

# BEYOND TODAY

The British & European Supplement

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## Millennia marred by discontent

*For thousands of years human beings have expressed dissatisfaction with their lot. Who's behind the recent rising tide of mayhem?*

A brief glance at the daily news illustrates that we are living in an age of discontent manifested in protests, demonstrations, marches and chanting. Whatever the issues may be, many are dissatisfied with their perceived lot in life and make their feelings clear. Often, they are intolerant of anyone who might express a different perspective.

Readers with long memories may recall the disruptions of the late 1970s, caused by disputes between the then Labour government and the trades unions. It became known as the “winter of discontent” – a phrase adapted from the opening line of Shakespeare’s *Richard III*. Journalists are once again referencing this quote to describe the present-day disaffection stirring within the nation.

A being with an even longer memory is behind it.

### Pride and envy caused Satan’s downfall

Satan is the architect of discontent. Dissatisfied with his position, he felt his talents were underused and wanted the same glory and authority that belonged to the Almighty who had created him (Isaiah 14:12-14). He was one of three mighty angelic beings – cherubs – who served at the very throne of God. Instead of serving, he instigated a rebellion that took one third of the angels with him (Ezekiel 28:12-15; Revelation 12:4). To study Satan’s origins further please request or download our study aid *Is There Really a Devil?*

Satan’s modus operandi in trying to turn everyone he can to sin is to promote discontent and a desire for instant gratification. The first temptation recorded in the Bible to which Adam and Eve succumbed was designed to foster in them a degree of distrust in God’s explicit instructions. If unheeded, their Creator had warned it would result in their deaths (Genesis 3:1-7).

***Satan’s modus operandi in trying to turn everyone he can to sin is to promote discontent and a desire for instant gratification.***

Matthew 4:1-4 explains how Satan tried a similar approach on Jesus whilst He was fasting. He first encouraged Him to break His fast. Then in an attempt to cast doubt on Christ’s divinity, he goaded him to take risks which would involve dangerous actions to prove whether God would intervene to save Him (verses 5-7). Finally, in a desperate bid to get Christ to worship him, Satan offered Him the world (verses 8-11). This latter was a ruse to pressure Christ to circumvent all the pain and suffering He was to endure and receive the kingdoms of the world from Satan, rather than from His Father in heaven.

## Dangers of discontent

Dissatisfaction in humans often stems from Satan's influence as he plays mind games with us. Trying to achieve even a perceived beneficial result in the wrong way does not usually end well. The apostle Paul describes Satan as "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2) whose disaffection is broadcast in various ways, one of which is wrong attitudes intended to promote sin. Thus, to indulge in discontent could be viewed as rebelling against God's will as Satan has done and continues to do.

Unhappiness is commonly associated with a lack of possessions or money, and arrogance often drives seeking greater position, authority or glory for oneself. Disciples of Jesus Christ must consider their place in the body of Christ and the providence of God throughout the varied

circumstances of life. Scripture informs us of the need to be satisfied with our lot and warns of potential pitfalls if pride, frustration and envy overshadow authentic and legitimate efforts for self-improvement.

The hostile resentment we see all around us is unlikely to moderate in the present age, so we need to be clear about the approach God would have His people follow in order to remain content whilst living in a disaffected world. Being at peace with what we possess is vital to maintaining a spiritually healthy mind and can help avoid disasters that dissatisfaction can produce.

As Christ instructs us in His model prayer, let's pray fervently for His return, when the source of thousands of years of discontent, the devil, will be locked away (Revelation 20:1-3).

David Fenney

# How to find happiness

*Insatiable desires for bigger, better or greater have at their root spiritual immaturity, since contentment is, ultimately, found only in God.*

**W**e've seen how feelings of resentment and a perception of being overlooked can result in committing nefarious acts, seeking personal gain without regard to others and often ignoring or deliberately breaking the law. There is another response.

Of himself, the apostle Paul explained: "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:11-13). Paul didn't feel the need to claim honour, power and privilege for himself. Instead he trusted in God.

