

# BEYOND TODAY®

A Magazine of Understanding

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## When Heaven Comes to Earth

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# BEYOND TODAY

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# A World Going Insane



Scott Ashley  
Managing editor

Sometimes I think the world is going crazy. The rest of the time I *know* it is.

I woke up this morning to news of another mass killing, this time in Dayton, Ohio, where a 24-year-old gunman shot and killed nine people—among them his own younger sister. Another 27 were injured, some by gunfire and many from injuries incurred while running for their lives.

Only 12 hours earlier a similarly deranged 21-year-old murdered 22 people and wounded 24 more in a 20-minute shooting spree inside a large store in El Paso, Texas.

Just a few days earlier, another young man shot and killed three and wounded 15 more at a festival in California after cutting his way through a fence to avoid security officers.

Meanwhile, an average of 56 people are shot per week, 10 fatally, in Chicago alone. In all fairness, many cities in Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela have far higher murder rates, so devastatingly high homicide deaths are a worldwide phenomenon. And this doesn't begin to take into account the ongoing mass murders of Christians in the Middle East and Africa by those determined to stamp out Christianity.

At the same time, those of us in the West live in societies where advocates of the murder of unborn babies lecture us on human rights, socialists lecture us on economics, transvestites lecture us on human biology, and Hollywood actors and actresses with multiple children by various sex partners lecture us on virtue.

Just last week a homosexual U.S. presidential candidate (there's a phrase I never remotely imagined I would type on my keyboard!) lectured the nation on proper Christian and biblical morals—which in his view requires yet more government redistribution of citizens' hard-earned money.

On the heels of that, dozens of Hollywood A-listers, politicians, entertainment moguls and celebrities descended on the Mediterranean island of Sicily in more than 100 luxury private jets and yachts (one costing \$400 million) to stay in \$900-a-night resort rooms for a three-day conference. The reason for this meeting? To discuss how to "save" the planet from climate change! (The luxury private jets alone—not to mention the many limousines, sports cars and helicopters—generated some 900 U.S. tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.)

Yes, the world truly is going insane.

What do all of these problems have in common? One is that they are all symptoms of a *spiritual sickness* that pervades our world. So much that we see around us is indeed a kind of insanity—thought processes and actions that defy rational explanation and make no sense. We're entering uncharted waters where up is down and down is up, or, as the Bible puts

it, people "call evil good, and good evil" and "put darkness for light, and light for darkness" (Isaiah 5:20).

And to anyone with any perception at all, it's obvious things are getting *worse*, not better.

Why can't we find solutions? Because these are *spiritual* problems, symptoms of *spiritual* sickness, and the solutions must be *spiritual*.

Why do I say these problems are spiritual? Because there is a spiritual force and power behind them. Few people realize it, but a dark and malevolent influence is working continually behind the scenes of our world.

The Bible reveals to us information we otherwise could

not know because it isn't discerned by the human senses of touch, taste, sight, hearing or smell. But it is real, as surely as you and I are real. The Bible reveals the existence of an invisible, unseen *spirit* world. And it records the occasional intersection of our physical world and this spirit world, with results that often terrified those who experienced it!

The Bible reveals that there are spirit beings called *angels* who serve God. (To

learn more, download or request our free study guide *Angels: God's Messengers and Spirit Army*.) But it also shows there are evil and rebellious angels called *demons* who serve a powerful fallen angel called *Satan* (meaning "adversary" or "enemy") the devil (meaning "false accuser" or "slanderer"). He is called a liar and a murderer (John 8:44) because *that is what he does*.

His influence is so great that he "*deceives the whole world*" and "*the world around us is under the control of the wicked one*" (Revelation 12:9; 1 John 5:19, New Living Translation). If you believe in God the Father and Jesus Christ based on what is written in Their holy Word, the Bible, then you must also believe in Satan the devil and his demons, whom the Bible reveals to be every bit as real!

This is why our many problems are so entrenched and unsolvable in spite of humankind's best efforts. Without God's help we *cannot* solve them. They are *spiritual* in nature and require a *spiritual* solution. Spiritual forces we cannot defeat are behind them and fill our world with violence, hatred, hostility, murder and lies.

So what is the solution? God *can and will do* what mankind cannot. The time is approaching when He will intervene and send His Son Jesus Christ to earth to end Satan's reign as "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4). This issue of *Beyond Today* discusses how that will come about and what the coming new and transformed world will be like. It's why we encourage you to join us in praying, as Jesus taught, "*Your Kingdom come!*" BT



# When Heaven Comes to Earth

You were born to live a life Jesus Christ can use when He returns with the Kingdom He receives from His Father. Are you using your time now to prepare for your future role?

by Darris McNeely

**T**he crowds around Jesus were buzzing with excitement. For days the talk among those following Him to Jerusalem had grown stronger in excitement and anticipation about what might occur. They thought the establishment of the Kingdom of God was imminent.

Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom had increased. When the Pharisees questioned Him about its appearing, His answer seemed to indicate it was near, even among them. His stating that societal conditions would resemble those of the days of Noah also made them think their day would see the coming of the Kingdom. After all, weren't conditions in their time similar to those of Noah's time?

Miracles had increased, and the power of Jesus' message connected His ministry to the prophecies of the Messiah's rule. Though He foretold His death and resurrection according to the prophets, people did not grasp what He was saying—not the crowds nor His closest disciples.

At last Christ gave one of His most impactful parables, a message meant to convey the real purpose for His disciples' calling. They now faced a life of preparing to rule in Christ's Kingdom. But again they missed what He was saying.

Christ's message from this story, known as the Parable of the Pounds (or Minas), applies to us today.

We'll look more at this parable shortly, but its message is basically this: *The Kingdom of God is coming to the earth*, and you have the opportunity now, in this life, to prepare to be with Christ when He establishes that Kingdom here.

Another way to say this is that "heaven," the divine realm of God's reign, *will come to earth*. When you die you are not going to live in heaven. God is going to bring heaven to earth! And your life today is meant as a time to prepare to reign with Christ as a co-heir in His coming Kingdom!

## Today's two views vs. the real future

Two views of our world and the perpetuation of human existence dominate today's thinking.

One outlook is more material-based, seeking salvation through science and government intervention in ecological management. A common belief is that human activity is altering our planet's environment to the point that life here could end or be severely changed. Some even make the claim that anthropogenic (manmade) climate change could render the earth uninhabitable within 10 to 12 years. Ideas like colonizing the moon or Mars have been put forward as a means of saving the human race. It's a dire and stark view but sincerely taught through mainstream media and educational institutions.

The other perspective is the typical religious belief that human salvation comes through a disembodied afterlife. This common conception of people's souls floating away to heaven to spend eternity there with God has little or no relevance to ongoing earthly existence. Many people of faith accept this future as a biblical teaching without really searching the Scriptures to determine whether it is actually valid.

The fact is, the popular teaching that at death one goes to heaven or hell for eternity cannot be found in the Bible. What





“And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls [physical lives] of those who had been beheaded [in martyrdom] for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast [a tyrannical end-time empire and its leader] or his image [a religious hierarchy patterned after that of the empire], and had not received his mark [sign of authority] on their foreheads or on their hands [that is, in their allegiance and practice]. 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 [ultimate annihilation from existence] has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him for a thousand years.”

With these verses—and there are many more that could be added that reveal other details from Scripture—we conclude that the earth will be the place where Christ will dwell with His resurrected and transformed followers. With them He will begin a time of restoration and refreshing of the earth long foretold by the prophets of God (Acts 3:19-21).

You will not go to dwell in heaven at death, or to an everlasting hell. And you need not fear that the human race will be wiped out through human-caused environmental damage. However, as we’ve written about elsewhere, it is true that people have done and will continue to do

the Bible shows is that at death people “sleep” with no conscious awareness, awaiting a resurrection. It is at Christ’s return that “the dead in Christ” will rise to meet Him in the air and be with

## Instead of everything ending or people going away to live in heaven, with the earth forsaken, Christ will bring “heaven” to earth!

Him (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). (To learn more, read our study guide *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*).

Zechariah the prophet foretold of that time, “In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives” (Zechariah 14:4), which is on the east side of Jerusalem. Jesus will come back to the earth, His resurrected followers with Him, and Jerusalem will become the center of His reign. People of all nations will come there to learn how to administer the authority of God throughout the world.

Revelation 20:4-6 sums up what lies ahead for mankind and the earth when Jesus returns in great power and glory:

great damage to the environment (Revelation 11:18), and cataclysmic disasters will devastate the planet as judgment on human sin and to motivate repentance. But this will not spell the end of mankind.

Instead of everything ending or people going away to live in heaven, with the earth forsaken, Christ will bring “heaven” to earth, with the ultimate sense of this to follow (see “The Coming of Heaven to Earth: In Stages” on page 7).

### Using this time of preparation

Today God is preparing a people to help bring His Kingdom to replace the kingdoms of this world. That is what

Jesus told His disciples in the days before His death, preparing them, and us, for the real purpose for our present life on earth. Let’s consider what He said.

The masses following Jesus to Jerusalem thought the Kingdom of God would appear immediately. To correct this misimpression He spoke a parable that showed they had a time of preparation ahead. Today this parable teaches us the same thing. We are in a time of preparation for living and reigning with Christ in His Kingdom. That is the purpose of our life now—if we will accept it.

Jesus described this reality in Luke 19, using the story of “a certain nobleman who went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return” (verse 12). The nobleman represents Christ, and the far country is heaven, where He went to remain a long time, starting 40 days after His resurrection. The receiving of the Kingdom here is Jesus being granted the power and authority to reign by the Father.

Notice further that the departing nobleman entrusted others with certain responsibilities. “Before he left, he called together ten of his servants and divided among them ten pounds of silver [or 10 minas, each mina about three months’ wages], saying, ‘Invest this for me while I am gone.’ But his people hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We do not want him to be our king’” (verses 13-14, New Living Translation).

Christ is saying this just days before His crucifixion. His people, the Jewish nation, had rejected Him as Messiah and His message. All this was according to what the prophets had foretold.

Jesus then fast-forwards to His future appearance in glory as King of Kings. As He states of the nobleman—representing Himself—this involves a calling to account of His servants: “After he was crowned king, he returned and called in the servants to whom he had given the money. He wanted to find out what their profits were. The first servant reported, ‘Master, I invested your money and made ten times the original amount!’

“Well done!’ the king exclaimed. ‘You are a good servant. You have been faithful with the little I entrusted to you, so you will be governor of ten cities as your reward’” (verses 15-17, NLT).

By the ingenious use of a parable about financial stewardship of a nobleman’s money, Jesus is explaining that He expects

His servants—His true followers—to be busy increasing the gifts of spiritual knowledge and ability He has committed to them, symbolized here by money. The first servant used what was placed in his care wisely, increasing it 10 times.

Now the next servant gives account for what he was given: “The next servant reported, ‘Master, I invested your money and made five times the original amount.’

“Well done!’ the king said. ‘You will be governor over five cities’” (verses 18-19, NLT).

Both servants did what they were told and returned an increase several times the original amount. They are rewarded accordingly. Their reward is to be leaders over cities and people, in line with what is stated in Revelation—that Christ’s followers will be given rule as “priest-kings” with Him in His Kingdom (Revelation 5:10). This is what God intends to bring to the earth—His government, His Kingdom.

When we talk about the Kingdom of God on earth or heaven coming to earth, we are speaking about something real. This is not a spiritual allegory or symbolic concept. A real ruling Kingdom is coming, a government by which God will teach all nations His law and way.

The prophet Daniel saw Jesus receiving this Kingdom in vision in Daniel 7:14 (NLT): “He was given authority, honor, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed” (emphasis added throughout).

God will use those who experience a foretaste of the godly way of life today to help in bringing this new way of life to the earth tomorrow!

Preparation for this future has been going on for a long time. From every era of human history, God has called and chosen those who will take part in establishing and overseeing His Kingdom. He intended our human lifetime today to be one of learning important lessons, with faithful disciples coming to live productive, godly lives, developing character and a state of mind God can use to teach others.

It’s stunning to realize the great truth that this life now is meant as a time of preparation to rule with Christ. Put yourself in this parable and envision what can be *your* future—a part of the

group God uses to bring heaven to earth!

### A warning about failing to use this time

Christ speaks in this parable about one other category of people—those who will not heed God’s calling, refusing to obey in making use of what they’re given. Notice how this is described.

“But the third servant brought back only the original amount of money and said, ‘Master, I hid your money and kept it safe [in a cloth or napkin, other versions note, so not really that safe]. I was afraid because you are a hard man to deal with, taking what isn’t yours and harvesting crops you didn’t plant.’

