

OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2014

THE

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REAL TRUTH™

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING



AFRICAN UNITY

Just Out of Reach?

Demystifying the Spirit Realm

Another Temple in Jerusalem?

What Thanksgiving Should Mean to You

Why Drought Matters!

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VOL. XII | NO. 9 | OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2014

ARTICLES

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■ **PARCHED:** A pedestrian walks a dog on a dried section of Bernal Heights Park in San Francisco, California (July 16, 2014).

PHOTO: JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

Why Drought Matters!
Half of the United States is struggling with extremely dry conditions—with almost 100 percent of California suffering severe drought. It should serve as a wake-up call.
Page 7

FRONT COVER: Photo illustration by Jody E. Lydick

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Personal from the Editor-in-Chief
The Truth About Baptism
Page 1

African Unity: Just Out of Reach?
Africa has long attempted to come together, but with little success. Here is why.
Page 4

Demystifying the Spirit Realm
Demonic activity is on the rise. You can understand evil spirits, why they exist—and their ultimate fate.
Page 11

Another Temple in Jerusalem?
News out of the Middle East makes it seem impossible that Jewish religious rites will ever again be performed on the Temple Mount. Yet the Bible explains events that will unfold at the site.
Page 16

What Thanksgiving Should Mean to You
Thanksgiving Day, as celebrated in North America, is a time to gather with family and friends to give thanks for the many blessings enjoyed by these nations and their citizens. To many, its meaning can become lost.
Page 22

World News Desk
Page 33

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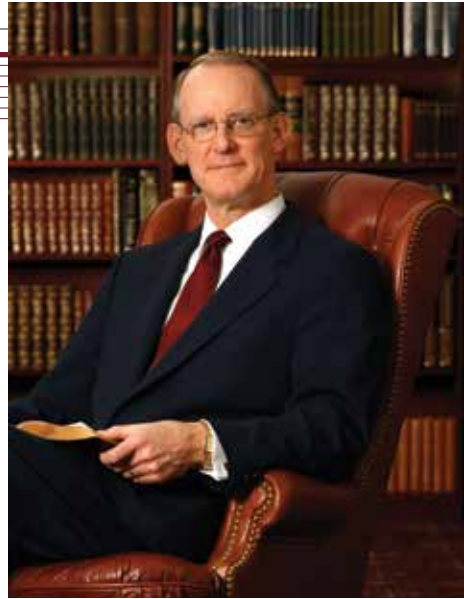
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



The Truth About Baptism

DOES SALVATION REQUIRE *water* baptism? If so, how should it be done? Sprinkling? Pouring? Immersion? What about infants and children? Who should baptize—an ordained minister or may others do it? Is *re-baptism* necessary? What part does *repentance* play? How does the *Bible* answer these questions?

Millions of people become Christians every year around the world. Some are baptized babies, others are young adults joining the church of their choice—and still others are adult converts reached by missionaries. Of course, many “believers” are never baptized. Most of the rest are not *correctly* baptized.

On Pentecost, in AD 31, the day the New Testament Church was created, the apostle Peter gave a powerful sermon to many listeners. His message was so convicting that 3,000 were baptized. Before their baptism, many asked him, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Peter’s answer? “Repent, *and be baptized* every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (vs. 38).

This verse is God’s plain command to “be baptized”! Not only is this instruction in your Bible, but the Bible

also says repentance must precede baptism or one will not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Most believe there are no requirements—no *conditions*—to being saved. This is untrue and Acts 2:38 proves there is at least one condition that must precede baptism itself—*repentance*! Some who teach there are no conditions for salvation quote Romans 10:9: “That if you shall *confess* with your mouth *the Lord Jesus*, and shall *believe in your heart* that God has raised Him from the dead, *you shall be saved*.” Verse 13 *appears* to make it even easier: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

What could be simpler for would-be Christians? How often have you heard that all one must do is “believe in your heart”? But is there more to this verse than meets the eye?

Many speak of having had a “religious experience” that instantly turned them into Christians. I once lived next door to a woman who told me that she “just knew” that she was a Christian because, as she put it, “I locked Jesus and the Bible up in my heart when I was nine years old.”

So many believe this is all that is necessary for conversion to occur. Others believe, “Christ did everything on the cross for me,” or “I am saved by grace alone without conditions.” What about the millions who

believe these ideas? Is this all there is to salvation? Are Romans 10, verses 9 and 13, the *only* verses that should concern you? Important background is required to set-up the method of proper biblical baptism.

Under the Death Penalty

The Bible says, “For the wages of sin is *death*; but the *gift* of God is *eternal life* through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23), and, “[Christ] *only* has immortality,” (I Tim. 6:16) as well as, “For *all* have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). These three verses prove that *no* human beings have immortal life inherent within them. God told Adam, “...dust you are, and unto dust shall you return” (Gen. 3:19). Human beings are made of simple dirt—earth—and nothing more. This is what they will return to after death.

Notice this: “And this is the record, that God has *given* to us *eternal life*, and this life is in His Son. He that has the Son has life; and he that has not the Son of God *has not life*” (I John 5:11-12).

Unless human beings have a Savior—One who pays the *penalty* for their sins—they are headed for *death*, not immortality! The good news is God—and only God—*does* hold the power to grant the “gift” of eternal life (John 5:26). Make no mistake! It cannot be *earned*—it is a free gift. But it is a gift given with conditions—to those who *qualify*!

Most Christians believe they are “saved by the blood of Christ.” This is not true. The Bible says we are “*saved* by His *life*” (Rom. 5:10), while we are “reconciled to God” and “*justified* by His [Christ’s] *blood*” (5:9). Also see I Corinthians 15:17-18. This is vital to understand and requires some explanation.

Consider! If Christ is *not* risen from the dead, then He cannot send His Holy Spirit to beget Christians. Recall that Peter said repentance and baptism would lead to the receiving of God’s Holy Spirit. A Christian is one who is led by the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14).

It is this same Spirit in Christians that God will use to eventually change them into sons of God composed of spirit—resurrected spirit beings. It is this Spirit *in them* that, when they are changed, makes eternal life—SALVATION—possible. If Christ had not been resurrected, He could not have gone to heaven where He could send His Spirit to Christians. Without this Spirit living in the mind of a Christian, there is no hope of eternal life.

Romans 8:11 says, “But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also *quicken your mortal bodies* by His Spirit that dwells in you.” At the Resurrection, one previously *begotten* of God will have become *born* of God. Prior to this new birth (John 3:3-6), a Christian is merely an *heir*—and not *yet* an actual *inheritor* (of eternal life). In this life, a Christian is like an impregnated egg in the womb. The baby’s birth comes nine months later. In this same way, a Christian’s birth into God’s kingdom comes well *after* the time of begetting and conversion.

Paul wrote, “For God has not given us the spirit of *fear* [timidity]; but of *power*, and of *love*, and of a *sound mind*” (II Tim. 1:7). A true Christian is actively working on all three of these qualities, which spring from God’s character and Spirit. He is striving to develop the love of God. He regularly asks God to give him a sound mind and the power to grow, change and become more like Jesus Christ in word, thought and deed! It is the Christian’s goal to grow in every possible way. Peter wrote, “But *grow* in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (II Pet. 3:18). If Christianity were merely a single moment of decision to call on Christ’s name, then why does the verse say to *grow*? What would be the point of this instruction?

Jesus said, “But he that shall *endure* unto the end, *the same shall be saved*” (Matt. 24:13). Here is another verse showing that for one to be saved, there is more required than to “just believe.” There is a need for endurance—a need to *stay the course* when it is not easy!

And it is not always easy to obey God’s Law and yield to the government of God in one’s life.

True Christianity is not a “cake-walk.” It is not taking the path of least resistance, with no need to grow, change or endure difficult challenges and tests! Christ said, “Enter you in at *the strait* [difficult] *gate*: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat: because *strait* is the gate, and *narrow* is the way, that leads unto life, and *few* there be that find it [Greek: *are finding it*—present progressive tense]” (Matt. 7:13-14).

It should now be clear that receiving God’s Spirit is not an end in itself, but rather the *beginning*—the *start*—for a newly begotten Christian. Compare Romans 8:7 with I John 5:12 and two things become indisputable. A person must belong to Christ, and he cannot belong to Christ unless he has been *begotten by God’s Spirit*.

But how does one reach the point when the Spirit of God is given?

“Repent and Believe”

The first words the Bible records from Christ’s mouth during His ministry are, “*Repent* you, and *believe* the gospel” (Mark 1:15). It has been made clear that repentance is tied to baptism and conversion. But it is also tied to believing the gospel of the kingdom of God. *Both* of these represent commands—*requirements*—CONDITIONS—for one to become a Christian!

The world is ignorant of the true gospel. It is preoccupied with the *Person* of Jesus Christ instead of the *message* that He brought. He spoke continually about the kingdom of God that is soon to come to this world!

The word *repent* means to *change*—to stop sinning! But what is sin? The Bible answers, “Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: *for sin is the transgression of the law*” (I John 3:4). While many have heard of sin, almost no one understands what it *is*—its definition. There is no misunderstanding what is meant here.

Please see **PERSONAL** page 29

HELD CAPTIVE and Completely Unaware!



There are forces at work that have held sway over civilization since the dawn of mankind. Humanity has believed the soothing words of a captor, thinking themselves better off under this subtle but powerful influence. Yet deliverance is coming soon!

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AFRICAN UNITY: JUST OUT OF REACH?

Africa has long attempted to come together, but with little success. Here is why.

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

THERE IS A tendency to see the entire continent of Africa—which is made up of 54 separate nations and encompasses nearly 20 percent of Earth's total land—as one gigantic country.

The approach of merging the continent's unique landscapes, divergent cultures, and peoples who speak over 1,000 languages makes it difficult to fully appreciate its

variety. Yet some are trying hard to change this view.

One of the more creative ways is through a computer application two major newspapers are using to track how many times they print "Africa" in lieu of naming a particular African nation in stories. The thinking is that measuring this will help hold journalists accountable and ultimately lead to change.

Alongside this struggle for uniqueness, however, are aspirations of soli-

arity. Africans want to be seen as one—a U.S.A., or "United States of Africa" as it has been called. Their goal is not to do away with individuality among nations, but instead to help others view the continent as a single prominent player on the world stage—a superpower bursting with potential.

Proponents of unity proclaim the continent is an untapped economic powerhouse. They propose that its one-billion-plus occupants—second most on the planet—provide a vast market-

■ **SEARCHING FOR PEACE:** Left, Somali soldiers patrol in Mogadishu, Somalia, following heavy fighting against a powerful militia warlord (Aug. 15, 2014). Right, members of the African Union discuss issues affecting the continent during the opening session for the year in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (Jan. 30, 2014).

PHOTOS: MOHAMED ABDIWAHAB/AFP/GETTY IMAGES (LEFT); SAMUEL GEBRU/AFP/GETTY IMAGES (RIGHT)



place for products and services. Africa's populace, they maintain, also boasts a large potential workforce and hosts the youngest population among continents—all eager and ready to contribute.

Further investment possibilities exist with the development of infrastructure for telecommunications, electricity and delivering potable water.

Human capital is not Africa's only asset. It is also a world leader in mining rare minerals critical for industry. It provides 80 percent of the world's platinum (for the automobile and jewelry industries), 49 percent of its palladium (for electronics manufacturing), 55 percent of its chromium (for stainless steel production), and is becoming a global resource for oil and gas.

Militarily, Africa has 22—just over 20 percent—of the world's top 106 nations listed on the Global Firepower rankings website. This ranking is based on a nation's "conventional war-making capabilities across land, sea and air."

Such a high proportion of representation speaks to the continent's fighting prowess.

A large population, vast resources, and an adequate military usually

make for a respected global entity. Yet despite having all three, Africa continues to be dismissed—largely unable to shed its perception as a group of divided, "third world" countries.

Unlike the European Union, Africa has been unable to come together as a community of nations and present itself to the world as a viable entity.

What is holding the continent back?

Significant Roadblocks

Any conversation about Africa's ability to integrate could start with acknowledging its numerous problems. It has long been vexed by disease, poverty, hunger, war and instability—all of which seem insurmountable.

The Ebola virus, which has reemerged in West Africa, illustrates the trials the continent faces, especially regarding health. Originally discovered in the 1970s, the virus kills up to 90 percent of those infected and is back on the scene wreaking havoc.

World Health Organization Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan summed up the impact in an August 2014 speech, "...this [Ebola] outbreak is moving

faster than our efforts to control it. If the situation continues to deteriorate, the consequences can be catastrophic in terms of lost lives but also severe socio-economic disruption and a high risk of spread to other countries."

Sadly, Ebola is just one of several deadly diseases troubling the continent. Despite having only about 15 percent of the world's population, Africa accounts for 70 percent of all AIDS cases and over 70 percent of all AIDS deaths worldwide. Even older diseases, such as malaria, which most parts of the world have successfully overcome, still afflict the area. The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 91 percent of worldwide deaths from the parasite occurred in the African region in 2010.

While parts of Africa are growing economically, the continent still contains a majority of the world's poorest nations. In Sub-Saharan Africa, nearly 50 percent of the people lived on \$1.25 or less a day in 2010.

"The number of poor...almost doubled, from 200 million in 1981 to about 380 million in 2005. If the trend persists, a third of the world's poor will live

■ **DISEASE AND UNREST:** Left, a mother waits in the rain with her children outside an Ebola treatment center in Monrovia, Liberia (Aug. 17, 2014). Right, military personnel escort a town official and her family out of their neighborhood after residents blamed the government for how they were handling the Ebola crisis and a mob overran a disease treatment facility (Aug. 20, 2014).

