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THE

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REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

What God Thinks of POLITICS





An oil pump jack in a field in Nolan, Texas (June 28, 2024).

BRANDON BELL/GETTY IMAGES

The Future of Energy?

As the global population continues to grow, so does the demand for energy and the challenge of protecting the planet. The Bible reveals how to balance dominion and stewardship.

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Front Cover: Left, U.S. Vice President and Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris speaks at the Philip Chosky Theatre during a campaign event in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Sept. 25, 2024). Right, former U.S. President and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump attends a campaign event in Grand Rapids, Michigan (April 2, 2024).

LEFT, JIM WATSON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; RIGHT, SPENCER PLATT/GETTY IMAGES

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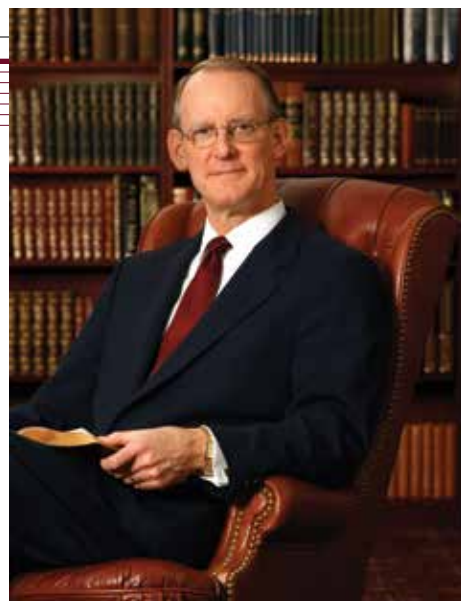
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David C. Fack



What God Thinks of Politics

WHETHER A nation's leader is liked or hated, voted in, seizes power or born into royalty, most are shocked to learn the Bible reveals: "the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will" (Dan. 4:17).

The same verse explains that God often "gives" power to the "basest" of humans. The example of brutal King Nebuchadnezzar in context underscores the point. While there have been exceptions throughout history, leadership has too often been the sad tale of governments using citizens or subjects to serve and enrich *themselves*, instead of the other way around!

But why would God allow—even *cause*—this?

As political division within the democratic nations of the world only intensifies, increasing numbers view voting as a civic—or even a *sacred*—duty. Some feel torn about who to vote for. Others feel guilty about *not* voting. Yet true Christians feel no such pressure! They are, and in fact *must* be, politically neutral.

On trial before His crucifixion, Jesus Christ explained to Pilate, "My Kingdom is *not of this world...*" (John 18:36). The apostle Paul amplified this with language that is difficult to understand in mod-

ern English. He told the Philippians, "Our *conversation* is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (3:20). "Conversation" in the original Greek is *politeuma*. It means *community* or *citizenship*. It is no accident the word begins with "*polit.*" Think of it this way: True Christians are *politically* aligned with God's values—those in heaven—not with any government on Earth.

This is not to say Christians can or should *disobey* those in authority. On the contrary, Peter instructed Christians to "*Honor the king*" (1 Pet. 2:17). Paul wrote to Timothy: "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for *all men*," and went on to say this included "*kings, and for all that are in authority*; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

Many leaders are in fact well-intentioned, even having some "good" positions. But they invariably also have some "bad" policies—taking of the same "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:17) humans have eaten from since the Garden of Eden. Even the most principled are not immune to the still-

present influence the serpent used to “beguile”—meaning *lead astray, delude or seduce*—Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:13).

The apostle John explained that “the whole world lies in wickedness” (I John 5:19) and Paul called Satan “*the god of this world* [who] has blinded the minds of them which believe not” (II Cor. 4:4). Christ, after fasting for 40 days, was confronted by this “god.” What exactly does this mean? I am including the first part of their exchange in Luke 4 to drive home the unmissable point:

“And the devil said unto Him, If You be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. And the devil, taking Him up into a high mountain, showed unto Him *all the kingdoms of the world* in a moment of time. And the devil said unto Him, All this power will I give You, and the glory of them: *for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it*” (vs. 3-6).

This could not be plainer. The *entire world* has been “delivered” to Satan by God. Think of it this way: In many cases, God has delegated rulership choice to Satan, who naturally selects “base” human beings.

God is giving a world cut off from His way—living in disobedience—leaders who are representative of their citizens’ own character. He wants them to learn hard lessons, which will make it easier to accept God’s soon-coming *righteous government*.

Christ taught His disciples to pray, “*Your Kingdom come, Your will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,*” and to live with the following great goal: “seek you first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:10, 33).

Do not misunderstand! This is a literal Kingdom that will “come” to Earth! God will rule this Kingdom, with great numbers of true Christians under Him, teaching humanity what *real* leadership is and administering His perfect way of life.

As you witness government corruption and dysfunction increase, take

comfort in knowing God is ultimately in control. Recall Daniel 4 from the outset: “the MOST HIGH rules in the kingdom of men” (vs. 17). He is deeply angry with abusive leaders. The same Daniel explains in chapter 2 that God will take control: “And in the days of these [earthly] kings shall the God of heaven set up a Kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the Kingdom *shall not be left to other people*, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (vs. 44). Chapter 7 adds that it will be governed by “the saints of the Most High” (vs. 18). *This* is when true Christians become involved in politics!

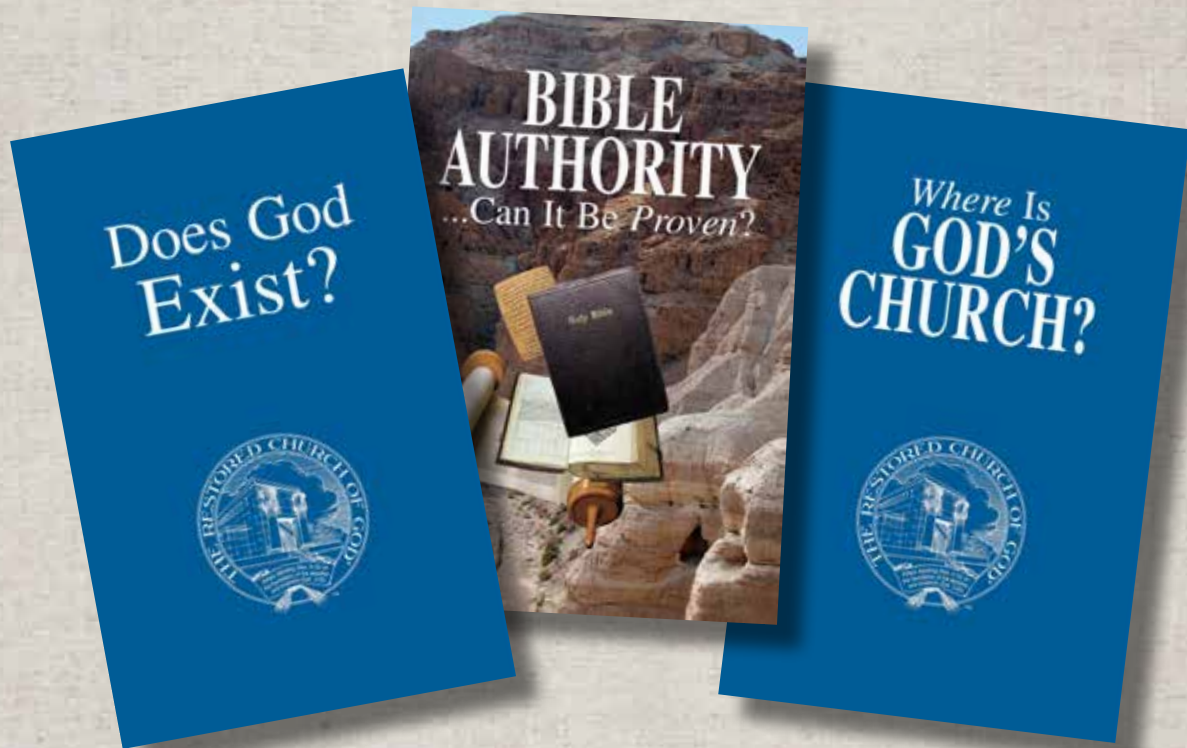
It is of this Kingdom that Isaiah wrote: “Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end” (9:7). Under God and Christ, true Christians who remained independent from the politics of this world, will “order it, and...establish it with judgment and with justice...even forever”—bringing real change that leaders of this world cannot. □



Voters fill out their ballots on the second day of early voting in the 2024 presidential election at the Board of Elections Loop Super Site in Chicago, Illinois (Oct. 4, 2024).

KAMIL KRZACZYNSKI/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Answers to Life's Greatest Questions...



Millions believe God exists. Few have proof. Have you proven that God exists? Or do you hope—suspect—feel—believe—think—He does? Can His existence be scientifically proven? Can you know with certainty that an all-intelligent Mind created the universe and all life on Earth—including you? Must the answers be “accepted on faith”? Let’s squarely face these questions!

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Is College Worth It?

Many people are reconsidering the value of a college education and opting out of the expense in pursuit of a better future.

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

IS A COLLEGE degree still a golden ticket to success, or has it become a path to financial despair?

Millions of Americans are skeptical about the value and cost of college. A new poll by Gallup and the Lumina Foundation found that most people are unhappy with the U.S. higher education system. The survey revealed only 36 percent of adults express high confidence in higher education, down from 57 percent in 2015. This declining confidence aligns with a drop in college enrollment as people grapple with student debt and skyrocketing tuition.

The survey asked new, detailed questions to uncover why confidence in colleges is falling.

More than two-thirds (67 percent) of respondents said college is headed in the “wrong direction,” while only 31 percent felt it was moving in the right direction. Almost one-third of respondents cited cost as the main issue, and 24 percent felt students are not learning the skills needed for success.

Another study showed that tuition at public four-year colleges has increased by 38 percent and by 29 percent at private institutions over the past two decades, even after adjusting for inflation (*DavidLerner.com*). Because of these increases, student debt in the nation has ballooned to nearly \$1.8 trillion, affecting 44 million borrowers (Center for Global Higher Education).

College costs have created a national crisis. Experts warn that fewer college graduates could worsen labor shortages in important fields such as health-care and information technology.

Some think skipping college and going straight into the workforce is the easier solution. Not so fast. Those who skip college often earn 75 percent less over their lifetime compared to those with bachelor's degrees, accord-

“Clearly, we need an education system that values deeper, lasting things beyond financial gain.”

ing to Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce. And during economic downturns, those without degrees are more likely to lose jobs.

“It is sad to see that confidence [in college] hasn't grown at all,” says Courtney Brown, vice president at Lumina, an education nonprofit focused on increasing the number of students seeking post-high school education. “What's shocking to me is that the people who have low or no confidence is actually increasing.”

The skyrocketing cost of college has led many to question whether higher education is truly the gateway to a better life.

Misplaced Priorities

Imagine investing tens of thousands of dollars, only to end up trapped in debt, with your dreams overshadowed by endless loan payments. This is not just a hypothetical for many Americans.

Student debt is not just a number—its impact can delay key life milestones and affect people's lives in various other ways.

Debt-burdened young adults delay marriage, homeownership and starting families—decisions that hurt the economy by slowing housing markets and reducing consumer spending. The pressure to secure high-paying jobs forces people into careers that do not match their passions or talents, leading to job dissatisfaction and a workforce focused on survival rather than contributing meaningfully to society (The Center for Law and Social Policy).

Sadly, those from lower-income backgrounds bear the heaviest burden, often forced into lifelong debt and financial insecurity due to a lack of financial education.

