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THE

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REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING



Are We
Headed Toward
APOCALYPSE?



An illustration of the Copernican Solar System by Andreas Cellarius from the Harmonia Macrocosmica atlas (1661).

BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

Astrology: Should You Trust the Stars?

God made the lights in the sky.
Why do so many look to them for guidance?

Page 24

Personal from the Editor-in-Chief Finding Answers in an Uncertain World

Page 1

Why the Olympics Can't Unite the World

As tremendous athletic feats took place during the Games, the world outside grew only darker...

Page 4

What God Looks for in Leaders

In a world of electoral promises and political upheaval, citizens are often left disillusioned. Yet there are timeless leadership qualities God values—and a way to make them a reality.

Page 12

Are We Headed Toward Apocalypse?

World conditions spell trouble. The Bible outlines terrible coming events. Here is what God wants you to know...

Page 16

Russia and North Korea's Partnership

The new agreement could be the strongest since the Cold War. What are its implications?

Page 20

7 Money-saving Tips for the Grocery Store

How can you stretch your dollar without sacrificing good health?

Page 28

World News Desk

Page 32

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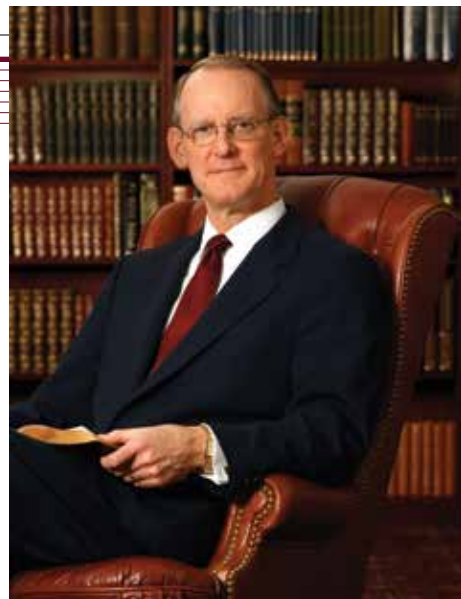
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



Finding Answers in an Uncertain World

THIS SUMMER, the 45th president of the United States was shot at a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, a short two-hour drive from our World Headquarters Campus in Wadsworth, Ohio.

No one was prepared for what occurred at 6:11 p.m. on Saturday, July 13, though many thought it possible—even likely—in the current political climate. I had voiced this expectation for months to a close circle.

The most powerful nation on Earth is in a time of bitter divide. A sense of desperation grips the U.S., with no clear path forward. Amplifying the instability, the current president withdrew from the presidential race. America is in truly uncharted territory.

But the country's political uncertainty is far from the only major issue threatening to throw the world into complete chaos.

In his first public speech following the assassination attempt, the former president gave a dire assessment of the state of the world: "Nobody can believe what's happening. War is now raging in Europe and

the Middle East, a growing specter of conflict hangs over Taiwan, Korea, the Philippines, and all of Asia, and our planet is teetering on the edge of World War III, and this will be a war like no other war because of weaponry. The weapons are no longer army tanks going back and forth, shooting at each other. These weapons [lead to] obliteration.

"It's time for a change," he added.

The Church of God does not take sides politically (Phil. 3:20)—only on matters of right and wrong. But everyone reading this, regardless of political affiliation, can agree *CHANGE* is desperately needed!

But would change brought by the hands of *any* human candidate be enough? The world is *rapidly* spiraling out of control. Problems are now *too many* and *too complex*. Even if domestic and geopolitical wounds were somewhat temporarily healed, most sense the world has entered a new and more dangerous frontier, marked by uncertainty that cannot be pushed back beneath the surface.

As things grow more confusing, the hope for a better future seems more and more elusive. Maybe



Ukrainian soldiers fire D-30 artillery in the direction of Toretisk, Ukraine (July 30, 2024).

DIEGO HERRERA CARCEDO/ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES

you are like many who are questioning why we are here and why the world has come to this.

I wrote a booklet titled *Why Do You Exist?* It begins with a series of questions that are now more pressing than ever: “WHY WERE YOU BORN? Is there a reason—a meaning—for your life? Is your existence part of a divine plan?

“Was mankind placed on Earth by an all-wise Creator as part of a great Purpose—a MASTER PLAN?”

These are the same questions I asked as a teenager in the tense political climate of the late 1960s. I had witnessed the Cuban Missile Crisis, the *successful* assassination of a president and growing fears of World War III. But the world is now *magnitudes* worse than it was as I was entering adulthood! The RIGHT answers to these fundamental questions are now more relevant than ever.

More than anything, humanity is in the grips of what can only be characterized as WORLDWIDE CHARACTER BREAKDOWN. *This* collapse is the *cause* of all the bad *effects* we are seeing.

Notice what the prophet Isaiah recorded about *our time now*: “Behold,

the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your *iniquities* have separated between you and your God, and your *sins* have hid His face from you, that He will not hear. For your hands are defiled with *blood*, and your fingers with *iniquity*; your lips have spoken *lies*, your tongue has muttered *perverseness*. None calls for justice, nor any pleads for truth: they trust in *vanity*, and speak *lies*; they conceive *mischiefs*, and bring forth *iniquity*” (59:1-4).

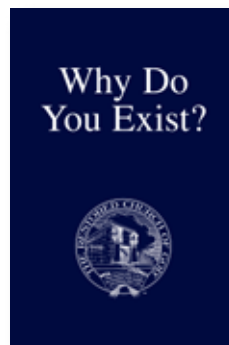
Later in the same chapter, Isaiah further describes this current era of confusion and lies before pointing to the only TRUE solution for change, regardless of how sincerely men would like to bring it this side of the Kingdom of God:

“Judgment is turned away backward, and justice stands afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yes, truth fails; and he that departs from evil makes himself a prey: and the LORD saw it,

and it displeased Him that there was no judgment. And He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: *therefore His arm brought salvation unto Him; and His righteousness, it sustained Him*” (vs. 14-16).

God’s intervention promised in Isaiah is the only path out of this darkest of times. Political platforms and solutions of men—however well-intentioned—cannot pull humanity back from the brink. Only sweeping character change brought by God’s Kingdom can permanently solve *every* problem mankind now grapples with.

I urge you to request my free booklet *Why Do You Exist?* at rcg.org/wdye. You, too, can learn the Bible answers to life’s most pressing questions—the same ones I was led to examine more than 50 years ago—and what *your* role can be in bringing permanent change to this broken world! □



Order a Free Copy!
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Top left, displaced Palestinians return to the southern Gaza Strip following reports of Israeli forces withdrawing from the area (July 30, 2024). Top right, a smoke plume billows during Israeli bombardment on the village of Khiam in south Lebanon near the border with Israel (June 23, 2024). Middle left, former president Donald Trump raises his arm with blood on his face after an assassination attempt during a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania (July 13, 2024). Middle right, rockets fired from southern Lebanon are intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome air defense system (Aug. 4, 2024). Bottom, an Israeli army battle tank moves along the border with the Gaza Strip and southern Israel (April 2, 2024).

TOP LEFT, BASHAR TALEB/AFP; TOP RIGHT, RABII DAHER/AFP; MIDDLE LEFT, JABIN BOTSFORD/ THE WASHINGTON POST; MIDDLE RIGHT, JALAA MAREY/AFP; BOTTOM, RONALDO SCHEMIDT/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



PARIS 2024

Why the Olympics Can't Unite the World

As tremendous athletic feats took place during the
Games, the world outside grew only darker...

BY GARRICK R. OXLEY

GRAPHIC BY KYLE M. HOLCOMBE

Top left, actors perform during the Opening Ceremony in Paris (July 26, 2024). Top right, smoke resembling the flag of Team France is shown over Pont d'Austerlitz. Middle left, headless figures depicting the 18th century Queen Marie Antoinette perform along the Seine River outside the Conciergerie, where the queen was held captive during the French revolution. Middle right, singer Celine Dion performs on the Eiffel Tower. Bottom, French Paralympic Marie-Amelie Le Fur holds the Olympic torch as the Louvre Museum is seen in the background.

TOP LEFT, WANG DONGZHEN/POOL/GETTY IMAGES; TOP RIGHT, LARS BARON/GETTY IMAGES; MIDDLE LEFT, NATALIA KOLESNIKOVA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; MIDDLE RIGHT, IOC/GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM, DAVID GRAY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

As THE 2024 Olympics began in Paris in late July, more than 100 conflicts were festering around the world. The Middle East was teetering on the brink of a regional war. In Ukraine, Russia was advancing slowly but steadily in the east, reducing towns to rubble. Conflicts in Sudan, Haiti and Myanmar were grinding on with no end in sight.

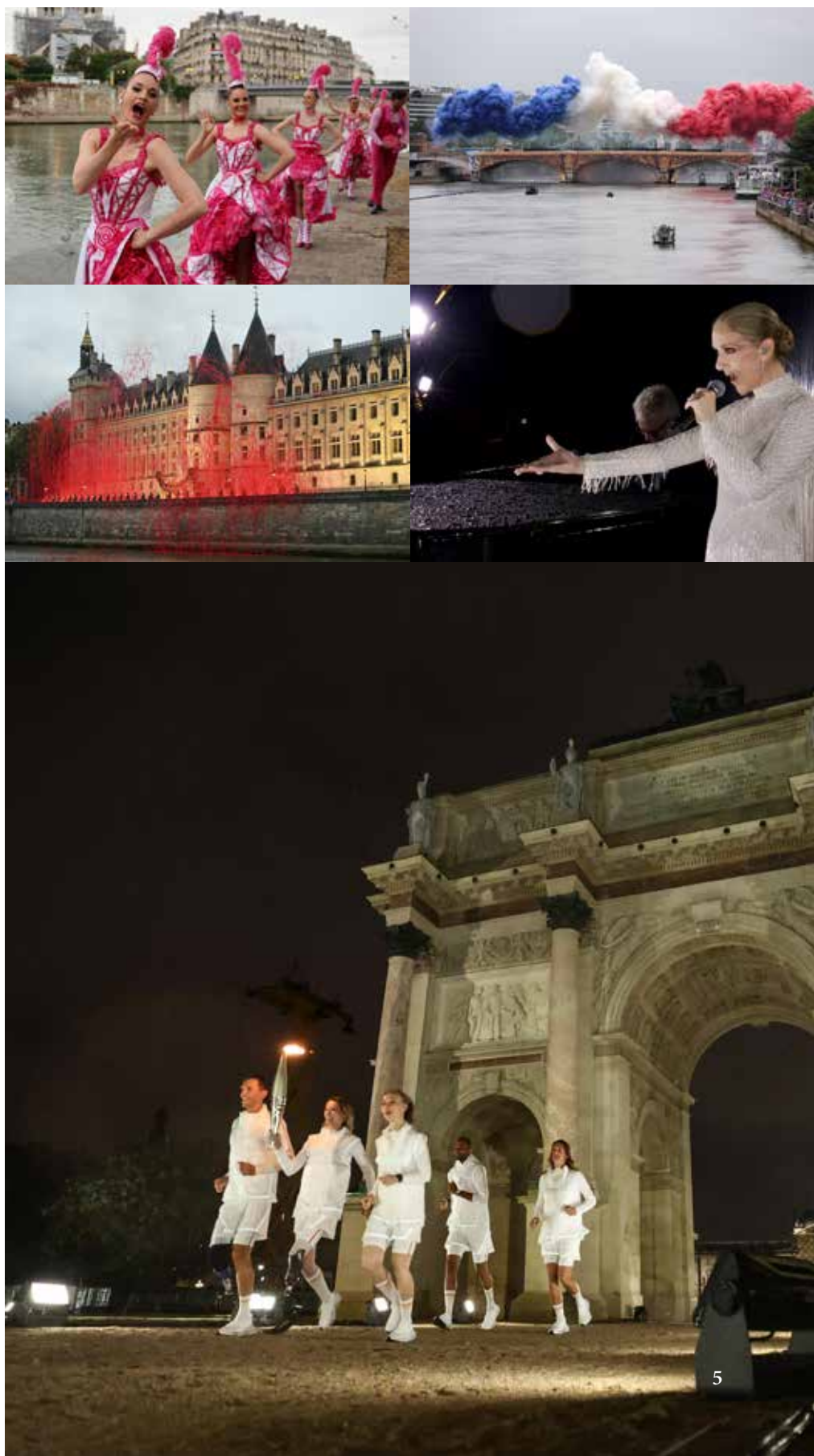
Clearly, the "Olympic Truce" was not being heeded.

