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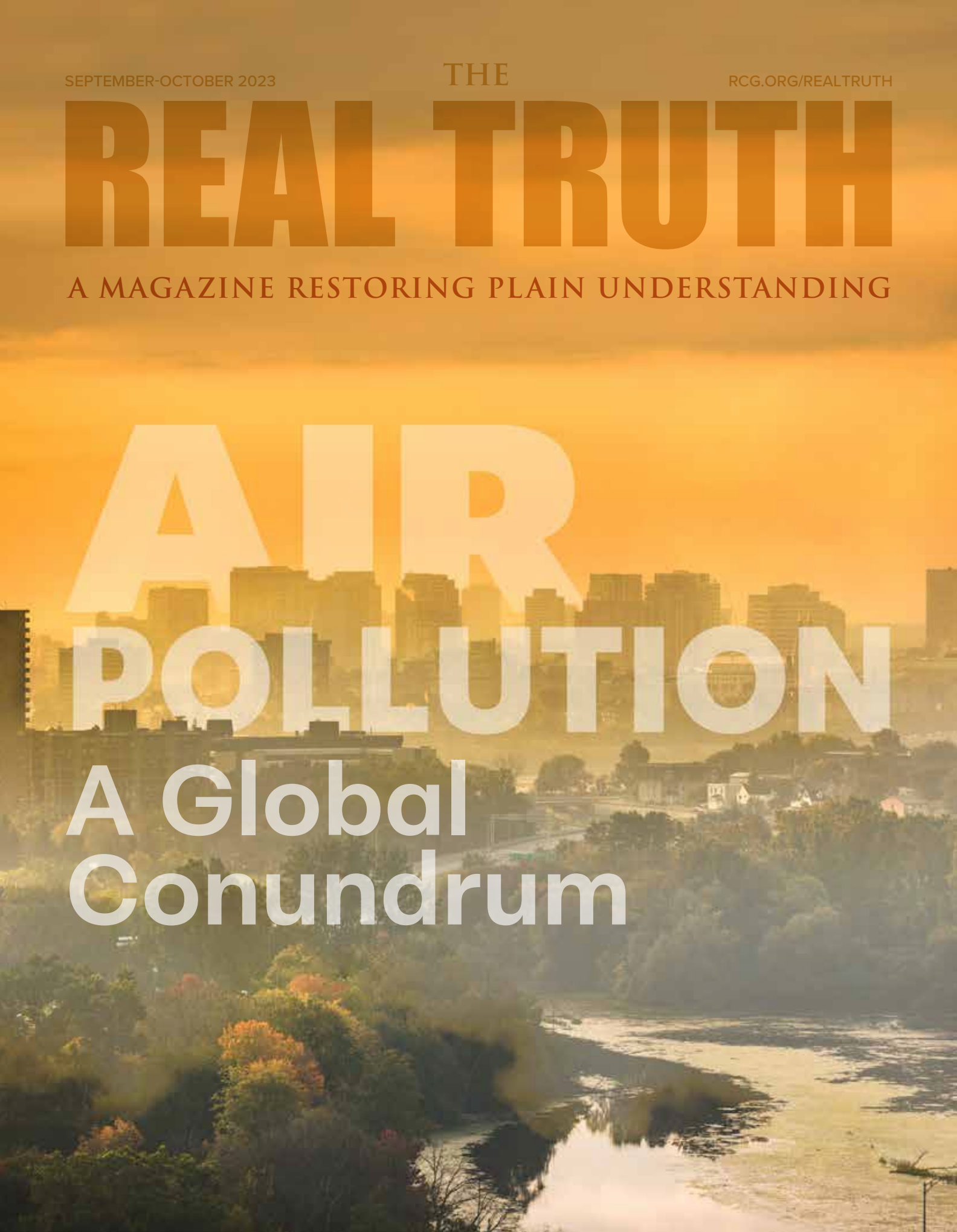
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# REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

# AIR POLLUTION

## A Global Conundrum





U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken (fourth from left) attends a meeting with China's President Xi Jinping (right) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing (June 19, 2023).

LEAH MILLIS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

**U.S./China: An Unbridled Rivalry**

Recent diplomatic communications have done little to resolve the geopolitical rift between the two nations.

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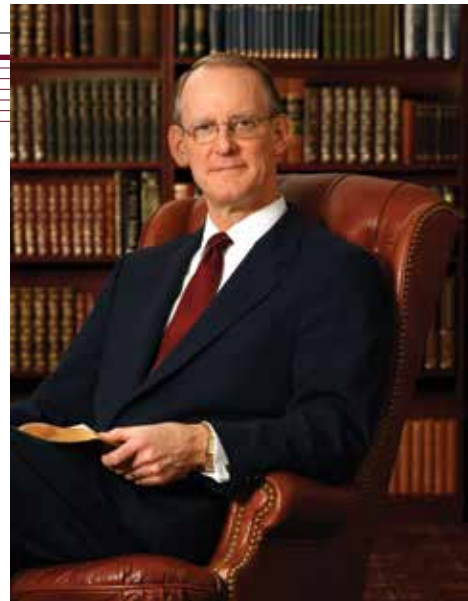
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## PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



# 12 Rules for Studying the Bible (Part 2)

**T**HE BIBLE is the inspired Word of God—His Instruction Book to mankind. It answers every important question in life, revealing how to live and the road to salvation. But why do so few understand it? Why are millions of professing Christians woefully ignorant about how to study the Bible?

God commands His servants, “Study to show yourself *approved* unto God” (II Tim. 2:15). Do you understand the value of Bible study? How do you establish a routine and stick to it? What parts of the Bible should you start with? Part 1 covered the first seven rules. Part 2 brings the last five rules of Bible study, and why you should study this living Book!

### **Rule #8: The Bible Interprets Itself**

We start with one example of men blatantly misinterpreting the Bible’s plain meaning—the title of the book of Revelation. Most Christians believe it is “The Revelation of Saint John the Divine.” But the *real* title is in its first verse: “The Revelation of *Jesus Christ*, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things

which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John” (1:1).

The correct title is “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” It originated from God the Father, who gave it to Christ, who signified it by His angel, who revealed it to John. Men credit John, ignoring God and Christ.

Two types of symbols are used in Revelation 1—verse 12, where John saw seven golden candlesticks, and verse 16, where he saw seven stars in the hand of the Son of Man.

How is the meaning understood here? By continuing to read. Verse 20 explains: “The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which you saw are the seven churches.” The Bible interpreted itself! No need to invent meaning.

II Peter 1:20 declares, “No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.” God does not permit men to bring their own interpretation to His Word. Instead, He provides the interpretation in other passages.

Another example of the Bible interpreting itself is in Revelation 17: “There came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come here; I will show unto you the judgment of the great whore that sits upon *many waters*” (vs. 1).

What are “many waters”? Is this some woman sailing the seven seas? Or, as many conclude, something you just cannot know?

There is no need for confusion. Fourteen verses later, “many waters” is explained: “He [the angel] said to me [John], The waters which you saw, where the whore sits, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations and tongues” (vs. 15). In this case, the term is not *immediately* explained, but is later in the chapter. Again, the Bible interpreted itself! No human opinion was needed.

#### **Rule #9: Always Start with Clear Scriptures**

This means never establishing doctrine with unclear scriptures. An example is Acts 10 regarding unclean meat. It is incredible how the world has perverted this chapter. Initially ambiguous to Peter, the meaning becomes unmistakably clear later. God was teaching the apostle Peter a principle.

After he was shown a vision of all kinds of animals, birds and insects, Peter heard a voice: “Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice spoke to him again the second time, What God has cleansed, that call not you common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven” (vs. 13-16).

Millions presume this verse permits eating unclean animals that are now supposedly “cleansed.” False teachers twist and creatively interpret vague scriptures. This gives them room to speculate and invent doctrine.

Peter did not understand the vision until verse 28: “You know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God has shown me

that I should not call any *man* common or unclean.”

By itself, this vision was insufficient to establish doctrine. Reading the full account makes the real meaning apparent—Peter was speaking of calling men unclean, not about unclean animals. God wanted salvation opening to the Gentiles to be known.

#### **Rule #10: Use More Than One Translation**

There are many advantages to using several Bible translations. While the King James is generally reliable, some verses are hard to understand because of its more than 400-year-old archaic language and various errors by the translators. Some modern translations, like the New King James, help with clarity. The original King James Version does offer a big advantage—words added by the translators are italicized. This helps readers discern between translated words and implied words. Because italicized words can be wrong, caution is needed.

The Moffatt version is also good because it comes directly from the original Greek and Hebrew manuscripts—not Latin transcriptions. Most modern translations are so watered down by liberal interpretations it is best to avoid them. The New International Version is among the worst. Much there is invented.

A prime example of error being introduced is I John 5:7-8. It contains text that is not found in any older Greek manuscripts. It was likely added by a monk scribe to inject counterfeit theology in about AD 800. The portion in italics was inserted to promote the trinity: “There are three that bear record *in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit and the water and the blood: and these three agree in one.*” These words were just made up even though Revelation 22:18-19 powerfully warns against adding to or subtracting from Scripture.

Any time you come to a vague passage, cross-referencing other translations usually clears up questions.

An example of a deletion by scribes and monks is Matthew 27:49. Part of the verse was cut to promote the false idea that Christ died of a broken heart. The King James Version says, “The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him.” Yet Moffatt records, “But the others said, ‘Stop, let us see if Elijah does come to save Him!’ (Seizing a lance, another pricked His side, and out came water and blood.)”

The words in parentheses were omitted from the King James Version but appear in all other translations that reference the older Greek manuscripts. This shows exactly how Jesus died—He was killed! He did not die of a broken heart. Consulting other translations is effective at getting to the truth of a Bible matter. Remaining questions can often be answered with Bible helps.

Bible dictionaries and *Strong’s Concordance* are among the best tools to find the original meaning of words. One must carefully distinguish words whose meanings have changed over time. An example is the word translated “conversation.” It means conduct. Bible dictionaries help show this.

#### **Rule #11: Do Not Use Bible Helps to Establish Doctrine**

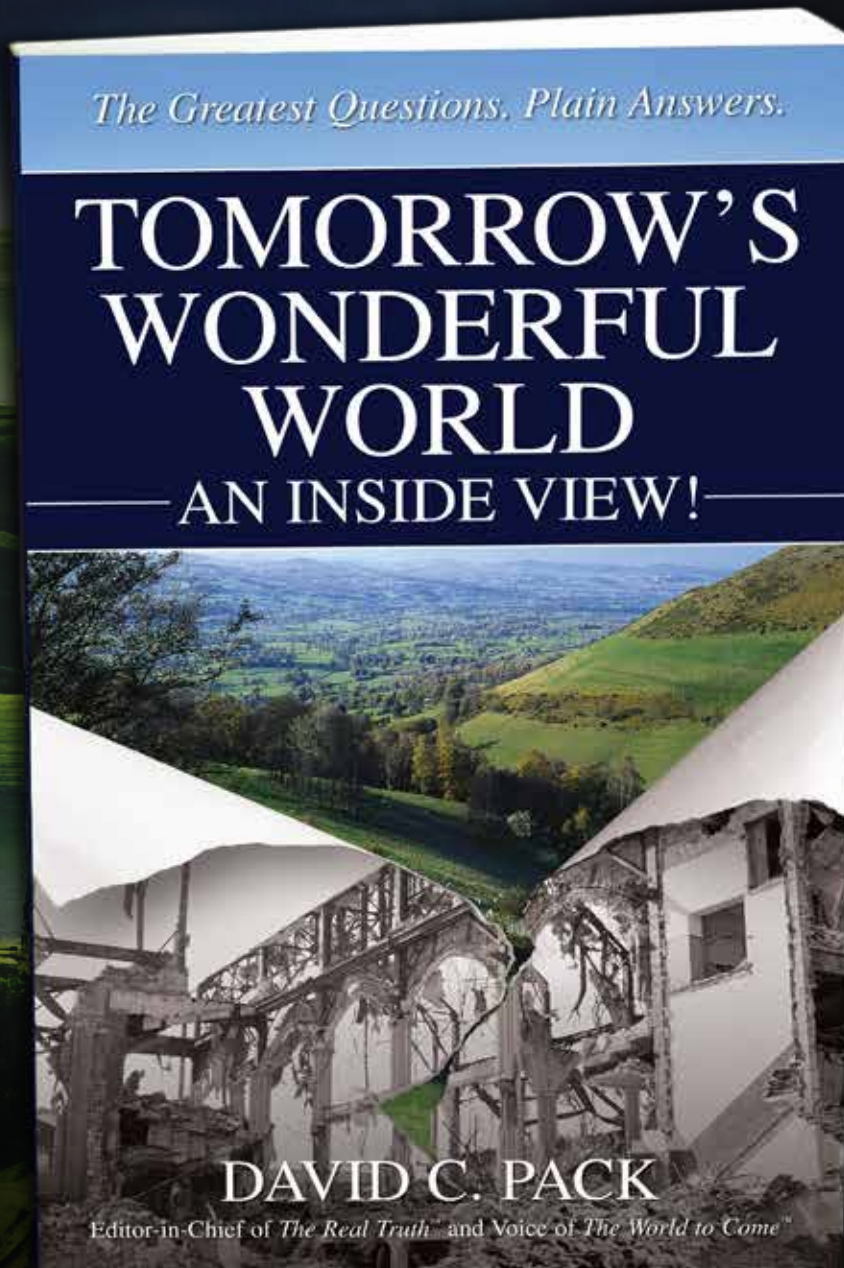
Well-known reference works include *e-Sword*, *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown’s Commentary* and *Halley’s Bible Handbook*. These and other helps and tools can sometimes increase understanding. Margin references and notes at the end of certain Bibles can also be helpful. But be cautious when using these because much of the information can be misleading. The scholars who wrote them lacked God’s Spirit, so error is inevitable.

