

BEYOND TODAY

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The ultimate intervention

The world is facing an uncertain future, but Jesus Christ will return to establish true peace. This will be a total abolition of war, not just a respite.

In the autumn of 1944, my brother, sister, and I were travelling through Berlin by train. We were coming from Eastern Europe, escaping the Russian army heading westward. In Berlin we saw a devastated landscape of the city, reminiscent of what we have witnessed recently in Ukraine.

As the train trundled through the destruction, I saw a man in the distance holding a brick in his hand amidst all the rubble, perhaps saying to himself: “Not again!” as he pondered the futility of war! There was a common belief among the German populace that if we had to fall into the hands of any invading army, let it not be the Russian army. Even then they had a reputation for ruthlessness.

The end of the Second World War in Europe didn't come for another nine months.

We live in a world engulfed by military conflict and devastating war – with the Russian threat of using nuclear weapons hanging over us. The former Soviet Union, renamed the Russian Federation after the collapse of the USSR, has a vast arsenal of nuclear weapons capable of destroying the world several times over.

A recurring theme

Late in the 19th century, the Russian author Leo Tolstoy penned *War and Peace*, arguably one of the best novels ever written. The fact that Tolstoy didn't entitle his book *Peace and War* shows us that it was war, not peace, that took centre stage in 19th century Europe that was Tolstoy's subject matter. In fact, four years after the novelist died, the world became involved in the First World War, the first global conflict.



Kyiv resident gazing out from a bombed-out apartment onto the surrounding destruction. War destroys lives and a lifetime's hopes and dreams. Shutterstock

As reflected in Tolstoy's novel, peace did not prevail over war in the 1812 conflict between Napoleon Bonaparte's France and Czarist Russia. Periods of war have always been more prevalent than times of peace, hence the title *War and Peace!*

Fast forward to the early 1960s, at the height of the Cold War, when U.S. President John F. Kennedy forced ships carrying Soviet missiles to Cuba to turn back. He warned that those missiles, were they to reach Cuba, would compromise the security of the United States.

I happened to be in America at that time visiting my mother and was travelling back from Milwaukee, in the state of Wisconsin, and saw hundreds of US military



Ruins of the Retroville Shopping Centre in Kyiv causing hardship for many. Shutterstock

vehicles heading down the Interstate highway preparing for potential nuclear war with the Soviet Union.

It was a frightening moment in mankind's history when two superpowers were facing each other in a possible suicidal war of mutual annihilation.

The question that everybody asked 60 years ago was whether it would ever come to that. Fortunately, it didn't, but the same question is now being asked in 2022 since Russia has threatened to use tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine. Although President Putin may have been bluffing, one can't be sure that nuclear weapons won't be used.

Jesus Christ promised in Matthew 24:22 that the world will not be totally destroyed in a nuclear war. God's intervention will prevent it, but the threat to use any weapons of mass destruction will increase. Referring to end-time events, Christ forecast a time when "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; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:21-22).

Here we see that God Almighty in the person of Jesus Christ will intervene and so prevent an all-out nuclear war taking place, understanding that such a scenario would contaminate the entire planet and destroy all human life. Verse 22 indicates that God will save the world "for the elect's sake." These individuals are described elsewhere as "the first fruits of His creatures" (James 1:18). There is a selection process involved in God's plan of salvation. Our booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* goes into this subject more thoroughly. Please request or download your free copy.

Prelude to Armageddon

There is an additional prophecy that focuses on the end time of man's rule on earth, indicating that a superpower other than Russia will initiate Armageddon, the gathering of armies in the plains in the north of Israel which will culminate in the final battle between God and man as Christ returns to the earth (Revelation 16:16). It's found in the last book of the Bible: "The ten horns which you saw [in a vision] are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour with the beast [power]. These are of one mind and they will give their power and authority to the beast. These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen and faithful" (Revelation 17:12-14).

These three verses refer to the end time of God's intervention in the affairs of man, a time when "the Lamb shall overcome them." We are shown that Christ shall be victorious in that final battle. It will be the seventh and final revival of the Roman Empire, as indicated in Revelation, chapter 14. This ten-nation superpower will challenge God's intervention. These ten kings or nations will surprisingly "give their power and authority to the beast" (Revelation 17:13).

