

DECEMBER 2011-JANUARY 2012

THE

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# REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

## THE EU'S RELUCTANT PLAYER

*Is the Stage Set for Britain's Exit?*



# THE REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

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PHOTO: TED ALJIBE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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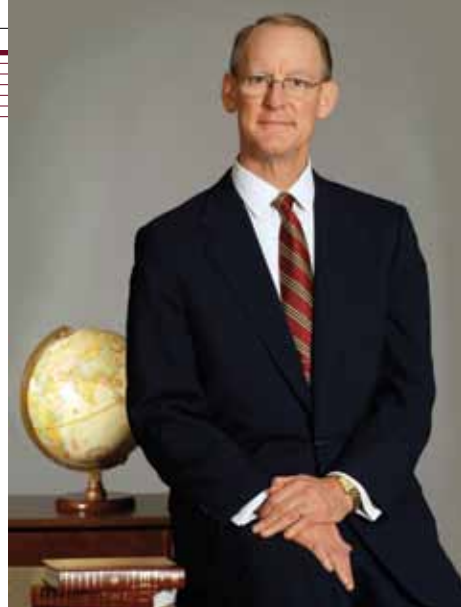
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## PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



# *The Truth About Christmas— and Other Popular Holidays*

**W**HERE DID MAN'S popular holidays come from? What are their roots? Most people never reflect on—or investigate—why they believe and practice what they do. In a world filled with customs and traditions, few seek to understand—to research—the *origin* of things. Most accept common practices without question, choosing to do what everyone else does because it is easy—and fashionable. Most follow along as they have been taught, *assuming* what they believe and do is right. They take their beliefs for granted and never take time to **PROVE** them.

Nowhere is this more true than in the observance of Christmas, Easter, New Year's, Halloween and Valentine's Day, among other supposed Christian holidays. Millions keep these days without knowing *why*—or where they originated. Most suppose they are “found in the Bible”—that *God* backs them—because they see so many professing Christians observing them. Surely hundreds of millions cannot be wrong.

Or can they? What does the Bible—and history—*really* teach? You will be *shocked!*

To find the truth of a biblical matter—*any* biblical matter—you must be willing to open your Bible and

honestly accept what it says. The majority of people stoutly defend what they have merely *assumed* is right or biblical. They read with prejudice anything that contradicts cherished beliefs.

If you are going to take the time to read this Personal, should you not at least read it with an open mind—without bias? The Bible is “profitable for correction” (II Tim. 3:16) for all who are willing to accept it—for all who truly want to serve and please God. The Bible also states, “**PROVE** all things” (I Thes. 5:21). Ask God to guide you—to help you *prove* what He says in His Word.

No matter how comfortable a lifelong practice may be, should you not base it on *proof*—hard *evidence*, and of what God says—instead of *assumptions*?

In this Personal, we will examine certain of men's holidays, and their origins. What follows is but the barest beginning of all that could be shown.

### **Christmas Unveiled!**

First is Christmas. This worldwide tradition is thought to be a wonderful time, focused on giving, family, beautiful music and decorations, special foods and singing traditional carols. All this is supposedly centered around the worship of Jesus Christ, and His birth on December 25th.

But where did Christmas come from? What is the *origin* of Santa Claus?—mistletoe?—Christmas trees?—

holly wreaths?—Yule logs?—and exchanging gifts?

There is no mistaking the source of the modern Christmas celebration. Nearly all aspects of it have their roots in Roman custom and religion. The *Encyclopedia Americana* reveals, “Christmas... was not observed in the first centuries of the Christian church, since the Christian usage in general was to celebrate the death of remarkable persons rather than their birth... a feast was established in memory of this event [Christ’s birth] in the fourth century. In the fifth century the Western church ordered the feast to be celebrated on the day of the Mithraic rites of the birth of the sun and at the close of the Saturnalia, as no certain knowledge of the day of Christ’s birth existed.”

Now the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, under “Christmas”: “In the Roman world the Saturnalia (December 17) was a time of merrymaking and exchanging of gifts. December 25 was also regarded as the birth date of the Iranian mystery god Mithra, the Sun of Righteousness. On the Roman New Year (January 1), houses were decorated with greenery and lights, and gifts were given to children and the poor. To these observances were added the German and Celtic Yule rites when the Teutonic tribes penetrated into Gaul, Britain, and central Europe. Food and good fellowship, the Yule log and Yule cakes, greenery and fir trees, gifts and greetings all commemorated different aspects of this festive season. Fires and lights, symbols of warmth and lasting life, have always been associated with the winter festival, both pagan and Christian.”

What could be plainer?

### Origin of the Christmas Tree

Where did the Christmas tree come from? Notice: “The Christmas tree is from Egypt, and its origin dates from a period long anterior to the

Christian Era” (Frederic Jennings Haskin, *Answers to Questions*). How many know the Christmas tree long preceded Christianity?

Most aspects of Christmas are not referred to in the Bible. Of course, the reason is that they are not from God—they are not part of the way He wants people to worship Him. The Christmas tree, however, is mentioned in the Bible!

We know what men think about it. Here is what God says, “Thus says the LORD, *Learn not the way of the heathen*, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven [the stars]; for the heathen are dismayed at them [millions ignore this plain statement of God and read their horoscopes daily]. For the customs of the people are vain: for one cuts a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree...” (Jer. 10:2-5).

This description is obvious. God directly refers to the Christmas tree as “the way of the heathen.” Just as directly, He commands, “Learn NOT the way of the heathen,” calling these customs “vain.”

The most common justification one will hear regarding this holiday is that people have replaced old pagan intents and customs by asserting they are now “Christian.” For instance, many say they are “honoring Christ” in their Christmas-keeping. The problem is God does not say that keeping this tradition is acceptable to Him! *In fact, He plainly commands against it!* Christmas-keeping dishonors Christ! You will see God considers everything about it to be an abomination.

Many additional sources and scriptures could be cited. Read our booklet, *The True Origin of Christmas*. Facts from history and Scripture, when placed together, paint a powerful picture!

### Truth About Easter

What about Easter? Since hundreds of millions keep it, supposedly in honor of Jesus Christ’s Resurrection, then surely the Bible must have much to say about it. Many verses must mention rabbits, eggs, baskets of candy, hot cross buns, Lent, Good Friday and sunrise services—not to mention Easter itself.

There is also no mystery about where Easter came from: “On this greatest of Christian festivals, several survivals occur of ancient heathen ceremonies. To begin with, the name itself is not Christian but pagan. ‘Ostara’ was the Anglo-Saxon Goddess of Spring” (Ethel L. Urline, *Festival, Holy Days, and Saints Days*, p. 73).

And notice: “But the name Easter comes to us from Ostera or Eostre... for whom a spring festival was held annually, and it is from this pagan festival that some of our Easter customs have come” (Mary Emogene Hazeltine, *Anniversaries and Holidays: A Calendar of Days and How to Observe Them*, p. 53).

Colored eggs have long been associated with the Easter celebration. Nearly every culture in the world does this. Notice: “The origin of the Easter egg is based on the fertility lore of the Indo-European races... The egg to them became a symbol of spring... In Christian times the egg had bestowed upon it a religious interpretation, becoming a symbol of the rock tomb out of which Christ emerged to the new life of His resurrection” (Francis X. Weiser, *Handbook of Christian Feasts and Customs*, p. 233). This is a classic example of how pagan symbols and customs are “Christianized”—with Christian-sounding names pasted over pagan customs. Due to this, people feel better about following a custom not found in the Bible.

Please see **PERSONAL**, page 21



*David C. Pack*

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# BLACK FRIDAY'S Feeding Frenzy



# What does the annual consumer blowout reveal about America?

BY JEFFREY R. AMBROSE

**A**H, THANKSGIVING WEEKEND. A time for American families to fill their vehicles' gas tanks, perhaps drive across state lines, get together with seldom-seen relatives, enjoy one of the most delicious meals of the year, give thanks for the nation's bounty, catch up on recent happenings in each other's lives, reminisce over old memories, watch football, and...engage in competitive shopping?

Yes, the day after Thanksgiving, labeled "Black Friday," is like no other.

"The American holiday shopping season began in earnest Friday as stores opened their doors at midnight—a few hours earlier than they normally do on the most anticipated shopping day of the year. A few retailers even had lines of shoppers when they opened on the Thanksgiving harvest holiday on Thursday.

"Retailers hope the earlier openings will make Black Friday shopping more convenient for Americans who are more likely to be worried about high unemployment and the other challenges they face in the weak economy. Black Friday is important to merchants because it kicks off the holiday shopping season, a time when they can make 25 to 40 percent of their annual revenue. It's expected that shoppers will spend nearly \$500 billion during the holiday shopping season, or about 3 percent more than they did last year" (*The Associated Press*).

Expanded business hours created a buzz: "A record number of shop-

pers are expected to head out to stores across the country this weekend to take advantage of discounts of up to 70 percent. For three days starting on Black Friday, 152 million people are expected [to] shop, up about 10 percent from last year, according to the National Retail Federation," *Fox News* reported.

So how was the turnout?

"About 600 shoppers were in line at a Target store in Brooklyn in New York when it opened at midnight. By the time it opened at midnight, nearly 2,000 shoppers wrapped around a Best Buy store in St. Petersburg...Mall of America, the nation's largest... had 15,000 shoppers for its midnight opening. And more than 9,000 people were outside the flagship Macy's store in New York's Herald Square at its midnight opening, up from 7,000 a year ago" (*ibid.*).

## Modern Tradition

For decades, turkey-and-pie-stuffed consumers have descended in droves on malls and shops the day *after* Thanksgiving, looking for deep discounts on Christmas gifts for others, or splurging for themselves.

But why "Black" Friday? While many now assume it refers to the day that retailers' books cross from red ink to black (which signifies that a company is making a profit), this was not the original meaning.

"In 1966, Black Friday was the name the Philadelphia Police Department gave to the Friday after Thanksgiving," *ABC News* reported. "The police hated the day—massive traffic jams, overcrowded sidewalks, lots of shoplifters—all because downtown Philly stores were filled with

shoppers taking advantage of the first holiday sales.

