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The Canaries Are Falling Silent

The state of Colorado where I live is well known for its mining history. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, millions upon millions of dollars’ worth of gold, silver and other precious metals and useful materials such as coal were mined in the state. Being a history buff, I’ve explored several of these old gold and silver mines.

Some miners struck it rich. Most didn’t, but even so, they could make a good living wage at the time. Mining had its dangers. Mine collapses and cave-ins were perhaps the greatest. Occasionally mines flooded when an underground stream or pocket of water was accidentally breached. The explosives needed to shatter the rock were a continual hazard.

One danger was particularly menacing—poisonous gas, such as methane or carbon monoxide. Because this danger was silent and invisible, it could overtake miners suddenly and without warning. One minute all was fine; the next they were unconscious or dead.

To deal with this hazard, miners devised an ingenious solution. They took caged canaries with them into the depths of the mine. Canaries, doing what canaries do, cheerfully chirped and sang as the miners toiled away. Their singing no doubt improved the working conditions, but they also served as an early warning system. Because when their singing stopped, it was due to the canaries having passed out or died due to toxic gases or lack of oxygen. Being smaller, they were affected more quickly. And the miners knew that they had to immediately get out of the dangerous situation or they would soon die too.

This practice gave us the figure of speech of a “canary in the coal mine.” It came to be a metaphor for a warning of danger—a warning that, if ignored, would likely prove fatal to a person and those around him.

This particular metaphor has been on my mind a lot lately. Why? Because it seems that wherever I turn my attention, the canaries are no longer singing. The cheerful chirps and chatter are going silent. The silence is becoming ever more deafening.

People sense an ominous foreboding. As a longtime student of history, I’ve never seen a time quite like today. Current economic conditions seem like a combination of a return to the disastrous inflation and stagflation of the 1970s coupled with the days leading to the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The international scene, with Europe in chaos, the Russian invasion of Ukraine bringing global turmoil, and China’s increasing aggression against Taiwan and other Pacific neighbors, is frighteningly reminiscent of the time just before the conflagration of World War II in which tens of millions died.

Growing food shortages bring to mind severe famines of several decades ago. The escalating energy crisis is like—well, it's not like anything we’ve seen in recent memory where states, regions and nations are experiencing rolling power blackouts that could bring thousands of deaths from overheating and freezing.

What’s behind this growing storm of trouble on so many fronts at once? The name of this magazine, Beyond Today, is taken from a specific but largely ignored news source. That news source is the Bible—specifically, Bible prophecy. Its tagline reads “A Magazine of Understanding,” being based on an understanding of Bible prophecy that God gives to His servants (Amos 3:7).

Bible prophecy reveals a coming storm unlike anything in all of human history (Matthew 24:21-22). It will catch most people by surprise. As the apostle Paul foretold, “For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them . . . And they shall not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

Why is this storm coming? God tells us in Isaiah 30:12-14 (New Living Translation): “Because you despise what I tell you and trust instead in oppression and lies, calamity will come upon you suddenly—like a bulging wall that bursts and falls. In an instant it will collapse and come crashing down. You will be smashed like a piece of pottery—shattered so completely that there won’t be a piece big enough to carry coals from a fireplace or a little water from the well.”

The warning signs of the gathering storm are becoming more obvious by the day. But far too many people despise God’s Word and trust in lies.

Listen closely—are the canaries still singing, or are they falling silent one by one? Are you paying attention? Your life—physical and eternal—depends on it. Far too many will be caught unaware by what’s coming. But that doesn’t have to include you!
World events are spiraling toward a time of unparalleled crisis, and you need to remain alert. But be encouraged too, for beyond the chaos will come a time of unparalleled peace.

by Darris McNeely

Recently over a long weekend my wife and I attended a wedding. It was a lovely wedding with the bride and groom exchanging vows before God and witnesses in a beautiful outdoor setting. Friends and family came from across the country to witness the happy moment. Afterwards people mingled, ate, talked and caught up with friendships for hours over food and drink. It was all that a wedding should be, a celebration of a God-ordained institution and a blessing for the families.

Earlier in the year when we received the invitation in the mail, we thought how nice it would be in the spring to travel south and attend the wedding. Since then, a few things have changed. Gasoline prices have doubled, bumping up travel costs. Hotel room prices have increased with inflation, requiring more outlay there, yet it’s still manageable.

The nagging Covid virus still lingers. Before leaving on this trip a small outbreak of infection took place at a conference we attended, enough to remind us of that concern and all that has come with it. Russia invaded Ukraine during this period. While that war is far away from most of us, in time its impact will be felt by all of us. While millions in Ukraine go through severe tribulation, many of us are still free to move about our lands, live a normal life and go to weddings. Yet how long will that be the case?
The fact is, a severe storm is brewing. Thankfully the storm will ultimately break, but it will wreak great destruction before then. We need to pay attention.

**Are we whistling past the graveyard?**

Are we giving sober consideration to our world as we go about our lives? Or are we, as one expression puts it, whistling past the graveyard—putting on a cheerful demeanor while ignoring the hazard or crisis at hand?

As enjoyable as it was to attend the wedding, I admit to thoughts like, “Are we ignoring the reality of the times?” or “Do we really understand the serious moment of history we live in?” Don’t mistake my meaning. I fully believe that life should go on and that we must not put every pleasure on hold at this moment.

But Jesus did speak to just this moment when He made a well-known statement about the state of society and any others after that.

We should all think about what Jesus said regarding the spirit of the times before His coming. Are we living in a time like that of the period before the Flood of Noah? Do Christ’s words speak to this moment, a time of great stress in world conditions that calls for vigilance? I think they do. Our time is like Christ’s description of Noah’s day. And that thought should awaken us to the dangers of the moment.

**A terrible storm is coming**

A lot of what I read now comes from people around the world who are trying to discern these times. I hear recognition with almost one voice that something has happened. It’s like a great undercurrent moving below the surface of world events, bringing with it vast changes in all parts of life. It brings with it uncertainty, unease and apprehension as to what will happen next.

Before Christ’s return there will be a storm of such proportions it will rock the foundations of civilization and threaten the human race with extinction.

in the days leading to His return, His second coming. Notice this in what’s known as His Olivet Prophecy (so named because it was delivered on the Mount of Olives or Mount Olivet next to Jerusalem), recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21:

“But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:37-39).

Does this sound like today? I think it does. I thought about this verse while at the wedding. And I’m sure I’ll think about it again when I attend another wedding in a few months.

Astute observers try to understand what’s happening and where it’s all leading. Some focus on the technology side, thinking it’s all material. Others see civilizational currents moving like shifting tectonic plates. Still others see vast spiritual forces at work and turn to religion for understanding. Scriptures are quoted. Old Testament allusions are brought out. One writer used the pagan god Molech to describe this moment as an insatiable hunger for the bodies and souls of people to be fed to its fiery presence.

The world has long known troubles throughout history, with terrible wars and other disasters rising to new heights in the world wars of the past century. For the past several decades, though, many nations have lived in relative security and calm.

But as Scripture warns us, this is a “calm before the storm.” The Bible describes a coming time of trouble unlike any since the beginning of history called the Great Tribulation (Daniel 12:1; Jeremiah 30:7; Matthew 24:21).

The world will be thrown into massive upheaval. As Jesus further said in His Olivet Prophecy: “There will be . . . on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Luke 21:25-27).

He also says of this time: “It will be a time of great distress, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and will never be again. If that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could survive, but for the sake of God’s chosen it will be cut short” (Matthew 24:21-22, Revised English Bible).

Before Christ’s return there will occur a storm of such proportions that it will rock the foundations of civilization and threaten the human race with extinction. Do we see storm clouds on the horizon?

For more than two years we have experienced an upheaval of norms, unprecedented in our time and, when looked at in the span of history, potentially larger and more significant than any past period.

As many analysts are seeing, every component of modern society—business, education, media, technology, commerce—has been touched by recent events, and nearly everything has changed. While we might hope for a return to “normal,” a realistic assessment says we’ll likely not return to the world of just three years ago. This can be very unsettling. More
than ever, we need to turn to God and His Word, the Bible, for understanding and a sane, balanced mind.

**Jesus tells us to watch—to stay alert**

Jesus gave His Olivet Prophecy in response to His disciples' question, “What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3). He started with a summary list of rising trends—false Christian deception, wars and rumors of wars, famine and disease epidemics along with devastating natural disasters. He then continued into specific end-time events.

He quoted Daniel's prophecy of the abomination of desolation, an ancient defilement of Jewish temple worship to yet be repeated in some form, and then spoke of the time of Great Tribulation already mentioned.

Common to all three accounts of Jesus' prophecy are His statements sternly warning His disciples to watch, to pray, and to not be caught unaware by the coming events, unable to face them with courage and determination. Let's look closely at what it means to watch and to understand so as to not be caught off guard. This is perhaps the most critical of lessons to take from Christ's teaching.

The account in Mark 13 gives us a complete synopsis of Christ's warning to His disciples. Understanding what His warning means for us today can provide the comfort and confidence to help us cope with these times.

After going through several signs showing the nearness of His return at the close of the age, He states: “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. *Take heed, watch and pray;* for you do not know when the time is.”

And then He gave an example to illustrate His point, comparing Himself to a man who leaves specific instructions for his servants and then departs on a long journey:

“It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. *Watch therefore,* for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: *Watch!*” (verses 32-37, emphasis added throughout).

Three times Jesus tells His followers to watch. What does He mean? The Greek word *gregoreo,* translated as "watch," further means *to stay alert, keep awake, pay attention and take heed.* He knows well our human tendencies—that through neglect or laziness we could let down and be overcome with sin, or a sudden calamity could overwhelm us spiritually.

**The watchman's warning**

The idea of watching is drawn from its use in the Old Testament period to describe what a prophet was to do for the nation, watching for danger and sounding a warning. We see this prominently in the assignment God gave to the prophet Ezekiel in warning the people of Israel. God said to Ezekiel, “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me” (Ezekiel 3:17).

The picture here was drawn from a watchman or sentinel on the lookout to safeguard fields or towns. In the ancient world of agrarian societies, watchtowers were built to overlook the fields. In the weeks the crops were ripening toward harvest, men would stand watch in these towers, guarding the fields from animals or thieves who would make off with the crops. With the community’s food supply at stake, the watchman’s role was critical to the townspeople.

