

MAY-JUNE 2026

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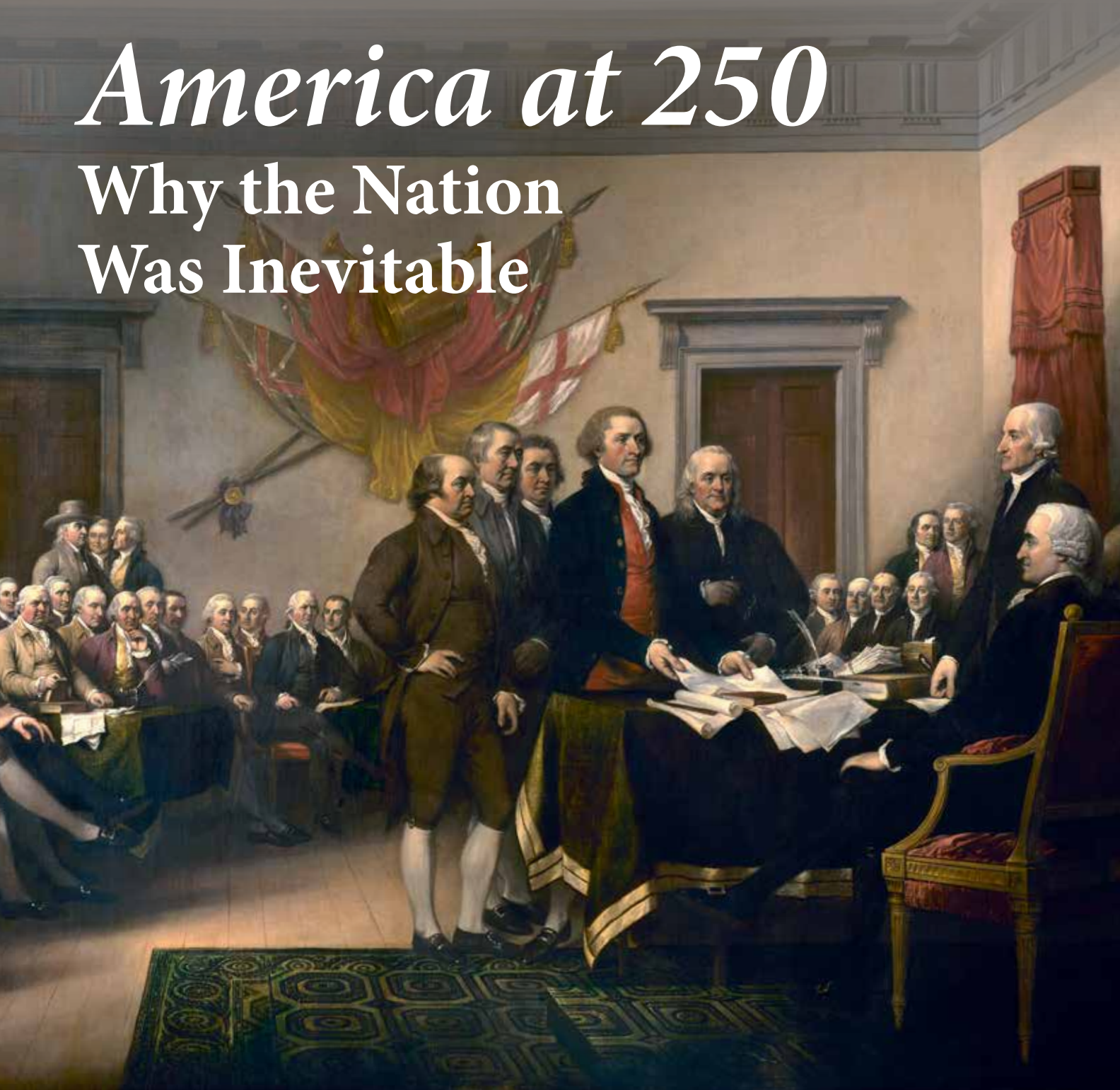
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# REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

## *America at 250*

### Why the Nation Was Inevitable





Vintage engraving by Gustave Dore, from Milton's Paradise Lost.  
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Did Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden get passed on to you and every person who has ever lived?  
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**Front Cover:** The adoption of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776. Oil on canvas by John Trumbull.  
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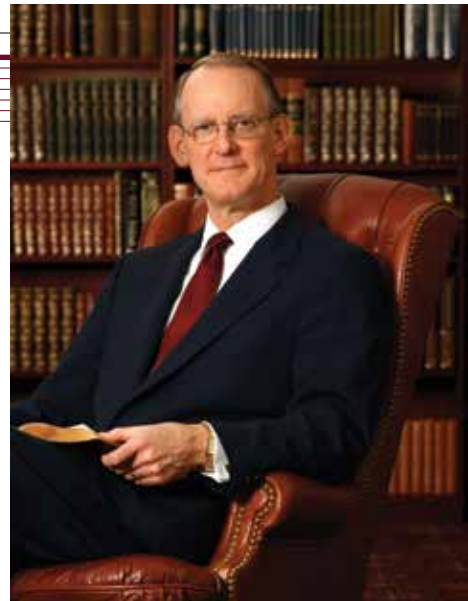
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## PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



# The Law of Kindness

**I**N ADDITION to meeting for the Sabbath, Holy Days and other Bible-appointed times, God's Church enjoys certain traditions (II Thes. 2:15). During the year, men around the world regularly meet for Spokesman Club to hone leadership, speaking and socialization skills. Each club season culminates in Ladies Night, where husbands bring their wives or single men bring dates to a special evening of fine dining, speeches and a Q&A session designed to stimulate discussion in which everyone can participate.

Unless you have attended one, it is difficult to appreciate how special—and often humorous!—these evenings can be.

It was at our 2025 Headquarters Ladies Night that a question I chose to answer inspired a sermon and this Personal: “The Proverbs 31 woman is described this way: ‘in her tongue is the law of kindness’ (vs. 26). What does the ‘law of kindness’ mean to you?”

The world is an increasingly *unkind* place, in need of this “law” more than ever! Proverbs 31 asks a question that introduces a role model who exemplifies this character attribute: “Who can find a *virtuous woman*? For her price is far above rubies. The heart of her hus-

band does safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life” (vs. 10-12).

Deeper in the description of what it means to be a virtuous woman are qualities all people—men and women—should aspire to: “Strength and honor are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness” (vs. 25-26).

The word “kindness” is *khesed* in Hebrew and it means *kindness, piety* or *beauty*. Think. God says acting this way is *law*. Physical beauty is easy to understand, but what about *spiritual* beauty? Good character used to be taught and appreciated. Now it is seldom even thought about!

To truly understand the law of kindness, Proverbs 19 is the place to start. Notice: “The desire [meaning *attractiveness* or *beauty*] of a man is his kindness” (vs. 22). Again, it is not the way a man looks that makes him attractive or beautiful in God's sight, but how he treats others—the degree to which he applies the law of kindness!

You can apply this law *everywhere*—in relationships at work, home, in friendships and with people

you bump into at the grocery store. Husbands and wives, determine not to have any harsh words. Make it your goal.

Not surprisingly, the Bible has much to say on the subject.

The account of King Josiah's death further establishes kindness as a *law*. First note how well loved he was, before seeing *why* he was held in such high regard: "And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah: and all the singing men and the singing women spoke of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel: and, behold, they are written in the lamentations" (II Chron. 35:25).

This king was mourned—and continued to be mourned generations later. This is in great part due to his faithful practice of the *law* of kindness. Here are verses 26 and 27: "Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and his goodness [*khesed* again—kindness!], according to that which was written in the law of the LORD, and his deeds, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah."

Do not miss the point. The summary of this great king's character was *Law-based kindness!* In other words, God's Law is the *path* to kindness.

In Matthew 22, a lawyer tempted Christ by asking, "Master, which is

the great commandment in the law?" (vs. 36).

His answer helps explain why kindness is the foundation of God's Law: "Jesus said unto him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang *all* the law and the prophets" (vs. 37-40).

Don't miss this. God's Law is based on how a person treats God, first and foremost, but also other human beings. This is the law of kindness in action—and is all-encompassing!


Book after book in the Bible speaks of kindness, expanding on its tremendous importance. Here is what the psalmist wrote: "Surely His salvation is near them that fear Him; that glory may dwell in our land. MERCY [*khesed*] and TRUTH are met TOGETHER; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yes, the LORD shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase. Righteousness shall go before Him; and shall set us in the way of His steps" (85:9-13).

Christ in John 17:17 explained, "Your [God's] word is *truth*." Kindness and truth are inextricably woven together.

This should not be surprising considering the nature of the *Author* of this truth and law. Psalm 145:8 explains that "The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of GREAT mercy [again *khesed*]."

There is much more to learn about this enormous subject—far more than can be explained in a brief Personal. For in-depth understanding, I would encourage you to watch my sermon "The LAW of Kindness" at [rcg.org/sermons](http://rcg.org/sermons).

This law of God will soon begin to transform an *unkind* world with the arrival of the Kingdom. Until that time, strive to understand and obey it in your life *now!* □



**“The summary of this great king’s character was Law-based kindness! In other words, God’s Law is the path to kindness.”**

# Children *Do* Have an Instruction Manual!

**P**arenting advice is everywhere—thousands of books, endless opinions and plenty of conflicting ideas. Yet for all the guidance available, many parents still feel unsure about what actually works.

What most may not realize is that there is a clear, reliable instruction manual: the Bible. It cuts through the confusion and reveals proven principles for raising children the right way.

To discover what God's Word says about parenting, request your free copy of *Train Your Children God's Way* at [rcg.org/tuyc](http://rcg.org/tuyc).



**FOREIGN  
INTERVENTION:**

**WHY  
NATIONS  
*CANNOT*  
FIX EACH  
OTHER**

Why do nations' attempts to shape other nations keep failing—and what is the only solution that works?

BY JUSTIN M. FRAZIER

A plume of smoke rises after a U.S. strike on the Iranian capital Tehran (March 3, 2026).

ATTA KENARE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



**T**HE PETRODOLLAR system is a symbol of American influence. It arose from a series of agreements in the mid-1970s that ensured oil would be traded in U.S. dollars. This strengthened America's influence across the Middle East and helped fuel regional economic growth.

Then, over time, American culture and political ideas also began to reshape parts of the region.

The United States used that influence to encourage governments to become more pro-American. Many nations accepted the changes—but Iran pushed back.

From 1978 to 1979, protests spread across Iran against the monarchy led by a shah. Many believed traditional Muslim values were being replaced too quickly. Wealth inequality grew, political repression increased and foreign influence made the government seem less independent. By early 1979, the unrest led to the government collapsing and being replaced by an Islamic theocracy.

Since then, Iran's leaders have promoted their system of government and expressed a desire to expand it beyond their borders. The United States has done the same in different ways—using economic pressure, alliances, and at times, military force to influence other nations.

