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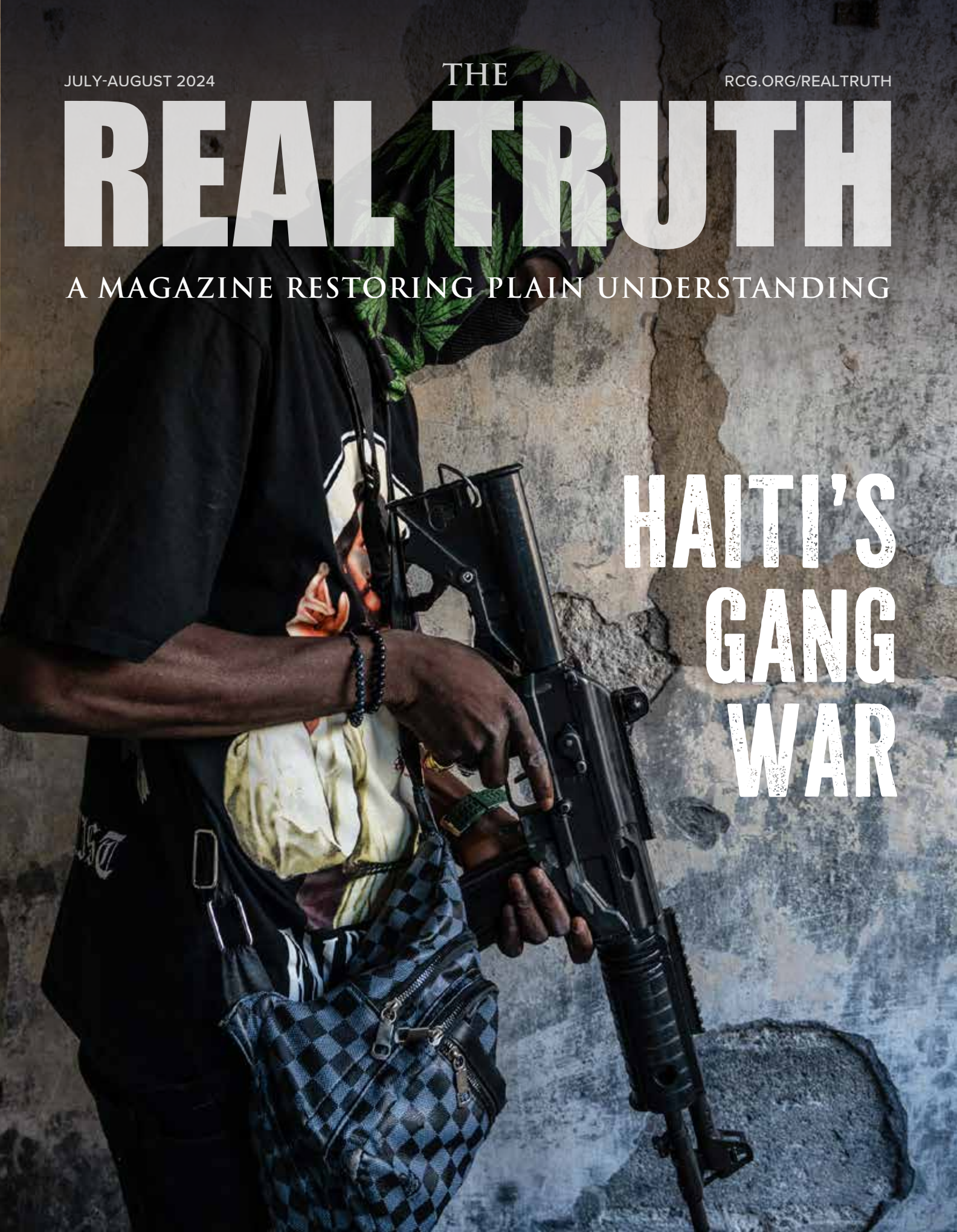
THE

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REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

HAITI'S
GANG
WAR





Rolling green fields near Paris, France (Nov. 28, 2022).

GETTY IMAGES

Does God Care How We Grow Our Food?

The Bible provides solutions to today's farming problems in verses almost no one knows.

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Front Cover: An armed gang member in Port-au-Prince, Haiti (Feb. 22, 2024).

GILES CLARKE/GETTY IMAGES

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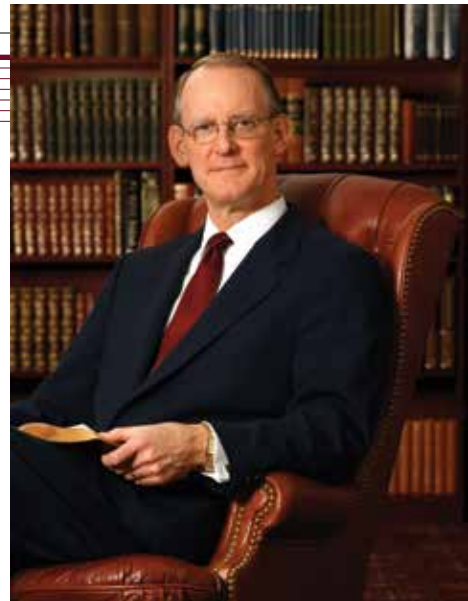
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Pack



D-Day 80 Years Later

JUNE 6 marked the 80th anniversary of D-Day, when Allied forces stormed northern France, turning the tide of World War II. Defeat would have meant a very different world, formed in the image of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich.

While everyone alive has been indirectly affected by that day in 1944, many of my generation have family who fought in what was the deadliest war ever waged. My father served as a U.S. Army officer and pilot on the European front. He survived heavy enemy fire and three aircraft crashes. His brother—my Uncle Bill—was a Navy pilot in the same war. He was at Pearl Harbor during the December 7, 1941, attack—a day he was understandably reluctant to talk to his young nephew about. He attained the rank of Navy captain and commanded two or three United States naval air stations. Another uncle, my mother's brother, also served in the Signal Corp during WWII.

Had these men—and countless others—not demonstrated the courage and toughness necessary to prevail, freedom as we know it would not exist. Yet war was *never* God's intent for humanity. He is five times specifically called the "God of PEACE" (Rom. 15:33, 16:20; Phil. 4:9; I Thes. 5:23; Heb. 13:20)! He *hates* bloodshed, but is ironically also a "man of war" (Ex. 15:3), with the power to ultimately eliminate those who would jeopardize peace for the rest of mankind.

Everywhere Jesus Christ went, He preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14). *Gospel* simply means "good news." He taught true Christians to pray: "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). This "will" includes *peace* only available in a world-ruling Kingdom of God that *will not permit* war.

For years, I conducted Sabbath services in New York City. The location was across the street from the United Nations building where a statue of a sword being forged into a plowshare sat outside. The sculptor who formed it was guided by Isaiah 2:2-4:

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

The concept of an implement of destruction being repurposed into a useful tool is the antithesis of



Top, American troops and equipment land on Omaha beach on the Northern coast of France (June 7, 1944). Bottom, a memorial to those who lost their lives during the D-Day landings on the beaches of Normandy in World War II.

TOP, FOX PHOTOS/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM, JOHN ELK/GETTY IMAGES

where the world is headed today. War in simplest terms involves human beings killing other human beings—conflict hated by the God who plainly commanded, “You shall not kill” (Ex. 20:13). Only *He* can permanently end the bloodshed and heartache that has plagued mankind for nearly 6,000 years.

World War I saw more than 15 million deaths and was called “the war to end all wars.” Yet World War II was fought mere decades later and claimed over *70 million* lives! Many more wars have been fought since, with the world now teetering on the brink of nuclear holocaust. Tensions between the world’s greatest nuclear powers are higher than ever, and only increasing. Without God’s intervention, the slightest miscalculation or overreach could trigger an attack and counterattack that would make the combined casualties of World War I and World War II seem insignificant. These are the darkest days of mankind’s existence.

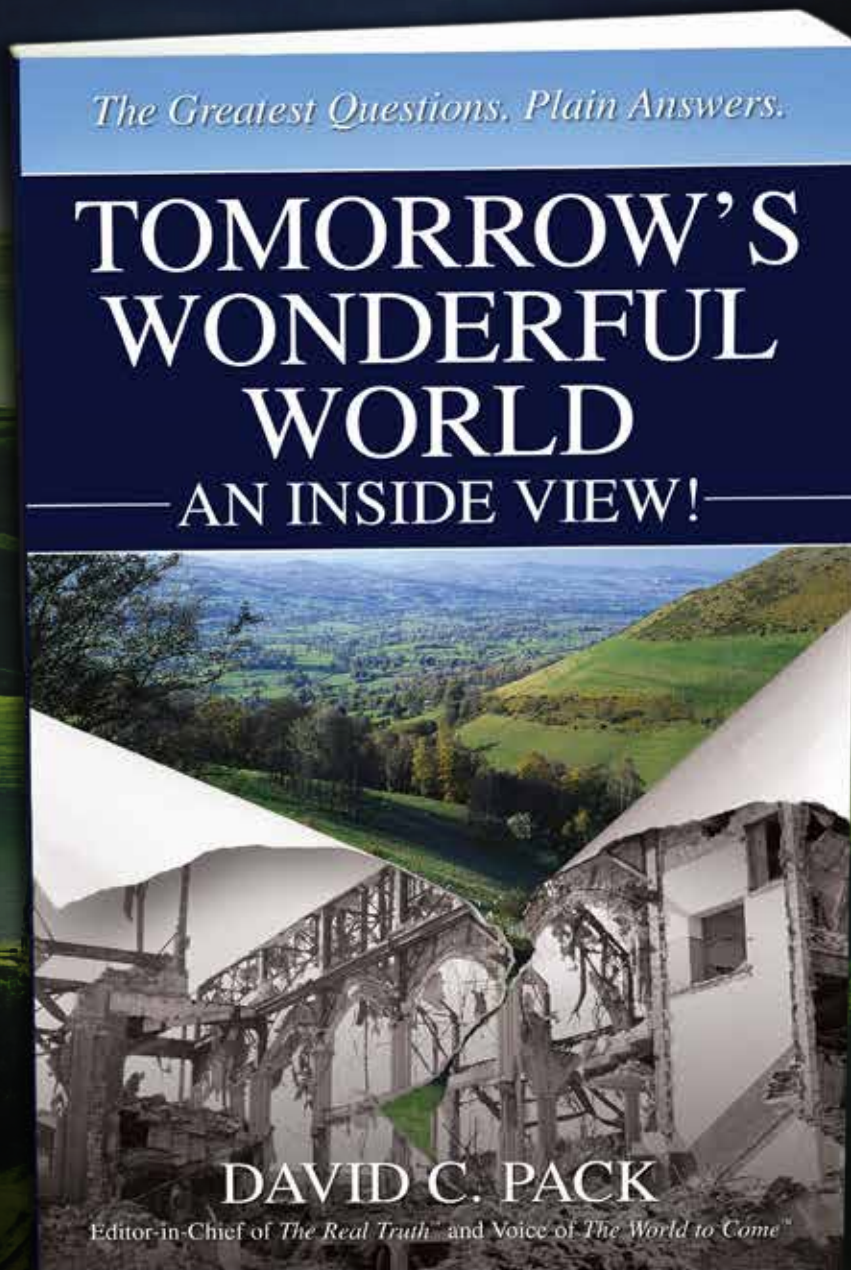
But understand! The World War III scenarios humanity is careening toward will not occur. God will intervene before it is too late.

Here is one more passage to meditate on as you think back to the events of June 6, 1944, and watch the near-daily nuclear threat escalation now besieging the world. Seven chapters later in the same book, Isaiah recorded this of God’s Kingdom: “Of the increase of His government and **PEACE** there shall be no end” (9:7).

Far more than just a pipe dream, everlasting peace **WILL COME!** This Kingdom will be established “with *judgment* and with *justice* from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (vs. 7). Mankind will *never again* learn war.

Come to grips with the **GOOD NEWS** of God’s coming Kingdom. Pray more fervently for God’s Kingdom to come and His will to be done on Earth—when He will **END WAR** by personally taking control of world affairs! □

Where Will We Be in 2050?



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

HAITI

HAITI'S GANG WAR

The Caribbean nation has seen no end of tragedy in recent years. What's behind its latest upheaval?

BY GARRICK R. OXLEY



THE PEOPLE of Haiti have endured many hardships. Look at what the nation has gone through in just the last two decades: Major earthquakes in 2010 and 2021 that killed hundreds of thousands. A cholera outbreak in 2010 with over 800,000 reported cases and almost 10,000 deaths. Hurricane Matthew in 2016 devastated the land and left nearly 500 people dead. Through it all, the nation's residents have resiliently held on.

Today, natural disasters and disease epidemics are not the Caribbean nation's biggest problems—human conflicts are. Its latest crisis? An outbreak of violence that has destabilized the nation.



Gang leader Jimmy 'Barbecue' Cherizier with G-9 federation gang members in the Delmas 3 area in Port-au-Prince, Haiti (Feb. 22, 2024).

GILES CLARKE/GETTY IMAGES

It can be easy to blame Haiti's current problems on the nation's long-standing poverty, the legacy of colonialism, widespread deforestation and European and U.S. interference. These may all play a factor. But the immediate cause is something else: Violent street gangs.

Who are these gangs? *The New York Times* reported: "Experts estimate that up to 200 gangs operate in Haiti, about 20 of them in Port-au-Prince. They range from small groups of a few dozen young men who share pistols to crews of roughly 1,500 men with weekly

salaries and automatic weapons who belong to hierarchal organizations with bosses. Two main gang federations, G-Pep and the G-9 Family, control many of the poorest neighborhoods in the capital. The criminal groups and their allies sometimes collude, but more often clash."

