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REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

Is Iraq's 'Garden of Eden' Lost Forever?





Extinction Crisis: 1 Million Species Under Threat

Is there anything the global community can do to stem the tide?

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Front Cover: Children guide water buffaloes and other livestock near the Euphrates river in the marshes of Chibayish in Iraq's southern Dhi Qar province (Oct. 31, 2022).

ASAAD NIAZI/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

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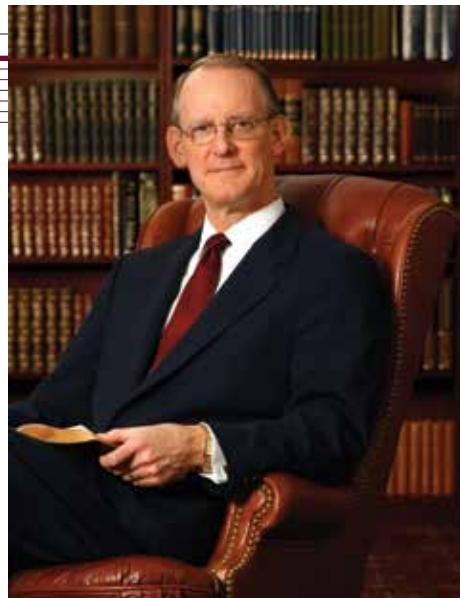
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Pack



Identifying the Church Jesus Christ Built

MY MOTHER required her three children to read numerous books when growing up. I spent many summers reading her assigned book a week. On occasion, perhaps two or three times, I picked up the Bible and attempted to read it. But I never got far, because it made no sense to me. I simply *could not understand the Bible*.

Despite this lack of understanding, when quite young, I was “confirmed” into the church that I had been born into. I recall having to appear briefly before a panel of deacons to answer a couple of questions, which I no longer remember. I do recall making some kind of general affirmation about this denomination, but I also remember that I was not concerned in the least with whether or not I was in the right church, or if I was fulfilling the Bible definition of a Christian.

Neither of these questions *remotely* interested me. I did vaguely believe God existed, but He was not *real* to me. I had certainly never attempted to build a personal relationship with Him or to find His one Church. I did not pray or study His Word for

guidance or doctrinal instruction. These concerns did not enter my mind until some years later, in 1966, when I heard a powerful voice on the radio introduce me to Christ’s statement in Matthew 16:18. I began to question where I could find this true Church. I immediately realized that it *had* to exist because, through just basic study, I came to understand Christ’s promise that it would remain and could not be destroyed.

Jesus declared something in Matthew that almost none seem to believe, or even know about. He wrote, “But *in vain* they do worship Me, teaching for *doctrines* the commandments of men” (15:9). In Mark’s parallel account, Christ added, “Full well you *reject the commandment of God*, that you may keep your own *tradition*” (7:9).

The world’s Christianity is filled with traditions. One of the largest is the traditional view of the New Testament Church. Most ministers, theologians and religionists typically define the Church this way: “All those who *sincerely believe* in Jesus Christ, and accept Him as their Savior, comprise the true Church,” I

might add, without regard to their denomination or beliefs. This is often followed with the familiar statement, “There are many routes to heaven” or “There are many spokes on the wheel of salvation.”

Though the Bible does not teach that heaven is the reward of the saved, the clear implication of these clichés is that people can believe what they want, or be a part of any group or organization they choose, and still be Christians—still receive whatever is salvation. While people may sincerely believe these traditional ideas, *they are sincerely wrong!*

My research led me to absolute proof of *where* the Church was that Christ promised to build. I learned that this Church, foretold to span seven eras or phases, could be carefully traced through the centuries.

I was shocked. I could not believe the Bible was *so clear* on a subject that confuses *so many*.

Your Bible declares, “God is not the author of *confusion*, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints [the context shows this means *all congregations* of the true Church, not *all* of the *many organizations* of men]” (I Cor. 14:33).

God’s Church was to reflect *peace*—not confusion. You need not be confused about its identity—about the location of the true Church. God commands, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (I Thes. 5:21). While this refers to *scriptural* matters (not the car you drive or the house you buy), it does say “*all* things,” not “*some* things,” should be proven! Surely God would not exclude something of such magnitude—such supremely vital importance—as the matter of where His true Church is found. And He would never emphatically tell people to prove things that *cannot be proven!*

The more I studied the other doctrines of the Bible, the more I learned that the churches of this world were *wrong*—on virtually everything! One plain scripture after another contradicted each *traditional*, supposed Christian idea I had been taught. I was amazed—actually stunned—at

how easy it was to find direct, clear, undeniable proof that even the most popular—the most *widely* believed—traditions of the big denominations were not based on the Bible—at all!

Each time I studied a Bible doctrine—salvation, baptism, who and what God is, the gospel, death and hell, law and sin, grace, being born again, the Christian Sabbath, the true origin of supposed Christian holidays, where the modern-day tribes of ancient Israel are found today, the sequence of prophecy in the last days, including events surrounding Christ’s Return—and so much more—I gained *undeniable proof* of what the Bible really taught! I was excited and fascinated. I found that the churches of this world were confused on *every one* of these and many other plain points of Bible teaching. I came to realize there had to be a church that correctly believed and practiced *all* of the doctrines of the Bible—including perhaps the most central—*what is the true Church*.

So, I learned that this Church existed, and that the proofs *identifying* it and setting it apart from all the churches of recognized, mainstream Christianity were no different from the proof of any other biblical doctrine. I also learned that the *scope* of the proof—the sheer volume of facts—about God’s Church was vast, almost overwhelming in amount. Of course, therefore, I came to see that those who were in this Church absolutely KNEW they were—and it could not be otherwise.

Church, Not Churches

In one of the most powerful, dramatic, and profoundly important statements in the Bible, Jesus Christ declared, “I will build *My Church*” (Matt. 16:18). He did not say churches, fellowships, sects, denominations or communities of believers. No matter how men try to place an interpretation on it, this passage speaks of a single Church—of one, undivided organization!

Jesus continued, “and the gates of hell [meaning the grave] shall not prevail against it.” He promised that *His Church* could not be destroyed. This Church—

Christ’s Church—the *true* Church—was foretold to *never* be extinguished—to *never* die out.

Unrecognized and discounted as a cult or a fringe sect on the edge of supposed Christianity, the Church of God has endured every trial and storm it has faced.

For 2,000 years, almost everyone has been looking in the wrong place for God’s Church. The true Church was called out of this world—out of its religions, creeds, customs, beliefs and traditions. The word translated throughout the New Testament as “church” comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*, meaning to be “called out”—and Christ’s Church has come out of the world. This has made it more difficult for traditional historians to locate it. Unlike historians *within* the Church, they simply did not know where to look, or what to look for.

Since the Bible states that the whole world is deceived—Revelation 12:9—and blinded—II Corinthians 4:4—as well as cut off from God—Isaiah 59:1-2—it is evident that civilization as a whole could never be greatly influenced by the truth or by the true Church that always strove to uphold it. This helps explain why so few would become converted in this or any previous age. In fact, it is evident from just one other passage that the true Church of God would never be large. Notice how Christ addresses His Church in Luke 12:32: “Fear not, *little flock*; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give *you* the Kingdom”—not the masses yet, but to “you,” the “*little flock*.”

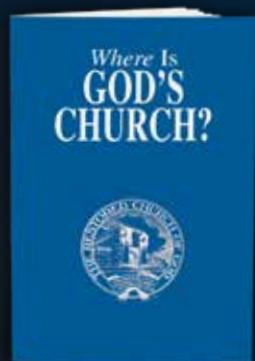
The respected and accepted churches of this world are so because they teach the popular doctrines and traditions, familiar to the masses. By no means could any of these well-known denominations be considered a little flock. Instead, many of them are comprised of millions, or even hundreds of millions of members. One has over a billion.

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Can You Find God's Church Today?



Jesus Christ declared, "I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). If He promised His Church would never be destroyed, where is it today? Jesus gave identifying signs in the Bible to locate it.



Order Your Free Copy of
Where Is God's Church? at rcg.org/wigtc.



UK BATTERED BY BREXIT

Will It Ever Pay Off?

Before the United Kingdom's breakup with the European Union, predictions varied widely on how the nation would fare after the split. The debate continues three years later.

ON JUNE 23, 2016, Britain voted to leave the European Union. Yet three years after its departure, the nation is yet to benefit from the Brexit dividend many envisioned for its economy as it lags its peers on multiple fronts, including trade and investment.

Britain formally exited the EU on January 31, 2020, though it remained in the bloc's single market and customs union for 11 more months. On that day, then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the country could now finally fulfill its potential and that he hoped Britons would grow in confidence with each passing month.

So far, the opposite has happened—a range of indicators show underperformance compared with other economies. Opinion polls show Britons who regret leaving the EU increasingly out-

number those who do not. A survey published recently by news website UnHerd showed this was now the case in all but three of 632 parliamentary constituencies analyzed. This is a stunning turnaround from the joyous optimism many displayed following the Brexit vote in 2016.

However, the government, now led by Brexit-supporting Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, says Britain is prospering with newfound freedoms. Finance minister Jeremy Hunt challenged the talk of decline and said recently that Brexit is offering a brighter future with room for measures that will attract investment in areas such as the green economy and tech.

Many economists say leaving the EU is not the sole cause of Britain's woes—the country was hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic and a surge

in gas prices after Russia's invasion of Ukraine—but it is a factor that can help explain recent underperformance.

"It's been more than a slow burn. It's been a serious reduction in economic performance," said John Springford, deputy director at the Centre for European Reform think tank. "If you impose barriers to trade, investment and migration with your biggest trading partner [the EU], then you're going to have quite a big hit to trade volumes, and to investment and to GDP," he said, pointing to a string of dismal economic data.

Britain was the only Group of Seven advanced economy yet to regain its pre-pandemic size of late 2019 at the end of September last year, the most recent period covered by data.

In late January, the International Monetary Fund said it expected

Britain's economy to shrink by 0.6 percent this year, in contrast to predictions of growth across the rest of the G7.

Mr. Springford estimated that Brexit reduced Britain's economic output compared with what it would have been without leaving the EU by around 5.5 percent as of mid-2022, based on a "doppelganger" model in which an algorithm selects countries whose economic performance closely matched pre-Brexit Britain.

The government's own forecasting organization, the Office for Budget Responsibility, and the Bank of England also judge there to be a long-running net cost to leaving the EU.

Some economists disagree with the consensus. Brexit-supporting economist Gerard Lyons, an adviser to online wealth management platform NetWealth who advised Boris Johnson during his years as the mayor of London, said it was wrong to blame Britain's problems on Brexit.

"Our problems pre-date Brexit," Mr. Lyons said, pointing to chronically low rates of investment in Britain. "Achieving the benefits of Brexit very much depends on delivering...a growth plan—how you can use your levers post-Brexit."

Mr. Lyons criticized the doppelganger method of analysis on the basis that some smaller countries selected by the models were inappropriate comparators for a large economy like Britain.

