

MARCH-APRIL 2026

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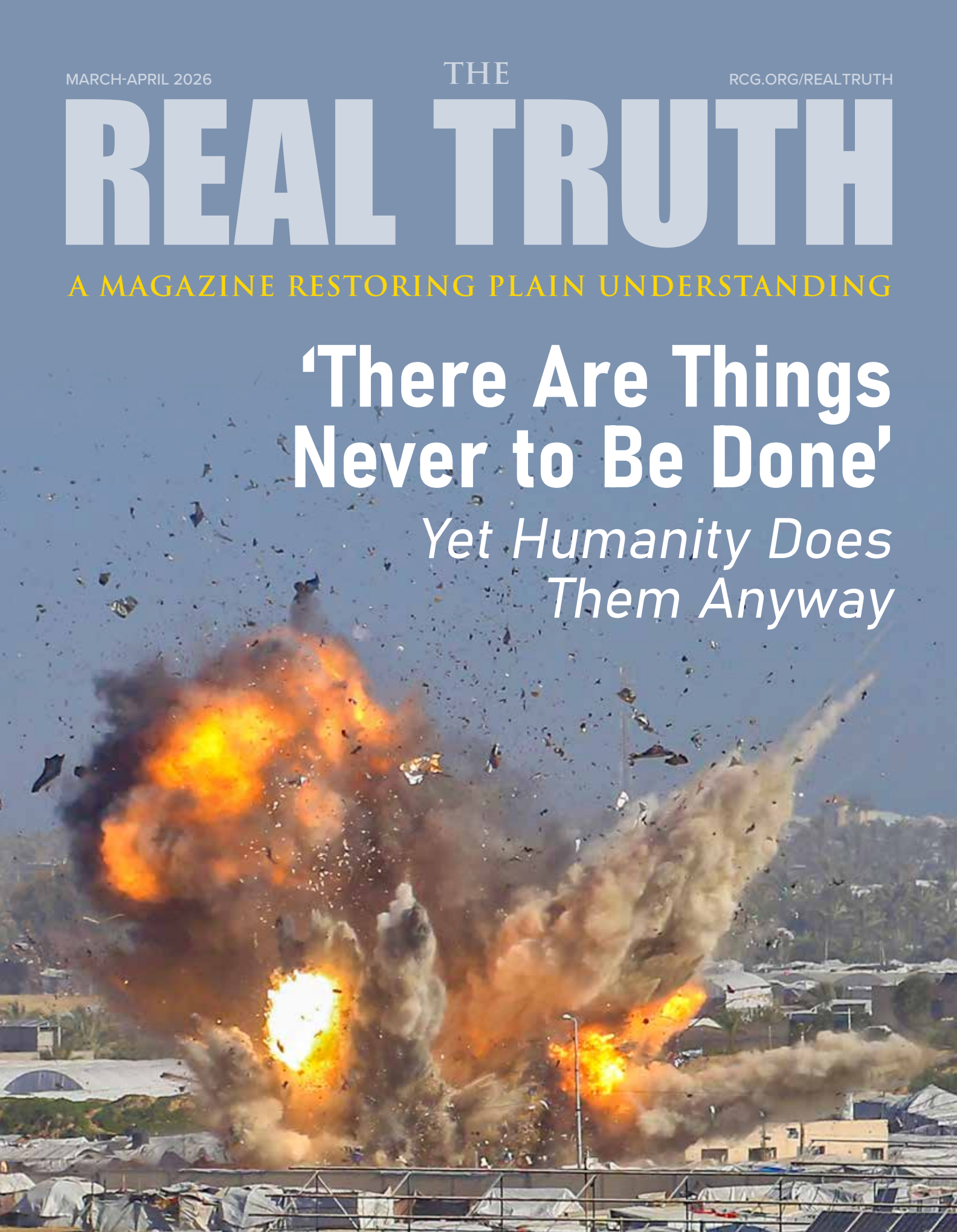
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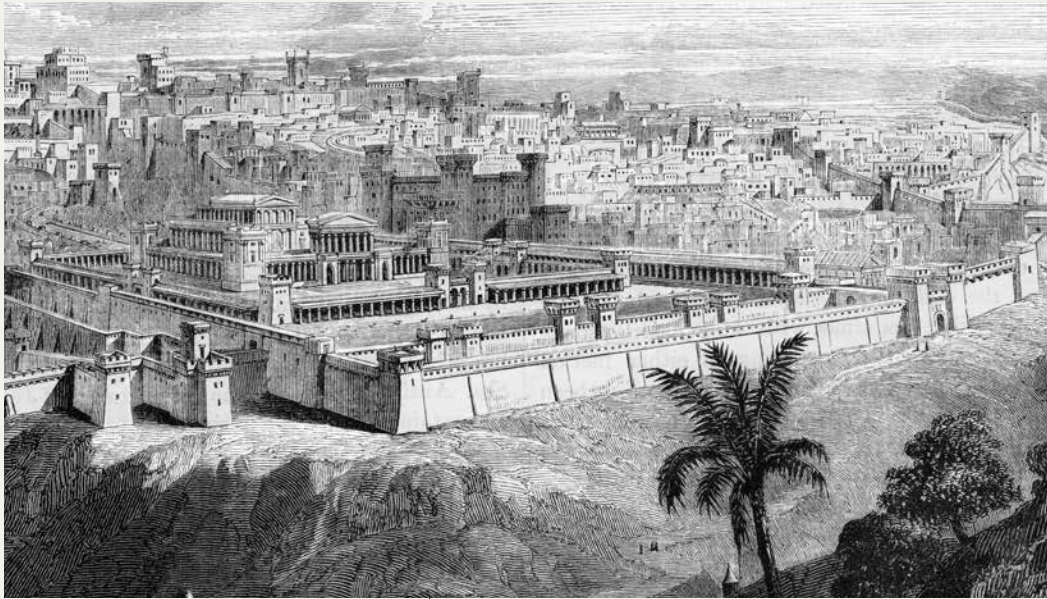
REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

**'There Are Things
Never to Be Done'**

*Yet Humanity Does
Them Anyway*





Jerusalem in the time of Jesus Christ, showing the Temple as renovated by Herod the Great.

GETTY IMAGES

Jesus Kept Passover. Why Does Christianity Keep Easter Instead?
Christians should sincerely ask whether this tradition truly reflects God’s will.
Page 19

Front Cover: Smoke and fire rises from the Gath shelter housing displaced Palestinians after an Israeli air strike in the west of Khan Yunis, southern Gaza Strip (Jan. 31, 2026). At least 556 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli strikes since a U.S.-brokered truce came into effect in October, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry. Four Israeli soldiers have been killed in Gaza in the same period, with more injured.

BASHAR TALEB/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

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Personal from the Editor-in-Chief
Think Like God
Page 1

‘There Are Things Never to Be Done’—Yet Humanity Does Them Anyway
An overlooked moment at the Winter Olympics revealed a fundamental truth about people.
Page 4

Egypt’s Drone Deployment Raises Stakes in Sudan’s Civil War
Page 9

A ‘Missing Piece’: Friendship in a Disconnected Age
Why does losing touch hurt so much? The Bible reveals the answer.
Page 12

Sports Betting: The High Cost of Fast Money
Legal sports betting moved from taboo to mainstream almost overnight. While the law may have changed, something else has not.
Page 16

China and Japan, Uneasy Neighbors in East Asia, Are at Odds Again
Page 24

Syrian Government, Kurds Agree to International Deal in ‘Historic Milestone’
Page 27

World News Desk
Page 30

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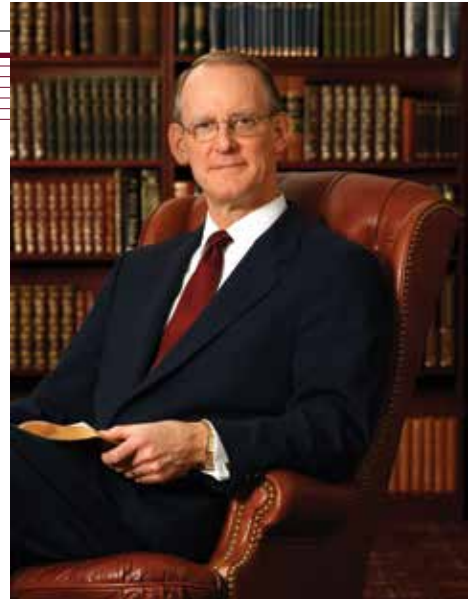
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



Think Like God

EVERY TIME we turn on the lights, use electric heat or most appliances, a stream of alternating current (AC) supplies the power. Much of modern life depends on scientist and inventor Nikola Tesla's harnessing the phenomena in the 1880s. In 1934, he stated that deep thought was the key to this level of ingenuity: "Originality thrives in seclusion, free of outside influences beating upon us to cripple the creative mind. Be alone, that is the secret of invention; be alone, that is when ideas are born."

I cited this in a recent sermon, touching briefly on the subject of correct meditation—something *completely misunderstood* in a world of smartphones, computers, television and other devices vying for our attention. Everything around you originated with *thought*. So did we. Genesis 1:26 reads, "And God said, Let Us make man in our image, after Our likeness..." God determined to do something—after careful thought!—and created mankind. He is a Being capable of unfathomably deep thought, yet He created us to be like Him. He expects us to think, too.

Of course, this includes *right* thought about *right* things. Simply "emptying the mind" as most proponents of meditation advocate, invites disaster.

Notice what Christ explained about this very subject in Luke 11:24-26: "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walks through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he comes, he finds it swept and garnished. Then goes he, and takes to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first."

An "empty" mind is like that swept house—*something* will fill it. God wants us to **FILL** our minds with His thoughts!

What You Should Think About...

Proverbs 8 contains a fascinating description of what we should focus our minds on: wisdom. Solomon asked, "Does not wisdom cry? And understanding put forth her voice?" (vs. 1). He then went on to explain in verses 22-25: "The LORD possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth."

Understand. God created and used wisdom *before* taking action. He thought—meditated!—on His decisions and ways, and expects us to do the same.

The Bible is filled with things God wants us to think about. Notice what the apostle Paul instructed in Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brethren, 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.”

King David explained what he thought about and was ultimately guided by: “I have more understanding than all my teachers: for Your testimonies are my MEDITATION. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts” (Psa. 119:99-100). This understanding led him to not only *think* differently, but *act* differently. Note the

next two verses: “I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep Your word. I have not departed from Your judgments: for You have taught me” (vs. 101-102).

As David grew closer to God, his appreciation for what he meditated on also grew: “How sweet are Your words unto my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (vs. 103-105).

David strove to meditate as much as possible, focusing on God’s way of life—even while drifting off to sleep. Here is Psalm 63:6: “When I remember You upon my bed, and meditate on You in the night watches.”

Your Thoughts Determine Your Life

As our minds expand through this kind of meditation, an amazing


transformation takes place. Christ explained, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34). He was building on an Old Testament principle: “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7). What fills our minds eventually shapes our lives.

This is why God commands us to diligently guard our thoughts: “Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). The modern world trains people to live distracted and shallow lives. Yet God wants us to regularly step away from the noise and *think deeply*.

