



December 14, 2006 Thursday

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What is a Christian?; New Moral Values; Evangelicals and Israel; End of Days; Capitalist Christian; The Seekers

BYLINE: Anderson Cooper, Gary Tuchman, Dan Simon, Joe Johns, Delia Gallagher, Tom Foreman, Randi Kaye

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HIGHLIGHT: A look at American Christianity through a variety of prisms -- evangelicals (and the belief of some that these are the Last Days), capitalist Christians (God wants you to prosper, if not be wealthy), conservative Christians, questioning Christians, gay Christians, fundamentalist Christians. And for those of you who call yourself Christian, you might wonder, just what kind are you?

ANDERSON COOPER, CNN ANCHOR: Nearly nine in 10 Americans is a Christian. So what is a Christian? How is the definition changing? No matter what you believe, no matter what your faith, chances are the answers will one day touch your life. So, what do you believe?

ANNOUNCER: So what is a Christian and where do you fit in? This is a special edition of ANDERSON COOPER 360. Here now, Anderson Cooper.

ANDERSON COOPER, CNN ANCHOR: Thanks for joining us tonight. If you were expecting a sermon or a civics lesson, sorry. You won't find one here. This is an hour about religion and politics.

But first and foremost, we hope it's a vivid color snapshot of your neighbors and our country and how we all have a stake in this question that seems to bring a thousand answers.

What is a Christian? We pose it, by the way, not to exclude anyone, but simply to recognize a fact. No other religion -- not yet -- has so profoundly shaped this country or been shaped by it. No other question, except perhaps what is an American, has figured so highly in so many debates that effect us all.

And even as we speak, American Christianity is evolving. How we worship, where we worship, how we express our faith in our daily lives. All of it is changing.

Tonight, we'll try to give you as many angles as we can, starting with who is a Christian.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

COOPER (voice-over): The vast majority of the united states, more than 85 percent is Christian and two-thirds of us, a number that's climbing, consider America a Christian nation. But from there, the lines start to blur.

According to a Baylor University study, about 34 percent of us -- fully 100 million Americans are Evangelical. That's an umbrella term covering dozens of denominations, as well as hundreds of independent churches.

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Evangelicals embrace a more literal view of the bible. They feel a close, personal relationship with Jesus Christ and aren't shy about spreading the gospel.

Twenty-two percent of us belong to mainline Protestant denominations like Episcopal and Presbyterian. These denominations take a more flexible approach to the bible. They don't see it necessarily as the literal Word of God.

In politics, they tend to lean to the left.

There's also a specifically African-American strain of America Protestantism. It makes up 5 percent of the country. It's tied to the black experience and can be found in denominations like African Methodist, Episcopal or AME. Theologically, they're conservative like Evangelicals. Politically, however, they are not.

(On camera): The largest single Christian denomination is Catholicism. Catholics comprise about 21 percent of the American religious landscape. They're highly concentrated in certain parts of the country, virtually invisible in others. Thirty-five percent of the Eastern U.S. is Catholic, but just 12 percent of the south.

As for Evangelicals, geographically it is the reverse. They are big in the south. More than half of all people there are Evangelicals. But in the East, they are a small fraction, just about 13 percent.

That lop-sidedness, however, may be changing. Evangelical numbers are growing across the nation. In total, more than half of us, about 56 percent attend church at least once a month; 43 percent attend nearly every week.

(Voice-over): And whether you're Catholic or Protestant, the more literally you read the bible, the greater the chance that you'll be politically conservative.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

COOPER (on camera): The question is, how does that combination of politics and faith play out in the public arena? Does it inevitable lead to Christian candidates and moral majorities and culture wars? The answer has varied enormously over time.

Right now, a number of conservative Christians are reevaluating their role in politics, especially in the wake of the recent election.

But as CNN's Gary Tuchman discovered, plenty of pastors are still sounding the call to battle.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

(BEGIN GRAPHIC)

"Law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and unruly, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane..." (Timothy 1:9)

(END GRAPHIC)

GARY TUCHMAN, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): Christmas time, Lancaster, Ohio. Amid the carols, a warning -- faith is under fire. Christians in America are under siege.

PASTOR RUSSELL JOHNSON, FAIRFIELD CHRISTIAN CHURCH: The ACLU and many others have tried to snuff out the spirit of Christmas. Secularism, materialism, intellectualism, hedonism cannot snuff out the spirit of life.

TUCHMAN: For Pastor Russell Johnson, the culture war doesn't take a vacation. From the pulpit of the Fairfield Christian Church, he delivers a confrontational message.

