

# REAL TRUTH™

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

# WHY GLOBAL FRUSTRATION?

———— YEAR IN REVIEW ISSUE ————

## Floods, Fires and Famines

Historic weather disasters put millions across the world in harm's way, leaving complex humanitarian issues in their aftermath.

## Increasing Terror

## The Vaping Crisis

An explosion of illnesses and deaths have been attributed to vape use, even though it has been seen as a safer alternative to smoking. Is society really better off?

DISEASES NEW AND OLD

## IMPEACHMENT

### *Who's Telling the Truth?*

If the investigation into the U.S. president has you frustrated—and maybe a little confused—here is how to make sense of the situation.

## Why to Keep an Eye on ISIS

The Islamic State's potential to quickly strengthen under a new leader cannot be overlooked.

# See Beyond the Bad News!

## Remembering Bastogne

The 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge brings the opportunity to remember the things that really matter.

# WHAT ABOUT 2020?

THE  
**REAL TRUTH**<sup>™</sup>  
A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

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A R T I C L E S

RCG.ORG/REALTRUTH



■ Protesters stand off with police during a clash at an anti-government rally in Hong Kong, China (Aug. 25, 2019).

PHOTO: ANTHONY KWAN/GETTY IMAGES

## Government

Whether citizens protesting leaders or legislators working to oust presidents, division has roiled and reset governments in nearly every nation across the world.

**Page 4**

**Personal from the Editor-in-Chief**  
**See Beyond the Bad News!**  
**Page 1**

## Environment

Historic weather disasters put millions across the world in harm's way, leaving complex humanitarian issues in their aftermath.

**Page 12**

## Health

The year began with a stream of reports on the U.S. opioid crisis, only to be overshadowed by the sudden increase of mysterious vaping illnesses by 2019's end.

**Page 16**

## Violence

While it looked like ISIS was finally put to flight, mass shootings, terrorist attacks, and gang violence continued to plague mankind—with its targets becoming increasingly random.

**Page 22**

## Anniversaries

Reflecting on major events of the past helps bring perspective to the often-confusing present. Here is a look at this year's commemorations of major turning points in world history—and what they mean for the future.

**Page 28**

**CREDITS:** All photos from Getty Images unless otherwise noted. Articles on pages 18-20 and 24-26 contain information from The Associated Press.

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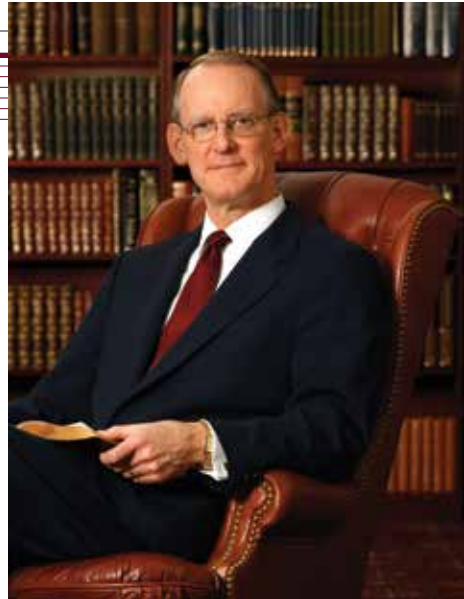
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## PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



# See Beyond the Bad News!

**T**O MAKE SENSE of the tumultuous year of 2019, we must look back to a Bible prophecy recorded millennia ago.

The prophet Habakkuk in chapter 1 saw a vision of our time now: “O LORD, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear! Even cry out unto You of VIOLENCE, and You will not save! Why do You show me INIQUITY, and cause me to behold grievance? For SPOILING and VIOLENCE are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention” (vs. 2-3).

How true is this today!

Verse 4 continues: “Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment does never go forth: for the wicked does compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceeds.”

The events of the past 365 days—and what is occurring NOW—can make us wonder the same thing as Habakkuk: “How long do we have to experience such evils, ills and confusion?”

So much happened in 2019, it is difficult to remember it all. There were the ongoing wars in the Mideast and Africa—oil tanker seizures in the Strait of Hormuz—intensifying racial strife worldwide—grow-

ing division (and threats) between Eastern and Western powers—entire nations plagued by famine—disease epidemics like Ebola threatening to morph into *pan-demics*—increasing earthquake activity worldwide that could bring violent eruptions predicted to last centuries—riots of every kind for seemingly every cause—multiple severe storms throughout the world leaving flooding and destruction—instability and disorder within every facet of societies. The list could go on and on.

Readers, know that this question of “how long” we have to watch the world spiral toward destruction is of titanic importance. In my nearly 53 years of knowing God’s truth, and almost 49 years of teaching it, the culmination of His masterplan for mankind has *never* been more in the forefront of my mind. The Kingdom of God—a divinely run SUPERGOVERNMENT—must soon come to save humanity from the problems, evils and ills it has brought on itself.

Ever-darkening world conditions make this abundantly clear.

### Close to Home

Think of the seemingly endless spate of mass shootings. These are increasingly leaving people wondering,

“Where will it happen next?”—and, “Could it happen to me, or someone I love?” Sadly, the answer to the first question is becoming, “Anywhere,” and the answer to the second question is, “Yes.”

Some events strike closer to home than others. In November, multiple shots were heard from our World Headquarters campus here in Wadsworth, Ohio. Early reports revealed a 26-year-old man was killed by officers in the Wadsworth Police Department and City Hall parking lot, under two miles from the campus. *Cleveland News 5* reported there were “several rifle shell casings on the ground, a shotgun and handgun and a couple of cars in the parking lot littered with bullet holes.”

A later press conference attended by *Real Truth* reporters revealed the incident was a case of “suicide by cop.” The man was shot six times after drawing a very realistic looking BB pistol. Even the city wherein God’s Work is done is not immune to the commotions increasingly plaguing society.

Also not far from home, a 24-year-old masked gunman clad in heavy body armor killed nine (plus himself) and injured at least 27 others at a bar in Dayton, Ohio, in August. The victims included his sister. Astonishingly, he took nine and wrecked 27 lives in *less than one minute*. Police say that if their response had not been immediate, the death toll would have been in the *hundreds*.

I cannot count the number of trips to and nights I have spent in Dayton since I was a small child. I have dined in the downtown area where the shooting occurred. For me, the picture is very real.

And we should at least note that 55 people (including seven on a playground) were killed or wounded just in Chicago on the same weekend of that month—a worse total than the incident above. These received almost no press because “it’s Chicago.” But we could also talk about how many died or were shot in Baltimore and St. Louis and Los Angeles and New York and...and... and...

No one—regardless of party, political or moral persuasion—knows who or what is *truly* to blame. I John 5:19 says “the whole world lies in wickedness.” Who believes this? II Corinthians 4:4 adds that Satan is the “god of this world” who has “blinded the minds of them which believe not.” And who believes *this*? Revelation 12:9 speaks of Satan “which deceives the whole world.” And again, who believes *this*? No one even talks about such verses, never mind believes them! The true God will soon take back and fix what Satan has destroyed. Only then will tragedies like the one endured just 180 miles southwest of where I write be stopped.

### Fixing Government

Watching world conditions and events can be “vexing,” as was the case with ancient Lot observing his surroundings (II Pet. 2:7-8), but it is also to be deeply *motivating*! As the mess that encompasses the world only grows steadily *worse*, our desire to do something about it—to *fix* it!—should grow steadily *stronger*.

So many *leaders* have more concern for their own careers and agendas than for the people they are elected to serve. Isaiah 9:16 has application: “The leaders of this people [the modern-day nations of Israel] cause them to err.” We are truly a nation today that is “erring” in almost every way imaginable.

God was right in Amos 3:3 when He asked, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” The obvious answer is, *of course not!* The two big political parties of America simply cannot walk together. Without Christ’s intervention into world affairs very soon, it is impossible for mankind to ever see the goal of world peace achieved.

When God changes—*revolutionizes*—society, it will not just be from the “top down.” Every individual will be taught the correct way to live and given every opportunity to make the right choices. God describes one Israelite nation—Ephraim—in the following way: “From the sole of the

foot even unto the head there is *no soundness in it*” (Isa. 1:6). In the modern vernacular, which borrows from this verse, they are “sick from head to toe.” Every level of society demands the change we are so blessed to understand is just ahead!

### Special Issue

As you read this year-in-review edition of *The Real Truth*, think about the conditions Habakkuk saw in vision. They are at an intensity NEVER seen before, and they are rapidly growing worse. God’s Kingdom CANNOT be far away!

And I said *nothing* about the riots in Hong Kong, mass protests in Moscow, worsening horrors in Venezuela, 57 who died in a Brazil prison riot (16 decapitated), a bomb that killed and injured scores in Cairo, the canceled Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty between Russia and America, Israel attacking sites in Iraq for the first time in 38 years, India suddenly ending the long-time autonomy of the region of Kashmir next to Pakistan and creating an uproar, President Trump issuing a 100 percent embargo of non-medical products going into Venezuela, and unending turmoil on the American southern border. Nor did I reference any recent earthquakes or storms, mass death of whales on the west coast, bees and bats disappearing seemingly everywhere, billions of grasshoppers suddenly descending on Las Vegas, and so much, much more.

In one sense, there could be no worse time to be alive. But more correctly, there could be no better time either! The chaos around us is the surest signal that God’s Kingdom is close. Keep watching!

