

## Prepare to Meet Your God

*As political tensions heighten in the world around us, as natural disasters loom and as violence increases, how ready are we for Christ's return?*

Towards the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ stressed the importance of being ready at all times for His return (Matthew 24:42-44). Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden chose to rebel against God, and set the course for their offspring. As the inevitable outcome of that choice approaches with its final frightening fulfilment at 'the end of the age,' it becomes even more expedient for Christians to prepare to meet their God.

Meeting God can be experienced on several levels. Direct access to the Father through personal prayer was made possible through Christ and His sacrifice (Hebrews 10:19-20). The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, 'There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus' (1 Timothy 2:5). We are encouraged to go 'boldly before the throne of grace' in prayer (Hebrews 4:16), building a family relationship with our Heavenly Father.

However, a group of faithful followers, referred to in Scripture as the elect, shall literally meet God at the return of Jesus Christ to begin His reign on the earth. This is prophesied to be at a time of great trouble when,

if God did not intervene, all life on earth would end (Matthew 24:22).

It could be said that survivors of the Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord will also 'meet God' in the sense that they will see Christ's glorious return to earth to rule (Luke 21:27; Zechariah 14:9).

### Christ in us

While we cannot earn our salvation, those who have neglected to build a relationship with God based on trust and obedience will find

*If Christ's character and way of life are not found in us then there is nothing in us worth saving.*

themselves unprepared on the day Christ returns to the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:9-12; Zechariah 14:1-4).

Those who appear Christian, yet neglect or refuse to allow God to work with them to mould them into the image of Christ could find themselves rejected. Our Saviour explained, 'Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done

many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness!"' (Matthew 7:22-23).

The test is quite simple. Is Jesus Christ in us? If not we fail the test and are disqualified (2 Corinthians 13:5). If Christ's character and way of life are not found in us then there is nothing in us worth saving.

A major part of the apostle Paul's labour was geared towards this same goal. In his letter to the church in Galatia, he wrote, 'My little children, for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is formed in you' (Galatians 4:19, emphasis added). This is the

purpose of the Church of God – to make disciples and to support them as Christ is formed in us all.

### The goal of a Christian

The goal of each Christian is to become like Christ. As Paul put it, 'Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,' and that we may 'grow up in all things into Him who is the

head – Christ’ (Ephesians 4:13, 15).

This requires work on our part. With God’s help, we are to put off the old self, and put on a new self, growing to be like God in all respects. Again, in Ephesians, Paul wrote, ‘that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness’ (chapter 4:22-24).

Similar instructions are found in Paul’s letter to the Colossians: ‘Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry . . . put off all these: anger,

wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection’ (Colossians 3:5, 8-14).

Without achieving this goal, we

will find ourselves unprepared to meet God.

## Measuring up to Christ

This required transformation will not happen on its own. Preparing to meet God demands a plan of action, and as we also need His help and support to effect these changes, it necessitates that we build a close relationship with Him.

The first step is that we desire to change enough that we actually make a start. We must come to our senses, as the prodigal son did in Luke 15:17 – ‘he came to himself.’

Next, we must see in ourselves the sins and bad habits of the ‘old man.’ These must so appall us that we repent and throw ourselves on God’s mercy, asking for the blood

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of our Saviour to cover those sins. We must be prepared to change all our ways to fit in with the image of Christ that is to be formed in us.

To learn the qualities that will make up the new person, we will need to study the scriptures and amend our thinking to comply with what they actually say and not the 'traditions of men' so often taught in their place. We need to compare our thoughts and actions with those of Christ, and if they do not measure up, we need to cry out to Him and our Heavenly Father for help in changing and overcoming. The hackneyed question, 'What would Jesus do?' is well worth asking when we find ourselves trapped in temptation. As we become more aware, we can learn to recognise temptation for what it is and can cry out to God for help to remove ourselves from it before it engulfs us.

God's help can be physical,

mental, emotional and spiritual. However, it does take effort and the willingness to obey on our part.

Prayer, meditation and occasional fasting can help keep us on track and build the necessary close relationship with God. Christ's half brother James advised, 'Draw near to God and He will draw near to you' (James 4:8). We need God to be involved in our lives if we are to achieve the required spiritual growth.

### Christ's return and beyond

God has promised a glorious future for those who, with His help, achieve this goal. Scripture refers to it as 'overcoming.' It is only having Christ formed in us that gives us any hope of future glory (Colossians 1:27). Those who overcome will meet Christ as He returns to this earth, and in the process of time will also meet the Father (Revelation 21:1-7). The effort we put in, with

God's help, will pale into insignificance when we appear with Christ in glory (Colossians 3:4).

The apostle John put it this way, 'Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is' (1 John 3:1-2).

For all who have Christ formed in them, there is a glorious future at His return. For more information on how to strengthen or to begin building a strong relationship with God, please request or download our free booklets *Transforming Your Life* and *Tools for Spiritual Growth*.

David Fenney

## The Race for Eternal Life: Lessons from 'Le Tour'

In July 2014, one of the world's biggest sporting events, the Tour de France, came to England for only the fourth time in its long history. Competitors left Leeds city centre to cycle up to Harewood House, where the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry formally started the race. Following the Grand Départ, as the opening stage of the race is called, cyclists raced throughout the Yorkshire region, finishing in Sheffield on Sunday, July 6.

Ending in Paris on July 27, the Tour took its toll of anticipated winners, often in accidents, proving King Solomon's comment, 'the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong . . . but time and chance happen to them all' (Ecclesiastes 9:11). As the race went on it became apparent that Vincenzo Nibali from Italy would be victorious.

The apostle Paul likened the Christian journey to taking part in a race. Running to receive the prize was to keep pressing on towards the ultimate goal of eternal life (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). Before any major sporting event, each competitor will go through months

or years of training, and probably keep to a strict diet to stay fit and healthy. Writing to his younger colleague Timothy, Paul remarked, 'But bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things' (1 Timothy 4:7-8). Exercise is good for us but only profits a little, or 'for a little while,' compared to the greater results achieved by 'godliness.'

If we stay faithful to God, live by His word and keep His commandments, God promises the gift of eternal life as a prize. However we need to remain dedicated and obedient at all times, modelling our lives on Jesus Christ. This takes effort on our part and, like competitors in a race, we need a training programme.

Our booklet *Tools for Spiritual Growth* provides information on a biblically-focused regime to help bring us closer to God and to the wonderful prize on offer.

When taking part in a race like the Tour de France, each competitor has to maintain the vision of winning, and be disciplined and totally committed. This could be a spiritual lesson for us all.

Sharon Nibbs



# *The Day of the Lord:* **Hope for All Mankind**

*The Bible speaks of the Day of the Lord as a time of great upheaval and cataclysm, but also of hope. This ‘day’ actually symbolises a period of time beginning with great trouble for mankind and extending into an eternity of peace.*

**T**he fiery preacher cries, ‘Get ready for the Day of the Lord!’ His audience listens in terror as he describes horrifying phenomena that will soon engulf the entire earth.

He asserts that in this way Almighty God will lash out in anger and exact a cruel revenge on a sinful mankind!

But, we might ask, is this picture of the Day of the Lord accurate? Does the Bible teach that this period of time brings only ‘gloom and doom?’ Is Jesus Christ going to return to the earth merely to destroy it?

The Bible refers to this same time in a variety of ways. The expression ‘Day of the Lord’ is synonymous with the ‘day of visitation’ (1 Peter 2:12), the ‘day of the Lord Jesus’ (2 Corinthians 1:14), the ‘day of judgement’ (1 John 4:17), the ‘great and awesome day’ (Joel 2:31), the ‘day of vengeance of our God’ (Isaiah 61:2) and ‘the great day of God Almighty’ (Revelation 16:14). Other passages simply refer to this time as ‘the day,’ ‘that day,’ or ‘the day of God.’

Regardless of how it is referred to, it is going to be the most awesome time in all of human history! And it’s imperative that you *understand* what will happen during this period and the incredible changes it heralds for our world.

## **So what is the Day of the Lord?**

In its broadest sense, the Day of the Lord simply refers to the era when God will take control of the earth. Right now Satan is the ‘god of this age’ (2 Corinthians 4:4) and ‘deceives the entire world’ into following his social and religious systems

til the times of *restitution* of all things’ (Acts 3:21). Thus, something that used to be here is going to be restored – put back in place. But what was removed that needs to be restored?

The answer is simple – *God’s direct rule over the entire earth*. It will be restored during the Day of the Lord.

## **A day long prophesied**

More than 2,500 years ago, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had a disturbing dream. In it, he saw a huge statue with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of



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***Does the Bible teach that this period of time brings only ‘gloom and doom?’ Is Jesus Christ going to return to the earth merely to destroy it?***

(Revelation 12:9). But his influence on the earth is only temporary according to God’s purpose.

The Bible reveals that Jesus Christ will remain in heaven ‘un-

bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron mixed with clay (Daniel 2:31-33).

As he admired the image, a stone came out of the sky and smashed its feet and toes! The entire statue then

collapsed into dust and was blown away by the wind, with no trace left behind. Then the stone quickly grew into a great mountain that filled the entire earth! (verses 34-36).

The only one able to explain the vision was the prophet Daniel, to whom God revealed its meaning. Daniel was at that time a captive serving in Nebuchadnezzar's court. He informed the king that the statue represented a succession of empires that would dominate the known world from that time forward.

