

Vol. 3, No. 5 • September/October 2016

DISCERN

A Magazine of *Life Hope & Truth*

As the Days

of Noah Were

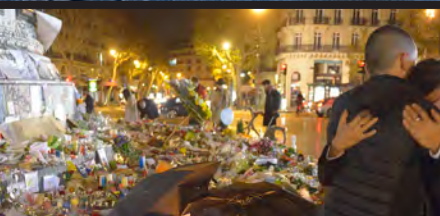
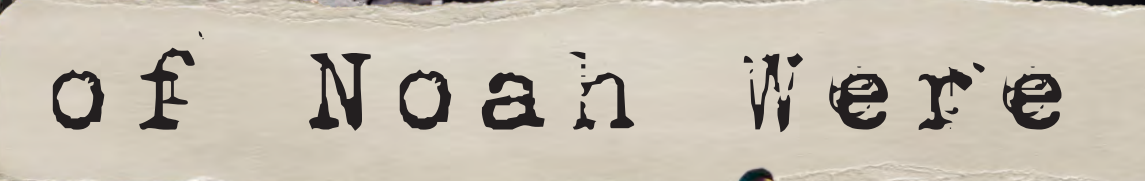
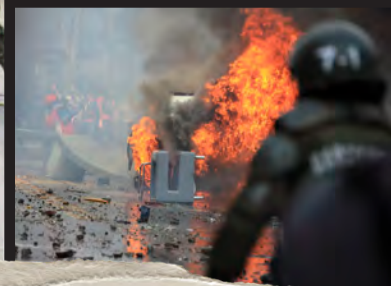


Table of Contents

News

4 WorldWatch

25 World InSight

The Scourge of Slavery Returns

Columns

3 Consider This

So Simple a Child Can Understand

28 Christ vs. Christianity

Where Did the Popular Image of Jesus Come From?

31 By the Way

Don't Defenestrate!

Feature

6 The Return of Jesus Christ: As the Days of Noah Were

As corruption, violence and evil increase, our world teeters on the brink of self-destruction. Jesus Christ's promise to come again offers our only real hope.

Departments

10 PROPHECY

Who Would Jesus Vote For?

America is in the midst of a contentious presidential election, and other nations are facing major elections as well. If Jesus walked the earth today, who would He support?



13 PROPHECY Satan: A Profile

He's invisible, so many people are confused whether Satan really exists. They don't know how he works today. Here's what you need to know for your protection.

16 CHANGE The World Needs Visionaries

Being a Christian isn't just about being a visionary. It's about being the *right kind* of visionary. The pages of God's Word show us how.

19 LIFE Is God Fair?

It's a fair question. But even many religious people who think He is can't explain some of the tough questions that cause many to think He isn't.

22 RELATIONSHIPS You Don't Say!

Five questions to ask yourself before you say anything to anyone.

DISCERN

A Magazine of Life Hope & Truth

September/October 2016; Vol. 3, No. 5

Discern magazine (ISSN 2372-1995 [print]; ISSN 2372-2010 [online]) is published every two months by the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, as a service to readers of its LifeHopeandTruth.com website. *Discern*'s home page is LifeHopeandTruth.com/Discern. Free electronic subscriptions can be obtained at LifeHopeandTruth.com/Discern. Contact us at info@DiscernMag.com.

©2016 Church of God, a Worldwide Association, Inc. All rights reserved.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version (© 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.). Used by permission. All rights reserved.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to P.O. Box 1009, Allen, TX 75013-0017

Publisher: Church of God, a Worldwide Association, Inc., P.O. Box 1009, Allen, TX 75013-0017; phone 972-521-7777; fax 972-521-7770; info@cogwa.org; LifeHopeandTruth.com; cogwa.org

Ministerial Board of Directors: David Baker, Arnold Hampton, Joel Meeker (chairman), Richard Pinelli, Larry Salyer, Richard Thompson and Leon Walker

Staff: President: Jim Franks; Editor: Clyde Kilough; Editorial content manager: Mike Bennett; Managing editor: Elizabeth Glasgow; Senior editor: David Treybig; Associate editor: Erik Jones; Copy editor: Becky Bennett

Doctrinal reviewers: John Foster, Bruce Gore, Peter Hawkins, Jack Hendren, Don Henson, David Johnson, Ralph Levy, Harold Rhodes, Paul Suckling
The Church of God, a Worldwide Association, Inc. has congregations and ministers throughout the United States and many other countries. Visit cogwa.org/congregations for information.

Donations to support *Discern* magazine and LifeHopeandTruth.com can be made online at LifeHopeandTruth.com/donate or by surface mail to Church of God, a Worldwide Association, Inc., P.O. Box 731480, Dallas, TX 75373-1480. The Church of God, a Worldwide Association, Inc. is organized and operated as a tax-exempt organization in the United States according to the requirements of IRS 501(c)(3). Contributions are gratefully acknowledged by receipt.

Unsolicited materials sent to *Discern* magazine will not be critiqued or returned. By submitting material, authors agree that their submissions become the property of the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, Inc. to use as it sees fit.

SO SIMPLE A CHILD CAN UNDERSTAND

H

How do you explain to a child what is happening in our world today?

When we stopped for coffee on a long road trip recently, one of my grandchildren softly asked me, “What do you think about what all of you were talking about?”

Reeling from one tragedy to another

I thought she had been asleep. But no, she had been quietly listening to us adults bemoaning how our world is hurting, reeling from one crisis and tragedy to another—brutal, senseless, unpredictable mayhem that has everyone on edge. And, of course, we were also opining about the complex, underlying reasons.

Our focus was on events of only the previous month—shootings (some involving police) of unarmed civilians in cities around the United States, armed civilians assassinating police officers, terrorists armed with bombs attacking an airport in Turkey, another armed with nothing more than a big truck mowing down scores of people (including many children) in France, and the deadliest mass shooting by a single shooter in U.S. history in an Orlando nightclub.

I was immediately sorry she had heard all that—it’s too much for little ears to hear and young minds to comprehend. I’m even more sorry about the world we are handing to the next generation. And how do we explain to children what is happening when we adults grapple with understanding it ourselves?

Clear, simple answers are the most difficult to develop, and a 10-second stroll into the restaurant hardly allows for substantive dialogue. So when drink and food choices quickly distracted her from the topic at hand, I was grateful for the reprieve. I needed a little more time to think this through, to recover from the lousy job I did in stumbling around for a simple and honest, yet reassuring, answer that a child could understand.

The simplest principles

She hasn’t brought the question up again, but it has hardly left my mind. Children don’t need complicated analyses and answers to life’s big questions. But frankly,



neither do adults. It’s time we adults stop acting so childishly, lift our eyes higher than the issues that are dividing and destroying us, and reduce life to its simplest, most important principles.

So, trying to answer a child’s question, here’s my attempt. I think:

- We need to admit that we humans are utterly incapable of solving our own problems.
- We—every single one of us—need to take a long, honest look inside ourselves and humbly admit that we are wrong in so

many ways we think and live.

- We need to quit ignoring and instead turn to a higher authority than ourselves—God!
- We need to really listen to Him, repent and start doing what He says. Jesus’ message was clear and simple: “Repent and believe in the gospel!”
- Knowing history and human nature, most people aren’t ready to listen to God just yet, but some are. You can choose to.
- The Bible is right—the only viable solution for our world’s problems is for Jesus Christ to return as soon as possible.
- Ultimately, everything’s going to be okay because—and only because—He is coming back.
- This isn’t just what a human thinks; it’s what God tells us. I choose to believe Him.

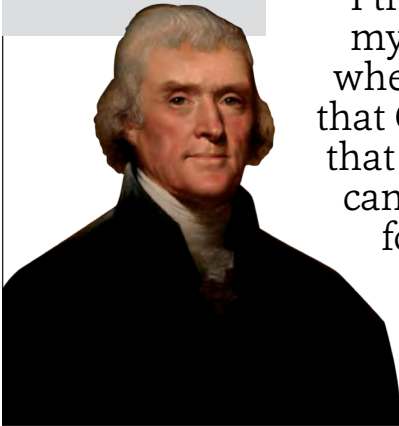
This is actually the theme of this edition of *Discern*. We believe these are the core issues and solutions for humanity, and we hope it gives you something to believe in!

In the right time and place, I’ll revisit this question and try to better explain to my granddaughter what I think and why, in simple terms that even a child can understand.

I think it’s what God has been trying to tell all of us, as His children, for a long time.

Clyde Kilough
Editor
@CKilough

Learn more about the cause and solution to injustice in the article "Is God Fair?" on PAGE 19.



"I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever."

—THOMAS JEFFERSON

"Of all the weapons of destruction that man could invent, the most terrible—and the most powerful—was **the word**. Daggers and spears left traces of blood; arrows could be seen at a distance. Poisons were detected in the end and avoided. But the word managed to destroy without leaving clues."

—PAULO COELHO

Learn more in the article "You Don't Say!" on PAGE 22.

"All the miseries and evils which men suffer from vice, crime, ambition, injustice, oppression, slavery and war, proceed from their despising or neglecting the precepts contained in the Bible."

—NOAH WEBSTER

Learn more in the article "The Return of Jesus Christ: As the Days of Noah Were" on PAGE 6.



Percentage of Americans who "believe that Jesus Christ definitely (23%) or probably (18%) will have returned to earth [by 2050]. However, a 46%-plurality of the public does not believe Christ will return during the next 40 years."

PEW RESEARCH



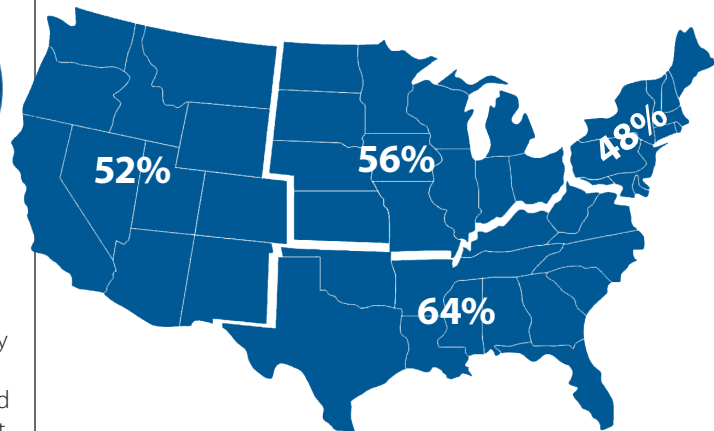
Percentage of Americans who "see another world war as definite or probable" by 2050. "Nearly as many (53%) expect the United States to face a terrorist attack with nuclear weapons."

