

# *The* Good News

November-December 2001

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

## What Lies Ahead for **America?**



Where Was God on Sept. 11? • Good Samaritans: Selfless Sacrifice and Heroism  
A Different World • Whose Prayers Does God Hear? • Weapons of Terror

On Sept. 11 almost 5,000 men and women who went to work that morning in New York City's World Trade Center never came home. The staggering loss of life in history's deadliest terrorist attack was more than double the number of servicemen killed at Pearl Harbor and more than triple the number who perished in the *Titanic's* sinking. It claimed more than eight times the lives lost in the previously greatest airline disaster.

The United States was plunged into mourning, its sense of security and invincibility shattered. In their anguish millions turned to religion for comfort and solace—and rightly so.

In times like these we naturally wonder how God views such events. They are so remarkable, so powerful, that we've devoted this entire issue to answering various aspects of that question.

What would Jesus Christ tell us in the wake of what has happened?

He addressed two tragedies of His day that remarkably parallel recent events. Just as America's disaster involved random murders and the collapse of the World Trade Center towers, the tragedies Jesus referred to involved unspeakable brutality and the destruction of a well-known landmark—the tower of Siloam in Jerusalem.

We read in Luke 13 that people told Jesus a shocking story: On the Roman governor's orders, several men had been brutally murdered while bringing sacrifices to the temple. Jesus' response should stir us to reevaluate our personal mortality and standing with God: "Do you suppose that, because these Galileans suffered this fate, they must have been greater sinners than anyone else in Galilee? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all of you come to the same end" (Luke 13:2-3, Revised English Bible).

Those who heard Christ's words couldn't understand how God could allow such a disaster. In that same way we can scarcely comprehend how God could allow death to descend so suddenly, so brutally, on so many people innocently going about their everyday lives.

Jesus pointed out that no one is immune to the twists and turns of this life. He also made an explicit point that should hit home to us: Unless we repent *we are subject to an equally sudden end*. Why? Because a close relationship with God is our only reliable source of protection from such disasters.

Lest they—and we—misunderstand, Christ reinforced the lesson with another example. "... The eighteen people who were killed when the tower fell on them at Siloam—do you imagine they must have been more guilty than all the other people living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all come to an end like theirs" (verses 4-5, REB).

Untimely deaths such as the murder of the Galileans bringing their sacrifices, Jesus said, were simply a matter of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The victims of these tragedies weren't more evil or less evil than others; they were random victims of random events.

They were sinners, however, and—as with all who have not repented of their sins (1 John 1:8)—their only assured destiny was death (Romans 6:23).

Our position is no different. We may not be the victims of random violence or a collapsing building, but we are sinners, and eventually God will hold us accountable for what we know and do. When we realize that, Jesus' words should cut to the core of our being: "*Unless you repent, you will all come to an end like theirs.*"

Knowing that we live in a world in which tragedy can suddenly strike at any time, shouldn't we heed Christ's warning to repent and begin aligning our life with His? Indeed, God "*now commands all men everywhere to repent*" (Acts 17:30, emphasis added).

Only by surrendering to God—through repentance and living according to His laws—will it be possible for us to gain victory over death and to participate in the coming era when horrors such as that of Sept. 11 will never again be repeated.

—Scott Ashley

The Good News (ISSN: 1086-9514) is published bimonthly by the United Church of God, an International Association, 5405 DuPont Circle, Suite A, Milford, OH 45150. © 2001 United Church of God, an International Association. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form without written permission is prohibited. Periodicals Postage paid at Milford, Ohio 45150, and at additional mailing offices.

Publisher: United Church of God, an International Association  
Managing editor: Scott Ashley Writer-researchers: Jerold Auld, Roger Foster, Melvin Rhodes, Tom Robinson, John Ross Schroeder  
Copy editor: Dixon Cartwright Art director: Shaun Venish  
Editorial reviewers: John Bald, Bruce Gore, Paul Kieffer, Graemme Marshall, Richard Thompson, David Treybig, Lyle Welty, Dean Wilson  
United Church of God Council of Elders: Gary Antion, Aaron Dean, Robert Dick, Roy Holladay (chairman), John Jewell, Clyde Kilough, Victor Kubik, Les McCullough (church president), Mario Seiglie, Richard Thompson, Leon Walker, Donald Ward

Free subscription: Call (513) 576-9796, visit our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org), or write to *The Good News*, United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, or the office nearest you from the list below. *The Good News* is sent free to all who request it. Your subscription is provided by the voluntary contributions of members of the United Church of God, an International Association, and others. Donations are gratefully accepted and are tax-deductible in the United States. Those who choose to voluntarily support this worldwide work are welcomed as coworkers in this effort to proclaim the true gospel to all nations.

Personal contact: The United Church of God has congregations and ministers throughout the United States and many other countries. To contact a minister or to find locations and times of services, contact our office nearest you or access our Web site at [www.ucg.org](http://www.ucg.org).

Scriptural references in *The Good News* are from the New King James Version (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., publishers) unless otherwise noted.

**International addresses:**

**Australia:** United Church of God—Australia  
GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia  
Phone: 07 55 202 111 Free call: 1800 356 202 Fax: 07 55 202 122  
Web site address: [www.ucg.org.au](http://www.ucg.org.au) E-mail: [info@ucg.org.au](mailto:info@ucg.org.au)

**Bahamas:** United Church of God, P.O. Box N8873, Nassau, Bahamas  
Phone: (242) 324-3169 Fax: (242) 364-5566

**British Isles:** United Church of God  
P.O. Box 705, Watford, Herts, WD19 6FZ, England  
Phone: 020-8386-8467 Fax: 01257-453978  
Web site address: [www.goodnews.org.uk](http://www.goodnews.org.uk)

**Canada:** United Church of God—Canada  
Box 144, Station D, Etobicoke, ON M9A 4X1, Canada  
Phone: (416) 231-9379, (800) 338-7779  
Fax: (416) 231-8238 Web site address: [www.ucg.ca](http://www.ucg.ca)

**Fiji:** United Church of God, P.O. Box 10577, Nadi Airport, Fiji  
Phone: 723-678

**French-speaking areas:** Église de Dieu Unie—France  
B.P. 51254, 45002 Orléans Cedex 1, France

**Germany:** Vereinte Kirche Gottes/Gute Nachrichten  
Postfach 30 15 09, D-53195 Bonn, Germany  
Phone: 0228-9454636 Fax: 0228-9454637

**Italy:** La Buona Notizia, Chiesa di Dio Unita  
Casella Postale 187, 24100 Bergamo, Italy  
Phone and fax: 0039-035-582140  
Web site address: [www.labuonanotizia.org](http://www.labuonanotizia.org)  
E-mail: [redazione@labuonanotizia.org](mailto:redazione@labuonanotizia.org)

**Mauritius:** P.O. Box 53, Quatre Bornes, Mauritius

**Netherlands:** P.O. Box 93, 2800 AB Gouda, Netherlands

**New Zealand:** United Church of God  
P.O. Box 22, Auckland 1015, New Zealand  
Phone: Toll-free 0508-463-763

**Philippines:** P.O. Box 4774, MCPO, 1287 Makati City, Philippines  
Phone: 82 241-0150 Web site address: [www.ucg.org.ph](http://www.ucg.org.ph)

**Scandinavia:** Guds Forenade Kyrka  
Mailbox 144, 111 73 Stockholm, Sweden  
Phone: +44 20 8386-8467 Fax: +44 1257 453978

**South Africa:** United Church of God, Southern Africa  
P.O. Box 2209, Beacon Bay, East London 5205  
Phone and Fax: 043 748-1694 E-mail: [rsa@ucg.org](mailto:rsa@ucg.org)  
Web site address: [www.ucgsa.org](http://www.ucgsa.org)

**Spanish-speaking areas:** Iglesia de Dios Unida  
P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.  
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795

**Tonga:** United Church of God—Tonga, P.O. Box 127, Nuku'alofa, Tonga

**Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement Number 1487140.**  
Address changes: POSTMASTER—Send address changes to *The Good News*, Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027.

# Table of Contents

## Cover Feature

### What Lies Ahead for America?

*As much of the world watched in horror, a carefully planned series of hijackings unfolded that destroyed the World Trade Center, shattered the Pentagon and snuffed out the lives of more than 5,000 men, women and children. In the space of a few hours the world dramatically changed. What do these attacks—seemingly against civilization itself—mean? What is their long-term significance? . . . . 4*



*A nation grieves and wonders what the future holds 4*

### Where Was God?

*If God truly is all knowing and all powerful, how could He allow evil human beings to brutally murder thousands of people who have done them no harm? Why would He allow such things? Why doesn't He intervene to stop them? . . . . 8*



*Does God set conditions for answering prayers? 19*

### A Different World

*The terrible events of Sept. 11 may have forever altered life for much of the world. That day's atrocities underscored the grim reality that the cultural clash between Islamic extremism and the West is a clash of different worlds. . . . 12*

### America's Good Samaritans: Selfless Sacrifice and Heroism

*Not since Pearl Harbor has the United States experienced such national shock. Yet from the rubble arose stories of sacrifice and heroism that should cause us to reflect on one of Jesus Christ's most important teachings. . . . 16*

### Whose Prayers Does God Hear?

*On one side of the world stunned Americans mourned and prayed for comfort and strength while on the other religious extremists offered prayers of thanks for what they saw as a great victory. Whose prayers does God hear? . . . . 19*

### What Is Repentance?

*In the wake of the terrorist attacks on the United States some have suggested that the national mood could lead to repentance. Most people, however, have only the vaguest idea of what the word means. What exactly is repentance? . . . 23*

### Pathogens, Poisons and Other Weapons of Terror

*Just as Americans were recovering from the Sept. 11 attack, envelopes with anthrax spores spread through the U.S. mail system—conjuring fears of a new wave of terror. What other horrifying weapons might terrorists wield? . . . 25*

### America's Astounding Destiny: A Nation Losing Its Way

*In earlier parts of this series we saw how the birth and expansion of the United States fulfilled Bible prophecies. We conclude with a sobering look at how a nation's growing rejection of God threatens its existence. . . . . 28*



*Terrorists can wield a deadly arsenal 25*



# What Lies Ahead for America?

---

by Melvin Rhodes



The world stood transfixed in the wake of a carefully planned series of hijackings that destroyed the World Trade Center, crippled the Pentagon and took the lives of more than 5,000 men, women and children. On a sunny September morning, the world dramatically changed. What is the long-term significance?

**T**he horrifying attacks on Sept. 11 in New York City and Washington, D.C., stunned the world. The terrorist assaults—the hijackings and suicide crashes of four domestic passenger jets—were the worst on any nation in history.

A collective national shock hung over the land as people tried to make sense of what had happened. No sooner had Americans begun to recover than another wave of horror began when anonymous envelopes carrying anthrax bacteria led to the infection of people in several cities and reached even into the offices of the U.S. Congress.

Television and radio stations broadcast continuous news coverage for days in attempts to explain the shocking events.

The country's sense of invincibility vanished in an instant. Suddenly people who were normally happy and confident grew apprehensive about their future. The old certainties were no more. Against a backdrop of a smoldering World Trade Center, the British magazine *The Economist* summed up the mood of the people and the new reality in a headline on its cover of Sept. 15: "The Day the World Changed."

Nothing has been the same since Sept. 11. Nothing will be the same in the foreseeable future.

## Entering a new era

Americans rightly wondered what the future holds for the country. As is so often the case in the wake of a national catastrophe, a nation's strengths and weaknesses come to the fore. Americans came together after the atrocity. Rescuers labored around the clock in dangerous, distressing conditions to try to pull survivors from a mound of rubble some 12 stories high. Tens of thousands of people donated blood and items urgently needed by the Red Cross. On the streets of New York people hugged strangers and offered help in a time of unprecedented distress.

The president and the Congress came together, political rivalries temporarily forgotten, as both major political parties pledged themselves to vanquish those

responsible. The military forces of the United States, Britain and other nations immediately began to pool their resources, determined to stamp out terrorism. America and its allies quickly launched a war against Afghanistan's ruling Taliban regime, which had long given refuge to Islamic terrorists.

President Bush warned the American people to prepare for a new kind of war, a war against an enemy that hides in the shadows, a war that would last a long time.

## Strengths and weaknesses

Sometimes a country's greatest strengths can also become major liabilities. This is true of the United States. An awareness of its strengths and weaknesses will help us understand the present situation and the challenges that lie ahead for America and the rest of the civilized world.

A proper biblical background adds yet another dimension to understanding what the future holds. The three-part series entitled "America's Astounding Destiny" (which concludes in this issue beginning on page 28) reveals how the United States and Britain have fulfilled several major points of biblical prophecy. Genesis 49:22-23 in particular shows that the descendants of Joseph—the British and American peoples—were to grow into global superpowers, bringing prosperity to many other nations around the world.

At the same time, they would struggle to maintain peace, without which prosperity is difficult if not impossible. This passage of Scripture, along with other Bible prophecies, shows God's involvement in the development of these nations.

Today, however, the United States and other nations that sprang from Britain have largely turned away from God and are reaping the negative consequences of breaking His laws—again in accordance with biblical prophecies.

America's confidence was hit hard by the attacks on New York and Washington. The long-term economic impact, devastating at first, remains to be seen.

The World Trade Center stood at the heart of

New York's financial district, with New York itself the leading stock market in the world. In the first week after the market reopened, U.S. stocks collectively lost \$1 trillion before rebounding several weeks later.

Many of the people killed worked in the financial markets. Years of experience and intellectual capital died in the rubble. Discussion about the economy no longer centered on *whether* the economy would slip into recession, but *when*—and how that would affect America's preeminence in the world.

By most measures American military

the United States broke away from Britain, it set a course largely independent from Europe, avoiding "entangling alliances" as George Washington, America's first president, advised the country to do. This enabled America to concentrate on building the strongest and richest single nation in history.

