

The Good News

January-February 2011

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

DO YOU UNDERSTAND ■ THE **Signs** OF THE **Times?**

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The Watchman's Mission



In biblical lands in ancient times the role of a watchman was crucial. Invasion, siege, destruction and enslavement were all too common as empires battled for power and plunder. Watchmen were stationed atop towers or the city wall, and if danger approached they were to sound the alarm to alert their fellow citizens to the threat.

A watchman failing in his role all too often meant the difference between life and death—not just for himself, but for those around him.

This is the background for the prophetic commission found in Ezekiel 3. Here God tells Ezekiel, “I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me” (verse 17, emphasis added throughout).

Notice also that it was a message of sober warning: “If I warn the wicked, saying, ‘You are under the penalty of death,’ but you fail to deliver the warning, they will die in their sins. And I will hold you

Sin exacts a terrible price, whether on a nation or an individual. We're seeing that played out before our eyes.

responsible, demanding your blood for theirs. *If you warn them and they keep on sinning and refuse to repent, they will die in their sins. But you will have saved your life because you did what you were told to do.*”

He continues, “But if you warn them and they repent, they will live, and you will have saved your own life, too” (verses 18-19, 21, New Living Translation). God's goal was clear: He wanted people to *heed the warning, repent and live.*

And here's where the story really gets interesting. The ancient Israelites were divided into two kingdoms—the house of Israel and the house of Judah. When Ezekiel, of Judah, gave his prophetic warnings intended in large part for the house of Israel, *its people had already been punished and taken away into captivity by the Assyrian Empire more than 120 years before.*

If you've been reading *The Good News* for long, you probably understand that many Bible prophecies are *dual*, meaning they have more than one fulfillment. You may also realize that, as discussed regularly within our pages, those ancient Israelites disappeared from the pages of history (becoming known to historians as “the lost 10 tribes”) before reemerging in more recent centuries as the peoples of Northwest European heritage, especially the major English-speaking nations.

Viewed in this light, the puzzle of Ezekiel's message makes sense. His warning *could not have been* for the Israel of his own day, since it was 120 years too late. *It must be for the modern descendants of Israel, predominantly today's major English-speaking nations—the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.*

And if ever a people needed a warning, it is today. Britain and the United States have been the world's foremost superpowers over recent centuries, first with the British Empire ruling the seas and a vast array of peoples and nations, followed by the United States assuming Britain's former role after World War II.

But Britain's empire fell and is now a shadow of its former self. America is rapidly following in economic, social and cultural decline, losing influence daily around the world.

Sobering as it is, this is a primary message of *The Good News*—that sin exacts a terrible price, whether on a nation or an individual. We're seeing that played out before our eyes. And like Ezekiel, we are sounding the alarm, shouting a warning message to all who will hear and heed. Are you listening?

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor

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DO YOU UNDERSTAND ■ THE Signs OF THE Times?

by John Ross Schroeder

The intensity and frequency of tragic world and national events should rightly concern all of us. Jesus Christ Himself spoke of “the signs of the times.” Certain telltale signs correspond to a crisis-filled close of this age—called in the Bible “the time of the end.” Do you understand the nature of these crucial signs?

Jesus Christ emphasized how important it is to understand the significance of the times in which we live. The religious leaders of His day asked Him to give them a sign from heaven. Christ used this opportunity to explain a very important principle.

He told them: “You know the saying, ‘Red sky at night means fair weather tomorrow, red sky in the morning means foul weather all day.’ You are good at reading the weather signs in the sky, *but you can’t read the obvious signs of the times!*” (Matthew 16:2-3, New Living Translation, emphasis added throughout).

Christ repeats an important principle

On another occasion Jesus said to the multitudes: “Whenever you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say, ‘A shower is coming’; and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow, you say, ‘There will be hot weather’; and there is. Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, *but how is it you do not discern this time?*” (Luke 12:54-56).

Some 2,000 years ago the vast majority of the people in the land of Israel simply did not even comprehend that Jesus Christ was the true Messiah. They did not under-

stand His mission in life. “He came to His own [people], and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11).

And as Christ foretold in advance, they also failed to anticipate the tragedy that would inevitably befall their much-loved Jerusalem. Just thinking about the horrors to be visited on the city caused Jesus to weep.

“Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, ‘If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, *because you did not know the time of your visitation*” (Luke 19:42-44).

Christ was speaking in part of the Roman siege of A.D. 70, which ended with the

“Red sky at night means fair weather tomorrow, red sky in the morning means foul weather all day.’ You are good at reading the weather signs in the sky, but you can’t read the obvious signs of the times!”

some aspects of this prophecy did have a preliminary fulfillment in A.D. 70, many other aspects clearly did not. At the time of the end, the horrendous consequences will affect not just Jerusalem, as in the first century, but the entire world.

End-time conditions, Jesus said, will worsen to the point that human survival will be at stake! “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).

Can we understand prophetic events today?

It is certainly possible to comprehend the meaning and significance of key events and trends in our crisis-prone modern age.

article by Belinda Luscombe highlights the sad state of American morality with the somewhat cynical title: “Marriage: What’s It Good For?” The troubling results of a recent survey published in the magazine should concern every American citizen: “Fewer U.S. adults are married . . . More are living alone . . . More kids are born to unmarried women” (Nov. 29, 2010).

That last declaration is underpinned by the fact that in the United States, “41% of babies were born to unmarried moms in 2008, an eightfold increase from 50 years ago.” Further, “25% of kids lived in a single-parent home, almost triple the number from 1960.”

If that weren’t bad enough, the national curse of abortion has resulted in the killing of more than a million unborn babies every year. Additionally, reckless promiscuity has brought on a plague of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Clearly the decline and

fall of chastity is a sad reality—rendering our rapid decline in biblical morality a genuine sign of the times.

The *Time* article even addressed the idea that marriage may be becoming obsolete. A *USA Today* article reported that “marriage is increasingly optional and could be on its way to obsolescence, according to a [Pew Research Center] survey of more than 2,600 Americans that examines changing attitudes about relationships today . . . Cohabitation has nearly doubled since 1990” (Sharon Jayson,

“We’re Just Not That Into Marriage,” Nov. 19-21, 2010).

It should go without saying that these modern trends fly directly in the face of clear biblical teaching. (To learn more, request or download our free booklets *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension* and *The Ten Commandments*.)

Trouble grasping the nature of God

Another sign of our troubled age is the shallow way in which many people, especially members of the intelligentsia and media who shape the views of society, conceive of God. In one British Sunday newspaper, the following question was actually



horrifying destruction of Jerusalem and its citizens starved, slaughtered or sold into slavery. The Jewish people of His day simply did not realize the significance of events surrounding Christ’s first coming.

As it was then, our world today fails to grasp the significance of certain tragic signs that will increasingly afflict the nations, presaging Christ’s second coming as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 11:15).

Much of biblical prophecy is *dual*, meaning it often has two fulfillments—a preliminary fulfillment, then a greater secondary fulfillment, often centuries later.

Jesus’ Olivet Prophecy, a message about the future delivered on the Mount of Olives on the east side of Jerusalem (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21), is a prime example of the principle of prophetic duality. While

Historically, one tribe of Israel possessed a remarkable comprehension of the current affairs of its day. The children of Issachar “*had understanding of the times*, to know what Israel ought to do” (1 Chronicles 12:32).

Centuries later Jesus Christ provided the book of Revelation “so that his servants might have knowledge of the things which will quickly take place” (Revelation 1:1, Bible in Basic English). Amos 3:7 also tells us, “Surely the Lord GOD does nothing unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

Which specific trends should deeply concern us today? Let us begin with the traditional moral standards that emerged from the Bible itself. A recent *Time* magazine

Photos, from left: iStockphoto, Shaun Venish, iStockphoto

asked in the title of a three-page feature article: “Is Religion a Force for Good . . . or Would We Be Happier Without God?”

Some of the opinions expressed by specially chosen panel members are typical of our secular thinking today. Consider just two. The first: “Religion is often a leap of faith for many people, but so is atheism . . . because we’re talking about the unknowable.” The second: “What we think of as distinctive of western morality has its roots in the non-religious secular tradition” (*The Observer*, Nov. 21, 2010).

Are these people really saying that we cannot know God and that unaided human thought is the true source of traditional Western morality? It certainly appears so. A personal, caring, loving God has pretty much been left out of the picture.

Another feature article in *USA Today* asked the following question in the title: “In God-Fearing USA, Where Is the Decency?” (Tom Krattenmaker, Oct. 26, 2010). The drophead continued: “You’d think that in our highly religious American experiment, our collection of Good Books and legions of prayerful people would cultivate a political world that reflected high-minded values. And you’d be wrong.”

Does the root of the problem possibly lie in many Americans’ misunderstanding of God? Contrary to popular conception, Duke University Divinity School Professor Stanley Hauerwas observed, “The US is more secular than Britain—Americans have only a general belief in belief.”

Hauerwas continued in the text: “In the US, many who may have doubts about Christian orthodoxy may continue to go to church. They do so because they assume that a vague god vaguely prayed to is the god that is needed to support family and nation” (“How Real Is America’s Faith?” *The Guardian*, Oct. 16, 2010).

He has a point. Religious writer and minister John Stott once wrote, “In the United States there is an astonishing religious boom, which nevertheless perplexes friendly observers who cannot easily reconcile it with that nation’s alarming statistics of crime, violence, abortion and divorce” (*Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today*, 1982, p. 115).

And of course, this doesn’t even begin to address the interconnected trends of the growth of atheism, the broad acceptance of Darwinian evolution and widespread attacks on the authenticity of the Bible. (Interested readers should request or download our free booklets *Life’s Ultimate*

Question: Does God Exist?, Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe? and Is the Bible True?)

Another troubling sign: Today’s disturbing international picture

When the Berlin Wall collapsed some 20 years ago, effectively ending the Cold War between America and the former Soviet Union, many expected a new dawn in international relations. But it was not to be. Relations between nations are worsening, and the current recession has accelerated this process.

Tensions between established countries and rising nations are definitely on the increase. The United States, racked by near double-digit unemployment and a huge budget deficit, as well as being mired in two foreign wars, watches anxiously as Brazil and India project their booming economies onto the world scene. America has already been experiencing trading and currency conflicts with China, not to mention long-standing disagreement over Taiwan, to which China lays claim.

Iran remains a constant worry for the West and the state of Israel in particular. Iran seeks to fulfill its dictatorial ambitions in the Middle East, including the acquisition of nuclear weaponry.

Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher foresaw in 1993 the devastation a single currency for the European Union would inflict on the poorer member nations like Greece, Ireland and Portugal—the euro being unable to effectively accommodate these much weaker economies in the same monetary house with financial powerhouses like Germany and France. The financial crises growing in these countries are leading more to question the viability and even the survival of the euro.

The number of failed or failing states like Pakistan has increased with a vengeance, especially in these times of severe economic stress. Some of these impoverished, poorly led countries, such as North Korea, devote enormous resources to pursuing nuclear weaponry, which makes the world a much more dangerous place than it already is.

Another troubling sign of the times involves the growing weakness of the

The United States, racked by high unemployment and a huge budget deficit, while being mired in two wars, watches anxiously as other nations project their booming economies onto the world scene.



United States. The more America declines, the less able it will be to effectively continue as world policeman and provide needed aid to the large number of afflicted nations of Africa and elsewhere. Longtime readers of *The Good News* understand that this decline is a direct consequence of the failure of modern America to adhere to the teachings of the Bible. (To understand more fully, request or download our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

The late Alistair Cooke, a popular American-based British broadcaster and journalist, wrote 18 years ago of his fear of “a darker upheaval in America if it continues to follow the Roman road to decline” (“The Fate of the Union,” *Financial Times*, Oct. 5, 1992). And continue to follow it we have.

But as we witness continual decline in the United States, an ancient nation in

Central Europe may be beginning to fulfill its prophetic destiny.

Germany takes center stage in Europe

While much of the world is in economic turmoil, Germany finds itself in the enviable position of staging a strong comeback. It is once again emerging as an economic powerhouse, with the best growth statistics since German reunification along with receding unemployment. It's even been said that the fallout from Germany's economic recovery will begin to help other eurozone countries to emerge from the current recession, in spite of the serious financial problems Greece, Italy, Ireland,

Portugal and Spain are now experiencing. called "the beast," headed by a charismatic dictator also referred to as the Beast, having great authority over other nations (see Revelation 13:1-9).

Bible prophecy foretells that the rulers of 10 nations or groups of nations will cede their power to this new "beast" power, albeit for a relatively short time (Revelation 17:12-13). The only European nation that truly fits this prophetic role in Central Europe is Germany. (For a more detailed account, request or download our free booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.)

Surely recent trends revolving around Berlin constitute yet another vital sign of our troubled times. But our account would

This German-born pontiff's visit to Britain in the autumn of 2010 exceeded even the Vatican's expectations. I watched the reception on TV while sailing from North Wales on a passenger ferry destined for Dublin. Queen Elizabeth was seated on one side of Pope Benedict and Prince Philip on the other, a very friendly royal welcome.

Jeremy Davis reported for *The Tablet*: "The visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Britain brought hundreds of thousands of people on to the streets. He conveyed a warmth and friendliness that surprised many"

("Confident Again," Oct. 9, 2010). But he had a serious message for the United Kingdom. *The Daily Telegraph* reported:

"The Pope has warned Britain not to lose sight of its Christian heritage in its 'multicultural' and 'aggressively secular' modern culture" (Martin Beckford, "Pope Visit: Benedict Urges Multicultural UK to Keep Sight of Christian Heritage," Sept. 17, 2010).

It seems quite likely that Benedict XVI will at some point articulate the very same message to other secularly oriented nations on the European continent. It

is interesting to note that German Chancellor Angela Merkel has seriously questioned the appropriateness of multiculturalism in Germany.

Continuing with *The Daily Telegraph* account: "At the start of his historic state visit to the country, Benedict XVI delivered an uncompromising message that excluding religion from public life could lead to the 'atheist extremism' of the Nazis and Soviet Russia."

The extent of the fallout from the pope's British visit may surprise us. A Nov. 14, 2010, headline in *The Sunday Telegraph* stated, "Fifty Clergy to Defect to Rome." This defection is from the Church of England, also known as the Anglican Church. Hundreds of Anglican members will likely follow their leaders and convert to Catholicism.

Pope Benedict employs his own methods for shaping the future of Roman Catholics in Europe. The Rome correspondent of *The Tablet* reported that "Benedict XVI is making appointments that will ensure power in the Vatican and the College of Cardinals remains in European hands" (Robert Mickens, "Benedict Shapes the Future," Oct. 30, 2010).

How Pope John Paul II laid the groundwork for Benedict XVI

The previous pontiff had a monumental impact on the last quarter of the 20th century. He said, wrote and traveled more than any previous pope in Catholic Church history.

He presented "a vision of a wider Europe, culturally and spiritually united" (*The Pope From Poland*, 1980, p. 250). Some readers may remember John Paul II calling for a revived Europe extending from the Atlantic to the Ural Mountains in Russia. European unity was a continuous theme throughout the early years of his pontificate.

