

JULY 2014

THE

REALTRUTH.ORG

REAL TRUTH™

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

A Window into

AGRICULTURE'S FUTURE

America's Consumerism
Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of... Stuff?

Did Jesus
Teach Socialism?

**Egypt's
Untapped Potential**

Does God Speak Through
"Blood Moons"?

THE
REAL TRUTH™
A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

VOL. XII | NO. 6 | JULY 2014

ARTICLES

REALTRUTH.ORG



■ **EMPTY POOLS:** The swimming pool area stands empty at a high-end hotel beside the Nile River shore near Luxor, Egypt (Oct. 23, 2013).

PHOTO: ED GILES/GETTY IMAGES

Egypt's Untapped Potential

Despite continuing instability, the nation is a dormant superpower. All it needs is a government that can deliver.
Page 9

FRONT COVER: Top, an aerial view of a drought-affected area as colorless as a moonscape around Bakersfield, California, shows the extent of a third dry year on the state (May 27, 2014). Bottom, an aerial view of a lush area of Belarus is a striking contrast to the western U.S. state.

PHOTO: PAULA C. RONDEAU/THE REAL TRUTH (TOP)

PHOTO CREDITS: All photographs courtesy of Thinkstock unless otherwise noted.

Personal from the Editor-in-Chief **A Window into Agriculture's Future** **Page 1**

America's Consumerism
Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of...Stuff?
The nation should consider its many blessings and where they *really* come from.
Page 6

Lost Under City Lights
Masked by manmade light, the vast treasure trove beyond our skies is slipping out of view. But why should you be concerned?
Page 14

Leader Profile: Shinzo Abe – Prime Minister of Japan
The nation's premier appears uniquely poised to take on the host of challenges facing 21st-century Japan.
Page 18

Did Jesus Teach Socialism?
Are Jesus' teachings about love and goodwill toward fellow man proof that He taught socialist principles?
Page 22

Special Analysis: Does God Speak Through "Blood Moons"?
Page 30

World News Desk
Page 32

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

The Real Truth
1000 Ambassador Drive
Wadsworth, OH 44281
realtruth.org

PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
DAVID C. PACK

EXECUTIVE EDITOR
JEFFREY R. AMBROSE

MANAGING EDITOR
EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

SENIOR EDITORS
WILLIAM H. BEHRER
KEVIN D. DENEE
GABRIEL N. LISCHAK
DALE L. SCHURTER

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
DAVID C. PACK

JEFFREY R. AMBROSE
SAMUEL C. BAXTER
WILLIAM H. BEHRER
RYAN L. CASWELL
KEVIN D. DENEE
ROBERT R. FARRELL
GREGORY E. KAIDANNEK
GABRIEL N. LISCHAK
KENNETH M. OREL
JUSTIN T. PALM
JAMES F. PASTOR
DANIEL A. QUIMBY
BRADFORD G. SCHLEIFER
DALE L. SCHURTER
NESTOR A. TORO
JAMES F. TURCK
F. JACO VILJOEN
VIDAL N. WACHUKU
EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
STACEY L. PALM

COPY EDITOR
DENISE C. RITTER

ART/GRAPHICS
JODY E. LYDICK
PAULA C. RONDEAU
EILEEN M. WILLARD

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

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
TIMOTHY C. WILLARD

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

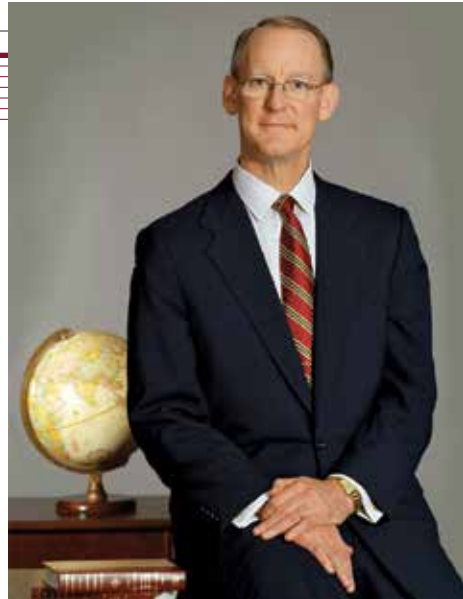
Copyright © 2014, The Restored Church of God. Printed in the USA. All rights reserved.

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

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

PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



A Window into Agriculture's Future

WITH EACH PASSING week, more headlines herald a massive and growing crisis in global agriculture and food production. These examples speak for themselves: “UN Seeks Urgent Funding to Curb Looming Food Crisis in Somalia”—“Advocacy Group Says Agribusinesses Creating ‘Superweed Crisis’”—“Food Shortages May Become Most Critical World Issue by Mid-century”—“Food Prices to Keep Rising as Drought, Demand and Disease Strain Supply”—“Decline of Bumblebees Could Affect Our Global Food Supply”—“California Drought Threatens Food Supply of All Americans.”

Many more could be cited. For most nations, the effects of these trends are only beginning to take shape. But in some, they are already here! It is anticipated that *just* in Somalia, *just* in the next seven months, 200,000 children—*just* in the age group of 5 and under!—will die from severe malnutrition, partly because of famine due to ruined soil and erosion,

and also resulting from manmade food shortages and poor food quality. Meanwhile, China, the world’s most populous nation, reported that nearly a fifth of its arable land has been severely polluted with heavy metals.

The array of other insoluble problems that occupy humanity’s attention pales in comparison to the importance of the global food supply!

In the 1970s, my father decided to open a natural food store. Having seen many business fads come and go, he contrasted the constant demand for this basic human need, saying, “Food is here to stay.” But in the 21st century, those words appear increasingly obsolete!

World leaders are watching with grave concern, anticipating the horrific consequences that could come upon their citizens. Voices of concern from various corners have been raised, and are growing louder.

But one program not only foresaw this crisis, but has for nearly five decades been committed to educating the world about its causes—and demonstrating a better way.

Deep Roots

The Agriculture Education and Research Institute (AERI) operates under the auspices of Ambassador Center, the



■ **RESTORING THE VISION:** Left, the Hall of Administration—which is the headquarters for both *The Real Truth* and its publisher The Restored Church of God—is seen among the campus’s lush gardens and well-manicured rolling hills. Right, President and Pastor General of The Restored Church of God, Mr. David C. Pack, cuts the fence leading to a newly acquired property—58 acres—on which the Church will build its upper campus. PHOTOS: PAULA C. RONDEAU/ (LEFT); STACEY L. PALM/ (RIGHT); THE REAL TRUTH

educational arm of The Restored Church of God, which publishes *The Real Truth*.

Its beginnings can be traced to Ambassador College, a liberal arts institution founded by Herbert W. Armstrong, Pastor General of the Worldwide Church of God. This college had three campuses: Pasadena, California (site of the Church’s Headquarters); Bricket Wood, England; and Big Sandy, Texas. The latter campus, set on 1,600 acres in rural east Texas, is where AERI’s forerunner was centered.

Commissioned by Mr. Armstrong to research biblical principles of agriculture, a team led by Ambassador College faculty member and minister Dale L. Schurter, whom I have known for nearly 40 years, applied what they found in Scripture—with stunning results. Spanning both crops and animal husbandry, the quality and yield of what was produced far surpassed what was being done by farmers using artificial methods—often literally “just across the fence”!

Ambassador’s student newspaper *The Portfolio* recounted the story in 1977: “When Dale Schurter graduated from Big Sandy in 1965, Herbert

W. Armstrong asked him to teach a course in agriculture and submit a proposal for an Ag curriculum. In the spring of 1966 Mr. Schurter headed up the [educational, research, production and extension] program...and continued as Ag Department head until 1975...The four areas of effort during the first seven years were research, with a view to recapturing true values in agriculture, student education, extension services (including some soil testing and fertilizer sales) and production.”

Mr. Armstrong’s vision was for Ambassador College to pioneer the use of agricultural principles found in the Bible, coupled with natural cycles, scientific and practical research, and common sense, to find the most effective and sustainable ways to raise healthy animals and produce quality feed crops and food (such as meat, milk, eggs, cheese, vegetables, fruits and honey). The ultimate purpose was to bring happy, healthy and abundant living to those who implemented these practices.

AC students were presented the opportunity to apply what they learned on the college’s 1,600-acre (and additional rented 2,600-acre)

farm and ranch. Over a five-year period, a 27-course agribusiness major became an important component of the Big Sandy Ambassador College curriculum and in serving the college students, employees and community.

In the decades that followed, the program came to provide food for hundreds of students on the Big Sandy campus, as well as for its sister campus in Pasadena.

Mr. Schurter and colleagues also organized programs and informational workshops designed to educate the public about biblical agriculture techniques and help those who wanted to implement the practices in their gardens or on their farms.

Local, state and federal agriculture officials as well as various celebrities took notice.

In a 1976 letter to Mr. Armstrong, actress Gloria Swanson stated, “We are just back from three unforgettable days at Big Sandy...What you have begun there can truly have the power to reclaim this country and this planet.”

While visiting world leaders, Mr. Armstrong would often invite them to Big Sandy to tour the farm and ranch, and Mr. Schurter would be



■ **PREPARING THE LAND:** Top left, an employee fertilizes a parcel of land with a tractor and attached spreader. Bottom left, rye grass and red clover that were frost seeded, which involves planting seed in late winter when the ground is partially frozen, grow in a field in early spring. Right, a path leads to farmland that will be used by the Agriculture Education and Research Institute (AERI) to demonstrate biblical farming principles. PHOTOS: NICOLE M. QUIMBY/ (TOP AND BOTTOM LEFT); PAULA C. RONDEAU/ (RIGHT); THE REAL TRUTH

their escort. This led to many opportunities for him to travel abroad on behalf of Mr. Armstrong and demonstrate what various dignitaries had seen accomplished on campus. From 1978 to 1982, Mr. Schurter visited 23 countries around the world (many several times) to teach biblical agriculture. To date, he has taught these principles in 40 nations.

Through the Ambassador Foundation of the Worldwide Church of God, a project very special to Mr. Armstrong, Mr. Schurter and others conducted work in Thailand. This was to fulfill a request from King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit to assist them in their efforts to help poor farmers switch from growing opium to health-giving vegetables. Mr. Schurter designed and helped implement a successful soil equilibrium and crop rotation program for the region. Five years later, Mr. Armstrong received a letter from King Bhumibol stating that 90 percent of opium crops had been replaced with vegetables and fruit trees.

Another example of Mr. Schurter's overseas work involved establishing community development efforts in the South American nation of Guyana.

At the time, he was working with then-Prime Minister Hamilton Green, national government officials, educational instructors, and local chiefs to augment the level of sustainable food production in the country. These efforts, the broadest project he has undertaken, yielded a 300 percent citrus increase and an average 45 percent increase in other crops with extensive involvement of the local population, in addition to other nationwide benefits.

These are a few examples of similar work accomplished in many other countries as well.

As new leadership assumed control of the Worldwide Church of God, in the wake of Mr. Armstrong's death in 1986, this program was eventually discontinued—part of a wholesale abandonment of all that had been accomplished under his leadership.

But the story does not end there!

Agriculture Program Restored

In May 2013, The Restored Church of God—the true continuation of Mr. Armstrong's ministry—moved its corporate offices to a new, state-of-the-art Headquarters campus in Wadsworth, Ohio. Later in the same

year, 59 acres of adjacent woods and farmland were acquired to expand the campus, now encompassing upper and lower sections, to 90 acres, making it three-quarters of a mile long.

Well ahead of this expansion, a restored agriculture program was in view. While it will not have the same scale, or acreage, as the Big Sandy operation of the past, it will again truly be “God's farm,” reflecting His standards of beauty, quality and precision.

In addition to AERI operations, this land will also provide room for the Church's annual fall convention, an expanded summer youth camp, additional much-needed parking space for events, a source of natural resources such as lumber, athletic facilities for the Church, youth camp and Ambassador Center, and more.

As of this writing, initial work such as “frost seeding,” soil sampling, and mineral balancing have prepared the land for crops. A road system serving the entire upper campus has been mapped out. A number of AERI-related buildings are in the planning phases, some in the advanced stages, beginning with a multi-use barn. Much necessary equipment has been gener-



■ **PIONEERING AGRICULTURE PROGRAM:** Upper left, an Ambassador College student in Big Sandy, Texas, cuts hay. Upper middle, the peanut plant on the right was grown using biblical agriculture methods and is much fuller than the one on the left that used conventional growing techniques. Bottom left, an aerial view of the Big Sandy farm shows research plots used to test and refine growing methods. Upper right, Dale Schurter is pictured during a visit to the nation of Guyana, where he worked with government leaders and local officials to increase food production. Bottom right, the health of the registered Brown Swiss cattle at Big Sandy shows the effectiveness of the school's agriculture program.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF DALE L. SCHURTER

ously donated, allowing for advancement to the program's next phases.

This unique program will further distinguish The Restored Church of God from all other groups, particularly the many offshoots ("splinters") of the Worldwide Church of God. It will become an additional benefit and opportunity for the many who will yet become members of the Church in the years ahead. And it will also benefit the surrounding community, since it will impart proven principles that can be employed in farms and individual backyards.

We expect that, as in the past, any number of world leaders—including presidents and prime ministers as well as ministers of agriculture and others—may visit our campus, and that others will receive representatives of AERI and the Church in their own nations.

Difficult Times Ahead

Most regions of the planet have seen periods of great difficulty in food production. One recent example was America's Dust Bowl catastrophe during the 1930s. But Bible prophecy makes clear that a far worse time is coming, with famine—and the accompanying scourge of disease—to affect many peoples, including the most powerful, prosperous "have" nations.

