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THE

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# REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING



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Can It Really Last?**



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 Junk food is easy and convenient. How can you break the habit of consuming it?  
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**Front Cover:** Newly-elected Pope Leo XIV addresses the crowd on the main balcony overlooking St. Peter's Square in Vatican City, Vatican (May 08, 2025).

VATICAN MEDIA VIA VATICAN POOL/GETTY IMAGES

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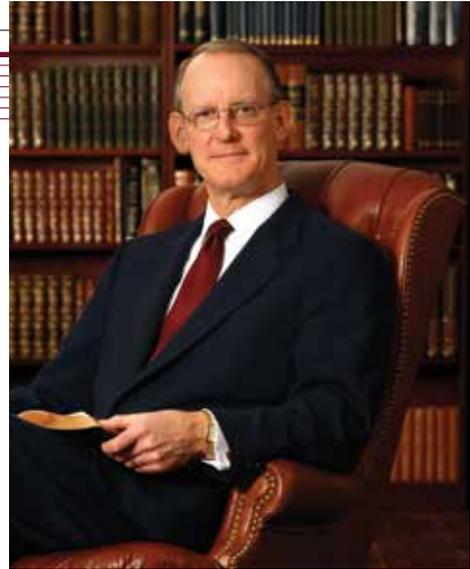
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## PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



# Why Christians Do Not Protest

**W**ATCHING PROTESTERS on the streets of Los Angeles today brings to mind the riots that rocked the same city 33 years ago. In late April and early May of 1992, dozens were killed with thousands injured and thousands more arrested. Reports placed property damage at \$1 billion, with 1,100 buildings damaged.

It was the most devastating event of its kind in American history, but was surpassed in the spring of 2020 by nationwide protests, with some estimating twice the damage.

Regardless of *what* is being protested—with injustices real or perceived—chaos, destruction, arson, violence, vandalism, theft, injury and even loss of life often follows.

I am writing this only days after over 2,100 “No Kings Day” protests involving an estimated 5 million people took place worldwide. In just the immediate radius of The Restored Church of God Headquarters in Wadsworth, Ohio, demonstrations occurred in dozens of communities—including Cleveland, Akron, Chagrin Falls, Cuyahoga Falls, Parma, Dover, Ashland, Mentor and North Ridgeville.

Ahead of the event, organizers described their purpose this way: “Cities across Northeast Ohio

[are] preparing for a wave of protests Saturday as part of ‘No Kings Day,’ a national movement opposing what organizers call increasing authoritarianism and political overreach. From lakeside parks to suburban squares...participants [are] rallying under the message: ‘No Kings, not now, not ever’” (*News 5 Cleveland*).

Yet Christians are commanded: “Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. *Honor the king*” (1 Pet. 2:17).

With the Kingdom of God not yet here, the apostle Paul explained this extends to *all* forms of government—not just monarchies. He instructed Titus, “Put them in mind to be *subject* to principalities and powers, to *obey* magistrates, to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men” (3:1-2).

Peter further added people should “by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation,” and in the same context said, “*Submit* yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by Him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is *the will of God*, that with well



Demonstrators take part in a protest against the Trump administration during the “No Kings” national rally in downtown Los Angeles, California (June 14, 2025).

RINGO CHIU/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Kingdom *is not of this world*: if My Kingdom were of this world, *then would My servants fight*, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My Kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36).

Philippians 3:20 reveals that a Christian’s “conversation [meaning *citizenship*] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” II Timothy adds, “No man that wars entangles himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please Him who has chosen him to be a soldier” (2:4).

The apostle James warned, “the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God” (1:20). No amount of human anger or action will bring about the revolutionary change only possible with the arrival of the Kingdom of God. This is why Christians every day pray, “Your Kingdom *come*. Your will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10)! Developing the character to rule in this coming Kingdom and asking God to bring it are the actions true Christians take.

Paul explained the civil duty of Christians: “Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation [meaning *generation* or *age*], among whom you shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:14-15).

Do not be tempted to “make your voice heard” by engaging in protest—even in an instance where a cause seems just. Instead, be visible and take action in the way Christ instructed: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your *good works*, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). God wants a person’s focus to be on *personal conduct*, which invariably translates to being a model citizen in whatever nation one lives.

Focus on developing godly character in your own life now and look forward to *real change* that will come worldwide in the Kingdom of God now just ahead! □

doing you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (I Pet. 2:12-15).

Civil government can only be disobeyed if a Christian is *personally commanded* to do something contrary to Scripture. In Acts 5, Peter and the apostles were confronted with such a situation. After being commanded not to teach in Jesus’ name, “the high priest asked them, saying, Did not we straitly command you that you should not teach in this name? And, behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine” (vs. 27-28).

Peter’s answer is key: “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to *obey God rather than men*” (vs. 29).

Do not misunderstand! This is *not* license to engage in public, organized protest, but rather a command to obey God, no matter the circumstances.

That said, as commandment keepers, true Christians are seldom confronted with such trials. Rather than being the *target* of government officials, they are instead *model citizens* because obeying God’s laws yields peace and order!

The kingdoms of this world are deeply flawed. Just as Adam and Eve rejected God’s rule by succumbing to Satan’s influence and had to learn hard lessons, the same is playing out today on a worldwide scale. The bitter fruit is everywhere, and increasingly evident.

Notice Satan’s words in his failed attempt to make Christ worship him, where he took Jesus up into a high mountain and “showed unto Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto Him,

All this power will I give you, and the glory of them: *for that is delivered unto me*; and to whomsoever I will I give it” (Luke 4:5-6).

Do not miss the point! The kingdoms of this world have currently been “delivered” to Satan the devil. However sincere certain human leaders are, they *cannot* and do not know how to administer the society God envisions and will bring—the Kingdom of God!

Christians *wait for* the Kingdom of God (Mark 15:43). They do *not*, through activism, attempt to correct governments as they currently exist.

God long ago warned of the dangers that come from engaging in mob mentality: “You shall not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shall you speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment” (Ex. 23:2). In other words, do not get caught up in the evils that flow from protest by trying to enact change. How plain!

King Solomon warned in Proverbs 24:21, “My son, fear you the LORD and the king: and *meddle not with them that are given to change*”—think *revolutionaries*.

His reasoning was based on the principle outlined in Exodus, but also rooted in common sense: “*For their calamity shall rise suddenly*; and who knows the ruin of them both?” (Prov. 24:22). Senseless death and calamity—as well as all the other bad fruits of protests—are too often on full display when such events unfold.

Consider the grave injustice of Christ’s capture before His crucifixion. Yet note what He told Pilate: “My



## **6,000 Years Ago— or 460 Million?**

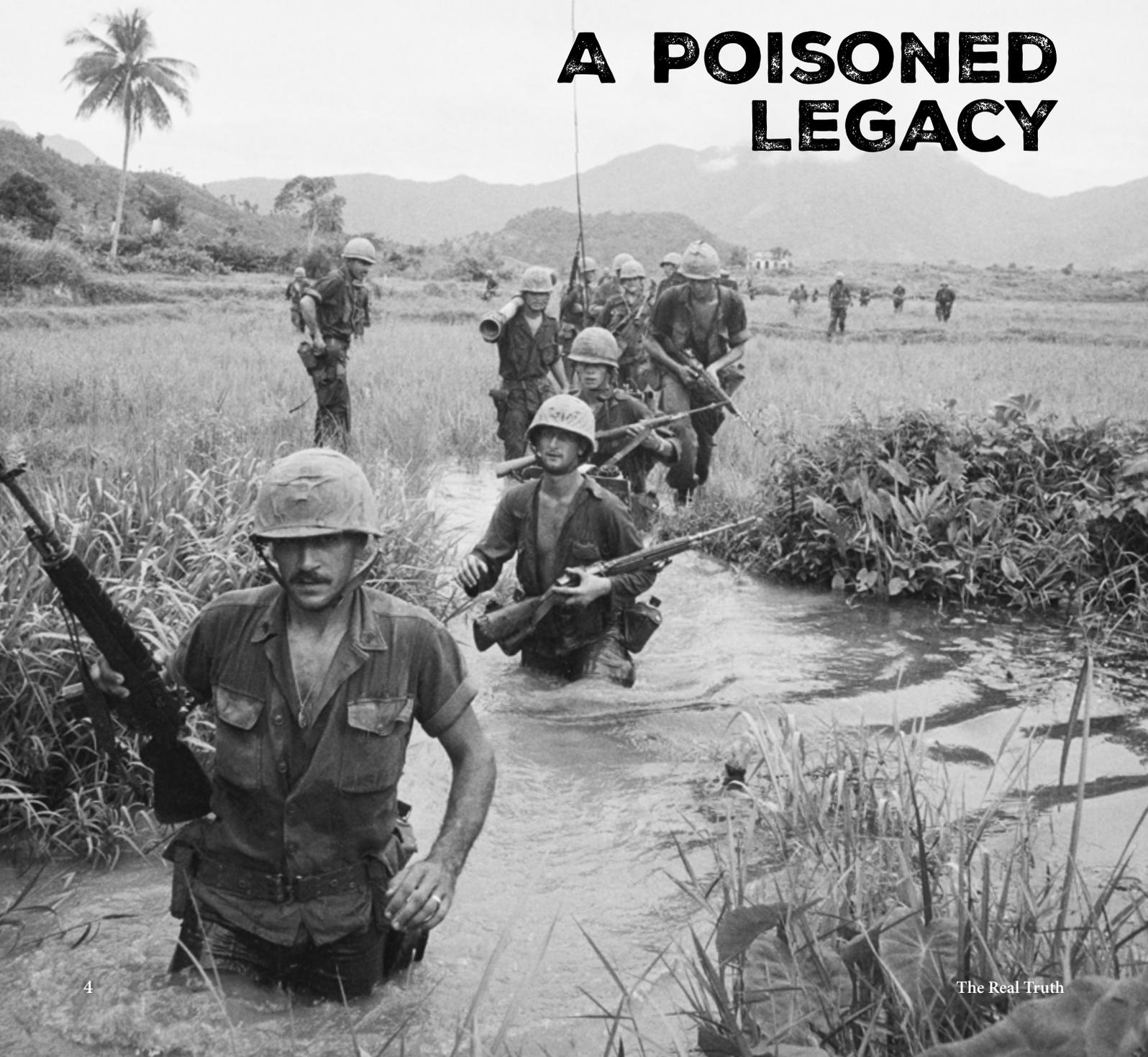
**G**eologists record that trilobites appeared during the Cambrian era—more than 500 million years ago—and existed for hundreds of millions of years more before they went extinct.

What does the Bible say about such prehistoric creatures? Does their existence disprove—or does it actually prove—the validity of Scripture? Read the article “Is the Earth 6,000 Years Old?” for the answer!

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# VIETNAM 50 YEARS LATER

## A POISONED LEGACY



# ONE POWERFUL SYMBOL FROM THE VIETNAM WAR REVEALS A FUNDAMENTAL TRUTH ABOUT PEOPLE.

BY GARRICK R. OXLEY

**F**OR NGUYEN Thanh Hai, it is a struggle to complete tasks others take for granted: buttoning the blue shirt he wears to a special school, practicing the alphabet, drawing shapes or forming simple sentences. Mr. Hai was born in Vietnam with severe developmental challenges linked to Agent Orange.

The Vietnam War ended on April 30, 1975, when the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon fell to Communist forces. But millions of people still face daily battles with its chemical legacy.

Mr. Hai, now 34, grew up in Da Nang, where a former U.S. air base left behind large amounts of Agent Orange that leached into food and water, affecting generations of residents. Across the country, U.S. forces sprayed 19 million gallons of defoliants to strip the enemy's cover. More than half was Agent Orange, a blend of herbicides.

This deadly substance was laced with dioxin, a type of chemical linked to cancer, birth defects and environmental damage. Today, 3 million people, including many children, still suffer serious health issues from it.

By the time Saigon fell in April 1975, over 58,000 Americans had died, an estimated 2 to 3 million Vietnamese

U.S. soldiers wade through the water in Vietnam. Undated photo circa 1960s.

BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

soldiers and civilians had been killed, and the U.S. had spent billions without achieving its goals. Vietnam was left under Communist rule.

Agent Orange and its long-lasting effects symbolize the Vietnam War's legacy as a whole. The moral and societal damage from the conflict still lingers five decades later.

Yet as bad as Agent Orange is, an even deadlier substance was at the heart of the war. It also has long-term effects, and unlike the chemical, there is an unlimited supply.

In the New Testament book of Romans, God describes the ugliness within people: "There is none righteous, no, not one... Their throat is an open sepulcher [a tomb]; with their tongues they have used deceit; *the poison of asps is under their lips*" (3:10, 13).

This poison is HUMAN NATURE.

The chapter goes on to describe the record of humanity: "Destruction and misery are in their ways: *and the way of peace have they not known*" (vs. 16-17).

Human nature is what allows toxins like Agent Orange to be developed and used. Man's sinful tendency to harm, injure and kill other human beings is toxic.

The Vietnam War's legacy lays bare the far worse poison of human nature. Its effects have impacted every generation, harming lives in unfixable ways.

## Poison in Policy and Perception

After the war ended, the U.S. distanced itself from Vietnam, eager to turn the page on a painful chapter in its history. But the Asian nation was left with dozens of dioxin hotspots spread across 58 of its 63 provinces.

Vietnamese officials and advocacy groups say the health impacts last generations, threatening the children, grandchildren and even great-grandchildren of people exposed to the chemicals, with health complications ranging from cancer to birth defects that affect the spine and nervous system.

