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THE

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REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

IRAN FALLOUT
A GLOBAL
HUNGER CRISIS?



NASA's Space Launch System rocket carrying the Orion spacecraft with astronauts onboard launches on the Artemis II mission (April 1, 2026).

NASA VIA GETTY IMAGES

Why Artemis II United Us

Space exploration has a way of grabbing our attention, even when times are hard. There is a deeper reason for this.

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Front Cover: A satellite view of the Persian Gulf, with Iran to the northeast and the Arabian Peninsula to the southwest.

GETTY IMAGES

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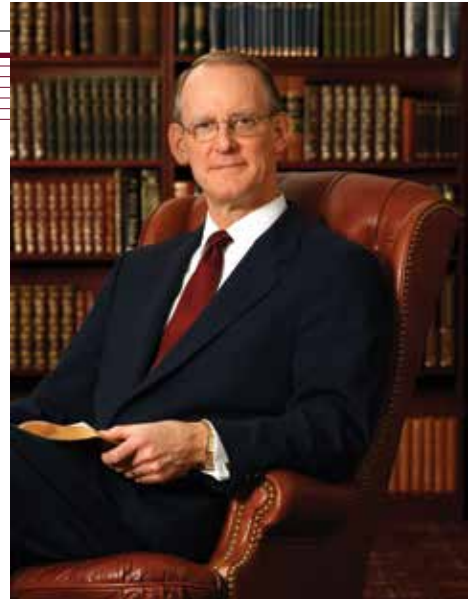
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



A Christian's First Priority

IN MATTHEW 6:33, Jesus Christ gave what could be argued is the most important instruction for Christians: “Seek you *first* the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness...”

The word *first* means just what you would expect. It is translated from the Greek word *proton*, meaning “*firstly* (in time, place, order, or importance)” (*Strong’s Concordance*). No greater goal exists for a Christian than looking for and seeking after the Kingdom of God—an eternal place in God’s ruling Family.

This is achieved by accepting Christ’s sacrifice and developing God’s very nature.

Note that Jesus’ command is twofold. It involves seeking the Kingdom *and* His righteousness.

A Christian must pursue God’s righteousness—His character—which is developed by living His way of life. Psalm 119 explains “all Your commandments are righteousness” (vs. 172). The apostle Paul clarified further by explaining to Timothy, “that from a child you have known the *holy scriptures*, which are able to make you *wise unto salvation* through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by

inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for *instruction in righteousness*: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (II Tim. 3:15-17).

Put plainly, the Bible tells us how to live in pursuit of the Kingdom of God—the ultimate goal we must seek.

True Christians are intently focused on this soon-coming Kingdom. It motivates and drives their lives as they await it. This has always been the case, with even the early Church anticipating the Kingdom some 2,000 years ago.

Christ’s Central Message

Everywhere Christ went, His message was the same. He instructed listeners to “Repent: for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17).

It is the same message He commissioned the apostles to proclaim: “As you go, preach, saying, the Kingdom of heaven is at hand” (10:7).

Luke 4 is plain. Bringing this news of the Kingdom—and of course how to enter it—was Christ’s chief mission: “And He said unto them, I

must preach the Kingdom of God to other cities also: for *therefore am I sent*" (vs. 43).

This is the gospel, meaning *good news*, which is why it is called "the gospel of the Kingdom of God."

The apostle Peter explained God has "begotten us again unto a *lively hope* by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an *inheritance incorruptible*, and undefiled, and that fades not away" (I Pet. 1:3-4)—a permanent place in the Kingdom of God!

This is "the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (vs. 9).

The Kingdom has been the focus of not only the early Church through the present, but also of those in Old Testament times.

Continuing in verses 10 and 11, Peter states, "Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently,

who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."

Note that they were focused on the *what*—the nature of salvation—and the *when*—"what manner of time"—of prophecy. Put plainly, they "inquired and searched diligently" to fully understand both salvation, and when it would arrive!

God's true Church bears many hallmarks. A unique focus on the Kingdom of God and its arrival is one of them. After all, this is what the Church of God seeks *firstly* in *time, place, order* and *importance*! (You may wish to request my booklet *Where Is God's Church?* at rcg.org/wigtc to discover where it exists today.)

A Mystery Worth Pursuing

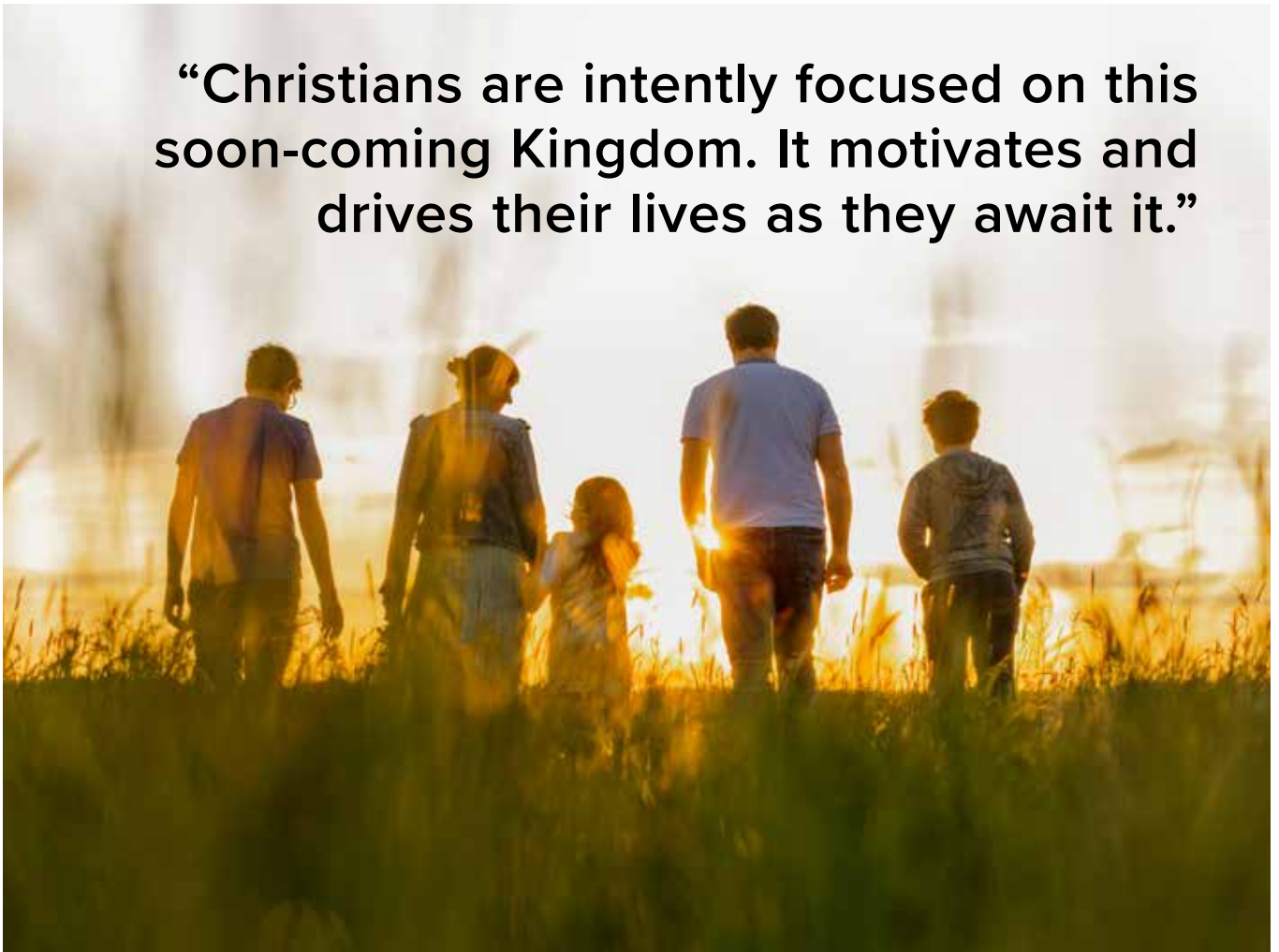
Speaking of true Christians, Christ said, "it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 13:11).

Mysteries are not easy! They involve careful analysis of all facts—a careful focus on all details. Proverbs 25:2 says, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing..." Very few understand the *mystery* of the Kingdom of God. The verse closes, "but the honor of kings is to *search out* a matter."

Take interest in the Kingdom of God! Learn all you can about it. *Seek it first!* Anticipate it. Pattern your life after Christ, the disciples and all true Christians since.

When you next pray, "Your Kingdom come," as instructed in Matthew 6:10, let it be with greater meaning and full expectation! □

"Christians are intently focused on this soon-coming Kingdom. It motivates and drives their lives as they await it."



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IRAN FALLOUT A GLOBAL HUNGER CRISIS?

The ripple effects from the Iran war will continue long after the shooting stops, threatening farmers, harvests and families worldwide.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER



OUTSIDE THE United Nations headquarters in New York City stands a statue of a man beating a sword into a plowshare, bringing to life the words of Isaiah 2:4. The Bible verse pictures a hopeful future when war will be gone and humanity can focus all its efforts on peaceful pursuits.

That future has not yet arrived.

The conflict involving Iran, the United States and Israel has shown how quickly war can reach far beyond the battlefield. When the military clash began in late February, farmers around the world felt the squeeze almost immediately. Gas prices shot up and fertilizer supplies waned due to the near shutdown of the Strait of Hormuz.

These results are a sobering reminder: In a deeply interconnected world, military conflict can threaten harvests thousands of miles away.

The poorest farmers in the Northern Hemisphere rely on fertilizer imports from the Gulf, and the shortage came just as planting season began, said Carl Skau, deputy executive director of the UN's World Food Program.

Fertilizer shortages put the livelihoods of farmers in developing countries—already troubled by higher temperatures and erratic weather systems—further at risk. It could also lead to people everywhere paying more for food.

Worse, it is pushing millions into acute hunger, the WFP reported.

