

JULY-AUGUST 2021

THE

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A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING



The Science of Hypocrisy

**U.S. Healthcare:
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5 Bible Verses that
Explain Today's World

**The Joy
of Reading!**

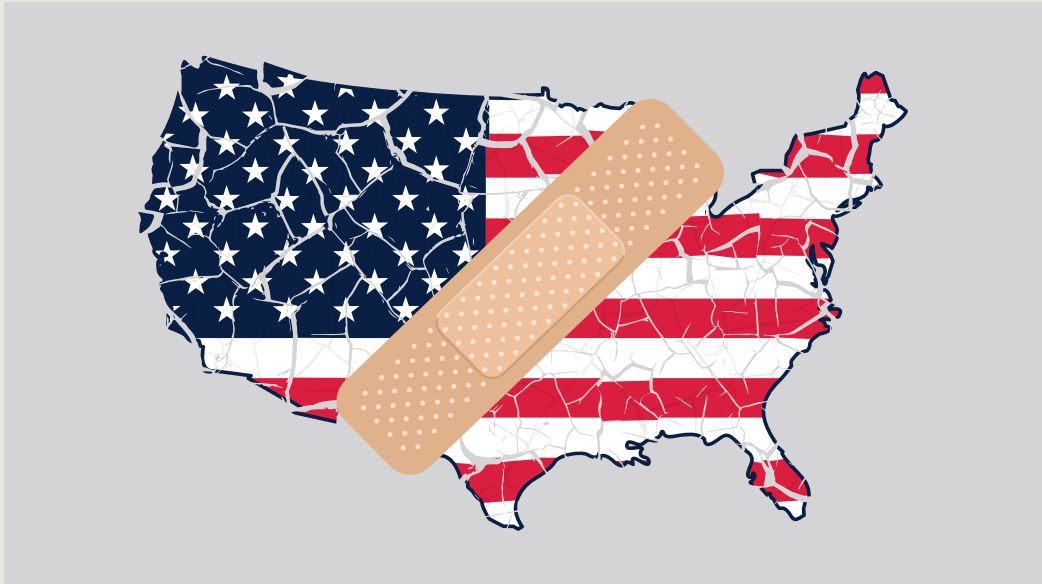
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Should They Stay That Way?

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A R T I C L E S

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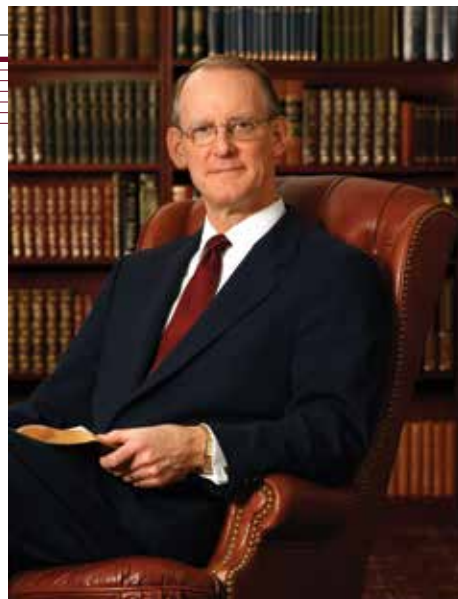
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



‘The Unknown God’

YOU COULD NOT read an article more important than this! It will forever change your perception of what you have been taught about who and what is God.

Virtually every student of the Bible is familiar with the Ten Commandments. The famous movie of the same name is rerun every spring in connection with the celebration of the ancient supposed Christian tradition of Easter. Many millions have come to know the Hollywood version of the Bible account of the receiving of the Ten Commandments.

In the 2000s, when the United States was embroiled in a legal battle over whether the Constitution allows for the Ten Commandments to be displayed publicly in courts and government buildings, Supreme Court Associate Justice Antonin Scalia put it best when he said, “I think 90 percent of Americans believe in the Ten Commandments, but 85 percent probably couldn’t tell you what they are.” And how many could even *paraphrase half* of them is another question.

Therefore, largely lost in this astounding account in the book of Exodus is the all-important first commandment, establishing *Who* it was that gave these laws to ancient Israel in the wilderness. This commandment—the identity of the true God—lies at the heart of all religion!

Moses recorded God’s words: “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:3).

Surely, if the Bible is the inspired instruction book of an all-wise and all-powerful Creator God, who was also the *only true God* in the universe, His first commandment could not have been otherwise. Under no circumstances would that God want *other gods* worshipped in His place. In fact, in the very next commandment, the Author of these laws describes Himself as “a jealous God.”

Notice this second, longer command: “You shall not make unto you *any* graven image, or *any* likeness of *anything* that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: you shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD your God am a jealous God” (vs. 4-5). This commandment is a very broad, sweeping, explicit prohibition intended to cover *every* form of false worship involving *every* other kind of supposed “god,” and representation of such, that human beings with creative reasoning could devise. Like any parent whose children chose to come home to a different house and to different parents after school, the Parent who made all human beings—His children—*would* certainly be jealous if they went off after idols and false gods.

Even the third commandment is tied directly to the first two. It describes the careful reverence with which

the God of the Bible wants His name to be used at all times. Here is that command: “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that takes His name in vain” (Ex. 20:7). The meaning of this commandment is that when people even *reference* the true God, they should be very careful how they do this (Psa. 111:9). They should think about the purpose—the reason—for which they mention His most holy name.

The fourth and final commandment that we will examine here is also tied directly to the identity of the God of the Bible. Let’s first read this considerably longer command before examining it more closely: “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor, and do all your work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD your God: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Ex. 20:8-11).

Although the world has generally discarded observance of the seventh-day Sabbath in place of Sunday, the first day of the week, this is nevertheless an extraordinary command, given for a vital purpose. This command also creates a special problem for the evolutionist—even the one who professes to believe in God, and more specifically, in the God of the Bible.

Here is how: God expects all of His servants to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. Why? So that they would never forget *which God* it was Who “in six days” created “heaven and earth,” and who sealed this by resting on “the seventh day.” In this way, the God who authored the Bible directly ties *all* of the Ten Commandments to the Creation account, which, in turn, leaves no room for His servants to

drift into following and worshipping other gods. While one may not otherwise be correctly worshipping God, at least by observing the Sabbath every seven days, the adherent is forced to be cognizant of the sole God of Creation.

The God of the Bible leaves no room for doubt in the first four commandments. He expects to be worshipped *as He is*, including on the day that He, not man, has selected for this worship. He allows no room for confusion and does not want human opinion added—He accepts no substitution of the true for the false.

The evolutionist has a big problem trying to explain belief in a God who created all life on Earth in six days. Having rejected the Creation account of this God, it becomes much easier to go on to the next step—the very rejection of that God, and possibly the idea that there even is a God! Of course, faithful Sabbath observance would eliminate this problem.

God Most Plain

These commandments are not difficult to understand. The God of the Bible speaks plainly—He says what He means and means what He says! (Note that God repeats in Deuteronomy 5 the same Ten Commandments verbatim for emphasis.)

We might pause at this point and ask: Do these four commands, when understood collectively, sound like the laws of a God who takes lightly those who worship any other but Himself? Do they seem like mere wishful instruction on the part of this God—things that He only *hopes* His followers will remember to do? Do they sound like the words of a God who is willing to let people worship idols, false gods or even any other wrong *form* of supposedly who and what He is, as long as the proponent proclaims such to be the true God?

A relationship with the God of the Bible begins with a recognition, understanding and acceptance of the first four commandments. All other approaches will preclude contact with Him.

To Be a Model Nation

God first revealed Himself to an entire people when He called the nation of Israel and led them out of the land of Egypt. God intended that ancient Israel be a model nation that all other nations would copy. This was always His purpose. He expected His people to set an example for these surrounding nations of how happiness, peace, abundance, blessings and protection from enemies would result from obedience to Him.

Sadly, despite an early willingness and determination to obey God, starting when the commandments were first given at Sinai, Israel repeatedly found herself *copying* the nations around her and worshipping their gods, thus achieving the very opposite of God’s purpose! (Recall how quickly Israel fell into worship of the “golden calf” after the Ten Commandments were given—before Moses could even get down from the mountain.) This worship of false gods has had repercussions lasting thousands of years.

The long, broken history of Israel is that she turned from the true God and fell into the seductive trap of idolatry and the worship of foreign gods, doing this over and over again. Each time this pattern repeated itself, God sent her back into captivity and slavery. After a time, she would cry out in bondage, offering repentance, and God would raise up a judge and deliver her. This cycle, described in the book of Judges and elsewhere, was never broken until ancient Israel and Judah finally went into captivity (for the next-to-last time), with 10 of the 12 tribes becoming lost to history. Only the Jews—the tribe of Judah mixed with one other tribe—have retained their national identity, and this is largely attributed to having continued to observe God’s Sabbath.

Jeremiah Summarizes

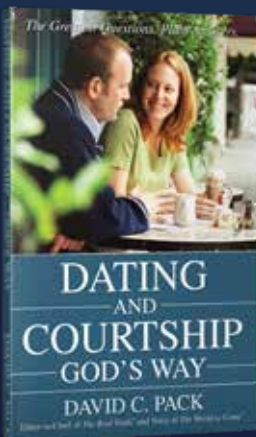
Here is how God, through the prophet Jeremiah, describes and laments the

Please see **PERSONAL**, page 29

Today 12:01 AM

Hey I want to break up

Dating doesn't have to be this way.



The path to getting married can be complicated. On average, a person will experience four disastrous dates, be in eight relationships, will have "fallen in love" twice, and will be heartbroken two times before settling down.

But this is not what God intended! Order your free copy of *Dating and Courtship – God's Way* to learn straight from the Bible how to practice successful dating—free from heartbreak—and to prepare for a successful marriage.

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U.S. Healthcare: What's the Prognosis?

Many realize that something is not right with healthcare in the United States. Yet everyone is looking at the symptoms rather than the cause...

BY DAVID J. LITAVSKY AND RAYMOND M. GARB

A STORY ILLUSTRATES THE complexity of healthcare costs in the United States.

A woman experiencing stomach issues went to a doctor, who recommended a diagnostic test called a HIDA scan. The woman's health insurance policy had a high deductible, so she knew she would likely have to pay for the procedure out of pocket.

As she left the doctor's office, she asked the receptionist a seemingly simple question: "How much is this going to cost?"

That question turned out to be not so simple. "The receptionist had no idea—and she had no way to check," reported an article on the story on BenefitsPRO, a website for benefits professionals.

The woman's husband, who is an employee benefits consultant, decided

to compare prices for the HIDA procedure at various hospitals and medical centers in their area. The results ranged from \$450 to \$3,177.33. Some locations did not disclose rates.

After further research, he came across similar examples of pricing disparities across the U.S. His findings were based on information from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS):

■ "A permanent pacemaker implant at Pennsylvania's Phoenixville Hospital is billed at \$211,534. Four hours away at Unitown Hospital, the same procedure costs \$19,747, or 91 percent less."

■ "The official bill rate to treat chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, at Bayonne Hospital Center in New Jersey, is \$99,690. At Lake Whitney Hospital in Texas, it's \$3,134, or 97 percent less. Thirty-five

hospitals bill an average of more than \$50,000 to treat COPD, while 161 bill less than \$7,500."

■ "A kidney and urinary tract infection faces a \$132,569 bill at Crozer Chester Medical Center in Pennsylvania, but \$6,224 at Wyoming County Community Hospital."

Many factors can help explain these differences. Top quality care at a hospital that takes in more seriously ill patients tend to price their services higher than average. Different equipment, drug costs, protections from possible lawsuits, and new technologies also play into the prices.

But clearly there is a problem here. The complexity of medical service costs should not leave healthcare professionals speechless.

The American Medical Association *Journal of Ethics* conceded: It is "fairly challenging for anyone trying



to answer the question, ‘Doc, how much is this going to cost me?’”

“Even if the doctor knew the charge, he or she would be unlikely to know the specifics of a particular patient’s insurance plan. The amount that a patient may owe is further affected by the setting or location of the health care good or service.”

Unsuspecting patients do not fare much better.