Learn more in the article "Satan: A Profile" on PAGE 13.

57%

Percentage of Americans who believe the devil exists.

According to a survey by YouGov, this includes "72 percent of African Americans, 65 percent of Republicans and 61 percent of women. ... Sixty-three percent of people with a high school education said they believe in the evil spirit compared to 48 percent of college graduates. ...

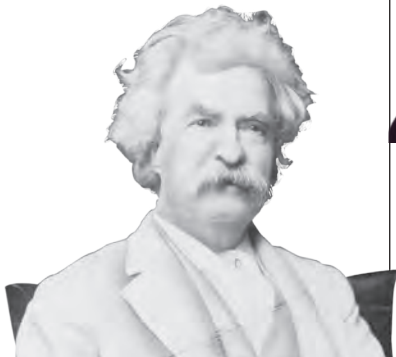


"Sixty-four percent of Southerners fear Satan compared to 56 percent in the Midwest, 52 percent in the West and 48 percent in the Northeast."

DAILY MAIL

“You cannot depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus.”

—MARK TWAIN



“Vision is the art of seeing the invisible.”

—JONATHAN SWIFT

“The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight but no vision.”

—HELEN KELLER



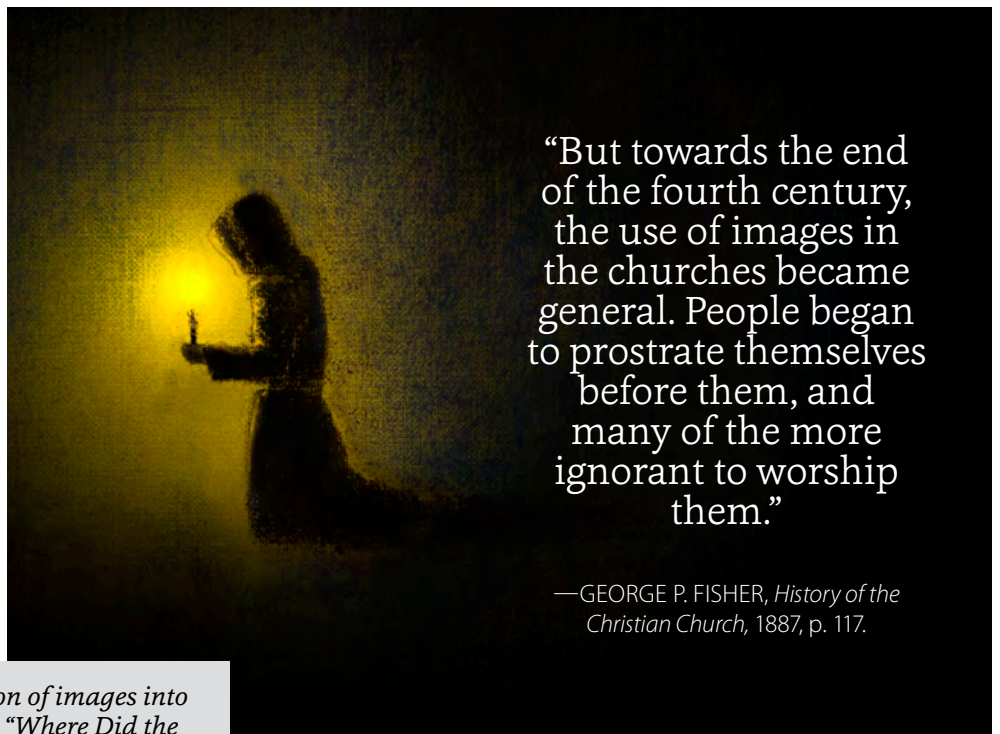
“Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law”

(Proverbs 29:18, English Standard Version).

\$2,500,826,756

(amount pledged to Kickstarter projects to date)

Learn more in the article “The World Needs (the Right Kind of) Visionaries” on PAGE 16.



“But towards the end of the fourth century, the use of images in the churches became general. People began to prostrate themselves before them, and many of the more ignorant to worship them.”

—GEORGE P. FISHER, *History of the Christian Church*, 1887, p. 117.

To learn more about the adoption of images into mainstream Christianity, read “Where Did the Popular Image of Jesus Come From?” on PAGE 28.

Prophecy

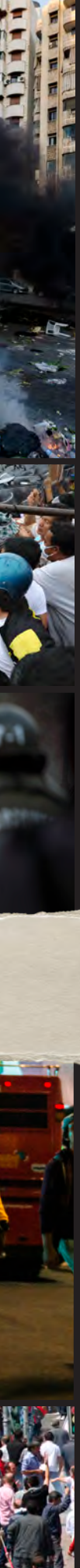


As the Days



of Noah Were





As corruption, violence and evil increase, our world teeters on the brink of self-destruction. Jesus Christ's promise to come again offers our only real hope.

By Jim Franks



According to the Pew Research Center, 41 percent of Americans believe Jesus Christ will return in the next 40 years, but 46 percent don't believe He will. The numbers in other, less religious nations would be much different.

How can we know if He will return—and when? What does the Bible say?

Is our world like the days of Noah?

In speaking about His return to this earth, Jesus Christ said, “But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:37).

Genesis 6 describes the world of Noah's time. “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (verses 5-6).

Later in this same chapter we read: “The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth” (verses 11-12).

The hallmarks of that society were corruption, violence and evil. While one can argue that there has been corruption, violence and evil since Adam and Eve were forced out of the Garden of Eden, one cannot ignore the extraordinary increase in each of these in the past decade.

In 2014 the World Health Organization (WHO) published a report titled “Global Status Report on Violence Prevention 2014.” The report substantiates the fact that, even with a decline in homicides, violence is on the rise and is destroying millions of lives each year. Since Cain took it upon himself to kill his brother, mankind has followed this same path in huge numbers, and increasingly in recent years.

According to the report, “there were an estimated 475,000 deaths in 2012 as a result of homicide. Sixty percent of these were males aged 15-44 years, making homicide the third leading cause of death for males in this age group.”

Homicide is a violent act perpetrated by one human being against another human being, but these statistics do not take into account the hundreds of thousands killed each year by war. The report goes on to state that in 60 percent of the countries of the world there is no usable data collected on violence. So, these numbers are based on only 40 percent of the countries, meaning that the problem is likely much greater than what is being reported.

What about those who are not killed but who suffer permanent damage from an act of violence? The report states, “Women, children and elderly people bear the brunt of nonfatal physical, sexual and psychological abuse:

- “A quarter of all adults report having been physically abused as children.
- “One in five women reports having been sexually abused as a child.
- “One in three women has been a victim of physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in her lifetime.”

In addition, none of these numbers takes into account the millions of unborn children being killed by the scourge of abortion.

Violence is truly a hallmark of our age—as it was in the time of Noah.

After the Flood, God gave the rainbow as a sign that He would never again destroy the world with water. But the Bible predicted a time when God will intervene for a similar reason (evil, corruption and violence), but in a different manner. This time He will send His Son to *save* the world from self-destruction. (Read more about this in our LifeHopeandTruth.com article “[As in the Days of Noah: Warnings for Today.](#)”)

A second coming needed to save the world

The New Testament has many references to Jesus Christ's second coming. Hebrews 9:28 states it clearly: "So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him *He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation*" (emphasis added throughout).

In the New Testament we find a reference to the return of Jesus Christ, on average, once in every 25 verses. And 23 out of the 27 books refer to the second coming. It is the focal point of Scripture and the basis of the gospel itself—the good news of the Kingdom of God He will establish upon His return.

Scripture is clear that the return of Jesus Christ will be visible and seen by the entire world. "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and *every eye will see Him*" (Revelation 1:7).

Angels told the apostles that His return would be visible and not secretive: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). This was a visible departure, and the angels promised a visible return. The commonly taught idea of a secret rapture is simply not true.

Christ promised to return, and He predicted how it would happen. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, *I will come again* and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3). He gave more detail in the Olivet Prophecy: "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and *they will see the Son of Man coming* on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30).

The only thing secret about the second coming of Jesus Christ is the timing. Notice these clear statements:

- "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:42).
- "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32).
- "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7).

What will it be like?

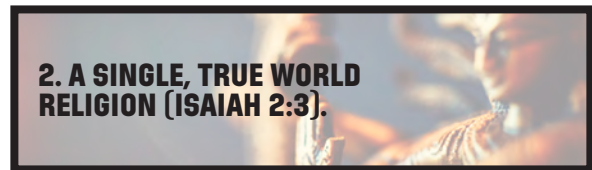
The return of Jesus Christ to this earth will forever change the world. No event like it has ever occurred in human history. We know that before Christ returns the world will be filled with evil, violence and corruption, but what will the world be like after His return?

The return of Jesus Christ will bring about the following changes:

WE KNOW THAT BEFORE CHRIST RETURNS THE WORLD WILL BE FILLED WITH EVIL, VIOLENCE AND CORRUPTION, BUT WHAT WILL THE WORLD BE LIKE AFTER HIS RETURN?

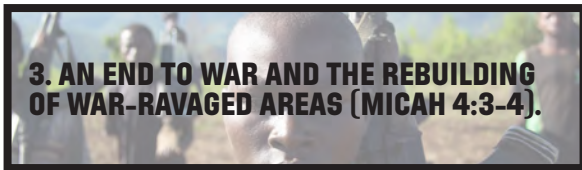


Consider the corruption that takes place in every country today. The politics of this world, even in the more developed countries, such as the United States, are built on a wrong foundation. They are built on human reasoning symbolized by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is a fact throughout the world that corrupt governments have led to great misery and untold deaths. Consider the many countries embroiled in war—fighting to see who will rule and how that government will function.



Human religions have brought deception and mental slavery to the world. Consider India, a country of 1.2 billion people. It is mostly Hindu, a very complicated religion that worships more than 330 million gods. Many Hindus are vegetarians, and they permit cows along with other animals to roam the streets of their cities. They would not dare harm or remove these animals since they are considered holy and may represent a relative who has been reincarnated. The slavery that this thinking creates does serious damage to an entire society.