These works can help supplement understanding of historical and grammatical details but should never be relied on for doctrine. They bring their own interpretation. Most scholars simply echo the doctrines of mainstream Christianity.

Never forget: Reference works are ideal for filling in technical details but

Please see **PERSONAL**, page 29

# Where Will We Be in 2050?



**A**lmost all forecasts for the future are bleak—overpopulation, crippling pollution, skyrocketing obesity rates, disappearing coastlines, constant extreme weather—yet this is *not* what the Bible says Earth will be like! Yes, there are trying times ahead, but man's ultimate future is BRIGHT. You can know what the coming decades will bring—and in crystal-clear, astonishing detail. The book *Tomorrow's Wonderful World – An Inside View!* offers a preview of what God's Word says is coming for the entire globe. Order your free copy at [rcg.org/tww](http://rcg.org/tww).

# MISSING: *True Leadership*

Amid deepening problems—domestic and  
global—nations require strong leaders.  
Where can they be found?

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER



**W**E NEED someone who can unite us. Someone we can trust. Someone charismatic. Someone with the resolve to tackle tough times. Someone who understands issues affecting ordinary people. An everyman and visionary—a great leader.

Such thoughts are on the minds of citizens whenever a crisis arises. But what makes a great leader?

These are also the thoughts of citizens when elections come around. At that time, the question becomes this: What makes a great politician?

For good or ill, most world leaders today are also politicians. In democracies, people tend to vote for individuals they personally like. They are most likely to vote for candidates who seem to be better versions of themselves, an article in the *Journal of Research in Personality* stated.

A 2020 study by researchers from the University of Vienna found:

- Citizens seek candidates with personalities like their own and who have similar core ideological views.
- When many personality traits and core values align, it produces a much stronger connection between voter and politician.
- Ideal politicians are seen as more stable, extraverted, conscientious, open and honest than the voters themselves.

The problem with all of this? Each individual is deciding for themselves what makes an effective leader. How can the average person know for sure that the people they are picking are up to the task?

In these powder-keg times, each election seems to grow in importance. There are 45 national votes scheduled in 2023, according to the National Democratic Institute. That is everywhere, from Chile to Belarus to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

As global problems become increasingly complex, the world needs true leadership as never before. Yet such leadership seems nowhere to be found.

### **Election-year Politics**

In the United States, we used to speak of *election-year* politics, but that has now transformed into *everyday* politics. The nation seems to be perpetually ramping up to a presidential vote in a process that all but ensures no ideal candidates run for head of state.

Look at attack ads filled with mud-slinging, propagating half-truths and putting forth *ad hominem* arguments. Add to these biased news outlets extolling their chosen candidate and digging up dirt on the opposition. If a person has no substantial skeletons in his closet, he or she will be denigrated through whatever means necessary. This can be as petty as the way the candidate combs their hair.

Super PACs add to this. This type of public action committee operates independently of a specific candidate and can take in unlimited funding from individuals, unions and corporations. In other words, these committees can decide the content of advertisement campaigns for a given person—without the involvement of the man or woman they are promoting.

One does not have to imagine the hatchet jobs and propaganda possibilities when a group can have *unlimited* funding—such ads are everywhere.

U.S. politics has essentially become a game of who you know, how much money you have, what the media thinks of you, how good you look on TV and what campaign moment can go viral on social media.

While some elected officials do sincerely want to help their nations succeed, they are forced to “play the game” to remain in office. The deck is stacked against anyone exemplifying true leadership rising to high office.

### **History’s “Greats”**

What citizens want from a leader has generally been the same—no matter the time period or circumstances. He should recognize the problems of the people and promptly address them, make bold decisions when necessary and bring lasting peace, health and abundance to everyone under him.

To accomplish this, a leader must have characteristics such as vision, sound judgment and integrity, and selflessly put his country’s needs before his own.

Historians hold up certain world leaders as examples of these qualities.

After the Revolutionary War, George Washington wanted to return to his estate in Virginia. Yet when he saw his country needed him to run for president, he did.

Winston Churchill—known as the British bulldog—gave inspirational speeches that helped his nation endure World War II, and he stood up to one of the most destructive European dictators in history. Even as his health began to fade, he exerted great effort to continue actively participating in government.

Golda Meir, Israel’s first prime minister, planned to move to the newly created country to live on a farm. Instead, she found herself working with surrounding national leaders to ensure the Jewish people could have a homeland after the Holocaust.

Some elected officials are seen as the personification of certain ideal qualities. For example, Abraham Lincoln is known as “Honest Abe.”

Non-political leaders can also exemplify aspects of good character. In 1914, explorer Ernest Shackleton tried to cross Antarctica. His 27-man crew became stranded in the wintry wilderness for 20 months, yet because of his perseverance and drive, not one of them died.

While some successful men and women receive near-unanimous praise from their countrymen, the track records of others are markedly different. For example, while some label Julius Caesar the consummate politician, he murdered his rivals! Genghis Khan amassed a formidable kingdom and was incredibly adaptable on the battlefield, yet he was monstrously cruel.

Even the best leaders had flaws, whether a fierce temper, a tendency toward depression or other weaknesses.

But one characteristic runs through the lives of all these prominent figures: Their time in power came to an end. Caesar's empire fell apart. Lincoln was assassinated. Churchill was voted out of Parliament. And so on.

While some of these men and women did successfully help their nations weather hard times, they could not ensure lasting peace and prosperity for their citizenry. At best, each could offer only a temporary period of abundance or respite from war.

Look at the entire history of those considered great leaders. The "great" ancient kingdoms—whether ruled by the pharaohs of Egypt, kings of Babylon or Caesars of Rome—ended in utter collapse. The prominent nations of the 20th century—which were helmed by many so-called great men—are now in decline, making way for rising new global superpowers. Attempts to use religion (Islam, Christianity, etc.) as a backbone of government have failed, and the same can be said for the efforts of atheists.

Given this track record, finding someone who perfectly upholds every trait of a true leader appears to be a pipe dream.

### Only Solution

The one thing all governments throughout the ages have in common is this: They all relied on *men and women* to rule them. This means every administration's rule was swayed by human nature.

Some leaders feel human nature can be changed, or govern with the assumption that each man, woman and child is inherently good. Others feel mankind *cannot* change and govern with an iron fist, imposing tyrannical rule. None of these approaches have been successful.

Unknown to most, the Bible clearly explains human nature. It reveals how and why political leaders continually fail to initiate solutions.

Consider just one verse: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9).

Take this verse at face value. It is the only answer to why even rulers ultimately fail. The human mind is deceitful *above all things*. Despite millennia of being unable to solve even one of its greatest problems—war, famine, disease, etc.—mankind continues to *deceive itself*, believing it will ultimately discover these solutions.

While the Bible reveals the *why* behind the failure of even "great" men, it also holds incredible good news of the only solution to mankind's woes.

Consider what is written in the Old Testament book of Isaiah: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the *government* shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (9:6).

The "Child" mentioned in this passage is Jesus Christ. Notice He has a *government*. The next verse states, "Of the increase of *His government* and *peace* there shall be no end...and upon His Kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever" (vs. 7).

Peace has not been increasing since Christ's earthly ministry. In fact, the opposite has happened—*war* has increased! Therefore, this Kingdom must yet be established in the future.

Part of how Jesus will rule this coming supergovernment is detailed in verse 6. Most imagine Him as a helpless baby in a manger or a weakling on a cross. Yet the meaning of the original Hebrew words used to describe His characteristics reveals the traits a truly great leader must have (all definitions taken from *Gesenius's Lexicon*).

■ **Wonderful:** "admirable" and "distinguished."

■ **Counselor:** "to advise, consult, give counsel, purpose, devise, plan." Under Christ's rulership, mankind will receive perfect advice and solutions to its problems.

■ **Mighty God:** This has a similar meaning to the modern term "strongman."

■ **Prince of Peace:** This phrase connotes "welfare, peace," "safety," "health, prosperity," "quiet, tranquility, contentment," "friendship," as well as peace in "human relationships," "with God," and "from war." This is true peace!

With God the Father, Jesus Christ will set up the Kingdom of God, which shall never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44).

During Christ's time on Earth, He constantly demonstrated real leadership. In the gospel accounts, Jesus was seen to be an exceptional speaker, sometimes teaching crowds of thousands (Matt. 14:13-21). He must have been incredibly effective because they refused to leave even when hungry. In addition, He showed integrity, good judgment and vision—and selflessly put others first. As the account in Matthew 4 demonstrates, He is immune to bribery and corruption.

In short, Jesus Christ is the perfect leader because He possesses perfect character! (Read Hebrews 5:8-9.)

When this supergovernment is established, people will again come from near and far to hear Him teach. At that time, "...many people shall go and say, Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths...And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. 2:3-4).

Only when all of man's failed attempts at governing himself are wiped away, and God takes the throne as the all-time ultimate leader, will peace and prosperity finally break out across the globe. These conditions will continue "from henceforth even forever" (9:7).

Man's long-running search for true leadership will finally be over.

To learn more, read our booklet *What Is the Kingdom of God?* at [rcg.org/witkog](http://rcg.org/witkog). □



# Americans Are WIDELY PESSIMISTIC About Democracy

Only about 1 in 10 U.S. adults give high ratings to the way democracy is working in the United States or how well it represents the interests of most Americans, according to a poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Majorities of adults say U.S. laws and policies do a poor job of representing what most Americans want on issues ranging from the economy and government spending to gun policy, immigration and abortion. The poll shows 53 percent believe Congress is doing a bad job of upholding democratic values, compared with just 16 percent who say it is doing a good job.

The findings illustrate widespread political alienation in a polarized country that limped out of the pandemic and into a recovery haunted by inflation and fears of a recession. In interviews, respondents worried less about the machinery of democracy—voting laws and the tabulation of ballots—and more about the outputs.

Overall, about half the country—49 percent—say democracy is not working well in the United States, compared with 10 percent who say it is working very or extremely well and 40 percent only somewhat well. About half also said each of the political parties is doing a bad job of upholding democracy. This includes 47 percent who say that about Democrats and even more—56 percent—about Republicans.

“I don’t think either of them is doing a good job just because of the state of the economy—inflation is killing us,” said Michael Brown, a 45-year-old worker’s compensation adjuster and father of two in Bristol, Connecticut. “Right now I’m making as much as I ever have, and I’m struggling as much as I ever have.”

A self-described moderate Republican, Mr. Brown has seen the United States falling short of its democratic promise ever since learning in high school that the Electoral College allows someone to become president while not winning the majority of national votes. But he is especially disappointed with Congress now, seeing its obsessions as not reflective of the people’s will.

Mr. Brown said he sees politicians fighting over things that have nothing to do with average voters.

The poll shows 53 percent of Americans say views of “people like you” are not represented well by the government, with 35 percent saying they are represented somewhat well and 12 percent very or extreme-

ly well. About 6 in 10 Republicans and independents feel like the government is not representing people like them well, compared with about 4 in 10 Democrats.

Karalyn Kiessling, a researcher at the University of Michigan who participated in the poll, sees troubling signs all around her. A Democrat, she recently moved to a conservative area outside the liberal campus hub of Ann Arbor. Her Republican family members no longer identify with the party and are limiting their political engagement.

Ms. Kiessling researches the intersection of public health and politics and sees many other ways to participate in a democracy in addition to voting—from being active in a political party to speaking at a local government meeting. But she fears increased partisan nastiness is scaring people away from these crucial outlets.

“I think people are less willing to get involved because it’s become more contentious,” Ms. Kiessling, 29, said.

That leads to alienation at the national level, she said—something she certainly feels when she sees what comes out of Washington. “When you have a base that’s a minority of what general Americans think, but they’re the loudest voices in the room, that’s who politicians listen to,” Ms. Kiessling said.

Polarization has transformed some states into single-party dominions, further alienating people like Mark Short, a Republican who lives in Dana Point, California.

“In California, I kind of feel that I throw my vote away every time, and this is just what you get,” said Mr. Short, 63, a retired businessman.

The poll shows that the vast majority of Americans—71 percent—think what most Americans want should be highly important when laws and policies are made, but only 48 percent think that is actually true in practice.

And views are even more negative when it comes to specific issues: About two-thirds of adults say policies on immigration, government spending, abortion policy and gun policy are not representative of most Americans’ views, and nearly as many say the same about the economy as well as gender identity and LGBTQ+ issues. More than half also say policies poorly reflect what Americans want on health care and the environment. □



# AIR POLLUTION

## A Global Conundrum

Summer's wildfires left many in North America gasping for air. Yet the problem of air pollution stretches to all corners of Earth.