“The US healthcare system is so complex that more than half of consumers do not understand how to navigate it appropriately,” according to research by Accenture, a Fortune 500 consulting and processing services company. “This low healthcare system literacy is creating an estimated \$4.8 billion annual administrative cost burden for payers.”

The likelihood of high expenses leaves many ways to seek medical help.

“For many Americans, a trip to the doctor hinges on whether they can afford to go, rather than if it’s a medical necessity,” *CNBC* reported. In 2019, 22 percent of the population skipped medical care because of costs, and 29 percent did not take their medications as prescribed because they felt they could not afford them. In addition, 1 in 7 Americans who live in families said they struggled to pay their medical bills after seeking medical help, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The affordability issue is keeping afloat the debate over whether the government should step in and regulate—or whether it is better left alone. Both sides of the political aisle, the public, news media, and medical experts share concern over the current picture. But few agree on exactly what reform is needed.

Diagnosing the fundamental problem with America’s healthcare industry is key in solving it.

A Complex System

Despite all the disagreement, one problem is undeniable: Medical costs are increasing.

Health spending per person in the U.S. has increased about *sixfold* from \$1,848 in 1970 to \$11,582 in 2019 (the year before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the nation), after adjusting for inflation. In 2019, the last year for which full-year data is available, \$3.8 trillion was spent on healthcare—making up 17.7 percent of the GDP—according to CMS numbers.

Although it is easy to point the finger at corporate greed, the reason for this overall trend is more complicated.

According to BioMed Central: “Health systems around the world are

struggling with the unprecedented interacting challenges of—among others—increased life expectancy (and the concomitant increase in chronic illness, multi-morbidity and frailty), technological progress (both real and imagined), the convergence of ‘health’ and ‘care’ needs (along with increasingly messy disputes over who should pay for them), fragmentation of services, mismatches between workforce supply and system demand, a mushrooming of regulations and protocols, diminishing public trust in health professionals, and shrinking budgets.”

Add to this worsening health conditions among a fast-growing population. Six in 10 American adults have a chronic disease and 4 in 10 have two or more, according to the CDC. The aging baby-boom generation and the worse-than-expected health of millennials is straining the system. Forty-four percent of older millennials (born between 1981 and 1988) have already contracted one or more chronic health conditions and are unhealthier than expected, a *CNBC* sponsored survey found. Their health is expected to continue to decline with age.

“At the end of the day, if these trends continue, then you’ll have higher health-care costs,” *CNBC* quoted Dr. Georges Benjamin, executive director of the American Public Health Association.

Such trends would result in higher insurance premiums, which could create what some commentators call a “death spiral.”

“An ageing population, increased use of health services, and rising health-care costs are driving up the benefits insurers have to pay out each year,” *The Conversation* reported. “As pay-outs increase, insurers raise premiums, to recoup these costs.”

“Rising premiums make health insurance less affordable and less attractive—particularly to younger and healthier people.

“As younger, healthier people drop their insurance, the insurance ‘risk pool’ gets worse; people who hold insurance are older and more likely

to use their benefits and use them to a greater value.

“This increases the cost of premiums, younger people drop out, and the death spiral starts again.”

Already, the strain is showing as hospitals face a kind of Catch-22. Doctors, nurses, surgeons and other healthcare providers are required by law to treat all patients in emergencies, regardless of whether they are insured. Yet 33 million Americans under age 65 opt out of medical insurance, and many with high-deductible insurance plans still struggle to pay.

“Today’s fragmented health care system leaves hospitals with a daily balancing act to maintain their mis-

sion to the community while making ends meet,” the American Hospital Association (AHA) explained.

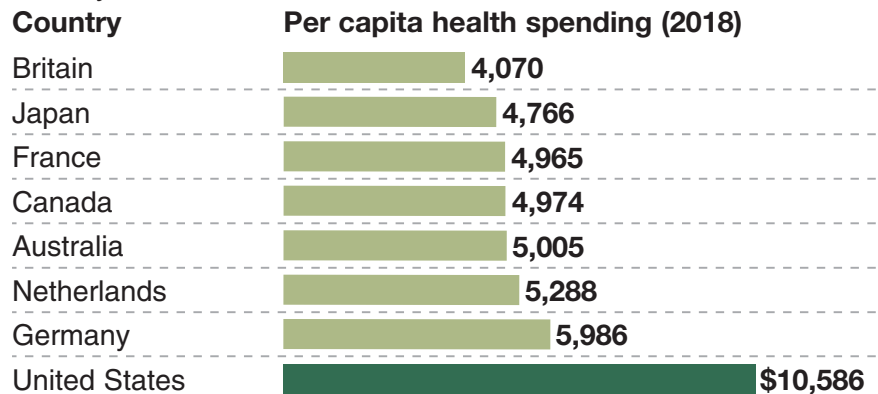
This is seen when patients experience unexpected emergencies and are unable to choose providers or opt out of treatment.

“One example is when a patient has a heart attack in a public setting, and a bystander calls an ambulance,” Definitive Healthcare reported. “The patient, who may not have been able to consent, would be on the hook for the cost of the ambulance ride and the care provided en route to the hospital.”

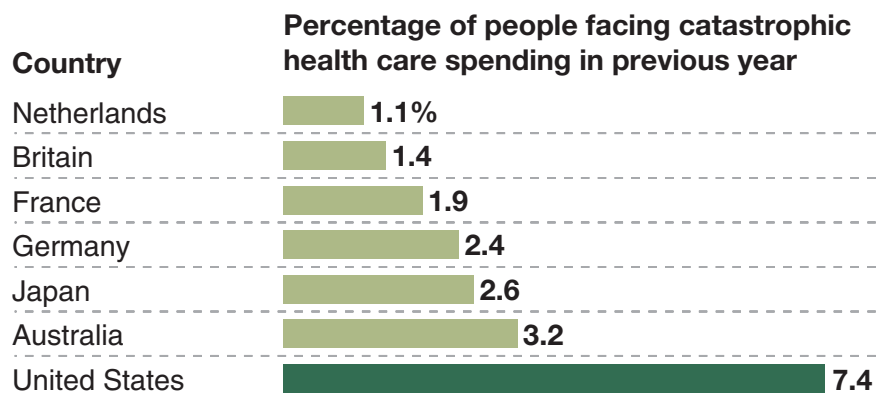
According to an AHA report of 4,985 hospitals, unpaid medical bills total nearly 6 percent of hospital expenses.

The High Cost of U.S. Healthcare

The U.S. spends more on healthcare than other wealthy countries.



Residents of other wealthy countries have less trouble with medical bills.



Catastrophic health care spending calculated based on data from most recent year available

Source: OECD, World Health Organization, European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies

Graphic: Los Angeles Times/TNS

As a result, *one-third* of 100 hospital executives surveyed in 2018 reported their health system faced over \$10 million in “bad debt,” which includes patient delinquency for extenuating circumstances such as unemployment.

An AHA fact sheet titled “Hospital Billing Explained” reported: “In addition to the high number of uninsured people in America, the hospital payment system itself is broken. Government programs like Medicare and Medicaid pay hospitals less than the cost of caring for the beneficiaries these programs cover; insurance companies negotiate deep discounts with hospitals; and many people who are uninsured pay little or nothing at all.”

Who Should Pay?

The U.S. currently has a hybrid system in which most costs are paid by the private sector—patients themselves—which is supplemented by government funding.

Some point to fully public healthcare services provided in other nations as a model for how the U.S. can reduce the burden on patients.

In such countries, medical costs are paid by taxing incomes on the entire population. In Sweden, for instance, an income tax beyond 50 percent helps fund the government to pay for 97 percent of healthcare costs. However, Swedes visit hospitals even for routine checkups, which can put those who need more urgent care on a waiting list that lasts months.

“Swedish law stipulates patients should wait no more than 90 days to undergo surgery or see a specialist,” *Agence France-Presse* reported. Yet, according to government data, 1 in 3 wait longer.

And this is for a population of 10 million. Imagine a system like this in a country with 33 times the population—the United States.

In 2019, *The New York Times* published a scenario in which the U.S. government provided universal healthcare for all. The main question the publication tried to answer is whether having the federal government foot the entire

estimated \$4.13 trillion medical bill would raise taxes for households.

The results were as complex as the healthcare system is today: “A number of economists have closely examined the possible costs of Medicare for all. Some estimate that such a system would increase the nation’s total health bill, and some find it would decrease it—but all of them see a huge increase in the amount the federal government would

“Although we are developing better medicines, experiencing longer average lifespans, increasing medical knowledge, and have improved techniques at combatting illness, the number of conditions Americans experience is slated to increase.”

spend. The increase in federal spending represents more than triple all spending on the military, or about 80 percent of all government spending on things other than health care.”

This “would mean either large tax increases or cuts in other government spending—or both,” the publication continued. One estimate included “a new 32 percent payroll tax, on top of existing rates.”

But even a system of universal financial coverage would be useless if patients cannot be physically reached or transported to a hospital. This is a reality for many Americans today who live in a “care desert.”

According to a *CNN* analysis, 16 percent of residents in the U.S. main-

land live in a community that is at least 30 miles from the nearest hospital. Reducing this number for a population spread across the third largest country by area would require constructing and funding more medical centers—which would amount to an even greater tax burden on citizens.

Addressing the Cause

The “U.S. healthcare system is a study in complexity,” *Forbes* reported. “The best medical treatments on the planet exist within a complicated medical marketplace. The most cutting-edge technology is often tethered to heavily siloed patient data that can’t be accessed or shared, and the spatial and social determinants shaping our local behaviors—by far the greatest contributors to our overall well-being—receive far less attention than the clinical and financial components accompanying them.”

Amid all this, it can seem impossible to cut through to the real causes of our issues. The article argued that “the greatest contributors to our overall well-being” are swept aside to squabble over costs and care quality.

Modern healthcare is a paradox. Although we are developing better medicines, experiencing longer average lifespans, increasing medical knowledge, and have improved techniques at combatting illness, the number of conditions Americans experience is slated to increase.

All groups involved—from policymakers to insurance and pharmaceutical companies to doctors on the frontlines—are working hard to deliver on the needs of American lives. But it seems the more policies governments pass, the more vaccines and pills companies distribute, and the more procedures patients receive from medical practitioners, the results are still mixed. It is one step forward, two steps back.

Clearly, we are missing something here!

The Book of Health

There is a healthcare model that does not involve massive insurance costs or high taxes and one that prevents disease. It is a solution that, if imple-

mented nationwide, could provide an entire population with vibrant health and a low incidence of life-threatening illness. A system that could also intervene to heal those who are sick—to reverse life-endangering medical conditions.

While often swept aside as ancient Hebrew literature, the Bible contains many health principles that work.

Encyclopedia Britannica stated: “Though the Bible contains little on the medical practices of ancient Israel, it is a mine of information on social and personal hygiene. The Jews were indeed pioneers in matters of public health.”

As medical knowledge has advanced, biblical principles have remained relevant to medical science.

For example, the Bible emphasizes thorough washing after coming into contact with bodily fluids (Lev. 15:1-12). In the 17th century, doctors discovered that washing their hands prior to aiding childbirth largely prevented puerperal fever—a disease that took the lives of an estimated 250,000 to 500,000 mothers.

Another example from Scripture is a simple diet principle in Proverbs 30:8: “Feed me with the food allotted to me” (New King James Version).

The word translated allotted means “an appointed quantity.” Today, experts agree that the quantity of our food intake should match the energy we use to maintain weight and overall health. “Excess weight, especially obesity, diminishes almost every aspect of health, from reproductive and respiratory function to memory and mood. Obesity increases the risk of several debilitating, and deadly diseases, including diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers,” according to a Harvard Medical School article. “Obesity decreases the quality and length of life, and increases individual, national, and global healthcare costs.”

Many other biblical principles on how to stay healthy are also supported by medical experts of today.

True Reform

We have seen that the Bible contains hidden knowledge that, when applied,

has been proven to work in our modern world. But that alone has not solved any of the issues societies face in regards to healthcare. They are still growing worse.

For the U.S., the solutions for healthcare all circle back to government. Should there be more involvement or less? How much should Washington intervene? While all these solutions have fallen flat, the truth is this: Government is central to solving a nation’s healthcare system.

In fact, it is all about GOVERNMENT!

