

BEYOND TODAY

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Our greatest hope – a truly “forever home”

There is a new space race among billionaire citizens. Is the future of humanity among the stars or should we be striving to enter heaven? The Bible reveals God’s long-held plan.

In July 2021, Sir Richard Branson (Virgin Group) and Jeff Bezos (Amazon) achieved significant milestones in their respective privately funded space tourism ventures, launching businesses (and themselves) into space.

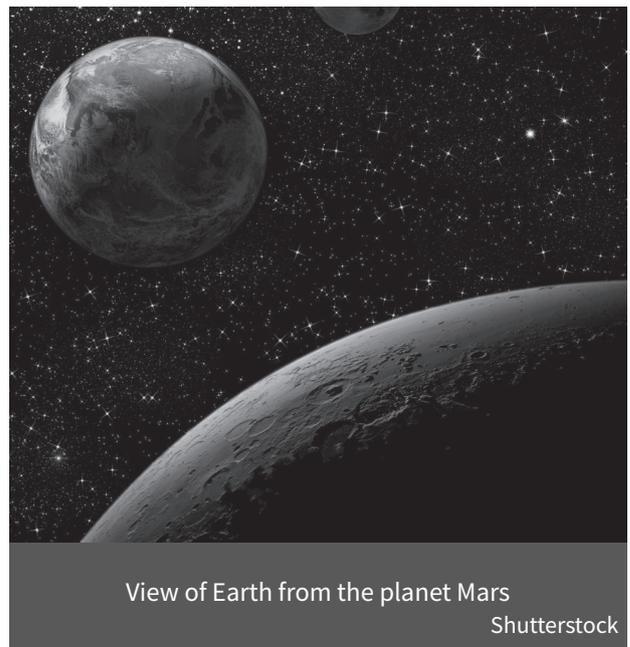
It could be tempting for those who can afford it to purchase a seat offering a four-minute glimpse of outer space at more than £300,000 a trip in order to experience how life could be on another planet.

Elon Musk (SpaceX) has stated that he believes for humans to survive, we must become a multi-planetary species.⁽¹⁾ This is due, as environmental activists claim, to human action that is destroying the world. As a result, they suggest, sweeping societal changes must be enacted to save the planet.

This narrative is further spread by Hollywood movies depicting dystopian futures where conditions have become so dire on earth that new planets on which to survive are sought, providing humanity with hope to propagate the species. Could space be the “forever home” where God expects us to live?

Conversely, world religions seek solace by teaching adherents to put all hope and faith in heaven, or an equivalent, as a destination and reward immediately after death.

⁽¹⁾ Brown, E. (2020, September 29). <https://www.unilad.co.uk/science/elon-musk-says-we-must-become-multi-planet-species-before-the-sun-engulfs-earth/>.



Speculation as to what one would actually be doing for all eternity includes worshipping, feasting, living with others who have died in the faith, celebrating and serving God.

However, the Bible teaches neither view. Humanity’s future is neither seeking out an existence among the galaxies, nor donning white robes, playing harps and living amongst the clouds in heaven beyond the pearly gates. Scripture likens death to sleep (1 Corinthians 15:16-20). It’s a state of being where there is no awareness or

consciousness (Psalm 6:5).

For the righteous who endure, the promise of the resurrection to eternal life as a spirit being is a great hope and reward (1 Corinthians 15:51-54). Spirit-born members of God's family, together with Jesus Christ and eventually God the Father, will live right here on earth, albeit a renewed one, once God's Kingdom has been established.

Earth is a special place

The earth is unique in that it is the only known planet in the observable universe to support life, and complex life at that. God spent six days preparing the earth's surface to sustain human life. Then He called it very good (Genesis 1:31). Earth was not created in vain but was intended to be inhabited (Isaiah 45:18). Indeed, scientists can all agree that earth benefits from a set of "Goldilocks-like" conditions allowing life to flourish. God took special care to create the earth and document the creation in stages. Out of the entire cosmos, God repeatedly focuses His attention on the earth.