The final stage of these governments – represented by the feet and toes of mixed iron and clay – would be an alliance of 10 distinctly governed nations or regions. During the time of their unified kingdom, the God of heaven will come to earth to destroy every vestige of these national powers. He will then establish His own Kingdom that will last forever (verses 41-45).

Jesus foretold that on this day He will be visible in the sky like lightning: 'For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day' (Luke 17:24).

The final cataclysmic battle takes place at Jerusalem. The prophet Joel gives some vivid details of the devastation that will take place, beginning with an alarm of war being sounded: 'Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand' (Joel 2:1).

He then describes an immense army coming down to Jerusalem – a military force including soldiers from virtually every nation on earth. This army will be gathered by Satan and his demons in one last desperate attempt to prevent the Kingdom of God from being established on the earth (Revelation 16:14).

But their efforts will be for

nothing as they are defeated by the returning Christ (Revelation 16:18, 21; Zechariah 14:12-13). Modern weapons, destructive as they have become, will be no match for the infinite power of Jesus Christ!

Then, once the battle is over, Christ will rule over the entire earth and at last establish His Kingdom: 'And the Lord shall be King over all the earth' (Zechariah 14:9).

So the Day of the Lord can be correctly understood as the day of

***Each trumpet brings a new plague as God begins the process of leading deceived and defiant human beings to repentance so that Jesus Christ can rule them.***

the final battle at Jerusalem – the day when all the combined armies of the world are defeated and the Son of God reigns over the earth.

These momentous events, it should be noted, take place after the seventh trumpet (Revelation 11:15; 16:17). However, a number of scriptures also include events that *precede* this trumpet as part of the Day of the Lord. So it is also correct to see this 'day' as a lengthier time period.

### **The year of trumpets and plagues**

The apostle John opens the book of Revelation by telling his reader that he was 'in the Spirit on the Lord's Day' (Revelation 1:10) – not Sunday, as many assume, but a vision of the Day of the Lord. According to *Vine's Dictionary of the New Testament*, the Greek word *herera*, translated here as 'day,' can mean a 'period of undefined length marked by certain circumstances . . . The Day of the Lord is the Day of His manifest judgement on the world' (pp 270-271).

This understanding is borne out by the message of the book – the visions John saw and recorded for us concerning the awesome events

which culminate in Jesus Christ's Kingdom being established here on earth! Christ also included what will happen just prior to His return as part of 'the day when the Son of Man is revealed' (see Luke 17:28-30).

Leading up to these events is a series of intensifying calamities, the first manifestations of which occurred shortly after Christ's first coming. They are represented by the opening of 'seals' in Revelation 6.

The visions of the first four seals

are known as the 'Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.' They represent false Christianity, war, famine and disease epidemics. The same global problems were also foretold by Jesus Christ directly (Matthew 24:1-12).

When the fifth seal is opened, Satan initiates a great persecution of true Christians (Revelation 6:9; 12:12-17). The 'Beast' foretold in Revelation 13 will have risen to power at this time. As this union of civil and religious rule enforces its 'mark' on all mankind, true followers of Jesus Christ who refuse to receive this mark will be afflicted, hated in all nations, betrayed and in some cases even martyred for their refusal to disobey God (Revelation 13:15-16; Matthew 24:9-10).

This time is referred to by Jesus as the Great Tribulation (verse 21), and signals the beginning of the 3½-year countdown to the final battle. According to Revelation 13:5, the Beast will rule the earth for 42 months (3½ years). This same period of time was revealed to the prophet Daniel as the time when this powerful church-state union would come like a whirlwind into the 'Glorious Land' – that is, the Holy Land (Daniel 11:40-41) – and would shatter the

power of the ‘holy people’ for ‘a time, times, and half a time’ (Daniel 12:7). This also refers to the 3½ years – each ‘time’ evidently representing one year in prophecy.

It is during the 3½-year period, ‘immediately after the tribulation,’ that terrifying heavenly signs will be seen (Matthew 24:29). These heavenly signs – visible phenomena in the sky – constitute the *sixth seal* of Revelation in chapter 6:12. They occur between the persecution of God’s people and the beginning of His wrath upon the earth (Joel 2:30-31).

The tumultuous and chaotic events Joel writes about earlier in the same chapter occur after the heavenly signs and during a period leading up to the great Day of Battle. Over the course of this period the ‘seven trumpets’ of the ‘seventh seal’ are sounded (Revelation 8-9). Each trumpet brings a new plague upon the earth as God, in His great mercy, begins the process of leading deceived and defiant human beings to repentance so that Jesus Christ can rule them.

This time is called the ‘great day of His wrath’ (Revelation 6:17) – a ‘day’ that, following the prophetic ‘day for a year’ principle (see Ezekiel 4:6; Numbers 14:34), is referred to in Isaiah 34:8 as *one year*: ‘the day of the Lord’s vengeance, the *year* of recompense for the cause of Zion.’ That year – the last year of the 3½-year period – will include the most intense part of God’s wrath upon sinful mankind.

On the heels of these tremendous events and their culmination in the immense battle at Jerusalem, a new era in history begins! And the Scriptures reveal that the Day of the Lord will then continue onward.

## The Millennium

The wonderful truth that Jesus Christ is going to establish His throne – *His Kingdom* – upon the earth and rule with His saints for 1,000 years (a millennium) is well documented

# Day of the Lord

**Fifth Seal – The Great Tribulation** is Satan’s wrath of 3½ years on true Christians and on modern-day descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel (*Revelation 6:9-11*).

**Sixth Seal – The Heavenly Signs and Great Earthquake;** a period of ‘distress of nations’ and a time of ‘men’s hearts failing them for fear’ (*Revelation 6:12-16*).

**Seventh Seal = 7 Trumpets. 7<sup>th</sup> Trumpet = 7 Last Plagues.**

- 1 – Sores on Beast worshippers (*Revelation 16:2*)
  - 2 – Oceans become blood (*16:3*)
  - 3 – Rivers and fresh water become blood (*16:4*)
  - 4 – Sun scorches the earth (*16:8*)
  - 5 – Thick darkness in the Beast kingdom (*16:10*)
  - 6 – Euphrates River dried up (*16:12*)
  - 7 – Massive final battle (*16:17-21*)
- Christ seen in the clouds
  - God’s people raised (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)
  - Jesus stands on the Mount of Olives

**Satan is bound (*Revelation 20:1-2*).**

**1000-Year Reign of Jesus Christ begins, leading to everlasting peace**

in Scripture (Revelation 11:15; 20:4). When Jesus returns as King of Kings, He will land exactly where He left from – the Mount of Olives, just east of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (see Acts 1:9-12; Zechariah 14:4).

From that time forward, He will begin the healing process for the nations and teach people to obey God’s laws – so much so that the knowledge of the true God will cover the earth as water now covers the seabeds! This wonderful time is pictured in the book of Isaiah: ‘They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea’ (Isaiah 11:9).

From the earliest days of Christianity, some Bible scholars have

believed that God has allotted a time period of 7,000 years to deal with mankind. In this ‘7,000-year plan,’ each day of the week is understood to represent 1,000 years, with the ‘seventh-day Sabbath’ as the final millennium – the time when Jesus Christ will rule the earth and give it rest from Satan’s influence.

The Day of the Lord also sometimes refers to this 1,000-year period, as it is the ‘day’ when the Lord will rule the earth. The apostle Peter seems to have been referring to this particular understanding in 2 Peter 3: ‘But beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand

*(Continued on page 9)*

# After the Chaos: The Times of Refreshing

*In a world of troubles and grief, we are all in deep need of physical and spiritual refreshment. Even tougher times are coming, but they will be followed by Jesus Christ's reign and His times of refreshing.*



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Even in this emotionally, physically and spiritually parched world, God has a plan for quenching our spiritual thirst.

The apostle Peter summed up God's plan this way: 'Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come . . . that He may send Jesus Christ . . . whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things . . .' (Acts 3:19-21).

Peter said that these 'times of refreshing' and 'times of restoration' describe what will occur when God sends Jesus Christ back to the earth. Have you ever wondered what it will be like when He actually stands on the Mount of Olives and takes charge of human affairs? What kind of world will He create?

## Restoration and peace under Christ's reign

What a momentous challenge Jesus will face – an environment that

will no longer support life, and people who are numbed by the horrific and terrifying events of the Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord. There will be untold millions of violated, starving people still living without hope.

In this burned-out environment with its mass of hopeless people, Jesus Christ will start bringing great change to the world with the help of

## *World peace will not come instantly, but it will come.*

His saints – His followers from this age resurrected at His return to assist in His reign over the nations. *How will Jesus and the saints begin to create the 'times of refreshing'?*

The prophet Isaiah wrote one of the most evocative descriptions of Christ's reign on earth in Isaiah 2: 'Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on

the top of the mountains . . . And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' . . .

'He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore' (verses 2-4).

One of the first things Christ will do is heal the environment that has been ruined by natural disasters, nuclear war and meteor impacts. And of course He will begin leading people into the way of peace.

World peace will not come instantly, but it will come. Even the nature of animals will be transformed as an aspect of the world becoming a secure and peaceful realm. Isaiah 11 is one of the great prophecies about the 'times of refreshing': 'The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child

shall lead them . . . The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea' (verses 6-9).