“‘You wicked servant!’ the king roared. ‘Your own words condemn you. If you knew that I’m a hard man who takes what isn’t mine and harvests crops I didn’t plant, why didn’t you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it’” (Luke 19:20-23, NLT).

This servant addresses the king as master, but he refused to do what he’d been

nearby, the king ordered, ‘Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one who has ten pounds.’

“‘But, master,’ they said, ‘he already has ten pounds!’

“‘Yes,’ the king replied, ‘and to those who use well what they are given, even more will be given. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away. And as for these enemies of mine who didn’t want me to be their king—bring them in and execute them right here in front of me’” (verses 24-27, NLT).

Christ here shows us the infinitely better reward that comes for those who accept the calling from the Father and yield to allow His Spirit to work in them, producing the fruit of righteousness. This is a warning to take seriously the calling of God and not neglect it.

### Your purpose, your life

Christ’s mission at His first coming was not to establish His reign over

You can be a part of the body of Christ, if God is drawing you to understanding. The choice is before you. Will you accept God’s calling?

told. He expresses that he was fearful over making the wrong investment choices in the face of the supposed severity of the master. And, along with the master’s expectation of a return on his investment, a certain resentment is evident over being put in this difficult position.

But what we really see here is an accusatory spirit and a total distortion of the truth. A person like this will not yield and allow Christ to work in him. At the very least, what was given could have been put out to others in some way, represented here by earning nominal interest in a bank rather than taking the money completely out of circulation. That might have indicated a cooperative spirit despite a concern over making a misstep. Instead, a hard and bitter spirit is shown by an outright refusal to serve, accompanied by defamatory blaming of the master. Christ cannot work with or use this type of person.

The hard stance taken by the last disciple merits a hard judgment by Jesus Christ:

“Then, turning to the others standing

the nations. His work then was to be the Lamb of God who would die to take away the sins of the world and to found His Church—His spiritual people, the children of God, as His collective body of believers. This parable in Luke 19 shows there would follow a long period of time when He would then prepare His people to reign with Him.

This preparation is what the Church of God is to be engaged in. Christ is its founding Head. His Church’s reason for being is to carry on the work He began in His earthly ministry. Its core purpose is to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God and prepare a people to assist Him when He returns.

This is *the real purpose for responding to the message of the gospel and changing your life today*. The Father and Jesus Christ are right now preparing a spiritual body of disciples who will be raised to divine immortality at Christ’s return, many of whom are already prepared and now “sleep” in the grave—awaiting the moment when Christ will call them forth to a new life in a glorified, resurrected

# The Coming of Heaven to Earth— in Stages

As our main article here shows, Jesus will soon return to establish the Kingdom of God over the nations, bringing “heaven”—its rule and ways and conditions—to earth.

But a further coming of heaven to earth will remain in store. Revelation 21-22 shows that after Christ’s 1,000-year reign there will be a new heaven and new earth, with the heavenly city of New Jerusalem descending from heaven to a transformed earth. God the Father will at that time come to dwell on the earth as well—our planet

will then serve as the home of the Father and Christ and all of the saved forever.

Thus we see heaven coming to earth in stages. It began with God’s work among people in the Old Testament period. It grew with Christ coming to the earth as a man and God dwelling in people through His Spirit. Now we

are poised for the final stages. A vast change of the world system will come when Jesus returns to set up the Kingdom of God over the nations. The rule of the Kingdom will begin at Jerusalem and soon spread over the whole earth.

And finally, beyond those days, the Father and Christ will in the end both dwell here, with humanity then perfected, all at last doing God’s will “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). There will be no more sin and no more misery—only everlasting joy and peace and life to the full. Truly, heaven will have then come to earth in an ultimate and complete sense!

—Tom Robinson

body. This is the group He will use to teach the world of His ways.

You can be a part of that body if God is drawing you to understanding. The choice is before you. Will you accept God’s calling?

There is much work to be done. If we have the fundamental mindset that heaven is coming to earth and we are to prepare to assist in establishing the Kingdom of God on earth, then we must begin today—seeking God’s help in focusing our lives on His Kingdom and way of life (Matthew 6:33).

It starts with the prayer “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). This simple yet direct prayer we’ve all heard many times is really packing in the profound message that in the coming of the Kingdom, heaven is going to come to earth, with God’s will carried out here as it now is there by His angels. With that focus, we who are God’s servants should be leading the way in that now, doing the will of God in our life today.

We must put God first, serving Him and our fellow human beings. We should honor, respect and care for each other. God tells us to love one another as we should love Him. These are fundamental principles of behavior that set the pattern for realizing God’s purpose in our life.

## Living a “10-city life”

What we do reflects how we feel about God and our fellow man. Our manner of life should reflect a deeply held conviction that there is a God and that He has revealed His will for mankind. Yes, God can be known—and we can live His way with profound positive consequences for our lives.


The fully realized life of a disciple of Jesus Christ is one where we truly live what we believe. It is not a halfway effort. To live as a halfway Christian is a subtle form of atheism, where we show by our actions that we do not really believe God means what He says. That is, we say we believe God, but parts of our lives are lived without a deeply held belief influencing our thoughts and conduct.

In my years of working with people in pastoral ministry, I have observed that people are often sincere in their *profession* of belief but fall short in the *proof*. That’s human, but it can be a flaw that keeps us from living what we might call, based on Christ’s parable, a “10-city life.” Remember from the story that one is given rule over 10 cities and another over five cities, while one receives nothing, instead having everything taken away. Who among these would you want to be? We should all strive to do the most we can with what we’ve been given!

Christ offers a reward for how we live this life. You may not have thought about your relationship with God in this way, but it’s what the parable says. Christ expects no less than a full commitment to Him and His teachings and tells us we will receive a reward commensurate with our effort. Salvation is a free gift by grace, but we are rewarded in this coming Kingdom according to our works (Matthew

16:27; Revelation 22:12). Our reward comes from how yielded we are to God working in us.

If the idea of heaven coming to earth is not what you believe, then you should dig deeper into the topic by requesting or downloading a free copy of our study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. You need to understand what the Bible says about this vital subject!

You were born to live a life Jesus Christ can use when He returns to earth with the Kingdom He receives from the Father. Are you using your time now to prepare for your future role? It is the reason you were born! 



## LEARN MORE

Jesus Christ began His ministry preaching about the gospel—the good news—of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14). But what exactly is that message and that Kingdom? Download or request our study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. A free copy is waiting for you!

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



# What Heaven on Earth Will Be Like

God's Word has astounding prophecies and promises for the future of planet earth. What will that future be like? How will it be different from our world of today?

by Scott Ashley

**M**any specific Bible prophecies tell us what the world will be like after Jesus Christ establishes the Kingdom of God on earth. Some almost sound like common ideas about heaven. In fact, some people apply some of these prophecies to heaven when in fact they're talking about how the earth and everything on it will be transformed!

Let's consider what Bible prophecy tells us about this coming wonderful world tomorrow. It paints an astoundingly beautiful picture of a world very different from our world of today!

## **Jesus Christ will bring a very different government**

Christ Jesus will reign as the divine, uncontested King over all the earth, it then being announced: "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).

To bring peace to the world, Jesus Christ must assume control of all nations and peoples on earth: "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 7:14).

Christ, the Prince of Peace, will be the ultimate Peacemaker, enabling and enforcing an enduring worldwide peace: "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

... Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end..." (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Under His rule, nations' priorities will shift from an age-old pattern of aggression to peace: "He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Micah 4:3).

## **Jerusalem will become the world capital**

Jesus Christ will return to the Mount of Olives just outside Jerusalem, and will then reign over all the earth (Zechariah 14:4, 9, 17), with Jerusalem as the capital of His world-ruling government (Jeremiah 3:17). "Thus says the LORD: 'I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the LORD of hosts, the Holy Mountain'" (Zechariah 8:3).

As King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16), Jesus Christ will teach all nations the laws of God as spelled out in Scripture: "Many nations shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD... He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Micah 4:2).

He will rule over all peoples with perfect justice: "The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. His delight is in the





If you believe God and that the Bible is His word, the Bible, then believe that ***Jesus Christ will return*** to bring this promised paradise to earth and to transform this world into a new Eden!

fear of the LORD, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears [that is, just by how things look or what people tell Him]; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth . . .” (Isaiah 11:2-4).

Assisting Jesus Christ in ruling over the earth will be His followers from this age who have truly surrendered and dedicated their lives to God: “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Revelation 3:21).

**Mankind will experience a great spiritual transformation**

Satan the devil, the unseen “god of this age” who “deceives the whole world” (2 Corinthians 4:4; Revelation 12:9), will be forcibly removed from mankind so he can no longer influence people and lead them into his path of deceit and death: “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished” (Revelation 20:1-3).

With Satan, the source of all lies and deceit, removed, all of humanity will learn about the true God and come to know Him and His way of life: “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” (Isaiah 11:9).

Once Satan is out of the picture and people can at last learn about the true God and His way of life, God will offer His Spirit to all human beings, allowing them to become spiritually converted, starting with His people Israel as a model for what He will do for all mankind: “Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God” (Ezekiel 11:19-20; see also Acts 2:17).

Receiving God’s Spirit doesn’t do away with God’s law as so many believe, but is actually the means of having God’s law internalized in people’s hearts and minds and coming to truly know Him: “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:33-34; Hebrews 8:10-12).

**Prosperity will increase, crime will decrease**

Two hallmarks of Christ’s reign on the earth will be a great increase in wealth and the ending of crime and corruption.

Photos, from left: Arto Marttinen/Unsplash, Alex Ugalek/Getty Images Plus, Designpics

“Instead of bronze I will bring gold, instead of iron I will bring silver, instead of wood, bronze, and instead of stones, iron. I will also make your officers peace, and your magistrates righteousness. Violence shall no longer be heard in your land, neither wasting nor destruction within your borders” (Isaiah 60:17-18).

People will no longer fear that criminals or oppressive governments will harm them or steal their property. “But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid” (Micah 4:4).

“My people will build houses and live in them, plant vineyards and eat their fruit; they will not build for others to live in or plant for others to eat. They will be as long-lived as a tree, and my chosen ones will enjoy the fruit of their labour. They will not toil to no purpose or raise children for misfortune, because they and their issue [descendants] after them are a race blessed by the LORD” (Isaiah 65:21-23, Revised English Bible).

### The world will be physically transformed

Peace will even extend to animals' nature: “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” (Isaiah 11:6-8).

Divine healing will be available to cure all sicknesses, diseases and injuries: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing . . .” (Isaiah 35:5-6).

In contrast to so much of today's world, agricultural lands will become incredibly productive: “Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it” (Amos 9:13).

Desert areas that are currently wastelands will become fertile and lush with springs and rivers of fresh water: “Waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; in the habitation of jackals, where each lay, there shall be grass with reeds and rushes” (Isaiah 35:6-7).

### LEARN MORE

Jesus Christ brought a message called “the gospel,” meaning *good news*. That good news included a new and very different world! Request or download our free study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom* to learn more and about how you can be part of it!

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Not only will these areas flow with water; they will also have a wide variety of vegetation: “I will open rivers in desolate heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree, the myrtle and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the cypress tree and the pine and the box tree together, that they may see and know, and consider and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it” (Isaiah 41:18-20).

After Jesus Christ ends the massive destruction and warfare that precedes His return, worldwide reconstruction projects will rebuild destroyed areas and make them habitable again: “So they will say, ‘This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited’” (Ezekiel 36:35).

### What a world to look forward to!

These and other verses spell out a vision of the future that will soon become reality. If you believe in God and that the Bible is His Word, then believe that these promises will be fulfilled! Jesus Christ *will return* to bring this promised paradise to earth and to transform this world into an Eden-like existence! (Be sure to also read “Paradise Found: A Feast for the Ages” beginning on page 11 and “The Wonderful World We Wait For” beginning on page 20.)

These promises—of Jesus Christ reigning on earth to establish peace and justice, of Satan the devil and his evil influence being removed, of a spiritual transformation of humanity through obeying God's laws and receiving His Holy Spirit—will produce a world of peace, prosperity and purpose.

It will be a world beyond our wildest dreams—and you can be part of it! **BT**



# Paradise Found!

## A Feast for the Ages

God’s plan to bring back the paradise man lost is revealed in biblical festivals meant for all to observe—culminating each year in rejoicing over the restoration to come.

by Peter Eddington

**W**ouldn’t you love to live in paradise? For a lot of people this evokes images of a tropical beach or some other beautiful, lush setting with perfect conditions—the word *paradise* having come to mean an ultimately pleasurable environment. Others think of an idyllic pastoral life of plenty, safety and contentment. A great many apply the term to a place of future happiness, typically thought of as an afterlife in heaven.

