

MARCH-APRIL 2018

THE

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REAL TRUTH™

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

LIVING WITH ENDLESS WAR

*How IEDs Changed
Modern Conflicts*



**The New Silk Road
China's Path to Global Authority?**

**Why Can't We Stop
Texting and Driving?**

**Dirt: A Missing
Ingredient for World Peace**

**7 Years After
the Arab Spring**

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REAL TRUTH[™]
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VOL. XVI | NO. 2 | MARCH-APRIL 2018

A R T I C L E S

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■ **INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION:** Delegation heads attending the Belt and Road Forum pose for a group photo at the Yanqi Lake venue near Beijing, China (May 15, 2017).

PHOTO: NG HAN GUAN-POOL/GETTY IMAGES

The New Silk Road China's Path to Global Authority?

Will the Asian nation's
singular approach to infra-
structure bring greater world
influence?

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FRONT COVER: A boy receives care at a facility that specializes in treating wounds from landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Kabul, Afghanistan (Jan. 10, 2018).

PHOTO: SCOTT PETERSON/GETTY IMAGES

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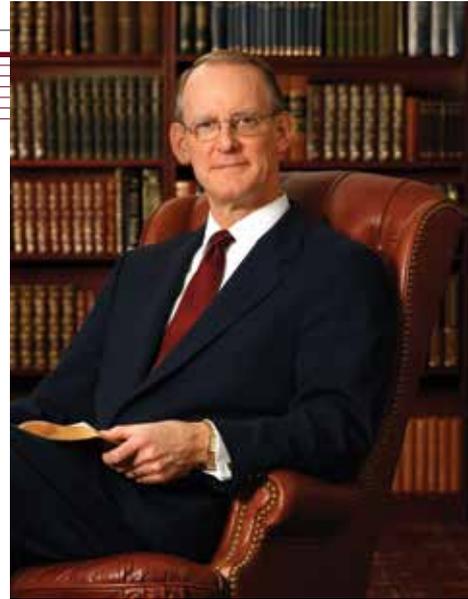
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



America and Britain in Bible Prophecy

ALL NATIONS ARE now rushing toward the conclusion foretold to occur in the “last days.” Humanity plunges ahead—blind, pleasure-crazed and largely detached from important world events occurring daily.

American, British, Canadian and other Western leaders would take action, if they only knew what lies ahead. Great prophetic truths, revealing amazing—truly *astounding!*—climactic changes to stagger all civilization, go unrecognized. In fact, the entire world remains in ignorance—WHY?

You can learn what vast millions have *not* understood!

What Lies Ahead?

Everyone wants to know what the future holds. So many are confused, not knowing where to turn for *answers* to the great questions about the future! Many have opinions, but few recognize how to find the answers. Others think they already understand the prophecies of the Bible. They are wrong about what is LIFE-CHANGING knowledge.

Awe-inspiring prophecies recorded long ago have been fulfilled. Others are now coming to pass. Still oth-

ers are yet to occur. These involve the greatest nations in the history of the world—and are part of a *divine purpose* far beyond the imagination of the world’s most brilliant minds!

About one-third of the Bible is prophecy—history written in advance. Over 80 percent of this future history is yet to be fulfilled. Tragically, most Bible readers are completely unaware of awesome, impending world events, soon to shock all nations—focusing first on the *greatest* nations. Vast sections of Scripture are hidden from them. Thus, most simply have no idea what the future holds. Even those who are interested in learning remain tangled in a Gordian knot of disjointed, confusing, competing popular ideas and opinions.

This need not be you!

God intended these “great nations prophecies” be understood, or He would not have recorded them. They involve events no man could carry out—but *God* can—and their fulfillment does not hinge on the thinking or agreement of human beings. God’s Word is sure and all would do well to *take heed*—pay attention!—to what God makes known.

The most educated, prosperous and influential civilizations have all come and gone, with no exceptions. The pattern of history is that Rome, Egypt, Babylon, Greece,

Persia, and other powerful, developed empires, rose to dizzying heights before crumbling and final collapse. Will America's and Britain's future be the same?

Everything is at stake for the Anglo-Saxon peoples—literally. Cataclysmic prophecies must yet be fulfilled—and these will soon begin to crash upon unsuspecting populations. You *can*, indeed you *MUST*, understand all that lies ahead for hundreds of millions.

The ultimate future of the American and British peoples is astounding, with their greatest period of prosperity and world influence yet ahead. But this time will not come as leaders, planners and thinkers believe.

What precedes it is totally unexpected.

Dire World Conditions

The Bible is a jigsaw puzzle, and it must be permitted to interpret itself. Most have never heard this. When related Bible passages are assembled in clear and concise form, the prophecies about America and Britain (and certain other Western countries) are not difficult to understand. In fact, you will wonder why so few have been able to comprehend them. God has left a *plain message* in His Word—a clear path—for those *willing* to read and understand, and willing to accept blunt warnings, impossible to misunderstand.

Suppose you could know the direction and conclusion of world events—*world history*—in advance of the outcome. What if you could know the courses of nations before they happen? What if the future of great nations—indeed the greatest in all history—could be known? In other words, imagine knowing tomorrow's biggest headlines before they come to pass, and how events will affect *you*, and every human being, personally.

Again, the governments of the West do not know the world-shattering changes just over the horizon for the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and certain Western European nations. But, again, *you* can know!

Turmoil, fear and confusion now grip the nations of the West. Terrorism, political division, and widespread uncertainty have left people confused, not knowing where to turn for answers to the great questions about the future, now on the minds of millions!

Many sense that the differences both between and within nations are intensifying—threatening to spin out of control. New and different power blocs are forming, with traditional alliances wavering, waning or disappearing.

Ominous signs of grave difficulty in resolving humanity's most fundamental problems are everywhere. Many sense the world is hurtling toward terrible trouble, even absolute calamity. Disease, famine and war sweep the planet as never before. New diseases are continually appearing and old ones are reappearing worse than ever. This and famine, which always follows in the wake of war, are decimating entire segments of local populations. Weapons of mass destruction, so incomprehensibly destructive that they boggle the mind, now threaten humanity as *never* before. Many nations have learned to live on alert to terrorist cells, which can strike anywhere without notice.

World conditions, events and trends speak daily in frightening terms about how things could quickly turn in the wrong direction. The courses of nations, indeed the greatest nations, hang in the balance. History shows that *all* the great civilizations eventually crashed, having become decadent—awash in material prosperity and greed—and educated in wrong knowledge.

This can happen again!

Addicted to War

Of course, many are unfazed—not concerned—about the tumultuous events surrounding them, trusting things will work out in the end “because they always do.” Believing things will eventually “turn out all right,” these close their eyes, choosing to pursue pleasure and accumulation of material goods at a frantic pace. But for the short term, things will *not* turn out all right. World conditions are and will

become infinitely more serious than most realize.

At the same time, regarding just the physical location of nations, the youngest generations reflect an appalling ignorance of the most basic geography, and a nearly total lack of knowledge about even the most rudimentary understanding of relationships between countries—with studies now revealing that most people ages 18 to 24 cannot even locate them on a map.

Why can the very best minds not find peace? Why do even these remain in almost complete darkness about the staggering events soon to strike all humanity? Both Isaiah, in the Old Testament, and Paul in the New Testament, flatly state that men “*do not know the way to peace*” (Isa. 59:8; Rom. 3:17). This vital knowledge has been missing for millennia. The institutions of men are woefully uninformed—and ultimately toothless—concerning the *causes* of peace, leading to the right *effects* all peoples long for—world peace. In the end, neither diplomacy nor war has worked, while knowledge of the right causes that lead to peace remains unseen, eliminating any hope of success.

While men may talk about, call for and pretend to seek peace, world leaders always seem to fall back on the tool of war to achieve it—and suffering, misery and unhappiness *increase* in its wake. American Confederate general Robert E. Lee warned, “It is well that war is so terrible, or we should get too fond of it” (*Words on War: Military Quotations from Ancient Times to Present*). Nations have grown fond of war—indeed, they are addicted to it. For 6,000 years, man has proven himself unable to break the cycle of war.

As a result, history's *greatest* wars lie dead ahead!

America and Britain in the Bible?

Against the backdrop of growing fear, mixed with confusion, many wonder—and are openly asking—about America and Britain's role in the prophecies foretold in the Bible to occur in the

Please see **PERSONAL**, page 29

LIVING WITH ENDLESS WAR

How IEDs Changed Modern Conflicts

Improvised explosive devices, landmines and unexploded ordnances prevent war-ravaged communities from recovering—even decades after the guns fall silent.

BY RYAN L. CASWELL

RETURNING TO their hometown in Iraq after security forces retook it from the Islamic State terror group, 10-year-old Omer and his family thought life could finally return to normal.

They set out to rebuild their old home. As Omer helped clear debris, he came across an unexploded mortar. It detonated and injured the boy.

In Syria, Hassan Hejazi, a 29-year-old man living close to the Turkey border, decided to visit an olive grove near his home. Walking through the rows of trees, he found a small pile of what he thought were unexploded shells. He began to carefully move each one out of the grove, to prevent someone being injured by them. During one of the trips, he stepped on a thin sheet of metal—and suddenly everything went black.

Days later, he awoke in a hospital, blind, with broken bones and lacerations

all over his body. He learned that thousands of IED traps were planted in this grove. As a result of stepping on one, the father of three is no longer able to work and provide for his family.

In northern Nigeria, Otus Umusu, a lieutenant colonel in the Nigerian army, was patrolling a road once controlled by Boko Haram. He was a well-trained officer and often traveled this particular road. Only minutes before, others in his convoy passed along this route to resupply and he felt confident in safe passage. However, the weight of his vehicle tripped an IED buried deep in the road. The explosion killed his entire security detail and destroyed his vehicle. Umusu died of sustained wounds while being transported to a hospital. This was the fourth high-ranking army officer to be killed by Boko Haram indirectly.

These stories, reported by the Danish Refugee Council, *Al Jazeera*, and *Sahara*

■ **AMONG THE RUBBLE:** People walk beside destroyed buildings in Mosul, Iraq, after the city was liberated from the Islamic State terror group (Nov. 6, 2017). Neighborhoods have been laced with booby traps and homemade bombs by ISIS since the group fled the city.

PHOTO: CHRIS MCGRATH/GETTY IMAGES







■ **CRUDE DEVICES:** Top, people survey the damage from an IED blast that killed eight people in Maiduguri, Nigeria (July 31, 2015). Middle, forces loyal to the recognized parliament in Libya collect IEDs in the western suburbs of Benghazi (April 23, 2016). Bottom, civilians carry their belongings on a destroyed street in an outer neighborhood of Mosul, Iraq (Nov. 6, 2017).

PHOTOS: DELIL SOULEIMAN/AFP/ (TOP); STR/AFP/ (MIDDLE); CHRIS MCGRATH/ (BOTTOM); GETTY IMAGES

Reporters respectively, reveal the harrowing realities for those in today's armed conflicts. "Peace," "cease-fires" and "victory" do not mean safety and security in modern war zones.

The use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) has skyrocketed over the past 10 years, partly owing to them being a cheap yet effect deterrent to opposing forces. The United Nations Mine Action Service estimates that 59 countries worldwide have "widespread contamination" of landmines or IEDs from either past or current conflicts.

These weapons are the most serious threat to non-combatants in post-conflict areas. According to the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, between 2011 and 2015, 82 percent of all casualties by IEDs were civilians.

Both during conflicts and long after fighting stops, IEDs and other undestroyed military ordnances hamper reconstruction for decades.