Never before in the history of Europe have independent nations sacrificed their sovereignty to a higher power. Nevertheless, that is what the Bible indicates will occur to a much greater degree than has already happened within the European Union. Russia is not, however, destined to play a major role in the composition of this superpower. For further information on Russia and its role in end-time events, please request or download our booklet *Russia and Bible Prophecy*.

History still being fulfilled

The original Roman Empire came to an end in 476 AD. It was to have seven revivals altogether, of which six have been and one is yet to come. The first revival occurred when Emperor Justinian resurrected the old, civil Roman Empire that had fallen into decay and had been conquered by Germanic tribes prior to his reign. Of him it is said that “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*, William L Langer, p. 172). Langer refers to “the grandiose reconstruction of the Roman Empire” (p. 146). So, the concept of the Roman Empire continued.

Whilst the year 554 AD marked the first revival of the Christianised Roman Empire, others occurred during the reigns of Charlemagne, Otto the Great, Charles V, Napoleon and Hitler-Mussolini. The present European Union (EU) may be the precursor of the final revival mentioned in Revelation.

An attempt to destabilise Europe

Where does Putin’s Russia come into the equation? The leader of the Russian Federation seems eager to divide the West and create instability in Europe for his own gains. He may succeed.

Current European Union nations have already given up portions of their sovereignty to one central power but this may not in itself be sufficient to thwart President Putin’s aim to create instability. For 27 EU nations to retain a high degree of unity among its members without some breaking rank will be challenging. Extreme times may require extreme measures to be applied. The EU may shrink in number when difficult decisions need to be reached, probably to the ten nations mentioned in Revelation 17:12-13.

The world is facing an uncertain future. Unexpected events happen that surprise us. Are we witnessing the forerunner to the biblical beast power, the emergence of the final revival of the Roman Empire? Will President Putin succeed in destabilising Europe to the extent that the EU will be drastically reduced to ten nations?

In Isaiah 9:6 God’s firstborn Son is referred to as the Prince of Peace. Christ will be given authority from Almighty God to establish God’s kingdom on Earth. Jesus Christ qualified to be Prince of peace some 2000 years ago. It is He who will establish true peace on Earth once He returns – not just a respite from war, but its total abolition. All the indications point to this happening soon.

Are you ready for that momentous event of Christ’s Second Coming?

Gerhard Marx

Prepare to meet your God

As political tensions heighten in the world around us, as natural disasters loom and 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). In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve chose to rebel against God, and thus set the course for their offspring. As the inevitable outcome of that choice approaches with its final momentous fulfilment at “the end of the age,” it becomes 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 therefore encouraged to go “boldly to the throne of grace” in prayer (Hebrews 4:16), building a family relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Secondly, 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 also be said that survivors of the Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord will “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 failed to build a relationship with God based on trust and obedience will find themselves unprepared on the day Christ returns to the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:9-12; Zechariah 14:1-4).

Those who profess to be 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 (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 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). This is the purpose of the Church of God – to make disciples and to support them as Christ is formed in us all.

A Christian’s remit

The aim 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 the help of God’s Spirit within us, we are to put off the old self, our old ways, 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 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 appal us that we repent and throw ourselves upon God’s mercy, asking for the blood 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 within 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 say and not the “traditions of men” so often taught in their place. We need to compare our thoughts, opinions and actions with those of

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

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 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 instructed, “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; Romans 8:18).

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 begin building a strong relationship with God, or how to strengthen it, please request or download our free booklets *Transforming Your Life* and *Tools for Spiritual Growth*.

David Fenney

It's not about you

Religious, political or social viewpoints can all produce strong opinions. Holding such views is one thing, but expressing them, especially if done forcefully, can cause division.

Highly opinionated people tend to irritate those who disagree with them or attract those of a similar persuasion. As this world moves further away from God and His laws, Christians may find themselves in a quandary as to how to explain God's teachings, without unnecessarily causing offence or being labelled a fanatic.

Two simple methods can lessen the chance of conflict, thereby eliminating unnecessary offence or boosting our egos by expressing our personal views, or ideas acquired from others.

Be wary of stating your own opinion

Opinions, no matter how strongly held, are just that – opinions. If we do not argue with someone else's viewpoint, it does not mean that we agree or disagree with it. We are simply keeping our own counsel (something at

which Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II excels).