Some envision having all their questions answered and curiosities satisfied. Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges said, “I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library.” Still others hearing the word might imagine a manmade utopia on earth—a perfect civilization of harmony and peace that, as many have dreamed, people will somehow bring about.

The various conceptions of paradise have their roots in man’s first home in the biblical Garden of Eden. The word *paradise* is of Persian, or ancient Iranian, origin—*pairi-daiza* meaning a walled-in area and used to describe an enclosed garden or royal hunting ground.

The Old Testament Hebrew word *pardes*, referring to an orchard or park, came from the Persian language. Both this word and the Hebrew *gan*, meaning garden, were rendered in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament with another derivative of the Persian word, the Greek *paradeisos*. This word entered Jewish and Christian usage for the Garden of Eden. It also occurs in the New Testament.

Throughout history man has yearned to recapture what was lost in Eden. Will that desire ever be realized? As we will see, God has given a powerful reminder that reaffirms the answer to this question every year.

### Paradise lost

Adam and Eve were placed in the luxuriant garden in the land of Eden with work to do, to tend and keep it. The first human beings were, in the beginning, at peace with nature, evidently not fearing bad weather or wild animals. However, something happened in that garden that forever changed the course of human history!

The garden had trees of all kinds, including two that were real fruit-bearing trees but also symbolic. One was the tree of

life, the means to human beings’ ultimate destiny of eternal joy as spirit beings in the family of God.

The other was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which symbolized human beings determining right and wrong for themselves rather than according to what God said. The first man and woman tragically listened to Satan and ate the fruit of the forbidden tree. They were banished from the garden and cut off from the tree of life. Mankind has followed in wrong ways ever since.

The 17th-century epic poem *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, first published as 10 books and soon after arranged as 12, recounts the sin of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the garden. It also focuses on the rebellion of Satan and the demons, which eventually led to the temptation in Eden. Milton presents Satan as an ambitious and proud being who defies his Creator, the omnipotent God, and wages war in heaven, only to be defeated and cast down.

In the opening of Book 1, a long, twisting sentence mirroring the epic poetry of ancient Greece invokes the “Heavenly Muse” (the Holy Spirit), presents the author’s theme of “man’s first disobedience” and the “loss of Eden,” and states that his aim is to “justify the ways of God to men.” Satan and the other rebel angels are described as lying on a lake of fire, from where Satan rises up to claim hell as his own domain, delivering a rousing speech to his followers declaring, “Better to reign in Hell than serve in heaven.”

In Book 12, at the very end, the angel Michael leads Adam and Eve from the garden. *Paradise has been lost*. The poem ends, “The world was all before them, where to choose their place of rest, and Providence their guide: They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow, through Eden took their solitary way.”

Many religious people have looked on this epic poem as approximating in certain regards what actually happened in the temptation and sin of man. And in spite of a number of serious misconceptions, there is a lot of truth and remarkable insight in what Milton wrote.

Just before the poem’s ending, reference is made to the Messiah, “the Promised Seed [who] shall all restore.” Indeed, Scripture speaks of paradise being restored to the earth, with conditions similar to what the Garden of Eden was meant to be.

## The plan of restoration and God's festivals

Does God plan for a return to paradise? Will man be brought back to close fellowship with God in an Eden-like setting? Will the devil's corruption of man be overturned?

God's plan for the redemption and salvation of mankind is revealed through a series of festivals and Holy Days He commanded His people to observe. These are listed in Leviticus 23.

First is the weekly Sabbath, which itself pictures a time of spiritual rest and rejuvenation at the end of thousands of years of toil. God also gave seven annual festivals—starting with the Passover, which pictures Christ's sacrifice to free us from death, and culminating later in the year with the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles and the following Eighth Day, which together point to a *true paradise to come*.

In supreme love, God wants to rescue us from our corruption and restore us to the joy He intended for us—that of paradise.

The Feast of Tabernacles is also called the Feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23:16; 34:22). On a physical level this signified rejoicing in the abundant agricultural harvest in Israel in late summer and early fall. But on a spiritual level, we celebrate God bringing in a great harvest of human beings (see Luke 10:2; John 4:35)—people who will become part of His spiritual family. Following Christ's return will come the greatest time of salvation harvest ever, with blessings and abundance overflowing.

After a terrible time of devastation will come a time of peace, joy, abundance and restoration under the rule of Jesus Christ—a time of paradise. Notice: "So they will say, 'This land that was desolate *has become like the garden of Eden*; and the wasted, desolate and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited'" (Ezekiel 36:35, emphasis added throughout).

This restoration will begin at Jerusalem: "For the LORD will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; *He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD*; joy and gladness will be found in it" (Isaiah 51:3).

Many other Bible passages show that these wonderful conditions will be extended around the globe—"a wonderful feast for all the people of the world" (Isaiah 25:6, New Living Translation). Mankind will then experience "the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:21).

You are living on the very edge of events that will usher in the development of a true, godly paradise for the entire world! The stage for paradise is being set.

In fact, the setting of the stage has long been underway. God's plan to save mankind through Christ was laid out "before time began" (2 Timothy 1:9). God's festivals, which picture His plan and its culmination, were even an integral part of His setting in order the very heavens (see "God's Festival Times Marked Out From Creation" on page 13).

These festivals are a powerful reminder of the awesome plan God is working out. And the culminating fall festival season especially reminds us of the future paradise of the Kingdom of God on earth.

God wants us to have this reminder, and throughout biblical history He repeatedly affirmed its importance. To see that, we will now look in chronological order at distinct periods of



After a terrible time of devastation, Jesus will usher in a time of peace and joy, of abundance and restoration—***a time of paradise!***

observance of the Feast of Tabernacles, along with the Eighth Day, as pointing to future paradise. Recognize that rejoicing in these days affords a small foretaste of the paradise ahead.

### The Feast of Tabernacles observed by Moses and Israel

In Leviticus 23, we see God outlining His festivals to be observed annually, culminating with the Feast of Tabernacles and Eighth Day:

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel, saying: "The fifteenth day of this seventh month [corresponding to September-October] shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation [or commanded assembly] . . . [And] on the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation . . . It is a sacred assembly"' (verses 33-36).

They were to use tree branches to construct tabernacles or booths, temporary structures, to stay in during these days to picture when the Israelites left Egypt (verses 40-43). This time of great rejoicing each year was sometimes just called "the feast of the LORD" (verse 39) or more simply "the Feast."

Note that all the festivals here are "the feasts of the LORD" (verses 2, 4, 44). God declares, "These are *My feasts*" (verse 2). As *His* festivals, they are intended for *all humanity*, not just Israel or the Jews, as many now think. Yet Israel, chosen to set an example for the nations, was specifically directed to keep these festivals.

The Israelites afterward observed the Feast of Tabernacles for centuries, though with varying degrees of faithfulness. The temple in Jerusalem was even dedicated when the Israelites assembled with Solomon at the Feast in the seventh month (1 Kings 8). And it didn't stop there.

Let's now move forward in time.

### The Feast observed after the Jewish return from Babylon

Long after the Israelites split into two nations, Israel in the



north and Judah in the south, both nations ended up being deported, the southern Jewish nation taken to Babylon. Then after Babylon was conquered by the Persian Empire, a remnant of Judah returned to the land and continued to keep God's festivals.

The Persian king Cyrus gave the Jews permission to go back and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1). On arriving, "They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as it is written" (Ezra 3:4).

Another group returning decades later discovered that they "should dwell in booths [or tabernacles] during the feast of the seventh month" (Nehemiah 8:14), and so they kept the Feast more fully, "and there was very great gladness" (verse 17, see also verses 13-18).

It was important that the people continued in keeping this great celebration that gives a foretaste of rejoicing with God in paradise. But did this end with the ancient Israelites? Let's move forward in time again.

### The Feast observed by Jesus

In the Gospel of John we see that Jesus Christ observed the great fall festival days: "Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand . . . Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught . . . [And] 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 . . .'" (John 7:2, 14, 37).

Jesus referred here to God's Spirit as "living water," anticipating this pathway to eternal life, the fruit of the tree of life, becoming available to all mankind (verses 38-39).

Christian believers clearly have a connection to this festival and its meaning. So did its observance end with Jesus and His crucifixion? Many will tell you that it did! They will say the biblical festivals are no longer required to be observed. But let's keep moving ahead in time.

### The Feast observed by the New Testament Church

The New Testament Church has a rich heritage of faith in observing these days—for the past 2,000 years even to our time! The example left by Jesus and the first-century Church of God is our model. We must do likewise.

The apostle Paul, in a hurry to travel, had to leave from synagogue discussions in Ephesus to keep the Feast. He said,

"I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing" (Acts 18:21).

While many claim the italicized phrase should not be here, as some of the ancient New Testament manuscripts don't have it, the words do appear in the majority, and many scholars agree that Paul went to Jerusalem in verse 22, likely for a feast. Many reckon the feast here to have been Tabernacles, although others think it was the spring feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread.

In any case, we do know that Paul was observing the biblical feasts in general. Several chapters later we see that he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem on Pentecost (Acts 20:16). And He told Christians in Greece to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread along with the Passover with understanding of their spiritual meaning (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

As *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* confirms, "The first Christians . . . continued to observe the Jewish festivals [actually God's festivals], though in a new spirit, as commemorations of events which those festivals had foreshadowed" (11th edition, Vol. 8, p. 828).

In celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles and the Eighth Day that follows, the Church pictures the future time of prosperity, hope, peace, abundance, beauty, calm, joy and salvation for all mankind—paradise on earth under Christ's coming reign. So will the observance end when He returns?

### The Feast will be observed after Christ's return

The prophet Zechariah foretold a time when *all nations will observe the Festival of Tabernacles*:

"And in that day His [Jesus'] feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two . . . And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem . . . And the LORD shall be King over all the earth . . . And it shall come to pass that *everyone* who is left of *all the nations* . . . shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to *keep the Feast of Tabernacles*" (Zechariah 14:4, 8-9, 16).

Yes, most definitely, the festivals of God will be kept after Jesus Christ's return. And this will continue through His thousand-year reign over the nations (see Revelation 20:4),

## God's Festival Times Marked Out From Creation

In the biblical account of creation in Genesis 1, we are told that "God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years'" (Genesis 1:14, emphasis added throughout).

This might seem to only concern general timekeeping, but the Hebrew word rendered as "seasons" here, *mo'edim*, is often translated as *feasts* or *appointed times*. Other Bible versions render the word in Genesis 1:14 as "religious festi-

vals" (God's Word Translation), "special days" (Contemporary English Version), "special meetings" (Easy-to-Read Version) and "sacred times" (New International Version).

*Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible* notes on verse 14: "For seasons . . . *mo'edim*; For the determination of *the times on which the sacred festivals should be held*. In this sense the word frequently occurs; and it was right that at the very opening of his revelation God should inform man that there were *certain festivals which*

*should be annually celebrated* to his glory."

And so we see the very first chapter in the Bible pointing to the way the heavens are set up to designate the appointments, or sacred festivals, of God. The very orbits of the heavenly bodies were established to enable all people to reckon the times of God's festivals! The fact is, God intended all humankind to observe His festivals. They portray His plan of salvation for all.

To learn more, download or request our free study guide *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

also known as the Millennium.

The last chapters of Ezekiel describe a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem and its service during that future age. Ezekiel 45 speaks of priestly duties then during Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (verses 21-24), as well as at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles: “In the seventh month, on the fifteenth day of the month, at the feast, he shall do likewise for seven days” (verse 25). We learn in these chapters that *God’s Sabbaths and feasts will be observed under Christ’s reign during the Millennium.*

Imagine a time when everyone is keeping the Feast of Tabernacles! Imagine a time when all nations eventually repent and turn to God.

John Adams, America’s second president, wrote in his diary on Feb. 22, 1756: “Suppose a nation in some distant region should take the Bible for their only law book, and every member should regulate his conduct by the precepts there exhibited! Every member would be obliged in conscience, to temperance, frugality, and industry; to justice, kindness, and charity towards his fellow men; and to piety, love, and reverence toward Almighty God. . . . What a Utopia, *what a Paradise would this region be*” (quoted by William Federer, *America’s God and Country Encyclopedia of Quotations*, 1996, p. 5).

