

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2021

THE

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# REAL TRUTH™

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING



# Is Hell Real?

From Pearl Harbor  
to Superpower

How Haiti  
Endures

'Queen of Europe'  
to Step Down

COVID Vaccines:  
The Mark of the Beast?

# THE **REAL TRUTH**<sup>TM</sup>

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

VOL. XIX | NO. 6 | NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2021

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RCG.ORG/REALTRUTH



German Chancellor Angela Merkel addresses the nation during the COVID-19 pandemic in Berlin (March 18, 2020).

STEFFEN KUGLER/BUNDESREGIERUNG VIA GETTY IMAGES

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COVER ILLUSTRATION: JODY E. LYDICK

**CREDITS:** All photos from Getty Images unless otherwise noted. Articles on pages 13-15, 20-24, 30-31 contain information from Reuters and The Associated Press.

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

**The Real Truth**  
1000 Ambassador Drive  
Wadsworth, OH 44281  
[rcg.org/realtruth](http://rcg.org/realtruth)

**PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**  
DAVID C. PACK

**MANAGING EDITOR**  
EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

**SENIOR EDITOR**  
BRADFORD G. SCHLEIFER

**ASSOCIATE EDITOR**  
SAMUEL C. BAXTER

## **CONTRIBUTING WRITERS**

DAVID C. PACK

SAMUEL C. BAXTER

JUSTIN M. FRAZIER

WULPHERT DE GRAAF

ANDREW J. HOLCOMBE

RICHARD O. LEE

DAVID J. LITAVSKY

FRANK LYDICK

KENNETH M. OREL

GARRICK R. OXLEY

TIMOTHY D. RANNEY

DOMINIC J. RIVARD

BRADFORD G. SCHLEIFER

NESTOR A. TORO

F. JACO VILJOEN

VIDAL N. WACHUKU

EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

## **EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS**

MELISSA M. HOLCOMBE

DAVID J. LITAVSKY

GARRICK R. OXLEY

## **ART/GRAPHICS**

CHAUNTEL A. HOUK

DARNITRA D. JACKSON

JODY E. LYDICK

SARAH O. VIDAL

## **WEBSITE SERVICES**

BRADFORD G. SCHLEIFER

ANGELA K. BAXTER

AMANDA B. DODD

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

TIMOTHY C. WILLARD

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

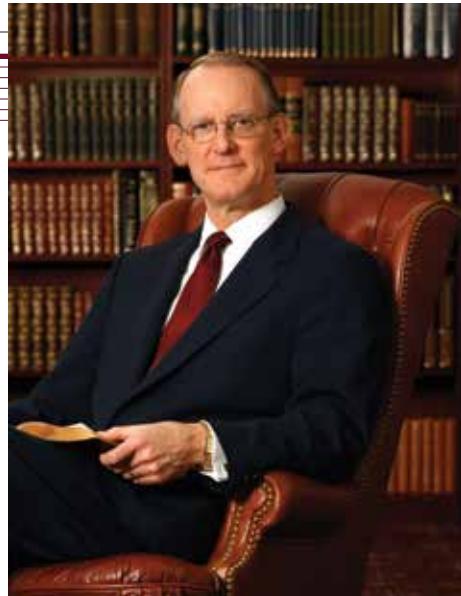
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Pack



# Should Christians Celebrate New Year's?

**M**ILLIONS KEEP New Year's without knowing why—or where it originated. While some question its observance, most see nothing wrong with such a celebration.

Have you ever considered or investigated why you believe and practice what you do? The world is filled with endless customs and traditions. Yet few seek to understand and research the origin of things. Most go along with popular practices without question, choosing to do what everyone else does because it is easier. The majority hold the same beliefs they learned in childhood, assuming what they believe is right.

Should true Christians—whose calling and goal is to imitate the perfect life of Jesus Christ—celebrate New Year's? Should they be caught up in the excitement? What could be wrong with “ringing out the old and ringing in the new”? What is the origin of this holiday? What does God say about it? You will be surprised to learn the truth that ministers of professing Christianity either do not know—or will not teach.

## The Record of History

Before looking at what the Bible says about New Year's, we must first examine the history of this popu-

lar holiday. Notice this from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: “The earliest-known record of a New Year festival dates from about 2000 BC in Mesopotamia, where in Babylonia the New Year (Akitu) began with the new moon after the spring equinox (mid March) and in Assyria with the new moon nearest the autumn equinox (mid September).”

The *World Book* states: “Many ancient peoples...performed rituals to do away with the past and purify themselves for the new year. For example, some people put out the fires they were using and started new ones.” The Celts celebrated the new year on November 1, marking the end of summer and the harvest, and the beginning of the cold, dark winter ahead. (This was a precursor to Halloween.) They built sacred bonfires to scare off evil spirits and to honor their sun god.

Also notice this: “In early times, the ancient Romans gave each other New Year's gifts of branches from sacred trees. In later years, they gave gold-covered nuts or coins imprinted with pictures of Janus, the god of gates, doors, and beginnings. January was named after Janus, who had two faces—one looking forward and the other looking backward” (*ibid.*).

These historical accounts make clear that the history of New Year's Eve and New Year's Day is deeply rooted

in pagan traditions. It originated in the minds of men—pagan idol-worshippers—and it slowly developed over the centuries.

### **God's View of Paganism**

Now notice what God thinks about New Year's, and any holiday that has its roots in pagan practices, customs and traditions. You will be shocked.

We begin with Jeremiah 10:2-3: “Learn not the way of the heathen... for the customs of the people are vain.” This is a plain command from God—in your Bible.

Throughout His Word, God describes “the heathen” as those who worship nature (the sun, moon, stars, trees, etc.), or manmade idols, or anything but the one true God. God calls such people and their practices *heathen*. Men call them *pagan*. Christians know that God hates all customs, practices and traditions that have pagan roots.

How serious is God about paganism? Follow the next passages carefully. When He rescued the 12 tribes of Israel from Egypt and led them out of brutal slavery, He commanded, “After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein you dwelt, you shall not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, where I bring you, shall you not do: neither shall you walk in...[men’s] ordinances” (Lev. 18:3). In verses 24-29, God told the Israelites not to defile themselves with the practices and customs of the surrounding nations. And also, “Therefore shall you keep My ordinance, that you commit not any one of these abominable customs, which were committed before you, and that you defile not yourselves therein: I am the LORD your God” (vs. 30).

God cursed Egypt with 10 plagues and freed Israel from slavery. He parted the Red Sea and led Israel to safety. He fed them manna from heaven, protected them from battle-tested gentile armies, delivered them into the Promised Land, and drove out their enemies. How did Israel treat God in turn? “Our fathers understood not Your wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of

Your mercies; but provoked Him... at the Red Sea...They soon forgot His works; they waited not for His counsel: but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert...They made a calf in Horeb, and worshiped the molten image. Thus they changed their glory [the true God] into the similitude of an ox that eats grass. They forgot God their Savior, which had done great things in Egypt; wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red Sea...they despised the pleasant land, they believed not His

## **“The Greek word for ‘confusion’ also means instability, disorder, commotion, tumult—words that aptly describe New Year’s chaotic history.”**

word: but murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto the voice of the LORD...They joined themselves also unto Baal-peor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead. Thus they provoked Him to anger with their inventions” (Psa. 106:7-29).

Captivity ultimately came because Israel lusted after pagan customs, rituals, traditions and ways.

### **New Year's in Modern Times**

After examining the previous scriptures, it becomes obvious that God does not take pagan practices *lightly*. True Christians know that “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (I Cor. 14:33).

The Greek word for “confusion” also means instability, disorder, commotion, tumult—words that aptly describe New Year’s chaotic history. For thousands of years, men kept

changing their new year from spring to fall, from March 1 to January 1 (and in some cases December 25), to March 25, back to January 1 again—the dead of winter!

Notice *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of World Religions*: “January 1 was restored as New Year’s Day by the Gregorian calendar (1582), immediately adopted by Roman Catholic countries. Other countries slowly followed suit: Scotland, 1660; Germany and Denmark, about 1700; England, 1752; Sweden, 1753; and Russia, 1918.”

Even today, men cannot agree on the date. Notice: “Chinese New Year is celebrated officially for a month beginning in late January or early February,” and, “The Muslim New Year falls on the first day of the month of Muharram and commemorates the date of the Hegira (July 16, [AD] 622, on the Gregorian calendar), the starting point of the Muslim calendar. Since the Muslim year is a lunar one consisting of only 354 days, the commencement of the new year fluctuates widely by the Western calendar.” The Vietnamese New Year, Tet, falls sometime between January 21 and February 20. And, “the Jewish New Year...is observed during September or early October. Hindus in different parts of India celebrate the new year on various dates.”

This is what happens when people insist on following their own judgment rather than trusting the One who designed the entire universe and everything in it.

### **Ideas of Men**

Not only is the history of New Year’s confusing and chaotic, but so is the holiday itself. During New Year’s celebrations, people let go of all inhibition—and many times self-respect—and go wild. They use drugs, overdrink, practice free sex—and with those they barely know. These actions often yield lifelong repercussions. Some even shoot guns to “ring in the new year.” Common sense is thrown away to have a good time. Usually,

*Please see PERSONAL, page 25*



# The Missing Ingredient for Good Health

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A memorial stands over the remains of the USS Arizona, a battleship that sunk during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. To this day, oil leaks from the vessel and the bodies of 1,102 sailors and Marines who died on the ship remain inside.

TROPICALPIXSINGAPORE/GETTY IMAGES

# From Pearl Harbor to SUPERPOWER

Japan's surprise attack 80 years ago was intended to bring the U.S. Navy to its knees. Instead, the event jumpstarted America's transformation into the greatest single social, economic and military superpower in the world.

BY JUSTIN M. FRAZIER

**T**wo waves of Japanese warplanes armed with up to 1,760-pound bombs and torpedoes. Two hours on the Sunday morning of December 7, 1941.

Those numbers represent all it took for much of the American Pacific naval fleet to be damaged—along with 188 aircraft and 2,403 military and civilians killed.

The surprise attack was so effective that by 8:00 a.m., just five minutes after the first bomb was dropped, four U.S. battleships were hit—including the *USS Arizona* that still sits on the floor of the harbor on the Hawaiian island of Oahu with crew members entombed inside.

The scale of destruction, the covert actions by the Imperial Japanese forces, and the horrifying details of the way sailors and others died were vivid in Americans' minds when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt uttered those unforgettable words before Congress: "Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy..."

The U.S. declared war on the Empire of Japan and soon after on the other Axis powers, Nazi Germany and fascist Italy.

FDR's words, heard in the halls of Congress and on radios across the nation, united America. In the following days, newspapers predicted a power-hungry Japan would invade the Philippines, Guam and other Pacific territories belonging to the U.S. and Britain. Posters urged every American who might have responded to a war draft with passivity to 'Remember Pearl Harbor!' And Jazz leader Count Basie's song *Draftin' Blues* prompted women to encourage their men to sign up for the war effort.

As a result, military recruiting offices were jammed, some open 24/7 to handle those responding to the call to duty. Men waited for hours to enlist. Those who could not serve in the military made personal sacrifices for the war effort—from purchasing government bonds to giving up leisure, school and jobs to work in industrial centers.

The attack on Pearl Harbor left the U.S. limping into war. As Winston Churchill would later reflect: "There were no British or American capital ships in the Indian Ocean or the Pacific except the American survivors of Pearl Harbor who were hastening back to California. Over this vast expanse of waters, Japan was supreme and we everywhere were weak and naked."

Yet four years saw the greatest transformation of a nation ever witnessed, with the U.S. today the only remaining superpower from World War II and the only nation to have deployed atomic weapons in war.

When fully understood, no other nation throughout history could have responded as America did. An incredible series of miraculous blessings made this possible.

## Pre-War Industrial Expansion

Even before entering WWII, the United States was already showing signs of manufacturing greatness. As war in Europe and the Eastern Hemisphere became more extensive and more intense, politicians and businesses saw the potential for a neutral country to provide manufactured goods such as cars and trucks to countries at war. That way, nations engaged in conflict could focus on producing what they needed to survive.

America was sympathetic to the British, French and Chinese causes, but had a general anti-war sentiment and a series of neutrality acts preventing it from joining another large war. The Pearl Harbor attack would change that, but the late start gave the U.S. plenty of time to get ready.

And get ready it did. The U.S. began expanding production in the mid-1930s as the world recovered from the Great Depression. Businesses and politicians navigated loopholes in the neutrality acts allowing them to sell war material to combatants. Each new neutrality act introduced stricter arms and equipment sales restrictions into law, but the manufacturing of war goods increased.

A “cash-and-carry” provision in the Neutrality Act of 1937 allowed the U.S. to sell materials to warring nations if they arranged for their transportation and paid upfront with cash. Since only Britain and France could travel the Atlantic freely, President Roosevelt believed this would aid the Allies without directly involving America in the war.

But a different story played out in Asia with the war between Japan and

China. Roosevelt had set a precedent in 1935 after Italy invaded Ethiopia by invoking the neutrality act to stop the sale of arms and ammunition to both countries. He also declared a “moral embargo” to prevent the sale of goods not covered under the act. However, he chose *not* to do this with Japan and China since they had not officially declared war. Roosevelt then let British ships carry arms and munitions to China while “quarantining” Japan and other aggressors.

The final neutrality act that President Roosevelt signed in 1939 officially allowed the sale of weapons to warring nations under cash-and-carry, ending the American arms embargo. When the Lend-Lease Act became law in 1941, America could produce more war materiel than its future allies could afford to buy with cash.

