

A close-up, low-angle shot of the Statue of Liberty's head and crown, set against a dark, cloudy sky. The statue's green patina is prominent, and the rays of the crown are visible. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

BEYOND TODAY[®]

January-February 2017

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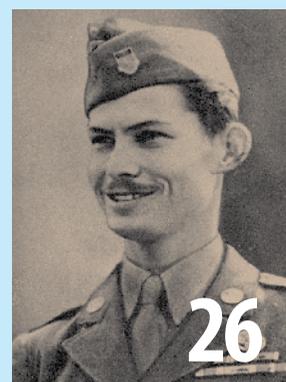
With the presence of God the Father and Jesus Christ dwelling in them, Christians must proceed forward—pursuing God's will above their own.



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Scott Ashley
Managing editor

Turning Points

The term *turning points* has become something of a buzzword lately. It shows up regularly in media and the news. Several books have been published under that title, and at least one magazine bears that name.

The term generally refers to the time in a situation at which a decisive change takes place—the point at which the situation changes in a definitive way.

Historians can point to any number of turning points in history where peoples and nations made dramatic and pronounced course changes—some for the better and some for the worse.

Some wonder whether the unexpected election of Donald Trump as president of the United States might signal such a turning point. After all, he ran as the anti-Obama, anti-Hillary, anti-left candidate.

Mr. Trump promised to roll back executive orders and legislation on a vast range of programs and policies ranging from health care to illegal immigration to climate change. He vowed to appoint strict constitutionalists to the U.S. Supreme Court, build a wall on the southern border, bring back overseas jobs, rebuild the U.S. military and “make America great again.”

Taking a page from former President Ronald Reagan, Trump pledged to “drain the swamp in Washington” and “make our government honest again.” While many of his campaign promises appear to be clear examples of overreach, a number of his cabinet appointees indicate that he is deadly serious about changing the ways of Washington and altering the trajectory of the nation.

And the trajectory of the nation certainly needs to be altered!

Over recent years America has experienced great harm from the imposition of policies and laws that directly contradict biblical values and teachings. President Obama’s signature health care legislation, among other things, forced employers to pay for abortion-inducing drugs for employees—essentially forcing business owners to finance the murder of the unborn.

The U.S. Justice Department ordered all schools nationwide to allow students to use whatever

restrooms they felt appropriate for their preferred gender, regardless of the reality of their biological sex—with no government concern at all expressed for students who didn’t wish to share restrooms or locker rooms with students of the opposite sex.

The federal government has aggressively pushed a pro-homosexual agenda, creating a legal climate in which cake-bakers, wedding venue providers and wedding photographers have seen their businesses ruined simply for following their consciences (based on biblical values) and not joining in celebrations of homosexual marriage.

Then there was the horror of the revelation that

Planned Parenthood, recipient of half a billion dollars annually in government funds, was collecting and selling body parts from aborted babies. (Planned Parenthood is America’s largest abortion provider, taking the lives of some 300,000 unborn infants each year.)

In the pages of *Beyond Today* we’ve regularly covered these and other issues where governments have pushed laws, regula-

tions and policies that directly oppose God’s will and truth. And we will continue to do so as part of our effort to teach the world the true values of our Creator and why the world is in such an abysmal state.

Our hope is that all nations might experience some kind of positive turning point and not experience the continuing, escalating problems we have brought on ourselves due to turning from God.

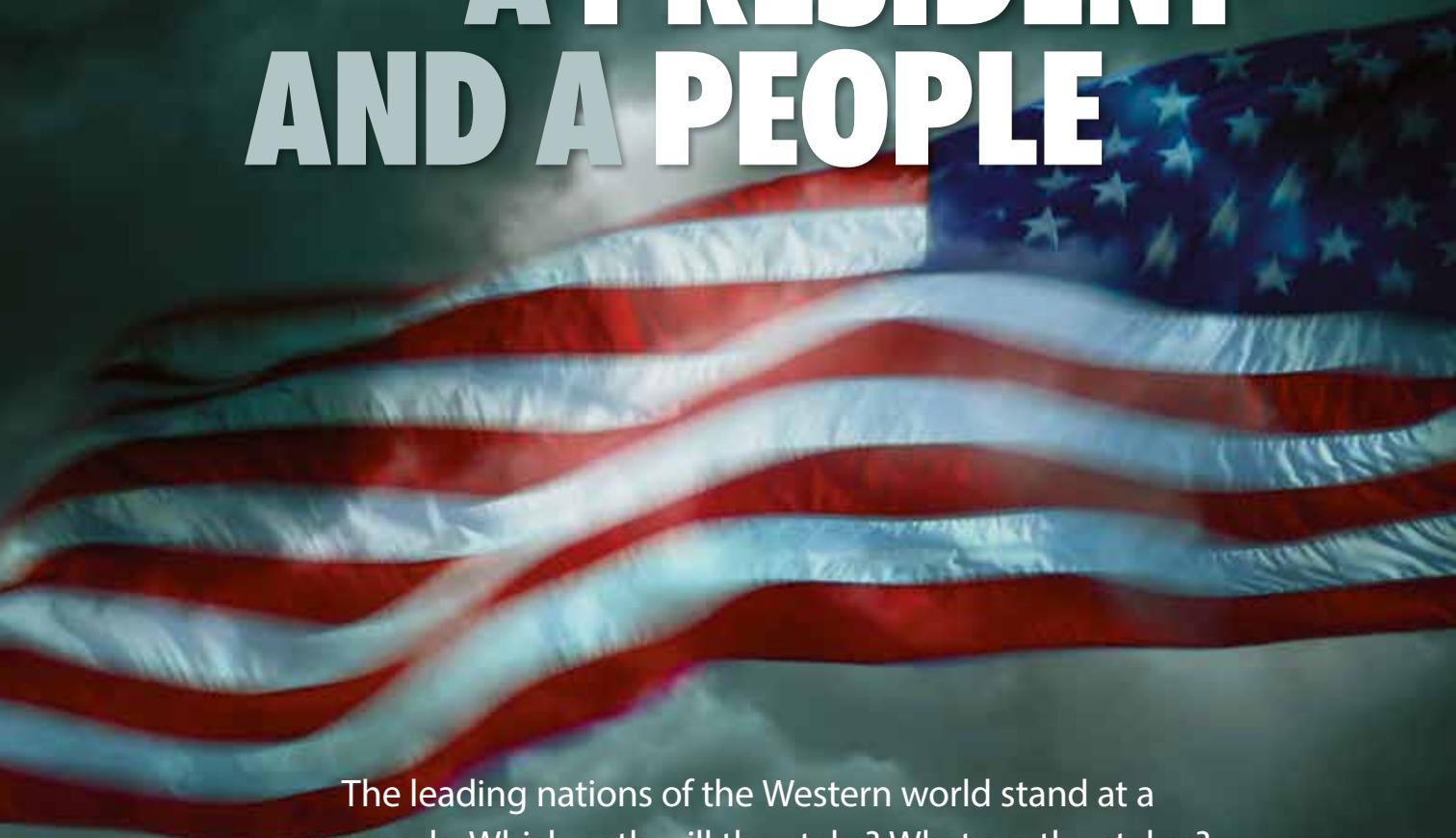
Notice that God Himself expresses the same hope of a positive turn for us in Ezekiel 33:11: “Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die . . . ?’

Why, indeed? God offers each of us a turning point, nationally and individually. “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

May we all have the wisdom to hear and heed! **BT**



A PROPHET, A PRESIDENT AND A PEOPLE



The leading nations of the Western world stand at a crossroads. Which path will they take? What are the stakes? Could an ancient biblical prophet give us any insight?

by Darris McNeely

Soon after America's Founding Fathers signed the Declaration of Independence, a statesman named John Page wrote these words to his fellow Virginian Thomas Jefferson: "We know the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. Do you not think an angel rides in the whirlwind and directs this storm?" Few today would recognize it, but his reference to an angel in a whirlwind is from the Bible. He was talking about the guiding hand of God in the founding of America. (Some might recall that former U.S. President George W. Bush quoted these words in his first inaugural address in 2001.)

For more than 240 years America has been blessed by the hand of God. Because of God's promise and enduring faithfulness it grew from a ragtag collection of colonies along the Atlantic Coast into the most powerful and prosperous single

nation in world history. America is great because God is great. For years its citizens openly acknowledged this truth.

But have we come to the time when the angel's presence might vanish? Would God leave America to the violent winds of time and history, to be toppled from its position of global supremacy and collapse as has happened to so many major powers before?

Understanding this critical time

How can one know the outcome of this critical period in history? America and the world are at a historic moment. A vital question is this: Does God still direct America in its historic and prophetic role in world affairs?

What do you need to understand about this time in which we live? There's more to the story than the news and analysis you get from today's experts in politics and journalism. These

“experts” have been shown to be blind, ignorant and often extremely biased in describing world events.

What you really need is a true biblical perspective that God gives us from His Word. This is what *Beyond Today* seeks to provide in each magazine article and television program. It’s time you understood that the headlines of today are rooted in your Bible.

The best way to explain what’s going on in the world is by taking you to the words of a biblical prophet named Amos, a common man of the people who obeyed the call of God to stand in the streets of a nation to deliver His message of hope and repentance.

The prophet Amos’ message for today

The nation God sent Amos to was Israel—a nation with whom God had a special history and relationship. Israel’s forefather, Abraham, was one to whom God made unconditional promises of national prosperity and greatness. Because of these promises, God brought the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery under Moses and set them in a land of promise.

Israel was the recipient of blessings and promises not made to any other nation, ever. “You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth,” God said (Amos 3:2, New International Version). Those promises included blessings for obedience. But sadly, Israel did not live up to its part of the agreement. And because Israel had rejected God, He said, “Therefore I will punish you for all of your sins” (same verse, NIV).

Israel at this time was in a strong position amid other coun-

tries. Following the death of King Solomon in the 10th century B.C., the kingdom of Israel split into two nations—Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The two nations went through decline but, weathering serious difficulties, experienced a resurgence during the eighth century, reaching their height of prosperity and power since Solomon. Both were major regional influences in a pivotal geographic spot.

The best way to explain what’s going on in the world today is by taking you back to the words of a biblical prophet named Amos, 2,800 years ago.

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Here is a parallel for America today. For more than two centuries America has grown to become the single greatest nation ever to exist. Even today, with severe internal problems and great challenges from hostile nations, it remains the world’s most influential power and its strongest economy.

In spite of its problems, its influence for good in a troubled world is immense. A world without America would be a different and far more dangerous world. Just as God used ancient Israel as a counter to other nations, so today America is an indispensable power used by God to advance His greater purpose and prophetic plan for mankind.

Israel at the time of Amos

Let’s look closer at the nation of Israel. In about the year 782 B.C., a king called Jeroboam II ruled Israel. He was a strong leader who brought a renewed power and wealth to the nation.

He restored the nation’s borders. He opened the trade

routes so that the economy once again began to grow, and wealth flowed into the nation. Israel began to prosper within the global economy of the day. Ships and caravans carried goods from Africa into Asia and throughout the Mediterranean world.

The middle-class citizen of Israel or Judah was perhaps as well off as at any time before. It was a euphoric period of optimism. The level of prosperity was greater than anyone could remember. It’s likely that Israel was trading with every significant nation of the region at that time. It was an ancient period of globalization.

But Israel’s prosperity caused it to forget *the true source* of its wealth. *God* was the cause of such power and wealth. The nation had long since abandoned faith and belief in God even though some outwardly professed belief in the God of Abraham. Instead, the pagan cult of Baal was firmly rooted in the culture. People worshipped at pagan altars more than at the temple of the true God in Jerusalem.

Paganism replaced the truths of God. The new religion hid Israel’s identity as God’s special covenant people. The true God was hidden from the people.

History repeats itself with America today

The same situation exists in America today. While America experiences unrivaled prosperity and freedom, it fails to understand the true source of its blessings. Americans think that their wisdom and ingenuity have achieved greatness. But

in truth, the United States has received its wealth and power from God through the promises He made to the patriarch Abraham.

When an early American statesman recognized that an angel rode in the storm over

the country’s founding, it was not his imagination. America’s creation was according to a divine plan. God was fulfilling a promise made long ago to His servant Abraham. That promise has been a blessing for the modern world.

The message Amos took to Israel has significance to America in the 21st century. America faces the same problems today that ancient Israel did so many centuries ago. The good times for Israel were about to end. What was thought to be unending wealth was merely a final revival before the fall.

It was during this prosperous period that Amos came on the scene with a warning message that goes to the seat of political and religious power. Amos saw a nation awash in a sea of lies. Everywhere he looked he found untruth, injustice and inequity. Under the veneer of stability and prosperity, he saw a decaying structure on the verge of collapse.

He was quick to give God’s verdict on the nation: “This is what the LORD says: *‘The people of Israel have sinned again and again, and I will not forget it. I will not let them go unpunished any longer!’*” (Amos 2:6, New Living Translation 1996, emphasis added throughout).

God’s message from an unexpected messenger

Amos was not a traditional religious figure. He felt a unique and divine call to deliver God’s message to the nation. He

was not part of the mainstream religion. He could speak to the heart of the problem. He was not defending a position, but rather merely speaking the truth. Spiritual truth was gone from the nation.

Amos was a sheepbreeder who shepherded his own flocks and tended sycamore fig trees. He was not trained as a theologian or a priestly religious teacher. He was a commonsense man of the field who understood how life worked at the most fundamental level. He worked with animals that depended on him for survival. The health of his flocks determined whether his family would prosper. He understood life and death, good times and lean times.

Kings in palaces surrounded by wealth and power did not impress him. He knew that the king ruled only by the grace and will of God and that if that king misused his office, good people in the small towns suffered. Amos feared God more than he feared any man. He was the right man God could use to warn the nation.

He carried a message from God that was like the roar of a lion. Amos indicted all the nations of the region for their foreign and domestic policies that led to war, treachery and regional instability.

He didn't spare the people of Judah or Israel. No policy escaped his withering evaluation. He said God would judge those of the nation because "they have perverted justice by selling honest people for silver and poor people for a pair of sandals. They trample helpless people in the dust and deny justice to those who are oppressed" (Amos 2:6-7, NLT 1996).

Great sins of injustice and inequity

Societal justice was high on Amos' list of problems to bring

to the attention of the kingdom. The wealth flowing into the nation was not being used to establish a culture rooted in God's law. Israel had long before abandoned the foundational social economic system that God had enshrined in law.

The entire national structure was not working. Religion was corrupted. Government was broken. Underneath the facade of prosperity and order, societal injustice and inequity were draining the life out of the people.

Nations can linger for a long time in spite of significant structural problems. Israel's days as a nation were numbered, but the people didn't realize it. *Amos did*. He had the unenviable job of bringing the message.

Does this sound all too familiar? America is very much like this today. The recently completed national election was

Amos was a shepherd, not a trained theologian or religious teacher. He was a commonsense man of the field who understood how life worked.

in large part about the economy—the money in the pockets, or more properly the money that is *not* in the pockets—of the middle class working people.

In spite of the wealth of the nation, many clearly felt a growing sense that the future for them holds only stagnation and uncertainty. A growing number of people believe that life will not improve—that the American dream of financial security and progress will not happen. And there is plenty of reason to believe their fears are well founded.

Unemployment and underemployment figures reveal a great disparity in wealth and growing inability to fix the systemic problems. One proposed solution is to increase taxes on the wealthy to pay for job growth programs or to fund social

Major Challenges Facing America

After a very bitter and long election, Donald Trump takes office at a critical moment in American and world history. As he takes office he faces many challenges.

America's role in the world has dramatically changed over the last eight years, a fact recognized by foreign policy experts. Its historic and prophetic role could be turning in a different direction. Let's look at a list of those challenges.

• **Russia** has been aggressively extending its reach and influence. It seized the Crimean Peninsula and other parts of the territory of Ukraine and has been engaged in a low-intensity war with that nation for several years. Russian planes have buzzed U.S. Navy ships in the Baltic

Sea. NATO and American aircraft have been harassed by Russian aircraft.

Russia's backing of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has prolonged Syria's civil war and the suffering of its citizens. American diplomatic efforts regarding the conflict have been frustrated by Russia's involvement.

When Europe has faltered, Russia has been quick to exploit its weakness—desiring to see a fractured European Union rather than a unified bloc of nations.

Given past history, Russia has reason to fear a powerful and cohesive Europe. However, provoking Europe into a reactionary posture, given the stress it has from the massive influx of immigrants

from the Middle East, could lead to ominous developments.

• **China's** relationship with America is changing. China seeks to replace America's longstanding influence in Asia. It is rapidly expanding its navy and its interests with regional neighbors like the Philippines and Australia. China wants to be the arbiter of relations between Asian Pacific nations.

Disputes with Japan over joint claims to Pacific islands aggravate the historic bad blood between the two nations. If armed conflict were to arise between the two, America would be treaty bound to support Japan with military force.

China holds more than a trillion dollars of U.S. debt. This fact handicaps America's



programs. Yet putting money into the hands of the government has repeatedly shown that while government's size and number of employees grows, the number of people mired in poverty remains largely unchanged.

