

MARCH 2016

THE

REALTRUTH.ORG

REAL TRUTH™

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

CHINA'S HAZY FUTURE



Deadly Superbugs
What's After Antibiotics?

Why Conspiracy Theories?

America's Crumbling Infrastructure

Finding Easter
in the Bible?

THE
REAL TRUTH[™]
A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

VOL. XIV | NO. 2 | MARCH 2016

ARTICLES

REALTRUTH.ORG



■ **LUNAR SURFACE:** NASA astronaut Eugene Cernan poses next to the lunar rover and American flag during the Apollo 17 mission—NASA's last manned mission to the moon (Dec. 13, 1972).

PHOTO: PROJECT APOLLO ARCHIVE/NASA

Why Conspiracy Theories?

Beliefs that covert governments and organizations are orchestrating world events are widespread. You can understand why such fringe ideas persist.

Page 10

FRONT COVER: A traditional Chinese "junk" sails in front of Hong Kong's skyline, which is shrouded in a dense blanket of smog (April 15, 2013). Although the city is financially independent from China, the area is inextricably linked to the nation—and its many problems.

PHOTO: PHILIPPE LOPEZ/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO CREDITS: All photographs from Thinkstock unless otherwise noted. Page 24: Paula C. Rondeau/The Real Truth.

**Personal from the Editor-in-Chief
Your Awesome Potential! (Part 2)**
Page 1

China's Hazy Future

Asia's largest nation has battled air pollution for years. Yet smog is not the only problem. Other social, economic and military concerns make the coming years look uncertain.

Page 4

2016: Bleak Forecast for Global Economy?
Page 13

Deadly Superbugs What's After Antibiotics?

Seventy-five years after the discovery of penicillin, experts fear we have reached the end of the antibiotic age.

Page 15

America's Crumbling Infrastructure

Millions in the United States believe their lifestyles filled with modern conveniences will continue forever. But the underpinnings of the country—including its electrical grids and transportation systems—tell a different story.

Page 19

Finding Easter in the Bible?

Many think this popular festival is connected to Christ's Resurrection, but do passages within God's Word prove otherwise?

Page 24

World News Desk
Page 31

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:

The Real Truth

1000 Ambassador Drive
Wadsworth, OH 44281
realtruth.org

PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
DAVID C. PACK

EXECUTIVE EDITOR
JEFFREY R. AMBROSE

MANAGING EDITOR
EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

SENIOR EDITORS
KEVIN D. DENEE
BRADFORD G. SCHLEIFER

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

DAVID C. PACK
JEFFREY R. AMBROSE
SAMUEL C. BAXTER
RYAN L. CASWELL
KEVIN D. DENEE
ROBERT R. FARRELL
ANDREW J. HOLCOMBE
GREGORY E. K AidANNEK
DAVID J. LITAVSKY
KENNETH M. OREL
JUSTIN T. PALM
JAMES F. PASTOR
DANIEL A. QUIMBY
BRADFORD G. SCHLEIFER
NESTOR A. TORO
F. JACO VILJOEN
VIDAL N. WACHUKU
EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS
DAVID J. LITAVSKY
KIRSTEN A. SODERQUIST

ART/GRAPHICS
PAULA C. RONDEAU
SARAH O. VIDAL
EILEEN M. WILLARD

WEBSITE SERVICES
BRADFORD G. SCHLEIFER
ANGELA K. BAXTER
JEFFREY D. DAVIS
AMANDA B. DODD

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
TIMOTHY C. WILLARD

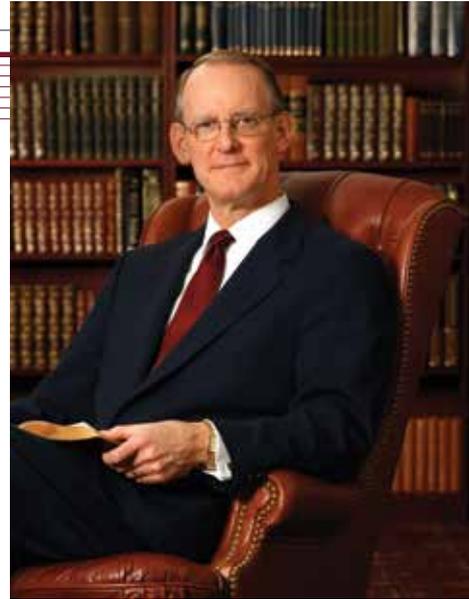
The preparation and production of this magazine involved the work of editors, proofreaders, graphic artists, illustrators, writers, researchers and those who support the Work of God. Copyright © 2016, The Restored Church of God. Printed in the USA. All rights reserved.

The Restored Church of God is not responsible for the return of unsolicited articles and photos.

Scriptures are quoted from the King James (or Authorized) Version of the Bible, unless otherwise noted.

PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



Your Awesome Potential! (Part 2)

THIS IS PART 2 examining the incredible potential of mankind. The world does not know of God's marvelous Plan. Evolutionists are trapped within the boundaries of their theory. They see no greater reason for the birth of a human than a puppy or giraffe. If human beings are merely the highest animal produced by blind, dumb evolution, it is *impossible* for them to at the same time believe in a transcendent, God-ordained PURPOSE for human life. No one can honestly accept two opposite positions!

Though often highly intelligent, the evolutionist's dependence on human reasoning, accompanied by rejection of revealed knowledge, leaves him utterly incapable of knowing God's great purpose for humanity. He has literally shut himself out of true understanding!

This Personal is for those who will consider what God reveals. God's Word shows that man has an *awesome purpose* completely beyond human imagination. After hearing God's explanation, you be the judge of whether it makes more sense than what is offered by evolutionists—and traditional Christianity.

If you regularly read *The Real Truth*, you know the Bible is God's *Instruction Book* for mankind. It is the source of revealed knowledge and understanding that man cannot discover for himself. It answers life's most important questions.

Recall from Part 1 that the Bible begins with Genesis, meaning "beginnings." This book explains more about God's Plan than I have covered. It reveals that animals were made differently, with each after "his kind."

Men are not part of the animal kind. They do not carry the likeness of any "beast of the earth." As part of the *God* kind, man was created to enter a relationship with his Creator that animals can never realize.

Think for a moment. What could be more important to understand than the purpose for your life? But most

live their entire lives without even a *clue* as to why they are here. They drift aimlessly, unconcerned about the answers to life's greatest questions—*why life* and *why death*? Others enjoy debating life's meaning, but never arrive at the correct answers. Many conclude mankind is little more than a cosmic accident—luck put us here!

Genesis 1 records man's PHYSICAL creation. Adam was created so that he looked like—appeared like—God in *physical* form and shape. Though physically complete, Adam was left spiritually incomplete. A vital spiritual component was missing.

Adam was physical. He breathed air, and required food and water—all needed to survive.

Though Adam was made in the image of God, there was an obvious—and big—difference between him and God. Adam was made of the dust. Since God is a spirit, He is made—composed—of *spirit*.

Two “Adams”

An important parallel exists between Adam and Christ—the God of the Old Testament (John 1:1, 14; I Cor. 10:4). It offers another clue to God's *purpose*. The apostle Paul makes this comparison: “So it is written, The *first man Adam* was made a living soul; the *last Adam* [Christ] was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural [Adam]; and afterward [at the Resurrection] that which is spiritual. The first man [Adam] is of the earth, *earthy*: the second man is the Lord from heaven [Christ]. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also [by the Resurrection] that are heavenly. And as *we* [converted, Spirit-led people] have borne the image of the earthy [made of flesh], we shall also bear the image of the heavenly [composed of spirit]” (I Cor. 15:45-49).

Paul's inspired statement starts with a reference to Genesis 2:7—“so it is written.” For those who will accept it, this is *New Testament verification* of the Genesis account! Paul

knew Adam “was made” by God—that this *did* happen. He believed the Old Testament account.

The goal of a Christian is to receive a spirit *body* at the Resurrection—to “bear the image of the heavenly.” As God created animals—elephants, dogs, cats, horses, etc.—to reproduce after their kind, He (Elohim) created man after the God kind.

Grasp this. God planned His spiritual creation to be with humans—never animals. We must understand how.

Human Mind vs. Animal Instinct

Animals possess instinct. No evolutionist has ever successfully explained why this is or how it is even possible. Why do bees return to their hive day after day, generation after generation, making honey the same as they did 1,000 years ago unless they were *designed* to do this? Why do birds know to fly south, and at just the right time? Then, how do many know to go each year to the exact same tree in Central or South America—and then fly back north, right on schedule? Instinct!

As marvelous as is this instinctive capability, it is dwarfed by the capacity and power of human intellect. Humans can acquire knowledge. All knowledge falls into two categories: (1) *physical* knowledge of how to work with matter and physical things, and (2) *spiritual* knowledge necessary for people to develop personal relationships with both God and their fellow man. All knowledge is either physical or spiritual.

Physical knowledge is acquired through the five basic senses—sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. People understand they must gain certain knowledge and add to it throughout their lives. The senses enable them to continually do this.

Created to Obtain Knowledge

God gave Adam and Eve “dominion” over the Earth (Gen. 1:26). This meant man would be able to and need to learn and produce—to generate—much knowledge in subjugating the

planet. He designed human beings with minds that could create, devise, reason, observe and experiment. Through this inherent ability, *physical* knowledge could be processed. This was good and right, as long as it was used within the framework God intended.

Adam and Eve's problem was they reasoned that *every* kind of knowledge necessary for salvation could be obtained on their own through experimentation. Once they moved off course from God's intended way, they had no hope of reaching the *destination* He purposed for them—and neither does mankind, which followed their choice. Once this first couple accepted the *wrong premise* as their *STARTING POINT*—that they could reason everything out themselves—they were destined to fail!

Accumulating vast knowledge over millennia has not changed—and will never change—that mankind is headed for the wrong destination.

Revealed Knowledge

Every sophisticated or technical device or product comes with an *instruction manual*. Without it, the owner would find the object useless. He would not know how to properly operate it. Nor could he repair or maintain it.

God's Instruction Manual—the Bible—contains vital REVEALED knowledge that is otherwise unattainable. Unlike the modern system of education, it teaches *how to live*, not just how to earn a living. It explains history, prophecy, important knowledge of doctrine, and thousands of other points and principles governing every aspect of life.

Now understand. The Bible was never intended to contain ALL knowledge. It just contains that which is essential for salvation—knowledge man could not discover through human reason, experimentation, analysis and observation. The Bible was not intended to teach mankind how to design marvels of engineering such

Please see **PERSONAL**, page 28

Coming Soon: World Peace *Starting in the Mideast!*

David C. Pack proclaims God's breathtaking plan for Jerusalem, the Middle East, and ultimately the entire Earth in a unique series for *The World to Come*[™] program.



Many Old Testament books virtually explode with descriptions of a wonderful time just ahead. A giant transformation is in store for all nations, brought by a coming world government! Part 1 of the series “Third Temple Foretold—Bible Prophecy!” shows the beginning stages of God’s plan for humanity and each broadcast that follows reveals the shocking truth of how world peace will come. Visit worldtocome.org or youtube.com/RestoredCOG to start watching today!

CHINA'S HAZY FUTURE



Asia's largest nation has battled air pollution for years. Yet smog is not the only problem. Other social, economic and military concerns make the coming years look uncertain.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER
AND DAVID J. LITAVSKY

ROUGHLY 4,400 DIE each day from air pollution in China. That comes to 1.6 million deaths per year and roughly 17 percent of all deaths in the nation, Berkeley Earth, a California-based climate research organization, reported.

Smog-choked skylines are the ugly side of breakneck progress for the Asian nation. For years, it has enjoyed seemingly unstoppable growth: A GDP of over \$10 trillion, rising global ambitions and clout,

and the biggest middle class in the world.

A nation of farmers only 50 years ago, it has risen to become the world's second largest economy and home to some of the world's largest, most advanced cities.

Yet rapid development has caused immense problems: half of China's rivers and lakes are severely polluted from industrial and chemical waste. Each year, 800,000 citizens develop lung cancer, primarily from air pollution. Deaths from the disease surged nearly 465 percent over the last three decades.



These negative effects have spurred the Chinese government into action. For the past three years, it has worked to mitigate the effects of pollution—namely forcing the closure of small industrial companies.

Reuters explained the results of the campaign: “On the outskirts of Beijing, the disused factories of Chaomidian show the impact of China’s drive to shut down thousands of small firms causing big pollution. Amid scrapheaps and idle machinery,

the community has clean air these days—and no jobs.

“After a three-year campaign, China’s push to cut smog appears to be paying off, whatever the localized cost, just as economic growth weakens to its slowest pace in 25 years. Chinese cities saw an average 10 percent drop in key pollutants [in 2015], according to Greenpeace.”

While China did reduce smog, it destroyed many jobs. In addition, Beijing issued its first air quality “red alert” in December last year after heavy pollution reduced visibility to less than a mile. The government warned citizens to avoid all outdoor exertion, closed schools and construction sites, and ordered some industrial plants to cease operation.

Coal is the major reason for such widespread air pollution. China produces and consumes nearly as much coal as *the rest of the world combined*.

The nation has pledged to cut back. During the international environmental summit in Paris last year, China promised to modernize its coal power plants by 2020 and cut emissions by 60 percent.

Yet this means more factory closures are coming, and more jobs lost.

Pollution is just one negative effect stemming from China’s mammoth growth spurt. In a nation of 1.4 billion, everything is blown up to a massive scale. Invariably, the solutions to problems lead to *even more* complications.

Aspike in population, spiraling national debt, and widespread infrastructure shortages all cast a pall of uncertainty over the emerging superpower. Yet all of this has not interrupted amazing growth.

To onlookers and citizens alike, the Asian nation’s future remains hazy.

Economic Transformation

China’s national development has led to a massive relocation of the population from the countryside to cities. About 300 million have moved

already, with another 300 million expected to do so by 2030.

Put in perspective, this is like the entirety of the United States relocating *twice*.

To hurry the transition, Beijing plans to urbanize 100 million rural citizens within the next five years through a process called “townification.” Instead of moving them into cities, construction crews will develop urban sprawl around small towns and tribal communities. This process, according to *Forbes*, will “require the construction of 50 Bostons, or six Shanghais, by 2020.”

All of this is part of the communist government’s goal to establish a consumer nation. President Xi Jinping is working to create a more substantial middle class, which will increase internal spending. By encouraging the migration of workers from rural jobs to urban ones, a rising middle class, he believes, will increase the demand for goods and services.

So far, an increasing urban population, with greater access to jobs and amenities that cities have to offer, has helped with GDP growth. Individual standard of living has also increased, with GDP per capita quadrupling to nearly \$12,000 between 2000 and 2013.

The nation’s middle class is already larger than that of the United States, with 109 million Chinese citizens earning between \$50,000 and \$500,000.

Yet for China to keep rising, it needs to sustain this economic growth—a seemingly impossible task.

