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Funerals have a way of grabbing you by the shoulders, forcing you to look in the mirror of life and ask, “What happens when I die?” Sometimes you’re shaken hard, especially when the memorial’s for someone younger than yourself. It can be unnerving to confront life’s reality that we have no guarantee how long it will last. We shrink from musing on our mortality, but sometimes find it more discomforting to consider our living—the lifestyle we’re pursuing.

I started this editorial in flight, returning from a close friend’s funeral. En route I had read Joel Meeker’s “By the Way” column—“Halt! This is the realm of death!” (p. 31)—a fascinating and inspiring read about the 6 to 7 million people interred beneath Paris.

It also illustrated to me how remarkably limited we are. Six to 7 million people! It’s a number so unreal one glosses over it without emotional impact; but just one close friend is so real you’re stirred deeply, even to tears. Big numbers and faraway figures move us only slightly, but we stop and ponder when touched up close and personally.

Fun or funeral—which is better?

Neither of us proposed to bookend this issue writing about death, but maybe the timing was providential. After all, we’re really writing about life. And hope. And truth.

Truth is, as we heard at the funeral, it is “better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting.” Solomon didn’t say it was more fun; he just said it was better. Given the choice between a party and a funeral, pick the funeral. Why?

“For that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth” (Ecclesiastes 7:2-4).

The house of mourning demands that we stop and consider deeply life’s meaning, our ways of living, where God fits into the picture, and whether there is any hopeful answer to humanity’s age-old question, “If a man dies, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14).

Life, hope and truth. Those issues define who and what you are! What you know about truth, what you embrace as hope, how you understand life—living now and the life to come—those elements ultimately define the essence of your existence.

Replacing cracked and foggy mirrors

Here at Discern we strive in every article to give insight into God and His Word in hope that it will inspire your direction in life—showing how to live now and how to live eternally!

For example, when you read “Beyond Repair: 3 Things Too Broken for Us to Fix” (p. 14), you’ll get a stark look at some of life’s unsolvable problems ... and how God promises to solve them.

In another article, the fifth in the proof of the Bible series, you’ll see another building block of evidence verifying the dependability of God’s Word.

Why is this type of content so important? Well, remember that mirror of life mentioned in the first paragraph? Without the knowledge of God, we’re left only with the cracked and foggy mirror of human ideas about death and all the other really important issues of life.

But by putting death in the light of God’s Word, we in mourning’s house that day saw the future clearly, gained comfort and, hopefully, took to heart the importance of living in a godly manner. Death is arguably the biggest thing humans can’t fix; but God can and will. He can fix your life too!

Clyde Kilough
Editor
@CKilough
Jesus told us to “watch” (Luke 21:36), and this section is designed to touch on an array of interesting and important factors that may have prophetic significance. For more background on what to watch, see our article “Five Prophetic Trends to Watch” and our “Insights Into News and Prophecy” blog.

“I’d say the war with China will probably take place in the next 10 years.”

—PROFESSOR JOSEPH SIRACUSSA, deputy dean of global studies at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, commenting on rising tensions between China and the United States in the South China Sea and China’s tests of hypersonic glide vehicles that can carry nuclear weapons (News.com.au).

**Why Eastern Europe’s Austerity Didn’t Make Them Feel Sorry for Greece**

Several Eastern European members of the European Union showed little sympathy for Greece’s demands for lifting of austerity measures. They had endured hardships as bad or worse than Greece’s, yet had avoided bailouts and returned to growth. Some of the smaller, poorer EU countries became “vigilantes for rules they consider the Greeks to be flagrantly violating,” according to The Economist.

“Greece’s recession has been brutal, thanks in part to the austerity imposed by its creditors. But its tales of hardship fall on deaf ears in countries like Slovakia, where GDP per head is 85% of Greece’s and pensioners live on far less.”

**56%**

Percent of American adults who are concerned that religious freedom will become more restricted in the next five years. Concern is higher among those over the age of 40 (62 percent) compared to those under 40 (45 percent). Among practicing Christians, 74 percent are concerned, compared to only 29 percent of those listing no faith (Barna.org).

**Why Eastern Europe’s Austerity Didn’t Make Them Feel Sorry for Greece**

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“Greece’s recession has been brutal, thanks in part to the austerity imposed by its creditors. But its tales of hardship fall on deaf ears in countries like Slovakia, where GDP per head is 85% of Greece’s and pensioners live on far less.”

**81%**

Increase in number of people killed in terrorist attacks in 2014. Almost 33,000 died in the nearly 13,500 attacks, of which more than three-fifths were in five countries: Afghanistan, India, Iraq, Nigeria and Pakistan (The Week).

**59.5 million**

Number of refugees around the world by the end of 2014, according to the United Nations. This is the largest number since World War II, and more than half are children (The Week).
The tentacles of the death cult have extended even here.

—Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott, discussing the self-proclaimed Islamic State’s reach into Australia and Southeast Asia. IS says it wants to establish a province of its so-called caliphate in Southeast Asia (The Economist).

1 million
Number of new millionaires in China last year. China’s total of 4 million is second only to the United States’ 7 million millionaires (Christian Science Monitor).

15,765
Approximate number of nuclear weapons in the world among the eight declared nuclear states and Israel (which has not officially claimed to have nuclear weapons). Here are the estimates:

RUSSIA
7,500

UNITED STATES
7,200

FRANCE
300

CHINA
250

UNITED KINGDOM
215

PAKISTAN
100-120

INDIA
90-110

ISRAEL
80

NORTH KOREA
<10

Radical Shift in Moral Views
Gallup’s Values and Beliefs survey shows Americans’ rapid shift in what they consider morally acceptable.

The biggest change was in the public’s opinion of the acceptability of gay or lesbian relations. In 2001, 40 percent considered homosexual relations acceptable; by 2015 it had jumped to 63 percent.

“The public is now more accepting of sexual relations outside of marriage in general than at any point in the history of tracking these measures, including a 16-percentage-point increase in those saying that having a baby outside of marriage is morally acceptable, and a 15-point increase in the acceptability of sex between an unmarried man and woman. Clear majorities of Americans now say both are acceptable” (Gallup.com).

What does God say about these moral issues? See our Life, Hope & Truth articles “Seventh Commandment: You Shall Not Commit Adultery” and “Living Together Before Marriage.”

“Iraq, Iran, Syria, Yemen, Libya, others—these are some of the most complex and complicated issues that I’ve seen in my 35 years working on national security issues. So there are no easy solutions.”

—CIA Director John Brennan on Face the Nation.
There is so much bad news today, good news can seem unbelievable or at least overblown. But utopia is real—and it’s coming soon.
And that’s what Jesus Christ and those who have prepared to assist Him will provide.

**Crisis management**

In the aftermath of wars and disasters, many immediate needs must be cared for first. The starving and thirsty will be given healthy food and drink. Injuries will be tended to. Sanitation systems will be set up and agriculture restarted.

Everyone will come to see and know that God truly is “the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort” since His followers will “be able to comfort those who are in any trouble” with the comfort they have received from God (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

The refugees and survivors will learn to cast all their care on God for, as Peter wrote, “He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

God will fulfill both physical and spiritual thirst: “For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring” (Isaiah 44:3). He will bring people into a new and refreshing relationship with their Maker. And He will provide food and refuge and will save those “who are about to perish” (Isaiah 27:13; 25:4).

**Healing bodies and minds**

God will hear the cry of the hurting and will heal their wounds and bruises (Isaiah 30:19, 26). And He has even more incredible miracles planned.

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and tongue of the dumb sing” (Isaiah 35:5-6).