Sadly, the economic system we have, with cronyism and collusion, is not fair in many respects. Hacked e-mails of government insiders have revealed a cozy insiders' club where the elites float easily between big corporate interests, government, academia and lobbying—all the while increasing their net worth exponentially.

This inequity has contributed to a culture of anger and distrust of the ruling class. In the time of Amos there was a growing gap between rich and poor, as people increasingly

took advantage of others. History repeats today. The result is severe social problems that “trample helpless people in the dust.”

What would Amos say today?

Amos looked at the state of Israel in his day and saw little left to salvage. The moral and ethical condition of the state was precarious.

In his summation, Amos saw a vision of God and a time of judgment on the nation when all would come crashing down: “I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and He said: ‘Strike the doorposts, that the thresholds may shake, and break them on the heads of them all. I will slay the last of them with the sword . . . I will set My eyes on them for harm and not for good’” (Amos 9:1-4).

Amos' message applies today to the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia and other English-speaking peoples of the world who have sprung from common ancestors. Today's headlines can be found in these prophecies given to Israel nearly 2,800 years ago.

This is a strong warning. It comes from God and directly applies today to America. This is a time for the nation and any who will listen to carefully heed what God said through a prophet in that ancient time. While there may not be a prophet like Amos to walk into the office of a president today, there are still the words of God that speak directly to the nations and their leaders.

Imagine what a prophet of God might say today to the new American president. Perhaps it might include something like this: “You are coming into office at the most critical moment in America's history. America's position in the world faces the greatest challenges since the end of World War II. The nation's enemies are at the gates. The handwriting is on the wall. The security and prosperity of this nation and the maintenance

ability to effectively deal with serious issues like Chinese cyberhacking and the creation of a hostile business environment for American companies.

Despite diplomatic smiles, China wants to assert itself as the dominant world power.

World leaders wish that China would rein in North Korea's nuclear program. The unstable rogue regime of Kim Jong Un is China's client. It suits China's interests to give North Korea a long leash. No one knows how much control and influence China has with North Korea. One wild action could create a nuclear conflagration that could spin out of control.

• **Radical Islamic terrorism** has not disappeared. ISIS, Iran and al-Qaeda have



Shanghai—symbol of China's growing power

grown in their capacity to attack global targets. Their ability to strike is wider and deeper than it has been for years.

Over the last eight years America's economic debt has doubled to nearly 20 trillion dollars. This huge, incomprehensible figure represents another significant national security threat. You don't have to be an expert to look at this and wonder what keeps America economically viable in the world. The unrecognized fact is

that God is, for the time being, keeping America strong and prosperous in spite of this and many other glaring problems.

God is the “angel in the storm” who continues to watch over the United States of America. The long and prosperous history of the nation is testimony to God's enduring faithfulness to His promises to create this single great nation in the modern world.

While nations like Iran, China, Russia and North Korea and desperate terror groups like ISIS plot and wish to dislodge the United States from its position as the dominating world power, the fact is that they cannot until God removes His hand of blessing from America.

America and its new president have a moment of reprieve. There is time to hear a message of hope and to turn to God in heartfelt repentance.

of the current world order are at stake. Many wonder what your administration will do to meet the challenges and lead the country. The choice is yours as to which way you, and the nation, will go!” No doubt there would also be admonishment to turn to God and follow His ways.

Holding back the storm

Right now I hope you’re asking yourself some critical questions. Your life is comfortable. You have concerns about the present state of affairs, but America has always pulled through—and of course it is still the strongest nation in the world. What do you have to worry about?

The truth is, America without God holding back the storm is in a very dangerous place. This is a tough message to accept and believe, and most people are too distracted with life and don’t believe it’s possible for America or the West to falter. God and the Bible have largely disappeared from public life. Many no longer know where to go for understanding and hope.

What is critical for you to understand is that God is patient. He is merciful. *But He is also a God of judgment.* God is the epitome of patience, waiting long for sinners to repent. But at the time of Amos’ writing, His patience with Israel was rapidly running out. God had said, “*I will spare them no longer*” (Amos 7:8, NIV). And after showing Amos a basket of mature summer fruit, He sternly stated, “The time is ripe for my people Israel; *I will spare them no longer*” (Amos 8:2, NIV).

What will you do?

What can you do? Honestly, you are not going to change the course of this world, this nation and God’s plan for the nations. But you can let what you see stir you to a passion for God and His way. You can do as Amos warned his hearers, to grieve for the ruin of the nation.

You can also make intercession to God for America. Like other prophets before him, Amos did this. Notice that when God foretold a plague on the nation, Amos begged: “Sovereign LORD, forgive! How can Jacob [Israel] survive? He is so small!” (Amos 7:2, NIV). God relented. Again God said He would bring a fire to scourge the land. Amos pleaded: “Sovereign LORD, I beg you, stop! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!” (verse 5, NIV). And again God held back.

Why would God do this? *Because He does hear the prayer of a righteous man.* Scripture shows God hearing prayers of His faithful servants when they offer heartfelt intercessory prayer. God is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11). He wants you to repent, to change, to turn your life around and stop the cycle of sin, suffering and death. He wants you *to turn and to live.*

But Amos’ account also shows that even God’s mercy has limits. The sins of Israel were so great that God reached His limit. He said, “*I will spare them no longer.*”

God then began rendering His judgment on Israel. The nation soon fell into sharp decline and, about 20 years after Amos ended his prophecies, most of the northern kingdom of Israel was taken captive by the Assyrian Empire and scattered



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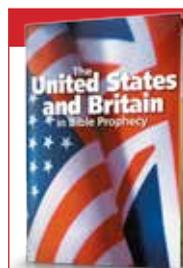
among the nations—and the remainder were taken away a little over a decade later. But even with this, God said there would be a future for the people, a regathering. He would not totally destroy the people of Israel. History and prophecy show this has happened.

Today America, Great Britain, Canada and Australia—the major English-speaking nations of the world—are proof of God’s enduring promise to fulfill His word made to His servant Abraham and his descendants. This little-known key to understanding history and the Bible is the missing element in studying modern world affairs.

The same God today stands in the darkening storms that hover over the nations. For the moment He is shielding America and the other English-speaking nations from those who would attack and bring unspeakable destruction. While we trust in our armies and intelligence to keep the walls secure, God’s Word reveals the *true* source of our blessing and security—*He* is our refuge and our source of blessing.

It’s time that this nation humbles itself in a deep and heartfelt repentance, unlike anything that has ever been seen. America, as a world power, needs a great awakening of historic proportions.

We stand at a pivotal moment of opportunity. It’s up to you to allow this warning to make a difference in your life. Make the right choice! **BT**



LEARN MORE

The United States and Britain both grew from insignificant beginnings into the most dominant powers the world has ever seen. And this was foretold in the pages of your Bible! Download or request our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy.*

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After eight years of liberal policies and programs dominating the American political and social scene, could a new presidential administration make a difference in America's direction?

by Mike Kelley

America and the world watched transfixed as the roller coaster 2016 U.S. presidential campaign finally came to its conclusion on November 8. The surprises and revelations continued right up through election night when billionaire real estate developer Donald Trump shocked the world by winning the presidency.

Perhaps not since Abraham Lincoln was elected in 1860 has a U.S. election laid bare the deep divisions among Americans. It became, more than any other election in recent memory, a contest between two visions of America. Supporting Mr. Trump were those who saw him as a political outsider not beholden to the power elites, a candidate with a new vision for America that rejects the overreach of a hyper-liberal agenda that attacked traditional Judeo-Christian values.

Hillary Clinton, a social activist since the late 1960s, campaigned on a promise to continue the Obama vision of federal government solutions to most of America's problems at home and subordination of U.S. interests abroad as a recipe for peace and stability while continuing his progressive social agenda of government health care, support for gay rights, and open door immigration policies.

The clash of values escalated tensions between the heartland's traditional values and the progressive vision popular

on both the East and West Coasts. Liberal progressives even admitted as much. "We have two cultures in this nation," said MSNBC political analyst Nicole Wallace. "Millions of Americans feel alienated by the cultural elites on both coasts. They are tired of being talked down to."

Donald Trump tapped into the anger and frustration of millions of Americans fed up with a progressive, socialist, ever-bigger-government path and growing government hostility toward traditional American values.

Election post-mortem

For much of his campaign, Mr. Trump did not sound "presidential." And his repeated attacks on the prevailing philosophy of cultural progressives enraged the mainstream media, who in spite of their claims of objectivity could not resist bashing the Republican candidate at every opportunity.

Many voters took note of the media piling onto Mr. Trump mostly for things he said, some of which were indeed egregious, while largely ignoring Mrs. Clinton's actual misdeeds. Afterward, some mainstream journalists admitted as much. "We in the media considered his remarks worse, but it is obvious the average voter did not see it this way. They saw her email scandals as equally incriminating," admitted MSNBC's Wallace the night after the election.

In the election post-mortem, some observers pointed out how the Democratic Party, long seen as the friend of the working class, appears to have turned on its base of voters by promoting economic policies and regulations that effectively closed American factories, moved millions of jobs overseas and imported millions of immigrants to compete with American workers for scarce jobs. Mr. Trump campaigned on a platform of building a wall along the southern border and bringing jobs back to American shores.

With personal wealth of more than \$3 billion, Mr. Trump was able to self-finance his primary campaign and much of his presidential campaign. His disavowal of financial allegiance to any political party or interest group proved intoxicating to millions of voters disgusted at the huge campaign contributions to both Democrats and traditional Republicans from special interests.

How will he govern? What is his agenda?

With his election accompanied by Republican control of both houses of Congress, Mr. Trump is seen to have at least a two-year window of opportunity to bring about the changes his administration seeks. Leading U.S. conservatives are urging him to act without delay.

“The historic opportunity he and the Republican Party have been given by his stunning victory of November 8 will not last long,” wrote conservative commentator Pat Buchanan in a Nov. 10 column. “His adversaries and enemies in politics and the press are only temporarily dazed and reeling. This great opening should be exploited now.”

Reinvigorating the economy?

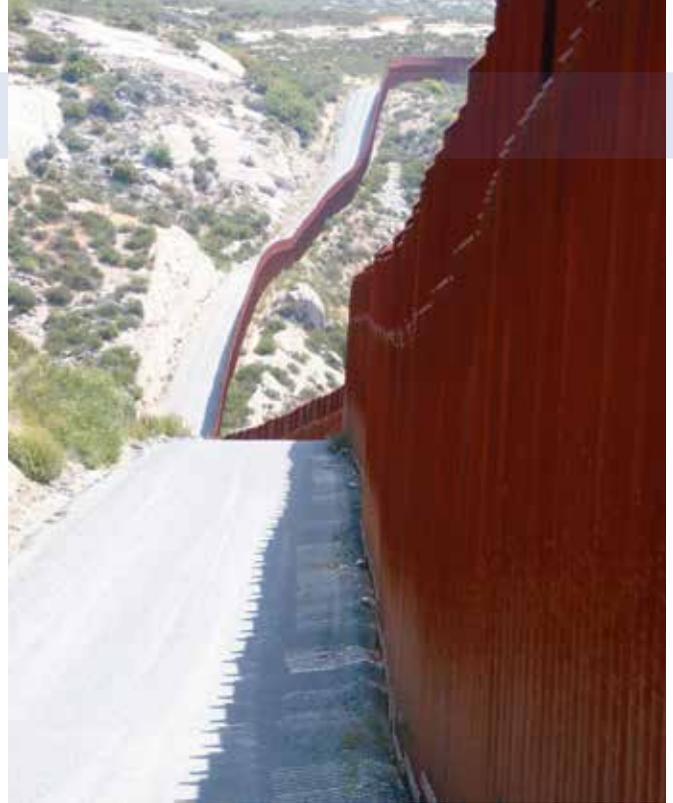
As has been the case in most recent U.S. presidential elections, economic issues were again at the forefront of concern for most voters.

A return to strong economic growth is at the core of Mr. Trump’s economic plan. Through a program of tax cuts on corporations and individuals, regulatory reform and other economic incentives, he wants to increase the growth rate of the nation’s Gross Domestic Product to 3.5 percent per year from the present rate of 1.5 and create 25 million new U.S. jobs over the next decade.

His tax cut plan, outlined on his website, would focus tax cuts on working and middle-income taxpayers. According to his plan, a married couple making \$75,000 a year with two children would see their annual income taxes drop by 30 percent. His carrot-and-stick approach to corporations would cut corporate tax rates from 35 percent (one of the highest rates in the world) to 15 percent (to encourage corporations and jobs to move back to the states), but hit American companies operating overseas with a 10 percent tax on repatriated earnings—strong coercion for them to move back.

Mr. Trump also placed the blame for the loss of American jobs on globalization policies that he says have “pushed American jobs out of the country.” He has pledged to protect U.S. jobs and create new ones with policies that encourage new business formation while encouraging existing businesses to maintain their U.S. workforces. His plans also include rolling back unnecessary regulations that cost corporations and their customers billions of dollars.

In campaign speeches across the industrial heartland, he



severely criticized the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and its ideological cousin, the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), as job killers. He has vowed to renegotiate trade deals on terms more favorable to America, while also threatening stiff tariffs on companies that move jobs overseas and bring their products back into the United States.

Could these plans reinvigorate the stalled U.S. economy? Some conservatives have spoken against protectionist measures. Others point to how bad things have been, with economic growth averaging an anemic 1.55 percent the last eight years and tens of millions of Americans being out of work or underemployed.

Resurgence of traditional values?

In his presidential campaign, Mr. Trump spoke to the concerns of millions of Americans who feel their traditional values have been trampled by a wave of progressive thought over the past several decades. Even many who saw him as morally objectionable nevertheless voted for him as what they considered the better alternative.

By all accounts, left-leaning judges and the U.S. Supreme Court have been the ideological ally of the progressive movement. President-elect Trump’s administration will have the opportunity to change that with the immediate appointment of a conservative to replace Justice Antonin Scalia, who died in February 2016. Mr. Trump may have the chance to increase the conservative stature of the court with the replacement of three other Supreme Court justices over age 80, two of whom take liberal stances. But it remains to be seen what he will do.

In the national debate over abortion, pro-life advocates see hope for the eventual overturning of the infamous 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision that has led to the murder of some 60 million unborn children in America. Proponents of traditional values will work to find just the right case to again bring the issue before what they hope will be a more conservative, pro-life court.

“We are going to appoint great Supreme Court justices . . . These will be justices of great intellect . . . And they will be pro-life,” Mr. Trump said at a gathering of Christian conserva-

tives in June 2016. During the campaign he released a list of 21 conservative judges he could nominate for the court.

Mr. Trump has voiced a strong commitment to the Second Amendment right to bear arms. His campaign platform calls for “national right to carry”—legalizing open-firearms carry in all 50 states. Using familiar Trump-style language, his website says, “Law enforcement does a tremendous job, but they can’t be everywhere all the time.”

Rebuilding national defense

On the campaign trail, Mr. Trump pledged to put American interests first, a position dear to millions of Americans but anathema to the left and those who feel America should simply “play nicely in the sandbox of nations.”

Mr. Trump campaigned on a platform of building a wall along the southern border and bringing jobs back to American shores.



His platform calls for a resurgence of the U.S. military, reversing a trend that has seen a gradual reduction of U.S. Army forces from about 550,000 when Barack Obama took office in 2008 to a projected 460,000 by 2017. He has called for an immediate 85,000-troop boost to the Army, rebuilding the U.S. Navy to 350 ships, and growth of the Marine Corps to 36 full-strength battalions. He plans to pay for this by eliminating wasteful defense procurement practices and unnecessary federal programs.

In foreign policy, Mr. Trump has said that his administration would end current policies of regime change and nation-building, while working with Arab allies in the Middle East to erase the ISIS threat. He wants a new approach to Russia, thinking that he can work with Russian President Vladimir Putin to ease tensions. (However, some are quite troubled at the idea of a Trump-Putin friendship.)

Mr. Trump made illegal immigration a central campaign issue, focusing especially on illegal immigrants from Mexico and Central America. While many observers are skeptical of his plans to build a wall along the border with Mexico to prevent illegal immigration, most see his call for stricter vetting of immigrants as gaining traction under his administration.

It is his position on the immigration of Muslims into the United States that has drawn perhaps the greatest fire. In the face of recent terrorist attacks by Muslims in Europe and the United States, Mr. Trump has called for tougher background checks on immigrants from predominantly Muslim nations. President-elect Trump sees his role as commander in chief as doing what it takes to maintain national security, both internally as well as around the world.

Strengthening of Europe?

While not as widely reported, Mr. Trump has argued that America’s NATO allies in Europe and such Asian allies as Japan and South Korea shoulder more responsibility for their own defense, including paying what he terms their fair share of military costs.

His rhetoric has European leaders worried. Coming on the heels of the late June 2016 vote by the United Kingdom to exit the European Union (see “Brexit: What Does It Mean for Your World?” in our September-October 2016 issue), European leaders have stepped up their

calls for a European defense force, one composed of soldiers from all or most of the EU nations.

