

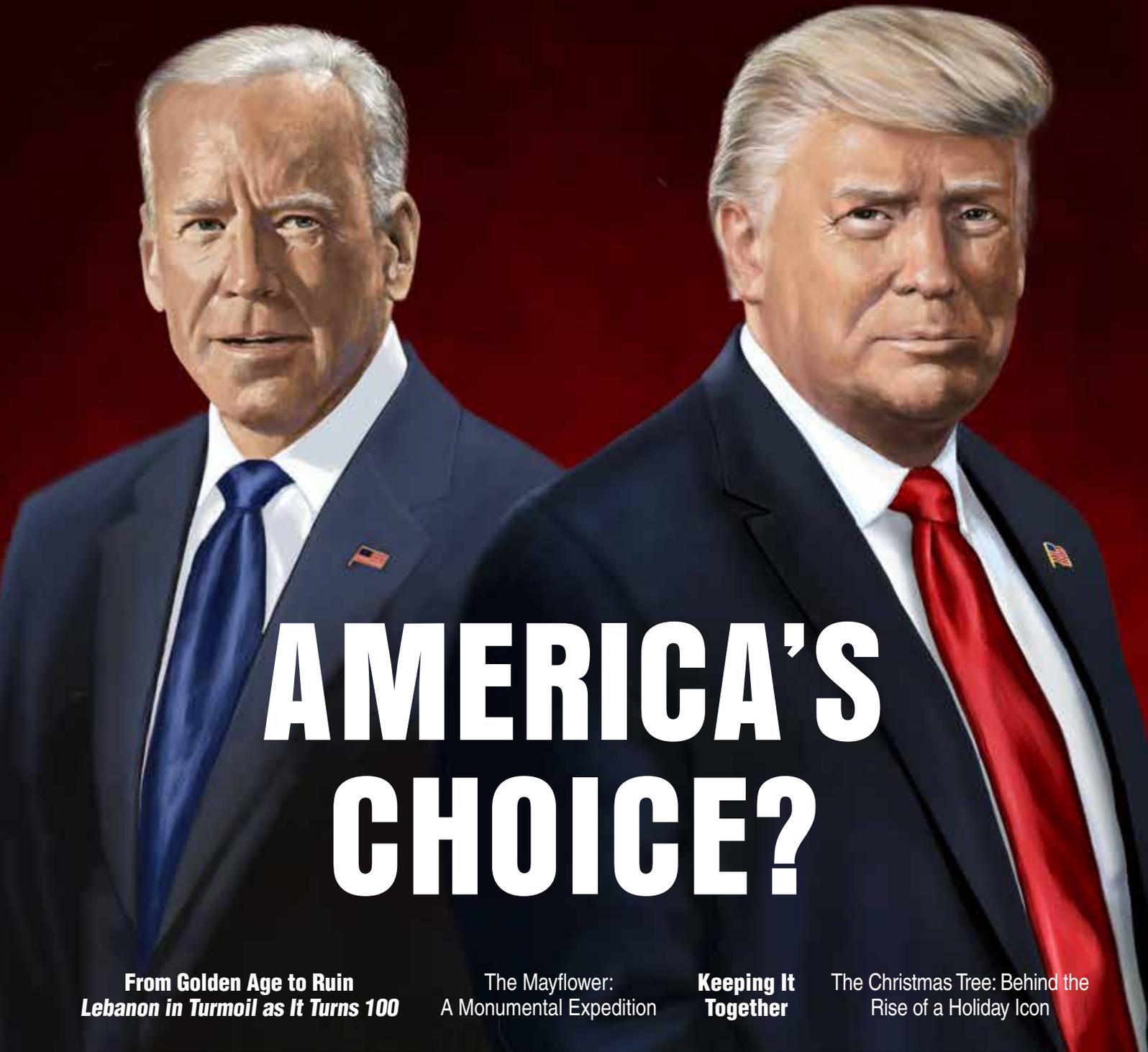
NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2020

THE

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# REAL TRUTH™

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING



## AMERICA'S CHOICE?

**From Golden Age to Ruin**  
*Lebanon in Turmoil as It Turns 100*

The Mayflower:  
A Monumental Expedition

**Keeping It Together**

The Christmas Tree: Behind the Rise of a Holiday Icon

THE  
**REAL TRUTH**<sup>™</sup>  
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VOL. XVIII | NO. 6 | NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2020

A R T I C L E S

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■ A firefighter of a San Benito Monterey Cal Fire crew sets a controlled burn with a drip torch while fighting the Creek Fire in Shaver Lake, California (Sept. 6, 2020).

PHOTO: MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ

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**FRONT COVER:** U.S. President Donald Trump and Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden.

ILLUSTRATION: PAULA C. RONDEAU

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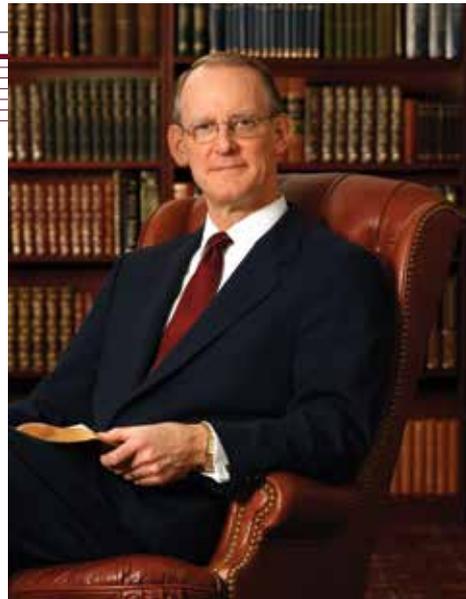
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## PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



# God's Key to Financial Prosperity

**M**UCH OF THE national news is devoted to the rollercoaster ride of the “leading economic indicators”—and whether they are moving up or down. Unemployment, inflation, recession, interest rates, bull or bear markets, stocks, housing starts, auto sales, layoffs, hires, available energy, and fuel prices are all household words dominating the news.

What about you? If you are honest with yourself, you will admit that you spend a lot of time thinking and talking about MONEY. You probably wrestle with financial difficulties daily. Sometimes you feel that you are winning the battle, only to learn that you are either treading water or falling behind.

Many today find it almost impossible to “get ahead.” For most, the “money struggle” is constant, and the pressure can seem unbearable. Just the stress of these problems can drive away the happiness and peace that everyone seeks but few find.

Yet all of this is unnecessary if you have God's key to financial prosperity.

### What You Earn Is Not Your Own

Your house belongs to *you*, right? So does *your* car, doesn't it? You bought the clothes on your back with *your* money, didn't you? Haven't you heard yourself say, “I earned my money, it's *mine*”? Isn't it true that “what's yours is yours and what's mine is mine”? Not so fast!

Certainly we would all agree that before we have fully paid off the things that we have purchased, they are not truly ours. Banks and other lenders hold liens against houses, cars, boats and other expensive things that people buy on credit. Everyone understands this. But have you ever considered whether you *really* own everything that you *think* you do? Do you really have title to the things you own “free and clear”?

We must consider whether others could lay claim to what is “ours.”

### “Death and Taxes”

Most are familiar with the phrase, “Nothing is certain in life except death and taxes.” Indeed, death is certain. Of course, everyone also recognizes that the government is entitled to a certain percentage of one's income. Few

dispute this, though most seek to get around taxes in as many ways as possible. No one wants to give the government a penny more than “its fair share.” Most feel that *less* than “its share” would be better.

Have you stopped to consider whether *God* instructs us to pay taxes? *He does!* These scriptures prove it. Paul wrote, “Let *every soul* be subject unto the higher powers...Wherefore you *must* needs be subject...for conscience sake. For this cause pay you *tribute* [Greek: taxes or assessment] also...Render therefore to all their dues: *tribute* to whom *tribute is due*” (Rom. 13:1, 5-7).

Christ was asked if He felt that taxes should be paid—with the question actually directed to Him for the purpose of tempting Him into giving a wrong answer. Notice that those who questioned Him said, “Is it lawful to give *tribute* to Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give?”

Christ asked to be given a penny for the purpose of illustration. He then answered, “Render to Caesar *the things that are Caesar’s*, and to God *the things that are God’s*” (Mark 12:14-17). Christ taught that there are things that *belong to man’s government* and things that *belong to God*.

We will momentarily address what belongs to God. However, what belongs to the government are *taxes!* In some countries this includes city, state and federal taxes. Woe to those caught not paying them! Interest, penalties and even prison can be the result for those guilty of tax evasion. In doing this, people have disobeyed not only the laws of the land, but also God’s plain instruction.

So then, taxes *are* an undisputed fact of life for most people on Earth. The fact that you *earned* the money you have does not negate the fact that human governments have a prior right to take a certain percentage of it to ensure their own operation. No government can function without tax revenue.

This is one way that what is yours is *not* always entirely yours.

## Who Really Owns Everything?

Despite the fact that governments can legally collect taxes for themselves from the taxpayers of a country, no one would suggest that they own everything *else* that a taxpayer has. All that is left belongs to the taxpayer—or does it?

Now for a basic question. Look around you and ask yourself: Where do we get the things that we have? Where did they actually come from?

God says, “...for all the earth is *Mine*” (Ex. 19:5). Have you ever considered this? The Bible also states, “Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is *the Lord’s* your God, the earth also, with all that therein is” (Deut. 10:14) and “whatsoever is under the whole heaven is *Mine*” (Job 41:11).

In the Psalms, King David was inspired to write, “The earth is *the Lord’s*, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (24:1). Paul recorded the same statement in I Corinthians 10:26.

God says, “For every beast of the forest is *Mine*, and the cattle upon a thousand hills...If I were hungry, I would not tell you: for *the world is Mine*, and the fullness thereof” (Psa. 50:10, 12). Finally, the prophet Haggai said, “The silver is *Mine*, and the gold is *Mine*, says the LORD of hosts” (2:8).

In a sense, God is saying that *all* money is His. (Remember, the value of money is generally attached in some way to gold and silver.) God *owns* absolutely *everything* there is to own. Human beings are “squatters” on His land and “renters” in homes that belong to Him. This is what these verses say! Make no mistake—what you think is yours is not! Everything that you *think* you own is actually owned by God. You are merely its temporary custodian.

People may manufacture products from natural resources, which come from the earth, but it is God who makes both the natural resources and the earth in which they are found. Men may own mining or timber rights, but it is ultimately God who owns the mine

and created the timber, which grew because of the elements found in the soil of the Earth—which He created and owns!

Any time He wishes, God can take back all that is His. After all, *it is His!* This includes your income. While you may have “earned it,” God owns it.

## “Things that Are God’s”

We have seen Christ said that, in addition to taxes belonging to Caesar, there are also “things that are God’s”—or things that *belong to God*. What are these things? We have read that God owns everything. And Christ said, “*Render...to God the things that are God’s.*” Render means *give*. Since the heavens and the Earth (or the land on which we live) cannot be “rendered” back to God by human beings, to what is this referring?

