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The year 2020 is one for the history books. We’ve seen several world-changing scenarios unfold—a frightful disease epidemic that quickly spread throughout the world, devastating economic consequences as nation after nation went into shutdowns to prevent the coronavirus spread, a worldwide travel collapse as many countries went into quarantines, and massive government intrusion into citizens’ lives.

And as millions of people were essentially sentenced to home confinement, thousands of prisoners were released from jails (ostensibly to prevent the spread of Covid-19) and hordes of thousands rampaged through America’s streets, looting and burning. Many were arrested, but sympathetic politicians typically set them free to continue to wreak terror on others.

This doesn’t even begin to cover the “normal” background bad news of wars, famines, corrupt politicians and governments, genocide, crop failures, natural disasters and the like.

And it’s far from over. Around the time many of you receive this issue, the United States will be holding elections that will determine the nation’s future. Beyond Today does not endorse any political party, but we are compelled to address the reality of where the nation is at the moment. The stakes are high because what is at play is the survival of the nation as we know it.

Why would I say that? We’re used to politicians making promises they know they can’t keep to try to persuade people to vote for them. Usually we can tune them out. But this year is different.

Over recent years we’ve seen tipping points where political parties gained enough leverage to wield total control over everything within their power. We’ve seen it in America’s big cities and states, which are overwhelmingly dominated by one political party. There the career politicians have been able to implement their platforms, policies and goals unhindered. I live in one such state and have seen the process unfold.

What’s been the result? Huge tax burdens, rising homelessness, an epidemic of substance abuse, failing schools, crumbling infrastructure, enormous and unsustainable pension obligations, persistent crime and fed-up, overtaxed and over-regulated businesses and citizens fleeing by the thousands.

If you’ve been paying attention over recent months, you may have noticed the radical ideas proposed by the leadership of one of the major U.S. parties. And I’m not talking about their presidential election platform, which calls for trillions of dollars of tax increases, the economy-crushing “Green New Deal,” reinstating Obamacare, rejoining the Paris Climate Accords, restricting school choice, restoring funding to pay Palestinian terrorists, federal funding of abortion and defunding police.

This party’s presidential candidate tweeted on July 5 that if his party wins the presidency, “We won’t just rebuild this nation—we’ll transform it.” He didn’t say how that transformation will take place or what they will transform the nation into. That is why the proposals presented by other party leaders are important. They reveal the transformation they want to accomplish if they gain control of the presidency and Congress.

Their list of proposals reveals a well-thought-out plan for permanently altering government and a transformation of American society into something vastly different.

Here are the steps that have been openly presented:

- Abolish U.S. Senate filibuster rules that require a 60 percent vote for major legislation or decisions. This would abolish more than 200 years of history and tradition of cooperation and deliberation before making significant changes. With those rules abolished, the party would then be free to:
  - Give statehood to the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico—giving this party a total of four more reliably liberal senators and additional liberal members of the House of Representatives.
  - Expand the current nine-member Supreme Court to 15 or more—and pack those extra seats with liberal activist judges who make law rather than interpret law. This would make the Supreme Court permanently left-leaning and give them an unstoppable ability to create new law through judicial fiat rather than working through the constitutionally mandated requirement that Congress make laws.
  - Open U.S. borders and change immigration policy and laws to import more unskilled or low-skilled immigrants who will be dependent on permanent government assistance and who’ll support those who promise more. Included would be a “path to citizenship” for 20 to 30 million illegal aliens, permanently changing the political balance throughout the nation as a whole.
  - Further restrict free speech rights guaranteed by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and the right to bear arms as spelled out in the Second Amendment. This would permanently alter constitutionally guaranteed rights put in place specifically to help prevent such government power grabs.
  - With these steps in place, the America we know would soon be no more. And the entire world would permanently change.

Make no mistake: These exact proposals have been publicly presented and repeated in recent days as the political campaigns heat up. And this party’s many surrogates controlling social media outlets and in the mainstream media are hard at work marginalizing and removing the diminishing number of conservative and Bible-supporting voices.

These are dangerous times. The ground is shifting underneath our feet. Prophecies of a very different world—one in which the United States no longer exists as a viable nation—are lining up.

What should you do? Pray. Draw close to God. Prepare yourself spiritually for what lies ahead. Read this issue carefully, and continue reading and watching Beyond Today to understand what you need to be doing!
For me, the year 2020 began with a Jan. 1 flight into Hong Kong. Tens of thousands of protestors were in the streets of the city that day continuing their months-long protest against the Communist Chinese Party (CCP). Four days later our group flew back to the United States just as China was admitting to the world that a new virus strain called Covid-19 was loose in the city of Wuhan and posed a serious threat. It was an ominous start to what would become the most tumultuous year in recent history.

As we approach the close of the year, it is a good moment to examine what has happened on the world scene to gain understanding of what it means in the larger context of Bible prophecy and God’s purpose in history. None of the events of the year happened in a vacuum, cut off from divine involvement. Many rightly wonder if we have moved closer to the time of Christ’s intervention in world affairs to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

**Vision of the biblical prophet Habakkuk**

Throughout the year I’ve been regularly reminded of a passage of prophetic scripture about God’s rule over the nations. In the book of Habakkuk, the prophet has a vision of God standing among the nations in a moment of crisis, the nations shaken by events. He writes:

“I see God moving across the deserts from Edom, the Holy One coming from Mount Paran. His brilliant splendor fills the heavens, and the earth is filled with his praise. His coming is as brilliant as the sunrise. Rays of light flash from his hands, where his awesome power is hidden.

“Pestilence marches before him; plague follows close behind. When he stops, the earth shakes. When he looks, the nations tremble. He shatters the everlasting mountains and levels the eternal hills. He is the Eternal One!” (Habakkuk 3:3-6, New Living Translation).

This is a vision of God marching among the nations in judgment. It is as if He stands taking stock—measurement—of the events among the people of the earth. There is a stirring and trembling among the nations and, interestingly, pestilence and plague. Things that seem certain and unmovable—mountains and hills—are shattered and crumble.

The scene is of disarray among the nations. God is judging in what appears to be a prelude to more events to come. This is a scene telling us God is ever-present, with nothing escaping His knowledge. He is the judge of all the earth. His purpose in history and prophecy progresses at His pace and according to His timing.

The scene here is intended as a comfort for us, as we might “tremble” with uncertainty at the events of this year, wondering what lies ahead and hoping for a return to “normal,” whatever that might be. This is a scene to give us hope in a time of trouble.

Let’s examine some of this “shaking” among the nations today.

**Covid-19 and its fallout**

As I write this (in early September) we are seeing many nations emerge from the worldwide shutdown created in March in response to the threat of hundreds of thousands, even millions, of projected deaths from the Covid-19 pandemic. The world quickly shut down travel, business, sports, restaurants and entertainment to contain the virus.

Within a month millions became unemployed. Nations mounted massive medical efforts to test, treat and deal with this new virus for which there was no known cure nor vaccine. Thankfully, actual deaths were far below projections and the world is gradually reopening.
But something bigger happened.

The economic fallout from the pandemic and shutdown is massive. Fears of a depression confront us as the reality of a recession lingers. Unemployment remains high, and it appears many segments of the economy will be very slow to recover—if they ever do.

Thousands of restaurants have shuttered, and those that have reopened do so with reduced capacity due to social-distancing mandates. Many small, service-related businesses did not weather the shutdown in spite of trillions of dollars of government aid. Individual retail merchants and even massive chains that have been in business for decades have declared bankruptcy. Airlines, hotels and the tourist and convention industries do not expect to recover to pre-pandemic levels for years.

In spite of all this, the New York Stock Exchange had a good run in late summer, cresting above 29,000 points, near its all-time high from earlier in the year. It is a paradox. Will the world economy sink into a prolonged recession or, worse yet, a depression? Or will it recover faster than expected amid pent-up demand coupled with the resiliency of markets, manufacturing and technology? Should a vaccine become available, the world economy could begin to turn around faster than expected.

But damage has been done, and the effect of ballooning debt in America is incalculable at this point. America, and to an extent the rest of the world, continue to defy the gravity of solid economic theory. It is a testimony to the depth of economic wealth within the developed world along with, again, the timing of God in even economic events.

Still to be determined is the mental impact of the pandemic and economic and social disruption. The sequestration of families and the shutdown of schools have created conditions where abuse of women, the elderly and children can occur without detection. Health officials expect to see increases in suicide and mental disorders among younger populations such as teens and white middle-aged men.

Will China dominate?

The virus originated in China, and the government there denied the danger and stood by as Chinese tourists, workers and businessmen spread the virus around the world by means of modern travel.

The question is to what extent will China leverage this crisis and continue its drive to achieve dominance in Asia, in the Middle East and even over the United States? China’s ambition to become number one in the world is no secret. Should its leaders achieve their aim, that would represent a major crisis for not only America but for Europe, the rest of Asia and the world.

A recent U.S. Defense Department report on China’s military revealed the growth in China’s armed forces. China is the most rapidly growing military power in the world today. It recently attained the goal of building the world’s largest navy.

By 2035 China could be the world’s dominant power. To achieve this, China must be able to project power worldwide—something it presently cannot do because it lacks the military bases to do so. By contrast the United States has 80 bases around the world, giving it a sizable edge over China. But in every major category China is growing with the intent to surpass America. This has a destabilizing influence in Asia and areas to the west where China is expanding.

Earlier this year China clamped down on Hong Kong, imposing changes to law that make any dissent against the Communist Party a crime. Protests in Hong Kong have almost disappeared. When they do occur, it’s under a far more watchful eye of authorities with stricter punitive action. The Hong Kong I visited in January no longer exists.

The next step China could take to assert control is over Taiwan, the long-estranged state separated from the Chinese mainland by the 200-mile-wide Taiwan Strait. Taiwan’s independence has been a decades-long thorn in the side of the CCP. Taiwan is shielded by agreements with the United States that go back to 1982. But should the communist Chinese invade Taiwan—and it’s known they do have plans to that effect—would America or any other nation come to Taiwan’s defense? China could take out U.S. bases and keep America’s navy at bay if it chose to take Taiwan. It is a threat that could succeed.

The world did nothing while China shut down dissent in Hong Kong. Would the Chinese calculate that other nations would again stand by and do nothing while they annex Taiwan? This could be the next flash point in the region, setting up a major crisis for Asian nations and U.S. dominance in the Pacific.

China’s ambitions are real and far-reaching. China is extending its influence further into Africa and the Middle East. Through its Belt and Road Initiative it has made loans and built infrastructure in African nations, giving it a beachhead for the extraction of valuable minerals and other natural resources while gaining territorial influence enabling projection of power.

China’s relations with Iran indicate a desire to extend valuable support to a country that is strapped by American sanctions and is a pariah to its fellow Muslim states in the region. Iran’s actions have destabilized the region, even influencing the recent peace agreement between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the state of Israel. China’s influence with Iran again destabilizes the delicate nature of Middle Eastern politics.

Asian stability

China’s goals to dominate in Asia run counter to the interests of America, Australia, India and other nations. How this conflict is managed will impact world commerce. The trip that took me to Hong Kong this year included a stopover in Singapore and an opportunity to better understand the world economy.

Singapore sits astride the Straits of Malacca and is the world’s second-largest port. Shipping between China, Japan and the West flows through this region. It is the fifth-largest banking hub in the world. A key to Asian stability, Singapore does not relish the ambitions of China nor conflict between

Understanding what will emerge out of the current crisis period of 2020 depends on a foundation rooted in the insight of God’s prophetic promises to the biblical patriarch Abraham.
America and China. Singapore does not want to choose sides in this battle. It craves order and stability to fulfill a historic role that’s a legacy of British colonization in the 19th and 20th century.

While in Singapore my conversations with locals highlighted the positive feelings there toward the United States and other parts of the English-speaking world. Singapore does not want a dominant Asian power to again roll its way—it remembers well World War II and the Japanese invasion. Singapore understands that America must stay focused on Asia with a strong naval presence, while at the same time knowing a “cold war” between China and America would be disastrous. Nations like Singapore, the Philippines, Vietnam and others benefit from a strong American presence that keeps China from dominance.

I came away from my trip to Asia in late 2019 and early 2020 with a better understanding of the American role in Asia and the world, as well as a growing sense that events would likely see that role continue for the short term.

God’s revelation in the Bible gives critical understanding about the role of geopolitics in the modern world. The English-speaking nations of America and Great Britain have had a significant impact not only on Asian nations but the ongoing global balance of power in our time. Understanding what will emerge out of the current crisis period of 2020 depends on a foundation rooted in the insight of God’s prophetic promises to the biblical patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph (see “America’s Role in History Foretold” beginning on page 14).