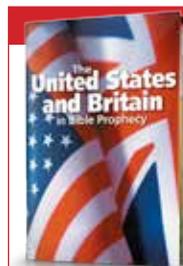
This has prophetic implications. For nearly half a century, *Beyond Today* and its predecessor publications have predicted the rise of a major power in Europe, one formed as an outgrowth of the present European Union.

With a population in excess of 450 million and a larger combined economy than that of America, this superpower could act as a roaring lion on the world stage, exerting power and influence across the globe. Bible prophecy reveals, in Revelation 17, that such a power would be mainly controlled by 10 national leaders who “give their power and authority” to a strong dictator the Bible refers to as “the beast.”

Interesting times ahead

One thing is for sure: Interesting times are ahead as America struggles for its identity and future in a population divided between fiercely opposite and contradictory visions. Will the new president follow through on his promises? Will the nation make real changes for the better, or continue its pattern of decline?

The nation and the world will be watching the new Trump administration. In turn, you also need to be watching Europe and the world, taking particular note of how the American people and other nations and leaders react to potential major shifts in American policy. The future of the nation—as well as your personal future—could depend on it! [BT](#)



LEARN MORE

The amazing story of America’s rise—and of its inevitable decline—were foretold long ago in the Bible. You need to understand what the Bible says is coming, and why! Download or request our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

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Europe pulled apart and together at the same time

The Brexit vote in Britain to leave the European Union has provoked a great deal of anger at Britain by many in Europe, but it has also served as encouragement to many other Europeans to focus on preserving their own individual nations and cultures against pan-Europeanism and immigration from the Muslim Middle East and North Africa—and it has led to growing support for nationalist or “far right” parties.

December 2016 saw an unsuccessful nationalist bid for the presidency in Austria, but the far right there made it farther than before in its efforts. At the same time, a referendum in Italy in which constitutional reforms centralizing power were rejected led to the resignation of the pro-EU prime minister. Elections coming in May in France and September in Germany may see significant showings by nationalist parties.

At the same time, European leaders, worried about Britain’s exit and the election of Donald Trump in the United States on top of longstanding concerns over Russia and Islamic terrorism, are looking toward increased integration, including militarily. Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission, mounted a fresh call for a European army, claiming: “The Americans will not see to Europe’s security forever. We have to do it ourselves” (*Daily Mail*, Nov. 10, 2016).

This echoed similar sentiments by Germany’s defense minister. Some are even calling for Germany to take up the leadership of the free world in lieu of the United States (*Foreign Affairs*, Nov. 16, 2016). But it certainly does not have the means for that role, despite its dominance over the EU.

The Bible prophesied a series of revivals of the Roman Empire in Europe, which have included the Holy Roman Empire of the Middle Ages, Napoleon’s French Empire and the Hitler-Mussolini Axis of World War II.

And these were but forerunners of the culmination of this system in a final revival to appear shortly before Christ’s return, with 10 leaders giving power to a single ruler for a very short time (see Daniel 2 and 7 and Revelation 13 and 17, esp. verses 12-13). This power will ultimately be an enemy to the United States and Britain. But how will we arrive at that predicament?



Some European leaders are calling for Germany to take a greater leadership roll in the world.

With the Brexit vote and a new direction for the United States, Europe may be forced to become more cohesive to preserve its union, or supranationalism may be widely rejected in favor of individual nation states. Some students of Bible prophecy have the idea that Europe’s principal players like Germany, Italy or France could not leave the European Union—and that the EU will smoothly transition into the biblical revival laid out above.

But the Bible doesn’t say this. In fact, the Bible refers to the final union as partly strong and partly fragile, with its members not binding together well (Daniel 2:42-43). The increased power of the nation-states in EU governance, as recently noted by former

European Commission president Romano Prodi (*Daily Express*, Nov. 28, 2016), actually accords well with the Bible’s reference to 10 rulers supporting a central power for only a short time.

It’s possible that the present EU could crumble, with even central members leaving, only to reappear in a new form. On the other hand, the present EU could just as well remain essentially intact and still transition to what the Bible foretells. We must not be dogmatic in this regard, as the Bible is not.

In any case, much has to change to bring about what the Bible foretells. For instance, the Bible says that the world will marvel at the rise of the Beast and its unrivaled war-making capacity (Revelation 13:4). The current push for a European military seems a likely step toward this, but it does not explain how European military might will be as great and unrivaled as the Bible says it will be.

There is reasonable conjecture as to how this could come about—though insufficient space here to go into and something to explore at a later time. Another example is the Bible showing Europe dominated by a strong Roman Church, whereas Europe is presently very secular. Perhaps a backlash against Islamist encroachment will drive a return to tradition.

Rising nationalism fits in with this. Already “one in three Germans feel they are ‘strangers in their own country’ due to ‘Muslim infiltration’” (*Daily Mail*, Nov. 23, 2016). But the degree of backlash would need to be vastly greater than it is now—as certainly seems likely eventually.

It’s important that we remain alert to ongoing developments in Europe and the Middle East while keeping in mind what Bible prophecy reveals. Scripture is the only sure guide to understanding where matters will finally end up—and to knowing what you need to do in the face of it all. (Sources: Sky News, *Daily Mail*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Daily Express*.)

Ohio State knife attack proves ISIS tactics working

The “lone wolf” terrorist attack seen often in Israel and Europe of late has spread to America. This time the scene was Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. In similar instances of violence, the attacker, while working alone to pull off the attack, has been linked to ISIS, with the group publicly taking responsibility for inspiring such terrorist attacks through its media efforts.

As a *Financial Times* column reported, ISIS similarly did so the day after the violence at Ohio State: “On Tuesday [Nov. 29] Isis claimed responsibility for the attack, calling [the attacker] Artan a ‘soldier’ of the militant group. It released a short statement on Amaq, its news agency, which claimed that the attack had been a ‘response to calls’ to target citizens of countries fighting the group. The language was similar to previous claims of responsibility by Isis where the group has not had direct contact with the attacker, but where its propaganda has played a role” (Shawn Donnan and Geoff Dyer, “Ohio State Attack Claimed by Isis as Investigation Continues,” Nov. 29, 2016).

The attacker, Abdul Razak Ali Artan, a Somali-born student at the university, represents the new face of hidden radicalism. Authorities keep close tabs on those they suspect of being linked to groups like ISIS or al-Qaeda, but as Andrew Welsh-Huggins reported for the Associated Press, Artan was an unknown entity: “Artan was not known to FBI counterterrorism authorities before Monday’s rampage, Angela Byers, the FBI’s special agent in charge in Cincinnati, said” (“Ohio State Knife Attacker Was ‘Nice Guy’ but Unknown to Many,” Dec. 1, 2016).

While there were no fatalities as a result of Artan’s rampage, it wasn’t for lack of trying. Artan first drove his car into pedestrians on a campus sidewalk, hitting six, then began slashing anyone within reach with a butcher knife, injuring five more before he was shot dead by a campus policeman.

His methodology is all too familiar after a string of similar attacks starting in late 2015 in Israel, with 48 vehicular attacks and 167 stabbings that killed 42 and injured more than 600. Other notable similar attacks were the Bastille Day tragedy in Nice, France, which saw 85 dead after an ISIS-inspired terrorist drove a truck into the crowds, and the September knife attack at a Minnesota mall that injured eight. ISIS’ tactic of inspiring radicalized Muslim youth abroad is working and is reaching communities the world over. (Source: *Financial Times*, Associated Press.)

Mideast Christians face fears, questions following ISIS occupation

Even if Iraqi forces and their supporters are able to push the Islamic State or ISIS out of its foothold in Iraq, prospects are not good for one of the most persecuted and brutalized groups fighting for liberation from ISIS—Middle Eastern Christians. The native Christian populaces of Syria and Iraq had already been enduring persecution, but the rise of ISIS resulted in unimaginable suffering for them. And progress made by others against ISIS is no guarantee of the Christians' peace and safety.

Christian Post reporter Samuel Smith wrote a piece exposing fears and anxieties for Iraqi Christians as they move forward after ISIS occupation: "Although Iraqi-

led coalition forces are fighting to liberate Mosul and many Christian villages in the Nineveh Plains from IS (also known as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh), much uncertainty remains about what the future will look like for Iraqi Christians in their ancient homelands" ("Iraqi Chris-

Ancient Christian communities in Iraq have suffered greatly during years of brutal ISIS occupation.

tians Fear Persecution in Post-ISIS Iraq," Nov. 24, 2016).

These communities are bravely rebuilding after being engulfed in ISIS' brutal occupation, but the road ahead is a long one, with much of the region devastated: "Simply rebuilding many of the Christian towns

in the region will be a years-long undertaking . . . The town of Qaraqosh, which was once home to 50,000 Christians, has been 65 percent destroyed" (ibid.).

These and similar stories are a chilling reminder that even in our modern world, worship at times comes

with serious dangers, as these people have been killed, tortured and brutalized simply for identifying as followers of Christ.

We in Western societies should not take our precious freedom of religion for granted and should take full advantage of this freedom while God allows us to have it. (Source: *The Christian Post*.)

A weaker but bolder Russia

Recently *The Wall Street Journal* reported that Russia's involvement in the Syrian conflict—helping President Bashar al-Assad in fighting against Islamist forces seeking his ouster—has given some insight into Russian military capabilities:

"The quarter-century-old [flagship aircraft carrier] Kuznetsov lacks the kind of powerful catapult system that is featured on U.S. carriers,

training flight on an approach to the carrier" (Nathan Hodge and Julian Barnes, "Russian Campaign in Syria Exposes Moscow's Defense Gaps," Nov. 28, 2016).

The world feels ever-more fragile as powers are starting to shift and move. It's clear that other nations are ready to move into the world power seat that has been America's for about a century. Russia being not so mighty as it once was may be comforting to some, but it could mean Russia has less to lose in making a bold move.

Whatever happens with Russia's involvement in Syria, the world is on the cusp of a turning point. God foretells a time of trouble coming to the world like we have never seen. A marked increase in wars and rumors of wars is a prelude to a time so severe that unless those days are cut short "no flesh would be saved [alive]; but

for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:6-8, 22).

Thankfully God will be merciful and send His Son Jesus Christ back to establish world peace at long last. No longer will headlines scare us, and peace will then rule in all nations. (Source: *The Wall Street Journal*.)

Astrophysicist: Earth, humans are special in the universe

Continued forays into astrophysics and the laws underlying the universe lead to the conclusion that our world and the human race are special.

In a Thanksgiving column for *The Washington Post*, Harvard astrophysicist Howard Smith reflects on the fact that modern astronomy allows us to view ourselves as cosmically special:

"Some of my colleagues strongly reject this notion . . . All the observations so far, however, are consistent with the idea that humanity is not mediocre at all and that we won't know otherwise for a long time. It seems we might even serve some cosmic role. So this season let us be grateful for the amazing gifts of life and awareness, and acknowledge the compelling evidence to date that humanity and our home planet, Earth, are rare and cosmically precious" ("Humanity Is Cosmically Special. Here's How We Know," Nov. 25, 2016).

In an increasingly secular, naturalistic society, with academics all too ready to reject God as Creator and man's place in God's creation, it's refreshing to see a voice stand up and proclaim, based on his experience and knowledge of the universe, that we are in fact a marvel in this vast universe and that, as he put it, "we might even serve some cosmic role."

Christians know that role is to be children in God's very own family—a marvelous purpose indeed. Send for or download our free study guide *Why Were You Born?* to learn more. (Source: *The Washington Post*.)



forcing Russian planes to carry lighter payloads and less fuel, according to North Atlantic Treaty Organization officials. And a dearth of highly trained aviators able to take off and land at sea has forced the ship to carry fewer pilots, according to Western officials. Moscow already lost one jet fighter when it crashed this month during a

How can you make sense of the news?

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The Radical New Morality

Where Will It Lead?

The Western world is seeing dramatic shifts that are reshaping society in powerful ways. What's going on, and why? Where is it leading?

by Mike Kelley

A look back over 2016 America reveals an unmistakable reality—the growing alienation of the nation from God and traditional morality. Poll after recent poll confirms the continuing drift of the United States from a belief in God and traditional values towards a humanist view that promotes radical new views on abortion, homosexuality, gender identity, assisted suicide, human cloning and a host of other issues.

No doubt about it, in the race for the affection and admiration of the general public, God seems to be trailing.

Even belief in God's existence is crumbling, according to the Pew Research Center findings published May 12, 2015. Surveys of 35,000 adults representing a cross section of America, taken from 2007 to 2014, showed Americans who describe themselves as "atheist" or "agnostic" jumping from 16.1 percent to 22.8 percent, a nearly 7 percent rise in just seven years ("America's Changing Religious Landscape," The Pew Research Center).

Not surprisingly, society's embrace of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender lifestyles has grown in proportion to the erosion of belief in God and the moral teachings of the Bible. A Gallup poll also conducted in May 2015 showed 53 percent of Americans saying that gay and lesbian lifestyles were morally acceptable.

State laws outlawing homosexual behavior have been

struck down. Homosexual "marriage," a contradiction of terms, is now the law throughout the land, even in states where it's still opposed by the majority of citizens.

Clearly, the nation whose money says "In God We Trust" has largely ceased to respect and follow God's teachings.

The new morality

How has this happened? One has to go back to the time after the Second World War. For about 20 years after 1945, the nation experienced a time of both sound basic morality and strong economic growth, with morality based on what are described today as "traditional values."

The first major assault came in the mid-1960s. The "Greatest Generation" watched its baby boomer children march off either to college or to war. The college-bound experienced attacks on their belief in God and traditional values by humanist, often atheist, professors. Those slogging through the rice paddies of Vietnam began to question the ethical foundation of the war.

In what became known as "the New Morality," millions of Americans embraced a new lifestyle of free sex, drugs and a general revolt against morality as it had been known. Millions of baby boomers lauded this as long-sought freedom, with no more shackles on free sex or drug use. "If it feels good, do it" became the slogan of the era.

But the consequences of this torrent of illicit sex



brought on millions of unwed mothers, illegitimate children, a spike in venereal disease and broken homes. Unrestrained drug abuse brought with it chemical dependency, horrible LSD “trips” and minds permanently damaged.

Traditional morality made somewhat of a comeback in the 1980s as the baby boomers matured, got jobs and started families. A decade that saw the growth of televangelism and Ronald Reagan elected president also showed a resurgence of values.

But by the close of the 20th century, standards began to slide again. Poll after poll documented the shift toward

Society’s embrace of homosexual and transgender lifestyles has grown in proportion to the erosion of belief in God and the moral teachings of the Bible.

what might today be termed “the Radical New Morality” of acceptance of beliefs and philosophies most would not have tolerated even in the 1970s.

The 21st century has brought a renewed assault on values. With acceptance of evolution and the new god of secular humanism now firmly entrenched in the educational system, America’s children have been taught to discard all traditional values and morality as irrelevant and useless. Acceptance of abortion, gay marriage, assisted suicide and even polygamy soared.

Many do not fully understand just how quickly society has changed. With increasing speed, America and the Western world are coming to accept practices and modes

of life that were almost universally condemned as evil even in the 1990s.

Welcome to the radical new morality

History has a way of repeating itself. The consequences of this brave new world of total toleration, total license and total freedom make those of the 1960s seem almost tame by comparison.

How did we come to this? Casting God out of the schools was the first step. A series of U.S. Supreme Court decisions beginning with the 1962 and 1963 bans on prayer and the Bible from schools virtually ordered God, the Bible and the Ten Commandments from our public schools. With the Judeo-Christian ethic effectively barred from the K-12 classroom, a generation further indoctrinated by the secular humanism of the college classroom has come to see religious beliefs and traditional values as no longer relevant to the advancement of society.

A nation obsessed with acceptance of every possible lifestyle has forgotten the stern warning of the God it claims to trust: “*Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness*” (Isaiah 5:20, emphasis added throughout).

The U.S. federal government has made the schools laboratories for social experimentation. In May 2016 the Obama administration, through the Department of Education, issued a directive requiring public schools to allow transgender students to use bathrooms and locker rooms consistent with their “chosen sexual identity.”

In other words, a boy who thinks of himself as a girl can now legally enter a girl’s bathroom, and vice versa. But nothing in this ruling protects the rights of the vast majority of children who want privacy in bathrooms and locker rooms and who might rightfully be shocked by this behavior.

Declining U.S. birthrate?

Though not widely publicized, America’s birthrate has dropped below replacement rate. As *Forbes* reported in early 2015, the official U.S. birthrate per 1,000 women aged 15-44 dropped to 62 per 1,000, the lowest ever recorded, with a fertility rate of 1.87 children over the course of a woman’s lifetime (“U.S. Birthrate Falls Again,” Jan. 28, 2015).

The widening acceptance of gay and lesbian couples, which cannot produce children, causes some observers to question if this will eventually further slow America’s declining overall birthrate.

When the U.S. Supreme Court took up the homosexual marriage issue in 2015, an *amicus curiae* (friend of the court) paper filed on behalf of opponents of gay marriage stated:

“Redefining marriage in genderless terms breaks the critical conceptual link between marriage and procreation

by implicitly endorsing an adult-centric model of marriage, and diluting the implicit encouragement the institution of marriage provides for procreation by married couples. It ignores the inherently generative nature of heterosexual marriages, and sends a powerful message that procreation is not a valued societal priority” (Walter Schumm and Jason Carroll, “How Redefining Marriage Will Make U.S. Birth Rates Fall Even Faster,” LifeSiteNews.com, April 29, 2015).

