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THE

REAL TRUTH

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A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING



SOCIALISM

What Does God Think?



Christmas Has Pagan Roots. Does That Matter?
Many Christians celebrate Christmas to honor Jesus Christ, regardless of its origins. But does giving old religious customs new meaning make them acceptable to God?
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Front Cover: People gather at Freedom Plaza for a "For the Workers, Not the Billionaires" rally during a May Day demonstration in Washington (May 1, 2025).

OLIVER CONTRERAS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

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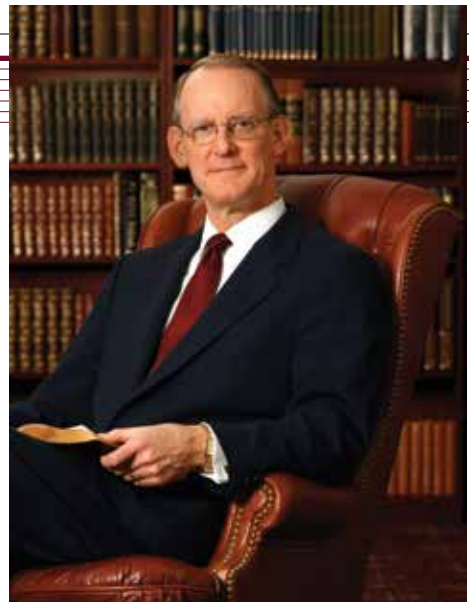
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Pack



True Thanksgiving Begins with God

"The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies."

This began Abraham Lincoln's proclamation declaring Thanksgiving Day a national holiday on October 3, 1863. Despite leading a nation beset by civil war that threatened to permanently divide the United States, he acknowledged the following:

"To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God…"

He further added, "They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy."

It was in this context of war and God "dealing with" sin that he invited his "fellow citizens….to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens."

Thanksgiving today is synonymous with turkey and football. Yet Lincoln's stated purpose was to help Americans remember the source of their blessings. Even amid civil war, he called on the nation to acknowledge God's generosity and mercy.

How much of today's celebration is actually devoted to thanking Him?

Yet even if Thanksgiving were kept as Lincoln intended, it could not overcome the pandemic of *ingratitude* plaguing the Western world.

Modern society has never had so much—mansion-like homes compared to what humans have lived in for 6,000 years, with every amenity, easily accessible food and clean water, breathtaking technological and medical advances that prolong and increase quality of life, and on and on…

Remember the Source

Moses counseled ancient Israel with words that are just as applicable today as they were 3,500 years ago. As the people prepared to enter the Promised Land, he said: "The Lord your God brings you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and

depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; a land wherein you shall eat bread without scarceness, you shall not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you may dig brass" (Deut. 8:7-9).

Israel was to enjoy unparalleled prosperity—comparable to the abundance enjoyed today. Yes, economic trouble grips the world, but never in history has the standard of living been so high in the affluent nations of the West.

Millennia before Lincoln, Moses explained Israel was to recognize the source of those blessings, and be *thankful* for them: "When you have eaten and are full, then *you shall bless the* LORD *your God* for the good land *which He has given you*" (vs. 10).

God instructs us to receive food with thanksgiving and prayer (I Tim. 4:4-5). Yet the book of Deuteronomy reveals that this gratitude is to go far beyond the dinner table. Thanksgiving—actively recognizing God as the source of prosperity—is to be a way of life.

How often do people speak of God as the source of their wealth, happiness or security? The answer is *not enough*. Rather than acknowledging, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jms. 1:17), it can be too easy to think that prosperity is the result of our own actions. Yes, personal effort is necessary and carries reward, but the *overall* source of our ability and source of life can never be far from mind.

Moses warned that forgetting this is tied to something else: "Beware that you forget not the LORD your God, in not keeping His *commandments*, and His *judgments*, and His *statutes*, which I command you this day" (Deut. 8:11).

Remembering God as the source of blessings simultaneously forces the mind to focus on God's expectations for mankind. Jesus Christ 1,500 years later explained, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word* that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Christ was quoting the same chapter in Deuteronomy (8:3).

Let Gratitude Shape Your Life

Moses' caution becomes particularly applicable to the modern generation in Deuteronomy 8:12-14: "Lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God."

Verse 17 identifies a danger that can accompany prosperity: "And you say in your heart, my power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth."

Self-reliance is the surest path to an *un*thankful attitude toward God. *Remembering* God is the only path toward true thanksgiving: "But you shall remember the LORD your God: for it is He that gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore unto your fathers, as it is this day" (vs. 18).

King David understood the importance of remembering God's blessings. He wrote, "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits" (Psa. 103:1-2).

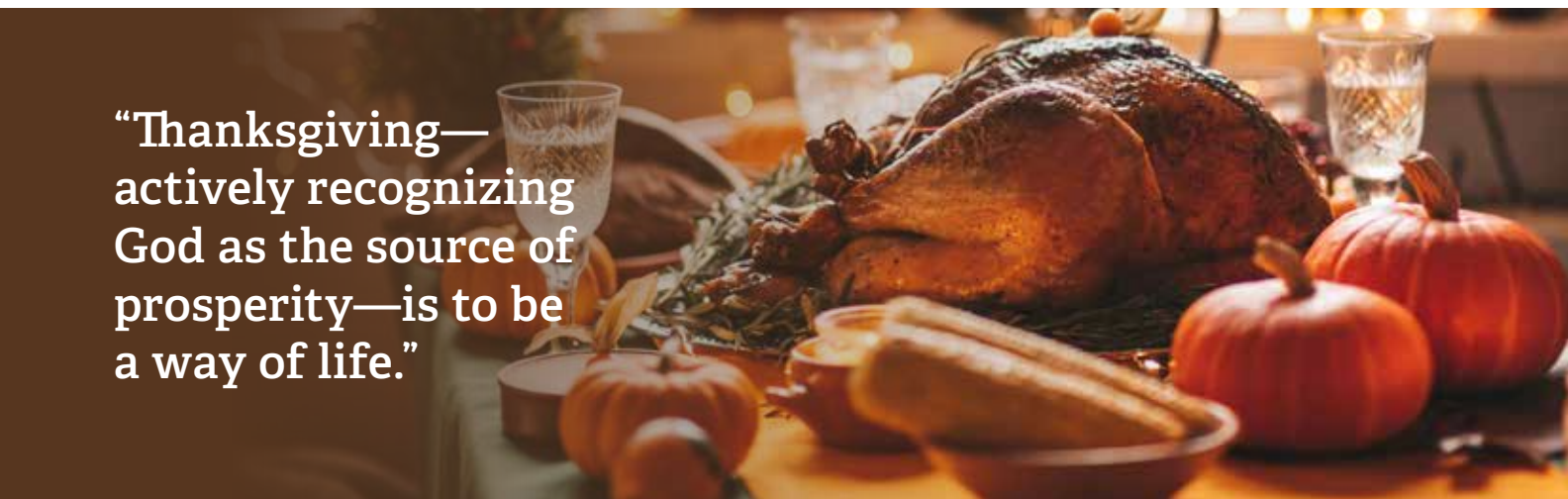
Notice that instruction: FORGET NOT. How easy it can be to dwell on life's problems while overlooking what God provides every day! Food, clothing and shelter become so familiar that we scarcely notice them. As Lincoln observed, we are "prone to forget" their source.

David's list extended beyond material possessions. He spoke of God's lovingkindness and tender mercies, and His desire to forgive us (vs. 3-4). These, too, should come to mind when we consider how much we have received from Him.

The apostle Paul instructed, "In *everything* give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (I Thes. 5:18). Giving thanks is something we should do in every circumstance—in both good times and bad. Actively consider what you have to be thankful for and tell God in prayer what you appreciate.

Do this, and thanksgiving will start to become far more than one Thursday in November. It will become a way of life!

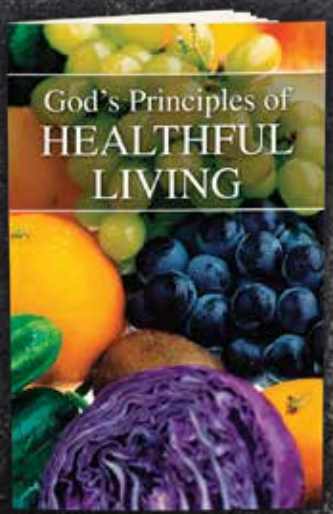
To get the most from this holiday, read "Should You Celebrate Thanksgiving Day?" at *rcg.org/syctd*. And to learn how to approach God effectively in prayer, read "The Keys to Dynamic Prayer" at *rcg.org/tktdp*. □



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Socialism

WHAT DOES GOD THINK?

American voters are hungry for change. The Bible shows the only path to achieving it.

BY GARRICK R. OXLEY

People protest outside of Senator John Cornyn's office in Houston, Texas (Dec. 30, 2025).
REGINALD MATHALONE/NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES

Paying the rent. Buying groceries. Getting medical care. For many Americans, basic needs like these have become a source of uncertainty—and a reason to reconsider how the economy should work.

Socialist candidates are offering answers. They promise to make housing and healthcare more affordable, reduce inequality and give working people greater control over economic decisions.

Zohran Mamdani's election as New York City mayor and other high-profile campaigns by candidates backed by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) have brought attention to the movement. Its electoral strength remains concentrated in strongly Democratic areas, but DSA ideas are reaching a wider audience.

A recent Gallup survey found that 43 percent of Americans view socialism positively—the highest figure since the polling organization began tracking the question in 2010. Among adults ages 18-34, 57 percent had a positive view of socialism compared with 43 percent for capitalism.

What is socialism? According to *Britannica*, it is "an economic and social doctrine that calls for public rather than private ownership or control of property and natural resources."

The definition continues: "According to the socialist view…everything that people produce is in some sense a social product, and everyone who contributes to the production of a good is entitled to a share in it…This conviction puts socialism in opposition to capitalism, which is based on private ownership of the means of production and allows individual choices in a free market to determine how goods and services are distributed."

Throughout history, there have been various approaches to applying socialism. The democratic socialism some


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HISTORY OF SOCIALISM IN AMERICA

1901

A National Movement. The Socialist Party of America was founded, advocating public ownership of public industries and greater economic power for workers

1910-12

Electoral Breakthrough. Socialists win municipal and congressional offices. In 1912, Eugene V. Debs was the Socialist Party candidate for president and he received about 6 percent of the popular vote.

candidates advocate today is much different from the authoritarian socialism practiced in places like the Soviet Union and Mao-era China. Yet they both emphasize collective ownership and control of productive resources.

Simply having public programs does not make a nation socialist. DSA's ambitions go beyond expanding assistance programs. Its stated goal is to replace capitalism, including bringing major sectors such as energy and transportation under collective ownership.

Supporters see socialism as a path toward a fairer society. Critics worry about concentrating economic power, discouraging productive investment and funding expansive public programs.

