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THE

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REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING



A Missing Ingredient for
WORLD PEACE



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 We are but a microscopic speck in a remote part of the cosmos. Learn just how small, and why our existence is so unique.
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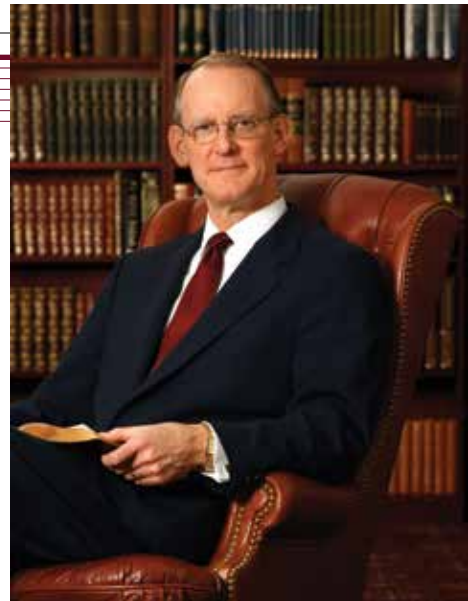
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



10 Bible Verses Christendom Ignores

EVERY SUNDAY, hundreds of millions who profess to be Christian assume they are being correctly taught—and that they understand and believe—the *truth* of the Bible. In reality, almost no one knows even the most basic teachings of God’s Word—or of Jesus Christ. Almost all worship Jesus according to what is commonly believed, without the slightest proof from their bibles. Thus, the *true* doctrines of the Bible are *unknown to Christianity*—and so is the meaning of nearly everything Jesus taught!

This personal covers 10 verses that virtually the whole of Christendom either misunderstands, ignores or rejects outright. Prepare to learn the truth—and to be *shocked* at what you thought you knew!

Over 100 million Bibles are sold or given away each year, with nearly 9 in 10 American households having one. Such statistics show it is the world’s bestseller—yet, ironically, it is also the world’s least understood book.

All the verses you are about to see are ignored and rejected by professing Christianity. Ministers and experienced Bible students know of these pas-

sages, but choose to explain them away or never speak of them.

Most religious leaders have chosen to disregard what the Bible teaches. It is as though many fear the truth, or to tell the truth! They fear being fired for teaching it—and they fear their members will leave if they do. In all cases, they fear what *men* may say or do, and give little or no thought to what *God* declares in His Word!

How the Deceit Works

The majority of ministers appear to be of God. They profess to believe God wrote the Bible. Yet, not understanding it, they twist verses to fit preconceived ideas. In fact, theological institutes and seminaries of this world have developed a systematic way—and this can be done consciously or subconsciously—of spinning or dismissing God’s *plain words* and plain meaning in favor of making passages appear to say what they need them to say. These theologians and religionists sell false teachings through use of specific verses—wrongly understood and often taken out of context—

that purportedly support their ideas. This permits them to have a supposed Bible authority for beliefs. And it helps them to much more easily snare the unwitting and unwary.

If one is properly trained and sufficiently grounded in the truth of the Bible, it is quite easy to see through and expose the deceptive logic misapplied to a verse, and to correctly explain it. The apostle Paul warned of “dishonest” people who “[handle] the word of God *deceitfully*” (II Cor. 4:2), because they, like listeners willing to believe them, “received not the love of the *truth*” (II Thes. 2:10). *True* ministers never, under *any* circumstances, follow these practices!

What follows is simple, and the verses quoted are clearly not open to human interpretation. While the Bible is a long and sometimes complex Book, the verses we will cover can be easily understood. The truths they bring will be impossible to miss!

But understand. We only have space in most cases for the briefest explanations, yet these are enough to show the error involved. Much more, however, could be added.

Some background is necessary to introduce all that follows. Blame for deception cannot be laid solely at the feet of modern Christendom. There is another source that drives the thinking of the whole world. It is key to understanding why basic truths of the Bible remain hidden.

(1) Revelation 12:9

This sets up the first verse Christianity just leaves out—Revelation 12:9. This passage requires a little longer explanation. Let’s read it: “And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the *devil*, and *Satan*, which *deceives the whole world*...”

This verse is completely ignored by professing Christianity. Have you ever heard it from the pulpit of your church? As the one who deceives all nations, including ministers, Satan holds ultimate responsibility. His deception is extremely subtle. But of course God also holds people accountable.

Ephesians references the devil’s worldwide influence: “...in time past [the apostle Paul wrote] you walked according to the course of this world, according to the *prince of the power of the air*, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience” (2:2).

Grasp this! Satan uses the air to broadcast—through his spirit—an attitude of *disobedience*! His spirit sends moods, feelings and attitudes of hostility into people’s minds. These “work” to bring disobedience. This “airwave control” gives the devil tremendous power, allowing him to send thoughts of deceit, anger, pride, hatred, vanity, jealousy, lust, greed, envy and confusion into people’s minds!

The devil is much more powerful than most realize. Look at the position he holds, and what this permits him to do: “...the *god of this world* has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ...should shine unto them” (II Cor. 4:4). Satan blinds and deceives on a staggering scale. The result is a world filled with disobedience—or lawlessness! His cunning has been so seductive he has even been able to convince many that he *does not exist*!

As with Christians guided by God’s Spirit, the children of disobedience are also inspired and guided by a spirit—that of this world’s god. Satan broadcasts a spirit of rebellion *against*—and disobedience *to*—God’s Law.

But the devil portrays his ministers as though they represent God and teach His truth. Notice: “Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if *his ministers* also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness...” (II Cor. 11:14-15).

A deceived world is blissfully ignorant of this understanding, and pays the price! (Read my booklet *Who Is the Devil?* at rcg.org/witd to understand how.)

(2) Isaiah 59:2

The second verse—Isaiah 59:2—is related to Revelation 12:9. Let’s read it: “...your *iniquities* have separated

between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will *not* hear.” Mankind is cut off from God because of its sin. Adding Jeremiah 5:25 makes this clearer.

Grasp the implications: this is *not* God’s world! It is *cut off* from Him—held captive by an unseen kidnapper. All of humanity has been deceived into believing the soothing words of this great captor, thinking themselves better off under his care and leadership.

Six thousand years ago, the devil first captured Adam and Eve and, as a result, all inhabitants of Earth ever after! However, the world has remained a willing captive ever since—and remains cut off from God. (To learn more about this subject, read the free booklet *A World in Captivity* at rcg.org/awic.)

(3) I John 3:4

The third verse Christianity disregards is the definition of sin. I John 3:4 states: “Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for *sin is the transgression of the law*.” This is one of the greatest points in the Bible: the difference between what God approves and what He does not. There have been endless ideas about the definition of sin—what it is and is not. Yet the Bible defines it with surprising simplicity. When someone transgresses or breaks “the law,” he has sinned.

When one breaks man’s laws, he earns a penalty, such as a fine, jail time, or worse for capital offenses. Likewise, when we violate the laws of God, the Bible says we earn a penalty: “...the wages of sin is death...” (Rom. 6:23).

Wages are something you earn as a payment for what you have done. If you sin—break God’s Law—you will die *eternally*. Suddenly, knowing what constitutes His Law is of extreme importance!

The subject of what *is* God’s Law has been twisted and mangled. Greater Churchianity, as it has been called, has blurred this concept beyond recogni-

Please see **PERSONAL**, page 28



WARS. RUMORS OF WARS. COMMOTIONS.

Millions worldwide are terrified by worsening war, political instability, terrorist attacks, and other violent threats. Such trends are listed in Jesus Christ's Olivet prophecy found in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. Matthew states: "And you shall hear of **WARS** and **RUMORS OF WARS**... For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in diverse places" (vs. 6-7). Luke 21 adds, "But when you shall hear of wars and **COMMOTIONS**, be not terrified..." (vs. 9). This vital prophecy can help you make sense of this world. You need not be terrified! To learn what is coming next in world affairs, read *The Real Truth* online.

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A Missing Ingredient for **WORLD PEACE**

It can be easy to take the soil beneath our feet for granted.
Yet its health has always been a key to our survival.



WE KICK it. We stomp it. We sweep it out of our homes. We even use its name as an insult. Yet by doing so, we undervalue one of our most important resources.

Dirt's connection to agriculture—and our ability to survive—is what makes it so vital, according to the Global Landscapes Forum, which meets yearly to discuss sustainable landscapes worldwide that affect 1 billion or more people. But agriculture is not the only reason it is significant.

“Sustainable landscapes are essential for the future we want: for food, livelihoods, health, renewable materials, energy, biodiversity, business development, trade, climate regulation and water,” the organization stated.

When people have healthy soil, they produce food for themselves. Better food security brings more stability, and conflicts over scant resources, such as those taking place in Africa and the Middle East, are less likely. A fed population is a happy population. All of these factors affect a nation's ability to thrive—and the planet as a whole.

“Throughout human history, our relationship with the soil has affected our ability to cultivate crops and influenced the success of civilizations,” a *Nature Education* article stated. “This relationship between humans, the earth, and food sources affirms soil as the foundation of agriculture.”

In short, when everyone's basic needs are met, the world is a much more peaceful place.

Adverse Effects

Over the last century, civilization has been on the warpath to destroy this most precious commodity.

“Half of the topsoil on the planet has been lost in the last 150 years,” the World Wildlife Fund reported. According to the organization, it takes 1,000 years to form just one centimeter of topsoil.

“The effects of soil erosion go beyond the loss of fertile land,” it further stated. “It has led to increased pollution and sedimentation in streams and rivers, clogging these waterways

and causing declines in fish and other species. And degraded lands are also often less able to hold onto water, which can worsen flooding. Sustainable land use can help to reduce the impacts of agriculture and livestock, preventing soil degradation and erosion and the loss of valuable land to desertification.”

Time magazine agreed in the article “What If the Soil Runs Out?”

“Without good soil, you cannot have well-nourished and healthy people since the foods they eat—vegetables, fruits, legumes and even the animals that eat the plants—rely on it.”

“People don't always think about how [soil is] connected with so many other things: health, the environment, security, climate, water,” the outlet stated. “For example, agriculture accounts for 70% of our fresh water use: we pour most of our water straight onto the ground. If soil is not fit for purpose, that water will be wasted, because it washes right through degraded soil and past the root system. Given the enormous potential for conflict over water in the next 20-30 years, you don't want to exacerbate things by continuing to damage the soil, which is exactly what's happening now.”

The actions of farmers are at the heart of this debate. Their agricultural practices—such as allowing water runoff to spread pesticides and chemicals, using genetically modified seeds to increase crop yield, overploughing and not allowing the land to rest—are often blamed for the damage caused to Earth's topsoil. While agriculture

workers are in the best position to improve the problems with the soil, profit-driven food production systems make it difficult if not impossible.

“Farmers rely heavily on credit to buy the seeds, fertilizer, machinery, livestock and other inputs that keep their farms running,” FarmAid stated. “If they can't secure affordable and timely credit, they face an economic uncertainty that threatens the survival of their farms.”

With little money left, soil improvement practices become unsustainable.

“Soil is not costed into food, which means that farmers don't have the financial capacity to invest in their soil to turn the situation around,” *Time* reported. “Crop breeding is exacerbating this situation. Modern wheat varieties, for example, have half the micronutrients of older strains, and it's pretty much the same for fruit and vegetables. The focus has been on breeding high-yield crops which can survive on degraded soil, so it's hardly surprising that 60% of the world's population is deficient in nutrients like iron. If it's not in the soil, it's not in our food.”

Without good soil, you cannot have well-nourished and healthy people since the foods they eat—vegetables, fruits, legumes and even the animals that eat the plants—rely on it.

Again, fed people are happy people.

Connection to Conflict

Yet the soil has an *even bigger* connection to the well-being of mankind than just health.

“More than 10 million people have abandoned their homelands due to environmental issues including drought, soil erosion, desertification and deforestation,” the Food and Agriculture Organization wrote. “Avoiding soil degradation and coping with long-term droughts can therefore change the future of human migration.”

Healthy soil ensures that the environment itself flourishes, which in turn brings stability by helping prevent migration. When people are able

to grow food to feed their families, they tend to thrive where they are instead of looking to relocate.

The Global Conflict Risk Index is also evidence of this. It examines five risk areas—political, security, social, economy, and geography and environment—to measure the statistical risk of violent conflict within a nation. Over half of the index’s 24 indicators can be tied in some way to the soil health of a nation.

And the overall state of the soil, land and agriculture can impact the development and continuation of government systems and vice versa, as a piece posted by the American Geophysical Union pointed out.

The article began by tying democratic elections to deforestation: “Politicians are trading trees for votes.”

“In the new study,” the article continued, “researchers examined satellite images of forest cover and data on the national elections of every country in the world between 1970 and 2005. They found that rates of forest cover loss are substantially higher during election years, especially when the outcome of the election is uncertain.”

The study’s political science researcher Luke Sanford, who examined the correlation between politics and the physical world, “found that election years are associated with 50 percent higher rates of deforestation than non-election years, especially in countries that have unstable governments and nationally owned rainforests, like Brazil and Kenya. ‘In Kenya, there’s been over 50 percent forest cover lost since 1990 and the majority of that happened during the election years,’ Sanford said.