The article continued, "The gangs are...hoping to set up a governing council to rule the country, and they want to help pick its members so they can exert control, said Robert Muggah, who researches Haiti for various U.N. agencies."

At the end of February, coordinated gang attacks saw gunmen taking control of police stations, opening fire on the main international airport that remained closed for nearly three months and storming Haiti's two biggest prisons. At least 80 percent of Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, is currently under gang control. The conflict has destabilized the nation, leading to a state of emergency being declared, hundreds of thousands of citizens displaced and the prime minister being forced to resign, meaning leaders have had to form a new government while the violence rages on.

"The most difficult time of our life"

In May, hundreds of people packed into a sweltering church in Haiti's capital to mourn Judes Montis, a mission director killed by gang members who also fatally shot an American couple that worked with him.

Wails filled the crowded church during the early morning service as tears streamed down the face of Montis' wife. The service also honored the lives of Davy and Natalie Lloyd, a married couple in their early 20s who were with Montis when gunmen ambushed them as they left a youth group activity held at a local church. Montis, 47, leaves behind a wife, two children, ages 2 and 6, and a brother who was present the night that the killings occurred.

"We'll never forget you or the path you created for others!" cried out one mourner as the crowd dressed in black and white made its way from the church to the cemetery.

The service was held just days after the three were killed in a gang-controlled area in a northern part of Port-au-Prince where Montis worked as the local director of the Oklahoma-based Missions in Haiti, a religious organization founded by David and Alicia Lloyd, Davy Lloyd's parents. "We are facing the most difficult time of our life," Missions in Haiti said in a Facebook post. "Thank you for all your prayers and support."

Sadly, these deaths are only the smallest thumbnail of Haiti's tragedy.

"I am appalled by the staggering and worsening level of gang violence," United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in January. "Gang killings, kidnappings and sexual violence, notably against women and young girls, among other abuses, continue with widespread impunity."

In March, the UN human rights office reported that gang violence had killed over 1,500 people so far in 2024, while dozens had been lynched, stoned or burned alive by so-called self-defense brigades.

A June report from the UN migration agency found that nearly 580,000 people had been displaced by gang violence. The International Organization for Migration said the displacement of more than half a million is mainly due to people fleeing the capital of Port-au-Prince for other provinces that lack the resources to support them.

"Nearly all those internally displaced are currently hosted by communities already struggling with overburdened social services and poor infrastructure, raising further concerns about tensions with the potential to spark further violence," the report said.

Marie Jean, 49, and her two children were displaced from their Port-au-Prince home after a gang killed her husband in February. She is now sheltered with her children at a public school.

"I lived in a comfortable home that my husband worked hard to build," Mrs. Jean told *The Associated Press*. "Now I'm living in a situation that's inhuman."

Juste Dorville, 39, is also staying at a public school with her 12-year-old daughter and boyfriend as gunshots are heard constantly in the area. "Every day we're hoping that we survive," she said.

"This violence is traumatizing"

As the conflict intensifies, Haiti's children are being recruited into gangs, with boys used as lookouts to help with kidnappings and robberies and girls used to do housework or as spies. Those who try to escape face execution, according to the UN.

Haiti's kids have been emotionally scarred—both those recruited and those

who are simply trying to continue their lives as all this is happening.

At a school in northern Port-au-Prince, students often throw up or wet themselves when gunfire erupts outside their school. When they do, school director Roseline Ceragui Louis finds there is only one way to try to calm the children and keep them safe: getting them to lie on the classroom floor while she sings softly.

"You can't work in that environment," she said. "It's catastrophic. They're traumatized."

At a recent training session in a relatively safe section of Port-au-Prince, parents learned games to put a smile on their children's faces. The parents are often so distraught and discouraged they do not have energy to care for the kids, said Yasmine Deroche, who trains adults to help children overcome trauma inflicted by persistent gang violence.

As of May, some 900 schools had closed, affecting some 200,000 children.

More than 80 children were killed or wounded from January to March, a 55 percent increase over the last quarter of 2023 and "the most violent period for children in the country on record," said Save the Children, a U.S. nonprofit.

Ms. Luca said among those hurt were two boys struck in the head while walking to school and an 8-year-old girl playing inside her home when she was hit by a bullet that tore through her intestines, requiring emergency surgery.

"We are witnessing a lot of mental health issues," Mr. Maes said. "This violence is traumatizing."

Ms. Louis said her 10-year-old son would daily cry, "You're going to die!" as she headed to school, and the violence caused the boy to not eat, sleep or play. She remained resolute, knowing she had to be strong for him and her students. "My heart is destroyed, but my students see my smile every day," she added.

"I know that the crisis we're living through right now will have consequences that will take I don't know

how many years to sort out," Ms. Deroche said.

"I want to be part of the change"

On March 11, as heavily armed rivals unleashed fresh waves of attacks, including raids on police stations and the international airport, Prime Minister Ariel Henry announced his resignation. He had left Haiti to seek support for a Kenyan security mission and could not re-enter the country. A transition council set to work selecting a new leader for the nation.

Amid all the violence and chaos, some Haitians have held out hope for leaders to solve their problems. As thousands fled, one man, who was among a handful of people joining a demonstration in the capital, said he wanted to stay until a new government is installed: "I want to be part of the change."

In late May, Haiti's transition council tapped former Prime Minister Garry Conille, who briefly led the country over a decade ago, to return to the role, seeking to restore stability and regain control.

Left, Jimmy Cherizier, a former elite police officer known as Barbecue who now runs a gang federation, holds a press conference in the Delmas 6 neighborhood of Port-au-Prince, Haiti (March 5, 2024).

ODELYN JOSEPH/AP



Dr. Conille's extensive resume in development, working largely with the United Nations, is considered key to shoring up international support as Haiti prepares to launch a UN-backed security mission led by Kenya, though its deployment has faced hurdles.

The transition council, which holds some presidential powers, and its head, Edgard Leblanc, acting as a de facto president, are now tasked with holding elections before February 7, 2026, as laid out in Haiti's constitution. President Jovenel Moise, who appointed Mr. Henry, was assassinated in 2021. Haiti has not had a president since.

Dr. Conille was previously the prime minister for just seven months, resigning in February 2012 after losing the support of his cabinet and clashing with then-President Michel Martelly.

In June, Haiti's administration finished selecting new ministers for the new prime minister's cabinet. In a stark departure from the previous government, the cabinet trimmed the

number of ministers while replacing all who had served in Mr. Henry's cabinet. Many of the new picks were drawn from outside Haiti's political class altogether. In the new cabinet, the prime minister will also serve as interior minister, controlling much of Haiti's security forces as well as intelligence gathering.

Yet the roots of Haiti's gang violence are much too deep for the new government to quickly rip them out.

"Created a monster"

Back in the 1990s, the military overthrew Haiti's President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, causing an embargo to be imposed on Haiti. The embargo and international isolation devastated the country's small middle class, said Michael Deibert, author of the book

Notes From the Last Testament: The Struggle for Haiti. A U.S.-backed UN force pushed out the coup's leaders in 1994. Afterward, he added, a World Bank-sponsored structural adjustment led to the importation of rice from the U.S., which devastated rural agricultural society.

Boys without work flooded into Port-au-Prince and joined gangs. Politicians started using them as a cheap armed wing. Aristide, a priest-turned-politician, gained notoriety for using gangsters. In December 2001, police official Guy Philippe attacked the National Palace in an attempted coup and Aristide called on the gangsters to rise from the slums, according to Mr. Deibert.

"It wasn't the police defending their government's Palais National," remem-

Top right, a child watches from an opening in a security gate as residents flee their homes due to gang violence, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti (March 9, 2024). Bottom right, an inmate comes to the aid of a prisoner after armed gangs freed thousands from the National Penitentiary, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti (March 3, 2024).

ODELYN JOSEPH/AP



bered Mr. Deibert, who was there. “It was thousands of armed civilians.”

“Now, you have these different politicians that have been collaborating with these gangs for years, and...it blew up in their face,” he said.

Many of the gangs retreated in the face of MINUSTAH, a UN force established in 2004.

Rene Preval, the only democratically elected president to win and complete two terms in the country notorious for political upheaval, took a hard line on the gangs, giving them the choice to “disarm or be killed,” said Robert Fatton, professor of government and foreign affairs at the University of Virginia.

After Preval’s presidency, subsequent leaders were at best easy on the gangs and at worst tied to them, Mr. Fatton said. He added that every key actor in Haitian society had their gangs, noting that the current situation is not unique, but that it has deteriorated at a faster pace.

“For the last three years, the gangs started to gain autonomy. And now they are a power unto themselves,” he said, likening them to a “mini-Mafia state.”

“The autonomy of the gangs has reached a critical point. It is why they are capable now of imposing certain conditions on the government itself,” Mr. Fatton said. “Those who created the gangs created a monster. And now the monster may not be totally in charge, but it has the capacity to block any kind of solution.”

The gangs, along with many Haitian politicians and businesspeople, earn money from an illicit brew of “taxes” gleaned through extortion, kidnappings, and drugs and weapons smuggling. “There are all kinds [of] criminal networks in the area,” Mr. Fatton added.

After Preval, gangs, politicians and businesspeople extracted every dollar they could, said Francois Pierre-Louis, a professor of political science at Queens College at The City University of New York.

“It was open house for gangs, drugs, the country, basically...became a narco-

trafficking state,” he said. “Basically, the gangs got empowered, and not only they got empowered, they had state protection, politicians protecting them.”

Why So Much Suffering?

Examining the current crisis makes one thing clear: Haiti’s citizens have suffered a lot. There are millions of citizens who are not affiliated with a gang and just want to live a normal life.

The nation has been so afflicted over the years that people wonder if Haiti is being punished by God. Some have even claimed Haiti made a pact with Satan in its distant past, putting it under a divine curse. While the facts do not bear out that Haiti ever made such a deal, this does point to a bigger question: Can we glean anything from the Bible about Haiti’s struggles?

Jesus Christ, in a seldom-quoted account in Luke, addressed whether people going through horror and tragedy automatically means God is angry with them. Jesus knew this question would be on the minds of His audience in the first century, just as it is for us today.

Chapter 13 opens by describing a tragedy that had taken place back then: “About this time Jesus was informed that Pilate had murdered some people from Galilee as they were offering sacrifices at the Temple” (vs. 1, New Living Translation).

Continue reading: “And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose you that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, No: but, except you repent, you shall all likewise perish” (vs. 2-3). Like those in the first century, people today can jump to conclusions that those who go through tragedy are “sinners above all.” Yet Christ explained this is not the case.

He continued, “Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think you that they were sinners above all men that dwelled in Jerusalem? I tell you, No: but, except you repent, you shall all likewise perish” (vs. 4-5). Jesus made clear that whether someone was murdered or died in a

freak accident, neither outcome meant they were singled out by God. Everyone is in the same boat of needing to repent and seek God, else we will all, as Jesus said, “likewise perish.”


Today, violence and disasters are mainstays for those in Haiti but also people in other nations of the world. The victims do not deserve the blame. These problems come from a larger cause: Human beings following their own ways and forms of government instead of God’s.

Real Truth Editor-in-Chief David C. Pack addressed this in his booklet *Why Man Cannot Solve His Problems*: “Cut off from God by sin (Isa. 59:1-2; Jer. 5:25), mankind has believed the lies of the god of this world for 6,000 years. The core of God’s plan encompasses 7,000 years. Few have understood this. Many *have* correctly understood at least some of the verses describing Christ’s 1,000-year Reign. But they know *nothing* of the fact that God has allotted 6,000 years, or six millennial days of a ‘seven-day week,’ to man’s rule, prior to the seventh 1,000-year ‘day.’ We are near the end of the ‘sixth day.’”

Mr. Pack continued: “Man (under the invisible sway of Satan) has been given six days, or 6,000 years, to try his own ways, governments, religions, philosophies, value systems and forms of education. Under the influence of Satan, he has practiced sin and disobedience to God’s commands for nearly 6,000 years. He has then tried to treat all of the ill *effects* instead of treating the *cause*—breaking God’s commandments. God is letting man learn bitter lessons.”

Yet there is hope. Mr. Pack added: “Eventually, the entire world will learn the truth (Isa. 11:9), with all nations having access to the plan of salvation. But that time has not yet come for humanity at large.”

To learn much more about God’s Plan for all peoples and nations, as well as the bright, wonderful future for the people of Haiti, read *Why Man Cannot Solve His Problems* at rcg.org/uun and *Tomorrow’s Wonderful World – An Inside View!* at rcg.org/tww. □

A stylized illustration of a plant with several stems and leaves. The stems are in shades of green and blue, curving upwards and to the right. The leaves are also in these shades, some pointing upwards and others to the side. The background is a light green color.

Does God Care How We Grow Our Food?

The Bible provides solutions to today's farming problems in verses almost no one knows.

BY RAYMOND M. GARB

IN THE beginning, God created... gardening? While not the first thing God made, it was on His mind from the start. The famous Bible account of Creation reveals that He planted a garden eastward in Eden and placed the first two humans, Adam and then Eve, into it (Gen. 2:8). This was quite the garden. It contained “every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food” (vs. 9). God’s instructions to Adam were “to dress it and to keep it” (vs. 15).

Put simply, God intended the first two human beings to be gardeners.

Yet their charge to care for Eden did not last long. Instead, they chose to reject God’s guidance in their lives—including how to garden and grow food as God intended. They were then banished from the garden and cut off from the tree of life (3:6, 23-24). God sent them to work to grow food (vs. 19) and to till land outside the garden (vs. 23).