"The goal was to make it a day that shoppers wanted to avoid. The negative name started to spread outside Philadelphia a few years later. In a 1975 *Associated Press* article, datelined Philadelphia, a sales manager at Gimbels [department store] was quoted as saying, 'That's why the bus drivers and cab drivers call today "Black Friday."'"

"It was only later that retailers, and other people who rely on Black Friday to make money, attempted to redefine the term as something positive."

Beyond the sheer number of people coming through their doors, store chains anxiously await the sales results of this day each year.

This year was no exception. Retailers held their breath: with the American economy still wobbly, would shoppers spend enough to make the year's end rosy? Many stores' unprecedented extended hours would certainly give them plenty of opportunity to do so.

When the receipts were tallied, a bright picture emerged. Shoppers coughed up an estimated \$52.4 billion, 6.6 percent more than in 2010. The stock market rallied afterward, partly due to these figures.

## Darkest Friday Yet

Despite encouraging numbers, another phenomenon that is becoming a yearly tradition repeated itself in 2011: shoppers resorting to violence, often to get their hands on products in limited supply.

Consider a sampling of stories—solely from Wal-Mart stores, many of which were reported by *USA Today*.

"Troubles at the nation's largest retailer began late Thanksgiving Day, when about 20 customers, including kids, suffered minor injuries at a Los Angeles Wal-Mart after they were pepper sprayed by a shopper. Police...say she used the pepper spray to gain an edge over fellow shoppers vying for discounted Xbox video game players."

"A shopper outside the San Leandro, Calif., Wal-Mart was shot...

■ **MAYHEM:** Top, a crowd lines up to get on an escalator inside Macy's department store in New York after the midnight opening to begin the "Black Friday" shopping weekend (Nov. 25, 2011). Bottom, customers shop for electronics at a Best Buy store on Black Friday in San Diego, California (Nov. 25, 2011).

PHOTOS: STAN HONDA/AFP/ (TOP); SANDY HUFFAKER/ (BOTTOM) GETTY IMAGES

after he and family members resisted two armed men trying to steal purchases" (*USA Today*).

These alone should cause general concerns. Yet there are *many* others.

■ One shopper was arrested at a Kinston, North Carolina, Wal-Mart after altercations took place between customers fighting over cellphones marked down more than 80 percent. A security guard used pepper spray on several store patrons.

■ A robbery at gunpoint occurred in a South Carolina Wal-Mart parking lot.

■ Two women sustained injuries during a fight over electronics in a Rome, New York, Wal-Mart.

■ "...a teenage girl was trampled at a western Michigan Wal-Mart store and suffered minor injuries after getting caught in a rush to a sale in the electronics department...[she] was knocked down and stepped on several times in the store near Muskegon" (*Detroit Free Press*).

■ "In Florence, Ala., a shopper was subdued with a stun gun at a Wal-Mart store as shoppers gathered for Black Friday sales. Authorities said he is charged with public intoxication, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest" (*ibid.*).

■ "Police used a stun gun to subdue [a] Wal-Mart shopper...in Milford, Conn., after he allegedly hit another shopper in a Thursday night fight while waiting to buy video games."

■ "A man was arrested in a scuffle at a jewelry counter at a Kissimmee, Fla., Wal-Mart."

"The incidents appear to be the result of two converging trends on Black Friday: bigger crowds in search of bigger, broader deals," *USA Today* reported.

Fights over consumer goods first entered public consciousness in the 1980s, at the height of the craze over Cabbage Patch Dolls. At that time, a rash of scuffles between mothers intent on snapping up one of a few remaining dolls elicited disbelief and amusement. The trend, however, was short-lived.

But in recent years, the list of Black Friday-related arrests and injuries seems

to grow annually, with the worst case being the trampling death of a store employee in 2008. What has changed?

### Consumer Greed

A fundamental development in American life over the past few decades has been how expectant the average man and woman have become in the area of physical comforts.

Consider. According to the National Association of Home Builders, the average U.S. home in 2009 was 2,700 square feet, roughly double the figure of 1970.

How about the accoutrements inside those homes?

"In 2009 the average American home had 2.86 TV sets, which is roughly 18% higher than in 2000 (2.43 sets per home), and 43% higher than in 1990 (2.0 sets)," research company Nielsen reported. "In addition, there continue to be more TVs per home than people—in 2009 the average U.S. home had only 2.5 people vs. 2.86 television sets. This year about 54% of homes in the U.S. had more than 3 or more television sets, 28% had 2 television sets and only 18% had 1 television set...38% of U.S. TV homes have digital cable...88% have a DVD player."

A look into a typical garage reveals that the average number of vehicles per household rose 66 percent from 1969 to 2009, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

Just a few decades ago, only the affluent toted outsized mobile phones. Today, the number of cellphones in the U.S. is almost the same as the number of people in the nation—and the United States is *behind* many other countries.

We have become a nation so awash in material goods that we can scarcely imagine life any other way. And for developed countries, this consumer mindset starts young. An Australian study of three- and four-year-olds revealed that "while the children were not yet able to read, they often knew exactly which logo corresponded with which brand. Certain logos—including those for fast food chains (McDonald's), entertainment companies (Disney...and Warner Brothers)

and cars (Toyota)—proved especially recognizable" (*ABC News*).

For context, recognize that this year's consumer blitz occurred in the middle of a stagnating economy. It also flew in the face of the headline-grabbing protests about the plight of the "99 percent," many of whom still enjoy imported wine and chocolate, smartphones and home theaters.

Now realize that many of these purchases are made with credit cards, which creates even greater financial strain on consumers who acquire cards with low interest rates only to find these soon skyrocket to 27 percent or more.

Going one step further, this shopping swarm is happening within a nation whose federal government is \$15 trillion in debt to China, Japan, the United Kingdom, OPEC nations, Brazil, and Russia, as well as commercial banks, mutual funds, pension programs, and the Federal Reserve.

### How Much Longer?

In the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and other prosperous Western nations, most citizens do not entertain the thought that the lifestyle to which they have grown accustomed could quickly and radically change.

Persistent unemployment, diminishing job prospects, and other gathering dark clouds have many Americans worried. But compared to most of the globe, these are still good times. Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid funds have not run out, lights stay on, roads are still drivable. Food stamps are still printed and accepted, free government-subsidized cellphones are still available. Mortgage lending has tightened somewhat, but credit cards are still easy to receive. Buy-one-get-one sales, rebates and no-interest store financing are taken for granted.

Yet even a casual student of history knows that current conditions are unsustainable!

In light of this, questions arise: If each year shoppers increasingly resort to violence over non-essentials like

*Please see **BLACK FRIDAY**, page 20*





# THE EU'S RELUCTANT PLAYER

*Is the Stage Set for Britain's Exit?*

Europe is calling for closer integration to solve its financial woes, which may force the United Kingdom to decide if it is in or out of the European Union.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

**T**HE EUROZONE crisis seems to have morphed into the likes of a Shakespearean tragedy. The dramatic tension in debt-saddled Greece and Italy and stirring speeches from Germany and France all appear to be set against a bleak backdrop—the collapse of the continent's common currency. In this scenario, the United

Kingdom could be cast as a sort of Hamlet wandering darkened corridors: “To be or not to be in the EU, that is the question...”

Britain's hesitant approach to the European Union is as familiar as the oft-repeated opening lines of Hamlet's famed soliloquy. Since entering the European Economic Community in 1973, they have held

a similar stance. Despite this, politicians and journalists are regularly swept up in the drama of EU politics, and seem to forget the UK's track record as a reluctant member state.

Take, for example, the outcome of the December 2011 emergency summit aimed at solving the eurozone crisis. Leading up to the gathering, Greece stood on the verge of bankruptcy, Standard & Poor's was poised to downgrade the credit rating of prominent European Union nations—

■ **SPEAKING OUT:** British Prime Minister David Cameron delivers a speech in London, England (Oct. 10, 2011).

PHOTO: OLI SCARFF - WPA POOL/GETTY IMAGES

and the future of the euro itself was at stake.

At the meeting, Germany and France pushed for a change to the Lisbon Treaty, meaning further economic assimilation for all 27 member nations—even those outside the eurozone. French President Nicolas Sarkozy warned that “never has the risk of disintegration been greater.”

European Union leaders emerged after an all-night “make or break” summit with an agreement hailed as a bold new direction for the power bloc. The summit attendees released a document, which stated, “Today we agreed to move towards a stronger economic union.”

Everyone was on board—except the United Kingdom. While the leaders of 26 European nations backed the pact, Britain stood as a minority of one.

The UK, which prides itself on the global clout of its financial sector, refused further European interference. In a press conference, the nation’s prime minister, David Cameron, stated, “What is on offer isn’t in Britain’s interests so I didn’t agree to it.”

Enter the news media. Journalists happily churned out headlines such as, “Europe’s Great Divorce,” “Britain’s Stand on Euro Leaves It Isolated,” and “Was This the Moment the UK Stumbled out of Europe?”

The *EUobserver* reported, “The break represents a major symbolic shift for the European Union which has never before cemented a disagreement so publicly and so thoroughly...”

While Britain’s move did not result in immediate EU expulsion, it was a foreboding moment that forced the world to ask: is the stage being set to exclude the UK from Europe?

### Writing on the Wall

As the dust cleared after Mr. Cameron’s “no,” news headlines shifted their focus back to the immediacy of the eurozone crisis, and less on Britain: “EU debt summit fails to satisfy ratings agencies,” “Fifth European solution failing to ease stress,” and “Euro dips after EU summit; more pain to come.”

*The Associated Press* reported that Moody’s debt-rating agency “noted that the pact does not address Europe’s immediate problem: the crushing debt loads of some nations and their rising borrowing costs.”

In short, the continent still did not have a clear solution to the deepening crisis.

With this news came a week’s worth of conciliatory remarks toward Britain. German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated, “Great Britain is a reliable partner for Europe not just in questions of foreign and security policy; Great Britain is also this partner in many other questions—in competitiveness, in the internal market, for trade, for climate protection.”