PHOTOS: JOHN MOORE/GETTY IMAGES

in Africa by 2015,” The World Bank stated.

Africans are also experiencing famine. In the Sub-Saharan region, one in every four people battle hunger. It is also the cause of one in every three childhood deaths (The Hunger Project).

In addition, conflict ravages the continent. Civil wars and clashes have led to over 9 million deaths since the end of the Cold War and another 9 million refugees and internal displacements, according to Virgil Hawkins, author of the book *Stealth Conflicts – How the World’s Worst Violence Is Ignored*. On top of this, since 1981, no fewer than 28 nations in Sub-Saharan Africa have been at war.

Tackling these problems leaves Africans with little strength to unite. Yet do these roadblocks actually prevent union or are they the result of *disunion*?

International Cooperation

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” This saying is at the heart of philosophical and ethical discussions about how nations of the world cooperate and interact with those in Africa.

The United Nations, World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, to name a few, have poured billions of dollars into projects and infrastructure with the goal of improving the continent’s standard of living. The thinking is that “aid today leads to growth tomorrow.”

The results have been mixed at best. Many believe large parts of Africa have been “given a fish” for too long, which has hindered their ability to unify and rise from obscurity.

“Financial aid going to African countries has often been mostly emergency food aid needed as short-term help with famines, and any longer-term aid has often been misappropriated for personal wealth by corrupt officials or for military spending. Where useful financial aid has been supplied to African countries it has often been in the form of loans with high interest rates that poor countries find too expensive a debt burden. Africa has to date attracted little foreign investment though much of that has been more stable longer-term European investment as in mining,” *world-poverty.org* stated.

In many cases, Africans are dealing with fledgling governmental structures

due to the exit of colonial powers. Most, however, are worse off financially than they were after initially attaining independence in the mid-20th century.

Foreign interaction with the nations of Africa is not limited to providing and receiving aid, however. There is also much outside involvement along the lines of normal international relations.

Africa continues to establish trade and commercial affiliations with several nations worldwide, including the United States.

In August 2014, U.S. President Barack Obama invited 50 African leaders to the White House for a U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit. An important goal of the conference was to focus on trade, investment and “fostering stronger ties between the United States and Africa.”

The president remarked during a speech in which he announced several business initiatives with American companies: “...I don’t want to just sustain this momentum, I want to up it. I want to up our game...I’m announcing a series of steps to take our trade with Africa to the next level.”

Many see this first-of-its-kind meeting as a reaction to the inroads others, including China, have made on the continent.

China’s own history with colonialism helps its people relate to many African nations, and the abundance of cash available for the Asian giant to invest has further strengthened ties with Africa. According to *China Daily*, Chinese investments in the continent rose from \$10 billion in 2000 to \$200 billion in 2013.

“The concept of ‘West is best’ is now a thing of the past,” *Der Spiegel* reported. “Disappointed by Europe and America, where their continent has often been written off as a hopeless case, Africans have instead looked to the Far East. There, they have found a strong ally, one that is mainly interested in doing business and doesn’t interfere in their internal affairs. China attaches no

Please see **AFRICA** page 27



■ **COOPERATION:** Leaders prepare for a meeting during the first-ever U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit in Washington, D.C. (Aug. 6, 2014). President Barack Obama hosted the event in an effort to strengthen ties between America and African nations.

PHOTO: CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES



WHY DROUGHT MATTERS!

Half of the United States is struggling with extremely dry conditions—
with almost 100 percent of California suffering severe drought.
It should serve as a wake-up call.

A DEPRESSION-ERA song brings to mind what Californians may be thinking today: “Don’t you know each cloud contains pennies from heaven?... Trade them for a package of sunshine and flowers. If you want the things you love, you must have showers.”

The world’s eighth-largest economy would love to see such “pennies from heaven” enrich its bare-brown earth and provide the things it loves once again.

Instead the state’s skies are cloudless, its soil parched. Lush lawns have been replaced by brass enclaves of grass, dead almond trees have been

ripped out of farms, and livestock struggle in the extreme heat with nowhere to graze. Boating and fishing are out, buying energy-efficient gadgets and finding ways to shorten showers is in. Golf course fairways and polo fields crisp in the sun. Lakes at hotspot tourism destinations have become mere puddles, with some

■ **DRY GROUND:** Cracked earth is visible on the banks of Shasta Lake at Bailey Cove in Lakehead, California. As the severe drought in California continues for a third straight year, water levels in the state’s lakes and reservoirs have reached historic lows. Shasta Lake is currently near 30 percent of its total capacity, the lowest it has been since 1977 (Aug. 31, 2014).

PHOTO: JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES



■ **SHRINKING RESOURCES:** Above left, a Porterville, California, resident uses a container of non-potable water to wash dishes (Sept. 4, 2014). Over 300 homes in the city have been without running water for weeks because of their wells drying up. Above top right, deer walk on ground that used to be the bottom of Shasta Lake in Redding, California (Aug. 30, 2014). Above bottom right, shoppers look at the dwindling supply of yellow cherry tomatoes available at a farmers market in Monterey Park, California (July 25, 2014). Below, the Enterprise Bridge passes over a section of Lake Oroville that is nearly dry in Oroville, California (Aug. 19, 2014).

PHOTOS: JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES (ABOVE LEFT, ABOVE TOP RIGHT, AND BELOW); FREDERIC J. BROWN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES (ABOVE BOTTOM RIGHT)



operating at only 20 percent of total capacity.

Now in its third year of heavy drought and 10th dry year in a row, more than 58 percent of California falls into the worst drought-level category—EXCEPTIONAL DROUGHT. The area stretches from the second-largest city in the U.S., Los Angeles, through the Central Valley in which 90 percent of the nation's fruits and vegetables are produced, and up to the mountain peaks of Redding to the north.

The rest of California has been declared a state of emergency as parts of it fit into the "moderate," "severe" and "extreme" drought-level categories. So far, it has been a \$1.7-billion disaster.

Fines exceeding \$500 await those who wash a sidewalk or driveway with a hose, use drinkable water in a decorative fountain, or wash a car without a proper nozzle. The state hopes to make a 20 percent cutback on its water usage by urging residents (who use an estimated 80 to 100 gallons of water a day according to the United States Geological Survey) to let lawns go brown and use dishwashers less, among other methods.

The measures, though, are for good reason. In certain areas of the state, the taps have already run dry and relief agencies have been called to bring bottled water to residents whose well water has disappeared. Other Californians have hired well drillers or taken to reporting neighbors to authorities in the hope that this great liquid asset will be available in the future.

Perhaps the worst part of the crisis is that officials have no idea exactly how much water exists in underground aquifers and wells. They can only estimate how much water people use compared to what is currently available through overland lakes and rivers.

"The 2014 drought is responsible for the greatest absolute reduction to water availability for agriculture ever seen, given the high agricultural demands and low streamflows and reservoir levels," the Center for Watershed Sciences at the University

of California, Davis reported. "Surface water availability is expected to be reduced by about one-third."

In addition, the center stated: "Net water shortages for agriculture in this year's drought most severely affect the Central Valley with at least 410,000 acres lost to fallowing, \$800 million in lost farm revenues and \$447 million in additional pumping costs...Dairy and livestock losses from reduced pasture and higher costs of hay and silage add about \$203 million in agricultural revenue losses."

There is the tendency for those in other parts of the country—and even the world—to become desensitized by the steady stream of bad news coming from the state.

Yet California's drought has implications for all of us.

Widespread Problem

The entire American Southwest is in the same perilous position as California, though it has not all reached the point of implementing water fines—yet. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, more than 73 million people—almost a third of the United States—live in a drought-affected area.

Other hard-hit states include Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona, Kansas, New Mexico, and Nevada.

"In six of the seven states with the highest levels of drought, more than 30% of each state was in extreme drought...a more severe level of drought characterized by major crop and pasture losses, as well as widespread water shortages," *USA Today* reported.

"Drought has had a major impact on important crops such as winter wheat," the media outlet continued. "'So much of the winter wheat is grown across the southern half of the Great Plains,' [U.S. Department of Agriculture meteorologist Brad] Rippey said, an area that includes Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas, three of the hardest-hit states. Texas alone had nearly a quarter of a million farms in 2012, the most out of any state, while neighboring Oklahoma had more than 80,000 farms, trailing only three other states.

"In the Southwest, concerns are less-focused on agriculture and more on reservoir levels, explained Rippey. In Arizona, reservoir levels were just two-thirds of their usual average. Worse still, in New Mexico, reservoir stores were only slightly more than half of their normal levels. 'And Nevada is the worst of all. We see storage there at about a third of what you would expect,' Rippey said."

In addition, many Western states are struggling to feed and grow livestock.

"Texas, the country's leading beef state, lost 24 percent of its total beef herd from 2010 to 2014," *Insurance Journal* reported. "Oklahoma saw a 13 percent cut. As a result of shrinking herds, some feedlots and even a meat-packing plant have closed...Hay and alfalfa are expensive and in short supply for feeding cattle. For the time being, dairy producers appear to be absorbing the increased costs, but beef ranchers are having a harder time managing the expense."

According to *National Public Radio*, hay prices have increased 200 percent since the drought began.

"Since the price of feeding cattle has skyrocketed, ranchers are culling their herds, selling off large numbers of cattle in auctions to out-of-state buyers. Crops also suffered, as corn outputs fell by 40% in 2011 and peanut production is down as well. The lack of crops has created conditions for severe dust storms across the western part of the state. Rains in 2013 improved the outlook somewhat for agriculture, but drought remained severe in much of the Texas Panhandle [in 2014], an important agricultural region."

State vs. State

The drought emergency has resulted in Western states fighting over alternative water sources. Oklahoma took Texas to court for trying to divert water and California and Arizona are engaged in ongoing public battles over the Colorado River, which has been declining for some time.

"[The river has] never provided the bounty that was expected in 1922,

when the initial allocations among the seven states of the Colorado River basin were penciled out as part of the landmark Colorado River Compact, which enabled Hoover Dam to be built, and the shortfall is growing,” the *Los Angeles Times* reported.

“The signs of decline are impossible to miss. One is the wide white bathtub ring around Lake Mead, the reservoir behind Hoover Dam, showing the difference between its maximum level and today’s. Lake Mead is currently at 40% of capacity, according to the latest figures from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which operates the dam. At 1084.63 feet...it’s a couple of feet above its lowest water level since it began filling in 1935.”

And, according to *The Telegraph*, the “water crisis in the south west of the US is likely to worsen...Research has found that the Colorado River Basin, the prime source of water in the region, is being sucked dry.”

The outlet continued: “The Colorado River is the only major river in the southwestern US, with the basin supplying water to 40 million people in seven states and irrigating around four million acres of farmland.

“In California, the basin is a key source of water for Los Angeles and San Diego.”

Another study showed the lack of water in the West is most likely the beginnings of a megadrought that could last for the next 35 years and lead to mass migrations of entire Western populations.

“While the 1930s Dust Bowl in the Midwest lasted four to eight years, depending upon location, a megadrought can last more than three decades, which could lead to mass population migration on a scale never before seen in this country,” *The Cornell Chronicle* reported.

“[Cornell University Assistant Professor of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences and one of the study’s authors Toby] Ault said that the West and Southwest must look for mitigation strategies to cope with looming long-drought scenarios. ‘This will be worse than anything seen during the last

2,000 years and would pose unprecedented challenges to water resources in the region,’ he said.

“In computer models, while the southern portions of the western United States (California, Arizona, New Mexico) will likely face drought, the researchers show the chances for drought in the northwestern states (Washington, Montana, Idaho) may decrease.

“Prolonged droughts around the world have occurred throughout history. Ault points to the recent ‘Big Dry’ in Australia and modern-era drought in sub-Saharan Africa. As evidenced by tree-ring studies, a megadrought

“The problem of drought is varied and complex, involving all aspects of modern society.”

occurred during the 1150s along the Colorado River. In natural history, they occur every 400 to 600 years.”

“Beyond the United States, southern Africa, Australia and the Amazon basin are also vulnerable to the possibility of a megadrought. With increases in temperatures, drought severity likely will worsen, ‘implying that our results should be viewed as conservative,’ the study reports.”

Imagine if major metropolitan areas across the world were inundated with millions of people due to migration! Where would they live? Would there be enough jobs for everyone? How would it affect the infrastructure of those cities?

Complicated Issue

The problem of drought is varied and complex, involving all aspects of modern society. As a result, residents, policymakers, farmers and ecologists are at a crossroads regarding how to solve it.

Some advocate returning to the area’s natural ecological system. After all, it is argued, California sits on desert land and was never meant to support green grass in its more arid regions. Water actually had to be drained from another part of the state and transported through manmade aqueducts to ensure Los Angeles had drinkable resources. Why should people continue to act as though it is *not* mostly desert?

On the other hand, California’s Central Valley is home to a \$45 billion agricultural industry that provides food for 300-million-plus people. If farmers cannot irrigate their land, they cannot produce crops. It becomes a vicious cycle—no jobs, no crops, no livestock, no food.

“Here in California, we’re the breadbasket of the United States, but also we export tremendous volumes of fruits, vegetables and even cattle overseas,” NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory climatologist Bill Patzert told *Voice of America*. “And so when these terrible droughts hit and production drops, this echoes around the globe.”

At the same time, not protecting current ecological systems could mean further depletion of the surrounding area and drying up river beds, resulting in more areas of the West turning to desert—and more problems.

