

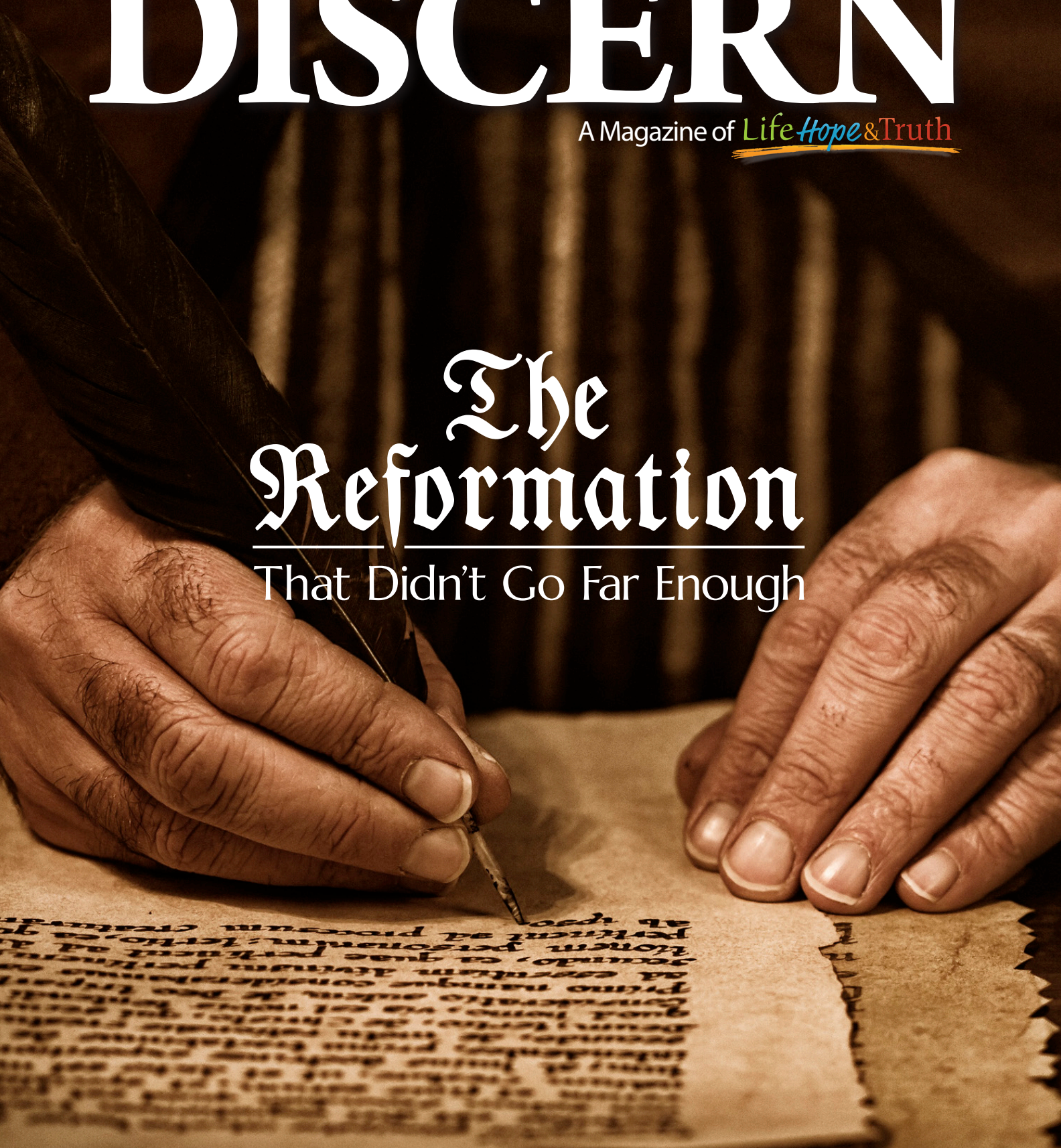
Vol. 4 No. 5 • September/October 2017

# DISCERN

A Magazine of *Life* *Hope* & *Truth*

## The Reformation

That Didn't Go Far Enough





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# NEEDED: TRANSFORMATION, NOT REFORMATION

**In light of a recent poll revealing that only 41 percent of Americans have “a great deal or quite a lot of confidence” in organized religion, it’s time for something different!**

One would hope that institutions claiming to represent Jesus Christ would be among the most respectable bodies on earth. Yet a Gallup Poll released in June revealed that only 41 percent of Americans have “a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in church or organized religion.” This continues a steady 40-year slide, with no signs the downhill trend will reverse.

I suspect similar trends exist elsewhere, particularly in the Western, Judeo-Christian world.

## Embarrassing lack of confidence

Until 1985 “the church and organized religion” rated highest among the 14 institutions in Gallup’s annual “Confidence in Institutions” survey. But since then it has slipped to fourth place, behind the military, small business and police.

Actually, the entire survey should dishearten Americans. What does it say about a nation when the large majority of its citizens lack faith in the institutions that guide and govern them? The Supreme Court, public school system, the presidency, banks, criminal justice system, television news and big business fare even worse, and Congress ranks last with only 12 percent!

But those institutions are different from religion—none of them claim to represent God! Why are the religious institutions suffering this embarrassing loss of respectability?

One major reason is the string of horrific sins and scandals—from televangelists’ sexual escapades to priests’ molestation of children to the corruption of church cover-ups—that has devastated people’s trust, support, belief and faith. Religious leaders are supposed to help us rise above—not descend into—the worst weaknesses of human nature!

## Jesus’ harsh words for hypocrites

There’s nothing new under the sun, though. Jesus aimed His harshest words at the religious leaders who acted very pious but were, as He called them, hypocrites, “whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones”



(Matthew 23:27). Their religious practices were highly organized, but their spiritual lives were chaotic!

And long before Jesus’ time, God’s prophets repeatedly emphasized that while each person was culpable for the sins destroying Israel, much of the blame lay at the doorstep of the religious leaders. The Bible abounds with warnings about the damage done, including credibility loss, when church leaders do not live up to the standards they preach.

## If Gallup could survey God

It’s easy then—and not entirely undeserved—to blame church leaders or “organized religion,” as some like to label it. But whether we are leaders, followers or outside observers, we have to take care not to point only at others. God also commands each of us to dig deeply within to examine our own hearts.

So here’s a twist on “organized religion” in the form of questions we need to ask ourselves and honestly answer:

1. Is my—or my church’s—belief system truly organized according to God’s Word?
2. Is my personal life and behavior truly organized according to God’s Word?

Or ask it this way: If Gallup could survey God, would He say He has a great deal of confidence that I truly represent Him and His way of life?

This issue of *Discern* examines the Protestant Reformation, now marking its 500th anniversary, and shows how religion’s leaders and followers alike have failed to honestly address those core questions. That’s why surveys keep telling us something isn’t working—something yet needs to be reformed—in the institutions and people that claim to represent God.

What we really need is not a human-led doctrinal reformation of a church, but a Christ-led character transformation of each individual. One where we will be, as Paul described in Romans 12:2, “transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

Only then can true Christianity begin to take its rightful place of spiritual leadership in the world.

Clyde Kilough  
Editor  
@CKilough

## WORLDWATCH

**"Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase."**

**(Daniel 12:4)**



"The current reach, volume and speed of travel are unprecedented, so that human mobility has increased in high-income countries by over 1000-fold since 1800."

**GLOBAL TRANSPORT NETWORKS AND INFECTIOUS DISEASE SPREAD**



"The Indexed Web contains at least 4.61 billion pages."

—MAURICE DE KUNDER

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Of the 1,459 operational satellites, more than 700 are used for communications.

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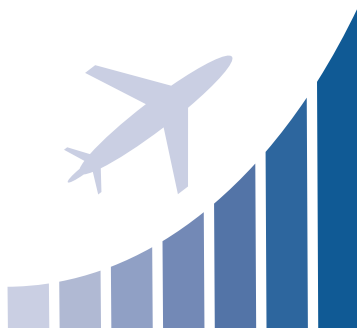
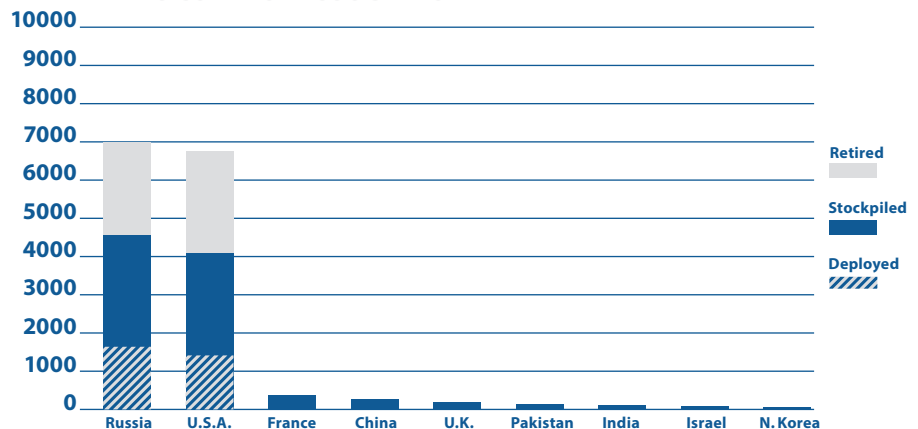


**Anything that happens anywhere  
can almost immediately be seen  
around the world  
(consider Revelation 1:7 and 11:9).**

## **Nuclear Weapons and the Risk of Human Annihilation**

The world's nuclear-armed states possess a combined total of roughly 15,000 nuclear warheads. Approximately 9,600 warheads are in military service, with the rest awaiting dismantlement.

**ARMS CONTROL ASSOCIATION**



In 2016 international tourist arrivals grew for the seventh consecutive year to pass 1.2 billion.

**UN WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION**

*Read more about end-time events in the article "Where Are We Now in Bible Prophecy?" on PAGE 12.*

Jesus warned that the end time would be marked by the risk of human self-destruction (Matthew 24:22). Consider the risk from weapons of mass destruction such as nuclear weapons.





