

# The Good News

March-April 2009

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

## When Nations Fall

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## Lincoln: President and Prophet?



On Feb. 12 America celebrated the 200th anniversary of the birth of one of its most beloved and respected presidents, Abraham Lincoln.

Lincoln took office in a time of great crisis. Although the issues are different today, the country he loved again faces great crises that, if unchecked, threaten its survival.

Lincoln was a student of the Bible. As many young men of his time experienced, books were rare and the Bible was often the only book found in many households. Lincoln himself noted of the schoolhouse he attended, "We had no reading books or grammars, and all our reading was done from the Bible" (quoted by Elton Trueblood, *Abraham Lincoln: Theologian of American Anguish*, 1973, p. 50).

It's no wonder the Bible shaped his thinking, including how he viewed his country. His words echo those of the biblical prophets.

For example, after the Union's humiliating July 1861 defeat at the Battle of Bull Run, President Lincoln declared a "National Day of

## The Bible shaped Lincoln's thinking. His words echo those of the biblical prophets.

Prayer and Fasting," calling on the nation to repent and turn to God.

"It is fit and becoming in all people, at all times," he stated, "to acknowledge and revere the supreme government of God; to bow in humble submission to his chastisements; to confess and deplore their sins and transgressions . . . and to pray, with all fervency and contrition, for the pardon of their past offenses . . . It is peculiarly fit for us to recognize the hand of God in this terrible visitation [of war], and in sorrowful remembrance of our own faults and crimes as a nation and as individuals, to humble ourselves before him, and to pray for his mercy—to pray that we may be spared further punishment . . ."

Lincoln may well have had in mind biblical chapters such as Deuteronomy 28, which describes the blessings God pours out for obedience—as well as the curses that follow when people choose to disobey Him. It's sobering reading with a strong message for our day.

In one of the darkest periods of the Civil War, he repeated his pleas with a "Proclamation Appointing a National Fast Day" issued March 30, 1863. His words strikingly fit our day: "We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown. *But we have forgotten God . . .*"

"We have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, *we have become too self-sufficient . . . , too proud to pray to the God that made us.* It behooves us, then, *to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.*"

President Lincoln wasn't afraid to tell it as he saw it. He felt a deep responsibility to his country. So do we at *The Good News*.

Sometimes we receive complaints that we have too much bad news in *The Good News*. We wish it weren't so. We wish this nation, and others, were not plagued by the many problems we've brought on ourselves by turning our backs on God's truth and laws. Like Lincoln, we have a responsibility to tell it like it is, and we do. Reading his heartfelt words above, we think he would approve.

Thankfully there is good news to proclaim as well. God has given us the best news possible. But to understand where He wants us to end up and the good that lies in store, we need to realize where we are now—and take steps such as those called for by Abraham Lincoln.

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor

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# When Nations Fall

The fall of nations and empires often takes place over several generations. Sometimes, however, it's sudden and takes place virtually overnight, stunning the world. Are we on the verge of witnessing another collapse? Are we paying attention to growing warning signs?

by Noel Hornor

**H**istorian Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) wrote a classic analysis on the rise and fall of civilizations. In his 12-volume work, *A Study of History*, he examined 21 great civilizations. Of all these, the only one that survives intact to the present is the United States of America.

If you were to poll Americans about whether they could envision the fall of their nation, most would probably react with a resounding negative answer.

Such a response would be no surprise. Citizens of some of the great empires of the past thought the same, but America would be wise to heed the lessons of history.

America has existed as a nation for less than two and a half centuries. Yet one of the longest-lasting civilizations of the past, ancient Rome, fell after more than 12 centuries. This was after standing first as

a monarchy, then a republic, then an empire.

In the waning days of the Western Roman Empire, which came to an end in A.D. 476, how did the Romans themselves feel about their status? Author Bryan Ward-Perkins wrote, “Romans before the fall were as certain as we are today that their world would continue for ever substantially unchanged” (*The Fall of Rome*, 2006, p. 183).

Even before the actual fall of the empire, the city of Rome was humiliated in A.D. 410 when an army of Germanic peoples plundered Rome. It’s interesting to note the observation of one person of that era: “‘There will never be an end to the power of Rome,’ wrote the court poet Claudian, shortly before the city’s sack by the Visigoths” (Cullen Murphy, *Are We Rome?* 2007, p. 31).

Can we see parallels between America and ancient Rome that portend the collapse of American civilization? Several authors have pointed out strong similarities.

Historians have cited many reasons for

Rome’s fall. One scholar compiled a list of 210—some credible and others far less so.

Some have to do with external factors and others with internal. We will focus here on the most striking internal problems that weakened Rome and that are now likewise destroying the United States from within.

## Massive spending: A staggering financial burden

As with many empires, financial difficulty contributed to the fall of Rome. “Military expenditure was by far the largest item in the imperial budget” (Ward-Perkins, p. 41).

The military was financed directly from taxes, as there was no mechanism in the Roman structure to finance it through governmental borrowing. Lacking sufficient tax revenue, Rome was unable to adequately defend itself in the early fifth century when hostile armies invaded. The rampaging of barbarian armies disturbed the economy, causing revenues to plummet at the very time they were most urgently needed.

Another author adds: “There was no obvious means of quickly or substantially increasing output . . . It is unlikely, therefore, that there was much extra slack left by the year 400 to fund still larger armies after the major increases in tax extracted a century earlier to fund the new armies on the Persian

front” (Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 2006, pp. 447-448).

In recent decades America has relied on massive debt to finance much of its expenditures. According to data on the White House Web site on Jan. 5, 2009, the national debt was over \$10 trillion and increasing at a rate of *nearly \$100,000 per second*.

Of expenditures financed from the general revenue fund of the U.S. government, 30 percent is allotted to defense. Defense spending has risen steadily since 2001, when America embarked on the war on terror. The official defense budget for the United States is \$516 billion dollars, but other sources put it as high as \$1.1 trillion.

The costs are driven up largely by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—neither of which is part of the official Department of Defense budget. By the end of 2008, the cost to fight the Iraq war alone totaled over \$580 billion. This breaks down to more than \$341 million per day—\$4,681 per U.S. household and \$1,721 per citizen.

In addition to its own wars, America provides the military muscle to guarantee the security of many other nations. Its military spending equals that of *the next 15 countries combined*. And although America is the world’s number one economic power, it provides a security umbrella for the number two and four powers, Japan and Germany.

Eventually Rome’s extensive commitments became too financially burdensome. “Rome had over-extended herself . . . The cost of maintaining the ‘Pax Romana’—the Peace of Rome—over most of the known world was proving too great even for the enormous resources of the mighty empire . . . The cost of its gigantic military program was only one of Rome’s headaches” (Daniel Mannix, *The Way of the Gladiator*, 2001, p. 3)

The United States’ financial commitments are taking a heavy toll just as they did on ancient Rome.

Interest on the national debt alone devours 19 percent of U.S. general fund revenues.

**“All the lessons of history tell us that the loss of economic discipline destroys nations and people.”**

A hugely expensive bailout package for the financial services industry was approved in October 2008. Then in February Congress approved an even larger financial package to stimulate America’s ailing economy.

This will produce, some financial experts estimate, a budget deficit of some *\$2 trillion*—more than *four times higher* than recent deficits have run. As the Jan. 3, 2009, issue of *The Times* of London warned, “Though he may not yet know it, *the role for which the US President-elect has been chosen is the management of national decline*” (Matthew Parris, “Rusty Superpower in Need of Careful Driver,” emphasis added throughout).

Moreover, this is not even taking into account massive looming problems in financing Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid as tens of millions of baby boomers begin to retire. By some estimates, when these unfunded liabilities are factored in, America’s true national debt is greater than *\$50 trillion*—roughly half a million dollars for every U.S. household!

America is spending itself into national bankruptcy. In 2004 Peter Peterson, a former chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank in New York, wrote: “*America was once the greatest creditor nation to nations around the globe; it is now the largest debtor in the world . . . we depend on an unprecedented \$2 billion of foreign capital every working day. If foreign confidence were to wane, this could lead to a dreaded hard landing*” (*Running on Empty*, front cover flap).

Yet national leaders seem to discern no real problem with this, as we saw with the previous administration: “President Bush says that the deficit is just ‘numbers on paper.’ Vice President Cheney claims that Reagan proved ‘deficits don’t matter’” (ibid.).

But free spending and fiscal irresponsibility do matter. As cultural commentator Jim Nelson Black summarizes, “All the lessons of history tell us that *the loss of economic discipline destroys nations and people*” (*When Nations Die*, 1994, p. 55).

#### **Cultural decay: Family and moral breakdown**

Roman family life never lacked its problems. For example, during the days of the Republic men had rights that women did not have; women’s status was low compared to men’s. However, during this period morals and family life were wholesome compared to what they would later descend to during the days of the empire.

Noted historian Will Durant offered the following description of sex and marital life in Rome: “From beginning to end of Roman

**“America was once the greatest creditor nation to nations around the globe; it is now the largest debtor in the world.”**

history the sexuality of the common man remained essentially the same: coarse and free, but not incompatible with a successful family life. In all free classes virginity was demanded of young women . . .

“The first recorded divorce in Roman history is dated 268 B.C.; a suspicious tradition claimed that no divorce had previously occurred since the foundation of the city” (*The Story of Civilization*, Vol. 3: Caesar and Christ, 1971, pp. 68-69).

But during the reign of the first emperor, Augustus (27 B.C.–A.D. 14), even this semblance of morality had vanished. “A large number of native-stock Romans avoided wedlock altogether, preferring prostitutes or concubines even to a varied succession of wives. Of those who married, a majority appear to have limited their families by abortion, infanticide . . . and contraception” (p. 222).

Augustus longed for conditions of the days of the Republic when the national moral standard was higher. He decided to take action. “By his powers as censor and tribune Augustus promulgated . . . a series of laws . . . aimed at restoring morals, marriage, fidelity, parentage, and a simpler life” (p. 223).

Yet he was unable to stem the tide of rising immorality, and the standard of civic morals continued its downhill slide. Not all Roman women consented to or plunged themselves into the depraved ways that had formerly been the domain only of men, but some did.

As one historian explains: “Before long women began to betray the truth which they should have pledged to their husband . . . The *Epigrams* of [the poet] Martial and the *Satires* of Juvenal bear witness to the prevalence of adultery . . .

“It is obvious that unhappy marriages must have been innumerable in a city where Juvenal as a matter of course adjures a guest whom he has invited to dinner to forget at his table the anxieties which have haunted him all day, especially those caused by carryings on of his wife, who ‘is wont to go forth at

dawn and to come home at night with crumpled hair and flushed face and ears” (Jerome Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, 2003, pp. 93-94).

“From this time on, we witness an epidemic of divorces . . . The disease tended to become endemic under the empire” (p. 97).

Continuing: “We must not imagine that it was always the man who took the initiative in these matters. Women in their turn discarded their husbands and abandoned them without scruple . . . Juvenal points the finger of scorn at one of these: ‘Thus does she lord it over her husband. But before long she vacates her kingdom; she flits from one home to another wear-

ing out her bridal veil . . . Thus does the tale of her husbands grow; there will be eight of them in the course of five autumns . . .’” (p. 99).

Whatever strength there had been in the familial unit of society in Rome had been diluted. “The fine edge of character had been blunted in the Rome of the second century” (p. 79).

Over time the empire would steadily decline, its corruption and lack of ethics escalating to plague levels. “Honesty and nobility of character disappeared, sexual immorality became rampant, and speaking out against excess or corruption was called treason. To squelch all evidence of resistance in their

policies, Roman emperors from Nero on used the army and their personal guard as a sort of thought police to ferret out dissent and punish opponents” (Black, p. 75).

Even the moral aspects of Roman religion in its various forms, which had once helped arrest the more sinister and evil aspects of human nature, lost their power. The result was a further decline of society in general, which contributed to Rome’s eventual collapse.

### What about America’s moral state?

Though America’s moral standard may not be as low as that which existed before

## The Experience of Israel and Judah: A Lesson for Today

In the Old Testament era, God worked primarily with the descendants of a man named Abraham. Abraham was a remarkable man to whom God had made promises because of Abraham’s faithfulness to Him. The Bible focuses on Abraham’s descendants through his grandson Jacob, the people of Israel (Israel being the name God gave to Jacob after he proved himself to God—see Genesis 32:28). These descendants were to receive many national blessings because of God’s promises to Abraham.

The books of the Old Testament describe Jacob’s descendants, the Israelites, growing into a mighty nation with whom God made a covenant. The essence of this covenant is spelled out in Deuteronomy 28, in which God promised them that if they obeyed Him, they would continue to be blessed. The penalty for violating this covenant was that they would suffer many curses and eventually be taken into national captivity.

During the first few hundred years that the Israelites dwelled in the Promised Land, they experienced a series of ups and downs, during which time they were guided in part by a system of judges. Eventually, during the tenure of Samuel, the last of the judges, Israel demanded a king. In response God gave them a monarchy but warned them that they would be subjected to government abuse at the hands of human kings (1 Samuel 8:10-18). Their first king was Saul, followed by David, Solomon and Rehoboam.

Rehoboam began his reign with strong signals that he would be an especially oppressive ruler (1 Kings 12:11), which led to Israel’s division into two competing kingdoms. The larger of the two, in the north, retained the name Israel and consisted of 10 tribes. The smaller in the south, with its capital at Jerusalem, was called Judah, consisting of two tribes. Thus began a long history of intrigue, rebellion and often-times violence in the two separate nations.

### Israel’s sins and downfall

Those of the northern kingdom of Israel were especially flagrant in their violations of the original covenant God had made with their fathers. They adopted practices of pagan nations, including child sacrifice, one of the heinous sins of the Canaanites who had occupied the land before them. They also copied the Canaanites’ practice of ritual fornication—the mixing of sex with idolatrous religious worship. Sexual morality sank to a new low (Amos 2:7).

Charles Feinberg summarized conditions during the latter history of Israel: “The days of . . . Jeroboam II in Israel were marked by great prosperity, in fact, the most prosperous for the Northern Kingdom. Israel was at the height of her power under this king. The period was one of great wealth, luxury, arrogance, carnal security, oppression of the poor, moral decay, and formal worship. The moral declension and spiritual degradation of the people were appalling” (*The Minor Prophets*, 1952, p. 86).

God sent many prophets—Elijah, Hosea, Amos and Micah, among

others—to Israel to warn the people to repent. The result was always the same—no lasting repentance. Finally God’s patience ran out, and during the late eighth century B.C. He allowed them to be taken into captivity by Assyria (2 Kings 17:5-6), after which they remained scattered, becoming known as the lost 10 tribes of Israel.

### Judah follows in Israel’s footsteps

The decline of the southern kingdom of Judah was not as rapid as that of Israel, but its people also often lapsed into rebellion and idolatry. They failed to learn a lesson from Israel’s devastating national punishment and continued in their sins. They, too, were threatened by Assyria and faced a similar fate.

When the Assyrian king Sennacherib laid siege to Jerusalem, Judah’s King Hezekiah fervently sought God’s intervention. God heard his prayer and delivered Jerusalem from the Assyrian ruler. But after Hezekiah died, his son Manasseh reigned and committed terrible abominations and atrocities—including sacrificing his son to a pagan deity (2 Kings 21:1-6).

The Bible summarizes God’s relationship with Judah: “And the LORD God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers . . . because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy” (2 Chronicles 36:15-16).

The people of Judah had made a mockery of the covenant their ancestors had made with God. The result, as with the northern tribes before them, was that God allowed their nation to be destroyed. Many of them were slaughtered by the Babylonians, Jerusalem was razed and the survivors were carried away captive to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:17-20).

### Will we learn from their example?

What can America learn from the histories of Israel and Judah? It can learn that it’s God who gives blessings to nations and it’s God who takes them away.

God is already removing the blessings He has given to the United States. He is doing it because America has rejected godly values. The nation disobeys and ignores Him, preferring instead the false gods of money, sex and secularism.

Most who think they are following the Bible and Jesus Christ unknowingly embrace a corrupting mixture of Christian and pagan traditions as their beliefs (to learn more, read our free booklet *The Church Jesus Built*).

Jesus issued a sobering judgment against religions that profess adherence to the Bible but don’t really accept or follow it: “*In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*” (Mark 7:7). Like ancient Israel and Judah, America is disobeying God’s laws and, like Israel and Judah, it will fall unless its people return to God with their whole heart.



## It is God who gave America its territory, its wealth, its resources and its status as a great and powerful nation. But God also has the power to remove all of this.

the collapse of the Roman Empire, we have abundant cause for concern. According to a Sept. 15, 2008, statement from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in 2007 there were 7.4 marriages per 1,000 Americans and 3.7 divorces. That's half as many divorces as marriages. According to the same agency, in 2005, 37 percent of all births were to unmarried women.