Throughout the pre-war period, American factories kept improving their ability to produce with a skilled labor force.

### Filling the Vacancies

Then the Imperial Japanese Navy attacked Pearl Harbor. Within days, the U.S. went from neutrality to a full member of the Allies. Over the next four years, more than 16 million Americans would serve in the U.S. armed forces, about 12 percent of the total population.

This boosted working conditions at home. Industrial productivity increased an astonishing 96 percent in four years, creating 17 million jobs. The average rate of pay for an American worker rose around 50 percent. The new productivity raised the standard of living for all Americans and brought growth in consumer goods, *even under rationing*.

## A Look Back at the Pearl Harbor Attacks

### Japanese Strike Force

Six aircraft carriers with 414 planes, 3 cruisers, 9 destroyers, 3 submarines, 2 battleships

 Commander: Vice Adm. Chuichi Nagumo

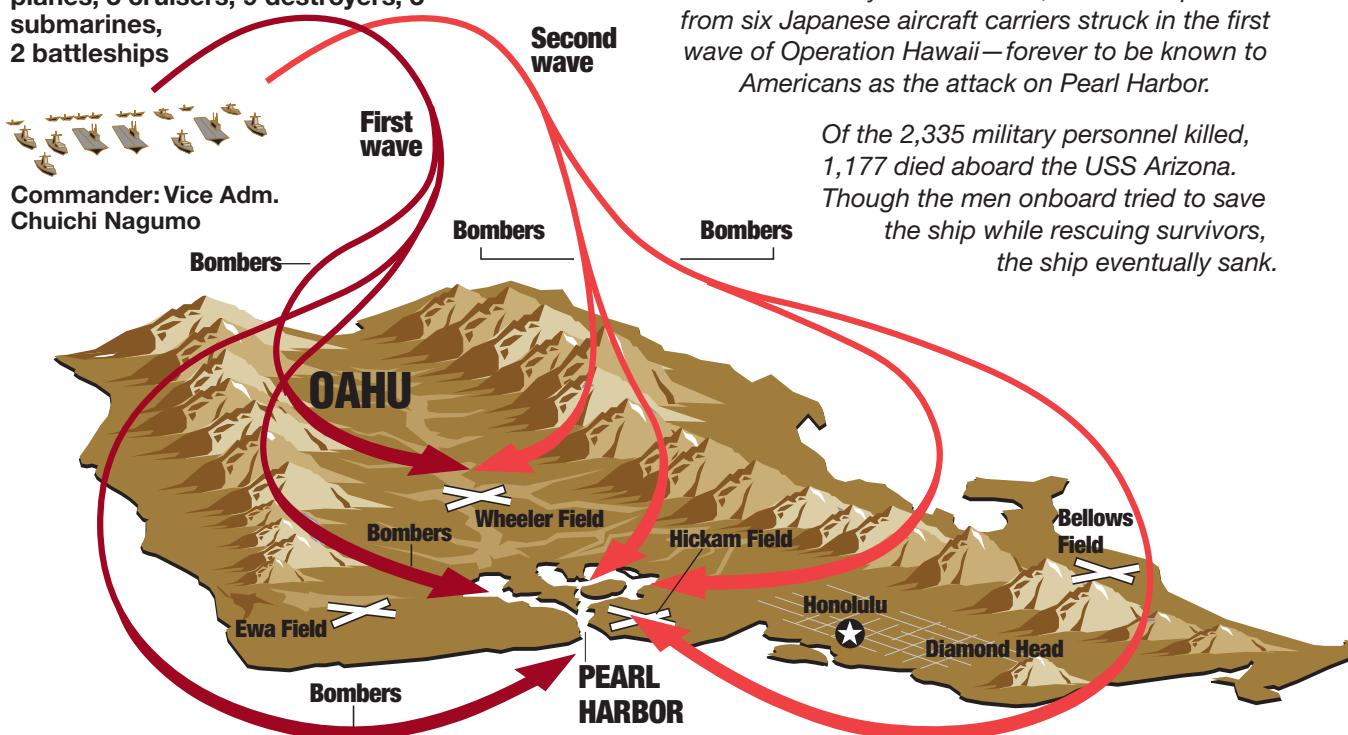
First wave  
Bombers

Second wave  
Bombers

Bombers

*It was a quiet Sunday morning in Pearl Harbor, the U.S. Navy's Pacific fleet headquarters on the island of Oahu. Shortly before 8 a.m., about 200 planes from six Japanese aircraft carriers struck in the first wave of Operation Hawaii—forever to be known to Americans as the attack on Pearl Harbor.*

*Of the 2,335 military personnel killed, 1,177 died aboard the USS Arizona. Though the men onboard tried to save the ship while rescuing survivors, the ship eventually sank.*



Sources: White House Historical Association, National WWII Museum, Britannica.com, National Park Service, “Air Raid: Pearl Harbor,” “World War II Almanac”  
Graphic: Staff, Tribune News Service

But factories needed to fill in for the massive labor shortage as a result of able-bodied men going overseas.

Industries first hired men too old or otherwise unable to go off to war, then boys too young to fight, and eventually women. Ads like the famous “Rosie the Riveter” successfully brought females into the workforce.

By the end of the war, 22 percent of trade union members were women, one out of every five defense workers was a woman who had recently been a student, and one out of every three defense workers was a former full-time homemaker. For the first time, more married women worked outside the home than single women.

The need for workers reached into minority communities, too, helping to bring a still largely racially segregated country together. Henry Kaiser’s shipyard in Richmond, California, recruited whites and blacks from across the South, many of whom had never worked with other races.

### **Wartime Advances**

Even with all the extra participation, the labor shortage was not completely filled. American manufacturers turned to technological innovations to further increase output.

President Roosevelt set the tone by telling Congress: “Powerful enemies must be out-fought and out-produced. It is not enough to turn out just a few more planes, a few more tanks, a few more guns, a few more ships than can be turned out by our enemies. We must out-produce them overwhelmingly, so that there can be no question of our ability to provide a crushing superiority of equipment in any theatre of the world war.”

The government took this to heart and created the Office of Scientific Research and Development (OSRD). This department joined contracts worth about \$7.4 billion (in 2020 dollars) with businesses and universities developing technologies and processes to aid the war effort.

The endeavor paid off in planes, tanks and ships built after the attack on Pearl Harbor. U.S. factories, safe



The USS Arizona burns after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (Dec. 7, 1941).

U.S. NAVY

from enemy bombardment, produced about two-thirds of the Allies’ warfighting equipment: 297,000 aircraft from bombers to fighters, 193,000 artillery pieces, 86,000 tanks, and 2 million army trucks.

The Ford plant in Ypsilanti, Michigan, converted from building cars averaging 15,000 parts to long-range B-24 Liberators with 1.55 million parts. The plant worked 24 hours a day completing a fully operational plane every 63 minutes.

Kaiser brought production time of a Liberty Ship cargo vessel down from 365 days to three ships every two days. Eighteen American shipyards would eventually build 2,710 of these cargo vessels.

The war forced the U.S. to become creative with how it received raw goods. For instance, much of the imported rubber came from regions Japan invaded in 1942, cutting off supply.

President Roosevelt’s administration invested \$700 million to find a way to convert abundant petroleum

into synthetic rubber. Companies like Goodyear and Firestone shared patents, making synthetic rubber production viable. By the end of the war, synthetic rubber output totaled around 800,000 tons.

Of all the homefront capabilities the U.S. had, its agricultural breadbasket proved in some ways the most potent. All the U.S. industrial production would have been useless if the men using it in combat had nothing to eat. Agricultural mechanization during the war raised production by 26 percent. Demand for crops and livestock more than doubled farm receipts, from \$9 billion in 1940 to \$22 billion by 1945.

Mobilizing the economy of a single nation to fund and fight a war in Europe and the Pacific required effort, sacrifice and innovation. However, as the war drew to a close, the U.S. was poised to shoot to unprecedented heights.

This was not apparent to some economists at the time. There was concern that 15.4 million returning home and reentering society would cause

significant problems. Arthur Herman, author of *Freedom's Forge: How American Business Produced Victory in World War II*, described how U.S. factories were “geared around producing tanks and planes, not clapboard houses and refrigerators.”

Some predicted mass unemployment, arguing that factories propped up by government wartime spending could not sustain those production levels during peace.

Those naysayers were proved utterly wrong...

### **Post-War Prosperity**

The American people remembered how the attack on Pearl Harbor unified the nation for war. That unity would carry on well after the war.

For one, the nation agreed that returning soldiers should have support. Congress passed the “GI Bill of Rights” providing these men with financial assistance for education, loans, unemployment allowances, and finding work. Most returning soldiers who used the money put it toward education and homes.

The U.S. implemented rationing during the war, encouraging citizens to save their money and keep necessary goods flowing to the soldiers. In *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, Lizabeth Cohen wrote that people saved on average 21 percent of their income during the war. With the war over, people started spending their savings.

The automotive industry transitioned from tanks and planes to cars, and Americans bought more than ever. From 1945 to 1955, new car sales quadrupled. The federal government started building the U.S. Interstate highway system in the 1950s improving transportation. By 1960, three of every four American households had a car.

Soldiers returning home to their wives drove a wave of population growth. This baby boom and increased mobility sent many to the suburbs to find room for their growing families.

Companies such as New York’s Levitt & Son supplied them houses using the mass production techniques honed during the war. At one point, Levitt & Son was finishing 30 houses each day. More homes also meant more appliances and furniture.

In addition to these material developments, the war led to societal changes. Millions of citizens had essentially received a collective education that opened their mind to various freedoms and global realities: Soldiers had seen other cultures, factory workers at home worked with other ethnicities, and women had worked outside the home during the war. The civil rights movement grew out of the egalitarian requirements of America at war.

Even though there were social clashes during the 1960s, there was still a national unity stemming from Pearl Harbor. The Cold War with the Soviet Union gave America a common enemy, and the U.S.—having just experienced the atrocities of war—was especially leery of another repressive government.

As if that were not enough, the war did leave the U.S. with the most powerful navy ever, which allowed freedom of passage at sea. This helped nations struggling to rebuild by securing the free flow of goods and people.

America's economic prosperity buoyed the entire world.

### **Prosperity's True Source**

All things considered, the calamitous events at Pearl Harbor ultimately led to the nation's unprecedented growth. The devastating conflict launched a series of successful technical and social innovations that exploded America's power and influence for decades after in a way that no other event in history has.

But these key accomplishments did not occur by coincidence.

The nation's citizens take for granted the incredible miracle of America. In addition, the U.S.—not realizing the true reason for its unique power and status—is blind to the role it will play in the future.

Nations are families grown large, and America's history traces back to a single boy by the name Manasseh. His father, Joseph, had been sold into slavery before becoming the second-most powerful man in Egypt.

Joseph's father would claim Manasseh and his brother Ephraim as his own children (Gen. 48:5), putting them on equal footing with their uncles. He also blessed the two boys saying, “Let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth” (vs. 16).

The descendants of Ephraim, destined to become the greatest commonwealth of nations, grew into the British Empire that ruled over 25 percent of Earth's land surface by 1921. Manasseh would become the greatest single nation ever, though in many ways America would never rival the heights of the British Empire.

When Jacob placed his name on Joseph's two sons, he also passed down the blessings God had promised Abraham: “That in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate [sea gates] of his enemies; and in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (22:17-18).

All that America accomplished to achieve its prosperity since World War II—the unity, the global economic growth, and “Pax Americana”—stem from God's promise to Abraham. America grew to such power because it received this promise.

Realize what the Bible clearly shows is not the racist ideology of British Israelism, which espouses the genetic superiority of Anglo-Saxon peoples. Instead, God brought the prosperity of the United Kingdom and America to fulfill His promise to Abraham, and to set up incredible events to occur very soon in world affairs.

To understand the real story of America's history—and its future role—read our book *America and Britain in Prophecy* ([rcg.org/aabibp](http://rcg.org/aabibp)). □



# Redefining FAMILY

Modern society is in the midst of the greatest shift in history when it comes to family structure.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

**A**N EXPLOSION of diversity." This is how the non-profit Council on Contemporary Families described the morphing landscape of American families. Today, unmarried parents, same-sex couples with adopted children, and homes composed of serial divorcees are increasingly as common as the traditional nuclear family of a married father and mother with kids.

These changes have truly been explosive. A report from the council stated: "At the end of the 1950s, if you chose 100 children under age 15 to represent all children, 65 would have been living in a fam-

ily with married parents, with the father employed and the mother out of the labor force. Only 18 would have had married parents who were both employed. As for other types of family arrangements, you would find only one child in every 350 living with a never-married mother!"

Fifty-plus years later, the world is a markedly different place.

The report continued: "Today, among 100 representative children, just 22 live in a married male-breadwinner family, compared to 23 living with a single mother (only half of whom have ever been married). Seven out of every 100 live with a parent who cohabits with an unmarried partner (a category too rare for the Census Bureau to consider counting in 1960)

and six with either a single father or with grandparents but no parents."

Now, dual-earner parents make up the biggest group at 34 percent, but the size of the other categories means it cannot be considered the "typical" American family.

According to *The New York Times*, these light-speed changes have stunned experts: "Researchers who study the structure and evolution of the American family express unsullied astonishment at how rapidly the family has changed in recent years, the transformations often exceeding or capsizing those same experts' predictions of just a few journal articles ago."

In the same piece, Andrew J. Cherlin, a professor of public policy at Johns Hopkins University, said:

"This churning, this turnover in our intimate partnerships is creating complex families on a scale we've not seen before."