Bloomberg wrote: “China’s urbanization policies were designed to bring hundreds of millions of people from farms to the cities over the next decade in an effort to unleash a surge of consumption greater than any the world has seen. The coming urbanization boom has been heralded by analysts, academics, and even by China’s top leaders. ‘China has much room for urban, suburban, and regional development and domestic demand has huge potential,’ said Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on Jan. 21 at the

■ **ANCIENT WONDER:** Tourists stroll on a section of the Great Wall of China (Oct. 28, 2014).

PHOTO: KEVIN FRAYER/GETTY IMAGES

World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. ‘Domestic demand will keep improving and bring even greater development for the world.’”

The problem? Domestic consumption *shrank* from 8.5 percent in 2009 to 7.1 percent today, *Bloomberg* reported.

Urban jobs are starting to dry up too. According to *Business Insider*: “For years it seemed that there were plenty of jobs to go around for everyone looking for one in China.

“The pace of rural workers moving to cities to find work and older people leaving the labor force was keeping the market tight. Then, as GDP growth slowed, the people seemed to evaporate.

“Chinese authorities knew this would happen eventually, that after pouring into jobs in cities the migrant worker deluge would have to end.

“It’s just that it happened before anyone thought it would, before the purchasing power of those with jobs was strong enough to support the domestic development of jobs for those without them, especially people

in the country and those too old to work.”

Urban relocation has also led to significant social woes, including chronic unemployment, lack of healthcare and education, the expansion of slums, and thousands of protests each year by disgruntled farmers.

The *Economist* summarized: “Residents are beginning to question whether their quality of life, which for many has improved by leaps and bounds, will continue to do so. The giant cities are polluted, pricey and congested. Average travel speed in Beijing is half that in New York or Singapore.”

As rural residents are forced to move to urban centers, many are not finding work opportunities.

“Farmers are often unwilling to leave the land because of the lack of job opportunities in the new towns,” *The New York Times* reported. “Working in a factory is sometimes an option, but most jobs are far from the newly built towns. And even if farmers do get jobs in factories, most

lose them when they hit age 45 or 50, since employers generally want younger, nimbler workers.”

Amid these growing problems, the only way Beijing can continue its economic advancement is by continuing to spend money.

Government Support

Sustained GDP growth has a hefty price tag. The government’s borrowing has quadrupled over the last seven years. This equals \$28 trillion in public and private debt—larger than that of the United States or Germany. In addition, the debt rate is increasing while GDP growth has been slowing since 2011.

Business Insider reported: “In 2005, China’s debt was 164% of GDP. Now it’s 236% of GDP. It’s not the scale that’s worrying. Many countries have debt that is twice GDP. It’s the speed at which it is changing, compared to the slower pace of economic growth.”

To make matters worse, the government currently has a \$174 billion yearly budget deficit.

Much of China’s cash goes into the construction of its infamous “ghost cities”—vacant communities filled with high-rises, shopping malls, and even theme parks. These pump up GDP growth because they count as real estate development. They have also created jobs through which the government could pump funds into the economy.

Yet these cities have taken away materials and funds from real population centers, and experts believe they will remain uninhabited for decades.

Forbes reported that the building projects were “evidence that China’s growth of the last 20 years was based on building things nobody needed or wanted. This was planned obsolescence on a grand scale. And now that the economy is slowing, what will become of those cities? Many of them are debt burdens carried by the developers who haven’t sold a single unit.

“From shopping malls to soccer stadiums, hundreds of new cities in China are largely empty. And yet



■ **SMOG ALERT:** Residents walk in Shanghai, China, despite having been advised to stay inside as heavy smog engulfs the city (Nov. 7, 2013).

PHOTO: CHINAFOTOPRESS VIA GETTY IMAGES

more cities are still being built deep in the heart of the country. All in hopes that its rural population will one day move to a flat in a city without a mayor.”

Despite these empty, half-built metropolises, *Forbes* reported that the country is now drawing up plans to construct new settlements for as many as 3.4 billion people—two billion more than the nation’s current population!

Even when a newly built city does attract citizens, there are still severe downsides. Another *Forbes* article stated: “Urbanization Chinese-style... forces agricultural populations from their land and into nearby highrises, where they are employed as maintenance workers or simply given extra units to rent out for income—should they be able to find renters. Urbanization thus destroys jobs rather than creating new employment.”

Taking people from farms and mines has forced the government to look elsewhere for natural resources and food.

In Africa, China has made \$26 billion of investments in raw materials, mining and energy. It also offered an initial payout of \$10 billion in loans to African nations, promising up to \$1 trillion in financing by 2025.

Across the Pacific, China is seeking oil and food from Canada. Han Jun, vice minister of financial and economic affairs, told *The Globe and Mail*: “What is China most in need of? We have a shortage of agricultural products. China is the biggest importer of agricultural products in the world and, also, we are one of the countries with the highest dependency on imported energy from other countries.”

Mr. Han proposed a free-trade agreement with Canada to promote an easier and cheaper transfer of goods between the nations.

President Xi visited the United Kingdom last October and struck over \$43 billion of trade and investment deals. This included a \$26 billion investment in Britain’s nuclear power plants, which would allow the Asian

nation to receive a portion of shares from the plant’s stocks.

More Spending

Government spending does not stop there. Other items on the Chinese budget contribute to a massive cash outlay—all in an effort to one day be a global superpower.

Military expansion: The nation is seeking to assert more dominance near and abroad. Early in 2015, the government announced a 12.2 percent increase in military spending over last year to \$132 billion. It has the second highest defense budget in the world, which is expected to increase to provide for an expanding naval fleet and projects such as airstrips built on manmade coral reef islands.

The actual defense budget may be even higher when factoring in “off the book” costs. An April 2015 report from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute stated that China’s real military spending is probably closer to \$216 billion.

Space exploration: The nation, following the pattern of the United States,

has planned to send probes to the “dark side” of the moon. To date, a spacecraft has never landed on the moon’s far side. Afterward, China plans on sending a manned mission there to conduct research and solidify the nation’s place in the 21st-century space race. This all comes with a price tag of about \$2 billion per year.

Stock markets: China is pumping funds into the plummeting stock market to prop it up—an unsustainable move according to most economists. Over the summer, Beijing provided \$236 billion to buy out stocks. It also banned large stockholders from selling their stocks.

For the Chinese government, all of these actions are an attempt to secure its nation a starring role on the world stage. The question is whether the high-risk, high-cost policies will pay off—or cause the emerging superpower to eventually crash and burn.

Some economists consider China’s current economic problems short-term growing pains. They point to America’s transition from an industrial economy to a middle-class



■ **HARD LABOR:** Coal miners exit an underground mine after their shift ends in Datong, China (Nov. 20, 2015). Mining jobs are being cut as the government cracks down on pollution. PHOTO: GREG BAKER/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



■ **RED ALERT:** Chinese paramilitary police standing guard in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, China, wear masks during the city's first declaration of a "red alert" due to dangerously high levels of pollution (Dec. 9, 2015).

PHOTO: KEVIN FRAYER/GETTY IMAGES



■ **DEVELOPMENT:** A skyscraper is constructed alongside downtown Beijing's modern architecture as the city's population grows (Nov. 15, 2015).

PHOTO: KEVIN FRAYER/GETTY IMAGES



■ **COLLABORATION:** Russia's President Vladimir Putin greets China's President Xi Jinping during a welcome ceremony in Ufa, Russia, at the start of the seventh BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) summit (July 9, 2015).

PHOTO: ALEXANDER NEMENOV/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

consumer economy after the Great Depression as an example of why the Asian nation should continue moving forward.

Other economists, however, believe this comparison does not work and point out that the United States had a lot less people in the 1940s, much more time, and more wealth.

China's transition to a consumer nation will involve "redirecting hundreds of millions of people and trillions of dollars of capital," a *Reuters* opinion piece reported. "Nothing like it has ever been attempted."

Long-held Pattern

Backing China's sky-high aspirations is its millennia-long history of awesome achievements and ability to weather hardships.

An obvious example of this is the Great Wall of China, one of the largest construction projects ever. Built over 2,000 years, it consists of 5,500 miles of walls and natural barriers, some running parallel to each other. Consider that this is roughly equal to the *entire* coastline of the continental United States!

The Great Wall required the work of hundreds of thousands of conscripted soldiers and citizens at any given time. While built primarily for defense, it is also a symbol of Chinese imperialism, engineering genius, and manpower superiority. Centuries ago, the barrier even allowed control of trade and travel along the Silk Road.

Yet this all came at great cost. During the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC), experts estimate that up to one million workers died building the wall.

The Chinese people have also endured many of the greatest natural disasters of all time.

■ Six of the world's top 10 deadliest floods and landslides—including the top five—occurred in China. The deadliest, the 1931 China floods, killed between two and four million. Following this were the 1887 Yellow River flood, which claimed one to two million lives, and the 1938 Yellow River flood, which resulted in 500,000 to 700,000 deaths.

■ China had the top three of the world's top 10 most fatal earthquakes. Considered the deadliest of all time, the 1556 Shaanxi quake reportedly killed over 830,000 people. The 1976 Tangshan earthquake killed between 240,000 and 780,000.

■ China had six of the world's top 10 deadliest famines, including the top two. The Great Chinese Famine between 1958 and 1961 claimed between 20 and 43 million lives—the deadliest ever recorded.

In addition to natural disasters, the nation has been involved in some of the greatest wars throughout its history.

The Mongol invasion of China spanned six decades in the 13th century. It was estimated to kill over 10 million citizens and result in heavy military losses.

During the Second Sino-Japanese War, which was fought before and during World War II, anywhere between 10 to 25 million Chinese civilians and over three million military personnel died from war-related violence, famine and disease.

Two characteristics helped the Chinese through all of these hardships: enduring resilience and impressive numbers.

The book *The Chinese People at War* by historian Diana Lary detailed China's national character: "The transcendence of trauma has been an almost commonplace feature of modern Chinese history. The endurance and toughness with which millions of people have endured terrible hardships and still kept going, with dogged determination, is something that fills foreign observers with admiration."

Yet understanding Asia's ancient roots reveals even more about China—and paves the way to understand its future.

Unknown to almost all, the Chinese and its neighbors have a common ancestor described in the Bible: Japheth, one of Noah's sons.

Japheth gave rise to the likes of China, Russia, India, Mongolia, Korea, Japan and other Asian nations. Note what was foretold about this Bible fig-

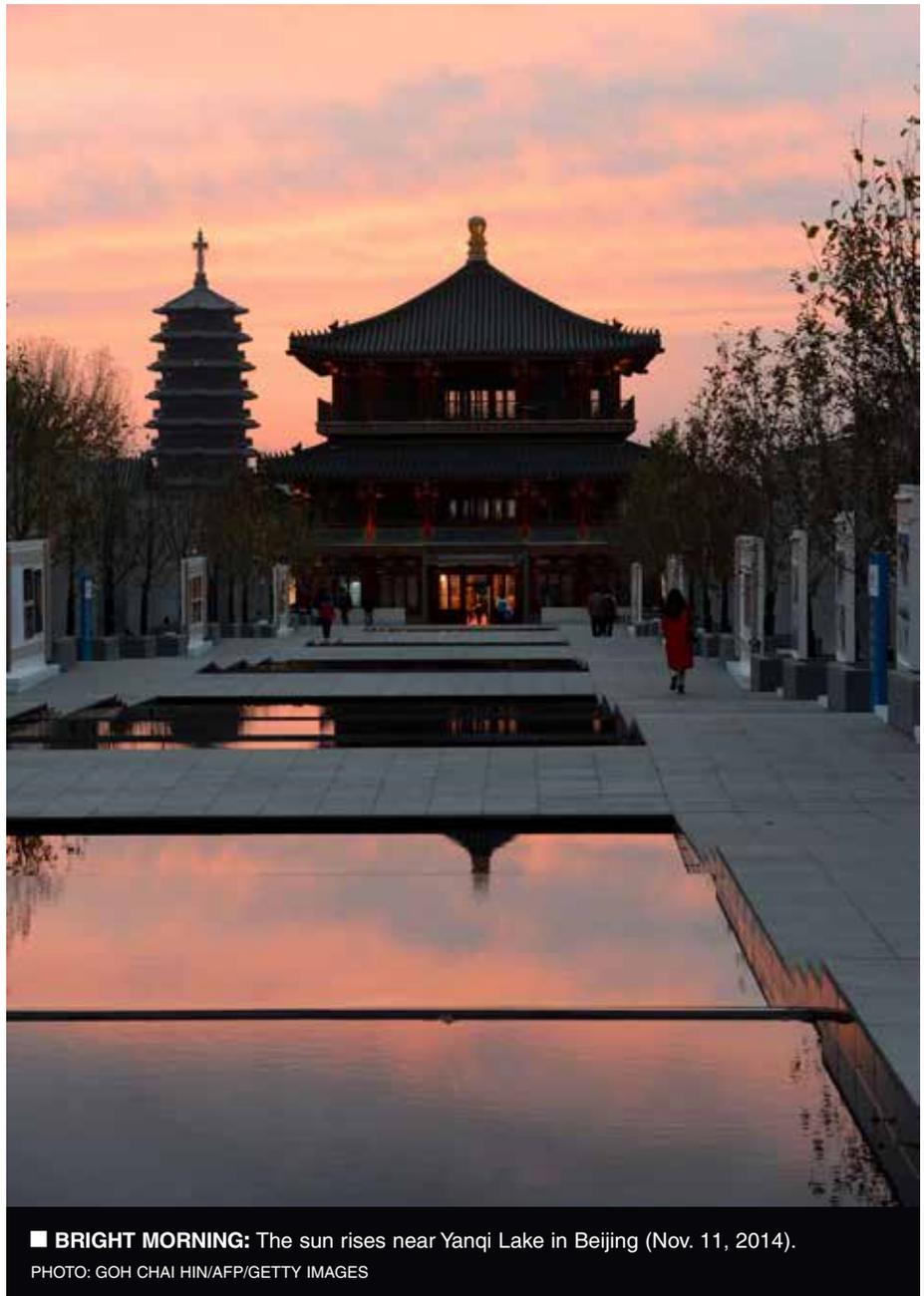
ure in the book of Genesis: "God shall enlarge Japheth..." (9:27).

No other family of races comes close to the sheer size of Asian nations. Well over half of the global population comes from that region.

