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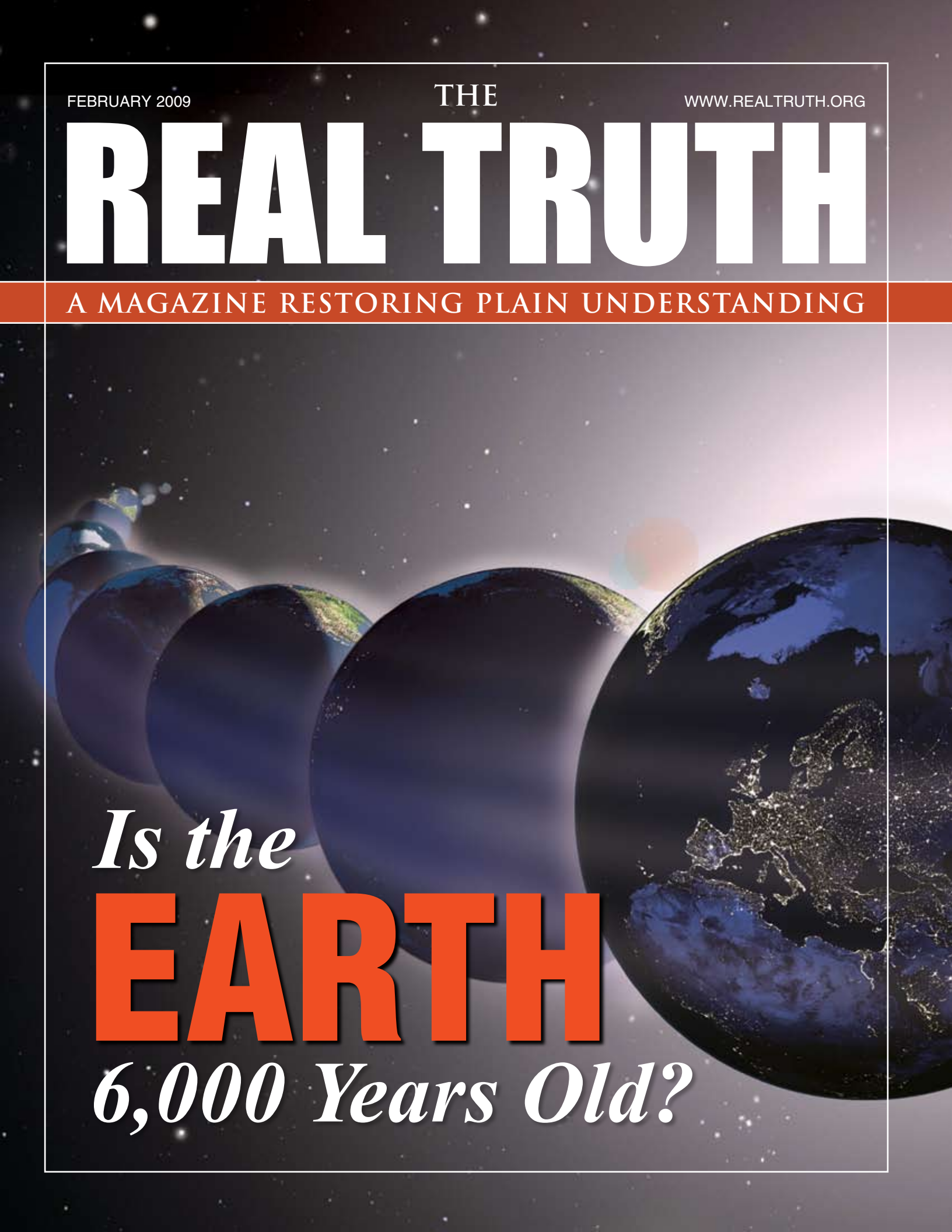
REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

Is the

EARTH

6,000 Years Old?



THE REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

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ARTICLES

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■ **TAKING APPLICATIONS:** A billboard on a street corner in Juarez, Mexico, urges citizens to apply for the police force.

PHOTO: MCT

Mexico's Drug Cartel War *Who is to Blame?*

Over 5,300 Mexicans died in drug-related killings in 2008—gunned down, tortured, beheaded—all to maintain the flow of illegal drugs into the United States. Where does the blame lie?

Page 17

FEATURES

Personal from David C. Pack
World News Desk

1
28

FRONT COVER: PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY
PAULA C. RONDEAU

Published 10 times per year, with online news updates throughout the week.

Corruption at the Top

Corruption is increasingly blatant and growing in both scope and frequency, even among wealthy democracies of the industrialized world. Will this come to an end?

Page 5

America's Healthcare Crisis *Is There a Solution?*

With skyrocketing costs and overburdened providers, America's healthcare system is facing collapse. Can it be fixed?

Page 7

Dating in the 21st Century

Dating has drastically changed over the decades. How can you be sure your dating will lead to true love?

Page 11

Is the Earth 6,000 Years Old?

When was the earth created? When did man appear? Can you trust only science—or is the Bible also a viable source?

Page 14

Why Doesn't God Answer?

In a world laden with war, famine, disease and other escalating problems, people pray to God for intervention, yet their suffering continues. Why?

Page 21

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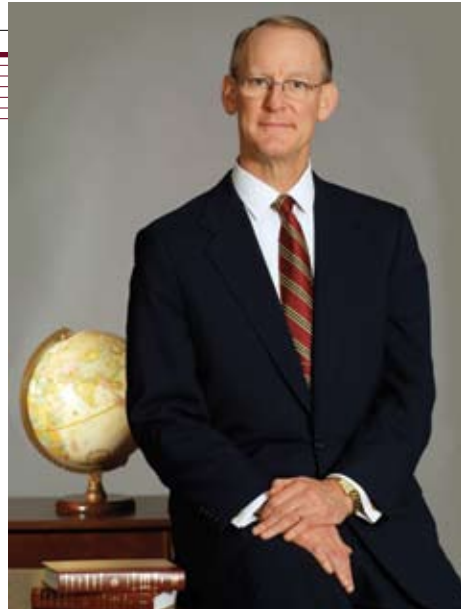
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



Have the Last Days Arrived?

EVERYONE WANTS TO know what the future holds. With world trends and conditions growing more grim by the day, what lies ahead for all nations has become the very greatest concern today. Millions are searching—wondering about the course of events.

Jesus' disciples asked Him about the "END OF THE WORLD (meaning, age)" (Matt. 24:3). The prophet Daniel spoke of "the TIME OF THE END" (Dan. 11:40; 12:9). The apostle Peter foretold: "There shall come in the LAST DAYS *scoffers*" (II Pet. 3:3). And the apostle Paul warned, "In the *last days* PERILOUS TIMES shall come" (II Tim. 3:1). This makes the subject more serious.

Has this final interval in world history arrived? Can you be sure? You can—in fact, God expects you to know!

Many "sense" or even firmly "believe" that we are in the last days. We hear from them daily. But these have rarely sought to prove this. They can—and should—KNOW whether we are. So must you.

Let's pull back and look at the big picture. It has become painfully obvious that this world is in *terrible trouble*. Mankind is *overwhelmed* with every kind of trouble, evil and ill—war, terrorism, violence of every kind, famine, disease, pollution, overpopulation, political upheaval, religious confusion and tremendous economic turmoil and decline, threatening to make the great depression look like child's play. Then there are the hundreds of millions who live in abject poverty, igno-

rance and oppression. Now add rampant and worsening immorality and perversion in every Western nation—and growing hatred, unrest and the never-ending cycle of war in the Middle East—and deteriorating conditions throughout Africa—and frightening weather patterns across many parts of the world—and devastating fires, earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, drought and floods occurring with greater frequency and intensity—and headlines screaming of murder, rape, robbery and crimes of every kind. These mushrooming problems now threaten all nations.

Is all of this really only a little temporary worsening of what is otherwise "business as usual" for Planet Earth? Many—and much louder!—are the voices that say TIME IS RUNNING OUT to solve the really big problems facing the world. More and more world leaders are expressing pessimism about the rise of troubles within and between nations. So are educators, military planners, sociologists and scientists. Yet, because this is also an age of religious sundowners and doomsayers, most will not pay real—SERIOUS!—attention.

Big Questions

How long until Jesus Christ returns? For those who believe He will, no question is bigger. But there are other questions, some big, that must be answered first. This personal will look at perhaps the second biggest question.

The Bible speaks of the period preceding Christ's Return as "the last days"—"the time of the end"—"the end of the age"—"the end of these things"—"the end

of the days”—and of a time when the course of human history as we know it, Daniel wrote, “shall be finished.”

Of course, many professing Christians do not believe in a literal Return to Earth by Christ. Of those who do, most think that it could be decades or even hundreds of years away. Some believe it could be “a thousand years away.” Others feel time may be short but see no way to KNOW.

What do you believe?

The original apostles thought for a time that Jesus would return in their lifetimes. Paul spoke of the resurrection of the dead at Christ’s Second Coming, and twice used the word “WE—which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord” (I Thes. 4:15, 17), because he expected to still be alive when it happened.

Paul later came to realize that he had misunderstood the timing of specific events that must *precede* Christ’s Return. In fact, he had to warn of those who would deceive others about *when* this would occur. He wrote about “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” and that brethren should be careful to “Let no man DECEIVE you by any means...” (II Thes. 2:1, 3).

Could you be deceived?

So then—have we entered the last days? Do you and I live at the time of the end? If so, HOW can you know for *sure*?

Jesus told His disciples, “I will *come again*” (John 14:3). Forty days later, as He was ascending to heaven, two angels added, “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so *come* in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). Matthew records Christ’s words: “For as the lightning comes... so shall also the *coming* of the Son of man be.” Seven times just in this chapter (Matt. 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 42, 44, 46), Jesus spoke of His Coming again, and the need to watch for key events, trends and conditions preceding it.

Is the world nearing Christ’s Return? Again, can we know?

Make no mistake! The Bible is *plain* about the Return of Jesus Christ.

Many verses speak of His Second Coming to Earth. It WILL happen—and it does not hinge on the opinions of men. However, in the period leading to this climactic event, many *other* things are foretold to happen—some, in fact many of them, *catastrophic*! Can you afford to be in the dark?

The idea of the end of the world has been a subject of speculation, ridicule, discussion, fascination and fancy for almost 2,000 years. Of course, most do not realize how much the Bible shows can be known about this time.

In Matthew 24, the disciples asked Christ, “Tell us, WHEN shall these things be? And what shall be the SIGN of Your coming, and of the *end of the age*?” (vs. 3). After a detailed answer, Jesus added, “But of that *day* and *hour* knows no man, no, not the angels of heaven but my Father only” (vs. 36).

Does this mean we cannot know the general time of Christ’s Second Coming?—and then also about the last days before it? Many think so—and therefore shrug off any need to be concerned with either.

Then what do verses 50-51 mean?: “The lord of that servant shall *come* in a day *when he looks not for him*, and in an hour that he is *not aware of*, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites”? Most will simply not be looking for Jesus’ Return at the *right time*. Worse, many will not be looking for Him at all. But Christ’s indictment shows they will have no excuse.

Why will so many be unable to recognize the onset of such an awesome, whole-world-altering event?

In verses 32-33, Jesus gave a parable: “Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and puts forth leaves, *you know* that summer is near: So likewise *you*, when you shall see all these things, *know* that [He] is near, *even at the doors*.” Since this could only apply to those alive at the end, Jesus states WE—“you”—*can know* the “*season*” of His Return, or when He is “at the doors.”

Do not be willing to settle for less than what the Bible reveals!

“Signs of the Times”

Years ago, a catchy tune called “A Sign of the Times” became popular. You may remember it. The title actually came from another verse here in Matthew. Religious leaders had confronted Christ, desiring a “sign.” He also called them hypocrites, adding, “You can discern the face of the sky; but can you not discern the *signs of the times*?” (16:3).

While the intent of their question was to get a sign that Jesus was the MESSIAH (read Matthew 12:38-40), His point was that they were unable to discern events they were witnessing all around them—or the “signs of the times”—and in that case, the “signs of their times” regarding Jesus’ FIRST coming!

Can you discern the signs of OUR times?

Christ told His disciples, “And when THESE THINGS begin to come to pass [He has just listed them], then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draws near” (Luke 21:28). The “these things” He referred to include a whole series of events prophesied to occur for the first time in history! THESE THINGS are happening—and intensifying—NOW!

A closer look helps to see the “signs of the times.”

First know this. The apostle John recorded the words of Christ that open the book of Revelation (remember this book is *Christ’s* revealing of things to come, not John’s), “The Revelation of Jesus Christ...to *show* [get this, “TO SHOW”—reveal—open up] UNTO HIS SERVANTS things which must shortly come to pass...blessed is he that reads [you must pick up your Bible to do this], and they that *hear* the words of this prophecy, and *keep* those things which are written therein: for the *time is at hand*” (1:1-3). At its end, the book states for emphasis, “SEAL NOT the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the *time is at hand*” (22:10).

Two thousand years later, how much more—today!—has the time for understanding colossal prophecies *come*! You CAN comprehend the mes-

sage they bring, IF you are determined to obey God—IF you are determined to become one of His servants—and this begins with IF you are willing to research these prophecies.

But time is short.

God has allotted man 6,000 years to try his own governments, philosophies, religions, values and forms of education. But humanly-devised ideas do not and can *never* solve the world's truly big problems. They always fail in the end. And, in the last 200 years or so, the world has changed dramatically—and rapidly. Events are speeding up in a way that has never been seen before! The 6,000 years are almost up.

The Twenty-First Century World

Everyone is familiar with sign-carrying kooks on street corners saying, “Repent! The end is near!” Hollywood has depicted many. For the most part, such people are not taken seriously. But times have changed, and, I repeat, now many are the voices of reason who report, for those who will listen, that something is *terribly* wrong! This has caused the idea of one world government, designed to save the planet and mankind from itself, to be heard more often. I recently read an article calling for this. However, no one seems to know how to create such a government and then acquire the cooperation of everyone necessary to make it succeed!

Look all around. What do you see?

As a whole, the world was a much more stable place until the early 19th century. At that time, the Industrial Revolution gave birth to the Modern Age. It was not until about a century ago that men began to drive cars and fly, and civilization went from the Modern Age to the “Nuclear Age” on to the “Space Age” and then to the “Information Age” in just a little more than a half century.