Early in his papal reign, it was stated under his auspices: "The Pope has come to speak to the whole church, to Europe and the world, to speak about the nations and peoples often forgotten . . . He has come to gather all these nations and peoples together with his own" (*ibid.*, p. 143).

John Paul II's reign was a hard act to follow, but after a rather halting start, Benedict XVI has surprised many observers.



Portugal and Spain are now experiencing.

Chancellor Angela Merkel has been called Germany's Iron Lady, insisting on changes in the Lisbon Treaty (the renamed European Constitution) to protect the euro from future instability. She was a prime factor in persuading Ireland to accept a huge bailout package with stringent strings attached. Some characterize her as being in Europe's driver's seat, as the French are still beset by serious societal problems.

Hand in hand with this, the Fatherland's military pacifism may be gradually drawing to a close. The German army has even been fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan—after well over 50 years in a noncombatant role.

What are the long-term consequences of these recent trends and developments in Germany? Few really understand that the Bible warns of the emergence in Central Europe of a new political superpower



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Watch what the Vatican does in Europe as a definite sign of our troubled times!

A Holy European (or Roman) Empire to come

The memory of the Roman Empire was etched in the minds of many for hundreds of years after the so-called barbarians vanquished the empire in the West. From time to time European leaders have attempted to restore unity among the nations of continental Europe. This was manifested in the Holy Roman Empire, an uneasy alliance of church and state that started with the crowning of Charlemagne by Pope Leo III in A.D. 800 and existed in various incarnations over more than a thousand years until 1804.

Nearly 20 years ago, an article appeared in *The Sunday Telegraph* by then-editor Peregrine Worsthorpe titled "Now, a Holy European Empire?" He wrote: "Even Napoleon, when he wanted to legitimise his rule in France, could think of nothing better than to call himself Emperor, and be crowned by the Pope . . . If European federalism triumphs, the EC [now EU] will indeed be an empire. It will lack an emperor; but it will have the Pope" (Aug. 25, 1991).

Bible prophecy clearly states that a powerful religious figure referred to as "the false prophet" will rise up shortly before the return of Jesus Christ alongside the previously described charismatic world dictator called "the Beast." This highly acclaimed religious personality will work miracles and "lying wonders" (2 Thessalonians 2:9), causing many people to proclaim their allegiance to this new geopolitical power based in Europe (see Revelation 13:11-14).

Has the time finally arrived?

Now that nearly 2,000 years have passed since Jesus Christ's first coming, ominous trends in the world today tell some of us that we indeed are presently living in the end time. Our age is replete with many disturbing signs indicating that this age of man is drawing to a close. In this article we have had sufficient space for only a relative few. Our free booklet *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* addresses many more.

What Bible translator James Moffatt labeled "the crisis at the close" may be already upon us. But if someone asks *when* in terms of the exact day, month and year, we can only repeat Jesus Christ's reply to His first-century apostles: "It is not for you to know times and seasons which the Father

has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7).

Their chief concern, per Christ's instructions, was to be preaching the true gospel (verse 8). When Christ does come to the earth a second time (Hebrews 9:28), His servants should still be found diligently doing the work of God to the best of their ability (Matthew 24:44-46).

All true Christians should enthusiastically anticipate Christ's second coming to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. After all, Christ Himself instructed us to pray to the Father "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10). And certainly a part of the work of His servants includes warning the nations of this world about the tragic events that must occur before Christ's return to this suffering planet (Matthew 24:14).

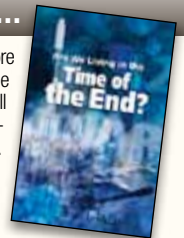
Clearly a prophetic message remains a vital part of the Church's mission to the world. This is why we publish *World News and Prophecy*, a newsletter with articles devoted to analyzing world events and trends in the light of Bible prophecy. We also freely offer several booklets covering key aspects of Bible prophecy.

Yet as crucial as prophecy is, our *personal spiritual preparation* is far more important than just understanding the significance of prophetic events alone (Luke 21:34-36). When we really understand its purpose, prophecy constitutes a divine call to true repentance. As God tells us in Ezekiel 33:11, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live" (New International Version).

As we contemplate the signs of the times we see all around us, let us be diligent to heed Jesus Christ's warning in Luke 21:36 (REB): "Be on the alert, praying at all times for strength to pass safely through all that is coming and to stand in the presence of the Son of Man." **GN**

To Learn More...

Bible prophecy reveals much more about the signs of the times—the key events and trends that will shape the world in the time leading up to Jesus Christ's return. You can learn much more about the signs of the times in our free booklet *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* Download or request your free copy today!



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www.GNmagazine.org/booklets

Jesus' Warning to "Watch"— Just What Did He Mean?

by Don Hooser

Jesus and the apostles exhort us to actively "watch"! We need to understand all that they meant and the wide-ranging implications. Our survival and salvation could depend on that understanding and action!

The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth, "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong" (1 Corinthians 16:13). The rest of the verse is clear, but what does "watch" mean?

Paul wasn't telling us to be passive spectators—of entertainment or anything else. He meant something far different.

This article focuses on New Testament scriptures with the verb "watch"—important scriptures that are often misunderstood, ignored and neglected.

How important is it that we "watch"? Consider this: The biblical command to watch is several times coupled with the command to pray. Is prayer important? Extremely so! And so is the command to watch!

Watch means to stay wide awake

When the New Testament commands us to "watch," it is usually the translation of one of two Greek words (*gregoreuo* and *agrupneo*), which have similar meanings—to "stay awake" and to "be sleepless." They are usually meant in the metaphorical and spiritual sense—to be vigilant and on guard, fully awake, aware, alert and intently focused—with several applications and implications.

In Matthew 26:37-40, the meaning of "watch" is primarily *physical*. Jesus was chiding the disciples for not remaining awake during the hour preceding His arrest.

But what Jesus next said to Peter had a deeper, spiritual meaning: "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing [i.e., intentions are good], but the flesh [mere human will-power] is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

It is *spiritual watching* coupled with prayer that gives one the strength to survive temptations and difficult situations.

"Awake to righteousness, and do not sin" (1 Corinthians 15:34). Being awake is equated with righteousness and not sinning. Paul was writing to the church at Corinth, which shows that even true Christians can be spiritually asleep to varying degrees.

Paul also wrote: "And do this, knowing the time, that *now it is high time to awake out of sleep*; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed" (Romans 13:11, emphasis added throughout).

In other words, the closer we draw to the second coming of Christ, the more urgent it is that we awake out of spiritual sleep! Indeed, we have entered the fearful end-time years that are the grand climax of human civilization. If ever there was a time to pay attention and get prepared, it is now!

Furthermore, none of us knows when he or she will die. Being spiritually prepared for the end of life should be our top priority.

Watching means properly using our minds

God gave us marvelous minds *to use*—to study, learn, observe, analyze, judge and *think*.

Life is time. To waste time is to waste life. Many people are mentally lazy—wasting a tragic amount of time on the trivial and temporal, mundane and materialistic. Many squander countless hours vegetating in front of their TV or computer seeking only to be entertained.

Real readers are becoming rare. A society becomes shallow and superficial when most citizens rely too much on pictures and images rather than *words*. In-depth learning requires *language*.

It is quite significant that God's true religion is based on *spoken and written messages* that were compiled into what we call the Bible. God's people are to be "people of the Book." In contrast, most pagan religions emphasize images, idols, symbols and rituals.

You see, God wants His people to zealously read and study, to think and meditate. He wants us to be well-informed regarding the major geopolitical, cultural and spiritual issues and events of our time. God deplores ignorance, indifference and being "dull of hearing" (Hebrews 5:11).

This is where the Bible comes in, providing the essential framework for a godly worldview. The Bible is God's divine revelation of absolute truth, which is just as relevant today as it ever was.

Because of this, the Bible should be the prism, lens and filter by which we can accurately perceive and judge all other information. It enables us to develop a godly worldview—the framework and foundation by which we can accurately interpret all that is going on in the world. We can then understand our confusing world scene with amazing clarity, sense and logic!

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees for their hard-hearted mind-set. If they had not had evil attitudes and had believed the Scriptures, they would have been able to "discern the signs of the times" and to realize the Messiah had come (Matthew 16:1-3).

We need knowledge of end-time prophecy

To know where to focus our attention, we particularly need to know the Bible

The Bible enables us to develop a godly worldview—the framework and foundation by which we can accurately interpret all that is going on in the world.

prophecies of the end time, especially the prophecies surrounding the second coming of Christ.

We are to “eagerly wait for” Christ’s return, not just passively wait around (Hebrews 9:28). Jesus was emphatic that His followers should *hope for* His return, *expect* His return and *pray for* His return! In addition, our enthusiastic *anticipation* and *excitement* will intensify as we see more and more world events fulfilling Bible prophecies—especially those that point to the increasing nearness of Christ’s return.

Note the watching, waiting, anticipation and preparedness in the following passage: “Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who *wait for their master*, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him *immediately*. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find *watching*” (Luke 12:35-36).

Jesus concluded His message by saying, “Therefore you also *be ready*, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour *you do not expect*” (verse 40).

Much later, Jesus echoed that point: “Behold, I am coming as a thief [meaning *suddenly and unexpectedly*]. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame” (Revelation 16:15). Wearing garments, especially white raiment, symbolizes a good spiritual condition (Revelation 3:1-5, 18). We must not be caught undressed—unprepared.

Christ’s all-important end-time prophecy

Jesus gave a crucial end-time prophecy shortly before His crucifixion, recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. It’s valuable to study this prophecy often.

Jesus’ disciples wanted to know what to watch for. “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3).

Significantly, the very first thing that Jesus responded with was a somber warning of what to *watch out* for: “Take heed that no one deceives you” (verse 4). Sadly, many *are* deceived. Many who call themselves Christians are deceived into thinking that Christ will not literally return to the earth, even though He repeatedly promised He would, or that He will return in some manner different from what He told us.

In the rest of the chapter, Jesus answers their questions by revealing the *future key*

Jesus then urged His disciples to “*watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.*”

trends and conditions for which it would be critically important to watch.

Jesus then urged His disciples to “*watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into*” (verses 42-43).

After Jesus’ resurrection, He again said, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Acts 1:7). However, in spite of Jesus’ statements, countless people have foolishly tried to predict the time of His second coming. It is because we *don’t* know the timing that we must *keep watching*.

Continuing in Matthew 24, Jesus said, “Therefore *you also be ready*, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (verse 44). *Watching* reminds us and motivates us to *remain ready*. That’s the main idea!

Shortly after, Jesus warns of the temptation to think, “My master is staying away a long time” (verse 48, New International Version). When a person thinks he has more than enough time to get ready, he is seriously tempted to let down spiritually (see verses 49-51).

The parable of the 10 virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) emphasizes staying spiritually *prepared and ready*. Keeping one’s lamp filled with oil represents staying close to God and staying filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus concluded the parable by saying, “*Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming*” (verse 13).

Watching, praying, staying sober and watching out for enemies

In Mark’s and Luke’s accounts of Jesus Christ’s prophecy, we see that Jesus *connected watching with praying*. There is much to pray about regarding the present and the future. Watching helps our praying, and praying helps our watching.

Mark records Jesus saying: “*Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time [of Christ’s coming] is. 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” (Mark 13:33-34; see also verses 35-37).

Christ was quite emphatic here in commanding us to do four things:

1. *Take heed* to what He had just said.
2. *Watch* for the signs He had outlined.
3. *Pray* regularly and earnestly so that we stay close to God.
4. *Keep doing God’s work!*

In Luke’s account, Jesus tells us that “when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near” (Luke 21:31). Then He warns about not letting “that Day come on you *unexpectedly*” (verse 34).

Jesus concludes by saying, “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36).

“All these things” refers to all that is recorded in this chapter, including the “great distress in the land and wrath upon this people” (Luke 21:23). Mark uses the term “tribulation” and Matthew says “*great tribulation*” (Matthew 24:21).

Of course, Jesus did not mean that we are to only focus our prayers on our own survival and salvation. He meant that if we keep watching our spiritual condition and world events and praying for the Kingdom of God and for all that God tells us to pray about, we will be changing, repenting and accepting Christ’s sacrifice and help. Then we will be accounted worthy to escape the end-time tribulation and to be with Christ in His Kingdom!

Paul urged that we pray “for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Timothy 2:1-2). This implies that we know who our leaders are and what issues might impact our lives and our freedoms to worship God and carry out His work.

You can learn more about the connection between watching and praying in Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 4:2 and 1 Peter 4:7.

And watching is sometimes connected with staying spiritually *sober*, meaning



sober-minded (1 Thessalonians 5:6-8; 2 Timothy 4:5; 1 Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8). This includes staying alert to our own spiritual condition, as mentioned.

Some scriptures about watching emphasize *watching out* for spiritual dangers and enemies such as “savage wolves,” deceivers who want to take advantage of God’s “flock” of followers (Acts 20:29-31).

Peter warns 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). Staying aware of the powerful behind-the-scenes role of Satan and his demons enables us to understand the atrocious evil and madness of this world. It also enables us to “resist” them (James 4:7).

Mistaken attitudes that entrap Christians

In light of the above, we see that in addition to concern we should have in personally drawing close to God and over what is happening in God’s Church, we are clearly also to watch, listen and read to keep up with world news, events, conditions and trends.

In doing so, we should focus on news that is significant rather than sensational. Let your knowledge of end-time prophecy guide you in your selections. If you’re quite busy, and many of us are, still make “watching” a high priority and dedicate time for it.

In spite of Jesus’ command, many Christians don’t stay well informed. Why? We can name several reasons.

Some feel that paying serious attention to news is not “spiritual” enough. But true spirituality is based on obeying our Master, Jesus Christ, who commanded us to watch!

Some people ignore news because it’s mostly bad news that interferes with feeling happy and comfortable. But that’s choosing escapism over facing reality and obeying Christ’s command to “deny” yourself (Luke 9:23). We are not to selfishly shut our eyes and hearts to the suffering of others, becoming indifferent, complacent or fatalistic.

People get depressed when they feel helpless. But by watching and praying, we are strengthened. We can help others to understand what’s happening, plus we are more effective helpers with God’s work in other ways!

A Christlike attitude is one of sympathy, empathy and compassion for your fellow countrymen and for all humanity. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). If we grieve for others, God will comfort us in this life and much more in the next life.

Our God-ordained responsibility is to *watch and pray*. Ignorance comes from ignoring, and God does not want us to be ignorant and “in darkness” (see 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10). Our Master and role model Jesus Christ certainly understood the issues, politics and personalities of His day. We should do likewise.

At the same time, we must avoid the mistake of going to the other extreme—studying world affairs, history and even conspiracy theories more than the Bible. Without a sound understanding of God’s Word and a dedication to live by it, little else matters.

Will you become one of God’s watchmen?

God called the prophet Ezekiel to be a “watchman” to the nation of Israel to warn them to repent of their wicked ways or else suffer dire consequences (Ezekiel 3:17; 33:7). God told Ezekiel that He would hold him accountable—that if he didn’t warn the people he would share the guilt for their suffering (33:1-6).

So this is another application of Christ’s command to “watch.” He means for us to act as *watchmen!* How can we best do that?