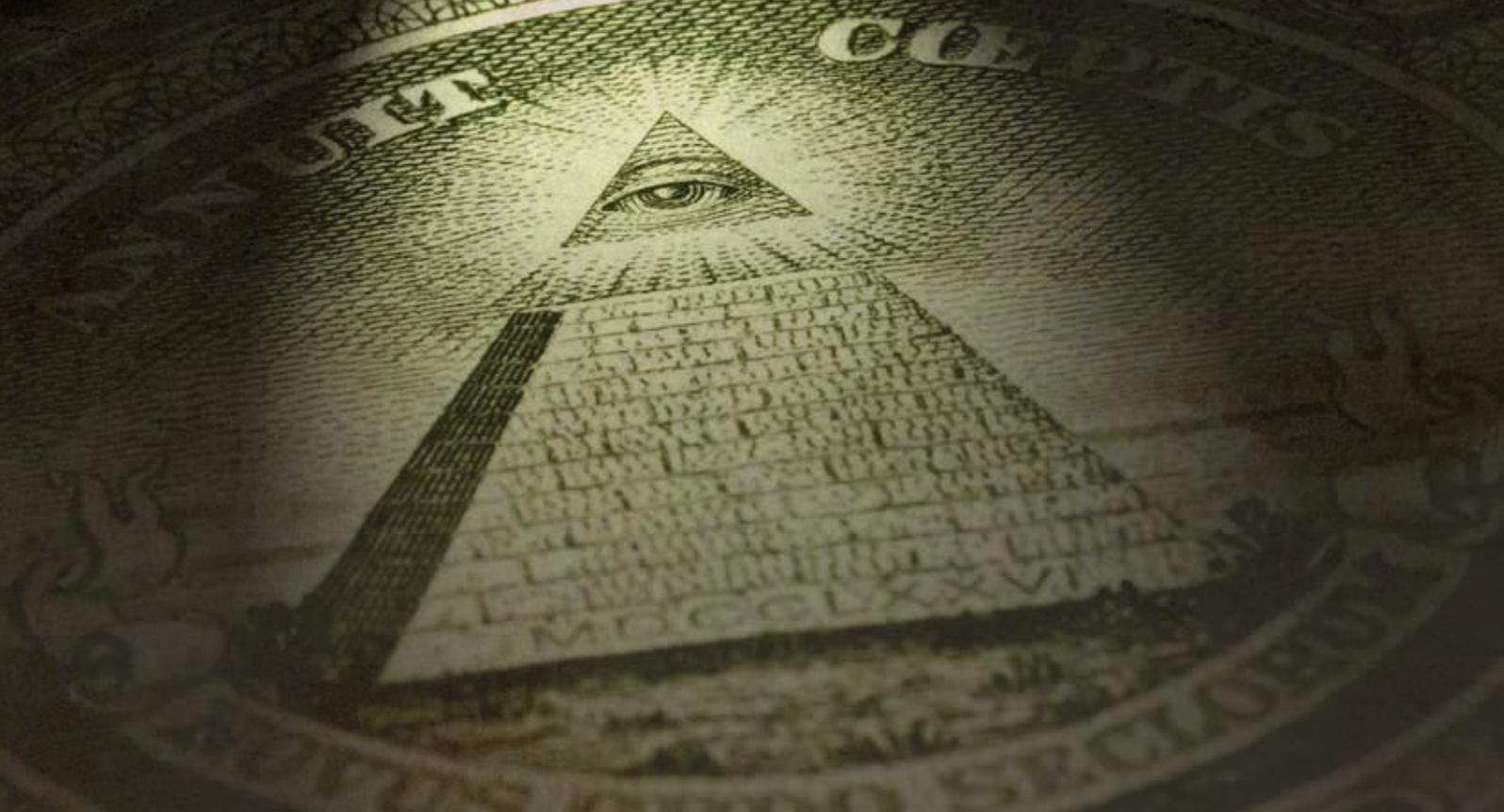
The fact that God said He would enlarge Japheth *and then did it* is one small proof of the Bible's validity. Numerous other fulfilled prophecies CONFIRM that this Book is divinely inspired. For more irrefutable evidence, read *Bible Authority...Can It Be Proven?* at rcg.org/bacibp.

God's Word reveals much more about China's future. While the nation will continue to have difficulties for a short time, it is destined for a period of *unprecedented* prosperity. Also, it is foretold to later align with Russia and other Asian nations as part of what the Bible calls the "kings of the east" (Rev. 16:12).

Keep reading *The Real Truth*, which will continue to explain prophecy and how it relates to world events. Do not let the coming years be hazy or uncertain! □



■ **BRIGHT MORNING:** The sun rises near Yanqi Lake in Beijing (Nov. 11, 2014).
PHOTO: GOH CHAI HIN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



WHY CONSPIRACY THEORIES?

Beliefs that covert governments and organizations are orchestrating world events are widespread. You can understand why such fringe ideas persist.

BY JEFFREY R. AMBROSE

THE MOON LANDING of 1969? It was filmed on a Hollywood soundstage... That building down the road—the one with the manufacturing sign out front? It is actually a United Nations-run prison camp... You don't really think that NASA has a Mars Lander, do you? That's all done with computer-generated special effects... Did you know the most recent hurricane to hit the coast was engineered by government scientists?

To most, such statements are nothing more than bad jokes. But some people's lives revolve around these ideas.

As technology continues to connect like minds in new and more efficient ways, conspiracy theories are spreading as never before. And they seem here to stay. But are they worth exploring?

Seeds of Distrust

Conspiracy theories have a long history—even in a nation as young as the United States.

“American pamphleteers in the 1790s warned of a plot by atheist,

libertine Illuminati and Freemasons to concoct an abortion-inducing tea and ‘a method for filling a bedchamber with pestilential vapours.’ The best-selling book of the 1830s was a racy confession by a repentant nun detailing a scheme by Catholics to undermine Protestant morals. At around the same time, Samuel Morse, better known as the inventor of Morse Code, exposed an Austrian plan to install a Hapsburg prince as emperor of the United States” (*The Economist*).

Some of the most well-known theories involve the assassination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy in 1963.

The lone-gunner theory endorsed by the investigating Warren Commission was received with widespread skepticism, which released a flood of conjecture that persists to this day. Other well-known theories include:

- The condensed water vapor left behind jet engines are chemtrails, or chemical agents sprayed into the air to purposely affect human beings.

- HIV and crack cocaine were both created by government agencies as genocidal weapons.

- The UN monitors Americans with black helicopters.

- Groups such as the Bilderbergers and Illuminati are re-engineering global systems into a New World Order.

- The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami was caused by an Indian-Israeli-American nuclear test.

- Fluoridation of water is part of a plot to control the population's behavior.

- The global Jewish community secretly controls most of the world, as set forth in the (fraudulent) *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* document.

- The U.S. military has the remains of extraterrestrials and their spacecraft stored at a southwest Air Force base.

A few other recent theories include that martial law was secretly passed through the American Senate, European officials planned the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, the Ebola outbreak was a government plot, and the United States is directly assisting North Korea to develop its nuclear program.

Powerful “Drug”

The obsession with conspiracy theories has been compared to an addiction. Once a person has delved deeply into this mindset, recovery—a return to balanced, sound thinking—is rare.

What draws a person to these in the first place?

Conspiracy theories are a powerful source of pride and intellectual vanity. The theorist comes to see himself as thinking on a higher plane than the ignorant masses around

him. He walks the fringes of society, watching his surroundings with suspicion. *No one realizes what's going on*, he thinks.

If speaking his mind on conspiracies causes others to recoil, he simply dismisses them as “dumb sheep” who cannot see what he sees. Every episode like this further reaffirms how special this inside information makes him.

While many conspiracy enthusiasts lack education, the supposed inside knowledge they gain makes them feel superior—one of the elite, enlightened few. “Besides, who needs schools? They're just brainwashing centers run by ‘the machine,’ right?”

Many of these individuals enjoy the thrill of perceived danger that comes along with having supposedly top-secret knowledge, feeling as though they have a lead role in a secret-agent film—except they are not in a movie!

If anyone attempts to point out serious flaws in a theory's logic, there is a standard response: *The conspirators purposely do certain things that appear to counter their goals, just to keep investigators off the trail.* Once this idea is accepted, *any* facts—whether or not they appear to fit the supposed covert scheme—reinforce the theorist's central idea that “things are not as they seem.”

Fueled by Technology

This thinking has found a new outlet with the Internet. As of this writing, a Google search for “conspiracy theory” returns about 16 million results.

The Web has allowed countless new theories to surface—and ancient ones to resurface.

The idea that the Earth is a flat disk continues to draw interest, especially after a popular U.S. musician openly supported the theory. One flat-Earth argument is that the planet's curvature is not visible from the ground. The idea is that high-altitude pictures of the globe's curvature are falsified images intended to dupe people.

Imagine all who would have to be “in on it”: airplane pilots, astronomers



and everyday passengers on flights would all have to lie about having witnessed the curve of the planet. On top of this, space agencies would have to craft false photographs to display a globe instead of a flat Earth.

Websites and online forums (along with television shows) featuring conspiracy theories are multiplying.

One online forum devoted to this subject featured discussions on nearly 120,000 separate topics—and it is growing. These include: “Egyptian Statues on Mars?” “Dead Celebrities That Are Now Alive,” “Mermaid Caught Swimming,” and “Strange Snake Creature with Human Face and Blonde Hair Killed.”

Those who are drawn to this strain of thinking once relied on a scant selection of special-order books, a magazine subscription or two, and their own imaginations to fuel the obsession. Now, these “birds of a feather” can cross-pollinate ideas across the world via the Internet.

This results in a large online community of theorists who validate and feed one another’s delusions. Meanwhile, in the real world, the theorists become isolated from friends, family and co-workers who will not join them in a fantasy world.

One columnist wrote of this online community: “After all, thanks to Google we can find ‘evidence’ in support of practically any belief. If you can imagine the conspiracy theory, there is a website out there ardently promoting it, and a clan of fellow believers who share your peculiar obsession with fluoridated drinking water and the New World Order. The end result is that we never have to recant. We can always find another link to ‘prove’ that the government is trying to ‘zombify’ us, or that aliens are going to destroy the earth at midnight” (*Wired*).

Despising Government

A common thread of many theories is the idea that “the government” is responsible for terrible calamities, and is generally deceiving its citizens. For example, some believe the United

States turned a blind eye to advance knowledge of the 9/11 attacks—or even directly perpetrated them—and now uses doctored videos and media manipulation as part of the cover-up.

This approach plays to an aspect of human nature that the apostle Paul wrote of nearly two millennia ago, describing those who “despise government” (II Pet. 2:10).

Increasingly, the average citizen has less respect for law or authority of any kind. Extreme examples are found in some conspiracy theorists who see themselves as above any and all law.

But this reveals the hypocrisy of many conspiracy buffs. The majority of Western governments now provide more benefits and services for their citizens than any other time in history: medical coverage, food aid, unemployment benefits, welfare, defense, travel infrastructure, food and fuel subsidies, stimulus packages, and the list goes on. How many theorists refuse the generosity of the governments they rail against?

Can You Know?

Make no mistake: There *are* conspiracies on planet Earth. Anyone with basic knowledge of human nature understands that some groups are perfectly willing to commit covert crimes to gain advantage, power or wealth.

However, the idea of well-known international organizations, with widely varied and often conflicting interests, somehow working together behind the scenes over decades—always conspiring, but never quite achieving their secret goals—becomes silly when examined in the light of reason. This is perhaps most true with theories that involve groups such as the United Nations, which have bureaucracies that make meeting even their *publicly stated* goals difficult, never mind covert agendas.

Is there any way to know what is true?

There are ultimately three positions one can hold on these theories: First, they are *all* true—which is definitely not the case! Even if they were reality, there would be nothing you could do

about them. Second, they are all false, and human beings never engage in attempts to deceive others. Third, they are a mixture of both, and there is no way to know which is which. If this last option is the case, then what is the point of delving into them?

One terrible result of these ideas is that untold hours of human energy and attention, which theorists might otherwise have put toward productive and positive ends, vanish in a cloud of smoke.

But aside from wasted time, such theories can hold other dangers: “In extreme cases, conspiracy theories can cost lives,” *The Economist* reported. “Adolf Hitler sincerely believed he was ridding the world of a Jewish menace. Many Serbs were convinced that the Muslims of ex-Yugoslavia were out to annihilate them. And many Rwandan Hutus, informed by their leaders that the Tutsis were planning to kill them, were happy to follow orders to pre-empt this threat.”

The most unbalanced members of a society, when exposed to these ideas, can be driven to commit terrible acts, including assault and mass murder.

The Real Conspiracy

Despite most conspiracy theories being wild speculation and fiction, you may be surprised to learn there *is* a real conspiracy of a different kind playing out on Earth. It has affected mankind for thousands of years. It involves figures of profound evil who operate on a level that is invisible to most. In fact, many are convinced these figures do not exist!

This plot has plagued *all* peoples on *every* continent. We have *all* played a mostly unwitting role in it. Yet the guilty parties are neither the usual suspects that conspiracy theorists blame, nor the supposed scapegoats they defend.

The good news is that this conspiracy can and will be stopped, but only after its architects unleash their worst attacks.

To learn more, read David C. Pack’s booklet *A World in Captivity* at reg.org/awic. □

2016: Bleak Forecast for Global Economy?

AFTER YEARS of being held hostage at the gas pump, consumers in certain parts of the world are sighing in much-needed relief due to plummeting oil prices. Despite a few more dollars in consumers' wallets, however, analysts, economists and pundits alike warn that the world is in for a rollercoaster ride of economic unpredictability for 2016 and beyond.

Consider economist Sara Johnson, senior research director for global economies at research and analysis company IHS Inc. In an interview with *NPR*, she acknowledged "that plummeting oil prices hurt the U.S. economy last year, decimating energy companies and sparking huge layoffs."

NPR wrote that investment firm "Goldman Sachs now predicts that those negatives will offset the benefit to U.S. consumers, so lower oil prices won't be a boost to the economy this year."

The Guardian's economics editor wrote this forecast for 2016: "At some point, a recovery built on booming asset prices, weak growth in earnings and rising personal debt is going to lead to another huge financial crisis—but not in the next 12 months.

"Instead, 2016 will be a year of living dangerously, papering over cracks and buying time before all the old problems resurface."

"This is a case of history threatening to repeat itself, because the buildup to the 2008 crisis began on the periph-

ery of the global economy. So, here is my final prediction: there will be no explosion in 2016, but a fuse will be lit."

In addition, a Council on Foreign Relations article that appeared in *The Atlantic* stated: "The world will face economic challenges on multiple fronts in 2016. As the U.S. Federal Reserve begins its monetary tightening, Europe is struggling to manage migrant and debt crises, China's financial stability is in doubt, and emerging economies are increasingly fragile."

Tightrope Act

As an emerging superpower, the health of the massive Chinese economy causes ripple effects across the globe. In addition, China must perform a delicate tightrope act. It is balancing itself between maintaining a communist regime and tolerating and even

encouraging capitalism, albeit in limited forms. Shop for sneakers, a television, or a computer in the West and you will likely end up with a product labeled "Made in China."

Walmart is the world's largest retailer—and is China's most important supplier. "If Wal-Mart were an individual economy, it would rank as China's eighth-biggest trading partner, ahead of Russia, Australia and Canada," said Xu Jun, Walmart China's director of external affairs (*China Business Weekly*).

China's ambitions to making money in a free market is not limited to just manufacturing cheap consumer goods.

"Over the past decade, China has built factories and expanded its manufacturing capacity in the expectation that the United States and Europe would continue to demonstrate a robust appetite for Chinese-produced goods. But western demand for Chinese products slowed in the wake of the financial crisis, leaving the Chinese economy with substantial overcapacity in manufacturing" (Australia's *Business Spectator*).

Yet there are other weak points in China's economic armor: "In recent years, China's growth has come heavily from massive infrastructure investment; China poured more cement and concrete between 2011 and 2013 than



■ **MONETARY HUB:** Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange in New York City (Jan. 15, 2016).