When it comes to alliances, however, Americans have a tendency to forget. Yesterday's enemy can rapidly become today's friend—as in the case of Germany and Japan in the years immediately after World War II. The reverse is also true: Moscow

of the wilderness, it is a definite weakness in our present, quickly changing world. Failure to understand the rest of the world—and lessons of history—could prove disastrous.

### Christendom vs. Islam

One of the great themes of history has been the on-again, off-again rivalry between Christendom and Islam, dating back to the beginnings of Islam in the early seventh century (see "The Birth and Spread of Islam," page 14).

No one familiar with history can credibly

**Sometimes a country's greatest strengths can also become major liabilities.** This is true of the United States. An awareness of its strengths and weaknesses will help us understand the present situation and the challenges that lie ahead for America and the rest of the civilized world.

strength has weakened considerably over recent years, following the pattern of the British Empire. As that empire expanded, so eventually British military commitments around the world increased. After World War II Britain was not able or willing to continue to act as the world's policeman. The United States took over the role, with Britain continuing to offer support to a close ally.

But the American military finds itself considerably overextended—especially since major military reductions in the last decade drastically cut numbers of available troops and combat aircraft, ships and armored vehicles.

Now both the United States and Britain have troops committed in various parts of the world that they increasingly need in the continuing struggle against terrorism. As they pull troops out of other areas, what will be the consequences? A significant danger is an unraveling of the world order created by the British and American leaders after World War II, threatening America's preeminence.

### America's short memory

Another U.S. characteristic that has been a strength—and, increasingly, a weakness—is revealed in the biblical name for America, Manasseh, which means "forgetting." When

became the enemy after standing as a valued ally in the war, only to become an ally again in the war on terrorism.

We see a similar pattern with the Taliban in Afghanistan. Twenty years ago the United States helped the Taliban's Islamic fundamentalists fight against Soviet forces; in recent months the arms the United States gave them have been turned on America, with America seeking Russian help against them after the Sept. 11 attacks.

The same was true with Iraq a decade ago. Ten years earlier the United States helped Iraq in its long war against Iran. Now, 10 years after the Gulf War, some of the allies who fought alongside the United States in the Persian Gulf have let America down in the conflict against terrorism because their national interests have since diverged. Fears of political instability have also increased among the more-conservative leaders in the Middle East, who are threatened by the rising forces of Islamic fundamentalism in their own countries.

School surveys show that Americans know little of their own history, let alone the complex and varied histories of the intertwining peoples and cultures of the world. It's as if history is irrelevant. Although lack of ties to the past was a strength when building a new nation out

say that one side in this struggle conducted itself better than the other in the eyes of God. The two religions—Christianity and Islam—underlie two fundamentally different cultures that inevitably clash when they confront each other.

One concern frequently expressed since the attacks is that Western attacks on radical Islamic forces could unite Muslims against the West. In a worst-case scenario, Islamic fundamentalists could overthrow more-moderate Mideast regimes such as Egypt and Jordan—and oil-rich monarchies like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, which could devastate Western petroleum-dependent economies. Interestingly, Daniel 11:40-44 indicates that Muslims in the Middle East at some point will be united against a common enemy (see "A Different World," page 12).

In recent times an added dimension to this historic struggle has been the increasing secularization of Christendom as the West has become more materialistic and hedonistic. The Islamic world resented domination by Christian nations during the colonial period but is even angrier at the secularization of its cultures by contemporary American culture (see "A Rising Tide of Islamic Fundamentalism," page 7).

As Americans and Europeans have turned further away from their traditional religious

beliefs, they have tended to think that religious and cultural differences no longer matter. Americans especially seem to think their culture is superior and take it for granted that everyone else wants to be like them. While some do, this is not always the case. Many of the people in the African countries in which my wife and I have lived resented efforts by Americans to change them.

Even many of those who have moved to America resent its culture—they want to retain their traditions, values and religious beliefs. Sometimes they find this extremely difficult. Anger and frustration are the result. Even if the vast majority of those moving to the United States are fully assimilated, the primary loyalties of many will still extend beyond America. Often the second generation is even angrier, finding it difficult to reconcile conflicting loyalties.

Those whose ancestors arrived in America generations ago often find it hard to understand these differences. After all, if *they* integrated successfully, why can't everybody else?

The answer lies in the significant changes in U.S. immigration laws in 1965 that led to increased immigration from so-called third-world countries with radically different cultures that are harder to assimilate. In such a climate extremist views can flourish among groups, some even succumbing to violence to achieve their aims.

This extremism will only worsen if the economy continues to deteriorate and unemployment rises. Extremist political movements found Europe an ideal breeding ground for such ideas during the Great Depression of the 1930s. As many nations have learned, enemies exist without—beyond the country's borders—but enemies also live within. History shows the enemy within is the greater threat, made even more threatening if the military is overexposed internationally, leaving few forces behind to defend the homeland.

### Respect replaced by disrespect

Early successes with surgical strikes against terrorist bases notwithstanding, it's highly unlikely that the terrorist problem will go away and that the world will return to the kind of normalcy that preceded Sept. 11.

Some of the reasons are explained above. Another is found in a scripture that well sums up today's reality: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

Time was when America was almost universally looked up to by the rest of the world. After the failure of their kings and

emperors to avoid the carnage of World War I, Europeans looked to President Woodrow Wilson to show them a new and better way. But lack of support at home kept America from staying involved.

It was different after World War II. Then Americans were committed to helping the rest of the world, and the United States took on the responsibility of leading the free nations (see "America's Astounding Destiny: A Nation Losing Its Way," page 28).

Even in the Middle East, combatants looked to the United States to assume the lead. It was President Jimmy Carter who brought Egypt and Israel to the table. Successive presidents have tried to arbitrate the region's conflicts, making efforts to talk with the several sides. But in the aftermath of September's attacks Americans saw Palestinians dancing in the streets celebrating America's agony.

### Blessings and curses

Respect and appreciation for America are not as great as they used to be. The Bible helps us understand why.

In the Pentateuch the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 28, promises blessings for obedience to God's laws and curses—devastating negative consequences—for disobedience. It may seem illogical to see in this an explanation for the terrorist attacks on the United States, but the fact is that America is not as respected as it used to be. Painful though it may be to admit, there are sound reasons for this decline in respect.

The Islamic extremists who have been behind repeated attacks on U.S. embassies and government and military personnel for years fear America's cultural influence on their societies. American television shows and movies constantly undermine moral values and the traditional family, both in the United States and elsewhere.

Characters are frequently shown scantily dressed, using foul language, showing no respect to their elders and obsessed with sex and materialism. Other shows portray an image of an extremely violent society. These images are so pervasive that Western countries no longer think anything of it, but religious countries in the East feel increasingly threatened by these corrupting influences. The situation has only worsened with satellite television and the Internet becoming more widely available around the world.

News of sex scandals at the very top of American society and government has lessened respect for America's political institutions and leadership. Information on these and other scandals is also more widespread

as a result of advances in communications technology during the last few years.

American culture and entertainment—its music, television shows and movies—are saturated with sex. The nation also accounts for 80 percent of the world's pornography, freely available in many countries. More than a million babies are aborted every year in the United States, innocent victims of a national obsession with pleasure free of consequences or encumbrances.

The solid principles given in Deuteronomy 28 show that obedience to God's laws results in a nation being "set . . . high above all nations of the earth" (verse 1), as the United States was in the years after its humble beginnings right up until after World War II. God promises blessings for obedience, including support against hostile powers (verse 7). America's history certainly shows the nation was blessed when its people better understood and followed many of the principles of God's laws.

Beginning with verse 15, though, we see the consequences of disobedience. Verse 16 says, "Cursed shall you be in the city." When a nation rejects God, its cities are no longer safe and secure.

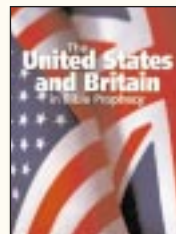
In verse 20 God warns that if a nation continues in its rebellion against Him He will send "cursing, confusion, and rebuke in all that you set your hand to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the wickedness of your doings in which you have forsaken Me."

### Individual responsibility

Many will read this article and conclude that responsibility lies elsewhere. Yet the book of Joshua, chapter 7, contains the story of one man, Achan, whose sin affected the

## Recommended Reading

To learn more about the astounding Bible prophecies of the future of the United States, be sure to request your free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. To better understand what the Scriptures reveal about the dangerous age in which we live, request *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*, also free.



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).

## A Rising Tide of *Islamic Fundamentalism*

What fuels Islamic fundamentalism? An article in the November-December 1998 issue of *Foreign Affairs* helps us understand the roots of the motivation that probably lies behind the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. Written by Professor Bernard Lewis of Princeton University, it began by quoting from a London-based Arabic-language newspaper dated Feb. 23, 1998.

*Al-Quds al-Arabi* published the full text of a "Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and the Crusaders." Osama bin Laden and other leaders of militant Islamic groups in Egypt, Pakistan and Bangladesh were among the signatories.

"The declaration begins [states *Foreign Affairs*] . . . [by] quoting the more militant passages in the Quran [Koran] and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, then continues:

"Since God laid down the Arabian peninsula, created its desert, and surrounded it with its seas, no calamity has ever befallen it like these Crusader hosts that have spread in it like locusts, crowding its soil, eating its fruits, and destroying its verdure; and this at a time when the nations contend against the Muslims like diners jostling around a bowl of food."

The statement continues, condemning the United States for three main reasons:

"First, for more than seven years the United States is occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of its territories, Arabia, plundering its riches, overwhelming its rulers, humiliating its people, threatening its neighbors, and using its bases in the peninsula as a spearhead to fight against the neighboring Islamic peoples . . .

"Second—Despite the immense destruction inflicted on the Iraqi people at the hands of the Crusader-Jewish alliance and in spite of the appalling number of dead, exceeding a million, the Americans nevertheless, in spite of all this, are trying once more to repeat this dreadful slaughter . . .

"Third—While the purposes of the Americans in these wars are religious and economic, they also serve the petty state of the Jews, to divert attention from their occupation of Jerusalem and their killing of Muslims in it."

The signatories conclude that these "crimes" amount to "a clear declaration of war by the Americans against God, his Prophet, and the Muslims." The declaration reminds readers that throughout the centuries the Islamic religious authorities "unanimously ruled that when enemies attack the Muslim lands, *jihad* becomes every Muslim's personal duty." *Jihad* is defined narrowly by Islamic fundamentalists as holy war, the call for a religious conflict that no Muslim may ignore.

Sensitivities over Arabia go back almost 1,400 years to the beginnings of Islam. "The classical Arabic historians tell us that in the year 20 after the *hijra* (Muhammed's move from Mecca to Medina), corresponding to 641 of the Christian calendar, the Caliph Umar decreed that Jews and

Christians should be removed from Arabia to fulfill an injunction the Prophet uttered on his deathbed: 'Let there not be two religions in Arabia.' The people in question were the Jews of the oasis of Khaybar in the north and the Christians of Najran in the south . . .

" . . . The expulsion of religious minorities is extremely rare in Islamic history—unlike medieval Christendom, where evictions of Jews and . . . Muslims were normal and frequent . . . But the decree was final and irreversible, and from then until now the holy land of the Hijaz [that is, the western Arabian peninsula, now joined with neighboring dominions to form Saudi Arabia] has been forbidden territory for non-Muslims . . . For a non-Muslim to even set foot on the sacred soil is a major offense . . .

"Where their holy land is involved, many Muslims tend to define the struggle—and sometimes also the enemy—in religious terms, seeing the American troops sent to free Kuwait and save Saudi Arabia from Saddam Hussein as infidel invaders and occupiers. This perception is heightened by America's unquestioned primacy among the powers of the infidel world."

The article, written three years before the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, concludes:

" . . . Some Muslims are ready to approve, and a few of them to apply, the declaration's extreme interpretation of their religion. Terrorism requires only a few. Obviously, the West must defend itself by whatever means will be effective. But in devising strategies to fight the terrorists, it would surely be useful to understand the forces that drive them."

Religious-affairs writer and historian Karen Armstrong helps us understand Islamic fundamentalism in her book *Islam: A Short History*: "As the millennium drew to a close . . . some Muslims . . . for the first time . . . have made sacred violence a cardinal Islamic duty. These fundamentalists often call Western colonialism and post-colonial Western imperialism *al-Salibiyah*: the Crusade" (2000, p. 180).

This is a chilling term for Muslims, calling to mind the violent clashes between the forces of medieval Christianity and Islam almost 1,000 years ago. European armies went on a series of Crusades to free Christian holy places from the forces of Islam, frequently committing atrocities during the period. "The colonial crusade has been less violent but its impact has been more devastating than the medieval holy wars" (*ibid.*).

Western cultural values have impacted all the countries of the world and, while some aspects are eagerly embraced, they are also sorely resented by many people.

Writer Armstrong continues: "All over the world, as we have seen, *people in all the major faiths have reeled under the impact of Western modernity, and have produced the embattled and frequently intolerant religiosity that we call fundamentalism*" (*ibid.*, emphasis added). We shouldn't expect Islamic fundamentalism to go away anytime soon.

whole nation's security. The biblical account shows that Achan himself had committed the sin of taking spoil from recently conquered Jericho, defying God's instructions to the people of Israel. Yet God judged that the *entire nation* had sinned (verse 11)—and Joshua had to find the transgressor before Israel could expect another victory.

The account shows the importance of every American conducting himself in a way that is pleasing to God. Around the world, respect for America has deteriorated markedly in recent decades because of the behavior of individual Americans, either on film, in the news or in real life.

Even tourists often cause offense by showing terrible ignorance of local customs and traditions, with which they could easily familiarize themselves before leaving the United States. Often their personal conduct and moral behavior are sadly lacking. Every American needs to take upon himself the individual responsibility of representing the United States in a way that will earn respect for the country. This goes for those in the film and music industries as well, where there is a dire need for wholesome and uplifting movies and music.

Nothing can justify the cold-blooded, murderous acts of Sept. 11 and afterwards.