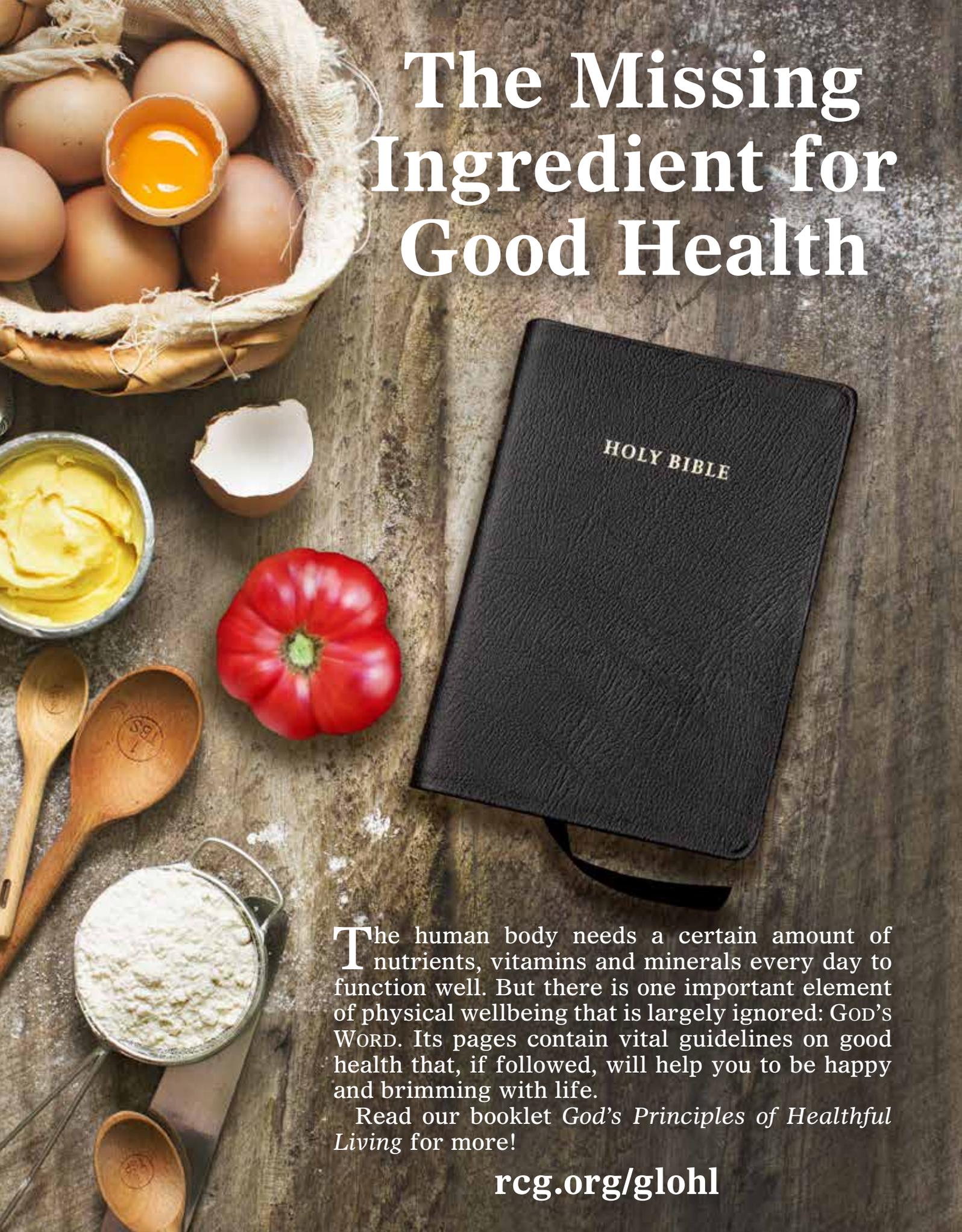
We have proven that our entire income (salary, wages, interest earned, investments, bonuses, commissions and any other kind of financial increase) actually belongs to God.

What of a farmer and the produce from his field? What is the process whereby things grow? The farmer does his part—tilling, planting, fertilizing, watering, etc.—but so does God in that He sends rain and sunshine and provides the very soil in which the fruit, vegetables or grains take root and grow.

Who did most of the work? In truth, the farmer did little more than a fraction of the work while God did the greater part. As a matter of fact, the farmer is far more dependent on God’s effort than God is on the farmer’s. Without God’s contributions, the farmer would produce nothing and *would not even be alive* because no one would be able to produce the food necessary for all human beings to survive.

Think of it this way. You formed a partnership with God—whether you knew it or not—the day you took a chosen profession, job or vocation. You are using materials that belong to God in order to invest, sell, distribute or produce goods or services whereby you

Please see **PERSONAL**, page 31



# The Missing Ingredient for Good Health

**T**he human body needs a certain amount of nutrients, vitamins and minerals every day to function well. But there is one important element of physical wellbeing that is largely ignored: GOD'S WORD. Its pages contain vital guidelines on good health that, if followed, will help you to be happy and brimming with life.

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# FROM GOLDEN AGE TO RUIN

*Lebanon in Turmoil  
as It Turns 100*

BY DAVID J. LITAVSKY

The REAL TRUTH

# The Mideast nation marked its centennial just after a massive explosion at Beirut's port. Ever since, political instability has threatened to bring the nation to its knees.

**“**I’VE HAD A RECURRENT nightmare ever since I was a kid: A tsunami takes over and all I can do is look for my sister to rescue her,” Karen Madi, a resident of Lebanon’s capital city, stated in a *NPR* interview. “I worried about her because I never thought I’d have to go through such a nightmare all alone.”

“And that I did, on August 4,” she said, referring to the day in 2020 that more than 3,000 tons of ammonium nitrate caught fire in a Beirut port warehouse, causing an explosion that killed at least 180 people, injured 6,000 and devastated a swath of the city. The blast was large enough for people 150 miles away on the island of Cyprus to report hearing noise and their windows rattling.

“A minute before the explosion, I needed to use the bathroom [at an art gallery],” Ms. Madi explained. “The shaking blue painted walls echoed the tsunami waves from my nightmares. ‘No, not like this,’ I said to myself, as I threw myself on the floor and tried to protect my head under the toilet. I can’t even remember the sound of the blast, similar to the silence you feel when you’re under a crashing wave.”

“When I got out of that bathroom, I realized that the world I built in this country came crashing down.”

For the hundreds of thousands of Beirut residents directly or indirectly affected by the blast, the realization was the same. The city’s mayor told *Agence France-Presse* that half of the city was damaged and it would cost up to \$15 billion for repairs. He said 300,000 people were unable to return to their homes.

■ A girl is evacuated by her uncle in the aftermath of a massive explosion at the port in Beirut, Lebanon (Aug. 4, 2020).

PHOTO: AP/HASSAN AMMAR

Explosions are not out of the ordinary in the coastal city, where car-bomb blasts have occurred almost monthly since 2005. But the latest explosion was so devastating, it triggered new reflection on the country’s troubled history and deepened worry for the future. Thousands took to the streets, demanding government reform. For them, the catastrophe was a continuation of the past, with crisis after crisis caused in one way or another by the sectarian elite putting factions and self-interest ahead of state and nation.

The blast also came amid economic upheaval. An unprecedented financial meltdown has devastated the economy, fueling poverty and a new wave of emigration.

Then came the centennial on September 1, which marked 100 years since the establishment of the State of Greater Lebanon, proclaimed by France in an imperial carve-up with Britain after World War I. It was the precursor to the modern state of Lebanon. Facing potential bankruptcy and total collapse, many Lebanese marked the 100-year anniversary with a feeling that their experiment as a nation has failed and questioning their willingness to stay in the crises-riddled country.

“I am 53 years old and I don’t feel I had one stable year in this country,” said prominent Lebanese writer Alexandre Najjar.

When the August 4 explosion occurred, it was, as Mr. Najjar characterized, the “peak of a failed state”—proof that authorities cannot even provide basic public safety.

It was never supposed to be that way.

The nation, which had been under the Ottoman Empire since the 16th century, was given semi-independence under France in 1920. By the time it was granted full independence, Lebanon was intended to showcase that three religions—Christianity,

Sunni and Shiite Islam—could coexist in both government and within the general population.

The experiment initially seemed to be a success. At its peak, Lebanon was hailed as a model of multiculturalism. In its heyday in the 1960s, the country became a regional center for the rich and famous who flew from around the world to gamble at the Casino Du Liban, or to attend concerts in the ancient northeastern city of Baalbek by international artists such as the Berlin Philharmonic, Soviet ballet dancer Rudolf Nureyev, American jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald, as well as famous Arab singers like Egypt’s Umm Kalthoum and Lebanon’s own Fairuz.

Yet even during its golden age—and prior to its inception 100 years ago—the seeds of division and turmoil had already been sown.

## “Thrown Together”

Looking back on his childhood in the newly declared state of Lebanon, Salah Tizani said the country was set on course for calamity from the start by colonial powers and sectarian overlords.

Mr. Tizani, better known in Lebanon as Abou Salim, was one of Lebanon’s first TV celebrities. He shot to fame in the 1960s with a weekly comedy show that offered a political and social critique of the nascent state.

Now age 92, he lucidly traces the crises that have beset Lebanon—wars, invasions, assassinations and, most recently, the devastating chemical explosion—back to the days when France carved its borders out of the Ottoman Empire in 1920 and sectarian politicians known as “the zuama” emerged as its masters.

For Lebanon’s biggest Christian community, known as the Maronites, the proclamation of the state by French General Henri Gouraud was a welcome step toward independence.

But many Muslims who found themselves cut off from Syria and Palestine were dismayed by the new borders.

Some like Mr. Tizani saw early division between Christians and Muslims. As a young boy, he remembers being ordered home by the police to be registered in a census in 1932, the last such survey Lebanon conducted. His neighbors refused to take part.

From the earliest days, people were forced into the arms of politicians of one sectarian stripe or another if they needed a job, to get their children into school, or if they ran into trouble with the law.

### Pointing to Catastrophe

When Lebanon declared independence in 1943, the French tried to thwart the move by incarcerating its new government, provoking an uprising that proved to be a rare moment of national unity.

Under Lebanon's National Pact, it was agreed the president must be a Maronite (part of the Catholic Church), the prime minister a Sunni Muslim and the speaker of parliament a Shiite Muslim.

The post-independence years brought signs of promise.

Women gained suffrage in 1952. Salim Haidar, a minister at the time, took pride in the fact that Lebanon was only a few years behind France in granting women the right to vote, his son, Hayyan, recalls.

Salim Haidar, with a doctorate from the Sorbonne, drafted Lebanon's first anti-corruption law in 1953.

"This was the mentality...that Lebanon is really leading the way, even in the legal and constitutional matters. But then he didn't know that all of these laws that he worked on would not be properly applied, or would not be applied at all, like the anti-corruption law," Hayyan Haidar said.

The 1960s are widely seen as a golden age. Tourism boomed, much of it from the Arab world. A cultural scene of theatre, poetry, cinema and music flourished. The arts were celebrated each year at the famous Baalbeck International Festival. Famous visitors included Brigitte Bardot. Casino du Liban hosted the Miss Europe beauty pageant in 1964. Water skiers showed off their skills in the bay by Beirut's Saint George Hotel.

Visitors left the capital with "a misleadingly idyllic picture of the city, deaf to the antagonisms that now rumbled beneath the surface and blind to the dangers that were beginning to gather on the horizon," Samir Kassir, the late historian and journalist, wrote in his book *Beirut*.

Kassir was assassinated by a car bomb in Beirut in 2005.

For all the glitz and glamour, sectarian politics left many parts of Lebanon marginalized and impoverished, providing fertile ground for the 1975-90 civil war, said Nadya Sbaiti, assistant professor of Middle Eastern Studies at the American University of Beirut.

"The other side of the 1960s is not just Hollywood actors and Baalbeck festivals, but includes guerrilla training in rural parts of the country," she said.

Lebanon was also buffeted by the aftershocks of Israel's creation in 1948, which sent some 100,000 Palestinian refugees fleeing over the border.

In 1968, Israeli commandos destroyed a dozen passenger planes at the Beirut airport, a response to an attack on an Israeli airliner by a Lebanon-based Palestinian group.



The attack “showed us we are not a state. We are an international playground,” Salim Haidar, serving as an MP, said in an address to parliament at the time. Lebanon had not moved on in a quarter of a century, he said.

### Time Bomb

Lebanon’s brewing troubles were reflected in its art.

The 1970 play “Carte Blanche” portrayed the country as a brothel run by government ministers and ended with the lights off and the sound of a ticking bomb.

Nidal Al Achkar, the co-director, recalls the Beirut of her youth as a vibrant melting pot that never slept.

A pioneer of Lebanese theatre, Ms. Achkar graduated in the 1950s from one of a handful of Lebanese schools founded on a secular rather than religious basis, Ahliyah, in the city’s former Jewish quarter. Beirut was in the 1960s a city of “little secrets...full of cinemas, full of theatres,” she said.

“Beside people coming from the West, you had people coming from all over the Arab world, from Iraq, from Jordan, from Syria, from Palestine meeting in these cafes, living here, feeling free,” she recalled. “But in our activity as artists...all our plays were pointing to a catastrophe.”

It came in 1975 with the eruption of the civil war that began as a conflict between Christian militias and Palestinian groups allied with Lebanese Muslim factions.

Known as the “two-year war,” it was followed by many other conflicts. Some of those were fought among Christian groups and among Muslim groups.

The United States, Russia and Syria were drawn in. Lebanon was splintered. Hundreds of thousands of people were uprooted.

The guns fell silent in 1990 with some 150,000 dead and more than 17,000 people missing.

The Taif peace agreement diluted Maronite power in government. Militia

leaders turned in their weapons and took seats in government. Hayyan Haidar, a civil engineer and close aide to Selim Hoss, prime minister at the end of the war, expressed his concern.

“My comment was they are going to become the state and we are on our way out,” he said.

### “I Lost Hope”

After the war, old fault lines persisted and new ones emerged.

According to *BBC*, Lebanon’s religious diversity “makes the country an easy target for interference by external powers, as seen with Iran’s backing of the Shia Hezbollah movement, widely seen as the most powerful military and political group in Lebanon.”