PHOTO: THIERRY SPENCER PLATT/GETTY IMAGES



■ **TUMBLING NUMBERS:** An investor observes the stock market at an exchange hall in Fuyang, China, during a volatile day of trading (Jan. 13, 2016).

PHOTO: CHINAFOTOPRESS/GETTY IMAGES

the US did in the whole of the 20th century. This, too, is unsustainable. Even if it is replaced by domestic services, China's contribution to demand for global commodities will fall" (*Financial Times*).

The International Monetary Fund downgraded its *global* economic growth forecast for 2016 to only 3.4 percent and 3.6 percent in 2017.

Much of this hinges on China's increasingly sluggish economy.

"The IMF forecast that growth in China will further slow to 6.3 percent this year and fall to 6 percent in 2017—below Beijing's official target for the pace of expansion," *The Washington Post* reported. "Many analysts are skeptical of the country's estimates of growth, and some fear its economy is in much worse shape than officials are willing to acknowledge.

"China's boom had been built on exporting its low-priced goods around the world, driving domestic investment in factories, equipment and infrastructure. China's seemingly insatiable demand for raw materials also helped buoy resource-rich countries such as Brazil and Zambia.

"Now the tide is turning."

It is only logical to ask: If China falls into a recession, will it drag the rest of the world with it?

To learn more about what the coming years will bring for the world's largest nation, read "China's Hazy Future" in this issue of *The Real Truth*.

Global Forecast

Aside from China, there are a number of other economic factors to watch in 2016.

■ **United Kingdom:** The world's fifth-largest market economy and Europe's second-largest (behind Germany), the United Kingdom is dominated by the service sector, which provides about two-thirds of its GDP and three-fourths of its total employment. As the fastest-growing G7 economy in 2014 and 2015, the UK is also expected to grow in 2016, investment analyst group *AllAboutAlpha* reported.

Yet there are worries of what will happen if the United Kingdom exits the European Union. Prime Minister David Cameron has promised a popular vote on whether the nation should remain in the power bloc. There are indications that this could be held in June or July of this year.

■ **Iran:** With economic sanctions having been lifted, Iran is determined "to win back its share of OPEC production at all costs," a senior economic official told *CNN*.

"The declining oil price is certainly not what we [economists] base our decisions on. And if the supply of oil is to decline, it should be the countries that increased their production while we were under sanctions that should scale back now—they should let Iran have its share of the market."

Many worry this will further cripple the global oil market.

■ **Russia:** "Huge spending on military hardware in an attempt to stem its decline in the Middle East is causing budgetary headaches for the government," *AllAboutAlpha* wrote.

The analyst group continued: "Tension with nearly all Russia's neighbors (Europe, Turkey, Middle East, U.S., etc.) will keep its economy mired in recession and the continued price collapse of its key commodity exports will put pressure on Vladimir Putin—who will respond as he always does—by banging the nationalist drum and kicking up trouble on his borders (most likely next in Moldova). This should be enough to ensure he maintains his position (if not his popularity)."

■ **Japan:** The world's third-largest market economy saw its minister for economic revitalization resign after allegations of political corruption. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said, "I feel responsible for appointing him, and I apologize to the Japanese people for this matter" (*The New York Times*).

The paper also stated: "His resignation comes amid mounting signs Japan's economic recovery is faltering, raising pressure on its central bank to inject still more cash into the economy on top of its already massive monetary stimulus."

Yet there are some bright spots on the economic landscape. The markets of Germany, India and the United States all are projected to perform fairly well during the remainder of the year.

Despite these few positive signs, the world economy is in rough shape—and will continue to be rocky unless substantial GLOBAL changes are made. □

DEADLY SUPERBUGS

What's After Antibiotics?

Seventy-five years after the discovery of penicillin, experts fear we have reached the end of the antibiotic age.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER AND EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

IN A SMALL, dimly lit hospital chapel, behind the first of four bare wooden pews, a man in his early 30s kneels in front of a cross at the front of the room, head bowed.

After a long moment of silence, he thinks, *How did we get here? It was supposed to be a routine procedure.*

For the first time since he was a child, he prays. *Why her?* he pleads.

His wife had come in for minor knee surgery. After the seemingly successful procedure, the area around her knee turned black and swollen.

Minutes pass and the man gets up to return to his wife's side.

Days later, he wheels his wife to the car. There is a bandage wrapped around the stub of a now amputated leg.

His prayer went unanswered.

The culprit? Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or MRSA (pronounced “mersa”) for short. This hard-to-cure superbug is an extreme form of staph infection. MRSA infections—which are contracted through open wounds and during surgical procedures—are common in healthcare facilities. Once in the bloodstream or lungs, it can lead to serious illness or death.

As with most bacteria, treating MRSA at the outset was simply a matter of administering antibiotics. But over the nearly 55 years since the organism's discovery, something changed. MRSA “learned” to resist ever-increasing and more powerful antidotes. The microbe mutated, hindering the usual cure.

It gets worse. MRSA is *dropping* in rank on the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Biggest Threats list. Why is this bad? It means other *even deadlier* antibiotic-resistant threats have emerged.

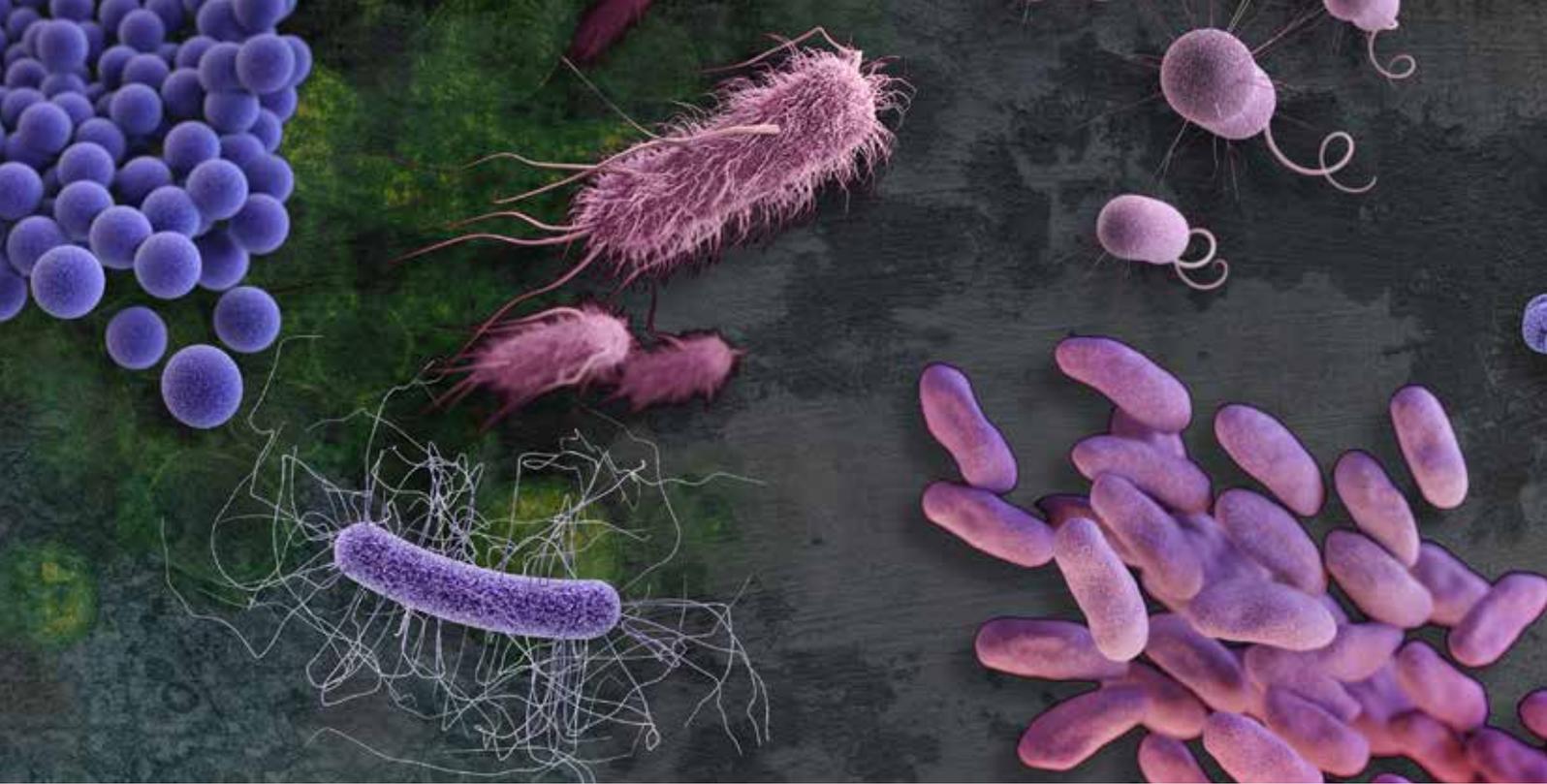
Topping the list is *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*). Listed as an *urgent threat*, it typically affects patients in hospitals or long-term care facilities. The bacteria attacks the human digestive system, causing nearly half a million infections annually just in the U.S.

Battling *C. difficile* has become a national priority as its financial impact has ballooned to a devastating \$4.8 billion annually.

CRE, which is short for carbapenem-resistant Enterobacteriaceae, is another emerging threat. A relatively new family of bacteria, its rapid spread is even more alarming due to its resistance to the most powerful antibiotics available. Unlike other antibiotic-resistant bacteria that took time to mutate, it has already managed to stymie even the most potent treatments. The deadly infection kills up to *half* its victims. Like MRSA and *C. difficile*, CRE is inextricably linked to treatment in healthcare facilities.

Hospital superbugs have become rampant, with the death toll quietly rising in the very place people go to *regain* their health. More and more, the path to wellness is becoming a path to the grave.

As these bacteria become stronger, doctors use the strongest antibiotics to combat them. But the bacteria continue to adapt and will soon overtake even the most powerful drugs. What happens when all antibiotic options run out?



Super Impact

According to the CDC: “MRSA occurs most frequently among patients who undergo invasive medical procedures or who have weakened immune systems and are being treated in hospitals and healthcare facilities such as nursing homes and dialysis centers. MRSA in healthcare settings commonly causes serious and potentially life threatening infections, such as bloodstream infections, surgical site infections, or pneumonia.”

As resistance to antibiotics has increased, hospitals have had to turn to vancomycin—“the drug of last resort”—to combat MRSA.

Regarding *C. difficile*, the CDC describes it as “a bacterium that causes diarrhea and more serious intestinal conditions such as colitis.” Symptoms include at least three bowel movements per day for two or more days, fever, loss of appetite, nausea and abdominal pain or tenderness.

An estimated 35,000 *C. difficile* infections occur per year in American hospitals, and tens of thousands more in nursing homes—with 15,000 to 20,000 killed annually.

The CRE family of bacteria is actually common in human intes-

tines. It becomes dangerous once it travels outside of this environment and into other parts of the body. Healthcare facilities can be breeding grounds for CRE infections since their staff routinely work with biohazardous waste and materials, increasing the likelihood of exposure. Also, the microbes affect those with compromised immune systems and those who routinely have tubes or other devices penetrating their bodies—both commonplace in the healthcare environment. Even the use of certain antibiotics can make it more likely that patients contract CRE.

These deadly superbugs are showing no sign of decrease. According to the CDC, between 1999 and 2005, MRSA hospitalizations more than doubled from 127,026 to 278,203. The year 2011 saw 11,285 deaths due to complications from the bacteria. That same year, 29,000 deaths were attributed to *C. difficile*. All of those deaths occurred within one month of diagnosis.

CRE deaths are significantly lower at about 600 per year. Yet the extraordinary level of resistance coupled with its rate of increase is what is troubling.

More worrisome is that even if you have a healthy immune system,

you can carry these virulent superbugs into the hospital environment without realizing it. Doctors can take them into exam rooms, family members can infect a patient they are visiting, and even surgeons can carry them into the operating room.

These bacteria can infect a person through a wound the size of a mosquito bite.

Growing the Bugs

How did these near-unstoppable bacteria grow to such formidable proportions?

For each decade following the 1928 discovery of penicillin, physicians prescribed antibiotics as “cure-alls” for just about everything. Have an earache? Take some Amoxicillin. Have bronchitis? Try Zithromax. Sinusitis? Trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole. Still won’t go away? Take moxifloxacin; it’s stronger.

Entire generations have been born and bred on this thinking. Nearly every trip to the doctor ends with a stop at the local drugstore—antibiotic prescription in hand.

Now the healthcare industry is reaping the effects of antibiotic overuse. What was once a giant safety net against disease has created mon-

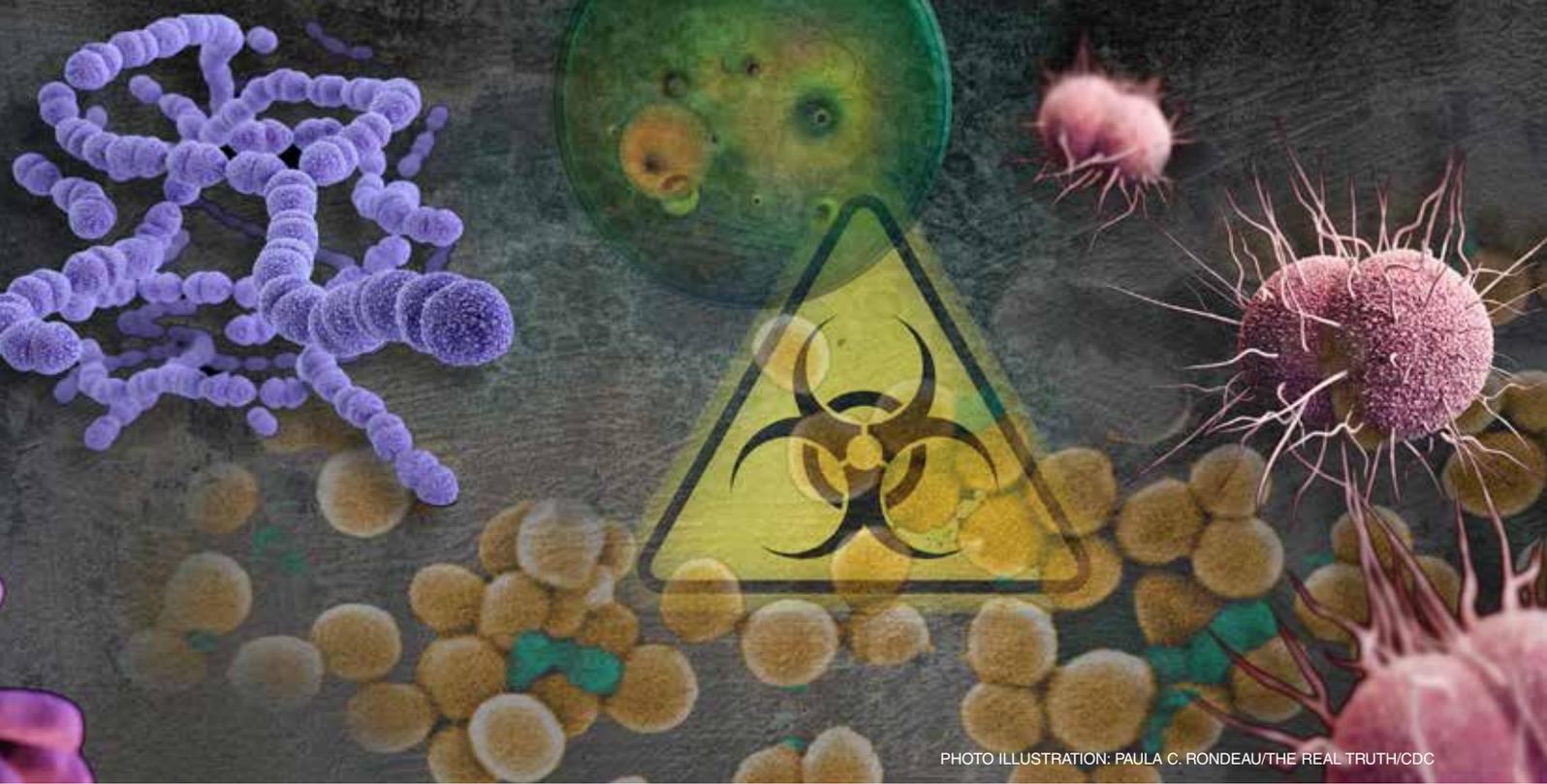


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: PAULA C. RONDEAU/THE REAL TRUTH/CDC

strous bacteria: *Clostridium difficile*, methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, and carbapenem-resistant Enterobacteriaceae, among others.

