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THE REAL TRUTH

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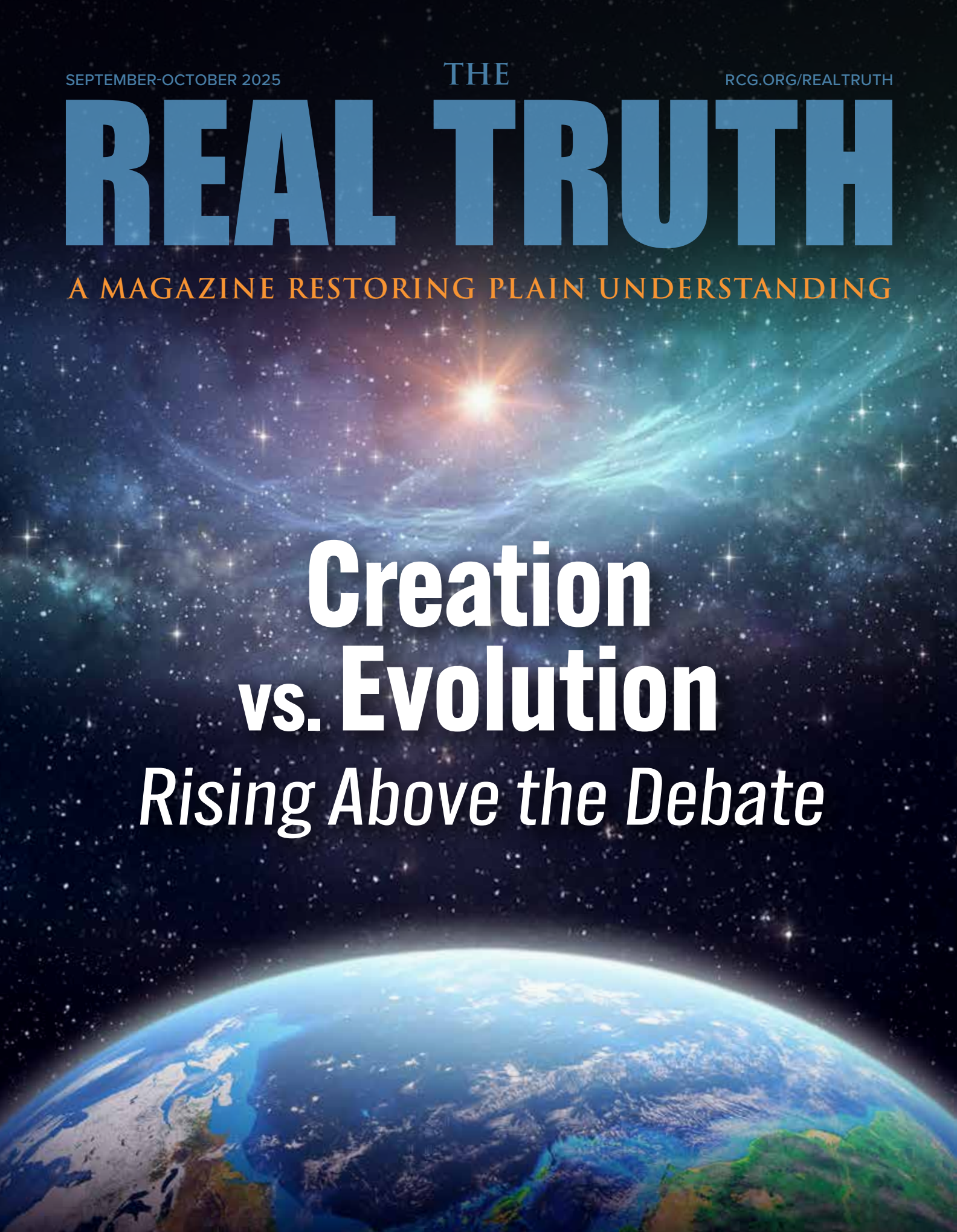
A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING



Creation vs. Evolution

Rising Above the Debate

Soldiers of the 3rd Marine Infantry Parachute Regiment land in a field after a parachute jump from a French military Airbus A400M aircraft as they take part in the military exercise 'Cathare 25,' involving over 800 active and reserve military personnel, near Pamiers (June 26, 2025).

LIONEL BONAVENTURE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

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Front Cover: Near the outskirts of the Small Magellanic Cloud, a satellite galaxy roughly 200,000 light-years from Earth, lies the young star cluster NGC 602, as captured by the NASA/ESA/CSA James Webb Space Telescope.

NASA.GOV

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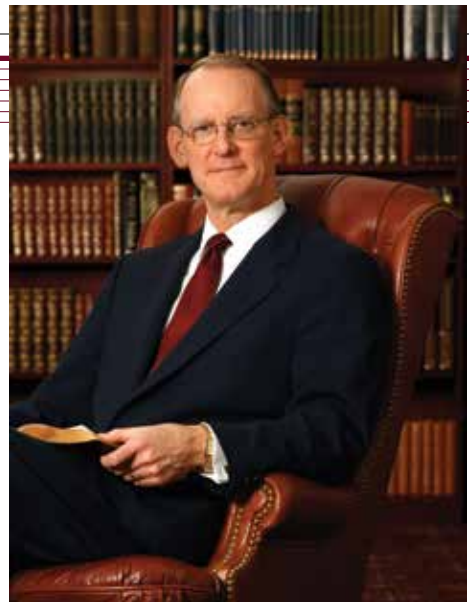
David C. Pack



The Peace Only God Can Bring

Recent months have seen calming of conflicts between Cambodia and Thailand, Pakistan and India, and Armenia and Azerbaijan. Prolonged war between Israel and Iran was averted. Israeli airstrikes destroyed hundreds of targets across Iran, while Iranian missiles rained down on Israeli cities. Most were intercepted, but those that penetrated aerial defense systems caused widely televised destruction.

Lives were lost on both sides, with great numbers injured and billions in damage. The war saw its climax when United States bombers destroyed Iranian nuclear sites in the most sophisticated stealth raids ever seen.

War between Israel and Hamas continues, with hostages still in captivity, catastrophic food shortages throughout Gaza and vast swaths of the country flattened.

Even larger is the Russia-Ukraine war, with all efforts to end it failing. Outside economic pressure and aid packages are not producing the desired result. Some estimates place the combined death toll at over 1 million, with Ukraine alone requiring more than half a trillion dollars—and many years—to rebuild. Reports of forced conscription on both sides show how dire the situation has become.

The Way of Peace

Speaking collectively of mankind, the apostle Paul wrote, "Their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known" (Rom. 3:15-17).

As terrible as the conflict is for the countries directly waging war, the threat to *world* peace is even greater. After U.S. President Donald Trump threatened "severe tariffs" on Russia if war did not stop in 50 days, he more recently changed the deadline to 10 days, citing no apparent willingness to produce peace.

These would include secondary tariffs—tariffs on countries who trade with Russia.

The blow-by-blow exchange via social media that followed bears recounting.

Following this news, Dmitry Medvedev, the former president of Russia and current deputy chairman of the National Security Council under President Vladimir Putin, warned, "Each new ultimatum is a threat and a step towards war. Not between Russia and Ukraine, but with his own country."

Mr. Trump countered with a statement to "tell Medvedev, the failed former President of Russia, who thinks he's still President, to watch his words. He's entering very dangerous territory!"

The dialogue did not calm down, with the former president of Russia reminding President Trump to remember "how dangerous the fabled 'Dead Hand' can be," a reference to its automated nuclear retaliation systems.

In response, Mr. Trump announced: "…I have ordered two Nuclear Submarines to be positioned in the appropriate regions, just in case these foolish and inflammatory statements are more than just that."

Russia has since "…declared that it no longer considers itself bound by a self-imposed moratorium on the deployment of nuclear-capable intermediate range missiles, a warning that potentially sets the stage for a new arms race as tensions between Moscow and Washington rise…" (*The Associated Press*).

Whether mere saber-rattling or a prelude to a wider war, these developments signal the most significant escalation between the world's two deadliest nuclear powers ever seen. There has since been talk of a potential breakthrough in peace talks—but the fact that nuclear war is even being discussed by politicians at the highest levels is an alarming testament to the ever-present danger facing humanity.

God's Perspective

Peace seems like an unrealistic dream. Yet the God who created the "way of peace"—who is Himself called the "God of peace" (Heb. 13:20)—has a plan. It begins with understanding how He views the world—and how He will soon address it.

The prophet Isaiah shows God will soon interrupt world affairs with a message. A voice will declare, "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withers, the flower fades: because the Spirit of the Lord blows upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withers, the flower fades: but the word of our God shall stand forever" (40:6-8).

A rhetorical question follows: "Who has *measured the waters in the hollow of His hand*, and *meted out heaven with the span*, and *comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure*, and *weighed the mountains in scales*, and the *hills in a balance*?" (vs. 12).

These are of course feats only God can achieve.

Continuing, "Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being His counsellor has taught Him? With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of judgment, and taught Him knowledge, and showed to Him the way of understanding?" (vs. 13-14).

This is the same Being who in chapter 55 declares, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (vs. 8-9).

Returning to chapter 40, it becomes plain how God views the nations of the world—even its superpowers: "Behold, the nations are *as a drop of a bucket*, and are *counted as the small dust of the balance*…" (vs. 15).

To a God of infinite power, the capacity of Earth's mightiest nations is as trivial as a water droplet or small mound of dirt. Instead of allowing mankind to accelerate toward war, the God of peace will soon interrupt affairs, *enforcing* peace!

Tomorrow's Wonderful World

My book *Tomorrow's Wonderful World – An Inside View!* explains the tragic state of human affairs *regardless* of who is in power or what is dominating the current news cycle:

"Billions today live with no hope. Yet all wish for better lives, a better tomorrow for themselves and their families. Most also recognize that the collective future of all nations seems equally hopeless. If one considers history, the course of the past 6,000 years, it is difficult to avoid pessimism. When the full picture is brought into view—when all facts are considered—*this* world *is* hopeless. Modern civilization is beset—overwhelmed!—with every conceivable problem, evil, and ill that competing, grasping, self-promoting human beings could devise. Having always been sick, it is now deep in terminal illness, wheezing out its final desperate gasps before breathing its last.

"The present world is a condemned building. It is like an old, empty row house—abandoned, overgrown, burned out, littered with trash, marred by broken windows, and covered in graffiti. Built on a *wrong foundation* from the beginning, its already weak underpinnings have now eroded to the point of collapse under its own weight. Like all condemned structures, dangerous if left standing, this building *must* come down. With explosive charges in place, it is soon to be imploded and the rubble scraped away in advance of a new and magnificent world architecture foretold long ago to replace it.

"The plight of all nations today stands in stark contrast to the world that is coming. An artistic masterpiece soon to be unveiled, a fantastic future—truly incredible!—lies ahead for every nation of the world! But it will not and could never occur under the hand of men."

Words of Life

Jesus Christ taught, "freely you have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8). The true nature of the fantastic future I referenced is explained only in the pages of the Bible. Real hope awaits humanity!

The Restored Church of God is able to offer *Tomorrow's Wonderful World – An Inside View!* and all other materials we produce free of charge because of faithful members' tithes and offerings as well as the generous support of readers and viewers who choose to support the Work of God.

Read it now to learn *why* the world is the way it is—but also to begin to understand the awesome hope that lies ahead for mankind!