Proponents of protecting various animal species at the expense of giving water to farmers argue that preventing the agriculture industry from having easy access to water forces it to stop turning a blind eye to harmful environmental practices, which include using pesticides and not restoring sufficient nutrients to the soil.

“Taking more water out of the Delta is not going to solve our problems,” senior attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council Kate Poole stated after the State of California ruled that farmers could not take water out of the San Joaquin Delta because it was home to a small endangered fish. “The emergency drought is a

Please see **DROUGHT** page 31



DEMYSTIFYING the Spirit Realm

Demonic activity is on the rise. You can understand evil spirits, why they exist—and their ultimate fate.

BY JUSTIN T. PALM

IN A SMALL RENTED house in Gary, Indiana, swarms of large black flies continuously invaded the front porch of a family of four—a mother and her three children. The insects would not relent despite the winter weather. Late at night, the basement door creaked mysteriously. Footsteps could be heard climbing the stairs when no one else was home. A child levitated on a bed. The three children's eyes

sometimes bulged, their voices became unusually deep, and their faces had eerie smiles.

One child, age 7, growled like an animal, baring his teeth and threatening to kill. During one episode, five men could barely hold him down. In front of a nurse and the family's case worker, his older brother climbed the wall backward and then walked upside down across the ceiling before flipping back onto the ground.

At first the family was categorized as “delusional,” afflicted with psychi-

atric disorders, *The Indianapolis Star* reported. Very few listened to them, including local churches the woman called. After a family doctor reviewed the case, his medical notes recorded: “delusions of ghost in home...hallucinations.” The mother even temporarily lost custody of her children.

But when the freakish events spread to others in contact with the family, including police officers, the case was taken seriously. For instance, an officer leaving the family's home after a visit reported the seat in his car moving backward and forward by itself.

Around 800 pages of documents outlined the incredible true story that convinced even the highly skeptical: “Gary police Capt. Charles Austin said it was the strangest story he had ever heard.

“Austin, a 36-year veteran of the Gary Police Department, said he initially thought...her family concocted an elaborate tale as a way to make money. But after several visits to their home and interviews with witnesses, Austin said simply, ‘I am a believer’...

“He later told *The Star* he believed in ghosts and the supernatural but said he didn’t believe in demons. Austin said he changed his mind after visiting the Carolina Street house” (ibid.).

The family’s landlord, once doubtful, also admitted that something unusual was taking place.

“‘I thought I heard it all,’ said Reed, who’s been a landlord for 33 years. ‘This was a new one to me. My belief system has a hard time jumping over that bridge’” (ibid.).

A Catholic priest performed rituals meant to rid the family of evil spirits, but some activity still continued.

Eventually, the family’s trial ended. The demons finally stopped manifesting themselves.

The woman who was influenced stated, “Demons can actually possess you. Use you, so you can give them souls...and they make you take your own life. So...it’s real. And a lot of people don’t think about it. They live their lives day to day and you never think that it would be you” (ibid.).

In this increasingly dark world, these stories are becoming more frequent.

Growing Trend

Spiritism is spreading like wildfire. Through books, magazines, television and movies, witchcraft, demonism and the occult reach into virtually every facet of life. Increasingly, people are even turning to spiritism for answers to their problems.

Does the spirit realm exist?—and should people communicate with it? Do witchcraft and the occult reveal “ancient wisdom” to life’s big questions? Are astrology, Tarot cards, Ouija boards, and crystals harmless fun—or is there something *more* to them?

Societies around the world are full of the influence of evil spirits—and in many forms. Since the famous 1973

movie “*The Exorcist*” was released, scores of movies, television series, and video games have dealt with demonic possession. Consider the “Hollywoodization” of the occult: “*The Exorcism of Emily Rose*,” “*The Possession of Michael King*,” “*Evil Dead*,” “*Paranormal Activity*,” “*Deliver Us from Evil*,” “*Carrie*,” “*Devil’s Advocate*,” and “*The Craft*.” These films tantalize and ultimately desensitize viewers to demonism, witchcraft and magic, many times with excessive blood and gore.

In addition, the minds of young and old alike have been entertained by television series such as *American Horror Story*, *Psychic Kids: Children of the Paranormal*, and *My Haunted House*.

NBC is developing a prime-time show that delves into demonic possession, as news tabloid *The Hollywood Reporter* detailed: “The network has handed out a script commitment to drama *The Possession of Maggie Gill*... *Maggie* centers on the Gills, a loving...middle-class family in Eugene, Ore., who find themselves in the midst of crisis when paranormal occurrences begin to affect the everyday fabric of their home. At the same time, a series of brutal murders is being investigated by two local detectives. The storylines converge as those involved slowly realize that the murders and hauntings may have a common link: Maggie Gill, 15-year-old daughter of the Gill family, who might be possessed by demonic attachments.”

There was a time when television shows, movies and books about demons were few and far between. Now their popularity is running wild. The article concluded with a description of this trend: “Exorcism dramas are a hot subject matter this development season. *The Walking Dead* [the zombie graphic novel series turned TV show] creator Robert Kirkman is adapting his exorcism comic, *Outcast*, as a pilot at Cinemax; and former *Walking Dead* showrunner Glen Mazzara’s *Damien*, a follow-up to *The Omen*, received a straight-to-series six-episode order at Lifetime” (ibid.).

Many argue that this entertainment is nothing more than harmless fun—a way to get a quick scare and learn about something that seems mysterious. But modern society’s focus on the dark spirit world is leading to real violence. For instance, after a 13-year-old girl became infatuated with the fictional horror character “Slenderman,” she stabbed her mother, who reported, “I came home one night from work and she was in the kitchen waiting for me and she was wearing a mask, a white mask...She was someone else during the attack...” (*News.com.au*).

Two Wisconsin girls, also reportedly influenced by Slenderman, were charged with stabbing their friend in a violent attack. A *Telegraph* headline said it all: “Two 12-Year-Old Girls Charged with Trying to Murder Friend to Please Internet Demon.”

Regular readers of this magazine understand that mankind has reached the period of time called the “end of the age” or the “time of the end.” This unprecedented period in history brings with it an increase in demonic activity.

Rise of Exorcists

The Catholic Church has taken note and called up more exorcists. *The Telegraph* reported on the trend: “Dioceses across Italy, as well as in countries such as Spain, are increasing the number of priests schooled in administering the rite of exorcism, fabled to rid people of possession by the Devil.

“The rise in demonic cases is a result of more people dabbling in practices such as black magic, paganism, Satanic rites and Ouija boards, often exploring the dark arts with the help of information readily found on the internet, the Church said.

“The increase in the number of priests being trained to tackle the phenomenon is also an effort by the Church to sideline unauthorised, self-proclaimed exorcists, and its tacit recognition that belief in Satan, once regarded by Catholic progressives as an embarrassment, is still very much alive.”

The article continued, “In Spain, Antonio Maria Rouco Varela, the

archbishop of Madrid, chose eight priests to undergo special training in May to confront what he described as ‘an unprecedented rise’ in cases of ‘demonic possession.’ The Church in Spain was coming across many cases that ‘go beyond the competence of psychologists’ and they were occurring with ‘a striking frequency,’ the archbishop said.

“‘Diabolical possessions are on the increase as a result of people subscribing to occultism,’ said... Francesco Bamonte, the president of the Italy-based International Association for Exorcists. ‘The few exorcists that we have in the dioceses are often not able to handle the enormous number of requests for help,’ he told *La Repubblica* last month.”

The International Association of Exorcists, which was formally recognized in July 2014 by the Vatican, consists of 250 priests scattered across 30 countries who can perform exorcisms.

Pope Francis apparently even publicly “cast out” a demon from a man in May 2013. Video of the event was posted and widely shared on the Internet.

Here is a description of what happened. While Francis was in Vatican City greeting people in a line, he came to a wheelchair-bound man. Francis shook the man’s hand and placed his other hand on the man’s head. The man, with eyes slightly bulging, looked up at Francis. The pope then put both hands on the man’s head and the man’s mouth opened wide. After slightly convulsing, he slumped down in his chair.

While on the surface it appeared to be some kind of exorcism, *The Christian Post* reported that a few weeks later, the man said that he was still possessed by a demon: “The wheelchair-bound man that Pope Francis blessed in a controversial prayer many billed as a public exorcism earlier this month in St. Peter’s Square, says the demons are still inside him.

“Identified in a recent report only as Angel V., the 43-year-old Mexican father of two reportedly told Spanish-language newspaper *El Mundo* that the demons have withstood 30 exorcism

attempts by 10 exorcists, including the Vatican’s leading exorcist, Rev. Gabriel Amorth, who claims to have sent 160,000 demons to hell.

“‘I still have the demons inside me, they have not gone away,’ said Angel...”

Why the Appeal?

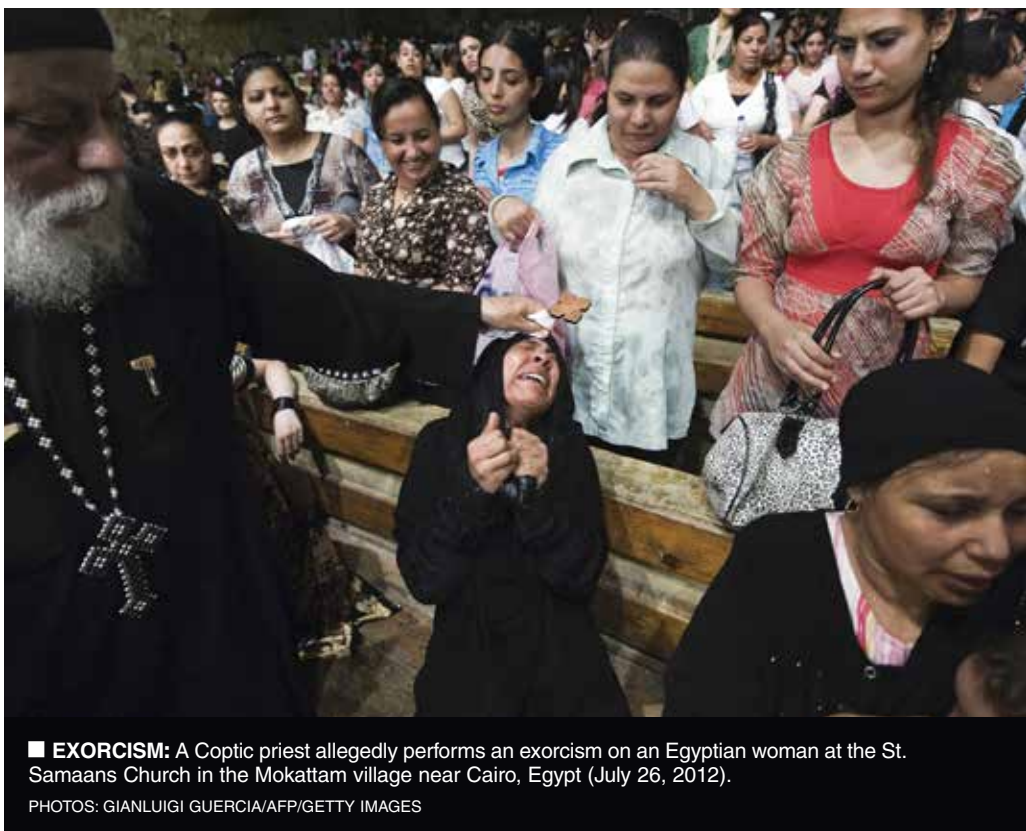
In May 2014, a six-day conference in Rome titled “Exorcism and Prayers of Liberation” concluded that the rise of demon possession is due to a lack of religious involvement.

The Telegraph reported, “The decline of religious belief in the West and the growth of secularism has ‘opened the window’ to black magic, Satanism and belief in the occult, the

want to understand the world in which they live. This is why, throughout history, men have turned (in one degree or another) to witchcraft and the occult. They open their minds, sometimes unwittingly, to the influence of spirits.

Crucial History

Understanding the spiritual world starts with turning to one book that describes all things spiritual—the Bible. God’s recorded Word presents the history of these evil spirits. Yet most, even professing Christians, have never understood the truth. Some do not even believe in them at all.



■ **EXORCISM:** A Coptic priest allegedly performs an exorcism on an Egyptian woman at the St. Samaan Church in the Mokattam village near Cairo, Egypt (July 26, 2012).

PHOTOS: GIANLUIGI GUERCIA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

organisers of a conference on exorcism have said.”

Yet humanity’s fascination with the spirit realm is nothing new. Man has always been curious to know if there is more to this life than just the physical, material world.

Whatever the tool of divination used, people want to know the future. They want to know the past. They

Yet demons *do* exist, and after reading the above news accounts, this should be obvious. How they came to be, however, is less apparent—unless one knows where to look.

The story behind the existence of demons begins in the book of Ezekiel. Even before God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He placed Earth under the authority of one of three

mighty cherubim—Lucifer (which means “light bringer”).

Notice the description of Satan’s original form and role in Ezekiel. Although he was once a perfect, righteous angel, over time, the devil became twisted and power-hungry. He attempted to overtake God’s throne and was cast down to Earth as a result. The context shows that the “king of Tyrus” is obviously a description of the devil.

The account states: “Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus says the Lord GOD; You seal up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. You have been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering...the workmanship of your tabrets and of your pipes was prepared in you in the day that you were created. You are the anointed cherub that covers; and I [God] have set you so: you were upon the holy mountain of God; you have walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. You were *perfect* in your ways from the day that you were created, till *iniquity* was found in you. By the multitude of your merchandise they have filled the midst of you with violence, and you have sinned: therefore I will cast you as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire” (28:12-16).

The chapter continues, showing Satan was lifted up with pride: “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty, you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness: I will cast you to the ground...you have defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities...” (vs. 17-18).