The science about the human health impact—both to those exposed to Agent Orange and the generations that follow—remains unsettled. This is partly because when the two countries finally started working together in 2006, they focused on finding dioxin in the environment and clearing it instead of studying the still-contentious topic of its impact on human health, said Charles Bailey, co-author of the book "From Enemies to Partners: Vietnam, the U.S. and Agent Orange."

Vietnam identifies Agent Orange victims by checking family history, where they lived, and a list of health problems linked to the poison.

It is hard to believe that such long-lasting consequences stemmed from what began as a Cold War-era effort to contain communism in Southeast Asia.

Following the division of Vietnam in 1954, America increasingly backed South Vietnam against the communist North, eventually deploying more than half a million troops at the war's peak.

The Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964—later revealed to be misrepresented—served as the catalyst for full-scale military intervention. U.S. officials claimed that North Vietnamese boats had attacked two American destroyers in international waters, prompting Congress to pass a resolution granting sweeping war powers to President Lyndon B. Johnson.

These efforts were doomed to fail. For all its firepower, Washington never clearly defined victory or how it would be achieved.

The war sowed deep unrest in the U.S. As the first televised conflict, American citizens watched nightly footage of jungle warfare and flag-draped coffins. Trust in government waned. Military leaders insisted progress was being made, but the 1968 Tet Offensive shattered that narrative. During a supposed holiday ceasefire, North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces launched surprise attacks across South Vietnam. The offensive, though repelled, showed the enemy was far from defeat.

By the time Saigon fell in April 1975, tens of thousands of Americans had died and Vietnam was reunified under communist control.

Proverbs 14:12 reveals this about human nature: “There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” U.S. involvement in Vietnam seemed like the right fight at the time. But in the end, it brought only death and destruction.

#### **The Spread of War’s Poison**

From the start, the Vietnam War suffered from unclear objectives and

divided leadership. Political interference from Washington often overruled military judgment, undermining battlefield effectiveness and morale.

The desperate evacuations of rooftops near the U.S. embassy in Saigon at the war’s end in April 1975 became a lasting image of defeat. With helicopters frantically lifting off from rooftops as crowds pleaded for escape, the scene captured the chaos and final unraveling of years of military effort. For viewers around the world, it exposed the gap between American intentions and outcomes—a superpower reduced to a rushed exit.

This perception of failure prompted what became known as “Vietnam Syndrome”—a deep-seated public skepticism toward foreign military engagements. Decades later, the U.S. no longer embraces its role as world policeman as it once did.

Vietnamese citizens were not the only ones to pay a price. For American soldiers, the battlefield may have been half a world away, but the poison

of war—this time moral, not chemical—followed many home. They had difficulty accepting their own actions in the heat of battle and those of the U.S., and faced challenges reintegrating into a society that was unhappy with how things went in Vietnam.

For George Bennett, the road to recovery and mental health continued long after flying home through San Francisco in 1968, where “sneering” protesters met returning soldiers in the terminal. Someone yelled out “baby killer.” Another spit at them. He and his fellow soldiers were turned away from one airport restaurant. Only later did he realize how much Vietnam had changed him because the war went against the strict sense of values instilled by his parents.

“I would go get my beer and come home...just drink beer and do nothing,” Mr. Bennett, a member of Alaska’s Tlingit tribe, said. “I think part of it was the fact that I was ashamed and guilty because I was part of the atrocity that occurred in Vietnam. I feel that I violated the



A military plane sprays a delta area with Agent Orange in a Vietnam war defensive measure, 20 miles southeast of Saigon, Vietnam.

DICK SWANSON/GETTY IMAGES

value and some of our cultural norms, and it made me want to run.”

And he did, from bar to bar and job to job. Finally, he wound up receiving help for alcoholism and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Mr. Bennett’s story is only a small snapshot of thousands that could be told. War is not just a societal problem—at its core, it is spiritual.

Jeremiah 10:23 sums up what many felt coming out of the war: “...the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps.” People do not instinctively know which way to go. They struggle with the effects of war because God never intended for people to go through war.

Verse 24 records Jeremiah crying out to God for His guidance: “O LORD, correct me, but with judgment.”

People and nations need divine guidance to navigate life. Only God can wipe away the poison of our human nature.

### Lingering Toxins

In the decades after the war ended, Vietnam fenced off heavily contaminated sites like Da Nang airport and began providing support to impacted families. The U.S. largely ignored growing evidence of health impacts—including on its own veterans—until the mid-2000s, when it began funding cleanup in Vietnam. In 1991, the U.S. recognized that certain diseases could be related to exposure to Agent Orange and made veterans who had them eligible for benefits.

Since 1991, America has spent over \$155 million to aid people with disabilities in areas affected by Agent

Top, paratroopers jump out from a helicopter to assist in fighting at Dong Ap Bia, which became known as Hamburger Hill in the A Shau Valley in South Vietnam (May 18, 1969). Middle, soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division move through a valley northwest of Qui Nhon after a napalm bomb, dropped by support plane, explodes on ridge (Sep. 10, 1965). Bottom, two Chinook helicopters hover above a road as they assist in evacuating supplies and soldiers of the South Vietnamese 18th Division and their families from Xuan Loc, Vietnam (April, 1975).

TOP, BETTMANN; MIDDLE, K. SAWADA; BOTTOM, DIRCK HALSTEAD/GETTY IMAGES



Orange or littered by unexploded bombs, according to the U.S. State Department. The two countries have also cooperated to recover war dead, with the U.S. aiding Vietnam's search for its own missing.

Cleaning up Agent Orange is expensive and often dangerous. Heavily polluted soil needs to be unearthed and heated in large ovens to very high temperatures, while less contaminated soil can be buried in secure landfills.

Cooperation on war legacy issues also laid a foundation for growing U.S.-Vietnam ties, culminating in 2023 when Vietnam elevated the U.S. to its highest diplomatic status of comprehensive strategic partner.

"The United States considers Vietnam a key partner in advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific," former U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in Vietnam in 2023.

But U.S. budget cuts during the Trump administration stalled key USAID-backed projects in Vietnam, and while many have resumed, doubts remain about U.S. reliability.

Vietnam now must negotiate a new reality where Washington says the U.S. can no longer afford to help other countries.

The country cannot handle the toxic chemicals that still persist without help, said Nguyen Van An, the chairman of Association for Victims of Agent Orange in Danang. "We always believe that the U.S. government and the manufacturers of this toxic chemical must have the responsibility to support the victims," he said.

Insufficient data means that experts cannot say when the risk to human health will end. But the more urgent problem is if those cleanup efforts are interrupted, the now-exposed contaminated soil could get into waterways and harm more people.

Chuck Searcy, an American Vietnam War veteran who has worked on humanitarian programs in the country since 1995, said he worries that trust built over years could erode very rapidly. He pointed out that

those who benefit from U.S.-funded projects to address war legacies are "innocent victims."

"They've been victimized twice, once by the war and the consequences that they've suffered. And now by having the rug pulled out from under them," he said.

### The Source of All Wars

The Vietnam War was just another chapter in mankind's long record of trying to govern without God, always with the same results.

Isaiah 59, which was quoted by Paul in Romans 3, sums this up: "The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goes therein shall not know peace" (vs. 8).

When people do not know how to guide their steps, they continue down the familiar "crooked paths" of war.

Ecclesiastes 8:9 adds, "one man rules over another to his own hurt." Every war involves a group of men exerting authority over another. But despite the intentions, it always leads to "hurt" for both parties.

The book of James explains more about why peace is so elusive: "What is the source of the wars and the fights among you? Don't they come from the cravings that are at war within you? You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. You do not have because you do not ask" (4:1-2, Holman Christian Standard Bible).

While America had noble reasons for getting involved in Vietnam, this passage plainly shows that people go to war because they do not trust God to provide for their needs. They do not ask Him to provide for them, instead taking matters into their own hands.

Deciding for ourselves what is right instead of submitting to God's will always ends in misery. Isaiah also wrote, "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities [sins] have separated between you and your God, and your

sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear" (59:1-2).

To get off the crooked paths of human nature, society must fundamentally change.

### The Only Antidote

On the 50th anniversary of the war's conclusion, thousands camped overnight on the streets of the former South Vietnamese capital, which was renamed Ho Chi Minh City after it fell to North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops, to get the best vantage point for the parade.

Many lingered on the streets later in the afternoon and had picnics while waiting for drone and fireworks shows scheduled for the evening. The red and yellow of Vietnam's national flag was everywhere—on buildings, shirts and waving hands.

"Now it's time for peace," said spectator Nguyen Thi Hue, a city resident. "Peace is the dream that everyone in the world wants."

Everyone wants lasting peace—an end to the lingering effects of past wars and ongoing wars like those raging in Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan today. But there is only one government that can bring it. The Bible describes it vividly.

Later in Romans, the same God that described human nature as poisonous gives us a glimpse of His own nature. He calls Himself the "God of peace" (15:33; 16:20).

II Peter 1 shows that God wants people to move from their own corrupt human nature to develop His "divine nature" (vs. 4).

God is only doing this in the lives of individuals now, not in the world at large. While we do not have space to explain how to overcome human nature here, read our free booklet *Did God*

Top, U.S. troops take cover from the Viet Cong in a trench on Hill Timothy. Middle, desperate South Vietnamese people clamber aboard barges in the port of Saigon in an attempt to escape from advancing North Vietnamese troops on the day of the Fall of Saigon that ended the war. Bottom, bamboo huts go up in flames during an effort by U.S. Army infantrymen to completely level the Viet Cong stronghold of Ben Suc (Jan. 14, 1967).

TOP, TERRY FINCHER/GETTY IMAGES; MIDDLE, NIK WHEELER/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM, GETTY IMAGES



*Create Human Nature?* at [rcg.org/dgchn](http://rcg.org/dgchn) to learn how you can identify it in yourself and defeat it.

But soon, when prophecy is fulfilled, God *will* work with all people of the Earth—in Vietnam, the United States and everywhere else—spreading peace and leading people to overcome their toxic nature. This can only be carried out by God’s government—the ruling Kingdom of God.

Isaiah 9 describes it: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given [Jesus Christ]: and the government shall be upon His shoulder...of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end...” (vs. 6-7).

This Kingdom will spread peace without end. The Hebrew word for government can also be translated empire. This will be a peaceful world-ruling empire. There will be no opportunity for individual nations to attack one another under God’s watchful loving care.

Micah 4:3 says, “He [God] shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, *neither shall they learn war any more.*”

No longer will nations have massive defense departments and budgets. People will unlearn warfare and rededicate their time and resources to productive pursuits.

Those serving in this divine government are told: “And they that shall be of you shall build the old waste places: you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in” (Isa. 58:12).

Building waste places and restoring paths would involve eliminating the lingering scourge of Agent Orange in Vietnam, as well as fixing all the other damage and hurt caused by war through history.

Fifty years on, Agent Orange still poisons Vietnam’s soil. Human nature still poisons human society. Only God—whose government will bring peace without end—has the power to heal both. □

# The Bible's Greatest Secret

# HIDDEN

## in Plain Sight

Most have heard the term gospel, but few know the world-altering implications of the message Jesus preached.

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

**I**T WAS one of the most intense confrontations of Jesus Christ's ministry.

Surrounded by hostile religious leaders with stones in hand, He was being accused of blasphemy for declaring Himself to be the Son of God (John 10:36). In the face of being stoned, Jesus calmly cited a verse many Bible readers gloss over: "Is it not written in your law, I said, You are gods?" (vs. 34). He was quoting Psalm 82:6.

Wait, did He just call a group of human beings "gods"?

Was Jesus speaking in metaphor? Was this simply a play on words? Or was He hinting at something far more

profound—something almost no one understands today?

When Jesus Christ began His ministry, He brought a message of good news. He was a Messenger sent by God, not focused on personal salvation or just sharing stories about Himself. Instead, He preached "the gospel of the Kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14-15). The word gospel means good news.

This Kingdom is not a metaphor, a church or heaven. It is a literal government to be established on Earth, replacing every human system. It will rule all people with God's perfect Law, bringing true peace and righteous

judgment. This was, and remains, *good news* in a world filled with problems.

God's Kingdom was the message Jesus declared. It was what He taught in city after city. It was the focus of His parables, sermons and private instruction. Yet even His followers struggled to grasp it—just as most do today.

The true gospel not only involves God's coming government, it also has to do with *who* will help lead it. God is not merely building a Kingdom; He is building a Family. Astonishingly, human beings are the ones who will be born into it. Jesus pointed to this truth when He quoted Psalm 82:6, calling people "gods."

This is the Bible's greatest secret—hidden in plain sight for millennia. This message runs through Scripture from beginning to end.

### Most Have Never Heard

The word “gospel” is everywhere in religious culture. It appears in sermons, devotionals, advertisements and mission statements. It is even the name of a music genre. For many, gospel is a familiar term that suggests truth, inspiration or spiritual comfort.

In many denominations, the gospel is thought to center on Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. Some feel the gospel has to do with healing, grace or personal relationships. Others believe it is simply to love your neighbor. While these are all important teachings, they are not the gospel Christ preached.

The Bible records it plainly: “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the *gospel of the Kingdom*” (Matt. 4:23). He preached the Kingdom of God, not a message about Himself. Jesus was simply the Messenger.

From the start, Christ pointed to a government, one that will reign over every nation on Earth. This divine administration is destined to bring peace and justice to a world long plagued by human failure.

The apostle Paul issued a sobering warning about not distorting this message: “I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him [God] that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:6-7). Paul declared that any who preached a different gospel were “accursed” (vs. 8).

This is serious. So serious that God inspired Paul to repeat the warning in verse 9.

How could such an important message be lost? Why do so many speak of the gospel while not understanding the Kingdom—and what it means to be part of it?