Since the end of the war, “political leaders from each sect have maintained their power and influence through a system of patronage networks—protecting the interests of the religious communities they represent, and offering—both legal and illegal—financial incentives.”

■ Left, a helicopter puts out a fire at the scene of an explosion at the port of Beirut (Aug. 4, 2020). Right, Lebanese protesters, enraged by a deadly explosion blamed on government negligence, clash with security forces near an access street to the parliament in central Beirut (Aug. 9, 2020).

PHOTO: STR/AFP (LEFT); JOSEPH EID/AFP (RIGHT); VIA GETTY IMAGES



Sunni and Shiite Muslims fell out following the 2005 assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, who was credited for a role in putting together the agreement that ended the 15-year civil war. A UN-backed tribunal recently convicted a member of the Iran-backed Shiite group Hezbollah of conspiring to kill Hariri.

Since then, the last 15 years have been punctuated by political slayings, a war between Hezbollah and Israel and a brush with civil conflict in 2008.

But for some, the bitter division never really ended.

Political conflict persists in government even at a time when people are desperate for solutions to the financial crisis and support in the aftermath of the port explosion.

While some refuse to lose faith in a better Lebanon, for others, the blast was the final straw. Some are leaving or planning to.

“You live between a war and another, and you rebuild and then everything is destroyed and then you rebuild again,” said theatre director Ms. Achkar. “That’s why I lost hope.”

Mr. Najjar offered a more hopeful conclusion.

“There is no doubt we were expecting the 100th anniversary to be different. We did not expect this year to be catastrophic to this level,” he said.

“There is still hope,” he said. “We have hit rock bottom and things cannot get worse.”

### Seeking Stability

The former MP Salim Haidar’s words—“We are an international playground”—not only describes Lebanon’s past 100 years, it could also apply to millennia of Lebanon’s history. The region has hosted a tug of war between Christianity and Islam, Arab and European empires, throughout the last 1,500 years.

The diversity of the population today reflects a confluence of cultures and religions: about 60 percent identify with Islam, with equal parts Sunni and Shiite, while about 40 percent are Christians. Rather than dominating any large part of the nation, the religious groups exist in isolated pockets.

Another emblem has literally depicted Lebanon’s changing tides of rulership: its flag. Each entity that

ruled over the mountainous region placed a unique symbol at the center of the flag to feel represented.

Under the dominance of Christian empires after the Crusades, for instance, a large gold cross with three smaller crosses was the flag’s center feature. A dynasty of Druze rulers adopted a laurel wreath at the flag’s main object. Various forms of the crescent moon were used under the control of the Ottoman Empire and various Islamic rulers from the 1500s onward.

It was not until independence in 1920 that the green cedar was introduced. It has remained Lebanon’s centerpiece of the flag and emblem for the past 100 years.

For independent Lebanese, the tree speaks volumes on their identity—and their hopes for the nation’s future.

The tree depicted on the flag is the Mountain of Lebanon Cedar, evergreens that were coveted for construction projects in ancient times and they are a main source of tourism and interest in the region today.

Lebanon’s anthem includes the line: “The cedars are his [Lebanon’s] pride, his immortality’s symbol.” The





■ Opposite page, protesters hold torches and nooses, symbols of anger against the Lebanese government, as they commemorate a month since the deadly explosion in Beirut (Sept. 4, 2020). Top, a picture taken from Dbayeh, north of Beirut, shows smoke from a huge fire raging at the port in the Lebanese capital (Sept. 10, 2020). Bottom left, a Lebanese child stands next to an empty refrigerator in their apartment in the port city of Tripoli north of Beirut (June 17, 2020). Bottom right, destroyed buildings are visible a day after the massive explosion (Aug. 5, 2020). PHOTOS: MARWAN TAHTAH/ (OPPOSITE PAGE); JOSEPH EID/AFP (TOP); IBRAHIM CHALHOUB/AFP (BOTTOM LEFT); SAM TARLING/ (BOTTOM RIGHT); GETTY IMAGES

song also invokes that “God preserve [Lebanon] until the end of time.”

In the Bible, God has a lot to say about the cedar. It is mentioned in Scripture 77 times, and is used as a symbol of prosperity and strength. A psalmist wrote: “The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon” (Psa. 92:12). The prophet Isaiah referenced the “glory of Lebanon,” followed by a list of trees the area was famous for: “the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box [cedar] together” (60:13).

Today, although the nation has a Christian minority, its war- and crises-weary citizens continue to look to the

tree as an emblem of longevity, political stability and lasting peace—all for which they desperately desire.

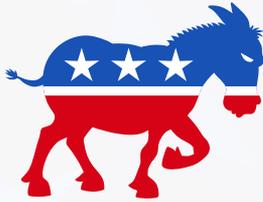
The good news for all those living with such hope is that the Bible is more than a book of symbols and poetry. It is also an authority on prophecy: and much of it is GOOD NEWS.

The same book that discusses the cedar shows that Lebanon’s hopes *will* turn into reality. Note another prophecy in Isaiah: “Is it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest?” (29:17).

This sounds like *awesome* prosperity—which would have to also include political stability! Both would be welcome news to a nation now going through its worst crisis in recent times.

This little-known prophecy is part of a larger plan made by the God who declares events before they occur. Overall, it is a plan of “peace” on Earth, and “good will toward men” (Luke 2:14).

For more on the way God plans to bring peace to Lebanon and all nations of the world, read our free booklet *How World Peace Will Come!* at [rcg.org/hwpcw](http://rcg.org/hwpcw). □



Every four years, the people of the United States face a presidential crossroads—with the nation’s future seemingly on the line. Every four years, many are woefully disappointed nothing ever seems to change...

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

**A**BUSE OF POWER. Corruption at the very highest levels. Hypocrisy, cronyism, lack of morals—all pushing a deep desire for sweeping change in leadership. For many voters, this can sound like the political climate of 2016, when then-candidate Donald Trump promised to “drain the swamp” of Washington. For other voters, it smacks of the presidential campaign for 2020, where supporters of Joe Biden feel they are in a “battle for the soul of the nation.”

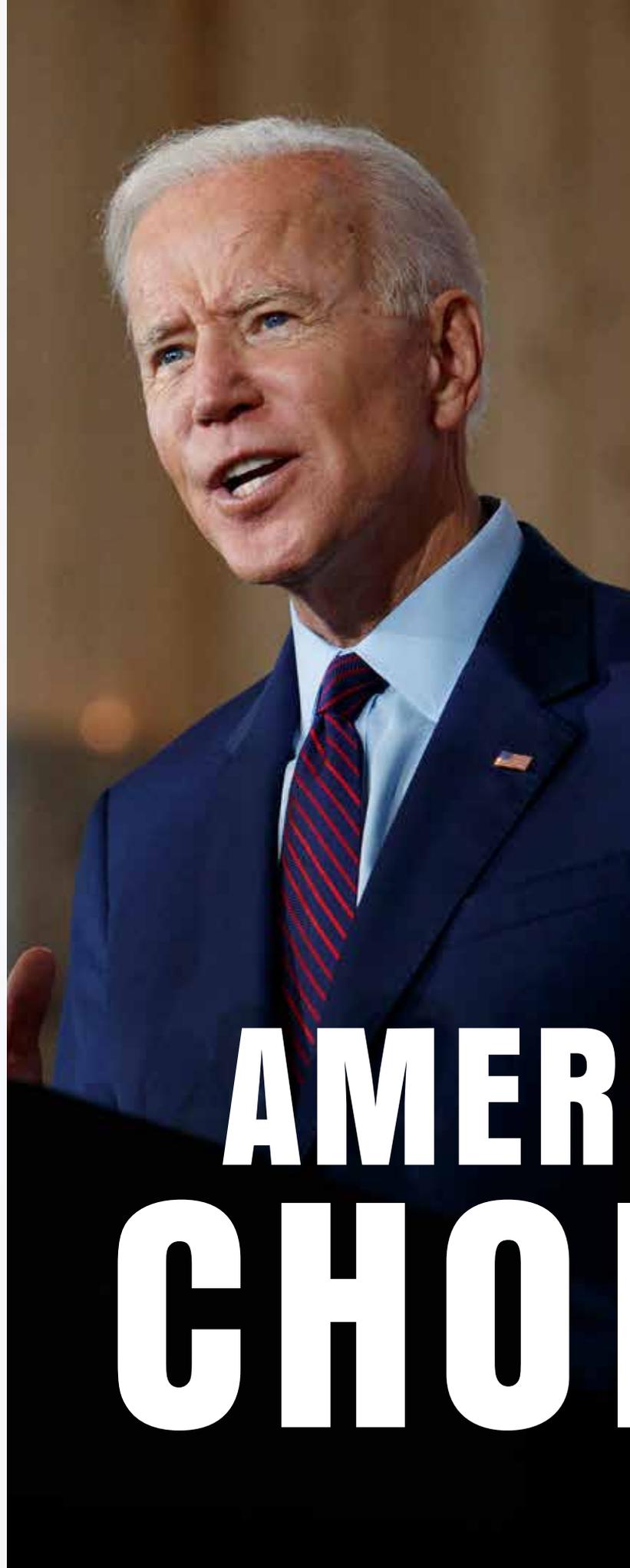
Yet this is not a description of today, rather of ancient Israel circa 1050 BC. At that time, the elderly priest Samuel made his sons judges over Israel. In I Samuel 8:3, it states that these men, Joel and Abiah, “turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.”

Such open corruption caused the elders of Israel to come to Samuel and demand: “Behold, you are old, and your sons walk not in your ways: *now make us a king* to judge us like all the nations” (vs. 5).

Despite protests from Samuel, and clear warnings on what this change in government would bring, the Israelites ultimately got what they wanted—and reaped the terrible results of their decision. In the end, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah had an incredible run of wicked kings, and scant few who were righteous.

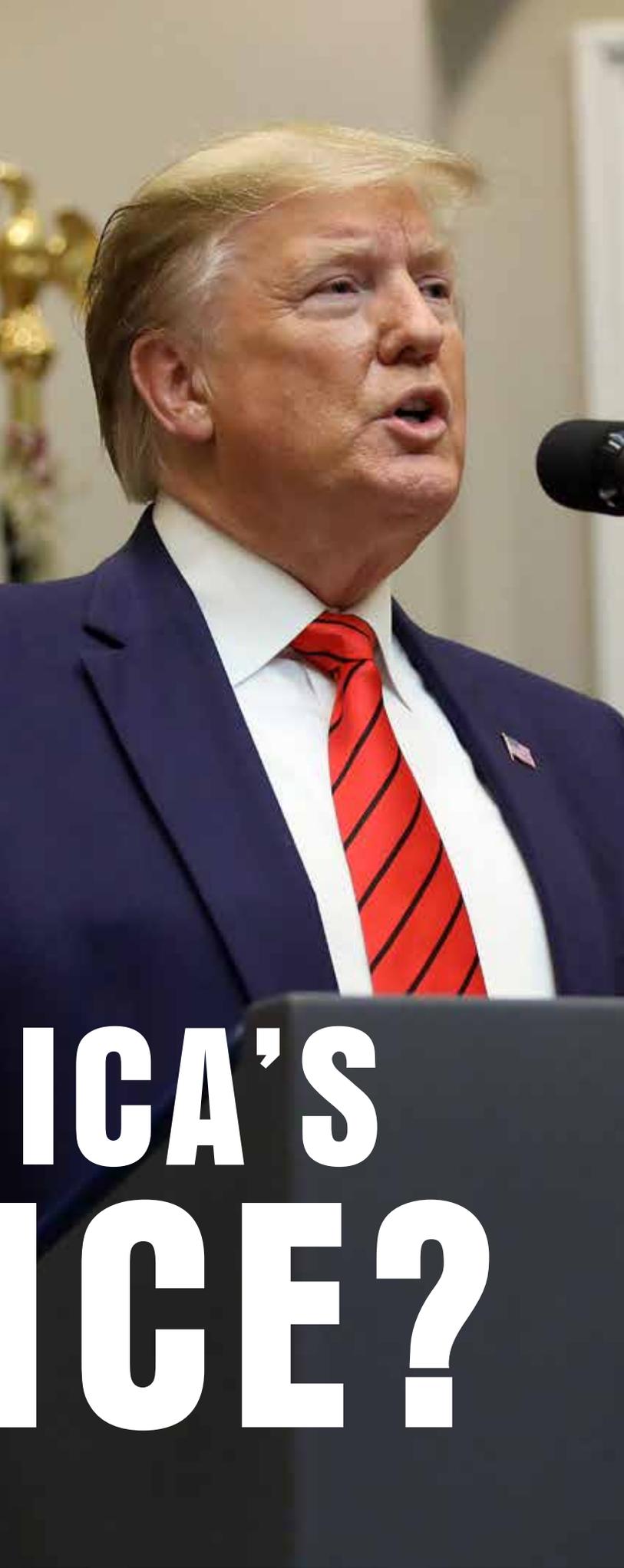
Of course, the U.S. shucked monarchy for a democratic republic during the American Revolution. With kings and queens, power remained in a close family line and leaders changed upon death. With presidents, anyone could be elected every four years.