A Devastating Weapon

There are over 600 types of improvised explosive devices. They have become more widely used since the most recent U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Most of these devices are bombs or booby traps that are crudely built from easily available materials such as fertilizer, gasoline and spent munitions. These are detonated by low-tech triggers such as remote controls for cars, garage door openers, and cellphone signals. Some are timed to explode by an analog clock while others are triggered manually such as with a suicide vest strapped to a person.

An exploding IED creates a tremendous amount of heat and pressure that, while invisible, shreds internal organs, ruptures eardrums, and causes blindness and concussions. The shockwave also propels shrapnel, either inside the bomb or surrounding debris, which is highly lethal to unarmored personnel. This all happens in a split second.

Pressure waves created from a large explosive can penetrate the most heavily armored vehicles. Shockwaves cause brain damage and repeated

exposure to IED blasts brings on symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, including hallucinations, an inability to focus, and severe memory problems.

Regardless of their variation, all IEDs have the same purpose: to spread fear by maiming and killing targets—whether they are civilians or the world’s most powerful army.

Asymmetrical Warfare

A reason IEDs are popular with insurgent groups is they cause so much damage despite being simple to build. Most of these weapons can be manufactured almost anywhere and very inexpensively. One person can figure out how to build one from instructions on the internet. When bombs are planted, they are difficult to detect and require highly trained personnel and thousands of dollars of equipment to safely defuse.

Because of this, insurgents can gain an advantage against more powerful military forces. This became clear during the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Despite America’s superior military force, progress was impeded by IEDs planted by insurgents.

Lieutenant General John Johnson, director of the U.S. Army’s Joint Improvised-Threat Defeat Agency, was quoted in a *USA Today* article: “The bombs radically affected how the American military could move around the war zone, creating a heavy reliance on helicopters and other aircraft in order to avoid roads...they’ve caused us a lot of pain...a lot of effort and a lot of treasure.”

The U.S. spent over \$75 billion on armored vehicles, robots, computer systems and scanners to detect weapons that cost around \$50 each to create.

While the U.S. and other Western forces are able to spend the money to counter IEDs, it is a different case altogether when unequipped civilians attempt their own clearing operations. Work is painstakingly slow.

Even worse, malicious groups specifically target civilians to inflict the greatest blow to stability within a region.

Targeting Citizens

The organization Action on Armed Violence compiled a report in 2014 examining 66 countries where IEDs went off. It estimated that 60,000 people were killed between 2011 and 2013. Eighty-one percent of those killed were civilians not actively involved in a conflict. In addition, 62 percent of the attacks were carried out in densely populated areas such as markets and shopping areas.

Militants are also increasingly planting these weapons on children to inflict greater psychological damage. A common technique in Afghanistan and Pakistan involves using a child to carry an IED into a crowded market and then triggering the explosive remotely—turning the carrier into a suicide bomber.

Even in cities where militant groups have been routed, citizens face the constant threat of booby traps left behind.

In July 2017, *Reuters* reported on Haskim Hazim, an Iraqi father working with others to clear rubble in his village after it was occupied by ISIS. Of the 120 families who once lived there, only Mr. Hazim’s and one other family returned. When they did, they found many houses rigged with explosives.

“We don’t know what’s under the rubble,” Mr. Hazim’s brother said, pointing to houses demolished by airstrikes.

Cautious, the family stays in rented rooms, waiting for more people to show up to help with reconstruction efforts.

Only weeks prior in that area, a young shepherd boy lost his fingers after picking up a small object, not realizing it was an explosive.

Such weapons are intentionally positioned by militants as they flee to hinder rebuilding efforts. It keeps the region and those that live in it demoralized, destabilized and in disrepair.

Impact on Refugee Resettlement

Even after the Syrian Democratic Forces and its allies retook Raqqa, the

ISIS de facto capital in Syria, the war was far from over.

Aaron Stein, a senior fellow at the Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, said that the primary challenges in the city are “post-conflict stabilization, the removal of IEDs and the inevitability of having to deal with an ISIS-led insurgency.”

“In short, there is still a lot of work to be done, despite the successful campaign to retake the city.”

A report by the Syrian Network for Human Rights estimated around 470,000 Syrians have been killed during the Syrian Civil War, many by IEDs.

In addition, 6.1 million people displaced by the conflict will be returning to cities, towns and villages that have been contaminated with explosive remnants of war (ERWs, which include IEDs as well as unexploded munitions such as artillery shells, grenades, rockets and air-dropped bombs). As a result, these populations face increased costs of rebuilding their countries, random casualties from explosions, and complicated humanitarian efforts for years to come.

The UN estimated that 8.2 million people in the Middle East already live in areas highly contaminated with ERWs. This is up from 2 million in 2016—more than *quadrupling* in one year.

Locals on the ground are attempting to clear booby traps, IEDs and other ERWs from their countries also. Adnan al-Hassan, a native Syrian, began demining when he was 20 years old, *Al Jazeera* reported. He began a group dedicated to eliminating IEDs planted by ISIS after they left cities, called the Syrian Mine Action Committee (SMAC).

Mr. Hassan said that IEDs made by ISIS are the most deadly he has seen. Unlike other groups, which simply adapt explosives from spent munitions, ISIS uses unconventional designs.

Damien Spleeters, the head of operations for Iraq and Syria for Conflict Armament Research, explained to the news outlet that ISIS “would target de-miners by setting up something



“WE SHALL BEAT OUR SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES”

These words, which mark a special sculpture on the grounds of the United Nations headquarters in New York City, come from the biblical book of Isaiah. Yet even more than a lofty ideal or nice-sounding idea, this Bible verse will come to pass—and soon. Read *How World Peace Will Come!* to learn exactly how this will occur.

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that is called an anti-lift device.” This is a type of device that appears to be deactivated, with the real trap hidden underneath. He continued, “If you think you’ve rendered safe a device and then you would lift it, that would detonate the device.”

Other mines are prepared with cement to look like rocks or construction materials.

Unlike most groups, ISIS does not keep maps of the areas it lays mines. When clearing the Syrian town of al-Bab, a member of SMAC estimated there were at least 15,000 weapons planted in the city and it would take up to two months to eliminate all the traps.

Long-term Fallout

IEDs kill and maim indiscriminately. Armistices, ceasefires and truces may stop fighting, but they do not disable devices. In effect, IEDs extend the life of the battle and create a perpetual warzone.

The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs states that leaving active IEDs undermines its “sustainable development goals” of ending poverty and promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies. Such weapons disrupt humanitarian efforts, refugee repopulation, the construction of sanitation and basic services, and the functioning of a sustainable government. They also slow the construction of infrastructure.

For example, at the close of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States canceled missions to help clear secondary roads and limit troops’ exposure to IEDs. Only large highways were cleared since they were easier to monitor. While this did reduce the number of troop casualties, outlying roads became choked with unexploded weapons, severely restricting trade and commerce.

Abandoned IEDs or unexploded munitions pose a huge risk for children who suffer worst in post-conflict war zones. According to the UN, over 60 percent of casualties resulting from ERWs were children. They often mistake leftover shells for

toys and end up accidentally detonating them. In countries with conflicts occurring, a significant percentage of children grow up maimed or with amputations.

The rise of undetectable explosives has also threatened non-government organizations such as the United Nations, Red Cross, and Doctors Without Borders. NGO’s are specifically targeted by foreign fighters to further demoralize suffering populations.

A report on the impact of IEDs on humanitarian space by the Chatham House noted that, while organizations can outfit personnel with safety equipment, virtually all traditional forms of protection, such as bullet-proof vests, are ineffective against IED blasts. In addition, arming personnel for aid organizations has had the unintended consequence of militarizing staff, which not only further makes them targets in the eyes of insurgents, it can create rifts between them and the people they are trying to help.

Chatham House interviewed dozens of NGOs in Afghanistan that have experienced increasing costs to their operations as a result of IEDs. Driving up the costs included expensive avoidance strategies, as well as purchasing improved GPS software and armored vehicles.

In some cases, aid groups have had to take less direct yet safer routes, forcing smaller NGOs to favor less risky assignments and neglect areas where there are needs.

There have been a slew of efforts to remove these deadly weapons, yet their use shows no sign of slowing.

Securing Peace After the Conflict

Since the Ottawa Treaty was enacted in 1997, which bans the use of anti-personnel landmines, a total of 162 countries have signed on.

Despite such international efforts, about 17 IEDs are detonated every day, *CBC/Radio-Canada* reported. (The number is likely to be higher due to the difficulty of reporting in the most vulnerable areas of the world.)

Many countries that have signed the treaty have failed to comply with the statutes by continuing to maintain their weapons stockpiles.

National leaders have tried unsuccessfully to track raw materials of IEDs and restrict their use on the battlefield. Bomb builders continue to find more ingenious ways to package death in these small, portable explosives—even inventing simpler building processes so just about anyone can produce them.

Such advancements force scientists, researchers and military experts to develop elaborate and expensive means to slow the spread of IEDs, track those who build them, and begin the long process of locating and dismantling them around the world.

But they are losing the battle. The rate at which IEDs are being planted far outpace the speed they are demined.

As geopolitical, economic, religious and cultural complications continue to grow, nations will increasingly turn to war as a solution. The rise of terrorist groups, rogue nations and rebels willing to do anything to advance their goals guarantees innocents and civilians become collateral damage. The proliferation of IEDs leaves a long and bloody trail, even after the war ends.

Military strategists overlook the one reason why they cannot ultimately stop the use of such deadly weapons. They are blindly seeking a solution without understanding the *cause* of the problem. When allowed to seek his own solutions to conflicts between peoples, man always resorts to war and killing. With this as his solution, deadly weapons including IEDs cannot be stopped. They will be redesigned, repackaged and recreated in another insidious form to inflict maximum harm on their victims.

Man actually CANNOT end the cycle of war and killing on his own. He must be taught to eliminate war as an option. In order to understand how this will occur, read the booklet *How World Peace Will Come!* □



■ **TARGETING CIVILIANS:** Top, a landmine is presented as part of a demining intervention plan in Vista Hermosa, Colombia (March 23, 2017). Middle, Iraqis flee from Mosul during the offensive by Iraqi forces to retake the last district held by ISIS (June 20, 2017). Bottom, a sign warns of land mines in a field in Mirna Dolyna, Ukraine (Sept. 7, 2017).

PHOTOS: AHMAD AL-RUBAYE/AFP/ (TOP); STR/AFP/ (MIDDLE); PIERRE CROM/ (BOTTOM); GETTY IMAGES

We Must Hit RESET on How Women Are Treated

To truly address sexual harassment and mistreatment of women, society needs to get back to the basics.

#METOO. Just seeing those words elicits a myriad of responses. On its face, the Twitter hashtag intends to demonstrate the pervasive nature of prejudice against and mistreatment of women.

The movement, which was popularized last October after a Hollywood mogul was accused of serial sexual harassment and assault, has prompted many to voice what they have endured. It brought out a bevy accounts of lewd catcalls, misogyny in the workplace, groping on the subway—and worse.

The hope is that, if enough women make their voices heard, they can finally effect real, lasting change.

For men, #MeToo is often tougher to grasp. There are the incredulous: “Do women really get harassed *that* often?” The defensive: “Not all men are like that!” The introspective: “Am I part of the problem?”

Yet the deluge of first-person accounts and news stories of harassment and maltreatment of women

PROVES there is a problem. Whether a person believes every story, feels women share part of the blame, or has never witnessed harassment himself is beside the point.

We as a society must take a long, hard look at ourselves. We need to ask difficult questions: *Why* is this occurring? *How* did we get here?

First, most men are never taught how they should treat women and vice versa. Most learn how to interact with the opposite sex from movies, television and music—probably the worst role models possible.

