

# Mike Bickle Answers the 100 Most Frequently Asked Questions About the End Times—Part 2

*This is part 2 of a multipart series. [Click here to read part 1.](#)*

**26. When does the final three and a half years start?** It is marked by the abomination of desolation (Matt. 24:15, Mark 13:14, 2 Thess. 2:3-4, Rev. 13:12-18).

**27. What is the abomination of desolation?** This occurs when the Antichrist stands in the Jerusalem temple and declares himself to be God by setting up an idol in the temple and then seeking to force all who are on earth to worship him (Dan. 11:31-32, Matt. 24:15, 2 Thess. 2:4, Rev. 13:14-17). The Antichrist's statue or image will be the greatest abomination to God in history, because the Antichrist will demand to be worshipped as God, and many will fully respond to this demand.

**28. When is the abomination of desolation set up?** It will start the final three and a half years of natural history. It will occur after the Antichrist puts a stop to the sacrifices in the temple. The desolation will occur in two different ways. First, the Antichrist will seek to desolate or destroy any who refuse to worship him. Second, God will desolate or destroy in judgment all those who yield to the pressure to worship the Antichrist. The abomination of desolation is referred to seven times in Scripture, five times by Daniel (Dan. 8:13, 9:26, 27; 11:31; 12:11) and twice by Jesus (Matt. 24:15; Mark. 13:14).

**29. Will the abomination of desolation in the temple be alive?** The false prophet will command all to make an image (statue)

related to worshipping the Antichrist (Rev. 13:14, 15; 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). He will cause the image to speak and breathe.

**30. Who is the restrainer in 1 Thessalonians 2:6-7?** The restrainer is a combination of two forces that currently restrain the Antichrist, referred to as something and someone by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-8. These forces will be removed to allow the Antichrist to come to a place of international political power. Paul describes the restrainer of the Antichrist as a what (neuter in v. 6) and as a he (masculine in v. 7). Thus, the restraining force is a what and a he working together. Paul taught that the power of the state is appointed by God to restrain evil (Rom. 13:1-4). The power of the state is what and the He is God and His sovereign decree. Some wrongly teach that the Holy Spirit is the restrainer who is removed when the church is raptured before the Great Tribulation. If that is true, then nobody could be saved in the Great Tribulation, because it takes the work of the Holy Spirit moving on an unbeliever's heart in order for salvation to occur.

**31. How do you know the horseman of the first seal judgment is the Antichrist?** The rider of the white horse has a crown (political prominence, Rev. 13:1-2, 7), a bow (military authority) and he is a successful conqueror. The nations have been enjoying a counterfeit worldwide peace (1 Thess. 5:3). This will end after the opening of the first seal, the fall of Babylon, and the abomination of desolation. The color white symbolizes righteousness, because his reign initially appears righteous. He is the counterfeit to Jesus who rides a white horse with truth (Rev. 19:11). It would be out of place to say the rider of this white horse is Jesus when the other three horses have negative judgment events that involve sinful actions of men. Jesus is gloriously pictured in Revelation in splendor in three places (Rev. 1:12-18; 14:14-16; 19:11-16). There are significant differences between the white horse

riders in Revelation 6:2 and Revelation 19:11-16.

**32. Do the first four seals describe the result of the Antichrist's activity?** Yes. Each seal leads to the unfolding of the next seal. For example, the rise of the Antichrist in the first seal (Rev. 6:2) leads us to a world war in the second seal, which in turn causes famine and economic crisis in the third seal and calamity in the fourth seal. Jesus releases the seal judgments against the harlot and the nations that align with her.

**33. Who are the two witnesses?** The two witnesses are prophets who will preach with great power and release God's judgments against the Antichrist's empire in the Great Tribulation.

**34. Who is the "prince who is to come" of Daniel 9:26?** He is the Antichrist who makes a covenant with many nations, including Israel (Dan. 9:27).

**35. Who is the Beast in Revelation 13:1-8?** He is the Antichrist.

**36. Why is the Antichrist called the Beast?** His character is like a wild animal. He will be unreasonable, ferocious, cruel, and without reason or mercy. The term beast is used 36 times to describe the Antichrist (Rev. 11:7; 13:1, 2, 3, 4, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18; 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2, 10, 13; 17:3, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 17; 19:19, 20; 20:4, 10).

**37. What do the four beasts in Daniel 7 represent?** Most scholars agree that the vision of Daniel 7 predicts four successive ancient empires (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome), described as four beasts. These empires played a key role in Israel's history between 605 B.C. when Israel went into Babylonian captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

**38. What are the seven heads?** The heads refer to seven empires from world history.

**39. What are the 10 horns?** The horns speak of a future 10-nation confederation that will work closely with the Antichrist in the end times (Rev. 17:11-13, 17).

**40. Who is the "other beast" in Revelation 13:11?** He is the false prophet.

**41. What are the "two horns like a lamb" on the second beast symbolic of? Why is the false prophet displayed as he is (Rev. 13:11)?** These two horns represent the false prophet's demonic power, probably displayed in religion and in economics. He will use his power behind the façade of being like a mild and gentle lamb.

**42. Who are the 144,000 of Revelation 7 and 14?** The 144,000 are ethnic Jews that are sealed to be protected from God's judgments in the book of Revelation.

**43. What is the third woe?** There are three "woes" that happen in chronological order; they are the fifth, sixth and seventh trumpets (Rev. 8:13). The third woe is the seventh trumpet, which involves the release of the seven bowl judgments.

**44. What is the "little book" in Revelation 10?** It is a book that contains key prophetic information for the end times. This may be the same book with the same prophetic information that Daniel received in Daniel 12. Daniel sealed up comparable prophetic information with an angel of similar glory and a corresponding oath related to the final three and a half years (Dan. 12:4-10). The little book is not the same book taken from the Father by Jesus (Rev. 5:7).