But that does not mean the United States started something new. Israel’s third king, Solomon, was right when he said that “there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecc.

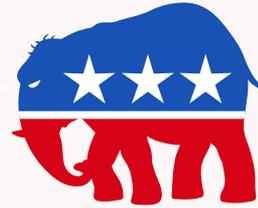


# AMER CHOI

PHOTOS: TOM BRENNER/ (LEFT); WIN MCNAMEE/ (RIGHT); GETTY IMAGES



# AMERICA'S ICE?



1:9). The U.S. voting system is not unlike the elder's request to Samuel. Instead of changing forms of government, voters today select a new man. The sentiment is the same, however. With each election, the populace can say: "We demand something different. This old way is not working."

And, sadly, the results are often the same. With each federal vote, the U.S. *seems* to turn a fresh page in its history, but little changes—and conditions often get worse.

The Moffatt translation of Ecclesiastes 1:9-10 sums up the situation perfectly: "What has been is what shall be, what has gone on is what shall go on, and there is nothing new under the sun. Men may say of something, 'Ah, this is new!'—but it existed long ago before our time."

This article was sent to print before the results of the 2020 presidential vote. Yet the result will be akin to something that has already occurred before. Is America doomed to repeat this four-year cycle forever?

## Constant Thread

Politicians and journalists are right to say that we live at a unique time in history. The COVID-19 pandemic even comes with the euphemistic tagline "these unprecedented times." So, while there is "nothing new" under the American political sun, conditions are ripe for post-election clashes as never seen before. The internet has given rise to a post-truth era with many living in ideological echo chambers—where incorrect beliefs are never questioned and instead root in deeper over time. This trend can be found among conservatives and liberals alike.

An early October YouGov poll of 1,999 registered voters found that 47 percent disagreed that the election "is likely to be fair and honest," 51 percent disagreed that "Americans will generally agree on who is the legitimately elected president," and 56 percent said they expect an increase of violence as a result of the vote. Headlines reinterpreted the last statistic as "on the brink of civil war."

The hair trigger that is internet and social media make this ever more a possibility.

Despite being in uncharted waters, there is an element that has remained unchanging in politics the world over: HUMAN NATURE. This has reared its head throughout American history, especially in political arenas.

Early in U.S. history, Founding Fathers Alexander Hamilton and James Madison detailed what they believed should be America's new national character. If these virtues were not adopted, Hamilton wrote, the nation would devolve into "plunder and devastation." Madison said it

would be a “gloomy and perilous scene into which the advocates for disunion would conduct us.”

The “advocates for disunion” were the group’s political rivals. “Poverty and disgrace,” Hamilton wrote again, “would overspread a country which with wisdom might make herself the admiration and envy of the world.”

By the late 1700s, negative campaigning was the norm. If Thomas Jefferson were to be elected, one Connecticut newspaper announced, “murder, robbery, rape, adultery and incest, will openly be taught and practiced, the air will be rent with the cries and distress, the soil soaked with blood, and the nation black with crimes.”

This form of political mudslinging has been honed and repeated ever since.

A *Harper’s* magazine essay by Richard Hofstadter said this in the article “The Paranoid Style in American Politics”: “American politics has often been an arena for angry minds. In recent years we have seen angry minds at work mainly among extreme right-wingers, who have now demonstrated...how much political leverage can be got out of the animosities and passions of a small minority. But behind this I believe there is a style of mind that is far from new and that is not necessarily right-wing. I call it the paranoid style simply because no other word adequately evokes the sense of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy that I have in mind.”

Heated exaggeration. Suspiciousness. Conspiratorial fantasy. While most do not want to admit it, this describes rhetoric from both the right and left today.

Now consider that this essay was written in 1954! *Nothing new under the sun, indeed.*

The essay included a 1951 quote from U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy, who infamously held trials to root out communists in the U.S.: “How can we account for our present situation unless we believe that men high in this government are concerting to deliver us to disaster? This must be the product of a great conspiracy on a scale so immense as to dwarf any previous such venture

in the history of man. A conspiracy of infamy so black that, when it is finally exposed, its principals shall be forever deserving of the maledictions of all honest men.”

Hofstadter also included a quote from an 1855 manifesto for the left-wing Populist party. The group was assured that the Vatican was pulling the strings in Washington. While the church at Rome has been party to many nefarious political dealings over the years, history shows this was not one of them.

“It is a notorious fact that the Monarchs of Europe and the Pope of Rome are at this very moment plotting our destruction and threatening the extinction of our political, civil, and religious institutions. We have the best reasons for believing that corruption has found its way into our Executive Chamber, and that our Executive head is tainted with the infectious venom of Catholicism...The Pope has recently sent his ambassador of state to this country on a secret commission, the effect of which is an extraordinary boldness of the Catholic church throughout the United States...These minions of the Pope are boldly insulting our Senators; reprimanding our Statesmen; propagating the adulterous union of Church and State; abusing with foul calumny all governments but Catholic, and spewing out the bitterest execrations on all Protestantism. The Catholics in the United States receive from abroad more than \$200,000 annually for the propagation of their creed. Add to this the vast revenues collected here.”

Fostering a paranoia about those on the other side of the aisle is as old as the U.S. itself. Again, *nothing new.*

### **Election Drama**

Wild, close elections have seemed to be the norm over the last two decades. While Hillary Clinton decidedly won the popular vote in 2016, Mr. Trump grabbed more electorates to win.

In 2000, it all came down to Florida. Many days after the election between George W. Bush and Al Gore, there were talks of butterfly ballots and “hanging chads.” In the end, Mr. Bush secured just 537 more votes in Florida

than his competitor—to win the electoral college 286 to 266.

Such craziness surrounding the polls can seem like a modern invention. Yet the most wild contest goes back to the 1876 election between Republican nominee Rutherford B. Hayes and Democrat Samuel J. Tilden.

*The New York Times* recounted that the day after the 1876 vote, “The country awoke to absolute turmoil.”

“Tilden was safely ahead in the popular vote by a margin of about 250,000 votes. The Republicans, however, claimed that Hayes had by now captured Florida as well, giving him a total of 185 votes and a whisker of a victory.

“But quickly the vote counts in Florida, Louisiana and South Carolina became the focus of sharp debate and manipulation. Fraud raged on both sides, historians agree. Boxes of ballots would turn up in bodies of water. Black voters were pivotal. Because blacks back then overwhelmingly voted Republican, the party of Lincoln and the party of emancipation, the Republicans had unleashed aggressive campaigns to get blacks to vote, while Democrats had used physical intimidation and outright bribery to discourage black turnout.

“Each party went about invalidating votes and paying bribes to ‘correct’ ballots, resulting in disparate counts for the three Southern states in dispute. Fraud was so pervasive in those states that it is hard to say who the voters truly wanted to win. The results in Florida were tantalizingly close. The Republicans said Hayes finished ahead by 922 votes out of about 47,000 votes cast. By Democratic count, it was Tilden by a skimpy 94 votes. In one Florida precinct that voted heavily for Tilden, the Republicans supposedly ruined ballots by smearing them with ink.

“Both parties sent additional representatives to the three Southern states. A Justice Department detective was dispatched to Florida.

“As bickering intensified, all of the states submitted their results to Congress. The three disputed states sent in two sets of electoral returns, each

showing a different winner. Oregon also submitted two sets of returns.”

After some back-door deals, Hayes secured the win by promising to end post-Civil War Reconstruction and withdraw troops from the South.

For more instances of political drama, one has to look no further than the contest between Andrew Jackson and John Quincy Adams in 1824, Theodore Roosevelt jumping in as an independent in 1912, or the down-to-the-wire results for Woodrow Wilson and Charles Evans Hughes in 1916.

*Nothing new under the sun...*

### History Repeats

Back to the story in I Samuel, where ancient Israel wanted a king. Just as previous presidential elections are instructive, so is this Bible story. It reveals more about the U.S. today than would first appear.

To repeat, the elders of Israel came to Samuel and stated: “Behold, you are old, and your sons walk not in your ways: now *make us a king* to judge us like all the nations” (I Sam. 8:5).

Israel wanted a whole new form of government and verse 6 shows that this request “displeased” Samuel, so he prayed to God.

Verses 7-9: “And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto you: for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them...Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.”

Humanly, Israel’s unease with their leadership can seem understandable. Samuel’s sons were corrupt. In addition, the high priest Eli also had rotten sons who stole from the people and fornicated with women who helped at the Tabernacle.

Yet God warned *in excruciating detail* what would happen if Israel decided to have a king: “This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and

some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and you shall be his servants” (vs. 11-17).

Now notice the end result of all of this: “And you shall cry out in that day because of your king which you shall have chosen you; and *the LORD will not hear you in that day*” (vs. 18).

How does this apply to America, especially considering that they rejected having a king to form a government with elected leadership?

Again, the results for Israel were as God said, with the ratio of evil to good kings woefully imbalanced. While the U.S. threw out monarchy as a form of government, they did *decide for themselves* what *they thought* was best for their nation.

America chose democracy, which British Prime Minister Winston Churchill famously called “the worst form of government except” all the others.

Herein lies the similarities between ancient Israel and the United States: both IGNORE what God and the Bible want for any nation. And the Book is most explicit.

### What We Are Missing

Every four years, U.S. citizens pin hopes of a better tomorrow on presidential candidates. Regardless of the outcome, each elected president fails to deliver his lofty campaign promises.

With each election, Americans CHOOSE a president—they CHOOSE to

support the nation’s form of government.

In this process, everyone wants a better future. Many even pray that God will help them select the right leader—or that He will guide the decision.

Yet few look to what God wants. It is clear from the account in I Samuel that God does not want a human king. So what does He desire? What form of government does He support?

The answer to this question is the central theme of the Bible.

Notice: “Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD” (Mark 1:14). Out of the gate, Jesus Christ taught about the Kingdom—which is just another way to say government.

This government of God, and Christ’s part in it, is expounded upon in Isaiah 9: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the *government shall be upon His shoulder*: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end...to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever” (vs. 6-7).

While some claim this Kingdom has already been set up on Earth, one only has to look to the conditions today—both the tumultuous protests in America and the chaos throughout the world—to see that God’s government has not yet been established.

Yet it will be soon. Daniel 2 speaks of that imminent time when “the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and *the kingdom shall not be left to other people*, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (vs. 44).

Read *How God’s Kingdom Will Come – The Untold Story!* ([rcg.org/hgkwc](http://rcg.org/hgkwc)) to learn the exciting truth of what is just over the horizon. It explains how all people—both in the United States and abroad—will forever break the cycle of repeating history’s mistakes. May God’s government come soon! □

# UP IN SMOK

The Increasing Devastation of West Coast Wildfires



# E



**T**HEY WORK 50 hours at a stretch and sleep on gymnasium floors. Exploding trees shower them with embers. They lose track of time when the sun is blotted out by smoke, and they sometimes have to run for their lives from advancing flames.

Firefighters trying to contain the massive wildfires in Oregon, California and Washington state were constantly on the verge of exhaustion as they tried to save suburban houses, including some in their own neighborhoods. Each home or barn lost was a mental blow for teams trained to protect lives and property.

And their own safety is never assured. Oregon firefighter Steve McAdoo's shift on September 7 seemed mostly normal, until late evening, when the team went to a fire along a highway south of Portland.

"Within 10 minutes of being there, it advanced too fast and so quick... we had to cut and run," he said. "You can't breathe, you can't see."

That happened again and again as he and the rest of the crew worked shifts that lasted two full days with little rest or food. They toiled in an alien environment where the sky turns lurid colors, ash falls like rain and towering trees explode into flames, sending a cascade of embers to the forest floor.

"The sky was just orange or black, and so we weren't sure if was morning or night," he said. "My crew and I said that to each other many times, 'What is going on? When is this going to end?'"

The firefighters tried to protect homes where they could, but the winds were so strong they could do little to stop the inferno as it spewed embers up to 10 miles away.

