

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2022

THE

RCG.ORG/REALTRUTH

REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING



Britain's Last
Monarch?



NASA's Space Launch System rocket with the Orion spacecraft aboard is seen atop a mobile launcher as preparations for launch continue at Kennedy Space Center in Florida (Sept. 2, 2022).

NASA/BILL INGALLS

Why Man Wants to Go Back

It appears man's footprints will grace the lunar surface once again—more than five decades after the first landing. What is motivating us to return?

Page 4

Front Cover: Past and present monarchs of England are pictured left to right: King George VI, Queen Elizabeth II, King Charles III, Queen Victoria and King George V. Photo Illustration by Jody E. Lydick.

Credits: All photos from Getty Images unless otherwise noted. Pages 12-23, 31-33 contain information from Reuters and The Associated Press.

Personal from the Editor-in-Chief
Cracks in the Christmas Legacy
Page 1

Nurture Your Mind with Nature
Page 9

Britain's Last Monarch?
 After Queen Elizabeth II's monumental reign ended, questions emerged of whether the crown should have a role in British politics—or even exist at all in the modern world.
Page 12

Forgotten History: Rethinking Turkey's Past
 When trying to understand the modern nation of Turkey, few look far enough into its history.
Page 16

U.S. Children Suffer Historic Learning Setbacks
Page 22

Is Jesus a Myth?
 Skeptics claim the Jesus Christ written about in the Bible is pure fiction. But you can know for sure that He really existed.
Page 25

World News Desk
Page 31

HOW THIS MAGAZINE IS PAID FOR:
 The Real Truth™ is made possible by the voluntary, freely given tithes and offerings of the members of The Restored Church of God®, and by the offerings and donations of co-workers and donors around the world. Contributions are gratefully welcomed and are tax deductible in the U.S. and Canada. Those who wish to voluntarily aid and support the Work of God in preaching and publishing the gospel to all nations are gladly welcomed as co-workers. Contributions may be sent to the following address:

The Real Truth
 1000 Ambassador Drive
 Wadsworth, OH 44281
rcg.org/realtruth

PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
 David C. Pack

MANAGING EDITOR
 Edward L. Winkfield

SENIOR EDITOR
 Bradford G. Schleifer

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
 Samuel C. Baxter

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

- David C. Pack
- Samuel C. Baxter
- Justin M. Frazier
- Wulphert de Graaf
- Andrew J. Holcombe
- Richard O. Lee
- David J. Litavsky
- Frank Lydick
- Kenneth M. Orel
- Garrick R. Oxley
- Timothy D. Ranney
- Dominic J. Rivard
- Bradford G. Schleifer
- Nestor A. Toro
- F. Jaco Viljoen
- Vidal N. Wachuku
- Edward L. Winkfield

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

- Melissa M. Holcombe
- David J. Litavsky
- Garrick R. Oxley
- Marcia K. Ranney

ART/GRAPHICS

- Frank Lydick
- Chauntel A. Houk
- Darnitra D. Jackson
- Jody E. Lydick
- Sarah O. Vidal

WEBSITE SERVICES

- Bradford G. Schleifer
- Angela K. Baxter
- Amanda B. Dodd
- Victoria R. Eriksson
- Courtney L. Frazier

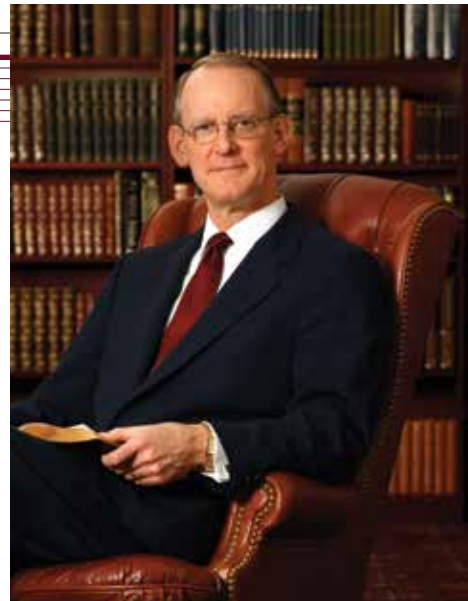
The preparation and production of this magazine involved the work of editors, proofreaders, graphic artists, illustrators, writers, researchers and those who support the Work of God.
 Copyright © 2022, The Restored Church of God. Printed in the USA. All rights reserved.

The Restored Church of God is not responsible for the return of unsolicited articles and photos.

Scriptures are quoted from the King James (or Authorized) Version of the Bible, unless otherwise noted.

PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



Cracks in the Christmas Legacy

CHRISTMAS IS THOUGHT to be a wonderful time, focusing participants on giving, family togetherness, beautiful music and decorations, feasting on special foods, and singing traditional carols. All of this is supposedly centered around the worship of Jesus Christ, and His birth on December 25.

Where did Christmas originate? What is the origin of Santa Claus—mistletoe—Christmas trees—holly wreaths—Yule logs—and exchanging gifts? Many seek to put Christ back into Christmas. Was He ever there? Surely the Bible instructs to do all these things. Or does it?

I grew up keeping Christmas, and it was a big event in our family every year. On Christmas Eve, excitement grew with every passing minute. After going to bed, I could neither sleep nor wait until morning to see all that “Santa” had brought me.

Christmas certainly *felt* wonderful to me. I trusted what my parents told me. I had no reason to doubt them. I was not taught to question the true origin of Christmas!

Most never reflect on *why* they believe what they believe or do what they do. We live in a world filled with customs, but few ever seek to understand their origin. We generally accept them without question. Most people basically do what everyone else does—following the crowd because it is easy!

Let’s look at the roots of Christmas. Let’s see *why* people follow the customs associated with it. Why is it kept on December 25? The early New Testament Church never kept it. Why?

This article introduces facts from history and Scripture that, when placed together, paint a complete picture. Let’s avoid all assumptions and only accept what can be *proven!*

The truth of this holiday celebration will shock you!

True Origin

Nearly all aspects of Christmas observance have their roots in Roman custom and religion. We will look at many respected sources (all emphasis will be mine), starting with the following admission from *The Buffalo News*.

“The earliest reference to Christmas being marked on Dec. 25 comes from the second century after Jesus’ birth. It is considered likely the first Christmas celebrations were in reaction to the Roman Saturnalia, a harvest festival that marked the winter solstice—the return of the sun—and honored Saturn, the god of sowing. Saturnalia was a rowdy time, much opposed by the more austere leaders among the still-minority Christian sect. Christmas developed, one scholar says, as a means of replacing worship of the sun with worship of the Son.

“By A.D. 529, after Christianity had become the official state religion of the Roman Empire, Emperor Justinian made Christmas a civic holiday. The celebration of Christmas reached its peak—some would say its worst moments—in the medieval period when it became a time for conspicuous consumption and unequalled revelry.”

Think. It was 300 years after Christ when the Roman church began keeping Christmas!—and not until hundreds of years after this that it was mandated to be kept throughout the empire as an official festival honoring “Christ.”

Consider these admissions from the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, under “Christmas”: “Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Church...the first evidence of the feast is from Egypt.” Further, “Pagan customs centering around the January calends [the early days of each month] gravitated to Christmas.” Under the topic “Natal Day,” Origen, an early Catholic writer, admitted, “In the Scriptures, no one is recorded to have kept a feast or held a great banquet on his birthday. It is only sinners (like Pharaoh and Herod) who make great rejoicings over the day on which they were born into this world.”

Encyclopedia Americana reveals: “Christmas...was not observed in the first centuries of the Christian church, since the Christian usage in general was to celebrate the death of remarkable persons rather than their birth...a feast

was established in memory of this event [Christ’s birth] in the 4th century. In the 5th century the Western church ordered the feast to be celebrated [forever] on the day of the Mithraic rites of the birth of the sun and at the close of the Saturnalia, as no certain knowledge of the day of Christ’s birth existed.”

“Think. It was 300 years after Christ when the Roman church began keeping Christmas!—and not until hundreds of years after this that it was mandated to be kept throughout the empire as an official festival honoring ‘Christ.’”

Here are more facts from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, under the heading “Christmas”: “In the Roman world the Saturnalia (December 17) was a time of merrymaking and exchanging of gifts. December 25 was also regarded as the birth date of the Iranian mystery god Mithra, the Sun of Righteousness. On the Roman New Year (January 1), houses were decorated with greenery and lights, and gifts were given to children and the poor. To these observances were added the German and Celtic Yule rites when the Teutonic tribes penetrated into Gaul, Britain, and central Europe. Food and good fellowship, the Yule log and Yule cakes, greenery and fir trees, gifts and greetings all commemorated different aspects of this festive season. Fires and lights, symbols of warmth and lasting life, have always been associated with the winter festival, both pagan and Christian.”

Stunning information! I ask: Do you care?

Consider what *The Democrat and Chronicle* admitted regarding who mandated the celebration: “The Roman festival of Saturnalia, Dec. 17-24, moved citizens to decorate their homes with greens and lights and give gifts to children and the poor. The Dec. 25 festival of *natalis solis invicti, the birth of the unconquered sun*, was decreed by the emperor Aurelian in A.D. 274 as a Winter Solstice celebration, and sometime (later)...was Christianized as a date to celebrate the birth of the Son of Light.”

Dr. William Gutsch further publicly confirmed the true origin and nature of Christmas with this: “The early Romans were not celebrating Christmas but rather a pagan feast called the Saturnalia. It occurred each year around the beginning of winter, or the winter solstice. This was the time when the sun had taken its lowest path across the sky and the days were beginning to lengthen, thus assuring another season of growth.

“If many of the trappings of the Saturnalia, however, seem to parallel what so many of us do today, we can see where we borrowed...our holiday traditions. And indeed, it has been suggested that while Christ was most likely not born in late December, the early Christians—then still an outlawed sect—moved Christmas to the time of the Saturnalia to draw as little attention as possible to themselves while they celebrated their own holiday.”

Let’s understand. Saturnalia simply means “festival or celebration of Saturn.” Saturday derives from the name of this god, as do all the other days of the week from pagan gods—Sun’s day, Moon’s day, Tiw’s day, Woden’s day, Thor’s day, Frigga’s day, and Saturn’s day.

But who was Saturn? Saturn was the god of sowing or planting—the fire god—because heat from the sun was required for the planting and growth of crops. He was also worshipped in this dead-of-winter festival so that he would

Please see **PERSONAL**, page 29



Should You Celebrate Thanksgiving?

For many in North America, the yearly celebration of giving thanks is reduced to gorging on a big meal, excessive drinking the night before, or snoozing in front of a football game. For others, Black Friday—a day of frenzied shopping to capture the best market deals of the year—overshadows the holiday altogether.

Given all the media hype, excess and sensational commercialism surrounding it, the original meaning of Thanksgiving can easily be lost

for Americans and Canadians. Yet citizens of these prosperous nations have every reason to keep the day as it was intended.

Although the national holiday was not instituted in the Bible, the scriptures have much to say about thankfulness. The article “Should You Celebrate Thanksgiving Day?” provides historical and biblical insight into this holiday that will help you better appreciate everything that you have.

Read the article today at rcg.org/syctd.

A large orange and white rocket is being mated to the International Space Station. The rocket is oriented vertically, with its nose pointing upwards. The orange section is the external tank, and the white section is the boosters. The nose cone is white and has a small American flag on it. The rocket is being mated to the station's structure, which is visible on the right side of the image. The background is black, and a large, bright, full moon is visible in the upper left quadrant.

Why Man Wants to Go Back

It appears man's footprints will grace the lunar surface once again—more than five decades after the first landing. What is motivating us to return?

BY DAVID J. LITAVSKY



IDEALISM CAN seem to border on lunacy—particularly when one does not have the means to accomplish a goal.

One could have thought this when U.S. President John F. Kennedy committed on May 25, 1961, to land a man on the moon and return him safely to Earth “before this decade is out.”

At the time he uttered those words, this goal sounded virtually impossible. “We didn’t have the tools or equipment—the rockets or the launchpads, the spacesuits or the computers or the micro-gravity food,” *Smithsonian* reported.

“And it isn’t just that we didn’t have what we would need; we didn’t even know what we would need. We didn’t have a list; no one in the world had a list. Indeed, our unpreparedness for the task goes a level deeper: We didn’t even know how to fly to the Moon. We didn’t know what course to fly to get there from here.

“And...we didn’t know what we would find when we got there. Physicians worried that people wouldn’t be able to think in micro-gravity conditions. Mathematicians worried that we wouldn’t be able to calculate how to rendezvous two spacecraft in orbit—to bring them together in space and dock them in flight both perfectly and safely.”

Thousands of concerns were laid on the table: A Cornell astrophysicist warned that lunar dust that had been isolated from oxygen could combust when brought back into a lunar module’s cabin. He also speculated that a spacecraft might sink into the moon’s soil and bury its occupants alive.

NASA itself, only three years old at the time, had no portable computers that could guide a spaceship. No way of talking to the astronauts as they were on the way. None of the metal alloys engineers would use on the spacecraft were yet invented.

A close-up view of the Orion spacecraft atop the Space Launch System rocket as it rolls to Launch Complex 39B at NASA’s Kennedy Space Center in Florida (June 6, 2022).

NASA/BEN SMEGELSKY

The president and his staff understood what the space program was up against. After making the proposition, Kennedy stated: “No single space project in this period will be more impressive to mankind, or more important for the long-range exploration of space; and none will be so difficult or expensive to accomplish.”

It was estimated that the costs for the Apollo program would reach \$40 billion—equivalent to \$391.6 billion in 2022. Even the International Space Station—the most expensive single item ever constructed—did not cost half this figure over its 20-year lifespan.

But it was not a lunatic idea. By the early 60s, Americans were itching to beat the USSR in *some way*. The Soviets were the first to launch a satellite into space with Sputnik in 1957 and, in April 1961, put the first human being in space.

Through the next eight years, NASA had to solve thousands of problems to safely get humans to the moon. “Every one of those challenges was tackled and mastered between May 1961 and July 1969,” *Smithsonian* continued.