Pornography plays an even more diabolical part in the development of boys. Women are treated as sexual objects with little or no say with what goes on.

A 2010 study of 304 best-selling porn videos, which was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Violence Against Women*, found that 88 percent of the scenes contained “physical aggression, principally spanking, gagging, and slapping.” In addition, 49 percent of the videos contained verbal aggression. The targets of abuse were overwhelmingly females who most often “showed pleasure or responded neutrally to the aggression.”

While pornography and hypersexualized entertainment have a clearly damaging effect, historic norms also take a central role. Perhaps the most significant driver of a society’s views on women is religion. For the United States and most of the West that would be Christianity and the Bible.

Scripture is sometimes seen as *the* main cause of problems between the sexes. It is viewed as deeply male-centric and misogynistic—with men as iron-fist rulers and women as passive baby-makers. But this is a misrepresentation!

Because the Bible has historically informed how masculinity and femininity have been viewed in the United States, it is the only place to start to understand where we are today—and how we can hit reset on how women are treated.

When today’s wrong thinking is cleared away, Scripture provides clear guidelines on how women and men should interact.

The Beginning

The first woman is introduced in the Bible’s first chapter: “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male *and female* created He them” (Gen. 1:27).

Notice that God created both male and female—men and women. While God initially made Adam (the first man), he was incomplete until Eve (the first woman) was created. The Creator made two sexes that were very different physically. Yet they were compatible and complemented one another.

Realize that physical differences *do not* mean women are of lesser value or potential. Women and men are equal in worth and significance—yet to insist they are exactly the same is folly. They need one another. The most obvious way this is exhibited is that it takes both sexes to have children.

Some trip up over Genesis 3:16, where it says that a wife should be subject to her husband who “shall rule over you.”

This command is expanded upon in Ephesians: “Wives, submit your-

selves unto your own husbands, *as unto the Lord*" (5:22).

Before drawing any conclusions, note the standard for husbands: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it" (vs. 25).

While women are supposed to submit to their husbands, men are supposed to love their wives "AS CHRIST"—Jesus Christ *died* for the Church!

Clearly, Scripture defines the marital relationship as one where both sides give of themselves to fulfill what God requires of them.

Women of the Bible

History has its fair share of women who held vital roles in pivotal times. Some are towering figures in the Bible.

One remarkable woman is found in the book of Judges. At a point, God used Deborah to judge ancient Israel. She was able to encourage a man named Barak to lead a battle against a ruthless Canaanite army that had held Israel captive for 20 years.

Here, the future of a nation rested in the hands of a woman. Her actions led to Israel being delivered.

Centuries later lived a woman named Esther. This time, Israelites were in captivity under the Persian Empire. Esther was a Jewish woman who was chosen to become queen, although her heritage was not known to the king. A man named Haman, who had a hatred of Jews, was promoted over all the land's princes. He convinced the king to have the Jews exterminated.

When Esther learned of this, she sent word through the kingdom for all Jews to fast for three days, after which she would present herself to the king. Her appearance before the king could well have been a death sentence for her. It was punishable by death to do so without an invitation, unless the king acknowledged the person by holding out his golden scepter.

After the fast, she carried out her plan. Esther 5:3-4 records the

event. Her entrance was successful—the king held the scepter and asked, "What will you, Queen Esther? And what is your request? It shall be even given you to the half of the kingdom."

From that point on, her boldness led to the eventual unraveling of Haman's genocidal plot and the Jews' deliverance.

Many other notable women could be cited from the Bible including Sarah, Rebekah, Miriam, Rahab, Ruth, Hilkiah, Huldah, Hannah, Anna, Mary Magdalene, Martha, Phebe and Priscilla.

These women had characteristics that the Bible promotes for women, which are summarized in the last chapter of Proverbs: hardworking (31:13-15), health-conscious (vs. 17), assertive when necessary (vs. 18), and elegant (vs. 22).

No single section of the Bible addresses men as directly as Proverbs 31 addresses women. The chapter is well worth the read for anyone interested in what God had in mind when He designed women.

There is no indication in the Bible of women taking a back seat to men!

Above All Views

Women are clearly not inferior to men in God's eyes. Notice how Jesus Christ honored a woman named Mary who anointed Him with a costly ointment prior to His death, saying, "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman has done, be told for a memorial of her."

The deed of this remarkable woman is memorialized for all time in the pages of the Bible. Yet that was not the only time such an honor was bestowed on a female. After Jesus was resurrected, He chose to first appear to a woman (John 20:11-18).

Let's return to when the first woman was introduced in Genesis 1: "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them" (vs. 27).

Verses 24-25 of the same chapter describe how God made every creature after its "kind," or species. But

in verse 25 something changes. "And God said, Let Us make man [human beings] in Our image, after *Our likeness*..."

In other words, while plants were made after the plant "kind" and animals were made after the animal "kind," men *and women* were made after the God "kind."

Many fascinating points emerge from the last statement. First, come to grips with who the first man and woman would have looked like—God! In fact, who else could they resemble? They had no grandparents or parents to draw genes from.

Second, just as sunflower seeds become beautiful plants, and colts have DNA within themselves to grow into majestic horses, each man and woman—from Adam and Eve to the estimated 130 million babies born each day—was created with the potential to ultimately become something vastly greater.

Depending on where you are from, your upbringing, culture, political inclination, experience, etc., you may have a unique view, or perhaps stereotype of women. But when God looks at a woman, He sees a being made in His image and likeness, of His own species, and far more. When properly understood, He sees a being with a staggering potential beyond the physical realm. The same goes for men. (Order our free book *The Awesome Potential of Man* at rcg.org/tapom to learn more about why God created you.)

There are the ways men view women, the ways women view women, and the ways different societies or religions view women. Yet the way *God* views women as their Maker rises above all views.

God loves women just as much as He loves men. That is why there are about the same amount of each sex worldwide.

After all, without women, none of us would be here.

For more on how God wants men and women to interact, visit rcg.org and read our popular books *Dating and Courtship – God's Way* and *Sex – Its Unknown Dimension*. □



DIRT

A Missing Ingredient for World Peace

It can be easy to take the soil beneath our feet for granted. Yet its health has always been a key to our survival.

WE KICK IT. We stomp it. We sweep it out of our homes. We even use its name as an insult. Yet by doing so, we undervalue one of our most important resources.

Dirt's connection to agriculture—and our ability to survive—is what makes it so vital, according to the Global Landscapes Forum, which meets yearly to discuss sustainable landscapes worldwide that

affect 1 billion or more people. But agriculture is not the only reason it is significant.

“Sustainable landscapes are essential for the future we want: for food, livelihoods, health, renewable materials, energy, biodiversity, business development, trade, climate regulation and water,” the organization stated.

When people have healthy soil, they produce food for themselves. Better food security brings more

stability, and conflicts over scant resources, such as those taking place in Africa and the Middle East, are less likely. A fed population is a happy population. All of these factors affect a nation's ability to thrive—and the planet as a whole.

“Throughout human history, our relationship with the soil has affected our ability to cultivate crops and influenced the success of civilizations,” a *Nature Education* article stated. “This relationship between

humans, the earth, and food sources affirms soil as the foundation of agriculture.”

In short, when everyone’s basic needs are met, the world is a much more peaceful place.

Adverse Effects

Over the last century, civilization has been on the warpath to destroy this most precious commodity.

“Half of the topsoil on the planet has been lost in the last 150 years,” the World Wildlife Fund reported. According to the organization, it takes 1,000 years to form just one centimeter of topsoil.

“The effects of soil erosion go beyond the loss of fertile land,” it further stated. “It has led to increased pollution and sedimentation in streams and rivers, clogging these waterways and causing declines in fish and other species. And degraded lands are also often less able to hold onto water, which can worsen flooding. Sustainable land use can help to reduce the impacts of agriculture and livestock, preventing soil degradation and erosion and the loss of valuable land to desertification.”

Time magazine agreed in the article “What If the Soil Runs Out?”

“People don’t always think about how [soil is] connected with so many other things: health, the environment, security, climate, water,” the outlet stated. “For example, agriculture accounts for 70% of our fresh water use: we pour most of our water straight onto the ground. If soil is not fit for purpose, that water will be wasted, because it washes right through degraded soil and past the root system. Given the enormous potential for conflict over water in the next 20-30 years, you don’t want to exacerbate things by continuing to damage the soil, which is exactly what’s happening now.”

The actions of farmers are at the heart of this debate. Their agricultural practices—such as allowing water runoff to spread pesticides and chemicals, using genetically modified seeds to increase crop yield, overploughing

and not allowing the land to rest—are often blamed for the damage caused to Earth’s topsoil. While agriculture workers are in the best position to improve the problems with the soil, profit-driven food production systems make it difficult if not impossible.

“Farmers rely heavily on credit to buy the seeds, fertilizer, machinery, livestock and other inputs that keep their farms running,” FarmAid stated. “If they can’t secure affordable and timely credit, they face an economic uncertainty that threatens the survival of their farms.”

With little money left, soil improvement practices become unsustainable.

“Soil is not costed into food, which means that farmers don’t have the financial capacity to invest in their soil to turn the situation around,” *Time* reported. “Crop breeding is exacerbating this situation. Modern wheat varieties, for example, have half the micronutrients of older strains, and it’s pretty much the same for fruit and vegetables. The focus has been on breeding high-yield crops which can survive on degraded soil, so it’s hardly surprising that 60% of the world’s population is deficient in nutrients like iron. If it’s not in the soil, it’s not in our food.”

Without good soil, you cannot have well-nourished and healthy people since the foods they eat—vegetables, fruits, legumes and even the animals that eat the plants—rely on it.

Again, fed people are happy people.

“The overall state of the soil, land and agriculture can impact the development and continuation of government systems.”

Connection to Conflict

Yet the soil has an *even bigger* connection to the well-being of mankind than just health.

“More than 10 million people have abandoned their homelands due to environmental issues including drought, soil erosion, desertification and deforestation,” the Food and Agriculture Organization wrote. “Avoiding soil degradation and coping with long-term droughts can therefore change the future of human migration.”

Healthy soil ensures that the environment itself flourishes, which in turn brings stability by helping prevent migration. When people are able to grow food to feed their families, they tend to thrive where they are instead of looking to relocate.

The Global Conflict Risk Index is also evidence of this. It examines five risk areas—political, security, social, economy, and geography and environment—to measure the statistical risk of violent conflict within a nation. Over half of the index’s 24 indicators can be tied in some way to the soil health of a nation.

And the overall state of the soil, land and agriculture can impact the development and continuation of government systems and vice versa, as a piece posted by the American Geophysical Union pointed out.