Since that time, humankind has learned to produce food its own way for millennia, with little to no thought about God’s first instructions. The results over the centuries since have been mixed. Too often, families, tribes and nations have struggled with periods of food scarcity and disease.

Today, modern advancements in agriculture allow relatively few farmers to efficiently produce food for billions, who often live in cities far removed from the farms and gardens that produce their food. Yet this ever-increasing productivity has come at a cost.

Even as farming has reached a larger scale, as well as become more intensive and efficient, the nutritional quality of the food it produces has deteriorated through soil depletion. This steady decline of nutrition has been monitored and recorded since the 1930s. In the years between 1975 and

1997, “average calcium levels in 12 fresh vegetables dropped 27 percent; iron levels 37 percent; vitamin A levels 21 percent, and vitamin C levels 30 percent” (*Scientific American*).

Vegetables simply no longer contain the same level of healthful vitamins and minerals they once did. The delicious, nutritious and flavorful food that our more recent forefathers may have experienced is now too often a memory of the past. The taste and quality of the typical fruits and veggies from grocery stores today can be hit or miss.

“The main culprit in this disturbing nutritional trend is soil depletion: Modern intensive agricultural methods have stripped increasing amounts of nutrients from the soil in which the food we eat grows,” *Scientific American* stated. Also to blame is modern agriculture’s focus on “practices designed to improve traits (size, growth rate, pest resistance) other than nutrition.”

It is easy to simply blame farmers for our poor nutrition. However, growers struggle with tight profit margins, trying to make ends meet with high production costs and low prices for their commodities. Sheer economic necessity dictates that farmers must produce high yields for the lowest cost possible. This means using chemical fertilizers that contain just a few major nutrients that drive plants to grow as fast as possible while ignoring all the other nutrients needed for healthy, balanced nutrition and good flavor. Soil is too often pushed beyond its reasonable limits to grow more and more without being rested—causing other nutrients and vital humus, the dark, decomposed organic material that feeds soil life, to be worn out.

Does the God who created soil, food and gardening care? Clearly, the answer is yes.

The Bible shows that God deeply cares about His Creation—much more than we may think. He cares about how our food is produced, the natural environment He created and even the plants and animals that provide our sustenance. Most importantly, God cares about the people who eat it, and

He cares just as much for the people who grow it.

The Bible’s little-known laws regarding food production prove God’s concern over these matters. In them, He goes far beyond His instructions to Adam and Eve about dressing and keeping. He outlines a series of agriculture principles that, if applied, would solve all the food-related problems seen today.

What God Intended

The first humans’ role as gardeners was much greater than simply sitting in the cool shade of trees and eating fruit. In the original Hebrew, to “dress” means to work or to serve. This suggests a bond of service to the environment. To “keep” means to guard, hedge about and protect. This implies protecting the garden by using it in a way that would preserve the environment.

But Adam and Eve’s responsibilities did not end there. Genesis 1 reveals that God intended humans to do much more than simply manage the garden. “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth...” (vs. 28).

God wanted them to have children who would help them in their role, which involved replenishing the entire Earth. This garden in Eden was an example of what human families could do with the rest of the planet.

The instructions continue in verse 28: “...and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (vs. 28). Their responsibilities were to extend over the entire globe and included sea life, birds and all other living creatures. Verse 29 shows even more: “And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.”

Understand. This means responsibility for all the plant life on Earth. With all types of animals and plants

included, the first humans were to look after not just a simple garden, but entire ecosystems.

God intended for Adam and Eve’s sphere of influence to gradually extend beyond Eden, yet the principle of dressing and keeping would still apply. Their job would always be to serve and protect the environment of Earth.

What should dressing and keeping look like today? Careful stewardship of whatever part of the planet we find ourselves in, whether it is a huge ranch, a backyard or even a flower box on our front porch.

Caring for the Land?

Adam and Eve’s rejection of God’s instruction set a precedent for thousands of years of ignorance in food production. While farmers do want to ensure their land continues producing, and some have learned basic principles of building healthy soil, the overall pattern has been of growing food in a way that takes from the Earth rather than cares for it.

Continuous cropping without balanced fertilizers has robbed the soil of vital nutrients for our food. Excessive tilling has depleted vital soil humus, which holds nutrients, houses soil life and helps hold soil structurally together. Without humus, soil becomes unstable, breaks down and can be blown away in dust storms or washed away in heavy rains.

During the last 160 years, 57.6 billion tons of topsoil have been lost by wind and water erosion from the once rich, fertile plains of the American Midwest. *The Smithsonian* magazine reported that “the erosion rate is estimated to be double what the U.S. Department of Agriculture says is sustainable. Future crop production could be severely limited if it continues.” Through abuse and neglect, much of the once legendary fertility of the American prairies has been literally blown and washed away. On average, farmed fields are 1.2 feet below the surrounding prairie, where growing plants protect the soil. To regenerate that lost topsoil would take around 1,000 years for every inch that has been lost!

All the washed-away topsoil pollutes rivers and the ocean. Excess nutrients from fertilizers that wash down the Mississippi River have created a dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico, which this year is roughly six thousand square miles in size.

But there is no need for ignorance. Through the Bible, God provided laws that teach the same essential principles He intended for Adam and Eve. If these were followed today, it would be possible to produce delicious-tasting and healthful food, care for the environment and protect family farms from economic hardship—all at the same time. These laws were given to ancient Israel for their national benefit but are just as relevant today.

You are likely familiar with the concept of a Sabbath rest, ceasing from work one day per week. Yet very few know God gave a sabbath command for the land as well, not just people. In Exodus 23, He told ancient Israel, “And six years you shall sow your land, and shall gather in the fruits thereof: but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie still; that the poor of your people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner you shall deal with your vineyard, and with your oliveyard” (vs. 10-11).

The land sabbath, coming once every seven years, ensures that people grow food while protecting the environment as God intended. Applying it would ensure that nothing like the destruction of the American Midwest would happen again.

During the land sabbath, land is rested by not working the soil—no plowing or tilling. Instead, the land is allowed to “rest and lie still.” This allows plants to grow vigorously and unhindered, covering the ground to protect it from erosion and adding plant material that will eventually decompose to build soil humus and encourage soil life (Lev. 25:5). Soil life then works on a microscopic level with particles making more nutrients available for future crops.

While the land rests, regrowth from the previous year’s grain harvest or

grapes from the vine are not to be harvested for sale: “That which grows of its own accord of your harvest you shall not reap, neither gather the grapes of your vine undressed [your unpruned vine]: for it is a year of rest unto the land” (Lev. 25:5).

Instead, farm livestock and wildlife are to be allowed to eat the extra plant growth: “And for your cattle, and for the beast that are in your land, shall all the increase thereof be meat [food]” (vs. 7).

Practical Application

The Restored Church of God, publisher of *The Real Truth*, has its World Headquarters Campus encompassing over 100 acres in Northeastern Ohio. I help coordinate a community garden program there for local members. We have the unique opportunity to apply God’s principles of environmental stewardship, following a pattern established in the Worldwide Church of God.

Last year, an area used to grow a community vegetable garden for six years rested for a land sabbath. A mixture of grasses and herbs was planted among our final vegetable crop in the sixth year and quickly sprang up among the still-growing vegetables. It was fascinating to watch this area during that seventh year. Creatures of all kinds were attracted to the area to feed. Insects like bees and butterflies gathered pollen and nectar from flowers, birds and small animals feasted on seeds, and deer grazed on plants. Small animals in turn became food for carnivores like foxes and hawks.

The land sabbath is a practical application of God’s instruction to dress and keep Creation. It teaches lessons in encouraging plant growth, building humus and soil life, soil and water conservation and the importance of providing habitat for wildlife.

At the same time, God is careful to ensure there is still plenty of food for humans during land sabbaths while crops are not being grown for food. He does that through a promise: “And if you shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? Behold, we shall not

sow, nor gather in our increase: then I will command My blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years” (Lev. 25:20-21). Farmers and growers do not struggle to survive during the seventh year—far from it. Their yields in the sixth year will be blessed by God to more than make up for what they lack. To ensure that happens, however, they must faithfully apply God’s commands.

Everyone Can Grow Food

An Eden-like picture of society benefiting from closeness to the land was once part of the American dream. According to *ushistory.org*, “Thomas Jefferson had once idealized America as a land of small, independent farmers who became educated enough to participate in a republic.” Today, Jefferson’s dream of the family farm as a basis for society has seemingly become just that—a dream. Now, only the most business-savvy survive.

In 1860, a full one-sixth of the American population were farmers, the same source stated. But by 2023, in a nation of 339 million people, just over 2 million farms were left, *usafacts.org* said.

Many give up their lives on the land for city life. There is a growing need for farmers to “get big or get out” as they find it harder and harder to provide for their families from the acreage they have. The alternative is to borrow money to buy more land, but then get financially squeezed even more by debt and higher overheads.

With so many people today living in cities, growing food is something the average person hardly thinks about. Many who have been farmers until recently have had to sell their land, been driven off because of hard times, or chosen a more stable life elsewhere. Many more are born into circumstances where they could never afford to own land. Yet God’s intention was always for everyone to get the opportunity to be involved in farmland ownership through the jubilee law.

Leviticus 25:10 says, “And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and you shall return every man unto his possession, and you shall return every man unto his family.”

The jubilee law ensures that every family owns land, and that ownership is retained within each family forever. Unfortunate circumstances could never drive a family permanently off their land.

Verse 23 says, “The land shall not be sold forever,” but it can be leased out for the remainder of a 50-year period until the next jubilee year, with the price of the land determined by the remainder of the time left available for the lease (vs. 14-16). Leasing the land to a farmer is allowed, but long-term ownership remains in each family.

God even included an option for another family member to “redeem” the lease by paying back the lease money to the person renting the land (vs. 24-27). Otherwise, the land remains under the management of the person leasing it until the next jubilee (vs. 28), when it returns to the family that owns it.

In ancient Israel, the jubilee law gave families a choice. Nobody was forced to be a farmer. A family could choose to lease land out and follow other career paths. But they could never sell out the land from future generations of their family members. Instead, every generation had the same choice to grow food and practice environmental stewardship on their land as their forefathers, and the same opportunity Adam and Eve had.

Under God’s system, everything a family did to improve their land was for the benefit of their children, grandchildren and generations into the future.

Of course, implementing a jubilee law cannot work in our modern circumstances. But it does show what God desires for humankind and the environment.

Think of the benefits of the jubilee: Focusing on dressing and keeping familial land promotes forward thinking. Each family would want to do all they could to care for the land and improve the environment for the future generations of their families. In addition, retention of land ownership promotes long-term food security. Every family can always go back to their own land to grow food. The problem of intergenerational poverty would be solved since no family can be driven off the land permanently by financial woes.

These are just two of the biblical principles that apply to agriculture. There are many more. To learn the true extent of the problems facing modern food production and God’s solution for them, read the book *Mounting Worldwide Crisis in Agriculture* at reg.org/mwcia.

Only Possible with God

Just a few farmers today are making real efforts to improve the environment over which they have been given stewardship. To be fair, God’s agriculture laws cannot be implemented now on a grand scale to solve the many problems of modern food production.

No technological advance can dig out the 58 billion tons of topsoil lying at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico and ship it back to the Midwest. No government can divide up the 2 million remaining farms in the U.S. and distribute them among 339 million citizens to reduce poverty. Such a move would be disastrous. Few would know how to farm it, and that would lead to mass starvation and economic collapse.

However, the world will soon learn of God’s Way. Once the Kingdom of God is on Earth (Mark 1:14), the land sabbath and jubilee laws will be kept, and people will again learn how to grow food in a way that cares for the land.

Micah 4 paints a picture of that coming Kingdom: “And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and

to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (vs. 2). This law will include instructions on how to grow food.

Verse 3 continues, “And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks,” choosing to grow food rather than fight in war. “But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken it” (vs. 4).

God’s Kingdom will change everything, establishing an entire society and economic system on His laws, complete with an education system to teach them. Humankind will eventually learn to apply the principles of environmental stewardship through the laws of the land sabbath and the jubilee year.

The economic impacts will be wonderful, but the benefits to nature will be even more spectacular! With balanced soil, the land will again produce abundant harvests of healthy, delicious food: “Behold, the days come, says the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that sows seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt” (Amos 9:13). This verse paints a picture of the hills flowing with the goodness of wine and oil.

Surrounding nature will also thrive: “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose” (Isa. 35:1).

With the world keeping God’s agricultural laws, humanity will finally learn how to care for the Earth’s environment by dressing and keeping it, just as He intended in Eden. Everyone will do their part to serve and protect their land and its nature.

God will respond with abundant blessings: Rich, fertile earth and healthy, delicious food for people and all of Creation to enjoy! □

ISRAEL VS. IRAN

Insights and Aftermath

The start and stop of direct confrontations and the resurgence of proxy war paint a complex picture of this Middle East conflict.

ISRAEL AND Iran have waged a shadow war for years, mostly in neighboring Syria. They have largely avoided direct confrontations, with Iran operating against Israel through proxy groups. That all changed after an April 1 airstrike killed two Iranian generals at an Iranian diplomatic compound in the Syrian capital of Damascus, the beginning of an unprecedented direct confrontation between the two nations. Although Israel did not comment, Iran blamed Israel for the strike and vowed revenge.

Iran responded with its first-ever direct attack on Israel, launching over 300 missiles and attack drones on April 14. Israel, working with a U.S.-led international coalition, said it intercepted 99 percent of the incoming fire, though a handful of missiles managed to land, causing minor damage to an Israeli military base and seriously wounding a young girl.

Then, on April 17, Israel appeared to fire back. Iranian state television said that air defense batteries fired in several provinces over reports of drones in the air. Iranian army commander General Abdolrahim Mousavi said crews targeted several flying objects.

