or ‘king’ of this wave of affliction is described as ‘the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon’ (verse 11, NIV). These titles, in Hebrew and Greek, mean ‘destruction’ and ‘destroyer,’ respectively. And we later see that the Satan-led ‘beast’ power emerges from this abyss or bottomless pit (Revelation 17:8), showing that the locusts here are probably the forces of this Europe-centered power bloc directed by Satan.”

The sixth trumpet “plague” is described in Revelation 9:13-21. Incredibly, it describes a 200-million-man army that will “kill a third of mankind”! Apparently the army comes from nations east of the Euphrates River. Quoting again from the chapter “The Day of the Lord Finally Arrives” from the same study guide: “This event, the second woe or sixth trumpet plague, seems to be a massive counterattack against the European-led forces of the first woe or fifth trumpet plague.”

The seventh trumpet announces “seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete”









Megiddo lies in the Jezreel valley where ancient trade routes converge. Armies will gather there before the final battle at Jerusalem.

(15:1). Each angel has a bowl full of the wrath of God, and each bowl in turn is poured out on the earth. These seven last plagues are described in Revelation 15 and 16. The fifth angel pours “his bowl on the throne of the beast” (16:10). The sixth angel prepares the way for the climactic battle commonly referred to as “Armageddon” (16:12-16).

► **What does “Armageddon” mean? What does the prophecy concerning it say?**

“Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the

Map and chart by Shaun Venish

Beginning of Sorrows/Birth Pangs				2½ Years		1		
Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse								
First Seal	Second Seal	Third Seal	Fourth Seal	Fifth Seal	Sixth Seal	SILENCE IN HEAVEN (Revelation 8:1-6)	First Trumpet	Second Trumpet
White Horse	Red Horse	Black Horse	Pale Horse	Great Tribulation	Heavenly Signs		One third of trees and all grass burned	One third of the sea becomes blood, a third of all sea creatures die and a third of all ships are destroyed
								
DECEPTION	WAR	FAMINE	PLAGUE	PERSECUTION AND CAPTIVITY				
Matthew 24:4-5	Matthew 24:6-8	Matthew 24:7-8	Matthew 24:7-8	Matthew 24:9, 21-22; Luke 21:23-24	Matthew 24:29-30; Joel 2:30-31			
Revelation 6:1-2	Revelation 6:3-4	Revelation 6:5-6	Revelation 6:7-8	Revelation 6:9-11	Revelation 6:12-17		Revelation 8:7	Revelation 8:8-9

kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

“Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.’ And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon” (Revelation 16:12-16).

Although Satan and the demons are doomed to lose any battle with Christ, they never give up trying to defeat Him. Once again, Christ will use their efforts to fulfill His purposes. The “spirits of demons” working under Satan and through the Beast and the False Prophet “go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to *the battle of that great day of God Almighty*” (Revelation 16:13-14). *That* is the real name of the final battle between Christ and the armies of the world.

Jesus Christ makes use of the demonic influences “to gather the nations . . . to pour on them My indignation, all My fierce anger” (Zephaniah 3:8). All nations, including the armies of the Beast, “will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings” (Revelation 17:14).

“And they [the demons] gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon” (Revelation 16:16). Armageddon literally means “Mount Megiddo.” In fact, the Majority Text of the New Testament says simply *Magedon* or “Megiddo.” This is an ancient city ruin northwest of Jerusalem. To the east of it is a broad valley or plain, called Jezreel or Esdraelon, in which numerous battles have been fought in the past. One of its names is “the plain of Megiddo” (Zechariah 12:11). This will be the central gathering place, but the huge armies will evidently be spread out over a much larger area.

As Christ descends toward Jerusalem, the area around Jerusalem will become the primary area of battle. “Behold, the day of the LORD is coming . . . For I will gather all the nations

to battle against Jerusalem . . . Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations . . . And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives . . . And the LORD shall be King over all the earth” (Zechariah 14:1-4, 9).

The actual battle begins when the seventh angel pours out his bowl. Then there will be an earthquake more devastating than any that people have experienced before! Islands and mountains will disappear! The “cities of the nations” will fall, including the leading city the Bible refers to as “Babylon,” a reference to the final revival of Rome, as we’ve seen in other lessons. A hailstorm will rain down hailstones that will weigh perhaps 75 to 100 pounds each (Revelation 16:17-21). The fall of Babylon is more fully described in Revelation 18.