For those who are paying attention, the early signs of this terrible time are here. Mr. Schurter's book *Mounting Worldwide Crisis in Agriculture* trumpets a truly dire warning of the severe damage that man has inflicted on Earth's soil—the ultimate source of all food. This absolutely fascinating and thoroughly researched and documented volume introduces and

carefully explains the devastating cumulative worldwide effects of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, including insecticides, herbicides and fungicides. It exposes the truth behind Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), monoculture farming, and other manmade techniques, as well as reveals the sobering implications now confronting all nations. But the book also brings to light the wonderful good news of how our planet's ecosystem can and will be renewed by God—not men.

Filled with many, many shocking facts, *Mounting Worldwide Crisis in Agriculture* conclusively PROVES that the Revelation 6 Black Horse of famine and Pale Horse of pestilence are BOTH galloping full-speed toward civilization. In fact, the book's power will make you hear their pounding "hooves" just over the



■ **AERI'S FUTURE:** Upper left, a rendering of the future home of the Agriculture Education and Research Institute (AERI) depicts a barn that will hold horses, cattle and goats. Upper right, an illustration shows a pole barn that will be constructed to store farming and landscaping equipment. Bottom, this field will be the site of the main hub of operations for the AERI.

PHOTOS: BAXTER N. CRUTTENDEN/AERI (TOP LEFT AND RIGHT); NICOLE M. QUIMBY/THE REAL TRUTH (BOTTOM)

horizon. Read it today free of charge at rcg.org/mwcia.

Worldwide Restoration Coming!

Mr. Armstrong envisioned Ambassador College's agriculture program as a forerunner of the worldwide restoration of true biblical husbandry that will occur during the Millennium, a thousand-year period of peace, prosperity and re-education to be ushered in by Jesus Christ at His Return. At a ministerial conference in 1967, he stated, "I think we [those who qualify to rule with Christ—Revelation 5:10] are going to get the whole world back into agriculture and farming."

Many passages describe this wonderful time. Among them is one of the most incredible prophecies in the entire Bible: "Then shall the lame man leap...and the...dumb sing: for

in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes" (Isa. 35:6-7).

Verses 1-2 add more to what this will mean for all the deserts of the world: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God."

Ezekiel 34 states, "...I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing. And the tree of the field shall

yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the LORD" (vs. 26-27).

This will all be accomplished through the power of God, *and* as a result of mankind learning God's ways in *all* areas—including agriculture: "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9).

Real Truth readers can catch that vision, and begin to learn and apply "the knowledge of the LORD" now!

Continue to watch the pages of this magazine, as well as our websites (realtruth.org and rcg.org), for updates on the progress and events of the Agriculture Education and Research Institute—and for ways that you can begin to practice, as the AERI motto states, "Tomorrow's Husbandry Today." □

America's **CONSUMERISM**

Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of...Stuff?



The nation should consider its many blessings and where they *really* come from.

BY RYAN L. CASWELL

JOHAN ADAMS, second president of the United States, thought July 4 should be a “great anniversary festival” to be “solemnized with pomp and parade...from this time forward forever more.”

He penned these words in a letter to his wife soon after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, which ushered in the eight-year Revolutionary War that pitted Britain against the American colonies.

For everyone alive at that time, July 4 was the start of the nation, but they all knew they had to risk life and limb to establish America as a “land of opportunity.” Like no other generation, they would have understood the historic importance of that day and “solemnized” it each year with both dignity and gravity.

Yet, through the years, what Adams and others pictured as a day of reflection for the country has turned into something very different.

If pressed, most of the roughly 330 million Americans would admit that July 4 is just another day off work or time for a backyard barbecue. The grocery store bills tell the story as to what the central focus is each summer. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that over the course of the celebration, Americans spend approximately \$193 million just on hamburger patties. They also devour 150 million hot dogs, purchase 700 million pounds of chicken, and drink 68.3 million cases of beer. In addition, they blast off 25 million pounds of fireworks—valued at \$600 million!

Marketers commercialize the event through advertising patriotic red, white and blue T-shirts, pins, fireworks and mini flags—all designed to ignite American pride and promote consumer optimism. A *Forbes Magazine* study

found that total July 4 spending exceeds \$3 billion each year. The National Retail Federation found that 62 percent of Americans attend a barbecue that day, with the average cost of one being \$54.62. These get-togethers account for almost two-thirds of the \$3 billion spent annually for this day.

What once started as a modest and solemn celebration recognizing new freedoms and the pursuit of a better life has been transformed into a massive multibillion-dollar festival, characterized by excess, overeating and drunkenness.

By and large, we as a nation have almost entirely forgotten the incredible blessing it is to live in the United States. Those who may recognize it still struggle to understand what it was like to endure winter at Valley Forge with General George Washington, hold down an understaffed farm while your husband is away like Abigail Adams, or watch enemy soldiers set fire to houses in your hometown one by one.

Most of us did not put everything on the line to gain access to the “American Dream”—the ability to enrich one’s life through education and enjoy liberties such as freedom of religion, self-governance and the pursuit of happiness.

As with July 4, the American dream has also changed. “Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” has become “life, liberty and the pursuit of *stuff*.” The effects of this shift are evident in our overwhelmingly consumerist culture—and it is dragging down the nation. Clearly, material blessings poured out on the United States are disappearing and we are struggling to maintain the standard of living enjoyed for decades.

Why? Because we have lost sight of what made America great in the first place.

Material Wealth

James Truslow Adams, an accomplished historian born in 1878, is credited with coining the term, “the American dream.” At its heart, it held true to Jefferson’s vision of the “pursuit of happiness.”

In *The Epic of America*, Adams spoke of this dream: “[the] American Dream of a better, richer and happier life for all of our citizens of every rank...that dream or hope has been present from the start. Ever since we became an independent nation, each generation has seen an uprising of the ordinary Americans to save that dream from the forces which appeared to be overwhelming and dispelling it...”

These words, written during the Great Depression, quickly spread through a desperate and financially strapped nation.

In the 1930s, when Adams wrote these words, he was acutely aware that a wave of materialism was overtaking the values that he believed had made the nation great. His earliest warning against a materialistic “American dream” stated that our freedoms “can never be wrought into a reality...by *keeping up with the Joneses*...We cannot become a great democracy by giving ourselves up as individuals to selfishness, physical comfort and cheap amusements” (emphasis added).

Even during the Great Depression, Adams was distraught that advertising campaigns encouraged Americans to spend what little they had on consumer goods.

This endless cycle of “earning and spending” would come to saturate the nation in the coming decades.

Spending Habits

CNN founder Ted Turner once bluntly stated, “Life is a game. Money is how we keep score.” In the 21st century, this is clear. Many in American society value money and possessions as the sum total of their entire lives. Success is determined by the quantity or quality of possessions. This consumer mindset transforms the outlook, social rela-

tionships, and self-image of typical citizens.

An overview of U.S. spending habits reveals a drastically skewed perception of what is important in life.

Homeownership, which was once a staple of the American dream, has become a nightmare for many families. As of 2008, 20 percent of all U.S. homeowners owe more on their home than its current value, according to author James A. Roberts in his book *Shiny Objects: Why We Spend Money We Don't Have in Search of Happiness We Can't Buy*.

While the economy is somewhat to blame, it appears that we have generally brought this on ourselves. In some cases, people bought “more house” than they needed or could afford in the long run.

In the 1950s, the average home size was 1,200 square feet, according to an article published in the February 2008 *CPA Journal*. By 2008, it was 2,500 square feet. This massive increase in square footage seems unnecessary given that family size has dramatically decreased, with many having fewer children and no longer having extended family members live with them.

Americans are also purchasing more and in greater amounts, with many spending beyond their means to accommodate these purchases. Total U.S. consumer debt, according to *creditcards.com*, increased 22 percent over an eight-year period reaching \$2.56 trillion in 2008. In 2010, 26 percent of Americans reported they were not able to pay all their bills on time.

As a nation, Americans spend far more on items using credit cards than anywhere else in the world. For example, *The Wall Street Journal* interviewed McDonald's executives who reported that after implementing widespread acceptance of credit cards in their restaurants (instead of cash), the average purchase increased from \$4.50 to \$7.00—almost double per customer! Several other industries note that consumer spending increases a staggering 60 to 100 percent per transaction when credit cards are used.

Such conveniences allow individuals to live beyond their means and

drive themselves further into debt. Without cash to pay for items, large and small, consumer debt continues to rise.

Also according to *creditcards.com*, consumer credit card debt was roughly \$10,679 per household. And of the 181 million credit card holders, 15 percent of them regularly make late payments. One in six of them *make no attempt at all* to pay the balance!

Many expenditures are unnecessary—others are completely absurd. In America, nearly \$10 billion was spent just on veterinary services for pets, reported *Businessweek*. This not only includes regular checkups, but also cosmetic procedures such as nose jobs, canine braces, liposuction and breast reductions—all for pets! According to *The Wall Street Journal*, another \$10 billion was spent on over-the-counter drugs for animals, in many cases, to help cure depression and anxiety in dogs. There is nothing wrong with taking care of pets, but how much is too much?

Fueling such spending is an avalanche of advertisements designed to convince us that the newest product will help us find happiness and fill a hole in our lives—often one we did not realize was there.

The U.S. Census Bureau recorded that on average both teenagers and adults spent a staggering 3,518 hours in 2012 watching TV, listening to a musical device, or surfing the Internet. During that time, the viewer is exposed to tens of thousands of advertisements. Television viewing alone breaks down to 1,820 hours per year, which equates to over two months of nonstop watching. For comparison, the average schoolchild attends classes for 900 hours a year—only *half* the amount of time spent watching TV! These children view 20,000 30-second commercials in a single year, which amounts to over 166 hours.

Advertisements fuel consumer culture, saturating our minds, and titillating our senses, encouraging us to continue buying the latest product.

Often called the “treadmill of consumption,” a consumer must increas-

ingly adapt to the “rush” from purchasing items and striving to reach a higher standard of living. Then, as an individual continues to buy new things, they more quickly adapt to this level of “purchasing and achievement.” They then need to buy more and in greater amounts to get the same “rush” from their spending. This is not unlike a drug addict who needs more of a particular drug to get the same “high” after becoming hooked.

In consumer cultures, this treadmill accelerates as individuals make faster purchases. Ultimately, they never reach the “plateau of happiness” promised by advertisers. They are never satisfied with what they buy, no matter how much or often.

This seemingly unending cycle continues until a person runs out of money and/or finds himself in staggering debt. These both obviously lead to problems that not only affect him, but also those around him.

Widespread Impact

Debt is just one problem that stems from a powerful consumer culture. Tragic effects on families are another. With many couples struggling to make ends meet and satisfy an insatiable desire to accumulate, both spouses often will take jobs. While this brings more income, both spouses spending the majority of time at work and not as much time together strains the relationship. Physical absence from the home leaves marriages weakened and couples ill-equipped to address issues that arise.

A study by researchers Paul Amato and Stacy Rogers cited in *Shiny Objects* found that working long hours and materialistic pursuits damage the long-term stability of a marriage. In 1980, they selected a sample of 2,033 married couples under age 55 and investigated whether there were problems in their marriages. Then they interviewed the couples to identify the nature of any marital problems. Returning 10 years

Please see AMERICA page 27

A MODERN DESCRIPTION of Egypt's tourist attractions reads like a verse out of the French-Revolution-themed musical based on Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*: "Empty chairs at empty tables where my friends will meet no more."

Only this time, the words could be changed to reflect what is currently occurring at its cultural icons: "Empty sphinxes and empty pyramids where visitors go no more."

Since the 2011 revolution that ousted long-time leader Hosni Mubarak, the 87-million-strong nation has been mired in political upheaval, resulting in a swift drop in tourism. Markets are eerily vacant, souvenirs sit unbought. Only a handful of patrons fill restaurants that once buzzed with a myriad of languages, and millennia-old attractions experience just a trickle of people daily.