Today’s historians and geopolitical pundits lack this critical understanding. This is why the best of them miss the mark of discerning why certain major events are occurring and where they will lead. Bible prophecy is a key to understanding today’s times and the future shape of world events. A key example is China and the emerging global order.

China’s ultimate endgame must follow what Bible prophecy reveals. And it shows that China will not be the dominant world power at the end of the age. While China’s growing influence will undoubtedly factor greatly, another global power will emerge out of a time of crisis that will astound the world (see our free study guides The Book of Revelation Unveiled and Are We Living in the Time of the End?). To better grasp this we must next look at another little-understood current trend.

Globalism on the march

The past four years have seen the steady march to a global world order that has been somewhat stymied by the election of U.S. President Donald Trump and his policies. President Trump’s emphasis on American global interests has been a thorn in the side of world leaders who’ve been steering the world to an ever-closer union of states without the constrictions of national borders, national laws and parochial national interests.

U.S. foreign policy has been critical of the United Nations, NATO and, more recently during the pandemic, the World Health Organization. Large numbers of troops have been withdrawn from Iraq and Germany. The historic and far-reaching NAFTA trade pact between the United States, Canada and Mexico was renegotiated to achieve more favorable terms for American manufacturers and workers.

The Trump administration’s policies have been a temporary detour away from the desire to eliminate national borders—essentially the modern nation-states—and the creation of a one-world order run by transnational bodies of justice, economics and politics. This has contributed to hostile feelings toward the president and created uncertainty about America’s commitment to the treaties that undergird the global project. Add to this the decision by Britain to leave the European Union, scheduled to be completed by the end of the year. Britain’s desire to retain its autonomy in world trade and politics, apart from the evolving bureaucracy of the EU structure, has pressed Europe to reassess its drive toward an ever-closer union of states acting with one accord.

The future of the United Kingdom in world trade and alliances holds the possibility of a closer union with its other major Commonwealth partners (Canada, Australia and New Zealand). Throw in the United States as a potential partner in an Anglosphere alliance, and the world could see the creation of a bloc of states with a combined GDP twice that of the European Union.

Both these developments—America’s reassertion of its own national interests first and Brexit—reflect a profound crisis for those who desire to create a transnational-rule-based global order. This aim of leaders and thinkers in seats of power is a long-held utopian desire—the dream of worldwide peace under a benevolent global regime.

The EU is the world’s strongest example. Whether in facing strife among nations, poverty and disease or global climate change, it’s felt that solutions to such large world problems can only be found in a powerful superstate where national interests are given up to the greater good.

The global project that has been proceeding since the end of World War II has been challenged by these two developments in the last five years. Because of the dominant power of the United States, its involvement is critical to the goals of this global order. Experts understand that for such a global system to come into effect, America would have to rethink and voluntarily give up its national sovereignty to such a global power. The present geopolitical dominance of the United States, along with the current administration’s policies, prevents this from happening at the moment.

But events can change rapidly. A different president and administration could alter course and reinstate policies whereby the United States would be absorbed by the forces of globalization. An economic shift brought on by America’s excessive debt could cause it to lose its dominant economic role.

Or a new power in Europe, one with deep historic roots...
going back to the time of the Roman Empire, could be revived and present itself as the force to restore order to a world in crisis and replace America and the English-speaking nations in the world order. This would lead to what the Bible describes as “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7)—a time during which the major English-speaking nations seem to “disappear” from the Bible’s prophetic timeline as the historic force for good in the world.

**America’s crisis**

This last scenario is what Bible prophecy ultimately foretells. We could very well be looking at the systemic causes for such a collapse, erupting from the body politic of America in 2020. Since May, many of America’s major cities have watched anarchy reign in the streets. Racially charged riots in Minneapolis, Seattle, Portland, Chicago and New York have exposed a cancerous mass of inner social corruption that threatens to destroy the nation from within.

In the name of social justice and resisting “systemic racism,” America has been thrown into a period of upheaval that is the biggest threat to social cohesion in the last half-century. The rot of political corruption, social decay and institutional failure has been exposed in ways that are shocking to an older generation with long enough memories to understand the threat of such behavior.

The broader world has looked at what is happening and asks whether America will have enough self-awareness and strength of national character to collect itself and carry on as the world leader. If self-loathing and anarchy continue to dominate, America’s ability to lead in the world could be severely crippled.

The prophet Isaiah’s description of a nation’s death throes are eerily familiar to the headlines of today’s America: “Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward. Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more.

“The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up or soothed with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; strangers devour your land in your presence; and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers” (Isaiah 1:4-7).

Perhaps the most significant crisis of today’s world is this scene of unprecedented polarization and civil unrest in the United States. Charges that America is irredeemably racist and that its history is that of an evil society that has only made the world worse is pushing it to the brink of irreversible national division. If this false narrative continues it will choke out the spirit of a people that has stood for liberty and justice throughout its exceptional albeit imperfect history.

America has had its severe flaws, but it is the only nation in history that has enshrined the values and principles of liberty in its founding documents. The Declaration of Independence states that “all men are created equal . . . with certain unalienable rights.” Its more than 240-year-history has been a story of a people seeking to create a society where this lofty and noble goal is achieved. It has fought itself over these ideals. It has gone to war in Europe twice to free nations from totalitarian governments that sought to snuff out those ideals in their bids for world conquest.

If, in this moment in time, America is deceived into thinking it is irredeemably racist, unjust and unworthy to lead, a leadership vacuum will be created in the world. Into that void will step a world power promising peace and order—but that power, as Bible prophecy reveals, will crush all who oppose it. This is what we see as we assess how the world has been reshaped in 2020.

**Your opportunity**

If the world at the conclusion of 2020 is at a moment of pause, like that described in Habakkuk where God stands measuring the startled nations, then each of us has a time of opportunity. Now is the time to seek understanding and help from God. It is time for you to seek Him with all your heart and to ask forgiveness from the God of grace and mercy.

Through Beyond Today you are receiving a message of warning and a call to understand the true God and His Son Jesus of Nazareth. You have opportunity to know this God in all His fullness and His purpose for your life.

God ultimately rules over the nations, and He is guiding all history to His purpose. What we are watching in today’s world events is more than a historic cycle of political and national interests. We are watching the concluding chapters of human experience leading to the moment when Jesus Christ appears in the glory of His second coming! He will then bring to this earth the Kingdom of God to replace all the kingdoms of this world.

Beyond Today presents the biblical keys of understanding that lead you to faithfully submit your life to Christ, the King of that coming Kingdom. Those keys show you the way to submit your life to Him today and trust that He, the living Christ, is the judge who is poised at the heavenly threshold in anticipation of the moment the Father gives the command to visibly intervene in history on a global scale.

I opened with the vision of the prophet Habakkuk. Let’s return to the end of that vision of God’s intervening judgment. Despite a time of trial, the prophet concludes with these words: “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer’s feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills” (Habakkuk 3:18-19).

Now is the time in our life to walk with the Lord God, with Jesus the Christ, with strength and confidence. Regardless of what the coming months will bring, God is guiding history toward the day when Christ will appear in the glory of His Kingdom!
A common stereotype of a biblical prophet is an angry robed man with piercing eyes and a long beard shouting words of condemnation. Predicting the end of the world, he calls on people to repent, yet his fearful and threatening words fall on deaf ears.

The word “prophecy” is often associated with doom, destruction, depression, despair and death—with words like “Apocalypse” and “Armageddon” offering added drama.

But did you know that most Bible prophecy is not dire prediction? Through prophecy, God affirms His relationship with us and explains His involvement with the world. Through prophecy we come to understand the whole point of Jesus Christ’s first coming as well as the power of His future return!

Showing us what the future holds, God reveals His love for mankind in sending His Son to save us—not only in His past sacrifice but in coming back to build a society that will live by values that guarantee peace, prosperity and happy families and lives. This revelation is the gospel or good news!

Notice this encouraging prophecy in Ezekiel 36: “I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations. You will be my people, and I will be your God. I will cleanse you of your filthy behavior . . . When I bring you back, people will say, ‘This former waste- land is now like the Garden of Eden!’ The abandoned and ruined cities now have strong walls and are filled with people!’ Then the surrounding nations that survive will know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt the ruins and replanted the wasteland. For I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will do what I say” (verses 26–36, New Living Translation).

While this prophecy is specifically directed to the people of Israel, God will expand this promise to all mankind according to His plan. And we see in this prophecy how the root cause of problems is solved: *Man’s stony, stubborn heart is replaced by a tender, responsive one*. This prophecy is yet to be fulfilled on the scale described. Nonetheless, there is much here for us, as there is with Bible prophecy as a whole.

We ask, then, who are these prophets of the Bible, and what is their message for us today?

**From one end of Scripture to the other**

Remarkably, much of your Bible is prophecy. According to *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* by J. Barton Payne, there are 1,239 prophecies in the Old Testament and 578 in the New, for a total of 1,817. These prophecies are contained in 8,352 of the Bible’s 31,121 verses, thus constituting 26.8 percent of the Bible’s volume. And many are yet to be fulfilled.

As for the prophets themselves, these were messengers sent by God to communicate His will to mankind. In the Old Testament, 15 books are named after prophets with familiar names such as Ezekiel, Isaiah and Jeremiah. There are other notables such as Moses and Daniel. The book of Psalms, along with many other Old Testament books, contains many prophecies as well. In the New Testament, the book of Revelation is nearly all prophecy. The apostle John wrote many prophetic statements here and elsewhere, as did Peter and Paul and other apostolic writers.

The greatest prophet of all was Jesus Christ, who was Himself foretold over a span of many centuries by other prophets. They recorded scores of distinct prophecies about His first and second comings. During Jesus’ ministry, He prophesied of the coming Kingdom of God, what it would be like and, most importantly, how we need to prepare for it.

The prophets of the Bible were a diverse group of men, with backgrounds ranging from shepherds to royal counselors to rulers. As their words were written down over such a long period of time, it’s obvious that most of the prophets could not collaborate with one another in person. Yet their writings all pointed to the same conclusion of man’s ultimate destiny, salvation and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on the earth.

The first prophecy occurs in the first chapters of the Bible in the Garden of Eden. It is an allusion to the clash between Satan and Christ. When God spoke to the serpent about his fate and future encounter with Jesus Christ, He said: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head; and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15). Satan was directly involved in the killing of Jesus, but the resurrected Savior eventually vanquishes the devil.

The very last prophecy in the Bible is Jesus proclaiming, “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly’” (Revelation 22:20).

Between these two prophetic points lies an entire story that tells us what man is and what our relationship with God should be. As you come to understand this narrative, you will see an
amazing story unfold about the purpose of life and our relationship with our Creator God in whose image we are made.

More than predictions

Prophets did far more than reveal future inside information. They taught about a relationship with our Creator and our responsibility to Him. By understanding prophecy, we see more clearly who God is and His love for and intended relationship with mankind.

Throughout prophecy we understand how evil will be eradicated. Prophecy shows how our existence will be elevated from mortal to divine status. It’s an inspiring story! Man’s history is not a patchwork of disconnected events. Prophecy ties it all together and gives our lives meaning.

We see that today’s struggles will lead to an amazing future. As Paul wrote: “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption [or sonship], the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:20-23).

John further explained: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 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).

We are promised a new world and a transformed, immortal existence ahead. That is our great hope!

The apostles appealed to the prophets of old as well as Christ for context and credibility in conveying the gospel message. Peter proclaimed: "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began."

“For Moses truly said to the fathers, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren [referring to Christ]. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.’ Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days. You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed’” (Acts 3:19-25 emphasis added throughout).

We see here, as elsewhere, a message of judgment as well as blessing.

Delivering vital truth

Throughout history, God has spoken through His prophets to inform and warn the world of what’s ahead: "Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets. A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?” (Amos 3:7-8).

Beyond Today is a prophetic work that does what our name suggests—shows from God what lies beyond today in the present age and the age to come. While not directly prophesying ourselves, we are communicating the hope and warning given by the prophets of old. Our tagline “A Magazine of Understanding” points to explaining the reasons for the way things are and where they are headed. It’s vital to know why catastrophic prophesied events will take place.

Prophets were to speak up when the covenants between God and the nation were violated. National leaders were aware of prophetic warnings, but few heeded. Today, God continues to warn the world at large of coming calamity as a result of destructive lifestyle choices, but the words are scorned. As God tells Jeremiah to say, “This is a nation that does not obey the voice of the Lord their God nor receive correction. Truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth” (Jeremiah 7:28).

That is what’s happening in our society. Where can we turn? What news can you trust on television or the Internet? Totalitarian governments tightly control information. And now we have hundreds of media outlets presenting information sharply slanted to their bias.