This will happen when Jesus is ruling from Jerusalem! Humanity will experience a thousand years of peace and prosperity. All nature will be at peace (Isaiah 11:6-9). And we’ve already seen how the world will be returned to an Eden-like state. It will truly be paradise on earth!

And it will not end with the Millennium. This time will be followed by the last judgment period, when all who have ever lived without sufficient understanding of God’s truth will be resurrected in the flesh to be given their first opportunity for salvation. (To learn more, read our free study guide *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind.*)

This future world of new opportunity is what Jesus referred to in answering the thief who was crucified next to Him. The dying man “said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today [that is, today I’m telling you] *you will be with Me in Paradise*” (Luke 23:42-43).

The Eighth Day that follows the Feast of Tabernacles looks forward to this very time—and to the eternal future that follows.

### God will bring ultimate paradise from heaven to earth

In God’s Kingdom, His people will tabernacle or dwell with Him. But it doesn’t end with the Millennium and the last judgment period. It projects beyond that into the time of a new heaven and new earth.

The apostle John writes in Revelation 21: “Now I saw a *new heaven and a new earth*, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. . . . Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, *the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them*, and they shall be His people.

“God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (verses 1-4).

In this wonderful city that will descend with God from

heaven will be, as in the Garden of Eden, the tree of life, then available to the repentant nations (Revelation 22:1-2, 14). “And there shall be no more curse” (verse 3). The expulsion from paradise will be over.

Paul locates “Paradise” as currently in heaven, to where he was caught up in vision (2 Corinthians 12:4). But clearly this paradise will be brought to earth—in part during the Millennium and in full when the New Jerusalem at last comes down. This is the true paradise of God—of which the ancient Garden of Eden was only a physical type or model.

Here we see the full breadth of God’s master plan as revealed in His festivals. The Feast of Tabernacles memorialized dwelling with God while in this world from ancient to present times, yet as a small foretaste of a much greater fulfillment to come—in the Millennium and, in an ultimate sense, beyond into eternity.

Thus, the meaning of this great festival persists *throughout all time—even after the present earth and heaven have passed away.* The tabernacle of God will dwell eternally with God’s immortal children. This is when the ultimate paradise is found!

### Paradise regained

John Milton wrote a follow-up to *Paradise Lost* called *Paradise Regained*. It centers on the temptation of Christ, showing how Christ’s victory over sin and the devil restored opportunity to again be in a relationship with God.

This presents the pathway of Christ’s work toward redemption of mankind—repeated word play on reversals reinforcing the idea that everything lost in the first epic is going to be regained. But beyond this poem, the full picture—as revealed in Scripture and as truly understood only by God’s faithful followers who keep His festivals—is that *paradise truly will be regained!*

The holy festivals of God, ordained from the beginning of time and observed for all history—past, present and future—give us the amazing outline. This is why we are to observe the Festival of Tabernacles today. It’s our lifeline to understanding the plan of God. We are on the cusp of a great new age. We are forerunners in the life of paradise soon to come to the earth!

Over the centuries God’s faithful people have been exercising faith, looking forward to being made perfect and immortal when Christ returns—to being ultimately at one in paradise with God the Father and the Son forever.

As the risen Jesus proclaims: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from *the tree of life*, which is in the midst of *the Paradise of God*” (Revelation 2:7).

Why not join with us in keeping the Feast of Tabernacles today as a wonderful foretaste of that paradise that awaits? **BT**



### LEARN MORE

To find out much more about the festivals of God and the Feast of Tabernacles, download or request our free study guide *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. It will open your mind to God’s great plan for all of humanity!

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# How to Enter the Kingdom of God

Christians are told to “seek first the Kingdom of God.” But what must we do to enter God’s coming Kingdom and inherit eternal life?

by Justin Palm

**T**oday there are more dislocated and homeless people on earth than there have ever been, even more than during World War II. Increasing populations in impoverished areas, famine, disease, horrible civil wars and strife have forced millions of men, women and children to leave their homes.

A recent *New York Times* article reported that “the global population of people displaced by conflict reached 70.8 million last year [2018], up from a little over 43 million a decade ago . . . Around 80 percent of the world’s refugees have been living in exile for five years, and around one-fifth of them for 20 years” (Nick Cumming-Bruce, “Number of Refugees Is Soaring to Records,” June 20, 2019).

Vast numbers now wander through the world’s highways and byways, looking for a new home, someone to take them in. They’ve become a new “Lost Generation”—eyes deadened by the things they’ve seen, hearts growing cold with sorrow and loss, their hope slowly dimming.

They are all searching for the same thing—*home*.

Through the centuries, a smaller group of people have also been searching for a home—for a *spiritual* permanent residence, *the Kingdom of God*.

One man, the biblical patriarch Abraham, spent his life looking forward to this spiritual home. The book of Hebrews describes his lifelong search, his “sojourn”: “By faith Abraham . . . went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he *sojourned* in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles [or tents] . . . for he looked for

a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:8-10, King James Version, emphasis added throughout).

Abraham sought the Kingdom of God. Christians throughout time have joined him in this search. In fact, Jesus Christ told His followers to “*seek first* the Kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33). Christians are to build their lives around this goal, this hope for the future.

The Bible a few times calls this coming Kingdom a paradise (see Luke 23:43)—with Eden-like conditions in every corner of the world. God’s Word shows this Kingdom arrives at Christ’s second coming. It will involve a righteous government, one that is finally able to bring about the peace and prosperity all long for. No more war. Abundant harvests. Right education, including religion. Booming economies everywhere. Harmony.

No wonder we should be seeking it!

The prophesied Kingdom of God is a type of final home, a *spiritual* home. It will be mankind’s ultimate home, and the Bible shows it will be established *on earth*.

This Kingdom is obviously not here yet. It’s something still being sought after, like the millions of people around the world struggling to find a new physical home.

But *how* are we to seek it? And how do we ultimately gain entrance to God’s Kingdom? This is one of life’s great questions. Is just saying a prayer and letting Christ into your heart all it takes, as some assume? And is God going to let everyone in?

The Bible holds the answers! There *is* a marked path to

entering God's Kingdom, but it is not what most believe.

### Repent—the first step

About 2,000 years ago, Christ started His ministry with the message, “The Kingdom of God is at hand: repent . . . and believe the gospel [or good news]” (Mark 1:15, KJV). He also told His servants to pray, “Your kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10). Those called into God's Church know they cannot build the Kingdom “in their hearts,” as some think. Instead they are focused on meeting the conditions to enter it.

The Bible shows that Christianity is a *lifelong process of conversion*—of building godly character. And God has outlined a number of steps—actions—that will cause people to truly change their hearts.

This process starts with *repentance*. The Greek word translated “repent” simply means “to change one's mind,” leading to turning one's life around. Everyone seems to generally agree that change is good, but most find it hard to make meaningful changes in their lives. A cartoon I once saw shows one person saying to another: “*Change is good. You go first.*” Change is hard! But with God's help through His Spirit, real change is possible. And it is *necessary* for those seeking to enter the Kingdom.

Repentance starts with recognizing our sin, which the Bible defines as, among other related descriptions, the breaking of God's law (1 John 3:4).

After the patriarch Job was humbled during his long, painful trial, he came to see himself as never before, telling God: “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I *abhor myself*, and *repent* in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6).

Job saw himself, and repented!

In the New Testament, the apostle Peter preached a powerful sermon on the day of Pentecost. His words deeply convicted listeners about their sin: “. . . God has made that same Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were *cut to the heart*, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, *what shall we do?*’ Then Peter said to them, ‘*Repent . . .*’” (Acts 3:36-38).

The Greek word translated “cut”—or “pricked” in the King James Version—actually means “pierced thoroughly, agitated violently, stung to the quick.”

They saw their sin! And they realized they needed to *do something* about it.

Peter's answer was, “Repent!” Change! Turn around from walking down the wrong path—one that doesn't lead to the Kingdom—and start walking the right path, according to God's ways.

Many more verses could be included to show the necessity of repentance. Jesus Himself commanded repentance, and more specifically spoke of the requirement of obeying God by keeping His commandments: “One came and said to Him,

‘Good Teacher, *what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?*’ So He said to him, ‘. . . If you want to enter into life, *keep the commandments*’” (Matthew 19:16-17).

### Believe the gospel

The next step involves how we respond to hearing the gospel. Recall that Christ started His ministry with the instruction to “repent . . . and *believe the gospel*” (Mark 1:15, KJV). God expects those who come into contact with the gospel to believe the message. But God also must open someone's eyes to grasp the truth of this amazing good news.

Believing Christ's true gospel also involves *unlearning* false teachings that obscure what He really said would happen. These false ideas include God's Kingdom being here already, or that it is merely within our hearts.



Baptism pictures the old sinful person being buried in a watery grave and the “new man” being raised up to a new life.

A number of Old and New Testament verses, including many of Christ's sayings, show that when the Kingdom arrives, every person on earth will be aware of it. There will be no secrecy in its arrival.

Of course, believing the good news takes real faith. This is what God is looking for in His servants—people who believe all that God reveals through His Word about this future Kingdom.

Do *you* believe the gospel?

### Recognize Jesus Christ's sacrifice and role

Another critical element to entering the Kingdom is recognizing what Jesus Christ did during His first coming. Without Christ's blood being shed to take away our sins (John 1:29), our salvation would not be possible. *Nothing* about Christianity would be possible without Christ's atonement for sin. We would all still be dead in our sins, unforgiven.

Christ Himself said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life.



No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). Peter highlighted Christ’s role in Acts 4:12: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Quoting the Old Testament prophet Joel, Peter also said, “Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). However, this does not mean that all one must do to enter the Kingdom is accept Jesus into your heart. But recognizing Christ’s sacrifice is certainly a crucial part of the process.

It’s also important to understand that Christ, raised from the dead, presented His offering before the Father for our atonement and intercedes for us. Christ is our Mediator and High Priest, as well as the sacrifice for our sins (Hebrews 9:12-15). We have a *living* Savior who bridges the gap between mankind and God—and who also leads us into righteousness individually and as His people. He is our Lord and King, who must come to rule our hearts so that we may reign with Him in His coming Kingdom.

Christians seeking God’s Kingdom accept and understand Christ’s all-important sacrifice and role.

### Seek baptism

Think back to Peter’s Pentecost sermon. After telling the audience to “repent,” he immediately gave them another action: “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you *be baptized* in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission [or forgiveness] of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:38). Remarkably, around 3,000 people took his words to heart and followed through on baptism that day (verse 41).

Baptism is one of the main requirements—a starting point—for Christians. It is an outward sign that someone has repented and made a commitment to live God’s way of life. Baptism is also a symbolic act showing that God is wiping away the person’s past sins. It is a ceremony that pictures the old sinful person being buried in a watery grave and the “new man” being raised up to a new life in Christ (Ephesians 4:22-24; Romans 6:3-11).

To learn more about baptism, read our free study guide *The Road to Eternal Life*. It will show you more about why baptism is so vital, along with explaining that the biblical pattern is to be baptized with a mature understanding that one is making a lifelong commitment, and that it should be done through full immersion, representing the death and burial of the old person and a new person rising to live a new life dedicated to God.

### Receive God’s Spirit

Another requirement for one to enter God’s Kingdom is

to receive the gift of God’s Holy Spirit. Peter also emphasized this in Acts 2. The Bible reveals that God’s Spirit is given after baptism through the laying on of hands by a minister of God. Hebrews 6:2 lists this as one of the foundational doctrines of the Church.

Notice the account in Acts 8: “Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then Peter and John *laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit*” (verses 14-17, New Revised Standard Version).

Although people in Samaria were baptized and had “accepted the word of God,” they had not yet received God’s Spirit. Baptism is not enough. The individual who has repented and been baptized must also have hands laid on him or her to receive God’s Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the missing ingredient—it is what gives Christians the ability to truly overcome the pulls of society, the self and Satan. God’s Spirit leads the Christian into deeper understanding and application of God’s truths. Notice: “As many as are *led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*” (Romans 8:14, KJV).

God’s Spirit is what ultimately enables a Christian to be born into the Kingdom of God as part of His divine family, as a son or daughter of God!

To learn more about the Holy Spirit, download or request our free study guide *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.

### Be active in God’s Church

Being an active member of God’s Church is another personal action required of those seeking to enter the Kingdom. Overcoming cannot be done alone. It is essential to be with other Christians who are committed to putting God first in their lives.

This involves faithfully keeping the Sabbath from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset and assembling for worship with others on this day. Members of the Church that Christ built (see Matthew 16:18) also observe and assemble for worship during the seven annual biblical festivals, including Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles. These important days reveal God’s plan for salvation.