Trading Blows

Trade and investment data point to other Brexit problems. Exports, especially in goods, have disappointed over the last three years, despite high hopes for a "Global Britain" rebalancing of the economy post-Brexit. Total exports, including services, have grown by less than those of any other G7 country since late 2019.

Boris Glass, senior economist at ratings agency S&P Global, said increased red tape in UK-EU trade had especially damaged the competitiveness of smaller British manufacturers since they have fewer resources to deal with it.



Top, an anti-Brexit campaigner holds a placard outside the Houses of Parliament in London, United Kingdom (Jan. 31, 2023). Bottom, Protesters at a march in London implore the government to make an EU membership U-turn and rejoin (Oct. 22, 2022).

CARL COURT/GETTY IMAGES (TOP); MARTIN POPE/GETTY IMAGES (BOTTOM RIGHT)

"It's worth noting that the UK has more small exporters than for example, France or Germany. So in that respect they are disadvantaged," Mr. Glass said. "If you are an exporter with 20 employees, then the burden of filling out these forms is very costly. Some of them can't compete at all."

Business investment, too, has grown by less since the June 2016

Brexit referendum than in the United States, France or Germany, according to a *Reuters* analysis of data from the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development.

Some pro-Brexit economists say such statistics ignore the fact that British corporate investment was unusually strong in the years leading up to mid-2016 and was bound to slow.

But business survey evidence overwhelmingly points to Brexit as a factor behind weak investment in recent years.

"It's concerning that there doesn't seem to be any kind of pickup in investment. And I think, in order for us to have a durable recovery from the Brexit shock, then we've got to see that rise," Mr. Springford said.

While Britain still boasts higher rates of employment and lower unemployment than most EU countries, there are signs that Brexit may have impacted the labor market too. Business groups want the government to relax its post-Brexit immigration rules as firms are struggling to find workers, something the Bank of England fears is stoking inflationary pressures. And, unlike most of its G7 peers, Britain's employment rate has yet to recover to its pre-pandemic level.

With all the problems Brexit is causing, why did Britain leave in the first place?

A Look Back

Imagine the UK's relationship with the EU pre-Brexit as the scenario of a married man and woman stranded on a desert island. Although the relationship had long become strained, they both realize for a time that their situation is desperate and, unless things change, their future is dim. They must work together—they have no other choice. Their very survival depends on it.

Now shift to the history of Britain and Europe. Two world wars left the European continent devastated. With Adolf Hitler dead, Nazi Germany smoldering in ruins, and the Soviet Union poised to emerge as a world superpower, the nations of Europe concluded that they must unite—or else.

Though the marriage seemed to work for a little while, their path forward was fraught with roadblocks, bumps and chaotic turns that seemed to detour into uncertainty. Nonetheless,

each partner knew the bed they had made with each other.

As with most rocky marriages, however, divorce was inevitable. Severing the bond eventually appeared to be a better option than continuing the status quo. There were too many disagreements and misunderstandings. The common proverb "the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence" became all too real when British voters became fed up with Europe's liberal leaning toward mass immigration and its financial mismanagement when dealing with fiscally irresponsible countries like Greece. To Britain, Europe had all too often crossed a line that had been drawn in the sand.

With the advent of Brexit, it became clear this marriage of convenience was over and there was no going back.

Many asked: Where did the marriage go wrong? Had Britain grown tired of European technocrats overruling British lawmakers and telling the UK what laws Europe would allow to go unchecked? Was it Europe's insistence that the UK accept any and all immigrants into its fold, regardless of UK immigration laws or how it would affect Britain economically, socially and politically? Was it the European Union's growing and unrelenting pressure for Britain to scrap the British pound in favor of the euro? Was it the famed "isolated island nation" mindset that Britain has long been accused of holding onto, therefore keeping it separate socially, culturally and mentally from the rest of Europe?

Yet we must pull back and examine on a foundational level why such radically different partners could never ultimately coexist.

The island nation of the British peoples has always had a mind of its own. After all, at one time it ruled or directly influenced the better part of the Earth, giving rise to the once-popular saying, "The sun never sets on the British Empire." And for good reason: At its zenith, the British Empire stretched across the planet, including England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Canada, the original 13 colonies of America, Bermuda, Jamaica, South Africa, Egypt,

Anti-Brexit campaigners wave European Union flags outside the Houses of Parliament in London, United Kingdom (Jan. 31, 2023).

CARL COURT/GETTY IMAGES



Sudan, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, India, Iraq, Burma (today's Myanmar), Australia, New Zealand and Fiji, to name a few.

The problematic relationship between Britain and the EU and its resulting financial struggles can be attributed to one thing: The mindset of the British peoples is fundamentally different from that of the other nations in the EU.

Over the decades, Britain had grown used to ruling on its own and charting its own course into the future. Quite naturally, it bristled whenever bureaucrats approved EU restrictions over British laws. The result of the Brexit vote and subsequent split further confirmed this. Yet there is an even deeper reason for this...

Look Back Further

The world remains in blissful ignorance of the real origins of the world's greatest nations, Britain and the United States. The reason Britain could not coexist with the EU has to do with its real identity—revealed in God's Word. People in Britain and America, along with Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and other English-speaking nations, cannot put in proper perspective what is happening to their nations because they do not know how to identify their origins in Scripture.

No wonder God lamented in the book of Isaiah: "The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel does not know, My people do not consider" (1:3).

Consider the following excerpt from the book *America and Britain in Prophecy*, written by this magazine's editor-in-chief, David C. Pack: "Many have mistakenly thought, 'The Jews are God's chosen people.' This is only partially true, and it denies the tremendous truth about why the United States and Britain rose to such unprecedented prominence and power.

"God's Holy Word clearly reveals that His entire plan of salvation is inseparable from, and relates to, the nation of Israel. Notice: 'Who are Israelites; to whom pertains the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants,

and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises...' (Rom. 9:4).

"The Jews never fulfilled the national greatness prophesied—and promised—to come on the modern descendants of ancient Israel. Have you wondered why?

"Now ask yourself: Why is it then that the English-speaking peoples most profess to believe in the Bible and the God it describes? Why is it that all peoples of the world professing worship of the God of the Bible, were at one time taught by these English-speaking, Anglo-Saxon people? Why is it that these same people have done more to preserve the Bible than any other? Is it not also strange that these nations, and not the Jews, have proliferated the Bible around the world far more than all other nations put together?

"The island nation of the British peoples has always had a mind of its own. After all, at one time it ruled or directly influenced the better part of the Earth."

"The Jews were prophesied to become scattered, and were never foretold to achieve national greatness. It is a far different story for the United States and British Commonwealth! It has been said that 'Never in history has any country or commonwealth been so blessed' and that because of this blessing, 'Never have so few produced so much to feed so many for so little.' How true of these nations—but this has never been true of the Jews!"

"Everything is at stake for the Anglo-Saxon peoples—literally. Cataclysmic prophecies must yet be fulfilled—and these will soon begin to crash upon unsuspecting populations.

You can, indeed you must, understand all that lies ahead for hundreds of millions.

"The ultimate future of the American and British peoples is astounding, with their greatest period of prosperity and world influence yet ahead. But this time will not come as their leaders, planners and thinkers might hope."

"When related Bible passages are placed together in clear and concise form—the Bible is a jigsaw puzzle, and it must be permitted to interpret itself—the prophecies about America and Britain (and certain other Western countries) are not difficult to understand. In fact, you will wonder why so few have been able to comprehend them."

The Bible is so much more than a collection of seemingly unrelated stories and enigmatic parables and dos and don'ts. It is man's Instruction Manual from his Creator, which has been recorded through the ages by divinely inspired servants. The Bible explains who and what we are, why we exist, what is life's ultimate purpose—and how we can achieve it.

The reason for Britain's mindset being so different from other European nations can be understood by grasping its real origin as a nation and what God promised it would become.

The Bible has much more to say about the roots of the British and American peoples *and* their ultimate destiny. God's Word identifies their forefathers, as well as those of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France, the Netherlands and certain other Western European nations.

There are awe-inspiring prophecies regarding Britain and America that have yet to be fulfilled. Roughly one-third of the Bible is prophecy—history written in advance.

If you would like to learn more about America and Britain's biblical origins—why they were such uniquely blessed and prosperous peoples—and what lies just ahead for them—read *America and Britain in Prophecy* at rcg.org/aabibp. □

EXTINCTION CRISIS

1 Million Species Under Threat

Is there anything the global community can do to stem the tide?



NATURE IS in crisis, and it is only getting worse. Species are vanishing at a rate unseen in human history, with more than 1 million species now on the brink.

Experts say that people are driving this extinction crisis through activities that take over animal habitats, pollute nature and fundamentally alter ecosystems.

When many hear such statistics, the discussion can quickly turn political: What should the government do to stem the tide of extinction? Does anything need to be done at all?

Yet these debates overlook the most important question: What does God think of this trend?

His first command to mankind in the Garden of Eden was “to dress it and to keep it” (Gen. 2:15). This really applies to the entire planet, and still applies now. The word translated “keep” in this verse means to guard, retain, protect and save. Taking care of the Earth and its animal inhabitants is man’s God-given responsibility.

Mankind is utterly failing to do this today.

According to many scientists, the mass extinction event that is now underway is only worsening. A mass extinction event happens when the extinction rate jumps so high that more than 75 percent of the world’s species go extinct within a relatively short time.

When an animal species is lost, an entire set of characteristics disappears along with it—genes, behaviors and activities. Whatever role that species played within an ecosystem is lost too—whether pollinating certain plants, churning nutrients in the soil, fertilizing forests, keeping other animal populations in check, among other things. If that function is crucial to the health of an ecosystem, the animals’ disappearance could cause a landscape to transform. Lose too many species, and the results could be catastrophic, leading an entire system to collapse.

“Despite our best efforts, the extinction rate is still estimated to be 1,000 times higher than before humans entered the stage,” said Paula Ehrlich,

president and CEO of the E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation. She estimates that half of the planet’s remaining biodiversity will be gone by the end of the century.

Extreme weather, habitat loss, pollution and development have hammered the world’s biodiversity, with the United Nations warning in 2019 that a million plant and animal species face extinction within decades—a rate of loss 1,000 times greater than expected. Humans use about 50,000 wild species routinely, and 1 out of 5 people of the world’s over 8 billion population depend on them for food and income, according to the report.

“God’s first command to mankind in the Garden of Eden was ‘to dress it and to keep it’ (Gen. 2:15). This really applies to the entire planet.”

But deep down, human beings know they *should* protect nature. Governments the world over agree on this much—but they do not agree on what to do about it.

In December 2022, the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP15) reached a historic deal to try to save Earth’s biodiversity and protect its lands and oceans. The most significant part of the agreement was a commitment to protect 30 percent of land and water considered essential for biodiversity by 2030, known as 30 by 30. Currently, 17 percent of terrestrial and 10 percent of marine areas are protected.

The Wildlife Conservation Society and other environmental groups are concerned that COP15’s deal only puts off the goal of preventing the extinction of species, preserving the integrity of ecosystems and maintaining the

genetic diversity within populations until 2030. They fear the UN timeline is not ambitious enough.