The job of a prophet is to deliver truth to people despite the overwhelming challenge of being heard. God’s servants, regardless, have the responsibility to tell the truth and warn the world, crying aloud and showing our nations their sins (see Isaiah 58:1).

Facing an upside-down world

Isaiah wrote of the widespread inversion of morality in these terms: “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil;
who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!’” (Isaiah 5:20-21).

That is the state of our nations today! We are becoming increasingly morally sick as our leaders and educators are losing any ability to properly differentiate between right and wrong.

The ancient prophets condemned child sacrifice. While seemingly unthinkable today, a contemporary parallel leaps to mind: In America alone we have snuffed out the lives of 60 million newly conceived lives. These are not just “human tissue”!

The prophets decried social injustice and violence suffered by the vulnerable and disadvantaged. But now we see rampant lawlessness and violence in the name of standing against these.

Never in the history of mankind has there been so much confusion about sexuality and gender. The LGBTQ abbreviation keeps expanding with more letters. One of God’s earliest descriptions of mankind concerned gender: “He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created” (Genesis 5:2). Many now claim that limitation to only two genders, male and female, is evil.

We are a voice crying aloud that the end of civilization is at hand unless there is repentance, which means changing how we live. We have proclaimed that message loudly in this magazine and on our Beyond Today television program.

National punishment and redemption

We read in 2 Kings 17:13-15 of God sending His servants to call His people to repentance: “Again and again the Lord had sent his prophets and seers to warn both Israel and Judah: ‘Turn from all your evil ways. Obey my commands and decrees—the entire law that I commanded your ancestors to obey, and that I gave you through my servants the prophets.’ But the Israelites would not listen. They were as stubborn as their ancestors who had refused to believe in the Lord their God.

“They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their ancestors, and they despised all his warnings. They worshiped worthless idols, so they became worthless themselves. They followed the example of the nations around them, disobeying the Lord’s command not to imitate them” (NLT).

Through Jeremiah God said this to the nation: “Your injury is incurable—a terrible wound. There is no one to help you or to bind up your injury. No medicine can heal you. All your lovers—your allies—have left you and do not care about you anymore. I have wounded you cruelly, as though I were your enemy. For your sins are many, and your guilt is great. Why do you protest your punishment—this wound that has no cure? I have had to punish you because your sins are many and your guilt is great” (Jeremiah 30:12-15, NLT).

Both Israel and Judah faced invasion and captivity by the Assyrians, and later in Jeremiah’s day the Babylonians invaded Judah and carried the remainder of the nation away captive. These words of warning will likewise come on the people of our modern nations who for now shrug off God’s warnings about their lifestyles.

Yet, just preceding these stern words, God also promises a redemptive path: “‘So do not be afraid, Jacob, my servant; do not be dismayed, Israel,’ says the Lord. ‘For I will bring you home again from distant lands, and your children will return from their exile. Israel will return to a life of peace and quiet, and no one will terrorize them. For I am with you and will save you,’ says the Lord. I will completely destroy the nations where I have scattered you, but I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you, but with justice I cannot let you go unpunished’” (verses 10-11, NLT).

While some of the people of Judah returned to resettle their land, the northern Israelites remained scattered. So this prophecy is ultimately for the future.

Prophecy for then, now and time to come

The most amazing aspect of the prophets is that their work was not limited to their nation or to their century, but could include New Testament fulfillment and extend further out to all nations into eternity. This is sometimes called duality. In Isaiah 52:7-10 we see a multilayered prophecy:

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’

‘Your watchmen shall lift up their voices, with their voices they shall sing together; for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord brings back Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem! For the Lord has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem.

“The Lord has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God” (Isaiah 52:7-10).

In the initial fulfillment, this prophecy encourages the Jewish captives in Babylon to prepare for their return back to Jerusalem. Rejoice, for God reigns! The people are redeemed. This was fulfilled.

Another level of fulfillment is in Jesus Christ and the gospel, as He came preaching the Kingdom of God. Jesus is Redeemer and Savior through His death and resurrection.

Yet another layer of fulfillment is seen in verse 10, which moves to the global scene that includes “all the nations” and “all the ends of the earth.” This brings us to end-time fulfillment, with the Church preaching the gospel to all the earth as Jesus instructed.

And still further fulfillment occurs in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth and then eternity beyond—a message we today must take to heart.

The prophets, we see, communicated God’s inspired words. They did not always understand what they were writing, but it’s amazing in its richness and wisdom. In reading their words, one is peering into the very mind of God and discovers a wealth of knowledge about who we are and where we’re going!

Let God’s words through the biblical prophets speak to you—and respond with a tender heart as He directs! 

LEARN MORE

God reveals important messages to us through Bible prophecy. How can we better understand what He’s telling us? Download or request a free copy of our study guide You Can Understand Bible Prophecy. A copy is waiting for you!

BTmagazine.org/booklets
Death to America! Death to America! Death to America!” The chants and shouts of hundreds of marchers echoed off the walls of the buildings and down the streets. Their sentiments were plain to see.

Yet the streets in this scene weren’t those of a Middle Eastern city, and the marchers weren’t people in Iran calling for the downfall of the United States. No, the streets were in a major California city, and the protestors calling for the end of their country were American.

And to make their message perfectly clear, the crowd, many among them declaring support for Black Lives Matter, broke windows, smashed cars, vandalized businesses and attacked police officers.

Perhaps what is most surprising about this scene is that it wasn’t surprising at all. It was only a matter of time before crowds that toppled statues of major American historical figures (including some who played key roles in the nation’s struggle to end slavery), that burned and vandalized hundreds of businesses and that called for the murder of police would at some point end the charade and make their intentions plain for the world to see.

Their goals have been made clear in other chants as well. In addition to the common “No justice, no peace,” marchers have called for the burning of police stations (“Every city, every town, burn the precincts to the ground!”), support of criminals (“Who do we protect? Black felons!”) and overthrow of elected governments (“You can’t stop the revolution!”).

Two very different agendas

A few will stop reading this article at this point and accuse Beyond Today of being “too political” and a tool for right-wing interests. This happens every time we discuss social issues. But our only agenda is God’s agenda. Our Master isn’t a politician, but the coming King of the world, Jesus Christ. And make no mistake: There is a godly, biblical perspective on social issues, and there is an ungodly, anti-biblical perspective on social issues.

Our reason for producing the Beyond Today magazine and television program is to present God’s perspective on what’s happening in the world and to explain it from His Word, the Holy Bible.

The Bible contains many prophecies about conditions in the time leading up to the return of Jesus Christ, and we explain world conditions in the light of Bible prophecy. If you don’t care what God thinks, you might as well stop reading now. But if you want to really understand what’s going on in our world and forces at work to transform America into something very different, read on.

Will we destroy ourselves?

The United States has faced and survived a number of great national crises—World War I, the Spanish flu pandemic, the Great Depression, World War II, the Cuban Missile Crisis and the 9/11 terror attacks. But the crisis the nation now faces is different. Now it’s a self-inflicted crisis of our own making.

There are now many at work within the country trying to bring it down. The recent rioting gives us a striking example, especially as we examine the underlying aims of many of the agitators (see “The Destructive Black Lives Matter Agenda” on page 12.)

One of America’s most beloved presidents, Abraham Lincoln, was a student of history and understood the danger that can come from within. Long before the opening volleys of the Civil War, he spoke these prophetic words: “At what point shall we expect the approach of danger? . . . If it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us . . . If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.”

Lincoln was also a student of the Bible. He knew what would happen to a nation that has known God but then rejects Him. He was familiar with passages such as Jeremiah 15:6-7 and feared the consequences that might fall on such a nation: “‘You have abandoned me and turned your back on me,’ says the Lord. ‘Therefore, I will raise my fist to destroy you. I am tired of always giving you another chance . . . I will destroy my own people, because they refuse to change their evil ways . . . I will cause anguish and terror to come upon them suddenly’” (New Living Translation).

Has the nation rejected God?

We need only look at America’s popular culture and
entertainment to see how far the nation has drifted from God. The nation’s movies and television are filled with sex and violence. Much of its most popular music is obscenity-drenched filth. Pornography is a multibillion-dollar industry. Child pornography and sex trafficking are huge and growing problems.

How did the nation get to this point?

We can trace the nation’s moral and spiritual decline through a series of U.S. Supreme Court decisions in recent decades. Two decisions in the early 1960s removed prayer and Bible reading from public schools. For more than 300 years children were encouraged to pray and read the Bible in school, but now God was expelled from public schools and, with subsequent decisions, was largely removed from public life. The nation was set on a path for which the evil fruit is now plain to see.

A decade later, the Roe v. Wade decision legalized abortion. Since then, between 60 and 70 million innocent unborn children have been chemically poisoned, ripped apart in their mothers’ wombs or killed in other horrifying ways. A nation that believes it is acceptable to murder a child in the womb, even up to full term, has shown that it is willing to approve all sorts of abhorrent behavior—even what God in His Word calls an abomination.

In 2015 the Court legalized homosexual marriage. In a powerful dissent from the decision, Justice Samuel Alito gave this chilling warning: “Today’s decision . . . will be used to vilify Americans who are unwilling to assent to the new orthodoxy . . . [It will be exploited by those who are determined to stamp out every vestige of dissent . . . Those who cling to old beliefs . . . will risk being labeled as bigots and treated as such by employers, and schools . . . By imposing its own views on the entire country, the [court] majority facilitates the marginalization of the many Americans who have traditional ideas.”

Justice Alito’s words proved to be prophetic. Individuals and organizations that stand up for biblical values—as we do in Beyond Today magazine and television—are branded as bigots, haters, homophobes and far worse. In today’s “cancel culture,” dissenting views such as ours are routinely silenced. And it will only get worse. Bible prophecy tells us that at some point our voice will be silenced too (Amos 8:11-12).

Only a few months ago the Supreme Court redefined “sex” family structure”—i.e., they want to abolish the biblical model of a husband and wife bearing and parenting their children in the way that has been the norm in civilized cultures for millennia (see Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7; Ephesians 5:31).

• “We foster a queer affirming network”—i.e., they support normalization and promotion of homosexual relationships, which are repeatedly condemned in the Bible (see Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

• “We . . . do the work required to dismantle cisgender privilege and uplift Black trans folk”—i.e., they deny the biblical truth that God created human beings “male and female” (see Genesis 1:27; 5:2; Matthew 19:4; Mark 10:6) and want to do away with male and female identities, promoting transgenderism and gender confusion as normal.

The BLM cofounders boast of their Marxist ideology and training. In a 2015 interview, one of the cofounders responded that they “are trained Marxists” who “do have an ideological frame.” She went on to state: “We are trained Marxists. We are super versed on ideological theories and I think that what we really try to do is build a movement that can be utilized by many, many black folk” (emphasis added throughout).

The organization’s website also states: “We call for a national defunding of police” and “This is the revolution. Change is coming.” Millions of dollars of donations, largely from major corporations, have poured into the organization over recent months that will help fund these goals.

While most of the problems in the black community—poverty, crime, substance abuse, etc.—can be traced to the breakdown of the traditional family structure, with an absence of fathers in the home, a stated goal of the Black Lives Matter movement is, as was noted above, to “disrupt” that same family structure, thereby worsening the problems!

Some will read these statements above and accuse us at Beyond Today of being racist. Let me be perfectly clear: The Bible nowhere condones or approves racism. Racism is an evil and abhorrent result of mankind’s corrupt inclinations and rebellion against the God who made all human beings in His image and “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

The apostle Paul tells us that “you are all one in Christ Jesus” and that neither race, status or gender should divide us (Galatians 3:28). Accordingly, the United Church of God, publisher of Beyond Today magazine, has thousands of members and ministers of all races scattered across all of the inhabited continents.

God “looks at the heart” of a person (1 Samuel 16:7), not the color of one’s skin. Jesus Christ gave His life for every human being (2 Corinthians 5:15).

The desire to eradicate racism is an admirable one—a desire we should all share. But supporting a radical, destructive Marxist revolutionary movement whose listed goals defy many clearly stated biblical laws and principles sets one in opposition to God Himself—a very dangerous position.

This is the biblical perspective each of us needs to understand if we are to grasp what is really taking place here and why. (To learn more, search for “Black Lives Matter” on our website at ucg.org.)
to mean a person can be whatever sex he or she claims to be—meaning men can claim to be women, and women can claim to be men. Thus “men” can now get pregnant, give birth and nurse children and “women” can impregnate their partners (see “The Supreme Court: Turning the World Upside Down” in our September–October 2020 issue).

In just over half a century these decisions by the nation’s highest human court have solidified in American life a defiance of God and His Word. But there is a higher court, and Romans 1:18 gives us its verdict: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

America has become spiritually blind, and each step farther down this path leads to only more darkness and confusion. Today America’s news media, entertainment, pop culture and social media empires are all dominated by the same anti-God, anti-Bible thinking.