**T**HICK, SMOKY air from Canadian wildfires has made for days and weeks of misery in New York City and across the U.S. Northeast this summer. The surreal, orange-tinted air in photos taken in New York at the time brought to mind apocalyptic scenes from movies.

In early July, New York and Washington had the second and third worst air quality respectively of any major cities around the globe, accord-

ing to IQAir.com, which tracks global air pollution.

While this effect was not as severe in other places, people in a number of states noticed degraded air quality and at times a visibly hazy appearance to the sky. This made spending time outdoors a challenge, especially for the very young, the elderly and those with asthma or other conditions. But the saga was little more than an inconvenience for most Americans. It was

not difficult to remain indoors, close to the comforting mechanical hum of the air conditioner, employing various additional gadgets for air purification to make it through.

Many may not realize that, for much of the world, breathing dangerously polluted air is an inescapable fact of life and death.

Almost the entire world breathes air that exceeds the World Health Organization's air quality limits at



least occasionally. The danger grows worse when that bad air is more persistent than the nightmarish shroud that hit the U.S.—usually in developing or newly industrialized nations. That is where most of the 4.2 million deaths blamed on outdoor air pollution occurred in 2019, the United Nations health agency reported.

“Air pollution has no boundaries, and it is high time everyone comes together to fight it,” said Bhavreen

Kandhari, the co-founder of Warrior Moms in India, a network of mothers pushing for clean air and climate action in a nation with some of the world’s consistently worst air. “What we are seeing in the U.S. should shake us all.”

“This is a severe air pollution episode in the U.S.,” said Jeremy Sarnat, a professor of environmental health at Emory University’s Rollins School of Public Health. “But it’s fairly typical for what millions and millions of people experience in other parts of the world.”

#### **Analyzing the Problem**

Last year, nine of the 10 cities with the highest annual average of fine particulate matter were in Asia—including six in India, according to IQAir.

Fine particulate matter, sometimes denoted as PM 2.5, refers to airborne particles or droplets of 2.5 microns or less. That is far smaller than human hair, and the particles can reach deep into the lungs to cause eye, nose, throat and lung irritation and even affect heart function.

Sajjad Haider, a 31-year-old shopkeeper in Lahore, Pakistan, rides his motorbike to work daily. He wears a mask and goggles to protect against frequent air pollution in the city of 11 million but suffers from eye infections, breathing problems and chest congestion that worsen as smog grows in winter.

On his doctor’s advice, he relies on hot water and steam to clear his chest but said he cannot follow another bit of the doctor’s advice: Do not go out on his motorbike if he wants to keep his health.

“I can’t afford a car and I can’t continue my business without a motorbike,” said Mr. Haider.

Last year, Lahore had the world’s highest average concentration of fine particulate matter at nearly 100 micrograms per cubic meter of air. By comparison, New York City’s concentration hit 303 at one point during the summer.

But New York’s air typically falls well within healthy levels. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s standard for exposure is no more than

35 micrograms per day, and no more than 12 micrograms a day for longer-term exposure. New York’s annual average was 10 or below the past two years.

New Delhi, a heaving city of more than 20 million where Ms. Kandhari lives, usually tops the list of the many Indian cities gasping for breath as haze turns the capital’s sky gray and obscures buildings and monuments. It is worse in autumn, when the burning of crop residues in neighboring states coincides with cooler temperatures that trap deadly smoke over the city, sometimes for weeks.

Vehicle emissions and fireworks set off during the Hindu Diwali festival add to the murk, and the results include coughs, headaches, flight delays and highway pileups. The government sometimes asks residents to work from home or carpool, some schools go online and families that can afford them turn to air purifiers.

Even as a hazardous haze disrupted life for millions across the U.S., New Delhi still ranked as the second-most polluted city in the world, according to daily data from most air quality monitoring organizations.

Ms. Kandhari, whose daughter had to give up outdoor sports over health scares related to the bad air, said the air pollution is constant but policymakers only seem to notice its most acute moments. That has to change, she said.

“We should not compromise when it comes to access to cleaner air,” Ms. Kandhari stated.

Many African countries in the Sahara Desert regularly grapple with bad air due to sandstorms. While the U.S. was reeling from wildfire smoke, AccuWeather gave nations ranging from Egypt to Senegal a rating of purple for dangerous air quality. It was the same rating given to New York and Washington, D.C.

#### **Attempted Solutions**

Senegal has suffered unsafe air for years. It is especially bad in Senegal’s east as desertification—the encroachment of the Sahara onto drylands—

carries particles into the region, said Dr. Aliou Ba, a senior Greenpeace Africa campaigner based in the capital of Dakar.

The Great Green Wall, a massive tree-planting effort aimed at slowing desertification, has been underway for years. But Dr. Ba said pollution has been worsening as the number of cars on the road, burning low-quality fuel, increases.

In the U.S., the 1970 passage of the Clean Air Act cleared up many smog-filled cities by setting limits on most sources of air pollution. The landmark regulation led to curbs on soot, smog, mercury and other toxic chemicals.

But many developing and newly industrialized nations have weak or little-enforced environmental laws. They suffer increased air pollution for other reasons, too, including a reliance on coal, lower vehicle emissions standards and the burning of solid fuels for cooking and heating.

In Jakarta, capital of Indonesia, the world's fourth-most populous country, it is often difficult to find clear blue sky, with power plants and vehicle emissions accounting for much of the pollution. It is also one of the world's largest coal-producing nations.

In one apartment building in the north of the city, between two busy ports where coal is shipped and stockpiled and where factories burn more, residents tried filtering coal dust with a net. It did not work.

"My family and I often feel itching and coughing," Cecep Supriyadi, a 48-year-old resident, said. "So, when there is a lot of dust entering the flat, yes, we must be isolated at home. Because when we are outside the house, it

feels like a sore throat, sore eyes, and itchy skin."

An Indonesian court in 2021 ruled that leaders had neglected citizens' rights to clean air and ordered them to improve it.

China has improved since Beijing was notorious for eye-watering pollution that wreathed office towers in haze, diverted flights and sent the old and young to hospitals to be put on respirators. When the air was at its worst, schools that could afford it installed inflatable covers over sports

fields with airlock-style revolving doors and home air filters became as ubiquitous as rice cookers.

Key to the improvement was closing or moving heavy industries out of Beijing and nearby areas. Older vehicles were taken off the road, many replaced with electric vehicles. China still is the world's largest producer and consumer of coal, but almost none is consumed at street level. The average PM 2.5 reading in Beijing in 2013 of 89.5—well above the WHO's standard of 10—fell to 58 in 2017 and now sits at around 30.



A man burns tree leaves to make charcoal at a park in Srinagar, India (Dec. 6, 2022).

TAUSEEF MUSTAFA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



Heavy smoke from Canadian wildfires turns the sky yellow as people walk across Times Square in New York City (June 7, 2023).

WANG FAN/CHINA NEWS SERVICE/VCG VIA GETTY IMAGES

China had just one city—Hotan—in the world’s top 10 for worst air.

Mexico City, ringed by mountains that trap bad air, was one of the most polluted cities in the world until the 1990s, when the government began limiting the number of cars on the streets. Pollution levels dropped, but the city’s 9 million people—22 million including suburbs—rarely see a day when air pollution levels are considered “acceptable.”

Each year, air pollution is responsible for nearly 9,000 deaths in Mexico City, according to the National Institute of Public Health. It is usually worse in the dry winter and early spring months, when farmers burn their fields to prepare for planting.

#### **Grim Outlook**

Mexican authorities have not released a full-year air quality report since 2020. But that year—not considered

particularly bad for pollution, because the pandemic reduced traffic—Mexico City saw unacceptable air quality on 262 days, or 72 percent of the year.

In the summer months, heavy rains clean the city’s air somewhat. That is what brought Veronica Tobar and her two children out in early June to a small playground in the Acueducto neighborhood near one of the city’s most congested avenues.

“We don’t come when we see that the pollution is very strong,” Ms. Tobar said. Those days “you feel it in your eyes, you cry, they’re itchy,” she said.

Her son was diagnosed with asthma last year and temperature changes make it worse.

“But we have to get out, we can’t be locked up,” Ms. Tobar said as her children jumped off a slide.

Whether caused by wildfires, industrial facilities, motor vehicles or other factors, air pollution is a massive problem for much of the world, and it is unclear how it could ever be addressed.

An article in *Time* magazine stated: “About 99.82% of the global land area is exposed to levels of particulate matter 2.5 (PM2.5)—tiny particles in the air that scientists have linked to lung cancer and heart disease—above the safety limit recommended by the World Health Organization, according to the peer-reviewed study published...in *Lancet Planetary Health*. And only 0.001% of the world’s population breathes in air that is considered acceptable, the paper says.

“Conducted by scientists in Australia and China, the study found that on the global level, more than 70% of days in 2019 had daily PM2.5 concentrations exceeding 15 micrograms of gaseous pollutant per cubic meter—the WHO recommended daily limit.”

Even with this data, it is difficult to fully grasp the depth and extent of the conundrum of air pollution. To learn the reason society has not been able to fix this and other problems, read our free booklet *Why Man Cannot Solve His Problems* at [rcg.org/uun](http://rcg.org/uun). □

God accepteth Job, and

JOB, XLII. *doubleth his former blessings.*

27 He esteemeth iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood.  
28 The arrow cannot make him flee: slingsstones are turned with him into stubble.  
29 Darts are counted as stubble: he laugheth at the shaking of a spear.  
30 Sharp stones are under him: he speedeth sharp pointed things upon the mire.  
31 He maketh the deep to boil like a pot: he maketh the sea like a pot ofointment.  
32 He maketh a path to shine after him; one would think the deep to be hoary.  
33 Upon earth there is not his like, who is made without fear.  
34 He beholdeth all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride.

CHAPTER XLII.

*Job answereth himself unto God. 1 God, preferring Job's name, saith he prefers about threescore, and accepteth him. 20 He magnifieth and doubleth Job's joy and state.*

THEN Job answered the Lord, and said,

2 I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.

3 Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.

4 Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.

5 I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.

6 Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

7 And it was so, that after the Lord had spoken these words unto Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the

thing that is right, as my servant Job hath.

8 Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job.

9 So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went, and did according as the Lord commanded them: the Lord also accepted Job.

10 And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.

11 Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bestowed him, and comforted him over all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an offering of gold.

12 So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses.

13 He had also seven sons and three daughters.

14 And he called the name of the first, Jemima; and the name of the second, Kezia; and the name of the third, Keven-happuch.

15 And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren.

16 After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations.

17 So Job died, being old and full of days.

# Why Should You Read THE OLD TESTAMENT?

Is the Old Testament still relevant? Learn the truth from an unexpected place—the New Testament!

**M**ANY CHRISTIANS claim to hold the Old Testament in high regard. Yet the first section of the Bible is often relegated to children's bedtime story material. Think of David and Goliath, Samson and Delilah, Jonah and the whale, Daniel in the lion's den and other familiar accounts. Some may turn to the Psalms for comfort during hard times yet ignore the vast majority of the rest of the Bible's first 39 books.

Many in and out of religious circles even question whether accounts in Genesis such as Adam and Eve in the

Garden of Eden (chapter 2), a worldwide Noachian Flood (chapters 6-7), and the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (chapter 19) really happened.

The Creation story opening the Old Testament is an example of a major element of the God-inspired record of history that is blurred even by Christendom today. Evolutionary concepts get combined with the account to create a hybrid version of mankind's origin. There is an inherent danger to this: If the Old Testament can be discredited out of the gate, the rest of the Bible is of far less value.

Some Bible translations even include only the New Testament, supposedly making it easier for readers to focus on the "more important" elements of God's Plan. Many churches teach that God's Law has been done away with and that believers need only focus on the *New Covenant* of "love, mercy and Christ's sacrifice."

When you think of the Old Testament, what comes to mind? Confusing stories of violence, adultery and genealogies? Long historical accounts of ancient judges and kings, harsh civil laws and mysterious prophecies?

An article titled “Why I Still Love the Old Testament” from *Relevant*, a non-denominational religious magazine, summarized the struggle to make sense of the Old Testament: “A[n]...old pastor friend of mine told me that 70 percent of evangelical sermons are drawn from the New Testament. Whether this is a proven fact, anecdotal or gut feeling, I never knew, but it doesn’t sound implausible. Particularly in recent years, where the Old Testament has come under such harsh scrutiny, it’s entirely understandable that pastors would lean toward the gentle hum of Paul’s letters and Christ’s teachings. The rest of us certainly do.”

Under the subhead “The mysterious God,” the author writes, “Of all the reasons to shy away from the Old Testament, this is the most compelling. Without mincing words, the God of the wandering Hebrews and the fiery prophets is confusing.”

Ironically, the writer concludes the article by *encouraging* readers to study the Old Testament—a section of the Bible he called confusing!