Readers, there is coming a time when Isaiah 11:9 will come to pass: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My [God’s] holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.” Satan’s influence will no longer hold sway over the world and the conditions found in this magazine will *go away*. May this be SOON! □

SPECIAL ISSUE

# THE YEAR IN REVIEW 2019

GOVERNMENT



ENVIRONMENT



HEALTH



VIOLENCE



ANNIVERSARIES

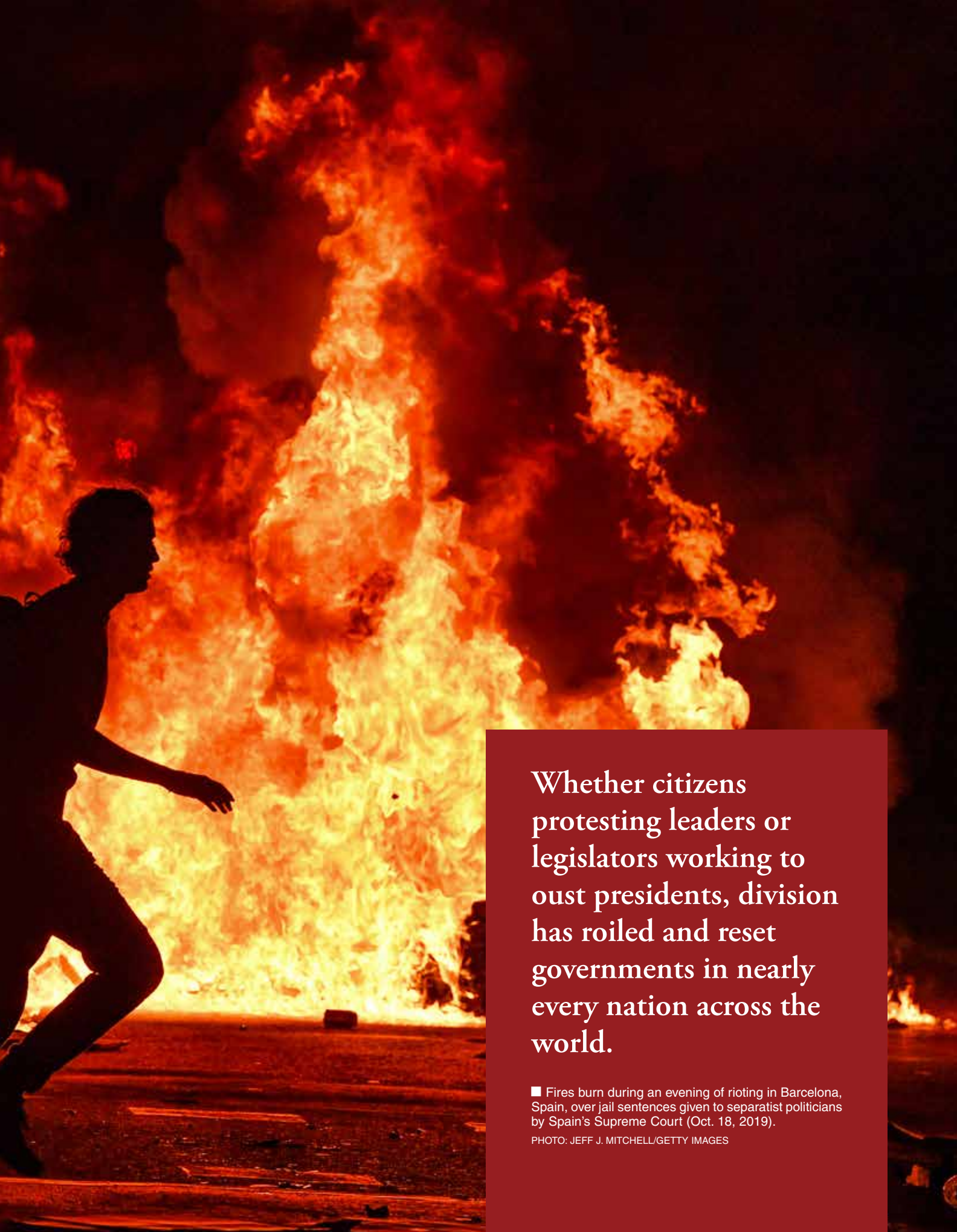


A large, intense fire burning at night, with a person's silhouette in the foreground. The fire is bright orange and yellow, with a blue light visible in the background. The scene is dark, with the fire providing the main source of light. The person in the foreground is walking away from the camera, their silhouette dark against the bright fire.

# G

GOVERNMENT

IN REVIEW



Whether citizens protesting leaders or legislators working to oust presidents, division has roiled and reset governments in nearly every nation across the world.

■ Fires burn during an evening of rioting in Barcelona, Spain, over jail sentences given to separatist politicians by Spain's Supreme Court (Oct. 18, 2019).

PHOTO: JEFF J. MITCHELL/GETTY IMAGES



PHOTO: WIN MCNAMEE/GETTY IMAGES

# IMPEACHMENT

## Who's Telling the Truth?

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

**L**ET'S FACE FACTS. The historic impeachment proceedings in the United States are unlikely to change many minds. Early on in the testimony portion of the inquiry, both behind closed doors and televised, most already held ironclad opinions.

In mid-November, 65 percent of Americans said they cannot imagine any information or circumstances during the impeachment inquiry that could change their minds. Just 30 percent said it is possible, the NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist poll found.

"We're really not seeing either a backlash or a positive," Barbara Carvalho, director of the Marist Poll, said of the impeachment inquiry. "What we're seeing is people just locking in."

America's hyperpartisanship at its worst.

Of those surveyed, about half of U.S. citizens approved of the impeachment inquiry. Similar numbers wanted President Donald Trump to be impeached and removed from office.

Although the president's approval rating took a small hit when the impeachment investigation began in late September, it has since climbed to around 42 percent. Barack Obama was at 44 percent at the same time in his presidency.

The main purpose of the inquiry centers on accusations that President Trump, using his personal attorney Rudy Giuliani and others, coerced the Ukrainian government to investigate political rivals in exchange for military aid.

Yet, for those who step back and take a look at the whole situation, the political scandal should not be the biggest takeaway.

At the 1,000-foot view, the impeachment soap opera reveals a strange quirk of thinking on the part of the right and left, Republicans and Democrats. Day in and out, they can thoroughly examine the same situations and come to *utterly* different conclusions. It often sounds as if the two sides are talking of two completely separate events.

The news media is little different.

It has come to the point that the average person can feel a little insane. Even when putting in the effort to keep up with news coverage and weigh presented facts, one can wonder: Who is telling the truth?

### Political Theater

A quick recap on the impeachment process sets the stage: The Constitution allows for Congress to oust presidents if enough lawmakers agree they committed "treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors."



“High crimes and misdemeanors” means abuse of power by a high-level official.

The language here is deliberately vague. It allows Congress to step in if they *feel* a president overstepped his bounds. In essence, removing a president comes down to *political will*—if the American people and their representatives want a leader out, they can make it so.

Said another way, a president does not have to break the law to be impeached.

Most on the left are ready to boot President Trump. The case against him is as certain as death and taxes. Statements from Democratic leaders make this clear. As does the news coverage, which generally supports the left. Their standpoint has been the loudest throughout this process.

What about the other side?

Here is what a conservative columnist wrote in *The Washington Post*: “Trump supporters have completely tuned out the regular news coverage that assails their leader, and by extension, them. They know the president won’t get a fair hearing before the partisan House or from the legions of talking heads who have been shouting at them for three years. It would take a truly earth-shattering revelation at this point to get them to reconsider their backing. The idea that somehow flogging Republicans over their supposed backwardness for backing Trump will get them to change their minds is as stupid and counterproductive as the saying that ‘The beatings will continue until the morale improves.’”

He continued: “I don’t expect anything to change in future hearings. Democrats will trot out witnesses they have already vetted in private. Anti-Trump acolytes throughout the media-entertainment complex will pronounce they are shocked at the revelations, all while refusing to even contemplate that maybe the Biden family should at least be looked into. And when the hearings reach their inevitable conclusion that Trump is guilty of high crimes and misdemeanors, the chorus will merely grow louder and insist that the Republican-

controlled Senate ‘do its job’ and put ‘country over party.’”

Just as average Americans are split on impeachment, so is Congress.

The Democrats have plenty of votes to bring articles of impeachment against Mr. Trump. It will just take a simple majority, and the party has 54 percent of the seats in the House. As *The Real Truth* goes to print, the House Judiciary Committee approved charges against the president. The House is expected to vote on the matter before year’s end.

Yet that is where the impeachment process moves to the Senate, which turns into a trial and then a vote on whether to convict the commander-in-chief. As Democrats are the minority there, they would have to get 20 Republicans to flip on the president—since a guilty verdict requires at least a two-thirds majority.

The likely result of the impeachment saga? Impeachment from the Democrats in the House. A “not guilty” vote from the Republicans in the Senate. The left will dig even further into its foxhole thinking, as will the right. A trench-warfare stalemate.

The only possible way Republicans could flip on the president is if public support completely eroded for him, something that currently seems unlikely. Also consider that no president has ever been impeached and removed from office. For example, in the 1990s Bill Clinton was impeached but not convicted. And it was only when President Richard Nixon lost voter and party support that he resigned.

If the current impeachment proceedings play out as they appear to be scripted, what is the point? The most obvious result will be an even greater political wedge driven between left and right.

### **Cruc of the Matter**

Back to the central question of this article: Who is telling the truth?

For those who attempt to objectively look at this situation, who and what to believe can seem a fool’s errand. When the leaders of history’s most powerful nation cannot judge a situation the same way—what chance does the average citizen have?

Such questions are a core reason *The Real Truth* magazine exists. We never take political sides. Instead, we allow the truths of the Bible to judge what is right and wrong. Viewing current events through the lens of God’s Word allows us to bring THE REAL TRUTH on matters.

A core part of understanding world trends and conditions is to look to Bible prophecy, which can be likened to history written in advance. In other words, God declared many millennia ago that He would do something, and He *will* bring it to pass.

Many of the Old Testament prophets describe the generation alive today. These verses help explain why politicians and the nation itself cannot agree on pretty much anything.