Our educational systems are similarly dominated by a mindset rooted in the atheistic theory of evolution, ingraining it in students’ minds as if it were proven fact. So when we teach our children that they’re nothing more than animals, why should we be surprised when, as we see commonly in the news, students will behave as if it were proof.

America at a dangerous crossroads

America is on a highly dangerous trajectory. Americans know it. The anxiety is evident—not just due to the months-long worry over Covid-19, but also over the direction of the nation and people’s own personal safety.

Over the first six months of 2020, Americans bought a record 10.3 million firearms—and that’s in addition to the nearly 400 million that were already owned. America now has more firearms than people! And guns and ammunition are in extremely short supply because citizens are buying up nearly anything that’s available.

And that should come as no surprise. Earlier in the year many city jails were virtually emptied of prisoners to reduce the spread of Covid-19, resulting in immediate crime waves. After some 600 riots in more than 200 cities in which thousands of incidents of arson and looting took place, it’s understandable that citizens are worried.

If that weren’t bad enough, those arrested in recent riots have often been released without charges or without bond, allowing them to continue their criminal behavior. Add to that the fact that more than a dozen cities have slashed police department budgets and/or cut the number of officers, and in many cities government officials have publicly supported protesters over law enforcement!

In a late August interview, Democratic party vice presidential candidate Kamala Harris said of the ongoing protests: “This is a movement . . . They’re not going to stop, and everyone beware . . . because they’re not going to stop before election day in November and they’re not going to stop after election day . . . They’re not going to let up and they should not, and we should not.”

Also in late August, she urged people to donate funds to an organization helping jailed rioters (and others charged with criminal activity) with legal help and bond to get out of jail. The organization took in $35 million. More than a dozen Joe Biden presidential campaign staffers donated money to the same group.

A house divided cannot stand

Shortly before he was elected president, Abraham Lincoln quoted Matthew 12:25: “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” It wasn’t long before the divided nation plunged into a devastating civil war in which hundreds of thousands died.

Today America is again deeply divided. It stands at a crucial crossroads. Some see national repentance and a return to strong biblical values as the only hope for the nation’s future. Others desire a continuing radical shift from those values and embrace a future in which God and the Bible are cast away as in the Supreme Court examples mentioned above.

Which way the nation will choose to go is anyone’s guess at the moment. Either way, it will not be pretty.

In any event, God tells us what we need to do as a nation and as individuals: “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14). And our nation desperately needs healing!

To each person He says: “Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:6-7).

God has not changed (Malachi 3:6). He does not want to see people suffer and die from continuing in their sinful ways and rejection of Him. He urges each of us—including you personally—to “choose life” (Deuteronomy 30:19) rather than the ways that lead to death and destruction. May you choose rightly!

LEARN MORE

Why is American society going through such radical turmoil? What’s really behind all the hatred and division? Where is it leading? You need to read our study guide The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy. A free copy is waiting for you!

BTmagazine.org/booklets
God gave great promises to the biblical patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Those promises were never fulfilled in ancient times. Yet that prophesied geopolitical role and abundant blessings are paralleled by what the United States and other English-speaking peoples have experienced. This is no coincidence.

by Tom Robinson

This year has witnessed massive assaults on the foundations of Western society. America and Britain have seen national monuments and statues defaced and toppled. Anarchists and Marxists have been at work to erase and replace national history.

On this 400th anniversary of the Pilgrims’ arrival in New England, attempts are being made to rebrand them and other colonists from Britain as evil pillagers who plunged the world into centuries of oppression and genocide, with the countries they formed continuing on the same brutal and villainous path. Yet this is a terrible lie.

The American and British peoples have not always done right in how they’ve treated others. Slavery was an appalling evil, as were many dealings with indigenous populations. Yet such evils long afflicted mankind for centuries prior, and these nations eventually worked to bring them to an end.

They further expanded freedom throughout large parts of the world, spreading principles and opportunities for liberty, and have been very generous in sharing their resources. These two great powers saved the world from despotism in two world wars. After the second world war, the United States even rebuilt its defeated enemies Germany and Japan, along with helping its allies. And America continued to protect the West against communist tyranny for the next half century.

These nations have been the greatest political powers in human history, using their might to do much good throughout the globe. They distributed Bibles around the world and long promoted biblical morality. While that good example has tragically given way to purveying depravity for many decades now, the Bible continues to influence large parts of society, being deeply ingrained in the national character and history.

Remarkably, it is in the pages of the Bible that we learn just who the people of America and the other British-descended Anglosphere countries truly are, why they are so richly blessed, why they have so greatly helped other nations and what now lies ahead for them.

To see this connection we must begin, surprising as it may seem, with the biblical story of the nation of Israel, starting with prophetic promises made to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph nearly 4,000 years ago.

God told Abraham, “I will make you a great nation . . . and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:2-3). God later specified, “I have made you a father of many nations . . . kings shall come from you,” and “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed”—further promising that Abraham’s descendants would be as countless as the stars and would possess the gates of their enemies (Genesis 15:5-6; 17:1-6; 22:16-18).

National greatness and blessings to the world

We see here a promise of both national greatness and blessing on the world through Abraham’s descendants. This blessing would come in part through the national greatness but ultimately, as we later discover, through the quintessential Seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ, and the spreading forth of Scripture.

Continuing in Genesis, we see that these blessings were passed down through Abraham’s son Isaac and then his son Jacob, who was renamed Israel. The national blessing Jacob received included the promise of his descendants inheriting the richest producing areas of the earth, with other nations bowing to them (Genesis 27:27-29).

God further told Jacob that His descendants would inherit not only the land of Canaan, but that they would spread abroad or colonize around the world and bless all the families of the earth (Genesis 28:13-14). Later, God declared that “a nation and a company of nations” would come from Jacob as well as royalty—thus a great singular nation and a related group of nations (Genesis 35:10-11).

We later find that the birthright promises of national greatness, including colonizing abroad, richness of land and people, and tremendous military power, passed to Jacob’s son
Joseph while the promise of chief rulership and kings passed to another of Jacob’s sons, Judah, father of the Jews (see Genesis 49:8-10, 22-26; 1 Chronicles 5:1-2). Through Judah would come the kingly line of David leading to Jesus Christ. But what of the national birthright?

In Genesis 48 we find the remarkable story of Joseph’s two sons being blessed by Jacob. Joseph had placed his eldest son

Despite the wrongs they have done, the American and British people have used their great blessings to help bless the rest of the world in many ways.

Manasseh at Jacob’s right hand, the place of prominence, and his younger son Ephraim at Jacob’s left. But Jacob put his right hand on Ephraim and his left on Manasseh, evidently crossing his arms, to convey the blessing.

He prophesied that Manasseh would become a great nation, but that Ephraim would become a multitude or group of nations. So here was the earlier promise to Jacob of a nation and a company of nations—with Manasseh to become the great single nation and Ephraim to become the related group of nations.

Thus begins the story that led eventually to the United States of America and the British-descended Commonwealth nations—Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Where are the ancient Israelites today?

Following their Exodus from Egypt, the Israelites lived in the Promised Land for many centuries. They became a great kingdom at the time of David and Solomon—but not to the extent that God had promised to the patriarchs. After Solomon’s death the kingdom split in two—with the Kingdom of Israel in the north and the Kingdom of Judah in the south.

Through Moses, God had promised the Israelites great blessings for obedience and warned of terrible curses for disobeying Him (see Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). Eventually both nations were invaded and carried away captive for their sins, as God had foretold.

Many of the people of Judah retained their identity, and some returned to resettle the Promised Land in the times before Christ. We know the people of Judah today as the Jews. But the northern tribes of Israel have been regarded as lost and assimilated into the nations. Yet God had said: “For surely I . . . will sift the house of Israel among all nations, as grain is sifted in a sieve, yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground” (Amos 9:9). God foretold they would remain, although scattered, a distinct people group descended from Jacob.

So where did these “lost 10 tribes” go? We explore a number of clues in Scripture and history in our free study guide

The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy. Putting it all together, we learn that over the centuries the Israelites migrated westward from the lands of their captivity to Europe. Many of the nations of northwestern Europe are of Israelite descent and have been greatly blessed.

Yet the foremost of all these nations—and of all nations in history—are those that sprang from Great Britain, including the United States. These nations are the descendants of Jacob’s son Joseph. They are Ephraim and Manasseh, to whom the special blessings of “becoming a multitude of nations” and a “great people” respectively apply (Genesis 48:8-19).

Between them the American and British people have dominated the globe for the last two centuries—together ruling over a greater percentage of the world’s people and territory than any people ever. They have clearly possessed, as foretold, the “gates” of their enemies—the vital sea and land passages giving them strategic military dominance over the various regions of the earth.

And, as already mentioned, these nations, despite the wrongs they have done, have used their great blessings to help bless the rest of the world in many ways.

“But we have forgotten God”

Sadly, America and other Israelite nations have not only lost the knowledge of their identity, but they have forgotten the God who so richly blessed them. Even far back in 1863, during the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln issued a decree acknowledging, “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” (compare Deuteronomy 8:11-19).

There have been times of drawing closer to God. But more recently, America and the other Israelite nations have become stubbornly disobedient against God and face a host of national punishments, as listed in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Ancient Israel and Judah suffered these to a large degree—and the same thing will happen to their modern-day descendants in the last days, yet on a more calamitous scale. In Jeremiah 30:4-7, God warned of the worst time ever, that of “Jacob’s
Although not commonly understood, the United States, Britain and other nations of northwest European heritage are in large measure descended from the ancient Israelites of the Bible. Yet many view this identification with contempt as racist. It’s true that some believers in certain forms of what is termed British Israelism have been racially bigoted, the worst examples being those in the misnamed “Christian Identity” movement, which is heinously white supremacist and anti-Semitic. But the actual biblical teaching concerning the identity of Israel is in fact anti-racist.

The national blessings and position God has granted to the English-speaking peoples should be understood as not a matter of racial supremacy, but of family inheritance and responsibility. Nations began fundamentally as families grown large. And God says He intends to bless all peoples through the Israelites. Many Marxist agitators today seek to eradicate familial inheritance from society. But inheriting within a family, indeed the family of Israel, is at the very core of the purpose and plan of God for mankind.

It is a fact that God chose a particular man, the patriarch Abraham, and his descendants to fulfill a special role in the world. The Creator God has every right to grant blessings and assign duties to whomever He chooses. To Abraham and his son Isaac and grandson Jacob, who was renamed Israel, God made particular promises in these regards. This did not mean that they or their descendants were inherently superior to other people (Deuteronomy 7:7-8; 9:6). In fact, God is far more critical of the Israelites throughout the Scriptures than He is of other people groups, since they are judged according to their heritage of understanding and blessings. As Jesus stated, “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required” (Luke 12:48).

Israelite ethnic heritage is not a cause for prideful boasting, though some have treated it as such. One of the primary purposes for the nation of Israel was to serve as an example for the rest of the world of what happens to a society that honors or rejects God. A number of prophecies concern Israel’s great national blessings in this age and the age to come. But many others warn of terrible consequences to come on the Israelites as judgment for flagrant sin and rebellion against God.

It is not reasonable to label the directing of such biblical warnings to the intended recipients as racist. Nor is it racist to express appreciation for the positive aspects of national heritage. Rather, it is right and appropriate to focus on examples of virtue (Philippians 4:8), realizing that all human beings except for Jesus are terribly flawed.

The biblical record presents Israel’s story in both its moral triumphs and tragedies, and we see the same in post-biblical history and in prophecy yet to be fulfilled. One important observation is that God selecting a particular people group for His holy purposes does not assure privilege for them—far from it! Following the suffering of the Jewish people at the time of World War II, one Jewish man sorrowfully asked, “Why doesn’t He choose someone else for a while?”

No follower of Jesus Christ should ever embrace or promote racism. God calls people out of “all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues” (Revelation 7:9). The Bible states that people of every ethnic background are the “offspring of God” (Acts 17:29), all with the potential of becoming glorified children in the divine family.

The apostle John wrote that God’s love for the whole world motivated the sending of Jesus to die for people’s sins (John 3:16). Moreover, God led the apostle Peter to declare: “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him” (Acts 10:34-35, emphasis added). God does not judge us individually by our ancestry or the color of our skin but by who we are on the inside: “For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). The Bible reveals that racial harmony will prevail when Christ rules the world in the Kingdom of God, with ancient enmity healed: “In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria—a blessing in the midst of the land, whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, ‘Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance’” (Isaiah 19:24). Yet that does not make physical lineage irrelevant. Note that distinct ethnic nationalities will still exist during Christ’s coming reign.