The answer is both simple and sobering. Paul explained in II Corinthians 4:4 that “the god of this world”—Satan

the devil—“has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ... should shine unto them.” That blinding includes many who sincerely believe they represent Christ yet unknowingly promote a counterfeit message.

In obscuring the real gospel, Satan has concealed far more than just knowledge of God's future government. He has also obscured who is meant to *participate* in that government.

### A Real Government to Rule

Most people know Jesus is called the Son of God. Yet what is attached to this sonship?

Isaiah 9:6-7 prophesied of Christ's role: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a *Son* is given: and the GOVERNMENT shall be upon His shoulder...of the increase of His GOVERNMENT and peace there shall be no end.” This is not poetic. Jesus is bringing a Kingdom with real authority, laws and leadership.

God's Kingdom will bring peace no human government has ever accomplished.

The prophet Daniel reinforced this: “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a Kingdom, which shall never be destroyed... it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms [the kingdoms of men], and it shall stand *forever*” (2:44).

Even Christ's teaching on the model prayer reflects this future reality. Jesus told His disciples to pray, “Your Kingdom come” (Matt. 6:10). This was not a prayer for something *already present* like a church or religious idea. It was a petition for a world-ruling government still to come. We should still pray this prayer, knowing the Kingdom has not yet been fulfilled.

This government will have a King—Jesus Christ. It will have a capital city—Jerusalem. It will have territory—all nations. It will have laws—God's Commandments. And it will have subjects—the entire world, brought under divine rule for the first time in history.

Isaiah 2 paints a vivid picture of the time when nations will no longer go to

war and weapons will be repurposed for peaceful use. People all over the world will seek instruction directly from God: “Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (vs. 3). At last, mankind will learn the way to peace.

Yet even this description only scratches the surface.

The Kingdom also includes those who will assist Christ in ruling. Revelation 17:14 calls Him “Lord of lords, and King of kings”—meaning others will reign alongside Him. Revelation 1:6 makes this even clearer, recording the words of those who have received salvation: “And has made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever.”

This is where the true scope of the gospel emerges. Jesus called people “gods” for a reason. God does not plan to lead this government alone—He is building a Family of divine beings to rule with Him.

### Hidden for a Reason

There is another reason the truth of the gospel has been hidden for millennia. God has also not chosen to reveal this knowledge to everyone quite yet. While Jesus Christ preached publicly, He often *concealed* the deeper meaning of His words.

Jesus regularly spoke in parables. When asked why, He replied: “Unto you [His disciples] it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand” (Luke 8:10). Matthew's account records Him saying, “It is given unto you to know the mysteries...but to them it is not given” (13:11).

Christ used parables not to make His teachings easier to grasp, but to limit who could understand.

This reveals another fundamental truth: God is not trying to save the entire world now.

Jesus plainly stated: “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14). Only a select number are being given the opportunity to understand

the gospel today, and to be among the first to become “gods.”

For those God is calling (John 6:44), the gospel is like a priceless treasure suddenly uncovered. Jesus compared it to “treasure hid in a field; the which when a man has found, he hides, and for joy thereof goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field” (Matt. 13:44).

This hidden truth is so valuable—so life-changing—that a person would give up everything to obtain it.

### God’s Family Government

From the beginning of man’s existence, God’s plan was to reproduce Himself. Genesis 1 reveals what sets human beings apart from the animals: “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them” (vs. 27). People were made to reflect God. He designed us with the capacity to develop His nature and character within us if we allow Him.

Paul added that those led by God’s Spirit are already considered His children: “The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:16-17).

By this point, you should know this means literal sonship!

The apostle John wrote, “Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God...now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is” (I John 3:1-2). Those who submit to God in their lives will in the Kingdom become “like Him”—composed of spirit.

This is why God says He is using Jesus Christ to bring “many sons unto glory” (Heb. 2:10). As a Father, God is not merely saving people—He is reproducing Himself, just as human parents reproduce themselves through children.

The men who sought to stone Christ in John 10 missed the point, but you should not. Human beings are meant to be God’s offspring.

Jesus called this process being “born again”—not as a religious experience now, but as a literal transformation that occurs at the resurrection. Read John 3:3-6 and I Corinthians 15:50-53.

Human beings will be changed from flesh and blood into immortal

spirit beings, full members of the God Family. This is the astounding truth behind the gospel Jesus taught.

I Corinthians 2 adds more: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him. But God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit” (vs. 9-10).

God is bringing a world-changing government, and Christians can help run it as part of His divine Family.

### Now What?

When Jesus announced the gospel, He tied it directly to personal action: “The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: *repent you*, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

Now that you understand what the true gospel is, His words take on far greater meaning. To “believe the gospel” means accepting this incredible reality: that you are being invited into God’s own Family—to share rulership with Jesus Christ in a soon-coming divine government.

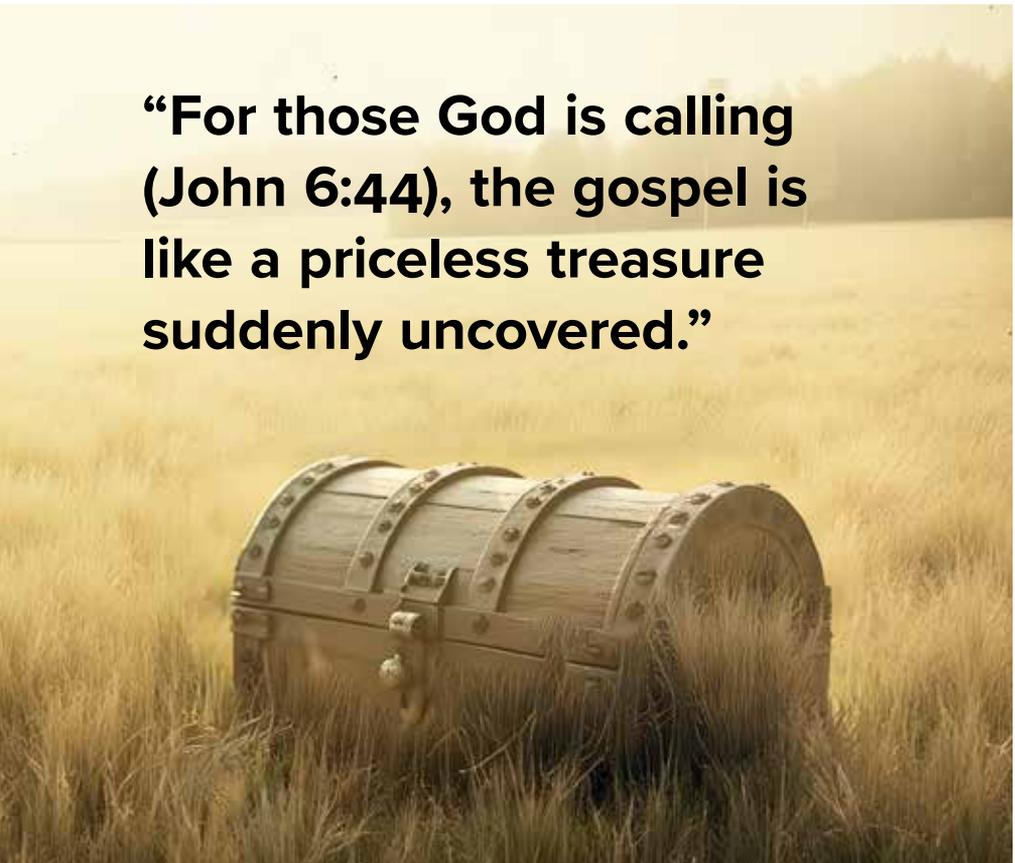
This gospel is the message—and commission—given to The Restored Church of God, creator of this magazine, to proclaim. Read Mark 13:10.

But belief alone is not enough. Christ also said to “repent.” Many assume repentance means only sorrow or emotion, but the term really means to *change*—completely surrendering to God’s way of life.

True Christianity is not just going to church once a week. It is a deep commitment to God. Someone who submits to God’s Way is learning, training, growing, overcoming and preparing to rule.

Jesus Christ will soon return to establish His Kingdom. Those who respond now—who believe and act on this gospel—will reign with Him as “gods.” This is not fantasy—it is the plain truth of your Bible.

To learn how to act on this incredible knowledge, read our free booklet *What Is True Conversion?* at [rcg.org/witc](http://rcg.org/witc). □



**“For those God is calling  
(John 6:44), the gospel is  
like a priceless treasure  
suddenly uncovered.”**



# How Mexico's Cartels Recruit Children and Groom Them into Killers

**S**OL REMEMBERS her first kill for a Mexican cartel: A kidnapping she committed with a handful of other young recruits that twisted into torture and bled into murder. She was 12 years old.

Sol had joined the drug cartel a few months earlier, recruited by someone she knew as she sold roses on the sidewalk outside a local bar. She started as a lookout but rose fast.

The cartel liked her childish enthusiasm for learning new skills, her unquestioning loyalty and perhaps most importantly, her status as a minor protected her from severe punishment if the cops ever caught her.

“I obeyed the boss blindly,” Sol, now 20 years old, told *Reuters*, speaking from the rehabilitation center in central Mexico where she is trying to patch her life back together. “I thought they loved me.”

Sol declined to say how many people she killed during her time in the cartel. She said she had been addicted to methamphetamine from the age of 9. When she was 16 she was arrested for kidnapping—her only criminal conviction—and spent three years in juvenile detention, according to her lawyer.

*Reuters* is withholding Sol's full name, and the names of the city where

she worked and the cartel she joined, to protect her. The news agency was unable to independently verify the details of Sol's account, although psychologists at the center and her lawyer said they believed it was accurate.

Security experts say children like Sol are a casualty of a deliberate strategy by Mexican organized crime groups to recruit minors into their ranks by preying on their hunger for status and camaraderie.

In cartel slang they are known as “pollitos de colores” or “colorful chicks,” after the fluffy baby chicks sprayed with lurid toxic colors and sold at Mexican fairgrounds. They are cheap, burn bright, and do not live long.

*Reuters* spoke to 10 current and six former child assassins, as well as four senior cartel operatives, who said

A former cartel member, who requested to be identified as Isabel, speaks during an interview with *Reuters* at an undisclosed location in Mexico (April 3, 2025).

REUTERS/RAQUEL CUNHA

cartels are increasingly recruiting and grooming young killers.

Their experiences reveal the growing brutalization of Mexican society and the failure of the government to address not only the expanding territorial influence of the cartels but also their extensive cultural hold.

The news agency contacted active cartel members through Facebook and TikTok. Many shared pictures of themselves holding rifles, one had a cap emblazoned with a cartoon chicken firing off automatic rounds—a reference to the “colorful chicks.” They were aged between 14 and 17.

Most said they had been recruited by relatives or friends, joining principally out of a desire to belong to something. They usually came from homes wrecked by violence and drugs. Many were already battling addictions of their own to drugs like cocaine or methamphetamine.

“You join with your death sentence already signed,” said one 14-year-old child killer who has worked for a cartel for eight months, requesting anonymity to protect themselves. “But it’s worth it,” they said. Now they are no longer hungry and have a sense of family.

#### Failed Policies

Although 15 security experts and those within the cartels say child recruitment is becoming more common, a lack of hard data makes the issue difficult to track.

The U.S. government’s Bureau of International Labor Affairs estimates that some 30,000 children have joined criminal groups in Mexico. Advocacy groups say the number of vulnerable children prone to being recruited is as high as 200,000. It is not clear how these numbers have changed over time, though experts say child recruits are getting younger.

A Mexican government report into the cartel recruitment of children published last year found minors as young as 6 have joined organized crime and also highlighted the growing use of technology, like video games and social media, to draw in young recruits.



Left, a person takes part in the “National Mourning of Tehuchitlan” following the discovery of a mass extermination site at Rancho Izaguirre in the state of Jalisco, Mexico City, Mexico (March 15, 2025). Right, women and children observe armed policemen with masks who fight the drug trade in Mexico City (June 25, 2020).

LEFT, LUIS BARRON/PIXELNEWS/FUTURE PUBLISHING VIA GETTY IMAGES; RIGHT, JAIR CABRERA TORRES/PICTURE ALLIANCE VIA GETTY IMAGES

The report said 70 percent of adolescents pulled into the cartels grew up surrounded by high levels of extreme violence.

In 2021, Mexican authorities intercepted three boys between the ages of 11 and 14 in the state of Oaxaca who they said were about to join a cartel after being recruited through the violent multiplayer game “Free Fire.”

Mexico’s National Guard has since issued guidelines on the safe use of video games, while a legislative proposal was before the Lower House seeking to criminalize the cultural glorification of crime in music, TV and video games.

“We see more and more criminal groups co-opting ever younger children,” said Dulce Leal, a director at Reinserta, an advocacy group focused on children who have been victims of organized crime. She said this trend has grown alongside the use of new technologies like video games with integrated chat messaging systems.

At the rehabilitation center in central Mexico, another former child killer, Isabel, 19, who is being treated for extreme trauma and depression, said her uncle recruited her when she was 14. The uncle helped her murder a former teacher who had raped her, she said, and they then became a couple despite him being 20 years her senior.

He got her pregnant but she miscarried, she thinks because of her heavy drug use.

*Reuters* was unable to corroborate all of Isabel’s account, but her arrest as an unnamed child cartel member was published in news reports at the time.

Isabel had tattoos with her uncle’s name removed, but still bears a stencil of his faceless silhouette.

#### ‘Disposable’ Kids

While the youngest kids might only be useful for simpler tasks, like delivering messages or working as lookouts, their loyalty and malleability quickly make them an asset. They are also cheap and



easily replaceable. By the time they are 8 years old, they can usually handle a gun and kill, one cartel member said.