The arrival of new inventions, at the fastest rate in history, is changing life daily. Just think of the impact of the printing press and you can appreciate how dramatically a single invention can change the world. Computers

have done the same—and there is no turning back from the huge impact, good and bad, of just this one invention. Remember, jet travel only arrived in the last half century.

Although estimates vary, it is believed that mankind's total fund of knowledge is doubling every few years. Some think this could soon accelerate to every *six months!*

In the early 1970s, a book appeared titled *Future Shock*. It described a certain psychological stunning or shock effect on minds due to the high speed of changes in society. The author demonstrated that these changes began in the 1970s at such a rate that people could no longer properly process them. Society as a whole began to go into what was described as mental overload—or “shock”—explained as the “future” slamming into the “present” so fast that people were “short-circuiting” in a way never seen before. Some time after, a sequel described the worsening of this condition.

The picture described was not good, and has only gotten worse!

Yet, with all man's supposed “advancement,” his problems have never seemed greater or more *insoluble!*

The projections of the HIV/AIDS epidemic are constantly being revised to reflect an outlook far more alarming than previously thought. Entire sections of Africa's population are forecast to be wiped out in a few years by this single, awful disease.

Earth's population of over 6.5 billion people is rising consistently at 1.2% each year. This means it will reach over 11 billion by 2050—if time were to permit, and it will not! This is despite the fact that disease and starvation are worst in the *fastest growing* parts of the world! High fertility rates in the less-developed parts of the world have already brought these increases right on schedule.

End-Time Prophecies

Let's look at some passages that describe crucial, end-time prophecies!

We explained that Paul came to realize he did not live in the age when

Christ would return. However, God did use him to record what conditions would be like when that time finally came. Consider this description of the widespread degeneration of attitudes and character, just before Christ's Return: “This know also, that in the *last days perilous times shall come*. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection [just ponder changing marital laws], trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good [be aware of this], traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God [so true, but strangely at the same time]; having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof: [the instruction to you] from such turn away” (II Tim. 3:1-6).

This is a graphic picture. It describes a complete breakdown of character in “the last days.” This time has come!—and these conditions grow worse daily! Again, look around. People's conduct is rapidly changing—seemingly always for the worse. More authority figures are sounding the alarm that human nature is running wild—and conditions are exploding out of control!

No thinking person could disagree.

The degeneration of people's attitudes and behavior is stark when compared to only a generation ago. There have always been acts of violence but now they occur more often, and are more depraved. There have always been liars but now deceit is more pervasive. There has always been adultery but the percentage of people who commit it is now epidemic. There has always been divorce but today it is much more common. There have always been disrespectful young people, but soon an *entire generation* will have forgotten the Fifth Commandment, “Honor your father and mother.” There have always been thievery and fraud, but statistics show these have never been worse—even in the most affluent countries, where people have a lot, but want more.

Much more could be said of each term used in Paul's prophecy. And we have not discussed pornography, child abuse, crime and trends in perverted sex, drug abuse, hatred, war and others! All these conditions have combined to create an age correctly described as "perilous"—or *dangerous*!

They become one powerful indicator that *these ARE the last days!*

Christ's Great Olivet Prophecy

Matthew 24, Luke 21 and Mark 13 contain Christ's Olivet Prophecy. We saw Matthew's account begins with His disciples asking about the events that would precede the "end of the world"—the end of civilized society as we know it. They had originally believed this would occur in their lifetime because they misunderstood Christ and tied it to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. While the temple was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70, Christ knew that His Second Coming would be almost 20 centuries after.

He prophesied certain *other*, much later events would precede it.

Jesus also described the breakdown of character: He warned that conditions would mirror "the days of Noah," which Genesis 6 describes this way: "The earth also was *corrupt* before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was *corrupt*; for ALL flesh had *corrupted* HIS way upon the earth" (11-12).

Corruption is mentioned *three* times in this one short passage. But, this description is at the same time highly specific and speaks of men as having individually *AND* collectively degenerated into *absolute* corruption—with civilization "filled with violence." God uses both the singular "his" and the collective "all" to drive this point home!

Consider how often acts of *mass* violence now occur in schools, campuses, restaurants, malls and workplaces in ways unheard of until recently! The terms serial snipers and suicide bombers were unknown 15 years ago. And the relatively new phenomenon of terrorism has become global in nature.

Christ also compared conditions before His Return to those in Sodom and Gomorrah. He leads in with Noah again: "...As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage [society looked like it would go on], until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded [society looked like it would continue]; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and *destroyed them all*" (Luke 17:26-29).

Genesis 18 and 19 show that these two cities were so rotten—so evil—that, just before God rained fire and brimstone, only four people were deemed worthy to escape—Lot, his two daughters and wife, who later turned to salt. Only eight people were allowed to enter the Ark before God flooded the world.

Ask: How much longer before conditions cannot grow worse?

An aside at this point that has much to do with whether you will believe Christ: Many have been told that the early chapters of Genesis do not describe real people and real events. This is to accommodate the nonsensical fiction of evolution in place of a literal Adam and Eve. But had you realized JESUS CHRIST said that Noah, the ark and the flood existed?—and that so did Sodom and Gomorrah, including its destruction?

Those who dismiss these and related Genesis accounts seem unaware that Christ validated this first book of the Bible. They also forget—or willingly ignore—Jesus' (and Paul's) references to Adam, and how this validates the Creation account. (Most simply do not know that, while *man* has been here for only 6,000 years, the earth has existed for billions of years—and the key to this is understanding what happened between Genesis 1:1 and the very next verse 2, a subject for another time.)

We are left to ask: How many will believe and ACT ON Christ's warning about oncoming events—when He compared these future events to Bible parallels that most do not accept as true?—as having ever happened?

This personal opened with a reference to "scoffers" in the last days. Let's now read the passage containing it and continue reading through a warning for us today. Notice: "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts" (II Pet. 3:3)—people choosing and following the course of human nature, as in Sodom and Gomorrah, and Noah's time.

Now verse 4, "And saying, Where is the promise of His coming? [thinking either "that's faded knowledge" or "it will never happen"] for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation"—people unwilling to believe that serious times—the last days!—could actually come.

God declares, "For this they *willingly* are ignorant..."—this speaks for itself!

And verse 6: "Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished"—remember, Christ supported the Noachian account and signified its warning for us.

So did Peter.

Now see this in verse 9: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise...but is longsuffering to us-ward [patiently waiting, because He is] not willing that any should perish, but that ALL should come to repentance."

Sadly, of course, most will not do this.

Next comes a stark warning to those who are *not* looking: "But the day of the Lord [the time of His wrath upon a sin-sick world] will come as a thief in the night...", followed by "Seeing then...what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy [conduct] and godliness", and "*Looking for* and hasting unto the coming of the day of God...", and also "...Seeing that you *look for* such things, be diligent that you may

Please see **PERSONAL**, page 23

CORRUPTION at the Top



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Corruption is increasingly blatant and growing in both scope and frequency, even among wealthy democracies of the industrialized world. Will this come to an end?

BY MARK P. DENEÉ

THE GOVERNOR of a Midwestern state was impeached for allegedly soliciting bribes in exchange for a seat in the Senate.

The mayor of a city in the American South was charged with giving away millions of dollars in bond work for \$230,000 as part of his former job as a county commissioner.

And a wide-ranging investigation in a county government resulted in at least two public officials being investigated

for possibly accepting gifts in exchange for county jobs and contracts.

One might think that during such challenging times as the on-going War on Terror and the current financial crisis, society in general, including lawmakers, would be able to exercise integrity in their personal and political responsibilities.

The media focuses on the tantalizing details of each scandal, with little analysis of the social implications. But the public response is borderline non-

existent. It is almost as if society has become jaded, accepting corruption as commonplace. Should it be?

Also telling are the often unapologetic and defiant attitudes of those accused. No doubt, they could be innocent. However, many do not show a willingness to cooperate or even a touch of humility.

Down Through History

The lust for power and money has existed since the beginning of mankind. Not long after the first groups of families formed villages, corruption among leaders, or “politicians,” was evident.

Lust is a basic expression of human nature. Man often slides toward the easy way to accomplish a goal. King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, wrote, “There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end of it are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12; 16:25).

History is rife with examples of corruption. One of the first is found in the Bible. Referring to the time of Noah, just before the flood, Genesis 6:11 states, “The earth also was corrupt [in decay, ruined, destroyed] before God.”

The corruption was so great that in verse 5 it says, “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that *every* imagination of the thoughts of his heart was *only* evil continually.”

Much of history connects corruption with the decline of a civilization. For example, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states that during the 16th century, a split in priority and loyalty among various classes in the Ottoman empire led to “corruption and nepotism...at all levels of administration” and that “accession and appointments to positions came less as the result of ability than as a consequence of the political maneuverings...”

In an effort to maintain their power, politicians of the time relied on acts of convenience as opposed to traditions and principles. The result was “a growing paralysis of administration throughout the empire, increasing anarchy and misrule, and the fracture of society into

discrete and increasingly hostile communities” (ibid.).

Corruption is also associated with alliances and war. One example is the U.S. relationship with Thailand following World War II. During the 1950s, the U.S. poured huge amounts of economic and military aid into Thailand as part of their strategy to contain communism.

Economically, this meant steady growth for Thailand until the 1990s. Socially and politically, however, the control and allocation of the aid led to significant corruption. Monarchs were assassinated, military rulers allied with police to suppress political opposition, and army chiefs sat on boards of numerous corporations—all while being responsible for distributing U.S. aid.

Tensions led to a coup in 1957, and the eventual return of the monarch years later. Increased U.S. aid during the Vietnam War stimulated continued economic development, “contributing substantially to the growth of corruption and a rising gap in the standard of living between rich and poor” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Public disaffection toward the war and the U.S.-influenced monarch grew, eventually resulting in out-

right insurgency and a revolution in 1973.

Political Dishonesty

Collectively, Western fingers often point to various countries in Asia or Africa as models of rampant corruption. But U.S. leaders are also often caught lying, bribing and mishandling public funds.

Following Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich’s arrest, John Caniglia of *The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer* wrote that political dishonesty is part of a national trend, referring also to cases involving the mayor of Birmingham, Ala., a Cleveland, Ohio city councilman and a Massachusetts State Senator.

“‘It has become so pervasive in our society,’ said Catherine Turcer of Ohio Citizen Action, a public watchdog group. ‘It almost begs a question: Is it so much worse or are so many more people getting caught? The more we hear about it, the less we trust government.’”

The article goes on to state that there are dozens of corruption cases sprouting up across the country this year, “damaging public confidence, hindering government and distracting

people from bigger, more pressing issues.”

In *The Wall Street Journal*, L. Brent Bozell III suggested that several of the country’s main media outlets were treating the Illinois governor case with undue obscurity in an attempt to protect the Democratic Party, and the image of the newly elected president.

Also tied to political corruption is the issue of fundraising. In a *townhall.com* piece, Paul Jacob said society overlooks the central issue. “It’s not that Illinois is especially corrupt. It’s that power tends to corrupt and every governor faces temptation. Many succumb.”

Mr. Jacob stated that many, if not most, push the envelope as far as they can in regard to “legal fundraising.”

“Americans outside Illinois have no reason to gloat. The fact that their governors haven’t been arrested does not mean their governors are not also dirty. Just, perhaps, more clever.”

The situation is similar in other Western countries. Canada, for example, currently has a Conservative Prime Minister, in part due to the once-domi-

Please see **CORRUPTION**, page 10

Corruption Index

14 least and 16 most corrupt countries in the world, according to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index 2007:



Source: Transparency International, Graphic: Jutta Scheibe, Majbrit Hoyrup © 2007 MCT



AMERICA'S Healthcare Crisis

Is There a Solution?

With skyrocketing costs and overburdened providers, America's healthcare system is facing collapse. Can it be fixed?

BY ROBERT R. FARRELL

THOUGH THE United States has the most expensive healthcare system in the world, 47 million Americans have no health insurance. Healthcare is the country's largest economic sector, accounting for over \$2 trillion in annual expenditures—four times larger than national defense!

Yet millions cannot afford to take care of their health needs.

And the prospects are getting worse. During the past eight years, insurance premiums have nearly doubled, resulting in health insurance moving farther out of reach for millions. Burgeoning medical bills are increasingly leaving families drowning in debt. Tragically, one-half of all personal bankruptcies are caused by medical bills, according

to the organization Health Care for All—California.

Hospital emergency rooms are stretched beyond capacity, as the number of emergency visits increased to 120 million a year in 2006, up from 90 million ten years earlier. At the same time, the number of hospital emergency departments dropped by 7%, according to the 2009 *National Report Card on the State of Emergency Medicine*. Millions of sick people who cannot afford medical care are desperately pouring into emergency rooms, which by law cannot turn them away.

Adding to the misery, by 2015, the National Coalition on Health Care projected that the government will double healthcare spending to \$4 trillion per year, or 20% of the nation's budget. With millions of uninsured people unable to access proper healthcare, overstretched hospitals and escalating

costs, America's healthcare system is collapsing.

Can anything be done to save it?

How the System is Financed

The U.S. healthcare system is financed by premiums, the collection of monies paid for health insurance. At the same time, healthcare providers must be reimbursed for services dispensed. The responsibilities for these are shared by insurance companies and the government.

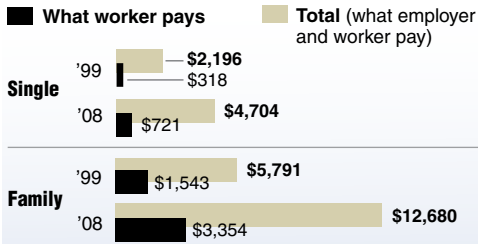
Individuals and businesses pay premiums to insurance companies that pay those insured when claims are made. In many cases, insurers make payments directly to the healthcare providers instead of to the claimants; this depends upon the type of plan chosen. Both individuals and businesses pay income taxes to the government, which fund programs such as Medicare, Medicaid

Workers Pay More for Health Insurance

The average annual premiums for employer-sponsored health insurance for families are up about 5 percent from 2007.