Hebrews 13:5 states: "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"

Thankfulness counters ingratitude and covetousness. When we have consistently thankful hearts there is an

increase of joy, gladness and peace that will permeate our lives. Put simply, thanksgiving will chase away discontent. The believer who practises the discipline of a thankful heart has found the perfect and God-given antidote to greed and dissatisfaction.

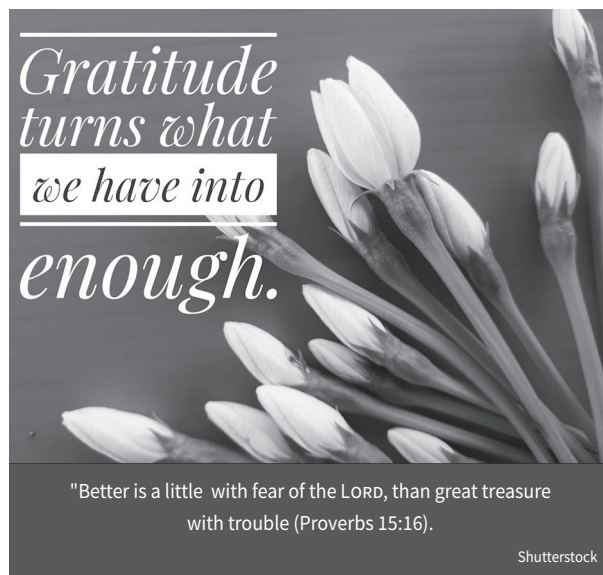
In 1 Timothy 6:6-10 Paul further explains: "Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we

shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition."

A contented spirit is an extremely important part of our calling and will provide protection from the worst excesses of today's society.

You may be interested in listening to the following sermon on joy from the *Beyond Today TV* presenter Gary Petty at [www.ucg.org/sermons/fruits-of-the-spirit-joy-0](http://www.ucg.org/sermons/fruits-of-the-spirit-joy-0).

Ademola Adesupo



# Biblical case study:

## Demise of a discontented prince

*Scripture is replete with examples of those who considered themselves hard done by. Taking matters into their own hands usually did not end well.*

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**T**he first two chapters of the First Book of Kings relate the ill-advised attempt of one of King David's sons to circumvent what God had ordained. "Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, 'I will be king'; and he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him . . . Then he conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest, and they followed and helped Adonijah. But Zadok the priest, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, Nathan the prophet, Shimei, Rei, and the mighty men who belonged to David were not with Adonijah" (1 Kings 1:5-8).

Adonijah was presumptuous, convinced he would be anointed the next king of Israel because Joab (the military commander) and Abiathar (a high-ranking priest) were supporting him. However the plot was discovered and instead Solomon was anointed king in his father's stead and with his father's blessing.

### The prince seeks mercy

"Now Adonijah was afraid of Solomon; so, he arose and went and took hold of the horns of the altar" (verse 50). This action seems to have been a way of preventing or delaying summary execution. The account continues: "And it was told Solomon, saying, 'Indeed Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon; for look, he has taken hold of the horns of the altar, saying, "Let King Solomon swear to me today that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.' Then Solomon said, 'If he proves himself a worthy man, not one hair of him shall fall to the earth; but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die'" (verses 51-52).

A common practice in ancient times was for a new ruler to strengthen his position by eliminating potential rivals. Instead Solomon pardoned Adonijah despite his obvious treachery. This act of great mercy came with the warning that the slightest inclination towards further rebellion would be met with immediate execution. Adonijah failed to take this admonition to heart as shown by his next move. He appears deluded in regard to the throne.

### Solomon's warning ignored

Upon King David's death, Adonijah lamented to

Solomon's mother Bathsheba, "You know that the kingdom was mine, and all Israel had set their expectations on me, that I should reign. However, the kingdom has been turned over, and has become my brother's; for it was his from the LORD" (1 Kings 2:15). As the oldest living son of David, customs of the time would consider Adonijah heir to the throne. However, God determined who the next king of Israel would be and Adonijah knew this.