This individual is not alone in his view of the largest part of the Bible. Rather than ignoring it altogether, many selectively read certain parts of the Old Testament, generally avoiding the prophets and Levitical laws and statutes and sticking to the Psalms and Proverbs.

This all may leave you to wonder how God—the Being who said, “every word of God is pure” (Prov. 30:5) and the “words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, *purified seven times*” (Psa. 12:6)—really wants you to view the Old Testament.

### A Revealing Account

To learn the answer, we must examine how Jesus Christ regarded this collection of religious books. Christians are those who strive to follow His example: “For even hereunto were you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an *example*, that you should *follow His steps*” (I Pet. 2:21).

Thus, we should emulate whatever view Jesus had of the Old Testament.

Many Bible students assume Jesus taught radical new truths that came out of nowhere. They think He disregarded the Old Testament books and replaced their teachings with a new message of love and forgiveness. Is this true? Did Jesus minimize the Old Testament and, in some cases, do away with it?

Before examining the New Testament record, we must establish a fundamental aspect of Christ’s teachings. The New Testament had not yet been written during His earthly ministry. Since there were no New Testament books for Christ to cite, His teaching from Scripture could only have come from the *Old* Testament. His authority came from God’s recorded Word—which, again, at that time, could only have been the Old Testament.

We begin with an account in Luke 4. Jesus had fasted for 40 days and nights to draw close to His Father. He was then led “by the Spirit into the wilderness” (vs. 1), where He was tempted by Satan: “And the devil said unto Him, If You be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread” (vs. 3). Jesus’ response? “*It is written*, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God” (vs. 4).

Christ quoted Deuteronomy 8:3!

Satan next offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world: “And the devil, taking Him up into a high mountain, showed unto Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto Him, All this power will I give You, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If You therefore will worship me, all shall be Yours.

“And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get you behind Me, Satan: for *it is written*, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve” (Luke 4:5-8).

This time Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:13!

In the third instance Christ was tempted, He used the same technique: “And he [Satan] brought Him [Christ] to Jerusalem, and set Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto Him, If You be the Son of God, cast Yourself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you: and in their hands they shall bear you up, lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone.

“And Jesus answering said unto him, *It is said*, You shall not tempt the Lord your God” (Luke 4:9-12).

Christ’s last quote was from Deuteronomy 6:16!

Jesus quoted the Old Testament *three separate times* to fight Satan’s temptations! Think: Why would He have done this if He viewed the Old Testament as unimportant?

### Fulfilled Prophecy

Continuing in Luke 4 brings more evidence of Jesus citing the Old Testament: “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of Him through all the region round about. And He *taught in their synagogues*, being glorified of all. And He came to Nazareth...and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

“And there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

“And He closed the book, and He gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on Him. And He began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (vs. 14-21).

This was a dramatic moment in the synagogue! The audience must

have been stunned when Christ boldly stated that *He* had fulfilled Isaiah 61:1-2. Jesus' fulfillment of this prophecy underscores the crucial value of the Old Testament in God's Plan.

#### More Examples

When describing the famous "Golden Rule" in Matthew 7:12, Jesus referenced "the law and the prophets"—the Old Testament! Jesus used Old Testament accounts when He discussed the Sabbath with the Pharisees (Matt. 12:3-5). He mentioned Noah's time and the Flood (Matt. 24:37-39), along with references to the prophet Daniel (Matt. 24:15) and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 17:29). Clearly, Christ believed these accounts were much more than children's bedtime stories.

Notice Matthew 22:37-40: "Jesus said unto him, *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.* This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." The first italicized sentence comes from Deuteronomy 6:5, with the second found in Leviticus 19:18.

Over and over throughout His ministry, Jesus confirmed the relevance of the Old Testament. It was the primary source of what He preached. What we have so far examined is just the tip of the iceberg.

Next, ask yourself these fundamental questions: If Christ's mission during His First Coming was to do away with the Law and the dusty, ancient Old Testament, why did He quote it so often? Why would He send such mixed signals to His disciples and Christians who would come later?

Allow Jesus to provide the answer. In His Sermon on the Mount, He clearly stated, "Think not that I am come to destroy *the law, or the prophets*: I am not come to destroy, but to FULFILL" (Matt. 5:17).

In verse 18, He made this capstone statement: "For truly I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, *one*

*jot or one tittle* shall in no wise pass from *the law*, till all be fulfilled."

Take Christ's words at face value. He was saying that heaven and Earth would "pass" before even the tiniest element would be nullified from God's Law.

What confuses many about the importance of the Old Testament is that the New Testament says that Jesus Christ did away with the sacrifice of animals and many of its physical, priestly duties (Heb. 7:12; 9:11-12; Gal. 3:10-13).

**“Far from an old historical document irrelevant to modern Christians, the Old Testament should be read and studied by everyone striving to live God’s way of life.”**

Christ's monumental sacrifice, however, does not nullify the importance of appreciating the intricate details and nuances of these God-inspired sacrificial offerings and ceremonial practices. Nor is it an excuse for ignoring the Old Testament altogether. Reading and understanding the Old Testament books helps us better recognize the importance of everything that led to God providing His Son as the ultimate sacrifice for sins (John 3:16).

#### Christ's Coming Foretold!

A passage in Luke 24 reveals another example of Christ teaching from the

Old Testament: "And He said unto them, These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the *law of Moses*, and in the *prophets*, and in the *psalms*, concerning Me. Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand THE SCRIPTURES [meaning the Old Testament]" (vs. 44-45).

The next passage in Isaiah 53, regarding elements of Christ's crucifixion, would have been one of the prophecies about Himself Jesus would have covered: "For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: He has no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.

"Surely He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opens not His mouth" (vs. 2-7).

This prophecy is only one of about 60 major Old Testament prophecies about Jesus' First Coming. Another is found in Isaiah 42:21. It reveals more about the purpose of Christ's earthly ministry: "The LORD is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He [Christ] will MAGNIFY the law, and make it honorable."

To learn much more about these prophecies, read David C. Pack's thorough and eye-opening book *The True*



*Jesus Christ – Unknown to Christianity* at [rcg.org/ttjc](http://rcg.org/ttjc).

You should have no doubt by now that Christ's purpose involved "fulfilling" and "magnifying" God's Law and the Old Testament, *not* doing away with it. We will see His disciples copied Christ's example.

#### **Paul's View**

Having no New Testament to reference, the apostle Paul also used the Old Testament. Here are just a few examples of this.

Paul instructed Timothy to "preach *the word*" (II Tim. 4:1-2). The phrase "the word" is found throughout the New Testament and refers to the Old Testament books of the Bible. Note how the term is used when Paul commands all true Christians to study the Old Testament diligently: "Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing *the word of truth*" (2:15).

Another passage in II Timothy brings even more proof that Paul advocated studying the Old Testament. Do not miss how he tied it to Christians receiving salvation: "And that from a child you have known the *holy scriptures*, which are able to make you *wise unto salvation* through faith which is in Christ Jesus. *All scripture* is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (3:15-17).

Paul wrote that "all scripture"—referring to the Old Testament—is "profitable" for Christians. He understood the importance of the law and the prophets. This is why, speaking of ancient Israel, he wrote: "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples [types]: and they are written for *our admonition*..." (I Cor. 10:11).

The long list of God's faithful servants outlined in Hebrews 11 proves even further that Paul trusted the veracity of Old Testament accounts. Time and again, he used the Old

Testament as the backbone of his preaching. And not once did Paul speak against or contradict these older texts!

#### **A Vital Account in Acts 8**

Acts 8 records other first-century disciples preaching from the Old Testament. The deacon Philip explained a prophecy about Jesus from Isaiah 53 (recall from earlier) to an Ethiopian eunuch in Gaza: "And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority...had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Isaiah the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join yourself to this chariot. And Philip ran...to him, and heard him read the prophet Isaiah, and said, Understand you what you read? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

"The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened He not His mouth: in His humiliation His judgment was taken away: and who shall declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth.

"And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray you, of whom speaks the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other man?

"Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:27-35).

Notice that Philip began at Isaiah 53:7-8 but would have also covered many other Old Testament scriptures about God's Plan. The account concludes with the Ethiopian eunuch believing the gospel, along with Christ's sacrifice, and being baptized.

Next, look at how first-century Christians saw the Old Testament: "And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither into the synagogue of the Jews. These were

more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received *the word* with all readiness of mind, and *searched the scriptures daily*, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:10-11).

The Bereans studied the Old Testament every day to prove what they were hearing. You can and should do the same.

#### **Believe Christ's Words**

Recall Christ's words in Luke 4:4: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." Each individual word that makes up *God's Word* collectively was inspired by the Creator for all true Christians to study and apply.

Christians should not cast aside even ONE WORD of the Bible, much less the entire first section of it! Far from an old historical document irrelevant to modern Christians, the Old Testament should be read and studied by everyone striving to live God's way of life.

There is no reason to be confused about whether to study the Old Testament. We saw concrete PROOF *in the New Testament* that Jesus hardly preached about anything else.

Honest Bible students, including religious scholars educated in this world's seminaries and schools of theology, have no excuse for misunderstanding this subject. Christ was plain. He said what He meant and meant what He said.

When Jesus said He came to FULFILL the Law and the prophets, He did *not* mean that He came to do away with the Old Testament. As He repeatedly preached from it, He set an example for all true Christians—then and now—to take every element of God's Word seriously.

Do not permit anyone to blur Christ's statements. Believe His words! Do not allow those who are confused or misguided to minimize the importance of the Old Testament to you. Take full advantage of this tremendously important spiritual resource given to us by Almighty God: the Old Testament. □



# U.S. CH

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U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken (left) attends a press conference in Beijing, capping two days of high-level talks with President Xi Jinping (right) and other Chinese officials (June 19, 2023).

LEAH MILLIS, POOL, AFP/GETTY IMAGES

**A**MERICA AND China may be back to having high-level government talks, but their battle for global power and influence remains unchecked. Mutual suspicion still runs deep.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken set low goals for his visit to Beijing in late June, and he met them. Seemingly the most the two rivals can hope for these days is to stop things from getting much worse.

Mr. Blinken pointed to difficult days ahead, while China's foreign ministry warned the relationship was in a downward spiral.

"It was clear coming in that the relationship was at a point of instability, and both sides recognized the need to work to stabilize it," Mr. Blinken said of the reason for his trip. "And specifically, we believe that it's important to establish better lines of communication, open channels of communication, both to address misperceptions, miscalculations and to ensure that that competition doesn't veer into conflict."

Mr. Blinken's two-day visit to the Chinese capital helped restore top-level ties, but China rebuffed a U.S. request to resume military-to-military contacts. Neither government appears convinced of the other's honesty.

#### **"Negative Assurances"**

Speaking at a fundraiser for his 2024 reelection, President Joe Biden said Chinese President Xi Jinping had been "embarrassed" by the spy balloon Mr. Biden ordered shot down over U.S. airspace. This incident prompted Mr. Blinken to cancel an earlier trip to China.

"That's what's a great embarrassment for dictators, when they didn't know what happened. That wasn't supposed to be going where it was. It was blown off course up through Alaska and then down through the United States. And he didn't know about it," Mr. Biden said. "When it got shot down, he was very embarrassed. He denied it was even there."

While the two countries say they are not enemies intent on harming

each other, they are not pretending to be friends.

After the June meeting with Mr. Xi, Mr. Blinken acknowledged entrenched differences. "We have no illusions about the challenges of managing this relationship. There are many issues on which we profoundly, even vehemently, disagree," he said.

Mr. Xi sounded a similar note but suggested that the rivalry could be overcome.

"The competition among major countries is not in line with the trend of the times and cannot solve the problems of the United States itself and the challenges facing the world," he told Mr. Blinken. "China respects the interests of the United States and will not challenge or supplant the United States. Similarly, the United States should also respect China and not harm its legitimate rights and interests."

Danny Russel, the top U.S. diplomat for Asia during the Obama administration who is currently vice president of the Asia Society Policy Institute in New York, said these so-called "negative assurances" that China respects the U.S. and is not looking to displace it—and that the U.S. is not trying to contain or hinder China—are important to prevent a collapse in ties.

"Both sides clearly used the visit to help stabilize the relationship, which has been lurching toward dangerously intense confrontation," Mr. Russel said. And, although both the U.S. and China mentioned specific disagreements, especially about Taiwan, Mr. Russel said that "the public statements by the two sides were notably positive, particularly by recent standards."

Yet Washington and Beijing remain deeply suspicious of each other's actions and intentions.

#### **Slow Progress**

At a news conference concluding his trip to Beijing, the first by a U.S. secretary of state since 2018, Mr. Blinken said Washington had achieved its objectives for the trip, including raising concerns directly, trying to set up channels for dialogue and exploring areas of coop-

eration. But he said progress was not straightforward.

"The relationship was at a point of instability, and both sides recognized the need to work to stabilize it," Mr. Blinken said before leaving China. "But progress is hard. It takes time. And it's not the product of one visit, one trip, one conversation. My hope and expectation is: we will have better communications, better engagement going forward."

U.S. officials had been playing down the prospect of a major breakthrough but hoped Mr. Blinken's visit would pave the way for more bilateral meetings. This happened to be the case as Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen visited China in early July.