The attacks on New York and Washington were heinous crimes against the United States and against the 80 other nations whose citizens—including many Muslims—died in the carnage while the world watched on television. These acts were inexcusable. But, as the United States and its allies embark on a long and challenging battle against the forces of international terror, this essential background knowledge will help us to better understand the overall significance of these attacks and the small ways in which individual Americans might help restore the respect the United States once had around the world. **GN**

# Where Was God?

*If God is all powerful and all knowing, the source of all that is good and kind and right, how could He allow evil human beings to snuff out the lives of people who have done them no harm? Why would He allow such things?*

by Bruce Gore

**T**he unimaginable atrocities of Sept. 11 brutally reminded us that evil remains a powerful and destructive force in the world. The terrorist attacks on New York and Washington prompted millions to ask: Where was God?



Where was God on Sept. 11? Why didn't He act to prevent such an evil? Doesn't He exercise control over everything that occurs? Is God powerless to prevent evil?

If God, who made the world, is good, why has the world gone wrong? If He is loving and merciful, why does He allow such horrible events? If He made His whole creation good, why hasn't it stayed good? If He possesses absolute power and hates evil, why does He permit such evil things to happen?

We often ask such questions when a child runs into a street and is struck down, when a speeding, drunken driver takes the lives of an innocent family or when someone falls victim to random violence. The stunning amount of destruction and loss of life in the World Trade Center and Pentagon has focused even greater attention on such questions.

Most people with religious upbringings learned that the world came into existence by the creative act of a great and powerful divine being. But obviously a great many things have gone wrong in the world since that time.

So we ask ourselves: Where was God on Sept. 11? Why didn't He act to prevent such an evil? Doesn't He exercise control over

everything that occurs? Is God powerless to prevent evil?

**What would it take to eliminate tragedy?**

The answer to those questions is inherent in another: Do we want God to totally control everything we do?

Think about it for a minute. Would you want someone else to take control of your life, to dictate everything you could or could not do, to determine everything you did in your every waking moment? Would you want that kind of domination over your life?

Where would you draw the line on what you would want God not to allow? Should God prevent anyone who drives too fast from speeding? Should He keep all of us from viewing television shows, movies and video games that could influence some to lust or commit acts of depravity and violence?

These forms of entertainment often lead to the misuse of our God-given sexuality, designed to bring us happy marriages and wonderful children. Such misguided programs degrade the character of those who produce and use them. Extramarital affairs often lead to the destruction of marriages and families. Many children from broken marriages grow up into hurt, angry, distrustful adults. Premarital sex often results in diseases, unwanted pregnancies and the aborting of tiny, innocent human lives.

When people break laws—do irresponsible things—they often hurt not only themselves but innocent people. At what point should God take control of people to stop them from doing such things? Before we criticize what God allows, we would be wise to examine and answer these crucial questions.

Understand that, for God to prevent every tragedy, He would have to exercise absolute control over *every* action of *every* human being on the face of the earth.

But, if He did, we would be nothing more than automatons—robots incapable of making decisions on our own. We would be deprived of freedom to make personal choices.

Nowhere in God's Word, the Bible, do we find evidence that He ever intended us to be mindless machines. On the contrary, the Scriptures reveal that God created us with freedom of choice, or *free will*.

We treasure this freedom so highly that much of Western culture is based on and passionately committed to protecting it. People regard it as one of the foundational rights of society. Yet we tend to blame God when our collective freedom to make choices and live our own way produces tragic consequences.

### It all started in the garden

We can find many answers to our perplexing questions by reviewing what happened in the Garden of Eden. That's where and when humanity's problems began. Much that has happened in history can be traced back to the brief time our first human parents spent in that God-made paradise. Patterns of behavior began there that still affect men, women and children everywhere.

God created us for an awesome purpose, yet He made us spiritually incomplete. From the beginning He gave us a remarkably capable mind. But He did not instantaneously create character within us. To develop righteous character we must consciously choose good over evil.

This takes time, and God gives us a choice in how we learn the difference between right and wrong. We can respect

can produce terrible consequences. The Scriptures tell us that "whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7). So, predictably, after Adam and Eve succumbed to Satan, they and their descendants began to reap a harvest of violence and suffering.

Though God created us with freedom of choice, He appeals to us to recognize that definitive knowledge of right and wrong is available only from Him. Notice how plainly the Scriptures explain the consequences of our choices:

"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you . . . But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear . . . I announce to you today that you shall surely perish . . . I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that *I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live*" (Deuteronomy 30:15-19).

God wants us to make good choices. But He does not *force* us to do so. Nevertheless

## Understand that, for God to prevent every tragedy, He would have to exercise absolute control over every action of every human being on the face of the earth.

God's wisdom and allow Him to teach us, or we can trust our own judgment and learn the hard way.

God created Adam and Eve, then placed them in the Garden of Eden. There He began to teach them the way of life that would bring peace and blessings—the way of life He wanted them to pass on to their children. He commanded them to obey His instruction.

Yet He did not *force* them to obey Him. It was their responsibility to choose whether they would trust Him and rely on His judgment and teachings or not. Satan, seeing in humanity's freedom of choice an opportunity to deceive, offered them a life based solely on self-determination and independence from God. Adam and Eve exercised their free will. They foolishly accepted Satan's offer. Their choice dramatically changed their lives and set the course of history for all their posterity.

### Consequences of choices

All choices produce results. Bad choices

He commands us, "Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD, till He comes and rains righteousness on you" (Hosea 10:12). If everyone would choose to sow righteousness, our world could reap the fruit of peace and security. This God has promised (Leviticus 26:3-12).

Most seldom take God and His Word into consideration in their choices. God allows human beings to make their own decisions and to be selfish, self-centered, greedy, angry, lustful and arrogant. He doesn't *want* people to be that way, but He permits it.

The problem with most people is that when they make bad choices they seldom realize that they are bad. They typically view them as being the best choices for them at the time—but they don't consider the long-term consequences. By repeatedly making bad choices, they bring pain and suffering into their lives and the lives of others. ". . . Those who plow iniquity and

sow trouble reap the same" (Job 4:8).

Because almost all of humanity has rejected God's counsel, most people continue to make poorly informed choices. Isaiah poignantly described humanity's typical path: "The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace. Therefore justice is far from us, nor does righteousness overtake us; we look for light, but there is darkness! For brightness, but we walk in blackness! We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes; we stumble at noonday as at twilight; we are as dead men in desolate places" (Isaiah 59:8-10).

God is allowing us to learn for ourselves that many of our choices are at best very unwise, that they can bring tremendous suffering. When we refuse to base our lives on God's revealed instructions, He lets us collectively suffer the consequences of our combined foolish choices. This is a primary reason that we live in a world filled with so much suffering.

### Not God's world

We also need to understand that this is not God's world. The apostle Paul refers to it as "this *present evil age*" (Galatians 1:4, emphasis added throughout).

The Scriptures speak of Satan the devil as a deceptive and powerfully evil spirit being who served God as a "covering cherub" (Ezekiel 28:16) before he rebelled. They explain that the devil offered Eve—and in turn Adam through her persuasion—an alternative path to the one that God had instructed them to follow.

Regrettably, they willingly accepted his offer. They chose to experiment with their own ways, independent of God's guidance. By succumbing to the devil's temptation, they submitted to his sway and influence. Adam and Eve set a pattern that mankind has followed ever since. Therefore Satan's evil ways became, in the words of Paul, "the *course* of this world" that most people unwittingly follow (Ephesians 2:2).

Mankind as a whole since that time has gone down the same path. In the same passage Paul calls Satan the devil the "*prince of the power of the air*, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience." He is so influential, even apparently "broadcasting" wrong moods and attitudes to receptive human minds, that he has deceived humanity into believing that ruthless competition and strife are better than the cooperative way God first began teaching Adam



and Eve. Therefore Satan has become “*the god of this age* [who] has blinded [those] who do not believe” (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Christ acknowledged that Satan is the present ruler of this world, or age (John 14:30; 16:11). He also said to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). Again, for the present, this is *not* God’s world.

Nor is God the author of the pain we see around us. Other factors cause humanity’s suffering—human decisions, sin and the devil’s success in influencing and manipulating our self-centered choices. (For more information be sure to request our free booklets *Why Does God Allow Suffering* and *Is There Really a Devil?*)

God is not trying to save the entire world now (Matthew 13:10-15). Instead, he is working out His plan according to His own time frame. He will deal with Satan at the proper time (Revelation 20:1-3)—but in the meantime He allows the devil to hold sway over the earth (1 John 5:19; Revelation 12:9).

### Painful lessons

Now back to our primary question: Why does God permit evil on the atrocious scale of Sept. 11? Primarily, it is so

## Understand that, for God to prevent every tragedy, He would have to exercise absolute control over every action of every human being on the face of the earth.

mankind can learn one essential lesson.

All of humanity must eventually learn, beyond a shadow of doubt, that God’s way of life is the only way that will really work. God prefers that we learn this lesson the easy way, by trusting His judgment and choosing to follow His instructions. This is the way He offered us—all of mankind—at the beginning of our existence.

Jesus Christ concisely sums up this way of life: “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37-39; quoting Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18).

Ironically, all three of the world’s great monotheistic religions—Christianity, Islam and Judaism—claim to accept these two divine commandments. But humanity as a whole has seldom followed them.

Mankind, being naturally hostile toward God and His law (Romans 8:7), has chosen the more difficult way. Therefore God has

given us thousands of years to write the hard lesson of experience under the disastrous sway of Satan. It is *his* influence, not God’s, that has pitted man against man and nation against nation.

Christ foretold where our collective determination to do things our own way would eventually lead. In His famous prophecy of Matthew 24 He predicted that in the end time “nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (verse 7). The Greek word here translated “nation” is *ethnos*, from which we derive the English word *ethnic*. Jesus prophesied a time when many of the world’s peoples and cultures would rise against each other—exactly as we have seen throughout history and especially in recent years.

Coupled with this, said Jesus, “kingdom [will rise] against kingdom”—countries and nations would go to war against each other.

The outcome that He foretold is chilling. The time immediately before His return will be “a time of great distress, *such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world*, and will never be again.” Conditions will be so dangerous, so terrifying, that, “*if that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could*

*survive . . .*” (verses 21-22, Revised English Bible).

This will be the culminating result of our collective choice to go our own way, to try to solve our problems apart from following God’s way of love: *We will find ourselves on the brink of annihilation.*

### Wresting control from Satan

“ . . . When you see these things happening,” Christ said, “know that the kingdom of God is near” (Luke 21:31). His message is clear: Because we are incapable of forging enduring solutions to our conflicts, He will have to intervene *to save us from ourselves.*

Our collective human experiences—including the terrible tragedies of this life—are like a torrential river sweeping humanity toward one inescapable conclusion: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death”—of pain and destruction (Proverbs 16:25). When mankind finally learns this crucial lesson, it will then turn to the instruction book of its Maker and be guided to the better way. In

the end our all-knowing, all-powerful God will bring good out of all the bad.

When Jesus returns, Satan’s influence over humanity will cease. Then it will be said, “Now is the judgment of this world; now *the ruler of this world* will be cast out” (John 12:31). Christ will forcibly step in and take control of the governments of the world (Revelation 11:15)—imposing punishment on those who refuse to obey Him (Zechariah 14:16-19).

Through His Spirit, God will begin granting people the power to control their human nature (Ezekiel 36:25-27). But even this will not be by actually *making* anyone do anything. People will still have a choice. Yet the choice will be much clearer for Christ will remove the spiritual blindness of living under Satan’s rule. He will teach people how to avoid wrong, selfish choices that bring misery and destruction (Isaiah 11:9; 30:21; Micah 4:2-3). Through their voluntarily yielding to Him, God will change their nature from within, writing His law in their minds and hearts (Jeremiah 31:33).

Must we, in the meantime, feel helpless before the power of Satan, who, according to John 8:42-44, is the father of lies and all other evil? Not at all, providing we will wholeheartedly examine our ways and individually turn to God in humility and obedience. The Scriptures tell us that, if we “submit to God” and “resist the devil,” he will “flee from you” (James 4:7).

Through Isaiah God tells us how to begin this process: “Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:6-7). To learn more, request our free booklet *Transforming Your Life*. We do not *have* to remain trapped under Satan’s sway. Indeed, God has shown us the way out. Once we are pardoned, God’s help through His Spirit is available to us to transform our lives in this life now.

### They will live again

“All that may be true,” some will say, “but it doesn’t help the loved ones I have lost.” Though at first glance that appears to be true, God has revealed that all is not lost for them, either. Those who had their lives, with their hopes and dreams, taken from them through death are destined to live again. He will resurrect them to live again in a world where neither evil nor Satan, the



## Why Do We Blame God for Catastrophes?

Insurance companies speak of damage done by an earthquake or storm as an “act of God.” Sometimes, when a child’s life ends prematurely, people will even say that God took the child to be with Him.

When an accidental death occurs or a weather disaster or earthquake demolishes buildings and injures or kills people, is it fair to classify such troubling events as deliberate acts of God?

Certainly not! In reality most of these tragedies fall under one of two categories—*time and chance* and *human error*.

Such tragedies usually result from people being at the wrong place or in the wrong situation at the wrong time. Their cause is similar to wise King Solomon’s explanation of why being faster, wiser or stronger may not always determine one’s success. “I returned and saw under the sun that—The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill; but *time and chance* happen to them all” (Ecclesiastes 9:11). The same principle normally applies to most victims of hard-to-explain disasters—they simply happen to be at the wrong place at the wrong time.

Recently a newscaster expressed the skepticism of many by asking, “*Why would God allow such terrible things [like the thousands of deaths in the World Trade Center disaster] to happen?*” Appropriately he did use the word *allow* rather than *cause*. Nevertheless, his question implied

that we might have reason to suspect that God doesn’t care about what happens to us.

Why are we so quick to question God’s goodness and fairness when something goes wrong but take for granted the bountiful blessings He has already given us? Is it fair for us to give ourselves the credit for the abundance of good things we enjoy and then blame God for the bad?