Martin Luther began the Protestant Reformation 500 years ago by posting his “95 Theses.” But did this religious revolution restore true Christianity?

By Erik Jones

# The Reformation

## That Didn't Go Far Enough

October 31, 1517, was a day that would change the world. The story goes that on that morning, a monk walked to the door of the Wittenberg cathedral in the German province of Saxony and nailed a parchment to it. This seemingly innocent act would start a movement that would ultimately rupture one of the world's largest religions and create divisions that still exist to this day.

The man was Martin Luther, and the parchment was his 95 Theses.

### The evolution of Martin Luther

Martin Luther was an instructor of theology at Wittenberg University and a dutiful monk who

meticulously practiced everything expected of him (the sacraments, fastings, confession, prayers, study, etc.). Yet the more piously he practiced the tenets of monastic Catholicism, the more dejected and unsure he was of his standing with God. During this time, he went so far as to describe himself as hating God, viewing Him as an angry judge imposing impossibly high standards on human beings.

Seven years before posting the 95 Theses, he made a pilgrimage to Rome. Upon his first view of the city, he exclaimed, “Hail, holy Rome!” But he left a month later feeling disillusioned. The city wasn't the mecca of holiness he expected, but instead was filled with corruption and depravity. He reported that the priests conducted themselves irreverently during the masses, had little



biblical knowledge and openly compromised the vow of chastity.

He later described climbing the *Scala Sancta* (“Holy Stairs”) on his hands and knees, reciting a prayer on each step that was supposed to deliver a dead relative from the grips of purgatory. But after completing the ritual, he stood up and exclaimed, “Who knows whether it is so?”

This doubt continued to grow for the next seven years—could doing the works taught by the church really justify him with God? He wrote later that at some point during this time, he made a discovery in Romans that changed his life and would become

one of his greatest themes—that justification is by faith alone, not by works. That belief became the basis for his attack on the Catholic system of indulgences.

### The indulgence spark

It was the issue of indulgences that propelled Luther to write his doubts on parchment and nail it to the church door. An indulgence is an act prescribed by the church to reduce the length of time someone would be punished for sin.

An indulgence could be a pilgrimage, repeating a series of prayers or doing some good work.

But in 16th-century Catholicism, indulgences were primarily monetary transactions. People would purchase indulgence certificates to release themselves or others from time in purgatory (which the Catholic Church taught was a place where the dead would be punished and purged of sin before entering heaven). The more paid, the more years were wiped off a sentence.

In Luther’s time indulgences were heavily marketed to the German people as a fund-raiser to construct St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome and to help Albert of Brandenburg recoup the enormous payment he had made to Pope Leo X for the office of archbishop of Mainz. This campaign was led by a monk named Johann Tetzel, who used fear to convince people to buy indulgences. He famously preached: “As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.”

This caused deep unrest as people felt pious Germans were being exploited to fund an extravagant building in a foreign land. But those tensions remained mostly under the surface—because it was still, after all, *the church*.

That is, until that October morning in 1517.

It was Martin Luther and his 95 Theses (technically titled *Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*) that brought all these tensions to the surface and began the religious revolution known as the Protestant Reformation. Within months, the text was translated into Italian, French and English and spread throughout Europe and into the British Isles. In this professor and monk, non-Italians who felt exploited by Rome were given an authoritative voice.

### The Reformation spreads

Martin Luther’s cause received widespread sympathy in the northern German states, not just from the peasants, but from other intellectuals and even Saxony’s sovereign, Frederick the Wise, elector of Saxony.





# In order to find true Christianity, we must open our Bibles and learn what it actually teaches.

It was Fredrick who saved Luther's life by giving him safe refuge in Wartburg Castle after he was condemned as a heretic at the Diet of Worms in 1521.

While in hiding, Luther wrote extensively. Meanwhile, Luther's colleagues continued pushing the reformation forward in Saxony. Like a fire, the protest against Rome spread throughout Europe, led by a variety of leaders including Huldrych Zwingli (Switzerland) and John Calvin (France, Switzerland, Holland and Scotland).

Although most of these reformers shared some fundamental doctrinal tenets with Luther, the Reformation was not a homogeneous movement. Though most agreed on the necessity of breaking with Rome, it wasn't long until doctrinal differences divided them. In some cases, the divisions were so sharp that followers of one wing of Protestantism would be banned from an area controlled by an opposing wing.

Today Protestantism is divided among thousands of denominations. The Reformation also directly caused the German Peasants' War (1524-1525) and the infamous Thirty Years' War (1618-1648)—a long, bloody conflict between the Catholic states led by the Habsburg dynasty and the northern German Protestant states.

On the positive side, the Reformation did lead to the translation and widespread distribution of the Bible into local languages. While hiding in Wartburg Castle, Luther translated the New Testament into the German vernacular. Later, this would inspire William Tyndale to translate the Greek New Testament into English, which served as the basis for the 1611 King James Version.

There is no denying that another legacy of the Reformation was addressing many abuses and teachings of the Catholic Church. In fact, the Reformation inspired the Counter-Reformation (an attempt by the Catholic Church to moderately reform some of its more obvious abuses). But when considering the legacy of Martin Luther and the Reformation he ignited, there is one primary question that has to be answered: *Did the Reformation restore the Christianity found in the New Testament?*

## The key to the Reformation's failure

The reformers often claimed their goal was to reform Christianity to better resemble the original Christian Church (found in the book of Acts). The New Testament gives ample information about the early Church's beliefs and practices. That Church was unified around the teachings of the 12 apostles, who faithfully taught what they had learned from Jesus Christ and the Old Testament Scriptures (Acts 2:41-42; 17:2; Ephesians 2:20). They truly believed and practiced the truth articulated by the apostle Paul: "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine*"

(2 Timothy 3:16, emphasis added).

In order to have truly restored original Christianity, the reformers would have had to totally embrace the Bible as the source for their doctrines and practice. The unfortunate reality is that they claimed to, but didn't.

Luther and the other reformers adopted the Latin phrase *sola scriptura* ("only Scripture") as one of their key principles. Studying Luther's writings reveals that although he paid lip service to *sola scriptura*, in reality, he did not entirely rely on it and was openly critical of it when it disagreed with his views!

In addition to the Bible, Luther "repeatedly cited the church fathers—especially Augustine, but also Ambrose, Hilary, Cyprian, John Chrysostom and others—to document his teaching. ... Luther did not simply disregard the church fathers; he read them with respect and honor" (James R. Peyton, *Getting the Reformation Wrong*, 2010, pp. 138-139).

These so-called church fathers were the theological architects of the Roman Catholic Church. They all operated 100 to 300 years after the close of the New Testament era and contributed to bringing many unbiblical doctrines into Christendom. Examples of doctrines introduced and defended by these men include original sin, the Church as the Kingdom of God, the adoration of Mary, priestly celibacy, the celebration of Christmas, the Trinity, and rejection of Christians who kept the biblical Sabbath and festivals.

Luther also endorsed the authority of the early Catholic councils that



# WHY THE REFORMATION FELL SHORT

Though Martin Luther attacked some of the obvious abuses of 16th-century Catholicism, he simply didn't go far enough. Consider these three serious deviations from biblical Christianity that he and the other reformers left *unprotested*:

- 1. The gospel.** Jesus taught “the gospel of the kingdom,” a message about the establishment of a world government under His rule and how mankind can become a part of it (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14). Catholicism suppressed this message by teaching the Church is the Kingdom. Luther taught that the gospel was simply the story of what Christ did for us and how man can be justified by faith.
- 2. The Sabbath and festivals.** Jesus, the apostles and the early Church observed the seventh-day Sabbath and biblical festivals. Catholicism abandoned those observances beginning in the second and third centuries and replaced them with Sunday and holidays taken from paganism. Martin Luther maintained Sunday and vigorously attacked Christians who kept the seventh-day Sabbath. Nearly all Protestant denominations today continue to keep the observances established by Rome instead of those instituted in the Bible.
- 3. Christianity and works.** Jesus taught that Christians are to strive for perfection (Matthew 5:48) and obey the 10 Commandments (Matthew 19:17). The Roman Church added many nonbiblical works for salvation, while compromising major points of the original 10 Commandments. Martin Luther correctly protested many of the unbiblical works added by the Roman Church, but he fell into another ditch of relying solely on faith (*sola fide*) and attacking the necessity of the works God requires. This is why he bristled at the epistle of James (see James 2:20, 26).

These are just three examples that show Luther, and the other reformers, had valid reasons to protest Catholicism—but did not go far enough to biblically correct them. Instead of restoring the truth, they maintained many erroneous teachings and introduced some of their own. To this day, Catholicism and Protestantism remain far different from the original New Testament Church founded by Jesus.

established many of the doctrinal positions of Catholicism in his treatise *On the Councils and the Church*. These councils progressively developed the Trinity doctrine and the celebration of Easter (instead of the biblical Passover)—two unbiblical doctrines Luther (and the other reformers) never protested.

Despite his strong statements defending *sola scriptura*, Luther often questioned, criticized and ignored sections of Scripture that disagreed with his theology. He openly elevated the books he liked—notably the Gospel of John and the epistles of Romans, Galatians, Ephesians and 1 Peter. And he scathingly criticized the books he disliked—notably Esther (which he felt was too “Jewish”), Jonah (which he considered a fable), James (an “epistle full of straw”) and the book of Revelation (which he couldn’t understand).

In contrast, the early Church viewed the Scriptures as Jesus taught them: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word* that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

The reality is that Luther did not fully rely on the Bible as his sole authority. His theology included selected portions of Scripture and the teachings of the third- and fourth-century Roman Church. By that time, the Roman Church had already replaced many biblical doctrines with elements of pagan thought and worship.

This is an important key to understanding why the Reformation leaders didn’t advocate the changes necessary to restore original Christianity. Minority groups, like the Anabaptists and Sabbatarians, who did try to practice a more biblical form of Christianity were often ostracized and persecuted by the mainstream reformers.