The psychological toll of this financial strain can be tremendous. Studies show that student debt fuels anxiety and depression. One survey by Student

Loan Planner revealed 1 in 16 respondents had suicidal thoughts due to student loans.

Clearly, we need an education system that values deeper, lasting things beyond financial gain.

Pursuit of Material Success

The escalating costs of higher education symbolize more than financial strain—they reveal society's obsession with materialism.

From an early age, people are conditioned to believe that prestigious degrees, high-paying jobs and social status are the keys to success. This narrative drives families to invest heavily in higher education, often risking their financial stability to pursue economic prosperity.

Our society's emphasis on making a lot of money is evident in college major selections. Students take on debt for degrees in fields like business, engineering and technology, perceived to offer higher financial rewards. While these fields are important, the pressure to secure a high-paying job often overshadows personal interests and talents. Many students graduate with bet-

ter financial stability but little personal fulfillment.

Crushing student debt drives this conundrum.

Some argue that prioritizing high-paying careers ensures financial security. However, material success often leads to long-term dissatisfaction if pursued at the expense of personal growth. Education should enrich lives, not drag them into misery. This crisis proves our education system is failing both economically and morally.

True Purpose of Education

The pursuit of material success at all costs has become a dominant force in educational decisions. Are too many people focused on the wrong goal? What if education's true purpose is to develop character, not secure a high-paying job?

Our Editor-in-Chief David C. Pack explained in his booklet *The Laws to Success*: "People do not *instinctively* know everything necessary to function successfully in life. They must continually acquire more knowledge throughout their lives to address new challenges and demands made upon them. This is the single biggest dif-

ference between men and animals. Human beings must educate themselves—gain knowledge—in order to do or achieve *anything* of worth in life. They must learn throughout life, continually acquiring more knowledge. This is itself fundamental knowledge."

Mr. Pack further explained: "The advanced fields of chemistry, biology, geology, astronomy, engineering, history, medicine and many more are now available for study, because men have searched out and acquired vast amounts of information in these fields. Colleges and universities around the world teach them, requiring students to study, which allows them to educate themselves in their chosen profession.

"But understand. In order to achieve a true education in right MORALS and PRINCIPLES, one must learn *how to live*—not just how to earn a living. There is a big difference! Learning morals, spiritual principles and laws—and the great law of cause and effect—are all extremely important in receiving a well-rounded education sufficient to prepare one to achieve true success."



The true purpose of education is to learn how to live in all aspects of life, not just to earn a living!

Divine Text

The Bible provides a clear perspective on the true purpose of education. From a biblical standpoint, education should develop the whole person—mentally, physically and spiritually.

In Proverbs 4:7, we are told, “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all your

getting get understanding.” Wisdom goes beyond facts to how we must apply them to life. Proverbs 16:16 says, “How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding rather...than silver!”

This proverb highlights the true value of education—not wealth, but the pursuit of wisdom.

The Bible also warns against a materialistic worldview.

Many know the saying, “money is the root of all evil.” This comes from

I Timothy 6:10: “The love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

Loving money above all else has dire consequences.

The student debt crisis, with its psychological and societal toll, is proof of these dangers. The constant pressure to fulfill financial obligations while pursuing goals creates a sense of entrapment, overshadowing the joy of learning.

When education is reduced to a transaction, it loses its power. Students may graduate with degrees but lack the wisdom and character that true education should teach.

Reorienting Priorities

Recognizing that education should not be solely about securing wealth or status is the starting point for reorienting our priorities.

Those who want a true, meaningful education must rethink their approach. Students and families should choose educational paths that align with their values and goals, not just the most lucrative options. This may involve going to college, but it may not. Developing the whole person is a vital focus—intellectually, morally and spiritually.

Mentorship programs can guide students in career and character development. Expanding scholarships, promoting community colleges and trade schools, and encouraging gap years are all steps that reduce student debt.

Some may skip traditional schools altogether. Online courses and self-paced programs offer education at a fraction of the cost. Promoting financial literacy among students is also essential. By pursuing affordable, meaningful education, people can reclaim its true purpose.

The rewards of material success are fleeting. What really matters is the enduring value of character.

For more on education and six other time-tested laws of success, read *The Laws to Success* for free at rcg.org/tlts. □





As the global population continues to grow, so does the demand for energy and the challenge of protecting the planet. The Bible reveals how to balance dominion and stewardship.

BY JUSTIN M. FRAZIER

THE CREATION account in Genesis 1 ends on the sixth day with God creating humans: “So God created man in His *own* image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the Earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (vs. 27-28).

In this passage, the original Hebrew words for “subdue” and “dominion” mean to rule over and subjugate. Many take this to mean that God wants people to force the natural environment to their will. Humans have conquered nations and peoples, denuded landscapes, polluted waters and made the land toxic to power the evolution of human civilization.

Genesis 2 provides a deeper examination of God creating man. God planted

THE FUTURE OF ENERGY?



a garden and then put Adam in it to dress and keep it (vs. 8, 15). The Hebrew words translated “dress” and “keep” respectively can mean to work in and protect.

These two passages *seem* to have competing directives. On the one hand, God tasked us with multiplying and exercising dominion over the natural world. On the other, He also said we should care for and protect Creation.

How has mankind done?

We can find the answer by looking at how civilizations have produced energy throughout the centuries. Cut off from true wisdom, knowledge and understanding, humanity has struggled to understand the natural world and use its resources sustainably. Time and again, attempts to solve problems have led to unintended consequences,

often causing even greater harm to the environment.

Today, the debate centers around conventional energy sources, such as coal and oil, versus green energy, such as windmills and solar panels. Can we learn from the mistakes of history to finally *keep* Creation, while also exercising *dominion* over it?

Natural Power

Power comes from converting fuel into energy that can be used to do work. The easiest way is to burn fuel. From Adam and Eve to the 17th century AD, we primarily used naturally occurring power to build our world. Yet, even working in and with nature, we created more problems than we solved.

Fire was mankind’s first power source, seen indirectly through Abel’s offering in Genesis 4:4. Later in the

same chapter, Tubalcain became “an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron” (vs. 22). Metalwork requires a forge to heat and shape the metal.

Fire powered the explosion of population throughout the known world before Noah’s Flood and again after it. Controlling the power of fire gave humanity the means to create the civilization we live in today. As mankind’s civilization has evolved and expanded, the search for effective energy use has grown from burning fallen sticks to industrial electricity generation.

Imagine a world without fire. How would our ancestors have eaten without it? Without fire, the bronze, iron and steel that led to the modern world could not have been smelted out of the rocks to become the skeletons of giant buildings, the reinforcement of our roads, the cars, trains, boats and planes

we use to move people and goods from one part of the world to another. Steam engines required fire to produce the steam that drove them. The internal combustion engine uses fire to drive the pistons in the engines that move most to work daily.

Fire is fundamental to our lives. It is also straightforward: Fire burns until the fuel runs out.

The most common fuel for fire is wood or dried vegetation, but it can also come from “burning rocks” of coal that the Chinese were mining as early as 1000 BC. Both sources produce smoke and require the removal of natural resources that are not easily replaced. Trees take a long time to grow, and once coal is removed from the ground, it never returns.

The usefulness of fire comes with an inherent danger: most of what we live in and around *also* burns. Since fire burns until the fuel runs out, mankind needed to harness other power sources. We domesticated animals, developed watermills and windmills and put sails on boats to do our work for us.

Domesticated animals are dirty and can require as much or more food, water, shelter and waste facilities as people. Proverbs 14:4 notes the productivity of oxen is worth the mess they cause. Animal power enabled more work, a concept we still honor with the term horsepower.

However, animals come with significant problems. Animals must rest and be sheltered. They also have size and strength limits. Adding more animals to a task faces diminishing returns, which limits their usefulness on an industrial scale.

Animals must also be fed enough to do the required work. The more animals used, the more food they require. The more food they eat, the more waste they create. Too great a density of animals can pollute water supplies and make a foul stench, not to mention disposing of carcasses.

As cities grew, their architecture changed to address the number of animals in the street. The famous brownstones of New York City, with their

distinctive stoops, were designed to raise the living area above the overflow of human and animal waste. Balancing animal power with human settlements never really worked. Most cities were cesspools until the automobile finally replaced horses on city streets.

Wind power is another powerful natural energy source that comes with limitations. Ships that relied on wind were often left vulnerable in storms and in calm conditions like the doldrums, where shipments were delayed indefinitely and supplies dwindled.

Windmills also harness regular breezes to drive machinery, with their use documented as far back as AD 500 in Persia, with cruder methods used earlier. This technology tended to be built where the wind blew often. But often is not always, and without a steady wind to drive them, the power they could generate was limited.

Waterwheels had a relatively stable power supply from the river flowing strongly enough to turn the wheel, and they were in use far back into antiquity. In many places, artificial dams provided consistency for waterwheels but impacted fish movement upstream and downstream.

Natural power originally comes from the largest fire in our solar system—the sun. Our star provides the light plants need to grow and feed the animals we use. The sun also powers

the movement of winds and the hydrological cycle that keeps the rivers flowing. It grew the wood that was burned or became coal.

On-Demand Power

Thomas Newcomen and his assistant John Cally invented the first usable steam engine in 1712. Later advances would create steam engines that were safe, stable, portable and on-demand. The unpredictability of natural power was replaced with engines that an operator could control by changing the heat of the fire under a boiler that generated steam to drive the machine.

By the late 1700s, mobile steam engines began providing mechanical power to move people and goods across oceans, up and down rivers and across entire continents faster and safer than natural means. Steam-powered equipment allowed farms and factories to industrialize, creating more output per hour worked and allowing people to move to the cities. Steam generation in town even heated homes and offices, meaning more opportunities for people leaving the farms to live and work in cities.

Steam engines allowed people to go places and do seemingly impossible things. Perhaps the most outstanding examples of mankind subduing the Earth during the steam age are the Suez Canal and the Panama Canal.



The 78022 British Railways Standard Class 2MT locomotive travels over the Mytholmes Viaduct on the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway during their Autumn Steam Up gala (Oct. 6, 2024).

DANNY LAWSON/PA IMAGES VIA GETTY IMAGES

The Suez Canal, built partly with steam-powered shovels, allowed steamships to travel faster and cut significant distances from major trade routes.

Construction on the Panama Canal ran from 1903 to 1914. Bucyrus steam shovels ran 24 hours a day, filling trains with soil every one and a half minutes. Steam locomotives pulled these trains to empty their cargo and brought in fresh men, supplies, equipment and everything else needed to build the canal.

These canals still serve the world. They handled over 34,000 vessel crossings in 2023. This accounted for about 18 percent of all the world's maritime shipping.

But the human and environmental toll of building these canals is staggering. Including the failed French attempt, around 30,000 people died building the Panama Canal, about 40 percent of the workforce! An estimated 120,000 workers died building the Suez Canal.

Steam power needs a fuel source to boil water. Coal burns hotter and more efficiently than wood, so it has become the preferred fuel for most large steam engines. People used it to heat their homes as well.

The result? Cities became covered in coal dust and soot. The sulfur in the coal released in the smoke began to acidify the rain that fell in and around cities. Urban air quality became horrible.

Smog became endemic to cities. Industrial and residential coal use would even lead to the Great Smog of London, which killed between 4,000 and 12,000 people in just five days.

Thick, polluted air has another side effect. Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork." When people can no longer see the stars and the immensity of God's Creation, they begin to lose their sense of awe. A 2021 article from *Big Think* titled "The Awesome Power of Awe: How This Neglected Emotion Can Change Lives" discussed studies that showed how awe improves health and makes people feel

more connected. Not protecting the environment hides God from people and contributes to poorer health and less connection.