Counting the Failures

Over the last five centuries, hundreds of unique animals across the world have vanished, such as the flightless dodo bird killed off from the island of Mauritius in the 1600s.

In many cases of species loss, humans were to blame, due to activities like fishing or hunting. This was the case with South Africa’s zebra subspecies quagga, which was hunted to its end in the late 19th century. In modern times, this would include any activity that pollutes, disrupts or takes over wild habitats.

For historical extinctions, it was not until long after the fact that scientists realized a species was gone forever. In contrast, people can now often watch animals go extinct in real-time.

Before a species disappears entirely, it may already be considered “functionally extinct”—with not enough specimens left to ensure the species ultimately survives. The last known specimens are known as “endlings.” When this happens, human beings can interact with these animals but are powerless to stop them from disappearing forever.

Some species we know today could soon be reduced to endlings. The world’s smallest porpoise, Mexico’s critically endangered vaquita, is down to just 18 known individuals in the wild, as fishing nets have ravaged its population.

The northern white rhino subspecies, the second-largest land mammal after elephants, now has no hope of recovery after the last male died in 2018. Only a female and her daughter are left.

This rhino is not just a part of the world, it is a world unto itself—a miniature ecosystem. It mows fields through grazing, fertilizes lands where it walks, allows insects to land on its skin, and then allows birds to feed off those insects. Losing this species of rhino affects much more than the rhino itself.

The current estimates for extinction are alarming, but the reality is likely even worse. Counting official species extinctions does not give the full picture, because scientists are incredibly conservative when declaring a species is gone. They will often label an animal as “critically endangered, possibly extinct,” even if just one of its kind is known to exist.

Endlings are the exception. Most extinct species have simply faded away in the wild without anyone noticing.

Scientists count 881 animal species as having gone extinct since around 1500, dating back to the first records held by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the global scientific authority on the status of nature and wildlife. And realize that this only represents cases resolved with a high degree of certainty.

If we include animal species scientists suspect *might* be extinct, that number shoots up to 1,473. Yet why is the bar so high for declaring a species officially extinct?

“It’s hard to prove the negative, to prove you can’t find it,” said Sean O’Brien, an ecologist who heads the NatureServe nonprofit working to establish definitive data on North American species. “And it’s emotional. A botanist doesn’t want to declare it extinct because it feels like a failure.”

Among terrestrial vertebrates—land animals with a backbone—322 species have been declared extinct since 1500. Add in the number of possibly extinct species, and the tally comes to 573.

For moisture-loving amphibians, vulnerable to both pollution and drought, things look particularly bleak, with the extinction rate escalating over the last few decades. Only 37 species have been declared extinct with a high degree of certainty since 1500. But scientists suspect more than 100 others have disappeared over the last 30 to 40 years, according to a 2015 study in the journal *Science Advances*.

There are many notable species among those that have vanished since 1500. The dodo, referenced earlier,

was last seen in 1662, within 65 years of its first being recorded. The Pinta Island tortoise was last seen in the wild in 1972.

Some vanishings have inspired public outcry, such as the 2016 extinction declaration for the tiny Christmas Island pipistrelle bat species, last seen in 2009. It was Australia’s first recorded mammal extinction in 50 years.

Losing hundreds of species over 500 years may not feel significant when millions of species are still living on the planet. But the speed at which species now vanish is unprecedented in the last 10 million years.

Why It Matters

There are also a vast number of animal species that mankind has yet to discover. Scientists have identified some 1.2 million species worldwide but estimate there are actually more than 8.7 million in existence. That leaves roughly 7.5 million species that we think are out there but know nothing about—including whether they are in trouble.

“Somewhere in the core of our humanity, we recognize these creatures, we’re touched by their story, and we feel compassion—and maybe also a moral compulsion—to help,” Dr. Ehrlich said.

The deep-seated desire to protect nature goes well beyond moral compulsion. It is built into humanity.

After creating everything seen in the world today, God said this to the first human beings: “I have *given you* every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to *you* it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creeps upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so” (Gen. 1:29-30).

God has given man everything and placed it under his dominion. Yet realize that God made it all. This fact alone should reframe any catastrophic effects human actions have on the

environment. In Genesis 1, He called everything He made “good.”

People should treat nature and the animal species within it with deep respect because God made it all.

Yet protecting nature’s awesome intricacies and variety goes far beyond realizing that the God of the universe entrusted it to humanity. It points back to why mankind exists in the first place.

This was not lost on King David. Thousands of years ago, looking out at the natural world prompted him to be introspective. Notice Psalm 8:3: “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?”

He summarized the verses from Genesis 1: “You made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yes, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passes through the paths of the seas” (Psa. 8:6-8).

Like the animals, human beings were created by God. Before we can stem the extinction crisis, mankind needs to first answer the biggest question: Why are we on this Earth?

If everyone truly sought an answer to that question from God’s Word, and then followed its commands, Creation would be preserved as God intended.

With so many differing and conflicting views and perspectives the world over, that is impossible today. But God has an incredible purpose for creating human beings and putting them on the Earth. And there is a time coming soon when, finally, man can fulfill his directive to dress and keep God’s Creation.

Isaiah 11:9 speaks of this time: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”

To understand how God will bring this verse to pass, read *What Is the Kingdom of God?* at rcg.org/witkog. □

10 of the Most Endangered Animals



Javan Rhino • 75 Remain
Location: Southeast Asia



Mountain Gorilla • 1000 Remain
Location: Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda



Amur Leopard • 100 Remain
Location: Russian Far East and Nearby China



Sumatran Tiger • 600 Remain
Location: Sumatra, Indonesia



Yangtze Finless Porpoise • 1000 Remain
Location: Yangtze River in China



African Forest Elephant • Number Uncertain
Location: Central Africa



Tapanuli Orangutan • 800 Remain
Location: Sumatra, Indonesia



Sumatran Orangutan • 14,000 Remain
Location: Sumatra, Indonesia



Black Rhino • 5,630 Remain
Location: Kenya, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe



Hawksbill Turtle • 20,000 Remain
Location: Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans

X PORNOGRAHY

PROTECT YOUR FAMILY FROM THIS HIDDEN ENEMY

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

The spread of pornography is having a destructive impact on society—especially on families.

MODERN FAMILIES face unprecedented challenges: financial constraints, work-life imbalances, fractured educational, political and religious institutions, changing societal norms and poor overall health and wellness.

There is another ever-present threat: pornography consumption. Yet, given this topic revolves around sex, few are willing to directly discuss this problem.

But every father and mother must squarely face this issue. Explicit pornographic content is always only a few clicks or screen taps away and can be accessed as quickly and easily as sports highlights or a recipe.

Far too many still consider porn use harmless entertainment, brushing off any qualms about its morality or decency. There are still blogs and

articles making awkward attempts to frame pornography as somehow a *good* thing, touting it as a stress reliever and a way to educate the public about sex.

However, the actual effects of porn are proving catastrophic—especially on families. Excessive exposure to it can lead to decreased relationship satisfaction between spouses, wrong attitudes toward sex, objectifying others, and a lack of intimacy and emotional connection between family members.

Scientists, psychologists and other experts are now reevaluating the social and psychological effects of porn use and coming to terms with them.

“Pornography negatively impacts society by deconstructing families, traumatizing children, and creating mental and physical health issues for individuals suffering from addiction,” the July 2021 Family Research Council report “Pornography and Its Consequences” stated.

The true consequences of indulging in pornography can no longer be ignored.

Pornography has always been contrary to God’s plan for families. From the start, He intended for a man and woman to marry and to have sex within that union to produce children (Gen. 2:24; 1:28).

Sex itself is not the problem—God created it. From His perspective, however, the sex act was meant to be a private affair between husband and wife, not a public display to titillate the masses.

For current and future generations to gain a godly understanding of family relationships and sexuality, it is critical to tackle the growing porn epidemic.

Technology and Pornography

All of the quality of life increases that the internet age provides come with a price: The proliferation of and easy access to sexually explicit materials. According to *Fight the New Drug*, a nonprofit organization committed to raising awareness on pornography's harmfulness, porn sites receive more traffic in the United States than Twitter, Instagram, Netflix, Pinterest and LinkedIn combined!

One of the most popular pornography sites claimed 42 billion visitors and 39 billion searches in 2019. This equates to 115 million visitors per day, nearly 5 million per hour and almost 80,000 per minute, all from just one site.

Pornographic internet traffic exploded during the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Recovery Village*, a rehab center that helps people with various addictions, reported there was an estimated 25 percent increase in pornography traffic due largely to pandemic-induced lockdowns and extended periods of remote work.

The porn industry continues to be an ever-expanding multi-billion-dollar enterprise with a reach spanning the globe. In 2015, the industry generated an estimated \$97 billion globally. The industry is believed to generate even more money today. Many of the most popular porn companies use the "free content" approach of many social media companies, generating advertising dollars by monetizing harvested data from its users. Other outlets offer subscription-based options that promise exclusive services such as live-streamed content or ad-free viewing.

No matter the business model, pornography sites get many millions of views daily to the delight of content creators and advertisers.

These numbers are expected to skyrocket as virtual reality and artificial intelligence technology open the door to newer, even more addictive forms of content creation. It is estimated that VR pornography alone will be a \$1 billion business by 2025.

What does all this mean for families?

According to a study in the *Journal of Sex Research*, married people who start watching pornography are twice as likely to divorce as those who do not.

Children suffer even more. The "Pornography and Its Consequences" report showed that from 2018 to 2019 pornography depicting minors increased from 45 million images to over 69 million images. An astonishing 67 percent of children featured in these types of materials report that their biological parents or guardians were their abusers.

"Excessive porn use can tear families apart emotionally. It can cause lasting damage to spousal and parental relationships and invite negative feelings of jealousy, envy, guilt, shame and regret among family members."

Family Impact

Pornography is like a drug for the brain. Tests show a similar reaction between those viewing porn and those on alcohol, cocaine or nicotine. Pornography's addictive nature can partly be attributed to a rush of dopamine, a hormone in the body that brings feelings of pleasure and reward.

For many, pornography is an escape from the stress and anxieties of everyday life. For others, it is an outlet for sexual dissatisfaction or the result of past experiences or trauma. Regardless of the reason people are drawn to pornographic content, both those directly involved in the industry and those viewing it as a twisted form of therapy or entertainment suffer greatly.

Porn use within a family can lead to a plethora of mental and physical health issues that all affect the family dynamic. These issues include depression, anxiety, loneliness, erectile dysfunction in males, physical maladies such as eye strain, back problems, sleep problems that come from extended sessions of viewing pornography, and much more.

Excessive porn use can tear families apart emotionally. It can cause lasting damage to spousal and parental relationships and invite negative feelings of jealousy, envy, guilt, shame and regret among family members.

Porn use damages the trust and emotional connection between people, which fights the fundamental purpose of marriage. While viewing porn has traditionally been associated with men, research shows that porn use among women continues to increase.

Once pornography use takes hold in a marriage, it can lead to a decrease in sexual stimulation and an overall loss of interest in intimate contact between spouses. There is a decrease in sexual desire, a warped perception of human sexuality and resentment and suspicion among mates.