In plain language, the court brief said increasing acceptance of gay and lesbian marriages sends the message that children—and families—are no longer a priority in American society. Have we stopped to consider the possible consequences of this attitude?

As Schumm and Carroll, quoted above, further point out: “Redefining marriage could have a profoundly negative impact on the United States’ declining fertility rate, *which is already below replacement level*. This would, in turn, increase the likelihood that the United States would face the same socioeconomic problems that plague other countries with sustained, extremely low fertility rates.”

Nations have long recognized that growing populations

eventual surgery when the chances are that they will come to see themselves as they were originally born?

Growing acceptance of polygamy

It turns out that polygamy also benefits from the growing acceptance of gay and lesbian marriage. The May 2015 Gallup poll also revealed that acceptance of polygamy has more than doubled since 2007, from 7 percent to almost 17 percent.

Inspired by LGBT gains in the courts, polygamists are beginning to push for the “right” to multiple wives or husbands. Though still officially banned nationwide, a 2015 *Washington Post* story acknowledged that support is increasing.

The *Post* story cited the role entertainment has played in shaping favorable public opinion on marriage issues, stating: “When Vice President Joe Biden came out in support of same-sex marriage in 2012 . . . he said the television show ‘Will and Grace’ probably did more to educate the public than almost anything else. There’s an argument to make that ‘Sister Wives’ has done the same for polygamists” (*The Washington Post*, July 2, 2015). The TV series *Sister Wives*, a reality TV show, features the real-life

family of Cody Brown, with his four wives and their 18 children.

But if “equality” is the issue here, polygamy flies in the face of the notion of a society that wants to think of itself as becoming more equal. Will the ultimate in toys of the rich include a collection of

wives? Will “harems” come into vogue?

Seeing the tidal wave of progressive, liberal thought sweeping the nation, even conservatives seemingly shrug their shoulders and admit to what is coming. Conservative columnist Ross Douthat had this to say in *The New York Times*: “Is a culture where prominent men routinely have multiple kids with multiple wives across multiple decades going to permanently deny marriage rights to people who want the same thing, except all at once?” (“The Prospects for Polygamy,” July 30, 2015). In his opinion, polygamy might become the law of the land as early as 2040.

One can also easily imagine how this destroys the bond between parents and children. A child would know his or her mother, but would grow up learning that the father merely provided the sperm and perhaps little else.

Sanctity of life under attack

The same May 2015 Gallup poll referred to earlier revealed that 68 percent of Americans support assisted suicide, specifically that “doctors should be legally allowed to assist terminally ill patients in committing suicide.” This figure represented a *10 percent increase in this view from just one year ago*. Very eye-opening was the statistic that an even greater majority, 81 percent, of the 18-34 age group support this form of euthanasia.

What does this portend for the future? At present, euthanasia is done when a person requests it, typically one suffering from terminal illness. But it takes little imagination to foresee a future in which laws will

Are you shocked and dismayed at what is going on, or are you simply resigned to this tidal wave of wholesale breakdown of values?

go hand in hand with national prosperity and security. Since its founding some 240 years ago, America has always enjoyed a steadily rising population and the economic growth that goes along with it. Now economists worry that a possible lack of workers in the near future will jeopardize support of the growing population of retirees—a problem currently faced by Germany and other European nations with stagnant or declining populations.

Blurring of male-female gender identity

The Department of Education’s directive on unisex bathrooms casts the spotlight on the transgender movement unlike nothing before it. For most, the fight boils down to the obvious embarrassment most children will face seeing someone of the opposite sex in their bathroom.

But has it been considered what the move to gender-neutral bathrooms does to gender identity during the crucial early years when children become aware of their sexual identity?

As reported in the July-August 2016 issue of *Beyond Today*, a Johns Hopkins University study found that 70 to 80 percent of children who reported transgender feelings “spontaneously lost those feelings” as they grew older. They simply outgrew them (“Transgender Surgery Isn’t the Solution,” *The Wall Street Journal*, June 12, 2014).

This was especially tragic for young people who had undergone transgender surgery. Does it make sense to give young people the radical treatment of puberty-delaying and gender-reassignment hormone therapy in preparation for

mandate that many considered “not fit to live” could have their lives ended against their will.

Again, history repeats itself. It was in 1939, during the lives of many still living today, when Adolf Hitler had laws passed in Germany that mandated euthanasia for the mentally handicapped, the insane, those with incurable diseases and others whose lives the Nazis felt “were not worth living.”

Is widespread acceptance of assisted suicide the first step down that path? Is growing support of assisted suicide merely the first step in the coarsening of regard for human life? Will it come to be accepted that when Grandpa and Grandma become too much of a burden, we simply give them the pills or lethal injection to “put them out of their misery”?

Let me introduce myself . . . and my clone

Science has made vast strides in the area of cloning, where a cell from a living creature is used to make copies of that creature. It jumped into American consciousness in 1996 with the creation of Dolly the sheep at the Roslin Institute in Midlothian, Scotland, cloned from a cell of another female sheep.

Seeing the possibilities for a source of replacement human organs, a drive in the medical world to advance cloning is taking shape. But where might this lead? A growing number of scientists have come out against cloning, in part because we can’t foretell where this Frankenstein monster may end up.

In Greek mythology, a *chimera* was a creature made up of several animal types. The news media have picked up on this word to describe the creation of human organs inside of animals for the purpose of harvesting those body parts as replacements for those of human beings.

Now some scientists and medical researchers want to go even further. Their goal is development of human embryos, and perhaps even fully developed infants, so their organs can be “harvested” for organ transplants.

Other scientists foresee a future in which “made to order” human beings will be conceived in test tubes, complete with whatever set of genetics the parents may choose for them. Parents could choose not only the sex of the child, but skin color, hair color and other physical traits. They might even pay extra to order customized test-tube children with superior intelligence or athletic skills.

How about one million Einstein clones walking around in the year 2050?

America of 2050?

Let us mentally fast forward to the world of 2050—just 33 years from now—if present trends continue. In a society where the God of the universe has been replaced by the false god of humanism, what would things look like?

Perhaps this:

Total devotion to the comfort and convenience of adults at the expense of the unborn and the very old is now the rule. Continued abortion on demand destroys millions more unborn human lives, while widespread euthanasia eliminates most of the old and diseased.

Complete sexual freedom of every type extended to everyone allows marriage of men to men, women to women, men to multiple wives, women to multiple husbands, and men and women to multiple people of both sexes (assuming people are still defined by gender). People might even be allowed to marry animals—or “non-human citizens.”

With cloning having eliminated the need for marriage to create children, “marriage” (if the term still exists) has degenerated into whatever type of relationship a person desires.

Total acceptance of cloning has created millions of human beings that look and act very much alike, due to having been custom ordered in the test tube. On the other extreme, millions of unfortunate human clones have been created for the purpose of harvesting organs for the fortunate Master Race.

Religion has almost totally disappeared. Church buildings in urban centers have been torn down to make way for high-rise lofts, with perhaps a few preserved as museums. (The only exception might be a massive increase in radical Islam—tolerated out of fear and to help keep Christianity in decline.)

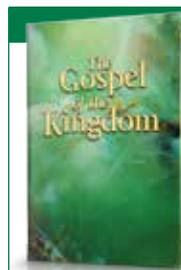
A frightening picture, indeed. As individuals, we cannot stop this mad, headlong rush to this Brave New World. But each of us can take control of our own lives and choose not to be a part of this insanity that mankind is trying to bring upon itself in the name of progress.

In a parallel to our times, the God of the Bible (whose existence *can be proven*) told ancient Israel: “This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now *choose life*, so that you and your children may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19, NIV).

Here, then, is the crucial question: Are you shocked and dismayed at what you see going on around you? Or are you simply resigned to this tidal wave of wholesale breakdown of values disguised as “social change”? As pointed out earlier, most Americans agree with these social changes and are not worried about the consequences.

But perhaps you’re one of those who “sigh and cry over the abominations” you see occurring around you (Ezekiel 9:4). Perhaps you read the news, observe changes in society and shake your head at what you see happening. You’d like to make a difference.

The good news is that a better world *is* coming. The same Bible that prophesied these conditions of today also reveals the coming of One who has the power to clean up this mess. You can be part of the movement to spread the news. You can be part of the solution, not the problem! **BT**



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You don’t have to be swept away by society’s ungodly and anti-biblical thinking. Choose God’s way—to be part of the solution. To learn more about the new world God promises, download or request your free copy of *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

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What's Behind the **CHAOS** in the Middle East?

The world is seeing an increasing number of growing trouble spots. Yet one remains consistent in its ability to dominate the headlines—the Middle East. What's behind its constant turmoil?

by Dan Taylor

Children play in the bombed out rubble of their homes behind a sniper screen made of buses in Aleppo, Syria.

Mention the words “Middle East,” and several other words come to mind—*violence, bloodshed, hatred, instability, refugees and terrorism*. In short, the Middle East scares us! For most of us outside the region, it's hard to make sense of the huge changes in the Middle East in recent years—the Arab Spring, governments overthrown, dictators toppled, the never-ending wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, and the rise of the Islamic State (ISIS or ISIL).

Yet even to the casual observer, it's easy to see that in the absence of strong leadership from the United States, coupled with the massive drawdown of U.S. forces in the region, ISIS, Russia and Iran have been filling the political and military power vacuum in the area.

Add to this the seemingly naïve Iran nuclear agreement, and this situation has all but assured that Iran will be able to manufacture nuclear weapons with which to threaten its neighbors for decades to come (though President-elect Donald Trump has stated his desire to negotiate a new deal).

Meanwhile, the instability and endless warfare in the region have sent a flood of Middle Eastern refugees into Europe and a growing stream into the United States—bringing political and cultural convulsions wherever they go.

Dramatic change from a century ago—what happened?

Think about it for a moment. Have you ever wondered why the Middle East is so often in the news headlines?

In stark contrast, a century ago it was a place where nothing of significance happened. Historian David Fromkin, author of *A Peace to End All Peace*, writes: “The Middle East, although it had been of great interest to western diplomats and politicians during the nineteenth century . . . was of only marginal concern to them in the early years of the twentieth century . . . The region had become a political backwater” (1989, p. 24).

Fromkin adds, “Few Europeans of Churchill's generation

knew or cared what went on in the languid empires of the Ottoman Sultan or the Persian Shah” (p. 25).

Today, the Middle East dominates global headlines. Why is it so different now? If we peel back the layers of recent history, we can begin to understand the factors underlying the instability of this vital region today.

What changed? Three major events, all of which were needed to set the stage for end-time biblical prophecy:

- The collapse of the Ottoman Empire.
- The establishment of the state of Israel.
- The rise of fundamentalist Islam.

How did these transform the region and lay the groundwork for prophecy to be fulfilled?

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire

For nearly 600 years, the Ottoman caliphate had ruled an empire that had subjugated Arabs, Kurds, Greeks, Armenians, other peoples of the Middle East, Southeastern Europe and North Africa. During the six centuries of its rule, the Ottoman Empire had provided a *laissez faire* stability in a region that would later become a modern-day powder keg.

By the early 1900s the Ottoman Empire was a mere shadow of its former greatness. Like the Russian Empire to its north, the Ottomans presided over a region of largely backward agricultural peoples for whom little had changed in centuries.

In the decade prior to the First World War, however, the so-called “Young Turks”—a group of Turkish intellectuals and military officers who founded the Committee of Union and Progress (C.U.P.)—took control of the Empire and began to try to modernize the state that had come to be dubbed “the Sick Man of Europe.” Their publicly proclaimed reforms included ending official discrimination against non-Muslims, the education and emancipation of women, and increasing the powers of secular law courts (at the expense of Islamic courts).

But as David Fromkin points out, “Once in power the C.U.P. showed the dark side of its nationalism by asserting the hegemony of Turkish-speaking Moslems over all others” (p. 48).

This emphasis on Turkish nationalism only served to provoke a sense of nationalism in other groups, including the Arabs. Yet the time for reforms had run out. Three disastrous wars, the first against Italy in Libya (1911-12), then two wars in the Balkans (1912-13) had cost the Ottoman Empire almost all of its European territories.

Ever wary of Russian designs on Turkish territory, the Ottoman Minister for War, Enver Pasha, signed a fateful, secret treaty of mutual aid with the Germans against Russia. As World War I (1914-18) began, the Ottoman Empire was drawn into the fight against the Allies (Britain, France, Italy and Russia).

Four years after the close of the hostilities of World War I, the Ottoman Empire ceased to exist in 1922, when Mustafa Kemal Ataturk overthrew the last caliphate and declared the Turkish Republic. The real question was not why the empire fell, but how the Ottomans managed to hold this cultural “patchwork quilt” of an empire together for so long!

The Ottomans had managed their conquests through decentralized governmental structures at the local level. When

Under Resolution 181, the holy places within Bethlehem and Jerusalem would remain under international control. On May 14, 1948, however, David Ben-Gurion, the head of the Jewish Agency, proclaimed the establishment of the state of Israel. The United States recognized the new nation that same day.

The following day, forces from five Arab nations (plus local Palestinian Arab forces) attacked the new state. Nine months later, the war ended and Israel had miraculously survived. As hundreds of thousands of Arabs fled Palestine, hundreds of thousands of Jews immigrated to the new, fledgling nation.

The Arabs largely allied themselves with the Russian-led Soviet Union. Israel, conversely, allied itself with the United States. The stage was set for three more major wars between Israel and its Arab neighbors, along with a score of other military actions. But in spite of what many believe, 1947 and the creation of the state of Israel was *not* the starting point for the strife in the Middle East.

Resurgence of fundamentalist Islam

During the “Young Turk” reforms before World War I, many Arabs, including the influential Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, founder of Saudi Arabia, labeled the Ottoman government anti-Islamic. As the First World War began, Arab nationalism began to stir.

Sharif Hussein ibn Ali, who was a descendant of the family of Muhammad, founder of Islam, and the ancestor of the

present King of Jordan, began the Arab Revolt in June of 1916. Financial and military support for the revolt later came from the French and British, including the support of Lieutenant T.E. Lawrence—better known as Lawrence of Arabia.

Sharif Hussein ibn Ali was driven by Arab nationalism. He envisioned an independent, unified Arab nation stretching from Egypt to Iraq and from Syria to Yemen. But for Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, it was a particular type of Islam that drove his vision—Wahhabism.

What did this movement have to do with the resurgence of fundamentalist Islam? A lot—even today.

Writing in *World Affairs*, Carol Choksy, adjunct lecturer on strategic intelligence at Indiana University’s School of Informatics and Computing, and Jamsheed Choksy, distinguished professor at Indiana University, observe: “The Saudi kingdom’s inseparability from the Wahhabi form of Sunni Islam, first espoused in 1744 and the fundamental creed of Saudi Arabia since its modern founding in 1932, has ensured that fundamentalism shapes domestic and foreign policies.

“Saudi Arabia is not the only source of resources for jihadism—public and private entities in Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and more recently Turkey have also been linked to collection and transfer of funds supporting terror groups. But the Saudis have been the most persistent source of support for global jihad by spreading Wahhabism abroad to radicalize foreign Muslims and then giving financial support to their violent struggles in countries as far-flung as Afghanistan, Syria, and Libya” (“The Saudi Connection: Wahhabism and Global Jihad,” May-June 2015).

The Middle East scares us! For most of us outside the region, it’s hard to make sense of the violence, hatred and terrorism. How will it end?

the European powers picked up the pieces of the fractured Ottoman Empire after the First World War, they imposed arbitrary governmental boundaries, while paying no attention to the complexities of the existing tribal and ethnic divisions that the Ottomans had given a certain autonomy to for centuries.

The League of Nations Mandate in 1921 made the land grab official. France acquired Syria and Lebanon, while Britain got Iraq, Palestine and Jordan. The Saudi Arabian Peninsula became a series of independent kingdoms and British protectorates.

While Europe got what it asked for, it failed to get what it wanted—compliant, happy subjects. Fromkin adds: “World War I was often called ‘the war to end all wars.’ At the close of the peace conference following the worst conflict in history, Archibald Wavell, an officer who served with the British Army in Palestine and was later promoted to field marshal, prophetically declared, “After ‘the war to end war’ they seem to have been pretty successful in Paris at making a ‘Peace to end Peace’” (p. 5).

The stage in the Middle East was now set for the next two prophetic elements.

Establishment of the modern state of Israel

On Nov. 29, 1947, the United Nations adopted Resolution 181 (known as the Partition Resolution) in spite of all Arab states voting against it. It divided the League of Nations Mandate for British-administered Palestine into Jewish and Arab provinces, not states, as Britain’s withdrawal was set for May 14, 1948, when its mandate ended.