The sudden volley of direct attacks raised tensions throughout the Middle East and the world, with many fearing they could lead to an explosion of larger conflict in that region. Some even worried the confrontation could be the start of World War III.

However, something else unusual took place: Israel and Iran both played down what happened. Incredibly, despite the apparent Israeli airstrike near a major air base and nuclear site in central Iran, the two bitter enemies seemed ready to prevent their latest eruption of violence from escalating into a full-blown regional war.

Yet the indecisive outcome of weeks of tensions did little to resolve the deeper grievances between the foes and left the door open to further fighting.

“It appears we’re closer than ever to a broad regional war, despite the fact that the international community will most likely make a great effort to de-

Iranian pro-government supporters gather at Palestine Square in Tehran, in a celebration of the early morning Iran’s IRGC attack on Israel (April 14, 2024).

HOSSEIN BERIS/MIDDLE EAST IMAGES/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

escalate tensions,” wrote Amos Harel, the military-affairs commentator for the Israeli daily *Haaretz*.

Aftermath

Israel has long considered Iran to be its greatest enemy—citing the Islamic Republic’s calls for Israel’s destruction, its controversial nuclear program and its support for hostile proxies across the Middle East.

These tensions have risen since Hamas and Islamic Jihad, Iranian-backed Palestinian groups, attacked Israel on October 7, sparking a devastating Israeli offensive in Gaza that has continued for more than six months. Hezbollah, an Iranian-backed proxy in Lebanon, immediately began striking Israeli targets, opening up tit-for-tat fighting along a second front, while Iranian-backed militias in Iraq, Syria and Yemen have also fired missiles and drones at Israel throughout the war.

Isfahan, near the base that was fired at by air defenses, is home to sites associated with Iran’s nuclear program, including its underground Natanz enrichment site, which has been repeatedly targeted by suspected Israeli sabotage attacks. The base is also home to Iran’s fleet of American-made F-14 Tomcats purchased before the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The apparent attack came on Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei’s 85th birthday.

State television described all Iranian atomic sites in the areas as “fully safe.” The United Nations’ nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, also said there was “no damage” to Iran’s nuclear sites.

Iranian officials made no mention of possible Israeli involvement. That could be intentional, particularly after Iranian officials for days had been threatening to respond to any Israeli retaliatory attack.

Israel also had no comment on the apparent attack, though one hard-line government minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, hinted at his dissatisfaction, with a one-word tweet, using a slang word for weak or lame.

But Italy’s foreign minister, Antonio Tajani, said at a summit of Western leaders in Capri that the U.S. received “last-minute” information from Israel about the attack. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken did not dispute that but said: “We were not involved in any offensive operations.”

Yoel Guzansky, a former Iran expert in the Israeli prime minister’s office, said Israel appears to have carried out the attack to “check off a box” by sending a message to Iran without doing anything too provocative that could upset the United States, which had urged restraint, or spark further Iranian retaliation.

“It seems very limited, to send a message that ‘we can strike you inside of Iran,’” said Mr. Guzansky, a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies, a Tel Aviv think tank.

He said “the current round” of violence appears to be over, but that “nothing has changed” with Israel still facing Iranian-backed threats on various fronts.

“I see further rounds,” he said. And the next time, if Iran surprises Israel or allies do not assist in Israel’s defense, “the outcome will be different.”

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for an end to the strikes.

“It is high time to stop the dangerous cycle of retaliation in the Middle East,” his office said.

Charles Lister, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Middle East Institute and a longtime regional analyst, challenged Iran’s claims that drones carried out the attacks. It appears instead that a small number of Israeli aircraft flew from Israel over Syria—striking at least two southern Syria military bases that have air defense systems along the way, he said.

They then entered Iraqi airspace, from where they fired a small number of Blue Sparrow air-to-surface ballistic missiles, likely without ever entering Iranian airspace, Mr. Lister said.

Accounts of explosions over Iraq support that scenario, and so does debris from what appears to be the booster of an Israeli-made Blue Sparrow missile that Iraqi security found in a field outside Baghdad, Mr. Lister stated.

“In other words, the Israelis would never have needed to enter Iranian airspace to conduct this attack,” Mr. Lister said. “I think this was Israel’s way of just sending a message that we can reach you anywhere we want.”

“Neither side is ready to jump over the brink,” said Alex Vatanka, director



A billboard featuring a portrait of former Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force commander General Qassem Soleimani, and Iranian-made missiles fired against Israel, is hanging from a government building in downtown Tehran, Iran (May 16, 2024).

MORTEZA NIKOUBAZL/NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES

of the Iran program at the Middle East Institute. But he added a major caveat.

“Probably we’re going to go back to the proxy war,” he said, but now it is a proxy war with the risk of “that sudden eruption of state-to-state war. Which we didn’t have to worry about before.”

Military Insights

As all sides took stock, regional security experts predicted that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s far-right government and the country’s allies would emerge encouraged by the Israeli military’s performance. In response to international appeals, however, both Israel and Iran had appeared to be holding back their full military force throughout the more than two weeks of hostilities, aiming to send messages rather than escalate to a full-scale war.

Crucially, experts also cautioned that Iran had not brought into the main battle its greatest military advantage over Israel—Hezbollah and other Iran-allied armed groups in the region. Hezbollah in particular is capable of straining Israel’s ability to defend itself, especially in any multifront conflict.

Overall, “the big-picture lesson to take away is that unless Iran does absolutely everything at its disposal all at once, it is just the David, and not the Goliath, in this equation,” Mr. Lister said.

Aside from those Iranian proxy forces, “the Israelis have every single advantage on every single military level,” Mr. Lister stated.

The Jewish Institute for National Security of America, a Washington-based center that promotes Israeli-U.S. security ties, pointed out that the final small strike underscored that Israel could do much more damage “should it decide to launch a larger strike against Iran’s nuclear facilities.”

Iran’s barrage, by contrast, appears to have used up most of its 150 long-range ballistic missiles capable of reaching Israel, more than 1,000 miles away, said retired General Frank McKenzie, former commander of the U.S. military’s Central Command.

Especially given the distance involved and how easy it is for the U.S. and others to track missile deployments by overhead space sensors and regional radar, “it is hard for Iran to generate a bolt from the blue against Israel,” Mr. McKenzie said.

Iran’s performance may have raised doubts about its ability to defend against future attacks, said Alex Vatanka, director of the Iran program at the Middle East Institute. Iran is about 80 times the size of Israel and thus has much more territory to defend, he noted. Plus, Israel demonstrated that it can rally support from powerful regional and international countries, both Arab and Western, to defend against Iran.

The two weeks of hostilities also provided the biggest showcase yet of the growing ability of Israel to work with Arab nations, its previous enemies, under the framework of U.S. Central Command, which oversees U.S. forces in the Middle East.

The U.S. under the Trump administration moved responsibility for its military coordination with Israel into Central Command, which already hosted U.S. military coordination with Arab countries. The Biden administration has worked to deepen the relationship.

Proxy Conflict Heats Up

Hezbollah is one of the most powerful militaries in the region, with tens of thousands of experienced fighters and a massive weapons arsenal. After an intense war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006 that killed more than a thousand Lebanese civilians and dozens of Israeli civilians, both sides have held back from escalating to another full-scale conflict. But Israeli and Hezbollah militaries still routinely fire across each other’s borders during the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

Hezbollah “is Iran’s only remaining potential advantage in this whole broader equation,” Mr. Lister said.

Six months of fighting in Gaza have “completely stretched” Israel’s military, he added. “If Hezbollah went all out and launched the vast majority of its

rocket and missile arsenal at Israel, all at once, the Israelis would seriously struggle to deal with that.”

And in terms of ground forces, if Hezbollah suddenly opened a second front, the Israel Defense Forces “would be incapable at this point” of fighting full-on with both Hezbollah and Hamas, Mr. Lister said.

In the months since Israel and Iran’s direct confrontation, conflict between Israel and Hezbollah has heated up. Hezbollah’s attacks escalated after Israel expanded its offensive into the southern Gaza city of Rafah in May. In June, an Israeli strike destroyed a house where Hezbollah military commander Taleb Sami Abdullah and three other officials were meeting, about six miles from the border. The Israeli military said the attack was part of a strike on a Hezbollah command and control center used to direct attacks against Israel in recent months.

Hezbollah vowed to intensify its attacks along the Lebanon-Israel border to avenge the killing of its most senior commander by Israel since the latest round of violence began eight months ago on October 7.

“Our response after the martyrdom of Abu Taleb will be to intensify our operations in severity, strength, quantity and quality,” senior Hezbollah official Hachem Saffieddine said during a funeral ceremony for Taleb Sami Abdullah. “Let the enemy wait for us in the battlefield.”

On June 5, Hezbollah fired a massive barrage of rockets into northern Israel, further escalating tensions as the fate of an internationally backed plan for a cease-fire in Gaza was hanging in the balance.

Hezbollah has traded fire with Israel nearly every day since the Israel-Hamas war began and says it will only stop if there is a truce in Gaza. That has raised fears of a regional conflagration.

Israeli airstrikes on Lebanon since October have killed over 400 people, most of them Hezbollah fighters, but the dead also include more than 70

Please see IRAN/ISRAEL, page 29



Deceit and Desperation

The Rise of Medical Conspiracies

As traditional medicine faces criticism for high costs, malpractice and profit-driven care, many people are seeking alternative and sometimes bizarre treatments.

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

THE HOTEL on the outskirts of town looks a lot like lodging one can find on any American highway. Over the years, it has been a Holiday Inn and a Days Inn. The sign outside now bears the brand of a new, growing chain—one that promises a lot more than a good night's sleep. At the Tesla Wellness Hotel and Medbed Center in Butler, about 45 minutes north of Pittsburgh, the enticements are nothing short of miraculous.

Part motel, part new-age clinic, the Tesla facility offers nightly rentals in rooms that come equipped with “BioHealers”—canisters that the company claims exude “life force energy,” or biophotons. Testimonials from the company’s patients speak to the devices’ power to, they claim, treat cancer, dementia, chronic pain and a long list of other ailments.

This is just one of many businesses exploiting skepticism toward conven-

tional medicine. Skepticism has grown due to high healthcare costs, a lack of empathy, medical malpractice and profit-driven motives in the healthcare industry. Unfortunately, this distrust in mainstream medicine has also led to an increase in medical conspiracy theories.

NPR reported, “Half of Americans subscribe to medical conspiracy theories, with more than one-third of people thinking that the Food and Drug Administration is deliberately keeping

natural cures for cancer off the market because of pressure from drug companies, a survey finds. Twenty percent of people said that cellphones cause cancer—and that large corporations are keeping health officials from doing anything about it. And another 20 percent think doctors and the government want to vaccinate children despite knowing that vaccines cause autism.”

Medical conspiracies take advantage of gaps in scientific knowledge and society’s moral and ethical vulnerabilities. Turning to the Bible, we can see darker motives at play—greed, deceit and sheer desperation. This understanding can point people to much better solutions rooted in patience, hard work and wisdom.

The Cost of False Hope

Besides brick-and-mortar locations, Tesla also sells canisters for home use. Prices start at \$599 and go up to \$11,000 for the largest model. There are slightly cheaper versions available for pets and children. The cost of these unproven products rivals that of many accepted medical treatments, underlining the public’s hefty healthcare financial burden.

Just do not call the thousands of people who have shelled out big bucks to Tesla “patients.” The company’s creator does not like the term—perhaps the first clue that what he is selling is well beyond the bounds of traditional medicine.

“We are not a clinic, not a doctor’s office,” said the founder, who earned a medical degree in China and a Ph.D. in human nutrition at Penn State University. “For me, for the company, I always call them customers.”

Various companies jack up the prices of products that have not been proven to work, exploiting desperation to make a quick buck. I Timothy 6:10 explains why: “The love of money is the root of all evil.” When companies prioritize profits over what is helpful or scientifically sound for their customers, they fuel this cycle of deceit.

Companies motivated by money often sell customers false hope. This

practice shakes faith in conventional medicine by setting unrealistic expectations and adds more problems for people who are already struggling.

Too Good to Be True

Tesla BioHealing, which has no connection to the car company, is part of a growing industry that markets unproven cures and treatments to conspiracy theorists and others who have grown distrustful of science and medicine. Experts who study such claims say they are on the increase, thanks to the internet, social media and skepticism about traditional health care.

In our information-rich era, it is surprising yet true that people can be easily misled. Jeremiah 17:9 says that “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” This scripture is a powerful reminder of just how easy it is for us to fool ourselves, or get fooled, especially when it comes to something as critical as our health. The promise of a miraculous fix is like a fog, clouding our judgment, making it all too easy to fall for those too good to be true unscientific cures. And it really hits home for those grappling with serious health issues. They are at the front line, vulnerable to those trying to sell them a miracle.

“There have always been hucksters selling medical cures, but I do feel like it’s accelerating,” said Timothy Caulfield, a health policy and law professor at the University of Alberta who studies medical ethics and fraud. “There are some forces driving that: obviously the internet and social media, and distrust of traditional medicine, traditional science. Conspiracy theories are creating and feeding this distrust.”

Blending the high-tech jargon of Western science with the spiritual terminology of traditional and Eastern medicine, these modern salesmen claim their treatments can reverse aging, restore mental acuity or fight COVID-19 better than a vaccine. They promise better health, but what they are really selling is the idea of insider information, the promise of a secret known only to the wealthy and the powerful.

So-called medbeds are one of the flashiest, most expensive and least credible. “Medbeds are coming,” exclaimed a woman in one popular TikTok video. Similar videos have been seen millions of times on the platform.