Think back to the health principles in the Bible. These come from the first five books of the Bible—which are often called the Law. Laws are put in place and enforced by a government.

These books were a *constitution* for the newly formed nation of Israel. Moses, who wrote the Law on God’s behalf, explained: “I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do so in the land where you go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people” (Deut. 4:5-6).

The Law applied to all of its subjects. It contained sweeping regulation that was to be enforced for the benefit of the citizens living under it.

If all these rules were applied under a government on Earth today, it would certainly bring many benefits, but it would not succeed overall. As the Bible states: “The way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23).

Only a PERFECT GOVERNMENT—one that will *never* corrupt, *never* render poor decisions, *never* put self-gain above the needs of the people and

the land on which they live—will solve humanity’s problems as well as guarantee health for generations to come.

That government would have to be ruled by the same Being who created the perfect laws that govern the human body. An institution headed by God Himself.

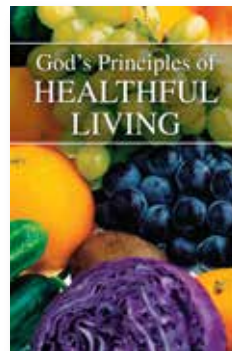
God plans to soon become actively involved in human affairs again. Isaiah 2:2-3 states: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”

Notice: God will set up a government, and from that government will “go forth the LAW.” All nations will heed.

At that point God will do what mankind cannot—enforce that all people follow the rules that keep them healthy. As they do, He will heal those with irreversible conditions: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing” (35:5-6).

This is a picture of true and *permanent* healthcare reform. For a sick world, this should come as INCREDIBLE, wonderful news!

For those eagerly anticipating such a world, there are steps you can take to prepare for it. In doing so, you will learn to better your health. To learn more about how it is possible to achieve a healthy body, brimming with life and energy, read the free booklet *God’s Principles of Healthful Living*. □



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JAILS EMPTIED IN THE PANDEMIC.

Should They Stay That Way?

IT WAS NOT long after Matthew Reed shoplifted a \$63 set of sheets from a Target in upstate New York that the coronavirus pandemic brought the world to a standstill.

Instead of serving a jail sentence, he stayed at home, his case deferred more than a year, as courts closed and jails nationwide dra-

matically reduced their populations to stop the spread of COVID-19.

But the numbers have begun creeping up again as courts are back in session and the world begins returning to a modified version of normal. It is worrying criminal justice reformers who argue that the past year proved there is no need to keep so many people locked up in the U.S.

By the middle of last year, the number of people in jails nationwide

was at its lowest point in more than two decades, according to a report published by the Vera Institute of Justice, whose researchers collected population numbers from about half of the nation's 3,300 jails to make national estimates.

According to the report, shared with The Marshall Project and *The Associated Press*, the number of people incarcerated in county jails across the country declined by roughly one-

quarter, or 185,000, as counties aggressively worked to release people held on low-level charges, dramatically reduced arrest rates and suspended court operations.

But in most places, the decrease did not last long: From mid-2020 to March 2021, the number of people in jails awaiting trial or serving short sentences for minor offenses climbed back up again by more than 70,000, reaching nearly 650,000.

“Reducing the incarcerated population across the country is possible,” said Jacob Kang-Brown, a senior research associate at the Vera Institute of Justice and author of the new report. “We saw decreases in big cities, small cities, rural counties and the suburbs, but the increase we see is troubling.”

In the Genesee County Jail in New York, where Mr. Reed recently began a six-month sentence for petit larceny, there were, for a time, only 35 people jailed, down from 90 before the pandemic, according to data compiled by the Vera Institute. Defendants had court dates pushed off, and judges went to extra lengths to allow people to wait at home rather than in jail. (New York’s bail reform law also went into effect in early 2020 and reduced jail populations even further.) By March, there were 54 people jailed in the county lockup.

For Mr. Reed, who said he has struggled with an addiction to crack cocaine, going to jail has meant losing his disability checks, his only source of income. Without income, he has no way to pay rent, and he fears that unless a family member can take him in, he will be homeless when he is released in September.

Another New Normal?

No sooner had social distancing become the new normal than it became clear that such a thing was impossible in jails. Overcrowding, poor sanitation and subpar medical care amplified the threat. And unlike in prison, where people serve sentences of one year or more, the jail population is in constant churn as people are arrested, released on bond or take plea deals and leave.

More than 40 people have died of COVID-19 in jails since the start of the pandemic, according to a Bureau of Justice Statistics survey of nearly 1,000 jails. That is likely an undercount; the virus has killed more than 2,600 prisoners and 207 staff in U.S. prisons, where deaths are easier to track.

Raymonde Haney’s grandson Lee had been jailed on a domestic violence charge in Tarrant County, Texas, when he died of COVID-19 at 34 in December. While others were released as part of safety precautions, he did

“According to the report, the number of people incarcerated in county jails across the country declined by roughly one-quarter, or 185,000, as counties aggressively worked to release people held on low-level charges, dramatically reduced arrest rates and suspended court operations.”

not qualify because of his domestic violence charge.

But many officials across the country, from small towns to suburbs and big cities, worked to get people out of jail. Public defenders and prosecutors—typically on opposing sides—collaborated with judges, sheriffs and local police departments to identify those in jail who could safely be released, and to make plans to send fewer people to jail, according to interviews with officials in more than a dozen counties.

“In the first few months, really almost all we did was releases,” said Florida Circuit Criminal Court Judge Nushin Sayfie in Miami-Dade County.

Bryan County, Georgia, reduced its jail population from 37 to 11, according to the Vera Institute. Sheriff Mark Crowe told police in the surrounding towns that he would only jail people charged with serious crimes like domestic violence. It was a challenge to persuade local law enforcement “to back off on some of the minor offenses you’d normally send to jail,” said jail administrator Larry Jacobs. “With traffic offenses, we told them, ‘Write them a ticket, give them a court date and wave goodbye.’”

In Wilbarger County, Texas, the sheriff made a similar decision. Paired with the local district attorney’s aggressive efforts to free anyone who was not a safety risk, the move cut that jail’s population in half, to fewer than 20. Throughout the early days of the pandemic, the local district attorney’s office reviewed the felony arrests each day and made sure anyone accused of a nonviolent crime—and even some with violent crimes, on a case-by-case basis—was released to await trial at home rather than in the jail, said Staley Heatly, the district attorney there. “I’ve been DA here for almost 15 years. That is about the lowest jail population number we have ever had,” Mr. Heatly said.

Pandemic Prisons

For Patrick Fagan, it seemed at first like getting probation for his marijuana possession charge in Flowood, Mississippi, was a good deal. But as a server in a restaurant with late-night hours, he sometimes missed check-ins with his probation officer, which resulted in his probation getting extended. He landed in jail after being stopped for speeding, when the police looked up his license and discovered unpaid court fees. Finally, after he and his partner weighed the risks of COVID-19 with the toll probation was taking on their lives, they decided he should take a deal that would have him serve a weekend in jail in order to end his probation.

But when he got to the Lowndes County Jail to serve his time last August, he said, they turned him

away. As a precaution against the virus, they were only accepting people charged with violent crimes. “I don’t know how to quantify how good it feels to not have to go to jail,” Mr. Fagan said.

The realities of the pandemic also kept jail populations down. Police officers tried to keep their distance from people on the street. Stores, bars and restaurants were closed, reducing calls for shoplifting, fights and related crimes. Roadways were quiet, which led to fewer traffic stops and the arrests that stem from them, like when police find drugs in a car or discover an outstanding warrant on the driver. Probation and parole departments across the country conducted far fewer check-ins, and most were by phone,

which provided fewer opportunities to discover violations.

As courthouses closed, many defense attorneys, with none of the hearings and motions that usually fill their calendars, focused exclusively on getting clients out of jail. In Palm Beach County, Florida, the public defenders’ office set up a team “to keep reviewing and reviewing people in custody and coming up with creative arguments,” said Dan Eisinger, the county’s chief assistant public defender. If the judge denied bond the first time, the team went out to look for more information—additional evidence of preexisting conditions, new medical records or information from family—and tried again, three and even four times, Mr. Eisinger said.

And it worked. By June of last year, the Palm Beach County Jail had gone from about 1,750 people before the pandemic to 1,500, according to the data compiled by the Vera Institute.

“There was a real fear that people were going to get sick and die. Most judges did really factor that in,” Mr. Eisinger said.

Alternatives to Incarceration

Reform advocates used the pandemic to support their argument: Cramped and filthy jails are the wrong place for most people who have been arrested. The pandemic forced a rapid departure from the status quo and became something of an exercise in an alternative to incarceration. “The pandemic has given prosecutors the chance



■ An elevated walkway leading from the Miami-Dade County Pre-Trial Detention Center to the Richard E. Gerstein Justice Building is shown, in Miami. By the middle of 2020, the number of people in jails nationwide was at its lowest point in more than two decades, according to a new report by the Vera Institute of Justice, whose researchers collected population numbers from about half of the nation’s 3,300 jails to make national estimates. But the numbers have begun creeping back up again as courts are back in session and the world begins returning to a modified version of normal (June 4, 2021).

SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES

to implement practices that have been discussed and floated for years now,” said Alissa Heydari, a former Manhattan prosecutor who is deputy director of the Institute for Innovation in Prosecution at John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

The moment comes as the nation is already reassessing the criminal justice system, decriminalizing some lower-level crimes and reforming bail laws. The killing of George Floyd in

at or near historic lows. Police leaders and union officials in places like New York City and Philadelphia have blamed policies freeing people from jail.

While some violent crimes have been increasing, the number of people accused of shootings and homicides makes up a sliver of the jail population. The most common crimes, such as theft and drug crimes, decreased during the pandemic.

brought on by the pandemic cannot solve the problems of the criminal justice system.

“I don’t think that there’s any way to take a completely anomalous moment—the most anomalous moment in criminal justice of the century—and say that this is the new model,” said Mr. Krasner, a Democrat. “But...if the question is whether the most incarcerated country in the world should be less incarcerated, the answer is...yes.”

The U.S. has about 5 percent of the world’s population yet holds over 20 percent of the world’s prisoners. Reform advocates have for years sought various alternatives to reducing prison populations, including decriminalizing drug offenses and putting emphasis on rehabilitation.

A problem with such efforts, however, is that only 15 percent of prisoners in state jails were charged on drug crimes. “Were we to free every person in prison on a drug charge tomorrow, we’d still have 1.2 million people in prison and something close to, if not actually, the highest incarceration rate in the world,” John Pfaff, a professor at the Fordham University School of Law in New York, said in a Federalist Society interview.

The majority of incarcerations are on charges of violence, including drug-related murder. Underscoring the complications of reducing drug-related crimes to reduce jail populations, Dr. Pfaff said that “some, and perhaps many (though surely not

all), of the homicides that arise from prohibition may occur in a world with legalization too, just for different reasons. Drug-related violence tends to occur in neighborhoods that are already under immense economic, and thus social and emotional, strain, which are all causes of violence; ending criminal prohibition may help, but if the underlying stress remains, so too will much of the violence.” □



■ An inmate cleans a jail cell at Las Colinas Women’s Detention Facility in Santee, California. Inmates and sheriff’s deputies at the prison practiced COVID-19 measures including wearing masks, keeping a safe distance and doing more frequent cleaning (April 22, 2020).

SANDY HUFFAKER/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

May 2020 accelerated the discussion around policing and the need for reform. Reformers are asking: Nothing catastrophic happened while people were not jailed, so why bother now? Why can’t the system work to keep defendants out, instead of in?

However, momentum for long-lasting change is wavering in the face of a rise in crime—including shootings and other violence—after several years

But for some officials, the push to clear the jails was simply a temporary precaution.

“The wrong conclusion to draw is, somehow before the pandemic we were putting people in jail that didn’t need to be there, and we stopped the optional people,” said Jeff Langley, district attorney in Lumpkin County, Georgia.

In Philadelphia, District Attorney Larry Krasner said the precautions



The Science of Hypocrisy

Research seems to show human beings are wired to say one thing yet do another. Here is what you can do about it.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

“WHAT, EXACTLY, is the problem with hypocrisy?” A 2017 *New York Times* article asked this question. It continued: “When someone condemns the behavior of others, why do we find it so objectionable if we learn he engages in the same behavior himself?”