He continued: "It's a mistake to think this is the endpoint of enormous change. We are still very much in the midst of it."

This is the greatest alteration in family structure in history, and it is also occurring in Britain, Western Europe, and across the globe. No matter a person's opinion on these seismic changes—whether they are exciting signs of modern progress or that something vital is being lost—everyone should examine the potential effects.

### Does It Matter?

One of the greatest shifts over the past decades is the everyday definition of family itself. The word once immediately painted a mental picture of biological parents and two-plus children. Now, the meaning is much more complex, with an endless array of home-life situations—what the Council on Contemporary Families called "a veritable peacock's tail of work-family arrangements."

The repercussions of this shift cover every part of society.

For government officials, a move away from married biological parents raising their own children can be worrisome. A joint study from Princeton University and the Brookings Institute stated: "Research clearly demonstrates that children growing up with two continuously married parents are less likely than other children to experience a wide range of cognitive, emotional, and social problems, not only during childhood, but also in adulthood."

Such positive effects—which include higher education, income, occupational status, and employment rates—are even more pronounced when children are raised by their biological fathers and mothers.

Going forward, researchers must attempt to pinpoint what advantages birth parents have. And policymakers must devise ways to supplement what is lost in modern family relationships to mitigate the potential wide-

spread socioeconomic effects in the shift away from traditional home-life arrangements.

Perhaps the groups most struggling to adapt to the new family landscape are professing Christians—a demographic that has long vocally opposed divorce and homosexuality while championing "traditional family values."

After the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in June 2015, evangelical preacher Franklin Graham told a conservative radio host the ruling was another sign that the nation is "slipping every year further and further away from the God of the Bible, the foundation that our nation was built on."

Pope Francis—who leads the largest denomination of professing Christians on Earth—has made protecting the sanctity of family and marriage one of his top priorities. The capstone of his first-ever visit to America in 2015 was a speech during the Festival of Families in Philadelphia. He exhorted the crowd by stating, "Let's protect the family. Because it's in the family that our future is at play."

Yet professing Christians are not immune to current trends. Divorce rates for them match the statistical average for the nation (though they are lower for faithful churchgoers). And opinions about same-sex marriage are steadily drifting into line with the public at large.

A Pew Research Center study stated that United States Catholics are "experiencing life in all its modern complexity. According to the survey, one-in-four Catholics have gone through a divorce. One-in-ten have not only divorced but also remarried. One-in-ten are living with a romantic partner, sans wedding, and more than four-in-ten have done so at some point in their lives."

Among U.S. Catholics, Pew found that 84 percent believe unmarried parents living together is an acceptable way to raise children. Also, 87 percent feel the same about single parenting, 83 percent for divorced parents, and 66 percent for same-sex couples.

A main reason for this shift is societal pressures. Yet some experts see another reason for the change of ideals.

University of Iowa sociologist Kristy Nabhan-Warren told the *National Catholic Reporter* that Catholics do draw on their church's moral teachings, but also look "deep into their consciences and are deciding what the moral, right thing to do is—even when that may seem to contradict teachings of the Church."

Many professing Christians in general cannot see how a loving and merciful God would condemn cohabitating couples, divorcees and homosexuals. And many denominations have already changed their official stance to be more inclusive of lifestyles once considered utterly anathema.

### "Traditional" Defined

Those who espouse traditional family values often look back to "simpler times" of the 1950s as the gold standard for home life.

Yet the worries in the mid-1900s were the same as today: increasing divorce, subverted gender roles, and waning religious influence. In fact, by this point in the 20th century, the West was *already* deep into redefining the traditional family.

The culprit? The Industrial Revolution.

A 1957 educational film from The McGraw-Hill Book Company described the shift: "Industrial expansion brought with it the growth of cities. And this too changed the traditional pattern of family life. Increasingly, families lived in apartments, not houses. This urban way of life brought with it greater individualism, more opportunities for self-expression, but at the expense of the family and home ties."

The film compared 1950s living arrangements with the typical family of the 1880s. At the earlier time, families lived the same way parents and their children did since the colonial period—and pretty much the same as most people have for the entirety of human history.

Most families in the 1880s were a tight-knit economic unit, with father, mother, children and perhaps grandparents all working together to run a farm and home. Dad worked the fields

and tended to the herds, mom kept up the home but also gardened and ensured there was food year-round by canning fruits and vegetables, curing meat, and so on. Boys learned the ropes of agriculture from their fathers and girls learned from mothers. Older daughters would often make clothes for the family. On Sunday, families did not work or play games. Rather, fathers would read the Bible to the family. The rest of the day was made up of visiting with nearby relatives.

Note the critical importance of each family member in this system. More than providing shelter, meals and emotional support—a home was an economic system. Remove any one part and success was put in jeopardy.

Industrialization utterly changed the roles of men and women. First, husbands became the sole breadwinners. Factories hired *individuals*, which greatly diminished the roles of women and even children. No longer was there the same united purpose, the urgency that all must work together to make a life.

Modern convenience further diminished the role of wives at home. McGraw-Hill said altering the status of women was “the greatest force of change in the traditional pattern of American family life.”

The film stated that the motivating factor for this was “the increasing employment of women outside the home: in factories, in commercial services, and in the professions. Industry offered her employment, at the same time providing her with merchandise and services that undermined her traditional tasks. Today, most women work. Not in protest against masculine domination, but out of economic necessity. New inventions in communication and ways of travel had an important impact on the traditional family pattern.”

Throughout the 20th century, grocery stores, department stores, and modern appliances replaced vegetable gardens, handmade clothes, wood-burning stoves, cow milking, butter churning, and canning—not to mention jumping in to help the husband with any farming needs.

Rather than being a crucial partner in keeping the family afloat, many 1950s wives were virtually demoted to a housemaid and babysitter. It is little wonder they entered the workforce. Dual-earner households could then afford more modern conveniences and services, which further eroded the importance of stay-at-home mothers.

Obviously, there is nothing wrong with modern conveniences. Yet most do not realize these technological niceties disrupted a system that had remained virtually unchanged throughout millennia.

### **Historical Pattern**

Recognize that the traditional family is not a purely religious or “Christian” construct. For most of history, marriage and family has stayed much the same: a man with one wife had children. They would work together to survive. Occasionally, homes would also include grandparents and sometimes servants. At times, multiple families (usually blood relatives) all lived together.

The notion of rampant polygamy (generally in the form of polygyny, a man with multiple wives) in ancient times is not supported by historical records. The greatest civilizations all tended to stick with the traditional family model.

*Encyclopaedia Britannica* stated that in ancient Egypt the ideal for households was the nuclear family and that they were overwhelmingly monogamous. Greece and Rome both had laws restricting marriage to one wife. In Assyria, Babylonia, China and Aztec Mexico, traditional marriage and family were also the norm. Likely this was the case for most cultures.

In *Monogamy and Polygyny in Greece, Rome, and World History*, Stanford University professor Walter Scheidel supported this idea: “The notion of moderate polygyny is supported by the global anthropological record. We find that most societies condoned social and genetic polygamy...but also that most individual bonding and mating arrangements were monogamous.”

In other words, polygamy did happen, but not often.

*Britannica* adds to this idea by stating that polygamy “appears once to have been fairly common worldwide. Nowhere, however, have any of these been the exclusive form of marriage.”

Many cultures did allow for polygyny, and some even saw it as the goal, but most still stuck with the traditional nuclear family. One reason for this was a lack of resources. Having multiple wives was expensive as there were more people to feed and protect.

For this reason, polygamy was generally only seen among the wealthy and elite. Yet this practice *seems* to have been widespread because history only records the lives of leaders who could afford the “luxury” of multiple wives and concubines.

In addition, the model of the traditional family is seen over and over because *it works*. A father and mother with children is a time-tested, solid unit that can weather almost any hardship in life.

Of course, cultures throughout history had relationship issues. There was adultery, jealousy, divorce and every other problem that stems from human nature. But the core family structure was still favored.

### **Biblical Record**

What about the Bible? The Book is often used to espouse the traditional family. From the get-go, it does just that.

After the creation of man, God immediately laid out ground rules. He told human beings to, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28). This can only occur through sexual reproduction. Chapter 2 puts parameters on this: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (vs. 24).

This is clearly describing a man marrying a woman and creating a family together. Jesus Christ validates this scripture in Matthew 19:4-5.

Yet there seems to be a problem. In Genesis, after stating the ground rules for human relationships, the Book

then *immediately* appears to support polygamy and other non-traditional forms of family.

There is a lot of polygamy in its pages. Some of the greatest servants of God fell into this practice including Abraham, Jacob and David.

So did these actions negate or further explain the Creator's command for marriage and family?

Just because God did not vaporize these men with lightning from heaven does not mean He *condoned* having sex and children with many women.

What many fail to realize is that biblical accounts contain lessons of both good *and* bad examples. The faithful Bible reader must look at the context and clear commands of God stated elsewhere to glean the overall meaning. When polygamy is present, the fruits born from these dalliances are always negative:

■ For Abraham, the rift between his two sons Isaac and Ishmael, born from different women, continues even to this day between the Arabs and the Jews.

■ Jacob (later renamed Israel) had his favorite son sold into slavery because of animosity between older half-brothers (Gen. 37).

■ After hatching a murder plot against a man and marrying his wife, Bathsheba, David was severely punished. God also admonished the king for having multiple wives and concubines. (Read II Samuel 12).

The Bible shows that these three men all later repented and ended their polygamist practices. To learn the crystal-clear facts about this topic, read our article "The Truth About Polygamy."

Other men, such as Esau and King Saul, did have a number of spouses, but they were ungodly and did not represent God's Way.

There are also three Bible passages that *appear* at first to support polygamy. By reading the context and examining all the facts of a specific account, however, this notion can always be disproved.

Exodus 21:10 states, "If he take him another wife; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish?"

First know that the word "wife" is in italics in the *King James Version*, which means it was added by translators. The verses immediately preceding this one show clearly that this means if a man take another *handmaiden* as a servant.

Also, this is the only time the Hebrew word translated "duty of marriage" is used in the Bible. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* states it can mean either to dwell together *or* sexual cohabitation.

With the context being maid-servants (not wives), this verse strongly indicates that the master of a house is forbidden from withholding food, clothing and *shelter* from the first maid-servant—not food, clothing and *sexual relations*. Another, but less likely, possibility is that the man was not to refuse to allow the girl to marry.

Deuteronomy 21:15-16 is another supposed proof text for polygamy: "*If a man have two wives*, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: then it shall be, when he makes his sons to inherit that which he has, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn."

This verse is speaking of two wives throughout the life of the man. The implication is that the first spouse would have already died. Even today, people will use the term "my second wife." Everyone understands that this means a second marriage has occurred after a divorce or death.

Then there is Deuteronomy 25:5. It states: "If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: *her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife*, and perform the duty of a husband's brother unto her."

The key to understanding this passage is the phrase "*If brethren dwell together*." This means, *if* a brother is living with his sibling, *then* the rest of the command applies. If a brother

is living with his sibling's family, he would have been single. Again, careful reading of the context makes the meaning clear.

Nowhere does the Bible condone polygamy or any other form of marriage and family besides what is laid out in Genesis!

## Even Deeper Meaning

A quick recap: Throughout history, even civilizations apart from the God of the Bible have generally followed monogamous relationships and had traditional families. Cultures over the millennia could have messed with the model. They could have favored single parenthood, same-sex couples raising children, men with wives, women with many husbands. Yet examples of this are few and far between.

The simplest reason they did not deviate too far from God's definition of family was that His Way works. In addition, until the Industrial Revolution, moving too far from the dad-mom-and-kids model was impractical at best, and impossible at worst.

Yet there is another vital piece of the traditional-family puzzle. It is a practice equally widespread: marriage.

"Some form of marriage has been found to exist in all human societies, past and present," *Britannica* stated. "Its importance can be seen in the elaborate and complex laws and rituals surrounding it."

Marriage is found in all human societies. Think of the chances of *every* culture stumbling upon this institution by themselves. It is universal because God created it.

Understanding God's true intentions for family and marriage deepens their importance. The short answer is that both show the Creator's awesome purpose for mankind.

Genesis 1:26 begins to reveal that purpose: "And God said, Let us make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness..."

"Let us make," "*our* image," and "*our* likeness"—to whom is God speaking? Have you ever noticed this before?

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# 'QUEEN OF EUROPE' TO STEP DOWN

Angela Merkel plans to retire after 16 years as Germany's chancellor.  
What does the void she will leave mean for Europe?

**G**ERMAN Chancellor Angela Merkel will leave office in the coming months with her popularity intact among voters and widely admired beyond Germany as a chancellor who deftly steered her country—and Europe—through numerous crises.

Whoever replaces her will help lead the continent into a new era. Often dubbed the “Queen of Europe,” Ms. Merkel was seen abroad not just as the leader of Germany but in many ways of Europe, helping guide the European Union through a series of financial

and political concerns and ensuring her country maintained a high profile on the international stage. It remains to be seen whether the next chancellor will match her global standing.

Difficulty forming a coalition after the September 2021 German federal

elections means Ms. Merkel could easily surpass her former mentor, Helmut Kohl, as the longest-serving post-war chancellor.

Such a scenario would give Ms. Merkel the chance to broker a new round of so-called “Normandy format” talks with Russia, Ukraine and France in an effort to quell the conflict in eastern Ukraine—negotiations she pushed for during a trip to Kyiv.

“I advocate working on having another meeting at the political leadership level with myself, the French

president and of course the Russian and Ukrainian presidents,” she said during that trip.