Those differences have been on full display during the clashes between the U.S. and Iran that are going on today.

The two nations have very different ideas about how a country should be governed—and both believe their system is right. Both have tried to shape other nations in their own image, with some success and many failures.

This is often called foreign intervention, in which one nation tries to influence or reshape another from the outside.

In such cases, who is right? Can one form of government truly work for every nation?

History shows that when nations try to reshape others, they fail—and yet the same foreign intervention tactics are tried again and again. As the Bible

says, “the thing that has been, it is that which shall be...and there is no new thing under the sun” (Ecc. 1:9).

Why do nations keep trying if it does not work? Is there a better way?

### **Defining a Nation**

To understand why foreign intervention fails, we must first understand what a nation is.

Paul explained that God made “of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” (Acts 17:26).

God sees nations as families grown large. He placed them in specific areas and set their boundaries.

After the Flood, all nations descended from Noah and his sons (Gen. 10). God divided the Earth among these families and gave each a place to live (Deut. 32:8). When nations rejected Him, God removed them from their land and gave it to others, as He did with the nations of Canaan and later with Israel (Deut. 9:4-5; II Kgs. 17:7, 18).

God made the “bounds of [national] habitation.” He put people where He wanted them to live. He never wanted people to flee their homes and land because of war, oppression or economic hardship. Rather, He wanted them to live in peace and prosperity that comes from following His Way.

Humanity, however, tends to define nations differently. Nations are seen as systems built on territory, government and citizenship.

Territory includes the land enclosed within a nation's borders. Nations have fought wars and millions have died just to move national borders.

Consider the Alsace region in Europe. It changed hands four times between France and Germany from 1871 to 1945. During that time, the continent fought devastating wars that cost tens of millions of lives. Yet, for the region, the result was a border shifting back and forth only a short distance.

From this perspective, nations can appear interchangeable—as if one

system of government could simply replace another.

But nations are not just systems. They are made up of people, cultures and history. What works in one nation does not always work in another.

This is where the problem begins.

God defined the nations and set their boundaries. But man keeps trying to change them.

### **Futility of Interventions**

Mankind tends to believe that all people are the same and that all nations want the same things. Western democracies, for example, often assume people want to choose their own leaders and shape their own future—but that is not always the case.

Because of this thinking, nations often try to remake other nations in their own image. Sometimes this is done to protect their own interests. Other times, it comes from a genuine belief that their way is better.

Whatever the reason, nations try to impose their ideas on others when they have the opportunity and the power to do so. Yet this kind of forced change rarely lasts.

Again consider the U.S.-Iran conflict. In 1953, American and British intelligence helped overthrow Iran's prime minister in an effort to limit the spread of communism. The shah was restored to power, but his rule lasted only 26 years before collapsing in the Islamic Revolution. The effects of that failure are still being felt today.

This is a common pattern. Foreign interventions often fail because they try to force change that does not fit the people and culture of the nation.

It is like one family trying to tell another family how to live. At first, it may cause tension and small arguments. Over time, resentment grows—and long-term conflict follows.

Nations are similar. But the problem goes deeper than large-scale family squabbles.

The Bible explains why. In Daniel 2, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon dreamed of a great statue made of different metals. The head was gold, the

# TYPES OF INTERVENTION

Foreign intervention is the attempt by one nation to direct or reshape the internal affairs of another nation from the outside.

## SOFT

### POLITICAL PRESSURE

Trying to sway public opinion or impact government decisions (including information campaigns, funding organizations, providing platforms for opposing voices or promoting particular values or worldviews).

### ECONOMIC INFLUENCE

Using economic interdependence via trade, investments, aid, sanctions and other means to influence another nation's decisions.

### MILITARY FORCE

Deploying armed forces across borders ranging from peacekeeping operations or humanitarian intervention to regime change or war.

## HARD

chest and arms were silver, the belly and thighs were bronze, the legs were iron, and the feet were a mixture of iron and clay (vs. 32-33).

God revealed through Daniel that the statue represented a sequence of world empires.

The head of gold was Babylon (vs. 38). It was followed by another kingdom, then another, and another—each powerful but temporary. History confirms this: The Babylonian Empire (625-539 BC) was conquered by the Medo-Persian Empire (558-330 BC), which was later overtaken by the Greco-Macedonian Empire (333-31 BC), and then by the Roman Empire (31 BC to AD 476).

The statue's feet—part iron and part clay—show that even the strongest human systems are unstable.

Daniel told the king that “the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure” (vs. 45). God brought the vision to pass just like He said!

This passage helps explain why foreign interventions ultimately fail. Human systems rise and fall. Even the strongest governments do not last. One unstable system cannot create lasting stability in another.

Most importantly, God alone directs the course of nations. As Daniel wrote, “He removes kings and sets up kings” (2:21).

When one nation tries to force another to change, it is stepping into a role that belongs to God. Human efforts will never produce lasting results.

Only God can truly change nations. And when He does, the results will be complete.

### One Successful Foreign Intervention

Now notice this from Nebuchadnezzar's dream. A stone “cut out...without hands” (vs. 34) strikes the statue and destroys it. The entire system is reduced to dust and blown away. The stone grows into a great mountain that fills the whole Earth (vs. 34-35).

Daniel explained what this means: “the God of heaven [shall] set up

a Kingdom, which shall never be destroyed...and it shall stand forever” (vs. 44).

This describes a complete change in the world’s governments. The systems that exist today—as with those before them—will be removed. In their place will be a world ordered the way God intended.

But what will that world look like?

Jesus Christ will rule that government under God. Nations will no longer follow competing systems, but will be united under one authority.

Isaiah describes this future, saying that all nations will flow to God’s government and learn His ways (2:2-3). People will be taught how to live according to God’s commands.

Where human governments try to force change from the outside, God changes people from the inside. True peace cannot come through pressure or coercion. It comes from shared understanding and willing obedience.

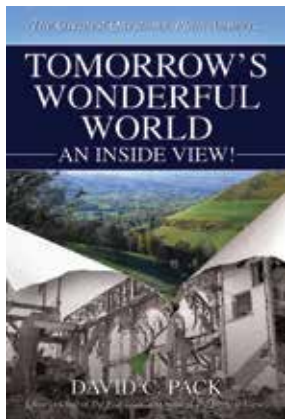
This is why war will end. Nations “shall beat their swords into plowshares...neither shall they learn war any more” (vs. 4). Conflict will disappear because its causes are removed.

God’s coming government will also be marked by fairness. He commands people to “execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother” (Zech. 7:9-10).

As people learn God’s Way, they will no longer be confused about how they should live.

When God intervenes in world affairs, everything will change. Nations try to change other nations from the outside and fail. God will change the world from within—and succeed.

To learn much more about what this will look like, read our book *Tomorrow’s Wonderful World – An Inside View!* at [rcg.org/tww](http://rcg.org/tww). □



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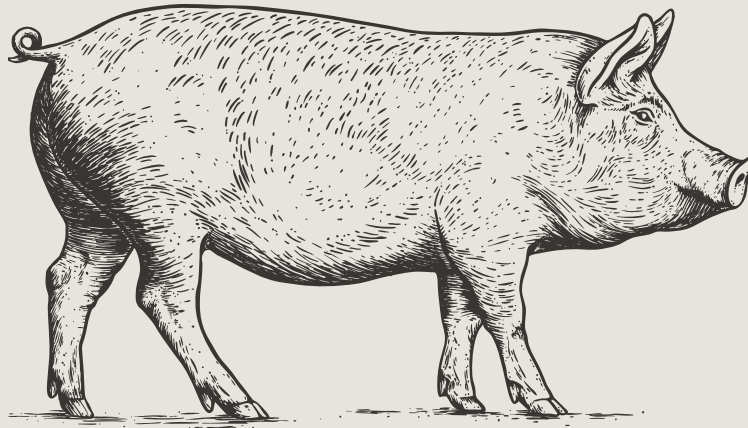
**“WHERE HUMAN GOVERNMENTS TRY TO FORCE CHANGE FROM THE OUTSIDE, GOD CHANGES PEOPLE FROM THE INSIDE.”**



People survey the damage following an Iranian missile strike on the Beit Ya’akov girls’ high school in Tel Aviv, Israel (April 6, 2026).

ERIK MARMOR/GETTY IMAGES

# Did the New Testament Make *All Meats* Clean?



**Most Christian denominations accept all meats as okay to eat. Yet a closer look at the Bible shows otherwise.**

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

**“R**ISE, PETER; kill, and eat.”

In a vision recorded in Acts 10, the apostle Peter witnessed a sheet lowered from heaven, filled with animals—“fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air” (vs. 12)—many of them considered unclean under the laws found in the Old Testament. In verse 13, a voice tells him to kill and eat.

Here is one of Jesus Christ’s apostles, in the early days of the Church, being told to eat what had long been forbidden. For many Christians, this moment appears to signal a turning point. Old restrictions are gone. Case closed.

Other passages seem to support the same conclusion.

In Mark 7:15, Jesus declared that what enters a man from the outside does not defile him. Many take this to mean that all food is okay to eat.

Then there is Paul’s statement in Romans 14: “I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself” (vs. 14). For those looking for confirmation, this seems to remove any remaining doubt.

The Old Testament distinctions between clean and unclean meats appear to have been removed. What was once forbidden is now allowed.

Meats such as bacon, sausage, shrimp, crab, lobster, scallops—and even more unusual animals like frogs

and snakes—are now widely considered acceptable.

Yet if these passages really mean this, why does the Old Testament go to such lengths to define which animals are to be eaten and which are not? And if those distinctions were set aside, does Scripture plainly say that?

These are simple questions. Yet they are often left unanswered.

A closer look at what the Bible really says—both before and after these New Testament accounts—reveals a complete picture.

### **Clear Instructions**

Long before the New Testament was written, the Bible addressed the subject of meats in clear terms. Two chapters—Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14—lay out the animals that are considered clean for eating and other categories of animals that are unclean. They are so detailed and specific that many find them challenging to study.

Consider the context for those receiving these instructions when they were given to ancient Israel. People lived on the land and relied on animals for survival. To “kill and eat” was a normal part of life for them. But just because a creature was available did not mean God intended it to be food.

Based on God’s instructions, if an animal was considered clean, the Israelites knew they could kill and eat it. If an animal was close at hand but it was one God said was unclean, it was off-limits.

Today, we usually purchase our food at a store or a restaurant. But as with the Israelites, we would not know what to eat or avoid unless God told us.

Leviticus 11:3 says, “Whatsoever parts the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and chews the cud, among the beasts, that shall you eat.” Animals such as cows, sheep and deer meet this requirement.

By contrast, animals that do not meet these conditions are excluded. The chapter continues, “the swine, though he divide the hoof, and be clovenfooted, yet he chews not the cud; he is unclean to you: of their flesh shall you not eat” (vs. 7-8).