There is even talk of a summit between Mr. Xi and Mr. Biden later in the year.

The two leaders last met on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Indonesia in November, pledging more frequent communication, although ties have since deteriorated.

"The two sides have also made progress and reached the agreement on some specific issues. This is very good," Mr. Xi told Mr. Blinken during their meeting.

Mr. Blinken responded by saying the two countries have a responsibility to manage their relationship.

His meetings in Beijing, including talks with China's top diplomat Wang Yi and foreign minister Qin Gang, had been "candid and constructive," Mr. Blinken added.

It was not clear from Mr. Xi's remarks what progress he was referring to, although he told Mr. Blinken that China "hopes to see a sound and steady China-U.S. relationship" and believes that the countries "can overcome various difficulties," according to a Chinese readout of the talks.

When Mr. Xi urged Washington not to "hurt China's legitimate rights and interests," this could signal potential flashpoints such as Taiwan, the democratic island Beijing claims as its own.

Mr. Blinken said he made clear that the United States needs much greater



Left, Chinese social media app TikTok has caused concern in the U.S. over its possible ties to the Chinese government and risks regarding user data, privacy and national security. Right, a Chinese 100-yuan banknote and a \$1 U.S. bill are displayed on a table.

(LEFT) JAAP ARRIENS/NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES; (RIGHT) FERNANDO GUTIERREZ-JUAREZ/PICTURE ALLIANCE VIA GETTY IMAGES

cooperation from China on stemming the flow of fentanyl, and the sides agreed to set up a working group on the matter.

#### Flashpoint Taiwan

The lack of open communication channels between the two countries has prompted international jitters, and Beijing's reluctance to engage in regular military-to-military talks with Washington has alarmed China's neighbors.

Speaking to reporters after the talks, senior foreign ministry official Yang Tao said U.S. sanctions were blocking progress on improving military-to-military communications.

Chinese defense minister Li Shangfu has been sanctioned since 2018 over the purchase of combat aircraft and equipment from Russia's main arms exporter, Rosoboronexport.

Asked what specific progress the two sides had made, Mr. Yang said they had agreed to prevent a downward spiral in relations. The official added that Chinese foreign minister Qin had

accepted Mr. Blinken's request to visit the United States.

Mr. Xi's comments, and the diplomatic choreography of the visit, appeared to signal a will to make progress, analysts said.

"China's messaging has been pretty positive," said Wu Xinbo, a professor and director at the Center for American Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai.

"China showed that it still hopes to work with the U.S. to stabilize and improve relations. I think that while China is not optimistic about Sino-U.S. relations, it has not given up hope either."

Beijing's tone on Taiwan was particularly pointed throughout Mr. Blinken's visit.

"China has no room for compromise or concessions," said Mr. Wang, according to the Chinese readout.

The United States has long stuck to a policy of "strategic ambiguity" over whether it would respond militarily to an attack on Taiwan, which Beijing has refused to rule out.

#### Uneasy Allies

United States Treasury Undersecretary Jay Shambaugh said that Washington would not hesitate to take targeted actions against China to secure the national security interests of the U.S. and its allies and to protect human rights. Such steely language is often heard from the leaders of both nations.

But, and there is almost always a but, Mr. Shambaugh also said the two countries must cooperate on global challenges.

While Beijing and Washington politically posture to demonstrate how committed they are to their positions, they also know they need one another to survive.

In prepared testimony before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Mr. Shambaugh said economic decoupling would be "disastrous" for both the U.S. and China and nearly impossible to achieve.

"When necessary, we will use a suite of tools to achieve our national security goals. It is our core mission to protect the American people

from national security risks while also clearly communicating our position and intent to China to reduce the risk of misunderstanding,” said Mr. Shambaugh, who heads Treasury’s international affairs.

The Biden administration is weighing new restrictions on outbound private investment into China and other countries of concern. The Senate voted overwhelmingly in July to back legislation that would require U.S. companies to notify federal agencies of proposed investments in Chinese technologies such as semiconductors and artificial intelligence.

“To be clear: neither targeted national security actions nor attempts to build diversified supply chains represent decoupling,” Mr. Shambaugh said in the prepared remarks. “We seek a fair and healthy economic relationship that benefits both countries and supports American workers and businesses.”

Ms. Yellen’s visit to Beijing aimed to reopen communications and make the same points to China’s economic leaders, saying the trip put the relationship on “surer footing,” though the world’s two largest economies remained at odds over many issues.

Mr. Shambaugh said these differences included U.S. objections to Chinese “non-market” economic practices and excessive government support that put U.S. companies at a disadvantage. He added that the U.S. has also objected to China’s “economic coercion” to punish countries for diplomatic actions by cutting off imports or exports.

He also said that the Treasury had been troubled by China’s recent punitive actions against U.S. firms and export controls on critical minerals for semiconductors.

“While we are still assessing their impact, these actions reinforce the importance of our administration’s efforts to build resilient and diversified supply chains,” Mr. Shambaugh stated.

### **Can They Cooperate?**

Mr. Shambaugh, who took over as the Treasury’s top economic diplomat in

January, said the U.S. and China must also be able to cooperate on pressing global challenges, such as climate change and growing debt distress in developing countries. The Treasury’s engagement with China has yielded some dividends, including progress on debt restructurings for Zambia, Ghana and Sri Lanka, but more needs to be done, he added.

He also said protecting U.S. economic interests requires “strong and reliable international leadership.”

This includes stronger engagement with allies and partners, particularly low- and middle-income countries, he said, adding that this would also entail making sure that the International Monetary Fund and World Bank are “adequately” funded.

Ensuring that there is a sufficient amount of “high-standards” lending available to low-income countries through these and other international financial institutions will help keep them from becoming dependent on loans from China, he added.

Despite any small signs of change, widespread cooperation between the two nations appears far off.

### **Global Agendas**

From the U.S. perspective, China’s rise has challenged its global position. Washington is racing to repair and shore up its relationships in regions where China has made inroads, particularly Africa and the Indo-Pacific, where America has opened or plans to open at least five new embassies this year.

Behind the scenes, the U.S. believes China has ulterior and perhaps nefarious motives.

An internal U.S. State Department document prepared earlier this year that focuses on China’s role at the United Nations and other international organizations said Beijing “believes that the People’s Republic of China must dominate and shape international institutions, standards and values in order to advance both its domestic and global agenda.”

“It views the established rules and norms in the U.N. system and other

international organizations as privileging Western countries, supporting liberal democratic principles, and posing a threat to its monopoly on domestic political power and assertive global ambitions,” said the document, which is marked “SBU,” meaning “sensitive but unclassified” and was obtained by *The Associated Press*.

The document accuses China of having “undertaken a systematic campaign to subvert existing principles and standards, promote authoritarian ideology and policy [and] reprioritize economic development over human rights and democratic governance.”

In addition, it says China is working “to undermine or reshape international law and standards, institutions, and values to legitimize its own development and governance models, including related to human rights [and] using its economic and political influence to compromise institutions’ transparency, effectiveness, independence and alignment with foundational norms and values.”

From the Chinese perspective, the U.S. is clinging to fading glory as the world’s lone superpower and seeking to sabotage China’s development and growing international stature by sowing mistrust about Beijing’s intentions.

China’s top diplomat Wang Yi demanded that the U.S. stop “hyping the ‘China threat theory’” and “urged the United States not to project on China the template that a strong country must seek hegemony.”

He also said China should not be judged “in the vein of traditional Western powers,” concluding that a change of perspective “is the key on whether the U.S. policy towards China can truly return to objectivity and rationality.”

Discussions continue about a new meeting between Mr. Xi and Mr. Biden. At this point, however, it is not clear if China and the U.S. have found any issue of substance they can negotiate about. More talks could help with short-term easing of tensions but are unlikely to change the fact of a global rivalry. □

# What Does the Bible Say About Marijuana?

Examining God's Word makes clear whether He approves of consuming this plant.

BY NESTOR A. TORO

**T**HE TOPIC of marijuana can be perplexing to Bible readers. This is because it is not mentioned directly in Scripture. No straightforward verse says, “Thou shalt not use cannabis.”

What makes the discussion more complicated is that societal norms are softening around the use of the drug—not to mention recreational use has been legalized in areas of the United States.

“Pot is so popular that, in 2015, its sales surpassed Girl Scout cookies, Oreos, and Dasani bottled water. By 2026, analysts predict it will match, and eventually outpace, America’s \$50 billion wedding industry,” a 2017 *Time Magazine* article stated.

Even now, marijuana is more popular than cigarettes. A 2022 Gallup poll

showed that 16 percent of Americans reported smoking marijuana, while only 11 percent had smoked a tobacco cigarette.

As of mid-2023, only six states still maintain a complete ban on the drug. Others have not legalized it but have adopted more lenient stances such as permitting its use for medical purposes.

Where should Christians land on this topic?

Think about other substances that have generated religious questions. One is alcohol. Jesus Christ’s first public miracle in John 2 involved turning water into wine at a wedding—a clear reference. This and other plain verses show Christians can enjoy alcohol responsibly while avoiding drunkenness.

Meat is another example. In Leviticus 11, laws regarding clean and unclean animals clarify that Bible believers can freely enjoy eating meat, with the understanding that there are specific animals designated as “unclean” by God that are to be avoided in their diet.

Without specific references to marijuana, one could reasonably ask, “Are Christians free to use it?”

Some conclude God does not care, it is just a personal choice, or a gray area. Others go as far as to claim that marijuana appears in the Bible, possibly under a different, ancient name.

Yet Romans 12:2 instructs us to “prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” That verse leaves no room for assumptions!

There must be a way to “prove” whether the God who “fearfully and wonderfully” designed our bodies (Psa. 139:14) allows us to use marijuana.

How can we learn God’s will on something the Bible seems silent about?

To uncover the answer, let’s analyze verses that reveal God’s teachings about plants and substances such as cannabis and their effects. We will address some of the most obvious—though often misinterpreted—scriptures, making the answer undeniably clear.

### “Every Green Herb for Meat”

Genesis 1:29 says this: “And God said, Behold, I have given you *every herb bearing seed*, which is upon the face of all the earth, and *every tree*, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.”

Does this passage imply that all plants on Earth are suitable for human consumption?

If we read the next verse carelessly, it could seem that way: “And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creeps upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given *every green herb* for meat: and it was so” (vs. 30).

This verse appears to indicate that marijuana, being both green and an herb, is appropriate for human consumption. However, this logic presents a significant problem: The deadly poisonous nightshade, rosary pea and oleander would also have to be considered safe for human consumption. But consuming these plants can result in death! Even the smoke produced by burning oleander can be lethal.

It is evident that although God created these toxic plants, He did *not* intend for them to be consumed, smoked or injected. He provided *certain* plants for our consumption, while others are not meant to be used that way. This is similar to how God differentiated between clean and unclean animals.

While the passage above does mention “every green herb,” it does not describe what humans should consume. Instead, it pertains to providing

food for animals, birds, reptiles and insects. It does not in any way give us a license to use marijuana.

Genesis 2:9 describes trees that are “good for food.” Realize that to say that certain trees are “good for food” demands that there are others that are *not* “good for food.”

### “All Things Are Lawful”

The New Testament verse of I Corinthians 6:12 also has the potential to lead to erroneous conclusions if we are not careful. The apostle Paul wrote, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”

From this, some conclude that as long as a person does not become controlled by—addicted to—marijuana, its use could be considered “lawful” in the eyes of God.

Yet if we assume that this apostle literally meant that “all things” are acceptable so long as we do not become addicted to or dependent on them, then that would mean occasional acts of murder, adultery, stealing, false testimony, coveting, idolatry, blasphemy, dishonoring parents, pride, envy, jealousy, gossip, slander, hatred, anger, rage, drunkenness, rebellion against authority, selfishness, hypocrisy and so on, should all be regarded as “lawful” too as long as we do not become “under the power of any,” right?

Also, since our discussion pertains to a substance, then *all* substances should be considered “lawful” for consumption if people do not let them control their bodies. This would include cyanide, arsenic, mercury, ricin, and strychnine.

Of course, both arguments above are ludicrous. Absurd as these assertions sound, this is where such reasoning leads. Alleging that I Corinthians 6:12 permits marijuana use is just as ridiculous.

The Contemporary English Version offers a more explicit rendition of this verse: “Some of you say, ‘We can do anything we want to.’ But

I tell you that not everything is good for us. So I refuse to let anything have power over me.”

Interestingly, Paul repeated a similar statement almost word-for-word in a later chapter, providing a clearer qualifier: “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not” (I Cor. 10:23).

When properly understood, Paul’s statements warn us to make wise choices in our actions, rather than endorsing the use of substances like marijuana.

### “Be Sober”

I Thessalonians 5:6 states, “Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.” So far, we have focused on verses that could be confusing if not read carefully. The command here, however, is plain: Be sober.

Getting high on cannabis is incompatible with being sober. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Recent marijuana use (defined as within 24 hours) in youth and adults has an immediate impact on thinking, attention, memory, coordination, movement, and time perception.”