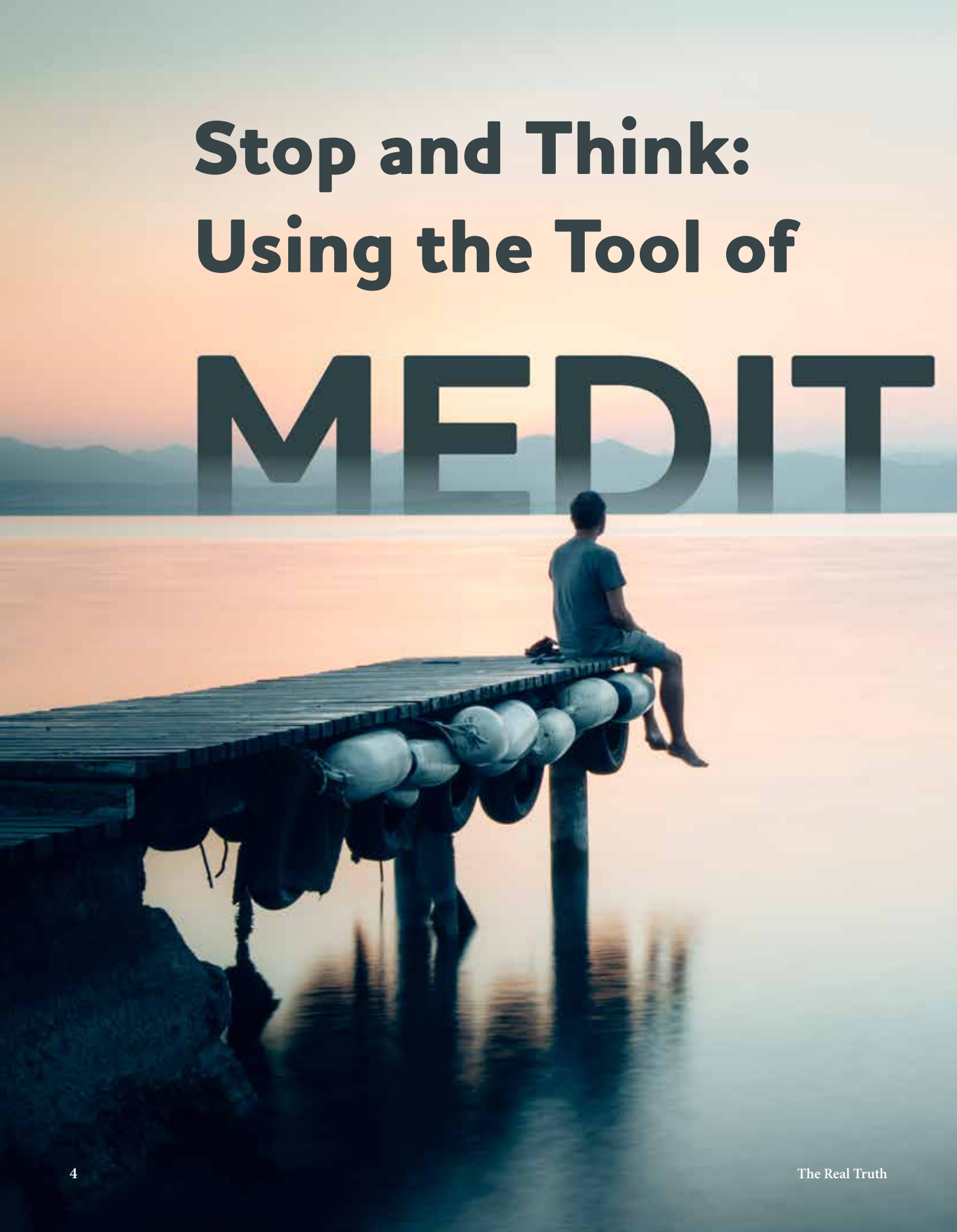
The world will *not* end in nuclear destruction. Character will *not* completely collapse. God will intervene before it is too late, and mercifully give mankind a prophesied future it desperately needs but does not understand. □

WHAT WILL THE WORLD BE LIKE IN 100 YEARS?

DISCOVER THE ANSWER AT

rcg.org/tww

Stop and Think: Using the Tool of MEDIT



ATION

Meditation allows you to contemplate the ultimate purpose for your life—and what can be your incredible future.

"Why can't I think straight anymore?" It was technology writer Nicholas Carr who brought this question into the public forum with his 2008 article in *The Atlantic,* titled "Is Googl e Making Us Stupid?"

The premise of the piece was that the internet may be "rewiring" users' minds, making it difficult to focus for long periods of time, particularly when reading.

At the time, Mr. Carr's hypothesis was met with a wide range of responses, everything from hearty agreement to bitter dispute. Today, the idea that technology affects the way we think is embraced by nearly all.

Our jobs often require us to stay connected to our email and instant messaging apps at all times. Our personal relationships involve reacting, liking and sharing content on social media. Keeping up with the news also seems to require keeping an eye on our smartphone at all times. Technology's role in our lives is both a gift and a curse.

An excerpt from a book titled *The Focus Fix: Finding Clarity, Creativity and Resilience in an Overwhelming World* explains more: "The rise of the internet—and the many devices we can now access it from—has both empowered and debilitated us. It is hard, in our current moment, to remember a time when we weren't

all so connected. And yet, it wasn't so long ago that the constant access to both information and other people we now take for granted was far from commonplace. Indeed, such advancements have not only dramatically altered the pace at which we live our lives, but also the very fabric of our neurology."

It continues: "Instead of making our work more efficient and communication more timely, most of us now feel more stressed and overwhelmed than we ever have done before…it seems we have unwittingly made a rod for our own backs by allowing technology to add to our mental burden rather than relieve it—but the good news is that being aware of the conditions that have led to this is the first step towards changing it."

This is life in the 21st century. For all its positive benefits, the information age has left many feeling unproductive, fuzzy and scatter-brained.

All the while, many have a nagging feeling that something is missing—a notion they are rushing headlong through life, with little say in how it progresses. Amid the busyness, days, weeks and months can breeze past without a person reflecting on how he is spending the 75-or-so years given to him.

What is the missing component in our lives? What is lacking in our hectic lifestyles?

Time to meditate.

You Are What You Think

For some, the word *meditation* conjures images of someone sitting cross-legged on the floor, arms folded, repeatedly chanting "Ommm." Many have the idea that meditation is only practiced in eastern religions. Others believe that the purpose of meditation is to go into a trance to receive visions, achieve a "higher plateau," or experience an "awakening of the inner self." Still others feel it is idle daydreaming.

The definition for meditate from the *American Dictionary of the English Language* clears up the confusion: "to dwell on any thing in thought; to contemplate; to study; to turn or revolve any subject in the mind," and "to intend; to have in contemplation."

Meditation is deep, serious, controlled thought. It involves reflection, contemplation, pondering, weighing, studying and imagining. This is exactly the type of activity high-speed lifestyles crowd out—making one feel overextended, frazzled and stressed out.

Many are realizing the benefits of taking more time to pause and be present with their thoughts, as seen in the rising popularity of mindfulness. A *VeryWellMind* article defined the term: "Mindfulness involves becoming more aware of the present moment—nonjudgmentally and completely—rather than dwelling on the past or projecting into the future."

The article goes on to include some of its benefits: "Mindfulness can… decrease anxiety about the future. It can provide a break from stressful thoughts, allow you to take a mental break, and gain perspective, among other things." It added, "One study found that mindfulness-based stress reduction significantly reduced stress levels. It also had lasting effects, with people showing improved coping skills, better relationships, and increased personal growth up to three years later."

Not stopping to clear mental clutter can lead to health problems. Taking the time to disconnect is challenging, but worth it.

"Research in neuropsychology and neuroscience shows that vigorous mental activity can lead to good brain fitness, which in turn, translates into a sharper memory, faster processing of information, better attention, and other improved cognitive skills," Dr. Elkhonon Goldberg and Alvaro Fernandez state in the book *The SharpBrains Guide to Brain Fitness*.

Similar to muscles in the body, the brain must be exercised for it to function correctly. Yet meditation brings much more than health benefits.

A Biblical Habit

You might be surprised to know that mindfulness and meditation have their roots in Scripture. The practice of being alone with your thoughts was undertaken by ancient patriarchs who lived thousands of years ago. The spiritual benefits of this habit are beyond measure.

Proverbs 23:7 shows the importance of good mental health: "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." Said another way, we are what we think. It is important to take time to think and to make sure our thoughts are healthy and profitable.

The apostle Paul explained what kind of thoughts we should nurture: "…whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

Meditating will help you learn to think before you act, instead of allowing your body to act before you think. You will become known as someone who is able to prevent himself from acting on impulses—which evidences a high level of self-control.

This also reflects on your character. Consider: "He that has no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls" (Prov. 25:28). In ancient times, a city without walls could not protect itself from outside forces. It was defenseless, and could easily be overrun by invaders or even animals. Ruling our thoughts gives us a defense against the challenges of life.

This habit can also benefit others around us. An article in *Scientific American* said, "Research demonstrates that people who meditate show increased positivity toward others. For instance, training in meditation is linked to increased sensitivity to and engagement with human suffering and an increased tendency toward altruism. Similarly, meditation interventions aimed at increasing kindness are associated with reduced bias toward numerous others…"

If we take time to think about not only our own needs but also those of people around us, we fulfill Philippians

2:4: "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

Meditation helps us be more caring and empathetic toward others. It puts us in a better mood and builds up our emotional control, which helps improve our personal relationships.

How to Do It

Since meditation is controlled thinking, best results are obtained when there are minimal distractions and interruptions. Any tranquil, peaceful area is suitable. For many who live in large cities, leaving the constant hum of activity is most beneficial. Going to a calm lake, a forest or serene farming area helps. If this is not an option, then a quiet park within a city may suffice. Even a still room in your home is suitable for meditation.

In the Bible, we read the example of what one of the patriarchs did: "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide" (Gen. 24:63). In such a setting, free from distractions, he could quickly adjust from dealing with daily irritations and enter into a reflective mode.

Meditation of some length is best done daily. Begin with short periods and gradually extend to longer sessions of 20 minutes or more. Use time in meditation to plan out your day. Set small goals. Think about these later in the day, perhaps during the car ride home from work. It may be best to turn off any music, with the possible exception of soft instrumental music. This will help you concentrate. You may also want to keep a pen or pencil nearby to write down thoughts.

Carefully pondering daily questions will yield positive results. Consider: "A prudent man foresees [considers and discerns] the evil, and hides himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished" (Prov. 22:3). Analyzing a situation and its possible outcome will allow you to stop and think before acting. It will give you greater perspective about how to handle a situation, which will most likely benefit you and those around you.

As you grow and develop in your ability to control your thoughts, you will receive great encouragement. Your life will take on new meaning.

Big Picture

As contemplating smaller tasks becomes a way of life, you can also start to meditate on other sections of your life—which involve the "big" questions. Your long-term goals. Your family. Where you want to be in a number of years.

This will naturally lead you to other questions that revolve around your existence: *Where is the world going? Why was I created? What is my purpose?*

One of the many benefits of meditation is that it helps us keep our goals in sharp focus. It also enables us to understand the differences between right and wrong goals, as well as differentiate between worthwhile, attainable and achievable goals, and mere pie in the sky dreams.

Goals define where we want to go. They give structure to our existence. However, for numerous individuals, goals are often vague and hazy. As a result, certain objectives are never fully realized.

What about you? Do you think about where you want to be in five, 10 or 20 years? Do you think about where your children and your family will be? Do you ever wonder about the purpose for which you were born—and what happens when you die? Contemplating such questions will become a driving force in your life.