JOHNSON: And someday the ACLU will go into (UNINTELLIGIBLE) of history and the Christ of Christmas will still stand tall. TUCHMAN: Two months ago, with the midterm elections approaching, Johnson thundered against a different set of enemies -- supporters of gay marriage and abortion rights. He didn't mince words, then or now.

TUCHMAN (on camera): You've said this is a battle between the forces of righteousness and the hordes of hell.

JOHNSON: I do believe there's a battle between right and wrong. I do believe that there is a forces of darkness.

TUCHMAN (voice-over): Johnson calls his opponents secular jihadists, fighting to remove religion from public life. 2004 he organized tens of thousands of Christian conservatives to vote for a ban on same-sex marriage in Ohio. They also helped to win Ohio for George W. Bush, whose picture hangs in the church's preschool.

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JOHNSON: I think this would be somebody they'd pray for. Somebody of courage.

TUCHMAN: This November, Pastor Johnson tried again to rally his flock. This time, though, it wasn't enough to keep Republicans in charge.

(On camera): Pastor Johnson is deeply disappointed by the midterm election results. He compares it to a crucifixion, but then continuing with the religious theme, he adds that every crucifixion is followed by a resurrection.

JOHNSON: Change my heart, oh, God, and make it ever true.

TUCHMAN: Johnson does know how to speak softly.

(On camera): You put the fish here for the beauty of it and for a religious lesson, too, for your kids?

JOHNSON: Absolutely. It's teaching creation. And it tells you something about the -- the creative genius of God.

TUCHMAN (voice-over): The pastor says this would be part of the public school curriculum if not for the secular jihad.

MARK GRIMSLEY, OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY: Pastor Johnson and his ilk are so sure they are on the side of God that they don't mind hurting people.

TUCHMAN: Mark Grimsley, a professor at Ohio State University, says he admires Fairfield Christian's charity work, but says its political message is destructive.

(On camera): Can you blame someone like Pastor Johnson if that's the way he interprets the scripture?

GRIMSLEY: Yes, I can blame him. You can stand up for what you believe without grinding other people into the dirt.

TUCHMAN (voice-over): We asked Pastor Johnson about Jesus' message of tolerance. He says there's a place for tolerance and a place for the truth.

Do you think you have the same spirit as Jesus?

JOHNSON: I think Jesus looked at some people and he said you all are dead men's bones. You have the stench of death all over you.

TUCHMAN (voice-over): The pastor's truth, an America is in danger and can be saved only by an army of the righteous.

Gary Tuchman, CNN, Lancaster, Ohio.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

COOPER: Well, having laid out a fairly black and white image of political Christianity, let's toss in a shade of gray here. It concerns an issue that affects all of us, Christian or not. But it is a relatively new cause for Christian conservatives. On second thought, though, it's really not a shade of gray.

As CNN's Dan Simon explains, call it a Christian shade of green.

(BEGIN GRAPHIC)

"God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it." (Genesis 2:15)

(END GRAPHIC)

(SINGING)

DAN SIMON, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): At the Imago Dei Church in Portland, Oregon, a quiet revolution is taking place.

(SINGING)

SIMON: The young worshipers here are taking a stand on an issue that's dividing Evangelical Christians. No, it's not one of the issues you always hear about, gay marriage or abortion. It's the environment.

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PETER ILLYN, CHURCH MEMBER: It was lonely being a Christian environmentalist. I mean, I came to Imago and I suddenly found this church of 1,600 people where from the pastor and everyone on staff, you know, understood that loving and caring for God's creation is a vital part of their, you know, faith journey.

SIMON: In other churches, Peter Ilyn has often felt like an outcast.

ILLYN: I had one pastor wave his finger at me and say you better never call the earth your mother.

SIMON: Here at Imago Dei, church members, sometimes in the hundreds, regularly go into the community to plant trees, clean areas, and restore parks. Children in their arts and crafts products use recycled materials. (On camera): When you come to spots like here in Oregon, it's easy to understand why the environment is such an important issue for people who live here, including those who identify themselves as Christian conservatives.

But elsewhere in the country, there's a growing movement among Evangelicals to take a proactive stance when it comes to environmental issues.

(Voice-over): It's a dramatic change. For decades, Evangelicals were reluctant to engage in environmental activism.

REV. RICHARD CIZIK, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EVANGELICALS: Oh, it's had impressions in people's minds of being liberal, democratic, left wing, big government, tied to population control, all these kinds of thing.

SIMON: But the escalating debate over global warming has led some top Evangelicals to cast protecting the planet as a moral issue like abortion. They call it creation care.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: It means God, Himself, in his Word has said we have a responsibility to take care of this earth, to be a steward over it.

