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The Deadliest Virus

By now we’ve grown used to seeing the world cursed by a deadly virus. We’ve seen chaos around the globe as nations have tried to cope with this enemy—one that’s unseen but all too painfully real. It has wreaked a great deal of havoc in people’s lives and continues its work of destruction and death. Governments desperately search for a cure, but none has yet been found. So we continue to hope desperately for a solution.

You probably assume I’m talking about the coronavirus, Covid-19. But I’m not. I’m talking about something far worse, far more widespread, and far deadlier.

I’m talking about the evil of the human heart. And as the destructive effects of Covid-19 and responses to it have been clear in recent months, so have the destructive effects of the evil of the human heart. We’ve seen it in the burnt-out husks of buildings, the destroyed and looted businesses, the piles of shattered storefront glass, the spray-painted profanities, and most of all in the anguished cries of families grieving for lost loved ones whose lives were taken far too soon.

Where does this spirit and attitude come from? And when and how will it end?

The subtitle of Beyond Today is “A Magazine of Understanding.” We call it that because we write from a unique perspective—the perspective of God’s Word, the Holy Bible. We believe this Book is the priceless revelation of God to mankind.

And through it we recognize that the underlying causes of humanity’s problems are spiritual in nature. They are rooted in our spiritual flaws and shortcomings. And because of this, our human-caused plagues such as crime, violence, hatred, racism, oppression, injustice and war have been with us for as long as human beings have existed on the earth. And they will remain with us until the spiritual solution is implemented.

What is humankind’s deep spiritual flaw? Most people tend to think that people are basically good. But the Bible—the inspired revelation of our Creator to mankind—shows something very different. Notice what God’s Word says we are really like. Speaking of humankind, it tells us:

• “The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths” (Isaiah 59:8, English Standard Version, emphasis added throughout).

• “The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?” (Jeremiah 17:9, New Living Translation).

• “There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one . . . Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:10-18).

I could cite many more passages, but you get the picture. We deceive ourselves if we think human beings are basically good. We deceive ourselves if we think we personally are basically good. God’s Word spells it out for us very clearly—reread these passages above!

Yes, mankind indeed has a deep spiritual problem—a deadly virus that has infected us and leads us into sin and death. It is our wicked, evil, selfish, self-centered and self-seeking way of thinking that inevitably leads to discord, conflict, hatred, violence and war. The pattern has been with us since Cain killed his brother Abel in a fit of jealousy and rage. And today we continue to kill our brother, only on a vastly larger scale and with ever-increasing efficiency.

So what’s the solution? God has a plan. He doesn’t leave us without hope. His solution is a spiritual heart transplant.

Let’s read about this astounding promise in Ezekiel 36:26: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them . . . you shall be My people, and I will be your God.”

That new heart comes through the transformative power of God’s Holy Spirit. It’s not something we can accomplish on our own. This spiritual transformation is something only God can provide. And as seen in the prophecy above, this is what He will offer to the entire world after Jesus Christ returns.

But you and I don’t have to wait until then! He wants to do this for us now. However, it’s up to us to take the first steps. What does that involve? He tells us plainly:

“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).

This is a process the Bible calls repentance—turning from our own human ways of thinking and living to instead thinking and living as God wants us to. It means abandoning our selfish, sin-sick ways that have brought so much suffering and sorrow on our world and becoming loving sons and daughters of God.

Are you willing to seek the cure for the deadliest virus?
Why Will JESUS CHRIST RETURN?

Many people believe Jesus Christ will soon return to the earth. But they’re not so clear on the reasons for His second coming. In part 1 of a two-part series, we ask: Why does Jesus Christ need to come back? Just what is He coming to do?

by Tom Robinson

Amid the trials of life and worsening times, there remains ever before us a wonderful hope. Though the world is beset by darkness and will yet grow darker, a turning point lies ahead in the coming of the Savior of the world—indeed the second coming, as Christians understand. Is that really going to happen? And why?

It’s commonly believed among those who identify themselves as Christian that Jesus Christ died, rose from the dead, went away to heaven and that He will one day return as He promised. Of course, the nature of this return is disputed. For instance, some think His return is spiritual through the Church. Yet most Christians believe He will literally return in power and glory—and polls reveal that a large percentage believes His return is within mere decades.

Still there are those who ridicule the idea. The Bible warned that scoffers would come in the last days saying, “What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again? From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created” (2 Peter 3:3-4, New Living Translation). Yet as prominent as the belief in Christ’s return is, it stands oddly against another popular conception in conventional theology of people having an immortal soul that flies away to be with Christ immediately at death. This would seem to leave no good reason for Jesus to return and for the resurrection of His followers that is supposed to occur then. There are explanations that try to join these concepts, but they really don’t fit together very well.

Even most who focus on Christ’s return still think of it in terms of a step on the way to heaven. Amid the confusion, we need to understand: Why is Jesus coming back? Is there yet unfinished business for Him here on earth? What does He intend to do when He gets here? And what does it mean for our future? We’ll examine 12 reasons from the Bible—starting with six here and covering the other six in the next installment.

1. To fulfill prophecy and promises

First of all, Jesus specifically said He would return—and He must be true to His word. He told His disciples, “I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3). He further said that in the end time “all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30; see also 26:64). The nations will then be hostile to His return.

As part of “the Revelation of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:1), the apostle John reiterated: “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him” (verse 7). When Jesus’ disciples watched Him ascend into the clouds from the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem, two angels told them, “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). This was an important part of what they would serve as witnesses to (verse 8). And they did—faithfully.

We find the promised return of Christ foretold all through
Why is Jesus coming back? Is there yet unfinished business for Him here on earth? What does He intend to do when He gets here?

powerful Lion of Judah (see Revelation 5:5, 11-13). As Hebrews 9:28 tells us, “...So Christ was offered once to bear the sin of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him...” (verse 13, emphasis added throughout).

Many prophecies speak of the coming of the Lord in might and the great changes He will bring to the world. Some of these prophecies speak of Christ’s first and second comings together even though a gap of time separates these events.

For instance, Isaiah 9:6 begins, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given...” in reference to Jesus’ first coming. But then the prophecy jumps far into the future: “...and the government will be upon His shoulder [as Ruler]! And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever” (verses 6-7). The latter part of this prophecy did not happen at Christ’s first coming, but it will when He comes again.

The One who came as a sacrificial Lamb will return as the

2:13). Paul expressed this longing with what was apparently a common Aramaic prayer in the early Church, Maranatha, translated “O Lord, come!” (see 1 Corinthians 16:22, King James Version).

Jesus must return to maintain the very integrity and honor of the Father and Himself—to uphold the truth of all They have proclaimed. But of course, the promise of Christ’s coming was not just meant to demonstrate Their truthfulness on fulfillment. Other great purposes behind Christ’s return are revealed in many specific promises and prophecies. He definitely has vital work still to do here, as we will see!

2. To save mankind from total destruction

We desperately need Christ’s return, or the human race is doomed.

The world is growing worse and worse. Paul told us to “know this, that in the last days perilous times will come” (2 Timothy 3:1)—times of increasing danger and distress. He then gives a list of selfish, hardhearted and evil attitudes and behavior on the rise (verses 2-5).

This is the age in which we live—becoming more and more like the days of Noah, when people’s thoughts were perpetually evil and God determined to destroy the world with a global flood, except for Noah’s family (Genesis 6:5, 11-13). Jesus said that before His return, conditions would be like the days of Noah, with people going about normal activities amid the increasing wretchedness, oblivious to the catastrophic destruction that was coming (Matthew 24:37-39).

In fact, Jesus said that the end of the age will turn into the worst time ever before His return, warning, “For then there will be great tribulation [horrible trial and distress], such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24:21).

Conditions will be so bad that “unless that time of calamity is shortened [cut short from running its course], not a single person will survive...” (verse 22, NLT). “But,” we’re then told, “for the sake of the elect [God’s chosen people] those days will be cut short” (same verse, English Standard Version).

Mankind has now come to the point where we are able to exterminate ourselves from the planet through nuclear armaments and other weapons of mass destruction. And many prophecies show that the nations are progressing relentlessly to a coming time of terrible world war in which such weapons will be unleashed. Moreover, still other prophecies warn that God will send cataclysmic disasters on an unrepentant humanity that would wipe out any yet remaining if the effects of these disasters are not cut short.

Thankfully, Jesus will intervene as He promised to keep mankind from being obliterated—again, for the sake of those elect or chosen of God!

3. To resurrect and transform His followers to immortality

Jesus promised eternal life to His followers, stating that He would raise them up at the last day (John 6:39-40, 44, 54).

Just after describing all people on earth seeing His return (Matthew 24:30), Jesus said of Himself: “And He will send His...
Many have the idea that Jesus will come just to take us away to live in heaven. But this is not what the Bible teaches. It shows that we will live with Christ on the earth. We look for this time ahead when “the Son of Man will come in power and great glory” (Matthew 16:27). Paul speaks of “when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe” (2 Thessalonians 1:10; compare John 17:24). He will also then show His glory to the nations: “It shall be that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see My glory” (Isaiah 66:18). Indeed, as we earlier read, “every eye will see Him” (Revelation 1:7).

Jesus will at last be given the proper respect and honor due Him!

5. To reign as King over all nations

We are further told that “when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him” (Matthew 25:31-32). At the blowing of the seventh and last trumpet of Revelation, not only will the dead in Christ be raised but a wonderful announcement will go forth: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15, ESV). And then at last the Kingdom of God will come.

Jesus will return in power to take over the nations and rule them as “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (Revelation 19:15-16; compare 17:14). “And the Lord shall be King over all the earth” (Zechariah 14:9). It is prayed in Psalm 67:4: “Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, and govern the nations on earth.”

The word Gospel means “good news”—so what is so good about Jesus Christ’s message of the gospel? Why is it such good news? You really need to understand! Download or request our free study guide The Gospel of the Kingdom today!

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Christ’s followers from this age, then glorified with Him, “shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6)—the Millennium—“and they shall reign on the earth” (5:10, ESV). Rather than going away to remain in heaven, they will live here with vital work to do—bringing wonderful transformation to the whole world. Jesus called this time “the age to come” (Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30) and “the regeneration [or rebirth], when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory” and His 12 apostles “will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28). It will be a time of incredible renewal, starting with Israel and expanding over the whole world!

6. To deliver and elevate Israel

As we’ve seen, Jesus will inherit the throne of David over Israel (Isaiah 9:6-7; see also Luke 1:32). In sitting on this throne, He will rule over all the world, with Israel promoted above all nations. Jesus’ return will enable the fulfillment of God’s plan for Israel.

In recent centuries, the nations descending from ancient Israel have been greatly blessed in fulfillment of promises made to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (see our free study guide The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy to learn more). This is not a matter of racial preference, but of family inheritance and responsibility. God’s intent is to bless all nations through Abraham’s descendants (Genesis 12:1-3; 26:4; 28:14).

However, prophecies show that shortly before Jesus comes back, the Israelite nations—now of northwest European heritage, as well as the Jewish people—will experience the coming time of terrible trial, called the great tribulation, because of egregious national sins. “It is the time of Jacob’s [or Israel’s] trouble, but he shall be saved out of it” (Jeremiah 30:7)—that is, after going through it.

The Israelites and the Jewish people will face animosity and devastating attacks from other nations. God warned the Israelites, “In all your dwelling places the cities shall be laid waste” (Ezekiel 6:6). Jerusalem will be beset with “all nations of the earth . . . gathered against it” (Zechariah 12:1-3).

Yet Jesus will intervene to defend His people: “Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives” (Zechariah 14:3-4). Jesus will return to the very spot from which He left—but now as divine warrior.

Various prophecies show that He will gather the scattered exiles of Israel back to the Promised Land. The two divisions of the nation, the northern tribes of Israel led by Ephraim and the southern tribe of Judah, will be fused back into a single undivided nation ruled again under King David, now resurrected (Ezekiel 37:15-28). As already mentioned, each tribe will be ruled by one of the 12 apostles (Matthew 19:28). And these and David will all reign under Christ’s overall rulership over the world.

Jesus will deliver the Israelites physically and also spiritually. Many think the New Covenant that Jesus brought—through which people are forgiven by His sacrifice and true obedience to God is made possible through His Spirit—was just for the Church in this age. But God said He was making the New Covenant “with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,” whereby He would put His laws in their hearts and minds (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The Lord also foretold that His Spirit would be poured out on the Jewish people at Jerusalem—and that they would look on Him “whom they pierced,” deeply grieving over their rejection of Him for all this time and now ready to repent and follow Him (Zechariah 12:10-11).

“And so,” as Paul writes, “all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins’” (Romans 11:26-27). And this will be wonderful for the rest of the nations (verses 11-12). Israel was meant to be a holy example for the world—as it will be when Christ returns!

Be sure to read about further reasons for Jesus’ second coming in our next issue. As we see already, there is yet much for Him and His followers to accomplish at His return. Trust in His promises. As Hebrews 10:37 assures us, “For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry”!
The Key to Ending Chaos

There are very real causes to the chaos we see in the world around us as well as in our own lives. There is also a very real solution for those who are willing to do what’s required!

by Gary Petty

Have you wished someone could help you find some answers to the chaos we see around us? You can. But it will mean taking a hard look at the real, underlying causes of our political, social, racial and economic problems. In the process you can discover the only solution for a nation, and a world, that is tearing itself apart.