Why are antibiotics no longer working? Adaptation. After an *unwanted* bacterium is introduced, the body's immune system fights back. To aid this, physicians typically prescribe antibiotics (any drug that either kills bacteria or hampers their growth).

With each use, however, bacteria can begin to “resist” the drug using a number of tricks. Some make themselves less permeable so that the antibiotic cannot be absorbed. Other bacteria change their structure so that antibiotics no longer recognize and destroy them.

In the worst case, bacteria can produce an enzyme to dissolve the antibiotic—rendering it useless. In effect, the *hunter* antibiotic becomes the *hunted*!

Another danger associated with the misuse of antibiotics is that they destroy bacteria indiscriminately. The body also has healthy bacteria that aid in digestion and help protect the body.

In the case of *C. difficile*, a bacterium can often survive the initial course of antibiotics. This means that,

once all other bacterial competition is killed, it can grow and flourish. Often a person will be put on *another* round of *stronger* antibiotics—meaning that *C. difficile* can become stronger and more resistant as it spreads to new hosts. Antibiotics influence CRE similarly.

Scientists are finding that, after long courses of antibiotics, *C. difficile* patients can pass the bacterium's spores into the environment around them—even after treatment has ended and the patient appears symptom-free.

Researchers at the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute created a “mouse hospital” to simulate the spread of *C. difficile* in a healthcare environment.

“We treated mice with short and longer courses of antibiotics,” said Professor Gordon Dougan, Head of Pathogen Genetics at the Sanger Institute and senior author of the study. “After a short course most mice had dropped back to normal spore shedding levels around two weeks after cessation of the treatment. But after long term exposure to antibiotics some of the mice remained in their ‘supershedder’ state for weeks or even longer after treatment was stopped. We should consider that

patients still pose a considerable transmission threat some weeks after treatment is terminated even if they have not exhibited signs of *C. difficile* disease.”

Prevention Measures

The towering threat of drug-resistant superbugs has hospital, government and local officials scrambling for answers. Because these dangerous microbes can transfer from devices such as breathing machines and urinary and vein catheters, or contact from healthcare workers, there are no easy answers.

One solution is for medical facilities to test everyone for the bugs upon admission and quarantine those infected. Yet many hospitals fear potential lawsuits from patients who tested negative when they were admitted but became infected during their stay.

While implementing more tests and isolating infected patients have shown promising results, the main problem in the superbug fight is the over-prescription of antibiotics. Although researchers have noted a decline in antibiotic prescriptions for ear infections, stronger antibiotic types are still regularly overused.

“There is good news about declining antibiotic use, since inappropriate use of antibiotics can result in bacteria that are resistant to these antibiotics,” Dr. Marie R. Griffin, a professor of preventive medicine at Vanderbilt University Medical Center and co-author of a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, said. “However, overuse of powerful antibiotics remains a problem.”

But is it too little too late? Even as healthcare facilities work to quell outbreaks of superbugs *within* their walls—the virulent bacteria are increasingly turning up in the community *outside* their walls. Although researchers have yet to put an accurate number on superbug infections, newspapers regularly report outbreaks in gyms, public pools, and high school locker rooms.

Professor Richard James, an infections expert at the University of Nottingham, told *The Telegraph*: “The threat from [community-acquired] MRSA in the US is a very serious concern, especially if there is an epidemic. It could trigger a large number of cases of necrotizing pneumonia, which has a mortality rate of 50 per cent in 72 hours.”

The Real Problem

Antibiotics have been a pillar of medicine for nearly a century. In a sad twist of irony, the very drugs created to defeat diseases have helped form bacteria poised to run rampant. Yet mankind thinks it will dig itself out of this trouble once again. *Through our savvy and ingenuity, we can always remain one step ahead of disease, man reasons.*

But what happens when man’s solutions no longer work? Clearly the explosion of antibiotic-resistant bacteria in the midst of tremendous advancements in medicine is a sign that overconfidence in humanly devised solutions is misguided.

As progressive as mankind is, there is a great unseen law that he has failed to grasp. Not following it has led to countless failures.

The law? Cause and effect.

From the beginning, God gave mankind a choice—compliance or non-compliance. Each alternative either led to abundance and prosperity or suffering and despair.

Often relegated to a bedtime story, the instructions given to the first human beings, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, established the pattern by which God would deal with all their offspring.

Note God’s plain guidelines: “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:16-17). If you do this, good things will happen. If you do that, bad things will happen. Simple.

Regrettably, Adam and Eve made the wrong choice and not only did they suffer for it, their offspring did as well. Yet this should have come as no surprise. God’s instructions were plain.

This same principle applies today. God gives us a clear choice to either obey Him, which includes living His way of life, or follow our own way. Both decisions have consequences.

For nearly 6,000 years, man has decided to do things his way. Like our parents in the garden, we feel as though we know what is best for us, despite warning to the contrary. While many admirably dedicate their lives to administering medical care, the industry itself is fundamentally broken. Everything from the reason people get sick to how illness is treated is a sad mix of misery, ignorance, greed and self-reliance.

Few understand that God did not intend for mankind to exist this way. In fact, very few understand the God of the Bible at all. He is a Father that, like His earthly counterparts, wants His children to prosper.

Consider Jesus Christ’s words, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). God the Father is so committed to mankind prospering that He was willing to sacrifice His own Son.

Yet God will not force benefits upon us. They must come as a result of a conscious decision—a choice. Chapter 30 of Deuteronomy says, “...I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live” (vs. 19).

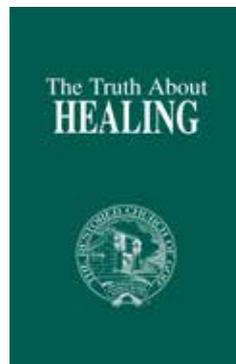
God is a God of consequences. He is not a monster waiting to punish the world undeservedly, nor is He a weak, inept Being who simply accepts indiscriminate conduct. He is a loving Creator who wants what is best for His children. He rewards obedience and punishes disobedience as any good parent would.

Understand, this is *not* a God preached from the pulpits on Sunday. This is *not* a God who makes empty promises. Rather, He is the God who will hear heartfelt, contrite prayers of repentance—and heals those who “seek...first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33).

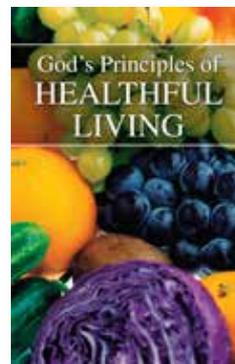
In the Old Testament book of Exodus, God declares He is “the LORD that heals you” (15:26). Healing is tied to obedience—doing what is right in God’s sight by keeping His

Commandments. This blessing points to a Being who is far from “fiery” and vengeful. Instead, He is a God who wants to see people prosper and succeed.

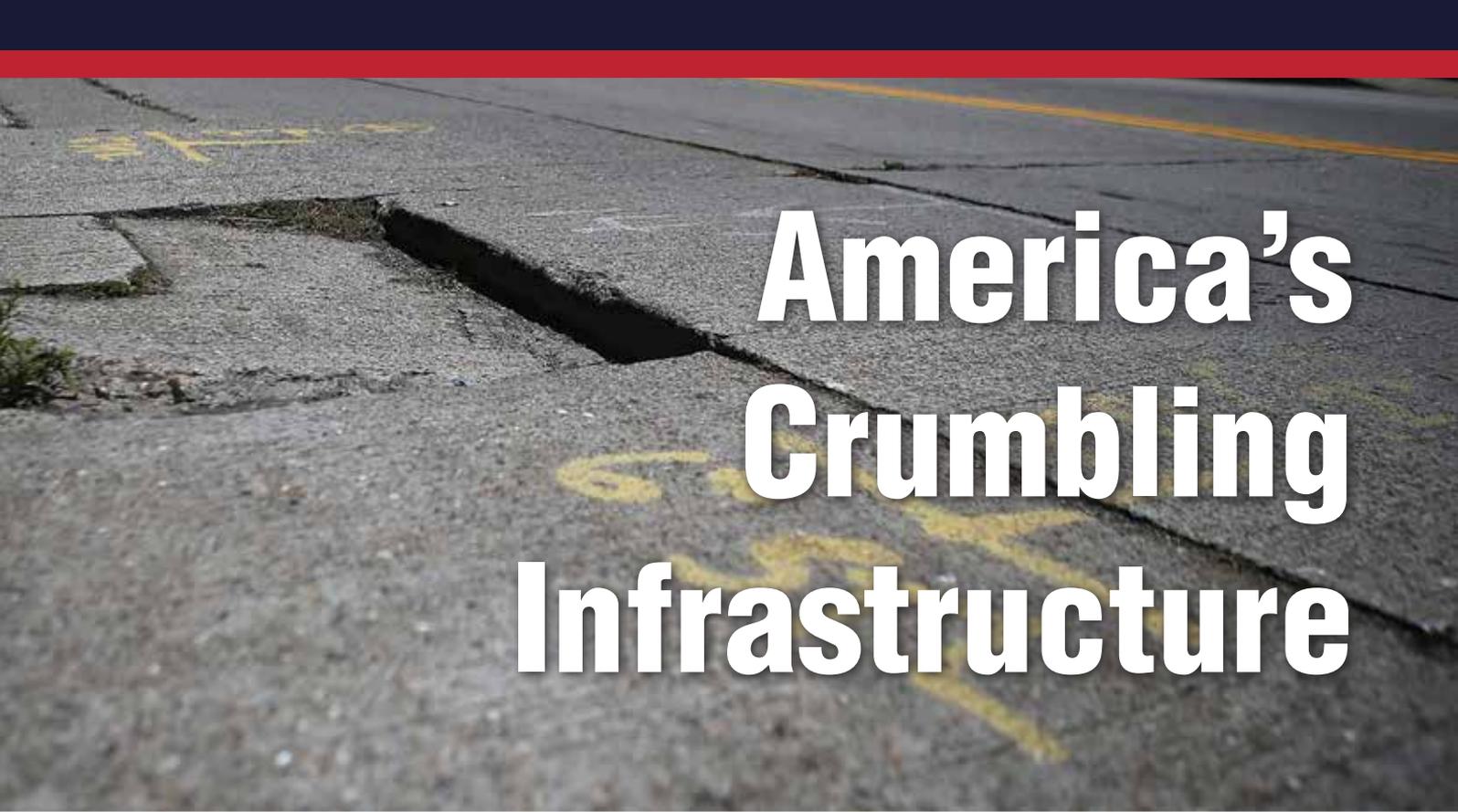
His promises of abundant health are outlined thoroughly in our booklets *The Truth About Healing*, which can be read at rcg.org/ttahe, and *God’s Principles of Healthful Living*, found at rcg.org/glohl. □



Order a Free Copy!
rcg.org/ttahe



Order a Free Copy!
rcg.org/glohl



America's Crumbling Infrastructure



■ **WEAKENED STRUCTURES:** Top, a large pothole forms in a street in San Francisco, California (July 28, 2015). Middle, firefighters survey the scene of a large sinkhole in New York City (Aug. 4, 2015). Bottom, a construction crew works under an interstate bridge in Forestville, Maryland (April 13, 2015).

PHOTOS: JUSTIN SULLIVAN/ (TOP); KENA BETANCUR/AFP/ (MIDDLE); MARK WILSON/ (BOTTOM); GETTY IMAGES



Millions in the United States believe their lifestyles filled with modern conveniences will continue forever. But the underpinnings of the country—including its electrical grids and transportation systems—tell a different story.

BY WILLIAM H. BEHRER

“**T**HERE ARE A LOT of people in the United States right now who think the country is falling apart, and at least in one respect they’re correct. Our roads and bridges are crumbling, our airports are out of date and the vast majority of our seaports are in danger of becoming obsolete. All the result of decades of neglect. None of this is really in dispute. Business leaders, labor unions, governors, mayors, congressmen and presidents have complained about a lack of funding for years, but aside from a onetime cash infusion from the stimulus program, nothing much has changed. There is still no consensus on how to solve the



■ **LOWERED STANDARDS:** Residents use bottled water after a federal state of emergency is declared in Flint, Michigan, due to a contaminated water supply (Jan. 21, 2016).

PHOTO: SARAH RICE/GETTY IMAGES

problem or where to get the massive amounts of money needed to fix it...”

This was the dire opening to a *60 Minutes* segment on America’s infrastructure. The public’s focus on this ongoing issue may have waned, but ignoring the problem is not making it go away. We are a mere tragedy away from facing the frightening reality of the nation’s condition.

The sweeping scale of the problem is not always foremost because infrastructure—power grids, water and sewer systems, etc.—is largely hidden from the naked eye. The average person gives little thought to it but for one exception: when it does not work.

In this age of modern technology, medical advances, and an International Space Station, it seems incredible that the vital infrastructure of the United States, the world’s most powerful nation, is collapsing. The major challenge? Tightened purse strings.

The Economist reported: “America saw two great booms in infrastructure spending in the past century, the first during the Great Depression...and the second in the 1950s and 60s, when most of the interstate highway system was [constructed]. Since then, public infrastructure spending as a share of

GDP has declined to about half the European level. America is one of the most car-dependent nations on earth, yet it spends about as large a share of GDP on roads as Sweden...The federal government scrimps on airports and sewage pipes so it can pay for pensions and health care.”

Most do not realize that the U.S. is hurtling toward a time when vital utilities will regularly drop out, roadways will become impassable due to disrepair, and blackouts will cripple metropolitan areas.