But keep it simple. Thinking about deep questions does not need to become overly complicated. Pondering life does not mean you need to become a philosopher. You just need to devote quality, consistent time to using the tool of meditation.

For much more about how to meditate, read our article "Meditation – The Misunderstood Tool" at *rcg.org/mtmt*.

Road Map for Life

Verses and principles in the Bible help us to meditate effectively. This living Book will also help you understand your purpose and guide you to greater and deeper understanding in life.

The Bible is the only guidebook that can steer us in the right direction on life's most important matters. Carefully studying and meditating on its instructions will assure a safe course whereby we may reach our goals. King David understood the importance of this, stating in Psalms, "Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (119:105).

Undoubtedly, the greatest goal anyone could have would be to live forever—to attain immortality. And unknown to most, this is exactly the goal our Creator has for us. In fact, it is the very reason we were created! If we meditate on His Law, this can be our destiny. Notice Psalm 119:97: "O how love I Your law! It is my meditation all the day."

God's Law teaches us the right way to live—and leads us to understand more about God Himself and the Master Plan He has established for the world.

Speaking about humanity's ultimate destiny, Paul wrote, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him" (I Cor. 2:9).

In his book *The Awesome Potential of Man*, our Editor-in-Chief David C. Pack expands on this concept: "Most assume that God is trying to save the world now…But because the masses have no idea *why* they were born—*why* they were put on Earth—they also do not understand why man cannot find peace, happiness, health, and abundance on his own. The whole world has been deceived about salvation and the most important questions and answers of life."

True meditation—the kind that involves controlling your thoughts and focusing on your purpose in this life—God's ultimate purpose for you—will lead to the reason you were born—and your incredible future.

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

NATO military forces at the Smardan Training Area in southeastern Romania (Feb. 19, 2025).
DANIEL MIHAILESCU/AFP/VIA GETTY IMAGES

The EU Presidency Says EUROPE MUST REARM WITHIN 5 YEARS

Defense spending would need to ramp up significantly. How could this be accomplished?

Top, demonstrators clash with riot police during a protest against the Gaza war and the European Union's rearming plans (May 27, 2025). Bottom left, a view from the formal inauguration ceremony of the German 45th Armored Brigade (May 22, 2025). Bottom right, Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen delivers a speech as Denmark holds the rotating presidency of the Council of Europe (July 8, 2025).

TOP, SALVATORE LAPORTA/KONTROLAB/LIGHTROCKET VIA GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM LEFT, AUHEN YERCHAK/ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM RIGHT, AP PHOTO/PASCAL BASTIEN

Russia could pose a credible security threat to the European Union by the end of the decade and defense industries in Europe and Ukraine must be ramped up within five years in preparation, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen warned in early July.

In a speech to the European Parliament marking the launch of Denmark's six-month term as holder of the EU presidency, Ms. Frederiksen lamented that "cutting our defense spending in the past 30 years was a huge mistake."

European officials have warned that President Vladimir Putin could soon try to test NATO's Article 5 security guarantee—the pledge that an attack on any one ally would be met with a collective response from all 32. Most of the allies are EU countries.

Russia has been accused of acts of sabotage, cyberattacks and fake news campaigns—largely to weaken European support for Ukraine—and while Europe is not at war, it is not at peace either, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte has said.

"Strengthening Europe's defense industry is an absolute top priority, and we have to be able to defend ourselves by 2030 at the latest," Ms. Frederiksen told EU lawmakers in Strasbourg, France. "Never, ever should we allow Europe to be put in a position again where we cannot defend ourselves."

Many European leaders insist they have heard the Trump administration's warning that American security priorities now lie elsewhere—in the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific—but

Europe's effort to arm is moving only slowly.

When NATO's Ambitions Are Not Enough

At a key summit in June, NATO leaders endorsed a statement saying: "Allies commit to invest 5% of GDP annually on core defense requirements as well as defense- and security-related spending by 2035 to ensure our individual and collective obligations."

That historic pledge will require them to spend tens of billions of euros more over the coming decade, not five years. Spain—NATO's lowest spender with 1.28 percent of GDP last year—quickly branded the target "unreasonable."

Belgium has cast doubt over whether it will make the grade. Slovenia is considering a referendum. Heavyweights France and Italy are mired in economic woes and will struggle to get there too.

Money spent on military support to Ukraine can now be included in NATO's defense calculations, but even that will not hike the GDP military spend by much.

The EU's Readiness 2030 Plan

With the threat of Russian aggression in mind, the EU's executive branch has come up with a security plan. It hinges on a 150-billion-euro ($176 billion) loan program that member countries, Ukraine and outsiders like Britain could dip into.

It aims to fill gaps that the U.S. might leave. Spending priorities for joint purchase include air and missile defense systems, artillery, ammunition, drones, equipment for use in cyber and electronic warfare, and "strategic enablers" like air-to-air refueling and transport.

On July 8, 15 EU countries were permitted to take advantage of another measure—a "national escape clause"—to allow them to spend more on defense without breaking the bloc's debt rules.

Beefing up Ukraine's defense industry is also a pillar. The country produces arms and ammunition faster and more cheaply than its EU partners. Kyiv estimates that 40 percent more of its industrial capacity could be exploited if Europe were to invest.

Still, ambition is one thing, and the reality another.

"Things are not moving fast enough to be able to defend ourselves in 5 years," Danish Defense Minister Troels Lund Poulsen told reporters. "It's a huge, huge challenge to reach that goal."

On the Need to Take Risks

A big part of the problem is that governments and the defense industry are stuck in old ways of thinking and neither wants to take a risk, even with Europe's biggest land war in many decades still raging in its fourth year.

"You cannot expect industry to invest in production capacity if you don't have long-term orders," said Joachim Finkielman, the director of Danish Defense and Security Industries.

"If you need to build new factories, if you need to engage a larger workforce, you need to make sure that you have that," he told *The Associated Press*.

Demand for 155mm artillery shells is a typical example, Mr. Finkielman said. "When you see the kinds of orders that have been placed around Europe, it is two to three years out in time," he said, while industry needs five to 10 years' worth of orders to take a chance.

Mr. Finkielman said that if governments and industries in Britain, France, Germany and Italy start to move, "the rest will follow." □

THE FALL HOLY DAYS FORESHADOWING GOD'S PLAN

BY SAMUEL E. MAIDEN

The world feels like it is spinning out of control. But God's Holy Days reveal where we are going—and how you fit in.

Do you ever wonder what God is doing in the world? With so many wars and natural disasters and accelerating moral decline, it can be hard to see any divine plan at all. Everything can seem chaotic, even hopeless at times.

Yet God explains His plan for humanity in the pages of the Bible—in verses most skim past without realizing what they reveal. Long ago, He outlined that plan through a series of seven sacred observances called Holy Days in Leviticus 23. These are set times when He invites His people to understand His purpose, each with its own unique meaning.

The apostle Paul wrote, "Let no man therefore judge you…in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ" (Col. 2:16-17).

Paul likens the Holy Days, among other observances, to a "shadow of things to come." Just as a shadow outlines the form of something real, the Holy Days reveal some of the most powerful and hope-filled moments in God's unfolding purpose.

The instruction to let no man judge you is sometimes quoted to claim Christians no longer need to keep the Holy Days. In reality, this passage teaches the exact opposite.

What does let no man judge you mean? First, look at the end of verse 17. In the King James Version, the passage ends with "but the body *is* of Christ." Note that the word "is" appears in italics—meaning it was not in the original Greek text but was added by the translators. Without that added word, the phrase simply reads, "but the body of Christ." Paul's

meaning becomes clear: Rather than outsiders or critics telling you how to keep these days, it is the Body of Christ—God's Church—that should provide that guidance.

For 2,000 years, that Church has continued to teach and observe these days, showing their meaning directly from the Bible. In a world filled with conflicting ideas about this verse and the Holy Days themselves, God's Church makes the meaning plain from His Word.

Contrary to popular belief, the Holy Days are not "Jewish" holidays. God calls them "the feasts of the Lord" (Lev. 23:2), and He intended them to be kept by all who worship Him, Israelite or not (Ex. 12:49). These days were never abolished. The early Church began on a Holy Day (Acts 2), and Gentile congregations faithfully kept them under the apostles' leadership (Acts 20:6). God said they are to be kept forever, throughout all generations (Lev. 23:31).

The Spring Holy Days—Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost—lay a foundation for understanding God's purpose. They point back to world-changing events that have already taken place, revealing how God began the process of saving mankind step by step through His Son Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection, as well as the start of the New Testament Church.

These fulfilled milestones give context for what the Fall Holy Days foreshadow: the completion of the plan God started.

"Just as a shadow outlines the form of something real, the Holy Days reveal some of the most powerful and hope-filled moments in God's unfolding purpose."

The Feast of Trumpets

The Feast of Trumpets is the first of the Fall Holy Days God commands His people to observe. Leviticus 23:24 says, "Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall you have a Sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation."

Throughout Scripture, the sound of trumpets signals major announcements from God. When He descended on Mount Sinai to give His Law, His arrival was marked by thunder, lightning and a piercing trumpet blast (Ex. 19:16). Trumpets were also blown at the beginning of the Jubilee year—a joyful time of liberty and restoration—as well as to accompany burnt offerings at the start of each month (Num. 10:10).

Prophecy shows dramatic blasts will be used again in the future. In the book of Revelation, seven trumpets herald end-time events, each announcing a stage of divine judgment during the Day of the Lord (Rev. 8-9). Jesus Himself said a great trumpet will sound at His Return: "And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. 24:31). Here, the trumpet is not a warning but a call of victory.

Today, God's people gather on the Feast of Trumpets to hear messages about this coming intervention in world affairs. The day is marked by awe of God's power and anticipation of what He will soon do on Earth. The celebration reminds us that judgment is coming—but so is deliverance and lasting peace.

The Day of Atonement

Sin separates people from God. It is a barrier that must be removed before humanity can fully learn His Way in the Kingdom. The Day of Atonement points to the time when mankind will be reconciled to its Creator—when the whole world will be "at one" with Him.

Leviticus 23:27 says, "Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord." Unlike the other Holy Days, this one is not a feast, but a fast. To "afflict your soul" is a biblical expression for fasting. Read Isaiah 58:3. From sunset to sunset on the Day of Atonement, God's people go without food and drink.

Fasting is an act of humility. It quiets the noise of daily life and reminds us that we are not self-sufficient. James wrote, "God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you" (4:6-8). When people humble themselves before Him, God responds with mercy.

In ancient Israel, the Day of Atonement was the only day each year when the high priest entered the Most Holy Place to make atonement for the people (Lev. 16:30). This foreshadowed Jesus Christ's perfect atoning sacrifice, when He entered the heavenly temple with His own blood to obtain eternal redemption (Heb. 9:11-12). But for God's Plan to move forward, Satan, as the driving force of human nature, must be removed.

The Bible calls the devil "the god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4) who "deceives the whole world" (Rev. 12:9). As long as he remains active, true peace cannot be established. Atonement points to the time when Satan will be bound and unable to influence the nations any longer (Rev. 20:2-3). Then, humanity will be free to live in harmony with God.

Today, God's people keep the Day of Atonement as a yearly reminder of this coming freedom. It pictures a world no longer under the devil's sway, where nothing will stand between mankind and its Creator.

The Feast of Tabernacles

Following the solemn Day of Atonement, God commands His people to rejoice. Deuteronomy 16:13 and 15 says, "You shall observe the feast of tabernacles seven days, after that you have gathered in your corn and your wine…because the Lord your God shall bless you in all your increase, and in all the works of your hands, therefore you shall surely rejoice." Deuteronomy 14:23 adds that those who keep the Feast learn to fear God.