“The answer may seem self-evident. Not practicing what you preach; lacking the willpower to live up to your own ideals; behaving in ways you obviously know are wrong—these are clear moral failings.”

Yet the answer has even more layers. The article cited research that people also dislike hypocrites because of their “outspoken moralizing falsely signals their own virtue.”

The study showed that the “use of moral proclamations falsely implies that [a person] behaves morally.” Conversely, those who are more honest about their flaws are viewed more favorably.

Experiments such as these show the human mind’s tendency toward hypocrisy and what conditions are needed for it to manifest itself. But the *why* behind this trait is difficult to pin down because it includes a tangled knot of cognitive and memory biases.

For example, sometimes we will simply overlook hypocrisy in others. *The Guardian* wrote that “people are far quicker to notice and call out hypocrisy when it goes against their own beliefs. A politician you oppose promotes family values but is caught having an affair? Hypocrite! Drum them out of office! But if it’s a politician you support? Gutter journalism! So he’s not perfect, give him another chance! There are more important issues to worry about etc.”

Hypocrisy has been on the minds of philosophers and thinkers for centuries. The word hypocrite comes from the Greek *hypokrites*, which means

“answerer, actor on a stage, *pretender*.” Research over the last few decades has helped to show the human mind’s astonishing capacity for hypocrisy. Despite this, scientists are missing something else entirely...

Say One Thing, Do Another

An article in *Medium* recounted a 2001 study that “aimed to turn people into hypocrites in the lab.” The results showed how quickly people can abandon their moral ideals.

“Participants were to assign a set of tasks to themselves and an unknown second participant. One type of task was exciting and offered rewards while the other was neutral with no rewards. A coin placed next to the participants had a written instruction explaining that most people believed flipping the coin would be a fair way to distribute the tasks. Indeed, practically all of the participants agreed that flipping the coin to assign tasks would be the most moral thing.

“But when it came down to it, only half of them actually flipped the coin, with practically everybody in the non-coin-flipping half giving themselves the exciting tasks. Among the people who did flip the coin—which was labeled ‘self’ on one side and ‘other’ on the other—85% to 90% still managed to assign the exciting task to themselves.”

This was not some magic coin. The participants *pretended* the coin toss went to them. They lied.

Medium continued: “People wanted to look fair by using a coin to make their decision, but behind the scenes, they were just as selfish as the people who did not use the coin at all (most of whom had agreed using the coin would be the most fair but didn’t do it). It’s all a perfect example of moral hypocrisy at work.”

Here is the conclusion the article drew: “Essentially, we all want to act fairly until we are put on the spot and are facing our own personal consequences.”

Science’s Limit

Research such as this does reveal characteristics of the human mind. Yet

scientists are just nibbling around the edges of what *causes* hypocrisy.

An article published by the American Psychological Association stated this: “People are capable of performing unambiguously immoral acts, but appear equipped with the psychological mechanisms to relieve themselves of responsibility.”

Put simply, people can know they are doing something wrong while their minds are “equipped” to give themselves a pass.

The study continued: “An equally unsettling, and perhaps more socially relevant, type of hypocrisy could be an interpersonal phenomenon whereby individuals’ evaluations of their own moral transgressions differ substantially from their evaluations of the same transgressions enacted by others.”

Again, put simply, people judge the missteps of others much more harshly than their own.

While it is helpful to know the natural proclivities of the human mind, not knowing exactly why makes doing anything about it incredibly difficult. A major reason the answer is blocked stems from institutions often called out for their hypocrisy: Christian churches. The Bible has much to say about human nature and hypocrisy. But insincere actions from religious leaders and adherents often sours onlookers to God’s Word.

This removes the Bible from the discussion, which is *the leading text* on what makes human beings tick.

Proverbs 21:2 confirms some of the studies already covered and is a great place to start: “*Every way of a man is right in his own eyes*: but the LORD ponders the hearts.”

Each individual will naturally make excuses for what he does—to the point that it seems like the right thing to do. This is true even if it hurts others.

Now read Jeremiah 17:9, which states, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; WHO CAN UNDERSTAND IT?” (Revised Standard Version).

Do not overcomplicate this verse. Our hearts are deceitful *above all things*. And we *cannot* understand them on our own. Truly, who can?

This Old Testament scripture reveals the limiting factor of scientific research into hypocrisy and human nature. Without God’s Word as a foundation, there is a ceiling to how much one can discover. Without God’s help, we cannot understand the human mind.

Left to our own devices, our hearts will deceive us. What we do will become “right” in our own eyes.

Power Corrupts

While scientific research cannot explain the why of hypocrisy, put next to the Bible, it can help us better understand human nature.

Have you ever wondered why power corrupts and the most prominent members of society are often found to be the most hypocritical? *National Geographic* reported on five experiments that aimed to do just that. They revealed that “powerful people are more likely to behave immorally but paradoxically less likely to tolerate immorality in other people.”

The researchers told 61 students at Tilburg University to recall a time when they felt powerful or powerless. The ones who thought of power were more prone to frown on cheating. Yet that same group was also more likely to cheat themselves. The “powerless” group was the opposite.

The studies presented a variety of psychological manipulation and moral dilemmas, but the results were always the same, the magazine reported. The ones who felt more powerful were also more hypocritical.

Note that the experiments “involved acts that are technically illegal but that many people take part in, such as speeding or tax-dodging. Their job was to say either whether they would be okay with doing it themselves, or whether they would think it acceptable if someone else did it.”

National Geographic summarized the findings: “It seems that power breeds a sense of entitlement, where people feel that they can take more than other people, but also dictate how others should behave. They can preach without the need to practice. But this hypocrisy hinges on the legitimacy of their power.

Power corrupts, but it seems that only true power truly corrupts.”

The flip side of this was also true. “Powerless” groups had a sort of anti-hypocrisy. They were much harder on their own failings than those of others.

High-up Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy among leaders was rampant in the first century during the life of Jesus Christ. While He preached that all should avoid moral duplicity, His strongest words were directed at the leaders of the day.

In Matthew 15, the scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus why His disciples did not follow the traditions of the Jewish elders. His response was an even more pointed question: “Why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?” (vs. 3, RSV).

“For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die.’ But you say, ‘If any one tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is given to God, he need not honor his father’” (vs. 4-5).

Finally, verse 6: “So, for the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God.”

Jesus then flat-out called the leaders hypocrites and quoted Isaiah—which includes God’s definition of a hypocrite.

Isaiah 29:13: “Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people *draw near Me with their mouth*, and with *their lips do honor Me*, but have *removed their heart far from Me*, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men.”

People can say they obey God and “draw near” to Him with their words—but their hearts are far removed.

In Luke 11:46 Jesus was again talking to the scribes and Pharisees as well as the lawyers. His words support the findings of the Tilburg University studies: “Woe unto you also, you lawyers! For you load men with burdens grievous to be borne, and you yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.”

Powerful people holding those under them to one strict standard while

giving themselves a pass. There is nothing new under the sun!

Over and over, Jesus spoke against hypocrisy, often with the Pharisees being the example to avoid.

Note this from Matthew 23: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses, and for a *pretense* make long prayer: therefore you shall receive the greater damnation” (vs. 14).

Making a show of morality—a *pretense* of righteousness—when forgetting to show care and concern for others was utterly abhorrent to Jesus.

Verse 23 states: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone.”

Now verses 27-28: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like unto whited sepulchers [white-washed tombs], which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so you also *outwardly appear righteous* unto men, but *within you are full of hypocrisy* and iniquity.”

Not only does this aptly define moral hypocrisy—it also shows how much God hates this attitude.

Do not miss the point here. While those in power may exhibit more hypocrisy, it does not give everyone else a pass. Jesus even cautioned His disciples: “Beware you of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1).

Hypocrisy spreads like leaven in bread—it puffs up until it consumes its whole host. Similarly, it affects every person alive today.

While science does not provide concrete ways to battle hypocrisy in your own life, the Bible does! It *clearly* shows how to identify and root it out.

Bible as a Mirror

Given that we naturally give ourselves a pass regarding hypocritical behavior,

we need help to see it in ourselves. Bible accounts bear this out.

Look at the example in the book of John, chapter 8. The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus.

Verses 4-5 say, “Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what say You?”

Christ knew they were laying a trap for Him. His response helps show the power of recognizing your own immoral behavior. He stooped down and began to draw in the sand—likely writing the sins of these corrupt leaders.

Jesus then stood up and said, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her”—before crouching down again to write in the dirt (vs. 7-8).

Notice the response in verse 9: “And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.”

We have already seen these leaders were huge hypocrites. Their consciences being pricked, they left.

Verses 10-11 close out the story: “When Jesus had lifted up Himself, and saw none but the woman, He said unto her, Woman, where are those your accusers? Has no man condemned you? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn you: go, and sin no more.”

Notice the words for the woman caught in adultery. She was not condemned, but Jesus said to “sin no more.” In other words, she was forgiven, but she needed to change her ways.

Another Bible example shows the level of self-deceit of which our minds are capable. We need help to recognize our hypocrisies. King David piled sin on top of sin when he committed adultery with Bathsheba, tried to cover up the resultant pregnancy, and then orchestrated the killing of her husband.

Please see **HYPOCRISY**, page 30

ISRAEL AND G

The Forever War



AZA

Tensions between Israel and Hamas peaked during an 11-day war this spring. Though the outright fighting is on pause, the fundamental issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remain.

WAR NUMBER four. That is how many times Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers have clashed in bloody conflict. In May, the Islamic militant group fired more than 4,000 rockets at Israel, some hitting deeper in Israeli territory and with greater accuracy than ever before. The onslaught was matched with hundreds of airstrikes that Israel said targeted Hamas' infrastructure, including a vast tunnel network.

Then came the cease-fire. After 11 days of fighting, Israel and Hamas agreed to a "mutual and unconditional" truce as brokered by mediator Egypt. If this sounds all-too-familiar, it is because something similar happened in 2014, 2012 and 2008—with clashes between Israel and Hamas going back to the Islamic group's creation in 1987.

The current round of fighting began May 10, when the militant group fired long-range rockets toward Jerusalem after days of clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, a flashpoint site sacred to Jews and Muslims.

To the Jews, Jerusalem was the capital in Old Testament times. And Christians see the city as the birthplace of the New Testament church—with some also viewing it as the prophetic epicenter of events to occur surrounding Jesus Christ's Return.

Ideological and religious views aside, as with any war, the human cost for the Israel-Hamas conflict is tragic. The Gaza Health Ministry reported at

least 250 Palestinians have been killed, including 66 children and 39 women, with 1,948 people wounded. The ministry does not break the numbers down into fighters and civilians. Hamas and militant group Islamic Jihad say at least 80 of their fighters were killed, while Israel says the number is at least 130. Some 58,000 Palestinians have fled their homes.

Yet the cease-fire does not address the fundamental issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Instead, it merely hits pause on what seems a never-ending war.

Jerusalem has been the scene of violent confrontations between Jews and Arabs for 100 years and remains one of the most bitterly contested cities on Earth.

Why does Jerusalem always seem to be on edge? Why can the city not secure true peace?

Capital of Two Peoples

Israel views Jerusalem as its "unified, eternal" capital. It captured east Jerusalem, which includes the Old City, in the 1967 Mideast war, along with the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinians want those territories for a future state, with east Jerusalem serving as their eventual capital. Many in the international community refuse to recognize Israel's annexation of the area.

The fate of east Jerusalem has been one of the thorniest issues in the peace process, which ground to a halt more than a decade ago.

Israelis on May 10 were set to mark Jerusalem Day, a national holiday celebrating the annexation. In past years, thousands of Israelis—mainly religious nationalists—have marched through the Old City, including the

■ Palestinians run from sound bombs thrown by Israeli police in front of the Dome of the Rock at Al-Aqsa Mosque complex in Jerusalem (May 21, 2021).

AP/MAHMOUD ILLEAN



densely populated Muslim Quarter, in a display considered provocative by many Palestinians.