First, we must strive to be “the light of the world” by being a godly example for others to follow (Matthew 5:14).

Second, we must study the Bible so that when people ask us important questions, we’ll be prepared to give them biblical answers (1 Peter 3:15). Also we should stay well-informed regarding world affairs so we’ll be able to help them understand those events from a biblical perspective.

Third, we must learn how God is using His Church to “go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15, NIV). We should learn how we can support and be a part of that great collective commission of “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God” (Mark 1:14).

The role of the Church has some similarity to the role of the Old Testament prophets. They taught the godly standards of good versus evil, the promise of God’s blessings on those who do right, and the warning of God’s punishments on those who do wrong.

The word *gospel* means *good news*, and the true gospel includes the wonderful news that Jesus Christ will soon return to give us true peace on earth! And before that, God will give forgiveness and protection to those who repent of their sins and make the commitment to obey and serve Him.

Jesus told us to regularly pray to God, “Your kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10). How can we convince others of the urgent need for God’s Kingdom if we can’t explain what’s wrong with the *present* world?

This magazine is part of the Church’s effort to be God’s watchman to the world. With each issue, some of the articles bring up-to-date reports on significant world events and trends and explain how they tie in with the Bible prophecies of the end time. We are glad you are reading and learning.

Keep watching! Perhaps the best summary of this subject is this sobering warning from Jesus Christ in Mark 13:35-37: “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!” **GN**

To Learn More...

The United Church of God, which publishes *The Good News* magazine, has prepared a lot of materials to help you better understand current events and what is foretold to happen in the times ahead. In addition to the booklets mentioned in this issue, we’d also recommend that you read our free *World News and Prophecy* newsletter, published every other month. Visit www.WNPonline.org to read it or subscribe.



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What's happening to our world?

It's becoming increasingly difficult to keep up with all the daily and weekly news relevant to biblical prophecies of the last days.

For example, we learned that the European Union (EU) bailout of the Republic of Ireland has *not* taken the pressure off the threatened euro (as expected), nor has it stabilized nervous markets. Then we soon discovered that Spain and Portugal may have to be bailed out as well. But before we could fully absorb this fresh development, surprising news surfaced that Belgium may also be a candidate for a future bailout. When will what began with bailing out Greece finally end? Can the euro survive all these past, present and potential bailouts?

Then on the military front, we received news that North Korea had wantonly shelled a South Korean island, even inflicting civilian fatalities. The immediate allied reaction was to announce a joint American–South Korean military exercise. But we soon found out that North Korea had allegedly supplied an already very dangerous Iran with missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads that could possibly reach Western Europe. Are we seeing these so-called new “axis powers” at the sinister start of a unified effort designed to harass and harm the West?

But before we could digest all these developments and others, we learned that hundreds of thousands of American State Department documents had been leaked to the media by the website WikiLeaks—replete with embarrassing but privately intended assessments of other countries, including even prominent individuals. Alleged Chinese views of the potential unification of the Koreas (with Seoul as the capital) came to light. Regrettably, this type of unauthorized diplomatic leak may actually be a factor in tempting China to postpone pressuring North Korea to unify with the South for some time to come.

We have now entered the second decade of the 21st century. What's ahead for 2011 and beyond? For the last few years in the January/February issues, we have reviewed events of the year past and looked ahead to the future—based on the overall guidance of biblical revelation. We continue that theme below.

A disturbing aspect of American decline



Financial Times columnist Philip Stephens said this about the WikiLeaks situation: “What all this says is that *American power is indeed waning*. In a world of rising states, nuclear proliferation and international terrorism, Washington cannot be sure of getting its way. How pleased the rest of us should be about this is another question. Courtesy of WikiLeaks and 250,000 cables we have been given a look at some of the alternatives. What's a little diplomatic chicanery, we might ask, against, say, a *nuclear arms race in the Middle East?*” (“A History of the Present in 250,000 Cables,” Nov. 30, 2010, emphasis added throughout).

Contemplating a world without American restraint in international affairs can be a bleak exercise indeed. But that is precisely where we are headed. In his article about the staggering U.S. national debt, *International Herald Tribune* columnist Thomas Friedman warned:

“Many people understand that we are slipping as a country . . . If we fail to come together and invest, spend and cut really wisely, we're heading for a fall—and if America becomes weak, your kids won't just grow up in a different country, they will grow up in a different world. We have to manage America's foreign policy, and plan its rebuilding at home, at a time when our financial resources and our geopolitical power are more limited than ever while our commitments abroad and entitlement promises at home are

more extensive than ever” (“Got to Get This Right,” Nov. 30, 2010).

Christopher Dickey, writing for *Newsweek*, stated: “Apathy, not activism, is likely to dominate U.S. foreign policy after November . . . Americans have been in this sort of apathetic but emotional mood many times before, and the record is grim. After World War I, the United States turned away from the League of Nations and back in on itself, *only to watch from an unsafe distance the resurrection of Germany under the Nazis*” (“America Turns Inward,” Nov. 1, 2010).

There remains, however, much more to understand about the American story, historically and prophetically. Download or request our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. (Sources: *Financial Times*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Newsweek*.)

How's Britain been faring?

Nearly 20 years ago, noted historian and journalist Paul Johnson asked: “*What has happened to the British?* Have we quite forgotten our global past? I recall, as a schoolboy, gazing with wonder at a map of the world, one quarter of which was coloured red, an empire and commonwealth on a scale never seen before. We had commitments, interests, responsibilities everywhere, and we took them with great seriousness” (“Turning Our Backs on the World,” *The Spectator* [London], April 11, 1992).

Clearly, harsh realities are everywhere present in the British Isles today. Philip Stephens commented: “Britain is turning in on itself. Cool Britannia, self-confident globalism and liberal internationalism—all belong to a bygone era. . . The time has come to pull up the drawbridge and pay the bills. Introspection and

austerity are the leitmotifs of the new age. Things are going to get grim . . . Taxes are going up and living standards are set to fall . . . The lesson from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan was that even before the cuts military commitments were running far ahead of the resources” (“Austerity Spells the End of Britain's Post-Imperial Reach,” *Financial Times*, Oct. 22, 2010).

Journalist Simon Jenkins has caught the unfortunate spirit behind the current defense cutbacks. His long feature article in the Nov. 5, 2010, issue of London's *Guardian* was headlined “Why It's Time to Scrap Britain's Armed Forces.” Exorbitantly expensive armaments have been proffered as one big reason for these drastic defense cuts. Britain has been famous for its highly effective Harrier jet aircraft, but it's soon to be a mere memory, with no new aircraft carriers on the horizon. Even military manpower comes at a high cost today.

How does Britain's longtime ally, the United States, view these negative defense developments? The British magazine *The Economist* commented: “*To Americans, it all looks like a dis-arms race*. NATO's longstanding call for allies to spend at least 2% of GDP on defence has been lost in the clamour over wider public-spending cuts” (“Defence Spending in a Time of Austerity,” Aug. 26, 2010).



But is Britain possibly in the process of repeating similar disarmament errors committed in the 1930s in the face of the Nazi threat? *The Economist* article continued: “The global pecking order is determined as much by economic performance in peacetime as by martial abilities in wartime. By this measure, China's economic strength should give the West cause for concern. China is also fast building up its naval power.”

To help its own people and the American government to swallow these indigenous cutbacks, Britain has signed a new defense treaty with France—joining up their respective armed forces. After all, the French have rejoined the NATO command after many years on the outside. But Philip Stephens, in another of his *Financial Times* columns, did add a paragraph of warning to his mostly positive reaction to this mutual entente. “Things, of course, could go wrong. The relationship between France and Britain has for centuries been shot through with intense and often bitter rivalry. The [English] channel has frequently looked wider than the Atlantic” (“A Cordial Entente to Match the Realities of Power,” Nov. 2, 2010).

For a biblical answer to Paul Johnson's question about what has happened to the British, we again refer you to our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. (Sources: *The Spectator*, *The Guardian*, *Financial Times*, *The Economist*.)

Threats to Israel

Several serious threats continue unabated, increasing in intensity: Namely, the widespread misrepresentation of Israel by the world's media, the modern

secular inquisition, the jihad against Israel's very existence as a nation, the blatant anti-Semitism among Islamic extremists and a softer version indulged in by too many apparently friendly countries that ought to know and do better.

Although surrounded and beset by other hostile forces, the possibility of a nuclear-armed Iran remains Israel's foremost security worry. In this instance everyone wants sanctions to work, but the track record shows that they rarely inhibit rogue nations bent on harmful mischief from carrying out their evil purposes. That puts Israel in a very precarious position.

Author Jerome Corsi stated in the concluding chapter of his book *Why Israel Can't Wait*, "Still, in the final analysis, Israel is a 'one bomb' state such that one atomic bomb, even of a relatively low yield, detonated successfully over Tel Aviv, Israel's business, banking, and telecommunications center, would destroy the modern Jewish state as the world knows it" (2009, p. 102).

Caroline Glick's Internet report shows that the Obama administration has been pursuing secret negotiations toward moving the peace process forward between Israel and the Palestinians. One key element calls for virtually handing over the Jordan Valley to the Palestinians. Here is Glick's frank evaluation: "By calling for Israel to cede the Jordan Valley to the Palestinians, US President Barack Obama is ignoring the most fundamental reality of the Middle East: Israel is besieged by its neighbors who seeks its destruction. Without the Jordan Valley Israel would become the modern day equivalent of Czechoslovakia stripped of the Sudetenland in 1938. It would be utterly indefensible" ("We Are Not for Sale," posted Nov. 5, 2010, originally published in *The Jerusalem Post*).

The so-called "land for peace" solution has rarely worked out for Israel in the past. Why would it now?

The Iranian threat to the Middle East

To Daniel Mariaschin, influential lobbyist for the Jewish service organization B'nai B'rith International, Iran remains Israel's most pressing concern: "Iran is issue number one, issue number two and issue number three in importance . . . We have been saying for years that *Iran is not just Israel's problem*, and fortunately the democracies seem to be waking up to this now. We hope it's not too late . . . We are watching as Iran builds a complex deployment system for their warheads. We are not talking about crude devices but sophisticated weaponry. Their idea is to create intercontinental ballistic missiles" (interview

with Simon Round, "The Man Warning the West on Iran," *The Jewish Chronicle*, Nov. 26, 2010).

Saudi Arabia has also become increasingly concerned about the possible fulfillment of Iran's nuclear ambitions. In 2006 the crown prince of Saudi Arabia stated, "They have to be dealt with before they do something tragic." Then in 2008, the Saudis conferred with U.S. Gen. David Petraeus, during which a leading Saudi official "recalled the king's 'frequent exhortations to the U.S. to attack Iran'" (David Sanger, James Glanz and Jo Becker, "Widespread Distress Over Iran," *International Herald Tribune*, Nov. 29, 2010).

Said a London *Times* article regarding the WikiLeaks releases: "They also provide the first published evidence of an alleged shipment to Iran of missiles capable of reaching western European capitals, including Moscow. They depict the leaders of Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as united in their pleas for the US to take the lead in crafting a military solution to the Iranian problem, but refusing to condemn Tehran publicly for fear of enraging their own Shia minorities" (Giles Whittell, "Israel's Warning to Obama: If You Don't Sort Out Tehran We Will," Nov. 30, 2010).

Finally Philip Stephens commented: "Yet if Tehran does succeed in its ambition, it will probably start a nuclear race in one of the world's most volatile regions. The pressures on Arab states to follow suit—Saudi Arabia and Egypt spring first to mind—would be intense. Turkey would have to consider whether to cross the nuclear threshold. Proliferation in the Middle East would signal in turn the end of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. John F. Kennedy's nightmare of a world held in terror by the threat of nuclear conflagration would come a big step closer" ("Caught Between Bombing Iran and an Iranian Bomb," *Financial Times*, Oct. 8, 2010).

To understand the historical and prophetic significance of the current dilemmas in regard to Iran, download or request our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. (Sources: *The Times* [London], *Financial Times*, *International Herald Tribune*.)

The Chinese Republic: a force to reckon with

China reminds one observer of 19th-century America, a go-getting nation of yesteryear. Eventual economic warfare with the dragon nation becomes an increasing possibility with the passage of time. In a *Newsweek*

article by Isaac Stone Fish titled "Chinese Economic Warfare," the drophead warned, "Don't expect a ceasefire, ever." A callout on the page summarized that Premier Wen Jiabao "denied using rare earth metals as a bargaining chip, but Xinhua [the state news service] contradicted, saying those precious metals are strong bargaining chips" ("Chinese Economic Warfare," Nov. 15, 2010).

The People's Republic of China has a reputation for buying up the world, with some takeovers currently described as "being eaten by the dragon." Another *Newsweek* article stated that "China soared through the financial crisis with ease, registering just under 9 percent growth a year, even in the darkest days" (Rana Foroohar, "China Is a Rich Country," Nov. 8, 2010).

On the military front, *Newsweek* reports that "China's fiercest anti-ship missile, the Russian designed Sizzler, can reach farther and fly faster than the West's top anti-ship missiles. 'Everyone in the Western world is wondering how you defeat it,' says John Patch, a professor at the U.S. Army War College" (Benjamin Sutherland, "China's Carrier Killers," Oct. 18, 2010). Nations like Australia and Japan are worried about Chinese intentions in the Pacific. The same report also mentioned that "China's new missiles come at a time when the U.S. Navy is more threatened by weapons systems that it has been since the end of the Cold War."

Another *Newsweek* piece by Isaac Stone Fish stated that "China's recent belligerence toward Japan has worried its neighbors, including Taiwan" ("Strait Tensions Still Hot," Oct. 25, 2010). Despite other serious disagreements and tensions between America and China, Taiwan still "remains the main point of contention between the two superpowers" (ibid.)

Keep your eye on the Far East! (Source: *Newsweek*.)

What will happen next?

Our world today seems more unpredictable and unstable than perhaps at any time since 1942 during World War II, when it appeared that the tide could turn sharply in favor of the then "Axis Powers." Many observers simply don't know what to expect next. Any one of a number of current crises could very well explode into something quite large.

What true Christians do have is the Bible and biblical prophecy. What the Scriptures give us is an overall outline of events to come and the signs that would accompany the close of our present age. Our free booklet *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* explains that a time of worldwide conflict is definitely coming. But this publication also depicts a wonderful world beyond. Download or request your free copy.



Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

How Can You Make Sense of the News?

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





Debt Troubles Mount for Britain and America

The late French President Charles de Gaulle once dismissed the United States and Britain as “the Anglo-Saxon debtor nations.” Four decades later, their enormous debt is forcing the two countries into a period of dramatic change.

t’s now official.

When I was at school in England in the 1950s and early 60s, we were taught that the two primary functions of government were “defense of the realm” and maintaining a strong and stable currency.

That’s now changed.

Faced with increasing financial problems due to years of overspending, Western governments are having to cut their big budgets. This includes the United Kingdom, which is having to cut billions of pounds in government spending to bring down the nation’s debts. Austerity—strictness in curtailing spending—is the constant refrain.