If not stopped, porn use can lead to infidelity and eventually divorce.

Pornography is also extremely damaging to children. The damage can be a result of them being innocent bystanders forced to witness the impact of pornography on their parents, or children and teens can themselves be caught in the cycle of porn.

Youngsters exposed to pornography are more likely to suffer from loneliness, depression, anxiety and sleep disorders. Being exposed to a wrong view of sex at such an early age can lead to promiscuity and hedonistic behavior later.

Children and teens can also form a distorted view of sex and marriage. Pornography often portrays an unrealistic, and sometimes even violent, version of sex that can be exponentially damaging to young, impressionable minds.

Any family member watching pornography long-term can lead to desensitization and a craving for more

pervasive content. Porn addicts are more likely to engage in abnormal and even deviant sexual behaviors: sexual aggression, loose sexual activity and even criminal activity such as prostitution and rape. These activities can lead to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, out-of-wedlock pregnancies and abortions.

An obsession with pornography can cause users to focus all their attention on porn to the neglect of relationships, work and family.

In short, porn is an undeniable and destructive force within a family.

God's View of Sex

God created sexual pleasure, yet this was always to be experienced within the parameters He designed. Doing anything contrary to this always causes problems.

In I Corinthians 6:18, God commands us to “flee fornication,” calling it a “sin against [one’s] own body.” Fornication means sex outside of marriage. When people have sex outside of marriage, they hurt themselves and others.

For anyone who thinks fornication is no big deal, this extended list of other lust-driven desires condemned by Scripture puts it in perspective: “Now the works of the flesh are manifest [obvious], which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:19-21).

Most have no idea that wrong forms of sex—adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness—are on a list with idolatry, witchcraft, wrath, murder and drunkenness!

Jesus Christ Himself shows that this includes consuming pornography: “You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looks on a woman to lust after

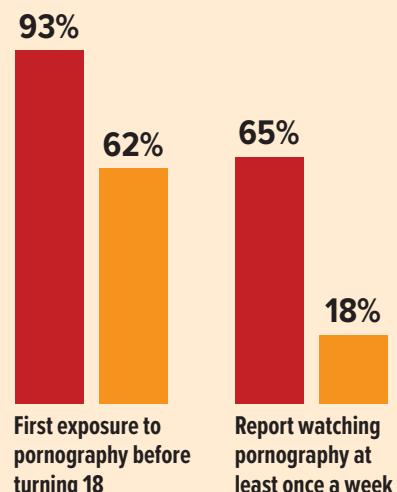
Pornography's Cost



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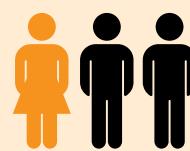
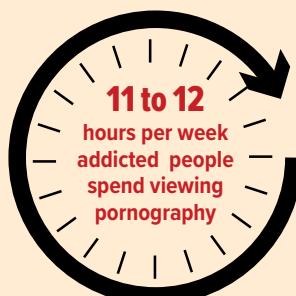
Number of U.S. adults who regularly visit internet pornography websites

■ Men ■ Women



20% 13%
Admit to accessing pornography while at work

Porn use among men can lower self-esteem of their wives and girlfriends



1 in 3 visitors of all adult web sites is a woman

35% of all internet downloads are pornographic



Mood Disorders



Depression & Anxiety



Memory Problems



Smoking & Tobacco Use



Substance Use Disorders

Source: The Recovery Village; sagu.edu | Graphic: Darnitra D. Jackson

her has committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:27-28).

Looking at women (or men) to lust after them is the undeniable purpose of pornography! According to Christ, adultery can be either having actual sex with a non-spouse or lust after them in the heart. If a person does either, they are cheating on their current or future marriage partner.

God did not intend sex to be shameful. He is not anti-sex. He told the first man and woman to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the Earth" (Gen. 1:28). While it is not directly recorded in the Bible, God would have explained to this first couple the proper use of sex.

Sex within marriage is a God-given act of unity, a sign of commitment, and an expression of love and pleasure between a husband and wife. Pornography sabotages the beauty of this divinely ordained act.

Sexual stimulation outside of God's plan for marriage and sexuality turns the purpose of marriage and family on its head.

The porn world is dark and seductive. Beneath its glittering veneer lies a sinister truth: men and women are reduced to mere sex objects, with their worth determined solely by their physical appearance and willingness to perform.

In pornography, sex is all about self-gratification and instant satisfaction. It has little to no regard for the pursuit of spousal fulfillment or any notion of love. Instead, it encourages infidelity, promiscuity and the exploitation of others—all in the pursuit of pleasure.

Yet notice how God wants individuals to treat others: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others" (Phil. 2:3-4, New International Version). This applies to human interactions in general, as well as within a marriage and family.

Those who are addicted to porn often feel disconnected from God. It is

near impossible to maintain and cultivate a spiritual relationship with Him when the heart and mind are filled with impure thoughts that directly violate God's will.

Ultimately, pornography undermines Christian morals and integrity, leaving individuals and families feeling spiritually and emotionally drained.

Saving Families

With God's help and guidance, families *can* win the difficult battle with pornography.

To succeed, each family member must understand God's view of sex. Parents must learn this first themselves and then teach it to their children. Our book *Sex – Its Unknown Dimension* plainly lays out what the Bible has to say on the subject—as well as how to impart this to daughters and sons.

The book states: "Where then can men find this missing spiritual knowledge, so sadly lacking in all the publications that stress only the *physical* aspects of sex? Generally these are focused on the supposed endless means and techniques to titillate and to maximize sexual pleasure. God knew there must be a *source* that clearly—PLAINLY—reveals and defines morality and proper human conduct...the true understanding of this unknown dimension is found in the Bible—the Word of God. No other source reveals it."

Beyond this crucial foundation of knowledge, families should engage in daily rituals that bring everyone closer. Find activities to do as a family. Show that fun is possible without always being tied to technology.

Parents must also be proactive in monitoring their children's internet use, setting boundaries so kids are not exposed to pornography. And because it is virtually impossible to keep *all* exposure to pornography away from their kids, parents should have age-appropriate conversations with their children about porn and its negative impact.

Adults should also be honest and open regarding technology use. Husbands should be open with their wives if they are struggling with porn and vice versa. As difficult as it can be, the spouse learning of the other's difficulty with pornography should not overreact in response. Be willing to forgive the offending spouse, remembering how merciful and forgiving God is toward your own shortcomings.

Being a healthy, well-balanced individual goes a long way to help avoid the dangers of pornography. Exercise is a great way to release tension and improve your physical and mental health. Family or individual activities and hobbies can include things like going for a walk, playing a sport or completing a puzzle. Eating healthy meals also helps to reduce stress and improve moods, as does getting enough sleep.

Family members must be there for each other in times of difficulty to decrease the likelihood of turning to porn for comfort or relief.

One way to avoid or overcome the depression, anxiety and loneliness that can lead to porn use is for the family to focus on serving others. Come together to participate in acts of service, kindness and compassion. Get involved with others in your local community. When families come together for a greater purpose, they can overcome nearly any challenge.

Pornography is a public health crisis, ravaging society and wreaking havoc on the mental and physical health of many. But families are not without hope. They can survive by taking a stand against consuming inappropriate content.

The battle against wrong sexual desires can be difficult. Yet, by developing a strong relationship with God to understand His view of sex and maintaining strong familial bonds, you can ensure pornography does not have a negative impact on your family.

To learn more, visit rcg.org to read these three free publications: *Sex – Its Unknown Dimension*, *You Can Build a Happy Marriage* and *Train Your Children God's Way*. □

Is Iraq's 'Garden of Eden'

LOST FOREST





A boy walks on an abandoned boat among a dried-up section of Iraq's receding southern marshes (June 28, 2022)—an area pummeled by three years of drought.

ASAAD NIAZI/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

The nation's marshlands are receding at an alarming rate. As the waters are disappearing, so is a centuries-old way of life.

BY JAMES E. HABBOUSH

EVERY MORNING at sunrise, Iraqi fisherman Ahmad Hassan Lelo emerges from his shack on the banks of the Tigris River in the heart of Baghdad, and every morning his heart breaks at the sight before him.

The once-mighty river that meandered past his home is a shadow of its former self. Its flowing waters—depleted by a devastating drought and dams and polluted by sewage and industrial waste—have become muddy and listless.

Mr. Lelo started to learn his trade by his father's side as an 8-year-old boy, but today his primary source of income comes not from fishing but from ferrying people from one side of the river to the other in his small boat.

"This has been the worst year of my life," the 56-year-old said. "The river is dead, and our livelihoods are dead with it."

Mr. Lelo's story is tragically common in a nation that has become a symbol of war, instability, poverty and vast arid deserts. Yet, until recently, this was not the case. Iraq takes its name from the Arabic word *araqa*, which can mean perspiring, deeply rooted and well-watered.

Millennia ago, Iraq's abundant water supply made possible one of the seven wonders of the ancient world: the famed Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the glory of Mesopotamia within the Fertile Crescent. Yet the Mideast nation is now experiencing its worst drought in decades, and it is the 39th most water-stressed country globally, according to the United Nations.

The lush marshlands of southern Iraq—home to 500,000 farmers and fishermen in the 1950s—have long been known as the nation's Garden of Eden. The ongoing environmental

catastrophe has driven out everyone but fewer than 20,000 inhabitants now.

The year 2022 was Iraq's driest year since 1930, a government adviser said in late September, depleting the country's two main rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris, and fueling competition for water with neighboring countries.

Cradle of Civilization

While it is impossible to know exactly where the biblical Garden of Eden was located, Iraq has reason to use that term for its once-lush region around the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

The first book of the Bible, Genesis, emphasizes how verdant the Garden of Eden was thousands of years ago: "The LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there He put the man whom He had formed...And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads" (2:7-8, 10).



A view of a traditional Marsh Arab village of reed houses in the wetlands of Southern Iraq circa 1978.

NIK WHEELER/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

Two of these “heads” were the now-ravaged Euphrates and Tigris rivers. Notice how God characterized the Euphrates when describing the Promised Land: “In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto your seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the *great river*, the river Euphrates” (Gen. 15:18).

The Tigris, referred to in the Bible as the Hiddekel, was also called “great” (Dan. 10:4).

What changed? Assuming the Iraq-Garden of Eden connection, how did the reputed waters that made Eden flourish become slow-moving channels of pollution? With access to waterways that were among Earth’s greatest resources, why are Mr. Lelo and so many others struggling to survive in professions that sustained previous generations of their ancestors?

Competition and Pollution

The basin of the Tigris, the second-largest river in Western Asia after the Euphrates, is shared by four countries—Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey.

There are 14 dams along its course, and irrigation and hydroelectric projects are putting pressure on the river’s flows, according to the Inventory of Shared Water Resources in Western Asia, a report prepared by UN agencies.

Iraqi officials say lower river flows from upstream neighbors Iran and Turkey—which are building dams to ease their own lack of water—are worsening homegrown problems such as leaks, aging pipes and illegal siphoning of supplies.