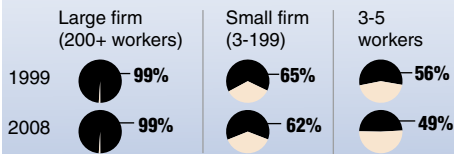
Rising premiums

Average annual



Fewer firms offer benefits

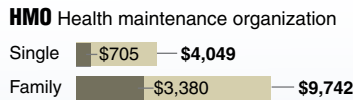
Percentage of firms that offer health benefits



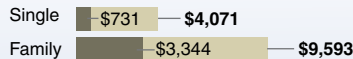
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, Health Research and Educational Trust; MCT

Premiums by type of plan

Worker (black bar), Employer (tan bar)

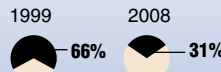


PPO Preferred provider organization



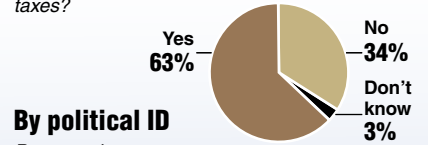
Retiree benefits shrink

Among large firms that offer health benefits to active workers, percentage that offer retiree health benefits



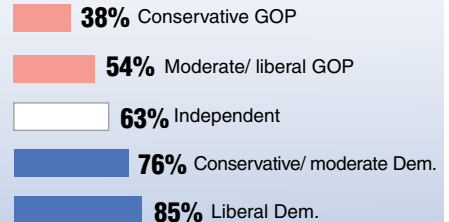
Poll: Universal Health Care?

Do you favor the U.S. government guaranteeing health insurance for all, even if it means raising taxes?



By political ID

Percent who say yes



Source: Pew Research Center for People & the Press poll of 2,905 adults, July 31-Aug. 10, 2008; margin of error: +/-2 percentage points; MCT

and other government-funded health insurance programs. The government also uses money from taxes to reimburse providers for services to members of government programs.

The federal government substantially subsidizes employer-sponsored insurance because employees receive this as a tax-free benefit, and employers are able to deduct health insurance benefits as a cost of doing business. The size of the subsidy is estimated to be approximately \$100 billion annually.

Expensive and Problematic

The U.S. spends a higher percentage of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on healthcare than other industrialized countries; in 2003, it was 15%, versus an average of 8.6% in the OECD nations (the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, a group of major industrialized countries). The United States also spends more per capita than any other industrialized country, spending \$5,635 per capita in 2003, versus the OECD's \$2,307. And coupled with high expenditures is the high cost of care for individuals.

The reasons for the high cost of care in the U.S. include factors such as the rising cost of technology and prescription drugs, and high administra-

tive costs from the country's complex multiple payer system. Approximately one-third (31%) of all healthcare dollars are spent on administrative costs. Further, another 10% of U.S. expenses are spent on "defensive medicine"—the costly tests by doctors, afraid of missing anything, who risk being sued for malpractice.

Another contributing factor is the shift from "non-profit" to "for-profit" healthcare providers, such as the growth of for-profit hospital chains. Also, the large number of uninsured people is significantly contributing to rising costs because conditions that could have been detected, treated and prevented in their early stages go undetected and later develop into full-blown crises. These then require more expensive procedures that may even include intensive care or emergency room treatment.

Due to rising costs, many employers have been forced to cut back or drop their health insurance plans. As the number of uninsured grows, hospitals and other healthcare providers must compensate through "cost shifting" at the expense of taxpayers and higher premiums for those with insurance.

Even public programs have been affected. The country's aging popula-

tion is boosting spending on health-care. It is estimated that one-half of Medicare funds are being used to support sick people in their last stages of life. Experts estimate that Medicare funds will be exhausted by 2018.

A Litany of Problems

The 2009 *National Report Card on the State of Emergency Medicine* gave the nation an overall grade of C-minus, with 90% of the states earning mediocre or near-failing grades. Hospital emergency rooms are stretched to the breaking point. If the economy continues to falter, the already long waits for care are likely to get much longer.

Every year, hospitals turn millions of dollars in unpaid bills over to collection agencies.

Here are a few statistics (from *ABC News*, *Science Daily* and the National Coalition on Health Care) that put the crisis into perspective:

- The U.S. has the world's most expensive healthcare system, yet only one-sixth of Americans are insured. National surveys reveal that the primary reason is the high cost of coverage.

- Approximately one-third (31%) of adults and a little more than one-half (54%) of children do not have a primary care doctor.

■ Federal spending on healthcare in 2005 alone totaled \$600 billion, a massive one-quarter of the federal budget.

■ Someone files for bankruptcy every 30 seconds because of health concerns. And every year, 1.5 million families lose their homes to foreclosure due to unaffordable medical costs.

■ The U.S. spends six times more per capita on the administration of the health insurance system than Western European nations, who insure *all* of their citizens.

■ The total medical expenditures for the uninsured of nearly \$124 billion in 2004 was more than the combined expenditures of the Iraq war and “war on terror” programs.

■ The percentage of adults who receive recommended preventative care and screening tests according to guidelines for their age and sex is only 49%.

■ Each year, the number of Americans who die from medical errors is close to 100,000—more than double the annual number of deaths from car crashes.

The list could go on. The critical problems that need urgent resolution are the lack of access to healthcare, the high cost, a perceived lack of fairness in the system along the lines of race and class, and ineffectiveness in improving the overall health of the populace. Other major contributing issues include declining patient choices; the increased control in healthcare decisions by managed care companies as they seek to further limit access to care; frustrated, overworked medical practitioners; nurses departing from the medical profession in droves; and quality of care issues.

America’s healthcare system is in turmoil.

DEFINING U.S. HEALTHCARE

The U.S. is the only developed country, except for South Korea, that does not provide healthcare for all its citizens. What is unique about the U.S. system is that the private element dominates the public one. For example, the Kaiser Foundation reported that 61% of non-elderly Americans in 2006 received insurance through their employers; 14% were enrolled in public insurance programs like Medicaid; and 18% were uninsured. Those over age 65 were usually enrolled in Medicare.

Here is how the system is organized:

Private Health Insurance

■ **Employer-sponsored Insurance:** The main way Americans receive health insurance coverage is through their employers. Companies provide this as part of their benefits package. These plans are administered by insurance companies both for-profit (Aetna, Cigna, State Farm, for example), and not-for-profit (Blue Cross/Blue Shield).

Some large companies choose to “self-insure,” that is they pay the health costs directly while choosing a third-party (usually an insurer) to administer the plan. Employer-sponsored plans are financed partly by the employers who pay most of the premium, and partly by employees who pay the remainder.

■ **Individual Health Insurance:** This option covers individuals for whom insurance is not provided through their employers, those who are self-employed, and retirees. Plans are provided by private insurance companies. Insured individuals pay the full health insurance premium.

Public Health Insurance

■ **Medicare:** This is a program provided by the federal government which covers individuals aged 65 and older, and disabled individuals as well. It is funded through federal income tax, as well as taxes on employers and employees, and premium payments by those enrolled. Medicare covers hospital services, physician services and prescription drug benefits.

■ **Medicaid:** This program is designed for low-income individuals and those who are disabled. States are required by law to provide coverage for children, the elderly, the disabled, parents and poor pregnant women. Adults without children are not covered, as well as poor individuals who earn too much. A comprehensive set of benefits is offered by the program, including prescription drugs. However, in spite of this, many of those enrolled still have problems finding providers that accept Medicaid, because of its low rate of reimbursement.

■ **Other Public Systems:** These include the Veteran’s Administration (VA), which provides healthcare for military veterans in VA hospitals and clinics, which are government-owned, and the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP), which covers children whose families earn too much to qualify for Medicaid, but too little to purchase private health insurance. □

An Unsolvable Problem?

Experts offer numerous theories as possible solutions. One that appears to be gaining support is a single-payer system, a universal form of government-provided healthcare, similar to Canada and certain Western European nations. Under this system, the federal and state governments play the major role in providing healthcare. Advocates of this approach believe it will resolve the problems of cost, access and fairness.

Other solutions include expanding Medicare to the entire population. Some favor price controls and imposing strict budgets. Others believe that free market competition is the way to go.

A common thread exists among the popular solutions offered: to create a better healthcare system. Yet few ask, “Why are so many Americans sick and out-of-shape?” In other words, why do so many need medical care in the first place?

There is a cause for every effect. Many attempt to solve problems by addressing the *symptoms* rather than the *cause*. The country’s healthcare problems will not be solved by more money, easier access to providers, a more efficient administration, greater government involvement, or any other solution that address the symptoms.

True progress will be achieved only when people take personal responsibility for improving their health. This

involves eating a proper diet, regular exercise, sufficient sleep, living less stressful lives—and, most importantly, obeying the laws and principles of God, which were designed to benefit human beings both physically and spiritually.

These changes demand a level of character and commitment so lacking today. Too many are willing to blame “the system” for their problems rather than take personal responsibility. Until these steps are taken—which will build sound lives, resulting in vibrant health and, subsequently, a lesser need

for healthcare—the crisis will not be solved.

The Ultimate Solution

A time is coming when America’s healthcare crisis will finally be solved.

A new, world-ruling government—the kingdom of God—will be established on earth. This divine SUPERGOVERNMENT will replace the governments of men and establish the Law of God throughout the world. The sick will be restored to

perfect health (Isa. 35:5-6). Humanity will be taught the laws and principles of good health. Consequently, today’s complicated, expensive and burdensome health insurance systems will be a thing of the past.

God’s kingdom will soon come. But you do not have to wait until then to benefit from God’s laws. You can implement them now. Start by reading our booklet *God’s Principles of Healthful Living*. You will be glad you did! □



CORRUPTION

Continued from page 6

nant Liberal Party’s involvement in an elaborate “sponsorship” (i.e., vote-buying) scandal. Auditor General Sheila Fraser’s report in 2004 stated that, “\$100 million was paid to a variety of communications agencies...and said the program was basically designed to generate commissions for these companies rather than to produce any benefit for Canadians” (CBC). In the end, the Prime Minister fired the heads of three Crown corporations (state-controlled companies), several executives were found guilty of fraud, and the ruling Liberals were forced out of government.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was also the subject of several corruption scandals, which forced his resignation. The two major cases involve suspicions that he took bribes from a New York financier and another in which political funds and expenses were mishandled regarding personal travel during his time as Trade Minister and Mayor of Jerusalem.

Why Corruption?

One might think that mankind should have gotten it right by now—so why, then, the continued corruption?

We are nearing the end of 6,000 years of mankind trying to live life its own way, as opposed to God’s way. Educational, judicial and governmental systems are all under the influence of Satan, who bombards mankind with attitudes of vanity, lust and greed.

Notice Isaiah 59, describing the worldwide corruption that exists today: “None calls for justice, nor any pleads for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief [evil], and bring forth iniquity... there is no judgment [justice] in their goings: they have made them crooked paths... Therefore is judgment far from us, neither does justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness... And judgment [justice] is turned away backward, and justice [righteousness] stands afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yes, truth fails; and he that departs from evil makes himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no judgment [justice] (vs. 4, 8-9, 14-15).”

One reason why society “accepts” corrupt politicians is that they are not that much different themselves. They see corruption in their own lives, and as such cannot, like the men who brought an adulteress to Jesus in John 8:1-11, cast any stones.

Forgotten Laws

Many Western nations were founded on principles derived from the Bible. However, their citizens have long forgotten them, and now wallow in the mire as what remains of the blessings that God once promised to Abraham disappear.

As the age grows more bleak, society, including politicians, will become more desperate and degenerate. Corruption

will become increasingly unchecked.

In his booklet *Are These the Last Days?*, David C. Pack wrote, “Consider [Paul’s] prophecy of the widespread degeneration of attitudes and character, just prior to Christ’s Second Coming. He wrote, ‘This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof: from such turn away’ (II Tim. 3:1-6).

“This is a powerful prophecy describing the complete breakdown of character in ‘the last days.’ This time has come!—and these widespread conditions grow worse daily! Look around. People’s conduct is rapidly changing—seemingly always for the worse. More educators and others in authority are sounding the alarm that conditions have exploded out of control!

“Who can doubt this trend?”

No one.

But the good news is that a time is soon coming when a single government will replace all the governments of this world. Ruled by Jesus Christ (Isa. 9:6-7), it will be completely free of corruption. Read our book *Tomorrow’s Wonderful World – An Inside View!* to learn more. □



Dating in the 21ST CENTURY



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Dating has drastically changed over the decades. How can you be sure your dating will lead to true love?

BY JEFFREY R. AMBROSE

IMAGINE A SIMPLER time: A well-dressed single gentleman pulls up to the front of a single lady's home in the early evening, steps out of his car, and approaches her front door. The two of them were introduced to one another by a mutual friend at a social function some weeks prior.

It is their first date.

As she steps outside, he offers an umbrella to shield her from rain showers, walks with her to the passenger side of the car, and opens the door for her. She notices the interior of the car is spotless.

The pair takes a scenic route to a special destination: a reserved table at an elegant restaurant. Conversation flows naturally for a couple hours, with each beginning to learn about the background and interests of the other.

After dessert, the gentleman pays for the meal and then drives the lady home. Accompanying her to her door, he thanks her with a warm smile, and departs.

This may be repeated on a regular basis, and could eventually lead to courtship and marriage, as the two get to know one another through hours of conversation, spread over months.

To older readers, the scenario above may have at least a vague, distant familiarity. But to younger readers, it may be utterly foreign, antiquated, unrealistic—like viewing a scene from an old black-and-white film in a world accustomed to the rapid-fire images of a high-definition action movie.

How much has dating changed in recent years?

Over the decades in the Western world, traditional dating was gradually overtaken by the high school “going

steady/boyfriend-girlfriend” approach. Those who did not find a romantic counterpart in this way would then often be initiated into the bar/nightclub scene, sometimes derisively referred to as a “meat market.”

While all of this was far from ideal, a look at 21st-century dating can be downright grim. Step back for a moment and ask: Is modern dating truly normal? Is it healthy? Is there a better way? Or must all single people settle for this path?

Speed Dating

Numerous companies specialize in hosting “speed dating” events for busy professionals who would rather speed up the process and dispense with small talk. One of the more popular forms uses a system of eight dates in one night, each lasting eight minutes.

