

BEYOND TODAY

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God speaks to us today

When we pray to God we are speaking to Him. How can we know when He is responding to us?

Religious deception is foretold for the end of the age. False gospels, prophets and even christs are prophesied to be prevalent, so it is vital we know how God really speaks to us. If we do, then we can avoid being deceived.

Over the centuries God has used numerous means by which to communicate with His human creation. This is particularly true of the Old Testament. Nonetheless, the most effective channel of communication today is by His Word, since the Bible is now a complete spiritual guide to teach us how to live.

Direct communication

In the Garden of Eden, God spoke to Adam and Eve personally as Genesis, chapter 3 shows. Later, in the days of Abraham and Sarah, God promised them a son who would become the progenitor of the Israelites (Genesis 17:1-7). Through this lineage the Saviour of mankind, the Messiah, would be born.

At the time of the Exodus God addressed Moses at the foot of Mt. Sinai from the midst of a burning bush that the flames did not consume (Exodus 3:1-7). In verses 14-15 God identified Himself to Moses as I AM WHO I AM, best translated as “the Eternal” or “Ever-living One.”

Compilation of the Old Testament began under Moses at the time of the Exodus when the Ten Commandments were first inscribed on tablets of stone. Additional laws were written on durable animal skin called vellum.

In the days of the Old Testament prophets like Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah, God inspired them to speak

His words. During those times, God revealed Himself to the prophets primarily in visions, dreams and angelic messengers.

As we approach New Testament times we find an angel revealing news to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, then to Mary and her husband, Joseph, regarding the Messiah's birth (Luke 1:5-25, 26-38). Later, both the apostles Peter and Paul received messages from God by means of visions.

The Bible is now a complete spiritual guide to teach us how to live.

The teachings of Jesus in the Gospels and the writings of Paul and the other apostles, including the message of Revelation which Christ revealed to the apostle John late in the first century AD, completed the New Testament.

The writer of Hebrews affirms that “long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son . . .” (Hebrews 1:1-2, English Standard Version). Today we must look to the written word of God.

Words by which we must live

The Israelites were the only people in Old Testament times who were to be the carriers of God's inspired Word, to the exclusion of all other people. “You only have I known of all the families of the earth,” is what we read in Amos 3:2.

God’s Word – including both the Old and New Testaments – should be the sole source of divine revelation in guiding us spiritually. Among the world’s religions we see all too often borrowed beliefs and religious ambiguities. We see a belief system vastly different from the teaching of the Bible. Indeed in many ways they appear as counterfeits – poor copies of the original.

If we want God to “speak” to us, we need to accept His Word without adding to or taking away from it. Such an admonition is clearly stated in Deuteronomy 4:2: “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.”

As we learn and study more of the Bible, we find the answers we seek from the words of the scriptures coming into our minds. As Christ promised: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). Through God’s Holy Spirit, Christ lives in us and reminds us of all He taught.

It was Christ Himself who said that the commandments of

God are not to be replaced with the commandments of men, as He stated clearly in Matthew 15:9. “In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” In Christ’s three-and-a-half-year ministry He spoke with divine authority, as we read in Matthew 7:28-29: “And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”

Christ spoke thus because his teaching was based entirely on biblical principles and not on human traditions that don’t reflect the pure Word of God. On one occasion some Jewish officials were assigned to listen to what Jesus was saying and to apprehend Him. They reported back to the Pharisees and Scribes, saying, “No man ever spoke like this Man!” (John 7:46). There was no scribe, no Pharisee, nor Sadducee to whom was given such an accolade, such praise as was given to Jesus of Nazareth, who was the One who inspired the prophets. (To study the identity of

the pre-incarnate Christ please request or download our study aid *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.)

In our wish to have God answer our prayers, we need to ensure that we worship Him “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Accepting religious concepts based on the commandments of men, often with a pagan background, hinders us from worshipping God as we ought.

A guide book for posterity

At the time of the Exodus under Moses, God instructed him to record His divine laws for future generations. This was accomplished by writing God’s Word on scrolls of vellum leather (from sheep, goat or antelope). We read this in the Pentateuch (Deuteronomy 31:24-27): “So it was, when Moses had completed writing the words of this law in a book, when they were finished, that Moses com-

manded the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying: “Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there as a witness against you; for I know your rebellion and

your stiff neck. If today, while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against the LORD, then how much more after my death?”