Instead, they worked to make sure people could get out, clearing trees off the roads, sometimes just feet from the flames. In California, Jesse Barnes said it felt like being in the stinging, acrid path

■ A tricycle that was in a small park along Detroit Avenue still stands near the Lake Detroit Market in Detroit, Oregon (Sept. 11, 2020).

PHOTO: AP/ALBANY DEMOCRAT-HERALD, MARK YLEN

of campfire smoke—for two days straight.

The speed of the winds and the dryness of the forest made these fires some of the worst he has seen. “There was no stopping it,” he said.

“We’re tired and covered in ash and soot all blowing in our faces, coughing from the smoke,” he said. But with so many wildfires burning, there was no one to take their places. “Once you’re there, there’s no relief,” he said.

Western states usually turn to each other for help, but that has been hard with the number of places under siege in this historic wildfire season, which has killed more than 30 people and

destroyed thousands of structures in three states.

“Sometimes it’s like a game of chess,” said Bart Vawdrey, deputy fire chief in Draper, Utah, “and mother nature usually wins.”

This summer, California already has seen more land charred by wildfires than in any previous full year, with some 3.4 million acres burned since mid-August to mid-September. Five of the state’s 20 largest blazes on record have occurred this year.

Wildfires tearing through trees and brush, rampaging up hillsides and incinerating neighborhoods: The names and places change but the devastation is showing signs of becoming

the new normal in California and throughout the West.

### **Why It Is Growing Worse**

This year’s deadly fires in the United States had devoured a record of nearly 5 million acres as of September 20, a scale of devastation that fits into the longer-term trend of more acreage being scorched as temperatures rise.

Historically, fires in the region tended to burn low to the ground, eliminating dead conifer limbs, keeping competing species in check and prompting pine cones to open and disperse their seeds.

These days, fire crews are seeing increasing cases of massive “tree-



torching” fires that engulf forests from the ground up through the canopy.

“Fires are not unnatural, but the kind of behaviour and the times, places and conditions they are igniting in are very, very unusual,” said Timothy Ingalsbee, who heads the Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology, an Oregon-based advocacy group that promotes forest management to mitigate fire risks.

If fires sweep a forest too frequently, they will wipe out saplings before they can reach maturity. Too hot, and the fire can turn large areas into a moonscape

barren of the seeds needed for new growth.

In California, a rise of 1.4 degrees Celsius in average summertime temperatures since the 1970s coincided with a five-fold increase in acreage burned annually, researchers reported last year in the American Geophysical Union.

The same dry conditions that aggravate the fires also undermine new forest growth.

Yet some researchers do not entirely blame warmer temperatures for worsening wildfires.

*Time* explained: “Urban development in vulnerable areas can make fires more devastating, and many of the state’s most destructive fires were started by humans...Max Moritz, a specialist in cooperative extension at the University of California’s Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, says hotter temperatures have made fire seasons longer, too. Scientists see a direct link between rising temperatures and the amount of dry brush and ample fuel, which makes the fires fast-moving and often more explosive.”

■ The Bidwell Bar Bridge surrounded by fire in Lake Oroville during the Bear Fire in Oroville, California (Sept. 9, 2020).

PHOTO: JOSH EDELSON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



“There’s good, solid research linking temperature increases to trends in fire activity,” Mr. Moritz told the magazine. “But it’s really long-term trends.”

### How We Got Here

Hotter temperatures. More urban development. People carelessly or deliberately sparking blazes. These *are* all factors in why wildfires are growing worse, but they overlook a major underlying cause—one that is over 100 years in the making.

In the late 1800s, the U.S. government established a policy of fire suppression. *The Washington Post* quoted a Joint Fire Science Program report that called wildfires the “moral and mortal enemy of the forest.” Wooded areas were also valued for their economic value as standing timber.

This thinking has colored America’s approach to forest management for decades. Fight any fire that starts instead of letting it burn. It also meant not using prescribed burns to clear out overgrowth. The result is forests thick with fuel waiting for a spark.

Scientists estimate that at least 10 to 15 million acres need to burn every year in order to return forests to a more natural condition, *The New York Times* reported. While the U.S. government recorded that 9.7 million acres burned in 2017 and 10.1 million in 2015, the public perception is that these numbers are way too high—and the issue is complicated by the amount of people living in heavily forested areas.

An article from *The Washington Post* explained how yesterday’s fire suppression policies impact blazes now: “What’s different about today’s fires is the intensity with which they’re burning. One reason is that fire suppression has changed Western forests. Take the ponderosa stands of the Southwest: Historically, low-intensity blazes, ignited by lightning or indigenous peoples, burned every five to 10 years, thinning the forest of young saplings and brush and leaving just 150 large trees per acre. Today, in the absence of flames, those stands are choked with as many as 1,200 trees per acre—too thick to walk through without risking a branch in your eye.”

Cal Fire Chief Thom Porter summarized the problem to *KPIX 5*: “After aggressively suppressing fires for the last 100 years we have put our forests in a state of peril.”

“By abstaining from controlled burns year after year, unchecked growth has multiplied, dried out and created a tinderbox,” the news outlet wrote. “The overgrowth has fueled deadly, out-of-control wildfires like the Carr Fire near Redding that took the lives of a four- and five-year-old.”

Mr. Porter was further quoted: “Prescribed burns alone will not stop that, but it is a tool that we can use to reduce the effect of those large fires.”

As concerns mounted about more frequent and severe seasonal fires, California ramped up its annual spending on forest fire prevention work to \$200 million in the 2018 fiscal year from \$40 million, according to a 2018 state report.

The U.S. Forest Service said it expects to spend around \$250 million a year under its agreement with the state to treat half a million acres a year.

However, about 163 million trees have died in the state in the last decade

■ Left, damaged homes are seen in a mobile home park that was destroyed by wildfire in Ashland, Oregon (Sept. 11, 2020). Right, Butte County firefighters watch as flames tower over their truck during the Bear Fire in Oroville, California (Sept. 9, 2020).

PHOTO: DAVID RYDER/ (LEFT); JOSH EDELSON/AFP (RIGHT); GETTY IMAGES



due to drought and bark beetle infestation, mainly in the Sierra Nevada mountain range, creating huge swaths of flammable material, according to a 2019 Forest Service survey.

In September, a Forest Service official said the agency needed to double or triple its efforts in the fire-prone state.

“We’re working really hard but we know it’s not nearly enough,” Chris French, national forest system deputy chief, said in testimony before the Senate Committee on Natural Resources. “In places like California it means treating two to three times more acres per year than our current actions.”

Seeing the results of these fires is devastating—both with homes and businesses ruined as well as injury and death. Yet the wildfires on the West Coast reveal a trait of humankind. We try to fix problems and end up causing even worse problems in the process. Fire suppression is just one example. Antibiotics giving rise to worse and worse superbugs is another. War usually spawns more conflict in the long run.

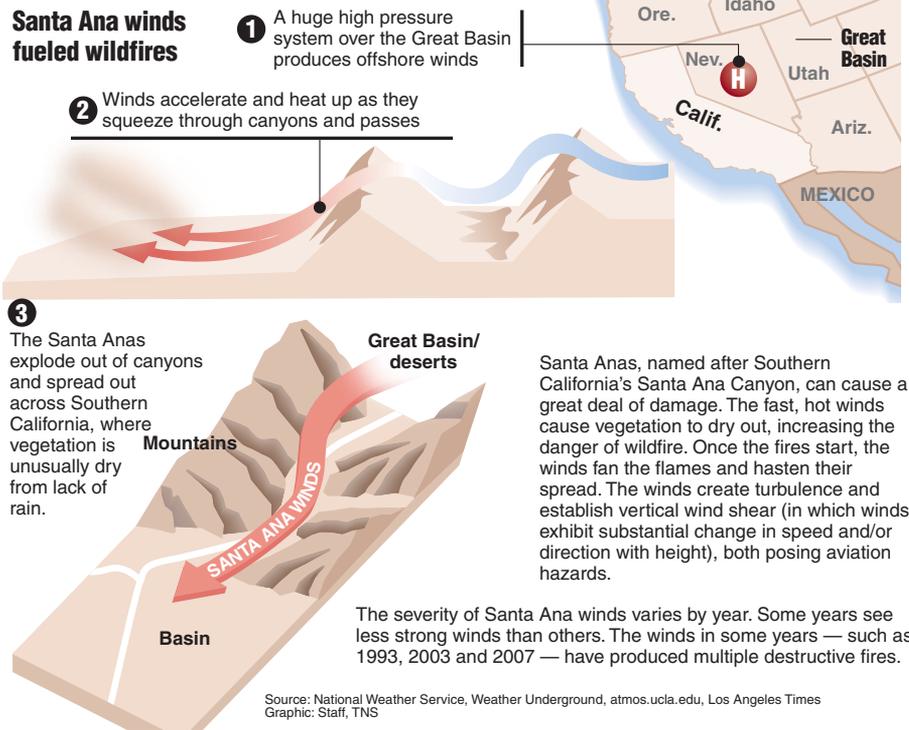
As a rule, when human beings are involved, any attempt to solve problems begets more problems and makes the situations even more complex.

Ask: Are we doomed to live with worsening difficulties?

## Recipe for Disaster

*Santa Ana winds are strong, extremely dry downslope winds in Southern California and northern Baja California. They originate inland in desert regions and occur mainly in the fall and winter but can arise during other seasons.*

### Santa Ana winds fueled wildfires



The better question is why? Man is capable of incredible genius, yet his very worst problems—war, famine, disease and increasingly deadly for-

est fires—remain. This is a question every person alive should strive to answer. Read *Why Man Cannot Solve His Problems* ([rcg.org/uun](http://rcg.org/uun)) for more. □





# The Mayflower

## A Monumental Expedition

BY JUSTIN M. FRAZIER

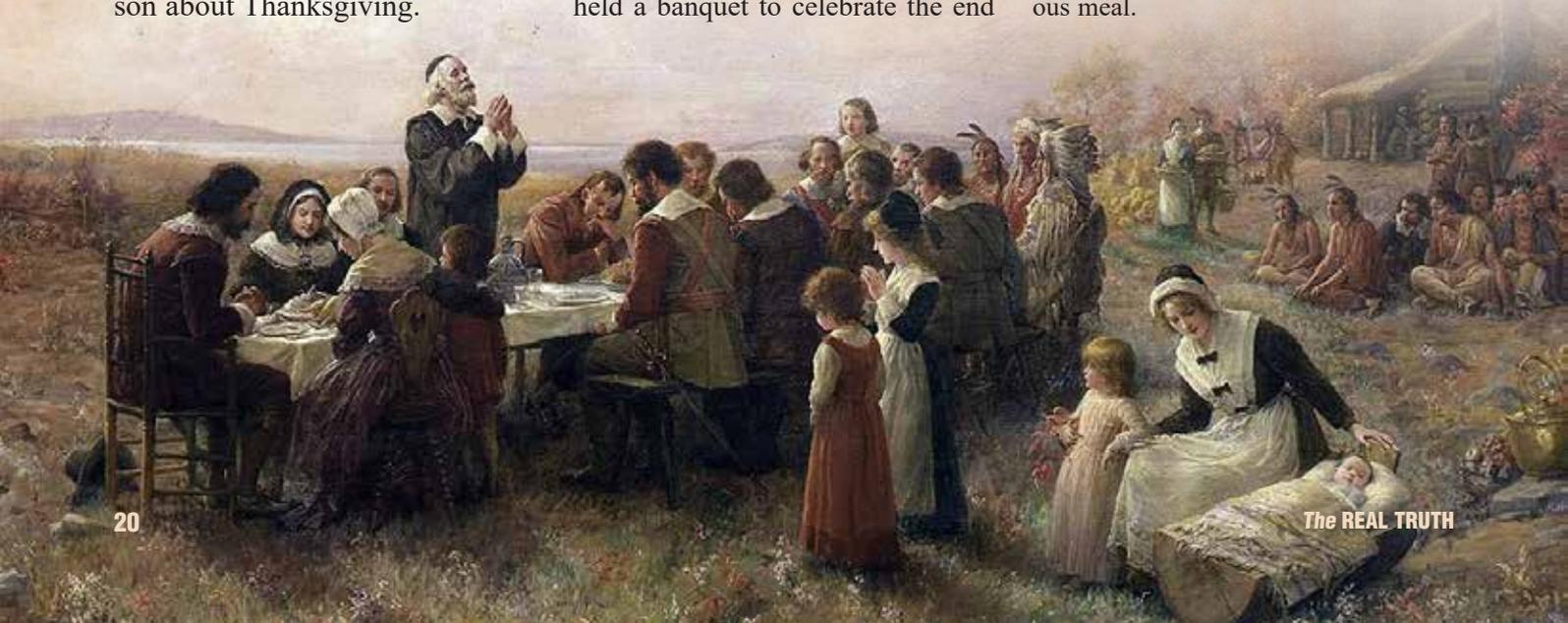
The voyage of the Mayflower 400 years ago began a nation that would change the course of world history. The story is told every year, but the real purpose of the journey has remained hidden.