A more extreme form of this is called an “Eye-gazing party”: Single men and women sit across from each other, and spend three minutes looking deep into each other's eyes (while somehow refraining from staring, according to the standard rules), before moving on to the next table.

Online Dating Sites

Another way to “find love” is by using the Internet to search for that “special someone.”

A number of popular websites function as a giant, continuously updated archive of personal ads. Users check out one another's profiles, which feature descriptions and photographs, and eventually arrange for in-person dates. There are sites that cater to specific ethnic groups, those in a specific career field, particular kinds of relationships (for example, “sugar daddy” sites—designed to help wealthy men

find younger women, or wealthy women find younger men)—the list is endless.

Such sites were initially viewed with suspicion and disdain. But any stigma has largely evaporated, since “the first generation of kids to come of age on the Internet are now young adults, still mostly single, and for them, using the Web to find what they need is as natural as using a lung to suck in air. They get jobs and apartments and plane tickets online—why not dates?” (*The New York Times*).

(An extension of this, using mobile phones with digital cameras, is the phenomenon called “sexting”—sending nude or semi-nude pictures from phone to phone. Several recent news pieces detailed high school students involved in this.)

Dishonesty, often in the form of misleading self-descriptions, is part and parcel of the online dating experience. “The first thing you can do when touring online dating sites is throw out any precept of honesty; this is hardcore self-aggrandizement at its finest. Take everything you read, see or believe with a grain of salt. Make that a salt mine” (*Associated Content*).

The causes for this include “the anonymity and fantasy that is part of our everyday virtual lives. Both parties in the dating exchange imagine and create alternative realities much more easily than a real-life introduction allows. It may rub avid online daters...the wrong way, but especially in the realm of romantic relationships the artifice of virtual communication probably raises more barriers than it breaks down” (*The New York Times*).

Another undesired side effect of this is grossly unrealistic expectations. One veteran online dater gave up the practice “because he found people started thinking they could place an order for a perfect partner” (*ibid.*).

Virtual Dating

Sites such as OmniDate and Second Life take the intersection of dating and the Internet further. These allow customers to create avatars—user-controlled, glorified video game charac-

ters—through whom they can interact with other users.

The result is an artificial world, but one that has effects that can spill over into reality: “Second Life certainly holds a great allure to a great many people; around 15 million have become ‘residents’ since it was founded in 2003, and more are joining every day. Exponents insist it’s not a game—there are no rules. Rather, it is a ‘synthetic world’...the real people behind the avatars carry their heightened emotions back into their first life—sometimes with devastating consequences for their marriage or relationship.

“Earlier this year...a prescient BBC documentary, *Virtual Adultery and Cyberspace Love*...featured the extraordinary transatlantic tale of Carolyn, a wife and mother of four from the United States, who became so obsessed with her Second Life relationship that she grew increasingly estranged from both her long-suffering husband, and her angry, confused children” (*Telegraph*).

This new technology-aided infidelity, sometimes called “cyber-adultery,” will likely become much more common as a growing number of Internet users establish online identities.

“Hooking Up”

A term used for essentially random, casual physical intimacy, “hooking up” includes anything from kissing to sex, between uncommitted “friends” or even strangers.

The book *Hooking Up*, by Tom Wolfe, provides a shocking account of this practice: “From age thirteen, American girls were under pressure to maintain a façade of sexual experience and sophistication. Among girls, ‘virgin’ was a term of contempt. The old term ‘dating’—referring to a practice in which a boy asked a girl out for the evening and took her to the movies or dinner—was now [dead]...In junior high school, high school, and college, girls headed out in packs in the evening, and boys headed out in packs, hoping to meet each other fortuitously. If they met and some girl liked the looks of some boy, she would give him the nod, or he would give her the nod, and the two of

them would retire to a halfway-private room and ‘hook up.’

“‘Hooking up’ was a term known...to almost every American child over the age of nine, but to only a relatively small percentage of their parents, who, even if they heard it, thought it was being used in the old sense of ‘meeting’ someone. Among the children, hooking up was always a sexual experience, but the nature and extent of what they did could vary widely. Back in the twentieth century, American girls had used baseball terminology. ‘First base’ referred to embracing and kissing; ‘second base’ referred to...‘heavy petting’; ‘third base’ referred to...oral sex; and ‘home plate’ meant...intercourse, known familiarly as ‘going all the way.’ In...the era of hooking up, ‘first base’ meant deep kissing...‘third base’ meant going all the way; and ‘home plate’ meant learning each other’s names.”

“In the year 2000, girls used ‘score’ as an active verb indicating sexual conquest...In the twentieth century, only boys had used ‘score’ in that fashion...women had been persuaded that they should be just as active as men when it came to sexual advances. Men were only too happy to accede to the new order, since it absolved them of all sense of responsibility, let alone chivalry.”

According to some, traditional dating has been overtaken by hooking up: “Under the old model, you dated a few times and, if you really like the person, you might consider having sex. Under the new model, you hook up a few times and, if you really like the person, you might consider going on a date” (*The New York Times*).

The New “Normal”

It has been observed that most people simply continue in the traditions, behaviors and mindsets learned from family, without question. They are content to be a product of their environment, with little desire or motivation to exercise judgment, examining *why* they do what they do.

For many younger people, weak family bonds, absent or otherwise pre-

Please see **DATING**, page 16

Valentine's Day: Its True Origin

As the “holiday for lovers” approaches, many begin to think about what they will purchase for their significant other. Pressured by flashy advertisements, men scurry through malls looking for the perfect diamond bracelet or bottle of perfume, while women peruse designer colognes or articles of clothing. Mothers and fathers even participate, encouraging their young children to buy cards to exchange with those they have a “crush” on. Chocolate, candy and flowers are often also among these popular gifts.

In the search to find the perfect way to show their affection, most never ponder the true origin of this holiday. Valentine's Day traces its roots to the ancient Roman pagan feast day Lupercalia, which was celebrated on February 15 to honor Lupercus, the god of fertility and husbandry. He was believed to be a mighty hunter who protected the Romans and livestock from wolves.

The day before the festival in Lupercus' honor, Feb. 14, teen-aged girls would write their names on small pieces of paper called billets, and drop them into a container. Adolescent boys would then randomly choose from it the name of a young girl, and the two would become a couple for the day, engaging in erotic games at parties celebrated throughout Rome. For the rest of the year, they would remain sexual partners.

Also, the Luperci (male priests) would run about Rome, clothed in loincloths made from sacrificed goats and smeared in their blood, striking women with *februa*, thongs made from skins of the sacrificed goats. The Luperci believed the floggings purified women and guaranteed their fertility and ease of childbirth. February derives from *februa* or “means of purification.” To the Romans, February was also sacred to Juno Februata, the goddess of febris (“fever”) of love, and of women and marriage.

These customs were observed in the Roman Empire for centuries.

In A.D. 494, Pope Gelasius renamed the festival of Juno Februata as the “Feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary.” The date of its observance was later changed from February 14 to February 2, then changed back to the 14. It is also known as Candlemas, the Presentation of the Lord, the Purification of the Blessed Virgin and the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple.

After Emperor Constantine had made the Roman church's brand of Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire (A.D. 325), church leaders wanted to do away with the pagan festivals. Lupercalia was high on their list, but the Roman citizens thought otherwise.

Powerless to get rid of Lupercalia, Pope Gelasius instead changed it from Feb. 15 to the 14th and called it St. Valentine's Day.

According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, “At least three different Saint Valentines, all of them martyrs, are mentioned in early martyrologies under the date of 14 February. One is described as a priest at Rome, another as bishop of Interamna (modern Terni), and these two seem both to have suffered in the second half of the third century and to have been buried on the Flaminian Way, but at different distances from the city...Of the third Saint Valentine, who suffered in Africa with a number of companions, nothing is further known.”

Several biographies of different men named Valentine were merged into one official “St. Valentine.” The name

comes from the Latin *Valentinus*, which derives from *valens*—“to be strong, powerful, mighty.”

The Bible describes a man with a similar title: “And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord” (Gen. 10:8-9). Nimrod hunted with a bow and arrow.

To the Greeks, from whom the Romans had copied most of their mythology, Lupercus was known as Pan, the god of light. The Phoenicians worshipped the same deity as Baal, the sun god. Baal was one of many names or titles for Nimrod, a mighty hunter, especially of wolves. He was also the founder and first lord of Babel (Gen. 10:10-12). Defying God, Nimrod was the originator of the Babylonian Mystery Religion, whose mythologies have been copied by the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans and a multitude of other ancient peoples. Under different names or titles—Pan, Lupercus, Saturn, Osiris—Nimrod is the strong man and hunter-warrior god of the ancients.

But what does this have to do with us today? Why should we be concerned with what happened in the past?

Here is what God, the Creator, tells humanity regarding the origin of worldly holidays and traditions: “Learn not the way of the heathen...for the customs of the people are vain” (Jer. 10:2-3). Those who engage in idolatrous worship, God calls *heathen*.

Throughout the Bible, God describes “heathens” as those who worship things that He had created (animals, the sun, the moon, stars, trees, etc.), or man-made idols, or anything but the one true God. He calls such people and their practices “pagan.”

Practicing pagan traditions and customs is serious in God's eyes. When He delivered the 12 tribes of Israel from Egypt, He warned, “After the doing of the land of Egypt, wherein you dwelt, shall you not do: and after the doing of the land of Canaan, where I bring you, shall you not do: neither shall you walk in their ordinances” (Lev. 18:3).

God also commanded the Israelites not to practice the idolatrous customs of the nations nearby: “Therefore shall you keep My ordinance, that you commit not any one of these abominable customs, which were committed before you, and that you defile not yourselves therein: I am the LORD your God” (vs. 30).

Clearly, God does not condone such pagan customs—but is it possible to “whitewash” or “Christianize” pagan practices and make them clean? Is it okay to practice these as long as you “worship God”?

The church at Rome attempted this. Regarding Valentine's Day, instead of putting the names of girls into a box, both boys and girls drew the names of “saints.” It was then each child's duty to emulate the life of the saint he or she had drawn. This was Rome's vain attempt to Christianize a pagan observance—even though God never gave man the power or authority to do this. Though the church had banned the sexual lottery, young men continued practicing a much toned-down version, sending women whom they desired handwritten romantic messages containing St. Valentine's name.

Today, Lupercalia is alive and well, but with a different name: Valentine's Day. Our article “The Truth Behind St. Valentine's Day” offers greater historical detail and explains how God views this and other worldly holidays. □

EVOLUTIONISTS BELIEVE mankind, Earth and the entire cosmos are the result of the forces of evolution that began with a single event—the Big Bang—occurring billions of years ago.

On the other hand, many evangelicals, some Jewish religionists, and others believe that the universe, our solar system, Earth and all of the plants, animals and even mankind was fully created in a single event occurring 6,000 years ago.

Is either view correct?

If you are a regular reader of *The Real Truth*, then you may have read our seven-part series on the theory of evolution, “Evolution Exposed – Deconstructing False Science.”

But where does the idea of a 6,000-year-old Earth originate? Is it possible to use the Bible to ascertain details of events obviously scientific in nature? Does God’s Word demonstrate the creation event occurring millions of years ago or a mere 6,000 years?

Framing the Argument

While certain details about the subject of creation differ, the general concept is that an intelligent force brought about physical matter, including the trillions of stars, billions of galaxies, our solar system, Earth and everything in it. Most believe it started with a single creation event.

“Young Earth” creationists believe in a literal interpretation of the Genesis creation account, and conclude that the universe was created 6,000 years ago. This age is determined by counting the generations of biblical figures recorded throughout the Bible, starting with Adam in the Garden of Eden. These creationists believe that any evidence not supporting their theory is incorrectly applied, or that the data is misinterpreted. Their view is that the Bible is the only source that should be examined to prove creation, and the events recorded in it should be taken as *they* interpret them.

When was the earth created? When did man appear? Can you trust only science—or is the Bible also a viable source?

Is the Earth 6,000 Years Old?

BY BRADFORD G. SCHLEIFER

Young Earth proponent Henry Morris stated, “Either...believe God’s Word all the way, or not at all” (*The Long War Against God*).

Only the Bible?

It has been said that one can be sincere, but at the same time sincerely *wrong*. Facts are facts; no matter how strongly one believes something, it must mesh with the truth. Let’s examine the truth of the matter, allowing the Bible to interpret itself.

Notice Romans chapter 1: “For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead” (vs. 20).

Now tie this with II Timothy 3:16: “All scripture is given by *inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine...*”

The original Greek word translated “doctrine” means “learning” or “teaching.” From these two passages we can see that Scripture, which is inspired by

God, can be used to learn about His eternal power and Godhead.

Young Earth creationists are correct to deduce that the Bible can be used as the starting point for any investigation of creation. If this is true, we should find evidence throughout “all Scripture.”

Let’s start in the book of beginnings, Genesis: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:1-2).

Verse one describes an event (“in the beginning”) when God created everything. The passage is straightforward, and nearly all translations render it the same way.

Before looking at verse two, consider that the God of the universe is a *perfect* Being and He always creates for a purpose. Consider further His description of the moment when the heavens and Earth were created: “For thus says the LORD that created the heavens; God Himself that formed the earth and made it; He has established it, He created it not in VAIN, He formed it to be inhabited” (Isa. 45:18).

The Hebrew word translated “vain” can also be rendered “a desolation, desert; a worthless thing; without form, nothing, waste, wilderness.” The heavens and Earth were created to be inhabited from its very first moment—obviously not “a worthless thing without form”!

In fact, the creation event described in verse one was so magnificent that “the morning stars [angels] sang together, and all the sons of God [angels] shouted for joy” (Job 38:7).

Now let’s examine Genesis 1:2. The phrase “without form” comes from the Hebrew word *tohu*—the same word translated as “vain” in Isaiah 45:18. The word “void” comes from *bohu*, meaning “a vacuity (a total emptiness of matter, a vacuum), an undistinguishable ruin.”

This is *exactly* what God said He did NOT create! He “is *not* the author

of confusion” (I Cor. 14:33)—rather, everything God does is “done *decently and in order*” (vs. 40).