To understand more on this vital subject, read our thorough article “Meditation – The Misunderstood Tool” at rcg.org/mtmt. It explains clearly what godly meditation is—and what it is not—and shows how learning to think as God instructs can reshape your life. □



Psalm 63:6
“When I remember You
upon my bed, and
meditate on You in the
night watches.”



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**‘THERE ARE THINGS
NEVER TO BE DONE’**

—YET HUMANITY DOES THEM ANYWAY



An overlooked moment at the Winter Olympics revealed a fundamental truth about people.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

AT THE opening ceremony of the 2026 Winter Olympics, Italy introduced itself to the world the way only Italy could. Opera swelled through the night air, with Verdi and Puccini woven into the program. The unmistakable strains of Rossini's *William Tell Overture* stirred the crowd.

Giant suspended paint tubes hung from the stadium ceiling, bursting with color as if the Renaissance itself were being poured out over the modern age. The ceremony nodded to Leonardo da Vinci's artistic genius, to Federico Fellini's cinematic imagination, to Giorgio Armani and the runways of Italian fashion. Espresso makers, mythological figures and contemporary choreography blended into one confident declaration: This is who we are.

Left, Ukrainian firefighters extinguish a fire after a Russian bombing raid on the city of Sloviansk, Ukraine (Feb. 10, 2026). Right, fire bursts from an apartment building following a Russian air attack in Kyiv (Feb. 3, 2026).

SARAH STIER/GETTY IMAGES; SERHII OKUNEV/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

For a few hours, the host nation presented the finest version of itself—culture, beauty, creativity, refinement. A vision of what humanity can create at its best.

Then, amid the spectacle, the tempo slowed.

Italian rapper Ghali stepped forward surrounded by dancers. Rather than deliver a hip-hop performance, he chose to recite a poem. In Italian, then in French and English, he spoke the words of children's author Gianni Rodari: "There are things never to be done...one, for example, is war."

This statement, from the poem Memorandum, comes after listing things children must do every day: bathe, study, play, help their parents, sleep and dream.

At the end, dancers lowered themselves to the floor, forming the shape of a dove, the universal symbol of peace.

Yet outside the stadium, peace was still missing.

In Sudan's Kordofan region, UN rights officials said drone strikes killed at least 57 civilians over two days in February—including at least 15 children—as warring parties targeted markets and shelters in the long-running civil war.

In Ukraine, Action on Armed Violence research shows civilian casualties surged in 2025, with dozens killed and hundreds injured by Russian strikes on cities and infrastructure.

And in Gaza, UNICEF reports that tens of thousands of children have been killed or injured since October 2023.

Why do we know to teach our children war is wrong, yet utterly fail to put a stop to it as adults?

Beyond Rodari, politicians, philosophers and thinkers throughout the centuries have written unending words about an end to war.

Why can humanity never seem to turn those dreams and ideals into reality?

Global Ideal

The official theme of the Games was *armonia*, the Italian word for harmony. The message was reinforced

visually and verbally: "Peace" glowed in giant letters on the side of the stadium, formed from the lights of the audience's wristbands. Speeches emphasized unity over conflict and division.

International Olympic Committee President Kirsty Coventry stated: "Here, athletes from every corner of our world compete fiercely—but also respect, support and inspire one another. They remind us that we are all connected, that our strength comes from how we treat each other, and that the best of humanity is found in courage, compassion and kindness."

South African actress and United Nations peace ambassador Charlize Theron quoted Nelson Mandela: "Peace is not just the absence of conflict. Peace is the creation of an environment where all can flourish, regardless of race, color, creed, religion, gender, class, caste, or any other social markers of difference."

Such words and displays are not unique to the Olympics.

After wars, leaders vow, "Never again." Candlelight vigils follow tragedy, memorials are raised to honor the fallen, and treaties and ceasefires are negotiated—all sincere attempts to secure peace after bloodshed.

Spilling Ink

For centuries, thinkers have wrestled with the deeper question beneath Rodari's simple line: If war is something that should never be done, how do you stop nations from doing it anyway?

In ancient China, during the Warring States period (475-221 BC), the philosopher Mozi condemned aggressive war by pointing out a moral contradiction: Killing one man was treated as a crime, yet invading a rival state and killing thousands was often praised. Mozi argued that war endures because people instinctively protect their own side and treat outsiders as less valuable. If human beings could learn to weigh other lives as heavily as their own, he believed, war would more naturally be avoided.

More than two millennia later, Europe was still wrestling with the

same question. In 1795, philosopher Immanuel Kant published the essay *Toward Perpetual Peace*. His aim was to build a rational plan for peace in a world of self-interested nations.

His starting premise: A peace treaty is not peace if it is signed with "mental reservations"—if leaders agree publicly while privately leaving room to resume the fight. From there, he argued that peace would require restraints: governments accountable to their people and international law to prevent disputes from escalating into war.

These ideas did not remain trapped in philosophy.

After World War I, leaders and legal theorists reached for Kant's ideas when trying to build institutions designed to prevent another catastrophe. Germany's foreign minister invoked the philosopher while making the case for the League of Nations, which later folded into the UN.

Humanity has not ignored the problem of war. It has studied it relentlessly. It has tried to write peace into philosophy, treaties, institutions and international law.

One might argue that the world we see today is humanity's best attempt to institutionalize peace. It has built mechanisms that have deterred *some* conflict, isolated *some* aggressors, and *sometimes* kept violence from spreading.

Yet war remains.

Why Words Fail

When Ghali's dancers formed a dove across the stadium floor, they were invoking a symbol nearly everyone recognizes. That dove with an olive branch has roots in the Bible: After the Flood, Noah sent out a dove, and it returned with an olive leaf as proof that destruction had passed and restoration could begin (Gen. 8:8-11).

That origin is fitting. The Bible has much to say about war and peace.

God is clear how He feels about violence. The Ten Commandments state it plainly: "You shall not kill" (Ex. 20:13). Innocent life is not to be taken.

Yet people do not need to know the Bible to understand war is wrong.



Relatives, friends and other attendees mourn over the coffins during a funeral ceremony for a father, his two sons and his daughter, who were killed by a Russian drone strike at a cemetery in the village of Skovorodynivka in the Kharkiv region (Feb. 13, 2026).

SAMOILOV/AFP

They may argue about when it is “necessary,” but few praise bloodshed as pure good. They justify it because they feel the need to.

This is what the apostle Paul explains in Romans 2: “The Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law...their conscience also bearing witness...” (Rom. 2:14-15).

By “the law,” Paul is referring to God’s Law, which is summed up in the Ten Commandments. Paul’s point is not that human beings naturally obey it, but that their consciences still recognize basic moral principles.

And yet, knowing what is right is not the same thing as doing it. Knowing how to bring peace escapes even the most celebrated minds of history.

In 1932, Albert Einstein wrote to Sigmund Freud with a question that still haunts the modern world: “Is there

any way of delivering mankind from the menace of war?”

Einstein was agnostic and Freud was an atheist. They did not follow the Bible but still treated war as a problem to be solved.

Einstein admitted something sobering about humanity’s peace efforts: “for all the zeal displayed, every attempt at its solution has ended in a lamentable breakdown.”

Freud, for his part, could only speculate that growing civilization—and dread of the next war’s destruction—might restrain mankind someday. But he conceded: “By what ways or by-ways this will come about, we cannot guess.”

Two of the 20th century’s greatest secular minds could see the moral problem. But they could not show how society would actually arrive at lasting peace.

God’s Word puts that verdict in a single line: “The way of peace they know not” (Isa. 59:8).

Humanity knows enough to condemn war. But without fully following God’s Law, it does not know the way to make peace permanent.

Words with Authority

It is fitting that some of the most impactful words of the Olympics opening ceremony came from a children’s author. Children represent the future. When we see them suffering—displaced by war, injured in bombings, growing up fatherless—the brokenness of the present world becomes unmistakable. Their vulnerability sharpens our longing for something better.

The Bible does not merely echo that longing. It describes a future in which it is fulfilled: “Thus says the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem...And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof” (Zech. 8:4-5).

This promise is rooted in Jerusalem, but its scope is far larger. It portrays a world where the most vulnerable—the elderly and the young—move about without fear. Streets are not emptied by air-raid sirens or scarred by rubble. They are filled with life. In a world where images of bomb shelters and refugee camps are common, such a scene feels implausible.

Isaiah expands the vision even further: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb...and a little child shall lead them...They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain” (11:6, 9).

This represents a total transformation from the world of today. Violence is not just restrained, it is removed entirely.

Today, children are often the first to suffer in conflict. In the world God describes, they become symbols of safety and trust.

And this coming peace will endure. It will be sustained by God’s instruction and guidance: “And all your children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of your children” (Isa. 54:13).

True peace lasts because it is taught. It must be anchored in God’s Law and upheld by His authority.

On its face, such a future sounds too hopeful—too distant from present reality. The gap between prophecy and headlines is wide.

The difference between man’s peace *plans* and God’s peace *promises* is authority. Human beings can write beautiful words and even build institutions, but they cannot guarantee results.

God can.

He describes Himself as the One “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure” (Isa. 46:10). And He states it even more simply: “I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it” (Ezek. 36:36).

In other words, God does not publish peace as an aspiration. He preserves it in His Word as a promise—and will bring it to pass.

The Gospel of Peace

A peaceful future is the very message Jesus Christ brought, and what the apostle Paul called “the gospel of peace.”

During His earthly ministry, Christ preached: “The Kingdom of God is at hand: repent you, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

Paul wrote, “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom. 10:15). He also said that Christians are to stand with their “feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15).

The word *gospel* means good news. It is the announcement of a coming Kingdom—the rule of God over the Earth.

“True peace lasts because it is taught. It must be anchored in God’s Law and upheld by His authority.”

Isaiah described what that rule will accomplish: “And He shall judge among the nations...and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (2:4).

Notice the structure of that promise. Peace comes after judgment—after authority is exercised. Nations will not simply agree to disarm, rather they will be taught a different way. War is *unlearned*.

Peace is connected directly to government: “Of the increase of [God’s] government and peace there shall be no end...” (9:7).

Even mankind knows government and peace are tied together. Just look at the UN. Yet peace from God does not depend on fragile consensus or

temporary restraint. It will endure because it is upheld by righteous authority.

This is why the gospel is good news. It does not ask humanity to generate a peace it has repeatedly failed to sustain. It announces that peace will be established by the One who can remove the causes of conflict altogether.

God’s Peace Now

God is not only planning to bring peace in the future.

Jesus said: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

The world offers fleeting peace through treaties, deterrence and negotiation. God offers peace through transformation of the human heart.

Colossians 3:15 says, “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts.”

Peace now comes from living under God’s government. The same Law that will one day guide nations can guide individuals today. Where God’s rule is accepted, conflict gives way to restraint. Pride yields to humility. Fear yields to trust.

Part of that peace comes from understanding the world as it truly is. Knowing that the “way of peace they know not” (Isa. 59:8) can help you make sense of the events going on in the world. It explains why the best human efforts to end war collapse. It confirms that lasting peace cannot emerge from human will alone.

And it anchors hope.

Because the God who gives peace to individuals today has promised to give peace to the world tomorrow. He has declared a future in which swords become plowshares, in which children play safely in the streets, in which war is not merely paused, but unlearned.

“There are things never to be done...one, for example, is war.”