**45. What are the seven thunders of Revelation 10?** They are seven prophetic messages that the Lord will strategically reveal to the end-time church. They have been sealed up until the end times like some of Daniel's prophetic words (Dan. 12:9).

**46. What is the bottomless pit?** It is a temporary prison from

which the Antichrist ascends during the tribulation (Rev. 11:7, 17:8). The demonic locusts seen in the fifth trumpet come from this pit (Rev. 9:1-2, 11). It is also the place where Satan will be bound for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:1-3).

**47. When will Jesus rapture the church?** The rapture will occur in association with the last trumpet (Isa. 27:13; 1 Cor. 15:50-52; 1 Thess. 4:16-17; Rev. 10:7, 11:15-17). The last trumpet is the last in a series of seven trumpets as seen in Revelation 8-9.

**48. What is dispensationalism?** It is the belief that world history is divided into seven different "times," or dispensations. It includes an understanding of the end times that was developed by John Darby starting in 1830 and made popular by the Scofield Reference Bible. It teaches about a "secret rapture" of God's people before the tribulation, thus teaching that the church does not go through the tribulation. The theological idea of dispensationalism is less than 200 years old.

**49. What does it mean to believe in the pretribulation rapture?** "Pre" means "before," so to be pre-trib (believing in the pretribulation rapture) means one believes that Christians will be raptured before the Great Tribulation begins.

**50. Who are the ones taken from the field, and who are those left behind in Matthew 24:38-42?** The context of this passage describes those taken in judgment in a sudden and unexpected manner. These will be "swept away" in death by God's judgment coming on the earth. Many people in Noah's day were surprised by the flood of judgment that killed them. In the same manner, many will ignore the signs that Jesus described in Matthew 24:3-35. Jesus told them clearly that those taken were taken by death to the place the eagle or vultures will eat them.

*I tell you, on that night two men will be in one bed; the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be*

*grinding grain together; the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two men will be in the field; the one will be taken and the other will be left."*

*They asked, "Where, Lord?"*

*He replied, "Where the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together" (Luke 17:34-37).*

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## **Mike Bickle Answers the 100 Most Frequently Asked Questions About the End Times**

**1. Why is it important that we study the and the Book of Revelation?** Studying what the Bible has to say about the future empowers us to be victorious in love and power during the most glorious and difficult time in history. It prepares us to actively participate under Jesus in the end-time events and to rightly interpret Jesus' leadership in the coming global crisis instead of being offended by Him (Matt. 11:6). Studying the end times awakens urgency in us for intercession, knowing that our prayers may minimize evil and increase victory. Understanding end-time Scriptures strengthens our

confidence in God's sovereignty by knowing that He is in control and is never surprised (Joel 2:13-14; Zeph. 2:3; Matt. 11:6, 24:4; Phil. 1:10; Rev. 12:11).

**2. How much does the Scripture say about the end times?** Most of the prophets spoke about the future "Day of the Lord" which relates to the events of Jesus' coming. See our article entitled "150 Chapters on the End Times."

**3. How do we know the end-time Scriptures were not fulfilled in A.D. 70?** The events of A.D. 70 do not fulfill most of the details of many Scriptures about the Great Tribulation. For example, Revelation 13 requires a talking image, the mark of the beast, a healed head-wound, mandatory worldwide worship of the Antichrist and a false prophet. Jesus said the Great Tribulation would not happen until after we see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place for exactly 1,290 days, which would result in the threat of every human being killed (Dan. 12:11). Nothing close to this scenario happened in the first Jewish revolt against Rome (A.D. 66-73), when Jerusalem and the second temple were destroyed in A.D. 70, ending at Masada (A.D. 73). In the second Jewish revolt against Rome, 500,000 Jews were killed, in addition to the destruction of 1,000 villages (A.D. 132-135 AD). The 50 million babies aborted worldwide each year overshadows the loss of life in both A.D. 70 and World War II.

**4. What is the Great Tribulation and how long is it?** It is the time period just prior to Jesus' return to earth (Dan. 12:1, Matt. 24:21-22, Mk. 13:19-27). In this time frame, God will release unprecedented judgments on the Antichrist's kingdom as seen in Revelation 6; 8-9; 16. It is 3.5 years in duration (Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 11:2-3; 12:6, 14; 13:5).

**5. Will the church be on earth during the Great Tribulation?** The church will absolutely be on the earth during the Great Tribulation. Jesus' bride will partner with Him in this very important time of history at the very climax of this age.

**6. What is the church's role in the Great Tribulation?** The church will participate in the release of God's judgments under Jesus' leadership through the unified global prayers of faith (Ps. 149:6-9; Matt. 18:18-19; John. 14:12; Rev. 8:4,22:17). The end times is the church's finest hour, when miracles will occur and supernatural prophetic direction will be released. The miracles of Acts and Exodus will be multiplied and combined on a global level (Mic. 7:15).

**7. How do I prepare for these events?** The key to preparing is to consistently and prayerfully study what the Scriptures say about the end times. Jesus called this "watching." Daniel received revelation of God's prophetic purposes for this generation by diligently studying what God's Word said about it (Jer. 29:10-14). He embraced a lifestyle of Bible study with prayer and fasting (Dan. 9:2-4) to receive "skill to understand" (Dan. 9:22).

**8. How can we know when Jesus is coming if He says in Matthew 24:36 that "no one knows" the day or the hour?** Jesus did not say we could not know the season or the conditions surrounding His coming. Neither did Jesus say that the church would not know the day and hour in the generation the Lord returns. We must seek the Father's Word as to when this begins, because only the Father knows. God did not want to make the day and hour known in the early church, but Daniel and the apostle John made it clear that the Messiah would come exactly 1,260 days after the abomination of desolation (Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 11:2-3,12:6, 14; 13:5).