Being active in the Church also includes dedicating one’s life to serving others and putting their needs first.

Jesus said in Matthew 10:42 (New International Version): “And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.”

The apostle Paul wrote: “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4).

Interaction and fellowship with others in the Church helps Christians learn more about living God’s way. It prepares them for the coming Kingdom of God.



**LEARN MORE**

The Bible has much more to say about what God expects of those who would enter His Kingdom. What does it tell us? To learn more, download or request our free study guides *The Road to Eternal Life* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.

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### Endure and overcome

The final step we will look at is one of the most important—*enduring* and *overcoming*. Jesus said, “He who *endures to the end* will be saved” (Matthew 10:22; 24:13). Many scriptures show that God’s servants must endure until the end of their lives. They must keep going despite what life throws at them. Christians continue living God’s way despite trials or temptations, always striving to overcome sin and grow in character and righteousness.

The Christian develops godly character through daily prayer, diligent Bible study, meditation and occasional fasting to draw closer to God. All of this is part of the overcoming process.

The book of Revelation contains a number of verses showing that Christians must overcome the world.

Jesus states, “To him who *overcomes* I will give to eat from the tree of life [representing eternal life], which is in the midst of the *Paradise of God*,” and, “He who *overcomes*, and keeps My works *until the end*, to him will I give power over the nations” (Revelation 2:7, 26).

He also says: “To him who *overcomes* will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Revelation 3:21).

And God later declares, “He who *overcomes* shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son” (Revelation 21:7).

Christians are overcomers! They keep obeying God and seeking the Kingdom all the way to the end of their lives.

### Now is the time!

You now know some of the basic steps to entering God’s Kingdom. Many other elements of Christianity could have been included, but this article only has space to cover the overall framework.

Christ said that the way to eternal life is “narrow” (Matthew 7:14) and that “not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (verse 21).

The path to the Kingdom can be a difficult one—but it is not impossible. Through God’s help, all things are possible! (Matthew 19:26).

The question now becomes, what will *you* do? With knowledge comes responsibility—in this case, responsibility *to act on what you have learned*. If God is opening your mind to understand the truth of His Kingdom, you are being given an incredible opportunity to be among those called now to enter the Kingdom of God at its arrival at Christ’s glorious return.

Continue reading *Beyond Today* magazine, watching our TV program and studying our library of material that teaches from Scripture the truths of God.

Keep striving to draw closer to God and bring your life more in line with His ways. Humble yourself and be willing to admit areas where you are wrong, or where you find yourself needing to unlearn wrong ideas.

As world conditions continue to deteriorate around us, with increased war, famine, disease and other signs of the end time, don’t wait to take action at a more “convenient” time.

Now is the time for action! **BT**

# Yearning for God's Kingdom Helps Us Now

Will longing for the Kingdom that Jesus Christ will bring tomorrow benefit our lives today? Yes it will! Here are seven ways.

by Mario Seiglie

**H**ave you ever wondered why, in the model prayer Jesus gave in Matthew 6:9-15, the first request He wanted us to focus on, after addressing God the Father in heaven, was, “Your kingdom come”?

What is so important about yearning for God’s Kingdom to arrive? Most people have the idea that *heaven* is where all the action will eventually be. Yet Christ said seeking *His Kingdom coming to earth* should be our primary goal.

In the same chapter where Jesus gave His model prayer, He elaborated on this principle: “But *seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*, and all these things [daily needs] shall be added to you” (verse 33, emphasis added throughout). So Jesus said these two related objectives should be our ultimate priorities.

And the Bible is filled with examples of faithful men and women who lived by these priorities. They glimpsed the coming Kingdom of God and saw it as something *real*—not doubting that it would surely come—and then they spiritually prepared for it.

The book of Hebrews tells us this about them: “These all died in faith, *not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth* [the present world not being their true home] . . . And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, *did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us*” (Hebrews 11:13, 39-40). So all those faithful to God will be made perfect together in the future—not at the moment of death but when Christ returns to reign! And they will then

reign *with Him*—on earth! (Revelation 5:10).

The summary of this hope is then given in the next chapter of Hebrews: “Therefore, *since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear*” (Hebrews 12:28).

This Kingdom will bring wondrous changes to the earth and all people (see “The Wonderful World We Wait For” on page 22). But all its benefits are not just future. Great desire for the coming Kingdom will result in changing us now for the better!

What, then, are some of the blessings that come from eagerly looking forward to the establishment of that glorious Kingdom? Just as the facets of a beautiful diamond give off multicolored rays, here are seven wonderful effects we experience through longing for God’s reign on earth. Understanding this, along with what the Kingdom will bring, should lead us to more fervently pray, “*Your kingdom come.*”

## 1. It puts first things first

The Kingdom of God is the ultimate goal in life. Jesus made it very clear: No matter how successful you may be in the material aspects of this life, even achieving fame and fortune, if you don’t ultimately enter into God’s Kingdom, your life will have been a failure before God.

As Jesus stated: “For *what profit* is it to a man *if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul* [his being or personal existence]? Or *what will a man give in exchange for his soul?* For *the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works*” (Matthew 16:26-27).

There are, of course, *many fine physical goals* to strive toward



in this life, just as the apostle John mentioned in 3 John 2: “I pray that *you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul* [or overall being, both body and mind] *prosper.*”

The overriding spiritual purpose in one’s life is to be part of the coming Kingdom. This is why looking forward to its appearance should be a priority in our lives, hopefully being able in daily prayer to glimpse that future Kingdom as a source of encouragement and inspiration.

## 2. It keeps us focused on our hope

Many don’t realize that the biblical hope is actually based on the arrival of the Kingdom.

About this hope, the apostle Paul explained: “For we were saved *in this hope*, but *hope that is seen is not hope*; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But *if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance*” (Romans 8:24-25).

Paul called this “*the blessed hope*.” As he told Titus: “For *the grace of God that brings salvation* has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, *looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*, who gave Himself for us, that He might *redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works*” (Titus 2:11-14).

Paul likened this hope to a soldier’s helmet that protects him from a fatal wound to the head. Paul mentioned that a Christian soldier attains the objective of salvation in God’s Kingdom through being armed for spiritual battle—“putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and *as a helmet the hope of salvation*” (1 Thessalonians 5:8).

## 3. It fills us with faith

Having the great hope of one day entering God’s Kingdom should infuse us with living faith! While having this hope brings focus on that final destiny, living faith is *the daily walk of trust* toward that goal, motivating faithful obedience.

Notice how Paul connects longing for God’s Kingdom to the daily walk of faith: “Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have *done the will of God, you may receive the promise . . . Now the just shall live by faith*, but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him” (Hebrews 10:35-38).

Faith allows us to believe in God’s promises as being certain, and to remain faithful to those truths despite life’s trials, sufferings and temptations. Moses is a great example of walking by faith and not by sight in Hebrews 11:27: “*By faith* he forsook Egypt, *not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.*” In other words, he had “spiritual eyes”

# The Wonderful World We Wait For

**T**here is so much to look forward to in the Kingdom that God through Jesus Christ will soon establish throughout the earth—so much that we fervently long for. Here are some of the blessings to come in that time ahead.

## 1. It will be a kingdom of outflowing love

God’s Kingdom will not be ruled as in this age, with people following the law of the jungle in which the strongest survive. Since the primary characteristic of God is love (1 John 4:8), this will be *the chief attitude* when Christ reigns over the earth. Instead of looking out for self, people will be looking out for the needs of others—serving, sharing, helping and loving their fellow man.

Jesus explained to His disciples that He was bringing a new kind of rulership: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles [the nations] *lord it over them*, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet *it shall not be so among you*; but whoever desires to become great among you, *let him be your servant*. And whoever desires to be first among you, *let him be your slave*—just as *the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (Matthew 20:25-28).

Consequently, all nations will work together at that time, instead of against each other. Countries that have been historical enemies will then

be loving friends.

As Isaiah describes: “And the LORD will strike Egypt, He will strike and heal it; *they will return to the LORD, and He will be entreated by them and heal them*. In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt and the Egyptian into Assyria, and *the Egyptians will serve with the Assyrians*. In that day *Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria—a blessing in the midst of the land*, whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, *‘Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance’*” (Isaiah 19:22-25).

## 2. It will be a joy-filled kingdom

Christ’s rule will be filled with joy, happiness and wholesome fun! The idea of a staid, stern and dour God is a total misrepresentation. Jesus was the happiest, most joyful person on earth, yet it pained Him to see people’s hardness of heart and how they suffered the consequences of sin.

He told His disciples, “I have come in order that you might have life—*life in all its fullness*” (John 10:10, Good News Translation). He later added, “I have told you these things *so that you can have the true happiness that I have. I want you to be completely happy*” (John 15:11, Easy-to-Read Version).

There will be no more exploitation in the world

that’s coming, and every person’s full potential will be reached, because people will help others to succeed. Again, the Bible gives us a peek into that future Kingdom: “They shall *not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat*; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and *My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands*.”

“They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. It shall come to pass that *before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear*. The wolf and the lamb *shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox . . . They shall not hurt nor destroy* in all My holy mountain,” says the LORD” (Isaiah 65:22-25).

## 3. It will be a reign of peace

We are accustomed to a world filled with crime and violence. No matter where you live, there is no place you can truly feel safe, even with the most sophisticated security systems. Criminals also use the latest technology to outwit these alarm systems.

Yet in the coming Kingdom there will be such peace that there will be no need for policemen or the armed forces. Micah described this wonderful scene: “Now it shall come to pass *in the latter*

that saw God's presence in his life and then acted on it!

#### 4. It gives meaning to our lives

One of the greatest blessings in life is to know *why we've been born*. So much despair in the world can be traced to people *not knowing the purpose of their existence* and consequently becoming frustrated, desperate and hopeless. We must seek the reason for our existence in God's Word. All things exist because of God as Creator, and the answer to why He made us must come from Him.

The answer revealed in the Bible is that God made human beings to ultimately be like Him in His divine family and Kingdom forever. Being like Him starts with God helping us to develop His *righteous character* now so we can one day share in His glory.

As Hebrews 2:10 tells us, "It was only right that God, who creates and preserves all things, should make Jesus perfect through suffering, *in order to bring many children to share His glory*. For Jesus is the one who *leads them to salvation*" (Good News Translation).

Paul adds: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also *eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body*, according to the working by which *He is able even to subdue all things to Himself*" (Philippians 3:20).

Of everything in the world we can know, *this understanding is the most valuable of all*. Once you know *why* you were placed here on earth, then you can realize why life is like an obstacle course with different tests and trials to go through. These are meant to reveal and improve our character, helping to train us for the coming Kingdom.

As the apostle Peter emphasized, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, *you have been grieved by various trials*, that the *genuineness of your faith*, being *much more precious than gold that perishes*, though it is tested by fire, *may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ*" (1 Peter 1:6-7).

#### 5. It provides satisfaction in an unjust world

We see daily that there are so many injustices around the world. And when one suffers personally for an injustice, it truly hurts! Evil people seem to get away with so many terrible crimes and then die peacefully in their sleep in old age, not answering for all the damage they did in this life. Moreover, those who have the least influence often end up getting the worst part of the deal. And it's been this way since time immemorial.

King Solomon bemoaned injustice in his day. Though a king, he was not able to make things right. He lamented: "I looked again and saw *people being mistreated everywhere* on

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 [referring to God's Kingdom ruling over all earthly kingdoms]; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; *He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.*'

"For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. *He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid;* for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken" (Micah 4:1-4).

Yes, there will be plenty of peace in those days—both outer peace, for no one will harm anyone, and inner peace, where nothing will disrupt a person's state of mind.

Isaiah states of that time: "The work of righteousness *will be peace*, and the effect of righteousness, *quietness and assurance forever*. My people will dwell in a *peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places*" (Isaiah 32:17-18).

#### 4. It will be an earth of physical and spiritual abundance

Another amazing feature of the coming Kingdom is that the curse placed on the earth because

of man's sin will be lifted, causing an enormous abundance of crops and the transformation of the fiercest animals into tame and cuddly creatures.

Isaiah depicts the removal of the curse from the land at that time: "For you shall go out with *joy*, and be led out with *peace*; the mountains and the hills *shall break forth into singing before you*, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. *Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree;* and it shall be *to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off*" (Isaiah 55:12-13).