A clear standard also applies to creatures that live in the water: “These you shall eat of all that are in the waters: all that have fins and scales shall you eat” (Deut. 14:9).

Fish such as salmon, tuna and cod fall into this category. Creatures such as lobster, shrimp and scallops do not meet that criteria. God says of those without these features: “And whatsoever has not fins and scales you may not eat; it is unclean unto you” (vs. 10).

These are plain commands. Certain animals are identified as food—and others are not. Take time to read both chapters for much more detail.

What is sometimes overlooked, even by those who follow these instructions, is that these distinctions did not begin with laws given through Moses.

Centuries earlier, during the time of Noah, God instructed him to take seven pairs of “every clean beast” and only one pair of “beasts that are not clean” into the ark before the flood came (Gen. 7:2). Noah clearly understood the difference. That knowledge had to come from God, long before these laws were recorded in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. God wanted Noah to have food available for the long voyage and made sure he packed animals he could kill and eat.

God defined what qualifies as food in specific terms. The question is, how should the New Testament passages often used to challenge this distinction be properly understood?

### **Often Misunderstood**

Consider first the words of Jesus Christ in Mark 7. The setting here is that the Pharisees were criticizing Jesus’ disciples for eating without first washing their hands. Today that is normal hygiene, but during that time, washing hands was a ceremonial practice the Pharisees had elevated to great importance.

Christ said, “There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man” (vs. 15).

Was this really a statement about making all foods clean?

Let’s look at the beginning of the chapter: “Then came together unto Him [Christ] the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashed, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands often, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders” (vs. 1-3).

The subject here was not which animals could be eaten. It was whether eating with unwashed hands defiled a person spiritually. No mention was made about what kind of food was being consumed.

Jesus was addressing a human tradition, not overturning God’s Old Testament commands. His point was about moral defilement, not diet—emphasizing spiritual cleanliness over ritual practices. Read the full account for yourself.

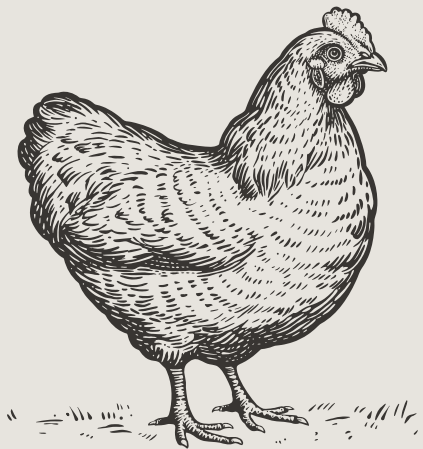
Christ further emphasized this when He spoke directly to His disciples later in the chapter: “Do you not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without enters into the man, it cannot defile him; because it enters not into his heart, but into the belly, and goes out into the draught, purging all meats?” (vs. 18-19).

Some latch on to the phrase “purging all meats” and miss the bigger point here: Germs from unwashed hands cannot spiritually defile us. What we need to worry about is what comes out of us, meaning thoughts and actions influenced by human nature. Jesus went on in verses 20 to 23 to talk about the evil things people do that originate in their hearts.

The phrase “purging all meats” in verse 19 simply refers to the body’s natural waste elimination process. Anything we eat eventually “goes out into the draught,” as Jesus put it, over time.

People similarly misunderstand Peter’s vision in Acts 10.

Peter saw the sheet filled with various animals and was told to eat them. At first glance, this appears to support the idea that all foods were now acceptable. But as the passage continues, the real meaning becomes clear.



Peter initially refused the instruction to rise, kill and eat, saying he had never eaten anything “common or unclean.” This statement shows that the distinction was still being observed by the early Church years after Jesus’ death.

The account continues, “the voice spoke unto him again the second time, What God has cleansed, that call not you common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven” (vs. 15-16).

God did not want the meaning to be unclear to Peter. The instruction was given three times for emphasis.

Verse 17 begins to reveal who or what was cleansed: “Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon’s house, and stood before the gate.”

Cornelius was a Gentile. Up to that point, only Jews had been part of the New Testament Church. After telling Peter three times that He had cleansed something previously considered common, God immediately turned the apostle’s attention to this Gentile man and his family, showing him that they were being called into the Church.

The vision was about *people*—specifically, the acceptance of Gentiles—not about food. The imagery of unclean animals served as a familiar way to convey this point. The vision marked a shift in how the gospel would be spread, not a redefinition of what could be eaten.

Peter got the point. He concluded, “God has showed me that I should not

“God defined what qualifies as food in specific terms. The question is, how should the New Testament passages often used to challenge this distinction be properly understood?”

call any *man* common or unclean” (vs. 28). This vision and its lesson were so important to God, the story is told again in the very next chapter.

Romans 14 is the other passage frequently cited. The apostle Paul wrote, “I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteems any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean” (vs. 14).

At first glance, this can seem to set aside the distinction between clean and unclean animals. But the key lies in the context in which the word “unclean” is used.

The term here does not refer to animals that are unclean by biblical definition. Reading the chapter in its entirety shows what is being discussed here are foods considered unclean or defiled in relation to a person’s conscience, such as meat that had been offered to an idol.

Rather than addressing clean and unclean animals, this chapter deals with avoiding offenses among Christians in personal matters of conscience and judgment, particularly with new believers.

For some, eating something that had been offered to an idol felt wrong. Others did not see a problem with it, since the idol represented a “god” that did not really exist. Verse 2, which speaks of a person who “eats herbs,” shows that some new converts were coming out of a previous lifestyle of vegetarianism.

This passage and other so-called proof verses actually address different issues—human traditions, the inclusion of Gentiles, and matters of personal conscience. When understood in context, they do not overturn what had already been clearly defined in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

If such a fundamental change had occurred—one affecting daily life so directly—God would have stated it plainly. Yet nowhere in the Bible does it say animals once considered unclean are now acceptable for food.

### **Fearfully and Wonderfully Made**

By this point, the Bible truth should be easy to see. God clearly defines certain animals as fit for food and others as not.

Modern culture often treats lobster, scallops, frog legs, escargot (snails), and other unclean foods as delicacies. Some are expensive. Some are associated with status or fine dining. But price and popularity do not determine what is right—God does.

The same God who made the human body also made the food supply that sustains it. Just as He designed the body with order and purpose, God also carefully engineered what kinds of animal flesh were appropriate for it.

David wrote, “I will praise You; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psa. 139:14). God made us, and He tells us what we should eat. He did so early in human history, repeated it clearly in His Law, and nowhere reversed it.

III John 2 adds, “I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers.” The truth about meats is one of the ways God guides us into good health and prosperity. If we obey what He says, blessings will follow.

For more information about God’s laws of clean and unclean meats, read our article “Are All Animals Good Food?” Our booklet *God’s Principles of Healthful Living* explains what the Bible teaches about many other health-related topics. Both are available free of charge at [rcg.org](http://rcg.org). □

# Post-Pandemic, U.S. Kids Still Struggle with Reading



A teacher points to a board as students listen in a fourth grade classroom at William Jefferson Clinton Elementary in Compton, California (Feb. 6, 2025).

AP/ERIC THAYER

**W**HEN COVID-19 wrought havoc on society in early 2020, today's youngest schoolchildren were infants or yet to be born. Now in their early school years, researchers are beginning to see how the pandemic years have shaped their education, even though many had yet to set foot in a classroom when it began.

First and second graders continue to perform worse than their pre-pandemic counterparts on math and reading tests, according to a report published March 10 by the education assessment and research group NWEA. But while math scores have inched up every year, reading scores remain stagnant, the report shows. The data suggests the slump in academic performance is not

rooted only in instructional disruption. Broader societal shifts might be at play.

In the youngest students' failure to recover, "there's something kind of systemic here happening...within schools and outside of schools," said Megan Kuhfeld, a researcher at NWEA. "We can't pinpoint one specific cause."

The pandemic's effects on older children's academic achievement are well-documented. COVID-19 forced kids out of classrooms and into online learning. Students lost out on face time

with instructors, their mental health suffered in the isolation, and their well-being deteriorated as some families endured hardship. Some schoolchildren stopped showing up to school altogether.

The federal government gave billions of dollars to school districts to help students catch up—with mixed results. In 2024, reading scores for fourth- and eighth-graders continued a downward slide, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Math scores, however, trended upward.

Testing for younger kids is less common, so the NWEA report offers insights into the depth of the academic disruption. It is based on assessments given to students in the 2024-25 school year.

Kindergarten scores for math and science remained roughly the same throughout the pandemic. First and second graders are trending in the same way as their older peers. Math and reading scores are still falling short of pre-pandemic levels, although math scores are slowly rising. Reading scores have remained roughly the same since the spring of 2021, when the first full

school year in the pandemic was wrapping up.

It is unclear what is depressing the scores. Ms. Kuhfeld pointed to emerging data showing that fewer parents are reading to their children, an activity that has been shown to boost literacy. A 2024 survey of parents in the United Kingdom found that less than half of children under five were regularly read to, a 20-point drop from a dozen years prior. Less than half of parents indicated they enjoyed reading to their kids, too.

Schools are beginning to make concessions to accommodate students with weaker literacy skills and short attention spans. Many teachers no longer assign books to their students.

In Minnetonka Public Schools outside Minneapolis, school leaders say that while reading scores dipped during the pandemic, they have since recovered. Teachers now focus more on phonics and also regularly assess students on literacy. Students who are behind receive extra help on the parts of reading where they struggle. A student who has difficulty reading aloud might be asked to read to one of their classmates, for example.

But some things are out of the district's control. During the pandemic, Associate Superintendent Amy LaDue said, many young children were homebound. They missed out on activities like going to museums and playing with other children, which are helpful for language and literacy development. She believes that is one factor that continues to hamper kids, especially those from low-income families.

"These kids weren't in school when the pandemic happened, but [some] were...in early childhood and preschool," Ms. LaDue said. "Their opportunities...to have those experiences outside of their home that build literacy skills and to apply them with peers probably were impacted because they were home."

Along with interventions at school, a growing number of states and cities are investing in pre-kindergarten to help children with early literacy. California has introduced universal pre-kindergarten, and New York City is expanding its pre-kindergarten program to two-year-olds, giving toddlers an early start on learning. New Mexico has made child care free for nearly all families. □



Left, books sit on shelves in an elementary school library in suburban Atlanta (Aug. 18, 2023). Right, Karter Hardeman, 7, and Janayla Ralsey, 8, read with volunteer Joshua Banks, during an after-school literacy program through the Pure Hope Project in Atlanta (April 6, 2023).