In an interview with French magazine *Le Monde*, translated by *Agence France-Presse*, Nicolas Sarkozy remarked, “We need Great Britain,” and, “We’d be greatly impoverished if we allowed its departure which, luckily, is not on the agenda.”

Why would Europe extend an olive branch to Britain after it had just hampered its plans for its rescue package?

The union needs the UK.

*Bloomberg* reported, “Britain’s EU partners realize that its financial sector has enormous economic weight. The U.K. hosts the world’s biggest markets for foreign exchange and financial derivatives, and is home to the biggest asset management business in Europe.”

Similarly, Britain needs Europe. The continent is the UK’s number one export destination, and exiting the union could mean hefty tariffs. Also, the political isolation of leaving the EU would utterly erode the nation’s sway over the continent.

For now, it seems Europe and the UK will continue their often frustrating relationship. It is necessary for the two sides to cooperate to ensure economic stability.

Regardless, the writing still appears to be on the wall for Britain.

After the emergency summit, *Bloomberg* stated, “The question is how much longer [Europe] can continue to be [on two tracks]. Closer

fiscal and economic integration may eventually make it impossible for the U.K. to stand slightly apart. Once and for all, it might have to choose: in or out. If it ever comes to that, Britain has an enormously difficult choice to make.”

Until now, the UK has been afforded a starring role on the EU stage (alongside Germany and France). Yet the euro crisis is increasingly forcing member states to give up sovereign rights in favor of a streamlined European government—a trend Britons historically oppose. Clearly, the diplomatic theatrics between the EU and Britain cannot continue forever.

### Looking Back

For characters in a play, how their own story ultimately ends is a mystery to them. These fictional figures unwittingly continue along the outline of the plot, with the ultimate conclusion already written. Audience members, however, can often see where a particular tale is headed because they are on the outside looking in. Foreshadowing events provide clues on the ending.

Something similar can be said about the United Kingdom and Europe. Constant political stagecraft masks what the future holds. Yet if someone steps back from the action to see the “foreshadowing events” in British history, it becomes clear where the country is headed.

The UK was a veritable pop-up nation—seeming to appear almost from nowhere. The country had limited natural resources and military power up until 1800. The following century marked its meteoric rise to unparalleled prominence. Between the 1750s and 1850s, the nation’s population jumped from 7.7 million to 20.7 million.

Soon, England was the cultural, financial and political capital of the world, and London was simply referred to as “the City.”

The nation’s naval superiority ensured its place as global superpower. Britons controlled or had access to virtually every vital sea gate the world

over: the Suez and Panama canals, the straits of Gibraltar and Hormuz, Singapore, Cape Horn, Malta, Cape of Good Hope, and Hong Kong.

For about two centuries, Great Britain ruled the world. At its zenith, it governed almost one quarter of the world population and controlled 11 million square miles of territory. The nation even had its own slogan: “The sun never sets on the British Empire.”

Since World War II, however, Britain has been in a state of perpetual decline. The British Colonial office closed in 1966—effectively ending the empire. Almost every vital colony and sea gate has been lost, with the last being Hong Kong in 1997.

ence of the English language, culture and religion, with missionaries toting King James Bibles.

While unknown to them, the very book that missionaries carried to the far-flung corners of the earth—and monarchs “defended”—holds the key to how the British Empire could reach such great heights.

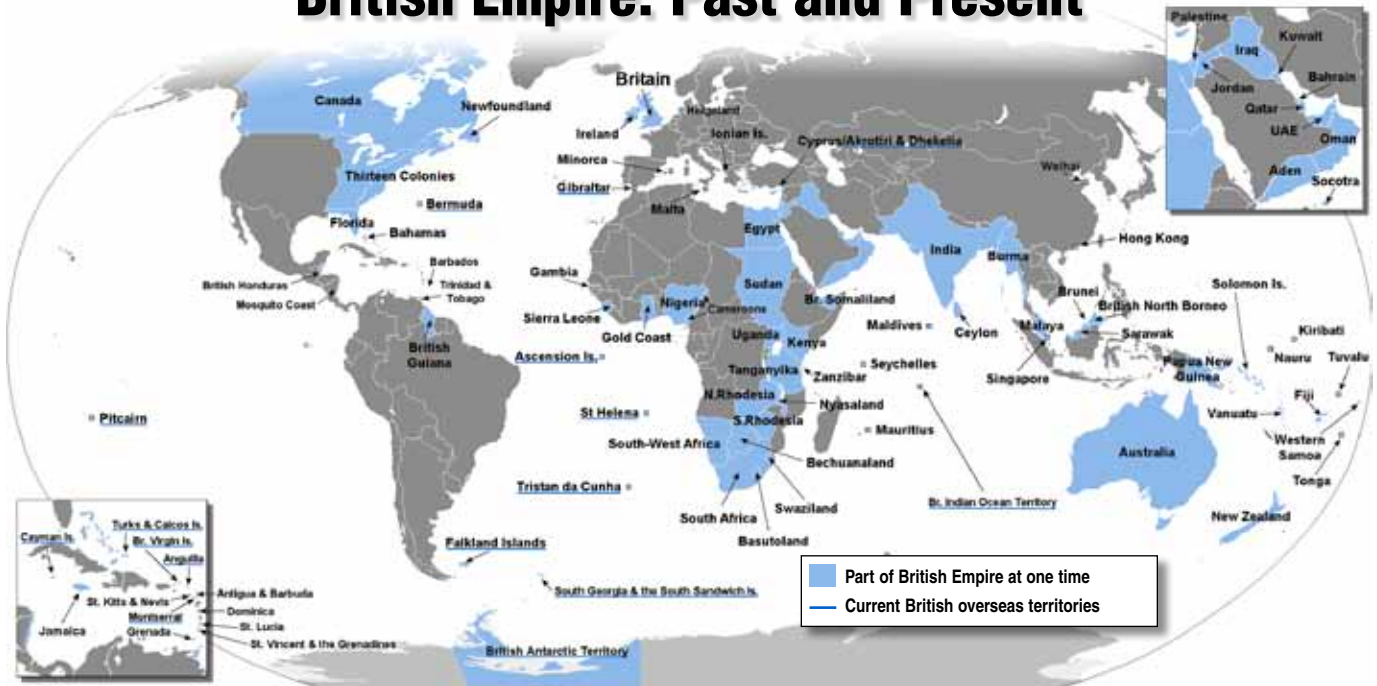
Notice this passage in the Old Testament book of Amos: “For, lo, I [God] will command, and I will *sift* the house of Israel *among all nations*, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall *not the least grain fall upon the earth*” (9:9).

Ancient Israel had 12 tribes. Contrary to popular belief, the mod-

A special blessing was put upon the tribe of Joseph, and passed to his sons Ephraim and Manasseh. God promised that both would “grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth” (Gen. 48:16). The older brother, Manasseh, was to “become a people, and he also shall be *great*: but truly his younger brother [Ephraim] shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a *multitude* of nations” (vs. 19).

Be honest. Who fits this description? Certainly not the tiny nation of ancient Israel or the modern state of Israel on the Mediterranean! Only one pair of brother nations has ever become a singular GREAT nation and a MULTITUDE of nations—the United States and

## British Empire: Past and Present



### Stranger than Fiction

Today, the nation is a hollow shell of what it once was. Gone are the days when Queen Victoria could look at a globe and feel she was undoubtedly “Her Majesty Victoria, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland Queen, Defender of the Faith, Empress of India.” Gone are the days of British sailors charting new territories. Gone are the days of the widespread influ-

ern-day nation called Israel is mostly comprised of the tribe of Judah. The other Israelite tribes gradually lost their identity.

In Amos 9, God promised protection for these tribes as they “sifted,” or moved, through the nations. While that was happening, these peoples took on the customs and traditions of the nations around them—and forgot their heritage.

Yet the Bible details exactly what these nations would look like in modern times.

Britain, with its former colonies.

To many, the idea that Britain’s rise to power was foretold in the pages of the Old Testament seems patently absurd. Yet the Bible offers many more details that make the description of this people unmistakable.

Abraham, one of the forefathers of the Israelite peoples, and the great-great grandfather of Ephraim and Manasseh, was given a promise from God for his

*Please see **BRITAIN**, page 19*

# COMING SOON: WORLD HEADQUARTERS COMPLEX



The Restored Church of God, which publishes *The Real Truth* magazine, announces plans for its World Headquarters, to be built in Wadsworth, Ohio, USA.



**A** STATE-OF-THE-ART complex to house *The Real Truth* editorial offices and printing facilities will provide a beautiful setting for the magazine's rapidly growing publishing operations and become the worldwide Headquarters of The Restored Church of God (RCG).

Turbulent world conditions and trends make it an urgent priority to reach many more millions of people in a short time frame. To allow this, the organization has begun a large-scale expansion of its facilities.

With significant site preparation underway, construction of six buildings is to begin in early April 2012. The complex will include:

- An elegant hall of administration, housing brand-new *Real Truth* offices

- A stunning auditorium in the style of the one found on the Worldwide Church of God's Pasadena, California, world headquarters, at which was produced *The Plain Truth*, the predecessor to this magazine

- A secondary administration annex for the printing of *The Real Truth* and other publications produced by RCG, mail distribution, maintenance of buildings and grounds, and other operations

- A conference center for the Church's educational training institution, Ambassador Center (AC)

- Two buildings to lodge AC attendees

- Immaculate grounds, including exquisitely manicured gardens, pools, paths, bridges, fountains, other water features, and sculptures, all set amid stairwells and terraced landscaping, etc.

The entire complex is designed to reflect the extraordinary tradition of the Worldwide Church of God's three Ambassador College campuses—which repeatedly won awards for their beauty and quality.

The buildings are scheduled to open in April 2013, and will coincide with a major expansion in enrollment for AC.

Visit [www.thercg.org](http://www.thercg.org) for more information. □

PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS: RCG



# Typhoon Kills More Than 1,200 in the Philippines

**T**YPHOON WASHI caused deadly flash flooding and mudslides in the southern region of the Philippines, killing more than 1,200 people and driving 45,000 others from their homes.