## Protesting today

Jesus said His Church would never die out (Matthew 16:18). In order to find true Christianity, we must open our Bibles and learn what it actually teaches. This requires abandoning the fallacies of popular religion and studying God’s Word with a humble and teachable attitude. *Discern* magazine and LifeHopeandTruth.com are supported by people around the world who are striving to do just that. We are here to help.

As we look back at the Reformation 500 years later, it should remind us that false teachings should be questioned. But, if we are going to *protest* error, we have to be willing to fully replace *the false* with *the truth*. Martin Luther didn’t do that. The other reformers of his time didn’t do it. But you can.

To learn about true Christianity and how modern Christianity deviated from the Bible, read [“Six Things You Need to Ask About Christianity”](#) and [“Was Christianity Designed to Evolve?”](#) **D**





# The *Reformation* to Come

Activists demand change, and leaders try to introduce reforms. But when Christ returns, He will truly bring the transformation this world so desperately needs.

By Don Henson

Protesters commonly gather by the hundreds or thousands to display their dissatisfaction with leaders, conditions or events. Probably the most significant protest movement in history was the Protestant Reformation, which began in 1517, when Martin Luther published the *95 Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*, challenging the authority of the pope in particular and the Roman Catholic Church in general. Luther demanded reforms to restore what he believed to be true biblical teaching and to free Christians from the corruption of the Catholic Church.

While the reformation Luther introduced had earthshaking impact on his time that continues to today, he failed to accomplish what he intended: *the full restoration of the teachings of Jesus and of the Church that He founded.*

For almost 2,000 years, there has been disagreement about what Jesus taught and what it means to follow Him. The best way to sort it out would be for Jesus to do so Himself. And that's exactly what will happen. Jesus promised that He would return (John 14:1-3; Zechariah 8:3; Acts 1:9-11), and when He does, He will establish the government of God on earth and will Himself bring about not just a reformation—but a complete transformation, restoring the truth of His message of the gospel (good news) of the Kingdom of God.



Under His authority and direction, the world will become a different place. People of every nation will finally come to recognize Jesus Christ as their Savior. They will learn how to live, how to live together and what to live for. There will be peace on every level—peace of mind, peace within families and peace between nations. The world will be transformed.

### A change of heart


The heart of the matter is the heart of man—a transformation of the human heart is the first step. The heart is used in Scripture to represent a person's thoughts, character and emotions—what a person is at his core. Jesus described the heart of man as the source of all kinds of evil behavior (Mark 7:20-23). The prophet Jeremiah said, “The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse—who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9, New Revised Standard Version).

Long ago God entered into an agreement (covenant) with the nation of Israel, promising to protect and bless them richly if they would obey His instructions. They agreed, but God knew they didn't really have the heart to live up to the terms of the covenant (Deuteronomy 5:29).

When Jesus returns, He will make a New Covenant available to all mankind. A prophecy in Jeremiah 31 states, “The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ... I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts” (Jeremiah 31:31, 33). He promises, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you,” and people will obey His commands (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

The key is the *new spirit*. On the day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2, God's Holy Spirit was given to those who became the first generation of His new Church, establishing the New Covenant. That process of conversion has continued throughout the ages as God brought people into His Church (Acts 2:38-39). The prophecies in Jeremiah and Ezekiel are of the time when Jesus will return and make available that same Spirit of promise to all mankind—which will ultimately lead to a change of heart.

This transformation of heart won't come easily. It will be the result of difficult and painful events that will occur prior to Jesus' return and will lead mankind to repentance (see “[What Is the Day of the Lord?](#)”). But as people yield to Him, everything will begin to change. Rather than an external exercise, they will be able to obey God from the heart. His laws will be internalized, transforming the natural carnal heart into one that is humble and obedient.



“He shall judge  
between the  
nations, and  
rebuke many  
people; they shall  
beat their swords  
into plowshares,  
and their spears  
into pruning  
hooks; nation shall  
not lift up sword  
against nation,  
neither shall  
they learn war  
anymore.”

### A world built on truth

It's amazing how much deception and confusion there is in the world today. When Jesus transforms the earth, civilization will be built on truth. The opening verses in Isaiah 2 provide an amazing prophecy of the transformation Jesus will accomplish:

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:2-3).

Jesus will restore the universal truth of the laws of God, which will be the foundation of civilization. When He rules the earth from Jerusalem, people from all the nations will come to His throne to learn how to live. The truth of God, based on His law, will spread from Jerusalem to all the earth.

Isaiah 11:9 says, “For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” Try to imagine a world that is saturated with the truth of God's way. Religion will be completely transformed. There won't be hundreds of religions worshipping dozens of different gods. Jesus will reveal and direct mankind to His Father,





and all will learn to worship the one true God.

The transformation will begin with the nations of Israel and Judah, but will also extend to those in lands who have worshipped different gods (Zechariah 8:20-23). A prophecy in Psalm 98 praises the God who “has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations. He has remembered His mercy and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” (verses 2-3).

### At last, a world at peace

Given a heart that is willing to obey and the truth of God to live by, the world will finally be transformed from the war and strife that have characterized history to a place of genuine peace, safety and security.

A famous statue, called “Let Us Beat Swords Into Plowshares,” stands in front of the United Nations building in New York City. It depicts a man using a hammer to reshape a sword into a plow, symbolizing the end of war and changing weapons into beneficial implements. Such an image is an elusive ideal for mankind. Though founded on admirable intentions, the UN has been powerless to prevent war and establish peace.

The sculpture is based on the prophecy in Isaiah 2:4: “He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

Jesus Christ will have the authority, love and wisdom necessary to untangle age-old conflicts between nations and cultures. There won’t be any more failed human attempts at peace through warfare, treaties and alliances. The skill of warfare will become as obsolete as the weapons of war. Mankind will be free to focus effort, resources and creativity for peaceful means.

A prophecy in Micah 4 is almost identical to the first four verses in Isaiah 2. But it adds a word picture of security and peace: “But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken” (verse 4).

### A time for personal reformation

Jesus will go beyond reformation—He will *transform* the world. The apostle Paul wrote that it is the purpose and the will of God the Father to rescue mankind, through Jesus Christ, from “this present evil age” (Galatians 1:4).

These events won’t magically happen at the snap of His fingers. It takes time to turn around an entire globe. And that’s just the beginning. The millennial rule of Jesus Christ is one step in God’s plan to rescue all of mankind. To learn more about that plan, read our booklets [The Mystery of the Kingdom](#) and [From Holidays to Holy Days: God’s Plan for You](#).

Understanding what Jesus will accomplish, we have the opportunity now to enter into that New Covenant agreement with God and Jesus Christ. Our hearts can be transformed, we can learn and build our lives on His truth, and we can find purpose and peace in our lives. **D**



Be sure to download and read our booklet [Change Your Life!](#) to begin your personal transformation.





Prophecy

# WHERE ARE WE NOW IN BIBLE PROPHECY?

How close are we to the end of the world?  
Is it even possible to know?

By Paul Luecke

An often-voiced concern of students of the Bible is the timing of the end of this world and the return of Jesus Christ. Since the Bible is God's communication to mankind, we must go there to find out about the events to unfold in the end time. In fact, a large portion of the Bible contains *prophecy*.

So where are we now in the timeline or progression of prophetic events?

## What we can and can't know

First, we can—and should—have a good, general idea of where we are in the order of prophesied events. Jesus Himself said, “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place” (Matthew 24:32-34; see also Mark 13:28-31).

In other words, when we see the prophecies Jesus had just described in what is called the “*Olivet Prophecy*” coming to pass, we can know the end is truly near.

At the same time, Jesus made it clear we cannot pinpoint the exact timing of the end of the world and His return. “*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in*



“AND THERE WILL BE FAMINES, PESTILENCES, AND EARTHQUAKES IN VARIOUS PLACES.”

heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:32, emphasis added throughout).

He said that in reply to a question the disciples had asked, “What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3). Jesus had listed a number of events to unfold in the end time. Then in verse 21 He said, “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world.”

This “great tribulation” is a *major* prophetic event and is mentioned in many other prophecies throughout the Bible.

In brief, these prophecies show that this tribulation will last 3½ years and culminate with the return of Jesus Christ. Some specific events prophesied to occur *during* the Great Tribulation have not yet been fulfilled. So, in other words, we are *not yet* in the final 3½ years of this age. To learn more about this time of trouble, see the article “[Great Tribulation](#).”

### What must happen before the Great Tribulation?

Our question then is, “How near are we to the *start* of that Great Tribulation?” To answer, we can look at a number of specific prophecies and dynamics that will be in place in the time of the end.

Specifically, the time of the end is a time when the following prophesied circumstances will be in place. As you read the list below, consider that these dynamics were not apparent in even the first half of the 20th century. But together, they give the picture of a world on the brink of the Great Tribulation. Relatively speaking, there seem to be only a few details yet to materialize before all factors are in place for the final 3½ years of this world to commence.

“MANY SHALL RUN TO AND FRO” (DANIEL 12:4)

This prophetic trend comes to mind anytime we’re on a busy highway or flying out of a busy airport. Around the world there are now over a billion cars,

and millions of passengers fly rapidly through the skies every day.

“KNOWLEDGE SHALL INCREASE” (DANIEL 12:4)

According to sources cited by Boston Commons High Tech Network, up to around the year 1900 human knowledge doubled about every century. By the end of World War II, knowledge was doubling every 25 years. Now our information base is doubling every 12 months, on the way to doubling about every 12 hours.

THE CAPABILITY EXISTS FOR HUMANITY TO DESTROY ALL LIFE

“And unless those days were shortened, *no flesh would be saved*” (Matthew 24:22). The capacity for humans to destroy all life on the planet did not exist until after 1945, with the advent of the atomic era. Since then, the proliferation of nuclear weapons has made the destruction of all life possible—*multiple* times over.

INCREASE IN EARTHQUAKES

“And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places” (Matthew 24:7). There have been earthquakes at times throughout human history. But Christ’s specific mention of them in the context of end-time events shows that earthquakes will be a much more notable, frequent phenomenon.