No injury or disability will be too difficult for the Creator of our eyes, ears, legs and tongues to heal.

**Curing human hearts**

But there is an even more important miracle that the survivors will need—even if they themselves don’t recognize it at first.

On the deepest level, all these other changes would be worthless if an even more fundamental change wasn’t part of God’s plan. So many times through human history we have experienced dreadful evils and recoiled for a time. But without an essential change to our heart of hearts, we have soon returned to the actions that led to trouble in the first place.

Thankfully everything else in God’s plan is designed to lead up to this very point. God is in the business of providing the kind of heart transplants we so desperately need.

“Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they
shall be My people, and I will be their God” (Ezekiel 11:19-20).

The way of peace

Instead of studying the way of war in military academies, people will learn and practice the way of peace. Consider this beautiful vision of that future peaceful Kingdom:

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’

“For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

“But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken” (Micah 4:1-4).

God’s ways—His laws—lead to real, lasting peace. God’s laws teach us how to show unselfish, godly love to everyone around us. This way of peace, which has eluded humanity for thousands of years, will finally be taught and practiced throughout the world. There will be no more fear and no more destruction.

All this will be only the beginning of a beautiful future beyond human imagination! Jesus Christ will truly establish the utopian world that humanity has always longed for.

“Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end” (Isaiah 9:7).

This is the best news ever!

What will you be doing when Jesus comes?

It almost seems too good to be true, but this promised kingdom of peace is coming. And God is currently training people to assist Jesus Christ in this intervention and transformation process.

What does He ask His followers to do to prepare for that time of good news?

Jesus pronounced a blessing on those whose “master, when he comes, will find so doing” (Matthew 24:46). What must we do now so that Christ will find us “so doing”?

• Pray. Jesus’ outline for prayer begins, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:9-10; learn more in our Life, Hope & Truth article “Thy Kingdom Come”).

• Repent and believe God’s promises. At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus said, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel [good news]” (Mark 1:15). To repent means to change—to put off the old ways that got humanity into this mess in the first place. Those who repent and believe are told to be baptized and receive the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit that allows us to grow to think and act more like God. Read more about this process of conversion in our free booklet Change Your Life!

• Put God's Kingdom and His laws first. “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33; learn more about these top priorities in our article “Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God”).

• Support the preaching of the good news. Jesus commissioned His Church to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Christ’s followers will want to help spread that message to prepare for Christ’s return.

• Practice the way of peace. In preparation for teaching others the way of peace, Christ’s followers must choose to live that way now. “The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever” (Isaiah 32:17). The Bible connects peace with righteousness and obeying God’s commandments of love (Psalm 119:165, 172; Romans 13:8-10). Study more about this in the article “The Way of Peace.”

Looking for and hastening the coming

When we understand how urgently this world needs Christ’s return and how wonderful the Kingdom of God will be, we will want it to come soon (2 Peter 3:12).


And we, with the apostle John, can fervently respond, “Even so, come Lord Jesus!” (verse 20).
Millions of people are feverishly preparing for the end of the world as we know it. Many of the fears are real. But is there a better way to prepare?

By Becky Sweat
In some ways, Geoff Miller lives like any other upwardly mobile suburbanite. He works as a software developer for an investment bank in downtown Chicago, commuting via rail from his home in the far north Chicago suburbs. His wife, Trish, works part-time as a physical therapist, in addition to running their two teenage daughters to sports activities and music lessons.

However, the Millers (who asked that their real names not be used) have some other pursuits that only a small circle of family and friends know about. Trish avidly stockpiles food and other supplies. Each week she cans and dehydrates large quantities of meats and produce, and shops at her local big-box store to buy jumbo-sized containers of nonperishable foods that she stores in their basement. Trish has also stashed away first-aid supplies, toiletries, water, batteries, charcoal and matches.

All told, the Millers are closing in on having food and supplies to last about one year.

Geoff has been busy renovating their home—installing security cameras, tempered glass windows, solar panels, an indoor hydroponic greenhouse and an electric fence around the perimeter of the property. He’s also purchased pistols and rifles for himself, his wife and their kids, and they practice their shooting skills weekly. “You have to be ready to protect yourself and what’s yours from looters,” Geoff says.

Recently, the couple purchased land in rural Wisconsin and had an underground bunker built on the property—their safe haven should they need to wait out a short-term threat or permanently leave the suburbs. There they have stored additional food, water, guns and ammunition. No one outside their immediate family knows where the bunker is located. “We won’t have room for anyone else, so we don’t want others knocking on the door when everything starts going down,” Geoff says.

**Preparing for survival**

The Millers are *doomsday preppers*—part of a growing movement of individuals who believe a catastrophic disaster or emergency, including the possible total breakdown of society, is likely to occur in the near future and are working feverishly to survive the aftermath.

A lot of preppers, like the Millers, keep their preparations quiet, so there are only estimates for how many people are involved in the movement. Tom Martin, founder of the American Preppers Network, says it’s generally believed there are 3 to 5 million preppers in the United States, plus millions more in other countries. “The preppers movement is a worldwide trend, and it’s getting larger all the time,” he says. “Anywhere there have been natural disasters, people are prepping more.”

The number of new businesses and websites catering to preppers is a good indicator of the momentum of the movement. And they are reporting rapid growth. For example, one reported a 708 percent explosion in revenues over the past three years! Shelter and bunker building is surging as well.

Thousands of survival blogs and websites exist, as well as dozens of magazines devoted to prepping. TV is spreading the word too. National Geographic Channel produces *Doomsday Preppers*, profiling different prepping households in every episode; and Discovery Channel’s *Doomsday Bunkers* follows a company that builds underground shelters for preppers.
What’s driving the movement?

Admittedly, the prepper movement is not a totally new phenomenon. There have always been people, often on the fringe of society, who feared and prepared for apocalyptic scenarios. “What’s different about the movement today is it has gone mainstream,” observes Mr. Martin. “There are preppers from all walks of life—people from every age, gender and socioeconomic level.”

He believes 9/11 was the turning point that really accelerated interest in prepping. Disasters like Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy or last year’s Ebola outbreak have added to the momentum. “Every time there’s a disease outbreak or natural disaster in the world, that fuels the prepping movement even more,” says Mr. Martin.

People prep for different reasons and to varying degrees. Most fall within one of two camps. The first is focused on regional disasters of some kind, natural or man-made. These preppers believe they need to be ready to “ride out the storm” for a period of time until life returns to normal.

The other camp is readying for all-out doomsday and “end of the world as we know it” scenarios. These are the so-called doomsday preppers. They’re convinced a catastrophe of world-changing proportions is looming, such as world economic collapse, the use of a weapon of mass destruction (nuclear, chemical or biological), a global superbug pandemic, an asteroid strike or comet collision, or electromagnetic pulses (EMPs) from a solar flare or nuclear detonation that would disable all electronics.

They’re prepping to survive not only the events, but the subsequent breakdown of societal infrastructure (transportation systems, roads, bridges, dams, utilities, hospitals, prisons, etc.), disruptions to the food supply, civil unrest and martial law.

It’s not surprising that preparing for these apocalyptic scenarios becomes their life focus.

The doomsday you can’t prep for physically

Without question we live in an increasingly uncertain and dangerous world. It makes sense to have some emergency provisions on hand in case of natural disasters, harsh weather, power outages or other difficult circumstances. “A certain amount of prepping for difficult times is always wise,” says Douglas Horchak, a minister with the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, in Dallas, Texas. “But the prepping that a lot of people today are pursuing isn’t going to save them from the doomsday that is coming!”