Jesus Christ confirmed this account in Luke 10, when 70 of His disciples reported to Him in astonishment that they were able to cast out demons. Notice Christ’s fascinating answer: “And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through Your name. And He said unto them, *I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven*. Behold, I give unto you power...over all the power of the enemy...” (vs. 17-19).

The book of Job makes clear that Satan has dominion over this Earth: “Now there was a day when the sons of God [angels] came to present themselves before the LORD [in heaven], and Satan came also among them. And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence come you? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro *in the earth*, and from *walking up and down in it*” (1:6-7).

Contrary to what most believe, Satan still resides on Earth today—not in an ever-burning hell as is supposed. And he takes an active role in influencing the thoughts and minds of human beings.

Notice in I Peter the warning for true Christians not to fall prey to the devil, who, “as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour” (5:8). The book of Revelation even describes “Satan’s seat” and “where Satan dwells” (2:13).

God’s Word reveals that the devil was given authority to reign over Earth, and that he still holds this power, if only for a little while longer.

“God of This World”

Most do not understand the incredible knowledge about the origin of Satan—and religionists, theologians, priests and professing Christian leaders fail to recognize it. God is not directly running the affairs of this world. All societies, governments, empires and kingdoms are being ruled by “the god of this world”—Satan the devil. All of the pain and suffering experienced today is the result of his rule.

Notice what the apostle Paul wrote the Corinthian congregation in what is one of the most important verses in the Bible: “In whom *the god of this world* has blinded the minds of them which believe not...” (II Cor. 4:4).

This is why man’s history has been rampant with all kinds of evil, suffering and turmoil!

It is unpopular to admit that the devil exists—let alone that he is “the god of this world.” Most scoff at the thought. It has been said that the greatest seduction the devil has pulled off is convincing the world that he does not exist. But this disbelief falls right into

Satan’s scheme. By blinding “the minds of them which believe not,” Satan deceives people into believing he is a fairy tale. He does not want humanity to be alerted to his world-ruling presence. Even God describes Satan as “the great dragon...that old serpent, called the devil, and Satan, which *deceives the whole world*...” (Rev. 12:9).

During Jesus Christ’s time on Earth, Satan challenged Him in a tremendous battle of wills. The devil took Christ to a high mountain and, in a vision, instantly showed Him all the kingdoms and powers of the world (Luke 4:5). Then Satan said to Him, “I will give You all their power and grandeur, for it has been made over to me and I can give it to anyone I choose” (vs. 6-7, *Moffatt* translation).

How did Christ respond? Did He dispute or deny the devil’s claim of possessing world-ruling authority? Did He say, “What are you talking about, Satan? You can’t give Me what doesn’t belong to you! God rules this world, not you”?

No. Christ simply said, “Get you hence, Satan: for it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve” (Matt. 4:10).

Clearly, the Bible shows that the devil has the authority to grant world-ruling power—Christ did not dispute or deny this! In fact, several times Jesus described Satan as “the prince of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

Satan does rule the governments of this world—and he is not alone. Why does God permit this to occur?

Fallen Angels

Satan’s deception is not limited to humanity. He also influenced one-third of the angels to follow him during his rebellion against God. Notice the account in Revelation 12: “There appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon [Satan]... and his tail drew *the third part* of the stars of heaven [angels], and did cast them to the earth...” (vs. 3-4).

Demons are fallen angels. By contrast, the remaining two-thirds of the angels were obedient and still serve God. Part of the faithful angels’ purpose is to help God’s people achieve

their awesome human potential. Hebrews 1:14 calls them “ministering spirits.”

Fallen angels serve their own selfish lusts and roam the Earth under the world-ruling authority of Satan, “the prince of the devils [demons]” (Mark 3:22). They are the “unfruitful works of darkness” that Paul warns about in Ephesians 5: “...have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (vs. 11).

In Ephesians 6:12, Paul wrote that Christians “wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness [or wicked spirits] in high places.”

Because a matter weighed heavily upon his mind, the prophet Daniel fasted so that he could draw closer to God, and perhaps receive an answer (Dan. 10:3-4). The fast was “three full weeks” before an answer from heaven arrived.

Finally, an angel appeared to Daniel (vs. 10-11) and said: “Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that you did set your heart to understand, and to chasten yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I am come for your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia” (vs. 12-13).

Were Michael and the other angel “withstood” by mortal men 21 days? Of course not! The above verses are about a conflict between angels (servants of God) and demons (servants of the devil). Satan has a kingdom with servants and Christ said this kingdom is not divided (Mark 3:23-26). Although it is based on competition, strife, hatred and selfishness, it is organized and structured.

All of what has occurred with Satan and his demons has been allowed for a reason. In God’s infinite wisdom, He has permitted them to play a role in His Plan for mankind.

Ever since Adam and Eve were deceived by the serpent in the Garden of Eden, humanity has taken to itself

the knowledge of how to live. Man has not heeded God’s commands and instead has followed his own path. As a result, he has reaped the fruits of the wrong way of life, and the devil and his agents have taken advantage of the fact that human beings have been cut off from God.

Yet God has a marvelous plan to free all mankind from Satan’s influence and give all people an opportunity for salvation. To learn even more about the history of Satan and his demons, you may wish to study the booklets *A World in Captivity* (available at rcg.org/awic), *Who Is the Devil?* (rcg.org/witd), and *The Truth About Hell* (rcg.org/ttah). These delve further into this topic and explain it in much greater detail than this article can.

Ultimate Fate

Demons, as the devil’s agents, always seek to confuse, blind and destroy. Among their tools are witchcraft, spiritism, paganism and the occult. These fallen angels do have limited power. They understand certain things and work to make humans follow them. However, they will not be free to torment mankind for much longer.

II Peter 2:4 describes how demons are being “reserved” for a future judgment: “...God spared not the angels that sinned [demons], but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.”

The Greek word for “hell” is *tartaros*, and means a “place of restraint” or a “prison.” Piecing this together with scriptures used earlier, this clearly describes Earth.

Editor-in-chief of *The Real Truth* magazine and voice of *The World to Come™* program, David C. Pack, wrote in his booklet *Who Is the Devil?* under the subhead “Satan’s Fate”: “But what happens to the devil *after* Christ’s Return? Will he be left free to roam the earth,

continuing to ‘deceive’ (Rev. 12:9) and ‘weaken’ (Isa. 14:12) the nations? Will he be allowed to remain the ‘god of this world’ (II Cor. 4:4) forever? What is his final fate?

“Revelation 20 describes Christ setting up a 1,000-year millennial rule (vs. 4) and bringing the ‘last chapter’ in Satan’s story. Verse 2 states that a mighty angel (vs. 1) actually binds him ‘a thousand years’ by ‘casting him into the bottomless pit,’ where he is ‘shut... up.’ This angel then ‘set[s] a seal upon him, that he should *deceive the nations no more*, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.’

“Paul mentioned the time of Satan being bound when he said, ‘the God of peace shall *bruise* Satan under your feet shortly’ (Rom. 16:20). This is God’s promise to all true Christians and all mankind, because Satan has persecuted the former and deceived the latter for thousands of years!

“The apostle Jude stated that Satan and his demons will be cast out of the universe into a place where the Bible explains there is *no light*. Verse 13 describes these wretched beings as ‘*wandering stars*, to whom is reserved the *blackness of darkness forever*.’ The ‘prince of darkness’ and his angels will get what they deserve—what they brought on themselves. The one who was once known as the ‘light bringer’ chose darkness. God will give him complete darkness for the rest of time!”

As world conditions speed toward the day when God must intervene in world affairs, the time is coming when Satan and his angels will be banished from Earth.

No longer will demons possess human beings and commit murderous and violent acts. Children will not be tormented any longer and seek to kill. All vile demon-influenced media will be gone forever. With it, mankind’s fascination with these evil spirits will disappear—and be replaced with a desire to seek the true God. □



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Another TEMPLE in Jerusalem?

News out of the Middle East makes it seem impossible that Jewish religious rites will ever again be performed on the Temple Mount. Yet the Bible explains events that will unfold at the site.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

TWENTY-THREE. That is the number of times armies have surrounded the city of Jerusalem throughout history. Egyptians, Assyrians, Romans, Muslims, and Christian Crusaders have all had their turn.

FIFTY-TWO. This is how many *additional* occasions the city has been attacked. It has been utterly destroyed twice.

FORTY-FOUR. That is how many times Jerusalem has been captured and recaptured.

Yet surpassing all these numbers combined, which come from Eric H.

Cline's *Jerusalem Besieged: From Ancient Canaan to Modern Israel*, are the differing opinions on how to bring actual and lasting *peace* to the City of Peace.

Today, tensions between Israelis and Palestinians largely center on the Gaza Strip, which is just over twice the size of Washington, D.C., and is governed by the terrorist organization Hamas. For years, the global community has favored a two-state solution, with the idea of having two official nations—one Israeli, the other Palestinian—peacefully exist side by side. Often this answer includes the contested city of Jerusalem being under international supervision.

Yet repeated failures to implement this have left many disillusioned. For example, in the wake of the most recent Israeli response to Hamas firing rockets into the Jewish state, *The Washington Post* published an article titled “Beneath the Conflict in Gaza Lies the Death of the Two-State Solution.”

The publication cited a Pew research poll that showed a growing segment of Middle Easterners believe that Israel and an independent Palestine could never peacefully co-exist. In Egypt, the number of people who believe this jumped from 40 to 48 percent over last year. Tunisia rose 14 points to 71 percent during the same time. Among Israelis, it went from 38 to 45 percent, and in the Palestinian territories it rose from 61 to 63 percent.

The *Post* article stated that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu “signaled clearly...that the two-state solution was off the table. In a speech discussing the current Operation Protective Edge [the military campaign



■ **PAST AND PRESENT:** Above, a model of Jerusalem and the Temple, located in the Israel Museum, shows what the city looked like during the time of Christ. Below, a view of the Temple Mount and the surrounding city, as seen from the Mount of Olives.

PHOTOS: THINKSTOCK (ABOVE); STACEY L. PALM/THE REAL TRUTH (BELOW)

to stop rocket fire from Hamas], he made this stark pronouncement: ‘I think the Israeli people understand now what I always say: that there cannot be a situation, under any agreement, in which we relinquish security control of the territory west of the River Jordan.’”

A growing number of Palestinians also favor alternate solutions, such as seeking full Israeli citizenship as part of a single binational state.

Even more perplexing in all of these attempts at peace is what to do with the Temple Mount. Some staunchly favor maintaining the status quo—allowing Muslim control of the area including the Al-Aqsa mosque and the iconic Dome of the Rock.

Yet the deep religious, historical and cultural importance of the site brings out a myriad of competing opinions, especially among those of the Jewish religion. The most visible are Israeli groups devoted to building a new temple on the site. (Two other Jewish temples have stood there previously.) These organiza-

tions seek to emulate the Israelites who returned from captivity to build the second temple in 538 BC.

One such group ran a video advertisement that included the tagline, “This is the generation. The children are ready.” The words followed a sweeping camera shot of Jerusalem’s Old City featuring cranes and scaffolding circling an under-construction temple—with the two mosques nowhere to be seen.

This organization is doing everything in its power to ready a new center of worship: completing priestly garb to the specifications of Exodus 28, breeding red heifers for sacrifices, building a menorah from 95 pounds of gold with a price tag of \$2 million, and so on.

Other Jews want a temple, but take a less potentially inflammatory approach by daily praying the words, “May it be your will, O my God and God of

my fathers, that the Temple be rebuilt speedily in our days...”

Not all those of the Jewish faith agree. The group that favors a temple being built cites rabbinical teachings that their efforts may speed the coming of the Messiah. Others feel that no structure should be constructed until *after* the Messiah’s coming. One other tiny group feels Jews should not even be in the Holy Land until the Messiah comes.

Christian denominations are similarly mixed on the idea of a third temple.

Many evangelical groups—with Bible prophecy as a motivation—heartily support Israel and the building of a third temple. Some even send considerable sums of money each year for charitable causes in the nation. Similar to some in the Jewish community, they believe supporting Israel will help speed end-time events.

All of these plans and theories are stated without addressing a hulking roadblock.

Imagine the uproar if Israelis went on the mount and leveled the Dome of the Rock to make way for their own temple. The entire Muslim world—and potentially the whole international community—would rally against tiny Israel.

Such issues can leave diligent Bible students unsure of who and what to believe. Yet this need not be. You can know what events to expect for the Temple Mount!

Putting Things in Perspective

There are a number of verses in the Bible that are used to support the idea of another temple. One is in II Thessalonians 2: “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (vs. 1-4).

These verses speak of a man called “the son of perdition” who will sit “in the temple of God” just before Jesus Christ’s Return.

Another clue is found in Daniel: “And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that makes desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days” (12:11).

Verse 9 shows that the context for these events is “the time of the end.”

While there are a few potentially confusing concepts here, notice that the temple sacrifices are prophesied to stop. In order for something to cease, it must have started again.

The context of Matthew 24 also addresses the end of the age (vs. 3) and speaks of the verse mentioned by Daniel. In it, Jesus Christ states: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. When you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand *in the holy place*, (whoso reads, let him understand:) then let them

which be in Judea flee into the mountains” (vs. 14-16).

There are other complex topics mentioned in this passage, but notice that there *will* be a “holy place.”

Also note the important phrase “whoso reads, let him understand.”

God wants His servants to understand what is coming for the world. Notice the start of Revelation 1: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, *to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass...*” (vs. 1).