All government departments were told to submit plans for massive reductions in spending, with the exception of two departments considered sacrosanct—health and overseas aid.

Defense is to be slashed amid fears that the country will no longer be able to defend itself. There is even to be some sharing of major military hardware with France—including an aircraft carrier!—so that both countries can save money. This is rather ironic when we consider that the British have fought France more times than any other country!

Clearly, “defense of the realm” is no longer the government’s foremost priority.

There are also to be cuts in welfare and other forms of government assistance. When it was announced that government support for rent was to be *capped* at £400 per week (about \$630), the Conservative mayor of London, Boris Johnson, charged his colleagues at Westminster of “ethnic cleansing” (he later softened his stance somewhat).

This was a reference to the fact that many of those in London receiving assistance are nonwhite immigrants and their adult children. Housing in London is extremely expensive, and news reports have frequently

highlighted families that receive *thousands of pounds every week* to help them remain in their homes. (One British pound equals approximately \$1.60.)

What’s happened to the United Kingdom?

A century ago, the United Kingdom was the greatest military power in the world. The country was also the greatest investing nation, accounting for almost 50 percent of all international investment on the eve of World War I in 1914.

Yet by 1916, halfway through the “war to end all wars,” the United Kingdom was borrowing heavily from the United States. The country still remained a global superpower right through World War II. Even in 1953, at the time of Queen Elizabeth’s coronation, it was a major military and political power.

But by the 1950s it was in rapid economic decline. Contributory factors were a lack of competitiveness and government control of much of the nation’s production. Added to these were rising welfare and health costs, a consequence of the postwar welfare state introduced by the government elected after the war ended in 1945.

For more than six decades Britain has been gradually reducing its military spending, effectively to finance its ever-increasing welfare and health costs.

Bible prophecy helps us understand

Regular readers of this magazine know that modern-day Britons are largely the descendants of the biblical half-tribe of Ephraim. God promised Ephraim and his brother Manasseh, the two sons of Joseph, incredible blessings for their descendants.

Manasseh was prophesied to become a great nation, whereas Ephraim was to be a “multitude of nations” (Genesis 48:19), a prophecy fulfilled in the former British Empire and Commonwealth, as explained in our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

The empire was still fairly intact when Queen Elizabeth assumed the throne on her father’s death in February 1952. Today, it has almost all gone, a reflection of the great decline the country has undergone during the reign of just one monarch.

The Old Testament prophet Hosea addressed his prophecies to modern-day Ephraim. Many reject that the prophecy is about our time, but a passage in chapter 5 of the book of Hosea shows that it was not a message intended for ancient Ephraim. In Hosea 5:5 we read that Israel and Judah will both fall and stumble within a period of 30 days, the “New Moon” referred to in verse 7.

This did not happen in ancient times. The 10 tribes comprising the kingdom of Israel, of which Ephraim was a part, fell to Assyrian invaders more than a century before the kingdom of Judah was overthrown and crushed by the Babylonians.

The decline of present-day Ephraim has a lot to do with the country turning away from God. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 show the connection between a nation’s obedience and blessings or disobedience and negative consequences.

One of the consequences of disobedience is economic decline, which the country is feeling now as it struggles with a heavy burden of debt. This is not new. The late French President Charles de Gaulle once referred to “the Anglo-Saxon debtor nations” when rejecting Britain’s bid to join the European Community (now the European Union).

He was talking about the United Kingdom and the United States, whose modern economies have been built on massive borrowing. (It’s ironic, but more than 40 years later France also wrestles with its own serious debt problems!)

One of the reasons for Ephraim’s economic decline is Britain’s 50-year obsession with Europe. The 1957 Treaty of Rome pledges member countries to form “an ever closer union.” Gradually, since joining in 1973, Britain has been losing more and more of its sovereignty and has traded places with others in Europe.

The country that once led Europe economically is now behind both Germany



One of the consequences of disobedience to God's laws is economic decline, which America and Britain are feeling now.

and France and is on a par with Italy as an economic power. Britain is a net contributor to the EU, which means it subsidizes other countries in the Union to the tune of billions of pounds each year.

Hosea 7:9 says that “aliens have devoured his strength, but he does not know it.” Whereas this certainly applies to the drain from the EU, it is also applicable in other ways. While on the surface a commitment to maintain overseas aid at its former level during a period of austerity may seem generous, it is difficult to understand how this should take precedence over the “defense of the realm.” After all, if the country suffers defeat in war, there will be no aid to give to anybody!

Even more curious is the fact that *India* is the foremost recipient of aid from Britain—the same India that is fast becoming an economic superpower! Other recipients include nations ruled by dictators who notoriously pocket a great deal of the money for themselves!

“Aliens have devoured his strength” at home too, as Boris Johnson’s comment on housing and subsidizing immigrants testifies. It’s well known in the United Kingdom that the country’s generous welfare system and free health care attract many to the nation’s shores. While many contribute to the country, huge numbers of other immigrants require financial help with housing, health care and financial support for their children.

Is the United States any different?

While Britain’s priorities have changed since World War II, the country has always

known it could, in the end, rely on the United States to defend it in the event of a major conflict. Britain itself has contributed to America’s wars, and the expectation is that the United States will always provide a military umbrella if the United Kingdom were attacked. But can the United States fulfill its military obligations at a time when U.S. debt is at record levels?

The United Kingdom and some other countries are in a time of austerity. America’s debts are just as bad. The only reason why the United States has gotten away with it longer is because the U.S. dollar is the world’s reserve currency.

This means that many countries willingly take American dollars as payment for goods because they can use those dollars to buy oil and other commodities from many different countries. The United States has even been able to print more dollars seemingly without too much concern, an option the United Kingdom and other nations can’t normally exercise without serious negative consequences.

But now some countries are clearly turning away from the dollar. At the November 2010 G20 meetings in Seoul, South Korea, Germany, China and Japan all called for an end to the dollar’s role as the world’s reserve currency, due to anxiety over reckless U.S. government policy in printing more money to stimulate the economy. On Nov. 24, 2010, the *China Daily* website carried the headline “China, Russia Quit Dollar.”

The article, written from St. Petersburg, Russia, began with the following: “China and Russia have decided to renounce the US dollar and resort to using their own

currencies for bilateral trade, Premier Wen Jiabao and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin announced late on Tuesday.”

Major changes looming for the United States?

A U.S. congressional committee looking into ways to reduce the nation’s debt is advocating cuts similar to those in Britain—including a call for reduced military spending. Just as Britain’s policing of the world, a job it had done for two centuries, was overtaken by other priorities for the British after World War II, so America will follow suit.

U.S. News and World Report publisher Mortimer Zuckerman, in the December 2010, issue, summed up what has become the new economic reality for many Americans. Titled “Tax Hikes, Fewer Benefits Key to Federal Deficit Crisis Fix,” the article was more ominously subtitled, “Americans feel anxiety without pause as millions fall out of the middle class.”

Zuckerman states: “The dominant mood in America today is one of anxiety without pause. Millions of decent, self-reliant, regular Americans who had begun to fear that the prolonged recession means the American dream is over for them now brood that their children and even their grandchildren are also to be denied the prospects of the good life they took for granted just a decade ago.

“Once, the vast majority thought they were in the middle class, not rich and not poor. Today, more and more Americans are starting to identify themselves with lower economic groupings and see no prospects

Continued on page 27

An Overview of End-Time Prophecy

by Jerold Aust



There are as many end-time scenarios based to some degree on Bible prophecy as there are prophetic teachers. Is there a singular overview of end-time prophecy that can help protect you from end-time catastrophes?

The *Left Behind* series is one of the most popular religious book series in recent history. Their fictional theme takes advantage of a culture hungry to escape prophesied catastrophic events.

The series started in 1995 with the release of *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*, a fictional book about what supposedly happens on earth after believers are raptured away prior to Jesus Christ's second coming. The series, written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, eventually stretched to 16 novels, of which 65 million copies have been sold.

Ironically, those who believe in the *Left Behind* concept—supporters of the rapture theory—may well find themselves confused and wondering as the true biblical end-time events unfold.

Why? Because Jesus Christ's outline of end-time prophecies does not include a secret rapture. His return will be obvious, preceded by heavenly signs, a global earthquake, worldwide volcanic activity and angels sounding trumpets with supernatural piercing blasts. Christ will not sneak back to this earth; He will return in great shining glory and well-deserved honor.

Jesus Himself said of His return, "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" (Matthew 24:30, emphasis added throughout).

Jesus revealed that everyone throughout the planet will see Him coming back to earth. The hidden rapture theory contradicts this, saying He will take away the elect earlier and secretly. Don't you believe it.

When you know the overview of end-time prophecy, you will know the truth about the major events that precede Christ's return, including how God will protect His true servants—and it's not through a secret rapture (Revelation 12:13-17). To learn more about this doctrine, download the free reprints "The Rapture—A Popular but False Doctrine" and "Have You Been Misled by the Rapture Theory?" at www.GNmagazine.org/reprints.

Bible prophecy comes from God alone. "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20, New International Version).

The best way to gain a proper overview of end-time prophecies is to let the Bible speak for itself.

What is prophecy?

Prophecy is sometimes described as history written in advance. God foresaw many trends and events to come—in part because

He perfectly understands what people will do in given circumstances and also because He guides and directs some circumstances.

To some extent, prophecy is God's advance warnings against ongoing human sin. Since sin harms us and can destroy us, God proclaims prophetic warnings to get the attention of human beings. Prophesied punishments are the results brought on by human beings. God wants to *spare* humankind, not destroy us.

Most people assume that prophetic warnings against human beings come from a vengeful God who cannot tolerate a weak and disobedient humanity. They reason that since God is holy and all-powerful and we aren't, and since we can never make ourselves holy, then God loses patience with our pathetic state and punishes us—perhaps even unfairly.

But that is not why God proclaims end-time prophecies. This is a false notion from the god of this world, Satan the devil, who has deceived humankind about God in many ways. As long as he can keep humanity blind to the true God's intentions, he can remain in his place as "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

People need to realize that Satan, who was "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44), wants all of mankind dead—forever. At the very end of this age of human misrule, Satan will attempt to destroy all humanity through two great military forces that will converge on Jerusalem to make war against the returning Christ, the Messiah (Revelation 16:14; 19:11-21; 14:14-20).

Prophecy shows that God is ultimately in charge, that He has a plan for humankind's future, and that human life has a great purpose. God's will is to save, not destroy, mankind.

Prophecy shows that God pleads with those who resist Him and that He will reward those who honor Him.

Prophecy's misunderstood purpose

Let's consider, then, the purpose of prophecy.

People from time immemorial have wanted to know the future, mostly for their personal benefit. For example, Jesus' disciples wanted to know what signs would precede His return. "Tell us," they asked, "when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the

age?” (Matthew 24:3). Human beings want to know what’s coming, if for no other reason than their personal protection.

Though people want to know the what, when and where of prophecy—good of itself—this is not the primary purpose of prophecy. The purpose of prophecy, rather, is to help people evaluate their personal conduct in light of God’s Word—*before* the prophesied circumstances come to pass. Without the warnings and fulfillments of prophecy, humanity would have no reason to question and stop its self-indulgent path to self-destruction.

If people read and heed God’s warnings, they could look to Him to protect them during the coming days of the Great Tribulation and His wrathful just judgment against the tyrants of this world. As Jesus said, “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial [the Great Tribulation, see Matthew 24:21-22] which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (Revelation 3:10).

God is merciful and loving. His Word is full of warnings to sinning human beings to get them to turn from sin and avoid its painful and inevitable consequences. God derives no pleasure from the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11). He also promises to reward, bless and protect those who follow His will (Deuteronomy 28:1-2).

The backstory of prophecy

The Bible gives the backstory of prophecy in Deuteronomy 28. This chapter shows the blessings and curses that automatically follow from either obeying or rejecting God’s laws. These laws are spiritual (Romans 7:14) and apply regardless of whether one knows about them or not (Romans 2:12). God promises to bless everyone who honors Him and, alternatively, He allows curses to come on those who dishonor Him. Understanding this fundamental aspect of God’s laws is foundational to understanding prophecy.

This one chapter, Deuteronomy 28, is pivotal to all prophecies. Know this chapter and you will know the purpose of prophecy. Again, *the purpose of prophecy is to help human beings to turn from their sins and seek God* for His blessings.

Many Bible stories validate this backstory of prophecy, but few highlight it better than the story of Judah and Babylon. For many years God warned the kingdom of Judah not to follow the way of her kinsmen, the neighboring kingdom of Israel.

Israel’s sins brought about its own demise, just as foretold in Deuteronomy

28:15. Eventually God allowed the cruel nation of Assyria to conquer and carry Israel away from its homeland in two massive deportations—in 733 and 722 B.C.

Nearly a century later, God gave Judah a



People assume that prophetic warnings come from a vengeful God who cannot tolerate a disobedient and weak humanity. This is a false notion.

righteous king, Josiah, as a last-ditch hope to save the Jewish nation from imminent captivity (2 Chronicles 34:1, 26-28). God also sent the prophets Jeremiah, Zephaniah and Habakkuk. Sadly, after Josiah’s untimely death the people of Judah quickly returned to their sinful ways, like a washed hog that wallows in its slop and a dog that returns to its vomit (2 Peter 2:22). Like Israel, they, too, were invaded and taken away into captivity.

Again, the purpose of prophecy is to motivate people to question their conduct in light of clear Bible teachings. That applies to all people, whether they profess Christianity or not. Some will heed the warnings of God’s end-time prophecies, and many will remain ignorant of them.

Jesus said that He spoke to the religious types of His day in parables because they refused to honor and obey Him:

“I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and

not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull, their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes *they have closed*, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn [back to God in repentance], so that I should heal them” (Matthew 13:13-15).

Strong end-time prophecies are like shots across the bows of rudderless societal ships, adrift on a sea of humanism, cast about by materialism. If there were no prophecy, and especially no end-time prophecies, humankind would have no one to challenge its dangerous drift into self-destruction.

An overview of end-time prophecy

The Bible gives an overview of end-time prophecy. Details are scattered throughout Scripture.

Jesus Christ Himself gave an overview of end-time prophecy shortly before His crucifixion. In it He foretold end-time events or the end of the age of human self-rule under the influence of Satan.

He shared with His disciples the major signs of the end of this age. Major events of His prophecy—recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21—correspond to the seals of the book of Revelation. Once Christ opens a seal (Revelation 6:1), it remains open to the very time of the end of human rule and Christ’s return.

For a more detailed guide to the major end-time prophecies, download or request our free booklets *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*, *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*, *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*

The first seal, in Revelation 6:2 and corresponding to Matthew 24:4-5, signifies the emergence, spread and domination of a false Christianity, which began shortly after Jesus’ resurrection and the beginning of the New Testament Church. This false Christianity is a religious mixture derived partly from the Bible and partly from *nonbiblical* beliefs and traditions originating in ancient pagan religion.

We know that this counterfeit Christianity began in the first century because a number of the New Testament writers spoke of it (Acts 20:16-17, 28-31; 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15; Jude 3-4; 1 John 2:18-19; 1 John 4:1). This false religious system, which the apostle Paul labeled “the mystery of lawlessness,” continues to the end, where it plays a major role in end-time deception leading up to Christ’s return (2 Thessalonians 2:7-12).

