

DECEMBER 2014-JANUARY 2015

THE

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A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING



2014: *A Year of* **RESURGENCE**

**Europe's
Fresh Start?**

The Truth About New Year's
—and Other Popular Holidays

**The Real
Exodus Story**

**From the Editor-in-Chief:
What the Midterm Elections
Mean for America**

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VOL. XII | NO. 10 | DECEMBER 2014-JANUARY 2015

A R T I C L E S

REALTRUTH.ORG

HOW THIS MAGAZINE IS PAID FOR:
The Real Truth[™] is made possible by the voluntary, freely given tithes and offerings of the members of The Restored Church of God[®], and by the offerings and donations of co-workers and donors around the world. Contributions are gratefully welcomed and are tax deductible in the U.S. and Canada. Those who wish to voluntarily aid and support the Work of God in preaching and publishing the gospel to all nations are gladly welcomed as co-workers. Contributions may be sent to the following address:

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The preparation and production of this magazine involved the work of editors, proofreaders, graphic artists, illustrators, writers, researchers and those who support the Work of God.

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■ **A NEW EUROPE:** European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker addresses the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France (Oct. 22, 2014).

PHOTO: FREDERICK FLORIN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Europe's Fresh Start?
Shifts in the European Union's leadership have rekindled hopes of a better future for the continent.
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FRONT COVER: Top left, a marina owner walks with her granddaughter on a boat dock at Huntington Lake, which is at only 30 percent capacity as a result of California's severe drought (Sept. 23, 2014). Top middle, European Parliament President Martin Schulz greets Pope Francis at the European Parliament (Nov. 25, 2014). Top right, an armored personnel carrier rolls down a main road in eastern Ukraine (Nov. 12, 2014). Bottom left, health workers carry a patient suspected of having Ebola to a treatment center in Macenta, Guinea (Nov. 21, 2014). Middle right, a Yazidi Iraqi woman sits in the Bajid Kandala camp in Kurdistan's western Dohuk province where she and others took refuge from Islamic State jihadists (Aug. 13, 2014). Bottom right, smoke billows from the Gaza Strip following an Israeli airstrike (July 9, 2014).

PHOTOS: MARK RALSTON/ (TOP LEFT); PATRICK HERTZOG/ (TOP MIDDLE); MENAHEM KAHANA/ (TOP RIGHT); KENZO TRIBOUILLARD/ (BOTTOM LEFT); AHMAD AL-RUBAYE/ (MIDDLE RIGHT); JACK GUEZ/ (BOTTOM RIGHT) AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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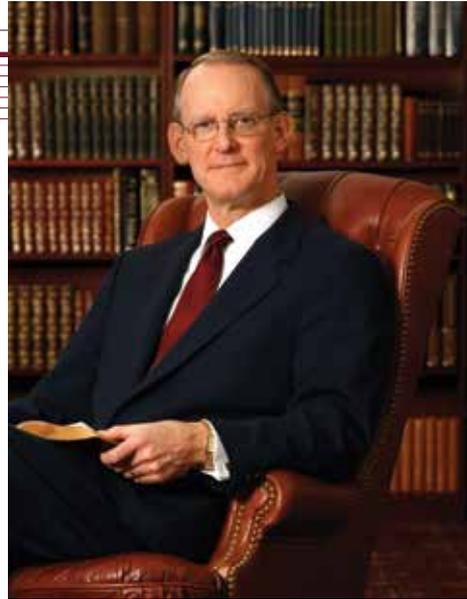
The Real Exodus Story
It has been told as a tale for children, through effects-heavy Hollywood movies, and from the pulpit on Sundays. Yet amid wild speculation, "artistic license," and outright lies, most everyone misses a central theme of the second book of the Bible.
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



What the Midterm Elections Mean for America

ONE CRISIS after another is breaking out around the world, with each seemingly as bad or worse than the previous one. And these problems run the gamut—war, terror and aggression, famine, disease, political corruption, storms, earthquakes, volcanic activity, violent protests, immorality, religious confusion, and economic turmoil, among others.

Mankind has created institutions to try to combat these issues, yet the problems only grow worse. In Western democracies, the people elect leaders to represent them. These governments are then supposed to implement lasting solutions to make life better for its citizenry. Why then do conditions continually deteriorate?

In the United States, tens of millions were waiting with almost bated breath for the highly politicized midterm elections held on the first Tuesday in November.

(But perhaps as many more millions were also waiting around the world to see what would happen in the government of the planet's most powerful nation.) The question was: which political party—Republicans or Democrats—will rule Congress? This governing body is made up of the Senate and House of Representatives. Republicans already controlled the House, but by winning back the Senate from Democrats, Republicans could be better positioned to block the Democratic U.S. president's agenda.

The GOP accomplished their goal and gained a majority of Senate seats. In response, the president vowed to move forward with his agenda.

The Republicans also rose to nearly the highest number of elected people in the House of Representatives that the nation has ever seen, going back as far as 1929. The more fractious wing of the now governing party, the conservative Tea Party element, has also been relegated to a much smaller role because the Republican speaker of the House *does not need their votes* to act in concert

with the Senate to present what would be only slightly less conservative ideas without them to the president for signature. But many expect that the president will likely veto almost any proposed law that is sent to him, anyway. Much of the gridlock will likely continue and the bitterness will certainly deepen.

Americans also elected two *more* Republican governors, which took the total from 29 to 31 instead of an anticipated reduction to 23-25 as *many* had predicted. Additionally, seven more state legislative chambers rolled over from Democrat to Republican, thus giving both existing and newly elected Republican governors greater power within their states. This was a tsunami against the present executive administration.

What does this political shift mean for the United States?

Coming Conflict

A real CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS could be brewing in this country! Some commentators are predicting that America is moving into its “most dangerous period since the Civil War.” And the number of these voices of alarm is growing. Big questions arise: At some point, will state governors begin to actively resist the current

American administration? Will the National Guard be employed by certain governors acting on their own to, as they see it, protect their state’s, and the nation’s, borders? Will Republican governors and their state legislators in some way act in concert with a now emboldened federal Republican House and Senate to address the string of scandals and claims of lawlessness occurring at the top of the country? And what will the Supreme Court and other federal judges do to rein in what some perceive to be brazen unconstitutional acts?

Could there be a positive side to all of this—at least in the short term? When conservative governments prevail, greater prosperity often follows, though not immediately. In America, it has usually been the Republican Party that has been most pro-business and most free market in thinking. (In fact, the stock market in America gained many hundreds of billions of dollars in value over the week before the election just in anticipation that the Republicans would win.) Yet these same free-market policies often give way to out-of-control GREED. For instance, an Oxfam report recently revealed that “the 85 richest billionaires on the planet...have as much money as the 3.5 billion poorest

people” (*USA Today*). This increasing gap between the rich and poor is shocking, and much of it is due to capitalism run amok!

Other analysts predict that the descent of the nation into so much raw perversion and amorality may be slowed in part because more conservative federal judges and Supreme Court justices will be selected, but also because certain laws will no longer be passed at the state or federal level. Others may be repealed. That said, a country under more conservative leadership is not without its problems. Take economic prosperity. While it does provide more money to spend, it can also cause people to move even deeper into covetousness and partying than they are now able to afford under current conditions.

Watch the political *and social* landscape of America very, very closely over the coming weeks and months. Republicans will begin as soon as possible trying to slowly undo nearly EVERYTHING that the American president has done (almost immediately after being sworn in January 3). They will also do everything in their power to block what they see as “damaging policies” in his remaining agenda through the final two years of his term.



■ **WAITING TO VOTE:** Voters check in to cast their ballots at a polling place in Climax, North Carolina (Nov. 4, 2014).

PHOTO: ALEX WONG/GETTY IMAGES

The American people overwhelmingly selected Republican candidates to fix the nation's problems—a move typical of an electorate fed up with the status quo. (A similar shift took place in 2006 as Democrats gained power under a Republican president.) Many people throughout the United States are now filled with hope for a brighter future. They are looking to conservative leadership to save the day. (Incidentally, at the time of this writing, at least 23 Republicans are already jockeying for position to be their party's nominee in the 2016 presidential race. However, when the time comes, will they be able to set aside their differences, come together, and support one candidate? Only time will tell, but history shows that this is highly unlikely.)

Will the Republican Party deliver the peace and prosperity that Americans long for?

Both Sides Wrong

Mankind believes that their political institutions will ultimately solve society's great problems. Yet history has proven that neither Republicans nor Democrats have successfully brought long-term peace, stability and economic prosperity. This also obviously includes independent parties. Problems continue to worsen, even in America, the most prosperous nation the world has ever seen. In the end, elected officials follow in the footsteps of their predecessors, unable to bring about the necessary change.

Despite the majority of Americans now putting their trust in Republicans, in time, as *always* happens when the situation does not improve, the public will shift right back to the other political party to repair the problems the previous party failed to fix. You have probably witnessed this cycle many times. Consider. How many times have people voted for someone, expecting them to make life better, yet conditions did not improve?

Why does this cycle occur over and over? Political commentators have opinions about how the future will play out. Yet none truly under-

stand *why* these problems never seem to go away. They are failing to examine the only source that could show them the truth.

The answer to what lies ahead can be found by understanding a basic truth: man cannot rule himself. Political systems built by mankind have all *utterly failed* to bring the peace and prosperity elected officials promise. Men's governments ultimately never work.

God, through the prophet Isaiah, described man's ways in the following powerful passage: "The way of peace *they know not*; and there is *no judgment* in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goes therein shall not know peace. Therefore is judgment far from us, neither does justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night..." (59:8-10).

How true!

This is again because the governments of men simply DO NOT WORK! They have *never* succeeded in finding permanent solutions to civilization's problems, because they lack the essential knowledge necessary to solve them. They do not have the answers to the most important questions. Man does not, of himself, understand the *path* to peace—or, for that matter, the path to true abundance, happiness, health and prosperity. The greatest thinkers, leaders, educators and scientists have failed miserably in their quest for peace on Earth. God has not yet revealed to mankind, as a whole, how to achieve the solution to war.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote: "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). This is another incredible statement. When confronted with problems or important decisions, men simply do NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO! They are at a loss for *how* to correctly address and solve the complex challenges, difficulties and problems engulfing

civilization today. Solutions born of human reasoning always generate *more* problems.

How badly is man botching his efforts to solve his problems? So badly that, without intervention by Almighty God in the affairs of men, all human life on Earth would soon be wiped out (Matt. 24:21-22). Pollution, food and water shortages, disease and the use of weapons of mass destruction would bring mankind to extinction. Mercifully, God will not allow events to go that far. His marvelous purpose and plan is working precisely on time toward a happy and peaceful end—a solving of all humanity's troubles!

There is hope for the United States, and for the rest of the world! God will soon intervene in the affairs of men and establish His government—one that will permanently solve humanity's problems. Notice another prophecy from Isaiah, speaking of Christ's Second Coming and the setting up of God's kingdom: "Unto us a Child is born [Christ], unto us a Son is given: and the GOVERNMENT shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His GOVERNMENT and *peace* there shall *be no end*, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with *judgment* and with *justice* from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the LORD of Hosts will perform this" (9:6-7).

To learn more about the soon-coming, world-ruling kingdom of God, read our inspiring booklets *What Is the Kingdom of God?* and *How World Peace Will Come!* Both are available at rcg.org.

Britain-Europe Divide

If the above accounts reflect terrible division *within* a country, the next quotes show division *between* countries. In Europe, the relationship between Britain and the European Union is in DEEP TROUBLE! After the EU hit

Please see **PERSONAL**, page 28

2014

A YEAR OF RESURGENCE



■ **CONTINUING SCOURGES:** Left, a Doctors Without Borders health worker wearing protective clothing holds a child suspected of having Ebola at a treatment center in Paynesville, Liberia (Oct. 5, 2014). Right, low water levels are visible in the Bidwell Marina at Lake Oroville in Oroville, California (Aug. 19, 2014).

PHOTOS: JOHN MOORE/ (LEFT); JUSTIN SULLIVAN/ (RIGHT) GETTY IMAGES



■ **EVENTFUL YEAR:** Top left, Russian guided missile cruiser Varyag, the flagship of Russia's Pacific fleet, berths in a port in Shanghai after taking part in a joint military drill with China (May 26, 2014). Bottom left, Pope Francis waves to the faithful as he arrives in St. Peter's Square for his weekly audience in Vatican City (Nov. 19, 2014). Right, Israeli emergency services members carry a body after two Palestinians attacked Israeli worshippers at a synagogue in Jerusalem (Nov. 18, 2014).

PHOTOS: AFP/ (TOP LEFT); FRANCO ORIGLIA/ (BOTTOM LEFT); JOHN MOORE/ (RIGHT) GETTY IMAGES

The whirlwind of 2014's tumultuous events deserves a comprehensive examination—but its true importance only becomes clear when placed into the context of history.

THE YEAR 2014 was one of anniversaries. On day 1 following the calendar switch, Europeans celebrated the 15th anniversary of the debut of their national currency, the euro. Two months later on March 11, Spain memorialized the 10th anniversary of the al-Qaida-perpetrated

izens displayed symbols of national pride, and editorials about ferocious battles filled papers. Unsung heroes graced newspaper covers around the world—their black-and-white images reminding future generations to never forget their sacrifice.