The Feast of Tabernacles pictures what life will be like during the Kingdom, when God will rule the nations and His Way will be taught to all. The Earth will be renewed. War, injustice and suffering will end. Humanity will finally experience life as God always intended—peaceful, productive and filled with joy.

God told ancient Israel to live in temporary shelters during the Feast (Lev. 23:42-43). This reminded them of their time in the wilderness, when they relied on Him for every need. This instruction also teaches a timeless truth: Our present lives are temporary. Paul compared our physical bodies to tabernacles—temporary dwellings that will one day be replaced with a permanent, eternal home (II Cor. 5:1).

The Feast points to the time when God's people will receive eternal life, living and reigning with God in a transformed world. Isaiah foretold that "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord" (11:9), and Micah said people will "sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid" (4:4).

Today, God's Church hosts the Feast of Tabernacles at locations around the world, where members hear daily messages about the coming Kingdom, enjoy uplifting fellowship and participate in wholesome activities. It is a time that strengthens each Christian's walk with God.

The Last Great Day

A final Holy Day completes God's Plan as pictured in the annual cycle. The Last Great Day powerfully illustrates His desire to offer salvation to every human being who has ever lived.

This observance comes immediately after the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles. Leviticus 23:36 says, "On the eighth day shall be a holy convocation unto you…it is a solemn assembly."

Thousands of years later, Christ revealed a deeper meaning of this day: "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believes on Me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38). John explained, "This spoke He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive" (vs. 39). In the future, God's Holy Spirit will be made freely available to everyone.

The Bible shows that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9). Those who never had the chance to know the true God will be raised to physical life and given that opportunity (Ezek. 37:12-14; Rev. 20:11-12). The same salvation now offered to the few called in this age (John 6:44) will be extended to multitudes from all nations and times.

Resurrected to physical life, people will finally understand God's Word clearly, see His plan for themselves and choose whether to walk in His way.

Today, God's people keep the Last Great Day as a reminder of this hope-filled future. It pictures the time when God's offer of eternal life will reach every person who has ever lived.

Experience the Blessings Now

From the sounding of trumpets to the hope of a renewed world, God's Holy Days reveal the most important story ever told—His plan to redeem humanity, restore Creation and freely offer eternal life to all.

More than just days about future events, they are designed to draw us closer to God *now*. Each one is filled with spiritual depth that can only be fully appreciated by keeping them.

Zechariah 14:16 describes a time in the Kingdom of God when all nations will go up "from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles." The Holy Days will be part of life in the wonderful world to come.

But you do not have to wait until then to take part. Today, God's people keep these observances in the way He commands—gathering to hear sermons that bring His Plan to life, sharing meals and meaningful conversations, and spending focused time with family and fellow Christians. These moments refresh and inspire, strengthen bonds and give a foretaste of God's soon-coming Kingdom.

To learn more, request your free copy of *God's Holy Days or Pagan Holidays?* at *rcg.org/ghdoph*. This resource explains each day in detail and shows how—and when—God says to keep them. □

Bruce Perry, 17, demonstrates the possibilities of artificial intelligence by creating an AI companion on Character.AI, in Russellville, Arkansas (July 15, 2025).

AP/KATIE ADKINS

Teens Are Turning to AI for Friendship

No question is too small when Kayla Chege, a high school student in Kansas, is using artificial intelligence.

The 15-year-old asks ChatGPT for guidance on back-to-school shopping, makeup colors and low-calorie choices at Smoothie King, plus ideas for her Sweet 16 and her younger sister's birthday party.

The sophomore honors student makes a point not to have chatbots do her homework and tries to limit her interactions to mundane questions. But in interviews with *The Associated Press* and a new study, teenagers say they are increasingly interacting with AI as if it were a companion, capable of providing advice as well as friendship.

"Everyone uses AI for everything now. It's really taking over," said Miss Chege, who wonders how AI tools will affect her generation. "I think kids use AI to get out of thinking."

For the past couple of years, concerns about cheating at school have dominated the conversation around kids and AI. But artificial intelligence is playing a much larger role in many of their lives. AI, teens say, has become a go-to source for personal

advice, emotional support, everyday decision-making and problem-solving.

Always Available

More than 70 percent of teens have used AI companions and half use them regularly, according to a new study from Common Sense Media, a group that studies and advocates for using screens and digital media sensibly.

The study defines AI companions as platforms designed to serve as "digital friends," like Character.AI or Replika, which can be customized with specific traits or personalities and can offer emotional support, companionship and conversations that can feel human-like. But popular sites like ChatGPT and Claude, which mainly answer questions, are being used in the same way, the researchers say.

As the technology rapidly gets more sophisticated, teenagers and experts worry about AI's potential to redefine human relationships and exacerbate crises of loneliness and youth mental health.

"AI is always available. It never gets bored with you. It's never judgmental," says Ganesh Nair, an 18-year-old in Arkansas. "When you're talking to AI, you are always right. You're always interesting. You are always emotionally justified."

All of that used to be appealing, but as Mr. Nair heads to college this fall, he wants to step back from using AI. Mr. Nair got spooked after a high school friend who relied on an "AI companion" for heart-to-heart conversations with his girlfriend later had the chatbot write the breakup text ending his two-year relationship.

"That felt a little bit dystopian, that a computer generated the end to a real relationship," said Mr. Nair. "It's almost like we are allowing computers to replace our relationships with people."

How Many Teens Are Using AI?

In the Common Sense Media survey, 31 percent of teens said their conversations with AI companions were "as satisfying or more satisfying" than talking with real friends. Even though half of teens said they distrust AI's advice, 33 percent had discussed serious or important issues with AI instead of real people.

Those findings are worrisome, says Michael Robb, the study's lead author and head researcher at Common Sense, and should send a warning to parents, teachers and policymakers. The now-booming and largely unregulated AI industry is becoming as integrated with adolescence as smartphones and social media.

"It's eye-opening," said Mr. Robb. "When we set out to do this survey, we had no understanding of how many kids are actually using AI companions." The study polled more than 1,000 teens nationwide in April and May.

Adolescence is a critical time for developing identity, social skills and independence, Mr. Robb said, and AI companions should complement—not replace—real-world interactions.

"If teens are developing social skills on AI platforms where they are constantly being validated, not being challenged, not learning to read social cues or understand somebody else's perspective, they are not going to be adequately prepared in the real world," he said.

The nonprofit analyzed several popular AI companions in a "risk assessment," finding ineffective age restrictions and that the platforms can produce sexual material, give dangerous advice and offer harmful content. The group recommends that minors not use AI companions.

A Concerning Trend for Teens and Adults Alike

Researchers and educators worry about the cognitive costs for youth who rely heavily on AI, especially in their creativity, critical thinking and social skills. The potential dangers of children forming relationships with chatbots gained national attention last year when a 14-year-old Florida boy died by suicide after developing an emotional attachment to a Character.AI chatbot.

"Parents really have no idea this is happening," said Eva Telzer, a psychology and neuroscience professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "All of us are struck by how quickly this blew up." Dr. Telzer is leading multiple studies on youth and AI, a new research area with limited data.

Dr. Telzer's research has found that children as young as eight are using generative AI and also found that teens are using AI to explore their sexuality and for companionship. In focus groups, Dr. Telzer found that one of the top apps teens frequent is SpicyChat AI, a free role-playing app intended for adults.

Many teens also say they use chatbots to write emails or messages to strike the right tone in sensitive situations.

"One of the concerns that comes up is that they no longer have trust in themselves to make a decision," said Dr. Telzer. "They need feedback from AI before feeling like they can check off the box that an idea is OK or not."

Arkansas teen Bruce Perry, 17, says he relates to that and relies on AI tools to craft outlines and proofread essays for his English class.

"If you tell me to plan out an essay, I would think of going to ChatGPT before getting out a pencil," Mr. Perry said. He uses AI daily and has asked chatbots for advice in social situations, to help him decide what to wear and to write emails to teachers, saying AI articulates his thoughts faster.

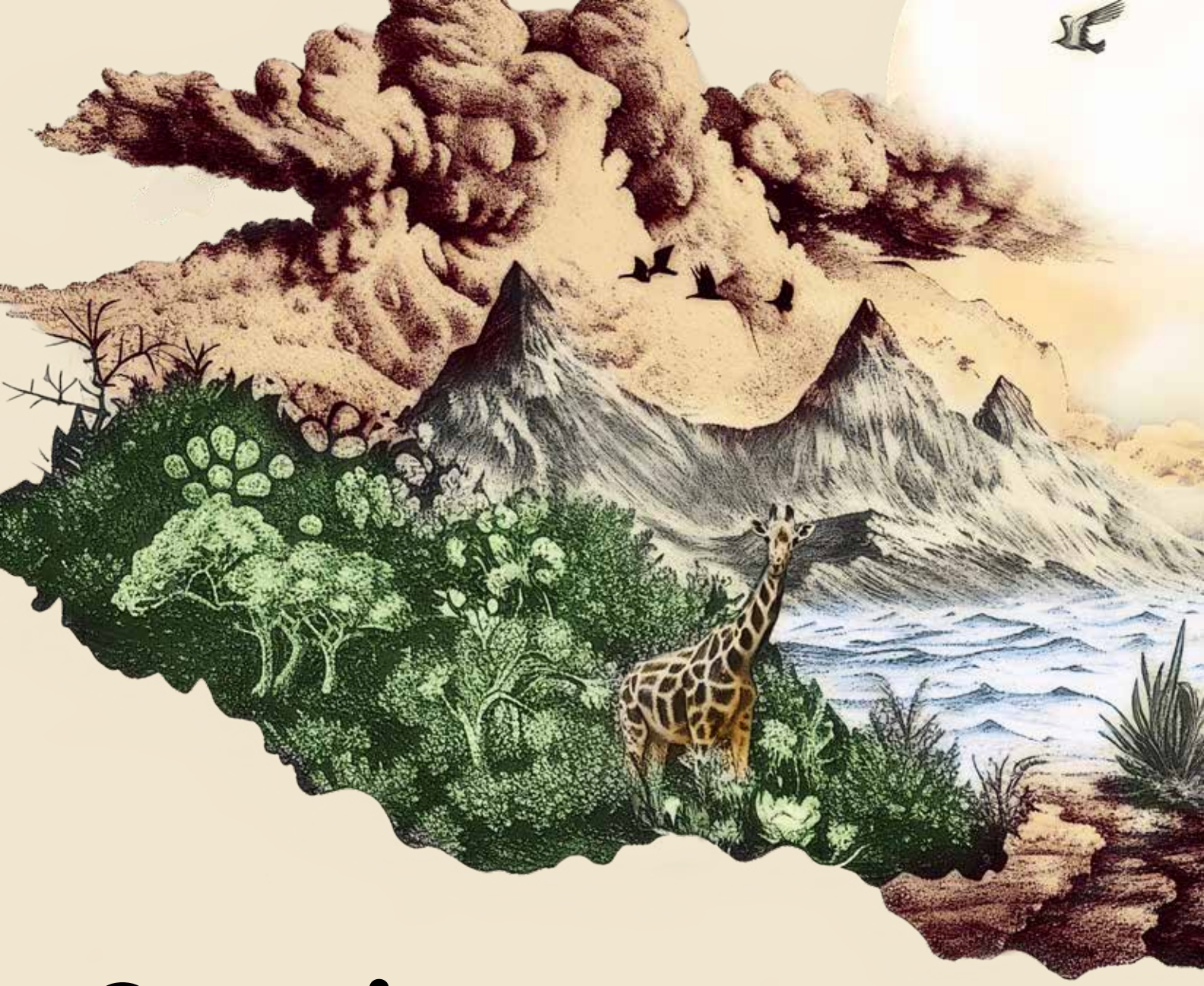
Mr. Perry says he feels fortunate that AI companions were not around when he was younger.