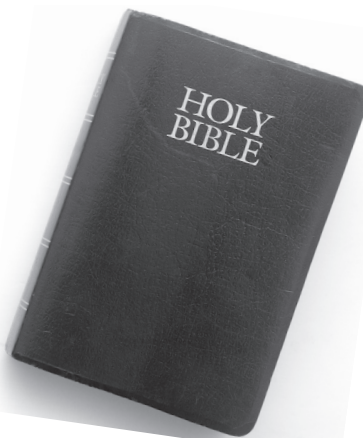
Centuries later the prophet Isaiah warned, “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). These contain God’s revelation that needs to be embraced in our worship rather than the vain and often harmful traditions, ideas and opinions of men.

The United Church of God accepts the authority of the Bible and rejects the doctrines of men, especially those with any pagan associations. We accept biblical authority in embracing a lifestyle that is pleasing to God.

It qualifies us to answer the fundamental questions our readers ask because our beliefs are backed up by the authority of the Bible, the very Word of God! That divine source is the effective means by which God speaks to us today.

Gerhard Marx

Beyond Today Supplement



Whose voice are you listening to?

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The purpose of prophecy

Properly discerned, it becomes a spur to turn one's life around rather than an end in itself.

Some 2000 years ago Jewish scholars were expecting a Messiah to come and make Judah the most prominent nation in the Middle East. They chose to believe that this Messiah would liberate them from the rule of the Roman Empire. Where did this idea come from?

It developed because they misapplied prophecy. Many prophets in the Old Testament foretold both Christ's first and second coming. However, the Jews overlooked the prophecies predicting a Messiah who would pour out His life's blood, causing His death (Isaiah 53:12). The Hebrew word translated "soul" is *nephesh* meaning a living, breathing creature. God elsewhere affirms that the life is in the blood (Leviticus 17:10-12). Jesus died when His blood was poured out for the sins of the world.

Prophecy provides otherwise unknown information

If we look back to the time when Jesus was born, we will see how prophecy was used by His contemporaries. When the wise men came to Judah looking for this prophesied King, they enquired of Herod where to search. From Micah 5:2 the priests and scribes were able to tell Herod that Bethlehem was the prophesied birthplace of

Prophecy is a means by which humans can be shown that God is in control.

the baby born to be the Saviour of the world.

The prophet Daniel knew of Jeremiah's prophecy of Judah's seventy-year captivity (Daniel 9:2). This captivity was punishment for disobedience of God's law. Even whilst Daniel was in that captivity he knew that the Jews would return to Jerusalem once the seventy years ended.

Earlier in Daniel's life, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream which worried him. Eventually, Daniel explained the dream and its interpretation. It was a message from God revealing four kingdoms of the world under the rule of men. The final empire, Rome, would exist in different forms until its eventual downfall by the returning Messiah who would set up God's Kingdom on earth. Represented by the stone being cut without hands, Messiah will

destroy the kingdoms of the world governed by men and rule instead (Daniel 2). To study these kingdoms further, please request or download our study aid *The Final Superpower*.

In Matthew 24, often called the Olivet prophecy since it was spoken on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Jesus and asked him when the temple would be destroyed and what the signs preceding this occurrence would be (verse 3). Jesus also explained what would happen before His return. To study this prophecy further please read our study aids *Seven Prophetic Signs Before Jesus Returns* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.

A warning and a call to repentance

Prophecy is also the way in which God shows what punishment will come upon a nation when it doesn't obey Him. Events may happen slowly at first, as in the days before the captivity of Judah. The Almighty declared that for a long time He had warned the people about their unrighteous behaviour.



Prophecy is not only about impending disaster but more importantly it is a call for a change of heart.

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If repentance and a change of heart do not happen, eventually the disaster occurs, often with frightening speed: "For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labour pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape" (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

After these prophecies have come to pass, people

may realise, as did the Jews in Ezra's time, that they need to repent of their lawless ways and abide by the laws of God. Thus, prophecy is a means by which humans can be shown that God is in control and that the way to salvation must start with personal repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

Expectation of a glorious future

For those who repent, prophecy provides hope. Seeing what God has prophesied coming to pass assures them that our Heavenly Father is true to His word. After the punishment of the wicked, the promised good will come.

This hope was held out to Judah whilst in captivity. "For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says

the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:10-13).

The same future hope will be available for all, whether we look to millennial prophecies such as Micah 4:1-5, or further ahead to the time when God the Father also comes to Earth (Revelation 21:1-7). For those who are willing to repent, there is a wonderful expectation beyond the distresses and turmoil of today.