There are some parallels with child soldiers fighting in places like Sudan and Syria, but Mexican cartels differ in their for-profit nature and arguably in the cultural sway they exert. Cases of child killers have emerged in other places too, including Sweden.

“These kids are disposable, they can be used...but in the end, all they await is death,” said Gabriela Ruiz, a specialist in youth issues at Mexico’s National Autonomous University.

In 2021, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights called on Mexico to combat the forced recruitment of minors after reports of children in the state of Guerrero joining a community defense force to fight criminal groups in the area.

Despite a government focus under former President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, and now under current President Claudia Sheinbaum, on combating the social roots of cartel violence—including programs aimed at keeping children away from drugs and crime—little measurable progress appears to have been made, the 15

experts who spoke with *Reuters* said. There are no specific government programs aimed at rescuing recruited children, they added.

One problem is a lack of clear criminal law banning the recruitment of minors into organized crime. Another is the broader problem of child labor in Mexico.

In 2022, the most recent official data available, 3.7 million children aged between 5 and 17 were already working, about 13 percent of that total age group in Mexico. By law, children in Mexico can work from the age of 15 if they meet certain criteria, including signed parental approval.

#### **Fleeing from Death**

Daniel was 16 when he joined a cartel in a state on Mexico’s Pacific coast in 2021. The group turned up to a party he was at and forced the kids to join at gunpoint.

For the next three years, Daniel worked for the cartel—starting as a lookout, becoming an enforcer collecting protection money, and eventually a cartel killer. Many of his friends died along the way, some at the hands of rivals, some by his own cartel—murdered to set an example, because they

refused to follow orders or because they were maneuvering to rise up the ranks.

Last November, he fled the cartel—leaving his partner and three-year-old son behind—and escaped to Mexico’s north, applying for a U.S. asylum appointment through the Biden-era government app CBP One. The program was dismantled when current President Donald Trump took office.

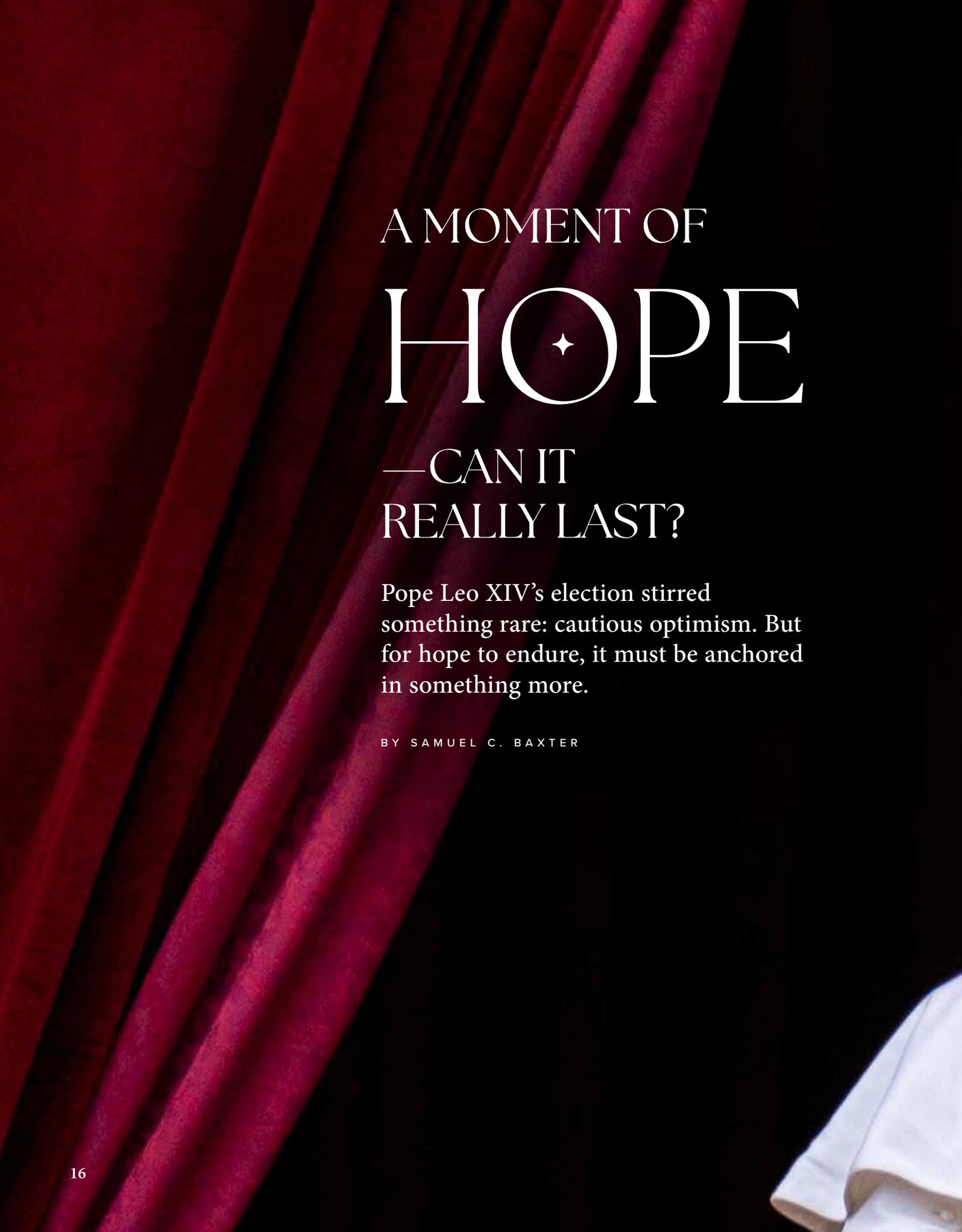
He is now hiding near the border. Afraid for his life and even more scared his old cartel will come after his partner and child. He is saving to pay a smuggler to get him to the United States.

“I have no choice, I’m scared to die,” he told *Reuters* at the migrant shelter where he was staying.

For Sol, her focus is on starting her life over in Mexico. She is studying for a law degree and wants to build a career and stable life away from the death and violence she wrought and suffered as a child.

She hopes to specialize in juvenile law and serve as a mentor for younger children tempted by a life of crime.

“I never thought I would make it to 20, I always thought I would die before,” she said, fighting back tears. □



A MOMENT OF  
HOPE

—CAN IT  
REALLY LAST?

Pope Leo XIV's election stirred something rare: cautious optimism. But for hope to endure, it must be anchored in something more.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

**O**N JUNE 14, tens of thousands packed into Chicago's Rate Field to celebrate the first U.S.-born pope. Choirs sang. Local clergy spoke. White Sox caps dotted the crowd. A hometown priest turned pontiff, now known as Pope Leo XIV, addressed the attendees on the stadium screens.

The prerecorded message spoke directly to young people: "You are the promise of hope for so many of us... we want you to come together to share with us in this common mission...of

Pope Leo XIV waves to the crowd at St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican (May 11, 2025).

MASSIMO VALICCHIA/NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES



Top, Pope Leo XIV addresses Catholic faithful on the scoreboard at Rate Field, home to the Chicago White Sox, during a celebration and mass to honor his selection as pope in Chicago, Illinois (June 14, 2025). Bottom, crowds around St. Peter's Square react as white smoke rises from the chimney on the roof of the Sistine Chapel indicating that the College of Cardinals had elected a new pope during their fourth vote on the second day of their conclave in Vatican City, Vatican (May 8, 2025).

SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES; CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES

announcing a message of true hope and of promoting peace, promoting harmony, among all peoples.”

Outside the stadium, such a hopeful future was hard to imagine.

Earlier the same day, political shootings in Minnesota left one state lawmaker dead and another critically wounded. The gunman, posing as a police officer, had a hit list of nearly 70 officials and activists. In Washington, D.C., U.S. President Donald Trump oversaw a \$45 million military parade marking the Army's 250th anniversary, while in over 2,000 cities worldwide, “No Kings” protests swelled against perceived authoritarianism. Elsewhere, Israel and Iran traded missiles, reviving fears of all-out war.

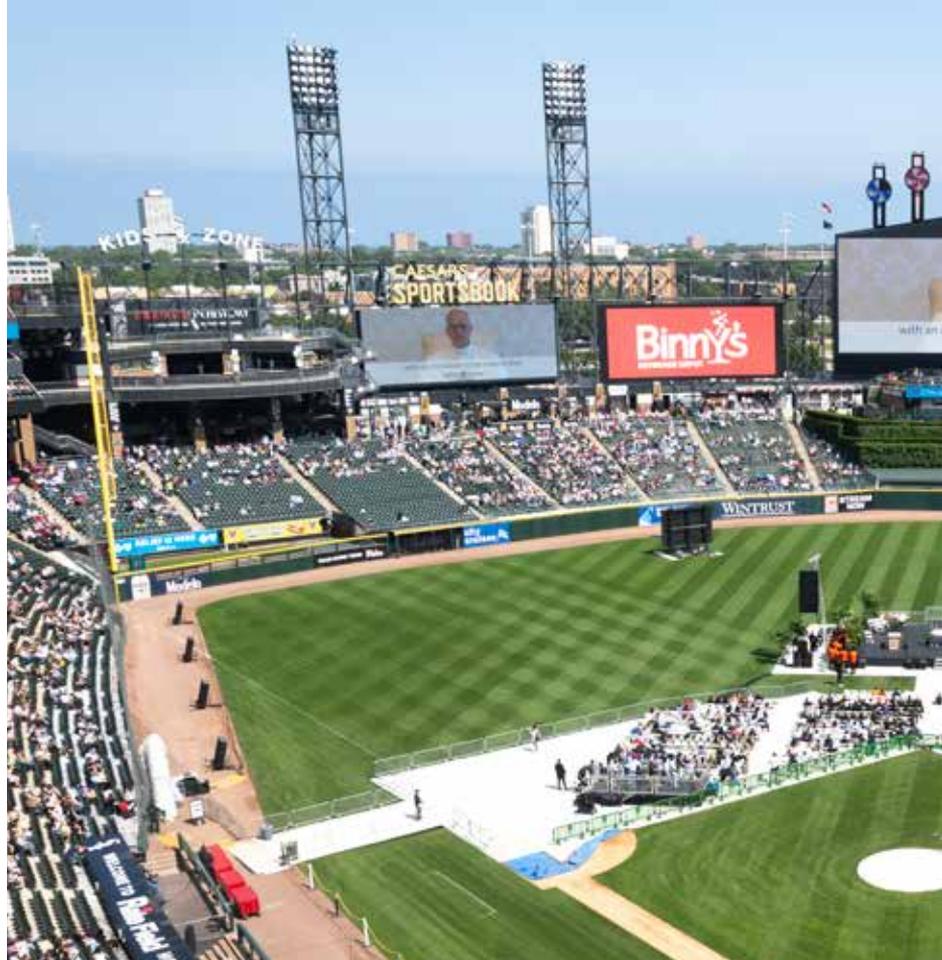
When troubles stack up like this, optimism can seem naive.

Even in such dark moments, people find themselves searching for hope. Pope Leo's election on May 8 became one of those moments that made people pause and believe—if only briefly—that things might get better.

Some of this is his personality. He is calm, plainspoken and respected by his peers. A missionary fluent in multiple languages, he has quietly worked to unify divided churches in Peru. From the moment white smoke billowed above the Vatican, many used the same word: HOPE.

“He is a kind of a vessel we're all pouring our hopes and expectations into until this papacy takes shape,” Steven Millies, a professor of Public Theology at Catholic Theological Union, told *The Washington Post*.

Surges of optimism are not unique to new popes. When a fresh face rises to leadership, the world seems full of possi-



bility. People want to believe that maybe, just maybe, this time will be different.

There is a cycle engraved in the tablets of history. Moments of hope burn high and bright, followed by an inevitable return to normalcy.

That does not mean we should stop hoping. But it does force a harder question: What kind of hope actually lasts?

#### **A Year of Hope?**

Hope was already in the air before Pope Leo's election. In May 2024, Pope

Francis had declared 2025 a Catholic Jubilee Year—a tradition held every 25 years to mark a spiritual reset. His declaration opened with a verse from the Bible: “Hope does not disappoint” (Rom. 5:5, New King James Version).

In his papal bull *Spes Non Confundit*, Francis meditated on the concept of hope.

“Everyone knows what it is to hope,” he wrote. “In the heart of each person, hope dwells as the desire and expectation of good things to come,



despite our not knowing what the future may bring.” He called on believers to become “tangible signs of hope,” encouraging them to rediscover God’s mercy through works of charity and spiritual renewal.

Pope Leo struck a similar note. In his Chicago address, he told young people to spread the message of hope “in outreach, in service, in looking for ways to make our world a better place.”

Both pontiffs pointed to Jesus Christ and eternal life as the ultimate

source of hope. But they placed the emphasis on expressing that hope by improving the here and now in striving to fix society’s injustices and strife.

This is ultimately the same kind of hope the world already clings to. It is the hope that drives political movements, social campaigns and humanitarian efforts. It is the belief that if we try hard enough, this present age can be redeemed.

Make no mistake: Hope in the here and now will disappoint. History proves this.

#### Patterns of the Past

The emotional charge around Pope Leo XIV’s election is not new. History keeps offering moments that seem like turning points for everything to finally get better.

When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, it felt like the Cold War had ended overnight. Crowds danced atop the crumbling concrete. Freedom seemed to triumph. Former U.S. President Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign promised “Hope and Change,” igniting global enthusiasm. In 2010, the Arab Spring swept across North Africa and the Middle East, sparking what many hoped would be a new era of freedoms. During the COVID-19 pandemic, each vaccine announcement came with renewed optimism for a return to normal.

