

BEYOND TODAY[®]

A Magazine of Understanding

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2020s
Are Here
ARE YOU READY?

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BEYOND TODAY®

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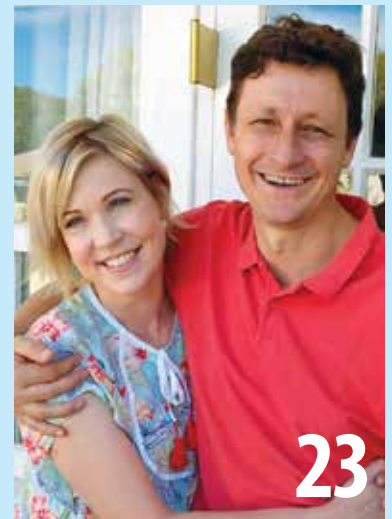
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Can We Know the Future?



Scott Ashley
Managing editor

umankind has long had a fascination with trying to know the future. In ancient times priests, prophets, shamans and other self-styled seers amassed great power and prestige by claiming the ability to discern what's to come.

The desire to understand the future hasn't waned over time. Considering the current state of the world as we begin a new decade, it's no wonder people want to know what the future holds. Many nations—and at times it seems the whole world—lurch from crisis to crisis. Adding to the unease are various other supposed crises manufactured by politicians, media personalities and other intellectuals who, in their quest for control over the lives of others, claim to know what's best for the rest of us and don't hesitate to tell us how to live.

We certainly live in a world plagued with problems. It's almost impossible to keep up with the number of wars and international conflicts afflicting the planet, with new clashes springing up almost weekly. Many nations are cursed with megalomaniacal leaders far more concerned with their own power and prestige than with their suffering citizens. Just this morning I read of one recently deceased leader who was found to have died with \$10 million in his bank account, plus at least eight cars and several palatial homes—all accumulated while his country's living standard plunged to one of the lowest on earth.

I subscribe to several science, technology and military newsletters, and it's frightening to see the steady stream of high-tech weaponry under development promising ever-more-efficient ways to kill ever-larger numbers of people in shorter amounts of time.

It's ironic that one of the latest concerns of public health officials is the growing amount of pharmaceutical contaminants found in the drinking water of major cities—one of the most common being antidepressants, flushed into water supplies from upstream sources. So if you don't have enough to worry about, your neighbor's anti-anxiety prescription drugs may be coming out of your faucet into your drinking glass!

If all of this sounds like bad news to you, you're right—it is. Such is the world we've built for ourselves by rejecting the knowledge found in the “instruction manual”



given to us by our Creator, His amazing book we know as the Holy Bible.

Mankind wants to know and understand the future, but there's really only one reliable source for that information—and that's *the Bible*.

Somewhere between a fourth and a third of the Bible is prophecy—history written in advance. Many books of the Bible are prophetic, describing the future. Many show how some prophecy has already been fulfilled, often in intricate detail.

Only in the Bible do we see the factual story of a God so powerful that He not only can foretell the future, but also has the power to bring to pass what He has foretold. And in the pages of the Bible He provides plenty of evidence that He can and will do exactly that—foretelling and directing the rise and fall of rulers, nations and empires.

Notice what He tells us in one of these prophetic books: “Remember the things I have done in the past. For I alone am God! I am God, and there is none like me. Only I can tell you the future before it even happens.

Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish . . . I have said what I would do, and I will do it” (Isaiah 46:9-11, New Living Translation).

He also says: “The LORD of Heaven's Armies has sworn this oath: ‘It will all happen as I have planned. It will be as I have decided . . . I have a plan for the whole earth, a hand of judgment upon all the nations. The LORD of Heaven's Armies has spoken—who can change his plans? When his hand is raised, who can stop him?’” (Isaiah 14:24-27, NLT).

In the pages of the Bible, God really does show where our world is headed and, equally important, *why*. He explains *why* our world is in such a perilous condition, as well as what He plans to do about it. Several articles in this issue discuss this in greater detail.

In revealing what God has planned, the Bible is also a message of *great hope*—hope far greater than anything promised by human leaders and would-be saviors. That's why this magazine's name is *Beyond Today*. We look for a brighter future beyond today's troubled world, a hope exceeding any human efforts and dreams.

We hope you'll join us on that journey to an awesome future, and that you'll continue learning more about what's ahead through this issue and others to come! **BT**



THE 2020s Are Here ARE YOU READY?

Entering the 2020s, the world continues to spiral out of control, and many wonder if we will ever see lasting peace. A lecture two decades ago from a Nobel Peace Prize winner and a conversation with him after pointed out some of what's needed. We must all do our part—but human effort alone is not enough. Thankfully, rescue will come!

by Victor Kubik

Since 2020 is the start of a new decade, it naturally draws curiosity about what the next 10 years might be like. Will things stay the same? Or will the fragile muddle of hostile world politics, unstable economies and kaleidoscopic religions break down? If so, where will this leave us as we ponder our own security and the direction of our own lives?

What can you expect to see happening in world news in the coming year and decade?

The mission of *Beyond Today* magazine is to show from the Bible where human civilization is headed and where it will end up. *Beyond Today* is “A Magazine of Understanding.” This understanding is not only in knowing *what* is going on, but recognizing *why*.

Bible prophecy is more than a revelation of what's ahead. It provides counsel on what we need to be thinking and doing as coming events affect us.

The Bible explains the causes of the disturbing state of the world we live in. It shows us that things will sadly get far worse. And yet it gives hope that the world will indeed change, foretelling an ending that is joyously triumphant!

With this overview we are able to consider the significance of the major trends and conditions we observe in the world around us.

This is our 25th year of publication, and the biggest events in

the history of the earth are just ahead. Stay with us.

Jesus Christ's prophecy of the end time

One of the best-known end-time prophecies in the Bible is the “Olivet prophecy,” recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. Just days before His death, Jesus took His followers up to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and told them about the coming destruction of the city, including the beloved temple: “And Jesus said to them, ‘Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down’” (Matthew 24:2). The Romans brought devastation about 40 years later in A.D. 70—as a forerunner of far worse things yet to come.

After leaving the Temple Mount, Jesus and His disciples walked up the nearby Mount of Olives where they asked Him: “What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (verse 3). Christ then listed a series of dire trends and events that would have extended to long after the ancient destruction of the temple and Jerusalem—conditions that would grow in frequency and intensity as the end of the age approaches. This listing includes a number of things that have not yet happened.

Jesus spoke first about religious imposters who would deceive many. He then listed wars and rumors of wars. This we are all too aware of as we watch our daily news. The dream of world peace would seem ever more fleeting. Famine and disease

then follow. There would be worsening sorrow, betrayal and more deception and then, near the very end, the worst time of anguish and distress ever—a horrible time unparalleled in all of human history (verses 21-22).

Yet the darkening period leading up to the end would also be a time when the gospel is proliferated to the world: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, *and then the end will come*” (verse 14, emphasis added throughout).

In the same discourse, Christ poignantly compares people’s state of mind before the world is plunged into the final chaos to that of Noah’s time: “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

is continually being deconstructed and ridiculed. We have trouble defining even something so simple as the difference between male and female. New deviant behaviors are being sanctioned. Our society prides itself by allowing and even admiring taboo corruptions of marriage and sexuality and calling this “progress.”

We live in what some have called the “post truth” age, with objective facts being less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief. We have so many choices and channels that it’s easy to hear what we want, cherry-picking data to suit whatever conclusion we desire. Therefore, what is looked on as truth is ever more relative, and can be customized to one’s personal conclusion and reality. Yet this is heavily driven by media influence. It’s no longer “we

report, you decide.” It’s becoming more “we report and decide what you will think.”

It’s increasingly difficult to reach minds warped by this societal drift—those who struggle to process absolute truth and to whom timeless values are disregarded. A similar drift and

abandonment of truth happened in Noah’s time. More and more we are becoming a post-Christian society where belief in the God of the Bible is increasingly irrelevant. People just do not want to be bothered with God.

We live in an amazing age of discovery. But no matter how many obvious proofs of God are highlighted through incredible discoveries in the world and universe around us, these are often just shrugged off. There are no exclamations of joy and praise to God in the media about the many wonders that are continually being revealed.

As society ignores the underlying reality of our existence and drifts farther from God and true values, is it any wonder that relations between people and nations continue to fray and worsen? Of Noah’s day we are told, “The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence” (Genesis 6:11). People failed to value their fellow human beings as precious creations made by God in His image.

Sadly, many prophecies foretell that we will see our own world plunged into such corruption and violence—on a scale never before seen. Facing such dark times to come, we must consider the challenges of world conditions and ask: Is there a pathway to peace?

Meeting with F.W. de Klerk

On the threshold of the new millennium starting in 2000, I heard 1993 Nobel Peace Prize winner and *Time* magazine “Man of the Year” F.W. de Klerk speak to the Indianapolis Economic Club, and I was able to talk with him afterwards.

I would like to share some insights from him about his assessment of the state of the world then.

De Klerk, who was president of South Africa, is best known for overseeing the 1990 release of Nelson Mandela from prison on Robben Island in Cape Town. Mandela and de Klerk then worked together to end the socioeconomic and political system of *apartheid*, meaning “apartness,” which institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination in favor of the white minority.

As society ignores the underlying reality of our existence and drifts farther from God and true values, is it any wonder that relations between people and nations continue to fray and worsen?

marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark” (verses 37-38).

As before, most people won’t realize the gravity of their situation until it’s too late.

A comparison to Noah’s day

Besides building the enormous ark, Noah was a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5), and throughout his highly visible 120-year construction project, his ministry was one of warning the world of its wickedness and destructive lifestyle. He pointed out that the ark and what it represented were for saving lives—not just the various animal kinds but people who would turn to God.

Yet after a century of this mission, there was no evidence of any change of heart or repentance—and, as a result, no human beings outside of Noah’s immediate family survived. Society’s reaction was callous indifference to Noah’s warnings and pleadings to take action.

Notice how that society is summarized: “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’” (Genesis 6:5-7).

Society in that day lost its conscience and discernment of values, decency and any relationship to God who had been talking to them through Noah. They were not redeemable after more than a century of warning. As a society they could not go on with all the unsustainable perversion that weakens and ultimately destroys a civilization.

The same is becoming true now.

Has society sunk so deeply into deviant thinking that it cannot even recognize right and wrong? Are we losing the ability to relate to common decency and values governing, among other things, family, marriage and sex? Biblical truth



Along with Mandela, de Klerk was partially successful in stabilizing South Africa to where it could continue in relative peace and economic prosperity. He said in his address that in 1989 the world was poised for the worst from South Africa. It could have easily become another Zimbabwe, in which the new revolutionary rulers ran the country into the ground economically and politically.

What happened in South Africa, by contrast, was a seemingly miraculous transition of power that enabled its population—only 14 percent white and a complex mixture of black peoples—to get along more reasonably. The courageous vision and work of de Klerk and Mandela and the cooperation of other South African leaders helped shape the destiny of their nation.

De Klerk's unselfishness was obvious as he passionately spoke about wanting to find a way to bring coexistence to many different people who called South Africa home. South Africa had only partially achieved such coexistence—or maybe more accurately a reprieve. But it was refreshing to see this positive example in the midst of so many abject failures in government.

After his presentation, I spoke to Mr. de Klerk privately about his insightful presentation. I told him I was a minister and was impressed by how the principles he expressed, if universally applied, would bring peace.

In his address de Klerk reviewed the recent history of South Africa as it moved from apartheid to integration. He emphatically stated that having leading countries as the “big boys” deciding the future of the world won't work. Smaller nations must be part of the process. In determining what's needed, you must involve those who are most in need.

While de Klerk took a secular view of geopolitics, we know that world tension will always be reality as long as human beings are in charge. It will take God's intervention to change that (see Matthew 24:22).

Still there is much value in what de Klerk brought out. Here are other key observations from his speech.

Navigating change in an interconnected world

Human civilization's unprecedented growth and change in little more than a century has eclipsed the progress of all of man's previous history. The revolution we're going through in the world today can be likened to the vast transformation brought about earlier by the Industrial Revolution.

Human flight was unknown until 1903. Now we're used to traveling all over the earth and arriving at any destination we wish within a day or two. We've sent men to the moon and spacecraft to the farthest reaches of our solar system and beyond.

It was not until the early 20th century that the first mass-produced automobiles came off the assembly line. Now, worldwide, there are *1 billion* automobiles on our roads. The first transcontinental telegraph was sent in 1861. But look at telecommunications now! The Internet is within the grasp of almost all people in the world, providing voice, text, photos and video. Facebook alone has nearly 2 billion accounts, and there are far more Internet users in China than anywhere else on earth. This has opened up new possibilities and forged new relationships and alliances. But are they all for the better?

Changes in world politics in our time have been monumental. Who would have thought that the Soviet Union would crumble as it did in 1991, only to rise again as a new Russia? Who would have believed that impoverished China would rise to become the second-largest economy in the world with a say in almost all affairs relating to our planet, from politics to environment?

Change is a reality to contend with as we consider making peace. Some changes have been beneficial, but others have not. De Klerk said it takes wise leadership to manage and lead that change. It requires overcoming natural resistance to change—letting go of clinging to what we're used to.

Leaders must first face facts and ask what's wrong. Constitu-

“We have to work with the ideal that there is room and space for all of us on this earth and need to be tolerant of one another.”