But is Christianity, as practiced and believed in the world today, any better? Mainstream Christianity creates an illusion of Christ that is simply not true. While we can accuse the eastern religions of being deceived and ridicule their worship of multiple gods, what god is truly being worshipped by the Christianity of today? People will be shocked to discover that the Jesus Christ who will return to this earth is not the Jesus spoken about in most churches of the world today.



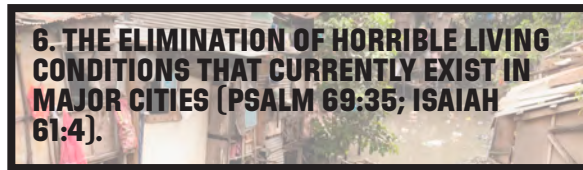
War is destroying many societies today. Syria is the most recent example. The cities are pockmarked with craters from bombs and debris from the civil war that has raged for years with no end in sight. When Jesus returns, these areas will be rebuilt into viable and livable cities, something that is not happening today.



Diseases such as Ebola and Zika threaten our world today, but these will be eradicated soon after Christ's return. For the first time in human history, man will actually know what causes disease and will be provided the answer for its eradication. Better sanitation and adherence to the biblical guidelines for handling disease will be put into place immediately after Christ returns.



The Bible foretells a time when deserts will blossom and the plains will again be fertile. Some of this will be the direct result of miracles, but there will also be a new approach toward agriculture that will provide bumper crops—"the plowman shall overtake the reaper."



In virtually every large city in the world a certain portion of the population lives in filth and without a real home. Lack of basic sanitation has put the earth on the verge of major disease outbreaks that could easily kill millions of people. The cities will be rebuilt, and proper housing and sanitation will be provided for every human being.



Today those who observe the Feast of Tabernacles are accused of being Jewish. But, after the return of Jesus Christ, any nation not obeying God's command to come up to Jerusalem to worship and learn about His wonderful plan during the Feast of Tabernacles will be punished (verse 17). Soon everyone will come to experience the joy and exciting truths of God's festivals.

Night and day

What a contrast between the prereturn world and the postreturn world—like night and day! All of these changes will take place within a few years of Christ's return. When the entire world is worshipping the same God and following the leadership of Jesus Christ, the Savior and Son of God, who walked this earth as God in the flesh, the problems that currently divide the nations and peoples of the world will be eliminated.

We are living in a time similar to what Noah witnessed just before God destroyed the world with the Flood. This time around, as evil, corruption and violence propagate in all nations, God will not destroy mankind. Instead He will convert mankind, from pagan, idolatrous religions, controlled by Satan, to a harmonious, loving way of life taught by Jesus Christ and His saints.

May God speed that day! **D**



Read more about Jesus Christ's return and the Kingdom. He will bring in our free booklet *The Mystery of the Kingdom*.

Prophecy



Who Would Jesus Vote For?

America is in the midst of a contentious presidential election, and other nations are facing major elections as well. If Jesus walked the earth today, who would He support?

By Erik Jones

Every four years, the United States goes through the (painful) process of selecting a president—an office considered to be the most powerful in the world. After a contentious primary season that lasted over a year, Americans will go to the polls on Nov. 8 to decide if they want Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump to lead their country over the next four years.

The American political landscape has been deeply polarized for years, but it seems like the political divisions are becoming sharper and less civil. Democrats, Republicans and independents seem unable to work together on almost anything—regularly casting doubts on others' motivations, integrity

and even resorting to name-calling and character assassination.

Other nations are preparing for important elections as well. After often bitter fights, will the winners be able to unite their countries and govern effectively? Will they be able to deliver on the many promises they make?

Who would Jesus vote for?

Jesus Christ cares deeply about our nations, and the Bible shows He has a great interest in government. So perhaps we should consider an important question:

If Jesus Christ walked the earth today, who would He support?

There is an answer to that question, but it requires a close look at what the Bible reveals about Jesus' approach toward politics, partisanship and civil government. To find the answer, consider these five points:



1. JESUS RECOGNIZED THIS IS NOT GOD'S WORLD—*YET*.

Many people look at their country and see serious problems. Some see moral decline; others note injustice and inequality; and still others focus on the growth of government and taxes.

But these are not problems unique to the 21st century. Jesus lived in a world that suffered the same problems—declining morality (Matthew 16:4), poverty and inequality (Matthew 26:11) and serious problems with government (Luke 13:1).

Jesus did help those He came into contact with, but He did not mobilize Himself to fix all the problems of His country and world then. Though some mistakenly thought He was coming to overthrow Rome and restore an independent Jewish kingdom (Acts 1:6), Jesus rejected that idea.

Jesus recognized that His first coming was not to *fix* the multitude of problems that faced humanity, because this wasn't His world—*yet*. When Jesus faced Satan in the wilderness, one of Satan's greatest temptations was offering Jesus immediate authority over "all the kingdoms of the world" in exchange for an act of worship (Luke 4:5-7).

Jesus did not contest Satan's ability to make this offer. Satan *does* have authority. For now, "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19).

But soon Jesus will cast out Satan (John 12:31)—*just not yet*.

Today Jesus would recognize that no candidate can *fix* the plethora of problems our nations face. He would be talking about the cause of our problems—but His solution would not be any of the current crop of politicians.

2. JESUS DID NOT INVOLVE HIMSELF WITH FIRST-CENTURY JUDEAN POLITICS.

Jesus didn't live in a democratic system. His country was ruled by the Roman Empire, which administered it through the Herodian kings and procurators (governors) like Pontius Pilate. But that doesn't mean first-century Judea had no politics! The Gospel accounts show the culture Jesus lived in was filled with politics, with multiple parties vying for political and religious influence.

Some of the prominent religious factions of first-century Judea were the Pharisees (an ultrastrict sect of Judaism that controlled the synagogues), the Sadducees (a party dominated by the priestly elite, associated with the temple and sympathetic to the Herods) and the Zealots (a group that violently opposed Roman rule).

The New Testament shows us Jesus was apolitical when it came to Jewish religious groups and Roman politics. He never joined any of these parties or endorsed their solutions to Judea's moral and civil problems. He would frequently point out where the religious views of these groups were wrong, but He taught His disciples to respect the limited authority they held without imitating their conduct (Matthew 23:1-3).

Just as He didn't side with the Sadducees or the Pharisees, if Jesus walked the earth today He would not ally Himself with the Democrats, Republicans or members of any other party. He would represent His Father's platform—not the platform of any political party.

3. JESUS ADVOCATED GOOD CITIZENSHIP, BUT NOT POLITICS.

Jesus had opportunities to advocate political change and to challenge the political power structure in His country. On one occasion, a group of Pharisees aligned themselves with the Herodians to question Him on the issue of taxation: "Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" (Matthew 22:17).

Taxation was a huge issue in first-century Judea—just as it is today. The Jews resented the high taxes levied on them by Herod and Rome.

Jesus had an opportunity to express a political opinion against the taxation that was financially burdening His people. Instead, He answered: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (verse 21).

The answer left His enemies speechless. He neither endorsed high taxation nor protested it. He simply said His people should fulfill their civil duties to whatever government they live under, while also fulfilling their duties to tithe to God.

Years later, the apostle Paul reinforced Christ's teaching that Christians should be "subject to the governing authorities" (Romans 13:1).

The apostle Peter, who at one point in his life tried to violently protest Jesus' arrest (Matthew 26:51-52), later wrote that "this is the will of God" that Christians submit to and respect civil authority (see 1 Peter 2:13-17).

Jesus Christ would take the same approach to civil government today. He would not protest or mobilize people against a leader or a party—but would pay His taxes, abide by any laws that did not contradict God's laws and show respect toward civil authority.



4. JESUS REPRESENTED A DIFFERENT GOVERNMENT.

When Jesus stood on trial for His life, Pontius Pilate asked, “Are You the King of the Jews?” (John 18:33). You see, the Jews who wanted Jesus dead accused Him of threatening Rome by declaring Himself the Messiah.

Jesus’ answer to Pilate is the key that frames how Christians are to look at their world: “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here” (verse 36).

This answer provides the *why* to all the previous points. This is *why* Jesus recognized this world isn’t ruled by God yet, *why* He didn’t endorse the political parties of His day and *why* He advocated good citizenship but not political engagement. This is why a few hours earlier Jesus said that His followers were “not of the world, just as I am not of the world” (John 17:16).

Jesus represented a Kingdom—a literal government—that wasn’t and isn’t of this world.

The Kingdom Jesus Christ leads and represents is currently in heaven—where Jesus sits enthroned at the right hand of God the Father. Instead of entangling themselves in the poli-

tics and affairs of this world, Christians are to *think* just like Christ—their allegiance is to His government. They realize their “citizenship is in heaven” and “eagerly wait” for the return of Jesus Christ to this earth (Philippians 3:20).

They interact with today’s world like ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20). Ambassadors who represent their country in a foreign land abide by the laws of that land, but do not actively participate in its politics.

If Jesus walked the earth today, He would be a good citizen and respect those in civil authority, but the Kingdom of God would have His primary allegiance, and He would always conduct Himself as an ambassador of that government.

5. JESUS WAS DRIVEN TO PROCLAIM A NEW GOVERNMENT—NOT TO INFLUENCE THE CURRENT ONE.

Throughout the Gospels, we read that Jesus came “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God” (Mark 1:14). He said His followers should “seek first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33).

What is the Kingdom of God? Simply put, a kingdom is a govern-

ment ruled by a king—with territory, laws and subjects. The Kingdom of God, then, is the government under the rule of God the Father and Jesus Christ. Currently, that dominion is in heaven, but the central message from Genesis to Revelation is that God’s Kingdom is coming to earth.

Jesus came preaching a new world government. After Christ returns, all the governments of man—the democracies, the dictatorships and every form of government in between—will be replaced by the rule of Jesus Christ: “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Revelation 11:15).

If Jesus walked the earth today, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom would still be His singular focus (Luke 4:43). Just as He was too busy to get entangled in the politics of His day, Jesus would spend His time proclaiming the solutions to our national and global problems—solutions that transcend politics.

Discern strives to stay out of partisan politics. Humanity’s problems are, at their core, spiritual in nature—and we strive to proclaim spiritual solutions. The ultimate spiritual solution is the same message Jesus proclaimed to first-century Judea—the gospel of the Kingdom of God!

Who would Jesus vote for?