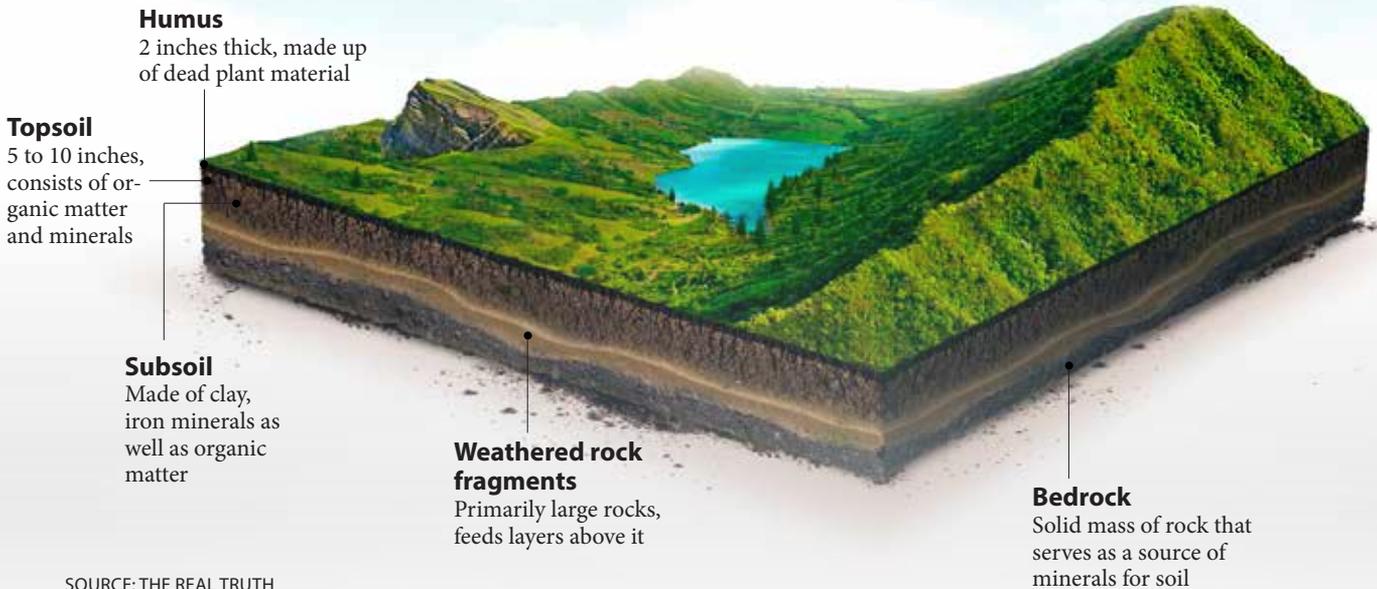
The article began by tying democratic elections to deforestation stating, “Politicians are trading trees for votes.”

“In the new study,” the article continued, “researchers examined satellite images of forest cover and data on the national elections of every country in the world between 1970 and 2005. They found that rates of forest cover loss are substantially higher during election years, especially when the outcome of the election is uncertain.”

The study’s political science researcher Luke Sanford, who examined the correlation between politics and the physical world, “found that election years are associated with 50 percent higher rates of deforestation

LAYERS OF IMPORTANCE

The different strata of soil are all crucial to ensure life on the planet. The upper layers are where plants grow, but the deeper ones are needed to “feed” minerals to the topsoil as well as filter out chemicals, dust and other contaminants.



SOURCE: THE REAL TRUTH

than non-election years, especially in countries that have unstable governments and nationally owned rainforests, like Brazil and Kenya. ‘In Kenya, there’s been over 50 percent forest cover lost since 1990 and the majority of that happened during the election years,’ Sanford said.

“The study suggests the amount of deforestation that occurs during an election year often depends on how competitive the election is. Sanford found that close elections are associated with higher rates of deforestation. Targeting key constituencies is more important when elections are competitive, he said. In Kenya, for example, votes are aggregated at the county level. Kenya’s densely populated northern counties often determine the outcome of the country’s national elections. As a result, most of the forested land allocated for commercial use in Kenya is located within these counties.”

The article continued: “When a country transitions from being an autocracy to a democracy, the rate of forest cover loss increases, according to Sanford’s preliminary results. In

an autocracy, such as a dictatorship or monarchy, the number of people who can remove a leader from power is very small. ‘When the autocrat wants to pay those people off to stay in power, giving them some rural forested land isn’t really useful,’ Sanford said.

“But when a country switches to a democracy, smallholder farmers who had no say in the government now have a strong say in the government, he said. ‘As a result, if a politician wants to remain in power they have to start paying attention to what those people want, and a lot of those people want some land.’”

So, what is it about land and, in particular, its soil that makes it so valuable?

Amazing Purpose

“Soil is made up of minerals from rocks, organic matter from plants and animals, and the many species living in the soil,” biologist Becca Smithers wrote on the website Science Made Simple. “Earthworms keep soils clean by digesting the soil and their movement keeps the soil fresh, as do moles.

Bacteria in the soil recycle nitrogen and carbon, fungi transport nutrients and help to decompose organic matter. Intricate root systems of plants and trees provide shelter and food for lots of organisms.”

In 1945, author Karl B. Mickey wrote in his book *Man and the Soil* that the topsoil “which sustains life lies in a thin layer of an average depth of seven or eight inches over the face of the land; the earth beneath it is as dead and sterile as the moon. If that layer of topsoil could be represented on a 24-inch globe it would be as a film three-millionths of one inch thick. That thin film is all that stands between man and extinction.”

In addition to its importance for growing food and thus stabilizing regions and nations, it helps human beings as a source of cures for diseases.

“By some estimates, the earth harbors more than a trillion individual microbe species,” *Wired* reported. “A single gram of soil alone can contain 3,000 bacterial species, each with an average of four million base-pairs of DNA spooled around a single circu-

lar chromosome.” These bacteria are critical to disease research.

Yet, according to the outlet, “If the chance of finding a new antibiotic in a random soil screen was once one in 20,000, by some estimates the odds have dwindled to less than one in a billion. All the easy ones have already been found.

“Historically, it’s a search riddled with accidental discoveries. The fungal strain that was used to manufacture penicillin turned up on a moldy cantaloupe; quinolones emerged from a bad batch of quinine; microbiologists first isolated bacitracin, a key ingredient in Neosporin ointment, from an infected wound of a girl who had been hit by a truck. Other antibiotics turned up in wild, far-flung corners of the globe: Cephalosporin came from a sewage pipe in Sardinia; erythromycin, the Philippines; vancomycin, Borneo; rifampicin, the French Riviera; rapamycin, Easter Island. By persuading the right microbes to grow under the right condition, we unearthed medicinal chemistry that beat back our own microscopic enemies.” The more we degrade the quality of or soil, the more we degrade our chances to maintain good health.

Perhaps *The Guardian* columnist and author George Monbiot put it most succinctly: “We’re treating soil like dirt. It’s a fatal mistake, as our lives depend on it.”

Replenishing the Soil

The importance of preserving soil and how much our survival depends on it is not a new idea.

Written thousands of years ago, Genesis—the first book in the Bible—describes how dependent man is on the earth underneath his feet.

It states that human beings were formed “of the *dust of the ground*” (2:7). Chapter 3 adds to this saying that “for dust you are, and unto dust shall you return” when you die (vs. 19).

In agricultural terms, the dust is most mineral-rich part of the soil. These particles, known as colloids, are removed by erosion and misuse

of the land. Colloids hold the bulk of the minerals that form the structure of the soil—and thus the “structure” of plants, animals and humans.

Also in Genesis, the first humans are told to “dress” and “keep” the Garden of Eden (2:15). Note that the original Hebrew words for *dress* and *keep* mean “to work” and to “protect” (*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*). Man was charged with *protecting* the environment in which he was placed.

The Bible also extensively describes a coming time when war will end and peace will be ensured in part through a focus on proper agricultural processes. Isaiah 2:4 summarizes this time: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against

nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

The way in which this peaceful time will come to pass is a central theme of the Bible. It is the *good news* of a coming SUPERGOVERNMENT—the Kingdom of God—that will usher in this peace. This Kingdom will, as the verse in Isaiah states, teach people to care for the Earth, which includes proper farming practices and soil preservation techniques. In turn, these efforts will contribute to an era free of conflict.

These descriptions in the Bible, however, can seem mere words with no proof. But you *can* be certain of God’s existence and know that the Bible is His inspired Word. To get started, read the booklets *Does God Exist?* and *Bible Authority... Can It Be Proven?* □

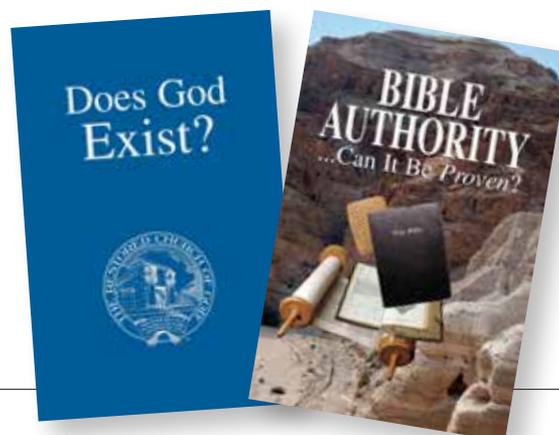
Where’s the Proof?

Millions believe God exists! Few have proof. Have you proven that God exists? Or do you hope—suspect—feel—believe—think—He does? Can His existence be scientifically proven? Can you know with certainty that an all-intelligent Mind created the universe and all life on Earth—including you? Must the answers be “accepted on faith”?

In addition, the Bible purports to be the Word of God. Must its authority be accepted on faith? Can its divine authority be demonstrated?

It is time for you to squarely face these questions!

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Silk Road Economic Belt

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A



THE NEW SILK ROAD

China's Path to Global Authority?

Will the Asian nation's singular approach to infrastructure bring greater world influence?

BY ANDREW J. HOLCOMBE

Lanzhou

Xi'an

CHINA

Fuzhou

Zhanjiang

Hanoi

Guangzhou

MALAYSIA

Kuala Lumpur

Jakarta

INDONESIA

CHINA NEVER does anything small. The Great Wall of China, built nearly 2,300 years ago, crosses nine provinces and is 13,170 miles long—more than half the length of Earth’s circumference. The famous Terracotta Army, a mass of 8,000 unique life-size statues, was made to accompany China’s first emperor, Qin Shi Huang, in the grave. The ancient Silk Road was a 4,300-mile trade route used to link China with the Middle East and Western civilizations.

It should come as no surprise that this nation is now funding the largest infrastructure project the world has ever seen, dubbed “The New Silk Road.”

The ancient road created a physical connection between cities, nations and cultures. Although it would take

migrants and traders nearly two years to traverse the path in its entirety, it established the first viable means for trading with countries thousands of miles away.

Its modern counterpart seeks to establish and promote trade in much the same way. Also named the One Belt and One Road (OBOR), this nearly \$1 trillion initiative will use modern interstates, railways and ports to boost international trade and strengthen economies throughout Europe and Asia.

In a keynote speech on OBOR, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared, “China’s Belt and Road Initiative is based on the historic roots of the Silk Road; it focuses on Asia, Europe and African continents, and is open to all friends.”

Many nations worldwide are praising China’s resolve to think outside its borders. Italian President Sergio Mattarella and French Prime Minister Bernard Cazeneuve each visited China in February 2017 to show support for this initiative. OBOR Europe reported:

“The Italian president insisted on Italy’s willingness to take part in the new Silk Road project and to build the infrastructure necessary for the realization of the OBOR. Mattarella thus emphasized the possible role that the Italian ports of Genoa and Trieste could play in the development of the new maritime Silk route.”

Although many nations support China’s effort, the logistical challenges to implement this plan are great.

Massive Undertaking

For its New Silk Road, China is coordinating hundreds of infrastructure projects simultaneously across eight time zones, all with unique climates and terrain. No two nations have the same language, government regulations, or building standards. This sheds a different light on the scope of One Belt One Road and reiterates China’s desire to “go big.”

Consider how long it takes to build just one road even when all parties



involved speak the same language, abide by the same regulations, operate within the same time zone, function within the same climate, and are accustomed to the same building methods and philosophies.

Planning and engineering alone can take up to three years before permits are granted and construction begins. After determining the location, environmental concerns, social effects and costs, dozens of subcontractors work to excavate, form and erect the infrastructure. Progress is routinely halted due to weather, government regulations, and unexpected problems that arise along the way.

Because the magnitude of China's project has never been attempted before, many are asking, why is China doing this now?