SIMON: In 2004, the National Association of Evangelicals issued an unprecedented call to civic responsibility, demanding tougher environmental standards. But that triggered a backlash from other powerful, conservative Christian leaders. Protecting nature, they charge, should not be high on the political agenda.

PASTOR RICHARD LAND, SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION: The bible clearly tells us that human beings come first. And so all conservation measures have to be measured against what their human impact is going to be.

SIMON: But back in Portland, many see creation care as part of a Christian's duty.

ILLYN: We're reaching a tipping point where the church is no longer saying, why should we take care of the earth? They're starting to ask, how should we take care of the earth.

SIMON: No consensus on that yet, but a question that even conservative Christians are now asking themselves.

Dan Simon, CNN, Portland, Oregon.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

COOPER: And we heard a bit from Richard Land in Dan's report. He is pastor and president of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

Jim Wallis is the author of "God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It." He's also the president of Sojourners, a progressive Christian ministry.

And the Reverend **Dwight Hopkins** is an American Baptist minister and professor of theology at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

We appreciate all of you joining us.

Dr. Land, do you worry that focusing on issues like the environment, is going to take away attention from more traditional focus of Evangelicals like abortion and same-sex marriage? Is the environment a Christian issue?

LAND: I believe it is a Christian issue. I wrote a book on the subject in 1992 called, "The Earth is the Lord's." And I don't think it needs to take away from our concerns about issues concerning the sanctity of human life or traditional marriage or human rights or sex trafficking. I have a great deal of confidence in Evangelicals' ability to walk and chew gum at the same time.

COOPER: Jim Wallis, you're trying to expand the pool of so-called moral issues, including matters like poverty, immigration, Darfur. Why should Christians be an important voice on those issues?

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JIM WALLIS, AUTHOR, "GOD'S POLITICS": Well, Richard is right. I mean, the 30,000 children who died yesterday, will today and tomorrow again of needless poverty and disease. That's got to be for us a biblical issue. I find 2,000 verses in my bible about poor people.

Richard and I are working together on ending the genocide in Darfur. How can these not be Christian issues if life is literally at stake in all of them?

COOPER: Reverend Hopkins, the rhetoric by some has grown so heated. A few minutes ago we heard from Pastor Russell Johnson, who said he's engaged in a culture war with what he calls the hordes of hell. Is Christianity really under attack in America? Do you believe that?

REV. DWIGHT HOPKINS, PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO DIVINITY SCHOOL: Well, I think that we have to make a distinction between those who use very volatile and militaristic language, who wear their collars as pastor on the one hand; and on the other, what Jesus Christ says in the four gospels of the New Testament.

COOPER: Dr. Land, you know, there are a lot of people out there listening who view conservative Christianity, certainly, as intolerant. How do you respond?

LAND: Well, I -- I don't think we are intolerant. I think that we have convictions. We have beliefs. And we bring those convictions and those beliefs to the policy agendas of our nation as well as to the determinations of our society.

I find many people are intolerant of Evangelical Christians. You know, it's one of the last groups in America that you can -- you can caricature with virtual immunity. COOPER: Do you worry at all that the faith of the church is behind history on the issue of gay marriage or the issue of rights for gay citizens? LAND: No, I don't. The bible has some very clear things to say about homosexuality and about homosexual behavior. I believe the response is to love the sinner, but reject the sin.

COOPER: Reverend Hopkins, how do you interpret homosexuality?

HOPKINS: I think Jesus never spoke on the issue of heterosexuality. Jesus never spoke on the issue of homosexuality. So we're at a loss as far as what Jesus has to say. And I'm not sure why homosexuality has become the sort of life and death issue on how we should build our families, how we should conceive children and how we should live as Christian witnesses, followers of Jesus Christ.

COOPER: Jim Wallis, you know, a lot of Americans grow uneasy when religion and politics mix. What do you think the role of religion is in the public square?

WALLIS: To be an Evangelical means that you've got to bring good news, especially to poor people. And so let's find where we can work together, cross all these divisive left-right boundaries. Not a mushy political center, but a moral center. Not a mushy political center, but let's not go left, not for right, go deeper. What are the moral questions that are right beneath all of our political debates?

If we can help show the country the way forward there, we might even help the divisive left-right politics that now polarize and paralyze, but don't help us solve things.

COOPER: Reverend Hopkins, you know, as Jim Wallis has written, the Democratic Party, they really haven't had much luck reaching out to people of faith. They seem to be making an effort now. Why do you think they've had so much trouble and who, if anyone in the party, speaks the language well?

HOPKINS: I think a lot of that has to do with the fear, the fear that if you raise religion in a political campaign, then you're going to somehow be seen as a loony toon or something of that nature. Or that religion is a private affair, politics is a public process.