The Bible has long predicted an end-time scenario for which humanity will be desperately unprepared. “In fact, Jesus Himself told of a future time of ‘great tribulation’ that would take place—a
time unlike anything the world has ever seen," Mr. Horchak explains.

“Furthermore, despite being warned well in advance, Jesus said that time will come unexpectedly on the whole world, like a snare suddenly snapping. That’s the doomsday we ought to be prepping for, but the question is ‘how?'”

That unique preparation was, in fact, what Jesus stressed in His prophecy. “Therefore you also be ready,” we read in Matthew 24:44, “for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

How can one possibly be ready for the cataclysmic events surrounding His return? “The real key is what you’re truly preparing for. If you’re preparing for battle so you can defend your property, which many of the doomsday preppers are, that’s out of the realm of what God says we should be focused on. It’s only spiritual preparation that is going to ultimately save anyone,” Mr. Horchak emphasizes, citing Luke 21:36, where Jesus said, “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

“God has to be in the picture,” stresses Mr. Horchak. “When people start thinking about how bad this world is and how difficult things could get, if God isn’t in the picture, people are left to do nothing more than to deal with their fears on a physical basis. And when that happens, people become suspicious of each other, there is division and animosity, and it leaves tremendous amount of room for human nature to blossom—in a negative way.”

On the other hand, spiritual preppers stand confidently on the Bible’s many promises of protection to those who serve God. Nahum 1:7 says, “The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him” (see also Exodus 14:14 and Psalm 34:19).

“While there are steps we can and should take to be prepared for emergencies and stay safe, God makes it very clear He wants us to rely on Him,” says Mr. Horchak. “We are to look to God for guidance, not just during calamities, but always.”

Rather than trust in God, self-reliance is a main tenet of the doomsday prepping movement. Many doomsday preppers don’t want to have to depend on anyone else or any other institution—or God—to take care of them. They are determined to take care of themselves—and do it their own way.

**Spiritual preparation should be our focus**

There is no better way to prepare for prophesied turbulent times ahead than to develop a close relationship with God through prayer, Bible study, fasting, meditation and fellowship with other believers. James 4:8 promises that if we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us. He is the ultimate true security.

He likewise promises that we don’t have to cower in fear before the challenges of this world or to allow situations beyond our control to dominate our minds. As 2 Timothy 1:7 says, God gives us “a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (English Standard Version). Prepping for doomsday or fixating on catastrophe is not the attitude God has in mind for us. Rather, we can have hope and peace of mind, knowing that all things are in God’s hands.

“Truly, if we are preparing spiritually—which means striving for a close relationship with God—we have nothing to fear, because God protects those who are His,” Mr. Horchak concludes. “God is the only One who can provide protection from global calamity and catastrophes, and He is the only source of true security.”


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_Preparing for disaster_  
Doomsday preppers train themselves in self-defense and build bunkers, which are normally located 20 to 30 feet underground._
The ROOT of the PROBLEM

This script from our new video series highlights the meaning of the biblical festival of Atonement. This holy day unveils how our adversary will be vanquished.

No story is complete without a villain, and no villain is more nefarious, more cunning or more unabashedly evil than the adversary of God’s people—Satan the devil.

The Bible has many names for Satan. The adversary. The devil. The evil one. The accuser of our brethren. The prince of the power of the air. A roaring lion, the great dragon, the serpent of old who deceives the whole world.

The backstory

But he wasn’t always that way. Once, long ago, Satan was a beloved angel of God. His name, Heylel, often translated “Lucifer,” literally meant “light-bearer.” He was the shining one, the day star. God described him as “the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.” He was a leader among the angels and favored in the eyes of God.

And then pride destroyed everything.

According to the biblical account, Lucifer became enamored with his own beauty and his own wisdom, believing that he was every bit as qualified as God to rule the universe, and then began plotting to overthrow God.

It didn’t work, of course. But from that moment on, Lucifer became Satan. The light-bearer became the adversary. And since that time, Satan has been actively working to undermine God’s plan for the human race.

He was there in the garden, convincing Eve that the things God had forbidden were the things she really needed. And he’s been playing that game with humanity ever since, expertly rebranding sin to look appealing and desirable instead of the awful, destructive thing that it is. Satan knows that if he can keep the human race hooked on sin, he can keep us from God. In his twisted mind, that’s a victory.

Future fulfillment

And that’s why Atonement is so important. After Christ’s return to earth, Satan will be captured and bound. For a thousand years, humanity will have something it’s never had before—an existence without Satan operating behind the scenes, deceiving, pulling strings and perverting justice. The veil of deception that our enemy has cast over the entire world will be removed, and for the first time in a long time, the human race will see clearly.

No more question marks. No more debates over morality and ethics. No more stumbling blocks. The God of the universe will speak, and we will listen. At long last, the whole world will have the door opening to something it never knew it needed—a relationship with its Creator.

In observing the Day of Atonement today, Christians honor the biblical instruction to afflict their souls from sundown to sundown—that is, to go 24 hours without eating or drinking. This act of fasting, as it’s called, humbles us as we strive to achieve the ultimate “atonement,” a oneness between ourselves and God. Fasting also reminds us that as hungry as we might be for physical food, our need for spiritual food is even greater—and Atonement is the day that will allow a starving world to finally be fed.
BEYOND REPAIR

3 THINGS TOO BROKEN FOR US TO FIX

In spite of our unquenchable optimism, the solution to our brokenness is out of reach. It’s going to take far more than elbow grease to fix the mess we’ve made.

By Jeremy Lallier
IN MY EXPERIENCE, THERE ARE TWO DIFFERENT KINDS OF BROKEN.

There’s the kind of broken where the damage is largely superficial—where the only thing that’s really needed to get things back up and running is some tender loving care (and maybe some elbow grease). This is the kind of broken I prefer to encounter, because it’s fixable. Sure, it might mean getting your hands dirty or cracking open a manual, but it can be done.

The other kind of broken is a little less forgiving. This isn’t the kind of broken where you open the hood of your car only to find your engine has kicked the bucket. It’s the kind of broken where you open the hood of your car only to find everything is on fire and about to explode. The solution to the first scenario might be rebuilding your engine; the solution to the second is diving for cover and looking out for shrapnel.

**The world is broken**

Not many people are willing to argue that the world isn’t broken. The real debate is over what kind of broken we’re talking about. Ideally, it’s the first kind—the kind where, if we all just work hard and do our best, we can clean things up and get everything in tip-top shape. This is the world people tend to believe in when it comes time to elect leaders and officials—a world where we can get things right if we just get the right people into the right positions.

I don’t think we’re dealing with that kind of broken. I think we’re looking at the flaming innards of our combusting car and trying desperately to convince ourselves it’s not as bad as it looks.

But it is.

Maybe part of the problem is that we tend to talk in generalities. Sure, there are wars. Sure, there is moral relativism. Sure, there are genocides. Sure, there are riots and political unrest and poverty and corruption, but those are all so vague and intangible. They happen ... somewhere ... to some people. But what do those things even mean? They’re bad words that represent bad things, but they’re too fuzzy to mean anything significant.

So let’s talk specifics. Let’s talk nitty-gritty. Let’s talk about the uncomfortable things we like to ignore because, deep in our hearts, they make us wonder if we really can fix things.

Let’s talk about:

### 1. Terrorists kidnapping, torturing and raping children.

Thanks to an ever-growing laundry list of senseless atrocities and heartless killings, the Islamic State (often called ISIS or ISIL) has wormed its way into headline after depressing headline, so you might have missed the one published by Reuters on Feb. 4 of this year. The headline reads, “Islamic State Selling, Crucifying, Burying Children Alive in Iraq.”