Yet today, Russia and Ukraine are at war, authoritarian regimes have resurged in the Middle East and America remains deeply divided. The world has yet to fully recover—economically or emotionally—from the pandemic.

This is the endless cycle: a hopeful peak, then slow erosion toward the status quo. So why do we keep clinging to hope even though it so often disappoints?

#### Why Hope Moves Us So Deeply

Psychologists have spent decades trying to understand why hope matters so much.

One leading theory, developed by researcher Charles Snyder, breaks hope into three key elements.

**Goals:** What we want to achieve.

**Pathways:** The ability to come up with routes toward goals—even when met with resistance.

**Agency:** The inner belief that we can start and keep moving toward our goals.

People with high “hope scores” are often not the smartest or most skilled but they tend to persevere. They tend to recover faster from injury, handle trauma better and succeed more consistently. They suffer the same hardships as everyone else but are more adept at picturing a better future and finding ways to move toward it.

Neurologically, hope activates the brain’s planning centers. Hopelessness, by contrast, triggers its threat and stress responses. We are *physically wired* to function best when we believe something good is ahead.

But when that hope is delayed—over and over again—it starts to wear us down. Proverbs 13:12 captures this plainly: “Hope deferred makes the heart sick: but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.”

Beyond describing these effects, the Bible explains why our hope instinct runs so deep.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God “has made everything beautiful in [its] time; also He has set the world in their heart...” The word “world” comes from the Hebrew *olam*—meaning eternity.

God wired ETERNITY into us.

We were not designed to be creatures of the present moment. We were made to crave things that last. Even when short-term hopes fail us, our yearning for something lasting does not go away—because God placed it in our hearts.

Romans 8 expands on this: “The whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now...waiting for the adoption [sonship], to wit, the redemption of our body” (vs. 22-23). The entire Creation is waiting—yearning—for a kind of hope that has not yet been fulfilled. It is the hope of God’s master plan for mankind. Read verse 19.

This is why we keep clinging to hope, even when the patterns of his-

tory try to beat it out of us. Even if a person has not yet heard what God has planned for all mankind, this yearning remains in their heart.

### Godly Hope

It is not wrong to desire peace or long for fairness. But when our *source* of hope is in this world, it will always lead to disappointment.

Psalm 146 warns: “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish” (vs. 3-4).

Even the best human plans are temporary. The next verse shifts the focus: “Happy is he...whose hope is in the LORD his God” (vs. 5).

This is the critical difference. One kind of hope depends on human momentum. The other rests on divine promises.

Yet God-given hope must go beyond mere words of looking to Jesus or a vague notion of eternal life. This hope must be crystal clear in a person’s mind.

This is the sort of hope Paul meant in Romans 5:5 when he said “hope does not disappoint”—which is also translated “does not make us ashamed.” This is not a feeling based on emotions or headlines, but on knowing with certainty what God is doing on Earth today—and what He will soon do in the world to come (Heb. 6:5).

Put simply: Worldly hope is tied to what *might* change—godly hope depends on what *will*.

### Steadfast Anchor

The apostle Peter wrote that God “has begotten us again unto a *lively hope* by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (I Pet. 1:3). The word “lively” means living, active, strong and effective. This is a hope you can always count on.

Hebrews 6 calls this same enduring hope “an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast” (vs. 19). It holds steady because it is tied to something—*Someone*—unchangeable.

The context explains more. Paul takes us back to God’s promise to

Abraham: “When God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself” (vs. 13). In other words, God did not just promise salvation—He backed that promise with an oath, swearing by His own perfect character.

Verse 17 expands the picture: “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the *heirs of promise* the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath.”

God wanted the heirs—those who would receive the promise—to know it was *guaranteed*.

Verse 18 states that, because it is “impossible for God to lie” we can confidently “lay hold upon the hope set before us.”

**“Hebrews 6 calls this same enduring hope ‘an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast’ (vs. 19). It holds steady because it is tied to something—Someone—unchangeable.”**

That “hope set before us” is the promise of eternal life in the Kingdom of God—not as spectators or distant citizens, but as full members of God’s Family.

Romans 8:17 calls Christians “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” Galatians 3:29 ties this back to Abraham: “And if you be Christ’s, then are you Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

This is the deeper meaning behind hope as an anchor. It holds true because it is tied to a God who cannot lie, whose plan has never changed, and who wants to make us part of His eternal Family.

### Lay Hold on What God Has Promised

How can you “lay hold upon the hope set before” you? How can you reach out, grab hold of it and never let go?

First, you must know exactly what it entails. God’s Plan is found all throughout the pages of the Bible. It describes a future when:

- “The LORD shall be king over all the earth” (Zech. 14:9)
- “The saints of the Most High shall take the Kingdom, and possess the Kingdom forever” (Dan. 7:18)
- “Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isa. 2:4)
- “[God] will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces” (25:8)

Do not read these verses as poetry or allegory. These are all specific, world-changing events God declares *will happen*.

This is the very same message Christ came preaching, which is the “gospel of the Kingdom of God” (Mark 1:14-15). This involves a very real government and a literal reign. It involves a spiritual Family that God is building now, quietly developing His character in the hearts and minds of those He is calling.

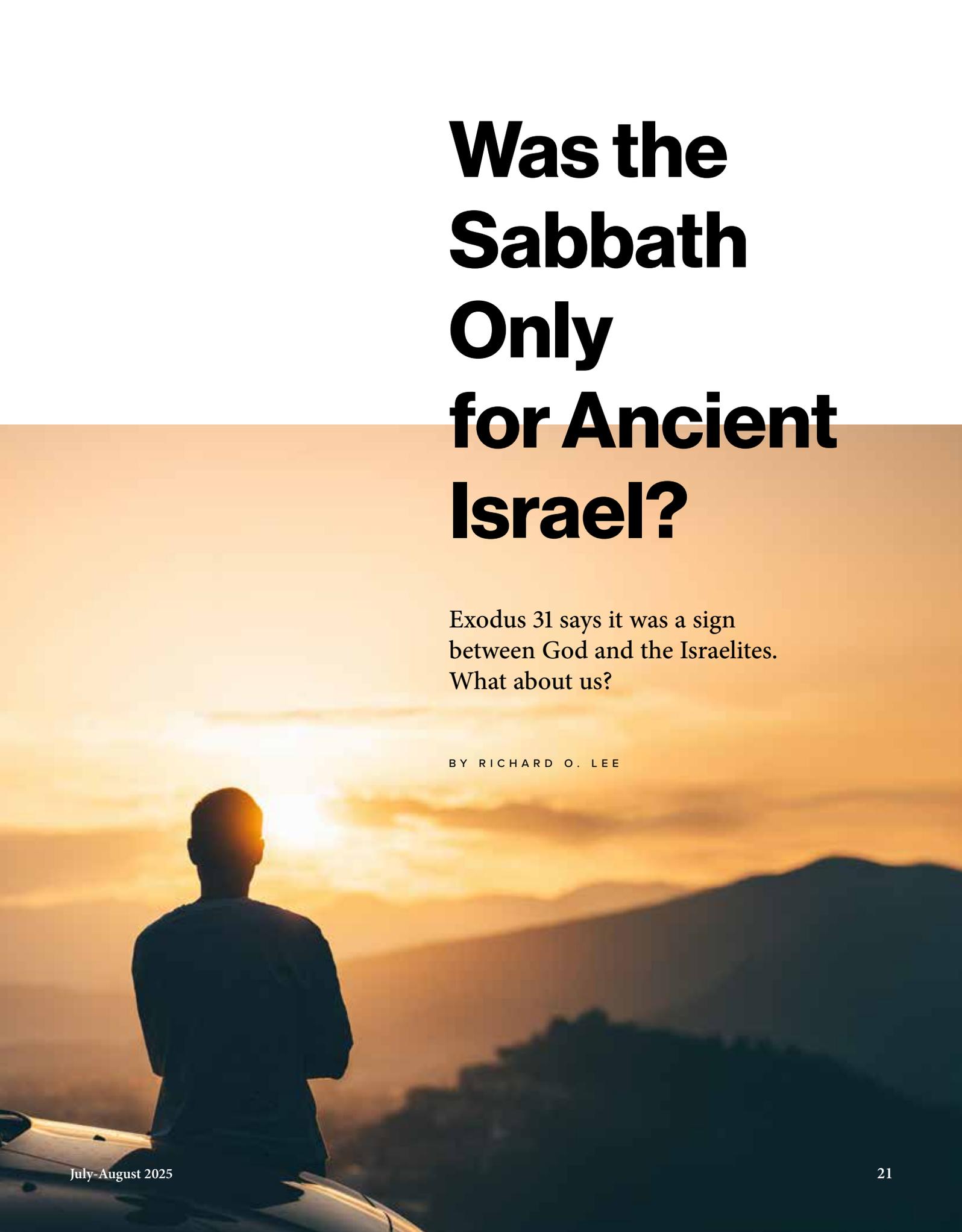
These are all the ingredients of a living, active hope.

Yet do not just take this article’s word for it. If your heart longs for something more than temporary bursts of optimism—if you want to know *for sure* what God has promised and how you fit into it—it is on you to study.

You need to prove beyond a doubt that the Bible is God’s inspired Word. That what He says in it will come to pass. That you can wholeheartedly rely on everything in its pages.

Start with our free booklet *Bible Authority...Can It Be Proven?* at [rcg.org/bacibp](http://rcg.org/bacibp). It will build your trust in what the Bible actually says—rather than emotional platitudes or popular ideas.

Never settle for hope that flickers and fades with the next crisis or news cycle. Determine to lay hold of the hope that never fails. □



# Was the Sabbath Only for Ancient Israel?

Exodus 31 says it was a sign  
between God and the Israelites.  
What about us?

BY RICHARD O. LEE

**T**HE SABBATH is one of the most revealing commandments in the Bible. It identifies who God is and who His people are today. Our Creator commands one day each week to be set apart, a vivid contrast to all the other days.

But who is the Sabbath for? Should it still be observed and kept? Some believe it was made exclusively for ancient Israel or for the Jews.

In Exodus 31, God said, “The children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed” (vs. 16-17).

This passage clearly states that the children of Israel were commanded to keep the Sabbath *forever*. Yet other scriptures show there is more to understand.

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ said, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27-28).

“Man” refers to all humanity. Jesus stressed that the Sabbath was made for *everyone*. It was meant for us to rest, be refreshed and spend time with God. Christ did not say it was made for Israel or for the Jews.

How can these two passages both be true?

The Sabbath was given to ancient Israel but also to all mankind. It is still a covenant and gift for God’s people now.

### Plain Origin

When did the Sabbath come into existence? To find out, we have to look earlier than Exodus 31. In the book of Genesis, the Sabbath completes what has been referred to as the Creation Week.

Chapter 2 says, “And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it” (vs. 2-3).

God sanctified the seventh day before there were any nations on the planet—long before the man named Israel or his son Judah, from whom the Jews descended, came into existence.

That day was so important to God that He later made it the Fourth Commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor, and do all your work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Ex. 20:8-11).

## “Israel was meant to be a model nation... By watching Israel, other nations would learn about the true God and His laws.”

The Sabbath was established over 2,500 years prior to God’s covenant with Israel in Exodus 31. From the beginning, He built the seventh-day rest into the pattern of everyday life.

### A Sign for God’s People

Now that we have seen the Sabbath began long before Israel existed, what did it mean when God later gave it as a covenant sign?

In Exodus 31:13, God stated, “My Sabbaths you shall keep: for it is a *sign* between Me and you throughout your generations; that you may know that I am the LORD that does sanctify you.”

Let’s break this down. The religious-sounding word sanctify simply means to set apart for a holy use. A covenant is an agreement between

two parties—like signing a contract. The Sabbath was a *sign* identifying Israel and setting them apart for God’s special purpose.

God had to reveal to ancient Israel that the Sabbath was holy time. At the time of the Exodus from Egypt, Israel had just spent almost two centuries in slavery. They had long forgotten the identity of the true God and His Sabbath day.

The Sabbath was illustrated to them when God sent bread from heaven called manna for six days, but not on the seventh day. Read Exodus 16 for the full story. God told Moses to instruct the people to gather double on the sixth day of the week, then rest on the seventh day Sabbath and not do any physical labor. God took special care to teach this physical nation the spiritual value of keeping the day.

Israel was meant to be a model nation—an example showing that God blesses those who obey Him. By watching Israel, other nations would learn about the true God and His laws.

The Sabbath did not begin with Israel and it does not end with this nation. The Sabbath is a sign that still identifies and sets apart those who belong to God today.

### The Sabbath in the New Testament

The New Testament clearly shows that Jesus observed the Sabbath when He walked the Earth. Christ knew exactly which day the Sabbath was—and He kept it faithfully.

Luke 4:16 says, “And He [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read.” Jesus taught, preached and healed on the Sabbath.

Jesus Christ is the example that anyone who wants to obey God must follow. Read I Peter 2:21. He led a perfect, sin-free life.

He kept the Fourth Commandment, and all the commandments, perfectly through His entire lifetime. He never told anyone to stop keeping it or that it was only for the Jews. Jesus tied Himself

to this day directly, saying in Luke 6:5 that “the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath.”

The early Church continued the same pattern. Acts 13:42-44 shows the apostles Paul and Barnabas taught on the Sabbath day. The passage shows they were teaching the truth to Gentiles—non-Israelites.

In Hebrews 4:9, Paul said, “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God” (New International Version). God expects all of His people, regardless of their background, to observe the Sabbath rest.