In the run-up to every Olympics over the past 30 years, the United Nations has passed a resolution upholding the Olympic Truce, which in theory halts hostilities in the name of granting athletes safe passage and promoting world peace. It is supposed to last from seven days before the Olympic Games begin until seven days after the Paralympic Games end.

In theory.

"Stepping into the Olympic Village, you realize like generations of Olympians before: 'Now I am part of something bigger than myself. Now we are part of an event that unites the world in peace,'" International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach said to athletes at the opening ceremony. He did temper his usual robust optimism with an acknowledgment that they lived in "a world torn apart by wars and conflicts."

This is a pitch the IOC has made often enough that it has become part





Heavy metal band Gojira performs during the opening ceremony (July 26, 2024).

ZHANG YUWEI-POOL/GETTY IMAGES



We're unable to bring peace. We can call for peace, but we probably won't achieve it.

Mark Adams,
IOC Spokesperson

of the brand that the Games project: the Olympics as the great uniter, one that has the potential to transcend all divides. Yet reality can interrupt even the tightest messaging.

Not even two weeks in, the news of missile strikes, annexations and heightened tensions became omnipresent. By July 31, in the wake of the assassination in Iran of Hamas' top leader, the international body had scaled down and adopted a more dejected tone.

"A culture of peace is what we try to create in a very modest way," IOC spokesperson Mark Adams said at a news conference. "We're unable to bring peace. We can call for peace, but we probably won't achieve it."

For an organization that has often waded into geopolitics—the normally stoic Mr. Bach choked up while remembering his late friend Henry Kissinger's "invaluable advice"—Mr. Adams' remarks seemed to signal a retreat in the IOC's ambitions, at least in the moment. "We can only do what we can do. We're a sports organization," he said. "Our job is to let the politi-

cians, unfortunately, get on with what they want to get on with."

The Olympics highlights man's dilemma—striving for peace and unity, but failing to achieve lasting global solutions.

Good Intentions

The Olympic Truce was revived in the immediate post-Cold War era, with roots in ancient Greece. But then and now, it has never quite worked. Russia alone has broken the Truce three times, most recently in 2022 with the invasion of Ukraine—a handful of months after the country voted for the UN resolution. This time, it abstained.

"We live in a divided world where conflicts are proliferating in a dramatic way. The horrendous suffering in Gaza, the seemingly endless war in Ukraine, terrible suffering from Sudan to the DRC, from the Sahel to Myanmar," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said after meeting with Mr. Bach before the opening ceremony. "In a moment like this, it is important to say that the first recording in history [of a]

real peace initiative was the Olympic Truce."

In November, 118 countries voted to adopt the resolution. No country voted against it, although Syria joined Russia in abstaining. In past years, the resolution received more full-throated support—the UN has 193 member-states, after all—but among those who voted for "building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal" were Iran, Israel and Lebanon, all embroiled in the latest flare-up.

"When we talk about sports, uniting people and bringing people together, yes, that is an aspirational ideal," said Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff, a sports diplomacy expert who lectures at New York University's Tisch Institute for Global Sport. "And a lot of that is reality. When you look at, typically speaking, sport does have that power."

The Olympics, she said, are an implement in the toolbox of striving for peace. "I don't think the Games themselves can transcend the world's wars, conflicts, and complex, complicated problems," she stated. "But I think what

Top, Olympian Katie Ledecky of Team United States poses with her medals on the Today Show set in Paris (Aug. 4, 2024). Bottom, cyclists pass by the Louvre Museum during the Women's Road Race on day nine (Aug. 4, 2024).

TOP, KRISTY SPAROW/GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM, TIM DE WAELE/GETTY IMAGES

they can do is provide pockets of space for people to have these conversations.”

The Truce is well-intentioned but ultimately toothless. There are no consequences to breaking it, aside from possible condemnation in the court of global public opinion.

For example, ahead of the Games, French President Emmanuel Macron publicly suggested a cease-fire between Russia and Ukraine during the days of competition. Not unexpectedly, both sides refused, and the war continued with the same intensity.

Russia and Belarus were barred from the Paris Games after a lengthy campaign from Ukraine's Olympic committee, which argued that Russian athletes should not compete even under a neutral flag while Moscow's troops persist with their deadly invasion. Some Russian and Belarusian athletes still competed as neutrals, approval contingent on not supporting the war. That allowance has not endeared the Games to its erstwhile host country.

Ukrainian athletes are under no illusion about Olympic idealism. For them, the Olympics are no longer about their achievements but rather proof that their country is still alive despite the war that began while the last Olympic flame was still lit. They do not see the Games as a respite from the war—it is a way to shout loudly about it so the world does not forget.

Zoriana Nevmerzhytska, 31, attended a flash mob in view of the Eiffel Tower to highlight the hundreds of Ukrainian athletes and coaches, both amateur and professional, who have been killed. Participants bore posters that read “world champions in rap-





ing,” depicting Russian soldiers, and “unmarked troops,” referring to the neutral athletes.

“For me, it’s not about something that promotes peace,” she said of the Olympics. “It can be about unity, but not this time.”

There will be a next time, though. When asked why the world keeps returning to the Truce for Olympics after Olympics, despite incessant conflict, Ms. Krasnoff noted that “we all like the idea that sport in and of itself can be omnipotent, even though we know in reality it is not.”

“I mean, that’s kind of the whole thing about sports,” she said, drawing an analogy. “You don’t dwell on what you haven’t been able to achieve in a

given performance. You say, ‘OK, well, that was that game. On to the next.’”

Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony illustrated just what an uphill battle the Olympics had to inspire the unity desired by its organizers. The wacky and rule-breaking display on July 26 at the French capital astounded, bemused and, at times, poked a finger in the eye of global audiences.

That Paris put on the most flamboyant, diversity-celebrating, LGBTQ+-visible of opening ceremonies should not have been a surprise, knowing the reputation of the French people. But Paris did not just push the envelope—it did away with it entirely.



The opening ceremony illustrated just what an uphill battle the Olympics had to inspire the unity desired by its organizers.

A person riding a horse crosses the Lena bridge to the Place du Trocadero, as Flags of Competing Nations are presented, with the Olympic Rings seen on the Eiffel Tower (July 26, 2024).

RYAN PIERSE/GETTY IMAGES

A practically naked singer painted blue made thinly veiled references to his body parts. A blonde-bearded drag queen crawled on all fours to the thumping beat of “Freed From Desire” by singer-songwriter Gala. There were the beginnings of a menage a trois—the door was slammed on the camera before things got really steamy—and the tail end of an intimate embrace between two men who danced away, hugging and holding hands.

“In France, we have the right to love each other, as we want and with who we want. In France, we have the right to believe or to not believe. In France, we have a lot of rights. Voila,” said the show’s artistic director, who is openly homosexual.

While some viewers appreciated the amorous vibe and impudence, others were repulsed by it. They felt the ceremony’s content detracted from the spirit of the Games. Some even chose not to watch the remainder of the event because of the opening ceremony.

A DJ, producer and LGBTQ+ icon who calls herself a “love activist” wore a silver headdress that looked like a halo as she got a party going on a footbridge

across the Seine, above parading athletes—including those from countries that criminalize LGBTQ+. Drag artists, dancers and others flanked the woman on both sides.

The tableau brought to mind Leonardo da Vinci’s famous “Last Supper” painting, which many associate with the moment in the New Testament when Jesus Christ declared that an apostle would betray Him. For others, the work is a nod to Dionysus, the Greek god of festivity.

The artistic director saw the moment as a celebration of diversity, and the table on which the DJ spun her tunes as a tribute to feasting and French gastronomy.

“My wish isn’t to be subversive, nor to mock or to shock,” he said. “Most of all, I wanted to send a message of love, a message of inclusion and not at all to divide.”

Still, critics could not unsee what they saw.

“One of the main performances of the Olympics was an LGBT mockery of a sacred Christian story—the Last Supper—the last supper of Christ. The apostles were portrayed

by transvestites,” the spokesperson for Russia’s Foreign Ministry, Maria Zakharova, posted on Telegram. The French Catholic Church’s conference of bishops deplored what it described as “scenes of derision and mockery of Christianity” and said, “Our thoughts are with all the Christians from all continents who were hurt by the outrage and provocation of certain scenes.”

Good and Bad

As the Olympics progressed, its massive audience witnessed tremendous displays of athleticism throughout the various events. But the world outside Paris saw no end of bad news.

Basketball, water polo, swimming, soccer, pole vaulting, tennis and other sports captivated millions and brought national pride to the countries that achieved victory. Meanwhile, a new leader of Hamas was selected, cease-fire talks with Israel deteriorated and fears swelled of a larger Middle East war between Israel and Hezbollah. Ukraine added F-16s to its military arsenal and mounted an incursion into Russia, the two enemies remaining locked in war. The U.S. said famine



As the Olympics progressed...the world outside Paris saw no end of bad news.

Shunsuke Izumiya of Team Japan competes in the Men’s 110-meter Hurdles first round heats on day nine (Aug. 4, 2024).

RICHARD HEATHCOTE/GETTY IMAGES

in Sudan could be the worst the world has seen in decades. This is only a brief thumbnail.

As the Games wrapped up, the contest for most gold medals ended in a 40-40 tie between China and the United States. But the U.S. topped the medals table with a whopping 126 overall, compared to 91 for China. The elation Americans felt was contrasted by the heating up of the U.S. presidential election back home, bitter attacks flying back and forth among Democrats and Republicans.

Any temporary peace or unity felt at the Olympics could not transcend the divided state of the world at large. But that does not dampen our enduring desire for lasting harmony to one day come.

“Even though the Games cannot solve every problem, even though discrimination and conflicts are not about to disappear, tonight you have reminded us how beautiful humanity is when we come together,” Tony Estanguet, the head of the organizing committee, had said at the Opening Ceremony. “And when you return to the Olympic Village, you will be sending a message of hope to the whole world: that there is a place where people of every nationality, every culture and every religion can live together. You’ll be reminding us of what’s possible.”

Each of us has a certain idea of what is possible. At times, we may feel more optimistic, and at other times pessimistic. The Olympics cannot unite the world. Will it ever be unified? And if so, how will this happen?