The country's disaster agency reported that as many as 10,000 homes were destroyed, and up to 145,000 people in 13 southern and central provinces were affected. The worst-hit cities were Cagayan

de Oro and Iligan, in the southern Mindanao region. In response, President Benigno Aquino declared a state of national calamity.

"The sheer numbers of dead bodies prompted health concerns among residents," *The New York Times* reported. "Officials are planning mass burials."

"For public health purposes, we're doing this," Mayor Lawrence Cruz of Iligan told *The Associated Press*. "The bodies are decomposing and there is no place where we can place

them, not in an enclosed building, not in a gymnasium."

Typhoon Washi, which wiped out entire villages along with schools, homes and bridges, and sent people fleeing to overcrowded evacuation centers, has caused worry among health officials that communicable diseases will spread, *Reuters* reported.

■ **SEARCHING FOR SURVIVORS:** Philippine policemen dig among debris and destroyed houses in Iligan City (Dec. 19, 2011).

PHOTO: TED ALJIBE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



■ **SWEPT AWAY:** Top, debris is scattered near destroyed houses in Cagayan de Oro, a day after Typhoon Washi (Dec. 18, 2011). Bottom left, a general view of debris washed ashore next to houses in Iligan City, in the southern island of Mindanao (Dec. 20, 2011). Bottom middle, residents walk past mangled vehicles along a canal in Cagayan de Oro (Dec. 18, 2011). Bottom right, a soldier helps a woman holding the body of her child who was killed during the passage of the tropical storm (Dec. 17, 2011).

PHOTOS: TED ALJIBE/AFP/ (TOP); TED ALJIBE/AFP/ (BOTTOM LEFT); CHERRYL VERGEIRE/AFP/ (BOTTOM MIDDLE); TED ALJIBE/AFP/ (BOTTOM RIGHT) GETTY IMAGES

The media outlet quoted John Salva, a spokesman for the charity World Vision, as stating on *ANC Television* that evacuation centers are filled to capacity, and water and food is in short supply.

“It is really overcrowded, there is almost no space between people,”

he said. “Diseases are starting to appear.”

To learn the reason for worsening weather patterns, watch *The World to Come* broadcast series “Extreme Weather—What the Bible Reveals!” available at [www.worldtocome.org](http://www.worldtocome.org). □



# All the Great Prophecies Unlocked!

As world conditions worsen and grow more complex, uncertainty is increasing about what lies ahead.

BY DAVID C. PACK

**A**BOUT ONE-THIRD of the Bible is prophecy—history written in advance. Over 80 percent of this future history is yet to be fulfilled. While many are intrigued by the *idea* of prophecy, they are not interested in the *truth* of prophecy.

Great numbers of people now routinely discuss terms such as Antichrist, Tribulation, Millennium, Armageddon, Mark of the Beast, 666, God's Wrath, Abomination of Desolation, and Babylon the Great, among others, without proper context, meaning or comprehension. They simply do not know where or how to look within the Bible for correct understanding of what these and other terms mean, and how they will occur, sequentially. For millions wanting to know, the many critical elements of prophecy never line up—never come together. This is because, instead of examining for themselves the hundreds of clear scriptures on prophecy—for proof—many seem content to trust “experts.”

Most who write about the Bible do not realize this Book interprets itself, and that if a symbol is mentioned in a prophecy—any prophecy!—and virtually every prophecy involves symbols—the Author of this Book would not leave the most crucial ques-

tions—those involving all humanity—subject to human interpretation. God would provide clues—necessary vital KEYS!—to understanding the large portions of His Word devoted to future events.

But who is an authority on this subject? Who truly understands what the future holds as outlined in the Bible? While recognized Christianity should hold the answers, it has not even figured out the *questions*—and, when understood, is seen to be the biggest part of the problem. However sincere at least some preachers and religionists may be, their publications merely *add* to the confusion offered to those desperately seeking answers in all the wrong places.

Because of this, most Bible readers remain completely unaware of awesome, impending world events, soon to involve all nations. The meaning behind large sections of Scripture is hidden, and outside their understanding.

My book *The Bible's Greatest Prophecies Unlocked! – A Voice Cries Out* addresses these events and more.

Examples of subjects covered include: What is the purpose of prophecy? Why did God devote a full third of His divine Word to the subject? What about the 2012 phenomenon? Will either the planet or civilization come to a *violent end* on December 21, 2012, as so many believe?

Related to this is the controversy surrounding Nostradamus. Many believe his writings hold the key to

understanding the future's greatest events. To followers, he accurately predicted many well-known events, and is revered as a prophet. But was he a true prophet, one sent by God—or a fraud, a false prophet?

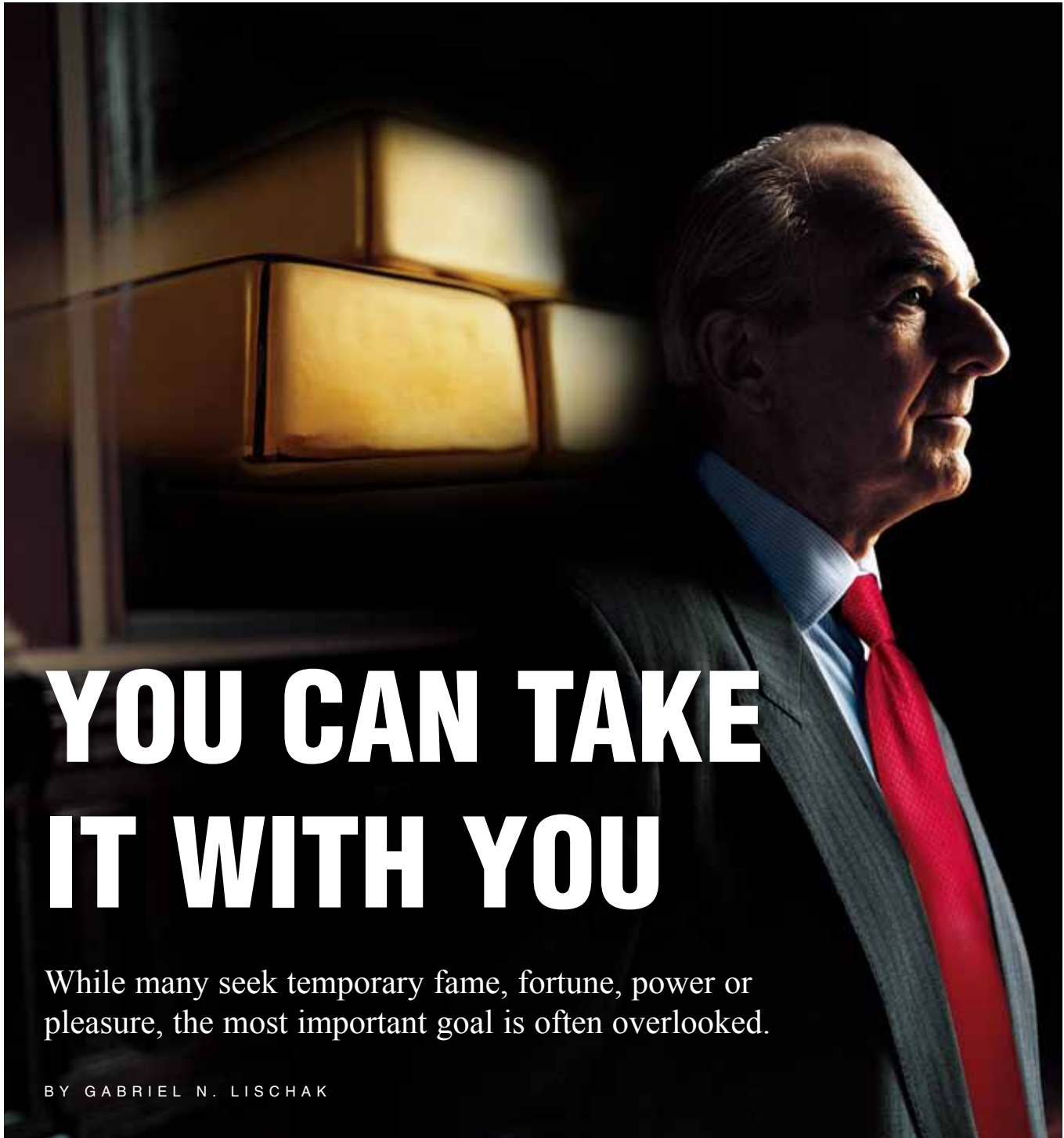
Then there is the Middle East, the region foretold thousands of years ago to lie at the center of the biggest—most shattering!—events ever to occur on Earth. While some Bible students seem to sense at least *this* much, they do not know in any detail what these events are, or why they will come. The book explains why events in the region carry much greater significance than most even begin to understand.

This is only the tiniest snapshot of topics covered within it. No other book on prophecy comes close to the impact of this one. As you reach the final page, you will close it with a firm grasp of everything about to occur on planet Earth.

*The Bible's Greatest Prophecies Unlocked!* pulls no punches. You will see prophecy made clear—the biggest and most crucial elements of it—all of them—made easy to comprehend through use of plain language.

Knowledge of awesome future events has been unlocked, opened and explained—and it thunders a powerful warning to all who will hear and heed! I urge you to read *The Bible's Greatest Prophecies Unlocked!* available in hard copy at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) and [barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com), or download it for free at [www.thercg.org](http://www.thercg.org). □





# YOU CAN TAKE IT WITH YOU

While many seek temporary fame, fortune, power or pleasure, the most important goal is often overlooked.

BY GABRIEL N. LISCHAK

**W**HICH OF THE following most appeals to you? An opportunity to: (1) receive an astronomical amount of *money*, such as \$1 billion; (2) become a *famous* actor, rock star or athlete; (3) receive great *power*, such as being the CEO

of a Fortune 500 company or the leader of a great nation; (4) be endowed with remarkable *beauty*—or (5) receive perfect *character*?

Which would you choose?

Understand that only *one* of these conditions is permanent. Only one will not fade with time. Only one cannot be

taken away from you by circumstances beyond your control. And only one will outlast your physical life.

Does this cause you to reconsider your choice? It should.