An analysis in three vulnerable countries found that an additional 2.5 million people in Somalia, 2.3 million in Afghanistan and 1.3 million in Sri Lanka are struggling to meet their basic food needs.

In March, WFP predicted that 45 million people could be pushed into acute food insecurity by the end of June—on top of the 318 million people around the world who are already in the category.

“We remain by that prognosis,” Mr. Skau told UN reporters. “That’s main-

A tanker passes through the waters of the Strait of Hormuz (Feb. 25, 2026).

FADEL SENNA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

ly because the correlation between the prices of energy and food is so tight in many places, and also that in the poorest countries people are already spending all their money on food, and hence when food prices rise, they eat less.”

“These impacts are expected to intensify in the coming months, even if the crisis in the Middle East de-escalates,” WFP said.

“The food system is fragile, and it depends on stable fertilizer supply chains to ensure farmers can produce the food the world relies on,” said Hanna Opsahl-Ben Ammar of Yara International, one of the world’s largest fertilizer companies.

WFP has had to limit aid to millions of needy people because of funding cuts, and Mr. Skau urged donors to step up, especially for Somalia and Afghanistan, “because the human consequences of not doing more will be massive.”

More Than Fuel

The Iran war revealed that the Strait of Hormuz is more than an oil chokepoint. This narrow passage that usually handles about a fifth of the world’s oil shipments also handles nearly a third of global fertilizer trade.

When fighting broke out, the supply chain for nitrogen and phosphate—two major fertilizer nutrients—came under immediate threat.

Nitrogen supplies, including urea, the most widely traded fertilizer, were hit especially hard by shipping delays and the soaring price of liquefied natural gas, an essential ingredient in production.

The conflict restricted about 30 percent of global urea trade, said Chris Lawson of CRU Group, a London-based commodities consulting firm.

Some countries are already facing critical shortages, according to Raj Patel, a food systems economist at the University of Texas. Ethiopia, for example, gets over 90 percent of its nitrogen fertilizer from the Gulf through Djibouti, a supply route that was strained even before the war began.

“The planting season is now,” Mr. Patel said in March. “The fertilizer isn’t there.”

Phosphate supplies, which support root development, are also under pressure. Saudi Arabia exports about a fifth of the world’s phosphate fertilizer, and the region exports more than 40 percent of the world’s sulfur, a key ingredient and byproduct of oil and gas refining, Mr. Lawson said.

Even after the war ends, Gulf producers will need clear security guarantees before resuming shipments through the strait, and insurance costs would almost certainly rise, said Owen Gooch, an analyst with London-based Argus Consulting Services.

The timing is crucial. Fertilizers are generally applied just before or during planting. When deliveries are delayed, crops can miss key early growth stages, reducing yields even if supplies improve later.

For this year’s harvest, nothing can undo the damage that is already done.

In the United States and Europe, the main spring planting window has come and gone—so farmers have already had to make tough decisions. In much of Asia, the monsoon planting season is starting now, when timely fertilizer supplies are critical for crops such as rice and cotton.

Other nations have failed to make up the shortfall. China, the world’s largest producer of nitrogen and phosphate fertilizers, has begun allowing some urea exports again after holding supplies back to protect its own farmers earlier in the crisis. But the Asian nation is still limiting how much can leave the country and keeping export prices high. Russia, another major producer, is already operating near full capacity and faces its own export constraints.

Sudan: Compounding Crises

Sudan is among the nations most vulnerable to the fallout from the Iran conflict. Farmers there say rising fuel and fertilizer costs have forced them to cut back on planting this summer, restricting food production in a country where civil war between

the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces has already caused acute hunger.

The nation relies on the Gulf for more than half of its fertilizer needs, according to UN data. At the same time, Sudan’s own war has left it entirely dependent on fuel imports. That makes the country exposed to both fertilizer shortages and rising diesel prices.

About 19.5 million people—more than 40 percent of Sudan’s population—are facing crisis levels of hunger, with some areas at risk of famine, according to a UN-backed monitor. About two-thirds of the population depend on farming for their livelihoods.

In Jamaia, an irrigation-based farming area in southern Omdurman, this planting season should have brought relief after the RSF was driven from the area near Khartoum last year. Instead, farmers face fertilizer prices up 67 percent year-on-year and fuel prices that have more than doubled.

“At that price we don’t make a profit, you spend your whole profit on the diesel,” said farmer Bashir Ismail.

Only 520 out of 10,400 acres had been planted about halfway into the planting season, said Omar al-Ebeid, secretary for the farmers’ committee in Jamaia.

The problems extend beyond prices. In Kordofan and Darfur, farmers say tractors have been looted, farmhands recruited to fight, and crops and supplies threatened at checkpoints. “There is no funding for farmers, no machinery for planting and plowing the land, and no security,” said Mohamed Adam, a farmer displaced from West Kordofan.

The regional war has added “salt to the wound,” said Sadig Elamin, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization’s senior food security analyst in Sudan. He warned that overall production could fall by “not less than 40%.”

Australia: A Global Exporter Under Pressure

In Australia, the crisis is not about famine, but it could still affect global food prices.

A farmer sows wheat at his farm near Brocklesby, Australia (May 5, 2026).

REUTERS/HOLLIE ADAMS

Australia is a major exporter of wheat and other crops. Its upcoming wheat harvest is expected to be the smallest in three years as high fertilizer costs and dry conditions reduce planting and yields, the government said in early June.

The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) said the country should reap 26.7 million metric tons of wheat later this year. That would be about 9 million tons less than last season and roughly 8 million tons less than the five-year average.

High prices will likely cause farmers to fertilize less, reducing yield potential, ABARES said. At the same time, large parts of eastern Australia have faced months of low rainfall. Widespread rain in May improved crop conditions, but forecasts still pointed to below-median rainfall in the months ahead.

“It will be crucial that adequate and timely supply of fertilizer is available and adequate rainfall is received to meet current yield projections,” ABARES said.

For Australian farmers, the Iran war added another cost pressure to an already uncertain season. For the world, a smaller Australian harvest means less supply from a major exporter and more upward pressure on prices.

Brazil: Expansion Put on Hold

Brazil shows a different kind of vulnerability. Its cheap, abundant land has helped farmers build vast operations and compete aggressively in global export markets. But the country relies heavily on imported fertilizer, leaving its farmers exposed when prices rise.

Many Brazilian farmers are already carrying debt. Higher fertilizer, fuel, seed and equipment costs are forcing them to rethink expansion and delay purchases.

“Profitability just isn’t there,” said Murilo Rabelo Martins Pereira, a farmer in Goias state. “Expansion is something everyone is rethinking right now.”



“THE COUNTRY SHOULD REAP 26.7 MILLION METRIC TONS OF WHEAT LATER THIS YEAR... ABOUT 9 MILLION TONS LESS THAN LAST SEASON.”

THE AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL AND RESOURCE ECONOMICS AND SCIENCES

Mr. Pereira farms soybeans, corn and tomatoes on nearly 2,000 acres. He said soaring production costs make it too risky to lease more land, even though he has received offers to do so.

Lower fertilizer use can mean lower yields and lower profits—or outright losses—for farmers already under pressure. “They are overleveraged,” said Bruno Fonseca, an analyst for Rabobank in Brazil.

For Mr. Pereira, the outlook has already forced practical decisions. “We had planned this year to replace our harvesters, which are quite old,” he said. “We decided not to go ahead.”

In Brazil, the fallout from the Iran war may not immediately empty plates. But it is squeezing the farmers who help feed global markets. If they plant less, fertilize less or stop expanding, the effects can ripple outward through export supplies and food prices.

Fragile System Exposed

The war in Iran exposed deep weaknesses in the global food system. Many

now see the crisis as a warning that farming must change.

Less reliance on imported fertilizers could help protect farmers and consumers from energy price swings and geopolitical shocks, said Oliver Oliveros, executive coordinator of the Agroecology Coalition. “This could be a turning point,” he said.

Others point to the danger of concentrating so much food production in relatively few countries and trade corridors. Pratima Singh of Economist Impact told *Reuters* that just 15 countries produce 70 percent of the world’s food, while the top 15 exporters account for more than 60 percent of global food exports.

“A narrow set of countries and trade corridors is underwriting much of global food resilience,” she told the news outlet. “When they function well, they stabilize markets far beyond their borders. When they fall short, systemic vulnerability follows.”

The case for change is clear. More resilient farming methods, diversified



A farmer works on a field during harvest season in southern Omdurman, Sudan (May 16, 2026).
REUTERS/EL TAYEB SIDDIG

supply chains and less dependence on imported fertilizer could help. But these changes are expensive, and many farmers facing higher costs and lower margins do not have the money to make them.

The Real Swords into Plowshares

There is a striking irony in all of this.

Modern nitrogen fertilizers can be seen as one of mankind's great "swords into plowshares" achievements. The same industrial chemistry that helped

produce explosives for war was turned toward farming, creating nitrogen-based fertilizers that dramatically increased yields.

While the fertilizers have helped feed billions, they come with significant downsides.

These fertilizers depend on enormous amounts of energy and stable trade routes. Their overuse can weaken soil health, pollute waterways and leave farmers locked into expensive systems they cannot easily escape.

When armed conflict threatens the Strait of Hormuz, mankind's system built to grow more food is disrupted by the very thing mankind has never been able to stop: war.

That is why Isaiah 2:4's promise of swords beaten into plowshares goes beyond better farming methods.

Read the broader context of the passage: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it" (vs. 2).

Mountains in Bible prophecy often symbolize governments. This verse points to the Kingdom of God being established above all human governments. Verse 3 shows that nations will come to learn God's way of life.

Then notice what follows: "And He [God] shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (vs. 4).

Under God's government, the tools of destruction will be turned into tools of production. But more than that, the causes of destruction will be removed. Nations will not merely pause from war. They will no longer even learn it.

Micah repeats the same prophecy and adds the result: "They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid" (4:4).

Until that time comes, mankind will continue to seek peace in the Middle East and elsewhere. It may increase funding to address food insecurity. It may invest in regenerative farming, diversify supply chains and reduce dependence on imported fertilizers.