These prophecies give us a wonderful glimpse into what the 'times of refreshing' will be like.

But what of people who have already lost loved ones before Christ's return? How will they regain hope? They will learn the wonderful truth that their loved ones will live again. In the meantime, Christ and His saints will give them comfort, teach them God's plan and purpose, help them in the right way to live and bless them with joyful lives.

The peace and joy of Christ's reign can be your future. It can also be part of your present daily life. To realise this future time of restoration, you need to take action now. You must discard the worn-out, empty platitudes that pass for religion and *become a true disciple of Jesus Christ.*

## **Future news and the Feast of Tabernacles**

Can you imagine turning on your computer and reading headlines like these?

*New Government Programme:  
All Military Armoured Vehicles to Be  
Turned Into Farm Machinery*

*God Heals the Earth: Food  
Shortages Disappear on All  
Continents as Crop Growth  
Outstrips Ability to Harvest*

*Peace Talks Between Israelis and  
Arabs Reach Final Peaceful  
Solutions Under the Direction of  
Jesus the King*

These made-up headlines actually portray events foretold in biblical prophecies about the times of refreshing.

Zechariah 14 is another of the great prophecies of Christ's return. The prophet describes how after Jesus touches down on the Mount of Olives and a great earthquake occurs, a river of living water will flow from Jerusalem to begin healing the earth.

Then Zechariah adds this curious statement: 'And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusa-

lem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles' (Zechariah 14:16).

One of the first religious requirements Jesus will establish for all humanity is the observance of the

***Observing the Feast of Tabernacles is one of the keys to understanding the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. It's a celebration of the coming spiritual harvest when Jesus Christ gathers all people to Himself and to His Father.***

Feast of Tabernacles. This might be something completely new to you. The biblical Feast of Tabernacles is centred on the late summer and autumn harvest season in the Middle East. Also known as the Feast of Ingathering, it is a celebration of the abundant blessings of God.

Observing the Feast of Tabernacles is one of the keys to understanding the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. For Christians who anticipate Christ's return, it's a celebration of the coming spiritual harvest when Jesus Christ will gather all people to Himself and to His Father.

Zechariah continues: 'And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the Lord strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles' (Zechariah 14:17-19).

Do you grasp what this prophecy actually foretells?

Not just Israel and the Jews, but *all nations*, even the Egyptians, will be required to worship the King, the Lord Jesus Christ, and to celebrate

the Feast of Tabernacles. This isn't an historical account. This has never happened. This is a prophesied future event concerning the establishment of the Kingdom of God over all nations!

Christ will not only require the

observance of the Feast of Tabernacles, but He will punish people who refuse to obey, for their own good. One aspect of Christ's spiritual refreshing of humanity will be the universal celebration of all the annual biblical festivals of God, which reveal God's plan of salvation for all mankind. Sadly, some will stubbornly resist the goodness of God.

## **Living the future today**

Another of Isaiah's prophecies about the messianic Kingdom states: 'Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles [that is, to all the nations] . . . He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands [the far reaches of the world] shall wait for His law' (Isaiah 42:1-4).

As with other passages we've seen, this looks forward to Christ's coming reign. Yet to take part in it then, we must submit to His reign in our lives today.

Do you desire to make a positive impact on the world? Do you want to change things and help people have better lives?

That is exactly what Jesus Christ is doing now and is going to do when He returns. He will restore the waste-

lands. He will have the power to stop war and violence. He will establish one true religion centred on the worship of the one true God. He will set up a new government based on laws of fairness and justice. He will develop an economic system that eradicates poverty. He will produce educational programmes and enable well-being for everyone.

This isn't a fairy tale. This is what will happen in the future times of refreshing that are coming to your life!

In the face of today's problems, this wonderful future can seem far away. How can you begin to experience these times of refreshing right now? God wants to bring spiritual refreshing to your life, but it's going to take some action on your part.

Let's go back to what Peter said: 'Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come . . . and that He may send Jesus Christ . . . whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things' (Acts 3:19-21).

You must take the action of crying out to God to convict you of your need for this refreshing. All too many people are unaware of their own spiritual thirst.

Jesus Christ reigning on earth is the future. Do you want to be part of His future? If your answer is 'Yes,' then Jesus Christ must reign in your life today!

Gary Petty

## Learn More

This article touches on a number of prophecies of events to happen in the time leading up to Jesus Christ's return.

To learn more, request our study guides *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

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# Hope for All Mankind

(Continued from page 6)

years as one day (verses 8-10; see also Psalm 90:4).

The book of Hebrews also confirms the identification of the Millennium as a 1,000-year-long Sabbath day. The author uses the keeping of the Sabbath as an illustration of the 'rest' or reward that Christians are striving to enter.

'For there is a place where it is said, concerning the seventh day, "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works" . . . for if Y'hoshua [Joshua] had given them rest, God would not have spoken later of another "day." So there remains a *Shabbat*-keeping [Sabbath-keeping] for God's people. For the one who has entered God's rest has also rested from his own works, as God did from his. Therefore, let us do our best to enter that rest' (Hebrews 4:4, 8-11, Complete Jewish Bible).

So the Millennium itself, in some cases, is represented as a 'day' – indeed, the Day of the Lord. Isaiah 19 and numerous other references in the prophetic books of the Bible describe the time when Jesus Christ will be ruling over the nations and teaching them His ways. The phrase 'in that day' often occurs in these passages and should in this context be understood as meaning the Millennium – the day when the Lord rules the earth and all its nations!

But the Kingdom of God will not end after the 1,000 years are finished. In fact, God's Kingdom will have no end (Isaiah 9:7).

## Eternity beyond

In the broadest sense, the Day of the Lord begins shortly before the Millennium starts and continues through the endless eons of time afterwards – for all eternity. Daniel was told in no uncertain terms just what would happen: 'But the saints

of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever' (Daniel 7:18).

Revelation 21 gives us a glimpse of the new heaven and earth that will eventually replace what we know today: 'Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God"' (verses 1-3).

So God the Father and Jesus Christ will dwell for all eternity with those who have been born into Their family! God proclaims, 'He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be my son' (Revelation 21:7).

Incredible as it may sound, each one of us has an awesome invitation from Almighty God, the great Creator of the universe, to spend His Day – *all eternity* – ruling with Him over the vast universe. What a day that will be!

Rex Sexton

## Learn More

Many people are confused about exactly what will happen in the time leading up to Jesus Christ's return. But you don't need to be! Download or request your free copy of *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* to understand what the Bible reveals.

Contact our office address on page 1, or request or download it from our website at [www.GNmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.GNmagazine.org/booklets).



# Hidden: *The Date of Christ's Birth*

*Was Jesus born on December 25? Can we even know when He was born? And most importantly, does it really matter?*

When was Jesus Christ of Nazareth born? We hear Christmas carols about the baby Jesus in the manger and the winter wonderland associated with His birth. If we look at our calendars, chances are they label December 25 as Christmas Day. The birth of Jesus Christ is said to be the 'reason behind the season.' But was He actually born on that day? It's not as clear and simple as our calendars would suggest.

December 25 wasn't always

date. Think about it – this means that Christmas, which most consider Jesus' birthday, wasn't observed by the Roman church until about 300 years after Christ's lifetime on earth.

Christmas can't be traced back to either the teachings or the practices of the earliest Christians. That sounds almost impossible, doesn't it? But it's true.

So why did the Roman church adopt December 25 as the time to celebrate Jesus' birth? The reason

*Christmas, which most consider Jesus' birthday, wasn't observed by the Roman church until about 300 years after Christ's lifetime on earth.*

considered Jesus' birth date. In a *U.S. News and World Report* article titled 'In Search of Christmas,' Joseph Sheler wrote: 'Lacking any scriptural pointers to Jesus' birthday, early Christian teachers suggested dates all over the calendar. Clement . . . picked November 18. Hippolytus . . . figured Christ must have been born on a Wednesday . . . An anonymous document believed to have been written in North Africa around A.D. 243 placed Jesus's birth on March 28' (December 23, 1996, page 58).

Although it's difficult to determine the first time anyone celebrated December 25 as Christmas Day, historians are in general agreement that it was sometime during the fourth century. This is an amazingly late

His birthday is celebrated at that time of year is that religious leaders in that era wanted to give a pagan festival held on December 25 a name change to make it easier for pagans to convert to Christianity.

The *Encyclopedia Americana* makes this clear: 'In the fifth century, the Western Church ordered it [Christ's birth] to be observed forever on the day of the old Roman feast of the birth of Sol [the sun god], as no certain knowledge of the day of Christ's birth existed' (1944 edition, 'Christmas').

The reason for this confusion is not surprising. The Bible doesn't actually spell out the exact date of Jesus' birth. What's more, we find zero mentions of any celebrations

being held honouring Christ's birthday by the early Church.

## **Jesus wasn't born in December**

So what about December 25? A careful Bible study shows that the middle of winter was clearly *not* the time Jesus was born. There are two big reasons why this can't be the time of Christ's birth.

First, we know that shepherds were in the fields watching their flocks at the time of Jesus' birth: 'And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger . . . Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night' (Luke 2:7-8).

Shepherds would not have been 'living out in the fields' during December, the weather being cold and miserable. According to *Celebrations: The Complete Book of American Holidays*, Luke's account 'suggests that Jesus may have been born in summer or early fall. Since December is cold and rainy in Judea, it is likely the shepherds would have sought shelter for their flocks at night' (p 309).