Rising demand for water in Baghdad, a growing city of about 8 million people, is putting further strain on dwindling resources, while treatment plants are lacking, according to a 2022 report by the University of Baghdad.

“When the amount of water goes down, the pollution goes up,” said Moutaz Al-Dabbas, one of the report’s authors.

Pollution from untreated wastewater, including sewage and garbage dumping, poses an additional threat to fish and other wildlife in the Tigris around Baghdad, the report said.

In 2018, thousands of tons of freshwater carp—a foundational ingredient in one of the country’s best-known dishes—washed up dead in the Euphrates due to high levels of coliform bacteria, heavy metals and ammonia in the water.

“We call for the purification of all this water before it is dumped into the rivers,” Mr. Al-Dabbas said.

Iraq’s Environment Ministry said in September 2022 that it was forming a committee to evaluate water pollution in the country.

Bad for Business

At Baghdad’s Al-Shawakeh fish market, stallholders—many of whom are also fishermen—are worried about the river’s future and their earnings.

Baker Ali, 48, who sells fishing supplies at his store in the middle of the market, said he recently spent eight hours out on the river without catching anything.

“All of us have been hurt,” he said, lamenting a 90 percent sales slump at his shop compared with last year. “When the fishermen suffer, we all suffer.”



An aerial view of an abandoned village on the banks of the dried-up bed of Iraq's receding southern marshes of Chibayish in Dhi Qar province (Sept. 28, 2022).

ASAAD NIAZI/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



Top, an Iraqi farmer on a boat collects reeds from the banks of the southern Chibayish marshes in Dhi Qar province as water levels recover following a rainy period (Jan. 23, 2023). Middle, a woman tends to her water buffaloes while grazing in the Hawiza marsh near the city of al-Amara in southern Iraq (July 27, 2022). Bottom, demonstrators lift a banner with a slogan in Arabic which reads "Save the marshes, water scarcity is killing life in the marshes" as they rally at the Umm El Wadha marsh southeast of the city of Nasiriyah in Iraq's southern Dhi Qar province (Aug. 16, 2022).

ASAAD NIAZI/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES (TOP & BOTTOM); AHMAD AL-RUBAYE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES (MIDDLE)

Nearby, freshly caught river fish flap in the makeshift pools of white polystyrene boxes destined for the city's famous Masgouf restaurants. Masgouf, a dish featuring grilled carp, is often the first meal visitors to the country are encouraged to try.

But as water levels recede, many fear the fish will disappear from the country's rivers, replaced by less-prized farmed carp.

"Last year was easier, the one before that easier still," Mr. Ali said, adding that many of his relatives had already quit fishing. "There is no water, there is no fish."

Sadek, 53, who asked not to give his surname, comes from a family of fishermen, but he has not been out on the water in almost a decade.

Sitting behind a white plastic table in his fishing supplies shop, he blamed damage to the environment and government failures to tackle the issue for his decision to abandon fishing and for his declining sales.

"We spend an entire day without selling anything," he said. "We cannot afford to live anymore."

In a report for *Vice News Tonight*, reporter Ben Solomon rode a motor-bike across cracked earth littered with clusters of dry reeds suggesting a more verdant time in the not-too-distant past. His Arab guide explained that the water here was once about 6.5 feet high, gesturing above his head to show the level.

Understanding this was once marshland, the reporter asked, "And now this is just totally dead?"

His guide's response: "Like a desert."

The report included Ahmed Salih, an environmental activist, saying: "An entire community used to live here. Villages and houses used to be here. People used to live and get married here. They used to raise cattle in the floating houses with their children."

Studying the scarred earth, it would be easy to conclude that this was fiction. Yet the reality is causing residents to grow bitter against government leaders.

When asked about the ultimate source of all the trouble, Mr. Salih concluded: "The problem is, despite this damage and all of these calls for help, the government doesn't care about it.

"What happens in my heart when I see this place is like what happened to this land. My heart is like the cracks in this land—cracked and broken."

Mr. Solomon asked the matriarch of a family packing their home to move north if relocating is hard.

She replied: "What do you mean 'hard'? When I can't seem to stop crying that I'm leaving my people and my home...leaving my life—leaving my neighbors. I swear, 'hard' is an understatement."

Asked if the government is helping, she said: "Nothing from the government. The government neglects the poor...Why? The people just want to live their lives—to have their own fish, birds and flock. Why cut the water?"

Grappling with insoluble problems itself, Iraq's government blames the dams in neighboring countries that are preventing water flow.

As with the ruined rivers, the land conditions are also devastating the lives of those who rely on it to survive. Farmer Abed Hameed al-Brahimi has never seen anything like the drought now gripping the country. It has killed virtually everything around him—his rice farm, most of his livestock and chickens—and accelerated a rural exodus that is jeopardizing Iraq's future stability.

Mr. Brahim's home now resembles a desert rather than the green oasis it was a year ago. Without water to irrigate his fields, he has not planted a single seed of rice, which used to feed his family of four and provide a surplus he could sell.

His guard dog does not bark. Thirsty and famished, it barely tilts its head toward the strangers traversing its domain, oblivious to the sounds and sights around it.

"What is happening to us has never happened before. We are completely destroyed," Mr. Brahim, 45, told

Reuters, standing next to his brown fields in al-Meshkhab, a town some 124 miles south of the capital Baghdad. "This year our lives ended all at once."

The abandonment of parched fields, suicides among destitute farmers and violent protests by jobless young men all point to a country struggling to recover from decades of war in the face of worsening weather disasters.

Iraq's three-year drought has devastated its agriculture industry and is robbing many farmers of their only source of income, said Hadi Fathallah, a director at NAMEA Group, a Dubai-based consultancy firm. It is a recipe for social unrest, he said, as people are abandoning their farms to seek work in urban areas.

"You have a scary number of young men who cannot emigrate and cannot do anything. At the end of the day, they will blow up," said Mr. Fathallah. "They can only protest. They have nothing else they can do and that will put a lot of pressure on stability and crime."

More than 560 people were killed during months of protests in 2019 over corruption and lack of jobs, which unseated the government.

Iraq has one of the region's highest youth unemployment rates, with more than a quarter of Iraqis aged 15 to 30 without work, according to the UN children's agency UNICEF.

Frustrations have risen with a year-long political deadlock that left Iraq without a functioning government until October 27, when a cabinet was finally approved.

Although soaring crude prices have boosted oil revenues, the government has no budget to deal with its dilapidated water infrastructure, power cuts, dire public services and poverty.

At the edge of his barren rice field, Mr. Brahim beat the dry earth with his plow to demonstrate how it had been hardened by the scorching sun. It hardly budged under his blows.

"We don't have clothes. We don't have 1,000 Iraqi dinars [\$0.69] to give our sons to buy school copybooks," he

said as his voice rose, the rage inside him barely contained. "We are mentally collapsing."

Zero-sum Game

Iraq is highly vulnerable to the impacts of environmental catastrophes. Temperatures already often hit 122 Fahrenheit, while rainfall is dwindling, along with water levels in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers that irrigate most of its farmlands.

The prolonged drought has forced authorities to make difficult decisions, said Hatem Hamid Hussein, Director General at the National Center for Water Resources Management.

Government rationing of limited water supplies has created a zero-sum game: supplying one area with water means depriving another.

"This year, the percentage of water in dams is only 11 percent of what we had in 2019," said Mr. Hussein, adding that the government halved the water allocated for farming nationally in 2022, which means the amount of land that can be farmed also halved.

"If this winter is not rich in rain, it will be impossible next summer to even ensure drinking water," he said.

The farmers who grow Iraq's famous amber rice in al-Meshkhab were only allocated enough water to irrigate 5 percent of their farms this year. The remainder were unable to plant.

The long-grained rice—which takes its name from the perfume it emits, like that of amber resin—is a source of great pride and the foundation of national dishes like lamb quzi. It takes six months to grow in water-flooded paddy fields.

"Before this, in al-Meshkhab we grew the best amber rice," said Mr. Brahim's neighbor, Haidar Serhan, 45, standing by his dried-out field.

"Now we cannot do anything. Everyone is leaving because of hunger," Mr. Serhan said, describing how many of his neighbors and friends have borrowed money or sold their assets to migrate to the capital in search of work.

"What can I do? I have put my fate in the hands of God. I can't go to

Baghdad," he said, adding that migrating would be too difficult and expensive for him.

After decades of war, insurgency and displacement, the UN's World Food Program said 2.4 million of Iraq's 39 million people are in acute need of food and livelihood assistance.

No Hope?

Aqeel Abdullah Al-Fatlawy will not give up without a fight. This year, he helped organize a series of farmers' demonstrations at the local water authority offices, demanding a larger cut of the water allocation.

"We are heading into a famine here," said the 48-year-old, describing how many of his friends cannot feed their families.

Almost all local employment is tied to farming, and with its demise, jobs have disappeared, he said.

Agriculture is the second-largest contributor to Iraq's gross domestic product after oil, employing almost 20 percent of the workforce, according to the WFP.

The sector contracted by 18 percent last year because of drought and the rising cost of inputs, according to the World Bank.

The WFP has called for more research and investment to help farmers handle adverse climate conditions rather than abandoning their lands, which only drives up local food costs and shortages.

But it is not easy.

"I have no solutions," said Abdulkhalik Mohammad al-Mayali, 59, a local official who coordinates between al-Meshkhab and the central government.

Farmers come to his office every day to complain about their dying animals or lost crops, he said.

"We have a lot of psychological and mental issues appearing in society," Mr. al-Mayali added, describing how the drought has forced people to abandon their homes and move into slums on the outskirts of town.

For some, the cost is too much to bear. Crushed by debt, 10 farmers have taken their own lives by suicide in the last year in al-Meshkhab, a region of 180,000 people, he said.

Mr. al-Mayali vowed to raise the farmers' concerns in the capital. But Mr. Al-Fatlawy was skeptical.

"He is a politician, he talks in slogans and does nothing," he said.

Back on the farm, Abed al-Hussein Kusayr worries that time is running out. He did not plant this year and sold half of his livestock because he could not afford the soaring price of fodder and feed.

If he does not plant in the coming season, he may permanently lose his farm to salinity—a common problem in arid lands where rainfall is too low to percolate through the soil.

"As time passes, this land will be over," said the 50-year-old father of four, surveying his dead rice fields. "If there was water, there would be life. Now that there is no water, there is no life."

Iraq is only one nation in the Middle East that is now a shadow of its early glory and suffering at the hands of government mismanagement and corruption.

Recall rice farmer Mr. Serhan's words: "What can I do? I have put my fate in the hands of God."



Left, an aerial view of a fishing boat coasting through a canal in Iraq's receding southern marshes of Chibay-ish in Dhi Qar province (Aug. 23, 2022). Right, shepherds lead grazing buffaloes in the region (Aug. 23, 2022).

HUSSEIN FALEH/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



A man sits at the entrance of a reed house known as a mudhif along Iraq's southern marshes of Chibayish in Dhi Qar province (Dec. 22, 2022).
HUSSEIN FALEH/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

The Bible not only describes how the Iraqi region looked anciently—it also answers Mr. Sehran's question.