Couldn’t it be that we need to reevaluate our perspective? Shouldn’t we acknowledge that we might avoid disasters if we put far more effort into learning and following the instruction and wisdom God has so generously and helpfully revealed to us in His Word? Isn’t this a time to examine our own ways rather than suggest that maybe God should accept the blame for our troubles?

Long ago God expressed His thoughts about accusations that He is unfair: “. . . The children of your people say, ‘The way of the LORD is not fair.’ But it is their way which is not fair!” (Ezekiel 33:17).

Isn’t it possible for us to acknowledge that sometimes our opinion of God really isn’t fair—or that God really could be consistently fair, even when He allows us to learn important lessons the hard way?

Let’s learn to be more vigilant in examining ourselves, admitting our weaknesses and mending our own ways. As we do, we’ll start to see that God has been much fairer with us than we could have ever imagined.

father of evil, will any longer dominate human affairs.

“Do not marvel at this,” Jesus said, “for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28-29, New American Standard Bible). (For more details about the hopeful side of this “resurrection of judgment,” be sure to request our booklet *What Happens After Death?* It thoroughly explains, from God’s Word, this wonderful resurrection that so few correctly understand.)

In time, all wrongs will be made right and all hard questions will be answered. God has promised, “I will bring the blind by a way they did not know . . . I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, and not forsake them” (Isaiah 42:16).

God’s goal is to create from human beings His own righteous family. But He reveals in His Word that mankind must first learn some hard lessons.

As we have already explained, there is an easy way to learn and a hard way. God prefers that we learn our lessons the easy way—by simply trusting Him and believing what He reveals in His Word without having to experience the consequences of a lifetime of questionable choices. But our resistance to God’s instruction means that we learn most of these lessons the hard way.

God wants us to learn and practice

righteous behavior. But He is even more concerned that we build *righteous character*—the kind of character that, with His help, will help us to control what we think and what motivates us.

This is where the real control over good and evil must be established—in the individual character of each of us. Only by giving us free will could God enable us to choose between right and wrong, between good and evil, so that He could establish His own character in our minds. His ultimate intent is to develop godly character in all of humanity so that we will base all of our choices on the same unselfish love that motivates Him.

The Scriptures show that God will succeed in accomplishing this beyond anything we could imagine—that when all is said and done only a small minority will have rejected His ways. When God has brought His plan to completion, humanity will be transformed into His own children and enjoy fullness of life and peace in a manner we can’t humanly realize is possible.

Yes, God allows human beings to choose who influences them and to make many, many unwise personal choices. Satan the devil still dominates the thinking of most of humanity.

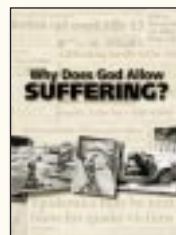
But, from it all, humanity is learning an incredibly important lesson that few at this time can appreciate. The net effect of the choices human beings make without God’s complete involvement in their lives can produce, at best, only a mixture of good and evil (Genesis 2:17).

Thankfully, God has set a time when He will send Jesus back to earth to make this lesson clear to human beings. This will include even those who have gone to their graves without this precious understanding (Titus 2:11-14; 2 Peter 3:9; Ezekiel 37:11-14; Matthew 12:41-42). The good news is that the overwhelming majority will ultimately listen and change their ways of thinking and living.

God *will* bring this about. Then all will be able to enjoy a peace and safety—as well as freedom—that is presently impossible. **GN**

### Recommended Reading

This article provides only a brief view of why the world is in such sad shape and why we experience so much pain and tragedy. For more understanding,



please request your free copies of the booklets *Why Does God Allow Suffering?* and *Is There Really a Devil?* To learn how God will ultimately right all wrongs and teach all people His way of love—including those who have already died—also request *The Gospel of the Kingdom* and *What Happens After Death?*

Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).

# A Different World

by Mario Seiglie

**T**he shock was absolute. The mind reeled at the magnitude of the destruction. Jumbo jets hit the two 110-story towers of the World Trade Center. The towers were aflame. In a little more than an hour both of them collapsed, killing thousands of innocent people. Then followed images of the smoldering Pentagon in Washington, D.C. A large section of it lay in ruins in which almost 200 more perished.

What we witnessed on Sept. 11 was a new type of terrorism that reached a new level of hate-inspired horror.

How could this happen, and what does it mean for the future? A bit of history is necessary for our understanding.

## Factions among Muslims

Many factions of Islam exist, but the two largest are the Sunnis, the overwhelming majority, and the Shiites, a radical minority opposed to the governing Sunni classes. The civilized world's present troubles come mainly from radical and militant Muslim groups, mostly from the Shiite, or Shia, faction. But some of the perpetrators of this epitome of violence are emerging from the Sunni branch.

For instance, Iran, under Shiite control since the takeover by the Ayatollah Khomeini at the end of the '70s, has been a major sponsor of terrorism. But five years ago Afghanistan fell under control of the Taliban regime, which represents a radical Sunni faction.

Taliban interpretations of Islamic law are so strict that even fundamentalist Iran considers it extremist. When the Taliban took over, it imposed restrictions that included a ban on, among other things, kite flying, stuffed animals, paper bags, marbles and recorded music. Taliban authorities arrested soccer players for wearing shorts. The Taliban tightened already-oppressive restrictions on women to include the banning of white socks. Every inch of a woman's body, including her face, must be covered, they decreed. She must make no noise with her feet while walking. If she teaches young girls to read and write, she may be put to death.

With such a radical faction in control, Afghanistan became a natural haven in which fugitive terrorist Osama bin Laden, himself

a fundamentalist Sunni, could find refuge.

## Deep-seated enmity

The conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors is a related controversy that spills over into the rest of the world.

After Arabs conquered Jerusalem in A.D. 638 (see "The Birth and Spread of Islam," page 14), Muslims controlled the Holy

Instead of creating the great Islamic world their forebears dreamed about, the Islamic world in recent years has lost economic, cultural and military ground to the more powerful and prosperous Western society. The Islamic world has also seen global communications penetrate its closed societies and expose its people to a flashy, materialistic lifestyle—one that appeals to many of their



**The terrible events of Sept. 11 brought home two realities: Our world will never be the same, and the cultural clash between Islamic extremism and the West is a clash of different worlds.**

Land until 1917. The only time they didn't was during the 11th to 13th centuries, when the crusaders managed to sporadically control the Holy Land but were ultimately defeated and expelled.

It was not until the British defeated the Muslim Ottoman Turks in 1917 that the Holy Land, then called Palestine, became a British protectorate for 30 years. In 1948 the creation of the Jewish state, Israel, led to the first Arab war against Israel.

So far Arabs have fought four wars against Israel—in 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973—and lost every one. In the 1967 war the Israelis took control of Jerusalem but left the control of the Temple Mount to Arab religious authorities. The friction between the Israelis and the Arab Palestinians continues and contributes to the hatred extremist militant Muslims have for the West and in particular the United States, Israel's main protector.

youths. Similarly, as women in Islamic countries have become better educated, fewer want to submit to strict Muslim laws.

This situation has fomented a great struggle between Western and Islamic values. Muslim extremist groups have used this situation to declare holy war against the West.

## Center of world conflict

To serious students of the Bible, today's troubles are no surprise. God, looking ahead in history, long ago predicted the land of Israel would be at the center of the world's troubles. He said: "Behold, I will make Jerusalem a *cup of drunkenness* to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a *very heavy stone for all peoples*; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are

AFP Photo

gathered against it” (Zechariah 12:2-3, emphasis added throughout).

Judah and Jerusalem could not become a center of conflict while the Muslim world ruled Jerusalem, since the whole Middle East was then under Muslim rule and Jerusalem was an insignificant place. It was only when the modern state of Israel came into being in 1948 that the balance of power and religion was forever upset in the region. After 1967 the conflict escalated because, after nearly 1,900 years, Jerusalem was again firmly in Jewish hands.

Just as prophecy foretold, the region reels as a drunken man who cannot find stability—it is a true “cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples.” Many insane acts are perpetrated under what can correctly be called religious drunkenness. Under its spell followers of militant Islam happily commit suicide, even at the expense of thousands of innocent lives (see “Religion of War or Peace?,” page 15).

No doubt, with the presence of such radical elements, the Middle East will remain an area of even greater instability. This is likely to be especially true in the face of Western reprisals against terrorist attacks.

### North-south divide

Where are these trends leading us? An important prophecy about the Middle East in the end time, in the book of Daniel, gives us some indications.

The prophecy first reveals the ultimate destiny of the Persian kingdom, of which Daniel was a high-ranking dignitary. Four prominent monarchs would succeed to the Persian throne. Surpassing the fourth in greatness would be a king of Greece, the head of a European nation, who would defeat the Persians (Daniel 11:1-3). This mighty conqueror, Alexander the Great, was prophesied to have a short reign and, at the peak of his power, perish.

The subsequent kingdom would divide into four parts and would not fall to any of Alexander’s heirs (verse 4). This prophecy proved true when four of Alexander’s generals eventually divided his kingdom among themselves. Then the prophecy focuses on the two Greek generals who would rule the areas north and south of the Holy Land. Seleucus would govern greater Syria to the north, and Ptolemy would reign over Egypt to the south. It then describes the struggle their dynasties would have to conquer the other’s region, especially the territory of the Holy Land.

In the prophecy Seleucus is called the king of the North and Ptolemy the king of the South. As the prophecy progresses over time, other successors of these positions are mentioned.

Then the scene in Daniel jumps forward in history to the “time of the end” (verse 40). The king of the North would now become a far more formidable power, while the king of the South would hold in his power a great part of the southern kingdoms surrounding Israel—territories that today belong to the Muslim Arabs.

The prophecy proclaims: “*At the time of the end* the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through” (same verse).

The end-time king of the South apparently will head a federation of nations that are presently under Muslim rule. The nations under the king of the South that will be invaded by the king of the North will include “many countries,” among them Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia (verses 41-43).

The king of the North is described in other parts of the Bible as the head of a great federation north of these southern countries.

### Time of Christ’s return

This king of the North will exist when Jesus Christ returns to earth: “*And in the latter time of their kingdom*, when the transgressors have reached their fullness, a *king* [likely out of Europe, as was the original king of the North] shall arise, . . . His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power. He shall destroy fearfully, and shall prosper and thrive; he shall destroy the mighty, and also the holy people. Through his cunning he shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule, and he shall exalt himself in his heart. He shall destroy many in their prosperity. *He shall even rise against the Prince of princes* [the returning Jesus Christ]; but he shall be broken without human means” (Daniel 8:23-25).

Revelation 17 describes an end-time dictator known as the “beast” heading a federation of nations, apparently in the territory of the former Roman Empire. This appears to be the same person as the king of the North, who also fights Christ at His return (verses 12-14).

This evil ruler will eventually conquer much of the Middle East, including Israel, and will set up a headquarters there. “He shall enter also into the glorious land, and

. . . shall plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas in the glorious holy mountain [Jerusalem]; yet he shall come to his end, and none shall help him” (Daniel 11:41-45, King James Version).

During this time the world will suffer great tribulation, just before the coming of Christ to end the corrupt and violent rule of men.

The prophecy continues: “*At that time* . . . there shall be a *time of trouble*, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book of life. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake . . .” (Daniel 12:1-2). Mention of the tribulation and resurrection here identifies the fulfillment of this prophecy as just before and through Christ’s second coming.

Bible prophecy foretells the rising of a king of the South who will play a significant role in end-time events. What will bring many of the Muslim nations to unite under such a leader?

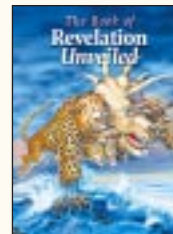
Is it possible that an escalation of unconscionable acts perpetrated by extremist Muslim militants against the United States, followed by Western reprisals, will eventually lead to the beginning of a broad Islamic union under a charismatic religious leader to defend the Muslim cause? One way or another, a “king of the South” will provoke a future war in the Middle East.

This is a time to stay tuned and watch current events ever more closely. We have entered a different world. Peace and security will never be quite the same.

As the apostle Paul tells us in Romans 13:11, “now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.” **GN**

### Recommended Reading

To learn more about what the Bible reveals about coming events, be sure to request your free booklets *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*, *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).

## The Birth and Spread of Islam

In A.D. 610, during the Islamic month of Ramadan, a 40-year-old merchant named Muhammad (570-632) was finding solace from the outside world in a cave not far from Mecca in what is now Saudi Arabia. This reputedly quiet, affectionate and kind man had been a caravan master. Now, married to a rich widow, his former employer, he had plenty of time for such solitude and reflection. By accounts he was worried about a moral crisis of reckless materialism hindering his Arabic society. Along with committing blatant idolatry, the poor and disadvantaged were in a serious state of neglect.

In the words of Karen Armstrong, Muhammad awoke one night “to find himself overpowered by a devastating presence, which squeezed him tightly until he heard the words of a new Arabic scripture pouring from his lips” (*Islam: A Short History*, 2000, pp. 3-4). He later understood that presence to be an angel. And, reportedly, it was through such means that the one God (Allah, the Arabic word for God)—the creator and sustainer of the world—and His will were revealed to the one whom more than a billion people now regard as “the Prophet.”

After further experiences or visions of this type, Muhammad began preaching and gaining converts in 612. Apparently he did not think of founding a new religion but merely of bringing the revelation of Allah to the Arab world. He preached against the multitudinous gods and idols of the time. Muhammad became aware that the Arabs sprang from Ishmael (Ismail in Arabic), one of the sons of the biblical patriarch Abraham (or Ibrahim). We are told that he highly regarded the Old Testament prophets and Jesus of Nazareth, though he claimed that Jews and Christians had corrupted their sacred texts as passed down. Indeed, he saw himself as restoring the Abrahamic religion.

The religion Muhammad proclaimed eventually came to be named Islam, in essence meaning *surrender* to the will of God. Its adherents became known as Muslims (or Moslems); that is, those accepting this surrender.