Millions believe the comfort and luxury afforded to nearly every American will go on forever. But, without *drastic* intervention, the nation inevitably faces ruinous collapse.

America Scores Low

“We’ve been talking about this for many many years,” Patrick Natale, executive director of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), told *CNN*. “We really haven’t had the leadership or will to take action on it. The bottom line is that a failing infrastructure cannot support a thriving economy.”

After reviewing several areas of America’s infrastructure, ASCE

issued its 2013 report card (the most recent data available), which gave the nation a bleak cumulative ranking of “D+.”

The results for the individual categories were equally telling: Aviation, D; Bridges, C+; Dams, D; Drinking Water, D; Energy, D+; Hazardous Waste, D; Inland Waterways, D-; Levees, D-; Public Parks and Recreation, C-; Rail, C+; Roads, D; Schools, D; Solid Waste, B-; Wastewater, D; Transit, D.

In 2009, the ASCE grade was D.

Despite a slight improvement in the cumulative ranking, conditions remain relatively the same nearly seven years later.

Imagine if your child brought home the same poor grades year after year. You would certainly take action! However, American infrastructure is able to skate by with barely passing grades because the situation is *seemingly* not yet dire.

The ASCE estimates that the U.S. needs \$3.6 trillion by 2020 to address all of these concerns. This is staggering—especially when considering that the nation is plagued by ever-increasing debt. Daily, the government spends an average of \$9.5 bil-



lion—with total U.S. debt over \$19 trillion. Because of massive expenditures on the military, healthcare and education—and necessarily so—there is little room in the government’s budget to spend trillions of dollars on infrastructure nationwide.

Shaky Foundation—Shaky Future

How important to the health of our nation is our infrastructure? Just as the proper functioning of the circulatory, nervous and skeletal systems is vital to your body’s health and well-being, the nation’s infrastructure is vital to the success of its citizens. Utilities and services must be maintained to allow Americans to live the way they do. Without them, nearly everything in the U.S. comes to an immediate halt.

The 2013 ASCE report card detailed the level of disrepair and decay and showed how infrastructure plays into almost every part of day-to-day life.

Roads: “Forty-two percent of America’s major urban highways remain congested, costing the economy an estimated \$101 billion in wasted time and fuel annually. While the conditions have improved in the



■ **DEADLY FAILURE:** Navy divers survey and assess the wreckage of the I-35W bridge collapse in Minneapolis, Minnesota (August 7, 2007). The tragedy, which killed 13 and injured 145 people, is one of the most well-known examples of failed infrastructure.

PHOTO: JOSHUA ADAM NUZZO/U.S. NAVY VIA GETTY IMAGES

near term, and Federal, state, and local capital investments increased to \$91 billion annually, that level of investment is insufficient and still projected to result in a decline in conditions and performance in the long term. Currently, the Federal Highway Administration estimates that \$170 billion in capital investment would be needed on an annual basis to significantly improve conditions and performance.”

Bridges: “Over two hundred million trips are taken daily across deficient bridges in the nation’s 102 largest metropolitan regions. In total, one in nine of the nation’s bridges are rated as structurally deficient, while the average age of the nation’s 607,380 bridges is currently 42 years. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) estimates that to eliminate the nation’s bridge deficient backlog by 2028, we would need to invest \$20.5 billion annually, while only \$12.8 billion is being spent currently. The challenge for federal, state, and local governments is to increase bridge infrastructure investments by \$8 billion annually to address the identified \$76 billion in needs for deficient bridges across the United States.”

Drinking Water: “At the dawn of the 21st century, much of our drinking water infrastructure is nearing the end of its useful life. There are an estimated 240,000 water main breaks per year in the United States. Assuming every pipe would need to be replaced, the cost over the coming decades could reach more than \$1 trillion, according to the American Water Works Association (AWWA). The quality of drinking water in the United States remains universally high, however. Even though pipes and mains are frequently more than 100 years old and in need of replacement, outbreaks of disease attributable to drinking water are rare.”

Public Transportation: “America’s public transit infrastructure plays a vital role in our economy, connecting millions of people with jobs, medical facilities, schools, shopping, and recreation, and it is critical to the one-third of Americans who do not drive cars. Unlike many U.S. infrastructure systems, the transit system is not comprehensive, as 45% of American households lack any access to transit, and millions more have inadequate service levels. Americans who do have access have increased their ridership 9.1% in the past decade,



■ **FAULTY STRUCTURE:** Water gushes from a water main after it breaks at a construction site in New York City (Oct. 23, 2015).

PHOTO: ANDREW BURTON/GETTY IMAGES

and that trend is expected to continue. Although investment in transit has also increased, deficient and deteriorating transit systems cost the U.S. economy \$90 billion in 2010, as many transit agencies are struggling to maintain aging and obsolete fleets and facilities amid an economic downturn that has reduced their funding, forcing service cuts and fare increases.”

Other areas of America’s infrastructure require the following budget increases in order to be repaired:

- Wastewater: \$298 billion
- Schools: \$270 billion
- Levees: \$100 billion
- Dams: \$21 billion

The list goes on and on.

Widespread Blackouts

One of the most outdated and overburdened parts of America’s infrastructure, which its citizens perhaps most take for granted, is the electrical grid.

What would life be like without electricity? When did you last walk up 42 stories due to an inoperable elevator? How would you prepare meals without a stove or microwave? Failed

alarm systems, downed traffic lights, dead telephone lines, and no Internet access are just a few of the additional problems you would face.

The ASCE states the electrical grid is in urgent need of modernization.

“The electric grid in the United States consists of a system of interconnected power generation, transmission facilities, and distribution facilities, some of which date back to the 1880s. Today, we have an aging and complex patchwork system of power generating plants, power lines, and substations that must operate cohesively to power our homes and businesses. There are thousands of power generating plants and systems spread across the United States and almost 400,000 miles of electric transmission lines. With the addition of new gas-fired and renewable generation, the need to add new transmission lines has become even greater.

“Aging equipment has resulted in an increasing number of intermittent power disruptions, as well as vulnerability to cyber attacks. Significant power outages have risen from 76 in 2007 to 307 in 2011...Reliability

issues are also emerging due to the complex process of rotating in new energy sources and ‘retiring’ older infrastructure.”

A report from *International Business Times* stated that the average number of power outages increases each year, and that blackouts cost American business \$150 billion annually.

What happens when the power ceases to flow?

In the summer of 2003, the power went out for much of the northeastern United States, as well as parts of eastern Canada.

The New York Times reported during the event: “Office workers who were still at their desks watched their computer monitors blink off without warning on a hot and hazy afternoon. Soon hospitals and government buildings were switching on backup generators to keep essential equipment operating, and the police were evacuating people trapped in elevators.”

“Traffic jams grew to dozens of miles long, stranding buses and even emergency vehicles, as police officers and platoons of well-meaning citizens tried to control the streets with hand-lettered stop-and-go signs. Hundreds of subway and commuter trains were paralyzed, some in tunnels, including a Long Island Rail Road train that was trapped beneath the East River with no air-conditioning for almost two hours.”

The blackout affected as many “as 50 million customers in the United States and Canada, as well as a wide range of vital services and commerce,” ASCE reported. “Air and ground transportation systems shut down, trapping people far from home; drinking water systems and sewage processing plants stopped operating, manufacturing was disrupted and some emergency communications systems stopped functioning. The lost productivity and revenue have been estimated in the billions of dollars.”

Region-wide loss of power cripples the flow of everyday life. No electricity means no television, no place to charge your cellphone, no Internet

■ **POWER FAILURE:** Customers wait in line following a power outage in Washington, D.C. (April 7, 2015).

PHOTO: ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



access, no working gas pumps—virtually every part of the daily routine is affected.

The 2003 blackout was relatively short-lived. Consider if the outages were longer—what violence, looting and rioting would soon grip a city in darkness?

Disaster upon Disaster

The United States must summon \$3.6 trillion over the next four years to begin fixing its deteriorating physical foundation. This is \$3.6 trillion the nation does not have. For the once-towering economic leader, this is a tragic and crippling problem.

Crumbling infrastructure means one thing for the individual—without drastic and widespread intervention, each individual in America is destined for a severe change of life. One with spotty electricity, less Internet access, impassible roads riddled with potholes, more deadly gas leaks and explosions, higher food prices, and water that has to be boiled to ensure it is safe to drink.

To the average American citizen, this is unthinkable. Yet just sitting down to watch a daily 30-minute news program reveals a different view. On top of failing bridges and roadways, outdated electrical grids and levee systems, and pipes bursting every two minutes are news report after news report of countless tragedies—crises of all kinds—disaster upon disaster.

Unemployment, immigration woes, pension and social security concerns, homegrown terrorists, oil spills, earthquakes and citywide flooding are just a small sample of what America faces. Put together, these crises will cost the nation additional trillions.

After reviewing the facts, one can feel defeated and think: *How did we get ourselves to this point? Why has it come to this?*

Unknown to most, this coming period for America was foretold long ago—and with it comes the reason for the United States' decline.

The Old Testament of the Bible details the coming state of the nation:



■ **OIL-STAINED BEACH:** Officials survey an oil-covered beach near Goleta, California, after about 21,000 gallons spilled from an abandoned pipeline and spread over four miles within hours (May 19, 2015).

PHOTO: AL SEIB/LOS ANGELES TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES

“Mischief shall come upon mischief, and rumor shall be upon rumor” (Ezek. 7:26). The antiquated language hides the true meaning of the phrase. The *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* entry for “mischief” includes the terms *ruin* and *disaster*. The word “rumor” includes the terms *news* and *report*.

Certainly, there is tragic news report after tragic news report today! Before one set of crises is addressed, another consumes the nation.

Yet God’s Word reveals that—while events will improve for a time—they will ultimately become much worse. The book of Ezekiel states, “An end is come, the end is come: it [awakes against you]; behold, it is come” (7:6).

There is a period ahead when disasters and ruin will pile upon one another.

During this time, the consumer-driven economy will cease to exist: “The time is come, the day draws near: let not the *buyer* rejoice, nor the *seller* mourn: for wrath is upon all the multitude thereof” (vs. 12).

Accumulated luxury items will be useless: “They shall cast their silver

in the streets, and their gold shall be removed: their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD” (vs. 19).

Ezekiel also states that there comes a point when God intends to punish America. When that time comes, His judgment will be swift and exacting.

“Now I will shortly pour out My fury upon you, and accomplish My anger upon you: and I will judge you according to your ways, and will recompense you for all your abominations” (vs. 8).

But why would He do this?

Before punishment, there will be a warning about national sins and what will come if there is no change. God always warns before chastisement, leaving no excuse for those who continue in ruinous behavior.

That warning message, detailed in the pages of the Bible, is plainly explained on *The World to Come* program presented by David C. Pack. This broadcast, coupled with unique analysis found in *The Real Truth* magazine, will continue to paint the picture of what is to come—and how it will affect you. □

Many think this popular festival is connected to Christ's Resurrection, but do passages within God's Word prove otherwise?

BY F. JACO VILJOEN

A BOY LEAPS out of bed, filled with excitement. Today will be a special day for him and his family. He bounds down the stairs and discovers a reed basket filled with beautifully painted eggs and chocolate rabbits. He cannot wait to dive into the goodies!

His anticipation grows as he thinks of the fun he will have. Lent, a 40-day period during which worshippers try to emulate Christ's suffering by fasting and abstaining from certain pleasures, is finally over—and Easter Sunday is here!

As he tears the wrapper off an egg-shaped chocolate treat, his mother explains to him the significance of the day: "Son, on Friday we commemorated the crucifixion and death of our Savior, so today—Easter Sunday—we celebrate His Resurrection."

For millions around the globe, this narrative is typical of their own Easter celebrations.

Jerusalem, where the most well-known Easter celebrations take place, is jam-packed with worshippers from all across the world. Along the famous cobble street Via Dolorosa—Latin for "Way of Suffering"—thousands of parishioners walk the path Christ is believed to have taken on His way to Golgotha. To them, and millions of like-minded professing Christians, Easter is the principal feast of the liturgical year.

Elsewhere, a group of devout women in Peshawar, Pakistan, gathers around a picture of "Jesus" to reflect on the significance of the day and give prayers of thanksgiving. Farther east, thousands of South Korean Catholics attend services.

Later that evening, several German Christians in Europe light a custom-

ary bonfire to protect them against the cold. Meanwhile, during a traditional ceremony in Bulgaria, priests bless painted red eggs, which symbolize spring. And several time zones away, an Armenian priest in New York City releases doves to illustrate how the original 12 apostles were commissioned to "spread the gospel."

Certainly, long-held traditions such as Ash Wednesday, Lent, Good Friday, sunrise services, hot-cross buns, Easter eggs, and rabbits—which form the building blocks upon which Easter is established—must have deep ancient roots. If Easter traditions are all about the Christ of the Bible, then they should be found within the pages of God's Word.

But are they?

While Acts 12:4 is the only time the word "Easter" is mentioned in the King James translation of the Bible, the customs of this holiday appeared long before Christ's Resurrection.

Origin of Easter

American novelist Henry James once wrote the following about traditions: "It takes an endless amount of history to make even a little tradition..."

Throughout the centuries, millions of people have been persuaded into believing that Easter's purpose is to honor Christ's death and Resurrection. Yet this age-old global tradition can be traced back to thousands of years before Jesus was born.

"That God sacrificed his only Son for the salvation of the world... is so mystical, so remote...yet the extraordinary fact is that a similar belief ranges all through the ancient religions, and can be traced back to the earliest times," Edward Carpenter wrote in *Pagan and Christian Creeds*.

Easter customs involving the celebration of death and resurrection originate from pagan rites. In his

book *The Two Babylons*, Alexander Hislop explained, "Among the Pagans this Lent seems to have been an indispensable preliminary to the great annual festival in commemoration of the death and resurrection of Tammuz, which was celebrated by alternate weeping and rejoicing."

The Bible records in Genesis that Nimrod, also known as Tammuz or Baal, was the founding father and builder of Babylon. His mother-wife, Semiramis, also called Ishtar, was Babylon's first queen. She was worshipped as a goddess.

Ashtoreth (Easter), Baal's mother and wife according to historians, was considered the "Great Goddess" throughout the ancient world, in Greece, Germany, Babylon and Phoenicia. This generally occurred in conjunction with the worship of Baal (El or Tammuz).

This is made evident in the book *Did God Have a Wife?* by William G. Dever. He wrote: "In earlier Canaan, the Great Goddess may be a cosmic deity who could be known by several names: Asherah; 'Anat; Astarte; or Ba'alat or Elath (the feminine forms of 'Ba'al' and 'El')."

"Her role in the cult is as the consort of El, the principal male deity of the pantheon, as 'Mother of the Gods,'" Dr. Dever further wrote.

Alexander Hislop elaborated on the origin of Easter (or Astarte) in his book *The Two Babylons*: "It bears its Chaldean origin on its very forehead. Easter is nothing else than Astarte, one of the titles of Beltis, the queen of heaven...That name, as found by Layard on the Assyrian monuments, is Ishtar."