May 10's clashes took place in and around the Al-Aqsa Mosque in the Old City. The mosque is the third-holiest site in Islam and sits on a sprawling plateau that is also home to the iconic golden Dome of the Rock. Muslims refer to the compound as the Noble Sanctuary.

The walled plateau is also the holiest site for Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount, because it was the location of biblical temples. Romans destroyed the Second Temple in AD 70, with only the Western Wall remaining. The mosques were built centuries later and the site has been under Muslim care for 1,300 years.

Neighboring Jordan serves as the custodian of the site, which is operated by an Islamic endowment known as the Waqf. The site is open to tourists during certain times but only Muslims are allowed to pray there. The Western Wall is the holiest site where Jews can pray.

In recent years, groups of religious and nationalist Jews escorted by police have been visiting the compound in greater numbers and holding prayers in defiance of rules established after 1967 by Israel, Jordan and Muslim religious authorities. The Palestinians view the frequent visits and attempted prayers by Jews as a provocation, and it often ignites scuffles or more serious violence.

Some Israelis say the site should be open to all worshippers. The Palestinians refuse, fearing that Israel will eventually take over the site or partition it. Israeli officials say they have no intention of changing the status quo.

Ancient History

Clashes atop the mount are nothing new. It is easily the most coveted archeological, religious, historical and cultural plot of ground in the world. Even more, it is the epicenter of conflict in the Mideast.

Christianity and Judaism claim the site is Mount Moriah, the location of



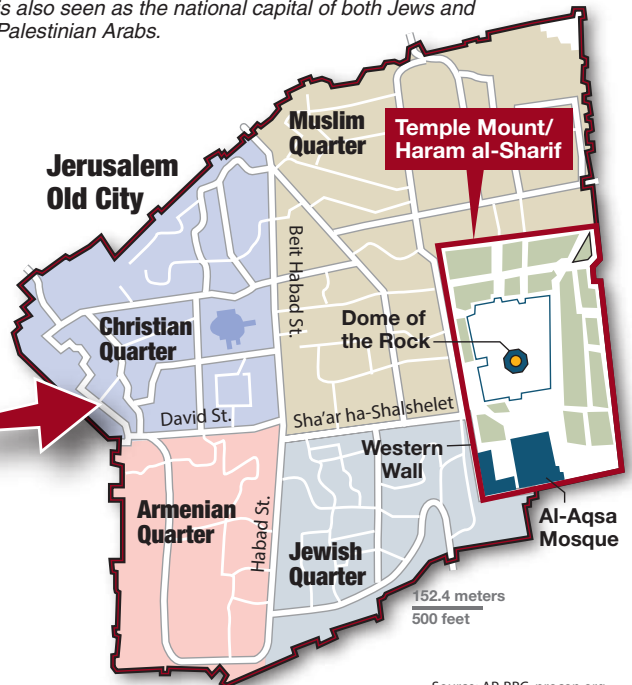
— West Bank Barrier
- - - Jerusalem boundary



Conflict over Jerusalem

The heart of the dispute over Jerusalem is the Old City. Jerusalem is home to the third holiest shrine of Islam, along with the holiest site in Judaism and major Christian holy sites, especially in east Jerusalem.

Beyond the religious significance, the city of Jerusalem is also seen as the national capital of both Jews and Palestinian Arabs.



Source: AP, BBC, procon.org
Graphic: Staff, TN5

Solomon's Temple. Muslims say it is where the prophet Muhammad took his night journey to heaven on his horse to receive the mandate to pray five times per day. Christian heritage also connects to the mount, which carried the footprints of Jesus Christ and the apostles. In addition, it was a site of Catholic cathedrals during the Crusades.

BBC broadcast journalist Tim Franks put it this way: "If Jerusalem is the crucible of the Middle East Conflict, then the Old City is the crucible of the crucible, and the [Temple Mount] is the crucible of the crucible of the crucible."

The Temple Mount turf war reaches even further into the past. The land, which rises 2,428 feet above sea level between the Kidron and Tyropoeon valleys, has passed through the hands of great civilizations and empires.

Yet it all started with the biblical patriarch Abraham. The first recorded mention of Mount Moriah comes from

the book of Genesis. After rescuing his nephew Lot from four Canaanite kings, Abraham met with King Melchizedek at the base of the mount.

Jewish scholar Doctor Benjamin Mazar placed the meeting between Abram and Melchizedek—known as "king of Salem"—in the En-Rogel valley (*The Illustrated History of the Jews*). Note that Salem was later renamed Jerusalem.

In his book *Moriah*, Andrew J. Gregg described the location of the valley: "From En-Rogel, the view of Mt. Moriah is grand, as it towers above the valley."

After a meal, Melchizedek blessed Abraham (Gen. 14:19-20).

That night, the patriarch was blessed further: "The word of the Lord came to Abram...and He brought him forth *abroad*, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if you be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall your seed be" (15:1-5).

The Hebrew word for *abroad* means “brought outside,” likely to the peak of Mount Moriah to look at the stars. Abraham then built an altar there and offered a sacrifice.

Later, the patriarch returned to the same spot after God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son. “And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood” (22:9).

God spared Isaac and blessed Abraham for his faithfulness.

Divided Family

Abraham’s ties to Moriah do not end there. He had two sons: first, Ishmael (by Hagar, a handmaid), then Isaac (by his wife, Sarah).

Though Abraham passed the birthright to Isaac instead of his first-born, Ishmael was also blessed. His offspring became the Arab people. Ishmael’s 12 sons (Gen. 25:16) went on to form major Arab nations, not insignificant nomadic tribes as some believe. These peoples intermarried primarily with the Egyptians and were located southeast of Canaan, in the region of Arabia.

Isaac’s wife, Rebekah, had twins: Esau was the eldest and Jacob the younger. Esau lost the birthright—instead, it went to Jacob.

Esau married Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael (28:9). The house of Esau, also known as the Edomites and Amalekites, gave rise millennia later to the Ottoman Turks, as well as the Seljuk Turks, who conquered and held most of Asia Minor, and the Caucasian Osmanli Turks, who controlled the Holy Land from AD 1070

■ Top, an Israeli airstrike in Gaza City hits Jala Tower (May 15, 2021). Left, a technician removes an unexploded missile fired from the Gaza Strip, in Ashkelon, Israel (May 20, 2021). Right, Palestinian paramedics carry a girl from the rubble of a destroyed building in Gaza City (May 16, 2021). Bottom, the destroyed building housing offices of The Associated Press and other media after it was hit by an Israeli airstrike in Gaza City (May 20, 2021).

MAHMUD HAMS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES (TOP, RIGHT); AP/JOHN MINCHILLO (LEFT); AP/HATEM MOUSSA (BOTTOM)



until they surrendered it to the British in 1917.

Both Ishmael and Esau remained bitter for not getting the birthright blessing. The jilted brothers jealously despised the descendants of Jacob (whom God renamed *Israel*).

How Will It End?

Stop and consider. The world's greatest politicians and thinkers have not found the answer to ending Israel-Palestine violence. And this is not for lack of trying. Why?

Consider this question on a larger scale. Why has mankind *never* been able to bring lasting peace throughout history? A major answer is human nature gets in the way.

Recall that both Muslims and Jews both claim a lineage from the patriarch Abraham. Both claims are correct! But here is what Abraham's God says about mankind in His Word: "... the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23).

Isaiah 59:8 more bluntly states: "The way of peace they know not..."

It is not given to man to figure out peace on his own. Yet this does not mean Israel and Palestine will be at war forever. The Bible also has a lot to say about Jerusalem—including how the tensions there will finally end.

One-third of Scripture is prophecy, which can be likened to history written in advance. God declares He will do something and then brings it to pass.

Peace in Jerusalem is one of the events prophesied to occur—yet it will not come by the hands of men. Notice Isaiah 40: "Comfort you, comfort you My people, says your God. Speak you comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that *her warfare is accomplished...*" (vs. 1-2).

There has never been a time when Jerusalem's warfare has ceased. The city has been in the hands of Jews, Muslims, Christians and others throughout millennia. The Old Testament shows that ancient Israel fared little better than its modern counterparts.

Jerusalem's warfare ending is just one element of what God will soon do on Earth. It is one piece of Him setting up a Kingdom that will never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44)—bringing peace to the Middle East *and* the entire globe.

Read *How God's Kingdom Will Come – The Untold Story!* (rcg.org/hgkwc) for the full picture. □

■ Top, Palestinian demonstrators burn tires during a protest against tension in Jerusalem and Israeli-Gaza fighting (May 17, 2021). Bottom, Palestinians wave national flags in front of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (May 21, 2021).

ABBAS MOMANI/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES (TOP); AP/JOHN MAHMOUD ILLEAN (BOTTOM)



5 BIBLE VERSES THAT EXPLAIN TODAY'S WORLD

Despite mankind's best efforts, world conditions keep deteriorating. God's Word shows why.

BY NESTOR A. TORO

EVERYONE LOVES positive news stories. A recent one involved a man who got caught in a dramatic car wreck over a bridge on Assawoman Bay in Maryland. "The accident sent eight people to the hospital and left a pickup truck dangling precariously over the guardrail," the Good News Network reported.

Leaving his car to check if he could help, the article states that he was "alerted...to a heart-wrenching sight—a toddler, ejected from the passenger side, was floating in the bay, her pink dress billowing in the waves."

Realizing there was zero time to wait, he jumped into the water about 30 feet below and swam to the drowning toddler, saving her life.

Another feel-good story happened at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and was shown in a viral internet video. A young woman at a grocery store noticed an elderly man with only a few items in his shopping cart. She urged him to get more items and said she would pay for it.

The good deed inspired others to give groceries for which they had already paid. By the end, the old man's grin said it all.

We all gravitate to uplifting stories of heroism, videos of kind-hearted gestures, summaries of grand-scale efforts to clean the environment and provide food to the hungry, and statistics of philanthropy. Some websites are totally devoted to data of this nature.

Why do we yearn so much to hear this restore-your-faith-in-humanity kind of news? Why do we need to find reminders that there *is still* good in

this world and people who *do still* care about others?

A look at the world today shows why.

Despite the best efforts by some of the planet's greatest, well-intentioned thinkers, we cannot seem to stop the same, ever-worsening problems. Reports and stories of poverty, severe hunger, disease, illiteracy, injustice, unsanitary conditions, corruption, confusion, war, murder and violent crimes fill our ears and eyes every day.

We all want to hear tales of happiness and assume the best of mankind. Yet situations almost always turn out to be worse than expected. Whatever good we witness, it always comes in between ripples of evil.

For most, this is a confusing picture. Why is the world the way it is—why is so much **WRONG**?

It does not have to remain confusing. The Bible long ago outlined

the way the world would turn out in our modern times. Five plain verses explain the *why* behind the ever-worsening trends that we see. But it is not all bad news—by understanding these passages, you will also be prepared to learn the best good news possible.

GENESIS 2:17

Good and Evil

1

“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die.”

Anyone familiar with the Bible knows that Genesis recorded a monumental choice made by the first couple who walked the Earth. In chapter 2, verse 17, God told them that “of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, *you shall not eat of it...*”

The instruction was plain: Stick to what God says—avoid deciding for yourself how you should live.

Adam and Eve were pioneers for mankind. Their choice would have lasting implications on how societies would function for the millennia to come.

Yet the first humans ultimately did not believe God. They found “knowledge,” even though it would come mixed with good and evil, more alluring than simply obeying their Creator.

In this infamous account, the serpent exploited Adam and Eve’s temptation. But it was them who made the choice to pick from the tree and eat. They chose on all mankind’s behalf to figure out for themselves how to live based on a hybrid system of good and evil.

The underlying outcome is man—not God—is now deciding *for himself* what is good and evil.

This single choice set the world on a faulty foundation for millenia to come. All understanding ever acquired from that point on was doomed to be a fuzzy blur between truth and error.

It is for this reason mankind cannot rid itself of its problems. To this day, though the fruit of knowledge has increased, it has brought an abundance of both good and bad. Yet evil always eventually kills—even if mixed with good.

The trends seen in today’s world stem from the decision

made millennia ago. Current conditions prove the Genesis account, and why you should base your choices on what the Bible—not society—says is right and wrong.