Paul, the apostle to the gentiles, saw significance in his own ethnic lineage: “For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (Romans 11:1). Of course, our most important lineage is spiritual, having God as our Father through the Holy Spirit. Yet remarkably this is equated in Scripture with becoming a true Israelite. As Paul explained, Jesus Christ is the perfect Seed of Abraham, with all others disqualified from ultimate inheritance through sin—yet all who repent and are joined to Christ through receiving the Holy Spirit become Abraham’s seed and coheirs with Christ as Israel, including those who are physically gentiles (Galatians 3: 6-16; Romans 2:28-29; 8:14-17; 9:1-8; 11; Ephesians 2:11-22).

It’s important to understand that people of all nations must become Israelites to be saved. The divine family is in the end Israel in glory, the gates of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22 bearing the names of the 12 tribes. Yet while that gives us the ultimate picture of the world blessed through Israel into eternity, we should see that God has blessed the world of this age in many ways through Abraham’s progeny—primarily through Jesus but also through great benefits God has brought to the world through the family He has chosen. All this, from one end of the Bible to the other, shows that Israelite national inheritance is central to God’s plan for humanity.

No, proclaiming who the Israelite peoples are today is not racist—as it recognizes what God has been doing over the centuries in working out His great plan to bless all peoples through Israel.
In this surreal year of riots attempting to tear down cultural heritage comes a significant milestone—the 400th anniversary of the Pilgrims’ landing in America. From their storied ship the Mayflower, these New World settlers from Europe first set foot on Cape Cod in New England at what later became Provincetown, Mass., on Nov. 13, 1620—before moving on to finally land at nearby Plymouth Rock on Dec. 18. The journey and its aftermath have long been recalled in the American observance of Thanksgiving each November.

This year the fateful voyage is being commemorated by quadricentennial celebrations in not only the United States, but also Great Britain and the Netherlands. Why was this event so significant in world history?

**A world-changing enterprise**

Fleeing religious persecution in England, a group of Puritans who regarded themselves as Separatists had gone to Leiden in Holland. After enduring difficulties there for more than a decade, a number decided to move to America, setting sail from Plymouth in England, hoping to make a better life for their families by being able to worship freely and in peace. Later known as the Pilgrims, these are among the most famous colonists in history. Their faith and self-governing system laid the religious and cultural cornerstone for a new nation.

A group of British merchants was persuaded to back the venture, forming a joint-stock company with the colonists. Of the 102 passengers aboard the Mayflower, just 37 were Pilgrims—with the others recruited by the London company to protect its interests.

The new settlement, Plymouth Colony, was the second successful English colony in America after Jamestown, Virginia, founded in 1607. Yet unlike many of the Jamestown settlers, the Pilgrims were not out to become wealthy entrepreneurs but to work the land and serve God without government hindrance. The social and legal systems of the colony, begun with the famous Mayflower Compact, were closely tied to their religious beliefs and English tradition.

More of the Separatists soon came to Plymouth. And over the next 20 years, 16,000 Puritans would follow in emigrating from England to the nearby Massachusetts Bay Colony, which was later merged with Plymouth. Many more Puritans settled in Connecticut and Rhode Island. And the faith and practice of these early settlers established a lasting influence on American culture and national character.

Of the initial journey, American naval historian Henry Culver says: “No vessel, neither the Santa Maria [Columbus’ flagship in the discovery of America], nor the Constitution, most noted and glorious of all the warships of the United States, can compare in romantic interest and patriotic reverence with the properly accorded fame of the Mayflower. Her name is indissolubly linked with the fundamentals of American democratic institutions. She was the wave-rocked cradle of our liberties” (*The Book of Old Ships: From Egyptian Galleys to Clipper Ships*, 1924, p. 84, emphasis added throughout).

What are some of the biblical aspects we should reflect on today in remembering these early founders of what became the United States of America?

**A pilgrimage into the wilderness**

“And the Lord spoke to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh and say to him, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Let My people go, that they may serve Me’”’” (Exodus 8:1).

Over the ages people striving to follow God have had to flee religious persecution, with the Exodus from Egypt being an outstanding example. Many centuries later, the apostle Peter
The Puritan Aim of Living Under Divine Rule

Though little recognized today, the Pilgrims and other Puritan settlers sought in the wilds of New England to establish the Kingdom of God on earth as they understood it, seeing themselves as a new Israel.

As one source explains: “From the outset, the Puritans combed the King James Bible in search of precedents for a New World theocracy [with God as King]. In the separate but cooperative rule of Moses and his priestly brother, Aaron, for example, they found Biblical sanction for the twin offices of magistrate and minister. In the book of Acts they found precedents for the organization of their church: those congregations, in turn, provided a model for the town-meeting form of local government. Some Puritan leaders actually suggested making Hebrew the language of the colony (“How the Bible Made America,” Newsweek, Dec. 27, 1982, p. 46). While Native Americans were regarded to some degree as Canaanite opposition, missionary work among them was seen as the chief objective. The First Charter of Massachusetts, in 1629, was written “for the directing, ruling, and disposing of all other matters and things, whereby our said people . . . may be so religiously, peaceably, and civilly governed, as their good life and orderly [conduct], may win and incite the natives of the country to the knowledge and obedience of the only true God and Savior of mankind and the Christian faith . . .”

Setting up the Kingdom of God was central to the Puritan fathers’ national purpose. John Robinson, pastor of the settlers at Plymouth, expressed it clearly in his parting address to the Pilgrims: “As the prophetic and priestly office of Christ was completely vindicated in the first times of reformation, so now the great cause and work of God’s reforming people is to set up His Kingdom” (emphasis added throughout).

In fact, the 1643 Articles of Confederation for Massachussets, Connecticut, New Plymouth and New Haven declared, “We all came into these parts of America with one and the same end and aim, namely, to advance the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to enjoy the liberties of the gospel in puritans with peace.”

How was this to be achieved in New England? Jonathan Mitchel, famed Puritan writer, gave the answer in 1662: “In the Commonwealth, Christ’s Kingdom is set up, when all things therein are so ordered, (laws and all civil administrations) as doth most fitly and effectually tend to advance, promote, and maintain religion and reformation.” To this end, the Puritans set up a theonomist state, that is, one based upon the laws of God as found in the Bible. The 1644 New Haven Charter was written with the following stated purpose: “that the judicial laws of God, as they were delivered by Moses . . . be a rule to all the courts in this jurisdiction . . .”

How times have changed! But of course, as noble as their intentions were, their aims were not truly in accordance with the Bible, which explains that God’s Kingdom will not be established until Jesus Christ returns. Still we may marvel at the desire here—and lament how low the society founded on such principles has sunk in recent times, with outright rejection of any semblance of following God’s laws.

—Tom Robinson
Massachusetts Bay over his promotion of greater religious freedom and other disagreement, established Rhode Island specifically as a safe haven from religious persecution, thereby adding freedom of conscience to Plymouth’s self-governing model. (It was in Rhode Island that the first Sabbatarian Christians, fleeing religious persecution in England, would establish the first seventh-day-keeping congregations in America.)

Historian and rabbi Ken Spiro points out about the Puritans: “Having had their right to worship denied by the decrees mandating uniform liturgy, the Puritans were anxious to make sure no human being ever held that power over the conscience of others. In the words of Puritan preacher Roger Williams (later founder of Rhode Island): ‘It is the will and command of God that conscience and worship be granted to all men in all nations and countries . . . An enforced uniformity of religion denies the principles of Christianity . . .’

“A very significant political evolution was taking place in the New World. Unlike the Puritans in England who, of necessity, lived under English common law and were ruled by a king and Parliament, the Puritans of America had no central authority or national governing body. Yet they did not lapse into anarchy. Instead, they created communities governed by elected councils of elders similar to the ‘presbyters’ of England. Their communities were both stable and prosperous, with mandatory school systems modeled after the Jewish ones” (WorldPerfect, 2002, pp. 240, 249).

In this system, liberty was still to be rooted in following God and His laws yet by community agreement (see “The Puritan Aim of Living Under Divine Rule”).

Up to our present day, the United States has been a haven for many persecuted “pilgrims” from other lands and still practices widespread religious toleration. And America, despite its flaws, has served as a model of freedom to other nations.

**A powerful legacy now eroded and upended**

“If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:3).

 Sadly, the strong Christian religious foundation that the Puritans laid has been quietly eroding over past decades. Polls in America uniformly show a steep decline in people who say they hold Christian beliefs, while morality has sunk to new lows.

If the Puritans were to come back to life today, they would be appalled at what this country has become. It would be virtually unrecognizable to them as far as basic Christian morality is concerned.

Other past Christian leaders would likewise be shocked, such as George Washington, the first president of the United States. In his farewell address to the nation in leaving office, Washington warned: “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports . . . Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religion.”

The threat Washington was talking about is exactly what has happened in America today!

As evangelical author Tim LaHaye brought out in his 1987 book *Faith of Our Founding Fathers*: “The United States was founded on more biblical principles than any other nation in history—the secret to America’s greatness. Those principles originally permeated our educational system, courts, public life, religious life and economic system, producing what President Ronald Reagan [who was in office when this was written] calls ‘traditional values.’

“When these values prevailed, the quality of life from the family to the streets was far better than today. While citizens certainly did not have modern means of communication, mobility, or twenty-first century technology, neither did they endure streets that were unsafe for women after dark, a tragic rate of child molestation, 1 million teen pregnancies annually, and rampant violence and crime. We were certainly not known as ‘the pornography capital of the world.’

“Whenever we point to the need to return to traditional values, the humanists remonstrate that we want to take the country ‘back to the dark ages.’ In actuality, modern technology would be far more beneficial to mankind in an environment of ‘traditional values’ than it is in the permissive, humanistic society of today” (p. 34).

**Societal decline foretold by God**

What has happened to American society? In drifting farther and farther from God, it is plagued by real and worsening darkness. God knew this would happen all along and warned of it in the Bible.

He inspired the apostle Paul to describe the end of this age in writing to a fellow minister: "In the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God” (2 Timothy 3:1-4, New Living Translation).

That is a succinct picture of much of society today!

**A far better new world is still ahead**

Yes, the 400th anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims is a very noteworthy event. But since secular humanism has now prevailed in schools, the press and government, the remarkable religious foundation of the nation is quickly crumbling—and much worse times lie before us.

Yet there is still good news ahead, for God has great plans for America and the rest of the world!

The dreams of the early Pilgrim and Puritan fathers of a pure Christian society under the rule of God and His laws will be far exceeded in the wonderful new world God will bring at the return of Jesus Christ to the earth—a time of true and lasting righteousness and freedom in the ultimate promised land of the Kingdom of God!"
The poison fruit of “cancel culture”

It strikes fear in some, while others claim it doesn’t exist. What started on social media has spread like cancer throughout America and the Western world. People are being fired, publicly shamed, kicked out of groups, banned from social media, even killed—all for saying things that don’t align with today’s new politically correct norms.

Dictionary.com defines “cancel culture” as “the popular practice of withdrawing support for (canceling) public figures and companies after they have done or said something considered objectionable or offensive.” Employees are being “canceled” or fired for simply stating their opinion about a controversial topic.

Notice this from a Reason magazine article from July 8, 2020, by John Stossel titled “Cancel Culture Is Out of Control”: “The online mob came for Harald Uhlig. What terrible thing had he done? … He tweeted that Black Lives Matter ‘torpedoed itself, with its full-fledged support of #fundthetelepolice.’ Instead of defending, Uhlig suggested, ‘train them better.’

“Hundreds of people then signed a petition to demand that Uhlig, a University of Chicago professor and head of the Journal of Political Economy, resign. Even prominent economists like Janet Yellen and Paul Krugman joined the mob. Krugman called Uhlig ‘another privileged white man who evidently cannot control his urge to belittle the concerns of those less fortunate.’”

“There was nothing racist or discriminatory in how he said it,” says Reason magazine senior editor Robby Soave, who covers the new ‘woke’ protests. ‘But because he has some different views from the protesters, he must be a racist.’

“Uhlig was placed on leave by the journal he ran.” We could give many other examples of people who lost their jobs over something they said or posted on social media.

One of the big problems with cancel culture is that people are being held up to continuously shifting societal standards. What was once common-sense knowledge has become radical or reprehensible. America’s moral compass keeps spinning in new directions.

J.K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter book series, was nearly canceled due to her positions on women being biologically different from men. Rowling was labeled “transphobic” simply for saying that women are women, biologically. They are not “people with cervixes.”

Cancel culture has also exposed a lack of mercy throughout society. Some people are being canceled for views they expressed decades ago. An executive at Boeing was forced out because—30 years ago—he was against women serving in the military.