Think back to one of the most infamous moments of the opening ceremony: The scene many associated with the biblical Last Supper. While this famous work of art has roots in paganism and does not accurately depict what Jesus looked like, it is what most people think of if they consider Christ’s last moments with His disciples. But many may not know

that during that momentous evening, Jesus also addressed the subject of unity.

During a prayer to His Father, Jesus said: “I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in Me through their message. *I pray that they will all be one, just as You and I are one*—as You are in Me, Father, and I am in You” (John 17:20-21, New Living Translation).

The apostle Paul wrote, “I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose” (I Cor. 1:10, NLT).

Yet, as we saw, man’s efforts to achieve unity are flawed at best. They could be likened to a “tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:9). Remember the Opening Ceremony. Actions that some may find unifying, others find divisive, and vice-versa. And as inspiring as the high points of the Olympics were, they did nothing to discourage warring nations from continuing to do battle. The prophet Jeremiah summarized the dilemma this way: “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps” (10:23).

Jesus established a very high level of unity for people to attain: Being just as unified as are He and God the Father. This is a far cry from what we see in the world today.

A Unified World

To achieve the kind of peace and unity God wants people and nations to have, foundational changes must take place in the world. Biblical unity cannot be achieved by the efforts of human beings, including those who organized the Olympics, despite the vast millions of dollars at their disposal. Yet societal change *is* coming, and sooner than you might think.

Real Truth Editor-in-Chief David C. Pack explained this in his book *Tomorrow’s Wonderful World – An Inside View!* He wrote: “Everything on Earth begins with government. The governments of men do not and have never worked.”

“But a better, perfect GOVERNMENT—one not left to the devices, machinations, and confusion of men—is coming. It will usher in peace, happiness, unity, abundance, and prosperity for every human being and every country on Earth. While such a vision may seem impossible, it *will* happen—and in your lifetime!

“It was always the Creator’s Plan that a whole new and infinitely better world would come—one built from the beginning on the *right* foundation. One full third of the Bible is prophecy—history recorded in advance. Large sections of this describe the establishment of another world, one completely different from anything ever before seen on planet Earth. The coming utopian age that God planned long ago will be absolutely marvelous—breathtaking to behold!—and it appears scripturally in vivid colors, with sharp outlines, and in exquisite detail, as a stunning, beautiful, panoramic, and previously unimagined future worldscape.”

“There will be absolute UNITY in every aspect of God’s government. And it will not be based on compromise. All leaders—at every level—will seek and find agreement, because all will be in agreement with Christ, who agrees with God. Government, education, religion, and social functions will all be unified, because everyone will be working toward the same end.”

During the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:15), the world will be totally unified—finally measuring up to the high standard in Jesus’ prayer to the Father. To learn much more about how it will come and what it means for you, read *Tomorrow’s Wonderful World – An Inside View!* at rcg.org/tww. □

ELECTION 2024

WHAT GOD LOOKS FOR IN LEADERS

In a world of electoral promises and political upheaval, citizens are often left disillusioned. Yet there are timeless leadership qualities God values—and a way to make them a reality.

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD



THE YEAR 2024 marks a historic time in global politics, with nearly half of the world's population participating in national elections across more than 70 countries. From Asia to Europe to the Americas, citizens have turned out in droves, hoping for change, stability or progress.

Elections kicked off in Asia as Taiwan's January balloting saw citizens voting amid escalating tensions with China. Shortly after, Bangladesh re-elected its government despite political violence and an election boycott. In February, Indonesia and Pakistan also held significant votes, allowing citizens to express their views in complex political environments.

As winter turned to spring, attention shifted to Europe. Russia's March election extended the incumbent's rule for another six years, raising eyebrows about how much citizens were involved

in the democratic process. Meanwhile, Ukraine was forced to postpone its elections until 2025 due to its ongoing war, putting the people's voices on hold.

Summer brought progressive policies for voters in the European Union and a major shift in the United Kingdom as the opposition party came to power. Venezuela's controversial presidential election sparked global protests.

Now, all attention is on the United States. The presidential and congressional elections scheduled for November 5 could not only reshape the nation but also significantly impact the rest of the world. America's highly polarized political environment has raised concerns among voters about the future of U.S. democracy and its global influence.

During these various elections, citizens expressed their leadership choices against a backdrop of intense global

issues, worries about election fairness and the potential for political unrest. Economic uncertainty, security concerns and questions about democratic integrity were on voters' minds worldwide.

As with previous elections, optimism runs high, but disappointment usually follows. People feel let down by those in power, with even the most promising leaders coming up short.

Voters say they value character in those who lead them. They may look for virtues like integrity, competence, vision, empathy and accountability in their leaders.

Interestingly, these virtues align closely with what the Bible says God wants from leaders.

Regular readers of *The Real Truth* understand that the politics and governmental systems of this world are not biblical. Our booklets *Should Christians Vote?* and *A World in Captivity* explain this in detail. Yet the Bible shows that God does use people in leadership roles to fulfill His purpose. He led ancient Israel in the Old Testament through Moses and other leaders under him (Ex. 18:12-27). He leads Christians today through the ministry (Eph. 4:11-12). He is preparing people to reign with Jesus Christ in the soon-coming Kingdom of God (Rev. 2:26-27). God has certain qualities He looks for in leaders.

For instance, Scripture emphasizes qualities such as humility, wisdom and servanthood. Philippians 2:3 says, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Micah 6:8 adds, "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"

These verses show a desire to prioritize the common good over personal gain.

So, if God and voters in nations around the world are looking for the same thing in leaders, why do they so often fall short? What holds them back?



Ideal Qualities

Good leadership, in its truest form, transcends time and culture. The qualities that define great leaders have remained consistent throughout history, from ancient rulers to modern-day politicians and business executives. Both God and the masses recognize the importance and effectiveness of certain leadership traits.

Integrity, for instance, stands as a cornerstone of trustworthy leadership. This attribute is about aligning proper actions with proper values, even when the path is difficult.

President Abraham Lincoln is often called “Honest Abe” for his unwavering commitment to truth and moral principles. While not perfect, Lincoln’s integrity guided his decisions and earned him respect from both allies and adversaries, even in the face of a divided nation during the Civil War.

King David was described as “a man after [God’s] own heart” in I Samuel 13:14. David’s integrity was evident in his refusal to harm his predecessor, King Saul, a man who was seeking to kill David, even when given the opportunity (24:1-7).

Competence and vision are two more necessary leadership characteristics. A leader must have the skills to address complex challenges and the vision to guide followers toward a better future.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, often lauded for his achievements, demonstrated these qualities during the Great Depression and World War II. His New Deal programs and decisive leadership during wartime showcased his competence in crisis management and his vision for a stronger, more resilient America.

In Genesis 41, the patriarch Joseph showed competence in managing Egypt’s resources and vision in preparing for a coming famine (vs. 33-41). His foresight and administrative skills saved Egypt and surrounding nations from starvation.

Charisma and experience, while often underestimated, can also significantly improve leadership effective-

ness. A leader’s ability to inspire and unite people, coupled with hard-earned wisdom, can be transformative. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill exhibited these qualities during World War II. He guided Britain through one of its darkest periods, leaning on his remarkable experience in managing the war effort and demonstrating extraordinary charisma in inspiring his people to victory against Nazi Germany.

Moses, despite initial reluctance, became a charismatic leader who guided the Israelites through the wilderness. His experiences, from his upbringing in Pharaoh’s court to his years as a shepherd, prepared him for the monumental task of leading an entire nation (Ex. 3:1-10).

Empathy and accountability are yet another set of vital qualities for outstanding leadership. An empathetic leader understands and addresses the needs of their followers, fostering trust and loyalty. At the same time, accountability helps ensure transparency and ethical governance.

Nelson Mandela’s leadership in post-apartheid South Africa displayed both these qualities. His empathy for all South Africans, including those who had oppressed him, and his commitment to accountability helped heal a deeply divided nation.

We see similar qualities in ancient King Josiah, who led with heart and accountability. He showed empathy for his people by tearing his robes upon hearing the words of the Law, recognizing how far his nation had strayed. He then held himself and the nation accountable, leading a significant religious reform (II Kgs. 22:11-20; 23:1-25).

Leaders today who possess these and other related qualities, whether acquired through formal training, experience or both, have the ability to succeed. Yet there are still impediments...

Leadership Failures

If good leadership is so straightforward, why do our leaders so often fail to meet expectations?

Falling short is not unique to our time. In the Bible, we see examples of

leaders who strove for greatness but also made great mistakes. King David, despite all the good he did, succumbed to temptation and abuse of power in the incident with Bathsheba (II Sam. 11). Similarly, his son King Solomon, renowned for his wisdom, strayed from godly principles, leading to the division of his kingdom (I Kgs. 11:1-13).

The Old Testament is filled with sordid details of kings and others who failed to rule as they should have. Since there is nothing new under the sun (Ecc. 1:9), these biblical examples help explain the challenges faced by today’s leaders.

Understanding why leaders fail is more than knowing leadership ideals. It is understanding the difficulty of consistently applying them amidst myriad temptations and demands.

Modern leaders grapple with personal and social pressures that can derail even the most well-intentioned. Bad character attributes like greed, jealousy and selfishness are timeless human flaws that continue to plague people. Jeremiah 17:9 underscores just how bad human nature is: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”

Jesus taught His disciples and future leaders, “...whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister [servant]” (Mark 10:43). How realistic is this today when corruption and power chasing are rampant?

The reality of backroom deal-making and quid pro quo arrangements significantly complicate leadership. While sometimes viewed as necessary evils in politics and business, these practices usually conflict with the principles of transparency and integrity that leaders are expected to display. Again, realize that man’s political systems are inherently flawed and unbiblical.

Politics is often a series of battles, with the most ruthless and dishonest ultimately emerging victorious.

The futility of political infighting is well expressed in James 4: “From whence come wars and fightings among

you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? You lust, and have not: you kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: you fight and war, yet you have not, because you ask not" (vs. 1-2). Many leadership failures today are driven by lust or self-satisfaction.

The pressure to please people can be another major obstacle to effective leadership. It can result in compromised decision-making or telling people what they want to hear instead of what they need to hear. This becomes even more challenging when all the people do not agree, forcing leaders to change their message depending on the audience.

Such leaders, who often know better, find themselves torn between doing what is right and doing what is popular. The account of King Saul in the Bible shows this struggle. He "rejected the word of the LORD" to please the people (1 Sam. 15:26).

Despite our high hopes for leadership, human nature and complicated social systems are significant obstacles.

God's Standards

So where does this leave us? Leaders often know the right thing to do but do not live up to what is expected by God or the people they serve. How can those in charge close the gap between knowing what is right and doing it?

Leaders need help beyond themselves. Understanding the expectations of effective leadership is not enough. Leaders need a certain kind of guidance and strength to rise to the high standards expected of them. However, this help is not just about better policies, staff or funding—it is spiritual in nature. Only with God's help can leaders hope to meet these high expectations.

Although most do not seek Him, God is perfectly willing to help those who ask. The book of Proverbs says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart; and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (3:5-6).

If leaders trust God for guidance instead of trying to do everything themselves, He promises to guide their decisions.

Leaders who meet God's requirements naturally fulfill and even exceed the expectations of the people they lead. Proverbs 16:7 explains this principle: "When a man's ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."

When leaders prioritize God's standards, approval and support of the people often follows. Rather than lowering standards to fit into flawed systems, God-inspired leadership requires raising them to a higher level.

"Only with God's help can leaders hope to meet these high expectations."