Not content with his circumstances, Adonijah asked Bathsheba to petition the king for his father's last concubine, who was still a virgin, to be his wife (1 Kings 1:1-4; 1 Kings 2:16-22). Marrying King David's widow would strengthen Adonijah's hand in any future power play with regard to the throne. A king's widow could only marry another king. Recognising this Solomon declared: "May God do so to me, and more also, if Adonijah has not spoken this word against his own life! Now therefore, as the Lord lives, who has confirmed me and set me on the throne of David my father, and who has established a house for me, as He promised, Adonijah shall be put to death today!"

So King Solomon had Adonijah executed (verses 23-25).

### More disasters born of discontent

After Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, their firstborn son Cain murdered his younger sibling because he was unhappy God had accepted Abel's offering but had refused his (Genesis 4:1-8).

Achan's discontent with God's instructions led to covetousness and sin wreaking destruction on his whole family (Joshua 7:1, 10-26).

Naaman, having followed God's instructions as relayed by the prophet Elisha on how to be healed of leprosy, subsequently offered Elisha gifts, which he refused. Gehazi, Elisha's servant, overheard what transpired, and decided to deceive Naaman, coveting the gifts for himself. This action brought sorrow to Gehazi and his descendants (2 Kings 5:1-27).

# Endure to the end

*The Almighty has a purpose in all we face in life.*

**D**uring a lifetime, numerous trials will befall us. Some are fairly short and may be easily resolved, whilst others may last many years and become wearisome. We might wish God would remove our burdens straight away, however the Almighty has a purpose for letting us face whatever we experience.

## Lessons to learn

In what is known as the Olivet Prophecy, Jesus Christ explained the events that would transpire at the end of the age, warning of a time when, “because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12). We are surely seeing that come to pass. He added: “But he who endures to the end shall be saved” (verse 13).

This reveals an expectation for us to persevere, living God’s way, of life, keeping His laws and growing in the love of Christ irrespective of events around us. The primary reason for this is that our Heavenly Father is creating a family. For God to grant eternal life to any human being, that individual must be converted, submitting wholeheartedly to His rule, and repenting when falling short.

Our Father knows what is required of each of us to attain the character needed to become like Christ (Galatians 4:19). Some may be more easily transformed into the image of Christ, whilst others may require further life-changing trials to reach that point. The apostle Paul explained: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29).

Often it is through trials, when we cry out to our Heavenly Father and seek His guidance, that we build a relationship with Him and enhance our faith in Him and Jesus Christ.

## A lifetime of endurance

Individuals can endure a variety of physical struggles just to stay alive. However, were our lives always blissful, trial-free and devoid of difficulties, what would be the test of our endurance and how could we build faith?

Holding fast to God’s laws, remaining honest and trustworthy, and avoiding the excesses of those becoming increasingly lawless will be no mean feat (2 Timothy 3:1-5, 13). The last days are prophesied to end up as violent as the days of Noah and Lot (Genesis 6:5-6; Luke 17:26-29). Clearly, we are to persevere in God’s ways through a time of increasing ungodliness and lawlessness, sighing and crying for the violence and abominations

done on earth (Ezekiel 9:4). We must focus on the offer of eternal life and never allow that goal to slip from our minds amidst the mayhem.

Christ continued His discourse with: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). Despite the violence around us, we must continue to preach a witness of why God will usher in His Kingdom and how one might enter it through repentance and the shed blood of Christ. Jesus will return to rescue the world from the annihilation of mankind (verses



Burnt out car set on fire and abandoned by joy rider.

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21-22). To learn more of the reality of God’s Kingdom, please request or download our booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

For Christ’s disciples, enduring to the end can mean until they die, or when Christ returns, whichever comes first. At His return, both groups will have their physical bodies transformed into spiritual (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). The apostle John calls this the first resurrection: “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6).