Nothing New

China's modern approach to infrastructure is one-of-a-kind. The New Silk Road is not the only example of



■ **GLOBAL AMBITIONS:** Top, pumps dredge sand to reclaim land at the site of a Chinese-funded \$1.4 billion reclamation project in Colombo, Sri Lanka (Dec. 5, 2017). Left, Pakistani fishermen construct boats in the impoverished Gwadar port (Oct. 4, 2017). China has pledged millions to modernize this strategic location near the Strait of Hormuz. Bottom right, China Railway Express containers are loaded onto a freight train ahead of departure from a rail depot in Corringham, near London, England, en route to China (April 10, 2017).

PHOTOS: LAKRUWAN WANNIARACHCHI/ (TOP); AMELIE HERENSTEIN/ (LEFT); ISABEL INFANTES/ (BOTTOM RIGHT); AFP/GETTY IMAGES



large-scale Chinese infrastructure that has raised eyebrows.

Entire cities built to house hundreds of thousands or millions of people sit nearly empty within its borders. Rows of vacant high rises line barren streets. The New South China Mall, considered the largest in the world in terms of leasable area, remains unoccupied. Tourists come to these cities, not to visit bustling fish markets, ride packed subways, or see the latest plays, but instead to witness the vast emptiness of an urban landscape built for no one.

Kai Caemmerer has photographed many of these desolate cityscapes. In an interview with him, *BBC* reported that he “thinks part of what makes

highly risky—there is no guarantee apartments, homes and businesses will be filled. However, China’s city planners believe it will eventually alleviate overpopulation in the nation’s larger cities, as well as help urbanize people living in rural areas. Both take time.

These “ghost cities” are evidence that China will devote vast sums of money and resources to an uncertain end, with hopes to produce large-scale returns in the future. This quality is what sets China apart from many other nations: a long-term focus and willingness to fail.

The One Belt and One Road initiative takes this unique ideology on infrastructure to an international and even

ture could bolster poorer countries to the south of China, as well as boost global trade. Domestic regions are also expected to benefit—especially the less-developed border regions in the west of the country, such as Xinjiang. The economic benefits, both domestically and abroad, are many, but perhaps the most obvious is that trading with new markets could go a long way towards keeping China’s national economy buoyant.”

But China will benefit the most in that it will have bragging rights for authoring and funding the largest global infrastructure project in history. Just this one reason, let alone all the other, makes it evident why Beijing would take on a risky \$1 trillion project. Even if OBOR does not result in projected economic gains, at the very least, Beijing can claim real estate rights after spending billions of dollars to build infrastructure and provide jobs in Kyrgyzstan, Iran, Turkey, Russia, Poland, Germany, Italy, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Indonesia and many other nations.

Some nations are concerned that the New Silk Road initiative contains a hidden agenda. The business news outlet *Quartz India* reported that “nations wonder if hegemonistic designs are hidden behind the rationality of connectivity and trade. The policy initiative aims to enhance China’s centrality in the global economic unilateral approach. But how the project is conceived and implemented so far belies the rhetoric of multilateralism emanating from Beijing.”

In other words, some fear that China, by attaching strings to each nation, would create a broad network of allies, bolstering its economic and political influence through “soft colonialism.”

President Xi stated during the Communist party congress in 2017 that the nation is standing “tall and firm in the east.” As the One Belt, One Road initiative progresses, the passing of time will tell just how tall and firm China’s global authority will become.

For more on the Asian giant’s outlook, read China’s Hazy Future. □



■ **EAST MEETS WEST:** World leaders attend the Belt and Road Forum at the Yanqi Lake venue near Beijing, China (May 15, 2017).
PHOTO: NICOLAS ASFOURI-POOL/GETTY IMAGES

these places seem so ‘weird’ is the speed with which they have been built. ‘Many of these cities are built on a scale that is somewhat unfamiliar to the methods of Western urbanization.’”

Cities throughout history have grown organically with natural increases in population. As families expand and generations pass, the number of buildings, roads, shops, bridges and schools increase in proportion.

China’s modern view of urban development flips this principle, following the notion that “if you build it, they will come.”

Spending billions and trillions of dollars to erect such metropolises is

global scale. While the risks are high, the potential gains are even higher.

What Is at Stake?

China stated at the Silk Road Summit in Beijing that its goal is to create “a new era of globalization.” The OBOR initiative includes two main routes—one by land and one by sea—that closely mimic the ancient paths. The plan involves 68 countries, 40 percent of the world’s GDP, and affects three out of every five people on Earth.

The global benefits could be massive. The World Economic Forum reported: “One strong incentive is that Trans-Eurasian trade infrastruc-

Why Can't We Stop TEXTING & DRIVING?



Heartbreaking stories abound of innocents being killed or injured by distracted drivers. This trend is a symptom of a deeper problem.

BY GARRICK R. OXLEY

EVERY CHILD HAS dreams. Xzavier Davis-Bilbo, a 5-year-old growing up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, surely did. With his energy, enthusiasm and love for sports, his mother looked forward to cheering him on as a star football player one day.

Yet he will never be able to suit up for a single game.

After school, Xzavier was walking down his street with his sister to play at a park. Without warning, he was struck by a car. The driver was a teenage girl. She had driven through a four-way stop and veered over to the wrong side of the road, hitting him.

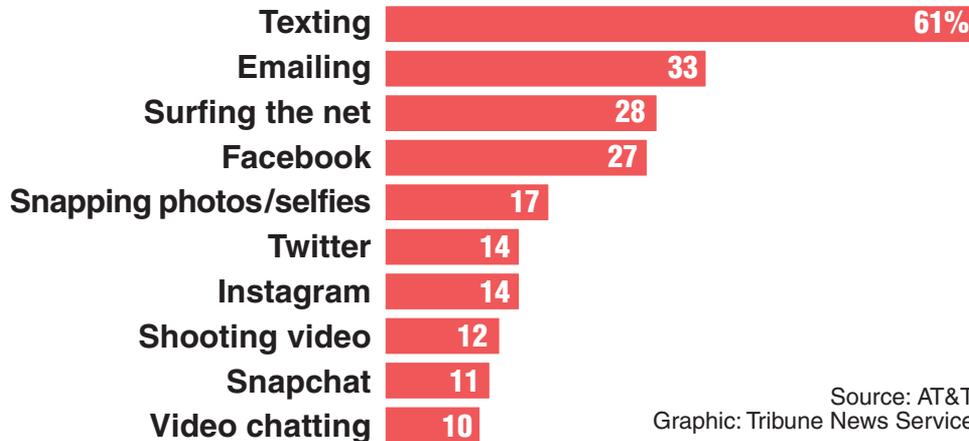
She had been texting.

The child—who barely started grade school—became paralyzed from the diaphragm down. He is now only able to move around in a motorized wheelchair.

This account was presented in Werner Herzog's 2013 documentary "From One Second to the Next." Sadly, Xzavier's story is not a freak occurrence. Tragedies like it, caused

Driving with Smartphones

Smartphone activities people say they do while driving include:



Source: AT&T
Graphic: Tribune News Service

by texting and driving, happen every day.

■ April 2016: A 19-year-old girl veered off a road in Florida, smashing her car into a tree. She was killed instantly. She had just sent a text message to her boyfriend stating, “I can’t wait to see you this weekend!” (*Daily Mail*).

■ July 2017: A Michigan State University coach was texting just prior to fatally striking a car with his pickup truck. He killed a mother and her 5-year-old daughter. Records show the man sent six text messages and received 17 during the 20 minutes before the collision (*Lansing State Journal*).

■ September 2017: A young man traveling through Palmer Township, Pennsylvania, texted his friends from behind the wheel to discuss where they wanted to have dinner that night. While distracted, his vehicle drifted onto the shoulder of the road and struck a 12-year-old girl walking home from an ice cream shop. She was killed by the accident (*The Morning Call*).

Many innocent people have been injured or killed by texting drivers.

Some victims were pedestrians, others motorists. But all were simply minding their own business. And of course some drivers injure or kill only themselves.

Continually seeing the suffering of victims and their loved ones, despite so many warnings and tragedies, begs the question, *why does this keep happening?*

Deadly Facts

According to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nine people die and more than 1,000 are injured each day in distracted driving accidents in America. Yet it can be difficult to pin down exactly how many deaths come specifically from texting.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported that 448 deaths were linked to mobile phone use in 2015. Yet this number may be lower than reality. *Bloomberg* reported: “The data from each state is compiled from accident reports filed by local police, most of which don’t prompt officers to consider mobile phone distraction as an underlying cause. Only 11 states use report-

ing forms that contain a field for police to tick-off mobile-phone distraction, while 27 have a space to note distraction in general as a potential cause of the accident.

“The fine print seems to make a difference. Tennessee, for example, has one of the most thorough accident report forms in the country, a document that asks police to evaluate both distractions in general and mobile phones in particular. Of the 448 accidents...84 occurred in Tennessee. That means, a state with 2 percent of the country’s population accounted for 19 percent of its phone-related driving deaths. As in polling, it really depends on how you ask the question.”

Distracted driving can be difficult to detect and police, especially when compared

with drunk driving. After being pulled over, a drunk driver blows into a breathalyzer to *prove* he is drunk. A texting driver can easily get away with saying he was not using his phone. An intoxicated person can show many warning signs of his condition even before entering his vehicle. One cannot predict whether a motorist who seems normal one moment could be fatally distracted the next.

A survey of drivers shows that this habit is pervasive. Emergency road service provider AAA reported: “More than 2 in 5 drivers (42 percent) admit to reading a text message or email while driving in the past 30 days, while 12 percent report doing this fairly often or regularly. Nearly 1 in 3 drivers (32 percent) admit to typing or sending a text or email over the past month, while eight percent say they do so fairly often or regularly.” One can wonder how many others simply chose not to admit it.

A Zendrive study found that “during an hour-long trip, drivers spent an average of 3.5-minutes using their phones. This finding is frightening, especially when you consider that a 2-second distraction is long enough

to increase your likelihood of crashing by over 20-times. In other words, that's equivalent to *105 opportunities an hour that you could nearly kill yourself and/or others*" (emphasis added).

Society's Efforts

State governments have taken various steps attempting to solve this problem. For example, 90 "texting zones" have been added along highways in New York, allowing motorists to pull off and park to safely use mobile devices.

Texting while driving has been banned in many states. A texting ban bill is presently being considered by the Florida House. *The Associated Press* reported: "Currently, Florida law says texting by noncommercial drivers is a secondary offense—law enforcement officers must see another violation like speeding or an illegal lane change before they cite a driver for texting. The bill would make texting a primary offense."

Yet, Florida would not be the first state to do so. In fact, it would be one of the *last!* According to

the Governors Highway Safety Association, "Currently, 47 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands ban text messaging for all drivers. All but 4 have primary enforcement. Of the 3 states without an all driver texting ban, 2 prohibit text messaging by novice drivers."

Stricter laws no doubt have positive effects. Yet the fact that people continue to text and drive despite it already being widely prohibited shows that it cannot be stopped by laws alone.

Some blame phone companies for not doing more to prevent people from endangering others. Various apps and safety features have been developed to combat distracted driving. Apple debuted a mode in a recent update of its mobile operating system called "Do Not Disturb While Driving." *The Telegraph* reported that it "uses a number of signals, such as the iPhone's accelerometer, the rate at which it finds and loses nearby Wi-Fi networks, and GPS to try to detect when it thinks you are driving."

Apps intended to help include AT&T DriveMode, Textecution, DriveSafe.ly, Text-STAR and DriveScribe. They offer features such as the ability to send automatic replies to text messages received while driving, informing the person you will get back to them later, and the option for incoming messages to be read audibly to eliminate the need to look at your screen. The user can respond to the person by verbally dictating a message.