Guidance and instruction for leaders is freely available in Scripture. Proverbs 2:6 tells us, "The LORD gives wisdom: out of His mouth comes knowledge and understanding." True wisdom comes from God. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." The Bible shows the path toward effective leadership.

II Samuel 23:3 directly addresses leaders: "He that rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." Exodus 18 shows that when Moses and Jethro sought leaders in ancient Israel, they looked for "able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens" (vs. 21).

Space does not allow us to cover all the wisdom God gives about leadership in His Word. But recognize that the responsibility for good leadership goes beyond the heads of nations.

What God expects from leaders, He expects from everyone. Why?

Because we are all leaders in our own way. Every person is a leader in their daily lives—at home, at work or in society.

In our families, we have the choice to lead with love, respect and honesty, or with selfishness, rudeness and lies. At work, we lead by upholding ethical standards and promoting a positive environment, or we can instead do whatever it takes to get ahead, even if it means stepping on others. In our neighborhoods, we lead by being responsible citizens or we fail to properly lead if we care little or nothing about those around us.

The same standards we apply to public figures should guide our private lives. Jesus asked, "Why behold you the mote that is in your brother's eye, but consider not the beam that is in your own eye?" (Matt. 7:3). We must be careful not to focus so much on the shortcomings of our leaders that we cast a blind eye to our own conduct.

The traits we expect from our leaders—integrity, competence, vision, empathy and accountability—are the same traits God expects from *everyone*. All leaders, not just those with official titles, must exemplify godly standards.

And just as the Bible can be a helpful guide to traditional leaders who hold public office, it is helpful to you. We all must seek and follow the same guidance and strength that God offers through scripture for effective leadership.

Applying godly leadership principles starts with you. Yet following God's Word does not mean cherry-picking verses and principles to fit one's own needs and purposes. It requires following the whole thing—something no nation on Earth does today. To get to that point, however, one must know for certain the Book is divinely inspired by God.

Order our free booklet *Bible Authority...Can It Be Proven?* at rcg.org/bacibp. It is sure to increase your conviction in God's Word—and your desire to apply its wisdom in your life. □



Are We Headed Toward **APOCALYPSE?**

World conditions spell trouble. The Bible
outlines terrible coming events. Here is what
God wants you to know...

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

THE APOCALYPSE is big business. Just this year, movies centered around cataclysms made over half a billion dollars at the box office and a boatload more on streaming services. There was “Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes,” “Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga,” “A Quiet Place: Day One,” “Arcadian,” “Lazareth,” and on the list goes.

Yet apocalypse talk is not relegated to the world of fiction. World events are hurtling toward disaster. Unlike entertainment, however, we cannot turn them off.

In May 2023, Russia said that Western weapons support for Ukraine made a “nuclear apocalypse” more likely. In December of that year, *Al Jazeera* published the article “Is the World Capable of Stopping a Climate Apocalypse?” It quoted United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as warning that humanity has “opened the gates of hell.” This August, a former Israeli minister penned an opinion piece titled “Gaza and the Apocalypse.”

Talk of the end of the world is becoming all too common. It dominated conversations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Israel-Hamas war is threatening to spark World War III. And the Doomsday Clock is at 90 seconds to midnight.

A *Study Finds* article added another existential worry: “The exponential growth of artificial intelligence over the past year has sparked discussions about whether the era of human domination of our planet is drawing to a close. The most dire predictions claim that the machines will take over within five to 10 years.”

The article, which explored the popularity of the term “apocalypse,” included a study that “collected all articles mentioning the words ‘apocalypse’ or ‘apocalyptic’ from The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and The Washington Post between Jan. 1, 1980, and Dec. 31, 2023. After filtering out articles centered on religion and entertainment, there were 9,380 articles that mentioned one or more of four prominent apocalyptic concerns:

nuclear war, disease, climate change, and AI.”

A Pew Research Center study found that 39 percent of adults in the United States think “we are living in the end times.”

For Christians, this assertion stems from the events detailed in Revelation. Indeed, the last book of the Bible is filled with horror-inducing imagery. There is the battle of Armageddon involving all the armies of Earth (16:16) and a beast with seven heads and 10 horns (13:1). There are also the seven trumpet plagues that include fiery hailstones (8:7), a star called Wormwood falling from the sky and poisoning a third of freshwater (vs. 11), and a massive supernatural army sweeping the Earth and causing mass death (9:3-11).

The global calamity detailed in Revelation is colloquially called “the apocalypse.”

Yet there is a problem with our modern usage of the word apocalypse. It is not what the original Greek term meant.

Read Revelation 1:1: “The *Revelation* of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass...”

The word “revelation” here is translated from *apokalypsis*, from which comes apocalypse. *The Outline of Biblical Usage* defines it this way: “laying bare, making naked, a disclosure of truth, instruction, concerning things before unknown.”

Realize what this means. The word apocalypse does not necessarily mean doom and gloom, although God is certainly revealing globe-changing events in Revelation.

In books, film and TV, apocalypses are depicted as world-changing events. Afterward, life is never the same. The same should be true of God disclosing His truth.

The Bible reveals that humanity is heading toward apocalypse—but it will look nothing like the world thinks.

Why Record It?

“The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” is one of the most famous

prophecies in God’s Word. Found in Revelation 6:1-8, these harbingers of doom perfectly summarize what most think of when they hear the term Bible prophecy.

The first horse, white, goes “forth conquering, and to conquer” (vs. 2). Then comes a red horse, whose rider has “a great sword” and is able to cause world war (vs. 3). The third rider is on a black horse of famine (vs. 4) and the fourth a pale horse whose rider is named “Death” (vs. 8).

Verse 8 continues and explains the havoc these horsemen cause on the Earth: “And power was given unto them over the *fourth part of the earth*, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.”

Let that sink in. ONE-QUARTER of humanity dead.

What is God saying here? Why would this occur? And when?

Such “apocalyptic” storylines capture the imagination and pique our curiosity. In addition to the cataclysmic events of Revelation are the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and many other biblical writings. When put together, they give you a rough picture of future events. To understand more, read *Revelation Explained at Last!* at rcg.org/real.

Yet prophetic puzzles are a funny thing. As the apostle Paul said, we see prophecy “through a glass, darkly” (I Cor. 13:12). Try as we might, we can never completely understand every future event outlined in the Bible.

If we cannot fully know, why would God commit one-third of the Bible to prophecy?

One reason is to get our attention—and the events outlined in His Word certainly do that!—so that He can reveal deeper truths we can apply in our lives today.

Revisit the description of the red horse, this time in its full context: “And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon *to take peace from the earth*, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword” (Rev. 6:4).

The red horse *takes* peace from the Earth. Realize the implication here. To take peace, there has to first BE world peace. This is not a picture of today. This means the four horsemen must ride at a time *after* world peace is here.

These four horsemen of death and destruction capture our attention, and then God slips in a reference to His awesome plan for all of humanity, which includes how world peace will come.

What Else God Is Revealing

Analyzing future events laid out in the Bible is thrilling. But what should they mean to you as an individual? Here we can learn a lot from the examples of Old Testament prophets. God used them to record what would occur in the future—and that exercise caused them to take a look at themselves and humanity as a whole.

The book of Isaiah declares the future punishment of all nations in graphic detail. Chapter 24 describes the culmination of God's righteous wrath: "Behold, the LORD makes the earth empty, and makes it waste, and turns it upside down, and scatters abroad the inhabitants thereof" (vs. 1).

After years of global peace that clearly demonstrate God's "goodness," those who will not listen will experience His "severity" (Rom. 11:22), similar to a parent chastising children.

These events reveal God's awesome power. And this was not lost on Isaiah. He declared: "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, He takes up the isles as a very little thing" (40:15).

God uses Bible prophecy to reveal crucial truths about humankind. We can so often get caught up in the here and now in this age. World events can be distressing, yet we should remember things from God's perspective: The nations are just as a drop in a bucket compared to Him and His Plan.

Jeremiah is another example. In chapter 10, God used the prophet to describe the sinful conditions of the nation of Israel—and their impending punishment: "For thus says the LORD,

Behold, I will sling out the inhabitants of the land at this once, and will distress them..." (vs. 18).

What was Jeremiah's response to all of this? Introspection. He was able to see humanity's failings in crystal clarity.

In verse 23, the prophet declared: "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps."

Humanity, left to its own devices, cannot govern itself. This should also be obvious to us today, which is why events seem to be pushing us ever closer to global catastrophe.

Yet Jeremiah did not just point the finger at others when learning what God had in store—he also turned inward. He admitted that he, too, cannot direct his steps. He said: "O LORD, correct me, but with judgment; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing" (vs. 24).

When God reveals future events to us, He also wants us to think about ourselves. His Word reveals much more than just the size of hailstones that will fall (Rev. 16:21) or when the moon will turn blood-red (6:12). It contains specific knowledge He is revealing to YOU.

Spiritual vs. Physical

How God reveals spiritual knowledge can be found in I Corinthians 2. It states: "As it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him" (vs. 9).

God must be involved for us to understand spiritual knowledge.

Verses 10-11 continue: "But God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God."

Without God, we can only know "the things of man." With Him, we can know the "things of God."

We must be humble enough to know that we cannot figure things out by ourselves: "But the natural man

receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (vs. 14).

Jesus explained this process in Matthew 11. He said: "I thank You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have REVEALED [*apokalypsis*] them unto babes"—those who have humble, teachable attitudes—"Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things are delivered unto Me of My Father: and no man knows the Son, but the Father; neither knows any man the Father, save the Son, and He to whomsoever the Son will REVEAL Him" (vs. 25-27).

"Reveal" here is *apokalypso*, which carries a similar meaning to *apokalypsis*. God will "apocalypse" spiritual things to those who respond to His calling.

Individual Apocalypses

Paul defined his conversion as an apocalypse in Galatians 1:12: "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the REVELATION [*apokalypsis*] of Jesus Christ."

In verses 13-17, Paul describes how he had persecuted and killed Christians, going by the name Saul, before God called him. This scenario is detailed in the book of Acts.

Chapter 9 begins: "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem" (vs. 1-2).

Verses 3-5 show the life-changing moment in Paul's life: "And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecute you Me? And he said, Who are You, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus

whom you persecute: it is hard for you to kick against the pricks.”

Notice Paul’s attitude in this scenario: “And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what will You have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told you what you must do” (vs. 6).

Of course, God does not strike everyone to the ground and talk to get their attention. But the effect is no less dramatic. When God opens a person’s mind to spiritual knowledge, it is nothing short of apocalyptic—if they respond, their lives will never be the same.

Yet that response requires *action*.

God of Secrets

Reread Revelation 1:1 and notice to whom it is written: “The Revelation [apokalypsis] of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass...”

Through the book of Revelation, God is revealing what will come to pass. God wants people to know what is coming. Yet He only reveals it to specific people: His servants—those who do what God says.

God’s way of life must also be revealed to us. If God did not “apocalypse” these things for us, we would never figure them out.

Notice Deuteronomy 29:29: “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

God is a God of secrets. Yet He does not want to withhold them but rather give them to those who follow His ways. He longs to reveal them to His servants.

A Great Mystery

Bible prophecy should spur us to action, especially the greatest prophecy in the Book: the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

In Romans 16, Paul said the gospel and preaching of Jesus Christ involve “the *revelation* [apokalypsis] of the

mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” (vs. 25).

The gospel message was obscured until Jesus came to reveal it to the entire world. Verse 26 continues: “But now is made manifest [apparent], and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.”