Watchers were also positioned atop...
dangerous weather and direct us to take emergency steps as needed. We ignore their warnings at our peril.

Applying Jesus’ instruction to watch today in terms of societal morality and impending judgment involves an alert awareness of the trends of our world from a biblical perspective. It means evaluating cultural shifts and direction, significant political and geopolitical movements, education and religious trends from the teaching and insight of the Bible. It also involves a sound grasp of Bible prophecy, understanding how God has guided history to fulfill His purpose and where He is ultimately leading things.

Watching also means to examine our lives against the standard of the Word of God to see whether we meet its righteous standards and have a relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ His Son.

In telling us to watch and pray always that we may be accounted worthy to escape calamitous end-time events and stand before Him (Luke 21:36), Jesus shows that we are to be committed to living a godly life. And we are to recognize that the prime goal in life is to seek the values and life of the Kingdom of God now in a personal relationship with God and Christ so that we may live forever in the family of God (Matthew 6:33; Colossians 3:1-4).

This sacrificial role is not only about warning of calamity but in announcing when the danger is passing or when help is on the way, bringing a message of hope.

Declaring the end of the storm

When Jesus’ disciples were afraid in the midst of a raging storm, “He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace, be still!’ And the wind ceased and there was a great calm” (Mark 4:39). Even so, at Jesus’ return He will cause the end-time storm of destruction to cease and will bring great calm to the earth—a time of peace brought by His rule on the earth in the Kingdom of God. In this wonderful “times of refreshing” (Acts 3:19-21), the whole world will at last learn and follow God’s ways.

God wants His watchmen to communicate this good news of coming rescue and salvation. Notice this in Isaiah: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’ Your watchmen shall lift up their voices, with their voices they shall sing together; for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord brings back Zion. ‘Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem! For the Lord has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has made bare His holy arm [rolling up His sleeves, as it were] in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God” (Isaiah 52:7-10).

When Christ instructs us to watch and pray as a prophetic storm looms, He is in essence telling us to draw strength from the gospel during these dark times. The biblical truth that Christ will intervene in world affairs to end injustice, tragedy and corruption gives the visionary hope beyond all other failed promises of human institutions. The Kingdom of God is the only hope for the survival of humanity.

To Jerusalem and the land of Israel
God says the watchmen will hold a constant prayer vigil for the peace of the people: “I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth . . . “Go through, go through the gates! Prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway! Take out the stones, lift up a banner for the peoples! Indeed the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the world: ‘Say to the daughter of Zion, “Surely your salvation is coming; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him’” (Isaiah 62:6-11).

These watchmen, by their presence and prayers, seek to keep the people from suffering the ravaging effects of evil and to help them hold on to hope.

**Called now to serve**

These passages in Isaiah describe a group of godly people with unique insight into the world of today and the world to come. They understand the universal application of the gospel of the Kingdom of God. They see that God will bring that Kingdom to the world to prove that He alone is God. All other gods erected by people to hide His truth will be destroyed.

Proclaiming this message includes showing any who listen the way to personal peace. The message presents the true teaching of God and the way to salvation. It’s also a message of how one can choose to escape the time of judgment God will bring on the world. Christ’s admonition to His disciples to be watching and alert points the way to understanding the times at the end of the age. This is one of the comforting aspects of the gospel message.

In a time of great distress, God lights a path forward. In the book of Amos we have a promise that God gives insight to and through His servants: “If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid? If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it? Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets. A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?” (Amos 3:6-8).

Jesus Christ was a prophet—in fact, the greatest of the prophets. He commissioned His disciples to take the gospel to the world. As part of its role the Church, the Body of Christ, understands the times as it submits to Him as the Head (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Christ tells us as disciples to watch and to pray so we are not caught unaware. He gives discernment to His people about the big events happening today, the ominous gathering storm of world-changing occurrences. Through the lens of the Bible and with the mind of Christ, a clear view of today’s world events can give us insight into the world of today and through His servants the prophets. A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?” (Amos 3:6-8).

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Jesus Christ and God the Father have committed to a purpose to bring together the diversity of peoples and cultures into the one family. They are building—the family of God. When Christ tells us to watch and to pray, He is saying He will give understanding that will bring peace of mind and calm, determined strength. We don’t have to worry excessively about world events beyond our control.

We can take courage in knowing that God is in ultimate control of history and even allows the suffering and, yes, evil that happen for now within the context of His overall purpose. In fact, He has revealed to us that purpose as well as the outcome in general terms. Godly faith brings a peace that passes all understanding in the human realm (Philippians 4:7).

Why, then, does God allow a storm of evil and suffering to come on the world before Christ’s return? The answer lies in understanding the nature of man and the purpose of life. Again, God is creating a family, reproducing beings in His image, yet the current stage of humanity’s development is necessary to that supreme purpose. Each of us must choose to enter a covenant of obedience with God as a prelude to the gift of eternal peace that passes all understanding in the human realm (Philippians 4:7).
life He promises. This vital knowledge is missed even by most people of faith.

**Will you watch and pray?**

You are likely a sincere person who believes in God, and you no doubt consider yourself on a track to receiving whatever promises of God you feel are in your future. Still, ask God to help you make sure you’re seeing the full picture. Recognize that you could be in the category of those who are deceived by Satan.

“The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19), for Satan the devil and arch-deceiver “deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). The great deception Satan has placed on mankind is the reason for the great storm that is coming. He has blinded people’s minds (2 Corinthians 4:4) to the purpose for human life, the reason we were put on this exceptional planet by the Creator God. And without that vital understanding we have no context in which to place the coming storm.

Even if you are a passionate student of Bible prophecy, with knowledge of the signs of Christ’s coming, you can still be missing the important connection of why these times of trouble will come. Christ’s warning to “watch and pray” by itself is not enough. We must watch and pray within the context of broader understanding of God’s Word, especially the steps in God’s plan of salvation. These steps are represented in God’s appointed annual festivals revealed in the Bible. At these times God’s elect assemble before Him to remember and rehearse the grand meaning of human existence.

God’s biblical festivals show His plan to bring many children into His divine family. That plan, in place before the foundation of the world, calls for faith in Christ as the Lamb of God. Each of the festivals show an aspect of Christ’s work to bring eternal salvation to the world (see "The Biblical Festivals That Teach Us About Jesus Christ" beginning on page 24). When you understand and celebrate these days in spirit and truth, you see God guiding this world through the storms of trial and difficulty to the time of calm represented by the Kingdom of God on the earth after Christ’s second coming.

The worst storm ever is coming—but the storm will break when Christ returns. Stay alert and hold fast through the storm to the peace and calm God has promised!

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**LEARN MORE**

Where are today’s chaotic conditions taking the world? What do they mean, and do they fit with Bible prophecy? You need to read our free study guide *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* to better understand the answers! Download or request your free copy today!

[BTmagazine.org/booklets]
A marvelous, peaceful and prosperous, 1,000-year-long age is on the horizon for all humanity. Yet surprisingly, it will not be initiated by human effort or action. Discover how, why and when this new era will be launched and what its amazing impact will be in the lives of every person on earth.

by John LaBissoniere

After serving eight years as president of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower gave a farewell speech to the nation on Jan. 17, 1961. Near its conclusion he laid out this captivating vision: “We pray that people of all faiths, all races, all nations, may have their great human needs satisfied; that those now denied opportunity shall come to enjoy it to the full; that all who yearn for freedom may experience its spiritual blessings; that all who are insensitive to the needs of others will learn charity; that the scourges of poverty, disease and ignorance will be made to disappear from the earth, and that, in the goodness of time, all peoples will come to live together in a peace guaranteed by the binding force of mutual respect and love.”

In conveying his sincere aspirations for humanity, President Eisenhower voiced what many others have yearned for throughout history. Was this merely wishful thinking? Was it just a dream to imagine that peoples, nations and races could live together in perfect harmony and enjoy loving, respectful relationships? Is it possible that every person on earth could have their physical needs met completely and continually?

And in taking this a bit farther, is it only a fantasy to think that all people could enjoy peace of mind, feel totally safe and secure, be educated and have the opportunity to fully develop their talents? Is it beyond hope to think that people could always be governed under honest, honorable and caring leadership?

Not a dream but a coming reality

As improbable as it may seem, what President Eisenhower expressed was not a mere dream but a marvelous and electrifying reality yet to come! It will happen—not by human effort or action, but because the loving, powerful, eternal God of the universe will bring it to pass!

Bible prophecy reveals that these wonderful conditions the world has longed for will last for a millennium, meaning 1,000 years. When this epoch is initiated it will mark
the most magnificent turning point in the entire history of humanity. World society will move from conditions of fear, deficiency and distress to assurance, prosperity and tranquility.

And, most significantly, all people will have the opportunity to develop a close and enduring relationship with their Creator, follow His way of life, obtain the gift of spiritual salvation and enter into His eternal, divine family (Isaiah 61:10; John 17:3). This is all part of the greatest news anyone could ever hear!

This glorious age to come will begin when Jesus Christ returns to earth in magnificent power and glory to reign for 1,000 years as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 17:14; 19:16). Just prior to that time, however, the world will experience a calamitous period of global warfare resulting in enormous destruction and the death and suffering of billions of people (see “The Storm Before the Calm,” beginning on page 4). However, Christ will intervene to stop it completely so as to save humanity from annihilation (Matthew 24:22).

Furthermore, He will take power and authority out of the hands of debased, evil men and wicked spiritual influences operating behind the scenes, incarcerating Satan and his demonic cohorts so they can no longer corruptly influence human beings (Revelation 20:1-2; Jude 13). The world will then at last be freed from its long and wearisome captivity to ignorance, violence and iniquity (Romans 8:21).

Afterwards Christ will launch the beginnings of a new, righteous civilization that will bring all people tremendous joy and an incredibly exciting future (Isaiah 49:8-9; Jeremiah 29:11). Building literally on the ashes of a spent, shattered human society, He will first offer great comfort and reassurance to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned.” And likewise in Isaiah 49:13: “Shout for joy, you heavens; rejoice, you earth; burst into song, you mountains! For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones” (New International Version).