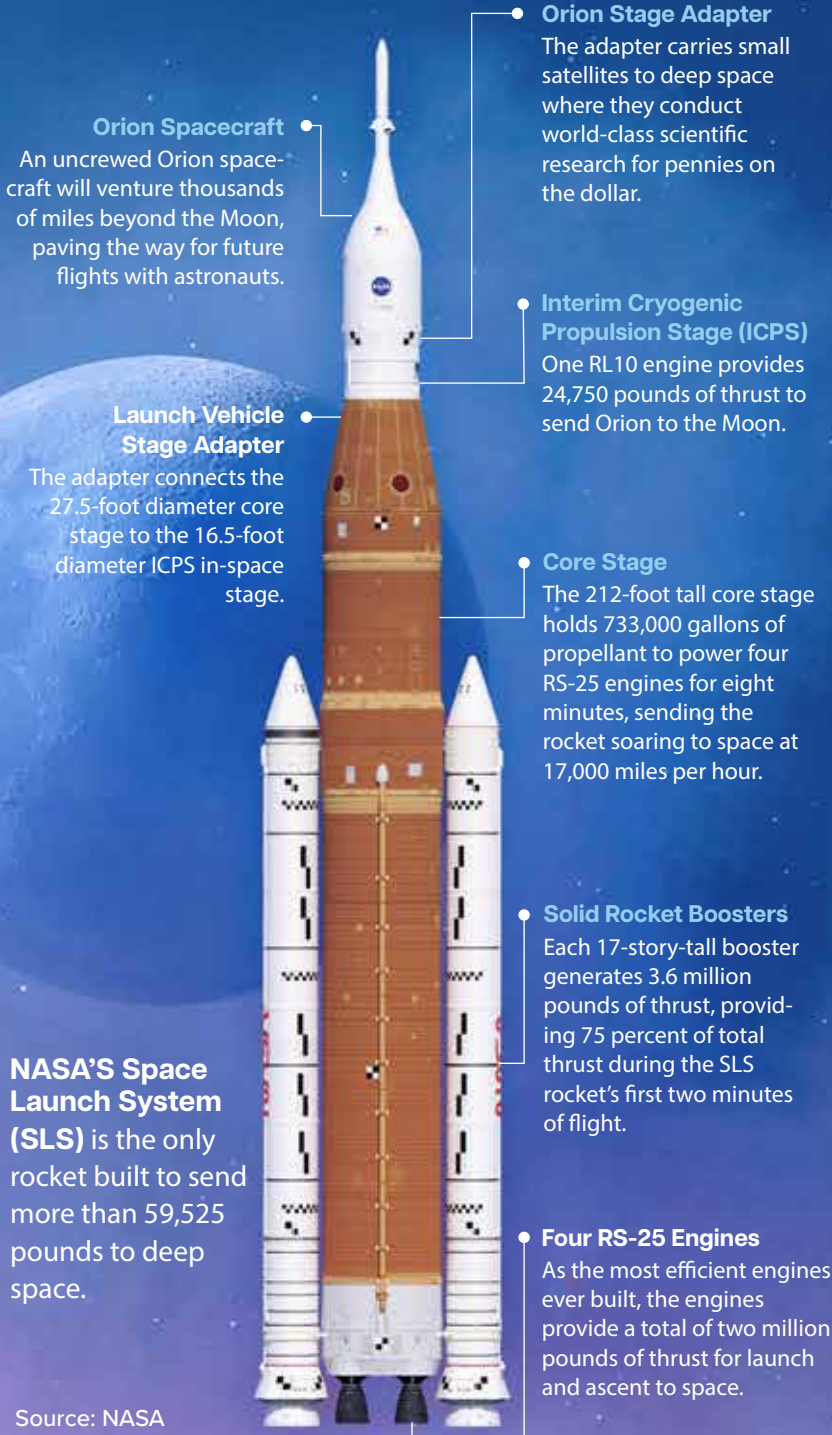
Not all went smoothly. The first crewed mission of the Apollo program ended in disaster in 1967 when all three of its crew members died in a fire during a launch rehearsal test. And the Apollo 10 crew—who conducted the “dress rehearsal” months before the Apollo 11 moon landing—were seconds from blacking out and crashing on lunar soil after the spacecraft began spiraling out of control.

Yet the blood, sweat and tears expended by hundreds of thousands of scientists, engineers and factory workers fulfilled Kennedy’s prerogative—before the decade was out. In that way, when Neil Armstrong made the small step to put the first human footprint on the lunar surface during the Apollo 11 mission, it truly represented a giant leap for mankind.

It began decades of technological progress and unquestioned U.S. leadership in exploration and military prowess. Young minds were fascinated into the decades that became known

Space Launch System

ARTEMIS 1 Moon Rocket



Orion Spacecraft

An uncrewed Orion spacecraft will venture thousands of miles beyond the Moon, paving the way for future flights with astronauts.

Orion Stage Adapter

The adapter carries small satellites to deep space where they conduct world-class scientific research for pennies on the dollar.

Interim Cryogenic Propulsion Stage (ICPS)

One RL10 engine provides 24,750 pounds of thrust to send Orion to the Moon.

Launch Vehicle Stage Adapter

The adapter connects the 27.5-foot diameter core stage to the 16.5-foot diameter ICPS in-space stage.

Core Stage

The 212-foot tall core stage holds 733,000 gallons of propellant to power four RS-25 engines for eight minutes, sending the rocket soaring to space at 17,000 miles per hour.

Solid Rocket Boosters

Each 17-story-tall booster generates 3.6 million pounds of thrust, providing 75 percent of total thrust during the SLS rocket's first two minutes of flight.

Four RS-25 Engines

As the most efficient engines ever built, the engines provide a total of two million pounds of thrust for launch and ascent to space.

NASA'S Space Launch System (SLS) is the only rocket built to send more than 59,525 pounds to deep space.

Source: NASA

as the Space Age—complete with the space movie epic *Star Wars* and TV series *Star Trek*.

But what was accomplished in eight years reveals a fundamental drive for mankind to explore—and an incredible reason for it.

The All-time Moment

More than 50 years ago was a moment millions of now grown-up Baby Boomers say defined their childhood: when they watched NASA's Apollo 11 make the first manned lunar landing. Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on the moon together. Michael Collins zipping along in orbit in the command module.

But little did viewers back on Earth understand the complexity of the mission. The descent was a near-miss. Armstrong manually flew the Eagle—the name given to the module that would land on the moon—to avoid a rocky area. They found a landing spot with only two seconds of fuel to spare before a mandatory abort.

When the Eagle touched the ground, Armstrong and Aldrin were supposed to sleep for five hours before opening the hatch. But the two—one a hardened X-15 test pilot and the other an Air Force veteran—went ahead with preparations. Armstrong's heart rate exceeded 160 beats per minute at this time.

Next, Armstrong squeezed through the opening just large enough for his space-suited frame. He pulled a ring that activated the TV camera, and some 600 million people—one-fifth of the world population at the time—began watching the ghostly black-and-white images on live television. It was the public's first moving-picture view of the moon's surface. People came to a standstill as they watched, from Marines fighting in the jungles of Vietnam to children at Disneyland.

A plaque on the ladder of the Eagle, which was left permanently on the lunar surface, states: "Here men from the planet Earth first set foot upon the Moon, July 1969, A.D. We came in peace for all mankind." It was signed by President Richard Nixon and the three astronauts.

Top, the International Space Station photographed by Expedition 56 crew members from a Soyuz spacecraft after undocking (Oct. 4, 2018). Bottom, engines for early Artemis missions being prepared for flight at Stennis Space Center near Bay St. Louis, Mississippi.

NASA/ROSCOSMOS (TOP); NASA/JOEY MICHEL (BOTTOM)

Armstrong described the surface as “very fine-grained” and “almost like a powder.” When he made the epic step, it became, as he said, “one giant leap for mankind.”

Soon after, Aldrin joined his partner and described what he saw as “magnificent desolation.” The lunar pioneers then spent the next 2.5 hours picking up soil samples, taking photos and testing different walking methods on the slippery surface in one-sixth of Earth’s gravity.

From 1969 to 1972, 12 men landed on the moon over six Apollo missions. The last time human footprints graced the lunar surface was during the Apollo 17 mission.

Waning Interest

Public interest in space exploration had steadily declined by the last Apollo mission. At that point, it was clear the U.S. had space superiority. Cold War tensions began easing—evidenced by joint space projects with the Soviets such as the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project, which involved the docking of the two superpowers’ spacecraft in 1975. In addition, domestic issues were on the rise in the homeland. With inflation rising, the government was under pressure to reduce spending.

In 1973, 59 percent of those polled by Gallup said they favored cutting funding for space exploration.

“The Apollo project was a political project,” Sergei Khrushchev, the son of late Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, alleged in an interview with *Scientific American*.

The moon landing made a bold statement, but many other important areas of space exploration exist. And NASA’s programs have indeed flourished since, with the International Space Station, Mars rovers, the Hubble Space Telescope, automated explora-



tion of the outer regions of the solar system such as New Horizons visiting Pluto in July 2015, and most recently the launch of the James Webb Space Telescope—the largest of its kind in space today.

Yet the notion of putting human beings on another planetary body was never truly extinguished.

Going Back

There is a renewed race to get human beings back on the moon, although it

has a lower profile than the one in the 60s. NASA is calling the new program Artemis, after the twin sister of Apollo in Greek mythology.

For the next go-around, the space agency wants its moonwalkers to reflect today’s more diverse astronaut corps, thus the name of Apollo’s sister. Artemis was goddess of the hunt as well as the moon.

After several canceled launches due to fuel leaks and engine issues, NASA is now setting sights on getting

its new moon rocket test launched in mid-November.

Once in space, the crew capsule atop the rocket will aim for lunar orbit with three test dummies, a crucial test rehearsal before astronauts climb aboard in 2024. People last walked on the moon in 1972.

The next generation of rockets NASA will use for the Artemis program is designed to reach farther destinations such as Mars.

“We’re on the eve of a historic launch kicking off the Artemis era and this contract shows NASA is making long-term plans toward living and working on the Moon, while also having a forward focus on getting humans to Mars,” Lisa Callahan, vice president and general manager for Commercial Civil Space at Lockheed Martin, said in a statement.

The desire to put man back on Earth’s nearest neighbor may seem like pure nostalgia. But there is a fascinating point to man’s inherent need to explore.

What’s Out There?

Think of all the reasons man is driven to explore outer space.

For one, it pushes us to progress in ways we now mostly take for granted.

In 60 years, we went from being bound to Earth to eventually exploring every planet in the solar system. With satellite coverage, we can talk on cellphones and drive with GPS. Technologies for industry, transportation and medicine, as well as our understanding of human health, have advanced because of space travel. Also, the photographic and video images of places never seen before have aroused imaginations and inspired generations to continue the quest of understanding humanity’s place in the universe.

Ultimately, space exploration missions answer fundamental but profound questions mankind has asked for millennia. Questions NASA listed: “What is the nature of the Universe? Is the destiny of humankind bound to Earth? Are we and our planet unique? Is there life elsewhere in the Universe?”

These same questions have motivated humans to devote their lives to searching the great unknowns: Cortez and Columbus claiming land in the New World, crews racing to be the first to reach the South Pole in Antarctica, Theodore Roosevelt charting the River of Doubt in the Amazon, and the ongoing effort to reach greater depths in the oceans’ trenches.

Man has an insatiable need to find anything and everything that is beyond his line of sight. David Scott, an astronaut who set foot on the moon during the first rover mission in Apollo 15, summarized this: “As I stand out here in the wonders of the unknown at Hadley, I sort of realize there’s a fundamental truth to our nature. Man must explore. And this is exploration at its greatest.”

Eyes to the Sky

There is one source that can explain our passion for understanding the unknown: the Being who created everything.

Note: “Thus says God the LORD, He that created the heavens, and stretched them out” (Isa. 42:5). “I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even My hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded” (45:12). “It is He that sits upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretches out the heavens as a curtain, and spreads them out as a tent to dwell in” (40:22).

The heavens glisten with the fingerprints of a Creator. It is no wonder Buzz Aldrin quoted on the last night of his mission before splashdown: “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained: What is man, that You are mindful of him?” (Psa. 8:3-4).

Mr. Aldrin was quoting a man who lived 3,000 years ago: David—who slayed Goliath and was king of ancient Israel.

Both Mr. Aldrin and King David realized how tiny and insignificant they were. So does anyone who has seen the vastness of the universe.

The same Being who created the stars also made human beings, and designed us to feel this way. Notice: “He has set the world [eternity] in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end” (Ecc. 3:11).

God is eternal—He is infinite! But because human beings are finite, “a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labor to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yes further; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it” (8:17).

God put the desire to understand all of His Creation and our place in it into our hearts, so we yearn and search. Space exploration programs are a modern fulfillment of this. But God promised that we would not be able to figure out eternity or fully understand the universe. Therefore, we continue to wonder and explore.

This can sound defeating—until you realize the mind-boggling purpose for every human being who has ever lived.

Again, the answer is contained within God’s Word. Read what comes after the verses Mr. Aldrin quoted from Psalms: “You made [man] to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet” (8:6).

What the psalmist explained has enormous implications: God gave man control over everything He made—which is *everything!*

Your incredible potential exceeds even the grandest accomplishments of mankind. They all pale in comparison to what God has in store for you.

Read *The Awesome Potential of Man* to grasp the crucial purpose for your life. □



Order a Free Copy!
rcg.org/tapom



Nurture Your Mind with Nature

ONCE A FAVORITE pastime, spending time outside in nature is becoming a thing of the past for many Americans.

“Nearly half of the U.S. population doesn’t participate in any outdoor recreation at all, and only 17.9 percent got out at least once a week in 2018,” *Outside* magazine reported, citing a 2019

study by the Outdoor Foundation. “The result? One billion fewer hikes, climbs, rides, and other outdoor excursions in 2018 than in 2008. Even kids are staying inside. Children took part in 15 percent fewer outdoor activities in 2018 than they did six years before.

“The study suggests barriers like work, technology, and cost of entry

prevent individuals from playing outside. ‘[The study] indicates that we’re becoming an indoor nation,’ said Lise Aangeenbrug, the executive director of the Outdoor Foundation, the philanthropic extension of the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA). ‘People are missing out on the joy, learning, and community building that the out-

doors can provide. Whether you bike, hike, ski, hunt, run, or fish, it's a lost opportunity.”

Although most would agree that getting outside for a breath of fresh air is a good idea, very few do. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, Americans spend a whopping 87 percent of their time indoors and an additional 6 percent inside vehicles. This leaves a paltry 7 percent of time spent outdoors.