The rest of the year included three other important commemorations: the 75th anniversary of the start of World War II, the 25th anniversary of the

Still, these amazing discoveries could not transcend the fact that even as the anniversary of the Berlin Wall's collapse arrived, Cold-War-style tensions escalated between the West and Russia once again. By the time the anniversary of WWI rolled around a military coup had occurred in Thailand, a mudslide killed thousands in Afghanistan, and the terrorist group Boko Haram executed 300 people in Nigeria. Instead of Rwandans dying, thousands of Christians in Iraq died this year in murderous pursuits by the Islamic terrorist organization ISIS and it was announced that more than 10,000 children have perished since the start of Syria's years-long civil war.



■ **RWANDA REMEMBERS:** Thousands of people march in Kigali, Rwanda, to commemorate the 1994 Rwandan genocide (April 11, 2014).
PHOTO: AHMAD AL-RUBAYE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

■ **PERSECUTION:** Fleeing ISIS militants, Iraqi families from the Yazidi community cross the Iraqi-Syrian border in northern Iraq (Aug. 13, 2014).

PHOTO: AHMAD AL-RUBAYE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Madrid train bombings that killed 191 people.

April brought the 20th anniversary since the start of the Rwandan genocide and the end of apartheid in South Africa while June brought the 25th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre and what marked perhaps the largest commemoration of all: 100 years since the shooting of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary. This event is credited with igniting World War I.

In preparation for this anniversary, military memorials were erected, cit-

Berlin Wall falling, and the 10th anniversary of the tsunami off Thailand's coast that killed 250,000 from 14 countries.

The year was not all somber, though. It also brought incredible advances. Scientists discovered a new subatomic particle, an unmanned spaceship landed on a comet for the first time, and water was found on Enceladus, one of Saturn's moons. Also, a human cell was cloned for the first time in an effort to cure certain diseases, and a prosthetic hand helped an amputee regain his sense of touch.

Anniversaries usually signal an achievement of long-lasting success. They are supposed to be a time for us to remember and examine our actions. Given this, how much should we *really* be celebrating?

"The human record is littered with lessons unlearned," historian David Kennedy told *USA Today* in an article titled "3 Important Lessons Learned from World War I."

If indeed, "The past offers us a rich database from which we can learn, in order that we may keep succeeding," as noted civilization expert Jared Diamond stated in his book

Collapse, then what have we learned this year? Is man succeeding, or is he barely keeping his head above water as he struggles to tread in the fast-moving current? What can we tell our children, grandchildren and those who will come after us about the legacy we left behind in 2014?

Starting in January, events seemed to portend that it would be another rocky year. But no one fully expected the types of problems that seemed to reappear from out of the blue, making us stop dead in our tracks and ask: how can we stop the cycle? How can

the past eight months, most in Europe.”

The outlet continued: “...other incidents took place thousands of miles away. For example, Russian bombers in the Labrador Sea off the coast of Canada practiced cruise-missile strikes against the U.S. in early September. Also in September, Russian military jets made repeated incursions into U.S. and Canadian air-defense zones in the Arctic. Last spring, a Russian military plane was spotted 50 miles off the coast of California, the closest such approach since the Cold War.”

sharp differences between Ukraine’s linguistically, religiously, and ethnically distinct eastern and western regions.”

The situation with the Ukraine resulted in the most deaths since the nation gained its independence. It has angered Russia, which planned to incorporate Ukraine into its Eurasian Union, set to meet for the first time in January 2015.

Resurgence 2: Terrorist Attacks

In the Middle East, terrorism abounded. In particular, the Shiite extremist



■ **COMMON GROUND:** Jordan’s King Abdullah II (right) holds a trilateral meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (center) and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry (left) in Amman, Jordan (Nov. 13, 2014).

PHOTO: DAVID BUIMOVITCH/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

■ **POLITICAL UNREST:** Armed protesters in Kiev, Ukraine, advance toward new positions after storming police barricades in a spate of violence that killed at least 26 people (Feb. 20, 2014).

PHOTO: LOUISA GOULIAMAKI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



we better glean wisdom from a “history littered with lessons unlearned”?

Resurgence 1: Cold War Brinkmanship

At the beginning of the year, bellicose rumblings from Russia brought Cold War memories flooding back. For the first time since the 1980s, a Russian warship docked in a Cuban harbor. Elsewhere around the world, Russian President Vladimir Putin sponsored war games.

Businessweek reported, “An interactive map in the report [from the European Leadership Network titled “Dangerous Brinkmanship: Close Military Encounters Between Russia and the West in 2014”] describes nearly 40 ‘sensitive incidents’ over

To the disdain of Western powers, Russia also continued to support Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, back Iran’s nuclear program, augment trade with China, and assert dominance over Ukraine.

“Ukraine’s most prolonged and deadly crisis since its post-Soviet independence began as a protest against the government dropping plans to forge closer trade ties with the European Union, and has since spurred escalating tensions between Russia and Western powers,” the Council on Foreign Relations reported. “The crisis stems from more than twenty years of weak governance, a lopsided economy dominated by oligarchs, heavy reliance on Russia, and

organization ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), replaced al-Qaida as the most fearsome terrorist group of 2014. The two organizations later agreed to join forces.

Since declaring its caliphate status in June, ISIS has recruited thousands of fighters to capture towns in Iraq. It has forced over 800,000 to flee their homes, enslaved and sexually abused many, plundered vast sums of money from Iraqi banks, and demanded that citizens convert to the Muslim religion or face death. More than 1,000 captured Iraqi civilians and hundreds of war prisoners have been executed or beheaded, including a number of international journalists and foreign aid workers.

Such brutal forms of Islamic terrorism were not just felt in the Middle East, but overseas as well. In Oklahoma, an Islamic man beheaded a coworker. For the first time in its almost 150-year history, Canada also endured this scourge when Islamic terrorists killed two soldiers over a three-day period at historically significant areas. After killing one soldier, one of the terrorists stormed the Parliament building in Ottawa.

In Nigeria, Islamic terror group Boko Haram strengthened its presence. Throughout the year, it expanded its sphere of influence to include two

involved. Israel's relations with the United States also became even more strained.

Israel and Hamas shifted between heavy fighting and humanitarian cease-fires for a period of seven weeks, until a final ceasefire on August 26.

"It was only a few months ago that [Benjamin] Netanyahu talked of a 'new horizon' in the Middle East, saying the threat from Islamic State meant that countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt shared an interest with Israel in defeating Islamist extremism," *Reuters* reported.

"By late March, Ebola cases were cropping up hundreds of miles away on the Atlantic coast in Conakry, Guinea's congested capital, with a population of 1.7 million," *The Wall Street Journal* reported. "The disease had also spread into Liberia, and then Sierra Leone, as nurses who treated the sick and villagers who attended their funerals all brought the virus into their homes and workplaces, sparking chain reactions."

Riots broke out in treatment centers as residents in Sierra Leone blamed the government for the spread. At one point, the government shut down the country



■ **MISSING GIRLS:** One of the mothers of a kidnapped Nigerian girl wipes her tears during a rally in Abuja, Nigeria, by civil society groups pressing for the release of the girls (May 6, 2014).

PHOTO: PIUS UTOMI EKPEI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

■ **EBOLA IN AMERICA:** A man reads the local newspaper at a subway station in New York City, New York (Oct. 24, 2014).

PHOTO: MARCO LONGARI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



dozen cities and abducted over 200 school girls. Human Rights Watch reported that the militants killed 2,000-plus civilians in the first half of 2014 alone.

Conflict also continued between Israelis and Palestinians. While the two are always at odds, the latest summer conflict escalated quickly into the first continuous armed period of unrest since 2006 when Hamas became Gaza's dominant political party. At that time, the Israeli government immediately mandated that all settlements and military presence in the area be pulled back.

The increasing violence prompted urgent calls for peace talks, with Egypt and the European Union becoming

"Now, however, with Jordan having withdrawn its ambassador and Egypt on edge about developments at the Noble Sanctuary, which contains al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock, that new horizon is starting to look distant and cloudy."

Resurgence 3: Reemerging Diseases

One of the biggest stories of the year was Ebola, which reappeared with a vengeance for the first time in 20 years. The deadly virus first resurfaced in a two-year-old Guinean boy. Soon, it had taken the lives of his mother, sister and grandmother, and began spreading through neighboring Liberia and Sierra Leone.

for three full days to stop the virus from spreading and quarantined almost a third of the nation's six million people.

By July, the disease reached Nigeria. By August, Senegal and Saudi Arabia. In September, it reached the shores of the U.S. and led to the death of one Liberian patient as well as the quarantine of several nurses who had contact with him. While the nurses survived, several other healthcare workers returning from the area were also put into quarantine and the country became increasingly concerned about the potential spread, urging the closure of the border.

In October, the Democratic Republic of Congo confirmed that 49 people had died from Ebola and Mali had its first

case. In the same month, a Sudanese man who had been treated in Germany died and a nurse contracted Ebola from missionaries returning to Spain from West Africa.

According to the World Health Organization, as of this writing, there have been 14,098 reported cases of Ebola with 5,160 reported deaths.

Yet Ebola was not the only disease to resurface. Others included polio, whooping cough, Lassa fever, measles and bird flu.

Resurgence 4: Massive Drought

Drought not seen since the Dust Bowl of the 1930s took center stage in the

the climate, which was posited by a study released this year, suddenly did not seem like such a farfetched idea. The fact that this already happened during the 1930s—when farmers were forced to abandon their land due to massive dust storms, heat and dearth—only served to strengthen the argument.

Worldwide, Brazil and Kenya also posted unprecedented droughts, both of which authorities are concerned could have serious consequences in the year ahead.

Resurgence 5: Religious Renewal

On the religious front, the pope stole almost all headlines. Nicknamed the

ing the poor, even as he has cracked down on Vatican waste and corruption.”

The Washington Post noted a few months later that Francis was working hard to heal schisms among Catholics globally, especially those who have felt excluded. This has included atheists, Muslims and homosexuals: “He has chosen inclusive language, has played down the importance of following the hierarchy and has warned against the church locking itself up ‘in small-minded rules.’”

Then in May, Francis inserted himself into the Middle East peace process by inviting Israeli and Palestinian leaders to the Vatican.



■ **EXTREME DECREASE:** The Jacarei river near Sao Paulo, Brazil, is experiencing historically low water levels (Nov. 19, 2014).

PHOTO: NELSON ALMEIDA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

■ **GLOBAL INVOLVEMENT:** Pope Francis delivers a speech during the International Conference on Nutrition at the Food and Agriculture Organization headquarters in Rome, Italy (Nov. 20, 2014).

PHOTO: GREGORIO BORGIA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



U.S., with more than 50 percent of California, one of the leading producers of fruits and vegetables in the world, combating it. Wells ran dry, livestock died, orchards shriveled, and many were forced to rely on emergency personnel for potable water.

The dry conditions even led to a season of wildfires that sparked “firenadoes” in the state.

In addition to California, the entire Western U.S. saw widespread drought. Ranchers from Montana to Texas reduced herds and livestock prices skyrocketed.

The possibility that millions could migrate east as a result of changes to

“superpope” early in the year and called the Catholic Church Inc.’s new “CEO,” Pope Francis busied himself with making sweeping changes throughout the church and dramatic announcements to the public.

The constant stream of headline-worthy news said it all—usually furthering the pope’s mission to be more inclusive. In January, an *Associated Press* article had the title “Pope Francis says women should play expanded role in Church.” Later in the month, the news organization noted that pro-pope graffiti was popping up around the Vatican. It stated, “Francis has charmed the masses with his simplicity and message of help-

He has also been vocal about global affairs by decrying capitalism and youth unemployment.

A *Malta Independent* article title summed up his message: “Pope Francis claims global economy is close to collapse and describes youth unemployment rates as an ‘atrocious.’”

Francis continued to shake things up when he married 20 couples who had been living together before the ceremony. He directed those in the church to stop using terms like “shacking up” and “living in sin.”

Throughout the year, the pope persistently focused on the spiritual realm. An October 29 *AP* article

reported: “Francis has demonstrated an unusually vivid concern about the devil, more than his predecessors, in a reflection both of his Jesuit spirituality and his Latin American roots. This week he sent a message to the International Association of Exorcists, praising the work of exorcists for ‘showing the church’s love and welcome toward those who suffer from the devil’s work.’ Earlier this year, the Vatican granted the association legal recognition in a sign of Francis’ belief that the world needs more exorcists for the increasing

is littered with lessons unlearned.” Throughout 2015, it will be crucial to pay attention to world events.

Again, history can be a guide. *The Economist* drew many similarities between global conditions at the time of WWI: “The memory of the horrors unleashed a century ago makes leaders less likely to stumble into war today. So does the explosive power of a modern conflagration: the threat of a nuclear holocaust is a powerful brake on the reckless escalation that dispatched a generation of young men into the trenches.”

“Which, by and large, it is not. The most troubling similarity between 1914 and now is complacency. Businesspeople today are like businesspeople then: too busy making money to notice the serpents flickering at the bottom of their trading screens. Politicians are playing with nationalism just as they did 100 years ago. China’s leaders whip up Japanophobia, using it as cover for economic reforms, while Shinzo Abe stirs Japanese nationalism for similar reasons. India [elected] Narendra Modi, a Hindu nationalist who refuses to atone for a



■ **JAPAN'S ECONOMY:** Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe speaks during a press conference at his official residence in Tokyo (Nov. 18, 2014).

PHOTO: KAZUHIRO NOGI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

number of people seeking to be liberated from their demons.”

In addition, Francis has said that the devil is behind divisions among Christian denominations and that everyone has a guardian angel and should listen to it.