—F. W. de Klerk *Former President of South Africa*

ents need a new vision presenting both the *need* to change and the existence of a *way* through which change *can* be achieved. Old dreams may fail to bring justice. De Klerk said that a leader must provide inspiration, an action plan and strategy. He couldn't be more on target. That is what Jesus Christ is going to accomplish in full at His return!

De Klerk asserted that while the world of this new century has fewer borders, it has many more dangers. More communication does not mean better understanding or behavior. In fact, instant communication can produce impulsive, reckless, rash reactions and responses. Some technologies have led to sophisticated international crimes.

De Klerk also commented on how what happens in remote parts of the world affects us all, citing fluctuations in the Asian markets, financial instability in Russia and, at that time, then-President Clinton's scandals as causing negative uncertainties that affected a stable banking system and markets in South Africa.

He mentioned how South Africa had increasingly become embroiled in other nations' problems, noting the conflict between the United States and Islamic fundamentalism and consequent terrorist retaliations in Kenya and Tanzania leading to South Africa becoming a target of such retaliation when a Cape Town restaurant was bombed.

De Klerk spoke in detail of his vision to bring unity, common citizenship and “one man, one vote” to Africa and to eliminate apartheid. He and the other South African leaders had a choice of doing this gradually or as a quantum leap. They decided to take the leap and turned things around 180 degrees. The gradual route might have given the impression that they were changing only under pressure. He felt those outside of Africa at first thought they were bluffing, but credibility was built when words were turned into deeds.

Dramatic change came through moving forward with the release of Nelson Mandela and involvement of the broadest number of leaders who then felt part of the process and forging a vision and action plan.



F. W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela on May 10, 1994.

Facing the problems of poverty and underdevelopment

Economic disparity is a big reason for conflict. This disparity was already severe when F.W. de Klerk spoke to us, but it has regrettably widened even further since then. The poor of the world are looking to the well-off to meet their needs. Impoverished nations look to the United States, the European Union and the G8 industrialized countries for help with growth, development and even peace. These nations have about 58 percent of the world's total wealth at about \$317 trillion. Over 46 percent of the world's nominal GDP is represented in these nations.

I have done charity and ministry work in very poor countries in Africa such as Malawi and Zambia. On my last visit to Malawi in 2019, a banner newspaper headline shouted, "Malawi Ranked Fourth Poorest" in the world.

A large percentage of the people there have virtually no income and eke out a living as subsistence farmers. Those who have jobs may get paid \$70 a month, which is considered good. A night watchman gets about \$45. These are pathetically low wages. Since I started doing work in Malawi back in 1996, the population there has doubled to 18 million. In addition to being poor, the country is one of the most densely populated in Africa.

We will not see an end to this growing problem before Christ's return. Until then, we can expect more conflict.

Continued religious and ethnic strife

De Klerk made another penetrating observation: "Ultimately the source of most conflict is religious, ethnic and cultural. We have to work with the ideal that there is room and space for all of us on this earth and need to be tolerant of one another."

Yet we must go beyond what de Klerk said here.

While we need to be tolerant of one another, we also need to come to terms with who we as human beings are. This cannot be solved by acknowledging a variety of gods and opposing religious creeds. It is not logical in the grander scheme that we each have our own God as we imagine him. The paramount truth is that humanity came from the same Creator who has

given particular instructions about how to relate to Him and each other, and that will have to be resolved.

The same God who created me created my South African, Japanese, Ukrainian and Eastern European friends, as well as all other fellow human beings. He has made us. We are not to remake Him as we please.

The apostle Paul challenged the Greeks in Athens in his famous address concerning "the Unknown God," stating: "Therefore, since *we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.* Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:29-31).

The time will come when one God and one divine law will be acknowledged.

The warning of the Doomsday Clock

Today's world lives precariously under the figurative sword of Damocles. Hanging over our heads by the thinnest of threads, it could come crashing down in a moment.

World War II was brought to a grinding halt by the dropping of atomic bombs that wrought instant mass destruction on two Japanese cities. The newfound power to annihilate large populations set off a race for nuclear supremacy.

Today, nearly 14,000 nuclear warheads are in the arsenals of just nine nations—the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea. There is enough destructive capability in these weapons to extinguish civilization on the earth many times over.

Nuclear exchanges between, for example, the United States and Russia or India and Pakistan would bring apocalyptic consequences and deaths to multiple millions instantly. Tiny Israel holds a vast group of hostile nations in the Middle East at bay by its nuclear arsenal, while rogue nations like North Korea get publicity and play in the nuclear drama of our age.

Two years after the instant nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the "Doomsday Clock" representing the probability of a man-made global catastrophe was initiated. The Doomsday Clock is maintained by the members of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists and symbolizes the threat to humanity from scientific and technical advances we cannot fully control. Factors influencing the clock's setting are nuclear risk and the state of the environment.

The clock's original setting in 1947 was seven minutes to midnight. It has been set backward and forward many times since then. The most recent officially announced setting—two minutes to midnight—was made in January 2018 and remained unchanged in 2019 due to ongoing threats to human survival.

As we face the years to come, the threat of global cataclysm remains very real. And indeed the Bible tells us that this is what the world is headed toward.

Divine intervention and a new world

The good news, and the truth of what will happen to this world, is that mankind will not be annihilated. Again, in Matthew 24, Jesus Christ spoke about what will occur just before

the boiling-over point of man's catastrophic misrule: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened [cut short from running their course], no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake [the sake of God's chosen people, His repentant followers] those days will be shortened" (verses 21-22).

Just as God promised Noah after the Flood to never again allow the wholesale destruction of humankind, He will intervene to save us from ourselves!

This intervention was also foretold by the vision in Daniel 2:34-44 of the wiping out of a statue representing a succession of major dominant empires over the course of history. At the end, the statue is suddenly smashed and blown into dust after being struck by a stone "cut out without hands" that becomes a great mountain that fills the earth and replaces this world's governments. This is no human-led kingdom, but *the Kingdom of God*.

The biblical comparisons of national governments to mountains are numerous, but two that most display a different nature and priorities of future world government are beautifully portrayed in Isaiah:

"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.'

"For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, *neither shall they learn war anymore*" (Isaiah 2:2-4).

The second prophecy, found in Isaiah 25:7-9, adds to the wonderful hope presented in the first: "And He [the now-returned Messiah, Jesus Christ] will destroy on this mountain the surface of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, and the LORD God will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken. And it will be said in that day: 'Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.'"

Nations will no longer prey on other nations for their people and resources as this world's empires have done for millennia. Rather, *everything* will change.

And this change will not come through mere human ingenuity and effort. For enduring genuine change to take place, it will require outside help. All these realities will require the return of Jesus Christ as the stone "cut out without hands" to then become the great mountain filling the earth and replacing this world's governments.

Yet people will have a part to play. All must experience a change of heart to start making right choices—as will happen when God begins teaching the world His ways and pouring out

His Spirit on all mankind. This wonderful day *will* come, as foretold by Isaiah and other prophets.

"Surely I am coming quickly"

Yet we do not need to wait for world cataclysm and the righting of the world's wrongs at Christ's return to have our lives turned around. We can heed the warnings of Scripture, repent of our sins and put our trust in God *today*, seeking His mercy and intervention in our lives *now*.

In His Olivet prophecy, Jesus gave personal action steps for those who will be spared the consequences of what will happen in the dangerous times before He returns, just as happened in the world of Noah leading up to the flood:

"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.


When Christ returns, nations will no longer prey on others for their people and resources as they have for millennia. Rather, *everything* will change!

Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:34-36).

While delivering a sobering and detailed list of coming events here, Jesus also gives us advice we need to be careful to heed: *Stay alert. Don't live in denial by dulling your senses with the cares of this life. Don't be caught unaware.*

Likewise Christ outlined for us in Matthew 5 how we must live out our lives in a troubled world, exhibiting qualities of meekness, mercy, purity of heart and becoming peacemakers. We ought to be found "so doing," as Matthew 24:45-46 clearly states: "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? [We are to be helping and serving others as part of God's family.] Blessed is that servant whom his master will find *so doing* when he comes" (English Standard Version).

There's no question we live in the most interesting of times. While dangerous, they are exciting because of what will soon take place. The ageless Bible tells us the whole story of mankind from long before creation, from "before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4), and points us to what lies yet ahead, the last verses of the Bible giving us all great hope: "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).

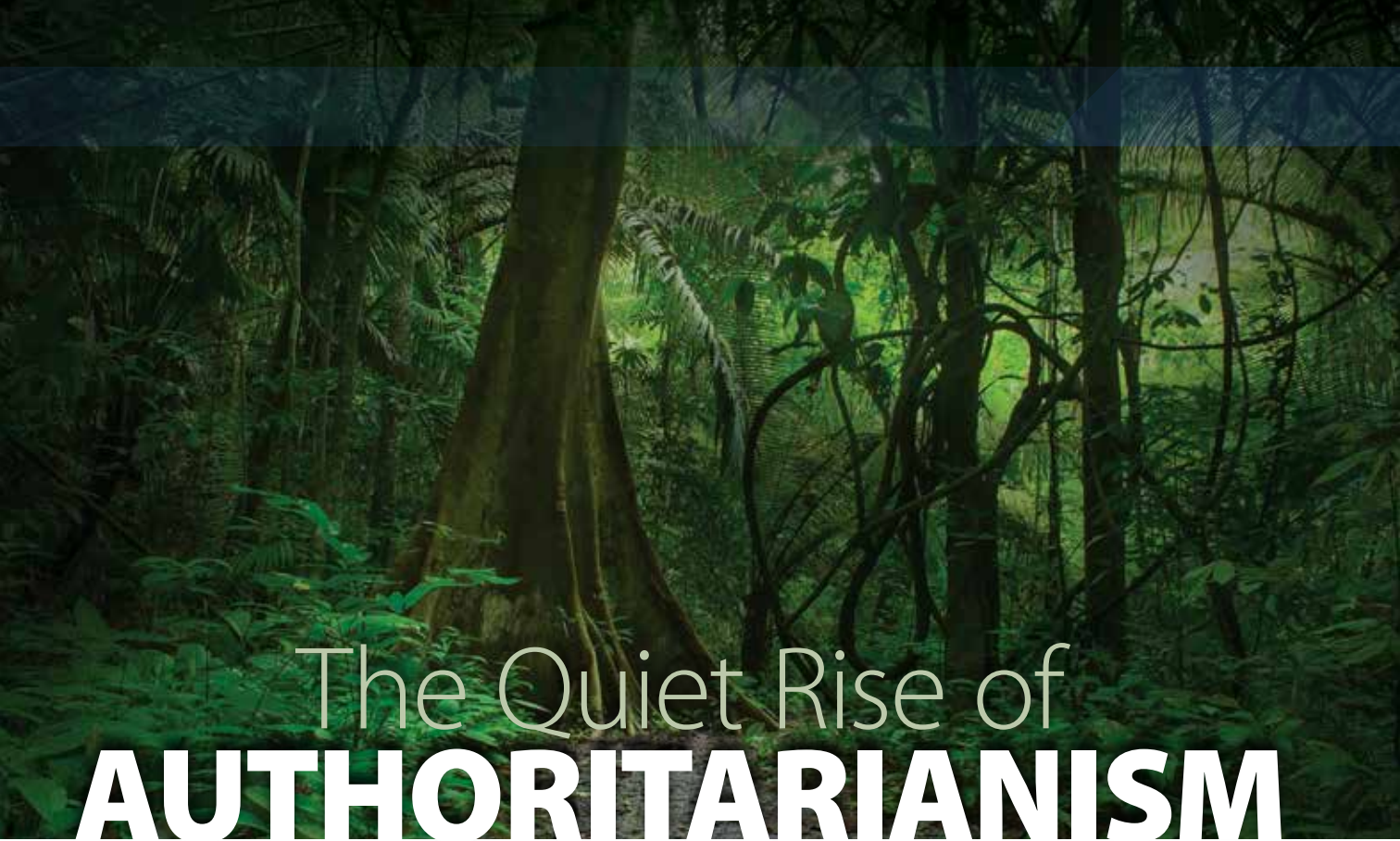
He's coming soon. Are you ready? 



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The Quiet Rise of AUTHORITARIANISM

“The jungle is growing back,” warns a recent book. A shocking study shows that authoritarianism is creeping into more democracies than ever before. The Bible reveals where this disturbing trend is leading.

by Justin Palm

In the background, behind the scenes of the day’s headlines, something bad is happening. Democracies around the world are under attack by authoritarian tactics. An unprecedented March 2019 study showed that a new “wave” of *autocratization* has been underway since 1994, and that it is happening under our noses, in a more subtle and deceptive way than ever before.

Author Robert Kagan warned in a recent book that “the jungle” is growing back—referring to the brutal, dictatorial, war-torn way of life that has filled most of humanity’s history (*The Jungle Grows Back: America and Our Imperiled World*, 2018).

In *The New York Times*, columnist David Brooks called it “a dark spiral”: “China is cracking down on democratic rights in Hong Kong. Russia launches cyberattacks everywhere. Iran is destabilizing the Middle East. The era of great power rivalry is coming back. *We’re in a dark spiral*. Americans take a dark view of human nature and withdraw from the world. Wolves like Putin and Xi fill the void and make bad things happen, confirming the dark view and causing even more withdrawal” (June 13, 2019, emphasis added throughout).