I shouldn’t have to continue. I don’t want to continue. But I’m going to because something here is very broken, and we can’t afford to ignore it. The article goes on to explain that Islamic State militants are abducting children in Iraq—children of Yazidis, of Christians, of Sunnis, of Shiites, of anyone whose beliefs don’t mesh with their own—and then doing unspeakable things to those children.

They take girls and sell them at the markets as sex slaves. They take the mentally challenged and load them up with explosives and use them as unwitting suicide bombers. They take boys and use them as bomb makers or human shields during airstrikes. They take others and crucify them, behead them or bury them alive.

Children. These things are happening to children—defenseless, helpless children. Tell me, what’s the solution?

Some would (and will) go in with guns blazing to try and eradicate these monsters. But the Islamic State is built on a belief—the belief that an unending, bloody jihad against infidels is both pleasing to and demanded by their god. Stamping out the伊斯兰 State wouldn’t stamp out the belief; it would just create a vacuum for another group to take up the same mantle.

So what’s the solution?

### 2. Man wins an award for becoming a woman.

Let’s shift our focus to an entirely different arena: the recent media frenzy over the sex-change operation of former Olympic athlete Bruce Jenner. Jenner claims to identify as a woman; and after a slew of hormone injections and cosmetic surgeries, he now looks like a woman.

He isn’t one, of course. He’s a very confused man who has paid incredible amounts of money to have his body changed in radical, irreversible ways out of a genuine belief that he was born the wrong gender.

The loudest voices in the media and our American culture say that Jenner is a hero—that his decision to become his “authentic” self was brave and inspiring and praiseworthy. ESPN even selected Jenner as this year’s recipient of the Arthur Ashe Courage Award, reserved for those with “the
willingness to stand up for their beliefs no matter what the cost.”

The problem here is that Jenner and others like him are attempting to define reality based on how they feel. He doesn’t feel like a man, so he’s trying to change his gender. It’s a style of thinking that results in a relativistic sludge of opinions, every one of them equally important and valid. When right and wrong are determined on a case-by-case basis, we’ve created a world where facts mean nothing and feelings trump all other considerations.

So what’s the solution?

You might be wondering if a sex-change operation really belongs on a list that begins with the heartless killings of a terrorist organization. After all, if Jenner really is in the wrong, it’s only himself he’s hurting.

Is that true, though?

Doing what feels right instead of what God says is right has caused far more damage than just gender confusion. It’s responsible for the worst genocide the world has ever known, and here’s the really dark part: That genocide is still happening.

It’s called abortion; but unlike other genocides, it is legal in many countries and even celebrated.

In much of the so-called civilized world, it is acceptable for an expectant mother to pay a doctor to slice up her unborn child and then extract it, piece by bloody piece, from her womb. This is her right; this is her privilege. It is codified and protected by our legal systems, and it happens about 125,000 times every day throughout the world.

World War II spanned six years and claimed more than 50 million lives. Since 1980, more than 1.3 billion children have been aborted. Billion. With a “B.” These are children who, in many cases, had functioning hearts pumping blood through their tiny veins, who could make facial expressions and respond to things like touch and sound. As a race, we have convinced ourselves that these are not actual human lives; that if we can just get a knife or a pair of forceps into the uterus before the baby comes out, we’re merely performing a medical operation on a “blob of tissue.”

We are broken.

So what’s the solution?

Thy Kingdom come

There are other problems, of course. Venezuelans are buying toilet paper on the black market because their economy is falling to pieces. Americans are racking up astronomical debts that will become the responsibility of their children and grandchildren. The people of Burundi are in the throes of political instability thanks to corrupt elections. The list goes on and on, but the recurring theme is always this:

We’re broken, and we can’t fix it.

Thankfully, Someone else can. We may not have the solution, but Jesus Christ does. After His prophesied return to the earth, He will set the human race on the road toward true peace and prosperity (Isaiah 2:4)—a road that will lead to the establishment of God’s unfailing Kingdom here on earth.

But what about right now, in this moment? What does God want us doing in the middle of all this unfixable brokenness?

When Jesus taught His disciples the model prayer, the very first thing He instructed them to pray to God about was this:

“Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

That comes first. Top of the list. Not our own needs, not forgiveness for our sins, not even protection and deliverance from Satan.

God’s Kingdom. That’s what we’re told to pray for above all else. This is the coming future Kingdom where “God Himself will be with mankind and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:3-4).

We need this.

Praying for the Kingdom isn’t a formality. It isn’t some boilerplate we should dutifully stamp onto our prayers before getting to the more important stuff. Your needs, your sins, your safety—those things are important, and God wants you to talk to Him about them, but they don’t hold a candle to the world’s desperate need for the Kingdom of God.

Helpless boys and girls in Iraq need it. Confused men and women radically altering themselves in an attempt to feel whole need it. More than a billion children who died before ever seeing the light of day need it.

You need it. I need it.

We’re broken. This world is broken. The Kingdom of God is the only solution.

Read more about the Kingdom in our free booklet The Mystery of the Kingdom. D
The website 1001biblecontradictions.com says: "This website could just as well have been called 'Against fundamentalism.' My purpose is to expose a large number of contradictions and discrepancies in the Christian Bibles to disprove fundamentalist claims that every word in the Bible is true."

But is the Bible really filled with contradictions? Or will careful examination show a remarkable consistency despite all the odds against it?

So far, this series of articles has focused on sources outside the Bible. What about the Bible itself? This final article will focus on the internal evidence proving the consistency of Scripture. Skeptics will dismiss the use of the Bible to prove its own legitimacy, but when combined with the previous four proofs, the fact that the Bible as a collection of ancient documents is consistent in its message is further proof that it is indeed true.

Consistency against the odds

J. Philip Hyatt, a professor of the Old Testament at Vanderbilt University from 1944-1972, identified some of the challenges to maintaining the accuracy of the biblical text across the millennia:

“It should be obvious from this history of the text that a period of a thousand years or more elapsed between the completion of the latest book of the [Old Testament] and most of the [manuscripts] on which modern study is based. During this time the text was repeatedly copied and recopied by hand. When one thinks of the errors that may arise even with the use of modern typewriters and composing machines, it is not difficult to realize why errors arose in this repeated copying by hand. Errors could arise from failure to read a text properly, failure to hear correctly when manuscripts were written from dictation, fatigue, failure to understand what one was writing, and even sheer carelessness" (Encyclopedia Americana, Vol. 3, 1984, p. 658).

Our modern Bible has 66 books, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. These 66 books were written by more than 40 different authors from all walks of life—shepherds, farmers, tentmakers, physicians, fishermen, priests, prophets and kings—over a period of more than 1,500 years.

The Bible was written in three primary languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. But these were not always the languages spoken by the primary characters. For example, Jesus and His disciples most likely spoke Aramaic the majority of the time, but the Gospels were preserved in Greek.
In spite of all these obstacles—copyist errors, translation issues, different spoken vs. written language—the degree of continuity and consistency found in the Bible is actually quite remarkable.

This evidence backs up Jesus Christ’s declaration: “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

The apostle Paul also authoritatively referred to Old Testament passages many times, such as: “For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness’” (Romans 4:3).

Compared to other ancient classics
In spite of the number of authors and the volume of writing, the Bible, when it comes to internal agreement, exceeds what one could expect from any other ancient document.

Consider the example of the Iliad written by one author, Homer, sometime around 900 B.C. There are 643 known ancient copies of the Iliad, and the oldest dates from 400 B.C. But not a single copy is 100 percent in agreement with the others. On its website Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry rates the agreement among the copies of Homer’s Iliad as 95 percent.