**E**VERY NOVEMBER in the United States, schoolchildren make pilgrim hats out of black construction paper and draw hand turkeys as part of a lesson about Thanksgiving.

They are taught that the pilgrims who sailed to America on the Mayflower fled religious persecution and that the first winter was hard. The local native population helped them survive, and they had held a banquet to celebrate the end

of a bountiful harvest with their native friends.

Americans have continued this traditional celebration to this day—so every year families come together to carve turkey meat and share a sumptuous meal.



Turkey, 'taters and tales of survival. This is all most have ever known of the meaning behind the autumn holiday. But the *real* story of those men and women who traversed the Atlantic has much more significance on modern society than the tradition reveals.

Genealogists estimate that one out of every 10 people in the U.S. today is a descendant of those who crossed the Atlantic on the Mayflower, survived their first winter in America, and then went on to have children. That means 35 million Americans today came from 132 colonists who landed in Cape Cod in November 1620.

But the full story of that tiny group carries an even greater significance to all Americans and the nation as a whole. The nation's identity—and future—is locked inside the tale of these handful of people.

### Fleeing Persecution

The persecution facing the Pilgrims began with England's religious break-away from the Catholic Church. The Protestantization of England was completed with the Act of Uniformity 1558, which put fines on those who did not attend required services at the Church of England every week.

This was not enough for some who felt Church of England was *not Protestant enough*. These dissenters sought to "purify" the new English church of ALL Roman Catholic traditions they considered unbiblical—such as making the sign of the cross at baptism or bowing on hearing the name of Jesus.

Members of these so-called Puritan groups were arrested and imprisoned. Others' homes were under constant watch from the community. Many saw the only option to escape intense scrutiny was to set sail for Holland.

Yet the trouble continued even after the move to continental Europe. In 1619, Holland forbade any organization from collecting money to support ministers, orphans or the elderly except the Dutch Reformed Church. Again, the Puritans faced the decision of assimilation or departure.

Seeing nowhere fruitful to go in Europe, they began to look west toward the New World.

At the time, a move to North America was especially risky. The Puritans would have heard of the colony in Jamestown, where in the winter of 1607, 440 of the 500 new settlers died of starvation. Also, the threat of attacks from indigenous peoples was constant.

But a sense of divine purpose—a kind of 17th century Manifest Destiny—overpowered these potential threats. "We verily believe and trust the Lord is with us," they wrote, "and that He will graciously prosper our endeavors according to the simplicity of our hearts therein" (*Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War*).

The Pilgrims in Holland bought a 43-year-old boat named the Speedwell to take them back to Southampton, England, and rendezvous with the Mayflower. Future governor of Plymouth Colony, William Bradford, described their emotional departure on July 22, 1620: "So they left that goodly and pleasant city which had been their resting place near twelve years; but they knew they were pilgrims, and looked not much on those things, but lift up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country, and quieted their spirits." They called themselves "strangers and pilgrims" (Heb. 11:13) who would "declare plainly that they seek a country...But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly" (vs. 14, 16).

Twice on their journey to Southampton, the Speedwell sprung a leak, forcing it to dock. This delayed the trip enough that some of the passengers became disillusioned and returned to Holland.

Those who made it to the Mayflower were already running low on provisions. They had been on board for six weeks, nearly the length of time they had planned to be at sea.

Bradford worried whether there would be enough to survive: "Our victuals will be half eaten up, I think, before we go from the coast of England; and, if our voyage last long, we shall not have a month's victuals when we come in the country."

Finally, favorable winds on September 16 allowed the crossing of the Atlantic with 102 passengers on board.

### Perilous Journey

The first month at sea was calm, but conditions were at best uncomfortable for passengers. Since the Mayflower was a cargo ship, it was not designed to carry as many people as it had. Most passengers had to stay in an area where the ceiling was five feet high.

The second month brought the dreaded north Atlantic storms, "with which the ship was thoroughly shaken, and her upper works made very leaky," Bradford recorded. Waves would sweep the top deck as the raging seas buffeted the ship's hull.

The storms broke one of the main beams in the middle of the ship. The leaders of the passengers met with the captain and his officers to discuss returning to England. But the ship's officers decided that the boat was strong enough below the waterline to keep going and that the buckled beam could be raised with an iron screw.

Though weakened, it was assured that the boat would make it.

Finally, after 66 days at sea, land was sighted on November 9 at Cape Cod. One of the passengers, William Brewster, led the Pilgrims to read Psalm 100 to give thanks for the successful crossing.

But the story of survival was far from over.

### The First Winter

Weeks of waves brought the ship several hundred miles off course, and the worsening winter weather made following the coastline to the mouth of the Hudson River impossible.

So they had no choice but to find a site and winter in. As the men sought suitable land to begin construction, most of the passengers and crew stayed on board the Mayflower for another four months.

The tight quarters and cold weather helped spread disease, and 45 passengers died by winter's end. Another six died over the summer.

# THE JOURNEY

To pay for the journey to America, the Pilgrims took a loan for 1,700 pounds. The average day's wage back then was 10 pence (one-tenth of a pound). To repay the loan, the Pilgrims signed an indenture, which obligated them to work for seven years, six days a week, harvesting furs and cod. However, more than half the Pilgrims died from the bitter cold during the first winter.

NEW WORLD

ATLANTIC OCEAN

EUROPE

5

4

3

2

1

**1. JULY 22, 1620:** Speedwell departed Delfshaven, Netherlands, to Southampton, England. Leaks in the Speedwell are patched up.

**2. AUGUST 15:** Speedwell and Mayflower left Southampton. The ships were forced back twice because of leaks in the Speedwell.

**3. SEPTEMBER 16:** The Mayflower left Plymouth carrying 102 passengers from both ships.

**4. NOVEMBER 11:** The Mayflower Compact was signed aboard the ship at sea.

**5. NOVEMBER 21:** The Mayflower anchored at Provincetown, Massachusetts. By the end of the journey, two passengers died and a boy was born.

SOURCE: MAYFLOWERHISTORY.COM; NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC  
ILLUSTRATION: SARAH O. VIDAL

Only 51 of the 102 passengers survived to that famous first Thanksgiving.

The Pilgrims chose an abandoned settlement that was easy to defend, and since the land was already cleared it would be suitable for spring planting. They named their colony Plymouth after the port in England from which they had departed.

## New Israel

Beating overwhelming odds while crossing the Atlantic and surviving in the harsh new world, the Pilgrims clung to the belief that they were a kind of Old Testament Israel being guided out of Egypt into the Promised Land.

In his journal *The History of Plymouth Settlement*, William Bradford made the comparison clear: "Our fathers were Englishmen who came over the great ocean and were ready to perish in the wilderness, but they cried to the Lord, and He heard their voice and looked on their adversity...When they wandered forth into the desert-wilderness, out of the way, and found no city to dwell in, both hungry and thirsty, their soul was overwhelmed in them."

Yet this is not the last time ancient Israel would be tied to the budding nation.

Over 100 years later, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams proposed a seal for the new nation of the United States. It was to be an image of the ancient Israelites crossing the Red Sea with pharaoh chasing them and Moses standing on the other side. It would have included the motto, "Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God."

The Liberty Bell also bears an inscription from Moses' book of Leviticus: "Proclaim LIBERTY throughout all the Land unto all the Inhabitants thereof" (25:10).

Moses, the human leader of the Israelites as they exited Egypt, is depicted on the eastern pediment of the U.S. Supreme Court building holding two tablets. He also appears inside the courtroom, holding the Ten Commandments.

Connections to Old Testament Israel are laced throughout America's political system, partially in a nod to our ancestors' tendency to identify with it. But this fascination with an event nearly 3,500 years ago says a lot about America's true identity—and its future.

## Ancient History

To understand, we must realize that the Bible is so much more than a book of antiquity. It contains *two kinds* of history.

One is details of past events such as the Exodus story in which Pilgrims found so much meaning. But another kind of history—that is, history written in advance—comprises ONE-THIRD of the book.

Much of this *future history*, aka prophecy, is recorded of ancient Israel and has a lot to do with the nation that came from the Pilgrims.

Chapter 49 of the first book of the Bible, Genesis, reveals what would become of Israel's 12 tribes in the "last days" or the far future (vs. 1). Each of them were to eventually grow into separate nations or set of nations.

The most extensive description belongs to the tribes of Joseph. The Bible states that his descendants would grow and spread beyond the territory allotted to them. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall" (Gen. 49:22).

In addition, Joseph would become powerful and unstoppable in war: "The

# ABOARD THE MAYFLOWER

132 crew and passengers



**NAVIGATION:** Done with a compass and star location. An hourglass was used to keep time.



**THE BIBLE:** The primary source of literature for passengers. Adults read scriptures to children daily.

**UPPER DECK:** Where seamen worked and attended to the ship.

**FORECASTLE:** Where meals were cooked and crew's food supplies were kept.

**CAPSTAN:** A large apparatus used to lift and lower cargo.

**GUN DECK:** Typically used to store cannons and cargo, this is where passengers on the Mayflower lived. Each passenger had a space of 2 by 7 feet, and the ceiling was only 5 feet high. Families built simple wooden dividers for privacy.

**FOOD:** Stored in barrels to keep dry and safe from rodents. It included salted meats and fish, raisins, prunes, oatmeal, rice, butter, beer, wine and water (used only for animals and cooking).

**MASTS:** During a storm on the journey, the main beam cracked. It was fixed with a large screw intended for housebuilding.

**STEERAGE ROOM:** The ship was steered with a stick called a whip-staff, which moved the tiller that moved the rudder.

**POOP HOUSE:** Quarters for the captain and higher-ranking crew.

**CABIN:** General sleeping quarters for the 30 crew. The crew slept in shifts.

**CARGO HOLD:** Food, tools and supplies were stored here.

**GUN ROOM:** Gun powder and other supplies for the guns and cannons were stored in this room. There were 12 cannons loaded on board to defend against pirates.



SOURCES: NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC; MAYFLOWERHISTORY.COM  
ILLUSTRATIONS: SARAH O. VIDAL

archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him, but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob” (vs. 23-24).

It would also become the wealthiest nations the world had ever seen, given “blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb. The blessings of your father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph...” (vs. 25-26).

These blessings that were pronounced on Joseph were then passed on to his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Each were given a unique promise that would make them distinct on the world scene millennia later.

### Fulfilling a Promise

Nations are families grown large. Many modern nations can trace their lineage back to one of the 12 tribes of Israel, each tribe coming from one of the sons of the patriarch Jacob (also named Israel).

The Bible provides clues as to where these nations exist today.

David Pack, editor-in-chief of *The Real Truth* magazine, explained which countries these tribes of Israel eventually became in his book *America and Britain in Prophecy*.

Mr. Pack explained Genesis 49 is “an absolutely astounding prophecy, carrying truly staggering implications for all the nations of the world.”

Mr. Pack further explained the identity of Joseph’s sons: “the great, wealthy, dominant single ‘nation,’ of Genesis 35:11, would descend and grow from Manasseh. The even greater, wealthier, more dominant ‘company of nations,’ here called a ‘multitude of nations,’ would spring from Ephraim.”

The greatest nation and company of nations or empire—what do these sound like? History reveals there is only one answer!

The British Empire is the greatest empire the world has ever seen. Britain explored, conquered, and colonized every continent, including Antarctica. The British Empire, at its peak in 1920, covered over a quarter

of the entire planet. For a time, the sun did not set on the globe-spanning empire.

The United States is undoubtedly the most powerful single nation in history. It rose as a new country in 1776 to become so powerful that it unilaterally brought the “Pax Americana” to the world after 1945. The U.S. was instrumental in turning the tide of war in both world wars. The current period of general worldwide peace and prosperity traces directly to the United States’ military and diplomatic strength over the last 75 years.

The U.S. and Britain clearly show that God finally gave the promised blessings of Abraham to his descendants.

The Pilgrims had believed they were establishing a New Israel. What they did not realize is they had established a colony of the tribe of Manasseh—foretold to explode in riches, power and fame!

America and Britain are just two of the tribes of Israel. Read *America and Britain in Prophecy* at [rcg.org/aabibp](http://rcg.org/aabibp) to learn the identity of the others and what God has planned for them. □

■ Signing of the Mayflower Compact.