“The study suggests the amount of deforestation that occurs during an election year often depends on how competitive the election is. Sanford found that close elections are associated with higher rates of deforestation. Targeting key constituencies is more important when elections are competitive, he said. In Kenya, for example, votes are aggregated at the



An aerial view of a coca field in an area that was deforested in the Guaviare department of Colombia (Nov. 4, 2021). The Colombian Amazon has been experiencing environmental degradation due to illicit crops, intensive livestock farming, illegal mines and drug trafficking.

RAUL ARBOLEDA /AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

county level. Kenya’s densely populated northern counties often determine the outcome of the country’s national elections. As a result, most of the forested land allocated for commercial use in Kenya is located within these counties.”

The article continued: “When a country transitions from being an autocracy to a democracy, the rate of forest cover loss increases, according to Sanford’s preliminary results. In an autocracy, such as a dictatorship or monarchy, the number of people who can remove a leader from power is very small. ‘When the autocrat wants to pay those people off to stay in power, giving them some rural forested land isn’t really useful,’ Sanford said.

“But when a country switches to a democracy, smallholder farmers who had no say in the government now have a strong say in the government, he said. ‘As a result, if a politician wants to remain in power they have to start paying attention to what those

people want, and a lot of those people want some land.’”

So, what is it about land and, in particular, its soil that makes it so valuable?

Amazing Purpose

“Soil is made up of minerals from rocks, organic matter from plants and animals, and the many species living in the soil,” biologist Becca Smithers wrote on the website Science Made Simple. “Earthworms keep soils clean by digesting the soil and their movement keeps the soil fresh, as do moles. Bacteria in the soil recycle nitrogen and carbon, fungi transport nutrients and help to decompose organic matter. Intricate root systems of plants and trees provide shelter and food for lots of organisms.”

In 1945, author Karl B. Mickey wrote in his book *Man and the Soil* that the topsoil “which sustains life lies in a thin layer of an average depth of seven or eight inches over the face of the land; the earth beneath it is as

dead and sterile as the moon. If that layer of topsoil could be represented on a 24-inch globe it would be as a film three-millionths of one inch thick. That thin film is all that stands between man and extinction.”

In addition to its importance for growing food and thus stabilizing regions and nations, it helps human beings as a source of cures for diseases.

“By some estimates, the earth harbors more than a trillion individual microbe species,” *Wired* reported. “A single gram of soil alone can contain 3,000 bacterial species, each with an average of four million base-pairs of DNA spooled around a single circular chromosome.” These bacteria are critical to disease research.

Yet, according to the outlet, “If the chance of finding a new antibiotic in a random soil screen was once one in 20,000, by some estimates the odds have dwindled to less than one in a billion. All the easy ones have already been found.

“Historically, it’s a search riddled with accidental discoveries. The fungal strain that was used to manufacture penicillin turned up on a moldy cantaloupe; quinolones emerged from a bad batch of quinine; microbiologists first isolated bacitracin, a key ingredient in Neosporin ointment, from an infected wound of a girl who had been hit by a truck. Other antibiotics turned up in wild, far-flung corners of the globe: Cephalosporin came from a sewage pipe in Sardinia; erythromycin, the Philippines; vancomycin, Borneo; rifampicin, the French Riviera; rapamycin, Easter Island. By persuading the right microbes to grow under the right condition, we unearthed medicinal chemistry that beat back our own microscopic enemies.” The more we degrade the quality of our soil, the more we degrade our chances to maintain good health.

Perhaps *The Guardian* columnist and author George Monbiot put it most succinctly: “We’re treating soil like dirt. It’s a fatal mistake, as our lives depend on it.”

Replenishing the Soil

The importance of preserving soil and how much our survival depends on it is not a new idea.

Written thousands of years ago, Genesis—the first book of the Bible—describes how dependent man is on the earth underneath his feet.

It states that human beings were formed “of the *dust of the ground*” (2:7). Chapter 3 adds to this saying that “for dust you are, and unto dust shall you return” when you die (vs. 19).

In agricultural terms, dust is the most mineral-rich part of the soil. These particles, known as colloids, are removed by erosion and misuse of the land. Colloids hold the bulk of the minerals that form the structure of the soil—and thus the “structure” of plants, animals and humans.

Also in Genesis, the first humans are told to “dress” and “keep” the Garden of Eden (2:15). Note that the original Hebrew words for *dress* and *keep* mean “to work” and to “protect” (*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*). Man was charged with *protecting* the environment in which he was placed.

The Bible also extensively describes a coming time when war will end and peace will be ensured in part through a focus on proper agricultural processes. Isaiah 2:4 summarizes this time: “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 anymore.”

The way in which this peaceful time will come to pass is a central theme of the Bible. It is the *good news* of a coming supergovernment—the Kingdom of God—that will usher in this peace. This Kingdom will, as the verse in Isaiah states, teach people to care for the Earth, which includes proper farming practices and soil preservation techniques. In turn, these efforts will contribute to an era free of conflict.

These descriptions in the Bible, however, can seem to be mere words with no proof. But you *can* be certain of God’s existence and know that the Bible is His inspired Word. To get started, read the booklets *Does God Exist?* (rcg.org/dge) and *Bible Authority...Can It Be Proven?* (rcg.org/bacibp). □



Misganaw Animaw seeds his family’s farmland in a rural village near Bahir Dar, Ethiopia (June 21, 2021).

EDUARDO SOTERAS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

The Extent of the UNIVERSE

We are but a microscopic speck in a remote part of the cosmos.
Learn just how small, and why our existence is so unique.

BY BRADFORD G. SCHLEIFER

FOR THOUSANDS of years, mankind has gazed into the heavens. Some have seen the stars and imagined that they formed meaningful pictures and symbols—bulls, scorpions, lions, etc. Others view the beauty of the night sky as a source of inspiration. Still others see the dark expanse as a window into both our past *and* future.

No matter the reason, human beings have always had an unquenchable fascination and sense of wonder with the heavens. This has grown into an insatiable desire to understand and explore their awe-inspiring beauty.

In part one of this series, we started small by examining Earth and its many unique attributes. In part two, the scope was broadened to include our solar system and the Milky Way galaxy. (Read both articles at rcg.org/realtruth.) Though such an inspection spans tens of thousands of light-years, our cosmic neighborhood is but a tiny speck. Much more lies beyond the spiral arms of the Milky Way. The beauty and harsh extremes therein are nearly impossible to properly frame.

The universe was constructed in a specific way, making life possible. In fact, the margin of error for some universal constants is so small that even minute changes would cause the entire

universe to unravel. As your understanding grows about our precise and perfectly designed cosmos, its purpose will become more personal.

Measuring Light

You may have wondered how astronomers measure the distance and age of stars, galaxies and other cosmic objects. This is possible by an attribute of light (and other forms of electromagnetic radiation), known as *red shift*. Over extreme distances, radiation shifts toward the red side of a spectrum.

The human eye can see part of the visual spectrum of light. However, this is an extremely small segment of the electromagnetic spectrum. Just below the range of the human eye is infrared. Most people are familiar with equipment enabling soldiers or others to see in dark conditions. This equipment converts infrared light into visible light.

There are many more forms of electromagnetic radiation, including ultraviolet, X-rays and gamma rays. Some segments of the spectrum are able to travel much farther than visible light and are easier to measure. This is particularly true of extremely high-power gamma radiation.

The farther light travels, the more dramatic its red shift. If we measure that shift in comparison to light com-

ing from our sun, a difference can be determined. And using the speed of light as a constant (186,000 miles per second), distance can be calculated.

This is all used to determine that the universe is nearly 14 billion years old. However, the age of the cosmos is not the only thing that inspires awe. Its scope and size have also enthralled mankind.

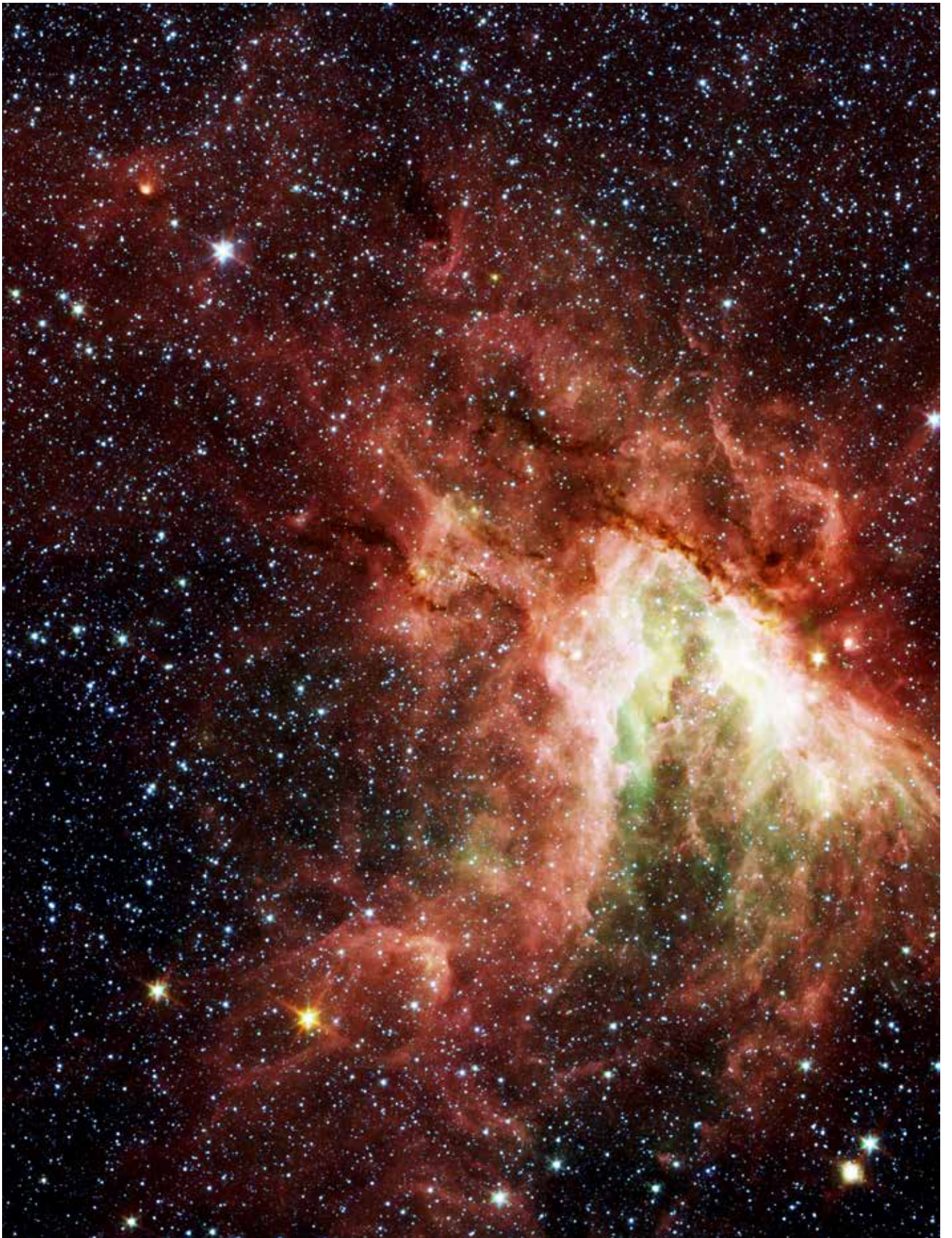
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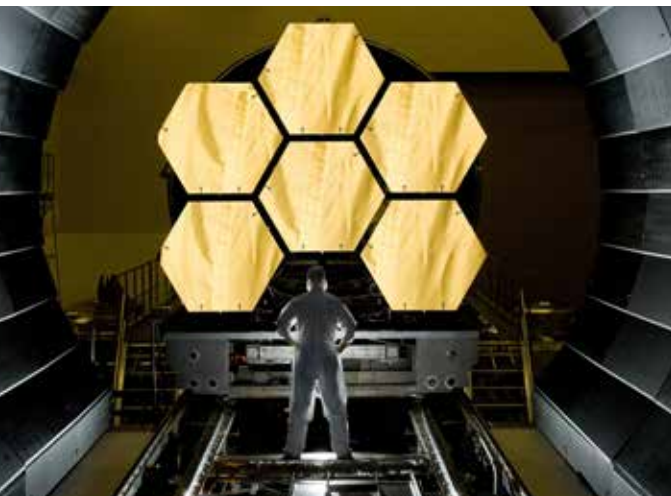
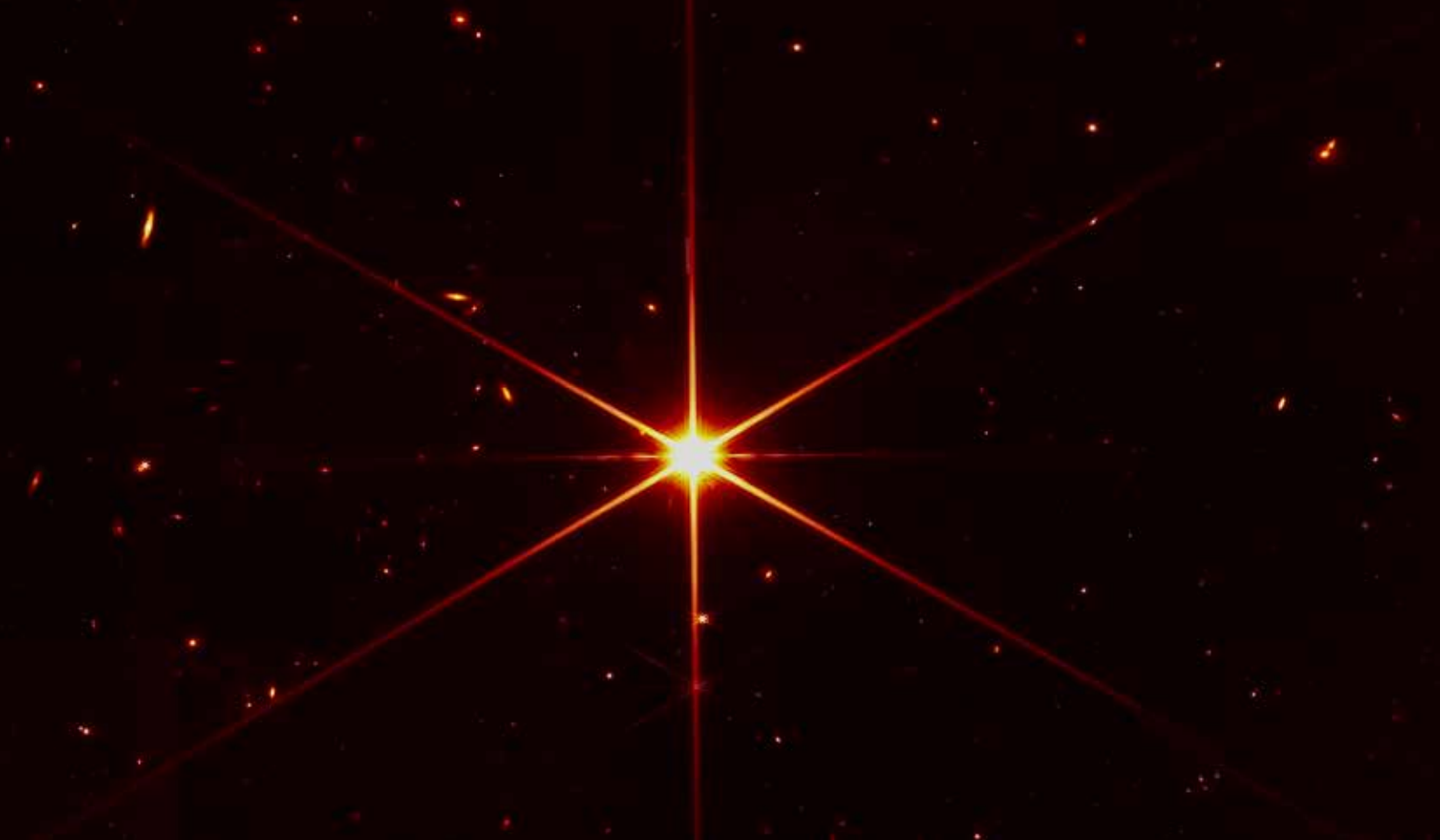
It has only been in recent decades that scientists have been able to determine the approximate size of the universe. When describing it, measurements with values of billions and trillions are used—in light-years, not miles. Analogies and descriptions can help one appreciate our comparative microscopic size in relation to the cosmos.

