

A photograph of a dirt path leading through a wooded area. The sun is bright in the upper left corner, creating a lens flare effect. The path is made of dirt and small rocks, and is flanked by green bushes and trees. The sky is a clear blue.

RETURN AGAIN TO The Old Paths

Jeremiah 6:16

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The Trail

By Harold Bollinger

While walking down the road of life,
I met a man with careworn face and bending back.

As I was about to take this trail,
That seemed to carve and shape his ways
I asked of him what I should face.

With anxious face and a slight worn smile.
He said in broken tones and scrambling words.
This road had vines that blocked the way,
I cut and shaped so others could pass by.

The many stones that blocked the trail,
Became a dam to drive the torrents from the path.
The fence I built keep travelers safe,
From natures foes who wish to cross the path.

The bridge I built provides a way
Across the great crevasse
The seeds I planted for the flowers,
Will spread aroma through the air.

Oh, I know this path so very well,
Both its struggles and its joy.
I do not wish to trace these steps.

But to you young one,
Do not abuse the trail.
Make ready for another soul,
Who soon will follow there.

Chapter 1



Paths of Believers

Hebrews 12:13

And make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

God is not only a disciplining parent but also a demanding coach who pushes us to our limits and requires our lives to be disciplined. Although we may not feel strong enough to push on to victory, we will be able to accomplish it as we follow Christ and draw on his strength. Then we can use our growing strength to help those around us who are weak and struggling.

The word therefore is a clue that what follows is important! We must not live with only our own survival in mind. Others will follow our example, and we have a responsibility to them if we are living for Christ, as we claim to be. Does your example make it easier for others to believe in and follow Christ, and to mature in him? Or would those who follow you end up confused and misled?

God will make your path known.

Psalm 16:11

You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

This psalm is often called a Messianic psalm because it is quoted in the New Testament as referring to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Both Peter and Paul quoted from this psalm when speaking of Christ's bodily resurrection (see Acts 2:25-28, 31; Acts 13:35-37).

David's heart was glad—he had found the secret to joy. True joy is far deeper than happiness; we can feel joy in spite of our deepest troubles. Happiness is temporary because it is based on external circumstances, but joy is lasting because it is based on God's presence within us. As we contemplate his daily presence, we will find contentment. As we understand the future he has for us, we will experience joy. Don't base your life on circumstances, but on God.

David stated confidently that God would not leave him in the grave. Many people fear death because they can neither control nor understand it. As believers, we can be assured that God will not forget us when we die. He will bring us to life again to live with him forever. This provides *real* security. For other passages about resurrection, see Job 19:25-26; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2, 13; Mark 13:27; 1 Cor. 15:12-58; 1 Thes. 4:13-18; Rev. 20:11-21:4.

The soles of Job's feet were limited.

Job 30:13

"They break up my path, they profit from my destruction; No one restrains them.

God guides me in the paths of righteousness.

Psalm 23:3

He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.

When we allow God our shepherd to guide us, we have contentment. When we choose to sin, however, we go our own way and cannot blame God for the environment we create for ourselves. Our shepherd knows the "green pastures" and "quiet waters" that will restore us. We will reach these places only by following him obediently.

Rebelling against the shepherd's leading is actually rebelling against our own best interests. We must remember this the next time we are tempted to go our own way rather than the shepherd's way.

My feet have not slipped from the path.

Psalm 17:5

My steps have held fast to your paths my feet have not slipped.

David's claim was an understanding of his relationship with God. In Psalm 32 and Psalm 51, David freely acknowledged his own sins. Nevertheless, his relationship with God was one of close fellowship and constant repentance and forgiveness. His claim to goodness, therefore, was based on his continual seeking after God.

God's word is a light to my path.

Psalm 119:105

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

To walk safely in the woods at night we need a light so we don't trip over tree roots or fall into holes. In this life, we walk through a dark forest of evil. But the Bible can be our light to show us the way ahead so we won't stumble as we walk. It reveals the entangling roots of false values and philosophies. Study the Bible so you will be able to see your way clear enough to stay on the right path.