Such statistics spell serious trouble for the moral and spiritual health of any nation. The family is the basis of all sound societies; when it fails, inevitable decline sets in.

As the family goes, so goes the nation. The United States may well be living on borrowed time because of the high rate of divorce-affected families and single-parent homes.

The prophet Ezekiel wrote, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezekiel 18:2). The meaning of this statement is that choices result in consequences for those around and generations that follow. In the case of divorce and single-parent families, the consequences can spell disaster.

### Children of divorce

The best measure available in America of the familial dynamics of divorce was borne out in a study of the long-term effects it has on the children of parents who split up.

Following a 25-year landmark study, Judith Wallerstein explained one of the traumatic effects of divorce: "As they [the children in the study] explain so eloquently, they lose the carefree play of childhood as well as the comforting arms and lap of a loving parent who is always rushing off because life in the postdivorce family is so incredibly difficult to manage" (*The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, 2000, p. 296).

She continued: "We have a consensus that children raised in divorced or remarried families are less well adjusted as adults than those

raised in intact families . . . In adulthood it affects personality, the ability to trust, expectations about relationships, and ability to cope with change . . . Children soon learned that the divorced family has porous walls that include new lovers, live-in partners, and step-parents. Not one of these relationships was easy for anyone" (pp. 297-298).

Adult children of divorce who do marry may find their own union to be at higher risk. She explained: "In coping with the normal stresses in a marriage, adults from divorced families were at a grave disadvantage. Anxiety about relationships was at the bedrock of their personalities and endured even in very happy marriages" (p. 300).

Adolescence, she noted, "begins early in divorced homes and, compared with that of youngsters raised in intact families, is more likely to include more early sexual experiences for girls and higher alcohol and drug use for girls and boys" (p. 299).

Some of the consequences of early sexual experience for girls and boys are tragic. "In fact, young people account for half of the 19 million new STD [sexually transmissible disease] cases each year . . . Teen pregnancy occurs in about 750,000 girls each year" (*U.S. News and World Report*, Sept. 15, 2008).

It's with good reason that Jesus Christ stated that rigid constrictions are to be placed on divorce (Matthew 19:3-9). He understood that divorce is harmful and that destruction of families is like a cancer that rots a society from within. That cancer is eating away at America just as it ate away at ancient Rome.

### What does the future hold?

So we ask again: Could America fall? Could it go the way of powerful nations and empires of the past?

America's shocking financial status and standards of morality do not look good. Can they be turned around, or do they portend the

collapse of America as a superpower?

We need to remember how the Romans viewed their circumstances—thinking their empire would always continue, that it was too big to fail. They were wrong, and their sense of self-satisfaction did nothing to stem their decline.

Ultimately it is God who grants nations the power to ascend to greatness and the ability to remain there.

In the late seventh century B.C. a mighty empire arose centered in Babylon, whose greatest king was Nebuchadnezzar II. God communicated to this mighty ruler through Daniel the prophet that it was God who gave him his kingdom and glory (Daniel 2:21). The king had to learn a traumatic lesson that could have easily brought down his kingdom.

Later on in the next century, a succeeding king named Belshazzar dared to scorn the revelation that God had given to Nebuchadnezzar (see Daniel 5). The result was that God brought Belshazzar down and with a swift blow delivered a fatal wound to both the king and the Babylonian Empire.

*Continued on page 23*

### To Learn More...

Where is the United States mentioned in Bible prophecy? While Bible prophecy mentions several rather insignificant nations by name, are major powers left out? Or are they identified in ways that few people understand? You need to understand what the Bible reveals about the future of the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and other countries. Request or download your free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* today!



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# Farewell to America as a Financial World Power

by Paul Kieffer



A major shift in world financial power centers is on the horizon. America is on the decline, while Asia and Europe are on the rise.

Just five years ago, it would have been hard to imagine an official representative of the German government making such statements in a speech outlining his government's position in Germany's parliament, the Bundestag. Yet at the end of September, German Finance Minister Peer Steinbrück bluntly stated his view of the world financial crisis.

One thing is absolutely clear, he said: "The United States is the place of origin and the focal point of the crisis." Although the long-term effects of the crisis are as yet undetermined, Germany's finance minister stated bluntly that America "will lose its status as [the] superpower of the world's financial systems."

## Stunning financial developments

It doesn't take a lot of insight to identify America as "ground zero" of the turmoil in the world's financial markets. The latter part of 2008 will go down as one of the most noteworthy chapters in the history of the modern financial system. In less than 30 days the world witnessed several alarming developments in the United States:

- The U.S. Department of the Treasury nationalized mortgage lenders Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.
- The investment bank Lehman Brothers declared bankruptcy, making it the largest insolvency in American history with a loss

of some \$600 billion.

- To stave off possible failure, the investment banks Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley applied to operate as commercial banks to gain access to the FDIC for securing investor deposits. In so doing, both banks voluntarily accepted regulation by the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank.

- The U.S. Congress approved an emergency aid package worth \$700 billion to prevent a possible economic meltdown.

According to Steinbrück, the financial malaise in the United States "spread like a poisonous oil spill." The European Union and several Western countries took emergency measures of their own to cope with the crisis. The Bundestag quickly passed legislation authorizing the establishment of an emergency fund for German banks that was proportionately even larger than America's initial \$700 billion plan.

## "The world will not be the same again"

One result of the worldwide financial crisis is already foreseeable: "The world will not be the same again as it was before this crisis," was Steinbrück's prediction. Europe's response to the crisis is likely an indication of the shape of things to come.

The European Union and Asia are pushing for new regulations to oversee the world's financial markets. Former U.S. President George Bush reluctantly

approved additional regulation.

For 40 years former U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan has championed unregulated capital markets. "I made a mistake," Greenspan said in recent Congressional hearings, "in presuming that the self-interest of organizations, specifically banks and [other financial institutions], were such that they were best capable of protecting their own shareholders and the equity in the firms."

Some analysts called this a "non-apology apology," an attempt to deflect blame away from his management decisions.

An alternate view is that the U.S. Congress is itself largely responsible for the crisis because it interfered too much in the mortgage industry. It ordered lenders to give mortgages to people who would otherwise not be able to obtain one, leading to the now infamous subprime mortgage meltdown.

Regardless of the political viewpoint, it is naive to fail to account for human nature's ability to make use of an opportunity for personal enrichment at the expense of others. "Love of money" is one of the characteristics of the perilous times to arise in the last days, wrote the apostle Paul (2 Timothy 3:1-2).

Even without the current crisis, though, the U.S. position as the world's financial leader has been threatened by America's risky financial policies.

## A developing shift in the geopolitical balance of power

With the turbulence in world financial markets, "small" investors are understandably concerned about the safety of their deposits and investments. However, the current situation is more than just a financial crisis. It signals an impending *irreversible shift in global power*. The age of America's dominance as the world's financial superpower is coming to an end.

The damage to America's standing in the world community as a result of the current crisis will be irreversible. Government intervention in the U.S. economy and the nationalization of financial institutions defies the principles of free capitalist markets. The inherent weaknesses in America's

economic system are being exposed, just as were those of the Soviet system.

The American system operates on the premise that capital markets will be self-regulating to everyone's benefit. The result of this false premise—as the current financial crisis clearly demonstrates—is a “predatory capitalism” where some seek quick profits using greed techniques like short-selling, leveraged buyouts, speculative hedge funds, etc., that provide no real economic value.

For years American administrations seemed to be schoolmasters, lecturing other countries on the virtues of sound financial planning, budget deficits and related issues. American influence within the International Monetary Fund was the reason countries like Argentina, Indonesia and Thailand went into recession when their governments were forced to cut government spending in exchange for funding by the IMF.

However, the United States did not practice what it was preaching. Overspending and the burden of unforeseen military obligations have led to an unprecedented increase in the federal budget deficit.

At the end of September the U.S. national debt exceeded \$10 trillion for the first time in history. By Jan. 6 then-President-elect Barack Obama warned Americans of the likelihood of “trillion-dollar deficits for years to come” due to government spending and lowered revenues from a battered economy. Yet he is now, as president, advocating vast overspending through what is claimed to be an emergency stimulus package.

### More spending, less saving

In the past, concerns over America's growing national debt were countered by the argument that the creditors were largely Americans themselves, who bought U.S. treasury bills. Today, however, 25 percent of America's annual federal budget deficit is paid for by foreign purchases of treasury bills.

The percentage has doubled in just the last 20 years and is set to continue to increase. Why? The average savings rate of the American public—the percentage of disposable income set aside in savings—is at an all-time low and is actually negative at about 2 percent. That means the average American is actually spending more money each year than he has available to spend. By contrast, the German savings rate is at a postwar record level of 11.2 percent.

America's emergency economic stimulus packages will lead to more deficit spending, which is being financed increasingly by

foreign nations like China. Oddly enough, China has been one of the nations that Washington lectured in the past on sound fiscal policy.

But will China and other nations that have been major purchasers of U.S. treasury securities in recent years—countries like Russia and the petrodollar nations lining the Persian Gulf—continue to support the U.S. dollar as the world's leading currency? Or will the current crisis be the impetus that eventually leads to moving away from the dollar?

Whatever the answer turns out to be, the United States won't be determining the answer on its own. The current financial mess can only be solved through cooperation among the affected regions of the world.

### Caught in a debt trap

The U.S. economy will remain the world's largest economy for the time being. However, the demise of former world empires was often tied to the adverse effects of vast government spending, with one adverse effect being the rise in national debt.

For example, the British Empire began to buckle under the weight of its colonial obligations in the 19th century, and expenditures for World War I pushed Britain further down the road to losing its position as the world's financial center. One of the reasons for the collapse of the Soviet system was the failure of its economy, which was strained by its war in Afghanistan and the attempt to keep up with the United States in the Cold War arms race.

It won't be any different for America when it comes to the impact of mounting deficits and increased government spending. In the five years since the United States invaded Iraq, the national debt has grown by \$500 billion annually. This trend would have threatened America's position as the world's primary financial center even without the current crisis.

Currently the publicly held portion of the national debt accounts for about 37 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP). When that portion of the national debt held by U.S. governmental agencies is factored in, the percentage rises to 65 percent. That is twice as high as at the end of World War II, which was the most expensive war in U.S. history. By contrast, the current ratio of national debt to GDP for China is only about 19 percent.

If current trends continue and legislated increases in U.S. entitlement programs and

deficit spending for unfunded Social Security obligations are factored in, then America's national debt will be well over twice the country's annual GDP by the year 2040. As financial expert David Walker asks, “Who will want to lend us money then?”

### What does the Bible say?

Proverbs 22:7 reveals an interesting principle that this development will have on America's status as a world leader: “The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.” Most Christians do not realize that America's greatness as a nation—as well as her impending decline—were prophesied in the Bible. America's real heritage can be traced back to the ancient nation of Israel with its 12 tribes.

One of the blessings promised Israel for faithfulness to God was a solid financial standing among the community of nations: “You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath” (Deuteronomy 28:12-13). Conversely, Israel was prophesied to become a debtor nation if it chose to disobey God (verse 44).

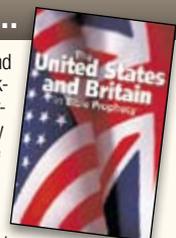
As noted earlier, the U.S. national debt has now surpassed \$10 trillion. Only a generation ago the United States was the world's largest lender. Today it is the greatest debtor nation in the history of the world.

Bible prophecy indicates a shift in the balance of power among the world's major regions for the period preceding Jesus' return. The main focal point of that development will be the continued decline of the English-speaking peoples that descended from their British homeland, including the United States.

That is the real story behind the current financial crisis and the impact it will have on America's future. Are you paying attention? **GN**

### To Learn More...

What is the real story behind America's rise from a lowly backwater colony to the most prosperous and powerful nation history has ever known? Does Bible history shed any light? Does it indicate what lies ahead? You need to read our free eye-opening booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. Request or download your free copy today!



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## Is the West in Decline?

The editor of the British cultural and political magazine *Standpoint* stated that “war, famine and pandemic have been familiar since the horsemen of the Apocalypse. More remarkable is the fact that Western civilisation constantly overcomes these terrors, renews itself and enables all humanity to share in its prosperity . . . Our civilisation has withstood dictators and depressions before” (Daniel Johnson, January 2009, p. 3, emphasis added throughout).

The bold title of his editorial is “*We Decline to Decline*.” But will the West be able to forestall all the forces arrayed against it?

The United States is still the hub of Western civilization. Is American power waning? The prognosis of some insightful observers is not that encouraging.

The BBC News Web site reported on Nov. 21, 2008: “US economic, military and political dominance is likely to decline over the next two decades, according to a new intelligence report on global trends. The National Intelligence Council (NIC) predicts China, India and Russia will increasingly challenge our influence” (“US Global Dominance ‘Set to Wane’”).

(Europe, meanwhile, is a sleeper not yet in the picture of most intelligence services. But according to biblical prophecy, a new European-centered superpower will emerge to dominate much of the world. *The Good News* and its sister publication

*World News & Prophecy* continually watch and report on developments within the European Union, a likely



**“Good and evil are present in this world, and between the two there can be no compromise.”**

predecessor to a much more sinister, powerful and supremely authoritarian configuration.)

Paul Kennedy, professor of history and director of International Security Studies at Yale University, wrote that “overspending and military overstretch are contributing to U.S. decline and Asia’s rise” (“American Power Is on the Wane,” *The Wall Street*

*Journal*, Jan. 15, 2009, p. 14). In another feature article this insightful observer said, “But it looks as if we—America, much of the rest of the world and its peoples—are in for a rough ride as 2009 unfolds” (“When Soft Power Meets Hard Choices,” *The Sunday Times*, Jan. 25, 2009).

Former President George W. Bush threw some much-needed light on this fundamental question of decline in his farewell address. “He underlined that, in facing challenges, the US must ‘maintain our moral clarity’ as he came close to reprising his famous ‘axis of evil’ speech. He said: ‘I have often spoken to you about good and evil. This has made some uncomfortable. *But good and evil are present in this world, and between the two there can be no compromise*’” (Tom Baldwin, “Bush Calls on America to Keep Its Moral Clarity,” *The Times*, Jan. 16, 2009, p. 41).

In the end, the fate of America and Western civilization depends much more on our moral status with God than any other factor. For example, how is the nation doing in observing the Ten Commandments?

In actuality the Bible foretells the direction in which the leading Western countries have been and are headed. To understand more, request or download our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. (Sources: BBC News, *The Times* [London], *The Sunday Times* [London], *Standpoint*, *The Wall Street Journal*.)

## Is Mexico the next threat to U.S. stability?

Even in terms of annual legal crossings on the U.S.–Mexican border, the estimated number of 300,000 makes it the world’s busiest. Yet the possibility of a failed Mexican state ranks high among American international worries.

A regular column in the *International Herald Tribune* asked: “What do Pakistan and Mexico have in common? They figure in the nightmares of U.S. military planners trying to peer into the future and identify the next big threats. The two countries are mentioned in the same breath in a just-published study by the United States Joint Forces Command, whose jobs include providing an annual look into the future to prevent the U.S. military from being caught off guard by unexpected developments” (Bernd Debusmann, “Among Top U.S. Fears, a Failed Mexican State,” Jan. 9, 2009, p. 2).

Both of these countries are close to the top in the reported rankings of failed states *subject to rapid and sudden collapse*. The dangers associated with Pakistan are more painfully obvious. A retired American intelligence analyst said in December 2008 that Pakistan is “one of the single most challenging places on the planet” (ibid.).

Mexico is more of a surprise. One paragraph in the article reflects the gravity of Mexico’s plight: “Vicious and widening violence pitting the drug cartels against each other and against the Mexican state have left more than 8,000 Mexicans dead over the past two years. Kidnappings have become a routine part of Mexican daily life. Common crime is widespread. Pervasive corruption has hollowed out the state” (ibid.).



Mexico’s governmental infrastructure remains under continual pressure and assault by drug cartels and other criminal gangs. The Joint Forces Command study plainly stated: “Any descent by Mexico into chaos would demand an American response based on the serious implications for Homeland Security alone. One minor indication is that the Mexican border town of Tijuana is now off-limits to American marines because of its increasing violence” (Chris Ayres, “You Wanna Die Tonight, Gringo?” *The Times*, Jan. 23, 2009, p. 2). (Sources: *The Times* [London], *International Herald Tribune*.)

## Failed states threaten British security

An important U.K. report published by the Commission on National Security—a project sponsored by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)—called attention to weak states as major threats to Britain’s security. The more-than-20 such states have a combined population of 880 million.