Subduing the Earth includes both the surface resources and the mineral wealth. In the Old Testament, God described the land that He gave the Israelites this way: "A land wherein you shall eat bread without scarceness, you shall not lack anything in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you may dig brass" (Deut. 8:9).

This verse shows that God supports the responsible use of the Earth's resources, including mining. However, when greed drives these activities, the results are devastating. Landscapes are scarred, ecosystems disrupted and miners suffer dangerous conditions.

Even today, coal produces over a third of the world's power, more than any other single source, according to Our World in Data. While the environmental impacts of coal use have reduced considerably over the last 150 years, they cannot be fully eliminated. So-called clean coal generators lessen the harmful effects of coal but cannot remove them entirely.

Coal mining impacts the lives of millions. About 16 percent of miners alive today suffer from black lung disease caused by breathing coal dust. Mining is loud and destroys natural habitats. Some mining techniques cause significant changes to the topography of a landscape through subsidence and erosion. Water in coal mines can contaminate ground and surface water.

Coal can even burn underground for decades. A coal mine fire in Centralia, Pennsylvania, started in 1962 and still burns over 60 years later. A coal basin in France burned for about three centuries, while a coal seam fire in Dudweiler, Germany, ignited around 1668 and is still burning. Mount Wingen in New South Wales, Australia, has an active coal seam fire that scientists estimate has smoldered for 5,500 years.

Steam power and the coal that powered it changed the world, but not

always for the better. Thousands have died due to steam power, and environments have been destroyed. Work continues to clean up and repair the damage done by coal mining and its use.

Remote Power

Despite its problems, coal-generated steam remained the most common energy source for industry and individuals until the late 18th century with the advent of electricity. What began as a curiosity quickly became widespread during the Industrial Revolution.

Unlike steam power, which had to be used where it was generated, electricity generated in one place could travel hundreds of miles to be used. In addition, batteries allow electricity to be stored for use days, weeks or months after production.

These two properties allowed mankind to extend its dominance over the natural world.

Electricity allowed for the most outstanding achievements of the 19th, 20th, and (so far) 21st centuries. Steam locomotives were replaced by diesel-electric hybrids. Cities began expanding their electrical grids to rural areas, connecting and tying people together.

Communications speed increased through the telegraph wire, then the telephone and now modern data transfer systems like fiber optics, all powered by electricity.

Electricity powered the modernization of the world, from household appliances to refrigeration and air conditioning. Large swathes of the world would be unlivable without electricity to power the cooling systems needed to keep food and medicine from going bad and people from dying.

Electromagnetism is one of the four fundamental forces of the universe. Harnessing electricity is arguably the most important scientific and engineering feat in mankind's history.

As with the other forms of power, electricity comes with a cost.

The primary source of electrical generation comes from steam pass-

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IS KARMA REAL?

Good actions lead to good outcomes, bad actions produce bad outcomes. Simple, right?

BY GARRICK R. OXLEY

SOMETHING INCREDIBLE happened at a Dairy Queen drive-thru in Brainerd, Minnesota: People in over 900 cars took part in a “pay it forward” chain.

It began the morning of Thursday, December 3, 2020, with a single kind act from one man and continued into Friday and Saturday. The first customer paid for his order and that of the people in the car behind him. The next patron followed suit. Eventually, over two and a half days, over \$10,000 had been spent in this chain of generosity, the store manager told *CNN*.

“There’s all different types of ways to help people,” the manager said. “I think this touched a lot of people that we didn’t even know it touched, deeper than we know. And you don’t know what’s going on in a person’s life.”

Similar pay-it-forward chains have made the news over the years. Paying for a stranger’s meal is an example of a random act of kindness. Polling shows the average American engages in five generous acts per week, totaling 260 random acts of kindness each year.

Many feel that engaging in good deeds like these is a way to generate good karma. What goes around comes around, right? That is the belief of 84 percent of United States citizens asked by OnePoll on behalf of banking app Chime—nearly 9 in 10 Americans.

Another 84 percent said they will go out of their way to pay it forward whenever possible. This most often comes in the form of a special treat for their loved ones, generous tips or helping neighbors—carrying their groceries, mowing their lawns or shoveling snow from their driveways.

What is karma? *Britannica* states: “Karma, in Indian religion and philosophy, [is] the universal causal law by which good or bad actions determine the future modes of an individual’s

existence.” It is a concept in Eastern religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism.

Most people do not think of karma in this way, that every act of kindness will help rebalance a cosmic scale. Instead, they believe in the value of doing good deeds for others, regardless of whether they are rewarded for it. While the average person probably does not consciously associate karma with Indian religion, many do view their deeds through its lens. Good actions generate “good karma” that leads to good outcomes, they think. Bad actions produce “bad karma” and bad outcomes.

Experts point out that the Sanskrit word refers more to a law of consequences than a particular reward or punishment system. But that does not stop many from blaming karma for their problems. Americans attribute bad relationships, losing something, and arguments with others to bad karma. Some feel that when famous politicians or celebrities get engulfed in scandal that this can be attributed to karma. They got what they deserved.

Is karma real? Should it motivate your actions? Or is there an even greater principle that ought to drive your random acts of kindness?

Examining Roots

Karma can seem like a simple, harmless concept. But even briefly examining its roots reveals that the term is much more interwoven with pagan religion than most realize.

Britannica continues: “Karma represents the ethical dimension of the process of rebirth (samsara), belief in which is generally shared among the religious traditions of India. Indian soteriologies (theories of salvation) posit that future births and life situ-

ations will be conditioned by actions performed during one’s present life—which itself has been conditioned by the accumulated effects of actions performed in previous lives. The doctrine of karma thus directs adherents of Indian religions toward their common goal: release (moksha) from the cycle of birth and death.”

Hinduismtoday.com states, “Esoterically, karma refers to the totality of our actions and their concomitant reactions in this and all previous lives, all of which determine our future.”

Watching your neighbor’s dog, pulling in their trash bin from the curb, calling an elderly relative and other nice deeds feel like great things to do. But many would be uncomfortable attributing these actions to karma if they knew how closely the concept was tied to eastern religion and reincarnation.

There is another source that endorses the concept of paying it forward without the baggage of paganism: God’s Word.

Biblical Principles

The Bible has much more to say about good deeds and the concept of “what goes around comes around” than you may have realized.

Jesus Christ promoted acts of kindness—random or otherwise—when He taught, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

In Luke 6:38, He added, “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you mete withal it shall be measured to you again.” If we give generously to others, like the man in the drive-thru in Brainerd did, we will also receive generously.

Scripture repeatedly emphasizes that when we do good, we can expect good things to happen. Ecclesiastes tells us, “Cast your bread upon the waters: for you shall find it after many days” (11:1). The New Living Translation makes this even clearer: “Send your grain across the seas, and in time, profits will flow back to you.”

There is also the flip side of this. The Bible reveals that bad actions lead to bad outcomes. The patriarch Job observed, “Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same” (4:8). Solomon wrote, “As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come” (Prov. 26:2).

Just as a robin or dove does not arrive at its destination without flying there, bad effects do not come randomly. There is a reason for them. Yet it is not the pagan karma concept—it is simply a “cause.” Something we do or do not do that produces an effect.

Romans 11 describes how God works with us in different ways based on our actions: “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness: otherwise you also shall be cut off” (vs. 22).

Other verses continue to show that the choices we make have real consequences. Paul wrote, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7). Jesus taught, “Therefore all things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12).

Karma is not real. Rather you should think of this as the biblical concept ordained by God: that of cause and effect. Right causes lead to right effects, wrong causes lead to wrong effects. The principle is taught throughout the Bible and it can be seen in individual lives as well as in groups and nations.

Cause and Effect

In a *Real Truth* Personal titled “You Can Prove the Bible’s Authority!”, Editor-in-Chief David C. Pack explained more about cause and effect.

He wrote: “Another proof of Bible authority is the principle of cause and effect. Most live their lives completely unaware of *why* things either ‘go right’ or ‘go wrong.’ They seem unable to comprehend that what they do, or do not do, has a direct effect on their lives. Most do not know that for every cause

there is an *effect*, and for every effect there is a *cause*. Scientists understand this principle in physics, but mankind does not apply it spiritually.

“Consider how cause and effect works in life. If you routinely eat too much, you will get sick, or overweight—or both! No mystery. If you drink too much alcohol, you become intoxicated. This could lead to a hangover, being arrested, or even a car accident that could result in injury or death. If you break laws, you could go to jail. This will affect your family, employment opportunities, and your entire future.

“The Bible is also a book about CAUSE and EFFECT—containing hundreds of different laws, each carrying the power of cause and effect for those who keep or break them. Whether one knows every law in the Bible has no bearing on whether breaking them brings punishment. Just as speeding can result in a ticket—whether or not the driver knew the speed limit—those who break God’s laws reap penalties—whether or not they know they are violating specific laws!”

Cause and effect is real, and it is serious. It applies even to small actions like what you have for dinner, what kind of TV shows you watch and the news sources you use, but also bigger matters in life like your chosen career path, who you marry and what holidays or holy days you observe. And it certainly applies to how kind or unkind we are to others.

This explanation of cause and effect is not meant to discourage you from committing kind acts. Instead, knowing the truth of God’s Word should motivate you to become even more generous!

Defining Generosity

Let’s revisit the five generous acts Americans practice each week. What are they? Random acts of kindness include donating money to organizations or charities, volunteering their time to help out friends and family and supporting small or locally owned businesses.

The top three ways Americans define “generosity” include “going out of your way to help someone else,” “giving your time,” and “paying it forward.”

This is very compatible with the Bible. Paul wrote, “Brethren, you have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13).

Acts of paying it forward have real effects on more than those on the receiving end. The data showed that Americans feel better about themselves and their lives overall, plus they feel more confident when they are able to do so. They say intention is key—so every act of generosity benefits the giver as well as the receiver. It could be thought of as a win-win.

This makes perfect sense when we realize that the simple act of giving emulates God: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jms. 1:17).

Despite less than half of all Americans currently feeling financially secure, nearly three-quarters (72 percent) consider themselves to be generous. And that is true whether or not there is a financial stake. Being generous and a good person could include donating your time or skills to a cause you really care about or helping out a family member who is going through a tough time.

Several respondents to the OnePoll survey shared personal, anonymous stories of being generous. “[I] opened my home for a friend to move in during a health crisis,” “I overheard a waitress discussing some unexpected bills she was worried about covering so left her a \$200 tip,” and “I went to Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina to work on restoring houses.”

Remaining anonymous when doing good deeds is also scriptural. Matthew 6 says, “Take heed that you do not your alms [good deeds] before men, to be seen of them: otherwise you have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when you do your alms, do not sound a trumpet before



“Jesus Christ promoted acts of kindness—random or otherwise—when He taught, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’ (Acts 20:35).”

you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when you do alms, let not your left hand know what your right hand does: that your alms may be in secret: and your Father which sees in secret Himself shall reward you openly” (vs. 1-4).

While some acts will of course be seen and noticed, especially by the recipient, the recognition should not be what drives us. It is the act of giving itself: A positive cause that leads to a positive effect, first for others but also for yourself.

“These survey results highlight the generous spirit in our country, regardless of what they think about the world around them or their current financial situation. Despite only 43% feeling financially secure, results found that almost two-thirds (65%) are likely to ‘keep the chain going’ and pay for the food of the person behind them in a drive-thru if someone else paid for theirs,” said Sara El-Amine, Vice President of Community at Chime.

“We’re encouraged to see that the ‘pay it forward’ spirit is alive and well in this country, despite some of the current economic challenges everyday people are facing.”