You carefully watch my path

Psalm 139:3

You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways.

Sometimes we don't let people get to know us completely because we are afraid they will discover something about us that they won't like. But God already knows everything about us, even to the number of hairs on our heads (Matthew 10:30), and still he accepts and loves us. God is with us through every situation, in every trial—protecting, loving, guiding. He knows and loves us completely.

The path of the righteous is like a light.

Proverbs 4:18

But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn that shines brighter and brighter until the full day.

Even friends can make you fall. It is difficult for people to accept the fact that friends and acquaintances might be luring them to do wrong. Young people want to be accepted, so they would never want to confront or criticize a friend for wrong plans or actions.

Many other people can't even see how their friends' actions could lead to trouble. While we should be accepting of others, we need a healthy skepticism about human behavior. When you feel yourself being heavily influenced, proceed with caution. Don't let your friends cause you to fall into sin.

The path of the righteous is level.

Isaiah 26:7

The way of the righteous is smooth; O Upright One, make the path of the righteous level.

At times the "path of the righteous" doesn't seem smooth and it isn't easy to do God's will, but we are never alone when we face tough times. God is there to help us through difficulties, to comfort us, and to lead us. God does this by giving us a purpose (keeping our mind centered on him, Isaiah 26:3) and giving us provisions as we travel. God provides us with relationships of family, friends, and mentors. God gives us wisdom to make decisions and faith to trust him. Don't despair; stay on God's path.

Watch the path of your feet.

Proverbs 4:26

Watch the path of your feet and all your ways will be established.

Our heart—our feelings of love and desire—dictates to a great extent how we live because we always find time to do what we enjoy. Solomon tells us to guard our heart above all else, making sure we concentrate on those desires that will keep us on the right path. Make sure your affections push you in the right direction. Put boundaries on your desires: don't go after everything you see. Look straight ahead, keep your eyes fixed on your goal, and don't get sidetracked on detours that lead to sin.

There is no pathway of death to the righteous.

Proverbs 12:28

In the way of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death.

I will lead the blind down the pathway;

Isaiah 42:16

"I will lead the blind by a way they do not know, in paths they do not know I will guide them I will make darkness into light before them and rugged places into plains These are the things I will do, And I will not leave them undone."

Part of Christ's mission on earth was to demonstrate God's righteousness and to be a light for the Gentiles (to all nations). Through Christ, all people have the opportunity to share in his mission. God calls us to be servants of his Son, demonstrating God's righteousness and bringing his light.

What a rare privilege it is to help the Messiah fulfill his mission! But we must seek his righteousness (Matthew 6:33) before we demonstrate it to others, and let his light shine in us before we can be lights ourselves (Matthew 5:16; 2 Cor. 4:6).

Chapter 2



Paths of Righteousness

Proverbs 4:11

I have directed you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in upright paths.

If you want wisdom, you must decide to go after it. It takes resolve—a determination not to abandon the search once you begin no matter how difficult the road may become. This is not a once-in-a-lifetime step, but a daily process of choosing between two paths—the wicked (Proverbs 4:14-17, 19) and the righteous (Proverbs 4:18). Nothing else is more important or more valuable.

David taught Solomon as a young boy that seeking God’s wisdom was the most important choice he could make. Solomon learned the lesson well. When God appeared to the new king to fulfill any request, Solomon chose wisdom above all else. We should also make God’s wisdom our first choice. We don’t have to wait for God to appear to us. We can boldly ask him for wisdom today through prayer. James 1:5 assures us that God will grant our request.

Keep the paths of the righteous.

Proverbs 2:20

So you will walk in the way of good men and keep to the paths of the righteous.

“Differing weights” refers to the loaded scales a merchant might use in order to cheat the customers. Dishonesty is a difficult sin to avoid. It is easy to cheat if we think no one else is looking. But dishonesty affects the very core of a person.