In nearly all Semitic dialects, "Ishtar" is pronounced "Easter." Easter festivities extensively refer to celebrating the personage Ishtar,

Ashtoreth and the “queen of heaven,” who has many interchangeable names. Each year, citizens in pagan nations celebrated her son’s death and resurrection during spring.

Plainly, this festival was initiated *long* before Christ walked the Earth.

Easter and the Bible

Ancient Israel incorporated some of the practices of surrounding nations, and Easter was no exception. It is in this regard that the holiday is mentioned in the Bible.

After the house of Israel was divided into the northern 10 tribes and Judah in the south, King Manasseh of Judah “set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house [the Temple of God]” (II Kings 21:7).

But to what is “the grove” referring?

The Hebrew word *asherah*, with two exceptions, is always translated as “grove” in the King James Version of the Bible. *Smith’s Bible Dictionary* defines *asherah* in the following way: “The name of a Phoenician goddess, or rather of the idol itself...Asherah is closely connected with Ashtoreth and her worship...Ashtoreth being, perhaps, the proper name of the goddess, while Asherah is the name of her image or symbol, which was of wood.”

Dr. Dever, in his book, wrote, “Thus it seems clear that originally in ancient Israel there was a Goddess named ‘Asherah,’ who was associated with living trees and hilltop forest sanctuaries, and who could sometimes be symbolized by a wooden pole or an image of a tree.”

He added, “It is noteworthy that in at least a handful of cases, the term *asherah* must refer to the Goddess Asherah herself, not merely to a ‘symbol.’”

Thus, when Israel’s ruler erected a figure of “the grove,” he may have actually set up an image of Asherah in God’s Temple!

Throughout Israel’s history, its people attempted to serve false gods alongside the God of the Bible. The book of Jeremiah makes clear that

families in Israel also worshipped Easter—the “queen of heaven.”

Notice: “The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods” (Jer. 7:18).

Israel’s devotion to false deities is also engraved in the annals of secular sources. Archeological evidence indicates that the nation of Israel fell into keeping Easter, thinking they could worship Ishtar alongside the true God. Archaeologists have found tomb inscriptions in Israel that read, “Yahweh and his Asherah,” erroneously suggesting God had a goddess as wife!

“Throughout Israel’s history, its people attempted to serve false gods alongside the God of the Bible... families in Israel also worshipped Easter—the ‘queen of heaven.’”

When God started to work with Israel early on, His instructions through Moses were clear: “You shall not plant you a *grove* of any trees near unto the altar of the LORD your God, which you shall make you” (Deut. 16:21).

Moreover, “you shall destroy their altars,” referring to the surrounding nations’ many idols, “and break down their images, and cut down their *groves*, and burn their graven images with fire” (Deut. 7:5). These directions from God were unmistakably plain.

But, time and time again, “the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim [plural of Baal] and the groves [Asherah]” (Judg. 3:7).

Israel’s behavior was clearly *evil* in God’s sight!

Even King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, rejected God’s counsel and was persuaded by his foreign wives to worship Ashtoreth. As a result, the house of Israel split into north and south—directly because “Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians” (I Kings 11:5).

In biblical times, without any exceptions, God’s true servants never celebrated Easter to honor Him and Israel was directly forbidden to have any part in it.

Lost in Translation

How did Easter—clearly a festival not sanctioned by God—become “Christian”?

“The idea of Christ’s resurrection was injected into the old practice of Easter observance and not the other way around” (*Early Gentile Christianity and its Hellenistic Background*).

The Greek word translated “Easter” in Acts 12:4 is *pascha*. This refers to Passover, which was always kept on the 14th day of the Hebrew month of Nisan (Abib). It was *Passover*, not Easter, that God commanded His people to observe, and they did so throughout early New Testament time. “Easter” in Acts 12:4 is a gross mistranslation.

But slowly, Easter, with all its pagan customs, replaced Passover. Disagreement arose surrounding the correct observance of the day, which led to the “Quartodeciman Controversy.”

The following quote from the 11th edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* shows how Easter was “Christianized:” “Polycarp, the disciple of St. John the Evangelist and bishop of Smyrna, visited Rome in 159 to confer with Anicetus, the bishop of

that see, on the subject; and urged the tradition, which he had received from the apostle, of observing the fourteenth day...A final settlement of the dispute was one among the other reasons which led Constantine to summon the council of Nicaea in 325...The decision of the council was unanimous that Easter was to be kept on Sunday, and on the same Sunday throughout the world, and 'that none should hereafter follow the blindness of the Jews'..."

In his book, *History of the Christian Church*, Peter Schaff wrote, "At Nicaea, therefore, the Roman and Alexandrian usage with respect to Easter triumphed, and the Judaizing practice of the Quartodecimarians [those obeying God], who always celebrated Easter [actually Passover] on the fourteenth of Nisan, became thenceforth a heresy."

Britannica stated: "There is no indication of the observance of the Easter festival in the New Testament, or in the writings of the apostolic Fathers...The first Christians continued to observe the Jewish festivals [God's festivals of Leviticus 23], though in a new spirit...Thus the Passover, with a new conception added to it of Christ as the true Paschal Lamb...continued to be observed."

The apostle Paul exhorted New Testament brethren to continue to keep these Holy Days: "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the *feast*, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the *unleavened bread* of sincerity and truth" (I Cor. 5:7-8). Matthew 26:19 states that the "disciples did as

Jesus had appointed them" and commanded His disciples to make "ready the Passover."

In Matthew 28:20, Christ also instructed His disciples "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you..."

Clearly, Christ commanded the Passover—connected with the Feast of Unleavened Bread—to be kept as a "statute forever" (Lev. 23:31). Easter is a human tradition that was never commanded by the God of the Bible.

Mystery Unwrapped

Every child loves to receive a gift, but does not know its contents until the gift paper is unwrapped. Professing Christians similarly hold fast the traditions of men in keeping Easter, but are blind to its real meaning or "content."

Rejecting God's instruction, men concealed a pagan festival in "Christian giftwrap" to make it acceptable to the masses. But when Easter is unwrapped, the true content is unmistakable. Suddenly, the parallel between the pagan feast kept in ancient times and the present-day Easter celebrations becomes painfully obvious.

These festivals are one and the same. Easter has the power to convince people to believe that this day is all about Christ—but when exposed, it shows that it has everything to do with a pagan deity.

Today, the ancient unbiblical Easter tradition is still celebrated worldwide. Millions gather each year to celebrate the death of their "savior" (on Good Friday) and his resurrection (on Easter Sunday). They sincerely believe that they honor Christ, but little do they know that they are unwittingly serving "another Jesus"! (See II Corinthians 11:4.)

With the wrappings of Easter removed, it becomes plain that any attempt to Christianize the holiday is in "vain" (Mark 7:7).

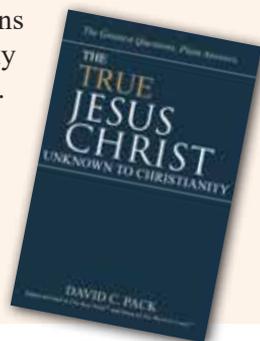
To more fully understand Easter and its customs—as well as "another Jesus"—read *The True Origin of Easter* at rsg.org/ttooe and *The True Jesus Christ – Unknown to Christianity* at rsg.org/ttjc. □

How Well Do You Know Jesus Christ?

Test your Bible knowledge: Are the following statements true or false?

- Jesus was an only child.
- He had long, flowing hair.
- He taught that if you believe in Him you will go to heaven.
- He did away with the commandments.
- He preached a gospel about Himself.

All of these statements are false! Millions claim to "know Christ," but few search deeply into what God's Word actually says about Him. The true picture of Jesus is much more exciting and important than most realize. Find out more in the one-of-a-kind book *The True Jesus Christ – Unknown to Christianity*. Order your free copy at rsg.org/ttjc.



PERSONAL

Continued from page 2

as telescopes that can probe the outer reaches of the universe or computers that can perform trillions of calculations per second. Men were given the capacity to reason out and design these and many other highly complex, technical inventions.

Education in physical knowledge is therefore important.

Here is why. Much of Earth's population lives in abject poverty, disease, filth, squalor and illiteracy. They lack the most fundamental education that developed "have" nations enjoy. So, basic education can bring *physical* improvements and advancements for civilization.

Surely 6,000 years of misery, unhappiness and every conceivable evil, ill and woe that humanity has suffered ought to tell the world it should carefully heed the Instruction Book it has ignored. Yet man continues to reject God's SPIRITUAL REVELATION.

However, cut off from revealed laws and truths, man still possesses the power of human reasoning, which sadly has led to weapons of mass destruction, terror, cruelty, slavery, repression, pollution, crime, religious confusion, and so much more. Hence, man's misery and woes compound and mount at every turn.

But remember, God's process of SPIRITUAL CREATION is still in progress. It is *not complete!*

Product of God's Workmanship

Let's continue examining the bigger picture of God's PURPOSE. God is fashioning, molding and building His very character in those He calls. Notice: "O LORD, You are our Father; we are the CLAY, and You our POTTER; and we all are the WORK OF YOUR HAND" (Isa. 64:8).

Most have no idea God works within human beings He has called—or *what* He is doing in them. God is now actively working in the minds of only those *few* who have His Holy Spirit (read Acts 2:38). Humans are not *born*

with God's character. And, again, God cannot instantly infuse them with it. Character must be *developed*.

The true Christian increases in understanding and "grow[s] in grace, and...knowledge" (II Pet. 3:18). He endures a lifetime of overcoming because he is in training for a great purpose. Those called know "he that shall ENDURE unto the *end*, the same shall be *SAVED*" (Matt. 24:13).

Paul understood how God works in Christians. He recognized that salvation (Rom. 6:23), and even faith to receive it, are free gifts. They cannot be earned. But this does not mean God is not *actively working* (requiring good works) in people, as He REPRODUCES HIMSELF.

Consider: "By *grace* are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the *gift* of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. FOR WE ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP, created in Christ Jesus *unto* GOOD WORKS, which God has before ordained that we should WALK IN THEM" (Eph. 2:8-10).

Did you catch the phrase Paul used—"we are *His* workmanship"? What could be plainer? The verse continued by saying Christians must "walk" in "good works." The false notion of "just believing in Jesus" thwarts God's Supreme Purpose of fashioning people through careful WORKMANSHIP, like a potter with clay.

Salvation, though of "grace... through faith," involves good works. This means salvation is a *process*, not something that happens immediately upon supposedly just "giving your heart to Jesus."

Here is more: "If any man be in Christ, he is a *new creature*..." (II Cor. 5:17). Those God is working with are literally NEW CREATIONS! The one who serves God is being transformed in his mind. He seeks to replace his own will with God's will in all matters. He seeks to please God—not *self!*

The Human Spirit

There is another crucial element of man's potential to understand. While

man is composed of flesh, he has a *non-physical* component, which can only be understood through what God has revealed in His Holy Word. The Bible records, "There is a *spirit in man*: and the inspiration of the Almighty gives them understanding" (Job 32:8). This is plain. Here, God reveals men possess a kind of spirit—called the "spirit in man."

Because man is made of physical matter, God, composed of spirit, had to have a way for Himself to be able to work with and communicate with man (flesh). Notice this: "... The LORD, which stretches forth the heavens, and lays the foundation of the earth, *and forms the spirit of man within him*" (Zech. 12:1). God created, designed and formed the spirit of man in each human being.

Now an astonishing verse: "What man knows the things of a man, save the *spirit of man* which is in him? Even so the things of God knows no man, but the *Spirit of God*" (I Cor. 2:11).

Do not try to interpret this verse. Accept it for what it says. It identifies two different kinds of spirit—the "Spirit of God" and the "spirit of man." Each provides a different function in acquiring knowledge. This verse identifies how.

Human knowledge ("the things of a man") is acquired because God has given men a human spirit. Paul makes clear that spiritual knowledge ("the things of God") can only be acquired by the presence of the *Spirit of God*. Even this very knowledge—that these two spirits exist and how they work—is in itself truly amazing! Virtually no one has the knowledge about HOW either *physical* or *spiritual* KNOWLEDGE is acquired!

All human beings were created by God to receive two entirely different spirits. One comes at conception. The other by repentance and baptism. Without God's Spirit, people are *incomplete*. Their existence remains limited to what they can acquire on their own without God's help. Thus, vast amounts of *spiritual* knowledge remain beyond reach. Though the

human ability to acquire physical knowledge is beyond animals, men cannot attain any of this other marvelous understanding.

Proverbs offers important insight: “The *spirit of man* is the candle of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly” (20:27). Think of this verse in the following way: God can work within a physical brain—communicating with and inspiring it—by means of, or through use of, the non-physical component of this spirit.

God Preserves the Spirit in Man

In the *converted* mind, both the Spirit of God and spirit of man are present. They work jointly: “The Spirit itself bears witness WITH *our* spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom. 8:16). This is fascinating to know. The converted person differs from animals in two distinct ways.

At the end of the converted person’s life, God returns the human spirit to Himself. In it He has preserved a detailed record of all that pertained to the life of that individual. This is the plain statement of scripture: “...I pray God *your whole spirit* and soul and body be *preserved* blameless unto the coming of our LORD Jesus Christ” (I Thes. 5:23).

The spirit, soul and body represent all that was the person. The personality, experiences, accumulated knowledge, and character of each human being is reflected in the human spirit.

Next is the capstone verse that explains the preservation of all human spirits and exactly where God keeps them: “You are come unto mount Zion [in prayer, is the context], and unto the city of the living God, *the heavenly Jerusalem*, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to *the spirits of just men made perfect*” (Heb. 12:22-23). This is an incredible passage. The God of “all spirits” (and of all “just men made perfect”) keeps them with Him until the Resurrection.

It is in heaven—specifically heavenly Jerusalem—where the spirits of all God’s saints since Creation are *preserved*, awaiting the “coming of our LORD Jesus Christ” (I Thes. 5:23).

Reuniting with the Human Spirit

The spirit in man neither changes nor resurrects the person. This comes from God’s Spirit, first working in the mind. We saw that, at the Resurrection, the spirit in man will UNITE with the Holy Spirit. We will be exactly the same, except made of spirit and therefore will no longer have human nature or the pulls of the flesh.

“In the *converted* mind, both the Spirit of God and spirit of man are present. They work jointly: ‘The Spirit itself bears witness WITH *our* spirit, that we are the children of God’ (Rom. 8:16).”

Think of man’s spirit like a cassette tape of *everything* we have ever learned or done—the very mold of the mind for our coming spirit body, containing the memory, character and experiences of each human being. In a sense, like any cassette tape, it can be *played back*. Yet it cannot have or give life, or function by itself. It must be connected to a physical brain—or a spirit mind at the Resurrection.

Like one working with a computer, the spirit in man works *with* the brain to form the amazing HUMAN MIND!

Science will never discover this knowledge. What you have just learned almost no one knows!

But Whose Righteousness?

It is supremely important—absolutely vital!—to grasp that Christians only grow through being connected to Christ. The Bible often speaks of “Christ in us” (Gal. 2:20; 4:19; Col. 1:27; Eph. 3:17; II Cor. 13:5). The Christian does not do the character-building works. Christ, at work in him, does them. The Father guides the process as a person remains in contact with Him through the Spirit of Christ (and God) in him.