This trend is not limited to Americans. According to a British wildlife study commissioned by Jordan Cereals, almost 70 percent of Britons described themselves as losing touch with nature, with nearly one in seven saying that they had not visited the countryside in two years.

These findings are eye-opening. More could be cited for other parts of the world. And consider that the above studies were before the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced people to spend even more time indoors than they had previously. If such studies were to be redone today, the numbers would reflect an even more significant disconnect with the natural world.

Recall that Ms. Aangeenbrug referred to spending time in nature as an opportunity. This connotes a benefit for those who take advantage of it. *Merriam-Webster* defines opportunity as “a favorable juncture of circumstances” and “a good chance for advancement or progress.”

Over time, people have lost touch with nature and its marvels. Many may not be aware of the potential for favor and advancement that time outdoors holds. We will examine several inspiring ways that time in nature can improve your life.

Stress Reduction

Studies have shown that living in a city is a risk factor for developing a mental disorder, while living close to nature benefits mental health. A central brain region involved in stress processing, the amygdala, has been proven to be less active during stress in people living in rural areas compared to those who live in cities.

“But so far the hen-and-egg problem could not be disentangled, namely whether nature actually caused the effects in the brain or whether the particular individuals chose to live in rural or urban regions,” Sonja Sudimac, a predoctoral fellow in the Lise Meitner Group for Environmental Neuroscience and lead author of a new study, stated.

To achieve causal evidence, researchers from this team examined brain activity in regions involved in stress processing in 63 healthy volunteers before and after a one-hour walk in Grunewald forest or a shopping street with traffic in Berlin using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). The study's results revealed that activity in the amygdala decreased after the outdoor walk, suggesting that nature

elicits beneficial effects on brain regions related to stress.

“The results support the previously assumed positive relationship between nature and brain health, but this is the first study to prove the causal link. Interestingly, the brain activity after the urban walk in these regions remained stable and did not show increases, which argues against a commonly held view that urban exposure causes additional stress,” explained Simone Kuhn, head of the Lise Meitner group.

The authors showed that nature positively impacts brain regions involved in stress processing and can already be observed after only a one-hour walk. Even short exposure to natural surroundings decreases amygdala activity, suggesting that a walk outdoors could serve as a preventive measure against developing mental health problems and buffering the potentially disadvantageous impact of the city on the brain.

The results align with a previous 2017 study in *Scientific Reports* that showed that city dwellers who lived close to the forest had a physiologically healthier amygdala structure and were presumably better able to cope with stress.

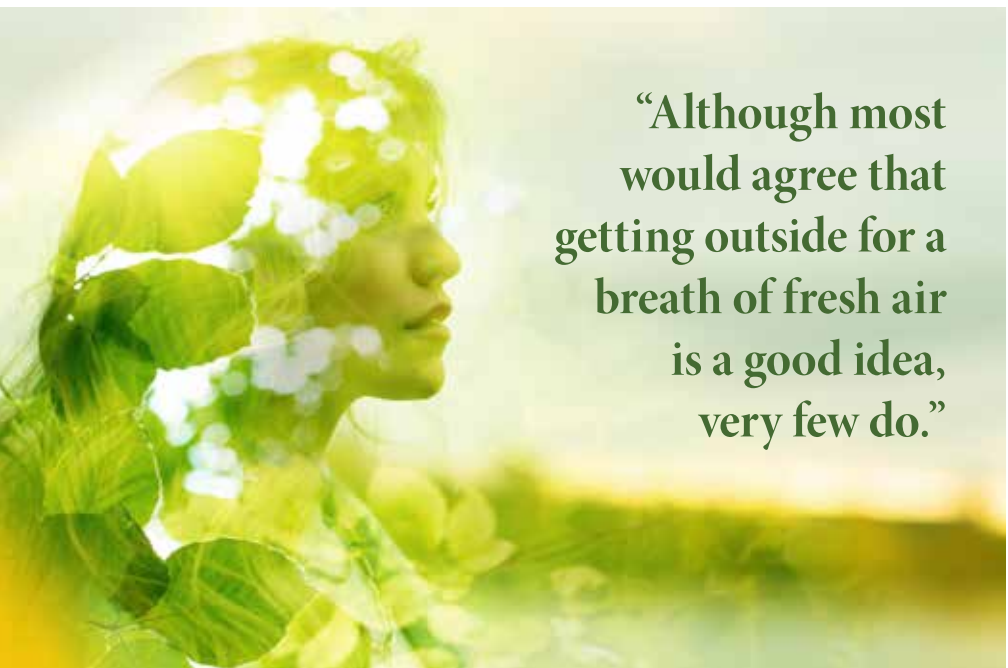
Peace and Productivity

Additional research shows the benefits of soaking in the great outdoors go well beyond stress reduction.

A Human Spaces report found that in addition to making us physically healthier, 15 percent of employees experienced a higher level of well-being, a 15 percent increase in creativity, and a 6 percent increase in productivity because of exposure to natural elements during the workday.

The study showed that not only does exposure to nature make us feel better, it also makes us more effective.

On the other hand, those with less access to nature often experience physical and mental health problems. A Johns Hopkins University study found that childhood asthma sufferers experienced 20 percent more symptomatic days for every 1,000 feet they



“Although most would agree that getting outside for a breath of fresh air is a good idea, very few do.”

were from a green space compared to those living next to them.

In addition, a compilation of studies published by *The Conversation* found that urban dwellers in Australia have a 39 percent higher risk of mood disorders and a 21 percent added risk of anxiety disorders versus their rural counterparts.

Clearly, our exposure to nature directly affects our health. Losing touch with it seems to have adverse effects. In contrast, regular exposure improves our overall wellbeing and, according to *Business Insider*, can even lower our mortality rate by up to 12 percent.

Nutrition

Losing touch with nature can ultimately have a detrimental impact on our survival as a species. Urbanization and separating ourselves from the natural environment are making us forget where our sustenance comes from.

Directly tied to our overall health is the food we eat. In every society, knowledge of what food is and is *not* is passed down from generation to generation. What, where and how to extract essential nutrients from our natural environment are all matters of survival and are increasingly being outsourced to big businesses. Individually being unable to identify, grow or harvest food in its natural state is increasing and can be a big problem.

Daily Express published a study in which 65 percent of Britons 25 years and under did not know what a pruner was, while a striking 10 percent under 35 were unfamiliar with a hose—both of which are essential for gardening. Even more shocking is that 77 percent had never grown vegetables in a garden.

In a later study conducted in Australia, 92 percent of children between 6 and 17 years of age did not know bananas grew on trees, 50 percent did not know beetroots grew in the ground, and 75 percent could not identify a radish or a leek, according to *News.com.au*.

“It’s a shame that so many Aussie kids seem unaware of where fresh fruit

and veg come from, especially in a country that is home to such beautiful and delicious produce,” world-famous chef Jamie Oliver told the media outlet.

Some have attempted to take on the task of educating people about their food. Yet the issue of food ignorance continues to grow. Parents are increasingly unable to pass this vital survival information to the next generation.

A lack of understanding of nature and the food that comes from it becomes an issue of global proportions. As the human population explodes beyond 8 billion and our arable land continues to decrease, our food supply goes down. *The Guardian* reported in 2015 that over the previous four decades, “nearly 33% of the world’s adequate or high-quality food-producing land has been lost at a rate that far outstrips the pace of natural processes to replace diminished soil.”

Conversely, immersing yourself in nature and learning about proper food and nutrition will open the door to robust health that cannot be attained otherwise.

God’s Purpose

The idea that man is tied to nature is not new. In the Bible, Genesis 2:7 states that man was created from the “dust of the ground.” God directed the first humans to “dress and keep” the surrounding environment (2:15) and to “have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the Earth” (1:28).

Mankind was to work and till the land for food, while guarding and protecting the integrity of the plants and animals. Logically, the way to accomplish all this most efficiently and effectively is to have a rich understanding of nature. This only becomes possible by learning and appreciating the different, intricate and essential natural beauty that surrounds us.

The apostle Paul added, “For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead” (Rom. 1:20).

God, the Creator of the planet, nature and mankind, clearly desires the human beings He made to spend time in the natural world He also devised. He *designed* us to benefit from time in nature. This is one aspect of how He “fearfully and wonderfully made” us (Psa. 139:14).

Wise King Solomon wrote, “The light is pleasant, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun” (Ecc. 11:7, New American Standard Version). It is *good* for you to get outdoors, away from the stale air and artificial light of your home or office. It starts with making a conscious effort to increase the amount of time you spend outside each day.

If you have not taken the time to connect with Creation, it is not too late. Commit to starting a small garden in your backyard next spring or to nurture a hanging pot in your kitchen. Make a plan to visit a botanical garden. Pledge in the coming days to visit a local park or even simply take a walk around your neighborhood for contact with fresh air and trees. Try an outdoor sport such as tennis or basketball or an outdoor hobby such as fishing or bird-watching.

These are just a few ways for you to regularly incorporate contact with your natural surroundings.

We have seen that a one-hour period in nature can make a big difference. Yet, if it is challenging to fit this into your schedule, even a small commitment can help. *Environmental Science & Technology* reported that “even small doses of outdoor exercise can have remarkable effects on mental health... In a meta-analysis of 10 studies, [Jules Pretty and Jo Barton of the University of Essex] found that getting outside—and moving—for as little as five minutes at a time improved both mood and self-esteem.”

So get outside! Start with five minutes and work up from there. Boost your health and well-being by doing what God designed you to do—be in touch with nature.

To learn even more about achieving vibrant health, read our free booklet *God’s Principles of Healthful Living at rcg.org/glohl*. □

Britain's Last MONARCH?

After Queen Elizabeth II's monumental reign ended, questions emerged of whether the crown should have a role in British politics—or even exist at all in the modern world.

BY DAVID J. LITAVSKY



TWO PHOTOGRAPHS taken this year could have represented two different generations of British history.

The pictures were of traditional and ceremonial rites of the monarch meeting the British prime minister-in-waiting to ask them to form a new government.

In the first picture, Queen Elizabeth II met incoming prime minister Liz Truss on September 6. It was the last time the monarch was seen in an image by the public after her 70 years on the throne. Her reign had straddled two centuries, post-colonialism, Brexit and a pandemic.

And the other photo: former Treasury chief Rishi Sunak, now prime minister, was pictured shaking hands with King Charles III.

The time between those two photographs? Seven weeks.

During this brief period, the nation went from mourning into an acute, turbulent economic crisis. Many in Britain had never experienced such tectonic shifts, one after the other.

For Ms. Truss, it was a new start, handing her the keys to 10 Downing Street—capping weeks of bruising battle for Conservative Party leadership with Mr. Sunak. Her predecessor, Boris Johnson, had been forced to resign amid a haze of ethics scandals.

The queen, using a walking cane after prolonged mobility issues, is seen smiling. Ms. Truss, too, from the side angle, can be seen smiling as they shake hands. The queen died two days later.

Britain is on its third leader this year, and the two most recent ones took the post without a direct mandate from the British people—they were elected leader of the Conservative Party and became prime minister automatically. There is a clamor among the opposition and beyond for a general election. By law, that does not have to be until 2024, and Mr. Sunak has said he will not call one—after the recent turmoil, the conservative Tories face possible obliteration at the polls as it stands now.

Charles III is secure in his position and almost certain to outlast the

government. His mother met 15 prime ministers in her 70 years on the throne; Charles is on his second after less than two months. But he is nevertheless the oldest person to ascend to the British throne.

In the middle of such chaos, who knows what the next photograph might show?

“As the United Kingdom moves forward to the coronation of its new king, it will be forced to look back at the very traditions performed during the ceremony.”

Mounting Uncertainty

It is unlikely seven weeks would reveal another drastic change in leadership. Since the queen's death, however, speculation has arisen as to whether the new regent can fill the shoes of his wildly popular predecessor.

As *Time* put it: “The challenge now facing the country is how to move on without her.”

“While the path forward for Britain is clear (it has, after all, done this many times before), the future of the British monarchy feels less certain. King Charles III inherits the throne at a time when the monarchy as an institution is still broadly supported in Britain, with a slight majority of 62% in favor, according to a June poll. But the outpouring of support and admiration for the Queen should not be mistaken for unwavering support for the Royal Family as a whole, especially after recent fallout over the treatment of Prince Harry and Meghan as well as the sexual-assault allegations facing

her son, Prince Andrew. The biggest test facing the new King is whether he can emulate his mother's image of stability and preserve the institution that she spent so much of her life trying to protect.”

By many accounts, Charles faces a daunting future. He will confront those challenges at the age of 73, the oldest monarch to take the throne in a lineage that dates back 1,000 years, with his second wife Camilla, who still divides public opinion, by his side.

To detractors, the new king is ill-equipped for the role of sovereign. Throughout his life, Charles has been caught between modernizing the monarchy and trying to find its place in a fast-changing and more egalitarian society while maintaining traditions that give the institution its allure.

That tension is seen through the lives of his sons.

The eldest, William, 40, now the heir, leads a life of traditional duty, charity work and military pageantry.

His younger son, Harry, 37, resides outside Los Angeles with his American ex-actress wife Meghan and family, forging a new career more in keeping with Hollywood than Buckingham Palace.

The brothers, once very close, are now barely on speaking terms.

Whether this means the “writing is on the wall” for the British monarchy is speculative at best. Yet, while the UK is entering an uncertain future, its past offers a picture of certainty.

Royal Roots

As the United Kingdom moves forward to the coronation of its new king, the nation will be forced to look back at the very traditions performed during the ceremony. More specifically, the question will be: What place do centuries-old royal rites have in the 21st century?

This is not a new question.

“When Elizabeth was crowned in 1953, many contemporaries openly asked what the coronation ritual—in essence, the same ritual that was devel-

oped and refined in medieval Europe in the 8th, 9th and 10th centuries—meant in the modern world of the 1950s,” Rutgers University reported.

A similar sentiment permeated the past several centuries as Britain’s monarchy held less and less control in governmental and public affairs. It was becoming hard to ignore that the world was moving beyond monarchical customs.

And yet those rites have remained more or less unchanged since their institution. In fact, some of the musical performances during these ceremonies reveal roots that originate much earlier.