Somalia is at the top of the list. Drought, al-Qaeda influence and even piracy are major factors in making it a threat. In alphabetical order this list of potential failed states also includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Haiti, Nigeria and Pakistan. Some are concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, an arc of instability that poses security problems for not only Britain, but the United States and the entire Western world.

The IPPR report concluded that “weak, corrupt and failing states have become bigger security risks than strong states . . . They are the targets of transnational criminal networks which are expanding their drugs, arms and people trafficking” (Richard Norton-Taylor, “Weak States Are Major Threat to British Security, Report Warns,” *The Guardian*, Nov. 27, 2008).

This report warns that “storm clouds are gathering [in the African arc of instability], creating profound and direct challenges to UK and wider international security” (ibid.). These little-governed or ungovernable areas of the globe warrant our attention as actual and potential sources of terrorist attacks. (Source: *The Guardian* [London].)



## Anti-Semitic, anti-Israel riots erupt in Europe

**T**he *Jewish Chronicle* called it “The Worst Wave of Hate for Quarter of a Century.” Hatred of Jews suddenly became much more evident in the wake of the air strikes and Israeli incursion into Gaza. One observer said that anti-Semites are “using an overseas conflict as an excuse for their racism” (Leon Symons, Simon Rocker and Jonny Paul, Jan. 16, 2009, p. 1).

A demonstration in London against the Israeli action attracted 12,000 protestors. Over a period of about two weeks more than 150 anti-Semitic incidents were recorded across Britain—including arson, personal attacks on individuals, graffiti and abusive telephone calls (ibid.).

The “State of the Union” column in *The Wall Street Journal* reported: “A Pew study from September [2008] shows that 25% of Germans and 20% of French are still affected by the [anti-Semitic] virus. In Spain, 46% have unfavourable views of Jews.

“Is there really no connection between this statistic and the fact that the Spanish media and government are among Europe’s most hostile toward the Jewish state? Is it just a coincidence that Europe’s largest anti-Israeli demonstration took place Sunday in Madrid with more than 100,000 protestors?” (Daniel Schwammen-

thal, “Europe Reimports Jew Hatred,” Jan. 13, 2009, p. 12).

It is increasingly difficult to conveniently separate anti-Israeli feelings and anti-Semitism, as London’s chief rabbi has pointed out for many months. *The Wall Street Journal* piece plainly concluded that “the rejection of Israel’s right to exist is what drives their attacks.”

A *Time* feature article observed that “the threat posed by Hamas is only the most immediate of the many interlocking challenges facing Israel, some of which cast dark shadows over the

### It is increasingly difficult to conveniently separate anti-Israeli feelings and anti-Semitism, as London’s chief rabbi has pointed out.

long-term viability of a democratic Jewish state” (Tim McGirk, “Can Israel Survive Its Assault on Gaza?” Jan. 19, 2009, pp. 13-16).

For a comprehensive understanding of the immediate dangers and the biblically foretold, positive long-term outcome, please see our May-June 2008 *Good News* cover article “Can Israel Survive?” Also, to comprehend the historic and prophetic background of Israel’s position in the world, request or download our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. (Sources: *The Jewish Chronicle* [London], *The Wall Street Journal*, *Time*.)

## New era of riots and protests in Europe?

**R**iot and protests have been erupting at various points in Europe. Formerly placid Iceland has been the site of several this year. In Riga, Latvia, 10,000 protestors stormed the national parliament. Demonstrations against the Bulgarian government have alarmed the intelligentsia there. Last December Greece was the site of two weeks of demonstrations by protestors. The Greek consulate in Berlin was briefly assaulted as well. All these occurred in addition to the widespread protests against the Israeli incursion into Gaza.



In some of these nations the police are viewed as lazy, corrupt and brutal—often seemingly powerless when confronted by a rioting crowd. Civil unrest is apparently becoming a serious problem in Europe. Is this one small indication of the potential revival of authoritarian forces that will restore order? (Source: *The Times* [London].)

## Second Irish vote may lead to new EU presidential office

**A**ccording to a *Daily Telegraph* article, “Secret talks to create a European Union President and Foreign Minister will begin in the New Year after the Irish government confirmed it would hold a second referendum on the Lisbon Treaty [the renamed EU constitution]” (“Secret ‘EU President’ Talks Begin as Ireland Agrees to Vote Again,” Jan. 12, 2009).

Negotiations on these two new positions created by the Lisbon Treaty had ceased when the Republic of Ireland voted to turn the treaty down last June. A positive result is considered likely with special concessions to Ireland such as a permanent Irish European Commissioner and legal guarantees that the

EU will keep hands off the country’s military neutrality and tax, social and ethical issues. But that’s a lot, and some observers question the long-term ability of the EU to fully honor these guarantees.

William Hague, British shadow foreign secretary and a member of the Conservative Party, stated: “It would be a serious mistake to take the Irish people for granted. It would be democratically illegitimate to start putting the renamed EU constitution into force when the Irish people have yet to give their democratic consent” (ibid.).

An editorial in *The Times* said that “the EU has many challenges, chief among them [is] understanding democracy” (“No Still Means No,” *The Times*, Dec. 12, 2008). In other words, the European Union doesn’t take “no” for an answer and is determined to press ahead in spite of opposition from concerned voters. (Sources: *The Times* [London], *The Daily Telegraph* [London].)

## Britain becoming hostile to Christianity

**A**ccording to a British Roman Catholic cardinal who recently published a new book, *Faith in the Nation*, “The rise of secularism has led to a liberal society, hostile to Christian morals and values, in which religious belief is viewed as ‘a private eccentricity’ and the voice of faith groups is marginalised” (Jonathan Wynne-Jones, “Cardinal: Britain Is Hostile to Christians,” *The Sunday Telegraph*, Dec. 7, 2008).

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor, head of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales, continued, “Britain shows signs of degenerating into a country free of morals, because of its rejection of traditional values.” He also stated that “atheism has become more vocal and aggressive” (ibid.). (Source: *The Sunday Telegraph* [London].)

## How Can You Make Sense of the News?

So much is happening in the world, and so quickly. Where are today’s dramatic and dangerous trends taking us? What does Bible prophecy reveal about our future? You’re probably very concerned with the direction the world is heading. So are we. That’s why we’ve created the *World News & Prophecy* Web site—to help you understand the news in the light of Bible prophecy. This eye-opening site offers you a perspective so badly needed in our chaotic and confused world—the perspective of God’s Word, the Bible. Visit us at [www.wnponline.org](http://www.wnponline.org) today!



# God's Forgiveness: What Does He Require From You?

by John Ross Schroeder

**Our loving Creator promises complete forgiveness of our sins once we sincerely turn from and forsake them. How do genuine repentance and God's compassionate forgiveness work together to assure our salvation?**

**T**he Bible describes sin as the deadly enemy of all mankind. The chaotic and confused condition of our world proves this basic biblical truth. Yet most of humankind remains solidly in denial. Our human nature has a powerful compulsion to sin.

But to receive God's gift of eternal life, we must completely forsake sin in our attitudes and intents. Transgressing His great spiritual law is like playing with fire, and we trifle with it at our peril. The Bible clearly states that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

## God leads us to true repentance

*True repentance* is the fundamental first step on our way out of sin—putting us firmly on the road to eternal life. Our puny human efforts are, however, far from enough.

Without God's help and support, we simply cannot accomplish this difficult task—freely admitting with shame and regret that we have been totally wrong in our defiance of His great spiritual law and that we seriously intend to mend our ways.

The apostle Paul challenged Christians in Rome with this crucial question: "Do you despise the riches of His [God's] goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, *not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?*" (Romans 2:4, emphasis added throughout). Indeed, God must *grant* us repentance (see Acts 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25).

Like the patriarch Job, prior to his heart-rending repentance, too many of us stubbornly hold onto our own "righteousness" before God. But the Bible compares it to "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6).

## Another key biblical passage

Written two millennia ago, Acts 2:38 is one of the most crucial passages in the

Bible. The apostle Peter cut to the core of what God expects from us in his inspired sermon on the Day of Pentecost. He told his convicted listeners: "*Repent and be baptized*, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ *for the forgiveness of your sins*. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (New International Version).

This critical passage shows two key truths: that our repentance and God's merciful forgiveness are both necessary, complementary parts of the overall salvation process.

Since repentance has to occur before forgiveness, let's look at repentance first.

## Repentance in action

The book of Acts covers about 30 years of early Church history, reaching from Jerusalem to Rome. In one sense it is also a record of the repentance of God's people during the first century.

Paul, like Peter, continually preached the importance of repentance. He testified "to Jews, and also to Greeks, *repentance toward God* and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21).

He emphasized that promises to turn away from sin had to be reflected in *obvious good works*. He stated that men and women "should repent and turn to God and *prove their repentance by their deeds*" (Acts 26:20, NIV). Earlier John the Baptist had demanded "*fruits worthy of repentance*" from his listeners (Luke 3:8).

Paul and Barnabas urged the people of Lystra to "turn from these worthless things to the living God" (Acts 14:15, NIV). Those who are truly being called by God have normally felt a strong sense of urgency to move forward—taking the biblical steps our Creator requires.

Procrastination—putting off God's clear command to repent and be baptized—gets us nowhere! We have to *act* on the

truth God has already revealed to us. Then He will bless us by revealing more truth and helping us to follow Him.

Continuing in sin has a way of leading us into a box canyon with no way out. Most people do not realize that God holds us accountable for our thoughts and actions that defy His righteous way of life. *We take sin all too lightly!*

## God views sin seriously

God does not view sin lightly! He is *deadly serious* about it—hating the transgression of His law in any form.

When King David broke two of the Ten Commandments, the Creator asked him through Nathan the prophet: "Why did you *despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes?*" (2 Samuel 12:9, NIV). The shaken king responded, "I have sinned against the LORD."



**God holds us accountable for our thoughts and actions that defy His righteous way of life. We take sin all too lightly!**

## What if We Sin After Conversion?

Christians, or those considering baptism, may well ask: What if we slip up and sin after true conversion?

The apostle John spells out the answer: “If we [Christians] walk in the light [practice God’s way of life] as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins [to God], He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:7-9).

This clearly is not a license for Christians to sin (see 1 John 2:1 and

Jude 4), but a frank acknowledgment of the humanity of even the most righteous Christian. Our fight and struggle against sin is a daily task as we strive with God’s help to overcome our human tendencies (Hebrews 12:1; 1 Corinthians 9:26-27).

The apostle Paul tells Christians to “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you [through the Holy Spirit] to will and to act according to His good purpose” (Philippians 2:12-13, NIV). As with repentance and forgiveness, it’s part of our partnership with our Creator and Father in heaven.

But notice Nathan’s reply: “The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die” (verse 13, NIV). David’s sincere, heartfelt repentance is detailed for us in Psalm 51. Every *Good News* subscriber should read it from time to time to recognize the kind of heart and attitude God wants to see in us.

David’s sin was against God, but it seriously affected the lives of others. Our Creator hates what sin does to human beings—the harm it automatically and inevitably produces for anyone caught in its clutches. God’s spiritual law is *self-enforcing*. No human being has to catch you in a transgression. If you break God’s law, *it will eventually break you*.

But God has mercifully provided us a way out of sin—at great cost to Himself. Once we really grasp the greatness of God—and really begin to see ourselves in comparison to our Creator like Job did—we are well on our way to genuine, heartfelt repentance.

Notice what this ancient patriarch said in reply to God’s personal revelation to him: “I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted . . . My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. *Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes*” (Job 42:2, 5-6, NIV).

### God’s merciful and compassionate forgiveness

King David expressed God’s gracious nature in Psalm 103: “Praise the LORD, O my soul, . . . and forget not all his benefits—*who forgives all your sins* and heals all your diseases . . . The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, *abounding in love* . . . He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

“For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; *as far as the east is from the*

*west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us*. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust” (verses 1-14, NIV).

Once you have truly repented of your sins, God’s forgiveness is absolute, total and complete. He applies the sacrificial blood of His Son Jesus Christ to you personally. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

God blots out our transgressions of His law through the sacrifice of Christ, “in whom we have redemption through His blood, *the forgiveness of sins*” (Colossians 1:14).

### Clearing our guilty consciences

Without fully realizing it, the whole world is on a massive guilt trip.

Most of us have pangs and twinges of conscience from time to time. Things we have done in the past bother us, especially when inevitable circumstances remind us of occurrences we would rather forget. Yet God has provided a way to clear our troubled consciences and put us squarely on the path of getting rid of troublesome guilt.

The animal sacrifices mandated for Israel in the Old Testament “were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper” (Hebrews 9:9, NIV).

But Christ’s atoning sacrifice can and will: “How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, *cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death*, so that we may serve the living God” (verse 14, NIV).

### Our new status with God

Repentance, water baptism and receiving God’s Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) begins a completely changed life for the true

Christian. Once this bridge has been crossed, our salvation is sure—*provided* we keep to the path of God’s law, mirrored by obedience to the Ten Commandments. As the psalmist wrote, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

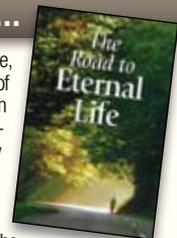
Jesus Christ said, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him [the Father] who sent me *has eternal life* and will not be condemned; he [or she] *has crossed over from death to life*” (John 5:24, NIV).

The apostle John repeated this encouraging truth in 1 John 5:11-12: “And this is the testimony: that *God has given us eternal life*, and this life is in His Son. *He who has the Son has life*; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

After His resurrection, Jesus, speaking of Himself in the third person, told the apostles that “*repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations*, beginning at Jerusalem” as a key component of the mission He gave His true followers (Luke 24:47, NIV). Now we can see how genuine repentance, followed by God’s merciful and compassionate forgiveness, converge to impart true conversion—putting us firmly on the road to eternal life! **GN**

### To Learn More...

As we’ve seen from this article, repentance and forgiveness of sin are key parts of God’s plan for us to receive His gift of salvation. But exactly what do they mean? What steps do we need to take? Does God’s Word give us more information to help us understand? You need to know the answers! Request or download our free booklet *The Road to Eternal Life* today!



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# When Will the West Wake Up?

Islamic extremism is back—not that it ever went away. Following the terrorist attacks in Mumbai and the continuing threats from Iranian proxy Hamas, the question must be asked: When will the West wake up?

For Winston Churchill, the 1930s were, as he aptly described them, “the wilderness years.” This was the period when he was out of office and deeply unpopular for his continual warnings about the rise of Nazi Germany and the threat it posed to Western democracies.

His was the now most famous voice warning of impending catastrophe—but he was a lone voice that turned out to be correct!

Today a few voices have been raised in concern about a coming cataclysm, one which poses a far greater threat to the peace and security of the Western democracies!

Longtime Harvard University professor and political scientist Samuel Huntington, who died Dec. 24, 2008, was one of those voices. His 1993 landmark study *The Coming Clash of Civilizations* warned of the inevitable clash between Islam and the West, a part of the historic continuum of struggle between Europe and Islam. (The phrase “clash of civilizations” was earlier applied to this conflict by Islamic scholar Bernard Lewis in 1990.)

## A clash of viewpoints

After Sept. 11, 2001, “half the world hailed Huntington as having foreseen the conflict between Islam and the west and half mistook him for a promoter of it” (Christopher Caldwell, “Huntington’s Disputed Legacy,” *Financial Times*, Jan. 3, 2009).

Many thought the events of 9/11 would usher in this monumental clash of civilizations. “Not so, argues a vast cohort of academics, journalists, writers, and retired diplomats,” according to Efraim Karsh, head of the Mediterranean Studies Program at King’s College, University of London.

Instead, they say, “The attacks were a misguided, if not wholly inexplicable, response to America’s arrogant and self-serving foreign policy by a fringe extremist group, whose violent interpretation of Islam has little to do with the actual spirit and teachings of this religion”

(*Islamic Imperialism: A History*, 2006, p. 2).

Through all the major terrorist attacks since 9/11, this continues to be the predominant reaction of those employed in academia and the media.

Author and Middle East expert Daniel Pipes observes: “But for the real target of Islamist terror, the world at large, the experience has become numbed, with apologetics and justification muting repulsion and shock . . . Indeed, as one reflects on the most publicized episodes of Islamist terror against Westerners since 9/11—the attack on Australians in Bali, on Spaniards in Madrid, on Russians in Beslan, on Britons in London—a twofold pattern emerges: Muslim exultation and Western denial. The same tragedy replays itself, with only names changed” (“Still Asleep After Mumbai,” *The Jerusalem Post*, Dec. 10, 2008).

During and after the November 2008 Mumbai massacre in which nearly 500 people were killed or injured, a great deal was said and written about the backgrounds of the perpetrators, who were poorly educated and came from poverty-stricken families.