Besides providing empathy and support, Christ will deliver miraculous healing to halt pain, distress and suffering (Isaiah 35:5-6; Malachi 4:2). Over a period of time all who’ve endured intense misery and tragedy will experience a rebuilding of their physical, mental and emotional health and strength: “I have seen their ways, but I will heal them; I will guide them and restore comfort to Israel’s mourners” (Isaiah 57:18, NIV).

As the Good Shepherd who truly cares for His flock (John 10:10-14), Jesus will also help people understand that genuine safety and security is now guaranteed, with a divine, benevolent administration in place to continually serve and support them (Isaiah 2:3; 9:6; Jeremiah 33:15).

He will replace all levels of human rule with judicious and righteous governance, resulting in magnificent changes throughout world society. During Jesus’ millennial reign over the Kingdom of God on earth, His generous and gracious ways will characterize all relationships between people (Revelation 20:6; Psalm 111:4). With society personally guided and governed by Jesus Christ, genuine peacefulness—previously unknown to humanity—will gladden and reassure individuals, families and entire nations (Isaiah 9:7; Psalm 119:165).

Contributing to this spectacular condition will be the fact that education in warfare and war itself will be utterly abolished (Psalm 46:9-10). Assuredly, humanity will no longer suffer the apprehension, cruelty and devastation of war (Micah 4:3).

“Violence will disappear from your land; the desolation and destruction of war will end. Salvation will surround you like city walls, and praise will be on the lips of all who enter there” (Isaiah 60:18, New Living Translation). All people will experience confident well-being as God’s loving and saving influence transforms the hearts and minds of people the world over (Isaiah 52:10).

Wonderfully, these earthly citizens of God’s government will be relieved of anxiety and live peaceably because conflict and contention between races and peoples will be entirely eliminated! In fact, former enemies will work together in complete unity and harmony (Isaiah 19:24-25).

Peacefulness will not only be the way of life for humanity, but it will also govern in the natural world since God will change the very nature of animals so they become tame. “A wolf will reside with a lamb, and a leopard will
lie down with a young goat; an ox and a young lion will graze together, as a small child leads them along” (Isaiah 11:6, New English Translation).

In this transformed world, parents will be freed from all worry in knowing that their children are safe in every situation. The same prophecy continues: “The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain” (verse 9).

**Wilderness areas to be transformed**

God’s flawless design for His coming, marvelous age will also take into account an important new fact about the earth itself. Shortly before Jesus Christ’s second coming, powerful earthquakes and meteor impacts will cause enormous changes to the world’s surface (Matthew 24:7; Revelation 6:12-14). And divine intervention will bring further changes.

As God promises the blessings of rain and abundance for all peoples, it appears that the earth’s weather patterns will be altered substantially. Multiple millions of previously unusable acres of land will become accessible for future human settlement and cultivation. Also, abundant water resources, including new rivers, streams and lakes will be manifested in the changing landscape (Psalm 107:35).

Earth’s former wilderness areas will be transformed into well-watered, productive lands (Amos 9:13). Deserts and former wastelands will turn green and lush as rainfall reaches them regularly in precisely needed amounts (Isaiah 51:3). “The wilderness and the dry land will be glad. The desert will rejoice and blossom like a rose” (Isaiah 35:1, World English Bible).

Besides having suitable precipitation on a consistent basis, springs of water will bubble up from the ground creating clear, sparkling streams and gracefully flowing rivers (Isaiah 41:18). It will be as if the earth itself expresses great joy because of all these marvelous changes! As Psalm 65:13 says, “The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered with grain; they shout for joy, they also sing.”

Moreover, many uninhabited, abandoned cities and towns will be completely renovated: “And they shall rebuild the old ruins, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations” (Isaiah 61:4).

Imagine young families journeying to these locations to build homes and farms (Ezekiel 36:9-10). “The fields that used to lie empty and desolate in plain view of everyone will again be farmed. And when I bring you back, people will say, “This former wasteland is now like the Garden of Eden” (Ezekiel 36:34-35, NLT).

Jesus Christ will at that time give all families their own land to cultivate and enjoy! “Everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken” (Micah 4:4).

Farms and gardens will flourish abundantly: “The LORD says, “The time is coming when there will be all kinds of food. People will still be harvesting crops when it’s time to plow again. People will still be taking the juice from grapes when it’s time to plant again. Wine will drip from the mountains and pour from the hills” (Amos 9:13, New Century Version).

Families will experience blessing after blessing as they raise a variety of abundant crops, care for productive fruit trees and tend to healthy livestock (Isaiah 30:23).

**Great prosperity and fulfillment**

As a result of God’s perfect rule through Jesus Christ, families all around the world will have plenty to eat, live healthfully, be prosperous and enjoy extraordinary fulfillment (Jeremiah 31:12).

The next verse adds that the people of that day, being peaceful, happy and productive, will have opportunities to participate in a variety of cultural, recreational and social activities, with young and old enjoying each other’s company: “The young women will dance for joy, and the men—old and young—will join in the celebration. I will turn their mourning into joy. I will comfort them and exchange their sorrow for rejoicing” (verse 13, NLT).

And significantly, as an example to other towns, villages and farms around the globe, the world capital of Jerusalem will become the center of education and inspiration for everyone. “Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3).

Unlike the present age, when Jerusalem has so often been a place of bitter fighting and contention, it will
become an incredibly beautiful city of supreme happiness and tranquility (Isaiah 33:20). It will be so secure and peaceful that little boys and girls will play happily in its streets (Zechariah 8:5). “Behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying” (Isaiah 65:18-19).

Throughout the Millennium, people everywhere on earth will live in perfect safety and will raise their children in fine homes on beautiful, well-tended, highly productive land: “My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings and in quiet resting places” (Isaiah 32:18).

Learning God’s perfect way of life

Not only will Jesus Christ make it possible for people to live in peace and enjoy great physical abundance, but He will give them key spiritual and moral instruction and guidance. Assisting Christ in this essential duty will be His resurrected, faithful and wise divine sons and daughters of this age who will then serve as teachers, administrators, judges and leaders (2 Corinthians 6:18; Isaiah 30:20).

They will diligently coach all people in God’s exceptional way of life—foundational to which are His Ten Commandments, including the required observance of His weekly Sabbath day along with His seven annual Holy Days (Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 44:24). If anyone drifts from following these vital guidelines, they will be quietly yet firmly corrected: “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left” (Isaiah 30:21).

By obeying God’s teachings, all individuals and nations will have a firm foundation for cooperation as they harmoniously serve others. It will be such a spectacular time that “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14)!

In addition, God will grant repentance to all who are willing, followed by the matchless gift of His Holy Spirit (Acts 11:18; Jeremiah 31:33). As He says, “I’ll place my spirit within you, empowering you to live according to my regulations and to keep my just decrees” (Ezekiel 36:27, International Standard Version).

Empowered and changed by that Holy Spirit, people will be motivated by a sincere desire to love and obey God and show profound, caring concern toward their neighbors. “This is the new covenant I will make with my people on that day, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds” (Hebrews 10:16, NLT).

Then, after 1,000 years of phenomenal peace, joy and prosperity, the next phase of God’s great plan will commence. All the billions of people who have lived in past ages, not having known their Creator or scriptural truth, will be resurrected from their graves to physical life and be given their very first opportunity to learn about God and His way of life (Ezekiel 37; Revelation 20:11-12).

Jesus Christ will offer them the gift of the Holy Spirit so they will not only comprehend spiritual knowledge, but have the prospect of receiving salvation (Acts 2:38; Isaiah 65:20-24). As they look back on their former physical lives, they will see that its results could never compare to the prosperity, tranquility and joy experienced under the rule of God’s Kingdom. As a result, the vast majority will choose to submit to God, obey His commandments and later be transformed into immortal spirit beings in His eternal, divine family (Ephesians 3:15; Hebrews 2:10).

The greatest news anyone could hear

Perhaps you can now better visualize God’s breathtaking new age, which is depicted clearly in Bible prophecy. He is preparing the most positive, exciting and marvelous future for all humanity.

Jesus Christ will introduce dramatic and wonderful changes into people’s lives as He initiates an entirely new, awe-inspiring civilization built on the foundation of God’s truth. This will result in immeasurable joy, peacefulness and abundant prosperity for every person. And, through God giving people His Holy Spirit, they will have the ability to truly love and obey Him, deeply care for others and personally grow spiritually strong (Galatians 5:22-23).

With everyone continually educated in God’s ideal ways and applying them, they will experience boundless contentment and happiness while becoming spiritually prepared to join God in His family of divine beings (Psalm 100:1-5; Ephesians 3:15). All of this is what the Millennium will be like!

President Eisenhower echoed the yearnings of many others throughout the ages when he spoke about his hope and aspiration for a time when all people on earth would live together in genuine peace and freedom and be completely freed from the scourges of poverty, disease and ignorance. How thrilling it is to know that God will make those dreams a perfect reality—to last for a millennium and beyond! Considering the wonderful future God has in store for humanity, it truly is the greatest news anyone could ever hear!
When on trial for His life, and asked by the Roman governor if He were a king, Jesus Christ replied: “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born and for this cause I have come into the world” (John 18:37, emphasis added throughout).

Jesus plainly stated that He was born to be a King and He came to be a King. And He will return to earth to be a King to reign over the entire earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 17:14; 19:16).

The Bible contains dozens of scriptures and prophecies about these events. They give us great hope for the future, of a far better world beyond today.

However, over the centuries many people have become so focused on when this will happen—timing the Father has not revealed (see Matthew 24:36)—that they missed the most important point for us to understand. And that is how Christ will reign and govern. What will His Kingdom and government be like? What will His reign be like when He is the ultimate King and Ruler over the entire earth?

**The Kingdom of God on earth**

Jesus spoke repeatedly of the Kingdom of God, and in this He was continuing the message of God’s prophets who had come before. He referred often to His return to earth to establish the Kingdom these earlier biblical prophets had foretold. In His lengthy prophecy given in response to His disciples’ question, “What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3), He described the arrival of His divine reign on earth to usher in a new age and to end all human-led governments with their history of abuse, oppression, death and destruction.

Christ specifically answered the disciples’ question in Matthew 24:30: “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then 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.”

When Jesus came to earth the first time, He proclaimed the good news of the Kingdom of God and how we can be a part of it. And when He returns at His second coming, He will come as the world’s all-powerful ruling King to establish His Kingdom over the entire earth and make that good news a reality!