Isaiah 29:19 sets the stage, describing a coming time when the “poor among men shall rejoice” in God because He intervened in world affairs.

Six chapters later, Isaiah explains what world conditions will be like then: “The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing...Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where

each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes” (35:1-2, 5-7).

The dried-out marshes of southern Iraq are just one example of ruined lands on every continent, whether caused by man or events beyond his control. These will soon change.

God will refashion Earth’s surface to give *all* human beings what He always envisioned—“new heavens and a new Earth, wherein dwells righteousness” (II Pet. 3:13). God promises that the people of Iraq will once again dwell in a perspiring, deeply rooted well-watered land alongside all mankind, this time under His care, in landscapes unparalleled in history—the best mankind has ever known.

But focus further on the phrase “wherein dwells *righteousness*.” Pure physical waters have long been a symbol of much purer *spiritual* waters—

the life-transforming “living water” Jesus Christ offered (John 4:10-11; 7:38).

God’s Kingdom will make this available to *all mankind*, including those in drought-stricken Iraq. The Bible promises that just when mankind needs it most, “*living* waters shall go out from Jerusalem...And the LORD shall be king over all the Earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and His name one” (Zech. 14:8-9).

Only under this Kingdom of God can mankind enjoy the physical—and more importantly, *spiritual*—prosperity the Creator always intended. The hard life endured by drought-stricken Iraqis, hard in ways unfathomable to most in the Western world, will finally change.

Hope will finally come to a people that currently have none. □

Good Friday to Easter

1+1=3?

Jesus Christ said He would be in the grave for three days *and* three nights.
Friday afternoon to Sunday sunrise falls far short...

BY ANDREW J. HOLCOMBE

EVERY SPRING, churchgoers around the world gather on Good Friday evening for candlelight services to commemorate Jesus Christ's crucifixion. Then, starting at sunrise the following Sunday, they meet again to celebrate the resurrection.

This traditional time period presents a common Bible question: How long was Jesus in the grave before He rose again?

Jesus said in Matthew 12:40, "For as Jonah was *three days and three nights* in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be *three days and three nights* in the heart of the earth."

Taking this at face value, Christ said He would be dead for three days and three nights—72 hours—before His resurrection.

Yet how does that track with Good Friday to Easter Sunday? How do you fit 72 hours between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning? Much of mod-

ern Christendom put Christ's death at around 3:00 p.m. on Friday and His resurrection on Sunday at sunrise, around 6:00 a.m.

This is, at best, only 39 hours—a little over *half* of the time Jesus said He would be in the grave.

How long was the period between Christ's death and resurrection? The answer matters more than you think!

Does 1 + 1 = 3?

Catholic.com attempts to answer the question of how Friday evening to Sunday morning equals three days and nights. Their explanation is similar to those across Protestant denominations.

"Is there a contradiction here? No, because the ancient Jews counted as a whole day any part of a day, so 'three days and three nights' (which means the same as 'three days' in modern usage) could be as little as twenty-four hours plus a few seconds on either side—if

there had been, back then, clocks that could register seconds.

"In our way of reckoning things, from lunch time today to lunch time tomorrow is one day. Ancient Jews would have counted it as two days because it includes parts of two distinct days."

So, the thinking goes, Friday evening is counted as a whole day—Saturday is counted as a whole day—and Sunday morning is counted as a whole day. Many other churches explain this the same way, stating that "ancient Jews" considered parts of days as entire days. But no one brings actual historical evidence that this was the case in first-century society.

This interpretation brings out many logic problems. First, it contradicts Jesus Christ's own words. He said *specifically* three DAYS and three NIGHTS. Both those words are present in the original Greek!

Let's illustrate the point using a classic Easter candy: If you were promised

three jellybeans, but you only receive *one and a half*, you would feel slighted. You would be missing half the amount you were offered.

The same is true here. Christ promised He would be in the grave three full days and three full nights—not three portions of days and nights.

This is not a petty theological discussion. Correctly understanding how long Jesus was in the grave is vitally important—and reveals awesome characteristics about God.

Notice the context of Matthew 12:40. In verse 38, some of the scribes and Pharisees cornered Jesus and asked Him to give them a sign. Jesus called them out: “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah.”

Jesus told these leaders the only sign He would perform was being in the grave for three days and three nights. It is Christ’s one and only sign—He had to get it right!

No...1 + 1 = 2!

The Old Testament further proves Jesus was in the grave three full days and three full nights. Jesus tied His one sign to the story of Jonah being swallowed by a giant fish.

Jonah 1:17 says, “Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three *days* [Hebrew: *yom*] and three *nights* [Hebrew: *layil*.]” The words for days and nights here are the same Hebrew words found in Genesis 1:5—“And God called the light Day [*yom*], and the darkness He called Night [*layil*.] And the evening and the morning were the first day.” A whole 24-hour period is defined as a day and night!

If we put all these verses together and allow the Bible to interpret itself, it is easy to see that the three days and nights Jonah was in the belly of the fish were full 24-hour days as defined in Genesis. And because the example of Jonah was used to explain how long Jesus would be in the grave, the only answer is that He was buried for a full 72 hours.

This leads to the greatest misunderstanding the world has regarding Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. Since 72 hours absolutely cannot fit between Friday afternoon and Sunday sunrise, the world ignores the provable history of the correct date Christ was crucified. Because they are counting from an incorrect start date (Good Friday), they are forced into rejecting very simple math!

“Correctly understanding how long Jesus was in the grave is vitally important—and reveals awesome characteristics about God.”

John 19 is the account of Christ’s torture, crucifixion and death. This chapter contains powerful and irrefutable points further proving what day Christ was killed. “When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the *preparation of the Passover* and about the sixth hour: and he said unto the Jews, Behold your King!” (vs. 13-14). The Jews on that very day were preparing to keep the Days of Unleavened Bread (a seven-day festival also called Passover in Ezekiel 45:21).

Reading further in the chapter continues to make this clear: “The Jews therefore, because it was the *preparation*, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the *sabbath day*, (for that *sabbath day* was an *high day*,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away” (John 19:31).

The term Sabbath can be used for both weekly and annual Sabbaths—in this case, it is describing the Holy Day that starts the Passover week (Ex. 12:15-16).

So, Christ died in AD 31 on the day before the First Day of Unleavened Bread—a Holy Day! Merging history with this Bible passage demonstrably proves that Christ was not killed on a Friday prior to the weekly Sabbath, but rather killed on a Wednesday afternoon before the Holy Day that would begin at sunset that evening. He was then resurrected *Saturday afternoon*, 72 hours later.

The truth of the timing of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection reveals that God is a Being of incredible precision. Jesus said it would be three days and three nights and God guided this to happen. He also brought about the crucifixion at the same time as the Passover lamb was traditionally killed, revealing Christ as mankind’s Passover lamb, sacrificed for the forgiveness of sins (I Cor. 5:7-8).

There is one more chilling reason we must correctly understand Christ’s death and resurrection, and why the Good Friday to Easter Sunday fiction is dangerous.

It comes down to the words of Jesus: “In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:9).

Realize the magnitude of these words: By following “the commandments of men,” a person can unknowingly be worshipping God in vain. No one wants to be in such a position!

Just as God is precise in bringing events to pass, He is also precise in what He desires from those who follow Him—for example, which days you should commemorate. This understanding is plainly laid out in the Bible.

The truth about Christ’s death and resurrection is just one of many issues that bear examination in the Easter season. To learn about Easter’s origins, read our booklet *The True Origin of Easter*. To learn what days God wants Christians to keep today, read *God’s Holy Days or Pagan Holidays?* Both are available at rcg.org. □

High Blood PRESSURE

A Silent Killer

Left unchecked, this increasingly common condition can be fatal. But there are simple, practical actions you can take to protect yourself.

THINK BACK to your childhood. Remember filling up a water balloon with a hose or spigot? As water rushed into the balloon, the pressure increased. If you forgot to pay attention—*pop!* The stressed rubber would break without warning, with water splashing everywhere!

Although the above scenario may not appear to be related to health, it illustrates a principle that is playing out with the blood vessels of adults across the globe. This phenomenon is high blood pressure. The higher the pressure, the greater the force being exerted against the walls of your blood vessels.

The World Health Organization estimates that nearly 1.3 billion adults globally have high blood pressure and that 46 percent of these are unaware of their condition!

“High blood pressure affects nearly half of the adult population in the United States, yet many people who have the condition don’t know they have it,” the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stated. “Even though most people with uncontrolled high blood pressure have health insurance and visit a health care team member at least twice a year, the condition is often not diagnosed.”

When someone has diabetes, cancer, gout or arthritis, there are usually discernable symptoms. With high blood pressure, there can be *no symptoms!*

“There’s a common misconception that people with high blood pressure, also called HBP or hypertension, will experience symptoms such as nervousness, sweating, difficulty sleeping or facial flushing,” the American Heart Association reported. “The truth is that HBP is largely a symptomless condition. If you ignore your blood pressure because you think symptoms will alert you to the problem, you are taking a dangerous chance with your life.”

This is why high blood pressure is called a silent killer—it is a deadly condition that often manifests without warning.

Left untreated, hypertension increases the risk of many diseases, including heart disease and stroke—two of the top five most common causes of death in the U.S. We must examine this condition to fully understand it, as well as look at practical actions you can take to avoid it.

Contributing Factors

There are various risk factors for hypertension. We will examine three primary contributing factors.



Obesity: Risks begin to increase for adults who are overweight, defined as a Body Mass Index (weight adjusted for height) greater than 25. At a BMI of 30, the risk is substantial. The CDC defines obesity as having a body mass index of 30 or higher. According to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Adult obesity is associated with increased risk of a number of health conditions, including diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, cardiovascular disease, stroke, arthritis, and certain cancers. The prevalence of obesity was 42.4% among U.S. adults in 2017–2018.” This means nearly half of adults are increasing their own health risks—unnecessarily!

Inactivity: According to the National Library of Medicine, “Physical inactivity is a leading cause of morbidity and mortality and is a major public health problem. Insufficient activity is responsible for a large proportion of non-communicable diseases such as hypertension.”

Only about one in five American adults meet the minimum recommended requirement for physical activity. Increasingly few are reaping the benefits that exercise can bring.

Diabetes: This is a condition in which the body has high blood sugar

levels for prolonged periods. Over 34 million American adults suffer from diabetes—about 10 percent of the population! This is concerning because, as Johns Hopkins Medicine reported, “High blood pressure is twice as likely to strike a person with diabetes than a person without diabetes.”

According to the CDC, about 90-95 percent of those with diabetes suffer from Type 2 or adult-onset diabetes. Type 2 diabetes is associated with BMI measures above the healthy range of 25. In fact, it is uncommon to have Type 2 diabetes without an elevated BMI.

These three conditions—obesity, inactivity and diabetes—are on the up tick in America. This makes a perfect storm for people to develop high blood pressure.