The implication was that poverty breeds terrorism. This simple reasoning overlooks the fact that those who committed the atrocities of 9/11 and the July 5, 2005, subway and bus bombings in London came from affluent backgrounds. Clearly, the answer to terrorism is not simply raising the level of economic prosperity of Muslims throughout the world.

And Muslim terrorism is what we are talking about. Of all the terrorist ideologies in the world, Islamic terrorism poses the greatest threat to the peace and security of the West, even though most Western leaders are in denial over this serious and pervasive threat.

## A war against the West

Because most terrorist attacks happen in faraway countries that most people in the

West cannot locate on a map, few people are concerned. Even Western leaders consider terrorism in underdeveloped countries a “local” matter, of little concern to us.

The Mumbai attacks, however, were far from a simple local matter. Nor were they mainly about the Indo-Pakistani conflict that goes back more than six decades. British, American and Jewish victims were singled out for special atrocities during the attacks.

A headline in the Dec. 25, 2008, *Mumbai Mirror* highlighted the treatment of these foreign nationals. In an article titled “Terrorists Sexually Humiliated Guests Before Killing Them,” the newspaper reported being in possession of photographs showing that some of the foreign victims were stripped naked before being killed. Jewish victims were reportedly sexually mutilated.

The West was the primary target. It was not just a local matter of no concern to us.

Columnist Mark Steyn points out that the attackers’ method was anything but random: “Yes, the terrorists targeted locally owned hotels. But they singled out Britons and Americans as hostages. Yes, they attacked prestige city landmarks like the Victoria Terminus, one of the most splendid and historic railway stations in the world. But they also attacked an obscure Jewish community center. The Islamic imperialist project is a totalitarian ideology: It is at war with Hindus, Jews, Americans, Britons, everything that is other.

“In the 10 months before this atrocity, Muslim terrorists killed more than 200 people in India, and no one paid much attention. Just business as usual, alas. In Mumbai the perpetrators were canner. They launched a multiple indiscriminate assault on soft targets, and then in the confusion began singling out A-list prey: Not just wealthy Western tourists, but local orthodox Jews, and municipal law enforcement.

“They drew prominent officials to selected sites, and then gunned down the head of the antiterrorism squad and two of his most senior lieutenants. They attacked a hospital, the place you’re supposed to take the victims to, thereby destabilizing the city’s emergency-response system” (“Mumbai Could Happen Just About

Anywhere,” Nov. 28, 2008).

### Is poverty the cause?

This terrorism, writes London’s *Daily Mail* columnist Melanie Phillips, “is both global and local. It is not ‘our’ fault; it has nothing to do with Muslim poverty, oppression or discrimination . . . No less important was the wish to destroy the ever more vital strategic alliance between India and the West in common defence against the Islamist onslaught.

“That was why British and American visitors in those two grand hotels were singled out. And that was why Mumbai itself was chosen—as the symbol of India’s burgeoning commerce and prosperity and its links with the West” (“The Mumbai Atrocity Is a Wake-Up Call for a Frighteningly Unprepared Britain,” Dec. 1, 2008).

Phillips’ article continued to show that major Western cities will likely suffer attacks similar to the ones in Mumbai in the months and years ahead: “The Iranian-born foreign affairs specialist Amir Taheri has pointed out that the Mumbai attacks embody the plan outlined by a senior Al Qaeda strategist after the U.S. decided to fight back following 9/11—a decision that the Islamists had not expected.

“This new strategy entails targeting countries with a substantial Muslim presence for ‘low-intensity warfare’ comprising bombings, kidnappings, the taking of hostages, the use of women and children as human shields, beheadings and other attacks that make normal life impossible. Such a simultaneous, multi-faceted onslaught quickly reduces a city and a country to chaos. It can be repeated anywhere—and British cities must be among the most vulnerable.

“This is because—astoundingly—Britain now harbors the most developed infrastructure of Islamist terrorism and extremism in the Western world. The security service has warned that it is monitoring at least 2,000 known terrorists, and has said repeatedly that although many outrages have been averted a major attack may not be preventable . . .

“The Government and security establishment refuse to acknowledge that what we are facing is a religious war. Instead, they think that Islamist terrorism is driven by grievances which are basically the fault of the West. But you have only to look around the world or at the history of the past four decades and more to see the absurdity and ignorance of this view.

“Look at Thailand, for example, currently convulsed by Islamist terrorism in the south with bombings, beheadings and the murder of Buddhists. Look at the persecution of Christians in Nigeria. Look at the Islamist terrorism in the Philippines. Look . . . at the attacks variously upon New York, Bali, Istanbul, Jakarta, Sharm el Sheikh,



## Major Western cities will likely suffer attacks similar to the ones in Mumbai in the months and years ahead.

Casablanca, Madrid, London and India.

“If we don’t understand what we are fighting, we cannot defeat it. Mumbai is yet another wake-up call—to a Britain that is still in a trance of denial.”

### Asleep in the face of danger

How many more “wake-up calls” are needed before the West will wake up?

American columnist Cal Thomas went so far as to call for a fundamental and far-

reaching change to immigration policy in the United States and United Kingdom:

“What is needed in Britain—and America—is a change in the thinking that naively believes that simply exposing foreign nationals to our way of life means they will ‘catch’ it as they might the flu. Allowing immigrants from nations in which the dominant religion mandates the forced subordination of every other faith (or no faith) and their subjugation through state power under Sharia law, increases the likelihood of more attacks.

“At the very least, all non-Western immigrants to Britain and America should be told prior to their arrival that our intention is to westernize them. They must learn English, study and embrace the history of their host nation and, if they are Muslim, they will be allowed to worship only in existing mosques.

“No new ones should be built. Existing mosques must be monitored to make sure that hate is not taught and aggressive behavior toward their host countries is not promoted. If such behavior and speech are detected, the mosques should be closed and the imams arrested or deported” (“Lesson of Mumbai Explained,” Dec. 2, 2008).

### Gaza is part of the same problem

Shortly after the Mumbai terror attacks, Gaza hit the headlines. That is not to say there was no problem there earlier. Israel completely pulled out of Gaza in 2005. Since then Hamas, the terrorist organization that rules Gaza, has sent more than 6,000 missiles and mortar shells Israel’s way.

People in Israeli communities within range have suffered around-the-clock danger, never knowing when a shell or rocket would hit their homes, their children’s schools or their car while driving. Finally, after years of asking Hamas to desist from such attacks and warning of possible consequences, Israel hit back.

Of course, it was only at that point that the issue made the headlines. When Israelis were suffering, it wasn’t news. As soon as Israel attacked the Hamas terror structure, it was big news throughout the world.

As with Mumbai, the Western media is once again in denial about Islamic militancy. The thinking behind most media coverage is that the poverty of the Palestinians is behind support for Hamas, a self-proclaimed terrorist organization whose charter calls for the elimination of Israel.



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But 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 what 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 *The Good News*, various booklets (also free) and our TV programs, 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 and plan for us as taught by Jesus Christ.

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## Hamas wants Israel destroyed. They want to rid the world of the “Zionist entity.”

On Sunday, Jan. 4, I was watching one of the Sunday morning news programs on American television. A panel of four well-known journalists was being asked by the host to discuss top news stories, including the events in Gaza. A quote from Hamas was displayed on the screen and read by the host. In it, the leader of Hamas made it clear that Hamas would never negotiate with Israel and would not stop until Israel was wiped off the face of the earth.

The panel continued to discuss the need for peace talks as if they had not heard a word. They just didn't get it. *Hamas wants Israel destroyed*. They want to rid the world of the “Zionist entity.”

As former *Jerusalem Post* editor Bret Stephens wrote in *The Wall Street Journal*: “Hamas, to its perverse credit, does not lie, at least not on fundamental issues . . . It is sworn to Israel's destruction. Its charter is nakedly and aggressively anti-Semitic; no fig leaf of ‘anti-Zionism’ there . . . ‘Anyone who thinks Hamas will change is wrong,’ said supreme leader Khaled Mashal in 2006. Could he be any clearer?” (“The No-State Solution,” Jan. 13, 2009).

### Another rise in anti-Semitism

Even in the West, many blame Israel for everything. It's all reminiscent of the 1930s when fascist parties in Europe blamed the Jews for everything that had gone wrong.

*Boston Globe* columnist Jeff Jacoby highlighted the growing tendency toward anti-Semitism in the United States, a country that has long been a refuge for people of the Jewish faith and is home to more Jews than Israel itself.

“Criticizing Israel doesn't make you anti-Semitic,” he wrote. “If it's been said once, it's been said a thousand times. Yet somehow that message doesn't seem to have reached the hundreds of anti-Israel demonstrators in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., who turned out last week to protest Israel's military operation in Gaza. As their signs and chants made clear, it isn't only the Jewish state's policies they oppose. Their animus goes further.

“Demonstrators chanted ‘Nuke, nuke

Israel!’ and carried placards accusing Israel of ‘ethnic cleansing’ and bearing such messages as: ‘Did Israel take notes during the Holocaust?’ . . . To the dozen or so supporters of Israel gathered across the street, one demonstrator shouted: ‘Murderers! Go back to the ovens!’” (“Yes, It's Anti-Semitism,” Jan. 7, 2009).

### We haven't seen the end of religious conflict

Until 9/11 most people in the West thought that religious conflict was something from the Middle Ages. The last few years have shown the fallacy of this reasoning. But even now few see the growing threat of Islamic terrorism and the increasing possibility of a major clash of civilizations.

The Bible shows such a clash lies ahead. In Daniel 11:40 we read of a future conflict between what is likely an Islamic power (“the king of the South”) and a European-centered power that is a successor to the Roman Empire (“the king of the North”).

“At the time of the end,” Daniel tells us, “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.” It may well be that the “attack” perpetrated by the “king of the South” could be terrorism—a major threat to Europeans, made worse by significant Islamic immigration into Europe since World War II.

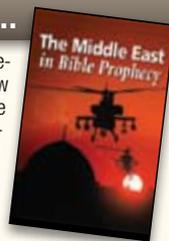
The Bible also shows that the Middle East is at the very center of Bible prophecy. Jesus Christ warned His followers: “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near” (Luke 21:20).

Gaza is only one geographical area of conflict between the Israelis and Islamic militants. The West Bank is another. Northern Israel, lying within range of Hezbollah rockets from Lebanon, is yet another. Jerusalem, as it has been for years, remains the biggest single scene of potential conflict.

The problem of Islamic militancy is clearly not going to go away. The West had better hope that its leaders awake to that fact. **GN**

### To Learn More...

What's behind the conflict between Islam and the West? How did it begin, and why? Does Bible prophecy tell us where it's heading and how it will end? You need to know! Request or download your free copy of *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* today!



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# What Was the Purpose of Christ's Death?

by Jerold Aust

Millions of Christians believe that Jesus Christ died for them. But do they really know why? *Why* was Jesus Christ's death really necessary?

**M**ost Christians, if asked what makes them a Christian, would respond something like this: "I know that Jesus is the Son of God who died for my sins, and I accept His shed blood for my sins."

While Jesus did die for us, is that all there is to this belief? Does the Bible tell us that there's more to the story?

## A sacrifice for humanity's sins

Many Bible passages show why Jesus died for humankind. Let's look at a few.

The apostle Paul wrote that we are to "walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Ephesians 5:2, emphasis added throughout).

To the Christians in Rome, Paul explained: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation [atoning sacrifice] by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed" (Romans 3:23-25).

Later in the same letter, Paul wrote: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (Romans 5:8-9).

To the Corinthian church Paul explained

that God the Father "*made Him who knew no sin [Jesus Christ] to be sin for us*" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Here the clear implication is that Jesus took our guilt on Himself and paid the penalty for us by His death.

The book of Revelation opens by describing Jesus Christ as the One "who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Revelation 1:5).

The apostle John also explained the reason for Jesus' death: "If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and *he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world*" (1 John 2:1-2, New Revised Standard Version).

A little later he explained: "God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that *he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins*" (1 John 4:9-10, NRSV).

And also: "We have seen and testify that *the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world*" (verse 14).

The apostle Peter confirmed this great truth, that Jesus Christ "*bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness*" (1 Peter 2:24).

The prophet Isaiah wrote of the purpose of Jesus' death centuries before it actually took place: "He was *wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed*" (Isaiah 53:5).

Scripture is very clear about the fact that Jesus had to die for all people of all time and for crucial reasons. He had to die *because of human sin*—yours, mine and everyone else's.

## Sin brought on Jesus' death

The scriptures quoted above show the necessity of Jesus' death—that it was required because of sin. Without sin, there would be no need for Jesus' death, the shedding of His sinless blood.

Sin is the violation of God's law (1 John 3:4). It requires a price to be paid because, as Romans 6:23 tells us, "The wages of sin is *death*." Without some payment for that awful penalty, human beings would face oblivion through death with no hope beyond the grave.

The New Testament letter to the Hebrews states plainly that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (9:22, NRSV). One purpose for this letter was to explain that Jesus Christ was the very Son of God and that He gave His life's blood for the remission—the forgiveness, the pardon, the penalty removal—of humankind's sins.

The recipients of this letter were quite familiar with the Old Testament sacrifices that, as the epistle explains, foreshadowed the one holy sacrifice of mankind's Savior: "He has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26, NRSV).

Human beings must have their sins washed away, pardoned and forgiven, to be reconciled to God. "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life" (Romans 5:10, NRSV). Without reconciliation to God the Father, there could be no forgiveness of sins.

Hebrews 9:28 further explains that "Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him" (New International Version). A sinless Jesus became sin for us as we've seen (2 Corinthians 5:21). He took on the sins of humankind to save us from everlasting death.

**The Bible shows that there is much more for you and me to do than simply accept the name of Jesus, call ourselves Christians and accept the shed blood of our Savior.**

### How sin began

Considering that sin is so terrible and destructive that we need a Savior to atone for us, just how did sin begin?

The archangel Lucifer, since known as Satan, was the first to sin against God, the first to break His laws (see Ezekiel 28:15-16). Ironically, Satan has since influenced the world to think that mankind was the first to sin. Adam and Eve did sin, but they weren't the *first* to sin. Satan had already rebelled against God and was waiting there in the Garden of Eden to plant his lies in their thinking (John 8:42-44).

Eve and Adam were the first human beings to sin against God, and since then all human beings have sinned in like manner (Romans 5:12). Most people find it difficult to acknowledge sin; they simply act as if it didn't exist. But sin is destructive. If God had not provided us with a solution, eventually it would destroy all mankind.

Today, God "commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30)—to *stop sinning*, to cease from breaking His laws.

Since no human being can obey God's laws perfectly without sinning, God extends *grace* to the repentant, pardoning them for their sins.

### Law and grace go together

Most Christians today find it difficult to understand the relationship between God's grace and God's laws. The view most commonly held is, "If there's something we must actually *do* to be forgiven, then grace is meaningless because grace implies that God demands nothing in return."

There is some truth in this. Grace, God's favor or good will toward us, is undeserved. It includes unmerited pardon or forgiveness of sins. That cannot be earned.

But God's forgiving grace was never intended as a *license to continue sinning*. Paul makes this truth very plain: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any

longer in it?" (Romans 6:1-2).

Grace and law are inseparable, as the Bible clearly teaches. Since sin—the breaking of God's law (1 John 3:4)—is to be removed, what would be the point of pardoning people from it just to allow them to continue to violate God's law? This clearly makes no sense.

This also would be an utter contradiction



## Anyone who sins deserves death. But God is merciful to us and has given us His Son to willingly take that penalty on Himself and die in our stead.

of Paul's teaching that Jesus Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might *redeem us from every lawless deed* and purify for

Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14).

Grace, made possible through Christ's sacrifice of Himself, allows us to be "redeemed"—to be *bought back* by God through Christ paying the price for our sins. But God's grace (His free *gift*) encompasses much more. It includes our being *purified* as God's "own special people" through the gift of His Holy Spirit, making us "zealous for good works."

Yes, grace, through Christ's sacrifice, supplies the forgiveness that the law can't give. But grace does not replace the laws of God, as Scripture clearly shows. Rather, grace gives us a new beginning, a chance to start life over in harmony with God's teachings—which include the great spiritual principles embodied in His law. Indeed, grace includes God giving us the needed spiritual help *to obey*.

### Who can receive salvation?

Many misunderstand grace. To think that God requires nothing from us except to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died for our sins would deprive us of salvation—would leave us *still in our sins!*

Don't take my word for it! See what your Bible has to say: "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore *do not let sin reign in your mortal body*, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

"*For sin shall not have dominion over you*, for you are not under law [that is, under its punitive judgment for violating it, as they had been before they repented] but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you

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obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" (Romans 6:11-16).