We live in a world where no one can solve the problems because no human society truly acknowledges the Creator. This isn’t the world God designed for us. If this isn’t the world He designed, what political agenda should you embrace to bring change to a troubled world? The answer has to do with what motivates your citizenship.

The United States, and the world, is divided over who is to blame for the political confusion, hatred, violence, international health crisis, racial conflict, economic distress and ever-present anxiety that fills the news cycle and plagues our mental health. It seems everyone is finger-pointing and angrily shouting at those they believe are responsible.

And just who is responsible? We’re going to answer that question.

Where is God?

First let’s ask an even more provocative question: How would you describe God’s dealing with humanity? Where is God in this mess?

It would seem that of all people, Christians should be able to explain God’s solutions. But in reality, those who identify as Christians are deeply divided over the answers to how God wants us to solve the problems of poverty, governance, racial relationships and injustice throughout the world.

The starting point to finding answers is found in Psalm 103:19: “The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all.” The right and true answer to all questions begins with accepting the God of the Bible as the Creator and Ruler over all the earth. But it also means you have to have a clear definition of your true citizenship.

Is God at fault by allowing a corrupt world?

God’s sovereignty doesn’t mean He created this violent, self-destructing, dysfunctional human condition. The story of Adam and Eve isn’t a nice fairy-tale about how to understand good and evil. Their story is the reality of how evil became part of the human experience. Our first parents lived in perfect peace and happiness as long as they followed God’s instructions. Then Satan came into their lives and everything changed.

It is necessary to understand that Satan is a real being. He was one of many angelic beings created by God before the creation of the physical universe. He rebelled against God and now desires to destroy God’s purpose for humanity—and thus God’s purpose for you. Satan influenced our first parents and they became separated from God. According to the apostle Paul, from that point forward their descendants have been spiritually blinded by “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

That means all human history has been a sad, dysfunctional experiment in forming religions, governments and social systems to ensure fairness, equality and safety. It also means that the god of this age, the author of evil, has manipulated people and the course of human history through spiritual blindness. This spiritual blindness is at the root of human inability to govern ourselves without conflict, injustice and violence.

Understand this: God still reigns over the universe. And He is still involved with human beings. But He has allowed wayward humanity a specific length of time to experiment with every kind of government, systems of justice and economic theories we can devise to see that none of it will work apart from Him.
God continues to intervene

God has a plan for humanity, which includes a personal plan for your life. You can discover God’s designed purpose for you—and it has to do with your citizenship. God isn’t far off, ignoring what is happening in this mess. He is acting amidst this human tragedy to carry out His destiny for humanity.

A past example of God’s intervention is found in Isaiah 45:1: “Thus says the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held . . .”

Cyrus was a famous king of Persia. Here is what is interesting about this verse. Isaiah wrote this prophecy a century before Cyrus was even born. Early in his reign Cyrus issued a decree sending Jews who had been scattered by the Babylonian captivity back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple (2 Chronicles 36:22-23). The Jews returned, and years later Jesus the Messiah came into this world as a Jew exactly as the prophecies said He would. Cyrus was used by God to make sure Jesus was born in Judea.

God’s intervention in human history doesn’t mean He controls all human actions. He is allowing us, under the malevolent influences of the god of this age, to create religions, governments and social systems. None of which produces peace, justice, prosperity for all, or shines light through the spiritual blindness of war, crime, hatred, anxiety, suffering and broken lives.

Where is your citizenship?

You live in a world where humanity can’t solve its problems because no human society or government is submitted to the rule of God. If this isn’t the world God designed for us, then what political agenda should we embrace to bring change to a troubled world?

To answer that question you have to first answer this question: How do I define my citizenship?

Here is how the apostle Paul defines Christian citizenship: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20).

Paul had been a prominent leader in the Jewish religious establishment. He was also by birth a citizen of the Roman Empire. But his primary citizenship was in the Kingdom of God, who reigns from heaven.

No political or social movement can solve the human condition. The real problem lies in the mind and heart of each of us. Since the core problem is inside the human heart, only God can supply the solution. This means that the solutions to society’s problems begin with God actively working in your life and bringing about a fundamental change in the inner person. And God will do so. This is part of the gospel message—the good news.

We can keep trying to change other people, or change the government, or change the culture, but until we submit to God and His power to change our inner person, we’ll always end up with the same problems. You can’t change someone else, but God can change you.

Where does our allegiance lie?

We all must humbly realize that as long as Satan is the god of this age, no human effort will free humanity from its spiritual blindness. God is seeking those who wish to come out of the darkness and participate in the only real hope for humanity. God is seeking those who will submit to His rule while living in an age of spiritual darkness.

When you embrace God’s call to citizenship in His higher Kingdom, there is a fundamental change in your allegiance. This isn’t an easy calling. It means more than “accepting Jesus,” singing religious songs and going to church. To become a citizen of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom the prophet Daniel foretold many centuries ago would destroy all human governments, you must accept the values and laws of God’s Kingdom in your life right now. That means you must become, in a real sense, a spiritual stranger in a strange land.

Hebrews 11:13-16 describes the lives of great men and women of faith who died waiting for the restoration of God’s Kingdom on earth:

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country [that is, a transformed world under the rule of God]. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them”—the New Jerusalem, which will come from heaven to the earth (Revelation 21-22).

The reality of true Christianity is to be a stranger and pilgrim on the earth. It is to seek a different “homeland” and to understand that all human attempts to create utopia are doomed to failure. It means embracing a lifelong journey towards the return of Jesus Christ.

The transformation of becoming a citizen of the Kingdom of God

How does being a citizen of the Kingdom of God change your life? It changes everything, because being a citizen of God’s Kingdom is based on accepting not only the sovereignty of God over all humanity, but His ownership of your life right now. It is complete submission to His mission in your life. It is absolute allegiance to Jesus Christ as Savior, Master and King of Kings. This citizenship supersedes all other forms of allegiance and patriotism.

When you give total allegiance to God, and your citizenship is in heaven, you will be transformed by God’s direct intervention in your life. Here’s what you will begin to experience:

**You begin to seek God’s purpose and goals in your life.**

God has a purpose for your life. That purpose has a goal. Remember what Paul wrote, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ . . .” Jesus Christ is returning to earth to tear down all human governments and restore God’s rule over His creation.

Being a citizen of the Kingdom of God means accepting the sovereignty of God over you and all humanity, and supersedes all other forms of allegiance and patriotism.
When you seek God’s future He has designed for you, you in turn must accept His directions toward that future. This may be the most difficult thing for human beings to do. All of us want to be our own masters. We want to control our immediate environment and everyone else around us so we can feel secure and happy.

But the foundation of faith is to give leadership of your life over to God as a loving Father. You can only give up the need to control if you trust in God’s involvement in your life now and look forward to His promised future. You must pray to God and let Him lead your life.

**You begin to change your priorities.**

How do you spend your time? Time is a great gift God has given to each of us. When we allow God to set our priorities, the consuming desire to make money and own things is replaced with a consuming desire to live as a devoted son or daughter of God.

The need for status is replaced with the need to love others. The search for self-determination is replaced with seeking God’s way of life. The desire for constant entertainment and immediate gratification is replaced with a peaceful understanding of what is really valuable in life—having a relationship with God as His child and showing His love to others.

**You begin to change how you spend your mental and emotional energy.**

We waste so much of our lives in resentment, selfishness, envy and other destructive thoughts and emotions. But notice what God wants to produce in your life: “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness [and] self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). This can only happen when you acknowledge that you need God’s rule in your life and accept your absolute inability to heal your spiritual blindness.

**You begin to obey God’s commandments.**

You must accept the right of the Creator to have dominion over His creation—part of which is you. Just as there are physical laws like gravity that govern the universe, there are spiritual laws that govern your relationship with God and your relationships with others. It is meaningless to “confess Jesus” and at the same time ignore His directions because that means our citizenship is not in the Kingdom He proclaimed.

**How do citizens of God’s Kingdom interact with civil governments?**

Dedicating your life to being a citizen of the Kingdom of God naturally raises this question: How are Christians to interact with the civil government where they live?

The apostle Peter addressed this question to the early Christians who lived under the heavy foot of the Roman Empire: “Dear friends, I warn you as ‘temporary residents and foreigners’ to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when He judges the world.

“For the Lord’s sake, submit to all human authority—whether the king as head of state, or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right. It is God’s will that your honorable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you. For you are free, yet you are God’s slaves, so don’t use your freedom as an excuse to do evil. Respect everyone, and love the family of believers. Fear God, and respect the king” (1 Peter 2:11-17, New Living Translation).

Notice that Peter, like the writer of Hebrews, addresses the followers of Jesus as “temporary residents and foreigners.” They may have been citizens of a particular region, or even a citizen of the Roman Empire, but they were intensely aware that their primary citizenship was in the Kingdom of God.

Peter instructs them to submit to the civil authorities so that “even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when He judges the world.”

Christians were persecuted by the Romans for their allegiance to God the Father and to Jesus as their King. Still Peter tells them to obey the laws of the land so that when Jesus returns the civil leaders will know that His followers were among them. Obviously, Peter doesn’t mean that Christians are to follow civil leaders if they tell them to disobey God (see Acts 5:29). Every Christian’s primary allegiance is to God and His laws, but the followers of Christ should also be known for their respect for authorities, peacefulness and care for others.

During Jesus’ ministry, He was confronted by a group of Herodians, essentially a political party, with the question of whether Jews should pay taxes to the Romans. This was a trick question. If Jesus answered that they were to pay taxes to the Romans, He could be accused of supporting the evil empire...
Is God controlling all human decisions?

We find an example of God’s powerful intervention in human affairs in the biblical book of Daniel. In this well-known story in chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar, the great king of Babylon, had a troubling dream. Daniel, a young Jew who was forced to serve in the king’s palace, was inspired by God to tell Nebuchadnezzar that his dream had been divinely inspired.

Daniel described how the dream involved a strange image of a man with a head made of gold, arms and chest of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron mixed with clay. A large stone smashed the feet of the image, and it came crashing down into a heap of rubble that was then blown away by the wind.

The king was told by Daniel that his dream reveals how various empires, reaching across centuries into the future, would be involved in God’s plan for humanity. Daniel declared that the head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire, with the other three metal parts symbolizing successor kingdoms. History shows that Babylon was followed by the Persian, Greek and Roman empires.

The first of these empires interacted with the Jewish nation. The fourth empire interacted with both the Jewish nation and the Church founded by Jesus. The prophecy ends with the hope of a future event when “the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed” (verse 44). We see in Daniel’s story a man who, while living in a foreign land, understood his true citizenship.

An example of how God also allows human beings to create their own destruction is found in the history of ancient Israel recorded in the book of Judges. In spite of God’s interaction with them, Israel spent centuries trapped in a self-destructive cycle. During this time a man named Abimelech, a son of the judge Gideon, conspired with other men who craved power. He killed most of Gideon’s other sons and set himself up as king. A reading of his story in the book of Judges shows that things did not turn out well for Abimelech or his followers, who were without God’s blessing (Judges 9).

Israel later became a major kingdom in the Middle East. God ultimately determined the nation’s kings in carrying out His plan on earth. The three most famous kings were Saul, David and Solomon. After Solomon’s death Israel entered a long period of rejecting God and slid into lawlessness and anarchy.

Around 200 years after the death of Solomon, God told the prophet Hosea to warn the nation of coming invasion: “Set the trumpet to your mouth! He shall come like an eagle against the house of the LORD, because they have transgressed My covenant and rebelled against My law. Israel will cry to Me, ‘My God, we know You!' Israel has rejected the good; the enemy will pursue him. They set up kings, but not by Me; they made princes, but I did not acknowledge them” (Hosea 8:1-4).

Because of their rebellion against His ways, God was not directly guiding Israel’s government or society. This shocked the Israelites who cried out, “My God, we know You!” God’s response was that He didn’t accept them. We see in this that God doesn’t control all human affairs, but allows us to go our own way within limits. We see that without submitting to God’s sovereignty, all human attempts to create the perfect government will sow the seeds of their own downfall.

and lose support among the Jewish people. If He said they weren’t to pay taxes, He could be accused of sedition and arrested by the Roman authorities.

Jesus asked for a coin and then asked the Herodians whose inscription was on it. They answered that it was Caesar’s. Jesus responded, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:15-21).

Here Jesus explains the tension of being a citizen of an earthly kingdom and at the same time a citizen of the Kingdom of God. The coin bore the image of Caesar, showing it belonged to him. But what bears the image of God, showing God’s ownership? Human beings who are made in God’s image! Jesus’ point, then, is that all of us must give ourselves wholly to God.

Christians must live in allegiance to God and the laws and values of His Kingdom. And this includes compliance with the laws of human governments as long as the human laws don’t conflict with allegiance to God. Jesus, Peter and Paul all instructed Christians to be good citizens of the countries where they lived. Yet all three of them chose loyalty to God’s Kingdom as their first allegiance and were killed for it.

Focusing your life

We opened here with a partial list of groups accused of causing the chaos in our world. Who is actually to blame? All of those listed play a part. So do you and I if we are not first and foremost citizens of the Kingdom of God. And don’t forget the god of this age. Satan does his most effective work in chaos. Chaos is the breeding ground for evil. When Jesus returns, He must first remove Satan from being able to influence human beings. Only then will all people be able to experience true freedom and happiness for the first time since Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden.