Humanity can write those words. Only God can make them permanent. □



Egypt's Drone Deployment Raises Stakes in Sudan's Civil War

East Oweinat airfield, after the start of renovations to a runway and other construction work, in East Oweinat, Egypt (Jan. 21, 2026).

2026 PLANET LABS PBC/HANDOUT VIA REUTERS

THE DEPLOYMENT of a powerful model of Turkish combat drone to a remote airstrip on Egypt's southwestern border signaled a sharp escalation in Sudan's civil war, suggesting one of its largest neighbors is being drawn deeper into the fray, more than a dozen officials and regional experts said in February.

Egypt, which shares the Nile River and a more than 745-mile frontier with Sudan, has provided staunch political backing to the country's military in its nearly three-year conflict with the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary group.

But while Egyptian security officials have privately acknowledged sending logistical and technical support to the Sudanese Armed Forces, until last year Cairo mostly refrained from direct intervention in fighting that has killed tens of thousands of people, displaced millions and spread famine across the vast country.

Cairo's position toward the conflict started to change when the RSF made a series of advances in Sudan's western Darfur region, first capturing a strategic northwestern triangle between Egypt and Libya in June and then over-



running the Sudanese military's last foothold in Darfur, the city of al-Fashir, in October, according to eight regional analysts and three diplomats briefed by Egyptian officials.

Egypt's presidency warned in December that the country's national security was directly linked to Sudan's, and Cairo would not allow its "red lines" to be crossed. Those lines include preserving Sudan's territorial integrity and rejecting any "parallel entities" that threaten the country's unity, it said.

Two Egyptian security officials told *Reuters* two airports in the south have been supplied with military equipment over the past eight months or so to secure the border and carry out military strikes to protect "national security." The officials, who like other sources spoke on condition of anonymity, declined to provide details.

Satellite images from Vantor, a U.S. space technology firm, show a large drone on the apron of one of the airports, in East Oweinat, on September 29, December 28 and January 9.

Two military experts who reviewed the images told *Reuters* the aircraft was identifiable as a Bayraktar Akinci based on its distinctive body and wing

Top, people stand beside the ruins of a historical building in Suakin, Sudan (Jan. 22, 2026). Bottom, a man who suffered head and leg injuries during a drone attack near Um Baru, Sudan, is being treated by nurses at the hospital in Tine, Chad (Jan. 30, 2026).

TOP, MUTAWAKIL ISSA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM, JORIS BOLOMEY/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



design. *The New York Times* has also published imagery of Akinci drones at the East Oweinat airstrip, which they reported were being used for strikes in Sudan.

The Akinci is one of the most advanced drones manufactured by Turkish defense firm Baykar, with the ability to travel at high altitudes, remain airborne for 24 hours and carry a wide range of munitions.

A Wide Range of Foreign Actors

Egypt—along with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and United States—is part of the so-called “Quad” of countries seen as most influential in the conflict, which has been trying, without success, to broker a ceasefire.

Cairo’s toughening stance adds another potentially explosive element to a conflict that has drawn in a wide range of foreign actors since April 2023, when the country’s military and the RSF fell out over how to integrate their forces during a planned transition to civilian rule.

UN experts have accused the UAE of providing weapons to the RSF, which Abu Dhabi denies. Sudan’s military has deployed Turkish and Iranian drones, and it has received political and other backing from Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

RSF head Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo has accused Egypt of being involved in airstrikes against the group since at least October 2024, which Cairo denied at the time. Shortly before al-Fashir’s fall, Mr. Dagalo said his forces were being attacked by aircraft taking off from “airports in neighboring countries,” warning they would be considered a “legitimate target” for his fighters.

The New Arab, a London-based pan-Arab news outlet, quoted an Egyptian military official as saying Egypt carried out an airstrike on an RSF convoy in the border triangle area on January 9. A diplomat in Cairo briefed by Egyptian officials said the strike was carried out from an airbase in southern Egypt. *Reuters* could not independently verify the accounts.

Samir Farag, a retired Egyptian military officer, said East Oweinat is one of the “main bases through which Egypt can secure its southern borders.”

The airstrip is located in a remote farming region, about 37 miles from the Sudan border, and was primarily used to support a desert reclamation project before the war.

“Egypt doesn’t allow anyone to be present on its borders and threaten its national security,” Mr. Farag said. “It will intervene directly and manage the situation. This is the right of every country in the world.”

Drone Deployment at the Base

While only one Akinci is clearly visible on any given day in the Vantor imagery, an image captured by U.S. satellite firm Planet Labs on December 28 almost certainly shows two outside one of the hangars, according to Jeremy Binnie, Middle East specialist at Janes, a defense intelligence company.

Akincis can also be seen outside multiple hangars, suggesting more than one is being used to store drones when they are not flying, he added.

The presence of support equipment and loading material around the aircraft, and the fact that they appear in different locations, suggest they are being used, said Wim Zwijnenburg, a military technology expert at Dutch peace organization PAX.

The images reviewed by *Reuters* also show renovations underway at the airport between early July and the end of January. The runway was being repaved and possibly widened slightly, and several smaller roads were added. There were also signs of digging and construction, with at least two small structures added.

The RSF says its territory has been attacked repeatedly with Akincis, claiming its fighters shot down at least seven since June.

Two videos posted on social media in mid-January showed what RSF fighters said was an Akinci shot down near Nyala, the group’s main stronghold in Darfur. The two military experts told

Reuters the wreckage was consistent with a crashed Akinci, but the news agency could not determine when and where the videos were shot, or who was operating the drone.

Egypt’s Shifting Stance

Justin Lynch, managing director of the Conflict Insights Group consultancy, which closely tracks the war in Sudan, said the drone deployment at East Oweinat was “an indication of Egypt’s recent policy to be more involved in Sudan.”

The airport is less than 250 miles from Sudan’s border triangle, a strategically sensitive region on Egypt’s doorstep through which the RSF can receive supplies from southeastern Libya destined for Darfur.

Supplies sent through that corridor proved instrumental to the fall of al-Fashir, during which the RSF was accused of widespread atrocities, including gunning down hundreds of civilians and holding residents hostage for ransom.

The city’s fall was a turning point in Egypt’s previously “ambiguous” stance toward the conflict, said Jalel Harchaoui, a contributor to Britain’s Royal United Services Institute think tank.

“The Egyptian military harbors no affinity whatsoever for the Rapid Support Forces. Yet Egypt depends on the United Arab Emirates, a major backer of the RSF, for financial assistance,” he said. “When al-Fashir finally fell...Cairo’s equilibrium shifted toward taking tougher measures against the RSF.”

Egypt may also have been emboldened by Saudi Arabia’s moves to curb the UAE’s influence in Yemen, according to the analysts and diplomats who spoke with *Reuters*, a rivalry that has since spilled over into the Horn of Africa.

An Emirati official said the UAE was working with regional partners—including Egypt and Saudi Arabia—to secure a ceasefire in Sudan and that its “decisions have consistently favored restraint over escalation.” □



‘A Missing Piece’

Friendship in a Disconnected Age

Why does losing touch hurt so much? The Bible reveals the answer.

BY GARRICK R. OXLEY

SOME FRIENDS are so close, you cannot imagine seeing them apart. Heather Robb and Laine DiPasquantonio were nearly inseparable in their 20s when they both lived in Boston. They went to concerts and vacationed together. Laine was there when Heather met her future husband and attended their wedding as a bridesmaid. Their bond seemed like it would endure forever.

Yet sometime after Ms. Robb married and Ms. DiPasquantonio moved to Colorado, their circle of friends scattered. They became busy raising children, juggling jobs and caring for aging parents.

“It’s terrible because you don’t know it’s happening,” Ms. Robb, now 60, said about their friendship fading in a joint

interview. “I think it was simply space and time. We were all in different cities, we were all in that busy time of toddlers.”

Years passed with occasional cards and texts but few meaningful interactions. Ms. DiPasquantonio saw photos on social media of Ms. Robb skiing and traveling with other friends. “I wasn’t sure there was so much room for me, from a distance,” she said.

“Aww, I feel badly about that,” Ms. Robb replied. “I would argue that’s the bad side of social media.”

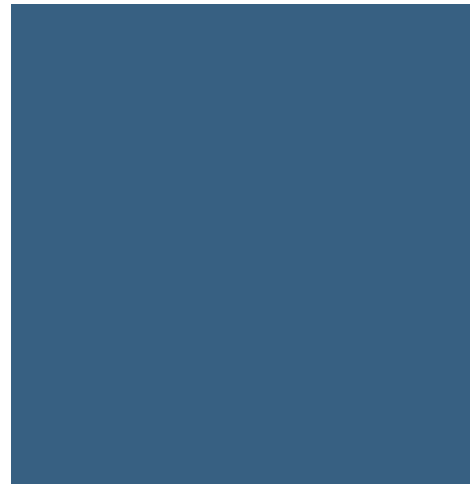
The women found their way back to each other when Ms. Robb had a business trip to Denver last spring. “I was so tickled that you called and wanted to get together. It was awesome,” Ms. DiPasquantonio, now 63, said during

their interview. “What took us so long, right?”

They have remained close since. “It just feels so good. It feels like there was a missing piece,” Ms. Robb added.

The friends we make early in life can be some of the deepest relationships we have. The schoolmates who shared bike rides and their favorite candy. The roommates who comforted us after bad news. Our friends know us, sometimes better than we know ourselves.

But as we grow up, take on jobs and gain the responsibilities of homes and families, it can be challenging to stay connected with everyone we have loved. And when we lose contact, there is a real void. As Ms. Robb put it, “a missing piece.”



This yearning is nothing new. People instinctively long for meaningful friendship. Thousands of years ago, Solomon wrote in the Old Testament about “a friend [who] loves at all times” (Prov. 17:17) and “a friend that sticks closer than a brother” (18:24).

Those verses sum up the kind of friend we all desire. That type of relationship is possible, but it takes time and effort—and sometimes reaching out long after the bond appears to have faded.

Designed for Friendship

Just after God created the first human being, a man named Adam, He observed: “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18).

God then created the first friend: Adam’s wife, Eve.

These words apply to the complicated world we live in today just as they

did in the Garden of Eden. It is “not good” for people to be isolated. While we all need some alone time on occasion, prolonged solitude is harmful.

A 2025 study of nearly 50,000 people across the United States conducted by Howard University College of Medicine in Washington, D.C., found that more than 80 percent of those surveyed experience some degree of loneliness.

The lead author said in a press release: “People who felt lonely ‘always’ had a fivefold increase in depression risk, 11 more poor mental health days, and 5 additional poor physical health days per month compared to those who never felt lonely. These effects were consistent even after accounting for age, race, gender, and other factors.”

Technology, including social media, video calls, text messages and other

things, has made it easier to stay in touch. But that is not a substitute for in-person interaction. A person can be on social media all day but still feel lonely. That is why it is so important to have real-life friends.

The book of Ecclesiastes adds, “Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed” (4:9, New Living Translation). While the specific context here is family, the principle applies to friendship too.

Having a deep connection with another person makes us “better off.” Two friends can “help each other succeed.” God designed us this way.

If we lack friends, or even if we still have a friend group but have lost one or two people we were especially close with, we will feel the difference. But if we make friendship a priority, we can enjoy the benefits described in Ecclesiastes 4:9.

Another story of reconnection underscores this.