These impairments can make it difficult to think clearly, maintain focus and make rational choices, leading to poor decision-making and an increased likelihood of engaging in behavior we might avoid when sober. This increases the risk of accidents, particularly when performing tasks that require precision or quick reflexes.

The CDC also reports, “After alcohol, marijuana is the substance most often associated with impaired driving.”

At this point, you might wonder why moderate alcohol consumption is considered acceptable in the Bible while moderate marijuana use is not. That is a valid question.

The simple answer is that alcohol—not marijuana—is God’s chosen substance for moderate merriment. Had God intended marijuana for “recreational use,” we would find refer-



ences to it in His Word. However, Ecclesiastes 10:19 mentions “wine” as the merrymaking substance, not cannabis. The Hebrew word *yayin* is translated as wine 136 times in the King James Version.

In the New Testament, Jesus Himself told the disciples, “I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine [wine], until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s Kingdom” (Matt. 26:29). The Greek word for vine is *ampelos*, which is always translated vine. The marijuana plant is not a vine. The grape is.

Nevertheless, God does not show favoritism toward any form of intoxication. Inebriation, whether from alcohol or marijuana, will hinder a person from entering God’s Kingdom.

It is worth noting that long-term abuse of alcohol and marijuana tends to have distinct effects. Alcohol abuse is associated with physical problems like liver disease, pancreatitis and heart damage. On the other hand, while smoking marijuana can cause lung damage, its abuse primarily impacts the mind, possibly leading to conditions like depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

#### “Sound Mind”

II Timothy 1:7 states, “God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a *sound mind*.” The Greek term for “sound mind” means self-control.

Marijuana is well-known to alter the mind, making it more challenging to control one’s cravings or maintain sound judgment. For example, one common effect is an increase in hunger, often called “the munchies.”

The potential implications, however, go beyond merely making you insatiably hungry. Multiple studies have linked marijuana use to an increased risk of suicidal thoughts and actions, particularly among teenagers and recreational users who experience depression.

NBC News recently quoted a psychiatrist based in New York City who has observed a notable outcome: “Of

all the people I’ve diagnosed with a psychotic disorder...I can’t think of a single one who wasn’t also positive for cannabis.”

Although some proponents argue that cannabis has no significant impact on the mind, it is worth considering why people consume it if not for its mind-altering (psychoactive) effects. It would not be popular if it were no different from the weeds growing on someone’s lawn!

#### “No Rule Over His Own Spirit”

This verse presents a powerful analogy that perfectly applies to marijuana use: “He that has no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls” (Prov. 25:28).

## “Inebriation, whether from alcohol or marijuana, will hinder a person from entering God’s Kingdom.”

Marijuana is often referred to as a “gateway drug” due to the increased risk it is said to bring for further substance abuse. While researchers debate to what degree this is true, one thing is certain: It is a *spiritual* gateway drug.

Some religions build ceremonies around marijuana, using hallucinogens to connect with the spirit world. Even when not used for religious purposes, people who do drugs often say that getting high opens their minds. This is dangerous!

Experienced ministers of God who have counseled individuals struggling with demonic issues understand that these fallen angels often target those who lack firm control over their minds. Recreational drugs like marijuana—in all forms, not just when smoked—only exacerbate this problem, as they contribute to the loosening and opening

of a person’s mind instead of helping them keep proper control.

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

The lesson here is straightforward. When a person has a demon expelled, it is crucial to actively fortify the walls of their mind—the opposite of loosening them—to prevent ending up in a worse condition. Any substance that degrades a person’s ability to control their mind must therefore be avoided.

#### “Gird Up the Loins of Your Mind”

The next verse builds on the previous one: “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 1:13).

Through our examination, it has already become obvious that consuming marijuana opposes the act of girding one’s mind. This brings together three crucial elements. We cannot maintain hope for the grace to be granted us at Christ’s Return unless we maintain sobriety. Achieving sobriety is only possible when the loins of our minds are girded. The use of recreational drugs such as marijuana hampers this process.

A Drug Fact Sheet published by the U.S. Department of Justice states: “When marijuana is smoked, the active ingredient THC passes from the lungs and into the bloodstream, which carries the chemical to the organs throughout the body, including the brain. In the brain, THC connects to specific sites called cannabinoid receptors on nerve cells and influences the activity of those cells.”

As we delve deeper into these scriptures, the picture becomes

unmistakable: There is no provision for marijuana use if we are trying to live God's Way.

### "Pharmakeia" and "Pharmakos"

A list of "the works of the flesh" is outlined in Galatians 5:19-21. It includes sins such as "adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, *witchcraft*, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies..."

The Greek term used for witchcraft in this passage is *pharmakeia*, which *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* defines as "the use or the administering of drugs."

Similarly, in Revelation 22:15, those pictured outside the Kingdom of God include "*sorcerers* [*pharmakos*]..."

Note that while these terms are related to the word pharmacy, they do not condemn pharmacists or pharmacies, nor do they imply that all pharmaceuticals are inherently evil. Instead, they pertain to specific drug use that leads a person to act against God's will.

Revelation 9:21 introduces another list. It mentions people who did not repent of their "murders, nor of their sorceries [*pharmakeia*], nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts."

Drug use is depicted in this verse as something individuals should have *repented* from. Repentance means to change—to turn away from sin. Sin is the transgression of God's Law—what He says to do or not do. Read I John 3:4.

Biblically, the consumption of marijuana should be understood as a sinful act that can ultimately disqualify Christians from entering the Kingdom—this is serious.

### "Idols in Their Heart"

God told the prophet Ezekiel, "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face..." (Ezek. 14:3).

This prophecy reveals that idols encompass more than the typical graven images found in worldly

churches. There are also "idols of the heart [mind]."

These idols are particularly dangerous because they are not easily recognized for what they are. The final verse of the book of I John warns, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (5:21). *Anything* we prioritize above God's will has the potential to become an idol. This includes marijuana.

**"Wherefore gird  
up the loins of your  
mind, be sober, and  
hope to the end for  
the grace that is to be  
brought unto you at  
the revelation of  
Jesus Christ."**

— I Peter 1:13

Understand this substance as God does—it is an idol of the heart. If a person who wants to obey God desires to use marijuana, they should ask: "*Why* would I consume such a substance?" If the response is, "Well, it just helps me relax," why not rely on God's Spirit to achieve the same result? If we ever feel the need to rely on a substance for relaxation rather than using God's Spirit as our "Comforter" (John 14:16), we undoubtedly have an idol. Regarding idolatry, God is a jealous God (Ex. 20:5). His instruction is always to "flee from idolatry" (I Cor. 10:14).

No wonder the terms witchcraft and sorcery are biblically interchangeable with drug use!

When applying Ezekiel 14:3 to marijuana and similar drugs, individuals may literally be putting "the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face." God is explicit.

### God's Final Say

A Christian's ultimate goal is to cultivate God's holy and righteous character, aspiring to one day join His Family. This process involves allowing *Jesus Christ to dwell within us*, enabling Him to live through us by the power of His Spirit (Gal. 2:20).

With this in mind, it is worth reflecting: Would Jesus Christ, if He were physically present on Earth today as He was in the first century, engage in marijuana use? More pointedly, ask yourself: "Would He consume marijuana through *me*?"

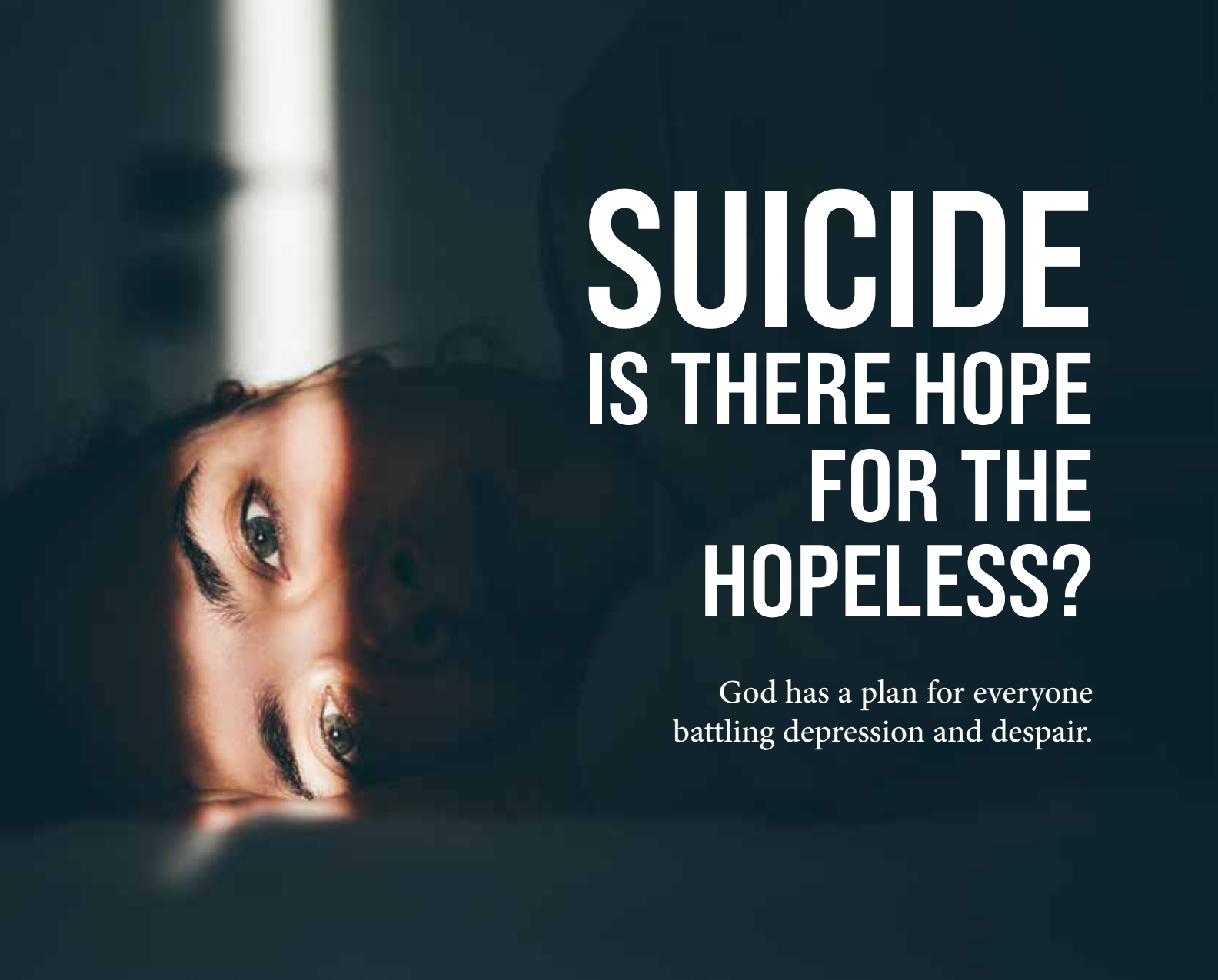
Seriously take a moment to ponder! The answer should be obvious.

No longer should this topic be perplexing to Bible readers. The reason God's Word does not speak directly about marijuana is because it does not have to! The Bible provides timeless principles that apply to all such substances.

Marijuana is just one among many other drugs that could someday be legalized by the governments of men. This should be unsurprising, as human leaders tend to legalize what they cannot fully control. This is understandable in a world disconnected from a God who outlines right from wrong (Isa. 59:1-2).

God's stance on marijuana is clear. The same proof can be applied to any other mind-altering substance that may become popular in society. You can take this article, replace its references to marijuana and statistics about it with any substance in question. Then, *voila*, you will have God's answer. The title could stay almost intact: "What Does the Bible Say About [enter latest legalized mind-altering drug]?" The scriptures would remain applicable because, as King Solomon wisely said, "There is no new thing under the sun" (Ecc. 1:9).

Suggesting the Bible condones the use of marijuana requires disregarding or outright rejecting God's plain words. While the legal status of marijuana may now vary according to manmade laws, it is undeniably regarded as *illegal* based on God's Word. □



# SUICIDE IS THERE HOPE FOR THE HOPELESS?

God has a plan for everyone  
battling depression and despair.

**W**HEN UNITED States government researchers recently tallied the suicide rate for adults in their early 20s, they were met with grim results: The number was the highest in more than 50 years.

A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report examined the suicide rate among 10- to 24-year-olds from 2001 to 2021. The increase is alarming and “reflects a mental health crisis among young people and a need for a number of policy changes,” said Dr. Steven Woolf, a Virginia Commonwealth University researcher who studies U.S. death trends.

Experts cited several possible reasons for the increases, including higher

rates of depression, limited availability of mental health services and the number of guns in U.S. homes.

“Picture a teenager sitting in their bedroom feeling desperate and making a decision, impulsively, to take their own life,” Dr. Woolf said. If they have access to a gun, “it’s game over.”

Suicide was the second leading cause of death for 10- to 24-year-olds after a category of accidental deaths that includes motor vehicle crashes, falls, drownings and overdoses.

“There is a misperception that if you talk to young people about depression, they’ll get depressed. A don’t-ask, don’t-tell policy for depression is not effective,” Dr. Madhukar Trivedi, a

psychiatrist at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, said. “The earlier we can identify the ones who need help, the better chance we’ll have at saving lives.”

