

BEYOND TODAY

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The EU's Fractured Union

Wrangling over the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union has continued, with another delay granted. In this context, what's at stake for the EU?

Bible prophecy isn't silent on this question.

The Bible spells out an end-time scenario that could very well be linked to current events in Europe, with Britain's anticipated departure playing a significant role. That departure could affect the European Union negatively – both politically and economically. Fearful that the EU may fracture as a unified Union of Nations, it hasn't been too eager to be generous with favourable concessions to a departing Britain, lest in future years other EU members might also be influenced to follow the UK out of the European Union.

After the horrors and devastation of the Second World War, there was understandably a desire among European nations to work more closely together in a Common Market, trading with one another without too many restrictions. In time, favourable trade agreements were worked out, national border checks ceased for citizens and free movement of EU members was established within various legal treaties.

Some political ideologists pushed even further and talked of full European integration, ultimately leading to a "United States of Europe" – a term coined by several EU pioneers. For some, this was a step too far and alarm bells began to ring on the question of losing national sovereignty. It was feared that the more political the EU became, the less national sovereignty would be retained by member states.

The utopian vision

The European Union's vision proclamation is en-



shrined thus: "The following visionary leaders inspired the creation of the European Union we live in today. Without their energy and motivation we would not be living in the sphere of peace and stability that we take for granted. From resistance fighters to lawyers and parliamentarians, the EU pioneers were a diverse group of people who held the same ideals: a peaceful, united and prosperous Europe" (source: europa.eu). A list of names follows, including Winston Churchill, Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer and Jean Monet.

Is such a utopian vision of a prosperous and harmonious Europe achievable? Or will we witness the shattering

of such a dream – together with its consequences? The stakes are high.

In 1957 the Treaty of Rome was enshrined on the statute books of the fledgling European Economic Community (EEC) which numbered six member states: France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. In 1973 the United Kingdom joined along with Ireland and Denmark. To commemorate Britain's membership, additional 50 pence coins were minted showing nine interlinking hands representing the nine members of the EEC. The hand of Queen Elizabeth II was engraved more delicately, since she was the only female head of state among the nine. The interlinking hands had the purpose of showing unity among its member states. That expression of unity between Britain and the EU, however, was short-lived, culminating in a majority of the British public voting in a referendum during the summer of 2016 to leave the European Union for good.

A question of sovereignty

One key reason for leaving was the question of the sovereignty of the United Kingdom. Over the years the EU had transformed itself from the envisioned economic union into a more political union. Many UK citizens fear this development would ultimately rob Britain of much of her sovereignty. For many in Britain this proved to be a step too far.

A surrender of national sovereignty is indicated in Scripture: “These are of one mind, and they will give their

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power and authority to the beast” (Revelation 17:13). The word “beast” is the biblical way of expressing a world power or an empire. In European history no nation has voluntarily relinquished their sovereignty to a central power. Individual nations have been taken over by conquest or have agreed to ‘sign’ non-aggression pacts, but never did nations agree to forfeit their sovereignty voluntarily. “Large areas of Europe had previously been united by empires built on force, such as the Roman Empire . . .” (Wikipedia’s “History of the European Union”).

From a biblical perspective, this transfer of national sovereignty to a central power is destined to come to pass, “For God has put it into their hearts to fulfil His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast”

(verse 17). This scriptural reference depicts a final revival of the “Roman Empire” at the time of God’s end-time intervention in human affairs.

How much more accurate could this prophecy be in modern times as we witness the European Union morphing into a federal state, even though the UK decided some three years ago not to have any part in it?

Whether Sir Winston Churchill might have been in favour of pushing for a *political* union among European nations isn’t known. He never expressed his view on this question publicly, but it seems unlikely that he would have countenanced Britain giving up its national sovereignty to Brussels.

Who will lead the EU?

Many political observers believe that Britain’s departure will have a negative effect on the unity and stability of the EU. High ranking officials in the EU didn’t expect the United Kingdom’s decision to leave. There is concern that Britain’s departure might influence other member states of the European Union to call it a day as well. Brussels cannot allow the EU to fracture. Its very survival may be at stake if others opt out of membership. The populist movements – a form of nationalism – in some EU member states do not bode well for unity and harmony within the European Union.

Regarding the special relationship Britain has with the United States, American foreign policy has always encouraged the United Kingdom to play a prominent role in European affairs, since Britain could be relied upon to remain a bastion of democracy in Europe – a region that has witnessed too many autocratic regimes in relatively recent times.