The New Testament has been preserved in almost 6,000 known Greek manuscripts. The agreement among these manuscripts is rated as 99.5 percent. The degree of difference is extraordinarily small. “If the critics of the Bible dismiss the New Testament as reliable information, then they must also dismiss the reliability of the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Caesar, Homer” (CARM). The degree of difference in each case is greater in these ancient classics than in the ancient manuscripts composing the Bible.

Five ways of resolving alleged contradictions
The fact is that most of the alleged contradictions in the Bible are easily resolved, and those that remain may have more than one logical explanation. The answers primarily fall into five categories:

1. Copyist errors.
2. Translation errors—different words chosen by different translators.
3. Numerical issues, often resolved by simply checking the context for each entry.
4. The context of the passage.
5. The use of literary devices in the passage, as opposed to a real event.

For more on this, see our Life, Hope & Truth article “Contradictions in the Bible?”

Resolving alleged contradiction in the creation accounts
One example of an alleged contradiction and its resolution is the creation account recorded in Genesis 1 and 2. Critics claim that in Genesis 1:24-27 man is created after the animals. But in Genesis 2:18-19, it appears that man is created prior to the animals.

Actually, there is harmony between the two accounts without any contradiction. Chapter 1 and continuing through the first four verses of chapter 2 focuses on the order of the creation events. But then chapter 2 provides additional details for the events that occurred on day 6. Chapter 2 does not state that man was created before the animals. The account of creation in chapter 2
has to do with naming the animals—without addressing
the order of creation.

Genesis 1 mentions the creation of man as the last of a
series without providing a lot of details. In Genesis 2 man is
the center of interest and more details are given about him
and the circumstances surrounding his creation. In other
words, chapter 1 is an outline, a skeleton, if you will; and
chapter 2 provides details, or flesh for the skeleton. There is
no contradiction.

What about Peter’s triple denial?

Another alleged Bible contradiction is the account of
Peter’s triple denial of Christ in conjunction with the crow-
ing of a rooster. Skeptics charge that Mark’s account contra-
dicts the other Gospel accounts.

In this example you must read the text carefully to see
what is being said and what is not being said. You must also
allow for the possibility that the accounts are complemen-
tary before assuming they are contradictory.

The passages to examine are found in Matthew 26, Mark
14, Luke 22 and John 13. Interestingly this is one event that
appears in all four Gospels, all written at different times.
Matthew, Luke and John quote Jesus as saying that Peter
would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed. This
is found in Matthew 26:34; Luke 22:34; and John 13:38.

Mark writes: “Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you
that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice,
you will deny Me three times” (Mark 14:30).

In all four accounts we have the same number of denials
listed—three; but in Mark’s account the third denial comes
before the rooster has crowed for the second time. So which
is it—once or twice? Mark records that the first crowing of
the rooster occurred after Peter’s first denial, but the third
denial occurred before the rooster crowed, which is exactly
what we read in Matthew, Luke and John.

In this case one should not assume that there is a con-
tradiction because three of the Gospel writers mention one
crowing, while Mark mentions two. The truth is that Peter
denied Christ three times before the crowing of a rooster.
Matthew, Luke and John do not concern themselves with the
number of times the rooster crowed, but the fact that Peter’s
third denial came in advance of a crowing of a rooster. There
is no contradiction among the four accounts.

The challenging, true and life-changing Word of
God

It is certainly true that there are challenges in the bibli-
cal text, and because of these challenges some declare that
the Bible is filled with contradictions. But upon a deeper
study, the beauty, the complexity and the consistency of
the text says otherwise. It is a remarkable book. (See more
on this in our Life, Hope & Truth article “Who Wrote the
Bible?”)

Let’s go back to the beginning of this series and read 2
Timothy 3:16 again. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of
God.” The Greek word for the phrase by inspiration of God
is theopneustos, which literally means “God breathed.” Paul
explained to Timothy that the true author of the Bible is
none other than God Himself.

Is the Bible true? Absolutely, it is! In this series, we’ve
touched on five out of many proofs: 1. archaeology, 2. the
Dead Sea Scrolls, 3. secular history, 4. fulfilled prophecy and
5. the consistency of the text itself.

When reading the Bible, read it for what it says and not
what people claim it says! By doing so, you will discover the
truth of the Bible; and in that truth, you will discover a way
of life that is very different from what is taught today, even
among Christians.

Being a Christian is more than acknowledging Scrip-
ture—it is living by Scripture. The Bible is true, but that fact
alone will not make you a better person. Living by its pre-
cepts will! The Bible is the true Word of God!

We encourage you to download our free study guide
Seven Keys to Better Bible Study. D
While preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God, Jesus Christ encouraged people to “believe in the gospel.” What does this belief really entail?

By David Treybig

We, like Christ’s first-century disciples, are called to believe in the gospel.
As Jesus traveled the countryside of Judea, He taught people about the coming Kingdom of God. His message included two action steps to take in response to His gospel. The first step was to repent—the subject of the previous article in this series. We now come to the second step Jesus gave: “Believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

As we consider Jesus’ admonition, we need to understand that there are different levels of belief. We also need to know the level to which Christ was referring when He gave this instruction.

The lowest level of belief occurs when we come to understand something without letting it affect how we live. The demons have this kind of belief. They believe God exists but will not turn from their unrighteous conduct (James 2:19).

The kind of belief Jesus urges us to have is a commitment that is clearly demonstrated by the way we live. Jesus was asking the people of the first century—and us today—to comprehend His message, trust it and act accordingly.

John the Baptist, the one prophesied to prepare the way for Christ’s ministry, “came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light [Jesus], that all through him might believe” (John 1:7, emphasis added throughout). The kind of belief that John the Baptist preached was marked by repentance—changing one’s way of thinking and conduct (Matthew 3:2, 8). Furthermore, the expectation was that after someone repented, his or her belief would compel him or her to continue living righteously.

To “believe in the gospel,” as Jesus instructed us to do, includes having the knowledge that He is the prophesied Messiah, repenting of our sins and then continuing to live in obedience to God’s law. The belief Jesus advocated was not only a matter of knowledge.

Believing the gospel: an all-in commitment

While all four of the Gospel writers emphasize the importance of believing in Jesus Christ and the message He brought, Mark has an interesting way of emphasizing the magnitude of this act. Showing the all-encompassing nature of the required response, Mark recorded Jesus’ statement: “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” (Mark 8:35).

The point is that when we truly believe the gospel Jesus preached, our entire lives are devoted to this cause. Our purpose in this human life becomes one of preparing for our future life in God’s family and Kingdom.

In discussing the hardships disciples will experience when they fully commit their lives to God, Jesus explained, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My...”
sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mark 10:29-30).

The key concept we must note is that believing in the gospel is an all-in commitment. Our daily prayers should include praying for God's Kingdom to come (Matthew 6:10). Even though we may experience hardship and difficulties in obeying God, our entire lives—our hearts, minds and deeds—must be focused on responding to Him. As Christ so clearly stated, we must “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33).

When seeking God's Kingdom and living righteously become our priorities, God promises to provide for our physical necessities. As Christ added: “And all these things shall be added to you” (verse 33). For further study, see the LifeHopeandTruth.com articles “How to Pray” and “Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God.”

“Conveyed” into the Kingdom now

When we truly believe in the gospel Jesus preached, our destiny to be part of God's Kingdom is assured, assuming that we remain faithful to the calling we have been given. Inspired by God, who “calls those things which do not exist as though they did” (Romans 4:17), Paul wrote that “He [God, the Father] has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Colossians 1:13).