In Egypt, a referendum was passed in the spring of 2019 that extended President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi’s term and allowed him to run for office in 2024 for another six years, until 2030.

In China, the National People’s Congress removed the two-term limit on presidents in 2018, essentially allowing its leader to be president for life.

In areas ruled by the Palestinian National Authority, Presi-

dent Mahmoud Abbas was voted into office in 2005 for a four-year term that was to end in 2009. But further elections were simply never held, so he remains in office more than a decade later—even though two polls in early 2019 showed that 60 percent or more of those under his rule wanted him to resign.

In Britain, people were so unhappy with the direction of the European Union that they voted to leave in 2016. A majority of Britons no longer feel comfortable being part of

“We have lived inside the bubble of the liberal world order so long that we have forgotten what that world . . . really looks like . . . History is returning.”

a growing European superstate, with more and more control handed over to Brussels.

Things are changing, and not for the better.

Calm before the storm

Since World War II, the last 75 years have been a time of relative peace. As David Brooks further writes: “Most of human history has been marked by war. Between 1500 and 1945, scarcely a year went by without some great power fighting another great power. Then, in 1945 that stopped. The number of battlefield deaths has plummeted to the lowest levels in history. The world has experienced the greatest reduction in poverty



in history, as well as the greatest spread of democracy and freedom.”

Even the Cold War ended in the peaceful collapse of the Soviet Union.

Brooks then explains what made this possible: “Mostly it was because the United States decided to lead a community of nations to create a democratic world order. That order consisted of institutions like NATO, the U.N. and the World Bank. But it was also enforced by the pervasive presence of American power—military, economic and cultural power as well as the magnetic power of the democratic idea, which inspired dissidents worldwide.”

But today, Americans on the right and left are tired of maintaining this world order. The glue—America—is no longer holding things together. “Let someone else do it!” is an increasingly common sentiment. The calm is giving way to the storm.

Bob Dylan once sang, “You know something is happening, but you don’t know what it is” (“Ballad of a Thin Man,” 1965). There’s a growing feeling that things have been *too quiet* for *too long*—that our era of relative peace won’t last. There is too much bad news—famine, disease, record numbers of displaced people, civil wars, religious confusion, extremism, mass shootings, zealotry and persecution, economic disparity, corruption and nuclear threats.

And it seems the news will get worse.

“The third wave of autocratization”

The aforementioned landmark study that came out in March 2019 was titled “A Third Wave of Autocratization Is Here: What Is New About It?” The authors, Swedish political scientists Anna Luhrmann and Staffan Lindberg, warned that “an *increasingly bleak picture* is emerging on the global state of democracy.”

The New York Times’ newsletter *The Interpreter* stated this after analyzing the study:

“A new academic study reveals that we are in the sixth chapter of democracy’s global history: a third wave of democratic decline—the largest such wave yet. Sure, you have probably heard of the four or five countries infamous for reverting back to authoritarianism: Russia, Turkey, Venezuela, arguably Hungary. And you probably think of this as a recent phenomenon, perhaps beginning with the 2008 financial crisis. But the political scientists [conducting this study] . . . analyze sophisticated, year-by-year data on the democratic health of every country on earth, to try to understand the state of global

democracy as completely as possible.

“They reach a chilling conclusion: This wave of ‘autocratization,’ as they call it, has been building since 1994, long before most of us noticed. And the number of countries to have taken significant steps toward authoritarianism is not four or five *but 75*” (“Our New Era of Authoritarianism’s Rise,” March 7, 2019).

In a graph from the report, a thick black line rising in the mid-1990s shows the sharp increase in the number of countries going through autocratization.

“Gradual” and “clandestine” shift

The authors of the study noted that this “unprecedented” trend is mainly hitting democracies. And they found that democracies turn autocratic in three stages: (1) a democratic *recession* occurs, (2) democratic *breakdown* and (3) *autocratic consolidation*. They also discovered that these shifts are subtle, with autocratic leaders changing their methods—becoming more deceptive, learning from past mistakes and borrowing successful strategies from each other: “Ruling elites shy away from sudden, drastic moves to autocracy and instead mimic democratic institutions while *gradually eroding their functions*. This suggests *we should heed the call of alarm* issued by some scholars.”

It’s further explained that “regime change is typically *gradual* and *slowly leading to hybridization* into electoral authoritarianism instead of sudden, dramatic transitions.”

The authors point out that “contemporary autocrats have mastered the art of subverting electoral standards without breaking their democratic façade completely.”

In other words, today’s autocratic shifts are occurring behind the scenes, one small step at a time. The study exposes these new tactics:

“Electoral autocrats secure their competitive advantage through *subtler tactics* such as censoring and harassing the media, restricting civil society and political parties and undermining the autonomy of election management bodies. Aspiring autocrats learn from each other and are seemingly borrowing tactics perceived to be less risky than abolishing multi-party elections altogether . . . The current wave of autocratization unfolds in a more *clandestine* and *gradual fashion* than its historical precedents.”

These 21st century autocrats typically grab power through “mostly legal means . . . Aspiring autocrats have clearly found a new set of tools to stay in power, and that news has spread.”

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Russian President Vladimir Putin meets Chinese President Xi Jinping.

“Contemporary autocrats have mastered the art of subverting electoral standards without breaking their democratic façade completely.”

This is not good news. And when we dig deeper into the trends, the picture grows even worse.

Once the dominoes start falling . . .

The New York Times analysis ended on a negative note:

“The authors are careful to avoid sounding too many alarms, stressing that ‘panic is not warranted’ . . . But there is some real cause for concern here. We were stopped cold by this paragraph in their study:

“About a third of all autocratization episodes ($N = 75$) started under a democratic dispensation. Almost all of the latter ($N = 60$, 80%) led to the country turning into an autocracy. This should give us great pause about [the] spectre of the current third wave of autocratization. Very few episodes of autocratization starting in democracies have ever been stopped before countries become autocracies.”

“In other words, any democracy that has backslid even somewhat, during this present period in history, has had a four in five chance to keep backsliding all the way into authoritarianism. Put another way, it’s rare for a democracy to backslide just a little. Once it starts, it usually doesn’t stop. That is concerning.”

Once the dominoes within democracies start falling, the chances are great that all the dominoes will eventually fall—leaving behind a full autocratic government.

Author Robert Kagan warns about this domino effect, writing that “when things start to go wrong, they can go very wrong very quickly, that once a world order breaks down, the worst qualities of humanity emerge from under the rocks and run wild” (*The Jungle Grows Back*, p. 24).

These new findings paint a bleak picture for our world. Most people probably do not even realize the full extent of this “third wave.” The drama of the day’s headlines usually drowns out these bigger-picture trends. Other people simply ignore these

trends and hope for the best. Or they reject the research, asserting that progress *is* being made in the march of democracy.

What is really happening? And where is it leading?

The Bible shows that dark times are ahead for mankind, but that they will culminate in the best news possible—the establishment of the Kingdom of God at Christ’s return. Yet before looking at what prophecy reveals, let’s note more of what Kagan has to say.

The jungle grows back

As earlier mentioned regarding Kagan’s book *The Jungle Grows Back*, “the jungle” is the way things have been up until the 19th and 20th centuries. For instance, during most of human history, there were no democracies.

Kagan writes: “Today there are signs all around us that the jungle is growing back. Where once many hoped that all the nations and peoples of the world would converge on a common path of liberal democratic capitalistic development, we now see *authoritarianism surviving if not thriving*. Today a Russian

dictator and European would-be dictators boast of their illiberalism, and a Chinese leader, wielding the absolute power of a Mao, portrays his nation as a model for the world” (p. 10).

Later in the book, the author

observes: “The problem is that we have lived inside the bubble of the liberal world order so long that we have forgotten what that world ‘as it is’ really looks like . . . History is returning. Nations are reverting to old habits and traditions” (p. 105).

Kagan’s observations about Germany and Europe are especially interesting. He writes: “The environment in which Germans live has an impact on how they act. Our abnormal era of peace and security has been the answer for seven decades; a return to normal would be worrying.

“Yet there is no avoiding the fact that the European environment is deteriorating . . . For the past few decades Germany has lived in a set of circumstances that made trust on all sides possible—a healthy German democracy in a healthy democratic Europe undergirded by a reliable American security guarantee” (pp. 127-128).

Kagan then asks some sobering questions:

“But what if Europe became less healthy and less democratic, more nationalistic and more fractured, less confident and less trusting? . . . Would Germans be immune to such a radical change in their environs? If Europe returned to past patterns, could Germans avoid being dragged back with the rest? We may find out, because unfortunately Europe is showing signs of returning to past patterns . . . For the first time since World War II, a far-right nationalist party has risen to claim a significant position in German politics” (pp. 127-128, 132).

“Gradually and then suddenly”

One final longer quote from the book shows how quickly authoritarian leaders can arise, seemingly out of nowhere:

“A character in Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, asked how he went bankrupt, responds, ‘Gradually and then suddenly.’ That is a fair description of how the world order collapsed before the two world wars, and of how it likely will collapse *in our own time*. Unfortunately, Americans have since forgotten

how quickly it can happen, how graver threats than we anticipate can emerge to catch us physically and psychologically unprepared.

“One would think it hard to have a 1930s mentality knowing what happened in the 1940s, but *we continually comfort ourselves that the horrors of seventy-five years ago cannot be repeated*. We see no Hitlers or Stalins on the horizon, no Nazi Germany, no Imperial Japan, no Soviet Union.

“We believe that the leaders of today’s potential adversaries, the Vladimir Putins and Xi Jinpings, are just run-of-the-mill authoritarians who only want a little respect and their own fair share of the international pie. They may be in it for the money or the glory, but they do not pose an existential threat to our way of life. *We forget, of course, that people in the 1930s felt the same way about Hitler and Stalin.*

[Bulgarian political scientist] Ivan Krastev jokes that ‘the question is no longer whether it’s possible for Hitler to come back; it’s whether we’d even be able to recognize him.’ But it is not a joke: we almost certainly will not recognize the Hitlers and Stalins in our midst until they have emerged as full-blown, unmanageable threats.

“There are always dangerous people out there, lacking only the power and the opportunity to achieve their destiny. We used to take the ever-present evil in man more seriously. In 1973 the German social psychologist Erich Fromm wrote about man’s inherent inclinations to ‘destructiveness’ and ‘cruelty,’ the ‘specifically human’ craving for ‘absolute control,’ the tendency to ‘malignant aggression’ . . .

“Many people have evil in them, and many of those people harbor grand designs, mad or not, that they never have a chance even to try to fulfill. They are constrained by the powers and forces around them, the ‘order’ . . . The circumstances in which Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini rose to power—a world in which no nation was willing or able to sustain any kind of international order—gave them ample opportunity to show what they were capable of” (pp. 143-145).

Kagan concludes this section with a powerful warning of what could be coming:

“We wanted to believe that history was taking us *away* from the wars, tyranny, and destruction of the first half of the twentieth century, but history and human nature may be taking us back *toward* them, absent some monumental effort on our part to prevent such regression. We have taken too much solace from the fact that our opponents are not communists but are merely authoritarians” (pp. 145-146).

A new dark ages

Most do not realize that Jesus Christ foretold this “dark spiral” or growing “jungle.” When His disciples asked Him what would happen just before His second coming, He told them that it would be the worst time in all human history. Notice: “For then there will be *great tribulation*, such as *has not been since the beginning of the world until this time*, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved”—that is, all mankind would be wiped out (Matthew 24:21-22).



Billions will be swept up in this coming authoritarian system that will bring tragic consequences but will be destroyed by the triumphant, returning Jesus Christ.

This is a shocking prophecy—and one for our time! Jesus said that conditions around the world would be so bad that no one would survive if God did not intervene. This is a strong indicator that today’s “third wave” is only *the front edge* of conditions that will eventually grow much worse.

The apostle Paul also warned of these dark times in 2 Timothy 3:1-5. He said that “in the last days *perilous times* shall come” and that people would be “proud,” “blasphemers,” “unholy,” “fierce,” “traitors” and “highminded” (King James Version). This certainly describes our world.

Numerous other Bible prophecies show that dark clouds will gather at the end of man’s age. Political power will be centralized in a few large regions of the world. Nations once at odds will form critical alliances to survive the next world war. We are already seeing some of these alliances begin to form. Conditions will culminate in horrible world events—a World War III!

The book of Revelation paints a picture of power-hungry authoritarian governments in place at the end. It describes the ultimate authoritarian government—a world-ruling superpower called “the Beast”—which will take control of vast parts of the world. Revelation 17:12-14 shows that “10 kings”—national leaders—will for a short time hand over their power to the leader of this Beast system.

Revelation 13 also shows a dramatic picture of how the entire world will buy into this coming powerful system: “All the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon [Satan] which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him? . . . And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God . . . and *power* was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And *all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him*” (Revelation 13:3-8, KJV).

Amazingly, billions of people will be swept up in this coming authoritarian system—a system that will bring tragic consequences and will eventually be destroyed by the triumphant, all-powerful returning Jesus Christ. Only after this dark time will the light finally break through with the coming Kingdom of God. As the saying goes, “It’s always darkest before the dawn.”

The end of authoritarian governments

At last, man’s track record of power-hungry authoritarian

regimes will be changed forever. The Kingdom of God, under Jesus Christ and His resurrected followers, will rule with love and real concern for the affairs of all people. All of man's wrong and failed forms of government—including gridlocked democracies—will be read about only in history books. Jesus and His followers will rule with righteous authority.