However, none of these advancements can eliminate the problem. With every app comes the option to disable it, or to never install it in the first place. If one is tempted to manually answer a text from behind the wheel, they need only tell their phone, "I'm a passenger."

Technology Addiction

A survey commissioned by AT&T found that "95% of drivers disapprove of distracted driving, yet 71% engage in smartphone activities while driving." If so many acknowledge that

WHY DO YOU EXIST?

Gazing up at the night sky—away from city lights—makes us feel tiny, miniscule, insignificant. When pondering the vastness of the universe, life's greatest questions come to mind: What is the meaning of my existence? Does my life have a deeper purpose? Can I know for certain?

You can know the answers to these questions. In fact, you **MUST** know!

Read the booklet *Why Do You Exist?* to learn the awe-inspiring reason you were put on this Earth.

RCG.ORG/WDYE

distracted driving is wrong, *why do they still do it?*

In today's hyperconnected world, people bring their phones *everywhere*. Texting while driving is simply an extension of a lifestyle.

A 2017 survey conducted in the United Kingdom by online casino company Casumo shed light on technology dependency: "Finding that the average user unlocked their phone more than 10,000 times a year—or about 28 times a day—the researchers identified about 4,000 phone interactions a year as being 'compulsive' (i.e., the owner had no particular act in mind when engaging).

"Equally eye-opening was the finding that the highest decile of smartphone enthusiasts—or the top ten percent of users—opened their device 60-plus times every 24 hours.

"Still, only a third of respondents earnestly believed they were addicted to checking their device."

Most conclude that technology dependence does not apply to them. No one wants to see himself as an addict. Yet even social media companies and others with plenty to gain by keeping people hooked on their products and services are starting to question the impact they are having on their users.

"There is growing concern that as well as addicting users, technology is contributing toward so-called 'continuous partial attention,' severely limiting people's ability to focus, and possibly lowering IQ. One recent study showed that the mere presence of smartphones damages cognitive capacity—even when the device is turned off. 'Everyone is distracted,' [Justin] Rosenstein says. 'All of the time'" (*The Guardian*). Mr. Rosenstein is the Facebook engineer who created the "Like" button.

Even those who do not use their phones *all day every day* can most likely recall moments of feeling like a slave to it. Each electronic ding, twinge of vibration, or glowing notification light is a harbinger of vital stimulation from a friend, family member, crush, spouse, employer, co-

worker or social media follower, and there is an impulse to check it *immediately*.

What's Missing

After considering technology's emerging long-term impact, we must ask: what exactly do we miss out on when we are glued to our phones? Are we unwittingly avoiding something important when we make technology such an integral part of our lives? And why are we so eager to remain connected that we cannot even unplug when operating a 4,000-pound vehicle at high speeds?

This is not to say that technology is inherently evil. Text messaging and smartphones in general can serve worthwhile purposes. It is when these are used in excess that they can do great harm. The tragedies we examined prove this.

Yet technology-dependent users are diverting their attention from more than just the road. There is also a failure of people thinking deeply about life and their place in it. This aversion to introspection is a much more subtle consequence than distracted driving—and much more pervasive.

The sad truth is that very few are any longer capable of being alone with their thoughts. In today's affluent Western nations, most crave constant stimulation. To sit in silence is virtually unbearable. In fact, some would rather experience pain than be forced to spend time alone with their thoughts as one experiment proved.

Researchers from the University of Virginia found that a surprising number of participants chose to give themselves a mild electric shock rather than sit alone in a room with their thoughts. Among those who said they would pay *not* to experience the shock again, one-fourth of women and two-thirds of men zapped themselves rather than sitting in silence (*Psychology Today*).

It is easy to think that we can use technology as much as we wish without it affecting our overall ability to think, but the evidence is proving otherwise.

Processing information in tiny, scattered spurts as we switch from one app to the next is vastly different from consciously setting aside a substantive amount of time to actively control and direct our thoughts toward a subject.

An article on the website Thought Catalog explained the importance of human thought: "Your thoughts... are not only necessary but are also incredibly useful. They are nature's way of telling you information that you need, that little light guiding you home. They provide you with emotions. They remind you that you are alive, and that you are a human being with likes and dislikes. They are not only capable of making your heart dance, reminding you of what you love, but they are also able to nudge you into straying away from what pains you."

Instead of occasionally disconnecting from our devices to think deeply about the circumstances and challenges we face, "we choose distractions as our primary coping method" as the article explains.

By relying so heavily on technology, we cut ourselves off from the many benefits that come from exercising our minds. These include analyzing important life matters—examining personal behavior—and considering much deeper concepts such as the ultimate purpose of our lives.

If we can honestly admit that we have a problem, we can then start addressing it by pursuing what truly matters. There are tremendous benefits in shifting our focus away from trivial, inconsequential things and instead on questions such as: What really happens to people when they die? Do they go to heaven if they were "good," and to hell if they were "bad"? Is there a God who created the universe and all life forms, or did everything evolve? Why do I exist? And is there a greater purpose for human life than meets the eye?

These questions DO have answers. To begin finding them, view the two-part *World to Come* series "Why Were You Born?" at rcg.org/worldtocome. □

1918 FLU PANDEMIC

A Century Later, Effective Vaccines Remain Elusive



■ **PANDEMIC:** An emergency military hospital in Camp Funston, Kansas, is inundated with patients during an influenza epidemic (1918).

PHOTO: NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HEALTH AND MEDICINE, ARMED FORCES INSTITUTE OF PATHOLOGY/CC BY 2.5

WASHINGTON (AP) — The descriptions are haunting.

Some victims felt fine in the morning and were dead by night. Faces turned blue as patients coughed up blood. Stacked bodies outnumbered coffins.

A century after one of history's most catastrophic disease outbreaks, scientists are rethinking how to guard against another super-flu like the 1918 influenza that killed tens of millions as it swept the globe.

There is no way to predict what strain of the shape-shifting flu virus could trigger another pandemic or, given modern medical tools, how bad it might be.

But researchers hope to develop stronger flu shots, ways to boost protection against ordinary winter influenza, and guard against future pandemics at the same time.

Dr. Anthony Fauci of the National Institutes of Health is designating a universal flu vaccine a top priority for

NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Labs around the country are hunting for a super-shot that could eliminate the annual fall vaccination in favor of one every five years or 10 years.

Still, it is a tall order. Despite 100 years of science, the flu virus too often beats our best defenses because it constantly mutates.

In 1918, there was no flu vaccine. It would not arrive for decades. Today, vaccination is the best protection. But at best, the seasonal vaccine is 60 percent effective. Protection dropped to 19 percent a few years ago when the vaccine did not match an evolving virus.

If a never-before-seen flu strain erupts, it takes months to brew a new vaccine. Doses arrived too late for the last, fortunately mild, pandemic in 2009.

Today's top concern is a lethal bird flu that jumped from poultry to more than 1,500 people in China since 2013. Last year it mutated, meaning millions

of just-in-case vaccine doses in a U.S. stockpile no longer match.

Mother of All Pandemics

The NIH's Dr. Jeffery Taubenberger called the 1918 flu the mother of all pandemics.

While working as a pathologist for the military, he led the team that identified and reconstructed the extinct 1918 virus, using traces unearthed in autopsy samples from World War I soldiers and from a victim buried in the Alaskan permafrost.

That misnamed Spanish flu "made all the world a killing zone," wrote John M. Barry in *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History*.

Historians think it started in Kansas in early 1918. By winter 1919, the virus had infected one-third of the global population and killed at least 50 million people, including 675,000 Americans. By comparison, the AIDS virus has claimed 35 million lives over four decades.

Three more flu pandemics have struck since, in 1957, 1968 and 2009, spreading widely but nowhere near as deadly. Dr. Taubenberger's research shows the family tree, each subsequent pandemic a result of flu viruses carried by birds or pigs mixing with 1918 flu genes.

"This 100-year timeline of information about how the virus adapted to us and how we adapt to the new viruses, it teaches us that we can't keep designing vaccines based on the past," said Dr. Barney Graham, deputy director of NIH's Vaccine Research Center.

Lingering Mysteries

Lingering mysteries continue to hamper research.

*Please see **FLU PANDEMIC**, page 31*

7 YEARS AFTER THE ARAB SPRING

ON DECEMBER 10, 2010, Mohammed Bouazizi doused himself in fuel and set himself on fire. He was protesting the economic conditions in Tunisia after alleged mistreatment by police who had confiscated his unlicensed vegetable cart. He died from his burns almost a month later not knowing the movement his actions would inspire.

Ten days after Bouazizi's death, the 23-year reign of Tunisia's President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali ended. The dictator stepped down because of intense public outcry. But the change did not stop with the nation.

The Tunisian revolt eventually led to Arab Spring upheaval in Libya, Syria, Yemen, Egypt and Bahrain. Seven years later, the political and social situations in all of these nations remain shaky at best.

Tunisians observed the seventh anniversary of their uprising with demonstrations and protests over failed government leadership and a flagging economy.

President Ben Ali's ouster seemed to transform the country into a budding democracy. Tunisians imposed a new constitution, opened the way to free elections and reinforced equality among sexes—all while the nation battled deadly extremist attacks, including on tourists at the famed Bardo Museum and at a resort hotel outside the seaside town of Sousse.

But six governments later, the North African nation's economy has struggled. Loans continue to weigh on the Tunisian economy, continued extremist attacks have sapped the important tourism sector, and regions far from the capital, where the revolution was ignited, remain neglected.

The jobless rate is above 15 percent, according to official figures, and above 25 percent in some regions, with vast areas of the interior still marginalized. Inflation is officially above 6 percent, evaluated at plus 9 percent by some experts.

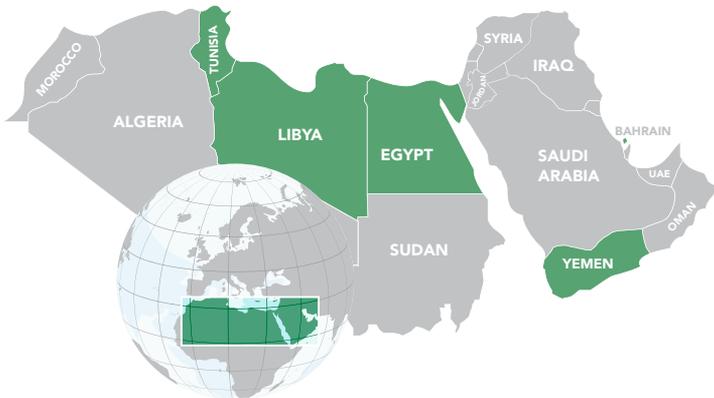
A new finance law raising prices of essential goods and adding new taxes sparked the most recent protests, which began with small demonstrations around the country before ballooning and degenerating into theft, pillaging and car-burning in some places.

Tunisian authorities announced plans to boost aid to the needy in a bid to placate protesters. Prime Minister Youssef



■ **MIDEAST REVOLUTION:** Top left, protesters carry flares and shout slogans during celebrations in Tunis, the capital of Tunisia, marking the seventh anniversary since the uprising that ousted President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and launched the Arab Spring (Jan. 14, 2018). Top right, a tank of the self-styled Libyan National Army, loyal to the country's eastern strongman Khalifa Haftar, advances through water in Benghazi during clashes with militants (Nov. 9, 2017). Bottom left, Houthi rebel fighters inspect the damage after an air strike carried out by the Saudi-led coalition targeted the presidential palace in the Yemeni capital Sanaa (Dec. 5, 2017). Bottom right, Bahraini protesters take part in a demonstration to mark the fifth anniversary of the Arab Spring-inspired uprising, in the town of Sitra (Feb. 12, 2016).

