WHAT IS HAPPENING TO OUR WATER SUPPLIES?
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**11 BIBLE** 4 Spiritual Laws That Are as Important as Gravity

The physical laws that govern our universe are constant, unchanging and essential for life—but the unseen spiritual laws are just as important. Do you know them?

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The horrors of nuclear war were unleashed 70 years ago this August. What have we learned and what do we have yet to learn to avoid a nuclear nightmare?

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Although I’m a science teacher, I don’t believe in evolution. Let me give you two reasons why.
The images were terrifying—cars and houses being swept away by raging flood waters, punctuated with the anguished “Oh no, oh please NO!” cries of those capturing the scenes on video. Record floods in the southern United States in May brought far too many of these distressing sights on the news.

It's bad enough to see innocent people caught accidentally in life-and-death flood conditions, but it is frustrating, sometimes maddening, when you see people willingly put themselves and loved ones in deadly circumstances because they ignore all the warnings.

The more the rains fell, the more we heard the voices of officials pleading with the public, “Remember, ‘turn around, don't drown!’” Yet every day newscasters had the sad duty of reporting about people who had nevertheless driven into high-water areas—sometimes even negotiating around the warning barricades—only to find their vehicles first becoming waterborne, then water-filled.

We all do foolish things at times, things we'd never do if we knew we would pay for them with our lives. Or if we could foresee our loved ones at our funeral painfully wrestling with the question, “Why did you do something so senseless?”

The coming tsunami—and Jesus’ warning

In 2003 the U.S. National Weather Service launched the slogan “Turn Around, Don't Drown” in Texas, and the next year it caught on nationally. It’s a good slogan, one easily called to mind, and probably one that has caused many people to pause, reconsider and save their lives.

Nearly 2,000 years ago Jesus had His own version of “Turn Around, Don't Drown.” Except He called it, “Repent!” That's basically what repent means, and His message was, “Turn around! You're heading into trouble!”

Predictably, most people have ignored His warnings, as well as the warnings of those who followed Him ever since. We just keep driving into the deep waters of sin. Paul described it as the “many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction” (1 Timothy 6:9).

As the weather forecasters warned us that the rains and floods were coming, Jesus warned in advance of times coming—the time of the end of man's age—when “lawlessness will abound.” Spiritually speaking, we humans have never been particularly law-abiding; but today we are quickly casting aside every semblance of God's law! And, consequently, developing right before our eyes is a tsunami of sin!

The only lifeline

Will people heed? Will you? Warnings are great, but they cannot force anyone to do anything. Will we learn the lessons of history? One of the greatest was that of Israel. Even when God miraculously intervened to save the Israelites, gave them His perfect laws to live by, promised to protect them and bless them, but also warned them of the destructions that would come if they ignored the consequences of sin—still they consistently ignored those warnings. Their Old Testament story reads like modern-day history!

Repent has never been a very popular message, but it is central to the gospel of Jesus Christ. “Repent, and believe in the gospel!” He said (Mark 1:15). It’s hard, it’s demanding, it “cuts to the heart”—but it’s your lifeline! When Peter’s gospel message convicted people that their sins crucified Christ, they knew they were in deep water and cried out, “What shall we do?”

Peter threw the lifeline: “Repent!” and “be saved from this perverse generation!” (Acts 2:37-40). If you do, he explained, God will rescue you, keep you from drowning in your sins, and give you His Spirit to help you change your life!

What will you do as the world slides deeper into sin? “Turn Around, Don't Drown!”

Clyde Kilough
Editor
@CKilough
Jesus told us to “watch” (Luke 21:36), and this section is designed to touch on an array of interesting and important factors that may have prophetic significance. For more background on what to watch, see our article “Five Prophetic Trends to Watch” and our “Insights Into News and Prophecy” blog.

“Al-Qaeda has given free rein to its members and operations to control highly significant regions [of Yemen], without any resistance.”

—FAREA AL-MUSLIMI, writing about al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula’s gains in Yemen while a coalition led by Saudi Arabia has been fighting the Houthi rebels in Yemen (Al-Monitor).

European War Games Escalate Tensions

Stratfor reported: “Ten NATO countries and Sweden launched a two-week planned exercise in the North Sea on May 4 to improve their anti-submarine warfare capabilities. On the same day, Finland—not a NATO member—began mailing letters to about 900,000 reservists informing them of their roles in a potential crisis situation. Meanwhile, Sweden’s Foreign Ministry formally complained to Russian authorities that Russian navy ships were disrupting cable-laying work in waters between Sweden and Lithuania. …

“In March, Russian military activity in the Black Sea, Baltic Sea and along the Finnish border spiked as part of snap drills simulating a full-scale confrontation with the West.”

After years of reduced defense budgets, in the face of Russian provocations, the countries of the region are seeing the need to quickly increase spending.

“Until recently, most Europeans believed that their post–Cold War security order held universal appeal. ... Russia shattered that assumption last year when it invaded Crimea. In the face of Moscow’s determination to preserve its influence in the post-Soviet space through the use of force, the EU’s soft power proved to be very soft indeed.”

A flood of immigrants from Africa and the Middle East have been trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea, fueling friction within the European Union. About 215,000 survived the crossing last year, most of them landing in Italy, which sent only about 5,000 back. The rest made their way through Europe’s open borders to countries like Germany (where about 200,000 asylum-seekers arrived last year).

Human traffickers in the failed state of Libya have demanded up to $2,000 each from desperate refugees for the right to be crammed into unsafe vessels for the dangerous voyage. In the first four months of this year, an estimated 1,750 died on the crossing. This was 30 times the death toll during the same period last year. Why the increase?

In 2014 Italy spent $9.7 million a month to comb the Mediterranean looking for migrants in trouble. But when Italy asked the rest of the European Union to help out, a divided EU decided to scale back rescue efforts instead, with the idea that refugees would no longer expect to be rescued and would find the risks too high. However, the tidal wave of illegal immigrants has continued.

_The Week_ reported, “With another million migrants reportedly waiting in Libya to cross the dangerous seas, the United Nation’s High Commissioner for Human Rights has warned that European leaders must do something to stem the crisis—or they ‘risk turning the Mediterranean into a vast cemetery.’”

After a major disaster in April, EU leaders tripled the rescue funding and pledged to destroy the smuggler’s boats in Libya. But will these and other compromise efforts really work, or will this immigration crisis continue to haunt the EU and strengthen right-wing anti-immigrant parties in Europe?
What is happening to our water supplies? Will shortages affect our health, economy and lead to more conflict? What does the Bible say about future water woes?

By Becky Sweat
Unfortunately, freshwater resources are dwindling rapidly. The world today is experiencing a surge of water-related crises, as reservoirs dry up and lake levels drop to historic lows.

At least half of the 50,000 rivers that existed in China in the 1990s have disappeared, the water drained for use by factories and farms. Pakistan’s emergency water reserves are down to a 30-day supply—a far cry from the recommended 1,000 days for semiarid countries. Last summer, the eastern basin of the Aral Sea dried up completely—the first time in 600 years.

Use of the Jordan River is drying up the Dead Sea, and now thousands of sinkholes dot its banks. The drought is so serious in southeastern Brazil, residents have begun drilling through their floors to try to reach water, and schools are discouraging students from using water to brush their teeth.

Those are just a few examples. According to the United Nations World Water Development Report 2015, about 1.2 billion people, or almost one-fifth of the world’s population, live in areas of physical water scarcity (meaning there isn’t enough water to meet demand). Another 1.6 billion people, or almost one quarter of the world’s population, face economic water shortage (a lack of infrastructure to use available water).

The Middle East is the most water-impoverished region. Shortages have also long plagued much of northern and sub-Saharan Africa, either due to dry conditions, economic water shortages or both. Increasingly, many Western nations are now feeling the heat.

California is in the fourth year of an unprecedented drought, and groundwater and snowpack levels are at all-time lows. Poor land management and drought have turned much of southern Spain into a virtual desert, with farmers battling each other for what little water is available. Queensland, Australia, is suffering its most widespread drought, and record numbers of livestock have had to be slaughtered.

“When water scarcity is not unique to developing countries,” says Zafar Adeel, director of the UN University Institute for Water, Environment and Health and former chair of UN Water. “In the U.S., because there are a significant amount of resources to help people overcome some of the challenges of water shortages, you may not feel that crunch as much as somebody in a developing country would. But the problem is really quite universal.”

The World Bank reports that 80 countries now have serious water shortages. Besides the Middle East and Africa, the regions with the worst problems are southern Australia, western United States, Central Asia, southern India, Bangladesh, northern China and sections of South America and Mexico.

All the signs suggest that water shortages will worsen in the years ahead, unless drastic measures are taken.

Admittedly, water covers a lot of the earth’s surface. However, only 2½ percent of it is freshwater. “Of that, only about a third of the world’s freshwater is available for us to use. The rest is locked up in glaciers and ice caps, or is deep underground,” notes Andrew Maddocks, communications and outreach coordinator for the water program at the World Resources Institute. “It’s a minuscule percentage of the total amount of freshwater that’s either available as surface water or as ground water that’s shallow enough to be accessible.”