Notice Isaiah 59: “The way of peace they know not; and *there is no judgment* in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goes therein shall not know peace” (vs. 8).

As a country, we should be honest with ourselves: We do not know the way to peace! On top of constant political infighting, there are the seven nations in which the U.S. is currently at war.

Verse 14 adds to this: “And judgment is turned away backward, and justice stands afar off: FOR TRUTH IS FALLEN IN THE STREET, and equity cannot enter.”

Truth is truly fallen in the street. Honest people today strain to know the truth of matters—and often must resign themselves to the fact that they cannot know for certain. This is one of the greatest indicators that the U.S.—and the world at large—is hurtling down the wrong path.

This is not what God wants! In Isaiah 1:18, He says, “Come now, and let us reason together.” For those willing to listen, He promises to “restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning...” (vs. 26).

God will soon reason with all those in the U.S. For now, He will work with individuals who seek Him and want to know His truth as outlined in the Bible.

Only by obeying God can you know the truth of what is occurring in the world today. □



# DEMANDING CHANGE

From Beirut to Hong Kong, protests reveal global frustration.

BY DAVID J. LITAVSKY

**D**ANCING ORANGE flames churn thick, putrid, mud-colored smoke in the middle of a once-traffic-congested street in downtown Santiago. It is just one of dozens of car-size fires roiling over piles of debris in Chile's capital that were set by protesters demanding improvements in health care, public transportation, education and other government-provided services. At a point, 1.2 million people jammed into the city center for a rally.

Santiago is just one of the many places that have caught fire across the globe, both literally and figuratively.

From Beirut to Hong Kong and London to Port-au-Prince, furious demonstrators swept through cities to demand fundamental change. These often-violent protests set tires, government offices, stores and metro stations ablaze.

It was the biggest surge of rallies since the Arab Spring in the early 2010s. Some publications argue that 2019's protests match the anti-communist demonstrations in Asia and Eastern Europe in





■ Top left, protesters surround the police headquarters in Hong Kong (June 21, 2019). Top right, Spanish protesters wave national flags during a demonstration against Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez in Madrid (Feb. 10, 2019). Bottom left, furloughed federal workers protest the partial government shutdown in Washington, D.C. (Jan. 23, 2019). Bottom right, a protester flashes victory signs as a police vehicle burns behind him during clashes in Baghdad, Iraq (Oct. 3, 2019).

PHOTOS: PAULA BRONSTEIN (TOP LEFT); PABLO BLAZQUEZ DOMINGUEZ (TOP RIGHT); WIN MCNAMEE (BOTTOM LEFT); AHMAD AL-RUBAYE/AFP (BOTTOM RIGHT); GETTY IMAGES

the late 1980s and early 1990s in terms of number of countries involved.

Yet while these past waves of unrest took aim at dictatorships, the latest demonstrations are more so rattling elected governments.

For months, pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong poured into streets, going so far as to stage the world's largest takeover of an international airport and occupying university campuses in weekslong standoffs with police. Though sparked by a proposal from Hong Kong's government to allow criminals to be extradited to mainland China, the protests turned into a wider call for securing the semi-autonomous city's freedoms from Beijing.

Lebanon was shaken by its largest demonstrations in decades over systematic corruption and mismanagement that brought the country into dire economic straits, leading the prime minister to resign within weeks.

Anti-government demonstrators in Iraq and Iran faced direct gunfire from security forces, leaving hundreds dead in both nations.

The list goes on: Algeria, Britain, Ecuador, France, Guinea, Haiti, Honduras, India, Kazakhstan, Pakistan and Spain.

What is driving the protests thousands of miles apart, across countries with profoundly different politics, economies, cultures and histories?

"One obvious link is also the most superficial: the role played by social media," *The Guardian* reported.

Social media enables the mass spread of notions of injustice. A mob mentality is compounded when it includes millions of people who feel oppressed across continents, not just the streets of one city.

Another motivator in the global trend is "generational," the British news outlet continued. "The majority of those protesting now are the children of the financial crisis—a generation that has come of age during the strange and febrile years after the collapse of a broken economic and political orthodoxy, and before its replacement has emerged."

"All this has produced a generation charged with hopelessness and hope."

But can grassroots movements—often violent—effect the change people seek?

Indeed, many leaders are taking the message and responding. Chile's President Pinera announced a package of measures including raising pension pay and increasing the minimum wage of \$400 a month by 16 percent.

Several others resigned quickly following pressure from citizens: Puerto Rico's Governor Ricardo Rossello, Bolivian President Evo Morales, and the leaders of Sudan and Algeria. Citizens in some nations settled for the repealing of unpopular legislation.

Yet many of these movements have only continued to fuel the problems and hopelessness they seek to escape.

In Chile, vandals and demonstrators wielding gasoline bombs all but destroyed commerce in many cities. Treasury minister Ignacio Briones has predicted that 300,000 people will lose their jobs because of the damage inflicted to stores. Small business owners say 50,000 already have.

Also, the likelihood government concessions can quell the rebellion is low. In many cases it has emboldened protesters to make more demands. Hong Kong's activists dug in even after the announcement that the extradition bill that triggered demonstrations would be rescinded. Organizers vowed to continue the fight until other demands were met.

Stop and break down what is going on here. People feel their governments have failed them—yet they are looking to governments and officials to bring solutions. Few, if any, of these protests have clear, actionable solutions to the problems they are calling out. Yet many are frustrated and see no other way to make their voices heard.

Tragically, such protests rarely bring good immediate or long-term results.

Is it any wonder Jesus told followers to pray "Your Kingdom come"? The Kingdom of God is just that: a Kingdom. Today, we would call it a government, something that has the rule of law over citizens.

Realize. We are told to pray that this Kingdom will arrive, which means it is not here yet!

The record of history shows that God's government is not yet set up on Earth. The world is shot through with bureaucracy, corruption, mismanagement, cronyism and the like.

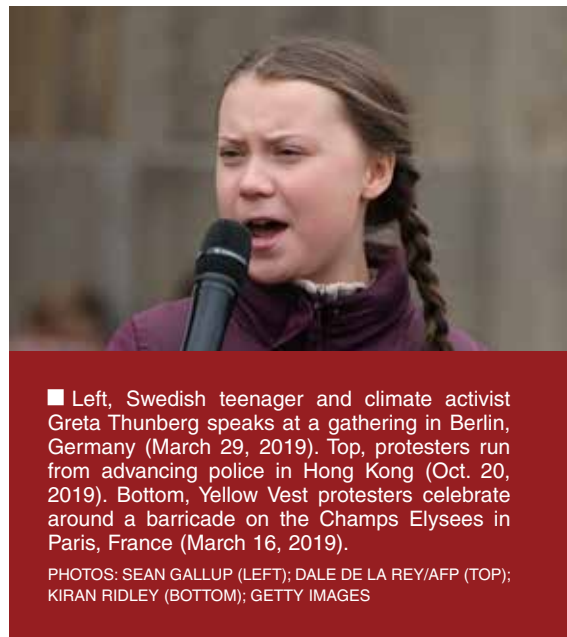
The Bible reveals that government solutions cannot come from the hands of men. Instead, it can only come from "the God of heaven," who Daniel 2 states will "set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall...stand forever" (vs. 44).

Only a Kingdom led by God Himself can permanently benefit citizens living under it. Only this PERFECT government can end mankind's millennia-old woes of war, poverty, famine, disease, crime and so forth.

Notice Isaiah 9: "Of the increase of His government and peace *there shall be no end...*" (vs. 7).

The unending pleas from millions of people reveal *all* peoples' genuine NEED for this world-ruling SUPERGOVERNMENT. It will soon bring true justice to the troubles both citizens and governments face.

To anyone wanting to see past the confusion and unrest that defines the world today, read *What Is the Kingdom of God?* at [rcg.org/witkog](http://rcg.org/witkog). □



■ Left, Swedish teenager and climate activist Greta Thunberg speaks at a gathering in Berlin, Germany (March 29, 2019). Top, protesters run from advancing police in Hong Kong (Oct. 20, 2019). Bottom, Yellow Vest protesters celebrate around a barricade on the Champs Elysees in Paris, France (March 16, 2019).