I think someone who's trying to present a way for the Democratic Party -- and I would say all progressive people who are concerned about moral issues in the United States would be Senator Barack Obama, particularly his book, "An Audacity to Hope." And there is a Democrat. He talks specifically from the heart on the role of Jesus Christ in his personal life, how Jesus relates to his family, his daughters. And I think it's a very fascinating turn and perhaps a beacon of how the Democratic Party might fare in the next couple of years.

COOPER: Gentlemen, we'll pick up the conversation again a little bit later in the program.

In a moment, people who believe not only that the end is coming, but the end is coming soon.

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(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP) PASTOR LARRY HUCH, NEW BEGINNINGS CHURCH: Yes. You look at the bible and you see all these things lining up, and it's not a coincidence. It is -- it is the end of the ages as we know it.

COOPER: How belief in the end of days is affecting everything, from book publishing to anti-Semitism. And some believe it's even shaping policy in the Middle East, when "What is a Christian," continues.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

REV. JAMES "BO" ROBERTS, SHOWBIZ TONIGHT. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH: If you love the Lord, find his sheep. Find them in your heart. Find them in your neighbor. Find them in the streets, the valleys and the rubble. And bring his sheep back to his fold.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

COOPER: If Christianity is a story, there's a long-running argument among Christians about the final chapters. Mainline Christianity warns against predicting the end of days. Some Evangelicals, on the other hand, believe they know the end is near. And as you'll see, this belief is being felt in some pretty unlikely places, not just in churches, but in synagogues, too, as well as on some of the most sacred and volatile ground on earth, Israel.

More from CNN's Joe Johns.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

(BEGIN GRAPHIC)

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: They shall prosper that live thee." (Psalm 122:6).

(END GRAPHIC)

JOE JOHNS, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): On a bitterly cold night in Dallas, a Jewish shofar horn announces a call to prayer and celebration.

(SINGING)

JOHNS: But this isn't a synagogue. It's a church. And the people you see here aren't Jews. They're Evangelical Christians.

(SINGING)

JOHNS: Tonight, the New Beginnings church is hosting a night to honor Israel. It's a window into a complicated and controversial new alliance between Jews and conservative Evangelical Christians. PASTOR JOHN HAGEE, CORNERSTONE CHURCH: Because there's a new day in Christianity when the Jews and Christians are coming together.

JOHNS: Pastor John Hagee is a pioneer in the booming Evangelical movement known as Christian Zionism.

(On camera): What is a Christian Zionist?

HAGEE, CORNERSTONE CHURCH: A Christian Zionist is someone who believes that Israel has the right to exist. Israel is the only nation on the face of the earth created by a sovereign act of God.

JOHNS (voice-over): In a recent Pugh Poll, seven out of 10 American Evangelicals said God gave the land of Israel to the Jews. That same poll shows the rest of the public, including most Catholics and mainline Protestants, rejecting that view.

HAGEE: You were, you are, and always shall be the apple of God's eye.

JOHNS: By his own accounting, Hagee has raised more than \$18 million for Israeli charities. And this summer he brought 3,500 Evangelicals to Washington to lobby for a hard-line give no ground, pro-Israel agenda.

As he sees it, he's following God's law as written in the bible.

HAGEE: We support Israel because Genesis 12:3, God says I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. That's God's foreign policy toward Israel and the Jewish people.

JOHNS: Many Evangelicals believe that foreign policy will culminate in an epic battle of good versus evil.

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The view tonight, here in Dallas, connects that belief with concerns about violent, extremist Muslims. For these Christians, evil incarnate can be found in Radical Islam.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Let it be known in Tehran, in Damascus, in Beirut that we, too, stand as watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem.

JOHNS: This is not a policy that allows for much compromise. And for those people, the Israeli Palestinian peace process holds little promise.

Earlier this year in a controversial remark, Evangelist Pat Robertson suggested the stroke that left former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in a coma came as punishment from God because Israel withdrew troops from Gaza. Sharon, said Robertson, was dividing God's land.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: And all God's people shouted, Amen.

JOHNS: At New Beginnings, Pastor Larry Huck encourages Christians to reconnect with what he calls their Jewish roots. The church hosts a monthly Shabbat service, some members of the congregation wearing yamikas.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: What we're reading is a Jewish book, written by Jewish apostles, by Jewish prophets about a Jewish messiah. JOHNS: Huck says every Christian should experience Israel firsthand. And a growing number of people are heeding the call.

According to Israel's Ministry of Tourism, about one-third of all tourists from America are Evangelical. (UNINTELLIGIBLE) recently hired a Christian Consulting firm to help boost that number even higher. And Israel asked Pat Robertson and John Hagee to film tourism commercials to air on Christian television.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: To walk where Jesus walked, to pray where Jesus prayed.