To study this topic further please request or download our booklets *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

David Payne

The Holy City comes to Earth

God's autumn festivals look forward to Messiah's reign on earth and beyond to when the Father will take up residence on a new Earth.

Some will no doubt know, and may even have sung, songs such as *The Holy City*, in praise of the New Jerusalem. This pictures a time when God the Father will dwell on a new earth with Christ and the saints for all eternity. A description of that city, with its streets of gold and gates of pearls, can be found in Revelation 21:9-27.

God's Feast of Tabernacles, as identified in Leviticus 23:1-2, 33-44 is a glimpse and a foretaste of that "heavenly country" we seek (Hebrews 11:16). Like Abraham and many others of the faith who have gone before, we must remember that we remain "strangers and pilgrims on the earth." (Hebrews 11:13). The apostle Peter affirms, "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13).

The great autumn celebration concludes with the Eighth Day. (For more information on the Holy Days God ordained please request or download our booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for all Mankind*.) When this day has its future fulfilment all judgement will be completed, leaving only righteousness. The Holy City, New Jerusalem, will come down from heaven from God, prepared as a bride to meet her husband, to become the home for the saints.

The dwelling place of God will be with men. All sorrow, pain and even death will be gone. God will wipe away every tear from our eyes and make all things new,

leaving nothing of man's miserable legacy on the new earth (Revelation 21:1-7; 3:12).

What a great salvation awaits us and all of mankind willing to repent and follow God's instructions! That is the reality that is surely coming, and the wonderful blessing of God's feast days strengthens our assurance that it will one day be here.

Those feast days, like our physical life itself, last only a short while. When we come back to our usual routines and to our normal daily lives, with the Feast of Tabernacles behind us for another year, we must not forget the vision of what lies ahead. We must more purposefully look for that Holy City "which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10). If you remain faithful to the end, you will have your place in that city, for God says, "He who overcomes shall inherit all things" (Revelation 21:7).

Each year, God's Feast of Tabernacles pictures for Christ's followers the only true hope and expectation for humanity – the mighty intervention of God in human affairs. He will save man from his own destruction with the return of Jesus Christ to set up His everlasting Kingdom. How wonderful to understand the meaning of God's Holy Days as we look now "for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

Andy Diemer

Our secure hope

In an age of turmoil where traumatic events can occur with little or no warning, where should our focus be?

We live in very unsettling times. A real fear of nuclear war has been around since the sixties. Now, in addition, are worries about hyperinflation and economic collapse on a scale not witnessed since the 1930s. Societal breakdown and lawlessness, threats of further global pandemics, food, energy and water shortages deepen the foreboding.

As physical humans we can become concerned for our well-being. Some respond with measures such as buying silver and gold, stockpiling food or buying land in a perceived safe country, and building bunkers.

One is reminded of those who sought security in the Falkland Islands in the latter half of the twentieth century, only to find war came to their door in 1982. Ultimately their search for a peaceful haven was to no avail.

Physical safety may be an illusion

The prophet Isaiah spoke of a time when “People will flee to caves in the rocks and to holes in the ground from the fearful presence of the LORD and the splendour of His majesty, when He rises to shake the earth. In that day people will throw away to the moles and bats their idols of silver and idols of gold, which they made to worship. They will flee to caverns in the rocks and to the overhanging crags from the fearful presence of the LORD and the splendour of His majesty, when He rises to shake the earth” (Isaiah 2:19-21, New International Version). Neither silver nor gold, nor “holes in the ground” (perhaps a reference to bunkers) will help them in those days when God acts.

Before that time comes, God warns, “Stop trusting in mere humans, who have but a breath in their nostrils. Why hold them in esteem?” (verse 22).

Throughout Scripture God’s people are encouraged to be aware of, but not unduly concerned about, events happening around them. Jesus Himself advised, “And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet” (Matthew 24:6).

Seeking ways to save one’s life may prove unprofitable in the long run. Christ warned, “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a

man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Mark 8:35-37).

Focus on the spiritual

These verses provide an indication of where our focus should be. Firstly, our trust should be in Christ. The apostle Paul wrote, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we are killed all day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter . . . For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord’” (Romans 8:35-36, 38-39).

Secondly, whatever else may happen to us, disciples should be preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of

Our focus must remain on the matters that concern God and not on the physical.

God and how we can enter it through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Matthew 24:14 and Mark 13:10 are among many scriptures that confirm that as the task of Christ’s followers.