PHOTOS: SEAN GALLUP (LEFT); DALE DE LA REY/AFP (TOP); KIRAN RIDLEY (BOTTOM); GETTY IMAGES

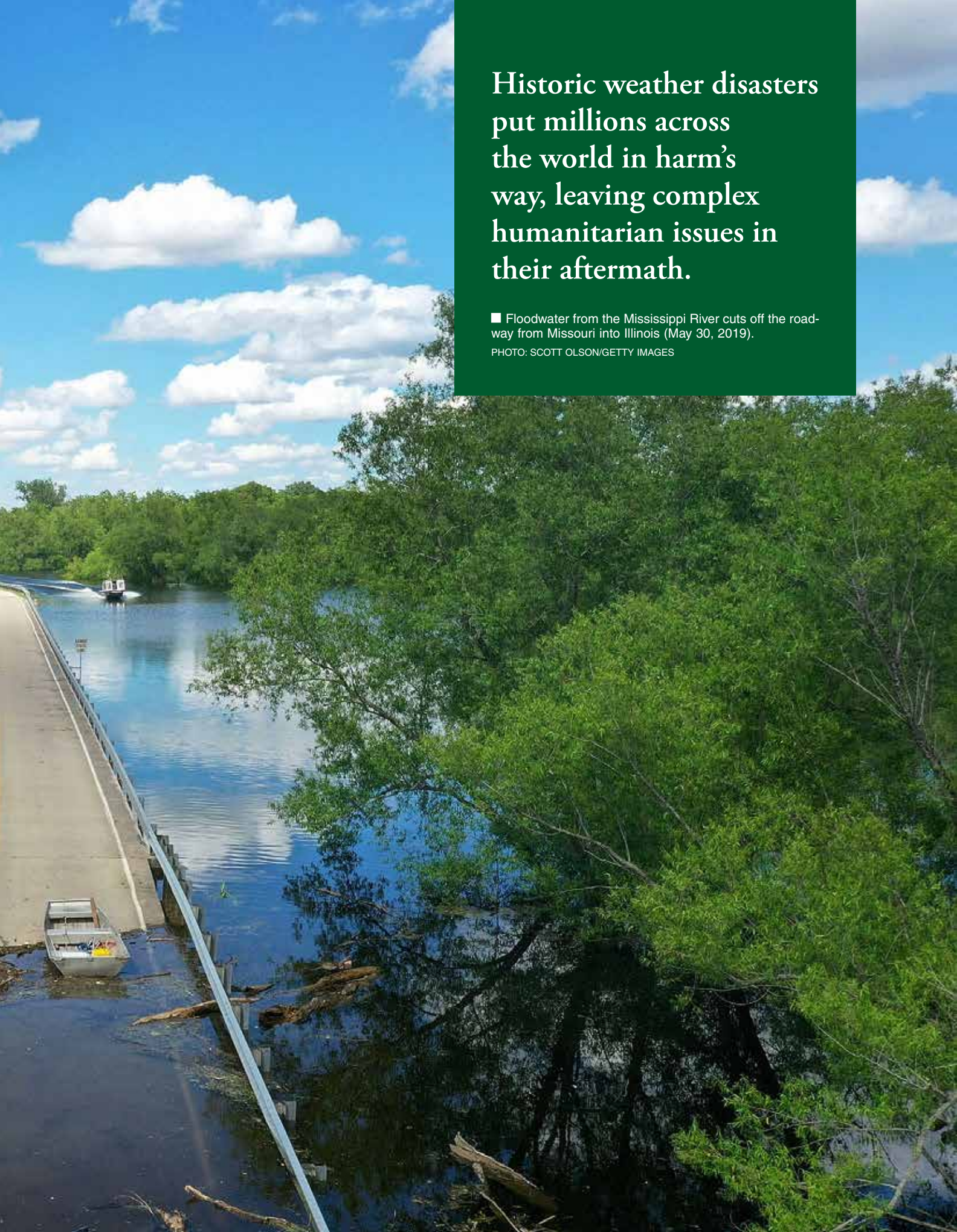




# E

ENVIRONMENT

IN REVIEW

A photograph of a dam on the Mississippi River. The dam is a concrete structure on the left side of the frame. A small boat is in the water near the dam. The river is surrounded by lush green trees. The sky is blue with white clouds. A green text box is overlaid on the top right of the image.

# Historic weather disasters put millions across the world in harm's way, leaving complex humanitarian issues in their aftermath.

■ Floodwater from the Mississippi River cuts off the roadway from Missouri into Illinois (May 30, 2019).

PHOTO: SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES



# FLOODS, FIRES AND FAMINES

**R**OMANS 8:22 states that “the WHOLE CREATION groans and travails in pain together until now” because it “waits for the manifestation of the sons of God” (vs. 19). This is the arrival of His Kingdom to restore the Earth! The environmental disasters of last year—manmade and otherwise—brought this verse to life.

In the 2019 State of Global Air report by the Health Effects Institute, air pollution “is the fifth leading risk factor for mortality worldwide. In 2017, air pollution is estimated to have contributed to close to 5 million deaths globally—nearly 1 in every 10 deaths.” According to Dr. John Balbus, senior advisor for public health for the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, pollution kills three times more people than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined.

There was also the surge in fires burning across the Amazon Rainforest, most of which were caused by slash-

and-burn methods by farmers to clear forest. More than 80,000 fires were reported in Brazil, which accounted for a 77 percent increase over 2018.

Bushfires ripping across Australia this year were also worse than usual. “Australia has always had devastating bushfires,” *The Guardian* reported. But “scientists say the fire conditions this year are without parallel on several fronts.” Whereas previous fires were fueled by brush that grew from excess rain, 2019’s fires were caused by lack of rain linked to record-breaking drought.

“For the forests and woodlands in the eastern half of the state, this is unprecedented,” Ross Bradstock, director of the University of Wollongong’s center for environmental risk management of bushfires, told the news outlet. “Natural features in the landscape which often impede fires, like these wetter forest communities, are just burning. There is likely to be long-term ecological and other environmental consequences.”

Treacherous floods and hurricanes affected many other countries that in some places brought the threat of famine as a result of crop losses.

Record flooding of the Mississippi River Basin during the winter and spring of 2019 caused an estimated \$12.5 billion in property damage, destroyed crops at the beginning of the growing season, and even prevented shipments of commodities as a result of high currents.

The rain contributed to what was the wettest 12 months on record in the United States.

Later in the year, Venice was hit with its worst flooding in over 50 years. City authorities said the water level peaked at over six feet.

Cyclone Idai flooded eastern African nations in what United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called “one of the worst weather-related catastrophes in the history of Africa.” More than 1,000 people lost their lives and its aftermath left survivors contending with the threat of water-borne diseases.

In the Atlantic, Category 5 Hurricane Dorian was considered the worst natural disaster in the history of the Bahamas. It had sustained winds of 185 mph, making it one of the most powerful Atlantic storms on record. □





■ Opposite page, St. Mark's square is flooded during an exceptionally high tide in Venice, Italy (Nov. 15, 2019). Top, a photographer takes photos amid a shower of embers as wind and flames rip through the area near Geyserville, California (Oct. 24, 2019). Bottom, an elderly man lies on the ground after his bag of rice was snatched from him in a scramble for food aid in Nyamatande, Mozambique (March 26, 2019).

PHOTOS: SIMONE PADOVANI/AWAKENING (OPPOSITE PAGE); AP/PHILL MAGAKOE (TOP); ARMEND NIMANI/AFP (BOTTOM); GETTY IMAGES





# H

## HEALTH IN REVIEW





The year began with a stream of reports on the U.S. opioid crisis, only to be overshadowed by the sudden increase of mysterious vaping illnesses by 2019's end.

■ Workers make pods for e-cigarettes on a production line at Kanger Tech, one of China's leading manufacturers of vaping products (Sept. 24, 2019).

PHOTO: KEVIN FRAYER/GETTY IMAGES



PHOTO: JOHN KEEBLE/GETTY IMAGES

# THE VAPING CRISIS

## Discerning the Facts from the Fog

An explosion of illnesses and deaths have been attributed to vape use, even though it has been seen as a safer alternative to smoking. Is society really better off?

BY JAMES F. PASTOR

**J**AY JENKINS entered a local convenience store and gas station with a friend. Noticing a cleverly marked package of cannabidiol (CBD) oil, he wondered, *what is vaping like?*

After purchasing the product, he took two puffs. What he experienced next was completely unexpected.

He said he quickly was “feeling crazy, not thinking straight, not able to move.” Seconds later, he experienced frightening hallucinations. Then he lost consciousness.

His friend drove him straight to the hospital. While there, Jay had seizures and difficulty breathing. He said it “felt like I was in hell” and that “I was already dead.”

Though this dramatic reaction is not typical of those who vape, it is not unprecedented. In Jay’s case, subsequent lab testing revealed he vaped a totally synthetic substance. Jay purchased a product wrapped and advertised as having CBD oil, which is derived from cannabis plants. The results showed what he smoked did not contain *any* of it!

Naturally, one would think the manufacturer would be liable—or at least could explain how a product marketed as containing CBD oil was mislabeled.

The *CNN* video describing his story reported there is no way to even know who manufactured the substance.

This example shows the complexity behind the vaping crisis today, one that has exploded in magnitude over just the past year.

On December 10, 2019, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported 2,409 confirmed and probable cases of vaping illnesses. Illnesses have occurred in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Fifty-two people in 26 states and the capital district have died. In addition, the CDC reported:

- The first case in the U.S. occurred in late March 2019. Cases ramped up in late June and rose dramatically in late July.

- The median age for illness is 23, though the median age for death is 50.

- Nationally, 9 in 10 cases required hospitalization. Many previously healthy adolescents and young adults needed machines to help them breathe.

- Doctors say the illnesses resemble an inhalation injury. Symptoms have included shortness of breath, fatigue, chest pain, diarrhea and vomiting.

- Officials continue to find substantial numbers of U.S. patients who said they vaped only nicotine—the most recent report says 16 percent—and not THC, the psychoactive ingredient in cannabis.

These numbers show there is clearly *some* problem with vaping. Despite this, some argue the problem is merely because vaping products are not being regulated by the federal government. Ultimately, they believe it would be better for the portion of society that uses cigarettes and tobacco to move on to vaping as a healthier alternative.

Yet there is still too much uncertainty surrounding the products, and that is enough for most to say it should be prohibited. The American Medical

Association called for an immediate ban on all e-cigarettes and vaping devices. Thirteen states have outlawed vaping in public areas where smoking cigarettes is not allowed.

Despite professed comparative benefits to smoking, vaping's damaging effects have alarmed medical and public health professionals. Let's cut through the marketing spin and get to the facts.

### What Is It?

According to nonprofit Center on Addiction, "Vaping is the act of inhaling and exhaling the aerosol, often referred to as vapor, which is produced by an e-cigarette or similar device."

Vape devices do not produce smoke, but rather an aerosol that is often mistaken for water vapor. The smoke-like appearance is actually fine particles that were vaporized by heat. When e-cigarettes were introduced to the U.S. in 2006, they were advertised as a healthy alternative to smoking.

Now there are a variety of vaping methods, including pens and JUUL boxes—which resemble USB flash drives. All devices have four simple components: a battery, coil, wick and cartridge containing e-liquid (or e-juice). Users press a button activating the heating component. This turns the e-liquid into the aerosol that is inhaled.