The most economically successful nation in the EU is Germany. There is a certain inevitability that the most powerful nation economically is ultimately likely to dominate a geographical region. There are nations in Europe that would not wish to see Britain on the outside and unable to use her influence as a member state to prevent any one nation lording it over others in the European Union.

Rome’s prophesied final revival

In the second chapter of the biblical book of Daniel we read of an end-time power that had its beginnings in the times of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar and will end when God intervenes in the affairs of mankind.

The king was reminded that “there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets” and “what will be in the latter days” (Daniel 2:28). The other kingdoms to follow Babylon were Persia, Greece and Rome. The last kingdom, Rome, was to

exist in some form or another, until it would be destroyed at Christ's return.

Prophecies in Daniel and Revelation indicate that after the fall of Rome in 476 AD, this last kingdom would have seven revivals. These began with the emperor Justinian in 527 AD. Rome continued to survive as the Holy Roman Empire for many centuries. Ruling from Constantinople, "Justinian's whole policy was directed toward the establishment of the absolute power of the emperor and toward the revival of a universal Christian Roman Empire" (*An Encyclopedia of World History*, compiled and edited by William L Langer, p. 172).

According to the Bible, the last revival will come just prior to Christ's return and the establishment of His Kingdom. It will be short-lived. The biblical definition of a very short period of time is "one hour," as we read in Revelation 17:12. For an overview of these revivals of Rome down to modern times please request or download our booklet *The Final Superpower*.

The final revival of the Roman Empire is depicted in Daniel

by the feet and toes of the image that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream. Its weakness was that the iron was mixed with clay. Daniel explained to the king, "and as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile . . . they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay" (Daniel 2:42-43).

This is true of the European Union with its current member states, each with differing and often conflicting national aspirations. If it doesn't survive as a unified entity, it may be transformed into the very beast power that the book of Revelation mentions. Difficult times require extreme measures and in times of acute crisis nations may be more willing to give up their authority to one central power – but evidently not Britain.

To learn what to do in these troubled times and about Christ's glorious kingdom beyond, please also request *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

Gerhard Marx

It's inevitable: Bad choices produce bad consequences

If we believe that bad choices in our lives won't bring bad results, either immediately or further down the line, we are deceiving ourselves.

As people become more materialistic, the tendency is to think of the Bible as antiquated, outdated and irrelevant. This often leads to people rejecting God's law, thereby also discarding the very principles that would result in a successful life. These values are so fundamental that even non-believers could certainly benefit from them. The rejection of specific principles is so pernicious, that you can practically watch in real time as society implodes.

If Christ's followers allow themselves to go down the same path, it will lead to death – eternal death from which there is no resurrection. That is Satan's purpose – the destruction of humankind – and he uses deceptive tactics to make us forget that our actions have consequences.

When writing to various members of the early Christian Church, the apostle Peter described Satan as a roaring lion "seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). However, having sought out and identified his prey,

the devil can become much more subtle. He appeals to our weaknesses, he tempts us, gets us to doubt, gets us to compromise. One of his most effective methods is to persuade us to believe that our bad choices don't have negative consequences.

Reaping what we sow:

The universal principal of cause and effect

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss-born American psychiatrist whose work aided the transformation of strategies for helping terminally ill patients and their families negotiate the final stages of life, commented: "I believe that we are solely responsible for our choices, and we have to accept the consequences of every deed, word, and thought throughout our lifetime."

This is what we see in society – each person must face the consequences of their choices. Yet people want the freedom to do what they desire to do, to make any choice

that makes them happy, albeit briefly. And even when they make bad choices, they still want to reap a good harvest!

We deceive ourselves if we believe that bad choices won't result in bad consequences. Why do we fall for this? Let's look at the tactics that Satan used against Adam and Eve.

How Satan works

God's instructions to Adam are recorded in Genesis 2:15-17. The phrase "surely die" is comprised of the same Hebrew word repeated twice. This grammatical construction intensifies the certainty of the action. The two words have different tenses – dying and die. Thus the phrase can literally be translated from Hebrew as "dying you shall die."

The way that this is worded makes it seem that the consequence for disobedience would be immediate. This is consistent with how we traditionally learn. We tend to learn lessons from immediate consequences very quickly, as when a small child puts its hand on a hot stove. God told Adam (and by extension Eve) that in the day that they chose to disobey (action), it would set them on a

Satan is rarely considered a threat but, in reality, he's lurking in your blind spot, waiting to exploit your weaknesses and encourage you to make poor choices.

course that would eventually lead to death (consequence).