The second seal, in Revelation 6:3-4 and

corresponding to Matthew 24:6-7, reveals that there will be “wars and rumors of wars.” Though there have always been wars and rumors of wars, Jesus said they would continue to the end and escalate into a final bloodbath that will take the lives of no less than a third of mankind (Revelation 9:15-16).

The great final conflict, which Scripture describes as “the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:14), does not take place at the infamous Armageddon (the hill of Megiddo in northern Israel), where great military forces gather (Revelation 16:14, 16), but near Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:1-4, 12-14). Conditions will be so dangerous that if Christ didn’t intervene in human affairs, no flesh would be saved alive (Matthew 24:21-22).

The third seal, in Revelation 6:5-6 and corresponding to Matthew 24:7, shows that the earth will be plagued with major famines, starvation and hunger. While there have always been famines in various regions, as time goes on they will grow worse and worse. Famines follow hard on the heels of war. Multiple millions will die from starvation.

The fourth seal, in Revelation 6:7-8 and corresponding to the next sign in Matthew 24:7, reveals that the world will be plagued by deadly diseases and terrible disasters. Famine, of course, leads to diseases. And both flow from man-made carnages and natural catastrophes. Widespread pandemics will decimate large populations, as the bubonic plague did in the 14th century, when it killed a third of the population of Europe, Russia, China, and cities on associated trade routes.

The fifth seal, in Revelation 6:9-11 and corresponding to Matthew 24:9-12, represents great persecution and martyrdom of God’s true and faithful servants. Persecution is the lot of God’s saints. As Jesus Himself said, “A servant is not greater than his master, if they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). Paul similarly wrote, “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).

Persecution of God’s people has been a fact of life throughout the ages, but it will increase in the time of the end. In times of societal turmoil, it’s common to seek a scapegoat. As in earlier times, religious authorities will find in true Christians a convenient group on which to fix the blame.

This commences the time of the Great Tribulation. Other passages reveal that the intensifying persecution will extend to not just Christians but to the physical descen-

This false religious system continues to the end, where it plays a major role in end-time deception leading up to Christ’s return.

dants of ancient Israel. The Israelite peoples will experience terrible devastation from enemies at this time, as prophesied in Deuteronomy 28 (see our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*).

The sixth seal of Revelation 6:12-17 corresponds with Matthew 24:29. Both describe terrifying signs in the sky—the sun and the moon darkened—and what appear to be meteor strikes on the earth. This introduces the time of God’s wrath (Revelation 11:18; 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1; 19:15), what Scripture also calls “the day of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 5:2; Malachi 4:5). This leads directly into Jesus Christ’s climactic second coming.

All these major prophetic events lead to and are a part of the very end time, referred to by such terms as the last days, latter days, last times, latter times and the Day of the Lord (see “Just What Is the End Time?” on page 19).

Real-time events and end-time prophecy

Not all prophecies are understandable today, but they all will become clear in the future as geopolitical and technological changes transpire. Who could see the advancement of communications through the vehicle of the computer and Internet? Still, God promises to reveal the future to His faithful people sent out to proclaim His truth: “Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

And God has indeed revealed to His followers a few end-time conditions that must be in place before Christ Jesus returns. These conditions have been met only within the last century.

• First, *the real possibility of human annihilation must exist.*

Humankind now has the ability to wipe out human life through nuclear warheads. That prospect already exists with the United States and Russia; and Britain, France, China, India, and Israel also have sizable nuclear arsenals.



Especially dangerous is the development of nuclear weapons by unstable states like Pakistan and North Korea, possibly soon to be joined by Iran.

Jesus said of the time of the end: “It will be a time of great distress; *there has never been such a time from the beginning of the world until now, 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; New English Bible).

Humankind has always fought wars, but until recently we’ve never had the ability to exterminate every human being from the earth. Since 1945 and the detonation of the first atomic bombs, followed by even more destructive hydrogen bombs, humanity now has the ability to destroy all human life many times over.

Jesus Christ must intervene to save humankind from itself—from self-annihilation!

• Second, *a Jewish nation must be in place and in control of Jerusalem* for some end-time prophecies to be fulfilled.

This was not possible before 1948, when the modern state of Israel was born—something thought impossible over preceding centuries.

The Jews’ culture and religion has survived major periods when they were dominated or defeated by Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. Noted 19th-century historian Heinrich Graetz said, “A nation . . . which has witnessed the rise and decay of the most ancient empires, and which still continues to hold its place in the present day, deserves . . . the closest attention” (*History of the Jews*, 1895, p. 705).

The French emperor Napoleon, when passing near a synagogue and hearing Jews weeping inside, remarked, “A people that longs so much for its city and its temple are

Just What Is the End Time?

From the time of the early New Testament Church, people have asked, “When is the time of the end?”

Jesus’ disciples asked Him for the signs that would precede His return. “Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives [on the east side of Jerusalem], the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’” (Matthew 24:3).

Jesus’ disciples were familiar with Old Testament prophecies. They understood that the end of the age meant the end of human misrule on earth, replaced with the righteous divine rule of the promised Messiah.

They knew about prophecies such as the one from Daniel that foretold the coming Kingdom of God: “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44).

God promises to end human self-rule on earth because mankind has never produced a peaceful and lasting government. Indeed it cannot (Romans 8:7). Human history is largely a chronicle of wars, emanating from selfish human nature and motivated by “the god of this age,” Satan the devil (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Since God has promised to remove all human governments at Christ’s return,

there is necessarily a “time of the end” or end of the age of man’s rule on earth. This is what *end time* refers to—the end of this present evil age and the dawning of a new age under God.

The Bible uses various terms to refer to the end of the age of man’s rule, such as “last day” (John 6:39), “last days” (2 Peter 3:3), “last time” (1 Peter 1:5), “last times” (1 Peter 1:20), “latter day” (Job 19:25, King James Version), “latter time” (Daniel 8:23), “latter times” (1 Timothy 4:1) and “the day of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 5:2). To determine what each term means, one must consider context. For example, “the time of the end” in Daniel 8:17 and 11:35 and verse 40 is the period at the very end of this age of man’s rule and the return of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Peter spoke about the last days beginning in his time (Acts 2:17) and lasting all the way to Christ’s return, reflecting the fact that the trends Jesus foretold shortly before His death would soon begin, continuing and intensifying up until His return.

Again, context tells us whether the expression refers to such a long stretch of time or the brief period prior to Jesus’ return.

To better understand the end of the age, request or download your free copies of the booklets *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*, *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*

bound to restore them one day!”

Jesus prophesied that as the end time approached, the Jews would once again control Jerusalem and the “holy place.” Later Jesus said the holy place would be desecrated with the abomination of desolation, as the prophet Daniel had earlier written about (Matthew 24:15-16).

The Jews today control Jerusalem. After the Six-Day War in 1967, when the Jews took possession of Jerusalem, they allowed the Arab Muslims to continue to control the Temple Mount. Since 1989, some Israelis have begun to prepare for the building of a new temple or “holy place.” Periodically devout Jews have attempted to place the first stone, but to no avail. The conditions of Jesus’ prophecy are partially in place, but more must change before prophesied events can proceed.

• Third, a final revival of a major European geopolitical power must come to pass.

A final revival of the ancient Roman Empire, foretold in the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation, must surface. Daniel 2:40-44 shows that a kingdom of iron, fourth in succession from ancient Babylon, would rule until the end time. That can apply only to the ancient Roman Empire and its 10 revivals, the last seven of which were influenced by the Roman church (compare Revelation 17).

At the end time 10 “kings” or rulers align themselves in a final world superpower that Scripture calls “the beast,” led by a powerful dictator also called the Beast (verses 12-13). The time setting of this prophecy is clear from the fact that these 10 rulers “will make war with the Lamb”—the returning Jesus

Christ—“and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings” (verse 14).

Only Europe can fill this role. Only Europe and the Roman church have worked together throughout the previous revivals of the ancient Holy Roman Empire. No other kingdom or continent can boast of such a 1,500-year-long relationship.

Newsweek journalist Michael Elliott reported that “in January 1957, six nations signed a treaty on the site of the ancient Roman Capitol, and brought into being the European Economic Community” (*Newsweek*, Jan. 29, 1996). Paul-Henri Spaak, the then Belgian foreign minister, said of that time, “Do you think that we have laid the first stone of a new Roman Empire?” His aide recalled, “We felt very strongly we were Romans that day” (*ibid.*).

How can end-time prophecy help you?

The *Left Behind* series of fictional novels cannot provide true prophetic insight to the end times. Only God can.

God provides end-time prophecies to cause a self-willed humanity to return to Him. He wants us to repent and fulfill our potential to be His children forever! He wants us to follow Him and to share the good news of Christ’s return and the Kingdom of God with others. Though, as we have seen, Christians will be persecuted and martyred in the end time, God has a plan to protect many of those who turn to Him from the terrible prophetic events to come.

To many of those who watch world news in light of end-time Bible prophecy, who

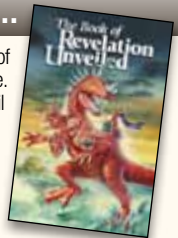
are alert to their spiritual condition and who pray continually to draw close to Him, God offers protection in these coming perilous times (Luke 21:29-36). As we saw earlier in Deuteronomy 28, we can obey God and be blessed now and, more importantly, in the life to come.

Satan’s avowed purpose is to destroy humanity. He thinks that he can destroy all human beings through the Great Tribulation before Jesus Christ can intervene to save us. Though billions will die (to be resurrected later in God’s plan), many millions will remain alive to begin a new life, rebuilding the waste places and living in a new global Garden of Eden under the reign of Jesus Christ on earth (Ezekiel 36:33-35).

Bible prophecies are God’s blueprint to save humanity from itself. These end-time prophecies can help deliver you and your family from the terrible times to come—if you will heed them now. **GN**

To Learn More...

This article provides an outline of Bible prophecies of the end time. Scripture offers much more detail to help you see where this world is going and why. For a more detailed exposition of prophecy in general and the end-time prophecies in particular, write for our free booklets *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*, *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*, *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*



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Is a Global Food Crisis Brewing?

by Becky Sweat

You've likely noticed recent increases in the cost of food, and no end is in sight. Are we seeing the beginnings of growing food shortages? What's behind this trend, and where is it leading?



Food. It's something many of us have long taken for granted—given that we've been able to go down to any grocery store or restaurant and buy basically whatever we want to eat and that we've had a seemingly endless variety of foods in unlimited quantities to choose from.

But that may be changing. Just take a look at your grocery bill. Many of us simply cannot *afford* to buy whatever we want, or as much as we want. Food costs are skyrocketing! Prices for fruits and vegetables, milk, coffee, sugar and beef have all reached record highs.

The Wall Street Journal reports: "Food prices are rising faster than overall inflation. The consumer price index for all items minus food and energy rose 0.8% over the year to September, the lowest 12-month increase since March 1961, the Bureau of Labor Statistics said. *The food index rose 1.4%, however*" (Julie Jargon and Ilan Brat, "Food Sellers Grit Teeth, Raise Prices," Nov. 4, 2010, emphasis added throughout).

Food inflation hits families hard

Many believe the food inflation rate will be even higher this coming year. In

November, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) issued a report predicting food prices will soar 10 to 20 percent in 2011 and warning the world to be prepared for "harder times ahead" unless production of major food crops increases significantly.

The FAO report indicates that world grain reserves slumped 7.2 percent in 2010, with barley plunging 35 percent, maize (corn) 12 percent, and wheat 10 percent. The decline is due to dismal fall harvests. Most disappointing was the Russian wheat crop, which was a third smaller than expected and caused Russia—the world's fourth largest wheat exporter—to impose an export ban on wheat. These supply shortfalls have sent grain prices soaring.

With escalating grain costs, several food manufacturers, including Kraft Foods, Sara Lee and General Mills, recently announced or implemented price hikes on their product lines. Several U.S. supermarket and fast-food chains, including Safeway, Kroger and McDonald's, announced that they plan to pass these higher costs on to consumers.

Yet not only is food becoming more expensive, but in recent years many Americans have experienced shortages of certain types

of foods for the first time in their lives. For instance, for most of 2010 it was almost impossible to find canned pumpkin for sale in the United States due to the heavy rainfall and flooding that rotted the pumpkin crop of the nation's largest supplier.

Rice was in short supply in 2008, prompting large retailers like Walmart and Costco to ration the bags of rice sold to consumers. Also in 2008, major retailers in New York were limiting purchases of flour, sugar and cooking oil, as demand was outstripping supply. Many agriculture experts believe these shortages are precursors of much more serious food shortfalls in the years ahead.

Chronic hunger plagues many

Of course, throughout much of the world food has never been taken for granted. According to the FAO, more than 1 billion people, or 15 percent of the world's population, suffer from chronic hunger and malnutrition—either because they cannot afford to eat a healthy diet or the food is simply not available where they live. The number of those who are hungry in the world has been steadily increasing in recent years, up from 825 million in the mid-1990s, and continues to edge upward.

Nearly all of the world's undernourished live in developing nations. The FAO and World Food Programme estimate 642 million people in Asia and the Pacific to be chronically hungry, 265 million in sub-Saharan Africa, 53 million in Latin America and the Caribbean, 42 million in the Near East and northern Africa, and 15 million in developed countries.

Rising food costs worldwide, while challenging to people in industrialized nations, are particularly tough for those in poor countries.

"When food prices shoot up, the low-income people of the developing world are the most vulnerable, as the share of food in their total expenditures is much higher than that of wealthier populations," notes Dan Gustafson, Ph.D., director of the FAO's Liaison Office in Washington, D.C.

Food represents about 10 to 20 percent of consumer spending in industrialized nations, but as much as 60 to 80 percent in developing countries, according to the

FAO. For example, when the price of a bag of rice goes up 20 percent, that extra cost will take up a much larger portion of household income for a family in Bangladesh than it will for a family in Canada.

Ominously, the situation does not look like it's going to improve in the immediate future. "We're not growing enough food, and too many of our crops are failing or having disappointing yields, so we're not able to put as much food into reserves," warns Gustafson. "Yet, at the same time, demand for food is increasing."

Concerns intensify when looking at the long-term picture. With a world population expected to exceed 9 billion by 2050, demand for food will rise by 110 percent, according to Julian Cribb, professor at the University of Technology in Sydney, Australia, and author of the 2010 book *The Coming Famine*.

He believes severe food shortages are inevitable, particularly in developing nations and the large "megacities" where most of the population growth is occurring. Wealthy nations will primarily be impacted with food shortages and higher costs (food scarcity causes inflation in food prices). In poor nations, however, it will cause greater numbers of people to starve.

But even if certain regions are not directly affected by famine, hunger will still be a worldwide problem, according to Professor Cribb. That's because of secondary issues that will arise. "Shortages of food, land and water will spawn wars, political unrest, and mass migration as people flee from the worst-affected regions," he writes.

"Even places that are physically remote may face refugee tides in the millions or tens of millions, threatening profound change to society. Governments in many countries may collapse under the onrush of people fleeing regional sustenance disasters. Every nation will face heavier aid and tax burdens and soaring food prices as a result" (*The Coming Famine*, p. 147).