The revealing of the gospel of the Kingdom of God is the greatest “apocalypse” anyone can experience. This is the same message Jesus preached. He plays the central role as Savior in God’s master plan for humanity, yet the Kingdom involves so much more.

God “apocalypses” this awesome knowledge in the first pages of His Word. In Genesis 1:26, God declared, “Let Us make man in Our image...”

God made mankind in His image and likeness. He desires to expand His Family by creating sons and daughters. What does this have to do with the gospel of the Kingdom?

In the Lord’s Prayer, we are to pray for God’s Kingdom to come because it is not yet here. That Kingdom, or government, will soon come to Earth and change everything.

Who will reign in this government?

Romans 8 reveals the answer: “The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed [apokalypso] in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation [apokalypsis] of the sons of God” (vs. 16-19).

These sons and daughters being born into the God Family will be a joyous moment in human history. These firstborn children will then teach everyone who has ever lived to do the same.

Ultimate Apocalypse

While the book of Isaiah describes many turbulent events that will befall

Israel as well as gentile nations the world over, it also details the ultimate “apocalypse”—when God’s Way will be revealed to the entire world.

Verses 2-3 state: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”

The result of Earth following God’s commands? “And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (vs. 4).

In the Kingdom, God will remove the veil that currently covers men’s hearts (Isa. 25:7) and reveal His plan of salvation to everyone.

For all of the cataclysmic events the book of Revelation contains, it is ultimately about the same positive message. In its last chapter, it states: “And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (22:17).

Soon, the entire world can come and take the water of life. For now, God is working with individuals who respond to Him opening their minds.

If you understand these truths, read the article “Are You Being Called?” at rcg.org/aybc. You owe it to yourself to explore this most important question.

Make no mistake, the many terrible events occurring today are heading mankind down a path of doom and destruction. Without God’s intervention, a cataclysm is certain.

Yet, in these tumultuous times, God reveals this to those who follow His ways: “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom” (Luke 12:32). □

RUSSIA AND NORTH KOREA'S PARTNERSHIP

The new agreement could be the strongest since the Cold War.
What are its implications?

IN JUNE, Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un signed an agreement that pledges mutual aid if either country faces “aggression,” a strategic pact that comes as both face escalating standoffs with the West.

Experts said it could mark the strongest connection between Moscow and Pyongyang since the end of the Cold War. Both leaders described it as a major upgrade of their relations, covering security, trade, investment, cultural and humanitarian ties.

The summit came as Mr. Putin visited North Korea for the first time in 24 years and the U.S. and its allies expressed growing concerns over a possible arms arrangement in which Pyongyang provides Moscow with badly needed munitions for its war in Ukraine, in exchange for economic assistance and technology transfers that could enhance the threat posed by Mr. Kim’s nuclear weapons and missile program.

Mr. Kim met Mr. Putin at the airport, where the two shook hands, hugged twice and rode together in a limousine. The huge motorcade rolled through the capital’s brightly lit streets, where buildings were decorated with giant Russian flags and portraits of Mr. Putin.

After spending the night at a state guest house, Mr. Putin was welcomed in a ceremony at the city’s main square, filled with what appeared to be tens of thousands of spectators, including children with balloons and people in coordinated T-shirts of the red, white and blue national colors of both coun-

tries. Crowds lining the streets chanted “Welcome Putin” and waved flowers and flags.

During the visit, Mr. Kim said the two countries had a “fiery friendship,” and that the deal was their “strongest ever treaty,” putting the relationship at the level of an alliance. He vowed full support for Russia’s war in Ukraine. Mr. Putin called it a “breakthrough document” reflecting shared desires to move relations to a higher level.

Military Assistance

Just what the threshold for military assistance would be is currently unclear—maybe deliberately so, to deter other countries from putting it to the test. Mr. Putin initially told Russian media that the partnership provides for “mutual assistance in the event of aggression against one of the parties,” while North Korea’s state-run *Korean Central News Agency* later reported that the pact’s Article 4 called for assistance “in the event that either of the parties is invaded and pushed into a state of war.”

If the pact is triggered, the countries’ obligations are also vague, with *KCNA* reporting that if one is attacked the other must deploy “all means at its disposal without delay” to provide “military and other assistance.”

Experts note that the language is almost identical to that of a previous mutual defense pact from 1961 between the Soviet Union and North Korea, which was never put to the test.

Such pacts are not uncommon and are rarely invoked, while often being touted as a means of deterring aggression, though the agreement between the two unpredictable and autocratic leaders of nuclear nations immediately raised concerns globally.

The United States has many similar treaty obligations with other Asian nations, not to mention through NATO’s Article 5 provision, which says that an attack on a member of the alliance is to be considered an attack against all of its members. The only time NATO’s Article 5 has been invoked has been to come to the defense of the U.S. after the September 11, 2001, attacks.

Russia also has mutual defense pacts with several post-Soviet states through its Collective Security Treaty Organization alliance, including Belarus and Kazakhstan.

Nuclear Implications

North Korea is currently under heavy UN Security Council sanctions over its weapons program, while Russia also faces sanctions by the U.S. and its

Top, Russian President Vladimir Putin shakes hands with North Korea’s leader Kim Jong Un after a signing ceremony following their bilateral talks at Kumsusan state residence in Pyongyang (June 19, 2024). Bottom left, a convoy transports Mr. Kim and Mr. Putin through the Arch of Triumph after a welcoming ceremony at Kim Il Sung Square in Pyongyang (June 9, 2024). Bottom right, South Korea’s 24-hour Yonhapnews TV shows a file image of North Korea’s missile launch during a news program on a TV at Yongsan Railroad Station in Seoul (April 22, 2024).

TOP, KRISTINA KORMILITSYNA/POOL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM LEFT, GAVRIIL GRIGOROV/POOL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM RIGHT, KIM JAE-HWAN/SOPA IMAGES/LIGHTROCKET VIA GETTY IMAGES



Western partners over its invasion of Ukraine.

U.S. and South Korean officials have accused the North of providing Russia with artillery, missiles and other military equipment for use in Ukraine, possibly in return for key military technologies and aid. A U.S. State Department spokesman said that in recent months, Washington has seen North Korea “unlawfully transfer dozens of ballistic missiles and over 11,000 containers of munitions to aid Russia’s war effort.”

Both Pyongyang and Moscow deny accusations of weapons transfers, which would violate multiple UN Security Council sanctions that Russia previously endorsed.

Along with China, Russia has provided political cover for Mr. Kim’s efforts to advance his nuclear arsenal, repeatedly blocking U.S.-led efforts to impose fresh UN sanctions on the North over its weapons tests.

In March, a Russian veto in the Security Council ended monitoring of UN sanctions against North Korea over its nuclear program, prompting Western accusations that Moscow is seeking to avoid scrutiny as it buys weapons from Pyongyang.

In Washington, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Mr. Putin’s visit illustrates how Russia tries, “in desperation, to develop and to strengthen relations with countries that can provide it with what it needs to continue the war of aggression that it started against Ukraine.”

Sam Greene of the Center for European Policy Analysis said Mr. Putin’s trip to Pyongyang is an indication of how beholden he is to some other countries since invading Ukraine. Previously, “it was always the North Koreans coming to Russia. It wasn’t the other way around,” he said.

The trip is a good way to make “the West nervous” by demonstrating Moscow has interests and clout beyond Ukraine, Mr. Greene added.

The North could also seek to increase labor exports to Russia and other activities to get foreign currency in defiance of UN sanctions, according

to the Institute for National Security Strategy, a think tank run by South Korea’s main spy agency. There will likely be talks about expanding cooperation in agriculture, fisheries and mining and further promoting Russian tourism to North Korea, the institute said.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula are at their highest point in years, with the pace of both Mr. Kim’s weapons tests and combined military exercises involving the U.S., South Korea and Japan intensifying in a tit-for-tat cycle. The Koreas also have engaged in Cold War-style psychological warfare.

Limits

There are limits to the relationship, though, say analysts. Russia, the world’s biggest nuclear power, is not interested in major nuclear proliferation, especially by a neighbor. Nor is China, which despite growing clashes with Washington on foreign policy and trade issues is far from the international pariah that Russia and North Korea have become.

Both Moscow and Beijing, while ready to needle the United States and its Asian allies with public support for North Korea, have in the past criticized Pyongyang in public for its displays of missile or nuclear might.

Russia is due to outproduce all of the NATO military alliance on ammunition this year, so Mr. Putin’s reliance on Mr. Kim is limited.

And while the Soviet Union helped North Korea build a research reactor at Yongbyon, the Soviet-era Kremlin was always wary of the nuclear ambitions of Kim Il Sung—the state founder and Kim Jong Un’s grandfather—and found Pyongyang a provocative, difficult partner, especially when it tried to nudge Moscow by deepening ties with China.

Russia has also historically balanced its approach to the North with its relations with South Korea, a U.S. ally but economic powerhouse, said Anthony Rinna, a specialist in Korea-Russia relations at Sino-NK, a website that analyzes the region.

“By sidling up to North Korea, especially by upgrading their rela-

tionship to a comprehensive strategic partnership, Russia risks undermining its policy of diplomatic equidistance,” he said.

China’s Influence

With no obvious options, China appears to be keeping its distance as Russia and North Korea move closer to each other with the new defense pact, which could tilt the balance of power among the three authoritarian states.

Experts say China’s leaders are likely fretting over a potential loss of influence over North Korea after Mr. Kim and Mr. Putin signed the deal, and how that could increase instability on the Korean Peninsula.

Beijing may also be struggling to come up with a response to the Russia-North Korea partnership because it has conflicting goals: Keeping peace in the Koreas while countering the U.S. and its Western allies on the global stage.

Beijing so far has not commented on the deal, and only reiterated boilerplate statements that it seeks to uphold peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and advance a political settlement of the North-South divide.

The Chinese response has been “very weak,” said Victor Cha, senior vice president for Asia and Korea chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, adding that it could be a sign that Beijing does not yet know what to do.

“Every option is a bad option,” he said. “You’re either unable to make a decision because of very strongly held competing views or...you’re just incapable of making a decision because you just don’t know how to evaluate the situation.”

Some in Beijing may welcome the Russia-North Korea partnership as a way of pushing back at America’s dominance in world affairs, but Mr. Cha said that “there is also a great deal of discomfort” in China, which does not want to lose its sway over its neighbor to Russia, does not want to see a destabilizing nuclear power



North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un listens to Russian President Vladimir Putin during their meeting in Pyongyang (June 19, 2024).

GAVRIIL GRIGOROV/POOL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

on its doorstep, and does not want to bring the conflict in Europe to Asia.

But China is not raising these concerns publicly. "They don't want to push Kim Jong Un further into the arms of Vladimir Putin," Mr. Cha said, referring to the leaders of the two countries.

Lin Jian, a spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, declined to comment on the new agreement. "The cooperation between Russia and the DPRK is a matter between two sovereign states. We do not have information on the relevant matter," he said, referring to North Korea by the initials for its official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

John Kirby, the White House national security spokesman, told reporters that the pact between Russia and North Korea "should be of concern to any country that believes that the U.N. Security Council resolutions ought to be abided by." The Security Council has imposed sanctions on North Korea to try to stop its development of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Kirby also said the agreement "should be of concern to anybody who

thinks that supporting the people of Ukraine is an important thing to do. And we would think that that concern would be shared by the People's Republic of China."