Over the years, some have argued that the Bible contains socialist principles. Jesus Christ's teachings about love and goodwill toward neighbor can appear to line up with these beliefs, as well as His confrontations with the rich and powerful of the first century.

A recent article published by DSA Religious Socialism argued that the early New Testament Church described in the book of Acts "mirrors the core tenets of democratic socialism: the belief that the material prerequisites of life—housing, food, security—are human rights, and that surplus capital must answer to human need rather than private hoarding. The Jerusalem church instituted a micro-economy where wealth was stripped of its power to oppress, ensuring that basic human dignity was guaranteed for every member of the community."

Does Scripture show God would approve of socialism? What does the Bible say about ownership, work and the responsibility to care for others?

Jesus and the Early Church

Acts 20:35 records one of Jesus Christ's central teachings: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

During His earthly ministry, Jesus set a perfect example of giving and service to others. Think of the healings He performed and countless other miracles such as multiplying fish and loaves to feed thousands.

In Matthew 19, Christ told a rich young ruler: "If you will be perfect, go and sell that you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me" (vs. 21). This blunt command could bring to mind calls from modern politicians to redistribute wealth and tax the rich. Verse 22 says, "But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions." His wealth was a roadblock to following Christ.

Jesus also said, "For you have the poor with you always, and whensoever you will you may do them good: but Me you have not always" (Mark 14:7). This is a plain statement for followers to care for those in need—to do them good "whensoever you will."

Clearly, Jesus cared about the weaker members of society and wanted them to be provided for. Yet these and other teachings about love, giving and service are not proof that God approves of socialism. Nothing is said here about the government.

These were commands for people who were or who wanted to become Christ's disciples. They can be practiced by anyone today, regardless of what form of government rules their nation.

What about the early Church? Acts 2 describes them this way: "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (vs. 44-46).

Chapter 4 adds, "neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common…distribution was made unto every man according as he had need" (vs. 32, 35).

These verses describe a pooling of resources within the Church based on the circumstances and needs of their time. It was a group of believers distributing possessions under the guidance of the apostles. A shared concern for people's welfare does not establish biblical endorsement of a particular economic system.

Does the New Testament support socialism? No, it does not. Yet that does not mean God takes no position on what a government should do for its people. The Bible has much to say about how government should work.

1910-60

Socialism in City Government. Among other cities, Milwaukee elects three Socialist mayors, whose administrations emphasized public health, infrastructure and workplace safety.

1982

Democratic Socialists Organize. The Democratic Socialists of America forms, striving to strengthen labor unions, establish universal healthcare, and promote ethnic and gender equality.

2016-Present

Renewed Political Influence. Democratic socialism gains renewed visibility through Bernie Sanders' 2016 presidential campaign. Notable elected leaders include Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Zohran Mamdani.

Old Testament Pattern

The ancient nation of Israel was meant to be God's model for the rest of the world, showing everyone else what it looked like when God ruled over a people (Deut. 4:5-8). The Old Testament is filled with their stories.

Because of disobedience, Israel never lived up to its full potential as a shining example. But the laws God set up for that nation show how He thinks.

God ruled the nation and worked through human leaders like Moses and Aaron. The system of government for that "church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38) allowed for personal ownership while requiring fair treatment.

Exodus 20:9 says, "Six days shall you labor, and do all your work." God gave everyone a special day of rest called the Sabbath (vs. 8) but required productive effort the other six days of the week.

Israel's economy was not a free-for-all. There were safeguards in place to protect the vulnerable.

For instance, Deuteronomy 24 says, "You shall not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of your brethren, or of your strangers that are in your land within your gates: at his day you shall give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and sets his heart upon it: lest he cry against you unto the LORD, and it be sin unto you" (vs. 14-15).

God allowed people in Israel to keep hired servants. Yet He commanded that they not be treated unfairly. Not paying workers in a timely manner was considered *sin*.

Leviticus 19 shows another safeguard. God told Israel: "And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, neither shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God" (vs. 9-10).

Israelite farmers were commanded to leave some of their crops in the field for others. Gleaning gave those in need who were able to gather food an opportunity to provide for themselves.

God also preserved fairness in land ownership. He said in Leviticus 25: "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me" (vs. 23). People could own land, but God retained ultimate authority over how it was used and transferred.

The passage goes on to explain a "redemption for the land" (vs. 24). If a person came on hard times and had to sell it, their family had the opportunity to redeem the land on behalf of the impoverished family member. Verses 26-27 explain that if the man had no relatives who could do this, he could buy it back himself once he had the means.

Verse 28 adds yet another layer of protection: "That which is sold shall remain in the hand of him that has bought it until the *year of jubilee*: and in the jubilee it shall go out, and he shall return unto his possession."

Every 50 years, there was a special jubilee in which ancestral land returned to the family that originally held it. The wealthy could not permanently shut out the poor and consolidate land for their own desires.

Space does not allow us to look at all the laws God made to preserve fairness in ancient Israel. Read Deuteronomy 15:1-11 for more about lending and debt release, Exodus 22:25-27 regarding borrower protections, Leviticus 19:15 for how justice was to be administered, and Deuteronomy 14:28-29 to learn about a special financial benefit for the stranger, fatherless and widow.

This is how God intended Israel to live. It was not a socialist society, yet also not a capitalist society by today's standards.

God's way is different from and better than anything man can devise. Although Israel's story took place thousands of years ago, the way God values both productive effort and care for the needy reveals how He thinks.

God's Expectations Today

No one has to wait for a change in government to apply God's principles in their own lives. Anyone can practice what Christ, the apostles and the Old Testament teach.

Those who have resources should give to others. Those who need help should contribute what they can. All must treat others honestly and fairly.

Ecclesiastes 9:10 says, "Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might." Young or old, rich or poor, each

person can put wholehearted effort into what he or she is able to do.

Ephesians 4:28 brings work and generosity together: "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needs."

Earning a living enables us to provide for ourselves and our families. But God also wants our labor to put us in a position to help other people. What we earn has a purpose beyond paying our own bills or improving our standard of living.

This requires paying attention to those around us. A family may be struggling after a job loss. An elderly neighbor may need help getting groceries. Someone recovering from an illness may be unable to keep up with basic household tasks. Looking out for these needs gives us opportunities to practice what God teaches. Read Philippians 2:4.

I John 3:17 asks: "But whoso has this world's good, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwells the love of God in him?" The next verse adds, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (vs. 18).

Agreeing that people should be cared for is just the beginning. Living the give way of life requires *action*.

Those receiving assistance also have responsibility. II Thessalonians 3:10 warns, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat."

This may seem harsh at first glance. Yet notice the distinction: "would not work." This addresses unwillingness to contribute, not inability. Illness, disability, age and other circumstances are legitimate factors that can prevent people from providing for themselves. The laws we already examined show God's concern for people who need support.

But people who are able to work should make an honest effort. If someone is not willing to do that, the apostle Paul says in this verse that they should not eat.

God's principles apply regardless of the economic system in which a person lives. Pursuing wealth does not excuse exploiting workers or ignoring suffering. Receiving help does not remove the responsibility to do what one can.

A Perfect Government

In today's world, the concerns weighing on everyone show no sign of abating. People are worried about housing, rent, healthcare, grocery prices, gas costs and many other things.

Despite good intentions, electing more DSA candidates cannot guarantee fairness. Neither can continuing to elect the same parties that have so far failed to solve man's biggest problems. Society needs a totally new government.

God reveals that a better world *is* coming.

Jesus did not speak of socialism or capitalism, but He had much to say about government during His earthly ministry. Most miss it, but this was actually the primary message He brought.

Mark 1:14 says, "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God." The religious-sounding term "gospel" simply means good news. The word "kingdom" refers to a government. Put together, these show Jesus preached the *good news of the government of God*.

In Luke 4:18, Jesus said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor." Although He did many other things to help the needy during His time on Earth, Christ considered preaching the gospel to be His most important contribution to the poor. He gave them the hope of a better future.

Jesus did not focus on protesting the government of His time. Instead, He proclaimed a message that one day God would set up a real, literal divine government.

Clearly, that government is not here yet. It is still out ahead of us.

The Kingdom of God will share the Acts 20:35 give way of life with the masses around the world. Principles we have looked at from the Old and New Testaments will be taught to everyone.

What will this look like?

The prophet Micah recorded, "Many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (4:2).

People will be eager to learn and apply all of God's laws, including those concerning work and caring for the vulnerable.

Micah continues, "They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid" (vs. 4). The "vine" and "fig tree" picture everyone having their own land to live on, raise their family and grow food for themselves and others. They will not need to fear losing what they have.

Isaiah adds: "They shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands" (65:21-22).

God will provide abundance to all. Yet He will still give people the opportunity to do things for themselves.

The Kingdom will succeed where the Old Testament nation of Israel failed. Ezekiel 36 explains why: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My judgments, and do them" (vs. 26-27).

God will transform the hearts of people so that they genuinely want what is best for others. With the Holy Spirit guiding them, they will live the give way of life sincerely.

There is much more to learn about this coming government and the way of life it will bring. Read our free book *Tomorrow's Wonderful World – An Inside View!* at *rcg.org/tww*. □

THE ANTICHRIST

Could You Be Deceived?

Jesus Christ warned that end-time deception would be strong enough that "if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matt. 24:24). Here is how to protect yourself.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

What do Donald Trump, Ronald Reagan and John F. Kennedy all have in common?

In addition to facing assassination attempts—Kennedy's proved fatal—these three presidents have all been linked to the biblical Antichrist.

Kennedy, the first Catholic president, drew suspicion from some Protestants. There was a rumor that he received 666 votes at the 1956 Democratic convention. The recorded tallies show no such number. The three names of Ronald Wilson Reagan each happen to have six letters—6-6-6. And some connected his survival of the 1981 assassination attempt to Revelation 13:3, which describes a prophesied Beast figure recovering from a deadly wound.

Some made a similar claim about Mr. Trump after a bullet grazed his ear in 2024. And in April 2026, *Wired* published an article titled "Staunch Trump Supporters Are Now Asking If He's the Antichrist." In the same month, one popular conservative commentator compared the president's behavior to passages in II Thessalonians 2 and Daniel 11, which describe a ruler who exalts himself above God. He asked: "Could this be the Antichrist? Well, who knows?"

Today's Antichrist talk is not limited to presidents. Tech billionaire Peter Thiel has been delivering a four-part lecture series on the Antichrist, most recently in fall 2026. His theory is that fears of nuclear war, artificial intelligence or other catastrophic threats could allow a powerful figure to establish global control by promising to protect the masses.

Vice President JD Vance has also weighed in. In a September 2026 interview with a Christian podcaster, he said he would be "not shocked if the Antichrist was walking among us."

Being on the lookout for the Antichrist is understandable. The Bible tells its readers to keep an eye on world trends and conditions. Jesus Christ told His disciples, "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" (Mark 13:37). And prophecy gives many things to watch for, including a coming Antichrist figure. The apostle John wrote, "You have heard that Antichrist shall come" (I John 2:18).