LEFT, AP/HAKIM WRIGHT SR.; RIGHT, AP/ERIC THAYER



*America  
at 250*

Why the Nation  
Was Inevitable

God has clearly blessed the United States. But those blessings do not tell the whole story.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

**A**N 81-YEAR-OLD Benjamin Franklin rose to address the Constitutional Convention in 1787. The elder statesman spoke to a room filled with tension as delegates struggled to form a government for the fledgling United States.

Reflecting on his decades of life, he said: “I have lived, sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that *God governs in the affairs of men*. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?”

Franklin had lived through the events leading up to and through the Revolutionary War and witnessed the birth of a new nation in 1776. He was convinced God’s hand had been involved.

Looking back 250 years after America began, we can see this far more clearly than Franklin could. The United States rose from a fragile cluster of colonies to the most powerful and influential nation in the modern world.

God’s hand in American history is clear, and the nation’s 250th anniversary is a perfect time to reflect on all He has done. The story of the United States is not just remarkable, it was *inevitable*.

### **Unexpected Revolution**

On June 9, 1776, Founding Father John Adams wrote: “We are in the very midst of a Revolution, the most complete, unexpected, and remarkable of any in the History of Nations.”

It certainly was unexpected. The colonial leaders had not begun by seeking independence. For years, they actively worked to avoid it. They wanted to remain within the British Empire while securing what they believed were their rights as Englishmen.

British military forces clash with colonial militia during the Battle of Bunker Hill in Charlestown, Massachusetts on June 17, 1775.

HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

In 1765, Parliament passed the Stamp Act, placing direct taxes on the colonies. The backlash was immediate. Yet independence was still not on the table.

The following year, Franklin traveled to London to testify before Parliament during the crisis. For hours, he patiently answered questions about the colonies’ mindset and intentions.

He said this about the colonists: “They consider themselves as a part of the British empire, and as having one common interest with it...they are zealous for the honor and prosperity of this nation, and, while they are well used, will always be ready to support it...”

As tensions escalated in the years that followed—through new taxes, protests and an increased military presence—most colonial leaders still desired reconciliation over separation.

When fighting finally broke out at Lexington and Concord in April 1775, even the start of the war was unclear. A shot rang out, often called the “shot heard round the world,” but to this day, historians do not know which side fired first. What is clear is that neither side had fully intended to begin a war that day.

Even after blood was spilled, colonial leaders desired peace. In July, the Continental Congress sent the Olive Branch Petition directly to King George III: “We...beseech your Majesty that your royal authority and influence may be graciously inter-





The adoption of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776. Oil on canvas by John Trumbull.

VCG WILSON/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

posed to procure us relief...and to settle peace through every part of your dominions...”

A day later, the leaders wrote “The Declaration of the Causes and Necessity for Taking Up Arms”: “We have not raised armies with ambitious designs of separating from Great Britain, and establishing independent states.”

The king refused even to receive the petition and instead declared the colonies to be in open rebellion.

#### **The Unthinkable Becomes Obvious**

Most in the American colonies were still not ready to break with the crown.

That began to change in January 1776.

An inflection point came with the publication of Thomas Paine’s pamphlet *Common Sense*. Writing in plain, direct language, he said: “In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense...”

Paine wrote of independence not as a distant possibility but as an unavoidable conclusion.

He said that “the period of debate is closed.” And also, “Every thing that is right or reasonable pleads for separation.”

To Paine, the question was no longer whether the colonies should separate from Britain, but whether they would accept what had already become inevitable.

He even drew on the Bible, framing the cause in moral and divine terms.

The message spread rapidly. The pamphlet sold more than 100,000 copies in just a few months among a population of roughly 2.5 million. It was read aloud in taverns, debated in town squares and reprinted in newspapers across the colonies.

What had once seemed radical now felt obvious.

In the Declaration of Independence, adopted July 4, 1776, Jefferson expressed this new certainty in unmistakable terms: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.”



The Declaration also appealed “to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude [righteousness] of our intentions...”

It concluded: “And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.”

#### **Divine Providence**

Providence—the belief that God directs the affairs of men and intervenes in the course of history—became central to the revolution.

The Continental Congress repeatedly called on the nation to seek God’s favor. In March 1776, it proclaimed a national day of fasting, urging the peo-

ple to humble themselves before God. The following year, it declared a day of Solemn Thanksgiving and Praise, calling on the nation to seek His help “to secure for these United States the greatest of all human blessings, independence and peace.”

The declaration stated: “It is the indispensable duty of all men to adore the superintending providence of Almighty God.”

George Washington, who would go on to become the nation’s first president, saw providence at work in his life even before the Revolutionary War. Writing in 1755 after battle during the French and Indian War, he said that “by the All-powerful Dispensations of Providence, I have been protect-

ed beyond all human probability and expectation; for I had four Bullets through my Coat, and two Horses shot under me, yet escaped unhurt...”

Years later, during the Revolutionary War, he wrote: “The hand of Providence has been so conspicuous in all this, that he must be worse than an infidel that lacks faith.” In other words, he saw evidence for God’s intervention all over the events of the Revolution—you would have to be blind to miss them.

One such moment came in the summer of 1776, during the Battle of Long Island. Washington’s forces had been defeated and trapped by the British. Capture or death seemed inevitable.

Under the cover of night, the Americans began a desperate evacuation

across the East River. Over the course of hours, thousands of troops—along with their artillery, horses and supplies—had to be quietly ferried across the water. At dawn, the operation would be exposed.

Instead, a dense fog settled over the area, concealing the final movements of the army and allowing it to escape. Washington and others saw this as God’s clear intervention.

Yet while they recognized the hand of providence in what was happening, they did not understand the real reason God was involved.

**Written Long Before 1776**

American leaders were looking to the Bible to understand their future long before independence.

In 1630, as a group of settlers prepared to establish the Massachusetts Bay Colony, John Winthrop described the kind of community they hoped to build in his sermon “A Model of Christian Charity.” If the people obeyed God, he said, others would look at their society and say: “May the Lord make it like that of New England.”

Winthrop adapted that saying from a verse in the Bible book of Genesis, directed toward the descendants of Joseph’s sons: “In you shall Israel bless, saying, God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh” (48:20).

The meaning of this verse is that the descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh would become so prosperous and prominent that others would ask God for the same blessings.

Winthrop sensed that something like this could happen. He believed God could bless their efforts. The early settlers hoped to build a nation that reflected God’s favor.

But the Bible provides something more than hope. It records promises—made long before America existed—about nations that would rise to greatness.

God first made these promises to the ancient patriarch Abraham: “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great” (Gen. 12:2).

Those promises were passed down to Abraham’s son Isaac and then to



Top left, covered wagons race across the prairie during the Oklahoma land race, circa 1919. Top right, an engraving of the departure of the Mayflower, the English ship that transported the Pilgrims from England to the New World in 1620. Bottom, a group photo commemorating the driving of the golden spike to complete the first transcontinental railroad, at Promontory, Utah, on May 10, 1869.

TOP LEFT, ARCHIVE HOLDINGS INC.; TOP RIGHT, GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM, ANDREW J. RUSSELL/CLASSICSTOCK/GETTY IMAGES



fulfillment of promises God made to Abraham—passed down through generations and culminating with the descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh.

To learn more about how the birth of the United States fulfilled Scripture, read our book *America and Britain in Prophecy* at [rcg.org/aabibp](http://rcg.org/aabibp).

### National Blessings

While the founding of the United States showed the signs of providence, the nation's rise in the decades that followed showed God continuing to fulfill specific promises He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—down to the detail.

What began as 13 colonies stretched along the Atlantic Coast rapidly expanded across an entire continent. In 1803, the Louisiana Purchase doubled the size of the young nation—adding more than 800,000 square miles of land for just \$15 million. It included vast fertile farmland that would become some of the most productive agricultural regions in the world.

By 1853, the contiguous United States was completed from the Atlantic to the Pacific—“from sea to shining sea.”

This expansion mirrors what had been promised centuries earlier: “Therefore God give you of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine” (Gen. 27:28).

The United States contains an extraordinary range of natural wealth and beauty—from the depths of the Grand Canyon to the geysers of Yellowstone, from the granite cliffs of Yosemite to lush plains, dense forests, deserts and even rainforests. Few nations combine this level of geographic variety with such abundant natural resources within a single border.

But the promises did not stop with land.

God said Abraham's descendants would rise to greatness among nations. That promise is reflected in the economic rise of the United States. By the late 19th century, it had become the world's leading industrial power. In the 20th century, it emerged as the world's largest economy—a position it has maintained ever since.

Isaac's son Jacob: “A nation and a company of nations shall be of you” (35:11).

From one family would come both a single great nation and a group of nations.

Near the end of his life, Jacob passed those promises to his grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh: “Let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac” (48:16).

Jacob explained that Manasseh would grow into a single “great” nation, while Ephraim would become “a multitude of nations” (vs. 19).

Realize what these words mean. They describe real nations that would emerge on the world stage.

History plainly reveals that this was the rise of the British Empire and the United States of America.

The British Empire, from Ephraim, became a company of nations that ruled territories across the globe. The United States, from Manasseh, emerged as a single dominant nation—unmatched in wealth, military strength and global influence.

When Winthrop alluded to Manasseh in the fledgling days of the American colonies, little did he know what he was saying!

The rise of the United States was not simply the result of geography, resources or political ideas. It was the

That national strength was especially evident during World War II. In what became known as the “Arsenal of Democracy,” American industry out-produced the Axis powers on a staggering scale. The United States produced more than 300,000 aircraft during the war, along with tens of thousands of tanks, ships and vehicles—a pace no other nation could match.

That dominance extended beyond industry to innovation. From the light-bulb and the airplane to the computer and the internet, American ingenuity has shaped the modern world. Its economy, influence and technological leadership have reached every corner of the globe.

Once again, God has clearly blessed America. But to what end?

### God’s Purpose

Recall Benjamin Franklin’s simple conclusion from earlier: “God governs in the affairs of men.” He had watched colonies become a nation and a revolution begin to shape the course of history. To him, it was clear that God had been involved.