Remarkably, many sincere people still believe that no changes are required of them to receive God's gift of grace other than to believe on the name of Jesus and accept His shed blood for their sins. Paul's words above show that is simply not true.

Perhaps the most popular and misunderstood scripture that focuses on the importance of Jesus' death is found in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

The last part of this verse, "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life," has been only partially understood by millions of people. Many mistakenly assume that believing in Jesus means only believing in His identity and promises and that it does not include any reciprocal action on their part. Yet truly believing in Jesus *is* demonstrated by one's actions. (See "What Does It Mean to Believe in Jesus?" beginning on page 22.)

But the Bible tells us emphatically that to be saved we must repent of our selfish ways, turn to God in faith and believe what Christ tells us to do (Acts 2:38). Many professing Christians who believe on Jesus still don't demonstrate their belief by living as Jesus instructs. As the Bible reveals, this initial, minimal level of belief isn't what Jesus desires (Luke 6:46).

When a rich young man asked Jesus what it would take for him to enter eternal life, he got an answer that would surprise many today: "If you want to enter into life, *keep the commandments*" (Matthew 19:17).

Jesus also warned that "whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19).

Paul knew this truth, explaining that "the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12). Therefore, God wants us to keep His laws in the spirit as well as in the letter—to genuinely grasp and apply their full intent. Salvation is only offered to those who are willing to strive to keep God's commandments from the heart.

If you need further proof as to whether there's anything more we must do than what is traditionally taught, go to the very end of your Bible. There it states, "Blessed are

those who *do* His commandments, *that they may have the right* to the tree of life [for the gift of eternal life], and may enter through the gates into the city [the new Jerusalem, our ultimate destiny]" (Revelation 22:14).

The Bible shows that there is much more for you and me to do than simply accept the name of Jesus, call ourselves Christians and accept the shed blood of our Savior. God wants to transform our lives, to build in us His righteous character.

To be accepted by God, to receive that great blessing, which is a gift and can't be earned, you and I must want to keep God's laws because we respect and love them and have repented of breaking them. Then we must accept God's grace for forgiveness of our past failure to keep His laws properly. And we must strive with His help to start obeying His laws, always repenting and asking for forgiveness when we fall short.

#### When Jesus' death applies to you

The death of Jesus Christ applies to you and me personally when we are drawn by God to understand His truths and we respond. If you've been called by God (see John 6:44), then you already recognize how Jesus' death applies to you.

Accepting the death of Jesus must be accompanied by *repentance*—a change of direction from our old habitual sins. It also requires that we exercise faith (sincere belief) in what Christ has taught us. This means we will begin obeying God's laws that can liberate us from our captivity to sin (Romans 6:11-23).

Yes, John 3:16 is true—we must believe in Jesus. But we need to fully understand what that means. The truth is that there is something for us to do, once we are drawn to God to understand His truth. We must know that our sins—yours, mine and everyone else's—have necessitated the death of Jesus Christ, without which we would die permanently and be forever forgotten.

Jesus died in our place. We deserve death; Jesus didn't. Anyone who sins deserves death (Romans 6:23). But God is merciful to us and has given us His Son to willingly take that penalty on Himself and die in our stead.

In response, He expects us to listen to His instruction, to obey His commands. This is what Jesus died for.

There's more to the greatest story ever told! So be sure to read the following article, "Jesus Christ's Resurrection: Leading the Way for Others," to discover the rest of the story of His involvement in your salvation. **GN**



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# Jesus Christ's Resurrection: Leading the Way for Others

by Jerold Aust

Why does modern Christianity consistently portray Jesus Christ as dead on the cross? Could it be that many really don't grasp the importance of His resurrection and what it means for us?

Jesus Christ's resurrection and its life-giving purpose is a consistent theme in the writings of His apostles. One of the most incisive passages concerning His resurrection is found in one of Paul's letters to the Corinthians:

"Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.

"We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised.

"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:12-19, New Revised Standard Version).

This is one of the most powerful statements in the Bible on the significance and indisputability of Jesus Christ's resurrection.

In a similar statement in the book of Acts, Paul defended himself before the Judean king Agrippa II regarding the resurrection of the dead, saying, "Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?" (26:8). Paul also boldly confirmed that even Agrippa was aware of the promise of the resurrection to eternal life for those who obey God (verses 6, 26).

The question for you is: Do you believe in the resurrection of the dead? Do you understand why Jesus had to be resurrected—and why the resurrection of the dead is the only avenue to eternal life offered in the Bible?

## Immortality through resurrection

To the Christians in Rome, Paul explained the connection between God's gift of the Holy Spirit as the down payment on eternal life and the actual receiving of immortality at the time of the resurrection from the dead:

"But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you" (Romans 8:10-11, NRSV).

When will God actually "give life to your mortal bodies," as Paul stated? Notice Paul's own explanation:

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

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

Writing to the Philippians, Paul also taught the importance of the resurrection of the dead: "For our *citizenship* is in heaven, *from which we also eagerly wait* for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will [when He returns to the earth and resurrects His followers from the dead] *transform* our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:20-21). Paul is consistent about the resurrection of the dead and its importance to Christians.

Many more scriptures confirm God's commitment to the resurrection of the dead. Let's now learn more about the resurrection from the dead through Christ's

## A Surprising Truth: Jesus Wasn't Resurrected on Sunday Morning!

There's much more to Christ's resurrection than watching a sunrise on Easter morning, probably the only occasion when most people even think about the resurrection.

Actually, Easter sunrise services were adopted from ancient paganism, just as the name *Easter* came from *Ishitar*, the ancient Babylonian fertility goddess. Such services are actually inconsistent with biblical facts about the resurrection of Christ. And in light of their origins, they are certainly unrelated to the promised resurrection of godly people to eternal life.

Another reason a sunrise service cannot honor Jesus is that *He did not*

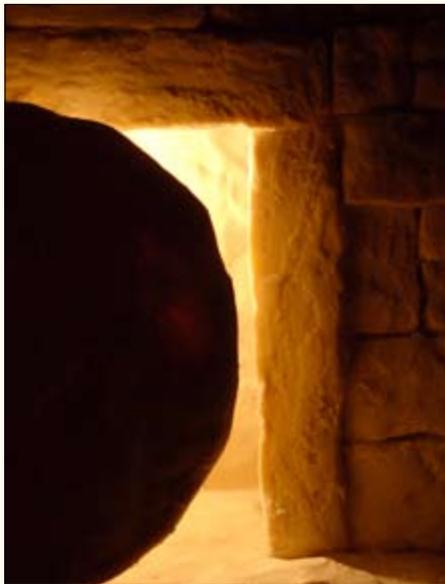
*rise on Sunday morning*. Your Bible teaches that He had *already* been resurrected when Mary Magdalene came to the tomb on Sunday morning "while it was still dark" (John 20:1)—before the sun had even risen!

Further, it is impossible to reconcile a Friday crucifixion and Sunday morning resurrection with Jesus' clear statement that He would be "in the heart of the earth" for three days and nights (Matthew 12:40). You simply cannot fit three days and nights into that time frame. Our free booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?* clearly explains the actual timing as proven in the Bible. Download or request your copy today!

example of a kernel of wheat.

### Death, life, and a kernel of wheat

Jesus taught an important lesson about His death and resurrection through His analogy of a wheat kernel. He said to His disciples: “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (John 12:24).



## Jesus Christ is our living Savior. His resurrection was essential for us to share eternal life with Him.

From the decaying kernel of wheat, a new, living plant emerges. Jesus, of course, is speaking of the life-giving benefits that the combination of His death and resurrection offer to mankind.

To the Christians in Rome, Paul pointed out that both Christ’s death and resurrection were essential for us to receive eternal life: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. *Much more than*, having now been justified by His blood, *we shall be saved* from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having

been reconciled, *we shall be saved by His life*” (Romans 5:8-10).

Here Paul shows that Jesus’ shed blood restores us to an acceptable relationship with God the Father by redeeming us from past guilt. But His atoning sacrifice only *reconciles* us to the Father. Paul then states emphatically that we are *saved by Christ’s life*, which makes His resurrection essential to our salvation and validates again the wheat-kernel analogy.

The importance of Christ’s resurrection takes nothing away from the importance of Jesus’ death and shed blood for washing away our sins. Rather, these are complementary; they fit together (Hebrews 11:12).

### We will be like Him!

The apostle John reveals that all who are resurrected to eternal life will become like Jesus Christ: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! . . . Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, *but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is*. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:1-3).

Paul describes the awesome change that will occur when the dead are resurrected to become like Jesus Christ: “There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies; and the splendour of the heavenly bodies is one thing, the splendour of the earthly another. The sun has a splendour of its own, the moon another splendour and the stars yet another; and one star differs from another in brightness.

“So it is with the resurrection of the dead: what is sown as a perishable thing is raised imperishable. Sown in humiliation, it is raised in glory; sown in weakness, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is such a thing as a physical body, there is also a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:40-44, Revised English Bible).

This passage is describing a truly incredible change. That is why Paul also says: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans

8:16-18, King James Version).

Knowing this, the apostle Peter near the end of his life sent these encouraging words to the congregational leaders of that time:

“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a *partaker of the glory that will be revealed*: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; *and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away*” (1 Peter 5:1-4).

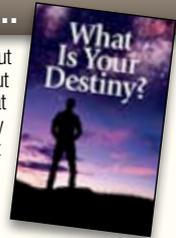
The glory and blessing of receiving eternal life is always linked to the return of Jesus Christ, to His second coming! Notice how strongly the apostle Paul stresses this fact:

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord *will by no means precede those who are asleep*. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. *And the dead in Christ will rise first*. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18).

Jesus Christ is our living Savior. His resurrection was essential for us to share eternal life with Him. Those whose sins are blotted out by His death and who continue to faithfully obey God’s Word are promised eternal life by a resurrection from the dead at His second coming! **GN**

### To Learn More...

The Bible repeatedly talks about the resurrection of the dead. But what does that really mean? What will the resurrection be like? Why is it necessary? Where does it fit in God’s great plan and purpose for you? What is the purpose of the resurrection of the dead? Discover the answers in our newly expanded free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?* Download or request your free copy today!



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# What Does It Mean to Believe in Jesus?

by David Treybig

Many claim to believe in Jesus Christ, but according to the Bible they really don't. How can you know that your belief is genuine?

**T**he New Testament urges us throughout to believe in Jesus Christ. The well-known scripture John 3:16 explains that God loved the world and gave His Son so “that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Other passages promise that those who believe in Jesus receive forgiveness of their sins (Acts 10:43) and salvation (Romans 1:16). Believing in Jesus is obviously *very* important.

In recognition of this instruction, many have been told that all they need to do is believe on Jesus to receive the benefit of all His promised blessings. But what many do not understand is what Jesus and the New Testament writers actually meant by the directive to “*believe*.” The vast majority of those claiming to be Christians today assume that this word simply means to recognize Jesus as Savior.

Many well-intentioned yet mistaken teachers have said that nothing else is required along with belief in Jesus. Their

reasoning is that if any works are involved, a person is trying to *earn* his salvation—something that is impossible to do (Galatians 2:16). Indeed, it is by *grace*—God’s favor toward us, including His gift of undeserved, unearned pardon—that we are saved (2 Timothy 1:9; Ephesians 2:5, 8).

But if no works are involved, does this mean one who believes that God exists and that Jesus is His Son and who is willing to receive all God’s promises doesn’t need to do anything? Does this mean such an individual can live a life of sexual immorality, lying, stealing, killing—breaking every commandment of God—and still receive eternal life?

Human beings have long wrestled with understanding the relationship between believing in Jesus and good works. Human opinions and interpretations abound. Let’s lay these aside and see how Jesus and the writers of the New Testament explain

what believing in Jesus means.

## Believing means accepting all of Jesus’ teaching

After miraculously feeding 5,000 men plus women and children with five loaves of bread and two small fish, the disciples gathered up 12 baskets of leftover food (John 6:5-13). “Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did [the miracle of feeding the multitude], said, ‘This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world’” (verse 14)—a reference to a great successor to Moses foretold in Scripture. These men believed that Jesus truly was of God.

After Jesus departed from the scene, many of those who enjoyed the miraculous meal came searching for Him. They wanted Jesus to perform another miracle, saying that this would help them believe Him (verse 30).

Rather than perform another miracle at this time, Jesus taught the people. He explained that, unlike the physical bread the crowd had recently eaten, He was the true bread from heaven who would give eternal life to the world (verses 32-33).

He told them that His followers would need to “eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood” (verse 53)—referring to the symbols of bread and wine in the annual Passover service and internalizing what these meant, affirming their covenant relationship with Him. This would ultimately lead to eternal life (verse 54).

Many of those listening to Jesus, including His own disciples, found this teaching difficult to understand (verse 60). Addressing this large group, Jesus then said, “‘But there are some of you who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him.” After this, “many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more” (verses 64, 66).

Though many of these same people had said that they believed Jesus was “the Prophet” whose coming was foretold by Scripture (verse 14), they did not believe what Jesus said. What Jesus meant by believing in Him *included believing everything He said*. It meant far more than just accepting free gifts He was offering.

## Believing means conviction to obey

One of the many traditions of the Jews



**Jesus clearly taught that genuine belief in Him would be coupled with baptism. Other passages show us that baptism includes repentance.**

during the first century was to carefully wash their hands in a special way prior to eating food. Noticing that some of Jesus' disciples had started eating without going through this meticulous ceremony, some of the Pharisees and scribes found fault with them and asked Jesus why His disciples had not carried out this ritual (Mark 7:1-5).

Jesus told them that they were hypocrites for asking such a question, declaring that these words from the Old Testament applied to them: "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (verses 6-7).

Continuing, Jesus said, "For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do . . . All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition" (verses 8-9).

Today many who claim to believe in Jesus also follow the commandments of men rather than those of God. For example, instead of assembling to worship God on the biblical weekly Sabbath (sunset Friday to sunset Saturday) and annual Holy Days as commanded by God, they worship on Sunday and holidays that originated in pagan religious worship, including Christmas and Easter.

In His famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:21-23, emphasis added throughout).

In accepting the *correct* teaching that we cannot earn our salvation through works,

many have naively embraced the *incorrect* teaching that keeping God's commandments doesn't matter. Jesus' own words clearly show that He expects believers to lay aside the commandments of men and keep the commandments of God—even though this obedience will not earn them salvation.

### Believing means resolving to be baptized

A popular notion among some professing Christians is that baptism is unnecessary because all one has to do is accept Jesus in one's heart. In this regard, some note Romans 10:9, which says, "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

Again, the issue here is: What does it mean to believe in your heart? And once again, rather than letting others define what constitutes believing, let's note what Jesus said.

In giving instructions to His disciples about the work they would do following His return to heaven, Jesus plainly told them: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever *believes and is baptized* will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16, New International Version).

Jesus clearly taught that genuine belief in Him would be coupled with *baptism*. Other passages show us that baptism includes *repentance*—changing from a sinful lifestyle to one of obedience to God's laws (Matthew 4:17; Acts 2:38).

When we look at Christ's teaching and that of His disciples, it becomes clear that when they said we must believe in Christ, this was with the perspective that believing would include baptism. Baptism is an outward symbol of a person's new life based on turning from *breaking* God's laws to *obeying* God's laws.

The notion that one can believe in Jesus without obeying His instructions, keeping the commandments and being baptized is a common but biblically flawed perspective. Jesus addressed this same fallacy during His earthly ministry by asking, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

To the contrary, He said, "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (John 15:8). Genuine belief in Jesus is not a passive experience. Disciples of Jesus will act on His teaching!

When it comes to deciding what believing in Jesus means, why not believe and act on what Jesus Himself said? **GN**

## When Nations Fall

*Continued from page 7*

It is God who gave America its territory, its wealth, its resources and its status as a great power. But God also has the power to remove all of this; indeed Bible prophecy reveals that *He will do just that.*

### What should you do?

The United States is sliding toward a national debacle. Bible prophecy foretells that it will happen and the signs are growing ever more obvious.

But America will not be alone. Eventually every nation and empire on this earth will collapse. God revealed through the prophet Daniel that this will occur: "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed . . . it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms [nations of the end time], and it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44).

No one knows exactly when this climactic end of the age of man will occur. Jesus said, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming" (Matthew 25:13). He did, however, explain that we can know when it is near.

Moreover, though you cannot know the exact time of Christ's coming, He clearly urges us *to be in a state of spiritual readiness*. The Bible contains many warnings urging that you heed and live your life according to godly principles. You can conduct your moral and family life in accordance with the Word of God. The Bible abounds with laws and examples that can instruct us on how to conduct ourselves as spouses and parents.