Editor-in-chief of *The Real Truth* David C. Pack wrote about this concept in his book *The Bible’s Greatest Prophecies Unlocked! – A Voice Cries Out*. In this excerpt, he starts by referencing Matthew 24:15.

“Next consider verse 15, which concludes referring to ‘Daniel the prophet’ and the admonition ‘whoso reads, *let him understand.*’ Most today do not—and *will not*—understand the events soon to smash into civilization. Here is one big reason. God’s servants obey Him (Acts 5:32). Understanding flows directly from obedience to God: ‘The



■ **TEMPLE DESTRUCTION:** “The Destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem,” by Francesco Hayez was painted in 1867 and depicts the invasion, burning and looting of the Jewish temple by Roman soldiers.

PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a *good understanding* have all they that *do His commandments*' (Psa. 111:10).

"Grasp this. All real understanding of God's Plan and spiritual truth comes from God. It is only the action of His Spirit that opens one's eyes. Notice: 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the *spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened*' (Eph. 1:17-18).

"All who yield themselves in obedience to God, wishing to be His disciples—His servants—*will be able to understand all the great prophecies to be fulfilled in the last days!* Professing Christianity refuses to obey God, rejects His authority over them—and remains blind as a result. No amount of trying to understand will unlock God's purpose to those who ignore His commands.

"This is the great *first* KEY to grasping the meaning of major biblical prophecies. They are intended for, and will only be understood by, *God's people*. All others will remain in confusion, mangling and misunderstanding the horrific, world-shattering events that will soon directly impact every person on the planet!"

While it can seem as if a temple potentially being built in Jerusalem is a gigantic event, it is just one of many other prophetic events. In order to fully understand what the Bible states about it, you must understand prophecy in general.

More Keys

A crucial fact about how the Bible is laid out is found in Isaiah. Chapter 28 explains that God's Word is written, "... precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little..." (vs. 13).

In other words, information about any given biblical topic is found throughout the entire Bible "here a little, and there a little." This is especially true with prophecy as was demonstrated in the verses above from Daniel, Matthew and II Thessalonians. They all speak of similar or related events—the daily sac-

rifices, the abomination of desolation, and the son of perdition—but each contain different details. Even though these three passages were written decades apart by different authors, God inspired bits of information to be recorded in each. Only when put together can one see the whole picture.

Another key to understanding prophecy is to approach it with an open mind. Allow *God's* clues to open up the meaning. In fact, the Bible is written in such a way that it interprets itself. Any time there is a symbol used—and most prophecies involve symbolic language—the Book always explains what it means.

Again, bring an open mind. Do not allow anything that you have learned previously to cloud what God's Word *actually* says.

Last Days

To know if the Jews will soon begin priestly duties again on the Temple Mount, one must check if the timing is right. Understanding individual prophetic events hinges on *WHEN* they occur. Remember the terms used in the three verses first quoted in this article. They spoke often about the "end" and "the end of the days." Elsewhere in the Bible, this time period is referred to as the "last days."

For instance, Genesis 49:1 states, "And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in *the last days*."

Another example is in II Timothy 3: "This know also, that in the *last days* perilous times shall come" (vs. 1).

Also, II Peter 3: "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the *last days* scoffers, walking after their own lusts" (vs. 3).

When are these days set to occur and how can you know whether we are in them? Mr. Pack thoroughly covers what signs would accompany this time in the booklet *Are These the Last Days?* It is available for free at rcg.org/attld.

In it, Mr. Pack writes: "The longest single prophecy in the Bible is found in Daniel 11. Chapter 10 introduces it and chapter 12 completes it. Numerous

times (six in chapter 12 alone) is found the word 'end.' The first time that '*the time of the end*' appears is in Daniel 11:40.

"Yet the prophet Daniel was not permitted to understand the prophecy he recorded. When he asked God (12:8) its meaning, God told him that it was '*sealed till the time of the end*' (vs. 9). It was to be *unsealed* when that time came—and this has happened. Verse 10 teaches, 'the wise shall understand,' but that 'none of the wicked shall understand.' This means that some—a relatively very few—*will* understand, while most will *not* understand Daniel's prophecy!

"Daniel 12:4 gives two vitally important clues to know when the end time has arrived. Notice: 'But you, O Daniel, shut up the words, and *seal the book*, even to the *time of the end*: many shall run *to and fro*, and *knowledge shall be increased*.'"

He continued by discussing "the incredible knowledge explosion brought about by the arrival of computers in scores of millions of homes. Great numbers now have access to vast amounts of knowledge—*instantaneously!* What can be quickly known by anyone seeking information is staggering! Surely we have arrived at the time when 'knowledge shall be increased'—along with its easy access!

"Daniel also wrote, 'many shall run to and fro.' It took the arrival of railroads in the middle of the nineteenth century—then great ships driven by powerful engines to move them ever faster across oceans—followed by automobiles—and finally, jet planes to make our planet almost universally accessible. The arrival of the supersonic Concorde Jet turned the Atlantic Ocean into little more than a large lake. Seemingly, the planet grows smaller daily because of people's ability to 'run to and fro' almost anywhere and at any time!"

Another way to know if these are the end times are the lists of prophetic trends and conditions the Bible says will coincide with the last days. The most comprehensive list is found in Jesus' Olivet Prophecy, which was recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.

Christ stated of the last days, “And you shall hear of *wars* and *rumors of wars*...and there shall be *famines*, and *pestilences*, and *earthquakes*, in diverse [various] places” (Matt. 24:6-7).

Take a look at the world around you! This passage reads like the front page of a modern newspaper. All of these trends have existed throughout man’s history, but they are *worsening*. Anyone who is honest with the facts can see that there are more severe droughts, more virulent diseases, and more earthquakes than ever before.

This means that the time mentioned in the Bible about the daily sacrifices, man of sin, and abomination of desolation is just around the corner!

Daily Sacrifices

Another principle of foretold events makes understanding the abomination of desolation much easier: that of DUALITY. Put simply, the former fulfillment of a prophecy helps one understand its latter fulfillment. A quote from the article “What Is the Abomination of Desolation?”—available at rcg.org/witaod—explains this concept.

“This duality is seen with the ‘abomination of desolation’ prophecy. And what it reveals is fascinating! Let’s examine the historical TYPE of what has already occurred. First, recall the lengthy Daniel 11 prophecy. A crucial part of that prophecy comes up for review and expansion at this juncture.

“In about 176 BC, Antiochus IV...acquired the kingdom from his older brother. After this, Antiochus Epiphanes removed the high priest in Jerusalem and installed someone loyal to himself. Upon a triumphant return from Egypt, in 168 BC, Antiochus sacked the Temple at Jerusalem and took its golden vessels.

“...Antiochus also sent troops to Judea in 167 BC. They destroyed the Temple and its sanctuary. This act stopped the commanded twice daily sacrifices at the Temple (Ex. 29:39-42; Num. 28:4-6). This was an overt attempt to wipe out the Jewish religion with all of its doctrines.

“This military leader also stationed a garrison atop the Jewish Temple Mount, desecrating it. Also recall that Daniel wrote, ‘Yes, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him [Antiochus] the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of the sanctuary was cast down’ (8:11).

“Daniel added this in chapter 11: ‘And arms shall stand on his [Antiochus’] part, and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength [the Jewish Temple], and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the *abomination that makes desolate*’ (vs. 31).

“Now then, *what exactly* is this coming ‘abomination’ that will be ‘set up’ again? The truth—born of history—is beyond eye-opening in regard to prophecy.

“The first fulfillment was not just Antiochus’ armies coming into Jerusalem—an early ‘treading it down’ for three years until 165 BC—but the fact that those armies set up an IMAGE—a specific IDOL—on the Temple’s altar, which *defiled* and made it *desolate*. Antiochus further polluted the Temple by offering swine’s blood upon the altar.

“These historical events of Daniel 8 are an unmistakable fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel 11:31, and a FORERUNNER of the end-time fulfillment of the ‘abomination of desolation’ spoken of by Christ in Matthew, Mark and Luke.”

So does the abomination of desolation prophecy mean that a *temple* will be constructed within the next few years?

Not necessarily! The historical record bears this out. In Ezra 3, it shows the Israelites who returned to build the second Temple restarted sacrifices *before* anything was built.

Notice: “And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem...and [the priests] built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because

of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening” (vs. 1-3).

The same pattern can apply today. The important thing to remember is that in order for the daily sacrifices to stop, they must first start again. Yet *something* will need to be built on the Temple Mount, which also means that there will have to be significant changes in Israeli-Palestinian relations. An entire temple, though, is not necessary for sacrifices to begin again.

Prove It!

Everything covered in this article provides just the barest look at what the Bible records about prophecy. In fact, a full one-third of God’s Word is devoted to it.

To fully grasp its intricacies takes WORK. Note that every time a Bible topic was mentioned in this article, there was a referenced book, booklet or article. These all take time and diligent effort to read and study.

God does not expect you to take what He says on blind faith. Instead, He wants you to PROVE what you are learning. This is demonstrated by the command in I Thessalonians 5: “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (vs. 21).

The Creator of all things wants you to know what the future holds, but you must work to make it happen. Blow the dust off your Bible—or go buy one if you do not have one—and closely examine what is said in *The Real Truth* magazine and through the literature found on rcg.org.

God wants you to know what the future holds, but you must back up that desire with sincere action.

The most expansive look at Bible prophecy can be found in Mr. Pack’s *The Greatest Prophecies Unlocked! – A Voice Cries Out*. This one-of-a-kind work delves deep into God’s Word and explains future events in easy-to-understand language. It is available for free at rcg.org/tbgpu.

If you put the time in, you can understand world events as never before—and your place in them! □

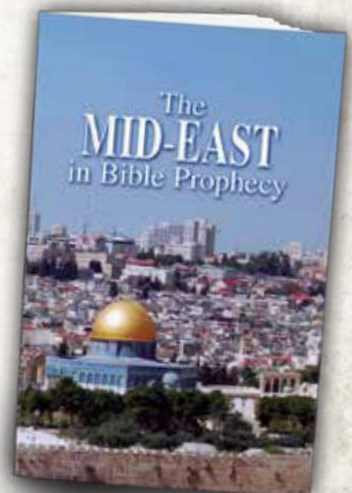


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WHAT THANKSGIVING SHOULD MEAN TO YOU



Thanksgiving Day, as celebrated in North America, is a time to gather with family and friends to give thanks for the many blessings enjoyed by these nations and their citizens. To many, its meaning can become lost.

TURKEY DINNERS, cranberries, candied yams, stuffing, mashed potatoes, pumpkin pie and family gatherings—these are all commonly associated with most Americans' and Canadians' yearly celebration of giving thanks—Thanksgiving Day!

In the United States, Thanksgiving is on the fourth Thursday of November. In Canada, it is the second Monday in October. On this holiday, a meal is prepared with all the trimmings; families gather together and talk, while others watch a football game or

a parade filled with pilgrims, American Indians, and other colonial figures. Some have their own yearly holiday traditions.

What comes to mind when you think of Thanksgiving? Do you picture a time of thankfulness toward God—or is it merely one of eating, partying or watching a game?

Sadly, the latter is what Thanksgiving has become to most. They have forgotten *why* the day was established. Its meaning has slowly deteriorated, and is now almost completely lost under a cloud of media hype, sales pitches, marketing tactics, and blitz commercialism.

While many are familiar with the traditional *representation* of the original Thanksgiving, it is helpful to examine the purpose for which it was first celebrated. By doing this, the day's meaning can be firmly established.

Origin of the Day

In August 1620, the Mayflower, a 180-ton ship, set sail from Southampton, England. After difficulties with the vessel, resulting in its return to port, the voyage finally began. Her 102 passengers were to become some of the founding pilgrims of the United States of America, and the initiators of one of this nation's most popular holidays.

After weeks of plowing through the tumultuous Atlantic waters, battling strong winds, pounding waves, and a number of problems with their vessel, the pilgrims spotted Cape Cod, off the coast of Massachusetts. They had arrived there by accident. Their intended location was off the Virginia coast, where other pilgrims had established colonies.

Before anchoring at Plymouth Rock and disembarking to explore the territory, the pilgrims devised the "Mayflower Compact." This was to serve as the basis for governing their new colony, where all would have the freedom to worship God as they chose.

The compact stated: "We whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread sovereign lord King James...Having undertaken, for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and honor of our king and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia, do by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God and one of another, covenant, and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation, and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions, offices from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the colony: unto which we promise

all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names; Cape Cod, the 11th of November..." (*Mourt's Relation: A Journal of the Pilgrims at Plymouth*).

The next few months would prove to be difficult and trying. More than half of the original pilgrims did not survive the first, long, bleak New England winter. Often, two or three people would die in one day due to infection and sickness.

But the approaching spring provided new hope. The survivors built homes and planted crops. They made friendships with local Indian tribes and traded with them. The passing of winter allowed the pilgrims to labor and produce, causing the colony to flourish.

After reaping their first harvest in the fall of 1621, the pilgrims dedicated a day for thanking God for the bounty with which He had blessed them. They had endured the many hardships that came with pioneering a new land. They toiled through building an entire colony from what was simply wilderness. They were at peace with their neighbors. And they were especially grateful for their harvest. This allowed them to gather and store plentiful food and crops for the long and brutal winter ahead.

Their governor, William Bradford, proclaimed a day of *thanksgiving* toward God. They prepared a great feast to enjoy with family and friends—both from within the colony and with neighboring Indian tribes.