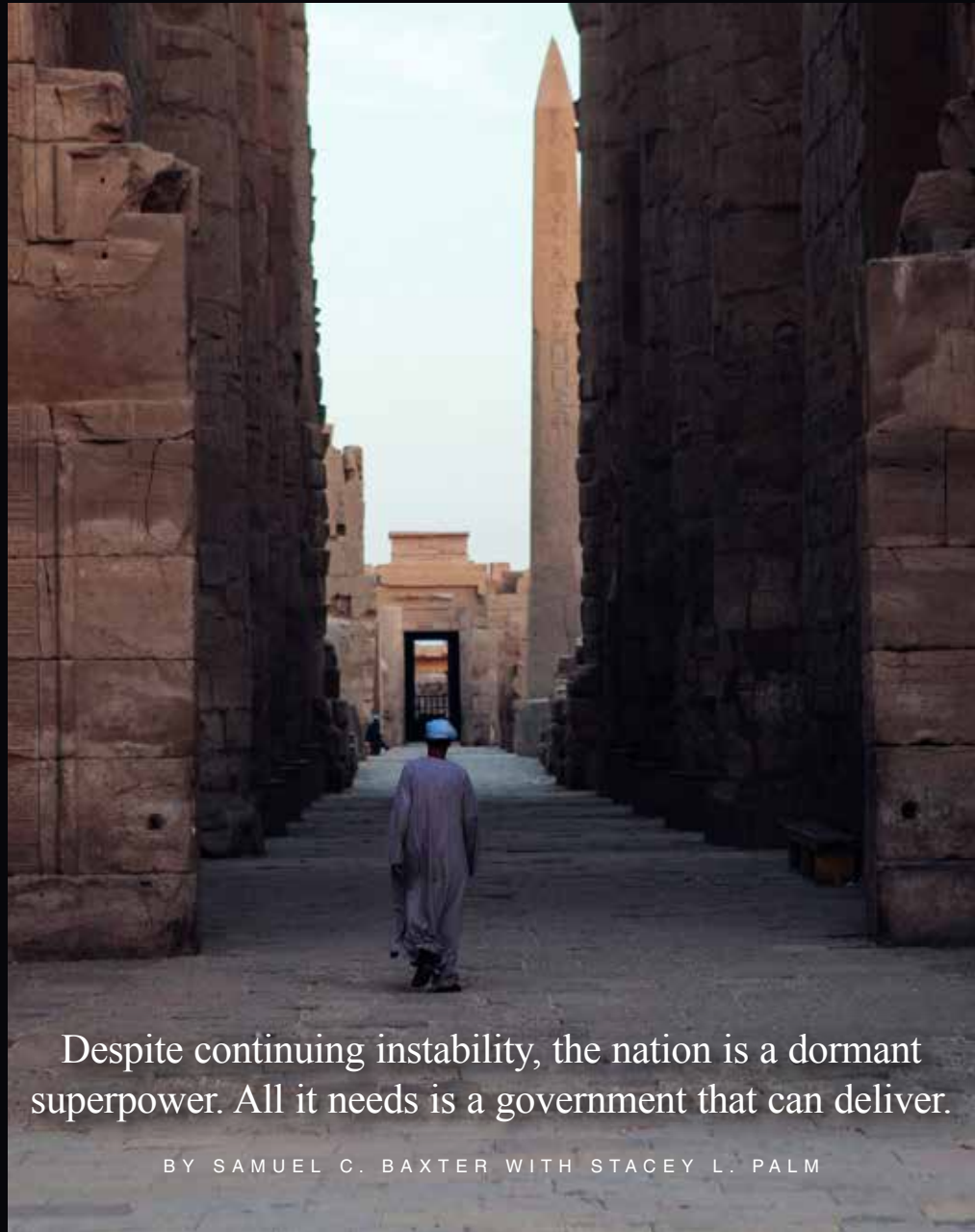
"In 2010, 14.7 million visitors came to Egypt generating \$12.5 billion dollars in revenue," *CNN* reported. "Last year [2013], 9.5 million visitors came to Egypt generating \$5.8 billion dollars in revenue—a three year drop of more than 5 million visitors and roughly \$6 billion dollars."

The rollercoaster ride of governmental instability has been a continuing scourge as the "tourism sector represents 11.3% of Egypt's GDP and is the largest source of income for the economy after remittances from Egyptians abroad," *Gulf News* stated.

As of April 2014, the bad news has continued: "The number of tourists who visited Egypt in April was down by 21 per cent compared to the same month a year earlier, the tourism ministry said in a statement cited by state-run Al-Ahram website... The ministry said only 859,889 tourists visited Egypt in April, adding more than 1.11 million tourists visited the country in April 2013" (*The Gulf Today*).

Tourist warnings from more than 15 nations regarding political unrest as well as deadly clashes between demon-

EGYPT'S Untapped Potential



Despite continuing instability, the nation is a dormant superpower. All it needs is a government that can deliver.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER WITH STACEY L. PALM

■ **EMPTY MONUMENTS:** An Egyptian man walks through an empty temple in Karnak (Oct. 22, 2013). The dip in tourist numbers is contributing directly to a rise in unemployment in the southern Egyptian city.

PHOTO: ED GILES/GETTY IMAGES

strators and security forces have pushed away visitors. Eyewitness accounts of tank-lined streets and violence against Westerners have not helped either.

“The loss of tourism has taken a disastrous toll on the economy, starving the country of income and badly needed foreign currency,” *Telegraph* reported. “Now many people in Egypt talk not just about short-term pain but also long-term damage as workers forsake years of training and experience to hunt for new jobs outside the industry and students abandon what had been the country’s most promising career track.”

The decrease in tourism demonstrates just one aspect of Egypt’s struggle to recapture its “Mother of the World” identity.

Once the breadbasket of the Mediterranean, due to its coveted vast wheat fields, the nation was considered a center of culture, architecture, history, commerce and education. It was a crucial part of the spice trade route from India and housed the largest

library in the ancient world in its second-largest city, Alexandria. Its people were known for their business savvy and wisdom, even helping to avert disaster in surrounding countries by providing for them in times of drought.

Over the decades, Egypt has also been a crucial partner in maintaining Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations and regional stability. No temporary peace has been achieved in the region without its participation. The nation has the most Westernized, technologically advanced, and sophisticated military in the region—rivaled only by Israel—and the largest and strongest force on the African continent and in the entire Middle East, including Iran.

Egypt’s unique structures also demonstrate its rich cultural past. For example, the 450-foot Great Pyramid of Giza, the oldest and largest of the three pyramids in its capital of Cairo, took an estimated 10 to 20 years to build. Engineers still remain baffled as to how workers could achieve such precise measurements in construction. Some stones weighed as much as 80 tons and were carried distances of up to 500 miles by approximately 14,000 to 300,000 workers.

These pyramids, museums and sphinxes stand as a testament to the power Egypt once held. Yet many of these same cultural icons now sit vacant, unable to provide their people a source of income—all because the country cannot find internal peace and stability.

Why can Egypt not solve its own troubles and return to international prominence?

Why can Egypt not solve its own troubles and return to international prominence?

National Challenges

Within the last three years, Egyptians have developed a reputation for revolution.

“The government has struggled to meet the demands of Egypt’s population through economic reform and massive investment in communications and physical infrastructure,” *CIA World Factbook* stated. “Inspired by the 2010 Tunisian revolution, Egyptian opposition groups led demonstrations and labor strikes countrywide, culminating in President Hosni Mubarak’s ouster. Egypt’s military assumed national leadership until a new parliament was in place in early 2012; later that same year, Mohammed Morsi won the presidential election. Following often violent protests throughout the spring of 2013 against Morsi’s government and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), and massive anti-government demonstrations, the Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF) intervened and removed Morsi from power in mid-July 2013 and replaced him with interim president Adly Mansour. In mid-January 2014, voters approved a new constitution by referendum.”

The new constitution paved the way for the May 2014 election of General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who led the overthrow of Mr. Morsi (also spelled Mursi). Mr. Sisi won a landslide victory against opponent Hamdeen Sabahi, receiving more than 95 percent of the vote—23.9 million votes—in an election that saw 47 percent of the approximately 54 million eligible Egyptians cast a ballot over a period of three days.

Because of his military backing, Mr. Sisi is widely considered capable of providing political and economic stability, according to *The Independent*: “The former army chief also has the support of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, which see Mursi’s Muslim Brotherhood as an existential threat. Gulf Arab states pumped billions of dollars into Egypt to keep the economy afloat.”

Many analysts claim that the numbers, which were lower than expected by Mr. Sisi’s team, demonstrate that Egypt is becoming weary of the democratic process and is looking for a leader to grab the reins of power.



■ **OPPOSITION RALLY:** Supporters of Egyptian leftist presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabahi attend a campaign meeting at his headquarters in Mahala, north of Cairo, in the Delta region of Egypt (May 5, 2014).

PHOTO: MOHAMED EL-SHAHED/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

“Nearly a year of tumult and violence has drained Egyptians of their optimism and battered the images of key players in the post-Mubarak era,” Pew Research Center reported before the elections. “...72% of Egyptians are dissatisfied with their country’s direction, and although most still want democratic rights and institutions, confidence in democracy is slipping. In a shift from previous years, Egyptians are now more likely to say that having a stable government (54%) is more important than having a democratic one (44%).”

Even if a leader can provide stability for Egypt, however, it alone would not eradicate the challenges facing the nation. And there are many...

Rising food prices: “After the 2011 revolution, poverty has been slowly rising in Egypt, while worries about food supplies have increased,” *CNN* reported. “According to the U.N. World Food Programme, 17% of the country faced a shortage of food in 2011, compared with 14% in 2009. With the economy barely improving, poverty remains a pressing concern for millions.”

Crime: “According to research by the Wilson Center, in 2010, there were about 200 reported incidents of armed robbery in Egypt; by 2012, that number had risen to 2,807 reported incidents” (ibid.).

Unemployment: “High levels of youth unemployment...represent another serious challenge for the new president,” Carnegie’s Endowment for International Peace’s magazine *Sada* stated. “General unemployment in Egypt currently stands at 13.4 percent; nearly 70 percent of the unemployed are between 15 and 29 years, and over 80 percent are educated. Each year, over seven hundred thousand young Egyptians enter the job market for the first time, thus adding to the severity of the problem. With an already bloated government sector that no longer guarantees automatic employment for college graduates (a state policy that was in place from the 1960s to 1990s) and a non-dynamic private sector that increasingly operates under a highly

problematic business environment, the only option left for most Egyptian youth seeking employment is in the informal sector, where jobs are largely characterized by low pay and low quality, with no work benefits and no prospects for career growth.”

Government subsidies: “One of Sisi’s biggest tests will be the politically-sensitive issue of energy subsidies which drain billions of dollars from the state budget every year,” *The Independent* reported. “Businessmen have urged Sisi to raise energy prices even though that may trigger protests, or risk sinking the economy.”

An article in the journal *Topics in Middle Eastern and African Economies* revealed: “The Egyptian government spends more than \$15 billion a year on energy subsidies, and can’t cut any percentage of this spending, otherwise it may face harsh public opposition. The temporary supply shortages that followed the upheaval coupled with rising international prices of food and fuel have been adding to the pressure on the domestic price level since early 2011.”

Misused Resources

Such widespread problems cloud the fact that Egypt has been a nearly continuous regional powerhouse throughout history. As far as sheer numbers go, the nation today should *still* be a leading player in the Middle East—and even the entire world. Nearly every major indicator makes this clear.

First look at population. There are 86.9 million Egyptians, which places it 16th in the world. It has a commanding lead over all other Middle Eastern nations. Cairo is the largest Arab city and second largest in Africa.

Then there is the nation’s economy, with a

GDP of \$551 billion. For the region, it is second only to Saudi Arabia’s \$927.8 billion. Note that Egypt is in the number two slot despite not having huge oil reserves.

There is also geography. The nation’s strategic position makes it a crossroads for Europe, Africa and Asia. Its control over the Suez Canal, which connects the Mediterranean and Red seas, makes it a crucial part of commerce and travel. Annual revenues from tolls exceed \$5 billion.

Yet all of these positive factors have been largely negated due to decades of governmental mismanagement. At every turn, Egypt is a land of unrealized opportunities.

John Brian Shannon, who is on the Editorial Board for the *Arabian Gazette*, wrote on his news blog: “If ever a country had the gift of being placed in the best geographical position on the world map, it is Egypt.”

“There they are, with the Mediterranean to the north, the Suez Canal and the Red Sea to the north and



■ **FRONT-RUNNER:** Egyptian supporters of Egypt’s former army chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi hold his portraits as they watch him on a screen from the street in downtown Cairo (May 5, 2014).

PHOTO: KHALED DESOUKI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

east, and all of Africa to the south and west of them. It is literally the cross-roads between Asia, Europe and Africa.

“Not to mention Egypt’s priceless Nile River and the still largely untapped resources such as its hydro-electric power opportunities, the fertile agricultural land of its Nile Valley, and the country’s unimaginable solar and wind power potential.

“Egypt has somewhat more than 84 million people to help bring all those opportunities to fruition, who live on only 3 percent of the total land area of the country, which is the fertile Nile Valley.

“Some 96 percent of the country is desert with nothing in sight except the blasting Sun and sand dunes. One tiny corner of Egypt covered with solar photovoltaic panels (or thermal solar power) could power all of Europe!

“Some of that unused land could be used for wind farms, as there is plenty of untapped potential there too.”

In summary, Mr. Shannon stated, “Egypt should be the richest nation (per capita) on the planet.”

But it is not. Another reason for this is the underexploited area of trade. Right now, the nation’s main export partners are its neighbors or close allies. These include Italy, India, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Libya.

Experts believe that if Egypt wants to fuel economic growth, it must do so by expanding its gaze. *Daily News Egypt* reported on the 2014 Export Diversification Seminar in Cairo, which focused on the Middle East and North Africa region. The paper quoted Caroline Freund of the Peterson Institute of International Economics: “The region is exporting at [a] third of its potential.”

Right now, trade brings in \$24.81 billion per year. If this was expanded by two-thirds, it would be \$74.43 billion!

An overall theme of the seminar was that Egypt and its neighbors must diversify products and export destinations. This move, Ms. Freund stated, would also increase job opportunities in the nation.

In addition, a Gallup poll revealed that, in 2010, 71 percent of Egyptians age 15-29 felt the nation’s leadership was not harnessing their potential. Understandably, this segment of the population was key in ousting Mr. Mubarak the following year. Analysts feel that, for the nation to move forward, it must engage this demographic.

The employment market has continued to worsen since the revolution. A July 2013 Silatech/Gallup report showed that the number of young

Egyptians who feel they have access to good jobs has continued to dwindle. In 2010, 13 percent said they were satisfied, then 10 percent in 2011, and 8 percent in 2012.

For Egyptians, all this wasted potential is a blow to the national pride of a people that have enjoyed sustained, incredible prominence throughout much of history.