One area that China could be concerned about is whether Russia will help North Korea's weapons program by sharing advanced technology, said Alexander Gabuev, director of the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center.

"If China is indeed concerned, it has leverage in both Russia and North Korea and it could probably try to put some limitations to that relationship," he said.

Complicated Relationships

The meeting between Mr. Putin and Mr. Kim was the latest chapter in decades of complicated political and military relationships in East Asia, where the Chinese Communist Party, once an underdog, has emerged as a leading power that wields influence over both North Korea and Russia.

That and other developments have raised alarms in the U.S. that Beijing, now the world's second-largest econo-

my, could challenge the U.S.-led world order by aligning itself with countries such as Russia, North Korea and Iran. Beijing has rejected that allegation.

Sun Yun, director of the China program at the Stimson Center, said Beijing does not want to form a three-way alliance with North Korea and Russia, because it "needs to keep its options open."

Such a coalition could mean a new Cold War, something Beijing says it is determined to avoid, and locking itself to Pyongyang and Moscow would be contrary to China's goals of maintaining relationships with Europe and improving ties with Japan and South Korea, she said.

Ms. Sun added that the rapprochement between North Korea and Moscow "opens up possibilities and potentials of uncertainty, but based on what has happened so far, I don't think that China's national interests have been undercut by this."

Closer ties between Mr. Putin and Mr. Kim could weaken Beijing's sway and leave it as the "biggest loser," said Danny Russel, who was the top U.S. diplomat for Asia in the Obama administration.

"Apart from irritation over Putin's intrusion into what most Chinese consider their sphere of influence, the real cost to China is that Russia's embrace gives North Korea greater impunity and room to maneuver without consideration to Beijing's interests," he said.

Mr. Russel, now vice president for international security and diplomacy at the Asia Society Policy Institute, said that Mr. Kim is eager to reduce his country's dependence on China.

"The dilution of Chinese leverage means Kim Jong Un can disregard Beijing's calls for restraint," he said, "and that is much more likely to create chaos at a time when [Chinese leader] Xi Jinping desperately wants stability."

Keep your eyes on how Russia and North Korea's partnership develops, and how this pact impacts their relationships with China, America and the rest of the world. □



ASTROLOGY

Should You Trust the Stars?

God made the lights in the sky. Why do so
many look to them for guidance?

BY NESTOR A. TORO

THE STARS may not hold their fate, but they may hold their next date. A 2024 study from The Harris Poll Thought Leadership Practice finds most Americans believe at least somewhat in astrology—and strong majorities, especially among Millennials, say astrology literally makes or breaks their romances.

The findings are based on a January 2024 survey of a nationally representative sample of 2,069 U.S. adults across all demographic groups: Gen Z (ages 18-26), Millennials (ages 27-42), Gen X (ages 43-58) and Boomers (ages 59 and older).

Among the key findings: A strong majority of Americans (85 percent) feel either positive or neutral about astrology, and about six in 10 agree that “astrology provides comfort in uncertain times by serving as a reassuring friend for those seeking guidance.”

“As people seek to try to navigate today’s implausible uncertainty and misinformation, astrology for many has become one source of trusted or at least considered advice,” said Libby Rodney, Chief Strategy Officer and Futurist at The Harris Poll. “We especially found it interesting in the realm of dating, where over half of Millennials consult the signs before going out on a date, and four in 10 have actually canceled a date due to an undesired sign.”

Imagine receiving a text message that says, “Sorry, my horoscope advised me not to come,” or “The stars got in the way,” while you are waiting for a date who never shows up! Yet Millennials believe their faith in astrology pays off: Well over half of them say astrology has improved their dating life and almost two-thirds say it has improved their relationships.

In addition, majorities say they have consulted or would consult the stars for self-care, health or relationship advice, and nearly half would do so for help on life choices or career.

Accessing horoscopes has evolved significantly from the days of daily newspapers. Today, people can find

them through astrology websites, phone apps, email subscriptions, podcasts and social media.

For instance, the astrological social networking service *Co-Star* offers an “astrology machine” that provides customized horoscopes. The machine “features a large circular screen with a moon on it, and little dials that indicate where the planets were at the time of your birth and where they are now,” a *Bustle* article stated. “But the real magic takes place on a smaller screen that includes a list of pre-written questions for you to have answered based on your birth chart.

“To receive your personalized answers, you’ll need to input your birth date, month, and year, as well as the time and city in which you were born...In the end, your answer is printed on a piece of receipt paper, almost like a little souvenir.”

While fun and entertainment were the biggest reasons people in the study said they engaged with astrology, nearly a third said astrology helps them understand themselves better or is a tool for self-reflection.

For Millennials, astrology can even be an alternative to “traditional” religion—about a third say astrology “gives me something bigger than myself to believe in,” and most say more of their peers believe in astrology than they do in religion.

What fuels the fascination with astrology? The Bible reveals what is behind its appeal and whether the Creator of the stars ever intended them to guide your life decisions.

Believers and Skeptics

Believers in astrology seek their predictions or horoscopes, which, according to *Astronomy.com*, “are based on the signs of the zodiac, a loose collection of constellations that the Sun passes through each year. This itself is a form of astrology, which claims that heavenly objects, especially the positions of the Moon, Sun, and planets with respect to the constellations, can determine and even predict our lives.”

In the Harris Poll, half of Americans say they “believe somewhat” in astrology, finding it fun and interesting to learn about, but not all true. But nearly one in five are “total believers,” saying they identify with astrological meanings and predictions.

Gen Z was, in one way, the generation most skeptical of astrology: More than half say they “judge people who take astrology too seriously,” compared to 38 percent of all respondents.

The Harris Poll corrects a common misconception that astrology is a “girl thing”: Men are as likely as women to be “total believers,” more likely to consult astrology for guidance, more likely to pay for astrology, and pay more for it on average.

A *Time* article titled “Where Do Zodiac Signs Come From? Here’s the True History Behind Your Horoscope” explains, “While some horoscope sites may promise predictions based on the ‘movement’ of the stars, it’s important to remember that it’s the Earth that’s moving, not the stars. The reason why stars look like they’re moving, both throughout the night and over the course of the year, is because the Earth rotates on its axis and orbits around the Sun. But, before most humans knew that, they spent a lot of time thinking about what was happening up there in the sky.”

Consider the incredibly slim chances that an object light-years away could impact a person on Earth. It is equivalent to believing that the flap of a butterfly’s wings in the Amazon could trigger a typhoon in Japan!

Yet the belief that the positions and movements of celestial bodies, like stars and planets, can influence human events and personalities dates all the way back to ancient Babylon.

William Langer’s *An Encyclopedia of World History* states: “When Babylon became a great metropolis and the capital of an empire, its god Marduk acquired a new importance and...became the supreme god of the pantheon and was later called Bel [the ‘Baal’ referenced in the Bible]...The most characteristic and influential

features of Babylonian religion, aside from its mythology, were the elaborate systems of magical practices (incantations) and the interpretation of omens (divination), particularly the movements and position of the heavenly bodies (astrology), the actions of animals, and the characteristics of the liver of sacrificial victims.”

From Babylon, astrology spread to Egypt, Greece, India, China, Rome, Byzantium and even Iran and the Islamic world.

Astronomy.com explains, “For millennia, astronomy and astrology were synonymous.” It later adds, “By the 1800s, however, astrology began to separate from astronomy. By that time astronomers had discovered two new planets in the solar system, and began to realize that a) there were a lot more stars than we had previously thought and b) those stars were impossibly far away. Armed with a newfound understanding of the gravitational force, they realized that the planets and stars could have no influence whatsoever on our Earthly lives, and the profession of astronomy began to focus more on the physics of the cosmos rather than astrological predictions.”

Astrology has experienced numerous resurgences throughout history. The concept of daily newspaper horoscopes became widely accepted after *London’s Sunday Express* published an astrological profile in a 1930 feature about Princess Margaret’s birth. This trend saw a significant boost in the late 1960s when the counterculture movement, fueled by a fascination with Eastern mysticism, alternative spiritual practices and the use of psychoactive drugs, embraced astrology.

Astrology and the Bible

We saw that some people believe in astrology more than religion. Is there a conflict between the Bible and this practice? Are these belief systems compatible? Many Christians, for example, do not see a problem with reading their horoscope from time to time.

The Bible says, “Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at

the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them” (Jer. 10:2).

Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance defines the Hebrew word for “heaven” in this verse as “the sky (...aloft; the dual perhaps alluding to the visible arch in which the clouds move, as well as to the higher ether where the celestial bodies revolve)...air...astrologer...”

Verse 3 gives the reason we should not “learn” it: “For the customs of the people are *vain*.” The word translated “vain” here means: “emptiness or vanity; figuratively something transitory and unsatisfactory...” (*Strong’s*).

Astrology would have been popular back in ancient times, yet the Bible shows God does not want us to get involved with it, because it is vanity, or emptiness.

Centuries before Jeremiah’s writing, God warned ancient Israel as they were getting ready to enter the land He had promised them: “Take you therefore good heed unto yourselves...Lest you corrupt yourselves... And *lest you lift up your eyes unto heaven, and when you see the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, should be driven to worship them, and serve them*, which the LORD your God has divided unto all nations under the whole heaven” (Deut. 4:15-16, 19).

Worshipping heavenly bodies does not require people to physically prostrate themselves before them. By simply regarding them as having supernatural power to influence life decisions, personality, moods, etc., a person is granting some control over their life to those physical things. God considers this worship.

Another verse states, “And they left all the commandments of the LORD their God...*and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal*” (II Kgs. 17:16). Here the Bible underscores the connection between astrology and Baal.

This sampling of verses clearly shows that God does not approve of astrology. He condemns it in the strongest terms.

Spirit of Divination

Acts 16 contains a fascinating account of God’s servants being met by “a certain damsel possessed with a *spirit* of divination...which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying” (vs. 16). This verse exposes the real driving force behind any form of divination, “soothsaying,” or foretelling, such as astrology. A *spirit* influences those who do it.

It is interesting that the English word “divination” can be traced back to a Latin word that means “to be inspired by a god” (*etymonline.com*). Since He condemns divination, this cannot be speaking of the true God of the Bible.

II Corinthians 4:4 speaks of “the god of this world” who has “blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” The context shows this is speaking of Satan the devil. Did you realize that the Bible refers to this being, who can blind people from the truth, as a “god”? That should sober you. Satan, the counterfeit “god of this world,” is the spirit behind astrology.