Muhammad’s disciples memorized his recitations. After his death they wrote them down to form the Koran (or Qur’an, meaning “reading”). According to Islamic thought, God’s will is revealed to man through the Koran—the record of God’s revelation to His messenger Muhammad. Muslims understand Muhammad to be the last of a long series of prophets, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Written in classic Arabic and 80 percent of the length of the New Testament, the Koran includes pronouncements against idolatry and mandates for social justice.

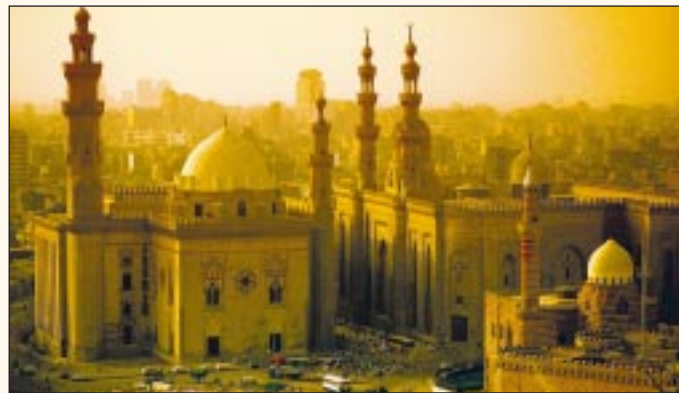
At first Muhammad made few converts. After four years of preaching, he had only about 70 followers. But he was undaunted, and soon many more were attracted to the new faith. Yet this religion brought drastic social repercussions with it. Because Muhammad’s teachings threatened the religion and the commerce of the people of Mecca, they persecuted him and his growing band of believers, at last forcing him, in 622, to flee to the Arabian city later called Medina. His flight, called the Hegira (or Hijra), marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

Up to this point Muhammad had proclaimed a peaceful religion concerned with social justice and providing for the poor—and patience in the face of persecution. Yet, after his flight to Medina, things began to change. Gaining power, he announced that God had ordered Muslims to fight unbelievers. According to historian John Glubb: “The prophet, so patient, humble and devoted under persecution in Mecca, commenced to use power politics after his arrival in Medina. Not only does he resort to war against the Meccans, but in Medina he drives the Jews into exile and arranges for his opponents to be assassinated.”

According to another history: “Toward the end of his life [Muhammad] was responsible for organizing several expeditions against the Christian Arab border states, on the north of the [Arabian] peninsula” (Geoffrey Parrinder, editor, *World Religions: From Ancient History to the Present*, 1983, p. 469). Whatever words he may have used, his example

spoke volumes. Shortly after his death, in 632, the “sword of Islam” began conquering vast tracts of the known civilized world.

This was, as the Muslims understood it, *jihad*—holy war. Historically, jihad was not itself meant to convert individuals to Islam. Rather, its supporters understood it to gain political control of society and administer it through the principles of Islam. Conversions of individuals were to be a by-product of Muslim authorities taking over and imposing righteous laws. According to strict Muslim doctrine, compulsory conversions are forbidden. Yet that did not stop Arab warriors from demanding of pagans that they “accept Islam or die.” In fact, it was mainly through that kind of missionary efforts that Islam spread.



*Cairo's Sultan Hassan Mosque, constructed beginning in 1256, is one of the finest examples of Islamic architecture in the world.*

Soon Islamic armies rampaged against the decadent Sassanid (Persian) and Byzantine (Asia Minor-Greek) forces controlling the Middle East, quickly defeating them. Arab warriors conquered Jerusalem in 638. By the early 700s Islam had spread across North Africa. It then pushed east as far as India and north as far as Spain. From there the Arab raiders attempted to conquer the rest of Europe but were stopped in 732 at the Battle of Tours in the plains of Poitiers, France, by the armies of the French prince, Charles Martel. Unable to spread further into Europe, Islam continued south and east, carrying its holy war into other parts of Africa, the Middle East, India and the rest of Asia.

American author Louis L'Amour, noted for his extensive research, summarized the spread of Islam as follows: “In the space of one hundred years following the death of Mohammed in 632, the Arabs had carried the sword of Islam from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, holding at one time most of Spain, part of southern France, the isle of Sicily, all of North Africa and Egypt, all of Arabia, the Holy Land, Armenia, Persia, Afghanistan, and almost a third of India. The empire of the Arabs was larger than that of Alexander the Great or of Rome” (*The Walking Drum*, 1984, p. 171).

It is important to realize that Jews and Christians, whose religious traditions Muhammad saw himself as succeeding, were accorded special favor in this conquest. He allowed them to keep their religion as long as they paid a tax. In this respect the Islamic empire was more tolerant of Jews and Christians than Christian Europe was of Jews and Muslims during much of its history. Muslims gave those who were not Jews or Christians the simple choice of converting to Islam or death.

Yet, as L'Amour writes: “They came with the sword, but they retained the best of what they discovered. Much that we know of Arab science was born from the minds of Jews, Persians, Greeks, various Central Asiatic peoples, and the Berbers, but it flowered under Arab enthusiasm. A scholar was welcome everywhere . . . [and] for more than five hundred years the Arabs carried the torch of civilization” (pp. 171-172).

While Europe languished in the poverty and ignorance of the Dark Ages, the Arabs were developing libraries and learning centers. They

preserved the great works of ancient Greece and Rome, transmitting to us the decimal system, logarithms, algebra and trigonometry. Under their patronage, medical treatment, botany, geography, zoology and other studies advanced.

Over the centuries Islam spread throughout the Arab world, ultimately becoming one of the world's great religions. Though often violent, expansion has been peaceful at times—as Muslim populations simply expanded and overflowed into other areas. In its tumultuous history, genuine missionary activity has ebbed and flowed, experiencing

a sharp increase in the 20th century.

As noted earlier, Islam has more than a billion adherents. They live in every country. Indeed, although most Arabs are Muslim, no longer are most Muslims Arab. About one third of Africa is Muslim. Even America has seen peaceful Islamic growth. *Time* reported that Islam may be America's fastest-growing religion. "The country's 7 million Muslims are overwhelmingly middle and professional class" (Atlantic edition, Sept. 24, 2001).

—Tom Robinson and Mario Seiglie

## Religion of War or Peace?

In an article on the values of Islam, *Time* said that "like Judaism and Christianity . . . Islam honors all humanity—not just believers—as created by God, who is referred to as 'the compassionate and the merciful'" (Sept. 24, 2001). In common with Judaism and Christianity, the Islamic scriptures espouse the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

After the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, many Muslims have pleaded with Americans to recognize Islam as a peaceful religion. Indeed, President George Bush stood in a mosque before American Muslim leaders and proclaimed, "Islam is peace." Henry Kissinger, a former secretary of state, added, "The battle is against a radical minority that disgraces the humane aspects of Islam."

However, such statements may seem jarring when juxtaposed with the terrorist acts of the past few decades, the crowds of cheering Palestinians when the World Trade Center was destroyed, and the bloodstained history of this religion, which spread by conquest (see "The Birth and Spread of Islam," page 14). Indeed, the word *jihad*—holy struggle or war—conjures images for many of an entire religion bent on destroying Western civilization.

Yet *jihad* should be understood in its context. We must realize that Islam itself has undergone many changes in modern times—with particular philosophies coming to the fore while others have fallen into disrepute.

In its entry on *jihad*, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* explains: "Islam distinguishes four ways by which the duty of *jihad* can be fulfilled: by the heart, the tongue, the hand, and the sword. The first consists in a spiritual purification of one's own heart by doing battle with the devil and overcoming his inducements to evil. The propagation of Islam through the tongue and hand is accomplished in large measure by supporting what is right and correcting what is wrong. The fourth way to fulfill one's duty is to wage war physically against unbelievers and enemies of the Islamic faith . . . Modern Islam places special emphasis on waging war with one's inner self. It sanctions war with other nations only as a defensive measure when the faith is in danger" (Micropaedia, Vol. 6, 1985).

This is in keeping with Muhammad's teaching in the Koran: "Fight for the sake of God those that fight against you, but do not attack them first. God does not love the aggressors" (quoted by Philip Novak, compiler, *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions*, 1994, p. 300).

However, this sentiment was belied by Muhammad's own aggression against the Meccans and others. In Islam, as in Christianity, fundamentalists and liberals, left-wingers and right-wingers, radicals and moderates all claim to be the true followers of the religion.

Most Muslims would never consider killing themselves in a suicide bombing of inhabited buildings with the resultant loss of thousands of precious human lives. Of suicide, the Koran clearly states: "Do not destroy yourselves. God is merciful to you, but he that does that through wickedness and injustice shall be burned in fire" (ibid., p. 309). Yet suicide bombers, armed with a radical interpretation of Islam, inflicted a massive

dose of suffering and death on many innocent, unsuspecting people in Manhattan's two tallest buildings—including, ironically, several dozen fellow Muslims.

How do they justify it? They argue that the West has already attacked them through cultural imperialism and international policies that hurt Islam worldwide. They see America as the invader of their lands and destroyer of their faith, with Israel as America's primary accomplice. This makes them, as they see it, martyrs for Islam—for which the Koran does promise great reward.

After the U.S. embassy bombings in 1998, Osama bin Laden contended in a January 1999 interview that Muslims were merely responding to a "legitimate duty to protect their religion against perceived attacks from 'Jews and crusaders (generally Americans) . . . Our holy land is occupied by Israeli and American forces . . . We have the right to defend ourselves and to liberate our holy land . . . Hostility towards America is a religious duty and we hope to be rewarded for it by God . . . Praise be to God for guiding us to do *jihad* in his cause."

This is not the view of the majority of Muslims living in the United States and other Western nations. But, in the poorer areas of the world—much of which is Muslim—many harbor resentment over the affluence of Western life they see portrayed in movies as opposed to their own often-destitute conditions—thus fueling the fire against America. U.S. support for what they see as corrupt leaders in their countries only furthers that resentment.

Anti-American rhetoric in the Middle East is incessant. "For example," reported *The Wall Street Journal*

on Sept. 20, "the mufti—or chief cleric—appointed by the Palestinian Authority under Yasser Arafat has prayed that God will 'destroy America,' while the editor of a leading Palestinian journal has declared: The American 'murderers of humanity, the creators of the barbaric culture and the bloodsuckers of nations, are doomed to death.'"

Such ranting is not without effect. Continuing in *The Wall Street Journal*: "Only last November . . . one of the official Palestinian Authority newspapers reported the results of a poll in which 73 percent of Palestinians supported 'suicide missions against American interests in the Middle East.' Is it any wonder, then, that there was rejoicing among the Palestinians over the attacks 'against American interests' in America itself . . . ?"

David Pryce-Jones, senior editor of *National Review*, properly remarked in *The Sunday Telegraph* (London): "There are of course many millions of Arabs and Muslims, including Iraqis and Palestinians, who do not rejoice, who repudiate the horror committed in their name . . . They are as threatened as the rest of the civilized world by Islamic fanaticism" (Sept. 16).

Yet it is a mistake to consign those in favor of terrorism against the West to a tiny, insignificant lunatic fringe. Although they may represent a small portion of the Muslim world, that part is nevertheless all too significant—and rooted in Islamic traditions, in spite of the many who believe terrorist actions violate the tenets of Islam.

—Tom Robinson



# America's Good Samaritans: Selfless Sacrifice and Heroism



Not since Pearl Harbor has the United States experienced such a shock of national proportions as it received on Sept. 11. Yet out of the rubble and carnage rose a multitude of Good Samaritans. Some sacrificed their lives. Others gave unmeasured comfort to the wounded and brokenhearted. All left us unforgettable examples.

"Okay, there's a group of us and we're going to do something," said the voice on the phone. Remarkably, Tom Burnett had been able to phone his wife, Deena, while aboard ill-fated United Airlines Flight 93. The other resolute passengers included Mark Bingham, Todd Beamer and Jeremy Glick. Passengers Lou Nacke and Donald Greene, the latter a trained pilot, are also believed to have been involved. Together the group was probably instrumental in forcing the plane to crash in rural Pennsylvania rather than strike an intended target in Washington, D.C.—perhaps, as many believe, the White House or Capitol.

Ground zero—site of the World Trade Center towers' meltdown and collapse—was a living hell. Televised images and reports of the unbelievable devastation couldn't describe the terror, torture, confusion and carnage thousands experienced that day.

Yet out of the white dust—concrete pulverized into powder—and over an estimated million tons of rubble, twisted girders and whole office floors, poured forth stories of selfless sacrifice and incredible heroism.

Out of the anguish, excruciation and deaths of thousands in New York City and Washington came countless stories that should cause us to reflect on the teachings of Jesus Christ—particularly His parable of the Good Samaritan.

## The Good Samaritan

We find the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, where Jesus said that to inherit eternal life we must love God above all else and love our neighbor as ourselves. One man, wanting to justify himself, asked Jesus whom he should consider to be his neighbor.

Jesus answered with the story of the Good Samaritan. The parable would have been unexpected by those who heard it because the Jews of Jesus' day despised Samaritans. So why did He tell it?

The Good Samaritan story explains itself: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion.

"So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'"

"So which of these three," Jesus asked, "do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And the man who had first asked the question responded: "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:30-37).

The traveler in Jesus' story was journeying from Jerusalem down to Jericho, a 17-mile trek descending 3,000 feet over rocky terrain, a dusty, rugged, bleak and dangerous road, with plenty of good places for robbers to hide. The thieves wounded and robbed him, even stealing the clothing off his body and leaving him "half dead."

In the parable a Jewish priest first saw the stricken traveler. He observed the man and walked on the other side of the road, being sure not to touch him, because if he touched a dead man he would have become ceremonially unclean. Ceremonial purity, not helping a brother, was more important for this priest.

Next to happen upon the injured man was a Levite. As a religious man, he also was interested in ceremonial purity. He judged it prudent not to get involved, and he, too, passed by on the opposite side.

Jesus then introduced the Samaritan, providing a twist to the story because a Samaritan would be the last person those in Christ's audience would expect to help the injured man.