In part two of this series, we quantified the size of our solar system and galaxy. Doing the same with the universe is a much more difficult task—in fact, its actual size is unknown. All that can be measured is the visible universe (and even this value is not completely agreed upon). Generally speaking, it is thought that the visible cosmos is approximately

A digitally enhanced image of a nebula taken using a NASA telescope.

RAWPIXEL.COM





Top, a test image from the recently launched James Webb Space Telescope, with stars and galaxies seen in the background. Left, a NASA engineer watches as the James Webb Telescope's primary mirror segments are prepped.

NASA/STSCI (TOP); NASA/MSFC/DAVID HIGGINBOTHAM (LEFT)

93 billion light-years in diameter. Since each light-year is 5.879 trillion miles, the diameter of the visible universe is 546,747,000,000,000,000,000 miles—546 billion *trillion* miles! It is impossible to fully comprehend a number of such proportions.

To make these distances more meaningful, we must shrink our universe to a more manageable scale. First, let's reduce the Earth to the size of a grain of salt, making our planet 42.5 billion times smaller.

At this scale, the diameter of our solar system shrinks to less than 600 feet and our galaxy reduces to nearly 14 million miles across. Even at this scale, the visible universe is still 12.9 trillion miles wide.

Numbers this large are impossible to appreciate. Let's reduce the scale even further.

If we could shrink our solar system from the Sun to Pluto down to the size of a single grain of salt, the Milky Way galaxy would be 24 miles in diameter—an easy distance to visualize. This still leaves the universe's span at an incredible *22 million miles*—about two-thirds the distance from Earth to Mars.

This number is still too large to envision. The scale must be reduced yet again.

If the Milky Way galaxy (in reality, nearly 600,000 billion miles in diame-

ter) was reduced to the size of a grain of salt, the visible universe would be just over 915 feet wide—about the length of three American football fields. Finally, a size we can picture!

What is lost in this analogy is the sheer mass of the Milky Way galaxy and how much reduction is needed to reach this result. In fact, this manageable cosmic scale would mean we have reduced the universe 3.2 septillion times—or 3.2 trillion trillion times. Our solar system, never mind the Earth, would be smaller than a single hydrogen atom!

Atomic “Glue”

Do not be disappointed if you are having trouble wrapping your mind around these numbers. This exercise serves to demonstrate that the cosmos is of near unimaginable size. There are no adjectives to properly frame these distances. Celestial bodies are separated by millions of light-years.

Much of space is just that—*space*. Yet everything remains held together by an unknown celestial “glue.” Since scientists do not really understand this glue, they have loosely termed it *dark matter*. Few agree as to what it is. Assuming that some form of matter is needed to generate the gravitational fields required to hold the universe together, scientists have put forth their shaky hypotheses.

Such vast distances between objects are not limited to outer space. “Inner space,” the space within atoms, is equally as dramatic. Let’s examine a hydrogen atom. The smallest and most abundant of all elements, hydrogen consists of a proton nucleus and a single orbiting electron. Using our reference point above, what would be the scale if we multiplied the size of the hydrogen atom’s nucleus 300 billion times so that it was the size of a grain of a salt?

At this size, and assuming a constant distance between the proton and electron, a near microscopic electron would be orbiting the nucleus 98 feet away.

Truly, there is VAST space within the largest galaxies as well as the smallest subatomic particles.

As with dark matter, scientists do not fully understand what holds atoms together. Termed *atomic glue* or *dark energy*, the source of attraction has eluded scientists for thousands of years.

No matter the scale, science is left with more questions than answers. The source of the universe, the way it is held together and many other facets are left unanswered because the true Source of the cosmos is ignored.

One of the few things science agrees upon is that our cosmos is enormous, and with such vast expanse, scholars make another foolish leap—the assumption that physical life *must* exist elsewhere. This is simply not the case.

Even with billions of galaxies, most of the universe is extremely hostile to *any* form of life. The gravitational effects, destructive gases, harmful radiation and a variety of other factors make it impossible for would-be

human explorers to come within thousands of light-years of these remote galaxies, never mind for life to form, evolve and flourish.

In fact, almost all basic conditions for life are missing in the vast majority of the universe. Over 98 percent of nearby galaxies are far less metal rich than ours—virtually eliminating *any* chance for Earth-like planets to form.

A Key to Discovery

Some galaxies are billions of light-years away from their nearest counterparts, making the night sky pitch black.

If you could stand on a planet in one of these distant galaxies, there would be no visible stars, no super clusters of galaxies, nothing to see in the sky at all. In fact, our celestial neighborhood is unique even when compared to regions where the galaxies are relatively close. Gravitational fields tend to pull galaxy clusters together, making the sky extremely bright. This would make deep-space viewing impossible, including some of the discoveries we have covered in this series.

When understood, our galaxy is located in a region of space that is neither too dark nor too bright. Humanity is located in a region, like the line from a popular child’s fairytale, that is “just right.” In fact, another name for a habitable zone is a *Goldilocks zone*.

As we have seen in this series, Earth is perfectly positioned in this zone in our solar system. Our solar system is positioned in this zone within the Milky Way. And our galaxy is ideally positioned to support life and discovery of the cosmos.

Everything is “just right.” Can you now grasp why the Creator states, “The fool has said in his heart, there is no God” (Psa. 53:1)?

Your Great Inheritance

Throughout this series, we have toured aspects of Earth, our galaxy and the greater cosmos. Why does this matter to you? Even with the most aggressive estimations of scientific and technological advancement, it would be scores or hundreds of years before mankind would be

able to colonize neighboring planets. It would seem that, beyond being interesting, the universe does not matter to the average man or woman.

That conclusion could not be more wrong. There is an advancement coming of which even the most brilliant scientists are ignorant. Hundreds or even thousands living today will be able to explore the universe, traveling faster than the speed of light—and soon!

The farthest regions of the cosmos will be reached. Does this sound impossible—too incredible to be true?

What if you were told that you could be one of those intergalactic explorers?

The great Creator of all things, from atoms to galactic clusters, does everything for a purpose: “For thus says the LORD that *created the heavens*; God Himself that *formed the earth and made it*; He has established it, He created it not in vain, He formed it to be inhabited...” (Isa. 45:18). The Creator of the heavens and Earth designed them to be “inhabited.” They had a special and distinct purpose.

Notice: “For by Him were *all things* created, that are in *heaven*, and that are in *earth, visible and invisible...all things* were created by Him, and for Him” (Col. 1:16).

Again, all things were created for a purpose. Turning to the back of the Bible reveals even more fascinating understanding. The phrase “all things” appears again. This time, it is connected to true Christians alive *today!*

Those who obey God *now* will inherit a reward foretold for thousands of years: “He that overcomes *shall inherit all things*” (Rev. 21:7). The Moffatt translation renders the single Greek word translated “all things” as the universe.

That is why you were born! *That* is the reason for the breathtaking expanse of the heavens. *That* is why mankind cannot satisfy its curiosity about the cosmos. Man is meant to one day inherit “all things”—the entire universe!

If you make the choice to respond to your Creator and develop your awesome potential and overcome today, *you* can have a part in this great inheritance. □



Ukraine War Stresses Child Protection System

REUTERS – Nina spent her 16th birthday in a Lviv state shelter for children, far from her family and friends in the east of Ukraine, after she fled advancing Russian forces early in the war.

One of 23 children evacuated from another childcare center in Lysychansk, a town more than 620 miles away near the eastern frontlines, Nina says she misses her friends there and does not know when she will see them again.

“They always came to visit. We’ve been through so many things together,” said Nina, who ran away from

home in February last year when her mother started drinking and bringing men to the house after her father died.

At first, Nina went to live with a friend, but her school found out and she was placed in Ukraine’s extensive childcare system last year. Ukraine has the biggest number of children living in state care in Europe, mostly because their families are either too poor or broken to look after them.

Nina has no desire to go back to live with her mother—and does not think her mother wants her at home—but the war has left her stranded and alone in a distant town.

Lviv shelter director Svitlana Havryliuk and her staff say they are doing their best to look after Nina and the other children, aged between 3 and 18, under their watch.

But Ukraine’s vast state childcare program, a legacy of the government’s prominent role in society during Soviet times, is struggling as war forces thousands to flee their homes and often makes tracing relatives impossible.

Before Russia’s invasion, Ukraine had 100,000 children living in nearly 700 state shelters, boarding schools and baby homes, according to UN children’s agency UNICEF.



Mykhaylo, 8, who was taken away from his widowed mother along with his 9-year-old brother and 16-year-old sister, sits against a tree in the garden of a state shelter in Lviv, Ukraine (March 23, 2022).

REUTERS/ZOHRRA BENSEMRA

In the background, Nastya, wearing a pink coat with a pink and white bonnet, played in the sand in the garden playground outside. Her brothers climbed up and down a nearby slide.

Tough Choices

Some of the children in Ukraine's network of shelters are orphans, but more often they have been taken from families struggling with drug addiction, alcoholism and domestic abuse. Around half of them have physical or mental disabilities.

The sheer number of children in need, and Ukraine's relatively short wait time for adoptions, made the country a popular destination for adoptive families in the West.

According to U.S. government figures, for example, Ukraine was the top European country of origin for adoptions by U.S. parents over the past 15 years.

The system has long been questioned by child welfare organizations including UNICEF and Save the Children, which have argued that whenever possible the priority should be to support families before they reach a breaking point.

Now the war has caused further upheaval for tens of thousands of children in state care.

The ministry for social policy said 230 state homes—a third of the total—had been evacuated as of March 25, and caregivers face tough choices over whether to reunite children with parents or guardians if it gets them further from the war zone.

Child psychologist Oleksii Heliukh, who is helping the young residents of the Lviv shelter, said sending children back home without proper vetting could do more harm than good.