Notice what Christ specifically said about authoritarian-style governments. After the disciples James and John presumptuously asked Christ for top positions of authority in the Kingdom, Jesus used this as a teaching opportunity. Christ told His disciples, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles *lord it over them*, and their *great ones exercise authority over them*" (Mark 10:42).

Christ knew that authoritarian governments have been a common part of man's history. He acknowledged that most of the time the people's "great ones" have been tyrannical. Most of man's history has been *autocratic*, not democratic.

Christ then explained what true leadership looks like: "Yet *it shall not be so among you*; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (verses 43-45).

Christ's message to His servants—including us today!—is that we should focus on serving others. He led by example when He sacrificed His life in service to mankind.

In the Kingdom of God, the rule of Christ and His followers will be one of love, of outgoing concern for others and for providing people their physical, emotional and spiritual needs. It will be outflowing! Christ will not *take* from people but will *give*, exercising proper loving authority. This Kingdom will be unlike any other government before it; it will be based on the way of *give*, not *get*.

How much longer?

It is impossible to know how long this "third wave" of authoritarianism will last—if it will culminate in the horrific final events of the end time or if it will give way to another mild surge in democracy. But one thing is certain. Eventually, and hopefully soon, all forms of autocratic governments will be gone. The righteous Kingdom of God will rule over all nations, finally bringing about the peace, security and prosperity that billions of people have longed for.

As we read today's headlines and study the sobering trends, remember the hope Christ offered when He said that when we "see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near" (Luke 21:31).

This is the ultimate good news within today's bad news. Each day that passes brings us one step closer to God's Kingdom! BT

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Brexit From Babylon: The Future of the Democratic Nation-State

A recent European news analyst commented that both of the principal Anglo-Saxon countries—the United Kingdom and the United States of America—are in a state of chaos. Where will it lead? he asked. It's a good question as we turn the page to 2020.

by Darris McNeely

An obscure event in Great Britain recently caught my attention and made me think about a certain Bible scripture. Protests led by LGBTQ factions forced the mall housing the only UK restaurant of the American-based Chick-Fil-A chain to not renew the restaurant's lease.

Chick-Fil-A is owned by a family with deeply held religious convictions. Its stores close on Sunday. It refuses to endorse the gay lifestyle. Until recently, it financially supported religious organizations that hold to the biblical teaching on marriage between a man and a woman—though under pressure from LGBTQ groups it seems to have recently dropped support for some such organizations, including the Salvation Army and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

The chain's strong stance upholding traditional Christian beliefs on sexuality has brought severe criticism in America. Now the only Chick-Fil-A in the United Kingdom has closed, a victim of the culture wars in the Western world.

Nations sapped of their strength

Reading this news made me think about what God said through the prophet Hosea. Speaking to the foremost tribe of the nation of Israel known as Ephraim and noting that the nation suffered crippling social problems because it had forsaken His law, God said this:

“The people of Israel mingle with godless foreigners, making themselves as worthless as a half-baked cake! Worshiping foreign gods has sapped their strength, but they don't even know it. Their hair is gray, but they don't realize they're old and weak. Their arrogance testifies against them, yet they don't return to the LORD their God or even try to find him” (Hosea 7:8-10, New Living Translation, 2015).

Great Britain's government is hopelessly gridlocked over Brexit, and on another cultural level the gender wars target a food chain selling chicken sandwiches. National strength is leaking at both ends, yet very few can connect the dots.

Two of the world's leading powers, Great Britain and the United States, are experiencing political and cultural turmoil

threatening a loss of standing among the nations and even fundamental shifts diminishing their dominant role in the world. Events in coming months—Britain leaving the European Union (EU) and the 2020 presidential election in America—will have great impact on the future of both nations.

As this article goes to press, the British government still seeks Britain's exit (or Brexit) from the EU more than three years after a majority of the electorate declared the desire to sever ties with the continental union the nation joined in 1973. That decision led to the resignation of the prime minister who called for the vote, David Cameron. His successor, Theresa May, failed to reach a settlement that her Parliament could agree to and had to step down in 2019.

The third prime minister to deal with this decision, Boris Johnson, is fighting the same severe headwinds as his predecessors. When he could not persuade Parliament to endorse his deal with the EU, the Oct. 31 deadline to leave was extended to Jan. 31, 2020. Those who want to leave the EU loudly cry out that the will of the people is being ignored, while the “remain-ers” predict economic catastrophe if the UK leaves the EU without an agreed exit arrangement—commonly referred to as the “no-deal Brexit.” It's a generational breakdown in government no one could have predicted.

A critical U.S. election

Meanwhile, the United States government is locked in a constitutional crisis that will likely create unintended consequences in its relations with other nations, both friend and foe.

The House of Representatives, now controlled by the Democratic Party, has begun discussions and inquiries on impeaching President Donald Trump, who is of the Republican Party. An impeachment trial would require a vote of two-thirds of the Republican-controlled Senate to remove the president from office. While this seems unlikely, some argue the Republican leadership might use this circumstance to pressure the president to resign, hoping to secure a less divisive nominee for the next election. Others maintain that impeachment proceedings would backfire against the Democrats, helping President



Anti-Brexit marchers protest the latest Brexit deal in London.

Great Britain and the United States are experiencing political and cultural turmoil threatening a loss of their standing among the nations of the world.

Trump's chances in the next election.

In any case, what is clear is the deep political and cultural divide that has opened within the nation. The battle for its future hasn't been so raw and brutal in its language and implication since the bloody Civil War more than 150 years ago.

Coming at a critical moment when the world is going through a shift of power alignments, the crisis that has developed both nations should make us ponder the question, *Why does this matter?*

What difference does Great Britain's departure from the EU make in world affairs? What does the political and cultural turmoil surrounding an American president mean beyond the visceral emotions stirred by his character and worldview?

It makes a difference because these two nations have played a key role in the story of the gospel of God!

A central feature of the true gospel is the promises God made to Abraham, the patriarch of a people known as Israel. These spiritual and physical promises are relevant to our world today and hold a key to understanding what is happening in Great Britain and America.

It's no coincidence that these two nations have shaped the world of the past 250 years and that America still dominates the world scene. The God who said to Abraham, "I will make of you a great people" (Genesis 46:3) directs the destiny of today's nations. The role of the English-speaking peoples has, according to His will, impacted the modern world with more positive benefits than any other grouping of people in history. What happens to them *definitely does matter* in today's world.

This little-known, yet critical, aspect of the gospel of salvation is known to longtime readers of *Beyond Today*. Our study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* tells the story in greater detail. (Be sure to download or request your free copy.)

The what and why of Brexit

Great Britain's desire to pull out of the EU is a multilevel story.

First, there's the fact that more than half the voters expressed a desire to leave an economic and political union that includes 27 other European countries. Britain being one of the three largest economies in this union makes its exit a big deal. The prevailing sentiment among the British is a desire to retain their sovereignty as a nation.

Increasingly the EU has become a supranational power whose policies and laws override those of individual nations. Laws regarding immigration, taxation and economic regulation have been dictated to member nations from the increasingly powerful centralized EU bureaucracy.

The EU goal of diminishing national borders has facilitated movement of people and goods among the member states. While many other European nations have been more accepting in this regard, the British began to push back on this trend as they saw their unique culture and identity fading

and reshaped by massive immigration from other EU countries—with the native population in effect having no say in the matter.

Many lawmakers and voters expressed their view that

these trends had gone too far. Great Britain, in their minds, stands for something special in the world. Its national sovereignty, they reason, has to be maintained rather than gradually ceded to Europe.

This conviction is part of the historic fabric of a distinctly British culture developed over more than a millennium among the inhabitants of the British Isles. The political, economic and even religious culture here was different from what developed on the European continent during the same period and represents another level of the story.

In a new history of the United States, *Land of Hope: An Invitation to the Great American Story*, historian Wilfred McClay describes what England developed: "England itself, as an island nation that developed in comparative isolation from other nations' influences, devised institutions and customs that were very different from those on the European continent. It had a far weaker feudal tradition than its continental rivals, and a far stronger commitment to property rights. As in religion, so in politics and society, the English way of doing things was distinctive.

"The monarchies of early modern France and Spain embraced absolutism, which meant greater and greater centralization of power in the hands of a single sovereign whose royal prerogatives were grounded in divine right. But the English followed a very different route, creating a system in which the ruler was limited by forces that divided and restrained his power" (2019, p. 22).

This system restricting the power of rulers was enshrined in 1215 when the English nobles forced King John to sign the Magna Carta, an agreement limiting the power of the king and sharing it with the aristocracy.

Along with power sharing, the king had limited control of government at the local level—that was left to lesser officials. The Parliament, elected by the people, controlled fiscal policy

and had authority to levy taxes.

McClay explains that the king's power was "limited by a generally held conviction that the people possessed certain fundamental rights that no monarch could challenge or violate. Such rights were believed to be grounded in something more permanent than the wishes of rulers. They were seated deep in the unique English tradition of common law, an approach to law that relied on judicial precedents built up over many years by generations of judges. Rights such as the right to trial by jury or protection from unwarranted search and seizure were inviolable because they were enshrined in both law and custom, liberties woven into the warp and woof of English historical development."

This distinctive English culture stands in stark contrast to the European continental model that developed over the same period. Europe developed a legal system based on Roman civil law codified in the sixth century by the Emperor Justinian.

This civil law placed the power of the state in the hand of the monarch—the Caesar (the Czar or Kaiser) or the king.

The modern European Union has developed into a vast intertwined bureaucratic "superstate" rooted in the Roman model. It's in some sense a modern revival of the Roman imperial system begun by Caesar Augustus 2,000 years ago. Great Britain has decided to extricate itself from this system. Interestingly, it's not the first time.

In A.D. 410 the Roman Empire in the west was crumbling under the weight of its own corruption and pressure from invading Germanic tribes. A revolt in Britain, which had been part of the empire for about four centuries, severed the country from Roman continental rule. A combination of distinct religious, political and cultural views came together, similar to what has happened today with Brexit.

In 410 there was a pro-European "remain" faction who desired to remain under Roman power. A compromise was effected whereby the Emperor Honorius was petitioned, asking for legal separation of the colony from the administrative power of Rome. The British were granted permission to separate. Nothing like this had ever happened. On June 25, 2016, when Great Britain voted to leave the EU, we saw a repeat of the same process. The United Kingdom again seeks to leave a Continent-based power that increasingly resembles the ancient Roman system.

Revelation 17 and 18 describe in graphic prophetic terms a global power called "Mystery, Babylon the Great"—a political, economic and religious union with roots going back to Rome (both ancient Rome and the Holy Roman Empire of the Middle Ages) and ultimately back to the city of Babylon. It ruthlessly suppresses all opposition. It is, as it has been in times past, "drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." It's a power that "reigns over the kings of the earth" (Revelation 17:6, 18).

From the story of history and Bible prophecy there is every reason to believe today's European-based economic power is the forerunner of the final revival of Babylon and Rome prophesied to be a dominating transnational global power in the



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson and U.S. President Donald Trump.

Bible prophecy shows the world is headed toward an end-time global order destined to stun the world with its power and wealth, in which there will be no America or Britain.

end time. As we watch Brexit play out in our headlines, we are watching one of the world's leading nations try to extricate itself from a Babylon-like system—and *finding it extremely difficult*. The fact is, Brexit is not an insignificant event in the course of world events. It has prophetic implications!

And America?

Since the election of Donald Trump as U.S. president, there has been a constant state of crisis against the man and his policies. Under the slogan of "Make America Great Again," President Trump has sought to bring sweeping changes.

He has worked to renegotiate trade treaties that have been slanted against American interests and have instead given economic advantages to others.

He has criticized NATO countries for not paying more of the financial and military burden for the defense of Europe, saying America is no longer going to bear the majority share of costs while its NATO partners fail to pay their agreed-on portions.

He has pulled American troops from the Middle East, which has shifted the balance of power in the region, causing even allies like the state of Israel to question how much they can count on America's support against their enemies.

His policy of building a wall on America's southern border to cut off illegal immigration (and drug smuggling) has infuriated progressive-minded policymakers in America and other world capitals.

By trying to restrict immigration from nations that are havens for Islamic terrorists, President Trump has managed to alienate not only the governing Washington establishment and political opponents but a fair portion of international policymakers from every part of government and culture.

The reason for such opposition to virtually anything President Trump attempts to do should be understood by readers of *Beyond Today*. It's not just partisan politics and challenging personalities.

More of what's fueling the antagonism is presented by a Hudson Institute senior fellow, John Fonte, in an August

2019 article at the American Greatness website titled “Who Makes the Rules in a ‘Rules-Based’ Liberal Global Order?” Fonte describes transnational globalism as a utopian ideology derived from an age-long desire for the world to be ruled by one power, without individual sovereign nations.

In this globalist view, he explains, world peace, social justice and economic equity can be achieved only through the benevolent governance of all peoples by a global power that supersedes all national boundaries, ethnic diversities and religious affiliation.

This is a dream growing out of the ideas of Aristotle and Plato in considering who should rule and on what basis. But it’s actually older than the Greeks. Genesis 11 shows this focus at work in the post-Flood world when mankind gathered at Babel and began to form the first “transnational global world order.” God stopped it short by dividing the people through giving them different languages.