"I'm worried that kids could get lost in this," Mr. Perry said. "I could see a kid that grows up with AI not seeing a reason to go to the park or try to make a friend."

Other teens agree, saying the issues with AI and its effect on children's mental health are different from those of social media.

"Social media complemented the need people have to be seen, to be known, to meet new people," Mr. Nair said. "I think AI complements another need that runs a lot deeper—our need for attachment and our need to feel emotions. It feeds off of that."

"It's the new addiction," Mr. Nair added. "That's how I see it." □

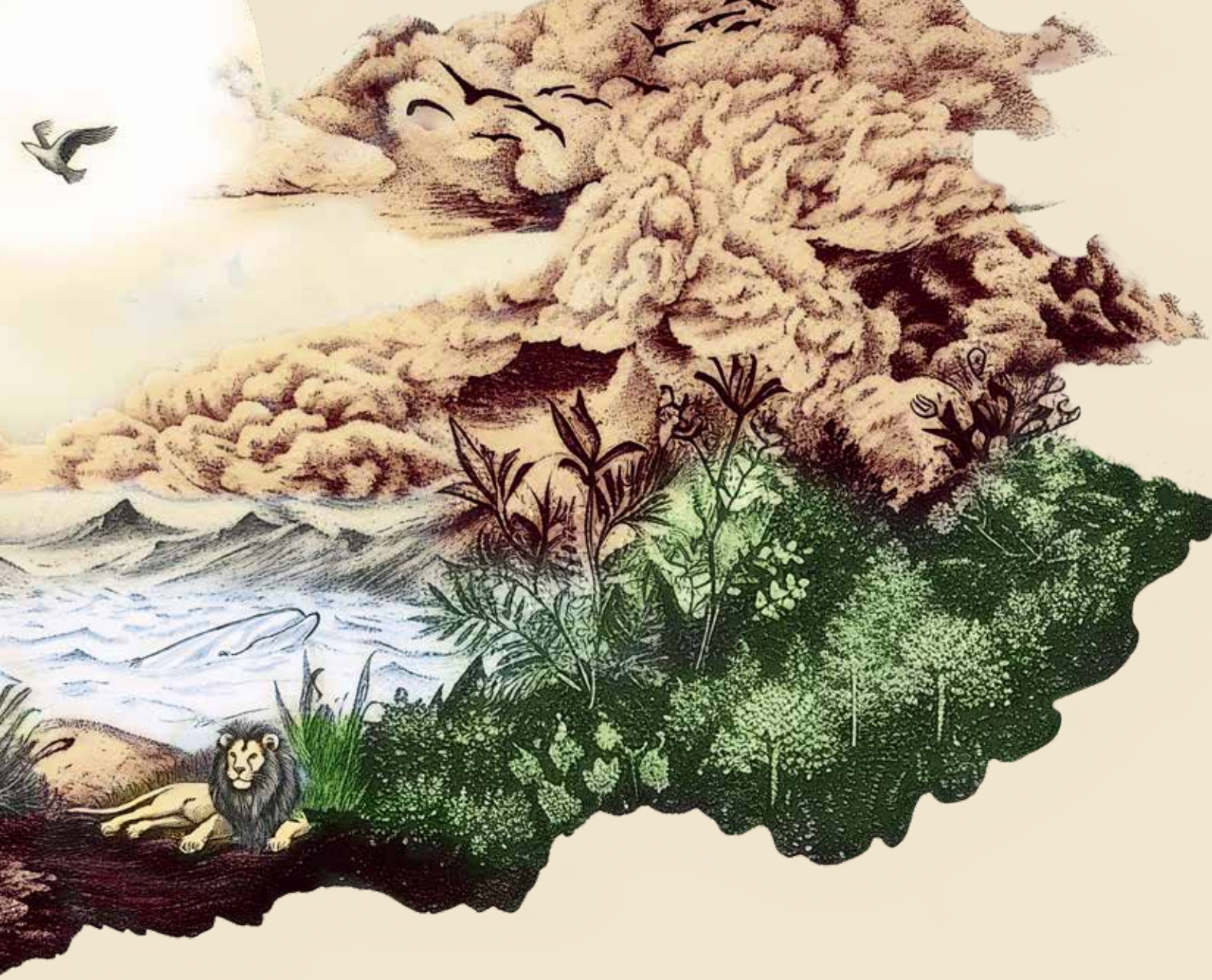


Creation vs. Evolution

Rising Above the Debate

A century after the infamous Scopes trial, the battle about where life really came from rages on. What is the truth?

BY GARRICK R. OXLEY



A COLOSSAL REPLICA of the biblical Noah's Ark rises majestically from the countryside of northern Kentucky. It stretches one and a half football fields long, holding three massive decks with wooden cages, food-storage urns, life-size animal models and other exhibits.

The structure was designed to show that the biblical story was literally true. And with that, Ken Ham, the organizer behind the Ark Encounter theme park and related attractions like the Creation Museum, furthers his goal to assert the biblical Book of Genesis should be interpreted as follows: Humans were created by God on the sixth day of Creation on an Earth that is only 6,000 years old. Exhibits picturing dinosaurs aboard Noah's Ark and other displays reflect widely held creationist views.

Mr. Ham and other leading creationists want to succeed where they believe William Jennings Bryan failed. Bryan, a populist politician and fundamentalist Christian champion, helped the prosecution in the famous Scopes Monkey Trial, which took place 100 years ago this July in Dayton, Tennessee.

Bryan's side won in court—leading to the conviction of public schoolteacher John Scopes for violating state law against teaching human evolution. But Bryan was widely seen as suffering a humiliating defeat in public opinion, with his sputtering attempts to explain the Bible's spectacular miracles and enigmas.

"It showed people around the world that Christians don't really believe the Bible—they can't answer questions to defend the Christian faith," Mr. Ham said. "We want you to know that we've got answers."

Yet the teachings of Mr. Ham and other creationist organizations defy the consensus of modern scientists—that the Earth developed over billions of years in "deep time" and that humans and other living things evolved over millions of years from earlier species.

Leading science organizations say it is crucial to teach evolution and old-Earth geology. Evolution is "one of the most securely established of scientific facts," says the National Academy of Sciences. The Geological Society of America similarly states: "Evolution and the directly related concept of deep time are essential parts of science curricula."

What does the public believe? Polls generally show that somewhere between 1 in 6 and 1 in 3 Americans hold beliefs consistent with creationism, depending on how the question is asked. A 2024 Gallup poll found that 37 percent of U.S. adults agreed "God created human beings pretty much in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years or so."

What makes the creation versus evolution debate even more confusing is that many religious groups accommodate a belief in evolution. Gallup's survey found that of Americans who believe it, more say evolution happened with God's guidance (34 percent) than without it (24 percent). Catholic popes have shown openness to evolution while insisting the human soul is a divine creation. Many liberal Protestants and even some evangelicals have accepted at least parts of evolutionary theory.

To get to the truth about where life came from and when, you must rise above the never-ending debate. A closer look at Genesis shows it does not require a young-earth interpretation, contrary to what many assume. And when this is correctly understood, it is not incompatible with science.

What Scripture Really Says About the Earth's Age

Most creationists say the Earth is 6,000 years old. Their argument is that, if one reads Genesis 1 literally, it describes a creation that took place over a seven-day week, culminating in the creation of Adam and Eve, and this occurred six millennia ago. This contradicts the scientific consensus that the planet is considerably older.

The desire to interpret the Bible literally is not wrong. But some verses require careful scrutiny to know what they really mean. Verses 1 and 2 of Genesis 1 are commonly misunderstood.

Verse 1 says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." People do correctly see that this describes God literally creating heaven and Earth. The next verse is where confusion enters.

Verse 2 says: "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

It *appears* that this immediately follows what God did in verse 1. But looking at the original Hebrew reveals that these two verses do not neatly fit within a seven-day week.

The Hebrew word translated "without form" means to lie waste, a desolation, a worthless thing, confusion, empty place. Similarly, "void" comes from a Hebrew word that means emptiness, void, waste.

Why would God create a planet that is worthless and desolate?

Isaiah 45:18 shows this is not what happened: "For thus says the Lord that created the heavens; God Himself that formed the earth and made it; He has established it, *He created it not in vain*, He formed it to be inhabited…"

The word translated "in vain" here is the same Hebrew word translated "without form" in Genesis 1:2. This verse proves that God did not create Earth in that state. Rather than verse 2 immediately following verse 1 in time sequence, a long period of time actually transpired between the two verses.

Since God did not create the world in an empty, desolate state, something else had to happen to put the planet in that state.

The meaning of another Hebrew word adds to the story. Look back at the statement that "the earth was without form, and void." The word "was" here can mean become or come to pass. Earth was not created that way—it *became* that way.

Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 show it was the rebellion of Lucifer, later renamed Satan, along with one-third of the angels, that put Earth in a desolate condition. Jesus Christ referenced this in Luke 10:18 when He told the disciples, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." While we do not have space here to tell the whole story, read our free booklet *Who Is the Devil?* at *rcg.org/witd* for more.

Let's summarize the timeline. First, God created the heaven and Earth (Gen. 1:1). Then, a long period of time passed before verse 2, during which Earth became desolate. What followed in the Creation Week was a *re-creation*—restoring the beauty and order that had existed before.

This *re-creation* did take place about 6,000 years ago. It took place over a seven-day week, culminating in the creation of man, after which God rested on the seventh-day Sabbath.

This period between the original creation and the re-creation accounts for the Earth's fossil record, including the existence of dinosaurs and other ancient species. These creatures lived and died long before the creation of man, during the pre-Adamic world. Their fossils remain as physical evidence of that earlier time. This means they were not passengers on Noah's Ark, as some claim, but part of the Earth's history long before God created humanity.

In short, the Bible leaves room for an ancient Earth while clearly establishing God as the Creator of life.

Evolution Also Gets It Wrong

While most popular creationist organizations get the timing of Earth's creation wrong, many evolutionists are wrong in believing that no God was involved in the origin of human life at all. They believe life evolved over time without a Creator. While evolutionists generally get the age of the planet right, the belief that life sprang from non-life, without design or direction, is false.

Of course, neither side is a monolith. Some creationists do accept an old Earth, and some scientists accept intelligent design in some form.

The Real Truth magazine is published by The Restored Church of God. It is primarily written to an audience that believes in God and has an open

mind toward the Bible and its teachings. Therefore, it is not our purpose here to exhaustively debunk evolution as the origin of life. For a thorough explanation, see our free brochure "Evolution – Facts, Fallacies and Implications" at *rcg.org/effai*.

As we saw earlier, even many believers wrestle with whether evolution occurred but was guided by God. This is known as theistic evolution.

Proponents do think God exists and is the source of life on Earth, but that the accounts in Genesis are not to be taken literally and that God could have directed the evolutionary process to create everything.

This can sound reasonable, but it is just as wrong as an atheistic belief in evolution. Theistic evolution requires someone to believe God exists but that His Word in the Old Testament is false. These positions are incompatible.