Reading the rest of Hebrews 4 shows that the weekly Sabbath points to a prophetic future time of rest for those who belong to God. This future rest represents the time when all humanity will be freed from sin under God’s Kingdom.

This is why those who follow Christ—then and now—continue to keep the Sabbath.

#### God’s People Today

Who are God’s people today? Even as Israel was delivered from Egypt so they could worship God, individuals today have been called out of a sinful world to worship God and obey His commandments. John 6:44 explains that the Father draws people to Jesus Christ.

Being descended from Israel does not set a person apart—obedience does.

God did make a special Sabbath covenant with Israel and the Jews. But it applies to Christians today as well. Romans 2 says, “A true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by God’s Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people” (vs. 29, New Living Translation).

Anyone who obeys God, regardless of background, is a spiritual Jew.

Galatians 6:16 supports this, saying of those who follow God’s commands: “Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the *Israel of God*” (NIV).

What defines being a follower of Christ is obeying the laws of God. And the most visible commandment that

sets a person apart from others is the Sabbath. It identifies those who worship God.

#### A Command That Still Applies

The truth matters to God, and it should matter to us. The Sabbath is not only about a requirement to observe the right day, but about being in harmony with our Creator.

The Fourth Commandment is tied directly to God’s identity. God states that the Sabbath identifies Him and reminds His people of who He is (Ezek. 20:12). It is a weekly reminder of the Creator—the God who made heaven and earth in six days and rested on the seventh.

The Sabbath was not just for ancient Israel—it is for all mankind. This special day was given at Creation to complete the weekly cycle. God preserved it through Israel’s history.

Jesus faithfully observed the Sabbath and made it central to His life and ministry. If you want to follow Christ, consider keeping the same day He did. The apostles and the early Church observed it, and it is still in force today.

Isaiah 58 shows that those who keep the Sabbath will be blessed by God: “If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honorable; and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words: then shall you delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father: for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it” (vs. 13-14). If you observe the Sabbath, you can lay hold on these blessings too.

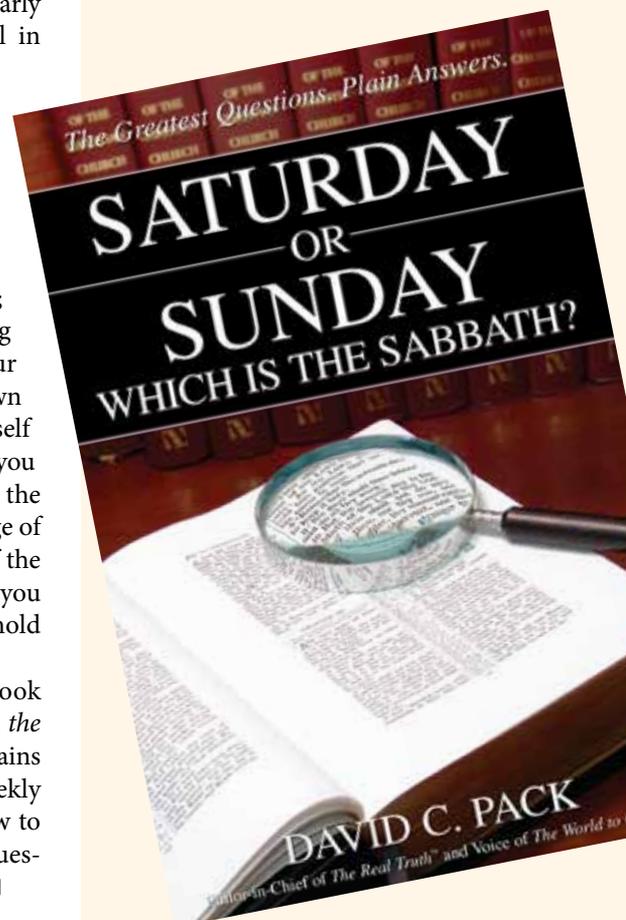
To learn more, read our book *Saturday or Sunday – Which Is the Sabbath?* at [rcg.org/tsosw](http://rcg.org/tsosw). It explains how you can know whether the weekly Sabbath is Saturday or Sunday, how to properly keep it, and many other questions that may be on your mind. □

# Made for YOU

Did you know God created the Sabbath to benefit man—not to burden him?

Learn more by reading the book *Saturday or Sunday – Which Is the Sabbath?*

[rcg.org/tsosw](http://rcg.org/tsosw)



# With Retail Cyberattacks on the Rise, Customers Find Orders Blocked and Shelves Empty

A STRING OF recent cyberattacks and data breaches involving the systems of major retailers have started affecting shoppers.

United Natural Foods, a wholesale distributor that supplies Whole Foods and other grocers, said recently that a breach of its systems was disrupting its ability to fulfill orders—leaving many stores without certain items.

In the UK, consumers could not order from the website of Marks & Spencer for more than six weeks—and found fewer in-store options after hackers targeted the British clothing, home goods and food retailer. A cyberattack on Co-op, a UK grocery chain, also led to empty shelves in some stores.

Cyberattacks have been on the rise across industries. But infiltrations of corporate technology carry their own set of implications when the target is a consumer-facing business.

Beyond potentially halting sales of physical goods, breaches can expose customers' personal data to future phishing or fraud attempts.

Here is what you need to know.

## Cyberattacks Are on the Rise Overall

Despite ongoing efforts from organizations to boost their cybersecurity defenses, experts note that cyberattacks continue to increase across the board.

In the past year, there's also been an "uptick in the retail victims" of such attacks, said Cliff Steinhauer, director of information security and engagement at the National Cybersecurity Alliance, a U.S. nonprofit.

"Cyber criminals are moving a little quicker than we are in terms of securing our systems," he said.

Ransomware attacks—in which hackers demand a hefty payment to restore hacked systems—account for a growing share of cyber crimes, experts note. And of course, retail is not the only affected sector. Tracking by NCC Group, a global cybersecurity and software escrow firm, showed that indus-

Some shelves at a Whole Foods in New York City sit empty (June 10, 2025).

AP/WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS



trial businesses were most often targeted for ransomware attacks in April, followed by companies in the “consumer discretionary” sector.

Attackers know there is a particular impact when going after well-known brands and products that shoppers buy or need every day, experts note.

“Creating that chaos and that panic with consumers puts pressure on the retailer,” Mr. Steinhauer said, especially if there is a ransom demand involved.

Ade Clewlow, an associate director and senior adviser at the NCC Group, pointed specifically to food supply chain disruptions. Following the cyberattacks targeting M&S and Co-op, for example, supermarkets in remote areas of the UK, where inventory was already strained, saw product shortages.

“People were literally going without the basics,” Mr. Clewlow said.

#### **Personal Data Is Also at Risk**

Along with impacting business operations, cyber breaches may compromise customer data. The information can range from names and email addresses to more sensitive data like credit card numbers, depending on the scope of the breach. Consumers therefore need to stay alert, experts say.

“If [consumers have] given their personal information to these retailers, then they just have to be on their guard. Not just immediately, but really going forward,” Mr. Clewlow said, noting that recipients of the data may try to commit fraud “downstream.”

Fraudsters might send look-alike emails asking a retailer’s account holders to change their passwords or promising fake promotions to get customers to click on a sketchy link. A good rule of thumb is to pause before opening anything and to visit the company’s recognized website or call an official customer service hotline to verify the email, experts say.

It is also best not to reuse the same passwords across multiple websites—because if one platform is breached, that login information could be used to get into other accounts, through a tactic known as “credential stuffing.”

Mr. Steinhauer added that using multifactor authentication, when available, and freezing your credit are also useful for added lines of defense.

#### **Which Companies Have Reported Recent Cybersecurity Incidents?**

A range of consumer-facing companies have reported cybersecurity incidents recently—including breaches that have caused some businesses to halt operations.

United Natural Foods, a major distributor for Whole Foods and other grocers across North America, took some of its systems offline after discovering “unauthorized activity” on June 5.

## **“Overall, experts say it is important to build up ‘cyber hygiene’ defenses and preparations across organizations.”**

In a securities filing, the company said the incident had impacted its “ability to fulfill and distribute customer orders.”

While United Natural Foods worked steadily to restore the services, there were leaner supplies of certain items for a period of time. The Amazon-owned grocer’s partnership with United Natural Foods currently runs through May 2032.

Meanwhile, a security breach detected by Victoria’s Secret in May led the popular lingerie seller to shut down its U.S. shopping site for nearly four days, as well as to halt some in-store services. Victoria’s Secret later disclosed that its corporate systems also were affected, causing the company to delay the release of its first quarter earnings.

Several British retailers—M&S, Harrods and Co-op—have all pointed to impacts of recent cyberattacks.

The attack targeting M&S, which was first reported around Easter weekend, stopped it from processing online orders and also emptied some store shelves.

The company estimated in May that it would incur costs of 300 million pounds (\$400 million) from the attack.

Other breaches exposed customer data, with brands like Adidas and The North Face disclosing that some contact information was compromised recently.

In a statement, The North Face said it discovered a “small-scale credential stuffing attack” on its website in April. The company reported that no credit card data was compromised and said the incident, which impacted 1,500 consumers, was “quickly contained.”

Meanwhile, Adidas disclosed in May that an “unauthorized external party” obtained some data, which was mostly contact information, through a third-party customer service provider.

Whether the incidents are connected is unknown. Experts like Mr. Steinhauer note that hackers sometimes target a piece of software used by many different companies and organizations. But the range of tactics used could indicate the involvement of different groups.

Companies’ language around cyberattacks and security breaches also varies—and may depend on what they know when. But many do not immediately or publicly specify whether ransomware was involved.

Still, Mr. Steinhauer says the likelihood of ransomware attacks is “pretty high” in today’s cybersecurity landscape—and key indicators can include businesses taking their systems offline or delaying financial reporting.

Overall, experts say it is important to build up “cyber hygiene” defenses and preparations across organizations.

“Cyber is a business risk, and it needs to be treated that way,” Mr. Clewlow said.

To learn how you can protect yourself from tech traps, read our article “From Romance to Robocalls: Keeping Yourself Safe from Scams.” □



# Breaking the Junk Food Cycle

Junk food is easy and convenient. How can you break the habit of consuming it?

**W**HY IS it so hard to eat a healthy diet?

According to a national Cleveland Clinic survey, “the most common barrier to a healthier diet is that almost half of Americans (46%) view healthy food as being more expensive, while also citing a lack of time to prepare healthy meals (23%) and unfamiliarity with healthy ways of cooking (20%).” The survey also found that 45 percent of Americans purchase fast food at least once a week.

While many know that junk food is associated with an increase in obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer, tooth decay and other maladies, and that vegetables and fruits are what they *should* eat, junk food remains popular.

These salty snacks, sugar-filled desserts, fried treats and sweet beverages are some of the major food culprits within this category. Generally, these contain minimal amounts of protein, vitamins,

minerals, fiber and lots of empty calories from sugar or fat.

Related are ultra-processed foods such as breakfast cereals, frozen pizzas, potato chips, ice cream and more. These foods make up about 60 percent of the U.S. diet. For kids and teens, it is even higher—about two-thirds of what they eat.

Ultra-processed foods have been linked to a host of negative health effects, from obesity and diabetes to heart disease, depression, dementia and more. One recent study suggested that eating these foods may raise the risk of early death.

Most people want to be healthy and feel good. But with the hustle and bustle of everyday life, tight finances and the allure of a juicy burger with french fries, what can you do to make better choices?

#### **Quick Fix**

As any busy person knows, eating healthy does not always seem realistic. Children need to be

ferred to soccer and ballet practice. There are work projects, laundry, family needs, car issues and other tasks that have to be done. Quality options are often substituted with highly processed boxed meals.

Depending on where you live, eating right may feel virtually impossible. A drive down a main street of any sized town or city engulfs the senses in an onslaught of bright colors, flashing signs and enticing slogans all designed to make you crave a quick-fix meal.

“...fast food has infiltrated every nook and cranny of American society,” Eric Schlosser wrote in *Fast Food Nation*. “An industry that began with a handful of modest hot dog and hamburger stands in southern California has spread to every corner of the nation, selling a broad range of foods wherever paying customers may be found.”

While fast food may appear cheap and convenient, the long-term costs are anything but. The money saved on a value menu today can quickly be outweighed by future medical bills. A 2024 report from the CDC estimated that obesity-related medical costs in the U.S. were nearly \$173 billion in 2019. Individuals with obesity paid an average of \$1,861 more in medical costs annually than those with a healthy weight.

Then there is the cost in productivity. Poor diets have been linked to lower academic performance in children and decreased workplace performance in adults. Chronic fatigue, foggy thinking and diminished physical stamina are often rooted in a nutrient-deficient diet.

These hidden costs, though less visible, impact quality of life, and reveal that junk food’s true price tag is far higher than what the receipt shows.

### **Blame Game**

When it comes to dealing with the increase in fast food popularity—and the associated obesity pandemic—there is a lot of blame to go around. There are food manufacturers and their sly production techniques, unscrupu-

lous advertisers who know their claims are half-truths at best and calculating retail marketers who understand that placing junk food next to a checkout line will lead people to make choices they may not normally make.

Much of this, health experts say, is related to the increase of processed food. However, many factors can influence obesity including lack of physical activity, eating more calories than you use or eating foods high in sugar, not getting good quality sleep or enough sleep, stress, health conditions, genetics, some medications and our environment.

Twinkies are just one example of a processed food to avoid. The additive that gives them their smooth feel—cellulose gum—is also used in rocket fuel. The gooey pastry eaten for breakfast? Most likely it contains alloxan, a byproduct of white flour, and it has been shown to destroy the pancreatic beta cells.