Christ will capture the Beast and the False Prophet—the consummate antichrists described in the last lesson—and cast them into a lake of fire and will kill all the opposing armies (Revelation 19:19-21).

The prophet Zechariah records the fate of these armies that fight against Christ, apparently being hit with a blast of immense power: “And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths” (Zechariah 14:12).

► What will be the great triumphant climax of the Day of the Lord?

“Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever”” (Revelation 11:15, English Standard Version).

“And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: “We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should

Year ————— A Short Time —————

The Day of the Lord—Time of God’s Wrath (Joel 2:1, Revelation 6:15-17; 11:18; 14:19; 15:1)

Seventh Seal: Seven Trumpets and Plagues (Revelation 16:1)

Third Trumpet	Fourth Trumpet	Fifth Trumpet	Sixth Trumpet	Seventh Trumpet: Jesus Christ’s Return and Seven Last Plagues Revelation 10:7; 11:15-19; 19:1-21; Matthew 24:30-31; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Zechariah 14:1-4						
One third of all rivers become wormwood	One third of sun, moon and stars darkened	Locusts, symbolic of Beast’s military power (Revelation 17:8-14)	200-million-man army, one third of humanity killed, mankind refuses to repent	First Plague	Second Plague	Third Plague	Fourth Plague	Fifth Plague	Sixth Plague	Seventh Plague
				Sores on people who accepted mark of the Beast	Sea turns to blood, all sea creatures die	Springs and rivers turn to blood	Sun scorches humanity with great heat, mankind blasphemes God	Beast’s seat of government afflicted with darkness and pain	Euphrates dried up, armies gathered to Armageddon (Joel 3:9-17)	Great earthquake and hail
Revelation 8:10-11	Revelation 8:12	Revelation 9:1-12	Revelation 9:13-21	Revelation 16:2	Revelation 16:3	Revelation 16:4-7	Revelation 16:8-9	Revelation 16:10-11	Revelation 16:12-16	Revelation 16:17-21
		First Woe	Second Woe	Third Woe (Revelation 8:13)						

be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth” (verses 16-18).

“Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.

“Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:11-16).

“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:50-54).

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

With the seventh trumpet comes the announcement of marvelous news for the saints and for the future of the world: Jesus Christ lays claim to His rule of the earth! The 24 elders in

heaven announce that it is time to “reward Your servants the prophets and the saints”!

The great climax of the Day of the Lord will be the awesome return of Christ, so vividly described in Revelation 19, and the raising from the dead of the saints, which is “the first resurrection” (20:6). Almost all of 1 Corinthians 15 discusses the resurrection. It tells us that the blowing of “the last trumpet” will signal the resurrection (verse 52). The resurrection of the saints is also described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and is referred to in many other scriptures.

This seventh trumpet also announces the pouring out of the seven last plagues, as we’ve seen. These plagues, which include the gathering of the Beast and False Prophet and other forces, will follow the resurrection, with Christ and the saints then coming down to the final battle.


► What annual festival commanded by God pictures the Day of the Lord?

“Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, saying: “In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord”’” (Leviticus 23:23-25).

This passage briefly refers to the Feast of Trumpets, which foreshadows the fulfillment of the trumpets of Revelation, especially the last one marking Christ’s return and the resurrection of the saints. The Feast of Trumpets and the six other annual festivals and Holy Days commanded by God are explained in our free study guide *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. All of these occasions are joyful and deeply meaningful. Once you understand them, you will want to celebrate them!

Apply Now

After talking about the resurrection in 1 Thessalonians 4, the apostle Paul goes on to talk about “the day of the Lord” in 1 Thessalonians 5. He makes it clear that when this time finally comes, it will do so suddenly, so we should stay spiritually prepared. After that, Paul gives a wonderful list of simple instructions for true Christian living.

Take some time to read 1 Thessalonians 5 now. Enjoy and be inspired! Plus, pick two or three mandates from Paul’s list, write them down and set a goal to focus on practicing them in your daily life for the next week. 

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