Americans are most likely to pay it forward without any prompting necessary. Others are influenced by a good mood or after someone else does something nice for them. Or generosity might strike when a loved one is celebrating a milestone or accomplishment.

No matter what triggers it, results also found that Americans are more than five times more likely to find that their spirits are lifted more when they are able to help someone else out than when someone else helps them out (72 percent versus 13 percent). Remember Christ’s words about how it is more blessed to give than receive.

Even More Generous?

What holds people back from giving? Looking to the future, an astounding 83 percent of respondents believe that they would be even more generous

if they were more financially secure. Financial security and progress look different for everyone, but two in five say that financial progress means being able to treat their family and friends or being able to donate to charity.

“Feeling good about your finances can mean more than just adding commas to your bank account. The results further emphasize that everyday people are considering others when managing their own financial progress,” explained Ms. El-Amine. “Someone’s financial situation should not be the thing holding them back from living generously.”

In addition to all the Bible principles we have already examined, God, the giver of every good and perfect gift, promises to bless His followers financially. This allows them to be even more generous. His little-known financial laws open the “windows of heaven” (Mal. 3:10) for those who claim His promises.

Want to know more? Read our booklet *End All Your Financial Worries* at rcg.org/eayfw. □



AMERICA & ISRAEL: WHAT CAN BREAK THEIR BOND?

The two nations have steadfastly supported each other throughout history. Will this always be the case?

BY GARRICK R. OXLEY

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks to reporters at the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. ahead of his remarks during a joint meeting of Congress (July 24, 2024).

ANNA MONEYMAKER/GETTY IMAGES

OCTOBER 7, 2024, marked the one-year anniversary of Hamas' deadly incursion into Israel. On that shocking day in 2023, at least 1,200 people were killed and 250 were taken hostage. This sparked Israel's military offensive that has lasted 12 months and running.

Over that time, Israel has battled its way through the Gaza Strip to eliminate Hamas, killing at least 41,000 Gazans, according to the Gaza health ministry.

Israel's supporters have emphasized the nation's right to defend itself and its need to rescue hostages.

Others feel the offensive has gone too far, with innocent Gazans who are not affiliated with Hamas caught in the crossfire. Israel has been accused of war crimes. Some groups have even labeled Israel's actions as "genocide." South Africa accused Israel of this before the International Court of Justice.

Israel has also exchanged fire with Lebanon-backed Hezbollah, eventually assassinating several of its leaders, and even putting Israeli boots on the ground in Lebanon in early October.

The small Middle East nation additionally exchanged unprecedented direct attacks with longtime arch-enemy Iran, first in early summer and then in the fall, swelling fears of all-out war. Talk of a nuclear World War III has never been so prevalent.

Through it all, Israel has been able to count on its most faithful ally: America. The U.S. has supported Israel during its ongoing conflicts with Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran. It has provided a multitude of weapons, and at least \$17.9 billion in aid since the October 7 attack.

Yet there have been recent rough patches between the two nations.

U.S. President Joe Biden has pressed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to accept a cease-fire agreement with Hamas, putting public and

private pressure on the leader toward that end. In the fall, he warned Israel not to strike Iran's oil and nuclear facilities. Pro-Palestinian voters have expressed their frustrations with what they see as the current administration's leniency towards its ally's actions.

Mr. Biden was asked at an October White House press briefing if he thought that by not engaging in diplomacy, Mr. Netanyahu was trying to influence the November 5 U.S. election in which Republican former President Donald Trump faces Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris.

"Whether he is trying to influence the election, I don't know but I am not counting on that," Mr. Biden said. "No administration has done more to help Israel than I have."

At an October 7 remembrance event, Mr. Trump said, "This attack should have rallied the entire world in support of the Jewish people and the Jewish homeland." He added, "The anti-Jewish has returned even here in America in our streets, our media and our college campuses and within the ranks of the Democrat Party in particular."

In an interview with CBS' "60 Minutes," Ms. Harris was asked a question about whether Mr. Netanyahu is considered "a real close ally." She responded, "The better question is: Do we have an important alliance between the American people and the Israeli people? And the answer to that question is yes."

As Israel's warfare on multiple fronts seems to have no end in sight, many wonder if the relationship between it and America can continue forever. Will the U.S. continue to support Israel's actions? What could sever the special connection between the two nations?

Foundations of a Friendship

How did America and Israel's bond begin? One place to look is the birth of the Jewish state many decades ago. The relationship between the two countries dates back at least to that time.

It was 1948. World War II had ended three years prior. Adolf Hitler's extermination campaign had killed six mil-

lion Jews, with millions of Jewish survivors without a home country. The 1917 Balfour Declaration from Great Britain had promised support of a permanent homeland for the Jews in the land of Palestine. Momentum for the creation of a Jewish state began to build.

The story was recounted in the *Washington Post* article "Washington's Battle Over Israel's Birth": "The British planned to leave Palestine at midnight on May 14. At that moment, the Jewish Agency, led by David Ben-Gurion, would proclaim the new (and still unnamed) Jewish state."

Despite opposition, President Harry Truman was determined to support the Jewish people. The paper continued: "The Jewish Agency proposed partitioning Palestine into two parts—one Jewish, one Arab. But the State and Defense departments backed the British plan to turn Palestine over to the United Nations. In March, Truman privately promised Chaim Weizmann, the future president of Israel, that he would support partition—only to learn the next day that the American ambassador to the United Nations had voted for U.N. trusteeship..."

"With only a few hours left until midnight in Tel Aviv, [Clark] Clifford [one of President Truman's aides] told the Jewish Agency to request immediate recognition of the new state... Truman announced recognition at 6:11 p.m. on May 14—11 minutes after Ben-Gurion's declaration of independence in Tel Aviv. So rapidly was this done that in the official announcement, the typed words 'Jewish State' are crossed out, replaced in Clifford's handwriting with 'State of Israel'" (emphasis added).

Being in such close contact, the U.S. and the new Jewish state were able to nearly simultaneously announce the news.

The official press release from Washington stated: "This Government has been informed that a Jewish state has been proclaimed in Palestine, and recognition has been requested by the provisional Government thereof. The United States recognizes the provisional government as the de facto author-

ity of the new State of Israel” (The National Archives).

It is interesting to note that, “President Harry Truman, an avid student of the Bible and its prophecies regarding the return of Jews to the Holy Land, was the first world leader to recognize Israel in 1948, a moment some Christians believe began a new prophetic era for events in the Middle East” (*USA Today*).

Many U.S. voters and politicians consistently point to the Bible as a chief reason for supporting Israel.

An October 2023 *New York Times* article stated: “Four out of five American evangelicals say that the creation of the modern state of Israel in 1948 and the return there of millions of Jewish people were fulfillments of biblical prophecy, according to a survey conducted in 2017. Almost half of respondents [to a Pew Research Center survey] said the Bible is the primary influence of their opinions on Israel.”

A June 2024 press release by *Religion News* provided more insight into Americans’ thinking. It said a “study, which simultaneously examines sentiment across mainline, evangelical and Catholic communities, finds that a belief that ‘God’s covenant with the Jewish people remains intact today’ has the greatest impact on support for Israel among a number of potential political, theological, sociological, and demographic factors considered in the study. If a respondent professes this belief, the likelihood that this person strongly supports Israel increases almost threefold (180%).”

For more than 75 years, America and Israel have moved forward as close allies. There have been tensions, but both governments claim today that diplomatic ties are strong. The roots of the bond can indeed be found in Scripture, as well as the relationship’s future.

Who Was Israel?

The word “Israel” appears constantly throughout the scriptures—over 2,500 times! Bible readers can see how important Israel is to God and want to support the nation because of it. Yet

modern Israel is not the only nation descended from biblical Israel.

In the Bible, Israel started with a single man who had children. His name was originally Jacob and was changed to Israel by God. He had 12 sons. Israel became a nation in the Old Testament and was led out of slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land by Moses and Joshua.

Saul and David ruled the ancient kingdom of Israel. Following the death of David’s son Solomon, the nation was divided into two separate kingdoms. One was the House of Judah, which consisted of descendants of Israel’s fourth oldest son, Judah, as well as Benjamin, the youngest son, and Levi, the third oldest son. The other kingdom was called the House of Israel. Over time, the descendants of this latter kingdom lost their identity.

The nation known as Israel today primarily descends from just one of Israel’s children, Judah.

What most do not realize is that America is also a biblical nation descending from the patriarch Israel. Although the word “America” does not appear in Scripture, there is abundant evidence to show the United States has its roots in another of Israel’s offspring.

Judah, however, was never considered lost and is understood to be the Jewish people of today. The Jews never lost sight of their biblical identity—because they generally continued to observe the seventh-day Sabbath, a sign that identifies God’s people (Ex. 31:13).

America today is filled with descendants of the ancient patriarch Israel who do not know who or where they came from.

America’s Identity

The world has long been suspicious of America’s biblical origins, yet most have been unable to pin them down.

Puritan leader John Winthrop, in a 1630 sermon titled “A Model of Christian Charity,” said that, if the Puritans did justly, loved mercy and remained humble, “We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand

of our enemies; when He shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, ‘may the Lord make it like that of New England.’”

In this last phrase, Winthrop was paraphrasing Genesis 48:20, which states: “The nation Israel will invoke blessings by you, saying, ‘May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh’” (Christian Standard Bible).

Little did Winthrop know what he was saying. The verse quoted helps prove the Bible identity of America, which is also tied to the identity of the United Kingdom.

One of Jacob’s sons was Joseph. In Genesis 48, Joseph gave his sons Ephraim and Manasseh separate blessings. Verse 19 states that Manasseh “shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations.”

Scour the record of history. There are only two brother nations with a common heritage where one was a massive empire—a “multitude” or “company of nations”—and the other became a single, great nation. These are the United Kingdom with all of its commonwealth countries and the United States.

These blessings came to these nations as the result of a promise God gave to Ephraim and Manasseh’s great-grandfather Abraham. Because of this patriarch’s obedience, God assured him, “in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore” (Gen. 22:17).

That promise was passed down through Abraham’s line, and today’s residents of the U.S. are the unwitting recipients of this special blessing.

Reflecting on all we have learned, it becomes plain why America and Israel have such a strong bond: They are brother nations, one descending from Judah and one from Manasseh. Ancient familial bonds have kept these peoples aligned.

What Can Break the Bond?

The Bible proves why the relationship has endured so much over the years.

This same divinely inspired source also has much to say about Israel's future.

The wars they have fought for over 75 years will come to an end: "Comfort you, comfort you My people, says your God. Speak you comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, *that her warfare is accomplished*, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she has received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins" (Isa. 40:1-2).

This is just one of the tremendously inspiring prophecies in God's Word about the nation. No more battles with Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran or any other enemy. The Israeli people no doubt look forward to this passage's imminent fulfillment.

A lesser-known prophecy in Zechariah 11 directly addresses Israel's relationship with the United States. God says: "I took unto Me two staves [staffs]; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock...And I took My staff, even Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break My covenant which I had made with all the people...Then I cut asunder Mine other staff, even Bands, *that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel*" (vs. 7, 10, 14).

The staff called Beauty has to do with God's grace and salvation. The other staff, Bands, fits with the subject at hand. Realize its meaning: America and Israel's relationship *will* eventually rupture. But it will only break when *God* brings Zechariah 11 to pass. Today's wars, political pressure or personal relationships among elected leaders simply cannot break it! In the meantime, the relationship could strain, but prophecy indicates it will not completely sever until God acts.