The Samaritan had compassion on the sufferer. He attended to the man on the spot, using wine and olive oil to treat his wounds. Since the victim was too weak to walk, the Samaritan set him on his own beast of burden and brought him to an inn to take care of him.

Yet even then the Samaritan didn't

the kind of selflessness Jesus talked about.

### Selfless sacrifice

On Sept. 11 and during the following weeks, millions of Americans united to give blood, food, drink and comfort. If that were not enough, some even gave their lives so that others might live—as happened on Flight 93.

President Bush, in his remarks on the national day of prayer and remembrance Sept. 14, mentioned several acts of selflessness.

She started down the stairs only after word came to evacuate the building.

Incredibly, when she reached floor 13 the building collapsed and Miss Guzman's head became wedged between two pillars. Beside her was a man also trapped. She heard him cry out twice, then he was silent. Crying out to God, she asked for a second chance in life. She saw nothing but darkness and dust. She said another prayer: "Please just give me this one miracle."

Suddenly above her a man appeared, "a saint named Paul, who lifted her from the rubble. Twenty-six hours had passed" (*Time*, p. 70). At Bellevue Hospital, Miss Guzman's head was swollen and her legs required surgery, but doctors expect full recovery. The compassionate stranger showed the love and concern of the Good Samaritan.

Good Samaritan Ronnie Clifford, 47, an architect who was a hero and blessed to be a survivor, helped save Jennie-ann Maffeo, an asthmatic who was allergic to latex. Mr. Clifford was standing in the Marriott Hotel's lobby inside the Trade Center complex after the first plane hit one of the towers. Out of the pyre Mr. Clifford saw "a charred woman rise, her fingernails melting off and her clothes burned onto her skin" (*Time*, p. 71).

He shielded her with his coat when a second shudder dropped them to the floor. To combat shock, Mr. Clifford did his best to keep her alert. They talked and prayed together. Finally he led her to a nearby ambulance, Miss Maffeo's charred skin clinging to his coat. From there he ran west and boarded a ferry to go home to Glen Ridge, New Jersey, where he hugged his wife and 11-year-old daughter.

Later Mr. Clifford learned that he had lost his sister and niece in one of the jets that had plowed into one of the towers. Amazingly, while he was grieving, he still contacted Miss Maffeo's employer, who telephoned her family to inform her relatives of her condition.

When she was reunited with her family, she determined to track down the man who had saved her life. While consoling his own family in Ireland, Mr. Clifford received a phone call from Miss Maffeo's sister. The sister gave Mr. Clifford the family's thanks for putting himself at risk to save her sister. Consistent with his heroics and sacrifice, "Clifford replied that she had it wrong—he never would have made it out of the building before it collapsed if he had not picked up her sister. 'The truth is, she saved my life, she gave me strength'" (*Time*, p. 73).

## Are We Our *Brother's Keeper*?

America witnessed its share of Good Samaritans during and after the recent World Trade Center disaster. They are to be commended for their call to duty and sacrifice, some even giving up their lives in the process. Like the original Good Samaritan, their examples should remind us of God's love for mankind, which transcends even such outstanding examples of human love and sacrifice.

God calls us to a way of life exemplified by Him and His Son, Jesus of Nazareth. "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:7-8).

You and I can come to understand and apply the kind of love and sacrifice Jesus made for all humanity. The Bible describes it as *being our brother's keeper*, one who unfailingly "keeps" his brother or sister. Such constancy is more than an immediate and unplanned sacrifice for others, commendable as that is. To be your brother's keeper means to consider your neighbor's needs *at all times*, whether he is present or not.

A brother's keeper is one who understands godly love as expressed in Christ's sacrifice (John 3:16-17). That kind of love is embodied in the final words of Jesus as He hung dying on the stake: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). This is what Jesus asked of the Father for His murderers.

This kind of love for others is not a part-time job but a way of life. It follows the example of the Good Samaritan at all times. Ultimately the way of life God desires for us involves God's calling (John 6:44), repentance from dead works and faith toward God (Hebrews 6:1-2). To learn more, request our free booklets *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* and *The Ten Commandments*.

assume that his duty was done. He had to leave, so he paid the innkeeper some money on account and asked him to look after the man. Based on the rate of exchange and economy of the time, the Samaritan paid the innkeeper, in advance, for about two months' board. He then assured him that if funds were needed beyond this he would be good for it.

This, said Jesus, is what loving your neighbor entails. The Samaritan of Christ's parable depicted a person who did more than the minimum, more than was required. His attitude typified human goodness.

This is where the acts of selfless service and fearless heroism come into focus, both at the World Trade Center and on the jet that crashed into a field in Pennsylvania. We now know there were other countless acts of selfless service, sacrifice and heroism. Let's review a few as a reminder of

"... We have seen our national character in eloquent acts of sacrifice," he said. "Inside the World Trade Center, one man who could have saved himself stayed until the end at the side of his quadriplegic friend. A beloved priest died giving the last rites to a firefighter. Two office workers, finding a disabled stranger, carried her down 68 floors to safety. A group of men drove through the night from Dallas to Washington to bring skin grafts for burn victims."

The Sept. 24 issue of *Time* magazine contained other accounts of people caught in the World Trade Center disaster. An unknown hero named Paul helped save Genelle Guzman.

Miss Guzman, 31, was an office manager who worked on the 64th floor of Tower 1. When the havoc broke loose after the first plane exploded in the tower, she stayed put as per announced instructions.

## 'A lot of heroes'

Capt. Pat Brown, 48, was a highly decorated fireman. After a stint in Vietnam, he returned home in 1973 with many medals and with a bellyful of anger and dared anyone to knock the chip off his shoulder. He credits the New York City fire department for saving his life.

The department *became* his life. He was known for spectacular rescues. One day he even chased down a mugger in Central Park while exercising. He taught blind people self-defense.

"Last Tuesday [Sept. 11] his company got the call to go to the World Trade Center," reported *Time*. "Fire fighter Brandon Gill says someone yelled, 'Don't go in there, Paddy!' But Brown called back, 'Are you nuts? We've got a job to do!' and rushed up the stairs of the north tower with his men . . ." (*Time*, p. 75). In Capt. Brown's rush to save lives, he lost his own.

Roko Camaj, 60, lived among the clouds. As a window cleaner for the World Trade Center, his workspace offered a panoramic view of New York City. He loved his job, dangerous though it was. "Camaj was on the observation deck on the 107th floor in 1993 when a bomb hit the building. It took him 2½ hours to descend by stair, his mouth covered with one of his damp sponges, his doffed shirt covering the mouth of a pregnant woman he escorted down. He was back at work the next day."

On Sept. 11 Mr. Camaj called his wife at 9:14 a.m. He was on the 105th floor of the south tower. His son Vincent related his father's last words: "He told my mom he was with about 200 other people, and he was just waiting for the O.K. to head down. He told her not to worry, we're all in God's hands" (*Time*, p. 69). It was the last time they heard his voice.

A final story must be told about Michael Hingson, a blind man, and his yellow Labrador named Roselle. Mr. Hingson was on the 78th floor of the south tower when the chaos started. Although his dog was afraid of thunder, she appeared not to be afraid of the sound of the jets crashing and the collapse of the two towers. She was calm throughout the tragedies and their aftermath. "We moved fairly swiftly until we hit about the 40th floor. Then things got kind of jammed—a lot of stopping and starting," he said.

Miraculously, Mr. Hingson and Roselle both made it to safety. "Roselle was a hero for helping me to safety. But there were a

lot of heroes out there. Everyone helped each other—down the stairwell, on the street—and everyone stuck together. We're all alive because of that. Everyone did what had to be done, and things were amazingly orderly" (*Time*, p. 84).

## Back to normal?

All those who expressed their willingness to help others in their hour of need are to be commended. But will this spirit continue, or will it dissipate as has happened too many times before?

Shortly after the atrocities, author Max Lucado raised this point about human nature.

"Is this normal?" he asked. "Four thousand gathered for midday prayer in a downtown cathedral. A New York City church filled and emptied six times last Tuesday. The owner of a Manhattan tennis-shoe store threw open his doors and gave running shoes to those fleeing the towers. People stood in lines to give blood, in hospitals to treat the sick, in sanctuaries to pray for the wounded. America was different this week. We wept for people we did not know. We sent money to families we've never seen. Talk-show hosts read scriptures, journalists printed prayers.

"Our focus shifted from fashion hemlines and box scores to orphans and widows and the future of the world. We were different this week. Republicans stood next to Democrats. Catholics prayed with Jews. Skin color was covered by the ash of burning towers. This is a different country than it was a week ago. We're not as self-centered as we were. We're not as self-reliant as we were. Hands are out. Knees are bent. This is not normal. And I have to ask the question, 'Do we want to go back to normal?'"

"Are we being given a glimpse of a new way of life? Are we, as a nation, being reminded that the enemy is not each other and the power is not in ourselves and the future is not in our bank accounts? Could this unselfish prayerfulness be the way God intended for us to live all along? Maybe this, in his eyes, is the way we are called to live. And perhaps the best response to this tragedy is to refuse to go back to normal.

"Perhaps the best response is to follow the example of Tom Burnett. He was a passenger of Flight 93. Minutes before the plane crashed in the fields of Pennsylvania he reached his wife by cell phone. 'We're all going to die,' he told her, 'but . . . [a group of us] are going

to do something about it.'

"We can do something about it as well. We can resolve to care more. We can resolve to pray more. And we can resolve that, God being our helper, we'll never go back to normal again."

For those who want to do more, who don't want to be just *normal* again, this is what they can do: They can humble themselves before God, seek through prayer and Bible study to know His will and surrender to Him. That's a big step for anyone in a world that is often traveling exactly the opposite way. But it is doable. With God's help all things are possible (Matthew 19:26).

Let us never forget to *thank* God for His desire and design to help all mankind be saved from extinction (1 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9). God will intervene in the affairs of man and save us from ourselves and comfort us. Christ quoted a prophecy about Himself from Isaiah 61: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18).

Therein lies America's future and the future of all of mankind. Let's pray for God's Kingdom to come to earth (Matthew 6:10) to bring unprecedented peace and unparalleled prosperity, just as Scripture promised mankind 2,000 years ago: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:14).

In the future global Garden of Eden, the world will be filled with Good Samaritans. That God guarantees. **GN**

## Recommended Reading

What does God expect of us in our relationships with our fellowman? What does He expect in our relationship with Him? What will it take for humans to finally live in peace and care about others? The



biblical answers are spelled out in our booklets *The Ten Commandments* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*. Both are free for the asking.

Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).



# Whose Prayers Does God Hear?

While Americans mourned and prayed for God's comfort and strength, passionate religious extremists offered prayers of thanks for what they saw as a great victory. Whose prayers does God hear?

by Roger Foster

America's wake-up call—that's how many news commentators and government officials characterized the recent airborne terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in the United States. Almost with one voice they called on Americans to pray for the comfort and support of the nation and for all who had suffered loss.

The response to this call for prayer, including the special service on the day of prayer and remembrance emanating from the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., was heartfelt and massive. The international response also was encouraging.

Yet, equally passionate religious people—primarily from militant extremist groups and their supporters—celebrated and offered up prayers of thanksgiving. Some of them, caught on videotape, openly and gleefully celebrated the grievous wound that was inflicted on the United States. No doubt they also were confident that God had heard and answered their prayers.

Terrorism, a horrible and heartless form of evil, is routinely motivated by religion as well as politics. Many who die as suicidal terrorists sincerely see themselves as martyrs in a just and holy war against an infidel society.

## Whose cause is just?

Those who despise America would argue that their cause is just and their prayers for retribution are pleasing to God. Most Americans are equally convinced that they are right and that God is obviously on their side. This tragic dichotomy can be found

in almost all of the world's sordid conflicts.

Whose prayers will God answer? Could the real wake-up call be that all of humanity needs much clearer understanding of how God determines whose prayers He will hear and heed?

Christianity, Islam and Judaism—the world's three great monotheistic religions—each views itself as the primary religion of the one God worshiped by the ancient patriarch Abraham.

Significantly, it is in the Holy Scriptures, preserved by Abraham's descendants, that we find the world's first written revelation of the one God. These Scriptures tell us that He is "God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing" (Deuteronomy 10:17-18).

These Scriptures also tell us when and why that same Creator God will not respond to people's prayers: "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But *your iniquities* have separated you from your God; and *your sins* have hidden His face from you, *so that He will not hear*" (Isaiah 59:1-2, emphasis added throughout).

If ever a wake-up call is desperately needed, the entire world needs it today. The world abounds with religion—but religion that is woefully ineffective in persuading its adherents to live godly lives.

## Conditions for answered prayer

When we face a crisis, nothing is more

important than knowing the criteria God uses for responding to our prayers. The only way we can know is to carefully look at what the Holy Scriptures reveal about God's criteria for answering—or refusing to answer—the petitions we make to Him.

Let's be bold and ask the key question: Who has God's ear?

God Himself gives us a clear answer: "This is what the LORD says: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?' declares the LORD. '*This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word*'" (Isaiah 66:1-2, New International Version).

Those who think God is more inclined to respond to their prayers simply because they are uttered in a religious building—a church, temple, synagogue or mosque—usually do not have a clear perspective of His true priorities. God's first criterion is to examine each person's attitude.

It is those who humble themselves that will sincerely hear and heed His instructions. They have God's ear. Without that commitment, no building of any kind will make the prayers of those who refuse to live righteously acceptable to Him.

God warns those who continually ignore His commandments: "When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; *even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen* . . . Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage

the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

“Come now, let us reason together,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. *If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.*’ For the mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 1:15-20, NIV).

Everyone should take that warning seriously, especially those who profess to worship the one and only God. “For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12).

President George W. Bush, in his Sept. 20 address to Congress, expressed this same principle when he said, “Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them.” Proverbs 28:9 tells us, “One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.”