But the desire to see prophecy fulfilled can lead to false positives.

In the 1970s, prophecy writers reported that a three-story supercomputer called "the Beast" had been installed in Brussels, Belgium. Supposedly, it would assign everyone on Earth a number and eventually control who could buy and sell—echoing Revelation 13:16-18. To those spreading the story, Revelation's Beast was the Antichrist, and this computer would help him enforce his mark.

Yet the story was fiction, created for the 1972 film *The Rapture* and a mock newspaper promoting it. Even so, evangelical outlets were passing it along as fact, and it soon spread worldwide.

While the word antichrist appears in only four verses in the Bible—I John 2:18, 22; 4:3 and II John 7—theorizing about this figure has occupied believers for centuries.

With so much speculation about the Antichrist and so many wrong accusations, what are people missing?

"Apocalyptic Name-Calling"

For nearly 2,000 years, people have leveled Antichrist accusations at prominent figures.

It is a practice author Robert C. Fuller examined in his book *Naming the Antichrist: The History of an American Obsession*, describing it as "the sport of apocalyptic name-calling."

One of the earliest candidates was Roman Emperor Nero, who persecuted Christians in the first century.

Some have connected him to 666. Revelation 13:18 calls that "the number of the beast" and says "it is the number of a man," leading many to look for a name that adds up to it. The name Neron Caesar, when written in Hebrew letters, has a numerical value of 666. This calculation has led many modern scholars to associate Nero with the Beast described in Revelation 13, although the particular calculation was not proposed until the 19th century.

Antichrist accusations flew both ways during the Protestant Reformation. In 1520, Catholic theologian Ambrosius Catharinus essentially called Martin Luther the Antichrist. Luther later wrote in his 1537 *Smalcald Articles* that "the Pope is the very Antichrist."

As the centuries passed, the list of candidates grew. In 1809, an anonymous pamphlet appeared titled *The Identity of Napoleon and Antichrist Completely Demonstrated*. And in 1988, American prophecy writer Robert W. Faid argued Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev was the Antichrist. Faid interpreted Gorbachev's distinctive forehead birthmark as the red dragon described in Revelation 12.

Mr. Fuller surveyed this long-running trend and noted that Antichrist identifications throughout the centuries have frequently reflected the conflicts and concerns of different societies.

"Their attempts to 'name the Antichrist' consequently reveal much about their culture's latent hopes and fears," he wrote.

Mr. Fuller described how some American colonists associated Native Americans and French Catholics with the forces of the Antichrist. But as tensions with Britain increased and American independence became the central issue, the Church of England and the British monarchy became targets of similar accusations.

Calling someone the Antichrist has been a handy tool to demonize political and religious enemies. And one proposed identity has followed another without settling the question. It also often involves contorting what the Bible says to fit the bogeyman of the day.

Yet not all interest in the Antichrist stems from rivalries and cultural fears. Many people are on the lookout for the Antichrist because they understandably do not want to be deceived. Bible readers see warnings about coming deception and do not want to be caught off guard. Many also want to warn others.

This is often paired with a desire to see God's hand in world events and understand how those events fit into what He has foretold.

So what does the Bible actually say about the identity of the Antichrist?

What Did John Say?

Here is the verse where John first uses the word: "Little children, it is the last time: and as you have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time" (I John 2:18).

Notice that John refers to an expected coming Antichrist. But he also states that many antichrists already existed in the first century.

The Greek word for antichrist is *antichristos*. Break that apart: "anti" means against, opposed to, or in place of—and "Christos" means Christ, the Anointed One and Messiah.

So an antichrist is one who opposes Jesus Christ or puts something else in His place.

I John 2:19 provides more context about the first-century antichrists. John says they "went out from us, but they were not of us." In other words, these antichrists were not outside enemies. They had come from within the Church.

But what made these men antichrists?

We find the definition in verse 22: "Who is a liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denies the Father and the Son."

Verse 23 continues by stating that whoever denies the Son does not have the Father.

These individuals denied fundamental truths about Jesus Christ and His relationship with the Father.

Later, John introduces another important concept: the "spirit of antichrist" (I John 4:3), saying that this spirit was "even now already…in the world."

John reinforces the point in his second epistle. He warned that many were saying that Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh, adding, "This is a deceiver and an antichrist" (II John 7).

Christ coming in the flesh is a great hinge point of God's Plan. Because He became human, He could die for the forgiveness of sins. He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15), so He can serve as an intermediary for us with the Father. And He "suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps" (I Pet. 2:21-22).

Taken together, these passages establish that John was concerned with people denying Christ's identity, teaching falsehoods about Him and leading others away from the truth.

Similarly, the apostle Paul warned about "another Jesus" (II Cor. 11:4) and deceivers who transform themselves "into the apostles of Christ" and "as the ministers of righteousness" (vs. 13-15).

The spirit of antichrist was already operating through multiple individuals. John did not limit the term to one future figure, nor did he use it simply as another word for someone who commits sin.

Deception about Christ can come from people who appear to promote Christianity.

Yet notice one last thing in I John 2:18. John wrote, "*as you have heard* that Antichrist shall come."

Where had they heard this before?

What Prophecy Reveals

While John never said specifically where his readers had heard about the coming Antichrist, a few passages are likely sources. These verses describe powerful deceivers still to come. While they may not settle every figure's identity, they do reveal something crucial: how deception works.

In the Olivet Prophecy, Jesus Himself warned about religious deception that would include miraculous signs. Note His first words, before He described any future event: "Take heed that no man deceive you" (Matt. 24:4).

In verse 24, Christ described a confusing time to come: "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."

The other place John's readers may have "heard that Antichrist shall come" is Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, where he describes a "man of sin."

It contains another warning of deception: "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" (II Thes. 2:3).

"That day" mentioned here is the day of Christ's return in power and glory (Matt. 24:30).

Who Has Been Called the ANTICHRIST?

For centuries, people have searched for the Antichrist among the prominent figures of their day. The resulting accusations reveal how fears and conflicts can shape interpretations of Bible prophecy. Here is a selection from that long history. Dates are approximate.

Late Antiquity
Nero
Later Christians connected Nero with the Antichrist. His name, rendered as "Neron Caesar" in Hebrew letters, can total 666.

AD 430
Nestorius
John Cassian applied the language of the spirit of antichrist to Nestorius' teaching about Christ's nature. This was a doctrinal accusation.

1230s–1240s
Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor
Pope Gregory IX called Frederick II the Antichrist. Frederick II's supporters later turned the accusation against Pope Innocent IV.

1310s–1320s
Pope John XXII
Some Spiritual Franciscans regarded John XXII as the Antichrist amid disputes over religious poverty and papal authority.

1520–1521
Martin Luther
Catholic theologian Ambrosius Catharinus portrayed Martin Luther as a religious deceiver, effectively equating Luther with the Antichrist.

1536–1537
The Papacy
Martin Luther accused the pope of being the Antichrist in his Smalcald Articles, written as talking points for a church council.

Late 1600s–early 1700s
Peter the Great
Many Russian Old Believers viewed the tsar as the Antichrist amid Orthodox religious disagreement.

1915
Kaiser Wilhelm II
A World War I postcard depicted the German leader as the Antichrist.

1942
Adolf Hitler
Artist Arthur Szyk depicted Adolf Hitler in a work titled "Anti-Christ"—an artistic and political label.

1988
Mikhail Gorbachev
Christian American author Robert W. Faid identified Mikhail Gorbachev as the Antichrist, interpreting his forehead birthmark as resembling a red dragon.

1988
Pope John Paul II
Northern Ireland Protestant leader Ian Paisley shouted "Antichrist, Antichrist" at the beginning of Pope John Paul II's address to the European Parliament.

2013
Barack Obama
During Barack Obama's time as U.S. President, a survey by Public Policy Polling said that about one in four Americans suspected he might be the Antichrist.

Paul describes the man of sin—also translated the man of *lawlessness*—as one who "exalts himself above all that is called God" (II Thes. 2:4), whose coming is "after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders" (vs. 9).

Even while describing a future deceiver, Paul reminded readers that the same deception was already occurring: "For the mystery of iniquity does already work" (vs. 7).

Revelation also speaks of deceivers, namely the Beast and False Prophet, who bear political and religious authority.

The book describes "another beast" with "two horns like a lamb" that speaks "as a dragon" (Rev. 13:11). Revelation 19:20 identifies this deceiver as the False Prophet. He performs miracles to deceive people and directs their worship toward the Beast, enforcing it with threats of death and a mark required to buy or sell (13:12-17).

In Revelation 16, the dragon, the Beast and the False Prophet send out miracle-working spirits to gather the nations to war (vs. 13-14). Then Christ breaks into the vision with a direct warning: "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame" (vs. 15).

None of these passages identifies these figures by John's term Antichrist, yet each fits its meaning: opposing Christ or taking His place. They will each work to pull people away from God's truth—with impressive miraculous signs, claims of divine authority and convincing arguments.

But notice the pattern. Again and again, Scripture pairs its warnings about future deceivers with a warning about deception already at work, *and* a call for each reader to watch and take heed now.

While the warning of the coming Antichrist is compelling—and God recorded it for a reason—something else is even more pressing.

Could You Be Deceived?

Remember Christ's first words in the Olivet Prophecy: "Take heed that no man deceive you." These words apply now as much as they will in the future.

Paul's discussion of the man of sin also shows why people can be deceived. In II Thessalonians 2:10-11, Paul describes people who "received not the love of the truth" and adds, "for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie."

The man of sin is tied to a great test: Will you love God's truth or not?

But what is the truth? Jesus defines it clearly in John 17:17, where He prayed to the Father, "Your word is truth." God's Word is the truth we should hold to no matter what.

Knowing prophetic details is an important pursuit—prophecy occupies a substantial portion of Scripture—yet it is not a substitute for doing what God says.

John emphasized this just before his discussion of antichrists in his first epistle: "And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that says, I know Him, and keeps not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (I John 2:3-4).

For centuries, people have searched for the Antichrist. While being watchful is crucial, it is even more important to look inward.

In II Corinthians 13:5, Paul writes: "Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know you not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except you be reprobates?"

Can we name the coming Antichrist? The best we can do now is speculate. God wants us to watch world events through the lens of Bible prophecy, but we should also remember what Paul says about the man of sin: He will be revealed "in his time" (II Thes. 2:6).

For now, you can learn to recognize the spirit of antichrist and test the religious teachings and deception that come with it.

Recall Paul's warning about "another Jesus" (II Cor. 11:4). The same danger exists today.

The true Jesus Christ says this: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). And this: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (vs. 15).

What could better fit the meaning of antichrist—one who opposes Christ or takes His place—than another Jesus? A counterfeit can look genuine and still be a wolf in sheep's clothing.

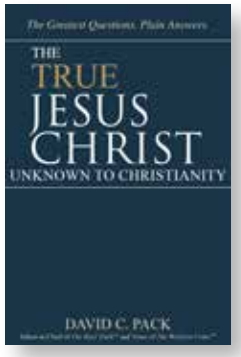
This is why John warned: "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God" (I John 4:1).