The Bible, despite being written in three languages by forty authors over a period of 1,500 years, has one consistent message – God's desire to dwell amongst His people. During the wandering in the wilderness, God lived with the Israelites in the tabernacle, or "tent of meeting." He

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later gave the Israelites a permanent home in the land of Canaan, and when King David conquered Jerusalem from the Jebusites it became the Israelite king's capital city (2 Samuel 5:6-10). Later David and God both expressed a desire to create a permanent home for the Almighty – a temple (2 Samuel 7:1-6). Solomon's temple, the Holy of Holies more specifically, was an inner sanctuary where God's presence resided.

Righteous dead not ascended into heaven

John described a vision of heaven, where God's throne is located (Revelation 4:2). God's throne, God the Father, Jesus Christ, and angelic beings are there. However, the righteous who died in the faith are not mentioned as living their afterlife there. John understood that no one has ascended to heaven except Jesus, the one who came down from heaven (John 3:13).

Jesus, the Word, who was with God and who is God, became a human, lived a perfect life, suffered and was killed to atone for the sins of all mankind (John 1:1-3, 14).

After His resurrection, Jesus Christ ascended to heaven to sit at the right hand of God (Hebrews 8:1). However, the many righteous who died in faith including some who were martyred, were not believed to have gone to heaven. Not even King David, a man after God's own heart, was believed by the apostles to be there (Acts 2:34-35).

The Day of the Lord

The environmental doom-sayers and Bible prophecy do have one thing in common: Both predict that conditions on earth will become, and are already becoming, extremely dire due to humanity's greedy abuse of the planet's natural resources and fellow humans.

Matthew 24 and Revelation 8-16 describe catastrophic end-time events that will result in untold devastation and indescribable destruction. God's creation, His beautiful earth, will be desolated. Under the influence of Satan, human stubbornness will drive leaders to organise into a church-state superpower. This time will be unmatched in history. Jesus Christ prophesied: "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." (Matthew 24:21).

Yet, God will not allow mankind to be annihilated, promising "And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:22).

Then comes God's final intervention to capture humanity's attention and to bring them to repentance. Called in Scripture the "Day of the Lord", judgement will come on a people who have, since the time of Adam and Eve, repeatedly and wilfully rejected His laws and commandments and have turned instead to false religion. At this time Jesus Christ will return to earth to remove world governments, along with their armies, which will be trying to destroy Him.

To study the sequence of end-time events please request or download our booklets *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*

Times of refreshing

Peter spoke of times of refreshing and complete restoration (Acts 3:19-21). Satan will be bound and the saints will reign with Christ on earth for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1-4). Once Satan's influence is removed, Jesus will establish the Kingdom of God on earth; all nations will learn His ways and live His way of life (Isaiah 2:2-4). After all the destruction, God's precious earth will be renewed.

Following this, the surface of the earth, and maybe the entire planet, will be renewed to make way for the spirit-born family of God and God Himself to take up

residence thereon (Revelation 21:1-5). Its capital will be the New Jerusalem that comes down from heaven, shining and adorned like a bride wearing exquisite jewellery, where those who reign with Christ will live (Revelation 21:9-21).

To learn more about the Kingdom of God, please request or download our booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

God will dwell with us on earth

On the current trajectory of strife and conflict, humanity will likely not be afforded adequate time to attempt to become a space-faring civilisation. Correct biblical interpretation shows that heaven is not the destination for anyone who has died, with the sole exception of Jesus

Christ. When He returns, those who are called and endure in this life will be raised or changed to spirit beings. Those not called now will be given an opportunity to learn God's plan of salvation during a later period of judgement. Our Heavenly Father longs for everyone to willingly choose Him and His way of life.

Mankind's "forever home" is neither in space nor in heaven. Although we will, no doubt, venture throughout the universe, it has been God's intention since before creation, through the days of Moses and ancient Israel, to dwell forever with His spirit-born family on a renewed earth in New Jerusalem.