This is the water that’s so vital for life, yet running in short supply.

Factors behind the crisis
So what’s behind the global water crisis?

• Population growth
In the 20th century, the population went from 1.7 billion to 6.6 billion people. Yet the earth’s freshwater supply is finite.

Simply put, “if you have 100 gallons of water per person and the population doubles, now there’s only 50 gallons per person,” says Aaron Wolf, professor of geography at Oregon State University and director of the Transboundary Freshwater Dispute Database project. “With more people on the earth, there’s less water to go around.”

Today, 70 percent of the world’s available freshwater goes to agriculture. “As populations grow, that puts a bigger strain on water resources,” notes Maddocks. “Crops like corn, soybeans, barley and wheat are extremely water intensive. The more people there are, the greater the demand for those water-intensive crops and the more water that will be needed.”

The world’s population is growing by about 80 million a year, according to World Bank statistics, and is predicted to reach 9.5 billion by 2050. Most of the growth will be in cities, putting a huge strain on urban water supplies.

An estimated 93 percent of urban growth is in developing countries, the UN reports. The largest developing
region, sub-Saharan Africa, is projected to double its urban population by 2030. If we don’t act now, “this will not only tax out their already limited water supplies, but mean more slums and shanty towns and, along with that, increased water pollution,” warns Olcay Ünver, deputy director of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, land and water division.

- **Increased demand**
  
  In addition, per person consumption of water doubled in the last century. This was due to the world becoming more affluent, says Ünver. “As more and more people come out of poverty, they eat more meals (e.g. three times instead of once or twice a day) and more meat (which requires more water to produce than vegetables or grains).”

  The world’s “new middle class” is buying washing machines, dishwashers, showers, toilets, swimming pools, etc. They’re also buying more goods like clothing, electronics and automobiles, all of which require water for production.

  All this has increased demand for energy. “Producing any kind of energy requires intake of water,” notes Adeel. It takes huge quantities of water to produce electricity from nuclear energy or fossil fuels. Extracting oil and natural gas from the ground with hydraulic fracturing techniques also requires large amounts of water.

- **Overextraction of groundwater**
  
  Faced with growing water shortages, governments have been increasingly tapping subterranean supplies of groundwater. “We are drawing down these hidden, mostly nonrenewable groundwater supplies at unsustainable rates in the several dry regions globally, threatening our future,” warns Ünver. Aquifers are being overdrawn in the western and central United States, northern China, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Mexico and Europe.

  The UN estimates that global groundwater withdrawals have tripled in the past 50 years. Maddocks says one of the big issues is that “in most places, it’s impossible to know exactly how much groundwater you have available. It’s like making withdrawals from a bank account without knowing the balance.” Meanwhile, water continues to be pumped out as if there’s an endless supply.

  Adds Steven Downey, head of communications for Global Water Partnership: “It can take the hydrological cycle hundreds of years, in some cases thousands of years, to replenish aquifers. So, for all practical purposes, in those places where the aquifers are being drained, that water is gone for good.”

- **Poor management of water resources**
  
  Water is also being lost via poor distribution infrastructures. This is occurring in developing nations, as well as developed countries. The American Water Works Association estimates that 2 trillion gallons of water (one-sixth of the water treated in the U.S.) is lost each year.

  “In the U.S. a lot of our major cities have sewer systems and water treatment systems that are over 100 years old or at least many decades old, and that leads to a lot of leakage, cracked and burst pipes, and other inefficiencies,” notes Maddocks. “That’s a small piece of the pie relative to agriculture and energy, but it’s still an issue.”

  Inefficiencies in agricultural practices are a factor too. As
much as 70 percent of water used by farmers never gets to crops and is lost through leaky irrigation channels, reports the International Water Management Institute (IWMI). More precise water delivery systems are needed to make irrigation more efficient, but many nations do not have the funds to make these upgrades.

- **Changing weather patterns**
  “We are seeing profound changes in the hydrological cycle due to changing weather patterns,” states Ünver. Water is being “redistributed” globally through the water cycle, leading to some areas having floods and monsoons, while other areas have become more drought-prone.

Clearly, there has been an increase in both the severity and frequency of extreme climate events in recent years, Downey adds. Droughts can obviously result in water shortages. But floods and severe storms can wreak havoc on water supplies as well.

“In many poor countries, their water infrastructure is weak. A large storm can wipe out earthen dams and water cisterns on rooftops,” he says. “Even in a rich country such as the United States, Hurricane Katrina was strong enough to destroy protective dikes.” Not only that, “in any country, the water from floods carries lots of contaminants which can end up in freshwater sources such as groundwater.”

- **Pollution**
  Industrial wastes, agricultural runoff and sewage discharges have aggravated the water crisis. “The problem is not just that we’re facing water shortages, but that we’re running out of clean water,” Wolf states.

About 40 percent of rivers and lakes in the U.S. are too polluted to support normal activities. Around 70 percent of China’s rivers and lakes are contaminated with industrial waste, and nearly 60 percent of its underground water is polluted. In developing countries, an estimated 90 percent of wastewater is discharged into rivers and other waterways, with little or no treatment. Almost half of all European bodies of water have unsafe levels of chemical toxins. The list could go on.

**The ramifications**

These trends are certainly disconcerting. How will they affect us?

- **Health consequences**
  One of the most serious ramifications relates to health. “Particularly in the developing world, people often don’t have access to clean drinking water, so they use whatever is available, even if it’s dirty,” notes Wolf. He estimates that between 5 and 10 million people die every year of water-related illnesses.

If shortages worsen, there won’t be enough water to grow food. Growing numbers of people could be affected by malnutrition and hunger.

By 2030, as populations grow and demand for water increases, the IWMI predicts farmers will have about half as much freshwater available to grow their crops—paradoxically at a time when the world’s food needs will have increased by 50 percent.

- **Economic implications**
  Another concern relates to economic health. Water shortages can lead to energy shortages, which can have a domino effect, making it harder for businesses and industries to function. A case in point is the drought São Paulo, Brazil, faced in 2001-2002.

Explains Maddocks: “That drought led to a decline in reservoir levels and reduction in hydro power that was generated from water flowing through the dams, so energy capacity was cut. That resulted in nationwide blackouts and power rationing.” In the end, it cost Brazil nearly 1.5 percent of its gross domestic product in 2001. “When water resources are unreliable, just about every sector of the economy is impacted.”

- **The potential for conflict**
  Third, water shortages may contribute to geopolitical conflict (see “Water Wars” on our website.)

**Searching for solutions**

While there are certainly no quick fixes to water shortages, a number of technological options are available to help solve problems of both water quantity and quality. “The global community is profoundly aware of the water issue; and the technology [and] solutions are out there,” Wolf says. “It’s just a question of resources and political will.”

Since the majority of freshwater usage is allocated to agriculture, there has been a big push for farmers to use drip irrigation systems (which give crops the exact amount of water needed) and to plant saline- and drought-tolerant crops.

Other strategies include improving municipal water supply systems and repairing pipes to reduce leakage, rainwater harvesting, the reuse of treated wastewater for agriculture, desalination of seawater, expanding use of renewable energy sources like wind and solar power, and media campaigns to educate the public about water conservation. Innovative technologies, such as waterless fracking, waterless toilets and more water-efficient washing machines may prove useful as well.

All people “must be more mindful about how much water they are consuming, and be more efficient in their water use,” Adeel says. “Governments must improve internal water policies that support efficiency and conservation. Countries need to negotiate such things as river alterations and shared groundwater usage, and not act unilaterally.”

Adeel believes the world needs to move quickly to avert a full-blown water crisis. “If we keep doing business as usual, our world will require 40 percent more water 20 years from now. But if we change our patterns of water usage, we could actually achieve a 40 percent reduction in usage,” he says. “Today, not tomorrow, is the time to start turning this situation around.”

To understand the deeper significance the Bible gives to this issue, be sure to read the accompanying article “Water in Bible Prophecy.”

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**Notes:**

- The New Testament uses the word “water” 39 times, the Old Testament 11 times. The Bible talks about water 50 times. “Water is not just a resource,” says Wolf, “it’s a very powerful force.”

- What is the Bible’s perspective on water? “The Bible is clear that water is a gift from God, and that we are to use it wisely,” says Wolf. This is reflected in the passage in Proverbs 22:29: “Do you see a man skillful in his own business? In the end he will be rich.”

- Wolf says that the Bible also gives weight to the importance of water for health. “We should all look to the Bible for guidance on how to use water wisely,” he says.

- The book of Revelation talks about water shortages in the future. “We are seeing profound changes in the hydrological cycle due to changing weather patterns,” states Ünver. Water is being “redistributed” globally through the water cycle, leading to some areas having floods and monsoons, while other areas have become more drought-prone.

- Clearly, there has been an increase in both the severity and frequency of extreme climate events in recent years, Downey adds. Droughts can obviously result in water shortages. But floods and severe storms can wreak havoc on water supplies as well.