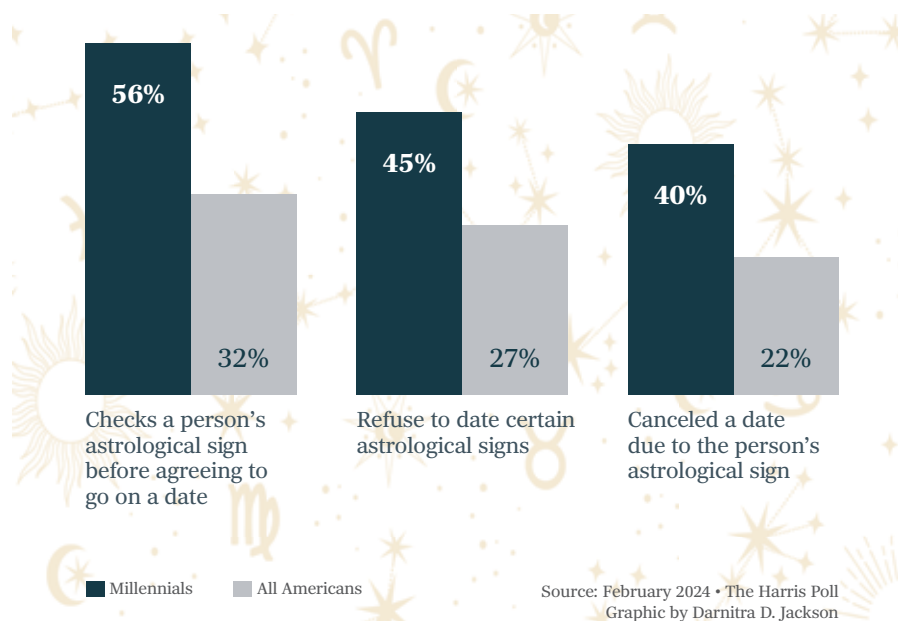
Acts 16:16 also shows there is “much gain” for those in the business. Even today, the Harris Poll shows that Americans’ overall belief in astrology is strong enough that people will pay—often a lot—for astrology content and services. Nearly three in 10 Americans pay monthly for astrological content, with median spending between \$20 and \$49 per month—and one in six pays \$100 a month or more. That trend is even stronger for Millennials, where more than half said they pay for astrology content.

The rest of the story in Acts shows that when the apostle Paul cast out the evil spirit from the damsel, “her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone” (vs. 19), which led to God’s true servants being beaten and thrown in prison.

Why then are so many people—even Bible readers—still drawn to astrology?

How Astrology Influences Dating Decisions

Nearly half of Millennials refuse to date certain signs, with over half checking a person's sign before agreeing to a date.



Spiritual Void

Psalm 84:2 begins to answer: “My heart and my flesh cries out for the living God.” Read also Matthew 5:6: “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”

These verses illustrate that human beings have a spiritual *void*.

Romans 15 adds how this void should be filled: “Now the God of hope *fill you* with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit” (vs. 13). This scripture shows that this spiritual void is only meant to be filled by God’s Holy Spirit. Without it, we remain hopeless, looking for answers from above.

Think: If people did not have this void, they would not be compelled to look to the stars for answers, because they would already have all the answers themselves!

In his book *The Awesome Potential of Man*, Real Truth Editor-in-Chief

David C. Pack expands on this missing spiritual component: “Without the Spirit of God, people are simply *incomplete*. Their existence remains limited to what they can acquire on their own without God’s help. Thus, vast amounts of *spiritual* knowledge remain beyond reach.”

This is the little-understood reason that drives people to tap into various forms of divination, such as astrology. Astrology capitalizes on the basic human need to fill that spiritual void. Yet having access to the Holy Spirit is not a magic pill that one can pop whenever needed. It involves nurturing a genuine relationship with the living God of the Bible.

Jesus said in John 14:21, “He that *has My commandments, and keeps them*, he it is that loves Me: and he that loves Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.”

In this context, He adds in verse 26 that “the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, he shall teach you all things...”

“Ten Times Better”

Astrology offers a quick and superficial alternative to a proper relationship with God—a mere spiritual “empty calorie snack” rather than the deep connection found through obedience to God’s Law.

While astrology may provide a temporary, cheap fix for spiritual emptiness, why settle for worshipping the stars when you can worship the Creator who made them? Why rely on a horoscope when you have access to God’s Word? Why choose a fleeting solution when you can have your spiritual void filled by the power of the Holy Spirit?

Stars can be useful for navigation if you are out at sea without a GPS or admiring God’s vast universe. However, relying on them to guide life’s decisions is both unscientific and unbiblical.

The book of Daniel, written while he was in captivity in Babylon, where astrology is historically traced back to, illustrates the stark contrast between four of God’s servants versus astrologers. The passage records that “among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them *ten times better* than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm” (1:19-20).

Astrology pales in comparison to the wisdom and guidance available through the Holy Spirit. You will also find God’s wisdom “ten times better” than anything astrology can offer. You can have access to God now if you are willing to seek Him. And we are here to assist you in that journey.

To learn more, read or order *The Awesome Potential of Man* for free at rcg.org/tapom. □

7 Money-Saving Tips for the Grocery Store

How can you stretch your dollar without sacrificing good health?

BY F. JACO VILJOEN AND
GARRICK R. OXLEY



INFLATION PEAKED in 2022. Yet Americans still grapple with money anxiety. This is because prices have not come down far enough for people to feel financially secure. A staggering 80 percent of Americans say that the cost of living is their most significant stressor, with inflation a close second at 73 percent, according to a personal finance poll from Clever Real Estate.

As costs rise, incomes do not—or at least not at a level that keeps consumers' heads above water. Wages are a challenge, with salaries remaining the same despite soaring costs of basic needs. And making ends meet is getting harder: 56 percent of Americans report being underpaid.

Cutting back on spending is an obvious tactic to try to mitigate these challenges. But this is easier said than done. When consumers have no pur-

chases besides essentials, cutting back can mean denying necessities like food, medical care and housing. 44 percent of Americans admit to skipping meals to be able to pay a bill. These needs are often the first areas cut when consumers cannot afford the basics.

The grocery store is where we shop for life's essentials—the food we need to feed ourselves and our families. If you have noticed that you are still paying more than before for the same amount of groceries, you are not alone. Despite inflation easing, grocery prices are still high—up 21 percent on average since inflation started to surge more than three years ago.

“When inflation rises, it reduces people's ability to afford groceries by increasing the overall cost of goods,” said Cassandra Happe, analyst for WalletHub.

Unlike other budget items, you cannot just stop buying groceries when they are pricey, and there is nothing you can do about inflation. But you can find ways to save on groceries so they do not heavily affect your wallet.

One of the challenges with cutting back on grocery spending is that it becomes easy to cut corners on our health.

When money is tight, we may be tempted to rely on cheap, heavily processed snacks or even skip the grocery store entirely, favoring fast-food. These foods are filling and provide a certain immediate gratification of “comfort food” ingredients—high levels of fat, sugar and sodium.

The New York Times reported, “No country has embraced the movement toward commercialized, prepackaged food as much as the United States. Americans eat 31 percent more pack-



People shop for food at a store in Rosemead, California (Jan. 19, 2024).

FREDERIC J. BROWN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

aged food than fresh food and they consume more packaged food per person than their counterparts in nearly all other countries.”

Yet it is a mistake to assume that fast-food is the cheapest option. Prices have been rising there as well. And while there are healthier options at some fast-food restaurants, it is still better for us to cook at home. When we shortchange our health, we pay for it in the long run.

Even in the face of financial difficulties, you can avoid convenient, empty nutrition for a diet that will keep you healthy but not break the bank. Here are seven money-saving tips that will help you stretch your dollar and support good health.

(1) Basic Planning

Making a budget is a key to keeping grocery spending under control, and

the first step is to track how much you are already spending. Start by reviewing how much you have spent on your last few grocery shopping trips, recommended David Brindley, deputy editor for AARP Bulletin.

If you do not keep receipts from past grocery runs, try looking at your bank account statement and adding up the grocery charges. Once you know how much you spend, set a goal. This could involve staying within a specific budget for a pay period or reducing your spending by a certain amount.

Before you head to the store, take a moment to look around. Ensure you know what you currently have in your fridge and your pantry. Sarah Schweisthal, personal finance expert and social media manager at budgeting app YNAB, recommends taking everything out and making an inven-

tory so you do not buy duplicates of things you already have on hand.

Mr. Brindley also recommends planning to cook multiple meals with similar ingredients, which saves money and cuts down on food waste.

For example, you may wish to get a large container of spinach and use it for salads with lunch for the first few days and then spice it up and cook it with chicken for dinner on the fourth day. There are many different options.

Once you have tracked your spending and inventoried what you already have, the next step is to make a plan. Write down or capture in a document on your computer or smartphone the items you are looking to buy and your estimated cost, making sure you stay on budget. Meal planning for the week or month can be a good way to stay on top of your spending, Ms. Schweisthal said. It does not need to be complicated.

When you do make it to the store, going up and down the aisles can sometimes make you crave things that you have not planned for, like a snack or a new dish. If you foresee that it will be hard for you to stick to your list, include some flexibility in your plan, such as allotting a specific dollar amount for snacks or even a random item that catches your eye at the checkout line.

“I think having flexibility in a plan actually helps you stick to it more,” Ms. Schweisthal stated.

You can use a simple paper shopping list, or apps like OneNote or Google Keep. You can also try shopping list apps like OurGroceries or Listonic. There are also various apps to specifically help you with meal planning such as AnyList or Mealime. Proper planning will help you buy what you need once you are at the store and reduce impulse spending.

Be sure to compare prices of different brands. Since buying in bulk can be very cost-effective, you could team up with a friend or a family member to buy specific items in large quantities and split them, sharing the discount. If you are in charge of buying groceries for your entire family, it can be beneficial to include them in your grocery budgeting routine. Also, avoid shopping when you are hungry. Go to the store after a meal or a light snack.

Slowing down and taking time to plan can feel difficult at first, especially if you are working more than one job or facing other serious time demands. But it pays dividends!

(2) Try Coupons

Kiersten Torok started using coupons back when she was in high school, after her parents lost their jobs during the 2008 recession. She began relying on them even more in 2020, when she lost her own job during the pandemic. Now she is using her social media platform to help others learn how to save.

“When times like these come up, coupons are a necessity for so many

Americans,” said Ms. Torok, known on Instagram and TikTok as Torok Coupon Hunter.

Many might think that using coupons means cutting them out of a magazine. While you can certainly still do that, there are now easier ways to get the discounts. Many stores, like Walmart and Target, have coupons available on their apps.

“All you have to do is scan an item in a store, the coupons pop up on your app and then they automatically apply in the register,” Ms. Torok said. “It’s become much more streamlined.”

One of Ms. Torok’s coupon golden rules is: Never pay big for toothpaste—there is always a combination of coupons and offers available. For anyone who wants to try couponing, Ms. Torok recommends that you first start using them at your favorite store and never buy things you do not need, even if there is a big discount.

However, even when couponing, be diligent to read labels of unfamiliar products. Many discounted and advertised products are not nutritious. Remember, your health is at stake!

Apps like Flipp, which lets you browse for coupons from major grocery stores, and Ibotta, an app that gives you cash back for using coupons, can make your couponing journey easier.

(3) Shop Online

If you tend to wander off your grocery list because every time you go to the store you buy things you do not need, shopping online and picking up curbside is a good workaround.

“I 100% recommend sitting down Sunday morning and just looking at the stores and comparing the items you need for the week, especially with things you can get for curbside pickup,” Ms. Torok said.

If you buy your groceries from multiple stores because each has better prices on some items, ordering ahead of time can also save time.

You can also save money by using food-sharing apps such as Olio, which connects people around a community

to share extra grocery items, and Too Good to Go, where you can buy surplus food at a discount.

(4) Opt for Nutrient-dense Items

Our first few tips have focused on how you shop. The next several tips deal with what you should shop for.

Nutrient-dense food is filling and promotes satiety, the feeling of being satisfied after eating. Cutting down on how much you eat will aid any grocery budget.

According to an article by the U.S. Department of Agriculture: “Dark green leafy vegetables are great sources of nutrition. Salad greens, kale and spinach are rich in vitamins A, C, E and K, and broccoli, bok choy and mustard are also rich in many of the B-vitamins. These vegetables also contain an abundance of carotenoids—antioxidants that protect cells and play roles in blocking the early stages of cancer. They also contain high levels of fiber, iron, magnesium, potassium and calcium. Furthermore, greens have very little carbohydrates, sodium and cholesterol.”