There is no longer any room for people to change or grow out of certain behaviors or views. God says in Proverbs 16:27 that “an ungodly man digs up evil” (King James version). God knew thousands of years ago how damaging it is to dig up dirt on other people!

There is no such thing anymore as “innocent until proven guilty.” People who are canceled don’t get a trial. In today’s climate, the mob decides who is guilty and who is innocent. Sometimes false witnesses are involved. And once someone’s name is tarnished, there is rarely a way to offer an apology and return to public life. They are seemingly black-marked forever.

God speaks out strongly against mobs and this way of reacting. Notice: “You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice” (Exodus 23:2). If most people employed just two biblical principles, cancel culture would disappear.

First, practice forgiveness. If someone makes a mistake, forgive them. Move on! Don’t join a mob in rubbing their noses in it. Constantly ask yourself: If I were in their shoes, would I want to be treated?

Christians are called to be different from the society around them—to be like God. King David wrote that God is “ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You” (Psalm 86:5). He also wrote that God takes away our sins: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12). If someone sincerely apologizes, we are to be like God and forgive them.

Second, when you hear reports or rumors about people, be careful you don’t inadvertently join a mob trying to destroy someone’s life. Many Bible verses tell us to get the facts before making a judgment (see Deuteronomy 17:2-7; Proverbs 18:17).

Before you jump into the “cancel culture” fray, understand the trend and practice forgiveness and due diligence.

America’s most crucial election ever?

On Nov. 3 the United States will hold what could be the most crucial presidential election in its history. Whatever the outcome, the nation will likely continue to see the advance of a revolution that has been building since 1968, when protestors took to the streets calling for racial and social justice and attempted to influence the outcome of a major political convention in Chicago.

Revolution—overturning the current order, in this case to empower a radical minority—is still the goal, though it’s wrapped in the benign guise of “social justice.” The difference today is the power centers of government, media and culture are helping drive the revolution by openly supporting and enabling the movement.

Events on the streets of the nation since May have been interpreted as a trial run for what could happen post-election. A scenario run by a group called the Transition Integrity Project concluded that election night “will be marked by a chaotic legal and political landscape.” Instead of a court battle like the one that settled the 2000 election victory of George W. Bush, the outcome of this report promises “that what would follow the November election would be ‘a street fight, not a legal battle.’

It would be easy to dismiss this as conspiracy hysteria. However, in June the sitting Secretary of Defense warned the President not to invoke the Insurrection Act for the rioting occurring in American cities because it could incite unintended reactions. Some Democratic party leaders have called for the U.S. military to forcibly remove President Trump if he is declared defeated and rejects that as unsettled.

Add the frenzied push to allow unrestricted mail-in balloting across the country—introducing the element of massive voter fraud—and the possibility of a contested election result looms as a real danger to the normal orderly transfer of power.

Could the peaceful transfer of power in America devolve into a civil dispute that would undermine the stable process of government? History tells us it has happened before. In 1933 Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist (Nazi) Party seized state power in Germany in a matter of weeks.

The use of protests, intimidation, propaganda and manipulating the organs of government resulted in the rise of the Nazi Third Reich—this despite the party receiving only 44 percent of the vote. William Shirer in his definitive great work The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich quotes historian Alan Bullock saying, “The street gangs had seized control of the resources of a great modern State, the gutter had come to power” (p. 200).

This has been a tumultuous year. Combining a pandemic, economic upheaval and social unrest into a national election can create unexpected events. As noted in this issue’s lead article “A World in Crisis,” we are watching a unique historic moment. We are watching the concluding chapters of human experience leading to the moment when Jesus Christ appears in the glory of His second coming. It is a time to seek understanding from God and to turn to Him with all our heart and seek His righteousness.
Lessons from the Pilgrims’ experiment with socialism

On this 400th anniversary of the arrival of the Pilgrims in America in 1620, we reflect on a failed experiment they were initially subjected to that many now want to impose on America and the rest of civilization—a socialist system that almost wiped them out.

As explained by Dr. Paul Jehle of the Plymouth Rock Foundation, the agreement between the colonial investors and settlers “was changed at the last minute...They were now being forced to share their homes, gardens and land in a communal arrangement as well as their labor...

“The Pilgrims knew by the experience of Jamestown (planted in 1607) as well as their experience in England that unless private property and labor were respected, there would be little incentive to work. The prevailing notion in England was that all use of land and labor was government-granted because the profit-motive was sinful. When the Pilgrims arrived in 1620, there was no trust in a free market” (“Economic Liberty in America: A Legacy of the Pilgrims,” PlymouthRock.org).

But they soon learned hard lessons. As commentator John Stossel writes of their experiment with socialism: “When they tried that, the Pilgrims almost starved. Their collective farming—the whole community deciding when and how much to plant, when to harvest, who would do the work—was an inefficient disaster.

“By the spring,” Pilgrim leader William Bradford wrote in his diary, ‘our food stores were used up and people grew weak and thin. Some swelled with hunger...They began to think how...they might not still thus languish in misery.’ His answer: divide the commune into parcels and assign each Pilgrim family its own property. As Bradford put it, they ‘set corn every man for his own particular...and assigned every family a parcel of land.’

“Private property protects us from what economists call the tragedy of the commons...[wherein] no one person has much incentive to protect and develop it. The Pilgrims’ simple change to private ownership, wrote Bradford, ‘made all hands very industrious, so much more corn was planted than otherwise would have been.’

“Soon they had so much plenty that they could share food with the natives. The Indians weren’t socialists, either. They had property rules of their own. That helped them grow enough so they had plenty, even during cold winters.

“When property rights are tossed aside, even for the sake of religious fellowship or in the name of the working class people just don’t work as hard. Why farm all day—or invent new ways of farming—when everyone else will get an equal share? You may not intend to be a slacker, but suddenly, reasons to stay in bed seem more compelling than they did when your own livelihood and family were dependent on your own efforts” (“Thanks, Private Property!” Townhall.com, Nov. 27, 2019).

Dr. Jehle relates what the Pilgrim fathers came to understand in these regards: “Bradford identifies several reasons why socialism (common ownership of labor and land) and elementary communism (common ownership of land) did not work, even among the most godly people. We can deduce at least the following from his discourse describing their 1623 decision.

“1. In a common ownership of labor and land, people tend to become lazy, not wanting to work, thus private property must undergird a free and productive economy.

“2. Under socialism, people tend to make up excuses why they can’t work, thus private profit is a key ingredient in a free economy as well.

“3. Communal living breeds discontent, for all tend to want what others have, but refuse to work for it, thus welfare must be voluntary (private charity) rather than forced (government charity).

“4. Socialism is built on pride and a presumed incentive and self-interest in order to overcome one’s naturally corrupt nature.

“6. Ultimately, God’s design for the economy rests on voluntary choice, which is far more productive than government force and the re-distribution of wealth...

“[7.] Bradford adds a seventh characteristic necessary for the success of a free economy. He states that the Pilgrims had to ‘rest on God’s providence...’ (the) need to pray that God would give them their daily bread...’In other words, without prayer even a good economic system will fail.” This became apparent when a drought came right after the reapportionment of land and labor. Following a day of humble and fervent community prayer came needed gentle rains that astonished even the Native Americans.

These principles of economic freedom are enshrined in Scripture. To learn more, we encourage you to search our website ucg.org for these articles: “Freedom and Free Enterprise: Great Biblical Blessings” and “The Early Church Was Not Communist—and Neither Was Jesus” (both from the July-August 2011 issue of our formerly titled Good News magazine).

May we learn from the mistakes of the past so as not to repeat them!

How can you make sense of the news?

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

Promoting materialism, debt for what families can’t afford, lies and pagan revelry—it’s all part of the magic of Christmastime.

by Vince Szymkowiak

Despite the Christmas holiday being touted as “the most wonderful time of the year” for children and families, the sad fact is that it brings serious problems to both.

Young people are taught to focus more on what they will get for Christmas than the real meaning of the coming of Jesus Christ. And among people of all ages, terrible falsehoods about the celebration abound, along with wrong objectives and pursuits.

Pressuring into debt

There was the story of three children in a family who all wanted their own gaming notebook computers—expensive ones to play on and proudly show their friends. Right after Halloween, they began working on their parents to make it happen. By starting in early November, they felt they could get what they wanted by Dec. 25.

Sadly, this had been a difficult year for the parents. The father had gone through a period of unemployment due to mandatory layoffs, and the highly educated mother was underemployed, finding no work in her field of expertise. The parents simply could not afford all three notebooks at one time. So they decided to buy one a year, starting with their oldest child.

But the children persisted. After all, it was argued, all their friends had gaming computers. They whined, complained, begged and badgered their parents until the parents simply gave in. They went into debt, paying with their credit card. Surely, they hoped, this would give their children a merry Christmas.

Several months later, the parents were still paying down Christmas bills—at over 17 percent interest.

This all-too-common story illustrates one of the pitfalls of the holiday exciting and magical for them. The involvement of strong authority figures children develop as they mature adults know this is not the path to real, lasting success. Further, the fact is that this famous article is riddled with lies! Indeed, the entire Christmas holiday is riddled with lies! Yet most of society is happy to join in on the deceptive “fun.”

Lying as part of the enchantment

A second pitfall of Christmas is the intentional lying to children about Santa Claus and surrounding mythology to make the holiday exciting and magical for them. The involvement of strong authority figures in this deception (including parents, grandparents, teachers, pastors and public officials), along with businesses and the media, ultimately sends the message to children that in certain situations it is permissible if not even commendable to lie. And it may well factor into distrust of parents and other authority figures children develop as they get a little older.

In the late 1800s, a young girl in America by the name of Virginia O’Hanlon asked her father whether or not Santa Claus existed. Her father suggested she write a letter to The Sun, a New York City newspaper. So she wrote:

“Dear Editor, I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, ‘If you see it in the Sun, it’s so.’ Please tell me the truth, is there a Santa Claus?”

The letter was answered by an editor named Francis Pharcellus Church. His answer became immortalized with the famous line “Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.” Even 100 years later, this article “is the most reprinted editorial in any newspaper in the English language” (Wikipedia, “Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus”).

In fact, the phrase “Yes, Virginia, there is (a) . . .” has become an idiomatic expression to insist that something is true” (ibid.).

While some praise the editorial for supposed philosophical value, the fact is that this famous article is riddled with lies! Indeed, the entire Christmas holiday is riddled with lies! Yet most of society is happy to join in on the deceptive “fun.”

Even NORAD, the North American Aerospace Defense Command, a joint Canadian and American early warning defense organization, gets into the act. For decades, it has pretended to track Santa Claus’ travels across the northern hemisphere. A Reuters article explains how this tradition gained traction:

“"The origins of tracking Santa date back to 1955 . . . when a local ad to speak directly with Santa printed the wrong phone number—instead directing children to a military defense
operations center. Tracking Santa grew from there after officers on duty actually fielded the kids’ questions . . .

“For more than 50 years NORAD has followed the flight path of jolly old Saint Nick, but these days technology helps children and families pinpoint Santa’s more exact route to their own homes . . . Kids can download mobile device apps to watch Santa and the reindeer traverse the globe. Otherwise, they can call or email the command center for Santa’s coordinates” (Lauren Keiper, “NORAD’s Santa Tracking Set to Launch on Christmas Eve,” Dec. 23, 2011).

Perpetuating this huge lie is seen as a wonderful gift to children, while exposing it is regarded as ruining the fun and practically evil and perverse. Is the promotion of this lie godly in any way? Titus 1:2 shows that God “cannot lie.”

And God warns us of reveling in lies and demanding lies of others. He states in Isaiah 30:8-10: “Now go and write down these words. Write them in a book. They will stand until the end of time as a witness that these people are stubborn rebels who refuse to pay attention to the Lord’s instructions. They tell the seers, ‘Stop seeing visions!’ They tell the prophets, ‘Don’t tell us what is right. Tell us nice things. Tell us lies’” (New Living Translation, emphasis added throughout).

As part of the true worship of Jesus, parents should be teaching their children what the Scriptures really say regarding the true story of the birth of Jesus—and the truth about the Christmas holiday. Here is some of what they would find.

Jesus was not born in the dead of winter

Various factors make it clear that Jesus’ birth was not at Christmas. One is the census taken throughout the Roman Empire when He was born, as recorded in Luke 2:1-3: “And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.”

A pitfall of Christmas is the intentional lying to children about Santa Claus and the surrounding mythology to make the holiday exciting.

Given the incredible efficiency of the Romans, coupled with their mission of obtaining an accurate count, the winter months in Jerusalem would hardly be the appropriate time to conduct a census. Bad weather would cause many to stay home and delay the count. A much more temperate time of the year would be the logical choice for such a census.