Keep reading in Zechariah 11, and notice the context of the split between Israel and Judah. It says this occurs during the reign of a figure known as the "foolish shepherd" (vs. 15-17)—who will be part of a global "beast" system outlined in Revelation 13. When Judah is severed from the rest of Israel, it will be clearly evident that God is responsible.

While the relationship between the U.S. and Judah will rupture for a time,

it does not mean God is casting aside either nation. The people of America and Israel have bright, peaceful futures ahead of them in the Kingdom of God. The Bible's Author has a plan for all mankind—every nation that descended from Israel's 12 sons, as well as all gentile nations of the world.

Different nations have different paths God uses to work with them to ensure the best possible outcome. But God gives *everyone* an opportunity. Read II Peter 3:9.

A prophecy in Isaiah 2 illustrates what will happen: "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" (vs. 2).

Zechariah 12 says specifically of Judah: "The LORD also *shall save the tents of Judah first*, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem do not magnify themselves against Judah. In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the LORD before them" (vs. 7-8). Joel

3 adds, "Judah shall dwell forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation" (vs. 20).

What about America and all the other tribes? Read Jeremiah 31:1: "At the same time, says the LORD, will I be the God of *all the families of Israel*, and they shall be My people."

The people descended from the tribes of Israel will prosper in God's coming Kingdom. They will also share beautiful unity, even greater than the America-Israel relationship today. The prophet Ezekiel recorded, "Moreover, you son of man, take you one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: and join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in your hand" (37:16-17).

We offer many free resources on rcg.org that explain God's hand in history and how He works with nations. To learn much more about the origins and prophesied future of America and Israel, as well as the rest of the ancient patriarch's 12 sons, read *America and Britain in Prophecy*. □

THE BIBLE'S AUTHOR HAS A PLAN FOR ALL MANKIND—EVERY NATION THAT DESCENDED FROM ISRAEL'S 12 SONS, AS WELL AS ALL GENTILE NATIONS OF THE WORLD.



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What Is the Mark of the Beast?

The description of the infamous mark in the book of Revelation invites widespread speculation, especially regarding rapid advancements of technology.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

FEW BIBLE passages evoke more fear and fascination than those about the mark of the beast. The mark—placed on a person's right hand or forehead (Rev. 13:16)—directly affects a person's ability to “buy and sell” (vs. 17). In an age of rapid technological advancements, theories and speculation abound about what it is.

The fate of those who take the mark adds to the urgency to identify it. Revelation 14:10 says followers of the beast will “drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture.”

Bible prophecy invites readers to engage with it and see what current world events align with God's Word. Jesus Christ told His followers to “watch” (Mark 13:37)—both their spiritual conditions and global trends. Given this, the many theories about the mark are understandable.

One popular theory is that the mark of the beast involves modern technologies such as RFID chips or implanted microchips. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved one such chip for implantation back in 2004. Alternative ideas have circulated for years, with barcodes, COVID-19 vaccines and other modern innovations thought to be candidates for the mark.

While these theories may seem plausible at first glance, the Bible provides the true path to understanding.

The key to identifying the mark is to fully apply God's Word, examining all relevant scriptures before drawing conclusions.

What Comes with the Mark?

The mark of the beast is not an isolated symbol or arbitrary code that someone might unknowingly accept—it is part of a larger, terrifying package.

Revelation 13 begins to describe the beast itself: “And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy” (vs. 1).

An additional beast is found in verse 11: “And I beheld *another beast* coming

up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon.”

Realize that these are not *literal creatures* rising out of the ocean. They are part of an evil world-ruling government. The Bible interprets itself a few chapters later: “The seven heads are *seven mountains*, on which the woman sits. And there are *seven kings*...” (17:9-10).

The two beasts of Revelation 13 are two leaders, one civil and the other religious, known as the beast and false prophet (19:20). They rule over all mankind and cause “all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark...” (13:16-17).

The mark is part of a bigger prophetic picture. For the mark to exist, there needs to be a world-ruling government and religious system operating on Earth led by the beast and false prophet. This is not occurring today, immediately discrediting RFID chips or any other modern technology as viable candidates.

When Will It Appear?

To properly understand the timing of the mark, we need to place it within the grander prophetic timeline of God’s Plan.

The four horsemen of Revelation 6 picture the beast system ramping up on the world stage. Note the second rider: “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” (vs. 4).

As the beast and false prophet come onto the scene, they will TAKE PEACE from the Earth. For this to happen, there would have to be world peace beforehand, which has never occurred in human history.

Isaiah 2:2-3 shows how peace will come to all mankind: “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.”

This passage pictures the Kingdom of God coming to Earth “in the last days.” God’s way of life will be revealed to all mankind, and they will experience the many blessings that flow from following His commands.

Verse 4 shows that this involves peace for the first time in human history: “And He [God] 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*.”

During this time, all people will understand God’s true way of life. It will be an era of peace, and God’s Law will go out from Jerusalem.

The True Meaning of the Mark

Knowing everyone will learn God’s ways before the beast rises is crucial to understanding the mark itself. It is part of a future test for all mankind.

To understand this coming test, we must examine one of God’s commands: the Sabbath. During the peaceful period of God’s Kingdom, all will learn how to properly keep this crucial command.

Notice what is found right after Revelation 14:9-10. Verse 12 begins to make clear what actions are tied to the mark: “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that *keep the commandments of God*, and the faith of Jesus.”

Those who do not take the mark follow the commandments of God. Conversely, the beast will lead people to disobey God.

When the beast appears on Earth, there will be one command of God most tied to his mark: the fourth commandment to “remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8).

Note the importance God puts on Sabbath-keeping: “Speak you also unto

the children of Israel, saying, Verily My sabbaths you shall keep: for it is *a sign* between Me and you throughout your generations” (31:13).

The Sabbath is a sign of obedience. Now look at how God describes one of His annual Sabbaths: “And it shall be for a sign unto you *upon your hand*, and for a memorial *between your eyes*” (13:9).

Recall that the mark of the beast will be in the right hand and forehead, symbolically tied to actions and thoughts. Similarly, God sees Sabbath-keeping as a sign—a mark of obedience—upon the hand and between the eyes.

After years of the world keeping God’s commands in the Kingdom, including the weekly Sabbath, the beast will “think to change times and laws” (Dan. 7:25).

The mark of the beast will involve a choice: either accept God’s Way, including His commanded Sabbath, or accept the counterfeit teachings of the beast’s false religion. The beast will force all to work on God’s weekly holy day or suffer persecution.

A Test for Today

While the mark of the beast is a future event, there are still lessons to learn from it now. In Revelation 18:4, God declares: “Come out of her [the false ways of this world], My people, that you be not partakers of her sins, and that you receive not of her plagues.”

As with the mark, this has a future application, yet God desires the same from individuals today: obedience. God wants those He is calling to live differently from those in the world, to set themselves apart by obeying Him.

Any energy focused on what the mark might be—a microchip, barcode or something else—is better spent on being concerned with whether you are obeying God now.

A central part of that obedience is the weekly Sabbath. Which day to keep holy has been debated for centuries. Read *Saturday or Sunday – Which Is the Sabbath?* at rcg.org/tsosw to learn the clear Bible answer of what God desires. □



5 WAYS TO *Become* **MORE** *Thankful*

How can you practice gratitude as a way of life, long after dinner wraps up on Thanksgiving Day?

BY FRANK LYDICK

EACH YEAR, millions of Americans take a break from their busy lives and sit down with the people they love for a Thanksgiving dinner. Anyone who has been at one of these gatherings knows that it can be a memorable experience.

The Thanksgiving holiday was created in the United States in 1863, in part because of the efforts of President Abraham Lincoln to foster unity and

gratitude among the American people during the Civil War. It officially became a nationally observed holiday in 1941.

Thanksgiving reminds us to be thankful for what we have. Science proves that being thankful improves your physical and mental health, increases empathy, reduces aggression, improves sleep, increases self-esteem and your mental fortitude. Studies have also shown that those who express

gratitude experience less stress and are happier than those who do not.

Thinking beyond the holiday itself, are there ways we can more effectively embrace gratitude the rest of the year?

Religion and belief in God have been shown to play a vital role in how grateful you are. According to a 2014 Pew Research study, which focused on whether poll participants felt a powerful sense of gratitude on a weekly basis,

there was a 22 percent gap between those who believed in God (80 percent felt thankful) and those who did not (58 percent were thankful).

The Bible has a lot to say about how to cultivate a thankful mindset. I Thessalonians 5:18 tells us: “In *everything* give thanks: for this is the will of God in Jesus Christ concerning you.”

By being thankful for all that we have, we are obeying a direct command from God, and it is also a way to honor Him. Considering thankfulness from God’s perspective is vital.

There are simple, practical ways—backed by Scripture—to become more thankful every day. This article will cover five of them.

1) Focus on the Positive

We all sometimes tend to feel like the world is out to get us. Negative thoughts have a way of dominating our thinking.

A key to becoming more thankful is finding ways to shift the focus from the negative to the positive. Finding the unseen benefit in various situations can help you learn from the experience.

Philippians 4:8 tells us to focus on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report.

This flies in the face of the world we live in and the prevalent “me first” mentality. Navigating daily life and fulfilling this scripture can be a challenge. But if you focus on the good that happens throughout your day, you will become more positive. The simple act of someone letting you into traffic during your morning commute and waving with a smile is something you can appreciate.

A first step is to dwell on what you have rather than what you lack. The news is littered with examples of billionaires and celebrities who never seem happy and settled. They seem to always want more. Thinking about and reflecting on the many blessings you have daily can help you establish a new pattern of thankfulness in your life.

Writing down and capturing what you are thankful for is a big step towards

having a more positive outlook every day. Counting your blessings will keep them at the front of your thoughts, not buried in a sea of negativity that you see in the world around you.

A handwritten list in a journal is an effective way to keep these things in mind. If you are more technologically minded, you can use the notes app on your smartphone to keep your list.

2) Use Thankfulness Cues

In my home, we created a wall of family photos from several generations back. When we sit down to have a conversation or watch a movie, we are reminded of relatives who have passed away—a way to feel gratitude for the people who have shaped our lives and the legacy they left behind. This is an example of a thankfulness cue, and we can all use them in various forms in our homes and workplaces.

The benefit of thankfulness cues is that they trigger mindfulness toward what we should be grateful for in our lives.

I have my father’s baseball glove that he used when he was a pitcher in the 1930s. It reminds me of him and makes me thankful for all the time that I was able to spend with him playing catch in the yard growing up. Our son has class photos and yearbooks from each year in school. They remind him of classmates and teachers. There are many more examples that I could list here.

Think about thankfulness cues you could use in your life: A photo of a loved one, a memento from a place you used to live or visited on a trip, a quote that inspires you—the possibilities are endless.

Another cue that we can use to help us be more thankful is the physical environment we are in.

If you live close to beautiful natural locations, they can be a trigger to set


your mind on gratitude. Places like exquisite gardens and rustic hiking trails present opportunities to focus on God’s Creation and your appreciation for it.

You can also use your home as an environment for thankfulness. A quiet room with a comfortable chair, a pleasant view of your backyard and a hot cup of herbal tea may be all you need to get into a gratitude mindset.

Using cues and designating specific times and places to be thankful will help us fulfill Psalm 100:4. God commands us to “enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise.”

What is thankfulness?

The state of being conscious of a benefit received, expressive of thanks, or well pleased.