All of us should be aware of what is happening in our world. We are all distressed by the chaos, suffering and evil. It helps to always keep this in mind: The sovereign Ruler over the universe has already foretold the failure of all human efforts to try and live outside His Kingdom.

This isn’t the world God designed for us. He is sending Jesus Christ to replace the worn-out, dysfunctional world of this age by restoring God’s Kingdom on earth. The more you focus your life on the chaos, the more you become part of the problem. Instead, focus your thoughts, actions and energy on the hope, salvation and unity Jesus Christ will bring to all humanity when He returns.

God is going to create a new world. He is calling all those who want to be part of that great movement to come out of this world and become citizens of His Kingdom!
“Who Will Listen to My Warning?”

The prophet Jeremiah warned the rebellious people of ancient Judah that they needed to turn to God in humble obedience. How do Jeremiah’s admonitions apply to the people of today’s lawless world?

Don’t you want people to listen to you, especially when you have something important to say? Imagine, for example, that you see whiffs of smoke rising from a house indicating a fire. You immediately start to warn people living there—but, shockingly, no one pays any attention to you!

At that point you quickly call the fire department, but even then the operator treats your report with indifference. As you watch flames beginning to rise from the house, you become more insistent. But the operator curtly dismisses you and tells you to get off the phone! Stunned, you hang up and ask: Will no one listen?

It seems unlikely that such a scenario would occur in the report of a real fire. But something like this did happen when God’s prophets gave urgent warnings to the rebellious ancient nations of Israel and Judah about the devastating inferno of sin in their midst. The response of their leaders and citizens was similar to what was just described. The prophets and their admonitions were repeatedly met with indifference or derision.

When the prophet Jeremiah experienced such reactions he lamented: “Who can I speak to? Who will listen to my warning?” (Jeremiah 6:10, Evangelical Heritage Version).

Who heeded Jeremiah? Who really cared? The answer was—nearly no one!

He then said: “Their ears are closed; they cannot hear. They’re deaf to anything about God. The Eternal’s word is offensive to them. They take no delight in it” (Jeremiah 6:10, The Voice).

Why is it important to explore God’s warnings through Jeremiah and other prophets? Because they have significant application to the nations of today. In fact, many prophetic statements have dual application—meaning there’s a preliminary fulfillment as well as a later or final fulfillment, often to occur at the time of the end. (You can learn about prophetic duality by reading our free study guide You Can Understand Bible Prophecy.)

Two nations that ignored God’s warnings

Before examining Jeremiah’s poignant warnings, let’s briefly note what occurred in Israel’s history following the death of King Solomon in 931 B.C. The Bible explains that at that point, the kingdom experienced a contentious division into two nations—the southern kingdom of Judah, consisting of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and the northern kingdom of Israel, made up of the other 10 tribes (1 Kings 12:1-18).

Soon afterward, God sent several prophets to the northern kingdom—including Elijah, Hosea, Amos, Micah and others—to proclaim strong cautionary messages regarding their disobedience and what would result if it continued (Hosea 4:1-2). For example, Hosea warned that if the nation didn’t comply, God would allow it to be invaded and enslaved by the Assyrian Empire. This disastrous event occurred in two waves in the 700s B.C. (Hosea 7:13; 8:14; 2 Kings 15:29; 17:5-6).
In addition, God sent prophets to the kingdom of Judah, including Jeremiah, Isaiah, Micah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah and others. These faithful servants gave powerful warnings to the leaders and people about the coming result of their persistent disregard of God and His laws (2 Chronicles 36:14-16).

Jeremiah’s prophetic efforts spanned 40 years of Judea’s tumultuous history. It began during the 13th year of King Josiah’s kingship in 627 B.C. and continued until the 11th year of King Zedekiah’s reign in 587 B.C.—when troops of the Babylonian Empire conquered the entire nation, subjugated its people and destroyed the temple in Jerusalem.

From the outset of Jeremiah’s ministry, he warned the leaders and people that their beloved nation risked this precise calamity if they didn’t reject idolatry and other appalling conduct:

“The Lord said to me, ‘From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land. I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdoms,’ declares the Lord. ‘Their kings will come and set up their thrones in the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem; they will come against all her surrounding walls and against all the towns of Judah. I will pronounce my judgments on my people because of their wickedness in forsaking me, in burning incense to other gods and in worshiping what their hands have made” (Jeremiah 1:14-16, New International Version).

As Jeremiah conveyed these warnings, he also reminded the people of God’s great mercy if they responded in sincere humility and repentance (Jeremiah 3:12; 22; 31:20). Indeed, God was tremendously concerned about the Judean people and wanted them to cast off rebellious, profane conduct.

But, then, what about today? Has God somehow changed so that He ignores the mountains of sin committed by the people of our age? The scriptural answer is categorically no! God has never changed in His abhorrence of all iniquity (Malachi 3:6; Proverbs 6:16-19).

Today’s urgent need to turn to God

Today there is an urgent need for all nations to turn to God in deep respect and obedience. This is especially crucial for the people of the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the nations of northwest Europe. Why? Because they are the modern-day descendants of ancient Israel. (For more information on this important subject, read our study guide The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy). A significant portion of end-time Bible prophecy is directed toward them.

Plus, returning to God is particularly essential for America since, unlike any other nation, it had a unique, biblically centered formation. The country’s forefathers, who were on the whole deeply religious, recognized the tremendous value of God’s laws outlined in the Bible, and they sought His guidance and blessings in their founding deliberations.

American University School of Public Affairs professor Daniel Dreisbach stated in a speech on May 19, 2017: “The founding fathers read the Bible. Their many quotations from and allusions to both familiar and obscure scriptural passages tell us that they knew the Bible well. Biblical language and themes liberally seasoned their rhetoric; the phrases and the cadences of the King James Bible, especially, informed their written and spoken words. The ideas of the Bible shaped their habits of mind and informed their political pursuits.”

The Declaration of Independence was signed by 56 delegates to the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, in Philadelphia, Penn. The preamble of this famous document expresses how the founders comprehended that the Eternal God created human beings and provided them with inherent rights. It states:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” (emphasis added throughout). The Declaration notes that the signers were “appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions” and concludes by stating, “. . . with a firm reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.”

To determine the principles of the new American government, the Constitutional Convention was held from May 14 to Sept. 17, 1787, in Philadelphia. One of the most famous of its 55 delegates, Benjamin Franklin, said: “I have lived, sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth: that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid?”

There is no question that the Bible and Christian principles influenced the lives and actions of America’s forefathers. For example, the nation’s first president George Washington said, “It is impossible to govern the universe without the aid of a Supreme Being.” He also said, “To the distinguished character of patriot, it should be our highest glory to add the more distinguished character of Christian.” John Adams, the nation’s second president, stated, “The general principles . . . of Christianity are as eternal and immutable as the existence and attributes of God.” Virginia governor and famous patriot Patrick Henry wrote, “The Bible is a book worth more than all the other books that were ever printed.”

Bible knowledge has deteriorated

Likewise, many former U.S. presidents expressed their strong support of Holy Scripture. For example, 16th president Abraham Lincoln penned: “In regard for this Great Book, I have this to say, it is the best gift God has given to man. All the good Savior gave to the world was communicated through this Book.”

Franklin Roosevelt, the 32nd president, wrote: “We cannot read the history of our rise and development as a nation without reckoning with the place the Bible has occupied in shaping the advances of the Republic. Where we have been the truest and most consistent in obeying its precepts, we have attained the greatest measure of contentment and prosperity.”

Ronald Reagan, America’s 40th president, stated: “Inside the Bible’s pages lie all the answers to all of the problems man has ever known. It is my firm belief that the enduring values presented in its pages have a great meaning for each of us and for our nation.”

Due to the foresight of America’s leaders and its citizens’ desire to honor God and observe His laws, He blessed them with great freedom, safety and material prosperity. How tragic, then, to see what has happened in the United States, especially over the past several decades. Sadly, Christianity itself and Bible knowledge in particular have deteriorated to the point that a substantial number of people today are biblically illiterate.
Lifeway Research of Nashville, Tenn.—which conducts research projects on faith and culture—surveyed 1,000 Americans on their views about the Bible. An article by religion editor Bob Smietana on April 25, 2017, explained the findings: “[M]ore than half of Americans have read little or none of the Bible. Less than a quarter of those who have ever read a Bible have a systematic plan for reading the Christian scriptures each day. And a third of Americans never pick it up on their own. . . . Most Americans don’t know first-hand the overall story of the Bible—because they rarely pick it up.” [LifeWay’s executive director Scott] McConnell commented, ‘Even among worship attendees, less than half read the Bible daily. The only time most Americans hear from the Bible is when someone else is reading it.’

Additionally, an Oct. 17, 2019 report from the Pew Research Center titled “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace” states that according to “telephone surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019, 65% of American adults describe themselves as Christians when asked about their religion, down 12 percentage points over the past decade. Meanwhile, the religiously unaffiliated share of the population, consisting of people who describe their religious identity as atheist, agnostic or ‘nothing in particular,’ now stands at 26%, up from 17% in 2009.”

Abandoning the flawless values expressed in the Word of God has led to horrible results. Consider for example, how the sacred marriage relationship has been disgraced through widespread divorce. In addition, the nation has experienced pervasive sexual immorality and perversion as well as the appalling killing of tens of millions of babies through abortion. These and many other evils have left America dangerously close to being branded as a byword for lawlessness among the nations.

As John Winthrop, the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony of New England, warned: “For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword through the world.”

God’s warnings today through His true Church

Similar to how nearly no one listened to God’s ancient prophets, most people today will not heed the teachings He gives through His true Church (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20). The prophet Isaiah described the corrupt conduct of both the people of ancient Israel and their contemporary descendants when he wrote: “This is a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of the Lord; who say to the seers, ‘Do not see,’ and to the prophets, ‘Do not prophesy to us right things; speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits. Get out of the way, turn aside from the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us” (Isaiah 30:9-11).

Such impertinence brings the accelerating loss of God’s favor and divine protection. Similar to what happened to ancient Israel and Judah, these modern-day nations, if they choose to remain unrepentant, will ultimately experience a devastating downfall resulting from their brazen disregard of God and His commandments. This punishment will occur during a time described as “Jacob’s trouble,” when they will be attacked, plundered and vanquished by enemies (Jeremiah 30:5-7).

To avoid this devastating outcome, people must hear and respond to God’s urgent warnings to repent and change—expressed today by His Church proclaiming His Word through this magazine, numerous other publications, television and the Internet. The Church has the same responsibility God gave His faithful prophet Isaiah: “Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins” (Isaiah 58:1).

Not only does God speak through the Holy Scriptures today, but He also allows what could be termed “wake-up warnings” to alert people to the disasters awaiting them if they choose not to listen and change.

Consider some of the major wake-up calls that have shouted for Americans’ attention in the past several years:

• The Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., that killed almost 3,000 people.
• The 2008 global financial crisis, which until that time was the worst economic disaster since the Great Depression of the 1930s.
• The 2020 coronavirus pandemic, which has greatly impacted people’s physical and emotional health as well as the entire world’s economic life.
• The riots and protests in 2020 that, according to insurance industry estimates, could result in a total of billions of dollars in damage.

Do you hear God’s warning?

Will other severe warnings occur to rouse people out of their state of indifference and sinfulness? For example, could there yet be a severe economic depression? What about a massive attack on the nation’s electrical power grid? Or a significant cyberattack on business, government and military computer systems? Maybe a great drought that severely limits crop and meat production, resulting in widespread food shortages? Or an enormous earthquake or some other massive natural disaster?

Sadly, since many people today have no interest in knowing God or learning from His divine Word, they will be blind to these and other danger signals that could arise in the coming days (Matthew 24:37-39).

Finally, when Jeremiah asked, “Who will listen to my warning?” he sincerely hoped that his countrymen would hear his message and turn to God in heartfelt repentance (Jeremiah 9:12, 20). Similarly, as God’s Church preaches the gospel of God’s coming Kingdom as a witness and warns people of the consequences of their sins, we too hope and pray that people will respond positively to God’s urgent admonitions. However, just as most people didn’t listen to Jeremiah in his day, most will refuse to listen and repent now.

What about you? Will you hear and heed God’s warning?
The Bible’s Prophetic Festivals

God gave seven annual festivals that present the work of Jesus Christ in saving humanity. It’s vital that all of us learn of them and what they teach.

by Vince Szymkowiak and Tom Robinson

As His Word the Holy Bible reveals, the Creator God made human beings with the intent of their becoming part of His family—billions of children joining God the Father and Jesus Christ in glory forever, sharing Their nature and character.

However, from the time of the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, mankind has been led astray by the rebellious fallen angel now known as Satan the devil. Under his influence, all people have sinned—disobeyed God—and come under the resultant penalties, ultimately death (see Romans 3:23; 6:23).

So is humanity lost beyond recovery? Has God’s plan to produce His family been thwarted? By no means, for God had already established a plan to save His precious children before they even existed.