Other translations of the Greek word for “conveyed” in this passage include “translated” (King James Version) and “transferred” (English Standard Version). The meaning is that when we commit our lives to God and begin living as He instructs, our citizenship is transferred from a kingdom of this world to the Kingdom of God.

Even though we have not yet been changed from flesh and blood to spirit and must remain faithful to God's instructions in order to have our mortal bodies transformed, God already considers us members of His future family and Kingdom because we are voluntarily living by the laws of His Kingdom. From this perspective, “our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20); and like Paul and Timothy, we function as “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Your response to the Messiah’s message

In this series of articles on the Messiah’s message, we have now reviewed each of the four components that Jesus emphasized in preaching the gospel of the Kingdom: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). You must now decide whether you will respond to Jesus’ life-changing call.

Your Savior wants you to heed the invitation you have been given. God loves you. He loves the world and wants all to be saved (John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). God will not force you to respond, but He surely hopes that you will. This is the great purpose for your life and is the only path that leads to a fulfilling, joyful life forever.

It is critically important to fully respond to Christ’s teaching. We can’t just believe in Christ as the Messiah and not believe in living in accordance with God’s laws. As Christ stated: “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word” (John 14:23).

If you respond to Christ’s call, your life will change for the better (1 Timothy 4:8). (For more on responding to God’s call, study our free booklet Change Your Life!) You can become part of the Body of Christ, which has the commission of teaching “all things” that Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:19-20).

Heeding the Messiah’s message—the true, original, complete message of the Kingdom of God that Jesus preached—is vitally important to each of us. As John noted, “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine [teaching] of Christ does not have God” (2 John 1:9).

It is also important to note that Jesus said: “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). This gospel will be preached by those who respond to Jesus’ timeless call.

God’s purpose and plan will be fulfilled. The question for each of us is this: Will I truly, fully and completely believe in the gospel of the Kingdom?

We encourage you to believe Christ and to join us as we proclaim the same gospel of the Kingdom that our Messiah began preaching some 2,000 years ago. Remember Jesus’ sobering reminder: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).
Bill exercises three times a week, eats heart-healthy foods and watches his sugar intake. But all his efforts could be a waste of time if Bill doesn't stop neglecting a key area of his health: his emotions.

Bill is an angry man. He hates his job, hates his daily commute, hates that he's been passed over for promotion three times, etc. Yet most would not know that Bill is so angry. He gets his work done. He doesn't complain, at least not to his colleagues. But his wife often gets an earful of negativity every evening, and his kids have learned to avoid him.

Then there's Sue Ellen. She can't understand why she's been experiencing heart palpitations and facial tics lately. She thinks there may be something physically wrong with her, but her doctor says, no, it's just stress. She thinks: *It's true; I do worry a lot. Who doesn't?*

These two scenarios do not represent specific people, yet they depict normal circumstances in which people suffer from an unsuspected buildup of toxic emotions.

### The power of emotions

Emotions are essential to our well-being. They are, in fact, God-given. He has not given us *good* or *bad* emotions, however, but rather a wide range of feelings that all serve a purpose.

So when do emotions become toxic?

Most of us live in a very passive way. We drift along with the currents of life, experiencing highs and lows: the waves of fear, uncertainty and despair, as well as the surges of buoyancy that highlight times of joy and excitement.

*We're determined to keep our noses above water no matter what,* yet we internalize stress along the way. We
get used to the nagging headaches, knots in our stomach and the tension in our shoulders. We pop antacids, antidepressants and accept that disappointment, pain, fear, worry, resentment and depression are just a part of life.

But this kind of roller coaster living leaves us feeling a little wobbly, both inside and out, and can deplete us of both physical and psychological health. Consider these medical facts:

- There is a mind-body connection; how you feel on the inside affects you physically.
- Emotions stimulate the release of hormones into the body that, in turn, trigger the start of many diseases.
- Scientists have directly linked emotions to many illnesses, like cancer and heart disease (Don Colbert, M.D., Deadly Emotions, 2006, pp. xi-xii).

In his book, Dr. Colbert discusses how and why certain patients, when faced with an incurable disease, seem to shift their entire focus, reprioritize their lives and, in some cases, actually get better (p. x).

These people make conscious choices in that moment to stop dwelling on negative, painful experiences and instead focus on what really matters: God, family, forgiveness and things that bring them true peace and joy.

For further insight into choosing how we will respond to life, read “The Power of Choice: Complaining, Comfort and Contentment” on our Life, Hope & Truth website.

**Our power to choose**

Consider Viktor Frankl, a Jewish psychiatrist who survived one of the Nazi death camps of World War II. He continued to hold out in part because he came to see that there was a gap between what happened to him (the trigger) and his reaction to that trigger. In that gap lay the *freedom to choose*. It was his personal power to choose his response that defined him, not the horrifying events that were happening around and to him.

The same is true for us. One of the greatest gifts God has given us is the amazing ability to *choose how* we react to events around us via our thoughts, emotions and behaviors. Healthy thinking leads to greater emotional and physical well-being.

**How** can we react to situations in a healthier way? Here are four biblical keys:

1. **Pray to God about your worries and concerns.** You can cast “all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). His shoulders are much broader than yours, and He wants to help carry your burdens.

2. **Have an attitude of thanksgiving.** Focus on the blessings you have received, not negativity (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

3. **Try hard to encourage others.** Focusing on others takes our attention off our own problems and builds up others (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Proverbs 16:24).

4. **Turn off the noise!** To be spiritually and emotionally healthy, it’s important to focus on the important things in life—and minimize distractions (Matthew 6:25-34).

It’s time to stop drifting along, passively reacting to life’s stressors. God wants us to live joyfully, not suffer the effects of toxic emotions.

For further insight into the topic of emotions, read these past Life, Hope & Truth blog posts:

- Taming Our Emotions.
- When Emotions Become Dangerous: Working Through Guilt and Shame. **D**

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**THE IMPORTANCE OF A HEALTHY MIND**

By Peter Hawkins

In recent years scientists have been learning about the influences of one’s thinking and actions upon his or her health. Yet about 3,000 years ago, the book of Proverbs provided important principles for the well-being of both mind and body.

Notice how some of King Solomon’s wise proverbs show how our thoughts and deeds can affect our health.

**Living God’s way is healthy:**

“Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones” (Proverbs 3:7-8).

**Be kind rather than cruel:**

“The merciful man does good for his own soul, but he who is cruel troubles his own flesh” (11:17).

**Use your speech to encourage:**

“There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health” (12:18).

**Overcome fear and be positive:**

“Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad” (12:25).

**Set and achieve helpful goals:**

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life” (13:12).

**Be grateful, not jealous:**

“A sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones” (14:30).

**Provide a caring environment:**

“Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fattened calf with hatred” (15:17).

**Cheerfulness helps recovery:**

“A merry heart does good, like medicine, but the tongue of the wise dries the bones” (17:22).

**Always have hope:**

“The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness, but who can bear a broken spirit?” (18:14).

**Keep control or be defenseless:**

“Whoever has no rule over his own spirit [mind] is like a city broken down, without walls” (25:28).
The 20th century was undoubtedly the American century. But after seven decades serving as the world’s policeman, a day rarely passes now without another alarm sounding that the United States is in global retreat. Just two decades ago the United States was hailed as the world’s sole superpower; but with dizzying speed, several economic convulsions, the threat of terrorism, diplomatic blunders and moral degeneracy have the nation reverting to an isolationist mentality and on the verge of superpower suicide.

America’s downward trend and the economic and military ascension of numerous regional powers have become obvious to all but the willfully blind. A growing chorus of political pundits repeatedly addresses the topic.