One person is especially nervous about Ms. Merkel’s future role: French President Emmanuel Macron.

Angela Merkel’s exit from the EU stage she dominated for 16 years has handed Mr. Macron an opportunity to take up the mantle of European leadership and press on with his plans for a more independent Europe.

Not so fast, diplomats from countries across the European Union say.

The energetic French leader has sought to bring a clarity of strategic vision that the bloc under Ms. Merkel at times lacked.

But in a post-war Europe founded on consensus, Mr. Macron’s direct and abrasive style, coupled with a willingness to go it alone in a bid to shape EU strategy, means he will struggle to fill Ms. Merkel’s shoes, senior diplomats across the region said.

“It’s not like Macron can lead Europe alone. No. He has to realize that he has to be careful. He can’t expect people to jump on the French bandwagon,” one diplomat posted to Paris from one of the EU’s founding nations said.

“Merkel had an extraordinary place. She was listening to everyone, respectful of everyone,” the diplomat added.

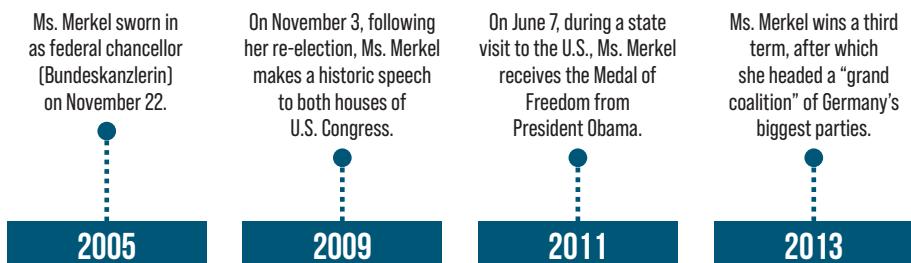
One thing for sure is that the future of a post-Merkel Germany is uncertain. As one diplomat speaking about a more sensitive topic facing the EU put it, “The question is: without Merkel in the room, are we going to be able to solve them [negotiations on climate policies]? I think we can...but it will definitely become more difficult.”

### Unifying Leader

Ms. Merkel, who today remains personally popular for having helped Germany through a string of crises, announced in 2018 that she would not go for a fifth term. Her outgoing government will remain in office until a successor is sworn in, a process that could take weeks or even months. There are no formal restrictions on her powers during this time, though Ms. Merkel is a consensus seeker and previous chancellors have not made radical decisions during this window.

The outgoing chancellor fully intends to use her time after the election to press on with foreign policy initiatives, government officials say.

Ms. Merkel appeared close to tears during an address to mark the 31st anniversary of reunification that may be the last before she steps down. She said the freedoms that came with German reunification 31 years ago had brought “so many new opportunities” for people from the former



Angela Merkel takes the oath of office for her third term as chancellor at the Bundestag in Berlin, Germany (Dec. 17, 2013).

SEAN GALLUP/GETTY IMAGES





German Chancellor Angela Merkel deliberates with U.S. President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the official agenda on the second day of the G7 summit in Charlevoix, Canada (June 9, 2018).  
JESCO DENZEL/BUNDESREGIERUNG VIA GETTY IMAGES

Communist East, where she grew up, but that many of them suddenly “found themselves in a dead end.”

During the speech, the chancellor stressed that Germans must remain focused on democracy, saying that even today, the achievement of democracy should not be taken for granted.

“Democracy isn’t simply there,” Ms. Merkel told listeners. “Rather, we must work for it together, again and again, every day.”

According to the leader of the reunified nation, the merger of East and West Germany happened “because there were people in East Germany who risked everything for their rights, their freedom and a different society.”

Ms. Merkel also cautioned that German unity “isn’t a finished process,” recognizing that many fellow former East Germans have experienced having to continually justify being part of the country.

With a voice that betrayed her emotion, she recalled how a journalist had written last year she “wasn’t a true born German” after she told reporters in 2015 that “if we have

to start apologizing” for showing a friendly face during the refugee crisis “then this is not my country.”

“Are there two kinds of Germans and Europeans—the original and the acquired, who have to prove their affiliation every day anew and can fail the exam with a sentence like the one in the press conference?” Ms. Merkel asked.

### Feminist Icon?

Angela Merkel took power in 2005—when George W. Bush was U.S. president, Jacques Chirac in the Elysee Palace in Paris and Tony Blair British prime minister.

She has become a feminist icon after 16 years in power even though the world’s most powerful woman has only belatedly accepted that label as she prepared to step down. She has also conceded that gender equality is still a long way off.

“She is admired by women all over the world, this is her main legacy. That a woman showed what she is capable of and does this with dignity and resolve,” German feminist activist Alice Schwarzer told *Reuters*.

A rare woman in the upper echelons of her conservative, male-dominated Christian Democrats (CDU), Ms. Merkel, 67, long avoided casting herself as a feminist and has only reluctantly supported some policies pushed by feminists such as quotas for women in boardrooms.

“She hasn’t spent the last 16 years carrying out great feminist deeds. To be fair she had quite a few other things on her plate,” Ms. Schwarzer said, noting Ms. Merkel had supported policies that helped women like expanding state-funded childcare.

“The very fact of her existence is a feminist statement.”

In 2017, Ms. Merkel avoided saying whether she considered herself a feminist when urged to do so at an event with then International Monetary Fund director Christine Lagarde and Ivanka Trump, daughter of President Donald Trump.

“I don’t want to decorate myself with a title I don’t actually have,” Ms. Merkel said back then.

However, as her time in power draws to a close, Ms. Merkel—who has a doctorate in quantum chemistry—has reconsidered her position.

“I have thought my answer through more and so I can say yes: we should all be feminists,” she said to cheers at an event with Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, whose TED talk entitled “We should all be feminists” went viral in 2013.

At the premiere of a film that tells the story of prominent female politicians in post-war West Germany, Ms. Merkel said she was disappointed that women still account for only 31 percent of seats in parliament.

“We have not yet achieved equality between women and men in Germany. Much remains to be done,” she said.

Ms. Schwarzer recalled that Germany was not really ready for its first female chancellor when the CDU narrowly won the election in 2005, with her predecessor Gerhard Schroeder saying publicly she was not up to the job.

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# Is Hell Real?

Many staunchly believe the wicked are destined for eternal torment. A growing group of theologians and historians are questioning this idea. What does the Bible say?

BY NESTOR A. TORO

**W**HAT IF someone told you hell does not exist? Think of how it would make you feel. How you would react.

If you grew up in one of the many denominations of modern Christendom, your response would likely be, “If you don’t believe it, you’re bound to go there!” Or you would kindly agree to disagree, but one word would be at the forefront of your mind: HERETIC.

Eternal punishment for the wicked is a bedrock doctrine for most churches. It has been for centuries. This would be the first reason to believe in a place called hell—it has stood the

test of time. It not existing can seem utterly absurd, and not even worth giving another thought.

Yet bear with me. Have you ever wondered why a loving, merciful God would want a large portion of humanity to exist eternally in hell? How could He live with Himself?

Even more, why would the Creator of the universe set up a system like this?

Despite these questions, you may be thinking of Bible verses regarding hell. Mark 3:29 *does* mention “eternal damnation.” And Matthew 18:9 *does* mention “hell fire.”

So what is the truth here? Every Bible believer owes it to himself to

examine what God’s Word says about eternal punishment.

The Bible demands of its readers: “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (I Thes. 5:21). It also states, “Every word of God is pure: He is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him. Add you not unto His words, lest He reprove you, and you be found a liar” (Prov. 30:5-6).

It is time for you to prove once and for all whether you *want* to believe in an ever-burning hell.

## The Only Source

Theologians and historians have dug into the question of eternal hell—and what makes its existence so appealing.

An opinion piece for *The New York Times* stated this: “It’s comforting to imagine that Christians generally accept the notion of a hell of eternal misery not because they’re emotionally attached to it, but because they see it as a small, inevitable zone of darkness peripheral to a larger spiritual landscape that—viewed in its totality—they find ravishingly lovely. And this is true of many.”

Yet the author continued that this viewpoint is not shared by all: “For a good number of Christians, hell isn’t just a tragic shadow cast across one of an otherwise ravishing vista’s remoter corners; rather, it’s one of the landscape’s most conspicuous and delectable details.”

What makes eternal torment a desirable doctrine?

The article attempted to answer that question: “How can we be winners, after all, if there are no losers? Where’s the joy in getting into the gated community and the private academy if it turns out that the gates are merely decorative and the academy has an inexhaustible scholarship program for the underprivileged? What success can there be that isn’t validated by another’s failure? What heaven can there be for us without an eternity in which to relish the impotent envy of those outside its walls?”

Understand. This is an *opinion* piece by someone who believes in universal salvation—that everyone will ultimately be saved. A little later, we will look into what the Bible says about that as well. But the point made in this article is clear: Some WANT an eternal hell to exist because it *humanly* feels good. Yet doctrines should come from the Bible—not human reasoning.

The popular imagery of hell—a place of flame and torture deep within the earth—also does not come from the Bible. In fact, most of these conventional ideas come from pagan poetry, namely Dante Alighieri’s *The Divine Comedy*. This work was completed in 1320.

A BBC article illustrated the poem’s outsized importance on popular culture: “The Divine Comedy reigns

supreme—this is the work that... advanced the idea of the author as a singular creative voice with a vision powerful enough to stand alongside Holy Scripture, a notion that paved the way for the Renaissance, for the Reformation after that and finally for the secular humanism that dominates intellectual discourse today. You may have never read a single line of *The Divine Comedy*, and yet you’ve been influenced by it.”

The article added that Dante “had the presumption to fill in what the Bible leaves out...Dante’s idea of Hell draws from Aristotle’s view that reason is the most important thing in life—which would be the later idea in Protestantism that an individual’s reason is their path to salvation.”

Dante wanted to “fill in the blanks” of the Bible. He leaned on Aristotle, a Greek philosopher who lived in the 300s BC. Neither of these show God’s mind on the subject—and the Bible is most clear.

### What Does God Want?

Let’s start with perhaps the Bible’s most familiar and often-quoted verse. John 3:16 states, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

In *The Truth About Hell*, David C. Pack explained one phrase that is often overlooked in this verse. He wrote, “Those who receive salvation are promised that they ‘should not perish’ but ‘have eternal life!’”

Have you noticed that? God shows the alternative to having eternal life is *perishing*.

Mr. Pack continues: “If hell is a place of eternal torture, then the people suffering this torment must also have eternal life. But the verse says, ‘should not perish.’ It does not say, ‘Should not suffer eternal life in torment.’”

Scores of scriptures in both the New and Old Testaments say the same thing—that the only alternative to eternal life is DEATH. Here is just a brief sampling of mankind’s twofold options:

■ II Peter 3:9 – “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some

men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should *perish*, but that all should come to repentance.”

■ II Thessalonians 2:10 – “And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that *perish*; because they received not the love of the truth, *that they might be saved*.”

■ John 10:28 – “And I [Christ] give unto them eternal life; and *they shall never perish*, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.”

■ Ezekiel 18:4, 23, 32 – “Behold, all souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine: the soul that sins, it shall die... Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? Says the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?...For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies, says the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live.”

Just from these few verses you can see that God does not want people to perish—which originally meant “destroy fully” in the Greek language from which the New Testament was translated. Clearly this means unconsciousness. It is death that is shown as the only alternative to being *saved*.

This naturally begs the question...

### Is the Soul Immortal?

The idea that hell is a place of eternal torture goes part and parcel with the concept that every living person has an immortal soul. Because there is a spiritual part of you that cannot die, it must live on forever in some place—heaven or hell—after the physical body dies.

Yet read Ezekiel 18:4 again: “The soul that sins, IT SHALL DIE.”

How can a soul die if it is immortal?

We also saw in John 3:16 that the alternative to having eternal life is perishing—being utterly destroyed—instead of automatically living either in heaven, hell or some other afterlife setting.

How can dying and living happen at the same time?

The Bible answer keeps it simple. It does not say human beings *have*

immortal souls. Rather, it states we *are* souls. In Genesis 2:7, when “God formed man of the dust of the ground,” it says He “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man *became* a living soul.”

It is that simple! Your *soul*, which is really just an English word that was put there in place of the concept of *breath, life, creature*—is you. When breath stops, so does your consciousness.

Ecclesiastes 9:5 furthers this by declaring “the dead know not anything”—meaning they are unconscious. They are not experiencing either supreme bliss or ageless agony.

Reading the Bible’s simplest verses on a topic makes it absolutely clear: When you die, you remain unconscious.

But what about all the verses that talk about hell? Isn’t there punishment for sinners?

Though God’s Word clearly shows there is punishment for evildoers, it may be different from what you have always believed.

### Various Types of “Hell”

Just like the word *soul*, the word *hell* is an English word that was used to translate various Hebrew and Greek words. They have different meanings.

Read again from *The Truth About Hell*: “The Bible uses three Greek words in the New Testament, and one Hebrew word in the Old Testament, explaining the meaning of hell. Let’s examine these words.

“The Hebrew word translated hell in the Old Testament is *sheol*. It has a New Testament counterpart, *hades*. Actually, if you look up *sheol* in a concordance, it will reference the Greek word *hades*. They both mean ‘the grave, pit, world of the dead or hell...’”

This is the case in most references to hell throughout the Bible. Psalm 9:17 states, “The wicked shall be turned into hell,” and Psalm 16:10 reads, “For You will not leave my soul [body] in hell.” In both cases, “hell” is clearly referring to the earthly grave.

Mr. Pack continues, “It was only with the passing of time that the pagan view of hell, as a blazing underground

inferno, came to replace this original intent of the word.