It makes him untrustworthy and untrusting. It eventually makes him unable to know himself or relate to others. Don't take dishonesty lightly. Even the smallest portion of dishonesty contains enough of the poison of deceit to kill your spiritual life. If there is any dishonesty in your life, tell God about it now.

Make me know the path of life.

Psalm 16:11

You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

This psalm is often called a Messianic psalm because it is quoted in the New Testament as referring to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Both Peter and Paul quoted from this psalm when speaking of Christ's bodily resurrection (see Acts 2:25-28, 31; Acts 13:35-37).

Make known to me the ways of life.

Acts 2:28

'YOU HAVE MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE; YOU WILL MAKE ME FULL OF GLADNESS WITH YOUR PRESENCE.'

Peter quoted from Psalm 16:8-11—a psalm written by David. He explained that David was not writing about himself, because David died and was buried (Acts 2:29). Instead, he wrote as a prophet (Acts 2:30) who spoke of the Messiah who would be resurrected. The audience understood “decay” (Acts 2:27) to mean the grave. The emphasis here is that Jesus' body was *not* left to decay but was in fact resurrected and glorified.

Teach me your paths.

Psalm 25:4

Make me know your ways, O LORD; Teach me your paths.

David expressed his desire for guidance. How do we receive God's guidance? The first step is to *want* to be guided and to realize that God's primary guidance system is in his Word, the Bible. Psalm 119 tells of the endless knowledge found in God's Word. By reading it and constantly learning from it, we will gain the wisdom to perceive God's direction for our lives.

The path of your commandments.

Psalm 119:35

Make me walk in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.

In today's world, people most often covet financial gain. Money represents power, influence, and success. For many people, money is a god. They think about little else. True, money can buy certain comforts and offer some security. But far more valuable than wealth is obedience to God because it is a heavenly treasure rather than an earthly one (Luke 12:33).

We should do what God wants, regardless of the financial implications. Make the psalmist's prayer your own, asking God to turn your heart toward his statutes and not toward making money; it's in your own best interest in the long run.

May we know your ways and walk in your path.

Isaiah 2:3

And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

God gave Isaiah the gift of seeing the future. At this time, God showed Isaiah what would eventually happen to Jerusalem. Rev. 21 depicts the glorious fulfillment of this prophecy in the New Jerusalem, where only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will be allowed to enter. God made a covenant (promise) with his people and will never break it. God's faithfulness gives us hope for the future.

This describes a wonderful future of peace when instruments of war will be converted to instruments of farming, when we will be taught God's laws and will obey them. Although we know that eventually God will remove all sin and thus the causes of war, conflicts, and other problems, we should not wait for him to act before we begin to obey him. Just as Judah was told in Isaiah 2:5, we should walk in his light now. Though our eternal reward awaits us, we already can enjoy many benefits of obedience now as we apply God's Word to our lives.

Ask for the ancient paths where the good way is.

Jeremiah 6:16

Thus says the LORD, "Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, and walk in it; and you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'

The right path for living is ancient and has been marked out by God. But the people refused to take God's path, going their own way instead. We face the same decision today, going God's old but true way, or following a new path of our own choosing. Don't be misled. The only way to find peace and "rest for your souls" is to walk on God's path.

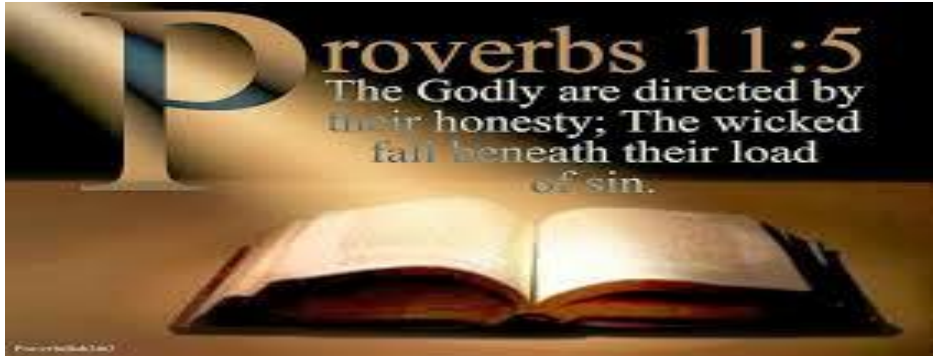
The people have forgotten and walk in bypaths.