The Choksys add that the weapons and ammunition used in the January 2015 attack on the Paris offices of *Charlie Hebdo* magazine that left 12 dead and 11 wounded “have been traced back to jihadis in Bosnia, where preachers at the King Fahd Mosque in Sarajevo who were trained and funded with Saudi support declare those attacks were staged by the West as an excuse to discriminate against Muslims” (ibid.).

The rise of fundamentalist Islam and its militant course brings up two legitimate questions: Why all the violence, and where will this clash of cultures and the rise of fundamentalist Islam lead?

As to the first question, historian Karen Armstrong adds this insight on the violence associated with Islamic fundamentalism in her book *Islam: A Short History*: “As the millennium drew to a close, however, some Muslims seemed to have lived up to this Western perception, and, for the first time, *have made sacred violence a cardinal Islamic duty*. These fundamentalists often call Western colonialism and post-colonial Western imperialism *al-Salibiyyah: the Crusade*” (2000, p. 180, emphasis added throughout).

This term reminds Muslims of the violent wars between medieval Christianity and Islam almost 1,000 years ago during the Crusades (in which European armies tried to retake previously Christian Middle Eastern lands that had been invaded and taken over by Muslims). It also reminds them of the Western incursions of more recent times—World War II, the first and second Iraq wars and Afghanistan.

Many Muslims view the impact of modern Western culture as something of a cultural crusade aimed at taking over the world. While some aspects of Western culture like technology and medicine are welcomed, others, particularly corrupt moral values, are seen by many as contrary to Islam and their way of life.

Karen Armstrong continues, “All over the world, as we have seen, people in all the major faiths have reeled under the impact of Western modernity, and have produced the embattled and frequently intolerant religiosity that we call fundamentalism” (ibid.).

As the intensity of the resentment against Western culture and military incursions continues to build, we can expect Islamic fundamentalists to continue to strike out against targets in the United States and Europe and even against other Muslims who do not subscribe to their particular brand of Islam.

As for the second question: Where will this clash of cultures and the rise of fundamentalist Islam lead?

An end-time confederacy of Arab states?

The Bible actually has much to say about the current situation in the Middle East. In fact, Bible prophecy reveals where these current conditions will ultimately lead. One mention can be found in Psalm 83.

This psalm appears to be a prophecy of a confederacy of nations that, while it may have applied in part to ancient events, seems to tie in to end-time events. It describes how a group of nations and peoples band together for a common

purpose—to cut off the nation of Israel:

“For behold, Your enemies make a tumult; and those who hate You have lifted up their head. They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones. They have said, ‘Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more.’ For they have consulted together with

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one consent; they form a confederacy against You” (verses 2-5).

Here we read of a coalition of people who are fighting ultimately not against Israel, but *against God*. For many Arab leaders and people, the annihilation of the Jewish state of Israel—and eventually the United States and other Western powers of Israelite heritage—is among their chief goals.

Verse 6 identifies a host of Arab people who, it appears, will ally together to fight against Israel: The “peoples of Edom” include the Palestinians and some of the Turks. “Ishmaelites” comprise many of the Arab peoples throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Moab is the area of central Jordan. The “Hagrites” appear to be other descendants of Hagar, mother of Ishmael. The “children of Lot” refers to Moab and Ammon—again, regions of modern-day Jordan. Others are identified as well.

One of the great unfulfilled aspirations of the fall of the Ottoman Empire was a unified Arab state. It was the dream of Sharif Hussein ibn Ali and many others. Could this

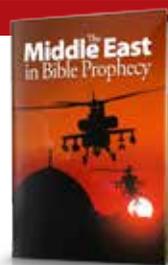
Prophecy is clear—a coming conflict in the Middle East will lead to a new world war that will threaten the survival of all human life!

confederacy be the fulfillment of that dream? The social and political currents sweeping throughout the Arab world point to this possibility.

The caliph and the king of the South

The word *caliph* comes from the Arabic *khalifa*, meaning “successor” (to Muhammad). The last of the caliphs were the Ottomans (1517–1924). Many in the Islamic world today dream of restoring a caliphate to unify the Muslim world and restore the hegemony of Islam.

The leaders of al-Qaeda, the Muslim Brotherhood and ISIS in particular have all pictured themselves in this role. Given their abject brutality, however, it might prove rather difficult for any of these groups to gain a following widespread enough to produce a caliph broadly acceptable to the Muslim world.



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Trouble in the Middle East is nothing new. It began thousands of years ago, and the roots are described in the pages of your Bible! To understand where events there will take the world, download or request our free study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* today!

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However, if such a leader were to arise today, under the right circumstances he would be able to command the allegiance of millions of Muslims. As a new caliph rises, so will the desire to once again wield the sword of Islam to conquer and bring all others under submission to Islam. We have regularly seen Islamic leaders such as al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden, former Libyan strongman Muammar Gaddafi and Islamic State caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declare this goal.

War between the king of the South and king of the North

Daniel 11 is a prophecy covering the time from the 500s B.C. up to and including Jesus Christ's return. Most of this remarkable prophecy describes the dramatic ebb and flow of a clash between the once mighty Seleucid and Ptolemaic Empires in the Middle East of around 485 to 168 B.C.

But in verse 40, the prophecy catapults to the future, when the end-time king of the South, likely the leader of a confederacy of Islamic nations in a restored caliphate, will initiate a war with a power lying to its north, apparently centered in Europe. This war will unleash a chain of events leading to unprecedented destruction, bringing the human race to the verge of extinction were it not for Jesus Christ's return to save mankind from its madness.

Here we see a description of the forces of the end-time kings of the South and North as they clash: "At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots,

horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through" (verse 40).

It's not clear what this "attack" consists of. Considering the methods employed by Muslim extremists in recent years, perhaps a series of major terror attacks against European targets could constitute what is referred to here. What is clear, however, is that this end-time king of the South will attack the king of North in such a way as to provoke a major military counterstrike in the Middle East that will completely overwhelm the forces of the South. Following the complete defeat, we read no more of the king of the South in Scripture.

What should you do?

The fall of the Ottoman Empire unleashed a series of events that set in motion the unstable Middle East that we see in the headlines nearly every day. The demise of the Ottomans set the stage for Bible prophecy to be fulfilled, and Daniel 11 is clear that coming conflict between king of the South and king of the North will lead to a new world war, one that will threaten the survival of all human life (Matthew 24:21-22).

At this critical juncture in world affairs, you need to comprehend not only *what* is happening around you, but *why*. Isn't it time you blow the dust off your Bible and begin to see for yourself? Isn't it time for you to begin developing a close relationship with your Father in heaven? It could very well be your only source of help in a coming time of need! **BT**

A Nuclear Arms Race in the Middle East?

Israel and Pakistan both have nuclear weapons. Iran wants nuclear weapons in addition to regional hegemony, and its efforts are causing others to join the nuclear bandwagon as well. The United Arab Emirates began building a nuclear reactor due to be completed in 2017. They are now joined by Egypt, Turkey, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, the latter of which plans to build 16 nuclear plants over the next two decades.

What's behind this Middle Eastern push for nuclear power plants and the potential for nuclear weapons? All the nations listed above are controlled by Sunni Muslim governments that feel increasingly threatened by Shiite Iran. Should Iran get a nuclear weapon, these nations will need a "plan B."

One of the quickest ways to acquire a nuclear weapon is to get one that is already made. For that, many nations and terrorist organizations need to look no further than Pakistan. Pakistan has gone through a great deal of instability. The Pakistani government has been battling the Pakistani Taliban,

perceived as a threat, while turning a blind eye to other terror groups in the country that threaten people outside the country. It's a dangerous game. Terrorists are most certainly ready to take advantage of any potential opportunity to seize a nuclear weapon.

The possibility of Pakistani nuclear weapons being procured for a terrorist group or even a nation-state is alarmingly real. Harvard's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs' Senior Fellow Rolf Mowatt-Larssen has explored this topic. He wrote: "The greatest threat of a loose nuke scenario stems from insiders in the nuclear establishment working with outsiders, people seeking a bomb or material to make a bomb. Nowhere in the world is this threat greater than in Pakistan" ("Nuclear Security in Pakistan: Reducing the Risks of Nuclear Terrorism," *Arms Control Today*, July 1, 2009).

He went on to catalogue how Abdul Qadeer Khan, the father of the Pakistani bomb, gave nuclear technologies to Iran, Libya and North Korea while Sultan

Bashiruddin Mahmood, who had been in charge of Pakistan's Khushab reactor, had reviewed al-Qaeda's nuclear plans with Osama bin Laden.

Despite the Pakistani government appearing to take new measures to improve security for its weapons program, Mowatt-Larssen was still concerned, adding: "There are troubling indications that these insider threats are not anomalies . . . It would be foolhardy to assume that such lapses could not happen again" (ibid.).

Given the tumultuous situation in the Middle East today, the money available to terrorists and rogue states and the religious sympathies extant, the potential is indeed quite real. The nuclear arms race in the Middle East is a danger to the entire world.

Bible prophecy indicates that weapons of mass destruction will play a key role in the end time. In fact, chapters 8 and 9 of the book of Revelation state that a third of humanity will perish—more than two billion people according to current world population statistics. The only thing that will save us from extinction is the return of Jesus Christ. His ultimate victory will usher in a thousand years of peace.

God and Astronomy

Recent discoveries have taught us a great deal about the universe.
How do these findings compare with what we find revealed in the Bible?

by Mario Seiglie

In the last century we have witnessed the greatest scientific discoveries regarding the vastness and functioning of the universe. From believing there were just a few thousand stars in the cosmos, now it is known there are billions of galaxies, each with billions of stars. According to a recent news release at the *Sky & Telescope* website, a team of astronomers has now upped the estimate of the number of galaxies to *two trillion*—“10 times as many galaxies as astronomers previously thought.”

Yet, what has been more amazing has been the discovery of how the laws of science appear to have been finely tuned to allow life and the universe itself to exist. This has led some scientists to admit all of this careful design could not be the result of chance but must have come from a superior Mind.

As the famous ex-atheist philosopher Antony Flew stated a few years before his death: “The leaders of science over the last hundred years, along with some of today’s most influential scientists, have built a philosophically compelling vision of a rational universe that sprang from a divine Mind. As it happens, this is the particular view of the world that I now find the soundest philosophical explanation of a multitude of phenomena encountered by scientists and laypeople alike” (*There Is a God*, 2007, p. 91).

Despite the mounting evidence for a

Creator God, many people still don’t take Him into account. It’s like acknowledging a building and its parts, but not its architect.

How does God relate to astronomy?
Let’s see some of the ways.

Explaining the beginning of the universe

If there is one discovery above all others that has puzzled astronomers, it is learning that the universe had a beginning and that it literally came out of nothing.

This was not expected at all at the beginning of the 20th century, since virtually all scientists thought the universe had always existed. Even the famous physicist Albert Einstein believed the universe did not have a beginning and later had to admit he made his biggest mistake when he added a constant to his theory of relativity to make it appear the universe was not expanding.

Yet, the Bible from the start affirmed the universe had a beginning. In the first verse it says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Here we have a statement that the universe had a beginning from nothing and that its cause is an all-powerful Creator.

Antony Flew admitted this discovery was one of the greatest evidences against atheism, saying: “If there had been no reason to think the universe had a beginning there would be no need to postulate

something else that produced the whole thing. But the big-bang theory changed all that. If the universe had a beginning, it became entirely sensible, almost inevitable, to ask what produced this beginning.

“This radically altered the situation . . . Modern cosmologists seemed just as disturbed as atheists about the potential theological implications of their work. Consequently, they devised influential escape routes that sought to preserve the non-theist status quo. These routes included the idea of the multiverse, numerous universes generated by endless vacuum fluctuation events, and Stephen Hawking’s notion of a self-contained universe” (p. 137).

A beginning points to a Creator

Perhaps the noted astronomer Robert Jastrow best describes the dilemma scientists faced on discovering that the universe had a beginning and that this fact pointed to a Creator God. “A sound explanation may exist for the explosive birth of our Universe,” he asserts, “but if it does, science cannot find out what the explanation is. The scientist’s pursuit of the past ends in the moment of creation. This is an exceedingly strange development, unexpected by all but the theologians.

“They have always accepted the word of the Bible: ‘In the beginning God created heaven and earth.’ It is unexpected because science has had such extraordi-

nary success in tracing the chain of cause and effect backward in time. Now we would like to pursue that inquiry farther back in time, but the barrier to further progress seems insurmountable.

"It is not a matter of another year, another decade of work, another measurement, or another theory; at this moment it seems as though science will never be able to raise the curtain on the mystery of creation.

"For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries" (*God and the Astronomers*, 1992, p. 107).

What holds the earth in its place?

Before our modern era, it no doubt seemed logical—since all objects on earth are sustained by something else upholding them—that the earth is also held up by a solid support. Thus, in India and China, religious beliefs included the idea that the earth was held up by a giant turtle. The Greeks believed the god Atlas supported the world on his shoulders. All ancient religions had something or someone holding up the earth—except the Bible.

Instead it says of God: "He stretches out his heavens over empty space. He hangs the earth *on nothing whatsoever*" (Job 26:7, God's Word Version, emphasis added throughout). This seemed to defy logic, but it's turned out to be true—our planet is held in its place and orbit by nothing that we can see!

It wasn't until many centuries later that the invisible force that holds the earth in its place and orbit was correctly identified—*gravity*. Yet, how did the Bible get it right thousands of years before? The answer:

Only through being inspired by the Creator God.

The roundness of the earth is even mentioned in the Bible, as it states: "It is He who sits above *the circle of the earth*, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in" (Isaiah 40:22).

The stars as a navigational tool and agricultural almanac

For millennia, explorers both on land and sea have been able to find their bearings by identifying the basic constellations in the sky. Also, farmers have used the pattern of the stars and constellations to know when to plant their seeds.

God Himself said He designed the positioning of the sun, the moon and the stars to allow human beings to determine the proper planting and harvesting seasons and to provide an orderly calendar.

before mankind was created!

Of all the places in the sky, there are two key constellations in particular one can use to find one's bearings. In the northern hemisphere Polaris, the North Star, can be easily located during the entire year by finding the Big Dipper (part of the constellation Ursa Major), with the two outermost stars of the bowl opposite the handle pointing to Polaris. In the southern hemisphere, the Southern Cross is a bright constellation that points directly south.

Remarkably, the Bible mentions some of these same constellations in Job 9:7-9: "God alone stretched out the sky, stepped on the sea, and set the stars in place—the Big Dipper and Orion, the Pleiades and the stars in the southern sky. Of all the miracles God works, we cannot understand a one" (Contemporary English Version). His handiwork truly is awesome and beyond our limited human comprehension!

God could ask the same questions of

Discoveries in astrophysics have led some scientists to admit all of this careful design could not be the result of chance but must have come from a superior Mind.

He said in Genesis 1:14-15, "Let lights appear in the sky to separate day from night and to show the time when days, years, and religious festivals begin; they will shine in the sky to give light to the earth . . . and it was done" (Good News Bible).

The Hebrew translated "religious festivals" here is *moedim*. Literally meaning "appointed times," this is the same word used in Leviticus 23:1: "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts [*moedim*] of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts [*moedim*].'" So God planned for there to be holy times to observe even

today's secular astronomers that He did Job and still get the same answer. He asked: "Can you arrange stars in groups such as Orion and the Pleiades? Do you control the stars or set in place the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper? Do you know the laws that govern the heavens, and can you make them rule the earth?" (Job 38:31-33, CEV). The answer is still the same—they are not even close to being in God's league!

Where does this leave us?

God's connection to astronomy is simple: It is His handiwork, and we should be thankful and give recognition and praise to Him for it.

As King David proclaimed in Psalm 19:1-4 (CEV): "The heavens keep telling the wonders of God, and the skies declare what he has done. Each day informs the following day; each night announces to the next. They don't speak a word, and there is never the sound of a voice. Yet their message reaches all the earth, and it travels around the world." BT



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What do scientific discoveries teach us about God? Many assume that science has disproved the existence of God, but is that true? What does the evidence from recent discoveries reveal about the origins and structure of our universe? Be sure to read our enlightening free study guide *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* A copy is waiting for you!

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DOES THE TRUTH LIES REALLY MATTER?

We live in a world in which, as Isaiah 59:14 says, “Truth is fallen in the street.”
Is truth that important anymore? Is it important to you?

by Rudy Rangel

I believe I was in junior high the first time I heard the term *perjury*. It must have been civics class, and we were learning about the branches of the U.S. government.

Specifically, that day we were discussing the judicial branch and how the court systems worked. I don’t remember how it came up, but I was surprised when I heard there was a law against lying under oath. I was shocked. I couldn’t imagine that we needed a law against putting your hand on the Bible, swearing to tell the truth in front of an audience of witnesses and then lying through your teeth. Who would dare?

It turns out that *many* would dare. That’s the problem, so we have laws against it. It seems that we have come to expect people to withhold, stretch and bend the truth—especially for self-preservation.

Consider what we have seen in the news over the last few months—mud-slinging elections at all levels when candidates said whatever was necessary to undermine their opponents. On the morning after every speech or debate, news sources would analyze the statements made and give a report on what was true and which statements were lies. Of course, you often can’t trust the news analysts to present matters truthfully either. Still, we’ve all seen that politicians will say whatever it takes to reach office—as they always have. This past year is even bigger proof of that.