The following quotes from *America's God and Country* demonstrate Bradford's and the colony's thankfulness for God's protection and blessings: "Being thus arrived in a good harbor, and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of Heaven who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean, and delivered them from all the perils and miseries thereof, again to set their feet on the firm and stable earth, their proper element."

In reminiscing upon the colony's success, Bradford continued, "Thus out of small beginnings greater things

have been produced by His hand that made all things of nothing, and gives being to all things that are; and, as one small candle may light a thousand, so the light here kindled hath shone unto many, yea in some sort to our whole nation; let the glorious name of [God] have all the praise."

Clearly, pilgrims of the Plymouth colony gave God credit for all that they had. Notice the many references to God, and their acknowledgment of how He granted them so many blessings. The pilgrims' beliefs were firmly entrenched in the realization of God's presence and intervention in their everyday lives. Thanksgiving Day began because of this belief. It is a day dedicated to giving thanks to God for the many things we often take for granted.

Over the years, many colonies did keep Thanksgiving, but they kept various other days of thanksgiving, at different times of the year. It is a popular misconception that the pilgrims kept Thanksgiving on the same day each year following the first celebration in 1621, and that the other colonies began keeping that same day. In truth, it was a tradition always used to highlight and show gratitude for important events, such as bountiful harvests, victories in battle, etc. Whenever these took place, the colony called for the celebration of a day of thanksgiving.

In the late 1700s, during the American Revolution, the Continental Congress suggested the yearly observance of a day of national thanksgiving in hopes of uniting factious states.

In 1817, the state of New York adopted Thanksgiving Day as an annual holiday. By the mid-1800s, other states likewise adopted the practice. In 1863, President Lincoln appointed it as a national holiday, and gave a Thanksgiving proclamation. Each president since then has issued a proclamation, announcing the celebration of this day.

Is It Biblical?

In examining the origins of popular holidays, some may wonder if Thanksgiving Day is a biblical holiday,

or whether it is rooted in paganism, as some have claimed.

Though not specifically mentioned in the Bible, Thanksgiving is different from most other national holidays. In fact, many nations celebrate their own unique harvest festivals. Deceived by Satan (Rev. 12:9), the world at large is cut off from the true God. Therefore, it should not be surprising that even such harvest festivals occasionally become tainted with the worship of heathen deities. Although such ancient festivals were usually influenced by paganism, history shows Thanksgiving Day as practiced in North America was unique. The originators of this day focused upon giving thanks for an abundant harvest, sorely needed for survival.

Being centered on giving thanks to the Creator is a major distinction in origin that separates Thanksgiving Day from holidays tainted with pagan origins, such as Easter, Valentine's Day, Christmas or Halloween. (Read the booklet *God's Holy Days or Pagan Holidays?* at rcg.org/ghdoph to learn more.)

But does God allow Christians to participate in holidays even if they are not associated with paganism?

To find the answer, we must examine God's Word—the Holy Bible. God has allowed the recording of certain scriptural accounts so that those who diligently search them can find answers to their questions.

John 10:22 records Jesus Christ being present at a Jewish celebration called the "Feast of Dedication." This day was a yearly anniversary of the purification of the Temple at Jerusalem (in about 165 BC) after it was desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes. This was not a day of riotous parties or celebrations. It was a national holiday commemorating a respectable and solemn event. This account clearly shows that Christ Himself was with the Jews as they gave thanks to God on this special day.

In the book of Esther, we read that through the inspiration of God, Mordecai and Esther established the "Feast of Purim." This day was a yearly commemoration of the Jews overcoming persecution from Haman, the prime minister of King Ahasuerus.

Notice Mordecai's and Esther's proclamation, confirming the keeping of this day: "And that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim

reverence as God's Holy Days, which represent specific parts of His Master Plan of salvation. Rather, these celebrations were simply for remembering important national events.

The examples of Christ, Mordecai and Esther show that God permits customs commemorating honorable moments in national history to be kept—but *only* if they are done in a proper manner and free of any pagan influence!

Although not *directly* mentioned in Scripture, Thanksgiving Day is a holiday specifically based on *biblical* principles and commands. It was to be a day to spend with family and friends, honoring and *thanking* God for the bountiful blessings He provides.

King David wrote in the Psalms, "Let us come before His presence *with thanksgiving*, and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms" (95:2). "Enter into His gates *with thanksgiving*, and into His courts with praise: be thankful unto Him, and bless His name" (100:4). And, "O give *thanks* unto the Lord, for He is good: for His mercy endures forever...Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! For He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness" (107:1, 8-9).

The apostle Paul wrote, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known *unto God*" (Phil. 4:6).

He also said, "*Giving thanks* always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20).

These great servants of God gave thanks, and recorded their examples for us to follow today. Thanksgiving should be done regularly. In fact, God even commands that we do so.

“Being centered on giving thanks to the Creator is a major distinction in origin that separates Thanksgiving Day from holidays tainted with pagan origins...”



should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed. Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority, to confirm this second letter of Purim" (9:28-29).

These days were not to be observed with the same degree of honor and

Sacrifices of Thanksgiving

In the Old Testament, God's people were required to sacrifice animals (such as lambs, rams, goats, etc.), and offer them as burnt offerings to Him. These sacrifices took place in conjunction with repentance for sins, and asking for God's forgiveness. Sacrifices occurred regularly, and served as a constant reminder of obedience toward God.

Yet God did not require sacrifices because it pleased Him. In fact, it was done to picture the *ultimate* sacrifice that was yet to come—Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God (John 1:29). At Christ's death, the *physical* sacrifices that were part of the Old Covenant were no longer required.

But God *still* requires the offering of *spiritual* sacrifices—including those of giving thanks.

Psalms states, "I will offer to You the *sacrifice of thanksgiving*, and will call upon the name of the LORD" (116:17), and, "Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God *thanksgiving*; and pay your vows unto the most High" (50:13-14).

These verses clearly explain that God has no need of "the flesh of bulls, or the blood of goats" that would be offered in a sacrifice. Instead, He wants us to offer Him sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise!

David understood this, and even appointed certain Levite priests the specific duty of thanking and praising God: "And he appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, and to record, and to *thank* and *praise* the LORD God of Israel" (I Chron. 16:4). Chapter 23 of I Chronicles further explains the Levites' duties. Verse 30 states that they were to "stand every morning to thank and praise the LORD, and likewise at even."

Today, God wants—and expects—these same sacrifices of thanksgiving from us through our actions and prayers. Recall what Paul wrote: "Giving thanks *always* for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20).

Paul further explains: "Rejoice evermore. *Pray* without ceasing. In everything give *thanks*: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (I Thes. 5:16-18).

This is how we can give thanks to God each and every day! To be effective, our thanksgiving must be spontaneous and from the heart, rather than an expression of routine formality. The article "The Keys to Dynamic Prayer," found at rcg.org/tktdp, provides helpful points on how to properly and effectively praise God.

The book of Daniel records a valuable lesson regarding learning to acknowledge God's power. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, leader of one of the most powerful gentile kingdoms ever, believed that he had strength and wealth because of his actions. The king failed to realize that this power came from God—and His mighty hand directing world events and the flow of history. Because of Nebuchadnezzar's ingratitude, God caused him to become as a wild animal, roaming the countryside and eating grass. This king lived as a madman for seven years (Dan. 4:27-33).

After this time, King Nebuchadnezzar learned his lesson. Notice this sobering and insightful account: "And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up my eyes unto heaven, and my understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High [God], and I praised and honored Him that lives forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He does according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What do You?" (vs. 34-35).

"Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase" (vs. 37).

Pride, arrogance and ingratitude prevented Nebuchadnezzar from grasping the full scope of God's power.

But through his trial, his pride was broken—and he came to see how puny and weak he and his kingdom actually were in comparison to God. If we do not acknowledge God's might—as this gentile king did—and thank Him for it, then this account of Nebuchadnezzar should be taken as a personal warning!

Ultimate Gift Giver

The pilgrims could never have imagined that America would become the global superpower it is today. The U.S. has continuously been at the forefront of economic prosperity, medical science, technology, food production, sanitation, architecture and space exploration. Its citizens enjoy the freedoms of religion and speech. It allows individuals and families to emigrate from other countries, and enjoy these liberties. It is usually the first country—if not the only one—supporting other nations and peoples in need. And the income and standard of living for most Americans are still relatively high compared to other industrialized nations, though significantly less than its peak of about six decades ago.

Yet Americans seem to have forgotten *where* these blessings came from!

Consider: "The silver is *Mine*, and the gold is *Mine*, says the LORD of hosts" (Hag. 2:8). Exodus 19 records, "Now therefore, if you will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: *for all the earth is Mine*" (vs. 5).

The Bible clearly shows that God owns everything!

James 1:17 further states, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from *above*, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no *variableness*, neither shadow of turning." There are no variables with God; He does not change.

The apostle James makes his point by comparing God's promise of blessings to the source of the Earth's physical light—the sun. Depending on the time of day, cloud coverage, and other deciding factors, the amount of light reaching the Earth's surface varies. For example, a tree, mountain or build-

ing may block light, which creates a shadow; smog and exhaust can cause less sunlight in a city.

However, variables do not apply to God. His goodness and blessings do not change from one day to the next, depending on His mood, cloud coverage or temperature. While there are conditions to receiving blessings, His promise of showering gifts for obedience is forever—*constant*—unchanging!

Look at the world around you. If you live in the U.S., or another Western country, you enjoy many blessings that other nations do not. Although many live relatively comfortable and peaceful lives, many dangers come with this.

Notice Moses' grave warning: "Then *beware lest you forget the LORD*, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage" (Deut. 6:12). Moses understood—and warned—that when people receive much, it is in their nature to become ungrateful and arrogant, and forget the source of their blessings—God!

Christ's admonition in Luke 12:48 has been ignored: "for unto whomsoever much is *given*, of him shall be much *required*."

But not for long. Society will soon be caught unaware, like "a thief in the night" (II Pet. 3:10).

America the Strong?

America and other Western nations are unaccustomed to true hardship and have enjoyed national power, prestige and wealth. Yet we have become blind to *where* these blessings originated.

The general national attitude is one of arrogance and pride—that of no longer feeling the need to show gratitude toward God the Provider. Although Thanksgiving Day is celebrated yearly, the practice of giving thanks—as the pilgrims originally intended—has all but disappeared!

In 1973, a Senate member proposed a resolution to declare April 30 as a "National Day of Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer." The purpose of this day was to repent for "national sins," modeled after Abraham Lincoln's 1863 "Proclamation Appointing a

Day of National Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer." (Interestingly, President Lincoln believed that the Civil War was punishment for the nation's sins. To receive forgiveness from God, he issued this national day of fasting—much like the king of Nineveh did in the book of Jonah, chapter 3.)

However, the 1973 resolution was overturned. Members of the House, and even some of the Senate, did not approve of using the word "humiliation." Many cynics equated the term "repent for national sins" to Americans feeling sorry or ashamed for the wealth and prosperity of the nation. The purpose of the resolution was ignored—even ridiculed. The cynics concluded that there was no need to repent for *anything*!

If that was the world in the 70s, one can only imagine how much worse this nation has become—decades later!

In 1630, John Winthrop, the first governor of Massachusetts, gave a moving speech titled "A Model of Christian Charity" to the passengers of the 350-ton sailing vessel, the *Arbella*. Winthrop believed that through humility toward God, they would prosper.

He said: "We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other; make other's conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. The Lord will be our God...and will command a blessing upon us in all our way. So that we shall see much more of his wisdom, power, goodness and truth, than formerly we have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies..."

"For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to *withdraw His present help from us*, we shall be made a *story* and a *by-*

word through the world..." (*Colonial American History*, emphasis added).

These are strong words. They accurately portray the condition of our nation today!

The Bible foretells that because America has forgotten God—and dealt "falsely with Him"—no longer recognizing that He is the great Provider, He will "withdraw His present help from us." The very blessings now taken for granted by so many will be stripped away. Millions will go into a time of great suffering because of the dangerous and deadly sin of ingratitude. Only through God's great mercy will this country avoid becoming "a story and a by-word through the world."

To learn more about the many prophecies in the Bible describing the nation's future, read the book *America and Britain in Prophecy* at rcg.org/aabibp.

Making Thanksgiving Meaningful

To most nations, the concept of celebrating Thanksgiving Day is viewed as a holiday that is meaningful for North Americans, although certain other nations have similar harvest festivals.

However, the act of thanksgiving toward God should be done everywhere—every day—by everyone! It is not just an American holiday; neither should it be limited to one day a year.

As Thanksgiving Day approaches, ponder and consider the many wonderful blessings you enjoy. Be grateful for these wonderful benefits. Realize that these material blessings were not given to us because of anything we have done—we do not deserve them.

Before you and your family enjoy Thanksgiving festivities, be sure to take time to truly thank God in prayer and thought for the national wealth, power and prestige He has given your nation.

Make certain that you and your family are not partaking in the nationwide, unthankful attitude. Be sure to give thanks to God in the same heartfelt, sincere manner that the pilgrims did on the first Thanksgiving in North America! □

AFRICA

Continued from page 6

political conditions to economic cooperation, unlike the West, which, at least on paper, demands good governance, the rule of law, anti-corruption measures and protections for human rights.”

Yet the quid-pro-quo relationship between China and Africa is not without its critics—even within the continent itself. There are concerns that focusing just on business, without accountability, will not best serve the African people in the long run.

Another *Der Spiegel* article noted that this non-interference approach is no panacea and “one of the reasons that despots...hold the Chinese in such high regard. Cooperating with China fills their empty coffers and enables them to secure their hold on power. And Africa’s dictators are not badgered when they oppress and prey on their own people.”