“The second Greek word translated as ‘hell’ is found only once in the New Testament. Notice II Peter 2:4: ‘For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.’ The word used here is *tartaros* and refers to angels, not people. It means ‘a prison, incarceration, place of restraint or a dark abyss.’”

The only other term for hell in the Bible is the Greek word “gehenna.” This most closely resembles the mainstream concept of hell. The booklet adds: “From Hasting’s Dictionary comes the following definition of this word: ‘Gehenna: the word occurs twelve times in the New Testament. This term ‘gehenna’ represents ‘the Valley of Hinnom’ (Neh. 11:30, II Kings 23:10, etc.). The place was...a deep narrow gorge in the vicinity of Jerusalem, understood to be on the south side. It is repeatedly mentioned in the Old Testament (Jer. 19:6, etc.). It became an object of horror to the Jews, and is said to have been made the receptacle for bones, the bodies of beasts and criminals, refuse and all unclean things. The terrible associations of the place...the fires said to have been kept burning in it in order to consume the foul and corrupt objects that were thrown into it, made it [an]...unmistakable symbol of dire evil...absolute ruin. So it came to designate the place of future punishment.’”

This is the place that Christ used in Mark 9 to say that the unrepentant could be cast into “hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched” (vs. 43-44).

Mr. Pack’s booklet clarifies: “He was referring to the bodies of certain criminals that were thrown over the edge of the ravine but did not burn up because they got stuck on a ledge. They literally rotted and decomposed where they were. The maggots that entered their bodies completed the decomposition process without interruption from either the fire or any-

thing else. These worms ‘died not,’ so to speak, because they later developed into flies. This graphic picture is part of the reason that Gehenna was such a place of revulsion to all who were familiar with it!”

When properly examined, verses referring to what seem to be an ever-burning hell actually describe a PERMANENT death by fire. Unlike the idea of universal salvation, which purports God will save every human who has ever been born, God’s Word clearly shows human beings can face either outcome.

### The True Ultimate Punishment

Let’s look more at what we should fear in place of the idea of a never-ending torment. Note these three statements in the Bible.

The first: “Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2).

Again, when people die, they “sleep in the dust of the earth.” They are dead, they “know not anything.”

The confusion can come with being resurrected to either to everlasting *life* or *contempt*. This can appear to read “some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting hellfire.”

Yet the next verse clarifies what awaking to *contempt* looks like: “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28).

The term translated “hell” here is *gehenna*. Recall that is where refuse is *destroyed*. The verse even states God can DESTROY your body and life—your entire possibility for existing again—in this fire.

Christ was educating His listeners about who to fear. Men can destroy one’s physical life. But this is only the first death (see Hebrews 9:27). God has the power to raise back to life, and He has the power to take that life away PERMANENTLY—something no human being can do.

This is what all references to the “lake of fire” picture. Revelation 20:15 shows: “Whosoever was not found

# **“Using Dante’s writings as a basis to understand hell is comparable to using space alien movies to understand the vast universe! Neither will provide an accurate picture.”**

written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

The very verse before this refers to the lake of fire as the “second death” (vs. 14). Death is a cessation of life.

God can make it as if someone *never* existed. That is what we should fear, rather than burning indefinitely in hell and never being able to be put out of that misery. No loving God would take pleasure in seeing someone suffer for all eternity.

## **Flipped Narrative**

If God has not authored an ever-burning hell, then who did? The popular version of hell more closely resembles the fate that awaits Satan the devil rather than the fate of human unrepentant sinners:

■ In Leviticus 16:22, he is represented as the “Azazel goat” that was to be released alive “unto a land not inhabited.”

■ Revelation 20:3 says to cast Satan “into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.”

■ Matthew 25:41 speaks of “everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Understand. The one who has afflicted mankind for thousands of



CHART OF HELL BY SANDRO BOTTICELLI

years will be finally placed where he will no longer be able to torment people. Knowing his end, the devil flips the narrative to make people to believe that is *their* future!

Satan is the author of the belief that eternal fire is the fate for human beings. Only the “father of lies” (John 8:44) could have inspired the idea that people would spend time forever in a fictitious place with elements of the punishment he will receive. Satan is an *insane* immortal being. He literally wants people to “go to hell” and stay there, because he fears our future potential as God’s offspring. (To learn more, read *The Awesome Potential of Man* at [rcg.org/tapom](http://rcg.org/tapom).)

Satan’s incredible deception is the fundamental reason people want to believe in hell, even though no one really would ever choose to go there.

## **Your Choice**

Take this all in. Human reasoning should not color your picture of eternal punishment. Also, using Dante’s writings as a basis to understand hell is comparable to using space alien movies to understand the vast universe! Neither will provide an accurate picture.

When Christ spoke of hell, no one at the time could have conceived of anything written by Dante, who was not born until well more than 1,000 years later! Yet we have been so deeply

steeped in these ideas that it can be difficult to come to grips with the fact that there is no ever-burning hell. When we die, we stay in the ground.

Review the literature referenced in this article. Available at [rcg.org](http://rcg.org), it will bring further clarity to other supposed “hell passages” such as the story of Lazarus and the rich man, and many more. As you continue to arm yourself with these truths from God’s Word, you will begin to build a correct picture of what comes after life, including His judgment.

Now, as you think about all the Bible truths on hell and eternal judgment we have covered throughout this article, it is time for you to make a choice.

Are you comfortable with the idea of a God—who says He does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked—sitting in heaven to the tune of millions, perhaps billions of torturous screams? The stench of burning flesh filling the halls? Of residents in heaven looking down every so often to see the silhouette of their unrepentant family members—children, parents, grandparents, siblings, spouses—wriggling within the bright towering flames?

Do you really WANT to cling to the doctrine of an everlasting hell? Or will you accept the plan clearly laid out in the Bible by a fair, just, loving God? □



## Reflecting on a 2019 trip to the Western Hemisphere's poorest nation—and everything it has suffered since—helps reveal how people can maintain hope no matter what.

BY DOMINIC J. RIVARD

**Y**OU WILL have to sit in the back seat. Keep your head down until I tell you not to."

With that command from our driver, I had to forfeit my position in the front seat—not easy to do when you are six feet, three inches tall. Having to crouch and keep my head down in the back of our small, cramped car did not make it any easier.

But it was a small price to pay to remain on the safe side given the area through which we were traveling. As a white man from Canada, I did everything I could to make myself less conspicuous and less of a target for theft—a difficult task given that crowds peered into the car every time we stopped amid chaotic, lane-free traffic.

This was *Cite Soleil*, a commune of the capital Port-au-Prince known as the most dangerous slum in the West. We had to go directly through it en route to

visiting church members I pastor on the southern part of the island.

As a minister for The Restored Church of God, which publishes this magazine, I am privileged to serve French-speaking church members across the globe—from French Polynesia to Quebec in my home nation of Canada and everywhere in between.

Yet my first-time visit to Haiti in September 2019 opened my eyes to just how tragic conditions are that people there endure. Working with members there regularly since then has helped me see something more in the Haitian people. Time and again, I have witnessed an incredible national quality buried under the regular news reports of violence, political turmoil, severe weather, poverty, disease, and earthquakes.

### Landing in Port-au-Prince

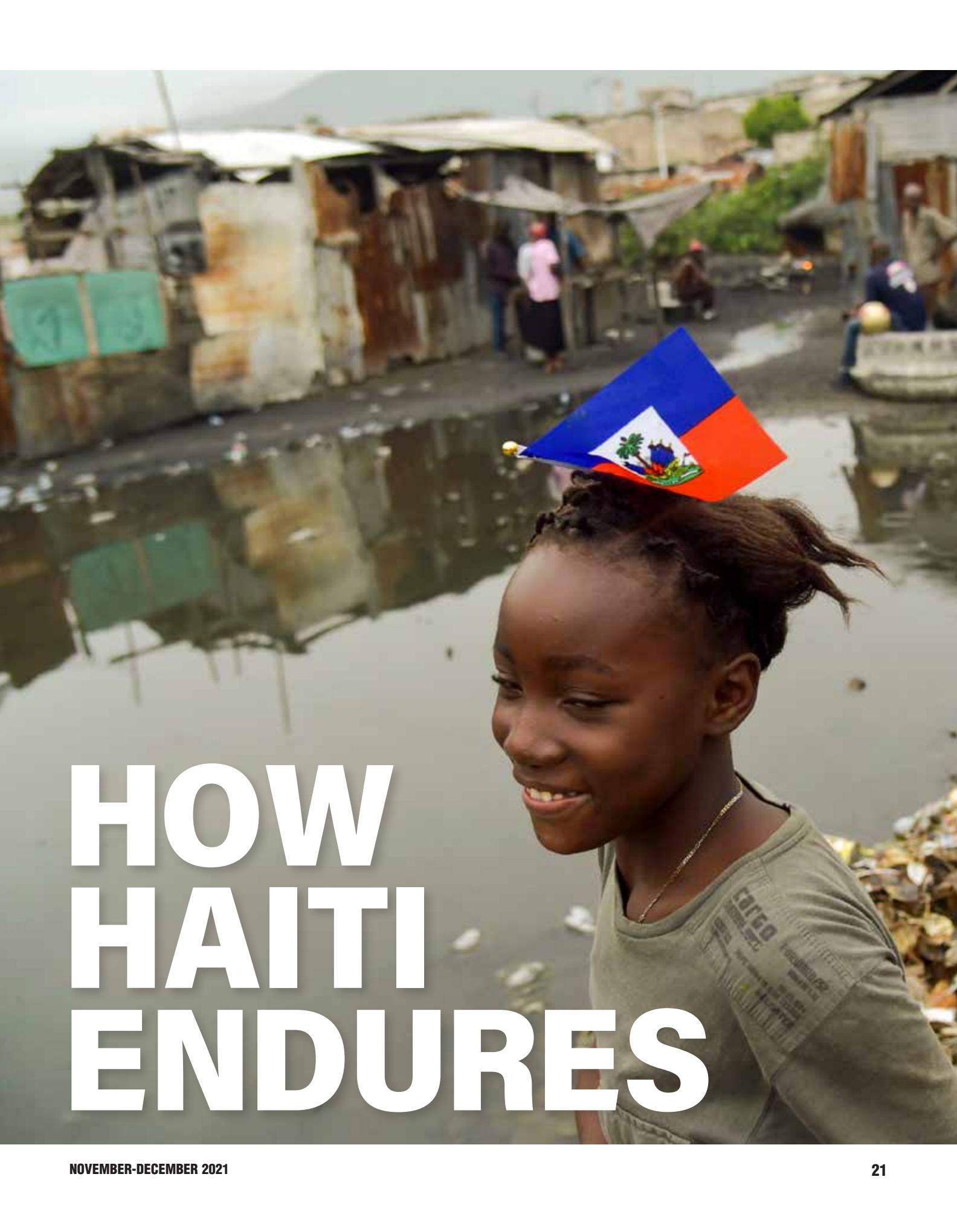
As I flew out of Atlanta's international airport and across the Atlantic two years ago, everything went as it has hundreds

of times in my decades of international travel—a smooth flight with a pristine view of the shimmering blue waters below. But as we descended toward Toussaint Louverture International Airport, it hit me that I was entering into a different world. The tropical greenery and farms of the country became swallowed up by patches of brown and grey. At the airport perimeter, it became clearer those patches were row after row of tightly packed shacks with tin roofs.

I walked off the plane with the other passengers—an assemblage of aid workers, United Nations employees and plainclothes travelers—out under a blistering hot sun. Inside the terminal, everything looked like most other airports—colorful murals decorating walls, trinket shops and restaurants. Nothing stood out as unordinary except numerous signs explicitly warning not to interact with “hawkers.” These were individuals offering “taxi rides,” “rooms for rent,” and other “services”—gim-

Opposite page, a girl wears a Haitian flag in her hair in the neighborhood of Cite Soleil in Port-au-Prince (May 17, 2017). Above left, a woman wearing a mask works at the MBI factory at the industrial park Sonapi in Port-au-Prince (April 21, 2020). Above right, a bulldozer clears the rubble of a building that collapsed in the earthquake in Brefet, a neighborhood of Les Cayes (Aug. 17, 2021).

AFP PHOTO/HECTOR RETAMAL, PIERRE MICHEL JEAN/ AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES, REGINALD LOUISSAINT JR/ AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



# HOW HAITI ENDURES

micks to lure unsuspecting travelers into an easy robbery at best.

It was a bit of a tense environment to be looking for my host whom I had never met. But I knew that with God's help I would be protected and guided. He would help me fulfill an important visit to a congregation of believers.

After my host found me, the initial confusion vanished and I was finally on my way to a hotel where our journey would start.

We secured a car rental and had to find fuel. This last task would prove to be problematic: the nation was in the midst of a *severe* fuel shortage crisis. Every petrol station was closed.

What gas we could find we had to pour into our vehicle with the help of a makeshift funnel (the top half of a plastic water bottle that had been cut in two). Mind you this was under the watchful glare of a guard armed with a 12-gauge shotgun. Times were desperate—some would literally kill to get gas. Even we felt the panic after

spilling some gas on the ground from mishandling our improvised funnel.

Fueled up for the six-hour drive to L'Asile where the brethren met, we were ready to head out to the southern part of the island, which meant traveling through Cite Soleil.

I have seen some of the largest slums in the world, such as India's Mumbai where 55 percent of the city's population eke out a life. But these places pale in comparison to what I witnessed here. It was a no man's land of slapped together shacks that more than 300,000 people call home.