The Hebrew word *hayah* makes this crystal clear. It was incorrectly translated “was” in Genesis 1:2. A more proper rendering is “became” or “came to be.” With all of this information a more accurate translation of the beginning of this verse could be: “And the earth BECAME DESOLATE, a WORTHLESS THING and an UNDISTINGUISHABLE RUIN...”

These verses describe two completely different events! This is not an interpretation by any man; it is the clear, direct interpretation of the Bible *by the Bible*.

The Bible is a spiritual “jigsaw puzzle.” The principle of Isaiah 28:10—“For precept must be on precept, precept on precept; line on line, line on line; here a little, there a little”—teaches that one must search the scriptures and put together separate verses to get the fullest picture of any doctrine.

Few people—including most Bible students—understand that *millions of years* passed between the events of Genesis 1:1 and verse 2. It is not the Bible’s purpose to give every last detail of history. For example, God’s Word covers the first 2,000 years of humanity’s existence on Earth in only six chapters (Gen. 1-6).

How Earth Was Made Desolate

How did our planet go from being beautiful and perfect at creation to a desolate desert and wilderness, a worthless thing without form? Who or what caused this?

Isaiah 14:12-14 tells a remarkable story containing many clues. Read carefully, noticing key phrases: “How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How are you *cut down to the ground*, which did weaken the nations! For you have said in your heart, *I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God...I will be like the Most High.*”

Ezekiel 28:12-17 parallels and reinforces Isaiah 14. When properly understood, the one called the “king

of Tyrus” is obviously the devil. The passage speaks of one who “*seals up* the sum, *full* of wisdom, and *perfect* in beauty,” who had also “been in Eden the garden of God.” No human being has ever been perfect. Also, it was the devil—the serpent—who beguiled Eve in the Garden. Verse 13 states, “you were created.” Satan is a created being. Verse 14 calls him “the cherub that covers.” No earthly king fits this description.

The latter part of verse 14 says that this “king” was “on the holy mountain of God” and “walked...in the midst of the stones of fire.” This describes the area around God’s throne.

Verse 15 declares, “iniquity [lawlessness] was found in you” and verse 16 describes this cherub as having been “cast...out of” heaven. God also said He would “destroy” (the Hebrew means “expel”) Lucifer from heaven. The verse ends with God “casting him down to the ground.”

Clearly, Satan attacked God when he sought to ascend from his own throne to take over God’s throne in heaven. While the ensuing destruction from this battle would have been colossal (as evidenced in Genesis 1:2), the devil’s attack failed miserably, and he was cast back to Earth.

This is what the Bible reveals!

Finally, verse 17 of Isaiah 14 ties everything together. Notice: “That [speaking of Satan] made the world as a wilderness...” The word “wilderness” can also be translated “desert.” Recall that the word *tohu* in Genesis 1:2 can also mean wilderness and desert.

In effect, Satan’s rebellion caused the earth to become desolate. God later sent His Spirit to re-create—“renew”—the planet: “You send forth Your Spirit...and You *renewed* the face of the earth” (Psa. 104:30).

Genesis 1:1 describes the original creation of the entire universe. Satan’s rebellion took place at some point between the accounts of verses 1 and 2. And verse 2 describes the *re-creation* of the earth that Young Earth creationists correctly date to approximately 6,000 years ago.

Scientific Proof

Christians should not run from science. While scientists do not always interpret the data correctly, certain concepts and fundamental laws mesh with the creation. Scientific laws man has discovered and defined were created by the God of the universe.

Let's look at one scientific proof supporting all we have covered. The speed of light is one of the more constant variables in the universe, with a speed of approximately 186,000 miles per second. This means that if you were 186,000 miles away from a person who turned on a bright light, it would take one second before that light reached you.

No doubt, you have probably experienced this "delay" with sound. Since light travels faster than sound, if a person on an opposite side of a football field clashed cymbals, you would see the action before the sound reached your ears.

The only difference is that light travels so fast that enormous distances are required for a "delay" to be realized. The only place with enough space to demonstrate this effect is outer space. Because of the vast size of the cosmos, distances are often measured in *light-years*, the distance light can travel in one year.

What does this have to do with the age of our universe?

If Earth and the universe were only 6,000 years old, we would only be able to see stars with a maximum distance of 6,000 light-years, otherwise the light would not have had time to reach us.

Let's put this in context. The Milky Way galaxy is approximately 100,000 light-years across, with our solar system about 28,000 light-years from the center. This puts us about 22,000 light-years from our galaxy's outer edge.

If the universe were only 6,000 years old, we would see only a fraction

of the 200 billion stars in just OUR galaxy since light from others would not have had enough time to reach us!

Of course, you have seen countless pictures of stars near Earth. There are amazing images of some of the estimated 125 billion galaxies. Of these, 3,000 are visible and can be anywhere from 80,000 to billions of light-years away. Light from the most distant galaxies had to have traveled for billions of years before it reached Earth. Of course, for light to travel billions of years there had to have been a universe for billions of years!

Earth has existed for billions of years. And it was only relatively *very recently* that God renewed—recreated—the earth to prepare it for the first human beings, Adam and Eve!

When one allows the Bible to interpret itself, and then uses that knowledge to properly interpret scientific data, the truth of creation is not only accurate, but magnificent and awe-inspiring! □

DATING

Continued from page 12

occupied parents, and a lifestyle in which daily interaction with father and mother is far outstripped by time with others their own age (in person, by computer or by phone), has led to the same "follower" mentality—but with the examples set by peers. The result is the same: Young people go along to get along, following the crowd into the next trend, unconcerned with the consequences.

Consider for a moment: Choosing a mate, the potential mother or father of your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, is one of life's most important decisions. As recently as a few generations ago, dating was commonly viewed in the West as the first step toward a potential marriage. Dating and courtship once often involved families who were familiar with one another in a town or neighborhood.

Today it can involve nothing more than two people and two computers.

Standards have gradually lowered over the decades, but the speed down the slippery slope has accelerated.

What now passes for dating may be the most tragic example of the shallowness of the modern age. This unthinking approach to relationships allows almost no time for real human interaction, the shared experiences on which a commitment to another human being is built. And it speaks of a profound lack of commitment.

The rushed building process could be likened to spending mere minutes constructing the foundation of a house, when many hours are required.

Women are arguably the biggest losers in this situation. They have by and large been fooled into thinking that casual sex carries no consequences. (Most men seem to have accepted this assumption.) However, studies show that the release of oxytocin (sometimes called the "bonding hormone" or "cuddle chemical") during sexual activity promotes emotional attachment within the female, regardless of whether she intends to become attached to anyone.

Any thinking man or woman eventually reaches the conclusion that the practices above do not work. But how far must dating deteriorate before things change for the better? And what will be the lowest common denominator? Many see recent changes as progress—but do the results support this view?

Give Versus Get

It has been said that there are two ways of life that a human being can choose, and this overall choice trickles down to most every decision. Dating, courtship and marriage are areas in which these choices are made very plain. These can be summarized as the "way of give" and the "way of get."

We are either motivated by love—genuine, outgoing concern for another—or by lust and self-interest. Real dating involves growing to love someone, rather than "falling" in lust.

When it comes to dating, there is a better way! Would you like to learn about it? If so, read our book *Dating and Courtship – God's Way*. □



Mexico's Drug Cartel War

Who is to Blame?

Over 5,300 Mexicans died in drug-related killings in 2008—gunned down, tortured, beheaded—all to maintain the flow of illegal drugs into the United States. Where does the blame lie?

IN EL PASO, Texas, a mother finishes a bedtime story and tucks her daughter into bed, kissing her goodnight. After heading downstairs, she hears the distant pop of gunfire echoing through the crisp night air.

Must be Juarez, she thinks and enters the kitchen to finish the dishes. Why should she worry about the city across the border? After all, this is El Paso—the third-safest city in the United States.

Things have been changing though. There have been increased incidences of kidnapping. Refugees from war-torn Juarez have begun to cross the border, seeking shelter in the States. Hotel capacity is often near 100%, with Juarez citizens looking for one night of peace. El Paso's city council unanimously signed a solidarity agreement to support Juarez. The trouble in Mexico is beginning to be noticed in America.

But for the mother doing dishes, it is hard to imagine the appalling conditions just across the border.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

At daybreak in a once-frequented park in Juarez, the light illuminates a horrific scene: headless corpses dumped in plain sight.

Tourists used to stream across from its sister city, El Paso, eager to buy trinkets and souvenirs. The streets now are bare. So are schools, with parents keeping children home in fear for their safety.

Here drug gangs are the law—judge, jury and executioner—vehemently defending trade routes in what the U.S. Government Accountability Office estimates is a \$23 billion a year industry.

Gangs extort store owners, but many cannot pay and are forced to close, fearing for their lives. Those who do not pay are likely to be kidnapped, tortured or killed. Heads of gang victims can be seen on fence posts, warning everyone to think twice before crossing a ruling cartel.

Welcome to Ciudad Juarez.

The Mexican “border town” of 1.7 million had an estimated 1,600 drug related-murders in 2008, the death toll rising faster than in Baghdad. In the first days of 2009, over 30 were killed in the city from drug violence.

“One speaks of failed states, Ciudad Juarez is a failed city,” George W. Grayson, an expert on Mexico-U.S. relations at the College of William and Mary in Virginia, said. “It’s a no man’s land. It’s totally out of control” (*Associated Press*).

The trouble is not limited to Juarez.

The drug cartels have a steely grip on many of the Mexican towns bordering the United States. Throughout Mexico, the death toll was up 117% over the previous year—from 2,477 in 2007 to more than 5,300 in 2008.

The Mexican government has been fighting back, yet the body count continues to rise. The United States also fears its southern neighbor will crumble into a “narco-state” ruled by feuding drug lords—or worse, the violence will spill across the border.

Living in Fear

A wave of killings occurred in December 2008, including the grue-

some discovery of eight tortured bodies in the state of Chiapas, in southeastern Mexico on Dec. 23. Three of the bodies were identified as local merchants.

The findings came just two days after Mexican authorities had uncovered nine decapitated bodies and their severed heads in the southeastern state of Guerrero. Eight were identified as soldiers, with the ninth body being that of a high-ranking police official.

These grim stories come across newswires with mind-numbing frequency. Some weeks the violence esca-



lates. In one instance more than 100 lives were claimed in seven days. A week in December of 2008 included the deaths of 20 police officers. Also, *Voice of America* reported that cartel hit men assassinated nine federal agents.

For millions of Mexicans, these are not isolated events—they are a way of life.

Drug gangs hold onto their territory with brute violence and intimidation. There is little doubt who rules the streets.

Kidnapping is another rampant terror. The Citizen’s Institute for Crime Studies estimates there are over 500 per month in Mexico. A December

2008 report by strategic consulting firm B.R. McCaffrey Associates stated that the majority of kidnappings are “not reported largely because of lack of trust in the police—or the reality of police involvement with the crime.”

And it is not just the rich who are targeted. “Now even poor Mexicans present a target for ATM [automated teller machine] extortion or even death because of non-payment of small ransoms,” the report said.

Death, destruction, carnage, extortion, fear—as the bodies pile up and the conflict threatens to spread into the United States, who or what is to blame for this drug war and its bloodied, lawless conditions?

Turf Wars

It seems obvious, one might logically reason. The members of the drug cartels are to blame, right? It is their business that is violently maintained, and they are the ones who pull the trigger. They are the ones with blood on their hands.

They are armed to the teeth, from the efficient AK-47 to the brutal machete—and not afraid to use them. Some are infamous for dissolving their victims’ bodies in lye. These are the Mexican drug gang members.

Border-town citizens awaken to streets littered with their handiwork: headless bodies wrapped in old carpet and dumped unceremoniously in streets and parks. Web videos circulate documenting their crude, terrorist-style beheading videos. They have tossed grenades in public plazas. They hire teenaged boys to do their dirty work, paying about \$300 a “kill.”

Terror is used to ensure their hold on the towns along the 2,000-mile Mexico/U.S. border—routes gangs hold onto, allowing the continual flow of drugs north and money back south. Battleground cities such as Tijuana, Juarez and Nogales are the front line in the cartel drug war.

Drug traffickers load cars with cocaine, marijuana and other illicit drugs and travel north. Once the drugs are dropped off, the same cars gener-



■ **CAPTURED:** Mexican Federal Police officers escort members of the Gulf drug cartel in Mexico City on January 20, 2008. The suspects were detained in the northeastern state of Tamaulipas.

PHOTO: STR/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

ally haul the cash back over the border. But there is often one more stop before drug-runners return with payment: gun shops in the United States. Cartels purchase high-powered weapons, such as the AR-15, a semiautomatic rifle similar to the U.S. army's standard-issue M16. The weapons pass through border checkpoints and are delivered to drug gangs.

"More than 90% of guns seized at the border or after raids and shootings in Mexico have been traced to the United States, according to the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives" (*Los Angeles Times*).

Government Declares War

The government is charged to maintain law and order. Are they to blame for unchecked lawlessness?

As would any nation under siege by "narco-terrorists," the Mexican government has retaliated.

Upon entering office in 2006, President Felipe Calderon deployed nearly 8,000 federal police officers and military personnel to cities across the nation. Today, there are about

40,000 troops allotted to fight the cartels.

There has been progress. The troops sought out and destroyed illegal crops, seized tons of drugs and contraband, and have arrested and interrogated cartel members.

But the impressive show of force appears to have worked for only a short time. After a lull, casualties began to increase and anyone standing in the cartels' way is now in danger.

Police officers in particular have become a favorite target. Since 2006, 450 police officers, prosecutors, military personnel and other government workers have been murdered. In one incident last year, a hit list was attached to a police monument in Juarez. One by one, the officers were killed. After the cartel had crossed many names off the list, the remaining officers began to quit their jobs.

But some stood firm. Municipal Police Chief Juan Antonio Roman was gunned down near the steps of his house, becoming the third senior police official in Mexico to be killed that week. Investigators estimated that assailants fired over 60 shots.

Attacks against government employees have become even more brazen. In early 2009, three severed heads of police officers were found in coolers placed outside the town hall of Guadalupe, Mexico. This occurred shortly after the head of another suburban police chief was deposited on the steps of a town hall; he had been chief only four days before being kidnapped and killed.