ISAIAH 59:2

Cut-off from Its Creator

2

“But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear.”

Most people would agree that sin is evil. Due to the good-evil mix in the world, however, few agree on what qualifies as sin. What you may consider evil may not seem as bad to another person.

This presents a huge problem. If we cannot agree on the standards for right and wrong, how can we ensure our decisions will not inconvenience, harm or offend anyone else—or even ourselves?

The only way to solve this is to allow the Supreme Being who created

us to precisely define sin. He does in I John 3:4, which says that “sin is the transgression of the law.”

To which law does this refer? God’s Law—all of the instructions contained within His Word. In simple terms, sin is not doing what God says. Adam and Eve sinned. Everyone ever after who has done anything contrary to what the Creator commanded (which is everyone) has “sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

This is what keeps us cut off from Him. Isaiah 59:2 explains sin cuts off mankind from its Maker: “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear.”

With that understanding, it should not be a surprise that Adam and Eve were put out of the Garden of Eden after they sinned. Our Creator, the only one capable of pointing us away from sin, cannot have any part with sin. He is perfect and pure.

Since the world runs on a platform that is not based on what God says, sin abounds.

No wonder the world cannot solve its problems!

Anyone who has ever broken any of man’s laws and gotten caught understands there are consequences. Breaking God’s spiritual Law—which includes the Ten Commandments—works the same way.

Separation from God is one of the consequences of sin. Without access to Him,

one is stuck in a rut of disobedience, which continues to make it impossible to solve one’s problems. Multiply that by the billions of people alive today, and you get why the world is in such a mess.

Repentance from sin is the only way to turn it around. Any approach that does not begin from the premise of a complete change of heart does not work. If the world would stop sinning, as the Bible defines it, human beings would regain access to the only Being who has the real solutions.

Yet the world cannot see that because of another issue.

ity.” The devil holds sway over Earth’s inhabitants!

mixture of good and evil and being cut off from the true God, makes this world’s problems more insoluble.

3

II CORINTHIANS 4:4 Blinded to Truth

“In whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

Back in the Garden of Eden, the serpent deceived Eve by twisting the truth. “You shall not surely die,” the snake told the woman (Gen. 2:17).

This statement was a direct counter to God’s clear instruction, “You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die” (3:3). Yet Adam and Eve preferred to believe the lie.

That same dynamic continues today. Millions who read their Bibles take it with a grain of salt. They pick certain principles that work for them, but do not take everything God says at face value!

The reason this continues is the being who spoke through the serpent—Satan the devil (Rev. 12:9)—is still around continuing to deceive people the same way he did the first humans thousands of years ago. In today’s world, his methods are so effective that the world does not even know it is being deceived. The devil is so powerful that II Corinthians 4:4 states, “The GOD OF THIS WORLD has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

What a shocking statement! Did you ever notice that Satan is called a “god” in the Bible? Not just any god, but “the god of this world.”

This is not a mistranslation. The Greek word for “god” is *theos*, which refers to a “deity” or “supreme divin-

ity.” Countless people believe in “God.” But rarely do any stop to think whether they are worshipping the right one. They rarely ever ask themselves, *Does the being I worship teach a mixture of good and evil?* Neither do they ask themselves, *Does the being I worship teach it is okay to sin (break God’s commandments)?*

Most do not ask these questions because they do not see anything wrong. More accurately, they *cannot* see what is wrong, because “the god of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not.”

Satan the devil blinds people’s minds. That is why they cannot see they serve the wrong god! Many professing Christians, for example, sincerely thinking they are following the true God, go about engaging in activism and try to make this world a better place. Yet—exactly as the god of this world would have it—they do not tell people to repent, which would end the cause to their problems. They may tell people to “accept Jesus,” but not to do everything that He commands.

In Luke 6:46, Jesus Christ said, “Why call you Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” How often have you heard that verse quoted in this world’s religious institutions?

The devil has done an astonishing job of deceiving the masses into many false religions, including a totally counterfeit version of true Christianity.

As the “prince of the power of the air”—another of Satan’s biblical names in Ephesians 2:2—he can broadcast certain attitudes into people’s minds to blind them. That sobering reality, in addition to having a

4

ROMANS 8:7 Not Subject to God’s Law

“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”

Even if mankind was suddenly infused with proper knowledge and reestablished relations with God, it would continue to struggle against evil.

Recall that Adam and Eve had access to the Tree of Life. They were not cut off from the true God—in fact they likely could see Him in person! They had not been blinded to the truth—God told them the truth of what would happen if they made the wrong choice. Yet the devil was still able to trick them.

How?

Human beings have a tendency to make things more complicated than necessary. We *want* to choose for ourselves, even when told what to do. It was no different for the first two human beings. All Satan had to do was offer them a choice.

Romans 8:7 gives the reason: “Because the carnal [natural] mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”

This verse should give you some serious pause.

The God of the Bible created all things, visible and invisible, to be regulated by laws. Everything He made is subject to these “natural” forces. Such a law is gravity. No physical object can defy this force. If a person tries to defy it—he will almost certainly get hurt.

The Bible outlines spiritual laws that regulate spiritual matters. Obedience to those laws bring blessings. Disobedience to any of those

laws brings curses. Breaking God's commandments blocks God's ability to bless us.

Yet Romans 8:7 plainly states that our minds are not subject—unable to submit—to the Law of God. Deep inside, we really do not want God to tell us what to do.

Truly, we are our own worst enemy!

Think of all the people who saw Jesus Christ in person perform miracles throughout His three-and-a-half-year ministry on Earth. Despite these acts being beneficial and a clear sign of the true God, many still disbelieved, hated and killed Him.

Christ's prayer to God the Father before going into His final trial was, "not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). It takes a different mind to want God to rule our minds.

Never underestimate your mind's tendency to convince itself that you do not have to obey God. The world at large is oblivious to this fact, but your Bible plainly shows it is true.

self-driving car without a sensor or a radar. It is a wreck waiting to happen.

So is mankind ruling itself without God's guidance. It is an ongoing wreck!

The record of history shows civilization after civilization of different forms of governments. You would think that at least ONE would have lasted. Yet all fail at some point.

Then there are global problems no one seems able to tame. For example, the United Nations established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a "universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere," the UN's website states.

The first three SDGs are No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well-Being. These are all-encompassing, generally noble objectives!

Yet despite all good intentions, these goals—embraced in 2015—stray further and further from reach.

Unless God is in the picture and in charge, with global obedience to Him, there will always be another

pitfall—another new, unprecedented problem to compound the situation to no avail.

Hope for This World

These five verses summarize why the world is so woeful today.

Yet there is good news! There are many more Bible passages that show the world will *not* stay hopeless. God has crucial reasons why He

"Human beings were created for well doing. That is why stories of caring people warm our hearts. That is why we so desperately yearn to witness and hear about good deeds."

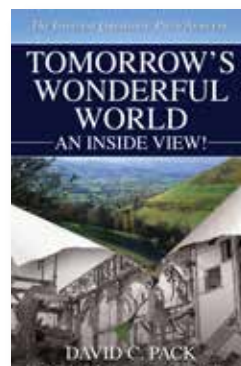
is allowing the world to worsen until mankind will finally be ready for Him to intervene.

Human beings were created for well doing. That is why the kind gesture at the grocery store catches on. That is why stories of caring people warm our hearts. That is why we so desperately yearn to witness and hear about good deeds. They represent attributes that come from God, who is the *author* of good.

But mankind is confused between good and evil, cut off from its Creator, blinded to truth, resistant to God's Law and unable to self-govern. In its current state, mankind is utterly unable to properly frame that innate desire to do well. Its efforts are tainted.

If these scriptures are ignored and misapplied, all the well-intentioned efforts to fix this world will continue to fail in the long run.

But there is real hope for this world to change. One day soon, those little good deeds will become the norm. To better understand the inspiring picture of this awesome new environment, read *Tomorrow's Wonderful World – An Inside View!* □



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JEREMIAH 10:23

Unable to Self-govern

5

"O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps."

All the scriptures mentioned previously prove it is utterly impossible for mankind to solve its own problems. The world is stuck in a self-destructive cycle.

Yet even if it did address all the issues previously described, there is another Bible truth that deals a death-blow to any hope of mankind figuring it out by itself: "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23).

Simply put, God did not design man to exist without His direction. Picture a



The Joy of Reading!

Parents, how can you inspire your children to reap the lifelong benefits of reading?

BY F. JACO VILJOEN

SUNSET DRAWS closer, signaling the end of another day. Eucalyptus and wild olive trees cast long shadows over the golden savannah. The familiar song of a diederik cuckoo rings

through the air as it basks its feathers in the late afternoon sun. Eland, zebra and giraffe tread over the slopes of a well-known trail. Their day will end by quenching their thirst at a drinking hole a few yards

away. From my family's favorite spot on a rocky edge of a *koppie* or small hill where we used to live, the vista seems endless...

While reading this description of my former home of South Africa,

your brain did an incredible amount of work—translating symbols on a page into detailed visual images. Through mere words on paper, you can be transported to majestic landscapes, exotic countries or even different time periods. Truly, reading can be “one of the most marvelous adventures that anyone can have,” as the two-time National Book Award-winning author Lloyd Alexander once stated.

Books connect us with others, allowing us to share ideas, understanding and experiences in a profound way. But the ability to read is a skill built with time and practice. Recently, educators and parents have been putting extra focus on reading development for children because the pandemic caused many young students’ skills to stall.

A recent study by researchers at Stanford Graduate School of Education found that “reading fluency among second- and third-graders in the U.S. is roughly 30 percent behind what would be expected in a typical year.”

Approximately 65 percent of U.S. children are still *not* proficient readers. According to the literacy network Reading Is Fundamental, assessments of those in the fourth and eighth grades showed two-thirds of students read below their grade level, and only 37 percent of high schoolers graduate at or above their required reading proficiency.

This alarming figure exposes a need to develop children’s reading abilities. Reading is learning. Nonproficient reading hampers skill and personal development in other areas of life. Not mastering the skill of reading stops children from enjoying its many benefits!

Parents, we must do all we can to foster a love of reading in young minds.

Reading Education Today

In an article to educators, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, Randi Weingarten, insists that “ultimately, the science of reading is inextricably linked to the love of reading. To teach and inspire the next

generation, we simply can’t have one without the other.”

Said another way, before building a love of reading in our children, we must first develop their ability to comprehend the written word. This is where educators come in, but parents must work to understand and support what their child is learning in the classroom.

Since the 1980s, there have been a few different methods used to teach reading education: “whole language” or “phonics.” While you may not recall all the intricacies of how you were taught to read, you probably remember the classic advertisements for Hooked on Phonics. Each method has its pros and cons. If your child is struggling with reading proficiency, talk to their teachers to find out which approach is being implemented.

The “whole language” method centers around a child recognizing and memorizing whole words, and was the traditional instruction when many of us were in school.

“Whole language teachers emphasize the meaning of texts over the sounds of letters,” Dr. Jon Reyhner, a Professor of Education at Northern Arizona University, wrote in his report “Reading Wars – Phonics versus Whole Language.”

Whole language instruction includes the idea that the more children read and write, the more they will develop their reading skills naturally as they go. However, this method relies heavily on students’ existing knowledge and teachers’ efforts to provide their own structure and curriculum in instruction.

The phonics reading method centers on the belief that a child must learn by breaking down or decoding words by their spelling and sound. This is especially helpful if a child struggles with reading aloud and the pronunciation of new words.

This too has its limitations. The English language has 44 speech sounds or phonemes, which is “defined as the smallest part of spoken language that makes a difference in meaning” (Reading Rockets). Some examples

are “z” as in zebra, “i” as in pie, or “er” as in bird. The word cook, for example, has four letters, but only three speech sounds, c-oo-k. And this is where the phonics method runs into problems: *Around half* of the English language cannot be broken down into phonemes.

A New Approach

There is a growing approach to reading instruction called the “science of reading” method that incorporates both whole language and phonics. According to The Philadelphia Citizen, one school in Pennsylvania saw statistical improvements in proficiency after incorporating this method into its reading program.