#### ABILITY TO VIEW AN EVENT AROUND THE WORLD

Revelation 11:3-11 reveals that shortly before Christ returns, His “two witnesses”—who will testify to the world from Jerusalem for 42 months (3½ years)—will be killed. “Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues and nations *will see their dead bodies* three-and-a-half days” (verse 9). For people all around the world to view this, the technology will need to already exist. Not only is this now possible, most of us now see images from other nations daily via satellites.



#### AN ARMY OF 200 MILLION CAN BE FIELDIED

Revelation 9:13-19 describes another event near the end of the 3½ years, during the sixth trumpet. Verse 16 shows that an enormous army will be fielded at that time: “*The number of cavalry troops was 200,000,000. I heard how many there were*” (International Standard Version). Furthermore, this comes after staggering numbers of humans have already died, as revealed in chapters 6 through 9. The ability to field such an exceptionally large army was not possible until recent times, when the populations of some nations (such as China and India, for example) or groups of nations grew so dramatically.



#### SACRIFICES AT JERUSALEM TO BEGIN

Daniel 12 points specifically to events at the end of this age (verses 4, 9). Verse 1 calls it the worst time of trouble in human history, which coincides with Christ’s words in Matthew 24:21. How long until all these things are finished? Daniel 12:7 answers “*for a time, times and half a time.*” This expression, also mentioned in other prophecies, equates with the final 3½ years (or 1,260 days) before Christ returns.

Verse 11 gives even more details: “And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, *there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety [1,290] days.*”

In order for sacrifices to be taken away just before the final 3½ years, they will first need to be *started* again. While there are a few Jews—a small minority at present—who are advocating and preparing for a restoration of the sacrificial system in Jerusalem, as of this writing their efforts have not been successful. This proposal to begin animal sacrifices once again seems quite radical to the majority of Jews, and there are political concerns about instituting this type of activity. Although sacrifices could begin again with or without majority approval, it is difficult to conceive how they

could be reinstituted under current conditions. Time will tell how and when animal sacrifices will resume and this prophecy regarding their being taken away will be fulfilled.



#### JERUSALEM SURROUNDED BY ARMIES

“*But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near*” (Luke 21:20). Verse 24 adds that Jerusalem will then come under *gentile* (non-Israelite) control. Matthew’s account adds the detail that the “abomination of desolation” (connected with the ending of sacrifices) will be part of this takeover of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:15).

In Zechariah 12:3, which also refers to Jerusalem in the end time, God says, “And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it.”

If there’s any city on earth that’s in the news almost daily—as a focus of conflict, division, bloodshed and controversy—it’s Jerusalem. It is easy to see how military activity could quickly begin and escalate there at any time. For more about what the Bible reveals regarding Jerusalem, see our article “[Jerusalem in Prophecy](#).”



## II

### FINAL REVIVAL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Students of Bible prophecy know that God foretold the rise and fall of four great world empires. The fourth was the Roman Empire, and the Bible shows that it would have 10 revivals (depicted by 10 horns on the fourth beast in Daniel 7:7, 23-24.) For a listing of the 10 *revivals* of the Roman Empire, see our article [“What Is Babylon?”](#)

The *ninth* revival has come and gone, starting with the reunification of Italy by Garibaldi in 1870 and ending with the defeat of the World War II Axis powers of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy (led by Hitler and Mussolini) in 1945. “Following [World War I], ... Mussolini decided his destiny was to rule Italy as a modern Caesar and re-create the Roman Empire” (History.com, “Benito Mussolini”).

Mussolini “concluded the decade [of the 1920s] on a high note: his Concordat with the Vatican in 1929 settled the historic differences between the Italian state

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**“BUT TAKE HEED TO  
YOURSELVES, LEST  
YOUR HEARTS BE  
WEIGHED DOWN  
WITH CAROUSING,  
DRUNKENNESS,  
AND CARES OF THIS  
LIFE, AND THAT  
DAY COME ON YOU  
UNEXPECTEDLY.”**

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and the Roman Catholic Church. Awed by a generosity that multiplied his annual income fourfold, Pope Pius XI confirmed to the world that Mussolini had been sent ‘by Divine Providence.’ As the 1930s opened, Mussolini, seated safely in power and enjoying wide support from the middle classes, undertook to shape his regime and fix its image. Italy, he announced, had commenced the epoch of the “Third Rome” (Encyclopedia.com, “Benito Mussolini”).

The last revival of the Roman Empire (which has always been European-based) will be a union of 10 “kings” (or kingdoms or states), who agree to come under the authority of the “beast” spoken of in Revelation 17. “And the ten horns which you saw [in

verse 3—a different “beast” than the one depicted in Daniel 7] are *ten kings* who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with beast. These are of one mind, *and they will give their power and authority to the beast*” (verses 12-13).

These 10 “kings” will cooperate, but they don’t mix well. This reality is pictured by the 10 toes of the image in Daniel 2:42-44. This passage refers to these toes as “kings” and places them in the time frame at the end of this age, when God will set up His Kingdom on earth. Today we see dynamics in Europe that will make unification and the rise of a strong leader attractive (for economic, military, cultural and other reasons). In fact, dialogue toward this goal is increasing daily.

### What are we to do?

Besides the short list above, there are additional prophetic indicators showing that we are near the very end of this present age. Time is short! But most people pay no attention to the Bible and believe their lives will continue securely for many years. And the Great Tribulation—which Christ said will be the worst time of trouble in man’s history—will catch them completely off guard.

“For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:38-39).

Therefore what does Jesus Christ tell us—His disciples—to do?

“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:34-36). **D**



Study more about end-time events and what our response should be in the free booklet [The Book of Revelation: The Storm Before the Calm](#).



# WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU DIED?

More than one in five professing Christians in the United States believes in reincarnation. What are its origins and what does the Bible say?

By Jeff Caudle

**O**ne quiet afternoon in February 1989, I found a small handwritten note in my mailbox. It had been left by the receptionist of my Bangkok apartment complex. Written in Thai, it simply said, “Sawat is dead.”

Sawat Yingyuad was a good friend and mentor to me and a number of Western colleagues who worked in Thailand, Sri Lanka and Nepal in the 1980s. He died in a car accident somewhere in rural Thailand. Questions flooded my mind. For a start, I didn’t even know where he was. I only had the note. With some help from local Thai monks, I soon found him.

A couple of days later I arrived at Sawat’s childhood



home in a remote village in northern Thailand. His body was in a closed casket on the open veranda. The atmosphere was hot and humid. And, as was the custom, he was not embalmed.

Sawat was a follower of Theravada Buddhism, as are some 60 million Thais today, 94 percent of the population. He had been in the monkhood from childhood into his 20s, studying at major Buddhist centers of learning in Thailand, India, Sri Lanka and Burma. He was a gifted linguist and scholar.

One other important fact: Sawat believed in reincarnation—rebirth in new bodies or forms of life, such as a human, animal, insect or some type of spirit.

### Funeral rites and beliefs

Buddhist funerals in Thailand usually last at least seven days but sometimes continue 100 days or longer. After the first seven days, funeral rites may be held on a weekly basis until an auspicious date—based upon astrology and local tradition—is selected for the cremation.

Funeral proceedings for high-ranking monks or royal family members may continue for over a year. For example, the long-reigning king of Thailand, Bhumibol Adulyadej, died on Oct. 13, 2016. But his public cremation will not occur until Oct. 26, 2017, during a royal ceremony attended by thousands held near the Grand Palace in Bangkok.

In Sawat's case, several monks came to the house nightly for several days to chant Buddhist verses, encouraging those present that he would be reborn into a better life in the future. Monks pray continually in the same manner for the late king and will continue to do so even after the royal cremation.

Family and friends came daily to pay respects to Sawat and his family and to eat, drink and openly discuss life and death—and the next life too. As is common, they also talked about their past lives. Yes, I mean before this life—before the last time they died.

They also reminisced about Sawat's life.

They believed Sawat's *karma*, his good or bad deeds in this life and in countless previous lives, would determine the nature of his next existence. They also believed that there are many levels of heaven and hell, places where the souls of the dead are tested and purified prior to rebirth. They believed that continual prayers and acts of merit for the dead will improve their loved one's afterlife and rebirth.

### Reincarnation in the Western world

All of this may seem unusual and foreign to Westerners, especially those of us from a Christian background. However, more than 1.5 billion people around the world believe in some form of reincarnation or transmigration. The primary adherents are Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs and Jains.

Still, a 2009 research study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that although the United States is “an overwhelmingly Christian country, significant minorities profess belief in a variety of Eastern or New Age beliefs. For instance, 24% of the public overall and 22% of Christians say they believe in reincarnation—that people will be reborn in this world again and again.”

In 2006 Erlendur Haraldsson, psychology professor at the University of Iceland, published data regarding beliefs about reincarnation throughout Europe, collated from European Values Surveys over two decades. His research indicated that at least 10 percent of all Europeans believe in some form of reincarnation, with highs of 30 to 40 percent in parts of Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries.

### Where did these beliefs originate?

In the fifth century B.C., the Greek philosopher Plato wrote his work *Phaedo*, which addressed *metempsychosis*, “the passing of the soul at death into another body either human or animal” (*Merriam-*

*Webster.com*). And in the first century B.C., Julius Caesar said of the people of Gaul (now France), “The cardinal doctrine which they [the Druids] seek to teach is that souls do not die, but after death pass from one body to another” (Caesar, *Gallie War*, Book VI, 14).

Some scholars believe that these writings, as well as Roman and Celtic histories and literature, indicate that a belief in rebirth and reincarnation was very common in Europe before the Christian era.

However, were any of these ancient beliefs really the origin?

### The real source

Many Christians and other readers are familiar with the Garden of Eden account in the book of Genesis. But many may pass over the specific words the serpent spoke to Eve and their direct impact on mankind's beliefs about life and death ever since.