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The Bible describes terrible end-time plagues on the earth’s water systems; but after Jesus Christ’s return, fresh water will bring life even to barren lands.

By Don Henson

God promised that obeying His laws would bring great blessings. He also warned that disobedience would lead to punishments, such as lack of fresh water (Deuteronomy 28:23-24; Psalm 107:33-34). The world’s developing water crises are the result of God’s withholding His blessing. But, at the end of the age, water will play an even more dramatic role in bringing mankind to repentance.

Trumpet plagues
Bible prophecy describes a time when the cycle of sin will grow worse and worse—to the point that Jesus will need to intervene to save mankind from self-destruction (Matthew 24:21). God will punish the sinful nations with a series of plagues, each preceded by the divine blast of a trumpet. Two of these plagues will directly affect our oceans and supplies of fresh water (Revelation 8:8-11).

With the second trumpet plague, a third of the sea will become blood and a third of sea creatures will die. After the third trumpet, the fresh waters of the earth will become polluted and poisonous, causing many to die.

Yet after six trumpet plagues, people will still not repent of their destructive sins (Revelation 9:20-21).

Last plagues
Even after the seventh trumpet, which will signal Jesus’ return, most of the people on earth will continue to resist Him and God will respond with seven catastrophic “bowls of wrath” (Revelation 16:1-6). Two of these will also involve water: Every sea creature will die in the areas where those plagues strike when the waters become like the blood of a dead man. The fresh waters (rivers and springs) will also be turned to blood, killing everything in them. (For more about these prophecies, download our latest free booklet The Book of Revelation: The Storm Before the Calm.)

Between the terrible, vile stench permeating much of the earth and the unimaginable suffering that will stem from a land without water, the stiff-necked remnants of humanity will be one step closer to accepting Christ’s authority.

Jesus will refresh and restore all things—physically and spiritually
It’s difficult to grasp just how battered and chaotic the earth will be when Jesus returns. But in the midst of this devastation, God promises a future restoration linked to fresh, healing waters.

Peter called the time after Jesus’ return the times of “refreshing” and “restoration of all things” (Acts 3:19-21). Isaiah painted this beautiful word picture: “The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. … For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water” (Isaiah 35:1, 6-7).

Ezekiel prophesied, “The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. They will say, ‘This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden’” (Ezekiel 36:34-35, New International Version). Also note Isaiah 41:18-20; 43:19-20; and Psalm 107:35-38.

But the story doesn’t end there. Read more about the coming time of restoration—and what it means for the whole human race—in the Life, Hope & Truth article “Times of Refreshing: How Will They Come?”
The physical laws that govern our universe are constant, unchanging and essential for life—but the unseen spiritual laws are just as important. Do you know them?

By Jeremy Lallier
The thing I love most about gravity is that it's dependable. When toast pops out of my toaster, it doesn't keep going till it hits the ceiling. When I turn on my faucet, water droplets don't start floating listlessly through my kitchen. When I trip, I don't go sailing off into the stratosphere like a balloon.

As a fundamental law of nature, gravity does what it does all day, every day. No exceptions. This is a good thing. It's hard to say exactly what would happen if gravity took a day off, but the best guesses all agree: It would be unpleasant. For starters, our atmosphere would be sucked into the expansive vacuum of space. Everything not anchored to the earth's surface would begin to float away, including our oceans, which would start boiling in the absence of atmospheric pressure. As if to add insult to injury, the molten layers of the earth would likely force their way to the surface, destroying our planet in an apocalyptic swirl of lava and death.

According to James Overduin, a physicist at Towson University in Maryland, without gravity, the universe would be “completely flat and featureless.” Also, you would be dead, so there's that.

The power of consistency

Shouldn't that—I don't know—worry us a little bit? If a few moments without gravity could be so disastrous, why don't we have more contingency plans about what to do if gravity just ... stops?

There wouldn't be a point. We're talking about gravity. It's a constant. It's a fundamental part of the universe, and it does the same thing, in the same way, every time. You can count on it.

Gravity is so predictable that physicists have developed and refined equations you can use to calculate its effects in a given situation. Here's what the Einstein field equations look like:

$$G_{\mu\nu} = 8\pi T_{\mu\nu} = R_{\mu\nu} - \frac{1}{2} g_{\mu\nu} R$$

For the people who understand them, these equations are powerful tools that allow them to examine the effects of gravity in nearly any scenario, anywhere in the universe.

Interpreting the universe

The same is true for a host of other physical laws—from electromagnetism to thermodynamics, the universe is consistent. Scientists take those consistencies and define them as laws and equations, which often lead to new technologies and scientific advances.

But there's an important relationship to keep in mind: These equations are shaped by the universe, not the other way around.

In other words, gravity was doing its thing long before scientists started trying to define it. Textbook equations don't pull objects back down to earth—gravity does. Altering those equations doesn't alter reality; it just makes the equations wrong. They exist to help us understand how the world around us works—not to change it.

We interrupt this article ...

I'd like to shift my focus for a moment and introduce you to a fictitious construct of my imagination. We'll call him Bob.

Bob is about to have a very bad day.

You see, Bob works on the second story of a corporate office building, and he's gotten it into his head that gravity isn't quite the big deal everyone makes it out to be. Which is why, in spite of his coworkers' frantic warnings, Bob is confidently striding toward the open window of a corner office.

"Bob!" shouts a concerned friend, "Have you lost your mind?!

With one foot already on the sill, Bob turns around with a confident grin. "Don't worry," he assures the panicked crowd. "I don't believe in gravity anymore!"

Two sets of laws

No one can stop Bob from ignoring gravity, but neither can Bob stop gravity from giving him an impressive collection of broken bones. Gravity isn't a matter of opinion, and it doesn't matter how you happen to feel about it—if you jump, you're coming back down. There are no alternatives. Anyone insisting differently would have to be delusional.

So, why is it that every day, billions upon billions of people insist on believing something just as delusional—and even more dangerous?

You see, there's more to what makes the universe tick than the laws of physics alone. The same God who established physical laws also established a set of spiritual laws that are just as real and just as important.

The problem is, it's easy to see one set of laws as essential, and one set as ... well, optional. No one can argue the importance of the strong nuclear force that keeps our atoms from falling to pieces, but it's not as if the world would collapse if we ignore the instructions in the Bible, right? Right?

Unchanging constants

Actually, that's exactly what would happen. That's exactly what is happening all around you. The spiritual world isn't as tangible as the physical world—it can't typically be touched, seen or heard—but the consequences that come from ignoring spiritual laws can be even more painful than the consequences of ignoring physical laws. Take that fact, multiply it by thousands of years of disobedience, and you'll catch a glimpse of why our world is in the shape it is.
For millennia, the human race has approached the law of God the same way our dear friend Bob approached gravity—and the impact has left us reeling. There are a lot of reasons people have for disregarding God’s law, but none of those reasons mitigate the damage that comes from ignoring it.

Like gravity, the law of God is constant and unchanging. It does what it does all day, every day. No exceptions. And like the equations that scientists use to model gravity, the instructions God gives us in the Bible help us understand how to interact with the spiritual world around us. Changing or reinterpreting these instructions has no effect on the spiritual forces they describe—it just makes the instructions wrong.

### Spiritual “starter equations”

That said, here are a few of the “spiritual equations” given to us by the Creator of the universe. This is by no means an exhaustive list—it’s just a good place to start.

1. **You reap what you sow**

A lot of people have phrased this principle in a lot of ways: “What goes around, comes around.” “You get out what you put in.” “Chickens come home to roost.” But no matter how you say it, the underlying message is still the same. Here’s how the apostle Paul put it:

   “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

A lot of people picture God with His hand hovering over a big red button labeled “SMITE”—just waiting for us to mess up so He can rain down punishment from the great beyond. But the fact is, it’s rarely God who punishes us. Most of the time, we do that. The laws established by God are not arbitrary; they serve to protect us from decisions and actions that would otherwise lead to painful consequences for ourselves and others.

Understanding this principle is vital for understanding so many of God’s laws. Our Father in heaven wants us to sow seeds that ultimately result in happiness, not pain and sorrow. And we’re more likely to do that when we realize...

2. **Results take time**

Wise King Solomon once bemoaned that “because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Ecclesiastes 8:11). In other words, a lot of bad people do a lot of bad things, and instead of being incinerated by a divinely aimed bolt of lightning, these people seem to prosper.

It’s maddening.

But Solomon didn’t stop there. He looked at the bigger picture and continued, “Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him” (Ecclesiastes 8:12).

Acts of evil don’t always bring immediate punishment, and it’s rare that acts of good are instantly rewarded—but every act sows a seed, and the harvest is coming.

3. **Sin does not subtract; it destroys**

On that note, it’s easy to think of good actions and bad actions as deposits and withdrawals in a spiritual bank account—every good action increases our balance, while every bad action reduces it. But that’s not the way it works. Sin doesn’t simply “take away” from our bank account—it completely eliminates it.