Proverbs 30:5 says "every word of God is pure." The pure words of Genesis cannot be dismissed as a metaphor. Adam, the first man, is mentioned in Jesus Christ's genealogy in Luke 3:38, and Paul referred to Adam and Eve as real, literal people in I Corinthians 15:22 and I Timothy 2:13, among other verses. If someone does not believe the Genesis account and thinks man gradually evolved from apes, they do not believe God.

A caveat: Although evolution was not the process God used to make all things, this does not mean Christians cannot acknowledge *micro*evolution, which describes smaller changes within species over time. The problem is believing *macro*evolution, or evolution that results in large and complex changes, including species formation.

Psalm 33:9 shows that God gave specific instructions when creating all things: "He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." Nature's design, order and complexity point to a Designer, not randomness.

How the Bible and Science Can Work Together

A man visiting the Ark Encounter from Mesa, Arizona, said the exhibit helped him appreciate "the opportunities God gives us to live the life we have, and hopefully make good choices and repent when we need to."

"I think," he added, "God and science can go hand in hand."

How can the Bible and science work together?

We have already seen the Bible does not contradict the scientific reckoning of the age of the planet. Beyond this, Scripture supports scientific discovery more broadly. For example, there are many Bible verses that reveal things about the natural world that man did not discover on his own until thousands of years after God recorded them.

For example, Job 26:7 shows the Earth "hangs...upon nothing." Only much later did scientists understand the planet's position in space and the forces at work to keep it in a position to support humans. Leviticus 17:11 shows that life is in the blood. Medical science did not understand this until the 1600s, and prior to that time, many patients' lives were unnecessarily lost due to the practice of bloodletting. The Psalms speak of ocean currents, which man later observed and documented scientifically. Many other verses could be cited.

A Christian would never dismiss science found in the pages of the Bible. But one who obeys God should also not reject science that is not directly found in the Bible. Scripture is the foundation of knowledge, but it does not contain all knowledge. There are many discoveries man has made that are not found in God's Word, yet are valid and legitimate observations.

The problem for a believer is "science" that people present as contradicting or invalidating belief in God or His Word. Some of what is presented as science is really a mix of truth and error, fueled by assumptions and human reasoning.

This is what Paul meant by "oppositions of science falsely so called" (I Tim. 6:20). He was not dismissing real science—he warned against false arguments parading as science.

God wants people to embrace all forms of right knowledge. Proverbs 18:15 says, "The heart of the prudent gets knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge."

But you must use good judgment and carefully evaluate what is presented to you. Be one of those who, as Hebrews 5:14 says, "by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

God's Purpose

The Bible reveals not only the Creator of life, but also a framework for Earth's history that can stand alongside scientific discovery. And, once you understand where life came from, this opens the door to a much deeper question: *Why are we here?*

A person's beliefs about human origins shape their morality and identity—and greatly inform the purpose they see for life. False ideas, including a young Earth and evolutionary theory, obscure the true understanding God wants you to have.

Romans 1:20 says, "The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made…" God has made the evidence plain. Creation points to a Creator. Design points to a Designer. And the Bible, when rightly understood, offers a logical and inspiring explanation for it all.

If you have never taken the time to prove that God exists or that the Bible is His Word, now is the time. God Himself says, "Prove Me now…" (Mal. 3:10). He wants you to seek answers and has made sure you can find them.

King David once looked at the stars and asked, "What is man, that You are mindful of him?" (Psa. 8:4). It is a question we all must answer.

God's Word does not just explain *how* we got here. It reveals *why*. You were made for a purpose, and the Creator of life wants you to discover it.

To learn more, read our free booklets *Does God Exist?* and *Why Do You Exist?*—both available at *rcg.org*. □

Western Countries Speak of a Future Palestinian State as the Gaza War Worsens

Plans announced by France, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia to recognize a Palestinian state will not bring one about anytime soon, though they could further isolate Israel and strengthen the Palestinians' negotiating position over the long term. The problem for the Palestinians is that they need immediate assistance.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejects Palestinian statehood and has vowed to maintain open-ended control over annexed east Jerusalem, the occupied West Bank and the war-ravaged Gaza Strip—territories Israel seized in the 1967 war that the Palestinians want for their state.

Israeli leaders favor the outright annexation of much of the West Bank, where Israel has already built well over 100 settlements housing over 500,000 Jewish settlers. Israel's offensive in Gaza has reduced most of it to a smoldering wasteland and is pushing it toward famine, according to experts, and Israel says it is pressing ahead with plans to relocate much of its population of some 2 million to other countries.

The United States, the only country with any real leverage over Israel, has taken its side.

Critics Say These Countries Could Do Much More

Palestinians have welcomed international support for their decades-long

Left, an aerial view shows the rubble of destroyed residential buildings, streets and avenues after Israeli bombardment in Rafah, Gaza (Jan. 22, 2025). Top, trails of Iranian ballistic missiles light up the night sky as seen from Gaza City during renewed missile strikes launched by Iran against Israel (June 15, 2025). Bottom, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer delivers a statement on the Gaza war (July 29, 2025).

LEFT, DOAA ALBAZ/ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES; TOP, MAHMOUD ISSA/ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM, OBY MELVILLE – WPA POOL/GETTY IMAGES

quest for statehood but say there are more urgent measures Western countries could take if they wanted to pressure Israel.

"It's a bit odd that the response to daily atrocities in Gaza, including what is by all accounts deliberate starvation, is to recognize a theoretical Palestinian state that may never actually come into being," said Khaled Elgindy, a visiting scholar at Georgetown University's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies.

"It looks more like a way for these countries to appear to be doing something," he said.

Fathi Nimer, a policy fellow at Al-Shabaka, a Palestinian think tank, says they could have suspended trade agreements with Israel, imposed arms embargoes or other sanctions. "There is a wide tool set at the disposal of these countries, but there is no political will to use it," he said.

It Is Not a Completely Empty Gesture

Most countries in the world recognized Palestinian statehood decades ago, but Britain and France would be the third and fourth permanent members of the UN Security Council to do so, leaving the U.S. as the only holdout.

"We're talking about major countries and major Israeli allies," said Alon Pinkas, an Israeli political analyst and former consul general in New York. "They're isolating the U.S. and they're leaving Israel dependent—not on the U.S., but on the whims and erratic behavior of one person, Trump."

Recognition could also strengthen moves to prevent annexation, said Hugh Lovatt, an expert on the conflict at the European Council on Foreign Relations. The challenge, he said, "is for those recognizing countries to match their recognition with other steps, practical steps."

It could also prove significant if Israel and the Palestinians ever resume the long-dormant peace process, which ground to a halt after Mr. Netanyahu returned to office in 2009.

"If and when some kind of negotiations do resume, probably not in the immediate future, but at some point, it puts Palestine on much more equal

footing," said Julie Norman, a professor of Middle East politics at University College London.

"It has statehood as a starting point for those negotiations, rather than a certainly-not-assured endpoint."

Israel Calls It a Reward for Violence

Israel's government and most of its political class were opposed to Palestinian statehood long before Hamas' October 7, 2023, attack triggered the war.

Mr. Netanyahu says creating a Palestinian state would reward Hamas and eventually lead to an even larger Hamas-run state on Israel's borders. Hamas leaders have at times suggested they would accept a state on the 1967 borders but the group remains formally committed to Israel's destruction.

Western countries envision a future Palestinian state that would be democratic but also led by political rivals of Hamas who accept Israel and help it suppress the militant group, which won parliamentary elections in 2006 and seized power in Gaza the following year.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, whose authority administers parts of the occupied West Bank, supports a two-state solution and cooperates with Israel on security matters. He has made a series of concessions in recent months, including announcing the end to the Palestinian Authority's practice of providing stipends to the families of prisoners held by Israel and slain militants.

Such measures, along with the security coordination, have made the PA deeply unpopular with Palestinians, and have yet to earn it any favors from Israel or the Trump administration. Israel says Mr. Abbas is not sincerely committed to peace and accuses him of tolerating incitement and militancy.

Mr. Lovatt says there is much to criticize about the PA, but that "often the failings of the Palestinian leadership are exaggerated in a way to relieve Israel of its own obligations."

The Tide May Be Turning, But Not Fast Enough

If you had told Palestinians in September 2023 that major countries were on the verge of recognizing a state, that the UN's highest court had ordered Israel to end the occupation, that the International Criminal Court had ordered Mr. Netanyahu's arrest, and that prominent voices from across the U.S. political spectrum were furious with Israel, they might have thought their dream of statehood was at hand.

But those developments pale in comparison to the ongoing war in Gaza and smaller but similarly destructive military offensives in the West Bank. Israel's military victories over Iran and its allies have left it the dominant and nearly unchallenged military power in the region, and U.S. President Donald Trump is the strongest supporter it has ever had in the White House.

"This [Israeli] government is not going to change policy," Mr. Pinkas said. "The recognition issue, the ending of the war, humanitarian aid—that's all going to have to wait for another government." □

Opposite page, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Mustafa speaks at United Nations Headquarters (July 28, 2025). Top, Palestinians walk with sacks of flour delivered after trucks carrying humanitarian aid enter northern Gaza (July 27, 2025). Bottom left, a Palestinian inspects a destroyed house after an Israeli airstrike in the al-Shati refugee camp, west of Gaza City (July 4, 2025). Bottom right, Israeli activists, one holding a sign saying "Gaza is ours forever," attend a rally calling for the re-establishment of Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip (July 30, 2025).

OPPOSITE PAGE, AP/ADAM GRAY; TOP, MAJDI FATHI/NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM LEFT, RIZEK ABDELJAWAD/XINHUA VIA GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM RIGHT, AP/OHAD ZWIGENBERG

Children of Divorce

Breaking the Cycle

New research shows the damage divorce can cause to children—but it does not have to define their futures.

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

Brandon Hellan still remembers what it felt like when everything changed. He was in his early 20s when his parents divorced. Though he was technically an adult, the split shook something deep inside him.

"I really think my parents' divorce made me put up these walls and treat relationships like they were rentals, temporary," he said years later.

Brandon's words echo the reality for millions of children of divorce. The effects do not end when the papers are signed—they can shadow a person for years, reshaping how they see loyalty, commitment and trust. Many grow up reluctant to marry. Some repeat the same pattern they once watched unfold. Others quietly resign themselves to distant or unstable relationships, never quite sure what a healthy home is supposed to feel like.

What can be done to stop the divorce cycle from continuing into the next generation?

It helps to recognize the scale of the problem. Recent research makes clear just how far-reaching the effects of a broken home can be. A comprehensive national study released in early 2025 found that U.S. children whose parents divorced before age five earned 13 percent less income by age 27 than peers from intact families. They were also more likely to experience teenage pregnancy, incarceration and even early death. Conducted by economists from the University of California, Merced, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the University of Maryland, the research drew from decades of government data, including tax records and census files for all U.S. children born between 1988 and 1993.

When a marriage ends, it often triggers a cascade of changes for the children involved: a drop in household income, relocation to a lower-income neighborhood and reduced time with one parent. These shifts combine to create a wide range of social and economic challenges—and their effects can last well into adulthood.

Wider Problem

The study reveals divorce is not just a family matter—it has ripple effects across entire communities and generations. As more children grow up without the daily stability of two married parents, the impact surfaces in classrooms, workplaces and neighborhoods. Lower graduation rates, fewer economic opportunities and weakened support networks often trace back to early family instability.

One-third of American children see their parents divorce before turning 18. Research from The Brookings Institution shows that those raised by continuously married parents enjoy significantly greater economic and social mobility than those from divorced or long-term single-parent homes.