When Jennifer Austin met Molly in second grade, they quickly became best friends. They giggled through classes until the teacher separated them, inspiring them to come up with their own language. They shared sleepovers and went on each other's family vacations.

But they gradually drifted apart after Ms. Austin's family moved to Germany before the girls started high school. Decades passed before they recently reconnected as grown women. But when they found each other again, it felt like they could just pick up right where they left off.

"Strong friendships really do stay for the long haul," Ms. Austin, now 51, said. "Even if there are pauses in between and they fade, that doesn't mean they completely dissolve or they go forgotten. They're always there kind of lingering like a little light in the back."

God created us to need connection and companionship.

How Friendship Functions

The Bible goes beyond simply showing that friendship is important. It also reveals how God intends friendship to function. We benefit our friends, and they benefit us, in practical ways.

The best friendships do not center on passively sitting in a room with another person to watch a movie or play a video game. They involve two people helping each other become the best versions of themselves.

Proverbs 27:17 illustrates this principle: "As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend" (NLT).

The first part of this verse could feel a little unfamiliar to people who are more likely to swipe a phone screen than work with metals. But in biblical times, iron tools and weapons were sharpened by rubbing them against another piece of iron. The friction removes dullness and refines the edge. It is not a gentle process—it involves contact, pressure and abrasion—but the result is a sharper, more effective tool.

It is not hard to understand what God wants us to take away from this

analogy. When we spend time with people who care about us, they inspire us to improve ourselves.

We cannot sharpen ourselves. We need friends for that.

Sometimes that happens through our example. Proverbs 13:20 says, "He that walks with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." Spending time with wise people will allow their winning traits to rub off on us.

At other times, a friend can more pointedly bring something to our attention that we need to change. Proverbs 27:6 says, "Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy" (NLT). Someone you respect and spend a lot of time with is often the best person to say things that feel like "wounds" but help you improve as a person.

Another key is found in Proverbs 17:17, which we saw earlier: "A friend loves *at all times*." Showing love at all times means we are consistent and dependable. Showing love encompasses many of the things we do for our friends.

Love motivates us to do things like give advice, help our friend move to a new apartment, text late at night with an encouraging word, give a ride to work when their car is in the shop, allow them to have space when they need it, and countless other things.

When you love at all times, you do not leave someone guessing whether you will do what you said or if they can rely on you. You are there for them.

Taken together, these verses show that God intended friendship to promote loyalty, trust and accountability. Being a good friend involves developing and showing good character.

Ruptures and Restoration

Despite all the benefits friendship brings, life changes can quietly weaken even the strongest bonds. Close friendships do not usually dramatically rupture. Instead, over time, people drift apart.

In Heather and Laine's story, the separation was not really anyone's fault.

It had more to do with shifting priorities in life and physical distance.

If you want to reconnect, someone must take the first step. If a friend is on your mind, chances are you might be on theirs. The choice is yours to reach out.

Simple, right? But sometimes we are held back by our feelings. We worry the person has forgotten us, we wonder if we offended them, or we fear rejection.

What does reconnecting look like? Reyna Dominguez, 18, provides a great example. She had the same best friend since first grade. But when Ms. Dominguez moved from Long Island to Brooklyn, her friend began college. Ms. Dominguez started working in a salon and their schedules did not align. About six months passed without any communication.

After graduating from cosmetology school, Ms. Dominguez texted her friend to share the news. "I was a bit anxious that she was not going to respond. But she did, and I was so relieved and happy," she said. Now they are in touch about once a month and are planning to get together.

"It's important to stay in touch because sometimes I do get lonely, like I have no one to really talk to," Ms. Dominguez said. "But with her, she knows all about my life."

Ms. Dominguez encourages anyone considering reaching out to an old friend to go ahead. "I say just do it. You have nothing to lose," she said. "I guess the worst they could do is not respond to you, but I feel like you'll still be happy with the thought, 'I tried.'"

Do not let reaching out to a friend feel more intimidating than it should be.

Proverbs 11:30 says, "The seeds of good deeds become a tree of life; a wise person wins friends" (NLT). Instead of focusing on your feelings, focus on the opportunity to do a good deed. Be wise about what you say, and you can win your friend back.

Using wisdom goes beyond just what we say or type when getting back in contact. We should also apologize for our actions if we know we did

something to cause the rupture. Also, use wisdom when you evaluate which friendships to pursue and which you should allow to lay dormant.

Understanding friendship and the purpose God wants it to fulfill in our lives does not mean we stay in touch with every friend we have ever had. There are simply not enough hours in the day for that. And people can grow apart in ways deeper than distance.

Some people naturally fit better into our life as casual acquaintances rather than best friends. Maybe we get in touch every few months but not all the time. That is fine. There are also people who were once our friends who we may choose to no longer communicate with at all.

We may learn that a person we once knew now has habits, beliefs or values in life that are not compatible with the way we live. The Bible addresses this too: "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man you shall not go: lest you learn his ways, and get a snare to your soul" (Prov. 22:24-25).

Even if we do not personally have a problem with losing our temper, spending time around a person like this would negatively influence us.

We may catch ourselves starting to snap at others, or even if we resist being angry, we could get caught in the crossfire if our friend gets into a heated argument with someone. We should not remain friends with, or seek to rekindle a friendship with, such a person. God uses the example of anger here, but the principle applies to other things too.

And sometimes, we just do not "click" with a person like we used to. Yet another story illustrates that we cannot reconnect every time.

Kim Ventresca, 22, drifted from her best friend while attending college. She reached out a few times and they reconnected when the friend was having a rough time. But they stopped talking again when Ms. Ventresca was going through mental health and relationship challenges. Eventually, the other young woman told Ms. Ventresca she no longer wanted to be friends.

"I've got some new friends now, and I feel like it's probably better because some things happen for a reason," she said. "I'm hoping that she's alright and that she is doing OK."

Does that mean it was all for nothing? No. Ms. Ventresca, who works as a social media manager and receptionist in New Jersey, said she still recommends reaching out to missed friends, even if it is awkward.

"The worst thing that happens is you get 'left on read' or delivered or declined," she said.

The Highest Form of Friendship

There is another important reason God wants us to value friendship. The friendships we make with people point to a higher level of friendship we can achieve: Being friends with God.

Jesus told His disciples, "You are My friends, if you do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knows not what his lord does: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you" (John 15:14-15).

Have you ever thought of yourself as being Christ's friend? This close relationship was not just offered to those who knew Jesus in the flesh in the first century. It is available to Christians today as well.

James 2:23 expands this inspiring picture further. It says, "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the *Friend of God*."

God the Father saw Abraham not just as a servant or someone who could be used to advance His Plan. God saw Abraham as a close personal friend.

The same can be true of us.

However, just as human friendships will not endure if we go on autopilot and do not work at it, we cannot expect to achieve this higher spiritual level of friendship without doing what God says is required. Notice that Jesus said we are His friend *if* we do what He commands us. And Abraham

was only considered God the Father's friend after Abraham *believed*.

Abraham showed a deep commitment toward God. He left his homeland as God commanded (Gen. 12:1-4). He obeyed when asked to sacrifice Isaac (22:1-18). Abraham trusted God enough to obey difficult commands, even when he did not understand the outcome. He showed that he was a friend of God through his actions.

In a sense, the Bible is a book all about how to be God's friend. Every time we live by what the Bible says, we grow in friendship with our Creator.

If we strengthen our relationship with God, our relationships with people will benefit. If we strive to be a good friend to people, that will benefit how we interact with God.

'Let's Not Wait Another 20 Years'

After Jennifer Austin's family moved to Germany, she did not see her childhood best friend again for 20 years until a chance meeting on a New York City subway platform. They reconnected briefly, but contact lapsed again.

Molly's 2021 visit with one of her children to a college near Ms. Austin's home provided another chance to restore their friendship.

They have remained close since.

"Something at that point just shifted," Ms. Austin said. "Things really picked up and we just basically outright said, 'Let's just keep this momentum going. Let's not wait another 20 years.'"

After reconnecting, Jennifer and Molly became committed to being friends once again. Whether they knew it or not, they both wanted to be that "friend that sticks closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24) and the "friend [who] loves at all times" (17:17).

That is the standard we all should strive for.

God designed friendship to be lived, maintained and valued. You can return to and maintain strong friendships even in an age of distance and distraction. And as you do, you reflect the faithfulness of the greatest Friend you can ever have. □

SPORTS BETTING

The High Cost of Fast Money

Legal sports betting moved from taboo to mainstream almost overnight. While the law may have changed, something else has not.

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

SPORTS BETTING used to be taboo. It was mostly illegal, heavily restricted and seen as a threat to the integrity of the games. Leagues and broadcasters wanted nothing to do with it.

Athletes were ridiculed and banned if they were suspected of gambling ties. A prominent example is professional baseball player Pete Rose, who received a lifetime ban

from baseball and was shut out of the Hall of Fame due to allegations of betting on games.

Gambling close to the action still carries consequences. In October 2025, Portland Trail Blazers coach Chauncey Billups and Miami Heat guard Terry Rozier were arrested for alleged involvement in illegal gambling. The story sent shockwaves through the NBA.

Yet for the average fan, sports betting has never been more mainstream.

Following a 2018 U.S. Supreme Court decision overturning a federal ban, sports betting quickly became legal in most U.S. states. What was once confined to casinos is now available on a smartphone.

Sports fans are blitzed with gambling ads, whether watching a game at home or attending one. But despite its

growing familiarity, sports betting carries real risks for those who participate.

“What we’re looking at is the total normalization of a known addictive product,” addiction counselor Harry Levant said during a panel discussion at Harvard University. “Does it get any more normalized than when a 9-year-old child visits Fenway Park and sees MGM and DraftKings on the Green Monster?”

Mr. Levant “noted that the American Psychiatric Association has classified gambling addiction alongside substance abuse disorders such as heroin and cocaine addiction since 2013. Despite the risk of gambling customers becoming addicted, however, existing policies allow online sportsbooks, such as DraftKings and FanDuel, to deploy advertising campaigns that...are designed to distract customers from the risk of harm” (*Harvard Law Today*).

An August 2024 *NBC News* article showed what that harm can look like: “In separate papers released this month, academics have found that households in states where gambling was legalized saw significantly reduced savings, as well as lower investments in assets like stocks that are generally considered more financially sound. Meanwhile, states that legalized sports betting saw their residents’ aggregate credit scores decrease, while bankruptcies increased.”

Gambling losses are taking a toll. As more information has emerged, some lawmakers who supported legalization to boost revenue in their state now admit they misjudged the consequences.

In early 2026, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine told *The Plain Dealer*, “People have asked me, ‘What mistakes did you make?’ And I’ll lead with signing a bill for sports gaming.”

“It’s a huge problem among young males up to 45. It’s a huge problem,” Mr. DeWine continued. “And we have many of them addicted, many of them spending money that they do not have.”

Sports betting offers people a path to quick money, but the costs to users and society at large are high. Gambling

points to a deeper problem with the way we think.

Digital Mainstream

Advertisements appear alongside commercials for insurance and fast food. Betting odds are discussed during pre-game shows. Podcasts, fantasy leagues and even stadium signage promote wagering. Technology is at the heart of it all.