Such a vocal pope—one who inserts himself into the worlds of politics, finance and society—has caught the world by surprise. Yet this is just another resurgence, as the Vatican returns to the historical role that it once held in Europe and globally.

Important Set Up

Recall historian David Kennedy’s observation: “The human record

The magazine continued: “Yet the parallels remain troubling. The United States is Britain, the superpower on the wane, unable to guarantee global security. Its main trading partner, China, plays the part of Germany, a new economic power bristling with nationalist indignation and building up its armed forces rapidly. Modern Japan is France, an ally of the retreating hegemon and a declining regional power. The parallels are not exact—China lacks the Kaiser’s territorial ambitions and America’s defence budget is far more impressive than imperial Britain’s—but they are close enough for the world to be on its guard.

■ **WORLD WAR I MEMORIAL:** People view crosses in the Garden of Remembrance in Princess Street Gardens on Armistice Day, in Edinburgh, Scotland (Nov. 11, 2014).

PHOTO: JEFF J. MITCHELL/GETTY IMAGES



pogrom against Muslims in the state he runs and who would have his finger on the button of a potential nuclear conflict with his Muslim neighbours in Pakistan. Vladimir Putin has been content to watch Syria rip itself apart. And the European Union, which came together in reaction to the bloodshed of the 20th century, is looking more fractious and riven by incipient nationalism than at any point since its formation.”

You cannot afford to miss reading *The Real Truth* throughout the next year. Its in-depth writing will enable you to understand all that is occurring in the world and help you to never forget the lessons of the past. □



EUROPE'S FRESH START?

Shifts in the European Union's leadership have rekindled hopes of a better future for the continent.

GOODBYE, *adieu* and *auf Wiedersehen*. In November and December, the European Union bid farewell to those holding three of its top leadership spots: EU Council President Herman Van Rompuy, Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, and foreign affairs chief Lady Catherine Ashton—all with expired terms—were replaced.

The continent then said *hallo* and *hola* to three new faces for these prominent positions: Donald Tusk,

Jean-Claude Juncker, and Federica Mogherini. Many hope these changes will signal a promising, fresh start for the beleaguered continent.

The union has experienced little success since the implementation of the pseudo-constitution Lisbon Treaty, which created the positions of Council President and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (the full title for the foreign affairs chief), given to Mr. Van Rompuy and Lady Ashton, respectively. The past five years have seen the eurozone delve into financial crisis, dis-

agreements with Britain over policies, and souring relations with Russia due to the Ukrainian conflict.

Wearied by economic troubles and decades-old political rivalries, Europeans hope the new leaders will be capable of reshaping their competing company of nations into an integrated “United States of Europe.”

While this has so far proven to be a fleeting dream, understanding the biographies of the three new leaders helps reveal what is to come for Europe's regional role and its place on the world stage. □



■ **CHANGE:** From left to right, EU Council President-elect Donald Tusk, outgoing Council President Herman Van Rompuy, outgoing Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, and Commission President-elect Jean-Claude Juncker pose for a photo at the power bloc's headquarters in Brussels, Belgium (Oct. 30, 2014).

PHOTO: JOHN THYS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



■ **NEW LEADERSHIP:** Left, Polish Prime Minister and EU Council President-elect Donald Tusk, outgoing Council President Herman Van Rompuy, and Italian Foreign Minister and newly elected EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini pose during a summit at the EU Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium (Aug. 30, 2014). Right, outgoing EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Catherine Ashton (center left) and her successor, Ms. Mogherini (center), greet each other at the start of a European Union Foreign Affairs Council meeting (Oct. 20, 2014).

PHOTOS: JOHN THYS/ (LEFT); EMMANUEL DUNAND/ (RIGHT) AFP/GETTY IMAGES



PHOTO: JANEK SKARZYNSKI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

DONALD TUSK

European Union Council President

Council.” He spoke highly of “the determined and confident way he has steered Poland through the economic crisis, and managed to maintain steady economic growth.”

Then-President Van Rompuy said Mr. Tusk will face three challenges: the problematic European economy, the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, and settling “Britain’s place in Europe.”

When Mr. Tusk entered his previous post in 2007, Poland was allied with Britain, wary of Franco-German dominion in the European Union, and historically suspicious of Germany’s motives. Throughout his seven-year period in office, “keen pro-Americanism waned” and Mr. Tusk “concluded that Britain and David Cameron in particular were making a mess of their tactics and strategy in Europe with other EU governments. Tusk bonded with Merkel, the EU’s first among equals, cemented a close Polish-German alliance, and concluded that Poland’s destiny rested on its closest possible European integration, setting it at odds with a UK travelling in the opposite direction” *The Guardian* reported.

According to *EUobserver*: “Merkel even urged Tusk to consider the office of president before he truly became a candidate. Thus, while Tusk’s appoint-

ment was a symbolic win for Poland and other new EU members, it was also a win for Germany.”

The article continued, “This matters immensely because Tusk’s ability to coalesce a strong negotiated position with the support of the indispensable Merkel would quickly and forcefully cement EU policies...decreasing French influence and uncertainty over the British role means a theoretical ‘Tuskel’ could move Europe forward with policies aligned around a central European view.”

Developing mutual trust between Germany and Poland could represent a shift of power toward central European nations. This would ultimately give Germany a greater hand in the direction of the entire continent and increased authority over Europe’s legislative actions. In the event of such a power shift, Europeans could see strengthened ties between member states and more stability in the euro-zone.

“...just as Juncker has realigned the Commission’s organisation in an attempt for more efficiency, a more assertive European Council president closely aligned to the most powerful players in Europe could help build a stronger and more united Europe,” *EUobserver* noted. □

Described by one *Guardian* reporter as “quiet, unassuming, firm and politically ruthless,” Mr. Tusk acted as Poland’s prime minister from 2007 to 2014, until his appointment as the second EU Council president, effective December 1, 2014.

This position is responsible for chairing EU summits, setting priorities for the European Commission’s legislation, and fostering agreement between the loosely related and sometimes divided EU member states. The term for a Council president is two-and-a-half years, with a maximum of two terms.

Mr. Tusk has long been thought of as a potential successor to Herman Van Rompuy.

In a statement following Mr. Tusk’s selection, Mr. Van Rompuy called him “one of the veterans of the European



PHOTO: JOHN THYS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

JEAN-CLAUDE JUNCKER

European Commission President

The former prime minister of Luxembourg from 1995 to 2013, Mr. Juncker was selected to become the 12th president of the European Commission, a post some consider to be the most powerful in the power bloc, on July 15, 2014. He assumed the role on November 1, 2014.

The Commission serves as the executive branch for the continent. Its president, elected for a five-year term, is responsible for determining the EU's policy agenda and administering its legislative proposals. Unlike the American presidency, however, the Commission president cannot determine foreign policy, command armies, or set taxes.

Previous Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso served two five-year terms from 2004 to 2014. Under his watch, the Lisbon Treaty was ratified, Turkey became closer to attaining member-state status, a single market for services within the EU was created, and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology was founded—an agency that aims to further the continent's ability to develop products and solutions for the benefit of society.

Mr. Juncker brings a markedly different personality and strategy to the Commission. According to *The Telegraph*, "...Mr. Juncker is not known to have other interests outside politics. He is married, but has no children...A modest and secretive man, Mr. Juncker, whose country combines both Germanic and French influences, has been relied on by three successive generations of German chancel-

lors and presidents of France as their preferred fixer, a key link in the euro structures that bind Paris and Berlin... He is both pragmatic and ruthless because he sincerely believes that the EU and euro is all that stands between Europe and war."

After his selection as Commission president in July, Mr. Juncker announced his agenda of promoting Europe as a "stronger global actor."

"Europe is chiefly a 'soft power.' But even the strongest soft powers cannot make do in the long run without at least some integrated defence capacities," he wrote in an article on the European Commission's website titled "A New Start for Europe: My Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change."

The article detailed his mission to consolidate military efforts and establish a more efficient European force: "The Treaty of Lisbon provides for the possibility that those Member States who wish to can pool their defence capabilities in the form of a permanent structured cooperation... Member States should create more synergies in defence procurement. In times of scarce resources, we need to match ambitions with resources to avoid duplication of programmes."

The push for integrated military resources has been a work in progress since the European Defence Agency (EDA) proposed a budget increase in 2010 that would be used to "set up an E.U. defense-planning headquarters in Brussels, a move Britain views as a duplication of NATO facilities and a waste of money," *The New York Times* reported in an article a few months after the proposition was made.

The budget increase was also intended to allow weapons procurement continent-wide. Soon after its proposal, though, Britain rejected the measure, which stopped the EDA from pushing for a larger budget.

"Under E.U. rules, a group of countries could proceed," the newspaper continued, "though consider-

ing Britain's important military role, its refusal to take part in missions planned by the new headquarters would undermine it."

Mr. Juncker intends to circumvent Britain's veto by encouraging other members of the union to integrate their defense resources and establish the headquarters in Brussels, which many feel would be a first step to creating a European army.

In addition to pooling defense resources, Mr. Juncker plans to devote considerable attention to rejuvenating Europe's economy. Speaking to the European Commission after being appointed in July 2014, he announced to "all countries in the European Union, we [will] set in place a minimum social wage, a minimum income, a guaranteed minimum income."

During his inaugural speech, he further detailed his belief in "free movement" of workers, which would allow struggling workers more access to learning other careers and skill sets and make it easier for them to migrate to nations with greater job opportunities.

He stated: "Free movement of workers has always been one of the key pillars of the internal market, which I will defend...I believe we should see free movement as an economic opportunity not a threat. We should therefore promote labour mobility, especially in fields with persistent vacancies and skills mismatches."

These policies oppose Britain's strategy of imposing restrictions on workers migrating to different countries for employment.

Financial Times reported on the day of his appointment: "To a mix of jeers from anti-establishment MEPs and enthusiastic cheers from his supporters, Mr. Juncker promised to be a 'patient, determined and courageous' leader, breaking new ground on social policy and re-industrialisation... 'I want a Europe that wins, attacks,' he said." □

FEDERICA MOGHERINI

European Union Foreign Policy Minister

Ms. Mogherini assumed the office of High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, which serves as the spokesperson for the EU's foreign policy and negotiates with other nations on behalf of the union, on November 1, 2014.

Born in Italy, Ms. Mogherini brings more experience and political ambition into the office than her British predecessor, Lady Catherine Ashton, who had no foreign policy experience and had never been elected to any position prior to being appointed.

Since 2003, Ms. Mogherini has held numerous roles where she has cultivated relationships among nations. Through these offices, she has participated in the Middle East peace process, assisted Italian relations with Afghanistan and Iraq, facilitated ties among left-wing political parties in the EU and overseas, and supported diplomatic endeavors between the U.S. and central European nations.

Before being appointed as EU foreign policy chief, she served as minister for foreign affairs in Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi's cabinet from February to October of 2014. During her tenure, she notably helped

stop a Sudanese woman—Mariam Ibrahim—from receiving a death sentence by her home country for supposedly converting from Islam to Christianity.

Now, as Europe's primary diplomat, her attention has shifted toward the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian crisis. *The Jerusalem Post* quoted her as saying: "European action can be decisive in this key moment, which is probably the most difficult moment the region has ever seen...for the first time I believe...they need the European Union to be present in order to make steps forward at this time of their history."

To cement her view, a week after being inaugurated, Ms. Mogherini traveled to Israeli and Palestinian regions, visiting with heads of state.

While touring a territory in Gaza, *Agence-France Presse* reported that she said, "We need a Palestine state—that is the ultimate goal and this is the position of all the European Union...We cannot just sit and wait. If we sit and wait it will go on for another 40 years. We have to have action now."

Ms. Mogherini's second priority is to solve the Ukraine-Russian crisis.



She told *The Guardian* "I will be very involved in Ukraine."

She then confirmed that Germany will play an increased role in foreign policy decisions, displacing previous British-French control.

"I witnessed as a minister in these past months quite a central foreign policy of Germany already. I think this is something positive...a country that has a history as Germany can play an important role...I welcome the fact that Germany has for sure shown in the recent past the willingness to involve its strength in European foreign policy."

The breadth of experience and aggressive approach Ms. Mogherini brings to her new role could position Europe as a dominant leader in global affairs. □



■ **OUTREACH AND DIPLOMACY:** Left, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas meets with the European Union's new foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini in the West Bank town of Ramallah (Nov. 8, 2014). Right, Ms. Mogherini visits the UN-run Bahrain boys school where displaced Palestinian families found refuge in Gaza City (Nov. 8, 2014).

PHOTOS: ABBAS MOMANI/ (LEFT); MAHMUD HAMS/ (RIGHT) AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Hope for the Hopeless

How Suicide Will Be Solved

Global suicide rates are worse than most realize—but a solution is coming.

BY JUSTIN T. PALM

SHE JUMPED. ONE thousand feet below the building's observation deck, the hood of a car broke her fall. Bystanders had helplessly watched her desperate freefall that ended in shattered glass and crumpled metal. The impact was explosive, a life snuffed out in the blink of an eye.

There would be no wedding. No children, no grandchildren. No happy memories. Surviving family members were left to pick up the pieces, wondering *why*. Her sadness was now transferred to them. They became the victims.

All have been affected in some way by suicide. You may know friends or family members who have attempted it or even succeeded. You may have even contemplated or tried it. Famous world leaders, artists, businessmen and women, comedians, actors, musicians, authors and doctors have all succumbed to self-destruction.

According to the first report on suicide from the United Nations World Health Organization, someone kills themselves *every 40 seconds*. Over 800,000 people end their lives every year.