He continued with His prophecy of His return: “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, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’” (Matthew 25:31-34).

The Kingdom Jesus referred to is the same Kingdom of God of which He often taught. As He said, this Kingdom has been in planning “from the foundation of the world.” And the goal of God’s great plan for mankind is that those who are “blessed of My Father”—who have a close, loving, reverential relationship with God—will “inherit the kingdom prepared” for them. Jesus will be the King of this Kingdom. How we may become part of this Kingdom is a vital part of what Jesus came to announce. This was the heart of His message to “repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

**A Kingdom of everlasting peace**

We read about Jesus Christ’s mission to establish this Kingdom in a remarkable prophecy in Isaiah 9:6-7 (New Living Translation): “For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity.”

This tells us that Jesus the Messiah will establish God’s government forever, and He will be King over all creation. And how will He reign? We see that in the words used here to describe Jesus Christ as king: “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” There will be no end of peace under that government. It will be established and upheld with fairness and justice forever. That is the kind of king and ruler Jesus Christ will be!

Isaiah 2:3-4 (NLT) further prophesies of that time: “People from many nations will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of Jacob’s God. There he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths.’ For the LORD’s teaching will go out from Zion; his word will go out from Jerusalem. The LORD will mediate between nations and will settle international disputes. They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will no longer fight against nation, nor train for war anymore.”

After thousands of years of human history marked by war, violence and corruption, Jesus Christ will lead a massive reeducation effort to teach people God’s way of outgoing love—of giving rather than the selfish way of getting.

This is the only way that leads to true and lasting peace!

Isaiah 11:9 tells us what the result of this worldwide reeducation effort will be: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

As the waters fill every crack and crevice in the basins of the seas, so will the knowledge of God fill the entire earth. People who have never known the true God—who have been spiritually blinded by atheism and false religions that teach lies rather than God’s truth—will at last have their eyes and minds opened to learn about the one true God and His Son, Jesus Christ. And as we just read, people will stream to Jerusalem from all over the world to learn about God’s truth and His way of life! (For more wonderful prophecies of this time, be sure to read “What Will the Millennium Be Like?” beginning on page 10.)

A Ruler unlike any human ruler

But what will make God’s government on earth different from all governments, kingdoms and empires that have gone before? Jesus Himself described the contrast in a gentle rebuke to His own disciples who, knowing Jesus was destined to be a king, had themselves been selfishly jockeying for positions of power and prestige. What did Jesus tell them?

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles [the nations of the world] lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25-28).

Jesus packed a lot of punch into this teaching moment. His disciples were well aware of the kind of abusive and corrupt rulership exercised by the governing Roman administrators and their lackeys. Like many government officials today, many of them made fortunes from “serving” the people, using their positions to enrich themselves.

Jesus made it clear that He and those who follow Him—and who will rule with Him when God’s Kingdom is established on earth (Revelation 1:6)—must follow a very different model of leadership. “It shall not be so among you,” He told them. Instead, “Whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your servant—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

The model for governing in God’s government will be giving rather than getting. It will be serving others rather than being served. It will be rooted and grounded in God’s character of genuine love, which is outgoing concern for others rather than self-centeredness.

Jesus modeled this kind of giving, serving attitude throughout His ministry on earth. He fed the hungry. He healed the sick. He raised up the oppressed. He gave...
hope to the hopeless. He took the role of a slave and washed His disciples' feet, and took the role of an ultimate sacrificial offering to die in our place, taking on Himself the punishment we deserved for our sins (John 13:12-15; Romans 5:6-8).

Isaiah 40:10-11 is another prophesy of Jesus Christ's coming reign on earth: "Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand . . . He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young."

His rule will be marked with kindness and compassion, love being the foundation of God's way of life and all of His laws (Matthew 22:37-40). This is not to say that He and those ruling with Him will not exercise firm power when necessary. At times it is required to prevent people from harming one another. But the key difference will be that all decisions will be based on righteous, perfect laws that benefit all those concerned (Psalm 119:172; Deuteronomy 6:24-25; James 1:25). It will truly be government for the good of the governed.

Beyond the horror and hardship of human government today, this is the wonderful future mankind has to look forward to—a world of peace, purpose and plenty under the loving rulership of God the Father through Jesus Christ. Join us in praying, "Your Kingdom come!" and in striving to live those righteous qualities in your life now so you can be part of that Kingdom then!
Where Does Evil Come From?

Every day we see and hear of terrible events—wars, horrifying violence, bloody crimes, government corruption, gross immorality, hypocrisy and more. Where do such things come from? And will they ever end?

by Steven Britt

God, as the Creator of all living things, loves life. When He made human life, He looked over His creation and declared in Genesis 1:31 that it was “very good”! He ultimately desires to give eternal life in His Kingdom to those who seek Him. But, before that Kingdom comes, He also wants us to have full, productive, peaceful human lives. So why don’t we have what God wants for us? Why is the world filled with violence, corruption and outright evil?

Scarcely a day passes without unequivocal evil marring the news headlines. Horrific images and stories from the Russia-Ukraine conflict have haunted us this year. Murders and sexual abuse ravage our cities. America is now regularly rattled and dumbfounded by the incomprehensible evil of school shootings, where some deranged individual guns down innocent children.

For those who believe in God and that the Bible is His inspired Word, we know the truth: Our world has serious spiritual problems that can only be rightly met with spiritual solutions, from the individual level right up to the global scale.

While these may seem like an impossibly broad range of issues—with calculated war between nations on one hand and spontaneous homegrown violence on the other—the same evil influence is behind it all. Satan the devil is referred to in Scripture as “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2). Jesus Christ called him “the ruler of this world” (John 14:30).

Do we believe the words of Christ—that Satan is literally in charge of the world we live in? God is the supreme Ruler over all creation, but Christ tells us that Satan is literally in charge of the world we live in!

Unseen spiritual forces influence the world

In Ephesians 6:12, Paul’s writings demonstrate his understanding of the workings of Satan and his demonic minions in the world around us, which continue to this day: “For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits” (New Living Translation, emphasis added throughout).

This is not mere poetic imagery—Paul’s statements agree with Jesus’ own words! It is critical to understand that dangerous demonic deception has wreaked havoc on human history—and that the worst is yet to come. Satan’s most significant work is actually happening all around us, in plain sight, in the mind of the average person. He “deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9).

Satan and his demons were originally angels submitted to God but who then rebelled. Satan’s self-corruption and sin are described in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14. God later allowed him to challenge our first human parents in the Garden of Eden, and they followed in his way. He now influences world leaders and governments like he influences all people—primarily through deception and pressuring with temptation, and this can occur in broad strokes or a more targeted fashion.

When Satan is called “the prince of the power of the air” in Ephesians 2:2, it evokes the imagery of his attitude of selfishness and pride being broadcast, just like the multitude of radio, television, cell phone and internet signals that are invisibly transmitting messages through the air all around us today. These broad strokes result in people’s disobedience to God’s law, leading them down a path to many negative outcomes, such as addictions and self-destructive behavior, insatiable greed and lust and, for some, outrageous violence against others.

But for world leaders, Satan prepares more narrowly focused tactics to prey on their human weaknesses and steer them in the direction he wants, which is lawlessness, death and destruction. We catch a hint of this in Revelation 16:13-14, which describes “three unclean spirits . . . coming out of the mouth of the dragon [Satan] . . . For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out
to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.”

Many today want to blame the state and direction of the world on a conspiratorial group of elites, a shadow government or a secret society. But the real and ultimate conspiracy is spiritual, unseen and far worse and more powerful than they could imagine.

Satan’s evil plot goes undetected because, most often, his deceptions work by having a false front that can convincingly appear to be good. As Paul wrote, “Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). All evil dictators in history have had their own devoted followers and their own side of the story. But the underlying reality these and many others have missed is that these rulers and their followers are actually pawns deceived by Satan into believing lies leading them to commit terrible crimes against humanity.

Lawlessness abounds in the end times

Lawlessness—the way of Satan—is steadily growing and overtaking daily life. It takes place when politicians and judges take bribes and show partiality. It happens when we see music, movies and TV shows overrun with profanity that border on being pornography—which is itself also accepted as “normal” by most today! It takes place when marriage is no longer valued or respected, as witnessed to by a high divorce rate, a high rate of illegitimate births and the sanctioning of same-sex marriage.

The lawlessness Jesus Christ spoke of was, specifically, rebellion against God's holy and righteous law, which is openly mocked in today’s world as being outdated, irrelevant, backwards and barbaric. People with no real understanding of the loving Creator twist His words, trying to make His laws appear ridiculous to “modern” and “enlightened” sensibilities—but these sensibilities are really nothing more than the product of a warped, self-centered and hedonistic way of thinking!

Even among those who believe that the Bible is God’s inspired Word, most disregard substantial parts of His law. Christ Himself prophesied of great religious deception, and we ought to pay attention! Jesus said: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:21-23).

Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:1-5 that “in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power.”

Bible prophecy reveals that under Satan’s influence conditions will grow so awful that human extinction will be the result without God’s direct intervention.

Massive end-time deception of the nations

The Bible reveals that Satan’s influence will come to an awful crescendo, growing much worse than any time in history just before the return of Christ.

Speaking of a final end-time global dictator, Revelation 13:2 states that “the dragon [Satan] gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.” The result will be not only the total corruption of world leaders and the
elite, but complete religious deception that will have the
general public siding with Satan through the common
bond of lawlessness. We can see from the moral decay all
around us that this is already underway!

Bible prophecy reveals that conditions will grow so
awful that human extinction will be the result without
God’s direct and sudden intervention (Matthew 24:21-
22). Jesus Christ will have to return to earth to save us
from destruction at our own hands! Only His return to
establish the Kingdom of God on earth will save us from
ourselves. At that time Satan will be removed and Jesus
and His resurrected saints, all His faithful followers of
this age, will reign on the earth.

This will be the greatest regime change in human
history—when “the saints of the Most High shall receive
the Kingdom, and possess the Kingdom forever” (Daniel
7:18). It’s the time when it will be announced that
“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, English Standard Version).

This can only be accomplished with Satan being com-
pletely deposed from his current position—and that’s
exactly what God reveals will happen!