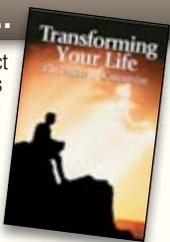
If you are a parent, whether married or single, you can, by looking to God's Word, be a good parent and give your children a right example to follow. In so doing, you increase the chances that they will choose to live a life that is also dedicated to God. Even if they do not, you will be rewarded with an entrance into God's Kingdom. "He who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life" (Galatians 6:8).

If you have not known or have disregarded God's commandments regarding marriage, you can begin to change that now. Even if family life in the nation around you is degenerating, *you can be different*. You can learn and practice morality starting from here, in spite of past mistakes you may have made.

These choices are up to you. God gave you free will, and it's His will that you use it to make wise choices and reap benefits accordingly. What are you going to do? **GN**

### To Learn More...

What does Jesus Christ expect from His true followers? Does God lay out conditions to receive His gift of eternal life? You need to know the answers! Discover the truth right from the pages of your Bible in our free booklet *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Salvation*. Be sure to request or download your free copy today!



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# Goodness: God's Character and Man's Potential

*The spiritual fruit of goodness enables sinful man to do good and to be good—good in the truest sense of the word. Goodness, after all, is the essence of God's nature.*

by Don Hooser

**A**re you suffering an internal spiritual war? If so, that's a good sign. It's a sign that you are pursuing goodness, which causes the badness of human nature to fight back.

Yes, according to the Bible, badness comes naturally (Romans 8:7). Goodness does not. But God has a wondrous plan to radically transform our character!

Though our natural inclination is to defy God in sin, He has determined to help us overcome that nature to live a life of righteousness and goodness. This is possible only through a relationship with Him. As the apostle John explained, "He who does good [as a way of life] is of God, but he who does evil [as a way of life] has not seen God [i.e., has not come to really know Him]" (3 John 11).

John also explained that those who truly are of God have God living in them through the Holy Spirit: "By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit" (1 John 4:13).

Paul explained to believers that God's perfect, loving character is "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Romans 5:5, New Revised Standard Version).

We can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit through faith, repentance, water baptism and the laying on of hands by God's servants (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:14-17).

Once God's Spirit is at work within us, it produces the wonderful fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, *goodness*, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). These virtues blend together to reflect the overall character of God!

## Goodness: part of God's nature

In the Bible, the "goodness" of God often refers to His gracious generosity in providing abundantly for mankind's needs and benefits (Psalms 23:6; 65:11). It can

also refer to God's generous mercy and patience that allow more time for sinners to repent (Romans 2:4).

But God's goodness is much more than those things. It is *the very essence of God's nature*—His righteousness and holiness. In Ephesians 5:9, we see that His goodness is closely associated with *righteousness and truth*.

To the extent that we have God's goodness, we have godliness or God-likeness.

The Bible gives us God's complete "instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). We should cherish it and read it far more than any other book or resource! Only through it can we learn to be like God.

God summarizes His standards of goodness in the Ten Commandments. Psalm 119:172 tells us that "all Your commandments are [or define] *righteousness*." God intends that they be our guideposts for life.

Let us now focus on how biblical goodness describes what one *does* and what one *is*.

## We must be doing good

Jesus wants His disciples to "bear much fruit" (John 15:8). Being fruitful requires *action*—knowing the right thing to do and then *doing* it. As James wrote, "*Be doers of the word*" (James 1:22). Simply abstaining from evil and *doing nothing* is not good enough.

Jesus "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). We should too! "Through love, *serve one another*," we are told (Galatians 5:13). Jesus' parable of the sheep and goats shows that God knows how much we love Him by how much we are showing self-sacrificing love for other people (Matthew 25:31-46).

Good works include *obeying God's laws*. God gives His Holy Spirit "to those who obey Him" (Acts 5:32). That doesn't mean salvation can be *earned* by obedience. We are saved by God's grace, which "is the

gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). However, we are being "created in Christ Jesus *for good works*" (verse 10).

He who loves God will gladly demonstrate that love for God by keeping His commandments (1 John 5:3; 2 John 6)!

It takes courage to obey God, because it often brings persecution: "But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently," God will greatly bless you (1 Peter 2:20; compare Matthew 5:10).

Christ said to *do good to everyone*, even our *enemies!* "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you" (Luke 6:27-28).

Later He said, "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same" (verses 32-33).

Doing good to someone who does good to you, Jesus points out, is not pure goodness. It is rather two people exchanging favors, which can be at least partly selfish. God's standard is the very highest!

Here is an inspiring passage to remember: "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us *do good to all*, especially to those who are of the household of faith [fellow believers]" (Galatians 6:9-10).

## Our heart should match our actions

God is just as concerned about our *heart* as He is our actions. James wrote to the early Christians, "Cleanse your hands [actions], you sinners; and purify your hearts [attitudes], you double-minded [straddling the fence between God and the world]" (James 4:8).

Double-mindedness can mean duplicity and hypocrisy. Jesus hated hypocrisy, which is a false front and being more con-

cerned about looking good to others than in getting rid of the evil within us (Matthew 23:25-28). Remember, we never fool God.

“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good” (Romans 12:9).

To keep a clean mind, guard it carefully! Don’t look at or listen to anything immoral or anything that compromises your conscience. Even *little* sins are spiritual poison that contaminate, infect and spread like cancer (James 1:14-15; 2 Timothy 2:17; Galatians 5:9). One sin leads to another.

Pure hearts require right *motives*. Paul

around us (verses 3-5). It calls “evil good, and good, evil” (Isaiah 5:20).

The evil is great because “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one,” Satan the devil (1 John 5:19). That’s why we need the spiritual defenses Paul referred to as “the whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:10-20).

Spiritual enemies also include false teachers (Galatians 1:6-9; 3:1). We must be extremely cautious about whom we listen to.

Usually, however, our biggest enemy is *ourselves*. Paul often warned about “the

of God’s Spirit, we have our part to do. Paul said, “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (verse 16, see also verse 25). While you have access to God’s Spirit, *stay with it, use it, walk, go forward!* Walking with God includes, of course, regular *talk* with God in *prayer*.

In verse 17, Paul describes the spiritual warfare that erupts whenever a person is trying to follow the lead of God’s Spirit: “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want” (NIV). To further understand this, you can read about Paul’s personal struggles in Romans 7.

Take note of the ultimate goal of this spiritual war: “*bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

It will be a positive sign when you begin to experience this inner warfare. It will mean you are trying to come out of sin, somewhat like Moses and the Israelites trying to leave Egypt. Remember how Pharaoh stubbornly tried his best to oppose them, to keep them enslaved? Well, that was a type of how Satan, the world and your human nature will try to defeat you. Don’t let them!

In Paul’s letter to the church at Rome, he wrote, “Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are *full of goodness*” (Romans 15:14). May you likewise pursue spiritual growth so that one day it will be said of you: *You are full of goodness*.

People speak of a life of comfort and affluence as “the good life.” But living a life close to God with all the great benefits He offers is the *truly good life!* Allow God to cultivate in you the good fruit of goodness. And that will lead to the gift of *eternal life!* *That’s as good as it gets!* **GN**



## God knows how much we love Him by how much we are showing self-sacrificing love for other people.

said that if he did good works without *love*, “it profits me nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3). Doing good deeds to impress others will bring no reward from God (Matthew 6:1-4). But when the motive is to “glorify your Father in heaven” instead of yourself, doing good works that are seen by others is part of being “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14-16).

### Our spiritual warfare

Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia (Galatians 1:1-2) because he had been shocked and grieved to hear how many church members had become deceived and led astray by spiritual enemies. One enemy then and now is “this present evil age”—the wicked influences in the culture

flesh,” meaning the selfish, destructive and downward pull of our human nature.

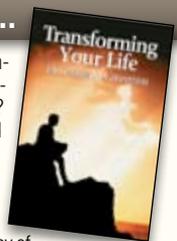
For example, he stated: “The acts [tendencies and temptations] of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21, New International Version).

Pretty nasty looking list, isn’t it? There is only one force that can defeat human nature—the power of God’s Spirit and the fruit it produces (verses 22-23).

Although the key to success is the power

### To Learn More...

How can you develop the wonderful fruit of the Spirit as described in this article series? What does it mean to be led by the Spirit? How can you have that Spirit at work in your life? You need to understand! To discover the answers, request or download your free copy of *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*. This free booklet explains the little-understood truth revealed in your Bible!



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# Television Log

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## UNITED STATES

**Alaska**  
Anchorage ch. 16, Fri 4 p.m.

**Arizona**  
Prescott ch. 13, Sun 5 p.m.; Sat 3:30 p.m.  
Prescott Valley ch. 13, Sun 9 a.m. & 6:30 p.m.  
Tucson ch. 72, 120, Sun 8 a.m.  
ch. 73, 98, Sat 8 a.m.

**Arkansas**  
Fayetteville ch. 18, Sun 10 a.m.; Wed 6 p.m.; Sat 9 a.m.

**California**  
Anaheim (west) ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.  
Berkeley ch. 26, Sun 8 a.m.  
Clayton ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Mon 8 p.m.  
Concord ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Mon 8 p.m.  
Costa Mesa ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.  
Cypress ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.  
Danville ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Mon 8 p.m.  
El Cerrito ch. 26, Sun 8 a.m..  
El Sobrante ch. 26, Sun 8 a.m..  
Emeryville ch. 26, Sun 8 a.m..  
Eureka ch. 12, Fri 8 p.m.  
Fountain Valley ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.  
Fremont ch. 29, Tue 6:30 p.m.  
Garden Grove ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.  
Hayward ch. 28, Tue 10 p.m.  
Hemet ch. 3, Fri 2:30 p.m.  
Hercules ch. 26, Sun 8 a.m.; Thu 9 p.m.  
Huntington Beach ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.  
Lafayette ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Mon 8 p.m.  
Livermore ch. 26, Fri 4 p.m.  
Los Alamitos ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.  
Marin County ch. 26, Thu 9 p.m.  
Martinez ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Mon 8 p.m.  
Midway City ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.  
Modesto ch. 26, Thu 8:30 p.m.; Fri 6 p.m.  
Monrovia ch. 16, 98, Tue, Thu and Sat 4:30 p.m.  
ch. 71, Tue 9:30 p.m.  
Oakland ch. 26, Sun 8 a.m.  
Orange ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.  
Orinda ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Mon 8 p.m.  
Palo Cedro DCA cable link, Thu 10 a.m.  
Pasadena ch. 56, Sun 6 a.m. & 6 p.m.  
ch. 26, Sun 9:30 a.m. & 3 p.m.; Sat 2:30 p.m.; Wed 6 p.m.  
Petaluma ch. 26, Sun 8 a.m.  
ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Mon 8 p.m.  
Richmond ch. 26, Sun 8 a.m.  
Rossmoor ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.  
Sacramento ch. 18, Mon 6:30 p.m.  
San Diego ch. 18, 19, 23, Mon 5 p.m.  
San Francisco ch. 29, Sun 9:30 a.m.  
San Jose ch. 15a, Wed 4:30 p.m.  
Santa Clara ch. 15a, Wed 4:30 p.m.  
Santa Rosa ch. 30, Sun 7:30 p.m.; Sat 10:30 a.m.  
ch. 6, Thu 4:30 p.m.  
S. Pasadena ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.  
Stanton ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Mon 8 p.m.  
Walnut Creek ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.  
Westminster ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.

**Georgia**  
Cornelia ch. 4, Sun 6:30 a.m. & 1:30 p.m.

**Hawaii**  
Hilo ch. 53, Sun 10 a.m.; Thu 7:30 p.m.

**Idaho**  
Boise ch. 11, Wed 7:30 p.m.

**Illinois**  
Arlington Heights ch. 35, Wed 6:30 p.m.  
Bartlett ch. 35, Wed 6:30 p.m.  
Brookport ch. 2, Sun 2 p.m.  
Buffalo Grove ch. 19, Wed 6:30 p.m.  
Chicago ch. 36, times vary  
Des Plaines ch. 35, Wed 6:30 p.m.  
Elk Grove Village ch. 19, Wed 6:30 p.m.  
Glenview ch. 35, Wed 6:30 p.m.

Golf Hanover Park Hoffman Estates Lincolnwood Metropolis Morton Grove Mt. Prospect Naperville Niles Normal Northbrook Palatine Park Ridge Prospect Heights Rolling Meadows Romeoville Schaumburg Skokie Springfield Streamwood Wheeling Wilmette

**Indiana**  
Bloomington Evansville Ft. Wayne Valparaiso ch. 3, Sun 9:30 p.m.  
ch. 7, Mon 5:30 p.m.; Tue 6:30 p.m.  
ch. 57, Sun 8:30 a.m.  
ch. 99, Tue 8:30 p.m.

**Iowa**  
Des Moines ch. 15, Sun 11:30 a.m.

**Kentucky**  
Owensboro Paducah ch. 72, Sun 8 a.m. & 7 p.m.  
ch. 2, Sun 2 p.m.

**Massachusetts**  
Boston ch. 22, 23, 83, Sun 7 a.m.; Wed 10 a.m. & 1:30 p.m.  
ch. 22, 23, 83, Sun 7 a.m.; Wed 10 a.m. & 1:30 p.m.  
ch. 5, Sun 11:30 a.m.  
ch. 95, Thu 3 p.m.  
ch. 17, Tue 4 p.m.; Wed 10:30 a.m.  
ch. 12, Tue 11 p.m.  
ch. 13, Thu 10 a.m.

Cambridge East Longmeadow Fall River Greenfield Palmer Worcester

**Michigan**  
Ann Arbor ch. 17, Thu 4:30 p.m.  
Grand Haven ch. 22, Mon 4 p.m.  
Grand Rapids ch. 25, Tue or Wed 11 a.m.  
Kalamazoo ch. 95, Sun 9 & 9:30 a.m.  
Michigan City ch. 99, Tue 8:30 p.m.; Thu 7 p.m.  
Midland ch. 3, Tue 5:30 p.m.  
Mt. Pleasant ch. 3, times vary  
Petoskey ch. 2, Sun 11:30 a.m.; Fri 5 p.m.  
Traverse City ch. 2, Sun 11:30 a.m.; Fri 5 p.m.  
Ypsilanti ch. 17, Thu 4:30 p.m.

**Minnesota**  
Albert Lea ch. 13, Sun 10:30 a.m.  
Austin ch. 13, Sun 10 a.m.  
Blaine ch. 14, Sun 1 & 9 a.m.; Sat 5 p.m.  
Bloomington ch. 16, Wed 10 p.m.; Thu 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Fri 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.  
Brooklyn Center ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.  
Brooklyn Park ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.  
Centerville ch. 14, Sun 1 & 9 a.m.; Sat 5 p.m.  
Circle Pines ch. 14, Sun 1 & 9 a.m.; Sat 5 p.m.  
Crystal ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.  
Eden Prairie ch. 15, Sun 12:30 p.m.; Thu 5:30 p.m.  
Edina ch. 15, Sun 12:30 p.m.; Thu 5:30 p.m.  
Golden Valley ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.  
Ham Lake ch. 14, Sun 1 & 9 a.m.; Sat 5 p.m.  
Hopkins ch. 15, Sun 12:30 p.m.; Thu 5:30 p.m.  
Lexington ch. 14, Sun 1 & 9 a.m.; Sat 5 p.m.  
Lino Lakes ch. 14, Sun 1 & 9 a.m.; Sat 5 p.m.  
Litchfield ch. 10, Sun 2 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 12:15 p.m., 7 p.m.; Wed 3 a.m., 8:30 a.m. & 6:30 p.m.  
ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.  
Minnetonka ch. 15, Sun 12:30 p.m.;

New Hope ch. 35, Wed 6:30 p.m.  
ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.

New Ulm ch. 72, Sun 5 p.m.; Thu 10 a.m.; Fri 7 p.m.  
ch. 14, Thu 9 a.m.  
ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.  
ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.

Osseo ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.

Plymouth ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.

Richfield ch. 15, Sun 12:30 p.m.; Thu 5:30 p.m.  
ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.

Robbinsdale ch. 10, Sun 10 a.m. & 7:30 p.m.; Sat 10 a.m. & 7:30 p.m.  
ch. 20, Sun 2 p.m.; Wed 3 p.m.  
ch. 14, Sun 1 & 9 a.m.; Sat 5 p.m.  
ch. 20, Sun 2 p.m.; Wed 3 p.m.  
ch. 8, Thu 11 a.m. & 8 p.m.; Sat 5 p.m.  
ch. 20, Sun 2 p.m.; Wed 3 p.m.