Given this, the falling U.S. divorce rate—from more than 10 percent in 2008 to about seven percent in 2022—might appear encouraging. Yet part of the decline reflects a shift away from marriage altogether. Cohabitation, which is harder to track, often involves children and long-term bonds but carries many of the same risks when it ends. Others remain in marriages that function in name only, staying together out of financial necessity or fear of the consequences.

Statistics can measure income and financial mobility, but they cannot capture the loss of confidence children feel when stability at home is uncertain. That erosion of trust—both in relationships and in life itself—becomes one of divorce's most lasting and costly legacies.

Emotional Inheritance

Children are not passive observers when their parents separate. They notice how conflict is handled—or avoided. They feel the absence when one parent is no longer there every day. Long before they can explain it, they are absorbing lessons about loyalty and forgiveness. Years later, those lessons shape how they approach relationships of their own.

For some, this means hesitating to marry, unsure whether commitment can last. Others carry unspoken tension into their own homes, struggling to model what they never saw lived out. Over time, these patterns can repeat—not only because of environment, but because of deep-seated ways of thinking and relating formed early in life.

Sociologist Philip Cohen noted: "I believe parents are aware divorce may have harmful consequences for their children, and make difficult judgments about what is in their own best interest, as well as the interest of their children." Divorce is rarely entered into lightly, but even the most careful decisions can leave sons and daughters with unresolved wounds.

The Bible affirms the importance of family. Proverbs 20:7 says, "The just man walks in his integrity: his children are blessed after him." Steady moral leadership in the home sets the direction of a child's life. Stability is learned by watching it. Love is learned by experiencing it. Trust is learned when forgiveness and humility are consistently exhibited. These foundational lessons are often among the first casualties when a home breaks apart.

Breaking the Cycle

The cycle of divorce can be broken. No matter how deeply it has marked

your past—whether you have experienced it yourself or grown up in its shadow—the future can be different. God's Way provides the framework to rebuild trust, strengthen commitment and create a home where stability is the norm.

Two Bible principles are especially helpful. One is conflict resolution. Ephesians 4:26 instructs, "Be you angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath." Addressing problems quickly, respectfully and with the goal of restoring peace prevents anger from hardening into bitterness—a habit children will carry into their own relationships.

Another is forgiveness. Colossians 3:13 urges us to forgive "even as Christ forgave you." In marriage, this means letting go of grudges, working through pain and refusing to weaponize past wrongs. When children witness this, they learn that while marriages face challenges, they can endure and grow stronger over time.

Whether breaking a destructive cycle or continuing a strong example, the way forward is the same: follow God's proven pattern for marriage and family. This takes work—but *it works*. Around the world, couples who once felt unsure or overwhelmed are now raising stable, loving households because they chose to apply biblical principles.

The Restored Church of God, publisher of this magazine, offers clear, practical resources to help you do the same. From dating and courtship guidance to parenting instruction, these tools show you exactly how to apply the Bible's wisdom in daily life. They do not sugarcoat the effort required—but they equip you with what you need to succeed.

God's Blueprint for Families

Breaking harmful patterns is only the beginning. For change to last, it must be anchored in a godly foundation that produces strong, stable families.

Proverbs 22:6 instructs, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." This training begins in the home and thrives on consistency and clear expectations. Children flourish when discipline is fair, affection is steady and teaching is woven into everyday life—not only during moments of correction.

Deuteronomy 6:7 encourages parents to speak of God's ways "when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up." This constant presence of godly instruction gives children a moral framework they can rely on, even in a world filled with shifting standards.

God's principles for marriage play a foundational role in this process. When a husband and wife follow the roles God outlines—marked by leadership, love, respect and sacrifice—they create an environment where children feel secure. Ephesians 5 clearly outlines what God expects from husbands and wives. Take time to read the entire chapter. This stability gives sons and daughters a living example to carry into their own homes one day.

"When a husband and wife follow the roles God outlines—marked by leadership, love, respect and sacrifice—they create an environment where children feel secure."

The Next Generation

God deeply cares about families—He is a Father Himself. Family is central to His Plan, and He will one day soon intervene in world affairs to "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:6). Isaiah 9:6-7 foretells of a time when God will reign as "The Everlasting Father," bringing lasting peace and order. That future will rebuild family structures at every level.

But you do not have to wait for that day to experience the benefits. God's instructions for marriage and family are available now. And they take into account that we currently live in a sinful, broken world.

Here is how God feels about marriages ending: "For the Lord, the God of Israel, says that He hates putting away [divorce]" (Mal. 2:16). At the same time, God acknowledges that divorce may sometimes be necessary. Matthew 19:9 and other verses show this. While divorce is not the ideal, God recognizes that not every marriage can be preserved when human nature is involved.

Knowing God's intent for relationships is only the first step. The real change comes when those principles are put into action—when couples build their homes on His standards.

We at The Restored Church of God are here to help. Visit *rcg.org* for a wide range of free, biblically based resources on marriage and family.

Cycles can be broken. Families can be built—or rebuilt—God's way. And when they are, the next generation can grow up with stability, trust and love as the foundation of their lives. □

WHAT DOES GOD THINK OF HALLOWEEN?

It is more than candy and costumes. See how the Bible measures this popular holiday.

BY NESTOR A. TORO

You have probably enjoyed at least some part of Halloween before. Maybe it was seeing your kids dressed up as their favorite characters. Maybe it was a hayride, visit to a pumpkin patch, school party—or just savoring a favorite candy.

But you have also seen the other side of the day. Front lawns covered in skeletons and tombstones. Stores filled with masks of witches, ghosts and demons. TV shows and movies celebrating fear and the occult.

If you have ever paused in the middle of all this and thought, *Something about this doesn't feel right*, you are not alone. Many who take the Bible seriously question whether Halloween fits the life God calls them to live.

So how should you look at the holiday? More importantly, what does God think of Halloween?

Since the Bible is the inspired Word of God, it provides clear answers. Is Halloween merely a playful custom—or does it carry deeper spiritual implications? Could its origins reveal something more serious than most have considered?

Behind the decorations, costumes and traditions lies a troubling history that still shapes how the day is celebrated.

Holiday Origins

Halloween's roots reach back to ancient pagan rites, particularly the Celtic festival of Samhain (pronounced "sow-in").

This was not a children's holiday. It was a religious observance marking the end of harvest and the beginning of winter—a season associated with death. Ancient Celts believed that on October 31, the boundary between the living and the dead was at its weakest, allowing spirits to roam the Earth. To ward them off or earn their favor, people lit fires, wore disguises and left out food as offerings.

Later, the Roman Catholic Church attempted to christianize the pagan observance by establishing All Saints' Day on November 1, with October 31 becoming All Hallows' Eve, which was eventually shortened to Halloween.

From the Bible's perspective, where a custom comes from *matters*. God makes clear that His people are not to adopt traditions rooted in false worship: "Do not inquire after their gods,

saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way" (Deut. 12:30-31, New King James Version). And He adds through Jeremiah: "Learn not the way of the heathen…For the customs of the people are vain" (10:2-3).

These verses show that God does not separate the practice of a religious custom from its source. If its roots are in false worship, He does not want His people to take part in it, no matter how much the meaning has shifted over time.

Vain Tradition

While God did not establish Halloween, He did command certain Holy Days in Leviticus 23 such as Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles. *These* are the days He designed for His people.

Jesus Christ warned about replacing God's ways with pagan human traditions: "In vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark 7:7).

The Greek word translated "in vain" carries strong meaning. According to *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, it conveys the idea of "tentative manipulation," an "unsuccessful search," or "folly…to no purpose." The *Mounce Concise Greek-English Dictionary* defines it as "fruitlessly, without profit."

In other words, all the effort a person puts into worshiping God—if it is mixed with pagan traditions—becomes empty. No matter the sincerity, God says it produces nothing lasting.

This is where the connection to Halloween's origins becomes important. Its customs were not given by God. They grew out of beliefs and practices that He clearly says to avoid. Over time, these practices were rebranded, softened or even given Christian labels, but that does not change where they came from. God says, "Abstain from *all appearance* of evil" (I Thes. 5:22).

From God's perspective, even appearing to celebrate darkness is something to avoid—whether it is dressing as something frightening or simply joining in customs that came from false worship. People may not be thinking of ancient Samhain rituals as they participate, but the true origins remain.

If your goal is to honor God, does Halloween really reflect the kind of worship He accepts?

What the Day Promotes

Halloween's origins alone show why God rejects it. Yet, even setting history aside, what the holiday promotes today still runs counter to His Way.

Think about what fills your neighborhood, store aisles and TV screens each October—witches, demons, vampires, goblins, ghosts. These are more than harmless decorations. They turn spiritual darkness into entertainment.

God commands His people to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11). To "reprove" means to expose and correct—not to blend in with or celebrate behavior contrary to the Bible. While it is not your responsibility to police what others do, it is your duty to govern your own actions and your children's.

Even if your family's costumes are lighthearted—superheroes, princesses and animals—participation still links you to a celebration built on fear, superstition and death. This sends a mixed message, especially to children still learning what to value and what to reject.

Parents, consider: What is your child learning to see as normal or fun? When excitement, candy and friends are tied to images of death and the occult, what message is taking root?

The Bible warns: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil… that put darkness for light, and light for darkness" (Isa. 5:20). Halloween takes what the Bible calls evil and turns it into amusement.

God's Standard

If God tells His people to avoid darkness, what should they seek instead? The Bible lays out a clear contrast: "What fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion has light with darkness?" (II Cor. 6:14).

God's standard is not just "avoid what's wrong." He also calls His people to fill their lives with what is good. Philippians 4:8 lists it plainly: whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, of good report—to "think on these things."

Measured against that standard, does Halloween pass? Take just one word from that list—*pure*. Or another—*lovely*. The day's focus on fear and the occult falls short every time.

God wants His people to be a light to the world (Matt. 5:14-16), to stand out from the darkness around them. This means choosing celebrations and traditions that reflect His character, not those rooted in or centered on what He calls evil.

A Clear Choice

Each year, many who take the Bible seriously approach Halloween with trepidation. They may not want their children to feel left out. They may not want to cause tension with friends, family or their community.

But God calls His people to a higher standard: "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation…called…out of darkness into His marvelous light" (I Pet. 2:9). True Christianity means standing apart from traditions that glorify what God calls evil, even when those traditions are popular or wrapped in seemingly harmless fun.

So ask yourself: If Jesus Christ stood at your door this October 31, would you be comfortable explaining your Halloween plans to Him? Would the example you are setting point toward light, or toward the darkness God commands us to avoid?

God says, "I have set before you life and death…therefore choose life" (Deut. 30:19). The choice is clear. Leave behind customs rooted in darkness. Fill your life with what reflects God's truth—and teach your children to do the same. □

Myanmar Security Forces Involved in Systematic Torture, UN Report Says

Reuters – United Nations investigators said on August 12 they have found evidence of systematic torture by Myanmar security forces and identified some of the most senior perpetrators.

The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), formed in 2018 to analyze evidence of serious violations of international law, said victims were subject to beatings, electric shocks, gang rape, strangulation and other forms of torture like the removal of fingernails with pliers.

"We have uncovered significant evidence, including eyewitness testimony, showing systematic torture in Myanmar detention facilities," Nicholas Koumjian, head of the IIMM, said in a statement accompanying the 16-page report.

The torture sometimes resulted in death, the report said. Children, who are often unlawfully detained as proxies for their missing parents, were among those tortured, it said.