Past Prestige

As the “Mother of the World,” Egypt was the globe’s first great empire. The Nile River gave it the resources to amass incredible wealth, military might, knowledge and technological innovation. Its historical importance becomes even more evident by examining its presence in the Bible. The nation features heavily in the books of Genesis and Exodus. Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob sought refuge there during times of famine. It provided a training ground for two of Israel’s most famous leaders: Moses and Joseph. Jesus Christ went there as a baby to escape Herod’s order to slay all infant boys. The list could go on...

Even the number of times Egypt is mentioned in the Scriptures bolsters this point. The terms “Egypt,” “Egyptian” and “Egyptians” are found 732 times in the *King James Version*. By comparison, variations of the word “Babylon” can be found 284 times, “Philistine” 284 times, “Ethiopia” 20 times, and “Libya” three times.

Throughout the Bible, Egypt is continuously shown to be a land of unsurpassed bounty. In Genesis 13:10, its lush landscape was compared to the Garden of Eden.

The presence of slaves is another indicator of military might and economic power. The fact that the Pharaohs had the time and ability to dream up building projects like the pyramids and sphinx—let alone complete them—is another proof of the region’s vast wealth.

The Bible also traces Egypt’s prominence throughout history. Daniel 11

Please see **EGYPT** page 26



■ **SLOW BUSINESS:** Shopkeepers await customers in Luxor, Egypt, which has been hit hard by the drop in tourism (Oct. 23, 2013).

PHOTO: ED GILES/GETTY IMAGES

Seven Laws that Guarantee

SUCCESS!



1

Set Proper Goals

Circumstances generally dictate the course of people's lives. To be a success, you must set goals—with the *right* goal being all-important.



2

Get the Right Education

People do not instinctively know how to function in life. Right education involves understanding how to *live*, not just how to earn a living.



3

Maintain Good Health

Poor health can rob a person of true success. If you lack energy and are sick, you will never accomplish as much as you would like.



4

Develop Drive

In order to move toward success, you must have drive—the ability to push oneself to achieve. This is not natural and must be developed.



5

Practice Resourcefulness

Things can and will go wrong. One must be able to maneuver around and overcome obstacles that are sure to appear along the path to true success.



6

Apply Perseverance

Achieving lasting success requires stick-to-it-iveness—the ability to never give up because of unforeseen circumstances.



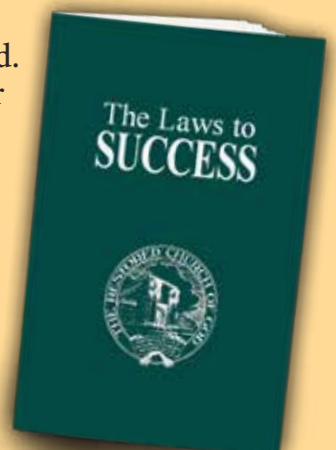
7

The Final Law—the Hidden Key to Success

The all-important seventh law is one few really understand. Learn how this law will give purpose and meaning to your life by reading *The Laws to Success*.

*Begin changing
your life today!*

Order your free copy at rcg.org/tlts.





Lost Under CITY LIGHTS

Masked by manmade light, the vast treasure trove beyond our skies is slipping out of view. But why should you be concerned?

BY JEFFREY R. AMBROSE

AS I LOOK UP from the front yard of an average suburban U.S. home at about 10:30 p.m. on an overcast night, the cloudy sky radiates an odd shade of pink.

Trucks roar by on an interstate highway a tenth of a mile due north, with an exit ramp visible just to the east.

Sprouting up around this freeway/state route intersection are the typical landmarks of an American Midwest interstate exit: several fast-food restaurants, a gas station/convenience store, a strip mall anchored by a grocery store, a big-box retailer and a large home supply center, three banks, a donut shop, two auto parts

stores, a paint outlet, a few motels, and an office building.

The lighted signs, parking lots, and interiors of these businesses, particularly the blazingly bright bulbs that flood the gas station's array of fuel pumps, seem to bounce their electric rays off the cloud cover to create the odd, hazy glow.

From horizon to horizon, the light is more reminiscent of a cheap night-light than the starry tapestry traditionally called to mind by the phrase "night sky."

For contrast, I reflect on a trip to northern New Hampshire with my wife some years ago. Taking a break from driving just south of the White Mountains, we stepped out of the car to marvel at countless brilliant points

of light, spread across a midnight-blue backdrop like diamonds on a velvet blanket, illuminating a dense, evergreen-dominated forest.

This suburban landscape, bathed in artificial light, seems almost like a different planet.

A *Men's Journal* article documented this phenomenon nationwide: "Across the country, as cities sprawl into suburbs and suburbs metastasize into exurbs, with the amount of artificial lighting exploding alongside every new McMansion, strip mall, and superhighway, the night sky, in its purest form, is increasingly becoming an endangered species. If you live in a decent-size metropolitan area, chances are you rarely glimpse any but a handful of the brightest stars and

planets. A clear view of the solar system—and that awesome, unmooring, sublime, occasionally terrifying feeling that comes over us when we bear witness to the vastness of the universe and recognize our infinitesimal place in it—had been a routine nocturnal experience for the bulk of human history. Now it's become rarefied and, for some, unimaginable.”

A freeway exit compared to the North Woods is a poignant illustration of the natural versus the manmade, with one setting far more inspiring than the other. But are pure beauty and aesthetics the end of the story?

Another Form of Pollution

The average 21st-century man or woman spends life taking the convenience of artificial light—present in many forms in virtually any setting—for granted. Only when a power outage abruptly plunges us into darkness might we consider that most generations never saw a single light bulb.

Of course, being able to “create daytime” at all hours can increase productivity, improve safety, and bring other benefits. But there are downsides.

A *National Geographic* article stated: “[Artificial light’s] benefits come with consequences—called light pollution—whose effects scientists are only now beginning to study. Light pollution is largely the result of bad lighting design, which allows artificial light to shine outward and upward into the sky, where it’s not wanted, instead of focusing it downward, where it is. Ill-designed lighting washes out the darkness of night and radically alters the light levels—and light rhythms—to which many forms of life, including ourselves, have adapted. Wherever human light spills into the natural world, some aspect of life—migration, reproduction, feeding—is affected.”

As with many repercussions of modern technology, light pollution is an unforeseen byproduct. Modern lighting patterns and trends have brought unintended costs. *Men’s Journal* continued: “Our indiscriminate overuse of outdoor lighting is the main cause

of light pollution. We light our driveways, our porches, our parking lots, our billboards and storefronts, our streets and highways, our parks and public spaces—at times for the purpose of commerce, but often because, on a gut level, it just feels safer to have bright lights around at night. But much of our outdoor lighting is poorly designed, blasting light into the sky rather than onto the sidewalk or city street we’re actually meaning to illuminate.”

“In certain obvious, unfortunate ways, light pollution has simply evolved alongside our lighting technology. As Paul Bogard points out in the new book *The End of Night*, a single 75-watt incandescent bulb burns 100 times brighter than a candle. Satellite images of North America at night, with various intensities of light represented by glowing yellows and oranges, are startling, with just about everything east of the Mississippi looking like a graphic representation of a toxic spill. Sky glow has transformed the color of night, for many of us, into perpetually dizzying gradations of pink and blue. A 2001 study co-authored by scientists from Italy and the U.S. found that for 80 percent of the U.S. population and two-thirds of the European Union population, night-sky brightness equaled full-moon conditions all month long.”

Losses and Negative Effects

In most developed nations, the view from the ground is very different from what our ancestors saw. Constellations—planets—meteor showers—shooting stars—the faint blur of the Andromeda Galaxy, which is most easily discerned using peripheral vision—all are now obscured.

The *National Geographic* article put this loss in perspective: “In most cities the sky looks as though it has been emptied of stars, leaving behind a vacant haze that mirrors our fear of the dark and resembles the urban glow of dystopian science fiction. We’ve grown so used to this pervasive orange haze that the original glory of an unlit night—dark enough for the planet Venus to throw shadows on Earth—is wholly beyond our experience, beyond memory almost. And yet

above the city’s pale ceiling lies the rest of the universe, utterly undiminished by the light we waste—a bright shoal of stars and planets and galaxies, shining in seemingly infinite darkness.”

An anecdote from Southern California paints a startling picture: “So foreign are the real night skies to Los Angeles that in 1994, after the Northridge earthquake jostled Angelenos awake at 4:31 a.m., the observatory received many calls asking about ‘the strange sky they had seen after the earthquake.’

“‘We finally realized what we were dealing with,’ [Griffith Observatory director Ed] Krupp said. ‘The quake had knocked out most of the power, and people ran outside and they saw the stars. The stars were in fact so unfamiliar; they called us wondering what happened’” (*Los Angeles Times*).

These urbanites were seeing the Milky Way—the galaxy in which they live—for the first time!

But light pollution’s effects are more than just emotional, psychological or philosophical. There are tangible, measurable physical repercussions as well. *National Geographic* continued: “Light is a powerful biological force, and on many species it acts as a magnet... The effect is so powerful that scientists speak of songbirds and seabirds being ‘captured’ by searchlights on land or by the light from gas flares on marine oil platforms, circling and circling in the thousands until they drop. Migrating at night, birds are apt to collide with brightly lit tall buildings; immature birds on their first journey suffer disproportionately.”

But does this modern problem affect only birds and other lesser species? What about *you*?

Human beings *do* respond to light! “For the past century or so, we’ve been performing an open-ended experiment on ourselves, extending the day, shortening the night, and short-circuiting the human body’s sensitive response to light. The consequences of our bright new world are more readily perceptible in less adaptable creatures living in the peripheral glow of our prosperity. But for humans, too, light pollution may take a biological toll. At least one new



study has suggested a direct correlation between higher rates of breast cancer in women and the nighttime brightness of their neighborhoods” (ibid.).

Another form of light pollution makes its way indoors: the ever-present glow of electronic screens—computers, tablets, phones, televisions and the like. These can have effects on the human brain even after they have been switched off.

Studies have documented “the effects of LED backlit screens and their emission of a certain blue-light wavelength on melatonin levels, an essential hormone that makes you drowsy and kicks in your sleep cycle. Melatonin is released naturally at the onset of darkness, preparing your body for rest, and then continuously throughout the night as part of your natural circadian rhythm—your body’s daily biological clock. However, melatonin can be partially curbed by exposure to light, and the abnormally bright glow of backlit computer screens seems to be especially disruptive to its release. Suppression of melatonin then has the opposite effects, increasing alertness and arousal, and even altering REM

sleep patterns when you finally do nod off” (*Nature*).

Modern man’s reliance on electric lighting, with most unable to function without the power grid, puts him in an incredibly precarious position. Author and national security expert Brian T. Kennedy, in a speech at Hillsdale College, stated: “America’s electrical grid is vulnerable...to an electro-magnetic pulse (EMP) attack—a nuclear explosion in the high atmosphere, creating an electro-magnetic pulse that destroys electrical wiring and hardware across the affected area. Such an explosion placed over the center of the U.S. could destroy the infrastructure that distributes electricity to consumers and industrial users in every state except Alaska and Hawaii.”

“What we know from work performed in the 1990s by a Congressionally-mandated EMP Commission is that without electricity, the U.S. has the industrial infrastructure to provide for only 30 million of its over 300 million citizens. If an EMP attack occurred right now, the lights in this room would go off and most of us would be walking home, since many cars and gas pumps would be disabled. Our cell phones and iPads

are likely to turn on, but not our computers and laptops—and in any case, cellular networks and the Internet will have likely been destroyed. Those of us able to reach home would have no lights or refrigeration. Most water is pumped electronically as well. So we would have only the food and bottled water we have stored in our houses—normally about three days’ worth” (*Imprimis*).

Considering all of this, we must ask: how *advanced* are we, really?

Two Possibilities

Our dependence on electric light is firmly entrenched, and studies regarding its effects are usually unheeded. Nevertheless, one fact is indisputable: blotting out the stars with incandescent and fluorescent bulbs robs us of some of the most stunning vistas and mind-expanding sights found in the human experience.

Why does a clear night’s sky—unobstructed by pollution—have such an effect on us?

If the universe is, as many believe, simply a huge, ancient accident—born of laws of physics and chemistry that are themselves an even more ancient and improbable accident—then we



could conclude that in the long run, it does not matter whether we can see beyond Earth's atmosphere.

But if the Earth, human beings, and all that exists are the Creation of a Creator, *everything* changes!

If the universe is here by design, why is it so *vast*? With no other signs of physical life having been found beyond Earth, what is the purpose of billions of galaxies holding trillions of stars? Why did the Creator make a portion of it visible to us at night and give us the creative capacity to build telescopes to peer many light-years into it?

The Bible makes plain that the Creator—God—is the Author of the universe. Many proofs confirm that this Book is not just ancient literature but rather God's inspired Word.

In it, He foretells that mankind will come to the brink of destroying the Earth before He intervenes (Rev. 11:18).

Light pollution is one more way in which humankind has degraded its environment. And just as this form of pollution takes a physical toll, it has a spiritual effect as well. It pushes us further into an artificial, tech-saturated cocoon, insulating us from real-

ity, making our world smaller, and diminishing our ability to see God's Creation—which testifies to His existence: "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..." (Rom. 1:20).

Consider the words of the biblical and historical King David, and picture him looking up at a pristine Middle Eastern sky: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them has He set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoices as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof" (Psa. 19:1-6).

Elsewhere, David was inspired to write, "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the

moon and the stars, which You have ordained; what is man, that You are mindful of him? And the son of man, that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and have crowned him with glory and honor. You made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put *all things* under his feet" (8:3-6).

Some translations render "all things" as "the universe." The context goes on to show that this has not *yet* taken place—mankind has not at this time been given rule over the entire universe.