These are noble pursuits, and some may even help. But they will bring, as human efforts always do, mixed results.

Only God's government can remove war from the equation. Only then will the world's food problems be finally and completely solved. □

SOLVING THE MYSTERY OF MELCHIZEDEK

He appears suddenly in Genesis, blesses Abraham, receives tithes—and then vanishes from the story. What does the Bible reveal about this mysterious figure?

BY JAMES E. HABBOUSH



SOME 4,000 years ago, the patriarch Abraham mounted a daring rescue.

His nephew Lot had been captured by Chedorlaomer the king of Elam, and a band of allied forces. These armies had plundered the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, taking their possessions and people captive (Gen. 14:11-12).

Hearing the news, Abraham acted immediately. He armed 318 trained men of his household and pursued the invading forces. Dividing his men, he struck the enemy by night and recovered his nephew, the other captives and all the goods (vs. 14-16).

After this successful mission, Abraham was met by a mysterious figure: “Melchizedek king of Salem,” who “brought forth bread and wine” (vs. 18).

Who was this man who received Abraham at such a pivotal moment? The rest of the verse explains that “he was the priest of the most high God.” But is there evidence of his specific identity?

For centuries, readers have offered different answers. Some Jewish traditions identify Melchizedek as Shem, the son of Noah. Many Catholic and Protestant commentators view him as a historical king-priest who foreshadowed Jesus Christ. Others have seen him as an appearance of the One who later became Christ.

But tradition and religious opinion cannot settle the question. Only Scripture can.

At this point in the Genesis account, Abraham was still known as Abram. Melchizedek blessed him, saying,

“Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the most high God, which has delivered your enemies into your hand” (vs. 19-20).

Abraham then “gave him tithes of all” (vs. 20), a significant clue in determining his identity. The Bible says “the earth is the LORD’s, and the fullness thereof” (Psa. 24:1). Since Abraham tithed directly to Melchizedek, “the priest of the most high God” (Gen. 14:18), that means Melchizedek had real spiritual authority.

Clearly, this was no ordinary priest.

David Adds a Clue

Centuries later, King David recorded, “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit you at My right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of your strength out of Zion: rule you in the midst of your enemies” (Psa. 110:1-2).

Notice that this ruler sits at the right hand of God Himself. His rule extends from Zion.

Then the psalm ties this same being to Melchizedek: “The LORD has sworn, and will not repent, you are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (vs. 4).

Do not miss this. This “Lord” who sits at God’s right hand is connected to the order of Melchizedek, and His priesthood lasts “forever.”

While Psalm 110 does not explain every detail of Melchizedek’s identity, it does establish he is someone who David called “my Lord.”

Only Candidate

More than 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ was born into a world that immediately sought His death. While He was still an infant, King Herod—who was “exceeding wrath” and determined to eliminate any threat to his power—“sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under” (Matt. 2:16).

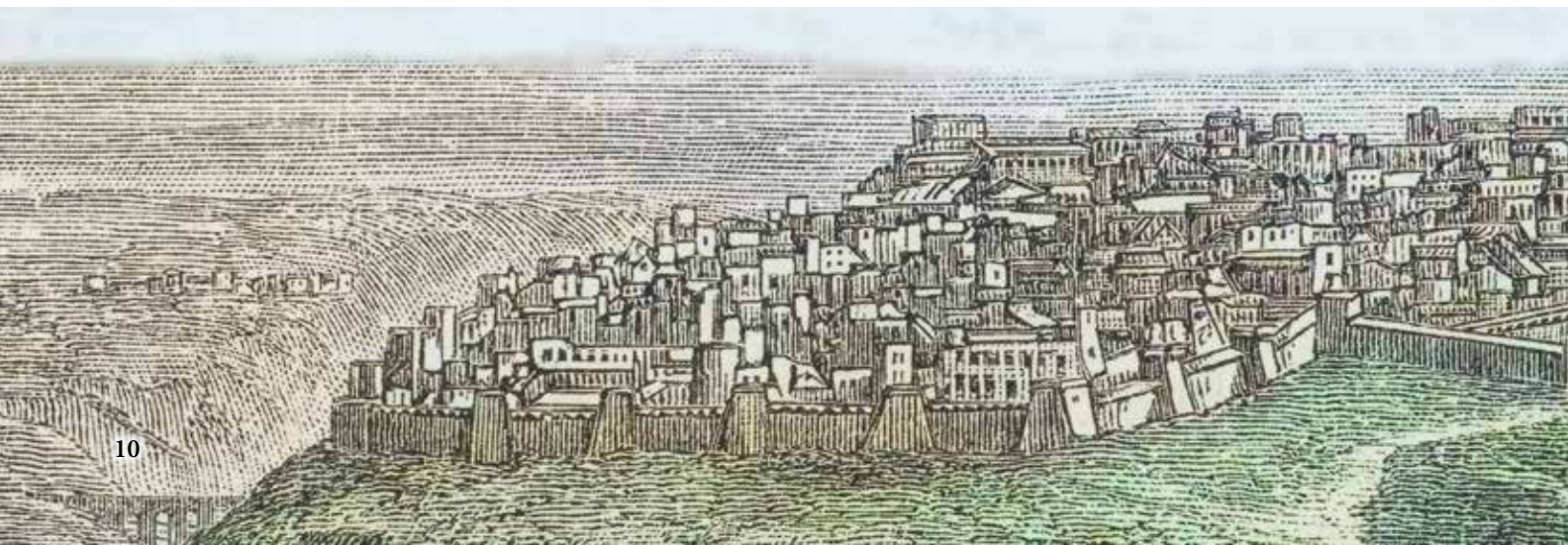
Great numbers of children were murdered, fulfilling Jeremiah’s prophecy of “lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning” (Matt. 2:18; Jer. 31:15). Jesus and His parents narrowly escaped (Matt. 2:13-15), but this was only the beginning of the opposition He would face.

Throughout His life, Christ was ridiculed, rejected and opposed by both the religious elite and the world around Him. Ultimately, He was arrested, illegally tried, beaten beyond recognition and murdered, becoming the Savior of mankind.

The apostle Paul in Hebrews explains how all-encompassing the trials were that Jesus endured, and introduces a central role He holds: “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (4:15).

Christ overcame perfectly and is therefore uniquely positioned to relate to the sufferings human beings experience.

Many assume Jesus became High Priest only after ascending to heaven. While His time on Earth equipped Him



to more powerfully fulfill this office, few understand He held it as Melchizedek long before that time.

Paul then connects Christ directly to the priesthood David described in Psalm 110: “So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made a high priest...” (Heb. 5:5). Paul then quoted Psalm 110:4: “You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 5:6).

At this point, an unmistakable connection has been made: Jesus Christ is the High Priest of Psalm 110.

Hebrews 5:7-9 further reveals Christ’s qualifications. He suffered “in the days of his flesh,” “learned...obedience by the things which He suffered,” and became “the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.” Verse 10 again plainly states He was “called of God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.”

King of Peace

Back in Genesis 14, Melchizedek is also called the “King of Salem” (vs. 18). Hebrews explains the meaning of this title in full: “This Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace” (7:1-2).

Only a member of the Godhead could command these names. No human ruler has ever perfectly embodied righteousness and peace.

Hebrews then gives the clearest statement of Melchizedek’s origin and therefore identity. He is “without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abides a priest continually” (vs. 3).

Put this all together: Melchizedek is an eternal being. The Being Paul is discussing is Jesus Christ, meaning Melchizedek *was* the One who later became Jesus Christ.

Verse 4 then underscores Melchizedek’s authority, telling the Hebrews to “consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils.”

Priesthood That Lasts Forever

While technical and beyond the scope of this article, Paul clarified the transfer of authority from the physical Levitical priesthood to Christ as High Priest. He asked, “If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchizedek, and not be called after the order of Aaron?” (Heb. 7:11).

In other words, the physical Levitical priesthood was temporary—a stopgap awaiting the ultimate High Priest, Jesus Christ.

When Christ was sacrificed for mankind, there came certain changes to the Levitical laws concerning such elements as purification and sacrifice:

“For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law” (vs. 12).

This does not mean, as many assume, that Christ abolished God’s Law. Jesus warned, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill” (Matt. 5:17). Rather, He upheld, taught and magnified the Law!

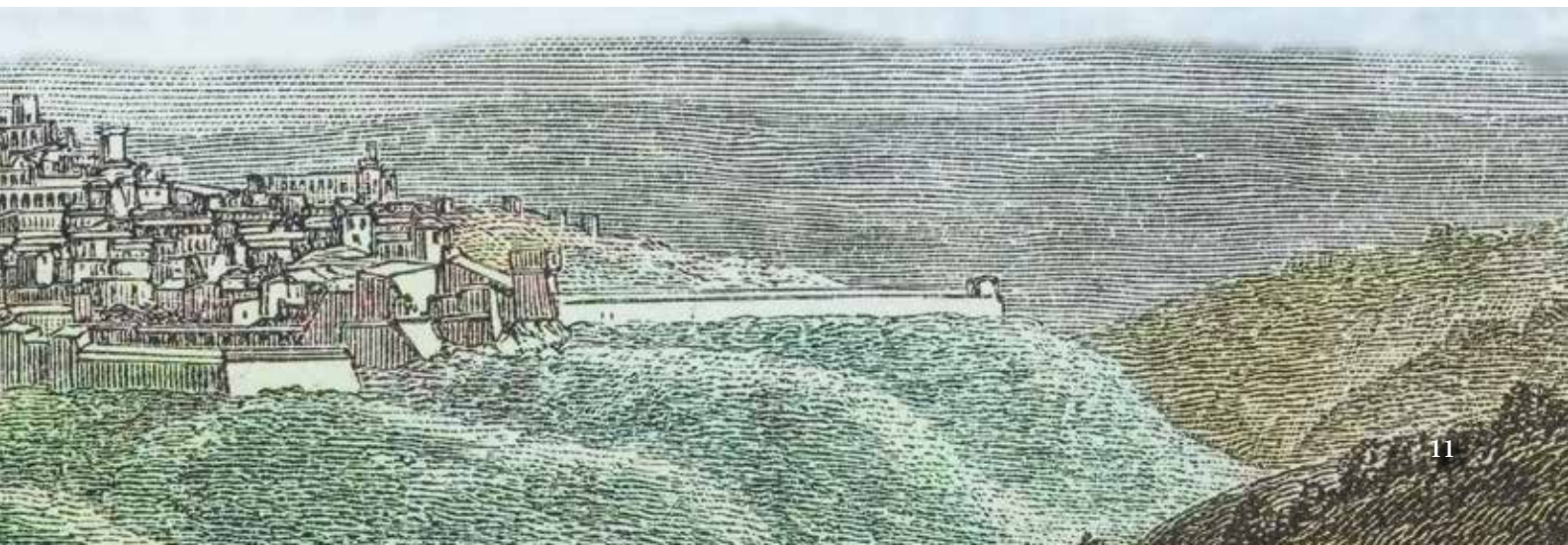
This High Priest is an eternal One: “And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchizedek there arises another priest, who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life” (Heb. 7:15-16).