In tempting Eve, Satan distorted the Eternal's instructions. His first distortion was to misquote God, in effect to say, "Did God say you can't eat from any tree in this entire garden?" Eve corrected him saying, we can eat from any tree in the garden except one. Satan followed up with a lie, "You will not surely die."

The temptation was too great. The feeling of instant gratification in the form of being wise like God outweighed any concept of consequence. Eve ate the fruit and she didn't die immediately. She disobeyed but there was no immediate punishment (Genesis 3:1-7). Death would come but it would be way off in the future.

Some consequences of poor choices occur immediately, others are delayed. The latter reinforces our proclivity for making more bad choices. If we do something that we know is wrong but we aren't punished for it immediately, maybe we feel it's actually not that bad. With this attitude we can be more willing to compromise again in the future. If there is no correction, no punishment, no consequence, our bad choices can multiply and escalate. For Christ's

followers, this can be an added complication when trying to keep within the guidelines of God's holy law.

Wise King Solomon observed that "Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

Hiding in plain sight

Satan has been attacking God's way since before God created humans. He's been perfecting his tactics for an untold number of years. There are probably two ways in which people think of the devil. Either he has horns and a pitchfork and a red cape and you can see him from a mile away, or he doesn't really exist at all. Whichever view a person holds, Satan is rarely considered a threat. In reality, he's lurking in your blind spot, waiting to exploit your weaknesses and encourage you to make poor choices. For more information on his origin and tactics, please request our booklet *Is There Really a Devil?*

We must be aware of how Satan uses subtle deceit to set us down a path away from God (2 Corinthians 2:11).

The website Biblemoneymatters.com comments, "A lot of people don't want to be responsible for the choices they make, and they often don't want to admit that their decisions have real life consequences. Try as you might, you can't escape the consequences of your decisions, whether good or bad" (www.biblemoneymatters.com/choices-have-consequences-change-your-life-one-decision-at-a-time/).

For help in making wise choices, please request or download our booklet *Making Life Work*.

Let's be mindful of our adversary. Beware his deceptive tactics and remember that bad choices will inevitably lead to negative consequences. We always reap what we sow.

Mark Mirigian

Successful parenting

We have a limited number of copies of this useful brochure available. If you would like a copy please request *Successful Parenting* from the address on the front page. If you would prefer to read online or download your own copy, the brochure can be found at www.ucg.org/reprints.



A name worthy of honour

The name of God is ever-present – on the street, on the building site, at the school gate, on TV and radio, in the movies. Yet mostly it is used without respect.

Living in a society which self-declares to being secular, with surveys indicating ever-decreasing percentages of people believing in God or going to church, it is curious to hear the names “God” and “Jesus Christ” occurring in so many people’s everyday speech.

For many, their use of these terms may not necessarily indicate a belief in God but more likely reflects a general indifference or sarcasm or even hostility towards any and all aspects of everyday life, with “God” being blamed.

But if there is a God and if Jesus Christ is His Son, as believed and preached by Christian Churches, what might *They* think about how our society casually makes use of *Their* names?

Imprisoned for a name

In the early days of the Christian Church, Peter and some of the other apostles found themselves in prison on the instructions of the High Priest – all because of a name. An angel of the Lord miraculously opened the prison doors and brought them out to return to preaching what the angel referred to as “all the words of this life.”

The High Priest and his men came after them again and challenged them about their preaching: “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name?” (Acts 5:26-28).

This invites a question: What’s in a name? The implied answer is that “this name” is what motivated Peter and the others to preach the gospel.

Although Peter’s reply wasn’t confrontational, it was assertive: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29-32). Peter continued by explaining the roles of God and of Jesus Christ at the heart and core of the Christian gospel: “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” Peter and the others were commanded not to speak in the name of Jesus, yet they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for Jesus’ name (verses 40-42).

Respect for God’s name

Long before Peter’s time, at the exodus of the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt, God spoke Ten Commandments. One of those commandments specifically

challenges people to “not take the name of the LORD your God in vain” (Exodus 20:7). “In vain” means in a futile or worthless manner. This illustrates that God is jealous of and protective of His name, which He wants to be treated with respect.