Biblical prophecies of famine

Certainly mankind has faced food shortages throughout history. But most were relatively short-lived and had a definite end in sight. The food crisis we're facing now, however, is different. Never before have more than a billion people been threatened with hunger and malnutrition. Never before have food shortages been a concern for the entire world.

In His major prophecy of the end time given shortly before His death and resurrec-

tion, Jesus told His followers that famines would be one of several signs of the end of this age (Matthew 24:7). Food shortages, along with warfare, disease epidemics and various natural disasters, would escalate prior to His second coming. This warning is repeated in Mark 13:8 and Luke 21:11.

Perhaps many of the wars during this time will be over food supplies, and diseases will spread due in part to malnutrition. It's also probable that the prophesied natural disasters may bring on agricultural shortfalls.

Of course, famines arise not just from natural causes but also from wrong government policies. In the past century, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's attempt to seize Ukrainian farmland resulted in some 4 million peasants starving to death (*The Sunday Times*, Nov. 13, 2009). And according to Scripture, things will be even worse in the years to come.

Famine is among the terrible end-time occurrences personified by the infamous four horsemen of the Apocalypse, which are described in Revelation 6. The third horse and its rider, described in verses 5-6, represent famine and severe economic conditions: "When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, 'Come and see.' So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, 'A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.'"

At the time this was written, a denarius was the average pay a laborer would receive for a full day's work. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* says the following about this passage: "This amount [of money] suggests food prices about twelve times higher than normal . . . and implies inflation and famine conditions . . . A quart of wheat would supply an average person one day's sustenance. Barley was used by the poor to mix with the wheat." The instruction to not harm the oil or wine implies that they also would be in short supply.

This prophecy foretells a time when people will be able to afford only the barest of necessities—just to survive. It will be a period of severe famine unlike anything in the past and global in its impact.

How close we are to this ultimate, end-time famine is uncertain. We may be witnessing the beginnings of a growing food shortfall right now. At the very least, we are seeing food shortages increase in

severity, as Jesus long ago foretold in this prophecy.

Major threats to the world food supply

Not only do we have Bible prophecies relating to food shortages, but we can also see various factors at play in the world around us, each driving this trend of global food scarcity. It should be pointed out that some of these factors arise from governments and policies that interfere with production and distribution, distorting markets and denying people the economic liberties that could prevent or alleviate some of these problems. With that kept in mind, some of the biggest threats to the world food supply are:

Overpopulation. In recent years, the world population has been growing by 1.3 percent a year. That is a slower rate from the peak that occurred a few decades ago (2.1 percent per year in 1965-1970). However, since this growth rate acts on a much larger population base, the absolute number of new people per year (90 million) is at an all-time high, according to World Bank statistics. The vast majority of the world's population growth—roughly 90 percent—is in poorer developing countries.

In *The Coming Famine*, Cribb quotes agricultural scientist Derek Tribe: "If allowed to continue unchecked, exponential growth—albeit at a declining rate—will ultimately spell disaster for planet Earth. Finite resources such as water, soil, plants, forests, animals, energy and minerals, upon which all human life depends, will inexorably be destroyed, degraded, exterminated or used up" (p. 154).

Many scientists are echoing the same warning—that our earth will not be able to sustain an infinitely growing population of people, especially on Western-style diets. And while markets free of government interference would allow for the better accommodation of a considerably larger population, that is not the way of the world.

Consumer demand. Meat consumption is soaring globally, particularly in the emerging economies of China, India and Brazil. "Their incomes have grown, and they can now afford a 'Western diet,' meaning a lot more meat," Gustafson notes.

In the last 30 years, China's annual intake of meat has quadrupled to 109 pounds per person, while Brazil's per capita meat consumption has doubled to 197 pounds a year. Per capita consumption of meat has also been rising in the United States, from 234 pounds a year in 1980 to

273 pounds today, according to the USDA.

“This dietary shift requires much larger quantities of grain to feed the livestock and poultry, compared to the more traditional grain-based diet they were eating before,” Gustafson explains. By some estimates, it takes 8 to 10 pounds of wheat to produce a pound of beef, and 3 pounds of corn to produce a pound of chicken. This, in turn, puts a lot more demands on world grain supplies.

Overfishing. The world’s fish stocks are dwindling, devastated by modern factory fishing techniques that use cutting-edge technology to target and harvest large populations of fish. “The demand for fish has become so high in some parts of the world, that fish are being taken from the oceans faster than they can reproduce,” Gustafson says.

Globally, per-capita fish consumption has increased from 23 to 36 pounds per year over the last three decades, according to a report by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. At the same time, fish stocks have declined in all oceans to the point that they are “near or exceeding their maximum sustainable level of exploitation,” the report says.

The FAO issued a similar warning in 2008, stating that “the maximum wild capture fishery potential” for the world’s oceans as well as freshwater lakes and rivers, has probably been reached.

The international ocean conservation organization, Oceana, warns that ocean fish catches could collapse by the 2040s due to overfishing of wild stocks. This would be at a time when food production needs to double. If the billions of people who are used to getting their protein from fish can no longer get it, they will need to get it from the land—putting more demands on the livestock and poultry industry.

Water shortages. In many farming regions, usable water is scarce and likely to get scarcer in the years ahead, says David Molden, deputy director general for research at the International Water Management Institute (IWMI). The grain-growing regions of northern China, India and Australia’s Murray-Darling Basin, as well as farming areas in the western United States, Mexico and Pakistan, face “really tight” water situations, he warns.

Presently, farmers use about 70 percent of the world’s freshwater to grow food. Crops are irrigated from rivers, lakes, reservoirs and aquifers, which are starting to be pumped dry in some areas.

By 2030, as cities expand in area and

population and demand for water increases, the IWMI figures farmers will have about *half* as much freshwater available to grow their crops—paradoxically at a time when the world’s food needs will have *increased* by 50 percent.

“Agriculture and irrigation methods must change for the world to produce enough food,” Molden says. As much as 70 percent of water used by farmers never gets to



Long ago, God told the Israelites that if they obeyed His laws they would be blessed with “rain in due season.” But if they rebelled, their crops would fail.

crops and is lost through leaky irrigation channels. More precise water delivery systems would make irrigation more efficient.

Of course, the reality is that there is no shortage of water on earth. The atmosphere and oceans are filled with water. The issue of making use of this water is one of cost. A truly free market under a proper rule of law would enable the cost to come down, making more usable water available to those in need. But that is not the world we live in.

Loss of arable farmland. Many coun-

tries are running out of agriculturally useful land, severely limiting food production. The FAO warns that almost a quarter of the world’s farmland is affected by serious degradation, up from 15 percent two decades ago.

The Futurist ran an article that explains the seriousness of the situation: “Soil erosion is currently lowering the inherent productivity of some 30% of the world’s cropland. In some countries, it has reduced grain production by half or more over the last three decades.

“Vast dust storms coming out of sub-Saharan Africa, northern China, western Mongolia, and Central Asia remind us that the loss of topsoil is not only continuing but expanding. Advancing deserts in China—the result of overgrazing, overplowing, and deforestation—have forced the complete or partial abandonment of some 24,000 villages and the cropland surrounding them” (Lester Brown, “How to Feed 8 Billion People,” January-February 2010).

At the same time, the world’s cities are sprawling, gobbling up some of the earth’s best farmland. In *The Coming Famine* Cribb notes: “In all, it is estimated, between 20,000 and 40,000 square kilometers (77-154 square miles) of good arable country is turned into ‘concrete jungle’ every year” (p. 58).

The result is a decrease in the amount of land, per person, in which to grow food. Cribb lists the findings of a study done by Rabobank, stating that “the area of food production has declined from 0.45 hectare (1.1 acres) per person in the 1960s to 0.23 hectare (0.6 acre) currently and will keep on falling as population rises, to around 0.18 hectare (0.4 acre) in 2050” (p. 48).

Cribb sums up the farmland crisis with a very astute observation: “Modern cities, which once supplied quite a lot of their own food, especially in the form of fresh fruit, vegetables and poultry—notably in Asia—have lately been planned and developed in ways that expel agriculture from within the urban perimeter. This is a piece of extraordinary blindness on the part of today’s urban planners . . . which could well turn some of these giant cities into death traps in the event of serious future disruptions to food supplies” (p. 59).

Fertilizer crisis. Since the 1960s, farms around the world have been dependent on the use of chemical fertilizers, which many credit for the tripling of food production in the last 50 years. But now fertilizer is in short supply, and its cost is escalating,

further driving up the price of food.

The problem is, the rise in demand for crop production has increased the price of fertilizer as nations hoard supplies for themselves. Adding to concerns is that one of the primary ingredients in fertilizer, phosphorus, is becoming scarce. Some have predicted that as early as 2035, the demand for phosphorus will outpace the supply.

Writes Cribb: "The world's main food crops are estimated to take up around 12 million tonnes (13.2 million U.S. tons) of phosphorus every year, whereas only 4 million tonnes of phosphorus are generated from natural weathering of rock or atmospheric deposition. This highlights civilization's critical dependency on the supply of artificial fertilizers, and our increasing vulnerability to any shortfall or disruption in supply . . . Worldwide, farmers today use seven times more fertilizer than they did a half century ago" (pp. 71-73).

Cribb and other agriculture experts worry there may not be enough fertilizer to go around in the future.

Biofuel production. Following the 2005 surge in U.S. gas prices, grain has been increasingly used to produce biofuels rather than food due to intrusive government policy. Many, like David Pimentel, an agricultural scientist with Cornell University, are concerned that the move toward such fuels is taking useful farmland out of food production in the United States. "Devoting land to growing biofuels exacerbates the problem of malnourishment worldwide by turning much-needed food grain into biofuel," he warns.

Not only has this resulted in less grain available for consumption, it has also caused an increase in food prices. "Using corn for ethanol increases the price of U.S. beef, chicken, eggs, breads, cereals and milk by 20 to 30 percent," Pimentel says.

Any food that has grain or even corn syrup as an ingredient is going up in cost. That includes meat, since grains are used as livestock and poultry feed. The whole situation seems to many to be a catch-22—we need fuel for our vehicles, but we also need food to live. However, as long as petroleum costs remain high, it is doubtful biofuel production will cease anytime soon.

Underinvestment in agricultural science. The rate of growth of agricultural research spending has been steadily declining since the end of the 1970s. National and regional governments, donors and investors, and academic institutions have all slashed funds for this kind of research.

Writes Cribb: "The powerhouses of agricultural knowledge—the United States, Germany, France, Japan, Canada and Australia—have turned away from agriscience in pursuit of other technological El Dorados. A report by Alex Evans for Britain's Royal Institute for International Affairs says that between 1980 and 2006 the proportion of the world's aid budget devoted to raising food output fell from 17 to just 3 percent" (p. 104).

Adds Gustafson: "The lag between research and increases in agricultural production is up to 35 years, which is why in some cases we are just starting to see evidence of this decline in R&D spending through falling productivity." This means farmers will have far less new technology to help them between now and 2030—at a time when we really need it.

Changes in climate and weather patterns. It's important to remember that some factors farmers are dependent on to grow their crops and raise livestock are beyond human control—namely adequate levels of rainfall, sunshine and temperate weather. With increasing occurrence, these factors seem less reliable. "Weather patterns have been changing, and are becoming more extreme and more unpredictable," observes Gustafson.

This past year, record-breaking heat and drought, often leading to wildfires, have plagued agricultural areas throughout the United States, Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, India and Brazil, decimating crops. Heavy rain, monsoons or hurricanes have flooded farmland in Pakistan, China, Niger, the United Kingdom, Europe and much of the United States this past summer, literally washing away fields or causing crops to rot. Other countries have lost crops to late frost, unseasonably frigid weather, hail and cyclones.

Sub-Saharan Africa, the world's poorest area and one heavily dependent on subsistence farming, is the region of the world most threatened by changes in weather patterns, according to the FAO. About 95 percent of the region's cropland is rain-fed, making it particularly vulnerable to drought, which has been an intensifying problem for many decades.

Emerging agricultural diseases. With increased international travel and transport, changes in farming systems and weather patterns, and the clearing of previously untouched forests, many new agricultural pests and diseases have emerged in recent decades. The list includes mad cow dis-

ease, foot-and-mouth disease, rinderpest, African swine fever, avian influenza, Newcastle disease, and Rift Valley fever—all of which have wreaked havoc for livestock and poultry farmers, causing huge losses in production.

As far as crop diseases go, a huge concern right now is UG99, a rust fungus that attacks wheat and other grains, killing 90 to 100 percent of crops that become infected. UG99 produces red pustules on wheat stems, which can burst and spread countless spores on the wind.

The *Southeast Farm Press* reports: "UG99 was first detected in Uganda in 1999—hence the name—in eastern Africa. It has since spread to other African countries and was recently found in Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan . . . Virginia Tech plant pathologist Erik Stromberg notes getting UG99 in the U.S. is likely more a matter of when, not if. 'With all the military personnel we have circulating through the Middle East, it's going to be difficult, if not impossible, to prevent the disease-causing spores from coming back to the U.S. on equipment or clothing,' Stromberg says" (Roy Robertson, "UG99 a Future Threat to U.S. Wheat Growers," July 7, 2010).

It is estimated that 85 percent of the world's wheat varieties are susceptible to the disease. There is no known cure.

Spiritual causes. Ultimately, what's behind our modern-day food crisis is spiritual in nature. Mankind as a whole has rejected God, and He is not blessing the nations with the conditions needed for bountiful harvests and healthy livestock.

This is nothing new. Thousands of years ago, when God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses told the people that if they obeyed the laws of God, they would be blessed with "rain in due season" and plentiful agricultural yields. However, if they rebelled against God, their crops would suffer and disease epidemics would afflict their flocks and herds (Leviticus 26:14-22; Deuteronomy 28:18).

God also warned that, because of disobedience, "you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it," and He further warned that He would "cut off your supply of bread" (Leviticus 26:16, 26).

As society's morals, values and behavior deteriorate at the end of this age, food shortages—due to bad weather, natural disasters, agricultural diseases, etc.—are once again a tool God will use to get humanity's attention.

Continued on page 27



Europe Braces for Terrorism

by **Beyond Today** host Darris McNeely

Recent warnings of terrorist activity in Europe don't reveal the whole story of what is happening behind the scenes. Both security officials and terrorists know more than headlines reveal. Bible prophecy tells the rest of the story.

The news that the Eiffel Tower had been closed for a bomb threat gave me a bit of concern as we prepared to board our flight for Paris in early October. We were on the last leg of a two-week trip to Europe and looking forward to spending a few days in France's capital city seeing some of its world-famous sights.

A few days earlier, French police responded to a bomb threat by closing the symbol of the city. On the same day a public transportation hub was closed when an unattended package was sighted.

Warnings issued for European travel

On Oct. 3, 2010, the U.S. government issued a warning for Americans traveling to Europe to be "vigilant." Intelligence forces had determined that al-Qaeda was planning attacks on European cities similar to those carried out in Mumbai, India, in November 2008. There attackers invaded hotels frequented by Westerners, and it took three days to repel them—after massive loss of life.