Whether it is through direct aid or normal international business relations, involvement from the outside has fallen short of helping Africa come together. The continent’s only hope, therefore, may be to help itself from within.

United States of Africa

Over 50 years ago, individual African states began a legitimate quest for unity by forming the Organization of African Unity (OAU). By 2002, this group had grown and was renamed the African Union (AU). All but one African country currently has membership in the union. Like its counterpart in Europe, the AU desires to address the world as one unified body.

The AU governmental structure is similar to the European Union. Its Assembly of the African Union is made up of heads of state and governments of member states. It is the supreme governing body for the union and is charged with making the group’s most important decisions.

Other governing bodies include the Pan-African Parliament, the union’s highest legislative body; the African Court of Justice, its highest court; and the Executive Council, which deals with

matters of foreign trade, food, agriculture and communications. There are even efforts to establish a central bank for the continent and one currency that will be known as the “afro” (similar to the euro). Again, Africans want to duplicate the perceived success of the EU.

A few of the AU’s objectives as stated on its website are: (1) to achieve greater unity and solidarity between African countries and Africans; (2) to promote peace, security, and stability on the continent; (3) to promote sustainable development at the economic, social and cultural levels as well as the integration of African economies; (4) to promote cooperation in all fields of human activity to raise the living standards of African peoples; and (5) to work with relevant international partners in the eradication of preventable diseases and the promotion of good health on the continent.

These represent only a *third* of their goals. But think: achieving just these five would have an enormous impact on the continent. So why after nearly half a century has such little progress been made?

The answer is simple. Unity in *principle* is much different than unity in *execution*. Almost from the very beginning, the idea was doomed to fail.

As an article from *RFI* titled “The Broken Dream of African Unity” put it, “...even during its formation, the OAU was mired in disagreements over its future objectives and prerogatives.”

The book detailed OAU disagreements about Africa’s emergence from colonialism—whether it should have been an “Africa of nations” or as a “federalist” entity similar to the United States—as well how each leader had differing opinions about how Africans should combine nations of varying degrees of economic strength. Eventually, the OAU became more divided and any real progress was obstructed.

The switch to the African Union in the 2000s became a sort of “reset” on the OAU’s efforts. Still, challenges have persisted.

As more and more issues continue affecting the continent, including conflicts in Darfur, Somalia and Zimbabwe,

rampant corruption among certain leaders, and the inability of the nations to agree on how to combine multiple forms of government, a “United States of Africa” has become regarded as an idea that *World Politics Review* called “woefully ahead of its time.”

What Is Lacking

A common thread with all the approaches to African unification is a lack of consistent direction. Competing interests, whether internal or external, are the demise of what may be well-meaning attempts to address issues.

Usually, a lack of direction is a tell-tale sign of a dearth of leadership.

This lack of strong leadership is a continuing theme for many African countries. Corruption, instability and violence have hindered progress in multiple nations of the continent. Often, misguided leaders have filled the void left by European colonists and brutal civil wars. Some have bucked this trend, yet they alone have never been able to turn the tide toward continental unity.

This lack of proper leadership is the main reason Africans have found it so difficult, actually impossible, to unite.

The Bible—considered by many, even among secular sources, to be a most effective book on leadership—has much to say about this topic.

Consider. Men create governments based on their own understanding of right and wrong. Yet the Word of God boldly claims to be a lamp or light for those seeking understanding (Psa. 119:105).

Look at the way this “lamp” provides insight on just one of Africa’s challenges—that of brutal dictators: “The prince [or leader] that wants [lacks] understanding is also a GREAT OPPRESSOR: but he that hates covetousness shall prolong his days” (Prov. 28:16).

This lone verse speaks not only to how ineffective leaders lack understanding, but also to how they can find success: by avoiding greed.

Notice another verse that speaks both to the people and leaders: “Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keeps the law, happy is he” (Prov. 29:18).

Effective leadership requires vision, with the person in charge inspiring it in people. For Africa to finally unite, it must have leadership that can paint a vision and properly guide the way.

Right Leadership

Where will this leadership come from? Before answering this, it must be understood that the ultimate causes for Africa's turmoil, including its failure to unite, are fundamentally *spiritual* in nature, not physical. This is the main reason attempts by men to address and solve any of its issues do not work. Disease, war, famine, poverty, oppression and corruption always stymie progress.

The driving factors of these problems are hatred, envy, malice, jealousy, lust and greed.

Because these attitudes are prevalent, they have led to failures in Africa as they also have in other nations and continents. Proverbs 14:34 states, "Righteousness [Psalm 119:172 shows this means to keep God's Commandments] exalts a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people."

With the core of the problem being spiritual, man must look beyond himself for the solutions. His approaches simply will not work.

The prophet Jeremiah bluntly summarized this understanding: "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps" (10:23).

Stated plainly, man CANNOT figure out the path to ultimate happiness. He may attempt to "direct his steps," but he cannot do so without avoiding problems that come along with it. While Africa reveals this in a graphic way, the principle applies to the entire world.

A great purpose for the Bible is to reveal to all that man's ways do not work and that true success only comes from following God's ways.

In other words, God must direct man's steps!

Right Vision

Picture Africa, or better yet, an entire world under proper leadership. What

would a globe with God as its leader look like?

There is no need to merely fantasize about this. The Bible describes in exquisite detail a time that is coming soon in which the world will be ruled by Jesus Christ. He alone will bring true leadership through a new world-ruling government—the GOVERNMENT OF GOD. Under this kingdom, the laws of God that lead to abundant joy and happiness will be enforced.

Here is a glimpse of this world. While reading, keep in mind how different this is from the current state of so many places in Africa.

■ "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

This verse shows that there is a time coming when the effects of rampant disease—including pain and death—and the equally devastating effect it has on families and friends—will be no more.

■ "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing... Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes" (Isa. 35:1-2, 5-7).

This passage illustrates not only a coming healing for the people, but also a healing of the land. Vast swaths of deserts will become fertile and provide more than ample living space for a growing population.

■ "And He [God] shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks:

nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid..." (Mic. 4:3-5).

Under Christ's rule, there will be no more civil wars and ethnic conflicts. The weapons of combat will be converted to tools of agriculture. Every person will gain stewardship over certain responsibilities and live in a way that pleases God.

■ "And shall make Him [Jesus Christ] of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of His ears: but *with righteousness shall He judge the poor...*" (Isa. 11:3-5).

Christ's leadership will be one of righteousness and equity. Gone will be the days of dictators and despots seeking personal gain at the expense of those they rule. The example of proper leadership will be apparent for others to model.

True leadership *will* come to Africa and the entire world. Under the rule of Christ and His saints, war, oppression and corruption will be a thing of the past. Instead of selfishness, people will learn to have outgoing concern for each other.

To find out more about the effects of this divine guidance, read the inspiring book *Tomorrow's Wonderful World – An Inside View!* at rcg.org/tww. It describes in detail what is in store for a planet desperately in need of direction.

Everyone in Africa and the entire world will soon be united. They will all be of one accord as they seek to serve the Creator.

Notice: "And many people shall go and say, Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:3).

Under God's leadership Africa will not only be together, but will also be a place of prosperity and joy—fulfilling every age-old hope and dream! □

PERSONAL

Continued from page 2

The command to “believe the gospel” means to believe the good news of the coming kingdom of God. The word gospel comes from *god spell*, meaning *good news*. God’s government coming to earth is GOOD NEWS. Those who yield to God must be willing to believe the gospel. With this soon-coming government will be the institution of God’s laws all over the Earth. Peace, abundance, happiness and joy will “break out” everywhere. No wonder Christians are instructed by Christ to regularly pray, “Thy kingdom come” (Matt. 6:10)!

The two conditions for salvation described in Mark 1:14-15 are the same as in Acts 2:38—repent and believe! Again, “*Repent*, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” God’s Spirit cannot be given unless there is absolute belief (faith) in the sacrifice—the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Baptism represents—symbolizes—complete faith (or belief) that Jesus’ sacrifice applies to each person who exercises this faith.

When Philip the deacon was counseling the Ethiopian eunuch for baptism, the eunuch asked, “What does hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, *If you believe* with all your heart, you may. And he answered and said, *I believe...*” (Acts 8:36-37). Philip then baptized him.

God has promised that where there is repentance and faith—belief—He will give His Holy Spirit. When God promises something, He keeps His word. He does not compromise or forget. But He makes clear there are conditions to receiving this gift.

Therefore, water baptism, symbolizing repentance and belief, is a commanded condition to receive salvation!

Was Jesus Baptized?

What was Jesus’ example in regard to baptism? Since He had no sin to repent of, He certainly did not *need*

to be baptized. Peter was inspired to record, “Christ...leaving us an *example*, that you should *follow His steps*” (I Pet. 2:21).

Notice Matthew’s account of Christ’s example. Christ came to John the Baptist “to be baptized of him,” it says (Matt. 3:13). Verse 16 states, “Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water.” And a voice from heaven said that God was “pleased” with His “beloved Son.” True Christians are also God’s sons.

Baptism Plainly Commanded

We have established that Peter commanded repentance, followed by baptism. Now notice: “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). This point must be made. God commands repentance, and repentance precedes baptism. Therefore, it could just as surely be said, “God commands all men everywhere to be baptized” or it could say “to repent and be baptized.”

Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize people so they could be saved. He tied salvation directly to baptism. He made it a *condition* to receive eternal life. His disciples always practiced baptism when new disciples were being converted. The book of Acts records, “Then they that gladly received His word *were baptized*” (2:41), and “Then Philip went down to...Samaria...But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the *kingdom of God* [notice the message new converts must come to believe], and the name of Jesus Christ, *they were baptized...*” (8:5, 12).

There are those who will say this was merely “baptism by the Holy Spirit.” Verses 15 to 16 make this explanation impossible because Peter and John “...when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit: (for as yet [it] was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)”

If the baptism of these converts was merely “by God’s Spirit,” then

how could it say they had been “baptized”? God’s Spirit had, as of yet, “fallen upon *none* of them”!

When the gentile Italian, Cornelius, and his family were baptized in Acts 10, a direct statement is made about the need for proper baptism. Peter was used by God to give the first sermon to the Jews discussing baptism (Acts 2). Ten years later He also used Peter to be the first apostle to preach the gospel to the gentiles. It says Cornelius’ family received “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (10:45). In this unique circumstance, now that they had received the Holy Spirit in advance of baptism, Peter’s immediate response was: “Can any man forbid *water*, that these should not be baptized...And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (vs. 47-48).

This is a plain *command* to be baptized in *water*!

Christ’s Great Commission Included Baptism

As stated, Christ directly commanded His disciples to baptize. Notice Mark’s account of Christ’s Great Commission to them: “...Go you into all the world, and preach the *gospel* [of the kingdom of God] to every creature. He that believes *and is baptized* shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned” (16:15-16). Belief *without baptism* is not sufficient to be saved!

Matthew 28:19-20 also records this instruction, but adds some points that Mark does not cover and excludes others. (This is the same commission, so both accounts must be taken together.) Matthew states, “Go you therefore, and *teach all nations...*” This had to include teaching the gospel of the kingdom because Mark mentioned this. The verse continues, “*baptizing them* in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe *all things* whatsoever I have commanded you.”

In His Great Commission to His disciples, Scripture states plainly that Christ commanded baptism!

It is key to note that this scripture explains that baptism is done “*in* the name of the Father, and of the Son, and

of the Holy Spirit.” The word “in” here should be properly translated “into.” While Acts 2:38 says to be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ,” Matthew’s account uses the longer phrase. Does Scripture ever contradict itself? Can it be broken or invalidated—sometimes by another scripture? John 10:35 says it cannot. This is impossible. The Bible never contradicts itself. If it did, it would not be worth the paper it is written on!

Baptizing in Jesus’ name and being baptized into the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are two entirely different points. The first speaks to the issue of authority to baptize on behalf of Christ—in His name, by His authority. One either has or does not have the authority to baptize. The latter speaks to the issue of being baptized into the Family—the Godhead of the Father, Son and (power of the) Holy Spirit.

(Though this Personal is not intended to address this issue, it must be noted that this is not referring to the unbiblical trinity doctrine, which denies the very meaning of the kingdom of God. God is a Father who is reproducing Himself—adding many children into His family. He is not “three persons in one,” forming a closed Godhead. The trinity first appeared as a teaching in the great, false “Christian” church in the third century AD—over 200 years after Jesus had built *His* Church. It was imported into the church as a counterfeit to replace the truth that God is expanding His Family.)

Is There a Right Method?

What is the proper form of baptism? Is it sprinkling, pouring or immersion? Not only must one follow God’s command to be baptized, but it must also be done in the manner—the method—He commands. Otherwise, the baptism is invalid. It is as if it had never occurred.

We must ask what the word baptize means. Does it mean to sprinkle?—or pour? The answer lies in the meaning of the particular Greek word used wherever the words baptism or baptize are found in the New Testament.

First, it is vital to recognize that *baptize* is actually a Greek word, *not* an English word! Most probably know that the New Testament was written in Greek and translated into English. When the translators came to the word *baptizo*, they chose to leave it untranslated as “baptize.” The question of which is the proper method would have been eliminated had they properly translated it into its true meaning, and here it is: *immerse, dip or put into!* The English word “pour” derives from the Greek word *cheo* and “sprinkle” derives from *rantidzo*. God chose the word *baptizo* because He did not want sprinkling or pouring to represent conversion!

Second, consider the matter in this way. One cannot be immersed by pouring or sprinkling—one can only be poured or sprinkled by pouring or sprinkling. Likewise, one can only be immersed by being immersed. God says what He means, and means what He says!