For cigarette smokers, the effect of inhaling and exhaling aerosol vapor satisfies the urge to smoke. For this reason, it is touted as a way for smokers to wean themselves off of cigarettes.

However, the illnesses and deaths associated with vaping show it is not a failsafe alternative. In addition, the products are often subject to false advertising.

### Unknown Risks

Cigarette smoking is being replaced by vaping, particularly among high schoolers.

The percentage of high schoolers who reported smoking fell to 5.8 percent in 2019 from the prior year, a 28 percent drop and the largest since the U.S. government began surveying teens.

The decline among teens has been seized upon by vaping proponents, who argue it undercuts the gravest argument against the nicotine-emitting devices: that they act as a "gateway" to traditional smoking.

Yet, for one, experts on both sides acknowledge there is no definitive evidence linking e-cigarettes to the decline in youth smoking. The question is clouded by too many long-term trends and complicating variables. Teen smoking has been decreasing since the late 1990s and is influenced by government policies, public opinion, changing products and tobacco industry marketing.

Meanwhile, vaping use among high school students has increased more than cigarette use has decreased. Nearly 28 percent reported vaping in the last month, according to preliminary CDC figures for 2019. That number is up from 21 percent last year and 12 percent the year before.

Part of the reason for this is e-cigarettes, *by their very design*, have more appeal to teenagers and are more difficult to quit than traditional cigarettes. "With vaping everything flips on its head," said Sharon Levy, the director of Adolescent Substance Use and Addiction Program at Boston Children's Hospital. While in the past teenagers had to sneak out of school to smoke a cigarette, "we have kids that are only using [e-cigarettes] at school," Dr. Levy said.

While vaping does produce an odor, it is far less than traditional tobacco or marijuana cigarettes. Often the tell-tale scents are masked by sweet-smelling flavors such as bubblegum or fruit.

In addition to being easier to hide, vaping devices contribute to a greater frequency of use and higher consumption of products such as nicotine. Some pods—which contain the ingredients that turn into vapor—contain the equivalent of 200 puffs of cigarettes (the same as one pack). Most users consume one pod a day.

Those who smoke typically end when they have burned through the cigarette. "For vapers, the feeling of

being done only comes at the end of a pod, when they've inhaled about an entire cigarette pack's worth of nicotine," *Wired* reported.

Essentially, teenagers may be addicting themselves to vaping products at a faster rate than to tobacco products decades ago.

The question of how to quit the product evades researchers. "It's a major research gap," stated Rachel Grana, the program director at the National Cancer Institute's Tobacco Control Research Branch.

And this may prove the greatest danger, that so little is known about the effects of inhaling various oils, flavor particles and other ingredients in vaping products. "We don't know enough about the aerosol that vaping produces in terms of the short and longer-term health impacts," said Dr. Anne Schuchat, the principal deputy director of CDC. "It may indeed be that *the process itself* is risky."

One medical doctor summarized the nature of vaping as a "maximum entrance into the blood stream which immediately is distributed throughout the body." The blood stream acts to "fast track" the vaporized substance.

If the substance is cut with harmful ingredients, the negative effects would quickly spread throughout the blood stream.

Recall how quickly Jay Jenkins reacted after just two puffs of a synthetic substance.

Yet it is not just products cut with harmful substances that experts recommend avoiding. The CDC advises against vaping in any form.

### What Can Be Done?

Like many problems facing humanity, vaping serves as a microcosm of why people cannot solve their own problems. After decades of tobacco companies and government regulators refusing to acknowledge the harm caused by nicotine, this cycle continues with vape products.

With the explosive increase of illnesses and deaths, this "healthy" alternative is, at best, questionable—and more likely part of the problem! Instead of seeing it as the lesser of two evils, society must realize it is another complex problem bringing a slew of unintended consequences.

In the end, the problem is larger than vaping. It is with the very nature

of mankind. Our report on drug trends addressed this problem.

The report pointed to *human nature* as the cause of any drug crisis. It states: "Sadly, drug use continues to maintain a stranglehold on young people, stripping away their chance for stable, happy and productive lives. Scientific knowledge combined with escapism, experimentation and sheer boredom has resulted in mankind inventing many poisonous substances and deadlier forms of drugs. These are then mixed to create even more lethal concoctions."

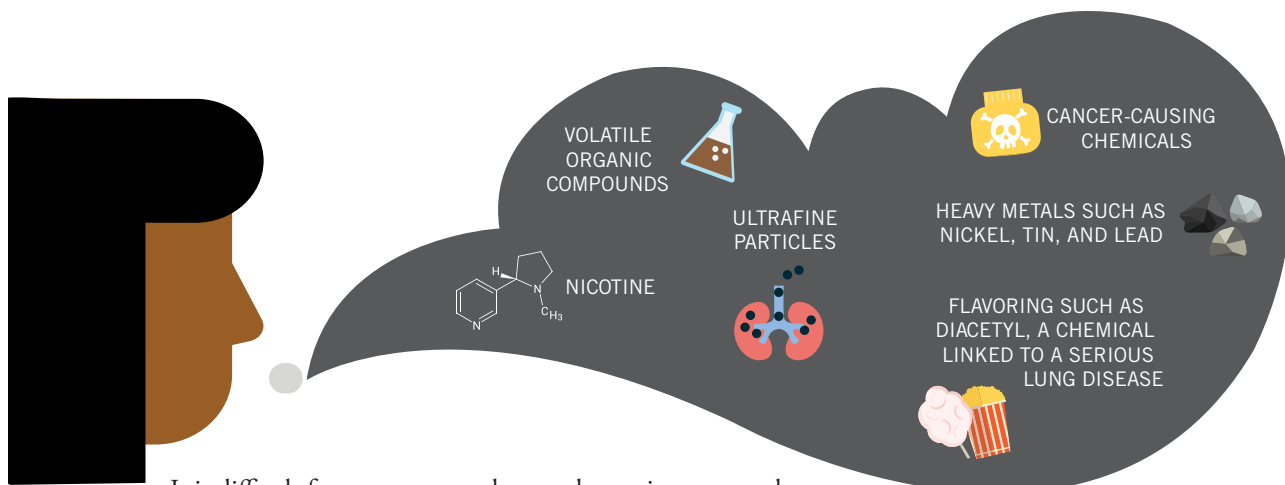
A desire to escape reality. Seeking alternative experiences. SHEER BOREDOM.

These begin to point to the root causes of the vaping crisis. They represent an overall breakdown in character both on the side of users and those in the industry. The focus is on pleasing oneself over others.

Almost no one knows that the law of cause and effect is the missing link to remedy humanity's issues. Consequently, society focuses on treating the EFFECTS of crises—and almost never the underlying CAUSES. Read *Why Man Cannot Solve His Problems* at [rcg.org/uun](http://rcg.org/uun) for more. □

## WHAT IS IN E-CIGARETTE AEROSOL?

The aerosol that users breathe in from e-cigarette devices can contain potentially harmful substances.



It is difficult for consumers to know what e-cigarette products contain. For example, some e-cigarettes marketed as containing zero percent nicotine have been found to contain nicotine.

GRAPHIC: U.S. DEPARTMENT HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES-CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION



# DISEASES NEW AND OLD

**D**ISEASE HAS plagued mankind over the millennia. Yet, even with the advent of technology and the availability of greater resources than ever before, sicknesses have continued to spread throughout the globe.

One of the hardest hit nations, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is fighting the second largest Ebola epidemic in history, with over 3,300 confirmed infections and nearly 2,200 deaths since the outbreak last year. It is also suffering the world's greatest measles epidemic, which claimed more than 5,000 lives.

While measles is seen as an easily preventable viral infection, the disease has roughly tripled around the world, including Ethiopia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Madagascar, Myanmar, the Philippines, Sudan, Thailand and Ukraine. Even with a stronger health infrastructure in the United States, the first five months of 2019 saw more infections of the virus than each year for the last quarter century.

One of the most worrying trends is the comeback of Black Death. From 2010 to 2015, more than 3,000 cases were reported with nearly 600 deaths. Now, a "strain of bubonic plague with high-level resistance to the antibiotic streptomycin, which is usually the first-line treatment, was seen recently in Madagascar," *CNN* reported.



■ Top left, vaccine for typhoid fever is prepared at the U.S. Army medical school in Washington, D.C. (1917). Top right, a woman holds her seven-month old son, who is suffering from measles and being treated at a government-run hospital, in Manila, Philippines (May 4, 2019). Bottom, a United Nations peacekeeper has his boots cleaned before leaving an Ebola treatment center in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Sept. 1, 2019).

PHOTOS: HARRIS & EWING COLLECTION (TOP LEFT); EZRA ACAYAN (TOP RIGHT); ALEXIS HUGUET (BOTTOM); GETTY IMAGES

Add to this the comeback of conditions in the United Kingdom: scarlet fever, whooping cough and gout. New data from the UK National Health Service shows that diagnoses of these Victorian-era conditions have been increasing since 2010.

Diagnoses of scarlet fever, which was a leading cause of infant death in the 1900s, increased 208 percent from 2010-2011 to 2017-2018. Incidences of whooping cough, which was virtually non-existent after a nationwide vaccination program in the 1950s, increased 59 percent from 2010 to 2018.