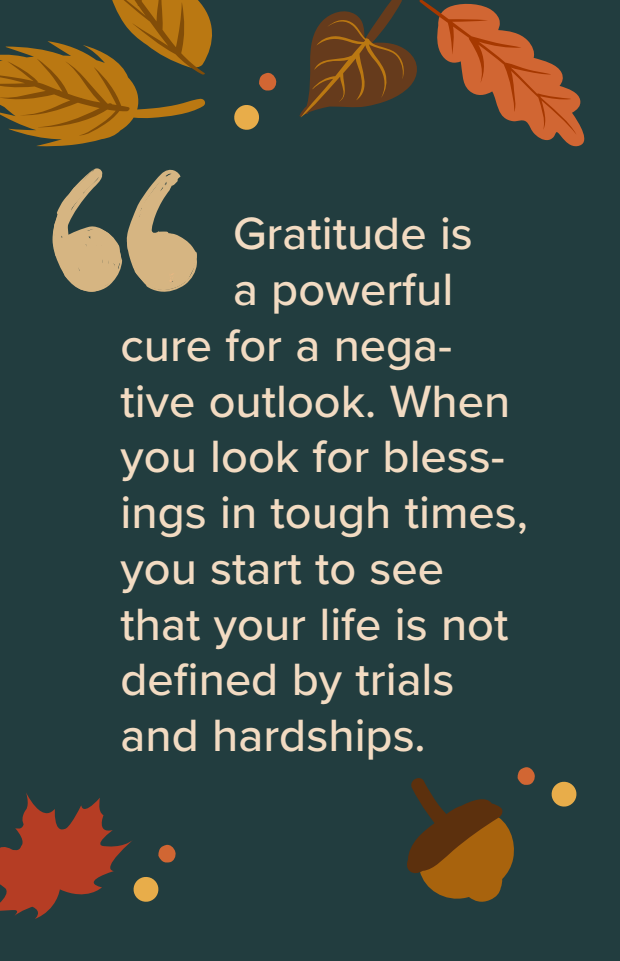
3) Use Thankfulness in Prayer

Gratitude should be a major focus of your prayer life. Be specific and thank God for each blessing that comes to mind.

Ephesians 5:20 shows we should be “giving thanks *always* for *all things* unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The phrase “all things” can mean all, any, every, the whole. We should thank God for big things, but also the small details of what He does for us.

Every time we go to God in prayer, it is important to add an element of thankfulness and gratitude. By doing so, we build a habit that we can repeat each time we pray. Gratitude in your prayers will become like second nature.

Take the list we discussed earlier of the things you are thankful for with



“Gratitude is a powerful cure for a negative outlook. When you look for blessings in tough times, you start to see that your life is not defined by trials and hardships.”

you when you pray. It will help you immensely to keep all those things in mind and include specifics when talking to God.

For example, we can thank God for our loved ones. Ephesians 1 says, “Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (vs. 15-16).

Reviewing the book of Psalms is a great source of inspiration for all that God does for us. Various psalms show how much and how often we should show thanks to our Creator God.

Psalms 103 is a great place to start. It lists many of God’s benefits in our lives. David wrote, “Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and *forget not all His benefits*: who forgives all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases; who redeems your life from destruction; who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfies your mouth with good things; so that

your youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (vs. 1-5).

4) Express Gratitude to Others

A big step toward becoming more thankful is to recognize the role that others play in your life. We all have friends, coworkers and relatives that always seem to “deliver the goods” when the time comes, time after time. Do you remember to express gratitude to them for what they did for you?

I Thessalonians 5:11 says, “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also you do.” Showing gratitude to others and letting them know how much you appreciate what they did for you is a great way to “comfort” and “edify” your loved ones.

A first step is to simply say “thank you.” This can be verbal, or take the form of a thank you note. This can make a big impression.

Making a habit of saying thank you will make you a more thankful person, and it will make your friends and family feel good.

5) Adjust Your Perspective During Tough Times

Finding the good in demanding situations is a powerful way to forge a thankful mindset. The Bible refers to these situations as “trials.”

A trial is a process of testing one’s faith in God and character when confronted with a difficult situation. When a trial strikes, it is easy to focus on pain and frustration, but consciously shifting your perspective can turn suffering into growth. It will also increase your gratitude for what you have.

James 1 illustrates what a Christian’s mindset should be during adversity: “When troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy” (vs. 2, New Living Translation). Part of this “great joy” can come from remembering to be thankful.

How we perceive challenges shapes our reactions. While your initial response may be negative, deliberately seeking the hidden opportunities or lessons in a challenge allows for a more constructive approach. This shift helps you regain control and purpose instead of feeling overwhelmed.

Trials often hold valuable lessons that only become clear after reflection. A job setback might teach patience or adaptability. Personal loss may reveal emotional resilience or deepen your appreciation for relationships that you have. Every adversity, when viewed as an opportunity to grow, can become a teacher.

Gratitude is a powerful cure for a negative outlook. When you look for blessings in tough times, you start to see that your life is not defined by trials and hardships. A challenging situation may bring out kindness, open new opportunities or strengthen your character in other ways.

Finding things to be thankful for during challenging times in our lives is one of the most difficult things to do. But in Romans 5:3-5, the apostle Paul tells us trials work “patience,” “experience,” and “hope” in those who believe God’s words. Be thankful for the spiritual lessons of adversity.

Make Thankfulness a Habit

Beyond the excitement of Thanksgiving Day, the football games and the shopping trips, there lies a mindset that, when applied in your life, will help you to be more thankful every day.

Do not limit your thankfulness to one holiday or time of year. Use the annual Thanksgiving holiday to jumpstart a spirit of gratitude every day going forward. Remember that God wants you to give thanks “in *everything*” (I Thes. 5:18).

Take advantage of the five practical tips in this article. By focusing on positivity, using cues, giving thanks in prayer, expressing gratitude to others and keeping hold of this mindset even in difficult times, you will become a more thankful person. □



Is Religion Dead in Australia?

A growing number of the continent's citizens claim they have “no religion.” Sociologists, theologians and the nation itself are struggling to grasp what this means.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

“**C**AN GOD survive in Australia?” A bestselling book in the 1980s used this question for its title, but the query still sparks heated debate today.

The book's author, Bruce Wilson, defined the titular question: “It means: can God survive in the hearts and minds of Australians living in a technological, industrial society? Or, more to the point: can Australians now get along all right without God, or do they just think they can?”

Australia in the 80s was no longer heavily influenced by the Church of England (glibly referred to as the “C

of E”). Instead, it had moved steadily toward secular modernism. The author noted that religion was increasingly extraneous in politics, society and individual lives, stating that God had become “as irrelevant as ice-chests in a world that has invented the refrigerator.”

The 1981 census reported that 10.8 percent of citizens responded they had “no religion”—a number that had been just 0.8 percent in 1966. At the time, 76.4 percent of Australians identified themselves as Christian.

About 40 years later, the “no religion” camp continues to grow, with 38.9 percent choosing the category in

the 2021 census. Christian belief is now claimed by only 43.9 percent. Other non-Christian religions, such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism, saw increases.

Given the decades-long trend, many interpret the data by declaring that religion is on its deathbed, with the vast majority of traditional Christianity merely running on fumes.

Has Australia really lost its religion—or is there something deeper going on?

Not So Easy

“Religion” is often seen as a dirty word in Australia. Many look at the his-

tory of what has been done by those in religious organizations—wars, genocide, child abuse, oppression—and do not want to be a part of any of them. Coming off this, some Aussies identify themselves as *spiritual* but not religious.

Having watched the situation grow and change over the years, Mr. Wilson amended his outlook for the nation in 1996, as a *Sydney Morning Herald* piece detailed: “Back then, in 1983, he argued that on the back of technology and economic growth people believed they could manage and deal with life without God. Although this clearly remains true for many people, Wilson now argues that behind this public secularism there has developed a ‘private spirituality.’

“In an internal sense people are very spiritual,” he says. “It does not necessarily mean they believe in God in the way that traditional Christianity expresses that belief. What people are saying is, ‘I do not belong to any institutional form of religion.’ They are not saying they are not spiritual.”

Other theologians continue to agree with Mr. Wilson today.

So who is right? It seems that everyone is partly correct: Atheism is growing, but so is “private spirituality.” Other groups, such as Islam or evangelical mega-churches, are also gaining ground. Twenty percent of the nation is Catholic and, despite losses, the Anglican church still has 9.8 percent of Aussies.

While hard and fast conclusions cannot be drawn from the statistics alone, one thing is certain: a seismic shift is occurring with religious belief in Australia. This dramatic change reveals a search for national identity—one that offers a clear path to a hopeful future.

Until now, everything Australians have tried, religiously speaking, has not worked. Widespread attachment to traditional Christianity has not brought true prosperity and contentment. Wholesale secularism has also failed to deliver.

Clearly the nation is looking for something else. For now, it is taking

the shape of a distinctly “multi-faith” society.

Historical Pattern

To understand religion in the nation, one must examine its history. For those in Europe, or even the United States, it is easy to forget that Australia only achieved independence from the British Empire in 1901. Compared to other Western nations, it is relatively young and still finding its footing.

In his book *Australian Soul: Religion and Spirituality in the 21st Century*, author and sociologist Gary Bouma examined the nation’s history to identify the motivation for its ongoing religious shift.

He described Australian society as “post-empire, post-colonial, post-modern, post-ecumenical, post-secular and post-family. As a result of this unique social structure and culture Australians experience religion and express spirituality in distinct ways.”

Yet as the nation moves forward, its past has left indelible marks—especially its time as a penal colony under the British crown.

Mr. Bouma frames the situation this way: “While Americans seem to have an immediate sense of the presence of God, for Australians, God is more distant—I suppose, at least as far away as London is from Sydney. The centre of imperial authority was a long way away and only partially effective in exercising control, providing the necessities of life and observing the behaviour of convict and colonist alike.”

In other words, being ruled by a king half a world away colored Australia’s view of God.

Mr. Bouma noted that Australians often see God as “distant, able to be got around and, while useful for desperate last-minute appeals, not quite relevant to daily life.”

The author suggested that after World War II, Australia’s move away from British ties led many to question their need for God, searching instead for other sources of identity and support.

Deeper Connection

The nation’s identity crisis has a specific reason, and it again relates to its history. Australia’s historical ties to Britain and the U.S. seem rather simple: these nations come from Anglo-Saxon heritage. Yet their ties are *much* older and run *much* deeper. One clue lies in Christianity being the dominant religion in all three countries.

Consider: why do all of these nations have an attachment to the Bible? The King James Version traveled far and wide on British ships and was prevalent in the empire’s colonies. The U.S. prints “In God We Trust” on its money. And Australia’s constitution begins by stating that the nation was formed while “humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God.”

Regular readers of *The Real Truth* already know the biblical identities of the U.S. and British Commonwealth nations, which includes Australia. They are the Israelitish tribes of Ephraim (the UK and related territories) and Manasseh (America). David C. Pack’s book *America and Britain in Prophecy* provides detailed proof of this. Using the Bible and historical accounts, this book reveals the true origins of these brother nations and shows beyond a doubt that they are part of what are commonly referred to as the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.

One proof of Australia’s ties to the Israelitish tribe of Ephraim lies in its vital sea ports.

The Bible shows that the patriarch Abraham was one of the forefathers of the Israelite peoples, and the great-great-grandfather of Ephraim and Manasseh. He was given a promise from God for his obedience: “That in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; *and your seed shall possess the gate* [sea gates] of his enemies; and in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because you have obeyed My voice” (Gen. 22:17-18).

This passage talks of national blessings, but these were withheld until the British Empire and America suddenly emerged on the world scene starting in the 1800s. After that time, these two great powers began to take control of every major sea gate: the Suez and Panama canals, the straits of Gibraltar and Hormuz, Singapore, Cape Horn, Malta, Cape of Good Hope, Hong Kong, etc.