Thirdly, we need to ensure our relationship with the Father and Jesus Christ is on a firm footing. As James wrote: “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Satan will do all he can to try to distract us from the work Christ has given us and weaken its impact. Our focus must remain on the matters that concern God and not on the physical.

Our ultimate security lies with Christ and our Heavenly Father and not with the physical things of this life. God is looking out for us and even if we do lose our lives, He has our eternal future and well-being on His mind. We shouldn’t be overly concerned with preserving the physical.

Philip Perry

God loved us first

The British have a reputation for not showing strong emotions. In contrast God declares that He is love. How should we respond to that love?

Going through a bad patch during the late 1980s and 90s, I realised I did not love God. Perhaps more importantly, I did not feel loved by God. I knew the scriptures that proclaim God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). The apostle John also assures us that we should love Him "because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Somehow I wasn't sensing this as a reality. As humans, we tend to deal in feelings, although it is more beneficial to look at the facts. At its root, love is more choice and actions than mere emotion.

Creation – an act of love

Although many would deny that God created all things through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:9), we don't actually need faith to recognise God exists (Romans 1:19-20). Creation itself declares the existence of a Creator.

Human beings are the pinnacle of that creation, made in the very likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Thus created, we are capable of having a close, loving one-to-one relationship with both the Father and with our elder brother Jesus Christ. Sadly, that relationship was marred when the first man and woman chose to believe Satan's lies rather than follow God's instructions.

Adam and Eve set the pattern for their descendants. At this point all humankind were severed, not from God, who continued to have a relationship with some, but from eternal life (Genesis 3:22-24). The vast majority of humanity have lived and died without knowing the truth about eternal life.

Knowing that sooner or later humans would fall prey to Satan's deceptions, the Creator had a rescue plan. This would pay the death penalty for those who had sinned but wanted a relationship with Him restored (John 3:16-17).

Christ volunteered for this difficult task. Throughout His human life He had seen the horrors of crucifixion and knew what to expect. The Gospels hint at His fear and agony as the time approached (Luke 22:41-44). He was innocent and did not deserve to die. He could have walked away. His Father could have prevented it. God's love for all His human creation was such that They both saw it through (John 12:27).

Eternal life offered again

Now, upon repentance, we can figuratively have our

sentence of death for our sins nailed to Christ's cross, where the accusation against Him was pinned (Mark 15:25-26; Colossians 2:14). He was innocent, but His shed blood covers the guilty verdict against us, as long as we remain in a repentant relationship with Him and the Father.

We show our love for God by keeping His commandments (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3). This avoids further sin on our part and lessens the need for Christ's blood to atone for it. However, we are frail beings and if we do sin we need to repent quickly to maintain our relationship with the Father and Jesus Christ (1 John 2:1-3).

Since Christ's death and resurrection, God has made His Holy Spirit available to those who repent, are baptised and have hands laid on them by an elder. God's Spirit joins with our human spirit and begets us as the Father's very own children (Romans 8:16-17). At the second coming of Jesus Christ those begotten children will be born into the family of God, truly in His likeness, and brothers and sisters of Christ (1 John 3:1-2; Revelation 21:1-7).

The writer of Hebrews affirms, "For it was fitting for

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3).

Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Hebrews 2:10-11). The phrase "all of one" is variously translated "all of one father" or "all of one family."

We should learn to love God for creating us in His image with the purpose of becoming His literal children, for the sacrificial death of Christ, which restores our relationship with the Father and makes eternal life available to us and for the promise of the resurrection into His Family. To study our awesome destiny further please request or

(Continued on page 7)



Q I was brought up in the Catholic faith. Can I join another Christian church?
Reader in Redcar

A We read in the New Testament, in the gospel of John, chapter 17, verse 17 in reference to true worship of God, “Your Word is truth.” This statement was made by Christ, the Saviour of all mankind, shortly before His death. It reveals how important it is that we worship God in spirit and truth. Earlier in His ministry Christ told the Samaritan woman by the well near the village of Sychar: “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him” (John 4:23). Christ message is clear as is the reason, given in the next verse: “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth.”

So we see that the manner of our worship is very important, that religious beliefs and teachings must be based on God’s Word, the Holy Bible, rather than the traditions, opinions and interpretations of men, which are all too often not based on God’s Word.