Similarly, *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary* says this passage argues 'against the birth [of Christ] occurring on December 25 since the weather would not have permitted' shepherds to be watching over their flocks in the fields at night. Though some dispute this, other reputable sources, such as *The Companion Bible* and *Clarke's Commentary*, make the same points about the shepherds not being outside in the

open at night in late December.

Another reason we can conclude that Jesus wasn't born in December is that His parents travelled to Bethlehem to register in a Roman census (Luke 2:1-4). No Roman ruler would have had a census taken in winter when temperatures often dropped below freezing and roads were in poor condition.

Taking a census under such conditions would have been self-defeating, since it would have been too difficult for Judean residents to travel to be counted. Travel back then wasn't as easy as it is today. We live in an age of heated vehicles and snowploughed roads, but back then the vast majority of people walked wherever they needed to go.

Based on these two facts alone we see that it's highly unlikely that Jesus' birth happened in the winter, let alone on the specific date of December 25. More than being a simple incorrect guess, the December 25 date is an example of *syncretism*, that is, integrating pagan practices into Christian worship.

## Jesus was born in the autumn

This all begs the question: Just when was Jesus born?

We find important clues about the real time of His birth in what the Bible tells us about His cousin, John the Baptist.

Maybe you've read the Gospel of Luke and thought it was strange that the book begins not with the story of the conception of Jesus, but with the story of the conception of John the Baptist. There's a very good reason why Luke was sure to tell us in very specific detail when John was conceived and born.

Luke tells us that John's mother Elizabeth was six months pregnant when Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit: 'In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to . . . a virgin pledged to be married to a man named

Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary . . .' (Luke 1:24-36).

Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, were cousins. From this passage we know that John was six months older than Jesus. So we can discover the approximate time of year Jesus was born if we know when John was born.

Let's look at what the Bible says about the time of John's birth.

John's father Zacharias was a priest serving in the temple at Jerusalem in 'the division of Abijah' (Luke 1:5). At this time, the temple priests in Jerusalem were divided into different 'divisions' or 'courses' – groups

## God didn't call for an annual celebration of Jesus' birth.

of priests that would take turns performing temple service during the year. This formed a yearly schedule for those serving at the temple.

Historians calculate that the course of Abijah, during which Zacharias served, was on duty around early to mid-June (see *The Companion Bible*, 1974, Appendix 179, p. 200).

During Zechariah's temple service, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and announced that he and his wife Elizabeth would have a child (Luke 1:8-13). After he completed his service and travelled home, Elizabeth conceived the cousin of Jesus – the child who would later become known as John the Baptist (Luke 1:23-24).

Considering that John's conception likely took place later in June, when Zechariah returned home after completing his service in the division of Abijah, adding nine months brings us to around late March as the most likely time for John's birth.

Adding another six months – the difference in ages between John and

Jesus (Luke 1:35-36) – brings us to about *late September* as the likely time of Jesus' birth.

## Does Christmas really honour Christ?

So if it can be shown from the Bible and some historical research that Jesus was born in the autumn of the year instead of December, does that mean we should keep Christmas in September instead of December?

*No, it doesn't!* Nowhere in the Bible do we find any instruction or command to celebrate Christ's birth. The fact that so many specific dates are given in the Bible about other important and less important events, while this exact date remains vague,

is significant!

*God didn't call for an annual celebration of Jesus' birth.* He gives us other specific days to observe that honour Jesus Christ and the Father. For those who love God and His Son it's only natural to desire to worship Them. But isn't it far better to do this on the days and times God has set rather than to invent our own days and times.

As for the celebration of Christmas in December, remember what we read earlier about the Roman church adopting pagan practices into the Christian faith to create Christmas. Would Jesus want us to celebrate pagan days to honour His birth?

God makes it very clear that He doesn't like pagan worship practices being used to honour Him. He told the ancient Israelites:

'When the Lord your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they

are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' *You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way . . . Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it*' (Deuteronomy 12:29-32, emphasis added).

## Jesus' coming brought us many things

He showed us how to have a relationship with God the Father. We see His example of a perfect life, perfect sacrifice, and His resurrection back to spirit life. He showed us the way for man to have the opportunity to share His glory and live forever in the family of God. He came to form a new relationship with man that, through His blood, extends to all nations. He came to become our High Priest and intercede before God's throne for us.

Through Him we can have an

authentic and fulfilling relationship with God based on truth and love. And if we truly love Him, we will show Him love the way He wants to be loved. To love God we should do what He asks: 'But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him' (1 John 2:5; compare John 14:15, 21; 15:10).

By not obeying God we are missing out on a relationship with Him. Obscuring these wonderful truths, nearly all Christmas traditions can be traced back to pre-Christian false religions (as a good encyclopedia or a quick Internet search will verify).

Christ was not born on December 25, in the dead of winter. Celebrating this date as His birthday doesn't change the fact. And God never gave us instruction to observe Christ's birth annually in any fashion.

Instead of holding to a wrong day and a wrong idea, Christians should

focus on why He was born. All should be observing and discovering the meaning of the days He Himself instituted and observed.

Why not build a better relationship with God starting today!

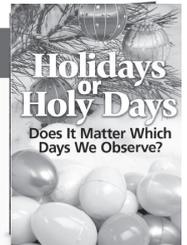
Darris McNeely

## Learn More

### What's the Real Truth About Christmas?

Millions of people continue the curious customs of Christmas, but few understand why they do so or what the customs and symbols are all about. Our eye-opening free booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?* will give you the surprising answers.

For your free copy, contact our office at the address on the front cover, or download or request it from our website at [www.GNmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.GNmagazine.org/booklets).



## Who Was Jesus Before His Human Birth?

Perhaps the boldest claim Jesus made about His identity was the statement, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM' (John 8:58). In English, His declaration may appear confusing. But in the Aramaic or Hebrew language in which He spoke, He was making a claim that immediately led the people to try to stone Him for blasphemy.

What was going on here? Jesus was revealing His identity as the actual One whom the Jews knew as God in the Old Testament. He was saying in one breath that He existed before Abraham and that He was the same Being as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Anciently when the great God first revealed Himself to Moses in Exodus 3:13-14, Moses asked Him what His name was. 'I AM WHO I AM,' was the awesome reply. 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you."'

Jesus clearly claimed to be this same Being – the 'I AM' of Exodus:3:14, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (verse 15).

'I AM' is related to the personal name for God in the Old Testament, the Hebrew name YHWH. When this name appears in our English Bibles, it is commonly

written using small capital letters as LORD.

When Jesus made this startling statement, the Jews knew exactly what He meant. They picked up stones to kill Him because they thought He was guilty of blasphemy.

Although impossible to translate accurately and directly into English, YHWH conveys meanings of 'The Eternal One,' 'The One Who Always Exists' or 'The One Who Was, Is and Always Will Be.' These distinctions can apply only to God, whose existence is eternal and everlasting.

In Isaiah 42:8 this same Being says, 'I am the LORD [YHWH], that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images.' A few chapters later He says: 'Thus says the LORD [YHWH], the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God"' (Isaiah 44:6).

To learn more about Jesus Christ, and the Father whom He came to reveal and whom He proclaimed 'is greater than I,' please request or download our booklets *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* and *Who Is God?*



Follow  
Me

# Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled

*When the storms and problems of life seem overwhelming, where can we turn for hope and encouragement?*

**H**ave you heard any good news recently? You're probably getting the same daily dose of human nature on steroids, with the steady traffic of troublesome headlines concerning the horrific slaughter of people in the Middle East at the hands of religious fanatics, the conflict in Ukraine between Slavic neighbours, crime waves suffocating our urban centres, friction in race relations, and economic problems.

The list is even longer, but the human psyche can only handle so much – so I'll stop there.

Throw into the mix our personal and family challenges, and the combination can paralyse the faith of even the most faithful. Sometimes we may feel less than Christian when we're troubled about what's going on around us or by what's gnawing at our hearts.

Rest assured, though, that Jesus Christ understands the human plight of His followers. He is fully aware that fear, anxiety and even hopeless anger are synonymous with the human condition. So we shouldn't

become distraught. But we can't ignore the problem either.

Let's be clear: It's a choice – *your* choice and mine! It's a matter of where to keep our focus. We can remain paralysed by despair, or we can choose to heed the ongoing invitation of Jesus of 'Follow Me' and His calming reassurance, 'Let not

*The peace of which Jesus spoke is a direct gift from God to those who focus on and truly believe in His promises and reach for them even in their very real moments of despair.*

your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me' (John 14:1).

## **Peace I leave with you**

About 2,000 years ago, the Teacher from Galilee gave us a framework to guide us through our troubled world. It wasn't meant to be trite philosophy or prose, but a personal anchor to securely moor us in times of great insecurity.

The very night He spoke it, multiple prophecies were coming

to a collective bursting point. His world and that of His followers was about to be turned upside down. In less than a day He would be dead – crucified!

Nonetheless, He squarely laid out a blueprint of hope for us to build on in John 14:27-28: '*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*' (emphasis added throughout).

Embedded within Christ's state-

ment are three specific steps to bear in mind and an incredible responsibility to uphold for Him. Let's work our way through these together. Jesus said:

- 1) He was going to be taken away.
- 2) He would leave a gift He called 'My peace.'
- 3) He is coming back.