Nearly three-quarters of the houses had no plumbing, and there was no sewer system in the commune, except for one open canal that flows through the area and into the bay.

When we crossed that canal, the sight hit me as hard as the stench itself. It was so packed with garbage you could not see a drop of water. The sight of many wading into the canal—young and old—alongside pigs will never leave me.

After we passed the canal, I continued to duck in the back seat as the driver navigated the narrow, cracked cement road. Overall, it took us a *long* 45 minutes to get through the commune. When our driver said, "It's better now," we took our first break to stand up out of the car.

### **Out in the Country**

As we ventured to the outer part of the country, we were greeted with green terrain and gently sloping mountains. It was a welcome respite to the tense environment in the city.

Heading toward L'Asile, which is about a six-hour drive south of Port-au-Prince, my mind turned toward the members we would visit there.

It struck me when we first reached the congregation both their level of tenacity as well as their service toward one another. We held our weekly church service, and I conducted numerous counseling sessions and baptisms.



Even in these rural areas, the economy is tight and homes are generally self-constructed shacks with tin roofs. Despite these conditions, the members made the best of what they had and served one another. I found their joy and camaraderie infectious. It brought to mind James 1:2-4, which states, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

I saw this scripture in action among the church members. But it also helped me see that quality in the rest of the nation. Whether impoverished and stuck in Cite Soleil, waiting out a political solution from the fledgling government in the capital city, or those doing their best to build a homestead in the earthquake-prone hills, they are a vulnerable people who continue to hold on. They stay in tight communities and rely on one another for survival.

There was so much to learn about character among these members in L’Asile. It would frame my thinking and observations as I traveled back into the heart of Haiti.

### Narrow Escape

Throughout my weekend visit, the fuel crisis at the capital had deteriorated to the point of full-blown riots.

A six-hour drive back slowed down to a crawl as we entered the city. At each intersection, the driver stopped, looked carefully both ways and towards the main artery a couple of blocks away for signs of danger before darting off to the next alley. Throngs of people, plumes of car tire smoke and debris were visible at each intersection. Blasts of gunfire were heard.

At the airport, the desperation was clear. People were lined up behind every desk they could find, clamoring to find any seat on any plane leaving the country. A fist fight broke out after someone tried to butt into the snaking line.

When I got to the counter, the concierge said, “We have no record of your return flight booking.”

I went to another counter and withstood another massive line up. Again, the



Opposite page, Kervens Casseus, 20, studies on a makeshift desk on the roof of a house in Port-au-Prince (Feb. 18, 2021). Despite a political crisis hampering schooling, he is working to make the best of the situation. Above, Haitians begin the work of recovering after a 7.2-magnitude earthquake struck the country in August. Left, a man helps his daughter Lucie reconnect to the internet as she takes classes through remote learning on a laptop in Port-au-Prince (Feb. 18, 2021). Below, Haitian migrants sit on a boat headed for the border with Panama in Acandi, Colombia (Sept. 25, 2021). Bottom, an open-air market in Port-au-Prince after several days of demonstrations in the Haitian capital (Feb. 15, 2021).

VALERIE BAERISWYL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES, RICHARD PIERRIN/GTETY IMAGES, RAUL ARBOLEDA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



same news: No more flights out. Every plane is booked.

Seeing no apparent way out, I found a spot somewhere on the floor to wait for the next available flight, the earliest of which was three days later. Three days in this loud and frantic check-in area. But still better than being in a city that is spiraling out of control.

As I prayed silently, asking God to provide a way, an attendant who had witnessed my plight approached me and said, "Follow me."

I did as he said and he brought me to a ticket desk and told the person there to secure a seat on the next departing flight.

For a moment, I stood in disbelief! It was clear to me God was providing an open door. I thanked Him and, with little time to react, ran to security. It was frantic—but I could finally see the light at the end of the tunnel. Making it past security felt like coming out of water for a breath of air—the RELIEF was incredible!

I called my wife, as well as another minister, close to tears and thankful for God's protection. I had scarcely made it out of the spiraling chaos of Port-au-Prince to the comfort of home. The relief was incredible: *I've made it. I'm going home.*

Yet as the plane took off and I looked at the city below, it hit me.

For the 11.4 million living on the western part of the island of Hispaniola, there is no going home. *This is* their home. There is virtually nowhere to run from everything I saw. And that was before the next two years would bring a Category 4 hurricane, the assassination of President Jovenel Moise, another major earthquake...

## Remaining Resilient

The events of 2021 have hit Haiti hard. Its leaders are scrambling to restructure the government in the wake of the president's assassination on July 7. Prime Minister Ariel Henry, who was not elected, is maintaining his position and plans to hold a referendum next year to modify the country's constitution. This has caused tension as opponents and several leaders of Haiti's civil society are calling for a

president and prime minister chosen by political parties.

Yet Mr. Henry acknowledged that Haiti is mired in a deep economic crisis and faces multiple other challenges, including a rise in gang-related violence and kidnappings.

The kidnapping of 17 Christian missionaries in October underscored the growing concern. Kidnapping have become more commonplace in recent months amid a worsening political and economic crisis, with at least 628 incidents in the first nine months of 2021 alone, according to a report by the Haitian nonprofit Center for Analysis and Research in Human Rights.

Haitians are also embroiled in a housing crisis in the aftermath of a 7.2-magnitude earthquake. The August 14 quake killed more than 2,200 people and damaged or destroyed tens of thousands of homes.

The epicenter of that earthquake devastated the area where most of The Restored Church of God's Haitian membership live. All but two households became instantly homeless.

I have been in near daily contact with the members since. Many lost all their possessions, and even the hall where they would meet for services was destroyed beyond repair.

Yet the congregation teamed up to clear rubble, build shelters and take care of the injured.

They also scrambled to secure a place for the 70-plus congregants to meet for the annual Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:34).

Most of our congregations meet for this eight-day multisite convention in hotel meeting halls. Haiti's small group of believers had to hold services under any shelter possible. This year, it happened to be under a large tree near where the hall once stood. To secure the area around the tree, metal sheeting from their collapsed roofs was used to create a fence.

They did not try to walk away from their situation or complain. They simply made the best of it.

Similar stories resound the same message. In another location, a Haitian man whose house crumbled in the earth-

quake "was laying on the floor and asked us if we could cover the top of his house so it doesn't get rained on, but he wanted a tarp to just sleep on," Carine Dorlus, the founder of relief volunteer charity Philadelphia for Haiti, told *CBS Philadelphia*.

"They just keep believing that God is going to make a way," Ms. Dorlus said. "Haiti is going to overcome."

You can see this unbending tenacity throughout the nation. I saw it in the Bible references painted on building walls, business signs and even on the sides of transport trucks. I observed how they pour their best resources into church buildings, which are often in better state of repair than all buildings around them. Ninety percent of the country claims belief in one of the many forms of Christianity.

They are looking for a higher power to save them.

In the same way, our church brethren keeping the Feast of Tabernacles under the tree has been symbolic of the hope these members have toward a better future. What better way for them to keep the Feast, which represents living in a temporary physical world while preparing for a much better, lasting world.

That better world is pictured in the Bible as the Kingdom of God—a world-ruling SUPERGOVERNMENT led by God Himself and Jesus Christ. It is a government that will administer peace, prosperity and order to all peoples of the Earth.

Isaiah 9:6-7 describes God's dramatic intervention in mankind's affairs: "the government shall be upon [God's] shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end... The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this."

Each year members keep the Feast of Tabernacles, they actively proclaim their hope in this coming utopia and the end of their plight.

You can share in the vision of this future time that motivates all of our members, including those living in Haiti. Read *How God's Kingdom Will Come – The Untold Story!* ([rcg.org/hgkwc](http://rcg.org/hgkwc)). □

## PERSONAL

Continued from page 2

the only thing people regret are next-day hangovers.

Obviously, a holiday this chaotic, violent and dangerous does not reflect God's command to "let all things be done decently and in order" (I Cor. 14:40). Again, true Christians recognize this about New Year's celebrations—and avoid them.

But most people—including most thought-to-be Christians—love and follow the ideas of men. Jesus knew this and warned, "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men...Full well you reject [meaning you know exactly what you are doing] the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition...making the word of God of none effect through your tradition" (Mark 7:6-13).

God commands His people not to follow pagan practices!

### What God Intended

When God instituted the Passover to Israel, He also revealed to them His sacred calendar. He said, "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you" (Ex. 12:2).

God's calendar begins in the spring, between March and April of this world's calendar system. Leviticus 23 reveals all the special Holy Days (annual Sabbaths) that Christians are to observe. They are dictated by God's calendar, not man's. Although the Bible tells us when His calendar year begins, God does not command—or suggest—or even allow—that His followers ever throw aside self-control for a night of wild partying.

His people understand the days they are commanded to observe: Passover and the seven Days of Unleavened Bread (in the early spring)—the Feast of Pentecost (or Firstfruits, in the late spring)—the Feast of Trumpets (or

Rosh Hashanah)—as well as the Day of Atonement (or Yom Kippur), the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot), and the Last Great Day, all in the early fall. God carefully explains when these days are to be observed within His sacred calendar. Jesus kept them, as did the apostles and the New Testament Church. The true Church—the only one Jesus established—has kept them for 2,000 years, since AD 31.

Jesus told His disciples, "You are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world" (John 15:19). Though they must live in it, Jesus' disciples today are not—and cannot be—of this world!

Those truly serving God have their minds focused on God's Kingdom (read Matthew 6:33). They strive to "put off the old man" and actively imitate the perfect, righteous example of Christ. They are to dedicate themselves to God and His way of life. They allow

God's Word to direct and guide every thought and action. They understand that they come out of the world—I repeat, including its pagan customs, practices and traditions. New Year's is no exception.

Soon, Satan will be removed from his throne and replaced by Jesus Christ, who will establish God's government—the way of righteousness, peace, mercy and truth—on Earth. When that day arrives, mankind will no longer be deceived into practicing customs contrary to God's will.

You have heard the truth about New Year's, its pagan origins, its history, and how God views its customs, traditions and practices. Now, what will you do this New Year?

To learn more about what God says regarding His Holy Days and men's holidays, read my booklet *God's Holy Days or Pagan Holidays?* ([rcg.org/ghdoph](http://rcg.org/ghdoph)). □

## Should You Celebrate Thanksgiving?

For many in North America, the yearly celebration of giving thanks is reduced to gorging on a big meal, excessive drinking the night before, or snoozing in front of a football game. For others, Black Friday—a day of frenzied shopping to capture the best market deals of the year—overshadows the holiday altogether.

Given all of the media hype, excess and sensational commercialism surrounding it, the original meaning of Thanksgiving can easily be lost for Americans and Canadians. Yet citizens of these prosperous nations should have every reason to keep the day as it was intended.

Although the national holiday was not instituted in the Bible, the scriptures have much to say about thankfulness. The article "Should You Celebrate Thanksgiving Day?" provides historical and biblical insight into this holiday that can help you better appreciate everything that you have.

Read the article today at  
[rcg.org/syctd](http://rcg.org/syctd).



worship the image of the beast  
should be killed.

16 And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, <sup>3</sup>to receive <sup>o</sup>a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads:

17 And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or <sup>l</sup>the number of his

18 Here is wisdom that hath understood the number of the beast: <sup>n</sup>it is the number of a man; and his number is threescore and six.

## CHAPTER

<sup>1</sup> The Lamb standing on the fall of Babylon. <sup>15</sup> The ha

**A**ND I looked, and lo! Lamb stood on the mountain Sion, and with him <sup>an</sup> hundred and forty and four thousand, bearing his Father's name written in their foreheads.

<sup>2</sup> And I heard a voice from

& 19. 26  
& 20. 4.  
<sup>l</sup> Cp.  
Gal. 1. 6-9.  
Eph. 3.9-11.  
Tit. 1. 2.  
<sup>o</sup> ch. 5. 9.  
<sup>3</sup> Gr. to give them.

the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to <sup>l</sup>every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,

7 Saying with a loud voice,  
<sup>h</sup> Fear God, and <sup>i</sup>give glory to him; for the hour <sup>k</sup>of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and sea, and the fountains

are followed another angel, saying, <sup>m</sup>Babylon is fallen, <sup>o</sup>that great city, she made all nations drink of the wine of the <sup>l</sup>fornication.

A third angel followed them; with a loud voice, <sup>p</sup>worship the beast, <sup>q</sup>and receive his image, and receive <sup>r</sup>his mark on his forehead, or in his

<sup>s</sup> The same <sup>t</sup>shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is <sup>u</sup>poured out <sup>v</sup>without mixture into the cup of his

# COVID VACCINES: The Mark of the Beast?

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

**C**OVID-19 VACCINES court much controversy. Yet some have an even greater worry—that coronavirus vaccines are the infamous mark of the beast mentioned in the book of Revelation: “And he causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to RECEIVE A MARK in their right hand, or in their foreheads” (Rev. 13:16).

The idea here can seem to jive with coronavirus. Notice what the

“mark” does: “that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark” (vs. 17). Vaccine mandates! Cannot shop without proof of inoculation! No jab, no job!

However, does this prophetic theory hold water?

Take a step back. Since the apostle John penned the enigmatic book of Revelation, people have had theories on what this mark is. Hitler’s swastika, microchips implanted in the wrist, barcodes and even three-digit telephone area codes have all been

brought out as candidates. Of course, all these ideas have come and gone because they ignored two iron-clad rules of Bible study: Examine the context and allow the Bible to interpret itself.

God’s Word is most clear about what is involved with the mark and when it will be administered.