During Queen Elizabeth II’s coronation, musicians performed George F. Handel’s “Zadok the Priest.” The piece was composed for the coronation of King George II in 1727. It evokes the biblical account of Solomon’s anointing as king in Jerusalem over ancient Israel (I Kgs. 1:38-40).

The piece has been sung before every sovereign’s coronation since its composition. However, the text from that scripture has been used in every English and British coronation since 973.

What is the significance of quoting this passage? It evokes a promise for which all monarchs vie.

After God anointed Solomon ruler of Israel, He reiterated a promise made to Solomon’s father. I Kings 9:5 states that God “will establish the throne of your kingdom upon Israel forever, as I promised to David your father, saying, There shall not fail you a man upon the throne of Israel.”

This original promise is in II Samuel 7, where God told King David: “Your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you: your throne shall be established forever” (vs. 16).

Forever means just that—for all ages! David’s line was said to last through the ages—outliving even the nation of ancient Israel.

That is why Solomon was warned that if he rejected God, “Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house [the Temple in Jerusalem], which I have

hallowed for My name, will I cast out of My sight; and Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all people” (I Kgs. 9:7).

However, nowhere does it say David’s line would be removed from the throne. Israel rejected God and became a “proverb” and a “byword,” with the Temple long since destroyed. Despite this, the promise to Solomon remains intact. The Bible states that—somewhere on Earth today—there is “a man upon the throne” of Israel from David’s lineage.

Where Is Israel?

Although God scattered Israel in ancient times, it still exists in a different form today.

Curiously, British culture is so steeped in Scripture that liturgical music is a staple of royal weddings, funerals and even sporting events.

For instance, one titled “Jerusalem” muses about an extrabiblical legend of a young Jesus Christ coming to visit Britain with Joseph of Arimathea: “And did those feet in ancient time, walk upon England’s mountains green?”

Based on a poem by William Blake, the words indicate a desire to build a city of peace in England: “I will not cease from Mental Fight...Till we have built Jerusalem, in England’s green and pleasant Land.”

There is also the Welsh hymn “Bread of Heaven.” While modernized English words are often sung today, a literal translation more clearly reveals a song about ancient Israel traveling to the Promised Land. It asks God to “guide me through the wilderness,” “give me manna,” and provide drink from “the sweet springs which gush forth from the rock.” Another translation calls this “the Rock that is.”

In addition, linguists have noted many marked similarities between Hebrew and Celtic languages.

The British royal seal also contains both a lion and a unicorn. Under this seal, the British Empire ruled. Now read Deuteronomy 33, which describes the descendants of Joseph, a son of Jacob, who was renamed Israel: “His

glory is like the firstling of his bull-ock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh” (vs. 17).

Israel’s grandsons Manasseh and Ephraim are further described in Genesis 48:19: “Manasseh will also become a great people, but his younger brother [Ephraim] will become even greater. And his descendants will become a multitude of nations” (*New Living Translation*). Also read Genesis 49:25-26.

The Bible describes these brothers as becoming the standard for prosperity. The following verse states that the surrounding peoples will offer this blessing, “God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh” (Gen. 48:20).

Seriously consider: *What other nation* has distinct ties to ancient Israel and became “a multitude of nations” that pushed “people together to the ends of the earth”? And *what other nation* has a brother country that has “become a great people”?

What other nations have had such influence and sky-high standards of living—“If only we could be prosperous like them!”—to which the world earnestly aspires?

Any honest person is left with one conclusion: Great Britain and the United States.

In Amos 9:9, God promised protection for the ancient tribes of Israel as they were “sifted,” or filtered, through the nations. These divided peoples eventually took on the customs and traditions of the countries around them—and forgot their heritage. As a result, they became known as the Lost Ten Tribes, and now inhabit many nations around the globe.

Yet British history is so steeped in clues that point to ancient Israel that God says this about these modern Israelites: “The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider” (Isa. 1:3, *New King James Version*).

This nation *could* know. Yet it refuses to consider.

Some few have used the identity of Britain as Ephraim to promote the racist theory of “British Israelism.” This idea is a corruption of the biblical truth regarding the modern descendants of the Lost Ten Tribes. Many who endorse this theory feel Anglo-Saxons are a “chosen people” and often equate the now-defunct British Empire with the Kingdom of God—a teaching plainly at odds with Scripture, which states this Kingdom will be established in the future. (See II Timothy 4:1.)

For more on Britain’s role in Bible prophecy, our book *America and Britain in Prophecy* (rcg.org/aabibp) provides a deep dive into the scriptures. You will be surprised by how many verses apply to this age.

That includes prophecies specifically addressing the future of the crown in England.

Transfer of the Crown

Another clue to the origin of the British throne lies within the throne itself.

Each coronation involves the king or queen being seated upon the royal chair, which contains the legendary Stone of Scone—also known as the Stone of Destiny.

Writing about the crowning of King George IV, *European Magazine* said in 1821 that beneath the throne “is enclosed a stone, commonly called Jacob’s Stone, or the Fatal Marble, being an oblong square...of a bluish steel-like colour, mixed with some veins of red; of which tradition relates, that it is the stone on which Jacob lay his head, on the plains of Luz...”

“Jacob’s stone” refers to the very rock the Bible patriarch Jacob laid his head on when he had his dream of a stairway reaching heaven (Gen. 28:10-13).

Ancient Irish annals tell of a patriarch called Ollam Folla or Ollav Fola (roughly meaning “prophet” in both Hebrew and Celtic languages). Irish lore and historical evidence point to the fact that he was the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah. These chronicles of

Ireland also record that he brought with him the coronation stone. The tomb of Ollam Folla is still located near Oldcastle in Ireland today.

The prophet was instrumental in carrying out God’s promise to maintain the Davidic line of kings—particularly when Jerusalem was about to be sacked in 589 BC by the Babylonians.

God revealed how this would occur through Ezekiel—a contemporary prophet of Jeremiah. Chapter 21 of Ezekiel’s book foretells Jerusalem’s imminent siege and capture. After that, the prophet revealed David’s royal line would be *removed* from the land.

Read Ezekiel 21:26: “Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same.”

The “diadem” and “crown” refers to a scepter of rulership that was given to Judah in Genesis 49. Verse 10 states: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet.” Since King David was anointed, Israel was always judged by a Jewish ruler.

However, Ezekiel 21:27 shows what was to happen to this crown after the Babylonians took it from the king in Jerusalem. God states: “I will overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until He come whose right it is; and I will give it Him.”

By stating He would “overturn” the kingdom in Judah, God indicated that He would remove the throne from the land and move it somewhere else.

Space does not permit explaining every detail of Jeremiah’s unique commission in bringing the line of kings to the British Isles almost immediately after the captivity of Jerusalem. (You can read the full story in the sixth chapter of *America and Britain in Prophecy*.) But history records that God guided events to ensure Judah’s crown lineage—through a process of three “overturns”—would continue until it landed in London. These “overturns” are a

type of a future series of events that will affect the descendants of Israel.

But the story does not end there. God’s Word also shows that the Tower of London is not the promised final destination of that crown.

Continuing in Ezekiel 21:27, the “diadem” and “crown” would remain for “He...whose right it is; and I will give it Him.” The One who has the right to the crown was also mentioned in Genesis 49:10.

Now read the entire verse: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between His feet, until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be.”

This is Jesus Christ. He will return to take the crown and authority over *all* the modern nations of Israel—not just Ephraim.

Unlike previous British monarchs and kings of ancient Judah, who have had reputations ranging from good to bad, the final occupant of the throne will not have a mixed record. This is the kind of ruler Christ will be: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder” (Isa. 9:6).

He will rule “upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom”—this further shows Christ will take the very throne Charles is scheduled to sit on early next year—“to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (vs. 7).

Jesus Christ’s rulership will not be of mixed quality. It will be perfect, just and infinite in time and size.

So, while Charles may be the final British monarch, it will only be because the throne is turned over—once and for all—to the ultimate King over Israel, Jesus Christ.

Read *What Is the Kingdom of God?* (rcg.org/witkog) to learn more about the kind of ruler Jesus Christ will be when He takes His rightful place. □



Order a Free Copy!
rcg.org/aabibp

A CHURCH BELL SOUNDS. The staccato thudding of mallet on plank summons monks to afternoon prayers. Deep voices are raised in communal chant. And high in the great tower of Pantokrator Monastery, a metal library door swings open.

There, deep inside the medieval fortified monastery in the Mount Athos monastic Orthodox Christian community, researchers are for the first time tapping a virtually unknown treasure—thousands of Ottoman-era manuscripts that include the oldest of their kind in the world. The documents contain a rare glimpse into Turkey's past.

The nation has long been an enigma to neighboring countries. Its population is 99.8 percent Muslim, yet it was also the capital of the Roman Empire from roughly 330 to 1453. It has had a bid to join the European Union since 1999, but talks have stalled because of concerns about human rights and rule of law.

What the nation's leaders will do next can seem impossible to pin down.

Consider a few headlines regarding how Turkey has responded to the Russia-Ukraine War:

- "From Ally to Mediator: How Russia's Invasion Has Changed Ukraine-Turkey Relations" (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace)
- "Turkey's Balancing Act on Ukraine Is Becoming More Precarious" (*Foreign Policy*)
- "Keeping Turkey on the right side of the battle between US and Russia" (*The Hill*)

So can these Mount Athos manuscripts shed any light on the Turkish peoples?

The libraries of the self-governed community, established more than 1,000 years ago on northern Greece's Athos peninsula, are a repository of rare, centuries-old works in several languages including Greek, Russian and Romanian.

Many have been extensively studied, but not the Ottoman Turkish documents, products of an occupying bureaucracy that ruled northern Greece from the late 14th century—well before the Byzantine capital, Constantinople, fell to the Ottomans in 1453—until the early 20th century when the area became Greek again.

Jannis Niehoff-Panagiotidis, a professor at the Free University of Berlin, said, seated at a table piled with documents and books, "The first documents that shed light [on the first period

of Ottoman history] are saved here, on Mount Athos." Others, the rarer ones, are stored in large wooden drawers.

These include highly ornate Sultans' firmans—or decrees—deeds of ownership and court decisions.

The manuscripts tell a story at odds with the traditional understanding in Greece of Ottoman depredations in the newly conquered areas through the confiscation of the Mount Athos monasteries' rich real estate holdings. Instead, the new rulers took the community under their wing, preserved its autonomy and protected it from external interference.

"The Sultans' firmans we saw in the tower...and the Ottoman state's court decisions show that the monks' small democracy was able to gain the respect of all conquering powers," Anastasios Nikopoulos, jurist and scientific collaborator of the Free University of Berlin, said. "And that is because Mount Athos was seen as a cradle of peace, culture...where peoples and civilizations coexisted peacefully."

These documents are fleshing out the fact that Ottoman Turks would often allow conquered areas to keep their cultural and administrative systems in place.

But researchers have just scratched the surface. The project is expected to continue for several months, even years.

"What could emerge in the long term I'll be able to say when we have catalogued and digitized all the documents," Mr. Niehoff-Panagiotidis said. "Right now, nobody knows what's hidden here. Perhaps, even older documents."

Years of research will unearth more information about the Ottoman Empire, which ended 100 years ago in 1922—before the nation became a republic a year later. Yet an even older document outlines Turkey's national character in clear terms. And this book is not hidden at all—the Bible.



The Battle of Vienna, 1683-1694, by Frans Geffels, oil on canvas. Osman I or Osman Ghazi was the founder of the Ottoman Empire (first known as the Ottoman Beylik or Emirate). While initially a small Turkmen principality during Osman's lifetime, his descendants transformed into a world empire in the centuries after his death. It existed until shortly after the end of World War I.

BADISCHES LANDESMUSEUM/VIENNA MUSEUM AT KARLSPLATZ

Forgotten History: Rethinking Turkey's Past

When trying to understand the modern nation of Turkey,
few look far enough into its history.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER



Melting Pot

Before delving into the Bible, we ask: Why is Turkey so hard to understand?

Turkey is a nation where continents collide. Literally. The Anatolian tectonic plate covers most of the country, and it is surrounded: the Eurasian Plate borders the north while the African and Arabian plates line the south and southeast, respectively.

Seismic tension builds from every compass direction and results in regular devastating earthquakes. Centuries ago, architects and civil engineers took this factor into account. Many times after a temblor, modern structures have collapsed while centuries-old palaces and mosques remain standing with little or no damage.

Even today, geologists study these still-standing buildings to glean information on how to make structures earthquake-proof. Byzantine and Ottoman landmarks—such as Hagia Sophia, Sultan Ahmed Mosque (the Blue Mosque), and Selimiye Mosque—have stood for many hundreds of years. Each was built to resist the clash of continental plates.

Turkey is also built for continental collisions of a different sort. The nation, often called “the crossroads of civilizations,” is where Europe meets Asia and the Middle East.

A strong potpourri of historical and cultural influences defines the nation. Greek and Roman fingerprints still exist from their respective empires. Byzantine culture left its mark before the Ottoman Turks rose to power. The ubiquitous presence of Islam in the country means there is a strong Middle Eastern flavor. Also, since the Turks came to Anatolia from western Mongolia, there are Asian influences.

Supercharging these influences is Turkey’s central location, which has made it a major trade route from antiquity until today.

A *Financial Times* article “Silk Roads Lead to Turkey’s Resurgent Power” demonstrated this point. The CEO of export firm TAV Group told the newspaper, “We used to say

that Turkey was surrounded by three seas”—the Black Sea, the Aegean, and the Mediterranean—“Now we say Turkey is surrounded by markets.”

The article continued, “Vaunting cultural, religious and historical ties, Turkish businesses have fanned out elsewhere in the Middle East and Africa, central Asia and beyond.”

“A strong potpourri of historical and cultural influences defines the nation. Greek and Roman fingerprints still exist from their respective empires. Byzantine culture left its mark before the Ottoman Turks rose to power.”

At the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, Turkey’s most populous city, the mercantile character of the nation is clear. There, one can purchase Russian caviar, Chinese tea, and Indian curry, along with Turkish specialties of fine apparel, foodstuffs, ornate rugs, and elegant metalwork.

So where does Turkey fit? The Middle East? Europe? Asia? Most Turks would probably tell you somewhere in between.