Yes, both the flora and the fauna will be restored to their previous Edenic state. The apostle Peter described that period, admonishing: "Repent therefore and be converted, that *your sins may be blotted out*, so that *times of refreshing may come from the presence of the LORD*, and that *He may send Jesus Christ*, who was preached to you before, *whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things*, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:19-21).

Here is a brief description of all the animals becoming docile and a world filled with God's truth: "*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* [the whole world ruled by the Kingdom], for the earth shall be *full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea*" (Isaiah 11:6-9).

The fertility of the soil will be so great that there will be multiple harvests during the year. As the prophet Amos declared, "Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "When the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the *treader of grapes him who sows seed*; the mountains shall *drip with sweet wine*, and all the hills *shall flow with it*" (Amos 9:13).

#### 5. It will be a world of righteousness

A good summary word for the coming Kingdom could be *righteousness*. According to the Merriam-Webster website, the term "righteous" comes from Old English *rihtwis*, meaning *right-way* of life. All people will be taught to live in this godly lifestyle based on God's Word.

Peter used the word "righteousness" to sum up what God's Kingdom will be like: "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be *in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God* . . . Nevertheless *we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells*" (2 Peter 3:11-13).

Do you see it in your mind's eye? Hold tight to the vision of the awesome, wonderful world God has promised!

earth. *They were crying, but no one was there to offer comfort, and those who mistreated them were powerful*" (Ecclesiastes 4:1, Contemporary English Version).

But things will not stay this way forever. When you have the knowledge of the coming Kingdom of God and of His justice ultimately prevailing, you know that a reckoning is coming. No longer will people get away with atrocious crimes and sins. No longer will the innocent suffer at the hands of the wicked.

As Paul said, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

So Jesus will be the righteous Judge at that time. We are told in the Bible of how He will carry out His justice—in a way far different from what's done in the world today.

The prophet Isaiah described Christ's perfect rule: "The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. His delight is in the fear of the LORD, and *He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist*" (Isaiah 11:2-5).

We long for that coming day when all that's crooked will finally be straightened out!

## 6. It motivates us to wake up positively every morning

Once we realize how much God the Father and Jesus Christ have done for us—and will do for us when They bring Their Kingdom to the earth—we become so thankful to be alive!

Though we will sooner or later go through some harrying times, our knowing what awaits us once Christ reigns here on earth gives us comfort to face our present circumstances. As Jesus said, "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and He will give you everything you need. So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom" (Luke 12:31-32, New Living Translation).

Paul, as a great spiritual motivator, added: "What then shall we say to these things? *If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect [those God has chosen]? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ [higher than all but the Father] who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us*" (Romans 8:31-34).

In following God, we are part of the winning team! No matter what happens to us, we know God is in charge and will somehow use circumstances for our ultimate benefit.

Again, Paul, imprisoned and beaten many times for his faith, was able to stay positive in the midst of tremendous trials, declaring: "For I consider that *the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God . . . And we know that all things work together for good to those who*

*love God, to those who are called according to His purpose*" (Romans 8:18-19, 28).

## 7. It instills perseverance in us

Perseverance is the ability to not give up or give in, holding on until the desired goal is accomplished. We are to persevere to have God's righteous character produced in us. As Paul mentions, "And not only that, but we also *glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope*" (Romans 5:3-4).


The spiritual life of a Christian is compared to that of a long-distance runner who, through patience and endurance, finishes the race. As Paul emphasized: "All athletes are *disciplined* in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but *we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise . . . after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified*" (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, NLT). Paul knew he could fail if he did not finish the race of faith, so he kept his eyes steadfastly on the goal and continued persevering.

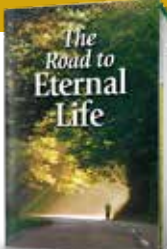
The objective of being part of God's Kingdom is so great that nothing else can truly be compared to it. Yet there are formidable enemies who don't want us to enter it. Our greatest adversaries in this life are: (1) ourselves, due to our corrupted human nature; (2) the world, with its lusts and attractions; and (3) Satan the devil.

Peter cautioned: "Be sober, be vigilant; because *your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you*" (1 Peter 5:8-10).

Christ warned that "because lawlessness will abound, *the love of many will grow cold*" (Matthew 24:12). "But," He then assured, "*he who endures to the end shall be saved*" (verse 13).

And it is our longing for the Kingdom, our desire to see the great promises of God fulfilled, that will *help us* to endure. It is through that same desire that Jesus Himself persevered: "who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2, New Revised Standard Version).

Now we can see why it is so important to daily glimpse the coming Kingdom when we pray and to be always encouraged by it. It is a powerful key to persevering and having the right frame of mind to face life's many challenges—and to one day *entering* that wonderful Kingdom of God! 



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# “As in the Days of Noah”– *Revisited*

What if today’s culture is like that of the time before the Flood of Noah described in Genesis? What if God’s judgment and intervention are once again drawing near, with great impact on your life and family? Would you be prepared?

by Darris McNeely

**R**ecently I took my grandchildren to visit the Ark Encounter attraction, a full-scale recreation of Noah’s Ark in northern Kentucky. It was a memorable experience and a sobering reminder that today’s world is much like that of Noah’s time.

The ark was the ship God told Noah to build to save people from the judgment He would bring on the world for its sin. An evangelical ministry has built this replica as part of its outreach to show that the Bible is true. Having been built according to the dimensions given in Genesis 6, the attraction is claimed to be the largest freestanding timber-frame structure in the world today, and I don’t doubt it.

The craftsmanship is amazing. What this group has done with its interpretation of this ancient structure and how it would have functioned with people and animals on board is truly remarkable. I gained a deeper understanding of the technological state of the pre-Flood world of Noah. That world was evidently far more advanced than our modern perceptions

give credit. Maintaining animal and human life within the ark over the course of the Flood is shown to be possible despite the logistical challenges.

This visit led me to think a lot more about the story of Noah and the Flood that God brought on the world of his day. It impressed on me more deeply that all the issues of Noah’s age are still headline issues of great importance today. Let’s review some of what the Bible says about this and what it means for us now.

## **A world of continual evil**

In Genesis 6 we see a grim picture of the state of the world: “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, ‘I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast,



creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.’

“... The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth’” (verses 5-7, 11-13).

Again, it is a grim scene—a time of total violence and evil stemming from mankind’s relentless drive to reject God. It appears from the verses preceding this that the corrupted morals threatened the divine intent God planned for human beings created in His image.

In the midst of this corrupt society one man found favor, or grace, in the sight of God—Noah.

Noah was given instructions to build the ark, a great boat of enormous dimensions. It would serve as the vehicle to preserve life from the great Flood that God would send to destroy the world, a world filled with people who had lost all moral bearings and would not change their behavior.

In Genesis 6:3 we are told that when Noah was given this task, 120 years remained for the people of that day. In those years Noah constructed the ark and warned his generation of the calamity to come. Noah is described as a “preacher of righteousness” in 2 Peter 2:5. Part of his work was to show the people of his world their sin and to warn of God’s judgment. They could escape what was coming through repentance. But in the end, only Noah, his wife and their three sons and their wives were saved—just *eight* people.

Through Noah—his work of building a huge boat and his preaching of God’s righteousness—God was giving the world an opportunity to repent, change and acknowledge Him as Creator. The work Noah did for 120 years was an example of God using human instruments to teach, warn and urge human beings to acknowledge their dependence on Him.

### A multigenerational work

You can imagine the message of Noah traveling far. People told the story of a man warning about a catastrophe coming on the earth. He said that if they did not repent of their ways, all people would face the judgment of God. The problem of that generation was much like ours today—people did not believe there would come a time of judgment for their actions.

Noah, of all the people on the face of the earth, had been called by God to understand the times and what lay ahead for mankind. He did what God told him to do and began building. People heard his preaching and were drawn to the project by curiosity if nothing else.

Consider that during this 120 years, at least several generations of people had direct contact with this work under Noah. It was a huge project bringing in people from many regions.



The Ark Encounter in northern Kentucky features a full-size reproduction of Noah’s Ark.

When human beings corrupted life on earth to a degree that it was no longer salvageable at that time, God brought destruction to the world. Yet through Noah He preserved life on earth.

Materials would have been gathered from far-flung areas and transported to the ark’s building site.

Perhaps dozens or even hundreds of people were employed at various times on the project. Whole families and communities may have grown and developed around this gigantic ship. Children grew up, married and raised their own children in its shadow. No doubt craftsmen from afar heard about a giant boat being built and traveled to the site to see what this was all about and to perhaps ply their trade.

How many came to the site wanting to be part of something bigger than their lives? Did any catch a vision of what was behind the boat? Did any believe Noah’s message?

Did some even believe the message of the coming Flood only to eventually abandon their belief? Perhaps some came to reason: “There will be no Flood. Life and this world will go on just as they always have. The idea of the depths of the earth erupting and water pouring down for weeks is absurd. It’s never happened, so why should we think it will happen now?”

The apostle Peter rebukes the thinking of those who imagine the world will just keep going on as usual, pointing out that they willfully forget the lesson of Noah’s Flood and warning that judgment is indeed coming. Peter explains that the reason for apparent delay is that God wants to give people time to trust Him and repent (2 Peter 3:1-9). God wants to save people—but they need to take Him at His word and hold fast to that.

Noah’s work was one of faith. Notice how it is described in Hebrews 11:7: “By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”

### Jesus Christ confirms the story

For us today, a critical reason to study the story of Noah is what Jesus Christ said about it. In Matthew 24, where Jesus gave specific signs that would precede His second coming, He brought Noah’s time into the 21st century with stunning clarity:



“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (verses 36-39).

People did not believe what Noah said about a coming judgment for sin. Today it’s the same. We go about life without a sense that sin has consequences or that God will bring a time of judgment because of mankind’s increasing rejection of God and His laws.

Have we reached such a point in our modern world?

To properly evaluate today’s world, we have to see it from God’s perspective. That can be sobering. Jesus is warning us today not to become so immersed in the present moment that we forget the Kingdom of God is nearly here. We must never become so preoccupied with our daily lives that we forget that life and death are in His hands. God has called us to prepare in advance for His Kingdom. That preparation should take place each day.

Christ continues: “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (verses 42-44, New International Version).

### How is this like today?

Society today is approaching a tipping point in human behavior from which there is no turning back. Corruption has reached unprecedented levels. Consider the recent mad rush by hundreds of state legislators to enshrine the legal right to murder unborn children. Just before I began writing this article, the state of Illinois joined New York and other states in enacting legislation effectively *legalizing infanticide*. America is creating a cultural catastrophe like that of Noah’s time when, as we read, “all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.”

Are we really “corrupt” today? As I write this, it’s “LGBTQ Pride Month” in the United States and other countries. My email inbox is a barrage of messages from many of America’s most notable companies celebrating homosexuality, bisexuality and transgenderism. Such issues, along with rampant adultery and premarital sex, are upending the divine order of the sexes and morality. We can’t even define something as simple as male and female anymore, much less right from wrong!

The prophet Isaiah wrote: “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness” (Isaiah 5:20). The pace of change away from what is good is dramatic, sweeping over our country and even the whole world like a storm—and the consequences are indeed frightening.

And we are like Noah’s time in another major way. God has been removed from the public square. We do not want to obey God or admit discussion about God and His law into public discourse over the major issues of the day that plague and divide us. That would be considered regressive and promoting of bigotry and even “hate speech.” People do not understand

the concept of biblical sin. There is little or no fear of *judgment* for sin—and disdain for anyone who would suggest it.

We who produce *Beyond Today* magazine and TV are challenged to address all this. So much that is so wrong is being accepted and even celebrated more and more every day. We cannot but help find ourselves thinking, *yes—we really are living in a time like the days of Noah!*

### Unparalleled judgment for unparalleled corruption

When human beings corrupted life on earth to a degree that it was no longer salvageable at that time, God brought destruction to the world. Yet through Noah He preserved the human race and other life on earth. God’s action was a remarkable combination of grace, judgment and purpose. Noah’s righteous life, as the focus of God’s attention and favor, provided a means for safety and salvation for humankind. The perfect plan of God called for judgment for sin, which at that time had led to a level of corruption *from which there was no turning back*.

Think for a moment about that last statement. I realize it’s strong, but we must understand the depth of human depravity that led to this event.

Human behavior could not be redeemed as things were, so a time of judgment came in order to *rescue* mankind. That is what the biblical account tells us.

This is a sobering message that in this time falls on us at *Beyond Today* to give to you. We are moved to carry out a work today that, like Noah’s, is *not popular or easy*. But God gave the message. We are commissioned to proclaim it. Will you be moved to respond in a godly manner as Noah did?