Pagan customs, the sun god and Dec. 25

In its entry on “Christmas,” the online Encyclopaedia Britannica has this to say about the holiday’s historical beginnings:

“The precise origin of assigning December 25 as the birth date of Jesus is unclear. The New Testament provides no clues in this regard. December 25 was first identified as the date of Jesus’ birth by Sextus Julius Africanus in 221 and later became the universally accepted date. One widespread explanation of the origin of this date is that December 25 was the Christianizing of the dies solis invicti nati (‘day of the birth of the unconquered sun’), a popular holiday in the Roman Empire that celebrated the winter solstice as a symbol of the resurgence of the sun, the casting away of winter and the heralding of the rebirth of spring and summer.

“Indeed, after December 25 had become widely accepted as the date of Jesus’ birth, Christian writers frequently made the connection between the rebirth of the sun and the birth of the Son. One of the difficulties with this view is that it suggests a nonchalant willingness on the part of the Christian church to appropriate a pagan festival when the early church was so intent on distinguishing itself categorically from pagan beliefs and practices.”

Yet the institution widely regarded as God’s Church at this later time had in fact drifted far from the early Church in both beliefs and practice.

We read this solemn warning in Jeremiah 5:30-31: “An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power [instead of God’s Holy Spirit]; and My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?” The New Living Translation renders the concluding question here as: “But what will you do when the end comes?”

Yes, people will have to give an answer to the only One who counts as to why they participated in the spreading of lies about what amounts to a false savior. If we were really interested in the proper worship of God and His Son Jesus, we would learn to worship “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24)—certainly not with the promotion of lies and pagan traditions.

Christmas gift-giving not from the wise men

The gifts of the magi in the biblical story of events surrounding Jesus’ birth are often claimed as a forerunner of...
Beyond Today         • BTmagazine.org

gift-giving at Christmas. But these wise men came a long while after Jesus’ birth—and they gave gifts to Him, not to each other.

Let’s take a brief look at the gifts from the wise men. We read in Matthew 2:11: “They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.” These gifts were highly symbolic.

**Gold** was a gift given to royalty; in this case, it was given to the One who is to reign as “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (Revelation 19:16). Gold also symbolizes the perfect, righteous character of our Lord and Savior, who was God in the flesh.

**Frankincense** was an ingredient in the incense used in the worship of God in the tabernacle and temple by Israel’s high priest (Exodus 30:34-37). It is also symbolic of the intercessory role of Jesus Christ as our High Priest.

**Myrrh** was a gift symbolizing the suffering, death and burial of Jesus. When He died, His body was wrapped in a 100-pound mixture of myrrh and aloes (John 19:39).

So the gifts given were in fact prophetic of the life, work and death of Jesus. The modern practice of exchanging gifts with friends and relatives has nothing to do with the actual biblical account.

Christmas gift-giving developed from the exchange of gifts in the Roman Saturnalia and other manifestations of the pagan winter festival (see our free study guide offered below to learn more).

**Give the gift of truth**

The claim that Jesus was born on Dec. 25 is a lie foisted upon our children along with other Christmas traditions. Whether from a newspaper editor to the respected NORAD, or from scores of other sources, our children are being deceived. History shows that the customs surrounding Christmas have more to do with championing a pagan deity than speaking of the true Christ of the Bible.

Also, allowing children to fixate on getting for themselves and to whine and needle their way to “success” is not teaching them true success at all. It is setting them up for hardship later on.

One point of truth is better than a thousand lies! Christmas observance is not supported in the Bible at all! It is instead condemned there. Parents should turn their children to the Bible because the Bible, God’s Word, is truth (John 17:17).

Learn and live by, and help your children learn and live by, the true gospel message of the Bible, embracing the life, teaching and salvation work of our Lord and Savior! There is no greater gift you can give to your children.
Why Will Jesus Christ Return? (Part 2)

Most of the Christian world believes Jesus is returning to the earth, but so many don’t understand the purpose in this. In part 1 of this article in our previous issue, we laid out six reasons Jesus Christ must return to the earth. We encourage you to read part 1 before proceeding into part 2, where we lay out six more reasons for a total of 12.

By way of review, the first six reasons were: 1) to fulfill prophecy and promises; 2) to save mankind from total destruction; 3) to resurrect and transform His followers to immortality; 4) to appear in glory for vindication and honor; 5) to reign as King over all nations; and 6) to deliver and elevate Israel.

Yet these are not the only things Jesus is coming back to do. As revealed throughout Scripture, He has much more to accomplish. We list six more here, but this is still a broad summary of the vast agenda for the world to come. No doubt many more aspects could be highlighted.

Continuing on then from what we’ve already seen, what else is Jesus coming to do? Again, why will He return to the earth?

7. To establish His throne in Jerusalem

Concerning the nation of Israel at His coming, the last point we mentioned, the Lord further declared: “I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary [or holy place] in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle [or dwelling place] also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. The nations also will know that I, the LORD, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore” (Ezekiel 37:26-28).

The final chapters of Ezekiel, starting in chapter 40, show that a rebuilt physical temple at Jerusalem will be functioning during the Millennium. Some dismiss this as mere spiritual symbolism, but the level of detailed description found in these chapters makes that idea untenable. The temple system always contained symbolic aspects, but it was nevertheless literal, as the new one will be.

The physical temple is regarded as the place of God’s throne on earth—the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant between the cherubim modeled on God’s throne in heaven. So Jerusalem will be the capital of the world: “At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts” (Jeremiah 3:17, emphasis added throughout). From here Christ will rule: “For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3).

8. To judge the world, rewarding the faithful and removing evil

The world today is filled with corruption and injustice. The righteous suffer wrongly while the wicked often prosper. Will a just and good God allow this to go on without end in parallel to merely continuing to take decent people away to an afterlife in heaven? As Abraham asked, “Shall
not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25).

Consider that ongoing evil in the world is used as an argument against the existence of God. For those of us who understand that Jesus came to die for our sins, are we to imagine that God will tolerate sin and its consequences forever and ever and ever? Will death and misery and pain never cease? No! It is allowed for a time for the building of faith and character. But there must eventually be a conclusion—and there will be!

At Jesus’ return He will bring justice to the world—to set all things right. He will reward the righteous and punish the unrepentant, working toward ultimately ridding the world of all sin.

We earlier saw in Jude 14-15 and Psalm 96:13 that the Lord is coming to execute judgment on the world. This refers to Christ, for He said “the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22).

God through Christ “will render to each one according to his deeds; eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth . . . indignation and wrath” (Romans 2:6-8).

Jesus showed in parable that at His return He will reward His servants, giving them different levels of authority in His Kingdom according to how they have used their spiritual gifts in His service, growing in His character—with those who fail to do as commanded losing their reward (see Luke 19:11-26). And His enemies who ultimately refuse to be ruled by Him will be destroyed (verse 27).

Jesus will triumph over enemies at His coming. The nations of the world, under the sway of Satan the devil (1 John 5:19), will be angry at Christ’s return and, resisting Him, will face His judgment (Revelation 11:18; Joel 3:2). An alliance of rulers “will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them” (Revelation 17:12-14). Paul writes of a human leader of the lawless system that will then dominate the world, “whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming” (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

Then Satan himself, along with his demons, will be seized and banished from the world to an abyss or bottomless pit for the 1,000 years of Christ’s rule—cutting off his deception of the nations and his spiritual influencing of people’s minds to wrong attitudes and disobedience (Revelation 20:1-3; see Ephesians 2:1-3). He will be briefly released at the end when he will go out to deceive the nations again—but he will then be cast into a lake of fire and be finally gone for good (Revelation 20:3, 7-10). Later, unrepentant human beings will also be cast into the lake of fire and destroyed, with death and the grave, the final enemies, gone forever (verses 14-15; 21:8; 1 Corinthians 15:25-26).

The removal of Satan and evil will allow all people to learn righteousness and live in harmony with God and one another. Jesus will finally receive the full praise and honor due Him. Those who follow Him will share in His glory. And Satan and those who refuse to repent will get the humiliation and dishonor they deserve.

This will commence when Christ returns in judgment to set everything right and bring healing to our broken, upside-down world!

9. To teach the world His ways and bring world peace

When Jesus rules the world from Jerusalem, “many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For [as we read earlier] out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:1-3). Instead of war, the world will be taught the way to peace (verse 4).

Yes, as part of Jesus setting everything right, the age-old dream of world peace will finally be a reality. Man’s attempts to bring it about have failed. We must come to acknowledge: “Lord, You will establish peace for us, for You have also done all our works in us” (Isaiah 26:12)—as Christ will work in and through people to bring this about, God’s Spirit then being poured out on all humanity (Joel 2:28).

Jesus and His resurrected followers, as a royal priesthood, will be the world’s teachers, calling out to people, “This is the way, walk in it” (Isaiah 30:20-21). Soon “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).

10. To bring restoration to all creation

With the transformation Jesus will bring, even the animals will be at peace: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them . . . They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain” (verses 6-9). This mountain refers to God’s ruling Kingdom, which will expand and encompass the whole earth (compare Daniel 2:35, 44).
The war-torn and devastated world, starting at Jerusalem, will be restored to a paradise resembling that of the Garden of Eden. "For the Lord will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord" (Isaiah 51:3). "So they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited'" (Ezekiel 36:35).

At that time, both the natural realm and mankind will experience amazing healing: “The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose . . .” (Isaiah 35:1). "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert, the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water” (verses 5-7).

This rejuvenating water is literal but also symbolic of the Holy Spirit and all God’s blessings. As God says: “For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring” (Isaiah 44:3).

An abundance of trees along the banks of a river that flows from God’s new temple in Jerusalem will be for food and healing (Ezekiel 47:1-12)—this picture also being both literal and symbolic. Because of sin, mankind was cut off from the Garden of Eden and access to the tree of life there. But that access is symbolic. Because of sin, mankind was cut off from God’s new temple in Jerusalem will be for food and healing (Ezekiel 47:1-12)—this picture also being both literal and symbolic. Because of sin, mankind was cut off from the Garden of Eden and access to the tree of life there. But that access will ultimately be restored (see Revelation 22:1-3, 14).

When Jesus returns from heaven, He will bring “the times of restoration of all things” proclaimed by all God’s prophets (Acts 3:21). And the whole creation will be freed from its bondage to decay (see Romans 8:18-23).

11. To offer salvation to everyone

We earlier saw God’s intention to save all Israel (Romans 11:26; compare Isaiah 45:17). And He intends the same for all mankind, as expressed in the inspired prayer of Psalm 67:2: “That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among the nations.” It was foretold of Jesus as Messiah that besides raising up and restoring Israel, He would bring salvation to the whole world: “I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6).

The whole world will be offered salvation when Jesus reigns in power and glory over the nations. Yet we might wonder: What about all those who died in past ages without the opportunity for Christ’s salvation? For instance, we read in Zechariah 12:10 that those who pierced Christ will be remorseful and repentant. In one sense this refers to the Jewish nation of the end time, and even to all people, as we all bear responsibility in Christ’s death. But what of those who actually took part in Jesus’ day? Are they forever lost even if they did not understand or come to see what they were part of? (compare Luke 23:34).

The reality is that these people too will have the opportunity for salvation extended to them. Jesus will raise His followers from death immediately at His return, “but the rest of the dead,” we are told in Revelation 20:5, will not live again “until the thousand years were finished.” So they will be raised up too. Many think this is to immediately condemn them again. But that is assuredly not the case. A judgment period will follow (verses 11-12)—a period of evaluation with the Book of Life opened, representing an open opportunity.

Thus Jesus is returning not just to offer salvation to all those alive at His return and the generations that follow, but to offer salvation to all who have ever lived who never had sufficient understanding or opportunity. (To learn more about this amazing truth, read “The Eighth Day: Eternal Life Offered to All” in our free study guide God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind.)

12. To usher in a new heaven and new earth

Finally, after the Millennium and last judgment period and the removal of all those who ultimately refuse to repent and obey God, those who remain will experience an extraordinary change in the whole of creation, as earth and sky are changed from subjection to physical decay to an eternal state (Revela- tion 21:1). We won’t then go away to a different earth. Rather, God will make the earth we dwell on and all things new (verse 5). Then the New Jerusalem, a city of vast dimensions, will descend to the earth with God the Father.

It is ironic that many read the descriptions of this city in the vision of Revelation 21-22 as detailing life in heaven, when the reality is that this city will come down to the renewed earth as the permanent dwelling of the Father and Christ and all the saved of mankind. Heaven will thus come to earth! The tree of life will then be here for the nations (Revelation 22:1-2, 14). “And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him” (verse 3). There is no temple seen in the vision “for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Revelation 21:22), shining in it as light brighter than the sun (verse 23).