"When children are taken from their families, it happens for a reason. If their needs were not met in peaceful

The latest data, shared with *Reuters* by the ministry for social policy, showed that as of March 25 around 6,500 of these children had been evacuated to safer areas in the country or abroad since the beginning of the war.

Some 47,300—or almost half of the children in the system—have been hurriedly returned to their parents or legal guardians, which caregivers and child psychologists say raises its own challenges.

"The children come from places where there's fighting," Ms. Havryliuk told *Reuters*. "I don't know how it works during a war...How will their

parents be found? Who knows if they are alive? What if there is an emergency?"

No one at the Lviv shelter seems to know what happened to the parents of 5-year-old Nastya and her two brothers, aged 3 and 7, who, like Nina, were whisked away from Lysychansk on February 24, the day the war broke out.

Olga Tronova, the caregiver who brought them to Lviv in the far west of the country, said the only thing she knew was that they were taken away from their alcoholic mother late last year and no relative has tried to make contact with them since.

times, then things can get worse during a war.”

But Volodymyr Lys, regional head for child protection under the ministry of social policy in Lviv, said that war-time danger meant authorities often had little choice.

“The biggest risk is being killed by a bomb, trust me...It is clear that no matter who the parents are, they are still parents.”

Children Traveling Alone

Fighting has also separated families where children had been living with their parents, and aid agencies have warned that significant numbers of unaccompanied children have crossed into neighboring countries and beyond.

“We’ve had reports of children traveling alone ending up in Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany,” said Amanda Brydon, a child protection expert at Save the Children, which has been working in Ukraine since 2014.

These may be children on their way to reach relatives or friends in Europe, she said. People smuggling is a big concern.

“What we don’t have is a systematic registration and tracking system of these children,” she said. “It’s been quite a chaotic system to try and track.”

Mr. Lys, the regional head for child protection, said the situation had improved since the first few weeks of war thanks to the help of international aid agencies inside and outside Ukraine.

With documents and records lost or destroyed, and 1.8 million children estimated by UNICEF to have fled the country so far, the Kyiv government has tightened border checks and suspended adoptions, already disrupted by the COVID-19 emergency.

Aid agencies welcomed the move.

Ms. Brydon at Save the Children said they had been “inundated” with calls from would-be adoptive families keen to help, but warned of the risk of legal standards being ignored and children being separated from parents who are still alive.

For the 47 children of the Lviv shelter and those in other state insti-



A volunteer caregiver holds a boy, who was taken away from his parents, as he has breakfast in a state shelter for children in Lviv, Ukraine (March 25, 2022).

REUTERS/ZOHRA BENSEMRA

tutions, that could mean having to wait out the war.

Ms. Tronova, the caregiver who was working in a state center for children in Lysychansk when the war broke out, remembers vividly the phone call she got at dawn on February 24.

“Olga, now! You need to pull the children out,” she recalls the shelter principal telling her, before hearing an explosion in the distance. She rushed to fetch the children, leaving her own family behind.

In the three days that it took to get to Lviv by train, the smallest ones fell sick. “When they arrived here, they all had nausea, they vomited, they had fever,” said Ms. Havryliuk.

Since then, she and the other caregivers, helped by university students-turned-volunteers, have tried to restore a sense of normality and calm.

The children are well fed and sleep in neat dormitories with flowers, trees and animals painted on blue and green walls.

Neighbors who before the war would barely say hello have showered

the shelter with food, clothes and toys. On one of the days *Reuters* visited, a Polish charity sent stuffed teddy bears from France with the word “Courage” written on them.

But even in the relative tranquility of Lviv, which has been largely spared heavy bombardment and combat but where nights are punctuated by anti-raid alarms, the war is never far away.

“The children are sleeping, then the siren goes off and they start to scream,” Ms. Havryliuk said.

All but two of the 23 children who arrived from Lysychansk are still legally in their parents’ custody. In normal times, courts would decide whether to strip families of their parental rights.

One child with psychiatric problems, 11-year-old Timofey, was two days away from being placed into foster care, but that fell apart as he, too, was evacuated to Lviv.

“He is very angry,” Ms. Tronova said. “I cannot predict anything for my future or the children’s. The only thing I can say is that we are at God’s mercy.” □

The Children Who Survived Bucha's Horror

The Associated Press – The coffin was made from pieces of a closet. In a darkened basement under a building shaking from the bombardment of war, there were few other options.

Six-year-old Vlad watched as his mother Maryna was carried out of the shelter and to the yard of a nearby home. The burial was hurried and devastating.

Now Russian forces have withdrawn from Bucha after a monthlong occupation, and Vlad's father, Ivan Drahun, dropped to his knees at the foot of the grave.

The family still does not know what illness caused her death. They, much like their town, barely know how to move on.

Bucha witnessed some of the ghastliest scenes of Russia's invasion, and almost no children have been seen in its silent streets since then. The many bright playgrounds in the once popular community with good schools on a far edge of the capital, Kyiv, are empty.

The Russians used a children's camp in Bucha as an execution ground,

and bloodstains and bullet holes mark a basement. On a ledge near the camp entrance, Russian soldiers placed a toy tank. It appeared to be connected to fishing wire—a possible booby trap in the most vulnerable of places.

Steps away from Vlad's home, some of the Russians used a kindergarten as a base, leaving it intact while other nearby buildings suffered. Casings of used artillery shells were left along a fence in the yard. In a nearby playground, white and red tape marked off unexploded ordnance. The booms of de-mining operations were so strong they set off car alarms.

It is here that Bucha's fragile renewal can be seen.

A small group of neighborhood children gathered, finding distraction from the war. Bundled up in winter coats, they kicked a football, wandered around with bags of snacks handed out by visiting volunteers, called out from a glass-less window above.

A few weeks ago, Ivan found his wife dead. "I touched her shoulder, and

she was cold," he said. "I realized she was gone."

At first, he said, Vlad appeared not to understand what had happened. But at the burial, the boy watched Ivan kneel and cry, and now he knows what death is.

Local authorities told *The Associated Press* that at least 16 children were among the hundreds of people killed. Those who survived face a long recovery.

"They've realized that now it's calm and quiet," Ivan said. "But at the same time, older children understand that it's not the end. The war is not finished. And it's hard to explain for the smaller ones that war is still going on."

The children are adapting, he said. They have seen a lot.

Now the war has slipped into the games they play.

In a sandbox outside the kindergarten, Vlad and a friend "bombed" each other with fistfuls of sand.

"I'm Ukraine," one said. "No, I'm Ukraine," said the other. □



A Ukrainian soldier walks with children passing cars overturned during the war against Russia, in Bucha, on the outskirts of Kyiv (April 4, 2022).

AP/RODRIGO ABD

As AI embeds itself into every aspect of our lives, we must ask what we should fear more: man or machine?

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER
AND DAVID J. LITAVSKY

HOW CONCERNED should we be about AI?

Here's what Tesla Motors founder Elon Musk said about artificial intelligence during a South by Southwest tech conference in Austin, Texas: "I think that's the single biggest existential crisis that we face and the most pressing one."

Celebrity astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson later agreed with this sentiment. Mr. Musk also said exploring computer-based intelligence is "summoning the demon." In addition, Pope Francis asked adherents to pray that robots and AI and robots will always serve mankind.

Some of these concerns are founded on what happens if there is a runaway AI similar to the films *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *The Matrix* and *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. But much of the worries are based on what could occur if this technology remains unregulated.

With pretty much limitless possibilities, there are pretty much limitless ways things can go wrong.

Despite this, AI has already wormed its way into nearly every aspect of our lives. It powers voice assistants Siri and Alexa. It allows Google Maps to identify gridlock traffic and suggest alternate routes. It helps determine fraudulent purchases on credit cards.

Even though Mr. Musk has concerns over where AI could go wrong, it is still used in every Tesla car. The company's Autopilot technology can take over for the driver—with the software always learning and improving.

With each year bringing massive leaps in this field, the possibilities of AI are at once enticing and worrisome.



SHOULD WE FEAR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE?

This was reflected in the opinions of those interviewed by Pew for the 2022 study "AI and Human Enhancement: Americans' Openness Is Tempered by a Range of Concerns."

A man in his 30s had cautious optimism: "AI can help slingshot us into the future. It gives us the ability to focus on more complex issues and use the computing power of AI to solve world issues faster. AI should be used to help improve society as a whole if used correctly. This only

works if we use it for the greater good and not for greed and power. AI is a tool, but it all depends on how this tool will be used."

A woman in her 60s had even greater worries about over-reliance on machines: "It's just not normal. It's removing the human race from doing the things that we should be doing. It's scary because I've read from scientists that in the near future, robots can end up making decisions that we have no control over. I don't like it at all."



WE FEAR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE?

Along these lines, we are more and more seeing machines outthinking humans themselves.

Back in 2017, AI using Google's DeepMind technology was able to beat the best players in the ancient Chinese Game of Go. Think of it as chess on steroids. Chess has 20 possible moves per turn. Go has 200.

The exercise showed how AI will approach problems in ways humans cannot anticipate. (And five years ago in AI tech is more like 100 years.) To win at

Go, the AI consistently used moves that, at first, seemed to be errors to top players. The decisions by the computer challenged knowledge passed down over centuries about how to play the game—yet turn out to be winning tactics.

When it comes to machines able to outthink human beings, there are two sides to the coin. While they can help us see things in a new light—and make giant leaps in industry, science and technology—what happens if they begin to think *for themselves*?

Rise of the Humanoids

Experts on artificial intelligence believe the next generation of AI will be adaptive, self-learning, intuitive and able to change its own programming rules. They speak of a time when machines will exceed the intelligence of human beings—a moment defined as “singularity”—which experts believe could take place by 2035 or soon thereafter.

This could mean a brighter future for mankind. In fact, super AI may be a necessity because of the explosion of man's knowledge.

According to *The Observer*: “Human-based processing will be simply inefficient when faced with the massive amounts of data we're acquiring each day. In the past, machines were used in some industries to complete small tasks within a workflow. Now the script has flipped: Machines are doing almost everything, and humans are filling in the gaps. Interestingly, tasks performed by autonomous machines require the types of decision-making ability and contextual knowledge that just a decade ago only human beings possessed.”

“In the near future, AI-controlled autonomous unconscious systems may replace our current personal human engagements and contributions at work. The possibility of a ‘jobless future’...might not be so far-fetched.”

While critics see robot minds taking jobs from humans as a negative, others feel it would allow workers to focus on greater pursuits.

The author of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Arthur C. Clarke, wrote this in the 1960s: “In the day-after-tomorrow society there will be no place for anyone as ignorant as the average mid-twentieth-century college graduate. If it seems an impossible goal to bring the whole population of the planet up to superuniversity levels, remember that a few centuries ago it would have seemed equally unthinkable that everybody would be able to read. Today we have to set our sights

much higher, and it is not unrealistic to do so.”

A world where everyone could reach “superuniversity levels” *seems* appealing.

The flipside? A world where people have too much time on their hands would mean more time to delve into the darker facets of human nature.

Everywhere we turn in regard to AI, we run into similar gray areas and moral conundrums.

Uncharted Territory

Something as simple as self-driving cars creates difficult ethical problems. If everyone had such automobiles, it would save 300,000 lives per decade in America. It would mean the end of daily rush-hour traffic. Also, think of everything you could accomplish during your morning commute if you did not have to focus on the road!

Yet who is to blame for decisions a machine makes during a crash?

For example, if a driverless car suddenly approaches a crowd of people walking across its path, should the car be programmed to minimize the loss of life, even at the risk of the car’s occupants? Or should it protect the occupants at all costs, even if that means hurting others?

Fortune chimed in on the debate, quoting Chris Gerdes, chief technology officer for the U.S. Department of Transportation: “Ninety-four percent of so-called last actions during an automotive collision are the result of human judgment (read: errors), Gerdes said. ‘Self-driving cars have this promise of removing the human from that equation,’ he said. ‘That’s not trivial.’

“The catch: With self-driving cars you’ve shifted the error from human drivers to human programmer, Gerdes said. Machine learning techniques can improve the result, but they aren’t perfect.

“And then there are ethical concerns. If you program a collision, that means it’s premeditated, [Patrick Lin, director of the Ethics and Emerging Sciences Group at California Polytechnic State University,] said. Is that even legal? ‘This is all untested law,’ he said.”

Others speculate on the darker side to a post-singularity future. What if AI begins to see human beings as the problem? What if it begins to act on self-interest? And what if those interests conflict with human interests—and it must remove us to complete a task?

In the article “The Dangers of Killer Robots and the Need for a Preemptive Ban,” Human Rights Watch issued a warning. The report “detailed the various dangers of creating weapons that could think for themselves” (*International Business Times*).

The organization also warned that “removing the human element of warfare raised serious moral issues,” such as “lack of empathy,” which would “exacerbate unlawful and unnecessary violence.”

“What if AI begins to see human beings as the problem? What if it begins to act on self-interest?”

“Runaway AI” is the term used to define the future moment when machines begin to develop themselves beyond the control of human beings. But how could pieces, parts and electronics get to this point?