### The Context

First, understand that the mark will not happen in a vacuum. There are other HIGHLY DRAMATIC events that will occur at the same time.

Read earlier in Revelation 13: “And it was given unto him [the beast] to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations” (vs. 7).

This will be a figure known as “the beast” who will rule the entire world. There is another figure he works with known as the “false prophet” (13:11; 16:13). Keep reading: “And [the false prophet] does great wonders, so that he makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceives them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast... And he causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads” (vs. 13-16).

Put this all together. This beast will have power over the entire world. The false prophet will use supernatural signs to deceive the masses. He will literally call fire down from heaven. It is in *this* context that the mark is brought up.

Understand. You cannot have the *mark of the beast* without the man known as the beast and all his trappings.

Even more, the mark is not something one can take without knowing it. This can be seen by looking at what happens to those who take it.

Revelation 14 states: “If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone...” (vs. 9-10).

Is everyone who took a coronavirus vaccine headed for God’s wrath “poured out without mixture”? Certainly not! God is a loving God who warns before punishment.

### The Bible Answer

So what is this mark? As with any Bible prophecy, we must allow the Bible to interpret itself. Notice what is stated right after Revelation 14:9-10.

Verse 12 begins to make clear what actions are tied to the mark: “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”

Those who do not take the mark keep the commandments of God. Conversely, the beast will lead people to disobey God.

When the beast appears on Earth, there will be one command of God most tied to his mark: the fourth commandment to “remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8).

Note the importance God puts on Sabbath-keeping: “Speak you also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily My sabbaths you shall keep: for it is a SIGN between Me and you throughout your generations...” (31:13).

So the Sabbath *is* a sign. Now look at how God describes one of the annual Sabbaths: “And it shall be for a sign unto you UPON YOUR HAND, and for a MEMORIAL BETWEEN YOUR EYES...” (13:9).

Remember that the mark of the beast will be in the right arm and forehead. Similarly, God sees Sabbath-keeping as a sign—a mark of obedience—upon the hand and between the eyes.

Understand the point here. God does not physically mark those who obey the fourth commandment. The mark of the beast will not be physical either. Rather, this language symbolically shows actions (the right arm) and decisions made in the mind (the forehead).

Looking at history helps make clear what will happen when the events of Revelation 13 finally come to pass. In the book *Saturday or Sunday – Which Is the Sabbath?* David C. Pack says: “Now understand this most basic point. The mark is plainly identified as one pertaining to the beast. It is the ‘mark of the beast.’ Other of my books have carefully identified the beast as the Roman Empire, with much proof. This is also the Holy Roman Empire through its eight revivals, or resurrections. Therefore, the mark of the beast is the mark of the eighth and last head of the (Holy) Roman Empire.”

“Keep in mind that the Bible uses the term ‘beast’ to symbolize civil governments, while a church or religious system is often represented as a ‘woman’ (Rev. 12:13-17). The Bible does not speak of the ‘mark of the woman,’ but rather of the ‘mark of the beast’ that the woman rides. Is this clear?

“While the beast has much greater power than she has, like any horse, camel or elephant has greater power than its rider, the rider—in this case, the ‘woman’—steers the animal to do its bidding.”

So the beast will be a *civil leader* and the false prophet a *false church leader*.

Mr. Pack continued: “We can summarize in this way: This great false church steers, guides and directs—‘causes’—others to receive the mark. She does not directly administer it herself, but rather causes all in the empire to accept—‘receive’—the mark. She is the same woman that caused the martyrdom of saints throughout the ages. The mark is received in the right hand and the forehead—and it is a kind of brand of the (Holy) Roman Empire, not of the church. This mark will be brought—caused—upon the entire world!”

One final reason the mark has nothing to do with COVID-19 vaccines. Revelation 17:9-11 states: “The seven heads are seven mountains [governments], on which the woman [great false church system] sits. And there are *seven kings*: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he comes, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is THE EIGHTH, and is of the seven, and goes into perdition.”

Throughout history, there have been only six resurrections of this Holy Roman Empire. There is still a seventh to come *before* the eighth that will include the beast and false prophet.

The Bible says much more on this topic. You can more clearly understand it all by reading *Revelation Explained at Last!* and *Saturday or Sunday – Which Is the Sabbath?* at [rcg.org](http://rcg.org). □

# FAMILY

Continued from page 12

Some believe that God is simply talking to Himself here—and that plural simply sounds better. Others think this is an example of “royal we” similar to how kings and queens will refer to themselves with plural pronouns in official communications. Still others think the Creator is talking to angels.

Again, one must look at the context and other supporting verses to fully understand what is being said in any Bible verse. The Hebrew word for God in verse 26 is *Elohim*. It is a plural word, which makes the plural pronouns make a lot more sense.

*Elohim* is also used in verse 1: “In the beginning *God* created the heaven and the earth.” Why use a *plural* word to describe God? This question has sparked controversy among Bible scholars for centuries. Yet the answer is quite simple and found in John 1.

Starting in verse 1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The Word is the Spirit-being who became Jesus Christ. He was simultaneously with God and also was God.

*Elohim* is plural in the sense of a family. Even if parents somehow produced 1,000 children, they would still form just one family. Therefore, in Genesis 1:26, Christ is talking to someone else. This is the Father, who is the only other God-being Jesus ever mentioned. Matthew 5:48 and John 5:17 are two examples of this.

God—the Father and the Word (who later became Jesus Christ)—made man in their image and their likeness.

For what purpose? Again, John 1 holds the answer. Verse 12 states that we can “become the sons of God.”

Jesus is known as the Son of God (John 20:31). Those who follow Christ can also become sons in the God Family. Do not make this complicated. Jesus is a Son—and true Christians can be sons, too!

Romans 8 makes this point clear: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, *they are the sons of God...*

The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that *we are the children of God*: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and *joint-heirs with Christ*; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also *glorified together*. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with *the glory which shall be revealed in us*” (vs. 14, 16-18).

There is a lot in this passage! It shows that the children of God will be “joint-heirs with Christ” who will be “glorified together” with Him at a later time.

The verses in I John 3:1-2 bolster this point: “Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us,

## “God—the Father and the Word (who later became Jesus Christ)—made man in their image and their likeness.”

*that we should be called the sons of God...Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.”*

What is Christ and the other sons of God joint-heirs of—what will they inherit when He appears?

Ephesians 5:5 clearly defines this “inheritance” as “the kingdom of Christ and of God.”

### Good News

During Christ’s time on Earth, He constantly brought one message: that of the gospel of the Kingdom (Mark 1:15). This ties perfectly into the fact that God is reproducing Himself and enlarging his Family.

The Kingdom of God is a major theme throughout the entire Bible. It shows that Christ will return to Earth and rule with the saints (Dan. 7:18; Rev. 5:10). Ultimately, all of

mankind will have a chance to become part of the God Family (I Tim. 2:4).

Let all of this sink in. It is awesome knowledge!

Yet what does it have to do with physical families?

God’s Plan reveals why family is so important to the Father and Son. It is a *physical* representation of His purpose for mankind—reproducing Himself. Following the biblical formula for marriage and family helps us understand God’s master plan.

Healthy relationships with physical fathers—or being a good dad to children—helps all to better grasp the relationship God the Father wants to have with mankind. Bonds between siblings show how Jesus wants to bond with those who follow Him. Rock-solid marriages between husbands and wives demonstrate how Christ loves the Church and how the Church should love Him back (Eph. 5).

Moving away from the biblical model of marriage and family hides the incredible potential for all mankind to become part of the God Family. Because of this, the Father and Christ do not want the family to be redefined in any way.

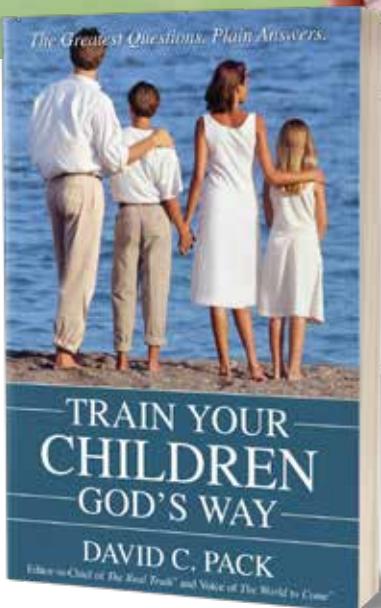
Does this mean those who have made mistakes—such as had children outside marriage or experienced divorce—have no hope for a proper relationship with God? No! He can work with anyone who will admit they are wrong, seek forgiveness and repentance, and desire to change.

The publisher of this magazine, The Restored Church of God, has many tools available to help you build up your familial relationships. A few include *Dating and Courtship – God’s Way*, *You Can Build a Happy Marriage*, *Understanding Divorce and Remarriage*, and *Train Your Children God’s Way*.

Also, be sure to read *The Purpose of Marriage – Ever Obsolete?* It greatly expands on the concepts covered in this article. These titles are all available on [rcg.org](http://rcg.org).

Determine to stick to the Bible definition of marriage and family—and reap the incredible benefits! □

# Children *Do* Have an Instruction Manual!



The world brims with ideas on how to rear children. Each year, 3,000 parenting books are published in the United States and there are half a million available on the internet library Google Books. These guides can be difficult to interpret, as they offer a wide range of competing childrearing “rules.” They may contain interesting facts, quotes and points, but none bring the solutions that parents long for—and desperately need.

Man has not known that there is an INSTRUCTION MANUAL that contains all the information necessary to rear children the right way. This inspired Book—the Bible—strips away the confusion, division, competing traditions, and ignorance that have shrouded the truth about childrearing.

To learn what God’s Word says about parenting, order a free copy of *Train Your Children God’s Way* at [rcg.org/tuyc](http://rcg.org/tuyc) today. It pieces together principles from God’s Instruction Manual and provides the keys to successfully rearing children.



## EUROPE

Continued from page 15

Yet today, Ms. Merkel is positioned to overtake former mentor Helmut Kohl to become Germany's longest serving chancellor.

Ms. Schwarzer said she is impressed by how Ms. Merkel has held her own among powerful men: "There is a joke in Germany: a small boy asks, mum, can men also become chancellor? One person proved it and now it is out there and no one can take that away now."

Women and girls say the impact of Ms. Merkel—who is often known as "Mutti," or mum, although she has no children herself—has been profound in a country where traditional gender roles are only changing slowly.

Lia, a 9-year-old girl in Berlin, said she would like to be chancellor one day. Asked what she would do, Lia said: "Work, I would just get on with it, and earn money!"

Her mother Nancy added: "[Ms. Merkel] has so much strength and influence on so many people and I do think especially women."

### German Diversity

Angela Merkel has long urged Germans to forge a common future that draws on their diverse backgrounds, hearkening back to the 2015 decision to admit 1 million refugees that was a defining moment of her long chancellorship.

This act of opening Germany to people fleeing war and poverty in the Middle East was the most controversial act of her time in power.

Asking "What is my country?" Ms. Merkel answered, "each and every individual must be able to feel heard and belong."

She called for a Germany "in which we shape the future together," adding: "Be open to encounters, be curious about one another, tell each other your stories, and tolerate your differences. This is the lesson from 31 years of German unity."

Germany's diversifying population has naturally led to diverse political representation.

Hakan Demir, who smiled broadly as he stood in front of Germany's majestic parliament building on his first official

day of work as a national lawmaker, is just one example of such change.

"My grandfather would have been mighty proud of me, and my parents are proud as well," said Mr. Demir, 36, taking a moment to remember his family's roots in Turkey, from where his grandfather came in the early 1970s as an untrained "guest worker" to help build roads and houses in Germany.

Mr. Demir, a member of the center-left Social Democratic Party, is one of hundreds of people who ran for Germany's 735-seat lower house of parliament with backgrounds as immigrants or parents or grandparents who immigrated to the country. The number who won in the recent vote has made the Bundestag more diverse and inclusive than ever before.

The chamber now includes at least three people of African descent—up from one in the previous parliament. After years of stagnation, the number of female lawmakers also has gone up again, including two who identify as transgender women.

Among the newly elected immigrants is Awet Tesfaiesus, 47, the first black woman to serve in parliament. Ms. Tesfaiesus, who fled from Eritrea with her family as a 4-year-old, is a member of the Greens who was elected to represent the Werra-Meissner constituency in central Germany.

Other new Social Democratic lawmakers are Armand Zorn, 33, who was born in Cameroon and came to Germany at age 12, and Reem Alabali-Radovan, 31, the daughter of Iraqi migrants.

Many who initially came as temporary workers decided to stay and bring their families, giving Berlin and other cities in western and southwestern Germany large immigrant communities.

Under Ms. Merkel's watch, there are now about 21.3 million people with immigrant backgrounds in Germany, or about 26 percent of the population of 83 million.

More than 500 candidates with immigrant roots ran for parliament this year. While it is not yet clear



Billboards with election campaign posters showing Germany's three chancellor candidates, from left to right, co-leader of Greens Annalena Baerbock, Finance Minister and Vice Chancellor of the Social Democratic Party Olaf Scholz, and Christian Democratic Union leader Armin Laschet (Sept. 25, 2021).

JOHN MACDOUGALL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

how many were elected, the number is expected to be higher than in all previous parliaments.

"There is more openness now, and the idea that diverse groups should be found in politics and be directly represented," University of Trier political scientist Uwe Jun said. "This will change politics."

### Next Chancellor

About 60.4 million people in the nation of 83 million are eligible to elect the new parliament, which decides who will be the next German chancellor. Recent polls point to a neck-and-neck race between Ms. Merkel's center-right Union bloc and the Social Democrats, with the latter marginally ahead.