Blood Pressure Explained

Before examining how to address hypertension, we must first understand what blood pressure is and how to measure it. Blood pressure is typically calculated by using two numbers in a ratio, such as 120/80. This ratio is commonly stated: “The doctor said my blood pressure was 120 over 80.”

What do these two numbers mean?

Think for a moment of the last time you took your own pulse. If you never have, take a moment to touch your wrist beneath your thumb and move your finger around until you feel a beat similar to that of your heart. Every time your heart contracts, it creates pressure, which pushes blood through your circulatory system.

The moment your heart contracts is the time when the greatest amount of pressure is exerted on your arteries. The measurement for this is known as the *systolic* pressure and represents the first or top number in your blood pressure ratio.

As your heart relaxes in between heartbeats and refills with blood, the pressure in your arteries drops. This is called *diastolic* pressure and represents the second or bottom number in your blood pressure reading.

According to the American Heart Association, resting blood pressure

falls into the following categories:

- Normal—anything less than 120/80
- Elevated—120-129/less than 80
- High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 1—130-139/80-89
- High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 2—140 or higher/90 or higher
- Hypertensive Crisis—Higher than 180 and/or higher than 120. At this stage, it is recommended to contact your doctor immediately!

Bear in mind that your blood pressure reading can change from minute to minute due to factors like stress, posture, caffeine intake, water intake or drowsiness. The best time to retrieve an accurate reading of it is before eating or drinking, and while you are at rest.

Defeating a Silent Killer

The factors we examined that contribute to high blood pressure—obesity, inactivity and diabetes—point directly to what to address. By managing your health in each of these areas, you put yourself in a much better position to reach and maintain a normal blood pressure.

What are some practical things you can do today to reduce your risk?

First, know where you stand. Since the symptoms of high blood pressure are hard to identify, invest \$20-\$50 in a simple blood pressure monitor. These can be purchased online or at local department stores such as Walmart.

The reading you get will inform what your approach should be. Higher numbers indicate a more pressing need to take action.

If you are not active, begin incorporating physical activity into your schedule. The CDC explained that according to the current Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, “Physical activity is anything that gets your body moving. Each week adults need 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity and 2 days of muscle strengthening activity.”

They continued, “Adults should move more and sit less throughout the

day. Some physical activity is better than none. Adults who sit less and do any amount of moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity gain some health benefits.”

Start where you are. Find activities you enjoy that work for your schedule—even something as simple as taking a short walk at lunchtime. For some, a membership at a health club is the catalyst they need. For others, playing outdoor tennis with a friend is a good entry point.

If you are diabetic, speak with your doctor about lifestyle changes you can make to improve your situation. This could involve limiting your intake of carbohydrates, reducing portion sizes and eating a more balanced diet.

Finally, assess how much weight you need to lose. A report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services explained: “Losing even 10 pounds can lower your blood pressure—and losing weight has the biggest effect on those who are overweight and already have hypertension.”

Shedding pounds is difficult, but it can be done. Consider tracking what you eat using an app or a smartwatch. Look for areas in your diet to cut back on or eliminate completely, such as sugary drinks. Find a friend to share your goals with to help keep you accountable.

All in all, maintaining a healthy blood pressure comes back to leading a healthy overall lifestyle. By educating yourself, making simple changes to your lifestyle and consulting with a professional when appropriate, you can improve your situation and avoid the threat of this silent killer.

There is one more critical source of help available to you: God’s Word. Few realize that the Bible contains timeless principles that, if applied, lead to vibrant health. The God who declares, “I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health” (III John 2) is ready and eager to help you in this pursuit.

Want to learn more? The place to start is our booklet *God’s Principles of Healthy Living* at rcg.org/glohl. □

PERSONAL

Continued from page 2

Over 2,000 different Christian organizations have been “built” by men just in the United States. Estimates place the number of professing Christians at over 2 billion. While it has been said, “They can’t all be *wrong*,” it is more correct to say, “They cannot all be *right*.¹

If Christ built His Church as He said, then it can be found somewhere on Earth today—and it is the only *right* Church. But we must ask: How do we find it? What do we look for? How do we identify it? And how do we know it if we see it?

A Little Flock

Let’s begin to take a closer look at *what* Jesus built. Recall He said, “Fear not, *little flock*; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.” Jesus recognized His people might naturally conclude, “We just don’t seem big enough.”

Now think. By no stretch can any church comprised of millions—let alone over 2 *billion* collectively—be considered a “little flock.” And such numbers would not have to be reassured.

Christ understood that *His* Church—His *little flock*—would be persecuted and despised by the world. Just before His crucifixion, He warned, “Remember the word that I said unto you [He must have taught this previously], The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have *persecuted Me*, they will also *persecute you*” (John 15:20).

In the preceding verse, Jesus had reminded His disciples that “I have chosen you *out of the world*, therefore the world *hates you*” (vs. 19). Of course, Christ was persecuted to the point of horrible torture and crucifixion. Therefore, the true Church could also expect to be persecuted—and *hated!* Those in it are not “of the world.” The world senses this and hates them for it. The apostle Paul recorded, “Yes,

and *all* that will live godly *in Christ Jesus* shall suffer *persecution*” (II Tim. 3:12).

The word “all” means what it says! What church do you know where absolutely *every person* in it is suffering at least some form of persecution? Any? Even one? And remember, Jesus said His servants would be hated! We will learn momentarily what *causes* the hatred.

First, consider what just these points reveal. How many churches can you name that are small, persecuted, not of this world—and to the point of being hated because of it? Think about those you are familiar with. Again, do *any* fit this description? If so, surely not many! And we have only *begun* the proofs.

The Importance of the Church’s Name

The world’s churches have many different names, which are derived in various ways. These include the particular doctrines they teach, the names of the men who founded them, the humanly devised type of church government they espouse, their location, or their intended scope and size, such as universal or catholic—in this case to be seen as all-encompassing and therefore being a big flock.

On the night of His betrayal, Christ prayed for His Church: “Holy Father, keep through *Your own name* those whom You have given Me, that they may be *one*, as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them *in Your name*...I have given them *Your word*; and the world has *hated* them [there it is again, and notice this hatred is tied to God’s Word], because they are *not of the world*” (John 17:11-12, 14). They believe and they act differently.

There are 12 verses where the New Testament records that the true Church *has* been kept in the name of the Father—meaning *God*. Let’s look at three.

First is Acts 20:28—this verse instructs elders: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock...to feed *the church of God*.²

Next is I Corinthians 10:32: “Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to *the church of God*.”

Last is I Corinthians 15:9: Paul wrote, “For...I persecuted *the church of God*.” And there are nine other places where it says much the same.

In the modern age, for corporate reasons, God’s Church may use an additional descriptive name to distinguish itself from other “churches of God”—those merely *appropriating* God’s name to themselves (and many groups do)—but who are not obeying His Commandments, believing His true doctrines, or doing His Work. Because of circumstances in our time, we use the name *The Restored Church of God*.

Just as various mainstream denominations may have a few correct doctrines mixed with much error, some appropriate to themselves the name of God’s Church. A few churches may have some amount of truth, while accepting many false doctrines. Only one Church on the face of the Earth has the correct name AND teaches all the additional many true doctrines of the Bible! Jesus prayed, “[meaning set them apart] through Your *truth*: Your word is *truth*” (John 17:17). The Church that Jesus works through, directs and guides is sanctified—is set apart—by its belief of the *plain truth* of God’s Word!

In addition to (1) carrying the name “Church of God,” we have seen the true Church has (2) come out of the world, (3) is small and (4) is persecuted. This Church is then also (5) set apart by its *beliefs* and *practices*—which are in complete agreement with the *truth* of the Bible!

But we are still only beginning with proofs.

Unified Through God’s Word

Let’s go further on this last point by asking an all-important question. What is the *Bible definition* of the *true* Church? Have you ever wondered? The answer has everything to do with why this Church is *unified*.

Men have their own differing definitions of what the Church is—and these could be listed almost without end—but only God's definition matters.

Paul wrote this: "...that you may know how you ought to behave yourself in the *house of God*, which is the *church of the living God*, the pillar and ground of the *truth*" (I Tim. 3:15). Note the words "the truth."

In the end, no other definition devised by men is acceptable. This description of the Church Christ built will guide us. So then, God's Church has and teaches the truth!

This world's churches are split by endless disagreement over doctrine and practice. Amos 3:3 asks, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" The answer is an obvious no! Just ask any divorced couple what caused their split. They did not agree!

The problem is these churches do not practice the principle of "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word...of God*" (Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4), meaning exactly as written. Instead—since they follow the many differing traditions and ideas of men—endless disagreements separate, divide and create more and more churches of *men*. These organizations generally do not *walk together*, because they do not *agree*—either with each other or with God! (And this starts with how they define the New Testament Church.)

God's Church is different. Many verses show that the Church Christ built is *unified*—with all its members and congregations walking *together* in complete agreement with each other—and with God and Christ.

A crucial point, revealing the kind of unity to be seen in the true Church, emerges from Jesus' earlier-referenced prayer of John 17. Notice: "And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be *sanctified* [again, set apart] *through the truth*...That they *all* may be ONE; as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be ONE *in Us*: that the world may believe that You have sent Me. And the

glory which You gave Me I have given them; that they may be ONE, even as We are ONE: I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in ONE" (vs. 19, 21-23).

These are powerful statements! Christ intended that His Church be unified—"one"—bound together—no less than were He and His Father!

There is no room for disagreement in a Church that is *this* unified. These verses describe a perfect oneness through the truth—the *same* kind the Father and Christ enjoy. It is *this* kind of unity that allows true Christians to be "in" them—be *in* Christ and *in* the Father.

Even in the Old Testament, David wrote, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for *brethren to dwell together in unity*" (Psa. 133:1).

Notice this earliest picture of Christ's Church. In Acts 2:1, on the day of Pentecost—the very first day the New Testament Church came into existence—with the disciples reported as gathered in "one accord," 3,000 converts were baptized. They formed the very beginning of Christ's building of His Church. The description of them was "and they *continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship*"—verse 42—and "all that believed were *together*"—verse 44—as well as "they, continuing daily with *one accord*...did eat their [food] with gladness and *singleness of heart*"—verse 46.

From these verses, we clearly see that the Church Christ built was unified. It was in agreement over doctrine—and was *together*. Notice verse 47: "And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved." In the Church Christ guides and directs, He is the One who adds to it, and builds it!

Think. Reason alone says Jesus would not add to thousands of different churches that cannot agree on His teachings—that cannot agree on what is truth.

We must ask one more question before concluding: How did mankind get into the state of confusion, division, war, competition and disagree-

ment existing all over the Earth today? Of course this includes religion. God's original command to Adam in Genesis 2: "But of the tree of the *knowledge of good and evil*, you shall *not* eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die" (vs. 17).

In chapter 3, Eve, with Adam following, rebelled and ate of this wrong tree. Notice that this tree represented *knowledge* that was both "good and evil." In other words, the tree was not entirely evil—it contained a *mixture* of true and false—good and evil—knowledge! It is the same with the churches of this world. Some do have small amounts of true (or "good") doctrinal knowledge, mixed with much false (or "evil") doctrinal knowledge.