Mark Mirigian

Our sense of urgency must exceed Satan's

With the signs of the times pointing to the end of this age sooner rather than later, our adversary knows his time is short. We, too, must zealously prepare for Christ's return.

Our adventure in Holland had been packed with fun and laughter, laced with a youthful disregard for responsibility. Five of our number urged us along towards our return ferry, setting the pace; the remaining five of us were determined to hang back and enjoy every last moment of our trip.

Our hearts sank as we watched our ferry home sail into the sunset without us. We had free tickets for the sailing that had just departed, leaving us on the quayside at the Hook of Holland. Our other five colleagues were safely ensconced on board.

We enquired about alternative sailings, but despite our protestations we were not allowed to board any of the Dutch vessels also plying the route. We had all run out of money (this was before the days of credit cards, or mobile phones) and the next British Rail boat for which our tickets were valid was an interminably distant thirty-six hours away.

Cold, tired and hungry, the only alternative was to shelter in draughty waiting rooms trying to stay warm. Hunger and panic had replaced the fun and laughter. We had shown no urgency in reaching the port on time, and missing the boat left us feeling totally helpless.



Hook of Holland quayside

Shutterstock

I shudder when I recount this experience; it puts one in mind of Matthew 25, the story of the wise and foolish virgins. We must all ensure that we are among the wise when the time comes. The way to do this is to develop a sense of urgency in our lives now.

Time is short

With all the "signs of the times" pointing to the im-

minent end of this age, our adversary Satan knows he has limited time before Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who has qualified to replace him, returns to take over rulership of this earth. The devil's priority and greatest desire is to destroy God's work and His people. "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time" (Revelation 12:7-12).

Satan's great pride is described in the book of Isaiah: "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High'" (Isaiah 14:12-14).

Satan is angry and urgent in his efforts to disrupt and destroy the work to which God has called us.

Lucifer was not content with the rulership of the earth that had been granted to him (Luke 4:5-6). Instead he wanted to be comparable to God – "like the Most High".

In contrast Jesus, who saw "Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18), was humble and expected His followers to practise humility too. On one occasion, the disciples came to Him and asked, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" In response, "Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven'" (Matthew 18:1-3).

The surprising answer to His disciples was that they needed to be converted – open, truthful, trusting and humble just as an innocent little child is, the very opposite of Satan's mind set.

An example of humility

There is an example of these contrasting attitudes given by Jesus Christ in a parable found in Luke 18:10-14: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell

you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The superior, proud, self-righteous attitude typical of Satan was displayed by the Pharisee. The humble child-like, godly attitude was displayed by the tax collector (or sinner). It is the simple, child-like, trusting approach of the tax collector that God wants to see in His children.

Be ready

We know that Satan understands that his time is short. He is angry and urgent in his efforts to disrupt and destroy the work to which God has called us. We must have an even greater sense of urgency in finishing our part in the work of preaching the gospel and making the changes in our lives that we know must be made, overcoming sin while there is still time.

The task that God has given to His Church collectively is encapsulated for us in Isaiah 58:1: "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins."

People need to be told their sins, both on an individual level and on a national level. They need to be told how forgiveness is available to them. That is the task with which we have been entrusted, so that repentance and conversion can take place. Jesus Christ reinforced this after His resurrection (Luke 24:46-47). To learn more please request or download our booklet *Forgiveness Is Possible*.

A sense of urgency is required. Our five wise colleagues who caught the ferry home had encouraged us to "keep up, don't become distracted, it's further than you think." Jesus Christ similarly admonishes us in the book of Revelation: "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things that are written in it; for the time is near" (Revelation 1:3).

Again in Revelation 2:5 "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent."

Many scriptures exhort us to develop a sense of urgency in making ourselves ready (repentance) and doing our part in God's work (preaching the good news of God's coming Kingdom and how we can be part of it).