Satan bound for 1,000 years

Revelation 20 is a key testimony to the future physi-
cal rule of Jesus Christ and the saints on earth. Verses
4-6 describe what many refer to as “the Millennium”—a
period of 1,000 years when Jesus and the saints will reign
over the physical earth and all its people immediately
after His return. But the chapter actually opens by dealing
with the problem of Satan and his influence first!

Here we see God giving full victory over this enemy.
A great angel comes down from heaven “having a great
chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, that
serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound
him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bot-
tomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him,
so that he should deceive the nations no more till the
thousand years were finished” (Revelation 20:1-3).

What’s truly amazing is that the binding of Satan was
foretold in the ancient observance of God’s annual Holy
Days—and it’s still celebrated each year by faithful follow-
ers of God. Each year, on the Day of Atonement, the high
priest in Israel would confess the sins of the people over
the head of a live goat and send it out alive into the wilderness.
The ceremony is found in detail in Leviticus 16. Unlike
other animals utilized in the Old Covenant system, this
goose was not slain in sacrifice because it did not represent
the sacrificial death of Christ. Rather, picturing Satan, it
was banished into the wilderness. The symbolic connec-
tion with Revelation 20:1-3 is clear, since Satan will be
likely banished into the bottomless pit.

The tragedies listed at the outset of this article are born
out of the evil intent of the hearts of men spurred on
through Satan’s inciting deception and temptation—and
the only effective approach against this is to cut off evil
from its source. That is why God will remove Satan from
the world and human contact altogether during the Millen-
nium, thus removing the originator of sin and temptation
so that mankind can finally flourish under God’s direction.

In 2022 the Day of Atonement is sunset Oct. 4 to sunset
Oct. 5, and you can join in this annual observance by re-
everently refraining from work, fasting before God for those
24 hours and gathering during the day in a sacred assembly
with others as God commands in Leviticus 23:27-32. Visit
ucg.org/congregations to find a congregation near you to
meet with in celebrating the coming victory over Satan and
learning much more about the full meaning of the Day of
Atonement, including how it uniquely reveals the work of
Jesus Christ as our High Priest.

It’s personal—Satan wants to influence you!

Satan’s attacks, while unleashed on the mainstream
to draw them away to his sinful attitude of pride, are
also targeted and personal. Jesus told His disciple Peter,
“Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you like
wheat” (Luke 22:31). Likewise, Satan wants to turn every
one of us away from God!

Peter was at that time tested on faithfulness to Christ
and failed in the moment. However, through repentance,
he was restored and set free from captivity to Satan’s influ-
ence, eventually being granted the power of God’s Holy
Spirit to overcome temptation and sin. We can have access
to that same power today—and we desperately need it!

Later in Peter’s ministry, God inspired him to write a
personal warning to us: “Be sober, be vigilant; because
your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion,
seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Satan wants
to devour you, just like he wanted to devour Peter.

But God also desires us—not to devour us, but to save
us from our sins and grant us eternal life with Him. James
4:7 exhorts: “Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will
flee from you.”

We do not have to wait for the return of Christ and the
binding of Satan in the bottomless pit to be delivered from
captivity. We can follow God’s commands today, celebrating
the Day of Atonement and all of His Holy Days and com-
pletely submitting ourselves to His will in our lives daily!

**LEARN MORE**
The Bible says a great deal more about Satan’s origin and the methods and tactics he uses to deceive mankind and to lead us into sin, suffering and death. You need to read our free study guide Is There Really a Devil? Download or request your copy today!

BTmagazine.org/booklets
As parents, we have an innate desire to protect our children and shield them from anything unpleasant. We'd rather they didn't have to hear about the latest school shooting, predictions of food shortages, threats of nuclear war, or what deadly disease is starting to spread. But the truth is, we are living in perilous times. The world's troubles seem to be mounting daily.

To compound matters, this is the digital age. When something horrific happens anywhere in the world, the media will bombard us with all of the gory details. Kids and adults alike are exposed to a steady stream of often sensational news reports 24/7. It's nearly impossible to not be exposed to these stories.

This kind of intense news coverage can leave adults feeling grieved, depressed, anxious and overwhelmed. But it's even harder on kids.

"Children can become very traumatized by the news," says Scott Poland, Ed.D., a professor of psychology at Nova Southeastern University and an expert on crisis situations. "They may not be able to put things in perspective. They may worry about their own safety, even if a tragedy occurred far away. If what's on the news is just speculation about something bad that might happen, they don't always know that's just conjecture."

He advises parents to open up a dialogue with their children whenever a new tragedy breaks in the media: "Don't wait for your kids to come to you about their concerns, or assume they aren't interested in the topic or don't know what happened. They're going to know about it, and their fears won't go away by simply ignoring the reality of the situation."

You need to check in with your children so you can clear up any misconceptions or misinformation they may have, and hopefully put their anxieties to rest. It doesn't have to be a long conversation; even just chatting for a few minutes can help them feel calmer and more secure.

It can be hard to know exactly what you should tell your kids, but even saying something less than perfect is better than not addressing the topic at all. The following suggestions may help:

**Get control of your own emotions**

Before talking with your children, make sure you are calm. "Your kids will look to you for cues about how to react to tragic events," Dr. Poland says. "If you seem overly upset or hysterical, they will absorb those emotions and respond the same way." It's okay if your kids see you sad or crying, he adds, as long as you are able to control your emotions.

If your children are with you when you first learn about a troubling event, you may feel distraught, but you still need to try to maintain composure. You won't be able to help them if you completely fall apart.

**Draw out their concerns**

Open the conversation by asking your children some questions to find out what they've heard about the incident and how they feel about it. You could say something like, "You've probably heard the sad news for today. What are other young people you know saying about what happened?" If you and your kids are watching the news together, you could ask, "How do you feel about this?"

Allow your children to share their perspectives and concerns, and listen carefully to what they say. Be sure to ask them if they have any questions. This will help you know what may be troubling them so you can better address their fears.

**Provide age-appropriate details**

Respond to your kids' questions openly and truthfully, with their age and maturity level in mind. "You don't want to overwhelm children with too many details or information they can't handle developmentally," cautions Dr. Poland. Teens may want to get into why something
Open up a dialogue with your children whenever a new tragedy breaks in the media. Don’t wait for them to come to you. happened and the potential ramifications for the community or nation.

Try to correct any of your kids’ perceptions that are untrue or overblown, and fill in any gaps in information. Often once they know the facts, they’ll feel better. You do need to educate yourself in advance about the topic so you can provide accurate information. If you don’t know how to answer some questions, or if the situation seems complicated and you’re still trying to understand what happened, admit it. Most kids will appreciate the honesty.

Explain that the “news” isn’t always “truth”

Teens, in particular, typically get most of their “news” from social media feeds, which tend to disseminate a lot of half-truths, unsubstantiated claims, exaggerated views and opinions-presented-as-facts. Much of what kids see is contradictory or confusing, adding to their angst about the topic. The mainstream media isn’t any better, often covering only the most frightening developments or what details promote a particular narrative.

None of this is surprising, as Satan certainly influences what’s in the media. Ephesians 2:2 refers to him as the “prince of the power of the air.” In Revelation 12:9, he is described as the one “who deceives the whole world.” Satan will do anything he can to keep humanity confused and in fear.

Address this with your kids. Tell them we shouldn’t believe everything that’s presented in the media. Explain that anyone can publish “information” online in a blog or social media post, even if it isn’t well-researched or factual. Point out that the agenda of many media outlets has shifted from objectively informing the public to generating fear, propagandizing politics and creating their own “truths.” This may prevent kids from falling prey to manipulation, and help them stay grounded in reality.

Encourage them to look to God for protection

More than anything, your kids want reassurance that they’re safe. Assure them that God is aware of the dangers we face today and that He promises to protect us if we seek Him.

Says Brad, father of two preteens: “My kids know I’ll do whatever I can to keep them safe. They know we have policemen and firefighters in the community. But there’s only so much human beings can do. I always remind my kids that ultimately God is the only one we can truly rely on to protect us.”

The Bible is filled with God’s promises of protection. Read some of these verses to your children and talk about what they mean. Deuteronomy 31:6, Joshua 1:9, Psalm 46 and 91, Isaiah 41:10, and 2 Thessalonians 3:3 are good passages to start with.

During your conversation, suggest to your kids that they pray with you. Ask God to keep your family safe and to send comfort and help to those affected by the crisis. This reinforces the lesson that God is our protector and that He wants us to reach out to Him.

Point them to God’s “big picture”

The most important information to relay to your kids is that Jesus Christ will return to establish the Kingdom of God and put an end to the trauma and suffering we’re seeing in the world today. Even young children can grasp that basic concept and be encouraged by it.

Depending on your child’s age and maturity level, you could do what Mike, father of three teens, does: “I try to talk with my kids whenever there’s a big news story that could relate to Bible prophecy, and try to help them understand why these things are happening and what is prophesied to occur before Christ’s return. I don’t want them to be alarmed when they learn about all the scary things going on.”

The Bible provides us with the answers that are missing from most news programs—why we see so much pain and destruction in the world and how these problems will be solved. That is vital information to convey to our kids. God’s “big picture” should be in the forefront of their minds—and ours too. That is the only way to cultivate a truly peaceful, positive and hopeful outlook.
Promoting immoral pride plunges to new depths

As we addressed in our last issue, so much of society now hinges on the purveying of LGBTQ values—including the promotion of drag queens to innocent children, such as “drag queen story hour” as part of library reading programs.

What is most disturbing about this is not merely the attempt to normalize alternative orientations, but the pushing of overt sexual expression on young kids. Men in drag are not simply wearing women’s clothes, which God calls an abomination (Deuteronomy 22:5). They are engaging in flamboyant exhibitionism for sexual thrill—and here it’s perpetrated against children.

Until very recently that was rightfully viewed as a crime.

But so many of our government leaders are all in with this movement. Speaking before a civil rights conference in June, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel mocked concerns over this, stating to a laughing audience:

“You know what’s not a problem for kids who are seeking a good education? Drag queens. Okay? So let me say this: Drag queens, not only are they not hurting our kids, drag queens make everything better. Drag queens are fun! Drag queens are entertainment.

And you know what else I’ll say that was totally not poll-tested? I say this: a drag queen for every school! That is what would be fine for a kid and lift them up when they’re having emotional issues.” This from the chief law enforcement officer of a U.S. state.