His position is irrevocable, “with an oath by Him that said unto Him, The Lord swore and will not repent, You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (vs. 21).

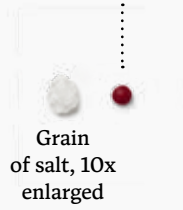
Think of it this way: God has doubly sworn, *and* will not go back on His word.

Earlier in Hebrews, Paul called Christ the “captain” of salvation, whose goal is to bring “many sons unto glory” (2:10)—every human being who will ultimately accept God’s way of life. The One who appeared to Abraham as Melchizedek is now High Priest, and through that eternal office, He is working to fulfill God’s purpose for mankind.

What exactly is that purpose? And what does salvation actually involve? To learn the Bible’s answers, read our free booklet *Just What Is Salvation?* at rcg.org/jwis. □



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Deadlier Than Fentanyl: Weapons-Grade Carfentanil Surges

It is much more than an opioid crisis.

BY NESTOR A. TORO

NEARLY TWO decades after drug addiction sent him to rehab as a teenager, 36-year-old Michael Nalewaja had settled into a quiet life in Alaska where he worked as an electrician.

That all came crashing down days before Thanksgiving 2025, when he and a mutual friend unknowingly took a lethal cocktail of fentanyl and carfentanil they may have mistaken for cocaine.

“I heard the word ‘autopsy’ and I literally just collapsed to the floor,” his mother Kelley Nalewaja said, recalling the call she received from his wife. “Even if somebody had been there prepared with Narcan—even if somebody had called 911 in time—he was not going to survive.”

Just when fentanyl seemed bad enough, carfentanil has emerged as an even deadlier threat: a chemical authorities say is 10,000 times more potent than morphine and 100 times stronger than fentanyl. It has surged sharply across the United States, killing hundreds of unsuspecting drug users.

The rise coincides with a recent crackdown by the Chinese government on the sale of precursors used to make fentanyl. Those regulations are likely prompting traffickers in Mexico to use carfentanil to boost the potency of a weakened version of fentanyl,

according to U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration intelligence bulletins reviewed by *The Associated Press*.

The agency warns, “This white, powdery drug closely resembles other substances like fentanyl or cocaine, but its danger far exceeds that of nearly any other opioid on the street. Carfentanil is a chilling reminder of how the opioid epidemic continues to evolve and introduces new threats at an alarming pace.”

Suddenly the two milligrams of fentanyl that can kill a person now seem like a large amount compared with the 0.02 milligrams of carfentanil that can do the same.

“You’re talking about not even a grain of salt that could be potentially lethal,” said Frank Tarentino, the DEA’s chief of operations for its northeast region, which stretches from Maine to Virginia. “This presents an extremely frightening proposition for substance abuse dependent people who seek opioids on the street today.”

This drug reveals a civilization in which wounded people seek relief, traffickers monetize their pain and suffering only gets worse.

Extreme Danger

A decade ago, carfentanil exploded into the North American drug supply, causing hundreds of unsuspecting drug

users to overdose, only to see a major dip after China banned it in 2017.

But the situation has shifted dramatically in recent years.

In 2025, DEA labs identified carfentanil 1,400 times in U.S. drug seizures, compared with 145 in 2023 and only 54 in 2022, according to DEA records viewed by the *AP*.

Traffickers in Mexico may be experimenting with producing carfentanil themselves, authorities say, while others could be procuring it from China-based vendors skirting the country’s regulations by spamming online forums in other countries with ads for the drug.

Complicating matters for the cartels are the extreme dangers associated with manufacturing carfentanil, Mr. Tarentino said.

“You can’t just dabble in this,” he said. “This is not some mad scientist on Reddit you’re going to get to go out to a rudimentary laboratory in Mexico to make carfentanil.”

People making this drug put themselves at great risk. Powdered carfentanil is especially dangerous if inhaled or if it contacts mucous membranes, and liquid or highly concentrated forms may also be absorbed through skin.

As full-strength fentanyl becomes harder to obtain, traffickers are will-

CARFENTANIL COMPARISON

100x
stronger than
fentanyl

FENTANYL

10,000x
stronger than
morphine

MORPHINE

THINGS TO KNOW



VETERINARY ORIGIN, NOT FOR HUMANS

Created for tranquilizing megafauna like elephants.



ONE PILL CAN KILL

It has often been mixed with other drugs or made into pills that look like prescription painkillers.



HARDER TO REVERSE

Overdoses may require multiple high doses of naloxone and reversal is never guaranteed.

Source: dea.gov

ing to take the risk, using carfentanil to boost potency and stretch supply.

'All About Money'

Most people buying drugs on the street are not seeking carfentanil. It is commonly mixed with other illicit drugs or pressed into counterfeit pills such as OxyContin or Xanax, often without the user's knowledge. Many victims think they are taking cocaine or other opioids and do not realize what they have consumed until it is too late.

The microscopic nature of a carfentanil dose provides logistical advantages for traffickers. Smaller quantities of the drug are easier to conceal and transport across borders than larger volumes of less potent narcotics like heroin or cocaine.

The financial incentive is massive. By substituting carfentanil into the illicit supply, traffickers can dramatically lower their overhead costs while maximizing the addictive qualities and street value of their product.

Ultimately, law enforcement and addiction experts emphasize that the

shift toward carfentanil is a calculated financial strategy, with traffickers prioritizing the exponential revenue generated by such a high-yield substance over the extreme risk of fatal poisoning it poses to the public.

In some cases, frequent drug users have become tolerant to fentanyl and are seeking out carfentanil despite the danger, because of the sudden euphoria it promises, explained Rob Tanguay, senior medical lead for addiction services with Recovery Alberta, a health agency in Canada. It appeals to the drug market, he said, because so little of it goes such a long way.

"The toughest part about all of this," he said, "is that this is all about money."

Two millennia ago, the apostle Paul identified the main catalyst for such heartless indifference toward human life. He wrote: "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. *For the love of money is [a] root of all evil:* which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced

themselves through with many sorrows" (I Tim. 6:9-10).

A desire for money leads people to dark places. Those pushing this drug are monetizing human pain—causing "many sorrows" for their victims, their victims' loved ones, and even themselves. Were Paul alive today, he would point to the same cause.

Deceptive Progress

Ironically, the surge of a drug so deadly that less than a poppy seed-sized amount can kill a person comes as fentanyl seizures and overall drug overdose deaths continue a multiyear decline.

However, authorities warn that this period of apparent progress may be illusory.

Fentanyl seizures, along with several other illicit drugs, have also dipped. U.S. Customs and Border Protection reported that fentanyl seizures plunged to about 12,000 pounds in 2025—less than half the amount seized in 2023.

Yet federal law enforcement data and public health reports confirm that, even as illicit fentanyl metrics

show improvement, the DEA remains intensely focused on the crisis due to the emergence of even more toxic substances.

In response to this evolving threat, the DEA's proposed budget recently included a \$362 million increase specifically centered on combating cartel-driven trafficking.

"Anyone who takes a pill that is not prescribed to them by their doctor is playing a game of Russian roulette with their life," stated Sara Carter, drug czar in the Trump administration. "But if those terrorists think they can continue this chemical warfare without consequences, they are wrong."

Chemical Weapon

While the prevalence of carfentanil still pales in comparison to fentanyl, experts are nevertheless alarmed by the increase of a substance researched for years as a chemical weapon. It was used by Russian forces during a Moscow hostage situation in 2002, which led to deaths among both hostage takers and hostages.

The DEA's annual quota for lawfully manufactured carfentanil—veterinarians use it to tranquilize elephants and other large animals—is just 20 grams, an amount that can fit in the palm of your hand.

"It's like a biological weapon," said Michael King Jr., founder of the Opioid Awareness Foundation. "If the world thinks we had a problem with fentanyl, that's minute compared to what we're going to be dealing with with carfentanil."

In 2024, overdose deaths involving carfentanil nearly tripled compared to the previous year, with 413 deaths across 42 states and Washington, D.C., according to the most recent data available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Carfentanil definitely has that potential of spreading throughout the United States unless law enforcement really focuses in on carfentanil and they develop intelligence as to how these drug addicts are getting it," said

Mike Vigil, a former chief of international operations at the DEA.

In recent months, the DEA has documented several large seizures of carfentanil. In October, the DEA Los Angeles Field Division found 628,000 pills containing carfentanil, while in September, officials seized more than 50,000 counterfeit M30 pills from a person at a gas station in Washington state that turned out to be a mixture of carfentanil and acetaminophen.

For each shipment seized, authorities worry about the quantities that pass through undetected. Each successful distribution of these pills acts as a deployed weapon in the community.

If that sounds alarmist, ask the parents of carfentanil's victims—people like Ms. Nalewaja. After her son Michael died, she chose not to hold a large funeral. Instead, she organized a town hall in her hometown of El Dorado Hills, California, bringing together local officials and other grieving mothers who had endured similar loss.

Now, as she mourns a charismatic son who had recently received a national award from the electrical union, she is pressing for major legislative and judicial changes so other families do not suffer what hers did.