The Social Democrats' candidate, current finance minister and Vice Chancellor Olaf Scholz, has seen his personal ratings climb amid error-strewn campaigns by his rivals, the Union's Armin Laschet and the Greens Party candidate, Annalena Baerbock.

Voters appear underwhelmed by the choices. Whoever finishes first is expected to get a historically low share of the vote, with polls showing no party expected to get 30 percent support. The lowest score so far for a winning party is the Union's 31 percent in 1949, which also is the bloc's worst showing to date.

But observers say that Ms. Merkel bears at least some responsibility for the dire straits that her party is now in.

"Merkel has focused on governing in recent years and neglected her party work," said Klaus Stuewe, a political scientist at the Catholic University of Eichstaett-Ingolstadt.

After stepping down as party leader in 2018, Ms. Merkel largely stood back while the Christian Democrats underwent a series of painful leadership contests. The turmoil detracted from its efforts to lay out a coherent party program—which for years was focused largely on Ms. Merkel's persona—and many voters lost faith in its competence in key areas such as foreign and economic policy.

It is believed that Germany's next chancellor will need to address one of

the biggest criticisms of Ms. Merkel's step-by-step approach to politics: that it failed to keep pace with the big changes happening in the country and beyond.

While some viewed Ms. Merkel as an anchor of stability, particularly in turbulent times, others saw in her a source of stagnation.

In-demand reforms—from the digitalization of schools and government services to the greening of Germany's heavy industry—were hardly attempted under Ms. Merkel. And despite frequent, vocal protests to speed up Germany's response to climate change, she made sure the country's powerful auto industry was shielded from tough measures.

The blame for the Union bloc's recent poor showing has also been placed on the party's candidate, Armin Laschet, a state governor whose gaffes contrast with Ms. Merkel's image as a calm, professional stateswoman.

Mr. Laschet is largely a centrist in Ms. Merkel's mold, backing her welcoming stance toward refugees and other migrants. Still, he has been keener than the outgoing chancellor to relax restrictions during the pandemic and is treading a fine line between offering continuity and promising renewal.

Even after Mr. Laschet won the Union bloc's nomination in a hotly contested battle in April, Ms. Merkel remained aloof.

"For a long time, she did not campaign for Laschet at all, supporting him only at the very end before the Bundestag election, when it was already too late," said Mr. Stuewe.

Olaf Scholz and his center-left Social Democrats, the narrow winners of Germany's parliamentary election, underlined their hopes of talks soon on forming a coalition with the two parties that are likely to be kingmakers.

Mr. Scholz pulled his party out of a long poll slump to win.

"Voters have spoken very clearly," Mr. Scholz said after his victory. "They strengthened three parties—the Social Democrats, the Greens and the

Free Democrats—so this is the visible mandate the citizens of this country have given: These three parties should lead the next government."

Mr. Scholz and others were keen to dispel concerns that lengthy haggling and a new, multiparty government would mean unstable leadership in Europe's biggest economy.

"My idea is that we will be very fast in getting a result for this government, and it should be before Christmas if possible," Mr. Scholz told reporters in Berlin. "Germany always has coalition governments, and it was always stable."

The current German vice chancellor is an experienced and pragmatic politician whose calm, no-frills style is in some ways reminiscent of Ms. Merkel's. Calling for continuity in foreign policy, he said a priority will be "to form a stronger and more sovereign European Union."

"But doing so means also to work very hard on the good relationship between...the European Union and the United States," he added. "The trans-Atlantic partnership is of [the] essence for us in Germany...and so you can rely on continuity in this question."

The poor results for the Union bloc are unlikely to tarnish most voters' favorable views of Ms. Merkel as she stays on as a caretaker chancellor—possibly for several months—while Germany's coalition talks play out, said Julia Reuschenbach, a political scientist at the University of Bonn.

"As long as the formation of a new government lasts, she will presumably remain the seasoned, experienced politician who now needs to lead the country through a transition period," said Ms. Reuschenbach.

If this holds true, it could be said Angela Merkel's politics and spirit of compromise will outlive her reign. This would be fitting as the "Queen of Europe" leaves behind a legacy for Germany and the rest of the continent that could be as timeless and noble as a Roman marble bust—undoubtedly a model for future kings and queens to fashion themselves after. □

## INTERNATIONAL

## Quest for More Leverage Drives Iran's Nuclear Stalling Tactic, Analysts Say



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi delivers a speech during the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Dushanbe, Tajikistan (Sept. 17, 2021).

REUTERS/DIDOR SADULLOEV

**D**ubai (Reuters) – Western powers have been trying for weeks to get Tehran's answer to one question—when will the Islamic Republic return to nuclear talks that have been on hold since June? Iran's response has been vague and simple: “soon.”

Behind Tehran's stalling is an attempt to gain leverage to extract more concessions when negotiations do eventually resume, officials and analysts said, including by advancing its uranium enrichment program, a possible pathway to a nuclear bomb.

Iran has long denied seeking to weaponize nuclear energy.

The talks, which aim to bring both Washington and Tehran back into compliance with a 2015 nuclear pact aimed at curbing the Iranian enrichment program, were adjourned in June after hardliner cleric Ebrahim Raisi was elected Iran's president.

“Iran will eventually return to the talks in Vienna. But we are in no rush to do so because time is on our side. Our nuclear advances further every day,” a

senior Iranian official said on condition of anonymity.

Ali Vaez, senior Iran analyst at the International Crisis Group, said “more time equals more leverage, given the exponential growth of Iran's nuclear program.”

While China and Russia, closer trading partners of Iran, are more restrained, Western parties to the pact can scarcely conceal their frustration. The United States and European powers have urged Iran to resume talks, saying the diplomatic window would not stay open forever as Tehran's nuclear program is advancing well beyond the limits set by the 2015 pact.

The nuclear agreement limited Iran's uranium enrichment activity to make it harder for Tehran to develop nuclear arms, in return for lifting international sanctions.

But former U.S. President Donald Trump ditched the deal in 2018, saying it did not do enough to curb Iran's nuclear activities, ballistic missile program and regional influence, and

reimposed sanctions that have crippled Iran's economy.

In response, Tehran breached the deal by rebuilding stockpiles of enriched uranium, refining it to higher fissile purity and installing advanced centrifuges to speed up output.

“They [Iran] keep saying they are going to come back to the table. But when they say soon...it means absolutely nothing,” said a senior European diplomat.

“That doesn't mean we think they don't want to come back, but we think they want their cake and to eat it. They want to create a fait accompli on the ground—technical and nuclear—and preserve the possibility of a negotiation.”

### More for Less

Emboldened by the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, Iran's rulers are confident their stalling strategy will not bring serious repercussions, analysts said, especially when U.S. President Joe Biden is embroiled in a growing rivalry with China and battling a COVID-19 crisis at home.

In contrast, the Biden administration is signaling that Iran should take nothing for granted.

Top U.S. officials will tell visiting Israeli counterparts in Washington on Tuesday they are committed to diplomacy but would be prepared to pursue “other avenues” to ensure Tehran does not acquire a nuclear weapon, a senior U.S. official said.

Israel says it will not allow Tehran to get a nuclear bomb.

The man with ultimate authority in Iran, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has blamed the United States for the pause in the talks.

“Ayatollah Khamenei seems to believe that by waiting, he can get a better deal from Washington. That time is on his side,” said Meir Javedanfar,

Iran lecturer at Israel's Reichman University.

Tehran and Washington still disagree on which steps need to be taken and when, with the key issues being what nuclear limits Tehran will accept and what sanctions Washington will remove.

The fact that indirect talks between Tehran and Washington paused after the election of Mr. Raisi was a sign of Tehran's plan "to press for major concessions" from the United States, said a former Iranian official.

"The establishment is also weighing different tactics to get more and give less in return. It takes time to determine their strategy," he said.

Naming Ali Bagheri Kani, an ardent critic of the 2015 pact, to replace former pragmatist chief nuclear negotiator Abbas Araghchi, signals Tehran

will take an uncompromising approach when the talks resume, Eurasia Group analyst Henry Rome said.

### Economic Risk

In addition to seeking the lifting of Trump-era sanctions in a verifiable process, Tehran also wants Washington to remove Iran's Revolutionary Guards from a terrorism blacklist. It also wants Europe to guarantee foreign investors will return, and assurances that Washington will not renege on the deal again.

For his part, Mr. Biden wants to restore the pact's nuclear limits and, if possible, extend them while pushing back against what he has called Iran's other destabilizing activities.

Sanam Vakil, deputy director of Chatham House's Middle East and North Africa Program, said Iran would

"win" if it gained further concessions from Washington, but should the deal collapse Iran's rulers sense that they could survive through "maximum resistance," a reference to economic self-reliance.

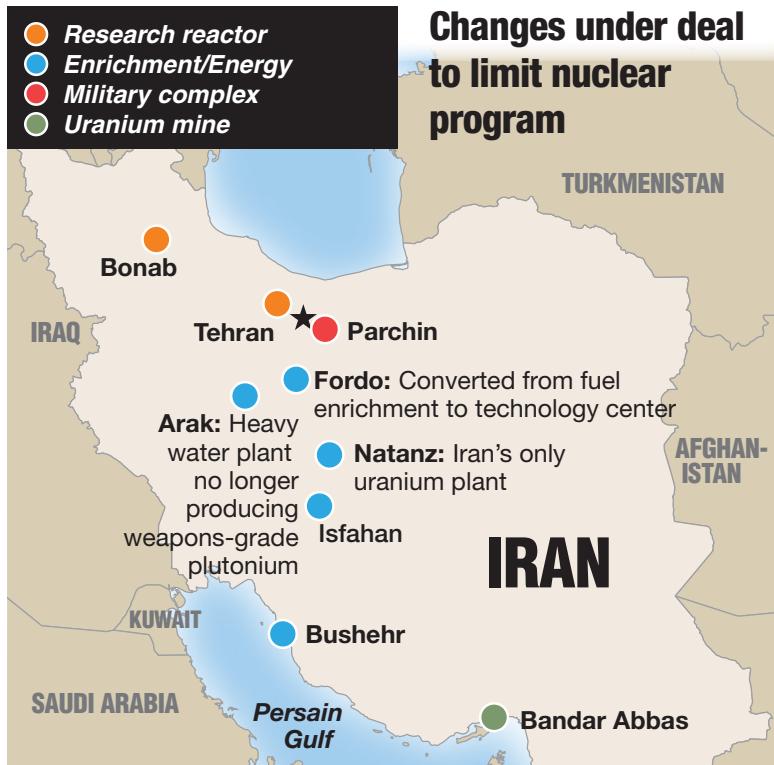
However, Iran's foot-dragging strategy could weaken the country's clerical rulers by further hurting an economy already grappling with squeezed oil revenues.

The authorities fear a re-eruption of unrest among its core supporters—lower-income Iranians—whose periodic bouts of protest in recent years reminded them how vulnerable they could be to popular anger over economic hardships.

"A failure to revive the nuclear deal entails real economic risk for Iran... but politics trumps economics right now," Mr. Rome said. □

## Iran Ramps Up Uranium Enrichment

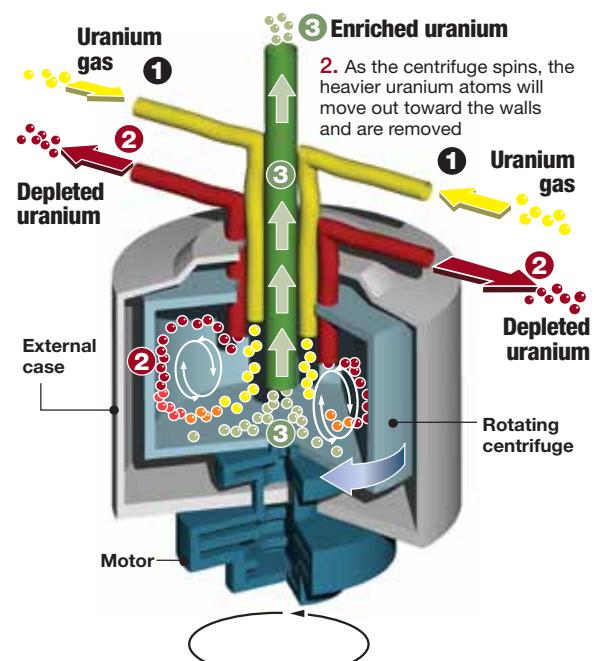
*In July 2015, Iran had almost 20,000 centrifuges. Under the nuclear deal with world powers, it was limited to installing no more than 5,060 of the least efficient centrifuges at Natanz until 2026—10 years after the deal's "implementation day" in January 2016. Iran's uranium stockpile was reduced by 98 percent.*



### How a Centrifuge Is Used To Enrich Uranium

*Spinning centrifuges convert the gases into enriched uranium that can be used for reactor fuel and medical isotopes. If enriched to higher levels, the material can be used for weapons.*

1. Uranium gas is fed into a centrifuge rotor and spun at very high speeds in the range of 100,000 rpm



3. The lighter, enriched uranium tends to stay in the center of the centrifuge. This is removed and placed in another centrifuge and repeated many times to create a highly enriched uranium. This enriched uranium can be used to make nuclear weapons.

Source: AP, HowStuffWorks, BBC, Council on Foreign Relations, Nuclear Threat Initiative, International Atomic Energy Agency, Institute for Science and International Security  
Graphic: Staff, Tribune News Service



# “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.

Visit [rcg.org/hwpwc](http://rcg.org/hwpwc) to order your free booklet!