The Bible presents God’s awesome plan of salvation. Spanning ages, it encompasses some being led in this age to realize their need for forgiveness of sin on through to the time when salvation will be offered to all who have ever lived. The major steps in this plan are revealed through the biblical festivals God’s Word instructs us to observe (laid out sequentially in Leviticus 23). And through these annual commemorations we learn the key role Jesus Christ performs in mankind’s salvation.

The Passover

Exodus 12 introduces the Passover lamb as a means of redemption for the ancient Israelites in Egyptian slavery. When God sent a plague of death on the land of Egypt, the blood of the sacrificed lambs around the doors of the Israelite houses allowed the Israelites to be spared. This occasion was to be observed every year on the same day it occurred in early spring as a memorial (see also Leviticus 23:4-5). Yet the sacrificed lamb without blemish more importantly served as a representation of Jesus Christ, who was without any spiritual blemish of sin.

The New Testament reveals that Christ was killed on the very Passover day and that He is “our Passover, sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7). Indeed, He is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Through His sacrifice we are by God’s grace forgiven of sin and ultimately spared from sin’s penalty of death.

Today Christians are commanded to observe the memorial of the Passover yearly at the same time by drinking of the cup of the New Covenant and eating unleavened bread in remembrance of Christ’s incredible sacrifice. By doing so, we solemnly and thankfully remember the Lord’s death until He returns (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). This festival pictures the start of God’s plan of redemption—the washing away of our sins by the very blood of Jesus Christ.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

So, being forgiven of sins by God’s grace through the sacrifice of Christ, are we entitled to go on sinning? Paul asks, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” (Romans 6:1). In other words, do we just stay the way we are and continue our sinful habits while expecting God to look the other way? Paul answers emphatically: “Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (verse 2).

Rather, in deep appreciation of what God has done and is doing for us through His Son, we continue to repent of our sins and live a changed life. As we come under God’s grace and mercy, we must continue to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

The Days of Unleavened Bread immediately follow the Passover (Leviticus 23:5-8). Historically, the seven days of this festival commemorate the time that the freed Israelites departed from Egypt and its godless ways. For a Christian living under the New Covenant, these days reveal the convicting truth that we must leave our sinful ways and work to overcome sin. We cannot continue in sin!

Yet, unlike the Israelites of old, we have a new and better way to accomplish this spiritual work. This festival begins to tell us how a new life, based on Christ, can be achieved.

This seven-day festival highlights elements of the work of Jesus Christ that are essential for our understanding the salvation process of God the Father. For one, it was during this festival that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, three days and nights after being placed in the tomb, as He said He would (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). This central truth of Scripture is key to our salvation.
because without a risen Savior we are still in our sins without hope (verses 14, 17).

Scripture tells us that for this one-week period we are to avoid leavening, an agent that causes bread to rise in baking (yeast in the biblical period). Leaven represents “malice and wickedness” or sin (1 Corinthians 5:8). And for this one week we instead eat unleavened bread with our meals (Exodus 12:15, 19-20). By doing so, we are reminded of our constant need to put sin out of our lives and to put sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:8) into our lives.

Furthermore, the Days of Unleavened Bread also picture the work of the risen Christ. In fulfillment of a special firstfruits grain offering brought during this festival (see Leviticus 23:9-14; 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23), Jesus, at the time it was to be offered, ascended to the throne of God to present Himself for acceptance as the beginning of God’s spiritual harvest of humanity and as the One who leads us all in the way of salvation. Being accepted as the Lamb of God, He entered the Most Holy Place with His own blood and began a new role as High Priest making intercession for us (Hebrews 9:12, 24-25).

Moreover, this ongoing work makes the eating of unleavened bread throughout this festival all the more significant. Jesus Christ, as the bread of life (John 6:48, 51), enters the life of a Christian through God’s Spirit. It is then possible to live a new life with and through the help of Jesus Christ as He lives again through and in us.

The apostle Paul spoke of this awesome truth when he wrote, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, King James Version).

The Feast of Pentecost

The next festival God revealed to the Israelites (Leviticus 23:15-22) came in late spring in Israel after seven weeks or on the 50th day following the offering of the firstfruits that took place during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. On this day—called the Feast of Weeks (Exodus 34:22; Deuteronomy 16:10, 16), Pentecost (meaning 50th in Greek) and the Feast of Harvest (Exodus 23:16)—another firstfruits grain offering was presented. This day pictures the next step in God’s great plan of salvation.

Acts 2 explains that God’s Holy Spirit was poured out on Christ’s disciples on this very day. God’s Spirit forever changed these people. Peter immediately gave an inspired sermon and exclaimed to the multitudes gathered: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

Yes, the promise of receiving the Holy Spirit is available to all those whom God is calling today. Those who receive God’s Spirit are said to have “the firstfruits of the Spirit” (Romans 8:23), being themselves “a kind of firstfruits of His creatures” (James 1:18).

While Jesus, as we saw, was the firstfruits of God’s spiritual harvest of mankind, here we see that Christ’s followers in this age are also considered firstfruits—Jesus therefore being first of the firstfruits. One implication of God’s servants in the present age being His firstfruits is that others will be spiritually converted at a later time—a fact we will see more about shortly.

Progressing from spring to fall festivals

So far, we see a logical progression in God’s plan of salvation. First, Jesus, our Passover lamb, demonstrates God’s love for us by dying for our sins.

Second, the Days of Unleavened bread teach us to overcome sin in our lives and to look to the risen Christ to deliver us from sin’s power and help us live righteously.

Third, we learn through the Day of Pentecost that God promises to give to us of the Holy Spirit—His power, mind and life—as firstfruits in the spiritual harvest of His family. It is only through the Spirit that we can “put to death the [sinful] deeds of the body” (Romans 8:13) and walk as Christ walked.

Now let’s take a look at the last four festivals. Coming in late summer and autumn in the land of Israel, the prophetic fall feasts represent events that come later than those pictured by the spring festivals. Indeed, they foreshadow wonderful events yet to take place in God’s great plan.

The Feast of Trumpets

Leviticus 23:23-25 commands God’s people to observe “a sabbath rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets.”

Trumpets had great meaning for the Israelites. They were used in the calling of special assemblies (Numbers 10:1-10) and to sound the alarm for war (Jeremiah 4:19). Moreover, God had come down in a manifestation of power at Mount Sinai to reveal His law with the blaring of a trumpet (Exodus 19:16-19).

Scripture also prophesies that trumpets will serve as heralds of great future events soon to take place on the earth. The book of Revelation tells us that seven trumpets will be sounded by angels to announce awesome end-time events. The first angel’s trumpet will announce a great plague of hail, fire and blood, which will destroy a third part of the earth’s vegetation (Revelation 8:7).

More trumpet blasts will be heard, culminating with the seventh and last trumpet (Revelation 11:15). This trumpet announces the return of Jesus Christ to the earth and the establishment of His glorious Kingdom over all nations.

We are also told by the apostle Paul that this trumpet will signal the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the transformation of all Christ’s followers from physical flesh to glorified spirit existence (1 Thessalonians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 15:50-52). Jesus Himself said that His chosen people will be gathered at the “great sound of a trumpet” (Matthew 24:31).

As we observe this festival of Trumpets today, we are to keep in mind the great events that will soon take place on the earth, culminating in the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the saints.

The Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:26-32) is mentioned in the New Testament in Acts 27:9, where it is called “the Fast,” as marginal notes in many Bibles today affirm. It was thus familiar to New Testament Christians as a day they still observed with fasting.

This Day of Atonement, on which we are to fast, is called “a sabbath of solemn rest” (Leviticus 23:27-32). The ancient rituals for the day are explained in great detail in Leviticus 16. A central
ceremony involved two goats, one sacrificed in representation of the Lord and the other called in Hebrew אֶזֶר (ez)el, meaning “goat of departure.” Some early translators used the word “scapegoat,” thinking the goat escaped free. The word has since come to mean one who is innocent but is made to bear blame. Neither sense fits here.

In some other translations, such as the New Revised Standard Version, the Hebrew word אזֶר (Azazel) is used, some maintaining that Azazel is the name of a demon.

Some claim that the Azazel goat represents Jesus Christ just as the first goat, but this is an illogical interpretation once we understand the fate of the Azazel goat. Leviticus 16:22 tells us, “The goat shall bear on itself all their [i.e., the Israelites’] iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he [the suitable man chosen for the task (verse 21)] shall release the goat in the wilderness.”

This goat was not allowed to return to dwell among humanity. It was driven away and banished. This is the exact opposite concept of the role of Jesus Christ, who as Immanuel—meaning “God With Us” (Matthew 1:23)—has promised to always be with us. He tells us He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). So, in contrast to the goat of departure, Jesus will be with us always.

It is Satan who will be banished from the face of humanity. At Jesus’ return, the devil will be bound and cast into a bottomless pit (Revelation 20:1-3)—and later taken out of the picture for that time.

The Day of Atonement pictures the wonderful time when humanity at large will repent and accept the atoning sacrifice of Christ, as pictured by the first goat, and Satan will be banished, as pictured by the driving away of the second goat. We will be given complete victory over the devil through Jesus Christ.

The Feast of Tabernacles

The next annual festival, the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:33-36), was celebrated by the ancient Israelites with makeshift shelters, recalling their transitory dwelling when they left Egypt and made their way to the Promised Land.

Also called the Feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23:16; Deuteronomy 34:22), this festival celebrated the late summer and early fall harvest in the land of Israel. In a spiritual sense it represents the great ingathering of God’s spiritual harvest of mankind following Christ’s return. This feast looks forward to the time of the earthly rule of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Himself observed this feast during His ministry and told others to do so as well (John 7:8-14). The Bible even states that instead of being done away, this feast will be observed by the gentile (non-Israelite) nations during Christ’s reign over the earth (Zechariah 14:9, 16-18).

Scripture tells us that the resurrected saints will reign with Christ. Revelation 20:4 says: “And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them . . . And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (compare Daniel 7:27).

The wonderful truth is that when Christ returns, true Christians from this age will rule under Him as kings and priests (Revelation 5:10; 20:6)—leading the rest of the world into God’s ways.

The Eighth Day

Immediately following the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles is another Holy Day or Sabbath—referred to in Scripture simply as “the eighth day” (Leviticus 23:36, 39). This day pictures the most joyful of all events yet to take place in God’s great plan.

We should consider that the celebration of the ingathering of all humanity is not complete with the 1,000-year reign of Christ. For what about all those who died in this age who were not called as part of God’s firstfruits? There will yet remain billions of people from this age who are not saved.

So are they forever lost?

Many Bible students realize that one day we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). What most don’t realize is that for those who died without the true knowledge of the plan of salvation, the time will come when they will be resurrected to physical life and given their first opportunity to really understand God’s plan and make an informed choice about it.

Revelation 20:11-15 speaks of this time yet to come 1,000 years after the “first resurrection” (verse 6), when “the rest of the dead” will in a second resurrection be restored to life (see verse 5). Ezekiel 37:1-14 describes the same period—a time when those who seemed doomed with all hope lost (verse 11) will be raised to life again. They will be astonished to find out that God will offer to them His Holy Spirit (verse 14) and give them the opportunity to really know for the first time just who the true God is (verse 13).

This vision, then, speaks of the time when all humanity who never sufficiently understood God’s truth will at last come to know it. It will be at this time that they will have to decide whether or not they will submit to and serve God. In other words, their salvation is dependent on whether or not they will choose to accept Jesus’ shed blood for their sins and serve God faithfully once they come to know Him.

This will be a time of judgment in the sense that the new lives of these multitudes will be under evaluation. Those who stay on the right path with God’s help will be saved. Those who ultimately reject God are the only ones who will be condemned in the end. Undoubtedly, most of humanity will make the right decision to obey Him and continue in His ways.

God, in His great wisdom, has a plan to offer everyone who has ever lived an opportunity to inherit eternal life. He is calling some to repentance now, and the rest He will call during the millennial reign of Christ and the second resurrection period that follows.

If you have read this far and are coming to understand God’s great plan, perhaps you are being called at this time. May God help you to respond to His call to receive Jesus Christ and follow His ways—including observance of these important festivals that show the way to eternal salvation in God’s family!
The Supreme Court: Turning the World Upside Down

The U.S. Supreme Court has again defied God—by not only denying His Word but also scientific reality.

by Darris McNeely

On June 15, 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a ruling that redefined the meaning of “sex.” The court has now decreed that “sex” (in discrimination law) means more than biology and genes and DNA. Sex is now interpreted to mean one’s personal preference and identity—i.e., men can now claim to be women and women can claim to be men, and everyone is legally obligated to accept such obvious falsehoods as true and normal.

This sweeping ruling will impact every part of U.S. culture—from schools and businesses to churches and restrooms. The Supreme Court has again, as it did in the same-sex marriage decision of 2015, crossed a line into the realm of God and interfered with the biblically established divine order of life itself.

God made human beings in His image, declaring them “male and female” with distinctive biological and spiritual roles. Without a hint of God’s will or purpose mentioned in the ruling, the court has rendered a debasing and unrighteous decision on sexual morality that will further erode America’s moral and spiritual culture.

This decision, like earlier Supreme Court decisions, invites divine judgment on a people who do not wish to keep God in their knowledge.

What does this mean going forward?

The Supreme Court’s ruling essentially rewrites the 1964 Civil Rights Act barring discrimination in employment on the basis of “race, color, religion, sex, [and] national origin.” The court redefined “sex” to mean more than man or woman, male or female.