Let us keep enduring to the end of our physical lives by staying close to God, following His way of life and, in a genuine penitent attitude, acknowledging and accepting the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made on our behalf, to cover the death penalty we incurred because of our sins.

*David Riddell*



# Where is hell?

*Most people think of hell as a place of eternal torment for the souls of wicked people. Could a compassionate God really torture people forever?*

Jesus Christ asserted, “It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire – where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched’” (Mark 9:47-48). Here Jesus is quoting from Isaiah 66:24 but without an understanding of the word translated “hell fire,” this quotation can be misconstrued to give a totally misleading impression of what happens to the dead.

## What does happen to the wicked?

The Bible says that all die. In one of the most well-known verses in the Bible, Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The apostle Paul also makes a clear contrast between death and eternal life: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). The prophet Ezekiel confirms, “the soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4).

It was the serpent in the Garden of Eden who started the lie that man would not die – in other words that man had an immortal soul (Genesis 3:4). But the Bible shows that “the dead know nothing” (Ecclesiastes 9:5) and “sleep in the dust of the earth” to awake in the resurrection



Modern day photo of Gehenna Valley near the walls of the Old City in Jerusalem.

Shutterstock

(Daniel 12:2). In the first of these, faithful followers of Christ will rise to glory (Revelation 20:4-6). Those God has not yet called will be restored to physical life in the second resurrection to learn God’s ways and be judged on their response (Ezekiel 37:1-14; Revelation 20:11-15).

## Christ: Died with criminals; buried with the rich

*Prophecy identifies where Christ’s body would be laid.*

The prophet Isaiah when foretelling Christ’s sacrifice stated that “He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12). Although perfectly innocent, Jesus was crucified between two malefactors, flagrant violators of the law (Mark 15:27-28; Luke 23:33).

Isaiah 53 also says, “And they made His grave with the wicked – but with the rich at His death” (Isaiah 53:9). This can sound like a contradiction, but the first part denotes the initial assignment of a mass grave for executed criminals, usually the city rubbish dump called *gehenna*, whilst the latter part shows what actually

happened – that He was buried in the tomb of a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea, who made a special request of Pilate for his body (Matthew 27:57-60). Only God could have ordained all this, recording it centuries in advance and ensuring its fulfilment.

Thankfully, Jesus did not remain dead in the grave. Three days and three nights after His crucifixion and burial, He was resurrected from the dead and, after appearing to many people, ascended into heaven to sit at His Father’s right hand where He’ll remain until the appointed time. He’ll return as “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Revelation 19:16).

## Words for “hell”

The Bible uses four words that have been translated hell. *Sheol* (Hebrew) and *hades* (Greek) both refer to the grave where righteous people like Job, David, Hezekiah and even Christ knew they would go at death (Job 14:13; Psalm 88:3; Isaiah 38:10; Acts 2:27, 31).

*Tartaroo* (Greek) is only used once in the Bible, and concerns the place where fallen angels are restrained awaiting judgement (2 Peter 2:4; 1 Corinthians 6:3).

*Gehenna* is the Greek form of the Hebrew *Gai Hinnom*, meaning Valley of Hinnom. This area was just outside Jerusalem and in Jesus’ day was used as a refuse dump where the city’s rubbish and the bodies of criminals were burned up. Fires here burned constantly, fuelled by detritus and the dead bodies of animals and humans. The fire was not extinguished – it burned as long as there was fuel to keep it burning.

Jesus used this desolate and miserable place to represent the fate of unrepentant sinners. Notice that Jesus said the worm does not die, not that the people punished in hell fire do not die. The punishment is eternal, meaning that it is permanent and complete. This does not mean that the incorrigible are kept alive perpetually and tortured incessantly by a vengeful God.