Also in the news this summer, Olympic swimming medalist Ryan Lochte told reporters that he was mugged at gunpoint during the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It didn’t take long for investigators to discover that a drunken Lochte and several of his fellow swimmers vandalized a gas station bathroom and that the owner was demanding payment for the destruction.

It was embarrassing. I was embarrassed as an American

to have a representative of our nation be a guest in another country and act like a child—then lie about it to cover up his bad behavior. It’s shameful.

Does the truth matter anymore? These high profile people don’t seem to think so. We can see it by their actions and their lies. Can we live successfully in a world where everyone is telling their own versions of the truth? What is the negative impact of this reality? How does it affect our personal relationships if we are comfortable with a world full of half-truths?

Most importantly, how does this affect our spiritual growth and relationship with our Father in heaven?

God commands us to be truthful

God has much to say about the importance of speaking the truth. The Israelites shook with fear while God boomed from the mountain as He spoke the Ten Commandments. God, with all authority, gave the foundation of the law and then personally wrote the commands on stone tablets for Moses to bring to the newly freed nation.

One of those commands deals with speaking the truth: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16).

God’s command on the subject is clear and concise concerning lying against your neighbor. As you study God’s Word you realize that it is an all-encompassing command. God’s plan for you and me is *transformation*. God wants our Christianity to be a *total* effort. This command about not bearing false witness is so much more than avoiding lying. It’s about *living a life of truth*.

King David asked in Psalm 15:1-2: “LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?” He then answered: “He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, *and speaks the truth in his heart.*”

Those who will become part of the Kingdom of God will speak the truth in their hearts. Truth in your heart means that *you embrace truth to the very core*. Truth should be *deeply a part of us*.

Those who will be in God's Kingdom will spend a lifetime of pursuing purity—a *lifetime of seeking and living out a life of truth*.

What makes this process so difficult is that *we live in a culture that doesn't value the truth*. We have come to accept half-truths, spin and misinformation as normal. Consider broadcast and cable news as an example. We have become completely fine with *versions* of truth. Whether conservative or liberal, we can choose the flavor of truth that is most pleasing to us. We have to understand that even half-truths also include a portion of deceit.

Can we choose our own truth?

In the Bible we see that the people of the Kingdom of Judah were tired of the condemnation that the prophets of God were proclaiming to them. They didn't want to hear the truth or God's judgment. In fact, they wanted to keep living a life contrary to God's instruction and ignore what He had to say about it. "They tell the seers, 'Stop seeing visions!' They tell the prophets, 'Don't tell us what is right. Tell us nice things. Tell us lies'" (Isaiah 30:10, New Living Translation 2015).

When we pick only the flavor of the truth we want to hear, we are essentially doing the same thing. There are different sides of a matter. Of course, it's okay to have strong opinions once we have deeply sought truth while investigating all sides. Consider the various sides, yes, but know that *what God has to say* in a matter is supreme.

So can we ever get to the bottom of what is true? Because it's not just the news media that provides a slant. A slant can creep into all aspects of our lives. Ryan Lochte gave a heavily slanted version of events to keep his image intact. Two presidential candidates spent months telling their slant of who they are and what they wanted to do as leader of the United States.

Who, really, believes every word they said? Probably no one. No one believed them because we have become familiar and perhaps even comfortable with the fact that we are lied to on a daily basis. From a little child to the leaders of our nations, we know and understand that what we are receiving is a *version* of "truth" that may or may not be accurate.

Proverbs 22:1 tells us, "Choose a good reputation over great riches; being held in high esteem is better than silver or gold" (NLT 2015). There was a time when honesty and integrity were highly valued characteristics. But now bullying your way to the top, stepping on others and saying whatever gets you there is what we see in our society. Characteristics that once seemed good and wholesome can now come across as weak and complacent. Honesty, humility and patience aren't characteristics of a go-getter.

Are you willing to seek and live the truth?

I remember watching the first season of the TV show *Survivor*. It was the only season that I watched. I've caught

a few episodes here and there since then, but that first season we saw something new. It was a game show like no other. *Survivor* showcased human nature, deception and greed as contestants competed to win. It took cunning to win, not honesty. The honest people are among the first booted from the show. The honest person doesn't make it in a cutthroat world.

So why isn't a good reputation held in high esteem like the proverb says? The winner of *Survivor* was given a million dollars and touted around all of the talk shows as a champion. We have slowly conditioned ourselves into a way of life that is tolerant of the fact that dishonesty is a part of how to get ahead in life.

We have lost sight of and even rejected the source of truth. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). The ultimate truth is of God. It's His realm. God speaks truth. But that's not what people want to hear. Everyone wants their own perspective or version of the way things are or should be to be truth.

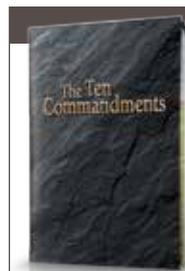
Man has not always appreciated the truth of God. "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

"Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised" (Romans 1:21-25, New International Version).

What about our relationship with God? Do we value the source of truth? Do you worship Him in a spirit of truth? That's what is required from you (John 4:23).

The fact is, real truth is out there. If we are following God and seeking to live a life acceptable to Him, *we have to seek out His truth*. The Bible says that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). *His very being* is truth.

He sent His Son to live a perfect life for our example. We too should be seeking to live a life of truth. Leaving God out of our lives doesn't lead to a life of truth. *The opposite* will eventually happen if we're not careful. We should look to God because He is truth. He sets the bar for us—the signpost of truth. Truth should be an ever-growing part of us. Truth should be in our hearts, to our very core. It's a highly valuable characteristic. Truth *does* matter. Truth matters to God, and it should matter to us. 



LEARN MORE

What would it be like to live in a world of truth, compared to the world of today? What kind of difference would it make if everyone lived by God's laws? Request or download our study guide *The Ten Commandments*. A free copy is waiting for you!

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HACKSAW RIDGE

The Story of a Different
Breed of Warrior



A new Hollywood movie recounts the astounding story of a man who stood by his religious convictions and whose love for his country and fellow man led him to save many lives at great risk to his own.

by Robin Webber

The movie *Hacksaw Ridge* is a leading contender for several entertainment industry awards. It tells the remarkable story of Desmond Doss, a U.S. Army soldier who set an example that he was ridiculed for at first, but ultimately highly rewarded for in the end.

What can we learn from Doss's example?

This soft-spoken Southerner volunteered to serve in the military during World War II, yet at the same time he refused to carry a gun. For over two years his commanders and the army tried to kick him out of the service, but at war's end a grateful nation awarded this most unlikely of heroes its highest military decoration, the Medal of Honor—along with two Bronze Stars for bravery and three Purple Hearts for being wounded in action.

Yes, that's right—this one man earned six medals for heroism and exemplary service. This hero without a gun waged a different kind of fight. Meet Desmond Doss.

But I don't want you to meet him as just one more aging veteran from the conflict of long ago, because you really can't. You see, he died in 2006. But neither do I want you to immediately meet him in a foxhole of long ago and far away. No, let's go back to events and values that molded Corporal Doss to

become worthy of our notice.

How could one brother kill another?

Doss grew up in a typical Depression-era family. One of his earliest memories was staring at an illustrated picture of the Ten Commandments hanging on the living room wall. One caption that vividly stood out in his mind was the scene of Cain beating Abel next to the inscription of the Sixth Commandment: "You shall not kill."

At a young and tender age, it startled Doss that one brother could kill another. Family members would recall how the lad would reach out and touch that illustration. These simple images on a country home's wall would shape and define his character a half a world away in years to come.

One specific occasion in his youth solidified his belief regarding firearms. His father and uncle got into a tussle and a gun was drawn. His mother got in between his dad and her brother to stop the fight.

Both men backed down because they didn't wish her harm. But all Doss could see through his wide-open eyes was a reenactment of the vivid picture of Cain attacking Abel. His mother gave him the gun and asked him to dispose of it. After that event, Doss vowed never to touch a gun again.

Call me a “conscientious cooperater”

When World War II arrived, he chose to become a combat medic. Even though he had a job in a shipyard that gave him a deferment from serving in combat, Doss felt that he should not be spared while others risked and gave their lives for their country.

When he enlisted, he made his position clearly known. He would not carry a gun even though most medics did. He refused to call himself a conscientious objector. He preferred to be called a “conscientious cooperater.” Yet right from the beginning he got one clear message: “You’re in the army now. We’ll tell you, you don’t tell us!”

The officers attempted to break his morale by assigning him to a rifle company. There he would either cave in to peer pressure, or he would be considered a pest and be pushed out of the service due to intolerable peer abuse.

Most simply didn’t “get” this soft-spoken and easygoing person with his strange beliefs. He was ostracized. One of his fellow soldiers threatened, “If we go into battle together, I’ll shoot you.” Sadly, most of his fellow soldiers didn’t realize he had chosen to be there as a medic to save lives—theirs!

Honoring the seventh-day Sabbath

In training at Fort Pickens, another of Doss’ beliefs would

Doss felt that he should not be spared while others risked and gave their lives for their country, so he enlisted even though he would not carry a weapon.

become an issue. He was a seventh-day Sabbath-keeper. He would not work on the Sabbath. He would pray and meditate on that day, as well as attend Saturday church services. At nighttime he would study from the pocket-sized Bible his wife had given him.

His fellow soldiers would curse him and throw their boots at him as he knelt by his bed to pray. It just seemed as if he had too many privileges—even though he would work around the clock on Sunday and be given the grimmest of chores to break his morale.

Matters came to a head at an Arizona training camp. A commanding officer ordered Doss to receive a gun from him on threat of court-martial, even though it specifically stated on his papers that he did not have to carry a gun. He was given two chances. He refused both times. He knew he would be in trouble if he only compromised once, because he would then do it again and again.

The officer tore up the furlough pass for Doss to visit his wife and brother. It was a low moment for him. Finally, his officers were put on notice regarding an Act of Congress that they must respect the rights of conscientious objectors.

The man whom they tried to drum out of the service on the issue of “mental instability” was the same “conscientious cooperater” who had repeatedly told his officers: “Don’t doubt my courage. As you take life, I’m going to be right by your side saving life. I’ll be just as good a soldier as you.”

Those words were about to come true as his unit was shipped off to the Asiatic-Pacific Theater in the summer of 1944 to participate in the brutal island-hopping campaign against Japan.

The legacy begins

From Guam to the Philippines to Okinawa, this different breed of warrior would develop, day by day and person by person, an incredible legacy. As the men of the 77th Division fought battle after battle and island after island, Desmond Doss was right beside them and often out in front of them.

Early on he was alerted to the danger of not carrying a firearm. The enemy had chosen to intentionally target the easily identified medics as they performed their courageous labor so as to demoralize the troops.

But out he would go anyway, again and again, among the wounded. He did most of his work at night, crawling from person to person in the muddy tropical landscape. In one battle on Guam, as Doss moved forward without a firearm along with the troops, the same officer who had threatened a court-martial fled the battle scene.

Ultimately, the 77th was given orders to replace the decimated 96th Division on Okinawa. The task before them was to take Hacksaw Ridge on a looming 400-foot-high escarpment. Nine times in seven days the troops were driven off the escarpment. Eight commanders were lost in 36 hours!

Finally the orders came down: “Hacksaw Ridge—do or die!” Volunteers were requested to drape a cargo net on the ridge so men could rapidly charge up the cliff. Three volunteered. Doss was one. A photograph shows the lone figure of Doss standing at the top of the ridge, cargo net in place. It was the last recorded impression, as the photographers would advance no further due to the fierce fighting.

On April 30, 1945, Doss requested that he might pray for his comrades before the next assault. On that particular day, not one man died in Company B.

“Lord, help me get one more”

On the third assault of the escarpment, the Japanese launched a major counteroffensive. U.S. troops were being bayoneted and shot as they fled down the net. But many soldiers remained on top, unable to flee. Doss was there among them to save lives. He knew the enemy would torture and kill the wounded men, so he refused to leave.

Over the next 12 hours, he would drag the wounded, one by one and sometimes two by two draped under his arms, several hundred feet to the cliff’s edge. There he would then lower them one by one, 75 in all, down the 70-foot cliff by rope.

Each time he returned for another comrade, he would simply pray, “Lord, help me get one more!” Years later, one Japanese veteran during an interview stated, “I believe that man was in my sights, but each time I would shoot, the gun jammed.”

The final assault on Hacksaw Ridge was planned for a few days later. However, the date happened to be a Saturday. Yes, the Sabbath! All were ready to go except one person—Doss! He was the only medic in the vicinity.

Another commanding officer who had tried to drum Doss out of the service put the entire offensive operation on hold. By

now, Doss had become the “safety blanket” of the 77th.

Lost without his Bible

Later in that deadly back-and-forth battle, Doss and several others took shelter for the night in a foxhole. Suddenly a Japanese grenade fell into the foxhole. The others scrambled out, but Doss instinctively put his boot on the grenade to cover it. It exploded, hurling him out of the foxhole and leaving his leg gashed and bleeding from many wounds.

Rather than call for another medic who might risk his own life to help him, Doss bandaged his own leg and waited five hours for daybreak. When stretcher bearers arrived at dawn and began to carry Doss to safety, they passed another soldier with more critical injuries. Doss told them to put down the stretcher and carry the other man instead.

Doss' actions were based on his heartfelt convictions. His actions and convictions serve as an example of how to “endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”

Joined by another injured soldier, Doss and the other man leaned against each other as they tried to hobble their way to safety. But as they did, a bullet struck Doss' wrist and lodged in his upper arm. Had it not hit his arm, which was draped across his fellow soldier's shoulders, it likely would've struck his wounded compatriot in the neck and killed him. Doss splinted his useless arm with a rifle stock and together they crawled to safety.

As he was being taken to a hospital ship, he realized something precious had been lost on the battlefield. His Bible was out there! His source of strength was missing, and without it he felt lost. He wrote to the men of Company B and asked if they might help. Some of the same men who had jeered at him, thrown their boots at him and made his life miserable went into the field of battle and found his “sword,” the Word of God (Hebrews 4:12), and mailed it back to him.

Surgeons removed 17 pieces of shrapnel from Doss' leg and put his arm in a cast to heal. His war was over. He'd fought his own good fight in his own way, never compromising his convictions. On his return to the United States, President Harry Truman personally awarded this “hero without a gun” the nation's highest military honors for valor. As the President stood facing the courageous corporal, he said, “I would rather have this Medal than to be the President.” He then hung the Medal of Honor around the neck of this very different breed of warrior.

“Desmond did that every day!”

But Doss' good deeds came at a cost. His wounds would leave him 100 percent disabled. Wrong doses of treatment for tuberculosis contracted in the islands would leave him nearly deaf.

In a documentary titled *The Conscientious Objector*, one of Desmond Doss' wartime companions said it best about this different breed of warrior. He said that some men are awarded the Medal of Honor for one moment in time in which they perform an incredible act of courageous daring on behalf of

their fellow man. Yet, he remarkably added, “Desmond did that every day!”

The corporal's saga recalls the time when the Israelite patriarch Joseph, having advanced by God's favor to the highest levels of government in Egypt, told his brothers who had sold him into slavery years before: “Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Genesis 50:19-20).

Doss' determination in the face of possible severe punishment echoes the words of three men in Babylon who would not join in false worship on pain of death: “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king.

But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (Daniel 3:16-18).

Our spiritual battles

Doss' actions were based on his heartfelt convictions. His actions and convictions

serve as an example of how to “endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:3) in the day-to-day struggles confronting us. This man's light and the savor of his convictions (compare Matthew 5:13-14) slowly turned the wrath of his comrades into admiration until they couldn't advance without him.

It brings to mind the future prophetic reality of Zechariah 8:23, which speaks of a time when “ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.’”

Desmond Doss lived his faith in the crucible of war. Christians are called to fight a different warfare than the wars of this world. Our calling is to stand for the One who said, “My purpose is to give life in all its fullness” (John 10:10, New Living Translation 1996) and who leads us as the Captain of our salvation.

The apostle Paul often pointed out as examples those who stood in harm's way to crystallize and galvanize our own Christian walk. It is in that spirit and intent that we can learn from this “different breed of warrior” about the lesson of “this is the way, walk in it” (Isaiah 30:21).

It was from the mouth of one who once despised him that this echoing lesson of Isaiah can be heard. Some men are awarded the Medal of Honor for one incredible act of courageous daring, but “Desmond did that every day!” 



LEARN MORE

Where did Desmond Doss get the beliefs that so strongly motivated him and shaped his life? He drew them from the Ten Commandments. What are these commands from God all about? Download or request our free study guide *The Ten Commandments* to learn more!

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Above All Else, Guard Your Heart

While protecting your family and belongings is important, discover why Proverbs 4:23 says you should safeguard your heart more than anything else.