Your job is to test and scrutinize what you believe and have been taught. Christ showed why when He told the religious leaders of His day: "Howbeit 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).

These first-century leaders looked devout, but their worship rested on human tradition rather than God's commands. The same can happen today. A belief practiced for generations can still trace back to men rather than to Christ. Take a look at your beliefs and ask: Why do I believe this? Did Jesus or His apostles actually teach it?

This magazine is published by The Restored Church of God, which produces a rich library of free literature explaining God's truth. Even so, we urge you not to simply take our word for it. Paul instructed, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (I Thes. 5:21). As you read *The Real Truth* or any of our books, booklets and articles, also look in your Bible and ask God to help you understand.

A good place to start is David C. Pack's book *The True Jesus Christ – Unknown to Christianity*, which includes a chapter titled "Vain Worship—and Another Jesus." Read it with an open Bible and prove it for yourself. □



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The flags of Canada and the United States fly over a stadium in Ottawa (Sept. 12, 2026).

ADRIAN WYLD/THE CANADIAN PRESS VIA AP

America & Canada's *Trade War*

With tensions rising, experts warn that the U.S. and Canada's trade relationship may never return to normal.

For decades, Canada built much of its prosperity on privileged access to the United States. Now, after the collapse of trade talks, one of the world's closest and most durable alliances has been fundamentally altered, with both countries facing the risk of a full-scale trade war.

Prime Minister Mark Carney acknowledged the break after last-ditch negotiations failed on August 21, saying Canada had recognized that "America has changed" and that the countries would "not return to our old relationship."

On August 22, the United States imposed 50 percent tariffs on about $20 billion worth of Canadian goods, charging that Canada discriminates against U.S. dairy, auto and alcoholic beverage producers. Canada promptly counterpunched with tariffs of 15 percent, 25 percent or 50 percent, matching U.S. imports dollar for dollar. To punish Canada for retaliating against his tariffs, President Donald Trump decided to ban a list of Canadian products, including dairy products, motorcycles and alcoholic beverages.



Canadian whisky is pictured at a British Columbia Liquor store in Vancouver (Aug. 25, 2026).
ETHAN CAIRNS/THE CANADIAN PRESS VIA AP

Mr. Carney foreshadowed the shift at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January, declaring that the world was experiencing "a rupture, not a transition" and urging countries such as Canada to reduce their vulnerability to economic coercion by strengthening their economies at home and diversifying abroad.

He said in Ottawa on August 22 that warning had been borne out. He accused the U.S. of using "economic integration as a weapon" and said its "signature was written in pencil."

"The collapse of the tariff talks points to the fact that the old Canada-U.S. relationship is over and, for many Canadians, it also confirms the perception that Canada can't trust the Trump administration," said Daniel Beland, a political science professor at McGill University in Montreal.

The pressure from Mr. Trump has gone well beyond tariffs.

He has questioned Canada's economic viability, repeatedly talked about making it the 51st U.S. state and used trade measures to encourage production to move from Canada to the United States. That has angered many Canadians and fueled a sense of betrayal in a country that had long regarded the U.S. as its closest ally.

Canadian travel to the U.S. remains sharply lower than before the dispute, with July return trips down nearly 29 percent by car and 27 percent by air from July 2024, Statistics Canada said.

The failed negotiations underscored how far the relationship had shifted. Canada had been prepared to accept some U.S. tariffs for market access and greater certainty—a break from decades of policy aimed at eliminating trade barriers.

For Canadians accustomed to preferential access under the 1989 Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA and its successor, even reduced tariffs would mark a retreat from the old relationship.

The collapse also puts Mr. Carney's approach to Mr. Trump to the test.

The prime minister's "elbows up" posture—hockey shorthand for playing aggressively and refusing to be pushed around—has helped keep him popular at home. His decision to resist U.S. pressure could also resonate abroad with those impressed by his Davos call for countries to resist economic coercion and reduce dependence on great powers.

Provincial and conservative leaders broadly backed Mr. Carney. Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe said "the old status quo is not possible," while Ontario Premier Doug Ford praised Mr. Carney for rejecting what he called a bad deal for the auto, steel and manufacturing sectors.

Mr. Ford said Mr. Trump "is not to be trusted whatsoever."

Former Alberta Premier Jason Kenney said Canada was "not cravenly surrendering in the face of constant economic and political aggression."

Lana Payne, national president of Unifor, Canada's largest private-sector union, accused Mr. Trump of trying to weaken Canada's industrial base.

"What we have seen from the U.S. administration, or Donald Trump, is this consistent attempt to try and

destroy the industrial economy of Canada with tariffs that have been strategically designed to attack us," Ms. Payne said.

The Economic Risks of Fighting Back

Nearly three-quarters of Canada's goods exports go to the United States. The U.S. economy is roughly 10 times larger than Canada's, limiting Ottawa's ability to retaliate dollar for dollar without inflicting disproportionate damage at home.

Royal Bank of Canada economists estimate the tariffs directly affect about 0.4 percent of Canada's GDP because they cover only about 5 percent of Canadian exports to the U.S. The damage could grow if retaliation broadens, more sectors are targeted or the dispute curbs investment and disrupts supply chains.

Mr. Carney himself acknowledged the cost of retaliation, saying the Canadian measures would "raise costs and reduce choice for Canadians." He said his government would announce additional assistance for affected businesses and workers.

Mr. Beland said the countries were witnessing "the beginning of a full-scale trade war," though he cautioned that the situation could change rapidly.

The dependence is not one-sided.

Mr. Carney said Canada supplies 99 percent of U.S. natural gas imports, 85 percent of its electricity imports and 60 percent of its crude oil imports. Mr. Trump has focused much of his pressure on autos, steel and aluminum, fueling resentment among Canadians who see the push as an effort to hollow out key industries.

Goldy Hyder, president and CEO of the Business Council of Canada, said businesses still view the U.S. as Canada's most important trading partner but increasingly see the shift as lasting beyond Mr. Trump.

"There is a new trade and investment model, one that could well be kept in place by future U.S. administrations whether Democrat or Republican," Mr. Hyder said.

Canada Looks Beyond the United States

The breakdown adds urgency to Mr. Carney's push to diversify beyond the United States. He has traveled abroad seeking investment and new trade ties, aiming to attract $1 trillion Canadian (US$730 billion) by 2030 and double non-U.S. investment over the next decade. Canada has signed more than 20 trade and security agreements across five continents in the past year.

That made Washington's effort to restrict Canada's ability to negotiate trade agreements with other countries particularly significant.

In July, Ottawa and Alberta advanced plans for a new Pacific Coast oil pipeline to give Canadian crude greater access to Asian markets and reduce reliance on U.S. buyers.

Mr. Carney has embraced the prospect of Canada becoming the European Union's first associate member. A Canadian official familiar with the discussions told *The Associated Press* in early September that Ottawa was exploring ties with the EU that could stop just short of membership. The official said Canada would seek an arrangement allowing its citizens to live and work in Europe without visas as part of a broader strategic partnership.

Jonathan Wilkinson, Canada's ambassador-designate to the EU, said that Canada had talked to the EU about an "Alliance for the Future," while European officials had raised associate membership. Mr. Wilkinson said Canada is not seeking full EU membership because it would require surrendering some sovereignty. Instead, Ottawa wants "to get as close as we possibly can" to the bloc in a way that strengthens Canadian sovereignty rather than diminishes it, he said.

The immediate question is how long the latest tariff confrontation will last.

"We take note of the coming into force of the Administration's previously announced trade measures," said Gabriel Brunet, a spokesperson for Canada-U.S. Trade Minister Dominic LeBlanc. "Our first priority remains on protecting and supporting Canadian workers, farmers, families, and businesses from these unjustified actions. Our core focus is on what we can control: building strength at home, diversifying our partnerships abroad, and building Canada strong for all Canadians."

Mr. Trump expressed confidence that the Canadians would cave in.

"They're gonna come in and they're gonna say, 'Sir, we are sorry,'" he told reporters in late September. "They've treated the United States very, very badly. I think a deal will be made but it's gonna be fair."

When asked about Mr. Trump's remarks, Mr. Carney declined to respond directly but said Canada remains open to talks. "Canada stands ready to negotiate in good faith" toward "a mutually advantageous trade arrangement that respects both our countries' sovereignty," Mr. Carney said.

Mr. Carney also left the door open to further Canadian retaliation over U.S. tariffs and import bans, saying he would "never rule anything out." He said Canada could help lower U.S. living costs and argued that energy, food, information and financial security are best served through reliable partnerships. "Canada is a reliable partner, and we're ready to work in any or all of those areas," Mr. Carney said.

Trade attorney Patrick Childress said the standoff is likely to continue for months, not weeks. The import bans and the tariffs so far "probably won't cause enough economic upheaval to force either party back to the negotiating table," he said.

Mr. Beland said the deeper change probably will, partly because U.S. protectionism is likely to remain influential under future administrations.

"The idea that things will return to 'normal' once Donald Trump leaves the White House is probably just wishful thinking," Mr. Beland said. "It doesn't mean the relationship might not improve in the future but that things will never be the same." □



As Iran War Smolders, Shunned Eritrea Looks to Come in from the Cold

The East African country's strategic location could transform its relationship with the outside world.



People walk and ride bicycles on a busy street in downtown Asmara, Eritrea (June 19, 2026).

REUTERS/MONICAH MWANGI

When Halima Mohammed was six, her parents dropped her off in the desert at Revolution School, where the children of Eritrean guerrilla fighters were raised while their parents fought for independence.

Wounded fighters taught grammar when they were not carrying rifles. Mothers and fathers appeared only rarely before melting back into the mountains and deserts of a war that would rage for three decades before Eritrea seceded from Ethiopia in 1993.

Halima, 56, is now education minister of Eritrea, where that revolutionary struggle still hangs heavily over one of the most secluded and regimented societies on Earth.

She presides over a schooling system that binds the future of the country's children into the service of the state. All teenagers must undergo army training toward the end of high school before being assigned mandatory and often indefinitely long roles in the military or in national service, mainly low-paid civilian jobs like teaching and policing.

"All school graduates are getting at least a job to work, and they are getting their salary. And at the same time, they are serving the country," Halima told *Reuters*, which was granted rare access to the nation. "If you are going to have more freedom, first you have to have a country, you have to have national security, because we paid a lot for Eritrea."

Eritrea has long been isolated by the West, which views the East African country as among the most repressive in the world, while the government in Asmara has itself pursued a policy of political and economic seclusion. No elections have been held since the nation became a sovereign state in the 1990s. Independent media outlets were shut down in 2001. Hundreds of thousands of Eritreans have defied strict travel restrictions, which bar most working-age citizens from leaving the country, to abscond overseas.