So can we know who Jesus would vote for? Here is the definitive answer: *Jesus would vote for none of the candidates. In fact, He would not vote at all.*

If Jesus were here on earth now, He would be doing the same things He did 2,000 years ago (Hebrews 13:8). He would be talking about how Satan rules over this earth today and how people can escape his destructive influence. He would not be involved with any of the competing political parties. He would be a good citizen but an ambassador of a different (and much higher) government. His time would be consumed with preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Discern will likewise not be endorsing any political candidate. *Discern* will be endorsing Jesus Christ as the best candidate to solve the world’s biggest and toughest problems.

The Kingdom of God is the only real solution. **D**



To learn more, see our Life, Hope & Truth article “The Politics of Jesus” and download our free booklet *The Mystery of the Kingdom*.

He's invisible, so many people are confused whether Satan really exists. They don't know how he works today. Here's what you need to know for your protection.

By David Treybig

SATAN: A PROFILE

Stumbling along in the dark is never a pleasant experience. It can be especially unnerving when it happens unexpectedly. I recently had a vivid reminder of what this feels like.

After driving for a few hours on a recent trip, I stopped at a gas station with a convenience store. While I was in the restroom, the electricity went off in the entire facility, and the room went dark. There was no window to let in natural light, and there were no emergency backup lights. Try as I might, I couldn't see anything. It was pitch black, and I was in an unfamiliar room.

Doing my best to remember the multiple turns I had taken on my way in, I groped my way along the edges of the wall. Occasionally I put my hands in front of me to make sure I didn't walk into an unseen object or another wall. After what seemed like an unusually long time, I finally saw a glimmer of light and scampered out of the darkness.

As I and a few other customers exited the store, the employees locked the doors behind us because, without electricity, the gas pumps wouldn't work, and they couldn't ring up sales on their cash registers.

Spiritual light and darkness

The Bible often uses the stark contrast between light and darkness to make a point. In creating the physical universe, we know that God made light and divided it from darkness (Genesis 1:3-4), and metaphorically, not following God is described as walking in darkness instead of light (Isaiah 50:10). Later, Jesus said that He was "the light of the world" (John 8:12).

The apostle Paul employed this same light-and-darkness concept when he wrote that people are blinded by Satan "lest the *light* of the gospel of the glory of Christ ... should *shine* on them" (2 Corinthians 4:4, emphasis added throughout). And he used it in explaining his ministry before

King Agrippa, saying that he had been called by Jesus to open people's "eyes, in order to turn them from *darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God*" (Acts 26:18).

So it is clear that Satan—"the god of this age," as Paul called him (2 Corinthians 4:4)—is an evil being who aims to keep people in the dark regarding God's way of life. But Satan didn't start out on the dark side. He began as an angel who served as an administrator in God's perfect, righteous government.

Satan's turn to the dark side

Before he was called Satan—a name meaning "adversary"—this angel was known as "Lucifer" (as most English translations put Isaiah 14:12). "Lucifer" is a Latin translation of the Hebrew word *heylel*, which means "shining one" (*Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Lexicon*). Lucifer served as an anointed cherub—a type of angel—who covered the mercy seat. Serving in this capacity, he was "on the holy mountain of God" and was perfect in his ways (Ezekiel 28:14-15). Satan thus began as an angel of light—one who supported God and His plan. He drew high praise as one who was "the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty" (verse 12).

Lucifer continued in this capacity until "iniquity was found" in him (verse 15). Scripture explains that he "became filled with violence within" and that he sinned (verse 16). He was represented in Scripture by the prince of Tyre (Ezekiel 28) and the king of Babylon (Isaiah 14), both of whom were filled with pride. And his pride apparently led him to attempt to ascend into heaven to exalt his "throne above the stars of God" and "be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14).

In his misguided attempt to advance himself, Lucifer apparently convinced a third of the angels to follow him. But instead of obtaining the position he coveted, he and the rebelling angels

were cast to the earth (Revelation 12:4). Sadly, these vanquished fallen angels continued their fight against God. They also became adversaries of humans, who will each have an opportunity to become children in God's eternal family (something the devil and his demons can never become).

Now, instead of being an angel of light, Satan and his followers impersonate or pretend to be angels of light in order to deceive humans (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

Because of his unsound mind and actions, Satan has now accumulated quite a rap sheet—an extensive record of criminal activity. Put another way, Satan is among the worst terrorists imaginable, guilty of crimes against humanity. Consider two of the key aspects of his character.

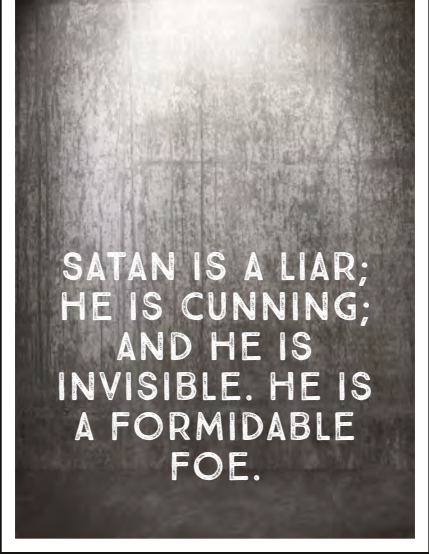
Liar

The word *liar* is only found in about a dozen places in the Bible (it varies slightly among various translations), and John 8:44 is one of the most insightful of these. Here Jesus said that Satan “does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he *lies*, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a *liar* and *the father of lies*” (English Standard Version).

Jesus had the perspective to know. In His spiritual existence before coming to earth as a human, Jesus had seen Satan's fall from heaven (Luke 10:18) and had witnessed his conduct.

While Satan probably lied to the angels he led in rebellion against God, the first biblical account of Satan lying to a human occurred in the Garden of Eden. Wasting no time to continue his battle against God and His plan for humanity, Satan lied to Eve, saying that it was okay for her to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree, and she would not die as a result of doing so (Genesis 3:1-5).

It is important for us to note that Satan was quite “*cunning*” in his approach (verse 1). In other words, he was quite skillful when it came to lying. Invoking half-truths—Eve



SATAN IS A LIAR;
HE IS CUNNING;
AND HE IS
INVISIBLE. HE IS
A FORMIDABLE
FOE.

didn't die immediately; that would come later—and trickery, “the serpent [Satan] deceived Eve by his *craftiness*” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

Eve fell for Satan's deception and Adam followed her example. Because of their disobedience, they were banished from the Garden of Eden and no longer had access to the tree of life (Genesis 3:22-24). Not content with what he had done to the first humans, Satan and his demons have continued their lying deceptions against humanity.

Though invisible, Satan, “that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan ... deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). He is “the prince of the power of the air, the *spirit* who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2). And “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19).

Satan is a liar; he is cunning; and he is invisible. He is a formidable foe.

Murderer

The result of Satan's lie to Eve was that she and Adam would die instead of living forever with God, which was symbolized by access to the tree of life (Genesis 3:22). This result was not accidental. It was what Satan intended. We come to this understanding of Satan's motive when we ponder Jesus' declaration that Satan “was a *murderer* from the beginning” (John 8:44).

Murder, of course, breaks yet another of God's commandments (Exodus 20:13). We see the mind-set

of this evil spirit being. He will break rules, tell lies, do whatever he deems necessary to deceive and kill humans.

Today Satan is assisted in his efforts against humanity by demons and false religious teachers (2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 14-15). To counter his relentless efforts, we must live by every word of God (Matthew 4:4) and “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3).

With God's help, we can “overcome the wicked one” (1 John 2:13-14). Learn more in our articles “Don't Be Ignorant of Satan's Devices” and “How to Resist Satan, the Roaring Lion.”

Satan's fate

Even though Satan is currently the god of this age, his jurisdiction over our present evil world will eventually come to an end (see “Satan Destroyed? How?”). The Day of Atonement—a holy day of God most people have been blinded from understanding—pictures the binding or putting away of this being who trades in darkness (Leviticus 23:27-32; Revelation 20:1-3).

Christians who are striving to live by the original faith delivered by Christ to His apostles will observe this holy day on Oct. 12 this year. With the binding of Satan, the light of God's truth will be able to shine steadily upon all of earth's inhabitants. People won't have to live in the dark or endure the attacks of our invisible enemy. **D**



To learn more about the Day of Atonement, see the *Feasts of the Lord* video “Atonement: The Root of the Problem” and the booklet *From Holidays to Holy Days: God's Plan for You*.

Change

Being a Christian isn't just about being a visionary. It's about being the *right kind* of visionary. The pages of God's Word show us how.

By Jeremy Lallier

A person is shown from the side, unrolling a large, white scroll. The background is a city skyline at sunset, with the sun low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the buildings. The person's hands are visible, holding the ends of the scroll. The overall mood is one of hope and vision.

THE WORLD NEEDS
[THE
RIGHT
KIND
OF]
VISIONARIES

The world is full of visionaries. Browse through Kickstarter sometime, and you'll see pages and pages of visionaries looking to change the world (or some corner of it) with new technology, new innovations, new games, new music, new films—

new everything.

Visionaries are the people who look at the world as it is and see what it could be instead. They're the people who invented broadcast television and wireless Internet, who launched astronauts safely into the frigid vacuum of space, and who dreamed up the combustion engine. They're the people who bridge the gap between the present and the possible.

Unfortunately, that's not always a good thing.

The way that seems right

Visionaries are really just forces for change. Sometimes that change is great and sometimes it's terrible, but most of the time it's somewhere in between. Take Charles Babbage, for example—when he dreamed up his steam-powered, programmable “computer,” I doubt even he could have imagined a future where computers fit in people's pockets, connecting the world in a boundless network capable of incredible good and terrible evil.

The Bible warns, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12). If that seems like hyperbole, then consider:

- Visionaries turned slavery into a commercial enterprise.
- Visionaries designed the first atomic bomb.
- Visionaries engineered the Holocaust.

And what's even scarier—what's absolutely terrifying—is that in each of those scenarios, there were visionaries who honestly believed what they were doing was okay.

There were people who thought it was okay to buy and trade their fellow human beings like cattle.

There were people who thought they were doing the right thing by building a weapon that could level entire towns. There were people who thought they were justified in herding the Jews and other minorities into concentration camps and gas chambers.

“There is a way that seems right to a man.”