Sometimes euphemisms and slang terms are employed to avoid obviously profaning God’s name. These would be such expressions as “gosh” or “golly”; or words beginning with the initials JC, such as Jiminy Cricket and misspellings such as Lawdy for Lord, or “Oh my word,” Word being another title of Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3, 14). Attributes of God can also be heard in expressions of surprise or expletives, such as the terms “goodness” or “holy.” All these should be avoided.

For a fuller explanation of this commandment and its ongoing application and force in everyday life, please request or download a free copy of our booklet *The Ten Commandments*.

God is jealous and protective of His name, which He wants to be treated with respect.

In the New Testament, with the establishment of church communities throughout the Roman world, the apostle Paul wrote to the Church in Philippi that the protection of God’s name included that of Jesus Christ. In Philippians 2:9-11 Paul wrote: “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Today, with so many using the names of God and Jesus Christ casually and even rudely in everyday speech, it is very easy to follow suit unless we are constantly vigilant regarding the words we use. Yet God’s challenge to us today remains the same as it was in the days of the children of Israel or of Peter and Paul: to not misuse the name of God the Father or the name of His Son Jesus Christ.

David Fenney

If you feel like you're being watched – you probably are!

Almost wherever we go in Britain CCTV cameras record our activities. However it is worth considering Who else might be watching us.

According to the American question-and-answer site Quora.com “Britain is one of the most heavily surveilled nations on earth, with an estimated one surveillance camera per 11 citizens.” A plethora of CCTV cameras cover motorways, shopping centres and businesses. Technology is now able to connect them to smart phones, so they are becoming an increasingly popular way to provide protection for private houses by alerting the owners to unexpected “visitors.” With so many observers, it is easy to forget the cameras are even there. Hence they can often be used to track the causes of accidents or the perpetrators of crime.

Believers and non-believers alike are usually oblivious to the fact that God is also watching. The Israelite King David, who wrote many of the Psalms, asserted, “The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. (Psalm 14:2, New International Version throughout).

In case anyone thinks this only means Christians, David also wrote, “[The LORD] observes everyone on earth; His eyes examine them” (Psalm 11:4) and, “from heaven the LORD looks down and sees all mankind; from His dwelling place He watches all who live on earth – He who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do” (Psalm 33:13-15).

Awareness of God’s omnipresence

King David was aware that God was watching him and knew his innermost thoughts (Psalm 139:1-6). David was overwhelmed by the knowledge that God knew everything about his life, even how he was formed in his mother’s womb (verse 13).

Nothing escapes the eyes of God, whether it be the smallest bird breathing its last or the thoughts and intents of the human heart.

However, like those of us who forget we can be seen on CCTV, on one occasion David forgot God could see everything he did. It was here the usually God-fearing king came to grief. Having committed adultery with Bath-

sheba, the wife of Uriah, one of his senior military leaders, David then had him killed. He might have got away with it except God was still watching and “the thing David had done displeased the LORD” (2 Samuel 11:27). Sins separate us from God, forming a barrier to communication with Him (Isaiah 59:2). How God grabbed David’s attention and David’s deeply repentant response are recorded in 2 Samuel chapter 12 and Psalm 51.

God forgave David and set up his son Solomon to



Shutterstock

reign after him. At the end of his life, the LORD’s assessment of David was that he “had done what was right in the eyes of the LORD and had not failed to keep any of the LORD’s commands all the days of his life – except in the case of Uriah the Hittite” (1 Kings 15:5). (To study the subject of repentance further please request or download our free booklet *Forgiveness is Possible*.)

Nothing escapes the eyes of God, whether it be the smallest bird breathing its last (Matthew 10:29) or the thoughts and intents of the human heart (Hebrews 4:12). One day we shall all have to give an account for all that we have done. It will do us no good to deny either our actions or our thoughts. God sees. God knows.

For those who repent and seek God now, we can build a relationship with our Heavenly Father that will last for eternity and He will watch over us for our good.

Diane Topping



Q What does Matthew 8:22 mean by “let the dead bury their own dead”?

FAQ

A In Matthew 8:22 Jesus said, “Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead.” He was responding to a request from one of His followers who asked to be excused from his responsibilities to “go and bury [his] father” (Matthew 8:21).

It might seem that he was asking to make funeral arrangements for his recently deceased father. However, he was actually asking Christ to excuse him from his spiritual responsibilities so that he could return to live with his ageing father until after his father died. That could mean the disciple would be gone for a long time. It seems he was skirting his spiritual calling and wanted Christ to give His blessing to this action.