What this means is that not only does Christ have much work to do here on earth for which He must come back, as we have seen, but His work here will never end! He will reign here with the Father and all His followers in awesome joysous existence through eternity to come, world without end.

Yes, the hope of Christ’s return is certain. The Bible ends in affirmation of this abiding promise and a prayer for its swift fulfillment we should all join in with. Revelation 22:20 concludes, “He [Jesus Christ] who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”
How are we to experience God’s gift of peace? Through the example of Jesus Christ and biblical principles of listening to God, drawing near to Him and trusting persistence.

by Robin Webber

Jesus’ first contact with His disciples after His resurrection is telling for all His followers through the ages. His words speak to us more than ever, as if we ourselves are in the “upper room” of Jerusalem. He finds His friends hiding in “fear of the Jews” (John 20:19). Their human reaction is understandable. The One they followed for years was turned over by their countrymen and crucified by the Romans. The pounding, paralyzing, screaming question dominating their hearts was “Are we next?”

It’s here that Jesus not only miraculously came through walls to meet them, but penetrated their anxieties by greeting them with “Peace be with you.” These were His first recorded words as He displayed the wounds of His death to encourage them and verify it was Him, yet now risen! (verses 19-20). He again declared before leaving them, “Peace to you.” Here we discover how Christ enters and exits His encounters with those precious to Him, always embracing them—embracing us—with “peace.”

A week later He came through the walls again and greeted a disciple named Thomas who was fraught with understandable human doubt. He missed the first encounter, and Jesus offered him one-on-one attention to calm and restore him. Again Christ’s opening comments were “Peace to you!” Yet this time He not only penetrated physical walls, but in allowing Thomas to penetrate His wounds He also penetrated the wall of human apprehension that was thwarting Thomas’ ability to serve (verses 26-28).

What, then, of us today? What personal troubles are diminishing our ability to serve Christ? As I write we are experiencing some “upper room dynamics” of closed doors with regard to the Covid-19 virus. “Who’s next?” many wonder. “Will it be a loved one or me?” Such concern is perhaps layered on top of preexisting challenges—a strained marriage, lack of employment, social pressures or a serious ongoing ailment threatening your life or that of a loved one. In desperation we cry out, “What’s the sense of all this?”

It’s here in our most desperate and stifling moments that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, calls out to us, “Follow Me” (Mark 1:17; John 21:19) and bids us peace. He never changes His tune, His words, His personal presence with us accompanied by the peace He offers.

How then can we be at peace in troubled times? We must consider and follow Jesus’ own example, learning to live by specific biblical principles for experiencing the peace of God.

Experiencing peace and sharing it with others

Let’s first, then, appreciate that Jesus practiced what He preached. It may seem easy to say “peace” after one is rescued from death, but that same peace was expressed and offered even before.

Look at what occurred on the last night of His humanity within hours of being tortured and crucified. He declared: “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

Note His claim of “My peace,” and that it’s not as the world gives. It’s something that’s not from around here—not earth-bound or homegrown. He offered it as a gift to be left “with” us. Such peace is custodial in nature, demanding stewardship to understand the life-penetrating invitation to be a disciple of Christ and to hold onto that peace not merely for dear life, but for the dear life who gives it to us.

Jesus as a Jew would have said Shalom when greeting His disciples with “peace.” Shalom is not merely a hello and goodbye in Hebrew, but is most importantly a blessing. It’s a spiritually realistic affirmation to the recipients of not necessarily conflict-free existence, but rather of God’s companionship being with them and supplying the wisdom, strength and comfort needed as life’s challenges develop.

And here’s more to consider: Christ has called us to peace and grants us peace—His kind of peace, which includes, as He exemplified, extending peace to others. There is an implied demand for action in His encouraging beatitude “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9). Note that He didn’t merely say “the peace dreamers.” We have to act, doing whatever we can rightly do to bring peace, starting with our own attitude.

How then do we experience the gift of God’s peace? Here are three biblical steps to guide us in living according to Christ’s invitation of “Follow Me.”

Stop and be still

The first step is to stop and be still. We live in a restless 24/7 world that encroaches on our already fractious human nature via instant communication. While often necessary, it’s also distracting and addictive. It can overwhelm us into forgetting who walks before us and reigns over our lives.

Consider David’s words in Psalm 46:10: “Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted above the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” The nations at large are not listening at this time, but individually we begin to exalt God when we get off the treadmill of fear and “stop, look and listen” to God before walking into the intersections of life.

Humble silence before God is a wise approach for the faithful. Psalm 62:5-6 illuminates the heart of the individual who mutes up the spiritual awareness and nerve to remain still:
Christ has called us to peace and grants us peace—His kind of peace, which includes the act of extending peace to others.

“My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation.”

Did you notice the word “wait”? This takes more than a minute of holding your breath while quietly murmuring, “I’ve been still enough!” We wait because there is an “expectation” that God will answer in His way and time. Caring for and expanding on the bestowed peace of God takes visionary awareness and determined personal sacrifice to move beyond the roar of self to be able to hear, as the prophet Elijah did, the “still small voice” of God apart from the storms and earthquakes of this life (see 1 Kings 19:12).

Spend time in solitude with God

The next step is to find solitude with God. We live in a crowded and noisy society. Think about it for a moment: Gas station pumps that speak to you, overhead music drowning out your dinner date with your spouse, people talking over one another and smartphones in our hands doing our thinking for us. The world has always been busy, but now it’s on steroids. Where do we find quiet as the storms of life swirl around us? People often speak of “getting away” on vacation, and that’s good. But for those heeding the invitation of Christ, should not “getting away” describe, to an extent, our spiritual vocation?

Consider some of those God called into desert solitude for a timeout. This was the experience of Moses, the Israelites after the Exodus, Elijah, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostle Paul. Here in the desolate wilderness, away from everyone and everything, God’s servants could better commune with Him, becoming more grounded and fine-tuned for that which lay before them. The point was not merely that everything was still and quiet, but that they were alone with God.

Consider Christ’s example in Mark 1:35: “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.” This was His regular practice. Luke 5:16 tells us, “So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.”

The “wilderness experience” is essential to walking the walk of Christ, who not only shows the way but is “the Way” to communion with God (John 14:6). I’m not talking about 40 days or 40 years of absence from life. I’m speaking of finding timeouts and places to “fast from this world” and “fast from the news,” focusing on God’s promises rather than our human premises.

At the same time God has not called us to be hermits. His Spirit led Jesus up into the wilderness for testing (Matthew 4:1), but Jesus then returned to serve humanity—and so must we. Carving out “wilderness time” in our schedule affords us the solitude and quiet we need to hear the voice of the Shepherd over the roar of self. What might the outcome be? Scripture spotlights this promise: “You [God] keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you” (Isaiah 26:3, English Standard Version).

Abide in faith toward God and go forward

The third step is to abide in faith toward God—to trust Him completely. We exist in a world that is dramatically changing moment by moment. Our personal circumstances are in constant flux. Educational factories of today teach that there are no absolutes—that everything is subject to change. But that’s not so. There are certain absolutes that never change, particularly the character and reliability of God the Father and Jesus Christ and all the truths they reveal. And we need to anchor ourselves in these and not the passing fancies of secular humanism.

Use these revelatory absolute truths to galvanize your walk with Christ. Isaiah 46:9-11 reminds us that we have surrendered our lives to One “declaring the end from the beginning . . . saying . . . I have purposed it; I will also do it.” We commit our hearts and minds to a Sovereign Lord who says, “I change not” (Malachi 3:6). We yield our lives to a Heavenly Father “with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17). We follow the invitation of One who is “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

There is great need for time in our spiritual walk to be still and for time to seek solitude and experience “the wilderness” to hear loud and clear the “still small voice” from God.

It’s revealing that on the edge of the Red Sea Moses told the troubled people of Israel: “Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord . . . The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace” (Exodus 14:13-14). And notice the instruction God then gave: “. . . Tell the children of Israel to go forward” (verse 15). To follow then was an act of faith.

Let us likewise leave our personal “upper room of trouble and doubt” and heed the same voice with its directive of “Go forward” and, as later expressed by Jesus to those of the past and us today, “Follow Me.”

LEARN MORE

What exactly is faith? And what does it mean to live by faith and have a relationship of faith in God the Father and Jesus Christ? To learn more about this crucial subject, download or request our free study guide You Can Have Living Faith. A copy is waiting for you!

BTmagazine.org/booklets
“The Key to Ending Chaos”

Thank you for this excellent article! We look forward to the Kingdom of God and the change in man's heart to want to fully surrender to God's will and purposes. This world is spiraling downward quickly. May His Kingdom come!

From the Internet

Excellent article with appropriate timing! It is easy for us to be emotionally assimilated into righting the wrongs in society with political or organized groups. We have to remember we are citizens of heaven and ambassadors for Christ.

From the Internet

“Who Will Listen to My Warning?”

A timely topic to think about for all mankind! I pondered what was the real problem with the ancient nation of Israel. Quite simply, they were a stiff-necked people. Being stiff-necked is defined as haughty and stubborn. Nothing has changed in the course of time, even with modern Israel and the nations of today; they are all “stiff-necked”—resisting the true God's invitation to return to Him!

From the Internet

Thankful for many free resources provided

I have been receiving your magazines and am very grateful for them. Thank you so much. Please continue sending me your literature, as I find it to be so helpful. Any other literature will be helpful in the consequential times we live in.

Subscriber in South Africa

I really love your magazines and look forward to when they arrive. The articles are so uplifting and very inspirational. They are well-researched and always speak to me. I gain insight and reassurance.

Reader in Ontario, Canada

I want to inform you that I have been greatly edified by receiving your magazine for quite some time. My appreciation for it is so much that I have saved many issues, and I have taken material to preach from several of them, since I am a volunteer chaplain at a prison. May you be greatly blessed for working and editing such a wonderful magazine.

Subscriber in Chile

Looking for resources about the seventh-day Sabbath

God bless you greatly. I am a pastor-evangelist in Cuba and have been a Christian for 21 years. I recently received your book The New Covenant: Does It Abolish God’s Law? The content of the book was quite good, but I would like to go deeper with a booklet that refutes Sunday as the day of worship.

I honestly do not see in any text of the Bible that Saturday has been changed to Sunday. I have seen much more evidence for Saturday than for Sunday as the correct day of worship, but I want to be sure of some doubts regarding three passages where believers are apparently seen gathered together on Sunday. I want to know the “why” and “what” of these passages. Pray a lot for me. In fact I am asking God for a lot of wisdom.

From the Internet

We have just the publication you need. Titled Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest, it shows from the Scriptures how the seventh-day Sabbath was instituted by God and never changed. It also examines the passages you mention, showing how they’ve been misinterpreted. You can find this free study guide on our website ucg.org/booklets or request it from the nearest regional office to you, as listed on page 31.

Looking to meet with others to worship God

I follow with great interest the teachings of the United Church of God through your many booklets. I’ve learned about Christianity strictly from the Bible, and of all the many churches I’ve analyzed, the beliefs of United Church of God align most closely with my understanding of this faith. Is there anyone from UCG in Malaysia or countries nearby that I can talk to/consult? Kindly assist. Thank you.

Reader in Malaysia

Is the United Church of God a true seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) keeping church? If so how can I become a member? And is there a body of believers in my area? I left my former church last year when I learned of its deceptions.

From the Internet

I very much need to talk to someone from your church. I practice everything you practice, biblically speaking, and that without knowing that this church even existed.

Reader in Brazil

Do you have a church in Nicaragua? Thank you.

From the Internet

We are indeed a seventh-day Sabbath-keeping church and are always glad to receive visitors who would like to worship God with us. You can find the closest congregation on our website ucg.org/congregations. You’ll also find the name and contact info for the pastor of the congregation closest to you to answer any questions.

Published letters may be edited for clarity and space. Address your letters to Beyond Today, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A., or email BTinfo@ucg.org (please be sure to include your full name, city, state or province, and country).
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<td>San Francisco ch. 29, Sun 6:30 p.m.</td>
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<td>Detroit ch. 38.5, Sun 10 a.m., Fri 3 p.m.</td>
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| Toledo ch. 69, Sun 5 p.m. |
| Georgia/Portland ch. 22/23, Sun 7:30 p.m. |
| Milwaukee ch. 23, Sun 6 a.m., Mon 11:30 a.m., Wed 4:30 p.m., Thu 7 a.m., Fri 5:30 a.m., Sat 8:30 a.m. & 4:30 p.m. |
| Oregon City ch. 23, Sun 2:30 p.m., Thu 10:30 a.m. & 2:30 p.m., Fri 4:30 a.m., Sat 3 a.m. & 4 p.m. |
| Washington Everett ch. 77, Wed 5 p.m. |

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