And in between all of these scriptural dynamics, He offered a specific reassurance: 'Let not your heart be troubled.'

The peace that Christ mentions is something He owns by experience and shares with those who respond to His call of 'Follow Me.' Such peace is a direct gift from God to those who focus on and truly believe in His promises and reach for them even in their very real moments of despair. Our knees may still be knocking together, but the shaky walls of our heart can begin to firm up.

Let's consider a few of those promises to enable you to 'let not let your heart be troubled.'

## The big headlines made in heaven

First of all, we need to continually remember that the really big headlines are being made above, not down here below. We don't have to let the latest news leave us depressed, but can be fortified with the promising reality of God's assuring words in Isaiah 46:9-10: 'For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose'' (English Standard Version).

Yes, God is our ultimate inside Source of information, giving context and purpose not shaded by political bias – just godliness.

Imagine a bold front-page headline in your local newspaper blaring, 'Archangel Michael's Forces Poised for Action!' This is news that you won't really see in the headlines. But it's happening around us every day.

God offers an incredible promise to His faithful ones in these troubling times that He is not a distant, absentee cosmic landlord. And it's a promise you can hold on to in times of trouble!

Consider these words in Daniel 12:1: 'At that time *Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people;* and there shall be a time of trouble,

such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book.'

Yes, God has appointed a great angelic being and his supporting forces to protect His people down here below!

## 'What shall we do?'

Perhaps we can gain insight to what is presently possible for us with hindsight from an event found in 2 Kings 6:15-17 regarding the prophet Elisha's servant, who felt himself overwhelmed by events swirling around him.

The passage reads: 'And when the servant of [Elisha] the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him [Elisha], "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" So he answered, "Do not fear, *for those who are with us are more than are those who are with them.*" And Elisha prayed, and said, "Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.'

Just like the shocked servant, we too can stay focused on modern-day enemy armies rather than the reassuring promises of God. And yes, our modern-day enemies are just as numerous and real as in Elisha's day. But remember, Christ gave a gift He called 'My peace.'

This peace, His peace, can only abide in us when our eyes stay opened to the promises of God. More than ever, it's time to pray the prayer of Elisha that God might not only open all our eyes, but also give us insight beyond the moment to strengthen our unsteady hearts.

One such promise is found in Matthew 24:21-22. Here Jesus Christ assures us that help is on the way:

'For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved [alive]; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.'

Here Jesus Christ states three specific promises:

- 1) Time will not come to an end.
- 2) Humanity will not annihilate itself.
- 3) God specifically looks after those who have been chosen or selected by Him – 'the elect' – and who in turn have committed their lives to Him.

You might be saying, 'Well, that's great news for humanity as a whole in the future, but my world is crashing all around me right now!' Such a state of mind is certainly understandable.

In a world of seven billion people, we can feel isolated and lost in a crowd – crowded with bad news, crowded with rumours of wars, so crowded we can't put one thought together with another. We can crawl into a cave with the prophet Elijah, who became terribly discouraged, and say as he effectively did, 'Nobody loves me; nobody cares; look what's become of me' (compare 1 Kings 19).

As Christians, we need to embrace the spiritual reality that Christ never said our lives would be trouble-free, but did say that He would provide His followers with the means to rise above whatever comes our way.

His peace is constructed not on the premise of a conflict-free life but of sustained and properly focused faith. As our mind remains fixed on Him, our Heavenly Father 'shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus' (Philippians 4:19).

(Continued on page 19)



# Current Events & Trends

## Islamic State exploiting power vacuum

For 13 years, al-Qaeda has been the face of terror and Islamic extremism, both feared and hated in the West. Now their hold on the Middle East is slipping.

Despite the insistence of senior al-Qaeda leaders, Reuters reports that ‘counter-terrorism experts say al-Qaeda’s ageing leadership is struggling to compete for recruits with Islamic State’ (Noah Browning, ‘Al Qaeda Denies Decline, Acknowledges ‘Mistakes’ by Its Branches,’ September 14, 2014).

Browning’s report quotes the US State Department in saying that al-Qaeda’s ‘ability to conduct attacks and direct its followers’ has been limited (ibid). The terrorist group has been dealt several severe blows over the last three years, beginning with the assassination of its figurehead and leader Osama bin Laden in 2011. Bin Laden was seen as al-Qaeda’s spiritual leader as well as its geopolitical and organisational chief.

A few months ago, reports of a weakening al-Qaeda would have been welcomed, but the power vacuum being left by al-Qaeda and its affiliates has been quickly filled by the Islamic State or IS, a group making headlines through its declaration of a caliphate, extreme brutality and speedy expansion.

Daniel 11 describes historic wars between two geopolitical powers called the king of the North, located north of Jerusalem, and the king of the South, located to the south of Jerusalem. In verse 40 the perspective switches to a prophetic view of future events: ‘At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack

him [the king of the North]; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through’ (Daniel 11:40). (To learn more, see our free study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* and ‘Islamic Caliphate Declared: What Does It Mean?’ in the September-October 2014 issue of *The Good News*.)

With the Islamic State’s aggressive stance and strategic pushes toward the West, this situation is one that biblically minded individuals will want to keep a close eye on. (Sources: Reuters, BBC.)

## Richard Dawkins: It’s immoral not to abort Down’s syndrome baby

‘Abort it and try again. It would be immoral to bring it into the world if you have the choice,’ were the words of noted evolutionist and atheist Richard Dawkins on August 20, 2014, in response to a woman carrying a baby suspected to have Down’s syndrome (Twitter feed posted at *The Independent*, September 26, 2014).

Dawkins used the social media outlet Twitter to share his opinion. The tweet caused a ‘feeding frenzy’ of angry backlash, for which he apologised. It’s interesting that he apologised for the backlash but not for the comment itself. He obviously believes that the value of the life the woman was carrying is little enough that it ought to be killed.

Coming from an avowed atheist who makes a point of ridiculing the idea of God’s existence, Dawkins’ view is symptomatic of the Darwinian belief that we are all here

merely because the strongest have survived and the weak are left behind. From that viewpoint, someone with Down’s syndrome is merely a genetic aberration. And modern technological advancements have given us the opportunity to determine if a baby in the womb has potential abnormalities.

To someone who does not believe that life comes from God, it seems logical to terminate a pregnancy in which there are abnormalities. While we note the Holocaust and other mass murders, we willfully ignore the massacre taking place right under our noses – abortion.

God said to the prophet Jeremiah, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.’

God is the Giver of life. One day Mr Dawkins’ eyes will be opened to change his compassionless, error-filled viewpoint (Source: *The Independent*.)

## Scottish vote highlights UK divisions

On September 18, 2014, Scotland’s voters decided to remain a part of the United Kingdom – at least for now. It was a long and emotional campaign. Deep divisions between Scotland and England were exposed. The union remains, but it has taken a beating.

Westminster made major concessions to persuade voters. Delivering on those promises will further alter the relationship between the two countries. ‘There will always be an England,’ the old saying goes, but its standing in the world continues to decline. The debate surrounding this vote is a symptom of the decline of

the English-speaking nations – the most successful confederation of peoples in the history of mankind.

In the end the likely deciding issue was economics. Too much money already flows north to subsidise education, research and industry. Scotland's economic future was more important in this case than history, tradition and culture.

Writing in *The American Interest* on September 12, Walter Russell Mead said: 'The British political establishment has been tried and found wanting in this referendum; unfortunately it is not alone. The leaders of the European Union have conspicuously and repeatedly failed to master the vital and urgent issues that confront them.

'The euro has ruined and embittered a third of the European Union; populist movements of protest and resistance are bringing fascism back from the grave in more than one country. Outside, the enemies of every European ideal are gathering strength; inside, voters across Europe increasingly find the post-War social-democratic order bland, remote, and overbearing' ('A Royal Mess').

Europe and America continue to grapple with a destabilising mixture of events. As the current leadership of America and the United Kingdom struggles to effectively defend and explain their importance to the modern world, Bible prophecy reveals that another power will arise on the world scene to ensure order – at what will ultimately prove to be a devastating cost. (Source: *The American Interest*.)

## **A Year of Remembrance**

In Germany, 2014 has been named 'Super-Gedenkjahr' – a 'super-anniversary year' – being 100 years since the start of the First World War, 75 years since the Second World War began and 25 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

According to an article in *The Guardian* earlier this year, the event most likely to cause German intro-

spection will be that of the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989. (*The Guardian Online*, January 2, 2014).

Opinion is divided on the success of the reunification of West and East Germany. While there is a degree of stability, economic figures are poor. GDP in the east is 'only 67% of that in the west – roughly the same as 10 years ago,' and stagnation is evident particularly in former communist-ruled regions (*The Guardian Online*, October 24, 2014).

Ex-Soviet Leader Gorbachev, attending the commemorations, warned of a potential new cold war if the West continued its interference in Ukraine (*The Guardian Online*, November 9, 2014).

## **Continued Vatican revelations discredit Christian faith**

The Associated Press reported that, 'the Vatican put its former ambassador to the Dominican Republic [Josef Wesolowski] under house arrest Tuesday [September 23] after opening a criminal trial against him, the first time a high-ranking Vatican official has ever faced criminal charges for sexually abusing youngsters' ('Vatican Puts Ex-Dominican Envoy Under House Arrest,' September 23, 2014).