In the same month, “pride month,” U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi made her second guest appearance on a well-known TV drag show and stated: “It is my honor to be here to say to all of you how proud we all are of you. Thank you for the joy and beauty you bring to the world. Your freedom of expression of yourselves in drag is what America is all about. I say that all the time to my friends in drag.”

She then repeated this on Twitter. Yes, the third-highest officeholder in the country says drag exhibition is what America is all about!

Not to be left out, the second-highest officeholder, Vice President Kamala Harris, went on stage at a Capitol Pride event with a drag queen winner of that same show and posted a picture of her hugging him with the words “Love is love. Happy Pride!”

Yet is overt sexual exhibitionism really love? Think of gay pride parades that devolve into vulgar and graphic sexual spectacles. To object is to be accused of hate. Increasingly, it seems that this is indeed what America and other Western nations are being forced and groomed to be about.

Our foreign policy experts even proclaim that our commitment to this supposed liberty is what sets us apart from backward authoritarian states. A recently highlighted Brookings Institution article that originally appeared in The Washington Post three years ago is titled: “What does a Pride parade have to do with NATO? More than you might think” (June 28, 2019).

A summary note states: “The degree of respect for LGBTQ people has increasingly become a measure of democratic health in former Soviet states. If Russia were a place where Pride parades were allowed, its quarrels with the United States, and ours with it, would possibly diminish.” Read that again. It is unbelievable.

How have we arrived at such an insane place? The fact is, unseen spiritual forces are operating behind the scenes of this world. Be sure to read “Where Does Evil Come From?” beginning on page 17 of this issue.

Abortion ruling overturned, but the scourge remains

June 24, 2022 was a historic day. The infamous Roe v. Wade U.S. Supreme Court decision of 1973 that legalized abortion throughout America was, after 49 years, at last overturned. Writing for the majority, Justice Samuel Alito said the former decision and repeated affirmations of it were egregiously wrong in terms of being an overreach and abuse of judicial authority.

There never was a right to abortion in the U.S. Constitution, as many imagine. The new decision returns the matter of abortion to the people and their elected representatives. This was a monumental and positive change—that will result in many lives saved.

On the other hand, this decision does not outlaw abortion. It leaves that up to state legislatures and the U.S. Congress. While some states will severely restrict and even ban abortion altogether, others are expected to remove restrictions all the way up to birth. Some governors have said they will be sanctuary states for abortion, even paying for people of other states to travel there to have abortions. President Biden and other liberal politicians would like to codify abortion protection into U.S. law, but that seems unlikely to happen right now.

In the weeks before the decision and afterward, protestors thronged the streets outside of Supreme Court justices’ homes, even though such intimidation is forbidden in criminal law, but the current administration allowed it to go on. One disturbed man traveled there intent on assassinating Justice Brett Kavanaugh, part of the court’s conservative majority, to keep Roe from being overturned. The man had even stated that he intended to take three justices out—which would have drastically reshaped the court and with it the country.

The mainstream media has said very little about this, whereas if the man was intending to kill liberal progressive justices that would no doubt be trumpeted out repeatedly. This incident shows how precarious our justice system is. We all need to be praying for God’s protection and direction.

Sadly, the scourge of abortion remains a terrible evil throughout America and much of the world. May God bring the day when no more innocents will be slaughtered by a wayward civilization.
A nation in deep and dangerous decline

God warned the ancient Israelites that if they turned away from Him in disobedience of His laws, He would bring national curses upon them in judgment and to lead them to repentance. One of these was “I will break the pride of your power” (Leviticus 26:19). As America goes the way of ancient Israel in its rejection of God and His ways, we see such curses increasing everywhere we look. Our leaders and many who support them are bringing destruction on the whole nation, including themselves.

For instance, it was reported this summer that the Pentagon “is putting national security at risk and ordering the U.S. Army to begin purging its ranks of more than 60,000 U.S. soldiers who have thus far refused to take any of the coronavirus vaccines” (Western Journal, July 8, 2022). Those removed from active duty include many pilots, special warfare operators and other personnel with specialized training that cost millions of dollars.

This is one of many reasons military recruitment is severely down. With the end of the recruiting year rapidly approaching, the U.S. Army as of this writing is less than halfway to its recruiting goal—and that rapidly approaching, the U.S. Army as of this writing is putting national security at risk and ordering the U.S. Army to begin purging its ranks of more than 60,000 U.S. soldiers who have thus far refused to take any of the coronavirus vaccines” (Western Journal, July 8, 2022). Those removed from active duty include many pilots, special warfare operators and other personnel with specialized training that cost millions of dollars.

Another factor is the increasingly weak focus. Military leaders have stated that the greatest threats to U.S. security are not Russia, China, Iran, North Korea and Islamic terrorists, but climate change and domestic white supremacists.

Several U.S. military bases recently held events featuring drag queens (and backlash forced the cancellation of others that were planned). The U.S. Navy is putting out training videos emphasizing how Navy personnel should be careful to use people’s chosen gender pronouns—something you won’t see in Chinese military preparedness. A recent CIA recruiting ad featured a self-proclaimed “cisgender millennial who has been diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder” who “used to struggle with impostor syndrome”—who else to better protect national security?

U.S. forces were successful in finally taking out al-Qaeda leader and 9/11 plotter Ayman al-Zawahiri by a drone strike on July 31 as he stood on a balcony in Afghanistan—but that raises the issue of how he was able to live openly in Afghanistan. It’s because since America’s disastrous pullout, leaving behind $85 billion in advanced weaponry, that state is now again a haven for al-Qaeda.

As White House reporter Peter Doocy challenged National Security Council coordinator John Kirby: “So we know that the Taliban was harboring the world’s most wanted terrorists. You guys gave a whole country to a bunch of people who are on the FBI Most Wanted list. What did you think was going to happen?” Kirby took issue with that premise.

America is increasingly a country in decline. It’s plagued with the highest inflation level in more than 40 years. Having lost its energy independence, it now has the highest energy costs in its history. Crime and homelessness are rampant. Russia, China, Iran and North Korea grow increasingly belligerent and threatening. Its southern borders are invaded by millions of illegal immigrants, aided by drug cartels that are making billions of dollars through drug, sex and migrant trafficking.

This is heartbreaking reality. Maybe some of the slide can be stopped. But there is so much wrong—and much more than what is mentioned here. Of course, God will help any nation that turns to Him. And even if the nation doesn’t, you can seek Him and find Him. He will intervene for you personally. And the good news beyond the bad is that God has a plan to turn this nation and all nations to Him and His ways. The darker the world gets, know that a new day is coming, as this issue details. To learn more, download or request our free study guide The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy.

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!

U.S. belief in God and the Bible at record low

According to recent polling, the number of Americans who believe in God and the Bible as God’s Word is at an all-time low.

The May 2022 Gallup Values and Beliefs poll showed that 81 percent of American adults believe in God, down 6 percent from 2017—with 17 percent saying they do not believe in any God, and 2 percent unsure. This is a far cry from the 1950s and 60s, when 98 percent of U.S. adults believed in God. In 2011 it was 92 percent.

A Gallup poll from 2018-2020 showed that 47 percent belong to a religious congregation, down from more than 71 percent over the course of the 1930s to the 1980s.

A record-low 20 percent now say the Bible is the literal Word of God, down from 24 percent in 2017 and half the number from the 1980s. A new high of 29 percent see the Bible as a collection of fables, legends, history and manmade moral precepts—the first time those who view it as uninspired outnumber those who regard it as God’s Word. Among Christians, only 25 percent regard it as God’s literal Word, while a majority (58 percent) say it’s inspired but not to all be taken literally—with another 16 percent viewing it as an ancient book of fables.

Younger people are leading these statistics. A 2021 Arizona Christian University poll found that more millennials believe in guidance from horoscopes (35 percent) than those who believe that all people have the purpose of knowing, loving and serving God with all their heart (19 percent). Our society is in real trouble.

For those who understand the truth, is it any wonder that so much is going wrong in our culture? To help ground you more in the reality of God and His Word, we recommend reading our free study guide Life’s Ultimate Question: Does God Exist? and Is the Bible True? Nothing is more important than the answers to these questions!
The Biblical Festivals That Teach Us About Jesus Christ

Few people are aware of the seven festivals God reveals in the Bible. Even fewer are aware that they center around and teach us a great deal about Jesus Christ and His role in God’s plan for all mankind.

by Mario Seiglie

The feasts of the Lord, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts” (Leviticus 23:2).

Sounds important, doesn’t it? God Almighty saying in Scripture, “These are My Feasts.”

Yet for most of traditional Christianity, these “feasts of the Lord” are thought to have been meant only for ancient Israel and are viewed as meaningless for Christians. New religious holidays not found in the Bible have been substituted instead.

How did this come to be? What is the true meaning of these biblical “feasts of the Lord”? Do they have anything to do with Jesus Christ, or is their symbolism limited to long-ago events? Do the Scriptures reveal whether these feasts teach us important truths about Jesus Christ?

The Passover: a Christ-centered feast?

After the weekly Sabbath day, the Passover is the first of God’s annual feast days mentioned in Scripture in Leviticus 23. It commemorates the greatest event in the people of Israel’s history—their miraculous liberation from Egypt. Observant Jews have been celebrating this feast for more than 3,400 years.

But is this feast intended only to celebrate the Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt? Does the New Testament have anything to say about the occasion?

When John the Baptist saw Jesus Christ coming to the Jordan River to be baptized, he exclaimed, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, emphasis added throughout).

In the Bible the lamb is a symbol of the Passover because a lamb was slain at the beginning of the Passover and eaten that night. The Israelites knew the blood of the lamb had protected them from the death of the firstborn on the Passover night in Egypt (Exodus 12:12-13).

In the New Testament, the Gospels several times record that Christ kept the Passover with His disciples. On the night before His death, Jesus knew He was giving His life in fulfillment of the symbolism of the Passover lamb.

Notice Luke 22:14-16: “When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

Jesus then instituted new symbols that represented not the sacrifice of a lamb, but His far greater sacrifice. The Passover symbols would now represent Christ’s complete sacrifice—the unleavened bread representing His sinless body that was beaten for us, and wine signifying the blood He would shed to wash away our sins.