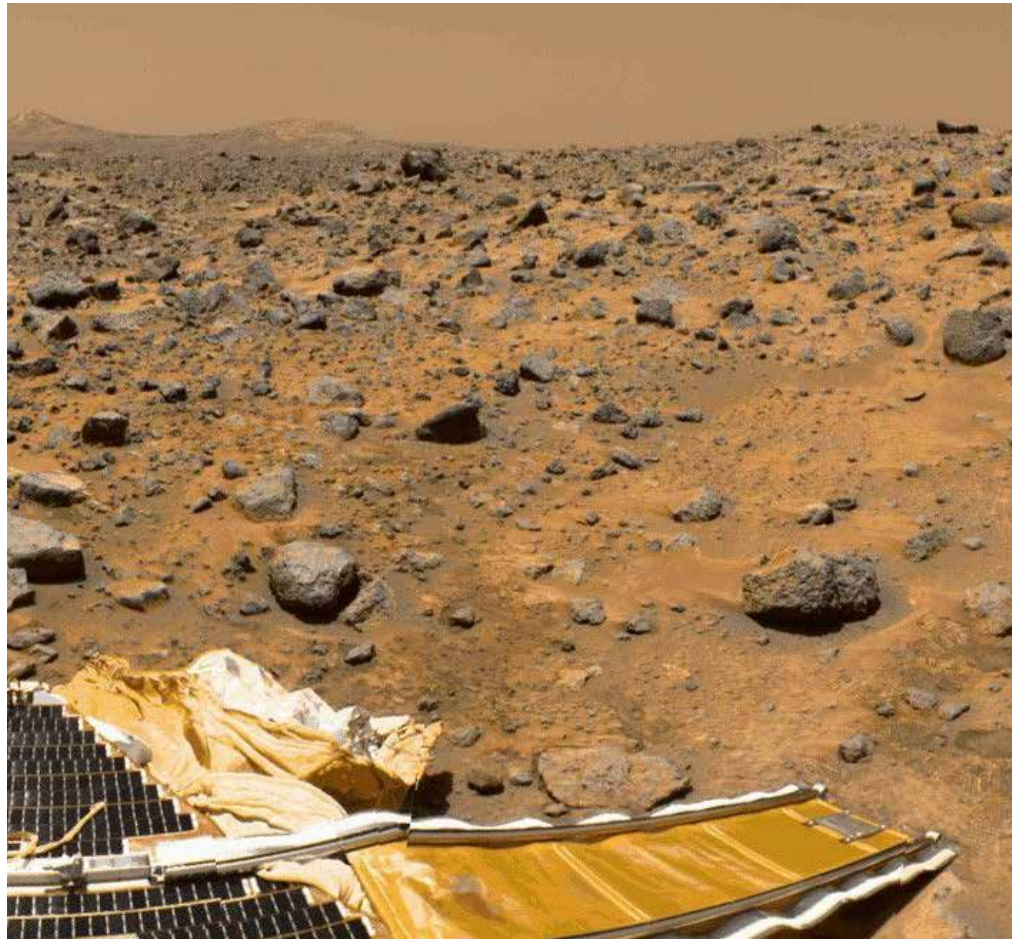
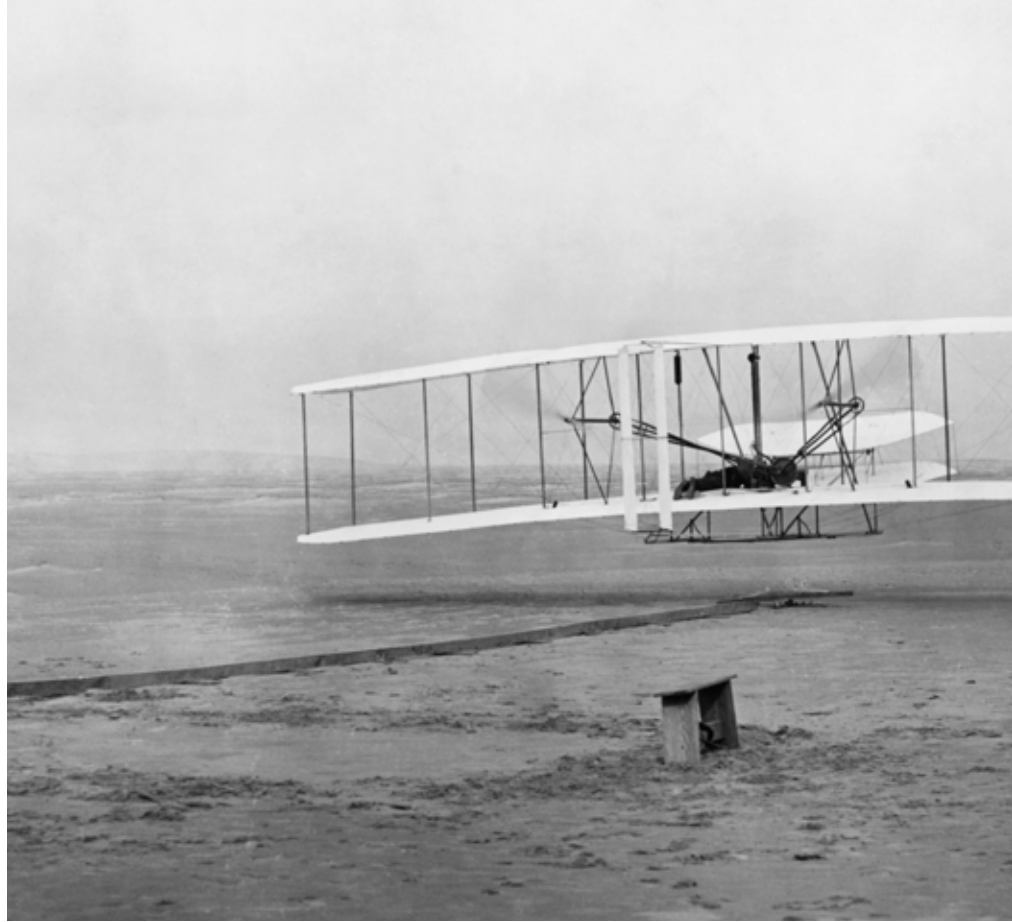
Looking back after 250 years of American history, this should also now be clear to you.

The rise of the United States unfolded according to promises God had made thousands of years before—promises passed from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob, and then to Ephraim and Manasseh.

For those promises to be fulfilled, the descendants of Joseph could not remain together. They *had* to become distinct national powers. Manasseh could not remain within Ephraim’s company of nations. It needed to become a separate nation just as God foretold.

This is why the rise of the United States was inevitable.

God had already declared what He would do, and He always brings His word to pass. Numbers 23:19 says: “God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: has He said, and shall He not do it? Or has He spoken, and shall He not make it good?”





The rise of the United States stands as proof of this. The promises made to Abraham were not symbolic. They were literal and fulfilled by God.

And yet, even with those blessings, the United States is not perfect.

Its history, like that of every nation, is marked by division, conflict and human weakness. The same nation that rose to unmatched power has also struggled to solve the deepest problems facing society. This reality reveals an important lesson God wants the world to learn: Even a nation richly blessed cannot bring lasting peace, stability or righteousness.

But because God has fulfilled His promises to Abraham—across centuries, through nations and down to the details—we can know His other promises are just as certain. And He has foretold something far greater: A time when He will finally and completely intervene in world affairs and establish His own government over all nations.

The Bible calls this the Kingdom of God.

Revelation describes what will happen: “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever” (11:15).

God will not leave the world to continue under human rule. He will replace it with His own—a government that will finally bring the lasting conditions that human systems have never been able to produce.

As we reflect on America’s 250 years, we should all be thankful for the blessings this nation has received. But those blessings were never meant to be the end of the story.

They are a preview—only the smallest glimpse—of what God will soon bring to the whole world. Just as He fulfilled His promises to Abraham in the rise of the United States, the coming Kingdom is no less certain.

It is INEVITABLE. □



Top left, the Wright brothers’ first flight, taking off from Kill Devil Hills on December 17, 1903. Bottom left, Mars Pathfinder and Sojourner rover on Mars in 1997. Bottom right, NASA’s Space Launch System rocket carrying the Orion spacecraft with astronauts onboard launches on the Artemis II mission (April 1, 2026).

TOP LEFT, BETTMAN/GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM LEFT, NASA.GOV; BOTTOM RIGHT, NASA/JOEL KOWSKY





A woman checks her phone as she walks through Red Square at sunset in Moscow (March 31, 2026).

AP/PAVEL BEDNYAKOV

# Russia's Internet Crackdown Leads to a Spring of Growing Discontent

**S**EVERAL DOZEN people lined up outside a presidential administration building on a sunny spring weekend in April in central Moscow as police stood nearby and watched them closely.

The people were lodging complaints about the government's intensifying crackdown on the internet that has seen regular shutdowns of cellphone internet connections, blocked popular messaging apps and cut access to

thousands of other websites and digital services.

It was the latest sign of the growing anger and frustration over the restrictions that have disrupted the daily lives of Russians, hurt businesses and drawn criticism even from Kremlin supporters.

Knowing that any unauthorized demonstrations are harshly suppressed, activists have tried to organize authorized rallies, plastered

posters on walls and notice boards, and filed lawsuits. Industry leaders pleaded with authorities to repeal the measures.

Even the leader of Armenia delivered a not-so-veiled barb at Russia during a televised meeting with President Vladimir Putin on April 1. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan noted that in Armenia, "our social media, for example, is 100% free. There are no restrictions whatsoever."



An unsmiling Mr. Putin stared at Mr. Pashinyan with slightly raised eyebrows.

The clampdown not only serves to control what websites Russians can see, but also has thrown digital life into disarray, making it difficult to order taxis and deliveries, pay for goods and services electronically and stay in touch with friends and family.

Politician and Kremlin critic Boris Nadezhdin spoke for many Russians who are upset about the internet clampdown when he said in an interview with *The Associated Press*: “This infuriates a huge number of people.”

### **Moves Toward Internet Control**

For years, Russia has sought to take the internet under total government control and potentially cut it off from the rest of the world, blocking tens of thousands of websites, messaging apps and social media platforms that refuse to cooperate with the authorities.

Internet users have gotten used to circumventing the restrictions by using

virtual private networks, or VPNs, even as the government has been actively blocking those, too.

But last year, the restrictions reached a whole new level: sweeping shutdowns of cellphone internet connections—and sometimes broadband, too—leaving only a handful of websites and apps on government-approved “white lists.”

Officials claimed the drastic measures were needed to thwart Ukrainian drones relying on Russian cellphone internet for navigation. But the shutdowns hit remote regions that have never been targeted by Ukraine’s drones, with ordinary people and businesses decrying the measures as detrimental.

The Kremlin has gone after the country’s two most popular messaging apps—WhatsApp and Telegram—while simultaneously promoting a state-backed “national” app called MAX, widely seen as a surveillance tool.

At first, voice and video calls on WhatsApp and Telegram were blocked. Then, sending messages became effectively impossible, too, without using a VPN.

In early April, Digital and Communications Minister Maksut Shadayev said his ministry received orders to further decrease the use of VPNs. Unconfirmed media reports said his ministry proposed a flurry of new measures against VPNs.

Lawyer Sarkis Darbinyan, co-founder of the RKS Global digital rights group, told *AP* the goal of the authorities is to drive internet users into a “digital ghetto” of Russian, government-controlled apps and platforms.

“The internet is no longer this universal digital good,” he said.

### **Business Leaders Seek Moderation**

A growing number of business leaders in Russia have voiced concern about the sweeping restrictions and urged authorities to take a more moderate approach.

Alexander Shokhin, head of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, told Mr. Putin at a recent forum that cellphone internet shutdowns “made life difficult for both businesses and citizens.”