Apps such as FanDuel and DraftKings dominate the market. Within seconds, users can create accounts, deposit money and wager on virtually any game—or part of a game—happening anywhere.

Some people who bet on sports do so only occasionally. They wager when they have money they can afford to lose and then stop. But the convenience is designed to increase repeat play, which means higher risk of addiction.

Parlays combine multiple outcomes into a single wager with higher payouts. An example would be betting that three different teams in different sports would all win on the same night. If even one leg or outcome fails, the entire bet loses. These bets are statistically harder to win, yet are heavily promoted because they promise larger returns.

Proposition bets fragment the game even further. Instead of wagering on the final score, “prop” bets allow users to bet on individual plays, player statistics or novelty outcomes, such as the color of the Gatorade during game celebrations or whether a fan will streak across the field.

Every moment becomes an opportunity to gamble. It is easy to get hooked.

Open a betting app during a game and the screen flashes phrases such as “Boosted Odds,” “Risk-Free Bet,” and “Cash Out Now”—common promotional language used by major sports betting platforms. The tone is urgent and immediate.

Notifications are timed with bonuses structured to encourage continued play. The “near miss” effect—losing by one leg in a parlay—creates the psycho-

logical impression that a win was close and is therefore attainable next time.

Research in behavioral psychology shows that intermittent rewards—unpredictable wins—can reinforce behavior more effectively than consistent ones. This is why casino slot machines, a more traditional form of gambling, are so addictive. The design of modern sports betting mimics this pattern.

Addiction keeps hope alive even as losses accumulate.

The faster the cycle, the less time there is to reflect. Watching a game becomes tapping a screen, again and again. A winning bet at the right time makes it all feel worthwhile.

Left unchecked, compulsive gambling can devastate finances and relationships.

Rigged Game

Industry data and lawsuits reveal that a small fraction of users—often less than one percent—generate the majority of gambling revenue.

A 2024 article published by *Connecticut Public Radio* reported, “Connecticut officials released a new study examining the impact of legalized gambling on state residents...the first study of its kind for Connecticut since state lawmakers legalized online sports betting in 2021.

“About 1 in 10 Connecticut adults reported betting on professional sports, e-sports and fantasy sports at either a sportsbook, casino or online site, according to the report.

“The study also found that 1.8%, or about 50,000 state residents, have a gambling problem. About half of the state’s online sports betting revenue comes from those individuals.”

Let those numbers sink in: 50,000 people providing half the total sports gambling revenue of a state of 3.68 million.

Even if a person wants to stop, there are incentives built in to keep them hooked.

Some losing bettors have claimed they were offered bonuses, credits and personal outreach designed to

keep them going. Loyalty programs and “VIP hosts” encourage continued play.

And the damage is not limited to the bettor’s bank account. Betting also changes how people watch the game.

When money is tied to every play, suspicion follows. A player sitting out with an injury, a missed free throw, an early substitution, a dropped pass—ordinary moments can suddenly look like manipulation. The question shifts from “What happened?” to “Was that intentional?”

Professional sports depend on trust. Without confidence in fair competition, fan loyalty and engagement inevitably suffer.

The Root Cause

We have described the behavior—chasing losses, monetizing weakness, justifying risk—yet the deeper question remains: Why are people so easily pulled into it?

The laws may have changed, but the human heart has not.

Scripture shows that the way people naturally think is the opposite of the way God commands. Romans 8 says, “The carnal [natural] mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (vs. 7).

One of the laws people are naturally opposed to is the Tenth Commandment, which forbids covetousness. Read Exodus 20:17 and Deuteronomy 5:21. The archaic-sounding King James word “covet” simply means desiring something we should not have.

The urge to gamble is motivated by human nature. It involves coveting money we have not earned.

Jesus Christ warned, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses” (Luke 12:15).

Covetousness begins in the mind but progresses into our actions. The apostle Paul said in Romans 7, “The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (vs. 19). Although he was a great servant of

God, Paul was not immune to temptation. Earlier in the chapter, he said: “I had not known lust, except the law had said, You shall not covet” (vs. 7).

Human nature is a lifelong struggle. Even when we know better, we tend to do the opposite. We promise restraint, justify one more attempt, and convince ourselves we are different.

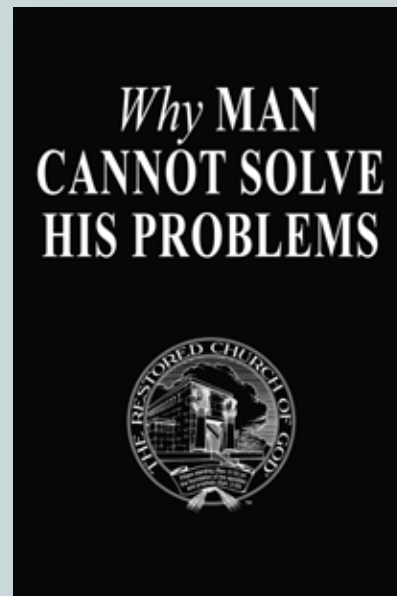
If someone like Paul could admit that he struggled with doing the right thing, we should be willing to do the same. Those who struggle with gambling are encouraged to seek help. The National Problem Gambling Helpline offers confidential support.

The natural way people think is inclined toward self—toward shortcuts, immediate gratification and rationalized behavior that feels rewarding. That tendency explains not only gambling, but countless other habits.

Sports betting did not create these impulses. Legalization—driven by lust, greed and apathy—simply amplified them.

To learn more about what human nature is, why it drives behaviors like gambling, and where it really came from, read our free booklet *Did God Create Human Nature?* at rcg.org/dgchn. □

How do you make sense of it all?



The constant whirlwind of bad news that fills today’s headlines can leave you reeling. To understand the *true causes* of these worsening trends—and how they will ultimately be resolved—order your free copy of *Why Man Cannot Solve His Problems* at rcg.org/uun.

Jesus Kept
Passover.
Why Does
Christianity
Keep *Easter*
Instead?

Christians should sincerely ask whether
this tradition truly reflects God's will.

BY NESTOR A. TORO

EASTER IS a time when believers across traditions honor the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Roman Catholics hold the late-night Easter Vigil, looking ahead to the account of Jesus' empty tomb. Protestant congregations often gather for sunrise services, recalling the early morning discovery that Christ had risen.

Lifeway Research, an organization that monitors religious trends, notes that pastors consistently report Easter as drawing some of their largest crowds of the entire year. This single day often surpasses attendance even on Christmas.

Easter's influence reaches beyond churches. School calendars schedule spring break around the same period, showing how deeply the observance is embedded in public life.

Yet careful readers of the Bible notice three striking realities that conflict with the popular Easter tradition.

First, the Bible never commands an Easter celebration. Nowhere—from Genesis to Revelation—does God establish such a day or instruct His people to observe it.

Second, Jesus never taught His disciples to institute a yearly resurrection festival.

Third, the apostles never practiced it. The single appearance of the word "Easter" in the King James Version in Acts 12:4 is recognized by scholars as a mistranslation of the Greek term *pascha*, which everywhere else refers to Passover.

These facts raise a necessary question for anyone who seeks to follow Scripture faithfully: If Jesus never commanded Easter, never taught the apostles to keep it, and they never observed it, why would Christians keep it today while overlooking the memorial God Himself appointed?

Foreshadowing Christ

Long before the New Testament era, God established Passover as a sacred memorial. After bringing nine dev-

astating plagues upon Egypt, He declared, "This day shall be unto you for a memorial; and you shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; you shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever" (Ex. 12:14).

Passover was permanently fixed into Israel's yearly cycle—a lasting memorial of the night God delivered them from bondage.

Within this memorial, every household killed a lamb and shared a meal according to God's precise instructions.

It memorialized the time God literally passed over their blood-marked houses, sparing their firstborn while Egypt's firstborn were killed during the 10th plague, and setting in motion Israel's release from slavery into freedom.

Leviticus 23 further confirms Passover's significance by listing it among God's appointed times. These annual observances were not human inventions. God Himself sanctified them, calling them "My feasts" (vs. 2). These are holy convocations set apart for His own purpose.

This foreshadowed something far greater than the Israelites could yet grasp. The ritual pointed forward to the ultimate sacrifice God would later provide through the true Passover Lamb: Jesus Christ. The New Testament identifies Him plainly. John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus as "the Lamb of God" in John 1:29, and the apostle Paul wrote, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" (I Cor. 5:7).

By observing Passover year after year, Israel rehearsed the need for a Savior who would provide deliverance not merely from physical captivity, but from the spiritual slavery of sin. His death made it possible for people to have salvation.

From the beginning, Passover was designed to be a memorial for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8).

c. A.D. 33–100

Jesus kept Passover before His crucifixion (Luke 22; I Cor. 11). Early Christians observe Passover on the biblical date of Nisan 14.

Jesus Kept Passover

When Jesus gathered with His disciples on the night before His crucifixion, He was keeping the same Passover God had commanded Israel to observe since their deliverance from Egypt—not establishing a new holy day.

Knowing He would be killed before the national observance the next day, Christ held the meal early and used the occasion to reveal the deeper spiritual meaning within the Passover ceremony.

During this service, Jesus introduced the foot washing ordinance as an example of the attitude His followers must cultivate—ongoing humility as a way of life, pictured through a willingness to "wash one another's feet" (John 13:14).

He then expanded the meaning of the symbols they had always used. The unleavened bread represented His sinless body. The wine symbolized His shed blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sin.

In doing this, Jesus honored the memorial His Father had instituted and made clear that His disciples were to continue observing it.

Just as important is what Christ did *not* do. In all the gospel accounts of His final instructions, there is no reference whatsoever to an annual resurrection celebration. He issued no command, hint or teaching that would support the creation of Easter or anything resembling it. At no point did He authorize replacing Passover with a different spring festival.

What the Early Church Observed

The New Testament Church continued to keep this memorial annually in the spring, following the same pattern Christ Himself had established. In I Corinthians 11, Paul provided plain instruction on how the Church was to observe the yearly Passover service. The entire chapter is worth studying. In verse 26, he wrote: "For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this

THE
ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY
OF
EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS,
BISHOP OF CESAREA, IN PALESTINE.

IN TEN BOOKS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL,

BY

THE REV. C. F. CRUSE, A. M.

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.

SECOND EDITION, REVISED AND CORRECTED
BY THE AUTHOR.

"There was considerable discussion raised about this time, in consequence of a difference of opinion respecting the observance of the paschal season. The churches of Asia...supposed that they ought to keep the fourteenth day of the moon for the festival of the Saviour's passover..." — Excerpt from *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus: Bishop of Caesarea, in Palestine*.

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cup, you do show the Lord's death till He come."

That phrase, "till He come," is a powerful New Testament affirmation that the observance of these symbols, taken on Passover night, is to continue uninterrupted until Christ returns to establish the Kingdom of God.

If ever there was a moment for Paul to introduce a resurrection festival—to pivot the Church toward Easter—this would have been the perfect place. Yet he does nothing of the sort. Instead, he affirms the importance of keeping Passover exactly as Christ taught it.

In verse 27, Paul issues a sobering warning: "Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord."

The implications of mishandling this observance, taken only after care-

ful self-examination (vs. 28-29), are described as serious and potentially eternal.

To learn more about Passover, read our free booklet *God's Holy Days or Pagan Holidays?* at rcg.org/ghdoph.