Fifty-five or so years ago I missed the boat. I don't want to make the same mistake again. Rather, the lesson is, be ready and doing. Jesus warned: "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matthew 24:44).

We must maintain our sense of urgency and be doing what God requires until His Son returns.

Frank Jarvis

From sinners to saints

“Saint” has come to mean someone church leaders deem a pre-eminently holy person whom they officially recognise as such after death.

The biblical definition is somewhat different.

To become a saint should be the aspiration of all those God calls to Himself. However, biblical saints are rather different from those portrayed in much of Christian literature and architecture today.

“Saint” in the New Testament is translated from the Greek word *hagios* meaning “sacred” (Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries G40). It includes being “morally blameless or religious, ceremonially consecrated”.

Scripture states that God is holy, “but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:15-16). As the ultimate example and source of holiness, God commands us to become holy as He is. Holiness includes both the idea of being separated for a special purpose and being pure and right – acting and thinking like God.

Church members called ‘saints’

It may come as a shock to some, but God calls all members of His Church to become holy – literally, to be both now, and in the future, “saints”. Consider the opening verses of first epistle to the Corinthians for example: “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all

Repentant sinners striving with the help of God’s Spirit in them to overcome the pulls of the flesh are termed “saints” in Scripture.

who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (1 Corinthians 1:2).

“Sanctified” can be translated as “set apart” (Jewish New Testament), or as the Amplified Bible expands it, “to those consecrated and purified and made holy.” All members of the Church of God are called to be “saints,” or God’s “own holy people” (New Living Translation). The many issues Paul describes in the Church of God in Corinth show that, although the brethren were far from achieving the goal of holiness, saints is what they were called and holiness remained their aim.

Paul continues this theme in Ephesians 4:11-12, where he explains that the task of church leaders is “the equip-

ping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” This shows that all Christians, not just leaders, are included in the term “saints.” Notice, too, that in Paul’s greeting the saints are listed separately from their leaders: “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Philippians 1:1). The leadership would be included but saints would predominantly comprise lay members.

Paul uses the same terminology to describe Christians at Ephesus (Ephesians 1:1), at Philippi (Philippians 1:1) and at Colosse (Colossians 1:1-2). In Philippians 4:22, he states that “All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar’s household.” Here we have an example of living saints in one church area greeting living saints in another.

If you are a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, have repented of your sins, been baptised and have received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands, then by biblical definition you are a saint. However, a saint must continue to obey God and remain faithful to the end “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12). Those set apart by God may slip up and sin periodically, but they are not habitual sinners.

Change of emphasis

So how did the meaning of the word “saint” change? According to the *New Bible Dictionary*, the apostles called all Christians saints, and “it continued to be used as a general designation at least up to the days of Irenaeus and Tertullian, though after that it degenerated in ecclesiastical usage into an honorific title” (second edition, pp. 487-488).

Thus, instead of being an aspiration for all those called by God, some tried to claim this title for themselves, or claimed the power to decide who was and who was not a saint. This is contrary to clear biblical teaching where all repentant sinners striving with the help of God’s Spirit within them to overcome the pulls of the flesh and of the world are termed “saints.”

To learn more please download or request our booklet *The Church Jesus Built*.

Perils of bad fruit

Good quality, ripe fruit produces delicious smoothies, whilst the fruits of God's Spirit form the building blocks of sound character.

As so often happens in Britain, this summer's brief heatwave ended in violent thunderstorms and a return to traditional cool, wet and windy weather. Fruit growers appreciate a certain amount of gentle summer rain to swell the produce ahead of harvesting but not so much that it spoils the crop by rot or blight.

Our Creator has provided a vast array of fruit for our enjoyment including raspberries, blueberries, nectarines, strawberries, peaches and bananas.