In the process the six-justice majority bypassed Congress as the nation’s constitutionally delegated lawmaking branch of government. It set a precedent of reinterpreting the clear meaning of a law written by an earlier generation.

The 1964 Civil Rights law was landmark legislation aimed at righting historic injustice. The meaning of the word “sex” in context referred only to whether a person is biologically male or female. Now, 56 years later, public views have changed and the court has reinterpreted this word with a never-intended meaning.

In a powerful dissent, Justice Samuel Alito condemned the ruling as “preposterous” and showing “breathtaking arrogance.” Alito warned that the decision will have wide-ranging destructive impacts on key freedoms Americans hold dear, and that “the entire Federal Judiciary will be mired for years in disputes about the reach of the Court’s reasoning.”

His dissent lays out seven different realms of American life that will be affected by this ruling. Those seven areas are:

- **Bathrooms and changing rooms.** The ramifications here are far-reaching and involve the safety of women and underage children, as this ruling means that biological men can now use women’s restrooms and other women-only facilities. It opens the door for tragic cases of abuse.

- **Women’s sports.** As Justice Alito notes, “The effect of the Court’s reasoning may be to force young women to compete against students who have a very significant biological advantage, including students who have the size and strength of a male but identify as female and students who are taking male hormones in order to transition from female to male.”

- **Religious employment.** Again Justice Alito noted in the dissent: “Briefs filed by a wide range of religious groups—Christian, Jewish, and Muslim—express deep concern that the position now adopted by the Court will trigger open conflict with faith-based employment practices of numerous churches, synagogues, mosques, and other religious institutions.” In other words, those who hold to biblical definitions of male and female may be forced to hire or keep as employees individuals who deny and defy these biblical definitions.

- **Health care.** There are multiple issues here. Alito warns, “Transgender employees have brought suit . . . to challenge employer-provided health insurance plans that do not cover costly sex reassignment surgery.” So we would see the cost of health plans increase as employers, employees and taxpayers are forced to foot the bill for such surgeries that are understood by many to be morally wrong.

- **Freedom of speech.** Alito warns: “The Court’s decision may even affect the way employers address their employees and the way teachers and school officials address students.” As has already happened in a number of cases, people can and will be punished for speaking the truth about such madness.

- **Constitutional claims.** The issues here are wide-ranging and go beyond what we have space to discuss now. But the majority ruling has the abrupt effect of broad legislation that will impact many other areas of public life without the moderating and settling effect of debate, discussion and deliberate legislation over
time. The real effect is that six unelected officials have determined that an entire nation of more than 330 million people must accept and pretend that an obvious lie is in fact true.

Those who are cheering the current decision strongly feel the court is merely catching up with where the rest of the country is. But frankly, the culture is moving so rapidly on these issues that it’s difficult to stay informed about what is happening and the meaning and ramifications for all of society.

America still has a strong traditional religious stream flowing through its culture. This decision, and the social fallout, will widen the cultural and political divide in America. Those who hold to a form of biblical morality will feel further alienated. We are watching a nation distance itself from God-ordained morality based not only on the revelation of Scripture but the scientific facts of biology established by God as Creator.

Four blasphemous Supreme Court decisions

In the last 60 years the U.S. Supreme Court has issued four landmark decisions impacting faith and God in the public realm. Each decision has violated godly principles, laws and the divine order of creation put in place by our Creator.

In the early 1960s the Supreme Court issued two rulings regarding prayer and Bible readings in public schools. In the first, the justices ruled that prayer had no place in public education. A year later, the court declared school-sponsored Bible reading and recitation of the Lord’s Prayer unconstitutional.

While the decisions didn’t rule for or against personal expressions of faith, they were part of a period of cultural change that continues to this day. The court ruled on a matter of great spiritual importance for a nation blessed with a unique place in the world—a place made possible by the God of heaven.

In biblical terms, this act “planted the wind and will harvest the whirlwind” (Hosea 8:7, New Living Translation). By planting these evil seeds—officially removing God from education and public life—the court set the nation on a course of moral degradation that we are seeing the full results of today in violence, perversion, epidemics of sexually transmissible diseases, substance abuse and breakdown of families and law and order.

In 1973 the Supreme Court decided another significant landmark case, Roe v. Wade. This case labeled murder of the unborn a right guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution—even though the Constitution states that it is meant “to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity,” which includes the unborn.

Since 1973 more than 60 million abortions have been legally performed in the United States alone. When a nation does not protect its unborn life, it deserves the judgment of the God who created and gives life (Numbers 35:33-34; Proverbs 24:11-12). That judgment is coming, and sooner than we might think!

The fourth of these rulings by the Supreme Court came in June 2015 with the legalization of same-sex marriage. In this ruling the court again made up a sweeping right that same-sex marriage is guaranteed by the Constitution.

Decisions that deny God and reality

Let’s be plain about this highly charged issue: The U.S. Supreme Court has stepped beyond its temporal earthly bounds into the spiritual realm in defying the God who created man, woman and marriage. The court decreed that the divine institution of marriage, defined in the Bible as a sacred union between a man and woman—the only biblical definition of marriage—is superseded by the human reasoning and judgment of five unelected officials. Human jurisprudence now sanctions as marriage relationships God never intended—in fact, ones He specifically forbids!

With these rulings America has crossed several major lines. We have gone from a ruling against prayer and Bible reading in public schools to sanctioning the killing of the unborn to ruling against the biblical definition of marriage. Now the court has denied the scientific and biological reality that “male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27; compare Matthew 19:4; Mark 10:6).

Within 60 years these decisions have taken us down a path of open public defiance of God in the most elemental aspects of human life and society. As Justice Alito warned in his dissent on the court’s legalizing of homosexual marriage:

“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 be able to whisper their thoughts in the recesses of their homes, but if they repeat those views in public, they will risk being labeled as bigots and treated as such by governments, 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.”

A time of judgment is coming

Justice Alito’s words have proven prophetic. Those who stand up for biblical values—as we do in Beyond Today magazine—have been repeatedly branded as bigots, haters, homophobes and worse. Many voices have been shut down. It will grow worse. At some point we too will be silenced (see Amos 8:11-12).

America gropes its way forward in a blind stupor. Each wave of moral change brings further spiritual blindness. The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans about the corrupt and degenerate society of his day: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18).

This latest ruling represents another momentous step in the nation turning away from the knowledge of God. It shows confused and irrational thinking. For those who hold the Bible as the standard of truth and who believe that America is a nation “under God,” it raises serious questions for the future.

Now is a time for each of us to understand the serious times in which we live and to see with God’s eyes where America and the world at large are headed. We will reap what we sow. God will not be mocked (Galatians 6:7). The righteous Judge of all the earth will act, and we will reap the whirlwind as never before.
Will NATO leadership shift from America to Germany?

An analysis piece in The Washington Times noted that “in response to a perception among many in the European Union that the United States has mishandled the coronavirus outbreak, EU Foreign Minister Josep Borrell told an audience in Berlin . . . that some European analysts had been talking more and more about the ‘end of an American-led system and the arrival of an Asian century.’ The 27-nation bloc, he concluded, should therefore ‘follow our own interests’” (Daniel Davis, “Transitioning NATO Into a European-Led Force,” May 31, 2020).

The article contends that Borrell has a point, stating: “A wealthy, strong, and—critically—indepen dent Europe is in America’s interest. A re-evaluation of the trans-Atlantic relationship is long overdue . . .

The first NATO Secretary-General, Lord Hastings Ismay, famously said that NATO existed to ‘keep the Soviets out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.’ But with the collapse of the U.S.S.R.—along with the rise of France, the U.K., and a reunified Germany as rich nations—the fundamental reasons for NATO’s existence vanished. The once-compelling justification for the United States to underwrite the security of Western Europe has likewise disappeared.”

The Wall Street Journal reported that “President Trump has directed the Pentagon to remove thousands of American troops from Germany by September, a move that would dramatically reshape the U.S. military posture in Europe and reflects growing tensions between Washington and Berlin over military spending and other security issues” (Michael Gordon and Gordon Lubold, “Trump to Pull Thousands of U.S. Troops From Germany,” June 5, 2020).

In a June 23 interview with Deutsche Welle, current NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said, “The world needs more German leadership . . . NATO needs German leadership. We all need Germany to play an even more important role because Germany is the largest economy in Europe” (“NATO Chief Stoltenberg: World Needs More German Leadership”).

Shortly before that, the same source ran a story titled, “How Will Europe Guarantee Its Security Without the US?” (June 20). Many are pondering the implications. “Germany has been a key component of the US defense strategy in Europe for decades, with US nuclear weapons—to be delivered by German fighter jets in a moment of crisis—stationed here . . .

“If Europe wants to provide its own security it will have to come up with a replacement shield. As things now stand, France would be the only choice in stepping up to the task . . . [But] French missiles have never been integrated into NATO defense planning. Nevertheless, in the past the French have made clear their willingness to allow Germany proximity to its prized arsenal . . .

The one seemingly intractable conflict inherent in the idea of a ‘European bomb,’ however, is the question of who would decide to use it when a split-second decision is needed” (ibid.).

It should be noted that Europeans are currently unhappy with both the European Union and the United States. As a National Pulse headline proclaims: “European Union ‘Failed,’ Was ‘Irrelevant’ During Pandemic Says Major, Continent-Wide Survey” (Derek Dunn, July 2).

“The news will be seen as vindication of the United Kingdom’s choice to exit the European Union, and the American political right’s continued warnings about European-style socialism and increasing centralization of powers . . . [However] while the results appear to be an unmitigated indictment of the status quo in the European Union, some of those surveyed believe more European integration is the solution to Europe’s irrelevance during the pandemic . . . The European Union may have to make considerable changes, if it wants to justify its existence down the line.”

While it appears at present that America will remain the dominant global power for some years to come, we also know from Bible prophecy where things are ultimately headed—to greatly diminished American power and an ascendant Germany-led Europe that will end up an enemy to the United States. Perhaps European military power will be further facilitated by America continuing to withdraw from the world scene and eventually handing over a lot of military equipment sitting in Europe to the current NATO allies.

To learn more, be sure to read our free publications The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy and The Final Superpower (available at ucg.org/booklets).

Iran-China 25-year cooperation plan

A special report from BESA Center (the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies) points to major developments in Asia. Titled “The Iran-China 25-Year Plan: A Preliminary Assessment” (Ofira Seliktar and Farhad Rezaei, BesaCenter.org, July 21, 2020), it presents this analysis:

“On June 23, 2020, the Iranian government announced the Iran-China 25 Year Comprehensive Partnership . . . It amounts to an unprecedented economic, military, and technological cooperation between the two states. Relations between Beijing and Tehran . . . have blossomed under Chinese President Xi Jinping, who is pushing China’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). According to China, the BRI aims to create a huge unified market in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa through massive investment in infrastructure, education, and technology. Critics view the BRI as a thinly disguised effort to achieve Chinese domination over a large swath of the globe.

“Iran would serve as a regional hub for the BRI, giving China extraordinary leeway across a wide range of economic activity. This includes petrochemical production, renewable energy, civilian nuclear energy, high-speed railways, highways, subways, airports, and maritime connections . . .

“A section of the draft agreement reveals an exceptionally high level of military cooperation between the two countries. This includes, among other things, shared development of defense industries, intelligence sharing, and joint military maneuvers. Earlier reports indicate that China and Iran have been working on a large arms deal timed to coincide with the ending of the UN Security Council arms embargo . . .

“The benefits of this arrangement to China are clear. Beijing would accomplish its strategic shift to the Indo-Pacific region. China has already built a string of logistical station ports along the Indian Ocean to Djibouti and the Suez Canal. Dominating Iran would give China a side presence in the Gulf . . . Most of the world’s oil transits through that passage . . .

“For the Iranians, who are operating under the severe pressure of American sanctions, the deal is a lifeline . . . But some Iranian critics . . . believe the Tehran government has sold out Iran’s sovereignty to the Chinese . . . Moreover, China expects Iran to use its oil receipts in an ‘optimal way’ . . . [and not] on the revolutionary export projects so beloved by the late Quds Force chief Qassem Soleimani . . . It is not clear whether the Revolutionary Guards would oblige, however.”

Meanwhile, Iran continues to pursue nuclear development, to the great concern of Israel and many other nations (“IAEA: Iran Further Raises Uranium Stockpiles 8 Times Its Limit, Blocks Visits to Sites,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, June 5, 2020).

The Chinese-Iranian alliance appears to be a further step toward an eventual coalition of eastern powers that will destroy vast numbers of people and will come against European forces in the Holy Land at the time of Christ’s return (see Revelation 9:13-21; 16:2-16)—and against the people of Israel not long after (see Ezekiel 38-39). Russia will evidently be another major player in this eastern coalition. We see many of the eastern powers currently working together in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), already widely regarded as the “alliance of the East.”
What people need to know about Black Lives Matter

Many in the Western world are embracing Black Lives Matter (BLM) and displaying this phrase. Yet before championing a cause people should understand what the cause actually is. In this case many want to express solidarity with those perceived to be unfairly discriminated against due to racism. That’s an admirable sentiment. But lending support to this particular cause goes far beyond the three-word slogan. Let’s consider some of the serious problems.