JOHNS: The past is precious, but many Evangelicals also see Israel as the key to the future as well. God's ultimate promise, many believe, will be realized in Jerusalem and sooner than you might think.

What's the most important reason to have a connection with Israel?

SCOTT DITCHFIELD, SUPPORTER OF ISRAEL: I believe they play a key role in the end times. I believe we're in the end times.

JOHNS (on camera): Do you see what's been happening in the Middle East as the beginning of the end of times?

DITCHFIELD: The beginning of the end as we know it, yes. Yes. You look at the bible and you see all these things lining up and it's not a coincidence. It is -- it is the end of the ages as we know it.

JOHNS: Pastor Huck believes Israel will be the final battleground for an epic clash between God and Satan, a biblically foretold chain of events already in motion. And there's a heavenly reward just around the corner for true Christians. But where, one wonders, does that leave the Jews?

(END VIDEOTAPE)

COOPER: The where indeed? The answer is coming up in part two of Joe Johns' report.

And who do these Christian Zionists now see as the new Antichrist? Another part of the puzzle, when "What is a Christian?" continues.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: It will end up being a fight between good and evil. God's people or not God's people and of course, we've read the end of the book, and God wins.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: The day is coming when you shall take your rightful place among God's chosen. Yes, know this, that the day is coming. When the Lord himself shall appear.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

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COOPER: Before the break, Joe Johns asked the question, now that a growing number of Evangelical Christians started championing Jews as people who will play a key role in the end times, where does that leave them when the end actually arrives?

And on a more secular note, where does it leave Jews in the turbulent Middle East right now? Here's part two of Joe Johns' report.

(BEGIN GRAPHIC)

"Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book." (Revelation 22:7)

(END GRAPHIC)

(SINGING)

JOHNS (voice-over): This place is devoted to looking at the past to predict the future. It's a center of Evangelical faith. And the faithful here say, the end of the world is coming, but don't say when.

This is the Dallas Theological Seminary, and the scholars here believe God put Israel at the center of both our past and our future.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: He will establish his kingdom in Israel and...

JOHNS: Students here are taught a calendar of biblical events. It's a countdown to the end of days. But that doesn't come until after the faithful simply vanish from the earth. It's called the rapture. Professor Darrell Bock has been teaching here since 1982.

DARRELL BOCK, DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY: But the next thing that happens on the calendar is that Christ comes to gather his church. They're raptured or taken out the world to be with him in heaven. He meets them in the clouds.

JOHNS: The rapture is vividly described in the wildly popular series of books and movies, called, "Left Behind." One in five Americans has read or seen the stories detailing the non-believers who stay on earth, versus the true Christians who are saved.

This scene from the movie illustrates the moment God summons true believers to heaving. They simply vanish, leaving just their crumpled clothes. It's an event Pastor John Hagee takes a bit further. He believes not only that the end is coming, but that it's coming soon. HAGEE: I not only believe it could happen in my lifetime, I believe it could happen any day at any hour. And that includes this day and this hour. I believe we're that close.

JOHNS: For proof, he points to the formation of Israel in 1948, a key event in the bible's prophecy. HAGEE: When my father's generation was talking about the rapture, Israel had to be a state. Israel is now a state. Jerusalem had to be under the control of the Jewish people. Jerusalem is now under the control of the Jewish people.

JOHNS: The Jews, who you support, are raptured up to?

HAGEE: No. The rapture is exclusively for the church.

JOHNS: If you believe this, it's not good for the Jews. They will either perish or convert.

Ken Jacobson, of the Anti-Defamation League, says he's not concerned.

KEN JACOBSON, ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE: You know, we kind of feel like we'll worry about that when it comes. Meanwhile, in a world where Israel is under siege, having so many millions of Evangelical Americans supporting Israel is of immense benefit.

HAGEE: Ladies and gentlemen of America, we are at war. It is a war of good versus evil.

JOHNS: Pastor Hagee also sees the chaos in the Middle East as a clear sign that the end is near. But back at the seminary, apocalypse now? They've heard it all before.

MARK BAILEY, PRESIDENT, DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY: We at Dallas seminary get calls every time there's a disaster. We get calls, is this the apocalypse? You know, is this the end of it? What does this mean?

So I think any time there's a conflict that relates to a Middle Eastern setting, people are wondering how does this fit in to the biblical scope?

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JOHNS: In a 2002 CNN/TIME poll, more than half of all Americans say they believe in the wondrous and terrifying end of time events laid out in the New Testament's book of Revelation.

Jesus wins a glorious victory over the antichrist in the battle of Armageddon. The site of that battle, of course, would be Israel.