“Given the high level of mobile technology penetration in our lives, we hope that a systemic, balanced solution will be found,” said Mr. Shokhin.

A similar plea came from CEOs of two of Russia’s four cellphone operators at a telecommunications conference. Sergei Anokhin of Beeline and Khachatur Pombukhchan of Megafon said that instead of cellphone internet shutdowns, operators could just identify suspicious users and restrict them, the Russian news agency Interfax reported.

“This would make life significantly easier for people, for clients,” Mr. Pombukhchan said.

### **Cautious Steps Toward Protest**

Activists from Moscow to Vladivostok in the Far East have tried to organize rallies against internet restrictions since late February.

Knowing that unauthorized demonstrations are harshly suppressed and government critics are routinely jailed, they acted cautiously and sought authorization for the gatherings in accordance with strict protest laws. In most cases, those were rejected, and some activists were even arrested on various charges.

But people managed to hold small pickets in a few cities. In others, activists plastered flyers and banners on walls and public notice boards decrying the restrictions.

Opposition politician Nadezhdin says he is determined to increase pressure on authorities despite the crackdown. Public frustration over the restrictions is “enormous,” and people are ready to take part in protests that are authorized and safe, he added.

Moscow-based opposition politician Yulia Galyamina echoed his sentiment in a video she recorded near the presidential administration, where she and others filed their formal complaints, saying the discontent “is truly widespread.”

“The more there is public outcry over the blocking of the internet, Telegram in particular, and depriving us of the possibility to communicate with each other, interact, express our political position, the bigger the effect will be,” she said. □



# Original Sin

## What Does the Bible Really Teach?

Did Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden get passed on to you and every person who has ever lived?

BY GARRICK R. OXLEY

**A**CRYING INFANT wriggles in the arms of his mother as a priest attempts to pour water on the child's forehead. Mom and dad hush their son as the ceremony continues. Eventually, the baby is calm enough to be "baptized," at which point the family steps aside for the next one waiting in line.

For many, this scene looks strange. *Why are they doing this?*

The practice of infant baptism traces back to a belief commonly called "original sin." This doctrine is taught in Catholicism but is also believed by other mainstream Christian groups, such as Protestants and Eastern Orthodox, with some differences.

The basic teaching is that people have a sinful nature from birth—every human being inherited "original sin" from long ago. Hence the need to baptize a tiny infant.

*Catholic.com* defines original sin this way: "Original sin may be taken to mean: (1) the sin that Adam committed; (2) a consequence of this first sin, the hereditary stain with which we are born on account of our origin or descent from Adam."

The Episcopal Church calls it: "The shared sinful condition of all humanity...drawn from the Pauline writings, such as Rom 5:12-19 and 1 Cor 15:21-22, which suggest that humanity shares by nature in the fall of Adam described in Gn 3...Original sin has been described as 'hereditary sin.' Augustine understood original sin to be transmitted through sexual intercourse leading to conception" (*episcopalchurch.org*).

Lutherans describe original sin this way: "Original sin in human nature is not only a total lack of good in spiritual, divine things, but...at the same time it replaces the lost image of God in man with a deep, wicked, abominable, bottomless, inscrutable, and inexpressible corruption of his entire nature in all its powers...As a result, since the Fall man inherits an inborn wicked stamp, an interior uncleanness of the heart and evil desires and inclinations" (*cyclopedia.lcms.org*).

Is this doctrine true? Does a newborn baby really inherit a “hereditary sin” and a “wicked stamp”?

Millions believe original sin is indeed biblical. Yet many who have heard it preached in their local church may have never looked deeply into what Scripture really says.

Examining what God teaches about sin turns up verses that appear to contradict this doctrine. Romans 3:23 says, “ALL have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

If “all” have sinned of their own volition, it would make no sense to blame Adam millennia later. These and other verses must be harmonized with the verses people point to for proof of original sin.

A careful look at God’s Word shows that although his choice did have deep implications, Adam’s sin was *not* passed down to all mankind. Instead, each person holds power over their own actions.

#### **Did Adam’s Sin Become Yours?**

Examining the Genesis account shows exactly what God said would result from Adam and Eve’s decision. In chapter 2, God told them: “The tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die” (vs. 17).

Death was clearly identified as the consequence for disobedience. When the first humans were approached by the serpent, Satan the devil, in chapter 3, Eve accurately repeated this instruction (vs. 2-3), showing that they understood. The cunning snake responded, “You shall not surely die” (vs. 4).

God’s punishment for Adam and Eve for eating from the wrong tree was *death*. Adam, Eve and even Satan understood this. Absent from God’s warning is anything about a stain or stamp for people who never set foot in Eden.

The first humans gave in to the serpent’s temptation (vs. 6). Verse 7 records what happened after eating the fruit: “*The eyes of them both were opened*, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig

leaves together, and made themselves aprons.”

Again, take careful note of what is said and what is not. The immediate effect was their eyes being opened. Now Adam and Eve could judge for themselves between good and evil knowledge instead of trusting in God’s authority. That is one of the long-lasting impacts of their decision.

Hebrews 5:14 shows we have the same power today, speaking of people who “by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

Genesis 5:5 shows that Adam did ultimately die for his actions. The death penalty has remained in effect for people ever since. Hebrews 9:27 says, “it is appointed unto men once to die.”

As a result of Adam and Eve’s choice, “the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil...the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (Gen. 3:22-24).

Adam and Eve became cut off from God. Isaiah 59:1-2 shows that is still the case for people today. Only by God

drawing someone can someone have a relationship with him. Read John 6:44.

Let’s summarize. There are three clear ways Adam’s choice affected us: (1) We all die, (2) We all have access to good and evil knowledge, and (3) Mankind as a whole is cut off from God. But the account stops short of describing an original sin as taught in modern religion.

We saw Romans 5 is another passage cited by churches. Paul’s writings do include “things hard to be understood” (II Pet. 3:16) and require careful examination. But this chapter actually supports what we have already seen in Genesis.

The statement “as by one man sin entered into the world” in Romans 5:12 simply identifies Adam as the first man to sin. It does not say his sin outlived him.

Verse 14 says, “Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression.” Keep this simple. It does not say we were all corrupted by Adam’s transgression, just that after Adam’s choice brought the death penalty into effect, everyone has a finite lifespan. No one from biblical times is still walking the Earth today.

Verse 19 continues, “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one

**“Paul’s primary goal was not to tell us who to blame for sin. The takeaway is that we can avoid turning out like Adam, who died in shame, and achieve salvation by following Jesus.”**

[Jesus Christ] shall many be made righteous.” Simply put, Adam’s disobedience set a bad example that his descendants followed by committing their own sins. Likewise, Christ’s sacrifice and good example of righteousness enables people to choose a different outcome than Adam. Notice that it says “many” were made sinners. If this were Bible proof for original sin, why does it not say “all”?

Verse 21 concludes the chapter, putting everything in perspective: “As sin has reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Paul’s primary goal here was not to tell us who to blame for sin. The takeaway is that we can avoid turning out like Adam, who died in shame, and achieve salvation by following Jesus. Understanding the truth about sin is key.

#### **What Sin Really Is**

The Bible clearly defines what sin is. If we sincerely want to know, and are not seeking license to blame a man who lived thousands of years ago for our actions today, we need only to read God’s definition and accept it.

I John 3:4 says, “Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.” Sin is breaking God’s Law.

What is that Law? It is the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, but this term also encompasses every other command from God throughout the Bible.

While some Old Testament instructions regarding sacrifices and other physical ordinances commonly called the law of Moses were replaced by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the laws God gave us to live a righteous life have never been done away. If we violate those commands, we commit sin.

Notice the verse says this applies to anyone—“whosoever”—no mention of an ancient patriarch.

Adam’s choice did matter. It changed the course of human history. But if there is sin in our lives, that is

our own sin. Sin is not something we are born doing—it is something each person chooses to do.

The prophet Ezekiel wrote, “The soul that sins, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (18:20).

We are all responsible for our own actions. Yet sin is not always apparent for what it is.

James 1 explains, “every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death” (vs. 14-15).

People, especially those who want to follow God, generally do not wake up in the morning and consciously choose to sin. It happens subtly. We are “drawn away of [our] own lust, and enticed.” It can even seem like the right thing to do in the heat of the moment.

Sin in the 21st century does not feel like plucking fruit from a tree God explicitly forbade. Smaller acts, such as telling a white lie, holding on to hatred or jealousy towards others, lusting after someone we are not married to, coveting another person’s possessions, and various other things that break God’s Commandments, are borne from temptation.

Jeremiah 17:9 reveals why this is: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”

Our proclivity to deceive ourselves sheds light on why the original sin doctrine is so appealing. If we can blame Adam for sin, we are less careful about avoiding lawbreaking ourselves.

The truth is that no person is born righteous or guilty. People choose to commit or avoid sin. Adam set the pattern—but each person follows it individually. And everyone is a sinner. There is no one who has perfectly avoided sin their entire life. That is why we needed Jesus Christ’s sacrifice. Ecclesiastes 7:20 says, “There is not a

just man upon earth, that does good, and sins not.”

Also recognize that although people are responsible for their actions, the choice to sin is not made in isolation. There is a powerful influence that guides us in that direction: Satan the devil.

II Corinthians 4:4 says, “the god of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not.” Satan’s influence is so strong, the Bible calls him this world’s god!

Revelation 12:9 adds that “Satan... deceives the whole world.” This deceit does not just apply to doctrines and beliefs. It also involves deceiving people into sin.

Remember that it was the serpent who subtly tempted Adam and Eve to take fruit from the wrong tree. He is still at work today doing the same thing.

Understanding sin from God’s perspective requires us to take accountability for our actions, battle our human weaknesses, and resist the devil’s influence.

#### **Overcoming Sin**

The battle against sin is difficult, and it can feel overwhelming. Yet God is ready and willing to help you win. You *can* overcome and prevent sin.

The apostle Peter preached the following to a crowd of people who were convicted about their sins: “Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38, New Living Translation).

The religious-sounding word “repent” simply means to change. Peter told his listeners that if they turned away from sin and were baptized, their sins would be forgiven. They could not continue living a sinful lifestyle and expect to be saved. But if they were willing to change, salvation was available.

The same promise is available to us today if we choose it.

Peter’s words also reveal that people need knowledge and conviction to

be baptized. They must be capable of recognizing and turning away from lawbreaking and turning to God. It is simply unbiblical to baptize a baby who knows nothing about God or His Law.

Through the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we can have salvation. Recall the conclusion of Romans 5: “as sin has reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord” (vs. 21). A perfect sinless God being paid the price on our behalf, rescuing us from the death penalty.

This enables us to have a clean slate from our past sins, and to receive forgiveness when we slip up and sin in the future.

Now glorified at God the Father’s right hand, Christ is an advocate for everyone battling sin. Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

The part we play is to overcome. The same Jesus promised in Revelation, “To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne” (3:21).