But suicide is not only a pervasive problem for young people—it is ravaging those of all ages nationwide.

CNN reported: “The suicide rate in the United States returned to a near-record high in 2021, reversing two years of decline, according to a [CDC] report...Final data for the year shows that suicide was the 11th leading cause of death nationwide, with more than 14 deaths for every 100,000 people. The death rate has increased 32% over the past two decades, and the 4% jump

# 13 SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF MENTAL DISTRESS

Depending on the circumstances and other factors, these symptoms can affect emotions, thoughts and behaviors.

- 1 Confused thinking, reduced concentration
- 2 Excessive fears, extreme guilt
- 3 Extreme mood swings
- 4 Withdrawal from friends and activities
- 5 Difficulty relating to others
- 6 Tiredness, low energy, sleep problems
- 7 Detachment from reality, hallucinations
- 8 Inability to cope with stress
- 9 Excessive anger, hostility, violence
- 10 Alcohol or drug problems
- 11 Major changes in eating habits
- 12 Sex drive changes
- 13 Suicidal thinking

If you or anyone you know is considering suicide, contact emergency services. In the U.S., call 988 for the suicide and crisis hotline or 911 for immediate help.

between 2020 and 2021 was the sharpest annual increase in that timeframe.”

Trying to reverse the trend of suicidal has been a challenge. New programs have had mixed results. A July 2023 *New York Times* article stated: “It has been one year since the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline underwent a transformation, recasting its 10-digit number as 988, yet many people are unaware of the change or what the hotline provides.

“The new number is supposed to make it easier for callers to connect with help when they’re having suicidal thoughts, experiencing emotional distress or having a substance-use-related crisis, but only 17 percent of Americans say they are very or somewhat familiar with it, according to a survey...by the National Alliance on Mental Illness. In addition, the survey found, people are still confused about what to expect when they call.”

Suicide’s scourge goes far beyond the borders of America. According to non-profit Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, “Nearly 800,000 people die by suicide in the world each year, which is roughly one death every 40 seconds.”

What drives people to commit suicide? And is there any hope of a solution for those who have become hopeless?

## Why?

People of all ages end their lives for various reasons. Some do it after failures in school or work, or in the face of financial problems such as debt and bankruptcy. Others see worsening problems in society around them and conclude there is no hope for a better future. Divorce, stress, fear, lack of control, and guilt also play a role. After some unsuccessfully try to fill the void in their lives with money, material possessions, sex, alcohol, drugs and every other form of escape, they decide there is no other option but the final escape—death.

Others commit suicide because of a lack of social connections. They have no family members or romantic partner to show them the basic love and concern all human beings need. One man’s suicide note stated that if just one person smiled at him as he walked to the bridge

he would not jump. No one did. Think of how many people you might have crossed paths with on the street or sat next to on the subway who were experiencing similar thoughts.

A *Business Insider* article offered a glimpse into the minds of those who attempt suicide, showing it is most often an impulsive act: “Anywhere from one-third to 80% of all suicide attempts are impulsive acts, according to The New England Journal of Medicine. 24% of those who made near-lethal suicide attempts decided to kill themselves less than five minutes before the attempt, and 70% made the decision within an hour of the attempt.

“Suicidal urges are sometimes caused by immediate stressors, such as a breakup or job loss, that go away with the passage of time. 90% of people who survive suicide attempts, including the most lethal types like shooting oneself in the head, don’t end up killing themselves later. That statistic reflects the temporary nature and fleeting sway of many suicidal crises...”

The article continued with an example of two men who survived jumping from the Golden Gate Bridge: “Many rare survivors of Golden Gate Bridge suicide attempts recall regretting their impulsive decisions instantly—even as they were falling. A couple survivors who jumped from the Golden Gate Bridge told their stories to The New Yorker back in 2003, like then-18-year-old Kevin Hines who jumped in 2000 after pacing on the bridge for a half hour while passersby ignored him.

“He finally jumped based on the thought that ‘nobody cares.”

Mr. Hines told the *New Yorker*: “My first thought was, ‘What...did I just do? I don’t want to die.”

The *Business Insider* article continued: “Then-28-year-old Ken Baldwin, like Hines, chose to hurdle over the bridge’s railing rather than stand on it first because he didn’t want to lose his courage to jump. Although he was severely depressed on that day in 1985, he changed his mind the moment after his leap. ‘I instantly realized that everything in my life that I’d thought was

unfixable was totally fixable—except for having just jumped,’ he said.”

This story strikes at the core of the problem—loneliness and hopelessness. People are frustrated with their circumstances and feel their lives will never improve.

### Human Tendency

Discouragement to the point of suicide is part of human nature. All human beings who have ever lived experience feelings of despair and discouragement when events in their lives do not turn out the way they want.

The pain of depression can seem to blot out all hope. Even some of history’s greatest leaders battled this. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill once described it as the “black dog.” U.S. President Abraham Lincoln, regarded as one of the strongest leaders of all time, battled depression.

You may also find it surprising—and encouraging to a certain degree—that some of God’s greatest servants battled bouts of suicidal thoughts. The Bible recorded their struggles for us to learn from.

The patriarch Job, after enduring horrific trials brought on by Satan, sought death. Notice: “So that my soul chooses strangling, and death rather than my life. I loathe it; I would not live always: let me alone; for my days are vanity” (Job 7:15-16).

After undergoing severe trials, the prophet Jeremiah wished he had never been born: “Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto you; making him very glad. And let that man be as the cities which the LORD overthrew, and repented not: and let him hear the cry in the morning, and the shouting at noontide; because he slew me not from the womb; or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb to be always great with me. Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labor and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?” (Jer. 20:14-18).

The prophet Elijah, fleeing for his life from a vengeful Queen Jezebel, was temporarily suicidal: “He...came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers” (I Kgs. 19:4).

After hearing his despair, the account records that God comforted Elijah during his trial. The same could be said of Job.

### The “god of this world”

An overarching theme in suicide notes is the desire to escape the terrible conditions on Earth. Those who commit suicide feel that life has become unbearable. Many see or experience violent crime, rape, broken families and misery and ask, “Why has God abandoned mankind?”

The knowledge of why this world is in such terrible condition is revealed in a book many own but few study. Mankind’s future could be known if politicians, educators and other leaders were willing to investigate the only source of divinely revealed knowledge—the Bible.

This Book reveals mankind’s history and future. Humanity has been cut off from its Creator ever since its fateful decision in the Garden of Eden to take to itself the knowledge of how to live.

Since then, man has existed in a state of isolation from God’s blessings and protection. II Corinthians 4 reveals the true ruler of this world: “The *god of this world* has blinded the minds of them which believe not...” (vs. 4). The context makes plain the being referred to here is Satan the devil.

Revelation 12:9 also shows “the devil...deceives the whole world.”

In light of just these two verses, is it any wonder that life is filled with pain and misery for so many millions? (To learn more about the state of this world, read our revealing booklet *A World in Captivity* at [rcg.org/awic](http://rcg.org/awic).)

Satan seeks to destroy mankind. John 10:10 states, “The thief comes not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.” Jesus also explained that “the

devil...was a murderer from the beginning” (8:44).

Whether Satan can successfully inspire someone to kill another person or to kill themselves, the end result is the same: death. Suicide is self-murder. Just because the life a person takes is their own does not make it right.

The Sixth Commandment clearly states, “You shall not kill” (Ex. 20:13). Although some argue they have the “right” to take their own life, this is false. Only God, as the Creator of life, has the right to take it.

There is also the controversial subject of assisted suicide. Although outside the scope of this article, assisted suicide obviously falls under the category of suicide and would be considered murder in God’s eyes.

Return to John 10:10. It explains God’s will for every human being, in stark contrast to the devil’s ambitions: “...I [Christ] am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

God desires that everyone live the abundant life. But how can this happen?

No matter how many suicide prevention call centers mankind opens, humanity has proven to be unable to address the root cause of suicide—the unsatisfying and painful conditions that exist worldwide. Just as it has not yet been able to solve so many of its other problems—disease, war, poverty, crime, etc.—humanity has also failed to prevent the current suicide pandemic.

### **Wonderful Environment Coming**

God deeply cares about every single human being. He made every person in His image (Gen. 9:6). If He knows every “hair on your head” (Matt. 10:29-31), and is acutely aware of every sparrow that dies, how much more does God care about every person who has ever lived? The often-quoted John 3:16 makes clear that “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son...”

Because of this outgoing concern for His Creation, God plans to intervene in world affairs. Bible prophecies

recorded long ago reveal that a new world is coming. Jesus Christ promised, “I will come again” (John 14:3). When this happens, He will usher in the Kingdom of God—a world-ruling supergovernment that will bring the peace and prosperity so many desperately want.

Isaiah 55 describes this wonderful, prosperous time: “Every one that thirsts, come you to the waters, and he that has no money; come you, buy, and eat; yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price...Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David” (vs. 1, 3).

Utopia is not a distant dream of the world’s educators, philosophers, city planners, economists or political leaders. It will soon be reality. This incredible period of happiness and fulfillment is described throughout the pages of your Bible, and its arrival means the end of all forms of murder and self-harm, including suicide.

Here is what God’s Word reveals about the peaceful environment that will come: “Thus says the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain...there shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof” (Zech. 8:3-5).

This prophecy illustrates that people, young and old, will live full, rich lives, not cut short by a frantic impulsive decision amid feelings of hopelessness.

The abundant life Christ preached will be offered to all human beings, including those who previously lived and died. The millions who committed suicide will be resurrected to new life in a wonderful environment. Each one will receive an opportunity to know God’s truth and qualify for eternal life.

Our booklet *Is There Life After Death?* reveals more about God’s Plan for those who have ended their lives. Read it at [rcg.org/itlad](http://rcg.org/itlad).

### **No More Desire for Death**

God’s Kingdom will dramatically improve global conditions that will make suicide a thing of the past. No longer will people see death as an escape. They will want to live! The Creator of mankind actually put in all of us the desire to live forever. This is why those who survived suicide attempts from the Golden Gate Bridge say they immediately regretted the decision.

Suicide is preventable when the right conditions are in place. Think. What if there were no broken families? What if the bonds of friendship were strong and unbreakable? What if everyone always had someone to talk to about their problems or frustrations? What if all human beings had a purposeful role in society, with a steady and productive job? What if marriages were all rock-solid? Consider how much stronger would be the social fabric.

How many people would want to commit suicide under such conditions?

In God’s Kingdom, everyone will be taught to exercise self-control over their mind and their emotions. People will be given the strength to overcome feelings of despair. They will believe real positive change is possible and have access to the power to do so. Once this world’s terrible environment is replaced, men, women and children will no longer want to escape their circumstances. And those who previously committed suicide who have been given a second chance to live will be shown how to overcome the problems that once overcame them.

Despite the gloomy reports we examined that rising suicide rates are the new normal, there *is* hope. The coming new world will provide an environment where people will not desire death. For millions struggling today, there is a light at the end of the dark tunnel.

To learn more about what God’s Word reveals about man’s future, read our free book *Tomorrow’s Wonderful World – An Inside View!* at [rcg.org/tww](http://rcg.org/tww). □

not for interpreting meaning or establishing doctrine.

## Rule #12: Make Notes in Your Bible

Many believe God's Word is to be treated with so much reverence that it should never be marked in. But only the *message* it contains should be revered. The physical paper, ink and leather are not holy. What is holy is the truth that was recorded—the words of spiritual instruction.

Making notes in margins amplifies and reinforces God's message. It is perfectly acceptable to Him. How we act on His words is God's primary focus—not how reverently we treat paper and ink.

Wide-margin Bibles are ideal for inserting notes. These can come from sermons, Church Bible studies, technical details from reference works and other sources. It is satisfying to see a difficult verse and recall the correct explanation by looking at your notes.

Marking your Bible helps internalize precious truths. It may also be helpful to set aside special time to review your personal notes. You may find some are incomplete and need expanding. Besides providing an excellent review, this exercise should help you add effective notes to your Bible margins.

By diligently applying these 12 basic rules, personal study will be far more interesting. When you find it more difficult to break off than to get started, you can safely say your Bible study has become exciting and rewarding—as God wants it to be!

## Study Goals

Dedicated Bible students must establish goals in undertaking this vital spiritual activity. There are three categories: short, medium and long-term goals. This makes goals more obtainable. Of course, one could work on more than one goal at a time by alternating or

splitting study sessions. Let's see examples of each.

**Short-term Goals**—It is best to begin with these. For instance, read a short book of the Bible, such as James or Ruth. You might choose a particular book because it puts a personal trial or interest into better perspective.

Study a specific chapter of the Bible. Study a small Bible subject. An example could be: "Why kneel during prayer?" Or study the background of a book. This includes the time and circumstances in which it was written. Also, study a difficult scripture.

Make your study as exciting as possible—but keep it simple. When selecting a topic, give it forethought. Index cards are useful for listing ideas when studying.

Do not study haphazardly. Many people study wherever the Bible falls open. This is not the way to approach God's Word. God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). He expects an organized approach to His Word.