According to conspiracy theorists, medbeds were developed by the military (in some versions, using alien technology) and are already in use by the world’s richest and most powerful families. Whole message boards on Telegram are devoted to discussions about medbeds, and the latest rumors about when and where they will arrive.

“I’m desperately seeking any help from all to answer my prayers to a cure for my son’s cancer,” wrote one woman on another Telegram channel created by medbed conspiracy theorists in New Jersey.

Ignorance and Desperation

Sellers of these “miracle cures” are primarily responsible, but those who buy them are not entirely off the hook. In Hosea 4:6, God says, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...” When people do not know enough, they can get desperate and end up chasing after things that have not been proven to work. I Thessalonians 5:21 tells us to “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” While this primarily applies to spiritual matters, the principle can also be used for health. Each person is responsible for his or her wellbeing, including proving whether a cure is the real deal.

Not proving what we hear can open the door to misinformation and being taken advantage of. This is not just about wasting money or feeling betrayed, it can actually be dangerous for a person’s health. The Bible stresses the importance of using knowledge to avoid the perils of ignorance and encourages seeking wisdom to protect against deceitful practices.

For those desperate waiting for medbeds to arrive, Tesla BioHealers may be a tempting alternative, though one that comes with a cost. A one-night stay in a “highly-energized” room at the Tesla complex in Butler runs for \$300.

The rooms look like any other motel room, although a look beneath the bed reveals several of the biohealers placed underneath. The company runs seven other medbed centers in other states, and its devices are used at several other “partner” facilities operated by other businesses.

Inside the canisters? A mix of “fine naturally active stones and activated fine metal, grout, sands and proprietary polymers that are manufactured with a special technology,” according to the company.

In addition to the BioHealers, the company also sells bottled water—24-packs of 16.9-ounce bottles of Tennessee spring water—for \$150. The company says the water has been imbued with “life force energy” that can increase energy and libido, improve breathing, digestion and sleep, reduce pain and lead to “vivid dreams to indicate enhanced brain activity.”

At Walmart, a 24-pack of 16.9-ounce generic brand water bottles retails for less than \$4.

Reading the Fine Print

Deceivers in the medical field seriously harm public health when they lead people away from proven medical advice. Dishonesty is not just bad for our health system, it is also deeply displeasing to God. The Bible states, “Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD” (Prov. 12:22). Promoting false claims undermines trust in legitimate healthcare.

Online testimonials from Tesla’s customers speak to the life-changing power of the company’s products, with gushing superlatives such as “It worked miracles!” But experts and scientists who have studied the company’s claims say there is no scientific evidence to support them. Tesla acknowledges the facts in its terms of service: “Tesla BioHealing does not provide any medical advice,” the fine print says. “Our products...are not intended to replace your physicians’ care, diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease or medical condition.”

Sadly, many people do not take the time to read or carefully consider the finer details. Instead, they seek quick

fixes, leaving them vulnerable to being taken advantage of.

This tendency is also addressed in Scripture: “The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness, but every-one that is hasty only to want” (Prov. 21:5). This essentially says that those who take their time and are diligent in their actions tend to succeed, while those who rush and cut corners tend to end up wanting more. Quick-fix health solutions may be enticing, but they often result in disappointment, leading to more trouble and expense down the line.

Tesla’s leader told *The Associated Press* that he was unfamiliar with the medbed conspiracy theory when he named his company and that he is not trying to exploit gullible people who want to believe medbeds are real. He said 40,000 people have used his devices so far, and that he believes the canisters can treat about 80 percent of all disease.

Medical Quackery

Given the importance of health, it is hardly surprising that medical claims and products that seem too good to be true have a long history in America. More than a century ago, hucksters peddled magic elixirs from wagons. Decades later, electricity sparked a brief craze in electric belts and magnet suits as a supposed cure for anxiety, paralysis or sexual problems. In the 1920s, a quack named John Brinkley became a household name by implanting goat testicles into the bodies of patients complaining of infertility and impotence. He later lost his medical license after he was exposed as a fraud.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the back pages of magazines were filled with ads for mail-order diet pills and supplements that made promises not backed up by the facts. Today, the same claims are made online, where they have found a niche audience among conspiracy theorists and others who distrust science and traditional medicine. “Shop Now!” reads the website of an infamous conspiracy theorist who, despite legal troubles, has a daily broadcast and sells supplements

and vitamins alongside survival gear and emergency food rations.

These online communities were thriving long before the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw an explosion of false claims about vaccines, communicable diseases and even basic medical science. And as adherents’ suspicion of traditional medicine, the media and the government has grown, more people are willing to put their faith in untested treatments and claims.

The Food and Drug Administration maintains an online database of unproven or harmful treatments that it has identified, including unapproved treatments for COVID-19 that contain harmful chemicals, autism “cures” that include raw camel milk and the ingestion of dangerous heavy metals, and medications that supposedly cure all cancer.

“Distrust of government and distrust of major institutions makes people vulnerable,” said Stephen Barrett, a psychiatrist and expert in unverified medical claims who launched the organization Quackwatch in the 1970s to highlight medical scams. “But there are other factors too: Some people are desperate for help and they don’t know what to believe.”

Healthcare fraud is big business, and it was the largest source of civil fines and penalties for fraud paid to the federal government last year—more than \$5 billion. Most investigations and prosecutions focused on schemes to defraud public health programs such as Medicaid and Medicare or the billions of dollars set aside for COVID-19. As a result, low-level hucksters often do not get as much attention.

Galatians 5:19-21 talks about these and other negative human behaviors, calling them “the works of the flesh.” Understanding the dark side of humanity helps us understand how some in the medical field exploit people’s vulnerabilities. There are countless products and treatments out there that promise miracle cures and better health but are often overpriced and lack scientific backing. They play on our deepest desires for good health and exploit our fears, all for

profit. This should make us realize the importance of integrity and truth.

To learn more of what the Bible says about the dark side of humanity, read our free booklet *Did God Create Human Nature?* at rcg.org/dgchn.

“Desperate, Desperate, Desperate”

Tesla employees are quick to defend their work, arguing they are only giving people alternatives to a medical system many no longer trust. Like the automotive company owned by Elon Musk, Tesla BioHealing is named for Nikola Tesla, the 19th-century inventor and early electrical pioneer who has become a favorite of many conspiracy theorists.

Many of Tesla BioHealing’s customers have grown frustrated with the answers they get from doctors, said Seth Robinson, a chiropractor who directs Tesla’s clinic in Delaware. Asked to describe a typical Tesla patient, Mr. Robinson does not hesitate. “Desperate, desperate, desperate is the word,” he said. “A lot of times people will come here, they will have anti-medicine thoughts, feelings. We’re not anti-medicine. We believe medicine has a place. But medicine has a limitation.”

Tesla’s claims have attracted the interest of federal regulators. In August 2023, the FDA wrote to the company demanding responses to questions about its devices and their supposed medical benefits.

Among other concerns, the FDA questioned the assertions Tesla has made about its devices. The agency declined to comment on the matter. Depending on Tesla’s response, the agency could levy fines or take other punitive actions, including ordering the company to remove its products from the market.

The Associated Press contacted several people who had purchased the products, or whose relatives had, who said they later felt duped. None agreed to speak on the record, citing the fear of public embarrassment. Some angry customers have posted complaints about the products on social media. “Don’t waste your money, I’ve already wasted mine,” said one woman who uploaded a TikTok video about her experiences

with a BioHealer. During the video, the woman opened the container to reveal the interior of the canister: a solid mass that resembled concrete. “They sold me a can of cement.”

False Credibility

Many of the company’s claims ape the language of science, said Mr. Caulfield, the Canadian law professor, including technical sounding words like “quantum” or “biophotons” to add to their credibility. “They sound high-tech and employ the language of technology and medicine, even borrowing the name of Nikola Tesla,” Mr. Caulfield said. “It’s designed to enhance their credibility.”

Tesla’s claims about life force energy are also based, somewhat, on fact. Biophotons are real—a type of light emitted by living tissue that cannot be seen by the human eye. But their role in health is not well understood and use as a medical therapy is not proven, according to Bahman Anvari, a professor of bioengineering at the University of California, Riverside. Tesla is undertaking a clinical study to demonstrate the effectiveness of the canisters. For now, the company cites a single medical study written by Tesla’s founder and three of its other employees as evidence to back up its claims. That study found that Tesla’s canisters helped a woman who had complained of severe menstrual pain.

Mr. Anvari, however, noted that Tesla’s single journal article was not peer-reviewed, was limited to a single patient who was also receiving standard treatments, lacked a control group and has not been replicated. “It’s completely scientifically implausible,” Mr. Caulfield said. “But if you’re desperate, and you’re looking for answers, you can see why you’d be drawn to it.”

A Different Approach

To avoid deceptive medical conspiracies, it is much better to approach health with patience and determination. James 1:4 artfully says, “Let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” Many opt for quick fixes and

shortcuts instead of patiently applying instructions from mainstream medicine, which sometimes require a slower and steadier approach. Since we do not end up unhealthy overnight, we should not expect overnight solutions either.

Also, putting in full effort to establish and maintain healthy habits is highly valuable. Ecclesiastes 9:10 states, “Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, where you go.” This verse highlights the importance of fully dedicating yourself to what you want out of life, including good health.

Investing ample time and effort into established healthy practices such as eating well, exercising and getting regular medical check-ups leads to much better results than falling for seemingly miraculous schemes. Good choices, when made over the long term, can prevent many ailments in the first place.

Wisdom, knowledge and understanding help people stay sharp and avoid scams. Proverbs 4:7 emphasizes the importance of wisdom, saying, “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all your getting get understanding.” Seeking advice from trusted medical providers and doing your own research to better understand the advice helps individuals make wise and informed health decisions for themselves. Proverbs 18:15 adds to this by stating, “The heart of the prudent gets knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge,” reinforcing that staying on top of your health and wellness takes effort.

Through patience, hard work and the pursuit of wisdom, knowledge and understanding, you can shield yourself from medical conspiracies and scams. This approach results in genuine and enduring health gains, based in reality and backed by reliable medical science.

To learn much more about God’s instructions for achieving good health, read our free booklets *God’s Principles of Healthful Living* and *The Truth About Healing* at rcg.org. □



What Is the Bible?

How God's Word was written and preserved over millennia sheds light on its ultimate purpose—and what it should mean to you.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER



HERE IS the simple answer: The Bible is “the sacred scriptures of Christians comprising the Old Testament and the New Testament,” according to *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*.

We can dig into that a bit more. The word “Bible” derives from Medieval Latin *biblia*, which came from the Greek phrase *biblia to hagia*, “the holy books.” The modern Bible is comprised of 66 books that contain 1,189 chapters and 31,102 verses.

Yet this basic information does nothing to explain the Bible’s continuing deep impact on the world. Many billions of Bibles have been printed throughout history, and 6.4 copies are sold every 10 seconds today.

Its impact on culture and society cannot be overstated. We quote it all the time with sayings like “a drop in the bucket” (Isa. 40:15), “a house divided against itself cannot stand” (Matt. 12:25) and “a leopard cannot change his spots” (Jer. 13:23).

In addition, “salt of the earth,” “scapegoat” and “behemoth” come from Matthew 5:13, Leviticus 16:10 and Job 40:15-24, respectively.

The Bible also impacts individual lives—with viewpoints on what it is varying widely. Some view it as a source of inspirational quotes. Others see it as a storybook filled with heroes you should model your life after. To others, it is a window into the future with prophecy. Still others see it as a theological Q&A book—answering any question you may have.

None of these biblical outlooks are completely off base, but they are simplistic views of an incredibly complex book.

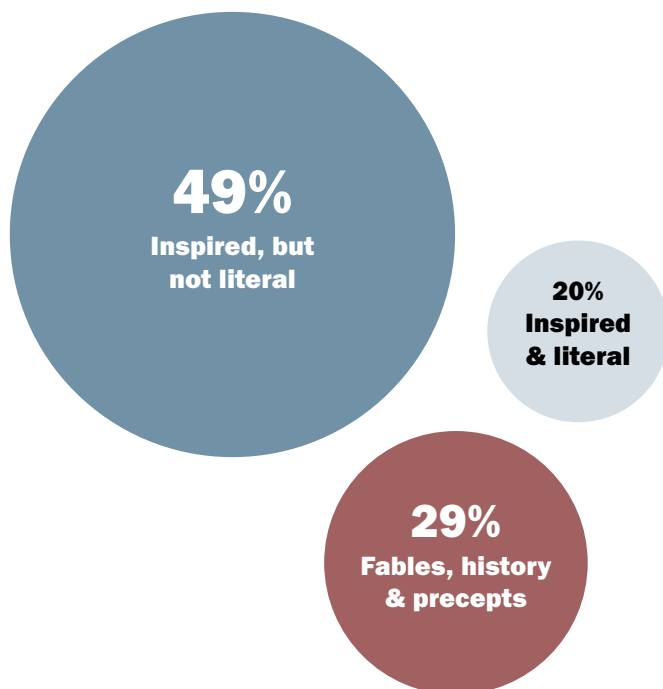
What does the Bible say it is? It certainly makes some huge claims:

- “Your word is truth” (John 17:17).
- “Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105).
- “Every word of God is pure” (Prov. 30:5).

So the Bible claims to contain God’s truth, that it can guide you in your life and that every word in it is pure. Yet can the book back all these up?

How does the average American view the Bible?

SOURCE: 2022 GALLUP POLL, GRAPHIC BY KYLE M. HOLCOMBE



You do not have to just take these words at face value. If God claims a book is His divine Word, He would make sure to bring proof of His authorship. He would plainly state why He inspired it.