But this *will* happen!

And this is where the vastness of outer space crosses paths with your future and the reason you were born. Since God does not create in vain (Isa. 45:18), we can be assured that the universe is not destined to remain an uninhabited, lifeless place.

To see how the purpose of Creation is directly connected to *your* purpose, read Editor-in-Chief David C. Pack's book *The Awesome Potential of Man*, which is available at rcg.org/tapom. Order your free copy today. It will forever change your view of the universe—and your place in it! □

Prime Minister of Japan

SHINZO ABE

The nation's premier appears uniquely poised to take on the host of challenges facing 21st-century Japan.

BY DANIEL A. QUIMBY

AN OLD JAPANESE proverb states, "Drops of water will drill through a stone." In other words, persistent, continuous effort leads to momentous achievements. It is exactly this type of tenacity that has placed Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe into the world spotlight. His story is one of political riches to rags, and then back again.

Until 2006, everything seemed to be going well for Mr. Abe. He was born in 1954 to a celebrated political family. His grandfather and great-uncle both served as prime ministers, and his father was foreign minister.

In 1977, Mr. Abe graduated from Seikei University in Tokyo and continued his education at the University of Southern California, where he studied political science. He then returned to Japan in 1979 to work for the Kobe Steel Corporation. Three years later, he



■ **NATIONAL PRIDE:** Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe delivers a speech during the graduation ceremony of the National Defense Academy in Yokosuka, Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan (March 22, 2014).

PHOTO: TORU YAMANAKA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

began working in politics as an executive assistant to his father.

Over the next decade, Mr. Abe continued his march up the echelons of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). In 1987, he married Akie Matsuzaki. The couple have no children.

As a member of the LDP, in 1993, the aspiring politician was elected to the lower house of the National Diet (Japan's parliament) where he gained popularity for his rigid stance toward North Korea. In subsequent years, he held a number of governmental posts, with the most notable being his election to the office of prime minister in 2006. His victory made him the youngest premier in over 60 years as well as the first to be born after WWII.

A staunch nationalist and conservative, he appealed to voters by building a sense of national dignity: "Under his administration, a bill passed setting out steps for holding a referendum on revising the country's pacifist constitution. He also called for a greater sense of national pride and backed a law requiring the teaching of patriotism in schools" (*BBC*).

But his success was short-lived. Almost immediately after he was elected, a number of scandals rocked his governing party. In 2007, *The Telegraph* described this time as "several torrid months that saw the suicide of a minister, a raft of resignations and corruption allegations, an election drubbing for his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the upper parliament and a bungled cabinet reshuffle..."

Mr. Abe soon resigned, citing ill health as the reason for his departure. *The Washington Post* wrote: "At his lowest point, Shinzo Abe lost his health and his reputation. He'd gotten his chance to lead Japan and lasted just 366 days. His aides scattered. He was jeered in public. When he boarded a plane one day, a passenger in the same row asked to move..."

Yet Mr. Abe remained resolute and refused to give up his political career. Within seven years, he was *again* elected prime minister—and by a landslide. He was listed in *Time* maga-

zine as one of the 100 most influential people in the world in 2014, and was even pictured on the cover of *The Economist* as a political Superman.

The Washington Post article continued: "Just seven years later, not only is Abe back as prime minister but he's also more powerful than any of his recent predecessors, with an approval rating near 60 percent. His resurgence is every bit as improbable as his country's."

Reborn Career

Political resurrections of this proportion are extremely rare, especially in Japan, where public disgrace rarely breeds anything but obscurity. In an interview with *Foreign Affairs*, Mr. Abe explained what he learned from this difficult time: "When I served as prime minister last time, I failed to prioritize my agenda. I was eager to complete everything at once, and ended my administration in failure.

"After resigning, for six years I traveled across the nation simply to listen. Everywhere, I heard people suffering from having lost jobs due to lingering deflation and currency appreciation. Some had no hope for the future. So it followed naturally that my second administration should prioritize getting rid of deflation and turning around the Japanese economy.

"Let's say that I have set the priorities right this time to reflect the concerns of the people, and the results are increasingly noticeable, which may explain the high approval ratings."

A 2013 *Wall Street Journal* article documented the distinctiveness of Mr. Abe's resurgence: "His return to leadership...five years after his unsuccessful and short first term as prime minister, is one of the great comeback stories in modern Japanese political history...Mr. Abe has won largely by successfully melding the idea of his own comeback with that of Japan, a nation increasingly written off as an also-ran—a once-world-beating economy slipping behind China and others.

"With bold stimulus policies, the economy appears to be emerging from its long slump, with growth forecast

to outpace that of the U.S. and other advanced economies...Mr. Abe says that in time, his new growth strategies should help restore the country's former glory."

Mr. Abe's renewed vigor and empathetic approach to the citizens of his nation seem to be paying off in his second stint as prime minister.

"Abenomics"

Japan's economy has been limping along for over a decade and there has been pressure on the government to stem the ongoing deflationary trend. Upon returning to office, Mr. Abe immediately began to make good on campaign promises, implementing what has now been dubbed "Abenomics." The plan has three main points (called "arrows") that emphasize monetary policy reform, federal stimulus, and structural reform.

His policy of aggressive government spending coupled with monetary easing has drawn mixed reviews thus far: "At a [2014] Japan Society forum in New York, a deputy to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe suggested that the third 'arrow' of his economic rejuvenation policies, the reform element or 'growth strategy,' be given an A-grade to date. Yasutoshi Nishimura, senior vice minister of the Cabinet Office in Tokyo, boasted of stock-price, employment and price-level gains from the first two arrows (monetary and fiscal stimuli) and laid out specifics of what the long-awaited third push is likely to entail in coming months...although skepticism about the overall Japanese recovery is growing as the latest GDP numbers showed a tailing off" (*Forbes Magazine*).

Included in Mr. Abe's government reform is a plan for rebuilding infrastructure as well as revitalizing Japan's lackluster military. The nation has been under a constitutional ban on forming a traditional military force since 1947 and currently only maintains a self-defense force. This renewed five-year defense strategy comes in the wake of ongoing tensions with China over islands in the East China Sea.

The New York Times explained the motivations for his military focus:

“While Mr. Abe described the spending plan as ‘proactive pacifism,’ it continues a trend started earlier this year [2013] when Mr. Abe began to reverse a decade of military cuts to help offset China’s rapid military buildup and the relative decline of American influence in the region.”

The article revealed that this type of thinking is unprecedented for the nation: “Under the new strategy, Japan will continue to build closer ties with the United States, whose 50,000 military personnel stationed here still form the basis of Japan’s national security. But it will also acquire weapons meant to increase its own capabilities—acquisitions that would have once been unthinkable for a nation that viewed its military with suspicion after its disastrous defeat in World War II.”

Foreign Policy Tensions

While Mr. Abe has gained popularity among many Japanese citizens for his unwavering stance toward neighboring countries such as North Korea and China, there has been some criticism of his foreign policy outside of the country.

Widely known for his nationalist stance, Mr. Abe made a controversial visit to a Japanese war shrine in December 2013 that angered both China and South Korea. The *Guardian* reported, “Many Chinese and South Koreans regard Yasukuni, in central Tokyo, as a potent symbol of Japanese militarism; among the 2.5 million Japanese war dead honored, there are several former leaders convicted of class-A war crimes by the Allies after the end of [WWII].”

The article continued: “Abe insisted he had ‘no intention’ of hurting the feelings of the Chinese or South Korean people.

““There is criticism based on the misconception that this is an act to worship war criminals, but I visited Yasukuni shrine to report to the souls of the war dead on the progress made this year and to convey my resolve that people never again suffer the horrors of war,” he told reporters.”

Despite backlash from the visit, Mr. Abe made a personal offering at the shrine in April 2014, again prompting anger from neighboring nations: “China’s official Xinhua news agency condemned Abe’s offering as a provocative move that threatened regional stability and was a ‘slap in the face’ of the leader of Japan’s closest ally.

“South Korea’s Foreign Ministry also responded angrily.

““We deplore the fact that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has romanticized Japanese colonialism and its war of aggression by paying tribute to the Yasukuni Shrine,’ [the agency] said in a statement, noting it had happened despite expressions of concern from the international community” (*Reuters*).

Japan is certainly no stranger to war, with a history that includes involvement in at least seven major wars since the turn of the 20th century. Any signs that point to an armed rebirth certainly are ominous for its neighbors.

Mr. Abe, however, sees Japan’s military resurgence as a necessity, and has even announced plans to lift the country’s ban on fighting in overseas conflicts.

According to the *Guardian*, “Abe believes that the constitution, compiled by US occupation officials after the war, unfairly restricts Japan’s ability to exercise its right to collective self-defense, or coming to the aid of an ally under attack.”

Japan’s newfound desire to defend itself stems from its volatile relationship with China, coupled with Russia’s increasing militarism and fanatical rhetoric from North Korea’s leader. Quoting a defense ministry report from Japan, *Chicago Tribune* related: ““There are various issues and destabilizing factors in the security environment surrounding Japan, some of which are becoming increasingly tangible, acute and serious,” the annual defense white paper said.”

At one point, Japan was envisioned as a future “Switzerland of the Far East” due to its post-World

War II focus on economics instead of military forces. But the realities of regional conflicts and aggression have made this transition difficult.

Common Ground

Despite roiling tensions between China and Japan, the two nations are still attempting to focus on where they can agree: economic ties. A *Reuters* article titled “Japan’s Abe Dubs China Vital Partner Amid Territorial Disputes” made this clear. It quoted Mr. Abe: ““China’s [economic] growth is a chance for Japan, and for the world as well. China is Japan’s largest trading partner and we are in inseparable relations economically,” Abe said at a symposium.

““On the other hand, it is true that China is challenging the status quo with force in the East China Sea and South China Sea,” Abe said, referring to Beijing’s territorial rows with several Southeast Asian countries as well.”

The quote from Mr. Abe continued: “It is necessary for not only Japan but many other countries to prompt China to grow peacefully as a responsible country.”

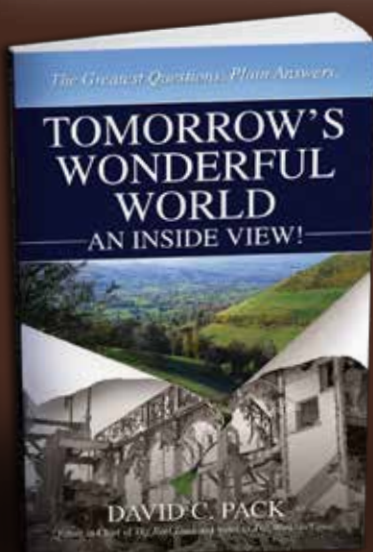
While the territorial disputes cloud even encouraging economic ties, there have been signs of progress. On May 17, 2014, Mr. Abe’s trade minister, Toshimitsu Motegi, went to China for an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

After meeting with the Chinese commerce minister, Mr. Motegi told reporters: “While there are difficult issues facing the Japan-China relationship, we agreed on the need to cooperate in the economic sphere...It was an extremely good atmosphere.”

Much like Japan, Mr. Abe has faced his share of difficulties over the years. With the nation’s 127 million looking to him for leadership and courage, his persistence and endurance will likely be tested. His 60 percent approval rating indicates that most feel they are in good hands as the nation begins to re-emerge on the world stage as a military and economic power. □



THE MODERN WORLD IS A CONDEMNED BUILDING!



Like an old, empty building—abandoned, overgrown, burned-out, littered with trash, marred by broken windows, and covered in graffiti—this world is built on a *wrong foundation*. Its already weak underpinnings have now eroded to the point of collapse under its own weight. Like all condemned structures, dangerous if left standing, this building must come down.

Yet it will soon be imploded in advance of a new and magnificent world architecture, foretold long ago.

Tomorrow's Wonderful World – An Inside View! will give you a preview of what is soon to replace a weary, broken world.

There Is Hope for the Future!
Order Your Free Copy Today at rcg.org/tww.

Did Jesus Teach SOCIALISM?



Are Jesus' teachings about love and goodwill toward fellow man proof that He taught socialist principles?

BY JUSTIN T. PALM

IF JESUS RETURNED today, which form of government would He choose?

Democracy? Would He “get out the vote,” give “power to the people,” or lead a popular uprising?

Communism? Would Christ redistribute wealth and bar social classes, leading a commune that shares everything?

Perhaps a monarchy? Would He rule as a king and take supreme authority?

Or would He be a dictator—reigning with an iron fist and subduing all peoples under a harsh rule?

What about socialism? Would He implement vast social reform programs to feed the hungry and provide shelter for the homeless?

Millions of people believe the latter—that Jesus would enact socialist policies because of His teachings about love and good will toward one's neighbor. But what *specifically* did Jesus teach during His earthly ministry? Was it really an early form of socialism?

Christ's Teachings

To many, Christ's teachings seem to fit socialism. First is love toward fellow man. Matthew 19 includes an account of a young man asking Jesus

what he must do to receive eternal life. His answer (in italics) could be interpreted as being a socialist principle: “...if you will enter into life, keep the commandments. He said unto Him, Which? Jesus said...*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*” (vs. 17-19).

Jesus also instructed, “If you will be perfect, go and sell that you have, and *give to the poor*, and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me” (vs. 21).

Loving one's neighbor and giving to the poor certainly fit within a socialist model. Think of programs such as Medicare and Social Security, which provide healthcare and financial stability to the elderly and those in need. Next think of labor unions fighting to bring fair wages and to rein in corrupt capitalists. This looks like caring for the poor and needy.