Australia could never have survived without these vital trade routes.

Further details of these blessings can be seen when God passed the promise to Abraham's grandson Jacob (who was later renamed Israel): "I am God Almighty...a nation and a company of nations shall be of you..." (Gen. 35:11).

Later, Jacob passed on the birthright blessings directly to his grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh and said: "He [Manasseh] also *shall become a people*, and he also *shall be great*: but truly his younger brother [Ephraim] shall be greater than he, and his seed *shall become a multitude of nations*" (48:19).

Undoubtedly, America has been the single most powerful nation of all time and the British Commonwealth countries were part of the greatest empire—multitude of nations—in all of history!

Yet the Bible says even more about the locations of Britain and Australia, namely that they will live on island nations. Psalm 89 states: "I will set his [the people of Israel's] hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers" (vs. 25).

Isaiah adds to this: "Listen, O ISLES, unto Me; and hearken, you people, from far..." (49:1). Verse 3 shows whom God is addressing: "And said unto me, You are My servant, O ISRAEL, in whom I will be glorified."

Ephraimites often live on islands! Those in Britain and New Zealand certainly do. While Australia is technically a continent, it could also be seen as a massive island.

Verse 12 shows where Ephraim would reside relative to Jerusalem:

"Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the NORTH and from the WEST; and these from the land of Sinim."

Look at a map. Northwest from Jerusalem are the British Isles! In addition, the "land of Sinim" is generally understood to be Australia.

These are just a few places where commonwealth nations are described in the Bible. There are many more.

Yet, with such a rich and important history, how could Ephraim and Manasseh forget who they are?

The answer is found in Deuteronomy 4. Moses addressed the tribes of ancient Israel: "Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers gives you" (vs. 1).

Verses 5 and 6 show the national benefits of living God's Way: "Behold, I [Moses] have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me...Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."

The passage continues showing what others would think of an obedient Israel: "For what nation is there so great, who has God so nigh [near] unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon Him for?" (vs. 7).

Obedience to God's commands meant He would remain NEAR unto the nation!

Yet Moses also issued a warning: "Only take heed to yourself, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life: but teach them your sons, and your sons' sons" (vs. 9).

Clearly Israel did not listen or teach these things to their offspring. In turn, they forgot and were all but lost to history.

Social Sickness

God sees the pitiful condition of His forgetful people and cries out to them today through the pages of the Bible: "The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel does not know, My people does not consider" (Isa. 1:3).

The modern nations descended from ancient Israel smugly see nothing wrong with the way they are living. Despite countless problems, they refuse to consider their ways.

Continuing, the Creator states: "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should you be stricken anymore? You will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint" (vs. 4-5).

Australia's social ills include alcohol abuse and sexual degeneracy.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, "Family, domestic and sexual violence is a major health and welfare issue in Australia, occurring across all socioeconomic and demographic groups, but predominantly affecting women and children." It added that "about 1 in 5 people (21%) aged 14 and over in 2022–2023 were verbally abused, physically abused, or put in fear by someone under the influence of alcohol in the previous 12 months."

How big is the alcohol problem? *USA Today* reported that "Among the 22 countries involved in the 2021 Global Drug Survey...respondents from Australia reported getting drunk more than any other country, with an average of 26 times a year, or about twice a month."

In November 2023, public intoxication was decriminalized in the state of Victoria. The Human Rights Law Centre stated, "This is an historic and long overdue reform...Victoria will be the first state to meaningfully transition away from a legal response to a public health response to public

intoxication, finally treating it as the public health issue it has always been.”

Then there is Australia’s favorite vice, gambling. Statistics from the Australian government in 2023 reveal the extent of this problem:

- “Australians lose approximately \$25 billion on legal forms of gambling each year, representing the largest per capita losses in the world.”
- “Research conducted in 2022 found that almost half (46%) of Australians aged 18 and over who gambled would be classified as being at-risk of, or already experiencing, gambling harm (low, moderate, or high-risk Problem Gambling Severity Index categories combined).”
- “Harms to relationships (25%), health (21%), and emotional/psychological wellbeing (19%) accounted for the greatest share of gambling-related harm.”

But blatant immorality and vice are not the only things forcing God to remain at a distance from Australia.

While the Bible strongly condemns manmade religious practices, this is exactly what the overwhelming majority have done—individuals and organizations alike. They *appear* religious (or spiritual), but it is in vain.

God addresses this in Isaiah 1: “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? Says the LORD: I am *full* of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats” (vs. 11).

While there is not widespread sacrificing of animals in Australia, this verse uses poetic language to make its point. The Creator is “full of”—SICK OF—manmade religious ceremonies: “Bring no more *vain* oblations; incense is an abomination unto Me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity...*Your* new moons and *your* appointed feasts My soul hates: they are a trouble unto Me; I am weary to bear them” (vs. 13-14).

Instead of keeping the Holy Days ordained by God, many ascribe to pagan-based holidays. The same

applies to religious practices and beliefs. Request *God’s Holy Days or Pagan Holidays?* at rcg.org/ghdoph to learn more.

Even though it may seem implausible, take God at His word. He says that the VAST majority of religious actions in Australia are done in vain. Why? Because they were created by the ideas of men (“YOUR new moons” and “YOUR appointed feasts”) rather than what the Bible actually commands.

God explains the result of this: “And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide My eyes from you: yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear...” (vs. 15).

Isaiah 59 reiterates this point: “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear” (vs. 2).

Australia Must Remember!

God longs to restore a close relationship with His people. The first step to making this happen is to show the modern nations of Israel their wretched condition—and He pulls no punches.

Isaiah 28 describes the British people, including Australia: “Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower, which are on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine!” (vs. 1).

Think of how often citizens of Israelitish nations—recipients of God’s awesome blessings—brag about their drunken escapades!

Hosea also describes the modern descendants of ancient Israel: “Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel: for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By *swearing*, and *lying*, and *killing*, and *stealing*, and *committing adultery*, they break out, and blood touches blood” (4:1-2).

With each passing generation, these nations have drifted further from God’s Way. Verse 6 continues: “*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*: because you have rejected knowledge, I will also

reject you...seeing you have forgotten the law of your God...”

Soon, God will clearly reveal His power to Australia and its brother nations and make them fully aware of their sinful condition.

Isaiah 58:1 states: “Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet, and show My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.”

At that point, those in these nations will have the chance to choose to follow God’s ways or face consequences similar to a parent punishing a child.

Ezekiel 5 details what this chastisement will entail, and how it will be on such a scale that it will become global news: “So it [the punishment] shall be a reproach and a taunt, an instruction and an astonishment unto the nations that are round about you...” (vs. 15).

Yet God will not utterly destroy His people, He simply intends them to learn the error of their ways. As a loving God, He not only warns and offers a way of escape now, but also during the coming time of trouble (Jer. 30:7).

Jeremiah 31 states: “And there is hope in your end, says the LORD...” (vs. 17).

The account continues: “I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; You have chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn You me, and I shall be turned; for You are the Lord my God.

“Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed...I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth” (vs. 18-19).

In verse 20, God calls repentant Ephraim His “dear son” and promises to “have mercy upon him.”

This type of deep repentance can happen on an individual level now. Any modern Ephraimite *can* change his ways.

All in Australia must consider their ways and take to heart the words of Isaiah 55: “Seek you the LORD while He may be found, call you upon Him while He is near” (vs. 6). □

ing through turbines, a set of blades mounted on a rotor shaft connected to a generator. Coal, oil, natural gas and biomass generators burn fuel to boil water into steam. Geothermal plants use either natural steam or pump water into the ground to let the Earth convert it to steam. The radioactive decay of nuclear fuel produces the needed heat to create steam. Natural gas generators may also use the gasses released from combustion to directly spin the turbines.

Coal, as mentioned earlier, has significant drawbacks, as does natural gas. Hydropower typically involves changing the environment to build massive lakes that can drive the generators. Nuclear power extracts radioactive materials from underground and creates impossible to dispose of radioactive waste.

The continued environmental degradation and risk from these sources ultimately fall short of “keeping” the planet God gave us.

In response, many see green energy technologies as the only path forward.

Solar power uses photovoltaic cells, which release electrons when they absorb light. These cells get chained together to produce the needed electrical current. Windmills use the movement of air to turn a turbine. Hydropower uses water moving downhill.

Solar, wind and hydropower all aim to use the same natural power sources that mankind used before the Industrial Revolution. In theory, these ought to be able to reverse the harmful effects of previous power generation.

But even *these* have significant harmful effects. Windmill blades are usually made of fiberglass, which cannot be recycled and end up in landfills. Most other green techs use rare earth elements that cannot yet be recycled. The mines for these are predominantly in China, which has very lax environmental controls.

Bautou, in Inner Mongolia, houses the Baoganag Steel and Rare Earth complex, an industrial facility the size of a city. Next to the compound lies a lake full of black, toxic sludge. A *BBC* article from 2015 called it “hell on Earth.” China produces around two-thirds of the world’s supply of rare earth elements, many of which go into wind turbines, solar panels and batteries for everything from smart-phones to electric cars.

Power generators also have an impact on local environments. Combustion-based generation expels smoke and noxious fumes. Solar farms require large areas of land to collect the sunlight that no longer hits the ground where plants can use it. Large-scale hydropower requires damming rivers and creating lakes that destroy habitats and even entire towns and interrupt migratory fish’s movement. Windmills require significant and near-constant wind movement, which birds also rely on. The spinning blades can wreak havoc on bird populations as they use the same air currents.

Modern green technologies make people *feel* like our power generation does not destroy the Earth. Instead, we are often just moving the worst destruction away from the view of rich people and wealthy nations.

In this world, *every* method to generate electricity negatively impacts the Earth. No matter what we have tried, we have only made this worse. We have failed to properly exploit and protect the planet God gave us.

Future Energy

But there is hope. The Bible reveals a future where mankind’s efforts to manage the Earth will no longer fall short. In this coming age, the perfect balance between dominion and stewardship will be achieved under the guidance of a world-ruling government led by Jesus Christ. This is the Kingdom of God, the time when all things will be restored to their proper order.

Isaiah describes this world-ruling government: “And it shall come

to pass...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” (2:2). Here, the “mountains” represent large nations and the “hills” smaller ones—showing a world united under righteous leadership.

When this Kingdom comes, all people will learn the correct way to live, “for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (vs. 3).

God’s Law will show humanity how to harness Earth’s resources without destruction, and this will include rules for clean and sustainable energy. Unlike today, where every form of power generation carries harmful effects, this future will bring solutions we can only imagine now.

Twice in Isaiah, God declares that no one “shall hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain” (11:9; 65:25). This promise extends even to the generation of power—it will neither harm people nor the planet.

So what might this future look like? While the Bible does not specify the methods of energy production, it does tell us that mankind will once again be connected with God, the Creator of all things. Through that connection, new knowledge and understanding will be revealed. Will there be revolutionary breakthroughs, ways of harnessing the natural world we have yet to dream of? Will ancient, untapped forces of nature be used in ways we have never considered? It is possible that energy will come from sources beyond what we know today.

God’s Word points to an exciting future where awesome innovation and progress occur under His guidance.

At that time, energy will be abundant, clean and in perfect harmony with the environment and humanity. Only in God’s Kingdom will power generation truly be green—ushering in a new age where energy and life flourish together in a way we can now only imagine. □

Cyberattacks on U.S. Utilities Surged 70 Percent This Year, Says Check Point



The sun sets behind power lines above the plains north of Amarillo, Texas (March 14, 2017).