When opportunity presented itself, Jesus Christ did not offer an opinion of His own but quoted Scripture, deferring to the higher authority of God the Father. He did this in His

encounter with Satan

the devil as recorded in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Three times He responded to Satan's tempting words with Scripture, even in one case calmly correcting the devil's

attempt to pervert the meaning of edicts clearly set forth by God (Matthew 4:3-10).

It is better to explain the reasons we walk with God as He commanded (2 John 1:4). In this way we turn attention to His opinion and not our own. If people choose to disbelieve it, then that is between them and their Heavenly Father. If an opinion does not coincide with God's, it is of no importance or relevance anyway (Isaiah 55:8-9; 66:1-2).

There are passages of scripture where Jesus expressed what might at first sight look like His own opinion. For example, He used the phrases "But I tell you" and "I tell you the truth" in many places in the gospels. However, He was still quoting the Father's words (John 12:49-50; Hebrews 1:1-2).

Softly, softly

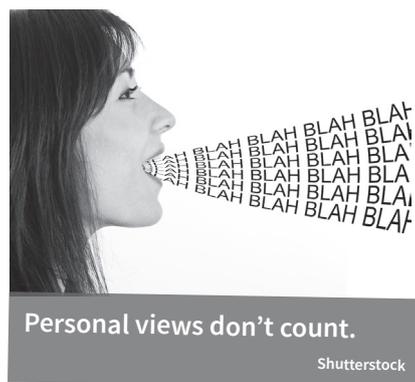
When sending twelve of His disciples out on a preaching tour, Jesus warned them, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

In the bird world, doves are softly spoken. The book of Proverbs tells us, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1). There is a way to respond to others using the fruit of God's Holy Spirit such as patience and self-control. We do not need to join in someone else's argument but should have our emotions under control.

We can avoid much conflict if we keep our own opinions, ideas and viewpoints to ourselves and express God's thoughts using His Word in a softly spoken manner.

To learn more please request or download our free booklet *Making Life Work*.

Alex Preston



From Sinners to Saints

“Saint” has come to mean an individual whom church leaders deem to be a pre-eminently holy person, whom they officially recognise as such after death. But how does the Bible define a saint?

Saint in the New Testament is translated from the Greek word *hagioi*, which is related to the Greek *hagios* meaning ‘holy’ (*New Bible Dictionary*, second edition, pp. 486-487).

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 designates all members of His Church to be holy – literally, to be both now and in the future, “saints.”

Consider the opening verses of the first epistle to the Corinthians for example, which proves this beyond dispute: “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all 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 the brethren were far from achieving the goal of holiness, yet saints is what they were called and their aim was to become like Christ.

Paul continues this theme in Ephesians 4:11-12 where he explains that the task of Church leaders is “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” This shows that all Christians, not just the leaders, are included in the term “saints”. 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). Both leaders and lay members would be included among the saints.

Paul uses the same terminology to describe Christians at Ephesus (Ephesians 1:1) and at Colosse (Colossians 1:1-2). In Philippians 4:22, he states, “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 by the laying on of hands after baptism, 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). Saints may slip up and sin, but they are not habitual sinners.

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 is and is not a saint.

Change of emphasis

So how did the meaning of the word saint become altered? 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 in them to overcome the pulls of the flesh and of the world are termed “saints”.

For more understanding, please download or request our booklet *The Church Jesus Built*.



is the author of moral evil, or sin, and such a sentiment is abhorrent to the general strain of the Bible, and to all just views of the character of a holy God” (notes on Isaiah 45:7).

Although for the present age God allows moral evil and sin, He does not create it. The rest of the Bible is replete with evidence of His goodness and His marvellous plans for mankind. James 1:17 assures us that, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (NIV). Satan is responsible for much of the evil of this present world. Moreover, people have brought calamity upon themselves by their own actions.

We recommend that you read our booklet *Why Does God Allow Suffering?* If you do not have a copy, we would be happy to send you one. Or you can find it online at the literature library of our web site at www.ucg.org.

See also ucg.org/beyond-today/beyond-today-daily/why-does-the-bible-say-god-created-evil.

Q Could you please explain Isaiah 45:7, which in the King James Version seems to say that God creates evil.