Meanwhile, common chronic conditions such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes are projected to get worse in both developed and developing nations. The World Health Organization reported: "It has been projected that, by 2020, chronic diseases will account for almost three-quarters of all deaths worldwide," an increase from 60 percent in 2001. □

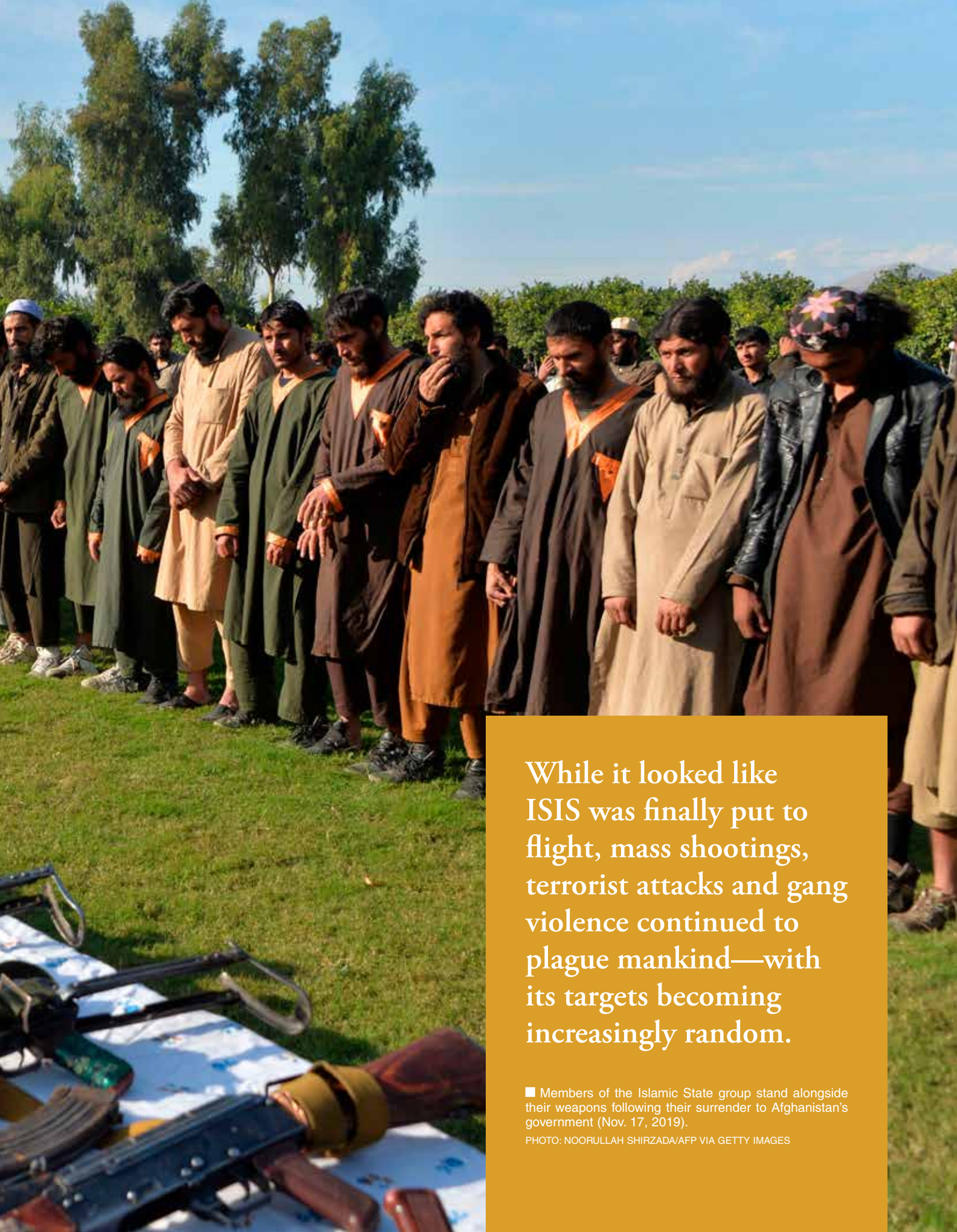
# V

VIOLENCE

IN REVIEW







While it looked like ISIS was finally put to flight, mass shootings, terrorist attacks and gang violence continued to plague mankind—with its targets becoming increasingly random.

■ Members of the Islamic State group stand alongside their weapons following their surrender to Afghanistan's government (Nov. 17, 2019).

PHOTO: NOORULLAH SHIRZADA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



**O**NCE SPANNING a large swath of Iraq and Syria, the self-declared caliphate Islamic State was delivered a seeming deathblow in October: United States special forces killed the group's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

But the militant group, which arose from the remnants of al-Qaida in Iraq after that group's defeat by U.S.-led forces in 2008, spent little time mourning before pushing forward.

"Less than a week after Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi detonated himself rather than risk capture, the Islamic State named his successor," *Washington Examiner* reported. "We give our obedience to the commander of the faithful, the caliph of the Muslims, Abu Ibrahim al Hashimi al Qurayshi, pledging to listen and obey, in times of delight and dislike, and in times of hardship and ease, and to do so selflessly," the group's new spokesman announced."

The *Examiner* article concluded, "ISIS's continued resonance among a subset of extremist Islamists worldwide, meanwhile, will make Baghdadi's death simply the conclusion of a chapter rather than the end of the story."

The Islamic State remains a dangerous threat in Iraq, Afghanistan and beyond.

U.S. forces, perhaps in reduced numbers, will continue hunting and attacking key Islamic State targets, even as President Donald Trump says he is committed to a 2016 campaign pledge to bring

# Why to Keep an Eye on ISIS

The Islamic State's potential to quickly strengthen under a new leader cannot be overlooked.

BY NESTOR A. TORO

■ A member of the Syrian Democratic Forces on watch duty in the village of Baghouz near the Iraqi border a day after the Islamic State group's "caliphate" was declared defeated (March 24, 2019).

PHOTO: DELIL SOULEIMAN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

them home to cease the “endless wars” started under his predecessors.

Mr. Trump suggested that other countries, including Russia, carry on the fight against ISIS, but there is no indication that U.S. forces will abandon the mission any time soon.

The general sentiment: America cannot get smug now, or just leave it to others. Do not underestimate ISIS’ ability to make a fast comeback.

“Our job is to stay on top of that and to make sure that we continue to take out their leadership,” Defense Secretary Mark Esper said on *ABC’s* “This Week.”

According to defense officials in Iraq and Afghanistan tasked with watching the Islamic State’s movements, the group is growing in power and numbers outside of Syria.

Western leaders know this and are focusing efforts on stopping ISIS from strengthening under new leadership.

### **Pervasive Mindset**

Social media posts by groups affiliated with ISIS note that the death of a leader does not spell the end of an ideology.

“Jihad has not stopped with the death of a leader or Emir,” said a post on Shmoukh al-Islam page, translated as “glory of Islam.” It added: “What if the leader of the Believers is martyred, we will stay the course and to whoever follows we renew the pledge.”

Al-Baghdadi’s jihad tactics are alive and well.

A key to ISIS’s macabre success is its “kill where you are” ethos. It encourages a far-flung network of followers, including those in the United States, to commit violence however and wherever they can.

That message, which bred the infamous attacks in Nice, France, and at Manchester Arena in England, lives on.

Militants under al-Baghdadi’s command were some of the first jihadis to grow up with the internet, and they deftly exploit social media to tout their military successes, document their mass slaughter, beheadings

and stonings, and promote the Islamic State to a global audience.

When President Barack Obama launched airstrikes against ISIS beginning in August 2014, Islamic State militants responded by beheading Western captives and posting the video footage online. American journalist James Foley was among the first.

A few months later, an online audio message purportedly from al-Baghdadi urged his followers to “explode the volcanoes of jihad everywhere.”

Since then the group has carried out countless kidnappings, car and suicide bombings in public places, and shootings of civilians and police. ISIS is infamous for using civilians as human shields.

According to the U.S. Department of State Country Reports on Terrorism 2018: “Since at least 2015, the group has integrated local children and children of foreign terrorist fighters into its forces and used them as executioners and suicide attackers. ISIS has systematically prepared child soldiers in Iraq and Syria using its education and religious infrastructure as part of its training and recruitment of members. Further, since 2015, ISIS abducted, raped, and abused thousands of women and children, some as young as eight years old. Women and children were sold and enslaved, distributed to ISIS fighters as spoils of war, forced into marriage and domestic servitude, or subjected to physical and sexual abuse.”

While still alive, al-Baghdadi served as a direct inspiration for extremists abroad. In the U.S., multiple jihadists in the last five years invoked his name as they carried out murderous acts.

Omar Mateen, the gunman who in 2016 killed 49 people inside a Florida nightclub, pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi during a 911 call in which he identified himself as an Islamic soldier.

Months earlier, Tashfeen Malik along with her husband killed 14 people at a party in Southern California. During the massacre, she posted her support for al-Baghdadi on Facebook.

“That voice, the face associated with it—the name in particular—it’s

all directly linked to those in the United States who have pledged allegiance to him so as to conduct attacks in the group’s name,” said Joshua Geltzer, a former senior counterterrorism official in the Obama administration.

### **Beyond an Ideology**

On April 30, 2019, al-Baghdadi appeared in a video acknowledging defeat in the group’s last stronghold in Syria but vowing a “long battle” ahead. He had a bushy gray and red beard, wearing a black robe with a beige vest and seated on the floor with what appeared to be an AK-74 rifle propped up next to him.

The terror leader also claimed responsibility for the Easter bombings in Sri Lanka that killed over 250 people as “part of the revenge” on the West.

“Our battle today is a war of attrition to harm the enemy, and they should know that jihad will continue until doomsday,” he said.

Having struck down one leader will likely only scatter loyal followers temporarily. What this extremist group pursues can outlive any leader, and it begins to underscore the sobering reality behind the persistent threat of ISIS.

In the 2016 *Real Truth* article, “Why Stopping Terrorism Is Harder than You Think,” terrorism expert Dr. James Pastor commented on the group’s future: “Ironically, if their caliphate is destroyed, which seems imminent, ISIS likely poses an even bigger threat. They will have a choice to make: Do they fold up their tent, abandon the idea of a caliphate, and cease to exist? Or do they export action directly into the West? The short-term answer is predictable: they will redirect their approach from securing land to exporting terror. After all, it was the West, with the help of the Iraqis and Kurds, that have caused the caliphate’s demise.”