“America’s Global Retreat” blares one headline from The Wall Street Journal, while the BBC asks about “The Decline of U.S. Power?” Best-selling books also paint a dismal future with titles like After America, America: Imagine a World Without Her and The Post-American World.

A forgotten key to national greatness

Whether you call it morale, will or national pride, this valuable component of greatness is bound to a country’s identity and purpose. America once had a national identity centered on a Judeo-Christian culture and a concept of American exceptionalism. It was tied to a purpose of actively promoting and defending freedom. This has slowly evaporated.

As America’s morals have departed from the biblical standards (including destruction of the family through adultery, out-of-wedlock births, abortion, homosexuality and illegal drug use, to name a few of the most prominent evils), its morale has also declined precipi-
tously. The Bible has a warning for nations that persist in breaking God’s laws: “I will break the pride of your power” (Leviticus 26:19).

A matter of perception

About half of Americans feel that U.S. power is waning and that it plays “a less important and powerful role as a world leader than it did a decade ago.” Among the young, this trend is even more pronounced. A paltry 15 percent of 18- to 29-year-old Americans believe that the United States is the greatest country in the world, according to the Pew Research Center in 2014, down from an already anemic 27 percent three years earlier.

Record numbers of Americans now believe that the U.S. should mind its own business internationally and want to reduce overseas military commitments.

The American people “have grown ever more convinced that the United States really is in decline... Little wonder then that much of the world today worries about American staying power” (Robert Kagan, “The Ambivalent Superpower,” Politico, Feb. 27, 2014).

“We are entering an era where American dominance on the seas, in the skies and in space—not to mention cyberspace—can no longer be taken for granted,” grimly acknowledged Chuck Hagel, the previous secretary of defense, as he announced a new round of budget cuts.

America’s formidable military strength is diminishing as precipitously as the nation’s pride. In the name of budgetary savings:

• Since 2012 the U.S. Army has dissolved 13 brigade combat teams—a drop of 80,000 active duty troops. The Pentagon announced 40,000 further troop cuts by 2018, shrinking the Army to 450,000, its smallest size since 1940 when Germany was conquering France.

• By some counts the U.S. Navy is at its smallest since World War I. While maintaining its congressionally mandated 11 aircraft carriers, only three of them—and just 35 percent of the entire Navy fleet, fewer than 100 ships—are actively deployed (Steve Cohen, “America’s Incredible Shrinking Navy,” Wall Street Journal, March 20, 2014).

• Plans to eliminate planes will make the U.S. Air Force the smallest and oldest since its inception in 1947. The average aircraft age is now more than 25 years old, and multiple upgrades or replacement programs have been scrapped or drastically reduced.

“Since the end of the cold war,” according to The Economist, “one simple geopolitical rule has endured: do not take on America. The country’s armed forces have been so well resourced and so technologically superior that it would be utterly foolish for any state to mount a direct challenge to the superpower or its allies. This rule still holds—
What America—and the world—really needs is to respond to God’s call for national and individual repentance. God’s Word offers hope to those who are willing to heed the warning.

but it is no longer quite as compelling as it once was. Although America still possesses by far the most capable armed forces in the world, the technological advantage that guarantees it can defeat any conceivable adversary is eroding quickly” (“Who’s Afraid of America?” June 13, 2015).

Economic decline affects everything

Military strength provides diplomatic leverage, which complements and magnifies other components of national power. But such leverage ultimately derives from the foundation of economic vitality. Drowning in massive federal debt with deteriorating credit-agency reports and repeated debt-ceiling crises, economic growth is slowly choking and could be on a downward spiral even as government entitlement programs are set to massively increase in the next few years.

Fiscal policy affects everything else, according to national security experts Elbridge Colby and Paul Lettow. “Among allies, adversaries, and swing states alike, U.S. fiscal policy is increasingly calling into question America’s ability to lead globally” (“Have We Hit Peak America?” Foreign Policy, June 3, 2014).

International perception of weakness

The cratering loss in strength and will is causing enormous global repercussions. “Perceptions shape actions,” notes foreign affairs columnist Bret Stephens. “Allies who doubt the credibility of American security guarantees, of its strength of will, will pursue their interests irrespective of Washington’s wishes or commands. Enemies who think they have nothing to fear from the United States will do as they please. ... American military power is becoming more of an over-the-horizon rumor than it is a visible and confident reality. For power to be believed it has to be seen” (America in Retreat, 2014, pp. 12, 220).

Despots around the world have taken note, leading to a steady increase in probing of U.S. power and will.

A Wall Street Journal editorial recognized that “China, Russia and Iran”—in addition to the rising Islamic State—are taking advantage of American retreat to assert political and (perhaps eventually) military dominance over their corners of the globe. They share a goal of reducing U.S. influence, bending neighbors to their political will, and ultimately using that regional base of power to diminish the global sway of Western democracies, especially the U.S.” (“Rise of the Regional Hegemons,” May 26, 2015).

A catch-22 phenomenon is now underway, as described by Nick Bryant in a BBC report. “The United States is no longer so keen to exert leadership in an increasingly messy world. Yet one of the reasons why the world has become so disorderly is because America is no longer so active in imposing order. Over the course of this century Washington has lost its fear factor. ... World leaders nowadays seem prepared to provoke the wrath of the White House, confident that it will never rain down on them” (July 10, 2015).

Even allies question the global commitment

Emboldening rivals and disheartening friendly nations, this perceived abandonment is spurring allies to look out for themselves. Persian Gulf states are arming themselves to fend off their enemies.

Policy makers in the European Union have noted with dismay the American administration’s provocative decisions to walk away from “non-binding” alliances, compelling them to confront their own long-term security outlook in a world in which Uncle Sam has chosen to take a vacation from leadership.

U.S. allies in East Asia face similar worries, as China aggressively builds militarized outposts in disputed international waters. Ravi Velloor, the foreign editor of Singapore’s Straits Times, echoed the thoughts and frustrations of many of America’s allies: “It’s one thing to have enormous power. It’s another thing to show you have the will to use it” (quoted by Robert Kagan).

Is America’s decline a foregone conclusion?

What America—and the world—really needs is to respond to God’s call for national and individual repentance. God’s Word offers hope to those who are willing to heed the warning. “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Will America turn from its ways before it is too late? We should pray fervently for a complete national repentance and seek individually to draw close to Him in humble repentance.

Be sure to also read the Life, Hope & Truth articles “What Is Going to Happen to America?” and “Why Is God Angry With America?”
One doctrine has launched thousands of Christian missionaries and even crusades throughout the world with the goal of getting as many people as possible to accept the name of Jesus Christ. It has also caused much worry and anxiety over the ultimate fate of many people. For some, this doctrine is even the reason they question the validity of Christianity.

This is the doctrine that now is the only day of salvation, or in other words, that those who die without accepting Jesus Christ are condemned to hell for eternity.

We do not question the sincerity of those who have been motivated to preach Christ because of this belief. But we must question whether this idea is actually what Christ taught.

Did Jesus Christ teach that those who don’t accept Him in this life—and those who are deceived by unbiblical forms of Christianity—are lost to hell forever?

QUESTIONS THAT MUST BE ANSWERED

Millions have read the Bible passages that declare the exclusivity of Christianity—the verses that tell us that Jesus Christ is the only path to salvation. And these scriptures are absolutely true!

Jesus Christ dogmatically stated: “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

The apostle Peter, speaking of Jesus Christ, proclaimed, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Many other scriptures reinforce this basic principle—you cannot be saved unless the Father calls you and you accept and follow Jesus Christ (John 3:36; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 5:12).