Overall Purpose

The Bible is a book like no other. It has about 40 authors and was written over many millennia. You have Moses writing the first five books of the Bible around 1600 BC and the apostle John recording Revelation around AD 90—and everything in between.

What should be a disjointed, disagreeing mess is instead an awesomely intricate and interwoven narrative revealing God’s Plan for humanity.

Notice the first place in the Bible that talks about writing the Bible. In the book of Exodus, God rescued ancient Israel by giving them victory over a warring tribe called the Amalekites. Notably, He then told Moses in chapter 17: “Write this for a memorial in a book...” (vs. 14).

Many thousands of years later, we can read that account. Look at what God was doing there. He had just

intervened to help and protect the people He was working with. At this time, it was the nation of Israel. The entire Bible has a similar theme, showing how He wants to work with all of mankind—both on a grand scale and in individual lives.

The very first pages of Scripture reveal God's ultimate reason for creating people.

Genesis 1:26 says, "And God said, Let Us *make man in Our image, after Our likeness*: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

God made human beings in His image and likeness. No other living thing has this distinction. For all the wonder, beauty and creativity seen in nature—no other creature is made to look like and be like the Creator God. Only human beings.

Verse 27 repeats this for emphasis: "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them."

This begins to explain God's Plan for humanity. He created mankind to expand His Family—a purpose that is emphasized throughout the pages of the Bible.

All the way over in the New Testament, look at what the apostle Paul said in II Corinthians 6:18. He wrote that those who follow God's Way "shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

Back to the story in Genesis. The first humans, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Doing so cut them off from eating of another tree that would have allowed them to build God's character in this life and ultimately be born into His Family as sons and daughters of God.

Genesis 3:24 says that God drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden "to keep the way of the tree of life."

The tree of life symbolizes man's awesome potential: to have eternal life and be born into His Family.

This theme bookends God's Word. Notice what it says on the very last page of the Bible: "Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they *may have right to the tree of life*, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev. 22:14).

Understanding God's purpose for humanity is essential to understanding the Bible and all that it contains.

How It Was Written

With so many people involved in writing the Bible over such a long period of time, its interconnectivity and singular message are nothing short of miraculous.

That is what II Timothy 3:16 flat-out says: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God..."

The Eternal God inspired the many authors of the Bible to record their words. He also directed those who helped compile, canonize and translate it into the book we have today.

God worked with and through these people to record history in the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles. He inspired the songwriters and poets in the Psalms. He gave the prophets the visions and words to describe future events in His Plan. He helped Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to craft various perspectives on Jesus Christ's life. He guided the pens of the apostles when writing letters to first-century Christians—words that would later become part of Scripture.

These writings all sing in harmony and build on one another to reveal God's purpose for mankind. Because of this, there is no reason to avoid certain books of the Bible. While it can be easy to focus solely on the New Testament, the Old Testament is equally important. There is a reason why it is over 70 percent of the Bible—not to mention that Jesus and the apostles constantly quoted from it.

Paul said this about the Old Testament's importance: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

He said something similar in I Corinthians 10: "Now all these things happened unto them [ancient Israel] for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (vs. 11).

Certainly, some of the Bible is more difficult to approach. There are sections that can initially seem obscure and odd, yet they all have a purpose.

Let's look at II Timothy 3:16 again, this time reading to verse 17: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for *doctrine*, for *reproof*, for *correction*, for *instruction* in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

The inspired Word of God—all of it—will show you how to live.

A Sharp Sword

The Bible tells you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear. That is why it is profitable for doctrine—to know what to believe—for reproof, correction and instruction.

Recall that Psalm 119:105 calls the book "a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." It lights the way forward.

Hebrews 4:12 describes it this way: "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

When wielded properly, the Bible can be like a razor-sharp sword and cut through faulty human reasoning.

For example, God's Word describes what man is like in his natural state: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9).

No one wants to admit that his heart is deceitful above all things or that he is desperately wicked. Yet God reveals exactly this to everyone who will read and take heed.

Understanding the facts of human nature—how we think and act when not following God's Way—makes the wisdom of the Bible even more vital. Without divine guidance, we would



“When wielded properly, the Bible can be like a razor-sharp sword and cut through faulty human reasoning.”



continue to do things that cause misery, harm and unhappiness.

This is why Proverbs 3:5 states: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart; and *lean not unto your own understanding.*”

The Bible instructs us how to live lives of outflowing concern toward God and others. It is the ultimate instruction manual for mankind.

Helping Hand

Even when you know the basics of the Bible, approaching it can still feel daunting. God knows this, which is why He uses teachers to help you along the way.

This has always been the case. A story in the book of Acts makes this clear: “So he [the apostle Philip] got ready and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading Isaiah the prophet” (8:27-28, New American Standard Bible).

God inspired Philip to go and talk to this man (vs. 29).

“And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Isaiah, and said, Understand you what you read?” (vs. 30).

The man responded: “How can I, except some man should guide me?” (vs. 31).

Philip then answered the man’s questions.

Anyone who has tried to read the book of Isaiah straight through knows how this man felt: “How can I understand this unless someone guides me?” It is a complex book that contains history, poetry and prophecy—some of which was fulfilled by Jesus Christ in the first century and other events have yet to occur.

Yet Isaiah is just one of the many prophecy books in the Bible. The others can also seem dense and unapproachable. What in the world is Revelation all about? There are the seven trumpet plagues, a mysterious mark of the beast, a horrible creature with seven

heads and ten horns rising out of the earth and a massive city coming out of the sky toward the book’s end.

Huh?

To help people navigate His Word, God established His Church to give them understanding. Ephesians 4:11 shows that God “gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.”

These ministers and teachers are placed by God into the Church to guide those who want to better understand Scripture and follow His way of life.

The Real Truth is here to offer you that biblical guidance. Yet The Restored Church of God, which publishes this magazine, has many more resources to help you delve into the pages of your Bible. We have *The Pillar of the Truth* magazine focusing on Christian living, *Ambassador Youth* magazine for teens, as well as many other books, booklets and articles answering life’s greatest questions. There are also *World to Come* videos and sermons to help you on your way. All of this is available at rcg.org.

But on your journey to understand God and the Bible more, do not just take our word for it. Be sure to read what God is saying in your own Bible.

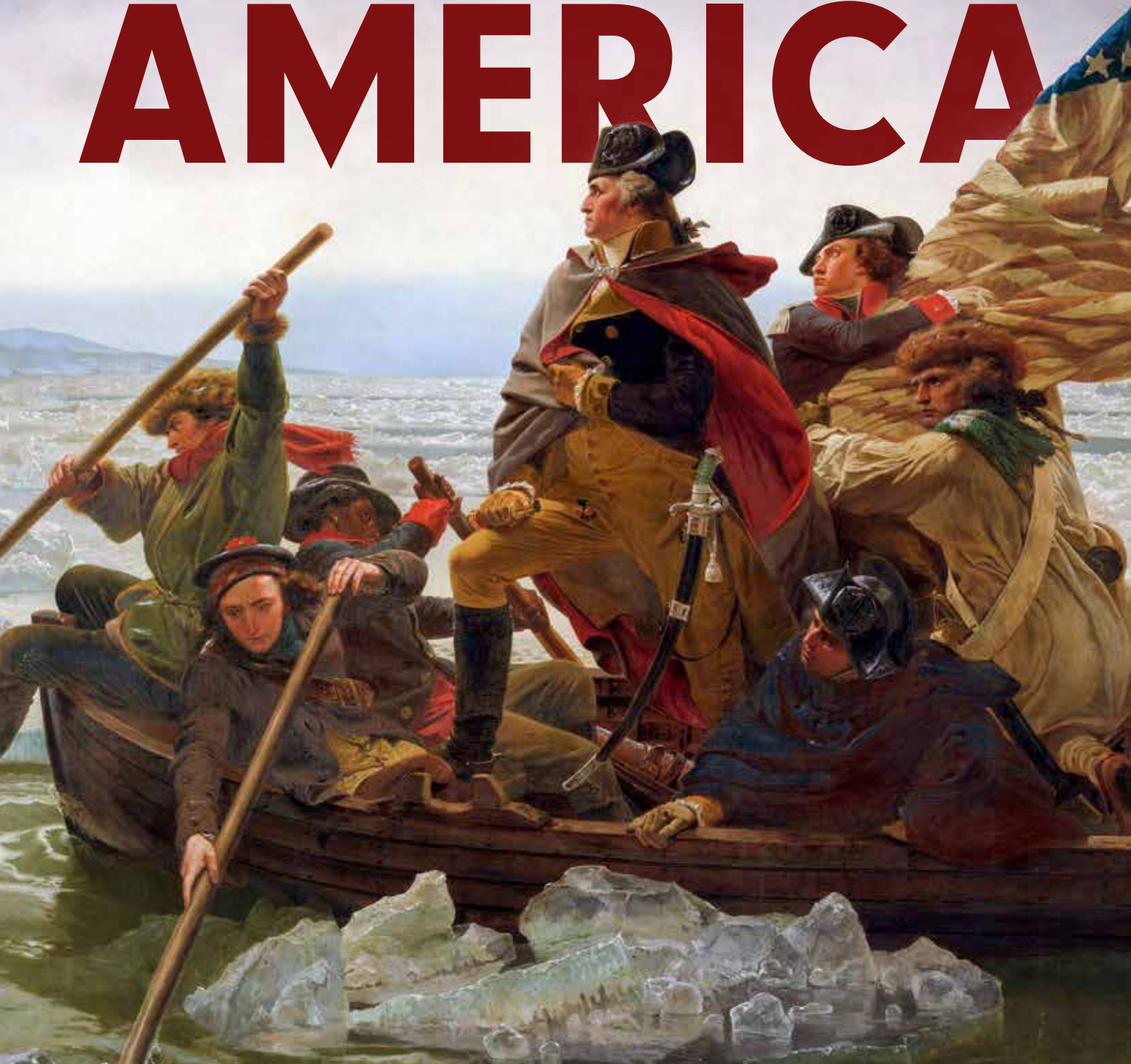
During Jesus’ ministry, He asked the 12 disciples if they would leave Him. Peter answered plainly: “Lord, to whom shall we go? *You have the words of eternal life*” (John 6:68).

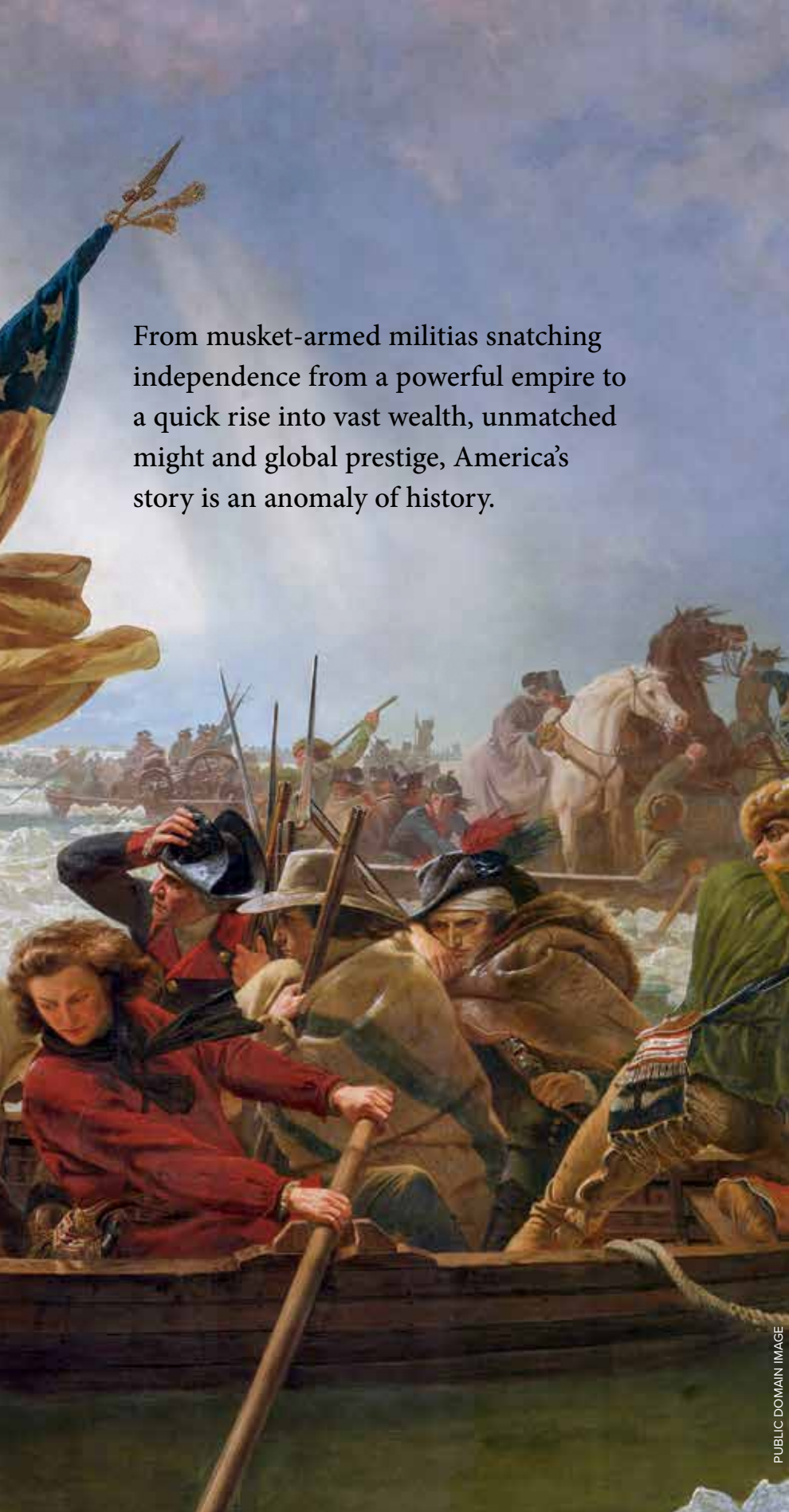
The Bible contains “the words of eternal life.” It is a living book that explains today’s world and what makes you tick. It shows exactly what God has been doing throughout history and today.