Fonte shows the plans for a new global order have been growing within the ranks of American officials and policymakers for several decades. He notes both Democratic and Republican officials in high positions of the State Department saying that “global governance meant nations would cede sovereign authority to supranational institutions in cases requiring global solutions to global problems” and that it “was time to ‘rethink’ [national] sovereignty” because “sovereignty is not only becoming weaker in reality, but that it *needs* to become weaker” (emphasis added throughout).

This thinking permeates virtually all multinational institutions. The World Bank, United Nations, International Court of Justice, World Trade Organization and International Monetary Fund are all led and staffed by people completely immersed in this ideology.

Fonte says, “The social base certainly includes the leadership of the European Union (which is a model for supranational governance) and its administrators in the European Commission, judges in the European Court of Justice, and other EU officials.” Transnational global thinking drives the leaders of the World Economic Forum, who gather to confer each winter in Davos, Switzerland.

Using the end of World War II as a benchmark, U.S. policy has been moving inexorably toward this global order. Beginning with the United Nations, international treaties and a growing position solely because of its immense economic and military power, America has become wedded to the developing global world.

In 2016 President Barack Obama openly declared his administration’s intent to push the United States into this system, telling the United Nations: “We’ve bound our power to international laws and institutions . . . I am convinced that in the long run, giving up freedom of action—not our ability to protect ourselves but binding ourselves to international rules over the long term—enhances our security.”

Fonte’s analysis shows the Trump administration’s efforts to roll back decades of policy movement toward the loss of American sovereignty. He includes Great Britain’s reaction to the EU as the key to understanding what is called the “state of chaos” in the two Anglo-Saxon nations.

“With the Brexit referendum, the election of Donald Trump, and the rise of conservative democratic nationalists throughout

the West, the global governance project has been seriously challenged for the first time. *It appears that the ‘arc of history’ has been altered.*”

Fonte concludes his piece saying, “On both fronts, externally and internally, we are now involved in a conflict that will determine, not simply the direction of politics, *but the existence of the democratic nation-state in America, Britain, the West, and throughout the world.*”

National resurgence or continuing decline?

What do Brexit and current Trump administration policies portend for the future?

We cannot predict the outcome of the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Barring a dramatic reversal of the Brexit vote or incessant postponement, Great Britain will leave the European Union. And if America and Britain then create an even tighter trade union with the other major English-speaking nations (Canada, Australia and New Zealand), a potential trading bloc greater than the EU could emerge. Together these five leading nations of what some have termed the Anglosphere account for \$27.5 trillion in GDP compared to \$15.9 for the EU. The implications of such a potential trading bloc are consequential.


What this could mean for prophetic events is yet to be determined. We have consistently chronicled in these pages the immense value of the English-speaking nations in the modern world. Their wealth is a blessing from the God of Abraham. He will maintain it for a time according to His purpose and will. (Again, we tell this story in our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

Bible prophecy shows the world is headed toward an end-time transnational global order destined to stun the world with its power, wealth and influence. Centered in Europe, it will be the final revival of Rome and Babylon referred to earlier (see our study guide *The Final Superpower* to learn more).

All nations will “worship” this power for its promise to bring a utopian world order of peace, prosperity, and inclusive justice for all. Yet, although it will have a veneer of religion, that veneer will hide tremendous evil that will be murderously opposed to true biblical Christianity.

National lines will be strained and some may disappear in a final effort to create a new world—a new global order with no America, Great Britain or any other sovereign state. The only thing that will not be tolerated will be opposition to this world state. Opposition to this world state and its aims will not be tolerated.

The world has not come to this point yet. God’s message of the gospel of salvation and His coming Kingdom can still be proclaimed. You still have opportunity to understand today’s world and to understand the true gospel of God, and to act on it! **BT**



LEARN MORE

Why is the United States becoming so divided? Why do we see so much growing hostility toward biblical religion? Where is this leading? You need to know the answers! Download or request our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

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Worldwide mass protests at historic level

Mass protests are growing worse. An increasing amount of people are taking to the streets, more than ever before.

Journalists Max Fisher and Amanda Taub break down our “new era of global unrest” in *The New York Times’* newsletter *The Interpreter*:

“It’s not your imagination, and the last few months are not an outlier: *Mass protests are on the rise globally*. They’ve been growing more common, year over year, since the end of World War II, now reaching an *unprecedented level of frequency* . . . The world is changing in ways that make people likelier to seek sweeping political change by taking to the streets” (“The Global Protest Wave, Explained,” Oct. 25, 2019, emphasis added).

The British newsmagazine *The Economist* also reported on the trend:

“For anyone trying to follow protest movements around the world it is hard to keep up. Large anti-government demonstrations, some peaceful and some not, have taken place in recent weeks in places on every continent: Algeria, Bolivia, Britain, Catalonia, Chile, Ecuador, France, Guinea, Haiti, Honduras, Hong Kong, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Lebanon and more. On November 1st Pakistan joined the ever-lengthening roll as tens of thousands of protesters converged on the capital, Islamabad, to demand that the prime minister, Imran Khan, stand down within 48 hours.

“Probably not since the wave of ‘people power’ movements swept Asian and east European countries in the late 1980s and early 1990s has the world expe-

rienced such a simultaneous outpouring of popular anger on the streets” (“Why Are So Many Countries Witnessing Mass Protests?” Nov. 4, 2019).

People are protesting for many reasons, but one of the main ones is economics. Most people are just scraping by to make a living; when gas or food prices go up significantly, it has a big impact on their families’ bottom line. Other economic factors are tax hikes, cost of living increases or “unfair” laws or regulations.

With a shocking rise in authoritarianism, people increasingly see their freedoms as being under attack from centralized, dictatorial governments.

But the findings also note that the protests are not really working. *The Interpreter* piece refers to a trend reversal that is bad news for anyone relying on protests to bring change:

“Only 20 years ago, 70 percent of protests demanding systemic political change got it—a figure that had been growing steadily since the 1950s. In the mid-2000s, that trend suddenly reversed. Worldwide, protesters’ success rate has since plummeted to only 30 percent, according to a study by Erica Chenoweth, a Harvard University political scientist who called the decline ‘staggering.’ ‘Something has really shifted,’ Ms. Chenoweth, who studies civil unrest, told us” (ibid.).

The authors give four reasons protests are not as successful as before: (1) democracy is on the decline; (2) social media “makes protests likelier to start, likelier to balloon in size and likelier to fail”; (3) social polarization is increasing; and (4) authoritarians are honing their craft.

The piece closed with this summary: “Protest movements don’t reliably achieve rapid and transformative political change in the ways that they used to . . . So while this may look like the era of people power,



it is maybe more accurate to describe it as an era of angry frustration.”

The Bible reveals where all of this is ultimately headed. Amazing prophecies in the books of Daniel and Revelation and Jesus Christ’s prophecy given on the Mt. of Olives show that geopolitical trends of the end time will culminate in large dictatorial power blocs forming with unprecedented levels of control over the masses. To learn more, read our free study guide *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* (Sources: *The New York Times*; *The Economist*).

Plague of brutal shootings continues

The apostle Paul wrote in 2 Timothy: “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power” (verses 1-5)

The word “brutal” is perhaps easily overlooked in this long list of sinful attitudes and behavior. The Greek word is also translated “savage.”

The world we live in is becoming more brutal everyday. In the Western world people are obsessed with brutality. It’s a main focus of entertainment. We watch violent movies, play video games that simulate warfare and then come home to the evening news that recaps the local shootings that happened in the last 24 hours. People have become increasingly comfortable with the brutality around them.

On Nov. 14 there was another school shooting, this one in Santa Clarita, Calif.



The gunman killed two and injured three before turning the gun on himself. Then just a few days later “four men were killed and six others were wounded at a home in Fresno, Calif., on Sunday [Nov. 17] when suspects opened fire on a backyard football watch party” (“Fresno Shooting Leaves Four Partygoers Dead, Six Wounded,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 18, 2019).

We hear about such things in the news and then go about our day because that’s just the way things are now. We ought to recognize that something is very wrong with our society, and that something needs to change. But rather than addressing the real issue, this topic has been politicized, with blame misplaced.

The fact is, we live in a brutal world. *That* is the issue. The expansion of gun control laws that many call for will not solve this problem.

More people will die whether guns are more regulated or not. The fact of the matter is that we live in an era that is becoming more savage. This is what was foretold in the pages of your Bible. This is what the world will look like until Jesus Christ returns to establish a Kingdom of true peace. Every day we pray for that Kingdom to come! (Source: *The Wall Street Journal*.)

Study finds quality beats quantity in friendships

Are you trying to collect as many friends as possible in the hopes that you will be better connected or have more meaningful relationships? Or what about collecting as many Facebook “friends” as possible? A fascinating new study published in the journal *Psychology and Aging* shows that when it comes to friendships for older adults, less may be more. The *quality* of your connections matters more than how many you have. In other words, two really good friends are better than 100 acquaintances.

An article about the study reports: “Researchers from the University of Leeds conclude that well-being is more closely related to how people feel about their friends than their overall number of friends.

“The study sought to compare the friendships and social circles of younger and older adults. Since younger adults are more likely to connect with friends, family members, and acquaintances using online social

networks, they tend to have contact with a wider circle of friends . . . While older adults may have generally fewer friends, they also tend to be closer with those friends and interact with them on a face-to-face basis



more frequently. According to researchers, when it comes to friendship-induced feelings of well-being, that makes all the difference.

“‘Stereotypes of aging tend to paint older adults in many cultures as sad and lonely,’ says lead author Dr.

Wandi Bruine de Bruin in a release by the American Psychological Association. ‘But the research shows that older adults’ smaller networks didn’t undermine social satisfaction and well-being. In fact, older adults tend to report better well-being than younger adults’” (Ben Renner, “For Older Adults, It’s the Quality of Friendships, Not Quantity, That Improves Well-Being,” StudyFinds.org, Nov. 16, 2019).

The article concludes with further reason to focus on connecting more deeply with those you already know instead of trying to seek out new friendships: “Only the reported number of close friendships was found to be significantly associated with social satisfaction and well-being . . . This positive association between close friends and well-being didn’t change in different age groups, suggesting that close friendships are important to overall well-being and social satisfaction throughout one’s life.” (Source: StudyFinds.org.)

CDC director believes the post-antibiotic era is here

On Nov. 13, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released a troubling new report about antibiotic-resistant bacteria titled “Antibiotic Resistant Threats in the United States, 2019.”

The foreword, by CDC Director Robert Redfield, is especially urgent about not only the future danger of antibiotic-resistant infections, but the present reality revealed by the study. “Stop referring to a coming post-antibiotic era—it’s already here,” Redfield writes. He points out that “antibiotic resistance has been found in every U.S. state and in every country across the globe. There is no safe place from antibiotic resistance.”

Penicillin was the first modern antibiotic, discovered by Alexander Fleming in 1928. Put into medical use beginning in 1942, its efficacy against bacterial infections was an unprecedented triumph of science and even hailed as a modern miracle. But as Redfield laments: “You and I are living in a time when some miracle drugs no longer perform miracles and families are being ripped apart by a microscopic enemy.”



Today several types of resistant bacteria are not affected by even the most cutting-edge antibiotics the medical community can muster. The report estimated

that there are more than 2.8 million antibiotic-resistant infections in the United States each year, killing more than 35,000 people.

The report includes a plan for more stringent controls of antibiotic use to hold out against the ongoing problem. Redfield states, “These actions are protecting us today and will continue to protect us, our families, and our nation from a *threat that will never stop*” (emphasis added). There is little hope in this vision of the future. At best Redfield sees a never-ending fight for survival against devastating, merciless and unseen enemies.

Thankfully, the Bible describes a future when our all-powerful God will take control and put an end to human suffering. That does not mean simply stepping in to instantly heal every disease. Rather, it starts by establishing a never-ending Kingdom under which mankind will learn the right way to live and be blessed abundantly.

As humanity finally learns to obey its Creator, God will eradicate disease from the earth, fulfilling in even greater measure the words spoken to ancient Israel: “If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight . . . I will put none of the diseases on you [that defiance of God had brought on others] . . . For I am the LORD who heals you” (Exodus 15:26).

Ultimately, God’s plan is to transform the world—all who will obey and submit to Him—into a new creation, where “there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying” (Revelation 21:4). The “microscopic enemy” Redfield refers to—antibiotic-resistant bacterial infection—is just one of the many agents of death, which Paul described as the “last enemy that will be destroyed” (1 Corinthians 15:26). That wonderful future with *no need for antibiotics* will be the true “post-antibiotic era”! (Source: CDC.gov.)

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!





Venezuela's Crisis

WHEN WILL IT END?

In one of the most heartbreaking modern tragedies, there is still hope.

by Justin Palm

It seems hope has left Venezuela. Hungry children cry themselves to sleep at night. With no food at home, kids turn to the streets. Swept up in gangs, they trade the safety of home for knife scars on their bellies. Stripped of their humanity, Venezuelans have been reduced to digging through dumpsters for food.

Parents lose their little ones to malnutrition. Cut-out paper wings are often placed over white baby coffins where parents slowly, painfully, tragically hold their babies for the last time before burying them. One tiny baby, Kleiver Enrique Hernandez, died from severe malnutrition just three months after birth. His small, lifeless body lay in a white coffin during a wake at the family's house, underneath a colorful sign that had just celebrated his arrival with "Welcome Kleiver Enrique, I love you so much."

Venezuelans can no longer earn a living due to hyperinflation. There is little food, fuel, medicine or access to jobs. And something else that is running out is *hope*. Venezuelans have been robbed of their future by governmental mismanagement and corruption.