BOCK: When I was growing up and coming to seminary, which was in the '70s, there was almost an antichrist candidate of the year.

JOHNS: Among them, every leader of the former Soviet Union -- Henry Kissinger, Saddam Hussein. For some conservative Evangelicals, this year's choice seems clear. HAGEE: There is a new Hitler and he is the president of Iran, Mr. Ahmadinejad. Pharaoh threatened Israel and he wound up as fish food in the Red Sea.

JOHNS: But Professor Bock says all the worry and guesswork is pointless.

BOCK: There's a clock, but there's only one person who knows what time it is.

JOHNS: But ask John Hagee and he'll tell you with righteous certainty that time is running out.

Joe Johns, CNN, Dallas.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

COOPER: One footnote, Iran's President Ahmadinejad also believes in the end times, but it's the Shia version, featuring the return of the Mahdi, who will change the world into a perfect Muslim kingdom.

Up next, though, the ministers and their growing flock who believe not in the Mahdi, but the money.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

PASTOR CREFLO DOLLAR: The Word of God is the gateway to the world of wealth.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

COOPER: Creflo Dollar. Yes, Dollar. And the gospel of wealth, next on, "What is a Christian?"

COOPER: God wants you to be rich. Well, an Amish farmer might disagree. So might a Catholic nun. A green Christian might shun the Jacuzzi and ask, what would Jesus drive? To which a growing number of very popular ministers today might answer, a big old honkin' Bentley.

The story from CNN's Delia Gallagher.

(BEGIN GRAPHIC)

"I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

(END GRAPHIC)

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: This is my bible. I am what it says I am. I have what it says I have.

DELIA GALLAGHER, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): He's the prosperity pastor, brandishing the bible almost as if it were God's checkbook, praising Jesus as every man's top financial advisor.

JOEL OSTEEN, LAKE WOOD MINISTRIES: This year will be a year of your unprecedented favor, that we will see promotions, bonuses, that you will open up doors that no man can shut.

GALLAGHER: Promotions? Bonuses? Is this really the Lord's work? Joel Osteen thinks so. And millions agree.

(SINGING)

GALLAGHER: Osteen is America's top TV preacher, a best-selling author and leader of the largest church in the land, Houston's gigantic Lake Wood Ministries.

OSTEEN: God rewards people that seek after him.

GALLAGHER: It's a simple message that's catching fire across the country.

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RANDALL BALMER, "ENCYCLOPEDIA OF EVANGELICALISM": What Joel Osteen is offering is a kind of feel good sort of up by the boot straps sort of Christianity. In many ways, it's kind of a self-help sort of ethic.

GALLAGHER: Self-help with a heavy focus on finances. Listen to Osteen's sister, Lisa, preaching in Florida.

LISA OSTEEEN, JOEL OSTEEEN'S SISTER: Open up the doors for them to have well-paying jobs with full benefits, Father, in the name of Jesus.

GALLAGHER: In this version of Christianity, good faith and good fortune go hand in hand.

J. OSTEEEN: I believe that God wants to bless us. I mean, it costs a lot of money to send our kids to college these days, and you know, and for us to drive a nice car. Our message that God wants you to have plenty to pay your bills.

GALLAGHER: Other preachers take it a step further.

DOLLAR: The Word of God is the gateway to the world of wealth.

GALLAGHER: Take Creflo Dollar. Yes, Dollar is his real name. He presides over the 29,000 World Changers Church just outside Atlanta. Like Osteen, he lives in a grand house and drives an expensive car. Rewards, he says, any Christian can claim.

DOLLAR: Everything that pertains to life and godliness is in your bible.

You've got money in your lap. You've got a house in your bible.

GALLAGHER: Dollar preaches that poverty is a curse and that poor people can find riches if only they believe. Among the faithful, Rick and Norma Hayes. Rick says he was homeless when he joined World Changers 14 years ago. Now he lives here.

RICK HAYES, CHURCH MEMBER: I can think of one scripture in particular. In Psalms 112, which says, wealth and riches shall be in my house. GALLAGHER: In a recent "TIME" Magazine poll, 61 percent of Americans said God wants them to be financially prosperous.

Still, some Christian leaders like "Purpose-Driven Life" Author Rick Warren reject the prosperity gospel. They call it name it and claim it materialism.

And at New York's Riverside Church, Reverend James Forbes asks who gets left out when there's too much money talk?

REV. JAMES FORBES, RIVERSIDE CHURCH: I do think that extraordinary luxury begins to undercut the -- the authenticity of the message of God's care for all of us.

GALLAGHER: But back in Houston, Joel Osteen preaches that prosperity is God's wish for everyone, both rich and poor.