**9. Why will believers reject Jesus during the end-time "falling away"?** Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 that people are condemned because 1) they do not love the truth; and 2) they take pleasure in unrighteousness. Paul explains to Timothy that those who depart from the faith will do so after "giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). A few years later, Paul adds that, " will not endure sound doctrine, but they will gather to themselves

teachers in accordance with their own desires, having itching ears, and they will turn their ears away from the truth and turn to myths" (2 Tim. 4:3). Paul describes this type of believer (and unbeliever) in 2 Timothy 3:1-5. The central issue is that they are lovers of themselves. The victorious believer in Revelation 12:11 will overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony and the fact that they did not love their lives to the death.

**10. Why is the book of Revelation important?** This book gives us more information on the end times than any other book in Scripture. It has a special purpose in equipping God's people to participate with Jesus' end-time plan and to overcome with victory in the Great Tribulation. It is the "prayer manual" for the end-time church.

**11. How can we tell if a passage in Revelation is symbolic or if it should be taken literally?** The general rule is that Revelation means what it says and says what it means (common-sense reading), unless an angel explains it otherwise. We interpret a passage symbolically when it is clearly indicated by the text. For example, in Revelation 1:20, the angel tells John the seven lampstands are symbolic of seven churches.

**12. Do other commentaries refer to the parenthetical sections as interrupting the chronological story line?** Yes, many throughout history have understood the structure of Revelation in this way.

**13. What is the special significance of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 for us today?** Jesus identified the issues that would most challenge the end-time church, and then addressed them by strategically selecting seven churches in the first century that were challenged in those very same ways.

**14. Are we able to know the signs of the times?** Yes, Jesus commanded the people who lived in the generation of His return

to know the signs (Matt. 24:32-44). Jesus rebuked those who did not heed the prophetic signs that pointed to His coming (Matt. 16:1-4; Luke 19:41-44). Prophetic signs serve the church in the same way that a weather station signals coming trouble so that people can prepare and save lives.

**15. Can the signs of the times be understood?** Yes. The Scriptures on the end times and the signs of the times were written to be understood by all, since the majority of people throughout history have been uneducated peasants. The Scripture was written for them. Jesus and Paul emphasized the know-ability of the prophetic signs of the end times (Matt. 24:32-34, Luke 21:25-29, 1 Thess. 5:1-6, 2 Thess. 2:1-11). The lie is that we are not to know the times and seasons of His return (Acts 1:7-8).

**16. How much information does the Bible provide on the signs of the times?** There is more prophetic evidence about Jesus' second coming than any other prophetic event in the Bible. The end times is the most written-about subject in all of Scripture. There are over 150 chapters in the Bible in which the majority of the chapter is about the end times.

**17. Is it true that every generation believed they were living in the generation the Lord returns?** It is a common misperception that most generations believed they were in the end times. It is true that a very small group (less than 1 percent) of every generation might have thought they were at the end. Only once has there been a universal sense that was sustained over decades that it was the time of the end, and that was during the generation of the first apostles.

**18. How long is a biblical generation?** A generation in Scripture ranges from 40 to 100 years (Gen. 15:13-16, Num. 32:13, Ps. 90:10, Matt. 1:17, Acts 7:6). Moses spoke of Israel's captivity in Egypt as lasting 400 years or four generations (Gen. 15:13). Thus, a generation could refer to 100 years. There were 14 generations from Abraham to David,

covering nearly 1,000 years (Matt. 1:17). These 14 generations averaged about 70 years.

**19. How can we be confident that we are living in the generation the Lord returns?** There are many biblical trends that reveal “the season or generation” of His coming (Matt. 24:4-8). They include the emergence of global prayer (Isa. 56:7), the increase of knowledge (Dan. 12:4), the revelation of the bridal paradigm (Rev. 22:17), the great harvest from all nations (Matt. 24:14, Rev. 7:9) and the increase of wickedness (Dan. 8:23, Rev. 14:9).

**20. What are Daniel’s 70 weeks (Dan. 9:24-27)?** The angel Gabriel revealed to Daniel that God’s purpose for Israel involved a prophetic period of seventy weeks. In the modern world, a week speaks of a period of seven days. However, in the ancient world, a week represented a period of seven years. Gabriel spoke to Daniel about a prophetic period in which God would deal with Israel’s salvation over seventy weeks, or 490 years ( $70 \times 7 \text{ years} = 490 \text{ years}$ ). However, after the initial 69 weeks ( $69 \times 7 \text{ years} = 483 \text{ years}$ ), a “pause” was put on the prophetic calendar when Jesus the Messiah was “cut off,” or crucified. There is one week, i.e., seven years, left in God’s prophetic calendar and plan in bringing Israel to salvation. The first 69 weeks of the “seventy weeks” prophecy of Daniel 9:24-26 were fulfilled, beginning at Nehemiah’s command to rebuild the city of Jerusalem in 445 BC (Neh. 2:1) to the time of Jesus’ first triumphal entry into Jerusalem to be crucified (Dan. 9:25).

**21. What is the beginning of the birth pangs?** The birth pangs occur in a significant prophetic period in which Jesus predicted that there would be 12 worldwide trends, all occurring in the same generation (Matt. 24:4-8, Mark 13:5-8, Luke 21:7-18). Matthew gives seven major trends: false christs, wars, ethnic conflict, economic warfare, famines, pestilences and earthquakes. Luke describes five more: commotions, fearful sights, great signs from heaven, distress

in the nations and roaring waves. The Greek word for “birth pangs” is translated as “sorrows” in the NKJV. It is to be compared with the increasing trauma a woman experiences during childbirth.

**22. How do we know when the final seven years of this age start?** It begins with a covenant made between the Antichrist and the nations, bringing peace and safety as Paul prophesied in 1 Thessalonians 5:3 (Isa. 28:14-18; Ezek. 38:8-12, 14, 39:26; Dan. 8:24-25, 9:27, 11:21, 45; Zech. 11:16; John 5:43; Luke 19:11-28).

**23. How will we know that the Antichrist is coming into power?** The main sign is the abomination of desolation, when the Antichrist stands in the temple of Jerusalem proclaiming himself as God (Matt. 24:15, 2 Thess. 2:4).