The white biscuit sauce slathered on top of a piece of fried chicken? It could have been created with corn dextrin, a common thickener used in most fast food that is also present in the glue on envelopes and postage stamps—and is even put in explosives.

Similarly, the list of other ingredients in what is labeled food would shock those who do not regularly read labels. Manufacturers have found a way to cause you to keep coming back for more by including certain additives and chemicals that create an addiction to their products.

In addition, foods that are mass produced can be more quickly processed, more efficiently packaged and sold, and stay on the store shelves longer. This all amounts to more profits for the food manufacturers but less nutrition for you.

There are healthier fast-food options such as salads, but be careful of certain salad dressings and add-ons like fried onions or croutons that add more calories.

According to the World Health Organization, “Worldwide adult obesity has more than doubled since 1990, and adolescent obesity has quadrupled.”

Additionally, “In 2022, 2.5 billion adults (18 years and older) were overweight. Of these, 890 million were living with obesity. Over 390 million children and adolescents aged 5-19 years were overweight in 2022, including 160 million who were living with obesity.”

Populations of entire countries are suffering from poor health partly through a regular diet of junk!

One of the most troubling aspects of junk food consumption is how aggressively companies market to children. Studies show that children under age 8 are cognitively and emotionally vulnerable, unable to understand the persuasive intent of advertising. Despite this, the average child in the U.S. sees thousands of food ads annually—most promoting sugar-laden cereals, fast food and snacks.

Characters from beloved shows are often licensed to create branded snacks and meals. Happy Meal toys, cartoon-themed cereals and colorful packaging all reinforce brand loyalty at a young age.

While the blame game could go on forever—science calls it a disease, doctors recommend surgery for it, evolutionists claim overeating is a leftover characteristic from man’s hunter/gatherer days—ultimately the only one who is responsible for putting a stop to it, through monitoring what is on your plate, is *you*.

### **Fuel for Life**

The modern world promotes a rushed existence. Attention spans are shorter. Time has become increasingly precious, with many not wanting to waste a single second. Many people push the limits and sleep less, looking for any shortcut to get more out of each day.

Where does a healthy diet fit into all of this? Nowhere, most conclude, and often the first place they cut corners is with their diets.

Realize, however, that what you put into your mouth is the *fuel* for your body. Consider. You would never pour sand into the gas tank of your car. If you did, you would go nowhere—and fast!

Eating junk food is similar, but the effects take longer to become obvious. Recognize what the ingredients contained in overly processed products are doing to your internal organs. Many of the calories in junk food come from dietary fat, starchy carbohydrates and sugar. This results in excess fat in the body. Excess fat wreaks havoc on the body's very delicate and complex internal system.

Those who survive almost exclusively on a junk food diet may appear to be fine, yet real harm is taking place inside the body. Even those who are not drastically overweight can still be causing major harm to their bodies.

Think of the chemicals mentioned earlier—cellulose gum, alloxan, corn dextrin and many others. Consuming these is no better than trying to run a car engine on improper fuel.

The body needs certain vitamins and minerals to function properly. Unlike automobiles, though, the human body can put up with a lot of abuse before it quits running.

When you eat a poor diet on a regular basis, you severely impair the body's ability—through its immune system—to fight off toxins and diseased cells.

Yet the negative effects of wrong eating often take years to manifest themselves.

You need quality nutrients to think, work and thrive. Yet a healthy diet is possible!

#### God's Perspective

Many conclude nature's health principles are just that—*nature's*. But when fully understood, these rules for an abundant existence came from a Creator. This Supreme Being wants all mankind to lead happy, abundant lives, as it states in His Word, the Bible: "Beloved, I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers" (III John 2).

God is not a distant observer—He cares about our physical health. During His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ healed the sick and cared for the whole person. While miracles of healing still happen, God also expects us to apply wisdom and diligence to maintain the health we have been given.

Our Creator designed quality food for us to enjoy: "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you" (Gen. 1:29, New

American Standard Bible). Leviticus 11 tells us what animals are clean to eat. Making natural fruits, vegetables and meats that God created a centerpiece of our diets instead of manmade processed foods will pay off.

Psalm 104 adds more: "He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth; and wine that makes glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengthens man's heart" (vs. 14-15).

Daniel 1 tells the story of the young prophet declining poor quality food at the king's table and instead eating a balanced, healthy diet. He had to resist peer pressure, but it paid off. He was noticeably healthier than others who were not watching their nutrition: "At the end of ten days their [Daniel and his friends] countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat" (vs. 15).

Most realize they need to consume healthy foods. Yet there is a major roadblock.

Society tends toward extremes. Everyone has probably met a health food nut who insists on rudely bringing up your food-choice shortfalls at every turn and would never stoop so low as to allow anything non-organic to pass through his lips. And he haughtily makes sure you know it. Despite all this talk of "health," he seems chronically underweight and pale. Something is definitely wrong.

Then there is the other side. This fellow chows down takeout at every meal. His decisions at lunch consists of which value meal number to select—"Should I have the two hamburger patties or just one? Large fries or *extra large*?"—and he will not eat it if it is not deep-fried, fat-filled and drizzled in ketchup.

Missing in both of these instances is balance. One is so "health conscious" he is not eating *enough* of certain foods. The other gorges every chance he gets. Neither extreme is good. The Bible warns against excess: "Have you found

**"Change can be difficult, yet it is possible to replace frequent junk food meals with easy, delicious whole food that will properly fuel your body."**



honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for you, lest you be filled therewith, and vomit it” (Prov. 25:16). Paul wrote, “Let your moderation be known unto all men” (Phil. 4:5).

We should care about our health. And as we do, we should be balanced, wise and moderate.

### **Determine to Change**

Whatever condition you find yourself in, it is never too late to turn things around. All it takes is some knowledge and commitment. Only you can make the tough choices necessary to break free from addicting junk foods.

If your health is a mess, chances are your diet is a mess. This comes back to the fuel idea. What you put in your body directly impacts to your health. Good food builds good health. Junk food, bad health.

This is an example of the principle of cause and effect. For every *effect*, there is a *cause*. You may be in the condition (effects) you find yourself in today because of the sum total of poor and ill-informed choices (causes) made over the course of time. Do not be discouraged. If you have made poor choices in the past, that does not affect your ability to change.

Whether food is helpful or harmful depends on the laws of nature. Something that your body can fully digest and use will bring vibrant health. Something that is junk contributes to lethargy and disease.

Take control and start today. You choose how you will fuel your body. Here are a few tips to help you get started.

Try to eat as many whole foods as possible including vegetables, fruits, whole grains and unprocessed meats. The more raw, unprocessed foods you eat, the better your body will function. Fruits, vegetables, whole grains and herbs have tremendous health and natural healing benefits. Natural foods play important roles in your body: Fruits cleanse, vegetables build, grains sustain and herbs help heal.

Avoid highly processed foods, sugar, artificial sweeteners, refined

grains, trans fats and products that have a lot of salt.

Limit the amount of red meat in your diet. According to Cleveland Clinic, “There are many healthy vitamins, minerals and other nutrients in red meat, and it can be a good source of protein, B vitamins, iron and zinc. But it also comes with some health risks, like raising your risk of certain types of cancer, increasing your risk of cardiovascular disease and contributing to having obesity...Red meats are high in saturated fats, which can cause elevated levels of LDL (‘bad’ cholesterol) and put you at risk for cardiovascular disease.” Try substituting beef or lamb with fish, turkey or chicken.

Do your own research and, if needed, consult a health professional about what changes are right for you. By making small changes, you can start turning the tide for the better.

### **Benefits of Good Health**

Good health enables better service to God, our families and communities. It increases energy, sharpens mental clarity and promotes a positive attitude. A healthy life is a gift—but also a responsibility.

To learn much more about how to be healthy, read our free booklet *God’s Principles of Healthful Living* at [rcg.org/glohl](http://rcg.org/glohl).

An excerpt from this booklet makes clear what is at stake for you:

“God’s physical creation is governed by definite, physical laws. These include laws that regulate our bodies. To be healthy, you must follow them. But when they are broken, sickness results.

“When a person breaks these principles and laws of health—whether through omission or negligence—the body suffers. Among the negative results are malnutrition, atrophy from inactivity, or exhaustion from lack of rest—simple cause and effect.

“In this booklet, we will examine several factors contributing to physical well-being, and help you identify areas where improvements could be made. Some of these involve the breaking of firmly established bad habits. These

must be replaced by new habits that harmonize with God’s laws of health. A mind that wants to obey God will look for ways to improve and upgrade life. This includes being more alert, awake, and alive!

“Though not stated in detail in the Ten Commandments or other statutes and precepts, the physical laws of health are living laws—they are real—and the Bible addresses many of them in principle. Breaking them is physical transgression—physical sin.”

It continues, “God does not want us to be ignorant of how cause and effect relates to healthful living. Applying these principles in a balanced way yields great benefits. Healthful living is not an end in itself. Avoid getting carried away or becoming obsessed with health—do not make it your god!

“Once you know the principles that govern health, you can grow in understanding and better practice them. But this should merely be your starting point, with long-term goals in mind. The physical is temporary at best. While you can demonstrate to God that you have wisely managed these physical resources, your main goals in life must surpass the ‘here and now.’ You must not overly focus on exercise or foods.

“In this life, some suffering is necessary. God allows us to endure certain physical ailments and afflictions for a reason. Sometimes, tests come in the form of physical affliction. However, by becoming armed with certain facts and knowledge, and acting on them, you can show God your willingness to properly care for your body—‘the temple of the living God’ (I Cor. 3:16-17). This will lead to greater resistance and immunity to disease and sickness.”

This informative publication provides information on how to “reactivate” your body through exercise, the benefits of wholesome foods, how rest and sleep rejuvenates your body, the benefits of fasting and so much more.

Change can be difficult, yet it is possible to replace frequent junk food meals with easy, delicious whole food that will properly fuel your body. Your body will thank you! □

# Boko Haram’s Resurgence: Why Nigeria’s Military Is Struggling to Hold the Line



Women displaced from Boko Haram attacks fetch water in Dikwa, northeast Nigeria (April 29, 2025).

AP/SUNDAY ALAMBA

**A**buja, Nigeria (AP) – A resurgence of Boko Haram attacks is shaking Nigeria’s northeast, as Islamic extremists have repeatedly overrun military outposts, mined roads with bombs and raided civilian communities since the start of the year, raising fears of a possible return to peak Boko Haram-era insecurity despite the military’s claims of successes.

Boko Haram, Nigeria’s homegrown jihadis, took up arms in 2009 to fight Western education and impose their radical version of Islamic law. The conflict has spilled into Nigeria’s northern neighbors and resulted in the death of around 35,000 civilians and the displacement of more than

2 million others, according to the United Nations.

In a recent attack in the village of Gajibo in Borno state, the epicenter of the crisis, extremists killed nine members of a local militia that supports the Nigerian military, after soldiers deserted the base when becoming aware of the insurgents’ advance, according to the group’s claim and local aid workers. That is in addition to roadside bombs and deadly attacks on villages in recent months.

Nyelni Kwari’s area of Borno, Hawul, includes some of the affected villages, and returning home has become unsafe. “Unfortunately, the situation hasn’t improved for me to feel secure,” said

Kwari, a graduate student in Borno’s capital, Maiduguri.

## Two Factions

Boko Haram has split into two factions over the years.

One is backed by the Islamic State group and is known as the Islamic State West Africa Province, or ISWAP. It has become notorious for targeting military positions and has overrun the military on at least 15 occasions this year, killing soldiers and stealing weapons, according to an *Associated Press* count, experts and security reports.

In May, ISWAP struck outposts in Gajibo, Buni Gari, Marte, Izge and Rann and launched an assault on the Nigeria-Cameroon joint base in Wulgo and Soueram in Cameroon. Other attacks this year have hit Malam Fatori, Goniri, Sabon Gari, Wajiroko and Monguno, among others. The group often attacks at night.

The other faction, Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-Jihad, or JAS, has increasingly resorted to attacking civilians and perceived collaborators, and thrives on robberies and abductions for ransom.

## Losing Ground ‘Almost on a Daily Basis’

At its peak in 2013 and 2014, Boko Haram gained global notoriety after kidnapping 276 Chibok schoolgirls and controlling an area the size of Belgium.

While it has lost much of that territory because of military campaigns, the new surge in Boko Haram attacks has raised fears about a possible return to the gloomy past.

Borno Governor Babagana Zulum warned recently of lost gains after raising concerns that military formations in the state are being dislodged “almost on a daily basis without confrontation.”

Federal lawmakers highlight the extremists’ growing sophistication and advanced weaponry, calling on the government to bolster military capabilities. □

## Conflict and Climate Drive Record Global Hunger in 2024, UN Says

Rome (Reuters) – Acute food insecurity and child malnutrition rose for a sixth consecutive year in 2024, affecting more than 295 million people across 53 countries and territories, according to a UN report.

That marked a 5 percent increase on 2023 levels, with 22.6 percent of populations in worst-hit regions experiencing crisis-level hunger or worse.

“The 2025 Global Report on Food Crises paints a staggering picture,” said Rein Paulsen, Director of Emergencies and Resilience at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.

“Conflict, weather extremes and economic shocks are the main drivers, and they often overlap,” he added.

Looking ahead, the UN warned of worsening conditions this year, citing the steepest projected drop in humanitarian food funding since the report’s inception—put at anywhere between 10 percent to more than 45 percent.

Washington has led the way, largely shutting down the U.S. Agency for International Development, which provides aid to the world’s needy, canceling more than 80 percent of its humanitarian programs.