### God is never fickle

A primary characteristic of God is His consistency. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, *with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning*” (James 1:17). Because He is consistent, we can learn much from the way He has responded to prayers recorded in the Scriptures. These examples reveal much about what He expects before He will hear and answer us.

One thing is clear. God always hates evil, wherever it exists. He wants us to do the same—but according to *His*, not *our*; definition of what is evil.

The Scriptures plainly tell us: “Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy . . .” on those people willing to respond in this manner (Amos 5:14-15, NIV).

As the apostle Peter explained, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (Acts 10:34-35, NIV).

God wants to bless us—every one of us. But He demands more than lip service. He has established and revealed specific, real conditions that we must meet if we are to receive those blessings. To God, both a *right heart* and *sincere obedience* are

prerequisites for His sustained care over us.

### How can a nation turn to God?

So how should a nation examine itself if it wants to secure divine assistance in addressing a national crisis? How can it be certain that God will hear and answer the prayers of its people? Is a national day of prayer sufficient to hold God’s attention? Or does He expect much deeper and enduring commitment, dedication and contrition?

God explained to the prophet Ezekiel that any superficial worship—even in the presence of one of His prophets—does not impress Him. “So they come to you in crowds as if they were really ready to listen. They sit in front of you as if they were my people and hear your words, *but they will not obey them.*”

“With their mouths they tell me they love me, but their hearts desire their selfish profits. To your people you are nothing more than a singer who sings love songs and has a beautiful voice and plays a musical instrument well. They hear your words, *but they will not obey them*” (Ezekiel 33:31-32, New Century Version).

In times of national crisis it’s normal for people to think their appeals to God are more likely to be heard when they band together in prayer. Indeed, God does promise to answer prayers of genuinely humble people who are willing to examine themselves and forsake their disobedient ways. But prayers on a nationwide scale that are not accompanied by sincere obedience to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures are not acceptable to God. He makes this clear in His Word.

### Lessons from the past

God established a special relationship with ancient Israel. He promised to always bless and protect the Israelites if only they would live up to their agreement to obey His commands. He had Moses tell them: “If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 28:1-2, NIV).

God proposed to make ancient Israel an example that all other nations would want to follow (Deuteronomy 4:5-8). But from the beginning He gave the Israelites this warning: “. . . If you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these *curses* will come upon you and

overtake you . . .” (Deuteronomy 28:15, NIV). He then gave a long list of potential catastrophes.

Over a period of several centuries God worked with these people. The more they sinned, the more He would withdraw His protection and blessings. At times He permitted many of them to die in national calamities such as droughts, wars and famines—even from occasional invasions by foreign armies. But they never really grasped God’s warnings about how lacking in true righteousness their national habits were. Even so, for decade after decade God was merciful toward them.

As Psalm 78:34-41 explains: “Whenever God slew them [by withholding His protection from national calamities], they would seek him . . . But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues; their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant. Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return. How often they rebelled against him in the desert and grieved him in the wasteland! Again and again they put God to the test . . .” (NIV).

Over and over, throughout the course of their history, God warned the Israelites that they were headed toward national disaster. But they refused to heed His warnings. In the end they forfeited the ultimate greatness they could have achieved. Their enemies conquered them and took them into captivity. Yet even then they were not totally destroyed because God kept His promise that He would never completely forsake them as His people.

Later, after a few had returned to their homeland from captivity, God summarized His past relationship with them with an appeal for them to learn from their tragic experience: “For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. Yet from the days of your fathers you have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD of hosts. ‘But you said, “In what way shall we return?”’” (Malachi 3:6-7).

### Realistic self-examination

We should be asking ourselves the same thing. Americans in particular should ask themselves: How should we return to the living God who has so richly and abundantly blessed us as a people?

## Pray for and Respect *Governing Officials*

The apostle Paul wrote to the young evangelist Timothy, “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

Political leaders, especially during times of national and global crises, often make decisions that will affect the lives of God’s servants. Whether those serving God will be able to live “a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” often depends on the soundness and wisdom of those decisions.

Therefore it is good and appropriate that we pray for God to aid and influence, according to His will and wisdom, those making critical governmental decisions. This is especially true when such decisions would dramatically impact the lives of those who genuinely want to please God and do His will. Also, we should consider that praying for government leaders demonstrates love to *all* our fellowman, because everyone is affected by the decisions of their rulers.

Praying for “all who are in authority”—regardless of whether they

personally believe in and serve the living God—is an appropriate way we can show godly appreciation, respect and concern for their service to us. The Scriptures also admonish us to submit willingly to their leadership, insofar as it does not require us to disobey God (Acts 5:29). In the case of corrupt or despotic rulers, it certainly would not be wrong to pray to God that such a person change or be removed from office.

“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers [as a general class of public servants] are not a terror to good works, but to evil.

“Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake” (Romans 13:1-5).

In other words, should we examine ourselves for personal, social and national sins? Should we ask ourselves if the calamities that have befallen us in recent years—such as devastating hurricanes, floods, droughts and other natural disasters—could be indicators that God is withholding His blessing from us because our way of life is not pleasing to Him?

Could the recent murderous terrorist attacks serve as a shocking indicator that He wants our attention? Could He be letting us learn—the hard way—that we are not sufficiently looking to Him to guide us and solve our problems? Has our confidence in our own perceived greatness deluded us into relying on ourselves instead of God to provide our physical blessings and national security?

God’s relationship with ancient Israel can be instructive for us—providing we are willing to listen and learn from the Israelites’ experiences. Speaking of events in that nation, the apostle Paul explained that “all these things happened to them as examples, and they were *written for our admonition*, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

At the beginning of their national existence God told the people of ancient Israel: “You should know in your heart that *as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you*. Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him.

“For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey;

a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper.

“When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you” (Deuteronomy 8:5-10).

Today, the entire Western world has been similarly blessed, especially the United States of America. But far too many have also become smugly materialistic and spiritually *independent* of God. Their outlook toward life has been that of undisguised self-sufficiency.

This is exactly what happened to ancient Israel. The Israelites paid a terrible penalty for not acknowledging their attitudes in real national repentance—by forsaking their evil ways.

Yet, from the beginning, God had warned them: “Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God *by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes* which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God . . .

“Then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’ And you shall remember the LORD your God, *for it is He who gives you power to get wealth*, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

“Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the LORD your God, and follow other

gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroys before you, so you shall perish, *because you would not be obedient to the voice of the LORD your God*” (verses 11-14, 17-20).

### A wake-up call for today?

Are these types of warnings only for the people of ancient Israel? Or are they applicable to all nations for all time? God, through the prophet Jeremiah, tells us: “If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it” (Jeremiah 18:7-10, NIV).

(For a clear explanation of how God announced, centuries ago, the present role of America and Britain in world affairs, be sure to request your copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. It’s free from any of our offices listed on page 2 or from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).)

As we saw earlier, God is consistent. The long-term welfare of any nation depends on whether its people have an obedient relationship with Him.

Notice God pleading with His people Israel to repent so that He will hear them: “‘Now, therefore,’ says the LORD, ‘turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.’ So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and

## How to Seek *God's Will*

**T**he attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon was a horrible act of violence by religious extremists. Their acts are unconscionable. Nevertheless leaders from all nations are warning that more violent acts of terrorism may come. They caution us that, though now few in number, these furtive enemies of Western civilization are intelligent, cunning and capable. We should never underestimate the havoc they can inflict.

Many leaders are also imploring us to pray for God's help. Indeed we should. But let's be realistic enough to realize that God will hear us only if we are willing to hear Him.

It is time we took the blinders off our eyes. Our entire Western

culture is caught up in an evolutionist philosophy that believes God doesn't exist or the surreal notion that we can do whatever we please and God's attitude toward us is one of ignoring our sins—that He simply needs and desires our adulation and attention. But that is not how the Holy Scriptures describe His view of humanity. The message they thunder from Genesis to Revelation is a call for repentance and obedience to God's laws and His way of life.

In times of trouble God offers this encouragement: "If My people . . . will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm. Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him . . ." (Joel 2:12-14).

Speaking to other nations, God warns: "But if any nation will not listen, then I will completely uproot it and destroy it" (Jeremiah 12:17, New Revised Standard Version).

God's message to a nation's individual citizens is similar: ". . . If I say to the wicked man, 'You will surely die,' but he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right—if he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die. None of the sins he has committed will be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he will surely live.

"Yet your countrymen [may] say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' But it is their way that is not just. If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, he will die for it. And if a wicked man turns away from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he will live by doing so" (Ezekiel 33:14-19, NIV).

### Seeking God's will

The Bible calls this turning from wickedness *repentance*. It involves much more than acquiring a superficial knowledge of God's Word or paying lip service to Him.

How do we begin reexamining our own lives? Where should we start in comparing our ways and thinking to the teaching of God's Word, the Holy Bible?

First, we should find a private place where we can humble ourselves before God. The normal biblical example is to pray while kneeling respectfully before Him (unless we are physically incapable of doing so for reasons beyond our control).

We should avoid approaching God in the manner of the Pharisee who could not see

in himself any need for repentance yet contemptuously viewed others as sinners (Luke 18:9-14). We should pray that God will give us a heart that is willing to face our shortcomings, willing to see what we need to change (Psalm 139:23-24). It is also important that we avoid superficiality but take our time to talk to God from the heart.

Once we genuinely want to both know and *do* what God tells us to do, we need to quickly acquire a proper understanding of His teachings. Paul wrote: ". . . Before people can ask the Lord for help, they must believe in him; and before they can believe in him, they must hear about him; and for them to hear about the Lord, someone must tell them" (Romans 10:14, New Century Version).

To receive a clear explanation of repentance and the way of life God expects of those who serve Him, be sure to request your free copies of the booklets *The Road to Eternal Life, Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* and *The Ten Commandments*. Read them thoroughly and carefully.

Also be sure to request *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* for an enlightening perspective of the troubled times the whole world will have to endure before Christ returns—and the wonderful world we can look forward to after He returns.

### When God will hear humanity's prayers

Of that exciting time we read: "Thus says the LORD: 'Keep justice, and do righteousness, for My salvation is about to come, and My righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who lays hold on it; who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.'

"Do not let the son of the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD speak, saying, 'The LORD has utterly separated me from His people'; nor let the eunuch

say, 'Here I am, a dry tree.' For thus says the LORD: 'To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant, even to them I will give in My house and within My walls a place and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

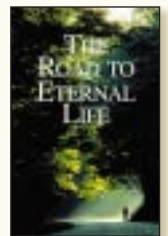
"Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants; everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant; even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer . . . for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:1-7).

God greatly desires to hear and answer humanity's prayers. After Christ returns—and after all mankind learns God's truth and most repent—that desire will become a reality.

In the meantime only those who are willing to hear His Word and turn away from their sins have His ear. If you want God to hear you and consistently answer your prayers, make sure you are hearing and responding to His teachings in the Holy Scriptures. **GN**

### Recommended Reading

To learn more about the kind of relationship God desires to have with each of us, please request your free copies of *The Road to Eternal Life, Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* and *The Ten Commandments*.



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).

# What Is Repentance?

*Many public figures have invoked God's name in the wake of the terrorist attacks on the United States. Some have even suggested that the national mood could lead to the beginning of a national "repentance." Most people, however, have only a vague idea of what the word means. What exactly is repentance?*

by Cecil Maranville

**J**esus, Christ, Christian and saved are words familiar to many in the Western world. But *repent* is seldom mentioned by religious figures, and few people comprehend what it means.

You may be surprised to learn how much the word and concept of repentance are a part of the teachings of Jesus Christ, the early Church and the entire Bible.

For example: "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel'" (Mark 1:14-15, emphasis added throughout). So begins Mark's account of the message Jesus brought.

While many religious teachers quote the apostle Paul, they don't usually point out that repentance was a central part of his message. "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked," said Paul to the Athenians, "but now [He] commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world . . ." (Acts 17:30-31).

All followers of Christ should clearly understand repentance. Likewise, every genuine servant of Christ should teach what He and His early disciples taught. "[Christ] . . . called the twelve [disciples] to Himself, and began to send them out . . . So they went out and preached that people should repent" (Mark 6:7-12).

## Theme of God's messengers

What did Jesus, Paul and the original apostles say to people? What did they expect their hearers to do? Most important, what does their message have to do with you and me?

"That people should repent" is a consistent theme of God's messengers and ministers. We find the message of repentance throughout the Bible, Old and New Testament alike.

In the Old Testament God's command to repent was most often directed at nations or other groups, whereas the New Testament's emphasis is most often on the *individual's*

need to turn from his wicked ways.

If you have thought that "repent" pertains only to criminals, pornographers, drug dealers and the like, you've been misinformed.

A good place to begin to understand the meaning of repentance is with these plain words of God through the prophet Isaiah: "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil" (Isaiah 1:16).

*Evil* is a strong word. The phrase "cease to do evil" is foundational to understanding repentance. Simply put, we are to *stop doing wrong things*.

## Wash off the dirt

Starting with God's words through Isaiah, what do we learn that we need to wash off? What is the evil that God wants us to stop doing?

If you answer that "dirty" and "evil" refer to breaking God's laws, you are on the right track. Repentance requires that we stop doing bad things—the things that, whether we realize it or not, hurt others and ourselves. God's laws *define* the kinds of thoughts and behaviors that cause people to suffer.

Notice Jeremiah 26:1-6, 13. In this message from the prophet Jeremiah to Judah, God defines "evil" as breaking His law and "repentance" as turning to obedience to God's commands. When God told the Jews to "turn from [their] evil way" (verse 3), the Hebrew word for "way" means a journey, a course of life, a way of life. An up-to-date synonym is "lifestyle."

If they didn't repent, God said, He would make them "like Shiloh." This warning reminded the people of the Philistines' annihilation of that city several hundred years before. This was a warning of the consequences for flagrant and sinful courses of action if they didn't change their ways. God takes sin seriously. (To better understand the purpose of God's laws, and where sin leads, please request the free booklets *The Ten Commandments* and *Why Does God Allow Suffering?*)

So we begin to construct our biblical definition of repentance: *Repentance involves turning from a life of evil and disobedience.*

## But what is "good"?

We've seen from the Bible what we need to turn *from*. But our definition is not complete. Now we need to consider what we must turn *to*. Not only do we need to *stop* doing bad things, we must *do* good things instead.