Throughout His ministry, Christ emphasized the importance of helping people. He continually healed the sick and at least twice (miraculously) provided food for the masses (Matt. 14:15-21, 15:32-38). Jesus stated that He had “compassion on the multitude, because they continue with Me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way” (15:32).

In Matthew 10:42, Jesus said that those who simply give a drink of cold water to a child will not lose their reward: “And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily [truly] I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.”

Public assistance programs appear to line up with this instruction to give a child a cup of water. But do the above scriptures prove that Christ was the first socialist?

Modern Socialism

Socialism is one of the most common forms of government today. Every country and territory on Earth has been affected by it in some way. Its principles have been enacted in Europe, Canada, Venezuela and the United States, as well as many other regions of the world.

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “socialism” as “a way of organizing a society in which major industries are owned and controlled by the government rather than by individual people and companies...(1) any of various economic and political theories advocating collective or governmental ownership and administration of the means of production and distribution of goods, (2) a system of

society or group living in which there is no private property..."

Socialism's mortal enemy is capitalist greed, which Jesus seemed to decry. Notice: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a *rich man* to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25).

Socialist ideology can be summarized by the idea that the government should care for those in need (youth, elderly, the sick, the unemployed). Think government housing, unemployment benefits, food stamps, welfare, among other social programs. Socialism appeals to the desire to help others through Christian "charity" or love. Most people inherently want to help others. Where they differ is in *how* this help should be given—through good works or through the government administering social welfare programs.

Such a system is not without its critics. With all its good intentions, it has not brought the utopian society that its proponents have promised. It has not eliminated corruption, poverty or disease, but has instead often led to bankrupt countries.

Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher famously stated in an interview on the television program *This Week*: "I would much prefer to bring them [socialists] down as soon as possible. I think they've made the biggest financial mess that any government's ever made in this country for a very long time, and Socialist governments traditionally do make a financial mess. *They always run out of other people's money.* It's quite a characteristic of them" (emphasis added).

Some, as Thatcher did, preach against socialism, believing it should be relegated to the scrapheap of history as a failed experiment. Others sing its praises, devoting their life's work to it. Still others proclaim that it has just never been implemented in the right way.

Love it or hate it, socialism has existed for hundreds of years and continues today. But do its principles of the government caring for and provid-

ing for others fit what Christ taught? On the surface, the answer seems an obvious "yes."

But to get to the heart of the matter, we must examine the religious justification for socialist principles—the "social gospel."

Roots of Movement

Supposedly one part Christ's teachings, one part socialism, the social gospel movement is woven throughout Western society in ways most do not realize. Its founders worked to spread God's kingdom on Earth through social reforms, and preached that churches should make people's lives better by reforming institutions. Since the mid-1800s, professing Christians, religious leaders, and politicians have invested vast amounts of time and energy attempting to spread the kingdom of God through this movement.

Encyclopaedia Britannica defines the social gospel as "a religious social-reform movement that was prominent from about 1870 to 1920, especially among liberal Protestant groups dedicated to the betterment of industrialized society through application of the biblical principles of charity and justice...Labour reforms—including abolition of child labour, a shorter workweek, a living wage, and factory regulation—constituted the Social Gospel's most prominent concerns. During the 1930s many of these ideals were realized through the rise of organized labour and the legislation of the New Deal."

Widespread corruption, poverty and injustice throughout the Western world led these religious figures to take on a number of issues: public health measures, women's suffrage, prohibition, anti-poverty measures, pollution, drug addiction, political corruption, the civil rights movement, gun control, and settlement houses.

In an article titled "History of the Social Gospel," *PBS* outlined the origins of the movement: "...in the late 19th century...the Protestant church began tackling social reform in what has become known as 'social

Christianity,' or sometimes 'Christian socialism,' which was later adapted into the more moderate 'Social Gospel.'

"The movement was a response to the rapid urbanization, industrialization, and mass immigration of the late 1800s. Protestant clergymen became interested in securing social justice for the poor..."

Promoting social gospel ideals was religion's best effort to make the world better. In fact, its proponents believed that the movement would bring about a golden age for mankind.

Walter Rauschenbusch, a leading writer and advocate of the social gospel in the 19th century, formed a group with other religious leaders called the Brotherhood of the Kingdom. In his book *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, Rauschenbusch wrote of his heartfelt desire to turn society around: "Will the twentieth century mark for the future historian the real adolescence of humanity, the great emancipation from barbarism and from the paralysis of injustice, and the beginning of a progress in the intellectual, social, and moral life of mankind to which all past history has no parallel?"

"It will depend almost wholly on the moral forces which the Christian nations can bring to the fighting line against wrong, and the fighting energy of those moral forces will again depend on the degree to which they are inspired by religious faith and enthusiasm."

In the eyes of social gospel advocates, the mission of churches was to fix the governments and institutions of this world. Their goal was to spread God's kingdom on Earth. To them, humanity's fate depended on it.

The *PBS* article put it this way: "The core of Christian progressivism was 'work in this world to establish a Kingdom of God with social justice for all.'"

Idealism Crashing on the Shores of Reality

The social gospel movement was plagued by a number of problems that

eventually weakened it. First, it was not unified. There were many different and competing approaches to the issues it took on.

PBS revealed this about the success of the movement (emphasis added): “The results of the movement were mixed. Although it helped liberalize organized religion and inspired many political and social reformers to look at reform in moral terms, the Social Gospel failed to win over many urban immigrants, and offered few long-term solutions to urban problems.”

“However, the work of the progressive social reformers was not in vain. Organized social concern and many of the reforms it inspired have *remained intact* through the twentieth century and *continue today*, evident...in *current social welfare programs*.”

The *Canadian Encyclopedia* characterized it this way: “In turn, its hopes and accomplishments were compromised by economic decline, the secularizing of social work and the backlash against prohibition, while labour and agrarian factional strife undermined the basis of radical Social Gospel action.”

Although the goals of these reformers were not always met, their work lives on in the form of “social justice.” Today’s “social justice” is yesterday’s “social gospel.” Same principle, different name.

A number of current American politicians have spiritual advisors that promote programs against economic inequality and social injustice. Such efforts are thought to provide a positive direction for the nation.

Pope Francis also promotes “social justice” and made this clear during a visit to a Rio de Janeiro slum: “Pope Francis met with poor persons living in the Varginha *favela* (slum) in Rio de Janeiro. Here was his moving message to them, which praised those who work for ‘social justice’ and ‘solidarity’ and decried ‘economic inequalities.’ The Pope said, ‘To all people of good will who are working for social justice: never tire of working for a more just world, marked by greater solidarity! No one can remain insensi-

tive to the inequalities that persist in the world!’” (*America, The National Catholic Review* magazine).

In addition, a number of Protestant denominations still carry the “social gospel” torch today.

While many powerful and influential religious and political leaders support the social gospel, its results have been mixed at best—and detrimental at worst.

Christ’s Message

Author Frederick Nymeyer, writing in 1971 in his book *Social Action, Hundred Nineteen*, condemned the social gospel as leading people away from Christ’s true gospel. He also highlighted that the movement has failed to bring the kind of social change it promised.

Nymeyer stated: “The Social Gospel may be the most crucial of all problems besetting Christian churches at this time, for when a Christian’s ethical certitudes are revealed to be defective, as it always turns out to be in the Social Gospel, then he ends up abandoning confidence in valid, Biblical faith. In practice what happens is that when Social Gospel action fails to produce valid results, the person promoting such programs does not abandon the Social Gospel and return to the true Gospel, but plunges deeper into further Social Gospel actions with progressively more frustrating results.”

Interestingly, the author wrote about abandoning the social gospel and returning to Jesus’ *true* Gospel.

Yet Christ’s *true* gospel has been widely misunderstood for centuries. The social gospel is just one of *many* different versions that has been created. For instance, some professing Christians believe in the “gospel of salvation” or the “gospel of grace.” Others proclaim a “gospel of miracles” or the “gospel of faith.” There are also those who preach a “gospel of foods” or one about “healing.”

But all these forms of the gospel miss the true message Jesus brought. Over the years, Christ’s teaching was perverted and covered up by false teachers. Galatians 1:6-9 shows that

as early as the apostle Paul’s time, the gospel was already being twisted.

When Jesus began His ministry, He plainly stated what His gospel was about. Notice Mark 1: “Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent you, and believe the gospel” (vs. 14-15).

Jesus did not come preaching the social gospel, or a gospel about social justice. He preached the gospel *of the kingdom of God!* His Church is supposed to *preach* about this coming kingdom—not attempt to bring it about on human steam.

The social gospel is NOT *Christ’s* gospel! It is a manmade perversion of Christ’s message created in the 19th century—over 1,800 years after Christ lived. Just this one passage in Mark 1 makes this clear. (To learn more about Christ’s true gospel, read our booklet *Which Is the True Gospel?* at rcg.org/witrg.)

Kingdom of God

To better understand Christ’s true gospel, one must examine what exactly is the kingdom of God. Much unnecessary confusion has existed about this subject. Yet the kingdom of God was the foundation of Christ’s teachings. Time and again, He preached about it.

Breaking down the word “kingdom” makes it clear. It is an Old English word that can also mean “government.” The word “gospel” is also an Old English word. It means “glad tidings” or “good news.” So the gospel of the kingdom of God can also be thought of as the *good news* of the *government of God*.

Multiple passages throughout the Bible show that God will establish His kingdom—a world-ruling SUPERGOVERNMENT—on Earth at Jesus Christ’s Second Coming. The purpose and mission of Christ’s First Coming was to announce the arrival of this one world government.

Notice this prophecy from Revelation: “And the seventh angel sounded [at Christ’s Return]; and there

were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms [governments] of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever” (11:15).

Understand that once God sets up His kingdom, all other forms of government will be abolished. Then recognize that God’s kingdom is obviously not here yet. This can be seen just by watching the news, which is filled with violence, corruption, crime, pain and misery.

“Not of This World”

Jesus made clear that He did not support this world’s institutions. When on trial before Pilate, He stated, “My kingdom [government] is *not of this world*: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight...but now is My kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36).

This means Jesus did not advocate or support any of the governments created by this world. Christ did not believe that the governments of men should be fixed since He knew the only solution to man’s problems was the kingdom of God.

Christ stated in John 8:23: “I am not of this world.” He also explained that His “servants,” true Christians, do not fight for this world. They stay out of its politics and wars, knowing the truth about God’s coming solution. Christians are not to spread the kingdom, but are to pray for its arrival (Matt. 6:10) and work to qualify to be part of it (vs. 33).

Once Christ returns, man will no longer be allowed to rule himself. We have already seen that those who try to reform the institutions of this world ultimately fail. The reason the social gospel movement faded away, and why today’s social justice will also be unsuccessful, is because reform in the hands of *men* never works. Due to the corruption of human nature, any success is short-lived.

The prophet Daniel confirms that God’s kingdom will not be left to men: “...the God of heaven [shall] set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall *not be left to other people*, but it shall break in

pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (2:44).

Christ will be a just, divine ruler—bringing true justice, equity, fairness and prosperity to all peoples.

Church Given Two Commissions

If true Christians are not to fix this world, should they simply sit around and wait for God’s kingdom to arrive? Should they not in the meantime actively try to “win souls for Christ” or to “bring the kingdom”? What about giving food and money to the poor?

Christ did command His servants to “occupy [work] till I come” (Luke 19:13), but most do not realize what He told them to do.

First, understand exactly what Jesus told His servants to give to the poor. Outlining a list of the fruits of His ministry, He said, “The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the *poor have the gospel preached to them*” (Matt. 11:5).

Christ told His servants to give the poor the gospel! But not the social gospel—the *real* gospel. And this is what God’s Church gives to the poor—exactly what Christ told them to give.

Jesus reiterated this in Luke 4:18: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to *preach the gospel to the poor*...”

Next, recognize that God works through His Church, not political institutions. Christ built one true Church (Matt. 16:18) and gave it two simple commissions.

The First Commission involves preaching the gospel and is found in Matthew 28:19-20. Christ instructed His disciples: “Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them...Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...”

Matthew 24:14 reveals that Christ’s Church was foretold to be preaching the gospel in a powerful way at the end of the age—our time now.

The Second Commission involves caring for those whom God calls out of this world. Read the account in John 21:15-17 where Christ tells Peter three times to “feed My sheep.”

Since its inception, the true Church has been busy carrying out these two commissions. On top of this, Christians have the personal task of overcoming their human nature and striving to qualify for God’s kingdom.

Ignoring Christ’s instructions, social gospel advocates focus on reforming institutions and spreading a kingdom that is not here yet. However well-meaning, this is NOT what Christ said to do!

Christians do not allow the teachings of Karl Marx, socialist preachers or anyone else to confuse the plain teachings of Christ.

If Jesus promoted the world’s form of socialism, He would have made this clear in His teachings. The word “gospel” is referenced 100 times in the Bible. Not once did Christ ever mention a “social” gospel. Nor did He support enacting “social justice” or “income equality” or the wholesale “redistribution of wealth.”

This said, Christ does care about all mankind. God’s government will bring the peace and prosperity that humanity has unsuccessfully tried to bring about for 6,000 years.

God’s Government

Finally, what will God’s kingdom be like? In some ways, certain principles of socialism match God’s form of government and will be applied in a just way worldwide.

In God’s kingdom, *actual* social justice will be a reality. Everyone will receive an opportunity to work and earn fair wages. A global “social security” program will be enacted to care for orphans, widows, the elderly and those who cannot help themselves. All peoples will pay a certain set portion into this program to ensure everyone is provided for (Deut. 14:28-29; 26:12-13). However, this system will be nothing like anything that has been devised by the governments of men. It will actually work—and no one will be allowed to misuse the funds!