While there have been many investigations into sexual abuse cases involving Catholic priests, this is the first time a Vatican official of a high rank has been brought to trial for the crime. The impact on the lives of children who have been hurt by such terrible acts is enough for us to stop and take note of these cases. We should pray for the well-being and healing of those damaged by all cases of sexual abuse.

At a deeper level we should take note of how sexual abuse charges against those professing to follow and serve God and Jesus Christ brings Their names into disrepute and damages the standing and message of the Bible and the Christian faith.

Christians should live in such

a way that they honour Christ and promote Christianity as a positive force in the world. (Source: Associated Press.)

## **Sex, sexual abuse, sexual addiction**

While the UK government has struggled to appoint an acceptable head of its wide-ranging enquiry into historical child sex abuse, other news reports highlight ongoing police cases involving the grooming of teenage girls for sex. Some of these current cases involve young people already living in care.

Children from all backgrounds often receive mixed messages regarding sexual behaviour: the Government's official guidance to schools relating to sex and relationship education contrasts with reports that doctors are being urged to look out for children who may be suffering – from the acts of other children as well as adults – as a result of 'sexting' or 'revenge porn.' At the same time it is reported that the government wants to force UK-based adult websites to verify users are aged 18 or over to prevent children from accessing sexually explicit content online.

Most adults and children are affected to one degree or another by society's sexual obsessions, whether it be directly by engaging in behaviours potentially damaging to health, wealth or reputation, or indirectly by falling into the chasm of addiction to online pornography.

God created mankind as male and female and is quoted as referring to His handiwork as 'very good.' God's word has much guidance regarding sex and relationships. Please request or download our booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*. In addition, our online publication *Overcoming Pornography Addiction* is a study aid to help break the chains of addiction to this form of sin ([www.ucg.org/booklet/overcoming-pornography-addiction/](http://www.ucg.org/booklet/overcoming-pornography-addiction/)).

# Are You Fighting Against God?

*God says He has friends – and enemies.  
In which category are you?*

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

*'I never knew you.'* I find this statement quite sobering. It makes me look deep inside and ask whether Jesus might say that to me. I follow Christ and call myself a Christian and I really do not want Him to look me in the eyes and say those words.

## Enemies of God

The book of Revelation shows us a prophetic image of armies gathering to fight Jesus Christ at His second coming:

'Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs . . . For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth

and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty . . . And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon' (Revelation 16:12-16).

Chapter 19 of Revelation provides more details: 'Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of

*Paul was challenged by God because he was fighting God. The encounter deeply impacted the rest of his life.*

heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great." And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, *gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army*' (verses 17-19).

What does this mean? How could men gather to fight God?

Here's the question we need to ask ourselves: Will you or I be in this army? Could we find ourselves fighting against Jesus at His second coming? The only certain way to avoid

being in this army is by submitting to God in our lives now.

## Resisting God

In the New Testament is the story of a man who thought he was the friend of God. This man was fervently religious. He went to worship services every week. He knew the Scriptures thoroughly. He could quote them verbatim. He was a devout man, and by his own description he was 'without blame' in observing his religious faith. But one day he was confronted by God with the hard

reality that he was actually an enemy of God.

This man was Saul of Tarsus, later known as the apostle Paul. He dedicated his life to fighting against what he considered to be false teaching. But in reality he was fighting against His Creator, Jesus Christ. If such a man could be wrong in how he worshipped God, then how important is it that you and I examine our religion?

Paul was challenged by God because he was fighting God. The book of Acts records that while en route for Damascus to persecute Christians there, God intervened in his life (Acts 9:1-8). The encounter deeply affected Paul, who changed completely and truly began to obey God.

## Practising lawlessness

From this event, Paul learned that mankind has a fundamental problem. It is the same problem Christ mentioned in Matthew when He said, 'Depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness' (Matthew 7:23). Paul covered this subject in a letter to the Christians at Rome: 'And even as they [those of the pagan world] did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting' (Romans 1:28-31). This is a powerful statement

*As He did with Paul, God can turn your life around and make you into one of His disciples. The choice is yours.*

that should make each of us stop and think!

Paul then includes a list of behaviours. He mentions sexual immorality, wickedness and murder – all what we might be tempted to call 'big ticket sins' – sins you would expect to be included on a 'top 10' list of sins. Sins that you say aren't a part of your life.

But wait!

He also mentions deceit, evil-mindedness and backbiting. He says pride is a problem, too. He talks about boasting and being disobedient to parents. He warns against not being able to forgive or to show mercy.

Paul is unsparing in this list. He compiles human mistakes that reflect not retaining God in our hearts and minds on a daily basis. Such behaviours wear down a relationship with God and makes us His enemies. Sin takes an enormous toll!

What Paul writes here in Romans tells us the reason there is an end-time army that gathers to fight Christ at His coming. Because people do 'not like to retain God in their knowledge,' there develops an animosity to God that distorts His true image.

Mankind cannot recognise God because of sin.

Lawless transgression of God's revealed way of life is what keeps the world in darkness today and will cause nations to rise in defiance when Christ appears in glory. Again, we have to ask, will you or I be found in this end-time army?

## Who is a friend of God?

We have an example in the Bible of a man God considered a friend: 'And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for

righteousness." And he was called the friend of God' (James 2:23).

Wouldn't you want to be called a 'friend of God'? What does it take to be a friend of God?

Abraham was a man told by God to start a journey to a new land. He was called to leave his past behind in search of a new life. God said, 'Get out of your country from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you.' So 'Abram [as he was then called] departed' (Genesis 12:1-4). Put yourself in his shoes. What would you have done?

Abraham listened to God. By leaving his home to go to the land God promised, he demonstrated faith – the active, living faith that it takes to become a friend of God. Abraham obeyed a God no one else seemed either to know or want to know. Abraham believed and did things to follow and obey God whilst others did not. He started to get to know God by living the right way of life – *God's way*.

It's by living God's way that we get to know Him better and more

intimately. When we live God's way, we become His friend and not His enemy. And we experience life as God lives and intends for us to live.

## You can become God's friend now

The apostle Paul spent much of his life unknowingly as God's enemy. Through an intense wake-up call, he stopped fighting against God and became His friend through obedience.

Abraham was a man who became God's friend by listening to God and doing what He said to do. We can follow his example by developing a firm intent to know the true God and His Son Jesus Christ.

On the night in which He was betrayed, Jesus Christ Himself, told His disciples, '*You are My friends, if you do whatever I command you*' (John 15:14).

Understanding and obeying the Ten Commandments of God is an important starting place for coming to know God and becoming His friend. But it takes even more than that. It takes a deep-seated, heartfelt desire to know God and to know Jesus Christ. This is the starting point for the kind of faith held by Abraham, God's friend.

Think again about the army that will fight against Christ at His return. Where will you be when that takes place? Will you be in that army, standing against your Saviour? If we don't keep God at the centre of our lives right now, we could find ourselves as His enemy.

But the good news is that *we can know God*, and we can become a friend of God just like Abraham. God wants to make you His friend, but this requires that you stop fighting against Him.

## What are you waiting for?

Just as He did with Paul, God can turn your life around and make you into one of His disciples. The choice is yours. Are you fighting against

God? Don't assume you're not! It takes more than belief to be a friend of God. It takes faith with action.

The end-time army that fights against God will be made up of people who fail in asking themselves these hard questions. They will not be characterised by looking deep into themselves and comparing their life choices with God's Word. They will go with the flow of society and end up on the wrong side of that battle.

When Jesus returns and that army rises up to fight Him, what will the soldiers essentially look like?

They'll look like you and me. If we don't consider where we stand with God and strive to obey Him as His friends, we could be found to be fighting against God.

Are you a friend of God or an en-

emy of God? Everyone is one or the other. Which will you be?

by *Beyond Today* host  
Darris McNeely

## Learn More

As noted in this article, understanding and obeying God's Ten Commandments is vital to coming to know Him and to becoming His friend. After all, these are a reflection of His character and His thinking. Obeying the commandments helps us understand and become more like Him! Download or request your free copy of *The Ten Commandments* today!

Contact our office address on page 1, or request or download it from our website at [www.GNmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.GNmagazine.org/booklets).



# Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled

(Continued from from page 14)

## God is in the storm

As the storms of life approach and swirl around us, let's focus on and seize the promises of God. When we utter, 'It's impossible!' let's remember that 'The things which are impossible with men are possible with God' (Luke 18:27).

When we moan 'I'm too tired,' let's stand on the promise – 'Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28).

When we say, 'I'm not smart enough,' let's recall the apostle Paul's message that Christ is wisdom personified (1 Corinthians 1:30) and that this is there for us to receive.

When we're feeling utterly alone, let's have that courage that holds on through fear and remember the Master's last words before He ascended to heaven – 'I am with you always, even to the end of the age' (Matthew 28:20).

It's time to return to Jesus' loving admonition, '*Let not your heart be troubled.*' And when your heart has been stilled, then pray that God will guide you to someone else's heart-beat that's racing even faster – so that you can let him or her know that it's all right, that God is in the storm with us!

Robin Webber



## How can I watch the *Beyond Today* TV programme in the British Isles?

*Beyond Today* isn't currently available on TV channels which broadcast in the British Isles. However, the programme is readily available on the Internet.