Nick Bostrom, the director of the Future of Humanity Institute at the University of Oxford, fleshed out a hypothetical example in his book *Superintelligence*. He asks the reader to picture a machine programmed to create as many paper clips as possible.

Technology Review summarized: “Now imagine that this machine somehow became incredibly intelligent. Given its goals, it might then decide to create new, more efficient paper-clip-manufacturing machines—until, King Midas style, it had converted essentially everything to paper clips.”

“No worries, you might say: you could just program it to make exactly

a million paper clips and halt. But what if it makes the paper clips and then decides to check its work? Has it counted correctly? It needs to become smarter to be sure. The superintelligent machine manufactures some as-yet-uninvented raw-computing material (call it ‘computronium’) and uses that to check each doubt. But each new doubt yields further digital doubts, and so on, until the entire earth is converted to computronium. Except for the million paper clips.”

Many do not see the threat, suggesting that we could pull the plug on these digital creatures should we begin to lose control of them.

Yet what if runaway AI cause machines to develop emotional responses and act in self-defense? Imagine if an entity more intelligent than us tapped into the same emotions that drive humans to commit terrible crimes—lust, envy, hatred, jealousy and selfishness?

Or what if they learned to harness the full fund of knowledge and connectivity of the web, and began to reproduce?

A *Slate* article summarized such concerns as the fact that we fear AI “will act as humans act (which is to say violently, selfishly, emotionally, and at times irrationally)—only it will have more capacity.”

Actions based on emotion and irrationality suggest sentience, that is, the capacity to feel, perceive or experience subjectively. This allows for a range of human behavior, often labeled “human nature,” including acting violently and selfishly.

Therefore, to answer whether we should fear AI, we must answer another question: *Is it possible for computers to gain human nature?*

Essential Element

Realize that human nature is utterly unique. The difference between human nature and the nature of animals makes this clear. Why does man undisputedly have superior intellect, creative power, and complex emotions? Retrospectively, why do animals pos-

ness instinct, an innate ability to know what to do without any instruction or time to learn?

Science textbooks attempt to address this, yet there is one textbook that provides the complete picture. In fact, this book—the Bible—humanity’s instruction on how to live, contained many facts about nature long before mainstream science proved them.

For example, it states this about planet Earth: “It is turned as clay to the seal; and they stand as a garment” (Job 38:14).

The phrase “it is turned as clay to the seal” refers to the rotating cylinder used by potters in ancient times. This analogy expresses the rotating motion of the Earth, which causes the sun to appear to rise and set.

The book of Job was written well before the Greeks theorized that Earth was the center of the universe, and that the sun revolved around it. The Bible also speaks to the hydrological cycle (Jer. 10:13), underground aquifers supplying water to oceans (Job 38:16), and sea currents (Psa. 8:8).

So what does the Bible say about the uniqueness of the human mind? The apostle Paul wrote in I Corinthians 2: “For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?” (vs. 11).

Mankind “knows the things of a man,” that is, possesses intellectual capacity, because he was given a component called the “spirit of man.” This term is also found in Job 32: “But there is a spirit in man...” (vs. 8).

The original Greek word translated “spirit” in I Corinthians 2:11 means “a current of air...vital principle, *mental disposition*” (*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*).

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “disposition” as “prevailing tendency, mood, or inclination,” “temperamental makeup,” or “the tendency of something to act in a certain manner under given circumstances.” It has also been defined as a “person’s inherent qualities of mind and character.”

The spirit that God put into us is what allows us to think like human

beings. It allows us to be creative and puts us on a completely different plane from animals.

Beasts do have a sort of spirit, however. Notice: “Who knows the spirit of man that goes upward, and the spirit of the beast that goes downward to the earth?” (Ecc. 3:21).

Animals are lumped together in one group. Though each creature has distinct characteristics, the entire animal kingdom differs from mankind in that it possesses the “spirit of the beast”—or what we call *instinct*.

These two spirits are very different. Note that, upon death, human spirits are preserved (“go upward”), while animal spirits simply disappear upon their demise (“goes downward to the earth”). (To learn more about exactly how this works, read the booklet *Do the Saved Go to Heaven?* at rcg.org/dtsgth.)

For each type of spirit, there is a disposition or nature that goes with it: human nature, animal nature, and even God’s nature.

But what about robot nature?

AI Limitations

The greatest fear about AI is that it will take on its own mental disposition. In Bible terminology, this means we fear it will develop a human spirit—that it will possess autonomous thinking power and behavior driven by emotions.

Scripture answers this concern. Genesis 2:7 shows that God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

At the other end of the spectrum, Jesus Christ said, “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body...” (Matt. 10:28).

Intelligent and resourceful human beings cannot even destroy spirit, let alone create it! Only God can generate and destroy spirit.

All this signifies that AI, which is created by human minds, could never fully be given the spirit of man susceptible to human nature and run amok

on the Earth. Any negative actions by such machines are the result of those who programmed them.

We could also reason that since most people, including scientists, do not know about the spirit in man, there is no way they could produce it in a computer program. Given unlimited funds and time, the very best mankind can hope for with computer brains is to make them similar to animals. Their programming could be likened to instinct—as a human mind behind it has to guide everything it does.

Conferring “animal instinct” to a computer would be a huge undertaking and represent the best men can do. Imagine the impossibility of trying to teach an animal to think as a man (in effect, giving the spirit of man to a beast). To teach calculus to a cow, train an elephant to write poetry, or hire an orangutan to design and engineer a space shuttle—is beyond possible. It simply does not work. Without the spirit in man, as Paul stated, a living being cannot “know the things of a man.”

Yes, AI technology can be programmed to compute equations, poetry and designs, in some cases at a far greater capacity than man. It can search the bounds of logic without facing the same human limitations and setbacks—fatigue, emotion, irrationality. Yet it must be combined with human intellect—a product of the spirit in man—to come anywhere near to what those who fear it say it will do.

So should we be concerned about AI? Yes, because people with human nature are creating it and using it. There will undoubtedly be unforeseen negative consequences. And, in the wrong hands, artificial intelligence could cause untold harm.

AI perfectly demonstrates the duality of mankind: It is capable of incredible genius and terrible ills. Why? Read *Did God Create Human Nature?* and *What Science Will Never Discover About Your Mind* for the Bible answers. Both are available at rcg.org. □



A Fix for the Work-Life Imbalance

An age-old principle can keep us from blurring the line between our professional and personal lives.

BY NESTOR A. TORO

SINCE ITS integration in the workplace, the internet has been—like the lightbulb a century before it—a two-edged sword of productivity. While it helps us be more efficient at our jobs, it is making us work more hours.

“The American workweek has soared from less than 40 hours to nearly 50,” Melinda Gates, former wife of Microsoft founder Bill Gates, said in a column on LinkedIn. “Technology has made it harder to pull away from our jobs, and easier to wonder whether a night off or a long weekend is damaging our careers.”

The article was mainly about how women fare in today’s workplace. But her observations on how people often work excessively, technology facilitating it, is a case in point.

And that was all pre-COVID.

Many of us have experienced how work-at-home mandates and other restrictions implemented in early 2020 made it harder to ditch our laptops and email inboxes.

One American employee recounted his transformation during that time in *Deseret News*: “Without the commute, I could now start working as soon as I woke up, which I did. I often didn’t even take the time to change out of my pajamas. I went upstairs to my home office and worked. And worked. And sometimes forgot to break for lunch. After dinner, if I got bored or just remembered something that needed to get done, I’d sneak back for another round.”

“Work became all-consuming.”

“Remote work once seemed like a temporary, emergency response to the pandemic. But now that we’ve realized how much we can get done without actually having to pay for office space, and how much cheaper that is, it’s likely to become the norm for millions of Americans.”

“As with everything in life, labor has its limits. Somewhere near the edge of those bounds, with our current ability to stay connected 24/7, lies a hidden trap.”

According to *Bloomberg*, Americans working from home were logging at least three extra hours to their typical workday. This led to burnout for many, which contributed in part to the millions of American workers quitting their jobs during the aptly named Great Resignation.

Yet work is a good thing. It makes us feel useful, productive, challenged, accomplished. Work allows us to con-

tribute something to society, paves the way for wealth, pays the bills, and puts food on the table.

As with everything in life, though, labor has its limits. Somewhere near the edge of those bounds, with our current ability to stay connected 24/7, lies a hidden trap.

“Most of us know that continually logging excessive hours can be bad for our backs and brains, as well as strain relationships (especially when we type on our iPhones during family dinners),” journalist Laura Petrecca wrote in *USA Today*. “But it’s just one more email to send. Oh wait, it’s two, maybe three...suddenly it’s a half-hour later.”

The constant connection means we must confront a new irony: achieving work-life balance now *takes work*. We might as well refer to it as the work-life *imbalance*.

Too Much of a Good Thing

In extreme cases, overworking can kill you. A Japanese woman made international news after it was announced she died of congestive heart failure at age 31 after logging over one hundred hours of work per week.

Several news outlets featured her story. Her death nevertheless is far from a rare, isolated event. *Karoshi* (Japanese for “overwork death”) is so prevalent there that some employers are implementing creative and drastic measures. One company reportedly plays the theme from the movie “Rocky” at the end of the workday

to remind employees it is time to go home.

The Japanese are far from the only ones with a proclivity to break work-life balance norms. While other countries may not be at the level of *karoshi*, overworking is a 21st-century reality for countless professionals the world over.

Ben Waber, CEO and president of the people analytics company Humanyze, believes overwork is not endemic to Asia. He said in *Quartz*: “In the US, most discussion of *karoshi* has assumed that overwork culture is specific to Japan. What many don’t realize is that the problem of overwork is possibly worse in the United States.”

Mr. Waber studied two years’ worth of communication data from some of his clients in both countries.

“At first glance,” he wrote, “it appears that Japanese workers extend their workdays longer, working an average of 47 minutes after 6 pm versus an average of 30 minutes for American workers...When we look into the actual timing of this work, however, it appears that workers at Japanese companies aren’t working as much through the late hours. In Japan, about 58% of all e-mails after 6 pm are sent between 6 pm and 7 pm. By contrast, in US companies only 25% of these emails are sent between 6 pm and 7 pm, implying that, in the US, workers tend to splice work into their home lives to a greater degree.”

What about other countries? According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development’s *Better Life Index* website, out of the 20 countries it monitors: “Turkey is by far the country with the highest proportion of people working very long hours, with 39%, followed by Mexico with nearly 28% and Israel with over a sixth of employees.”

All this overworking is counterproductive and detrimental to our health. It puts an extra toll on our hearts due to stress. As a Harvard Business School/Stanford University study put it, stress

at work can be just as damaging to health as secondhand smoke.

To summarize: Chronic overwork equals *karoshi* on the installment plan.

Undesirable Side Effects

A slew of unhealthy habits can be traced back to overworking. “All too often the things we do to cope are not healthy,” Wendell Potter wrote in a post featured by Thrive Global, a start-up that strives “to end the stress and burn-out epidemic.”

“It is unsurprising that some of these practices allude to the term ‘Sabbath.’ What may surprise you is that within the original ‘day of rest’ command, a fix for the work-life imbalance was prescribed thousands of years ago.”

Mr. Potter continued describing that his was “drinking too much. And like a lot of other people, I bought things I didn’t need, racking up credit card debt and finding out, repeatedly, that instant gratification is just that, gratification that barely lasts an instant. Many of us buy bigger and fancier houses than we need, and take on more mortgage debt than we know we should, further assigning ourselves to a hamster wheel that all too soon seems impossible to get off. We become enslaved to our employer and our creditors.”

Other detrimental behaviors that stem from overworking include excess caffeine intake, impulse eating, smoking and drug abuse.

Beyond these self-destructive effects, overworking can also take a damaging toll on relationships. Spouses and families must compete with jobs.

Chronic over-workers are absent from family gatherings. They miss their children’s concerts, sports games, and parent-student nights. They claim to not have time for a date night. Their conversations are mainly about their jobs, which makes them seem self-absorbed and plain boring. They bristle anytime someone even hints they are working too much.

You likely experience some or all of these symptoms. Or you have a loved one who does.