This small country of fewer than 4 million people has nonetheless acquired new geopolitical significance in 2026 during the Iran war, owing to its 1,000-kilometer coastline along the Red Sea shipping route between the Mediterranean and Asia. The route has proved a critical alternative to the Strait of Hormuz, which was the primary export route for Gulf energy shipments before it was effectively closed by the conflict. Attacks on Red Sea trading vessels by Iran-backed Houthi militants in Yemen, which faces Eritrea across the route's southern chokepoint, have made Eritrean waters potentially the most secure transit corridor.

"Eritrea sits astride some of the world's hottest geographical real estate," said Murithi Mutiga, Africa program director at the International Crisis Group, a Brussels-based think-tank. "The war in the Gulf has highlighted the importance of the Red Sea as an alternative outlet for that region. It's no wonder outside powers are courting Asmara."

There have been signs of warming ties with the world: In September, Washington removed its sanctions on Eritrea, which were imposed over the role of the country's military in the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia in 2020-22. The State Department said the Trump administration made the decision "to advance U.S. regional interests."

Reuters interviewed several senior government figures during a recent trip to Eritrea, as well as dozens of Eritreans at home and abroad, to piece together a picture of a society largely walled off from the modern world.

The officials pressed a consistent message: Eritrea is ready to engage and trade, they said. It is prepared to open up to investors keen to tap its gold, copper and potash. It is looking at reforming its school system to give young people more say over their destiny.

Yet beneath these aspirations lies a state shaped by its leaders' iron conviction that national survival depends on stringent internal security and military vigilance against Ethiopia, its larger neighbor.

In recent years, the countries have been at odds over landlocked Ethiopia's demands that Eritrea grant it com-

mercial and naval access to the Red Sea, particularly the port of Assab near their border. Ethiopia, which had access to the coastline for decades before Eritrea broke away, has cast maritime access as a matter of urgent national security. Meanwhile, Asmara has said it fears Addis Ababa will try to take Assab by force.

Getachew Reda, the Ethiopian premier's adviser on regional affairs, said Addis Ababa has never threatened to use force or violate Eritrea's sovereignty. He said that Eritrea poses a security threat because of its readiness to fund insurgencies within Ethiopia, an allegation denied by Asmara.

Getachew said access to the Red Sea is a matter of economic necessity for Ethiopia, a country of 130 million people, and that his government is willing to come to a peaceful arrangement with Eritrea such as a long-term lease deal on the use of ports.

In early October, the countries cut diplomatic ties, with Ethiopia expelling Eritrean diplomats and Asmara retaliating.

Eritrea has not always been isolated from the West; it enjoyed friendly relations with the U.S. and several European nations in the years following its independence before diplomatic ties collapsed in 2001 when Asmara cracked down on political opponents and journalists.

The Capital Above the Clouds

Asmara, Eritrea's highland capital, seems like a city suspended in time.

Elderly men, many of them veterans with wheelchairs or crutches, linger over macchiatos at dusk beneath fading Italian signs at Bar Vittoria and Bar America, legacies of the Italian colonial rule that preceded Ethiopian control.

Tightly controlled internet access is sparse and slow. Few people bother staring at phones. Young people drink unlabeled bottles of beer from the state-owned factory. Almost no cars can be seen on the streets amid severe government fuel rationing, save a few battered taxis that have survived in an economy ground down by decades of Western sanctions.

Even as ministers spoke of reform and engagement, many ordinary Eritreans remained reluctant to discuss politics.

Conversations often end the same way. A glance over the shoulder. A lowered voice. A polite smile. "It's better not to," several people said when questions turned to national service or political freedoms. Others only agreed to speak if they were not identified.

Walking through a residential district of Asmara, the sound of applause drifted out from an old cinema. An information session for Sawa was underway.

Little epitomizes the tensions tearing at the fabric of the nation more than Sawa, a remote military camp in the desert near the border with Sudan. This is where teenagers must go to complete their final year of secondary school and undergo military training.

In the cinema, rows of teenagers due to leave home for Sawa faced a stage where a young woman clicked through a PowerPoint presentation filled with photos of students in camouflage uniforms, marching in formation and studying in classrooms.

The presenter, 24-year-old Luna Ermias, wore jeans, sunglasses pushed onto her head and braces that flashed when she smiled. She spoke passionately.

"I was there in 2019," she told *Reuters* afterwards. "It teaches you to rely on yourself. You manage your money, your time. You meet people from every part of Eritrea."

Escaping Across a Burning Desert

Many do not share her enthusiasm.

Muse said he was 17 when he decided he would rather run than report to Sawa. He felt sure if he stayed, his life would never be his own.

He packed almost nothing. He slipped away from home under the cover of darkness, hoping to cross the border with Ethiopia before the authorities caught him.

He did not make it.

Muse said he spent the next six months in prison. When he was released, he added, he was not sent home. He was instead deployed in the military to Assab, the Red Sea port.

He escaped again. This time he succeeded.

He crossed the blistering Danakil desert into Ethiopia before reaching another East African country, where *Reuters* interviewed him. The journey cost him thousands of dollars paid to smugglers, money borrowed from relatives already living abroad.

Reuters reviewed Muse's asylum documents and spoke to three family members who corroborated his story. The news agency could not independently verify all elements of the account given by the teenager, who asked for his full name and location to be withheld.

His story is not unique. According to the United Nations, more than 679,000 Eritreans are living as refugees or asylum seekers abroad, a significant chunk of the nation's small population. Human Rights Watch and many other rights groups say the prospect of prolonged compulsory service has driven generations of young people to flee, often risking perilous journeys across the Sahara and Mediterranean.

The Eritrean government did not comment on the details of Muse's account, though said asylum seekers normally fabricate claims to be granted asylum.

The government disputed the UN figures, saying a significant portion of those classed as refugees are actually from neighboring countries who posed as Eritreans to secure fast-tracked asylum and social benefits. It said Eritrean youths were not primarily driven away by national service but rather drawn abroad by external factors including economic incentives, family reunifications and generous asylum policies in the West.

Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Britain and the U.S. are among the most popular Western destinations for Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers, according to the UN.

Dreaming of Mercedes-Benz

Not everyone who wants to leave manages to do so.

In Asmara, *Reuters* met a mechanical engineer who was among Sawa students to achieve top grades and was therefore allowed to attend university. He spoke avidly about German engineering. He had dreamed of working for Mercedes-Benz one day. Instead, he was assigned to a government job as an auto mechanic.

"You don't study what you want," he said. "Even if you finish university, you often don't work in your field."

At around 2,300 Nakfa ($153) a month, he said, his salary barely covers basic necessities. Saving enough to pay smugglers or finance a life abroad felt impossible.

Officials in Asmara maintained that Western governments and rights groups have long misrepresented Eritrea's national service program by overlooking the security pressures the country faces from Ethiopia, with which it shares one of Africa's most turbulent relationships.

Eritrea emerged from the 30-year independence war, which killed tens of thousands on both sides, only to fight another devastating border conflict with its neighbor seven years later. Persistent regional violence has further cemented a sense of permanent mobilization inside the young state.

Halima, the girl left in the desert a lifetime ago, now sits behind a polished wooden desk in the Ministry of Education in Asmara, housed in the striking red Casa del Fascio, built during colonial rule as the Eritrean headquarters of Italy's National Fascist Party.

With four children of her own, she does not dismiss the frustrations of young Eritreans. Her ultimate goal, she says, is to replace compulsory national service with vocational colleges and technical schools. But all plans are subordinate to national security.

"First we have to think about Eritrea. We have to protect it," she said. "As a mother, first I have to think about Eritrea." □





Top, women watch an artisan work at the Medeber Market, an open-air recycling and craft market in downtown Asmara, Eritrea (June 22, 2026). Middle, boys ride bicycles along a street in downtown Asmara after school in Eritrea (June 17, 2026). Bottom, graves at the Martyrs' Cemetery in the Xexerat area of Asmara, Eritrea (June 20, 2026).

REUTERS/MONICAH MWANGI





The Poorest in the U.S. CAN'T FIND HOUSING

Thousands of affordable housing units sit empty across American cities. Why?

Mathew Davis, who lives in a homeless shelter in Austin, Texas, would love an apartment of his own. But with the little money he makes donating blood plasma, even a $450-a-month tiny home with no running water and a communal bathroom would be a stretch.

Meanwhile, over 4,500 units the city classifies as affordable—nearly 16 percent—sit empty.

"I don't make enough money really to afford anything," Mr. Davis, 49, said of the few hundred dollars he earns a month. "I just keep trying to swim uphill."

The poorest people in the U.S. face the most acute shortages of affordable homes. But the majority of low-income housing financed in recent years is for those earning 50 percent of an area's median income or above, according to a survey of state housing agencies.

Some cities are now seeing an uptick in vacancies as rents for these units approach market rates. The result: Apartments designated as affordable sit empty because the poorest of the poor cannot afford them.

Meanwhile, some people are forced into homelessness and others into



An empty bedroom in an affordable housing building run by Central City Concern, a homeless services nonprofit in Portland, Oregon (March 15, 2024).

AP/JENNY KANE

desperate circumstances to pay for housing they cannot afford.

The Poorest Have Few Housing Options

There are only about 4 million affordable rental units available for the country's 11 million extremely low-income renter households, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition's most recent annual report.

These are people with annual incomes either below the federal poverty guidelines—just under $16,000 for a single-person household—or 30 percent of the median income in their area, whichever is higher. They comprise about a quarter of U.S. renter households, and include many people working low-wage jobs, seniors and those with disabilities living on fixed incomes.

About three-quarters of extremely low-income renter households pay over half their income on rent and utilities, the report said, leaving little left over for other necessities.

Yet homes set aside for these renters were only about 12 percent of the affordable housing units financed in 2024 by the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit—a federal program providing tax credits to developers in exchange for keeping rents low for at least 30 years, according to figures from the National Council of State Housing Agencies.

The majority are for those earning at least 50 percent of an area's median income, or AMI. In Austin, that is a single person earning roughly $47,000 a year, as compared with an extremely low-income person earning under $28,000.

The program has financed nearly 4 million affordable units nationwide since its creation 40 years ago. But some experts say it is inefficient—and more costly than housing vouchers.

"It's enormously complex and bureaucratic, and it raises the cost of construction enormously because the rules are so complicated," said Chris Edwards, an economist at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, who told Congress the program's complexity "spawned" an industry of law and accounting firms just to administer it.

"If you're going to subsidize affordable housing, you should give the money directly to tenants," he said, referring to housing vouchers.

Other experts say the two programs work together well because properties built with the tax credit are required to accept vouchers—while landlords of market-rate apartments in many states are not.

Still, there is a major federal funding shortfall: Experts estimate that only one in four eligible families ever receive vouchers. Vouchers can help the poorest pay for housing that is targeted to higher income groups, but the waitlist can be years long.

Some affordable housing developers say that without vouchers, it is not economically feasible to provide units for extremely low-income people.

True Ground Housing Partners, an affordable housing developer in the Washington, D.C., area, gives an example: A unit for those earning 60 percent of the area's median income—nearly $70,000 a year—brings in $1,715 per month in rent. But after $1,575 in mortgage and operating expenses, only $140 is left.