Satan asked Eve whether God had forbidden them from eating of every tree in the garden. Of course, he already knew the answer. But Eve said, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil], God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die’” (Genesis 3:2-3).

What was Satan's response? “*You will not surely die*. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (verses 4-5, emphasis added throughout).

Satan lied. He knew that physical humans *surely would die* if they disobeyed and rejected God's instructions. Adam and Eve sinned and ate from the forbidden tree. God thrust them out of the Garden of Eden, cutting them off from access to the tree of life and all its godly benefits.

Sure enough, mankind has suffered and struggled—and died—ever since. But humans still look for ways to believe Satan's words: “You shall not surely die.”

# “FOR THE LIVING KNOW THAT THEY WILL DIE; BUT THE DEAD KNOW NOTHING.”

## What does God say?

However, those who believe in an Almighty God who created the universe and all that exists, look to His Word, the Bible, as the genuine source of truth. Followers of Jesus Christ don't look to Eastern religions, philosophy, astrology or even modern forms of Christian belief for answers to life-and-death questions.

Ecclesiastes 9:5 clearly states what death is like: “For the living know that they will die; *but the dead know nothing.*” A few verses later, we read, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (verse 10).

Death is the complete end to all consciousness, thought, knowledge or action. Simply put, the dead are not living in any form or fashion; they're literally dead.

The prophet Ezekiel tells us that all souls (all lives) belong to God, and “the soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4). So they aren't alive in hell or purgatory.

The psalmist wrote that at death a person's “plans perish” (Psalm 146:4). And “the dead do not praise the LORD, nor any who go down into silence” (Psalm 115:17).

This is consistent with the rest of the Bible in describing death as a state of total unconsciousness. The dead do not make plans or worship God. They are not in heaven or hell.

And they are not reborn to die again and again. God tells us in Hebrews 9:27: “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment [at the resurrection].” Humans die once, though some (we hope only a few) will choose the second and final death (Revelation 20:14).

## God's incredible plan

God has a plan. Billions of people have died throughout human history. What happens to them and all who will ever live and die on earth?

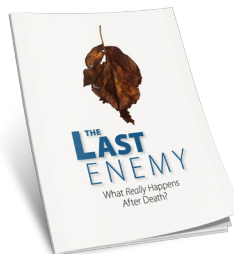
The Bible reveals a future time when the “dead *shall* live; together with my dead body they *shall* arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for ... the earth shall cast out the dead” (Isaiah 26:19).

Jesus, the Son of God, spoke of a time when the dead would be resurrected and live again. He said: “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which *all* who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28-29). In verse 26, Christ revealed that He and the Father are the only beings capable of raising the dead.

According to the Word of God, my good friend Sawat is dead and awaiting resurrection to life, according to God's own purpose and will. He is not in an endless cycle of rebirth and reincarnation. He is not in heaven or hell; he is not suffering for past lives or karma.

The truth of God's plan is simple yet profound. Everyone will die—but God promises that through the resurrection of the dead all will come to life once again. Those who have not had the opportunity to be saved and receive eternal life in His family will then be given this marvelous opportunity (1 Timothy 2:4).

Who will you believe? God—or Satan? **D**



For a deeper study into what the Bible teaches, see our booklet [\*The Last Enemy: What Really Happens After Death?\*](#)



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God

What does God look for when we fast? What are the deeper spiritual purposes and benefits?

By Bill Palmer

# “The FAST That I Have Chosen”



**T**here were no knife cuts or gunshot wounds on his body, nor had he been suffering from disease. Yet only days before, he had slipped into a coma from which he would never recover. It was May 5, 1981, when the 27-year-old prisoner breathed his last.

Malnutrition is what killed Bobby Sands! He had not eaten for 66 days. Why?

Bobby Sands had been a member of the Irish Republican Army, viewed by most of the English population as a terrorist organization, but by many Irish Catholics as freedom fighters. He had organized a group of fellow IRA prisoners to fast in defiance of British prison authorities, hoping to force them to label the IRA inmates as political prisoners. This hunger strike catapulted him to the global spotlight, focusing world attention on the conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland.

For Bobby Sands, what is supposed to be a tool for spiritual growth was turned into a religious and political weapon!

### What God says about fasting

But, as the book of Isaiah reveals, God does not heed *weaponized* fasting. In reproaching Israel for its hollow worship, devoid of morality but full of ritual and pretense, God addressed this issue.

Israel had asked, “Why have we fasted ... and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?”

The answer from God is clear: “Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high” (Isaiah 58:3-4).

Throughout the Bible we see many examples of people fasting with pure intentions, drawing close to God. But like so many aspects of spirituality, the pure values and purposes of fasting have often been corrupted. Even today, many religious people commonly fast for wrong reasons, such as:

- **To make penance.** A number of religions teach that fasting should be used for penance, which is self-abasement for the purpose of demonstrating repentance. In essence, individuals who fast in this way attempt to pay for their sins or, perhaps, to punish themselves before God gets around to it!
- **To impress other people.** During what is often referred to as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned about the all-too-human tendency to seek to impress other people. He explained that we should not adopt a “sad countenance” and “disfigure [our] faces” when fasting so we can impress our neighbors (Matthew 6:16).
- **To force God’s hand.** Many people would not admit, even to themselves, that through fasting they are trying to push God into granting their requests, but that can be a hidden motivation. Fasting with this mind-set is the equivalent of rubbing the brass lamp to release the wish-granting genie!

Clearly, God is not impressed when we fast for strife or any other wrong reason.

So what makes for a meaningful fast? The Gospel of John provides a fascinating way of looking at this topic by showing how Jesus viewed the contrast between physical and spiritual food—and with it we find some profound insights that underlie fasting.

### Encounter with a Samaritan woman

Jesus and His disciples had been traveling from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north. On their way,

they went through Samaria, a region inhabited by an ethnically mixed population. The Samaritans, rejected by the Jews as religious imposters, worshipped God at a temple on Mount Gerazim rather than at God’s temple in Jerusalem.

When Jesus and His disciples reached Sychar, the Samaritan city at the base of Mount Gerazim, He remained at Jacob’s Well to rest. The disciples continued into town to purchase food. It was while Jesus waited at the well that He broke Jewish custom by speaking with a Samaritan woman.

After He had told the woman things about her no stranger could know, she acknowledged Jesus as a Prophet. Then she spoke of the Jewish and Samaritan temples, pointing out that the Jews claimed God was to be worshipped only in Jerusalem. She wanted to know the thoughts of this unusual Rabbi about *where* God could be worshipped. She was focused on the physical.

Jesus replied with a surprising declaration: “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father” (John 4:21).

After repeating this shocking statement, Jesus added another thought: “Those who worship [God] must worship in spirit and truth” (verse 24). Christ focused on the spiritual, telling this woman not *where*, but *how* God is to be worshipped.

When the disciples returned, and after Jesus had concluded His conversation, they urged Him to eat. Saying that He had “food to eat of which you do not know” (verse 32), Jesus confused His disciples. They wondered who had given Him food. They, too, were focused on the physical.

### The Bread of Life

Jesus used the incident as an object lesson that reveals the chasm between a spiritual outlook and a physical one. This incident is not the only one John recorded about this





contrast between physical food and spiritual food.

Just a couple of chapters later Jesus miraculously fed a crowd that numbered 5,000 men (John 6:10). The group undoubtedly included women and children as well—it was, after all, a “lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish” who provided the small amount of food that Jesus multiplied (verse 9). After performing this miracle, Jesus left to be by Himself because they intended to “take Him by force to make Him king” (verse 15). Ironically, eating this miraculous meal had emboldened them to force their will on the Son of God!

The next day, the crowd caught up with Jesus on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus knew their motivation had more to do with the meal they had eaten than with the words they had heard (verse 26). He followed up by once again drawing the contrast between physical food and spiritual food: “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life” (verse 27).

During this same interaction, Jesus identified Himself as “the true bread from heaven” as well as “the bread of God” and “the bread of life” (verses 32-33, 35). Moments later, Jesus again declared His steadfastness in seeking “the will of Him who sent Me” (verse 38).

On two separate occasions, then, Jesus had equated Himself as the “water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14) and as the Bread of Life. In each case He had emphasized His determination to do the will of the Father.

There is clearly a connection between true spiritual food and the will of God.

### **The choice is ours**

Our lives are filled with choices every day. Some are insignificant, but some are crucial. So crucial, in fact, that Moses described the alternatives as “life and good” versus “death and evil” (Deuteronomy 30:15).

The apostle Paul addressed the same subject, telling the church at Rome that “to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Romans 8:6). In the very next verse, he explained that by nature people set themselves up in opposition to God. Without God’s Spirit,

our minds are “not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.”

So where does that leave us? As Christians, we must continually seek God’s will rather than our own, yet as long as we are in the flesh, our natural tendency is to rebel. What true Christian has not experienced a struggle in his or her own heart while striving to please God? What true Christian does not join with Paul in saying “what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do” (Romans 7:15)?

Fortunately, God offers us His Holy Spirit, through which we must “put to death the deeds of the body” (Romans 8:13). And God also gives us the tool of fasting for this very purpose.

When we fast, we decide not to eat or drink for a time. Our bodies protest our decision with hunger pangs, growling stomachs, fatigue and headaches. It’s a reminder that if we continued without food and water we would die, but we fast with the hope of living forever. And we are reminded of the words of Christ at the end of His 40-day fast when He was tempted by Satan: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God” (Luke 4:4).

Fasting, at its core, represents the most important choice we’ll ever make. As we fast, we set aside the physical, choosing rather the spiritual—we set aside our will, choosing as our food the will of God.

### **And the LORD will answer**

God did not end His message about fasting in Isaiah by censuring ancient Israel. In fact, He explained that He does want His people to fast, but that it must be “the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke” (Isaiah 58:6).

If we fast to seek God’s will rather than our own, choosing to “loose the bonds of wickedness” beginning with our own hearts, we can be confident that when we pray, “the LORD will answer,” and when we cry, “He will say, ‘Here I am’” (verse 9).