Partially burned remains of the bodies in the original *gehenna*, the Valley of Hinnom, decomposed and were infested with maggots (the “worms” of Mark 9:48). Maggots are the larvae of flies. As those who have found such crea-

tures in their dustbins will testify, these eventually pupate and then hatch into flies. Swarming over the decaying refuse, they lay more eggs, thus keeping it continuously infested with maggots. In contrast to these larvae, the bodies of animals and people thrown into *gehenna* either decayed or were burned up, eventually being completely consumed. Similarly, the unrepentant will not be tormented forever. Quite the contrary, they will be annihilated in the lake of fire, referred to in Revelation 20:14. They will be as stubble and become ashes under the feet of the righteous (Malachi 4:1-3). Christ used *gehenna* to refer to what Revelation 20:10 and 14-15 call “the lake of fire,” which brings “the second death” – permanent death.

## *Gehenna* a Jewish concept

In contrast to Christ, the apostle Paul did not use the term *gehenna* when referring to the place of the dead. Instead he used the Greek word *hades* (grave). This is because the non-Jews to whom he was preaching in various parts of the Roman empire would not have known what *gehenna* meant. They had never seen it and were unfamiliar with that terminology.

God does not want anyone to end up in the lake of fire and will make sure everyone has a full chance for repentance (2 Peter 3:9). We pray that few will make the choice to reject that wonderful future God has to offer. For more understanding, please read our Bible study aids *What Happens After Death?* and *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*

# Halloween

*Harmless fun, or dabbling with demons?*

**M**any films and celebrations, such as Halloween, try to portray Satan and evil spirits as merely entertainment. In Britain, Bonfire Night used to take precedence over Halloween, but the latter has taken on a life of its own, today celebrated with extravagant parties alongside associated ghoulish costumes, decorations and themed foods. Participants even wish each other “Happy Halloween.”

Instead of resisting or opposing the devil, too many allow their minds to be filled with demonic thoughts, vicarious violent feelings and graphic visual imagery peddled in “adult” movies, games and other media. Alarmingly, children as young as six have been seen acting out aggressive scenes from computer games.

If we do not recognise our enemy for who he really is, how can we hope to withstand him? In a world so enor-

mously influenced by Satan, Christians would do well to heed James 4:7: “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

We need to guard our minds from his contrivances, wiles and deceits. The apostle Paul advised, “Whatever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

For more information on our adversary and how to resist him, please request or download our free booklet *Is There Really a Devil?* You may also like to view our *Beyond Today* television programme “Dabbling with Demons” at [www.ucg.org/beyond-today-program/satan/dabbling-demons](http://www.ucg.org/beyond-today-program/satan/dabbling-demons).



**Q** Can gambling damage me spiritually? Can it be a sin?

FAQ

**A** Sins are thoughts and actions that break God's law; acts which He instructs us to avoid, because they hurt our relationship either with Him or others. Millions surrender part of their wages each week hoping to win a fantasy life of ease and luxury but in light of God's Ten Commandments, can gambling be considered sinful?

Webster's Dictionary defines the verb "gamble" as "to play at any game of chance for money or other stakes." The laws of probability clearly show that to gamble is to lose, so most agree gambling is unwise and wasteful. This is especially so when a gambler misappropriates money intended to take care of the needs of his or her family. The apostle Paul wrote that if a Christian doesn't "provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8). This could be compared to stealing from his or her family, thus breaking the Eighth Commandment.

Furthermore, an attempt to win something for nothing, to "beat the odds," could be viewed as covetousness, thus breaking the Tenth Commandment. When we put greed, lust and self above God and His instructions, coveting also becomes idolatry and breaks the First Commandment (Colossians 3:5).

The apostle Paul lists a number of end-time behaviours which will be prevalent amongst individuals just before Christ's return. Many will have allowed money to become an idol in their lives: "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty,

lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Please download or request our booklet *The Ten Commandments* to understand how God expects us to live today.

**Q** Did Jesus have siblings, physical brothers and sisters?

*Question from the Internet*

**A** Yes, He did. When the Jews of Jesus' hometown of Nazareth heard Him speak, they were indignant. Matthew records their contempt for Him, born of familiarity: "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?" (Matthew 13:55-56).