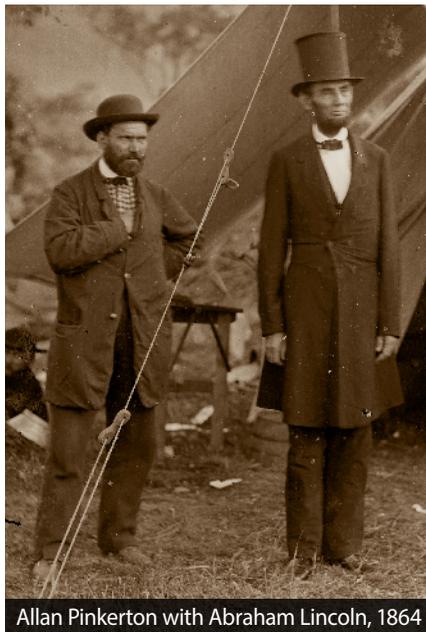
by John LaBissoniere

Throughout the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century, large numbers of people left farms and crowded into cities to find employment. This phenomenon was accompanied by an upsurge in criminal activity that intensified the need for personal protection. It was then that the idea of preventing crime rather than simply controlling it became a growing concept. This led to innovative security organizations, including one of the world's most famous founded by Allan Pinkerton.

In the early 1840s Pinkerton became active in volunteer police work in northeastern Illinois. He was appointed a deputy sheriff in 1846, and three years later accepted a position as Chicago's first police detective. After resigning from the police force in 1850, he established his private security and detective agency that later specialized in railroad theft incidents.

While investigating a case in 1861, Pinkerton became aware of a plot to kill Abraham Lincoln during a rail line stop on the journey to his first presidential inauguration. Pinkerton warned the incoming president about the threat and then modified the travel itinerary so Lincoln's train proceeded to Washington, D.C., without incident.

During the U.S. Civil War, Pinkerton launched the Union Intelligence Service, which secretly gathered information on Confederate troop strength and movements. He also served periodically as Lincoln's bodyguard. After hostilities ended in 1865, Pinkerton returned to Chicago to resume management of his growing security agency until his death in July 1884. Pinkerton's, Inc., has since



Allan Pinkerton with Abraham Lincoln, 1864

expanded into a \$1.5 billion international organization providing a wide range of protective services.

Since Allan Pinkerton's time, security concerns have not diminished. Today, many businesses and families are accelerating efforts to guard against potential threats by installing fairly inexpensive wireless electronic security systems. Equipment included consists of door, window and motion sensors as well as surveillance cameras accessible remotely via a client's smartphone.

Available also are loud sirens and automated communications devices, which include the services of remote alarm monitoring personnel who notify police of suspected break-ins.

Four critical spiritual qualities

While employing these or other measures to enhance *your own* security

can be valuable, much more crucial is to look to God, relying on His promises to watch over those who trust in Him. Many biblical passages, including Psalm 121:1-8, attest to this key fact.

And yet beyond this, there is *another* vital defensive effort you ought to take that involves your entire mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life." The New Living Translation expresses it this way: "Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life."

Before learning what *should be in your heart* that ought to be protected so greatly, let's briefly examine four critical spiritual qualities presented in this verse with the words *keep*, *heart*, *diligent* and *issues*.

- *Keep*. Translated from the Hebrew word *natsar*, the term means "to guard or protect." For example, you typically safeguard possessions having significant value or meaning such as a diamond engagement ring, a family heirloom or your smartphone. However, as Proverbs 4:23 explains, you should *especially* protect what you hold *in your heart*.

- *Heart*. The Hebrew word here, *leb*, typically refers to the "inner person, mind and will." This denotes the central core of your emotional, intellectual and spiritual existence. Similar to how your fleshly human heart is indispensable in sustaining your physical life, the *leb* is used here as the source of *everything* that affects your well-being.

- *Diligence*. The dictionary defines this as the "constant and earnest effort to accomplish what is undertaken." What may seem surprising however, is that the word is used to translate

the Hebrew word *mishmar*, denoting a “place of confinement, jail or prison.” So in Proverbs 4:23 *diligence* means you should guard your heart so conscientiously that it’s like keeping it under lock and key.

• *Issues*. Derived from the Hebrew word *totsaah*, the word means “borders or boundaries.” It refers to the sum total of *all* that occurs in your life, including what you are, say and do.

What should be in your heart?

In view of these four words and their meanings, *what should be in your heart* that would hold such momentous value? What is it that God urges you to safeguard above *everything else* in your life?

To discover the answer, let’s examine Proverbs 4:23 in the context of the entire chapter. Beginning in Proverbs 4:1-4, King Solomon says: “Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, and give attention to know understanding; for I give you good doctrine: do not forsake my law. When I was my father’s son, tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, he also taught me, and said to me: *Let your heart retain my words; keep my commands, and live*” (emphasis added throughout).

Here, Solomon offers to his children important guiding principles that his own father King David had given him. And more than that, as inspired Scripture these are actually profound *divine instructions from God to you* regarding His priceless words.

Continuing in verses 5-13, we learn that wisdom is gained by cherishing and obeying God’s teachings. For instance, verse 7 states: “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in *all* your getting, get understanding.” These values, if embraced and esteemed, will

guard *your* life’s walk each day.

Next, in verses 14-18, Solomon advises his children about hazards they should sidestep. For instance, in verse 14 he says, “Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil.” Likewise, God counsels *you* to avoid traveling down the road of sin because it results in suffering, anxiety and death.

More important than physical possessions

The king then makes a remarkable

These four practical steps will assist you in protecting your heart from the evils and threats that could defile and destroy you.

statement. He explains that his instructions are equivalent to life itself: “My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; *keep them in the midst of your heart; for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh*” (verses 20-22). Solomon concludes his decisive remarks in verses 24-27 by summarizing his earlier statements about doing what is good and upright.

So, what should all this mean to you? It signals that *guarding and cherishing God’s words and instructions* is incalculably more important than treasuring earthly possessions, desires and achievements (Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 12:15-21; Romans 8:5-6).

Regarding this pivotal divine reality, let’s consider 2 Peter 1:2-4. This passage not only mirrors what Proverbs 4 states about the blessings of living a virtuous physical life, but takes it to an even *higher spiritual level*.

As the apostle Peter states in verse 4, you have been given “*exceedingly great and precious promises*, that through these you may be *partakers of the divine nature*.”

This means that the knowledge you should cherish and guard *goes well beyond* how to live an upright earthly life. It’s *also* about the *breathhtaking eternal life* you will experience with God in His coming Kingdom (Philippians 3:11).

Just imagine! The mighty, immortal Creator of the entire universe wants *you* to be one of His very own divine

children in His glorious, spiritual family (2 Corinthians 6:18). How great is this knowledge! And how grateful you should be to know it (2 Corinthians 4:6-7; Psalm 139:17).

But this requires *much more* of you than simply having a good and warm feeling about it. You need to *also take decisive actions* to prove that your admiration and devotion to God is wholly genuine. It necessitates that you repent of sin and mount a fervent, persistent campaign to expunge it from your life while replacing it with God’s own righteousness (Ephesians 4:24).

This can be accomplished *only* by allowing Jesus Christ to live His life within you each day through the power of His Holy Spirit (Galatians 2:20; 2 Timothy 1:6). Plus, you need to hold tightly to the vision of the coming marvelous time when you will be changed from a physical human being into a holy, divine spirit being at Christ’s second coming (1 John 3:2-3).

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It will take great spiritual energy and resolve to prepare yourself for that magnificent future of loving service as a king and priest in God's prophesied earthly, global government (Revelation 1:6; 2:26; 5:10; 20:6).

How can you prepare successfully for this tremendous impending responsibility? It encompasses practical steps to treasure and protect the knowledge that God has so generously given you. It also involves guarding your heart against evils and threats that would try to destroy that unique understanding (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

Let's cover briefly four practical methods that will help you to successfully prize and protect God's flawless instruction and wisdom.

Four practical methods you can employ

1. *Love God.* To love God fully, take your cue from how you treasure the people you love. When you truly love others, you show your affection by spending time with them, helping them, doing thoughtful things for them and talking to them. In other words, *you demonstrate your appreciation to those you care about by your actions.* In reality, it's much the same with your Creator. You can express your love for God by communicating with Him continually through zealous prayer and regular Bible study. To properly love God, you need to make Him and His words the focal point of your life (Deuteronomy 6:5-6).

2. *Obey God.* Loving and honoring your Creator and having a close relationship with Him requires your obedience to His commandments (Deuteronomy 11:1; 1 John 5:3). God's laws, which are described fully in His Word, were designed specifically so you can live a joyful, productive life (Deuteronomy 4:1; 5:33; 30:15-16; 32:45-47).

3. *Abhor evil.* The Scriptures are clear that we live in a corrupt, degenerate age (Galatians 1:4). Since sin in all its forms is completely repulsive to God, it's essential that it be abhorrent to us also (Hebrews 1:9; Psalm 119:104). Therefore you must be vigilant in safeguarding your heart from adverse influences. For example, while the Internet, movies, television, music, books and magazines can be used for good purposes, you should be especially careful to avoid their powerful negative influences.

4. *Love the truth.* Proverbs 23:23 says to "buy the truth, and do not sell it"—that is, expend effort to learn it and never sell it away for anything. After having been granted the understanding of true biblical knowledge through God's gracious and merciful calling, don't let go of it no matter what happens (John 8:32; 2 Thessalonians 2:10).

These four practical steps are dynamic means of treasuring God and His perfect instruction and wisdom. They also assist you in protecting your heart from the evils and threats that could defile and destroy you. Plus they help you love and guard the great understanding God has given you regarding the astonishing future that awaits you.

Finally, as you recall some of the recent history of human security efforts, including the work of Allan Pinkerton, do everything you can to ensure your own personal physical safety with God's powerful aid. *But even more importantly,* remember carefully and apply diligently the vital message of Proverbs 4:23: "Above all else, guard your heart." **BT**

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The Spirit-Led Sacrificial Life

With the indwelling presence of God the Father and Jesus Christ, Christians must proceed forward with diligence, faith and virtue—pursuing God’s will above their own.

by Robin Webber

Over the course of recent “Follow Me” columns, we have taken quite a journey through Scripture in coming to see what Christ meant when promising, “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18).

Through our journey together we have come to understand that the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) isn’t merely a spiritual power tool, but is the very distilled nature of who and what God the Father and Jesus Christ are (Romans 8:9-11). God gives this Spirit “to those who obey Him” (Acts 5:32)—those who surrender their lives in obedience to Him.

It’s this divine essence that our Heavenly Father desires to impart that allows Paul to declare, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). God desires to take up residence inside us!

And what is the purpose of God giving His Spirit to us? Paul explains in Romans 8: “Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.

“For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God’s laws, and it never will. That’s why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God. But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you . . . (Romans 8:5-9, New Living Translation 2013).

With all that said, the simple question is: So where do we go from here? In the previous column I left you with a thought: If Christ dwells in us and we are offered salvation by God’s grace and not by human merit (Ephesians 2:8), what’s left for us to accomplish?

Living God’s way as His priesthood

Do we just stand still and bathe in the light of God’s grace? No! William Barclay, in his commentary on 2 Peter, offers this insight: “The truth is that, as Christians see it, happiness depends *both* on God’s gift and on our effort. We do not earn salvation, but at the same time we have to bend every energy towards the Christian objective . . . Faith does not exempt us from works; the generosity of God does not absolve us from effort” (*The New Daily Study Bible: The Letters of James and Peter*, 2003, p. 346).

That is, faith (in God’s sustaining grace) without works (obedience and total surrender to God as our grateful response) is dead (James 2:17-18)!

Christ’s call of “Follow Me” is multidimensional. It’s not merely to be a disciple (student and follower) learning a way of life, but is additionally to be the fleshly temple of God on two feet on the move toward the Kingdom of God. We are also called to be “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you might proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

Revelation 5:10 takes this one step further to outline God’s intent for Christ’s followers to become “kings and priests” under His future worldwide rule. The biblical reality is that we are now in training to become a realm of holy priests under the tutelage of the great heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 3:1). What do priests do? They teach and guide worship, they proclaim praises and act as intermediaries, including through offering sacrifices.

The daily call to be a living sacrifice

Perhaps there’s no more complete means of worshipping and praising God for granting us His Spirit of the divine nature than sacrificing ourselves on a daily basis.

Paul speaks to this in Romans 12:1: “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. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (emphasis added throughout).

Our human response to God’s spiritual grace is to offer up ourselves to Him and to others on a daily basis. It’s an incredible thing to die for God in martyrdom, but in one sense it’s equally challenging to live for Him and live like Jesus Christ on a daily basis by having our minds and thinking transformed by “walk[ing] just as He walked (1 John 2:6) and by “dying daily” (1 Corinthians 15:31)—deed by deed, need by need, person by person.

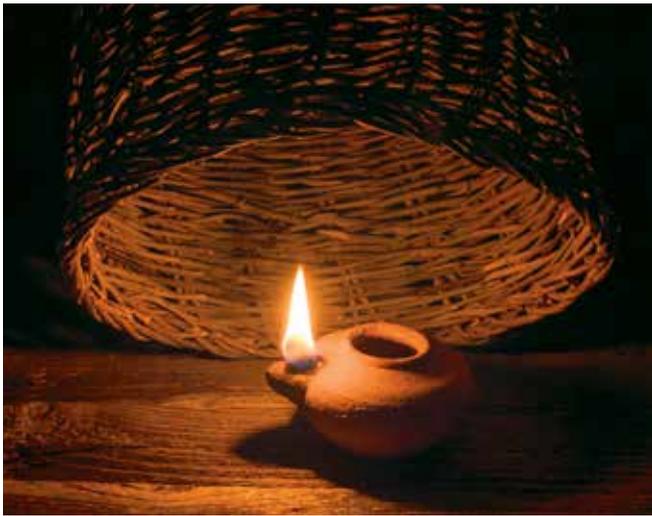
How do we actively surrender every element of our human territory into holy and acceptable alignment to the righteousness imparted to us through His divine nature? Be advised: It’s not an *event* but a *lifelong process*. And remember, Jesus promised, “I will come to you.” We are not alone!

After the incredible pronouncement about being partakers of the divine nature in 2 Peter 1:4, Peter offers systematic qualities to guide us in the Spirit-led sacrificial life, wherein God rules the throne of our heart. The apostle presents our part in drawing on the righteousness of God to ultimately occupy every vestige of our life.

Diligence with zeal

He begins in verse 5 by exhorting us first to be “giving all diligence” in response to our Heavenly Father’s calling and gift of His Spirit. The original Greek word denotes a sense of zeal towards the mission granted. Dedication in such a manner requires focus and, yes, self-sacrifice.

It’s been said that many people aim at absolutely nothing all



Is it any wonder that Christ says that we are to be a light to a darkened society and not remain hidden under a basket?

their lives and hit it every time. Remember Barclay’s comment that “we have to bend every energy towards the Christian objective”? While salvation is God’s gift, He wants to see our responsive desire to grab hold of it. And the opportunity for that will come minute by minute and person by person when we least expect it—but we need to be prepared.

I’m reminded of the words of pianist and composer Jan Paderewski when asked by a fellow pianist if he could be ready to play a recital on short notice. The famous musician responded: “I am always ready. I have practiced eight hours daily for forty years.” The other pianist remarked, “I wish I had been born with your determination.” Paderewski then replied: “We are all born with it. I just used mine.”

Let’s remember that those of us who’ve been spiritually converted have all been “blessed . . . with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). The same determined Spirit of Christ that said, “Not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42) resides in each of us to be drawn on!

But we have to draw on it! Being a Christian takes diligence that comes through a zeal that consumes us as it did Jesus (John 2:17) and continual practice. It takes total commitment

to learning and living His Holy Word. Life will have its twists and turns and continuous interruptions. Be zealous and diligent as you allow God’s Spirit to occupy every facet of your life by putting first things first—praising God not merely by what you say, but by what you do.

Faith and virtue—and laying down our life

Continuing in 2 Peter 1:5, the apostle next tells us to build on diligence with faith. Faith is more than believing in what you hold in your hand. As Hebrews 11:1 expresses, “Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see” (NLT 2013).

Simply put, when faith goes to market, it takes a basket. The Christian faith is not institutionalized, but is personalized and echoed in the words of Paul in 2 Timothy 1:12: “For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day.”

Such faith reminds us and at times restores us on the journey, refreshing us about a promise, “*I will come to you,*” and—better still—“*I will never leave you nor forsake you*” (Hebrews 13:5).

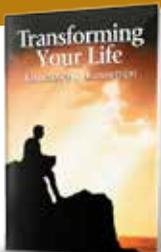
Returning to 2 Peter 1:5, Peter next spotlights virtue as a reasoned response to the goodness of God that has been granted to us. The root Greek word, *arete*, denotes an intrinsic moral excellence visible to others. A picture is worth a thousand words. Is it any wonder that Christ says that we are to be a light to a darkened society and not remain hidden under a basket? (See Matthew 5:14-16.)

Of course this is not about promoting ourselves but humbling ourselves in self sacrifice—allowing Jesus Christ as the light of the world (John 8:12) to shine *through* us to others. This takes faith, courage and, yes, practice—not in the soft spots of life, but in moments in which our knees may be shaking yet our hearts remain firm beyond the moment.