Family will also play a much greater role in God’s coming kingdom. Instead of people relying on the government to care for them as they age—while their

family does not help—sons and daughters will be taught to be responsible for elderly parents or grandparents.

Ultimately, love—outgoing concern for others—will be the law of the land (Mark 12:29-31).

People's needs will be taken care of when circumstances require it. Recall the miracle of the fish and loaves (Matt. 14:15-21). There is no evidence, however, that this miracle involved a long-term "handout" program to provide people free or discounted food for the rest of their lives.

God's government will not build social welfare programs, but will instead create an environment—free from corruption and greed—for people

to earn a living. But all will work to support themselves.

In the Old Testament, God implemented principles to provide for those in need. One example of this can be seen in Leviticus 19:9-10. Farmers were to leave the corners of their fields for the poor to "glean." People still had to reap these crops themselves. In other words, they had to work for their food. The apostle Paul confirmed this principle in the New Testament when he was inspired to write, "This we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (II Thes. 3:10).

These were laws in the physical nation of Israel and Jesus Christ will

certainly apply similar principles within His coming kingdom!

The unsustainable and ineffective systems of socialist, democratic and communist governments will be replaced by God's righteous, divine government.

Our booklet *What Is the Kingdom of God?* (available at rcg.org/witkog) answers these and other questions one might have about God's coming supergovernment. In addition our book *Tomorrow's Wonderful World – An Inside View!* (rcg.org/tww) brings the good news of the awesome future that awaits all mankind. Request your free copies of these informative materials today! □

EGYPT

Continued from page 12

starts by talking about Alexander the Great's untimely death and how his kingdom was broken into four parts.

Notice: "And a mighty king shall stand up [Alexander], that shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. And when he shall stand up, *his kingdom shall be broken*, and *shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven*; and not to his posterity, nor according to his dominion which he ruled: for his kingdom shall be plucked up, even for others beside those" (vs. 3-4).

The empire was divided into sections labeled north, south, east and west. Much of the time, Egypt was at the center of the kingdom of the south.

Verse 5 continues: "And the king of the south *shall be strong*, and one of his princes; and he shall be strong above him, and have dominion; *his dominion shall be a great dominion.*"

At this time in history Egypt again reached incredible heights!

The next verse describes when the reigning king of the north Antiochus II Theos divorced his wife Laodice to marry Berenice, the daughter of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (the king of the south at the time). The passage

describes Berenice losing the "power of her arm," her husband, and that he would not "stand." It also mentions that her father (called "he that begat her") would be "given up," or killed. These three did come to a bad end when Laodice had Antiochus and Berenice assassinated after the death of Ptolemy.

Read verse 6 carefully: "And in the end of years they shall join themselves together; for the king's daughter of the south shall come to the king of the north to make an agreement: but she shall not retain the power of the arm... but she shall be given up [killed]...and he that begat her, and he that strengthened her in these times."

STOP. Notice that Daniel 11 is written in *future* tense. This is because the book of Daniel was recorded around 600 BC—almost 300 years before Alexander the Great was born!

This is one major proof of the Bible's authority as the inspired Word of God.

One-third of this Book is prophecy, which can be likened to history written in advance. (Read *Bible Authority... Can It Be Proven?* at rcg.org/bacibp for further proof of the validity of the prophetic events foretold throughout God's Word.)

The rest of Daniel 11 confirms the Bible's ironclad authority. The chapter shows the kingdom of the south con-

tinuing its historical role of being a major player in the region.

Yet the prophecies related to Egypt are not all in the past. Unknown to almost all, this ancient text proves both Egypt's *former* glory AND its *soon-coming* return to the heights of power.

Superpower in Waiting

Through the Bible, God declares that the nation will once again—in the *next few years*—reach prominence. It will tap into its human, military and economic potential to become a regional and global player.

Egyptians long to reclaim their historical spot on the world stage. To do this, they will need a leader that can unite the conservative Muslims, the 20-something revolutionaries, and the older generation that favors the firm hand of a military leader. They will need a strong stable government to rally behind. Whether that is one led by Mr. Sisi or someone else remains to be seen.

The Middle East is the focal point of what God foretold for our time in His Word. *The Mid-East in Bible Prophecy* (available at rcg.org/tmeibp) explains in detail all of Daniel 11, as well as the future role each nation will play in the region.

Make sure to read it—and keep your eyes on Egypt! □

AMERICA

Continued from page 8

later, the researchers interviewed the same couples. Most of the couples had divorced, with only a small percentage still married. Of the couples who divorced, money-related issues topped the list of reasons why. Those suffering from such financial problems were 45 percent more likely to divorce than those without them.

In another example from the same book, Jason Carroll of Brigham Young University studied 600 couples, of whom 35 percent exhibited highly materialistic traits. He found that highly materialistic spouses are 40 percent more likely than non-materialistic spouses to experience greater financial problems and lower marital satisfaction. This led to one or both spouses chasing irrational material dreams, which wreaked financial havoc in the family.

The study also found that those with materialistic tendencies were

self-centered and generally unable to show interest in others, including their spouses.

This consumer mindset leads to individuals viewing friendships and relationships as commodities, with values attached. These relationships were only kept if they could advance a person's status or self-esteem. If they proved unfruitful, then they were often discarded or diminished.

Along with weaker marriages and strained relationships, an absence of parental guidance on young children and teenagers leads to other problems at home. It is well-documented that when youth come from more materialistic homes, as opposed to those focusing on community involvement, or education, they are much more susceptible to an assault by marketers and advertisers.

Also, a lack of socialization within the family unit at an early age, mostly by absent parents, leads to a lack of a child's development, according to *Shiny Objects*. He or she often grows up insecure, clinging to materialistic posses-

sions as a crutch and is unable to adjust well in adulthood. In the classroom, children who placed a higher importance on materialistic goals and financial success throughout school reported higher levels of depression and anxiety than those who placed an emphasis on self-actualization, affiliation into society, and building community relationships.

Regarding the relationship between materialistic parents and their children, Eirini Flouri, a professor of developmental psychology at the University of London, conducted a study that found the materialistic influences of parents on their children was more powerful than expected. Using data from 2,218 British secondary schoolchildren, researchers found that the materialistic nature of a father had almost no impact on his young children. When a mother exhibited materialistic traits, however, these passed immediately to her child. The children were then highly likely to exhibit signs of anxiety and low levels of life satisfaction throughout their early lives.

■ **CONSUMER SOCIETY:** Below left, Black Friday shoppers carry away discounted items from a Best Buy store that opened its doors at 6:00 p.m. on Thanksgiving Day in Naples, Florida (Nov. 29, 2013). Below right, shoppers walk through Herald Square outside Macy's on 34th Street in New York City (May 1, 2014).

PHOTOS: SPENCER PLATT/ (LEFT); ANDREW BURTON/ (RIGHT); GETTY IMAGES



All in all, parents who do not foster secure homes or raise their children properly will often produce insecure teens who turn to physical goods to fill a void their parents could not or do not fill. The family often becomes just another low-value casualty in a materialistic society.

Institutional Spending

While individual consumers are to blame for out-of-control spending, so too are the institutions that encourage it. Governments, civil authorities, educational institutions, and religious groups push the nation to spend, *spend*, SPEND! Many leaders in these organizations publicly call for financial restraint, but their actions speak louder than words.

Consider the U.S. government debt, which is well over \$17 trillion. It is far outpacing incoming tax revenue and projected income from economic growth. Yet almost all organizations in the federal government insist on continued spending and rarely make cuts to their budgets. Even though it is popular for political leaders to advocate a reduction in spending, they generally do not agree on which programs to cut.

Even the largest corporations routinely pay their executives exorbitant amounts of money for their services. This practice motivates them with a “getting at any cost” mindset that drives every decision made. This does not include various white-collar crimes committed through insider trading, Ponzi schemes and economic espionage that fill headlines—all with the end goal of having more money to spend.

Even many religious institutions in the United States are succumbing to the influences of a consumer culture. The rise of megachurches, large nontraditional Christian churches resembling shopping malls, have exploded across the country. Their purpose is to cater to their attendees, providing not only worship services for adherents but also music stores, movie theaters, Christian clothing retailers, food courts, and gift shops.

Consider the growth of such churches in the United States. Only two and a half years ago, there were 75 such churches; today there are over 1,200—each with an average attendance of 3,500 people, according to a report in the *Congressional Quarterly*.

Ginger Stickney, an author writing on the rise of megachurches and religion, wrote: “religion...is a dynamic

“While individual consumers are to blame for out-of-control spending, so too are the institutions that encourage it. Governments, civil authorities, educational institutions, and religious groups push the nation to spend, *spend*, SPEND!”

expression of society as a whole” (*Shiny Objects*). Considering that statement, it would appear millions of Americans are more interested in what amenities and shopping they can enjoy while “attending church.” The worship service is often the short time fit between visiting the gift shop and watching a movie in a church’s movie theater!

This consumer culture is actually encouraged by ministers who preach a “prosperity gospel” often known as “name it and claim it” theology. This holds that any religious act or worship will result in material possessions and

blessings for the worshiper. It also states that all success or prosperity is evidence of blessings and favor by God. These religious leaders have managed to cleverly articulate what amounts to an endorsement by God of such behavior.

Whether wittingly or not, the actions of federal and state governments, corporations and religious institutions all cloud an understanding of why America was given its immense material blessings in the first place.

Original Founding Father

Virtually all Americans understand they are reaping the benefits of decisions made by Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and others long ago. The signing of the Declaration of Independence, along with other documents such as the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, ensures we continue to enjoy those freedoms. There is no doubt that we as a people benefit from our forefathers’ actions.

However, virtually no one understands they are also reaping the benefits of another forefather alive millennia ago. This man is the patriarch Abraham in the Bible.

Does this sound strange? Unbelievable? Before you dismiss this idea, read the account found in the Old Testament. It describes the modern United States in stunning detail.

Due to obedience to God’s instructions, Abraham was told his descendants would receive tremendous blessings. God stated: “And I will make of you a GREAT NATION, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing...and in you shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:2-3).

Consider. America is the only nation throughout history to truly become a great nation that has been a blessing to the entire globe. These peoples were promised great physical prominence so that God could fulfill a tremendous purpose on Earth. Abraham’s great-great-grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, became part of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel and then became

the modern peoples of Britain and the United States. It is not the purpose of this article to prove this fully. Much more on this topic can be found in Mr. David C. Pack's book, *America and Britain in Prophecy* available at rcg.org/aabibp.

Put simply, the United States has forgotten its history and the warnings made to it by God—who even warned in Deuteronomy 8 about what would happen if the nation did not live His Way and allowed consumerism to run rampant.

Read carefully: “Beware that you forget not the LORD your God, in not keeping His commandments, and His judgments, and His statutes...Lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly house, and dwelt therein; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God...” (vs. 11-14).

“Eaten and are full”—think of the 50,000 fast-food restaurants dotting the nation. “Goodly houses”—think of the 2,500-square-foot homes we cannot afford. Multiplied silver and gold—think of the incessant consumerist culture.

And guess what? Americans HAVE forgotten the true God of the Bible. Instead, they think *they* have brought about their abundance. Look at verse 17: “And you say in your heart, my power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth.”

Instead of obeying God, which in turn brings tremendous blessings, those in the U.S. try to go after material blessings themselves. It is clearly not working, yet it does not have to be this way!

A Choice

In Deuteronomy 30, God clearly outlines what actions will bring positive outcomes. In verse 16, He gives a clear “cause and effect” instruction to “keep His commandments and statutes and judgments...and the LORD your God shall bless you in the land where you go to possess it.”

Yet in verses 17-18, He warns, “But if your heart turn away, so that you shall not hear, but shall be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them...you shall surely perish.”

This is a simple instruction. If one keeps God's laws, then blessings will follow. If one does not follow them, then negative results will occur.

In verse 19, the Israelites were given a choice: “I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore *choose* life, that both you and your seed may live [prosperously].”

Men have free moral agency and therefore are able to make their own choices. They can choose to worship God and keep His commandments—and receive incredible blessings. Or they can attempt to substitute Him for the covetous pursuit of physical possessions. Today, most wholeheartedly worship material wealth instead of the Being who has poured it out on them.

America's Founding Fathers designed the Declaration of Independence to present men with the opportunity to make decisions for themselves and to reap the benefits or consequences of these decisions. They offered the freedom to seek “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Individuals must choose to make good and wholesome decisions and reap good results—or poor choices, ultimately reaping poor results.

In the case of today, when one chooses to seek a life filled with endlessly pursuing material things, he must be prepared to accept the consequences of a life dependent and focused on the physical.

What About You?

Let the example of Abraham sink in. He had free moral agency and decided to follow God and serve Him, no matter the difficulty. He was a successful man who owned many possessions, yet chose to leave his country at God's request, and not trust in them. He sought a new life and followed God

(Gen. 12:1). As a result of his obedience, he was called a friend of God (II Chron. 20:7).

Through this choice, Abraham demonstrated an understanding of the bedrock principle of “cause and effect.” He made the right decision and was blessed—as were all his descendants until this day. Over time, however, his descendants have chosen to reject God's laws. As a result, these physical blessings are being slowly removed.

The Bible declares that *without national repentance* these blessings will be revoked entirely—and soon!

Sadly, most do not recognize the cause and effect principle at work. They continually choose the wrong way of life, the way of sin, bringing more punishment and further retraction of God's abundant blessings. Many have chosen to reject the God who gave us material prosperity and instead have worshiped the blessings themselves.