Jesus' neighbours knew His family intimately. From their comments, we know that Mary had four other sons and at least two daughters. The Bible says "sisters" instead of "sister," so there were at least two. The Gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus was Mary's "firstborn" son (Luke 2:7). This is a different word from an "only son" (Luke 7:12; 9:38).

Note also that Christ's half-brother James became leader of the Jerusalem Church. The apostle Paul affirms: "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother" (Galatians 1:18-19). This reveals that Christ's formerly unbelieving brother was now an apostle (John 7:3-5).

Paul also records that the apostles and "the brothers of the Lord" travelled with their wives suggesting at least one other male sibling was also converted (1 Corinthians 9:5).

You might be interested in reading our booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.

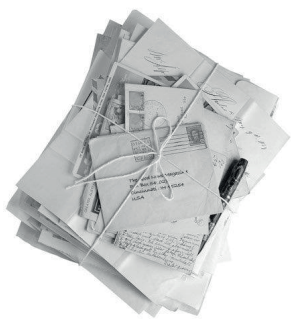
## Let the Bible answer...

### What does the Bible teach about revenge?

*We are not to avenge ourselves: Leviticus 19:18; Proverbs 20:22; Romans 12:17-19; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Peter 2:21-23; 3:9.*

*God will avenge His people: Psalm 54:4-5; 94:1; Luke 18:2-8.*





## Letters From Our Readers

### God's word trumps troubled world

I appreciated reading Darris McNeely's cover article "A Biblical Worldview in a Darkening Era" [*Beyond Today*, January-February 2024]. It gives hope when all seems lost.

Also in the same issue "Don't Quit: Keep Playing" seems to describe the losses in my life. My twin brother died two years ago, aged 79. I have been talking to his wife who is still grieving and sent her this article.

*Reader in Cardiff*

Your *Beyond Today* issues have been wonderfully refreshing. Thanks very much. Please renew my subscription.

*Reader in Colchester*

Please continue to send these publications. I find them both encouraging and challenging.

*Reader in Mansfield*

I appreciate all the booklets. They help me keep my mind on God's word

instead of all the worldly problems.

*Reader in London*

I take your *Beyond Today* magazine and look forward to each one you send me. Thank you for *Beyond Today* and all the people who put it together for us.

*Reader in Penzance*

Your magazine is biblically very sound and good in addressing big issues of our world, like NATO's fragility.

*Reader in Plymouth*

### Literature a blessing

As always I am truly blessed by all of your material, be it broadcasts, booklets, or *Beyond Today* magazine plus the UK Supplement.

*Reader in London*

I was pleased to see the package of booklets in my letterbox this morning. I look forward to reading them during the next 2-3 weeks alongside my Bible study.

I find your magazine *Beyond Today* very enlightening and stimulating. Please continue sending it to me. I also find your website most interesting and informative. I enjoy watching the videos by your presenters and reading your material online.

*From the Internet*

### Challenging mainstream beliefs

I have been reading your magazine for about 20 years. Please send me two copies of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. I want to challenge other Christians who aren't so inspired to see our Bible as European and world history.

*Reader in Southsea*

*Editor's comment: These have been sent to you.*

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Distribution of *Beyond Today* magazine, this Supplement and other literature of the United Church of God is funded by the generosity of Church members, co-workers and readers.

Jesus Christ instructed His disciples that as they had freely received they were to freely give (Matthew

10:8), so we supply our literature free of charge, making Christ's message available to all. Our gratitude goes to those who assist financially in this aspect of the Church's work.

Donations may be sent to *Beyond Today* or United Church of God, PO Box 705, Watford WD19 6FZ, United Kingdom; or online at [www.ucg.org.uk/donate.html](http://www.ucg.org.uk/donate.html) through PayPal. Donations can also be made directly to our bank account. Please contact us for details.

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