Read more about fasting in the Life, Hope & Truth article [“What Is Fasting?”](#) **D**

# Confronting Addiction

Our brains' wiring and society's temptations put us at risk of various addictions. We must escape these powerful and destructive habits. Here's how to start.

By Eddie Foster

**I**t's routine, comfortable, pleasing to the senses, and something we look forward to perhaps on a daily basis. It is also, however, something we hate and desperately want to remove from our lives.

It's addiction, and it's been winning for far too long.

## Addiction

The word has different meanings and connotations based on our experiences. The more tame and playful thought is of a person who simply "can't live" without peanut butter, coffee or a favorite TV show every day. This tame version of the word, however, can obscure the wretched and miserable nature of true addiction and how it completely changes the lives of those who've been snared by it.

Yes, snared. Those who have taken the first step to recovery—admitting they have a problem—often view themselves as in bondage to a cruel overlord. They want to stop. They want a normal life back, not one that's dependent on a substance for happiness. They just ... can't ... stop.

The most obvious examples are addictions to narcotics, opioids and painkillers. These often result in trips to rehab centers and intense, medically supervised detox to get some sense of control back. However, what we should "just say no" to has expanded tenfold in recent years. Drugs are not the only things that mess with our minds.

Addiction can be seen in all of the following actions:

- **Treating mind-altering drugs as more important than other people.**
- **Erasing an Internet history that includes evidence of hours of pornography and sex chat rooms.**
- **Sneaking outside to smoke and then using air fresheners and mouthwash to cover it up.**
- **Sheepishly trying to explain to a loved one why several thousand dollars has been gambled away.**
- **Clumsily getting ready for work in the morning after staying up all night playing video games.**
- **One drink leading to 10, with each new resulting situation being thought of as "rock bottom."**

Addiction generally eases its victim into ultimately destructive behavior by starting off slowly and promising that it is optional—until it becomes so powerful that it takes charge. It literally uses our brain against us, and we let it.



## Remembering shortcuts to pleasure: addiction's chemical warfare

The scientific background of addiction is widely covered in books and websites. Here's a brief layman's summary:

Addiction tricks our brains into thinking we are naturally happy and then enslaves us to that illusion. We use something (like pornography or drugs or high-risk public behaviors) to overflow our brains with pleasure neurotransmitters like dopamine. Gaining pleasure this way works so fast and so well that our brain dutifully remembers how well it worked and the conditions. Therefore, when the same conditions pop up again, our brain quickly reminds us of this quick path to pleasure. It definitely wants that again.

Everything can seem pretty great so far, except that the rush of dopamine and the manipulation of the neurotransmitter receptors actually *force the brain to change* in order to adapt. It either reduces the dopamine or the dopamine receptors. So, once or twice a month watching porn isn't enough now; neither is a slight buzz off two drinks or betting just \$100 online. It used to be enough, but after our brain adapts to such an unnatural rush of pleasure neurotransmitters, it starts to ask for more and more.

This process can go on to such an extreme that natural pleasure (sexual intercourse with a spouse, and even eating chocolate cake) can barely be felt at all. The only thing our bodies will want is the fake stuff given to us by the addictive habit.

After the brain keeps readjusting and adapting, it gets to the point that just the thought of the substance creates an overpowering compulsion (often referred to by addicts as "the wave"). It makes us so excited, and it entices us to do whatever it takes to achieve the high that we remember so well.

Porn addicts look to the more hardcore and bizarre, their natural sexual preferences shifting. Gambling addicts bet their life savings, unable to get pleasure from betting small amounts. Smokers go through several packs a day. Drug addicts overdose. Video game addicts completely drive away their loved ones.

But it all started so small.

## Barriers to confronting addiction

With all this information readily available, why are so many receiving counseling for addiction? Why are rehab centers packed? Why is the number of addicted individuals, and the number of substances we can become addicted to, growing?

Many societal, cultural and technological reasons contribute to this, of course, but the personal barriers to actually confronting addiction are so powerful that people often don't seek or get the help they need.

- **Denial:** "It's a bad habit, but I'm not addicted. I'll quit someday."
- **Shame:** "I'm a Christian. How am

## I addicted to this?

- **Embarrassment:** "I can't tell my wife about this; it's like I have no self-control!"
- **Fear:** "People are so judgmental. Everything I have will go up in smoke if this comes out."
- **Depression:** "I'm just not strong enough. There's no hope of beating this."
- **Reinforcement:** "It feels too good to stop."

Even with the insidious nature of addiction and the many barriers to confronting it, many have said, "Enough is enough!" Coming to this point—accepting that we have a problem and wanting to change—is an enormous step in the right direction. The next step should be to the Creator of the human brain.

## Start with the spiritual

Addiction treatment centers and programs often focus on the need to involve a higher power. There is something so empowering and helpful in realizing that we need not be alone in the fight against something as strong as addiction.

We can go to the God for whom nothing is too hard (Jeremiah 32:27; Luke 1:37). He is eager to help us when we turn to Him.

So, we start off with the spiritual. We repent of our offense against God. We have put a harmful substance or sinful behavior before Him and before the well-being of someone He loves (us).

We repent of our addiction's offense against our loved ones: the broken trust, the deception, the infidelity, etc.

We pray for the God who created the brain to help heal what we've allowed our brain to become.

We ask for and learn about receiving the power of God, the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:16), for the strength to combat "the waves" of compulsion.

We study the powerful, living Word of God (Hebrews 4:12) to understand why God hates things like addictions, which ruin people's lives, and how to use His power to overcome them.

This is only the beginning. If we let Him, God will lead us further on the road to recovery.

## Find a loving accountability partner

Too often people leave the battle against addiction up to just "me and God." God, however, does not force us to do things. He allows us to mess up, backslide, relapse and make poor decisions. One of those poor decisions would be to

Christ became the perfect example to all those tempted, since He suffered through temptation and came through it without sin.

not involve other human beings in our struggles.

Christians are to be so loving and helpful to one another that they can openly confess to each other their shortcomings and pray for one another (James 5:16). Due to the inherent risk of stigma in letting another human being know the thing we ourselves are most ashamed of, limiting the number of others who know of our addictions is natural.

But when we're battling powerful, destructive addictions, we need someone who knows and is on our side. God often works with us through interactions with other human beings.

These people are often called accountability partners, or sponsors. This person is someone who is loving, compassionate, merciful and humble enough to be trusted with such a heavy secret. Choose someone who will not add to the problem.

An accountability partner can be a spouse, minister, very close friend, family member or professional counselor. (Note that some addictions are medically dangerous and require professional intervention. In such cases, it is important to seek professional help in addition to having an accountability partner.)

Before asking someone to help

us in this very personal and private capacity, it is important to know their "fruits" (Matthew 7:16). No one is perfect, including Christians. But people who are unable to keep a confidence, very critical of others, unable to empathize with others' situations, and who never seem to bring up any of their own faults are definitely not suited to be accountability partners.

People who listen more than they talk, attempt to understand and empathize with others' experiences, and are not shy in talking about their faults are rare but do exist. They are the accountability partners who will actually help rather than hurt the situation, especially when discussing a relapse.

They provide a second conscience to encourage us to do the right thing, and they can be our help when we are too weak. They destroy the secrecy and isolation of addiction and help us get through failure. They are human beings God is working through to get us through the storm.

### Set up supports

With the help of your accountability partner, you can now set up supports to combat the deception and alluring aspects

associated with addiction. Here are some general ideas:

- **Mobilize familiar scriptures to repeat aloud when "the wave" nears.**
- **Talk aloud to addiction, personifying it as something we can literally hate.**
- **Write down successes and relapses, including trigger situations and strategies that worked.**
- **Discuss healthy habits that can replace the addiction.**

For specific addictions, the accountability partner needs to be directly involved with supports, such as:

**Pornography:** Have your accountability partner set up the necessary online filters that are password-protected and monitored by him or her. Designate times when relapse is more likely as check-in times on the phone or by text. Have daily check-ins.

**Smoking or drinking:** Map out routes with your accountability partner that help you avoid familiar places that sell the substance. Share social



calendars and favorite hiding spots with your partner.

**Gambling and online games:** Give your accountability partner access to monitor your online activity through software or check-ins with your accounts or browser history.

### Dealing with relapse

Relapse, especially within the first few months of attempting to kick an addiction, is as inevitable as it is frustrating. An addiction 10 years in the making rarely goes quietly into the night. It goes kicking and screaming, making life as miserable as possible. Just imagine the brain itself thinking: “What? We are not doing that thing that gives me instant pleasure anymore? We’ll see about that!”

This is when loving accountability partners are really helpful. They can help us through the failures and keep us going in the right direction. It is our responsibility to repent of any relapses and to work with God and our partners to do better in the future. God remembers that we are dust (Psalm 103:14), but He also knows that the righteous don’t stay down. They get back up, every time (Proverbs 24:16).

### Replacing the physical with the spiritual

We are a habit-driven species. When we are trying to kick addiction, something has to fill the giant hole of fake pleasure that will now be missing in our lives.

We need to rebuild the natural pleasures, which include loving connections with others and a deep relationship with our Creator.

Most importantly, those recovering from addiction should develop a new habit of assisting others as they have been assisted. Giving back brings something good out of something awful; it allows our sufferings as addicts to not be in vain.

Christ became the perfect example to all those tempted, since He suffered through temptation and came through it without sin (Hebrews 2:18), fully able to sympathize with our temptations (4:15). Though Christ is uniquely able to sympathize with every sin, we are in a much smaller way able to sympathize with others in the depths of addiction despair. We can exemplify to them: “It can get better. It doesn’t have to always be like this.”

### This is how to deal with addiction

Break free: Admit that you have a problem, break through the barriers to getting help, go to God, enlist a human teammate, set up lasting supports and continually replace the physical with the spiritual.

It can be done, so put addiction on notice: It isn’t welcome anymore. Read more about overcoming specific addictions in our online series “[Freedom From Addiction.](#)” **D**

## Accountability Partners’ Responses to Relapse

For any of us humbled and blessed enough to have the honor of serving another human being in such a powerful way as being an accountability partner, our response to a relapse is critical. It is a delicate balance between coming on too strong and demonstrating condemnation, or seeming too tolerant of sin and keeping the status quo.