Further, Dr. Pastor stated: “The people who run ISIS are, frankly, just like kingpins in the Mafia or leaders of a gang. They run an organization that pushes an ideological framework. The organization is just a name that is

run by people. But ultimately the name and the people are not that important. What's really important for them is the movement. If ISIS is defeated, there will be another name that will take the baton or move the ball in terms of fostering the goal of a worldwide caliphate."

Now that ISIS has been driven out of its territory in Syria and Iraq, other experts have confirmed its ideology continues to exist and spread. "I've always said, yes, I will celebrate when Baghdadi is dead, but at the same time, that celebration is quiet and quick, because there are other Baghdadis out there who have been radicalized," said Chris Costa, a former senior director for counterterrorism on the National Security Council.

That statement should bring pause. What does he mean, "there *are* other Baghdadis out there"? And the bigger question is, *WHY* are there *still* "other Baghdadis out there"?

Answering this requires understanding what it takes to stop an enemy.

### Defeating Two Caliphates

According to the U.S. Army *Counterinsurgency Warrior Handbook*, defeat is defined as "when an enemy

force has temporarily or permanently lost the physical means or the will to fight."

Indeed, armed forces have taken away the terrorist organization's physical means to fight by killing, wounding or capturing those in the physical caliphate, including al-Baghdadi.

But defeating the *virtual caliphate*—individuals and groups around the globe radicalized by the Islamic State's ideals through the internet—is next to impossible. In this case, stemming the "will to fight" involves a virtual struggle.

"Over time, internet has become an indispensable tool for the Islamic State—a tool they have used with much efficacy for all their operations ranging from spreading propaganda, recruitment, communication, planning, financing and execution," Observer Research Foundation reported.

"They have been able to survive and expand their presence across the world with the help of the internet, despite surveillance measures taken by governments and technology companies because of the wide array of options at their disposal."

The stabbing attacks in the Hague and London in November prove ISIS's ability to wage jihad beyond al-Baghdadi. The internet is why these attacks occurred.

"Terrorist groups use mass social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to accomplish as much interaction as possible in as little time as possible, given the efforts made by governments and technology companies to remove terrorist content from their platforms at the earliest opportunity," ORF continued. "However, these measures have not been very successful because of the sheer volume of bot accounts that are created. New accounts are ready to be used as soon as old ones are taken off."

Those who contact the groups do so through encrypted apps such as Telegram, Kik or WhatsApp. Many who do are then radicalized and encouraged to wage violence.

This is what makes defeating the terrorist group's will to fight practically impossible. According to the Council on Foreign Relations: "With the Islamic State going 'underground' by moving to encrypted, less open digital communications, counter-intelligence becomes more important but increasingly difficult and controversial. The shift to using the internet to facilitate conventional terrorist attacks keeps the need for counter-content efforts urgent, but finding and removing extremist content online will become more difficult as Western social media becomes less important."

As counterterrorist agencies struggle against virtual-fueled terrorism, the world will continue to contend with its effects.

Ultimately, unless the internet itself is eliminated or fundamentally changed, ISIS's survival is all but ensured. □

■ Men suspected of being affiliated with the Islamic State terror group gather in a prison cell in Syria (Oct. 26, 2019).

PHOTO: FADEL SENNA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES





# INCREASING TERROR

**T**HE PROPHET Habakkuk saw visions of “violence” and “strife.” Violence in 2019 appeared more extreme, more frequent—and its victims more random.

Think of the major terrorist attacks, starting with the deadliest mass shooting in modern New Zealand history. In March, a white supremacist opened fire at two mosques during Friday prayers, killing 51.

Perpetrators of some of the most violent attacks of 2019 were also motivated by racial tension. The deadliest U.S. shooting this year was at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, by a gunman fearing a “Hispanic invasion.”

Then there were assaults that had no clear motivation: An engineer firing at co-workers in a public utilities building in Virginia Beach. A gunman shooting passersby outside a bar in Dayton, Ohio. A shooting at a garlic festival in Gilroy, California.

Mexico’s drug war is worse than ever before. While it used to be confined to a few cities, it has now spread throughout the country. Gangs used to kill adults but leave children unharmed. Now, the killing of children alongside parents has become all too frequent.

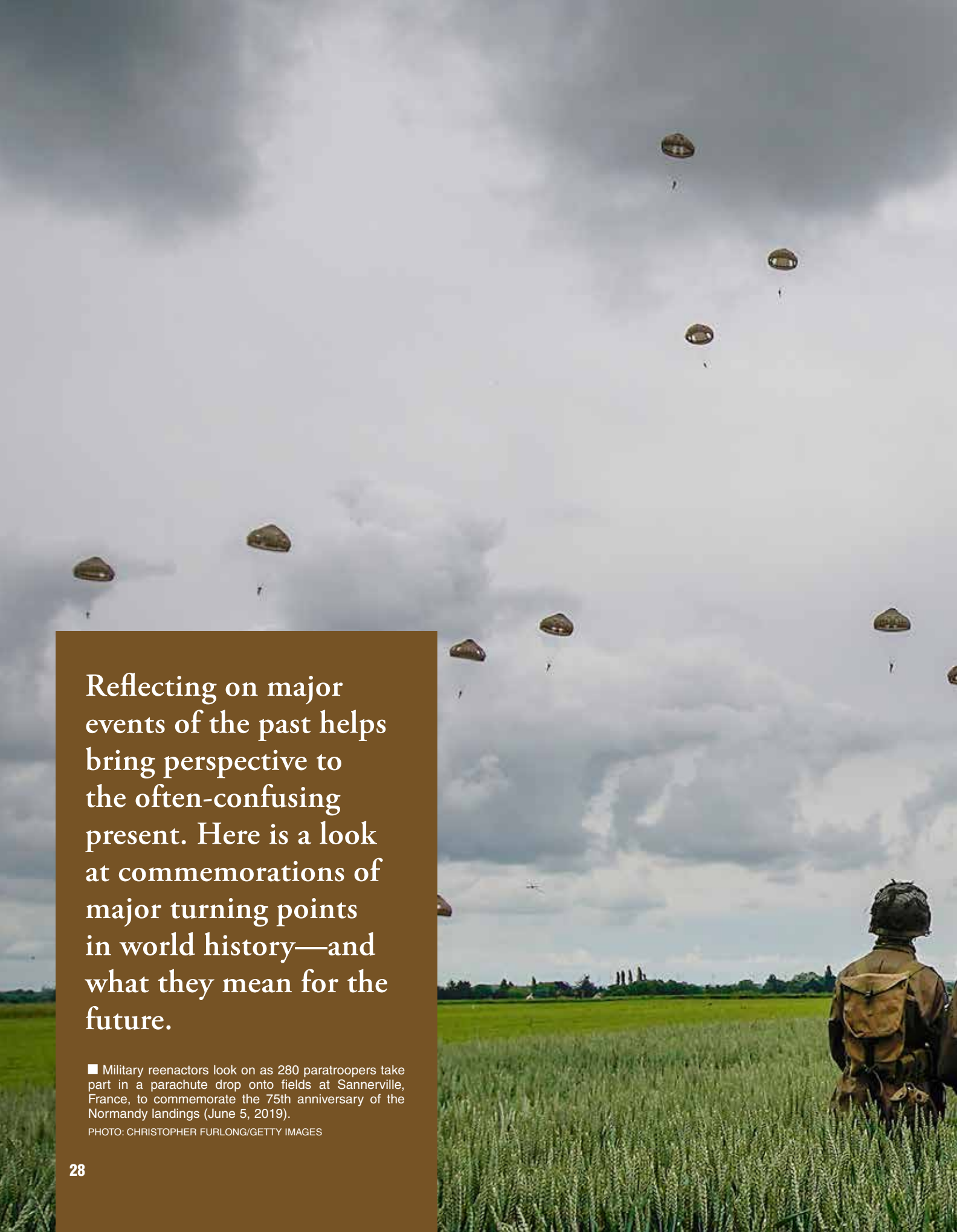
In November, nine Americans—three women and six children—were shot dead when cartel gunmen opened fire on their convoy near the Mexico-U.S. border in what appeared to be a case of mistaken identity.

Increasing violence was not limited to individual accounts of murder—it also occurred between nations and peoples.

In October, after Washington announced it was pulling U.S. troops out of Syria, Turkey launched an offensive to expel forces associated with the Kurds—which the Turkish government consider terrorist organizations. The conflict displaced 300,000 and caused nearly 100 civilian deaths. □

■ Students are evacuated from a high school after a shooting left two students dead in Santa Clarita, California (Nov. 14, 2019).

PHOTO: MARIO TAMA/GETTY IMAGES



Reflecting on major events of the past helps bring perspective to the often-confusing present. Here is a look at commemorations of major turning points in world history—and what they mean for the future.

■ Military reenactors look on as 280 paratroopers take part in a parachute drop onto fields at Sannerville, France, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Normandy landings (June 5, 2019).

PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES

A large, bold, white letter 'A' is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the image. The background is a cloudy sky with several parachutes in various stages of descent. The parachutes are small, dark, and scattered across the sky, some appearing as simple shapes and others with more detail. The overall scene is a historical or commemorative one, likely related to a military anniversary.

ANNIVERSARIES

IN REVIEW





# REMEMBERING BASTOGNE

The 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge brings the opportunity to remember the things that really matter.

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

**F**OR MOST Americans, World War II is difficult to truly comprehend. It is something that occurred decades ago on battlefields oceans away. This is not the case for those living in Europe, where war is part of the landscape—literally. Shell holes from both world wars litter fields in France and Belgium. Machine gun nests still lay rusting in the thick Ardennes forest.