It is no wonder then that when John the Baptist was baptizing people, he chose locations where it says, “because there was *much water* there” (John 3:23). This would not have been necessary for sprinkling or pouring. It is also no wonder when Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch it states, “they went down...*into* the water...and he baptized him. And when they were come up *out of* the water” (Acts 8:38-39), and the verse continues. This does not fit with merely using a little water to sprinkle or pour over a person’s head. Finally, Matthew 3:16 records that after Jesus was baptized, He “went up straightway *out of* the water.”

The clear Bible pattern is that baptism requires a lot of water, because people go *into* it and then come up *out of* it.

What Does It Picture?

There is an all-important reason that God does not accept sprinkling or pouring. While it should be enough that He commands us to do it and obey without question, it can be important to understand *why* God says to do something *His* Way. This is true of baptism.

The symbolism of being completely immersed in water has great meaning. Baptism symbolizes *death, burial* and a rising, or *resurrection*, from a grave. This is exactly the pattern of Jesus’ crucifixion, burial and resurrection. Neither sprinkling nor pouring reflects this symbolism. Consider: “Know you not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were *baptized into His death?* Therefore we are *buried* with Him *by baptism* into *death*: that like as Christ was *raised up from the dead* by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we [Christians] have been planted together in the *likeness of His death*, we shall be also in the *likeness of His resurrection*” (Rom. 6:3-5).

Now that’s plain! True Christians will be resurrected at the time of Christ’s Return to Earth.

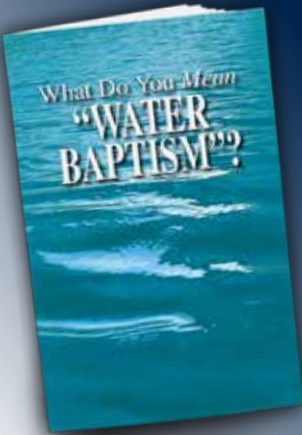
Also, they are “crucified with Him,” and are “dead” and “freed from sin” (vs. 6-7). There can be no mistaking the death, burial and resurrection symbolism of immersion—baptism—in water.

Paul also recorded, “*Buried* with Him in baptism, wherein also you are *risen* with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who has raised Him from the dead” (Col. 2:12) and “You, being dead in your sins...has He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses [sins, I John 3:4]” (vs. 13). A baptized person is a forgiven person—freed from sin and “walk[ing] in newness of life.” This is the plain truth from God’s Word!

A Christian has started his life over. His old life is dead and gone. He is a changed person whose past is wiped clean—buried in a grave—“for you are *dead*...hid[den] with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). What a wonderful, inspiring truth for those who choose to walk this path. God commands baptism so people can recognize they have begun again, and that they have a Savior—IF they express faith in Him and accept His sacrifice. Jesus, as Savior, will then send His Holy Spirit and help Christians grow and change.

Our goal is to become like God in character *now* so that we can rule with Him *later* in His kingdom—thus fulfilling our incredible human potential!

To learn much more about the subject of baptism, read *What Do You Mean "Water Baptism"?* It answers such questions as “When is a person ready for baptism?”, “Should baptism ever be delayed?”, “When and how should one counsel for baptism?”, “Is one being baptized into a church or denomination?”, “Who is authorized to perform baptisms?”, “Should children be baptized?” and much, much more. □



WHY BAPTISM?

God commands all believers to be baptized—but how, and why? What does God require prior to baptism—and what must one do after baptism? This booklet offers answers straight from the Bible. Order your FREE copy at www.rcg.org/wdymwb.

DROUGHT

Continued from page 10

state-wide problem that affects all of us—from farmers to fisherman to the average citizen. And it's the drought, not the Delta, that's affecting the water supply this year."

"While we can't make it rain, we can take charge of our water use by investing in smart water practices that protect and preserve our water supply..."

The National Drought Mitigation Center described the effects of drought on a community in terms of dominoes: "If those dominoes were drought impacts, the first domino you knock over might be farmers' corn crops dying. The second domino might be that the farmers would not have money to buy a new tractor from the dealer in town. The dealer would then lose money, which would be the third domino. If enough farmers lose their corn crops, the dealership might not be able to employ as many people or may even have to close down—the fourth domino. The dealership closing would cause many more impacts in the community."

All of these factors produce a ripple effect with economic, environmental and social implications. This can include energy companies pay-

ing more for water and passing on those costs to customers—ships having difficulty navigating waterways to deliver goods and upping the cost of delivery—increases in wild animal attacks because of the need to migrate to urban areas to forage for food—greater possibility of wildfires and the resultant damage to both human and animal habitats—soil erosion—health problems because of decreased water quality and availability—overpumping of aquifers that leads to the sinking of the ground and infrastructure collapse—lack of tourism—and migration of people from rural to metropolitan areas to search for work, among many others.

Unintended Consequences

In a certain sense, we are reaping what we have sown. Though there truly is a lack of rain, the land is also being depleted because many agricultural practices have not focused on protecting arable land, but instead on creating profit. Failing to use cover crops to stop water runoff and replenish soil is not helping either. (For more evidence of this, request agricultural expert Dale L. Schurter's comprehensive book *Mounting Worldwide Crisis in Agriculture* at rcg.org/mwcia.)

Setting aside the debate on global warming, continued drought actually *does* change the climate.

When an area loses its vegetation, which helps to cool the surrounding area and keep soil moist, dirt then becomes as hard as iron. After drying, it turns to powder. With nothing to absorb the sun and lack of vegetation, the temperature of that area naturally becomes warmer.

Think of a desert. The sun's rays bounce off the nutrient-less sand, heating the earth and producing dust. If there were trees to absorb that sun and provide needed shade to the landscape, it would not feel as hot.

"The increasingly dire water situation across California is being compounded by unusual heat," *The Desert Sun* reported. "Long-term weather records maintained by the National Climatic Data Center show that California had its warmest January-June period since record-keeping began in 1895, with the average temperature 4.6 degrees Fahrenheit above average and more than 1 degree warmer than the previous record, set in 1934."

Water is evaporated by the sun's rays. If an area does not have vegetation, moisture will be pulled out of it. Dry ground heats up faster than wet ground.

While the Western U.S. is prone to droughts, the overproduction and misuse of the land is intensifying their effects.

“Hotter temperatures worsen droughts by reducing mountain snow-pack and causing more evaporation from streams and reservoirs,” the newspaper stated. “Heat also draws more moisture from plants and the soil, and increases the amounts of water needed to irrigate crops and vegetation.”

The same applies to water, which heats up as vegetation around it disappears. Warmer water invites invasive species and promotes the growth of bacteria. This is because flora and fauna, which otherwise balance a natural ecosystem, cannot live in a pesticide-filled body of water or one that has been heated past a certain temperature.

Evidence of this occurred during the summer of 2014 in Toledo, Ohio, and lower Michigan when chemical-and-fecal-matter-laden water runoff led to an algal bloom that rendered water undrinkable for more than 400,000 people during a period of three days.

“The harmful blue-green algae feast on nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen, which have been entering Lake Erie en masse recently from farm runoff and sewage-treatment plants. The buildup causes algal blooms, and leads to water that can cause rashes, kidney and liver problems, as well as throw off the ecosystem.”

Imagine such things happening on a grander scale—and in communities across the U.S.—all at once! Prices for products would soar, both in America and across the world, and countries would look elsewhere for goods and services. This would have the potential to tank the American economy and even hamper the nation’s ability to give to others through its many relief programs.

How could the nation continue supporting the annual \$38 billion of aid it provides if sustained drought meant the country could not even support itself?

Conditional Arrangement

All of what is happening in the United States is no coincidence. The pennies

from heaven that are so needed to enrich the land are no longer falling for a reason.

That reason can be found in a book. That book is the Bible. This text—while ancient—has much more to do with California’s drought than most realize.

Deuteronomy 28 speaks of what God sincerely desires for America, and all nations of the Earth.

The words should be music to California’s ears: “Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be...the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your kine [cattle], and the flocks of your sheep. Blessed shall be your basket and your store” (vs. 3-5).

Verse 8 continues that God wants to “command the blessing upon you in your storehouses, and in all that you set your hand unto; and He [wants to] bless you in the land which the LORD your God gives you.”

Then in verse 12 it speaks of opening “unto you His good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto your land in his season...”

Awesome blessings! Yet they come with a condition, which is stated in verses 1-2: “And it shall come to pass, IF you shall hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD your God, to observe and to do all His commandments which I command you this day, that the LORD your God will set you on high above all nations of the earth.”

The U.S. and other nations must face the fact that they have not obeyed God’s commands. How can this be known for certain?

Read on in verse 15: “But it shall come to pass, if you will not hearken unto the voice of the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I command you this day; that all these curses shall come upon you, and overtake you.”

Notice the result of living contrary to God’s Way—and its integral connection with

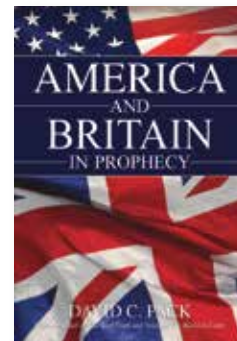
agriculture: “Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. Cursed shall be your basket and your store. Cursed shall be the... fruit of your land, the increase of your kine, and the flocks of your sheep” (vs. 16-18).

This is not just an indictment of California. Drought is affecting or will soon affect the entire nation. The U.S. must take a serious look at its conduct and the implications its choices have for the rest of the world.

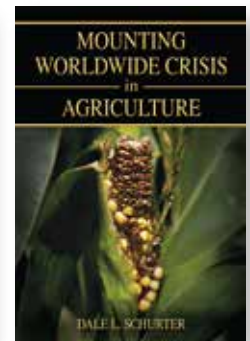
The account continues with another telling consequence of disobedience: “And your heaven that is over your head shall be brass”—NO RAIN!—“and the earth that is under you shall be iron”—SEVERE DROUGHT!—“The LORD shall make the rain of your land powder and dust...” (vs. 23-24).

The drought overtaking America, and the nation’s many other problems, should make its citizens stop and examine their conduct and character. They should take a hard look at themselves to know if they are headed down the right path. In fact, unknown to almost all, the Bible devotes many verses to help this modern nation do just that.

For a fuller picture of what is in store for America and its brother nations, read the book *America and Britain in Prophecy* at rcg.org/aabibp. Using both the unmistakable facts of history and the power of God’s words in the Bible, it explains what is coming for the U.S.—and the only way the nation can truly solve the scourge of drought. □



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ECONOMY & PERSONAL FINANCE

Bankruptcy Risk Spreads Among Countries Worldwide



■ **SECOND DEFAULT:** Lawmakers in Buenos Aires consider a measure that would transfer Argentina's payments on its restructured debt to France as the South American country grapples with continuing fallout from its 2001 default (Sept. 3, 2014).
 PHOTO: DANIEL GARCIA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Eleven countries—Argentina, Greece, Ukraine, Egypt, Cuba, Cyprus, Jamaica, Ecuador, Venezuela, Pakistan and Belize—face a substantial risk of defaulting on debt and declaring bankruptcy, according to Moody's Investors Service.

Of nations teetering on the edge of bankruptcy, three have debt levels soaring among the world's highest.

"When a government has a great deal of debt relative to the size of its economy, its credit rating may also be lower. Three of the nations potentially at risk of default had among the world's highest debt levels, at 120% of GDP or more based on 2014 estimates. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Greece's debt is projected to hit nearly 175% of GDP by the end of this year, more than that of any other nation in the world except for Japan," *USA Today* reported.

Jamaica and Cyprus also claim debts stretching beyond 120 percent GDP.

The newspaper listed some of the reasons for the widespread financial difficulties: "These nations also suffer from vastly different problems. Some nations, such as Ukraine and Egypt, owe their recent downgrades to political conditions" (ibid.). □

Nearly One-third of the U.S. Jobless

Jobless Americans hit a record 92,269,000 in August 2014, according to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. The number, consisting of those 16 years and older, signifies a labor force participation rate of 62.8 percent—a 36-year low.

"Of the 155,959,000 who did participate in the labor force, 146,368,000 had a job and 9,591,000 did not have a job but actively sought one," *CNS News* reported. "The 9,591,000 are the unemployed. They equaled 6.1 percent of the labor force—or an unemployment rate of 6.1 percent (which was down slightly from the 6.2 percent unemployment rate in July)."

The news affected the stock market, causing a devaluation of the U.S. dollar that was later allayed by the fact that Ukraine and pro-Russian separatists agreed on a ceasefire deal.

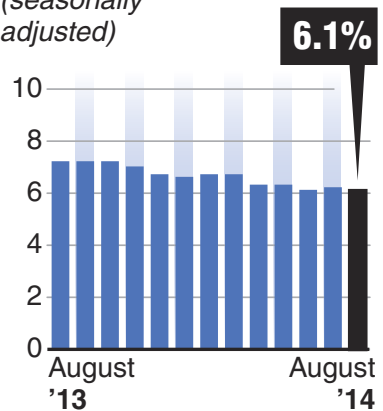
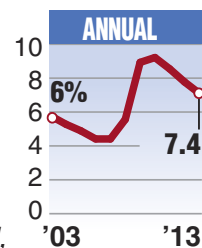
"The dollar fell...after data showed US employers added the fewest jobs in eight months, eroding some confidence in the domestic economy and reviving bets that the Federal Reserve might

leave interest rates near zero for longer than anticipated."

The data also revealed that the number of foreign-born individuals with jobs in the United States hit an all-time high of 24,639,000. □

Jobless rate

Percent of civilian labor force that is unemployed, by month (seasonally adjusted)



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 Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics



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