For 6,000 years, God has told His servants to avoid mixing truth with error. He warned Adam that eating of the wrong tree would result in death. And it did.

The warning is the same for us today!

When I was first learning the truth, I heard an analogy that I had never considered before—but have never forgotten since: Think of a delicious cake laced with either arsenic, cyanide or any other poison, while otherwise containing nothing but good and healthy ingredients. Eating such a cake would always result in death.

The good ingredients would not be sufficient to overcome the hidden poison. Likewise, God's Church does not and cannot mix truth with error. As with the cake, the result for those who do is fatal!

We have already seen some of the truths taught by the Church that Jesus built. But do not take my word for it. Take the time to prove these things to yourself from the Bible.

One article could scarcely contain a simple *listing* of all the truths taught in God's Word, let alone a detailed scriptural explanation proving each and explaining *why* God teaches it. To learn more, read my book *Where Is the True Church? – and Its Incredible History!* at rcg.org/thogtc. □

As ‘Skyglow’ Grows, New Study Documents Glaring Global Light Pollution



Electricity lights up the central business district of Cape Town, South Africa (June 18, 2019).

REUTERS/MIKE HUTCHINGS

Washington (Reuters) – Light pollution caused by the incessant nighttime glow of electric lights appears to be intensifying, according to research using observations from tens of thousands of people at various locations around the world.

The study found that the number of visible stars reported at the observation sites from 2011 to 2022 decreased by an amount indicating an increase in nocturnal sky brightness of 7 to 10 percent annually, higher than previously measured using satellite data.

The areas best documented were North America—particularly the United States—and Europe, with minimal data for parts of Asia, Africa and South America. More than 29,000

individual reports were made at more than 19,000 locations worldwide, the researchers said. The “citizen scientists” who provided the data made observations of naked-eye star visibility.

The study focused on “skyglow,” the artificial brightening of the night sky due to human-created light scattering in the atmosphere and returning to Earth. The nighttime glow of the sky above a big city is a familiar sight but even locales with smaller populations experience it.

“The study is important for two reasons. First, it is the first time that sky brightness has ever been studied on the continental scale. Second, it shows that existing norms and legisla-

tion are failing to reduce sky brightness or even halt its growth,” said physicist Christopher Kyba of the GFZ German Research Centre for Geosciences and the Ruhr-Universität Bochum, lead author of the research published in the journal *Science*.

“In the last decade, our understanding of the ecological consequences of light has grown dramatically, as has our understanding and modeling of light in the atmosphere,” Dr. Kyba said.

A 2017 study based on satellite observations found that Earth’s artificially lit outdoor surface at night was growing by about 2 percent annually in brightness and area. This data might represent an underestimate because the global observing satellite currently

used is not sensitive to the type of light emitted by modern LED lights, Dr. Kyba said. And satellites have a hard time detecting illuminated signs because these shine primarily sideways, not upward, Dr. Kyba added.

Light pollution has raised concerns about its ecological effects on people and animals. For instance, research has shown how light pollution threatens fireflies, which possess specialized light-emitting organs and flash to communicate as a part of courtship and reproduction.

The researchers said more can be done to mitigate light pollution, including better design of the direction, extent and type of lighting used.

"It is true that we will never get to a situation where there is no sky brightness over cities. But it is entirely reasonable to imagine that with excellent design, the Milky Way could be visible over cities with even a few hundred thousand inhabitants," Dr. Kyba said.

"On the best nights, I have been able to see faint traces of the Milky Way at my home near the center of Potsdam, Germany, with a population about 180,000. If all of the poorly directed lights in Potsdam were replaced by more effective ones, the level of skylight would be drastically reduced, and the Milky Way would be more generally visible," he added.

Bright starlight now seems confined on land surfaces to remote locales where tourists might venture and less developed regions.

For nearly the entire "history of life on this planet, the night sky was lit by starlight, moonlight and natural airglow. Until about 150 years ago, to step outside at night was to be confronted with the cosmos," Dr. Kyba said. "Who could say what the cultural and religious impact is when a formerly universal human experience becomes something that only extremely rich or extremely poor people experience?" □

Half of U.S. Mass Attacks Sparked by Personal, Workplace Disputes

Washington (Reuters) – Half of the mass attacks in the United States from 2016 to 2020 were sparked by personal, domestic or workplace disputes, according to a new U.S. Secret Service report that aims to prevent violence by identifying warning signs.

The attackers were overwhelmingly men, often with histories of mental health symptoms, financial insecurity or engaging in domestic violence. Guns were typically the weapon of choice.

The report came days after mass shootings in California took the lives of 18 people and as authorities searched for motives in the attacks, both linked to older men.

Mass shootings have become a regular occurrence in the United States in recent decades, but lawmakers remain divided on the solutions, with Democrats calling for more gun control measures while Republicans focus on mental health and increased security.

The 70-page report, issued by the Secret Service's National Threat

Assessment Center, examined 173 incidents where three or more people were harmed. The attacks targeted workplaces, schools, religious institutions and public transportation, among other locations, killing 513 people and injuring 1,234.

Lina Alathari, the center's chief, told reporters that it is common to see behaviors among perpetrators that might have helped others identify a problem beforehand.

"Interest in violence, interest in previous mass attackers, posting about them, talking to people about them, bringing a weapon to [their] workplace, bringing a weapon to school, coworkers fearing them, grievances," she said. "These are themes that we do see over and over again."

The report found that firearms were used in 73 percent of incidents, including by some prohibited from owning them.

State-level "red flag laws" that allow for the court-ordered removal of guns from someone presenting a risk could limit such attacks, the report said. □



People stand as the casket of one of the victims of the Robb Elementary school shooting that resulted in the deaths of 19 children and two teachers is carried gravesite at Hillcrest Memorial Cemetery in Uvalde, Texas (May 31, 2022).

REUTERS/VERONICA G. CARDENAS

'Doomsday Clock' Moves to 90 Seconds to Midnight as Nuclear Threat Rises

Washington (Reuters) – Atomic scientists have set the “Doomsday Clock” closer to midnight than ever before, saying threats of nuclear war, disease and climate volatility have been exacerbated by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, putting humanity at greater risk of annihilation.

The “Doomsday Clock,” created by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists to illustrate how close humanity has come to the end of the world, moved its “time” in 2023 to 90 seconds to midnight, 10 seconds closer than it has been for the past three years.

Midnight on this clock marks the theoretical point of annihilation. The clock’s hands are moved closer to or further away from midnight based on scientists’ reading of existential threats at a particular time.

The new time reflects a world in which Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has revived fears of nuclear war.

“Russia’s thinly veiled threats to use nuclear weapons remind the world that escalation of the conflict by accident, intention or miscalculation is a terrible risk. The possibilities that the conflict could spin out of anyone’s control remains high,” Rachel Bronson, the bulletin’s president and CEO told a news conference in Washington.

The bulletin’s announcement will for the first time be translated from English into Ukrainian and Russian to garner relevant attention, Ms. Bronson said.

A Chicago-based non-profit organization, the bulletin updates the clock’s time annually based on information regarding catastrophic risks to the planet and humanity.

The organization’s board of scientists and other experts in nuclear technology and climate science, including 13 Nobel Laureates, discuss world events and determine where to place the hands of the clock each year.

Apocalyptic threats reflected by the clock include politics, weapons, technology, climate and pandemics.

The clock had been set to 100 seconds to midnight since 2020, which

was already the closest it had ever come to midnight.

The board said the war in Ukraine had also heightened the risk that biological weapons could be deployed if the conflict continued.

“The continuing stream of disinformation about bioweapons’ laboratories in Ukraine raises concerns that Russia itself may be thinking of deploying such weapons,” Ms. Bronson said.

The clock was created in 1947 by a group of atomic scientists, including Albert Einstein, who had worked on the Manhattan Project to develop the world’s first nuclear weapons during World War II. □



The clock with the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists is placed ahead of the announcement of the location of the minute hand on its Doomsday Clock, indicating what world developments mean for the perceived likelihood of nuclear catastrophe, at the National Press Club in Washington D.C. (Jan. 24, 2023).

ANNA MONEYMAKER/GETTY IMAGES

Study: Non-infectious Diseases Cause Early Death in Pakistan

Islamabad (AP) – Pakistan has considerable control over infectious diseases but now struggles against cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and cancer as causes of early deaths, according to a new study.

The Lancet Global Health, a prestigious British-based medical journal, reported that five non-communicable diseases—ischaemic heart disease, stroke, congenital defects, cirrhosis, and chronic kidney disease—were among the 10 leading causes of early deaths in the impoverished Islamic nation.

However, the journal said some of Pakistan's work has resulted in an increase in life expectancy from 61.1 years to 65.9 over the past three decades. The change is due, it said, “to the reduction in communicable, maternal, neonatal, and nutritional diseases.” That's still 7.6 years lower than the global average life expectancy, which increased over 30 years by 8 percent in women and 7 percent in men.

The study says, “despite periods of political and economic turbulence since 1990, Pakistan has made positive strides in improving overall health outcomes at the population level and continues to seek innovative solutions to challenging health and health policy problems.”

The study, which was based on Pakistan's health data from 1990 to 2019, has warned that non-communicable diseases will be the leading causes of death in Pakistan by 2040.

It said Pakistan will also continue to face infectious diseases.



A man rests in the cardiac ward of a hospital in Karachi, Pakistan (Jan. 19, 2023).

AP/FAREED KHAN

“Pakistan urgently needs a single national nutrition policy, especially as climate change and the increased severity of drought, flood, and pestilence threatens food security,” said Dr. Zainab Samad, Professor and Chair of the Department of Medicine at Aga Khan University, one of the authors of the report.

“What these findings tell us is that Pakistan's baseline before being hit by extreme flooding was already at some of the lowest levels around the globe,” said Dr. Ali Mokdad, Professor of Health Metrics Sciences at IHME. “Pakistan is in critical need of a more equitable investment in its health system and policy interventions to save lives and improve people's health.”

The study said with a population approaching 225 million, “Pakistan is prone to the calamitous effects of climate change and natural disasters, including the 2005 Kashmir earthquake and catastrophic floods in 2010 and 2022, all of which have impacted major health policies and reform.”

It said the country's major health challenges were compounded by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and last

summer's devastating flooding that killed 1,739 people and affected 33 million.

Researchers ask Pakistan to “address the burden of infectious disease and curb rising rates of non-communicable diseases.” Such priorities, they wrote, will help Pakistan move toward universal health coverage.”

The journal, considered one of the most prestigious scientific publications in the world, reported on Pakistan's fragile healthcare system with the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington's School of Medicine. The study was a collaboration with a Karachi-based prestigious Aga Khan University and Pakistan's health ministry.

The study also mentioned increasing pollution as one of the leading contributors to the overall disease burden in recent years. Pakistan's cultural capital of Lahore was in the grip of smog on Thursday, causing respiratory diseases and infection in the eyes. Usually in winter, a thick cloud of smog envelops Lahore, which in 2021 earned it the title of the world's most polluted city. □



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

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

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

RCG.ORG/TAPOM