The following examples may help us when that very awkward conversation comes along that begins with:

**“I’ve relapsed.”**

**Harmful:** “Not again! I don’t understand how you let this keep happening!” (Sounds self-righteous.)

**Helpful:** “I’m sorry, my friend. I can’t imagine how frustrating that is for you.” (Expressing empathy.)

**Harmful:** “What happened this time?” (Impatience.)

**Helpful:** “Was it one of the familiar triggers we talked about, or was it something new that you haven’t experienced yet?” (Genuine concern.)

**Harmful:** “You’ve gotta stop doing this!” (They know this, and they already hate that they do it.)

**Helpful:** “Try not to get down; God knows you’re trying.” (Encouragement.)

**Harmful:** “Here’s what you are going to do. . . .” (Dictatorship.)

**Helpful:** “Do you think we need to change or update any filters or supports we put in place? Why or why not?” (Partnership.)

**Harmful:** “Try harder! I don’t want to hear about you messing up again.” (Unforgiving and unrealistic.)

**Helpful:** “I’m here for you whenever you need me. Don’t quit!” (Moving toward perfection.)



# *Sola Scriptura* vs. Sunday:

## Why the Reformation Failed

The reformers claimed to rely solely on the Bible. But Catholics argue that Protestants still recognize Rome's authority because of a specific belief.

By Erik Jones

**S**ola scriptura.

Martin Luther and his contemporaries claimed this Latin phrase, meaning "Scripture alone," was the basis for their efforts to reform Catholicism and reject the authority of the pope and Catholic tradition.

Unfortunately, a major problem arose: they couldn't fully agree on *what* and *how* to reform. Some wanted to move fast with sweeping reforms; others wanted to move slowly. Some wanted limited crosses and icons; others believed all icons were wrong. Some believed in infant baptism; others, only adult baptism. Some believed the Eucharistic bread was Christ's body; others believed it represented Christ's body. The disagreements went on and on, which is why there are thousands of Protestant denominations today.

But, despite these divisions, there is one belief the reformers almost unanimously agreed on. In this, they did not break with the Roman Church: *They upheld Sunday as the day of worship.*

### THE PROBLEM WITH SUNDAY

But maintaining Sunday created a huge problem Protestants still live with to this day. Simply put, it fundamentally broke with the concept of *sola scriptura*. The Bible shows that Jesus, the apostles and the early Church all observed the seventh-day Sabbath (Luke 4:16, 31; Acts 17:2-3; 18:4). So, if one was to rely solely on Scripture to decide doctrine, one would worship on the seventh day. (You can learn more about the biblical case for the seventh-day Sabbath in our video series "[The Sabbath: A Gift From God](#).")

To find the origin of Sunday worship, one has to consult extrabiblical history, which shows Sunday was gradually adopted (by some) beginning in the mid-second century. The first written evidence of Sunday worship is from a document written by Justin Martyr around A.D. 150. One of the primary motivations for the change to Sunday was a desire to not appear "Jewish." In fact, early in its history, the Roman Church even imposed a weekly Saturday fast to show "contempt for the Jews" who observed the Sabbath as a feast (Kenneth Strand, ed.,

*The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, 1982, pp. 137-138).

In A.D. 321 Constantine the Great officially established Sunday as the day of rest throughout the Roman Empire. Constantine had been a devout sun worshipper most of his life, which might help explain why he enshrined *dies solis* (the day of the sun) as the official day of worship.

The history of Sunday is not a secret. To its credit, the Catholic Church is very honest about making this change. John A. O'Brien, in his book on Catholic theology, *The Faith of Millions: The Credentials of the Catholic Religion*, states the Catholic belief: "The Church received the authority to make such a change from her Founder, Jesus Christ. . . . The Church did not change the divine law obliging men to worship, but merely *changed the day* on which such public worship was to be offered" (1974, p. 400, emphasis added). Many other Catholic sources say the same thing.

Secular history and the Roman Church agree on this point: It was the Catholic Church that changed the Christian day of worship from the seventh day to Sunday—not the Bible. To see more evidence of this, read "[When and How Did the Change in Worship From Saturday to Sunday Occur?](#)"

### THE REFORMERS AND THE SABBATH

Now, back to the Reformation. As we have already seen, the reformers challenged many practices of Rome—while leaving Sunday untouched. But it wasn't because they never considered the issue.

At the same time, there was a small movement that emerged from the Anabaptists in Silesia and Moravia advocating a return to the seventh-day Sabbath. Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli and John Calvin were aware of the Sabbatarians (as they were called), but all adamantly opposed them.

In a letter about fellow reformer Andreas Karlstadt





"Yet they not only reject the observance of the Sabbath enjoined in the written word, but they have adopted and do practise the observance of Sunday, for which they have only the tradition of the [Catholic] Church."

(who had Sabbatarian leanings), Luther wrote: "Yes, if Karlstadt were to write more about the Sabbath, even Sunday would have to give way, and the Sabbath, that is Saturday, would be celebrated. He would truly make us Jews in all things, so that we also would have to be circumcised, etc." (*Against the Heavenly Prophets*, 1525).

It's interesting that Luther distinguished Sunday from the Sabbath, which he understood was on Saturday. Luther's view was that the Sabbath was part of the ceremonial law for Jews and not binding on Christians. He maintained Sunday as the day of formal worship—but resisted it being considered obligatory or equated with the Fourth Commandment.

alone as their standard, they would be observing the seventh day as is enjoined in the Scripture throughout. Yet they not only reject the observance of the Sabbath enjoined in the written word, but they have adopted and do practise the observance of Sunday, for which they have only the tradition of the [Catholic] Church. Consequently the claim of 'Scripture alone as the standard' fails; and the doctrine of 'Scripture and tradition' as essential, is fully established, the Protestants themselves being judges" (quoted, for instance, in *Rome's Challenge: Why Do Protestants Keep Sunday?* 1995, p. 23).

The above quotes accurately express the Reformation's greatest failure. Protestantism was founded on the premise of

# Saturday Sunday

## A CHALLENGE FOR PROTESTANTS

Though Protestant literature usually tries to justify Sunday observance with selected scriptures, this is a smokescreen for the historical reality that Rome, not the Bible, was responsible for the change. Catholic apologists have often used the discrepancy between *sola scriptura* and Sunday worship to chide Protestants. Notice these two examples:

From *The Faith of Millions*:

"But since Saturday, not Sunday, is specified in the Bible, isn't it curious that non-Catholics who profess to take their religion directly from the Bible and not from the Church, observe Sunday instead of Saturday? Yes, of course, it is inconsistent; but this change was made ... centuries before Protestantism was born. ...

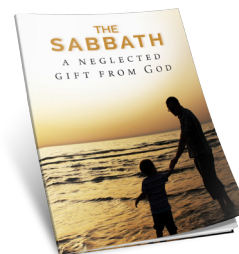
"They have continued the custom, even though it rests upon the authority of the Catholic Church and not upon an explicit text in the Bible. That observance remains as a reminder of the Mother Church from which the non-Catholic sects broke away" (pp. 400-401).

Many Catholic apologists will quote the archbishop of Reggio who, at the Council of Trent, said:

"The written word explicitly enjoins the observance of the seventh day as the Sabbath. They do not observe the seventh day, but reject it. If they do truly hold the Scripture

replacing Catholic tradition with *sola scriptura*, yet maintained one of the most significant changes the Catholic Church made to Scripture. Had the reformers seriously applied *sola scriptura*, they would have rejected Sunday and restored the seventh-day Sabbath.

Every weekend, when millions of Protestants work on Saturday and go to church on Sunday, they are unwittingly acquiescing to the authority of the Catholic Church rather than the Bible. **D**



If you're interested in going where Luther, Zwingli and Calvin refused to go, consider reading our free booklet *The Sabbath: A Neglected Gift From God*. It thoroughly covers the biblical case for the Sabbath, addresses common challenges and shows how the Sabbath can truly change your life for the better.

# Wars and Rumors of

## A NEW WARFARE

Fears of Russian meddling are not only reshaping the media, but also geopolitical alliances, warfare and the future of Europe. Where will they lead?

By Neal Hogberg

**W**hile the extent of Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election continues to drive a hyperpartisan debate in America, it has clouded the larger picture of how the Kremlin has, for more than a decade, been using very modern approaches to expand its influence throughout Europe.

### **Rolling back the history of Europe**

In relation to Europe, “Russia was often a threat,” notes historian Victor Davis Hanson, “given its large population and territory and rich natural resources—and it was also more autocratic and more volatile than many of its vulnerable European neighbors.”

Since the days of the czars, Russians have attempted to extend their influence westward. And, since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Kremlin has been on the defensive. In Moscow’s eyes, the West gained the upper hand in the 1990s due to Russia’s economic weakness, the growth of the democratic movements and a gradual military encirclement of Russia.

To counter the preeminence of the West, Moscow shifted to guerrilla tactics with at least a veneer of deniability, in order to achieve its overarching aims of fracturing the American-European partnership, collapsing the European Union and restoring Russian global influence.

### **Putin’s master plan**

Russian President Vladimir Putin “remains fixated on his ultimate goal,” according to Douglas Schoen, author of *Putin’s Master Plan*. That goal is “Russian hegemony in Europe, but not in the old Cold War sense. He doesn’t seek



# Russia is waging “the most amazing information warfare blitzkrieg we have ever seen.”

a Soviet-style, Moscow-centered megastate on the European continent, or even a Warsaw Pact–like formalization of Russian supremacy. Rather, Putin aims to neuter Europe politically, to make it concerned only with commerce and comfort, so that muscularly enforced Russian interests will dominate the political fate of the continent” (2016, p. xiii).

The result of this new Russian interference is that “nearly a quarter-century after the collapse of the Soviet Union,” according to an editorial in the *Economist*, “the West faces a greater threat from the East than at any point during the cold war.”