If you don't have a computer, you can watch it on a tablet, a 'smart TV' or even a smart-phone. You will need an Internet connection, and can then view

the current week's programme, plus all archived programmes, as well as *BT Daily* (short video blogs commenting on topical subjects of interest), as well as written transcripts of most of the programmes.

The links to *Beyond Today's* website and the dedicated YouTube channel are:

[www.ucg.org/beyond-today](http://www.ucg.org/beyond-today)

[www.youtube.com/user/BeyondTodayTV/](http://www.youtube.com/user/BeyondTodayTV/)

## How Our Literature Is Funded

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Donations may be sent to: *The Good News* or United Church of God, PO Box 705, Watford WD19 6FZ, United Kingdom, or donated through your bank (ask us for our bank details), or online at [www.ucg.org.uk/donate.html](http://www.ucg.org.uk/donate.html) through Paypal or Charity Choice.

# Why Christ Spoke in Parables

*Many people would be surprised to learn that Jesus Christ spoke in parables to hide His message from the masses. Why would He do this? How can you understand the deepest meaning of the parables of the Kingdom?*

Christ was asked, ‘Why do You speak to them in parables?’ (Matthew 13:10). He had begun to teach the lessons of the man who had gone into his field to sow seed. After telling them the initial idea, Jesus paused to answer this question.

The question is posed by the disciples. These are probably the 12 He initially chose, but could have included others who were following Him. But if we assume it to be only the 12 core men we at least begin to understand that Christ is here revealing the reason He cloaked His message around the parable form of teaching.

Christ’s answer to the question ‘Why do You speak to them in parables?’ is profound: ‘Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, *but to them it has not been given*’ (verse 11, emphasis added throughout).

Jesus did not intend the many to understand the full meaning of His teachings! Here is one of His hard sayings that so many can read over and not understand. And it is as applicable today as it was then. Christ knew the ears, eyes and hearts of the masses could not grasp the deep meaning of the gospel of the Kingdom of God. He deliberately cloaked His message!

Let’s think about this for a moment. Jesus’ Jewish audience looked for the coming of a promised kingdom. The restoration of the house of David and Israel’s glory had been foretold by the prophets. These men and women listening to Jesus ex-

pected something to happen in their day. Often they eagerly gathered around Him because they thought He might be the expected Messiah. The message of the Kingdom spoke to something they were looking for. It was not an abstract idea. It was an expected reality! That is why many came to hear Jesus teach.

But human nature had not changed through the centuries. Israel rejected the same message given by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and the other prophets. The first-century Jews of Jesus’ day would not, for the most part, fully perceive the message Christ brought. There was a reason.

Notice that Jesus offered additional explanation: ‘For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever

*Jesus didn’t intend the many to understand His teachings! This is as applicable today as it was then.*

does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him’ (verse 12).

This was a way of telling them to be careful how they handled spiritual truth about the Kingdom. Those listening thought they had certain knowledge – as part of the chosen people they thought they had an inside track – yet it was incomplete. Jesus was opening deeper understanding of the law, the nature of God and the Kingdom of God.

It was possible for them to receive more – more understanding of these matters that would broaden their limited knowledge. But it was

also possible they would not hear. Hence the reason to speak in parables. Not everyone was going to understand His message. The parables would help to reveal people’s thinking and whether or not God was calling them to His truth.

## God is not calling all today

Here is the point: *God was not calling all to understand the gospel of the Kingdom then, nor is He today.* Jesus would later explain that only God the Father can call a person to understand the truth of that Kingdom (John 6:44, 65).

God’s plan to bring knowledge of salvation to all of mankind is being done *in stages* according to a well-defined strategy. This is the only way you can understand what Jesus is saying here. He hid the full message in parables – illustrative stories with lessons – knowing that only a few would understand and heed the calling. Remember He said, ‘*It has been given to you to know the*

mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, *but to them it has not been given.*’

Even today this is not well understood. Well-meaning and sincere efforts are made to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God. Yet look around. Religions are divided. Religious messages are mixed. The conditions of the Kingdom of God are not yet on this earth. Could it be that what Christ said about hearing and understanding His message is true? Let’s read on to understand more.

‘Therefore I speak to them in parables, *because seeing they do not*

see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand' (verse 13). Teaching in parables was intended to not only hide the message, but came as a result of the spiritual condition of the nations. This was shown by His next statement – a quote from the prophet Isaiah.

Christ reached back to a scene where Isaiah recorded a vision of God's throne. A question is asked by the Lord, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' The prophet volunteers and is told, 'Go, and tell this people: "Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive"' (Isaiah 6:8-9).

This passage shows us that God's intent has been *to keep hidden* the deepest aspects of His purpose among man. Not all have understood the details – not even those whom He worked with intimately, such as the people of Israel.

Going back to Christ's parable we see that He quotes this Isaiah passage and applies it to His ministry: '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, so that I should heal them"' (Matthew 13:14-15).

This is a profound passage. Christ is showing that for the most part people have chosen to allow their hearts to grow dull to where they cannot see or hear or come to know the holy God enthroned in the heavens.

The message from God cannot get through. Even Jesus, as God in the flesh, could not reach many of the people. He was even killed for what He taught!

God, then, deliberately cloaks

His message in parables until the time is ready for the veil to be lifted. By saying, '... lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them,' Christ is speaking of understanding and healing that follow the choice of hearing and responding in the first place.

### **Blessed are your eyes**

Jesus then addressed the disciples directly, telling them: 'But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it' (verses 16-17).

Those closest to Jesus, His disciples who had chosen to receive His mentoring and teaching and committed themselves to becoming like Him in every way as their Master and Teacher, were blessed to 'see and hear.' They had been healed spiritually and could understand Christ's teaching about the Kingdom. What had not been understood by so many good men and women and prophets and kings who had gone before was now open to these disciples.

If God is calling you, this same priceless understanding can be yours. You can have a true knowledge and understanding of the coming Kingdom of God to earth and submit to the King of that Kingdom now. You need not be like so many today who don't understand the hope of that Kingdom. This hope can be a part of your life, adding the depth of meaning and purpose that no other knowledge can give!

This chapter, Matthew 13, contains specific parables that teach us many aspects about the Kingdom of God. When they are unlocked and understood, we see revealed many details about God's Kingdom and how it is being prepared in its fullness. When we understand these

parables, no longer is it a secret or a mystery! God intends to bring this Kingdom to earth, and you can prepare today to be a part of that realm!

Where do you begin? *By becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ!* By obeying His teaching and submitting yourself to the way of this Kingdom in your life today!

A disciple is a lifelong spiritual student, always learning but never in this life having arrived at the final goal, which is to become like the Teacher in every way. It begins with a first step toward God in submission of our will to His. That is the common attribute of these disciples as Christ called them to training and service.

Christ begins each of the parables in this chapter by stating, 'The kingdom of heaven is like . . .' He then uses examples from everyday life from that time, like the sowing of seed, or a mustard seed or a pearl of great price, to explain the multi-dimensional vision of the Kingdom of God. These parables hold so much of the details of how we become a part of that Kingdom.

### **That Kingdom is coming!**

Look at today's world. Its many problems and crises cry out for the Kingdom of God. Scenes of horror are spreading around the globe.

Our world is a changing tapestry of values and morals that are leading many to look for answers in religion. *The Good News* magazine and this *Supplement* offer you a refreshing glimpse of *a way of life that works*. Its teaching is rooted in Christ's transforming message of the coming Kingdom of God.

In the next issue of *The Good News*, we'll begin our study in the parables of Christ by focusing on the one that teaches us what the Kingdom of God is about. We will study truths that had been 'kept secret from the foundation of the world' (Matthew 13:35). It will be a fascinating study.

*by Darris McNeely*



**Q** What must one do to be saved and what must we avoid doing?  
*E C, Dagenham*

**A** When Christ was asked what one must do to attain eternal life, His brief answer was, 'Keep the commandments.' He was then asked which ones. In response He mentioned several of the commandments pertaining to loving our neighbour – all part of the basic code of law called the Ten Commandments (see Matthew 19:16-21).

Christ's sayings in His 'Sermon on the Mount' (Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7) show us further principles that are drawn from the Ten Commandments, which are themselves summed up in two basic principles: love of God and love of neighbour (Matthew 22:36-39). It is on these two commandments that 'all the law and the prophets' hang (verse 40). Our booklet *The Ten Commandments* will explain further.

That said, ultimately a person cannot earn salvation by his or her works, as the apostle Paul later explains (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is the gift of God (Romans 6:23).

Our journey towards salvation includes us following the apostle Peter's instruction in Acts 2:37-39 to repent and be baptised in water – followed by the laying-on-of-hands in order to receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables us to keep God's spiritual law. It is Christ living in us through that Spirit that performs Christian works (see Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:10). The foundational

step always remains accepting the sacrifice of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins (Romans 5:8-11). Sin is the transgression of God's spiritual law (1 John 3:4, KJV). Once we really repent and turn from our sins, then God forgives

us and we are reconciled to Him and redeemed through the death of His Son (see 2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

Luke 18:10-14 shows that, although we need to strive to overcome sin, we cannot stack up our own righteousness in pursuit of our salvation. Recognising our own frail humanity, we should humbly seek God's righteousness. Human beings naturally make the following mistake: 'For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God' (Romans 10:3).

For further understanding, please request or download our booklets *The Road to Eternal Life* and *Transforming Your Life*.