“‘Suicide is an amazing public health problem...it is a huge number,’ said Shekhar Saxena, director of WHO’s mental health department... ‘Suicide kills more than conflicts, wars and natural catastrophes,’ he said. ‘There are 1.5 million violent deaths every year in the world, of which 800,000 are suicides’” (*Agence France-Presse*).

On top of this, officials estimate that for every person who commits suicide, 20 attempt it. While these statistics are staggering, they can be easily glossed over as “just numbers.” The real stories involve gruesome gunshot wounds, violent and tragic murder suicides, nooses and chairs, drownings, stabbings, slit wrists, and sleeping pills.

A dark curtain of depression is hovering over millions of people.

Why is living so hard for so many?

Shocking Facts

A March 2014 piece in *The New Yorker* revealed the scope of the problem. Suicide is skyrocketing at a rate no one expected: “Le Monde, the leading [French] newspaper...published the results of a medical study of French fifteen-year-olds, which revealed that almost twenty-one per cent of girls and nine per cent of boys reported attempting suicide in the past year. That’s a shocking number, and it speaks to a global trend. In the United States, suicide rates have risen, particularly among middle-aged people: between 1999 and 2010, the number of Americans between the ages of thirty-five and sixty-four who took their own lives rose by almost thirty per cent. Among young people in the U.S., suicide is the third most common cause of death; among all Americans, suicide claims more lives than car accidents, which were previously the leading cause of injury-related death.

“Last May, citing the ‘substantial’ rise in suicide among the middle-aged, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention described suicide as ‘an increasing public health concern.’ That realization has begun to spread...In America, these numbers—which many experts believe are lower than the actual figures, owing to under-reporting—cannot simply be attributed to the toll of a long recession, or increasing gun ownership: clinical depression is also on the rise.”

Due to increased suicide activity on the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California, the bridge’s Board of Directors “unanimously approved \$76 million in funding to erect a 20-foot-wide steel net—extending out from each side of the 1.7-mile span—to deter would-be jumpers” (*CNN*).

Since the bridge’s completion in 1937, over 1,600 people are estimated

to have used it to end their lives. It is the second most used suicide spot in the world. “Tourists” travel from every corner of the globe to use it as their suicide method of choice.

An in-depth article published by *Newsweek* in 2013 added more detail to the grim picture of self-inflicted death. Experts predict we may be seeing just the beginning of a rapid rise in suicide deaths (emphasis added): “Every year since 1999, more Americans have killed themselves than the year before, making suicide the nation’s greatest untamed cause of death. In much of the world, it’s among the only major threats to get significantly worse in this century than in the last.

“The result is an accelerating paradox. Over the last five decades, millions of lives have been remade for the better. Yet within this brighter tomorrow, we suffer unprecedented despair. In a time defined by ever more social progress and astounding innovations, we have never been more burdened by sadness or more consumed by self-harm. *And this may be only the beginning*. If... others are right—and a landmark collection of studies suggests they are—we’ve reached the end of one order of human history and are at the *beginning of a new order* entirely, one beset by a whole lot of self-inflicted bloodshed, and a whole lot more to come.”

Note the fact that a “new order” of “self-inflicted bloodshed” is supposedly beginning, with “a whole lot more [suicide] to come...”

What a depressing forecast for man’s future!

Yet should experts who say we are on the cusp of a “new order” be believed? In one sense, they are right. But it will not come as they expect.

Troubled Youth

Young people by the millions are looking at the world around them and choosing death over life on planet Earth.

*Please see **SUICIDE**, page 29*

■ **DESPERATION:** Opposite page, a young woman contemplates suicide atop the Davis Building in downtown Dallas, Texas, as police officers attempt to persuade her not to jump (Aug. 1, 2007).

PHOTOS: DIESELGEEK/CC BY 2.0/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



THE EXO STO

It has been told as a tale for children, through effects-heavy Hollywood movies, and from the pulpit on Sundays. Yet amid wild speculation, “artistic license,” and outright lies, most everyone misses a central theme of the second book of the Bible.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

ARMS OUTSTRETCHED, a bearded Moses stands before a parted Red Sea, wooden staff in hand. Sandal-wearing Israelites make their way through a path between the walls of water. An angry Egyptian army follows closely behind.

REAL DUS DRY

To most, such a scene quickly comes to mind when they think of the Exodus story. Retellings typically begin with the first chapter of the biblical book that bears that name—around the time when the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt and God heard their cries. From there, Moses is born and reared

in pharaoh's palace, he kills an Egyptian and flees, God speaks to him from a burning bush, he returns to Egypt, pharaoh refuses to let Israel go, there are 10 plagues, Israel comes out of the country, they cross a parted Red Sea, and receive the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai.

This is all told and retold with varying degrees of detail.

But does it matter if the Exodus story *actually* happened as it appears in the Old Testament?

Two of America's Founding Fathers did not think so. Still, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson had such an affinity for the story that they both submitted Exodus-themed proposals for the offi-

cial seal of the United States. Franklin's was a detailed depiction of Moses at a parted Red Sea. (Congress later settled on the eagle seal still in use today.)

While both of these highly intelligent men believed the Bible contained many good life principles, they did not literally believe everything it said. According to *Smithsonian Magazine*, Jefferson even reconstructed his own version of the gospels, which cut out anything he deemed "contrary to reason." Mostly, he removed miraculous events. Certainly, the supernatural events of the Exodus would have also fallen into this category.

Yet an oppressed people escaping a tyrannical pharaoh—with God on their side—certainly fit well with the sentiments of the American Revolution.

But again, does it *matter* whether every detail of the story of God delivering the Israelites is accurate?

The *Jewish Encyclopedia* also says, "No." The publication states: "That the events narrated in Exodus cannot be historical in all their details has been generally conceded. The numbers [of Israelites who left Egypt] are certainly fanciful: 600,000 men would represent a total of at least two million souls... and how so vast an unorganized host could have crossed the Red Sea in one night are questions that have not been explained..."

Despite this commonly held belief, practicing Jews still diligently recount this event during their annual Passover Seder meals. The story has rich cultural meaning regardless of its historical accuracy.

Likewise, many professing Christians feel there is no harm if much of the second book of the Bible is allegory. Similar to a non-literal reading of the Creation account, Exodus is seen as an embellished story from which important lessons can be gleaned.

Even the irreligious find the tale captivating, and they certainly do not believe it occurred. Consider: an atheist filmmaker took on the story for a December 2014 mega-budget motion picture. If you only have so many movies you can make in your lifetime, choosing to make one based on Moses

when you do not believe in God is quite a statement.

Ask yourself: Does it matter if God really caused 10 literal plagues—including a deadly hailstorm and debilitating darkness—to decimate Egypt? Does it matter if God spoke through a burning bush? If Moses' staff turned into a serpent and back again? If the Nile River turned to blood when Moses' brother Aaron struck it with a staff? If all the firstborn of Egypt died in the 10th and final plague? If God parted the Red Sea and the Israelites passed through on dry land?

Regardless of religious preference, it appears everyone can still gain meaning and lessons from God's Word—even if events did not occur as written—so does it really matter if every word is accurate?

The plain-truth answer to this question is something with which EVERY Bible reader must come to grips.

Logic Problems

Stop and think what it means if parts of the Exodus story were merely allegorical or poetic. How could you know what was true or false? Where would you draw the line?

Few would question that the Ten Commandments are the building blocks of Judaism and Christianity. To most, these are safely in the "true" category. Yet did Moses literally receive them on the top of Mount Sinai? Did God write them with His own finger as it says in Exodus 31? Were there actual stone tablets? Or were some or all of these details added later?

The only answer is that if some of the Bible is not literal and true, then what should be taken at face value is open for conjecture. *Anyone* can decide what each verse means. Any reader could pick and choose what to believe.

If this were reality, it would say a lot about the character of God Himself.

Many believe that Jewish scribes embellished the Old Testament over the years. They also think that details were changed because of the limitations of oral tradition—something like a multi-millennia version of the children's game "telephone." According to them, the

number of Israelites leaving Egypt grew over the years from some "reasonable" number to roughly 2.5 million as mentioned in Exodus 12:37. They assert that artistic flourishes were added in each telling and retelling.

Where was God during this time? Did He let His Word get perverted and changed over the centuries?

Think. If God could not preserve the Bible's roughly three-quarters of a million words—He definitely could not part the Red Sea *or* perform any of the many other wonders Exodus purports.

This is hardly the image of an all-powerful Being.

Even stranger, it would mean God allowed his servants to boast about Him for events that are nothing more than poetic flair.

Psalms 77 speaks about Israel leaving Egypt and escaping pharaoh's army by going through a parted Red Sea: "You are *the God that does wonders*: You have declared Your strength among the people... The voice of Your thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook. Your way is in the sea, and Your path in the great waters... You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (vs. 14-20).

This passage calls the Creator "the God that does wonders." It does not say "the God of *poetic* and *fanciful* wonders"!

Verse 12 states: "I will meditate also of all Your work, and talk of Your doings." What kind of God would allow a psalmist—and all those who read the Bible afterward—to waste his time thinking about God's *made up* doings?

Now consider that King David, the prophet Jeremiah, the deacon Stephen, and the apostle Paul all believed in the literal story of Moses. Did God allow these great servants to remain confused?

More important, was Jesus Christ confused?

He stated in Luke 20: "...*even Moses showed at the bush*, when he called the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (vs. 37).

A pre-incarnate Christ was present *in* the burning bush. Surely, He would have known what occurred.

Put this all together. The pick-and-choose approach to the Bible is ludicrous! It makes God out to be a helpless weakling. It also means some of His greatest servants were confused (at best) or liars (at worst). Either you believe and apply ALL of Scripture, or it is utterly foolish to base your life upon it.

Yet God would never want you to believe His Word if you could not know with absolute certainty that it came from Him. Unknown to almost all, you *can* prove this book was divinely inspired and preserved.

Such proof is key to fully understanding the Exodus account.

God puts forth a challenge to all skeptics in the book of Isaiah. It is quoted from the Moffatt translation of the Bible: “Now, the Eternal cries, bring your case forward...STATE YOUR PROOFS. Let us hear what happened in the past, that we may ponder it, or *show Me what is yet to be, that we may watch how it turns out*; yes, let us hear *what is coming*, that we may be sure you are gods; come, do something or other that we may marvel at the sight!—why, *you* are things of naught, *you* can do nothing at all!” (Isa. 41:21-24).

The God of the Bible knows that no human being can predict the future and then make it come to pass. Yet He has done this repeatedly throughout history. Three-quarters of the Bible is prophecy, which can be likened to history written in advance. God says He will do something and then He makes it happen.

In order to prove the Bible’s validity, one must place fulfilled prophecy next to the record of history. Such proofs are found throughout God’s Word. David C. Pack, *Real Truth* editor-in-chief, brings forth a number of these towering examples in his booklet *Bible Authority... Can It Be Proven?* It can be read—free of charge—at rcg.org/bacibp.

Expanded Understanding

When Bible readers understand that they can simply read and believe the Exodus account, the story becomes sweeping in scope and importance. It shows that the Creator is the one true God and that He is an all-powerful Being capable of MIGHTY WONDERS.

In addition, by reading slowly and putting together all of the Bible verses on the story of the Israelites coming out of Egypt—from both the Old Testament and New—powerful lessons emerge about how God works with mankind and the incredible stubbornness of human nature.

First, the true beginning of the Exodus story is not in Exodus chapter 1. Rather, it is in the first book of the Bible in Genesis 15. God promised—PROPHESIED—that He would give the land of Canaan to the patriarch Abraham’s descendants after 400 years of sojourning (they lived in tents) as well as being strangers and then slaves in Egypt. After four centuries, God said He would bring them “out with great substance” and return them “hither” to Canaan. At that time, they would inherit the Promised Land (vs. 15-16).

The record of the Bible shows this played out to the letter. God said it would happen and it did. By carefully following the ages of the patriarchs, as well as key verses showing that time had passed, the period from Abraham’s death at age 175 (Gen. 25:7) until Joshua divided up the Promised Land for the Israelites (Josh. 14) was *exactly* 400 years.

The intricacies of how God accomplished this are astonishing!

After Abraham was buried, his son Isaac continued as a stranger in the land of Canaan. His son Jacob (who was later renamed Israel) did the same for most of his life until his son Joseph invited him to live in Egypt.

Joseph was second in command in Egypt when Israel and his family of 70 came to live there (Ex. 1:5). Notice Genesis 41: “Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt” (vs. 41). Due to this prominent position, the Israelites were given some of the choicest land in the nation and they “increased abundantly” (Ex. 1:7). The Hebrew peoples *were not* in slavery at this time. Contrary to common belief, Israel was only in slavery for 150 years *at most* before the Exodus, not 400 years as is commonly stated. (The bondage also did not last 430 years. This period, mentioned in Exodus 12:40-41,

encompasses the time from Abraham’s circumcision until the day Israel left Egypt.)

After Joseph died, a new pharaoh came to power that feared the Israelites were growing too prosperous (vs. 8-9). In order to suppress them, Egypt’s king “set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens” (vs. 11). This may have been Ahmose I.

Note that naming these different pharaohs is incredibly difficult due to the inconsistencies and incompleteness of ancient Egyptian records. Using I Kings 6:1, which states that the fourth year of King Solomon’s reign was 480 years after Israel left Egypt, one can speculate that these pharaohs were part of the 17th dynasty. Scholars place the fourth year of Solomon’s reign at approximately 964 BC, which puts the Exodus at around 1443 BC. According to the most widely accepted dates, this would exclude Ramses II—often used in movies about the event—as being the pharaoh alive in Moses’ time.