J. OSTEEEN: The bible says God's longing to be good to people that are looking for his goodness.

GALLAGHER: Osteen's message to the faithful, ask and you shall receive.

Delia Gallagher, CNN, Atlanta.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

COOPER: Well, straight ahead, people who left one kind of Christianity and have come back to another.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: You can come in and have your own thoughts and you can have reason and you can have doubt and nobody will judge you for that.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

COOPER: A church where there's room for doubt when "What is a Christian?" returns.

TOM FOREMAN, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice over): I'm Tom Foreman in Washington. More of "What is a Christian?" in a moment.

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First, a 360 news and business bulletin. Starting on Mt. Hood, Oregon. A hopeful sign in the search for the three missing climbers. Investigators say James Kelly had his cell phone on Tuesday morning. It sent out a signal. They also say the phone was on Monday morning. That said, efforts to find the three men are on hold tonight because of blizzard and avalanche warnings. A break in the weather not expected until Saturday.

On Wall Street, the Dow hit an all-time high. Blue chips gained 99 points to close at 12,416. The NASDAQ added 21. The S&P shot up 12.

And check your Christmas lights. They may be part of a massive recall. We're talking about more than 2 million sets. They were hold at Hobby Lobby creative centers throughout the south and central U.S. If you own them, return them. There is a risk of fire and electric shock. Those are the headlines.

"What is a Christian?" continues right after this.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

PASTOR DAVID JOLLY, RED HOOK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH: Jesus said I am the bread of life. We've all been hungry. We've all either been hungry in the pit of our stomach or the pit of our soul.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

COOPER: Well, as we mentioned in the top, nearly nine in 10 Americans are Christian, but only about half attend church at least once a month. Some have strayed because they no longer feel welcome in their old congregations or denominations.

And as CNN's Randi Kaye reports, some are finding new homes for their faith.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

(BEGIN GRAPHIC)

"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled." (Matthew 5:6)

(END GRAPHIC)

RANDI KAYE, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): It's Sunday morning at All Souls Unitarian Church in Washington, D.C. And Billy and Christy Wynne are celebrating their Christian faith.

The Wynnes came to All Souls after years of struggling to make sense of the dogma they say more traditional churches seem to push on them.

BILLY WYNNE, CHURCH MEMBER: I didn't find that I fit well with the rigidity of the creeds that were being taught.

KAYE (on camera): What was it about organized religion that bothered you so much? What couldn't you accept?

CHRISTY WYNNE, CHURCH MEMBER: I didn't think the focus should be so much on the after life. I felt like, well what about the here and now and, you know, what can we do now to make things better?

KAYE (voice-over): Here at All Souls, the focus is on deeds, not creeds. It's also about embracing tolerance. The Wynnes sit side by side with others who share their moral values, but perhaps not their religious beliefs.

(On camera): When you look around in the congregation, tell me who you see.

B. WYNNE: You see a very diverse church in terms of peoples' backgrounds, their skin color, which is not something that I grew up with. You see people who are comfortable with use of the word God and wouldn't necessarily define themselves as Christians.

One of the very special things about the service to me is the idea that I'm praying to my conception of God and I know that the person right next to me has a totally different concept of God. And yet we're still sharing in that worship. And we're respecting each other's views.

KAYE (voice-over): Billy and Christy both grew up Baptist, believed in God and went to church every week until their teenage years when they became what some call questioning Christians.

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REV. ROBERT HARDIES, ALL SOULS CHURCH: I think a lot of people left church -- the churches of their childhood because they found that the beliefs that they were taught served as walls, really, that divided them from other people.

Hi, good morning.

KAYE: The Reverend Robert Hardies, senior minister at All Souls, says up to one-third of his congregation identify themselves that way.

HARDIES: We see a lot of people who grew up as Christians and who left the church for whatever reason and who are coming back now to reclaim the core of their faith without -- without some of the baggage that came in the more orthodox traditions.

KAYE (on camera): Today there are more than 1,000 Unitarian churches nationwide and about 220,000 members. Here at the All Souls Church, 85 percent of new members are between 18 and 35, an age range that includes those who after years of searching are reconnecting with their spirituality.

What would you say makes this type of service appealing to someone like yourselves who strayed from your religion for a while?

C. WYNNE: I would say it's because you can come in and you can have your own thoughts and you can have reason and you can have doubt and nobody will judge you for that.

KAYE (voice-over): It's a belief the Wynnes will share with their new daughter, Eleanor.

C. WYNNE: And no matter what we practice and who we are, we all are under this same web of, you know, this inner connectedness.