As with Israel thousands of years ago, America still has a choice to reject the accumulation of empty, physical, materialistic objects and instead place God's laws and His purpose above its own pursuits.

Given this, we can either choose to join the perpetual cycle of materialistic gain or make the right choice of following God and the principles explained in His Word.

Consider what a blessing it is to live in the United States. Determine to get off the treadmill of consumption and take a serious look at your

life and the true history of this nation's rise to prominence. Mr. Pack's *America and Britain in Prophecy* can help you in this process by combining the incredible words of the Bible with the startling facts of history. Request your free copy at rcg.org/aabibp.

You have the opportunity NOW to make the right choices and secure lasting benefits! □



Order a Free Copy!
rcg.org/aabibp

DOES GOD SPEAK THROUGH “BLOOD MOONS”?

WHAT IS ALL the fuss about “blood moons”? You may have read about four total lunar eclipses throughout the next year and a half—and heard a prominent televangelist say they have biblical significance. You may have seen major news outlets, such as *Los Angeles Times* and *CNN*, pick up the story. You might be intrigued by the titillating theory that the sun and the moon are God’s way of communicating with mankind—for those who are looking.

You may feel like you are in the dark, but this need not be!

The idea started with Mark Biltz of El Shaddai Ministries and was popularized by non-denominational TV preacher John Hagee. It centers on a quartet of “blood moons” (known as a *tetrad*) to occur between spring 2014 and fall 2015, with a total solar eclipse falling in the middle on what they term the Jewish New Year.

Mr. Biltz feels that these events are unique because each lands on biblical Holy Days (except for the total solar eclipse), and should be seen as a warning sign that significant events will take place in the Middle East. Mr. Hagee agrees and calls the event “God’s billboard.” He believes that a world-shaking event is about to occur in the nation of Israel.

To back up this claim, the two preachers mention that important events in Jewish history have happened around Holy Day tetrads. They mark the expulsion of Jews from

Spain in 1492, Israel becoming a nation in 1948, and the Six-Day War in 1967 as all relating to such cosmic occurrences.

Also, the two men quote Joel 2: “And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth...The *sun shall be turned into darkness*, and the *moon into blood*, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come” (vs. 30-31).

The theory supposes that over the next year, the moon will turn “into blood” four times and the sun “into darkness” once. This means an earth-shattering event is about to occur for Israel, right?

Upon closer scrutiny, however, this idea crumbles into a pile of rubble.

Normal Occurrence

First, realize that when people use the term “blood moon,” they are really talking about a total lunar eclipse—a full moon being wholly enveloped in Earth’s shadow. While this does not happen every day, it is a *normal* astronomical event. NASA can predict when these will occur with pinpoint accuracy. In addition, while tetrads are somewhat rare, they are not unique.

The reddish color of such an eclipse comes from the sun’s rays being filtered through the edges of the Earth’s atmosphere toward the moon. This scatters the blue wavelengths of light, while the red and orange wavelengths punch through and are projected on the moon.

The first of the four lunar eclipses occurred on April 15, 2014, which was the first day of Unleavened Bread, a week-long festival referenced in the

Scriptures. Another will occur during this same spring feast next year with the other two during the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall of 2014 and 2015. So why are these eclipses landing on biblical Holy Days?

Realize that God’s calendar is lunisolar, which means it takes into account both the sun *and* moon. This is in marked contrast with the modern Roman calendar that only relies on the sun.

Where the biblical Holy Days fall on the calendar is marked by the moon. Every year, the first days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread *and* the Feast of Tabernacles have full moons. This fact *significantly* increases the likelihood that lunar eclipses and tetrads will fall on these dates.

Also realize that this has been the case for thousands of years!

God of Precision

The Creator is a God of exactness. When He declares He will do something, it will come—and *right on time*. In the Old Testament book of Isaiah, He states, “I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of My mouth, and I showed them; I did them suddenly, and they came to pass...I have even from the beginning declared it to you; before it came to pass I showed it you...” (48:3, 5).

Isaiah 46:11 states, “...I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.”

If tetrads herald significant events for the Jewish people, then the historical events touted as proof would have occurred with precision and order. Herein lies a major problem for the blood moon theory. None of the historic

events mentioned by Mr. Hagee or Mr. Biltz actually occurred on the dates of the tetrad eclipses. Notice:

■ The royal decree to expel the Jews from Spain occurred in 1492. The tetrad occurred in 1493 and 1494.

■ Israel became a nation in May of 1948. The tetrad did not begin until April of 1949.

■ The Six-Day War occurred in June of 1967. The first lunar eclipse was in April 1967.

In addition, there were two other Holy Day tetrads that occurred around minor events in Jewish history. And, stunningly, three more that were passed over by Mr. Biltz because he could not connect any important happenings to them.

Let's tally this up: three tetrads had *zero* events tied to them, two occurred around *minor* events, two eclipse cycles landed *after* the events, and just one event occurred shortly after the first of four eclipses. In other words, there is no clear pattern at all!

Yet there is another point that puts the matter to rest...

Biggest Problem

The "blood moons" idea hinges on the assumption that it is a fulfillment of the heavenly signs mentioned in Joel 2. Yet is this accurate?

Read verse 31 again: "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, *before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.*"

These heavenly signs will occur just before what is called "the great and the terrible day of the Lord." Elsewhere in the Bible it is made crystal clear that the Day of the Lord will take place *AFTER* the Great Tribulation. Revelation equates this with what it calls the "sixth seal" (the Tribulation is the "fifth seal").

Real Truth Editor-in-Chief David C. Pack explains this in *Revelation Explained at Last!* The entirety of the subhead "The Sixth Seal—HEAVENLY SIGNS" is reprinted here:

Next comes the *sixth seal*—the HEAVENLY, or astronomical, SIGNS: "And I beheld when He

had opened the SIXTH SEAL, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the *sun* became black as sackcloth of hair, and the *moon* became as blood; And the *stars of heaven fell* unto the earth, even as a fig tree casts her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind" (Rev. 6:12-13).

How do we know that the Heavenly Signs come directly on the heels of the Great Tribulation? Here are Christ's words: "*Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken*" (Matt. 24:29).

This is an almost verbatim, phrase-by-phrase description of Revelation 6:12-13. The parallel is unmistakable. *Christ* has again interpreted the sixth seal, and its timing, for us. The phrase "immediately after the tribulation" removes all doubt about *when* the Heavenly Signs occur.

The arrival of the Heavenly Signs heralds a great overall change in the direction—and speed—of events. This is understood by continuing in Revelation 6, a few verses later. Notice: "For the GREAT DAY OF HIS WRATH IS COME; and who shall be able to stand?" (vs. 17).

There it is in plain English. The Day of the Lord, or Day of God's Wrath, follows the sixth seal. Heaven and earth are shaken! This time reveals God's AWESOME POWER! It is comparable to nothing that has ever happened before, or will ever happen again.

The prophet Joel was speaking of this time when God's awesome power and great Wrath will be displayed when he said, "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, BEFORE the great and dreadful Day of the Lord come" (2:31).

Some have claimed that these signs have *already* occurred. This is *impossible!* Matthew 24 makes

plain that they all *follow*—not *precede*—the Tribulation. In addition, when they occur, they are either immediately followed by or accompany the *sign* of Christ's Coming (vs. 29-30).

The terrible period of God's Wrath is foretold to last an ENTIRE YEAR—after the initial two and a half years of the Tribulation. Here is how Isaiah described it: "For it is the Day of the LORD's vengeance, and the YEAR of recompenses for the controversy of Zion" (34:8). Jeremiah refers to this period as "the YEAR of...visitation" (11:23; 23:12—also see Ezek. 4:6 and Num. 14:34).

God's timeline for future events is plain. The heavenly signs mentioned in Joel 2 occur *after* the Great Tribulation. There is NO CHANCE that the current tetrad is involved in anyway. Proponents of this prophecy may be sincere, but they are sincerely wrong!

Tellingly, Mr. Biltz has even given himself an "out" in case nothing happens over the coming years. Buried on page 159 of his book *Blood Moons: Decoding the Imminent Heavenly Signs*, he states: "If nothing noteworthy happens in 2014 or 2015, it just means these are signs of things to come."

Now, *something* significant may occur around the time of the tetrad—especially in the volatile region of the Middle East. If this happens, do not let anyone sway you into believing it has anything to do with the moon moving into the shadow of the Earth a few times. It does not!

Yet the Bible *does* have a lot to say about what the future holds for the nation of Israel and the entire world. To understand the true order of prophetic events, read the rest of the eye-opening booklet *Revelation Explained at Last!* Available at rcg.org/real, it shows—WITH CRYSTAL CLARITY—what God has planned for all mankind! □



Order a Free Copy!
rcg.org/real

WEATHER & ENVIRONMENT

Extreme Weather Pinches Food Budgets Across Globe



■ **WEATHER WOES:** Top, a man harvests bananas from a flooded plantation in Puerto Yumani, Bolivia (Feb. 4, 2014). Middle, a villager harvests cabbages in his fields covered by ash at Jeraya village in northern Sumatra, Indonesia (Feb. 4, 2014). Bottom, a worker uses a tractor to pull an uprooted almond tree at a farm near Mendota, California (April 29, 2014).

PHOTOS: AIZAR RALDES/AFP/ (TOP); ULET IFANSASTI/ (MIDDLE); JUSTIN SULLIVAN/ (BOTTOM); GETTY IMAGES

Rising food prices are squeezing budgets worldwide and the weather is a major cause. From droughts in the United States and Brazil to excessively wet conditions in the United Kingdom to brushfires in Australia, extreme weather and its effects have helped push up the cost of many pantry staples.

In a recent Food Price Index, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization reported that the cost of food surged in March to its highest level in 10 months.

“The Index was influenced, as expected, by unfavourable weather conditions in the US and Brazil and geopolitical tensions in the Black Sea region, said Abdolreza Abbassian, FAO Senior Economist,” *UN News Service* reported.

Dry conditions have affected farmers and ranchers, resulting in consumers having to pay premium prices for meat, fruits and vegetables, wheat, rice and coffee.

“Poor weather conditions across South-East Asia, Latin America and the US have been a particular problem and sugar and cereal prices were among the worst-hit crops—both up in price by more than 7.5 per cent during the [first three months of 2014],” according to *The Independent*.

Half of the U.S. is in drought conditions, including California, which has experienced a three-year drought. Many farmers in the state’s Central Valley, where up to one-half of the nation’s fruits and vegetables are sourced, have been denied access to reservoirs traditionally used to irrigate thirsty crops.

Ranchers are also hurting. Higher grain prices have prompted them to cut back on livestock.

“Extreme weather has thinned the nation’s beef cattle herds to levels last seen in 1951, when there were about half as many mouths to feed in America,” *Los Angeles Times* reported.

Fewer cattle mean higher prices. And as wholesale food prices go up, grocers are forced to pass the increase to customers.

The media outlet also stated: “The retail value of ‘all-fresh’ USDA choice-grade beef jumped to a record \$5.28 a pound in February, up from \$4.91 the same time a year ago. The same grade of beef cost \$3.97 as recently as 2008.” □

SOCIETY & LIFESTYLES

Tablets Negatively Affect Preschoolers' Motor Skills



■ **CHILDREN OF THE MODERN AGE:** Above, children play with digital tablets during the “Kidexpo” show at the Porte de Versailles exhibition center in Paris, France (Oct. 19, 2013). Right, nursery school pupils work with a tablet computer in Haguenau, France (March 18, 2013).

PHOTOS: ANADOLU AGENCY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Growing numbers of preschoolers are becoming skilled at using iPads and other tablet computers, at the expense of the development of their motor skills, experts warn.

“I have spoken to a number of nursery teachers who have concerns over the increasing numbers of young pupils who can swipe a screen but have little or no manipulative skills to play with building blocks or the like, or the pupils who cannot socialise with other pupils but whose parents talk proudly of their ability to use a tablet or smartphone,” Colin Kinney, a teacher from Northern Ireland, told his colleagues at the annual Association of Teachers and Lecturers Conference in Manchester, England.

Mr. Kinney was quoted in the *Telegraph* as saying that “‘brilliant computer skills’ shown by many pupils was ‘outweighed by their deteriorating skills in pen and paper exams because

they rely on instant support of the computer and are often unable to apply what they should have learned from their textbooks.’”

Young children entering preschool are adept at manipulating the touchscreen of a computer tablet—often surpassing the skills of their parents—but their abilities to stack building blocks or properly grasp a pen or pencil have been stunted in the process.

This is a problem that doctors, teachers and therapists agree negatively affects young children’s physical, academic and social development. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends children under age 2 should avoid screens altogether. According to its guidance report: “Unstructured play time is more valuable for the developing brain than electronic media. Children learn to think creatively, problem solve, and develop reasoning and motor skills at early

ages through unstructured, unplugged play. Free play also teaches them how to entertain themselves.”

The New York Times quoted Dr. Gary Small, director of the Longevity Center at the University of California, Los Angeles, and author of *iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind*: “We really don’t know the full neurological effects of these technologies yet. Children, like adults, vary quite a lot, and some are more sensitive than others to an abundance of screen time.”

The newspaper continued, “But Dr. Small says we do know that the brain is highly sensitive to stimuli, like iPads and smartphone screens, and if people spend too much time with one technology, and less time interacting with people like parents at the dinner table, that could hinder the development of certain communications skills.” □



Where Is God's Church Today?

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

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

Locate Jesus Christ's Church!

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