PHOTOS: ANIS MILI/ (TOP LEFT); ABDULLAH DOMA/ (TOP RIGHT); MOHAMMED HUWAIS/ (BOTTOM LEFT); MOHAMMED AL-SHAIKH/ (BOTTOM RIGHT); AFP/GETTY IMAGES



LIBYA

The North African nation, which shares a border with Tunisia, experienced anti-government protests which began in February 2011 against Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi. The nation eventually dissolved into civil war, which continues today, long after opposition forces killed Gadhafi.

EGYPT

Protests, which began on January 25, 2011, led to the ouster of long-time president Hosni Mubarak. His successor Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood was removed through a coup led by then minister of defense, General Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, who became Egypt's president by popular election in 2014.

Today, many see a regime reminiscent of the one overthrown in the wake of the Arab Spring. According to *Al-Jazeera*, President Sissi's government "has imprisoned tens of thousands of Egyptians without charge and banned public protests by passing legislation prohibiting the gathering of 10 or more people, without prior authorisation."

President Sissi reportedly has silenced rivals seeking to run against him in the upcoming presidential race, leaving him as the only candidate in the race.

YEMEN

Beginning in January 2011, protests spread in opposition to unemployment, economic conditions and government corruption. President Ali Abdullah Saleh was ousted in 2012 after an assassination attempt in 2011.

The replacement government was eventually overthrown by Houthi rebels in 2015, sparking a civil war. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, more than 10,000 have been killed, 3 million displaced, and 17.8 million are food insecure in Yemen since the fighting began.

BAHRAIN

Protests began in Bahrain in February 2011. Youth in the nation used social media to encourage citizens to take to the streets in a Day of Rage. The protests, which began peacefully, led government forces to respond with tear gas and rubber bullets. One protester was killed and more than 30 injured in the initial protest.

According to Amnesty International, Bahraini authorities continue to arrest, torture and intimidate people who speak out against the government.



■ **UNREST:** Top, family members of a Tunisian who died in the revolution seven years ago stage a protest in Tunis, Tunisia (Jan. 13, 2018). Left, the view of destruction in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi (Nov. 9, 2017). Right, Yemeni women loyal to the Houthi movement hold up rifles to show support to the movement in Sanaa (Jan. 14, 2018).

PHOTOS: AP/HASSENE DRIDI (TOP); ABDULLAH DOMA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES (LEFT); MOHAMMED HUWAIIS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES (RIGHT)

Chahed decided to allocate 100 million dinars (about \$40 million) to help 200,000 of the neediest families and provide free healthcare for the jobless. An aid fund for poor families to acquire housing also was created.

The Popular Front, a coalition of leftist parties, called the prime minister's measures "laughable" and called for protests "until suspension of the measures in the finance law that affect citizens' buying power."

One person died outside the capital, Tunis, as a result of the protests and scores were injured, including 97 security officers in what became five days of unrest, Interior Ministry

spokesman Khelifa Chibani said. Dozens of police cars were damaged, two police stations burned and eight others ransacked. Arrests were put at nearly 780, including 16 religious extremists, for vandalism and looting. A police crackdown eventually stemmed the unrest.

President Beji Caid Essebsi, in charge since December 2014, attempted to calm the worsening situation saying, "Tunisians are capable of overcoming current difficulties." He called on citizens "for a bit of patience and understanding."

Yet citizens have grown tired of waiting.

"I've been out of work for seven years and see nothing ahead, no flicker of hope for a better future," said Ali Ben Mahmoud, a university graduate from Tunis who took part in the most recent demonstration organized by the group Fest Nestanaou (What Are We Waiting For).

Fatma Ben Hassine, a nearly empty shopping basket in hand, echoed that complaint.

"The revolution brought nothing concrete to our daily lives, which only get worse and worse," she said. "The politicians, whose only concern is their comfort, leave us in despair." □

PERSONAL

Continued from page 2

last days. Recognizing their rise to extraordinary prominence, having become so big and dominant that their impact on the world is enormous, people naturally wonder, “What about the United States and Britain?” Surely, among the Bible’s great prophecies, God would not ignore them. Are they mentioned in prophecy? If so, *where*? And will these nations be exceptions to the collapse of all the great civilizations that preceded them?

Not knowing who or what to believe, some ask their ministers—and find they do not know! Others turn to so-called prophecy experts—psychics, seers, crystal ball gazers and self-described prophets, and other “experts”—but find none of these know either. Truly, the educated of this world—but uneducated in basic, right spiritual knowledge—commentators, columnists, generals, scientists and educators—have absolutely *no idea* how to answer this question. Deceived, and having *closed* their minds, many at least do recognize this is beyond their field.

My book *America and Britain in Prophecy* provides answers—and a *powerful warning*—that no one else is telling you! I urge you to read it—all of it. It will change your thinking forever.

Only about 200 years ago, America and the British Commonwealth of nations suddenly shot to great prominence and power. Not so long ago, the combined wealth of these nations was over 70 percent of the total wealth and physical resources of the world. All the rest of the nations combined possessed less than 30 percent. Of Britain, it was said, “The sun never sets on the British Empire.” Yet, right on schedule, Britain declined to an almost third-rate power.

Now consider. Virtually all of Bible prophecy has to do with world trends and events for *our* time. How then could the mightiest nations of all time be left unmentioned?

Religious leaders explain that America, Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand are merely gentile nations, thus believing that end-time prophecy totally disregards these great countries. Deceived, they usually focus on prophecies describing the Jews, totally unaware of enormous understanding available about the identity of the peoples of the West. These leaders simply do not know *where, how*—or *what*—to look for. Thus, answers remain elusive.

Confusion About Prophecy Abounds

Knowing something is terribly wrong, many sense the world has reached what the Bible calls the “end time” or “last days.” This has caused a mushrooming of interest in biblical prophecy.

Millions of people now routinely discuss terms such as “Antichrist,” “Great Tribulation,” “Millennium,” “Armageddon,” “the Beast,” “False Prophet,” “God’s Wrath,” “Abomination of Desolation” and others, without proper meaning or comprehension. Again, they simply do not know where or how to look within God’s Word to get correct understanding of what these and other terms mean, and how they will play out, sequentially, within God’s incredible Master Plan for the end of the age. Like a kind of prophetic Rubik’s Cube, the many critical pieces of the puzzle never come together. This is because, instead of directly examining the hundreds of clear scriptures on these and other prophecies—for *proof* (I Thes. 5:21)!—many seem content to trust in human interpretations. Thus, confusion and disagreement about how to solve this great Rubik’s Cube have mushroomed.

We offer a tremendous amount of truth about Bible prophecy. It is all found on our websites.

Most students of Bible prophecy remain in near total ignorance of its meaning, unable to recognize the *speed, sequence, seriousness*—and AWESOME MAGNITUDE!—of onrushing events. They just cannot untangle the maze of *what* hap-

pens *when*, as well as *where* and to *whom*—never mind WHY. Our literature removes the veil of mystery shrouding God’s Plan and makes prophecy come alive—and reveals what lies ahead for all nations before Christ’s Return.

The Bible is close to 750,000 words. This means about 250,000 are devoted to many, many prophecies. Now ask: What possible purpose would God have for devoting a third of His Word to a subject—*any* subject—and then leave mankind in the dark about it? God gives prophecy for two clear reasons: (1) as a *warning* for those who will take heed and (2) *proof* of the existence of the God of the Bible, and therefore the *authority* of the Bible.

This Personal introduces the PLAIN TRUTH of final events prophesied to soon strike an unsuspecting world in general—and the United States and Britain in particular!

What Is Prophecy?

Any study of prophecy must begin with the proper definition of what it *is*. Most lack even this most basic knowledge.

Bible prophecy is the inspired, divine revelation or foretelling of historical events, written *in advance* of those events, pertaining to the unfolding of God’s Plan for mankind. A shorter definition is simply “foretelling the future.”

The apostle Peter wrote this about how God intends that prophecy illuminate the understanding of those who study it: “We have also a more *sure word of prophecy*; whereunto you do well that you *take heed*, as unto a light that shines in a dark place” (II Pet. 1:19). God’s purpose regarding His “*sure word of prophecy*” is that people “take heed.” You must be willing to take heed to what is written.

Now continue: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any *private interpretation*” (vs. 20). This is crucial to understand. No single verse—or even any two or three passages—is sufficient to bring

correct prophetic understanding. God says His Word is written “precept upon precept; line upon line...here a little, and there a little” (Isa. 28:10). One must know how to put many related verses together to get the full picture.

Continue again in II Peter 1: “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were *moved by the Holy Spirit*” (vs. 21). In short, prophecy comes from *God*, through His servants, as He inspires them to record *His* words.

God alone can fulfill prophecy. No human being has even the knowledge of what are world-shattering future events, let alone the power to bring them to pass centuries or even millennia beyond his lifetime. In Isaiah 41, God challenges all would-be “prophets” of this world to try to do what only He can do (vs. 21-24). In Isaiah 48, God says, “I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of My mouth, and I *showed* them; I did them suddenly, and they *came to pass*...I have even from the beginning declared it to you; *before* it came to pass I *showed it you*” (vs. 3, 5).

The Moffatt translation reads, “What has occurred I foretold long ago; it fell from My lips, I *predicted* it, then suddenly I *acted*—it was *done*” (Isa. 48:3). What God purposes *will happen*! If He tells us something—*anything*—is to occur, it *will* occur!

Isaiah 46 states, “I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me. Declaring the *end* from the *beginning*, and from ancient times the things that are *not yet done*, saying, My counsel *shall stand*, and I *will do* all My pleasure” (vs. 9-10). Strong words—and all skeptics should heed them!

God gives this sure promise of what will happen in advance of events He intends to fulfill: “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but He *reveals His secret* unto His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). God keeps His promises. He always reveals *major events before* they occur.

Understand! Almighty God will soon have to intervene and save humanity from itself. But before this occurs, world trouble will greatly increase—intensifying to staggering proportions. This will be followed by unexpected and cataclysmic events that will *shake* the whole world! Civilization as we know it will change forever.

Obedience Tied to Understanding

The book of Revelation opens showing God’s intent is to *reveal* to “*His servants*” what lies ahead for all nations. It is for all who will heed His words: “The Revelation [meaning a *revealing*] of Jesus Christ [not the apostle John]...to show unto *His servants* things which must shortly come to pass...signified...unto His servant John: who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ...Blessed is he that *reads*, and they that *hear* the words of this prophecy, and KEEP those things which are written therein: *for the time is at hand*” (Rev. 1:1-3).

Obviously, none can keep the great prophecies of the Bible unless they understand them. Therefore, God must provide the necessary *keys* to grasp all that lies ahead. We will examine these keys.

Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 are parallel accounts of what is called the Olivet Prophecy. This all-important prophecy works in combination with Daniel. It puts in sequence events that transcend the entire period from Christ’s First Coming until His Return, almost 2,000 years later.

Most have not understood the events of this prophecy because they do not know the *keys* to unlocking it—and they do not understand that Christ spoke it privately to only His disciples—His servants. This *must* be understood because it identifies who are and are not able to understand what lies ahead for the world!

Matthew uses the most detail, so we will look there, where the prophecy picks up: “As He sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him *privately*, saying, Tell us,

when shall these things be? And what shall be the *sign* of Your coming, and of the end of the world [age]?” (Matt. 24:3). Christ then lists a whole series of events, which occur sequentially until just before His Return. He concludes referring to Daniel the prophet and “whoso reads, *let him understand*” (Matt. 24:15).