Where is the light at the end of the tunnel?

In just a few short years, the country has become a told-you-so example used by advocates of freedom and capitalism to show the failings of socialism. Yet while socialism is certainly greatly to blame for Venezuela's fall and it's right to point it out, we must not forget the untold masses who are suffering—millions of people who just want to eat and live.

The Venezuelan crisis is not a mere *philosophical argument* for the 9-year-old girl scouring trash bags for breakfast.

The collapse is a *human* problem—a mankind problem.

Start of the slide

Venezuela has the largest oil reserves in the world. So how did a once-prosperous modern nation fall so quickly?

The economic collapse started with the nation's socialist leader Hugo Chavez. But it took on new depths under his handpicked successor Nicolas Maduro.

A comprehensive 2016 article in *The Atlantic* by Venezuelan authors Moises Naim and Francisco Toro shines light on what happened:

"What our country is going through is monstrously unique: It's nothing less than the collapse of a large, wealthy, seemingly modern, seemingly democratic nation just a few hours' flight from the United States. In the last two years Venezuela has experienced the kind of implosion that hardly ever occurs in a middle-income country like it outside of war.

"Mortality rates are skyrocketing; one public service after another is collapsing; triple-digit inflation has left more than 70 percent of the population in poverty; an unmanageable crime wave keeps people locked indoors at night; shoppers have to stand in line for hours to buy food; babies die in large numbers for lack of simple, inexpensive medicines and equipment in hospitals, as do the elderly and those suffering from chronic illnesses" ("Venezuela Is Falling Apart," May 12, 2016).

The country's rapid descent is not like a plane crash or train wreck or car accident. These kinds of tragedies happen *relatively* frequently. But an oil-rich, modern, beautiful country like Venezuela collapsing in just a handful of years? It just doesn't happen.

The authors related some of how the unthinkable came about:

"The real culprit is *chavismo*, the ruling philosophy named for Chavez and carried forward by Maduro, and its truly breathtaking propensity for mismanagement (the government plowed state money arbitrarily into foolish investments); institutional destruction (as Chavez and then Maduro became more authoritarian and crippled the country's democratic institutions); nonsense policy-making (like price and currency controls); and plain thievery (as corruption has proliferated among unaccountable officials and their friends and families) . . .

"There are many theories about the deeper forces that have destroyed Venezuela's economy, torn apart its society and devastated its institutions, but their result is ultimately a human tragedy representing one of the most severe humanitarian

crises facing the Western hemisphere.”

Food shortages have become so severe that reports have come out of people breaking into zoos to kill and eat the animals. Power blackouts are part of life in many areas of the nation. There’s a widespread lack of medical equipment, and disease is on the rise. Crime is skyrocketing, with Caracas now the murder capital of the world.

The littlest victims

The greatest tragedy in Venezuela is the suffering of its children. *The New York Times* spent five months in 2017 investigating how Venezuela’s economic crisis has affected the nation’s little ones. What they saw shocked them:

“Hunger has stalked Venezuela for years. Now, it is killing the nation’s children at an alarming rate, doctors in the country’s public hospitals say . . . Riots and protests over the lack of affordable food, excruciating long lines for basic provisions, soldiers posted outside bakeries and angry crowds ransacking grocery stores have rattled cities, providing a telling, public display of the depths of the crisis.

“But deaths from malnutrition have remained a closely guarded secret by the Venezuelan government. In a five-month investigation by *The New York Times*, doctors at 21 public hospitals in 17 states across the country said that their emergency rooms were being overwhelmed by children with severe malnutrition—a condition they had rarely encountered before the economic crisis began . . .” (Meredith Kohut and Isayen Herrera, “As Venezuela Collapses, Children Are Dying of Hunger,” Dec. 17, 2017).

The journalists also exposed how government officials have hidden the truth:

“The Venezuelan government has tried to cover up the extent of the crisis by enforcing a near-total blackout of health statistics, and by creating a culture in which doctors are often afraid to register cases and deaths that may be associated with the government’s failures. But the statistics that have come out are staggering. In the Ministry of Health’s 2015 annual report, the mortality rate for children under 4 weeks old had increased a hundredfold, from 0.02 percent in 2012 to just over 2 percent.”

After the government’s health ministry had not released even one report about infant mortality rates, a link suddenly appeared on their website in April 2017. It revealed that 11,446 children under the age of 1 died in 2016.

The nation’s healthcare system has been hit hard with an estimated 43,000 medical professionals leaving Venezuela. And for infants in hospital emergency rooms, baby formula is hard to find.

Sadly, since 2017, the situation has not improved. A February 2019 article titled “Venezuela Voices: ‘We Are Starving Here’” described the country as being “on the brink”: “Grocery shelves lie empty as food becomes increasingly scarce and expensive. People are fleeing the country at record rates, flooding neighboring countries. Inflation is set to reach 10 million percent in 2019” (Ana Vanessa Herrero and Megan Specia, *The New York Times*, Feb. 1, 2019).

Massive exodus of those finding a way to leave

This hopeless situation has caused 4 million Venezuelans—4 million!—to make the heartbreaking decision to flee their



A Venezuelan child plays inside his family’s house built of interwoven reeds covered with mud. Extreme poverty is exploding in the country.

homeland. A *Wall Street Journal* article described it as “the largest migration crisis in modern Latin American history” (Kejal Vyas, “The Perilous Road Out of Venezuela,” Oct. 3, 2019). And every day, thousands of citizens are adding to this number.

The article tells the story of a young Venezuelan woman who recently left the country with her boyfriend, the two of them having worked as nurses for a health clinic in eastern Caracas: “My grandparents used to tell me, ‘Don’t go,’” said Ms. Loyo. “Now they say, ‘Flee as fast as you can.’”

“The day before the bus trip, Mr. Morales [her boyfriend] went to the cemetery with a rag and a bottle of soapy water and washed the headstone over the grave of his teenage brother, Jhonny, who had been shot dead by gangsters four years ago.

“He swept away fallen leaves with a worn-out broom and laid down a fistful of marigolds. A short walk away, he tied the graves of two cousins, both victims of police shootings. ‘Everything around me just screams: Get out of here!’ he said.”

Some shocking migration projections follow: “The Brookings Institution estimates the number of Venezuelan migrants could double to eight million in the next two years, far more than the six million who fled war-ravaged Syria. Per capita, Venezuelan migrants have seen less than 2% of the international aid that has been committed for Syrian refugees” (ibid.).

No end in sight?

Since the beginning of Venezuela’s slide, its people have taken to the streets in protest. Out of these protest movements, one man, Juan Guaido, has risen up as the opposition leader. On Jan. 23, 2019, he boldly declared himself the nation’s rightful president:

“The young politician stood before thousands of protesters in Caracas and swore himself in as interim president—a move that was immediately greeted by the US and Canadian governments. Guaido first signalled that he was willing to mount a serious challenge to the country’s president in early January [2019] when Nicolas Maduro, began his second term of office following elections last summer [2018] that were widely denounced as fraudulent . . .

“Guaido, just six days into his post, told the world he was ready to assume the presidency until free and fair elections could be held—provided he had the vital support of the military” (Joe Daniels and Mariana Zuniga, “Venezuela: Who Is Juan Guaido, the Man Who Declared Himself President?” *The Guardian*, Jan. 23, 2019).

After President Maduro refused to step down, Mr. Guaido led a military uprising in April that failed. Despite the setback, the opposition has continued to pressure Maduro to leave

office, and Guaido has been recognized by more than 50 other governments as Venezuela's acting president.

The United States and other countries have been increasing political pressure on Venezuela, but so far it appears to have had little effect. Maduro is now targeting his military to consolidate power and crackdown on dissent:

"There are now 217 active and retired officers being held in Venezuelan jails, including 12 generals, according to the Coalition for Human Rights and Democracy, a Caracas-based nonprofit that represents several of the men. The coalition has documented 250 cases of torture committed by Venezuelan security forces against military officers, their relatives and opposition activists since 2017" (Anatoly Kurmanaev and Isayen Herrera, "Venezuela's Maduro Cracks Down on His Own Military in Bid to Retain Power," *The New York Times*, Aug. 13, 2019).

"The spectacle of collapse"

No one knows what exactly will happen in Venezuela in the coming years, but it's hard to imagine how it can continue getting worse without it reaching some kind of breaking point.

A final quote from the story in *The Atlantic* cuts to the heart of the matter. Is Venezuela another example of socialism's failings? Yes. But it is so much more than that. Above all, it is a humanitarian tragedy that should leave all of us looking forward to better days with some hope still left in our hearts.

The Venezuelan authors of the piece reflect: "The happy, hopeful stage of Venezuela's experiment with Chavez's 21st-century socialism is a fading memory. What's been left is a visibly failing state that still leans hard on left-wing rhetoric in a doomed bid to maintain some shred of legitimacy. A country that used to attract fellow travelers and admirers in serious numbers now holds fascination for rubbernecks: stunned outsiders enthralled by the spectacle of collapse. To the Venezuelans who live its consequences day after day, the spectacle is considerably less amusing."

In the midst of such great and totally unnecessary tragedy,

where can we look to find hope for the future?

Coming end to misery


The Bible reveals God's master plan for mankind. It shows us that a better day for humanity is coming—through the arrival of the Kingdom of God. This divine government will be ushered in at the second coming of Jesus Christ (see Daniel 2:35, 44-45).

With the ultimate fulfillment of the Kingdom of God on earth, after Jesus Christ has put down all enemies and submitted all to God the Father, the constant tears of today's hungry and hopeless will be a thing of the past. Notice this inspiring prophecy from the end of the Bible:

"And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And *God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away*'" (Revelation 21:3-4).

Today we are still living in the times of the "former things." But soon a new day is coming when the newborn baby will no longer have his or her life snuffed out so early. The days of failed governments will be over, replaced by a perfect government by God that is truly for the benefit of the people.

In the midst of a tragedy like Venezuela, there is still *hope* for a better world! **BT**



LEARN MORE

How will a new world come about in which horrors such as those experienced in Venezuela will no longer plague us? God's Word, the Bible, reveals the answers! Download or request our study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. A free copy is waiting for you!

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What Is "Socialism"?

While countries use different kinds of socialism as a political system, the word "socialism" is used in a general sense to refer to governments imposing more and more control over their citizens by legislating expensive *non-essential* programs. Think welfare programs, social services, etc. "Essential" government activities are those that provide safety for the citizens—protection from dangers from within (crime) and from without (attacks and invasion). Most modern nations are operating with a combination of personal freedom and socialism.

A helpful and thorough definition of socialism, and how it differs from communism, comes from Marcus Hawkins in his article "A Definition of Socialism":

"Socialism' is a political term applied to an economic system in which property is held in common and not individually, and relationships are governed by a political hierarchy. Common ownership doesn't mean decisions are made collectively, however. Instead, individuals in positions of authority make decisions in the name of the collective group. Regardless of the picture painted of socialism by its proponents, it ultimately removes group decision making in favor of the choices of one all-important individual.

"Socialism originally involved the replacement of private property with a market exchange, but history has proven this ineffective. Socialism cannot prevent people from competing for what is scarce. [Venezuela is a prime example of this.] Socialism, as we know it today, most commonly refers to 'market

socialism,' which involves individual market exchanges organized by collective planning.

"People often confuse 'socialism' with the concept of 'communism.' While the two ideologies share much in common (in fact, communism encompasses socialism), the primary difference between the two is that 'socialism' applies to economic systems, whereas 'communism' applies to both economic and political systems.

"Another difference between socialism and communism is that communists directly oppose the concept of capitalism, an economic system in which production is controlled by private interests. Socialists, on the other hand, believe socialism can exist within a capitalist society" (thoughtco.com, Jan. 28, 2019).

—Don Hooser

Spiritual Lessons From My Double Lung Transplant

My life was saved by a double lung transplant. This life-changing event led me to a much deeper understanding of Christ's sacrifice and God's plan for me and all mankind.

by Cathy Botha

I was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis (CF) when I was 12 years old. CF is a progressive genetic disease that primarily affects the lungs. There is no cure. Average life expectancy is 37 years. Medication and health management practices can prolong and improve quality of life, but once the patient reaches end-stage lung disease, double lung transplant becomes the only option.

I reached this stage in 2015, following years of gradual deterioration and irreversible lung damage. Eventually I was in and out of the hospital every few weeks battling severe, recurrent pneumonias. While at home, my daily routine at times involved up to six intravenous infusions, two to three hours of nebulizing and two hours of chest physiotherapy (treatments to assist clearing the lungs). I slept with the help of supplemental oxygen, and used it intermittently to relieve incredible fatigue.

The "burden of treatment" is a medical term describing the time and commitment involved in doing everything necessary to stay alive. This burden often destroys every vestige of the patients' quality of life, and eventually it was consuming me. My circumstances also meant that I had to continue to work, albeit not effectively. Ironically, I felt suffocated by the medical regimen that was keeping me alive.

An urgent prayer

I was barely holding my life together. And my spiritual life was suffering. If I tried to read the Bible, I would just doze off. Concentration became increasingly difficult. I listened to sermons but usually had to rewind them to hear the parts where I had fallen asleep. I would doze off during church services, and because of travel and church commitments, the Sabbath, meant to be a day of rest, was one of the most exhausting.