Years later, another pharaoh (perhaps Thutmose I) rose to power. He ordered all male Hebrew babies to be drowned in the river.

Moses was born at this time. Instead of being killed, however, God had big plans for the child.

First-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus recorded in *The Antiquities of the Jews* that the pharaoh’s murderous directive was in response to an Egyptian prophecy “that about this time there would a child be born to the Israelites, who, if he were reared, would bring the Egyptian dominion low, and would raise the Israelites; that he would excel all men in virtue, and obtain a glory that would be remembered through all ages.”

Josephus also mentions that Moses’ father had a dream in which God said his son would be divinely protected and grow up to deliver Israel from bondage. Additional Jewish traditions mention that Moses’ sister Miriam (called a prophetess in Exodus 15:20) foretold something similar.

While these ideas are not included in God’s Word, some or all of them do seem to fit as a motivation for pharaoh

to take such drastic measures. It is similar to the account in Matthew 2, where King Herod wanted to kill all the baby boys because he felt threatened by a coming “King of the Jews.”

Moses’ parents disregarded pharaoh’s decree. Hebrews 11:23 states “they were not afraid of the king’s commandment” and at a certain point put Moses in a small vessel made of reeds and placed him in the river. He was found and adopted by pharaoh’s daughter and raised in the palace (after having been weaned by his real mother).

In essence, Moses was raised as a prince of Egypt. Acts 7 explains: “Pharaoh’s daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was *learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds*” (vs. 21-22).

Josephus recorded that Moses grew into a skilled military leader who used ingenious tactics to help the Egyptians defeat the Ethiopians.

This prominent upbringing meant that Moses was fully capable of ruling a nation. God was miraculously providing a uniquely trained leader to bring the Israelites out of Egypt.

Yet at 40 years old (vs. 23), Moses became enraged by how some of his kinsmen were being treated: “And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand” (Ex. 2:11-12).

Acts 7 indicates that Moses was ready to lead his brethren at this time, but they did not want him to do so: “...for [Moses] supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not” (vs. 24-25).

Put simply, Moses thought they would realize God was using him to deliver them from bondage.

Exodus 2:14 shows that the Hebrew slaves rejected his leadership, saying, “Who made you a prince and a judge over us?”



■ **“BORROWING” FROM EGYPT:** A 19th-century painting by David Roberts depicts the Israelites plundering Egypt during the Exodus.

PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN/ WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Soon, pharaoh found out about the murder and Moses fled: “Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well” (vs. 15).

The Israelites were not yet ready to leave Egypt. They would require much greater events to capture their attention and bring them out.

On the Mountain

Moses spent the next 40 years (Acts 7:30) in Midian, which was east of Egypt. He became a shepherd and married a woman named Zipporah, with whom he had a son. Apparently, he had given up any thoughts of ever returning to lead his brethren.

How did God ultimately recapture his focus? Miraculous signs.

While the 80-year-old Moses was tending flocks on Mount Sinai, he came across a bush that burned with fire but was not consumed. God spoke from this flaming plant: “And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey...” (Ex. 3:6-8).

Even after seeing the miracle of the burning bush, Moses remained hesitant: “Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (vs. 11).

In verse 14, God called Himself “I AM THAT I AM”—the Living God. He assured Moses that He would “smite Egypt *with all My wonders* which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go” (vs. 20).

Yet Moses *still* needed convincing: “Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD has not appeared unto you.”

Realize that Moses was a flesh-and-blood human being and far from perfect. It was not until many years later that he grew into the meekest—most humble and teachable—man on Earth (Num. 12:3).

God gave Moses power to do three miraculous signs: transform his staff into a live snake, make his hand leprous and turn it back to health again, and convert water into blood. These were to capture the attention of the Israelites and Egyptians, and prove that he was backed by the living God.

Even so, Moses claimed that he was not an eloquent speaker and was “slow of speech” (Ex. 4:10). Some take this to mean he had a speech impediment such as stuttering. But recall that Acts 7 showed Moses was “mighty in words.”

The original Hebrew coupled with Moses' personality instead indicates that he was harsh when he spoke—perhaps not choosing his words wisely—rather than diplomatic. Another possibility is that he was severely lacking in confidence after 40 years as a shepherd.

The idea that Moses was incapable of public speaking was refuted by God, but Moses still tried to get out of the task. Exodus 4:13 states: “But he said, ‘Oh, my Lord, send, I pray, some other person’” (*Revised Standard Version*).

God was rightfully angry with this response—He had just shown Moses multiple miracles!—and decided instead to make his brother Aaron into the spokesman. Verses 27-28 show that God directed Aaron to come to Mount Sinai and his brother filled him in on the plan.

(In verse 19, God told Moses it was safe to return to Egypt because “all the men are dead which sought your life.” Despite this, many speculate that Moses grew up with, and was bitter rivals with, the pharaoh ruling at the time of the Exodus. This verse indicates otherwise.)

When Moses and his family traveled to Egypt, they gathered up the Hebrew elders. Aaron relayed what God had directed Moses to do and they showed the signs (vs. 29-30).

Verse 31 records their reaction: “And the people believed: and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel, and that He had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped.”

But this initial excitement did not last long.

Increased Power

Moses told pharaoh (perhaps Amenhotep II) to allow the Israelites to go into the wilderness to worship God for three days. Egypt's king responded by increasing the workload of the Hebrew slaves. This crushed their spirits, and—even after seeing the miracles—they were still not ready to wholly rely on God's divine intervention.

The Israelite leaders questioned Moses and Aaron, which caused Moses to question God: “And they [the leaders] said to them, ‘The LORD look upon

you and judge, because you have made us offensive in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.’

“Then Moses turned again to the LORD and said, ‘O LORD, why have You done evil to this people? Why did You ever send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people, and You have not delivered Your people at all’” (Ex. 5:21-22, *Revised Standard Version*).

Chapters 6-7 show that both Israel and pharaoh continued to reject God's authority. Because of this, He began a series of 10 plagues. Interestingly, the first few plagues affected Egyptians and Israelites alike. This was done so that both peoples would yield to Him.

First, the Nile was turned to blood: “And the fish that was in the river died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt” (7:21).

Even so, “Pharaoh's heart was hardened, neither did he hearken unto them; as the LORD had said” (vs. 22).

Then came the plague of frogs. The creatures swarmed the whole nation, including where the Israelites lived. Having thousands upon thousands of slimy amphibians constantly underfoot, both indoors and out, would have been bad enough—but imagine trying to sleep at night with them chirping, bel-lowing and clicking!

Soon, the Egyptian king wanted it to stop: “Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, Entreat the LORD, that He may take away the frogs from me, and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may do sacrifice unto the LORD” (8:8).

But pharaoh quickly changed his mind once the frogs died: “...when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said” (vs. 15).

Something similar happened with the plague of lice, which occurred next: everyone in Egypt was affected, yet pharaoh continued to stubbornly refuse.

Until this point, pharaoh's court magicians were able to mimic God's

miracles in a small way. But this changed with the lice: “And the magicians [tried] with their enchantments to bring forth lice, *but they could not*: so there were lice upon man, and upon beast. Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, *This is the finger of God...*” (vs. 18-19).

Even those in pharaoh's court recognized God's hand in what was occurring!

Next came swarms of flies. God further wanted to show His might. He made sure that none of the insects went into the land of Goshen where the majority of Israelites lived: “And the LORD did so; and there came a grievous swarm of flies into the house of Pharaoh, and into his servants' houses, and into all the land of Egypt: the land was corrupted by reason of the swarm of flies” (vs. 24).

In chapter 9, a “grievous murrain” (disease) was sent upon the animals of the land. Yet God spared Israel. Then there was a plague of boils and then hail mixed with fire (probably started from lightning strikes).

With the plague of hail, God gave a warning to the Egyptians. Those who heeded saved their animals and servants.

Following this were swarms of locusts that ate the crops in the field and then a thick darkness that covered the land. Only Israel had light in their homes.

Finally, there was a plague of the firstborn. The eldest offspring of both man and beast were killed, while the Israelites were protected because they kept the Passover and followed God's instructions.

At this time, pharaoh finally thrust the Hebrew slaves out. As Israel left, they demanded back wages from the years of bondage. In doing so, they plundered the nation: “And the children of Israel...borrowed [the original Hebrew means “demanded”] of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians” (Ex. 12:35-36).

Many see the account of the Exodus and draw the conclusion that God is a barbaric monster—how could He kill all the firstborn?—yet this thought ignores the overall plan of the Creator.

I Timothy 2:4 shows He desires to have “all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” In II Peter 3:9, it states: “The Lord is...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

As a loving God, He has a plan for all of those who have perished throughout centuries and have not been offered salvation. For more, watch *The World to Come™ with David C. Pack* video broadcast “What Happens When You Die?” Available at worldtocome.org, it explains the inspiring truth of what God has in store for such individuals.

At the Red Sea

The Israelites traveled day and night led by God, who took the form of a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21-22). They were also supernaturally aided in their flight in other ways. Psalm 105:37 states: “He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was *not one feeble person* among their tribes.”

The original Hebrew means that no one “stumbled” or “tottered” as they left. (This would also answer the *Jewish Encyclopedia’s* question on how Israel could later cross the Red Sea in one night.)

After the freed Hebrew slaves left, pharaoh changed his mind and decided to follow after them. He mustered an army that included “all the chariots of Egypt” (Ex. 14:6-7) and personally led the chase.

By the time the Egyptians caught up to Israel, they were at the Red Sea. The Hebrew peoples feared they would die, but Moses assured them that God would protect them. He stated, “The LORD shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace” (vs. 14).

As instructed by God, “...Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel

went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left” (vs. 21-22).

Some modern theories state that the sea receded because a giant earthquake caused a tsunami. Prior to a tsunami making landfall, the water first pulls back and reveals part of the ocean floor. It then returns as a wall of water from a *single* direction. Recall that Psalm 77 does record “the earth trembled and shook,” but it could not have been a tsunami. The Bible clearly states that water was on *both* “their right hand, and on their left” as they crossed.

The Egyptian army made chase: “And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen” (14:23).

While they were in the sea, God closed the pathway: “And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them” (vs. 28).

Nowhere in the Bible does it say the Israelites were capable of mounting any sort of defense against the Egyptians at the Red Sea. Instead, *God* had to fight the battle for the freed slaves (vs. 14). Also, Josephus stated that the Hebrews had no weapons at all until the following day when the remnants of their enemy’s army washed ashore.

Exodus 14:30-31 summarizes this entire event: “Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and His servant Moses.”

God of Wonders

Throughout Exodus, God repeatedly explained His overall purpose: “that you may know that I am the LORD”—the Eternal God. This is not merely for God’s self-satisfaction, but rather so that mankind may obey His voice and reap the blessings of living His Way.

Read Psalm 77 again: “You are *the God that does wonders*: You have declared Your strength among the people...The voice of Your thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook... You led Your people like a flock...” (vs. 14-20).

This *same* God of wonders is still capable of miraculous power today—both on a global scale and with individuals.

Bible prophecy shows that God will again powerfully intervene in world affairs as He did in Egypt. Scripture also states that God will protect and guide individuals who obey Him.

To understand God’s Plan for both the entire world and you, however, there is a requirement—you must *do* what God commands.

Recall the question at the beginning of this article: does it matter if the Exodus story *actually* happened as it appears in the Old Testament? Of course, the answer is YES.

But the requirement for obedience is the main underlying reason so many belittle Bible fact. If the events of the Exodus—and every other one recorded in God’s Word—were all true, then so would be what God commands as the only right way to live.

You can have a clearer understanding of God’s Plan for mankind and for you. To help achieve this, the publisher of this magazine, The Restored Church of God, freely offers literature covering every major biblical topic. Each book, booklet and article clearly explains scriptural truths and allows you to prove them from your own Bible.

Visit rcg.org to learn who and what is God, why you were born, what happens after death, the true plan of salvation, the real truth of prophesied events in our time, the purpose and meaning of God’s Law—and much more.

So what will it be? Faced with the FACTS of the Exodus story and the God of wonders, there are two options: you can trust and seek after His Way—or you can be like the hard-hearted pharaoh who refused to believe.

The choice is yours. □



THE TRUTH ABOUT NEW YEAR'S—AND OTHER POPULAR HOLIDAYS

BY DAVID C. PACK

WHERE DID MAN'S popular holidays come from? What are their roots? Most people never reflect on—or investigate—why they believe and practice what they do. In a world filled with customs and traditions, few seek to understand—to research—the *origin* of things. Most accept common practices without question, choosing to do what everyone else does because it is easy—and fashionable. Most follow along as they have been taught, *assuming* what they believe and do is right. They take their beliefs for granted and never take time to PROVE them.

Nowhere is this more true than in the observance of Christmas, Easter, New Year's, Halloween and Valentine's Day, among other supposed Christian holidays. Millions keep these days without knowing *why*—or where they originated. Most suppose they are “found in the Bible”—that *God* backs them—because they see so many professing Christians observing them. Surely

hundreds of millions cannot be wrong.

Or can they? What does the Bible—and history—*really* teach? You will be *shocked!*

To find the truth of a biblical matter—*any* biblical matter—you must be willing to open your Bible and honestly accept what it says. The majority of people stoutly defend what they have merely *assumed* is right or biblical. They read with prejudice anything that contradicts cherished beliefs.