The organization later stated: “Perhaps one of the most appealing benefits of dark green leafy vegetables is their low calorie and carbohydrate contents and their low glycemic index. These features make them an ideal food to facilitate achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight. Adding more green vegetables to a balanced diet increases the intake of dietary fiber which, in turn, regulates the digestive system and aids in bowel health and weight management.”

Compare this to a popular alternative—items filled with corn syrup or sugar, devoid of nutrition—so-called foodless foods. The value you gain in your health and energy from buying healthy foods will be worth it.

Try to avoid items that contain bleached flour or empty carbohydrates. And be aware that even whole wheat has changed after decades of hybridization, prompting some to avoid it in favor of other grains such as quinoa and brown rice.

Minimize consumption of packaged meals. A rule of thumb: If it is boxed, bagged or canned, it has likely spent extended time on a shelf and ideally should not be a large part of your diet.

Buy fresh produce. While this concept may go against conventional wisdom for those on a tight budget since fresh food has a shorter shelf life, the health benefits you reap outweigh the fact that a given product cannot sit in your refrigerator for very long.

One fresh produce strategy is to buy items that can be eaten raw or cooked later. For example, kale can be eaten fresh in a salad and sauteed later if it starts to wilt slightly. This also applies to tomatoes, peppers and green beans, among others.

Even though eating fresh produce sooner is best, it is versatile. It can be used in a salad, cut up and frozen, added to a soup, roasted and so on. Once vegetables are cooked, they often last longer. Roasted vegetables, for example, can last up to a week.

In addition, buying fresh produce grown locally has a number of benefits. When this is unavailable, frozen produce can be your next best option.

(5) Forget Soda, Drink Water

While water is not food, it will help you feel full and keep your body running well. Some sources recommend drinking one ounce per two pounds of body weight daily.

“Water serves as a lubricant,” a *New York Times* Health Guide explained. “It makes up saliva and the fluids surrounding the joints. Water regulates the body temperature through perspiration. It also helps prevent and relieve constipation by moving food through the intestines.”

In many places, water is still free, though you may need to purchase a water filter. By contrast, soda or other soft drinks are increasingly expensive and can be detrimental to good health given their high levels of sugar and salt. According to *USA Today*, Americans drink an average of 44 gallons of soda per person per year. Think of the health benefits and cost savings that would

result if these drinks were replaced with water.

(6) Skip Sauces and Use Spices

Most premade sauces contain synthetic additives or unnecessary sweeteners. To save money and help your health, try creating your own blend of flavor using spices and herbs. “Technically, spices are vegetables in concentrated form,” registered dietitian Wendy Bazilian told *Fitness* magazine. “Like veggies, they contain thousands of healthy phytonutrient compounds, including antioxidants.”

“I think of dried oregano leaves as miniature salad greens,” Bazilian says. One teaspoon contains not only six micrograms of bone-building vitamin K but also the same amount of antioxidants as three cups of spinach. And preliminary research indicates that oregano can help fend off stomach flu. ‘Bacteria often hitch a ride on the food we eat, and oregano may keep them from multiplying and making us sick,’ Bazilian says.”

Skip sugar-filled barbecue sauce for your chicken and opt instead for a flavorful marinade of olive oil, salt, pepper and red pepper flakes. Also, try mixing a few pinches of dried basil into some olive oil with salt, pepper and a trace of lemon to create an easy Italian dressing. This is a welcome alternative to the substances found in most store-bought salad dressings such as polysorbate 60 (an emulsifier that conjoins ingredients) or “caramel color” (which can contain toxic contaminants).

There are endless additional options and ideas on the internet for you to discover.

(7) Buy Items to Use in a Crockpot

Using a crockpot can help you eat a more wholesome diet while also saving time. For example, you can toss a bunch of vegetables into water with a little bit of salt and pepper or vegetable stock before you leave for work in the morning and by the time you come home, a delicious meal will be ready.

One of the most popular crockpot meals is pot roast, which consists of

a cut of beef, potatoes, carrots and onions. All of these ingredients can be simmered in a crockpot for more than 10 hours.

Another option for a hectic schedule is to slow cook frozen vegetables while you are away. But be sure to check out the ingredients: many frozen vegetables have added preservatives and chemicals that should be avoided.

Collard greens are an example of a vegetable that is easy to make in a crockpot. Just add a little water, olive oil, salt and pepper and set on low for several hours. Then enjoy all the healthy nutrients once you arrive home.

If you do not have a crockpot or the funds to buy one, visit a used-goods shop, where they can be found for as low as 10 percent of the original price. It is a worthwhile investment and the health benefits that you reap from your homemade food beat a microwave dinner any day.

More than Food

This article has briefly addressed some ways to stretch your budget while building your health. Realizing the full benefits of these strategies will require more research. Various resources that can help you are available online and at the library.

Yet there is another source for managing our health and our money that many do not consider: the Bible.

We offer two free booklets that examine health and finance principles from Scripture: *God's Principles of Healthful Living* and *End All Your Financial Worries*. You can read or order them on rcg.org. Thousands have put them into practice and are already living healthful lives with more vigor and vibrancy than they ever thought possible. They are also receiving financial blessings as they follow what God instructs in His Word. You can achieve these benefits too.

It takes time to improve your spending and eating habits. But the benefits you reap in the long run will be well worth it! □

Drive to End Global Hunger Has Stalled, UN Warns



Residents wait to collect food in containers from a soup kitchen in Omdurman, Sudan (March 11, 2024).

REUTERS/EL TAYEB SIDDIG

ROME (Reuters) – A goal to eliminate global hunger by 2030 looks increasingly impossible to achieve, with the number of people suffering chronic hunger having barely changed over the past year, a United Nations report released in July said.

The annual State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report said around 733 million people faced hunger in 2023—one in 11 people globally and one in five in Africa—as conflict, economic crises and other issues take their toll.

David Laborde, director of the division within the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) which helps prepare the survey, said that although progress had been made in

some regions, the situation had deteriorated at a global level.

“We are in a worse situation today than nine years ago when we launched this goal to eradicate hunger by 2030,” he told *Reuters*, saying challenges such as regional wars had grown more severe than envisaged even a decade ago.

If current trends continue, about 582 million people will be chronically undernourished at the end of the decade, half of them in Africa, the report warned.

A broader objective to ensure regular access to adequate food has also stalled over the past three years, with 29 percent of the global population, or 2.33 billion people, experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity in 2023.

Underscoring stark inequalities, some 71.5 percent of people in low-income countries could not afford a healthy diet last year, against 6.3 percent in high-income countries.

While famines are easy to spot, poor nutrition is more insidious but can nonetheless scar people for life, stunting both the physical and mental development of babies and children, and leaving adults more vulnerable to infections and illnesses.

Mr. Laborde said international aid linked to food security and nutrition amounted to \$76 billion a year, or 0.07 percent of the world’s total annual economic output.

“I think we can do better to deliver this promise about living on a planet where no one is hungry,” he said.

Regional trends varied significantly, with hunger continuing to rise in Africa, where growing populations, myriad wars and climate upheaval weighed heavily. By contrast, Asia has seen little change and Latin America has improved.

“South America has very developed social protection programs that allows them to target interventions so they can effectively move out of hunger in a very fast way,” said FAO’s chief economist Maximo Torero. “In the case of Africa, we have not observed that.”

The UN said the way the anti-hunger drive was financed had to change, with greater flexibility needed to ensure the countries most in need got help.

“We need to change how we do things to be better coordinated, to accept that not everyone should try to do everything but really be much more focused on what we are doing and where,” said Mr. Laborde.

The report is compiled by the Rome-based FAO, the UN’s International Fund for Agricultural Development, its Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization and World Food Programme. □

Mexico's Efforts to Seize U.S.-bound Fentanyl Drop Sharply, While Seizures of Meth Soar

MEXICO CITY (AP) – Even as Mexican-made fentanyl continues to flood into the United States, Mexico's efforts to seize the drug have declined dramatically, according to figures recently released by the Defense Department.

Figures for the first half of 2024 show that Mexican federal forces seized only 286 pounds of fentanyl nationwide between January and June, down 94 percent from the 5,135 pounds seized in 2023.

The synthetic opioid has been blamed for about 70,000 overdose deaths annually in the United States, and U.S. officials have tried to step up efforts to seize it as it comes over the border, often in the form of counterfeit pills made in Mexico.

But rather than join in the effort, Mexico's Army and National Guard appeared to have refocused their attention far more toward seizing methamphetamines, which are much more widely consumed domestically in Mexico than fentanyl.

Mexico seized a record of over 400 tons of meth in 2023, more than 12 times what it seized in 2022. That pace appeared to continue in the first half of 2024, with 168 tons of methamphetamines seized.

While Mexican meth is exported widely to the United States—and also causes huge addiction problems there—unlike fentanyl, a huge amount of meth is also sold inside Mexico.

Mexico's Defense Department did not explain why seizures of the two drugs have changed so dramatically. Some observers say the uptick in meth seizures may be the result of increasing internal disputes between the

"Mayitos" and "Chapitos" factions of the Sinaloa cartel, the largest producer of meth in Mexico.

Because they belonged to the same drug trafficking networks, analysts say the two factions may have become willing and able to "drop a dime" and inform authorities about the location of their rivals' meth labs and shipments.

But the sharp drop in fentanyl seizures appears to be harder to explain. After all, there is pressure from the United States to stem the smuggling.

The U.S. Embassy did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Mexican security analyst David Saucedo said the ongoing battles between the two Sinaloa cartel factions

may have also affected fentanyl shipments.

"The war within the Sinaloa cartel between Mayo Zambada and the 'Chapitos' may also be playing a role in reducing the number of shipments of fentanyl," said Mr. Saucedo. "The war between those groups is occurring in cities and on routes that are used for shipping drugs to the border. The violence [between the two factions] inhibits shipments, for fear of losing them along the route to the border."


The government of President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has always had a somewhat equivocal view of Mexico's role in fighting fentanyl, which is largely produced by Mexican cartels using precursor chemicals imported from China and India.

Mr. Lopez Obrador has long denied, for example, that fentanyl is even produced in Mexico, though experts—and even members of his own administration—acknowledge that it is. □



Officials from Mexico's attorney general's office unloaded hundreds of pounds of fentanyl and meth seized near Ensenada at their headquarters in Tijuana, Mexico (Oct. 18, 2022).

SALWAN GEORGES/THE WASHINGTON POST VIA GETTY IMAGES



Every minute, 56 acres of the world's soil becomes unusable for farming...

Today's farmlands are tired, overworked and being depleted. According to the World Wildlife Fund, half of the topsoil on the planet has been lost in the last 150 years. The world's productive land is being destroyed by erosion and other degradation. The UN reported that 12 million hectares are lost yearly. In man's husbandry of the soil, his impulse has been to take the simple, fast, cheap, easy way—either ignoring or not recognizing the real causes of the problem. Too often, agriculturists see only the *effects*, while the actual *causes* of the crisis grow worse and more complicated. For the sake of those alive today and all future generations, a major reform in modern agriculture is a must. Order your free copy of the book *Mounting Worldwide Crisis in Agriculture* to learn the stunning facts behind today's growing agricultural troubles and the often overlooked, clear-cut solutions.

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