More than just visionaries

We don't just need *more* visionaries. We already have plenty, each jockeying to lead the world down

any one of a thousand mutually exclusive paths. No, we need the *right kind* of visionaries—and those are harder to come by.

Seeing the world as it could be is easy. Seeing the road to get there is harder. But the real trick—and the part that really matters—is seeing the *right* world and identifying the *right* road.

That's tricky. But it's possible, and we can do it—but not without first looking to the ultimate Visionary.

The end from the beginning

The Bible is filled with prophecies that don't just describe the world as it *could* be—they describe the world as it *will* be. “For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done. ... Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it” (Isaiah 46:9-11).

And He *does* do it. Before the nation of Judah was conquered by the Babylonians, God sent prophet after prophet to warn His stubborn people of what was coming and how to avoid it (Jeremiah 44:4-6).

Before Alexander the Great was ever born, God sent Daniel a vision of a conqueror who would shatter the Medo-Persian Empire and then die suddenly, leaving his own empire to four inferior leaders (Daniel 8:1-22).

Before King Cyrus was born, God had Isaiah record a prophecy of a ruler named Cyrus who would release the Jewish people from captivity to rebuild God's temple in Jerusalem (Isaiah 44:28-45:7).

All these things came to pass, exactly as God promised they would. But most of the Bible's prophecies are still unfulfilled—describing a time in the future. There are prophecies about a time when “the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose” (Isaiah 35:1), when “the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped” (verse 5) and “sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (verse 10).

It's a picture of the world as it could be. As it should be.

As it *will* be.

A call for visionaries

The road to that world isn't an easy one, but it is a clear one. A lot has to change, and things have to get worse before they can ever get better.

But there's a reason for all of it—even the mo-

ments that seem arbitrary or hopeless. We might not understand the reason for every event along the way, but we know those moments are allowed by the God who reminds us, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9).

That doesn’t mean we have to stay in the dark about God’s plan. On the contrary, God maps it all out for us in the pages of the Bible and invites us to understand—because He wants *us* to see and seek His marvelous vision of the future.

Seeing the unseen

The book of Hebrews contains what’s popularly known as the Faith Chapter—a sort of spiritual hall of fame filled with the stories of those who made following God their top priority. These men and women have something else in common too: By and large, they were visionaries—and not just any visionaries, but the *right kind* of visionaries. They saw not just the world as it could be, but the world as it *will* be.

Moses, for instance, left his position as royalty to wander in the desert with slaves, “for he looked to the reward” and “endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:26-27).

Noah, “being divinely warned of things not yet seen,” built the ark that saved his family from the Flood (verse 7).

Abraham left his home without knowing where God was leading him, “for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (verse 10).

These men and women each peered into the world that will be: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ... Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them” (verses 13, 16).

Hebrews 11 is a chapter full of

visionaries, each of whom saw the future and started walking toward it.

Your turn

What about you? Where are you going? What do you *see*?

Is the future promised by God burning in the forefront of your mind? Can you visualize the city “whose builder and maker is God”? Do you know the road there?

Would you like to?

Finding the way

The answers aren’t secrets—they’re all on display in the pages of your Bible. It’s just that few people take the time to delve into those pages and ask the right questions. Jesus warned, “Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:14).

But it’s there. With God’s help, you can find it. And if you want to find that path, the Bible tells you exactly where to start.

Peter writes about the “exceedingly great and precious promises” we’ve been given, adding, “for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. ... For so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:4-7, 11).

It has to start with faith—“for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). But it doesn’t stop there. To faith, we must add virtue—a desire to do what’s right *because* it’s right.

Then comes knowledge—the more we exercise our faith through virtue, the more we come to understand God’s Word on a deeper and more personal level.

Next comes self-control, then perseverance, then godliness, and on it goes, with each step taking us farther and farther down the road to the

future God has prepared for the whole world, opening our eyes ever wider as we become the right kind of visionaries—the kind the world needs.

And that’s the beauty of it all. The road doesn’t stop with us just *seeing* the future. It ends with us being a *part* of that future. The world is becoming an increasingly dark and broken place, but the end of the story reveals that God’s visionaries will reign with Him for eternity, bringing light and healing to a world that needs it so very much (Revelation 20:4; 22:2-5).

RELATED READING



To start unraveling the incredible depth of God’s plan, read our article “[Hope for the Future Found in God’s Festivals](#).”

Until then

But that’s all later. That’s the future we need to keep our eyes on—the future the heroes of faith looked toward in the middle of their darkest moments and most difficult trials. And until that day comes, we have a road to travel—beginning with faith and ending with an entrance into the Kingdom of God.

“And so,” Peter writes, “we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19).

The future is certain. The road there is narrow, but the destination is clear. God is calling visionaries to see that future, to travel that road, and to one day help heal the world.

What do you see? **D**

IS GOD FAIR?

It's a fair question. But even many religious people who think He is can't explain some of the tough questions that cause many to think He isn't.

By Mike Bennett



You don't have to live on this planet very long to see unfairness, injustice, oppression and abject evil. We observe rich people cheating poor people, hear of coaches and priests abusing children, learn about wicked men trafficking runaways.

Too often it seems those guilty of great evil get away with it, while those trying to do the best they can get the short end of the stick. Even more disturbing, this unfairness frequently lingers till death. Why do some of the wicked enjoy life to the end, while some of the innocent die young or in agony—or both?

And then there is the missionary's dilemma. What about all the people around the world who even today have never understood the gospel of Jesus Christ? Will they all be thrown in the lake of fire? Has God only made salvation available to a tiny minority of all who have ever lived?

How could a just and fair God allow all of this?

Life's not fair—but why?

To try to understand our world of injustice, let's rewind to the beginning. God tells us He created a man and a woman and put them in a verdant garden. Life was simple then. God clearly explained the cause-and-effect rules they had to know. He wanted them to enjoy the wonderful world He had freely given them, but they needed to obey Him and avoid the fruit of the one tree that was not good for them (Genesis 2:15-17).

However, soon a slick salesman (the devil appearing as a snake) tried to convince them God was lying. By taking the forbidden fruit, they not only caused the destructive consequences God had warned about, they also effectively rejected God's beneficial and fair way of life. They chose Satan's way that produces injustice, oppression and evil. (Read more about all this in our Life, Hope & Truth articles "[Adam and Eve and the Two Trees](#)" and "[The Tree of Life](#).")

The Bible tells us that the world today is "under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19). Satan continues to lie and murder and promote self-destructive, sinful lifestyles, then tries to convince us that it is God who is unfair.

Perspective and patience

Life is not fair, but that is of Satan's doing and our human choosing. Satan has warped the whole system to sometimes temporarily reward the wicked and punish the innocent.

From God's perspective, cause and effect will prevail. The temporary delays will end. Those who cry out to God

in their suffering are told to wait patiently for God's intervention (Psalm 37:7-9). Justice will be done.

Except for one thing.

God had a reason for creating us, and He does not want to see us all get exactly what we deserve. Justice demands the death penalty for sin—and we have all sinned (Romans 3:23; 6:23). So instead of wiping us all out, God planned another way.

What do we really want: justice or mercy?

We naturally hate unfairness. But our sense of fairness is easily warped. We find it much easier to see injustice and sin in others. Our own sins and injustices we too quickly justify.

But if we could see everything clearly from God's perspective, would we still be seeking God's perfect justice? Or would we be begging for mercy?

The greatest injustice and cleaning the slate

When we understand that our sins (our disobedience to God's perfect laws) have earned us the death penalty, we realize our only choice is to ask for mercy. But how can a perfectly just God forgive sin? His justice requires blood—death—as payment for sin. So no human would receive eternal life.

But "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Jesus Christ was willing to die in our place—to pay the death penalty for you and for me. He did nothing worthy of death. He never sinned. As the Son of God, His life is worth far more than all human lives put together.

When you consider these facts, isn't Jesus' death the most unfair punishment ever? Yet He willingly gave Himself to make it possible for us to repent and be forgiven. His sacrifice made His mercy possible.

When we repent of our sins, we commit to turning our life around. We recognize the need to stop sinning and to obey God's good laws.

The apostle Peter outlined the process: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). God wipes clean the slate listing our sins and gives us the down payment of eternal life as His children!

We can be eternally grateful that in God's plan "mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13).

But what about the billions who've never believed in Christ—and the billions who died never even hearing about our only Savior?

GOD HAD A REASON FOR CREATING US, AND HE DOES NOT WANT TO SEE US ALL GET EXACTLY WHAT WE DESERVE.

God's desire

Paul wrote that God our Savior “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

Does that mean only the people born in “Christian” countries? Only the ones whose life experiences made them open to conversion? Only the ones who lived long enough to be called to come to Christ (John 6:44)?

No. When God says “all,” He means all. He is not limited by geography, language barriers or even death itself. In several often-misunderstood passages He shows how everyone who has ever lived will have a full, complete chance for salvation. It's not a second chance, as some misconstrue it. The Bible describes a second resurrection that is a *first* chance.

Before looking at these passages about the biblical day of judgment, let's consider what the Bible means by the word *judgment*.

What does the Bible mean by judgment?

Did you know the Church today is undergoing God's judgment? Peter wrote about judgment beginning with us: “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God” (1 Peter 4:17). This judgment can mean more than sentencing—in this case it refers to the whole Christian life being evaluated by God as

we live it. Judgment, as God considers it, can actually be an opportunity for salvation.

Revelation 20:12 talks about a future judgment, after Christ's 1,000-year reign on the earth (verse 4). Since the resurrection at the beginning of the 1,000 years is called the “first resurrection,” this immense judgment of the “rest of the dead” (verse 5) could be called the second resurrection.

John wrote, “I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things that were written in the books.”

What will this time of judgment be like, especially for those who have never had understanding of the meaning of the books of the Bible they are being judged by? Would not our loving God, who “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth,” also give them a chance to repent and a period of evaluation as He is giving the Church today?

How will the day of judgment be more tolerable for Sodom?

We can learn more about this time in the words of Jesus Himself. In several passages He talked about how pagan and wicked people would find it more tolerable during this day of judgment than the people who had rejected the teaching of Jesus Himself. Here is one example:

“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.

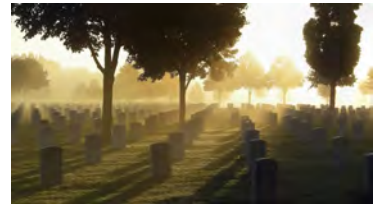
“And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had

been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you” (Matthew 11:21-24).