Paul offered zero instructions about shifting the focus to another celebration. Everything in this passage underscores that Passover was to be treated with the utmost gravity, preserved and guarded by the Church exactly as Christ delivered it.

A Gradual Shift

The transition from the biblical Passover to what later became Easter originated not within the Church Jesus built, but within a counterfeit

movement that had already begun infiltrating congregations in the first century.

The apostles repeatedly warned that this corrupting influence would grow after their departure. Paul told the Ephesian elders that "grievous wolves" would enter the flock, and that even some from within the congregations he served would rise up and "draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). He also explained that a "mystery of iniquity" was already working in his time (II Thes. 2:3, 7).

The apostle John likewise cautioned that "many false prophets" and "many deceivers" had entered the world (I John 4:1; II John 7), and Jude noted that "certain men crept in unawares" (Jude 4).

These warnings reveal an organized counterfeit influence operating alongside the true Church from the very beginning.

As the decades passed, two very different paths emerged. The true Church remained a "little flock" (Luke 12:32), scattered and persecuted, holding firmly to the doctrines delivered by Christ and the apostles. In contrast, a larger, more visible, politically connected religious structure developed—one that gradually adopted customs and doctrinal changes that aligned more comfortably with the surrounding Roman world.

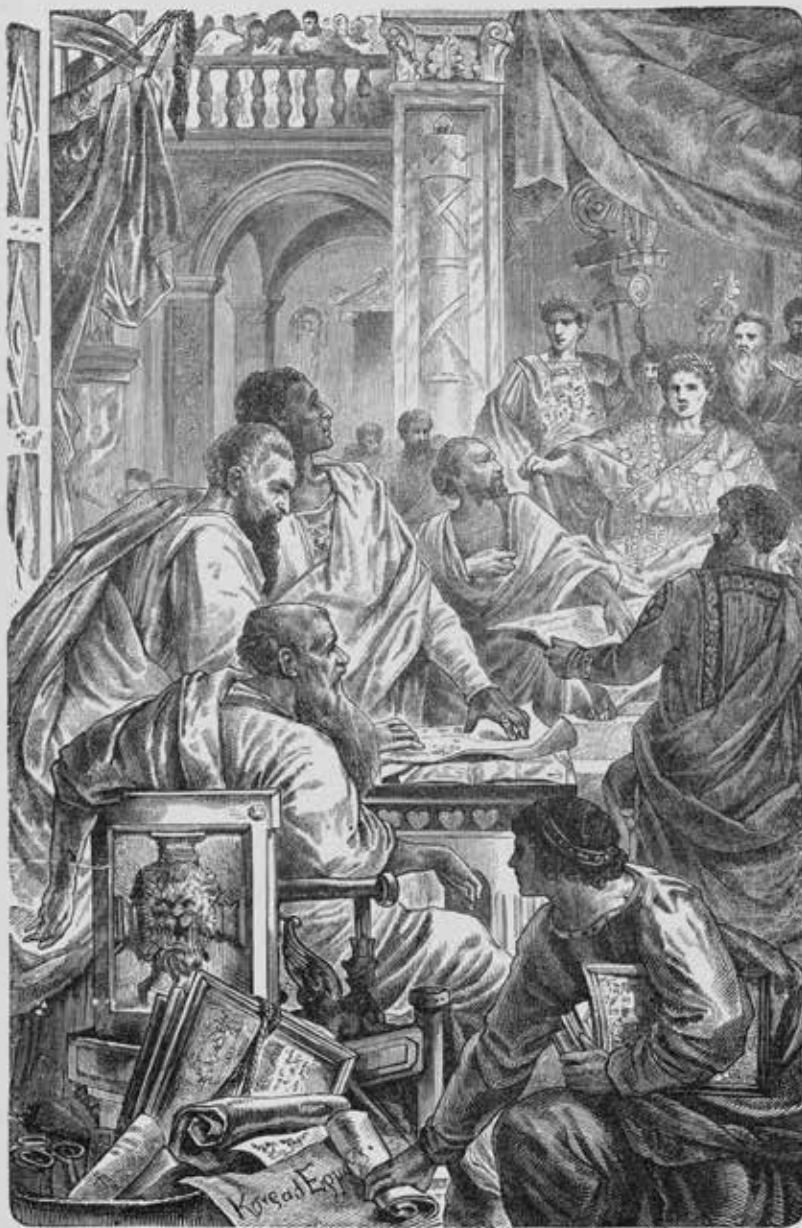
Within this post-apostolic environment, influential leaders began distancing themselves from anything associated with Judaism—including the biblical calendar God had established. Sunday observance gained influence, and a yearly resurrection celebration grew in popularity.

This widening divide became unmistakable in the Quartodeciman controversy, recorded by historian Eusebius in *Ecclesiastical History*. Congregations in Asia Minor continued keeping the Passover on the 14th day of Nisan, while Rome favored a Sunday observance instead.

In the mid-second century, this dispute became personal when

c. A.D. 155

Polycarp (a disciple of the apostle John) meets Bishop Anicetus of Rome to discuss when Passover should be kept. Rome favored a Sunday observance rather than Nisan 14.



19th century illustration of the First Council of Nicaea convened by the Roman Emperor Constantine I in AD 325. The Council worked to unify doctrine across all of Christendom.

GETTY IMAGES

Who Decides What Is Holy?

God alone determines what is holy. From the beginning, He established Passover as the memorial of Christ's sacrifice. It was not left to human interpretation or cultural preference.

No council, no tradition and no popular custom can alter what God Himself has declared sacred.

Throughout history, religious leaders have introduced customs that seemed attractive, unifying or easier to accept within the culture around them. Yet none of these innovations carry divine authority simply because they become popular. What God did not sanctify cannot somehow be made holy simply because people decide it is.

Christ warned plainly against elevating human tradition above the commandments of God. He rebuked those who replaced God's instructions with their own traditions, saying, "In vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men... Full well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition" (Mark 7:7, 9).

Millions find Easter inspiring and spiritually rejuvenating. Many observe it with sincere devotion. But inspiring does not equal holy. A practice becomes holy only when God designates it as such.

Passover carries God's authority because He instituted it. In Exodus 12:11, He calls it "the LORD's Passover."

Easter, however, arose centuries later through human decisions—decisions shaped by culture, politics and tradition rather than Scripture.

Christ's Only Sign

The Easter timeline is well-known: Jesus died on Good Friday and arose Sunday morning.

Yet Christ's own words contradict this. When challenged to prove His

Polycarp of Smyrna—a disciple of the apostle John—traveled to Rome to meet Bishop Anicetus. According to Eusebius, Polycarp explained that he had always kept the Passover on the 14th day, as he had received from John and the other apostles.

Neither man altered his position, and the matter was left unsettled.

A decisive moment came in AD 325 at the Council of Nicaea, where church leaders standardized a universal Sunday observance rather than keeping it tied to the Passover date. From that point, those who continued

holding to the 14th day increasingly found themselves marginalized by the growing institutional system.

Throughout this period, the true Church did not compromise. Though small and often forced to scatter, it continued faithfully observing the original Passover exactly as Christ and the apostles had taught.

The shift to Easter did not arise from Scripture. It gradually developed as a tradition.

A.D. 325

At the Council of Nicaea, church leaders rule that the resurrection celebration must occur on Sunday, not according to the Hebrew calendar.



People attend the Holy Thursday mass before the Easter celebrations at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (Church of the Resurrection) in the Old City of Jerusalem (April 17, 2025).

MOSTAFA ALKHAROUF/ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES

identity, He offered one unmistakable sign.

He declared, “As Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40).

This was a precise prophetic timetable. If it failed, His entire claim to being the Christ would collapse.

The popular Friday-to-Sunday tradition, however, cannot contain three days and three nights. At most, it produces a day and a half. No symbolic interpretation or compressed counting can reconcile that timeline with Jesus’ own words.

To understand this sign, the *correct* chronology is essential.

Jesus and His disciples kept the Passover on Tuesday night, or more accurately the start of Wednesday, since God counts days from sunset to sunset (see Genesis 1). That eve-

ning was the beginning of the 14th day of the month, exactly as God had appointed.

Later that same day—Wednesday afternoon—Christ died at the very hour the Passover lambs were being killed throughout Judea. He was placed in the tomb just before sunset, as the First Day of Unleavened Bread, an annual Sabbath, was about to begin. This moment marked the start of the first of three nights and three days.

Counting forward exactly 72 hours brings His resurrection to the end of the weekly Sabbath, completing the only sign He gave. This is why the tomb was already empty early Sunday morning—He had risen the previous evening, Saturday, precisely on schedule.

Only the Passover-based chronology—Tuesday Passover, Wednesday

4th–5th Centuries

Lent and Holy Week take shape. Easter expands into a full liturgical season beyond the original Passover memorial.

crucifixion, Saturday resurrection—matches the sign of Jonah exactly as Christ stated it!

Ironically, Easter observance emphasizes a Sunday morning resurrection while overlooking the very proof Christ said would confirm who He is. A tradition meant to honor His resurrection ends up obscuring the central evidence He gave us.

For more details about this timing, read our booklet *Christ’s Resurrection Was Not on Sunday* at rcg.org/crwnos.

This should prompt a sincere question: If Christ declared that this was the only sign verifying His Messiahship, why would any Christian ignore it—or embrace a tradition that contradicts it?

Scripture Before Tradition

The biblical record is consistent: God appointed Passover, Jesus kept it, the apostles taught it, and the early Church observed it exactly as they had received it. Each generation of the true Church continued the same practice because it was commanded.

In contrast, Easter does not originate from the Bible.

Sadly, millions are unaware or unsure of Easter’s history and its absence in Scripture and keep it anyway.

God calls people to “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” (I Thes. 5:21). This includes honestly examining whether long-held observances carry God’s authority.

Christ did not authorize a resurrection festival. Nor did He replace Passover. He was faithful to what His Father appointed and set an example for His followers.

That is the biblical pattern. Regardless of what popular churches may promote, Scripture overrules tradition. The question for every sincere Christian is whether they will follow the Word of God or a counterfeit substitute.

Paul summed up the entire matter: “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast” (I Cor. 5:7-8). □

China and Japan, Uneasy Neighbors in East Asia, Are at Odds Again



THEY'RE AT it again.

China and Japan—frenemies, trading partners and uneasy neighbors with a tortured, bloody history they still struggle to navigate—were freshly at each other's rhetorical throats as 2026 began. And it was over the same sticking points that have kept them resentful and suspicious for many decades: Japan's occupation of parts of China in the 20th century, the use of military power in East Asia, economics, politics—and, of course, pride.

From insinuations that Chinese citizens face dangers in Japan to outright accusations of resurgent Japanese imperialism, the first week of the year in China was marked by the communist government scorning Tokyo on multiple fronts and noticeably embracing the visiting leader of another crucial strategic neighbor: South Korea.

The latest chapter in Japan-China enmity surged in November 2025 when Japan's new leader, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, waded into choppy bilateral waters. She said, in effect, that if China moved militarily against Taiwan, she would not rule out involving Japan's constitutionally defense-only military. That did not go over well in Beijing, which has teed off on Tokyo over the years for far less.

"Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's erroneous remarks concerning Taiwan infringe upon China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, blatantly interfere in China's internal affairs, and send a military threat against China," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said on January 7, a week after military exercises around the island ended. "We urge Japan to face up to the root causes of the issue, reflect and correct its mistakes."

That is hardly uncommon language. China frequently demands Japan ponder the path it has taken and correct its "erroneous" course. It is rhetoric, but it goes far deeper. And sometimes it is hard to tell what is real umbrage and what is ginned up for domestic political consumption.

Because when it comes to the China-Japan relationship, anger remains a powerful and enduring tool on both sides. There is no indication that it will go away anytime soon.

A Long History of Antagonism

From the time Japan colonized Taiwan in 1895 after a war with Qing Dynasty China, a deep suspicion and at times outright enmity has existed between the two countries.

It worsened in the 1920s and 1930s after Japan's brutal occupation of parts of China resulted in torture and deaths that Chinese resent to this day. At the same time, Japanese leaders have sometimes thrown incendiary political footballs like visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, a memorial to Japanese who gave their lives in the nation's wars—including some war criminals from the Sino-Japanese wars. China, like clockwork, responds with indignation.

Japan lost World War II to the Allied powers and relinquished offensive military powers under a U.S.-drafted constitution, even as the current communist Chinese government was establishing the People's Republic in 1949. Since then, any hint of Japanese military assertiveness has drawn great umbrage. Disputes over territory, such as an island chain called Diaoyu by China and Senkaku by Japan, spike occasionally.

The enmity, pulled out when something is perceived as aggressive or anger is required for a domestic audience, lurks barely beneath the surface, ready to pop. Even today, cartoons circulate online in China depicting Japanese as demonic, aggressive and anti-China.

The first week of 2026 was an illuminating case study.

On January 6, China slapped restrictions on "dual-use exports" to Japan—anything, it said, that Japan could adapt for military use. Though it did not specify what the ban included, anything from drones to rare earths could be considered dual-use. The lack of specificity allows China to adjust its approach as it goes—making it more or less strict depending on where the political winds are blowing.

Japan demanded the move be rescinded. "These measures, which only target Japan, deviate significantly from international practice," its Foreign Ministry said, calling China's actions "absolutely unacceptable and deeply regrettable." This came days after it protested Chinese mobile drilling rigs in the East China Sea.

While the Chinese Commerce Ministry did not mention rare earths curbs, the official newspaper China Daily, seen as a government mouthpiece, quoted anonymous sources saying Beijing was considering tightening exports of certain rare earths to Japan.

On January 7, the focus turned to a gas called dichlorosilane, used in computer chip manufacturing. The Commerce Ministry said it had launched an investigation into why the price of dichlorosilane imported from Japan had decreased 31 percent between 2022 and 2024. "The dumping of imported products from Japan has damaged the production and operation of our domestic industry," it said.

Finally, on January 8, China's Arms Control and Disarmament Association, a nongovernment agency (inasmuch as any agency in China is nongovernmental) released with some fanfare a report provocatively titled "Nuclear Ambitions of Japan's Right-Wing Forces: A Serious Threat to World Peace." It spent 29 pages outlining worries and accusations that Tokyo harbors dangerous nuclear ambitions.

But it also went broader, invoking once again its stance that the nation's right-wing leaders—and, by extension, the whole country itself—have "failed to reflect on Japan's history of aggression."

"Japan has never been able to fully eliminate the scourge of militarism in the country," the report said. "If Japan's right-wing forces are left free to develop powerful offensive weapons, or even possess nuclear weapons, it will again bring disaster to the world."

Enter Seoul

Also part of the equation during the same week: China's visible pivot to

A Brief Timeline of Tension

How History Still Shapes East Asia's Fault Lines

1894–1895

The First Sino-Japanese War revealed the weakness of the Chinese empire and marked Japan's emergence as a major world power. The war stemmed from the conflict between the two countries vying for power in Korea. The Treaty of Shimonoseki ended the conflict. In that treaty, China recognized Korea's independence and ceded Taiwan, the Pescadores Islands, and the Liaodong Peninsula in Manchuria.

1931

Japanese troops seized the Manchurian city of Mukden, which became known as the Mukden Incident (the city is now known as Shenyang in the Liaoning Province of China). The Japanese then further invaded and took over all of Manchuria. They established the Japanese-dominated state of Manchukuo.

1937–1945

In 1931, Japan began expanding its territory. The Second Sino-Japanese War broke out when China began a full-scale resistance to this expansion of Japanese influence. The Japanese were concerned about the spread of nationalism in China. During this war, mass killing and ravaging of Chinese citizens and soldiers occurred, later known as the Nanjing Massacre.

2010

A Chinese fishing trawler collided with Japanese Coast Guard vessels near the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Japan detained the captain, which prompted a major diplomatic standoff and renewed focus on the territorial dispute.

2012

Japan brought three of the disputed East China Sea islands under state control, which sparked large-scale anti-Japanese demonstrations across China and increased military activity around the islands.

SOURCE: BRITANNICA.COM

another regional neighbor, South Korea, whose president spent four days in Beijing. Seoul has a bumpy history of its own with Japanese aggression and also sporadic—though generally less intense—friction with Beijing, a longtime supporter and ally of its rival North Korea.

Chinese media gave splashy coverage to Lee Jae Myung's visit, tout-ing new Beijing-Seoul agreements on trade, environmental protection and transportation—and notably technology, given the dual-export ban. Also visible: Mr. Lee at two business events watching major companies pledge increased collaboration. The sides signed 24 export contracts worth a combined \$44 million, according to South Korea's Ministry of Trade, Industry and Resources.

The burst of official affection toward South Korea did not stop with Mr. Lee. While he was here, Chinese media reported that South Korea overtook Japan as the leading destination for outbound flights from the mainland over New Year's. That is on top of Beijing's recent efforts to discourage Chinese from traveling to Japan, citing "significant risks to the personal safety and lives of Chinese citizens" there.

For now, Japan-China tension remains a matter of rhetoric and policy. But no one is predicting a quick resolution. With Japan's staunch ally, the United States, planning to furnish more arms to Taiwan in a single sale than ever before, there is too much at stake for both East Asian nations at this moment—and too much contentious history—for an easy and quick solution.

"This time...de-escalation and a return to the status quo may not be as easily achieved," Sebastian Maslow, an East Asia specialist and associate professor of international relations at the University of Tokyo, wrote in *The Conversation* in December 2025. "With diplomatic channels in short supply and domestic political agendas paramount, an off-ramp for the current dispute is not in sight." □



Syrian Government, Kurds Agree to International Deal in 'Historic Milestone'

THE SYRIAN government and Kurdish forces declared a ceasefire deal on January 30 that sets out a phased integration of Kurdish fighters into the state, averting a potentially bloody battle and drawing U.S. praise for a “historic milestone.”

The sides announced the agreement after government forces under President Ahmed al-Sharaa captured swathes of northern and eastern Syria from the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) group, forc-

ing the Kurdish forces to retreat into a shrinking enclave in the northeast.

The fate of the SDF, which once held a quarter or more of Syria, had been one of the biggest issues looming over the country since Islamist fighters led by Sharaa toppled President Bashar al-Assad over 14 months ago.

U.S. envoy Tom Barrack, who has been closely involved in mediation efforts, declared the agreement “a profound and historic milestone in Syria’s journey toward national reconciliation, unity, and enduring stability.”

The SDF was once Washington’s main Syrian ally, playing a vital part in the fight against Islamic State. But its position grew weaker as President Donald Trump built close ties with Mr. Sharaa, a former al Qaeda commander who has now brought almost all of Syria back under the authority of Damascus.

Syrian President Ahmed Al-Sharaa signs a ceasefire agreement with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces in Damascus, Syria. (Jan. 18, 2026).

ALI HAJ SULEIMAN/GETTY IMAGES



What Triggered the Syrian Army Advances?

Tensions had been simmering between the government and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces for months.

Damascus had demanded the SDF merge fully into the security forces and that governing bodies in the Kurdish-run regions also be integrated.

The Kurdish-led forces resisted, aiming to preserve their regional autonomy and expressing concerns that the Islamist-led administration in Damascus seeks to dominate Syria.

The Syrian government forces advanced in the provinces of Raqqqa, Deir al-Zor and parts of Hasakah province.

The territories include Syria's biggest oil fields, a major hydroelectric dam, agricultural regions, jails holding

Islamic State militants, and a camp where Islamic State-linked civilians are held.

The SDF had captured much of the territory from Islamic State when it was the primary U.S. partner fighting the jihadists in Syria. The captured areas are majority Arab.

U.S. Envoy Praises 'Courageous Steps'

Under the agreement, forces that had amassed on front lines in the north would pull back and Interior Ministry security forces will deploy to the center of the cities of Hasakah and Qamishli in the northeast, both held by the SDF.

The agreement includes the formation of a military division that will include three SDF brigades, in addition to a brigade for forces in the SDF-held town of Kobani, also known as Ain

al-Arab, which will be affiliated to the governorate of Aleppo.

Governing bodies set up by the Kurdish-led groups in the northeast are to be merged with state institutions.

Damascus and the SDF first struck an integration deal last March, but made scant progress towards implementation before a year-end deadline, paving the way for government forces to go on the march.

Mr. Barrack, in his statement on X, said: "Both sides have taken courageous steps: the Syrian government in extending meaningful inclusion and rights, and the Kurdish communities in embracing a unified framework that honors their contributions while advancing the common good."

Kurds have been on high alert for a potential government push into



Left, Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa receives a U.S. delegation led by U.S. Ambassador to Ankara and Special Representative for Syria Tom Barrack at the People's Palace in Damascus, Syria (Feb. 4, 2026). Middle top, Syrian Kurds lift up flags and flash the V for victory sign during a demonstration in the city of Hasakeh in northeastern Syria (Feb. 1, 2026). Middle bottom, men riding a motorbike wave a Syrian flag as government forces enter the Kurdish-majority city of Qamishli (Feb. 3, 2026). Right, a man burns a paper with a picture of President al-Sharaa while more than 1,000 people from Kurdish Communities demonstrate in the street of Brussels (Jan. 21, 2026).

LEFT, SYRIAN PRESIDENCY/ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES; MIDDLE TOP, DELIL SOULEIMAN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; MIDDLE BOTTOM; BAKR ALKASEM/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; RIGHT, THIERRY MONASSE/GETTY IMAGES

their remaining enclave, mindful of last year's violence against minority Alawites and Druze.

Noah Bonsey, senior adviser with the International Crisis Group think-tank, said the deal was "a potentially historic turning point."

"It looks like both sides have succeeded in defining a middle ground that works for both of them on some incredibly difficult questions," he said.

"It spares northeast Syria what could have been a really ugly mili-

tary showdown. Implementation will be tricky. There are a lot of challenges ahead," he said, adding that he was waiting to see all the terms.

Turkey said it was closely reviewing the agreement. Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said "genuine integration is in Syria's interest, and the parties are already aware of its conditions."

Turkey has sent forces into Syria several times since 2016, deeming the SDF an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party, which took up arms

against the Turkish state in 1984 but has been in a peace process with Ankara since early 2025.

Unifying Syrian Territory

Syrian Kurdish politician Elham Ahmad thanked the United States and France for their mediation efforts. "We hope they will play the guarantor role in the integration process," she wrote on X.