It is up to you to diligently study the scriptures and apply the words they contain. As II Timothy 2:15 states: “Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

Yet, remember, you do not have to go through this process alone. *The Real Truth* and The Restored Church of God are here to help! □

THE MIRACLE OF AMERICA





From musket-armed militias snatching independence from a powerful empire to a quick rise into vast wealth, unmatched might and global prestige, America's story is an anomaly of history.

SHOPPING FOR an Independence Day barbecue, you face a barrage of questions that can be summed up as: "Which one?"

Sweet relish or spicy? Dijon, honey or traditional yellow mustard? All-American Heinz ketchup or the more wallet-friendly store lookalike brand? For ice cream, there is rocky road or cookies and cream. What about vanilla? French vanilla, vanilla bean or "regular"? And which brand—Breyers, Ben & Jerry's, Turkey Hill or Haagen-Dazs? As for drinks, imported or domestic beer? Hoppo or malty?

You cannot forget the extra flare. What about glow sticks, American mini-flags and Uncle Sam hats? Or a smattering of fireworks: sparklers, colorful fountains or bottle rockets?

The number of options available to American consumers can shock even those from developed European nations. But this is July 4, after all, so is it not fitting that it is celebrated with a little panache?

Founding Father John Adams thought so. Writing to his wife Abigail, he stated that American independence would go down as "the most memorable epoch in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival...It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward forever more."

But beyond bratwurst and bombast, the day was intended to mark the birth of a miracle nation—which is evidenced by the abundance and freedoms it experiences today. Adams also wrote, "It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance, by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty."

"Standing Miracle"

Historian Jack Kelly, a contributor to *History* and *NPR*, wrote: "George Washington called the American victory in the Revolutionary War 'little short of a standing miracle.' In 1776, an overwhelming British army had defeated his

PUBLIC DOMAIN IMAGE

poorly trained force, driven them out of New York City, and chased them across New Jersey. Washington then lost Philadelphia, and his men had barely survived the wretched winter at Valley Forge. In 1780, the British captured the major southern port at Charleston, imprisoning the American garrison there, and utterly defeated a second patriot army. Before that year was out, his long-suffering troops were on the verge of mutiny and one of his senior generals had gone over to the enemy.

“A year later he had effectively won the war. How was it possible?”

Mr. Kelly posited that the British should have won the war given their longstanding military establishment, naval superiority and the fact that many colonists were loyal to the British crown. While the French provided additional guns, soldiers, food, ships and training needed to wage a lasting war, the Americans ultimately won, seemingly by no feat of their own.

He continued: “Again and again during the war, they reached points when they could have thrown in the towel. At times, the Continental Army seemed only weeks or days from disbanding. In spite of defeat after defeat, in spite of no pay, rampant disease and inadequate supplies, they kept at it.”

The British eventually surrendered, and the nation officially recognized U.S. autonomy with the Treaty of Paris in 1783.

While winning the fight was impressive by itself, the new nation of 13 loosely connected states cobbled together a constitution that has remained in place since 1787. By comparison, constitutions in other countries have an average lifespan of 17 years.

The miracle of independence was just the first instance of divine providence for America. Yet similar astounding events happened at every step during its rise to sensational power and prestige.

Manifest Destiny

At the turn of the century, America almost immediately went through one

of the greatest growth spurts in history. The U.S. *more than tripled in size* in less than 100 years.

In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson made the Louisiana Purchase—a vast territory that stretched from the Gulf of Mexico to the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains—from France for a meager \$15 million. Adjusting for inflation, this would be roughly \$300 million today.

**“America went
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Nonprofit firm Earth Economics estimated that if just the “natural capital” of the Mississippi River Delta were treated as an economic asset, its value could approach \$1.3 trillion. And this does not include all the other natural resources throughout the territory that made it even more valuable. The acquisition practically doubled America’s size, subsequently motivating millions to leave their homes in search of economic opportunities—namely land ownership and farming.

This was vastly different from what was occurring in Europe. According to *History*: “In Europe, large numbers of factory workers formed a dependent and seemingly permanent working class; by contrast, in the United States, the western frontier offered the possibility of independence and upward mobility for all.”

With the Louisiana Purchase, the 27-year-old nation began to be fueled by the notion of “manifest destiny,” a phrase coined by journalist John O’Sullivan in 1845. Americans felt it was their responsibility to “overspread

and to possess the whole of the [land] which Providence has given us,” the article noted.

Piece by piece, the nation’s property rapidly expanded. Spain ceded Florida in 1819, Texas became attached to the United States in 1845, and a year later, Great Britain gave the Oregon Territory to the U.S. In 1848, Mexico ceded territories of California, Nevada, Utah and Arizona. America’s “great leap westward” from the Atlantic to the Pacific was complete in half a century.

In 1867, another rich piece of land fell into America’s lap. The nation purchased Alaska from Russia for \$7.2 million—*two cents per acre*—or just \$110 million today. Some homes in Southern California are valued at twice that price!

Some considered the acquisition of Alaska a mistake. An American editorial labeled it a “sucked orange”—a tundra bare of resources. Of course, hindsight shows this was completely wrong.

The view that Alaska was a barren wasteland changed after a gold rush in the 1890s and discoveries of vast oil reserves later. The land was also an important barrier from the Soviet Union as well as a strategic military base in the northern Pacific during the two world wars.

Hawaii was annexed in 1898 and Puerto Rico was ceded by Spain the same year. Both have been vital naval ports and natural barriers against invading forces during times of conflict.

The total cost of America’s territory after adjusting for inflation? \$1.6 billion. Considering that the U.S. spends over \$800 billion each year on defense spending, it was a small price to pay to create the greatest nation on Earth.

Resource Rich

“The Greater Mississippi Basin together with the Intracoastal Waterway has more kilometers of navigable internal waterways than the rest of the world combined,” according to Stratfor, a geopolitical intelligence company.

“The American Midwest is both overlaid by this waterway and is the world’s largest contiguous piece of farmland. The U.S. Atlantic Coast possesses more major ports than the rest of the Western Hemisphere combined. Two vast oceans insulated the United States from Asian and European powers, deserts separate the United States from Mexico to the south, while lakes and forests separate the population centers in Canada from those in the United States.”

These lands contain world-renowned natural wonders including the Grand Canyon, Redwood Forest—home to the tallest and oldest trees on Earth—and Yellowstone, which houses the majority of the world’s geysers. Yellowstone was also America’s first national park, a concept of natural preservation that spread worldwide. Besides their beauty and natural resources, these features are a boon for scientific research and tourism.

This exceptional landscape allows for highly efficient agriculture. Stratfor continued: “Normally, agricultural areas as large as the American Midwest are underutilized as the cost of shipping their output to more densely populated regions cuts deeply into the economics of agriculture. The Eurasian steppe is an excellent example. Even in modern times Russian and Kazakh crops occasionally rot before they can reach market. Massive artificial transport networks must be constructed and maintained in order for the land to reach its full potential. Not so in the case of the Greater Mississippi Basin. The vast bulk of the prime agricultural lands are within 200 kilometers of a stretch of navigable river. Road and rail are still used for collection, but nearly omnipresent river ports allow for the entirety of the basin’s farmers to easily and cheaply ship their products to markets not just in North America but all over the world.”

By contrast, Mexico does not even have *one* navigable river to transport crops to a market.

Given the central location of the continent, the United States also has a

perfect balance of temperate climates and vast flatlands. Mexico and Central America possess too many wetlands and mountainous regions for large-scale farming while Canada is generally too cold.

The United States’ unique geography allows it to be the world’s top agricultural exporter today. Most exports are staple foods for the rest of the globe, including 30.5 percent of the world’s corn, 36.8 percent of its soybeans, as well as 13.27 percent of its wheat.

Yet the nation’s accomplishments go far beyond farming.

Economy: The U.S. GDP is more than \$25 trillion. This amounts to about \$80,000 per capita. While China comes in second with a GDP of nearly \$18 trillion, its per capita GDP is only about \$12,000. In addition, the U.S.-run NYSE and NASDAQ are bigger than the next largest six international stock exchanges combined.

Industry: Although the nation has declined slightly in global rankings in manufacturing, research, technology and innovation, it remains a global leader in all categories. The fact remains that it is the only country to put men on the moon and is the birthplace of world-changing developments such as aviation and the internet.

Humanitarianism: The U.S. gave \$12.1 billion in humanitarian aid in 2023, accounting for 35 percent of all assistance given worldwide, according to the United Nations. Germany came in second at \$3.8 billion.

Military: The U.S. has the most powerful and versatile armed forces. America’s Air Force is the largest in the world. The U.S. Navy has the world’s second-largest air force. The United States has the highest military budget of any nation—roughly \$800 billion per year compared to China’s \$231 billion—as well as the greatest number of foreign bases and allies.

Standard of living: In 2020, the median income was \$67,521. Those below the poverty line receive benefits from government programs such as food stamps and public housing. Approximately 80 percent of poor

households have air conditioning, and 91 percent of American households own a car, with roughly 37 percent owning two or more. About 95 percent of households have a computer and 90 percent have internet access.

From independence to becoming a global superpower, America is the ultimate success story—what Washington could still call “little short of a standing miracle.”

Was this all through human effort?

Source of Miracles

In 1789, while being sworn in as the first president of the U.S., Washington randomly opened the Bible to Genesis 49 and placed his hand there. As he pondered the future of the newborn nation and the importance of his position, he had no idea that, underneath his hand, America’s prosperous future had already been laid out.

Real Truth Editor-in-Chief David C. Pack’s book *America and Britain in Prophecy* discusses this universally ignored chapter in the Bible.

“Genesis 49 contains the patriarch Israel’s latter-day prophecies for the descendants of each of his sons. God inspired this description to be recorded because He also intended that the final homelands of *these* peoples be known.”

The prophecy in Genesis describes the future of each tribe of Israel, represented by each of Jacob’s 13 sons. The most obvious example is that the Jews are the modern-day descendants of Judah.

“Jacob’s prophecy foretells Judah will be a ‘lion’s whelp,’” Mr. Pack continued. “A whelp is another name for a young lion cub. Jacob prophesied that Judah would be a very young nation in the latter-day period of time. This describes the modern Israeli nation, which was ‘born’ in 1948 and is still a ‘young nation’ by today’s standards.”

The Bible shows that the descendants of Jacob’s son Joseph would also be clearly noticeable, as they were given a distinctly higher number and quality of blessings.

Mr. Pack writes: “As the primary subject of this book, ‘Joseph is a fruitful

bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: the 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...' (Gen. 49:22-24).

"In this scripture, Joseph—the father of Ephraim and Manasseh—is likened to a fruitful bough or branch, most likely an olive branch. Joseph is also described as being shot by archers.

"Later, Joseph's descendants are further described: 'His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh' (Deut. 33:17).

"With these descriptions divided between both sons, Manasseh's primary emblem was that of an olive branch, and his secondary emblem a cache of arrows. Also attached to Manasseh's ensign was the number 13, since he was the thirteenth tribe."

Interestingly, the official seal of the U.S. features an eagle carrying an olive branch and a cache of arrows, as well as 13 stars. This is an interesting link between America and the symbols described in the Bible for Manasseh.

Another key to identifying these nations is in Genesis 48, in which Joseph's two sons were given separate blessings.

Verse 19 states that Manasseh "also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations."

Scour the record of history. There are only two brother nations with a common heritage where one was a massive empire (a "multitude" or "company of nations") and the other became a single, great nation. These are the United Kingdom and the United States.

Best Gifts

In Genesis 49, Jacob outlined more specifically the blessings that both

America and Britain were to experience in the latter days.

Material wealth: "The God of your father, who shall help you; and by the Almighty, who shall bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies under..." (vs. 25).

The United States has the most varied weather patterns on the planet, contributing to diverse wildlife, plants and landscapes. The nation also has a greater concentration of natural resources in the ground and waters it controls than any other geographic location. It was the world's highest oil producer for much of the 20th century, and even today produces more than Saudi Arabia and Russia.

Military power and divine deliverance: "The 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).

The United States has experienced overwhelming victories in strategic wars and battles.

Global expansion and influence: "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall" (vs. 22).

Joseph's descendants are pictured expanding over their territorial limits. This speaks to the significant benefits, symbolized by *fruit*, America would share with the world.

Mr. Pack wrote: "Recall that, anciently, Joseph himself stored food in Egypt and helped other peoples and nations as a result. When God's blessings were still being poured out upon *our* peoples without measure...over and over, *our* blessings became blessings to *other* nations of the world. This same spirit in *modern* Joseph—Ephraim and Manasseh—gave birth to the Alliance for Progress, Marshall Plan, Hoover Program, Four Point Program and so many others that saved millions from starvation after World

War I and World War II. No other nations ever did *any* of these things, let alone all of them."

Possessing the gates of enemies: "...let your seed possess the gate of those which hate them" (Gen. 24:60).

This prophecy to Rebekah, Jacob's mother, was fulfilled when her descendants owned strategic positions throughout the world. These included America's possession of the Philippines, Hawaii and the Panama Canal, as well as Britain's access to Gibraltar, Suez, India, Hong Kong, South Africa and Australia, among many others.