In the fall of 2016, “the district implemented the Science of Reading, known as Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS), a comprehensive program developed by two veteran literacy experts, Louisa Moats and Carol Tolman, both PhDs. And the change was dramatic. By the following June, 88 percent of the district’s kindergarteners were reading at grade level, up from 46 percent when school started in September, and up from 71 percent the prior year. That progress continued over the next several years,” the news organization reported.

The article explained: “Science of Reading posits that learning to read is as much an auditory process as a visual one. Just as we learn to speak by hearing those around us, we also learn to read by listening. The key is to connect the sounds we hear with those squiggles on paper known as letters, what academics refer to as phonemic awareness. From there, it’s a matter of decoding words and linking what we hear and see with our knowledge of the world.”

With the understanding of new approaches to reading instruction in schools, we can create enjoyable reading experiences for our children outside the classroom as well. The science of reading method demonstrates that certain auditory and visual activities associated with learning *increases* comprehension.

8 Ways Reading Enriches Your Life

Children learn by example. To better inspire them, you must be a lover of reading yourself. Here are some major aspects of reading that can enrich you and your family's lives.

Increases Knowledge and Understanding

The brainpower used to translate writing to mental imagery increases your overall focus and boosts your knowledge base.

Sends You on Adventures

Using the power of your imagination, books take you on journeys to places you have never seen before.

Relaxes Your Mind

Reading takes your mind off concerns of the day and helps you reset your thinking as you relax into a good story.

Inspires Your Creativity

Whether it be fictional worlds or accounts of invention, books can inspire ideas you have never considered before.

Grows Your Perspective

Books from around the world help you see life through the lens of varying cultures, mindsets and backgrounds.

Transports You Through Time

Authors do extensive research on time periods to help you experience eras of the past, or even consider possibilities of the future.

Shows You How Others Think

Different from movies, books show you what the character is thinking and the reasoning behind their decisions.

Boosts Self-awareness

As you read, you can reflect on your attitude and reactions to the scenarios in a book and better understand yourself.



While you do not necessarily need to create structured instruction on phonics, parents can support the technical instruction from teachers by helping them develop a love of the written word. If you show your children all the fun adventures possible through books, they will better push through the grind of learning language.

What are some simple ways to foster that joy of reading?

Help Them Connect

The Atlantic summarized the philosophy of Michelle Martin, a professor at the University of Washington who specializes in children's library services: "all children can become lovers of books, but that it's an educator's job to help them find the stories in which they can see or imagine themselves."

One way you can help them develop this ability is by making a book into an activity. "You read about the wet dog, and then you're acting it out on the stage, or you're outside splashing around just like the wet dog did, for example. Martin refers to this

approach as 'reducing the distance between books and life'" (ibid.).

As children learn to relate to what they are reading, they will become more invested in a book. Often, reading is work for young minds, and they can miss the connection between what they see on a page and the real world. If we as parents help them associate experiences with what they are reading, they can better place themselves in the character of their book.

Deloris Fowler, an elementary school teacher with nearly three decades of experience, believes a child's mind should stay actively involved while reading. She came up with a similar strategy to make reading comprehension enjoyable for kids.

"The best parts of teaching," according to her, "were the two- or three-week units she and her colleagues created around science and social-studies topics. When the class studied Italy, for example, they read books by the Italian American author Tomie dePaola and went to a local Italian restaurant to eat spaghetti. A unit on Japan included reading books by Japanese-American

authors and making kimonos. When kids studied Antarctica, they did projects on penguins" (*The Atlantic*).

You can employ these same tactics in your home. Discover subjects that your children are fascinated with and make activities around them. Go to the library as a family and allow them to select books of interest. Then read together and create experiences that bring the text to life. Think of all the fun memories you will build together in the process!

Read with Your Child

Another way to build a love of reading is to read aloud from an early age. Cuddle up on a couch with your little one with a favorite book. They will connect reading with a feeling of closeness and affection.

Make reading part of your daily routine and set up specific times for the activity, for instance always sharing a bedtime story. Also incorporate themed reading. You could, for example, focus on the universe. Seek out books about space—maybe have your little ones dress up as astronauts before

going to bed. Turn off the lights and use a flashlight to read a book about the stars.

When young children start to read, allow them to read a sentence or two without seeing pictures. To test their comprehension, ask them to describe what they think the picture would look like. And see the excitement on their faces when you reveal the picture and show they were right!

You can help them build a reading habit by reading to them as often as possible. For example, pull out a book during a lunch or snack. Or keep reading material available throughout the house for free time when you can sit down with your child and make a story live.

Continue reading to your children even after they have learned to read on their own, no matter their age. This can help keep them interested in books as they grow older, as well as create great opportunities for conversation. This will help children better understand what they are reading but also will help them to apply what they learn to real life situations.

Before ending a book, talk about how each person thinks the book might end. Or you can discuss lessons you learned from a novel or what they think of a particular character and their decisions in the story. These conversations encourage your children to think deeper about what they read, bettering their ability to gain understanding from written materials as they continue through life.

Make Reading a Family Activity

Some families like to have book clubs where they all take turns reading the same book (or buy it in an e-book format and all read at the same time). Have all family members give a review and discuss the book afterward. You may want to use questions such as “What was surprising to you in the story/book?” or “Which character could you identify with most?”

Try “popcorn” reading. Take turns reading aloud a subtitle of an article or each person reading a chapter of a book for instance. Involve the whole

family while enjoying hot drinks on a cold winter night.

Use fun games to activate your child’s imagination. For example, start a verbal story by giving one sentence, and having the next participant come up with the next sentence, and so on. You will never know where the story goes!

Other Ideas

There are so many opportunities to instill a desire to read in children. Go online and learn about other strategies parents employ. Look for specific tactics if your child is struggling in a certain area.

For instance, creating a fun reading environment in the home can help boys and girls get in the mindset to sit down with a book. Have cozy nooks around the house with small bookcases or bookstands that make you want to sit there and read. Do this throughout all seasons. Read underneath the shade of a tree in summer or cozy up next to a fireplace in winter.

Do not neglect *fun* even when children grow older. Discover your children’s interests by exposing them to a wide variety of subjects and genres—no matter their age.

You might be working and have less time to spend with your child. You can still ensure that they develop a love of the written word. Some libraries offer morning activities for young children. Sign up your child for your local library’s summer reading program.

Use books as a reward or a gift for a job well done. Some thrift websites sell books at very low prices that are still in good condition. Or use reading a book as an incentive.

During summer break, write fun activities on colorful popsicle sticks that your child will receive each time a book is completed. These rewards can be inexpensive or free. For example: “Stay up late and catch lightning bugs,” “Go for an ice cream,” or “Go on a hike with the family.” This makes a child associate rewards for finishing a book.

Story of the Bible

As the highest-selling book of all time, the Bible draws the reader into

its pages. It is filled with stories of historical figures and events, lessons and wisdom for all ages. The first verse of the Bible captivates the imagination of young and old alike. Notice, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1).

These 10 words say God created “the heaven,” the known universe, every star and orbiting planet, including Earth. On a clear night, the naked eye can observe up to 5,000 stars. The Milky Way contains as many as 400 billion stars, but we do not know the exact amount. Beyond what our eyes can observe, there are hundreds of billions of galaxies in the known universe.

Just reading this verse and taking the time to look at photos from NASA’s Hubble Space Telescope can help children associate what they read to what they see in the night sky. This one verse is rife with opportunity for discussion and exploration—but only if you make the time to dig into it!

The Bible covers many more intriguing subjects, such as Noah’s Flood, David defeating the giant Goliath, and the origin of different languages. Many of the Psalms were set to music, and the book of Proverbs is filled with wise sayings that apply to children. Proverbs 22 teaches parents to be diligently involved in teaching children the joy of reading: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (vs. 6).

Every aspect of God’s plan for mankind sparked the imagination of many young children who read about it. Cover-to-cover, your Bible contains many lessons for children. Kids can learn the reason why they were born and the purpose for their lives.

The seven-volume series *The Story of The Bible*, available on our website rcg.org, will prove an effective tool to read aloud with your children. These volumes were written to bring the Bible to life for anyone—not just for young minds.

Inspire a love of reading, and your child will enjoy learning for life! □

PERSONAL

Continued from page 2

continual actions of His people—His “nation”: “Has a nation *changed their gods*, which are yet no gods? But My people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. Be astonished, O you heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be you very desolate, says the LORD. For My people have committed two evils; *they have forsaken Me* the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (2:11-13).

The latter phrase in this passage accurately describes *all* the false gods devised by men and nations over the last 6,000 years. These man-made “gods”—made of wood, stone, metal and *false thinking*—are truly “broken cisterns, that can hold no water.” Yet those nations (and religions) cleave to these fictional gods with a faithfulness Israel never showed to the true God. In fact, it has become both politically and culturally correct today to acknowledge and “respect” the myriad of different “gods” that are nothing more than inventions of men.

Jeremiah continues, describing Israel’s approach to gods she had copied and created: “Saying to a stock [of wood—a mere carved idol], You are my father; and to a stone, You have brought me forth: for they have turned their back unto Me, and not their face.” Speaking for God, Jeremiah then says of these gods, “but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us. But where are your gods that you have made you? Let them arise, if they can save you in the time of your trouble: for according to the number of your *cities* are your gods, O Judah” (Jer. 2:27-28).

This is a classic description of what is seen throughout the world in all the modern nations that consider themselves to be based upon Judeo-Christian roots. Idols, carvings, religious statues and stained-glass windows abound on and in every church in every city, with no one thinking anything of it.

Worldwide Confusion—Gods and More Gods

The world is filled with gods of every sort. It is as though mankind has reserved the very best of its creative powers for the invention of every conceivable type of god and goddess—whether composed of physical matter or defined by ethereal concepts in the mind. The world’s billions worship literally millions of gods.

The apostle Paul expresses it best as he introduces the true God of the Bible: “For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth (as there be gods many, and lords many), but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him. Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge...” (I Cor. 8:5-7).

The Romans worshipped and built temples to an almost endless array of gods and goddesses. But it is said that the ancient Greeks worshipped as many as 30,000 gods. Not to be outdone, the Hindus of today reportedly have 5 million, including their own trinity consisting of Sheva, Brahma and Vishnu! Of course, the Egyptians, as did other civilizations, also had their own brand of a trinity—Osiris, Horus and Isis. Then there is Tao, Confucius, Buddha, Allah and a host of other gods, goddesses and idols, worshipped today, including totem poles, nature, snakes, animals and fish in the sea, volcanoes and mountains, fire, wind, rocks, sun, moon, planets, stars and even certain human beings who are considered to be divine. Again, then, there are all the different kinds of metaphysical concepts of gods adored and worshipped in the mind—some of which have been depicted by physical symbols and representations rendered by artists. This describes the trinity.

Yet, and most are probably not aware of this, vastly more people believe in the three-in-one god of modern Christianity than any other form of god.

The Unknown God

A longer and fascinating passage illustrates how superstitious mankind will worship almost anything, including worship of many gods at the same time to avoid possible offense to whatever god they may have overlooked. This account paints an astounding picture. Take careful note of the last sentence. The story from Acts involves Paul in Athens:

“Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, You men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore you ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing He gives to all life, and breath, and all things; and has made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should *seek* the Lord, if haply they might *feel after* Him, and *find Him*, though He be not far from every one of us: for in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; *but now commands all men every where to repent*” (17:22-30).

Notice Paul’s reference “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD” (also found in capital letters in the King James Bible). God had to reveal the identity of this God to the superstitious Greeks through Paul. They had devised a catch-all inscription designed to include any other god missed in their devotions. Paul took note of how they had “covered themselves” in their determination to leave no stone unturned in the worship of

every possible deity. But they had not tried to “seek,” “feel after” and “find Him”—the true God.

King Solomon recorded that there is “nothing new under the sun” (Ecc. 1:9). Truly, the God of the Bible *has been unknown* to countless millions who have been content to worship a god *selected for them* by men. Theologians and religionists have sought the opinions of philosophers, scholars and supposed experts, instead of the only important opinion—that of God, found in His Word. Centuries ago, these religious leaders reported their findings to the masses, who were only too willing to swallow what was presented to them without proof.

The God Who Is Alive

Ultimately, we ask, what is the difference between the God of the Bible and all other gods? How does God Himself differentiate who and what He is from all others?