PAINTING: JEAN LEON GEROME FERRIS



# Keeping It Together

*Four Biblical Ways to Maintain COVID-Era Relationships*



“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:17).

BY NESTOR A. TORO

**C** OVID-19 LOCKDOWNS prompted us to reevaluate our relationships. Chances are, you said to yourself at some point during the time of the virus: “I should reach out more.”

The thought came as you were experiencing something kind of rare in your hectic pre-pandemic life: *free time*.

Fewer public distractions created a silver lining. During the lockdown,

you likely spent more quality time with your family. You paid more attention to your children. You called Mom regularly. You did activities with your siblings. You played games with your nieces and nephews over video calls. You reconnected with old friends on social media.

You checked to make sure everyone was OK. Throughout this whole ordeal, you suffered with those who suffered, especially if COVID-19 hit close to home.

A spark was lit. Old bonds were rebuilt and new ones established.

Arguably, we may have been more socially distanced from our loved ones *before* the coronavirus hit.

Pre-pandemic research backs this up. According to the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Two in five Americans report that they sometimes or always feel their social relationships are not meaningful, and one



“Getting into a pattern of recognizing others when they do something right is one of the most effective ways to ‘provoke’ people to be their best.”

in five say they feel lonely or socially isolated.”

HRSA reported that 43 percent of seniors feel regularly lonely, that seniors who described feeling this way have a 45 percent increase in mortality risk, and that loneliness is “more dangerous than obesity and as damaging to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.”

Similarly, a 2018 article in *The Lancet* journal reported isolation could result in people feeling “irritable, depressed and self-centered, and is associated with a 26% increase in the risk of premature mortality.”

Now that restrictions are loosening, people are reverting to their usual socially disconnected ways. Some jobs are expecting overtime work to compensate for production loss during the closures. Any closeness you established in your relationships could begin to fade.

How can you ensure you do not undo those bonds?

The Bible is a book about relationships. It provides clear principles on

how to have a good relationship with God, with fellow human beings, and with family.

One verse proves this in Proverbs 17: “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (vs. 17). As the “going got tough” during the height of the pandemic, we were pressed to practice brotherhood in many cases.

The answers to keeping the fire going in your most important relationships long pre-date the pandemic and are available to you. Following are four simple and effective biblical actions to help you preserve that closeness as everyone scatters back to the busyness of post-COVID-lockdown life.

### Be a Communicator

The first principle is found in Hebrews 13: “But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (vs. 16).

Two notable terms in this verse are “forget” and “sacrifice.”

The word “forget” in the original Greek means “to lose out of mind; by

implication to neglect.” This proves that being a communicator involves not being derelict in your duty to connect with your loved ones. Busyness may have seemed a reasonable excuse in the past, but it is not enough by the Bible’s standard.

Years ago, there was a news story about an 86-year-old man who traversed the streets of Covina, California, carrying a wooden sign attached to his walker that read, “Call your mother, she worries.”

People who saw him felt convicted. In the *CBS Los Angeles* story, the elderly man shared their responses: “I’m going to call her now”...“I’ll call her later”...“I want a picture of that to show my son or daughter.” Deep inside, they knew to do better.

If you tend to forget, develop your own version of that 86-year-old man’s sign. Create compelling reminders. Build a habit of scheduling time to communicate with family and friends. Preferably, schedule time for them first, before you schedule time to communicate with other acquaintances. Why not set a weekly alarm on Sundays to call someone who would love to hear from you? When something or someone else threatens to commandeer that time, learn to say, “Sorry, I am already committed, could we try a different time?”

If you wait until you *remember* to reach out, it will be easier to “lose out of mind” and neglect your duty to communicate.

Developing this habit of frequent contact may not be easy if you tend to be reserved. Or perhaps you are just a highly productive individual with loads of responsibilities. That is where the other word of interest in Hebrews 13:16 comes in: “sacrifice.”

The Greek word translated sacrifice can mean “victim,” and comes from a root word that means to “blow hard...kill, slay.”

In other words, you should be willing to figuratively “kill yourself” striving to reach out to others. God understands how challenging making time to communicate can be in our hectic schedules. Be assured that

your efforts will not go unnoticed. God emphasizes He is “well pleased” with those who do so.

Know as well that the more you reach out, the easier it gets. If time is of the essence, you may find that the first few conversations are longer, but as you continue in regular communication, they may become more manageable. With time, they will also feel less and less like a “sacrifice” as you experience the joy that comes from having closer relationships with those who are important to your life.

### Be an Encourager

The second biblical principle addresses *what* to speak about. It is found a few pages earlier in the same book. Hebrews 10:24 states, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works...”

Getting into a pattern of recognizing others when they do something right is one of the most effective ways to “provoke” people to be their best.

If you learn to do this, you will be an encourager. We all love to talk with people who know how to encourage because we were designed to receive sincere praise from others: “As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise” (Prov. 27:21).

Someone who understood well the power of praise was Dale Carnegie. In his bestseller *How to Win Friends and Influence People* he wrote, “Praise the slightest improvement and praise every improvement. Be hearty in your approbation and lavish in your praise.”

Sincere praise is not flattery. Flattery inflates and is driven by ulterior motives. Real praise involves recognizing someone else’s efforts and encourages them to keep going.

People are praise-deprived these days. Cutthroat politics, news media and competition has worsened an already negative environment. The uplifting power of “Likes” on Facebook, as well as the devastating effect of the lack thereof, shows how desperate people have become for positive feedback.

As you approach a conversation with those you care about, ask your-

self, what do they do well? What are their strengths? At a natural point, bring those things up. Even simple things: a warm smile, a good listener, a nice clothing choice.

They will appreciate it, and your conversations will be more rewarding. Lifting others through sincere praise can have the same effect as giving a thoughtful gift, yet it costs nothing!

### Be a Peacemaker

The book of II Timothy states, “A servant of the Lord must not argue. Instead, he must be kind to everyone, teachable, willing to suffer wrong, and gentle when refuting opponents...” (2:24-25, International Standard Version).

Few things can turn off the spark of a good relationship like arguing. Arguing never, *ever* does any good.

When disagreements arise—and it happens in the best families as you interact more—look for solutions, not merely to win an argument. A conversation between family or friends should never devolve into a debate.

Otherwise you may find yourself isolated, left telling yourself, *yeah, but I was right*. The last thing you should ever seek is to blow an opportunity to build a relationship just for the sake of being “right.”

Verse 23 gives the secret to stop any argument before it starts: “Do not have anything to do with foolish and stupid discussions, because you know they breed arguments” (ISV). This is God’s straightforward instruction on the subject. Bear in mind that the verse is meant to help you discern what subjects to avoid—not a license to tell anyone that you perceive their viewpoint is foolish or stupid. It does not go well if you take that approach.

So far, we have looked at techniques to be a *peacekeeper*—preserving peace by avoiding arguments. Being a *peacemaker* requires *manufacturing* peace when someone wants to argue.

To do so, here is another powerful Bible secret: “A soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Prov. 15:1). Apply that as you handle any tense conversation.

### Be an Inspiration

The fourth biblical principle for maintaining relationships is found in Matthew 5: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (vs. 16).

You may be familiar with the sentiment, “actions speak louder than words.” Jesus Christ implied this in His statement in the famous Sermon on the Mount. Later in the same message, He added, “Therefore all things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (7:12).

No one will reach out? You reach out anyway. Everyone is too busy? So are you, but still make time for these things. No one will encourage and everyone wants to be negative? You step out and dare to make the difference. Conversations tend to turn pessimistic? Be the one who always finds a way to turn them positive.

If you do these things, others may pick up on them and do them too. But someone must take the lead.

### Keep the Spark Alive

The pandemic may have turned our lives upside down, but it also provided motivation to start working on our relationships. Those precious bonds are invaluable in overcoming the feeling of anxiety that can overtake us when we look at today’s frightening world conditions.

You lit the spark—but it will take effort to keep the fire going! It can go out again if you let up. Today’s society is wired for social isolation and we must fight it.

Now you have four ways to continue building on the progress you have made. It is free knowledge that has been sitting right there in our Bibles all along, and it will help us preserve our most special relationships through *any* tough time, not just the COVID-19 crisis.

No matter what, make Proverbs 17:17 your new way of life. Be the friend who “loves at all times” and a brother who was “born for adversity.” □



# The Christmas Tree: *Behind the Rise of a Holiday Icon*

Most cannot picture a holiday season without decorating an evergreen in their living rooms. Yet few know why this practice is so popular.

BY RICHARD O. LEE

**I**N THE CRISP evening air, a military band plays along with a chorus of local singers. Everyone in the large crowd has their eyes fixed on the huge evergreen tree prominently displayed before them. The event is the lighting of the National Christmas Tree, an annual celebration in the United States capital of Washington.

With all the pageantry, music, and civic dignitaries, the countdown to the lighting of the giant tree is a celebration for citizens, rich and poor, young and old.

The ceremony began nearly 97 years ago when President Calvin Coolidge lit a 48-foot balsam fir from Vermont. On that Christmas Eve in 1923, the tree lit up with 2,500 red, white and green electric bulbs. The tree lighting ceremony remains a beloved holiday tradition. But it has not always been this way.

For many today, it would be hard to imagine winter holidays without an evergreen in their living room, brightly decorated with lights and colorful ornaments. The assumption would be that the Christmas tree has always been venerated in the United States. But the surprising truth is that through most of U.S. history this was not the case. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and many early American leaders never put up Christmas trees in the nation's capital. President Theodore Roosevelt, an avid outdoorsman and environmentalist, banned Christmas trees from the White House during his presidency, fearing it would contribute to deforestation. Every Christmas day during Abraham Lincoln's administration was just a normal workday.

## What Changed?

The answer comes from across the Atlantic Ocean in Britain. The most iconic symbol of Christmas was not a part of English tradition until around the 1840s. This changed when German Prince Albert married Queen Victoria in 1840. In 1846, Queen Victoria and her husband were seen in a sketch standing with their children around a Christmas tree at Windsor Castle, which appeared in the *Illustrated London News*.

Up until that point, decorating fir trees was an obscure custom practiced in a few Germanic countries. During the queen's lifetime, English Puritans condemned the practice and preached against "the heathen traditions" of merrymaking, singing carols, and decorating trees.

Unlike the previous royal family, Queen Victoria was extremely popular in Britain. What she did in her home immediately became fashionable in Britain—but also with fashion-conscious women in American society. Soon after Victoria started celebrating with fir trees as a favor to her German husband, ordinary citizens followed suit. Given the family-focused culture of the era, it did not take long before Christmas trees became a key component of holiday celebrations for working-class families.

Still, through much of the 19th century, decorating trees in December was frowned upon in the U.S. Puritan leaders throughout New England banned the tree altogether, considering it a symbol of "heathen idolatry."

It was not until after a large influx of German and Irish immigrants in the late 19th century that Puritan influence waned. Eventually, similar to what happened in England, American civic leaders, artists and authors played a role in changing how citizens viewed the custom.

The image of a happy working-class family exchanging gifts around a tree became a popular theme. This family-oriented symbolism replaced images of more decadent Christmas customs, such as binge drinking and partying. The theme of family gathering around the tree was further pushed into popular thinking by Clement Moore's poem "'Twas the Night Before Christmas." Though the poem was written in the early 1800s, it swelled in popularity over time.

According to the White House Historical Association, President Benjamin Harrison was the first president to set up an indoor Christmas tree for his family and visitors to enjoy, in 1889. Presidents Grant and Cleveland, both with young children,

had Christmas trees in the White House. Eventually President Coolidge started the National Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony on the White House lawn in 1923. There have been Christmas trees in and around the White House ever since.

The Christmas tree has come a long way since its obscure beginnings. Today, in the U.S. alone, 30 million trees are sold annually with an additional 10 million artificial ones sold. Every year, 350 million

**“Even long before Christianity, people used evergreen plants to decorate their homes to celebrate the winter solstice.”**

Christmas trees are grown on farms in the United States, a \$1.2 billion industry.

#### **Ancient Origins**

The history of the tree predates modern history—its roots lie in ancient practices and rituals.

The modern Christmas tree we are familiar with originated in Germany. Records indicate that by 1605, citizens of Strasburg set up fir trees in the parlors of their homes—a practice that was passed down from the Romans, who got it from the Babylonians and the Egyptians.

Even long before Christianity, people used evergreen plants to decorate their homes to celebrate the winter solstice. These evergreen plants served as a reminder of their belief that the sun god, who was "weakened" during the winter, would eventually regain his strength in the springtime.