Despite the deaths, President Calderon has continued to defiantly oppose the drug runners. At a memorial service last year for a fallen officer, Mr. Calderon confirmed his commitment to fighting the war on drug cartels. He said that organized crime groups were striking back against the federal government "because they know we are hitting their criminal structure." He also said the government is "determined to recover streets that never should have ceased being ours" (*Los Angeles Times*).

U.S. Ambassador Tony Garza said in an interview that President "Calderon must, and will, keep the pressure on the cartels, but look, let's not be naïve—there will be more violence, more blood, and, yes, things will get worse before they get better. That's the nature of the battle. The more pressure the cartels feel, the more they'll lash out like cornered animals" (*Dallas Morning News*).

One thing is certain: The drug gangs will defend their livelihood—and they are doing it with increasing levels of sophistication, with weapons often superior to the police defending the nation.

Outgunned, Out-trained

The drug cartels are heavily armed, others may think. Should their weapon suppliers be to blame?

Mexico's cartels are not "brainless thugs" with guns and knives. Often the Mexican army and police must combat attacks from highly trained units of gang members who employ night vision goggles, helicopters, encrypted communications and other sophisticated 21st-century technology. Cartels also have in their arsenal automatic weapons, rocket-propelled grenades,

anti-tank rockets, mines, booby traps, heavy machine guns, hand grenades and grenade machine guns.

Meanwhile, another trouble plagues the Mexican government's war on drug cartels: corruption.

An analysis report by the Council on Hemispheric Affairs detailed the rampant corruption: "Army Major Arturo Gonzalez, a member of Felipe Calderon's presidential guard, was purportedly put on the pad for \$100,000 a month to report the President's movements to a splinter group made up of former Sinaloa cartel leaders, the Beltran-Leyva brothers.

"The intelligence community also has been compromised; Noe Ramirez Mandujano, head of the country's anti-organized crime task force (SIEDO), was caught receiving \$450,000 a month in bribe money from the Beltran-Leyva brothers in exchange for classified information that could threatened [sic] the core of the cartel's operation.

"Ricardo Gutierrez, director of Mexico's Interpol branch, also has been accused of colluding with the Beltran-Leyva organization in providing sensitive information in exchange for large sums of money. This revelation was hugely embarrassing to the Mexican authorities."

Some police officers and army personnel simply switch sides altogether, hired to work for the drug gangs. A number have studied in the U.S. at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation in Georgia, a facility that trains Central and South American police and military leaders. Their training and experience are often used to the drug runners' advantage, helping them to anticipate how the police and army will react.

The U.S. Front

Or does it come down to supply and demand? If there were less Americans purchasing the drugs, wouldn't the problem disappear?

The implications of the Mexican drug war are not lost on the United States. "In terms of worst-case scenarios for the Joint Force and indeed the world,

two large and important states bear consideration for a rapid and sudden collapse: Pakistan and Mexico," said a U.S. Joint Force Command report.

It seems to be in America's best interest to act quickly to curb the violence. With its forces already spread thin by military operations in Iraq, it cannot afford to have a narco-state as a neighboring country.

Additionally, the Mexican cartels have a growing presence in America. "In April, the Justice Department reported that Mexican drug cartels represent the 'largest threat to both citizens and law enforcement agencies in this country and now have gang members in nearly 200 U.S. cities.' The 200 cities include Washington; Baltimore, Frederick and Greenbelt in Maryland; and Arlington and Galax in Virginia" (*Washington Times*).

The U.S. State Department estimates that 90% of cocaine enters the nation at the Mexican border. Cartels also operate methamphetamine labs in the states, particularly in California, and are known to grow marijuana in the U.S.

In response, the U.S. Congress approved the Merida Initiative, a \$400 million emergency aid package to combat the cartels. The package includes money for helicopters and additional training for Mexican police to stop smuggling and decrease police corruption.

Laying Blame

As with every aspect of the drug cartel war, there seems to be plenty of blame to go around.

Although Washington has already delivered \$197 million to the Merida Initiative, Mexican Ambassador Carlos Rico said until the U.S. stops consuming cocaine, the cause is hopeless.

"The key market in this case is a U.S. Market, that in spite of very, very impressive efforts that the U.S. government has put into reducing demand, it has remained as pretty much as it used to be a few years ago,' [Mr. Rico] said. 'So as long as that demand is there and the impressive possibility of amazing profits of illegal operators and criminal

organizations, it is going to be pretty much impossible for Mexico to solve the issue'" (*Voice of America*).

In border towns, lynching and vigilantism are becoming commonplace, the citizens blaming gang members. The situation has become desperate—prompting calls for desperate measures.

"We've reached such a level of crisis here along the border that all solutions now have to be on the table, including lifting the prohibition of narcotics," El Paso City Councilman Beto O'Rourke said after the council signed a solidarity agreement with Juarez. "Our national security is at stake" (*Dallas Morning News*).

Others support this cause, thinking that if heroin, cocaine and other illicit drugs were legalized, the cartels would lose their power.

These proponents are sincere in their want to cease violence. But in the end, this solution puts the blame on the law itself. If the laws against illicit drug use were abolished, where would this lead? Can legalizing drugs or removing laws really end crime?

Mankind is truly in desperate times, but when in history have even "desperate measures" brought lasting solutions? When has man ever solved his most pressing problems that destroy families, promote fear, insecurity and corruption, and incessantly plague humanity?

Proposed solutions for any problem come from knowledge obtained by one of the five senses, then formulated into a thought using the human mind. But these answers *assume* that the problems are physical and can be solved with scientific reasoning.

However, even with "all the options on the table," the record of history is against man. With the resources currently at his disposal, solutions will not be found, and it appears the best man can do is continue to futilely play the "blame game."

To learn more, read our booklet *Why Man Cannot Solve His Problems*. □



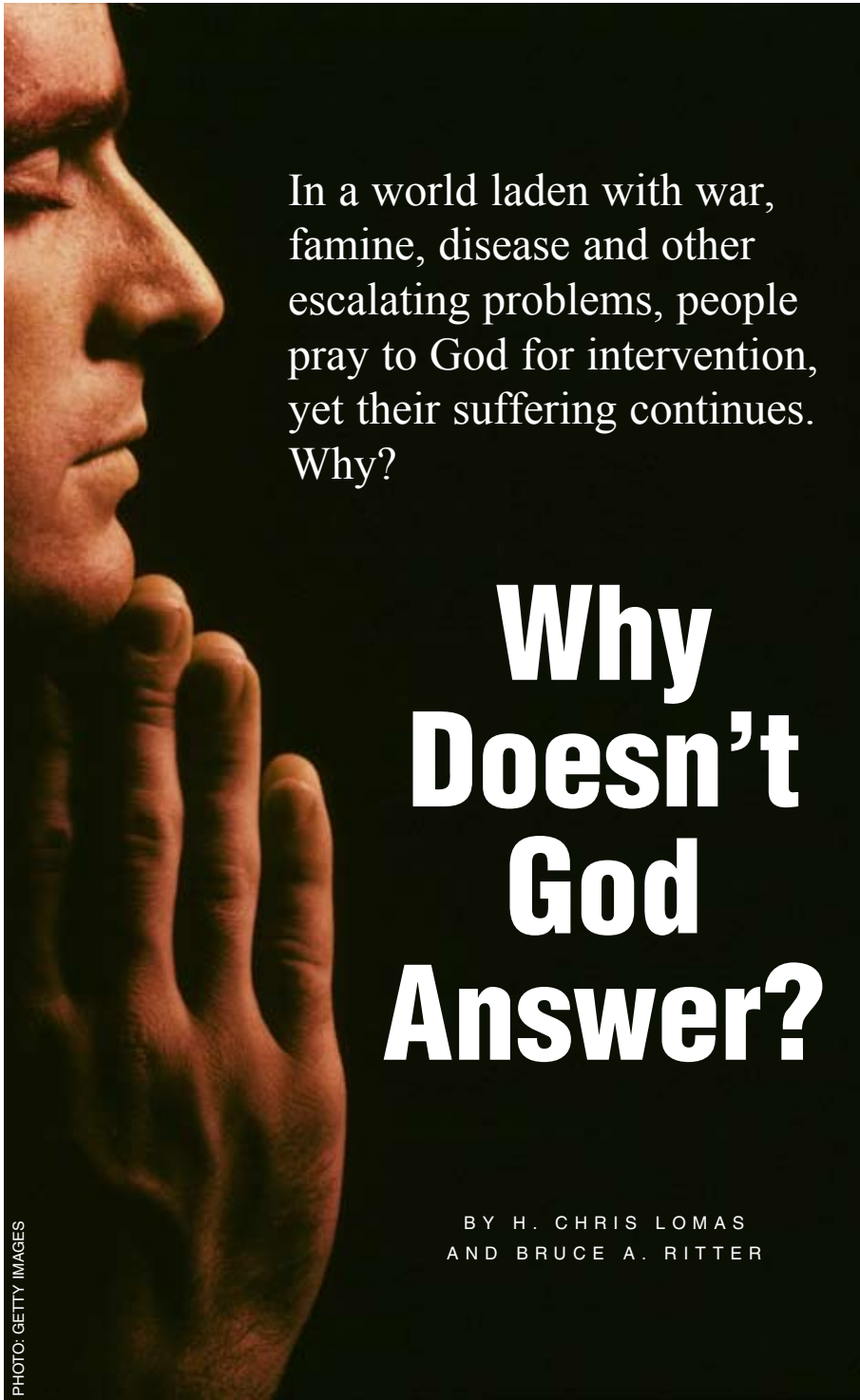


PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

In a world laden with war, famine, disease and other escalating problems, people pray to God for intervention, yet their suffering continues. Why?

Why Doesn't God Answer?

BY H. CHRIS LOMAS
AND BRUCE A. RITTER

BEFORE LAUNCHING a fatal attack, a suicide bomber prays to his deity, asking for success in taking the lives of as many men, women and children as possible.

In the aftermath moments later, among the strewn bodies is a

bloodied woman grasping hold of her husband. In her anguish, she turns to God for the first time in years and cries out, "Why God, why?"

Nearby, a man stretches his hands to the sky as he stands over the lifeless body of his child. He has diligently attended church services every Sunday

and has repeated the "Lord's Prayer" every day of his life for the past 15 years—yet he still feels cut off from God, left alone to wallow in his pain.

Elsewhere, at a military base within a war zone, soldiers observe a moment of prayerful silence before going into battle. The commander, his head bowed low, concludes his prayer, "... and Lord, protect us from the enemy we are about to face and help us to be victorious in battle."

Later in the day, the same troops are ambushed 30 miles from base, as a land mine rips to shreds the armored personnel carrier in which they are traveling. Ten men die in the initial blast. Another 18 die in the battle that follows. Only a handful of soldiers survive, forever scarred by the events of this day—a day in which their prayers went unanswered.

Throughout the world, people hold prayer vigils, asking God to end both natural and manmade catastrophes—droughts, famines, wars—yet circumstances only grow worse. Why does God not answer when millions seem to seek His intervention?

How the World Prays

Among the world's religious faiths, prayer means anything to anyone. It can be sing-song chants or long, monotonous recitations repeated over and over again. For hundreds of thousands of worshippers, prayer means public displays of emotion, involving tears, swaying bodies, and hands lifted to the sky. For others, it means facing a specific direction toward a revered, faraway site.

But to the God of the Bible, *true* prayer is a personal, private, one-on-one conversation between man and his Creator.

Scripture is filled with numerous accounts of answered prayer. Moses pleaded with God to change His mind and not destroy rebellious, carnal-minded Israel (Num. 14:11-19). Hannah, who was barren, implored God to give her a child of her own (I Sam. 1:5-11). David beseeched God to forgive him for committing terrible sins (Psa. 51). And before He was

taken to be crucified, Jesus asked God to protect His disciples (John 17:6-11).

God answered their prayers. He answers prayers today—if they meet certain conditions.

Believe God

The Holy Bible is a divinely inspired instruction manual from the Creator to His creation. It explains WHO and WHAT man is—WHY he exists, WHAT is life's purpose—and HOW man can attain the awesome future God has in store for him.

The Bible is also God's Word of truth (John 17:17). As its Author, God declares "the scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). It is a book of promises guaranteed to be fulfilled because it is "impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18).

Study the Bible and you will find God promises protection, to provide our necessities (food, drink, clothing and shelter), strength in time of need, and more. Jesus said, "And all things, whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive" (Matt. 21:22).

This requires faith. The apostle Paul wrote, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). It takes faith to believe that God exists and that He always keeps His promises.

The Bible defines faith as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (vs. 1). Faith is your PROOF that God will deliver His promises—it is your GUARANTEE He will come through for you. (To understand more, read our booklet *What Is Real Faith?*)

Psalm 14:1 states, "The fool has said in his heart, *There is no God.*" In this modern age of secular thinking, hundreds of millions do not believe God exists. Naturally, such people would think prayer a waste of time.

Yet there are others who—by their actions—say, "There is no God," meaning, "There is no God *over me!*"

They pray thinking they can flatter the Creator of the universe into doing whatever they ask. Often they are religionists who put on a "holier than thou" show of prayer "testimony" before their congregations, believing they can convince God with their many words. Their prayers may seem sincere—but God is not moved.

To approach God in prayer means to believe He exists. He is the One who says in Isaiah 1:18, "Come now, and let us reason together." God *wants* His creation to approach Him, to express thoughts and concerns to Him. He is the Master Potter, and we are His clay (Isa. 64:8). He declares, "I the Lord search the heart [mind], I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer. 17:10).

Obey God

But belief in God is only the first step. Billions believe God exists. They cry out to Him, but He seems so far away.

Yet God says of Himself, "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear" (Isa. 59:1). Still something prevents the prayers of most from going any higher than the ceiling. Verse 2 reveals the answer: "But your INIQUITIES have *separated between you and your God*; and your SINS have *hidden His face from you*, so that He will not hear."

"Sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4). Sin separates—cuts us off—from God. Ironically, religionists, preachers and others teach their followers that God's Law is "done away," "abolished" or "kept for us by Christ," convincing them there is no need to obey God.

The continual breaking of God's Law is a major factor in unanswered prayer. Consider: "He who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination" (Prov. 28:9).