Consider one more thing.

The account in Genesis says, “Then *the LORD saw* that the wickedness of man was great in the earth . . .” (Genesis 6:5). God’s perspective on the world is what matters—not ours. As it was then, so it is now: It’s what God sees that’s critical. God looks at human behavior according to how He intended people to behave when He made us. He defines righteousness not by popular vote or opinion, but *by His law*. But He also shows mercy and forgives when there is a change in heart. Noah found grace in God’s sight amidst the appalling evil and violence of the day.

These impressions remain with me following my visit to the replica of Noah’s ark. Our time mirrors that of Noah. It’s a *perilous* time (see 2 Timothy 3:1). A day of judgment is coming. We should consider how we live. Do we fear God? Would our lives find “grace” in God’s sight? I’ve asked myself: Would I be among only a handful of people God saves from the destruction of our modern civilization? Do I have what God is looking for? Do you? **BT**



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Where are today’s troubling and dangerous trends leading our world? Does Bible prophecy give indications of what lies ahead? Be sure to read our eye-opening study guide *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* to understand! Download or request your free copy today!

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## Bullet-resistant backpack sales surge

“Crayons, glue, pencils, bullet-resistant backpack. For some parents, that’s what a back-to-school shopping list looks like this year,” states Courtney Reagan at CNBC. She goes on to explain: “In recent years, there has been an increase in bullet-resistant consumer products coinciding with the rise in shootings at schools and other public places” (“Bulletproof Backpacks Have Become Another Back-to-School Staple,” Aug. 6, 2019).



*The New York Times* echoes: “As mass shootings become a tragic fact of life in the United States—at schools, stores, movie theaters and houses of worship— . . . [people] are investing in protective gear. In a dystopian development, a growing number of companies are offering bulletproof backpacks in back-to-school sales, marketing them to parents who are desperate to protect their children from gunmen” (David Yaffe-Bellany, “Bulletproof Backpacks in Demand for Back-to-School Shopping,” Aug. 6, 2019).

It’s reported that these backpacks doubling as “shields, which can cost up to \$200, started becoming more in-demand after the Parkland, Fla., school shooting in 2018. After the El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, shootings [Aug. 3-4, 2019] . . . the products are

back in the spotlight . . . Since the Parkland massacre, there’s been, on average, one school shooting every 12 days” (Jessica Campisi, “Demand for Bulletproof Backpacks Surging in the Wake of Shootings: Report,” *TheHill.com*, Aug. 6, 2019).

Experts have warned, however, that these backpacks are more properly labeled bullet-resistant than bulletproof, as they are designed to shield against handgun fire and not more powerful rifles like those used in most school shootings. Defending against the latter would require the backpacks be much heavier, which is not very practical when they are already laden with schoolbooks.

It’s been further pointed out that the odds of being shot in such an incident remain extremely remote across the whole population, so these backpacks could be doing more harm than good—increasing public hysteria and raising the fears of children sent off to school with these defenses. A child may wonder why a parent would send him or her into such an environment. Then again, parents don’t want to have the unthinkable happen and then lament that they might have been able to do something. It’s terribly sad that the darkening world around us has brought us to this quandary.

How wonderful it will be when Jesus Christ returns to the world and ultimately brings all people under His protection and peace—when there will be no more hurting and destroying (Isaiah 11:9) and “no one shall make them afraid” (Micah 4:4). Let’s all pray fervently for that day! (Sources: CNBC, *The New York Times*, *The Hill*).

## “In God We Trust” displayed in another state’s schools

It was reported over the summer that “public school students in South Dakota [would] notice something different on their first day back to school—the national motto, ‘In God We Trust,’ prominently inscribed on walls in stencil or paint. A new state law . . . requires the message to be displayed in an area where students are ‘most likely’ to see it, such as a cafeteria or entryway” (Dani Matias, “South Dakota Public Schools Add ‘In God We Trust’ Signs to Walls,” NPR.org, July 25, 2019).

This is a step in the opposite direction from what has been happening in the past several decades in U.S. public schools. Through a couple of major Supreme Court rulings in the early 1960s, school prayer was banned as a supposed violation of constitutional principles—even though Supreme Court sessions themselves begin with the words “God save the United States and this honorable court.” Since then God has slowly been expelled from public places throughout the entire country.

Still, the national motto “In God We Trust,” official since 1956, appears on all U.S. currency and is prominently displayed atop the rostrum of the U.S. House of Representatives.

After the legislation to post the motto in schools was passed in South Dakota, many proposed suggestions were offered to make it more “inclusive.” But the state ignored the submissions and instead came up with a contingency plan to deal with any lawsuits in the months following.

South Dakota is not the first state to do this. “Within the last couple of years, six Southern states—Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee, Florida, Alabama and Arizona—have approved similar legislation” (ibid.).

There’s an ongoing culture war between those of faith on one side, who understand their country to have been built on principles of the Bible, and those who are seeking to remove God from the public sphere altogether—just as they expel Him from their own lives—leading to worsening societal degradation.

It was only a couple of years ago that the removal of Ten Commandments plaques from state buildings was making headlines. It will be interesting to see what the reaction will be, both popular and litigious, to these public displays of “In God We Trust” in the coming months. (Source: National Public Radio.)

## Tensions rise with oil tanker seizures

In mid-July, as reported in *The Wall Street Journal*, “Iranian forces seized a British-flagged oil tanker in the Strait of Hormuz, as mounting tensions between Tehran and the West risked further disruption of commercial shipping in the strategically vital waterway” (“Iran Seizes British-Flagged Oil Tanker,” July 19, 2019).

This came a couple weeks after British forces seized and held an Iranian tanker. Then just hours after the Iranian retaliation, “President Trump said the U.S. Navy downed an Iranian drone that was flying too close to a U.S. warship in the Strait of Hormuz . . . the latest in a series of incidents that have ratcheted up tensions in a vital oil shipping route” (“Trump Says U.S. Ship Downed Iranian Drone

in Strait of Hormuz,” July 18, 2019).

The United States has been mounting sanctions on Iran to force a new nuclear deal, but Iran has continued to ramp up its supply of enriched uranium. And an Iran with nuclear weapons is a terrible prospect.

The Middle East continues to be a region of conflict and uncertainty affecting the rest of the world. Sanctions, seized tankers and continued nuclear development by Iran are reasons enough to keep an eye on this region—a region prophesied to be a hotbed of contention prior to the return of Jesus Christ.

To understand more about the conflicts in this critical area, send for or download our free study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. (Source: *The Wall Street Journal*.)



## New British prime minister presses forward on Brexit, other changes

After tumultuous negotiations over Britain's exit from the European Union, or Brexit, fell apart in Britain earlier this year, the nation elected conservative party leader Boris Johnson as its new prime minister. Mr. Johnson served as the mayor of London from 2008 until 2016, after which he spent two years as the nation's foreign secretary.

The new prime minister laid out a bold course for the future of the United Kingdom in an impassioned speech to the British Parliament on July 25, 2019. His main goal was to make good on the 2016 Brexit referendum. He said that while he would work toward an exit deal with the European Union, he would not hesitate to leave at the end of October without a negotiated agreement. Oct. 31 was the delayed date for Brexit agreed upon by EU leaders and the previous UK administration.

Johnson stated: "Today is the first day of a new approach which will end with our exit from the EU on the 31st of October. Then our country can have a

friendlier, constructive relationship as constitutional equals, as friends, as partners facing the challenges that lie ahead." He emphasized that the British people



Boris Johnson holds his first cabinet meeting.

expect its leaders to follow through on Brexit and that the government must "restore the people's trust in democracy."

Besides the focus on Brexit, Johnson made a num-

ber of dramatic promises about Britain's future. He said he would carry out a "radical rewriting" of Britain's immigration system and instructed one of the committees to review Australia's more skills-based stance on immigration. The new prime minister said that his country's future would be "clean, green, prosperous, united, confident and ambitious"—and that the United Kingdom will be "the greatest place on earth." He said, "There is every chance that in 2050 . . . we will be able to look back on this extraordinary period as the start of a new golden age for our United Kingdom."

There is a great deal more to the move to separate Britain from the European Union than news analysts realize. Most do not understand the amazing true history of the British people and what prophecy reveals about their future. The Bible unlocks the real story behind today's nations and the news headlines. To learn more, request our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. (Source: Address to Parliament, BBC News).

## Major Indian city runs out of water

Chennai, home to eight million people in southern India, is running out of water. Four of the city's main water reservoirs went dry after a long drought following already-low rainfall:

"Piped water has run dry in Chennai, the capital of the southern state of Tamil Nadu, and 21 other Indian cities are also facing the specter of 'Day Zero,' when municipal water sources are unable to meet demand. Chennai . . . depends on the fall monsoon to provide half of the city's annual rainfall. Last year, the city had 55 percent less rainfall than normal. When the monsoon ended early, in December, the skies dried up and stayed that way. Chennai went without rain for 200 days. As winter passed into spring and the temperature rose to 108 degrees Fahrenheit [or 42°C], its four water reservoirs turned into puddles of cracked mud.

"Some parts of the city have been without piped water for five months now. Weary women with brightly colored plastic jugs now await water tankers, sometimes in the middle of the night. On June 20, the delayed summer monsoon arrived as a disappointing light shower" (Meera Subramanian, "India's Terrifying Water Crisis," *The New York Times*, July 15, 2019).

An article in *USA Today* showed the impact this extreme water shortage is having: "People in India's sixth-largest city lined up with cans amid a widespread water shortage . . . Millions of people in Chennai were affected by the short water supplies, which sparked protests, work stoppages and business closures" (Ryan Miller, "The Sixth-Largest City in India Is Running Out of Water as Reservoirs Run Dry," June 20, 2019).

Officials have resorted to transporting water to citizens by train every day. *Time*

magazine reported: "Amid the green Yelagiri hills of southern India, the train inches along the tracks, carrying what has become precious cargo: drinking water bound for Chennai, India's parched Motor City.

"Demand for water in the manufacturing and IT hub on the Bay of Bengal far outstrips supply, forcing authorities to take extreme and costly measures to serve the city's 10 million people. And so, every day, the train sets out on a four-hour, 216-kilometer (134-mile) journey, its 50 tank cars carrying 2.5 million liters (660,000 gallons) of water drawn from a dam on the Cauvery River.

"The train is classic Indian 'jugaad,' the Hindi word for a makeshift solution to a complicated problem. Executive engineer K. Raju confessed this is not the best engineering solution to Chennai's water problem" (Emily Schmall, "This Indian City Doesn't Have Enough Drinking Water—So It's Shipping It in by Train," July 29, 2019).

India's water crisis is just the latest example of extreme weather occurring around the world. Think earthquakes, droughts, storms, hurricanes, wildfires, floods and more. These events have caused some to wonder if we have reached the end times described in the Bible. Our study guide *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* shows how to know whether the end time is here. Request or download your free copy now. (Sources: *The New York Times*, *Time*, *USA Today*).



### How can you make sense of the news?

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



# The Probing of the Master Prober

When the other disciples told Thomas they'd seen Jesus, Thomas would not believe. Then Jesus appeared with an invitation. What does this mean for us?

by Robin Webber

**D**id you experience being given a nickname when you were young, with everyone picking it up? Often it was a term of endearment. But sometimes it was not so dear, and you couldn't wait for it to ultimately fade away.

One enduring nickname that eventually stuck to a biblical figure is "Doubting Thomas." One of the original 12 apostles, he is often identified this way 2,000 years after he lived!

Thomas was not there when the resurrected Jesus appeared to the other disciples, and he would not accept that Jesus had risen from the tomb until he personally saw Him and felt His scars. Later Christ appeared again and gave Thomas that opportunity.

What was the risen Christ striving to accomplish with Thomas in that seemingly frozen moment in time? Thinking about this can help us appreciate how Christ intervenes to broaden our own understanding of His personal invitation to each of us of "Follow Me" (see Mark 1:17; John 21:19). Consider that Thomas was not the only one concerned with probing and poking into someone—for Jesus was doing His own probing into a needy heart.

## "I will come to you"

Now let's move into that room in which, on the first occasion, the disciples were hiding behind closed doors from the authorities (John 20:19). It's a little over three days since their Master, their Rabbi or Teacher, had been brutally slain. There's word that He's alive and outside the confines of His tomb, but most haven't personally seen Him.

They are perhaps mulling over His statement that He would be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights as likened to the prophet Jonah's entombment in the belly of the great fish (Matthew 12:40). Their knees are shaking, and their hearts aren't too far behind. Some of their Rabbi's final words are tumbling around in their heads. "I will come to you," He had said (John 14:18; compare verse 28). But how could He?