**Q** How do people truly know if God is calling them? Is it obvious or is it a subtle, internal process?

*J C D, Rochester*

**A** Nothing is more important than God's calling. Consider the majesty and greatness of what it means. The apostle Peter referred to this magnificent calling in his first letter: 'You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy' (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Peter's inspired description of the Christian calling helps us to comprehend the majesty of God's salvation. This great calling is made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins and the forgiveness He made freely available.

The apostle Paul underscored Peter's approach by describing God's Church as a spiritual building joined together and growing into a holy temple in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:20-22).

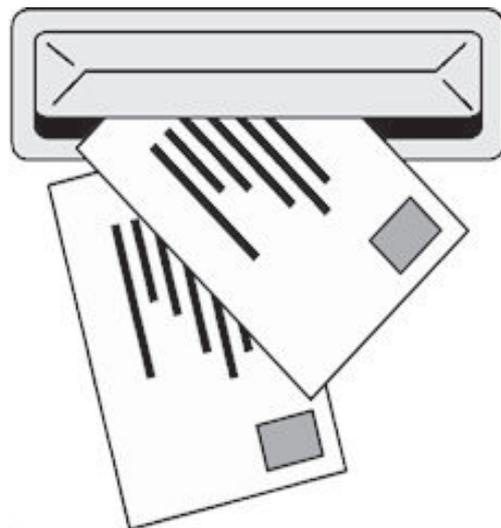
However, it is God the Father who initially calls His chosen ones out of this world of spiritual darkness into His marvellous light (John 6:44, 65). One of the signs that God may be calling you is that you are beginning, however gradually, to truly understand the Scriptures with a depth and dimension that you never experienced before. You have begun to understand the mysteries of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 13:10-11).

If God is calling you, you also will have awakened to the need for change in your personal life, to bring it into line with the godly standards and values shown in the Scriptures — 'to live a life worthy of the calling you have received' (Ephesians 4:1, NIV). The Bible refers to this process as repentance. Luke called it 'repentance to life' (Acts 11:18).

Obviously, there is much more to this miraculous process of the Christian calling than we can cover here. To learn more, please request or download our study aid that explains how acceptance of that calling leads to salvation – eternal life in the Kingdom of God. This free booklet, *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*, expounds these concepts in much greater detail. The title of the first chapter is: 'Who Are God's "Called, Chosen and Faithful" People?' We encourage all of our subscribers to read this crucial booklet.

# Letters

## from our readers



### Dates of the biblical Holy Days?

I read the information on the biblical Holy Days in the September-October issue. What are the actual months and dates of the seven holy days you discussed in the articles?

*Internet reader*

• *Thank you for your message. Feel free to access our online Holy Day calendar, which lists the dates for all of the upcoming Holy Days from 2015-2019. You can find it online at [ucg.org/holy-day-calendar](http://ucg.org/holy-day-calendar).*

### Articles about World War I

Of all the *Good News* issues I've read, your July-August 2014 issue taught me the most. The history of World War I clearly explains the problems of the world today. Your excellent articles opened my eyes to the underlying conflicts of today. I applaud such concise and appealing writers. Over the years of receiving *The Good News*, I've established a line of readers behind me who greatly enjoy your modern approach to life. Being a reformed Jew, I truly enjoy your responsible and reasonable outlook.

*Reader in Illinois, USA*

I am writing to tell you how much *The Good News* magazine is a blessing to me. I have just finished reading '100 Years After World War I: What Have We Learned?' It is excellent. Though I don't always agree with you, your magazines are good. Keep it up.

*Reader in Nairobi, Kenya*

### Beyond Today TV programme

Thank you for your *Beyond*

*Today TV* programme. This was my first time catching it and I will definitely stay tuned now. I have been praying for more understanding on this issue of what happens when believers die, and I believe God may have answered my prayer when I stumbled across your show this morning. Thank you very much and God bless.

*Viewer in Ohio, USA*

I was watching *Beyond Today TV* and I found it very interesting. You have a free giveaway *Bible Study Course*. I am interested in it if you could please send it to me. Thank you very much for your efforts. It's really changing my life. God bless you.

*Viewer in Queensland, Australia*

I've been enjoying your *Beyond Today TV* programme and literature I have received from you. Most of the mainstream churches have got it wrong. Where is your church in Brisbane?

*Viewer in Queensland, Australia*

I was very interested in everything I heard in your *Beyond Today TV* programme titled 'Are You Fighting Against God?' I was wondering if you have any meetings of the United Church of God in Western Australia because we are looking for somewhere to fellowship. I really liked what I heard today, I agree with absolutely everything that the gentleman said and I thought I should contact you and find if there is a group over here that I could attend. I would like to hear back. Thank you very much indeed.

*Viewer in Western Australia*

• *Please see page 19 for information on how to watch the Beyond Today TV programme in the areas where it is not available on broadcast TV.*

### Who are you?

I receive *The Good News* magazine and enjoy reading it. I'm still confused as to whether you are Seventh-day Adventist or what? What do you all call yourselves? Do you worship on Saturday?

*Internet reader*

• *Thank you for your interest. The Good News is published by the United Church of God and is not affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventists. We have some doctrines that are similar to the Seventh-day Adventists, the chief one being our observance of the seventh-day Sabbath according to the Ten Commandments. However, there are also a number of major differences between them and us. Rather than attempt to comment on their doctrines, we prefer to inform you about our own. We'll leave others to speak for their own organisations, and you can draw your own comparisons.*

*We invite you to learn more about the United Church of God by reading our booklets This Is the United Church of God and Funda-*

mental Beliefs of the United Church of God. *You can read or download these online or request free printed copies at [ucg.org/booklets](http://ucg.org/booklets). At this same location you can find booklets covering virtually all of our beliefs in great detail.*

### **Heartfelt thanks for *The Good News* and booklets**

Thank you very much for the valuable magazine and booklets that you have sent me. You cannot imagine how happy I am to receive your magazine for about 10 years free of charge. I can't find enough paper, ink, or even words to express my feelings on to you. What I am able to say to you is this: God bless you in your ministry. Your writers are really fantastic, and they are leading me into deep meditation. All the booklets I have received are really a blessing to me, and I am greatly enriched spiritually. I keep them carefully because they are a great source of information and inspiration to me.

Thank you so much for supporting me in my spiritual growth. May God bless you and your ministry.

*Reader in Asmara, Eritrea*

My heartfelt thanks and gratitude goes out to all of you for sending me a free subscription to *The Good News* magazine. I've learned many things about the world we're living in. It's really very informative reading material! To help me really understand the words of God, please send me the booklets *How to Understand the Bible* and *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*. Thank you very much and may God continue to bless and guide you all in spreading the gospel!

*Reader in Camarines Sur, Philippines*

*The Good News* magazine is a fixture in my home. I've been receiving issues since 2001 when I was running from doctor to doctor with my younger son who had been injured on the job, and again the same year my older son was diag-

nosed with cancer and passed away in 2002. It was a very sad year, but I derived comfort from your magazine and have read it faithfully ever since. Please keep up the good work! It is very much appreciated.

*Reader in Colorado, USA*

I have really enjoyed doing lessons seven and eight. They have been really helpful to me. It makes you realise that no matter how much you think you know about God's words, there is always something else new to learn.

*K T, Bristol*

Thank you so much for sending me copies of your *Good News* magazine. They are very enlightening and have increased my spiritual knowledge and beliefs.

*M B, Ireland*

Thank you for the booklets *Is God a Trinity?* and *The New Covenant*. They are so incredibly written that I cannot understand why so many people are unaware of the many truths that are written in those books and in your many other booklets.

*C D, Chard*

Thank you for sending me the first three lessons of your *Bible Study Course*. They have helped me immensely. I'm hoping to get my husband to do them. We both are thankful for the work you do in sending out the booklets and magazine. We thirst for knowledge – true biblical knowledge.

*Reader in Western Australia*

I just received the booklets I requested. Thanks so much. It is really a big help to us who have many questions in following Jesus. In reading the materials, our faith was restored, our long-time questions were answered and more knowledge was poured upon us, especially through the *Bible Study Course*. In our town,

I am the only subscriber and am sharing *The Good News* to those who need it. I do not have enough words to explain how thankful we are.

*Reader in Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines*

I received the booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest* as I requested. What I found out in reading this booklet really shocked me. Thank you and God bless *The Good News* worldwide.

*Reader in Masinloc, Philippines*

Please accept this donation to help get *The Good News* out to everyone.

*Reader in Oklahoma, USA*

I am one of your subscribers who has received copies of the magazine many times, but yet without saying any grateful statements. I am apologising for such behaviour. My silence doesn't mean I am not thankful. As a matter of fact, I save all my copies and share some with my friends. This is my way of showing gratitude and honouring to you for choosing me as one of your recipients. If you will, please kindly renew my subscription and please take this as my thanks to you.

*Reader in Davao City, Philippines*

People have been questioning my faith and are concerned with why I do not celebrate holidays like Halloween, Easter and Christmas. They constantly ask, 'Why do you have to be like that? You can't just have fun? They're about having fun!' I have spent years researching these holidays and the true Holy Days from God. Even if I hadn't done the research, it would take me only five minutes to read the Bible and know what God wants us to celebrate and what He sees as wrong. It became a million times clearer once I discovered the United Church of God and your amazing booklets.

*Internet reader*