From then on, this feast took on a much greater new meaning to Christ’s disciples. Instead of this feast being abolished, its ultimate meaning was revealed. The disciples came to realize that the Passover lamb was only the symbolic representation of Christ’s perfect sacrifice. Now they would keep this feast with far greater comprehension!

Some 25 years after Christ’s death, the apostle Paul instructed the Corinthian congregation—composed of believing Jews and gentiles alike—about the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread following it: “Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Paul understood this ancient feast of the Passover had now revealed its true meaning with Christ’s sacrifice. It was part of God’s plan for all of mankind that Jesus would give Himself in sacrifice for others’ sins. So, far from being obsolete, the Passover was revealed to have a vastly important meaning for Christians, with Christ at its center!

The apostle Paul explained this new understanding of the Passover to the Church members in Corinth when he instructed them on how to observe it: “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed [Passover night] took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’

“In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it [i.e., every Passover], in remembrance of Me”’ (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

So in the New Testament, the Passover becomes an annu-
The Days of Unleavened Bread: Is Christ at the center?

What about the Feast of Unleavened Bread? Is it obsolete and irrelevant? In the Old Testament, the Days of Unleavened Bread were understood to be a memorial of what occurred after the Passover night.

The next morning the Israelites packed their belongings and traveled to a nearby gathering place, ready for departure. That evening, they left Egypt by night. “It is a night of solemn observance to the Lord for bringing them out of the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:42).

Before that evening, one last thing occurred: “And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves” (verse 39).

This feast of the Lord is clearly spelled out in Leviticus 23:6: “And on the fifteenth day of the same month [as Passover] is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; seven days you must eat unleavened bread.”

What does this feast have to do with Christ? What does it teach us about Him? Unleavened bread—bread made without leaven—is mentioned in the Bible as something pure and unpolluted. All the grain offerings to be set on the altar fire were to be made without leaven: “No grain offering which you bring to the Lord shall be made with leaven, for you shall burn no leaven nor any honey in any offering to the Lord made by fire” (Leviticus 2:11).

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul explains the spiritual symbolism of unleavened bread in a passage we've already seen in part. Rebuking the Church members in Corinth for their acceptance of sin, he tells them: “Your gloriing is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:6-7).

Yes, as Paul states, it is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that removes our sins, and so we become “unleavened” in a spiritual sense. So, again, Jesus Christ is the focus of this feast of the Lord as it points to what He would do for all of us in cleansing us of sin and helping us to live sin-free lives.

Paul told the Corinthian members that they should continue to keep this feast that followed the Passover with a sense of its greater meaning: “Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (verse 8).

Pentecost: Is Christ at the center of this feast?

The Feast of Pentecost was originally called the Feast of Weeks (Exodus 34:22). This is because Leviticus 23:15-16 mentions counting seven weeks (or Sabbaths) or “fifty days” from the day a special grain offering of firstfruits was waved during the Days of Unleavened Bread to another waved grain offering of firstfruits. Thus the latter feast acquired the name of “fiftieth,” which is what Pentecost means in the Greek language of the New Testament.

Fifty days after Christ had been resurrected, the first Christians were celebrating Pentecost, one of the feasts of the Lord. And, as recorded in Acts 2, what a day that was! On it they received the Holy Spirit from God. This made them firstfruits along with Christ in God’s spiritual harvest of mankind.

Jesus Christ revealed the significance of this feast by sending the Holy Spirit to His followers. He had told them, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49; compare John 16:7).

God’s Spirit plays a crucial role in the life of Christians today as it did then. When a person receives God’s Spirit following repentance and baptism, that Spirit begins a process of spiritual transformation in the person’s life, a transformation the Bible calls conversion. (To learn more,
request or download our free study guide Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion.

Through this process, we shed our own way of thinking and living and allow Jesus Christ’s attitude and way of life to guide everything we do. Paul described this life-transforming change in Galatians 2:20: “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” (King James Version).

Thus we see that Jesus is at the center of the Feast of Pentecost as well.

Do we find the first-century Church continuing to observe Pentecost? In the book of Acts, we read of the apostle Paul hurrying to be in Jerusalem to keep this feast: “For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost” (Acts 20:16). In 1 Corinthians 16:7-8 Paul writes about his plans to remain in Ephesus to observe Pentecost with the Church members there before traveling to Corinth.

**The Feast of Trumpets: Is this a Christ-centered feast?**

The next biblical feast is the Feast of Trumpets. It is “a holy convocation commemorated with trumpet blasts” (Leviticus 23:24, New Revised Standard Version). Does the Feast of Trumpets teach us about Jesus Christ and His role in things to come?

The symbolism of the trumpet is mentioned by Jesus Himself: “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then 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. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:30-31).

Several times in the New Testament we see the sound of trumpets tied to Christ’s coming. Notice Paul’s description of the resurrection of the dead at the time a great trumpet announces Christ’s return: “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

We find this again described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.”

So Christ will ultimately fulfill the symbolism behind the Feast of Trumpets. He is the center of this feast too. At His second coming, the seventh trumpet shall sound, announcing the arrival of the King of Kings. Loud voices will proclaim, “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, English Standard Version).

So until the sound of the last trumpet is heard, this feast points to the future, with the return of Jesus at its center.

**The Day of Atonement: Christ’s role in its meaning**

Perhaps the most unusual of the biblical feasts is the Day of Atonement. In Old Testament times, it included an elaborate ritual described in Leviticus 16. The high priest was to present two male goats, the first of which was sacrificed for the nation’s sins (verse 15). Then, after the sins of the nation were symbolically placed on the other goat, it was expelled into the desert to a life of wandering (verses 21-22).

What does the Day of Atonement reveal about Jesus Christ’s roles? Is He also at the center of this feast?

The Bible is full of rich symbolism, and the early Church came to realize that Christ was at the center of the feasts of the Lord. Just as He was described as being “our Passover” and “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8), so they came to understand that He was at the center of the Day of Atonement. How? He fulfilled the role of the male goat slain for the sins of Israel and carried outside the camp (Leviticus 16:27).

We read in Hebrews 9, 10 and 13 about Israel’s sacrificial system and the Day of Atonement, with Christ being symbolized in the male goat and other animals slain on that day as sin offerings. “For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate [of the city of Jerusalem]” (Hebrews 13:11-12).

We should consider that while Christ has already been sacrificed, the atonement His sacrifice provides has not yet been applied to all of Israel and the rest of mankind. That will happen after Christ’s second coming.

Not only does the Day of Atonement depict Christ’s sacrifice for sin and His true spiritual reconciling of the people with God as High Priest, but Christ is directly involved in the symbolism of the other male goat that was cast out into the desert by a strong man (Leviticus 16:21).

The second goat, over which the sins of the Israelites were confessed, represented the instigator of those sins—none other than Satan the devil. When Jesus returns, He will command a powerful angel to bind Satan and cast him into a place of restraint for 1,000 years, exiling him from mankind just as the live goat was exiled from the Israelite camp on the Day of Atonement: “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:1-2).

So Christ plays a dual role in the symbolism of the Day of Atonement. He is sacrificed as the first goat for the purifying of the people from sin. And He acts as High Priest and will direct Satan’s removal in setting up God’s Kingdom.
The Feast of Tabernacles: How is Christ at the center?

Next is the sixth biblical feast, the Feast of Tabernacles. In the Old Testament, it was kept to remind the Israelites of God’s miraculous sheltering and leading of His people when He brought them out of pagan Egypt into the wilderness to be with Him: “All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths [tabernacles], that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt” (Leviticus 23:42-43).

What does the Feast of Tabernacles have to do with Jesus Christ? Jesus is recorded to have kept this feast in John 7:2-36. The symbol of the tabernacle is rich with meaning in the New Testament.

During Christ’s earthly ministry, the apostle John mentions that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The Greek term for “dwell” here actually means that He “tabernacled” among us. Just as Jesus Christ as the Creator God of the Old Testament (John 1:1-3, 10; Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:16) “tabernacled” with the Israelites in the wilderness, He now did so with His people in His physical life many centuries later.

At Christ’s second coming, He will again “tabernacle” with mankind. He will dwell with people on earth for a thousand years, this future rule of Jesus Christ over the earth being the fulfillment of this feast. Moreover, this feast, also called the Feast of Ingathering, celebrated the later harvest of the year and spiritually looks forward to the great spiritual harvest of human beings yet to come.

So Christ is definitely at the center of this feast too—as the Ruler who “tabernacles” with His people in the great harvest of the age to come.

The Eighth Day: yet another Christ-centered feast?

The Feast of Tabernacles lasted seven days. Then, on the eighth day, there followed another, separate feast day, the last of the biblically commanded feasts (Leviticus 23:36).

What does this day have to do with Jesus Christ?

In John 7, an account of Jesus Christ’s last Feast of Tabernacles on earth, we find Jesus declaring the significance of its conclusion: “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:37-38).

He was talking about His return to earth, when He will freely offer the Holy Spirit to those who will believe in Him. Jesus died for all of mankind, but only a fraction have ever had the opportunity to know about Him and accept His offer of receiving the Holy Spirit.

Yet during Christ’s 1,000-year reign, all of mankind will be offered God’s Spirit. And beyond that, the Bible reveals there will come a future time when Christ will offer it to those who rise up in a resurrection of the dead from all past ages—the ultimate spiritual harvest period. In Revelation 20, we read what happens after the Millennium, pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles, is completed:

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away . . . And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (verses 11-12).

From this passage this period is also called the White Throne Judgment, and it is Christ who has been appointed to judge all of mankind (John 5:26-27; Romans 14:10). This does not mean immediate condemnation but a judgment period, since the Book of Life is opened—meaning an opportunity is opened to receive God’s Spirit and have one’s name written into it. The apostle Paul writes in Philippians 4:3 of those “who labored with me in the gospel . . . and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.”

So Christ will also carry out the central role of this final feast, that of lovingly and mercifully offering the multitudes of the uninformed and the deceived an opportunity for conversion and salvation and to have their names inscribed in the Book of Life—and to render final judgment.

These feasts are meant for the followers of Christ

We see through these and other passages that Jesus Christ is at the center of all of the feasts of the Bible. Yet He has not brought them to ultimate fulfillment; that will only occur in the coming Kingdom of God.