America has consistently "brought the battle" to its enemies' homelands—from the Mexican War to the world wars to the War on Terror—but the nation's cities have never been directly bombed in war, neither have foreign armies fielded ground battles on American soil.

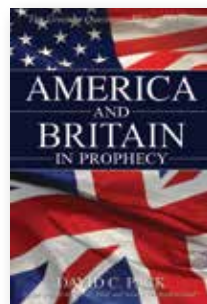
"America's forefathers could *never* have envisioned this nation as the global superpower it became," Mr. Pack summarized in his book. "The United States has continually been at the forefront of economic prosperity, medical science, technology, food production, sanitation, architecture, space exploration, etc. Its citizens enjoy freedoms unattainable to so many. The income and standard of living for most Americans, Britons, Australians and Canadians is far higher than even most other industrialized nations."

"But we have forgotten where these blessings came from!"

The nation's citizens take for granted the incredible miracle of America. And because the nation does not real-

ize the true source and reason for its unique power and status, it is blind to the role it will play in the future.

But the knowledge is freely available. *America and Britain in Prophecy* (rcg.org/aabibp) provides the real story of these nations' history and shows their destiny—straight from the Bible. □



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civilians and non-combatants. On the Israeli side, 15 soldiers and 10 civilians have been killed since the war in Gaza began.

Abdullah's sister Zeinab said her brother had been seeking "martyrdom for the past month," adding that his death will encourage more young men to join the militant group. "May God destroy Israel," she told *The Associated Press*.

A "Greater War"

The United States is trying to avert a greater war between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah movement, U.S. envoy Amos Hochstein said on June 18, following an escalation in cross-border fire between the foes along Lebanon's southern frontier. The previous week, the group fired the largest volleys of rockets and drones of the hostilities so far at Israeli military sites. Mr. Hochstein said he had been dispatched to Lebanon immediately following a brief trip to Israel because the situation was "serious."

"We have seen an escalation over the last few weeks. And what President Biden wants to do is avoid a further escalation to a greater war," Mr. Hochstein stated.

He had said on May 30 he did not expect peace between Hezbollah and Israel but that a set of understandings could remove some of the impetus for conflict and establish a recognized border between Lebanon and Israel. Mr. Hochstein brokered an unlikely diplomatic deal between Lebanon and Israel in 2022 over their disputed maritime boundary.

"We've heard Israeli leaders say the solution that they prefer is a diplomatic solution. And obviously that is the solution that we prefer too and that we're trying to pursue," U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said. The United States deems Hezbollah a terrorist group.

Hezbollah has signaled its eventual openness to an agreement that benefits

Lebanon, but has said there can be no discussions until Israel halts the Gaza offensive—something mediators are struggling to achieve.

Israel has also indicated its openness to a diplomatic settlement that would restore security in the north, where it borders Lebanon, while preparing for a military offensive to achieve the same goal.

"Whoever thinks that they can harm us and we will sit idly by is making a big mistake," Mr. Netanyahu said. "In one way or another we will restore security to the north."

The U.S. and France are engaged in diplomatic efforts to secure a negotiated end to the hostilities along Lebanon's border. A French proposal submitted to Beirut in February included elite Hezbollah fighters withdrawing six miles from the frontier and negotiations aimed at settling disputes over the land border.

Mr. Hochstein met caretaker Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati, who told him that "Lebanon does not seek escalation," according to comments issued by Mr. Mikati's office.

The increase in attacks was followed by a brief respite during the Eid al-Adha Muslim holiday. Hezbollah then announced a drone attack against an Israeli tank. The recent attacks prompted UN officials in Lebanon to warn that the "danger of miscalculation leading to a sudden and wider conflict is very real."

The situation remains volatile. In late June, Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah warned that the militant group has new weapons and intelligence capabilities that could help it target more critical positions deeper inside Israel in case of an all-out war.

"We now have new weapons. But I won't say what they are," he said in a televised address commemorating Abdullah. "When the decision is made, they will be seen on the front lines."

Hezbollah has used locally made explosive drones, as well as surface-to-air missiles to chase off Israeli jets. Mr. Nasrallah said in 2021 that Hezbollah has 100,000 fighters but

now he claimed the number is much higher, without elaborating. He also said he has rejected offers from allied countries and militias in the region that could add tens of thousands to his ranks.

A nearly 10-minute-long video allegedly filmed by a Hezbollah surveillance drone shows parts of Haifa—a city far from the Israel-Lebanon border. In his speech, Mr. Nasrallah said Hezbollah has much more footage—an apparent threat it could reach sites deep in Israel.

Israel's military chief, Lieutenant General Herzl Halevi, visited Israeli air-defense soldiers near the border with Lebanon, saying Israel was aware of Hezbollah's capabilities demonstrated in the video and has solutions for these threats.

"We of course have infinitely greater capabilities," he said. "I think the enemy is only familiar with a few of them and [we] will confront them at the right time." The Israeli army said it has "approved and validated" plans for an offensive in Lebanon, although the decision to actually launch such an operation would have to come from the country's political leadership.

Mr. Nasrallah said a wider war with Lebanon would have regional implications and that Hezbollah would attack any other country in the region that assisted Israel in the war effort, citing Cyprus, which has hosted Israeli forces for training exercises. He suggested Cyprus might allow Israel to use its bases in event of a wider war.

Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides said his island nation "is in no way involved" in any military operations in the region. Cyprus is "part of the solution, not part of the problem," he said, pointing out the Cyprus-Gaza maritime corridor used to deliver aid to the Palestinian territory.

Keep watching Israel's tensions with Iran and its proxies. Time will tell to what degree the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah will intensify, and whether Israel and Iran will one day engage in further direct confrontations. □

Obesity and High Blood Sugar Play Ever-growing Role in Ill Health, Study Shows

LONDON (Reuters) – Obesity, high blood sugar and high blood pressure among other metabolic issues now lead to almost 50 percent more years of healthy life lost to either disease or premature death than in 2000, a major international study showed.

Over the same period, the number of years lost due to factors associated with undernutrition for mothers and children, such as stunting or wasting, dropped by 71.5 percent.

The Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries and Risk Factors Study 2021, published in *The Lancet*, used data from 204 countries and territories to identify the leading causes worldwide of illness and early death. These are measured in disability-adjusted life years, or “DALYs.”

The data shows a clear shift in global health challenges as populations age and lifestyles change, the authors said, although air pollution was the biggest risk factor in both the 2000 and 2021 data.

They also pointed out that the results were not uniform. Undernutrition remained a major risk factor in sub-Saharan Africa, for example.

Ill health among 15- to 49-year-olds worldwide was increasingly attributable to a high body-mass index (BMI) and high blood sugar—two risk factors in the development of diabetes, the authors said.

“Future trends may be quite different than past trends because of factors such as climate change and

increasing obesity and addiction,” said Liane Ong, lead research scientist at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington, which led the study.

An accompanying study from the Global Burden of Diseases team predicted that life expectancy is expected to rise by 4.5 years by 2050, from 73.6 years to 78.1 years.

The biggest increases are likely in countries where the existing estimates are lower, meaning life expectancies are starting to converge around the world.

However, while people will live longer, they are likely to experience more years spent in poor health, the study forecast. □



People sit near a banner advertising the Brussels West Obesity Clinic during a two-day event marking World Obesity Day, at CHIREC Sainte Anne Saint Remi Clinic in Brussels, Belgium (March 6, 2024).

REUTERS/YVES HERMAN

Borrowers, Especially the Young, Struggle with Credit Card Debt in Potentially Bad Sign for Economy



AP/JENNY KANE

NEW YORK (AP) – Consumers are increasingly struggling to pay their credit card bills, raising concerns about severe delinquencies spiraling and sapping consumer spending.

The share of credit card debt that is more than 90 days overdue rose to 10.7 percent during the first quarter, a 14-year high, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York's report on first-quarter household debt.

A year ago, severe delinquencies totaled only 8.2 percent of credit card debt. The first-quarter jump in severe delinquencies was the biggest since 2011. Meanwhile, total credit card debt rose to \$1.12 trillion from just under \$1 trillion a year ago.

Those in their 20s and 30s are having the most difficulty paying their credit card bills. Those age groups typically have a mix of less earnings power and lower savings.

The Federal Reserve hiked its key interest rate to a 23-year high to com-

bat four-decade high inflation, which peaked in June 2022 at 9.1 percent. Those rate increases made borrowing more expensive on mortgages, auto loans and credit cards.

Consumer spending fuels economic growth, so trouble paying credit card bills is a worrisome signal. The direction of the labor market could determine whether debt stress becomes a bigger concern. Job and wage growth helped counter the hit to consumers' wallets from rising inflation, but a continued slowdown or reversal there could tip the scales.

"While these indicators do not necessarily predict a recession, especially with a robust labor market, a weakening in employment conditions could exacerbate household financial instability," said Gregory Daco, EY chief economist. "The combination of subdued job growth, sluggish income progression, and diminished savings could lead to increased delinquencies and a

potential retrenchment in consumer spending."

Wall Street has so far brushed off concerns about rising credit debt levels and payment struggles, forecasting earnings growth to accelerate from 5.6 percent in the first quarter to 17.1 percent by the fourth quarter.

Still, retail spending unexpectedly stalled in April in a sign of consumer fatigue and worry. Walmart, the nation's largest retailer, has said its customers are spending more on necessities and less on discretionary goods like home furnishings and electronics.

Coffee chain Starbucks lowered its sales expectations for the year as people visit its cafes less often, and McDonald's is offering more deals as people cut back on fast food and eating out.

The Fed is now faced with the prospect of inflation remaining stubbornly high around 3 percent, above its target of 2 percent. The mix of high inflation, expensive borrowing rates and a slowing economy has thrown more doubt around the central bank's ability to tame inflation without causing a recession.

Credit cards only make up about 6.5 percent of consumer debt, according to a Bank of America Global Research report. That alleviates some concerns, but the increase in delinquencies seems to be outpacing income growth and there is likely a large group of consumers who are paying their minimum balances and staying out of delinquency, but are too financially stressed to actually pay their full balances. A worsening of the economy could push those consumers into severe delinquency.

"If our forecast of a benign moderation in the labor market is correct, we think consumer spending will remain resilient," wrote Michael Gapen, Bank of America Global Research analyst. "However, elevated credit card delinquencies among lower-income consumers could increase the sensitivity of these consumers to an adverse labor market shock." □

China Lands on Moon's Far Side in Historic Sample-retrieval Mission



Hainan province, China (April 27, 2024).

CNSPHOTO VIA REUTERS

BEIJING (Reuters) – China landed an uncrewed spacecraft on the far side of the moon in early June, overcoming a key hurdle in its landmark mission to retrieve the world's first rock and soil samples from the dark lunar hemisphere.

The landing elevates China's space power status in a global rush to the moon, where countries including the United States are hoping to exploit lunar minerals to sustain long-term astronaut missions and moon bases within the next decade.

The Chang'e-6 craft, equipped with an array of tools and its own launcher,

touched down in a gigantic impact crater called the South Pole-Aitken Basin on the moon's space-facing side at 6:23 a.m. Beijing time (2223 GMT), the China National Space Administration said.

The successful mission is China's second on the far side of the moon, a region no other country has reached. The side of the moon perpetually facing away from the Earth is dotted with deep and dark craters, making communications and robotic landing operations more challenging.

"Landing on the far side of the moon is very difficult because you don't have line-of-sight communications, you're

relying on a lot of links in the chain to control what is going on, or you have to automate what is going on," said Neil Melville-Kenney, a technical officer at the European Space Agency.

Chang'e-6 marks the world's third lunar landing this year: Japan's SLIM lander touched down in January, followed the next month by a lander from U.S. startup Intuitive Machines.

The other countries that have sent spacecraft to Earth's nearest neighbor are the then-Soviet Union and India. The United States is the only country to have landed humans on the moon, starting in 1969. □

Mass Fish Death in Mexico's Chihuahua State Blamed on Severe Drought

A NAHUAC, Mexico (Reuters) – Thousands of dead fish have blanketed the surface of a lagoon in Mexico's northern state of Chihuahua, and local officials are blaming an intense drought.

The fish deaths at the Bustillos Lagoon, by the town of Anahuac in Chihuahua, came during long dry spells as temperatures have climbed above 104 degrees Fahrenheit. The lagoon's water levels are dangerously low, officials said.

Some form of drought is afflicting nearly 90 percent of Mexico, the highest rate since 2011, according to government data. Chihuahua state has

been hit particularly hard with most of its territory engulfed by the most extreme levels of dryness.

There was much less water in the lagoon for the fish to live in, and the remaining water was of poor quality, according to Irma de la Pena, head of the Ecology Department in the city of Cuauhtemoc.

"When the amount of water decreases, the pollutants become more concentrated and therefore they also affect the species that live here," Ms. De la Pena said.

Mass fish deaths in the area have happened in previous years when the lagoon dried up and fish stranded.

Livestock, including cows and donkeys, are also perishing as dams run low and farmers struggle to secure water.

Heat and drought have become so severe that many people who rely on agriculture have packed up and left.

"It's very abandoned because since it doesn't rain...they no longer dare to continue living here," said Jesus Maria Palacios, a raiser of livestock in Cuauhtemoc.

At the lagoon, local authorities are racing to cover the dead fish with lime, concerned their rapid decomposition under the baking sun could endanger public health by attracting insects and spreading disease. They are asking local organizations to help.

"What we need is support, especially with the potential we have for a health issue," said Saul Sausamed, president of the Anahuac community. □



Thousands of dead fish lie in the dry bed of the Bustillos Lagoon as high temperatures have caused an intense drought, in Anahuac, Chihuahua state, Mexico (June 7, 2024).

REUTERS/JOSE LUIS GONZALEZ

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