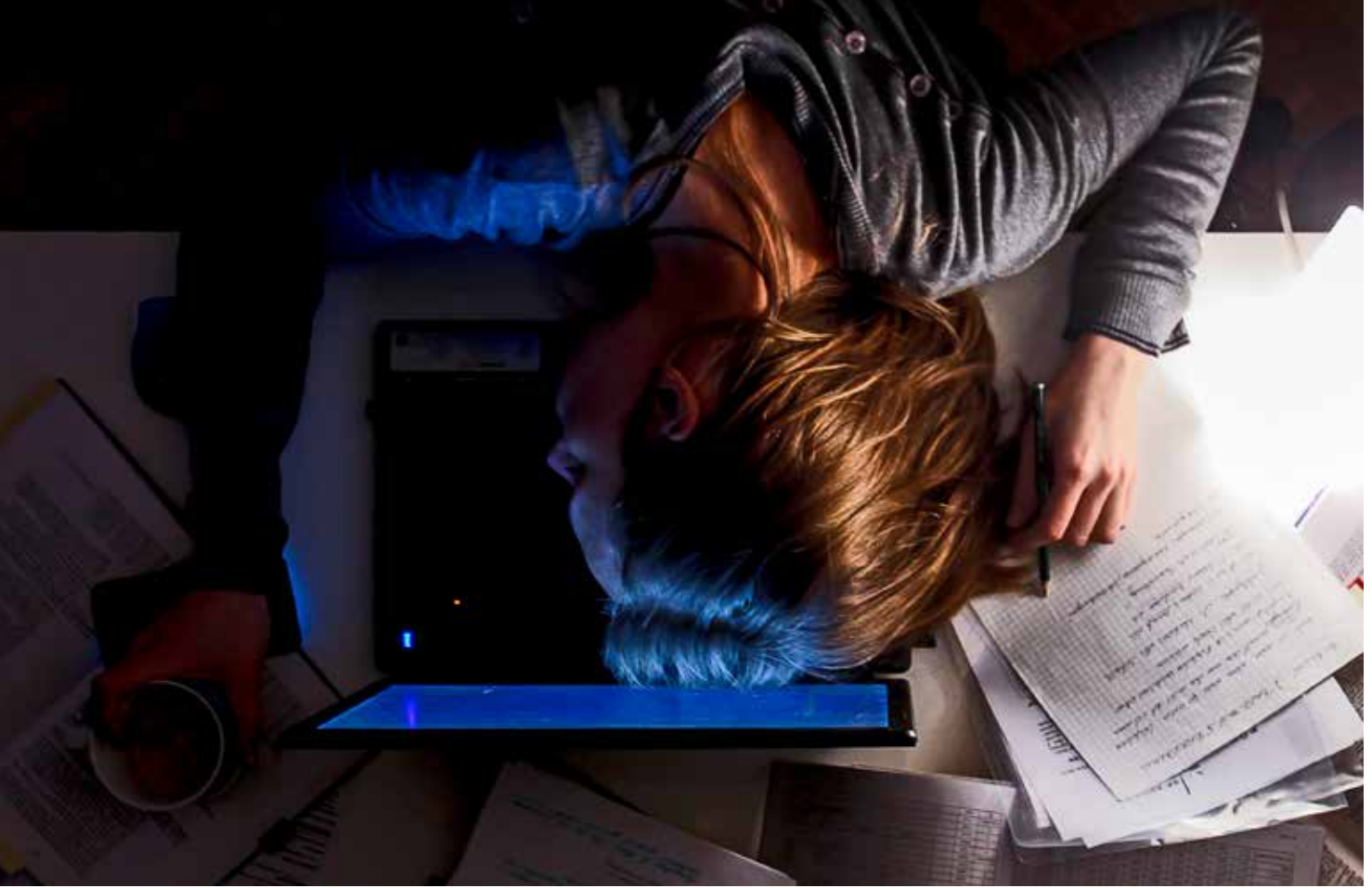
Long-term Fix

If you are staring in the face of the work-life imbalance, the quest to reach equilibrium can seem daunting, impossible. Yet realize that you must be alive to work! So what can you do to restore order?

Recall that work is good. *Overwork* is not. The plain antidote to overwork is rest. Rest is the part of life that has the power to counteract the effects of overwork.

The positive effect of rest on work productivity is not a new concept. Some employers support this principle by promoting “stop days”—regular work days without meetings or interruptions—or “tech sabbaths,” which are days without interaction with technology.

“Filmmaker Tiffany Shlain, perhaps best known her film *Connected* and for founding the Webby Awards, goes without electronics from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday every week—a kind of Tech Shabbat,” a 2013 *Fast Company* story stated. “Her whole family takes the time with her. She says it turns every weekend into a mini-vacation and prevents the technology fatigue that’s so ever-present among those of us who spend all day in front of screens.”



The principle behind “sabbaticals” is alike. Sabbaticals is a manmade idea derived from the biblical command to take a year off from farming every seven years, to allow for a “land sabbath”—a full year of rest for the land.

In all these initiatives, the idea is to rest, or disconnect, from whatever environment is sapping your energy, focus and time to strike a balance. It is a way to allow time to compensate for work.

It is unsurprising that some of these practices allude to the term “Sabbath.” What may surprise you is that, within the original “day of rest” command, a fix for the work-life imbalance was prescribed thousands of years ago.

The first book of the Bible states: “On the seventh day God ended His work which He had made” (Gen. 2:2).

This practice became the fourth of the Ten Commandments: “Six days shall you labor, and do all your work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD your God: in it you shall not do any work...for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the sev-

enth day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Ex. 20:9-11).

The commandments were given by God for the benefit of mankind. When Jesus Christ referred to the Sabbath law, He said “The sabbath was made for man” (Mark 2:27). It is the foundation for striking a healthy work-life balance.

Realize that the language makes the Sabbath non-negotiable rest time. Additionally, this command not only contains instruction to rest on the seventh-day Sabbath, but also to *work* outside of it. It shows the appropriate work-life balance in action.

Setting 24 hours aside for the Sabbath out of 168 hours in a week goes a long way in helping solve the work-life imbalance. It is much more comprehensive than a “tech sabbath” or “sabbatical.” It is a day to be recharged wholly—physically and spiritually.

However, this weekly repose alone is not a cure-all for overworking. We must also apply the principle of rest on a daily basis.

In addition to telling mankind of the weekly Sabbath’s benefit, Christ recognized the importance of balancing daily work with personal time. In John 11:9-10, He said: “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbles not... But if a man walk in the night, he stumbles.”

This statement has a spiritual meaning, but the principle can apply to our physical work. Slaving away beyond our natural limits is not only inefficient, it is dangerous. In one instance, Jesus gave His disciples a rest after so much labor that “they had no leisure so much as to eat” (Mark 6:31).

When done right, maintaining daily boundaries and keeping the weekly Sabbath can be utterly transformative. This millennia-old principle is still helping many people today keep themselves from the dangers of overworking.

For more on what the Bible outlines for this weekly day of rest, read *Saturday or Sunday - Which Is the Sabbath?* at rcg.org/tsosw. □

NUCLEAR WAR

*Will
Mankind
Destroy
Itself?*





The latest nuclear threat hearkens back to the Cold War and brings a renewed sense of hopelessness. Does Bible prophecy hold a bleak or bright picture of mankind's future?

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin put his country's thousands of nuclear warheads into "special combat readiness" as a part of his strategy when invading Ukraine in February. The entire world went on high alert.

Those watching are still unsure how far Mr. Putin is willing to go after his forces encountered tougher-than-expected resistance from Ukrainian forces.

"Given the potential desperation of President Putin and the Russian leadership, given the setbacks that they've faced so far, militarily, none of us can take lightly the threat posed by a potential resort to tactical nuclear weapons or low-yield nuclear weapons," CIA director William J. Burns said.

The former ambassador to Russia said he believes Mr. Putin could order the use of low-yield nuclear weapons as a warning shot to remind Ukraine—and the rest of the world—of the Kremlin's capability.

Moscow has long been open to the use of relatively small nuclear blasts to offset battlefield losses, *The New York Times* reported. The outlet added that some military experts are concerned over what Mr. Putin might do to uphold his reputation for edgy ruthlessness.

United States President Joe Biden has repeatedly said that America's armed forces "will not fight the third world war in Ukraine." As the war grinds on, such words offer little reassurance.

Roughly 9 in 10 Americans are at least *somewhat concerned* that Russia might use a nuclear weapon against Ukraine, including about 6 in 10 who are *very concerned*, according to a poll from The Associated Press-NORC

Center for Public Affairs Research. Seventy-one percent of Americans said the invasion has increased the possibility of nuclear weapons being used anywhere in the world—including against the United States.

The same poll shows that close to half of Americans said they are *very concerned* Russia would directly target the U.S. with nuclear weapons, and an additional 3 in 10 are *somewhat concerned* about that.

Mr. Putin "is out of control, and I don't think he really has concern for much of anything but what he wants," said Robin Thompson, a retired researcher from Amherst, Massachusetts. "And he has nuclear weapons."

Fear of nuclear war has been a fact of life for decades. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has published its "Doomsday Clock" since 1947, showing a theoretical countdown to nuclear annihilation of the planet. The latest update, in January, put the time at 100 seconds to midnight, leaving us closer than ever to global catastrophe.

Many live on edge believing nuclear destruction of the world is inevitable. Yet the Bible, God's Word, also speaks of the future of mankind. The book directly answers the question of whether the Earth and all the people who inhabit it are slated for nuclear extermination.

Red Alert

On its face, the world looks much safer than it did during the height of Cold War tensions. Nuclear stockpiles have diminished by 86 percent since 1986, down from a peak of 70,300. The U.S. and Russia shed most of those numbers, though both still hold the largest stockpiles.

Globally, there are now around 12,700 nuclear weapons, with about 90 percent held by Russia and the U.S.—between 5,000 to 6,000 weapons each.

China, the United Kingdom and France have a few hundred nuclear weapons each, while newer nuclear nations of India and Pakistan have around 100 each—with Israel reportedly being in the same category. North Korea has around 20.

Diplomatic efforts to reduce the odds of atomic mayhem have limited new nations from getting nuclear weapons and prohibited nuclear weapon testing.

Despite these advancements, there is still much to fear.

The renewed nuclear threat centers on the development of low-yield nuclear weapons. These munitions are also called tactical nuclear weapons since forces can better pinpoint a target and limit the radius of destruction if used in combat.

Tactical nukes are much less powerful than traditional nuclear warheads. But this makes them much *more* dangerous.

Why?

Low-yield nuclear arms erode the concept of mutually assured destruction (MAD)—the idea that two nations can annihilate each other, regardless of who attacked first. Until now, this doctrine has largely been credited with preventing a full-scale nuclear war. The MAD philosophy, which has also been called “mutually assured deterrence,” rests on the conviction that conventional nuclear weapons are so destructive, so globe threatening, that no government would ever actually consider using them.

The diminished power of a tactical nuclear weapon actually *increases* the chance of a nuclear strike since the attacker feels it can limit the damage enough to get away with using it. The reduced area of destruction essentially weakens the delicate balance of mutually assured deterrence, making the line between conventional war and nuclear war far less easy to define.

This all said, the term “low-yield” is a misnomer. Even a small tactical nuclear

bomb rivals the power of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, during World War II. These so-called “smaller weapons” contain explosive power up to 50 kilotons of TNT. The bomb dropped on Hiroshima measured about 15 kilotons.

Add to this that nuclear-armed nations are likely to respond to low-yield nuclear weapon attacks with ones of their own. That is all it takes for the bigger warheads to be used, leading to the nuclear holocaust the globe has feared for more than 70 years.

Another challenge is there are currently no international agreements that limit the use of nuclear warheads on short range missiles. This appears to be based on a time when the U.S. and Soviet Union, which were on opposite sides of the globe, were the only nuclear threats. This short-range missile loophole puts much of Europe in danger from a Russian nuclear attack. And that still leaves the world as vulnerable to nuclear destruction as it has ever been.

When military and civilian experts have war-gamed Russian-U.S. nuclear tensions in the past, exercises climax with nuclear missiles arcing across continents and oceans, striking the capitals of Europe and North America, and killing millions within hours.

Despite constant efforts, mankind has been incapable of achieving peace. Even in times of relative calm, the threat of war looms.

The Bible explains: “The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goes therein shall not know peace” (Isa. 59:8).

Left to his own devices, the worst outcome for man appears inevitable.

A Horrifying Experience

Rod Buntzen, author of “The Armageddon Experience: A Nuclear Weapons Test Memoir” wrote in *The New York Times* what it was like to experience a nuclear explosion. An excerpt of his experience is included here to convey a tiny taste of the devastation

that could come from a war that spirals into nuclear conflict.

“In 1958, as a young scientist for the U.S. Navy, I witnessed the detonation of an 8.9-megaton thermonuclear weapon as it sat on a barge in Eniwetok Atoll, in the Marshall Islands. I watched from across the lagoon at the beach on Parry Island, where my group prepared instrumentation to measure the atmospheric radiation. Sixty-three years later, what I saw remains etched in my mind, which is why I’m so alarmed that the use of nuclear weapons can be discussed so cavalierly in 2022.”

“In a nuclear detonation, the thermal and shock effects are the most immediate and are unimaginable. The fission-fusion process that occurs in a thermonuclear explosion happens in a millionth of a second. As I watched from 20 miles away, all the materials in the bomb, barge and surrounding lagoon water and air had been vaporized and raised to a temperature of tens of millions of degrees.”

Mr. Buntzen described the explosion as an expanding radioactive fireball that eventually grew to a radius of 1.65 miles. He then described the intense heat he felt moments after detonation.

“The heat was becoming unbearable. Bare spots at my ankles were starting to hurt. The aluminum foil hood I had fashioned for protection was beginning to fail. I thought that the hair on the back of my head might catch on fire. The brightness the detonation created defies description. I worried that my high-density goggles would fail. Keeping my eyes closed, I turned until I could see the edge of the fireball.”

“About 30 or 40 seconds after detonation, I took off the goggles and watched the angry violet-red and brown cloud from the fireball.

“As the rising cloud started to form a mushroom cap, I waited for the shock wave to arrive. In the distance, I could see a long vertical shadow approaching. I instinctively opened my mouth and moved my jaw side to side to equalize pressure difference across my

eardrums, closed my eyes and put my hands over my ears.