"It's not an OD; it's not an overdose," she said. "It's a murder weapon."

A Future Drug-Free World

A drug so lethal that less than a grain of salt sized dose can be fatal is terrifying.

The Bible explains that these and other tragic developments are the direct result of a civilization cut off from God. Isaiah 59 explains: "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear" (vs. 1-2).

Mankind as a whole has chosen to make its own decisions rather than following God's way of life revealed in Scripture. The inevitable result is misery and suffering. The prophet Jeremiah observed, "O LORD, I know

that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps" (10:23).

Yet God also promises that a better, perfect world will soon replace the miserable society of today. The Bible calls this "the times of restitution of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:21). This is what can give us true hope.

Found throughout Scripture, this time of restoration is simply called the Kingdom of God.

In this prophesied wonderful world, the drug crisis will be solved. The illicit supply chains and the violence of cartels will be replaced by a world government that ensures "they shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain," as the earth becomes "full of the knowledge of the LORD" (Isa. 11:9).

Every physical and mental scar—including the heavy chains of addiction and all the circumstances that have led people to it—will be erased, fulfilling the prophecy that "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick," because the underlying spiritual causes of their suffering will have been forgiven (33:24).

Until then, families will still receive calls no parent should ever receive. People will still seek relief in substances that cannot heal them. Traffickers will still turn pain into profit. But that Kingdom *is* coming.

David C. Pack, Editor-in-Chief of *The Real Truth* magazine, summarized what this time will be like in his book *Tomorrow's Wonderful World - An Inside View!*

He wrote: "The world will be a perfect environment for all to begin living God's Way—the way of peace and prosperity, happiness and joy—according to His perfect law...Humanity will finally be humble and teachable. Everyone will learn God's truth. There will be no more suffering. Smiles will shine on people's faces. Crime will disappear. Mass healings will occur. Drugs and alcohol will no longer enslave people."

To learn much more, read *Tomorrow's Wonderful World - An Inside View!* at rcg.org/tww. □

Why Artemis II United Us





A muted blue Earth with bright white clouds sits behind the cratered lunar surface of the moon. Captured through the Orion spacecraft window on April 6, 2026, during the Artemis II crew's flyby of the moon.

NASA

Space exploration has a way of grabbing our attention, even when times are hard. There is a deeper reason for this.

BY GARRICK R. OXLEY

IN THE Philadelphia suburb of Elkins Park, astronomy enthusiast Hector Ybe gathered over 200 people for an Artemis launch party.

“For two hours, everybody forgot what was happening outside in the world, everybody was talking about space,” he said, adding that participants represented a variety of ethnic, religious and racial backgrounds.

Young children dressed in spacesuit outfits marveled at the launch while an older generation recalled watching the first moon landing in 1969.

Mr. Ybe's party was only a small glimpse of the fascination people around the country felt about NASA's Artemis II mission, which took place from April 1 to April 10. Artemis II was the world's first astronaut voyage to the moon in over half a century, and captivated Americans young and old across political divides.

During a press conference from space to onlookers back home on Earth, astronaut Victor Glover gave the following message: "Trust us, you look amazing, you look beautiful, and from up here you look like one thing. Homo sapiens are all of us, no matter where you're from or what you look like, we're all one people."

Later in the conference, Mr. Glover added: "This mission has shown us what we can do when we, not just put our differences aside, but when we bring our differences together to accomplish something great."

Homegrown infatuation with Artemis, the successor to NASA's Cold War-era Apollo moon program of the 1960s and '70s, was also reflected in polling data.

Some 69 percent of Americans said they get excited about space exploration, and about 80 percent expressed a favorable view of NASA, including large majorities of both Republicans and Democrats, according to a three-day Reuters/Ipsos poll conducted during the mission. Likewise, 69 percent of respondents said it was important to return astronauts to the moon.

In a divided country, Artemis II provided a common interest that brought people together, even if just for a fleeting moment.

Space exploration has a way of capturing our attention and making us feel unified. There is a deeper reason for this.

'We're All in This Together'

The 10-day mission was a key dress rehearsal for a planned attempt later this decade to land astronauts on the moon for the first time since Apollo 17 in late 1972. It concluded with a splashdown of the Artemis II crew in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of California.

Top left, the first science officers of the Artemis program in the Mission Control Center at NASA's Johnson Space Center monitor data from the science console (April 6, 2026). Bottom, NASA's 322-foot-tall Artemis II Space Launch System rocket and Orion spacecraft lifts off from Launch Complex 39B at Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida (April 1, 2026). Top right, Artemis II astronauts in Orion spacecraft splash down in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of California (April 10, 2026).

TOP LEFT, NASA; BOTTOM, CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES; TOP RIGHT, NASA/BILL INGALLS/ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES



The astronauts' return to Earth was followed by the public and the media just as closely as the April 1 launch of their Orion capsule atop the towering Space Launch System rocket from Cape Canaveral, Florida.

"Everyone can be excited about humans extending their capabilities, learning new things, and doing so in a positive, peaceful way," said Geza Gyuk, senior astronomer at Chicago's Adler Planetarium, where he said hundreds of visitors flocked to learn about the mission.

As was the case during the Apollo program, NASA's latest lunar ambitions are being pursued at a time of political and social upheaval, including a U.S. military conflict that has proven unpopular at home.

The tumult may begin to explain the appeal of Artemis as both a welcome distraction from the grind of political news many find disturbing,



and as an affirmation of U.S. scientific and technical accomplishment.

Mr. Gyuk pointed to new images of Earth captured by the Artemis crew from space showing oceans and land masses without boundaries, a reminder of humanity's commonality.

"That helps people sort of realize that we're all in this together," he said.

Ambitious Plans

As inspiring as the mission was, it only left Americans wanting more. NASA's





Artemis II Mission Specialist Jeremy Hansen, Commander Reid Wiseman, Mission Specialist Christina Koch, and Pilot Victor Glover embrace during a press conference at Ellington Field Joint Reserve Base in Houston, Texas, after their historic 10-day mission around the moon concluded successfully (April 11, 2026).

DANIELLE VILLASANA/GETTY IMAGES

plans were not to evoke nostalgia—they represented an ongoing human drive to get back to space.

Less than two months after Artemis II's record-breaking lunar flyaround, NASA was ordering landers, rovers and drones for a sprawling moon base.

Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin will provide a pair of landers to deliver moon buggies to the lunar surface. Firefly Aerospace, which landed a lunar lander successfully on the moon last year, will deliver the first drones to the moon.

All this hardware is ideally supposed to arrive before the first Artemis astronauts land on the lunar surface, planned for as early as 2028.

For next year's Artemis III, another team of astronauts will practice docking NASA's Orion capsule in orbit around Earth with the lunar landers being developed for crews by Blue Origin and Elon Musk's SpaceX.

NASA is targeting Artemis III for mid-2027, with a landing by two astronauts following as soon as 2028. The moon base's second phase, from 2029 into the early 2030s, will start building up permanent infrastructure, including a power grid. As for when the base

will be ready to support astronauts for extended periods in specialized permanent habitats, that is expected sometime in the 2030s, during the third phase.

"Then we'll be able to say, 'Hey, we're permanently here and we're not giving it up,'" said NASA's moon base program executive Carlos Garcia-Galan.

The United States is currently the only country ever to have sent humans to the lunar surface. But it is far from the only nation with ambitions. Other powerful players such as China, India, Russia and Japan have been making strides in their space programs with robust plans for the coming years.

Mankind is committed to space. The dream is no longer simply to look at the moon, or even visit it, but to stay.

Why the Appeal

Space exploration has a way of captivating human beings. Where does this feeling come from?

Thousands of years ago, the biblical king David felt a similar sense of awe when he looked up at the night sky. Although he did not have a telescope or other modern resources that we use

today, he was still able to say: "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; what is man, that You are mindful of him? And the son of man, that You visit him?" (Psa. 8:3-4).

Seeing the moon and stars guided David's mind toward something greater than himself. He wanted to understand the Being who created all of that. Whether we realize it or not, the inspiration we feel when we see pictures of the moon from deep in space is similar. We are yearning for something greater than ourselves.

I Corinthians 15 adds more about how God designed space: "There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differs from another star in glory" (vs. 40-41).

Although the passage here is building to a larger point this article does not have space to examine, these verses reveal that the planets, sun, moon and stars each have a certain "glory." According to *Strong's Concordance*, the Greek word for glory means "glory (as very apparent), in a wide application, dignity, honor, praise, worship." This is part of what inspires us to keep exploring.

Psalms 19 adds: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows knowledge" (vs. 1-2).

The term "the heavens" here ties directly to what we have been discussing. Although heaven as a general concept is familiar, most do not realize that the Bible actually describes *three* heavens.



A young boy wears an astronaut costume next to a woman waving a flag as they watch a live broadcast of the return of the Artemis II crew members to Earth at the San Diego Air and Space Museum during a watch party for the crew's splashdown (April 10, 2026).

APU GOMES/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

The first heaven is the sky or air that surrounds the Earth, which we refer to as the atmosphere (104:12). The second heaven is the vast universe of stars, planets, comets and other bodies in space (Psa. 8:3). God the Father and Jesus Christ dwell in the third heaven (II Cor. 12:1-2). God's throne is located there.

Each of the various celestial bodies have their own glory. And taken collectively, "the heavens" show the glory of God.

Man's Destiny

Scripture explains more about why man is drawn to space. It has to do with God's ultimate destiny for people.

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

This was so important, God repeated it just two verses later in verse 28 for emphasis.

Yet notice what is missing from this list of things man was given dominion, or rule, over: outer space. Although the scope of what God gave man was enormous, including fish, birds, land animals and "all the earth," God set the bounds of man's control to the planet beneath his feet.

Man has been able to visit the moon and explore a tiny fraction of what space has to offer. But he has not received "dominion" over the vastness of what exists beyond Earth.

Yet.

The Bible tells us exactly what God plans for this vast cosmic expanse. And it has everything to do with salvation.