The military-backed government has not responded to over two dozen requests by the UN team for information about the alleged crimes and requests to access the country, the UN report said.

The military has said it has a duty to ensure peace and security. It has denied atrocities have taken place and has blamed "terrorists" for causing unrest.

The findings in the report covering a one-year period through June 30 were based on information from more than 1,300 sources, including hundreds of eyewitness testimonies as well as forensic evidence, documents and photographs.

Military personnel in tanks participate in a parade on Armed Forces Day in Naypyitaw, Myanmar (March 27, 2021).

REUTERS/STRINGER

Perpetrators identified so far include high-level commanders, the report said, although names were withheld due to ongoing investigations and concerns about alerting the individuals.

Investigators focused on torture partly because many victims were able to identify perpetrators individually which Mr. Koumjian, a former prosecutor, said could help with future convictions.

"People often know the names or they certainly know the faces of those who torture them or who torture their friends," Mr. Koumjian told reporters in Geneva.

Myanmar has been in chaos since a 2021 military coup against an elected civilian government plunged the country into civil war. Tens of thousands of people have been detained since then, the United Nations says.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing ended a four-year state of emergency last month and announced the formation of a new government, with himself as acting president, ahead of a planned election.

The IIMM is investigating abuses in Myanmar since 2011, including crimes committed against the mainly Muslim Rohingya minority in 2017 when hundreds of thousands were forced to flee a military crackdown, and those affecting all groups since the coup.

The IIMM is supporting jurisdictions investigating the alleged crimes, such as Britain and the International Criminal Court.

However, Mr. Koumjian said UN budget cuts threaten its work. Donations for its research on sexual violence and crimes against children as well as funding for witness security are set to run out at year-end, he said.

"All of this would have a very substantial effect on our ability to continue to document the crimes and provide evidence that will be useful to jurisdictions prosecuting these cases," he stated. □

Health Issues

China Fights Mosquito-Borne Chikungunya Virus with Drones, Fines and Nets as Thousands Fall Ill

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) – Chinese authorities are using nets, spraying insecticide and even deploying drones to fight the mosquito-borne chikungunya virus, which has infected thousands of people.

Authorities had reported more than 7,000 cases of the virus as of early August, mostly in the southern Chinese manufacturing hub of Foshan, some 105 miles from Hong Kong. The number of new cases appears to be dropping slowly, according to authorities.

It appeared to be the largest chikungunya outbreak ever documented in China, according to Cesar Lopez-Camacho of the University of Oxford. The virus is transmitted by infected mosquitoes and can cause fever and joint pain.

"What makes this event notable is that chikungunya has never been established in mainland China before," Mr. Lopez-Camacho said in a statement. "This suggests that most of the population had no preexisting immunity, making it easier for the virus to spread quickly."

This 2014 photo made available by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows a feeding female Anopheles funestus mosquito.

JAMES GATHANY/CDC VIA AP

Chinese state television has shown workers spraying insecticide around city streets, residential areas, construction sites and other areas where people may come into contact with mosquitoes. Workers sprayed some places before entering office buildings.

Unusually heavy rains and high temperatures have worsened the crisis in China, and authorities are using drones to try to find standing water, where mosquitoes lay eggs.

Authorities also have threatened to fine people who do not empty water from outdoor receptacles. Residents can be subject to fines of up to 10,000 yuan ($1,400) and have their electricity cut off.

Because of the virus, the U.S. has issued a travel advisory suggesting that Americans take extra precautions when visiting China's Guangdong province, where Foshan is located, as well as Bolivia and some island nations in the Indian Ocean.

Since the 2003 SARS outbreak, China has used strict measures to fight the spread of viruses, including hard-line tactics during the COVID-19 pandemic. This time, patients are being forced to stay in hospital in Foshan for at least one week and authorities briefly enforced a two-week home quarantine, which was dropped because the disease cannot be transmitted between people.

Reports also have emerged of attempts to stop the spread of chikungunya with fish that eat mosquito larvae and even larger mosquitoes to eat the insects carrying the virus.

Officials have held meetings and adopted protocols at the national level in a sign of China's determination to eliminate the outbreak and avoid public and international criticism. □

World Risks Up to $39 Trillion in Economic Losses from Vanishing Wetlands, Report Says

NAIROBI (Reuters) – The global destruction of wetlands, which support fisheries, agriculture and flood control, may mean the loss of $39 trillion in economic benefits by 2050, according to a recent report by the Convention on Wetlands.

Some 22 percent of wetlands, both freshwater systems such as peat lands, rivers and lakes, and coastal marine systems including mangroves and coral reefs, have disappeared since 1970, according to the intergovernmental report, the fastest pace of loss of any ecosystem.

Pressures, including land-use change, pollution, agricultural expansion, invasive species, and climate issues such as rising sea levels and drought, are driving the declines.

"The scale of loss and degradation is beyond what we can afford to ignore," said Hugh Robertson, the lead author of the report.

The report called for annual investments of $275 billion to $550 billion to reverse the threats to the remaining wetlands, and said current spending was a "substantial under-investment" without giving figures.

The world has lost 411 million hectares of wetlands, the equivalent of half a billion football pitches, and a quarter of the remaining wetlands are now classified as in a state of degradation, according to the report.

Wetlands' economic benefits include flood regulation, water purification and carbon storage—key as water levels rise and tropical storms and hurricanes intensify.

They also support the fishery and agriculture industries and offer cultural benefits.

The report launched a week before the Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, meeting of the parties of the Convention on Wetlands, a global agreement of 172 countries signed in 1971 to spearhead preservation of the ecosystem.

The group, which includes China, Russia and the United States, meets every three years.

Wetland deterioration is particularly acute in Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, but is worsening in Europe and North America, the report said.

Rehabilitation projects are underway in countries including Zambia, Cambodia and China. □

A drone view shows turf from Derryrush bog left out to dry after being harvested from the blanket bog, in Derryrush, Ireland (April 22, 2024).
REUTERS/CLODAGH KILCOYNE

Americas

Ranchers in Southern Mexico Are Struggling Against a Flesh-Eating Parasite Infecting Livestock

CINTALAPA, Mexico (AP) – With Mexican cattle again barred from entry to the United States over fears of spreading a flesh-eating parasite, ranchers and veterinarians in Mexico hundreds of miles from the border are fighting what has U.S. agricultural authorities so on edge this summer.

In the southern state of Chiapas, which borders Guatemala, the New World screwworm fly's rapid spread appears to have caught most ranchers off guard, despite memories of previous outbreaks in the 1980s and 1990s.

Mexico is building a plant with U.S. support in Chiapas to produce sterile flies, which have proven effective at stopping the spread, but it will not be ready until next year. Meanwhile, the price of medicines used to treat livestock infected with the screwworm have soared in price.

That has led some to fall back on home remedies like applying gasoline or lime to open wounds to coax out the worms.

In addition to the cost of the medicine, treatment requires careful monitoring and usually involves multiple courses. Any open wound, even very small ones, are an invitation to the fly to lay its eggs.

Veterinarian Alfredo Chavez left Chiapas to study in 1989, so he says he missed seeing the effects of that outbreak, but now he has seen cases multiply in his corner of the state over the month of July.

He has heard of dozens of cases in the area now and treated about a dozen himself. It is not just cows either—sheep, pigs, cats and dogs are targets as well.

A ranch worker drives cattle to a corral for inspection for New World screwworm at a ranch in Cintalapa, Chiapas, Mexico (July 23, 2025).

AP/ISABEL MATEOS

Armed with a pair of blue tweezers and an aerosol spray that helps draw the maggots out, Mr. Chavez moves from animal to animal. He puts maggots in plastic tubes as samples, which he provides to agricultural authorities.

But beyond providing the tubes and encouraging ranchers to report cases, he said that the government has not provided much help.

"We've faced it alone," he said.

The U.S. had just gradually started to reopen the border to cattle imports in July after an earlier suspension in May, when the Trump administration said that it would close it again after an infected animal was found in the Gulf coast state of Veracruz. While prevalent in Central America, the concern is that the fly is moving north.

U.S. officials worry that if the fly reaches Texas, its maggots could cause large economic losses, something that happened decades ago.

Ranch caretaker Edi Valencia Santos said that Mexican government officials have come to his community to talk to people with livestock, but so far without resources. He has had five infected animals on the ranch.

Despite cattle in this region going to domestic consumption rather than to the U.S., the presence of the screwworm in Mexico has frozen cattle exports to the U.S. nationwide.

Mr. Valencia said that he remembers the small planes distributing sterile flies during those earlier outbreaks, so he is optimistic they will eventually help, but for now the costs are piling up on ranchers.

"It's a big, big problem in Chiapas," he said. □

Africa

Nigeria Faces Hunger Crisis as Food Needs Rise Across West and Central Africa

UNITED NATIONS (AP) – Nigeria is facing "an unprecedented hunger crisis," and the need for food is rising across west and central Africa while funds are shrinking, the UN food agency's regional head said.

Margot van der Velden said nearly 31 million people in Nigeria are facing acute food insecurity and need life-saving food—a number "equivalent to the entire population of Texas going hungry."

But the regional director of the World Food Program (WFP) said that due to severe funding cuts starting in August, "we will face the heartbreaking reality of having to suspend humanitarian aid for the populations in areas devastated by conflict."

That means over 1.3 million people in Nigeria will lose access to food and nutritional support, 150 nutrition clinics in Borno state in the northeast where Islamic militants are active may close and 300,000 children will be at risk of severe malnutrition, and 700,000 displaced people "will be left with no means of survival," she said.

For years, the U.S. Agency for International Development had been the backbone of the humanitarian response in northeastern Nigeria, helping non-governmental organizations provide food, shelter and health care to millions of people.

The U.S. government has slashed foreign assistance and dismantled USAID, accusing the agency of waste and fraud and supporting a liberal agenda. Other Western donors also have slashed international aid spending.

Ms. van der Velden said WFP urgently needs $130 million to sustain its operations in Nigeria.

But she stressed that the crisis is not just in Nigeria but across west and central Africa, where WFP also is facing critical funding shortfalls that are forcing the Rome-based agency to reduce or suspend operations in some of Africa's "most fragile" countries.

A Fulani woman empties water from a bowl outside her house in Konduga, northeast Nigeria (July 23, 2025).

AP/SUNDAY ALAMBA

"WFP's aid has dropped by 60%, now reaching only 5 million people, with Mali and Niger suffering cuts of over 80% in emergency support," Ms. van der Velden said. "In countries such as Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Cameroon and the Central African Republic, we are seeing the same pattern: rising needs, shrinking resources and growing risks."

According to WFP's latest data, Nigeria's appeal for over $130 million for this year is only 21 percent funded.

The agency said the crisis in Africa's most populous country is driven by families' depleted food stocks, soaring food prices, inflation, currency depreciation and conflict—combined with "unprecedented funding cuts."

WFP also cited funding crises in other countries in the region—its appeal for $65.1 million for Cameroon is just 19 percent funded; the $35.8 million appeal for Mauritania is 39 percent funded; the $29.7 million appeal for Central African Republic is 49 percent funded; the $33.2 million appeal for Mali is 57 percent funded and the $21.4 million appeal for Niger is 74 percent funded.

Ms. van der Velden warned that when there is no food aid, hunger deepens and tensions rise.

"Communities fracture and the risk of instability increases, making it more difficult to maintain peace and resilience in the region," she said. □

Nervous About Finances?

God doesn't want you to feel this way! Read our free booklets *End All Your Financial Worries* and *Taking Charge of Your Finances* to learn clear Bible principles that will help turn around your money woes.

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