Paul explained that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). No amount of righteousness can undo or balance out a sin, and a single sin can earn us an eternal death penalty that can only be paid for with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. (For more on this subject, be sure to read our free booklet *The Last Enemy: What Really Happens After Death?*)

Mostly good isn’t enough—with God’s help, we must strive to be all good, all the time.

4. **Righteousness transforms us**

The prophet Malachi describes God as a refiner’s fire, purging His people like gold and silver, removing their impurities and bringing them toward perfection (Malachi 3:2-3). Nothing about that process sounds pleasant or comfortable, but the end result makes it worth it.

Concerning “those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name,” God promises, “They shall be Mine ... on the day that I make them My jewels. … Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him” (Malachi 3:16-18).

Isaiah—another prophet of God—painted a similar picture, one where “justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever” (Isaiah 32:16-17).

Righteousness—obedience to God—produces a change both in us and in the world around us. We explore the ultimate result of righteousness in our free booklet *The Mystery of the Kingdom.*

### What will you do?

Those are just a handful of the spiritual equations God gives us in the Bible—but you don’t have to believe this article. You don’t even have to believe God—because the fact is, your beliefs have absolutely no impact on reality. The universe works the way God designed it to work, both physically and spiritually, and you can’t change that.

But because God loves us and wants the best for us, He’s given us the spiritual principles and equations we need to get the most out of this life—and the next.

If we’re smart, we won’t let that go to waste.

Learn more about God’s beneficial laws by downloading our free booklet *God’s 10 Commandments: Still Relevant Today* from the LifeHopeandTruth.com Learning Center.
After explaining that the time was fulfilled and that the Kingdom of God was at hand, Jesus urged people to repent. What did He mean by this?

By David Treybig

The disciples were called to be fishers of men and to preach a message of repentance.
The first two statements of explanation that Jesus gave as He preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God—“The time is fulfilled” and “the kingdom of God is at hand”—were covered in previous articles in this series. We now come to the first of the two commands Jesus issued: “Repent” (Mark 1:15).

In the previous article we noted that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50). Our human body must be changed to a “spiritual body” (verse 44) if we are to be part of this Kingdom.

Obeying Christ’s command to “repent” is the first step in the process that prepares us for change from flesh and blood to spirit. This change is necessary in order for us to become members of God’s immortal family and rulers within His eternal Kingdom (John 1:12; Revelation 1:6; 5:10).

A key theme

Encouraging people to repent of their sins was an integral part of the gospel Jesus preached. Commenting on two occasions where people had lost their lives, Jesus said, “I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3, 5, emphasis added throughout). Later, He “began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent” (Matthew 11:20).

The historical record shows that the disciples Jesus trained also “preached that people should repent” (Mark 6:12). As Peter explained, repentance and then baptism were the initial steps Christians must take when they respond to the gospel (Acts 2:38).

A change of mind and deeds

The Greek word that is translated repent in the New Testament means “to change one’s way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness” (J.P. Louw and Eugene Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains, 1988). A person who repents realizes that he or she has been sinning—breaking God’s holy and beneficial law—and that he or she needs to change.

The calling and stimulus for wanting to repent—to change our lives—comes from God the Father (John 6:44). As Paul wrote to members at Rome, “Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4).

Although the realization of our need to change may come in various ways—a key moment in life, a time of contemplation, hearing a specific message, the example of a friend—it is always marked by a change of “heart”—that is, our way of thinking (Acts 2:37). Instead of ignoring God’s instructions as we had been doing, the primary focus in our lives becomes earnestly learning God’s law and living in accordance with it. God’s way of life is now our life. We love God’s instructions and want to do what He expects of us (1 John 5:3).

Understanding that a dramatic change in thinking occurs when people repent of their sins, some have referred to this event as “giving your heart to the Lord.” And while our hearts are indeed at the center of this

Key Steps in Repentance

What specific steps must one take in order to repent? The Bible reveals several actions that are integral to this important process:

- **Admit to God that you have sinned.** Although Scripture teaches that everyone has sinned (Romans 3:23), we do not like to personally acknowledge that we have broken God’s holy and beneficial law. Hard as it is, this fundamental act is the first step we must take in order to repent.

- **Ask God for help.** Although we like to think we can do anything we set our minds to, the truth is—we need God’s assistance in order to repent. Repentance is a gift from God (2 Timothy 2:25). He is the One who “leads” people to repentance (Romans 2:4).

- **Start living in accordance with God’s laws.** Our natural, carnal nature does not want to obey God, but we must rule over this rebellious nature and keep God’s commandments (Romans 8:7, 13; Matthew 19:17).

- **Continue to repent.** Even after we are baptized and receive the Holy Spirit, we still occasionally sin. When we do, we must confess our sins to God (1 John 1:7-10) and determine not to continue in them (Romans 6:1-2).

For further study on the actions involved in repentance, see the LifeHopeandTruth.com article “How to Repent.”
process, we must also understand that repentance is far more than simply an emotional moment. When we truly repent, we will also act differently—that is, by living righteously—and we will continue living righteously for the remainder of our lives.

Genuine repentance is not a one-time event. It is an ongoing way of thinking and living in accordance with God's instructions found in His Word—the Holy Bible.

**Repent of what?**

If we are going to obey Jesus' command to repent, we must also understand what He expects us to repent of. The obvious answer is that we must repent of our sins—the times we have broken or ignored God's law. As Peter told the crowd in Jerusalem, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19).

The Bible says “sin is lawlessness,” specifically meaning transgressing God's laws (1 John 3:4). In light of this, what would have been some of the sins Christ commanded the people of the first century and us today to repent of? Here are a few sins to consider.

- **Breaking the 10 Commandments** (Matthew 19:17; John 15:10; 1 John 2:4).
- **Not observing the seventh-day Sabbath** (Exodus 20:8; Luke 4:16; Acts 17:2; Hebrews 4:9).
- **Not observing the biblical festivals** (Leviticus 23:2; Matthew 26:17; Acts 18:21; 1 Corinthians 5:8).
- **Sexual acts before or outside of a traditional marriage** (Matthew 19:4-6, 18; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6).

Sadly, many within mainstream Christianity no longer understand what sin is. Many teach or condone some of the things Jesus expects people to repent of. The honorable traits of tolerance, love and respect have been so distorted and misapplied that many now think Jesus approves of the very things that were sins in the first century and that continue to be sins today.

Though their hearts and emotions may indeed be touched by the Messiah's message, too many have mistakenly continued living in opposition to God's teaching. Those who neglect or fail to understand this more complete understanding of repentance—that it includes our minds and our obedience to God's instructions in the Bible—are not properly responding to the Messiah's command to repent.

God hasn't changed His mind about what is and isn't sin (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8). In order to truly repent, we must accept God's definitions of sin and then alter our conduct accordingly.

**Baptism**

The biblical response to real, genuine repentance is baptism. As Peter told the crowd gathered in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost in A.D. 31, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Baptism represents our sins being washed away (Acts 22:16). The Holy Spirit helps us understand God's timeless instruction in spite of religious confusion in the world around us (John 16:13; 1 John 5:19). This power from God (Luke 24:49) strips away spiritual blindness (2 Corinthians 3:14-16; Ephesians 4:18); and when we receive it via baptism, it identifies us as “children of God” (Romans 8:9, 14, 16).

In addition to these wonderful benefits of having God's Spirit, there is still another important blessing that God extends when His Spirit is present within us. It is the guarantee of receiving eternal life. As Paul wrote, “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit” (Romans 8:11).

The new life we will receive will be eternal. As Paul further explained, this life will come when we are changed from natural bodies formed from the dust of the earth to ones that are immortal and similar to God in composition (1 Corinthians 15:35-53; 1 John 3:1-2).

Repenting of our sins and being baptized for the forgiveness of those sins so we can receive the Holy Spirit are thus necessary steps for us to enter the Kingdom of God. Again, as Jesus stated, “Unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3).

In the concluding article in this series we will examine Christ's command to “believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

For further study on repentance, see the Life Hope & Truth article “What Is Repentance?” and the ones in the section on baptism. D.
What is prophecy? “The foretelling of future events, by inspiration from God. ... A true prophecy can come only from God; and is the highest proof of the divine origin of the message of which it is a part” (American Tract Society Bible Dictionary).

Based on this definition, a large chunk of the Bible qualifies as prophecy. There are 16 named prophets who authored Old Testament books: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

Moses, the author of the first five books of the Bible, is also called a prophet (Deuteronomy 34:10). King David had a seer or prophet by the name of Gad (2 Samuel 24:11). Nathan the prophet confronted David over his sin with Bathsheba. And there were others—Ahijah, Jehu, Elijah, Elisha, Shemaiah, Oded and Samuel—who were identified as prophets.

Some scholars estimate that a third of the Bible is prophecy. How could a human being predict future events and have them fulfilled exactly as he said without God’s involvement?

In this article, let’s take a look at just three of the estimated 2,500 prophecies in the pages of the Bible and determine if they were indeed fulfilled.