**24. Is there a mathematical calculation that people need to figure out regarding 666 (Rev 13:18)?** The exhortation to understand the mark of the beast will become increasingly relevant as the end times approach. It will be obvious who the Antichrist is after he takes his seat in the temple, claiming to be God (2 Thess. 2:4). We will not be able to “calculate” it before that time. Some believe that calculating the number will involve the ancient practice of *gematria*, used to hide messages in numbers by substituting numbers for letters of the alphabet in order to give a numerical value to the letters, for example, “a” stands for 1; “b” for 2; “j” for 10 and so on.

**25. What does the “number of man” signify?** Seven is the number of perfection. Six is the number of man, which falls short of perfection. Three is the number of God, and three sixes speak of the satanic “trinity” (Satan, Antichrist and false prophet).

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## **Walk in Victorious Freedom With This Psalm 27 Tactic**

In May 1983, the Lord spoke audibly about establishing a ministry of 24/7 prayer with singers and musicians in Kansas City. (Only twice in my 40 years of ministry has the Lord given me a ministry assignment by the audible voice of God.) The idea of 24/7 worship and prayer was totally new to me, and I was not interested in it at that time. The Lord highlighted what King David prayed in Psalm 27:4:

*“One thing I have asked from the Lord . . . for me to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to see the beauty of the Lord ...”*

IHOPKC was founded in 1999, with 24/7 prayer and worship sustained by singers and musicians who have set their heart to behold the beauty of Jesus. But the message of God’s beauty is not limited to prayer ministries, it is for the bride—for all in the body of Christ.

The Lord is emphasizing the message of Jesus’ beauty to many ministries today. It is glorious that we have such access to

the beauty of God—the very reality that has enthralled the angels in heaven from eternity past. The Lord wants His people to be empowered and delighted by encountering His beauty. He wants many to become messengers of His transforming power through their conversations, social media blogs, songs, sermons and more.

The biblical vision for the Christian life is that God's people enjoy relating to Him by delighting in His beauty. This was David's experience. At the time he wrote Psalm 27, David was in a season of personal crisis, weighed down by a storm of fear, insecurity, rejection and an uncertain future. He was fighting for his life in many ways—his position, possessions and honor were all under attack. When we read Psalm 27, we see the intensity of the pressures David was facing when he wrote this psalm.

## **The Beauty of Jesus—Our Most Powerful Weapon**

*Beauty is the battlefield where God and Satan contend with each other for the hearts of men. – Fyodor Dostoevsky*

The enemy wanted David to see his life through a lens of negativity and mistreatment by others. But David refused to divert his gaze from the beauty of the Lord. He knew that encountering God's beauty would be his anchor through the storms that caused so many negative emotions in his heart.

We face many of the same challenges David dealt with—we are tempted to give in to fear, anxiety, insecurity, rejection, disappointment, mistreatment, bitterness and so on. The enemy wants these negative emotions to become strongholds of darkness in our life. Why? Because then people make bad decisions and more readily walk in compromise. But David determined that the story of his life would be dominated by pursuing God's beauty.

The more we see His glorious beauty, the more we become like

Him. As Paul the apostle said, “Seeing the glory of the Lord ... [we] are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Experiencing God’s beauty brings liberty to our heart. It is an essential aspect of walking in victory, and of loving God and people with all our heart. I believe the most powerful weapon in God’s “arsenal” against Satan is the beauty of His Son, Jesus. Filling our minds and our lives with His beauty equips us to resist fear, lust, offense, boredom and every temptation.

The strength found in encountering the beauty of God will be central to the safety of God’s people in the generation of the Lord’s return. In Isaiah 33, we read a prophecy about the people who will be alive when Jesus returns. It will be the most violent and the darkest generation in history, but Isaiah prophesied, “Your eyes shall see the King in His beauty” (Is. 33:17); he also assured us that it will be the strength and stability of God’s people in that hour (Isaiah 33:6). Yes, in that day, the Spirit will emphasize the beauty of King Jesus to His people.

## **So How Do We Encounter God’s Beauty?**

The beauty of God includes many things. It speaks of His glory—everything about Him that is dazzling, stunning, magnificent and striking that fills our heart with delight. It includes how He thinks and feels, what He does and His infinite power and knowledge. The greatest dimension of God’s glory is His personality—His kindness, mercy, justice, goodness, truth, love and all His excellencies. God’s beauty is displayed in creation, redemption and His leadership over history.

*We delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment. – C.S. Lewis*

I recommend three simple tools that have helped me to encounter His beauty:

**We Ask God to Help Us.** We regularly ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see more of Jesus' beauty. Ask Him to lead you into more of the truth of Jesus (John 16:13–14) and release a greater measure of the spirit of revelation, that you would see Jesus more clearly (Eph. 1:17–18).

**We Search Out God's Beauty.** We study the Scriptures that reveal specific aspects of His beauty, we look for tokens of it in His creation and science and we also learn about the beauty of God in His leadership over history. We usually behold God's beauty in little glimpses about Him as we search for insight through Scripture, creation, science, history and so on—brief glimpses that bring a spark of inspiration to our heart and mind. A life is not usually transformed by one big insight, but by the accumulative effect of many small insights and glimpses of His beauty over the years.

**We Praise God.** We put into words our admiration of God's beauty, glory and excellent qualities. We speak out in prayer our admiration and gratitude for the small things we see about Him. We respond to Him—by speaking or writing what we see—with adoration and delight. When I praise Him for small insights into even one facet of His beauty, I sometimes receive a little more insight, inspiration and delight.

I am convinced that encountering the beauty of Jesus is essential to experiencing victory in our lives, especially in this hour when fear, lust, offense, rejection and violence are increasing in society. God's desire is that we would more fully experience the wonder of being loved by Him and loving Him in return.