The true Church of God will worship God Almighty and His Son, Jesus Christ, according to the Scriptures that He has provided, i.e. the Old and New Testaments. The

God first loved us

(Continued from page 6)

download our booklet *Why Were You Born?*

God didn’t wait for us to make the first move. Instead He loves us so much, that He had everything in place to bring His plan to fruition. Our response should be to love Him, with all our being and without reservation. I had to learn that lesson.

Michael Hurst

apostle Paul wrote that in them we find the “oracles of God” (Romans 3:2).

The significance of the biblical beliefs far outshines the notions of the children of men. Our beliefs should be based solely on the Bible and not on human ideas or traditions. That includes the biblical festivals of the LORD found in Scripture – seven festivals that reveal the plan of God for His creation. These are explained in our study aid *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for all Mankind*.

Christ and the early Church kept the seventh-day Sabbath which equates to our Friday evening until sunset Saturday. Please request our booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest* for further information.

The members of the Church Jesus inaugurated endeavour to live by every word of God including His commandments. They worship no idols and have no need of any intercessor with the Father except Jesus Christ (1 John 2:1-6). Their overseers teach from the scriptures and the flock can check the veracity of everything (Acts 17:10-12). They are familiar with the Word of God and can apply its principles to their lives.

The Church of God will also be preaching the Gospel of Christ’s soon-coming Kingdom and how we may enter it, through His sacrificial death and our repentance of and turning from sin.

If you find that the church you attend does not fulfil these parameters and more, then you need to find somewhere that does. God encourages those who desire to worship Him in truth to come out of any situation where that is not taught (2 Corinthians 6:16-18; Revelation 18:4).

You may also like to request *The Church Jesus Built*.

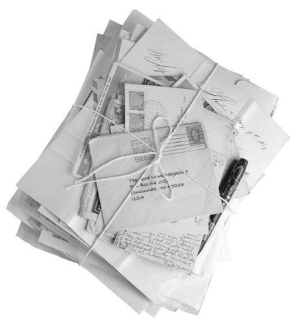
Let the Bible Answer...

How does God identify Himself in the Bible?

God identifies Himself as a Father: Matthew 17:5; 23:9; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18. He is preparing a marriage for His Son: Matthew 22:2.

Christ identifies Himself as a Son: John 1:1-2, 14, 17:1; Romans 1:1-4. He also identifies as a King: Matthew 19:28; John 18:37.

The pre-incarnate Christ was figuratively married to ancient Israel making Him a bridegroom: Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 3:20; 31:32. His death ended that marriage. Upon His return Christ will marry His Church, the bride: 2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 19:6-9.



Letters From Our Readers

Fascinating chronology

I have found the March/April issue of *Beyond Today* fascinating, especially the article on the biblical chronology of Christ's death and resurrection. Would it be possible to send me a couple more copies?

Reader in Kirriemuir

Editor's comment: A similar chart can also be found on page 41 of our booklet Jesus Christ: The Real Story and on page 29 of Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe? If you do not have copies you may like to order them from our usual address.

Gateway to knowledge

Thank you for opening the door to Bible study. Thank you for explaining truths that I need to understand. Thanks also for allowing me to learn at my own pace.

Student in Daventry

Thanks for the opportunity [to do your *Bible Study Course*]. I'm looking forward to starting it.

Student in Bromborough

Thank you for the magazine. I really needed more understanding. It has helped me understand the deeper meaning of the Bible.

I live in the UK where there are fewer churches than in Kenya where I come from. Thank you for reminding me and restoring my faith.

Reader in Bristol

Editor's comment: A list of United Church of God congregations in the British Isles, along with contact

details, can be found at ucg.org.uk/local-congregations/. Most congregations have a Zoom link for those unable to travel.

Literature – rich in truth

Thank you for your inspiring, straightforward messages, excellently written, revealing real truths from the word of God.

Reader in Montrose

Thank you for all your helpful booklets.

Reader in Wales

I find each and every magazine, Supplement and booklet absolutely outstanding in every way.

Reader in Northern Ireland

I really enjoy your subscription and would love to continue. Is there anything else you can send me? I would be very appreciative.

Reader in Northern Ireland

Editor's comment: All our booklets can be found on www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/booklets and can be ordered from the UK address at the bottom of the front page of this Supplement.

I have sent the form to continue to receive your magazines/publications. They have been helpful and useful to me to “study to show myself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

Reader in Waltham Abbey

How this work is supported

The outreach work of the United Church of God in the British Isles, including the production of this Supplement to *Beyond Today* magazine, is carried out by a small team of part-time employees, together with the efforts of unpaid volunteers.

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