“Millions of hungry people have lost, or will soon lose, the critical lifeline we provide,” warned Cindy McCain, the head of the Rome-based World Food Programme.

Conflict was the leading cause of hunger, impacting nearly 140 million people across 20 countries in 2024, including areas facing “catastrophic” levels of food insecurity in Gaza, South Sudan, Haiti and Mali. Sudan has confirmed famine conditions.

Economic shocks, such as inflation and currency devaluation, helped push 59.4 million people into food crises in 15 countries—nearly double the levels

seen prior to the COVID-19 pandemic—including Syria and Yemen.

Extreme weather, particularly droughts and floods, shunted 18 countries into crisis, affecting more than 96 million people, especially in Southern Africa, Southern Asia, and the Horn of Africa.

The number of people facing famine-like conditions more than doubled to 1.9 million—the highest since monitoring for the global report began in 2016.

Malnutrition among children reached alarming levels, the report said. Nearly 38 million children under five were acutely malnourished across 26

nutrition crises, including in Sudan, Yemen, Mali and Gaza.

Forced displacement also exacerbated hunger. Nearly 95 million forcibly displaced people, including refugees and internally displaced persons, lived in countries facing food crises, such as Democratic Republic of Congo and Colombia.

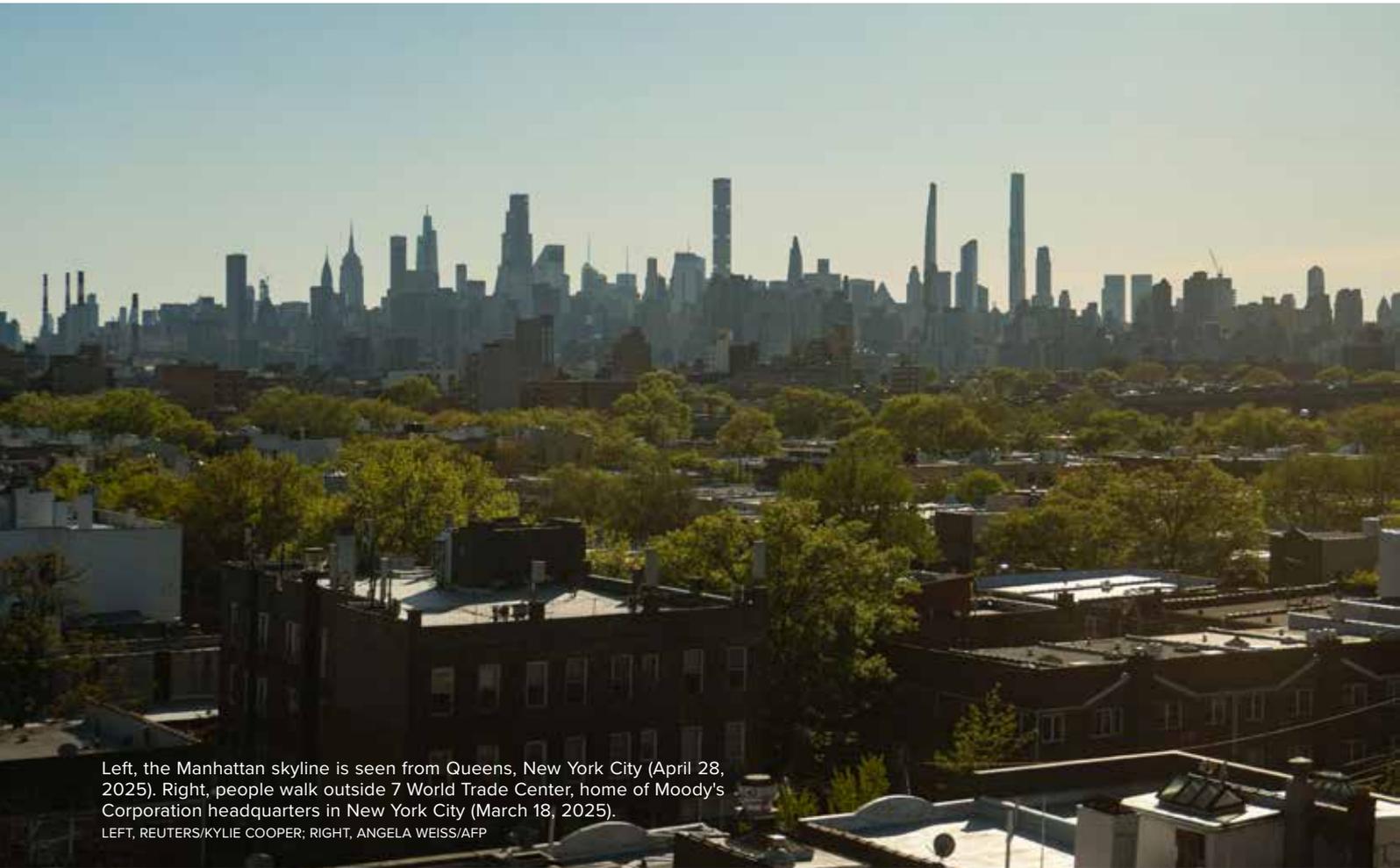
Despite the grim overall trend, 2024 saw some progress. In 15 countries, including Ukraine, Kenya and Guatemala, food insecurity eased due to humanitarian aid, improved harvests, easing inflation and a decline in conflict.

To break the cycle of hunger, the report called for investment in local food systems. “Evidence shows that supporting local agriculture can help the most people, with dignity, at lower cost,” Mr. Paulsen said. □



Palestinians stretch their arms through a metal fence with empty pots and pans, trying to receive food from a charity distribution point in Khan Yunis, Gaza (June 5, 2025).

ABED RAHIM KHATIB/ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES



Left, the Manhattan skyline is seen from Queens, New York City (April 28, 2025). Right, people walk outside 7 World Trade Center, home of Moody's Corporation headquarters in New York City (March 18, 2025).

LEFT, REUTERS/KYLIE COOPER; RIGHT, ANGELA WEISS/AFP

## Moody's Cuts America's Pristine Credit Rating

**R**euters – Moody's downgraded the U.S. sovereign credit rating on May 16 due to concerns about the nation's growing \$36 trillion debt pile.

Moody's first gave the United States its pristine "Aaa" rating in 1919 and is the last of the three major credit agencies to downgrade it.

The cut by one notch to "Aa1" follows a change in 2023 in the agency's outlook on the sovereign due to wider fiscal deficits and higher interest payments.

"Successive US administrations and Congress have failed to agree on measures to reverse the trend of large annual fiscal deficits and grow-

ing interest costs," Moody's said as it changed its outlook on the U.S. to "stable" from "negative."

The announcement drew criticism from people close to President Donald Trump.

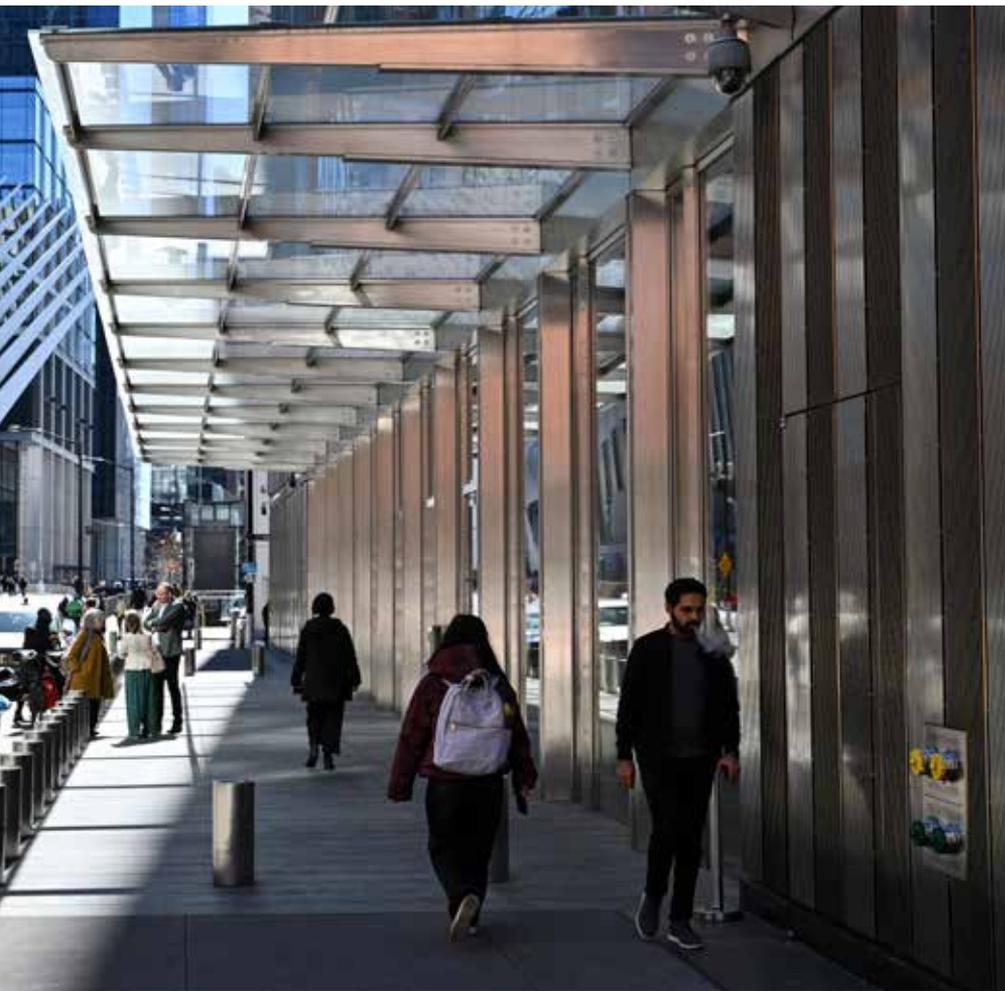
Stephen Moore, former senior economic advisor to Mr. Trump and an economist at Heritage Foundation, called the move "outrageous." "If a U.S.-backed government bond isn't triple A-asset then what is?" he told *Reuters*.

White House communications director Steven Cheung reacted to the downgrade via a social media

post, singling out Moody's economist, Mark Zandi, for criticism. He called Mr. Zandi a political opponent of Mr. Trump.

Mr. Zandi declined to comment. Mr. Zandi is the chief economist at Moody's Analytics, which is a separate entity from the credit ratings agency Moody's.

Since his return to the White House on January 20, Mr. Trump has said he would balance the budget while his Treasury Secretary, Scott Bessent, has repeatedly said the current administration aims to lower U.S. government funding costs.



But the administration's attempts to raise revenue and cut spending have so far failed to persuade investors.

Mr. Trump's attempts to cut spending through Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency have fallen far short of its initial goals. And attempts to raise revenue through tariffs have sparked concerns about a trade war and global slowdown, roiling markets.

Left unchecked, such worries could trigger a bond market rout and hinder the administration's ability to pursue its agenda.

The downgrade, which came after a market close, sent yields on Treasury bonds higher, and analysts said it could give investors pause.

"It basically adds to the evidence that the United States has too much debt," said Darrell Duffie, a Stanford finance professor who was formerly on Moody's board. "Congress is just going to have to discipline itself, either get more revenues or spend less."

#### **Focus on Deficits**

Moody's said the fiscal proposals under consideration were unlikely to lead to a sustained, multi-year reduction in deficits, and it estimated the federal debt burden would rise to about 134 percent of GDP by 2035, compared with 98 percent in 2024.

The cut follows a downgrade by rival Fitch, which in August 2023 also cut the U.S. sovereign rating by one notch, citing expected fiscal deteriora-

tion and repeated down-to-the-wire debt ceiling negotiations that threaten the government's ability to pay its bills.

Fitch was the second major rating agency to strip the United States of its top triple-A rating, after Standard & Poor's did so after the 2011 debt ceiling crisis.

"They have got to come up with a credible budget agreement that puts the deficit on a downward trajectory," said Brian Bethune, an economics professor at Boston College, referring to lawmakers.

#### **Market Fragility**

Investors use credit ratings to assess the risk profile of companies and governments when they raise financing in debt capital markets. Generally, the lower a borrower's rating, the higher its financing costs.

"The downgrade of the US credit rating by Moody's is a continuation of a long trend of fiscal irresponsibility that will eventually lead to higher borrowing costs for the public and private sector in the United States," said Spencer Hakimian, chief executive at Tolou Capital Management, a hedge fund.

Long-dated Treasury yields—which rise when bond prices decline—could go higher on the back of the downgrade, said Mr. Hakimian, barring news on the economic front that could increase safe-haven demand for Treasuries.

The downgrade follows heightened uncertainty in U.S. financial markets as Mr. Trump's decision to impose tariffs on key trade partners sparked investor fears of higher price pressures and a sharp economic slowdown.

"This news comes at a time when the markets are very vulnerable and so we are likely to see a reaction," said Jay Hatfield, CEO at Infrastructure Capital Advisors. □



# Every minute, 56 acres of the world's soil become unusable for farming...

Today's farmlands are tired, overworked and being depleted. According to the World Wildlife Fund, half of the topsoil on the planet has been lost in the last 150 years. The world's productive land is being destroyed by erosion and other degradation. The UN reported that 12 million hectares are lost yearly. In man's husbandry of the soil, his impulse has been to take the simple, fast, cheap, easy way—either ignoring or not recognizing the real causes of the problem. Too often, agriculturists see only the *effects*, while the actual *causes* of the crisis grow worse and more complicated. For the sake of those alive today and all future generations, a major reform in modern agriculture is a must. Order your free copy of the book *Mounting Worldwide Crisis in Agriculture* to learn the stunning facts behind today's growing agricultural troubles and the often overlooked, clear-cut solutions.

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