I felt increasingly frustrated about my lack of spiritual

diligence and enthusiasm for God's Word. When I saw others so full of zeal for God, I felt inadequate. I was just barely going through the motions. I also knew I was out of time, with possibly just one year left to live.

I was dying.

At one extremely low point of spiritual discouragement, I knelt and prayed a simple but urgent prayer—that God would give me more understanding and change my heart completely to be more like Him. According to Philippians 1:6, "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it." I had no idea how God could finish a good work in me when my body was essentially finished. I knew I had not finished my race (as the apostle Paul had in 2 Timothy 4:7), but there was no more race left in me.

Other than God's miraculous instant healing, my only

Other than God's miraculous instant healing, my only chance to live rested on the slim possibility of finding a donor. Most patients die before they find one.

chance to live rested on the slim possibility of finding a donor. The average waiting period is 1½ years, during which time most patients die.

Three weeks after my prayer, I received amazing news—the most unexpected and improbable thing to happen. This colossal life-changing and life-saving event has led me to examine the similarities between my physical salvation and my spiritual salvation, along with God's plan for all mankind.

"The call"

In the donor world, potential recipients are on a waiting list, sometimes literally waiting by the phone for what is known as "the call." When an organ becomes available, and the medical team is finally ready, a designated person makes a critical call to

the recipient. There is no prior warning that “the call” is coming.

The recipient is told that the surgery is their choice—he or she is under no obligation to accept. It is a simple phone call that offers incredible opportunity and considerable risk.

I was asked, “Are you ready and willing?” Some patients do not take the offer. They may feel the disease is manageable and are too frightened to risk death or other problems. Or they may not be emotionally prepared. Some accept it and go on to live significantly better lives. Some refuse it and ultimately die. Some accept it and still die.

Many people never get “the call” at all, but if they do, they are given a choice. Once the decision has been made, they must submit to the process.

I thought of the spiritual parallels of God’s calling process. I was reminded of 2 Timothy 1:9, which tells us that God “*has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.*”

I also thought of 2 Peter 1:10: “*Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things [that is, elements of good character listed in preceding verses], you will never stumble*” (New American Standard Bible).

Life-giving death

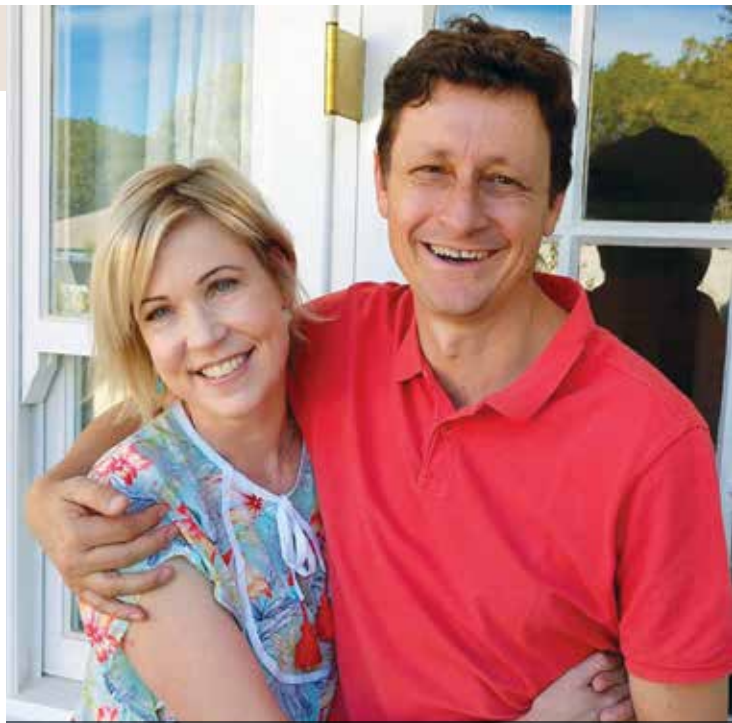
The story of Christ’s sacrifice is repeated so often in the Christian world that it can too easily become depersonalized. The phrases we hear regarding His death become sadly commonplace. *He suffered and died so that I may live.* I understood that, but did I really? I may even have allowed myself to think that because Christ knew He would die, He was better prepared to deal with it. Yet the Gospels show that even Jesus experienced deep emotions facing suffering and death.

He told His disciples before He was handed over in betrayal: “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch.” He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him” (Mark 14:34-35).

Only through my transplant experience could I truly begin to understand the reality of receiving His death in my place and God’s plan in a visceral way. I have come to better appreciate Christ’s humanness, and what He gave up for me to receive the opportunity of an eternal and vastly better life.

After my operation, I found out my donor was a little child. Nothing could have prepared me for this news. His life ended abruptly, leaving his loving parents devastated. He had a full life ahead of him—he was healthy and full of promise. He did not deserve to die, and his precious life certainly was not an equal trade for mine. My body was aged, tired, beaten up. My life was full of wasted opportunities and failures. Surely his little life was filled with so much more light and hope. Yet he died, and I was saved. I understand he was not sacrificed for me, but it was his death that enabled me to live on. And not only do I live, I have a far better quality of life.

When I think about Christ and my young donor, and the ripple effects their deaths have had on my life, I am overcome with emotion. Each one’s gift helps me understand the other. The comparisons between these two sacrifices have compelled me into a deeper, more gratitude-based relationship with



Cathy and her husband Vivien Botha in 2018, after her lung transplant.

God the Father and Jesus Christ.

Christ actually chose to die for me. He was more innocent than any human being who has ever lived. Yet He suffered horribly for my near-worthless life. I think of Romans 5:7-9: “*For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.*”

A parent’s sacrifice

I often think about my donor’s parents and the incredible gift they gave me at their time of unspeakable grief. They donated his lungs to save me, and other organs to other desperate patients. I imagine them having to watch their son die and making the choice to turn off his life support. And then, willingly and generously, through the fog of their own pain and suffering, they offered others a life-giving gift. This was a mindful decision, not an impulsive reaction to their own suffering.

I owe my donor family my physical life. But far greater than that, I know that through God’s plan of salvation, I have gained an elder Brother and an eternal Father. Only through the planned sacrifice and impossible-to-fathom death of Christ do I have the prospect of being grafted into the eternal family of God. “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Ephesians 3:14-15).

Hebrews 2:10 summarizes this process: “For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”

“Without blemish”

As with all transplants, the days and hours preceding are critical. The donor’s organs must be healthy and a suitable

match for the recipient. Many donors are rejected due to infections or organ damage. The batteries of critical tests and the analysis take 24 to 48 hours. Recipients are oblivious to this behind-the-scenes work. They are usually mired in the daily struggle for survival, totally unaware that somewhere, usually far removed from their reality, a plan to save their life is being meticulously worked out.

This plan can succeed only if the donor's organs are healthy. Despite the mockery of justice in the judicial proceedings Jesus went through, He was nonetheless found to be morally spotless by the human authorities of the time, Pilate even pronouncing Him a "just Person" (Matthew 27:24). But more importantly, God's assessment is found in 1 Peter 1:18-19: "You were not redeemed with corruptible things . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

Similarly, after all the medical scrutiny, my donor's organs were found to be *physically* perfect.

Christ living in me

I now have a redeemed-from-certain-death life. Yet I carry

Someday my young donor will be reunited with his family, my struggling friends will breathe easy, and all humanity will have the opportunity to experience love, health and peace in God's family.

around in my body the lungs of a child that I've never physically met. His lungs work to keep me healthy—breathing for me as mine no longer could. He has made me a better version of myself than ever before. This is something that, when I try to think about it, my mind refuses to engage. It's too hard to contemplate. The apostle Paul, in 2 Corinthians 4:10, notes that he was "always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body." These lungs live on in me—giving me so many unexpected opportunities.

I know I will meet my young donor one day when God resurrects all people to give them an opportunity for salvation. I can only imagine how humbling this meeting will be for me. I wonder if he will like me, the person I've become. Would he approve of things I've done with his gift of life—of my speech, my empathy, my marriage, my family, of how I treat others? How would my life choices and attitudes stack up to what he would have done with his extra time if it had not been cut short?

This meeting applies with greater magnitude to my spiritual life. The real question is, What am I doing with my life? Am I allowing old habits to continue, old ways of thinking and behaving? Do I reflect the life of Christ in me? Am I being submissive to His will and in tune with His Holy Spirit to help move my life forward in His direction?

He and his parents will ask me what I did with my extra time. God will ask me. I think of 2 Corinthians 5:9-10: "Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things

done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

How will I answer?

In Romans 12:1 Paul urges, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." To be a living sacrifice for Him, I need to do what He would do. I need to allow Christ to really live in and through me.

I have this hope that when I finally get to meet my ultimate Savior, Jesus Christ will be able to say to me, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matthew 25:23).

Lifelong commitment to discipline

Concerning life after a successful transplant, organ rejection is a real and ongoing threat for all survivors. I must live a disciplined life—being mindful of what I eat, carefully avoiding specific foods and certain situations, taking extra precautions to prevent infections, being diligent to take my

medications and undergoing regular medical testing and follow-ups. People are surprised to hear that I must take immunosuppressive drugs for the rest of my life.

Receiving donor lungs is not a once-off life-saving event.

I am saved in an ongoing way

principally by taking the anti-rejection drugs without fail, every single day. Daily disciplined actions and obedience to a regimen are keeping me alive. And the same applies to one's spiritual life.

Compared to my previous "burden of treatment," which included many grueling hours each day just to be able to breathe, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:30).

Paul says in Ephesians 4:1, "As a prisoner for the Lord, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (New International Version). I realize that both my physical and spiritual salvation are not totally secure. I must do my best to maintain them and give myself the best possible opportunity to endure.

I also find it spiritually significant that organ rejection occurs when the recipient's body overcomes the medication and rejects the new lungs—not the other way around. My body will try to attack and destroy the new life-giving lungs if it has a chance. The Bible reveals that "the mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God" (Romans 8:7, Christian Standard Bible). Only by accessing and stirring up God's Holy Spirit, which is given to us at baptism, can we practice what Paul refers to in Romans 8:13: "For if you live according to [the old, corrupt nature of] the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live" (NIV).

Hope for all

Reflecting back on the days immediately following my transplant, I remember lying in the Intensive Care Unit

Who's Behind Beyond Today?

Who's behind the *Beyond Today* magazine and television program? *Beyond Today* is provided by people from all walks of life, from all over the world, as enabled by God. We share a common goal—to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom of

God and to teach all nations to obey everything Christ commanded (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).

We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message

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

Through this magazine, our TV program and dozens of helpful free study guides, we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and threaten our survival. We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, sharing the truth of God's purpose as taught by Jesus Christ and His apostles.

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

For additional information, visit our website:

ucg.org/learnmore



Cathy Botha wears one of the pieces of physiotherapy equipment she had to use every day to treat her disease. She often spent many hours in various treatments just to be able to breathe during the difficult months before her life-saving transplant.

(ICU). I became acutely aware of other patients and their families in the cubicles around me. We were all surrounded by numerous drips, drains, beeping machines—mankind's valiant efforts to prolong life. The ICU is a place of protracted suffering and extreme grief, of unending perseverance by medical staff to save lives. It is a place of pain, confusion, fear, hope and joy—emotions jumbled up together, experienced all at the same time.

My lung transplant involved all of these for myself and my family. Although it entailed extreme discomfort, I received a new opportunity for life. Conversely, my young donor died, and his family experienced utter devastation. One life passed, but another was preserved.

Since my transplant, I have experienced a wonderful quality of life. But when I look at old friends still battling to breathe—their days a painful struggle against despair—it appears unfair. I know that but for the grace of God go I. And I feel so incredibly blessed to understand that unlike this physical life today, hope and salvation are not ultimately offered to only a select few. In the great plan God is working out, everyone will have the opportunity for a wonderful future without end.

As valiant as mankind's efforts are to bring healing, peace and prosperity, they will always fall short of God's perfect plan. One Man, Jesus Christ, died for all those people in that ICU where I was and for everyone else as well. He died that they might live again, and live better.

The ancient patriarch Job expressed this hope through his great suffering: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth" (Job 19:25). I now better understand Job's words. In that hospital ward, the true hope and longing for God's perfect, peaceful and joyful Kingdom dawned on me more forcefully than I could have ever imagined before. There was hope for all those despairing people moving in and out of that ICU, even though they did not know it.

Someday my young donor will be reunited with his family. Someday my struggling friends will breathe easy. Someday all human beings who have ever lived will have the opportunity to experience love, health and peace in God's family. Someday soon Revelation 21:4 will become a reality: "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."

God speed that day! **BT**

“Who Says I Can’t?!”

An inspiring story of struggle through serious challenges serves as a poignant reminder to be grateful and keep persevering with God’s help.

by Janet Treadway

As I combed my hair, brushed my teeth and walked to my car, it was a different sort of day. I was more appreciative of being able to do these simple things because of something I’d just watched.

As I got into my car, placed the key in the ignition and drove to work, the feeling continued. Then also as I parked my car, got out and walked into work.

As I type this on my keyboard, I am so much more aware of my 10 fingers and my ability to sit here and do this. Again, it’s a different sort of day.

So often we take for granted the wondrous body God has given us. He designed it to work so perfectly at our will. Are we grateful for this miracle? Do we use it for His glory?

There are people who do not have the same level of blessing many of us do in terms of fully functional bodies—a fact brought home to me in a powerful way through a documentary I just watched about a young man named Robert Mendez.