First, the slogan is deceptive and promotes a falsehood. What’s wrong with saying that black lives matter? Don’t they matter? Of course they do—because all human lives matter, as all people of every ethnic background are made in the image of God. But declaring this biblical truth now can get a person fired from his or her job, “canceled” or severely ostracized.

The truth is that factual statistical evidence disproves this narrative, as black conservative talk host Larry Elder and others have repeatedly pointed out (see creators.com/read/larry-elder/06/20/the-george-floyd-riots-wheres-black-lives-matter-when-you-need-them). While there has been rampant anti-black racism (and racism directed at other minorities) in the history of the United States and other countries, conditions have vastly changed over many decades.

No doubt racism still lingers among a few, which is abhorrent, yet actual instances are nearly universally condemned. As Shelby Steele, a veteran of the civil rights movement and best-selling author, stated in a June 7 interview, “The truth of the matter is blacks have never been less oppressed than they are today.”

The fact is, while there are no doubt some problems people among thousands of law enforcement officers, the police are not out targeting black people for mistreatment. Many police officers are black. A far greater danger is black-on-black crime in urban neighborhoods and abortion of unborn black babies.

Second, the popular phrase honors and helps fund a pro-LGBTQ, Marxist organization with ties to an organization known as the Movement for Black Lives (see its policy platforms at m4bl.org). This year BLM signed on with others in this coalition in a call to “Defund the police.”

This is all bad enough. But as it turns out, Black Lives Matter is actually the project of another nonprofit called Thousand Currents, the recipient and administrator of BLM fundraising. The vice-chair of Thousand Currents is Susan Rosenberg, a convicted terrorist who spent 16 years in federal prison before being pardoned by President Bill Clinton on his last day in office. Former New York police commissioner Bernie Kerik, who was involved with the case, cites this as yet further evidence that BLM is a revolutionary Marxist group that wants to overthrow our government (“Exposing Black Lives Matter’s Ties to Convicted Domestic Terrorist,” FoxNews.com, July 9, 2020).

The movement has been instrumental in rioting and destruction over the past few months. Of course many supporters will say that they are not for all this and aren’t advocating for this particular group named Black Lives Matter, but are just joining in using the phrase to stand against anti-black racism. Yet, whatever the intention, widespread support for the stated cause has helped undermine law enforcement and promote widespread rioting and destruction.

It’s also encouraged many in government at all levels to align with policies BLM advocates and stoked massive corporate monetary support. Millions of dollars are being funneled into what BLM is promoting along with other far-left causes supported by the organization. Black Lives Matter is not merely a heartfelt slogan. It’s a major fundraising tool for the radical progressive agenda—an agenda that’s supported through the promulgation of the phrase and the false narrative it sustains.

Third, taking up the slogan and associated implications ends up hurting people, including those it claims to help. It does great damage to society, leading to unrest and fragmentation. Moreover, promoting the defunding of police will lead to far worsening crime and deaths in urban communities desperately in need of policing. Supporting BLM actually ends up harming people in these communities. That is not genuine love, for “love does no harm to a neighbor” (Romans 13:10).

Concerning the real danger of crime in urban neighborhoods, the major culprit here is the dissolution of black families with an absence of fathers in the home. Black civil rights activist leader Bob Woodson and others have traced this terrible dilemma back to liberal social policies.

Yet in the current movement that claims to care about black lives we see a call to further erode the family and remove law enforcement. Achievement of these aims would lead to more suffering and death. Again, do black lives matter? Of course, but the real path to help is not to support this catchphrase that amounts to propaganda for far-left causes based on lies and that will lead to hurting many people. The real answer lies where it always does—in all people learning to live by the laws of Almighty God.

Perhaps it should not have come as a surprise when video coverage of Portland riots “showed protestors with ‘Black Lives Matter’ signs tossing Bibles into a raging bonfire” (Isabel Vincent, “Protests Burn Bible, American Flag as Tensions Rise in Portland,” New York Post, Aug. 1, 2020).

In all this a terrible spirit of lawlessness is at work. For more on this, read “The War on Law and Order” beginning on page 25.

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!
75 Years After World War II: Will History Repeat?

A massively destructive conflagration that engulfed the world ended 75 years ago after taking millions of lives and bringing untold suffering. Yet Bible prophecy tells us that an even worse time is coming.

by Victor Kubik

We have already gone through a Great Tribulation!” This is what my parents painfully exclaimed when they read in the biblical accounts in Revelation, Matthew and Daniel about the terrible end-time events that would embroil the entire world. What was described was wars, disease, famine and then the mass annihilation, genocide and martyrdom of many people.

They winced when they read Matthew 24:21: “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.” To them, these words were excruciatingly reminiscent of what they had personally lived through two decades previously. When they saw what the Bible prophesied for our time, the description became real—too real—for them.

Eastern Europe’s “bloodlands”

World War II ended 75 years ago. For 70 million people, the war ended in their personal demise. It was the deadliest military conflict in history. Vast quantities of blood were spilled on battlefields. People died in indiscriminate carpet bombings, in the Holocaust, of starvation in sieges, and of rampant accompanying diseases such as cholera, hepatitis and typhus.

In total war where nations pummel other nations, civilian populations suffer along with the military. Half the war dead were non-combatants. Cities such as Warsaw and Stalingrad were 90 percent destroyed. The grand finale of the war was a nuclear inferno that killed some 200,000 people in two Japanese cities—horribly yet likely preventing millions more deaths.

Losses were staggering in a war that started a mere 20 years after World War I—the war that was supposed to “end all wars.” This pause gave just enough time for the world to take a deep breath, repopulate and then expend another generation of men in a bloodbath. In essence World War I was fought all over again in Europe on two fronts, but now with much higher devastation and death. World War II was even more global in scope, as the Pacific theater war produced enormous casualties in China, the Philippines, Japan and other places.

The Russian-led Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R) suffered an astounding 15 million military and 15 million civilian deaths. Half the nation’s housing was destroyed. Of those who entered military service at age 19, only one in 100 returned. After the war, the population proportion in the Soviet Union was 65 men to every 100 women. One in seven people in the U.S.S.R. perished.

In his 2010 book Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin, Yale historian Timothy Snyder examined the political, cultural and ideological context tied to Central and Eastern Europe in the war. This region that he calls the “bloodlands” is comprised of Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), northeastern Romania and the westernmost fringes of Russia.

The regimes of Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union and Adolf Hitler in Nazi Germany killed an estimated 14 million non-combatants between 1933 and 1945. This was in addition to those who died in the death camps of the Holocaust. Stalin and Hitler, while fighting each other, increased suffering and bloodshed many times worse than any seen in Western history.

My parents were born in the heart of the bloodlands during the 20-year “peacetime” that was all but peaceful. They lived under the dominion of Joseph Stalin, one of the most cruelly depraved figures of all time. He is responsible for the deaths of at least 20 million of his own people in addition to the 30 million who perished in the war.

The magnitude of misery during this time was beyond comprehension. The mass statistics individually represent millions of sons, husbands, families and loved ones that were no more. These numbers express suffering, tears and grief beyond words. One can study war as geopolitics or the movements of armies on maps, but the real story is told in the innumerable personal stories of tragedy and despair.

Living through a hellish nightmare

Over the years and on several visits to Eastern Europe, I retraced the steps of both my parents and followed their migration from the bloodlands to the United States.

My mother Nina was born in 1926 in Pervomaysk, not far from Kharkiv, Ukraine. My father was born in 1923 in what was then Poland. But in 1939, the area where he lived became part of Ukraine as a result of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact signed on Aug. 23 that divided Poland between Germany and the U.S.S.R. Immediately after the signing, Germany invaded Poland. Britain reciprocated by declaring war on Germany on Sept. 1, igniting World War II.

During Stalin’s years, the police routinely snatched people from their homes and sent them off to gulags, labor camps where many millions died. These abductions were typically carried out at night using a black government vehicle the people frighteningly called “the Black Raven.” One of the victims...
was my mother’s father, who was picked up by the Black Raven and vanished. But then, after eight years, he suddenly returned home, unannounced, to his family’s surprise and joy.

In 1933 a devastating famine called Holodomor, which means “death by hunger,” was engineered by Stalin. In the space of little more than a year, this famine took the lives of as many people as the Holocaust later did in Germany and Poland.

Stalin sold off Ukraine’s grain to finance an industrialized Russia. My mother, who was eight years old then, later remembered too well the morbid sight of bodies thrown into ditches waiting to be collected as refuse. Her family made it through that difficult time on crushed corn cobs, to which some flour was added, and some other food they had managed to hide in the walls of their home.

Her mother sold her wedding ring to buy bread for a week for the children. Another man in town desperately slaughtered a horse lying dead on the ground to feed his family. The whole family soon died from eating the spoiled meat. The poignant and horrific stories go on and on.

In June 1941 Germany invaded the U.S.S.R. My mother’s town of Pervomaysk was bombed, and 700 people died that day. My mother, then 15, was bringing cows home from the field when bombs from German planes exploded near her. She was terrified beyond words. Her hands developed a permanent shake near her.

Dusya was also on that train, and both stayed close through the war.

My father’s story

My father Igor hailed from the village of Uhorsk in Western Ukraine but was born in the neighboring village of Stizhok. At 18 he was taken to Germany to work under similar conditions as my mother. His friend Volodya was on the same journey, and they remained friends through the war and beyond. He was assigned to work in a fruit-canning factory in Magdeburg.

On one of my visits, my relatives took me to my father’s birthplace and told me the horrifying history of the German invasion. When the Germans arrived, the local population at first greeted them as liberators from the Russians. The Germans, however, with warped racial views that looked down on Slavic peoples, were suspicious of Ukrainians and did not want or need their support.

They burned down village after village. Two years into the occupation in Stizhok, they rounded up more than 50 people into a barn and burned it to the ground. I visited the chapel memorializing this ghastly event. My grandparents used to live right next to the site of this atrocity.

After arriving in Magdeburg, foreign workers like my father found working conditions very harsh. Strict controls were imposed on their movements. They had to display a big patch with the word Ost on it, which means “east.” They had to continually identify themselves as Ost Arbeiter or “East Workers.”

German attitudes toward other nationalities and races were clearly noted.Captured American and British soldiers were treated with a higher level of respect. However, one time a black paratrooper came down. He was immediately executed. Jewish males were identified by checking whether they were circumcised (Germans and Russians typically were not). Gypsies, priests and the mentally impaired were undesirables and often sent to the death camps. Hate was not covered up.

Nevertheless, living in Magdeburg was relatively safe in the early part of the war. The killing was primarily taking place in the bloodlands.

Some of the largest battles of all time were fought on the Eastern Front. The Battle of Stalingrad from August 1942 to February 1943 resulted in nearly 2 million casualties. Most of the city’s civilian population also died during the combat. An American general visiting Stalingrad and seeing the almost total destruction of the city recommended it not be rebuilt, but left as a memorial to the futility of war. The Battle of Kursk, the largest tank battle of all time, was fought in July and August 1943 and resulted in more than a million casualties. Two thousand tanks were destroyed along with almost that many aircraft.

A struggle for survival

After my mother’s death in 1984, I found a few letters between her and her family in Ukraine that express what was happening during the war. One from her brother Victor in Ukraine, dated June 7, 1943, read:

“Our family greets you, Nina. Are you all right? You write that you are getting lonely living on foreign soil, but you’re not the only one separated from their family. Many people are finding themselves in this condition. We’re not receiving your letters. In 1943 we have received only two postcards from you, one dated...”
Jan. 20 and the other Feb. 8, which we received in June.

“If we live, we will meet again. The weather has been good for growing, the gardens look good, and we’ll have things to eat in the winter. The Russians came in February, but the Germans returned in March. On the front where we are there has been no shooting, but in May many people in the neighboring village died. The land is covered with blood, and the end of the war is not in sight.”

My mother’s hometown changed hands six times between the Russians and the Germans during the war.

We had a family reunion in Pervomaysk in 1988, and my uncle Victor took us up and down the streets of the town and showed us what had been destroyed. He explained how people survived and coped. For two years, they lived in underground cellars because all their homes were destroyed.

Back in Magdeburg from 1942 to 1944, my father became acquainted with Nina and started dating her. His friend Volodya dated Dusya, as the four spent a lot of time together. However, my father was suddenly arrested by the Gestapo and put into a concentration camp. The Germans used these prisoners after air raids for clearing rubble and pulling out unexploded bombs. Prisoners were expendable if a bomb exploded.

My father’s friend Volodya would look at the columns of marching prisoners and throw Igor a piece of bread when he could. Months went by, and there was no help for my father in the concentration camp.

But one day a miracle happened. Volodya was walking down a street that had been bombed just the day before when he heard a voice. "Volodya, Volodya!" He turned around and saw a shadowy figure in the rubble. "It’s me, Igor." Volodya could hardly recognize his friend. He wore the striped uniform of a prisoner and was scratched from head to toe from working in the rubble. After a brief hug, he took my dad to a friend’s apartment.

There was so much chaos in the last days of the war that my father’s absence was not followed up on. Volodya waited until nighttime to find a place for Igor but decided to get him out to a farm. Nobody was asking questions. Germans and foreign workers alike were waiting for the war to end and thinking only about survival.

Allied bombing was incessant. American bombers came by day and the British by night. Magdeburg was a strategic city for fuel storage. The two men were now out in the countryside, but the girls were still working in the factory in town. The men were so afraid that the girls would perish or had perished. Nightly the girls went into the bomb shelters.