What step will you take to encounter more of God's beauty?  
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*Mike is the author of several books, including Growing in Prayer, Passion for Jesus, Growing in the Prophetic, The Pleasures of Loving God, After God's Own Heart, and Prayers to Strengthen Your Inner Man. Mike's teaching emphasizes growing in passion for Jesus through intimacy with God, doing evangelism and missions work from the place of night-and-day prayer, and the end times. Mike and his wife, Diane, have two married sons and five grandchildren.*

*The biblical vision of the Christian life is one of enjoying relationship with God by delighting in His beauty. In **The Beauty of God**, Mike Bickle expounds on the revelation of God to the human spirit and how it is superior to every other pleasure in life. He presents a theology of God's beauty, teaching on His beauty in creation, redemption, His leadership over the nations, and even the way He designed humans to interact. Transformation occurs when God's people see His beauty, resulting in stability, joy, and strength (Isa. 33:6, 17). [Click here to get this great resource »](#)*

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## **The Only Way God's People Can Succeed Spiritually in the Days Ahead**

For those reading Luke 21 for the first time, the passage can seem like nothing but gloom and doom. In other biblical

accounts of what will happen in the end times, the writers include more positive elements than Luke 21. In fact, many of those passages make it clear that this will be the time of the great harvest, the outpouring of the Spirit in full measure released in all nations as the church walks in unity, purity and power even beyond the book of Acts. Yet here in Luke's account, Jesus highlights mostly the negative. We will soon see why.

In the first two-thirds of Luke 21, Jesus paints a vivid picture of the day of the Lord as He goes through the various signs of the times (wars, famines, earthquakes and so on). But in verse 25, He makes a strong prophetic declaration intended to alert us. Amid describing the tumultuous cosmic signs and tsunamis that will come in this season, He also declares, "On the earth [there will be] distress of nations." This will be a time of distress that is unique in its intensity—the measure of unrest will be unprecedented and unparalleled. It will include financial crises, terrorism, racial clashes, violent weather, persecution and many other things. But what makes this time unique is that the distress will continually increase until the Lord returns.

The nations of the world throughout history have always experienced some level of distress—whether from the chaos of a fallen natural world or from man's own hands (or most often both).

Throughout history, even unusual distress has come in cycles, meaning there was always a reprieve. But we are now entering a season in which distress will continually increase. Things will never go back to how they were in the "good ol' days" of safety and security, whenever that was. The places in the world that refuse Jesus' leadership will continue to get darker and more chaotic.

Sin will continue to escalate to higher levels. The demonic influence in the earth will increase.

Because the Lord is an excellent Pastor, He has told His people ahead of time what they should know and do. Throughout His Word—including here in Luke 21, where His instructions are explicit—He gives enough information to awaken our hearts spiritually and prepare us mentally so that we will not be surprised or overwhelmed. Jesus knows the human condition, mindset and capacity more than anyone. He knows that we are prone to overreact when we initially experience distress. He knows we can process only small amounts at a time. And so He tells us in this passage, “Pay attention! Don’t ignore what’s happening. If you do, when the distress of this day comes—when it hits you all at once—then you will be overcome with fear. You don’t want this to surprise you; there is no need for it to surprise you, for I am with you and can give you understanding. You can interpret the signs little by little as things unfold. My people will be able to understand more and experience more grace even as they observe things intensify more and more over several decades.”

But the important thing He is saying is this: “Stay close to Me.”

Indeed, in each season of increasing distress, we must realign ourselves with the Lord so that the intensity of the distress does not overwhelm us. As we come closer to Him and rely on Him for strength and wisdom, we will grow in understanding of what He is doing and in our dependence on Him. This is not just the safe way to respond; it is the only way God’s people will be able to succeed spiritually in the days ahead. {eoa}

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God, After God's Own Heart *and* Prayers to Strengthen Your Inner Man. *Mike's teaching emphasizes growing in passion for Jesus through intimacy with God, doing evangelism and missions work from the place of night-and-day prayer and the end times.*

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# Prayers That Change the Course of a Nation

We can be assured that God is ultimately in control of where, when and from whom judgment is withheld and mercy and blessing are given instead. He alone makes it rain on one city while withholding rain from another in a time of drought (Amos 4:7). In fact, one of the most remarkable elements of God's mercy in the context of His judgment is that at various times in history, the Lord has changed the fate of an entire nation due to the prayers of godly believers.

If you do not think your prayers matter, think again—they do! And as you consider this truth, take a look at just three of the many cases the Bible records of those whose history-changing prayers made the difference between blessing and judgment.

## **King Josiah**

Josiah lived in the same generation in which Babylon destroyed Jerusalem. Both his father and grandfather were wicked kings of Judah, yet Josiah “did what was correct in the eyes of the

Lord" (2 Chron. 34:2). Despite Josiah's own godliness, the people he ruled still worshipped other gods and refused to turn to the Lord.

As a result of their persistent sinfulness, the prophets told Josiah trouble was coming and Jerusalem would be razed to the ground. Josiah's response revealed his true colors, which so moved the Lord that He said this to the king:

"Because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place and those who dwell here, and you have brought yourself low before Me and torn your clothes and wept before Me, I have heard you, declares the Lord. I am bringing you to be with your fathers, and you will be brought to your grave in peace, and your eyes will not see all the disaster that I am bringing on this place and on those who dwell here" (2 Chron. 34:27–28).

Because of Josiah's commitment to the Lord and his lifestyle of crying out to God on behalf of his nation, the Lord actually delayed His judgments against Judah. This one man caught God's attention to such an extent that He altered history on his behalf.

Following God's assurance that Josiah would not see Jerusalem destroyed, the king successfully brought the people of Judah and Israel back to a posture of truly worshipping God and walking according to His covenant—"to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all [their] soul" (2 Chron. 34:31).

## **Moses**

On several occasions, Moses vented to God about the Israelites' stubbornness, and the Lord reassured him of His plans for His people. Yet in Exodus 32, we find the tables slightly turned after the Israelites made a golden-calf representation of God and began to worship it and make sacrifices to it. The Lord was so enraged that He told Moses,

who was meeting with Him privately atop Mount Sinai, “Let Me alone, so that My wrath may burn against them and I may destroy them” (v. 10). The Lord planned to wipe out the Israelites and start over with only Moses.