While this warning contained nothing specific—and it came short of advising Americans not to travel to Europe—it nonetheless gave me, as I mentioned, a bit of concern and raised my level of situational awareness a little higher. While traveling in and around Paris over the next few days, I did observe security personnel in the tourist locations, and I did keep a sharper eye out for anything suspicious.

While it pays to be alert while traveling, there will most likely be little we can do to avert any well-planned terrorist operation. Security experts know there is not much they can do to prevent a determined group



from mounting a terror attack.

Having been in an international city when terrorists struck (suicide bombers blew themselves up in three hotels near where I was staying in Amman, Jordan, in November 2005), I know from personal experience that there is little you can do other than react.

Facing an impossible challenge

These recent warnings reflect the dilemma that governments face as they combat terrorism. First, while they are extremely vigilant to target groups and questionable individuals, it is impossible

to monitor and control all behavior. Determined terrorists will find a way to evade detection. You cannot monitor everyone at all times. People will slip through the net.

Second, when officials find and detain a terrorist operative, they can often extract valuable information about impending attacks. But they have to be careful in how they use that information. To reveal all they know could end the flow of information. To be too specific in a public warning will let terrorist groups know they are being monitored. That is why we often hear only general warnings without the specifics. Governments do not always reveal all they know, but they have a duty to inform the public.

Since the 9/11 hijackers crashed jets into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, we have seen smaller attacks and attempted attacks, but nothing on the scale of that day. No doubt that is in part because of the increased vigilance of world governments to hunt down terrorist operations at the source and wherever they spread. The nine years of intense vigilance has worked to a considerable degree.

But security experts know that it's an impossible task to prevent any and all terrorist operations. It would require watching millions of people and the ability to monitor every meeting of a group of people bent on planning a terrorist strike. Again, this is impossible. No one, not even the United States, can police the world in this manner.

The key to winning the war on terror is to change the radical ideology that drives it. No one has the solution for this monumental task. So the threat of attack remains, and governments must be vigilant.

Terror threat to France and Europe

French officials know they are overdue for an attack. It has been five years since the riots in Marseille, in the south of France, highlighted the growing divide



between Muslim immigrants and the French.

The French government has recently placed a ban on some clothing worn by Muslim women. The ban pertains to the *burka*, a full-body covering that includes a mesh screen over the face, and the *niqab*, a full-face veil that leaves an opening only for the eyes.

French courts have upheld the law, supported by the French public by a margin of 4 to 1. Women will be fined if they break the law when it goes into effect next spring. Many suspect this law will provoke unrest, possibly even an attack by Muslims or a terrorist group. France has about 3.5 million Muslims, totaling about 6 percent of its population.

Stratfor, a global intelligence company, has recently assessed the threat to Europe and the United States and concluded that further attacks are inevitable, with accompanying loss of innocent life.

An article on Stratfor's website titled "Terrorism, Vigilance and the Limits of War on Terror" (Oct. 5, 2010) states: "The United States and Europe are going to be attacked by jihadist terrorists from time to time, and innocent people are going to be killed, perhaps in the thousands again. The United States and its allies can minimize the threat through covert actions and strong defenses, but they cannot eliminate it . . .

"[They] are therefore dealing with a threat

that cannot be stopped by their actions. The only conceivably effective actions would be those taken by Muslim governments, and even those are unlikely to be effective. There is a deeply embedded element within a small segment of the Islamic world that is prepared to conduct terror attacks, and this element will occasionally be successful."

The report goes on to say that Western nations will have to live with the terrorist threat for several years to come and that America's focus on the threat will leave it vulnerable in other critical areas.

The article concludes: "The United States and the West in general cannot focus all of its power on solving a problem that is beyond its power to solve. The long war against terrorism will not be the only war fought in the coming years. The threat of jihadism must be put in perspective and the effort aligned with what is effective. The world is a dangerous place, as they say, and jihadism is only one of the dangers."

This threat to Europe from radical Islam is not to be ignored. *When*—not *if*—an attack happens, it will trigger a reaction from key nations that could set in motion what is sometimes called "unintended consequences."

Unassimilated immigrants a growing problem

France is not the only nation with a large Muslim population that has not integrated

into European culture. The Netherlands is facing a similar crisis (see "Eurabia: A Voice Cries Out in Defense of Europe's Heritage" in the November-December 2010 *Good News*).

In mid-October German Chancellor Angela Merkel gave a speech addressing the problem of multiculturalism in Germany. Germany has had decades of immigration from Muslim countries. They came in the 1960s to provide workers for the postwar economic boom. Although many stayed, they did not blend into German culture. Many of these foreigners do not speak the native language adequately, lack many skills and have become a drain on the country's welfare system. Some politicians are calling for policies that would force immigrants to assimilate into German culture.

Chancellor Merkel's outspoken comments highlighted what many feel.

"This is a country that brought guest workers to Germany in the 1960s," she said. "For a while, we kidded ourselves into believing that they wouldn't stay and would leave. Naturally, the notion that we would become 'multiculti,' that we would live next to one another and be happy about one another, failed" ("Merkel Enters Immigration Fray," *The Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 18, 2010).

The fear in Germany, as with other European countries, is based on the decline

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Austin ch. 11, Mon 8:30 p.m.

El Paso ch. 15, Mon, Fri, Sat 1 p.m.

Virginia

Charlottesville/Albemarle County ch. 13, 14, Mon 5:30 p.m.; Wed 10 p.m.; Thu 4:30 p.m.

Washington

Everett ch. 77, Wed 5 p.m.

Wisconsin

Kenosha ch. 14, Sun & Mon 7:30 p.m.
Milwaukee ch. 96, Mon 2 p.m.; Tue 7 p.m.; Wed 2 p.m.
West Allis ch. 14, times vary

CANADA

NATIONWIDE CABLE TV

Vision TV Sun 10 p.m. EST, 9 p.m. CST, 8 p.m. MST, 7 p.m. PST
Star Choice Digital ch. 399, Sun 10:30 a.m. EST, 9:30 a.m. CST, 8:30 a.m. MST,

7:30 a.m. PST

LOCAL CABLE TV

Alberta

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

British Columbia

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

Manitoba

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

New Brunswick

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

Newfoundland and Labrador

The Christian Channel Rogers ch. 396, Sun 12 noon

Northwest Territory

The Christian Channel Northwestel ch. 226, Sun 8:30 a.m.

Ontario

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

Saskatchewan

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



Who's behind *The Good News* magazine? Many readers have wondered who we are and how we are able to provide *The Good News* free to all who request it. Simply put, *The Good News* is provided by *people*—people from all walks of life, from all over the world.

But those people have a common goal: **to proclaim the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all the world as a witness and to teach all nations to observe what Christ commanded** (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).

We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message Jesus Christ brought—the wonderful *good news* of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; 8:1). That message truly is good news—the answer to all the problems that have long plagued humankind. Through the pages of *The Good News*, various booklets (also free) and our *Beyond Today* TV program, we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and threaten our very survival.

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, sharing the truth of God's purpose and plan for us as taught by Jesus Christ.

The United Church of God has congregations and ministers around the world. In these congregations believers assemble to be instructed from the Scriptures and to fellowship. For locations and times of services in your area, contact us at the appropriate address on page 2. Visitors are always welcome.



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of the native birthrate and the rise of the immigrant birthrate. If the trend continues, in a few years immigrants, primarily Muslim immigrants, will outnumber native populations and dominate culture and politics. With 80 million people, Germany is Europe's largest nation. But it has a very low birthrate. Immigration and the growing Islamization of Germany is a serious issue of discussion.

Catalyst for future events

The historic clash between the East and West has its front line in Europe. In the eighth century the armies of Islam, having overrun North Africa, swept up into Europe, conquering Spain and pushing into France before being defeated by Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours in 732. Martel's grandson, Charlemagne, came to rule over much of Central Europe as a powerful Christian king who forged a bulwark against further encroachment. The pope and the Catholic Church lent support to ensure the boundaries were maintained.

In the 16th century the armies of the Ottoman Empire under Süleyman the Magnificent conquered areas of Central Europe, sacking Budapest in 1526 and twice trying to breach the walls of Vienna before being turned back. More than once in history, armies have come from the south attempting to conquer Europe.

Radical Islam has a plan to drive Western military personnel and the influence of Western culture from the Middle East. Other areas where the foot of Islam once trod are still considered part of their world. Spain, which they called and still call "al-Andalus," was for centuries a Muslim domain. In the minds of al-Qaeda commanders, Madrid lies in Muslim territory. Whole sections of Europe, including Bulgaria, Hungary, Serbia and Croatia, were once Muslim lands. Radical Islamic leaders would like to see them returned to the fold.

The mix of radical attacks and millions of unassimilated Muslim immigrants throughout Europe pose a potential catalyst for yet future events that could set the stage for one of Bible prophecy's key events.

The push from the south

Daniel 11 describes an attack in the end time from "the king of the South" against "the king of the North." This is clearly understood from history and the Bible to be forces coming from the present-day Middle East against modern Europe. His-

tory follows along prophetic pathways, and this future event will trigger key end-time movements leading to the return of Jesus Christ. Our booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* explains the details of this future event.

An attack by radical elements coupled with the fears generated by an unassimilated foreign population could lead to larger reactions from an as-yet-to-arise political force in Europe.

The stage is being set, and for years we have followed what we believe to be our duty in discussing this scenario in this publication. Europe will not continue to sit by and idly watch its future be threatened by an outside power. Historically, Europe eventually moves with force when threatened, even when it is divided by religion and politics and competing ideologies.

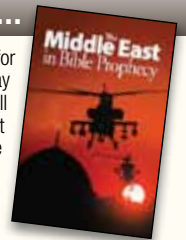
The 16th century saw Europe divided religiously by the Protestant Reformation and unable to act to prevent the loss of land to the Ottoman Empire. But it eventually came together to draw a line and to push back the threat of domination. Religion and political forces inevitably unite to preserve their culture.

Though present-day Europe has achieved a measure of political and economic unity in the EU, it is still not a union that can act decisively to project full political or military power beyond its boundaries. That can change when outside forces raise the threat to an unacceptable level. Forces can be unleashed to bring a yet unseen union together, thus creating a major geopolitical power to be reckoned with. It is, again, the matter of "unintended consequences."

That is why we pay attention to even the small threats of possible terrorist attacks. It is good to be vigilant to safeguard your immediate welfare as well as to see the larger picture these events are drawing. **GN**

To Learn More...

What does the future hold for Europe? What role will it play on the world stage? How will events in the Middle East affect Europe and the rest of the world in what Scripture calls "the time of the end"? What does the Bible reveal? You need to read *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. Download or request your free copy today!



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Food Crisis

Continued from page 23

A world of plenty is coming!

The world definitely faces enormous food-related hurdles. Cribb succinctly sums up the challenge this way: Worldwide food output needs to double in the next 40 years, using far less water, land, energy and fertilizer, and with less new technology available.

In the next 20 years, experts project a 33 percent growth in worldwide population. “Combined with increased consumption of meat as the global middle class grows larger, [this] means that food production must grow by at least 50 percent in that same period,” Cribb warns. Put another way, world population and consumer demand are together rising at about 2 percent a year. Yet food output is only growing at about 1 percent a year.

Some agricultural research is now underway, but “not nearly enough,” Gustafson says. Crop researchers are breeding new varieties of wheat in the hopes of finding some that are immune to the UG99 fungus. Livestock scientists are working on ways to produce meat with less feed. Researchers are trying to develop biofuels that use less corn. Genetic engineers are trying to

develop new kinds of high-yield and pest- and drought-resistant crops. (Of course, even if they are successful, there is still a great deal of opposition to genetically modified crops in much of the world.)

Scientists may be able to make some improvements in the global food supply before we see the fulfillment of Revelation 6. Ultimately, though, science can’t save us. Only God can provide the true solution to food crises and famines. And He will.

Someday in the future, Jesus Christ will return to set up God’s benevolent government on earth. It will be a rescue mission to save humanity from itself (Matthew 24:21-22). Christ will rule the earth for 1,000 years with His Spirit-transformed saints, who will teach humanity about God’s way of life (Revelation 20:4-6). This includes principles of true liberty—including economic liberty.

The nations will be blessed with good weather, abundant crops and productive farms. Amos 9:13 tells us, “Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.” Even the deserts will become fertile and blossom like

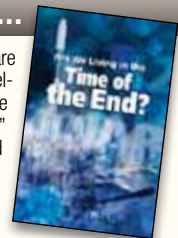
a rose (Isaiah 35:1-2, 6-7). It will be an age of peace, prosperity and abundance. Hunger and famine will be a thing of the past.

Certainly the news related to agriculture today is not terribly pleasant and can even be downright frightening. Yet we don’t need to fear food shortages or any of the other serious problems this world faces. God is in charge. He is well aware of the problems on earth and will intervene when the time is right.

We always need to remember that. A new world is coming in which God will change the curses to blessings. What a wonderful time to be able to look forward to! **GN**

To Learn More...

Food shortages and famine are some of the more ominous developments that mark what the Bible calls “the time of the end.” What other trends are revealed in Bible prophecy? What can we expect, and when and how will it end? Be sure to request or download your free copy of *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*



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Debt Troubles

Continued from page 15

of moving higher, whether in terms of job opportunities or earnings. The fear has grown that years of hard work will no longer translate into a better life for themselves and their families.

“The new normal is that millions of them are facing the risk, or the reality, of falling out of the middle class, losing all that this once meant in America—financial independence, sending your kids to college, having equity in your home, choosing where you live.

“Today, people in their 20s are hard-pressed to get jobs, and those who do are taking them at incomes lower than they ever imagined. For those who are surviving as middle-class families, they are facing years of financial insecurity.”

In an earlier Aug. 26, 2010, article by Zuckerman titled “The Most Fiscally Irresponsible Government in U.S. History”—subtitled “Current federal budget trends are capable of destroying this country”—he wrote: “There is another instinctive conclusion among the American people. It is that the national deficit,

and the debts we have accumulated, are of critical political importance.

“On the national debt, the money the government has spent without the tax revenues to pay for it has produced mind-numbing numbers so large as to be disconnected from reality. Zeros from here to infinity. The sums are hard to describe; it is hard to describe an elephant, but you know one when you see one. The public knows that, shuffle the numbers as you may, the level of debt is unsustainable.

“Who could be surprised since millions of voters have discovered that for themselves? As one realizes the morning after the night before, there is an unavoidable penalty for excess.”

Heading down the road to ruin

The United States is clearly going down the same path as the United Kingdom, its predecessor as global superpower. Only a few decades ago the United States was the world’s greatest lending nation. Today it is the largest debtor nation. By some estimates, when all of America’s debt is added to its future obligations to fund Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid,

the nation’s true debt is more than \$50 trillion—a staggering half million dollars for each American household!

With both Britain and the United States clearly in a period of financial decline, three questions loom with global implications: Where are these nations headed now? Who will be the new global leaders? And how will these developments transform the world in the next few years?

As for you personally, will you be ready? **GN**

To Learn More...