Jeremiah 18:15

'For My people have forgotten Me, They burn incense to worthless gods and they have stumbled from their ways, from the ancient paths, to walk in bypaths, Not on a highway,

The parables in these chapters, probably written during the early years of Jehoiakim's reign, illustrate God's sovereignty over the nation. God has power over the clay (Judah), and he continues to work with it to make it a useful vessel. But Judah must soon repent, or the clay will harden the wrong way. Then it will be worth nothing and will be broken and destroyed.

Chapter 3



Paths of the Wicked

Job 6:18

"The paths of their course wind along, They go up into nothing and perish.

Others do not want to abide in God's paths.

Job 24:13

"Others have been with those who rebel against the light; they do not want to know its ways nor abide in its paths.

God rewards the wicked and punishes the righteous; he was simply asserting that in his case, a righteous man was suffering.

Walk in the paths of peace.

Isaiah 59:8

They do not know the way of peace, and there is no justice in their tracks; they have made their paths crooked, whoever treads on them does not know peace.

Sin offends our holy God and separates us from him. Because God is holy, he cannot ignore, excuse, or tolerate sin as though it didn't matter. Sin cuts people off from him, forming a wall to isolate God from the people he loves. No wonder this long list of wretched sins makes God angry and forces him to look the other way.

People who die with their life of sin unforgiven separate themselves eternally from God. God wants them to live with him forever, but he cannot take them into his holy presence unless their sin is removed. Have you confessed your sin to God, allowing him to remove it? The Lord can save you if you turn to him.

The paths of pride and sexual immorality lead to death.

Proverbs 2:18

For her house sinks down to death and her tracks lead to the dead;

Two of the most difficult sins to resist are pride and sexual immorality. Both are seductive. Pride says, “I deserve it”; sexual desire says, “I need it.” In combination, their appeal is deadly. In fact, says Solomon, only by relying on God’s strength can we overcome them. Pride appeals to the empty head; sexual enticement to the empty heart.

By looking to God, we can fill our heads with his wisdom and our hearts with his love. Don’t be fooled—remember what God says about who you are and what you were meant to be. Ask him for strength to resist these temptations.

Keep your feet from the paths of the wicked.

Proverbs 1:15

My son, do not walk in the way with them Keep your feet from their path,

Sin is enticing because it offers a quick route to prosperity and makes us feel like one of the crowd. But when we go along with others and refuse to listen to the truth, our own appetites become our masters, and we’ll do anything to satisfy them.

Sin, even when attractive, is deadly. We must learn to make choices, not on the basis of flashy appeal or short-range pleasure, but in view of the long-range effects. Sometimes this means steering clear of people who want to entice us into activities that we know are wrong.

We can’t be friendly with sin and expect our lives to remain unaffected.

The evil find destruction in their highways.

Isaiah 59:7

Their feet run to evil, and they hasten to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity, Devastation and destruction are in their highways.

Sin offends our holy God and separates us from him. Because God is holy, he cannot ignore, excuse, or tolerate sin as though it didn't matter. Sin cuts people off from him, forming a wall to isolate God from the people he loves.

No wonder this long list of wretched sins makes God angry and forces him to look the other way. People who die with their life of sin unforgiven separate themselves eternally from God. God wants them to live with him forever, but he cannot take them into his holy presence unless their sin is removed.

Have you confessed your sin to God, allowing him to remove it? The Lord can save you if you turn to him.

When the evil guide you, they lead you astray.