1. Jeremiah’s 70-year prophecy

Let’s begin with the famous 70-year prophecy found in Jeremiah 25:11-12: “And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then it will come to pass, when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,” says the Lord; ‘and I will make it a perpetual desolation.’”

Here we have a very specific prophecy reported by Jer-
he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet’ (Matthew 2:4-5).

What about the 70 years of desolation of the land? Around 586 B.C. King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and the temple built by Solomon. After the destruction of the city, he took more of the Jews into captivity. This can easily be confirmed by history.

Most dates from this period of time are difficult to nail down exactly, but historians agree to the range of 587-585 B.C. for the destruction of Jerusalem. And the date of 586 B.C. is the most widely accepted, which would place the conclusion of 70 years as 516 B.C.

What happened in 516? According to historians, this is the year that the rebuilt temple was dedicated. Finally, after 70 years, the Jews once again could sacrifice and worship at a temple in Jerusalem.

But some will say that this prophecy was written after the 516 date. Is that true? There is solid historical evidence that Jeremiah wrote his book years before the dedication of the second temple in Jerusalem.

### 2. Prophecy about Bethlehem

Our next prophecy is found in Micah 5:2:

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.”

In the New Testament we read of a group of wise men who came to Herod looking for the Messiah. After they left Jerusalem, Herod gathered the experts to ask where the Messiah would be born. They quoted Micah’s prophecy, declaring that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. “And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet’” (Matthew 2:4-5).

Micah wrote his prophecy around 700 B.C., and the events recorded in Matthew took place in 4 B.C. Notice the string of events that had to occur to fulfill this prophecy. When an angel told Mary she would give birth to the Messiah, she was living in Nazareth (a city in Galilee) and betrothed to Joseph (Luke 1:26-27). As she approached her due date, Joseph took her to Bethlehem, a city far from Galilee.

Since Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth, the odds of them being in Bethlehem for Christ’s birth were quite small. This was a direct fulfillment of Micah’s prophecy and further proof that the Bible is true.
3. Prophecy of Cyrus before he was even born

Our third prophecy is even more incredible. In Isaiah 45:1 we read about a man named Cyrus. “Thus says the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held—to subdue nations before him and loose the armor of kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut: I will go before you and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron.”

Isaiah wrote in the eighth century B.C., but Cyrus was not born until the sixth century B.C., approximately 200 years later. How could Isaiah name Cyrus before he was even born?

History records that Cyrus the Great was the founder of the Persian Empire. He reigned from 559 to 530 B.C., during which time he united the Medes and the Persians into a formidable world empire. He was a warrior and fought many battles, but one of his most famous was the conquering of the city of Babylon, which was thought to be impossible because of the thick walls that surrounded the city.

But Cyrus used subterfuge. Here is the story of that battle from the online Ancient History Encyclopedia:

“By the year 540 B.C., Cyrus captured Elam and its capital, Susa. Cyrus moved into Babylonia and fought the Battle of Opis in or near the strategic riverside city of Opis on the Tigris, north of Babylon. The Babylonian army was routed, and Cyrus conquered Babylon [539 B.C.] without any significant resistance. Herodotus explains that to accomplish this feat, the Persians diverted the Euphrates river into a canal so that the water level dropped ‘to the height of the middle of a man’s thigh,’ which allowed the invading forces to march directly through the river bed to enter at night.”

Isaiah’s prophecy was very specific, even mentioning the double doors and gates that would “open before him.” All of this around 200 years in advance! Isaiah went on to prophesy that Cyrus would permit the Jews to return and rebuild Jerusalem. Consider the fact that when Isaiah wrote about this, the Jews were not even in captivity and Babylon was not yet a major world power.

- Isaiah 44:28: “Who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, “You shall be built,” and to the temple, “Your foundation shall be laid.”’” The fulfillment of this prophecy is recorded in the books of 2 Chronicles and Ezra.
- Ezra 6:3: “In the first year of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issued a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem: ‘Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered sacrifices; and let the foundations of it be firmly laid, its height sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits.’”

What an amazing fulfillment of prophecy! And so specific! In 2 Timothy 3:16 we read that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” Only God could have provided the Old Testament prophets with the inspiration to write prophecy and then have it come to pass. Just imagine the series of events that had to happen for Cyrus to be born, become the king of Persia, conquer the greatest city in the world (Babylon), and permit the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple!

These are only three of many prophecies found in the Old Testament, but they illustrate an important principle: The Bible is the authentic Word of God! It is true!

Next time we will explore the internal evidence proving the Bible is true. Keep in mind that the Bible as we have it today consists of 66 books, written by approximately 40 different authors over a period of about 1,500 years. It would seem highly unlikely that this many authors could write over such a long period of time with a simple, consistent message without God’s involvement.

For more about fulfilled prophecy, see our Life, Hope & Truth articles “Fulfilled Prophecy” and “Fulfilled Prophecy Is Evidence of God’s Existence.”
August 1945, after 3½ years of brutal fighting island to island across the Pacific, the United States and its allies were preparing to invade the Japanese homeland to finally end World War II. But a new top secret weapon changed the plans.

So on Aug. 6, 70 years ago, a U.S. bomber nicknamed *Enola Gay* dropped the first atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima, Japan. In seconds, 5 square miles of the city were incinerated, and an ominous mushroom cloud spread deadly radiation much farther. The bomb itself killed perhaps 100,000 people, and many thousands more died from the horrifying effects of radiation.

From the devastating descriptions in John Hersey’s 1946 book *Hiroshima* to the lingering aftermath of suffering and death, it became clear humanity had crossed a new threshold of horror.

Three days later, the U.S. unleashed this terrible new weapon again on the city of Nagasaki, killing tens of thousands more.

The war was soon over, but the world would never be the same. Within four years the Soviet Union joined the atomic arms race, and in 1952 and ’53 first the United States then the Soviet Union tested exponentially more powerful thermonuclear (fusion) bombs. Over the next 40 years these nations stockpiled enough weapons to kill every last man, woman and child on earth.

And now many more nations have developed nuclear bombs, including the United Kingdom, France, China, Israel, North Korea, India and Pakistan; and many more, like Iran, could have them soon.

Nuclear weapons have not been used in 70 years. But with humanity’s track record, it is only a matter of time before a terrorist or unstable leader uses them again. And what nation with nuclear weapons does not have a plan to use them when all else fails?

Nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction have made this possible within the last generation.

The horrors of nuclear war were unleashed 70 years ago this August. What have we learned and what do we have yet to learn to avoid a nuclear nightmare?

By Mike Bennett

The horrors of nuclear war were unleashed 70 years ago in the midst of history’s most terrible war.

**The brink of self-destruction**

The fact that humanity can destroy itself is, in itself, a sign of the end times. Jesus Christ promised to return at the time when humanity would be on the brink of suicide. He will save us out of the worst time of trouble the world has ever known—worse than the Black Death, worse than World War I, worse than World War II. “And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved,” He said (Matthew 24:21-22).

Nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction have made this possible within the last generation.

**Choosing curses?**

How have we come to this? Since the Garden of Eden, humanity has persistently rejected God and His way of life that produces peace and joy. We have chosen instead Satan’s alluring ways of selfishness and self-gratification, which lead only to fighting, pain and self-destruction.
The end result of this way has always been inevitable. Humanity has chosen the way of death, the way of curses, the way of complete annihilation. It would have happened earlier, but God stepped in at the time of Noah’s Flood and at the Tower of Babel to slow humanity’s downward spiral.

The end-time Elijah and the elect

The last verse of the last book of the Old Testament contains a powerful warning and a strong call to action for God’s people. In Malachi 4:5 God tells us He will send another “Elijah” before “the great and dreadful day of the LORD.” As John the Baptist prepared for Jesus Christ’s first coming, the end-time Elijah is to prepare for Christ’s second coming, “lest,” God says, “I come and strike the earth with a curse” (verse 6).

“Curse” is translated from the Hebrew word cherem, one of the harshest terms in the Bible. It “suggests complete annihilation” and is the same word used in Joshua 6:17 for Jericho being “doomed” to total destruction (NKJV Study Bible note on Malachi 4:6).

So what does God say is necessary to prevent this utter destruction? He says the work of His end-time Elijah “will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.” As John the Baptist turned people to God and prepared a people for the Lord, so the end-time Elijah will also do (Luke 1:16-17). The prophesied restoration of all things (Mark 9:12) includes the vital family relationship on both the human and divine level.

The people prepared for the Lord in the end time are the ones Jesus Christ was calling “the elect” when He said: “But for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened” (Matthew 24:22). Jesus said converted Christians—those preparing for Jesus Christ’s return—are the reason He will save the world from the curse of utter destruction!

God has used specific people in fulfilling this Elijah role, but now He is also using His Church as a whole to bring people to Him and restore and strengthen relationships. This is an awesome responsibility and calling!

Ultimate war, then real peace

A terrible time is ahead, and it seems that soon weapons of mass destruction far more powerful than those used on Hiroshima and Nagasaki will be unleashed. Thankfully, Jesus Christ will not allow the specter of nuclear war to totally wipe out humanity. He promises to return and stop the wars and help us clean up the mess we have made of this world.