Are America and Britain heading for national calamity? What’s behind their recent startling economic decline? What, if anything, can reverse their misfortunes? Bible prophecy provides the answers—for those with eyes to see and ears to hear and accept what it says! You need to read *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. Download or request your free copy today!



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“Is Christmas Really Merry?”

I really enjoy reading *The Good News* magazine, especially the articles pertaining to prophecy. I was, however, disappointed with the article titled “Is Christmas Really Merry?” I see Christmas as a beneficial holiday because I have seen the homeless receive clothing, food and toiletries around that time of the year. How can a holiday that evokes this type of generosity be evil? Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.” Christmas is an excellent season to demonstrate the spirit of generosity.

M.A.A., Akron, Ohio

Sadly, over the years Christmastime has also been known to have evoked an intensity of stealing, family violence and even murder. And people often spend so much money on gifts for loved ones that they can't afford to be generous elsewhere or at other times. Donations to churches are typically down at this time that is supposedly celebrating Jesus' birth.

In any case, the Gospel accounts show that our Savior tells us to observe the time of His death, not His birth (Matthew 26:26-28; 1 Corinthians 11:26). Most importantly, observing Christmas disobeys God's explicit instructions. The Bible tells us not to adopt customs that originated in pagan worship (Deuteronomy 12:1-4, 29-32). And it warns us that something can seem right but lead to death (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). Why not observe the festivals God commands in His Word instead?

“God, Science and the Bible”

Thank you so much for *The Good News*. I was most impressed with the article on the Philistine temples and the positioning of the supporting pillars. For years I've had no problem believing what the Bible says. I believe the names, places and events solely because the Bible says so. But I love it when something is discovered that proves the Bible true yet again—something such as Samson being able to “bring the house down” by means of the positioning of those two pillars. Enclosed please find a contribution.

S.H., Prescott, Arizona

The Good News

My wife and I highly appreciate *The Good News*. We share your interpretation of the Scriptures and look forward to deriving further benefits from your publications.

L.R., Norway

Thank you so much for my subscription to *The Good News*. This is my first time of coming across this kind of clear analysis of global events—cutting across politics, government, health, economic issues, education, money management—all being analyzed from a biblical point of view. I don't think we have this rare kind of biblical education in most churches today.

We are in a dangerous period in the 21st century, looking at the possibility of nuclear weapons getting in the hands of irrational religious extremists and terrorists. Please keep up the good work and kindly include Africa in your

lens of analysis. It is not an exaggeration that Africa is plagued by spiritual, political and health burdens—despite the aid and funding from developed countries.

J.Y., Nigeria

Thank you for sending me *The Good News* magazine. Atheism is certainly on the march in Britain via our left-wing universities and their theories of socialism. Ostensibly many educational posts and government departments get their staff (or did) from advertisements in newspapers favoured by the left. An atheist I know (but a genuinely caring person who taught me at school) was upset because I read the *Daily Mail* [a conservative British newspaper].

S.R.E., Stafford, England

Those interested in learning more about these issues should read our free booklets Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist? and Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?

I have just received the latest copy of *The Good News*. Again, I have found it to be most informative. I thank you for the opportunity to receive it. I wish to continue receiving your magazines as I definitely find them most inspiring. I look forward to further copies.

Reader, Christchurch, New Zealand

Beyond Today television program

I have just finished watching your telecast today and I was very, very blessed by the broadcast of “Dancing With the Dark Side.” I, too, am a former witch. I give God all glory, praise, honor and thanksgiving for delivering me from the occult world. I would appreciate it very much if you would be so kind as to send me the following booklets . . . and a subscription to *The Good News* magazine. I have a burning desire to really learn and live by God's written and spoken word. All my life I have been searching for absolute truth, but only kept getting half-truths. This lack of knowledge led me down a dark road. But thank God Almighty that He didn't allow me to go too far down that road of self-destruction. He didn't give up on me.

Reader, Burkeville, Virginia

Wishes to contribute

I have personally received so much benefit from your publications and would like to contribute to your ministry. Please tell me how. I am able to share these publications with my friends in my small, rural town. I subscribe to *World News and Prophecy* and I also am taking advantage of Bible study materials. I am very grateful that you have made these resources available.

B.H., Waverly, Washington

One important way to help with our ministry is through prayer. Prayer is a first priority in helping us to proclaim the Word of God, and everyone can help in this way. The apostle Paul urged the Christians in Colosse, “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ” (Colossians 4:2-4).

And although we offer The Good News, our Bible Study Course and our many booklets free, we do appreciate contributions from our readers so the true gospel can go out without charge to those who are unable to donate financially. Checks or money orders may be made out to The United Church of God. The U.S. address is: The Good News, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027. Addresses of other countries are listed on the inside front cover just below the staff box. Contributions are tax-deductible in the United States and Canada.

Reading and applying God's truth

Now with the winter just around the corner, I have so much to look forward to. I love to read, so it will be a blessing to curl up in my big armchair and read for hours and hours the beautiful words of truth, not error. Will you please send me more booklets? I would be ever so grateful. The more truths I learn, the more I can teach others.

J.H., Alberta, Canada

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

I really enjoy The Good News magazine. It gives a good understanding of the Bible and highlights information not given in mainstream Christian faiths. I highly recommend this magazine to all.

- K.T., Good News magazine Facebook fan



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Q: I am struggling to find peace in my life. I am angry, frustrated and have a disbelieving attitude toward life. I believe this life is pointless. I need a reason, a point to being here. Is God the answer?

P.T., Sheffield, England

A: You are certainly not alone in your feelings. Many struggle with these same thoughts. And without God in the picture, many would certainly conclude that life is pointless and without real meaning.

God's Word, however, offers a considerably different and much more hopeful perspective.

Near the end of His ministry on earth, Jesus Christ promised His followers that He would leave them with His peace: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives . . . *Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*" (John 14:27, emphasis added throughout).

He spoke these encouraging words on the night just before His arrest and the crucifixion that followed.

It might seem strange that someone could have real peace while anticipating the most difficult and horribly agonizing trial of His life. But Christ knew and understood the great purpose for which He had come to this earth—a purpose that superseded everything else. Without His sacrifice for our sins, there could be no salvation.

How do we find the peace Christ promised—the peace that overcomes our natural frustrations and troubling anxieties? We find one key to discovering true peace in Psalm 119:165: "*Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble.*"

Loving God's law clearly implies obedience to it (1 John 5:3). And this in itself leads to another blessing found in Psalm 111:10: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; *a good understanding have all those who do His commandments.*"

In contrast, "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked" (Isaiah 57:21).

As we begin to obey God, we learn about His way of life, the way He thinks and His great plan of salvation for all humanity. If we then submit to God's will, truly repent of our sins and are baptized, thereby receiving forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), that Spirit will begin to lead our thought processes to conform to those of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16; 2 Corinthians 10:4-5; Philippians 2:5).

The apostle Paul described this process as one of being "transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). This mental transformation of our thinking and outlook on life then enables us to enjoy "*peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Romans 5:1). Paul went on to explain: "Therefore if anyone is in Christ [truly converted], he [or she] is a new creation, . . . all things have become new. Now all things are of God, *who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ*" (2 Corinthians 5:17-18).

If we truly seek it in accordance with God's will, Christ will provide us with the same peace that allowed Him to willingly face such great adversity. He

will do so through living within us to change us (see Galatians 2:20). And what is the point of that? Paul referred to "Christ in you, the hope of *glory*" (Colossians 1:27). Other verses show that the glory here is that of God Himself. That is to say, the great God *intends to share His own divine glory with His spiritually transformed children.*

The supreme glory of everlasting life in the divine family of God is mentioned in many places in Scripture. King David refers to it in his psalms. In Psalm 17:15, for instance, he says to God, "As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied *when I awake in Your likeness.*" Centuries later Paul adds that the truly converted will be given the gift of immortality in God's Kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:50-54).

But the immortality God promises will not be anything like the popular idea of heaven, an eternity of endless leisure. God has something of far greater meaning and purpose in mind!

Those who have truly and faithfully followed God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ will reign with Christ on earth for 1,000 years as kings and priests (Revelation 5:10; 20:4-6). Serving under Him, they will have the priceless opportunity to help teach and educate the entire world in God's truth and ways.

Beyond that, God has given us "the stars [and] all the host of heaven" as an inheritance (Deuteronomy 4:19)—with all the glory, might and power that entails. Indeed, God has promised us a future and level of existence so awesome and transcendent that we can't even begin to fully grasp it (1 Corinthians 2:9).

In summary, the Bible reveals that the knowledge of God and Christ remains the only avenue to real peace in this life. However, that knowledge requires action on our part! Just as Jesus overcame this world's society, Satan the devil and the pulls of His flesh while He was on the earth (Revelation 3:21), so must we with the help of God's Holy Spirit (Revelation 2:26; 12:11).

The process of building righteous character into our lives through a dynamic relationship with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ will ultimately bring us real spiritual peace. That peace is available today, but the fullness of this promise will be realized in the culmination of God's plan. As Revelation 21:4 tells us: "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

To help you discover more about the true meaning and purpose of life, be sure to request or download our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*

God also recognizes that continued instruction in His way of life and regular contact with other believers is crucial to our spiritual growth and development and a positive outlook on life. For this reason He tells us, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day [of Christ's return] approaching" (Hebrews 10:25, New International Version).

Contact our office nearest you (listed on page 2) for information about weekly services or to get in touch with a minister.

Recently an old buddy of mine that I grew up with gave me the September/October 2010 issue of *The Good News*. He knew that I am interested in the Scriptures and always enjoy discussing them with whoever will listen. I've been laid off my job since this past June, and reading has suddenly become a rediscovered favorite pastime. I have long been extremely interested in finding a religious group that understands the significance of the entire Bible, not just the parts that uphold their particular beliefs. Please send me more information and your study guides. I look forward to receiving *The Good News*.

D.M., Roanoke, Virginia

The more I read of your publications, the more I want to read them. The main thing now is to apply the truths learnt in these booklets in my own life. I am praying that God will help me to do this.

B.R.T., Braintree, England

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

IS THE BIBLE STILL RELEVANT?

In this modern world, are the Scriptures worth reading?

by Jeremy Lallier

don't think our parents ever really saw our generation coming. They grew up in a world where people stretched a dollar as far as they could, and when something ripped, they put a patch on it and kept going. Most of *their* parents or grandparents remember living through the Great Depression, where just having anything, no matter how old, was a big deal.

The pace of change

But us? We're a different breed. We tear through technology and clothes like bags of potato chips. A five-year-old computer may as well be an ancient pottery shard. While you were busy blinking, everything owned by everyone else just got sleeker, faster and more expensive. Most cell phones today could outperform the first computer I ever remember using.

It was my family's old Packard Bell, which I'm just now discovering was ranked by *PC World* as the worst manufactured PC of all time. But we still liked it, at the time. I think if I had to go back

and use it now, I'd be pulling my hair out—because today, it would be like entering a horse-drawn carriage in a stock-car race.

And that's pretty much our world in a nutshell—outdated in months, obsolete in a few years. The concept of a decade becomes roughly equivalent to ancient history.

So when someone points out that parts of the Bible are almost 3½ millennia old, it's no surprise that my head has a slight bit of difficulty grappling with those numbers.

The word *millennium* is Latin in origin and refers (I am convinced) to the length of time that passes during one of those family road trips that involve you being stuck between your brother and sister in the back seat with your feet on that stupid little hump when your sister won't stop poking you and “*Mom, she's not staying on her side, and I have to go to the bathroom, and are we there yet, are we there yet, are we there yet?*” or, in simpler terms, “a thousand years.”

Almost 3,500 years old. How can anything that ancient possibly have any relevance today?

It can't, a lot of people will tell you.

They'll say that the Bible is just like my old Packard Bell—useful once upon a time, but now nothing more than an outmoded relic of a bygone era. Society has changed since then, and so has what defines right and wrong.

They'll tell you this as their loveless marriages collapse into petty disputes, as their circle of friends dwindles because of their tendency to bend the truth and stab backs, as their bodies are wracked with the effects of sexually transmitted diseases or substance abuse, as their credit card bills swallow their bank accounts whole—as their lives self-destruct.

Unchanging constants

The argument almost makes sense on the surface. After all, everything changes, doesn't it? Societal values shift across distance and time. What was acceptable dress in 14th-century Japan would likely be frowned upon in a 21st-century American business meeting. So it only makes sense that right and wrong, like all things societal, would change as a culture does.

But truth is not a suit. It is not an outfit to be mixed and matched, discarded and replaced to keep in step with the latest

If one's personal opinions of the effects of natural forces are irrelevant, why would spiritual laws be any different?

trends. It's an unchanging constant unaltered by time or culture.

Imagine a man about to walk off a cliff. A panicked crowd of friends behind him screams warnings, begging him not to do it. The man pauses in midstride and turns around. "Don't worry!" he tells them. "I don't believe in gravity. It's an archaic idea that just doesn't fit into my personal worldview." With that, he takes his final step over the edge.

Do you think gravity will be paying particular attention to the man's worldview?

One's personal thoughts and feelings on the physical forces in nature are pretty irrelevant. Gravity will continue to hold the matter of the universe together, regardless of your opinion on its necessity. You might disagree with the laws of inertia, but a falling object can still give you a nasty bruise if it hits you. You can't systematically wish away aspects of the universe just because you don't agree with them. They're still there, and whether or not you believe in them, they're still going to interact with you—like gravity pulling a man down a cliff.

Since the physical laws of this existence are unchanging, why would the *spiritual* laws be any different?

Essential guidelines of eternal value

What the Bible offers is a guidebook to interactions—with people, with things, with life in general. Rather than leave you to figure out the spiritual equivalent of walking off a cliff on your own, the Word of God lays out all the principles you'll ever need to make the important decisions in your life. In its pages, you'll find a thorough exami-

nation of what makes for a good decision and what makes for a terrible one.

The Bible deals with questions like: What do you do when you're faced with an interpersonal conflict? (See Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-17.)

How should you treat the most important relationships in your life? (See Ephesians 5:22-33; 6:1-4.)

How can you put your foot down on an issue and still show compassion? (See Luke 17:3; Proverbs 10:12.)

It also deals with character traits worth developing (1 Corinthians 13:4-8; 2 Peter 1:5-8), habits worth avoiding (Proverbs 6:9-19), friends worth having (Proverbs 27:17; Ecclesiastes 4:9-10) and maybe a thousand other things essential to getting the most out of this life—and the next. Study its words for a lifetime, and you won't stop uncovering wisdom until your final breath.

Sure, it's old. But old doesn't automatically mean obsolete, contrary to everything our culture would have us believe. Friction is old too, but you don't see it being replaced by anything. (Which is great, because I'm not big on perpetual motion as a way of life.)

So, is the Bible still relevant after all these years? Here's the thing: It is, and we could tell you all about why until the cows come home. But you're not going to really believe us until you prove it to yourself, which you can do one of two ways. You can follow the Bible's words and reap the benefits, or you can ignore them and suffer the consequences.

Either way, you'll find the answer.

(For a quick guide to some of the most relevant relationship tips, read or request *Making Life Work* at www.GNmagazine.org/booklets.) **GN**



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