With God’s help, we can battle against sin and overcome the devil’s influence. If we do, we will rule with Christ in His throne during the coming Kingdom of God.

Paul provided a firsthand account in Romans 7 of what battling sin looks like: “We know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I” (vs. 14-15).

Reading the whole chapter paints a picture of what he endured. It was not easy. He said, “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (vs. 18). Yet Paul stayed in the fight and ultimately overcame. So can we.

There are many inspiring verses that show how God helps us win against sin.

I Corinthians 10:13 says, “The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, He will show you a way out so that you can endure” (NLT).

The false teaching of original sin obscures this battle. It leads people to believe they have already lost against

sin because of Adam. The inspiring truth is that God empowers us to win.

We are not trapped by Adam’s decisions. God gives us the help we need to change, be forgiven of sin, take accountability for our actions and ultimately rule with Christ.

To learn more, read our article “You Can Overcome and Prevent Sin” and our booklet *What Is True Conversion?* at [rcg.org](http://rcg.org). □

# Overcoming Sin Is a Process

## You Can Overcome and Prevent Sin

by David C. Pack

So many seem trapped, unable to overcome—to grow in areas of weakness, fault and sin. Instead of overcoming their problems, most are overcome by their problems. This should not be—and need not be! You can overcome. Here is how.

Through the years, I have possessed thousands who have been called to God’s way. All have struggled against the pulls of the flesh and the temptations of Satan and his world. Some overcome. Others do not. Christ said, “Enter you in at the narrow [difficult] gate: for wide is the gate, and broad [easy] is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait [difficult] is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matt. 7:13-14). Most seek the easy, “broad” path.

Overcoming is hard—difficult—it is a life-long struggle. But it IS possible. You can overcome. If you are a Christian, you must overcome!

Yet, this world is drifting along, completely unaware of God’s great purpose for man, which is to build character in this life. He is preparing a team of those who will qualify to be part of restoring His government to earth at Christ’s return.

**The Bible Pattern**  
The Bible is filled with accounts of God’s greatest servants battling to overcome sin. In nearly every case, they had to learn difficult, and sometimes painful, lessons. When examined collectively, Moses, Noah, David, Samuel, Peter and others are seen to have fought every kind of problem known to man.

They battled sins, weaknesses, faults, attitudes, and pulls and temptations of the flesh. David fought sin and wrong attitudes and overcame them. Moses lacked faith and confidence and

had a temper that he had to overcome. Yet, he will hold a great office in God’s kingdom. Both Job and Elijah fought discouragement and depression, even to the point of wanting to die. But these men endured—they overcame. They slew their problems, rather than being slain by them!

These men were actively trained by God and had to overcome Satan, the temptations of his world and the pulls of the flesh. A Christian is one who overcomes his problems, weaknesses, sins and wrong attitudes, rather than being overcome and defeated by them!

**To the Overcomer**  
Through the apostle John, Christ said, “And he that overcomes, and keeps My words unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron...” (Rev. 2:26-27).

In His instruction to LAODICEA, He adds, “To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcome, and am set down with My Father in His throne” (Rev. 3:21).

These verses picture Christ re-establishing God’s government over all nations of the earth. Christians will receive *more*, *more* to *rule*. But first they must overcome.

Christians are those who follow—who copy—Christ (1 Pet. 2:21). Then what is the pattern Christ established for us to follow? Did He overcome?

In reference to His own struggle to remain free of sin, perfect in character, Christ said, “In the world you shall

have tribulation [how true!]; but he of good cheer, I never overcome nor was!” (John 16:33). Christ had overcome both the world and its god—Satan (II Cor. 4:4). Recall that Christ said, “You also overcome, and am set down with My Father in His throne.” Christ overcame and qualified to rule. Just as He qualified to replace Satan, so must we!

Such enormous power to rule could never be given to people who are unprepared—who have not qualified to properly use it. God will not hand great authority to people who might rebel and revert to Satan’s ways. God’s servants must use this life to build His very character, so necessary for those holding offices of great authority.

**Experienced in Sin**

Understand! You have been practicing yielding to the flesh and Satan’s way for your entire life. You have probably become very good at both. Believe me, as you strive to overcome and resist the pulls at work within you, you will find that wrong patterns of conduct are “second nature” to you—more than you now know! Left unchecked, human nature consists of vanity, jealousy, lust, greed, envy, resentment, hatred, anger, pride, rebellion, foolishness, deceit and hostility toward God. This is what you have been practicing—possibly for decades.

Overcoming will not be easy or happen overnight. It is a life-long struggle against well-established attitudes and a former way of life that the Christian has now rejected and turned from. The one

How can you break sinful patterns and build godly character? Order your free copy of David C. Pack’s article at [rcg.org/ycoaps](http://rcg.org/ycoaps) to learn a step-by-step process based on clear Bible verses.

# Artemis II Astronauts Safely Back After Historic Trip Around Moon



NASA astronaut and Artemis II Commander Reid Wiseman peers out of one of the Orion spacecraft's main cabin windows, looking back at Earth, as the crew travels towards the moon (April 2, 2026).

NASA/HANDOUT VIA REUTERS

**H**OUSTON (Reuters) - The Artemis II capsule and its four-member crew streaked through Earth's atmosphere and safely splashed down in the Pacific Ocean on April 10 after nearly 10 days in space, capping the first voyage by humans to the vicinity of the moon in over half a century.

The Artemis II flight was the debut crewed test flight and a critical hardware test in a series of missions that aim to return astronauts to the lunar surface starting in 2028.

They became the first astronauts to fly around Earth's only natural satellite since the Apollo program of the 1960s and 70s. Victor Glover, Christina Koch and Jeremy Hansen also made history as the first black astronaut, the first woman and first non-U.S. citizen, respectively, to take part in a lunar mission.

The crew's peak distance of 252,756 miles away from Earth broke the record of roughly 248,000 miles set in 1970 by the crew of Apollo 13.

NASA is seeking to achieve a crewed moon landing ahead of China, which is aiming to put its own crews there around 2030. The agency more broadly aims to establish a long-term lunar presence as a stepping stone to eventual human exploration of Mars.

For many in a global audience captivated by the latest moon shot, it reaffirmed the achievements of science and technology at a time when big tech has become widely distrusted, even feared. More than 3 million viewers watched the splashdown on NASA's YouTube channel, the streaming service showed.

The flight's conclusion puts NASA's focus on Artemis III, a mis-

sion planned for next year involving a crewed docking test in Earth's orbit with both of the lunar landers, before they attempt to land humans on the lunar surface for Artemis IV.

The Artemis III astronaut crew will be announced "soon," NASA's associate administrator Amit Kshatriya told reporters after the Artemis II crew's return. The landers' development, though, have been delayed, likely pushing those missions back.

As Artemis II commander Reid Wiseman and his crew approached Earth's atmosphere for re-entry, he told mission control: "We got a great view of the moon out window 2, looks a little smaller than yesterday."

"Guess we'll have to go back," replied fellow NASA astronaut Jacki Mahaffey from mission control in Houston. □

# Police Are Finding Suspects Based on Online Searches as Courts Weigh Privacy Concerns

**H**ARRISBURG, PA (AP) – Criminal investigators hoping to develop suspects in difficult cases have been asking Google to reveal who searched for specific information online, seeking “reverse keyword” warrants.

Unlike traditional search warrants, keyword warrants work backward by identifying internet addresses where searches were made in a certain window of time for particular terms, such as a street address where a crime occurred or a phrase like “pipe bomb.”

The legal tension between the need to solve crimes quickly and the U.S. Constitution’s Fourth Amendment protections against overly broad searches was at the heart of a recent Pennsylvania Supreme Court decision that upheld the use of a reverse keyword warrant in a rape investigation.

Google provided an emailed statement: “Our processes for handling law enforcement requests are designed to protect users’ privacy while meeting

our legal obligations. We review all legal demands for legal validity, and we push back against those that are overbroad or improper, including objecting to some entirely.”

## A Break in the Case

Pennsylvania State Police were stymied in their investigation into the violent rape of a woman in 2016 on a remote cul-de-sac. With no clear leads, police obtained a warrant directing Google to disclose accounts that searched for the victim’s name or address over the week when she was attacked.

More than a year later, Google reported two searches for the woman’s address were made a few hours before the assault from a specific IP address, a numeric designation that lists where a phone or computer lives on the internet.

That led them to the home of a state prison guard. He confessed to the

rape and attacks involving four other women over a five-year period, and was convicted in 2020.

The man’s attorneys argued police lacked probable cause to obtain the information and impinged on his privacy rights.

The state Supreme Court rejected those claims late last year. Three justices said the man should not have expected his Google searches to be private, while three more said police had probable cause to look for anyone who searched the victim’s address before the attack.

## Acting in Good Faith

In a similar case in Colorado, police sought the IP addresses of anyone who searched over a 15-day period for the address of a home where a deadly arson occurred. Authorities got IP addresses for 61 searches made by eight accounts, ultimately helping identify three teenage suspects.

The Colorado Supreme Court ruled in 2023 that although the keyword warrant was constitutionally defective for not specifying an “individualized probable cause,” the evidence could be used because police had acted in good faith about what was known about the law at the time.

## An Index of Deeply Personal Matters

For many people, their Google search history contains some of their most personal thoughts, from health issues and political beliefs to financial decisions and spending patterns.

In the case mentioned earlier, Pennsylvania Justice David Wecht drew a distinction between the state prison guard deciding to search for the victim’s name on Google and a 2018 U.S. Supreme Court decision that limited the use of broad collections of cellphone location data.

“A user who wants to keep such material private has options,” Mr. Wecht wrote. “That user does not have to click on Google.” □



The Google logo is displayed at their offices in London (Nov. 1, 2018).

AP/ALASTAIR GRANT

## Ecuador Prison Deaths Climb Again Despite President's Security Strategy



Inmates in cell block 3 bow their heads as they listen to a soldier at the militarized Litoral prison, as part of the measures taken by Ecuador's President Daniel Noboa to crack down on gangs, during a media tour in Guayaquil, Ecuador (Feb. 9, 2024).

REUTERS/SANTIAGO ARCOS

**Q**UITO/GUAYAQUIL (Reuters) – After hundreds of Ecuadorean inmates were killed in prison riots in 2021 and 2022, President Daniel Noboa made restoring order in jails one of the central pillars of his security strategy when he took office in 2023.

While the government has sharply curbed the number of riots, figures revealed in a *Reuters* investigation show prison deaths are reaching levels not seen since the height of the unrest.

Deaths of inmates almost quadrupled year-on-year in 2025 due to both violence and natural causes, including a tuberculosis outbreak, according to the figures obtained

by *Reuters* through a freedom-of-information request to the Interior Ministry. Deaths attributed to violence alone also rose fourfold from the year before.