Despite his frequent frustration over the hard-heartedness of Israel, Moses pleaded with God to change His mind. “Turn from Your fierce wrath,” Moses asked the Lord, “and relent of this harm against Your people” (v. 12b). Once again, God listened to the prayer of one of His servants. He spared Israel from the judgment they deserved (v. 14), even though He knew how often they would eventually turn from Him.

### **Where Does That Leave Us?**

Each of these examples reveals the extravagant compassion of our God—a kindness that goes far beyond what is deserved. Today, we live in an era of extravagant mercy and grace. Given our nation’s growing defiance of the Lord and His ways, God’s justice and righteousness could demand judgment—we certainly deserve it.

And yet God continues to show mercy. As King David wrote, the Lord is “full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in mercy and truth” (Ps. 86:15b).

The Lord remains compassionate by giving those who rage against Him more time. To use a cliché, we as a nation are living on borrowed time, just as the Israelites were in each of the examples above. Why are we living under such extreme mercy?

Because God does not delight in releasing a severe judgment upon America or any other nation. He wants restoration of our nation and desires for all to be saved. Likewise, He is waiting for the nations to turn to Him in repentance. Even the wickedest nation has an opportunity: “At one moment I may speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it. If that nation

against which I have spoken *turns from its evil*, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to do to it” (Jer. 18:7–8, emphasis added).

Not only is God waiting for nations to turn to Him, but also He is actually seeking intercessors who will pray these nations into His kingdom. This is how much God wants people saved; He is actively looking for those who will “stand in the gap” and contend in prayer on behalf of even those wicked nations that hate Him and rage against Him (Ezek. 22:30b).

What an amazing God! {eoa}

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# Engaging in a Joel 2 Response to a Psalm 2 Crisis

During the last two years, I have had the opportunity to meet with various governors, senators, congressmen and congresswomen. Providentially, situation after situation opened up for me to sit down in private, heart-to-heart conversations with a few well-known public officials in America.

I discovered quickly that these men and women love Jesus. They desire to lead in a way that honors the Lord. They realize it is becoming increasingly difficult to do so, especially because they are among the small percentage of politicians who do more than just use God's name as a means to gain more votes. They are born-again believers who truly follow Jesus and seek Him for answers. Several have stood boldly for God's Word even when their counterparts said to do so was career suicide. Some have even stepped out and, despite backlash, called for days of fasting and prayer because they are so troubled by the current state of affairs in the United States.

On several occasions when I met with these political leaders, they asked me the same question: "Mike, what do you think God is doing right now?"

My answer was the same each time. I shared with them the message set forth in this book. I walked through Psalm 2 with them and pointed out that they were actually mentioned in it.

"What do you mean?" they asked.

"Well, Governor, take a look at verse 10."

They read it again: "Now then, you kings, be wise; be admonished, you judges of the earth."

“See, that’s you!” I said. “You’re right there in verse 10. As a governor, you are one of the ‘kings’ specifically mentioned by David.”

They then asked what I thought they should do in response, and I told them: The Psalm 2 crisis requires a Joel 2 response, resulting in an Acts 2 outpouring of the Spirit.

Psalm 2 is about a crisis that begins as a serious spiritual crisis and quickly escalates to a global crisis affecting every area of life. Joel 2, as we will see, is about sounding the alarm and calling people to prayer and fasting in the face of such a growing crisis.

And Acts 2, as most believers know, is about the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit in response to God’s people crying out, as described in Joel 2.

I repeat: The Psalm 2 crisis requires a Joel 2 response, resulting in an Acts 2 outpouring of the Spirit.

In each passage referenced above, we see a dual fulfillment of the Scripture. All three passages have been fulfilled to an extent in the past, yet a complete fulfillment will come in the future. For example, we know that the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost—this is how the church began. Yet before Christ returns, we know the Holy Spirit will also be poured out “on all flesh” (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17) in such a way that the body of Christ will walk in unprecedented power while God releases “wonders in heaven above and signs on the earth below” (Acts 2:19).

The timing of the fulfillment rests on God’s people responding in a way described in Joel 2. Many believers love to quote from this key chapter in Scripture, particularly the verses that highlight the outpouring of the Spirit mentioned above. Yet Joel 2 provides more than just a hopeful message that has been partially fulfilled in the past and will be completely fulfilled in the future.

It gives us God's blueprint for responding to the growing crisis today so we can one day see such an outpouring. If we are experiencing the Psalm 2 crisis today (which we are) and desire an Acts 2 outpouring of the Spirit (which we do), we would do well to look closely at God's guidelines for how the church is to respond, as described in Joel 2. {eoa}

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## **Friendly Fire in the Church: God's Answer to a Growing Crisis**

We are experiencing a dramatic change in the cultural climate, both in the United States and around the world. The temperature is rising, as is the heat against Christians in

particular.

As believers we would be foolish to expect sympathy from the secular world. Jesus promised us, "You will be hated by all nations for My name's sake" (Matt. 24:9b).

Is it any wonder, then, that there has been such little media coverage and response from world leaders (other than the obligatory condolences and empty promises to bring about justice) to ISIS's beheading of Christians in droves, or to churches being blown up throughout the Middle East, or to entire towns of Christians in India being slaughtered? Truth be told, such murdering and torturing of believers was on the rise years before ISIS emerged. So the global apathy is not surprising.

What is alarming, however, is the growing trend of considering Christian persecution a mere myth. And what should concern us even more is who is helping to promote this idea.

The argument is simple: Christianity is the majority religion in the world, with more than 2.2 billion people—about one-third of the world population—claiming an association with the Christian faith; therefore, any reports of persecution toward Christians are part of their deceptive scheme to keep the masses sympathetic toward their cause. As one cynical columnist wrote, "Who can resist the deliciousness of having both the upper hand of power and the righteousness of the oppressed?"