Real Truth Editor-in-Chief David C. Pack explained this in his book *The Awesome Potential of Man*. He wrote: "The incredible goal of a Christian is to be born into the Kingdom of God—to become a spirit being RULING under Christ, as a very Son of God. What could be more wonderful—more GLORIOUS!—for a Christian to look forward to?"

Mr. Pack continues: "Paul goes on to explain that God plans to give enormous power and *authority* to His sons:

'You have put ALL THINGS in subjection under his feet. For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left NOTHING that is not put under him. But now we see *not yet* all things put under him' (Heb. 2:8). This has not *yet* happened—but it will soon.

"When God says that 'all things' will be put under the feet of man, that is what He means! The vast universe, with all of its quadrillions of stars and one trillion galaxies, will be put under the authority of men who have been born into the Family of God. In fact, the Moffatt translation renders the Greek word for 'all things' as 'THE UNIVERSE.'"

Man was made by God, in God's image, for a destiny far greater than life on Earth alone. That is why space moves us. God is now preparing to give dominion over all things—including outer space!—to those who receive salvation.

Artemis II could only give people a brief moment of shared wonder. God's plan explains why that wonder exists—and points to an amazing future where we will all be unified for good.

To learn much more, continue reading *The Awesome Potential of Man* at rcg.org/tapom. □



Displaced Palestinians make their way along a street with destroyed buildings at Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip (May 6, 2026).

OMAR AL-QATTAA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

The Widening Gap Between Rich and Poor Nations

A new UN report on global poverty highlights mankind's efforts to solve problems and the limits of financial solutions.

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

THE WORLD has never had more wealth, more institutions devoted to development or more public commitments to ending poverty. Yet the gap between rich and poor nations continues to widen.

A recent United Nations report concluded that commitments made by many countries last year to address the financial divide remain largely unfulfilled. Released ahead of spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the report assessed progress on the Seville Commitment, adopted by many world leaders at a conference in Seville, Spain, in June 2025.

World leaders are working to close a financial gap between nations, yet a

deeper gap remains—the gap between mankind's solutions and God's way of producing lasting prosperity.

Growing Financial Divide

The Seville Commitment was intended to help close the \$4 trillion annual financing gap the United Nations says is needed to achieve global development goals by 2030. Among its ambitious objectives were increasing investment in developing countries and reforming the international financial system, including the IMF and World Bank.

According to the report, progress has been slow.

Li Junhua, the UN undersecretary-general for economic and social affairs, said geopolitical tensions are

making it increasingly difficult for developing nations to attract financing. He described the current environment as “an extremely perilous time for international cooperation, as geopolitical considerations are increasingly shaping economic relations and financial policies.”

The report also cited rising trade barriers and repeated climate-related shocks as contributing factors in the widening gap between nations.

Compounding the challenge is growing uncertainty in the global economy. IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said the institution had been preparing for stronger global growth, but conflict involving Iran has clouded that outlook.

Aid is also shrinking. According to UN officials, 25 countries reduced assistance to poorer nations in 2025, resulting in an overall 23 percent decline from 2024—the largest annual drop on record. The United States accounted for the largest decrease, with assistance falling by 59 percent. A further overall decline is expected in 2026.

Tariffs have added another strain. The report said average export tariffs on the world's poorest nations increased from 9 percent to 28 percent in 2025. For developing countries excluding China, average tariffs rose from 2 percent to 19 percent.

Supporters of the Seville Commitment argue that expanding investment and improving access to financing could help developing nations build infrastructure, strengthen economies and improve overall living conditions.

The UN report on implementing the Seville Commitment said it represents “the best hope” to close the widening financial gap.

These reform efforts are understandable. Poverty remains a daily reality for billions. Many lack reliable housing, healthcare, sanitation, food security and economic opportunity. The goals of many national leaders and international organizations are sincere: reduce suffering, improve living standards and help people live better lives.

Yet the report also highlights a recurring challenge in human affairs. Nations often agree on common goals, but conflicts, competing interests and changing priorities can make cooperation and progress difficult to sustain.

Human suffering may be easy to recognize, but finding lasting solutions has proven far more difficult.

More Than Money?

Can financial resources alone solve humanity's problems?

Money builds roads, schools and hospitals. It creates jobs, expands opportunities and provides relief during crises. Financial assistance can ease suffering and improve lives.



Manhattan, New York, United States

GETTY IMAGES

“According to UN officials, 25 countries reduced assistance to poorer nations in 2025, resulting in an overall 23 percent decline from 2024—the largest annual drop on record.”

Children wait to receive food as food shortages continue in the Gaza Strip (May 26, 2026).

ABDALHKEM ABU RIASH/ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES

But money cannot solve everything.

Even as world leaders debate aid levels, trade policies and financial improvements, scarcity continues to affect billions of people.

And this hardship is not limited to poorer nations. Many living in so-called rich countries also face increasing pockets of homelessness, addiction, crime, family breakdown and social instability. Portions of their populations also struggle with poverty.

Yet poverty should not be measured only through the assumptions of wealthier societies. People in prosperous nations can mistakenly assume that those with fewer material advantages must be unhappy simply because they would feel deprived in the same circumstances. Human well-being is shaped by more than income. Family, community, purpose and stability all matter.

Many of the problems that weaken nations are rooted not in a lack of resources, but in how people and societies use them. Corruption, conflict, self-interest and dishonesty all undermine progress. No amount of funding automatically removes these obstacles.

The persistence of poverty shows that financial resources alone cannot address the deepest problems facing nations. Wealth can provide opportunity, but it cannot produce honesty. Aid can relieve immediate hardship, but it cannot create character. Investment can build infrastructure, but it cannot by itself build stable families, trustworthy leadership or lasting peace.

What Exalts a Nation

The Bible offers a perspective on prosperity often absent from discussions about economic development. Proverbs 14:34 states, “Righteousness exalts a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.”

Another verse earlier in the same chapter reveals God’s concern for those who struggle materially: “He



that oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker: but he that honors Him has mercy on the poor” (14:31).

God does not ignore poverty and He does not view the poor as less valuable. He condemns oppression and expects people to treat the vulnerable with compassion, fairness and mercy.

At the same time, Proverbs 14:34 points to a broader national principle. The verse does not focus on a nation’s natural resources, economic output or financial wealth. It focuses on conduct. A nation’s well-being is shaped by the values, character and behavior of its people.

Scripture defines sin as the transgression of God’s Law (I John 3:4). It involves actions that violate the principles God established for true prosperity. Righteousness is the opposite: living in accordance with those principles.

Financial wealth alone does not reveal a nation’s spiritual condition. Wealthy countries are still plagued by homelessness, addiction, crime, family breakdown and social instability. Poorer nations still have communities marked by generosity, strong family bonds, personal integrity and contentment.

Wealthy nations are not automatically righteous. Poorer nations are not automatically unrighteous.

Proverbs shows that lasting national strength depends on more than financial resources. When people live honestly, trust can grow. When families are stable, communities become stronger. When leaders act justly, citizens are protected. When people practice self-control, responsibility and diligence, they avoid many of the behaviors that produce suffering.

Much more than being personal virtues, these are national building blocks.

While Proverbs 14:34 reveals what exalts a nation, Jeremiah 10:23 reveals why mankind struggles to achieve it: “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps.”

Human beings can recognize problems and sincerely seek solutions. The



A young girl walks through floodwaters carrying a plastic basin in Gatumba, Burundi (June 10, 2025). MICHEL LUNANGA/GETTY IMAGES

efforts described in the UN report reflect this. Yet history reveals mankind’s limitations in solving the deepest causes of human suffering—problems money alone cannot fix.

If man cannot direct his own steps, then the world needs more than another financial framework. It needs God to teach mankind the way that produces peace, justice, stability and lasting prosperity.

In Isaiah 55:8, God makes clear the incredible gap between man’s thinking and His. He declares: “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the LORD.” He continues, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (vs. 9).

In other words, until the world follows God’s ways, it will never fully solve its problems.

Closing Both Gaps

The Bible shows that God’s government will one day produce the stabil-

ity and prosperity mankind has never been able to achieve on its own.

Isaiah 65 gives a small glimpse of that future: “And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat...and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands” (vs. 21-22).

This is not merely a picture of improved economic conditions. It is a world in which people are secure, their labor is not wasted, and the systems that produce oppression, fear, corruption and instability have been replaced by righteous rule.

God’s soon-coming world government will not merely redistribute wealth. It will teach the righteous way of life that produces lasting peace, justice, stability and prosperity.

Only with the arrival of the Kingdom will both gaps be closed—the economic gap between nations and the far wider gap between man’s way and God’s Way. □



How to Vet Health Advice on Social Media

HEALTH AND wellness advice is available in abundance on social media—from trendy to informative to straight-up disinformation—and you are far from alone in seeing it.

A new survey by the Pew Research Center found that about 4 in 10 U.S. adults—and around half of those under 50—get health information from social media or podcasts.

Researchers also looked at the social media profiles of 6,828 health and wellness influencers with at least 100,000 followers. Only about 4 in 10 list a background as a health professional. About one-third called themselves coaches, about 3 in 10 described themselves as entrepreneurs and about 1 in 10 cited their own life experience, like being a parent.

Despite the wide range of expertise, about half of people who get health and wellness information from influencers said the influencers help them better understand their own health, while about one-third said it has not made much difference. About 1 in 10 said it made them more confused.

Experts say a bit of skepticism is key to interacting with posts about fitness, mental health and personal health. Here are some tips on how to avoid health disinformation online.

How to Vet Credentials

Experts said the biggest green flag is when an influencer's credentials are easy to find on their profile. Beware the fill-in-the-blank “coach” who cannot prove their training.

Courtney Babilya, a certified medical exercise specialist and personal trainer who has more than 430,000 followers on Instagram, has seen this with maternity content: “Someone has a baby and suddenly they're a pregnancy coach.”

“We have to be careful with people who have an experience in one thing and suddenly become a ‘coach’ on that,” she said.