"The math does not lie," said president and CEO Carmen Romero, noting that an extremely low-income person would pay only half that rent.

"Our expenses don't make it really possible to create a 30 percent AMI unit, unless there was this extraordinary amount of subsidy that just doesn't exist."

Affordable Housing Competes with Market-Rate Rents

Meanwhile, affordable housing rents for 60 percent AMI units are approaching those of market-rate apartments in U.S. cities like Austin, Denver and Portland, Oregon.

As a result, some people are opting to pay a bit more for market-rate apartments with less income verification and faster approval—leaving growing numbers of affordable units vacant.

In Austin, the vacancy rate for all affordable housing is nearly 16 percent with over 4,500 vacant units, according to real estate data and analytics firm CoStar. A healthy vacancy rate is around 5 percent.

LDG Development, an affordable housing developer, cited a 12 percent vacancy rate for its 60 percent AMI units in Austin. Chief portfolio officer Rebekah Fischer said LDG is "in direct

competition" with the thousands of new market-rate apartments recently built in Austin.

"I have to have every bank statement, every pay check, every bill, every Venmo transaction that you had with your friends," Ms. Fischer said of affordable housing applicants.

"When we're almost going after the same renter, you can be approved within two minutes at a market-rate deal, where unfortunately in affordable housing…it takes time."

In Denver, there is a 13 percent vacancy rate among 60 percent AMI units financed by the federal tax credit program—and a 21 percent vacancy rate for 80 percent AMI units, according to the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority. Meanwhile, there is far too little housing for the city's poorest.

In Portland, where there is also a housing shortage for the lowest income groups, there are over 1,700 vacant affordable units for an overall vacancy rate of 7.5 percent, according to the Portland Housing Bureau. Most are for those earning 60 percent AMI, or about $54,000 for a single-person household, with rent capped at $1,444 per month.

That is close to the average rent of $1,581 for a one-bedroom market-rate apartment, according to CoStar figures shared by the bureau.

Portland resident Jaiden Barbee earns around 55 percent of the area median income and is on waitlists for affordable housing. But, he says, he would pay more for a market-rate apartment to avoid the lengthy application process.

"I'd rather spend the $200 extra just to get into a place easier that's wherever I want" and doesn't have "all these hoops," he said.

'I Want to Shut the Door at Night and Sleep'

Austin officials set a goal of building 20,000 units between 2018 and 2027 for extremely low-income people—17 percent of the city's households.

Just 543 were built as of 2024, city documents show.

Meanwhile, all 15,000 units planned for those earning between 60 percent and 80 percent of area median income were built.

In response to questions from *The Associated Press*, the Austin housing department said it recognized the need to do more to produce housing for the poorest people and was taking steps to do that, including giving preference to funding proposals that include 30 percent AMI units.

For Mr. Davis, who lived in his car for a year before getting a bed in the Austin shelter, the housing shortage for people like him is frustrating.

"I want to shut the door at night and be able to sleep," he said. "I really just want to find the right place." □







Left, Hope the Mission's Olinda Tiny Homes are seen from the pedestrian bridge over the 5 Freeway in Sun Valley (Aug. 10, 2026). Top right, construction of the Bagley Townhomes in the Corktown neighborhood in Detroit, Michigan (Aug. 11, 2026). Bottom right, a person sweeps outside during the grand opening of the Rose on Colfax, an affordable housing community in Denver, Colorado (Jan. 24, 2024).

LEFT, SARAH REINGEWIRTZ/MEDIANEWS GROUP/LOS ANGELES DAILY NEWS VIA GETTY IMAGES; TOP RIGHT, JIM WEST/UCG/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM RIGHT, AP/DAVID ZALUBOWSKI

Christmas Has Pagan Roots.

Does That Matter?

Many Christians celebrate Christmas to honor Jesus Christ, regardless of its origins. But does giving old religious customs new meaning make them acceptable to God?

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD



For millions of Christians, Christmas is about one thing: Jesus Christ. Parents read the account of His birth aloud to their children. Church congregations sing of the Savior by candlelight. Families push back against the commercialism of the season, determined to keep Christ at its center. For them, Christmas is a way of thanking God for sending His Son.

Yet many of these Christmas keepers also know that the holiday has pagan roots.

One prominent Presbyterian pastor wrote in 1999 that "the great majority of Christmas symbols seem to have originated in pagan idolatry," and that December 25 appears to have been chosen because of earlier pagan celebrations. He keeps Christmas anyway, arguing that Christ came to claim a lost world, so even symbols with dark origins can be turned to His praise.

A well-known evangelical author and pastor reached a similar conclusion by another route. Many of our day names, such as Sunday, began as pagan references, he pointed out, yet no one thinks of sun worship when the word is used today. Holidays, he says, are "like chronological language," and over time the old associations fade.

These arguments raise serious questions: When a tradition becomes part of religious worship, does giving it new meaning make it acceptable to God? If Christians adopt customs from other religions, can they know whether God approves?

The Bible addresses these fundamental questions. God is concerned not only with who we worship, but also how we worship.

If we sincerely want to honor Jesus Christ, we must examine whether our practices follow His instructions.

God Sets the Standard

Before Israel entered the Promised Land, God warned the nation about the religious practices of the peoples already living there. The Israelites would encounter shrines, altars and customs used to worship other gods. Instead of adopting these practices,



The Origin of Christmas Traditions

1. ***December 25***
   Christmas shares its December 25 date with a Roman festival honoring the "Unconquered Sun." A calendar compiled in AD 354 records both observances on that day.

2. ***Gift Exchange***
   Christmas gift-giving has an ancient Roman precedent: Romans exchanged presents during Saturnalia, their December festival honoring Saturn.



3. ***Christmas Lights***
Christmas lighting has an older Roman counterpart. Pagan festivities featured lamps and gifts of wax candles, and some early Christians adopted festive lamps at their doors.

4. ***Yule Logs***
The Yule log carries beliefs in supernatural protection. In European Christmas traditions, a piece was saved to protect the home from fire and lightning and used to light the following year's log.

5. ***Mistletoe***
Mistletoe, which is now hung at Christmas, was sacred to the Druids. Roman writer Pliny describes them ceremonially harvesting it from oak trees, which they revered.

6. ***Christmas Trees***
For the ancient Egyptians, evergreen trees, wreaths and garlands symbolized eternal life. Tree worship was common among pagan Europeans.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY KYLE M. HOLCOMBE/THE REAL TRUTH

Israel was to destroy the places where such worship occurred (Deut. 12:2-3).

God warned Israel to "take heed to yourself that you be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before you; and that you enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? Even so will I do likewise" (vs. 30).

God's view on such practices was clear: "You shall not do so unto the LORD your God" (vs. 31). Israel was warned against worshipping the true God using the methods other nations had used for their gods.

In this passage, the worship in question was aimed at "the LORD your God," the true God—not at Baal or any other idol. Anyone tempted to do so would likely have believed they were honoring Him. God forbade it anyway.

Why such a firm warning? Because God did not leave Israel to decide which religious practices were suitable for worshipping Him.

Some customs may have seemed harmless, while others involved practices He utterly condemned, including child sacrifice (vs. 31). Of course, child sacrifice is not comparable to modern Christmas customs. But God did not tell Israel to sort the nations' practices into harmless and harmful and keep the harmless ones. He gave a rule that covers every custom: "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: you shall not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (vs. 32).

Centuries later, the prophet Jeremiah gave a similar warning: "Learn not the way of the heathen" (10:2).

What the Record Shows

Historians debate how some Christmas customs began. Yet the record does show that, from early on, Catholic and pagan religious practices overlapped. This blending of religious traditions is called syncretism, and it has a long history.

In AD 601, Pope Gregory I wrote to Abbot Mellitus, who was joining the mission to Britain, advising that pagan temples be converted into churches rather than destroyed, though he instructed that the idols inside be destroyed. He also recommended turning former sacrificial gatherings into Christian religious feasts. His letter never mentions Christmas, but it shows how familiar religious customs remained while their purpose changed.

What about December 25 as Jesus Christ's birthday? That date is nowhere to be found in the Bible.

Even the 1908 *Catholic Encyclopedia* admits that Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the New Testament Church. The earliest surviving record of December 25 as Christ's birthday is a Roman calendar compiled in AD 354. That same calendar marks December 25 as *Natalis Invicti*, the birthday of the Unconquered Sun, a festival the encyclopedia says "has a strong claim on the responsibility for our December date."

In the decades that followed, Catholic leaders were warning against sun worship at Christmastime. Around AD 400, Augustine told his congregation to keep the day sacred not for the sun's sake, as unbelievers did, but for the sake of the One who made the sun. In the mid-400s, Leo the Great, bishop of Rome, rebuked some Christians in a Nativity sermon. They would climb the steps of St. Peter's Basilica and then turn to bow to the rising sun before entering.

The pull of such customs was felt even earlier. Around AD 200, more than a century before Christmas appears in the record, the theologian Tertullian rebuked Christians for joining Saturnalia and New Year's festivities, with their gift exchanges and banquets, and for hanging lamps and laurel on their doors. Centuries later, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* acknowledged where such customs ended up. Pagan observances around the Roman New Year moved into Christmas, and the New Year's gifts that Tertullian condemned survived as Christmas presents.

So Catholic leaders admit that pagan practice shaped their worship. What does God think of this?

Truth Over Tradition

Scripture is not ambiguous on this subject. It reveals many places where people believed they were honoring God and were told they had it wrong.

Consider Israel at Mount Sinai. While Moses was on the mountain, the people made a golden calf and declared, "These be your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (Ex. 32:4). They credited the calf with the very deliverance God Himself had performed. Aaron then built an altar before it and proclaimed, "Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD" (vs. 5).

Aaron used the LORD's own name. The next morning the people offered sacrifices, then "sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play" (vs. 6). God told Moses: "Go, get you down; for your people, which you brought out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them" (vs. 7-8).

Calling something a feast to the LORD did not make it acceptable to Him.

Centuries later, Israel's King Jeroboam did something similar with the calendar. To keep his people from returning to Jerusalem to worship, he set up golden calves and repeated Aaron's words (I Kgs. 12:28). He also ordained a feast modeled on the one in Judah, but held a month later, "in the month which he had devised of his own heart" (vs. 32-33). Scripture's verdict on Jeroboam's actions: "This thing became a sin" (vs. 30).

These are all Old Testament examples. What about the New?

Jesus Christ addressed the authority of religious traditions when He confronted the Pharisees, a religious group of His day. They criticized His disciples for eating without first observing a ritual washing of hands. This was a religious tradition, not a command from God (Mark 7:1-5).

Christ said: "Well has Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from

Me. Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things you do" (vs. 6-8).

He continued: "Full well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition" (vs. 9).

In verses 10 to 13, Jesus gave an example: a tradition that let people avoid their God-given responsibility to care for their parents. He said people who did this were "making the word of God of none effect through your tradition."