In America, this argument is frequently voiced with both reason and subtlety. The logical objection is that, unlike most nations in the world, the United States still upholds the ideal of religious freedom. Therefore to say Christians are persecuted in America is nothing more than a myth—after all, none of the believers listed in the previous section lost their lives or were tortured for their faith.

Indeed, the United States and many "post-Christian" nations

have a long way to go before their level of Christian persecution can compare to places such as North Korea, Somalia, Iraq or Syria. Though I pray the current level never increases, the point remains for those of us in America: the cases listed above—and countless others—are still reminders that our country is rapidly shifting even further away from its Christian roots. And within the last decade, the acceleration of decidedly anti-Christian activity is startling.

If Christians do not wake up to see what is happening—both overtly and behind the scenes—we will end up accelerating our own persecution. How do I know this? Because we can already see that one of the enemy's methods to increase the persecution of Christians is to use Christians themselves to say such persecution does not even exist.

You would think that when believers publicly stand their ground for biblical values, they could expect support from fellow believers. At the very least, the Christian community should be a safe haven for those who have been ridiculed, mocked or penalized in the public square for their faith. Yet often the leading voices in America's secular media touting the "myth" of Christian persecution are believers—many from a more liberal viewpoint—who claim to represent the church as a whole.

Even among smaller Christian media outlets, instances of Christian persecution—particularly the high-profile ones stirring national debate—draw out the worst in believers and often lead to friendly fire within the church. One of the most common shots fired is that believers exaggerate by calling it "persecution" in the first place. Benjamin Dixon, a former pastor and author of *God Is Not a Republican*, says Christians in America claiming to be persecuted "are embarrassing the faith because it would appear that [they] can't even endure what essentially amounts to someone no longer being the popular girl in school."

These fellow believers' main argument is that American Christians cannot claim to face real persecution as long as we are the majority of the population. Granted, I understand the dilemma of comparing the current persecution of Christians in America to that of Christians in countries where believers are beheaded for their faith. Clearly these are completely different levels of persecution.

So just because Christians hold the statistical majority in the United States does not mean the fiercer minority that hates their God cannot discriminate against them.

Jesus exhorted us to rejoice when this happens, knowing our reward in heaven is great (Matt. 5:12). Nominal and lukewarm Christians—those who make up the majority of America's "Christians" according to the Barna study on those with a biblical worldview—do little to draw persecution upon themselves because their beliefs are shaped more by popular culture's opinions than by what God's Word says. This type of "Christian" will do whatever it takes—in beliefs and actions—to fit in with what culture says is true and right. Yet those willing to take a countercultural stand, those who will declare God's truths even when they are unpopular, will face resistance in an ever-increasing way.

Again, Jesus promised we would be hated for following Him (Mark 13:13; Luke 21:17). For some, that hatred leads to death; for others, it involves being ridiculed. But whatever the degree, we cannot ignore or downplay the attacks simply because they are not as severe in the United States as in other countries. The growing trend of ridiculing Christians signals where our nation is going. Thus the body of Christ in America must brace itself to stand strong in the face of increasing ridicule and resistance along with more intense expressions of persecution. While we still have the freedom in this country, believers must boldly speak God's truth in love—both to affect our attackers and to wake up the conscience of a church that, for the most part, has slept

through the radical cultural changes thus far and done little to respond. {eoa}

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## **Pray-Reading the Word Can Revolutionize Your Life**

Studying the Bible is critical to our walk with the Lord. But it is not enough to study the Bible—we must talk to God as we study. Bible study is meant to lead us to conversation with God by giving us “conversational material” for our prayer life. It provides the language we use as we talk to Him. Using the Bible and speaking the Word back to God make prayer easy and enjoyable.

Jesus called us to abide in Him. The essence of abiding is talking to Him—communing with Him and having fellowship with Him—and one key element of this is “pray-reading” the Word, simply speaking the truths of the Word back to God as we read it. So as we read and meditate on Scripture, we pray Bible phrases and passages back to God, using the language of the Word as the basis and vocabulary of our prayers. This helps us to give our hearts practically to the Lord and to receive from Him, grounded in the truth of the Word.

### **Believing and Obeying**

We find two broad categories of truth related to pray-reading the Word: believing and obeying. First, we find verses that focus on promises we are to believe—for example, Scriptures that declare that God loves, forgives, leads, protects and provides for us. In the second category, we find verses that exhort us to obey God’s Word. Examples include Scriptures that command us to bridle our tongues, serve others, give time and money to God, live peaceably and so forth.

We dialogue with God by praying promises from His Word that we are to believe. First, we turn these truths into simple declarations of thanksgiving or trust. For example, we might say, “Thank You that You love me, that You forgive me.” We might declare, “I trust that You will lead me and protect me, that You will provide for me.”

Second, we ask God to release particular truths to us, to move them from our minds (just knowing them) to our hearts so that we believe and act on them. Ask God to give you a spirit of revelation (Eph. 1:17). For example, pray, “Father, please reveal to me the certainty of Your provision, how much You love me and forgive me, how I have ravished Your heart” and “Father, release Your promised guidance, provision and protection.” Pray according to Hebrews 12:2: “Give me more insight into how Your heart is made glad by my love for You.”

## **Making Word-Based Declarations**

We also dialog with God by praying truths that exhort us to obey His Word. First, we commit to obey God in the specific way set forth in the passage we are reading. If we are reading about obeying God with our speech, we make declarations of resolve to obey the Word in this specific way. For example, declare, "I set my heart to love You and obey You with my speech, time, money" and so forth. Tell the Lord, "I set my heart to love You like David, to endure hardship like Paul, to pray like Daniel." Making sweet resolutions like these to obey the Lord strengthens our hearts.