Micah 4:3-4 gives us a glimpse into that future world: “He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; 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. 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.”

Finally humanity will learn the way of peace! Finally we will safely disarm and shut down the armament factories and the war colleges. The stockpiles of nuclear bombs will be neutralized by scientific or supernatural means. Then we will finally have learned to avoid repeating the horror and suffering of devastating warfare like Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Pray that Jesus Christ will come soon to establish the wonderful Kingdom of God and bring that time of peace and joy! Read more about that Kingdom in our free booklet The Mystery of the Kingdom.
Why is it I do not believe that the physical universe started on its own and developed on its own into what it is today? What compelling evidence leads me to question evolutionary theory? Why do I believe in a Designer or Creator—an intelligent being who designed, made and sustains an entire universe?

Actually, I have many reasons why I believe the physical realm is not a result of happenstance, but is the careful design of a Creator. Here are two.

Laws that govern nature

First, take a look at the world around us and you’ll find many natural laws governing the behavior of the processes that make our world function—the laws of gravity, thermodynamics and motion, just to mention a few.

Consider the law of gravity—the attraction between two pieces of matter. It is the force that keeps us glued to this earth, keeps the moon in orbit around the earth, and keeps all the planets in our solar system revolving around the sun.

Where did gravity come from? Did it just appear at some point? How did matter know it should...
be attracted to other matter? These questions remain scientifically unanswerable. Certainly no one believes that Isaac Newton created gravity, nor should we believe he discovered it. Gravity obviously existed long before Newton was born. All he did was provide a scientific explanation for his observations.

Today, over 300 years removed from Isaac Newton’s original explanation, scientists still search for an understanding of the force we call gravity. Some believe gravity is the result of a particle; others believe gravity is a property of matter or a wrinkle in the space-time continuum. Bottom line? Science is unsure of where gravity came from, when it began and what it is composed of.

What we do know from our human experience, however, is that things do not simply come into existence on their own. So why should we believe gravity, or any other natural law, for that matter, just somehow happened—appeared on its own out of nowhere? I—and, as a matter of fact, many other scientists—don’t believe these laws developed on their own. It just doesn’t make sense.

Interestingly, all scientists call these natural forces “laws,” and indeed they are consistent rules that govern all things that exist. Even more interesting, a source long predating Isaac Newton tells us where gravity and all the other laws of nature came from! That source is the Bible.

James 4:12 tells us, “There is one Lawgiver.” That Lawgiver is the Creator God who designed and made the universe and this planet we call earth. In doing so, He created the rules that control it, both the physical laws governing the behavior of creation and the spiritual laws governing the behavior of humanity.

The complexity of nature

Mankind has a long and fascinating history of attempting to comprehend and probe nature’s complexities.

Around 400 B.C. the Greek philosopher Democritus imagined that matter consisted of tiny particles. He called these particles atoms, which in his language basically meant “indivisible,” (atomos, literally, “not cut”). Other Greek philosophers believed atoms came together to form molecules. They also thought atoms and molecules had mass or weight. It turns out they were far ahead of their time. Sad to say, other mistaken philosophical ideas gained precedence over these notions, suppressing for hundreds of years the concept of atoms.

It wasn’t until the 16th century that the belief in atoms saw a revival. By the beginning of the 19th century, scientists were conducting experiments resulting in conclusions explainable only by the presence of atoms. Experimental data gave proof of the atom’s existence.

During the next 100 years, scientists thought the atom to be the indivisible building block of matter, believing nothing existed smaller than the atom. But then came the discovery of radioactivity near the start of the 20th century. Radioactivity is the decay or breakdown of an atom through the emission of particles and/or energy from its nucleus. Around the same time electrons and protons were discovered. Electrons, neutrons and protons were shown to be the particles emitted from an atom during radioactive decay.

So the atom was not the smallest piece of matter after all!

Scientists proposed simple models of the atom; but as research continued, their models became increasingly complex. Positioning the electrons around
The nucleus of the atom was no longer as simple, for example, as positioning planets around the sun. It required complex mathematical equations to explain the behavior of electrons and to give their probable positions in space around the nucleus.

As researchers split more and more atoms, they discovered many other types of subatomic particles. Particles known as gluons, believed to hold protons and neutrons together, were identified. They also uncovered forces holding the nucleus together, which, when broken, release large amounts of energy. Once thought to be particles that could not be broken down further, protons and neutrons were shown to consist of electron-size particles known as quarks.

The more we study the atom, the more we are amazed at its incredible complexity!

After studying all these things, I had to ask myself, How could the remarkably complex structure of the atom have come together on its own? The evidence led me to conclude it had to be designed and assembled. It’s simply not logical that atoms just somehow appeared, at some point in time. The atom is too complicated for that to have happened. It had to be made—created.

Yet evolutionary theory wants and expects us to believe atoms and matter came out of nowhere at the time of the initial event—what has been called the big bang.

Belief in a Creator requires faith

Belief in a Supreme Being who created all things requires faith. Some may say this is a blind faith. Is it, though?

To me, it takes a blind faith to believe that this physical universe and its laws came about on their own, by happenstance! Evolution is an unprovable theory—it’s man’s attempt to explain the natural world without a Creator. Unlike atomic theory, for which there is strong evidence, there is no proof that evolution occurred.

Removing God from the picture is nothing new, of course. Carefully note these words written nearly 2,000 years ago: “Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things... Who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and who worshiped and served the creature, rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.”

Those are the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 1:21-23 and 25, as he described humanity’s history of refusing to accept God’s Word.

Refusing to accept God as the Creator, humans developed their own ideas—beliefs that undeniably require a blind faith to accept!

What kind of faith does it take, however, to believe that God created all things? In Hebrews 11:1 we read what faith is. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Is it blind because it is not seen, though?

Note how Romans 1:20 describes the evidence for God in His handiwork: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead.”

That is a powerful statement! We can look at what exists and see—clearly understand—the invisible attributes of God!

This is the faith and belief I have. I see things like I’ve described here—the laws governing the universe and the complexity of nature—and I clearly see God’s hand. I am also, by profession and training, a scientist. And I firmly believe that science, when examined properly, supports the existence and logic of a Creator far more than it supports a theory of the natural world somehow accidentally coming together on its own. I also see that the existence of a Creator gives meaning and purpose to our existence, something evolution can never provide.

So please do what I have told my students to do: Look carefully at all sides of the question before coming to a conclusion.

If you are willing to give God a chance, He will be happy to give you guidance in your search. You can ask Him to remove the blindness. Once you have studied all aspects of the question with God’s guidance, then come to a decision.

It’s the scientific—and godly—thing to do. D
HISTORIC. UNPRECEDENTED. ELECTRIFYING.
Pope Francis has become a whirlwind of news and a global phenomenon. He has skillfully exploited the perception of his being detached from wealth, power and pride and has charmed much of the world with his broad smile, folksy manner and attention-grabbing disregard for protocol.

The world media have embraced Francis. He has been named Person of the Year everywhere from *Time* magazine to the pro-gay magazine *The Advocate*. Britain’s *Guardian* announced that Francis was now “the world’s loudest and clearest voice against the status quo” and the *Financial Times* decided he was “the leading global symbol of compassion and humility.” He has even been named *Esquire*’s best-dressed man!

It may seem strange to some readers for a religious-based magazine like *Discern* to throw a blanket of caution over such a magnetic figure (“the coolest pope ever,” according to NBC’s *Today Show*).

But Scripture cautions us that things are not always what they seem. The Bible warns that a different gospel, with a different view of God’s laws, would counterfeit the biblical gospel of the literal Kingdom of God.

The apostle Paul clearly warns that one of the greatest deceptions ever will occur at the time of the end under a great religious figure he called the “lawless one” (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12). People ever since have pondered who this could be and how he could bring about the prophesied spectacular events that would astonish and delude millions around the world.

Many have foolishly branded various figures as “the beast” or “the false prophet,” only to be discredited; and *Discern* distances itself from such proclamations. However, we do not distance ourselves from Jesus’ statement to the religious leaders of His day: “You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times” (Matthew 16:3).

Knowing the prophecies of a powerful, apparently charismatic, end-time religious figure who will arise and deceive, we would be foolish not to have a discerning eye on any potential development along this line.
Bergoglio’s backstory becomes the Vatican future

Having watched his predecessor, Benedict XVI, become encrusted by Vatican bureaucracy and engulfed by scandals of court intrigue, clerical child sex abuse and a widespread culture of financial corruption, Pope Francis is clearly in an “evangelical hurry,” as Catholic theologian George Weigel put it, because he is 78 years old and knows that if new things don’t get done quickly, they may not get done at all.

“Vatican watchers,” according to the May 14, 2015, U.S. News & World Report, “say the confluence of the pope’s personal-ity, his Jesuit background and the geopolitical situation all combine to explain his assertiveness” on the world stage (“What’s Driving Pope Francis’ Middle East Diplomacy?”).