Robert was born May 9, 1988, without arms or legs, the result of a condition known as Tetra-Amelia, a rare congenital disorder that prevents the formation of limbs during embryonic development. Now 31, he has lived his entire life without arms and legs. He is mobile thanks to the chair he controls with his head and neck. It has given him a life otherwise inaccessible.

It was humbling to see this program. Watching him move around on the floor as a child—such a *happy* child even—and then grow into the man he is today, I just sat there and cried.

This young man did not let his disabilities stop him from being all he could be! Mendez went on to become a remarkable high school football coach in America. His favorite phrase to the young men he coaches and his motto in his life is, “Who says I can’t?”

Mendez accepted the Jimmy V Award for Perseverance at the 2019 ESPYs (Excellence in Sports Performance Yearly Award). In his acceptance speech, he was grateful, thanking his parents and also giving glory to God. He further stressed the importance of focusing on what you *can* do instead of what you *can’t*. (You can find his speech on YouTube by searching for the name of the award.)

Again, are *we* grateful for what God has given us? Do we use it to be the best we can be for Him and for others, as Robert Mendez has tried to do? What an inspiration this man is to others—including me.

When Jesus Christ returns, He will begin the process of bringing healing to the whole world. But in the meantime, there are those like Robert who, though facing hardship, set an amazing example of gratitude while pushing themselves to be all they can be.

These examples humble us and teach us valuable lessons. Here are two lessons I take from Mendez’s story.

First, be grateful for what God has given you and to those who have helped you.

And second, live your life to be the best you can be with what God has given you, so you can help and inspire others!

The opposite is mentioned in Romans 1:21, which describes the corrupt world of this age, and the fruit of an ungrateful heart: “For



Let’s never take for granted the miraculous body God has given us! And let us always ask God for help where we lack.

although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

We should always be giving God thanks for the things He has given us, and use them for His glory, and for the inspiration and encouragement of others.

Start your day with such gratitude and purpose along with a “can do” approach to life. Don’t use the words “I can’t”—for with God’s help, “all things are possible” (Mark 10:27).

Robert Mendez did not let his shortcomings stop him, but with gratitude and resolve, he rose above his challenges to inspire and help others. He certainly inspired me.

Let’s never take for granted the miraculous body God has given us! And let us always ask God for help where we lack or face challenges.

“Who says I can’t?” Let it not be us. For with God, *we can*. **BT**

Fixing Our Eyes on Eternity

How do we endure the challenges of this life?
By God enabling us to look beyond today to what lies ahead.

by Robin Webber

On the evening of Jesus' betrayal, hours before He would be brutally scourged and mercilessly crucified, He huddled with His followers and encouraged them by saying, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me" (John 14:1).

Later that evening, even though He knew what was about to occur, He amplified His message of hope beyond the moment by proclaiming: "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

How could He say that then? As some might remark today: "Was He on something? C'mon!" And yet on the next afternoon as He was dying while horrifically nailed to a piece of wood, He was able to declare, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46). How could this be? How could assured peace be His? Is there truly a cure for human despair? Is there hope beyond the moment?

Let's consider what we're told in Hebrews 12: "Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, 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" (verses 1-2, New Living Translation).

It's here that we discover two keys to moving beyond our humanly troubling moments to glorify God and bless other people: 1) we keep our eyes fixed on Christ, and 2) we keep the same focus and develop the same inner joy He had by looking beyond our human moments. We might say we need to keep the eyes of our heart fixed on eternity. This is vital to living by Christ's example in heeding His invitation of "Follow Me."

But how do we do this?

Survival based on vision

While none of us is likely bearing the weight of a literal cross, inwardly it can sure feel that way. Some of us right now are bearing heavy challenges, and making it through seems all uphill—such as living with a threatening disease, the loss of a loved one, a child who won't respond to our love, the loss of a cherished job, a business deal gone bad, a marriage gone sour, a friend who continually disappoints us and, yes, a God who for the moment seems far away. How do we move beyond our current dilemmas?

Victor Frankl, a concentration camp survivor, wrote a landmark work in 1946 titled *Man's Search for Meaning*. It relates his firsthand observations on life and death molded by personal experience at the Auschwitz death camp during World War II. He carefully considered why some captives survived while others died. He pondered why some with good health, intelligence and survival skills didn't make it while others who lacked these attributes endured and lived.

He concluded that the single most significant factor for survival was people envisioning a future for themselves, holding on to a conviction that they had a mission to perform, some important work yet to do.

Frankl's analysis was long before crystallized in God's admonition in Proverbs 29:18: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (KJV). The 19th-century U.S. Supreme Court justice Oliver Wendell Holmes further developed and broadened this concept in stating, "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."

Sadly, but humanly, even people called to serve the living God can at times travel through life like the living dead. How then do we live in the light of eternity and see beyond the moment in a darkened and cluttered world of time and space?

Seeing by God's Spirit

Remarkably, God empowers us to look to the future He has in store for us. Notice the apostle Paul's emphasis on the giftedness of the spiritual lens afforded us in stating: "*But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit*" (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). So it comes through the Holy Spirit, which we receive following repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38).

Seeing the wonderful life to come is much more than ultimately realizing it as a final destination. Rather, it's a way of traveling, here and now, with gifted spiritual vision fixed on God and fixed on eternity. And yet, perhaps we didn't realize that such eyes granting such vision are part of our spiritually converted existence in Christ today. Perhaps we have placed them in storage due to being overwhelmed by the stuff of life.

But consider for just a moment the upside of what God has placed inside us through His Spirit—vision to discern consequences ahead of time, and freedom from "the urgency of



as the Lord says, “be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).

Continuing in 2 Corinthians 4, Paul then moves through a series of contrasting elements to bring us to sharp focus in stating, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory . . .” (verse 17). Have you ever talked to anyone (name one!) who thought their individual troubles or challenges of this world were only light or momentary? They’ve probably been more along the lines of “Oh no, this is off the charts!” And yet Paul says the weight to measure everything in light of is not the present moment but the boundless realm of eternity.

He then provides one final lens of contrast by assuring us that God’s purpose is being accomplished in us “while we do not look at the things which are seen, but the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” Oh yes, the vision thing again! Our hearts need eyes!

Facing the horror of crucifixion, Jesus said, “In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” Is there really hope in a world of despair?

Eyes on loan!

So, a question: What side of the ledger are we on? Light or heavy? Momentary or endless? Visible or unseen?

now” that allows us to properly prioritize our life in surrender to God’s will.

Let’s take a closer look and truly see how these new eyes can more fully serve God and bless those around us.

This life in proper perspective

We only live a certain number of days as human beings on this earth. God does promise that His faithful followers will have eternal life (1 John 5:11-13). But for now, we’re locked into beginnings and endings, clocks, schedules and deadlines. Our human reality is that our days are numbered for each of us, and each of us has a different number, and we don’t know when our number is up. Yet, with this said, most of us live as if our number goes on forever. Younger people think they are immortal, and older people think of “old age” as being 15 years older than whatever age they happen to be at the time.

The psalmist proscribes this kind of math: “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). The focus is not on what is behind, but on what lies ahead. This will affect how we use time—how much time we waste, our priorities and how often we say yes or no to matters that are not worthy of our total life’s devotions. Perhaps that’s why God inspired Paul to further teach us to number our days and nudge our hearts by telling us, in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, to look beyond the self-reflecting mirrors of our current struggles and see our future with God in His Kingdom with the new eyes God has given us.

Paul writes here, “Therefore we do not lose heart . . .” (verse 16). Why? Spiritual heart failure can affect even converted Christians—even you! He continues, “. . . Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day” (same verse). Yes, God is steadily and lovingly at work. We are not alone! Paul is systematically leading us to the greatest spiritual outcome in a Christian’s life—to,

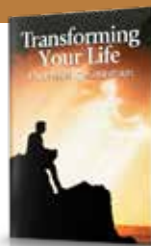
Trapped in time and space or focusing on eternity? We can’t always choose what comes our way, but we can choose how to respond to it by what pair of eyes we select. Once God gives us the gift of these eyes, He expects us to hold on to them and use them—now and always. They’re not ours to stow away, give away or lose. For they are God’s eyes given on loan to us—the same eyes used by Jesus when He endured the cross for the joy He looked forward to.

The great equalizer that frames our calling from God through Jesus Christ is that, like Jesus, before we bear a cross (2 Timothy 4:8) we must bear a cross (Luke 14:27). Jesus was always brutally honest as to what the invitation of “Follow Me” entailed. He never said it would be easy, but He did say it would be worth it. It must be. After all, He suffered and died that we might be with Him in God’s Kingdom.

Next time in this column we’ll explore what eternity will be like through the revelatory words of the ascended and exalted Christ. He now waits in heaven to fulfill His promise to those who accept the great invitation of “Follow Me,” assuring us, “I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may also be” (John 14:3).

May we all continue to look eagerly to that future, the wonderful joy set before us, to endure the trials of today, as Jesus set the example for us. **BT**

LEARN MORE



To those willing to surrender to Him, God offers astounding promises—including the gift of His Holy Spirit. How can we receive it? And what can it do for us? Download or request your free copy of *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* to learn more!

BTmagazine.org/booklets



“The Problem With Evolution and the Return of God”

There appears to be a lot of promotion of intelligent design in books, TV shows, movies, etc. Unfortunately in many of them, the designers are proposed to be an advanced alien race. I don't know how this will fit in with the great deception, if it fits in at all. With genetic manipulation the future will prove to be extremely intense as well as interesting.

From the Internet

“The Problem Is . . . : 5 Tips On How to Avoid Negative Thinking and Be More Positive”

This is a very good article. It is something I won't read once but several times. There are a lot of things that could have helped me but I failed to do because of negative thinking, only to realize years later that I was wrong.

From the Internet

Happy to receive teachings

I have been a lapsed Christian for more than a decade. Lately I have been responding to the promptings of my conscience after watching numerous *Beyond Today* programs on YouTube. I marvel at the honesty and the sincerity of the hosts. I find their words—and the Word of God, which they quote—personally confronting, extremely moving and motivational toward giving a personal response to God. To cut to the chase, I would like a person-to-person talk with one of your ministers. I shall look forward to your reply. Thank you sincerely.

Viewer in Australia

I found your study aid *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* to be of great interest because I have been seeing connections between America and Israel that goes all the way back to the Pilgrims. I also have always wondered if America is referred to in the Bible. Thank you so much for the opportunity to read this book.

From the Internet

I have been a regular visitor to your website for the last several months. I am so incredibly happy to have found a church that preaches the absolute truth of the Bible. I didn't actually believe there was anything like that which actually existed. I can only say that I was led to your website by the Lord because of my hunger to

hear the truth. I've searched for years. Thank you!

From the Internet

I was so excited to find your website. I was looking at another site and all of a sudden I saw your site with free study guides. I am getting them for my pastor for Pastor Appreciation Month next month. I will be keeping some for myself also. I can't wait to get them. Thank you.

From the Internet

Once again may I take this opportunity to thank you for helping me grow spiritually through the study guides you sent to me. They have opened my eyes to the gospel, which were previously closed. I am very grateful.

Reader in Kenya

I became a changed believer many years ago. God started working with me, and after leaving the “church” I started studying online by myself and found your site. I quickly started ordering all of your study guides, which I cherish, and also I took the Bible Study Course, which helped me see the gospel in a different light. The truth was so amazingly different from what I had been raised up in. Thank you for taking the time to respond and show the true love of our Messiah by your response.

From the Internet

I just want to thank you for all that you do. I had ordered some materials from your ministry to help me with my relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and to understand Bible prophecy. Thank you so much also for *Beyond Today* magazine. Enclosed is a donation. Thank you again and God bless you and your ministry.

Subscriber in Canada

“How can I become a member?”

I would like to know how to be a member of your church. I would like to receive study materials by mail if possible. I await your response.

Reader in Havana, Cuba

Do you have a small assembly near me? I tried your search for a congregation but couldn't find one. I'm hoping you have people around me, subscribers to your magazine, to get together with for a Bible study. Of all the churches in this town, I haven't found one that worships on Saturday. I pray you have others around here.

From the Internet

We are so glad to hear you're interested in becoming part of our fellowship or visiting our services. If we don't have a congregation near you, we are more than happy to send you literature, correspond with you and offer our support in other ways.

For all those looking for a congregation, you can find a list at ucg.org/congregations.

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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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Oregon
Gresham/East Portland ch. 22/23, Sun 7:30 p.m.
Milwaukee ch. 23, Sun 6 a.m.; Mon 11:30 p.m.,
Wed 4:30 p.m.; Thu 7 a.m.; Fri 5:30 a.m.;
Sat 8:30 a.m. & 4:30 p.m.
Oregon City ch. 23, Sun 2:30 p.m.; Thu 10:30
a.m. & 2:30 p.m.; Fri 4:30 a.m.; Sat 3 a.m. & 4 p.m.
Washington
Everett ch. 77, Wed 5 p.m.

AUSTRALIA

9GEM Sun 7:30 a.m. nationwide

CANADA NATIONWIDE CABLE TV

Vision TV Sun 6 p.m. ET
Hope TV Sun 1 p.m. ET
See local listing for the channel in your area.

NEW ZEALAND

Prime Television
(simulcast on Sky satellite platform) Sun 8:30 a.m.

SOUTH AFRICA

Cape Town DSTV
Sun 8:30 a.m. ch. 263 and open ch. 32, 67

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