The people of the evil cities of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom all earned the death penalty, as all human beings have. But Jesus said because they had not had the same chance to repent that the people He preached to had, things would be “more tolerable” for them in the day of judgment.

Unless you think that is a cruel joke from our Savior—the One who loved and died for all people—it cannot mean that they were all just

RELATED READING



Read more about this little-understood teaching of the Bible in our article [“Are Most People Eternally Lost?”](#)

sentenced to hell (what the Bible calls the [lake of fire](#)). The implication here, as in Revelation 20, is that people will be brought back to life, allowed to understand the Bible and to repent of their sins and, according to Ezekiel 37, to receive the Holy Spirit:

“Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live” (verses 13-14).

When all is said and done, it will be clear that God is totally fair and just, and even more important for all of us, His mercy endures forever! **D**

Relationships

YOU
DON'T
SAY!

Five questions to ask yourself before you say anything to anyone.

By Becky Sweat

As a writer, I spend a considerable amount of time proofreading, self-editing, fact-checking and scrutinizing my words. I want to make sure what I'm communicating will be helpful and well-received.

But I've found verbal communication can be a much harder challenge. It's so easy to blurt out something, only to realize after the words were spoken how inappropriate, insensitive or destructive they were.

Unfortunately, there are no "do overs" when it comes to conversations. Once we've said something, it's out there. We can't take back our words, no matter how much we'd like to.

The Bible describes an uncontrolled tongue as an "unruly evil, full of deadly poison," comparing its destructive power to a forest fire (James 3:5, 8). Careless words scar relationships and harm lives. We get ourselves into all sorts of trouble because we are not slow to speak. Yet if we think about our words before we spit them out, we can prevent a lot of problems. At the very least, we may fine-tune our message to make it easier to receive. We may come to see that our words shouldn't even be said.

The fact is, numerous situations can be improved not so much by what we say, but by what we *don't* say. I have found that if I ask myself the following five questions before I start talking, it helps me keep my tongue in check:

1. DO I HAVE ALL THE FACTS?

Probably most people can recall a time when they got upset with someone about something that was supposedly said or done, only to find out later that the situation was nothing like they'd originally surmised.

A while back, Debbie (names have been changed) promised to help me out in a major way with a project I was working on. After an initial meeting, we put together a plan and set off on its execution.

During the next week, I was busy with the project, but never heard from Debbie. I wondered how things were going on her end. I tried calling her several times, but she never picked up the phone. I left voicemail messages and sent email messages, but got no response. It seemed apparent that Debbie was not committed to the project, and I was feeling extremely put out.

A few more days passed, and I called Debbie one more time. This time she picked up the phone. I immediately started on a mild rant about the importance of following through on your promises. Debbie stopped me in my tracks with the news that her mother had died.

Oh, how I wish I had given Debbie a few moments to fill me in on her life, before I started talking!

Always remember, there may be some important details you aren't aware of that could paint a situation in a whole different light. Could there be other versions of what's happening that you're not privy to? This is likely to be the case if your assessment of the situation is based on assumptions or what others told you.

If there's a chance you may be missing vital information, keep silent. When confronting others, allow them to share their perspectives before mak-

ing rash conclusions. Nothing is more destructive or embarrassing than flying off the handle about something, only to discover you repeated something that wasn't true or got upset for nothing.

2. ARE MY WORDS HELPFUL?

Of course, even if what you're thinking of saying is correct, that doesn't mean it needs to be said.

Imagine this: Your spouse ignores your concerns about a potential business opportunity and forges ahead with the deal, which ends up bombing. While you were right in what you predicted would happen, it would hardly be helpful or necessary to tell your spouse, "I told you so" or, "If you would have only listened to me." These words are the verbal equivalent of pouring salt on a wound. Saying them can only make a bad situation worse.

Consider this wise advice: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Ephesians 4:29, New International Version).

It certainly isn't constructive to join in the office discussion about one of your coworker's latest blunders. The restaurant food you just ate may have been some of the worst you've ever tasted, but that doesn't mean you should tell the waiter. You may have waited an extra two hours at the airport for your friend's delayed flight to come in, but telling her how miserable the wait was will only make your friend feel bad.

Before you speak, ask yourself: What am I trying to accomplish? Will saying something create a possible resolution or perhaps a bigger problem?

What will be gained by saying this? Who stands to benefit by my speaking up right now?

If you honestly feel your words will help another person or improve a situation, it's probably a good idea to speak. Otherwise, keep your words to yourself.

3. ARE MY WORDS GENTLE AND KIND?

Another person may need to hear what you have to say, but bludgeoning him or her with criticism won't get your message across.

I once knew someone who prided herself on her "bold approach" to addressing people problems. She had no inhibitions about blasting individuals for what she perceived as their faults and wrongdoings. Her approach was often unnecessarily harsh, heavy-handed and judgmental. She gave people no room to explain themselves and tended to assume the worst possible motives. I often wondered if she was really concerned about the people she was confronting, or if she just wanted to vent her own frustrations.

It's much more effective to **speak the truth in love**. If we must bring up a problem to another person, what we say should be delivered with meekness and humility. Criticism must be rooted in genuine concern for the recipient if it is to be effective. If you take on the role of a human wrecking ball with no regard to other people's feelings, your comments will be taken as a personal assault.

Before speaking, always ask yourself, "Is this how I would want someone to confront me with his or her concerns?" If not, rethink your approach. If you are too angry to use the kind and gentle approach, do not let your words out of your mouth.

4. IS IT MY PLACE TO SPEAK?

Often we take it upon ourselves to speak up about a problem when really someone else should be passing on the concerns. I once worked with a woman who thrived on telling me what she heard other people say about me. She would say things like:

“Colleen thinks you wear out-of-date clothing styles.”

“Susan says you have a strange laugh.”

“Bob thinks you and your husband are a bad match.”

Those comments did nothing but make me feel bad. Did the other people really say and mean these things? If so, why couldn't they tell me directly?

I've made this my personal rule: If someone tells me about a gripe she has with one of my friends, I don't repeat it. If what the person is saying could contain some truth, I suggest she tactfully tell my friend directly. If the complaint is just a different opinion or a reflection of insensitivity or lack of knowledge about the person or situation, my friend doesn't need to hear it.

5. ARE THESE WORDS TIMED CORRECTLY?

Wise King Solomon said that a word spoken “in season” is good. It's possible to say something very appropriate, yet at the wrong time.

For instance, three hours after your friend's been in a serious automobile accident is not when you should tell him how bad his driving habits are. The minute you find out someone has fraudulently used your spouse's credit card is not the best time for a lecture on preventing identity theft. When your friend calls to tell you she just got fired

from her job is not the time to tell her why you think her boss didn't like her.

In most cases, the best thing you can do to help a hurting friend or family member is to just keep silent and listen. When people are upset about a difficult situation, they usually just need someone to hear them out. This allows sufferers to work out their own solution by talking through the problem. If you tell them how you would have handled the situation differently or give correction when they're not ready to hear, you will only add to their pain. Give the other person time to recover from the hurt and the initial shock of the situation before you share your perspectives about what happened.

Timing is so important. If there is little chance your words will be heard and received, it's worth waiting for a better time to talk. Of course, there may be times when you have to speak up in the midst of an emotionally charged situation, even if your words won't be appreciated at that moment (for instance, to try to prevent someone from acting impulsively and making a serious mistake). In general, though, it's best to wait and share your thoughts when the intended recipient has had a chance to calm down.

Take the time to think about the probable effects of your words before you open your mouth to speak. Granted, when you're talking, you may not have as much time to compose your thoughts as you do when you're putting something down in writing. However, taking just a few moments to contemplate what you want to say can help ensure your words will be constructive. If you can't answer “yes” to each of these five questions, it's probably best to keep your comments to yourself.

For more biblical keys to better communication, see the “[Communication](#)” section on Life, Hope & Truth, including “[Taming the Tongue](#),” “[Speak the Truth in Love](#),” “[Sticks and Stones: 6 Ways to Improve Your Words](#)” and “[Words That Hurt, Words That Help](#).” **D**

WHAT AM I TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH?



At the age of 3, this young Ethiopian woman was forced into marriage.

The Scourge of **SLAVERY RETURNS**

An estimated 46 million people have been forced into slavery in all parts of the world. What are the roots of this evil scourge, and how will it be eradicated?

By Neal Hogberg

Two centuries after the abolition movement began, slavery is now universally illegal, but buying and selling people into forced labor is still flourishing. The staggering number of slaves in the world today, both hiding in plain sight and lurking in the shadows, has been largely invisible to the news media and people's attention.

British Prime Minister Theresa May has aimed to make the fight against modern slavery a focus of her new administration. Noting that the number of victims being trafficked into Britain had risen by 245 percent over the last five years, Mrs. May, in her previous position as home secretary, was the driving force behind the Modern Slavery Act of 2015, which strengthened awareness, prevention and vital policing tools.

Britain will, vowed Mrs. May on July 31, 2016, lead the fight against modern slavery and rid the world of the "barbaric evil" she

called the "great human rights issue of our time."

More slaves today than at any time in human history!

Counting the number of people in slavery today is a difficult task because of factors such as the hidden nature of the criminal enterprises that feed off of it, but there is an increasing consensus on the magnitude of the problem.

Nearly 46 million people around the world are believed to be trapped in versions of bondage, according to a May 2016 human rights report. The Walk Free Foundation's *Global Slavery Index* showed 28 percent more people enslaved than its last estimate two years ago. Walk Free defines a modern slave as someone owned, someone working as a forced laborer or prostitute, someone in debt bondage or someone in a forced marriage.

This growth industry generates illicit profits estimated at \$150 billion annually.



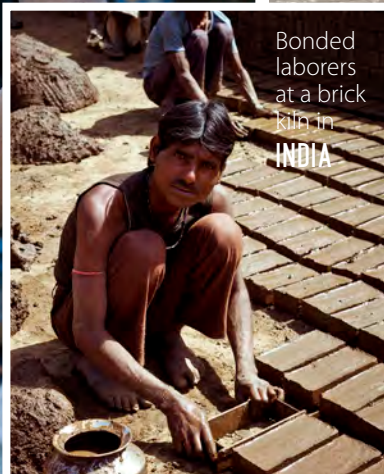
Child construction worker in NEPAL



Salt miners in ETHIOPIA



Child cobblers in INDONESIA



Bonded laborers at a brick kiln in INDIA



Garment workers in CHINA



This rivals illegal drug trafficking in global reach—and in the destruction of lives.