## Pursuit of Futility

Samuel Butler, a famous English author, declared in his book *The Way of All Flesh*, “Pleasure...is a safer guide

than either right or duty.” It would seem that modern society agrees. Seeking out and doing what *feels* good—pleasure—drives the minds of many, without any notion of resistance to *anything* on the basis of right and wrong. This thinking ultimately leads to a life of utter futility.

In other words, such a life brings no useful result—like one laboring for the wind (Ecc. 5:16). Though completely unaware of it, the vast majority are living this way—chasing after nothing!

Most are aware that life demands *action*—one must wake up each day and purpose to DO something. True happiness cannot be achieved through idleness (though some may speak as if such a life would be “fun”). One’s time must be occupied with worthwhile pursuits. However, for many, the sole purpose of life is the pursuit of *pleasure*.

Most seek *money* as the solution to all their problems, with many even resorting to robbery to obtain it. For example, according to 2010 FBI statistics, there were an estimated 367,832 robberies in the U.S. alone—just over 41 per hour. A combined total of \$456 million was lost—an average of \$1,239 per victim.

Others, not being satisfied with the amount of money they have, opt for an “easy” route to acquire more, such as lotteries and gambling. In 2010, Americans spent an astonishing \$58 billion on lotteries and \$34 billion on casino gambling. All this money is spent in the hope of “winning big” in order to “live the good life.”

Most fail to consider that even large sums of money can easily be depleted. Consider that “about once a month on average, a hapless millionaire winner of one of the 37 [now 43] state lotteries goes bust and files for bankruptcy, experts say. That’s the rags-to-rags fate of about one-third of all winners” (*New York Post*).

Then there are those who seek fame and power, with, of course, wealth being a welcome benefit. Many covet the “big life” that movie stars, rock stars, athletes and top business execu-

tives seemingly enjoy. It is thought that if fame is achieved, the ultimate “wonderful life” would result.

In a *New York Times* article, a former comedian and director explained the typical Hollywood financial story: “When you make money in this town [Hollywood] it’s very fast, and it feels like it’s never going to end. I’ve done it myself. I’ve been the [person] who was spending money and then thought, ‘Wow, I haven’t had a job in two years.’” Of course, the money—and the fame and power that yielded it—*does* eventually come to an end!

Many also seek “sex appeal” as a way of life, keeping up with the latest fads and trends. Billions of dollars are spent each year by people seeking to become or remain beautiful. In the fashion and cosmetic industries, new and exciting products and procedures are constantly being introduced, promising breathtaking beauty. Plastic surgery is a booming industry as well, with many *teenagers* seeking to become more attractive. Procedures such as liposuction and botox injections are increasing in popularity.

But, like money, fame and power, beauty will eventually come to an end.

The Bible provides an interesting account of the futility of pursuing pleasures to the extreme. Notice what King Solomon wrote near the end of his life: “So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, *I withheld not my heart from any joy* [pleasure]; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor: and this was my portion of all my labor” (Ecc. 2:9-10). Solomon made it his mission to enjoy every conceivable pleasure. God allowed this so that mankind could learn from his experience.

Here is what Solomon concluded: “Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and, behold, *all was vanity* [futile] and vexation of spirit [frustration], and there was no profit under the sun” (vs. 11). He continues, “For that which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts;

even one thing befalls them: as the one dies, so dies the other; yes, they have all one breath; so that a man has no preeminence above a beast: *for all is vanity* [futile]. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again” (3:19-20).

### **You Can Take It with You**

Solomon came to realize that we all eventually die. There is no escaping this fate. And when death arrives, the things that most pursue (wealth, fame, power, beauty and pleasure) also come to an end.

But there is one thing that *does* survive the grave: CHARACTER!

What is true character? It is the ability to come to the KNOWLEDGE of the right from the wrong—the true from the false—and to *choose* the right, and possess the will to enforce self-discipline to *do* the right and *resist* the wrong.

The reason we were put on Earth is to build perfect, righteous character. Ultimately, without character, we are NOTHING.

Understand. God *has* and *is* perfect character. For example, He cannot lie. He has perfect willpower—PERFECT CHARACTER—making it *impossible* for Him to lie (Heb. 6:18). And His goal is to build this same perfect, eternal, indestructible character in *you*. (Our booklet *Why Do You Exist?* explains this, and the purpose of mankind, in more detail.)

### **Free Moral Agency**

Imagine what life would be like if there were no choices or decisions to make, as if you were simply living according to a script. If this were the case, what would be the point of existence?

God designed life to be full of choices—what to eat, what to wear, what to drink—how to live. Throughout any given day, thousands of decisions are made. It can be said that life is as a *series* of choices, with each decision having an impact on *future* decisions. This ability to *choose* is FREE MORAL AGENCY.

Many are somewhat familiar with the account of Adam and Eve in the

Garden of Eden. Notice: “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:16-17). One often-overlooked aspect of this account is that Adam and Eve were given a CHOICE—to eat of a particular tree and *die*, or to avoid it and *live*. God did not *force* them to do what He commanded. Being given a choice is the *only* way to build character.

Because they did not believe God, Adam and Eve decided to eat from the wrong tree. They rejected God’s authority over them and thus were banished from the Garden of Eden. However, their choice not only affected *them*; it caused *all humanity* to be cut off from God.

Like Adam and Eve, you are presented with choices. And like them, the decisions *you* make will affect *others*—even though you may not be able to see it.

God realizes that free moral agents *can* reject His rule over them. However, He also understands that only free moral agents can develop His character.

### Coming to Right Knowledge

If you look around the world, you will observe confusion—everywhere. There are approximately seven billion people on Earth, each having his or her *own* view of right and wrong.

For example, among those who say that taking a human life is wrong, there are various philosophies as to when it is “right.” Then, there are those who say *lying* is wrong, but think that there are circumstances in which deceit, such as “little white lies,” are acceptable.

Why do people not agree? Because human beings do not inherently know right from wrong! One may *think* he has all the answers, concluding that a particular idea is correct, ignorant of how wrong he is. Notice: “...the way of man *is not in himself*: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). In the book of Proverbs,

Solomon stated this fact: “There is a way which *seems right unto a man*, but the end thereof are the ways of *death*” (14:12). By taking a cursory look at the society in which we live, the truth of Solomon’s statement, inspired by God, should be most obvious.

God—and ONLY God—can set the standard for right and wrong. As our Creator, He has this authority. If you were to invent a new piece of machinery, you would know for what purpose you invented it. And you would write an instruction manual on how to use it. God designed and created *us*, with the Bible as *our* Instruction Book.

God’s Word lays the groundwork from which to base our decisions. Remember, character involves making the *right* decisions. Not knowing absolute truth would make character-building impossible. The Ten Commandments—God’s great spiritual Law—are absolute truth. Sin is the transgression of God’s Law, with death being the result (I John 3:4; Rom. 6:23).

Simply put, God reveals through the Bible the knowledge of right and wrong.

### Doing the Right—Resisting the Wrong

As free moral agents, we possess the will to do what we want, whether right *or* wrong. Think of *will* as a mental, spiritual muscle, needing to be exercised in order to grow and become strong. Choosing to do right in the face of pain or discomfort—making the tough decision—exercises this muscle, building character. The more this is done, the stronger and more solidified our character becomes. The ultimate goal of a true Christian is to build God’s perfect character. This can only be done by resisting the wrong—no matter the cost.

It can be said that knowledge is knowing *WHAT* is right; understanding is knowing *WHY* it is right; and wisdom is *DOING IT*. You can take it one step further and say that character is doing it *REPEATEDLY*. Knowledge and understanding are important building blocks in attaining wisdom. Without

either, there can be no wisdom. However, you can have knowledge and understanding, yet lack wisdom. Knowledge and understanding are useless without wisdom. And wisdom is only of value if it ultimately leads to character.

You may have heard the expression “No decision *is* a decision.” Most put off decisions until a “more opportune time,” using their indecisiveness as an excuse. However, “halting between two opinions” (I Kgs. 18:21) invariably defaults to doing *wrong*.

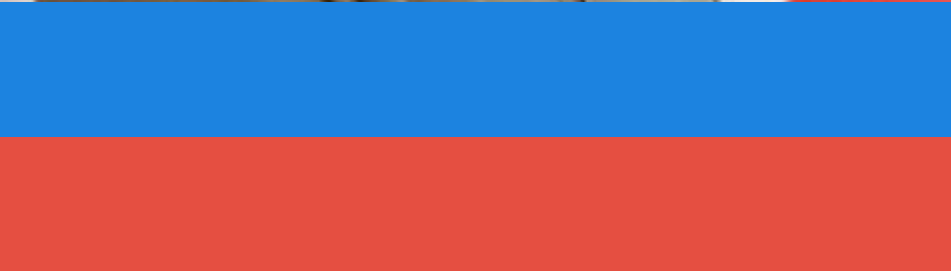
Also notice the following scriptures: “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes...” (Prov. 21:2) and “...we are all as an unclean thing, and all our [righteousness] are as filthy rags...” (Isa. 64:6). People have the natural tendency to *think* that what they are doing is right. But God views our righteousness—our “morality”—as nothing more than a dirty cloth.

### Choose Life

Recognize that there are only two paths in life from which to choose—one leading to life and the other leading to death. After delivering ancient Israel from captivity, showing them many signs and wonders, and giving them His Law, God said, “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before *you life and death*, blessing and cursing: therefore *choose life*, that both you and your seed may live” (Deut. 30:19). In other words, He gave them a CHOICE. If they obeyed Him, great joy would fill their lives. But if they disobeyed, misery would result.

Ultimately, every human being who has ever lived will be confronted with the same choice. The only difference is that the choice will be between *eternal* life and *eternal* death. Pursuing money, fame, power, beauty or personal pleasures as your *sole* purpose in life will bring upon you unhappiness, grief and the feeling of utter futility. In order to travel on the road to true happiness and fulfillment and, ultimately, *eternal life*, right decisions *MUST* be made, and character *MUST* be built. □

# Uncertainty Grows After Death of North Korean Dictator



**T**HE SUDDEN DEATH of North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il resulted in his son Kim Jong Un taking power over the nuclear-armed nation. This has evoked much fear and uncertainty across the globe regarding the stability of the country.