Origin of the Turks

Encyclopaedia Britannica explains the dual branches of Turks: “The Turkic peoples may be divided into two main groups: the western and the eastern. The western group includes the Turkic peoples of southeastern

Europe and those of southwestern Asia inhabiting Anatolia (Asian Turkey) and northwestern Iran. The eastern group comprises the Turkic peoples of Central Asia, Kazakhstan, and the autonomous region of Xinjiang in China. Turkic peoples display a great variety of ethnic types.”

While there has been some intermarriage, the western Turks are generally Caucasoid (white) and known as Oguz. The eastern clans are distinctly Mongoloid (of Asian descent).

Britannica continues by stating that when eastern tribes fought for control of Mongolia from the 8th to 11th century, the western Oguz Turks “migrated westward into Iran and Afghanistan. In Iran the family of Oguz tribes known as Seljuqs created an empire...In 1071 the Seljuq sultan Alp-Arslan defeated the Byzantine Empire at the Battle of Manzikert and thereby opened the way for several million Oguz tribesmen to settle in Anatolia [modern Turkey].”

The source continues, “These Turks came to form the bulk of the population there, and one Oguz tribal chief, Osman, founded the Ottoman dynasty (early 14th century)...The Oguz are the primary ancestors of the Turks of present-day Turkey.”

Notice that the Oguz did not fit in with the eastern Turks. The reason? Central Asia was not their original homeland.

A clue to the origin of the Oguz Turks can be found in the name “Ottoman.” Note that it was adapted from the ruler Osman, which is also spelled Othman and Uthman. Volume II of Edward Gibbons’ *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* includes additional spellings: “...Thaman, or Athman, whose Turkish name has been melted into the appellation of the caliph Othman.”

Thaman was a family name with roots in the Bible: Teman was a chieftain of the ancient Edomite kingdom and the grandson of Esau. William Hazlit’s *The Classical Gazetteer* spells Teman as *Thaman*.

Old Testament passages show that Esau was the son of Isaac and older twin of Jacob (who was renamed

Israel). Both brothers were grandsons of the patriarch Abraham.

The Oguz Turks have a direct tie to the land of Israel. Esau was born in that region!

What most do not realize is that nations are simply families grown large. Many modern nations today are populated by the descendants of single families. More often than not, these peoples are unaware of their origins.

Two examples of this are the Assyrians (the modern Germans and Austrians) and ancient Israel (which today includes Israel, America, Britain and many Western European nations).

Esau also became a great nation that has forgotten its ancient roots. Read Genesis 36: “These were dukes [chieftains] of the sons of Esau: the sons of *Eliphaz* the firstborn son of Esau; duke *Teman*, duke Omar, duke Zepho, duke Kenaz” (vs. 15).

The Esau-Eliphaz-Teman line gave rise to the Ottoman Turks and modern Turkey.

Earmarks of Edom

The Ottoman-Teman connection is just one proof of where most of Esau’s descendants reside today. Esau is synonymous with Edom: “Thus dwelt Esau in mount Seir: Esau is Edom” (Gen. 36:8).

A classic Edomite trait is allying with other peoples and adopting their cultures—such as the Oguz among the Mongoloid Turks.

This started with Esau himself. He married a daughter of Ishmael (the father of the modern Arabs), a daughter of the Hittites, and another Hittite woman who also had ties to the Hivites (Gen. 36:2-3).

Yet Esau still retained characteristics that have defined his offspring throughout history.

While the descendants of Esau spread throughout the region, many originally made their home in Mount Seir, a mountain range east of Israel. The Edomites set up a kingdom there with cave dwellings and a formidable rock fortress. Many considered Edom

to be invincible because of this defensive stronghold. Remnants of cities built into rock can be found throughout the region. The most notable example is the city of Petra, which was inhabited by the Nabataeans—a people who took over the region after most Edomites moved east.

Britannica adds, “Edom prospered because of its strategic location on the trade route between Arabia and the Mediterranean and its copper industry at Ezion-geber.”

Is it any wonder that the Ottoman Turks settled in Anatolia, a significant trade route even today?

Amazingly, one of the routes of the famed Silk Road from Asia to Europe was Urgup in Cappadocia (Eastern Turkey). In this area, unique rock formations were carved out for use as dwellings. The locations of Uchisar and Ortahisar were rock fortresses.

As with the Edomites, the Ottomans were often believed to be *invincible* by their enemies.

Another interesting point stems from the Turkish flag, which is red. Turkish tradition assigns colors to compass directions, with red meaning “south.” In Hebrew, the name Edom means *red*, and Teman means *south*.

Information from Brown University reveals even more connections: “According to tradition, in [circa] 1200 BCE, the Petra area (but not necessarily the site itself) was populated by Edomites and the area was known as Edom (‘red’). Before the Israelite incursions, the Edomites controlled the trade routes from Arabia in the south to Damascus in the north. Little is known about the Edomites at Petra itself, but as a people they were known for their wisdom, their writing, their textile industry, the excellence and fineness of their ceramics, and their skilled metal working.”

Even today, Turkey’s main exports include apparel, textiles and manufactured metal products. In addition, beautifully crafted Ottoman-period Iznik pottery, characterized by its intricate blue patterns, is famed the world over. Also, many Turkish sultans were

renowned for their wisdom such as Suleiman the Magnificent.

To summarize, the descendants of Teman, Esau’s grandson, migrated to Central Asia and then to the Anatolia region (modern Turkey).

In addition, other Edomites almost certainly moved north *much* earlier. Recall that Esau married two Hittites. The majority of these peoples resided in the Anatolia region.

Ties to the West

While Turkey is distinctly different from Europe, the two do have one major similarity: an unmistakable interest in the land of Israel. For many centuries, both powers coveted this tiny sliver of land. The territory was under Ottoman control from 1517 to 1917, the majority of the empire’s 600-plus-year reign.

In 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte, who was later crowned Holy Roman Emperor, intended to capture Jerusalem during a military campaign in Egypt and Syria. A loss at the Siege of Acre (in today’s northern Israel) meant he never made it to the “City of Peace.”

During the Crusades, European forces entered Jerusalem in triumph in 1099 and held the city until falling to Muslim ruler Saladin in 1187. There were numerous attempts to regain control of the Holy Land up until the last major medieval Crusade in 1272.

In the centuries before the Middle Ages, the Romans controlled Israel. The Roman Empire gained control of the region by defeating the Greco-Macedonian Empire.

At its peak, this Grecian empire touched three separate continents, stretching from Greece to the north, Egypt to the south, and to parts of India to the east. The Holy Land was part of its vast territory.

The empire’s most well-known ruler was Alexander the Great. He had a special link to Israel.

Jewish historian Josephus recorded in his *Antiquities of the Jews* that Alexander visited Jerusalem before confronting the Persians. The account states: “...and when he [Alexander]

went up into the temple, he offered sacrifice to God, according to the high priest's direction, and magnificently treated both the high priest and the priests. And when the [Bible] book of Daniel was showed him, wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that himself [Alexander] was the person intended..."

Daniel 8:5-7 tells of a military leader, represented by a "he goat" with a "notable horn," that comes from the West to defeat a great power in the East.

Sure enough, the Greco-Macedonian Empire completely defeated the formidable Medo-Persian Empire, verifying Alexander's supposition. Palestine, which up until then was under Persian rule, was included in the Greeks' spoils of victory.

Yet the prophecy in Daniel does not stop there.

Read verse 8: "Therefore the he goat [Alexander] waxed very great: and when he was strong, the great horn was broken; and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven."

After Alexander's death at age 33, his kingdom was split between his four generals, Lysimachus, Ptolemy, Seleucus and Cassander.

Daniel 11 adds more: "And when he shall stand up, his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven; and not to his posterity [Alexander had no heir to take his place], nor according to his dominion which he ruled: for his kingdom shall be plucked up, even for others beside those" (vs. 4).

This all came true! This is just one proof of the validity of the Bible. You can learn many more in the booklet *Bible Authority...Can It Be Proven?* at rcg.org/bacibp.

Another proof of Bible prophecy is found in Daniel 2. It lists a succession of kingdoms that conquered Israel—including the great European empires.

Chapter 2 describes a peculiar "great image" revealed to be a giant statue of a man. This man was made of four separate metals from head to toe—gold,

silver, bronze and iron—each metal equating to a successive world-ruling kingdom or empire.

Verse 38 reveals that Nebuchadnezzar II's Neo-Babylonian Empire was the statue's head of gold. Following this was the Persian/Achaemenid Empire torso of silver. The bronze was Alexander's Greco-Macedonian Empire. And the legs and feet of iron represented the Roman Empire. All four world-ruling kingdoms held the land of Israel.

Historical Allies

Throughout history, Esau's descendants have regularly allied with other nations, especially against the Israelites.

In the biblical book of Judges, the Amalekites (descendants of Esau) joined forces with the king of Moab to attack ancient Israel (3:12-13). Later in the book, an army of Midianites and Edomites come against Israel (6:3).

Yet Edom also worked with the "metal man" empires foretold in Daniel 2.

In 586 BC, Edom was involved when Nebuchadnezzar II's army razed Jerusalem and destroyed Solomon's Temple. Psalm 137 states: "Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Raze it, raze it, even to the foundation thereof" (vs. 7).

Edomites also held prominent places in the "metal man" governments. Haman the Agagite was influential in the Medo-Persian Empire, during the reign of King Xerxes I. He hatched a plot against the captured Jews.

Esau has even deeper ties to this empire, which reveals how early some of his descendants began moving east. The Edomite King Husham of Genesis 36:31-43 was a descendant of Teman. He likely controlled Mount Seir and parts of what are today Iraq and Iran. There are strong indications that Husham is the same as Hushang, a fabled early king of the Persians.

Under supervision of the Roman Empire, Herod the Great and his successors ruled over Judea from 37 BC to AD 92. This was an Idumean family. Idumea is the Greek term for Edom.

The motivation for the animosity between Edom and Israel stems from a bitter sibling rivalry. Genesis 25 and 27 show that Esau was the elder brother, yet Jacob tricked him out of his birthright. This blessing was later passed onto Jacob's grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh and can be summarized as them becoming "a multitude of nations" and a singular "great" nation (48:19). Centuries later, this came to pass with the British Empire and the United States—the greatest multitude of nations and single nation of all time.

Losing this awesome birthright has been perpetuated in bitterness toward Israel—which has been evident in Esau's descendants throughout history.

This rivalry will again push the Edomites, including modern Turkey, to an alliance with ties to Europe.

Coming Confederation

Bible prophecy outlines this coming coalition. The first details come in Psalm 83. This chapter lists a confederation of nations: "The tabernacles of Edom, and the Ishmaelites [Saudi Arabia]; of Moab [southern Jordan], and the Hagarenes [Syria]; Gebal [Lebanon], and Ammon [northern Jordan], and Amalek [Edomites scattered throughout the Middle East]; the Philistines [Palestinian Arabs, including Gaza] with the inhabitants of Tyre [Lebanon]" (vs. 6-7).

Verse 8 states that "Assur also is joined with them: they have [helped] the children of Lot..."

Assur is another term for Assyria. This includes modern Germans and Austrians. Today, the children of Lot live in modern Jordan.

Daniel 11 shows the Psalm 83 coalition will storm the Middle East, likely to destabilize the region. Notice that their troops "shall enter also into the glorious land, and many countries shall be overthrown: but these shall escape...even Edom, and Moab, and the chief of the children of Ammon" (Dan. 11:41).

Notice that this Assyrian-led coalition will invade certain nations, but Edom is spared because of an alliance.

Obadiah, a book entirely about Edom's future, reveals Turkey's role as armed forces enter Israel. Notice: "In the day that you stood on the other side, in the day that...foreigners entered into [Israel's] gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, *even you were as one of them*" (1:11).

As forces take on the Israelites, the Edomites will be "as one of them"—in league with the Assyrian power.

Guiding Force

The animosity of Edom toward Israel will fuel its partnership with the resurrected Assyrian power, but it is *not* the main motivating factor.

Daniel reveals the true driving force behind world events: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever: for wisdom and might are His: and He changes the times and the seasons: *He removes kings, and sets up kings*: He gives wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding" (2:20-21).

Realize that it is the God of the Bible who places rulers into power—"removes kings, and sets up kings"—and who is ultimately guiding world events. He is willing to reveal His incredible purpose for mankind to those who will listen.

While Edom plays an important role in prophecy, it pales in comparison with God's supreme goal: salvation for all mankind.

Note that He is "not willing that any should perish" (II Pet. 3:9) and wants "all men to be saved, and come unto the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4). He will do everything in His power to make sure the vast majority of humankind receive salvation.

This crucial fact brings purpose and reason to the tumultuous prophecies found in the Bible that could otherwise be seen as cruel and harsh.

Mankind as a whole is not ready to be governed by God, and is intent on ruling himself—despite millennia of failed governments. The only way man will listen is through national punishment.

This will not happen unexpectedly. As with any loving parent, God warns before He chastises. He will do just

that when He soon intervenes in world affairs.

For those in Edom who do not listen, God reserves a special punishment: "As you [Edom] did rejoice at the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so will I do unto you: you shall be desolate, O mount Seir, and all Idumea, even all of it: and they shall know that I am the LORD" (Ezek. 35:15).

"The motivation for the animosity between Edom and Israel stems from a bitter sibling rivalry. Genesis 25 and 27 show that Esau was the elder brother, yet Jacob tricked him out of his birthright. This blessing was later passed onto Jacob's grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh..."

While this obviously is severe chastisement, God makes His purpose clear: "...that they shall know that I am the LORD."

Human nature makes mankind hardheaded. Without this swift and severe action, only a scant few would listen!

Isaiah 63 shows another element of Edom's punishment: "Who is this that comes from Edom, with dyed garments...that is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save" (vs. 1).

Yes, who *is* this that comes from Edom?

The answer comes at the end of the previous chapter of Isaiah: "Behold, the LORD has proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say you to the daughter of Zion, Behold, your salvation comes; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him" (62:11).

This is God coming to Earth! Yet what is the "work before Him"?

Ultimate World Government

Return again to the book of Daniel. It adds a crucial point about Christ's Return. Read carefully the text immediately following the description of the "metal man:" "You saw [the statue] until that *a stone was cut out without hands*, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay [representing an unstable European empire], and broke them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass [Greco-Macedonian Empire], the silver [Medo-Persian Empire], and the gold [Neo-Babylonian Empire], broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff...and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth" (2:34-35).