God will not hear the prayers of those who do not obey Him: "Beloved, if your heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him

because we keep His commandments and do those things which are pleasing in His sight" (I John 3:21-22).

Note what Jesus said in John 8:29: "And He that sent Me is with Me: the Father has not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him." Christ obeyed God, and for this His Father always heard His Son's prayers. The same could be said of you—IF you, like Christ, obey God and diligently put His will first.

When thousands of believers gathered at Jerusalem asked the apostle Peter what they must do to stop living contrary to God's way of life, he said, "Repent"! (Acts 2:38). The word "repent" simply means "change." But what does one change? His attitude, thoughts and behavior—the total person, a complete change of life and direction from the way of get (selfishness, vanity, lust, greed, pride, competition) to God's way of give (selflessness, meekness, humility, concern for others, cooperation). Romans 3:23 states, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

Through genuine, heartfelt repentance, God grants the forgiveness of sins, removing through Jesus Christ's perfect sacrifice the very thing that separates us from God. Then and only then can our prayers be heard.

Traditional Christianity has lost these vital keys in obeying and serving God. Modern Christendom, though outwardly appearing to be righteous and sacred, is mired in traditions and customs of men. Christ says to those who profess to be Christian that God does not hear them because they break His laws (Matt. 7:21-23).

Determine to adhere to what GOD teaches, and not men. Avoid becoming like those Jesus spoke of in Matthew 15: "This people draws near unto Me with their mouth, and honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. But in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (vs. 8-9).

Fear God

There is an additional requirement to answered prayer, which flows from

believing and obeying God: We must FEAR Him.

The Israelites fell into a tragic cycle of believing God, obeying Him, taking His blessings for granted, forgetting God, disobeying Him, worshipping false gods, being punished, crying out for mercy, receiving God's deliverance—and so the pattern repeated itself.

Not fearing God prevented Israel from continuing to believe Him, and recognize His authority over their lives. Lack of godly fear kept the Israelites from faithfully obeying God's commandments, judgments and statutes.

Proverbs 8:13 states, "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward [perverse] mouth, do I hate." God hates ALL forms of evil—proud thoughts, arrogant attitudes, evil behavior, and perverse words—*everything* that comprises carnal nature.

The vast majority mistakenly believes man is "basically good," but flawed. But that is not how God views human beings. He says it is not natural for man to follow His ways. Take note: "Because the carnal mind is ENMITY [hostile] against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7).

But what about those who claim to worship God, who go to Sunday services and close their eyes in prayer,

thinking that God will hear them?

"There is NONE righteous, no, not one: There is NONE that understands, there is NONE that seeks after God. They are ALL gone out of the way, they are TOGETHER become unprofitable; there is NONE that does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: *There is no fear of God before their eyes*" (Rom. 3:10-18).

As you can see, the carnal mind does not naturally fear God—in fact, it works against Him. However, a believing, obedient mindset will allow one to fear God, if he submits himself to be led of God's Spirit.

God listens to those who are teachable, humble and yielded to Him. Notice Isaiah 66: "Thus says the LORD, The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool: where is the house that You build unto Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things has My hand made, and all those things have been, says the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is *poor* and of a *contrite spirit*, and *trembles* at My Word" (vs. 1-2).

Such a person "depart[s] from evil" (Job 28:28) because, like God (Prov. 8:13), he *hates* evil.

But what steps must one take to have the Holy Spirit actively at work in the mind, converting carnal thoughts to the outgoing thoughts of holy, righteous, godly character? Read our booklet *What Is True Conversion?* for answers.

More Information Available

The above points are just a few of the keys to establishing active, prayerful communication to which God will listen. Our article "The Keys to Dynamic Prayer" reveals much, much more. It will help you understand what it means to pray to God—how to pray—when and how often—what to pray for.

For example, the article explains the truth about the "Lord's Prayer"—that it is actually a prayer *outline* of major topics to address before God. The article goes into detail about each of the topics and what they mean. It also explains what the apostle James meant when he wrote, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (Jms. 5:16), and how to offer such a prayer.

The God who answers prayer, and says, "Come now, and let us reason together" (Isa. 1:18) is waiting to hear from you. □



PERSONAL

Continued from page 4

be found of [Christ] in peace, without spot, and blameless" (10-12, 14).

Finally, the very personal verse 17: "You therefore...seeing you know these things before[hand], *beware* lest you also, being led away with the error of the wicked [scoffers and ungodly people all around you], fall from your own stedfastness."

Now a caution: Be careful you are neither among the pooh-poohing, unbelieving scoffers—nor one of those who will not seek and obey God while there is still time.

The Bible promises that those who are faithful and obedient will be protected through the worst calamities that could fall upon an unsuspecting world. While the last days certainly are perilous—or dangerous—this is just the run-up period prior to the infinitely worse final three and a half years to follow before the good news of the gospel is fulfilled in Christ's Coming.

While much of Christendom accepts the false rapture theory—nowhere taught in Scripture!—God promises a special place of divine protection for the faithful in His Church. To learn more, read my booklet, *God's Promised Protection – Place of Safety or Secret Rapture?*

You do not need to fear the future. But neither should you listen to people who do not understand either events that are playing out now, or how God will protect His people from this greatest time of world trouble.

But there is more to know about whether we have reached this time.

What about religious confusion at the end? Matthew 24 records Jesus' warning about future *great deception*: "Take heed that no man *deceive* you. For *many* shall come in My name, saying, I [Jesus] am Christ; and *shall deceive many*" (vs. 4-5). In other words, *many* would *claim* to represent Jesus, and would acknowledge He was indeed the Christ, but bring a mes-

sage that *deceives* their listeners. The confused, disagreeing groups within professing Christianity today confirm Christ's prophecy.

Jesus' warning is critical. Modern preachers all stress the *Person* of Jesus Christ, instead of His *message!* They focus on the *Messenger* not His *message!* Saying Christ was, in fact, the Christ—the Messiah—is a true statement! The deception starts when His message of a coming world-ruling kingdom—with all that this means—is ignored—and even *suppressed*.

False Gospel Proclaimed

Herein lies the greatest deception! Understand this!

Jesus proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom of God. Here are His first recorded words: "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the *gospel of the kingdom of God*, and saying...the *kingdom of God* is at hand [Christ was its representative]: repent you, and believe *the gospel*" (Mark 1:14-15). Many verses show Jesus consistently preached *this* message.

Within 30 years of Jesus' crucifixion, Paul warned of those who were already perverting Christ's gospel with a *counterfeit message*. This understanding was so central that he pronounced a double curse on any who did this. He also warned, "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be *corrupted* from the *simplicity* that is in Christ. For if he that comes preaches *another Jesus*, whom we have not preached, or if you receive *another spirit*, which you have not received, or *another gospel*, which you have not accepted, you might well bear with him" (II Cor. 11:3-4)—meaning, you put up with it.

Preachers misrepresent Christ by bringing what is "*another Jesus*," "*another spirit*" and "*another gospel*," other than the kingdom of God.

God indicts these false ministers: "For such are *false* apostles, *deceitful* workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no

great thing [don't be surprised] if *his ministers* [Satan's] also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness..." (vs. 13-15).

This demonstrates the power of the deception Christ warned of by the ministers of this world's brand of Christianity. Some of these specialize, particularly today, in confusing, incomplete hodgepodes of prophetic theories about how the last days will play out. The utter nonsense of these conflicting seers, psychics and prognosticators, like Nostradamus and other supposed prophets and prophecy fiction writers, is without end.

But ministers do not preach the kingdom of God! Instead, they talk incessantly about "baby Jesus," "Christ on the cross," "the virgin birth" and various social gospels. How often do you hear that Jesus Christ is coming to *rule Earth* as a King—to bring an all-powerful *government* to replace the failed governments of men?

Rarely, if ever.

Christ told His disciples they would be terribly persecuted and even killed for the message they would bring. Only the apostle John survived martyrdom, living into his 90s.

The 1,900-Year Gap

Until Herbert W. Armstrong began to proclaim the true gospel in 1934, the announcement of the kingdom of God had not been taken worldwide for nearly 1,900 years. From the time of the apostles, until the beginning of the 52-year ministry of this one man, the true gospel did not go out in any real power to the world as a whole!

In Matthew 24:14, Christ foretold, "This *gospel of the kingdom* shall be preached in *all* the world for a witness unto *all* nations [this describes a huge, worldwide effort, and just before the end]; *and then shall the end come.*"

Mr. Armstrong reached an unprecedented hundreds of millions during his ministry. This included a readership (in seven languages) of approximately 25 million people of the *Plain Truth* magazine just at the time of his death, in 1986. Mr. Armstrong personally visited one-third of all heads of

state during the last two decades of his life. He always brought the message of God's coming kingdom. There were *few* places on earth where it was not heard on either radio or television. On hundreds of stations, his *World Tomorrow* telecast topped the Arbitron ratings as the most listened-to religious telecast on earth. The true gospel went out in power—like no other time in history!

Christ's prophecy is still true! Beginning in 1966, Herbert Armstrong was my teacher. Today, The Restored Church of God continues this commission *for a few more years*.

Wars, Famines, Pestilences and Earthquakes

The most cursory look reveals that this world is not led by God, but rather is filled with problems, suffering and misery of every kind. Christ warned, "And you shall hear of *wars* and *rumors of wars*...and there shall be *famines*, and *pestilences* and *earthquakes*, in diverse [various] places," but that "All these are the *beginning* of sorrows" (Matt. 24:6-7, 8).

Who can doubt these things have come to pass in a greater way? For instance, how often do we now hear of devastating earthquakes? A well-known television commentator stated that "for some reason" there are now more earthquakes occurring every day. Seismologists record 12,000 separate, measurable earthquakes annually. 88,000 died in them just last year.

New, serious outbreaks of old diseases—some now antibiotic-resistant—are reported more frequently. These include the HIV epidemic, cholera, typhoid, dengue fever, flesh-eating bacteria, Legionnaire's disease, the Ebola and West Nile viruses, malaria, the return of stronger, more resistant strains of tuberculosis and diphtheria, and an explosion of sexually transmitted diseases. These are but a small part of an immense, constantly-emerging picture of frightening *new* diseases—and *old* ones returning with a vengeance!

Consider. Over 10,000 die from lung disease *every* year just in Hong Kong—just due to pollution. But 1.28

million die just in China—one country!—each year just due to lung-related diseases.

About 24,000 people now starve to death *every day*—with this number steadily rising! Think. A medium-sized city disappears every 24 hours.

Wars, and what the gospel writer Luke called “commotions,” including acts of terror and protracted riots in more places, fill headlines—bringing more suffering and death. Greater disease and starvation are merely *natural by-products* of the population displacement and confusion that always follow in the wake of armed conflict.

In recent years, scientists have warned of global warming. Few any longer doubt that more extreme weather has arrived on the front edge of a worldwide phenomenon, whatever the cause. Storms are more severe, and more often. Abnormal flooding and devastation of the land are contributing to famines and disease epidemics of unheard of proportions. Weather catastrophes, earthquakes, wars and the resulting disease and hopelessness tend to exacerbate what is already an epidemic of suffering. Prophecy also foretold more volcanic activity—and this is happening!

The world needs God’s Law, which, if kept by all nations, would bring universal peace, happiness, abundance and prosperity. Cities would become beautiful. Disease, famine and war would disappear, as would racism, ignorance, poverty and all false religion.

Yet, no man, no government, nor all the governments of men put together can bring these things!

Only God’s kingdom, led by Christ and the saints who have qualified to join Him, can. The world must learn about the laws of God. Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-4 also speak of the “last days,” when this will happen. God’s Law and the love of God are prophesied to replace the lawlessness and hate between people and nations today!

God has to intervene! Christ revealed, “Except those days should be *shortened* [cut short], there should *no flesh be saved* [alive!]: but for the

elect’s sake those days shall be *shortened*” (Matt. 24:22)!

Think! When has mankind held the capability to destroy *all* human beings? Only with the advent of nuclear, chemical, biological and now “radiological” weapons could this be possible. We live when all of these are available—and nuclear weapons alone possess the capability, with the stockpiles that currently exist, to wipe out all mankind *many times over!* As one leader said, “Once would be quite enough.”

Some assert that these weapons are too terrible to ever be used—that they exist only as a “deterrent” *against* their use.

Do not be fooled! They *will* be used. Many prophecies make this clear. Remember, the moment these weapons became available, and the United States felt it in its interest to use them, President Truman ordered it in August 1945—and without hesitation! Yet, the two bombs that landed on Japan were little more than “firecrackers” by comparison to what exists today.

It is no coincidence the gospel was preached around the world at the time weapons of mass destruction became available—proving correct the timing of Christ’s prophecy about danger to the survival of all humanity!

The Coming Great Tribulation

Immediately after the gospel can no longer be preached, Matthew 24:21 includes a warning about *Great Tribulation*. This is just before Jesus’ statement that the last days will be cut short: “For then shall be *great tribulation*, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” This pictures a truly terrible time for all life on Earth!

This article would be unending if only a fraction of the passages describing the coming horrifying conditions on Earth were cited. Nearly every Old Testament prophet spoke of this worldwide trouble, now just ahead. Time is running out!

Daniel’s Long Prophecy

The longest single Bible prophecy is in Daniel 11. Chapter 10 introduces it

and 12 completes it. The first reference to “*the time of the end*” is 11:40, and six times in chapter 12 alone the word “end” is used.

The prophet Daniel was not permitted to understand what he recorded. God told him it was “*sealed* till the time of the end,” when it would then be *unsealed*. This has happened. Verse 10 teaches, “the wise shall understand,” but “none of the wicked shall understand.” This means some—a relative few—*will* comprehend events around them!

Daniel 12:4 gives two clues to know when the end time has arrived. Notice: “O Daniel, shut up the words, and *SEAL THE BOOK*, even to the *TIME OF THE END*: many shall *run to and fro*, and *knowledge shall be increased*.”

We have already discussed the astonishing knowledge explosion brought about by the arrival of computers in scores of millions of homes. Great numbers now have access to vast amounts of knowledge—*instantaneously!* What can be quickly known by anyone seeking information is staggering! Surely we have arrived at the time when “knowledge shall be increased”—along with its easy access!