Isaiah 3:12

O My people! Their oppressors are children, and women rule over them O My people! Those who guide you lead you astray and confuse the direction of your paths.

The people would be proud of their sins, parading them out in the open. But sin is self-destructive. In today's world, sinful living often appears glamorous, exciting, and clever. But sin is wrong regardless of how society perceives it, and, in the long run, sin will make us miserable and destroy us.

God tries to protect us by warning us about the harm we will cause ourselves by sinning. Those who are proud of their sins will receive the punishment from God they deserve. Having rejected God's path to life (see Psalm 1), the only alternative is the path to destruction.

In the middle of this gloomy message, God gives hope—eventually the righteous will receive God's reward and the wicked will receive their punishment.

Chapter 4



Pathways of Sin

Proverbs 2:15

Whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways;

Discretion is the ability to tell right from wrong. It enables the believer to detect evil motives in men (Proverbs 2:12) and women (Proverbs 2:16). With practice it helps us evaluate courses of action and consequences.

For some it is a gift; for most it is developed by using God's truth to make wise choices day by day. Hebrews 5:14 emphasizes that we must train ourselves in order to have discretion.

A wise man listens to counsel

Proverbs 12:15

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel.

Sinful talk is twisting the facts to support your claims. Those who do this are likely to be trapped by their own lies. But for someone who always tells the truth, the facts—plain and unvarnished—give an unshakable defense. If you find that you always have to defend yourself to others, maybe your honesty is less than it should be

God’s understanding produces favor.

Proverbs 13:15

Good understanding produces favor, but the way of the treacherous is hard.

God created us, knows us, and loves us. It only makes sense, then, to listen to his instructions and do what he says. The Bible is his unfailing word to us. It is like an owner’s manual for a car. If you obey God’s instructions, you will “run right” and find his kind of power to live. If you ignore them, you will have breakdowns, accidents, and failures.

Man’s ways will lead to death.

Proverbs 14:12

There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

The “way that seems right” may offer many options and require few sacrifices. Easy choices, however, should make us take a second look. Is this solution attractive because it allows me to be lazy? Because it doesn’t ask me to change my life-style? Because it requires no moral restraints? The right choice often requires hard work and self-sacrifice. Don’t be enticed by apparent shortcuts that seem right but end in death.

The ways of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.

Proverbs 15:9

The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But He loves one who pursues righteousness.

The “path of the upright” doesn’t always seem easy (Proverbs 15:19), but look at the alternatives. Hatred (Proverbs 15:17), dissension (Proverbs 15:18), and laziness (Proverbs 15:19) cause problems that the upright person does not have to face. By comparison, his or her life is a smooth, level road because it is built on a solid foundation of love for God.

There is no justice in the paths of the wicked.

Isaiah 59:8

They do not know the way of peace, and there is no justice in their tracks; they have made their paths crooked, whoever treads on them does not know peace.

Sin offends our holy God and separates us from him. Because God is holy, he cannot ignore, excuse, or tolerate sin as though it didn’t matter. Sin cuts people off from him, forming a wall to isolate God from the people he loves.

No wonder this long list of wretched sins makes God angry and forces him to look the other way. People who die with their life of sin unforgiven separate themselves eternally from God. God wants them to live with him forever, but he cannot take them into his holy presence unless their sin is removed.

Have you confessed your sin to God, allowing him to remove it? The Lord can save you if you turn to him.

The gate is wide that leads to destruction.

Matthew 7:13

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it.

The gate that leads to eternal life (John 10:7-9) is called "narrow." This does not mean that it is difficult to become a Christian, but that there is only *one* way to live eternally with God and only a few that decide to walk that road. Believing in Jesus is the only way to heaven, because he alone died for our sins and made us right before God. Living his way may not be popular, but it is true and right. Thank God there is one way!

The stubborn in heart destroy the watered land.

Deuteronomy 29:19

"It shall be when he hears the words of this curse that he will boast, saying, 'I have peace though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart in order to destroy the watered land with the dry.'