The governments of men, represented by these four humanly shaped and crafted metals, will eventually be destroyed by a "stone." This "stone" is Jesus Christ! He is commonly referred to as a "stone" and a "rock" throughout Scripture (I Pet. 2:8).

God will come and smash the governments of men when He sets up His Kingdom—a world-ruling supergovernment—and bring about the next phase of His Plan. He will offer salvation to everyone who has ever lived, *both past and present*. This includes those who perished during the national punishments mentioned earlier.

With God in charge, the governments of men will cease. His Kingdom, as a great "mountain" (a prophetic term symbolizing a government), will fill the entire Earth—and erase all crippling effects of national rivalries. □

U.S. Children Suffer Historic Learning Setbacks



THE COVID-19 pandemic led to historic learning setbacks for America's children, sparing no state or region as it erased decades of academic progress and widened racial disparities, according to results of a national test that provide the sharpest look yet at the scale of the crisis.

Across the country, math scores saw their largest decreases ever. Reading scores dropped to 1992 levels. Nearly 4 in 10 eighth graders failed to grasp basic math concepts. Not a single state saw a notable improvement in their average test scores, with some simply treading water at best.

Those findings from the National Assessment of Educational Progress—known as the “nation’s report card”—tested hundreds of thousands of fourth and eighth graders across the country this year. It was the first time the test had been given since 2019, and it is seen as the first nationally representative study of the pandemic’s impact on learning.

“It is a serious wakeup call for us all,” Peggy Carr, commissioner of

the National Center for Education Statistics, a branch of the Education Department, said in an interview. “In NAEP, when we experience a 1- or 2-point decline, we’re talking about it as a significant impact on a student’s achievement. In math, we experienced an 8-point decline—historic for this assessment.”

Researchers usually consider a 10-point gain or drop equivalent to roughly a year of learning.

It is no surprise that children are behind. The pandemic upended everyday life and left millions learning from home for months or more. The results reveal the depth of those setbacks and the size of the challenges schools face as they help students catch up.

Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said it is a sign that schools need to redouble their efforts, using billions of dollars that Congress gave schools to help students recover.

“Let me be very clear: These results are not acceptable,” Mr. Cardona said.

The NAEP test is typically given every two years. It was taken between

January and March by a sample of students in every state, and 26 of the nation’s largest school districts. Scores had been stalling even before the pandemic, but the new results show decreases on a scale not seen before.

In both math and reading, students scored lower than those tested in 2019. But while reading scores dipped, math scores plummeted by the largest margins in the history of the NAEP program, which began in 1969.

Math scores were worst among eighth graders, with 38 percent earning scores deemed “below basic”—a cutoff that measures, for example, whether students can find the third angle of a triangle if they are given the other two. That is worse than 2019, when 31 percent of eighth graders scored below that level.

No part of the country was exempt. Every region saw test scores slide, and every state saw declines in at least one subject.

Several major districts saw test scores fall by more than 10 points. Cleveland saw the largest single drop, falling 16 points in fourth-grade read-

ing, and a 15-point decline in fourth-grade math. Baltimore and Tennessee's Shelby County also saw precipitous declines.

"This is more confirmation that the pandemic hit us really hard," said Eric Gordon, chief executive for the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. To help students recover, the school system has beefed up summer school and added after-school tutoring.

"I'm not concerned that they can't or won't recover," Mr. Gordon said. "I'm concerned that the country won't stay focused on getting kids caught up."

The results show a reversal of progress on math scores, which had made big gains since the 1990s. Reading, by contrast, had changed little in recent decades, so even this year's relatively small decreases put the averages back to where they were in 1992.

Also concerning are the gaps between students.

Confirming what many had feared, racial inequities appear to have widened. In fourth grade, black and Hispanic students saw bigger decreases than white students, widening gaps that have persisted for decades.

Inequities were also reflected in a growing gap between higher and lower performing students. In math and reading, scores fell most sharply among the lowest performing students, creating a widening chasm between struggling students and the rest of their peers.

Surveys done as part of this year's test illustrate the divide. When schools shifted to remote learning, higher performing students were far more likely to have reliable access to quiet spaces, computers and help from their teachers, the survey found.

The results make clear that schools must address the "long-standing and systemic shortcomings of our education system," said Alberto Carvalho, superintendent of Los Angeles schools and a member of the National Assessment Governing Board, which sets the policies for the test.

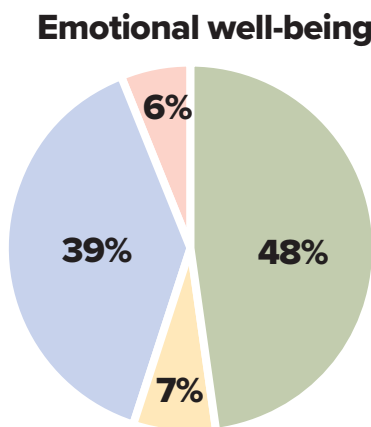
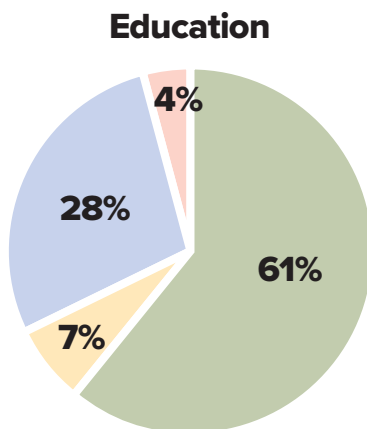
Many parents may not understand just how far behind their children are

academically. A spring survey by the national nonprofit Learning Heroes found the majority of parents believed their children were performing at or above their grade level in math and reading.

"There's a myth that parents just don't want to know. That the country just wants to get back to normal," said Sonja Santelises, chief executive officer of Baltimore City Public Schools. "But parents are very concerned."

COVID Impact

% of parents of K-12 students saying the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic had a— effect on their children's...



Source: Pew Research Center
Graphic: Staff, TNS

Some parents blame schools for not clearly communicating learning gaps. In Nashville, a parent advocacy group is pushing the school system to share clearer information about student progress—and to create personal plans to help students catch up.

"Every student has the right to be taught to read, but we failed at that," said Sonya Thomas, a mother who is the executive director of Nashville PROPEL. "That's creating social emotional problems. That's creating workforce problems. That's creating life and death problems."

Other recent studies have found that students who spent longer periods learning online suffered greater setbacks. But the NAEP results show no clear connection. Areas that returned to the classroom quickly still saw significant declines, and cities—which were more likely to stay remote longer—actually saw milder decreases than suburban districts.

Los Angeles can claim one of few bright spots. The nation's second-largest school district saw eighth-grade reading scores increase by 9 points, the only significant uptick in any district. For other districts, it was a feat just to hold even, as achieved by Dallas and Florida's Hillsborough County.

Testing critics caution against putting too much stock in standardized exams, but there is no doubt that the skills it aims to measure are critical. Students who take longer to master reading are more likely to drop out and end up in the criminal justice system, research has found, and eighth grade is seen as a pivotal time to develop skills for math and science careers.

For Ms. Carr, the results raise new questions about what will happen to students who appear to be far behind in attaining those skills.

"We want our students to be prepared globally for STEM careers, science and technology and engineering," she said. "This puts all of that at risk. We have to do a reset. This is a very serious issue, and it's not going to go away on its own." □



Is Jesus a Myth?

Skeptics claim the Jesus Christ written about in the Bible is pure fiction. But you can know for sure that He really existed.

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

THEORIES ABOUT the origin of arguably the most influential religious figure in human history range from bizarre to plain silly. One is that Jesus and His life are a personification of the symbols within the zodiac cross in astrology. They believe His role as a “Son” traveling with 12 disciples is a metaphor for the movement of the “sun” through the 12 constellations.

Another claim is that Jesus is a composite of several real-life first-century figures. Purportedly the notable deeds of these individuals were combined and mythologized into the person of Jesus Christ. Related is the thought that He is a fictional character cobbled together from inauthentic and over-interpreted sayings.

One particularly odd rationale is that Jesus, known to advocate peace, was a fabrication of the Roman government. Crafty officials supposedly invented Him to control their subjects with an alternative to the more threatening revolutionaries stirring up first-century Israel and posing a threat to Rome.

If any of these ideas were true, they would render numerous religious texts worthless and simultaneously shatter the hopes of billions of devoted followers. It is one thing to disagree with

Jesus Christ’s teachings or to reject Christianity as a whole, but to dismiss His existence as fantasy is another matter entirely.

Though their opinions about His role may differ, most followers of the world’s major religions—Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism, among others—accept that a man known as Jesus walked the Earth during the first century. Christ’s actual existence impacts over three-quarters of the population alive today.

What can be confusing is that proponents of the “Christ myth” sound so confident. They seem so sure of their conclusions that they can almost sound convincing.

Their cunning arguments plant doubt in the minds of an increasingly unchurched generation, and further disaffect those fed up with the hypocrisy of mainstream religion. Even those confident of Jesus Christ’s literal existence can get hung up searching for ways to counter these claims.

The principal reasons people assert Jesus is imaginary stem from three premises: (1) the charge that there is no secular or non-biblical proof of His actual existence; (2) claims that the Bible’s New Testament record has no legitimate historical value; and (3) the belief that Jesus Christ’s profile is suspiciously similar to ancient paganism predating Christianity.

Most recognize the accusation that Jesus never existed for what it is—absurd. They do not need to be convinced otherwise. However, going through the exercise of dismantling the supposedly overwhelming evidence can still be beneficial.

Taking the time to strengthen your conviction that Jesus Christ truly existed will help you better understand who He was and His purpose.

Historical Evidence

Advocates of the Christ myth say no sources outside the Bible corroborate His existence. This assertion is patently false.

The following are a few historical accounts recorded soon after Christ's life.

Tacitus: As a Roman historian who lived from about AD 56-117, he mentioned the person of Jesus Christ and His execution by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate in his extensive record known as the *Annals*, which cover the history of the Roman Empire from AD 14-68.

Suetonius: Another Roman historian who lived from about AD 70-140, he referenced Jesus Christ in his AD 121 work titled *The Twelve Caesars*, a set of 12 biographies of Roman emperors considered a primary source of Roman history.

In a section on Emperor Claudius, he references Jews being expelled from Rome since they “constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus.” “Chrestus” is commonly seen as a reference to Christ.

Within the section on Emperor Nero, Suetonius further speaks of inflicting punishment on “Christians... given to a new and mischievous superstition.”

Pliny the Younger: A Roman governor of the Bithynian province, who lived from AD 61-113, wrote a letter around AD 112 to Roman Emperor Trajan about dealing with “Christians” in his province. He noted that this group met “on a certain fixed day” and sang a “hymn to Christ as to a god.” In addition, he explained their

commitment “not to do wicked deeds, never commit fraud, theft, adultery, not to lie nor to deny a trust.” Pliny's remedy for dealing with Christians refusing to worship Roman gods was execution.

Flavius Josephus: This well-known Roman-Jewish historian and scholar wrote *Antiquities of the Jews*, a 20-volume historiographical work on the Jewish people. Within the text is written, “Jesus, a wise man...who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher...He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks.” The text continues, “[when] Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease.”

Although some allege that there is controversy on the authenticity of these direct references to Jesus Christ, indirect mentions of His person in other sections, such as a reference to “James the brother of Jesus,” are less disputed.

Note that the previously mentioned works do not defend or refute the existence of Jesus Christ. The writers acknowledge Christ as an accepted figure in history.

While admitting that unbiased men did mention Christ in their writings, determined skeptics still argue that they were not *eyewitnesses* of His life and, therefore, cannot be believed.

Think about what they are saying. By this “eyewitness” standard, any historical record, often a compilation of the oral and written records of others, could be dismissed as untrustworthy because the person pulling it all together did not personally *see* the subjects involved. This restriction would render history books from previous ages practically worthless.

Eventually, denials from skeptics of a literal Jesus become ridiculous, proving that if a person tries hard enough, they can spark doubt even in an established truth.

Also, doubters cannot label everyone acknowledging the literal existence of Jesus as merely “pro-Christian” and thus biased. One would be hard-pressed to describe

Muslims, Hindus, or Jews as such. Muslims commonly recognize Jesus as an important prophet, and Hindus acknowledge His teachings and effect on history.

The acknowledgment by the Jews is even more powerful. Jewish leaders had a hand in Christ's execution since they did not believe Him to be the coming Messiah. They had every incentive to deny the existence of an actual Jesus Christ, given the criticism they have received regarding His death and their continued belief in a coming savior. Though they did not see Him as the “Son of God,” even Jews acknowledge He existed.

In reality, many religious alternatives to the Christian faith could easily dismiss Christianity as a legitimate religion by alleging that the figure central to its belief system never lived—but they do not.

Book of History?

Bible critics are also wrong to believe the New Testament has no historical value. The New Testament contains provable historical facts, such as the construction of Herod's temple—remains of which still stand today, including the foundation and Western Wall.

There are also multiple references in the New Testament to Roman rule and the destruction of Jerusalem, which are all facts of history. Even Christ's human genealogy is listed in the gospels. Therefore, scriptures that detail the birth, life, and death of a literal man named Jesus cannot be reduced to a fairy tale.

In addition, archaeologists of every stripe and flavor agree that the Bible contains much factual information.

Millar Burrows, a professor who worked at Yale University, stated in his book *What Mean These Stones?:* “On the whole...archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the Scriptural record. More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine.”

Later in the book, he wrote, “Archaeology has in many cases refuted the views of modern critics.”

William F. Albright strengthens this case in his book *The Archaeology of Palestine*: “The excessive scepticism shown toward the Bible by important historical schools of the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries, certain phases of which still appear periodically, has been progressively discredited. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history.”

Jonathan L. Reed observed in *The HarperCollins Visual Guide to the New Testament*: “The many archaeological discoveries relating to people, places, or titles mentioned in Acts do lend credence to its historicity at one level; many of the specific details in Acts are factual.”

Yet even beyond establishing simple historical facts, you can prove the Bible is God’s Word.

What sets Scripture apart from all other history books is prophecy, history written in advance. Events foretold hundreds of years before they occurred prove that the Bible was divinely inspired.

In Isaiah 46:9-10, God challenges skeptics to place fulfilled prophecy next to the historical record. The booklet *Bible Authority...Can It Be Proven?*, available for free at rcg.org/bacibp, will remove any doubt of the Bible’s validity. Read it or request a copy today.