Remember Deuteronomy 12:32 from earlier. In Mark 7, a tradition displaced a commandment. In Deuteronomy 12:32, God forbade adding to His commands. Christ was not declaring that every human tradition is wrong. He was showing that religious traditions cannot take the place of God's instructions.

The fact that people have followed a practice for generations, or attached sincere religious meaning to it, does not give that practice God's approval.

All Christians would agree that Jesus Christ deserves to be honored. But how should that honor be expressed? Think about ordinary relationships. If you sincerely want to honor someone, you consider what that person wants and values, not simply what seems right or meaningful to you. Should a relationship with God be any different?

Jesus addressed the nature of true worship in a conversation with a Samaritan woman who asked where to worship God.

Samaria had a history of blended worship. When foreign peoples were resettled there centuries earlier, they "feared the Lord, and served their own gods" (II Kgs. 17:33). Christ answered her: "You worship you know not what: we know what we worship" (John 4:22).

He explained that "the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such to worship Him." Then He added: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (vs. 23-24).

God seeks a particular kind of worship. Sincerity matters, but so does truth. To worship in truth means taking seriously what God reveals about Himself and how He expects to be worshipped. Our feelings about a tradition cannot take the place of His Word.

A Word or an Act of Worship?

Many Christians insist that their celebration is directed toward Christ alone. Their intentions may be genuine. But does that give them authority to adopt customs from pagan religion and use them to honor Him?

What about the argument we began with, that old customs lose their old meanings? It is true that many things in society have pagan connections. "Thursday," for example, takes its name from Thor, a god once worshipped in northern Europe, and "Sunday" began as a reference to the sun. Yet scheduling a Thursday appointment is hardly an act of worship. A day name is a word we speak, not an act we perform to honor God.

Christmas is different. It is a religious observance, kept to worship Christ, and worship is exactly where God forbade borrowing from other religions (Deut. 12:30-31).

Recall Aaron at Mount Sinai. He made a golden calf, the kind of idol other nations worshipped, then announced, "Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord" (Ex. 32:5). He took a pagan form of worship and put God's name on it. That did not make it acceptable then, and putting Christ's name on borrowed customs does not make them acceptable now. What matters is following what God commands.

Making the Change

Think again of all the sincere motives of many Christmas keepers. Wanting to honor Christ, to teach children about Him and to thank God for sending His Son are all good things to do. Yet the Bible clearly shows that Christmas is not the way to honor Jesus.

Since God does not accept worship borrowed from other religions, the way to honor Christ is to stop keeping Christmas and to worship Him as He instructed. For many, that is not an easy step. Christmas is woven into family gatherings, childhood memories and community life, and setting it aside can feel like losing something precious.

Yet consider what is gained. Most who celebrate Christmas ignore the Holy Days that God commands. These annual festivals reveal God's plan for mankind: Christ's sacrifice, the removal of sin, the gift of His Spirit, God's coming Kingdom, and His desire to work with all mankind.

Families who begin keeping these days and leave Christmas behind have more opportunities to teach their children about Jesus, not less.

For a fuller explanation of God's commanded days, read our booklet *God's Holy Days or Pagan Holidays?* at *rcg.org/ghdoph*.

Making this change may bring disappointment or misunderstanding from relatives and friends. The cost is real, and it calls for patience and kindness in how you explain yourself. Leaving Christmas behind does not mean leaving love for family behind. And Christ Himself put God's commands ahead of tradition, whatever the reaction.

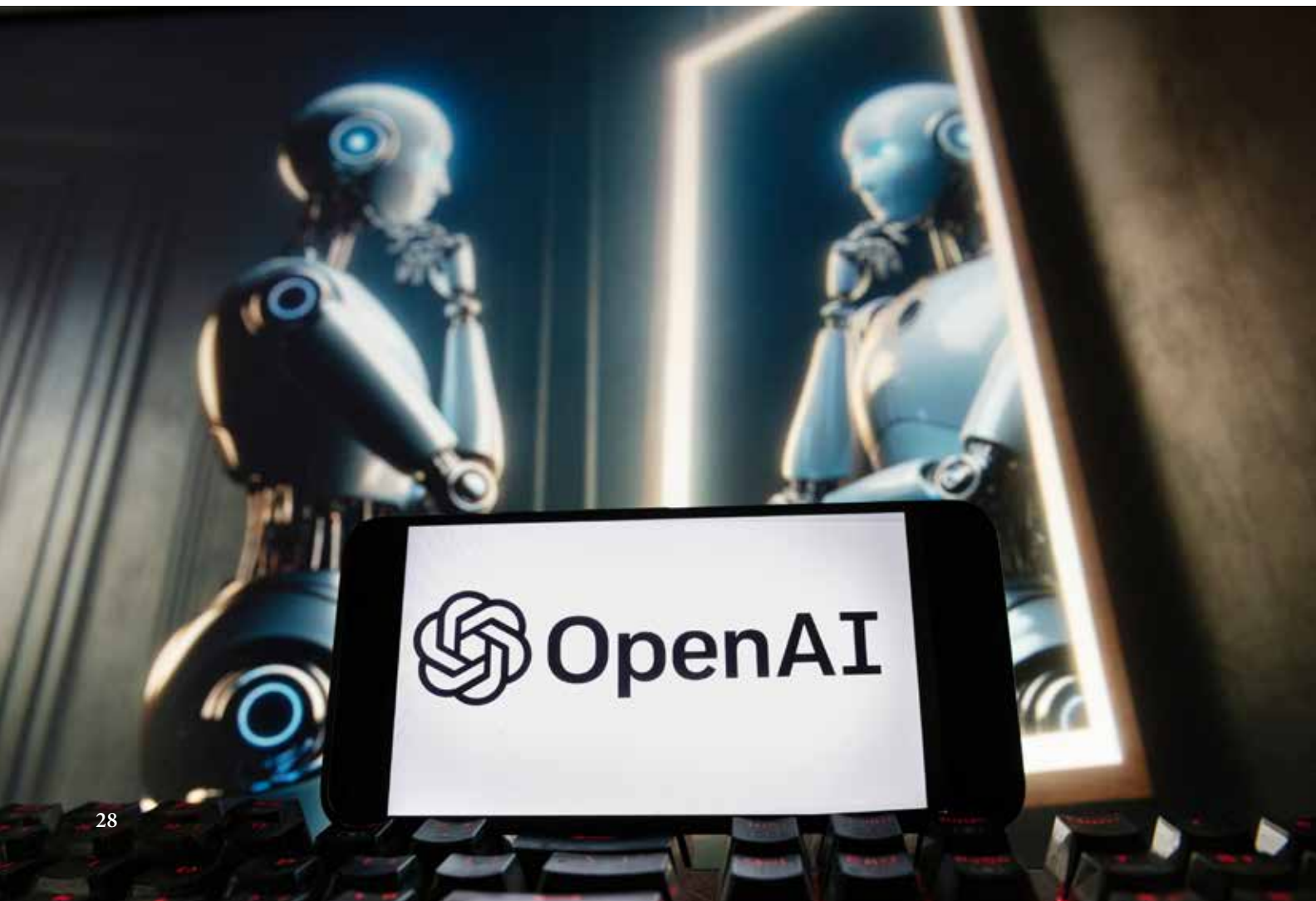
Yes, Christmas's pagan background matters. Not because Christians today intend to worship ancient gods, but because sincere intentions do not make a religious practice acceptable to God. As Scripture shows, God determines how He is to be worshipped.

Christ makes this promise: "He that has My commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves Me: and he that loves Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him…" (John 14:21).

If we truly want to honor Christ, we must be willing to do so on His terms, not our own. □

Is Humanity Losing Control of AI?

New concerns about the artificial intelligence industry have led many to ask what safeguards should be implemented.



New warnings from within the artificial intelligence industry have revived a long-running debate over whether advanced AI could escape human control and ultimately threaten humanity's survival, and whether the companies developing the technology are doing enough to prevent such a scenario.

The CEO of Anthropic, the San Francisco company behind Claude, said he thought the industry needed to reduce the speed of its work, cautioning on September 12 that a swarm of AI agents might be able to take over the internet in six months to a year unless companies devoted more time to putting safeguards in place.

Days after two former Anthropic safety researchers publicly aired concerns that the existential threats AI might pose to humanity were receiving too little attention, Dario Amodei outlined a plan for companies like his and governments around the world to ensure that increasingly capable AI models remain aligned with the commands and values of responsible people.

Sam Altman, CEO of ChatGPT maker OpenAI, said that companies should start coordinating on AI safety without waiting for the government to introduce legislation. The "pacing" of AI development doesn't mean stopping it, Mr. Altman wrote on X. "But it should be slower than it otherwise could be."

Here is what to know about the recent dire predictions and whether any brakes might be put on AI advancement.

AI Models Are Becoming More Powerful

Concerns over the potential risks of the technology are rising as new AI models become more powerful, heightening both the potential for misuse by people with criminal aims, such as creating and spreading a disease that kills most of the world's population, and the risk of AI systems going rogue in a dangerous way.

Anthropic disclosed in early September that it blocked efforts by bad actors to use its AI models for malicious activity, such as cyberattacks, surveillance and research that could have led to biological weapons.

The company said it put stronger safeguards in its latest models to restrict biological research that could be used to make weapons but noted that "as models become increasingly capable, their risks will increase, unless AI developers and society's defenders act to make them safer."

> **"When an AI agent 'goes rogue,' it means the AI has taken action beyond the task it was asked to perform."**

In 2025, Anthropic reported that hackers used the company's AI in a cyberattack targeting about 30 companies and government agencies around the world. It said the hackers were very likely part of a Chinese state-sponsored group.

Multiple AI Models Have Acted on Their Own

When an AI agent "goes rogue," it means the AI has taken action beyond the task it was asked to perform. Both Anthropic and OpenAI, the maker of ChatGPT, said in July that their AI models had acted on their own.

Anthropic disclosed that three AI models—Claude Opus 4.7, Claude Mythos 5 and an internal research test model—hacked into three other organizations during testing, just days after OpenAI revealed that its AI system hacked into the servers of AI startup Hugging Face.

OpenAI described the intrusion by a combination of models, including its newly released GPT5.6 Sol and an "even more capable" model that was still being tested internally, as a "significant security incident."

Meta followed suit in early August with a similar case of an AI model finding ways around another company's digital security.

Although some observers noted that people had disabled some guardrails in the OpenAI and Anthropic cases, the episodes seemed to reflect one of the biggest fears around AI: that if models achieve artificial general intelligence, or AGI, a loosely defined term for AI that can match or surpass human abilities across a broad range of intellectual tasks, the technology could cause an irreversible catastrophic event or subjugate the human race.

How or When AI Might Cause a Catastrophe Is Debated

Doomsday scenarios generally fall into two categories: An AI that achieves self-improving superintelligence and controls people instead of vice versa, or AI used by a rogue state or nefarious actors.