It was in those woods in Belgium I had an opportunity to better understand war and its effects when invited on a tour of the Bastogne War Museum.

The Battle of the Bulge, which took place between December 16, 1944, and January 25, 1945, was the largest and bloodiest for the U.S. in the second world war. Adolf Hitler risked everything by pulling his strongest units from the Eastern Front and throwing them against the U.S. and British forces in the west, which were

■ Three U.S. infantrymen in the snow during the Battle of the Bulge (Jan. 1945).

PHOTO: TONY VACCARO/GETTY IMAGES

fatigued and stretched thin on supplies.

The German strategy was simple—push west to Antwerp, Belgium, and split the Allied line in two, forcing them to negotiate peace.

The path to Antwerp would go through the quiet Ardennes forest. The Ardennes Offensive, as it is also called, would prove to be Hitler's last big gamble.

Yet these cold historical facts and decades-old battle plans obscure the inspiring stories of endurance and tenacity the museum narrated through the eyes of four characters—a German and American soldier, along with a teacher and one of her students. Each presented a different perspective on the war.

Visiting this historic site helped me better understand how individual lives were involved.

## The Offensive

On December 16, 1944, some 30 German panzer divisions, made up of hundreds of thousands of men and nearly 1,500 tanks, attacked the Allies across 85 miles of dense woods.

The timing for the assault was strategic. Attacking in winter meant ill-

prepared Allies would face freezing rain, snow drifts and record-breaking low temperatures. (It is believed more Americans died from frostbite than gunfire.) This, along with thick fog, severely slowed any Allied counterattack by air, which would have been the fastest way for them to respond.

The Allies, caught by surprise, retreated from the full firepower of the Wehrmacht. Within days, the Germans gained a triangular bulge of territory on the Western Front, giving the battle its title.

As German forces pushed American troops to the west, Supreme Allied Commander Dwight Eisenhower sent the 101st Airborne Division in to defend Bastogne.

The “Screaming Eagles,” as they were known, scrambled to form a perimeter around the city. Yet the rush left the group, which had already endured some of the fiercest combat since D-Day, outnumbered five to one, lacking winter gear, food, medical supplies and ammunition, and missing a number of senior officers who were elsewhere. Cloudy weather prevented resupply from the air, and only 40 medium and light tanks could be mobilized against the superior German panzer divisions.



Taking in the surroundings while riding to and from the museum, I tried to imagine how the GIs felt hunkered down in frozen foxholes, cautiously watching day and night for enemy movements—the medical and support units who doubled as infantry to fill in gaps in numbers and sent to hold thin sections of the front line—even the large trees exploding overhead from enemy artillery fire.

The German leaders knew of the Americans' dire situation. On December 22, the German commander sent an emissary to request surrender. U.S. officers were given two hours to comply or else face "total annihilation."

The Americans' tenacity was best summed up in their leading general's terse response: "NUTS!"

A U.S. lieutenant helped the Germans understand the tongue-in-cheek reply: "If you continue this foolish attack, your losses will be tremendous."

Hitler knew his last-ditch Ardennes Offensive was in jeopardy if Bastogne was left in Allied hands. On Christmas Eve, the *Luftwaffe*—the German air force—attempted to bomb out the beleaguered Americans. Seven medium bomber planes unloaded 7,000 pounds of explosive munitions, with one bomb landing on a military hospital killing 20 patients and a Belgian nurse. By one account, that night was the first time soldiers felt a sense of doom. Many "shook hands with their comrades," according to WWII historian S.L.A. Marshall, telling each other it would be "their last night together."

But through a combination of resourcefulness and fortitude, the 101st held out for seven brutal days.

For one, there was a benefit of being encircled: uninterrupted lines of communication. As Germans had to move around to try to poke holes, Americans could quickly move their tanks to ward off assaults. Ultimately, though, it was a matter of holding on and refusing surrender against the odds.

Finally, by December 27, relief came when General George S. Patton's Third Army arrived.

The sheer will and determination of the Allied troops had somehow outlasted the bullets, tanks and strategy of the German war machine, which was among the most prolific the world had ever seen.

More than 1 million Allied troops, including 500,000 Americans, fought in the Battle of the Bulge. Americans suffered more than 89,000 casualties and Germans 100,000. The Germans never fully recovered, being pushed back into their homeland until Berlin was sacked by the Soviets four months later.

### **The Greater Generation**

*The Real Truth's* editorial staff does not endorse war. But we do endorse strength of character.

Anniversaries like the Battle of the Bulge and others associated with WWII such as the Attack on Pearl Harbor, the Battle of Midway, and storming Normandy on D-Day, are an opportunity to reflect on a different time in American history.

Adversity introduces a man to himself, as the saying goes. And war brings out the worst—and sometimes the best—in people. If nothing else, it becomes one of those rare times people put away their differences and pull together for a collective purpose.

Those known as the Greatest Generation defended America and its values in the 1940s. Were they perfect? No. But this was never the question. The point is they were different, especially compared to the average person today.

The Greatest Generation (born 1901-1924) is marked by the weathering of a conglomerate of historic global catastrophes—Spanish Influenza, the Great Depression and WWII among them.

Using 1924 as the last year of birth, the youngest members of the Greatest Generation hit their mid-90s in 2019. How many 95-year-olds do you know? Probably not many.

According to the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, three years ago there were only 620,000 left of the 16 million who served in WWII. Every

day, nearly 372 of them die of old age. These treasure troves of experience and wisdom are quickly vanishing.

As children and teenagers, they endured the poverty and despair of the Great Depression. Young adults, many merely in their late teens and early 20s, took up arms to fight for their country after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. During the war, well over half the nation showed their support by purchasing \$180 billion in bonds. This would be roughly \$2.6 trillion today!

These people sacrificed. Without hesitation, they laid down their time, money and lives to ensure our way of life.

The thirst for power that led to the second world war and the greed and fiscal irresponsibility that brought the Great Depression were never God's Way. Yet these difficult times introduced Americans to virtues rare in today's hyper-divided, social-media-driven world.

How do we look today? As a nation we are financially rich beyond our wildest imagination and live in relative stability. Yet as rich and secure as we are, we are at the same time woefully poor in integrity and character.

If you doubt how different we are, imagine the events of the early 20th century happening today. Would people pull together if another severe economic depression were to hit? If we were struck by a foreign invader, would political parties and citizens alike band together or be too busy blaming one another? How many are too buried in debt to purchase war bonds if the need arose? Or worse, how many would simply not care?

I fear to consider the obvious answers to these and similar questions. Ultimately, it will take God's Kingdom to come and help dig America, and the entire world, out of the mess we have gotten ourselves into.

We must fight historical amnesia. Human beings must do all they can to remember their past—both good and bad—ancient and recent.

Otherwise we are on the fast-track to repeat it. □



# CLUES FROM HISTORY

**T**HE PAST IS PROLOGUE to today's world conditions. Events many decades ago continue to affect modern life. For example, the Berlin Wall fell 30 years ago as of November 9, yet East and West Germany have never really reunified.

“For 28 years, the wall split Germany like an iron curtain, into the capitalist West and the communist East,” *The Conversation* reported. Today, division remains, signified by the growing influence of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) political party in the East. “The rise of AfD fits into a global pattern of anger at democracy... Almost one-half of Easterners see themselves as second-class citizens, while 63% think the differences between them and the West are greater than what they have in common.”

Iran marked 40 years since the Islamic Revolution and takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. Yet the revolt has not brought stability to its citizens—or the entire world. The sabotage of oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz, where one-third of the world's oil supply passes through, makes this clear.

The U.S. celebrated its 50-year anniversary of the first moon landing by Apollo 11. It was a feat that has spurred technological progress and unquestioned U.S. leadership in exploration and military prowess that continues to this day.

But even such a great power, with the backing of the United Nations, failed to stop the Rwandan Genocide from occurring 25 years ago. The ethnic cleansing of Tutsis by Hutus left over 300,000 dead in a matter of days. Even now the ethnic divide manifests itself in bloody conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

It will take a force more powerful to bring an end to the world's greatest problems. □



■ Top, Buzz Aldrin poses next to the U.S. flag on the moon during the Apollo 11 mission (July 20, 1969). Middle, West Germans watch as East German border guards demolish a section of the Berlin Wall (Nov. 11, 1989). Bottom, a Hutu guard keeps a crowd back at a Tutsi refugee camp in Rwanda (June 24, 1994).

PHOTOS: NASA/LIAISON (TOP); GERARD MALIE/AFP (MIDDLE); SCOTT PETERSON (BOTTOM); GETTY IMAGES

# WHAT ABOUT 2020?



**W**E ASK AGAIN: “HOW LONG, O LORD?” Anyone with eyes to see feels the same as Habakkuk did when examining the world at large. When will all the horror and sorrow end? When will injustice and prejudice cease?

The events of 2019 should make us sick. Yet the Bible does not just describe our times and point out the failings of mankind. It is also an

Instruction Manual for life. Those who read and obey its words will be able to understand the great purpose God is working out on this planet.

This is where *rcg.org* comes into play, which is the website of The Restored Church of God—publisher of this magazine. It contains videos, books, booklets and articles that explain God’s truths in plain, easy-to-understand terms.

Bible prophecy is thrilling and can help us understand world trends. Yet

Scripture also outlines HOW to live—a way that brings incredible blessings. This Book also shows the causes for all of your individual problems, as well as man’s collective evils and ills.

If you are VEXED by the deluge of negative trends plaguing this world, you owe it to yourself to understand what is coming and what you can do now. Go find your Bible—blow the dust off of it if you have to!—and visit *rcg.org* to discover God’s purpose for you... □

# Greatest Questions.

# Plain Answers.

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