Another Jesus

What about the supposed pagan roots of Christianity? Are they proof that Jesus Christ is a figment of imagination or a compilation of pagan mythology?

A shocking, little-known warning from the apostle Paul in II Corinthians begins to answer this question: “But I [Paul] fear, lest by any means, as the serpent [Satan] beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that comes preaches *another Jesus*, whom we have not preached, or if you receive *another*

spirit, which you have not received, or *another gospel*, which you have not accepted, you might well bear with him” (II Cor. 11:3-4).

Did you catch that? This passage does not describe someone preaching about the authentic Jesus Christ. Instead, it speaks of false ministers preaching about *another* Jesus—a false Christ different than the true one! This “Jesus,” empowered by another spirit, and bringing another gospel, was being imposed upon true believers.

As astonishing as it may sound, this *counterfeit* Jesus Christ deceives millions today—and he *does* have pagan roots!

“The New Testament contains provable historical facts, such as the construction of Herod’s temple—remains of which still stand today, including the foundation and Western Wall.”

Why would Satan bother to spread the idea of “another Jesus”? Why not promote another false god entirely unrelated to the Jesus Christ of the Bible?

As any con man will tell you, the most effective lies contain elements of truth. What better way to deceive millions about the *true* Jesus Christ than to devise an alternative similar to the genuine Christ—even down to His very name! It is no accident that the devil is known as a master deceiver and the father of lies (John 8:44).

As Paul stated in II Corinthians 11, the devil has done this kind of deception from the beginning. He deceived Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden into eating fruit from “the tree of the knowledge of *good* and evil” (Gen.

2:17; 3:6). Recognize that God said the fruit of this tree had some “good” in it.

This *false* Jesus is a relative clone of many pagan gods in ancient societies such as Babylon and Egypt. Skeptics do not realize this wrong version of Jesus is the character at the center of the “Christ myth.” This made-up person did not exist historically! This phony Jesus has deceived billions throughout history.

The book *Christianity and Mythology* explains the heathen connection: “...the conception of a Saviour-God was quite normal in the ancient pagan world...a conception of salvation underlies the notion of such Gods as Osiris, Attis, and Adonis...”

Why are there so many stories similar to Jesus’ death and resurrection? The short answer is that instead of paganism influencing Christianity, as many claim, it is the other way around. God’s plan for mankind long predated paganism. For instance, God’s promise of a savior was first revealed in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15). Other prophecies foretold Christ’s coming: Genesis 12:3, 49:10; Numbers 24:17; and Isaiah 7:14, 9:6-7, 11:1-5. These words were written thousands of years ago.

Many pagan stories appropriate their themes from what God said He would do!

Perhaps the most famous examples of worshipping “another Jesus,” a false Christ, are the observance of Christmas and Easter. Both of these holidays are deeply rooted in paganism and focus on a “Jesus Christ” far different from the true one.

Christmas is a combination of several pagan symbols and principles. It has no actual Christian connection outside of the partial truths from the birth account of the child Jesus (think “knowledge of good and evil”) later attached to it. For instance, the supposed December 25 birth is a continuation of the Roman observance of Saturnalia, which involved worshipping a sun god. The Christmas tree is a holdover from a Babylonian idol people bowed under (Jer. 10:3-4).

Easter observance began anciently as a tribute to the “goddess of spring” or “queen of heaven” for the arrival of the spring season. The name Easter came from the Germanic goddess of fertility, Austron. She inarguably resembles the ancient mythological figures Ishtar, Ashtoreth, and Astarte.

The concepts of a “mother and savior” and a “savior-god,” prevalent in ancient cultures, were combined with facts about the true Jesus Christ’s birth from a human mother and His torture, death, and eventual resurrection. These all combined to form the modern observance of Easter.

The truth explains why both Christmas and Easter celebrations are so inconsistent with the worship of God in Scripture. Christmas trees and mistletoe? Santa Claus and reindeer? Easter eggs and bunny rabbits? Sunrise services and hot-cross buns? These “Christianized” symbols are all absent from the Bible yet prevalent in long-held pagan observances.

Exposing these pagan roots of Christmas and Easter is not new. Countless people have heard this before, with more discovering it every year. Some deny or choose to ignore this connection to continue keeping these days guilt-free. But many openly admit the true origins of these holidays. They justify keeping them by claiming they are not worshipping false gods but worshipping Jesus Christ instead.

The God of the Bible directly warns against this practice: “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... *Full well you reject the commandment of God*, that you may keep your own tradition” (Mark 7:6-7, 9).

God never commanded the observance of these days—He condemns it! Tragically, people think they are honoring the God of the Bible with these celebrations, but their worship is in vain.

All Christian practices and beliefs with pagan roots describe *another* Jesus about whom Paul warned. Making

matters worse, Christians ignoring the pagan origins of traditional holidays gives anti-religious skeptics fodder to poke holes in Christianity.

This is evidence of the incredible influence of Satan, whom the Bible says “deceives the whole world” (Rev. 12:9). The devil is such an effective counterfeiter of truth that he has successfully deceived billions into unwittingly worshipping false gods!

True Savior

In II Corinthians 4:4, Paul reveals the reason the devil is bent on keeping people away from the true Jesus Christ: “In whom the god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of them which believe not, *lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ*, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

The devil’s goal is to keep people ignorant of the actual Christ and a significant reason He came to Earth as a human being. God the Father sent Jesus to announce the gospel or good news of His coming Kingdom. Christ was a messenger of the wonderful opportunity for human beings to inherit eternal life!

Related to this gospel message is that the true Jesus Christ, as God (John 1:1), allowed Himself to be killed, thus becoming the perfect sacrifice required to redeem sinful mankind cut off from God. His shed blood was the payment necessary to deliver man from the death penalty due to sin (Rom. 6:23).

If Jesus Christ never existed and is simply a made-up idea, people would have no relationship with God and no chance at eternal life!

Recognizing the true Jesus Christ includes acknowledging the one Church He said He would build that would never be destroyed (Matt. 16:18). Finding and being part of this Church is how it becomes possible to attain the tremendous opportunities available to all in God’s Plan.

You should better understand why Satan is so determined to separate you from the true Jesus Christ preached in the Bible. It is the devil’s most effective weapon in preventing you from receiv-

ing all the wonderful things God has put in place for human beings.

Inherent within Paul’s warning to the Corinthians about worshipping the wrong Jesus is that there must be a way to tell the difference. As confusing as it may be to wade through the vast amount of information on the subject, there is a path to identifying and understanding the true Jesus Christ.

A vast difference exists between the popular Jesus Christ known to most and *the* Jesus Christ who walked Earth. The true Jesus Christ was not a weakling with long hair who taught people that God’s Law was no longer in effect. Instead, Jesus was a powerful man known for His ruggedness and masculinity, who taught that God requires obedience to His Commandments.

Perhaps the most vital difference between the two Jesus figures is that people believe the false one’s blood saves them. That is not what the Bible teaches. God’s Word clearly states mankind is “saved by His [Christ’s] life” (Rom. 5:10), while he is “reconciled to God” and “justified by His [Christ’s] blood” (vs. 9). We are saved by the true Jesus Christ’s resurrected life!

The false Jesus is a myth—an utter fabrication! Yet the actual, living Jesus Christ reveals an abundant life (John 10:10) for all who follow His teachings.

This article only begins to demonstrate the contrast between the true and false Christ. Much more than you may realize is at stake for not following the correct one.

Determine to know the truth! Order *Real Truth* Editor-in-Chief David Pack’s thorough book *The True Jesus Christ – Unknown to Christianity*. The only book of its kind, it lays out Christ’s life in detail.

After reading this free book, you will be able to recognize the true Jesus Christ among the counterfeits. You will also have a much better understanding of His purpose for coming to Earth and how belief in Him can lead to a sense of purpose and a lifetime of happiness.

The true Jesus Christ is unknown to almost all—but He can be known to you! □

Answers to Life's Greatest Questions...



Millions believe God exists! Few have proof. Have you proven that God exists? Or do you hope—suspect—feel—believe—think—He does? Can His existence be scientifically proven? Can you know with certainty that an all-intelligent Mind created the universe and all life on Earth—including you? Must the answers be “accepted on faith”? Let’s squarely face these questions!

**Visit rcg.org to order
your free booklets!**

come back (remember, he was the “sun”) and warm the earth again so that spring planting could occur. The planet Saturn was later named after him because, among all of the planets, with its rings and bright red color, it best represented the god of fire!

Virtually every civilization has a fire/sun god. The Egyptians (and sometimes Romans) called him Vulcan. The Greeks named him Kronos, as did the Phoenicians—but they also called him Saturn. The Babylonians called him Tammuz, Molech or Baal, as did the Druids. These were all simply the various names for *Nimrod*, the infamous biblical rebel of Genesis 10. Nimrod was considered the father of all the Babylonian gods.

There is no mistaking the origin of the modern Christmas celebration. And many more sources could be cited. Let’s tie in other facts.

Christmas Tree

The modern Christmas tree originated in Germany. But the Germans got it from the Romans, who got it from the Babylonians and the Egyptians.

The following quote from *Curiosities of Popular Customs* demonstrates what the Babylonians believed about the origin of the Christmas tree: “An old Babylonish fable told of an evergreen tree which sprang out of a dead tree stump. The old stump symbolized the dead Nimrod, the new evergreen tree symbolized that Nimrod had come to life again in Tammuz [a false god condemned in Ezekiel 8 as abominable]! Among the Druids the oak was sacred, among the Egyptians it was the palm, and in Rome it was the fir, which was decorated with red berries during the *Saturnalia*!”

The book *Answers to Questions* by Frederick J. Haskin states, “The Christmas tree is from Egypt, and its origin dates from a period long anterior to the Christian Era.”

How many know the Christmas tree long preceded Christianity? Did you?

What the Bible Says

Most aspects of Christmas are not referred to in the Bible. Of course, the reason is that they are not from God—they are not part of the way He wants people to worship Him. The Christmas tree, however, is mentioned in the Bible!

Read Jeremiah 10: “Thus says the Lord, *Learn not the way of the heathen*, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them [I ask: why do countless millions ignore God and read their horoscopes every day?]. For the *customs* of the people are *vain*: for one cuts a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne [carried], because they cannot go [of themselves]. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good” (vs. 2-5).

This description of the modern Christmas tree is plain. God directly refers to it as “the way of the heathen.” Just as directly, He commands: “Learn *not* the way of the heathen,” calling these customs “*vain*.” (Remember this word “vain.” It will return.)

Next, the *Encyclopedia Americana* states, “The holly, the mistletoe, the Yule log...are relics of *pre-Christian times*.” In other words, paganism! The Yule log was commonly used in a rite of Teutonic nature worship.

Frederick Haskin further states, “The use of the *Christmas wreath* is believed by authorities to be *traceable to the pagan custom* of decorating buildings and places of worship at the feast which took place at the same time as our Christmas.”

Britannica exposes the origin of the holly wreath, under the topic “*Celastrales*,” which are flowering plants: “European pagans brought holly sprays into their homes, offering them to the fairy people of the forests as refuges from the harsh winter weather. During the *Saturnalia*, the Roman winter festival [how many times have we seen this celebration directly referenced in relation

to Christmas?], *branches of holly* were exchanged as tokens of friendship. The earliest Roman Christians apparently used holly as a decoration at the Christmas season.”

There are dozens of types of holly. Almost all come in *male and female varieties*—such as “Blue Prince and Blue Princess” or “Blue Boy and Blue Girl” or “China Boy and China Girl.” Female holly plants cannot have berries unless a nearby male plant pollinates them. It is easy to see why the holly wreath found its way into pagan rituals as a token of friendship—and *fertility*!

Christmas is incomplete to many unless it involves kissing under the mistletoe. This custom is also pagan. It was natural on a night that involved much revelry during what were *drunken sex orgies*. Just like Christmas today, this “kissing” usually occurred at the beginning of the *Saturnalia* celebration. Mistletoe was considered to have special powers of healing for those who *reveled* under it.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, under “*Santalales*,” states, “The European mistletoe is thought to have had special ritual significance in Druidical ceremonies and lives in folklore today, its special status as the Christmas mistletoe having come from Anglo-Saxon times.”

Mistletoe is a parasite that lives on oak trees. (Recall the Druids worshipped in oak tree groves.) The ancient Celts—associated with the Druids—used to give mistletoe as an herbal remedy to barren animals to make them fertile. This herb is still referred to as “all healer” in Celtic.

Like mistletoe, holly berries were also thought to be sacred to the sun god. The original “sun log” came to be called the *Yule log*. “Yule” simply means “wheel,” which has long been a pagan representation of the sun. No wonder people today commonly speak of the *sacred yule-tide* season.

How interesting—and sobering!—are the facts of history.

The most common justification one will hear regarding Christmas is that people have *replaced* old pagan intents

and customs by asserting that they are now focusing on Jesus. I have heard many say they are honoring Christ in their Christmas-keeping. The problem is that God does not say this is acceptable to Him! *We saw He plainly commands against it! Keeping Christmas dishonors Christ!*

Jesus made a stunning statement—but how many believe it? He said in Matthew, “But in *vain* they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (15:9). Christmas is not a command of God, it is a tradition of men—a vain one, meaning empty or useless. Christ added this in Mark: “Full well you *reject* the commandment of God, that you may keep your *own tradition*” (7:9). Every year, throughout the world, on December 25, hundreds of millions do just that! No wonder Jesus asked this in Luke: “Why call you Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (6:46).

We saw God plainly commands, “Learn not the way of the heathen.” But most people do not fear God, and He allows them to make their own decisions. Human beings are free moral agents—free to learn or not learn what God instructs—free to obey or disobey Him!

God Warned!

Notice how specific God’s warning was to ancient Israel in Deuteronomy 12—and *why* His warning! “When the Lord your God shall cut off the nations from before you...and you succeed them, and dwell in their land; take heed to yourself that you be not snared by following them...and that you *enquire not after their gods*, saying, How did these nations serve *their gods*? *Even so will I do likewise*. You shall *not* do so unto the Lord your God: for *every abomination* to the Lord, which *He hates*, have they done unto their gods...” (vs. 29-31).