Disciples expected to produce spiritual fruit

In early summer, the Feast of Pentecost commemorates the establishment of the Church of God and the giving of the Holy Spirit – the essence of God that empowers us to obey His Commandments from the heart so we can bear fruit and become examples of God's way of life.

The fruit of God's Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering [patience], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Most of us manifest some of these virtues at times, but a person's character will never be consistently defined by these qualities until he or she has received God's Holy Spirit and puts them into practice.

Even upon receiving God's Spirit, imperfections remain. Endurance and perseverance are necessary to develop a spiritual harvest (Matthew 24:13). In order not to quench that Spirit, the very power that enables us to produce fruit, we must always endeavour to be active in stirring it up through daily prayer, regular Bible study, fasting and meditating on God's instructions. This is how we can eventually develop a Christ-like attitude in any given situation.

As free moral agents we have a choice. No matter the difficulties we face, we must ensure they do not affect our fruit-bearing capabilities. In a heart-to-heart discussion

with His disciples, Jesus imparted the following: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. . . Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing . . . By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples (John 15:1-5, 8).

Pruning is rarely painless, but is life-giving and necessary for greater fruitfulness. We must, therefore, exert effort to abide in Christ – it is a partnership.

Bad fruit discarded

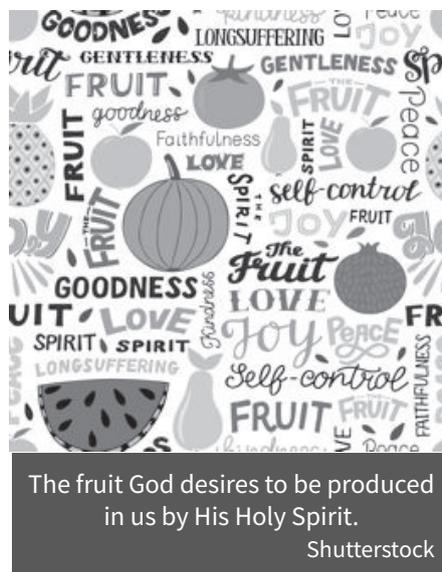
Towards the end of the Sermon on the Mount (recorded in Matthew chapters 5-7), Jesus warned His

disciples to beware of false prophets, those who fail to teach the doctrine He taught. He declared: "You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them" (Matthew 7:16-20).

Fresh, ripe, summer produce enhances various dishes, not just smoothies. Rotten or under-ripe fruit is discarded. With God's help we are

to become flavoursome through our words and actions. Producing abundant spiritual fruit will benefit us and our fellow human beings throughout the rest of our days and, after the resurrection, on into eternity.

Ademola Adesupo





Q Genesis 6:4 says: “. . . when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them.” Who were these “sons of God”?

FAQ

A Scholars disagree over the meaning of the reference to “the sons of God” in Genesis 6:1-4. Some read into these verses the idea that it refers to angelic beings marrying women and producing a race of giants. Christ explained that is impossible, teaching that angels don’t marry and, by implication, don’t produce children either (Luke 20:34-36).

Human beings are clearly the subject in Genesis 6 – not angels. God said, “My Spirit shall not strive *with man* forever, for he is indeed flesh” (verse 3) and, “*I will destroy man* whom I have created from the face of the earth” (verse 7, emphasis added throughout). The “giants” in verse 4 were simply people of giant stature. Similar people are spoken of in later times, most notably Goliath and his family.

How, then, can we understand Genesis 6:1-4? This is not referring to becoming spiritual sons of God through conversion, but to the fact that all people are sons of God by creation (Luke 3:38). The attitudes and actions of these

“sons of God” were so wrong that they provoked God into sending the Flood.

Halley’s Bible Handbook suggests these sons of God were the descendants of Adam and Eve’s son Seth. The latter, the Bible records, was a son in the image of Adam, who was made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26; 5:1-3).

Speaking of Seth’s descendants, Genesis 4:26 adds, “men began to call on the name of the Lord,” a phrase that could also be rendered, “to be called after the name of the Lord” – that is, the “sons of God.” If so, the women, “the daughters of men” whom these “sons of God” married, may have been the descendants of unrighteous Cain.