An SDF statement said the deal "aims to unify Syrian territory and achieve full integration in the region by strengthening cooperation between the concerned parties and unifying efforts to rebuild the country."

Syrian state-run broadcaster al-Ikhbariya published an almost identical statement, citing a government official.

A senior Syrian government official told *Reuters* the deal was final and had been reached late on the night of January 29, and that implementation was to begin immediately.

The statements did not address control of the last remaining SDF-controlled border crossing to northern Iraq, known as Semalka. The Syrian official said the Syrian state would take over all border crossings.

The Syrian official said the military division in the northeast would include "groups from the SDF within brigades, alongside other brigades."

The official said that fighters would join such brigades as "individuals" and that the whole division would be under the authority of Syria's Defense Ministry. □

As U.S. Block of Oil Supply Deepens Energy Crisis, Cubans Ask: What More Can We Sacrifice?



People wait to board transportation in Havana, Cuba (Feb. 6, 2026).

AP/RAMON ESPINOSA

HAVANA (AP) – After a day spent selling books, Solanda Ona typically boards a bus from a wealthy seaside district in Havana to her home in the city’s working-class center.

But on Thursday night, February 5, the bus never came. The 64-year-old bookseller spent the night sleeping in a nearby restaurant instead, worried that this could be the new normal if the gas that fuels the island runs out.

Anxieties simmered in Havana on February 6, a day after Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel warned that U.S. efforts to block oil supplies would take a heavy toll on the Caribbean nation and asked Cubans to endure further sacrifices to weather the impending hardship.

Many Cubans, already reeling from years of deepening economic crisis, were left asking: What more can we sacrifice?

“I’m very worried,” Ms. Ona said. “Before, things were always difficult. But there was always one bus. One way to get home. Now, there are none.”

By the morning of February 6, working class residents like Ms. Ona were already seeing an inkling of what the future might hold.

Already unreliable public buses stopped running altogether, leaving many stranded for hours. Others were left walking large distances or hitchhiking. Long gas lines and black outs, a constant on the island, have grown even worse as U.S. President Donald Trump presses down on Cuba with an increasingly heavy hand.

Mr. Trump recently signed an executive order threatening to impose tariffs on countries providing oil to Cuba, a move that could further

cripple an island plagued by a deepening energy crisis.

On Friday, the national transportation company also said it was cutting routes in the east of the island while the University of Havana said it would cancel some events and push for more remote learning, citing “energy deficits.”

While the U.S. announced \$6 million in aid to Cubans on February 5, severing the island from its primary energy sources has dealt a blow to the nation, especially to civilians who often bear the brunt of the economic crisis. Cuba only produces 40 percent of the oil it consumes.

The island’s communist government says U.S. sanctions cost the country more than \$7.5 billion between March 2024 and February 2025, substantially more than the year before.

The crisis deepened after Venezuela—once Cuba’s primary oil-rich ally—ceased shipments in January, following a U.S. military operation that captured then-President Nicolas Maduro. Then, in late January Mexico, a long vocal ally of Cuba, halted its oil exports to the island.

Left with few alternatives, many Cubans now say the current economic turmoil U.S. policies have wrought on their daily lives is comparable to the severe economic depression in the 1990s known as the Special Period, following cuts in Soviet aid.

“What does it mean to not allow a single drop of fuel to reach a country?” Mr. Diaz-Canel said. “It affects the transportation of food, food production, public transportation, the functioning of hospitals, institutions of all kinds, schools, economic production, tourism. How do our vital systems function without fuel?” □

Haiti Faces a Sexual Violence and Abuse Crisis as Gang Violence Spreads

HAVANA (AP) – The number of sexual abuse cases being treated at a clinic in Haiti’s capital has tripled in the past four years as gang violence surges across the troubled Caribbean country, a health charity warned.

Doctors Without Borders said it was “alarmed and outraged” by the overwhelming level of sexual and gender-based violence.

“The extent to which numbers have increased, it has shocked us,” Diana Manilla Arroyo, the group’s head of mission in Haiti, said in a phone interview. “It is not only the numbers, but the severity.”

More than half of the patients being treated at the Pran Men’s clinic, which

opened a decade ago in Port-au-Prince, were attacked by multiple members of armed groups, the charity, also known as Medecins Sans Frontieres, or MSF, said in a new report.

“Over 100 individuals were attacked by 10 or more perpetrators at a time,” it said, noting an average of three perpetrators per case.

The clinic has treated nearly 17,000 patients in the past decade, including 2,300 alone in the first nine months of last year. More than 350 of those patients are boys and men, MSF said.

The demographics of those being attacked have also changed. Prior to 2022, half of all cases at the clinic involved patients younger than 18,

compared with 24 percent today. The number of cases in the 50-80 age range has increased sevenfold, according to MSF.

Control and Power

Gangs control an estimated 90 percent of Port-au-Prince, with many resorting to sexual abuse to instill fear, experts say.

The abuse occurs during kidnappings, territorial takeovers and to control humanitarian aid, according to MSF.

“Armed groups are using sexual violence to terrorize, control and subjugate communities,” Ms. Manilla said.

The report cited one unidentified woman, aged 53, who said she was raped by three men young enough to have been her children.

“They beat me and broke my teeth,” she was quoted as saying. “After raping me, they also raped my daughter.”

At particular risk are those living in makeshift shelters, with gang violence displacing a record 1.4 million people across Haiti in recent years, according to the United Nations.

“Mothers are forced to stay close because when a child begins to grow, they can become a target for rape at any moment,” another woman said.

MSF said its clinic is struggling to find shelters willing to accept patients, and it noted that women with children or those who are pregnant or need medical care are often rejected.

“The lack of available services leaves survivors exposed to the same risks that led to their initial trauma,” MSF said. “Without safe shelter or relocation options, MSF discharges its patients straight back into the nightmare they came from, just to see them return another day after being violated again.” □



Burned cars block a street, photographed from inside an armored police vehicle patrolling a gang-controlled area in Port-au-Prince, Haiti (Jan. 16, 2026).

AP/ODELYN JOSEPH

Atomic Scientists Set 'Doomsday Clock' Closer to Midnight Than Ever



Jon Wolfsthal, director of global risk at the Federation of American Scientists, Asha George, executive director of the Bipartisan Commission on Biodefense, and Steve Fetter, professor of public policy and former dean at the University of Maryland, reveal the location of the minute hand on the Doomsday Clock during a town hall in Washington (Jan. 23, 2026).

REUTERS/KEVIN FOGARTY

WASHINGTON (Reuters) – Atomic scientists set their “Doomsday Clock” on January 27 closer than ever to midnight, citing aggressive behavior by nuclear powers Russia, China and the United States, fraying nuclear arms control, conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East and AI worries among factors driving risks for global disaster.

The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists set the clock to 85 seconds before midnight, the theoretical point of annihilation. That is four seconds closer than it was set last year. The Chicago-based nonprofit created the clock in 1947 during the Cold War tensions that followed World War II to warn the

public about how close humankind was to destroying the world.

The scientists voiced concern about threats of unregulated integration of artificial intelligence into military systems and its potential misuse in aiding the creation of biological threats, as well as AI’s role in spreading disinformation globally. They also noted continuing challenges posed by climate change.

“Of course, the Doomsday Clock is about global risks, and what we have seen is a global failure in leadership,” nuclear policy expert Alexandra Bell, the Bulletin’s president and CEO, told *Reuters*. “No matter the government, a shift towards neo-imperialism and an

Orwellian approach to governance will only serve to push the clock toward midnight.”

It was the third time in the past four years that the scientists moved the clock closer to midnight.

“In terms of nuclear risks, nothing in 2025 trended in the right direction,” Ms. Bell said. “Longstanding diplomatic frameworks are under duress or collapsing, the threat of explosive nuclear testing has returned, proliferation concerns are growing, and there were three military operations taking place under the shadow of nuclear weapons and the associated escalatory threat. The risk of nuclear use is unsustainably and unacceptably high.”

Ms. Bell pointed to Russia’s continued war in Ukraine, the U.S. and Israeli bombing of Iran and border clashes between India and Pakistan. Ms. Bell also cited continuing tensions in Asia including on the Korean Peninsula and China’s threats toward Taiwan, as well as rising tensions in the Western Hemisphere since U.S. President Donald Trump returned to office 12 months ago.

The last remaining nuclear arms pact between the United States and Russia, the New START treaty, expired on February 5. Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed in September that the two countries agree to observe for another year the limits set under the pact, which caps each side’s number of deployed nuclear warheads at 1,550. Mr. Trump has not formally responded. Western security analysts are divided about the wisdom of accepting Mr. Putin’s offer.

Mr. Trump in October ordered the U.S. military to restart the process for testing nuclear weapons after a halt of more than three decades. No nuclear power, other than North Korea most recently in 2017, has conducted explosive nuclear testing in more than a quarter century.

No country would benefit more from a full-scale return to such

testing than China, given its continued push to expand its nuclear arsenal, according to Ms. Bell, a former senior official at the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Arms Control, Deterrence and Stability.

'Aggressive and Nationalistic'

The changing world order was another area of concern for the scientists. Mr. Trump sent U.S. forces to capture Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, threatened other Latin American countries, vowed to restore U.S. dominance in the Western Hemisphere, talked about annexing Greenland and threatened transatlantic security cooperation.

Russia launched its large-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and there is no end in sight. Among the weapons Russia has used is the nuclear-capable

hypersonic Oreshnik missile. Russia released video in December of what it said was the deployment of the Oreshnik in Belarus, a move meant to boost the Russian ability to strike targets across Europe.

"Russia, China, the United States and other major countries have become increasingly aggressive and nationalistic," Ms. Bell said.

Their "winner-takes-all great power competition" undermines the international cooperation needed to reduce risks of nuclear war, climate change, misuse of biotechnology, potential AI-related hazards and other apocalyptic dangers, Ms. Bell said.

Ms. Bell also cited the federal government's domestic actions against science, academia, the civil service and news organizations.

Maria Ressa, a 2021 Nobel Peace Prize recipient for her journalistic efforts exposing abuses of power in the Philippines including how social media platforms were used to spread disinformation, participated in the announcement.

Ms. Ressa lamented the rise of technology that circulates lies more quickly than facts.

"We are living through an information Armageddon that's brought about by the technology that rules our lives, from social media to generative AI. None of that tech is anchored in facts. Your chatbot is nothing but a probabilistic machine," Ms. Ressa told an online press briefing.

The Bulletin was founded in 1945 by scientists including Albert Einstein and J. Robert Oppenheimer. □



Fire and smoke rise in the aftermath of a Russian drone strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Kyiv (June 6, 2025).

REUTERS/GLEB GARANICH



**17,670,000,000,000
miles**

The night sky has a way of making us ponder our existence. The stupendous grandeur of stars, planets and galaxies—or the Bright Pillar in the Carina nebula pictured here—can make us feel tiny and insignificant. This feeling is nothing new. Millennia ago, ancient Israel's King David wrote this in Psalm 8:3-4: "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; WHAT IS MAN THAT YOU ARE MINDFUL OF HIM?"

What is your purpose? While most never find a concrete answer to this question, you CAN know! To learn about your incredible human potential, read the eye-opening book *The Awesome Potential of Man*.

RCG.ORG/TAPOM