Of the 1,220 inmates who died in 2025, at least 206 were killed during gang clashes and other violence, up from 46 the previous year, according to the figures. It was the highest number since 2021, when 328 inmates died.

The other deaths last year were attributed to illness, suicide and other undetermined causes—a 256 percent increase from the 285 recorded in 2024. The government has not released comparable figures for 2021, 2022 or 2023.

In its response to the freedom-of-information request, the Interior Ministry said the sharp increase in deaths “even compared to historically critical periods such as 2021” could “without proper technical context,” create “distorted perceptions of institutional management.”

The ministry did not respond to a separate request asking it to explain the technical context.

Fatal prison riots were nearly a monthly occurrence in Ecuador in 2021 and 2022 as the nation's jails became a microcosm of a wider surge in drug-related violence rocking the country.

Bringing prisons under control is a main plan of Mr. Noboa's secu-

rity agenda. The conservative business heir has staked his legacy on fighting drug trafficking and crime, which have surged in Latin America in recent years, inspiring the election of tough-on-crime presidents from Costa Rica to Chile.

Mr. Noboa put the military in charge of certain penitentiaries, is building new jails he says are better equipped to handle violent felons, and has transferred some high-profile prisoners. His government says the moves have reduced violence compared with previous years.

### **Overcrowding and Tuberculosis**

The government acknowledges overcrowding in prisons and says it is responding to healthcare issues with disease screenings and medical attention.

But the death figures tell a grim tale of prison conditions, as relatives of inmates and rights organizations highlight violence, abuse, tuberculosis worsened by overcrowding, insufficient medical care and lack of adequate food, all of which they say have been exacerbated by the strict conditions imposed as part of the military intervention.

The government says military operations have dismantled criminal operations inside prisons, including drug shipments, extortion and planning for attacks against politicians and officials and that they have closed nightclubs and even a private pool within prisons which were once enjoyed by gang leaders.

But officials are also contending with overcrowding of 30.6 percent in adult prisons. Juvenile facilities were not overcrowded in 2024, according to official data, but reached a level of overcrowding of 15.3 percent in 2025.

The government says a 7.6 percent increase in the national inmate population last year, to 35,454, is due to

more arrests and longer sentences. It says many cells are unusable because of riot damage, forcing inmates to crowd into fewer spaces.

“We are now facing a health crisis, a food crisis, and complaints from relatives about alleged mistreatment and torture by military personnel,” said Rodrigo Varela, secretary general of Ecuador’s official human rights ombudsman. He said his office has referred several complaints about inmate conditions to the prosecutor’s office.

Though Mr. Noboa has resisted comparisons to El Salvador’s President Nayib Bukele, famed for a harsh prison strategy that rights groups have decried as abusive, Mr. Noboa has posted images similar to many shared by the Central American leader: of shaven-headed inmates, dressed in orange and sat in tight rows, as heavily armed, masked soldiers look on.

“We are not following either Bukele’s manual or [Argentinian President Javier] Milei’s manual—we are dealing with Ecuador’s reality,” Mr. Noboa told CNN en Español in an interview last year, adding that new prisons are the answer to overcrowding.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights asked Ecuador in December to improve conditions for the 7,000 inmates at the Litoral Penitentiary, Ecuador’s most dangerous prison, citing a government report listing 564 deaths there from January to September 2025, including 550 classified as natural or undetermined. Interior Minister John Reimberg has linked the outbreak to overcrowding, but has not explained its origins nor provided data on infections.

### **No Pillows**

Six relatives of inmates interviewed by *Reuters* said military presence has made already precarious conditions—

including extortion among inmates—even worse.

“Many times these are not riots—these are inmates raising their voices because they are dying or in agony,” said Ana Morales, an activist coordinator for relatives whose son is held at Litoral Penitentiary. “It is a lack of humanity by the military and dehumanization by the Ecuadorean state.”

All of the relatives decried lack of food and cell searches where military destroy personal possessions.

“We’re seeing not just a resurgence of tuberculosis but of military abuse,” said Stefany Salinas, whose husband is imprisoned for homicide in El Rodeo prison in Manabi. “We oppose mistreatment—they break everything, they throw away personal belongings.”

The SNAI and the defense ministry did not comment on the accusations. Mr. Reimberg has said all prisons have food provided, but many inmates prefer to trade their meals for drugs.

The government began transferring hundreds of prisoners to break up gang control of certain facilities in late 2025, and around 900 inmates were moved in January alone, SNAI said in a statement.

Inmates who were deemed highly dangerous—including gang leaders and former vice president Jorge Glas, convicted of corruption—were moved to El Encuentro, a new maximum-security prison built by Mr. Noboa, with capacity for 800 people. The government plans to build a similar facility for more than 15,000 inmates, scheduled for completion in 2027.

It has lauded El Encuentro, which allows no visits by lawyers or relatives and where members of different gangs are mixed together and held four to a cell, as a model.

Prisoners are not allowed pillows, because they can be used as weapons, Mr. Reimberg told television channel Ecuavisa. □

## In Cambodia, Thousands Flood Out of Scam Compounds and Find Little Help

**B**ANGKOK (AP) – One night in February, Youga was grateful when he finally slept in a bed, even though it had neither pillow nor blanket.

For two days, the African man said, he slept on the street after he reached Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh, following his escape from a scam compound in O'Smach, which borders Thailand in the north. He had only \$100 left to his name and wanted to save the money. So the Caritas shelter took him in.

The shelter, the only one of its kind that helps victims escaping from scam compounds, was funded previously by the United States. Today, it is stretched at the seams, working with a third of the staff and a fraction of the budget it previously had as the country faces an unprecedented surge of workers leaving scam compounds.

The compounds have become widespread in Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos, with thousands of workers involved in carrying out online scams.

Now, overwhelmed, the shelter has had to turn away people in need, more than 300 of them. Mark Taylor, who works on human trafficking issues in Cambodia, said, "It's become triage."

As of February, the shelter had about 150 people. Many of the newest arrivals were sleeping in a common room and did not have more than the clothes on their backs. The shelter did not have enough pillows and blankets, said Youga, who spoke on condition that only his first name be used out of fear of his former bosses.

### A Flood of People Are Leaving Scam Compounds

Cambodia is facing an unprecedented flood of workers leaving scam compounds. It came weeks after the coun-

try extradited a suspected kingpin of the scam business who had played a prominent role in Cambodian society to China in January.

Inside the compounds, scammers have built sophisticated operations, utilizing phone booths lined with foam for soundproofing, scripts in multiple languages, and even fake police booths of countries ranging from Brazil to China.

In Cambodia, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights estimated that there were up to 100,000 workers alone in 2023.

After growing international pressure from countries like South Korea, the U.S. and China built up over the past several months, Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Manet announced in January that "combating crime is a deliberate political priority" and specifically named cyberfraud. The Cambodian government said it deported 1,620 foreign nationals from 21 countries linked to scam operations in January.

Compounds let people go en masse in February, according to 15 videos and images on social media verified by Amnesty International. The organization also interviewed 35 victims, who described a "chaotic and dangerous" situation in trying to leave, although many noted a lack of involvement from Cambodian authorities in the mass exodus.

The departures from scamming compounds have created a humanitarian crisis on the streets that, activists say, is being ignored by the Cambodian government. In scenes of chaos and suffering, thousands of traumatized survivors are being left to fend for themselves with no state support,

Montse Ferrer, regional research director for Amnesty International, said in a statement.

"The Royal Government of Cambodia rejects claims that it is failing trafficking victims or tolerating abuse linked to scam compounds," said Neth Pheaktra, Minister of Information Cambodia in response to the claims. "All individuals are screened to separate victims from perpetrators, with victims receiving protection, shelter, medical care, and assistance for safe return."

Li Ling, a rescuer, said she had a list of 223 people, mostly from Uganda and Kenya who had come out from compounds in Cambodia asking for help to get home. She and her partner had spent at least \$1,000 of their own money to shelter some of the most desperate cases, but cannot sustain that.

Some had gone back to work in the compounds, she added. It was that or face sleeping on the streets.

"When international organizations based in Cambodia are continuing to tell victims to go to their embassies, but the embassies tell us frankly, they don't have a clear path or process, the responsibility is being shoved back and forth, creating a closed loop with no exit," she said. "This is not a one-off failure, but a systemic breakdown."

Those victims waited for hours outside the Phnom Penh office of the International Organization for Migration, a UN agency, she said, but were told the Caritas shelter, which IOM works with, is full.

Youga, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, said he was beaten often while inside a compound because he refused to work. He was determined to get out and escaped

on his own as the mass releases began and asked to be identified only by his first name out of fear for his safety.

*The Associated Press* was not able to independently verify all of his journey but saw messages of his pleas for help to IOM. The agency said they could not comment on individual cases.

### Hand to Mouth

While the shelter is still operating, of most immediate concern in the coming weeks is the budget for food, Mr. Taylor said. “It’s hand to mouth.”

The Caritas shelter received financial support from Winrock International, USAID’s partner in Cambodia, according to Mr. Taylor who oversaw the funding. It was due to receive \$1.4 million from USAID from September 2023 through the first part of 2026. That source of funding went away after U.S. foreign assistance was suspended and USAID was dismantled in early 2025.

The shelter was also partially funded by IOM, which was largely funded by

the U.S. and has also seen its funding cut.

Although many anti-trafficking organizations are registered in Cambodia, the Caritas shelter is the only one who takes in victims of scam compounds in an increasingly repressive environment. Under government pressure, independent media have shut down and a prominent journalist known for reporting on scam compounds was arrested and detained for a month.

“Given the deeply repressive environment in Cambodia that emerges from the scam industry’s role as a dominant source of ruling party elite rent seeking, there are an extremely small number of formal organizations willing to respond to the issue on the ground,” said Jacob Daniel Sims, a visiting fellow at the Harvard University Asia Center who has worked in countertrafficking in Cambodia.

Rescuers say many who do not make it to the shelter can end up in

immigration detention, stuck and pushed for bribes from officials. Others are now booking hotel rooms in groups if they have the funds. Those with embassies in the country are able to get help, such as Indonesians or Filipinos.

Youga cannot return home. He is from the Banyamulenge ethnic group, which has been the target of attacks by armed groups. Nor does he have an embassy in the region that can assist him.


He was lured into a scam compound in Cambodia in November 2025 after he fled to Burundi, separated from his family by the conflict. He said he was not looking for a job, but someone he did not know messaged him on his phone and then emailed him about a job, all expenses paid. He said no, but the recruiter still went ahead.

Youga said he was a university student before and wanted to continue. For now, he only hopes for a safe place. “I want,” he said, “to rebuild my life with dignity.” □



A Thai soldier keeps guard outside a scam center in O'Smach, Cambodia (Feb. 2, 2026).

AP/SAKCHAI LALIT



# 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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