By marrying these women, the sons of Seth turned from God, leading Him to say that the entire world was then corrupt (Genesis 6:5-7, 12).

An alternative explanation is that “sons of God” in Genesis 6:2 should be rendered “sons of the gods” and refers to men who were called such not in worship of the Creator, but of pagan deities. Their marriages would have been in defiance of the Creator God, as they lived contrary to His will. Indeed, in light of God’s characterisation of society riddled with violence (verses 11, 13), it could be that such men forcibly took the women as wives.

Regardless of which explanation is accurate, the idea that a half-spirit, half-human race resulted from angels marrying women is not what the Bible teaches.

Q Genesis 4:17 says, “And Cain knew his wife.” Where did he find a wife?

FAQ

A The first clue is found in Genesis 5:4: “After he [Adam] begot Seth, the days of Adam were eight hundred years; and he had sons and daughters.” God had told Adam and Eve, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28). It was expected that Adam and Eve would have many sons and daughters.

By the time Cain and his brother Abel were old enough to raise livestock and harvest crops (Genesis 4:1-4), they must have had younger siblings. The Bible does not record the names of all the children that followed, merely highlighting major events such as the murder of Abel (verse 8).

It is noteworthy that many years later Abraham married his half-sister Sarah (Genesis 20:12).

So, the logical answer regarding Cain’s wife is that he must have married one of his sisters. That is what all the sons of Adam would have had to do. Later, laws banning close-kin marriages became necessary and, following the Exodus, during the days of Moses, God forbade such unions (Leviticus 18:9; 20:17).

Let the Bible Answer...

What does the Bible say about doctrine?

Hold to the doctrine taught by Scripture:
Deuteronomy 4:2; 8:3; 12:32; Isaiah 8:20; 66:1-2; Acts 2:41-42; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 2 John 10-11; Jude 3-4.

Avoid non-biblical teachings: Matthew 15:7-9;
Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Timothy 4:1-7; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; Hebrews 13:9; 2 Peter 1:16; 2 John 1:10-11.



Letters From Our Readers

Is God alive?

I sincerely appreciate your teaching. It would be nice to have something on how to know God is alive.

Reader in London

Editor's comment: We have sent you a copy of our booklet Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist? which may help you in your studies.

From our Bible Study Course students

I would like to thank you for the *Bible Study Course*, the magazines and booklets. We never stop learning until Jesus Christ comes and for all eternity. God bless.

Student in Sutton Coldfield

I would find a *Bible Study Course* of great interest and I am sure it would be of great help to me with my Bible studies.

Reader in Andover

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to receive the *Bible Study Course*. It's an amazing course. I am loving my studies.

Student in London

I am very interested to start the *Bible Study Course*. I have been looking into the Bible for many years and I find your explanations to be simple and easy to understand.

Student in Wales

I have thoroughly enjoyed this Bible course and have learned quite a lot from it. Just goes to show you are never too old to learn.

Student in Wales

I'm learning so much from this great study. I'm loving the word of God.

Student in Gloucester

Subscription renewals

Thank you for renewing my free subscription to *Beyond Today* magazine. I really appreciate it.

Reader in Brighton

I really enjoy this magazine. It helps me to understand what is happening in the world today.

Reader in London

I very much enjoy reading your magazine and it has really opened my eyes to worldly matters relevant to the scriptures.

Reader in Newquay

Please renew my subscription and also send me a copy of *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. I can see how things are happening as it says in the Bible.

Reader in Ossett

Thanks your for continuing to send this useful and interesting publication. Please accept this donation towards your work.

Reader in Southport

Ten Commandments

I have been looking for the Ten Commandments. Is this something you could help me with?

Reader in Mansfield

Editor's comment: Our booklet on the Ten Commandments has been sent to you.

How this work is supported

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