Suddenly someone unexpectedly enters, through a door that has been shut! What's happening? It's their Master and friend, Jesus! His promise was true. They know it's Him because He openly reveals His wounds from His brutal execution at Golgotha (John 20:19-20).

He addresses them twice with the heartwarming greeting of "Peace." Just imagine the overwhelmingly joy. Here the One who proclaimed, "I am the Door" (John 10:9) doesn't come to them in a normal manner through a manmade opening. They see again that they, as all of us, should come to expect the unexpected from our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ—who

enter our lives in Their time and way to fortify our belief.

But wait a moment—someone's missing. It's Thomas.

When those gathered later encounter Thomas, they "unload" and share everything. Wouldn't you? When's the last time you saw a dead man alive, especially one scourged and beaten to a pulp and crucified? It's here that Thomas utters, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe" (John 20:25).

Did Jesus make a mistake in selecting this "stuck in park" individual, or is there more to the story?

## What's the backstory on Thomas?

Let's recall that Jesus spent an entire evening praying for those He selected to initially be witnesses of His life, death and resurrection (see Luke 6:12-16; Acts 1:2, 8). There were some interesting selections like Peter, Judas Iscariot and two brothers, James and John, the "Sons of Thunder."

Ultimately one would betray Him, and all would abandon Him in His greatest moment of human need at Gethsemane. And yet all except the traitor are to have their names written on the foundation of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:12-14).

Surely none were random selections. So, what's the backstory on Thomas? Let's connect some dots and understand why it's not wise to pigeonhole people for one moment in time.

Often overlooked is a prior time when Thomas spoke up while everyone else warned Jesus not to go to Bethany to see Lazarus due to impending harm (see John 11:7-8). Jesus still said, "Let's go," and Thomas spoke to the others saying, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (verses 15-16). Thomas seemed willing to sacrifice his all for Christ's cause. And everyone else then came along.

Let's now connect another dot. On the night before Jesus' death, He shared with His disciples, "I will come again and receive you to Myself." It's Thomas who inquires, "Lord, we do not know where you are going, and how can we know the way?" (John 14:3-5).

His inquiry is the launchpad for Jesus' self-disclosure, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (verse 6). Little did Thomas know he would have to wait for the answer—but it would come.

So now, why wasn't Thomas in the room at Jesus' first appearance? We aren't told. Just before Jesus appeared, the two who'd seen Christ on the road to Emmaus had "found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together," where they learned Peter had seen Jesus too (Luke 24:33-36). Since Thomas was one of the gathered eleven, he must have been there when they arrived. That means he must have left

the room shortly before Jesus entered.

Again, we don't know why Thomas went out. But no doubt Jesus' entry after Thomas' exit was intentional. Thomas himself would surely have wondered about it. It may help explain why he would not believe the detailed and corroborating reports of the others.

Recall that Thomas had previously thrown down the gauntlet in stating, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him," but when the ultimate test came, his courage melted. Accepting that he was left out of meeting Jesus may have saddled him with shame and guilt over his failing.

Of course, all the others had likewise scattered when Jesus was arrested—and it may be that any one of them would have reacted just as Thomas if they had been left out as he was. But someone had to demonstrate the lessons Christ was teaching here—lessons we all need to learn.

### Probing the hole of a broken heart

Eight days later the disciples are again gathered in the same room, and Thomas is now with them. Jesus comes again, once more bypassing the door but now to knock on someone's heart (John 20:26). He again greets the assembly with "Peace."

Now He zeroes in on Thomas. As the Good Shepherd (John 10:14), He knows this struggling lamb is in need. Jesus is neither hesitant nor offended, but invites the disciple to reach in and probe all he needs to be convinced. He bluntly offers: "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing" (John 20:27). His words are not an utterance of condemnation, but encouragement.

So often we center on Thomas' probing of Christ's wounds,

Thomas' story is our story. It's the story of the Good Shepherd actively tending to His sheep as we take up His invitation of "Follow Me."

when the real story is how Christ is probing the hole in Thomas' heart. It's here we discover that Christ comes to us in ways particularly appropriate to us to enhance our walk of faith.

Have you ever noticed how some people are auditory learners, while others better acquire knowledge by reading and viewing imagery, and still others by "hands on" experiences? It works the same in "the university of life." One form of an old Asian proverb states: "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand." Here, Christ, the "Master Potter" (Isaiah 64:8), is helping His friend and molding his future.

We should also consider how hard it probably was for Thomas in being singled out as the only apostle Jesus hadn't appeared to—and that he'd been reacting against that disturbing thought.

Our Heavenly Father has not called us to faith that evaporates under pressure. Thomas could have nodded in agreement with His fellow disciples, but if his heart wasn't in agreement for whatever reason, it would serve no one. Jesus knew once Thomas "got it" that his courage would revitalize. This same disciple who said he was willing to go like a lamb to the slaughter with his friend would now live, breathe and share

the good news of a *risen* Lamb.

What was the end product of the probing of the Master? Thomas declares to Him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). He mouths the ultimate confession of every believer that Jesus is more than a good man, wise teacher, prophet or dead martyr for the cause. Thomas comes to understanding through the personal touch of the Master—being allowed to reach into God in the flesh. Clearly, good fruit was produced!

Christ had great plans for His apostle and friend, who would not be propelled forward on the fumes of fake faith. Tradition holds that Thomas would later evangelize throughout Asia as far as India. He would ultimately be martyred in preaching about the risen Lamb of God and His coming Kingdom.

### What are we to believe?

This account illustrates Jesus' encouragement to us who live today to build on Thomas' acclamation. Jesus told Thomas, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen [referring to us!] and yet have believed" (verse 29). What elements from this account can we take away to enhance our personal walk of faith?

- God the Father and Jesus Christ don't mind being questioned. Think of Thomas—and while you're at it, of Job. God doesn't view struggling with questions as a wall, but a bridge to understanding. To learn, we need to ask questions and poke around and reach for answers that only God can supply.

- Come to expect the unexpected from our Heavenly Father and Christ. The ways of God are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). God answers when the time is right, which includes us being ripe for emboldening in understanding. The Father and Christ

open seas, shower bread from heaven, raise the dead, come through walls and open hearts that are dead. Be alert, and get used to it!

- Christ as the Good Shepherd knows our personal needs and learning styles and comes to us particularly

in how we can best learn and embrace genuine faith that endures. He knows it's a learning curve to embrace a risen Savior who lives for us—now, and each day.

- Christ often introduces Himself to us with "Peace," like He did to the gathered disciples. This is the common Hebrew greeting *Shalom*, but in Jesus' case it means so much more. He promised before He died: "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). Christ is willing to have you seek and probe Him and His ways, and in turn you must be willing to allow Him to probe the depth of your being—your very heart—to receive the depth of peace He offers.

Thomas' story is our story. It's the story of the Good Shepherd actively tending to His sheep as we take up His invitation of "Follow Me." It's a path leading to a future in which Christ promises to give us new names (Revelation 3:12). I trust we can reasonably agree that for Thomas, and for us as well if we remain faithful and receive these new names, there will be no "doubting" attached to them! Remember Christ's encouragement: "Do not be unbelieving, but believing"! **BT**





### Letters in response to the July-August issue

Just a quick note to tell you how much I enjoyed this issue. From cover to cover the articles were tremendous. Thanks.

*From the Internet*

### “Surprising Discoveries About Our Universe’s Origins”

Incredible! May God bless you in reaching those who hunger for truth. Thank all of you who make articles like this possible, and most of all thanks and praise to the Creator of all.

*From the Internet*

### “Man’s Search for Meaning in the Universe”

Yes, mankind is still searching for God, despite enormous evidence abounding that He exists. Can mankind find Him hiding somewhere? No, He is with us always.

*From the Internet*

### Comments on “To Kill a People: Abortion and the Soul of America”

One redeeming factor that might be holding off God’s just punishment are millions of Bible believers who are praying for an immediate end to abortion in America and in the world. Without those redeeming prayers, America might soon be “toast”!

*From the Internet*

When I think of the millions of babies who have been slaughtered since 1973, it breaks my heart. I read this article with tears running down my face. How educated people can murder these innocent babies, including late-term and already-born infants (which is infanticide!) is beyond me. It is truly Satan’s world. Thank you for all the wonderful articles in *Beyond Today*.

*From the Internet*

### Letters about suicide

*We have received a number of messages about suicide recently, two of which appear below. Our response follows after them.*

I am a 36-year-old man. I have been facing a lot of challenges for a long time, one after the other, and now these challenges seem to attack me at once. Even my spiritual life keeps on rising and falling, and now I have no hope left, and thoughts of terminating my life

come to mind every time. I have studied hard for too long in university, and have a number of qualifications, but I can’t get a decent job. I have lots of debt, which seem impossible to solve. I am living with a chronic illness. Everything that I touch does not work my way. I have lost my self-esteem, self-identity and hope.

*Reader in South Africa*

I have tried committing suicide. I am convinced that God will not forgive me and that I am going to hell. Is there any way that maybe I can be forgiven?

*From the Internet*

*If you are considering ending your own life, do not go through with it! Whenever you have thoughts of self-harm, please reach out to someone for help. Here in the United States the National Suicide Prevention hotline is 1-800-273-8255, and there are hotlines in other countries that you can find listed at [suicide.org/international-suicide-hotlines.html](http://suicide.org/international-suicide-hotlines.html).*

*God has created you in His image; you are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14). While life can be difficult and the challenges can seem insurmountable, there are always reasons to keep moving forward, looking to Him for strength. Feel free to reach out to one of our ministers for help. You can find the pastor for our congregation nearest you at [ucg.org/congregations](http://ucg.org/congregations), or call the number for the country you live in as listed on page 31. You are not alone, and your life is precious. Please seek help!*

*If someone you love is struggling with suicidal thoughts, or has even gone through with it, we have a free Bible study aid titled Suicide: Understanding and Preventing It. You can read it online or request a free copy at [ucg.org/booklets](http://ucg.org/booklets) (or again, contact the office of the nation you’re in as listed on page 31). There is hope after suicide.*

### Grateful readers looking to support our work

The information you publish is making possible a big change in me. While I can’t make a donation at this time and know it is not required, I plan to make a donation later.

*From the Internet*

I have your Bible studies and booklets, and they have been a blessing to me. Thank you for offering them for free; I will offer a donation to the Church. God bless you.

*From the Internet*

*We gratefully acknowledge your donations and are happy to continue preaching the gospel of God’s Kingdom to all at no charge.*

### Expressing thanks for our teaching

Recently our family, by the grace of God, has been introduced to the teachings of the United Church of God. Before discovering your teachings and principles, we had no idea what paganism was or how much of it we had been participating in our whole lives. We eagerly desire to be more holy and to give our children and our community the freedom to live as God has commanded.

*From the Internet*

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

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*I really enjoy Beyond Today magazine. It gives a good understanding of the Bible and highlights information not given in mainstream Christian faiths. I highly recommend this magazine to all.*

—K.T., Facebook fan



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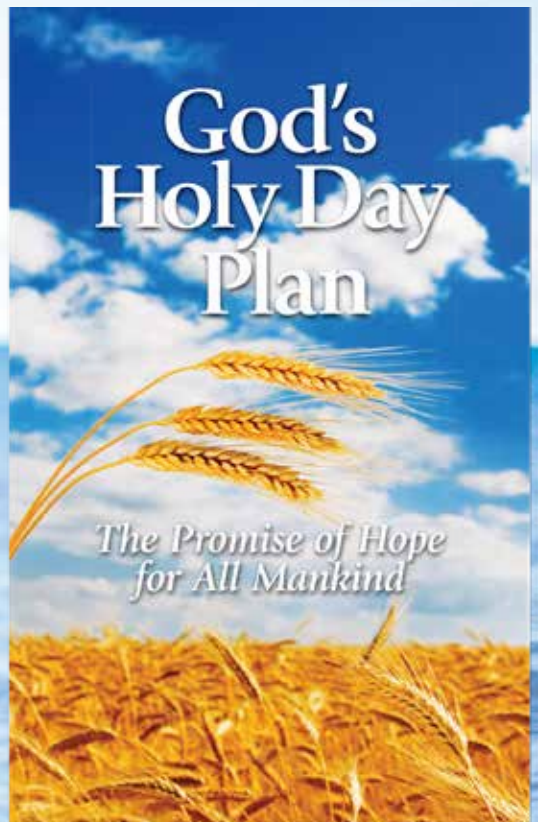
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