What about “many shall run to and fro”? The arrival of railroads in the middle of the 19th century—then great ships driven by powerful engines to move them ever faster across oceans—followed by automobiles—and finally, passenger jets, made our planet universally accessible, and quickly. Jets turned the Atlantic Ocean into little more than a large lake. Earth grew smaller because of its inhabitants’ ability to “run to and fro” almost anywhere *at any time!*

Four Prophesied Kingdoms

The book of Daniel addresses other great prophecies. The second chapter contains another long prophecy spanning over 2,500 years, concluding with Christ’s Second Coming. It pictures a giant man consisting of four metals (gold, silver, brass, and iron mixed with clay), which represent four succeeding world-ruling kingdoms that began in Daniel’s time.

The first, which was the head made of gold, represents Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian, or Chaldean Empire (625-538 B.C.). The silver breast and arms that followed represents the second or Medo-Persian Empire (558-330 B.C.), while the belly and thighs of brass represents the third or Greco-Macedonian Empire (333-31 B.C.), led by Alexander the Great. Finally, the fourth kingdom, depicted by legs of iron, and feet and toes of iron mixed with clay, represents the Roman Empire. This last, greatest empire defeated and succeeded the Greco-Macedonians. The toes represent 10 nations or kingdoms in Eastern and Western Europe. (The Roman Empire had two capitals—Rome and Constantinople.) This religious/political combine of nations will coalesce under one final leader, aided by a second, miracle-working world figure. This united superpower system is now forming behind the scenes, with today's worldwide economic crisis giving it birth.

Daniel 2:34 and 44 prove these 10 toes exist at Christ's Coming. They describe a stone coming from heaven that smashes and replaces the toes—and establishes God's kingdom. This symbolism depicts Christ's Return and the setting up of God's divine government—supplanting all humanly-devised governments!

Remember, when Christ foretold the "end of the world," He meant *man's civilization*—not the *planet* "blowing up."

Only by comparing Revelation 13, 17 and Daniel 7, with Daniel 2, can you fully understand the immense scope and magnitude of this prophecy. Numerous other scriptures refer to these four kingdoms.

Briefly, the Roman Empire, which began in 31 B.C., collapsed in A.D. 476—having been overrun by three kingdoms (or horns) from Northern Europe—the *Vandals*, the *Heruli* and the *Ostrogoths*. Daniel 7:8 shows these horns were "plucked up *by the roots*," meaning they disappeared from history. (The Vandals were so barbaric and destructive that the modern term "van-

dalize" is derived from their name.) However, seven more horns (verse 7 says there were a total of 10) were prophesied to rule this empire.

Beginning in A.D. 554, the Roman Empire became known as the *Holy Roman Empire*. Historians acknowledge that the Pope's crowning of Justinian signaled this change. Events in Europe, surrounding the Holy Roman Empire, rose and fell for many centuries. Periodically, new rulers appeared—Charlemagne (the *Frankish* second head in A.D. 800)—Otto the Great (the *German* third head crowned in A.D. 962)—followed by the Habsburg Dynasty of Charles V (the *Austrian* fourth head crowned in A.D. 1520)—which, in turn, was followed by Napoleon's reign (the *French* fifth head crowned in A.D. 1805)—with the sixth head being Garibaldi's united *Italian* head from A.D. 1870-1945! This culminated in the defeat of Adolf Hitler and the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini. Mussolini, after signing a secret agreement with the Vatican in 1929, united Ethiopia, Eritrea and Italian Somaliland back to Italy in 1935—and declared this union the Roman Empire re-established!

This is prophesied to happen one more time—one revival of the Holy Roman Empire remains!

Only the tenth horn of Daniel 7:7 (the same as all 10 toes of Daniel 2) is yet to appear. This will be the final *beast* of Revelation 17 that will come upon an unsuspecting world with stunning speed and force. With the 1989 collapse of the Iron Curtain and the reunification of Germany, the last resurrection, consisting of countries and kingdoms throughout Eastern and Western Europe, is soon to appear as a kind of United States of Europe. But we have already read how Christ will *smash* this union of human kingdoms at His Coming!

Fifty bibles are sold every minute worldwide. This translates to over 26 million each year. How many believe and act on its contents? All convicted Bible readers *will* accept that "We have also a more *sure word of prophecy*; whereunto *you do well* that you

take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn..." (II Pet. 1:19). This personal has brought light on subjects you have almost certainly not even heard *referenced*, never mind *explained*. Incredible events are foretold to play out upon the world just before the Tribulation. Some people know a *few* pieces within God's prophetic "puzzle," but even then they are *never assembled* correctly.

Let's briefly assemble some critical time periods. The Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord last 1,260 days, or 3 1/2 years. This is one of *three* key periods in God's final time frame before Christ's Return. The others are "1,290 days" and "1,335 days."

The 1,335 days—of Daniel 12:12—also count down to the Return of Christ. This moment signals the end of God's Work for this age—the completion of Matthew 24:14—and is when the "call" goes out to His faithful people to assemble for flight to safety. Then, 45 days later, at 1,290 days until Christ's Second Coming, events culminate in Jerusalem and the Church leaves its assembled location.

These things are carefully covered—and in plain fashion—all through our literature. Here is just some of what we have available on prophecy (shown on facing page):

■ *Are These the Last Days?*

■ *America and Britain in Prophecy*

■ *The Mid-East in Bible Prophecy*

■ *Who or What Is the Beast of Revelation?*

■ *Revelation Explained At Last!*

■ *How World Peace Will Come!*

■ *Tomorrow's Wonderful World – An Inside View!*

■ *God's Promised Protection – Place of Safety or Secret Rapture?*

Finally, there is our series on the four horsemen of Revelation 6—*false religion, war, famine and pestilence*.

Peter's Warning

Earlier, we saw "There shall come in the *last days* SCOFFERS, walking after their own *lusts*, and saying, Where is the promise of His Coming?" (II Pet. 3:3-4).



The modern world is filled with scoffers. They do not believe God will intervene—or that this is even necessary! Most believe man is capable at the last minute of “snatching victory from the jaws of defeat,” and will save himself by solving his own problems! They think “everything will turn out all right, somehow!” Though wrong in the short term, this is ultimately *correct*—but by other means!

Scoffing at the thought Christ is coming, people choose to live rotten, sinful lives, following their lusts. But scoffing will not change the truth of God’s prophecies! Men must learn bitter lessons—that they have utterly failed to bring the conditions everyone longs for. Peace, happiness, prosperity and abundance remain elusive despite humanity’s best efforts to find them.

Armies “trying to make the world safe for democracy,” humanitarian efforts, missionaries, “think tanks,” new scientific labor-saving devices, computers, cellphones, better school systems, fundraising efforts to eradicate deadly diseases, etc., will all *fail*—because humanity will not humble itself and seek the God who *does* have solutions—all of them!—to man’s greatest troubles!

But, when it is almost too late, Christ will intervene in power and glory *to save man from himself!*

What About You?

What about you? What will you do to prepare yourself for what lies ahead? Notice: “At that time...there shall be a *time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation...*and at that time Your [God’s] people *shall be delivered...*And many...that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, *SOME TO EVERLASTING LIFE*” (Dan. 12:1-2).

This describes the resurrection of the dead—of the true saints of God, who reign with Christ! Let’s read: “For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout...and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then *we* [the *living* saints in God’s Church—the *true* Church] which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (I Thes. 4:16-17).

New Testament scriptures state plainly that Jesus’ Second Coming will be sudden and unexpected. Christ is repeatedly depicted as coming “like a thief in the night.” Carefully read these verses. Christ returns to an unsuspecting—and unprepared—world: “So likewise *you*, when *you* see these things come to pass, *know you* that the kingdom of God is near at hand... For as a *snare* shall it come on ALL them that dwell on the face of the WHOLE earth. WATCH *you* therefore, and PRAY ALWAYS, that YOU may

be accounted worthy to ESCAPE all these things that shall come to pass, and *to stand before the Son of man*” (Luke 21:31, 35-36).

This can be your future!

You are the “captain of your own ship”—the “master of your own destiny.” It is your choice to reject God’s warning or to yield yourself to Him and ask Him to prepare you for *rulership* in His kingdom!

A formal statement is necessary here. Many write or call our Headquarters to thank us for what they call the “*service*” we are performing. They often add, for boldly or courageously “*educating*” or “*informing*” the public about matters others will not address. Of course, we appreciate such gratitude. But *The Real Truth* magazine, *The World to Come* broadcast and our vast library of free literature are FAR MORE than a mere “*service*” or attempt to “*inform.*”

Just knowing about the last days means nothing. There is a warning attached to this subject. Notice what God recorded in Ezekiel (twice) to one who would be alive at the end of the age: “I have made you a *watchman* unto the house of Israel [the book *America and Britain in Prophecy* explains in detail who is the *house of Israel*]: therefore hear the word at My mouth, and give them WARNING FROM ME” (3:17; 33:7)—meaning, this is *from God* not any human.

Understand. Someone, somewhere—yes, *someone, somewhere!*—had to be raised up to do this. God does not speak audibly from the heavens, but rather through His human servants. But make no mistake. The warning is not *from* the servant, it is *from GOD!*

You have been warned. You now know the last days are here. What will you do? □

INTERNATIONAL

World Reacts to Obama Inauguration



■ **A NEW ERA BEGINS:** President Barack Obama kisses his wife, Michelle, with daughters Sasha and Malia at his side, after being sworn in as the country's 44th President by Chief Justice John Roberts, left, at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. (Jan. 20, 2009).

PHOTO: NANCY STONE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE/MCT

The world watched, through television and the Internet, as 47-year-old Barack Obama was sworn in as the 44th President of the United States, Jan. 20, 2009.

France's President Nicolas Sarkozy, in a letter congratulating the new President Obama, wrote, "With your election, the American people expressed with vigorousness its faith in progress and the future, as well as its wish for an open, new, strong and united America that you embody.

"At the moment when you take up your functions, I wish to address to you, in my own name and that of the French people, my wishes for every success in your mission at the head of the American people."

"I also wish to assure you that France is determined to work hand in hand with America, its friend and ally,

so that we can together overcome the immense challenges which confront our world today."

The *Chicago Tribune* wrote, "One of Obama's first challenges will be to improve relations with the Muslim world, a task that has grown much tougher because of accusations that Obama remained silent while some 1,300 Gazans died during Israel's three-week offensive."

Al Arabiya said of the new presidential administration, "For the Arab World, it looks like that President Barack Obama is determined to change our world that is the world as created by his predecessor George W. Bush. The relationship between the Middle East and America, in the past eight years has been based on mutual suspicion and mutual disrespect..."

"President Obama, in his first ever

interview with any network, including American stalwarts such as *CNN* and *Fox News* was with Arabic language news channel *Al Arabiya*. In it Obama told us that he understands the Muslim world, he has family members who are Muslims, and he had lived in the Muslim world, in Indonesia..."

"Obama's remarks during his inaugural address in which he addressed the Muslim World directly by placing emphasis on promoting a different kind of America, America that wants a relationship of mutual respect and mutual interests. Obama's first ever phone call as a president to a foreign leader was to Mahmoud Abbas the Palestinian Authority president and his first ever interview was to an Arabic network. This shows the intensity and seriousness of how Obama's Middle East policy will look like." □

Will Global Unemployment Rise?



■ **SIGNS OF THE TIMES:** Above, more than 1,200 job seekers meet with potential employers at a job fair, in Concord, Calif., geared toward unemployed construction, real estate and mortgage workers (Dec. 17, 2008); the event was expected to draw just 400 people. Below, shoppers walk past a poster in London, England, aimed at those affected by the credit crunch and informing them of the welfare benefits available to them (Nov. 17, 2008).

PHOTOS: JUSTIN SULLIVAN (ABOVE), OLI SCARFF (BELOW)/GETTY IMAGES

Global unemployment will increase by 50 million worldwide if economic conditions continue to deteriorate, a report by the International Labor Organization revealed.

“By the end of 2008 working poverty, vulnerable employment and unemployment were beginning to rise as the effects of the slowdown spread. If the recession deepens in 2009, as many forecasters expect, the global jobs crisis will worsen sharply,” it stated.

Giants such as Caterpillar, Sprint Nextel, Pfizer, Philips, Texas Instruments, ING and Home Depot are expected to slash thousands of jobs.

“Caterpillar, the world’s largest maker of construction equipment, said it would cut 20,000 jobs as it reported fourth-quarter profits more than 32 percent lower than a year ago and warned earnings would be under pressure in 2009. The news comes a month after the U.S. group

slashed executive salaries by up to half and cut jobs at large plants” (*Financial Times*).

The global economic crisis is affecting both individual lives and the livelihood of corporations.

In a time when newspapers across the United States are suffering from dwindling advertising revenue, *The New York Times* was forced to sell display ad space on its front page. □



TERRORISM & SECURITY

Setbacks for Tehran

Berlin announced it is cutting federal export guarantees for domestic companies doing business with Iranian companies. The decision comes amid criticism from Washington and Jerusalem that, despite sanctions imposed by the United Nations, Germany’s level of trade activity with Iran increased in 2008.

Germany is Iran’s largest trading partner in the European Union. An estimated 1,700 German businesses operate within the aspiring nuclear nation, exporting nearly 3.6 billion euros worth of goods to Iran in the first 11 months of 2008.

Berlin is among six governments “leading diplomatic efforts to encourage Iran to abandon its nuclear program” (*Financial Times*).

On the same day of the Berlin decision, the EU also announced its decision to remove the Iranian resistance group, the Mojahedin Khalq Organization (MKO), from its list of terrorist organizations—further threatening to damage already strained relations between Western nations and Tehran.

Critics fear the move will, in effect, expand MKO activities in Europe.

“The former U.S. administration reaffirmed its designation of the MKO as a foreign terrorist organization...But Iran, which has said that nothing has changed ‘in the terrorist nature’ of the group, can be expected to take some sort of action against the EU ruling” (RFE/RL).

The MKO originated in the 1960s to fight against the U.S.-backed Shah of Iran. It “joined the 1979 Islamic revolution that overthrew him, but later fell out with the new clerical regime and fought with Saddam Hussein during Iraq’s 1980-88 war with Iran” (ibid.). □

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