Kim Jong Il, who was over 69 years old, kept the region on edge with what the *Financial Times* called “deft brinkmanship” during his 17 years as ruler of the impoverished communist nation.

Following his death, Chinese President Hu Jintao quickly visited the North Korean embassy to express his condolences.

In addition, South Korea’s unification minister stated, “Regarding the death of Chairman Kim Jong-il, the Government conveys sympathy to the people of North Korea” (*The Times of London*).

*Bloomberg* quoted United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who expressed “a common interest in a peaceful and stable transition in North Korea as well as in ensuring regional peace and stability.” She continued, “We reiterate our hope for improved relations with the people of North Korea.”

As of this writing, it appears there will be a power-sharing arrangement between Kim Jong Un, one of his uncles, and the military.

Officials worry Mr. Kim, who was appointed heir a little over a year ago, may assert his authority via military aggression.

“One question is: Will Kim Jong Un and others around him do something to prove him being in command?” said Michael Green, former National Security Council senior director for Asia under George W. Bush (*ibid.*).

There is also worry that the nation’s military will not respect Mr. Kim, and eventually seize control, although, *Reuters* reported, “The military has pledged allegiance to Kim Jong-un.”

In the coming months, it remains to be seen if Mr. Kim can pull the nation out of poverty, or if he will continue in the footsteps of his father. □

■ **IN MOURNING:** Top, North Korea’s now-deceased leader Kim Jong Il attends a meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev (not pictured) at Sosnovy Bor Military Garrison in Russia (Aug. 24, 2011). Bottom, North Koreans mourn the death of their leader Kim Jong Il in Pyongyang (Dec. 21, 2011).

PHOTOS: DMITRY ASTAKHOV/AFP/ (TOP); AFP/AFP/ (BOTTOM) GETTY IMAGES

## BRITAIN

Continued from page 9

obedience: “That in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and your seed shall possess the gate [sea gates] of his enemies; and in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because you have obeyed My voice” (Gen. 22:17-18).

Recall, the British Empire possessed virtually every crucial naval sea gate.

The same promise was passed to Abraham’s son Isaac and later to Jacob: “Therefore God give you of the dew of heaven, and the [fertile places] of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine” (Gen. 27:28).

At its peak, Britain controlled vital trade routes and had colonies with rich farmland.

Grasp this point. The British peoples descend from the nation of Israel. While most assume Israel is synonymous with those of Jewish descent, these people actually come from Judah alone, just *one* of the 12 tribes of Israel. Abraham’s “birthright blessings” were eventually passed on to Joseph’s sons, who became the tribes of *Ephraim* and *Manasseh* (Gen. 48).

God has fulfilled His promise to bless these two nations. Britain (Ephraim) and America (Manasseh) have risen to be the two greatest nations of all time.

Yet God did not say these countries would continue to enjoy unsurpassed national material blessings forever. Indeed, their power is dwindling fast: Britain’s empire is shattered, and America no longer remains unchallenged on the world stage.

Knowing the identity of the modern-day Israelitish nations unlocks vast sections of Scripture. In particular, being able to equate British people with Ephraim makes clear what is coming for this people.

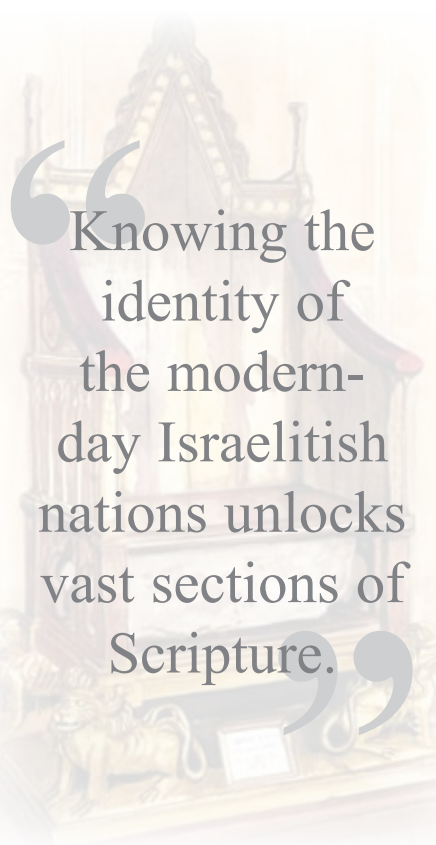
### Europe’s “Drunk Man”

Consider the story of the UK’s meteoric rise from God’s standpoint. The

Almighty God poured out unconditional blessings upon this commonwealth nation. They had it all: military might, political power, and wealth. Although greatly diminished, modern Britain still enjoys the remnants of these blessings: they have the second-greatest military, their financial center remains vital to international business, and their standard of living is among the highest in the world.

Despite this, modern Britons treat these God-given advantages as if they deserve them, and the nation’s moral character has utterly collapsed.

Everywhere Britons went during the British Empire, they brought a sense of decorum and love of well-kept



gardens. Today, they seem unwilling to even maintain their own environment. *Guardian* reported there were 820,000 incidences of dumping trash along the side of the road in 2011, including armchairs, stoves and kitchen garbage. This trend cost England’s local governments approximately \$97 million for the year.

In addition, British workers have become world-renowned as slothful

and unproductive. An Indian businessman who has steel-working and manufacturing plants in Britain announced plans to move parts of his operation overseas. Why? The man told *The Times* of London, “It’s a work-ethic issue. In my experience...nobody is willing to go the extra mile, nobody.” He also noticed that after 3:30 p.m. on Fridays his offices were nearly empty—as almost everyone had left early for the weekend.

And for the average Briton, Friday through Sunday means heavy drinking. In a survey of 2,000 adults, YorkTest health research group found that the average UK adult spends 1,452 days of his life with a hangover. That totals four years of life wasted dealing with the immediate effects of over-drinking!

Think of how this looks to the rest of the continent. *The Independent* reported, “Britain is the drunk man of Europe. Alcohol consumption in France, Germany and Italy is down by between 37 and 52 per cent since 1980. But in the UK it is up nine per cent, with binge drinkers sinking more booze than ever, putting unprecedented pressure on the NHS [National Health Service], police and social services.”

The next generation of Britons will only grow worse. The most popular prime-time television programs marketed toward teenagers are nothing more than a steady stream of obscenities and a vile parade of shameless nudity, sexual encounters, and wanton drug use.

One does not have to wonder why in all of Europe the United Kingdom has the highest teenage pregnancy rate and largest proportion of children living in single-parent families, according to research by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

### The Sun Has Set...

Due to Britain (Ephraim) squandering God’s blessings in front of the world, almost every other time the nation is prophetically mentioned in the Bible, it is in a negative context.

For example, Isaiah 28:1 states, “Woe to the crown of pride, to *the drunkards of Ephraim*, whose glorious beauty *is a fading flower*...”

Read this another way. Woe to the drunkards of the United Kingdom—whose glorious empire *has* faded like a flower!

In addition, Hosea 7 contains a harsh indictment from God: “Ephraim”—modern UK—“has mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned [half-baked]. Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knows it not: yes, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knows not” (vs. 8-9).

Britain no longer boasts that “the sun never sets” on its commonwealth holdings, with almost all of these already handed over to “strangers.” Indeed, the sun *has* set for the nation itself, but the nation remains oblivious and “knows it not.”

Hosea 7 continues: “And the pride of [modern] Israel testifies to his face: and they do not return to the LORD their God, nor seek Him for all this. Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria” (vs. 10-11).

Due to obstinate pride, as the UK continues in moral and economic decline, it will not seek God. In fact, most would scoff at such a suggestion. Rather, it will seek help from other nations.

God warns in the next verse that if Britain seeks after help from foreign powers, “I will CHASTISE them...” (Hos. 7:12).

Instead of realizing its error, when soon-coming calamity arrives for the UK and America, they will trust in allies. Yet no help will be found.

Make no mistake, Britain WILL SOON LOSE its remaining economic clout. When that happens, the EU will no longer tolerate its presence on the European stage. Also, the continent will *soon* unite to preserve the lives of luxury its inhabitants desire.

Simultaneously, God’s CHASTISEMENT will fall upon the United Kingdom and its brother nations. They all will be forced to realize the divine SOURCE of their national prominence.

Yet these passages are only a tiny portion of what is written in the Bible about the modern-day descendants of ancient Israel. The book *America and Britain in Prophecy*, by David C. Pack, explains in plain language what God’s Word reveals about the future of these two nations. Read this free book online at [www.thercg.org](http://www.thercg.org). □

## **BLACK FRIDAY**

*Continued from page 6*

towels or video game units, what happens when *necessities* become scarce? When grocery store shelves become bare, hospitals shut down, social services and safety nets fall apart, how will the average shopper act?

### **Too Much for Too Long**

In a letter to American statesman Adlai Stevenson, author John Steinbeck wrote, “If I wanted to destroy a nation, I would give it too much and I would have it on its knees, miserable, greedy and sick” (*Travels with Charley: In Search of America*).

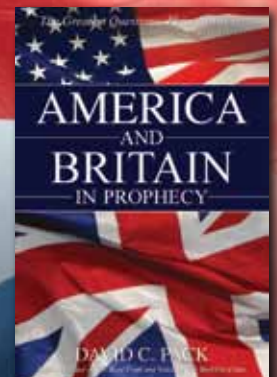
The United States has lived beyond its means for a long time. Measured against the yardstick of what we can actually afford, we *have* had too much! We increasingly cannot say “no” to ourselves—whether it is, “No, I don’t need a third helping of turkey,” or “No, I cannot afford a 3-D television this year,” or, “No, I should not punch the person who just took the last pair of boots off the rack.”

Students of history also learn that people, and whole nations, that cannot discipline themselves eventually have discipline imposed upon them. Can America keep postponing this reality check in the years ahead? If not, who will bring it discipline?

Keep watching! □

# Where are the U.S. and UK headed?

Read this free book at [www.thercg.org](http://www.thercg.org) to learn the answer!