Keep this clear. It is not anything *you* do of and by yourself that produces works of righteousness. Some do not understand God’s role in building character and righteousness: “They being *ignorant* of GOD’s righteousness, and going about to establish their OWN righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the *righteousness of God*” (Rom. 10:3).

It is a complete waste of effort to build your *own* character, your *own* works of righteousness. They gain you *nothing* with God. All spiritual growth comes from Him! But you must do *your part* in yielding to God.

Paul wrote, “We are laborers *together* with God: you are GOD’s HUSBANDRY [meaning tillage or crops], you are GOD’s BUILDING” (I Cor. 3:9). This is profound knowledge. God is a husbandman—a farmer. He is *building* a Family. True Christians are the product of *His* husbandry—*His* workmanship.

GOD, not any man, is building His Church. Jesus said, “I will build My Church” (Matt. 16:18). No wonder Paul wrote, “You are God’s building.” Yes, God is building something very special within those He calls.

Of course, every stable building has a proper foundation. This helps it remain solid. Paul adds, “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is *Jesus Christ*” (I Cor. 3:11). May your life come to be built on the stable, solid foundation of the true Jesus Christ at work in you!

The Role of Suffering

Man's allotted time under Satan will soon be over, and *all* human beings will be taught about their incredible potential. The terrible suffering, misery and insoluble problems of a world cut off from God will no longer exist. His mercy will soon end all of this forever.

But why has such terrible suffering been necessary—and for so long? What purpose has it played in God's Master Plan?

Much! Jesus, as "Captain of [our] salvation," was made "PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERINGS" (Heb. 2:10). It is crucial to understand *why* Jesus had to suffer. Hebrews explains clearly: "Though He were a Son, yet LEARNED HE OBEDIENCE by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him" (5:8-9).

What a big verse to grasp. Suffering kicks the spiritual learning mechanism into gear. When people suffer—encounter adversity—they LEARN (read Ecc. 7:14)! They gain experience—learn crucial lessons. This is critically important to the character-building process—to fulfilling their purpose for being!

Though sinless, even Jesus learned through suffering. This allowed Him to "captain" salvation for *many* sons God will add to His Family.

Mankind's suffering is no accident. When seeing the terrible, random, mass suffering around the world, many ask: Why do so many people, including innocent children, suffer so horribly? I repeat. This world is cut off from God (read Isa. 59:1-2 and Jer. 5:25).

Again, God is only working with a tiny few today. He is not delivering, protecting and working with the masses—YET! Man is being given time to learn his ways do not work—his governments, religions, philosophies, values, educational systems, and cultures do not work, and God is for now keeping hands off. Man is learning the slow, painful lesson—for when God calls all mankind later—

that when you keep God's holy, spiritual Law, it keeps you, and when you break it, it breaks you.

Can you now understand *why* the world must suffer? Can you better see that it is through difficult, painful experience that people will eventually understand life's deepest lessons?

Suffering is actually one of the most marvelous tools in God's Plan of reproducing sons with His character in them. Adversity is tied to character-building. Since God is longsuffering, no person is complete in the development of His nature and character until he has learned the value of suffering!

Born to Build Character

Every person God calls is presented with the same choice Adam and Eve faced—yielding to God and *His* government or to Satan and *his* nature.

God is a Father. He has one Spirit-composed Son, but we saw He will later have many more sons (Rom. 8:19). As little children grow up to look like their physical parents, so do God's children slowly take on the spiritual likeness of their Parent, in holy, righteous character. The apostle Peter described Christians as "partakers of the DIVINE NATURE" (II Pet. 1:4)—the nature of God. There is the physical nature of creation, *human nature*, and GOD'S NATURE. God is refashioning corrupt, carnal human nature into wonderful, glorious, perfect, SPIRITUAL CHARACTER—His DIVINE NATURE!

Character is understanding—knowing—right from wrong and doing *what is right instead of what is wrong!* God reveals what is right, but it is through the power of free moral agency, deciding to DO what is right, that righteous character is built.

Character is consciously *choosing* the right way against resistance. It is not the easy way. It is swimming against the current rather than drifting lazily wher-

ever it is going. It is building love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance (self-control), wisdom, knowledge, understanding, humility and more. This takes *time*, because character is built through experience.

God has perfect character in all respects. For instance, He *is* love (I John 4:8, 16). Love is fulfilling the Law, which requires yielding to God (Rom. 13:10; I John 5:3). It is outgoing, outflowing concern for others, putting them first—instead of self-interests. Satan's nature is selfish, inward and concerned only with what is best for self and how to get more for self. This is what he injected into Adam and Eve upon eating the forbidden fruit.

My free book *The Awesome Potential of Man* will open your eyes to so much more about man's incredible future. It can be found at rcg.org/tapom. Revealing the truth of salvation, it will expand your thinking beyond what you have ever dreamed. Not a book of mere helpful hints or tips for life, every chapter is loaded with REAL MEANING—straight from God's Word!

Recall God has allotted 7,000 years—seven *millennial days*—to work out His Plan. We are nearing the end of the sixth day allotted to man under Satan. Jesus Christ will soon return to establish God's government and perfect spiritual law on Earth. Satan will be bound (Rev. 20:2) and no longer able to sway this world to evil and rebellion against God's revealed knowledge. Then, only a few will reject and refuse to obey God.

While God made man in the form and shape, physically, of Himself, we saw it does not end there. God is creating children that will look and BE just like Him! To build the very character of God is the reason you exist—it fulfills your awesome potential! □



Order a Free Copy!
rcg.org/tapom

WEATHER & ENVIRONMENT

Decades of Extreme Weather Wiped Out One-tenth of World's Cereal Crops

Weather-related disasters, such as floods, famines, fires and storms, destroyed nearly 10 percent of the world's rice, wheat, corn and other cereal crops between 1964 and 2007, according to a recent study led by University of British Columbia (UBC) and McGill University researchers. Droughts and heat waves, which caused the most damage, resulted in three billion tons of cereal production losses during that time.

The study, published in the journal *Nature*, found that the effects of dry spells on crops were greater in developed countries than developing countries. North America, Europe and Australia lost about 20 percent of its crop from droughts since 1964 while Asia lost 12 percent, Africa 9 percent, and Latin American nations experienced no significant effects.

“Across the breadbaskets of North America, the crops and methods of

farming are very uniform across huge areas, so if a drought hits in a way that is damaging to those crops, they will all suffer,” first author Corey Lesk, a recent graduate of McGill's Department of Geography, said in a UBC press release. “By contrast, in much of the developing world, crop systems are a patchwork of small fields with diverse crops. If a drought hits, some of those crops may be damaged, but others may survive.”

The study also revealed that the damage caused by drought doubled from 1985 to 2007.

Dr. Navin Ramankutty, an author of the report and geographer from UBC, told *The New York Times*: “We don't think about it much, but rice, wheat and maize alone provide more than 50 percent of global calories. When these grain baskets are hit, it results in food price shocks, which leads to increasing hunger.” □



■ **LOST YIELD:** A cornfield is submerged by floodwaters during a heavy storm brought by typhoon Chan-hom in Zhoushan, China (July 11, 2015).

PHOTO: STR/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

HEALTH ISSUES

Study: U.S. Youth Do Not Exercise Enough at School

Less than one in 12 teenagers in the United States engage in enough physical activity at school to meet national standards, according to a study reported in the journal *Pediatrics*.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity for those ages 6 to 17. The study reported that teenagers exercise an average of 23 minutes a day while at school. This figure made up over half of the total 39.4 minutes that the average teenager exercised every day, which means most do not exercise much on their own.

Jordan A. Carlson, one of the authors of the study, reported that teenagers are “getting a lot less activity at school than we thought. We were surprised that they only spent about 4.8

percent of their time at school actually physically active.”

Experts suggest that parents should encourage teens to implement an exercise routine at home. This can help make up for lack of activity during the school day.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends daily moderate-intensity aerobics such as brisk walking and stretching.

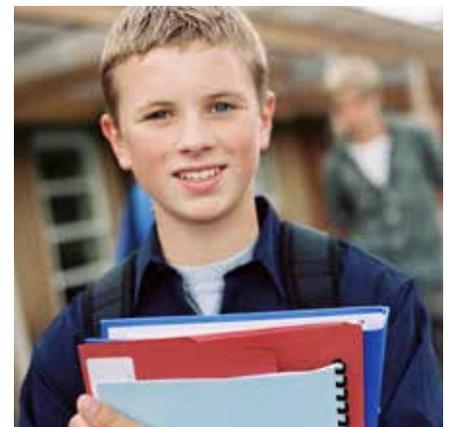
In addition, the CDC suggests the following at least three days a week:

- Cardio workouts such as long-distance running, swimming and bicycling

- Muscle training such as weightlifting or calisthenics

- Bone-strengthening exercises such as dancing, hiking, stair climbing, tennis and jogging

Parents who encourage their children to exercise can help ensure future success. *Livestrong.com* reported: “If teenagers can discover physical activities they enjoy, they are more likely to exercise on a regular basis and continue exercising into adulthood.” □





■ **DROUGHT-STRICKEN:** A man crosses the dried Bokaa Dam with a cart on the outskirts of Gaborone, Botswana, during the nation's worst drought in 30 years (Aug. 14, 2015).

PHOTO: MONIRUL BHUIYAN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Growing Trend

California became the fifth state to legalize assisted suicide, placing it alongside Oregon, Washington, Vermont and Montana. □



Declining Standard of Living

Nearly 11 percent of people between the age of 18 and 25 in the United Kingdom are permanently in debt, according to a *YouGov* poll. An additional 20 percent said it will take more than 10 years to pay off their personal debt. The survey found that the most common forms of debt among the same demographic were from bank overdrafts, credit card bills, and borrowing from parents. □

Bee Die-offs

Between 2008 and 2013, wild bee populations declined by about 23 percent in California, the Midwest, Great Plains states, and the Mississippi River Valley—all important agricultural regions—a study from the National Academy of Sciences reported. Researchers attributed the losses to the mass conversion of the bees' habitat to fields for biofuel crops such as corn.

“The researchers believe that the scale of wild bee decline will push farmers to rely even more heavily on commercial honey bee operators who travel across the US, hiring out colonies for pollination,” *BBC News* reported. “This is risky, they say, as these operators have suffered devastating losses from disease and colony collapse disorder in recent years.” □

Terror Threat

European security officials have warned that September 11-style terrorist attacks could occur on the continent this year. A French counterterrorism expert told *Daily Express* that terror groups operating within Europe “have the necessary false documents, the mastery of the language, the sites, [and] the weapons” to carry out acts of mass destruction. □

Famine Forecast

Southern African nations face severe food shortages this year due to droughts brought by a strong El Niño weather pattern, the United Nations World Food Program reported. The nation at greatest risk of starvation is Malawi, with 2.8 million facing hunger—16 percent of the population. Similarly, 1.9 million are expected to go hungry in Madagascar and 1.5 million in Zimbabwe. □



Effects of Inactivity

Young adults who watch over three hours of TV a day and exercise less than two and a half hours per week have weaker brain functions in their late 20s and 30s, researchers at the Northern California Institute for Research and Education found. According to the study, sedentary teens and young adults suffered weaker memories, a slower processing speed, and a decreased ability to plan and complete tasks before they reached middle age. □

Worsening Refugee Crisis

Europe could expect up to 10 million migrants entering its borders this year if it continues to accept refugees at the same rate it did in 2015, Germany's federal minister of economic cooperation and development Gerd Muller warned. He added that without financial support or reducing migration numbers, the EU's Schengen Agreement, which allows for borderless travel between member states, faces collapse. □



■ **MIGRATION PLIGHT:** Refugees walk on a road after crossing the border from Macedonia into Serbia, near the village of Miratovac, Serbia (Jan. 8, 2016). More than a million migrants arrived in Europe in 2015 in the worst crisis of its kind to face the continent since World War II.

PHOTO: ARMEND NIMANI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

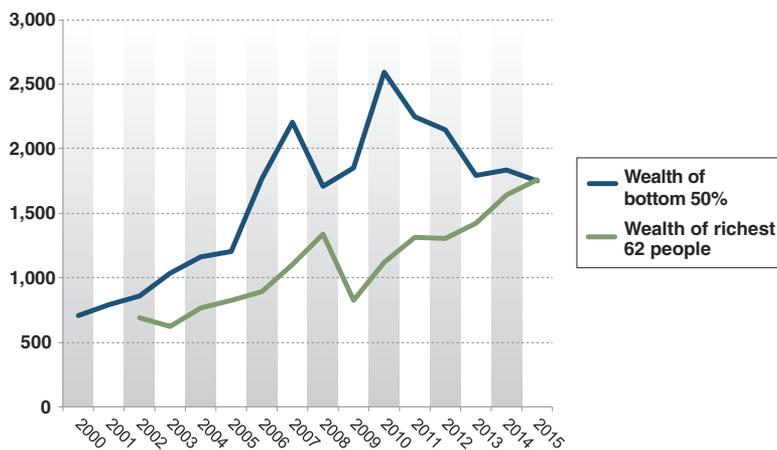
Galactic Surprise

Astronomers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have discovered a massive galaxy cluster—thousands of individual galaxies bound by gravity—that is only 3.8 billion years old. The finding challenges the belief among some scientists that galaxy clusters require much longer to form. □

Economic Inequality

According to research from Oxfam, the wealth of the world's richest individuals continues to grow while the wealth of the poorest half of the world decreases.

Total wealth in billions of dollars per year



Source: oxfam.org
Graphic: Tribune News Service

Disease Resurgence

Cases of tuberculosis, scarlet fever, and scurvy have increased as much as 300 percent in the United Kingdom over the past five years, according to Britain's National Health Service. The organization cited a 51 percent increase in malnutrition during the same period, continued poverty, and poor healthcare service as the main causes for the comebacks. □



■ **MAJOR FLOODING:** Overflowing water from the Meremac River completely submerges Highway 141 in Arnold, Missouri, after the area received days of record rainfall (Dec. 31, 2015).

PHOTO: MICHAEL B. THOMAS/GETTY IMAGES

Disastrous Year

A total of 300 natural disasters occurred worldwide in 2015, exceeding the 15-year average of 269 events, according to Aon's Annual Global Climate and Catastrophe Report. It stated, "While a notable uptick in recorded natural disaster events did not directly translate to greater financial losses in 2015, the year was marked by 31 individual billion-dollar disasters, or 20 percent more than the long-term average." □



Where Is God's Church Today?

Jesus Christ declared, "I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). If He promised His Church would never be destroyed, where is it today? Jesus gave identifying signs in the Bible to locate it. He said His Church would:

- Be a little flock
- Teach the truth
- Be separate from the world
- Be set apart by its beliefs
- Be identified by its biblical name
- Not mingle truth with error
- Be structured
- Not be divided

**Locate the Church Jesus
Built!**

*Order Your Free Copy of
Where Is God's Church? at rcg.org/wigtc.*