The Germans used the Ost Arbeiter as human shields and would march them onto bridges before a bombing attack. Nina and Dusya were in a column headed for a bridge. Igor and Volodya spotted their column and, when the guards were distracted, pulled them out of the line and took them out to the farm where they hid them in the attic.

Finally, the Americans arrived on April 20, 1945. Liberation! An American paratrooper came across my father and offered him a candy bar and chewing gum. The happy American spirit was everywhere. The war was over. Freedom at last! Or so they thought.

A new struggle begins

The Potsdam Conference starting in July partitioned Germany among the United States, France, Britain and the U.S.S.R. Magdeburg was assigned to the Soviet sector. One morning in July my parents were no longer hearing English voices. The voices were now Russian. According to the agreement, the Americans had to pull back and let the Russians come in.

Things grew bad very quickly. The Russians treated the Ost Arbeiter with contempt. They considered them traitors and collaborators with the Germans. They herded them into transition camps and interrogated them relentlessly. The Russians were going to send them off to Siberia, and the men were going into the service since Russia had just now declared war on Japan.

The foursome knew they had to escape. My father was given some duties outside the camp, and while he was out he spoke to a border guard and asked what it would take to get him and three others across the border. The guard replied, “Give me a suit, a bottle of vodka and a watch and I’ll get you across at midnight.” The four knew they could be betrayed at any time and killed.

Their dwelling place at the loosely guarded transition camp was on the outer perimeter. The four crawled out through a window and headed for the border on a train. There they met the guard and presented the gifts. The guard had to pay off each of his adjacent guards with one of the gifts. Finally, at the guard change at midnight they passed through the border into the British Zone. As they started running, shots were fired in their direction. They continued to run and run and run until they could run no more. They made it to safety, surprised they were still alive!

Finding safety at last

They then worked their way over to Hanover and found safe haven in a refugee camp. On the day they arrived, the news of the day was that an atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima, Japan.

They lived in the camp for four years as they searched for a new homeland. My parents married in 1946, and I was born in 1947. They looked and looked for asylum in Canada, Australia and other places, but found only dead ends. They almost resigned to go back to Ukraine. But at the last moment, they found a sponsor in Minnesota. We sailed to the United States past the Statue of Liberty and landed on Ellis Island on the troop ship USS General C.H. Muir.

My parents reminded us five siblings often of their odyssey of physical salvation. But God granted my mother and father an even greater and more permanent salvation. He called them out of this evil, suffering world that continually turns on itself and will bring on itself the Great Tribulation as foretold in Bible prophecy. My parents committed their lives to God, and that is the joyous conclusion to this story.

My parents’ story is an amazing saga of tribulation, redemption, God’s grace and mercy, love, friendship, survival, courage, liberation and triumph through God’s providential guidance and protection. It’s a story filled with parallels to our spiritual journey from this world to the Kingdom of God as stated by the apostle Paul: “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

It’s awful to contemplate, but there will yet be an even worse time of “Great Tribulation.” Let us pray for deliverance and the long-awaited Kingdom of God to come and, at last, end such senseless suffering!  

The War on Law and Order

A widespread movement to discredit, defund and physically assault law enforcement officers has shocked many nations. What’s going on? What’s behind the war on law and order?

by Mike Kelley

Events of the first half of 2020 rocked the world. First was the Covid-19 epidemic, but perhaps even more jarring was the tidal wave of racial unrest and protests that jolted America and then spread like wildfire overseas to Britain, Australia, France, Germany and other nations.

Where is the chaos in our nations leading? What does the Bible have to say about where our cities are headed? When will the lawlessness we see in our towns finally be brought under control? Can there truly be peace on our streets?

Because of disrespect for law enforcement, major cities across the United States have erupted into violence that caused more than two dozen deaths, more than a thousand injuries to police and rioters and property damage and other costs to society estimated at over $1 billion.

The spark was the death of a black man at the hands of police in Minneapolis, Minn. In the process of his arrest for trying to buy cigarettes with counterfeit money, George Floyd died after an arresting officer kept him pinned down with a knee on his neck for nearly nine minutes.

Nearly all Americans were rightly horrified at Floyd’s death, captured in cellphone videos and immediately broadcast all over the world. Overnight he became the latest victim of alleged anti-black police bias. Mainstream news media labeled his death as the latest example of a major city police department demonstrating that supposed systemic bias.

For much of the mainstream media, and groups like Black Lives Matter, it was all very simple: The Minneapolis police department, like most other large city police departments, was infested with racism, and George Floyd was only the latest victim (this despite the fact that the department was headed by a black police chief).

Within days, the protestors and rioters took up a new cry: “Defund the police!” Eager politicians jumped in to lead the parade.

What the media has not reported

Millions have come to realize that the major news media does have an agenda, and coverage of events is often slanted to fit that agenda. But certain facts deliberately unreported by the media help put this tragic event in better perspective.

For example, the mainstream media failed to point out that two of the four supposedly racist officers involved were themselves minorities. One was black and another Asian, and the officer whose knee allegedly caused Floyd’s death was married to an Asian woman.

Of course, none of this justifies what happened to Floyd or exonerates police officers from wrongdoing in this case. But a broader context lets us see how the incident was exploited to drive a particular narrative.

As protests and rioting spread to other cities, also largely unreported were the resultant deaths of many civilians, most of them black. Two black law enforcement officers were also killed in the violence. Yet no one carried signs and placards for these victims.

The protests that had started peacefully quickly turned violent. A number of protestors who marched and chanted by day turned the nighttime into firestorms of arson, looting and vandalism. Scores of businesses, many of them minority-owned, were looted and torched.

A number of police stations were attacked. “Every city, every town, burn the precincts to the ground!” became a popular chant.

When police have responded to try to keep order, they have been met with a hail of bricks, rocks, explosive fireworks and other objects. Police cars have been struck by Molotov cocktails and burned. Officers have been sprayed with mace, bleach and urine and struck with balloons filled with fecal matter.

At the time this issue went to press, more than 1,300 law enforcement officers have been injured and more than a dozen killed. One is paralyzed from the neck down after being shot in the head from behind.

Defund the police: the movement spreads

By mid-June, “Defund the police!” became the left’s new national battle cry. The group Black Lives Matter quickly took the leading role, joining with other groups calling not just for “reforms” in policing, but for the actual abolishment of police departments in major cities across the country. The movement quickly mushroomed, with news outlets more than willing to give vast amounts of coverage to the chants of protesters.

Minneapolis became the first city to move to officially dismantle its police department when the city council voted June 8 to replace it with a new “Department of Community Safety and Violence Prevention,” whose structure, power and procedures have yet to be fully defined (to take effect, the move must be approved by citizens at a future date).

Over the summer, the move to defund police departments spread like wildfire across the United States, with major cities seriously considering cutting back or eliminating their police departments altogether.

Black Visions Collective director and Minneapolis city council member Kandace Montgomery articulated the new mantra argued by progressives across the nation: “It shouldn’t have taken so much death to get us here,” she said at a Black Lives Matter rally. “We’re safer without armed, unaccountable patrols supported by the state hunting black people.” The very use of such an inflammatory term as “hunting black people” shows the depth of the growing animosity toward law enforcement in some of America’s political leadership and large urban centers.

Advocates of defunding are calling for a total restructuring
of policing. They argue that, instead of officers empowered to enforce the law, teams of mental health experts, drug counselors, social workers and victims’ advocates will help communities do away with crime.

Abolishing or restructuring?

The idea of police department defunding has been a gleam in the eyes of radical leftists for years. It sparked the founding of Black Lives Matter in the wake of the 2014 Ferguson, Mo., shooting of Michael Brown.

A white officer was accused of shooting Brown without cause, but a federal investigation determined that Brown, of “hands up, don’t shoot” fame, was actually attacking the officer, who was in his car questioning Brown because he had just committed robbery and assault. Brown was by no means surrendering. Yet protesters rioted and burned large parts of Ferguson in response.

While the slogan “Defund the police” is simple and powerful, there is disagreement among the anti-police crowd over what defunding actually means. In reality, it could range from merely restructuring many police departments to completely abolishing others. Much of the rhetoric involves slashing the number of officers and redirecting funds toward “community investments.”

Gone would be intensive placement of law enforcement officers in crime-ridden areas, a practice that led to two decades of reduced crime in cities such as New York. Instead, many or most police officers would be replaced, as noted above, by legions of substance abuse counselors, mental health workers and others dedicated to working with crime-prone populations to avert crime before it happens.

Police officers should be trained in ways to de-escalate violence. And maybe trained counselors could settle disputes or defuse some emotional situations. But how would this work in cases of violent crime? Would “counselors” miraculously appear to talk rapists and murderers out of committing their horrific crimes? Would they show up just in time to talk criminals out of armed robbery attempts?

Undoing two decades of progress

Those who call for averting crime before it happens do not realize (or choose to ignore) the fact that police were already doing that. Consider the success of America’s largest police force, the New York City Police Department. Their practice of intensive policing of crime-ridden neighborhoods resulted in crime falling for two decades, from 1994 through 2014. Noted criminologist Heather Mac Donald reported the results in her 2016 book The War on Cops: How the New Attack on Law and Order Makes Everyone Less Safe.

Intensive policing means that police proactively take actions to stop crime before it happens. In 1994, newly appointed New York City Chief of Police William Bratton instituted what became known as “broken windows” policing, which held that allowing neighborhoods to be overrun by litter, graffiti, abandoned buildings, public drunkenness and other forms of squalor breed crime by signaling that social control of the area has collapsed.

He put in place the controversial “stop and frisk” policy by which individuals exhibiting suspicious behavior could be stopped and questioned. “Frisking” was to occur only if such individuals were suspected of carrying a gun.

This and other tactics produced dramatic results: Crime dropped by 12 percent the first year and 16 percent the next. Seeing New York’s dramatic drops in crime, other cities adopted similar tactics.

Over the next two decades, Mac Donald writes, crime nationwide fell by 50 percent, helping to revitalize cities such as Baltimore, New York, Detroit and Philadelphia.

What was not commonly reported was how much safer law-abiding citizens of these cities felt. Elderly people could shop without fear of getting mugged, children could play safely without fear of being hit by stray bullets and small businesses began to come back to downtown areas.

Then came 2014. Two highly publicized deaths of young black men at the hands of police led to the founding of Black Lives Matter, which claims that police officers are the greatest threat to young black men today. Intensive policing suddenly came under attack. The practice of “stop and frisk,” now labeled as racist, disappeared.

In America’s big cities, the tide of opinion began to turn against police forces. In some cities, police departments that had enjoyed the support of their city councils and leadership saw a big jump in anti-cop rhetoric. Arrests and routine police actions began to draw jeers and taunts from hostile crowds. Any arrest was sure to be caught on cellphone video and then splashed on the Internet.

As police began to disengage from proactive policing due to what Heather Mac Donald terms “the Ferguson effect,” crime began to rise, with the murder rate in 56 of America’s largest cities rising 17 percent from 2015 to 2016. Proactive policing disappeared as more and more police were instructed to make no move until a crime actually occurred.

Is police bias real?

Black Lives Matter was founded largely on the claim that many of America’s police are racists who unduly target young blacks—this despite the fact that many of the police themselves are black or of other minorities. Just where is the hard evidence of such bias?

What the actual evidence shows is that police shooting incidents are related to crime and violence, not race. In a series of studies published in August 2019, researchers found that the more frequently officers encounter violent suspects from any given racial group, the greater the chance that a member of that group will be fatally shot. There is “no significant evidence of anti-black disparity in the likelihood of being fatally shot by police,” the report on the studies stated (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Aug. 6, 2019).

Mac Donald, in researching her book, came to the same conclusion, finding that, in terms of proportionality of violent crime, “blacks are killed by police at a lower rate than their threat to officers would predict.” She also found that “little over a quarter of all homicides by police involve black victims.”

The truth, as Mac Donald points out, is that police presence by and large saves black lives: “The irony is that the historic reduction of crime . . . since the 1990s was predicated on police singling out African Americans for their protection. Using victims’ crime reports, cops focused on violent hot spots; since black Americans are disproportionately the victims of crime . . . effective policing was heaviest in minority neighborhoods. The cops were there because they do believe that black lives
matters” (The War on Caps, p. 67).

**Immediate spikes in crime**

How will defunding the police protect the public? Will merely abolishing a city’s police department induce criminals to immediately become law-abiding citizens?

The defunding frenzy has had its results. Minneapolis quickly got a taste of the effect of reduced police presence as a wave of crime over the last two weeks of June accounted for more than 110 shootings and eight murders. The situation is so dire that some residents formed what amounts to vigilante committees to patrol the streets.

In New York City, where the city council voted to cut $1 billion from the NYPD budget, weekly shooting incidents in mid-June increased by 358 percent over the same period of the previous year, the new figure being 74 people wounded in 55 shootings. This came at the same time the city disbanded its 600-person anti-crime plainclothes unit, which had specialized in infiltrating gangs and getting illegal guns off the streets.

**Is this a foretaste of what’s to come in America’s large cities?**

Cities like Chicago, Detroit, Baltimore and Los Angeles, already seeing a small exodus of citizens, could see that stream swell to a torrent as people seek safety elsewhere. Forbes magazine reported in 2019 that people are moving out of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut in droves. The mass departure of productive citizens and businesses could lead to economic devastation.