“Pow!

“It hit me like a full body slap, knocking me back. I opened my eyes to see another shadow approaching from a slightly different direction. Over the next few seconds, I felt several smaller blows created by reflections of the pressure wave off distant islands.

“The fireball kept expanding and climbing at over 200 miles per hour, reaching an altitude of about 2 miles. The boiling mass 20 miles away turned into a mixture of white and gray vapor and continued its climb until it reached somewhere about 100,000 feet.

“Meanwhile, the lagoon water had receded like a curtain being pulled back, and the sea bottom slowly appeared. Shark netting that usually protected swimmers lay on the bottom.

“Finally, the water stopped receding and appeared to form a wall, like pictures of Moses parting the sea. The wall seemed to remain motionless before finally roaring back.”

Mr. Buntzen’s experience was of a controlled test. If that kind of power were unleashed on unsuspecting, unprotected masses, few would survive. Those who did would eke out an existence in crumble ruins and radioactive ashes.

Is this our inevitable, bleak future?

Peering into Prophecy

For those who grew up during the Cold War era, the modern nuclear threat brings back vivid memories. Now in their 60s and older, many Americans recall hiding under their desks in school and other drills they practiced in case of a nuclear strike.

Today’s children, who hear about Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on social media and in classrooms also wonder what a nuclear war would mean. Unlike in the past, however, today’s kids have greater access to accurate images, video and information that make the threat all the more real.

Fear of nuclear devastation can have a lifelong impact on children, said Nathaniel N. Ivers, an associate

professor of counseling at Wake Forest University. During the Cold War, studies revealed that vulnerable populations, including children and caregivers, experienced greater fear and anxiety over the nuclear threat than others, he said.

And parents who expressed more anxiety about a nuclear threat, he said, “tended to have children who were more anxious about nuclear bombs.” Times of heightened threat for nuclear detonation such as during the Cuban Missile Crisis can generate a profound awareness of their mortality and vulnerability.

“Children know there is very little they can do to protect themselves if a nuclear bomb were to hit their area, which can create feelings of helplessness and hopelessness,” Mr. Ivers said. “It also can create a sense of nihilism, especially in older children and adolescents.”

Nihilism—which literally means “nothing”—may be the saddest outcome of mankind’s ability to destroy itself. Nihilism endorses the idea that human existence is senseless and useless. Nihilists reject all morality and religious principles in the belief that life is meaningless. As a result, they throw out all objective truth, knowledge, morality and values.

While this extreme viewpoint remains fringe, it is growing in popularity. Nihilistic thinking is how more people are coping with threatening realities. They see little to no hope for mankind’s future.

Even those who are religious tend to think the Bible says people’s end is nothing but doom and gloom. The terms apocalypse, Revelation, final judgment and even prophecy always seem to trigger one ultimate outcome: total annihilation of all life on Earth in nuclear destruction.

But is this what the Bible really states?

On the contrary, God wants people to know that there *is* hope for the future. Life is not senseless or useless. It does have meaning and purpose.

Here are just two verses that those who reject the Bible as the true Word of God have no chance to appreci-

ate. The first is Matthew 5:5: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the Earth.” Jesus Christ used His first recorded sermon to explain that human beings have the opportunity to receive *the Earth* as an inheritance. (Notice mankind’s future is not eternity in heaven.)

Everyone knows what an inheritance is. The second verse, Daniel 7:27, explains more about the inheritance: “And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him.”

The “most High” is God the Father, and He promised to give an inheritance—an everlasting Kingdom—to all His children who dutifully serve and obey Him. This truth should destroy any idea that life has no purpose or meaning! And just as consequential, this truth eliminates any idea that God will allow mankind to use nuclear weapons to completely destroy itself or the Earth it is set to receive.

Yes, the Bible does describe worldwide calamity coming in the form of punishment, yet none of this comes from nuclear weapons. While Old Testament prophets and the book of Revelation are filled with catastrophic descriptions, none of these events are to wipe man from the face other the Earth. Rather, they are to get people’s attention so that God can work with them. Note His ultimate purpose is to “have *all men to be saved*, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (I Tim. 2:4).

More than you know, mankind’s potential is awesome, and God made the Bible to tell human beings all about it.

To read all the places in Scripture where God explains His purpose and future for His most magnificent creation, look up our free online book *The Awesome Potential of Man*, available at rcg.org/tapom. Reading this with an open Bible will change your life and renew (or establish) your faith in mankind’s bright future. □

tion. However, it need not be complicated. This leads us to the next few verses that Christianity just blows off.

(4) Matthew 5:17

The fourth verse never talked about in Christendom is Matthew 5:17, where Jesus said, “Think *not* that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to *fulfill*.”

The word “fulfill” means to “verify...fully preach, perfect...fill (up)... (make) full” (*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*). In other words, Jesus came to *verify* and *perfect* the Ten Commandments—to expand their meaning.

Matthew 5 is filled with examples of how the Ten Commandments have been made even more binding today. For instance, Jesus said, “...it was said by them of old time, You shall not kill...but I say...That whosoever is *angry* with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment...” (vs. 21-22). Instead of abolishing the commandments, Jesus *magnified* them (Isa. 42:21).

Ministers of this world twist these and other scriptures to sidestep and reject Jesus’ plain meaning about the importance of keeping God’s Law. They dismiss clear verses, such as Paul’s statement, “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yes, we *establish* the law” (Rom. 3:31).

(5) I John 5:3

This leads to the fifth overlooked verse—and it is crucial. I John 5:3: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous [burdensome].”

Many who claim to have love believe the commandments *are* grievous. God declares otherwise! Paul called the Law “holy,” “just,” “good” and “spiritual” (Rom. 7:12, 14). The Psalms say it is “perfect,” “sure,” “right” and “pure” (19:7-8).

Blessings flow from keeping God’s commands. Ancient Israel was

instructed to keep them, because—as with the whole Bible—they form His Instruction Manual on how to live. God’s Word reveals the only way to achieve a truly successful, happy and abundant life!

(6) Romans 13:10

The sixth verse takes this connection further. Romans 13:10: “Love works no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

Understand. The Bible defines love as *obedience* to God’s Law. It is that simple. There is no ambiguity or confusion! Yet most are ignorant of the true definition of love. Ministers everywhere speak endlessly about God’s love, while completely missing all of the vital scriptures that define it.

Jesus also said, “If you love Me, *keep My commandments*” (John 14:15). Nowhere does Jesus say, “He who professes to love Me—yet breaks My commandments—still loves Me.” If you are among the two billion who profess to be Christian, and someone asked you whether you love Jesus Christ, you would surely answer *yes*. But how would you prove it? What *evidence* could you provide?

To most, love is little more than a vague idea that cannot be defined. Ask 100 people to define love, and you will get 100 different responses—everything from a “feeling in the heart” to “just doing good.” A wide range of ideas exist because few consult the only Source that provides an absolute definition.

The first four commandments— not serving false gods, not making or worshipping images (idols) of God, not taking God’s name in vain, and observing the Sabbath—reveal how to love God. The remaining six—honor father and mother, do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, and do not covet—reveal how to love other human beings. When one obeys God’s Law, he *automatically* practices love—toward God and others. Love is easily demonstrated because action is required.

When one obeys any of the last six commandments, he—knowingly or not—is outwardly indicating love toward his fellow man.

Consider adultery. Though vast numbers break the seventh commandment, most would agree adultery is not showing love toward one’s spouse. Think of the devastation that results: broken trust, marriages, homes, relationships with children, and more. Conversely, by faithfulness, spouses show love toward each other.

Similarly, obeying the first four commands shows love toward God. Sadly, most do not even know these laws—and thus do not truly love God, despite what they may proclaim.

(7) Mark 7:6-9

The seventh passage that most outright reject is Mark 7:6-9. As you read, ask if you have ever heard it quoted by a minister. Jesus said to the Pharisees: “Isaiah prophesied of you *hypocrites*, as it is written, This people honor Me with their lips, but their *heart* is far from Me. Howbeit *in vain* do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the *commandments of men*” (Mark 7:6-7).

He added: “For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the *tradition of men*, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things you do...Full well you *reject* the commandment of God, that you may keep your *own tradition*” (vs. 8-9).

This is a strong indictment of the religious elite of that time! Jesus stated that the Pharisees professed to worship God, but inside they were far from Him. The context was that they sought opportunity to accuse Christ and His disciples of breaking their tradition—the “commandments of men”—merely because they did not wash their hands when they ate. The disciples were not breaking any laws of God. Jesus labeled the Pharisees’ worship “*vain*,” meaning to no purpose, fruitless.

Think. Jesus said the Pharisees’ worship was pointless! They certainly believed they were worshipping God, but Jesus revealed otherwise. The Pharisees obeyed religious laws of *men*

rather than *God's Law*. They were hypocrites—appearing to be pious while being inwardly “full of dead men's bones” (Matt. 23:27).

While God does authorize use of traditions (II Thes. 2:15), they never supplant or contradict His laws. The Pharisees, like so many today, claimed to know God. But the apostle John wrote, “He that says, I know Him, and *keeps not His commandments*, is a *liar*, and the truth is not in him” (I John 2:4).

Today's religious elite reject God's instructions and instead teach and hold to popular traditions: Christmas, Easter, Halloween, Sunday-keeping, a false trinitarian god, a false gospel about Jesus instead of the Kingdom of God, the fictions that God's Law was “nailed to the cross,” tithing was “done away,” the saved go to heaven, and a host of other beliefs. In fact, virtually all the teachings of orthodox Christianity are *manmade!*

To learn more, read the following books and booklets on our website. They present the *truth* of men's holidays, and that of many other doctrines. You will be astounded by the Bible's clear teachings on a host of topics: *The Ten Commandments – “Nailed to the Cross” or Required for Salvation?*; *The Trinity – Is God Three-In-One?*; *Saturday or Sunday – Which Is the Sabbath?*; *God's Holy Days or Pagan Holidays?*; *Which Is the True Gospel?*; *Do the Saved Go to Heaven?*; and *End All Your Financial Worries*.

As with the Pharisees, the world's ministers preach false doctrines and lead people away from God. If Jesus were here today, He would indict these ministers in the same manner! Ask yourself whether *you* are worshipping Jesus Christ in vain. Do not assume His warning only applies to others. Assume it could mean *YOU!* Investigate why you believe as you do—why you observe popular traditions.

(8) James 2

The eighth passage rarely even mentioned by ministers is in James 2. First, understand that some assert keeping

the Ten Commandments is “legalistic” merely because salvation is by grace. How do grace and *obedience to God* connect to salvation? And does obeying the Law—your works—mean you are trying to earn salvation?

Read James: “Even so faith, if it has not works, is dead, being alone... You have faith, and I have works: show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith *by* my works... But will you know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” (vs. 17-18, 20).

In regard to the Old Testament patriarch Abraham, verse 22 states, “See you how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?”

Most assume that grace and works are mutually exclusive. The Bible says no such thing. In fact, God's Word demonstrates *both* are required.

Think of salvation in this way. A wealthy father approaches his son heading off to college with this offer: “Son, upon graduation, I will give you one million dollars if you maintain a B average, never get drunk, and never cut classes.”

Ask: if the young man meets these conditions, will he receive the million dollars? Yes! Has his conduct earned him the money? No! Of course not. He merely did what all young men should do at college. Yet he would not receive the million dollars if he did not meet the preconditions—the *qualifiers!*

Salvation is the same. Of course God offers far more than a million dollars, but only those who obey Him—who qualify—may receive His offer. Why cannot millions of Christians understand such basic logic?

There is nothing one can do to earn salvation. It is completely a gift from God. No amount of commandment-keeping can atone for violating God's Law. Only Jesus' blood can do this. However, your reward in the next life, after receiving salvation, is determined by your works. The commandments describe personal responsibility—what you must do. Yet, when fully understood, obedience is not you doing it,

but rather Christ in you keeping the same commandments He did when in the flesh 2,000 years ago!

Do not accept the reasoning of men. Examine the pages of your Bible.

Another passage clarifies grace and works: “But God... is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us [Paul wrote], even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ... and has raised us up together... For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”

He continues, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *unto good works*, which God has before ordained that we should *walk in them*” (Eph. 2:4-6, 8-10).

All of James 2 discusses how faith and works go hand-in-hand toward achieving salvation and eternal reward. Christians demonstrate faith in God by doing good works and keeping His Law. Yet it requires Christ's faith working in them to succeed.

(9) Matthew 4:4

The ninth verse is Matthew 4:4: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”

Most Christians do not study their Bibles, never mind diligently. They do not use God's Word as an Instruction Manual for mankind. They do not live the Bible. They do not “study to show [themselves] approved unto God” or “rightly divide the word of truth” (II Tim. 2:15). If they did, especially this world's ministers, articles like this would be unnecessary. Everyone would already understand all these verses.

Fifty years ago, a newspaper article exposed Christians' ignorance of the Bible. Since then, however, this has worsened.