REUTERS/LUCAS JACKSON

Reuters – U.S. utilities faced a near 70 percent jump in cyberattacks this year over the same period in 2023, according to data from Check Point Research, underlining the escalating threat to a critical infrastructure.

The utilities and power infrastructure across the U.S. are becoming increasingly vulnerable as the grid expands rapidly to meet surging demand for power, and assets are digitalized.

Utilities are low-hanging fruit for cyberattacks because many of them use outdated software, said Douglas McKee of cyber security firm SonicWall.

To date, the attacks have not crippled any U.S. utility, but industry experts warn a coordinated attempt

could be devastating, impacting essential services and causing substantial financial losses.

There were 1,162 cyberattacks on average through August this year, compared to 689 in 2023, Check Point data showed.

The energy sector is considered to be more vulnerable to such attacks. In May 2021, fuel pipeline operator Colonial Pipeline was forced to shut down its entire network due to one of the biggest cyberattack incidents on the energy industry.

More recently, U.S. oilfield services firm Halliburton disclosed that an unauthorized third party had accessed and removed data from its systems.

The utilities industry depends on IoT and ICS (Internet of Things

and Incident Command System) technology, which are not as advanced in their cyber defenses as the software used by Apple or Microsoft, Mr. McKee said.

Compliance with regulations such as the North American Electric Reliability Corp's (NERC) Critical Infrastructure Protection, which safeguards bulk power systems from cyber threats, only provide a minimum standard or protection, experts said.

The expansion of the grid, including incremental interconnections to new customers like Gen-AI data centers, is creating more potential points of attack.

Earlier this year, NERC said the number of susceptible points on the U.S. electrical networks has been increasing by about 60 per day.

Several major U.S. companies have suffered ransomware attacks in recent years, including UnitedHealth Group's Change Healthcare unit in February.

"If an equivalent attack occurred that was on the scale of Change Healthcare...the impact could be completely devastating," said Kevin Kirkwood, chief information security officer at Foster City, California-based cybersecurity provider Exabeam.

Even breaches that do not directly compromise critical infrastructure could lead to significant financial losses, said Wayne Tung, managing director at Sendero Consulting.

The average cost of a data breach in the energy sector reached a global high of \$4.72 million, IBM reported in 2022.

Historically, election years also fuel heightened malicious cyber activity.

"With the upcoming U.S. election, we can expect a surge in cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, including utilities, energy grids, and communication networks," said Nataliia Zdruk, Senior Threat Intelligence Analyst at Binary Defense. □

Cocaine Trade in the Rugged Micay Canyon Threatens Colombia's Peace Efforts

El Plateado, Colombia (AP) – El Plateado in the rugged mountains of southwestern Colombia might seem like a typical community in the countryside—until you hear the bursts of machine-gun fire and mortar blasts in the distance.

The remote town of 12,000 people lies in the Micay Canyon, where rebel groups have entrenched over the past two years despite efforts by Colombian President Gustavo Petro to negotiate peace deals with these irregular armies under a strategy known as total peace.

The canyon is currently a bastion of a rebel faction that broke away from the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, and that has been attacking military positions while the army responds with heavy infantry.

“It hurts me to see my children growing up amid this war,” said Edilma Acuechante, a 34-year-old woman who makes a living from picking coca leaves at local farms that sell the harvest to drug traffickers who turn it into cocaine.

She said she keeps a small backpack with clothes, soap and toothbrushes in her wooden house, in case she needs to quickly flee her village.

The Micay Canyon plays a key role in the illicit trade of both drugs and weapons.

It connects the Andes mountains and the Pacific Ocean along dozens of remote trails used to bring cocaine to small ports where it is loaded unto homemade submarines heading to Central America. Experts say it also serves as a corridor to bring weapons into the interior of Colombia.

The former FARC faction, known by its initials in Spanish FARC-EMC, has set up roadblocks to control parts of the

Micay Canyon region, and guards coca leaf farms on its mountainsides.

Fighting between the rebels and the army mainly takes place on the hillsides, but the sounds of the confrontation can be heard from El Plateado, where residents try to maintain normal lives, selling things, working in stores, going to pick leaves at the coca farms.

It has been almost eight years since Colombia's government signed a peace deal with the FARC that was seen as a crucial step toward ending decades of rural violence in the South American country.

Under the 2016 agreement, more than 14,000 fighters laid down their weapons and formed a political party that was given 10 guaranteed seats in Colombia's congress.

The rebel fighters stopped taxing cocaine producers, handing out sen-

tences to thieves in small villages and watching over illegal mines.

But experts say that Colombia's government was too slow to fill the power vacuum left by the retreating rebels, and now a host of smaller groups that include the FARC-EMC, National Liberation Army, and the Gulf Clan are fighting to take over rural areas that were formerly under FARC control, like the Micay Canyon.

This threatens to undo years of progress in peacebuilding in Colombia.

Most members of the FARC-EMC withdrew from peace talks with Mr. Petro's administration in April, after the government blamed the group for killing an indigenous leader and suspended a ceasefire. The FARC-EMC had also expressed growing frustration with efforts by the government to patrol villages in the canyon and seize drug shipments.

President Petro has called the area “the great cocaine stock market” of the FARC-EMC, and he said that the canyon provides the group with one of its main sources of financing. □



A sack of harvested coca leaves sits on a field in the Micay Canyon, southwestern Colombia (Aug. 13, 2024).

AP/FERNANDO VERGARA

Democracy Declined for 8th Straight Year Around the Globe, Institute Finds

Copenhagen, Denmark (AP) – Last year had the worst decline in credible elections and parliamentary oversight in almost a half-century, driven by government intimidation, foreign interference, disinformation and the misuse of artificial intelligence in campaigns, an organization promoting democracy said.

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, or International IDEA, said election credibility is threatened by turnout dropping and results are increasingly being contested. One in three elections are being disputed in some way, it said.

The organization with 35 member governments said the average percentage of the voting age population who actually cast ballots has declined from

65.2 percent in 2008 to 55.5 percent in 2023.

“Elections remain the single best opportunity to end democratic backsliding and turn the tide in democracy’s favor,” said International IDEA’s Secretary-General, Kevin Casas-Zamora. “The success of democracy depends on many things, but it becomes utterly impossible if elections fail.”

The Stockholm-based organization said its Global Report on the State of the Democracy, which measures democratic performance in 158 countries from 1975 till today, found that 47 percent of countries have experienced a decline in key democratic indicators over the past five years, marking the eighth consecutive year of global democratic backsliding.

Globally, in nearly 20 percent of elections between 2020 and 2024, one of the losing candidates or parties rejected the result, and elections were being decided by court appeals at the same rate.

The report said 2023 was the worst year when it came to free and fair elections and parliamentary oversight.

There were threats of foreign interference, disinformation and the use of artificial intelligence in campaigns. The declines span both traditionally strong democracies as well as fragile governments around the globe.

In Africa, democratic performance has generally remained stable over the past five years, with notable declines in the Sahel, particularly in coup-affected Burkina Faso which is one of a growing list of West African countries where the military has taken power, accusing the elected governments of failing to keep their promises. IDEA noted that Burundi and Zambia have made notable improvements.

As to Western Asia, over a third of countries performed poorly, while Europe has seen widespread declines in democratic aspects like the rule of law and civil liberties. However, progress has notably been reported in Montenegro and Latvia.

The study noted that the Americas have mostly maintained stability, but countries like Guatemala, Peru and Uruguay have experienced declines, particularly in rule of law and civil liberties.

Most countries in the Asia-Pacific region have seen minor declines or stability, with notable improvements in Fiji, the Maldives and Thailand, the organization said. However, the declines were significant in Afghanistan where the Taliban have not been recognized by any country as the legitimate rulers since they seized power in 2021, and in Myanmar, where opposition to a military takeover has deteriorated to a civil war. □



A woman casts her vote in Romania's legislative election, in Bucharest, Romania (Dec. 6, 2020).

AP/ANDREEA ALEXANDRU

The World Is Pumping Out 57 Million Tons of Plastic Pollution a Year

Associated Press – The world creates 57 million tons of plastic pollution every year and spreads it from the deepest oceans to the highest mountaintop to the inside of people's bodies, according to a new study that also said more than two-thirds of it comes from the Global South.

It is enough pollution each year—about 57 million tons—to fill New York City's Central Park with plastic waste as high as the Empire State Building, according to researchers at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. They examined waste produced on the local level at more than 50,000 cities and towns across the world for a study in the journal *Nature*.

The study examined plastic that goes into the open environment, not plastic that goes into landfills or is properly burned. For 15 percent of the world's population, government fails to collect and dispose of waste, the study's authors said—a big reason Southeast Asia and

Sub-Saharan Africa produce the most plastic waste. That includes 255 million people in India, the study said.

Lagos, Nigeria, emitted the most plastic pollution of any city, according to study author Costas Velis, a Leeds environmental engineering professor. The other biggest plastic polluting cities are New Delhi; Luanda, Angola; Karachi, Pakistan and Al Qahirah, Egypt.

India leads the world in generating plastic pollution, producing 10.2 million tons a year, far more than double the next big-polluting nations, Nigeria and Indonesia. China, often villainized for pollution, ranks fourth but is making tremendous strides in reducing waste, Dr. Velis said. Other top plastic polluters are Pakistan, Bangladesh, Russia and Brazil. Those eight nations are responsible for more than half of the globe's plastic pollution, according to the study's data.

The United States ranks 90th in plastic pollution with more than 52,500

tons and the United Kingdom ranks 135th with nearly 5,100 tons, according to the study.

In 2022, most of the world's nations agreed to make the first legally binding treaty on plastics pollution, including in the oceans. Final treaty negotiations take place in South Korea in November.

The study used artificial intelligence to concentrate on plastics that were improperly burned—about 57 percent of the pollution—or just dumped. In both cases incredibly tiny microplastics, or nanoplastics, are what turn the problem from a visual annoyance at beaches and a marine life problem to a human health threat, Dr. Velis said.

Dr. Velis said the amount of plastic waste traded is small. Kara Lavender Law, an oceanography professor at the Sea Education Association who was not involved in the study, agreed, based on U.S. plastic waste trends.

The United Nations projects that plastics production is likely to rise from about 440 million tons a year to more than 1,200 million tons, saying “our planet is choking in plastic.” □



A man walks on a railway track littered with plastic and other waste materials on Earth Day in Mumbai, India (April 22, 2024).

AP/RAFIQ MAQBOOL

The background is a deep, textured blue. On the left side, there is a vertical arrangement of autumn leaves in shades of orange, yellow, and red, along with a brown pinecone and a small, spiky, brown object. In the bottom right corner, there are more autumn leaves in orange and red. The title "Should You Celebrate Thanksgiving?" is written in a large, white, serif font, centered on the right side of the image.

Should You Celebrate Thanksgiving?

For many in North America, the yearly celebration of giving thanks is reduced to gorging on a big meal, excessive drinking the night before or snoozing in front of a football game. For others, Black Friday—a day of frenzied shopping to capture the best market deals of the year—overshadows the holiday altogether.

Given all of the media hype, excess and sensational commercialism surrounding it, the original meaning of Thanksgiving can easily be lost for Americans and Canadians. Yet citizens of these prosperous nations should have every reason to keep the day as it was intended.

Although the national holiday was not instituted in the Bible, the scriptures have much to say about thankfulness. The article “Should You Celebrate Thanksgiving Day?” provides historical and biblical insight into this holiday that can help you better appreciate everything that you have.

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