If you are going to take the time to read this article, should you not at least read it with an open mind—without bias? The Bible is “profitable for correction” (II Tim. 3:16) for all who are willing to accept it—for all who truly want to serve and please God. The Bible also states, “PROVE all things” (I Thes. 5:21). Ask God to guide you—to help you *prove* what He says in His Word.

No matter how comfortable a lifelong practice may be, should you not base it on *proof*—*hard evidence*, and of what God says—instead of *assumptions*?

In this article, we will examine certain of men's holidays, and their origins. What follows is but the barest beginning of all that could be shown.

Christmas Unveiled!

First is Christmas. This worldwide tradition is thought to be a wonderful time, focused on giving, family, beautiful music and decorations, special foods and singing traditional carols. All this is supposedly centered around the worship of Jesus Christ, and His birth on December 25.

But where did Christmas come from? What is the *origin* of Santa Claus?—mistletoe?—Christmas trees?—holly wreaths?—Yule logs?—and exchanging gifts?

There is no mistaking the source of the modern Christmas celebration. Nearly all aspects of it have their roots in Roman custom and religion. The *Encyclopedia Americana* reveals: “Christmas...was not observed in the first centuries of the Christian church, since the Christian usage in general was to celebrate the death of remarkable persons rather than their birth...a feast was established in memory of this event [Christ's birth] *in the fourth century*. In the fifth century the Western church ordered the feast to be celebrated on the *day of the Mithraic rites of the birth of the sun and at the close of the Saturnalia*, as no certain knowledge of the day of Christ's birth existed,”

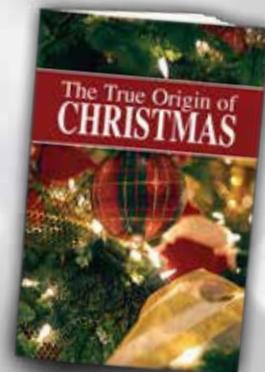
Happy Birthday...Jesus?



Theologians and ministers will tell you we cannot know the exact day Jesus Christ was born, but they willingly provide a variety of reasons why you *should* celebrate it on December 25.

Yet the plain motivations for this date—and why Christmas is observed in the first place—should be investigated by everyone who calls themselves Christian.

Order your free copy of *The True Origin of Christmas* at rcg.org/ttooc to find out the truth!



(emphasis added to quotes throughout the article).

Now the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, under “Christmas”: “In the Roman world the Saturnalia (December 17) was a time of merrymaking and exchanging of gifts. *December 25 was also regarded as the birth date of the Iranian mystery god Mithra*, the Sun of Righteousness. On the Roman New Year (January 1), houses were decorated with greenery and lights, and gifts were given to children and the poor. To these observances were added the German and Celtic Yule rites when the Teutonic tribes penetrated into Gaul, Britain, and central Europe. Food and good fellowship, the Yule log and Yule cakes, greenery and fir trees, gifts and greetings all commemorated different aspects of this festive season. Fires and lights, symbols of warmth and lasting life, have always been associated with the winter festival, both pagan and Christian.”

What could be plainer?

Origin of the Christmas Tree

Where did the Christmas tree come from? Notice: “The Christmas tree is from Egypt, and its origin dates

from a period long anterior to the Christian Era” (Frederic Jennings Haskin, *Answers to Questions*). How many know the Christmas tree *long preceded* Christianity?

Most aspects of Christmas are not referred to in the Bible. Of course, the reason is that they are *not* from God—they are not part of the way He wants people to worship Him. The Christmas tree, however, *is* mentioned in the Bible!

We know what men think about it. Here is what God says: “Thus says the LORD, *Learn not the way of the heathen*, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven [the stars]; for the heathen are dismayed at them [millions ignore this plain statement of God and read their horoscopes daily]. For the *customs* of the people are *vain*: for one cuts a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree...” (Jer. 10:2-5).

This description is obvious. God directly refers to the Christmas tree as “the way of the heathen.” Just as direct-

ly, He commands, “Learn NOT the way of the heathen,” calling these customs “*vain*.”

The most common justification one will hear regarding this holiday is that people have *replaced* old pagan intents and customs by asserting they are now “Christian.” For instance, many say they are “honoring Christ” in their Christmas-keeping. The problem is *God* does not say that keeping this tradition is acceptable to Him! *In fact, He plainly commands against it!* Christmas-keeping *dishonors* Christ! You will see God considers everything about it to be an abomination.

Many additional sources and scriptures could be cited. Read my booklet, *The True Origin of Christmas* at rcg.org/ttooc. Facts from history and Scripture, when placed together, paint a powerful picture!

Truth About Easter

What about Easter? Since hundreds of millions keep it, supposedly in honor of Jesus Christ’s Resurrection, then surely the Bible must have much to say about it. Many verses must mention rabbits, eggs, baskets of candy,

hot cross buns, Lent, Good Friday and sunrise services—not to mention Easter itself.

There is also no mystery about where Easter came from: “On this greatest of Christian festivals, several survivals occur of ancient heathen ceremonies. To begin with, the name itself is not Christian but pagan. ‘Ostara’ was the Anglo-Saxon Goddess of Spring” (Ethel L. Urline, *Festival, Holy Days, and Saints Days*).

And notice: “But the name Easter comes to us from Ostera or Eostre... for whom a spring festival was held annually, and it is from this *pagan festival* that some of our Easter customs have come” (Mary Emogene Hazeltine, *Anniversaries and Holidays: A Calendar of Days and How to Observe Them*).

Colored eggs have long been associated with the Easter celebration. Nearly every culture in the world does this. Notice: “The origin of the Easter egg is based on the fertility lore of the Indo-European races...The egg to them became a *symbol of spring*...In Christian times the egg had bestowed upon it a religious interpretation, becoming a symbol of the rock tomb out of which Christ emerged to the new life of His resurrection” (Francis X. Weiser, *Handbook of Christian Feasts and Customs*). This is a classic example of how pagan symbols and customs are “Christianized”—with Christian-sounding names pasted over pagan customs. Due to this, people feel better about following a custom not found in the Bible.

God never authorized *any* kind of eggs for religious use—yet people have followed this practice for millennia!

Where did the “Easter bunny” come from?: “The Easter bunny had its origin in pre-Christian fertility lore... [It] has never had religious symbolism bestowed on its festive usage... However, the bunny has acquired a cherished role in the celebration of Easter as the legendary producer of Easter eggs for children in many countries” (James Bonwick, *Egyptian Belief and Modern Thought*).

But this does not stop people from decorating their lawns and houses with

Easter bunnies every spring. Even in modern times, rabbits have remained common symbols of fertility. While their rapid rate of reproduction is well-known, there is a problem—rabbits do not lay eggs! While both are fertility symbols, there is no logical way to connect them. In a world filled with pagan tradition, truth and logic are lost. There is *nothing* Christian about fertility symbols. Merging sex symbols with Christianity makes an already idolatrous practice worse.

The true history of rabbits and eggs is *completely unknown* to unsuspecting, trusting little children who are easily led to think these things are special.

It may seem beautiful, religious, and deeply moving to *participants*, but God has forbidden His people from devising their own religious customs and ideas. He is not interested in what people may personally feel or think is right. He is interested in who cares what *He thinks* is right! As far as God is concerned, ancient sun worship, dressed up in Easter finery and bonnets, is just modern packaging of a very old, idolatrous pagan custom.

Is it a “light thing” to God that many millions keep Easter?

Jesus, who is God, made a stunning statement—but how many believe it? Notice: “But *in vain* they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:9). Christmas, Easter and other holidays are not commands of God, but rather traditions—“commandments”—of men.

Much additional proof—biblical and historical—exists proving Easter is not permitted by God. To learn about the customs surrounding this holiday, read my booklet *The True Origin of Easter* at rcg.org/ttooe. You may also wish to read another booklet—*Christ’s Resurrection Was Not on Sunday* at rcg.org/crwnos. It explains how and why the incorrect—unbiblical—“Sunday Resurrection” idea came into use as a means of subtly endorsing Sunday-keeping in place of keeping God’s Sabbath.

Valentine’s Day

Next, let’s examine Valentine’s Day, known as the world’s “holiday of love.”

Surely, celebrating a festive holiday like Valentine’s is harmless. Surely the God who gives us life, food, drink and the ability to think for ourselves, approves of the holiday for lovers to exchange gifts. Let’s see.

Innocent and harmless as Valentine’s Day may appear, its traditions and customs originate from two of the most sexually perverted pagan festivals of ancient history: *Lupercalia* and the feast day of *Juno Februata*. To the Romans, February was sacred to *Juno Februata*, the goddess of febris (or “fever”) of love—and of women and marriage. On February 14, billets—which were small pieces of paper with the name of a teenage girl written on it—were put into a container. Boys would then choose one billet at random. The boy and the girl whose name was drawn would become a “couple,” joining in erotic games at feasts and parties celebrated throughout Rome. After the festival, they would remain sexual partners for the rest of the year. This custom was observed in the Roman Empire for centuries.

Valentine’s Day—from this Satan-influenced world—is designed to appeal to fleshly, carnal desires—or, as the Bible calls them, *the works of the flesh*. (Read Galatians 5:19-21.)

Does God want His people partaking of candy and cards, or *any* customs associated with this day? Does He approve of this? Notice how specific was His warning to ancient Israel—and why His warning! “When the LORD your God shall cut off the nations from before you...and you succeed them, and dwell in their land; take heed to yourself that you be not snared by following them...and that you *enquire not after their gods*, saying, How did these nations serve *their gods*? *Even so will I do likewise*. You shall not do so unto the LORD your God: for EVERY ABOMINATION to the LORD, which HE HATES, have they done unto their gods...” (Deut. 12:29-31).

Read and reread this passage until it sinks in.

Christmas, Easter and Valentine’s Day are all attempts to “whitewash” customs and observances of pagan gods and idols by “Christianizing” them. For

more, read our thorough article “The Truth Behind St. Valentine’s Day” at rcg.org/ttbsvd.

What About New Year’s?

Now let’s examine New Year’s. What could be wrong with celebrating the start of the upcoming year? What’s wrong with “ringing out the old and bringing in the new”? The truth will surprise you!

The Bible reveals, “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace...” (I Cor. 14:33). The Greek word used for “confusion” also means *instability, disorder, commotion* and *tumult*—words that perfectly describe New Year’s history, which is as confusing and chaotic as the holiday itself. For thousands of years, men kept changing the beginning of their New Year from spring to fall—from March 1 to January 1—and in some cases, December 25—back to March 25—then to January 1 again!

Notice: “January 1 was restored as New Year’s Day by the Gregorian calendar (AD 1582), immediately adopted by ROMAN CATHOLIC countries. Other countries slowly followed suit: Scotland, 1660; Germany and Denmark, about 1700; England, 1752; Sweden, 1753; and Russia, 1918” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

Even today, nations cannot agree on this date. Notice: “Chinese New Year is celebrated officially for a month beginning in late January or early February” (*ibid.*). Also notice this quote: “The Muslim New Year falls on the first day of the month of Muharram and commemorates the date of the Hegira (July 16, 622, on the Gregorian calendar)... Since the Muslim year is a lunar one consisting of only 354 days, the commencement of the new year fluctuates widely by the Western calendar” (*Encyclopedia Americana*).

This is what happens when people rely on their own judgment rather than simply believing God. Great numbers lose inhibition on New Year’s. They make noise, get drunk, overeat, and often have illicit sex, sometimes with strangers. Common sense can disappear in pursuit of outright sin.

The God of the Bible said this to ancient Israel about the false gods they would encounter in the land He gave them: “You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, *nor do after their works*...lest they make you *sin* against Me...their gods...will surely be a *snare* unto you” (Ex. 23:24, 33). This certainly pictures New Year’s and other holidays we have seen.

Nowhere does God in His Word command the New Year’s celebration. To learn why true Christians do not get caught up in this day, read our eye-opening article “Why Christians Don’t Celebrate New Year’s” at rcg.org/wcdny.

Halloween Celebrations

Then there is Halloween. Americans spend over \$7 billion every year on this holiday. Is this just a harmless, happy childhood activity—or something very different? Its traditions, customs and practices are rooted in a past *much* darker, more sinister, and more demonic than you know.

On the night of October 31, the ancient Celts, after harvesting and storing their crops for the winter, began their annual fall festival. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* reveals, “Samhain (Celtic: ‘End of Summer’), one of the most important and sinister calendar festivals of the Celtic year. At Samhain, held on November 1, the world of the gods was believed to be made visible to mankind, and the gods played many tricks on their mortal worshipers; it was a time fraught with danger, charged with fear, and full of supernatural episodes. Sacrifices and propitiations of every kind were thought to be vital, for without them the Celts believed they could not prevail over the perils of the season or counteract the activities of the deities. Samhain was an important *precursor* to Halloween.”

The Celts observed the festival of Samhain in various forms. The Catholic Church took note. Throughout the church’s early history, Catholic worshippers observed special anniversaries for martyrs who had been executed for their beliefs. Soon there were not enough days in the calendar year to dedicate a specific day for each martyr.

So the Roman Catholic Church chose one feast day—“All Saints’ Day!”—for its martyrs. In the early ninth century, Pope Gregory IV sought to paste over this pagan practice by moving All Saints’ Day from May 13 to November 1—the same day as Samhain! This officially extended the festival to the entire church. Later, All Saints’ Day became known as All Hallows Day, while October 31 became All Hallows Eve. You know this carefully chosen heathen practice as Halloween!