Rochester ch. 10, Sun 10 a.m. & 7:30 p.m.; Sat 10 a.m. & 7:30 p.m.  
ch. 20, Sun 2 p.m.; Wed 3 p.m.  
ch. 14, Sun 1 & 9 a.m.; Sat 5 p.m.  
ch. 20, Sun 2 p.m.; Wed 3 p.m.  
ch. 8, Thu 11 a.m. & 8 p.m.; Sat 5 p.m.  
ch. 20, Sun 2 p.m.; Wed 3 p.m.

St. Charles Spring Lake Park Wabasha Willmar

Winona

**Missouri**  
Cape Girardeau ch. 5, Sun 7:30 a.m.; Tue 6 p.m.; Thu 12:30 p.m.; Fri 7:30 p.m.  
Jackson ch. 5, Sun 7:30 a.m.; Tue 6 p.m.; Thu 12:30 p.m.; Fri 7:30 p.m.  
Jefferson City Poplar Bluff Springfield ch. 3, Wed 6 p.m.  
ch. 54, Tue 4 p.m.  
ch. 26, Sun 8:30 a.m.; Wed 7 p.m.

**Montana**  
Billings Helena Missoula ch. 7, Sun 6 p.m.; Sat 11 a.m.  
ch. 11, Sun 3 p.m.  
ch. 7, Sun 11 a.m.

**Nevada**  
Carson City Reno/Sparks ch. 10, Wed 7:30 p.m.  
ch. 16, Wed 7 p.m.

**New Hampshire**  
Laconia ch. 25, 26, Sun 7:30 a.m. & 4:30 p.m.

**New Jersey**  
Newark ch. 19, Sun 8:30 a.m.

**New Mexico**  
Santa Fe ch. 16, Sun 10 a.m.; Mon 6:30 p.m.

**New York**  
Binghamton ch. 4, Thu 5:30 p.m.  
Bronx ch. 70, Mon 3 p.m.  
Brooklyn ch. 56, 69, Sun 10 a.m.  
Canandaigua ch. 12, Sun 2 p.m.  
Long Island ch. 20, Mon 10 p.m.  
New York ch. 57, Sun 7 a.m.  
Oneonta ch. 23, Mon 6 p.m.; Wed 9 p.m.  
Queens ch. 35, Tue 8 p.m.; Thu 3 p.m.  
ch. 56, Sun 10 p.m.; Thu 4:30 p.m.  
ch. 115, Fri 5:30 p.m.

Woodbury

**North Carolina**  
Charlotte ch. 21, Sat 1 p.m.  
Durham ch. 8, Wed 7:30 a.m.  
Hickory ch. 10, Sun 7 p.m.  
Raleigh ch. 22, Tue 6:30 p.m.

**North Dakota**  
Bismarck ch. 12, Sun 2:30 p.m.  
Fargo ch. 12, Tue 10:30 a.m.

**Ohio**  
Athens ch. 23, Sun 7 p.m.; Wed 7 p.m.  
Brunswick ch. 21, Tue 7 p.m.; Wed 12:30, 4:30 & 8:30 a.m.; 2:30, 6:30 & 9:30 p.m.  
ch. 4, Sun 11 a.m. & 8 p.m.; Mon 5:30 p.m.; Tue 4 p.m.  
ch. 12, Wed 11 a.m.  
ch. 18, Sun 10:30 a.m.; Tue 10 p.m.; Thu 11 p.m.; Sat 6:30 a.m.  
ch. 8, Sun 2:30 a.m.; Tue 9:30 a.m.; Wed 11 p.m.; Sat 2:30 p.m.  
ch. 12, Sun 11 a.m.; Wed 7 p.m.  
ch. 5, Sun 12 noon; Thu 6 p.m.  
ch. 23, Sun 5:30 p.m.  
ch. 3, Thu 8 p.m.  
ch. 12, Sun & Sat 9 a.m.  
ch. 23, Sun 5:30 p.m.  
ch. 23, Sun 5:30 p.m.  
ch. 1, daily 6 a.m., 10 a.m. & 7 p.m.

Dayton Defiance Fairborn Greenville Oberlin/Wellington Springfield Trotwood Urbana

Vandalia Wash. Court House Xenia ch. 23, Sun 5:30 p.m.  
ch. 3, Wed 2 p.m.; Sat 10 a.m.  
ch. 23, Sun 5:30 p.m.

**Oregon**  
Eugene ch. 29, Tue 2 p.m.  
McMinnville ch. 11, Sun 5:30 p.m.; Wed 8 p.m.  
Medford ch. 15, 95, Sun 5 p.m.  
Monmouth ch. 17, Sun 11 a.m.  
Portland ch. 22, Sun 7:30 p.m.  
Salem ch. 23, Sun 12:30 p.m.; Fri 2 p.m.; Sat 11:30 a.m.  
ch. 11, Sun 9 a.m.

Woodburn

**Pennsylvania**  
Pittsburgh/Moon Twp. York ch. 21, 14, Sun 12 & 2 p.m.  
ch. 16, Sun 8:30 p.m.; Mon 4:30 a.m. & 12:30 p.m.

**Rhode Island**  
Entire state ch. 14, Fri 10:30 a.m.

**Texas**  
Austin Dallas ch. 11, Mon 8:30 p.m.  
ch. 14B, 74, Sun 12:30 p.m.; Thu 9:30 p.m.  
Del Rio ch. 19, Sun 9 a.m.; Wed 5 p.m.  
El Paso ch. 15, Mon, Fri, Sat 1 p.m.  
Fort Worth ch. 28, Tue 5:30 p.m.; Thu 1 p.m.  
Longview ch. 26, Tue 2 p.m.; Sat 9 p.m.  
San Antonio ch. 20, Mon 10:30 a.m. & 6:30 p.m.

**Virginia**  
Charlottesville/ Albemarle County Hampton Roads ch. 13, 14, Wed 10 p.m.  
ch. 71, 74, Sun 10 a.m.

**Washington**  
Everett Kennewick Olympia ch. 77, Wed 5 p.m.  
ch. 13, Sun & Tue 8:30 p.m.  
ch. 22, 29, Sun 9 a.m.; Thu 10:30 p.m.  
ch. 14, Sat 5:30 p.m.  
ch. 11, Sun 11 p.m.; Mon 5 p.m.; Sat 11 a.m.

Spokane Vancouver

**West Virginia**  
Morgantown ch. 3, Mon, Wed & Fri 3 p.m.; Sat 10 a.m.

**Wisconsin**  
Beloit Eau Claire Kenosha Madison Milwaukee ch. 12, Thu 6:30 p.m.  
ch. 96, Sun 2 p.m.  
ch. 14, Sun & Mon 7:30 p.m.  
ch. 4, Sun 12:30 p.m.  
ch. 96, Mon 2 p.m.; Tue 7 p.m.; Wed 2 p.m.  
ch. 19, Sun & Sat 1 p.m.  
ch. 96, 984, 984-1, Mon 5 & 9:30 p.m.; Tue 10 a.m. & 3:30 p.m.  
ch. 96a, 981d, 98a, 980d, Sun 8:30 a.m.; Sat 9 a.m.  
ch. 14, times vary

## CANADA

**Nationwide**  
Vision TV, Sun 7 p.m. (PST)  
Star Choice Digital ch. 399, Sun 10:30 a.m. (EST)

**Alberta**  
The Christian Channel Telus ch. 158, Sun 8:30 a.m.

**British Columbia**  
The Christian Channel Telus ch. 158, Sun 7:30 a.m.

**Manitoba**  
The Christian Channel MTS ch. 21, Sun 9:30 a.m.

**New Brunswick**  
The Christian Channel Rogers ch. 396, Sun 11:30 a.m.

**Newfoundland and Labrador**  
The Christian Channel Rogers ch. 396, Sun 12 noon

**Northwest Territory**  
The Christian Channel Northwest ch. 226, Sun 8:30 a.m.

**Ontario**  
The Christian Channel Rogers ch. 396, Sun 10:30 a.m.  
The Christian Channel Cogeco ch. 186, Sun 10:30 a.m.

**Saskatchewan**  
The Christian Channel SaskTel ch. 282, Sun 8:30 a.m.



# How Can a Leader Assure Peace, Prosperity and Protection?

by **Beyond Today** host Darris McNeely

What should a good and wise ruler do to guide his people to the right path? Let's learn from the message God sent through one of His prophets.

**W**hat one thing could America's new president, Barack Obama, do to bring peace and prosperity?

It's a good question, especially in light of the high hopes and expectations he has generated not just for America but for much of the world. It is also the right question for any leader to ask himself.

It echoes what King Solomon said when he became king of Israel. He said to God: "You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" (1 Kings 3:7-9).

President Obama is no doubt getting advice from many counselors. But he—or any leader—would do well to listen carefully and consider the best advice possible, that of God's Word.

## A nation with a form of religion, but little substance

America's fundamental problem is that, though it claims to be a Christian nation, it neither knows nor obeys the true God.

Yes, the founding fathers believed in God, the Bible and even rightly invoked the Ten Commandments as vital for any nation to prosper. The laws of the Bible formed the foundation of the country's laws. American currency is inscribed with the words, "In God We Trust." And the



## Will President Obama heed the wise counsel of God's Word? Will the people he leads? He has a chance. So does the nation.

majority faith in the land is Christianity.

However, although 40 percent of those asked claim to attend church each week,

actual attendance figures show the total is much lower. Many claim to believe in God, religion, the Bible and many things spiritual. But it is the *substance* of those beliefs that we should be concerned about.

When we examine actual practices and beliefs of professing Christians in the light of what the Bible says, we find a wide discrepancy. Many of people's central beliefs about God and Jesus Christ are not found in the Bible!

The list is long and ranges from the true nature of God to the teachings of Jesus about the Kingdom of God, from the timing of Christ's birth to when He died and rose, from the day on which Christ and His apostles worshipped to the Bible's statements on what happens to a person at death. Confusion reigns when it comes to basic knowledge and understanding about God and His teachings.

The result of this confusion is a nation that has a *form* of religion but lacks biblical substance.

This may sound surprising. You may ask how—when all these churches do good works and speak so much of God—it could be said that America is not following Him. The answer lies deep within the story of how God works with His people.

## The reforms of a biblical king

The Bible tells the story of a time in the southern Israelite kingdom of Judah when King Asa took the nation through a spiritual awakening and reform. The kingdom of Israel had been divided into two peoples, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The resulting confusion impacted the spiritual life of the people, always a tenuous one since false religion continually lurked at the edges of society, seeking inroads against the true knowledge that God had placed within the laws and constitution of the land.

Asa began his reign by removing the altars to foreign gods and all the sacred high places, pillars and wooden images of

idols—gods that were not the true God (2 Chronicles 14:3). He issued a decree urging the people to “seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to observe the law and the commandment” (verse 4).

It may seem strange that the king of a nation founded by God would need to be redirected toward observance of the Ten Commandments! Yet this is what we read. Judah was a nation literally “under God,” but they had forgotten a great deal and needed to be reformed. Does this sound familiar?

The story continues. Asa was a capable and sincere king. He cared for the quality of life among the people. He maintained a standing army to protect the borders and ensure peace.

God, we are told, protected the people and maintained their national sovereignty in the face of hostile neighbors (verses 11-12). Israel had made a covenant with God and even though the nation did not always faithfully follow that covenant, God always upheld His part of the agreement and faithfully protected the nation. Until the day He let them go into captivity, God was patient and merciful with the nation.

While Asa had undertaken significant reforms, he had not gone far enough. One day he was confronted with another directive from God, sent through a prophet, Azariah the son of Oded.

The prophet boldly walked up to Asa and spoke these words: “Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. For a long time Israel has been without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without law” (2 Chronicles 15:2-3).

### Worshipping a different god

The people of Judah thought they worshipped God. But here God’s prophet said they didn’t worship Him. How could that be? The answer is simple. Their hearts had been turned away from the true God by the idols they worshipped.

The promises and enticement offered by another ideology and lifestyle led them

to worship the image that represented that desire. Whether it was a ritual that promised sexual fulfillment and fertility or another god that promised personal success, people were eager to fabricate an image of that god, thus obscuring their understanding of the true God of their fathers.

That is how idolatry works. It places a veil over the eyes, ears and mind of people that clouds proper understanding of the true God.

Whatever we as human beings place in front of our eyes and worship in place of God becomes our own idol. That act renders us *incapable of discerning truth* in worship of God. One can profess a belief in God, but if one’s actions serve another image of a substitute god, then that worship is futile.

Today America and other nations may profess a belief in God, but in reality they worship at the altars of many different gods created in the image of the believer.

Oh, most don’t carve out wooden images or offer sacrifices on altars dedicated to pagan gods today. And most do not worship a god of the sun, moon and stars. People are far more sophisticated than that.

No, they worship other gods—gods of tradition, celebrity, status, power and money. People worship themselves, made in the image of God, when they spend their energies pursuing these false values. When they think they can chart their own destiny and master their own fate alone, without God in their lives, then they are just as guilty as those in the ancient world who made a god out of every force of nature.

Psalms 115 speaks of those who fashion idols of silver and gold, the work of their own hands. Idols have hands that do not work, mouths that do not speak, eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear (verses 4-7). They are inanimate forms that do nothing but distract the worshipper from the truth of God.

Here is the irony. Those who fashion these images *become like them*, with eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear (verse 8). They become blind and deaf to true spirituality.

America stands at a crossroads. Its people desperately need the *true* God. Not the

false, lifeless image of a god that has been palmed off as the true God. America (and all nations, in fact) needs a true servant of God teaching the pure, unadulterated truth and law of God and turning the people’s hearts back to their Creator.

It is this God who has stood above America since its founding, protecting it against all enemies and blessing it through the ages. To this God America owes all thanks for the power and wealth it has amassed. Its national greatness comes from the faithful blessing of this God, not its own might, power, wisdom or genius.

And like Judah in the days of King Asa, America has been for a long time “without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without law” (2 Chronicles 15:3).

### An opportunity to change

Will President Obama heed the wise counsel of God’s Word? Will the people he leads? He has a chance. So does the nation. But without a return to the true God, only He knows when He will remove His hand of blessing and allow a tide of oppression to wash over the nation, sweeping away His benefits, along with America’s favored position among the nations.

Regardless of what others do, you have the opportunity to foresee the time of great trouble ahead and heed the warning of God’s Word. You can choose to hear and “seek the LORD while He may be found” (Isaiah 55:6).

As the prophet told King Asa so long ago, “When in their trouble they turned to the LORD God of Israel, and sought Him, He was found by them.” He followed that with an encouraging assurance: “Be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded!” (2 Chronicles 15:4, 7).

The choice is yours to make. **GN**

### To Learn More...

Why have America’s problems mounted so much over recent years? Why is it facing a huge financial crisis, bogged down in wars, threatened by terrorism and losing respect and leadership around the world? Does Bible prophecy offer any explanations? Indeed it does! You need to read *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. Request or download your free copy today!



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**America’s fundamental problem is that, though it claims to be a Christian nation, it neither knows nor obeys the true God.**

# God, Science and the Bible

News from the world of science about God and the Bible

by John Ross Schroeder and Mario Siegle

## Are children born to believe in God?

Recently Dr. Justin Barrett, a senior researcher at Oxford University's Centre for Anthropology and Mind, made some startling statements regarding children.

In an interview on BBC Radio 4, Dr. Barrett said, "The preponderance of scientific evidence for the past 10 years or so has shown that a lot more seems to be built into the natural development of children's minds than we once thought, including a *predisposition to see the natural world as designed and purposeful and that some kind of intelligent being is behind that purpose*" ("Children Are Born Believers in God, Academic Claims," *The Daily Telegraph*, Nov. 25, 2008, emphasis added throughout).

Dr. Barrett indicated that children naturally believe in some sort of higher being. He further observed that "children's normally and naturally developing minds make them prone to believe in divine creation and intelligent design. In contrast, evolution is *unnatural for human minds*; relatively difficult to believe" (ibid.).

Dr. Barrett also notes that anthropologists have discovered that in some cultures in which teachings about a Creator are withheld from children, they nonetheless still believe in a divine being. He said, "If we threw a handful [of children] on an island and they raised themselves, I think they would believe in God" (ibid.).

Whatever Dr. Barrett's personal beliefs about creation and evolution may be, undoubtedly his observations will not be well-received by fellow academics and scientists steeped in the evolutionary viewpoint. After all, how could Darwinian evolution account for human beings having an inborn propensity to believe in a divine Creator?

This discussion raises the important issue of adult responsibility in teaching young people truth. The God who created human beings in His own image (Genesis 1:26-27) will hold both parents and teachers responsible for what they teach children (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Proverbs 22:6).

Should it be divine creation or evolution? Many do not understand that Darwinian evolution is still unproven theory—and really not established fact. For a comprehensive study of this important question, request or download our free booklet *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?*

Our sister publication, *Vertical Thought*, regularly writes on these issues from a young person's perspective. If you have a teen or young adult, you may request a free subscription for him or her at [www.verticalthought.org](http://www.verticalthought.org).