The Celts in northern Europe decorated their druid temples with evergreen boughs, and the Vikings farther north thought evergreens were the plants of the god of light and peace. Likewise, the Romans marked the winter solstice with a feast called Saturnalia in honor of Saturn, the god of agriculture. They decorated their homes and temples with evergreen boughs in observance of the occasion.

Venerating evergreen trees can further be traced back to ancient Babylon. Historian William S. Walsh wrote in his book *Curiosities of Popular Customs*: "An old Babylonish fable told of an evergreen tree which sprang out of a dead tree stump. The old stump symbolized the dead Nimrod, the new evergreen tree symbolized that Nimrod had come to life again in Tammuz! Among the Druids the oak was sacred, among the Egyptians it was the palm, and in Rome it was the fir, which was decorated with red berries during the Saturnalia!" (emphasis added).

Nimrod is a figure written about in the Bible whose subjects worshipped him instead of God. He, along with Tammuz—a false god—are both condemned in the scriptures. Christmas' origins are in worship rites for these two figures!

#### **What Else Does the Bible Say?**

Many believe they are honoring the birth of Jesus Christ by keeping their beloved family tradition of decorating the Christmas tree. The problem is this practice is not endorsed by the God of the Bible. It is just the opposite. There are clear instructions *against* cutting down and decorating evergreen trees.

In Jeremiah 10:2-6, there are instructions that begin saying *not* to

# Christmas Tree Sales



SOURCE: NATIONAL CHRISTMAS TREE ASSOCIATION  
 GRAPHIC: SARAH O. VIDAL

up of pagan (Christmas) trees with this plain Bible command! This is not a harmless, innocent family tradition to God.

Isaiah 9:16 states: “For the leaders of this people cause them to err.” History has proven this time and again when it comes to Christmas tree displays. What started as a virtually unknown or even unusual practice among the people took off in England and America when the leaders began to take part.

This is proof that leaders can influence what we think and do. Artists, authors, presidents, royalty and even Bible experts—who should know better—can shape thinking and promote wrong cultural traditions in society. Succeeding generations, ignorant of the past, follow these traditions, thinking they have been around forever. Eventually, these practices become so ingrained that even plain facts—in this case of the Christmas tree’s true, PAGAN roots—cannot shake them.

Now that you know the *truth* of the origin of the Christmas tree, including what the Bible says about the forbidden custom, does it change your view? Cherished family traditions and the expectations of our society must not stand in the way of God’s clear instructions!

learn the way of the heathen (or unbelievers of God). The verses specifically prohibit “cutting a tree out of the forest” and “deck[ing] it with silver and with gold,” and “fasten[ing] it with nails and with hammers that it move not.” God then mocks these *idols* saying they stand upright “but speak not” and must be

carried “because they cannot go.” He says not to be afraid of this false god that can neither do good nor evil.

It is impossible not to recognize this plain description as a modern Christmas tree. God directly refers to it as “the way of the heathen.”

Take this verse for exactly what it says. God condemns the putting

A loving God allows people to make their own decisions. We are free to obey or disobey. Yet understand that both decisions come with significant consequences.

If you are interested in learning more, we recommend you read our booklet *The True Origin of Christmas*, available for free at [rcg.org/ttooc](http://rcg.org/ttooc). □

## PERSONAL

Continued from page 2

can earn a living—you have become a partner with God! There is no other way to view or understand this. Admit to yourself that, without God's role and help in earning a living, it would be impossible to produce anything! God knows this and has chosen to make a special arrangement with you. His Word describes it.

God lays prior claim to the first 10 percent of everything that people earn as income. This is called the *tithe*, and it means "tenth." You may be familiar with the term. To tithe, or to be a tithepayer, means the same as to "tenth" or to be a "tenthpayer."

The King James Version of the Bible was translated over 400 years ago—in 1611. At that time, the word *tithe* was commonly used to mean *tenth*. People have long understood that to tithe is to pay a tenth of one's income. We will thoroughly explore to whom this tenth was paid in the Old Testament, and to whom it is paid today.

There are small and large points within God's Law. Some commands carry more weight than others. When speaking of some lesser points within God's Law, Christ said in Matthew 5:19 that, "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Let us now examine an important verse about tithing. Christ said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these [the weightier matters] ought you to have done, and not to leave the other [tithing conscientiously] undone" (Matt. 23:23). God also inspired Luke to record the same account—and to repeat the same command (11:42).

Love, mercy and faith are indeed weighty matters within the overall Law of God. Christ acknowledges this. However, He also explains that tithing should not be something that people "leave undone." The argument is often raised that tithing is not important—that it is *least* among God's laws. This verse does not actually say that it is "least" among God's commands. Matthew 5:19 merely means that, *if it were*, it is still required to be kept today by all who value the commands of God!

Any who are learning the truth of God's tithing laws must pay His tithe—once it is clear where His chosen representatives are working! Tithing is the

**“Everything  
you take for  
granted as  
yours really  
belongs to God!  
But, through  
His mercy, He  
has allowed  
man to use His  
planet and its  
resources.”**

manner in which He finances the Work His true servants perform. Only after God's tithe has been paid does God give the rest of one's income back to the tithepayer. God's generosity and love for those who are His children is why He gives nine-tenths of what He owns to the one faithful in tithe-paying. In other words, we are not giving God *one-tenth* of what is *ours*. God is giving us *nine-tenths* of what is *His*!

God created all things (Gen. 1:1). He worked for six days, perfecting every detail of His Creation. He designed, made, maintained and nourished everything He made. This includes not only all the materials and riches in the world, but also all mankind and animals.

Everything you take for granted as yours really belongs to God! But, through His mercy, He has allowed man to use *His* planet and its resources. He has allowed us to be *His* stewards, and all will one day give account of how we managed what was not ours—but *His*! In return, God asks that we be honorable stewards—and not steal from Him. Yet many routinely do.

How?

Notice: "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me. But you say, Wherein have we robbed You? *In tithes and offerings*. You are cursed...for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring you all the tithes into the storehouse...and prove Me now... if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Mal. 3:8-10).

God only asks for 10 percent of what one makes (plus some "offerings")—and lets you keep the remaining 90 percent, although that still belongs to Him! God challenges skeptics to "prove" His promise of wonderfully blessing the tithepayer.

Some may argue, "But I can't afford to tithe."

But God says otherwise. You cannot afford NOT to tithe! God blesses generous givers (Prov. 11:25; 22:9; II Cor. 9:7), and no one else has the power to give as God does. While many seek ways to stretch their income, the most unlikely way is the *only* method to do so.

By simply giving back to God a small portion of what is actually His, God agrees to bless you more than you can ever hope! (To learn more about God's guidelines for money management and His promises to you, read our booklet *Taking Charge of Your Finances* available for free at [rcg.org/tcoyf](http://rcg.org/tcoyf).)

Thousands are learning that God's tithing system WORKS. This system is effective and has been in force for millennia. Let God's promise work for you today. Do not wait until financial ruin strikes—apply the principles found in this important booklet, turn the tide of debt, take charge of your finances, and find true economic success! □

## INTERNATIONAL

**More than 1 Billion People Face Displacement by 2050**

**L**ondon (Reuters) – Rapid population growth, lack of access to food and water and increased exposure to natural disasters mean more than 1 billion people face being displaced by 2050, according to a new analysis of global ecological threats.

Compiled by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), a think-tank that produces annual terrorism and peace indexes, the Ecological Threat Register uses data from the United Nations and other sources to assess eight ecological threats and predict which countries and regions are most at risk.

With the world's population forecast to rise to nearly 10 billion by 2050, intensifying the scramble for resources and fueling conflict, the research shows as many as 1.2 billion people living in vulnerable areas of sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia

and the Middle East may be forced to migrate by 2050.

By comparison, ecological factors and conflict led to the displacement of some 30 million people in 2019, the report said.

“This will have huge social and political impacts, not just in the developing world, but also in the developed, as mass displacement will lead to larger refugee flows to the most developed countries,” said Steve Killelea, IEP's founder.

The register groups the threats into two broad categories: food insecurity, water scarcity and population growth in one; and natural disasters including floods, droughts and cyclones in the other.

The result is an analysis assessing how many threats each of some 150 countries faces and their capacity to withstand them.

While some, such as India and China, are most threatened by water scarcity in the coming decades, others like Pakistan, Iran, Mozambique, Kenya and Madagascar face a toxic combination of threats, as well as a diminishing ability to deal with them.

“These countries are broadly stable now but have high exposure to ecological threats and low and deteriorating ‘positive peace,’ which means they are at higher risk of future collapse,” the 90-page analysis found.

Mr. Killelea said the world now has 60 percent less fresh water available than it did 50 years ago, while demand for food is forecast to rise by 50 percent in the next 30 years, driven in large part by the expansion of the middle class in Asia.

Those factors, combined with natural disasters, mean even stable states are vulnerable by 2050. □



■ Caked mud surrounds a small patch of water as a region deals with a prolonged drought at a dam near Bulawayo, Zimbabwe (Jan. 18, 2020).

PHOTO: REUTERS/PHILIMON BULAWAYO

## On 75th Anniversary of UN, Its Chief Appeals for Peace

**B**orn out of World War II's devastation to prevent the scourge of conflict, the United Nations marked its 75th anniversary on September 21 with an appeal from Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to preserve the longest period in modern history without a military confrontation between the world's most powerful nations.

The UN chief told the mainly virtual official commemoration that "it took two world wars, millions of deaths and the horrors of the Holocaust for world leaders to commit to international cooperation and the rule of law," and that commitment produced results.

"A Third World War—which so many had feared—has been avoided," Mr. Guterres said. "This is a major achievement of which member states can be proud—and which we must all strive to preserve."

His appeal came at an inflection point in history, as the United Nations navigates a polarized world facing a pandemic, regional conflicts, a shrinking economy, growing inequality and escalating U.S.-China tensions.

Mr. Guterres cited other major UN achievements over 75 years: peace treaties and peacekeeping missions, decolonization, setting human rights standards, "the triumph over apartheid" in South Africa, eradication of diseases, a steady reduction in hunger, development of international law and landmark pacts to protect the environment.

But today, he warned, "biodiversity is collapsing, poverty is rising, hatred is spreading, geopolitical tensions are escalating, nuclear weapons remain on hair-trigger alert." What is more, new technologies have produced opportunities "but also exposed new threats."

In an *AP* interview in June, Mr. Guterres said the UN's biggest failing was its inability to prevent medium and small conflicts.



■ President Harry Truman makes a formal welcoming speech to members of the UN General Assembly at its opening session in New York City (Oct. 23, 1946).

PHOTO: AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Two years ago, Mr. Guterres noted that the number of countries involved in "violent conflicts" was the highest in 30 years. He also stated that the number of people killed in conflicts has risen tenfold since 2005.

Appealing for the world's nations and peoples to work together, Mr. Guterres said, "the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the world's fragilities" which can only be addressed together.

"Today we have a surplus of multilateral challenges and a deficit of multilateral solutions," the secretary-general said.

While the UN has been criticized for spewing out billions of words and achieving scant results on its primary mission of ensuring global peace, it nonetheless remains the one place that its 193 member nations can meet to talk.

The United Nations marked its actual 75th anniversary—the signing of the UN Charter in San Francisco on June 26, 1945, by delegates from about 50 countries—on that date this year at

an event scaled down because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The mainly virtual official commemoration on September 21 was not a celebration. It included some grim video footage of the crises and conflicts during the UN's history, as well as high points and successes.

In an interview in 2018, the secretary-general summarized the 21st-century complexities peacekeepers face: "Peacekeeping was conceived, as the name indicates, to keep the peace... so the idea is, let's have a force of the UN—blue helmets—that is not supposed to fight. The peacekeepers were supposed to preserve the stability of a country that has reached peace. Now the truth is that most of the peacekeeping operations today are taking place where there is no peace to keep."

Our article "When There Is 'No Peace to Keep'" ([rcg.org/realtruth](http://rcg.org/realtruth)) provides a harrowing picture of what the UN leader meant by those words, and describes a way real and lasting world peace *can* be accomplished. □



# Should You Celebrate Thanksgiving?

**F**or many, the yearly celebration of giving thanks is reduced to gorging on a big meal, excessive drinking or snoozing in front of a football game. For others, Black Friday—a day of frenzied shopping—overshadows the holiday altogether.

Given the commercialism and excess, the original meaning of Thanksgiving can easily be lost for Americans and Canadians.

Our article “Should You Celebrate Thanksgiving Day?” provides historical and biblical insight into this holiday that can help you better appreciate everything you have.

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