According to the *2012 Global Estimate of Forced Labour*, more people live in slavery today than at any other time in history. In fact, “there are twice as many people enslaved in the world,” according to a chilling article in *The Atlantic*, “as there were in the 350 years of the transatlantic slave trade.”

Defining the enormity of the problem

- Just five countries account for 58 percent of the world’s slaves, but slavery is present in 167 countries. It is on the rise in North America and Europe, where the United Nations International Labor Organization estimates there are 1.5 million victims.
- India—the worst offender—alone has 18.4 million slaves, while 3.4 million more are enslaved in China; 2 million in Pakistan; and more than a million each in Bangladesh, Uzbekistan and Russia.
- North Korea has the highest proportion of its population in enslavement, with roughly 4.3 percent of the population estimated to be in modern slavery. Its gulag system alone is estimated to be 200,000 people.
- Of the 20.9 million victims of forced labor identified by the International Labor Organization, roughly 2.2 million are held by states and military forces, 4.5 million are sex workers and 14.2 million are forced to work in other forms of economic activity—primarily agriculture, mining, manufacturing, construction and domestic work.
- Women and girls account for 70 percent of those trafficked.
- The U.S. State Department’s *Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report for 2015* showed that fewer than 45,000—less

than a 10th of 1 percent—of trafficking victims were rescued the previous year.

Exploiting desperate people

Poverty, conflict, gender inequality and the relentless pressure to reduce costs are the most common conditions associated with slavery. Desperation and fear, not guns and chains, keep many modern slaves in place. (Of course, multitudes, such as the young women and girls trafficked for the sex industry, still are forced to work under threat of bodily harm.)

“The demand for cheap goods, cheap labor, cheap sex,” according to a recent article in *The Guardian*, is “an insatiable demand that causes questions for society as a whole. On the other side, there’s an endless supply of vulnerable people” (Mark Townsend, “Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking on the Rise in UK,” July 9, 2016).

Prime Minister May lamented the “sickening and inhuman crimes” of human trafficking this way: “Vulnerable people who have travelled long distance believing they were heading for legitimate jobs, are finding they have been duped, forced into hard labor, and then locked up and abused. Innocent individuals are being tricked into prostitution, often by people they thought they could trust.”

Nations with poverty and explosive population growth provide traffickers with an almost unlimited number of potential victims and a dramatic price reduction in the trafficking of human souls.

“In the 1860s,” according to Sean Carasso, the founder of Falling Whistles, a nongovernmental organization dedicated to freeing child soldiers in the Congo, “the average cost of a slave would have been around \$40,000 (accounting for infla-



cally for their vulnerability, children are trafficked and forced to work in Latin American gold mines, in Indian kilns baking bricks, in Bangladeshi sweatshops making garments and on Thai shrimping trawlers—in some cases up to 20 hours a day.

The ruthless kidnapping of young boys and girls to serve in military conflicts is another tragic but regular occurrence. UNICEF estimates that 300,000 children younger than age 18 are forced to serve in armed conflicts worldwide.

Sex slaves

Girls from rural areas of developing nations are often lured with the offer of legitimate work, violently abducted or even sold by their families. The fear and intimidation of torture, rape and humiliation traumatizes the women into compliance. Then they are forced into prostitution until they are discarded when they are seen as no longer useful due to age or disease.

A modern, transnational business

“Slavery is,” according to the Australian founder of Walk Free Foundation, Andrew Forrest, “the dark side of globalization.” Products made by slaves, according to Siddharth Kara, director of the Program on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, “touch almost every aspect of the global economy, including frozen fish, tea, coffee, rice, wheat, diamonds, hand-woven carpets, salt, cigarettes, and sporting goods.”

Human trafficking is often a highly mobile business, leveraging modern communications and logistics to take advantage of situations and move resources quickly. Regional economic upheavals and natural disasters provide opportunities for human trafficking rings to move in. Following the tragic 2010 earthquake that devastated Haiti, the capital was quickly overrun with opportunistic trafficking rings aiming to sell children into forced domestic work or brothels.

The heart of the matter

Throughout history, millions of people have lived and died in bondage. The Bible describes human nature and selfishness as the heart of a spiritual problem (Jeremiah 17:9) whereby humans have callously devalued and exploited other humans. The concept of the [Golden Rule](#)—treat others as you want to be treated—sadly seems hopelessly outdated in a world driven by increasingly heartless greed and growing callousness.

Prophecies relating to the end of this age aptly describe the characteristics displayed by those who would buy, sell and abuse their fellow human beings: “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, ... unholy, unloving [or “without natural affection,” King James Version], ... without self-control, brutal, despisers of good” (2 Timothy 3:1-3).

Another alarming prophecy that appears to have been pulled from today’s headlines is found in Revelation 18:13, where the trade of some merchants is said to include “bodies and souls of men”—a grisly reminder of the depth to which a world that rejects the Creator will sink.

Despite this, the time is coming—pictured by God’s annual festivals (see [From Holidays to Holy Days: God’s Plan for You](#))—when Jesus Christ will return to earth to break every yoke of human bondage, freeing humanity from its self-inflicted slavery. He will “proclaim liberty to the captives and ... set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18). Then “many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD ... He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths” (Micah 4:2). Read more about this wonderful time in our free booklet [The Mystery of the Kingdom](#).

Until that time, those who heed the calling of God will be sighing and crying because of mankind’s evil ways (Ezekiel 9:4) and eagerly anticipating a new way of life at Christ’s return. **D**

tion). Nowadays, the cost for a slave is roughly \$90 and can often be negotiated for an even lower price.”

What does modern slavery look like?

While auctions of sex slaves in ISIS-controlled territory of the Middle East are the most visible and egregious examples, there is no single face of modern slavery because human trafficking encompasses so many diverse forms of exploitation. Many types of simple, nontechnical and traditional work lend themselves to the abuse of forced or compulsory laborers, including immigrants, domestic servants, garment workers and agricultural laborers.

A common method of entrapment is debt bondage. This is the vicious cycle where desperate families in need of food, medicine, a funeral or a wedding are conscripted into a hopeless financial debt spiral that is often passed down to future generations or that actually entices parents to sell their children into servitude.

Children in bondage

According to the UN’s 2014 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, one in three slaves is a child. Sought specifi-



By Erik Jones

WHERE DID THE POPULAR IMAGE OF JESUS COME FROM?

Artistic images portray Jesus as a pale, long-haired man. Yet this image contradicts biblical clues about His appearance. What is the origin of this image?

It is the face known around the world. Though it sometimes appears with different shades of skin, the general characteristics are consistent: long hair, a beard, and a slender and somber face. This face is portrayed through paintings, sculptures, crucifixes and movies.

It is the face immediately recognized as Jesus Christ.

But, as we show in our article “What Did and Didn’t Jesus Look Like?” the Bible reveals very little about the physical appearance of Jesus. And what it does reveal contradicts the popular image you may have in your mind—an image that has been planted there by artists and filmmakers. Instead of having long hair, Jesus would have had short hair. Instead of having pale skin, He would have had a tanned complexion. Instead of being thin and fragile, He would have been masculine and strong.

But if the popular image was not derived from Scripture, where did it come from? Why do artists, sculptors and film producers consistently portray Jesus with these features?

What history shows may surprise you!

NO IMAGES IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The people closest to Jesus left no artistic descriptions of His appearance. This wasn’t just an oversight because they were busy. The New Testament is very deliberate in recording the most vital details about Jesus’ life—but notably there are few about His appearance. Nowhere do we find an artistic image of Him drawn by one of His contemporaries.

Why is this?

Simply put, the early Christians understood that while Jesus was ordinary in appearance (Isaiah 53:2), He wasn’t an ordinary man—He was [God in the flesh](#) (John 1:1, 14; 20:28). Since they faithfully obeyed the 10 Commandments, they applied the [Second Commandment](#) to Jesus. Jesus Christ was God and should not be represented through images.

The apostle Paul expounded on this when he said, “We ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold

or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising” (Acts 17:29). In other words, God is so great that reducing Him to an image is like [putting Him in a box](#). Paul relegated attempts to portray God through images to “times of ignorance” (verse 30). Paul was trying to combat idolatry—a major element of the Greco-Roman world he lived in.

Historian Jesse Lyman Hurlbut wrote of the first century: “Idol worship was interwoven with life in every department. Images stood in every house to receive adoration; libations were poured out to the gods at every festival; with every civic or provincial ceremony the images were worshiped. In such forms the [early] Christians would take no part” (*The Story of the Christian Church*, 1970, p. 41).

Secular history records, “The early Church had always been strict in forbidding the adoration of images and therefore did not want Christ’s face to be memorable” (Claudine Chavannes-Mazel, “[Popular Belief and the Image of the Beardless Christ](#),” *Visual Resources*, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 29).

It is clear from scriptural and historical evidence that the early Church had no images of Christ. So how did images and icons make their way into mainstream Christianity?

HOW IMAGES CREPT INTO CHRISTIANITY

Many changes occurred to Christianity after the end of the New Testament era. After the death of the original apostles, a small group of faithful Christians continued, but much of Christianity gradually began to evolve into a religion that bore little resemblance to the Church described in the book of Acts. You can read more about the transformation in our article “[Was Christianity Designed to Evolve?](#)”

The earliest images that have been uncovered supposedly portraying Jesus have been dated to around A.D. 240-256. Obviously, these artists, who lived 200 years after Christ’s ascension to heaven, had never seen Him or known any of His contemporaries.

Instead of trying to directly portray Him, these early

images represented Christ symbolically. The most common was Christ portrayed as the “Good Shepherd,” holding a lamb. In these images, He is portrayed as young, physically fit and beardless. Most of these images were found in catacombs in Rome—not in Judea or Asia Minor, where the majority of early Christians lived.

The problem historians have in positively identifying these images as Christ is that they parallel Greco-Roman pagan art that used a shepherd image as a symbol of philanthropy (André Grabar, *Origins of Christian Iconography*, pp. 218-219). We will see that borrowing from pagan art is a common theme of many of the familiar icons of Christianity.