## Peacocks' feather displays defy evolutionist explanations

"The sight of a feather in a peacock's tail, whenever I gaze at it, makes me sick!" wrote Charles Darwin to botanist Asa Gray on April 3, 1860.

His comments aren't surprising. After all, the stunning colors of the peacock's feathers are hard for evolutionists to explain. According to Darwinian evolution, natural selection is supposed to explain features in animals that give them a distinct advantage in their struggle for survival.

Yet the colorful array of the feathers in a peacock's tail certainly doesn't give it an advantage. As a matter of fact, the elaborate tail is a major hindrance to fleeing from predators and a bull's-eye for them to target.

So how could Darwin wriggle out of this dilemma?

He once noted to a friend that he prided himself as an expert "in the master art of wriggling" (*Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, 1891, Vol. 2, p. 239).

Darwin came up with another explanation to salvage his theory—what he called "sexual selection."

He speculated in his book *The Origin of Species*: "This leads me to say a few words on what I have called Sexual Selection. This form of selection depends, not on a struggle for existence in relation to other organic beings or to external conditions, but on a struggle between the individuals of one sex, generally the males, for the possession of the other sex.

"The result is not death to the unsuccessful competitor, but few or no offspring . . . thus Sir R. Heron has described how a pied peacock was eminently attractive to all his hen birds. I cannot here enter on the necessary details; but . . . I can see no good reason to doubt that female birds, by selecting, during thousands of

generations, the most melodious or beautiful males according to their standard of beauty, might produce a marked effect" (1872, pp. 94-95).

This sounds plausible, but does the evidence prove the point? Not according to a recent and thorough study on the attractiveness of the peacock's feathers to the female birds!

Researchers at the University of Tokyo studied peacocks and peahens in a zoo for seven years. They carefully photographed each male during the tail-fanning display ritual and counted the number of eyespots—a measure of the tail's quality. They next examined whether females chose mates with the best-quality tails.

During this period of observation, the scientists observed 268 successful matings. But to their surprise, they found that females mated with drab-tailed peacocks as often as with flashy males! They concluded that the male peacocks' tails were not the reason for the females' attraction to a partner—a result at odds with Darwin's theory of sexual selection (*Animal Behaviour*, April 2008, pp. 1209-1219).

Evolutionists, to say the least, are not happy with the findings. Yet, if their claim of objectivity holds, they should follow the evidence to where it leads and not to where they *want* it to go. Such findings open up a whole field of study about the validity of the theory of sexual selection and undermine the idea of sexual selectivity according to perceived attractiveness of the creature by their mates.

It seems the "master wriggler," Charles Darwin, has once again been defeated by the Master Creator. As we're told in 1 Corinthians 3:19-20 (Good News Bible): "For what this world considers to be wisdom is nonsense in God's sight. As the scripture says, 'God traps the wise in their cleverness'; and another scripture says, 'The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are worthless.'"



## “Change Is Coming”

The word “change” had become a frustration to me because of the recent U.S. national election. So the article “Change Is Coming” was excellent, succinct, encouraging! I praise God for your work. I pray that many more will have their eyes opened to God’s wonderful truth and His marvelous plan.

*L.D.B., Sullivan, Illinois*

## “What Will the Next President Face?”

In the recent article “What Will the Next President Face?” you make the remarkable statements that “God removes rulers and raises up rulers. No world leader holds office without his consent.” Does Robert Mugabe continue to subject the Zimbabwean people to torture, starvation and death with God’s approval?

*J.S., Queensland, Australia*

*It is important to understand that there is a difference between what God allows and what He approves. While God allows travesties such as the current conditions in Zimbabwe, that is not to say that He approves of them. Such “leadership” is utterly repulsive to our Creator. In His Word He says, “Like a roaring lion and a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people” (Proverbs 28:15). Both are destructive and can do great harm.*

*We need to understand that God has allowed human beings freedom of choice since the Garden of Eden. Rejecting God throughout the ages has brought horrible suffering on the human race. That is why the Bible refers to this age of human misrule as “this present evil age” (Galatians 1:4), telling us that Satan is the true “god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4).*

*But it won’t always be this way. God is working out a plan that will transform the world under the leadership of Jesus Christ. That is the good news from which this magazine gets its name. To understand more fully, request or download our free booklet Why Does God Allow Suffering?*

## The Good News

I want to congratulate you and your staff of writers for producing such a timely magazine. I especially appreciate your comment in a recent issue: “There comes a point in the lifetime of people and nations alike when there’s no turning back. The die is cast; the momentum is too great to turn things around.” Your publication defines for us the absurd world in which we live. It also helps people on the Christian pathway stay on the Christian pathway.

*J.S., Flagstaff, Arizona*

I want to thank all of the people who are responsible for *The Good News*. I am 25 years old and we all realize the pressures of the world when we are younger. I grew up in the church and, like many, when I became a teenager I stopped going. *The Good News* was mailed to me by mistake. God works in mysterious ways, and I believe this magazine is a calling from the Creator of heaven and earth. I have ordered almost all of the booklets and have taken the *Bible Study Course*.

*D.W., Sarasota, Florida*

I wish to thank you for the literature you have been sending so regularly. The magazines and booklets have been extremely helpful, instructional and inspirational. My prayer is that you will continue to reach out to people in this troubled world. I am enclosing a cheque to be used in your ministry.

*A.C.L.A., Nesperal, Portugal*

First, thank you very much for helping me turn my life around. I do, however, feel somewhat guilty because not only have I been receiving *The Good News* on a regular basis, but in addition you have sent me all the additional publications I requested without asking for anything in return. When the funds become available I will not forget you.

*J.W., Nashville, Tennessee*

Dear *Good News* family: I received *How to Understand the Bible and Is the Bible True?* I am still reading them. I also received *World News and Prophecy* yesterday. Thank you so much for your wonderful way of explaining the Word. I especially like the history you add in all your booklets and articles. Enclosed is a gift.

*M.D., Lady Lake, Florida*

## “The Real Nativity Story”

Thank you for the very informative scriptural interpretation of the nativity. It is something everyone should know and understand. I do, however, feel that you over-emphasize the literal. I think that the importance of Jesus’ nativity is that we celebrate it both as a holiday of festive joy and a holy day of spiritual renewal. We must, as Christians, emphasize the spiritual over the commercial/material in the holy season. Jesus Himself taught us to live by the spirit rather than the letter of the law.

*D.H., Jalisco, Mexico*

*Indeed, Jesus does want us to live by the spirit—the intent—of God’s law. Yet that does not mean ignoring the letter. And according to God’s law, in both the letter and spirit, we are frankly not to celebrate Christmas at all. It and its customs originated as a pagan midwinter festival honoring false gods long before the birth of Christ, and God tells us not to use pagan worship methods to worship Him (Deuteronomy 12:29-32). Thus, “to emphasize the spiritual over the commercial/material” in this case means to reject Christmas altogether, as it is in no way the “holy season” it is purported to be. To learn more, request or download our free booklet Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*

I just finished reading *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?* I was quite surprised that Jesus wasn’t born on Christmas Day as I had been brought up to believe. To find out the truth about Easter was just as amazing. Thank you for revealing the truth to me.

*E.S., Internet*

## The true Sabbath day

I have been a Christian for 28 years and over the last year have been reading your material, which I really enjoy. I am now rethinking my views on a lot of things and the Sabbath is one of them. I agree the Sabbath should be Saturday, but I have always fellowshipped and enjoyed it on a Sunday. I was watching a debate on a Christian TV channel regarding the Sabbath and was amazed at how many Christians like myself are rethinking this subject.

*J.M., Glasgow, Scotland*

*For a thorough biblical examination of this issue, readers may wish to request our free booklet Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest.*

## The Middle East in Bible Prophecy

Thank you for sending me the booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* as well as *The Good News*. As I was born in Jerusalem and lived there until age 37, the fate and future of that part of the world has always interested me. So when I read your booklet I became more worried that there is no hope for any kind of peace settlement. There was a time when in Palestine we used to live in peace and harmony with each other: Jews, Arabs and Christians. By reading about Bible prophecy, I started to wonder: Could all these be the early signs of Jesus’ return?

*L.S., Internet*

*A new age of peace is surely coming, as the booklet itself explains.*

## An encouraging life story

As a person who went down the wrong path in life at age 13, I’m now 28, having made such a total mess of my life. I had no hope at all. I’m doing one full year in jail and by pure chance I found out about your church. I cried out for help, and you, who I didn’t even know, have answered my call. The material that you have sent to me has been so awesome. It has given me hope for my future. Please tell me where you guys come from. How did your church get started? What is the history behind it? I’ll never be able to tell you how grateful I am.

*K.R.I., Oroville, California*

*We are happy to learn of your progress and have mailed the booklet This Is the United Church of God to answer your questions.*

Published letters may be edited for clarity and space. Address your letters to *The Good News*, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, Ohio 45254-1027, U.S.A., or e-mail [ginfo@ucg.org](mailto:ginfo@ucg.org) (please be sure to include your full name, city, state or province, and country).



**Q: I am not clear about Luke 23:43, where Jesus told one of those crucified with Him that he would be with Him in paradise. I've heard it explained that the comma is in the wrong place, which changes the meaning. Can you help clarify this verse?**

*Reader from Northern Ireland*

A: Most Bible versions translate Christ's words to the convicted criminal being crucified with Him similar to the New King James Version: "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Many people think Jesus assured the man he would go to heaven with Him that very day. But is this really what He meant?

Although it is a strong supporting factor, the fundamental understanding of this passage does not rest solely on the misplacement of a comma in English translations. Certainly the true meaning would be better understood if the comma were correctly placed after the word *today*. However, other rules of sound Bible study also help us to understand Luke 23:43.

We need to first understand that original texts of the Bible (Greek for the New Testament and Hebrew and some Aramaic for the Old Testament) used no punctuation.

As Dr. E.W. Bullinger explains in *The Companion Bible*: "None of our modern marks of punctuation are found [in Bible texts] until the ninth century . . . The punctuation of all modern editions of the Greek text, and of all versions made from it, rests entirely on human authority, and has no weight whatever in determining or even influencing the interpretation of a single passage" (1990, Appendix 94, p. 136, emphasis in original).

In most cases translators and publishers of the Bible have done an admirable job using punctuation to clarify the meaning of the Scriptures, but this is one case where their doctrinal bias has regrettably obscured the meaning of Christ's words. By placing a comma *before* "today" in Christ's statement to the dying man rather than *after* it, they have Jesus saying something He never intended.

We know this because the Bible clearly says Jesus Himself did not go to paradise or heaven on the day He died! Instead *He died and was buried in the grave*. Notice the apostle Paul's clear statement in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4: "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that *Christ died for our sins* according to the Scriptures, and that *He was buried*, and that *He rose again the third day* according to the Scriptures" (emphasis added throughout).

Notice what Christ told Mary soon after He had been resurrected: "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father" (John 20:17). A full three days after His death, Jesus Himself clearly said that He had not yet ascended to heaven!

Jesus had earlier plainly said that He would lay in the grave for three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40). The Scriptures nowhere say that His body was buried but His soul went elsewhere. Jesus died and was buried. He went only to the grave. Therefore the dying criminal *could not* have been with Jesus in heaven that day, because *Jesus Himself did not go there then*.

If Jesus was not telling the man he would be in heaven or paradise on that day, what was He telling him?

A fundamental principle for sound Bible study is to carefully check the context. Notice the specific wording of the man's request: "Lord, remember me *when You come into Your Kingdom*" (Luke 23:42). Notice that the thief expressed no expectation of immediately going to heaven with Jesus at the moment they died.

He may have already known something about the nature of the Kingdom of God—that it would be a literal kingdom to be established on earth by the Messiah, which many Jews of that day understood. Jesus Himself had previously given an entire parable "because they thought that the kingdom of God would immediately appear" (Luke 19:11). Jesus also taught His disciples to pray, "Your kingdom come" (Luke 11:2). This Kingdom, as explained in our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, is the Kingdom that Jesus will establish on

earth at His return, not a location in heaven to which we go when we die.

Notice also Jesus' response to the man, telling him "you will be with Me *in Paradise*." Understanding the nature of the biblical use of the term *paradise* is crucial to grasping the meaning of this passage.

The word translated "paradise" is used only two other times in the New Testament. In both cases it refers to the place of God's presence.

In 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 Paul describes a *vision* in which he "was caught up into Paradise." Paul says this paradise was in "the third heaven"—the dwelling place of God.

Jesus tells us that "the tree of life" is located "in the midst of the Paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7). Revelation 22:2 explains that the tree of life is to be in the New Jerusalem. God will come *from heaven* to dwell in this New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2-3) after the resurrections of the dead mentioned in Revelation 20. Only at that time will men dwell with God in this paradise.

Putting together these scriptures, we can see that the paradise Christ mentioned, in which men will dwell with God, is to be *at a future time*.

How do we know this was Christ's meaning? Again, as noted above, Jesus plainly said He was going to be dead and buried for the following three days and nights, after which He clearly told Mary that He had not yet ascended to heaven.

Some theologians and religious denominations try to redefine Christ's use of *paradise* to say that this referred to where the righteous dead went before Jesus came—a sort of temporary "holding place" next to hell because heaven wasn't available to them until Christ ascended to heaven after His death and opened the way for them to follow.

This concept, however, is straight out of pagan Greek mythology about life after death (the Elysian Fields as the section of the Greek underworld for good people) and not something taught in the Bible. The idea that the righteous dead of Old Testament times went to a place called "paradise" and later ascended to heaven after Jesus was resurrected is disproved by the apostle Peter's plain statements in Acts 2:29 and 34—almost two months after Christ's death and resurrection—that King David "is both dead and buried" and "David *did not* ascend into the heavens."

Putting together the relevant scriptures, we can see here the truth of the matter. The robber had come to his senses while being crucified alongside Jesus (Luke 23:39-41). Like anyone facing imminent death, he sought comfort and assurance. Jesus provided it, telling the man, "Assuredly, I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise."

Part of His reply, "Assuredly I say to you today" was a "common Hebrew idiom . . . which is constantly used for very solemn emphasis" (*The Companion Bible*, Appendix 173, p. 192). Examples of this Hebrew phrase, worded very similarly to Christ's statement, can be found in Deuteronomy 30:18 ("I announce to you today that you shall surely perish") and Acts 20:26 ("Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men"—New International Version).

Many centuries later, when the punctuation marks that we see in our English versions were inserted, Jesus' meaning was distorted by the wrong placement of the comma, and this Hebrew figure of speech was obscured. (Several other Bible translations and reference works, among them the Rotherham Translation, *The Emphatic Diaglott*, The Concordant Literal New Testament and *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, recognize the Hebrew idiom and correctly place the comma after "today" for proper punctuation.)

In conclusion, Jesus never said nor implied that the dying man would be in paradise or heaven on that very day. Christ was encouraging him by solemnly assuring him that a time would come, in God's future Kingdom on earth, when the man would be resurrected and would see Jesus again.

This dramatic event can be properly understood only when we comprehend the time frame of God's plan of salvation and the promised resurrections described in the Bible. To learn more, request or download our free booklet *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*

# Why Were You Born? Why Are You Here? What Is Your Destiny?

**D**oes your life have purpose? Does it have real meaning? Is life anything more than a brief span on earth, with nothing but eternity on either side of this physical existence?

This is the question of the ages, a riddle that has challenged human beings since they came to be: Why am I here? Why do I exist? Is there a purpose for my existence?

Thousands of years ago, the biblical King David looked up into the night sky and wrote down his thoughts regarding man's relationship to his Creator: "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?"

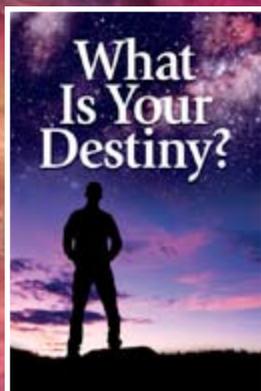
David wondered about the purpose of man just as we do today. He wondered why God is so concerned with human beings and their future and what role we have in His plan. Every one of us was created for a purpose, but few understand

what that great purpose is. *Do you?*

David perceived that no part of God's physical creation even begins to compare with His purpose for you and me! He continued describing God's purpose for mankind: "You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of your hands."

Perhaps David had in mind God's earlier proclamation through Moses that "the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven . . . the LORD Your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage."

Being crowned with glory and honor—having dominion over all God's works—being given the sun, stars and heavenly bodies as a heritage—what does it all mean? You need to know! Our newly expanded free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?* will help you understand the incredible truth about why you were born!



For your free copy, visit our Web site or contact any of our offices listed on page 2.

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