Throughout Scripture, God describes Himself over and over again as “the living God”—the “Eternal”—“I AM THAT

I AM” (the name in Exodus 3:14 that Moses was instructed by God to use when representing Him to Pharaoh). In other words, the God of the Bible establishes who He is and separates Himself from all other gods by declaring Himself to be alive!—LIVING!—meaning all other gods are nonexistent or, in a sense, “dead.” In effect, put another way, the true God states, “I AM,” meaning other gods “are not”—period.

The reader must ask whether he or she is worshipping the one true God—the God who is alive—or something nonexistent, inert and “dead,” a god who *is not!* This question towers over everything else regarding the subject of the true God.

Some who have accepted evolution have not been willing to turn to outright atheism. But, *influenced* by evolutionary thinking, modern theologians and religionists have not honestly explored their god in light of the plain facts of history and Scripture. They have *professed* themselves to be Christians, meaning that they have wanted to *appear* to be followers of the God of Creation. Again,

in the end, these have not been willing to face the facts about their “god.” They have not been willing to come to understanding of the true God—the living God!

Then, in succession, millions of professing Christians, unwilling to explore the facts for themselves, follow such men. They remain duped by dishonest, seductive arguments designed by the god of this world to lead them to worship of himself. This is because, in their vanity (Rom. 1:22), they have foolishly rejected vital knowledge. The result has been that so many have unnecessarily become “darkened”—blinded—to the plain understanding of the true God, believing Him to be triune in nature.

For God to require strict obedience to His first four commandments without explaining who and what He is would be tantamount to cruel and inhuman punishment. If God had given this instruction without carefully *equipping* His worshippers to be able to distinguish Him from all other gods, He would have been most unfair.

He has not! □

HYPOCRISY

Continued from page 15

Even then, David did not repent and ask for forgiveness.

At this point, the prophet Nathan came and told the king a story: “There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter” (II Sam. 12:1-3).

“And there came a traveler unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man’s lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him” (vs. 4).

When David heard this story, he was immensely angry with the rich man. He said in verse 5: “The man that has done this thing shall surely die.”

Nathan finally cut to the quick with the king: “You are that man!”

With that, David finally saw his wrongdoing and hypocrisy. He earnestly sought God’s mercy and forgiveness—Psalm 51 reveals his repentant attitude.

Yet anyone can be the same. We can see the flaws in others and miss obvious wrongdoing in our own lives. Because of this, we all need the Bible to help show us what human nature looks like. It can be a mirror to show us our true selves. But that is where action is required to make changes.

James 1 explains this principle: “Be you doers of the word, and *not hearers only*, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a [mirror]: for he beholds himself, and goes his way,

and straightway forgets what manner of man he was” (vs. 22-24).

Sometimes we will see the hypocrisies in our lives. We will notice our failings. This verse shows we must seize those opportunities and change—or else we will slip back into transgressions. But even when we want to change, it can be incredibly difficult. Thankfully, God shows how to live His way.

To learn more, read *Did God Create Human Nature?* The booklet is filled with Bible verses revealing your human nature—it will show you the true you. Yet then you must apply James 1 and jump into action, to be a *doer* of what God’s Word says. Our article “You Can Overcome and Prevent Sin” explains how to overcome areas of weakness, fault and sin. Both are available at rcg.org.

You can move beyond the scientific and hypothetical views of hypocrisy and make real changes in your life! □

MIDDLE EAST

In Numbers: The Cost of 10 Years of Devastating War in Syria

Ammann (Reuters) – What started as peaceful protests against President Bashar Assad’s rule in Syria has spiraled into a decade-old, multi-sided conflict that has sucked in neighbors and world powers and caused the largest displacement crisis since World War II.

As Mr. Assad begins his fourth term in office, here is a summary of the human and financial cost of the conflict according to data from United Nations bodies, international NGOs and Syrian civil society groups.

The Human Toll

■ **Death count and detainee estimates:** The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), which has been documenting the war from outside Syria and briefs UN agencies, has documented 227,749 civilians who were killed from March 2011 until now. This figure includes only documented civilian deaths, while researchers estimate another 250,000 combatants from all sides have also been killed.

The figures are broadly in line with estimates by rights groups and UN-commissioned investigators. They say Syrian and Russian bombing and Iran-backed militias were responsible for the bulk of civilian deaths.

Syria’s prisons hold tens of thousands of detainees. Many have been arbitrarily detained for participating in peaceful protests or for expressing dissenting political opinion, according to Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

SNHR has documented 149,361 political detainees, of whom 101,678 remain missing. Those figures match estimates by groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty.



■ Smoke rises from besieged Eastern Ghouta in Damascus, Syria (Feb. 27, 2018).

KYLE KOSMA/HIGH DESERT MUSEUM VIA AP

■ **Refugees and displacement:** Half the Syrian population, which stood at 23 million at the start of the conflict, have been forced to flee their homes, UN bodies say.

Of those, 5.5 million are living as refugees in the region, mostly in Turkey, the UN’s refugee body UNHCR says. Hundreds of thousands more are scattered across 130 countries, while 6.7 million have been displaced inside the country, including an estimated 2.5 million children.

Damage Assessment and Hardship

■ **Losses:** The UN’s ESCWA agency estimated physical capital destruction at \$117.7 billion and the economic damage in terms of lost GDP (Gross Domestic Product) at \$324.5 billion—putting the cost of the conflict at about \$442.5 billion.

The report also cites official data which showed by the end of 2018 real GDP had lost 54 percent of its pre-conflict level.

The World Bank has estimated cumulative GDP losses from 2011 to 2016 at \$226 billion and warned that the longer the conflict lasts, the more

difficult recovery will be as losses become more persistent over time.

■ **Battered economy:** Syria’s economy is in its worst state since the start of the conflict and economists say the challenge is to stop it deteriorating further. Many industrialists have fled to Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

In the past year alone, the Syrian pound has lost three quarters of its value while the cost of food and essential items has rocketed by more than 200 percent, according to the World Bank.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made an already dire situation worse, analysts say.

Syrians have suffered a dramatic reduction in purchasing power and rising levels of debt, leaving millions incapable of putting food on the table and meeting their basic needs.

■ **Poverty and worsening conditions:** Today, over 13 million Syrians require humanitarian and protection assistance and almost 90 percent of the population lives in poverty, according to UN and Western relief agencies.

UK based aid group World Vision International said this year a child’s life expectancy in Syria has been reduced by 13 years. □

INTERNATIONAL

Battleship Diplomacy: Britain's New Aircraft Carrier Joins NATO, Has Message for China



■ F-35B Lightning II jets are seen on the deck of the new HMS Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier offshore Portugal (May 27, 2021).

REUTERS/BART BIESEMANS

Cascais, Portugal (Reuters) – The maiden voyage of a new British aircraft carrier will seek to show allies that post-Brexit Britain is ready to defend Western interests and eager to see China respect international rules, the vessel's commander said.

HMS Queen Elizabeth took part in NATO exercises in the Mediterranean in May, ahead of the eight-month voyage that will cross through the South China Sea in a signal to Beijing that sea lanes must remain open.

The carrier is “a hugely powerful statement,” Commodore Steve Moorhouse, the ship's commanding officer and captain told *Reuters* on deck off the Portuguese coast as F-35B fighter jets took off around him.

“It shows that we are a global navy and wanting to be back out there,” he said. “The aim for us is that this deploy-

ment will be part of a more persistent presence for the United Kingdom in that region,” he added, referring to the Indo-Pacific that includes India and Australia.

Britain was the main battlefield ally of the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan and, alongside France, the principal military power in the European Union. But its 2016 vote to leave the EU had raised questions about its global role.

Partly in response to those concerns, London announced its biggest military spending increase since the Cold War late last year and has been touting the clout of the carrier, built at a cost of more than \$4.26 billion.

HMS Queen Elizabeth will exercise with naval vessels from the United States, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea, along the route, Cdre. Moorhouse said.

Threats and Challenges

Britain, like China, now has two aircraft carriers, both countries dwarfed by the United States' 11. The new 71,650-ton vessel carries eight British F-35Bs and 10 U.S. F-35s as well as 250 U.S. marines as part of its 1,700-strong crew.

It will lead two destroyers, two frigates, a submarine and two support ships on its journey of 26,000 nautical miles, joined by a U.S. destroyer and a frigate from the Dutch navy.

Asked about British efforts to step up influence in the Indo-Pacific region to counter China's rising power—a strategy also followed by the European Union and supported by NATO—Cdre. Moorhouse said: “We want to uphold international norms...our presence out there is absolutely key.”

China claims 90 percent of the potentially energy-rich South China Sea, but Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also lay claim to parts of it.

The United States has long opposed China's expansive territorial claims there, sending warships regularly through the waterway to demonstrate freedom of navigation. About \$3 trillion worth of trade passes through it each year.

In the Mediterranean, the British carrier group is part of NATO's biggest drills of the year, Steadfast Defender, that includes a maritime live exercise with around 5,000 forces and 18 ships.

“It sends a message of NATO's resolve,” NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said onboard the aircraft carrier.

“We face global threats and challenges, including the shifting balance of power with the rise of China,” he said, adding that although China had the world's biggest navy, it was not considered an adversary by NATO. □

‘Nothing Looks Good’ Preparing for West Coast Wildfire Season

Salem, Oregon (AP) – Wearing soot-smudged, fire-resistant clothing and helmets, several wildland firefighters armed with hoes moved through a stand of ponderosa pines as flames tore through the underbrush.

The firefighters were not there to extinguish the fire. They had started it.

The prescribed burn, ignited in May near the scenic mountain town of Bend, is part of a massive effort in wildlands across the U.S. West to prepare for a fire season that is expected to be even worse than last year’s record-shattering one.

The U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management have thinned by hand, machines and prescribed burns about 1.8 million acres of forest and brushland since last season, officials from the agencies told *The Associated Press*. They typically treat some 3 million acres every year.

All that activity, though, has barely scratched the surface. The federal government owns roughly 640 million acres in the U.S. All but 4 percent of it lies in the West, including Alaska, with some of it unsuitable for prescribed burning.

“All these steps are in the right direction, but the challenge is big and complex,” said John Bailey, professor of silviculture and fire management at Oregon State University. “And more needs to be done to even turn the corner.”

The efforts face a convergence of bleak forces.

Severe drought has turned forests and grasslands into dry fuels, ready to ignite from a careless camper or a lightning strike. More people are building in areas bordering wildlands, expanding the so-called wildland-urban interface, an area where wildfires impact people the most. Invasive, highly flammable vegeta-

tion is spreading uncontrolled across the West.

“I’m seeing probably the worst combination of conditions in my lifetime,” said Derrick DeGroot, a county commissioner in southern Oregon’s Klamath County. “We have an enormous fuel load in the forests, and we are looking at a drought unlike we’ve seen probably in the last 115 years.”

Asked how worried he is about the 2021 fire season, Mr. DeGroot said: “On a scale of 1 to 10, I’m a 12. Nothing looks good.”

Prescribed burns target vegetation that carries flames into forest canopies, where they can explode into massive wildfires. Planning and preparing for them can take two to five years. And carrying them out is a never-ending task, said Jessica Gardetto, spokeswoman for the National Interagency Fire Center, in Boise, Idaho.

While targeting one forest, other forests continue to grow, creating “this vast buildup across the landscape,” she said.

Besides overgrown forests, the West faces a newer threat: cheatgrass, which grows prolifically after a wildfire and becomes incredibly flammable. After a fire is put out, the first thing to come back is cheatgrass.

“It starts this horrible cycle that is really difficult to combat,” Dr. Gardetto said.

Despite preventative efforts, warnings are going out telling people to be ready for the worst this summer.

“Abnormally dry conditions and pre-season fires on the landscape are causing concern for the 2021 wildfire season,” the Oregon Office of Emergency Management said. “Now is the time for Oregonians to prepare themselves, their families and their homes for wildfire.” □



■ U.S. Forest Service firefighters carry out a prescribed burn on the grounds of the High Desert Museum, near Bend, Oregon (May 14, 2021).

KYLE KOSMA/HIGH DESERT MUSEUM VIA AP

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