KAYE: They have faith Eleanor can grow up not struggling with her Christianity, but celebrating what the Unitarians believe is the spark of the divine in all of us.

HARDIES: Go in peace and in love. Amen.

KAYE: Randi Kaye, CNN, Washington.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

COOPER: Coming up, what it means to be a Christian. Some final thoughts from our panel when "What is a Christian?" continues.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

PASTOR ERWIN MCMANUS, MOSAIC CHURCH: If you want to sharpen your sword and become the kind of person that unleashes the God-given potential in you, not only do you need to begin to live with a continuous, conscious awareness of God, but you need to adapt your life around meeting the needs and serving the good of others.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

BRIDGET MARY MEEHAN, SISTER OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY BARCROFT COMMUNITY HOUSE: The path to God is often found in the little ways, the unnoticed details of our lives. Like cutting grass for an elderly neighbor, making peanut butter sandwiches for our children, listening to people who are stressed out, even patiently bearing with traffic conditions.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

COOPER: Back now with Pastor Richard Land, president of Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission; and Jim Wallis, author of "God's Politics, Why the Right Gets it Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It." He's also the president of Sojourners, a progressive Christian ministry. And the Reverend **Dwight Hopkins**, an American Baptist minister and professor of theology at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

Dr. Land, we just heard in Randi Kaye's report about how younger Americans are looking for new ways to connect with Christianity. Do you think we are in a period of religious revival?

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LAND: I do. Something is going on, something that's not explicable sociologically or just merely in human terms. I see it everyone. On the campus where I went to college, Princeton University, when I went there in the late 60s was an aggressively, rabidly secular place and now you've got 1,000 students meeting for bible studies in various groups around the campus once a week and well-attended Evangelical worship services in the chapel. I mean, it's really a changed atmosphere.

COOPER: Jim Wallis, I spent a lot of time in New Orleans in this last year in the Gulf Coast and during spring break, seeing thousands of young college students, high school students, young Christians making an effort, putting their faith into action. Do you see a growth of that?

WALLIS: I think a whole generation of young activists now are faith-inspired activists and they say they want to change the world. That's what revival is. Not just renewal in the heart, but it overflows into the world and changes things for the better.

COOPER: And for them, is being a Christian -- what does it mean to be a Christian? And is it the same for this generation growing up now as it was for generations past?

WALLIS: The activists I meet today are not kind of just secular left-wing activists. They're young persons of faith who are getting engaged because of their faith. And so this is potentially a faith-inspired activism for the sake of the world that changes hearts and then changes neighborhoods, communities, nations, and the big issues that politics so far is failing to really deal with.

COOPER: Reverend Hopkins, earlier Delia Gallagher told us about this growing popularity of what some call the prosperity gospel, the idea that God wants us to be rich, kind of a self-help gospel in a way. Who do you think is drawn to this kind of message? And do you think it has real staying power?

HOPKINS: I think that people who feel dislocated, people who feel that their material economic situation is not favorable to them or themselves, people who are actually looking for some type of material prosperity are resonating and responding to this prosperity gospel. And I think that as people begin to continue in the prosperity gospel movement, at some point if a minister of Jesus Christ tells a person in the congregation that she is going to get a Mercedes-Benz and then next week, next month and next year she doesn't get that Mercedes-Benz, she is going to use her common sense and leave that church.

COOPER: Reverend Hopkins -- oh go ahead. Sorry.

WALLIS: I would say, God does not mind prosperity as long as it is shared, but inequality makes God mad. The prophets make that very clear. So it would come up in an affluent church, a comfortable society where this would be put forward. Around the world, where most of the world's people, half of them are poor, living on \$2 a day, the prosperity gospel is an offense. And I would say it's a heresy.

LAND: And I would agree that it's totally contrary to the teaching of both the Old and the New Testament. The idea that we can reduce God's blessings and define them as material things and as material well-being is -- is blasphemous.

WALLIS: It really is.

COOPER: Dr. Land, I want to ask you the same question that I asked Jim Wallis. What is a Christian today? What does it mean?

LAND: It means to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. It means a command to be the salt of the earth. It means a command to be the light of the world. It means to obey the command, to go forth and to share the gospel and never seek to impose it, never use coercion, but as an act of love to seek to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with all who will listen.

COOPER: Reverend Hopkins, Dr. Land, Jim Wallis, it's a really fascinating discussion. I appreciate you all joining us. Thank you.

WALLIS: Thank you.

LAND: Thank you.

HOPKINS: Thank you.

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COOPER: This is a discussion that in a larger sense is bound to continue. It is at the end of the day one of the great ongoing American conversations. One way or another for believers and non-believers alike, it is the story of our lives. We hope you enjoyed this chapter of it and I'll see you next time.

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