**Medium-term Goals**—These are projects that could last a few weeks or even months. Read a larger book of the Bible, such as Isaiah, Psalms or Proverbs. Study a specific doctrine in detail. Examples could be the biblical principle of tithing or the seventh-day Sabbath. If faced with illness, you could study healing.

Memorize a series of key verses. The Pharisees were required to memorize the Torah—the first five books of the law. Others have memorized the entire Bible—yet do not understand it. The purpose should never be to recite verses to impress others, but to internalize them for application in your life.

**Long-term Goals**—A common long-term goal is to read the whole Bible. If you have never done this, challenge yourself to do it. The benefits are enormous! A full reading may take as little as six months. If you reference other material, it could take up to two years. Reading the entire Bible gives a foundational understanding that can be built upon. Read all the Major Prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and maybe Daniel. Read

a selected "harmony of the gospels"—another excellent project. Make notations in your Bible. Perhaps study alongside our books and booklets, using your Bible to reference each scripture. Like the Bereans, prove if we know what we're talking about. Our vast library of literature is available on [rcg.org](http://rcg.org).

You will find that the more you study the Bible, the more you will want to study it!

## Bible Helps

Many useful Bible helps are available. Some are very expensive, but you may be able to access them at your library or on the internet. The following is not an exhaustive list, but it gives an idea of the wide variety of resources one could reference. Remember, authors always inject their own wrong ideas and misconceptions. While what follows can be useful tools, it does *not* represent an "officially sanctioned" list of perfect or near-perfect study aids.

*Unger's Bible Dictionary*: A thorough, practical one-volume dictionary.

*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*: While expensive, this five-volume set is probably the best Bible dictionary you could buy. You might find it in larger municipal and university libraries.

*Manners and Customs of the Bible*: This book discusses Bible figures, as well as manners and customs of a culture at a certain time in history.

*The Bible From 26 Translations*: This large work shows every verse in the Bible from at least four or five translations.

*The Amplified Bible*: This is based on the American Standard Version with modern English updates.

*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown's One-volume Commentary on the Whole Bible*: Although the full commentary covers six volumes, this one-volume commentary is perhaps the most highly recommended of all *single-volume* editions.

*Adam Clarke's Commentary*: Another six-volume set. This one is also well-

known and widely used, and has a one-volume version available.

*The Companion Bible*: This Bible is filled with historical, scriptural and linguistic details.

*Halley's Bible Handbook*: This is compact, but filled with valuable archaeological notes and historical background.

*The Angus/Green Bible Handbook*: This is a little more thorough than Halley's.

*Nave's Topical Bible* is ideal for tracing references when no common terms are used.

*The Works of Flavius Josephus* are considered the most authoritative reference supplementing the Bible.

*The Bible as History*: An authoritative history relating to the Bible.

*Baker's Bible Atlas*: This helpful tool shows geographical locations and gives detailed explanations of the culture of ancient times. It has many helpful photos and illustrations.

*Oxford Bible Atlas* is similar to Baker's and of equal quality, but with differing emphasis.

All these sources provide a kaleidoscope of valuable information. They make study not just interesting, but exciting. These titles are but a small sampling of what is available.

### Why Study?

Now, why study the Bible? What are the benefits? Recall II Timothy 2:15 admonishes, "Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Rightly dividing the Word of God—truly knowing the Bible inside and out—takes a lifetime. God's Spirit opens one's mind to spiritual understanding (read Psalm 119:18 and John 16:13). True biblical understanding comes from diligent effort and the Holy Spirit working in a person. Only by fully appreciating God's Word will we act on it. Jesus said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Psalm 119 affirms this: "Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (vs. 105).

Taking in the Word of God for spiritual nourishment is even more important than physical food. The Bible gives wisdom to understand the weighty aspects of salvation. All scripture is designed by God to mold and teach His people so they become perfect and equipped for "all good works" (II Tim. 3:17).

Bible study is a vital process that does more than *teach* you. A washing or cleansing effect is involved. Notice: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the *washing of water by the word*" (Eph. 5:25-26).

This is echoed elsewhere: "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:22).

Bible study washes the individual. This is our part of the cleansing process—God expects we do our part. This happens as one internalizes God's Word, which leads to the desire to repent and grow in godly character. God's Spirit is the key in this cleansing process, but diligent study is what we do within the process.

Now consider more benefits of daily study: "The word of God is quick [or living], and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

The Bible is a living Book that "discerns thoughts" in all situations. It should be looked to for daily guidance. Studied correctly, the Bible will make you "wise unto salvation" (II Tim. 3:15). It imparts wisdom to grow and survive in the proving ground of qualifying for salvation. It helps one recognize and shun error and be vigilant in resisting the devil's seductive arguments.

Bible study actually builds faith. This happens through studying the many examples of God's faithful servants—read carefully Romans 10:17.

Study can also be for comfort—to gain serenity, stability and peace of mind. Notice: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and *comfort* of the scriptures might have *hope*" (Rom. 15:4).

Consider setting aside time early in the morning for your study. This is ideal if circumstances permit. Some people study at night—but this does not work for most. For study to be beneficial, one must be alert. It must be when you can concentrate without distraction. Set aside solid time—not just a few minutes here and there. Actively plan and make arrangements for better conditions to study the Word of the living God. This is vital!

My booklet *Bible Authority...Can It Be Proven?* provides more crucial foundation for why we must study the Bible. You can read it at [rcg.org/bacibp](http://rcg.org/bacibp). You need to prove that the Bible comes with God's authority.

Prayer is talking to God. Bible study is God talking to you. Failing to study your Bible will lead to doubt, discouragement, emptiness, negativity, anxiety, unhappiness, ignorance, confusion, deception, uncertainty about the future—and feeling that *God is not with you*. Bible study is a major priority—a matter of life and death.

Read and internalize this powerful passage: "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). The greatest goal is abiding in Christ and having His word abide in us. Answered prayer is one of the many benefits of attaining this greatest spiritual goal. Bible study brings its own immediate rewards in this life—but also leads to the ultimate goal of eternal life. Be diligent every day in using the 12 rules of Bible study. Eternal life is worth it!

If you are being called by God, the Holy Spirit will lead you into understanding more truth through Bible study. It will impart spiritual knowledge to you and help you apply God's Word in your daily life. Read my free article "Are You Being Called?" at [rcg.org/aybc](http://rcg.org/aybc) to learn more. □



## Vanishing Whales Decline Worse than Previously Thought, Feds Say



A North Atlantic right whale feeds on the surface of Cape Cod Bay off the coast of Plymouth, Mass. (March 28, 2018).

AP/MICHAEL DWYER

**P**ortland, Maine (AP) – A review of the status of a vanishing species of whale found that the animal’s population is in worse shape than previously thought, federal ocean regulators said.

The number of the North Atlantic right whales is less than 350, and the population has been declining for several years. The federal government declared the whale’s decline an “unusual mortality event,” which

means an unexpected and significant die-off, in 2017.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration released new data that 114 of the whales have been documented as dead, seriously injured or sub-lethally injured or sick since the start of the mortality event. That is an increase of 16 whales since the previous estimate released earlier this year.

The agency recently completed a review of the whales using pho-

tographs from researchers and surveys to create the new estimate, said Andrea Gomez, a spokesperson for NOAA.

“Additional cases will continue to be reviewed, and animals will be added if appropriate, as more information is obtained,” Ms. Gomez said.

Thirty-six of the 114 whales included in the estimate had died, NOAA documents state. The agency cautioned that only about a third of right whale deaths are documented, so the total number of dead or injured animals could be much higher.

Right whales are found off the Atlantic coast of the U.S. They are vulnerable to collisions with large ships and entanglement in commercial fishing gear. The federal government has worked to craft stricter rules to protect the whales from both threats.

Commercial fishing and shipping interests have both vowed to fight stricter protections. A federal appeals court sided with fishermen last month after they filed a complaint that proposed new restrictions could put them out of business.

The new data illustrates how dire the situation is for the whales, said Sarah Sharp, an animal rescue veterinarian with International Fund for Animal Welfare. The number of injured animals is especially significant because injured whales are less likely to reproduce, Dr. Sharp said.

“If animals are putting energy into healing from a wound, they are not necessarily going to have those energy stores for other things,” Dr. Sharp said. “I think this just paints a much more accurate picture of the threats these whales are facing.”

The whales give birth off Florida and Georgia and feed off New England and Canada. They have been protected under the Endangered Species Act for decades, and federal authorities ruled in December that they must retain that protection. □

## Explainer: The Health Risks of Extreme Heat

London (Reuters) – The world is baking under extreme heat—with Asia, Europe and the United States all dealing with scorching temperatures.

### What Are the Health Risks?

Heat affects health in several ways.

Heat exhaustion, which can include dizziness, headaches, shaking and thirst, can affect anyone, and is not usually serious, providing the person cools down within 30 minutes.

The more serious version is heatstroke, when the body's core temperature goes above 105 degrees Fahrenheit (40.6 degrees Celsius). It is a medical emergency and can lead to long-term organ damage and death. Symptoms include rapid breathing, confusion or seizures, and nausea.

### Who Is at Risk?

Some people are more vulnerable, including young babies and older people, as well as people who must stay active or are more exposed, such as homeless people.

Existing conditions, including respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, as well as diabetes, can also heighten risk—and be exacerbated by heat.

Globally, just under half a million deaths a year are estimated to be due to excess heat, according to a 2021 study in *The Lancet*, although data is lacking from many low-income countries. As many as 61,000 people may have died in Europe during heatwaves last summer, with a repetition feared this season.

“Heat waves are a silent and invisible killer. We don't often see the impact that they have had on human health until the mortality statistics are published many months later,” said



An extreme heat danger sign is posted in Death Valley, California.

GETTY IMAGES

Professor Liz Stephens, a researcher in climate risk and resilience at Britain's University of Reading.

### Less Obvious Risks

Air pollution also poses a health risk, with serious potential effects from wildfire smoke including inflammation and tissue damage.

Heat also can lead to low birthweight and premature birth for pregnant women and babies, a number of studies have shown.

There are less obvious risks, too. Dr. Vikki Thompson, Climate Scientist at Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute, said extreme heat often contributes to poorer mental health, as well as a rise in car crashes and drownings.

“Heatwaves are one of the most deadly natural hazards,” she said.

### Timing Matters

Experts say more deaths occur earlier in the summer when people's bodies have not had a chance to acclimatize.

Location matters too. People are at higher risk in places where they are not used to such heat, including parts of Europe.

However, there are limits, and people all around the world are at risk in extremely hot weather, particularly people who must continue to work in physical jobs, for example.

“It is more important than ever that we put in place measures to limit the harm on our health,” said Dr. Modi Mwatsama, head of capacity at Wellcome, a London-based global health charity. She said this ranged from providing shade and painting buildings white to investing in early-warning systems for climate-sensitive infectious diseases such as cholera.

### What You Can Do

Public health agencies from Italy to the United States have issued advice on keeping cool, including avoiding exertion where possible and staying hydrated. Workers should think about having more breaks and changing their clothing too, scientists said.

It is also important to check on the vulnerable, including older and isolated people, they said.

Heatstroke is a medical emergency and requires immediate professional attention. □

## With 735 Million People Hungry, UN Says World Is ‘Off Track’ to Meet its 2030 Goal



About 735 million people worldwide faced chronic hunger in 2022, a figure much higher than before the COVID-19 pandemic and which threatens progress towards a global goal to end hunger by 2030, the United Nations said.

A multi-year upward trend in hunger rates leveled off last year as many countries recovered economically from the pandemic, but the war in Ukraine and its pressure on food and energy prices offset some of those gains, the UN said in its annual State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report.

The result is that an estimated 122 million more people were hungry in 2022 than in 2019 and the world is “far

off track” to meet the UN’s Sustainable Development Goal of ending hunger by 2030, said the report. Instead, the report projects that 600 million people will be undernourished in 2030.

“We are seeing that hunger is stabilizing at a high level, which is bad news,” said Maximo Torero Cullen, chief economist of the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization, in an interview with *Reuters*.

The main drivers of global hunger in recent years were conflict-driven disruption to livelihoods, climate extremes that threatened agricultural production, and economic hardship exacerbated by the pandemic, the report said.

Residents pick up free groceries at a food pantry run by La Colaborativa in Chelsea, Massachusetts (March 8, 2023).

REUTERS/BRIAN SNYDER

Some parts of the world have seen hunger decline, including South America and most regions in Asia. But in the Caribbean, Western Asia, and Africa, hunger is rising.

To change the trend, nations must pair humanitarian aid with strengthening local food supply chains, said Kevin Mugenya, the food systems director for Mercy Corps, an international aid group, in an interview with *Reuters*.

“Countries need to have localized solutions,” he said. □



## **6,000 Years Ago— or 460 Million?**

**G**eologists record that trilobites appeared during the Cambrian era—more than 500 million years ago—and existed for hundreds of millions of years more before they went extinct.

What does the Bible say about such prehistoric creatures? Does their existence disprove—or does it actually prove—the validity of Scripture? Read the article “Is the Earth 6,000 Years Old?” for the answer!

**[rcg.org/realtruth](http://rcg.org/realtruth)**