“The key point to understanding Francis,” observes veteran Vatican journalist John Allen, “is this: beneath his humble, simple exterior lies the mind of a brilliant Jesuit politician. Francis is spontaneous and often unscripted, but he’s never naive. Behind his seemingly impulsive and extemporaneous flourishes is a clear conception of where he wants to go and how to get there.” Allen adds that Francis “is not an ethereal monk indifferent to, or naive about, the realities of power. ... He has a track record of bending institutions to his will” (The Francis Miracle, 2015, pp. 231, 246).

Upon being named the bishop of Rome, Francis introduced himself as a man from “the ends of the earth,” but the center of the Catholic Church had already shifted south decades before. In 1910, 70 percent of the world’s Catholics lived north of the equator (primarily in Europe). By 2010 around 40 percent of all Catholics were in Latin America, and Spanish was the most widely spoken language in the Catholic world. More than seven in 10 Latin American Catholics are under the age of 25—the reverse of membership trends in North America and a highly secularized Europe.

Jesuit background

The descendant of Italian immigrants to Argentina, Jorge Bergoglio has been described as militantly religious from the age of 14. Working first as a chemist and nightclub bouncer, he was fascinated by members of the Society of Jesus (or Jesuit order), which he later joined. Jesuits have the longest period of training in the Catholic Church, with 10 or more rigorous years “in formation” before taking a unique, final vow of loyal obedience to the pope and becoming a priest.

Known for being tough, resourceful and willing to plant the flag of their faith anywhere, Jesuits were the most ardent missionaries and foot soldiers of the Counter-Reformation against Protestantism. More effective than fortresses in holding the line against Protestants, Jesuits became specialists in educating the children of the wealthy and elite while serving as popular confessors in the royal courts, becoming masters of ambiguity and showing a worldly finesse in political matters.

“Jesuits,” as historian Paul Johnson explains, “were widely identified with the view that the moral code could in some way be suspended when Catholic interests were at risk” (A History of Christianity, 1976, p. 305).

Returning the Vatican to diplomatic relevance

As the first Jesuit and first pope from the New World, Francis appears determined to reorient the Vatican and set a more personal stamp on foreign policy. Hailing from Latin America, a region with a turbulent political history, widespread poverty and a wary relationship with the United States, Francis is focusing on the “peripheries” (Africa, Latin America, Asia) far differently than any of his European predecessors.

In the geopolitical sense, the papacy matters. Noted political scientist Joseph Nye calculates the Vatican to be the world’s most important soft power—that is, a superpower not through the coercion of military or economic might but through the subtle ability to influence hearts and minds. After the inward-looking pontificate of his scholarly predecessor, Francis has put the Vatican back on the map with an active Vatican diplomacy that uses his popularity (Pew Research Center reports favorability ratings higher than any modern pope among Catholics, Protestants and nonreligious) and the huge audience...
he commands (1.2 billion Catholics worldwide) to challenge entrenched diplomatic positions.

“Only four years ago,” observed UN-based diplomatic reporter Colum Lynch in the May 11, 2015, issue of Foreign Policy, “the Vatican was in danger of becoming a diplomatic backwater.” But a new age of political audacity has begun as Pope Francis has begun to flex the Catholic Church’s diplomatic muscles. He has countries racing to upgrade relations with the Vatican “to leverage the Pope’s charisma and influence to advance their interests.”

Unafraid to mix theology and politics, Francis is “someone who’s capable of praying in the Blue Mosque in Istanbul and then talking about the Armenian genocide. He’s not someone who’s bound by political correctness,” said former Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini. “It’s the diplomacy of a real leader” (Gavin Jones and James Mackenzie, “Pope Francis Extends Agenda of Change to Vatican Diplomacy,” Reuters, May 17, 2015).

Last year he brokered a historic thaw in relations between Cuba and the United States after decades of hostility. More recently, he has made Middle East peace a priority, using the papal megaphone to slow a rush to war in Syria, recognize Palestinian statehood and attempt to protect Christians in the region. Showing his commitment to engage in even the most controversial political crises, Francis is expected to highlight the hot-button issues of immigration and war in Syria, recognize Palestinian president and American megachurch pastors Joel Osteen and Rick Warren, or exchanging skull caps over lunch with Episcopal “brother bishops,” Francis is making waves as he works toward his goal of ecumenical unity.

**Bringing all churches to unity**

Francis’ progress towards ecumenism—interactions between Christian communities with the goal of uniting in a single organization—has been dramatic. Emerging from an “ecumenical winter” brought about when Benedict drew a firm line between Catholicism and all other denominations and religions by labeling them “defective,” Francis has steered his church on a different course, reaching out to followers of virtually every religion, secularists and even atheists. Celebrated catchphrases like “Who am I to judge?” have thawed positions as Francis has both disarmed and stirred the curiosity of religious opponents.

“The blood of our Christian brothers and sisters,” he recently proclaimed at a mass, “is a testimony which cries out to be heard. It makes no difference whether they be Catholics, Orthodox, Copts or Protestants. They are Christians!”

This echoes a 2013 interview when Francis stated, “For me ecumenism is a priority. Today we have the ecumenism of blood. In some countries they kill Christians because they wear a cross or have a Bible, and before killing them they don’t ask if they’re Anglicans, Lutherans, Catholics or Orthodox” (“Blood and Ecumenism,” The Economist, Feb. 17, 2015). Christianpost.com reported, “Pope Francis has said that it’s the devil himself who keeps evangelicals, Catholics, and Christians from other denominations divided.”

The first item on Francis’ ecumenical agenda is to heal the great schism with the Greek Orthodox. In June 2014, while the world’s media were focused on Francis bringing together the Israeli and Palestinian presidents in Rome to jointly pray for peace, few paid much attention to the fact that Francis had invited Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople—his counterpart in the Greek Orthodox faith and a man he has called “his dear brother”—to join him as a geopolitical and ecumenical partner.

Just weeks before, Francis had dined with Bartholomew after praying together in the notoriously contentious Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and shocked many when he bent down to kiss the patriarch’s hand and spoke of unity.

Months after the event in the Vatican, Shimon Peres returned to Rome to propose the launch of a United Nations of World Religions, telling an Italian newsmagazine, “For the first time in history, the Holy Father is a respected leader, valued as such by the diverse faiths and their exponents.” Peres added that “he’s truly the only one who can lead this project.”

Francis has been relentlessly reaching out to the Protestant world, publicly conceding that divisions are the result of “sins on everyone’s part” and claiming “God has begun the miracle of unity.” With the 500-year anniversary of Martin Luther’s revolt and the beginning of the Reformation approaching in 2017, Francis has quietly been laying the groundwork with a wide swath of Protestant churches for a joint declaration—signed previously by Catholics and Lutherans in 1999—to resolve differences on salvation and works.

Whether turning toward Mecca and praying with the Grand Mufti in Istanbul, conferring warmly with American megachurch pastors Joel Osteen and Rick Warren, or exchanging skull caps over lunch with Episcopal “brother bishops,” Francis is making waves as he works toward his goal of ecumenical unity.

**What next for the “pope of surprises”?**

A savvy politician who has reanimated the papacy and appears determined to bring historic change to the Vatican, Francis has proclaimed, “If the Church is alive, it must always surprise.”

Having carefully developed a reputation as a “pope of surprises,” Francis has many wondering as to his next shocking announcement. Will there be a shift on doctrines of marriage, family or contraception that would be lauded by the secular Western world? Could the drive for ecumenical unity be propelled by an elimination of clerical celibacy? Or might other surprises be in store?

Remember Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:4-5 and 23-25 and Paul’s instruction in Galatians 1:6-9: Watch and discern the times, understand the things prophesied to happen, and don’t be deceived by anyone proclaiming a different gospel!

Read more in our Life, Hope & Truth articles “The Kingdom of God: A Message Christianity Ignores” and “What Is Babylon?”
Matthew 16:18 has been used to claim Peter and those considered his successors were given nearly unlimited spiritual authority. Is this what Jesus said?

Jesus had posed a question to His disciples: “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” Peter spoke up first—eventually giving the right answer (verse 16). Instead of just complimenting Peter for speaking correctly, Jesus Christ made a statement about rocks.

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (verse 18).

Peter, Christ, rocks, church, gates of Hades. Christ packed a lot into this short statement! So what exactly was He talking about?

ONE INTERPRETATION

The Roman Catholic Church essentially believes that Christ was saying this:

“And I also say to you that you are Peter (the rock), and on you, Peter, I will build My one Holy Catholic Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (verse 18).

Peter, Christ, rocks, church, gates of Hades. Christ packed a lot into this short statement! So what exactly was He talking about?

THE CONSEQUENCES

Believing that Peter and those they claim are his successors are truly “the rock” on which Christ built His Church and are the possessors of the “keys,” the Roman Catholic Church has therefore claimed the authority to declare doctrine—even changing or adding to biblical doctrines. Catholics maintain that when a pope speaks ex cathedra (Latin for “from the chair” of St. Peter), he is exercising this power in its fullness.