Halloween is brim full and running over with pagan customs, masquerading as Christian traditions! God bluntly labels any practice of such customs to be SIN. Israel was commanded to destroy the gods and nations around them. Why? “That they teach you *not* to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should you *sin* against the LORD your God” (Deut. 20:18).

Every parent should consider. Halloween teaches children that it is acceptable to beg for something instead of earning it through work. Think. It also teaches them to extort candy, because “trick or treat” means “give me a treat or I’ll play a trick on you!” Halloween’s ghoulish costumes, spooky jack-o-lanterns, festive parades, and prankish tricks—often translated vandalism!—may appear to be innocent fun. But our article “‘Trick?’ or ‘Treat?’ – Unmasking Halloween” (available at rcg.org/totuh) reveals the TRUTH about this rotten holiday.

Birthdays, April Fools’ Day and Thanksgiving?

Now for birthday celebrations. In every culture and nation on Earth, nothing is as universally celebrated. But is this practice biblical? Does *God* agree with it? Solomon wrote, “...better [is] the day of death than the day of one’s birth” (Ecc. 7:1). We would all agree that the day of one’s death is not exactly his best day. Yet God says that it is better than the day of his birth.

Here is the briefest look at the history of birthday celebrations: “The Greeks believed that everyone had a protective spirit or daemon who

attended his birth and watched over him in life. This spirit had a mystic relation with the god on whose birthday the individual was born... The Romans also subscribed to this idea... This notion was carried down in human belief and is reflected in the guardian angel, the fairy godmother and the patron saint... The custom of lighted candles on the cakes started with the Greeks... honey cakes round as the moon and lit with tapers [candles] were placed on the temple altars of [the goddess Artemis]... Birthday candles, in folk belief, are endowed with special magic for granting wishes... Lighted tapers and sacrificial fires have had a special mystic significance ever since man first set up altars to his gods. The birthday candles are thus an honor and tribute to the birthday child and bring good fortune" (Ralph and Adelin Linton, *The Lore of Birthdays*).

Birthday celebrations are mentioned in the Bible on three separate occasions and in each, terrible things occurred. Read our article "Are Birthday Celebrations Christian?" (at rcg.org/abcc) to learn much more of the truth about birthday-keeping.

What about April Fools' Day, also known as All Fools' Day? Every April 1, millions participate in pranks, practical jokes, and even outright lies—in the name of "innocent fun." Our article "A Foolish Holiday" (rcg.org/afh) explains the origin of this day, and whether one should observe it.

Finally, you may now be wondering about Thanksgiving Day. In fact, this is one of the few holidays *not* steeped in pagan tradition. Thanksgiving is set aside to show appreciation to Almighty God for the many blessings America has received—but has today so tragically forgotten. For more, read *The Real Truth* article "What Thanksgiving Should Mean to You" at realtruth.org.

What God Says

Men want to observe their own holidays in place of God's seven annual Holy Days—outlined and commanded in His Word—and then tell themselves they are pleasing and worshipping the true God. I repeat Jesus' statement: "In

vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark 7:7). He also said this: "Full well you *reject* the commandment of God, that you may keep your *own tradition*" (vs. 9). Every year, around the world, hundreds of millions reject God's Word and keep men's holidays! No wonder Jesus asked, "Why call you Me, Lord, Lord, and *do not the things which I say?*" (Luke 6:46).

God told Israel: "You shall *not* walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them... And you shall be holy unto Me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that you should be Mine" (Lev. 20:23, 26).

In the Second Commandment—forbidding all forms of idolatry—and in other passages, God declares He is a jealous God. He wants His people doing what *He* commands, not the practices of false gods!

We saw God plainly instructs, "Learn *not* the way of the heathen" (Jer. 10:2). But most people do not fear God—they do not care what He says—and He allows them to make their own decisions. Human beings are free moral agents—free to learn or not learn what God commands—free to obey or disobey Him!

But woe to those who ignore the plain Word of the Bible, believing men can overrule God!

People can worship in ways that represent things far different from what they sincerely believe or intend. When they have observed a practice for a long time they come to identify with it, as though it were their own. They become vested in it. When one tries to tell them the truth—even presenting **FACTS, EVIDENCE and PROOF**—many become hostile—*angry!*—that one would dare violate sacred personal beliefs.

The proof is overwhelming that men's holidays are "traditions" and "commandments of men"—*condemned*

by God! Yet vast millions keep them anyway!

God makes absolutely clear He does not want us to mix His ways with *any false* ways. He says, "What thing soever *I* command you, observe to do **IT**: you shall not *add* thereto, nor *diminish* from it" (Deut. 12:32). In other words, do *exactly* what I say—nothing more, nothing less!

Two Choices

Worldwide disobedience comes with a terrible price. National punishment now lies just ahead for the greatest nations—the ones who have been custodians of the Bible and who should—and could—have known the truth you now know.

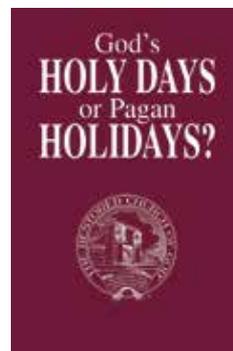
Be careful of being angry that I am "taking away your holidays." Your anger is in fact directed at God. I merely told you what He says. Direct your anger at ministers you trusted, but who deceived you.

So then, am I bad-mouthing cherished Christmas and Easter—and other holidays—or reporting the truth? Don't shoot the messenger! The message comes from **GOD**.

God declares He hates the customs associated with pagan celebrations. We saw His *plain words* to all who say they can mix the horrible customs of outright paganism with a supposed "focus on Jesus."

End the stress. Save your money. Do not be lulled or intimidated by the sheep instinct of others around you who spend money they do not have for things they do not need—thus going into debt disobeying God. And tell your children the **TRUTH** about Santa Claus—and all the other lies associated with this abominable holiday, which has always focused away from the true Jesus Christ of the Bible.

You face two choices: listen to confused, deceived ministers, and go along with the masses and their traditions. Or, open your mind—and your Bible—listen to God, and seek the **TRUTH** about these days. □



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rcg.org/ghdoph

PERSONAL

Continued from page 3

Britain with a completely unanticipated 1.7 billion pound sterling bill (\$2.7 billion), much WILD discussion has taken place about Britain exiting the European bloc. British Prime Minister David Cameron has not held back his disdain for the EU's recent actions: "Red-faced with anger, the Prime Minister vowed to block payment of the 'completely unacceptable' surcharge presented by EU officials in a surprise overhaul of national contributions. 'It is not acceptable, it is an appalling way to behave,' Mr. Cameron said.

"Calls for the UK to withdraw from the EU intensified yesterday following the cash demand, which will cost every family in the country £65. And he admitted the latest insult to UK taxpayers—with the bill due to be paid by December 1st—was undermining his drive to keep Britain in the EU. When pressed on the issue by the Daily Express he [admitted]: 'It certainly doesn't help, put it that way'" (*Daily Express*).

The bill, part of the EU financial structure, kicks in when countries perform better than expected. Germany, France and Poland are all scheduled to receive rebates since their economies underperformed. In other words, Britain (and Italy plus one or two more countries) are now going to pay money to countries that did not do well. This is called redistribution of wealth.

Germany Warns Britain

But the situation has worsened in another regard. Recently, German Chancellor Angela Merkel strongly rebuffed Mr. Cameron over one of his recent immigration proposals (*italics added*): "David Cameron has been *warned* by German chancellor Angela Merkel that *she would rather see the UK leave the European Union* than change freedom of movement rules, according to reports. Downing Street...did not deny that the conver-

sation had taken place, after German newspaper Der Spiegel said *Merkel had rejected Cameron's demands* for a cap on unskilled migrants. Sources told the newspaper that the chancellor said demands for any changes to freedom of movement rules represented a '*point of no return*' and that *this would be it for the UK's membership*" (*The Guardian*).

referendum" regarding EU membership in 2017.

Bible prophecy reveals that the tense relationship between Britain and the EU (think Germany) will eventually—if not *soon!*—come to a full boil. Many Bible passages show that the modern nations that are descended from ancient Israel will not be part of the coming European



■ **SPEAKING OUT:** British Prime Minister David Cameron addresses the media as he arrives at the Council of the European Union headquarters for a two-day meeting (Oct. 23, 2014).

PHOTO: CARL COURT/GETTY IMAGES

The same article also revealed a shocking turnaround by the British government to appease Germany: "...the Sunday Times also reported that the prime minister has dropped plans for quotas in a bid to placate the Germans and that Cameron is now looking at whether the government can ask EU immigrants to leave the country unless they can support themselves within three months of arriving in the UK."

David Cameron has promised that if he wins the coming May 2015 election he will have an "in-or-out

superpower—the period called by Jesus Christ "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24). They will either be kicked out or leave this union on their own accord. It appears that we are already seeing more than the beginning of this process.

To learn more about the future of the United States and Britain, read my eye-opening book *America and Britain in Prophecy* at rcg.org/aabibp. It reveals the incredible history of these two nations, along with their role in great prophecies to come. □

SUICIDE

Continued from page 15

The WHO reported that suicide is the second leading cause of death in 15- to 29-year-olds worldwide.

Stop and think about the tragedy behind just this one statistic. For this age group—those who have their whole lives ahead of them—the second leading cause of death is suicide!

As modern society grows more difficult and complex, each successive generation finds it harder to cope with life's difficulties. Because people's character has eroded, much less stress is needed for them to self-destruct.

If you doubt this, contrast the "Greatest Generation" of World War II with today's emotionally immature teenagers of "Generation Z," who are often sent over the edge by social media bullying.

A 17-year-old British teenager explained to *BBC Radio 4's Today* program that she had attempted suicide after being bullied by classmates: "I felt alone and isolated—I wasn't happy because the bullying followed me everywhere and I didn't really have an escape," she said.

"I thought 'What's the point in being alive if nobody likes me?'. I thought 'Why am I still here—we're all going to die anyway so does it really matter if I go now.'"

ChildLine, a counseling helpline in Britain, saw over 34,000 consultations with children calling for counseling about committing suicide in the 2013-2014 year. This number was a 116 percent increase over what was seen in 2010 through 2011, according to the media outlet.

What a sad statement about societal conditions when even our youth see no hope.

Why?

People end their lives for many reasons. Some do it after business failures,

or financial problems such as debt and bankruptcy. Others see worsening world conditions and conclude there is no hope. Divorce, stress, fear, lack of control, and guilt also play a role. After some unsuccessfully try to fill the void in their lives with money, material possessions, sex, alcohol, drugs and every other form of escape—they decide there is no other option but the final escape—death.

Others commit suicide because of a lack of social connections. They have no family members or significant oth-

er suicide attempts decided to kill themselves less than five minutes before the attempt, and 70% made the decision within an hour of the attempt.

"Suicidal urges are sometimes caused by *immediate stressors*, such as a break-up or job loss, that go away with the passage of time. 90% of people who survive suicide attempts, including the most lethal types like shooting one's self in the head, don't end up killing themselves later. That statistic reflects the 'temporary nature and fleeting sway of many suicidal crises,' reports *The New England Journal of Medicine*..."

The article continued with an example of two men who survived jumping from the Golden Gate Bridge. They recounted how, even in mid-air, they regretted their knee-jerk decision.

"Many rare survivors of Golden Gate Bridge suicide attempts recall regretting their impulsive decisions instantly—even as they were falling. A couple survivors who jumped from the Golden Gate Bridge told their stories to *The New Yorker* back in 2003, like then-18-year-old Kevin Hines who jumped in 2000 after pacing on the bridge for a half hour while

passersby ignored him.

"He finally jumped based on the thought that 'nobody cares.'

"My first thought was, 'What... did I just do? I don't want to die,'" Hines told *The New Yorker*.

"Then-28-year-old Ken Baldwin, like Hines, chose to hurdle over the bridge's railing rather than stand on it first because he didn't want to lose his courage to jump. Although he was severely depressed on that day in 1985, he changed his mind the moment after his leap. 'I instantly realized that everything in my life that I'd thought was unfixable was totally fixable—except for having just jumped,' he said."

This story strikes at the core of the problem—loneliness and hopelessness. People do not like their current



■ CALL FOR HELP: A man walks past an emergency telephone on Mapo Bridge, a common site for suicides, over the Han river in Seoul, South Korea (July 14, 2014).

PHOTO: JUNG YEON-JE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

ers to show them the basic love and concern all human beings need. One man's suicide note stated that if just one person smiled at him as he walked to the bridge he would not jump. No one smiled at him.

Think of how many people you might have crossed paths with on the street, shared a taxi with, or sat next to on the subway who were experiencing similar thoughts.

A *Business Insider* article offered a glimpse into the minds of those who attempt suicide, showing it is most often an *impulsive* act (emphasis added): "Anywhere from one-third to 80% of all suicide attempts are impulsive acts, according to *The New England Journal of Medicine*. 24% of those who made near-lethal sui-



■ **INTO THE FOG:** Over 1,600 people have committed suicide by jumping from the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California, since it opened in 1937. In 2013, 46 people jumped to their deaths (June 27, 2014).

PHOTO: JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

circumstances and feel their lives will never improve.

The then-18-year-old Mr. Hines concluded that no one cared. Yet there is a Being who does.

Human Tendency

Discouragement to the point of suicide is part of human nature. All human beings who have ever lived experience feelings of despair and discouragement when events in their lives do not turn out as they expect.

The pain of depression can squeeze all hope from every cell of one's body. Even some of history's greatest leaders fought deep depression. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill once described it as the "black dog." U.S. President Abraham Lincoln, regarded as one of the strongest leaders of all-time, battled depression.