FAQ

A While the Hebrew word translated “evil” usually refers to unethical or immoral activity, it can also mean times of distress (Amos 6:3) and is sometimes contrasted with shalom (peace). The New International Version renders the passage in question: “I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster.” Similarly, the New Living Translation offers, “I am the one who creates the light and makes the darkness. I am the one who sends good times and bad times.”

The Bible commentary *Barnes’ Notes* records: “The parallelism here shows that this is not to be understood in the sense of all evil, but of that which is the opposite of peace and prosperity. That is, God directs judgements, disappointments, trials, and calamities; he has power to suffer the mad passions of people to rage, and to afflict nations with war; he presides over adverse as well as prosperous events. The passage does not prove that God

Q Can you please explain Ezekiel 18:4: “The soul that sins shall die.”

Reader in London

A The Old Testament Scriptures were written in Hebrew, where the word “soul” has been translated from “nephesh”, which merely means “living being” or “creature” as in Genesis 1:21 and 2:19.

In Genesis 9:4 the “soul” (here translated “life”) is said to reside in the blood. Christ was prophesied to pour “out His soul unto death” (Isaiah 53:12). That is, He would bleed to death.

At present, man is a *mortal soul* and when he dies he returns “to the dust of the earth” (Genesis 3:19) until either the first resurrection to eternal life and immortality that the apostle Paul described in 1 Corinthians 15:50-57, or the resurrection of judgement (Revelation 20:11-15).

For more information please request our free booklet *What Happens After Death?*

Q Please explain Genesis 2:17, which seems to suggest that Adam and Eve would die the very day they took of the forbidden fruit?

Reader in Lincoln

A In reference to this scripture, the Nelson Study Bible (NKJV) makes this statement on the words “shall surely die”: “These emphatic words are made of two forms of the verb meaning ‘to die.’ The point is not that the guilty person would drop dead right then, but that [death] would certainly happen – there is no escape (Hebrews 9:27).”

Let the Bible Answer...

Where does the Bible encourage us?

For encouragement in difficult times, many of the Psalms offer hope. For example, Psalms 1; 23-25; 91-94, 103. There are many more.

When facing death or trials: 1 Corinthians 15:22-24; 50-55; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Philippians 1:6.

The certainty of Christ’s glorious Kingdom: Isaiah 11; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Micah 4:1-5; Amos 9:13-15.

Looking ahead into eternity: Revelation 21 and 22.



Letters From Our Readers

Uplifting verses

I've read the Bible through to the end again and now am not sure where to look for something uplifting in these rather sad times. Could you recommend some scriptures please? Thank you again for all your articles. They at least remind me regularly that a time is coming when all will be put right and we will live as we were meant to live in a world where God the Father and Jesus are in control.

Reader in Cornwall

Editor's comment: A few suggestions are included in our Let the Bible Answer box on page 7. There are very many more. Why not make a list or write out your favourite verses?

Students' experiences

Lesson 12 was very difficult as we do not hear much about what is meant in the Bible in [the book of] Revelation. I will be glad to learn more in the future.

Student in London

I've really enjoyed this course. Some of it really got me thinking and second-guessing myself. Although I've now come to the end, I will continue to re-read [the lessons] and continue learning.

Student in London

I finished all the lessons. If I score 80% on this test could you please send me the certificate of completion? Thank you for giving me this opportunity to study the Bible more seriously. The *Beyond Today* magazine is helping me understand the events which are happening in our world

right now. Everything written in the Bible is coming true!

Student in London

Enlightening and current

Your literature is a God-send. Please continue to send mailings to my new address. Please also send me *Christ's Reign on Earth: What It Will Be Like*.

Reader in Leeds

Thank you for your wonderful magazine. As always it is up to date on current events worldwide. Please could you forward us a copy of *Russia and Bible Prophecy*?

Reader in Newton Abbot

I want to thank you for your very inspiring articles in the *Beyond Today* magazine. Please send me a copy of *Russia and Bible Prophecy*.

Reader in London

Thank you for the subscription. Your magazine is so informative and speaks so clearly about what the world has come to. Please send me *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

Reader in Brighton

Seeking further study

I am really pleased with your publications. They have given me the motivation to study the word of God with interest. I will soon be joining your online courses for a better knowledge and understanding.

Reader in Kent

Editor's comment: Many of our ABC classes can be listened to online at <https://abc.ucg.org/courses>.

How this work is supported

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