Ex cathedra asserts that “when the pope in his official capacity, with the fullness of his authority, as successor of St. Peter and head of the Church on earth, proclaims a doctrine of faith or morals binding on the whole Church, he is preserved from error” (John A. O’Brien, The Faith of Millions, 1963, pp. 110-111).

In fact, one of the pope’s primary titles is vicar of Christ, which implies “his supreme and universal primacy, both of honour and of jurisdiction, over the Church of Christ” (Catholic Encyclopedia). The idea is that the pope stands in place of Christ as His representative on earth—endowed with Christ’s own authority—which was originally given to Peter.

The Roman Catholic Church has used this authority to change or proclaim many doctrines that are not taught in the Bible. Some include:

• In A.D. 190, Pope Victor I declared that all Christians should abandon the biblical Passover, and instead observe Easter to represent Jesus’ resurrection. The Council of Nicaea later confirmed this and made it binding on the entire church (A.D. 325).

• On Dec. 8, 1854, Pope Pius IX declared the doctrine of the “Immaculate Conception,” which proclaimed that the Virgin Mary was “preserved free from all stain of original sin” and throughout her life was “entirely...
perfect, beautiful, most dear to God and never stained
with the least blemish” (Ineffabilis Deus).

- On Nov. 1, 1950, Pope Pius XII announced the doctrine
of the “Assumption of Mary,” declaring that the Virgin
Mary’s body never died and saw corruption, but was
“assumed body and soul into heavenly glory” (Munifi-
centissimus Deus).

Now, if you are a Protestant Christian reading this article,
you may disagree with some of these Catholic proclama-
tions. But don’t be too quick to disconnect your own faith
from this topic. The fact is that Protestantism retained (and
still believes and practices) many doctrines established by
the Roman church using the authority they claim to derive
from Matthew 16:18-19!

ONE EXAMPLE

Let’s look at one example. Does your church hold ser-
vice on Sunday—believing that it is the “Lord’s Day”? Did
you know that Rome was responsible for changing the bibli-
cal day of worship from the seventh-day Sabbath to Sunday?

The Catholic Church itself is the first to admit it used its
authority to make the change. Furthermore, Catholics have
logically claimed that Protestants who observe Sunday do
so only by recognizing the universal authority of the Church
of Rome.

James Cardinal Gibbons, a Catholic cardinal, wrote:
“Now the Scriptures alone do not contain all the truths
which a Christian is bound to believe, nor do they explicitly
enjoin all the duties which he is obliged to practice. Not
to mention other examples, is not every Christian obliged
to sanctify Sunday and to abstain on that day from un-
necessary servile work? … But you may read the Bible from
Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line au-
thorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce
the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we never

The Catholic Universe Bulletin published this statement in
1942: “The Church changed the observance of the Sabbath
to Sunday by right of the divine, infallible authority given to
her by her Founder, Jesus Christ. The Protestant, claiming

“AND I ALSO SAY
THAT YOU ARE
PETER
AND ON THIS
ROCK
I WILL BUILD
MY CHURCH.”
—MATTHEW 16:18

Petra
Boulder, an
immovable mass

Petros
A fragment, a stone
the Bible to be the only guide of faith, has no warrant for observing Sunday."

If you go to church on Sunday, you are tacitly recognizing the authority of the Roman Catholic Church to change and add to biblical revelation.

If this makes you uncomfortable, you may want to read more about the biblical Sabbath in our booklet The Sabbath: A Neglected Gift From God.

WHAT JESUS REALLY MEANT

So, was Jesus really building the Church on Peter (and his successors) in Matthew 16:18? Let’s look more closely at the verse.

Understanding this passage in its original language, Greek, provides the key to understanding what Christ meant. Jesus used a wordplay that isn’t clear when read in English. First, Jesus used the word Petros when referring to Peter: “I also say to you that you are Peter [Petros].” He then used a similar-sounding word to describe what He was building His Church on: Petra. “And on this rock [petra] I will build My church.”

So, Christ’s statement actually reads like this: “I also say to you that you are Petros, and on this petra I will build My Church.”

Peter’s given name was Simon Bar-Jonah, but Christ had given him the nickname Cephas—an Aramaic word meaning “A Stone” (John 1:42). Petros in Matthew 16:18 is the Greek form of the nickname. The meaning of both Cephas and Petros is the same: “a fragment, a stone” (Zondervan Expository Dictionary of Bible Words, pp. 537-538). The closest English words to petros would be pebble, stone or small rock.

The second word Christ used was petra. This word also means rock, but it represents “a mass of rock” (ibid.). This word could be translated as boulder—an immovable mass. Had Christ intended to describe Peter, all He needed to say was: You are Peter and on you I will build My Church.

But He didn’t say that.

He distinguished the rock (petra) He was building the Church on from Peter (petros). The rock He was building His Church on was a rock big enough to serve as the chief cornerstone in the foundation; it was large, strong and immovable. This describes none other than Jesus Christ Himself!

The rest of the Bible clearly identifies Jesus as this rock. Jesus is called “the chief cornerstone” seven times in the New Testament (Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6-7). In 1 Corinthians 10:4 the apostle Paul refers to Christ as “that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.”

Jesus was not only the chief cornerstone, He is still the active “head of the body, the church” (Colossians 1:18; see also Ephesians 5:23). Christ did establish offices in His Church (Ephesians 4:11), but the Bible instructs those who hold offices of leadership to remain faithful to Christ’s teachings (1 Corinthians 11:1). Even Peter himself—far from claiming the authority some believe he was given—taught plainly that Christians “should follow His [Christ’s] steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

To learn more about the importance of staying faithful to the original teachings of Christ, read “Was Christianity Designed to Evolve?”

FIND THE CHURCH BUILT ON CHRIST

The most significant point we can learn from Matthew 16:18 is not about Peter—it is that Jesus did build a Church! The Greek word for Church is ekklesia, which describes people called out of the world, a select group noted by specific identifying traits. According to the Bible, Jesus’ Church would be:

• A Church that teaches and strives to live by “every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). In other words, a Church that bases its teachings solely on the Bible—not the traditions of men (Mark 7:7).

• A Church that keeps the same biblical Sabbath and holy days Jesus and the apostles did (Mark 2:27-28; Acts 18:21; 1 Corinthians 5:8).

• A Church that calls itself by the biblical name “church of God” (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 10:32; 11:16, 22; 15:9; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; 1 Timothy 3:15).

• A “little flock” (Luke 12:32) that would often be persecuted (Matthew 24:9).

• A Church that strives to preach “the gospel of the kingdom” to the whole world (Matthew 24:14).

Where can you find these identifying markers in churches today? To learn more about the true Church built on the Rock—Jesus Christ—read “The Church: What Is It?” on the Life, Hope & Truth website.
What’s on Your Golden Record?

A recorded message NASA designed for aliens recently left the outer limits of our solar system. The recording raises a question vital to our lives.

On Sept. 12, 2013, NASA announced that the space probe Voyager 1 had, in late August 2012, left our solar system. It had taken 35 years to travel the 11.25 billion miles (18.11 billion kilometers) to make its escape. It was the first human-launched object to enter interstellar space.

As fascinating, perhaps, are the golden records carried by both the twin Voyager 1 and 2 probes. These gold-plated copper phonograph records contain images and sounds intended to introduce earth life to any extraterrestrials they might encounter. Altogether 115 images and a variety of natural sounds are included, such as those made by surf, wind and various animals, along with musical selections from different cultures and eras, and spoken greetings in 55 languages, living and dead. Each record is equipped with a cartridge, a phonograph needle and instructions.

Scientists will have to wait a while to see if this galactic outreach is successful. It will take about 40,000 years for either probe to reach another solar system.

What would you want to preserve?

What a challenge: to sum up the diversity, cherished qualities and accomplishments of millennia of life on earth on one phonograph record. Reading about the Voyagers led me to wonder what I would want to record as an account of my life. What would you want to preserve?

Favorite family photos or videos perhaps: the first day of school, graduation, a wedding portrait, that family trip. We might record the voices of our parents or our children, memories of treasured friends, proud professional and personal accomplishments.

A higher account

Whatever we might select to highlight our lives, it’s worth noting that a higher account is being maintained.

The apostle John was given a glimpse of what will happen after our physical lives end. He described a resurrection and a judgment: “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened [the books of the Bible opened to their understanding]. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (Revelation 20:12).

God is keeping track of what we all do, and there will be a personal accounting for every human being.

The Bible makes clear that what interests God most are our spiritual accomplishments—our growth to resemble Him in character, to reflect His altruistic love, to seek the values that are His: “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

This is what our Creator is inscribing on our golden record. It is for us, with God's strength and guidance, to provide the material.

Read more about this in the article “The Book of Life” on the Life, Hope & Truth website.
This ancient wisdom could help solve all the world’s problems.

Learn how God’s 10 Commandments are still relevant today.

Download the free booklet from the Learning Center on LifeHopeandTruth.com