## Modern warfare hits the West

War is being redefined as more than a contest of steel and gunpowder. Valery Gerasimov, chief of the Russian General Staff, who envisioned cyberwarfare as a central tenet of a military doctrine called “hybrid war” or “new generation warfare,” noted that “distinctions between war and peace are becoming blurred in the 21st century.”

“Wars are no longer declared,” explained Gerasimov, “but are simply begun and then no longer follow familiar models” (*Spiegel Online*).

Gerasimov added in a now famous 2013 article, “A previously stable country could become the arena of a bitter armed conflict and the victim of foreign intervention. The state is plunged into chaos, a humanitarian catastrophe and civil war, by means of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other non-military measures.”

## The Kremlin playbook for war without war

Governments in Europe are not blind to the situation, but fearing swift repercussions, the political response has been anemic. “Russia has used proxy soldiers, unmarked Special Forces, intimidation and propaganda,” acknowledged NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at a NATO seminar in March 2015, “all to lay a thick fog of confusion; to obscure its true purpose ... and to attempt deniability.”

“What Putin is waging can be thought of as war without war—with all the means and goals of warfare but none of the costs and the traditional forms of battle. So long as the West remains acquiescent, confused and timid, he will continue to notch victory after victory. ... Armed with the knowledge that the West will shrink from open confrontation, the Russian leader doesn’t need a war to achieve his objectives—all he needs is the consistent application of pressure, confrontation, and high-stakes moves that will intimidate Washington and Europe into backing down” (*Putin’s Master Plan*, pp. 45, 57).

This modern brand of hybrid warfare combines the elements of destabilizing cyberattacks, designed to delay strategic responses, and waves of propaganda to sway or just confuse public opinion. Russia’s hybrid war also includes coercive pipeline politics.

## Energy and economic strangulation

Europe, the largest energy importer in the world, is addicted to Russian energy. The European Union gets one third of its natural gas and crude oil from Russia, and its dependence is growing.

Putin clearly understands the power of being at the right end of a pipeline. He uses the “petrocarrots” and “petrosticks,” as some analysts call them, of the world’s second-largest oil and gas exporter to provide sweetheart financial deals or to threaten adversaries into submission.

Putin has shut off energy supplies to entire countries before, most notably to Ukraine in the mid-2000s. Few doubt that he would use the “weaponization” of energy again, highlighting Russia’s ability to dramatically disrupt the continent’s economy.

## The arsenal of cyberwarfare

Putin, a former Soviet KGB agent who rarely uses a computer and once called the Internet a “CIA project,” has shrewdly deployed cyberwarfare alongside conventional warfare with devastating effectiveness. Recently retired supreme NATO commander Philip Breedlove stated emphatically that Russia is waging “the most amazing information warfare blitzkrieg we have ever seen.”

The 2014 Russian invasion of Ukraine first introduced a conventional ground attack married to a sustained cyberassault. More than 6,500 devastating intrusions in just two months immobilized troops, bewildered citizens and systematically degraded virtually every public, private and economic sector of Ukraine. “You can’t really find a space in Ukraine where there *hasn’t* been an attack,” says Kenneth Geers, a NATO ambassador who focuses on cybersecurity” (*Wired*).

Even more concerning, many global cybersecurity experts believe Russia is using Ukraine as a cyberwar testing ground.

“This is an entirely new way of waging war,” says a former KGB general. “It is like the invention of planes or submarines. Suddenly you can attack the enemy from a completely new and unexpected direction. ... This is the essence of warfare: constant surprise” (*Newsweek*).

Former Russian commander in chief General Yuri Baluyevsky proudly stated that a victory in information warfare “can be much more important than victory in a classical military conflict, because it is bloodless, yet the impact is overwhelming and can paralyze all of the enemy state’s power structures” (BBC).

The most dramatic warning of the danger was made in a 2012 speech in Manhattan by then U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta. He said that “a cyber attack perpetrated by nation states or violent extremists could be as destructive



as the terrorist attack of 9/11.” Broad-based infrastructure attacks, Panetta continued, “would cause physical destruction and loss of life, paralyze and shock the nation, and create a profound new sense of vulnerability.”

### Sowing chaos and confusion

Moscow “aims to sow confusion and defeatism in the West,” according to James Kirchick, author of *The End of Europe*, “by poking holes in its narratives and upending the very notion of objective truth” (2017, p. 216). The Internet and social media allow Russian political interference to spread rapidly and cheaply.

The Kremlin’s message is multiplied through online “troll factories,” where hundreds of young people work around the clock.

European security agencies have warned for some time that Moscow is targeting public opinion in European Union countries through the creation of RT, formerly known as Russia Today, which disseminates Moscow’s worldview in multilingual online news and videos.

When Putin founded RT, he said its mission was quite clear: to “break the Anglo-Saxon monopoly on global information streams” (*The Atlantic*).

The Kremlin-funded news outlet is substantially expanding its programming and, according to *Adweek*, became the first YouTube news channel with a billion lifetime views. In addition, Russia recently launched Sputnik as a new communications effort focusing on radio and the Internet, “telling the untold” and lobbying an information barrage of conspiracy theories and anti-Western hysteria.

### Targeting Germany

A prime Russian geopolitical objective, according to Douglas Schoen, is to “set up a choice whereby Germany pursues its economic relationship with Russia over its political relationship with America” (*Putin’s Master Plan*, p. 22).

The ongoing refugee crisis, terrorist activities and perceived American economic retrenchment all provide Moscow with issues ideally suited to stir up resentment and divide German society.

The head of Germany’s domestic intelligence agency, Hans-Georg Maassen, clearly said that cyberattacks on the German Bundestag were directed from Russia to “generate information that can be used for disinformation or for influencing operations” and may be used to try to influence or delegitimize the country’s election where Chancellor Angela Merkel is standing for reelection as a stalwart supporter of NATO and the EU (Reuters).

### How will Europe respond?

Western Europe has been lulled into complacency by decades of peace. It has shown timidity in failing to break its addiction to Russian energy and a reluctance to confront the mounting Russian threat.

Even some NATO members that were hostile to the Soviet Union act differently toward Putin’s Russia, and indeed some have friendlier relationships with Moscow than Washington, London or Brussels.

“Putin is a master manipulator,” says Guy Verhofstadt, the former prime minister of Belgium and author of *Europe’s Last Chance*. “Compared to him the leaders of our twenty-eight member states are dwarves” (2017, p. 72).

But Europe’s leadership role will not always fall to political dwarves. European fears of Russian meddling, security threats and the weaponization of energy is coinciding with an increasingly contentious



relationship with a United States inclined to shrink back from overseas commitments. These trends will lead to the rise of a revival of a European-centered superpower, described as “the beast” and led by a charismatic figure that will control the world’s economic and military might (Revelation 13:1-8).

The Bible foretells a time, right before the return of Christ, of “wars and rumors of wars” (Matthew 24:6) that certainly seems to echo the hybrid wars, cyberwarfare, proxy soldiers, economic blackmail, media manipulation, information blitzkriegs and “wars without war” we have started to see in our modern age.

After that, the good news is that Jesus Christ will return to establish a foundation of peace during a 1,000-year peaceful reign (Revelation 20:4-6). **D**



Read more about this wonderful promise in our free booklet [The Mystery of the Kingdom](#).



## “The Needy Shall Not Always Be Forgotten”

A walk through a quiet forest reminded me that evil men sometimes purpose to make others disappear without a trace. God will not allow it.

■ ONE CRISP, OVERCAST MORNING IN THE PINE FORESTS of northeastern Poland, 100 kilometers from Warsaw, my wife and I walked through a clearing. We walked among 17,000 scattered quarry stones purposely reminiscent of tombstones, because this clearing was the site of the Treblinka extermination camp.

Between July 23, 1942, and Oct. 19, 1943, the most horrible period of what the Nazi regime called the *Final Solution to the Jewish Question*, between 700,000 and 900,000 men, women and children were murdered here. At peak monstrosity, 12,000 to 15,000 were killed every day.

We walked slowly along the former path of the rail line, where a branch led to a mock train depot. To keep the condemned passive, the entrance to the camp was disguised as a transit station.

We walked up the hill to the location of the disrobing rooms. Men and women were separated, told to turn in their valuables for safekeeping and strip naked for a shower, in preparation for being sent on to resettlement camps farther east. The guards then rushed them quickly into the gas chambers, disguised as showers.

Exhaust fumes from a captured Russian tank were used to asphyxiate the victims, which took 20 to 30 minutes. A bit farther along, we came to the location where the open-air crematory pits were located and the bodies, doused with gasoline, were burnt.

### Unable to erase the memory

One of the most astounding elements of the horror of Treblinka was that the Nazis believed the barbarism could be hidden. When the camp closed, bodies buried earlier were disinterred and burned. The rail spur was removed; the buildings were destroyed; remaining bone fragments were pounded to powder; and the soil was plowed back to farmland. A house was built, and the “farm” was turned over to a family.

The SS intended for those hundreds of thousands of Jews to disappear without a trace—to leave no memory behind.

But there were a few survivors; among them were 70 who escaped and survived the war after a revolt in August 1943. They told their stories. Many guards were held accountable. Even today archaeologists work to reconstruct the history of this chilling place.

### God’s promise

Even more important than what men do to remember, God promises He will not allow any humans to permanently erase the memory of any others. He loves all His children, and He will restore their lives and their potential, however terribly their first passage on earth may have ended.

Jesus explained that God does not forget even the smallest of animals, much less creatures made in His image: “Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Luke 12:6-7).

No matter how arrogant and cruel people may be to each other, God will have the final word, restoring life and hope.

David wrote of God’s ultimate promise for all people: “For the needy shall not always be forgotten; the expectation of the poor shall not perish forever. Arise, O LORD, do not let man prevail; let the nations be judged in Your sight. Put them in fear, O LORD, that the nations may know themselves to be but men” (Psalm 9:18-20).

No one will be forgotten.

—Joel Meeker  
@JoelMeeker



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