Let this passage sink in. Then read Deuteronomy 20:18, which bluntly labels any practice of pagan customs to be sin. Many similar verses condemning the practices of false gods

should be studied. Read Exodus 34:10-17 and 23:23-33, as well as Leviticus 20:22-26, among others. These passages are so clear, so strong—and so *many*!

In the Second Commandment—forbidding all forms of idolatry—and in other passages, God declares He is a jealous God. He wants His people doing what *He* commands, not what false gods say!

Men want to observe their own holidays—including New Year’s, Easter, Halloween and Valentine’s Day—in place of God’s annual Holy Days, and then tell themselves that they are pleasing and worshipping the true God.

Deuteronomy 12:32 makes clear that God does not want us to mix His ways with any *false* ways: “What thing so ever I command you, observe to do it: you shall not *add* thereto, nor *diminish* from it.” In other words, do *exactly* what I say—nothing more, nothing less!

These are God’s *plain words* to all who say they can mix the horrible customs of outright paganism with a supposed focus on Jesus. Am I a scrooge for reporting the truth? Then what about God, who declares He hates the pagan customs associated with a pagan celebration? Will you listen to confused, deceived ministers—or to *God*?

The real Jesus Christ was *never in* and *never will be in* Christmas! Nor can He be put back into where He never was. You cannot re-enter a house you never entered. But the “god of this world,” Satan the devil (II Cor. 4:4), has *always* been in Christmas. In fact, he is seen to be its author!

The God of the Bible commands that His true worshippers “*MUST* worship Him in spirit *and in truth*” (John 4:23-24). This does not mesh with all the pagan Christmas lies.

There is no safety in numbers for those who keep Christmas because Satan, the Bible states, “deceives the *whole* world!” (Read Revelation 12:9.) He is also called the “father of lies” (John 8:44). Recognize that Christmas is truly a testimony to the tremendous power of deception.

Christ calls His Church a “little flock” (Luke 12:32). Other verses also show this. This Church does not have the large numbers of the respected, established brands of what can only be called humanly devised *Churchianity*. But it does obey God!

Whatever you do this season, read the booklet *The True Origin of Christmas*. You will learn Christ was not born on or near December 25—whether it is scriptural to exchange gifts—the origin of Santa Claus—about Christmas’ roots in child sacrifice, and how this connects to parents today with the Santa Claus and Christ-is-in-Christmas falsehoods—about religious leaders the Bible warns will change times and laws—and how the day is associated entirely with “another Jesus,” the one the apostle Paul directly warned against.

Jesus said twice that “you shall know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:16, 20). Everything that people say or do, good or bad, has fruits. The *fruits* of Christmas are terrible. Christmas is about getting for the self—and pure commercialism.

This season also leads the entire year in adultery, loneliness, jealousy, drunkenness and drunk driving, family arguments (and worse), and accumulation of debt that often lasts until March. This problem is so significant that almost all churches report that their incomes *drop* during this period as people recover from all their spending!

Obey God!—and *save your money!* Reject the falsehoods about the supposed right, purpose-driven Christmas. Do not be fooled by Christian-sounding names pasted over rank paganism and idolatry.

God declares it is *sin* to observe the customs of false gods! Make yourself read this in Deuteronomy 20:18, before reading I John 3:4.

But you have only *begun* to learn the *real* origin of Christmas. I repeat, read *The True Origin of Christmas* before getting caught up in the holiday spirit this year. This free booklet is available at rcg.org/ttooc. □

Survey Finds Young People Follow News, but Without Much Joy



A woman checks her phone in Orem, Utah (Nov. 14, 2019).

AP/RICK BOWMER

New York (AP) – Young people are following the news but are not too happy with what they are seeing.

That is the conclusion of a study showing 79 percent of young Americans say they get news daily. The survey of young people ages 16 to 40—the older of which are known as millennials and the younger Generation Z—was conducted by Media Insight Project, a collaboration between The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and the American Press Institute.

The report pokes holes in the idea that young people are not interested in news, a perception largely driven by statistics showing older audiences for television news and newspapers.

“They are more engaged in more ways than people give them credit

for,” said Michael Bolden, CEO and executive director of the American Press Institute.

An estimated 71 percent of this age group gets news daily from social media. The social media diet is becoming more varied; Facebook does not dominate the way it used to. About a third or more get news each day from YouTube and Instagram, and about a quarter or more from TikTok, Snapchat and Twitter. Now, 40 percent say they get news from Facebook daily, compared with 57 percent of millennials who said that in a 2015 Media Insight Project survey.

Yet 45 percent also said they get news each day from traditional sources, like television or radio stations, newspapers and news websites.

The poll found that about a quarter of young people say they regularly pay for at least one news product, like print or digital magazines or newspapers, and a similar percentage have donated to at least one nonprofit news organization.

Only 32 percent say they enjoy following the news. That is a marked decrease from seven years ago, when 53 percent of millennials said that. Fewer young people now say they enjoy talking with family and friends about the news.

Other findings, such as people who say they feel worse the longer they spend online or who set time limits on their consumption, point to a weariness with the news, said Tom Rosenstiel, a University of Maryland journalism professor.

“I wasn’t surprised by that,” Mr. Bolden said. “It has been a challenging news cycle, especially the last three years.”

The percentage of people who say “news stories that seem to mostly create conflict rather than help address it” and “media outlets that pass on conspiracy theories and unsubstantiated rumors” are a major problem exceeded the number of people concerned about journalists putting too much opinion in their stories, the survey found.

That would seem to point a finger at cable news outlets that fill airtime with debates on particular issues, often pitting people with extreme points of view. New *CNN* chief executive Chris Licht has recently called on his network to cool the overheated segments.

“There are people who have grown up in this world of political food-fight media, and this is the only world they know,” said Mr. Rosenstiel, who worked on the survey as Mr. Bolden’s predecessor at the press institute. “They might have heard their parents talk about Walter Cronkite, but they haven’t seen that.” □

Navy Wants New Destroyer with Lasers, Hypersonic Missiles



An Arleigh-Burke Class destroyer is christened at Bath Iron Works in Bath, Maine (Aug. 1, 2009).
AP/ROBERT F. BUKATY

Bath, Maine (AP) – The U.S. Navy’s workhorse destroyer went into production more than 30 years ago, when Tom Stevens was a young welder.

Now, the Navy is getting ready to turn the page as it looks to a future ship brimming with lasers that can shoot down missiles and attack enemies with hypersonic missiles topping 3,800 mph.

Mr. Stevens said the warship provides an opportunity to build something new after a historic production run of the Arleigh Burke class.

“It will be an impressive destroyer that will absolutely launch us into the next generation of ships,” said Mr.

Stevens, director of ground assembly at Navy shipbuilder Bath Iron Works.

The stakes are high when it comes to a replacement for the backbone of the fleet as the Navy faces a growing threat from China, whose numerical advantage becomes greater each year.

The first design contracts were awarded this summer to General Dynamics’ Bath Iron Works in Maine and Huntington Ingalls Industries in Mississippi for a large surface warship that would eventually follow production of the ubiquitous Burke destroyers.

All of that warfighting gear will not come cheap. The average cost of each new vessel, dubbed DDG(X), is

projected to be a third more expensive than Burkes, the latest of which cost about \$2.2 billion apiece, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

The Navy has vowed that it will not repeat recent shipbuilding debacles when it rushed production and crammed too much new tech into ships, leading to delays and added expense with littoral combat ships, stealthy Zumwalt-class destroyers, and the USS Gerald Ford aircraft carrier.

“Rather than tying the success of DDG(X) to developmental technology, we’re using known, mature technologies on a flexible platform that can be upgraded for decades to come, as the technology of tomorrow is matured and demonstrated,” said Jamie Koehler, a Navy spokesperson.

Production of the new ship is still years away.

For now, shipyards continue to produce Burke-class destroyers, which earned a spot in the record book for a production run that has outlasted every other battleship, cruiser, destroyer and frigate in U.S. Navy history.

At Bath Iron Works, shipbuilders have worked nearly exclusively on Burkes, save for the three Zumwalt-class destroyers, and they have a backlog that will carry through the end of the decade.

The Navy originally wanted to replace Burkes with stealthy Zumwalt-class destroyers that have electric propulsion, unusual tumblehome hulls, and an angular shape to minimize radar signature. The program was ultimately truncated from 32 ships to three because of the high cost, but supporters said the technological leaps could be useful for future ships.

Indeed, the new destroyers will draw on that ship’s electric power plant to energize lasers while using a conventional hull and a radar and weapon system similar to what is currently in use, the Navy said. □

UN Report: Modern Slavery on the Rise as Crises Fuel Poverty

Geneva (Reuters) – The number of people forced into modern forms of slavery by poverty and other crises has risen by a fifth in recent years to around 50 million on any given day, the UN International Labour Organization reported.

More than half of those had been forced to work against their will and the rest forced into marriage, the ILO said.

Both came under its definition of modern slavery as they involved people who “cannot refuse or cannot leave because of threats, violence, deception, abuse of power or other forms of coercion,” it added.

The situation had been exacerbated by crises—such as COVID-19,

armed conflicts and extreme weather—that have left more people in extreme poverty and forced more to migrate, the agency said.

“I think, by and large, that we simply relaxed our efforts. We’ve taken our eye off the ball when it comes to forced labour,” ILO Director-General Guy Ryder told *Reuters*, calling for improvements in recruitment practices and labor inspections.

He said trade measures, such as a ban on products and imports made with forced labor currently under review by the European Union, could also help.

Compared with the last count for the year 2016, the number of people in

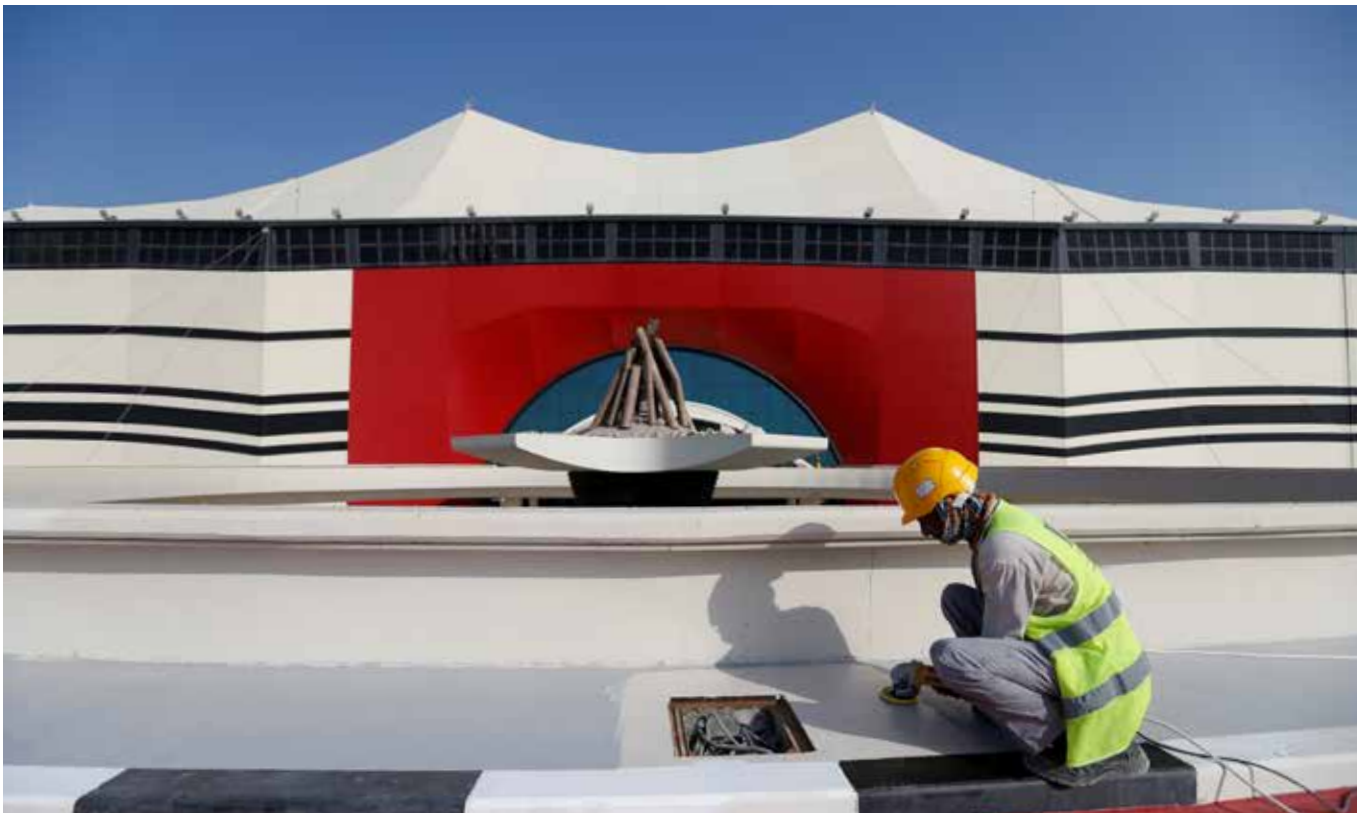
modern slavery has risen by around 9.3 million, the report said.

The ILO, which based its estimates partly on household surveys, found that more than half of all forced labor occurred in upper-middle income or high-income countries, with migrant workers more than three times as likely as locals to be affected.

The ILO report also pointed to concern about accusations of forced labor in parts of China.

It referred to a report released by the UN’s rights office on August 31 that said “serious human rights violations” had been committed in China and that the detention of Uyghurs and other Muslims in Xinjiang may constitute crimes against humanity.

China has vigorously denied the accusations and last month ratified two conventions against forced labor. □



A worker puts final touches at Al Bayt Stadium, one of the venues of the Qatar World Cup 2022, in Al Khor, Qatar (Nov. 17, 2021).

REUTERS/HAMAD I MOHAMMED

A person with dark hair, seen from behind, wearing a red jacket, stands on a wooden pier or dock. They are looking out over a calm lake that perfectly reflects the surrounding landscape. The background features misty, forested mountains under a soft, blue-toned sky. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

Where Will You Be in the Afterlife?

Nothing is more misunderstood than salvation. Why are so many confused—deceived—about what they will do in the afterlife? Does salvation come by grace or through works—and what is the difference? How—on what basis—are people rewarded in the next life? The vital booklet *What Is Your Reward in the Next Life?* removes all confusion!

rcg.org/wiyrnl