“You do have an obligation to make sure that you are not giving someone a false idea or spreading a message that

isn't going to be applicable to everyone,” she said.

Do Not Fall for Viral Shock Factor

If it brings up big emotions, pause. For people who cannot access care or feel unheard by their doctors, an offbeat opinion could feel like a long-sought answer. The Pew survey found 53 percent of uninsured people got health information from social media, compared to 38 percent of those who were insured.

But people who are trying to share good medical information online are not trying to incite fear or surprise, said Dr. Fatima Daoud Yilmaz, an OB-GYN at Stony Brook Medicine in New York.

Even if the person has expertise, ask yourself: Are they speaking outside the scope of their knowledge? Is what they are saying in line with scientific consensus?

“All opinions are not created equal when it comes to something such as health or medicine or science,” said Ms. Daoud.

Look out for exaggerated or definitive claims, especially in the first few seconds of the video when influencers are trying hard to grab your attention, added Ms. Babilya.

Follow the Influencer Money

People on social media are making money—for some, it is their livelihood.

“It doesn't mean that all of the information that they put out is biased, but it should tell consumers of that information to take it with a grain of salt because they do have financial incentive to be pushing information like this,” Ms. Daoud said.

Ms. Babilya's platform is now a full-time job, and it is how she supports her family. She is upfront with her audience and makes sure her ads are transparently labeled.

Stop Being a Passive Scroller

Experts also recommend pausing to check the video's sources. Some posts are not well fact-checked, Ms. Babilya warned, citing studies that have nothing

to do with what the influencer says it does.

Use the same standard as when you are vetting a purchase online. Look at the larger conversation around the advice as you would reading product reviews, Ms. Tawwab said.

Two-thirds of users said they just happen to come across the content rather than seeking it out, according to the Pew survey.

If you want to control your feed, it will take time and ongoing effort, said Ash Milton of the University of Minnesota, who studies how users navigate online mental health information.

“You have to work for it because the algorithm is designed to be passive consumption,” Ms. Milton said.

You can use “Hidden Words” on Instagram or “Not Interested” on TikTok to filter out certain content. Use your reaction as a barometer to limit content by asking yourself: Is the health information actually applicable and helpful to your life, or just relatable?

Find a Doctor You Trust

Confirm with a trusted health professional before acting on anything you see online.

Influencers can say anything while medical professionals are ethically and legally liable for your care, and “may face professional and personal consequences for the advice that they give you,” Ms. Daoud said. “Ultimately, talk to the medical provider who knows you.”

A good provider should be willing to answer questions, explain risks and benefits in plain language and take your concerns seriously—especially if something you saw online has left you worried.

Bring the post, clip or claim with you to an appointment. Ask: Does this apply to me? Is there solid evidence behind it? What are the risks of trying it? A trusted provider can put broad advice into context and help you make decisions based on the reality of your health—not the algorithm's idea of what will keep you watching. □

More Countries Are Turning to Nuclear Power 40 Years After Chernobyl

The 1986 Chernobyl disaster fueled global fears about nuclear power and slowed its development in Europe and elsewhere. Four decades later, there is a revival around the world, a trend that has been given a big boost by war in the Middle East.

Over 400 nuclear reactors are operational in 31 countries, while about 70 more are under construction. Nuclear power accounts for producing about 10 percent of the world’s electricity, equivalent to about a quarter of all sources of low-carbon power.

Nuclear reactors have seen steady improvements, adding more safety features and making them cheaper to build and operate.

While Chernobyl and the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan diminished the appetite for such power sources, it was clear years ago that there probably would be a revival, said Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency.

With the war in the Middle East, “I am 100% sure nuclear is coming back,” he added.

“It’s seen as a secure electricity generation system, and we will see that the comeback of nuclear will be very strong, both in [the] Americas, in Europe and in Asia,” Mr. Birol told *The Associated Press*.

Nuclear Energy Reliance Stays Strong

The United States is the world’s largest producer of nuclear power, with 94 operational reactors accounting for about 30 percent of global generation of



Construction of the TerraPower nuclear reactor is underway in Kemmerer, Wyoming (May 27, 2026). The reactor, which is expected to begin generating power by 2031, will support data centers and the artificial intelligence boom.

NATALIE BEHRING/GETTY IMAGES

nuclear electricity. And it is increasing efforts to develop nuclear energy capacity with a goal to quadruple it by 2050.

“The world cannot power its industries, meet the demands of artificial intelligence, or secure its energy future without nuclear power,” U.S. Undersecretary of State Thomas DiNanno said in March.

China operates 61 nuclear reactors and is leading the world in building new units, with nearly 40 under construction with a goal to surpass the U.S. and become the global leader in nuclear capacity.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen has acknowledged that it was Europe’s “strategic mistake” to cut nuclear energy and outlined new initiatives to encourage building power plants.

Russia, meanwhile, has taken a strong lead in exporting its nuclear know-how, building 20 reactors worldwide.

Chernobyl’s Reactor No. 4 exploded on April 26, 1986, while Ukraine was still part of the Soviet Union. The accident contaminated nearby areas and spewed radiation across Europe.

Ukraine still relies heavily on nuclear plants to generate about half of its electricity. Those plants have played a vital role after Russia sent troops into Ukraine in 2022. Moscow's forces have captured Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, and Kyiv accused Russia of a drone attack on the protective containment structure covering the damaged Chernobyl reactor.

Japan has restarted 15 reactors after reviewing the lessons of the earthquake and tsunami that damaged the Fukushima plant, and 10 more are in the process of getting approval to restart.

South Africa has the only nuclear power plant on the African continent, although Russia is building one in Egypt, and several other African nations are exploring the technology.

"The momentum we are seeing today is the result of a growing recognition that reliable, low-carbon electricity will be essential to meet the world's rising energy demand," said Rafael Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

EU Eyes Nuclear Expansion

Europe sought to wean itself off Russian energy after the Ukraine conflict, but its dependence on hydrocarbons was underlined by the war in the Middle East.

The European Commission has shifted its perception of nuclear energy and views it as part of clean energy, along with wind and solar power, to achieve climate goals.

In 1990, nuclear energy accounted for about a third of Europe's electricity; now it is only about 15 percent, and Ms. von der Leyen has acknowledged that its reliance on imported fossil fuels puts it at a disadvantage.

"I believe that it was a strategic mistake for Europe to turn its back on a reliable, affordable source of low-emissions power," she said in March. "In the last years, we see a global revival of

nuclear energy. And Europe wants to be part of it."

The EU is considering the development of Small Modular Reactors. Expected to become operational in the early 2030s, they are seen as cheaper and faster to build and more flexible than traditional reactors.

France and a few other EU members, including Sweden and Finland, have spearheaded nuclear power. On the other hand, Germany, Austria and Italy are among the EU members that outlawed its use.

In a major policy reversal last year, Belgium repealed a law that demanded the closure of its reactors and extended their lifespan. Spain, meanwhile, still plans to phase out its nuclear capacity and shut down its seven operational reactors between 2027 and 2035.

France Remains a Nuclear Powerhouse

With 57 reactors at 19 plants, France relies on nuclear power for nearly 70 percent of its electricity.

Successive governments have backed nuclear power as central to France's energy independence, undeterred by the Chernobyl disaster. In 2022, President Emmanuel Macron announced plans to build six new pressurized water reactors, aiming to cut greenhouse gas emissions and support the transition to low-carbon energy.

The COVID-19 pandemic, combined with the gas supply crunch triggered by the conflict in Ukraine, "revealed the limits of deploying renewable electricity and Europe's dependence on gas," said Nicolas Goldberg, a partner at Paris-based Columbus Consulting.

"France has therefore been reinforced in its strategy of maintaining its existing nuclear plants, which means extending their lifespan as much as possible," he said.

Germany Stands Firm in Phasing It Out

Decades of anti-nuclear protests in Germany, stoked by past accidents, had

pressured successive governments to end using a technology that critics saw as unsafe and unsustainable. Germany switched off its last three nuclear reactors in 2023, the final step in plans that had been drawn up by governments of various political stripes over two decades.

A significant nuclear revival in Europe's biggest economy still looks far-fetched, despite recent talk among some in Chancellor Friedrich Merz's center-right bloc about being open to a possible future generation of small modular reactors.

"The decision is irreversible—I regret it, but that's how it is," Mr. Merz said, noting the plant operators' "consistent answer was: 'We are too far along with demolition.'"

Russian Domestic Nuclear Expansion and Exporting Reactors

Russia has aggressively expanded its nuclear power capacity both domestically and internationally.

It has 34 operational reactors, including eight Chernobyl-type RBMK reactors, known as the light water graphite reactors, which account for about a quarter of all nuclear power generation. They have seen extensive modernizations, adding safety features to fix the inherent design flaw that, coupled with human error, triggered the Chernobyl disaster.

Key projects under construction include new units at the Kursk, Leningrad and Smolensk sites, a prospective plant in the Far East, and prospective floating nuclear units.

Russia also is building 20 reactors in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and has signed contracts to launch construction in several other countries.

Russia has built the first nuclear reactor for neighboring ally Belarus, which has seen a third of its territory contaminated from the Chernobyl accident. □

Man, Machine and AI Combine in Battle to Clear Ukraine of Mines and Shells



Employees of the HALO Trust use metal detectors to search for mines and unexploded ordnance left behind after Russia occupied the area, near the village of Myrotske in Kyiv region, Ukraine (April 8, 2026).

REUTERS/GLEB GARANICH

MYROTSCHE, Ukraine (Reuters) – Near the village of Myrotske in central Ukraine, a dozen people in protective equipment moved painstakingly forward in rows, sweeping metal detectors before them in time with one another, like reapers scything wheat.

They are working to make the woods and fields safe from unexploded ordnance left behind after Russia occupied the area, some 25 miles northwest of Kyiv, early in its invasion four years ago.

Huge areas of Ukraine are littered with mines and other discarded ordnance after years of fighting.

“Unfortunately, Ukraine is the most heavily mined country in the world,” said Olena Shustova, media manager for demining charity HALO Trust. “Ukraine will not be demined in less than 10 years.”