The ones most likely to suffer from police defunding would be inner-city minorities without the means and resources to escape. Ironically, the very populations Black Lives Matter and other anti-police organizations say are harmed by police presence would see their lives suddenly become much more dangerous—and would be unable to do anything about it.

A glaring reality the mainstream media hesitates to report is that the vast majority of blacks murdered each year in the United States—93 percent—are killed by other blacks. Heavy police deployment in inner-city areas is largely an effort to stop these killings, often prompted by criminal gangs fighting over territory.

Yet Black Lives Matter activists remain virtually silent about these facts. Nor do they protest against the abortion clinics that take the lives of some 350,000 black babies every year—with abortion killing more blacks every year than cancer, heart disease, diabetes, accidents, HIV and homicides combined. (For more, read "What people need to know about Black Lives Matter" on page 21.)

**Continuing rise in lawlessness**

Never, it seems, has the siren song of lawlessness been so appealing to so many. The hundreds of thousands participating in protests and riots against the police, and their support by the news media and millions on social media, reveals something deeply troubling about the character of the nation. More and more people hold law enforcement or any type of authority in contempt, be it religious codes of conduct or civil authority.

Few realize that these lawless conditions were prophesied in your Bible almost 2,000 years ago! Inspired by God, the apostle Paul could foresee that the kind of evil conditions that existed in the decadent Roman Empire of his time would be widespread in the end times as well:

“And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowl-

edge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness . . . haters of God, violent, proud, boasters . . . who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them” (Romans 1:28-32, emphasis added throughout).

Paul revealed more about end-time conditions in 2 Timothy 3:1-4: “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.”

**Does this describe much of society today?**

All of this should come as no surprise. In recent decades generations who have been schooled in humanistic thought from kindergarten through college now consider traditional moral restrictions as the enemy of their freedom to pursue lawless desires. Stirred up by evil forces and with some incident acting as a trigger, pent-up resentment and lawlessness are unleashed to run wild.

The apostle Peter also foresaw these times: “The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries . . . But these . . . speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness . . .” (2 Peter 2:9-13).

Notice: They speak evil of things they do not understand. It’s highly doubtful that more than a small percentage of those protesting and rioting could really explain and give any reasoned support for the messages on the placards they carry and the slogans they scream. They are being used.

Make no mistake: Powerful forces are at work to destroy the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia and other nations whose history and culture is rooted in the Bible. And it will grow far worse as this age of human misuse draws to its dangerous end.

The good news, however, is that these lawless times will come to an end. As unbelievable as it may seem, a time is coming when police will no longer be needed and racism will be a thing of the past. Events as sure as the rising of tomorrow’s sun will usher in a new era of universal peace and cooperation, because God Himself will bring it to pass—a time of peace, the likes of which the world has never seen!  

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**LEARN MORE**

Where is today’s chaos among the nations leading? What does it all mean? Is there a way to know? You need to read our eye-opening study guide The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy to learn the answers! Download or request your free copy today!

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Living in the Light of Eternity—Today!

As we conclude our series on eternity, we see that the Light shining from the beginning to endless end must shine in and through us—forever and now.

by Robin Webber

W e have been exploring the subject of eternity over the last three “Follow Me” columns. With this entry the series will be completed. But as it ends, our homework, the hard work, “the heart work,” begins afresh. Up until now we have focused on 1) a vision, 2) a promise and 3) a scriptural display of what constitutes eternity, God’s ultimate home for us with Him.

But first things first! Stepping into eternity means that for now we have to first step back into this world, the present age of human misrule, and move toward God’s promised realm step by step, person by person, heart by heart and need by need in a manner initially foreign and contrary to us. After all, the Kingdom of God is not merely a destination, but a way of traveling through the experiences God allows or places in front of us.

So how do we exist—or, dare I say, spiritually thrive—in the here and now? How do we live in the light of eternity today in a darkened world headed down its own course when Jesus tells us, “Follow Me,” directing us to a road far less traveled by our fellow man? Let’s begin by understanding the ultimate great light of Jesus Christ, which our Heavenly Father has given for us to emulate within our current sphere of influence—providing us a personal glimpse of what makes eternity eternity!

“Let there be light”

It’s always good to start at the beginning of a book to gain a sense of the development of the main characters. So let’s go way back and weave a thread to sew this column together. Genesis 1:1 tells us that in the beginning there was God, who created the heavens and the earth. Then after a time of darkness (verse 2), the first act in renewing the creation was God declaring, “Let there be light; and there was light” (verse 3).

The apostle John, at the beginning of his Gospel, identifies the uncreated light bringer spoken of in Genesis in this way: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it” (John 1:1-5).

Then in verse 14 John identifies this “Word” who was with God the Father as Jesus Christ, declaring Him “the true light,” yet light that the people formed by Him refused to accept (verses 9-10).

Both creation accounts, in Genesis 1 and John 1, emphasize contrast between darkness and light. It’s an analogy lost to a large degree on the world since Thomas Edison’s invention of the light bulb more than a century ago. That is, until we experience an electrical blackout and reach for a flashlight or light a candle so we can see and move without stumbling, thereby lessening our fear of the unknown. In days gone by, a single candle or oil or kerosene lamp placed by a farmhouse window could pierce the extreme darkness of the countryside as a welcome beacon to a stranger seeking solace in the grip of darkness.

Yes, Jesus of Nazareth in His preexistent role as the Word created light. Beyond that He proclaimed: “I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12). Light and life go intrinsically together. Light makes living things grow.

Now let’s go to the end of Scripture and discover one more aspect of this ageless thread concerning light. As we saw last time, the New Jerusalem of eternity to come is described at the end of the Bible in these terms: “The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light” (Revelation 21:23).

It’s here that the knot of understanding is tied tight. Jesus Christ is the Creator of light in a physical world of darkness, the saving Light in a world that favors spiritual darkness, and the One existing in eternity along with our Heavenly Father (verse 22) who has not only life but light self-inherent. Again, light and life go hand in hand.

Inaugurating the Kingdom of God experience

Some questions then: Do we have to wait till the future for any experience of God’s Kingdom of light and life? Are all its aspects placed on complete hold until a set future time? Just how near is “near” when it comes to experiencing eternity now?

In relation to Jesus saying the “Kingdom of God is at hand” in Mark 1:14-15, The Interpreter’s Bible states: “This was, beyond all question, the main subject of Jesus’ teaching. The changing climates of opinion have passed over this theme, what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God, more almost than over any other subject in the Gospel . . . ” The kingdom is the reign of God, His sovereignty over mind and heart and will, and in the world. It is sonship to God and brotherly relations with men. It is in the future. But whenever a human life is brought into harmony with the Father’s purpose, it is present” (Vol. 7, 1987, p. 656).

Our Heavenly Father sent Jesus to earth to inaugurate the Kingdom experience. He is the Kingdom personified. He was eternity made flesh to connect with us. The commentary continues: “Jesus
Jesus Christ proclaimed: “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”

called men to repentance as emphatically as did John [the Baptist]. But there is here this notable addition, believe in the gospel . . . Jesus never minimized sin or repentance . . . He proclaimed, 'A new order is at hand. Get a new mind that fits it.’”

Jesus gave those who trusted His offer of brotherhood, friendship and a brand-new existence a new job description in line with His own: “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that that they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16, emphasis added throughout).

It would take a while for them to grasp their calling, but they ultimately did on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem when they were “all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). The Spirit of God then became theirs.

As New Testament scholar N.T. Wright describes in his book Simply Jesus: “A new power is let loose in the world, the power to remake what was broken, to heal what was diseased, to restore what was lost” (2011, p. 193).

It was a peek at eternity in motion. The disciples’ collective light imbued by the living light of the Spirit of the Father and Christ in them was tangibly noticeable. When hailed before the Jewish authorities, a noteworthy comment is made about the proceeding—those in judgment “marveled” at the boldness of these disciples they deemed uneducated “and they realized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).

They were in the truest sense the real deal. The life, the love, the light of the One they had rubbed shoulders with on the roads of Galilee and Judea was now walking inside of them!

So how about us?

We have come to see that eternity is not a realm to be understood through physical measuring instruments like a ruler or clock, but is ultimately about a relationship in a new existence we’re being prepared for in which Christ’s prayer for His followers is fulfilled: “. . . That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us . . .” (John 17:21).

In the course of this series we have peeked into that world in which there will be no more tears, no more pain, no more sorrow, no more crying, no more night, no more shut gates, no more defilement and no more curse (Revelation 21-22).

As we wrap up this peek into eternity, let me again draw your attention in these final chapters of Revelation to the ultimate Eden-like setting in which God dwells and will once again walk and talk with His special glorified creation at last made fully in His image through the mold of Jesus Christ.

We are shown a paradise garden flowing with “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal” and “the tree of life . . . [with leaves] for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:1-2).

Now in conclusion, allow me to share a short thought-filled examination. We can call it the “Living in the Light of Eternity Today Test.” A few instructions first. It’s not multiple choice. (Sorry!) The answers are either yes or no. You don’t have to turn it in. Neither do I, as I’m taking it along with you. God above already knows our answers up to this point in life. Are you ready?

- Do we personally bring life, healing and “times of refreshing” where relationships have died and hope is lost?
- Do we prepare a place in our lives for others who have only known closed doors?
- Do we build walls or do we build bridges in regards to relationships — and who goes first?
- Do we use our ears more than our mouth, and do we exercise patience more than anger?
- Do we seek cures and solutions from Scripture for people whose lives are in pain?
- Do we bring joy into lives filled with sorrow?
- Do we wipe away tears from those who cry, or do we make them cry?
- Do we bring blessings where there have been only curses?
- Do we bring light where only darkness has been known?

Summing up, do people think of us like the disciples of old, recognizing we have been with Jesus? Do they see through the evidence of His presence in our lives as we’ve responded to His invitation of “Follow Me” in the journey toward eternity?

If the exam is tough on you, understand that it’s meant to be. All of us have more homework, hard work and heart work to do in our common pilgrimage toward the realm of eternity.

Till next time, then, stay on the road to eternal life as we respond to Jesus’ invitation of “Follow Me.” And always remember the echo of His personal encouragement to every disciple: “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). As He lights our way and lives in us, we can also be light, living the future now in anticipation of the fullness of eternity yet to come.

So how about us?

We have come to see that eternity is not a realm to be understood through physical measuring instruments like a ruler or clock, but is ultimately about a relationship in a new existence we’re being prepared for in which Christ’s prayer for His followers is fulfilled: “. . . That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us . . .” (John 17:21).
“Hope and Help for the Brokenhearted”

This is such an uplifting and timely subject, and it covered so much in just a few pages. There are so many people going through so much heartache and difficulties at this time. The overview and examples of biblical characters who went through depression are great, because it makes you realize that we are not the only ones, that great men and women of faith went through periods of much discouragement but somehow God came through every time and gave them a solution or a way out of it.

From the Internet

Please pass along my gratitude to the author of the “Hope and Help for the Brokenhearted” article. Suicide has occurred in our family for several generations and I really needed to read this. Thank you.

From the Internet

“Are You Worn Down by Weariness?”

Thanks for sharing this. I have realized how ungrateful I have been to God. He has blessed me so much, yet I worry about the things I do not have. This article has taught me how to battle weariness in a positive and godly way.

From the Internet

Thank you for this article. I recognize now that I have been dealing with weariness. I have tried to beat myself up for being lazy—which has never been a big issue for me—and could not understand why I could not just pull out of it. I plan to use your steps and may purchase Forty Days to a Joy-Filled Life. I get even more frustrated with myself knowing this is just the beginning of sorrows, and if I struggle to cope now, how will I when the birth pains [of world trouble] come closer together?

From the Internet

This was absolutely what I needed! My family has been dealing with serious struggles and I have been in over my head trying to cope. You get to the point where things are so chaotic that you don’t know where to start to get a grip. The points in this article were so helpful.

From the Internet

What a wonderfully inspiring message. We need uplifting and helpful words to help us navigate through our Christian journey. Thank you so much.

From the Internet

"Are You Prepared for the Next Crisis?"

Thank you for this reminder of how we are to be prepared for any calamity or disaster to come. I am studying and praying always.

From the Internet

Thanks immensely for this article. The crisis we see is almost like nothing we have seen before. This will help many see more clearly how we can encourage others and stay on course in a godly manner as in the examples set by Christ. We can become part of the solution and not part of the ongoing crisis.

From the Internet

Interested in joining for worship

I’m interested in attending your services. I’ve been trying to find a church where I will fit in that has the same beliefs that I have, and I have enjoyed using your online booklets to aid me in my study. I have recently been feeling the need to connect with others, and I really would love to be baptized and receive laying on of hands. I will of course in the meantime enjoy all your online services.

Reader in the U.K.

Your never-ending devotion to the Scriptures is inspiring. Where can one find a church that practices Saturday worship instead of Sunday? This can be difficult to locate.

From the Internet

We’re glad to hear you’ve been inspired by our material. We’d love to have you visit our worship services. You can find a full listing of all our congregations in the entire world—and search for one closest to you—at ucg.org/congregations. We hope to see you soon!

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—K.T., Facebook fan

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