Yes, Christ is our Passover who died in our place, He is the Unleavened Bread that purifies and sustains us, the Lord of our life who lives in us through the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost, the coming King whose arrival is announced by the blast of the trumpets, the One whose sacrifice will be accepted by humanity when He banishes Satan for a thousand years, and who tabernacles with man as King of Kings. Finally, He is to judge mankind and offer all an opportunity to have their names written in the Book of Life.

This is why God’s Church observes these feasts as shown in the New Testament. This is why these holy feasts are still to be kept—to remind us of the central role Jesus Christ has in carrying out the plan of God. Isn’t it about time you started keeping them yourself? Contact our office nearest you on page 31 to learn more.
Follow Me...

“Let It Be According to Your Word”

Jesus’ own example of humble submission was preceded by the example of a devoted and yielded mother.

by Robin Webber

In heeding Jesus’ ever-present invitation of “Follow Me,” we are confronted by His prayer before His crucifixion, imploring, “Oh My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me,” but then declaring, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39).

This sentiment echoes one expressed in different words more than three decades earlier by a young Jewish woman. We might wonder: Were her words never shared until much later with Luke the Gospel writer, or did she tell her Son of these impactful words when He was old enough to understand and internalize them for Himself?

Let’s drop in on the young lady named Mary as her ordinary life was abruptly changed forever in a moment! She was visited by the angel Gabriel, who declared, “Rejoice highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!” (Luke 1:26-28).

Stunned, she wondered what this meant. Gabriel succinctly laid out what was to occur: “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest” (verses 31-32).

Talk about a life changer! But she wondered how this could be since she was still a virgin (verse 34). Then Gabriel shared the unimaginable: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (verse 35). And he laid out a simple fact: “For with God nothing will be impossible” (verse 37).

Her response? “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word” (verse 38, emphasis added throughout). With her faith-filled and voluntary surrender to divine direction over any human-made future, Mary sealed the envelope of her life and placed it into God’s hands.

What might we gain from Mary’s experience, making her response our own as disciples of her Son? Let’s consider three key factors regarding Mary’s submission to the divine direction to enable our ability to heed her Son’s directive of “Follow Me.”

Submiting to God’s will

Mary was open and made herself completely available to the will of God. Her willingness is jaw-dropping! Inspiring! She accepts this mysterious design for her life with only a simple biological question of how.

Mary was no doubt a product of her upbringing—having been taught that she was part of a great story her people rehearsed daily in their lives centered on God’s interruptions and interventions in the lives of their ancestors.

Their God, our God, is in “the business of new.” “Behold, I will do a new thing,” He says (Isaiah 43:19). And His greatest miracle is taking “nothing” and making it something to fulfill His glory. God made light from darkness, He made man from dirt, He made woman from the man’s side, He drew a line through the Red Sea and made a pathway of deliverance, He blessed Sarai, Hannah and Elizabeth with children from an empty womb. Now the One from above would create a new life in Mary’s womb—apart from any man’s involvement—to bring about the most important birth ever. That would “stretch her some,” but she was all in!

Perhaps Mary mused on the words of Isaiah on accepting God’s work in our lives: “But now, O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand” (Isaiah 64:8). With that in mind, let us come to expect the unexpected as God molds us for His purpose and pleasure, and let our response echo the yielded response of Isaiah, Mary and Jesus: “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send Me’” (Isaiah 6:8).

Praise and humility go heart in hand

Mary’s humility is lovingly on display in visiting her relative Elizabeth. The words shared on her visit are so opposite of today’s narcissistic culture of “look at me,” as seen on various social media outlets. If anyone had “personal news” to broadcast, it was Mary, mother of the soon-to-be-born prophesied Messiah, the Son of God.

Of course, sharing such news would have been danger-
ous then. In any case Mary was not self-promoting but trusting in God. Scripture informs us that Mary “kept all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). Elizabeth recognized Mary’s mindset, commenting, “You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what He said” (Luke 1:45, New Living Translation).

Mary’s “text” that comes down through the ages shows her focus: “Oh how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! For He took note of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One is holy, and He has done great things for me. He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear Him” (verses 46-50, NLT).

When Mary says everyone will call her blessed, is she being boastful? The Life Application Bible Commentary: Luke answers well: “No, she was recognizing and accepting the gift God had given her . . . Pride is refusing to accept God’s gifts or taking credit for what God has done; humility is accepting the gifts and using them to praise and serve God” (note on Luke 1:51-53). Her upward and sincere words of praise show that she remained a humble and willing vessel in service to God.

Praising and worshiping God from a responsive place of humility open our heart to accept His will and enable us to hear directly from Him. Focusing on the greatness of our Creator pulls us out of doubt and fear. The spiritual reality is that praise truly closes the gap between ourselves and our Maker—the Master Potter who continues to mold us.

Letting go and letting God

Mary followed the true and challenging admonition to “let go and let God.” Obtaining such spiritual maturity doesn’t happen overnight but develops one bump at a time on the road of our spiritual pilgrimage. Did Mary understand everything concerning the life that would come forth through her in advance? No. We look back on her completed story in a rear view, but she was moving in real time amid the heavy traffic of life.

Would it ever be easy? Think about it: Fleeing from Herod, living in Egypt, Simeon prophesying in Luke 2:28-35 that her Son was destined for the fall and rising of many and to be spoken against, with advanced warning that “a sword will pierce through your own soul also.”

As a mother she would have to “let go and let God.” At age 12 her Son would tell her and Joseph, “I must be about My Father’s business” (Luke 2:49), which would ultimately lead to her as a mother watching His crucifixion, His Heavenly Father allowing His Son to be sacrificed for her sins and ours.

The lesson for us as we accept Jesus’ invitation of “Follow Me” is to continue to trust God even when circumstances seem impossible. Dedicate and prepare yourself to be a “living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1) no matter how it changes the path you thought your life would take.

Jesus, our ultimate example, never said it would be easy, but He did say it would be worth it! Imagine the joy that must have been on Mary’s face when she saw her resurrected Son! She was not merely His mother, but for the rest of her life His disciple also (Acts 1:14). Yes, Jesus was sent by His Father from heaven, but to a measurable degree He was also as a human being “mother-made” by word and deed here below.

She became a faithful example for the ages of one who took what was told to her from God and said, “Let it be to me according to your word.”

Mary’s life was abruptly changed when she was visited by the angel Gabriel, who declared, “Rejoice highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!”

LEARN MORE

Mary is a wonderful example of a person whose living faith played a part in her being chosen to be mother of the Messiah! But what exactly is faith, and how can we have that kind of faith? Download or request a free copy of our study guide You Can Have Living Faith today!

BTmagazine.org/booklets
“We’re Coming For Your Children!”

The editorial in the July-August issue was one of most objective, straightforward pieces on the LGBTQ agenda against the family that I have read anywhere. As someone from a different faith tradition than yours, I have followed your work for over 20 years and thank you for the courage to stand up for the biblical values that are foundational to our society. Please carry on, the world needs your message now more than ever.

Subscriber in Georgia

“What Are They Teaching Your Children?”

Thank you for a very timely and important message! I retired from teaching eight years ago, but continue to work quite regularly as a substitute teacher, and have witnessed alarming changes in the schools. “Rainbow flags” are now hung in the classrooms of some of the teachers. Students in our school district are now allowed to decide for themselves which restroom they wish to use based on their gender identity, and not their actual biological sex. Two weeks ago, I was in the men’s staff restroom and I noticed a newly installed vending machine that dispensed free feminine hygiene products. I could list other examples, but you’re right, it’s vital that we prepare our young people to face an increasingly ungodly and deceived culture.

Reader in Australia

“The New Sexual Revolution”

A great article. Parents would do well to read and understand just what is happening when their children are at school. They think that they are safe and sound within the walls of the school, but as you point out this is not so. Here in Australia my wife works in the local school, and she sees exactly what you are talking about.

Reader in Australia

I agree with the original biblical definition of sexuality and conduct. We know that God created man and woman, period. The lie that those LGBTQ+ groups are spreading goes against the Bible, children, youth and individuals of different age groups. I congratulate you for your moral point of view towards what we know forever as the traditional family structure.

From the Internet

Other responses to the July-August issue

The July-August issue of Beyond Today on “The New Sexual Revolution”

generated a lot of response, including more cancellations than any previous issue. Following are some of the responses that show how society’s thinking has been dangerously corrupted and shifted in only a few short years.

I recently received a copy of your magazine and I am beyond disgusted. You are a hateful organization citing junk science and even worse interpretations of Scripture. For every magazine I receive from your hate organization, I will be making donations to LGBTQ+ youth organizations to undo the harm you are inflicting. Do not mail to this address ever again.

Reader in Indiana

Your magazines spread hate. I’m not here to throw rocks at you, I just hope you all realize that you are not following God if you are making up and spreading hate against groups of law-abiding and God-respecting citizens based on their gender identities. Shame on you.

From the Internet

Remove me from your mailings. It’s hateful garbage that I do not want to even have to recycle. I disavow it. You make me sick.

Reader in Texas

Readers positively impacted by our message

Thank you so much. You are the reason I’m going to give myself to God. I am struggling quite a bit, especially mentally with extreme depression. I know the last option for hope to even continue my life is following God. Thank you again so much.

From the Internet

Greetings and hopefully you’re doing well. I am all the way from Kenya. I have been a Catholic since birth, but I have been reading some articles and sermons on your website that cover Bible topics that I have struggled a lot with. Thank you!

Reader from Kenya

Looking for a congregation with live webcast services to join

I have been writing and asking questions for a while now, and I was wondering if there is a live Sabbath broadcast of services? I am about 90 miles from the nearest United Church of God congregation. As a disabled person, I cannot afford to drive that far for services. I have been struggling as I have continued to go to worship services at a local church here which is not conducted on the Sabbath. I have been celebrating the Sabbath as Scripture tells us as well as the other festival days as much as I know how to do.

From the Internet

Interested readers can find a full listing of our congregations at ucg.org/congregations, and search based on your location to find the nearest one. We also stream live services from our home office in Cincinnati, Ohio, on the weekly Sabbath (Saturday). You can find that stream at ucg.org/webcast, where you can also find livestreamed services from dozens of our congregations and many archived recordings of previous Sabbath services.

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

His plan is simple, it’s concrete, and it’s laid out for you to understand in seven annual festivals found in the Bible. Discover what they are, what they mean, and how they reveal what Jesus will do when He returns to this earth.