## PERSONAL

Continued from page 2

God never authorized *any* kind of eggs for religious use—yet people have followed this practice for millennia!

Where did the “Easter bunny” come from?: “The Easter bunny had its origin in pre-Christian fertility lore... [It] has never had religious symbolism bestowed on its festive usage... However, the bunny has acquired a cherished role in the celebration of Easter as the legendary producer of Easter eggs for children in many countries” (James Bonwick, *Egyptian Belief and Modern Thought*, p. 236).

But this does not stop people from decorating their lawns and houses with Easter bunnies every spring. Even in modern times, rabbits have remained common symbols of fertility. While their rapid rate of reproduction is well-known, there is a problem—rabbits do not lay eggs! While both are fertility symbols, there is no logical way to connect them. In a world filled with pagan tradition, truth and logic are lost. There is *nothing* Christian about fertility symbols. Merging sex symbols with Christianity makes an already idolatrous practice worse.

The true history of rabbits and eggs is *completely unknown* to unsuspecting, trusting little children who are easily led to think these things are special.

It may seem beautiful, religious, and deeply moving to *participants*, but God has forbidden His people from devising their own religious customs and ideas. He is not interested in what people may personally feel or think is right. He is interested in who cares what *He thinks* is right! As far as God is concerned, ancient sun worship, dressed up in Easter finery and bonnets, is just modern packaging of a very old, idolatrous pagan custom.

Is it a “light thing” to God that many millions keep Easter?

Jesus, who is God, made a stunning statement—but how many believe it? Notice: “But *in vain* they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the

commandments of men” (Matt. 15:9). Christmas, Easter and other holidays are not commands of God, but rather traditions—“commandments”—of men.

Much additional proof—biblical and historical—exists proving Easter is not permitted by God. To learn about the customs surrounding this holiday, read our booklet, *The True Origin of Easter*. You may also wish to read another booklet—*Christ’s Resurrection Was Not on Sunday*. It explains how and why the incorrect—unbiblical—“Sunday Resurrection” idea came into use as a means of subtly endorsing Sunday-keeping in place of keeping God’s Sabbath.

### Valentine’s Day

Next, let’s examine Valentine’s Day, known as the world’s “holiday of love.” Surely, celebrating a festive holiday like Valentine’s is harmless. Surely the God who gives us life, food, drink and the ability to think for ourselves, approves of the holiday for lovers to exchange gifts. Let’s see.

Innocent and harmless as Valentine’s Day may appear, its traditions and customs originate from two of the most sexually perverted pagan festivals of ancient history: *Lupercalia* and the feast day of *Juno Februata*. To the Romans, February was sacred to *Juno Februata*, the goddess of febris (or “fever”) of love—and of women and marriage. On February 14, billets—which were small pieces of paper with the name of a teen-aged girl written on it—were put into a container. Boys would then choose one billet at random. The boy and the girl whose name was drawn would become a “couple,” joining in erotic games at feasts and parties celebrated throughout Rome. After the festival, they would remain sexual partners for the rest of the year. This custom was observed in the Roman Empire for centuries.

Valentine’s Day—from this Satan-influenced world—is designed to appeal to fleshly, carnal desires—or, as the Bible calls them, *the works of the flesh*. (Read Galatians 5:19-21.)

Does God want His people partaking of candy and cards, or *any* customs associated with this day? Does He approve of this? Notice how specific was His warning to ancient Israel—and why His warning! “When the LORD your God shall cut off the nations from before you...and you succeed them, and dwell in their land; take heed to yourself that you be not snared by following them...and that you *enquire not after their gods*, saying, How did these nations serve *their gods*? Even so will I do likewise. You shall not do so unto the LORD your God: for EVERY ABOMINATION to the LORD, which HE HATES, have they done unto their gods...” (Deut. 12:29-31).

Read and reread this passage until it sinks in.

Christmas, Easter and Valentine’s are all attempts to “whitewash” customs and observances of pagan gods and idols by “Christianizing” them. For more, read our thorough article “The Truth Behind St. Valentine’s Day.”

### What About New Year’s?

Now let’s examine New Year’s. What could be wrong with celebrating the start of the upcoming year? What’s wrong with “ringing out the old and bringing in the new”? The truth will surprise you!

The Bible reveals, “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace...” (I Cor. 14:33). The Greek word used for “confusion” also means *instability, disorder, commotion* and *tumult*—words that perfectly describe New Year’s history, which is as confusing and chaotic as the holiday itself. For thousands of years, men kept changing the beginning of their New Year from spring to fall—from March 1 to January 1—and in some cases, December 25—back to March 25—then to January 1 again! Notice: “January 1 was restored as New Year’s Day by the Gregorian calendar (AD 1582), immediately adopted by ROMAN CATHOLIC countries. Other countries slowly followed suit: Scotland, 1660; Germany and Denmark, about 1700; England, 1752; Sweden, 1753; and Russia, 1918” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

Even today, nations cannot agree on this date. Notice: “Chinese New Year is celebrated officially for a month beginning in late January or early February” (ibid.). Also notice this quote: “The Muslim New Year falls on the first day of the month of Muharram and commemorates the date of the Hegira (July 16, 622, on the Gregorian calendar)... Since the Muslim year is a lunar one consisting of only 354 days, the commencement of the new year fluctuates widely by the Western calendar” (*Encyclopedia Americana*).

This is what happens when people rely on their own judgment rather than simply believing God. Great numbers lose inhibition on New Year’s. They make noise, get drunk, overeat, and often have illicit sex, sometimes with strangers. Common sense can disappear in pursuit of outright sin.

The God of the Bible said this to ancient Israel about the false gods they would encounter in the land He gave them: “You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, *nor do after their works*...lest they make you *sin* against Me...their gods...will surely be a *snare* unto you” (Ex. 23:24, 33). This certainly pictures New Year’s and other holidays we have seen.

Nowhere does God in His Word command the New Year’s celebration. To learn why true Christians do not get caught up in this day, read our eye-opening article “Why Christians Don’t Celebrate New Year’s.”

### **Halloween Celebrations**

Then there is Halloween. Americans spend \$2.5 billion every year on this second-largest holiday, besides Christmas. Is this just a harmless, happy childhood activity—or something very different? Its traditions, customs and practices are rooted in a past *much* darker, more sinister and more demonic than you know.

On the night of October 31, the ancient Celts, after harvesting and storing their crops for the winter, began their annual fall festival. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* reveals, “Samhain (Celtic: ‘End of Summer’), one of the most important and sinister

calendar festivals of the Celtic year. At Samhain, held on November 1, the world of the gods was believed to be made visible to mankind, and the gods played many tricks on their mortal worshipers; it was a time fraught with danger, charged with fear, and full of supernatural episodes. Sacrifices and propitiations of every kind were thought to be vital, for without them the Celts believed they could not prevail over the perils of the season or counteract the activities of the deities. Samhain was an important *precursor* to Halloween.”

The Celts observed the festival of Samhain in various forms. The Catholic church took note. Throughout the church’s early history, Catholic worshippers observed special anniversaries for martyrs who had been executed for their beliefs. Soon there were not enough days in the calendar year to dedicate a specific day for each martyr. So the Roman Catholic church chose one feast day—“All Saints’ Day!”—for its martyrs. In the early ninth century, Pope Gregory IV sought to paste over this pagan practice by moving All Saints’ Day from May 13 to November 1—the same day as Samhain! This officially extended the festival to the entire church. Later, All Saints’ Day became known as All Hallows Day, while October 31 became All Hallows Eve. You know this carefully chosen heathen practice as Halloween!

Halloween is brim full and running over with pagan customs, masquerading as Christian traditions! God bluntly labels any practice of such customs to be *SIN*. Israel was commanded to destroy the gods and nations around them. Why? “That they teach you *not* to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should you *sin* against the LORD your God” (Deut. 20:18).

Every parent should consider. Halloween teaches children that it is acceptable to beg for something instead of earning it through work. Think. It also teaches them to extort candy, because “trick or treat” means “give me a treat or I’ll play a trick on you!” Halloween’s ghoulish costumes,

spooky jack-o-lanterns, festive parades, and prankish tricks—often translated vandalism!—may appear to be innocent fun. But our article “Trick? or Treat? – Unmasking Halloween” reveals the TRUTH about this rotten holiday.

### **Birthdays, April Fools’ Day and Thanksgiving?**

Now for birthday celebrations. In every culture and nation on Earth, nothing is as universally celebrated. But is this practice biblical? Does *God* agree with it? Solomon wrote, “...better [is] the day of death than the day of one’s birth” (Ecc. 7:1). We would all agree that the day of one’s death is not exactly his best day. Yet, God says that it is better than the day of his birth.

Here is the briefest look at the history of birthday celebrations: “The Greeks believed that everyone had a protective spirit or daemon who attended his birth and watched over him in life. This spirit had a mystic relation with the god on whose birthday the individual was born... The Romans also subscribed to this idea...This notion was carried down in human belief and is reflected in the guardian angel, the fairy godmother and the patron saint...The custom of lighted candles on the cakes started with the Greeks...honey cakes round as the moon and lit with tapers [candles] were placed on the temple altars of [the goddess Artemis]...Birthday candles, in folk belief, are endowed with special magic for granting wishes...Lighted tapers and sacrificial fires have had a special mystic significance ever since man first set up altars to his gods. The birthday candles are thus an honor and tribute to the birthday child and bring good fortune” (Ralph and Adelin Linton, *The Lore of Birthdays*).

Birthday celebrations are mentioned in the Bible on three separate occasions and in each, terrible things occurred. Read our article “Are Birthday Celebrations Christian?” to learn much more of the truth about birthday-keeping.

What about April Fools’ Day, also known as All Fools’ Day? Every April 1, millions participate in pranks, prac-



tical jokes and even outright lies—in the name of “innocent fun.” Our article “A Foolish Holiday” explains the origin of this day, and whether one should observe it.

Finally, you may now be wondering about Thanksgiving Day. In fact, this is one of the few holidays *not* steeped in pagan tradition. Thanksgiving is set aside to show appreciation to Almighty God for the many blessings America has received—but has today so tragically forgotten. For more, read our article “Should You Celebrate Thanksgiving Day?”