But here is the dilemma: What about all of those people who have not fulfilled the basic requirement of these scriptures? What about those who have lived far removed from ever even hearing the name of Jesus Christ? What about those who may have heard the name, but did not really understand Jesus or His message? What about all the children who have died?

Is that it? Have they missed their only chance—only to go to hell?

What about the scriptures that show God’s love, mercy, compassion and desire for mankind to be saved?

The Bible declares that “God is love” (1 John 4:8) and “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4, see also 2 Peter 3:9). The Bible’s most famous verse declares that “God so loved the world” (John 3:16).

Could a loving God sentence people to an eternity of torment for not having a chance to hear Jesus’ name? Imagine the millions of people throughout history who have lived and died in remote areas of this earth—for example, the aboriginal people of Australia, remote tribes in Africa and the Native Americans. Are these people all burning in hell because they just happened to be born at the wrong place, at the wrong time? What about people who lived before Jesus came to earth—and never even had contact with the God of the Bible?

JESUS, SODOM AND JUDGMENT

In Matthew 10 we read about Jesus’ instruction to His 12 apostles before they went out spreading His message. Within those instructions, Jesus made an important point that introduces us to the answer to these questions. After telling them what to do when people reject the gospel, He made this fascinating statement: “Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!” (verse 15).

Jesus referred to Sodom and Gomorrah, the infamous cities from Genesis 19 that God completely destroyed for
This life is all too fleeting, and we naturally want there to be something more. But how can we really know what happens beyond the great gulf of death? Is death just a terrifying reality to be feared, or are there hopeful, satisfying answers?

**THE LAST ENEMY**

What *Really* Happens After Death?

Learn the comforting and encouraging biblical truth about how God will defeat our mortal enemy and offer eternal life to all.

Download the free booklet from the Learning Center on LifeHopeandTruth.com
their moral depravity. He said that it will be more tolerable (or bearable) for the people of these ancient cities than for the people who would reject the apostles.

He did not say anything about going to hell or being lost forever. He essentially said that these people will rise in the same period of judgment, but that one group would be given more leniency.

That should make us stop and think. Maybe there is more to learn about what happens to non-Christians after death than you might have thought.

**JESUS ADDS MORE INSIGHT**

Jesus made similar statements that give us more insight into this coming judgment on non-Christians.

While speaking to Pharisees who were demanding a sign from Him, Jesus said: “The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here” (Matthew 12:41-42).

Christ was again speaking about the day of judgment, but not in the way it's popularly thought of. This judgment isn’t a quick condemnation. There will be ancient Assyrians from Nineveh, the queen of Sheba, Pharisees from Christ’s time, and those from Sodom and Gomorrah—all alive at the same time!

**THE DETAILS OF THIS JUDGMENT**

Jesus’ statements give us two small snapshots of individuals who will live again in the “day of judgment,” but few other details. When will these people live again? In what form will they live again? What will happen then?

Those answers are found in two biblical books devoted to prophecy: Revelation and Ezekiel.

**When?** Revelation 20 is one of the most important parts of the Bible because it reveals details about the sequence of events that will occur after the return of Jesus Christ. We read about Satan being bound for a thousand years immediately after Christ’s return (verses 1-3) and of the resurrection of the saints—Christ’s faithful servants throughout the ages (verses 4-6). Christ and His saints will rule for 1,000 years (commonly called the Millennium).

Then, after the Millennium, another group will be resurrected to life. This group is called “the rest of the dead” (verse 5).

**Who?** Verse 12 reveals who these people are: “I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God.” This will include the vast majority of those who have lived and died through the thousands of years of human history—all resurrected at the same time. The prophet Ezekiel was given a vision of this coming resurrection (Ezekiel 37:5-6), and he saw how God will give physical life back to what will turn out to be billions of people. Make sure you read his description and try to imagine what this will be like when human bodies will be reassembled and then resuscitated.

**What will happen?** After these people are given life, they will be given an opportunity to learn about God’s Word. We read, “And books were opened” (Revelation 20:12). The books (Greek biblion) refer to the books of the Bible. Those who were blinded to God’s truth before (Mark 4:11-12; Revelation 12:9) will then have the Bible opened to them—so they can truly understand it!

Revelation 20:12 then goes on to say, “Another book was opened, which is the Book of Life.” This represents the opportunity for eternal life being opened to all these people. This will be accomplished by God offering His Holy Spirit to billions of people (Ezekiel 37:14).

All of these people, the billions upon billions of them, will finally be able to understand the Bible, know and believe and obey Jesus Christ and have the opportunity to live forever.

This is the hope for all the people Christ mentioned—people like the queen of Sheba and the inhabitants of Sodom—and all the other people who have ever lived and not known the true God and His truth.

**AN INVITATION TO STUDY MORE**

This topic is huge. In fact, it’s literally one of the biggest topics there is! Last year, we published a 44-page booklet on this topic titled *The Last Enemy: What Really Happens After Death?* This booklet delves into scores of scriptures to show what really happens after we die and the great hope for every person who has ever lived.

We want to share that hope with you.

An ominous sign in the Paris catacombs sparked my thoughts about a much brighter future.

**FIVE STORIES BELOW GROUND LEVEL**

in the 14th arrondissement of Paris lurks an amazing if eerie history. Two thousand years ago quarries here provided limestone to build Lutetia, the Roman village that became Paris. Lengthening quarries later provided blocks to build the Cathedral of Notre Dame, the Louvre palace and the city walls.

**The Paris catacombs**

Just prior to the French Revolution, Paris was menaced by its overcrowded and insalubrious cemeteries. The decision was made to close them and transfer all the remains to a section of the quarries, which became the Paris catacombs. The transfer of the largest cemetery alone took two years.

Prominent people rest here, such as the writers Rabelais and La Fontaine. Victims of the guillotine, innocent and otherwise, were brought to the catacombs: the bones of Danton and Robespierre are here too. By the time the final transfer of remains occurred in 1859, between 6 and 7 million had found a final resting place in these tunnels, their bones arranged artistically, in places even whimsically. There is, for example, a large barrel, shaped from skulls and tibias.

**The realm of death**

Like all visitors, I was momentarily stopped by the ominous sign over the gate to the ossuary: *Arrête! C’est ici l’empire de la mort* (Halt! This is the realm of death). As I walked the half mile of the ossuary corridors, which occupy only a small section of the quarries, I was struck by the sheer numbers of those interred. It is difficult to conjure in one’s mind millions of individuals.

How would their lives have been during the Middle Ages, suffering the Black Death, facing barbarian invasions or under the Reign of Terror? So many people, so many personal histories!

**A happy ending**

Then I had a brighter thought: This macabre scene will one day become a place of light and joy.

One of the most encouraging lessons of the autumn festivals taught in the Bible is the coming general resurrection of the dead. Jesus promised, “The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth” (John 5:28-29). Those whose bones lie in the catacombs will live again. The cemeteries of all the world will empty. Even those who have disappeared completely will return.

Imagine the amazement of that hour, the jubilation, the embracing and kisses among families reunited, the tears of joy, the rushing return of hope for the future.

God has promised from ancient times that the story of humanity would have a happy ending:

“I will turn their mourning to joy, will comfort them, and make them rejoice rather than sorrow” (Jeremiah 31:13). Places that in this life have been associated with bereavement and sorrow will instead be forever remembered in the light of the resurrection; temporary torment finally giving way to elation eternal:

“He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces” (Isaiah 25:8).

What today is called the realm of death will be forever transformed into the realm of life.

Read more about this good news in our free booklet *The Last Enemy: What Really Happens After Death?*
Coming soon

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