Instead, Christ told him to focus on his calling. A better sense of Jesus’ statement would be, “Don’t neglect the high spiritual calling I’ve given you; let the spiritually dead attend to the routine tasks of life.” Certainly, Christ would not forbid the man from attending to the funeral arrangements for his father. Christ Himself went to visit

Let the Bible Answer...

What does the Bible say about old age?

A poetic description of old age is found in Ecclesiastes 12:1-8.

Respect for the elderly is mentioned in Leviticus 19:32 and Job 32:4-10.

A good old age is described as a blessing in Job 12:12; Proverbs 16:31; 17:6; 20:29. Living to a great age will be the norm under Christ’s benevolent rule on earth: Zechariah 8:4.

the family of His friend Lazarus after Lazarus’ death – even at great risk to His life (John 11:1-16).

God wants us to care for the needs of our families (Mark 7:10-13; 1 Timothy 5:8), but not to neglect our spiritual calling in the process. For more insight, please read our Bible study aid booklet *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.

Q How do I know if I have committed what is often called the unpardonable sin?

FAQ

A Christ mentioned this unforgivable sin in Mark 3:28-29, where it is described as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. It had to do with denying the authority and power of God. Mark explains that Christ was responding to an accusation from His detractors, who said, “He has an unclean spirit” (Mark 3:30). They meant that His authority came from Satan, not from God. Although these accusers knew that Christ was the Son of God, they accused Him of being a fraud. Christ warned them that they were in danger of committing a sin for which there was no forgiveness.

What is the fate of one who does not repent of this sin? The unrepentant will die in a lake of fire at the end of the age (Matthew 10:28; Revelation 20:14-15). It’s not that one sin is more terrible than another is, but rather that any sin we don’t repent of will result in death. Hebrews 6:4-6 and Hebrews 10:26-27 both mention this sin as well, warning us not to “fall away” or to “sin wilfully.” How does one know if he has crossed the point of no return?

So long as one desires to repent, to get his or her life back in order spiritually, God will always forgive. Sadly, it is possible to come to a state of not caring about and not looking for forgiveness. If there’s no repentance, there can be no forgiveness. That’s when a person is in danger of the unforgivable sin. A person can come to that place either by simply drifting away or by sharply turning away from God in hostility.

At any time, God can and will forgive the sin of departing from Him, if the sinner wants forgiveness and genuinely repents. God inspired John to write, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Clearly, God will extend mercy to all who sincerely repent and change – regardless of their sin. Christ’s words, coupled with the warnings in Hebrews, are sobering, nonetheless, we should hold fast to the hope that God will grant us repentance when we turn to Him.

For more understanding, please read our free Bible study aid booklet *The Road to Eternal Life*.



Letters From Our Readers

Literature helps relationship with God

The literature has been a real blessing to me and has helped deepen my relationship with God and with the study of His word.

Reader from Wallasey

Please keep sending *Beyond Today*. It is of great help in hanging on to faith and to the return of Jesus Christ – planet Earth's only real hope.

Reader from Bristol

I would like to continue receiving *Beyond Today*. I am learning more about Christian life through your magazine than from anywhere else.

Reader from Reading

We really appreciate your publications which explain the Bible and help us understand and better worship the Lord.

Reader from York

I prayed to God for knowledge and truth. He showed me your web site and literature. So much makes sense and faith has grown and matured.

Reader in Devon

The Rapture vs. the Bible

This is a very useful and timely booklet. Some members of my congregation attended a prophetic conference and were full of the imminent secret rapture theory. This will help answer them.

Name and address supplied

Bible courses

This study, without doubt, is the

most important thing ever in my life. Your teaching and amazing booklets have consumed much of my time. I am digesting so much of God's written living word.

Student in Cornwall

I love your *Bible Study Course*. I would also like to do more of these courses.

Student in Gloucester

Editor's comment: On completion of the 12-lesson Bible Study Course, there are several options available. There are a number of shorter studies online at www.ucg.org/bcse/search/bible%20mini%20study and at www.ucg.org/members/family-study-guides. Although the latter are primarily aimed at family study, they are useful in their own right.

There are also studies that can be watched for those with Internet or streaming enabled devices at www.ucg.org/beyond-today/beyond-today-bible-study.

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Reader from Cornwall

Please find enclosed a cheque to express my very sincere gratitude for your continuing instruction, comfort and direction that I receive from *Beyond Today* magazine. Truly the magazines are a God-sent gift.

Reader from Peterborough

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