### What God Says

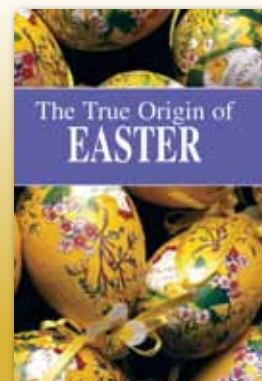
Men want to observe their own holidays in place of God’s seven annual Holy Days—outlined and commanded in His Word—and then tell themselves they are pleasing and worshipping the true God. I repeat Jesus’ statement: “*In vain* do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Mark 7:7). He also said this: “Full well you *reject* the commandment of God, that you may keep your *own tradition*” (vs. 9). Every year, around the world, hundreds of millions reject God’s Word and keep men’s holidays! No wonder Jesus asked, “Why call you Me, Lord, Lord, and *do not the things which I say?*” (Luke 6:46).

God told Israel: “You shall *not* walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them...And you shall be holy unto Me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that you should be Mine” (Lev. 20:23, 26).

In the Second Commandment—forbidding all forms of idolatry—and in other passages, God declares He is a jealous God. He wants His people doing what *He* commands, not the practices of false gods!

We saw God plainly instructs, “Learn *not* the way of the heathen” (Jer. 10:2). But most people do not fear God—they do not care what He says—and He allows them to make their own decisions. Human beings are free moral agents—free to learn or

To learn more, read “The Truth Behind St. Valentine’s Day,” *The True Origin of Christmas*, and *The True Origin of Easter*.



not learn what God commands—free to obey or disobey Him!

But woe to those who ignore the plain Word of the Bible, believing men can overrule God!

People can worship in ways that represent things far different from what they sincerely believe or intend. When they have observed a practice for a long time they come to identify with it, as though it were their own. They become vested in it. When one tries to tell them the truth—even presenting FACTS, EVIDENCE and PROOF—many become hostile—*angry!*—that one would dare violate sacred personal beliefs.

The proof is overwhelming that men’s holidays are “traditions” and “commandments of men”—*condemned by God!* Yet, vast millions keep them anyway!

God makes absolutely clear He does not want us to mix His ways with *any false* ways. He says, “What thing soever *I* command you, observe to do IT: you shall not *add* thereto, nor *diminish* from it” (Deut. 12:32). In other words, do *exactly* what I say—nothing more, nothing less!

### Two Choices

Worldwide disobedience comes with a terrible price. National punishment now lies just ahead for the greatest nations—the ones who have been custodians of the Bible and who

should—and could—have known the truth you now know.

Be careful of being angry that I am “taking away your holidays.” Your anger is in fact directed at God. I merely told you what He says. Direct your anger at ministers you trusted, but who deceived you.

So then, am I bad-mouthing cherished Christmas and Easter—and other holidays—or reporting the truth? Don’t shoot the messenger! The message comes from GOD.

God declares He hates the customs associated with pagan celebrations. We saw His *plain words* to all who say they can mix the horrible customs of outright paganism with a supposed “focus on Jesus.”

End the stress. Save your money before Christmas. Do not be lulled or intimidated by the sheep instinct of others around you who spend money they do not have for things they do not need—thus going into debt disobeying God. And tell your children the TRUTH about Santa Claus—and all the other lies associated with this abominable holiday, which has always focused away from the true Jesus Christ of the Bible.

You face two choices: listen to confused, deceived ministers, and go along with the masses and their traditions. Or, open your mind—and your Bible—listen to God, and seek the TRUTH about these days. □

## MIDDLE EAST

**U.S. Troops Pull Out of Iraq**

■ **GOING HOME:** One of the last American military convoys to depart Iraq crosses the border into Kuwait (Dec. 18, 2011).

PHOTO: MARIO TAMA/GETTY IMAGES

After eight years, \$800 billion in costs, and the loss of approximately 4,500 American and 100,000 Iraqi lives, the last troops pulled out of Iraq on December 18, putting an end to a war that began in March 2003.

“The last U.S. soldiers rolled out of Iraq across the border to neighboring Kuwait at daybreak...whoop-

ing, fist bumping and hugging each other in a burst of joy and relief,” *The Associated Press* reported. “Their convoy’s exit marked the end of a bitterly divisive war that raged for nearly nine years and left Iraq shattered, with troubling questions lingering over whether the Arab nation will remain a steadfast U.S. ally.”

In his weekly White House address, U.S. President Barack Obama said: “This week marked an historic moment in the life of our country and our military. For nearly nine years, our nation has been at war in Iraq. More than 1.5 million Americans have served there with honor, skill, and bravery. Tens of thousands have been wounded. Military families have sacrificed greatly—none more so than the families of those nearly 4,500 Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice.”

Iraq, though, appears to have been left in a fragile condition. On the same week of the American retreat, a series of at least 17 deadly bombings and resulting protests reminded the nation of its unresolved internal tensions.

“The crisis could scuttle a delicate power-sharing agreement that splits posts among Shi’ite, Sunni and Kurdish leaders...” *Reuters* stated. The media outlet later added, “Many Iraqis fear a return to sectarian violence without a U.S. military buffer.” □

## WEATHER &amp; ENVIRONMENT

**Worst Drought in 70 Years Afflicts Mexico**

Northern Mexican states have been plagued by one of the most severe droughts in the nation’s history. Analysts predict extreme regional water scarcity will cause food prices to rise, and result in a large migration of residents.

According to *The Associated Press*, the drought is Mexico’s worst “since the government began recording rainfall 70 years ago.” The country’s National Weather Service reported that areas that normally received 21 inches of rain per year had only gotten 12 inches in 2011.

“Mexican farmers have lost 2.2 million acres of crops to dry conditions

and 1.7 million farm animals have died this year from lack of water or forage, according to the nation’s Agriculture Department” (ibid.).

The Mexican government is trucking tanks with freshwater to affected areas, but after shipments arrive, the water often becomes a breeding ground for diseases.

The next rainy season—should it come—will not occur until June 2012.

“Forecasts do not signal any near-term relief, but rather more losses ahead as the winter season brings damaging frost,” *Reuters* stated.

In regard to the potential migration due to drought, *The Christian*

*Science Monitor* reported: “A reduction in crop yields...could mean up to 6.7 million additional Mexicans will emigrate to the United States by 2080, says a study by Princeton University researchers. The authors say that a 10 percent decline in agricultural productivity would lead two percent of the Mexican population to migrate.”

Northern Mexico is just another zone of several drought-affected areas around the world. Other regions experiencing severe water deficiencies include the southern United States, France, Britain and the Horn of Africa. □

## ECONOMY & PERSONAL FINANCE

# Britain's Homeless Youth Population Increases

Growing numbers of young people ages 16 to 24 are homeless according to a national British charity report.

Researchers from the organization, Homeless Link, found that almost half of the homeless-assistance institutions surveyed “have seen an increase in young people seeking help” due to “relationship breakdowns with family and friends,” according to the report “Young and Homeless.”

The charity wrote in a statement that “48% of homeless agencies reported turning away young single homeless people because their resources were fully stretched...”

A 17-year-old girl told *Sky News* that she “counts herself lucky to have a part-time job, but has spent the past year sleeping rough [spending the night on the street] or borrowing friends’ sofas in southeast London.” She continued, “I wake up in the morning and I don’t know where I’m going to be staying next...I do feel ashamed that when people ask me whereabouts do you live, and I have to say I don’t.”

Paul Marriott, chief executive of the nation’s largest charity for homeless youth, Depaul UK, said in the Homeless Link release that the results “sadly come as no surprise...Depaul UK has begun to see a rise in rough sleeping among young people in some parts of the country and we expect this to continue to rise given the continuing squeeze on household income and public expenditure.”

Lorna Esien, director of operations of St. Basils, which provides support services for homeless youth, agreed.

“For the first 6 months of this 2011, we saw 2289 young people which is a significant increase on 2010,” she said in the same release. “Over 30% were aged 16/17 and nearly 80% were Not in Education, Employment or Training.” □

## TERRORISM AND SECURITY

# India: World's Largest Arms Importer

India is the world’s largest weapons importer, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) found. At least 9 percent of all arms deals—the highest percentage of any country—occur there, with approximately 82 percent of imports coming from Russia.

“China and India remained the largest arms importers in the world,” SIPRI reported. “Also among the top 10 importers were five Middle Eastern countries.”

A *Foreign Policy* article stated, “India has kept pace with its neighbor to the north [China] and, in some areas, is actually exceeding it—a development that, though much less noted, is a sign of the growing militarization of the region as a new generation of emerging powers with global ambitions jockeys for regional supremacy.”

The rising military profile of the world’s largest democracy in the region is welcomed by the United States.

“As the economic power, cultural reach, and political influence of India increase, it is assuming a more influential role in global affairs,” a

*U.S. Quadrennial Defense Review Report* stated. “This growing influence, combined with democratic values it shares with the United States, an open political system, and a commitment to global stability, will present many opportunities for cooperation. India’s military capabilities are rapidly improving through increased defense acquisitions, and they now include long-range maritime surveillance, maritime interdiction and patrolling, air interdiction, and strategic airlift.”

According to a SIPRI Arms Transfers Programme official, India’s importation of weaponry is driven by rivalries with other nations, including Pakistan and China, as well as its own national security issues.

“An overview of India’s latest military acquisitions may give the impression of being China centric yet these developments only serve to further escalate the looming threat to Pakistan,” *The News International* reported.

The newspaper later stated, “This presents military planners in Pakistan with difficult options to maintain a credible balance of deterrence.” □



■ ON THE STREET: A homeless teenager sits in her tent on the pavement in Parliament Square London, England (June 20, 2011).

PHOTO: PETER MACDIARMID/GETTY IMAGES

# SHOULD YOU CELEBRATE NEW YEAR'S?

God's  
**HOLY DAYS**  
or Pagan  
**HOLIDAYS?**



What is wrong with “ringing out the old year and ringing in the new”? The truth may surprise you!

*Visit [www.thercg.org](http://www.thercg.org) to find the true meaning of New Year's!*