Many may also find it surprising—and encouraging to a certain degree—that some of God's leading servants battled bouts of suicidal thoughts.

The patriarch Job, after enduring horrific trials brought on by Satan, sought death. Notice: "So that my soul chooses strangling, and death rather than my life. I loathe it; I would not live alway: let me alone; for my days are vanity" (Job 7:15-16).

After undergoing severe trials, the prophet Jeremiah wished he

had never been born: "Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto you; making him very glad. And let that man be as the cities which the LORD overthrew, and repented not: and let him hear the cry in the morning, and the shouting at noontide; because he slew me not from the womb; or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb to be always great with me. Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labor and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?" (Jer. 20:14-18).

The prophet Elijah, fleeing for his life from a vengeful Queen Jezebel, was temporarily suicidal: "He...came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers" (I Kings 19:4).

After hearing his despair, the account in I Kings records that God comforted Elijah during his trial. Similar could be said of Job.

God of This World

An overarching theme when examining suicide notes is the need to escape

the terrible conditions on Earth. Those who commit suicide feel that life "has become unbearable." Many see or experience violent crime, rape, broken families, and misery, and ask, "Why has God abandoned mankind?"

The knowledge of why this world is in such terrible condition is revealed in a book that many own but few study. Mankind's future could be known if journalists, educators and other leaders were willing to investigate the ONLY SOURCE of divinely revealed knowledge—the Bible.

This Book reveals mankind's history and future. Humanity has been cut off from its Creator ever since its fateful decision in the Garden of Eden to take to itself the knowledge of how to live.

Since then, man has existed in a state of isolation from God's blessings and protection. Chapter 4 of II Corinthians reveals the true ruler of this world. Notice: "...the *god of this world* [Satan] has blinded the minds of them which believe not..." (vs. 4).

Revelation 12:9 also describes "the Devil...Satan, which deceives the whole world."

In light of just these two verses, is it any wonder that life is filled with pain and misery for so many millions of people? (To learn more about the state of this world, read our revealing booklet *A World in Captivity* at rcg.org/awic.)

Satan seeks to destroy mankind. John 10:10 states, "The thief [the devil] comes not, but for to *steal*, and to *kill*, and to *destroy*."

Another statement from Christ in John reveals a notable description of the devil's nature: "the devil...was a *murderer* from the beginning" (8:44).

Whether Satan can successfully inspire someone to kill another person or to kill themselves, the end result is the same: death. Suicide is, without a doubt, *self-murder*. Just because the life a person takes is their own does not make it right.

The Sixth Commandment clearly states, "You shall not kill" (Ex. 20:13). Although some argue they have the "right" to take their own

life, this is a gross misunderstanding of human “rights.” Only God, as the Creator of life, ultimately has the right to take it.

There is also the controversial subject of assisted suicide. Although outside the scope of this article, assisted suicide obviously falls under the category of “suicide.”

Return to John 10:10. It explains God’s will for every human being: “...I [Christ] am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

God desires that everyone live the “abundant life.” But how can this happen?

No matter how many suicide prevention call centers mankind opens, humanity has proven to be unable to address the root CAUSE of suicide—the unsatisfying and painful conditions that exist worldwide. Just like it has not yet been able to solve so many of its other problems—disease, war, poverty, crime, etc.—humanity has also failed to prevent the current suicide epidemic.

Wonderful Environment Coming

God deeply cares about every single human being—those made in His image (Gen. 9:6). If He knows every “hair on your head,” (Matt. 10:29-31) and notes when every sparrow dies, how much more does He care about every human being who has ever lived? The often-quoted John 3:16 makes clear that “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son...”

Because of this outgoing concern for His Creation, God plans to soon intervene in world affairs. Bible prophecies recorded long ago reveal that a new world is coming. Jesus Christ said, “I will come again” (John 14:3). At His Second Coming, He will usher in the kingdom of God—a world-ruling SUPERGOVERNMENT that will bring the peace and prosperity that so many desperately seek.

Notice what God inspired the prophet Isaiah to record, “Unto us a Child is born [speaking of Christ]... and the GOVERNMENT shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The

Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of *Peace*. Of the increase of His GOVERNMENT and *peace* there shall be *no end*...and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the LORD of Hosts will perform this” (9:6-7).

Utopia is not a distant dream of the world’s educators, philosophers, city planners, economists or political leaders. It will soon be *reality*. This incredible period is described throughout the pages of your Bible, and its arrival means the end of suicide.

Now notice what God’s Word reveals about the peaceful environment that will allow children to play safely in the streets: “Thus says the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain...there shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof” (Zech. 8:3-5).

This prophecy shows that people, young and old, will soon live full, rich lives, not cut short by a frantic impulsive decision or feelings of hopelessness.

Jesus Christ promised the “abundant life” (John 10:10) to His followers. This productive and happy life will soon be offered to all human beings, including those who previously lived and died. The millions who committed suicide will be resurrected to new life, in a wonderful environment. Each one will receive an opportunity to qualify for eternal life. (Our booklet *Is There Life After Death?*—available at rcg.org/itlad—reveals more about God’s Plan for those who have succeeded in ending their own lives.)

No More Desire for Death

Dramatically improved global conditions will make suicide a thing of

the past. No longer will people see death as an escape. They will *want* to live! The Creator of mankind actually put in all of us the desire to live. This is why those who survived suicide attempts from the Golden Gate Bridge say they immediately regretted the decision—in midair!

Suicide is preventable when the right conditions are in place. Think. What if there were no broken families? What if the bonds of friendship were strong and unbreakable? What if everyone always had someone to talk to about their problems or frustrations? What if all human beings had a purposeful role in society, with a steady and productive job? What if marriages were all rock-solid? Consider how much stronger would be the social fabric.

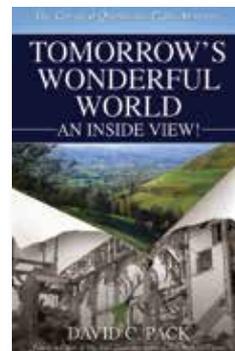
How many people would want to commit suicide under such conditions?

In this world tomorrow, everyone will be taught to exercise self-control over their mind and their emotions. People will be given the strength to overcome feelings of despair. They will believe real positive change is possible. Once this world’s terrible environment is replaced, men, women and children will no longer want to escape their circumstances. And those who previously committed suicide will be shown how to overcome the problems that once overcame them.

Despite the world’s gloomy reports that rising suicide rates are the “new normal,” there is hope.

The coming new world will provide an environment where people will not desire death. (To learn more about what God’s Word reveals about man’s future, request our free book *Tomorrow’s Wonderful World – An Inside View!* at rcg.org/tww.)

For millions struggling, there is a light at the end of the dark tunnel—there is hope. □



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CRIME & PUNISHMENT

Study: Crime Hits Quarter of U.S. Households



■ **VIOLENT AGE:** Above, students and family members embrace after a Marysville-Pilchuck High School shooting that left two dead, including the gunman (Oct. 24, 2014). Left, surrendered handguns are piled in a bin during a gun buyback event in the wake of a killing spree at the University of California that left six students dead (May 31, 2014).

PHOTOS: DAVID RYDER/ (ABOVE); DAVID MCNEW/ (LEFT) GETTY IMAGES

One in four households in the United States were affected by crime in the last 12 months, according to a Gallup poll.

“Twenty-six percent of Americans say they or another member of their household were the victim of some type of property or physical crime in the last 12 months, ranging from theft to sexual assault,” Gallup reported.

Most of the crimes were the result of property theft or vandalism. Other types included robbery, car theft, physical assault, sexual assault, and burglary, which have all maintained consistent numbers since Gallup initially began its annual crime poll in 2000.

For the first time, this year’s poll also inquired about cyber-crimes: “Twenty-seven percent of households and 19% of U.S. adults say they have been affected by stolen credit card information, such as those that affected Target and Home Depot customers in the past 12 months—far more than said they had been victimized by any of the [individual] traditional crimes.”

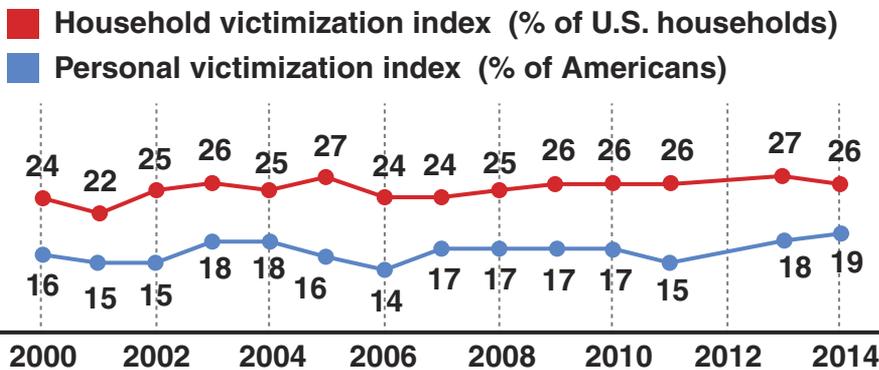
The report also stated: “The newer cyber-crimes are not included in Gallup’s victimization index in order to preserve the long-term trendability of the index. If they were included, the household victimization rate would surge to 46% (from 26%) and the individual victimization rate would jump to 34% (from 19%).”

In addition, many crimes go unreported. The Gallup poll showed that “only 45% who had credit card information stolen and 26% who had a computer or smartphone hacked said they reported those crimes to the police.” Many likely only told their bank about the incident.

Physical or property crimes are also underreported, with about one-third of these crimes not relayed to police, according to the organization. □

Crime victimization rates

A Gallup poll shows that 26 percent of Americans say they or another member of their household were the victim of some type of property or physical crime in the last 12 months.



Source: Gallup

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Organic Foods: More Antioxidants, Fewer Toxic Heavy Metals



■ **HEALTHFUL CHOICES:** Customers shop for produce at a Whole Foods Market in San Francisco, California (Oct. 15, 2014).

PHOTO: JUNG YEON-JE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Organic food has 60 percent more key antioxidants than conventional food, according to a study released by Newcastle University in the United Kingdom.

Eating food grown organically provides “additional antioxidants equiva-

lent to eating between 1-2 extra portions of fruit and vegetables a day,” the report stated.

“This study demonstrates that choosing food produced according to organic standards can lead to increased intake of nutritionally desirable antioxidants and reduced exposure to toxic heavy metals,” Newcastle University professor Carlo Leifert, who authored the study, said in a statement on the university’s website.

Compared to conventional crops, organic ones

evidence lower levels of toxic heavy metals.

Researchers “detected significantly lower concentrations of the toxic metal [cadmium] and total [nitrogen] in organic crops...[cadmium] is a highly toxic metal and one of the only

three toxic metal contaminants (the other two being [lead] and [mercury]) for which the European Commission has set maximum residue levels... in foods,” a report published by the *British Journal of Nutrition* stated.

In addition to toxic heavy metals, conventionally grown food also contains more pesticides: “...pesticide residues were four times more likely to be found in conventional crops than organic ones,” university researchers found.

According to researchers, the study was the “most extensive analysis of the nutrient content in organic vs conventionally-produced foods ever undertaken” and conclusively proves the value of organic produce.

“The organic vs non-organic debate has rumbled on for decades now but the evidence from this study is overwhelming—that organic food is high in antioxidants and lower in toxic metals and pesticides,” Mr. Leifert stated. □

WORRIED ABOUT YOUR FINANCES?



Despite unparalleled affluence in the Western world, three in four Americans live paycheck to paycheck. One-fourth have no emergency funds and one-third have no retirement savings. Personal bankruptcies are soaring, with millions of people drowning in a sea of high-interest credit card payments. Money woes are considered the second leading cause of divorce.

What about you? Do you often wonder where all your money is going? Do you wrestle with financial difficulties daily?

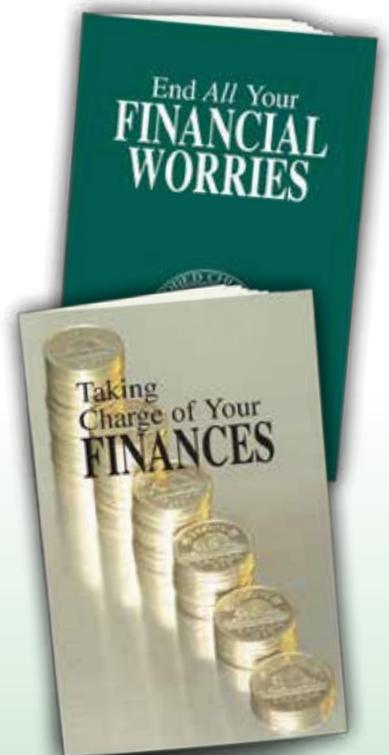
For most, the “money struggle” is constant and the pressure can seem unbearable. Just the stress of these problems can drive away the happiness and peace that everyone seeks—but few find.

Yet all of this is unnecessary *if* you have the keys to financial prosperity.

The free booklets *End All Your Financial Worries* and *Taking Charge of Your Finances* will show you how to loosen the chains of financial bondage, including:

- How to create and follow a budget
- Proven methods to break free from the vicious cycle of debt
- Biblical keys to financial prosperity
- Principles to achieve financial success in marriage—and much more!

Order your free copies of *End All Your Financial Worries* at rcg.org/eayfw and *Taking Charge of Your Finances* at rcg.org/tcoyf or use the self-addressed envelope inside this magazine.



**You can turn the tide of debt,
take charge of your finances—and find true economic success!**