HALO began operations here in December 2025 after a Ukrainian strike in March 2022 on a Russian military

logistics base left the woods scattered with unexploded munitions—showing the dangers left by the war even when the battlefield moves elsewhere.

“Everywhere where there was occupation, there are minefields and explosive ordnance,” said Ms. Shustova. HALO (Hazardous Area Life-support Organization), the world’s largest international mine action organization, employs 1,350 nationals in Ukraine.

According to state-run Demine Ukraine, more than 50,965 square miles—an area roughly the size of Greece or the U.S. state of Mississippi—remain contaminated by mines. So far, nearly 26,000 square miles have been made safe.

Given the huge scale of the task, HALO Trust has turned to AI to analyze high-resolution drone imagery of contaminated areas and train systems to identify mines and explosive remnants, achieving around 70 percent accuracy already.

“The process may take decades, but advances in technology are helping to accelerate it,” Ms. Shustova said.

Unmanned Machines Speed Up Demining

At another demining site near the town of Ivankiv, northwest of Kyiv, Oleksandr Liatsevych shelters inside a portable steel cage with reinforced windows where he peers into virtual reality glasses and uses a joystick to guide a customized digger a few meters away. The huge machine excavates earth and chews it up in a specialized grinder.

Work began here after a Ukrainian serviceman from a unit stationed nearby stepped on an anti-personnel mine while collecting firewood two years ago.

The unmanned excavator is one way in which demining groups are clearing vast areas of contaminated land more quickly and safely, in a conflict where automation, drones and artificial intelligence are revolutionizing warfare.

“The difference between driving from a cabin and driving a remote joystick is big,” said Mr. Liatsevych, a 39-year-old former civil servant and farmer from the southern town of Huliaipole, on the front line between Ukrainian and Russian forces.

In the woods nearby, deminer Olha Kava wears a protective vest and visor as she crouches to search for a possible anti-personnel mine in the old-fashioned way, by hand.

The former travel agent and mother-of-three applied to work as a deminer after her friends joined the armed forces following Russia’s full-scale invasion.

“Of course, there is fear,” she said. “It...motivates you to do your job correctly and responsibly.” □

Hawaii's Worst Flooding in 20 Years Leaves Farmers Struggling

WAIALUA, Hawaii (AP) – The red-dish-brown mud that smothered Bok Kongphan's Hawaii farm has hardened in the tropical sun. Irrigation tubes lie in a tangle where his lemongrass, cucumber and okra once flourished.

His niece, Jeni Balanay, lost her crops too—a mustardy green called choy sum, bitter melon, tomato. The leaves of her recently planted banana, coconut and mango have gone yellow, the trees unlikely to survive.

Across Oahu's North Shore, the small farms that help supply the island's food are struggling after back-to-back storms in March brought the state's worst flooding in two decades. Officials are pleading with farmers not to give up, stressing that local agriculture is crucial for the isolated archipelago.

"In some cases entire farms have been wiped out," said Brian Miyamoto, executive director of the Hawaii Farm Bureau. "These are farmers who were

just days or weeks away from harvesting and now they have to start over."

According to data collected by farming advocates, more than 600 of Hawaii's 6,500 farms reported nearly \$40 million in damage, including to crops, livestock and machinery. But Mr. Miyamoto said the farm bureau estimates that the full extent of the destruction is much broader—\$50 million at close to 2,000 farms.

Farmers in Despair

Without insurance, Mr. Kongphan, an immigrant from Thailand, has been trying to obtain government aid and figure out how to level earth moved by the floodwaters. His niece has been helping him and other Thai farmers navigate the process. Available help includes federal disaster relief, one-time \$1,500 emergency grants and long-term loans from the state, and a charitable fund that raised about

\$850,000 in the weeks after the floods. Many farmers also have online fundraising pages.

Mr. Kongphan pointed to a faint thigh-high line on a plywood wall showing where the water reached inside his home, which he built from a shipping container. Inside, there is now a donated tent, but he usually sleeps outside.

Flies swarmed as he carried a dirt-caked generator he hopes to salvage. Nearby sat a Toyota Yaris, covered inside and out in the same dried sludge.

Ms. Balanay, who learned farming from her mom after the family immigrated to Hawaii, is not sure she wants to keep at it. She recalled the torrent rising to her waist in seconds and wiping out her crops in the middle of the night.

"Will it happen again?" she asked. "When you look at the land and it's all destroyed, you want to give up."

The flooding is the latest crisis for Hawaii's farmers, on top of wildfires, pests and volcanic tephra—ash and debris ejected by an erupting Big Island volcano, said the state's top agriculture official, Sharon Hurd.

"These are the farms that we really need to get started again," Ms. Hurd said. "We cannot have them give up."

Sparser Offerings at Farmers Markets

Some farmers have been unable to make it to farmers markets, a key source of their income. Many who do have less to offer, Mr. Miyamoto said.

Farmer Kula Uli'i said her family has been bringing roughly one-quarter of their usual output. They lost starts that were due to be planted this month and face months of limited harvest.

Even the taro, which thrives in water, is lost, after it was submerged in the contaminants carried by the floods. "It's all gone," Ms. Uli'i said. "We can't use any of it." □



Bok Kongphan poses for a photo at his farm in Waialua, Hawaii (May 4, 2026).

AP PHOTO/MENGSHIN LIN

The Threat of Light Pollution Puts the World’s Darkest Skies at Risk



The Milky Way stretches across the night sky as seen from the Atacama Desert in Chile (April 15, 2026).

AP/ESTEBAN FELIX

THE ATACAMA DESERT, Chile (AP) – It takes a moment for the eyes to adjust. A faint spark appears in the darkness; then another, brighter one. Soon, stars, planets and entire constellations emerge. Before long, a whole galaxy stretches across the sky, visible to the naked eye.

In Chile’s Atacama Desert, the night sky feels infinite. Considered the driest place on Earth, its darkness is also one of the clearest windows to the universe.

A rare combination of dry climate, high altitude and, crucially, isolation from urban light pollution, makes the Atacama an unrivaled hub for world-class astronomy and home to the world’s largest ground-based astronomical projects.

“The conditions in the Atacama Desert are unique in the world,” said

Chiara Mazzucchelli, president of the Chilean Astronomical Society. “There are more than 300 clear nights per year, meaning no clouds and no rain.”

But the world’s darkest skies may be at risk.

Last year, the desert became a battleground between scientists and an energy firm proposing a green power complex just miles from the Paranal Observatory. Managed by the European Southern Observatory (ESO), the site also is the future home to what is to be the most powerful optical telescope ever built.

Although the energy project was canceled in January following a massive appeal from astronomers, physicists and Nobel laureates, it exposed deep concerns that existing sky preservation laws are lax, outdated and unclear. Since then, several environmental regulations

have come under review, including one from Chile’s science ministry targeting protected astronomical zones.

“We are working to ensure the new criteria are strict enough to guarantee that there will be no impact on astronomical areas,” said Daniela Gonzalez, director of the Cielos de Chile Foundation, a nonprofit founded in 2019 to protect the quality of Chile’s night skies.

The Best Skies

The Associated Press spent three days in April visiting the Paranal facilities in the heart of the so-called Photon Valley. In this high-altitude corridor, several observatories operate side by side using some of the most sophisticated instruments ever engineered.

“Many of these large facilities are located in Chile, and ESO’s telescopes

in particular are the most powerful astronomical facilities on the planet,” said Itziar de Gregorio-Monsalvo, the intergovernmental organization’s representative in Chile.

Paranal is one of nearly 30 astronomical sites in northern Chile, most of which are managed by international organizations. Every year, the Atacama Desert draws thousands of astronomers and scientists from around the world to investigate the origins of the universe.

Walking across the Atacama’s rocky, uneven terrain is no easy task. At altitudes exceeding 10,000 feet, oxygen becomes a luxury, while scorching days give way to relentlessly cold nights. But for space observation and exploration, these more than 40,500 square miles of desert are the perfect setting.

The exceptional conditions of the Atacama have enabled some of the most ambitious astronomical projects ever conceived, like the Extremely Large Telescope (ELT)—a \$1.5 billion endeavor by ESO scheduled for completion in 2030.

With 798 mirrors and a light-gathering area of nearly a quarter of an acre, the ELT will be 20 times more

powerful than today’s leading telescopes and 15 times sharper than NASA’s Hubble Space Telescope.

Darkness Under Threat

Twenty years ago, the Atacama Desert was “an ocean of darkness,” recalled Eduardo Unda-Sanzana, director of the Astronomy Center at the University of Antofagasta. “It was just you and the universe.”

Over the years, however, the landscape has changed drastically.

Driven by urban sprawl, industrial development and the arrival of mining and wind farms, the desert has become a coveted territory where balance is not always easy to reach.

In Paranal, specialists live like moles in an underground residence designed to keep their presence almost undetectable. Windows must remain covered, hallways stay dark, and any outside movement is guided only by flashlight. Even the faintest light can interfere with the telescopes.

The announcement last year of an imminent green energy project sent shock waves through the international scientific community. Experts pressured authorities to protect Chile’s night sky from the proposed site,

which was slated for construction just six miles from Paranal.

The case raised the alarms due to its impacts, such as increased light pollution, micro-vibrations and dust, as well as greater atmospheric turbulence. These conditions would make astronomical activities unviable.

“If you place the ELT next to a city, it doesn’t matter that its diameter is 40 meters long. It’s just the same as having a tiny telescope,” Ms. Gregorio-Monsalvo said.

Although the company canceled the project in late January, scientists warn that without new, updated regulations, similar projects could be proposed at any moment.

There is no shortage of precedents. The first international heliophysics observatory in Chile—a major solar station operated by the U.S. Smithsonian Institution in the early 20th century—was forced to shut down operations in 1955 due to environmental pollution caused by the expansion of mining activity in the area.

“We’ve had 70 years to learn from history and avoid repeating those same mistakes,” Mr. Unda-Sanzana said. □

The Paranal Observatory is an astronomical observation station operated by the European Southern Observatory in the Atacama Desert (March 5, 2025).

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