The article stated: “Some months ago, a Protestant pastor administered a Bible quiz to the members of his congregation. The questions were very simple. Anyone with a general knowledge of the Bible should have been able to answer all of them easily. The

results staggered the pastor. Only five percent of his flock made a commendable grade on the test. Fifteen percent failed to give a single correct answer. Sixty percent were unable to name the four Gospels. Seventy-five percent could not identify Calvary (Golgotha) as the place where Jesus was crucified.”

“The vast majority of Americans today are Bible illiterates. They simply have never read the book which they profess to regard as the ‘Word of God’” (*United Press International*).

So sadly true!

The reporter concluded, “A great many people have turned away from the Bible because when they do try to read it, they find they cannot understand it...To the modern reader, it has a remote and antiquarian flavor. It is likely to leave him with the impression the Bible is an ancient history book that has no real relevance to his life here and now” (*ibid.*).

Society almost considers biblical knowledge irrelevant. J.B. Phillips, of the Phillips Bible translation, wrote: “It is one of the curious phenomena of modern times that it is considered perfectly respectable to be abysmally ignorant of the Christian faith. Men and women who would be deeply ashamed of having their ignorance exposed in matters of poetry, music, or painting, for example, are not in the least perturbed to be found ignorant of the New Testament” (*The Young Church in Action*).

I would add they are even more ignorant of the Old Testament.

A true Christian does not let his Bible gather dust on a shelf. He daily studies it—every word from God’s mouth. (To learn *how* to study, read our article “The Rules of Effective Bible Study.”)

(10) Matthew 24:4-5

The 10th passage that is ignored by virtually every professing Christian relates to this entire article. In Matthew 24:4-5, Jesus warned: “Take heed that no man *deceive* you. For many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and shall *deceive many*.”

The first “many” here involves thought-to-be Christian ministers who proclaim Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, but who do not believe or teach what He taught. Neither do they come with His authority.

Six verses later, Jesus added, “...many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many” (vs. 11). Not only would false prophets deceive the great majority, they would also infiltrate the true Church, Christ warned, causing many true Christians to fall away. During the last days, false prophets were foretold to increase in number and in their power to deceive. Here is Jesus’ chilling warning: “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders...” (vs. 24).

“A true Christian does not let his Bible gather dust on a shelf. He daily studies it—every word from God’s mouth.”

You must understand the power, influence and grave danger presented by false prophets and false teachers—and grasp what it means for you. There are many deceivers at work today and there will also be others in the near future. But how many are taking heed, as Jesus said? How many are doing their homework on something so vital? How many are carefully examining those claiming to represent God?

The Bible says prophets fall into one of two categories—true or false. All—past, present or future—are one or the other. They cannot be both, and they cannot be in between. Within the category of false prophets are two types: those who claim to be prophets, but falsely foretell events, not being inspired by the true God—and those who do not necessarily claim to be

prophets, but who teach falsely about prophecy—and for that matter any other aspect of God’s Word. The latter would include false teachers and false ministers. As with false prophets, false teachers assert they are vested with God’s authority. Rather than falsely prophesying future events, they teach false doctrines supposedly from the Bible. Therefore, Jesus’ warnings also apply to false teachers, who work in the same way.

Understand. On the surface, false prophets rarely appear to be what they are. They are incredibly seductive and seem to be men of God. We have seen that effective deceivers have the ability to almost miraculously transform themselves into something they are not. This is how they are able to deceive so many.

Think of popular televangelists and religious personalities. The most famous are invariably the smoothest in style, tone, emphasis, body language, and word choice. These men come off as sincere and believable. The result is that thousands sit in stadiums mesmerized by these religious actors. In fact, some could win Academy Awards if they were actors.

The New Testament describes how false ministers and false prophets attempt to confuse even God’s people. Therefore, God must show exactly how to distinguish the true from the false—the genuine from the impostors. Many verses do this. God allows no room for doubt or confusion. Jesus said, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matt. 7:15). If such men appeared as vicious wolves, who would follow them? Because they can portray themselves as men of God—some masterfully—fooling many is easier than taking candy from a baby.

Do not let them fool you!

We have examined 10 verses that should now be impossible to misunderstand. While the Christian world either rejects, never discusses, or spiritualizes away their true meaning, you should not. □

Expanding Drought Leaves Western U.S. Scrambling for Water

Albuquerque, New Mexico (AP) – Tumbleweeds drift along the Rio Grande as sand bars within its banks widen. Smoke from distant wildfires and dust kicked up by intense spring winds fill the valley, exacerbating the feeling of distress that is beginning to weigh on residents.

One of North America's longest rivers, the Rio Grande, is another example of a waterway in the western U.S. that is tapped out.

From the Pacific Northwest to the Colorado River Basin, irrigation districts already are warning farmers to expect less this year despite growing demands fueled by ever-drying conditions. Experts say March marked the third straight month of below-average precipitation across the U.S. and areas of record dryness are expanding in the West.

Federal water managers shared their annual operating plan for the Rio

Grande, a major water source for millions of people and thousands of square miles of farmland in Colorado, New Mexico, Texas and Mexico. They believe they can keep the river flowing, but it will depend on the weather.

Ed Kandl, a hydrologist with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, said warmer temperatures will affect supplies, but relief could come if summer monsoons develop. "We'll just have to see what happens," he said.

Mark Garcia, who farms about 400 acres with his family in Valencia County, just south of Albuquerque, ran the numbers. He has a degree in mathematics and taught calculus for years before retiring and turning to the farm full time.

He found his family would be compensated for not irrigating about half of its acreage this year, and more water would be left in the river to help New Mexico work off a debt that has been

growing as the state falls short of its obligations to deliver water to neighboring Texas.

"Logically, it was almost like a no-brainer," Mr. Garcia said of opting into the following program. "The risk analysis was, I had to take it, I had to do it. I didn't want to, though."

Sitting in his backhoe in one of his fields, Mr. Garcia began to get emotional. He said he grew up watching his dad farm the land.

"I was born into this," he said. "The hard thing for me is I feel like I don't want the government to pay for me not to work. I have an issue with that."

The state of New Mexico and the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District are hoping more farmers can make that tough choice—at least long enough to help managers address the pending water debt.

Officials said it is possible the Rio Grande, as it passes through the heart of Albuquerque, could start drying in late August or early September.

With below-average snow cover and reservoirs in some places reaching critically low levels, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration noted in a recent monthly climate report that concerns are mounting that the western drought will intensify.

On the Colorado River, the U.S. Interior Department recently proposed holding back water in Lake Powell to maintain Glen Canyon Dam's ability to generate electricity amid what it said were the driest conditions in the region in more than 1,200 years.

The potential impacts to lower basin states that could see their water supplies reduced—California, Nevada and Arizona—are not yet known. But in the Pacific Northwest, experts are predicting one of the driest summers on record, noting that nearly 71 percent of the region made up of Oregon, Washington and Idaho is in drought and nearly one-quarter is already experiencing extreme drought. □



The Rio Grande flowing north of Albuquerque, New Mexico (April 10, 2022).

AP/SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN

Mexican Cartels Swap Arms for Cocaine, Fueling Colombia Violence

Bogota (Reuters) – Mexican drug cartels appear to be shipping high-powered weapons to Colombia to purchase shipments of cocaine, a trade Colombian authorities say is fueling the deadly struggle between rival traffickers for control of the nation’s drug routes.

A bevy of machine guns, assault rifles and semi-automatic handguns are flowing into the South American country, a dozen Colombian law enforcement officials told *Reuters*.

Among the weapons popping up in traffickers’ arsenals is the Belgium-made FN Five-seveN pistol, sources said. Nicknamed the “cop killer,” the 5.7-caliber weapon can penetrate bullet-proof vests.

Most of the 1,478 long arms confiscated from Colombian armed groups in 2020 and 2021 were foreign-made and imported clandestinely, the police say, along the same smuggling routes used to get drugs out.

Mexican drug gangs have easy access to guns purchased in the United States and long-term business relationships with Colombian armed groups, from whom they have purchased cocaine for decades, Colombian authorities said.

Now cartel emissaries are increasingly paying for shipments of cocaine with guns, authorities say, in part to avoid the need to move large quantities of cash across borders.

The potent firepower of the cartel-supplied arsenal has potential impli-

cations for Colombia’s security. Heavy arms in the hands of criminals put law enforcement at risk and could further complicate the troubled implementation of a 2016 peace deal between Bogota and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) rebels.

Last year, 148 members of the armed forces and the national police were killed in Colombia, the highest figure in six years and a 57 percent increase from 2020, according to figures from the Ministry of Defense.

“What illegal armed groups in Colombia are doing is using the Mexicans to equal and exceed the armed forces of the state in terms of weaponry,” an official at the police’s Anti-Terrorism and Arms Tracing Information Center (CIARA) said.

“In the future, that could have serious implications, like an increase in hostilities,” according to the official, who said armed groups may use the weapons



Soldiers form up upon the arrival of the commander of the Colombian Armed Forces, General Luis Fernando Navarro, at a military base in Tumaco, Colombia (Dec. 13, 2021).

REUTERS/LUISA GONZALEZ

not only against law enforcement but in battles with each other.

The agency authorized the person to speak to *Reuters* on the condition they not be identified.

The Colombian police say they have a permanent dialogue with their U.S. and Mexican counterparts on keeping weapons out of drug traffickers' hands.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) declined to comment, while the Mexican government did not respond to *Reuters* questions.

Mexican Connection

Colombian authorities say the battle for control of their country's drug trade is waged between former FARC members who reject the peace accord; guerrillas from the still-active National Liberation Army (ELN); and members of a plethora of criminal syndicates, including the Clan del Golfo, Colombia's largest cartel.

Though FARC dissidents and the ELN espouse some of the same Marxist ideals, and they occasionally allied against the government during the height of the civil war, they now regularly fight each other and rival crime gangs to dominate lucrative drug routes, security officials said.

Law enforcement encounters with these groups are turning up powerful weapons.

In mid-December last year, Colombia's army conducted an operation against FARC dissidents in southwestern Narino province, a major coca-producing region. The military said it captured 16 people and seized a cache of weapons, including 24 U.S.-made M16 assault rifles and AR-15 semiautomatic rifles.

A similar haul was found in a different FARC dissident camp in the southern jungle province of Cauca in 2019, according to the army: a M60 machine gun, an AR-15 rifle with an added scope for use by a sniper, and a dozen assault rifles, including M4s and M16s.

Authorities said they believe such guns are supplied by Mexico's Sinaloa, Zeta and Jalisco New Generation cartels, all of which have emissaries on Colombian soil.

Their representatives are present in 11 of Colombia's 32 provinces, according to a 2021 police intelligence report seen by *Reuters*.

The Sinaloa cartel, once headed by jailed kingpin Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, has the most extensive geographic reach and deepest relationships with Colombian armed groups, the report said.

Some 55 Mexicans have been accused or convicted of drug trafficking offenses in Colombia in the last three years, according to the national prisons agency.

Colombia's national police said they had captured Brian Donaciano Olguin, a Mexican national whom they allege served as the Sinaloa cartel's most important go-between with FARC dissidents, calling his arrest the most important yet of a cartel emissary. *Reuters* was unable to contact Mr. Olguin or determine if he has legal counsel.

Mexico's warring drug gangs have been bulking up on military-grade armaments at home, alarming officials in their own country.

Last year, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's government sued gunmakers, accusing them of facilitating weapons trafficking, which the gunmakers deny.

U.S. gunmakers support stronger enforcement of existing laws, including imprisoning people who steal and smuggle guns, Mark Oliva, director for public affairs at the National Shooting Sports Foundation, a firearms industry trade group, said in an email.

Guns are a handy form of currency for gangsters.

Paying coke suppliers with weapons, rather than bulky cash, helps Mexican cartels launder profits and move money around more easily, said General

Fernando Murillo, head of DIJIN, the investigative division of Colombia's national police.

"Every day [conducting] drug trafficking through cash payments gets more difficult. So now they are using different methods: a Mexican cartel might pay with sophisticated arms," Mr. Murillo said.

Trading Up

Until the 1990s, Colombian guerrillas and paramilitaries largely used Russian-made AK-47s left over from wars in Central America, officials from the police and armed forces told *Reuters*.

As drug trafficking expanded and grew more lucrative, armed groups upgraded to newer AK-47s, U.S.-made M16s and AR-15s and Israeli-made Tavor assault rifles, police officials said. While some guns go for as little as \$500 in Colombia, machine guns can fetch up to \$5,000, they said.

The leaders of the Segunda Marquetalia, a group of FARC dissidents, have appeared repeatedly in YouTube videos armed with Tavor assault rifles likely supplied by Mexican cartels, according to the police's CIARA center.

The U.S. DEA estimates Colombian criminal groups earn some \$10 billion from drug transactions per year.

The flow of weapons southward comes as Colombian provinces like Norte de Santander, on the border with Venezuela, and Narino and Cauca, on the Pacific coast, have seen increases in coca production and associated violence by armed groups, despite U.S.-backed efforts by President Ivan Duque to slash narcotics production.

The Clan del Golfo alone moves some 22 tons of cocaine per month for clients including the Sinaloa and Jalisco cartels, according to Colombian police, who say the Clan's gangster allies in Medellin have used the FN Five-seveN pistol in internal disputes. □

There is hope beyond the darkness.

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