Moses cautioned that the day the Hebrews chose to turn from God, a root would be planted that would produce bitter poison (see Hebrews 12:15). When we decide to do what we know is wrong, we plant an evil seed that begins to grow out of control, eventually yielding a crop of sorrow and pain. But we can prevent those seeds of sin from taking root. If you have done something wrong, confess it to God and others immediately. If the seed never finds fertile soil, its bitter fruit will never ripen.

The wicked walked in their own council.

Jeremiah 7:24

"Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward.

As this section opens, God sends Jeremiah to the temple gates to confront the false belief that God will not let harm come to the temple and those who live near it.

Jeremiah rebukes the people for their false and worthless religion, their idolatry, and the shameless behavior of the people and their leaders. Judah, he says, is ripe for judgment and exile. This happened during the reign of Jehoiakim, a puppet of Egypt.

The nation, in shock over the death of Josiah, was going through a spiritual reversal that removed much of the good Josiah had done. The themes of this section are false religion, idolatry, and hypocrisy. Jeremiah was almost put to death for this sermon, but he was saved by the officials of Judah (see Jeremiah 26).

The disobedient walked according to the course of this world.

Ephesians 2:2

In which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

“The ruler of the kingdom of the air” was understood by Paul’s readers to mean Satan. They believed that Satan and the evil spiritual forces inhabited the region between earth and sky.

Satan is thus pictured as ruling an evil spiritual kingdom—the demons and those who are against Christ. *Satan* means “the accuser.” He is also called the devil (Ephes. 4:27). In the resurrection, Christ was victorious over Satan and his power. Therefore, Jesus Christ is the permanent ruler of the whole world; Satan is only the temporary ruler of the part of the world that chooses to follow him.

Many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Philippians 3:18

For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ,

Paul criticized not only the Judaizers (see the first note on +Phil. 3:2-3), but also the self-indulgent Christians, people who claim to be Christians but don't live up to Christ's model of servanthood and self-sacrifice.

These people satisfy their own desires before even thinking about the needs of others. Freedom in Christ does not mean freedom to be selfish. It means taking every opportunity to serve and to become the best person you can be.

The time of the Gentiles walk according to the course of this world.

1 Peter 4:3

For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.

A person whose life changes radically at conversion may experience contempt from his or her old friends. He may be scorned not only because he refuses to participate in certain activities, but also because his priorities have changed and he is now heading in the opposite direction. His very life incriminates their sinful activities.

Mature Christians should help new believers resist such pressures of opposition by encouraging them to be faithful to Christ. *Dissipation* refers to wasteful expenditure and intemperate pursuit of pleasure, especially drinking to excess.

Those who indulge in the flesh walk according to corrupt desires.

2 Peter 2:10

And especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties,

The *celestial beings* may be angels, all the glories of the unseen world, or more probably, fallen angels. A similar passage is found in Jude 1:8-10. Whoever they are, the false teachers slandered the spiritual realities they did not understand,

taking Satan's power lightly and claiming to have the ability to judge evil. Many in our world today mock the supernatural.

They deny the reality of the spiritual world and claim that only what can be seen and felt is real. Like the false teachers of Peter's day, they are fools who will be proven wrong in the end. Don't take Satan and his supernatural powers of evil lightly, and don't become arrogant about how defeated he will be. Although Satan will be destroyed completely, he is at work now trying to render Christians complacent and ineffective.

Mockers will come who follow their own paths.

2 Peter 3:3

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts,

"In the last days" scoffers will say that Jesus is never coming back, but Peter refutes their argument by explaining God's mastery over time. The "last days" is the time between Christ's first and second comings; thus we, like Peter, live in the last days. We must do the work to which God has called us and believe that he will return as he promised.

Mockers follow their own ungodly lusts.

Jude 1:18

That they were saying to you, "In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts."

The *last times* is a common phrase referring to the time between Jesus' first and second comings. We live in the last times.

The Lord is knocking at your hearts door.



Rev. 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

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