Of course, most today do not—and will not—understand the shocking crush of events soon to smash into civilization. Here is why. God’s servants obey Him (Acts 5:32). Understanding flows directly from obedience to God. Notice: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that *do* His commandments” (Psa. 111:10).

All who yield themselves in obedience to God will be able to understand ALL prophecies to be fulfilled in the last days! Almost everyone in professing Christianity refuses to obey God, rejecting His authority over them—and remains blind as a result. No amount of trying to understand will unlock God’s purpose to those who will not keep His Law.

This is the great *first* key to grasping the meaning of major prophecies for America and Britain. They are intended for, and will only be understood by, God’s true people. All others will remain in confusion!

Great Prophecies Now Unlocked!

There is a crucial *second* key that must be identified, and understood by all seeking to grasp God’s end-time purpose. Without it, nations have remained in *total blindness* regarding even the question of human survival on planet Earth. Of course, cynics and skeptics dismiss all the prophecies of the Old Testament as dusty, antiquated, old Hebrew literature and poetry, of no use to us today. They will soon learn how terribly wrong they have been!

Now note this second key well, for almost *none* have understood it: All the major prophecies of the Bible have been *sealed* until the time of the end—the last days. You do not need to take my word for it.

Daniel foretells a time—now here—when “knowledge shall increase,” including the incredibly compelling—and electrifying—story of what God plans to do in our time. Daniel’s message had no application for his own time!

The book of Daniel spans a period of over 2,500 years of events then all yet to be fulfilled. Generations of Bible students, unwilling to believe God, have attempted to interpret Daniel’s prophecy. All have failed, resulting in endless disagreement and confusion. An angel instructs Daniel, near the last verses of his book: “*Shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased*” (12:4). Not grasping what was told him, Daniel sought to understand: “I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the *end* of these things?” (12:8). The angel repeated: “Go your way, Daniel: for the words are *closed up and sealed* till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the *wise shall understand*” (vs. 9-10). Let me reit-

erate that God says *obedience* brings understanding. No wonder Daniel said that “none of the wicked shall understand.” Any who rebel against God’s Law, regardless of how they see themselves, fall into this category.

No one with eyes to see could possibly doubt we are in the end time. God’s promise was always to *unseal* the prophecy when this time arrived. Of course, we now live in what is called the “Information Age.” No one doubts that knowledge has been increased in a general way—and this has been extraordinary. But the primary meaning must be understood in context with the knowledge of the prophecy’s true meaning being revealed at the end.

So the second vital key to properly understanding Bible prophecy is that all previous generations—of even God’s true servants—had *no chance* to understand events described in this book, or other biblical passages.

Master Key Found!

This Personal has only laid the foundation for all there is to learn about America and Britain in Bible prophecy.

A master lock has padlocked the source revealing where civilization is going. Until the 20th century, the key to this lock had been lost. Have you ever lost your keys? The world, like you, has been literally “lost without them.” Unlike you, the world has not been shown where to look. But this great master key has been found.

The identity of America and Britain—and what is foretold to happen to these countries just before Christ’s Return—is the most important *single* key, unlocking the over 80 percent of prophecy yet to be fulfilled.

Again, I urge you most strongly: Read this vitally important book, *America and Britain in Prophecy* at rcg.org/aabibp. You will be shocked at what you learn. It reveals the incredible unknown history of the nations of the West and their connection to the lost tribes of Israel—the identity of these tribes in modern times—why they were lost to history—how God fulfilled His promise to Abraham and how it relates to the rise of America and Britain. It introduces the terrible bad news, but then the awe-inspiring good news, of what lies ahead for these great nations. □

FLU PANDEMIC

Continued from page 25

Scientists now think people respond differently to vaccination based on their flu history. “Perhaps we recognize best the first flu we ever see,” said NIH immunologist Adrian McDermott.

The idea is that your immune system is imprinted with that first strain and may not respond as well to a vaccine against another.

Still, no one knows the ultimate origin of the terrifying 1918 flu. But key to its lethality was a bird-like hemagglutinin.

The Chinese H7N9 bird flu “worries me a lot,” Dr. Taubenberger said. “For a virus like influenza that is a master at adapting and mutating and

evolving to meet new circumstances, it’s crucially important to understand how these processes occur in nature. How does an avian virus become adapted to a mammal?”

While scientists hunt those answers, “it’s folly to predict” what a next pandemic might bring, Dr. Fauci said. “We just need to be prepared.” □



■ **FLU VACCINE:** Vials of the Fluvirin influenza vaccine are displayed at a Walgreens pharmacy in San Francisco, California (Jan. 22, 2018). A strong strain of H3N2 influenza has claimed the lives of 74 Californians under the age of 65 since the flu season began in October of last year.

PHOTO: JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

MIDDLE EAST

Israel Constructing Underground Wall to Block Tunnels from Gaza

Kissufim, Israel (AP) – Massive earthworks and mounds of sandy soil line the Israel-Gaza border as the Israeli military forges ahead with an ambitious subterranean barrier to detect and prevent attack tunnels from reaching southern Israel from the Palestinian enclave.

Israeli military officials on January 18 touted the project as a major deterrent against a strategic threat since the last war against Hamas exposed the extent of the tunnels. Israel has made uncovering the tunnels from Gaza a priority and in recent months has demolished at least three through a combination of intelligence, infantry operations, and hi-tech sensors.

Israel began construction of a 40-mile long underground wall last summer, aiming to prevent Palestinian militants from burrowing toward Israeli communities along the border.

“The technology really is groundbreaking,” Israeli military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan Conricus said in a briefing with journalists on the border with the Gaza Strip. “The message to Hamas is: ‘We now have this system which can detect and destroy terror tunnels that violate Israeli sovereignty.’”

He said that the anti-tunnel barrier under construction “provides a significant challenge for anyone tunneling below,” without elaborating.

Israel and Hamas, the Islamist militant group that has ruled the Gaza Strip since 2007, have fought three wars since 2008. During the most recent conflict in 2014, Hamas militants on several occasions caught Israel off guard by attacking through the underground tunnel network.

While Hamas fighters did not manage to reach Israeli civilian centers, five Israeli soldiers were killed in such attacks, which rattled the Israeli public. Israel destroyed 32 tunnels



■ **SUBTERRANEAN:** An Israeli soldier inspects the opening of a tunnel from Gaza that was allegedly dug by an Islamic jihad militant group, near Kissufim, Israel (Jan. 18, 2018).

PHOTO: JACK GUEZ/POOL VIA AP

during that conflict and has prioritized anti-tunnel operations since.

The barrier—hundreds of feet below ground, studded with sensors and topped by a 26-foot metal fence—has an estimated price tag of \$700 million and is on track for its slated completion in mid-2019, a senior Israeli military official said. Thus far, excavating machines, concrete mixers, and hundreds of workers working in shifts to cover 24 hours a day, six days a week, have completed 2.5 miles of the 40-mile border barrier.

Cranes hoisted 25-meter-long rebar cages into the air, and a senior Israeli military official said “several get welded together” to form the concrete wall’s reinforced spine.

Thus far, Hamas has not tried to disrupt construction, and giant earth berms protect workers from spying eyes and small arms fire. A senior Israeli military official said that while neither side wants to start a new round of violence, minor incidents along the border had the potential to snowball into a larger conflict quickly.

Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

The military on January 18 also showcased a tunnel destroyed in late

October—its demolition left a dozen militants dead.

The meter-wide concrete-lined shaft penetrated hundreds of yards into southern Israel toward nearby Kibbutz Kissufim. Its destruction prompted retaliatory rocket fire by the Islamic jihad militant group. Another tunnel was demolished late last year and on January 14, Israel said it destroyed a one-mile tunnel built by Hamas that stretched from the Gaza Strip through Israel and into Egypt.

Hazem Qassem, a Hamas spokesman, said the group would find a way around the wall.

“Our people have proved that they are always capable of finding means and mechanisms to overcome all measures by the [Israeli] occupation. Our people have many ways to defend themselves,” he said, without elaborating.

An Israeli military map of the Gaza Strip shown to reporters illustrated the miles of Hamas and Islamic jihad tunnels honeycombing the Palestinian territory. The military estimates that, working around the clock, a couple dozen militants can dig 10 yards of tunnel per day. □

World's 8 Richest Men Have Same Wealth as Poorest 50 Percent

The wealth gap between the haves and the have-nots continues to expand.

In a report published on January 16, Oxfam stated that eight billionaires now have as much money as the world population's poorest half—3.6 billion people.

According to the report titled “An Economy for the 99%,” income inequality is a burgeoning global crisis. Over the last 30 years, the growth of incomes of the top 1 percent has increased 300 percent over the last 30 years, while the incomes of the lowest half have not grown at all. Since 2015, the richest 1 percent owned more wealth than the rest of the planet. And data “compiled by Bloomberg



■ **IMPOVERISHED:** Residents of Manila, Philippines, rest on a wooden bridge over a garbage-filled waterway (Jan. 17, 2018).

PHOTO: NOEL CELIS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

showed that the richest people on the planet added 1 trillion to their collective wealth in 2017—more than four times the previous year's gains—thanks to a surge in stock prices,” *The Independent* reported.

This has resulted in stark differences between the rich and poor. For example, the richest person in Vietnam earns more in one day than the poorest

person earns in 10 years, and a CEO at an FTSE 100 company (e.g., BP and Burberry) earns as much as 10,000 garment factory workers in Bangladesh.

“Left unchecked, growing inequality threatens to pull our societies apart,” Oxfam stated. “It increases crime and insecurity, and undermines the fight to end poverty. It leaves more people living in fear and fewer in hope.” □

WEATHER & ENVIRONMENT

Ocean Dead Zones Have Quadrupled Since 1950

Fertilizers, sewage runoff, and rising water temperatures have suffocated the ocean and caused the number of dead zones in it to quadruple since 1950—with oxygen-deprived areas along the coastline growing tenfold, according to analysis published in the journal *Science*.

While increased pollution is concerning by itself, scientists say the uptick in dead zones has the potential to collapse the entire oceanic ecosystem.

“The oxygen content of the open ocean and coastal waters has been declining for at least the past half-century, largely because of human activities that have increased global tempera-

tures and nutrients discharged to coastal waters,” the analysis stated. “These changes have accelerated consumption of oxygen by microbial respiration, reduced solubility of oxygen in water, and reduced the rate of oxygen resupply from the atmosphere to the ocean interior, with a wide range of biological and ecological consequences.”

Additional nutrients can “cause an overgrowth of algae which consumes oxygen,” according to The Weather Channel, and that in turn these “oxygen-deprived areas leave sea life unable to breath and can cause massive fish kills.”

“Oxygen is fundamental to biological and biogeochemical processes in the ocean,” the report in *Science* further stated. “Its decline can cause major changes in ocean productivity, biodiversity, and biogeochemical cycles. Analyses of direct measurements at sites around the world indicate that oxygen-minimum

zones in the open ocean have expanded by several million square kilometers and that hundreds of coastal sites now have oxygen concentrations low enough to limit the distribution and abundance of animal populations and alter the cycling of important nutrients.”

More than half a billion people rely on the ocean for food and 350 million use it to make a living, according to The Weather Channel, so the potential that the oceanic ecosystem could collapse is of huge concern.

“Major extinction events in Earth's history have been associated with warm climates and oxygen-deficient oceans,” Denise Breitburg, who led the analysis, stated in *The Guardian*. “Under the current trajectory that is where we would be headed. But the consequences to humans of staying on that trajectory are so dire that it is hard to imagine we would go quite that far down that path.” □

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