Second, we ask God to help and empower us to obey the particular truth we see in Scripture. Ask God to give you wisdom, motivation and power to obey in specific areas. For example, pray, "Father, help me to love You, to bridle my speech, to use my time and money in full obedience. Father, strengthen me by Your grace to love You like David." When reading Matthew 6:13, "And do not lead us into temptation," we can pray, "Father, lead me away from temptation." Or if we are meditating on John 17:15, "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one," pray, "Deliver me from the works of the evil one."

As we make pray-reading the Bible a regular part of our lives in God, using the language of Scripture to talk to Him and committing ourselves to believe and obey His Word, we encounter Jesus, the living Word. And prayer becomes easier and more enjoyable.

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# How to Live Out God's Word With No Compromise

Imagine this great tragedy: A woman walks with God for 40 years, fully saved, redeemed and following Christ. She comes before the throne at the resurrection, and for the first time, she realizes what she's missed.

She feels wave upon wave of pleasure flowing from the Son of God and says to herself, "I could have drunk from this well of spiritual delight every day on earth. I just had to encounter Your heart and Your beauty. Life would have been so much better! Everything would have changed, and I would have accomplished so much more."

Many Christians are like the woman I've described: They spend their days on earth believing that Jesus is harsh instead of tender, mad instead of glad and distant instead of affectionate. When they finally see Him as He truly is, they will be filled with regret at not having spent their time on earth radically pursuing His heart and reaping the amazing pleasures.

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## 'You Shall Be Called a House of Prayer'

Do you know your eternal identity and destiny? Are you prepared for it? In one short statement Jesus revealed the

eternal identity and destiny of His people. He declared, *"You shall be called a house of prayer"* (see Matt. 21:13). Jesus was quoting Isaiah's prophecy to Israel: *"My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations"* (Is. 56:7).

When God calls us by a specific name, it indicates our character and how we are to function in the Holy Spirit. Isaiah's prophecy and Jesus' statement tell us that God's people are to function as a house of prayer both now and in the age to come. Our greatest place of authority, honor and dignity is found in prayer—that is, in or deep interaction and partnership with Jesus.

What does it mean to be or to function as a house of prayer? It means that God speaks to us and moves our hearts. Then we speak His words back to Him and they move His heart. The result is that God's resources are released on the earth—His power, money, wisdom, creative ideas, unity and favor. This is how the redeemed will operate forever in God's family, being moved by God to ask Him for the things that are on His heart so that He will release them onto the earth.

It is important to understand that the "house of prayer" in a city is the whole body of Christ in that city or region. It is not just the prayer ministries in that city. I tell our Bible-school students that the house of prayer in Kansas City is not made up of only our organization, the International House of Prayer. We are just a small "gas station"—it is as if we take a "cup of gasoline" and throw it on the prayer fires that burn in the whole house of prayer in Kansas City, which is the entire body of Christ—more than a thousand congregations.

The Holy Spirit wants to establish a culture of prayer integrated with worship in the church. In fact, He is currently raising up the greatest prayer and worship movement in history. Why? Because engaging in worship and intercession is the highest calling of the redeemed in the age to come, and it is the primary means by which He releases His power through

them to the earth. Worship and intercession are among the few things that we do both now and forever.

Prayer and worship have always been at the center of God's purpose. Central to God's government and the release of His power is His eternal worship sanctuary as described in Revelation 4-5.

Today the Holy Spirit is raising up what will become the most powerful worship movement in history, it will totally defeat the Antichrist's end-time worship movement.

Unquestionably the church's identity as a house of prayer is significant and the Lord desires to use the praying church as His vehicle to release blessing to the nations. We can see Him working now to bring change to the church to prepare it to function in this way now and in the coming hour.

However, the church in the West stands at a critical juncture. The nations are increasing in lawlessness and moral confusion and engaging in escalating conflicts, including those inspired by racism, terrorism and sexual immorality. In addition we are facing the threat of devastating global economic crisis; the breakdown of marriage and the family; the rapid, wholesale acceptance of the gay agenda; and many other pressures. The prevailing sentiment worldwide is one of growing fear, unbelief, and mistrust, as the earth shudders under the weight of man's escalating sin (see Ps. 2 and Is. 24).


The most significant crisis in the world today is in the church itself, particularly in the West. More and more church leaders are promoting a distorted grace message, making light of heterosexual fornication, celebrating the ordination of homosexuals, endorsing abortion, denying the authority of Scripture, rejecting Jesus as the only way of salvation, discarding the doctrine of hell, and even renouncing the divinity of Christ. Yet some of these congregations continue to grow.

Many leaders have substituted methodology and church-growth mechanics for God's calling on the church to function as a "house of prayer for all nations" (Is. 56:7). They have hidden their barrenness behind the fig leaves of superficial cultural relevance instead of pressing in to walk out the two great commandments—to love God and people (Matt. 22:37-40)—and to deeply engage in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19).

There will be two great trends in the church as we draw nearer to the coming of the Lord: Many will fall away from the faith, and at the same time many will rise up in wholehearted love for Jesus to participate in the most glorious and powerful time in the church's history.

Where will you stand? Will you give in to compromise or will you rise up in faith, wholly resolve to take hold of what God is saying and then do it with all your heart?

The choice is yours.

 *Adapted from Growing in Prayer by Mike Bickle, copyright 2014, published by Passio, Charisma Media/Charisma House Book Group. By combining biblical study with his extensive experience on pray, the author gives you the tools you need to turn your prayer life into an active and fulfilling one. To order your copy, click here.*

### **Prayer Power for the Week of April 20, 2015**

This week pray for an impassioned heart to love the Lord wholeheartedly as He desires. Ask Him to help you love your neighbor as yourself and put that love into action. Thank Him that He directs your steps and gives you divine appointments and opportunities to share His love and make a difference in your surroundings. Continue to pray that revival would ignite in our churches and spread across the nation and the world. Lift up our leaders and pray for the protection of Israel, grace for the persecuted church and unity in prayer and purpose among believers (Matt. 22:37-40; Matt. 28:19).