It wasn’t until after Constantine (272-337) that detailed artistic representations of Jesus began to be found in churches. Historian Paul Johnson wrote that “after the conversion of Constantine all the barriers [to the use of images] were broken down” (*A History of Christianity*, pp. 102-103).

In other words, before this time there was resistance to artistic portrayals of Jesus—but after Constantine accepted Christianity and started remaking it in the Roman image, the Greco-Roman customs of worshipping deities through statues and images became syncretized into Christianity.

“Towards the end of the fourth century, the use of images in the churches became general. People began to prostrate themselves before them, and many of the more ignorant to worship them. The defenders of this practice said that they were merely showing their reverence for the precious symbols of an absent Lord and his saints” (George Fisher, *History of the Christian Church*, 1915, p. 117).

Though there continued to be resistance, the use of icons and images won out and became entrenched in the Christianity that emanated from Rome and Byzantium. But the artwork of this emerging form of Christianity did not come out of nowhere. These images emerged from previous pagan imagery and traditions.

THE ORIGINS OF THE FACE OF “JESUS”

After A.D. 400, images of Jesus began to be found all over churches, catacombs and even on the vestments of priests. Since the artists had no knowledge of Jesus’ real appearance, they developed their own images of Jesus with features that continue to influence art to this day.

The early images of Jesus portrayed Him slightly differently from how He is usually depicted today. Instead of being slender with a beard, early art depicts Him as a youthful, physically fit, clean-shaven, though somewhat effeminate, long-haired man.

Choosing to depict Jesus with long hair was not a random decision on the part of these early artists. They choose to portray Christ this way because the male gods of the Greco-Roman pantheon almost always were depicted with long hair. “In Greek and Roman art loose, long hair was a mark of divinity ... in letting his hair down Christ took on an aura of divinity that set him apart from the disciples and onlookers who are represented with him” (Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, 1993, pp. 126-127).

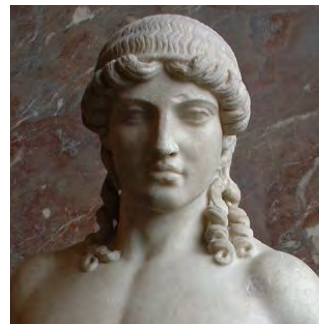
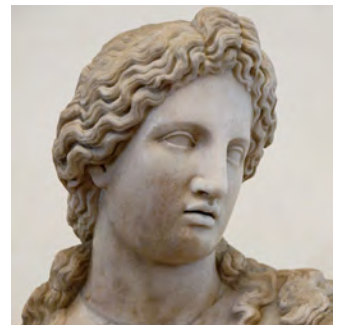
Many historians recognize that the early images of Jesus were directly based on the common features given to the sun god Apollo. Notice these enlightening quotes:

“When Christ is given a youthful, beardless face and loose, long locks it assimilates him into the company of Apollo and Dionysus. ... Insofar as he copied the look of Apollo or Dionysus, he assumed something of their feminine aspect as well” (ibid., pp. 126-128).

“The clean-shaven visage more resembles the representations of Apollo or the youthful Dionysus, Mithras, and such semi-divines or human heroes as Orpheus, Meleager, and even Hercules. A youthful appearance recalls the divine attributes most associated with personal savior gods” (Robin Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 2000, p. 119).

“Jesus’ representation as a version of Apollo/Helios in the Vatican necropolis demonstrates the way the Roman gods were directly challenged; Jesus usurps their place, often with iconographic attributes that make him quite similar in appearance to various pagan deities” (ibid., p. 120).

Look at these images of Apollo and note the similarities to many of the early artistic portrayals of the youthful Jesus:



Later artists wanted to capture the wisdom and power of Jesus as the “heavenly judge.” These artists turned for inspiration to the more powerful and authoritative gods in the Roman pantheon, such as Jupiter (the Roman version of Zeus), Neptune and Serapis. These gods, like Apollo, wore long hair to distinguish them from mortals, but were also distinguished by beards (which symbolized their wisdom and authority).

These characteristics found their way into artistic portrayals of Jesus. Notice these quotes from historians:

“The representation of Christ as the Almighty Lord on his judgement throne owed something to pictures of Zeus”



Artists took the most notable characteristics of divinity from the Greco-Roman world and combined them into an image of a roughly 30-year-old man—devising the image recognizable as Jesus today: the slender, pale, bearded, long-haired Jesus.

(Henry Chadwick, *The Penguin History of the Early Church*, 1967, p. 283).

“A full-bearded face suggests authority, majesty, and power and may be seen in the portraits of the senior male deities of the Roman pantheon—Jupiter and Neptune, or even the Egyptian import, Serapis. . . . The mature and bearded figure perhaps emphasizes Jesus’ sovereignty over the cosmos. Here Christ takes Jupiter’s place in the pagan pantheon, and the iconography makes that displacement explicit” (Jensen, pp. 119-120).

“It was only after Constantine, about the time of Damasus, that the picture of Jesus was changed from the youthful wonder-worker to the royal or majestic Lord. At that time, Jesus shifted more to a bearded, elderly, dominant figure” (Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life Before Constantine*, p. 298).

Notice the images of Jupiter, Neptune and Serapis:



Artists took the most notable characteristics of divinity from the Greco-Roman world and combined them into an image of a roughly 30-year-old man—devising the image recognizable as Jesus today: the slender, pale, bearded, long-haired Jesus.

THE DANGER OF IDOLATRY

A consistent biblical theme is God’s abhorrence of pagan idolatry. God strictly commanded His people not to make images of Him (or any made-up god) or to use those images in worship. Ancient Israel went into captivity because they embraced idolatry (2 Kings 17:15-18; Hosea 8:4). The New Testament is filled with admonitions to “flee from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 10:14) and to “keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).

Would a God who inspired these statements want to be worshipped and imagined through images inspired by pagan idolatry?

Did the God who declares Himself “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8) suddenly *change His mind* about images in the fourth century?

VIEW CHRIST IN TRUTH

When we try to portray God through a physical image, we lose sight of the full extent of His power and grandeur, which can never be captured in stone or on canvas. Instead of viewing Him with the lens He gives us in His Word, we view Him through the lens of the human imagination. In a sense, we remake Him in our image.

Not only do the depictions of Jesus mischaracterize what He looked like, but they are images based on false gods of ancient paganism.

The best way to replace these images with the truth about Jesus is to diligently study your Bible and fill your mind with the knowledge of His teachings—while avoiding man-made images of Him.

Jesus Christ made a powerful statement recorded in John 4:23-24: “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Worship of Jesus Christ should be fully based on truth, not false artistic renderings of His appearance. **D**

RELATED READING

If this article has raised questions in your mind, please read “[What Did and Didn’t Jesus Christ Look Like?](#)” (in the July/August 2016 *Discern*) to learn more about the true Jesus Christ.

Don't Defenestrate!

Looking through this famous window gave me a fresh perspective on an age-old problem—the human tendency to use violence to solve problems.

■ **WALKING THROUGH THE ANCIENT** castle in the Czech Republic's majestic capital, Prague, my wife and I came to an infamous lead-glass window. It offers a beautiful view of the city, being located on the third floor of the citadel. It is some 20 meters (65 feet) above ground level, as three men learned the hard way in 1618.

Imperial regents Vilem Slavata and Jaroslav Borzita and their secretary Philip Fabricius represented the Catholic side in the religious contention with Protestants that was about to become the Thirty Years' War—a war that would devastate Europe. The regents had gained the upper hand, and they were poised to take over the estates of their enemies. Protestant nobles decided upon a simple solution: They threw the Catholics out the window. They *defenestrated* them!

Surprisingly, the three men survived. Catholics attributed the escape to divine protection. Adversaries ascribed the men's deliverance to the large pile of horse manure into which they fell. ...

A natural reaction

It was a natural human response—when threatened by an enemy, take no chances. Do unto others before they can do unto you!

This defenestration attitude, present in the world since Cain murdered Abel, is now reaching a new intensity around the world. The Bible indicates it will continue to escalate. War, terrorism, social strife—all come, in sum or in part, from a fearful and vengeful attitude of domination.

Natural *human* responses, however, are rarely right before God. Defenestration certainly is not: "The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:20).

A different reaction

Jesus preached a different approach: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:43-45).

As our increasingly adversarial societies fragment, it will be challenging to resist desires for retribution over real or imagined aggressions. It will be tempting to give in to noxious emotions that darken our hearts. Jesus warned, "Because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12). The context indicates this verse refers to Christians who will not only stop loving their enemies, but even their spiritual brethren.

One antidote to the defenestration attitude is to take a long view of the salvation plan of the *God of love*. Our enemies will not always be our enemies. In the day our Creator opens their minds, they can become friends and brothers and sisters in the family of God. This is why God sends sunshine and rain on the unjust. He knows the potential He created in them; He sees not just what they are, but what they can become. God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). One day, they will.

Rather than emulating the attitude that made that window in Prague infamous, we should, through the window of our minds, focus on future peace and brotherhood among all in God's Kingdom on earth.

—Joel Meeker
@JoelMeeker

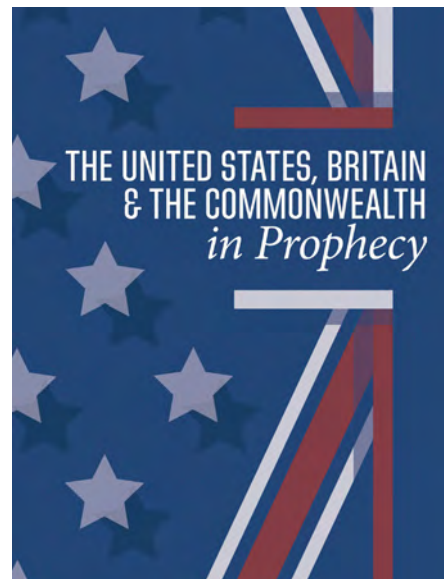


The Second Defenestration of Prague in 1618, depicted in a woodcut by Matthäus Merian the Elder.

What's Next for the United States and Britain?

Many people are unaware that the Bible foretold the rich blessings that would come to the United States, Britain and the other Commonwealth nations. The story begins with the promises given to Abraham and can be traced throughout history, even to this day.

Download our free e-book!



What does prophecy reveal about the future of these nations, and how will it affect you? The Bible holds the answers. Download our free booklet from the **Learning Center on LifeHopeandTruth.com**