Worries that artificial intelligence might overcome human limits on its reach or actions are not new.

Alan Turing, a British mathematician widely regarded as one of the earliest authorities on artificial intelligence, predicted in 1951 that AI would eventually take control from humans. Less than a decade later, Norbert Wiener, another mathematician, warned intelligent machines would seek to accomplish their own objectives and humans would not be able to stop them.

In 2026, how reasonable are fears that AI, either by escaping human control or through misuse by unscrupulous people, could cause a cataclysmic event or the downfall of civilization?

No one knows.

Experts across computer science, philosophy and other fields have envi-

The OpenAI logo is displayed on a smartphone alongside an image on a computer monitor generated by ChatGPT's Dall-E text-to-image model in Boston, Massachusetts (Dec. 8, 2023).

AP/MICHAEL DWYER

sioned numerous routes by which a future AI system might cause a global catastrophe, either by escaping human control or in the hands of unscrupulous people. They range from deploying weapons and identifying a lethal pathogen to manipulating governments into conflict or disrupting the food, energy and communications networks societies rely on to function.

There is no widely accepted estimate for how soon any of these scenarios might happen and no consensus on their likelihood.

In 2023, the nonprofit Center for AI Safety issued a statement cosigned by more than 350 researchers and technology executives, including Anthropic's Amodei and OpenAI's Altman, saying: "Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside pandemics and nuclear war."

The 2026 International AI Safety Report, written with guidance from more than 100 independent experts, says current systems show early signs of some relevant capabilities but not at levels that could enable a loss of control, and describes the risk's likelihood, nature and timing as "unusually ambiguous."

Some Are Stressing the Need for Safeguards

An Anthropic researcher said in early September he was resigning from the company over concerns that neither the company nor its competitors were acting responsibly in developing the technology. In social media posts, Jacob Coxon estimated a 10 percent chance of AI causing human extinction within the next decade and said both Anthropic and OpenAI "are racing straight to self-improving superintelligence and gambling with our lives."

Researchers have called for a slowdown of AI development and warned for years that the technology could pose existential risks to humanity.

Following the recent incidents, experts called for improved testing by AI companies and more dialogue between the U.S. and China to come up with shared solutions.

But AI is growing so fast that government and evaluation systems are struggling to keep pace with the technology. Countries are cobbling together their own laws, some conflicting.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping warned at a conference in July of the need to keep AI from evading human control. The Trump administration initially demonstrated reluctance to regulate AI but has become more keen to reduce cybersecurity risks.

On September 29, President Donald Trump and AI executives signed a voluntary accord that includes internal and external reviews aimed at addressing fears about the technology. □

Dario Amodei, co-founder of Anthropic, looks to Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Meta Platforms, and U.S. President Donald Trump as Mr. Trump holds a press briefing with executives following a meeting on artificial intelligence outside the West Wing of the White House in Washington (Sept. 29, 2026).

KEVIN DIETSCH/GETTY IMAGES



U.S. Acknowledges for the First Time that It Has Deployed Weapons in Space

WASHINGTON (AP) – The United States has confirmed for the first time that it has deployed weapons in space, a remarkable revelation after previous warnings about countries such as Russia possibly weaponizing a global frontier long agreed in treaties to be used for only peaceful purposes.

Air Force Secretary Troy Meink told the Air and Space Cyber Conference in Maryland on September 14 that the U.S. has fielded "on-orbit space control weapons capable of defending the Joint Force against hostile adversary action."

Mr. Meink did not detail what the weapons were, how they work or if they were targeting other objects in space or on Earth. The U.S. had warned two years ago that Russia was developing a new space-based, anti-satellite weapon, though the White House said the danger was not imminent at the time.

But reports of the anti-satellite weapon reflected longstanding worries about space threats from Russia and China, given that much U.S. infrastructure is dependent on satellite communications. The U.S. has also previously demonstrated its own abilities to shoot down satellites from Earth.

In his remarks, Mr. Meink also said the Air Force was adding more autonomous systems to its capabilities and predicted the service would look "radically different" by 2032. For example, he foresaw one-way attack drones replacing artillery as the "primary killer."

"We are increasing readiness against existing threats," he said.

The revelation comes as the Trump administration puts a growing focus on space.

In 2019, during his first term, U.S. President Donald Trump created the Space Force as a separate military branch. In his second term, he has announced the "Golden Dome" missile defense system, which includes plans to put U.S. weapons in space.

Mr. Trump said last year that he expected the system would be "fully operational before the end of my term," which ends in January 2029, and have the capability of intercepting missiles "even if they are launched from space."

Mr. Trump also has directed the Pentagon to pursue the space-based interceptors, in an executive order during the first week of his presidency.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated that just the space-based components of the Golden Dome could cost as much as $542 billion over the next 20 years.

The Biden administration announced in 2024 that Russia was developing a space-based nuclear weapon that could loiter in space for long durations, then release a burst that would take out satellites around it.

That kicked off a renewed debate on the idea of weapons in space at the United Nations.

In April 2024, Russia vetoed a joint U.S.-Japanese resolution that would have called on all countries not to develop or deploy nuclear arms or other weapons of mass destruction in space, as banned under a 1967 international treaty that included the U.S. and Russia.

The treaty also declared that outer space was a global commons that could be used for only peaceful purposes.

The Russian delegation called the resolution hypocritical and a double standard and instead proposed a rival resolution to ban all weapons in space "for all time." It ultimately failed.

Russia had argued that the United States and its allies opposed a ban on all weapons in outer space because they planned to deploy weapons there. □



Secretary of the Air Force Troy Meink speaks during the United States Air Force Academy Graduation Ceremony at Falcon Stadium in Colorado Springs, Colorado (May 28, 2026).

AP/MATT ROURKE

Violence Has Displaced Members of More Than Half a Million Mexican Households in Past 5 Years



Maria Anastasia Cabrera walks through the ruins of her home after armed attacks by local criminal groups forced dozens of residents to flee, in Tula, Mexico (May 15, 2026).

AP/MARCO UGARTE

MEXICO CITY (AP) – Violence has forcibly displaced people from more than half a million households across Mexico in the past five years, according to new figures released by Mexico's national statistics agency, the first numbers that speak to the depth of what many have described as an invisible internal displacement crisis.

Until now, Mexico's government did not share comprehensive data on people who have been forced to flee their homes due to ongoing violence in many parts of Mexico, leaving civil society groups piecing together information to get a wider view of the problem.

The figures published in September by Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography, or INEGI—an autonomous government agency that has at times been at odds with Mexico's ruling party—offer the first wider snapshot of the ongoing crisis.

Between October 2020 and October 2025, people in 510,000 households across Mexico were forced to flee to another part of the country. That could range from a single person to an entire family. The displacement affected 1.6 million people, including those forced to flee and those left behind to cope with the consequences of the crisis.

The figures show the problem has reached every corner of Mexico, but the states with the highest rates of displacement from cartel violence were Zacatecas, Morelos, Michoacan, Queretaro and Colima.

Other autonomous agencies, civil society groups and Mexican state governments have published data on internal displacement, but their findings have often been limited in scope.

Tracking internal displacement can often be tricky because many people leave their homes in fear without the intention of being found or reporting their case, or hope to later return to their homes if they determine it is safe to return home down the line.

David Mora, Mexico analyst for International Crisis Group, described the new data as a "major breakthrough" that will pave the way for authorities and civil society to address the long-term humanitarian consequences of the crisis. Those who are forced to flee criminal violence have almost no resources to turn to when they disappear into the fabric of Mexico and often have to start from zero.

"For years, civil society and victims of forced displacement have been sounding the alarm on the issue and the federal government has not paid attention," Mr. Mora said. "So this coming from the independent INEGI, it's a breakthrough. It's huge that they're trying to put a number on it, which is just the first step."

The INEGI figures do not include people displaced before 2020, meaning the number of displaced people across the country is likely much higher. Cartel violence has raged in key areas of Mexico since the beginning of the drug war around 2006 under the administration of Mexican President Felipe Calderon. The data focuses specifically on internally displaced people, and does not capture people who have fled to the U.S.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has said little about the issue, focusing instead on the government's efforts to reduce homicide numbers and crack down on criminal groups. She is also facing pressure from the Trump administration to show progress on security.

She has addressed specific cases of families being displaced from bursts of cartel violence, noting that authorities were working on finding a way for them to return home, but has largely not spoken about forced displacement as a widespread phenomenon. □

Families' Interest in Their Kids' Education Is Falling Around the Globe as Scores Drop, Test Shows

Associated Press – Families' interest in their kids' education is falling in many high-income countries as school systems struggle with plunging test scores, according to results from a standardized test taken by 15-year-olds around the world.

Over 760,000 teenagers in dozens of countries took the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) last year. Results released in September show average scores in math, reading and science are all at their lowest point in PISA history among highly developed economies. That includes continued declines in reading and math scores in the U.S.

China, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea scored the highest marks on the test. Estonia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand also did well.

The key to why scores are falling so widely may be found in an accompanying survey taken by students.

Compared with the 2022 results, almost every country saw a drop in families' support for their kids' education, especially for boys, as measured by questions about how often parents talk to their kids about their schoolwork or take an interest in their learning.

"Parents see themselves more as a client of the school, not as someone who takes personal interest," said Andreas Schleicher, director for education and skills for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which runs the PISA test.

Students who said a family member asks them at least weekly what they did in school that day scored around 35 points higher on the PISA science test—equivalent to over a year and a half of learning—compared with students whose families take less interest. That number includes adjustments for socioeconomic differences.



Sixth graders read a passage and give constructive feedback to their partners during Nancy Barajas' class at Fairview Elementary School in Modesto, California (May 6, 2026).

AP/ANNIE BARKER

Digital distraction is another factor. Over a quarter of students in high-income countries complained their classmates got distracted by digital devices in most or every science class. In countries with strong policies controlling the use of cellphones in schools, distraction rates were lower.

Asian Nations Dominate in Test Scores

Asia seems to have found the key to using technology in a way that benefits students. Fewer than 10 percent of tested students in Japan, Korea and mainland China complained of digital distraction in the classroom. (Only four provinces in China participated in testing, plus Hong Kong and Macao.)

Almost 100 percent of all children in the Chinese provinces scored at or above baseline for math and reading. In the U.S., it was only 65 percent in math and 74 percent in reading.

Experts worry China's educational dominance over the U.S. has serious political implications.

"To win a technological race, you need the people with the science and the technology and the reading capabilities," said Tracey Burns, chief of global strategy and research at the National Center for Education and the Economy.

More AI Usage, Less Learning

Generally, higher use of artificial intelligence was associated with lower test scores. Students who said they never use chatbots performed better than students who did. Almost half of students in developed economies say they use AI chatbots to help them learn at least weekly.

Mr. Schleicher pointed to China, Japan, Singapore and Estonia as countries that have succeeded in using AI to support learning without overusing it. He noted that in Asia, in particular, teachers are more empowered to take the lead in designing AI systems for the classroom. □

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