Sacrifice does not come cheaply. It will cost us something—*ourselves*. Jesus Christ of course gave all. When people look at us, do they witness the bright light of Christ—seeing us emulating the sacrificial life of our Master? Or do they merely see the flickering flame of momentary devotion?

The Spirit-led sacrificial life isn’t perfected in a day or hour. It’s not an event frozen in time, but is a progressive adventure encompassing the remainder of our allotted days. It can’t be squeezed into a moment, and neither can the qualities it requires be squeezed into one column.

So let’s keep walking together towards the next column and beyond as we continue to explore the qualities of the Spirit-led sacrificial life, exemplifying our desire to remain on the path set before us as we respond to the call of “*Follow Me.*” **BT**



LEARN MORE

How do we begin to live a life of submission to God, a life pleasing to Him, a life transformed by the Spirit and power of God? You need to read our study guide *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*. Download or request your free copy today!

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“Did Jesus Christ Really Exist?” best historical proof

I just read your article “Did Jesus Christ Really Exist?” in the November–December issue, and it is the best historical proof of Jesus’ existence and the accuracy of the books of the Bible I have ever read. I am a realist, and proof suits me better than faith alone. I would like to receive three additional copies of this issue—one for my pastor, one to send to my brother who is a retired pastor and one to send to my step-daughter who is a church secretary.

From the Internet

Response to “Do We Have Valid Testimony to the Life of Christ?”

Wow! I just read some facts about the crucifixion of Jesus, and I am astonished and amazed! I have long been feeling that everything I have been told and every doctrine I have been following has been untrue. I am now seeing that the truth has been distorted by mankind. I want to understand what God wants of me and how I can attain it. I want to know more about your ministry. Thank you.

From the Internet

“Don’t You Know Christ Is in You?” inspired us deeply

Reading the article “Don’t You Know Christ Is in You?” inspired my husband and me deeply. It clearly explains that both the Father and our Savior Jesus Christ are residing in the cleansed hearts and mind of believers by their Spirit. We are participators of the divine nature, and we are a new creation if we live in the Spirit and no longer in the flesh. We receive all we need to live a victorious life by the Spirit dwelling in us; it is not we who live, but it is Christ who lives in us.

Subscriber in Auckland, New Zealand

Inspired to learn about the biblical Holy Days

I’ve been a Christian my whole life, and like most Christians I celebrated Christmas and Easter and worshipped on Sunday. I’m new to learning about the Sabbath and the biblical festivals. How would someone like me keep these festivals? I have no church to attend where this is preached or to fellowship with other believers. I just feel alone, and I have a ton of questions. I study the Bible daily, and Google teachings so that really helps, but I wish I had other believers to worship with.

Reader in Oklahoma

Thank you so much for providing the dates for the seven annual festivals and Holy Days. Can you please provide details on how to celebrate each day, what is needed, what are we to do, etc.? I am new to Christianity, and very recently found out about God’s Holy Days, and wanted to know how to go about keeping each of the Holy Days. Thank you very much for your time, and God bless all of you.

From the Internet

We’re thrilled that you are excited to learn of God’s Sabbath and annual festivals. To find more information about them, including how to observe them and where to find a body of like-minded believers, search “how do Christians observe the biblical festivals” at ucg.org.

I thank the Almighty God for having directed me towards your website to learn more about the seventh-day Sabbath.

Reader in Uganda

Our pastor has just begun teaching about the Holy Days of God. A man who attends our church celebrates each of these days, and so we have started learning more about them. I have watched your *Beyond Today* program about the Feast of Tabernacles and found it very interesting and enlightening. Your booklet *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* would be a great help to our congregation, because there are so many who don’t understand these days.

Reader in Texas

Thankful for *Beyond Today* television

I was injured by chemicals serving as a nurse in Vietnam, and now I can hardly move. I cannot tell you how overjoyed I was to find that *Beyond Today* is back on television in Australia! Your program is the one light in my life, and it has given me so much hope for the future. The three hosts are absolutely lovely, and the way they present God’s teachings is so refined, godly and simply beautiful. You can see that they put their whole hearts into it. Please pass my thanks on to others in your organization, and thank you so much for your wonderful magazine and booklets, too. May God bless you all.

Subscriber in New South Wales, Australia

Is *Beyond Today* published by a Christian organization?

I have been a subscriber for quite some time now and really enjoy reading *Beyond Today*, but one reader stated that your magazine is produced by a non-Christian organization. One of the reasons I subscribed is because I thought this was a Christian magazine. Could you please tell me if it is published by a non-Christian organization?

From the Internet

The United Church of God, an International Association, which publishes Beyond Today, is a Christian organization. We trace our origins to the Church that Jesus Christ founded in the early first century. Our ongoing commitment is to recapture and practice the true Christianity of Jesus and the apostles. We strive to follow the same teachings, doctrines and practices of the early Church.

Our efforts to preach the same gospel Christ taught include a large library of printed study guides made available free of charge and an

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Are you on Facebook? If so, visit our *Beyond Today* magazine page. See what other readers are saying. Find links to interesting articles and Web commentaries. Become a *Beyond Today* magazine Facebook fan!

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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Q: Does God pick national leaders?

From the Internet

A: The Bible records that Nebuchadnezzar, a powerful ruler over the Babylonian Empire 600 years before Christ, received a vision from God. The prophet Daniel interpreted this dream. Daniel explained that God gave Nebuchadnezzar this vision “in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men” (Daniel 4:17).

As implied in Daniel’s words, Nebuchadnezzar was not a nice man. He threw people alive into hot furnaces if they didn’t bow to his idol. He threatened all of his advisors with mass murder if they didn’t interpret his dream.

Few developed countries have experienced such a violent ruler in recent times. Yet, the Bible clearly shows that at times God will place terrible leaders in positions of great power for the explicit purpose of fulfilling His plans.

This was certainly true of the pharaoh of the Exodus, whose heart God hardened time after time until Egypt was humbled for its evil treatment of God’s people, Israel. God sent Moses to tell Pharaoh, “Indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth” (Exodus 9:16).

God at times has been directly involved in elevating individuals to very prominent positions. He inspired the prophet Isaiah to announce far in advance the rise to power of Cyrus the Great to fulfill His purpose (Isaiah 45:1). It was a century and half later when God gave Cyrus power over the Persian Empire.

At another time, Daniel stated, “Praise the name of God forever and ever . . . He controls the course of world events; he removes kings and sets up other kings” (Daniel 2:20-21, New Living Translation 2013). The apostle Paul, writing to Christians

living in the capital city of the Roman Empire, wrote, “All authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God” (Romans 13:1, NLT 2013; see also Psalm 75:6-7; John 19:10-11).

So does this mean that God somehow “endorses” America’s new president or any other leader with all of his or her flaws and foibles? No. What it does mean is that God has a purpose for humanity, a purpose for current events, and He will accomplish that purpose through the leadership that He either puts in place or allows.

The Scriptures show that while God sometimes does indeed decide who will be the leading official of a nation, He also allows people to pick national leaders whose values are not those taught in the Holy Scriptures, even to their detriment. He once criticized His own anciently chosen people with these words: “Israel has rejected the good . . . They set up kings, but not by Me” (Hosea 8:4). The lesson is plain: God only approves of those rulers who have not “rejected the good” as He defines it.

The apostle Paul gives this superb advice for Christians who wonder what to think of the governments they find themselves living under: “Therefore I exhort first of all that *supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority*, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Timothy 2:1-2, emphasis added).

Praying that God will provide leaders who will work to make it possible for believers to live “a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” is commendable and proper in God’s eyes. But first it is critical to learn and practice His will before expecting Him to hear those prayers (see 1 John 3:22). Even Jesus, having complete faith in God’s decisions, prayed, “Not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). And it is in God’s Word, the Bible, where we can find His will revealed.

accessible, informative website geared toward helping people develop a stronger relationship with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. Our unique history and work can be found in our booklets This Is the United Church of God and Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God. You can find both publications on our website, ucg.org.

How to find a United Church of God congregation

I have been searching for a Christian church that has not mixed itself with any pagan practices. I would really love to come and visit one of your congregations. Are there any in Illinois? Thanks.

Reader in Illinois

Yes, we have a number of congregations in Illinois. Visit our website ucg.org/congregations to find the location nearest you.

I watch *Beyond Today* on Vision TV. Where can I find a United Church of God congregation near where I live? I know you keep the Sabbath and do not follow the traditions of men. Thank you very much.

Viewer in British Columbia, Canada

I love your teachings. They are similar to my church’s, but we wor-

ship on Sunday. I want to become a member—I have been reading your magazines and they are very encouraging.

From the Internet

I’m a believer in keeping the commandments of God, including the Sabbath. I’ve been looking for a church that worships on the Sabbath, and would like some information on the United Church of God. If it’s open to anyone, my wife and I would love to join, listen to the Word of God, and grow spiritually. Thank you.

From the Internet

We welcome anyone who wishes to worship with us in peace to join us for Sabbath services. We have congregations around the world. You can find the one nearest you on our website at ucg.org/congregations or by writing to one of our offices listed on page 39 of this issue.

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

Christ's First Coming

Was Prophesied in Detail!

Welcome to the sixth lesson in the “Bible Prophecy and You” series. Bible prophecies foretold—in remarkable detail—the two *greatest world events*, one in the past and one in the future. Those events are the first coming of Jesus Christ and His second coming! This lesson focuses on His first coming, “the greatest story ever told.”

Many details of His miraculous and marvelous birth, life, death and resurrection were foretold in prophecies sprinkled throughout the Old Testament. This lesson will point out some of those prophecies and their fulfillments and hopefully whet your appetite to notice more and more as you continue your study of the Bible.

Consider this quote from our study guide *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*: “The New Testament writers cite messianic prophecies from the Old Testament *more than 130 times*. By some estimates the Old Testament contains 300 prophetic passages that describe who the Messiah is and what He will do. Of these, 60 are major prophecies. What are the chances of these prophecies being fulfilled in one person?”

The answer? The chances are *staggeringly remote*—to the point of eliminating the possibility of mere coincidence.

The fulfillment of all the Bible prophecies regarding Jesus’ life, death and resurrection proved absolutely that He was the promised Messiah, Son of God and “Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14).

The Bible foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus Christ more than 1,800 years in advance in the true story of Abraham and his son Isaac.

Abraham loved his son Isaac as much as any parent

could love a child. Abraham and his wife Sarah had longed for a child, but Sarah was “barren”—unable to conceive. However, God promised them that they would have descendants, and after a 25-year-long wait, when Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90, they had a son together whom they named Isaac. This miraculous birth to a woman long past the age for childbearing was a forerunner of the future miraculous divine conception of the Word, Jesus Christ, in the womb of a virgin, Mary (John 1:1-2, 14).

Then when their son was older, God shocked Abraham with a command to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering at the top of a mountain in the land of Moriah (Genesis 22:2), which was apparently later the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (see 2 Chronicles 3:1). God was testing Abraham’s faith and obedience and giving us a picture of what He Himself would go through in giving His Son for us. As grief-stricken as Abraham was, he agreed to carry out God’s command because he believed that God would resurrect Isaac to fulfill His promises regarding descendants.

The journey to Moriah lasted three days, so in Abraham’s mind, his son was as good as dead for three days. Isaac could have resisted but apparently did not. At the last second, God stopped Abraham from slaying Isaac. Abraham’s faith had been proven. As a substitute for Isaac, God provided a ram.

The willingness of Abraham and Isaac to carry out God’s command illustrates the willingness of God the Father and His Son to make the ultimate sacrifice because of their love for the whole world. The substitution of the ram was a type of Jesus suffering the death penalty in our place. And the sparing of Isaac was a forerunner of Jesus’ escaping the

Who's Behind Beyond Today?

grave through His resurrection from the dead. See Genesis 22 and Hebrews 11:17-19. This poignant story gives us a deeper appreciation and empathy for the sacrifice the Father and Son made for all of us.

The essential purposes for Christ's first coming

The Heavenly Father and the Son, also called the Word, are both God (John 1:1). They planned "before the foundation of the world" that the Word would one day temporarily give up His glory and power in heaven, be born as a human being and set a perfect example for mankind of how to live a godly life (1 Peter 1:20; John 1:14; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 John 2:4-6).

Jesus revealed God's amazing plan for enabling human beings to have their sins forgiven and, on repentance and faith in the sacrifice of Jesus, receive God's Spirit as a down payment on eternal life as God's children in the Kingdom of God (Romans 8:14-17). Jesus then allowed Himself, God in the flesh, to suffer and be put to death to pay the penalty of sin for all (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-10).

His resurrection and return to former glory in heaven were the final proofs that He was God and had become mankind's Mediator, Lord and Savior (1 Timothy 2:5; Acts 5:30-31; 2 Peter 1:11). In fact, the entire Bible points directly and indirectly to the past, present and future work of Jesus Christ.

Let's now take note of several important prophecies and their fulfillments.

► Was the Messiah to be a descendant of King David?

"There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots" (Isaiah 11:1).

"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth" (Jeremiah 23:5).

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham . . ." (Matthew 1:1).

Note that Jesse, mentioned in Isaiah 11:1, was the father of Israel's greatest human king, David. During Jesus' ministry, some people quickly became convinced that He was the promised "son of David." Then during Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem several days before He was crucified, "the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: 'Hosanna to the Son of David!'" (Matthew 21:9).

► Was the Messiah to come from Bethlehem?

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).

"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem . . ." (Matthew 2:1).

There were two Bethlehems, one south of Jerusalem in the region of Ephrathah in Judea and the other to the north, in the region of the biblical tribe of Zebulun. But Micah's prophecy is clear. Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, as Micah foretold.

► Would the Messiah be born of a virgin mother?



Who's behind the *Beyond Today* magazine and television program? Many readers have wondered who we are and how we are able to provide *Beyond Today* free to all who request it. Simply put, *Beyond Today* is provided by people—people from all walks of life, from all over the world, as enabled by God.

And those people have a common goal—to proclaim



the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all the world as a witness and to teach all nations to observe 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 the pages of this magazine, on our TV show, and in dozens of helpful study guides (also free), we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and threaten our very 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:

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“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel [meaning “God With Us”]” (Isaiah 7:14).

“Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, ‘Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!’ But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.

“Then the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.’

“Then Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I do not know a man?’ And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God’” (Luke 1:26-35).

An angel appeared first to Mary to tell her that she would conceive a child by the Holy Spirit. The angel appeared later to Joseph to explain to him that Mary’s conception was a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy (Matthew 1:20-23).

► Did the biblical sacrifices point prophetically to Jesus’ sacrifice?

“But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:11-12).

“And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God . . .” (Hebrews 10:11-12).

The book of Hebrews explains how the animal sacrifices and temple rituals required of ancient Israel were a physical type of the perfect sacrifice of Christ. They pointed to the coming “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The sacrifice of the Passover lamb dramatically pointed to “Christ, our Passover [who] was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7).

As a fulfillment of prophecy, Jesus died on the very day of Passover. The lamb’s blood on the doorposts of the Israelites’ houses symbolized the shed blood of Christ who died so we can be forgiven and saved (Romans 5:9).

► Would the Messiah be crucified?

“For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet” (Psalm 22:16).

“And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand

and the other on the left” (Luke 23:33).

“The other disciples therefore said to him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ So he said to them, ‘Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe’ . . . Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing’” (John 20:25, 27).

Crucifixion is the only form of execution likely to cause a piercing of hands and feet. Yet amazingly, this prophecy was written almost 900 years before the Romans started using crucifixion for condemned criminals!

► Would any of the Messiah’s bones be broken?

“He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken” (Psalm 34:20).

“But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs . . . For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, ‘Not one of His bones shall be broken’” (John 19:32-33, 36).

In spite of all the brutal and cruel torment that Jesus received, God made sure that, to fulfill this prophecy, none of His bones were broken!

► Would the Messiah be betrayed by a trusted friend for 30 pieces of silver?

“Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me” (Psalm 41:9).

“Then I said to them, ‘If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain.’ So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver” (Zechariah 11:12).

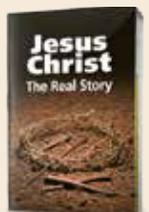
When Jesus indicated it was Judas Iscariot who would betray Him, He said this was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 41:9 (John 13:18, 26). And Judas was indeed paid 30 pieces of silver for his traitorous act (Matthew 26:14-15).

In fact, no fewer than 29 prophecies were fulfilled in the 24-hour period leading up to Jesus’ death. In a sermon by the apostle Peter, he said, “But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled” (Acts 3:18).

Apply Now

Consider that with all the prophecies of His own suffering and death, Jesus knew in detail what He would have to go through. No wonder He prayed in Luke 22:42, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.” Verse 44 explains that “His sweat became like great drops of blood” through the mental agony He experienced. Yet He was willing to do all this to pay for your sins so you can be forgiven and receive God’s gift of eternal life!

Read Acts 2:36-38 and consider the response God wants from you for that great sacrifice. Read what Peter, speaking under the inspiration of God, told them (and us) to do. Take time today to talk with God about Christ’s sacrifice and what He expects you to do. We also encourage you to read our free study guide *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*. You can download or request it at ucg.org/booklets. 



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