We read earlier in Isaiah 1:16 that God commands us to "cease to do evil." The very next words of God that follow are "*Learn to do good . . .*" (verse 17).

God expects us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ—in the awareness of what He says is acceptable (2 Peter 3:17-18). This must be a continual task of every truly devoted Christian, an enduring commitment. Sadly, many religious teachers speak only of an initial commitment to God rather than a new way of life.

Most people normally want to be thought of as good, but few are stirred to investigate what God calls good. In Romans 12:1-2 Paul urges us to "prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

To "prove" in this context means putting something to the test, to examine, to try, to discern. That speaks of learning through *doing*, accompanied by reason and reflection. In other words, the proof of what is the acceptable—the perfect—will of God is in the doing.

Our lives constantly change. Change comes to us simply through the process of maturing and aging. Circumstances around us change—job, finances, health and family. As they do, pressures and stresses upon us change.

In addition to such physical matters, if God is working with us He brings various spiritual concepts to our awareness at various times. These factors all demand that we continue to ask and discern what is good. The Bible is the source of the answer. Then we must continue *proving*

what is good by putting it into practice, by a changed way of living that is now in accordance with His instruction.

### A different way of thinking

Repentance goes beyond living by what we personally consider to be good. Repentance is a way of godly thinking that guides our actions. Notice Jesus' words in Matthew 9:13: "I desire mercy [a way of thinking and resultant action] and not sacrifice [religion based only on ritual]."

Christ amplified this thought in Matthew 18:3: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (New Revised Standard Version). The Greek word translated "change" means "to turn quite around or reverse, to convert" (*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*).

This is a much greater commitment than short-lived promises made on the spur of the moment. It's also deeper than the pledges people make in moments of crisis, sincere though they might be at the time.

While we're looking at the meaning of words, let's consider how the New Testament uses *repentance* and *repent*. To paraphrase the *Strong's* definition, *repentance* includes a sense of compunction for guilt, a reversal of one's decision, a resolve to think differently, to reconsider. We find in these meanings a combination of *conviction* and *action*.

Now we've added significantly to our construction of a definition: *Repentance is turning from a life of evil and disobedience to an obedient way of thinking and living.*

### Feelings can mislead

Our definition is still incomplete. Let's explore the idea of "compunction" a little further. It is defined in *The American Unabridged Dictionary* as "uneasiness caused by guilt, a prick of the conscience; remorse."

We find a biblical example of compunction in Acts 2:37-38: "Now when they heard this, *they were pricked in their heart*, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy [Spirit]" (King James Version).

This passage demonstrates that repentance *begins* with the "prick of the conscience" but goes beyond that to thought and action.

Although a sense of guilt can trigger the

beginning of repentance, we need to realize that emotions aren't always an accurate guide in this crucial spiritual matter. We can see how inaccurate one's senses or feelings can be by looking at Christ's parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14. Jesus showed that it is possible for a person to *feel* spiritually acceptable when he clearly is not. The obvious message is this: Don't rely solely on your feelings when it comes to spiritual matters.

John adds that there is a time to respond to our feelings and a time to ignore them (1 John 3:18-21). We have to properly educate our consciences, the basis for any sense of guilt or remorse, through study and proper understanding of God's Word.

In this same chapter, 1 John 3, we read of yet another defining aspect of repentance. We are to learn to love other people, believe in Christ and all He taught and choose ways that please God. These actions will result in a personal relationship with God and godly relationships with other people (verses 22-24.)

God amplifies His expectations in Jeremiah 7:1-14, 21-23. First we must change our thoughts, then our actions. Part of the change is to learn to conduct our relationships with other people in a godly manner. "For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you . . ." (verses 5-7, NRSV).

Notice John's words on this point: "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also" (1 John 4:20-21). We must build godly relationships with other people if we are to build the right relationship with God.

Some mistakenly view Bible prophecy as a club and prophets as the men who wielded it. On the contrary, prophecy is an appeal from God to His people, asking them to change so He can fully demonstrate His love for them. Our relationship with God includes responding to His direction and correction. God describes this as an intimate relationship in which "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jeremiah 31:33; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Hebrews 8:10).

Let's assemble what we have found into our definition: *Repentance is turning from*

*a life of evil and disobedience to an obedient way of thinking and living that results in a personal relationship with God and a godly relationship with people.*

### A comprehensive definition

Do we now have a comprehensive definition? Not quite. We need to add one more important aspect. We have seen this element in several references so far, although we haven't specifically pointed it out.

When is a person finished with repentance? *Never!* If you aren't familiar with the section of Scripture quoted at the beginning of this article, Isaiah 1:16-20, take time to read it. These verses summarize the meaning of repentance. They speak of a *lifelong* way of thinking and acting. Repentance is not limited to a point in time or an emotional experience when a person makes a commitment to God—commonly said to be "giving your heart to the Lord." It is much, much more.

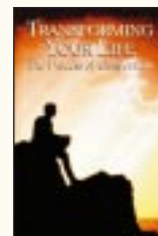
So we add this final thought to complete our definition: *Repentance is a continual turning from a life of evil and disobedience to an obedient way of thinking and living that results in a personal relationship with God and a godly relationship with people.*

If this concept of repentance is new to you, you probably have not repented—as shocking as that might seem. We don't say this in judgment but to give you the same message Jesus taught. You can see how integral repentance is to the Christian way of life and God's expectations for us.

Failing to understand and respond to God's call to repent could prevent us from enjoying all of the blessings He would like to give us. The foremost blessing is salvation itself. So the subject of repentance couldn't be more important to you. **GN**

### Recommended Reading

The Bible shows repentance to be the first step in forming a right relationship with God. What more does God ask? What do you need to do? To learn more, be sure to request your free copies of *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* and *The Road to Eternal Life*. Both booklets are free.



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).

# Pathogens, Poisons and Other Weapons of Terror

*Just as the United States was recovering from the Sept. 11 attack, a wave of envelopes containing anthrax spread through its mail system—conjuring fears of even direr prospects for the future.*

by Tom Robinson

**A**t first it seemed that the anthrax scare would be limited to one building in south Florida—the headquarters of American Media Inc., publisher of U.S. tabloids such as *The Sun*, *The Globe* and *The National Enquirer*. But on Oct. 18 everything changed when an assistant to NBC News anchorman Tom Brokaw had contracted a form of anthrax, possibly from a substance carried in mail she had handled several weeks earlier.

Laden's Qaeda network have tried . . . to obtain anthrax and botulinum toxin in Czechoslovakia, an FBI official tells *Newsweek*. Dozens of rabbits and dogs have been found fatally poisoned near bin Laden's Jalalabad training camps, according to a foreign intelligence

**“Osama bin Laden has publicly pronounced that acquiring weapons of mass destruction, chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear . . . , is a religious duty.”**

Similar incidents happened at the two other major television networks, ABC and CBS.

Thousands of hoaxes and false alarms followed. But more actual incidents cropped up too, several from people having been exposed to the pathogen in the offices of the U.S. Senate. Traces of anthrax were found in a facility that handled mail for the White House.

Eyes immediately turned to the terrorists. A few weeks earlier Americans had learned that individuals involved in the Sept. 11 attack had made inquiries into the use of crop-duster airplanes, possibly for disseminating biological or chemical agents. Though the Federal Aviation Administration temporarily grounded crop dusters, officials assured the public that adapting their sprayers to disperse bioweapons is nearly impossible and that spreading chemicals with them would have little or no impact because of their low quantity if delivered in that manner.

Nevertheless government officials say biological and chemical warfare is on the terrorists' agenda. *Newsweek* reports: “What we know for sure is that terrorists are experimenting with chemical and biological weapons. Operatives of [Osama] bin

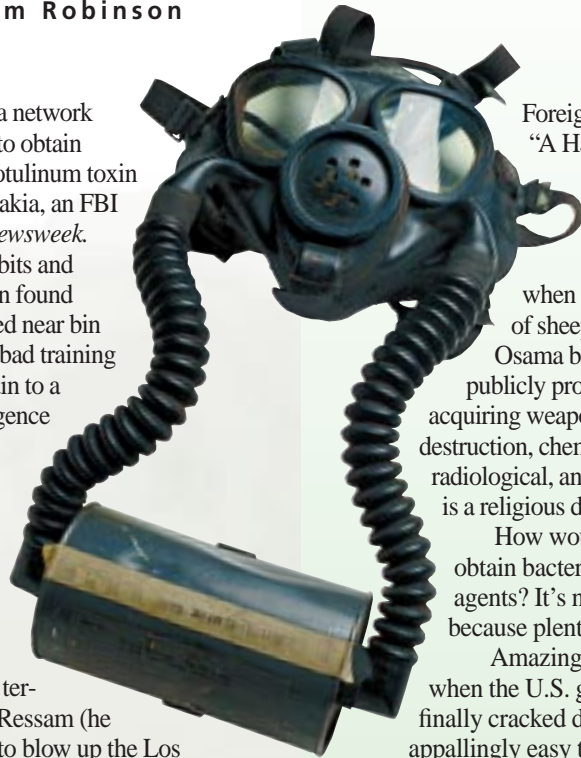
agency . . .

“Convicted terrorist Ahmed Ressay (he was planning to blow up the Los Angeles airport as 1999 turned into 2000) testified that he had spent six months in 1998 at one of bin Laden's Afghan training camps. There, he said, he learned to release cyanide into the ventilation systems of office buildings. Bin Laden, Ressay told intelligence officials, was also interested in the use of ‘low flying aircraft for the distribution of toxic materials’” (Oct. 8, p. 24).

As this issue of *The Good News* goes to press, no one knows who is behind the anthrax mailings or what will happen next. Whatever the case, fanatical Islamic terrorists have no reservations about using biological and chemical weapons along with other weapons of mass destruction.

## The threat of biowarfare

Six days before the Sept. 11 attack, Frank Cillufo, chairman of the Committee on Combating Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Terrorism at the Homeland Defense Initiative Center for Strategic and International Studies, said before the U.S. Senate Committee on



Foreign Relations: “A Hamas training manual expounds that it is foolish to hunt a tiger when there are plenty of sheep to be had. And Osama bin Laden has publicly pronounced that acquiring weapons of mass destruction, chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear . . . , is a religious duty.”

How would terrorists obtain bacterial or viral agents? It's not that difficult because plenty are available.

Amazingly, before 1996, when the U.S. government finally cracked down, “it was appallingly easy to buy an anthrax starter kit. All you had to do was find one of the 500 culture collections kept by universities, governments or private companies around the world and pay them about \$50. That's how Saddam Hussein did it, according to bioweapons experts” (*Time*, Oct. 22, p. 35).

In 1984 the United States experienced its first biological-weapon attack when fanatic followers of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh contaminated drinking glasses and salad bars in an Oregon town with salmonella legally purchased from a Maryland company, American Type Culture Collection (ATCC, now in Virginia). No one died, but 751 people became severely ill with salmonella poisoning. In 1986 the same company sold three types of anthrax and five strains of botulinum to the University of Baghdad. Two years later the firm sold anthrax and other pathogens to the Iraqi ministry of trade.

The next known attempt at biological mass attack came in April 1990, when Japan's Aum Shinrikyo sect drove a truck outfitted with a compressor and vents for

disseminating botulinum toxin around Japan's parliament building. The group's members tried the same tactic in June 1993 to disrupt the wedding of Japan's crown prince. Thankfully, in both cases they hadn't acquired a virulent strain and didn't have nearly enough of the toxin to do damage. Cult members also tried, for four straight days that June, to spread anthrax from a rooftop in Tokyo. Again, they failed, this time because they didn't turn the germ they had acquired into a breathable powder or fine enough mist.

Aum Shinrikyo probably obtained its pathogens from a national government, although such agents could have been derived from naturally contaminated soil.

In spite of these events, not until 1996 did American laws change. The previous year Larry Wayne Harris, a member of the white-supremacist group Aryan Nations, purchased three vials of freeze-dried bubonic-plague bacteria from ATCC for \$240 and stored them in his car's glove compartment. Though the germs turned out to be an innocuous vaccine strain, the incident gained the attention of Congress. Congressmen then passed legislation to restrict access to 24 deadly pathogens including anthrax, Ebola, smallpox and yellow fever.

However, as *Newsweek* has reported, many U.S. academic institutions work with pathogenic microorganisms and toxins that could be used in biological weapons development. "You can't just walk into a lab and swipe a vial of anthrax, but researchers admit that nothing would stop a determined individual from hiring on at a lab, as a student or technician, and obtaining a starter culture. 'We all use student workers who are 18 or 19,' says LSU's [Martin] Hugh-Jones. 'Most of them don't even have any background you can check'" (Oct. 22, p. 34).

"Since Sept. 11," reports *Time*, "acquiring anthrax samples has become even harder . . . [Yet] it's still possible to order anthrax from a few unscrupulous labs overseas—last week [in mid-October] nearly 50 sources listed by the World Federation for Culture Collections were still advertising the bacterium" (p. 35).

Iraq admitted in 1995 that it had produced 8,500 liters of concentrated anthrax and 19,000 liters of undiluted botulinum toxin. The UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) destroyed most of those supplies, "but officials believe that Iraq hid four times as much anthrax and twice as much botulinum as was discovered" (p. 38). This is of great concern in light of intelligence reports indicating "that an

Iraqi agent has met with an associate of Osama bin Laden. Also, Mohamed Atta, the Sept. 11 hijacker, reportedly had a June 2000 encounter with an Iraqi operative in Prague" (p. 38).

Of course, as *Newsweek* explains, "there are other sources of pathogens besides terrorist-friendly states. Anthrax is a relatively common veterinary disease. 'It's in Afghanistan,' notes molecular biologist Paul Keim of Northern Arizona State University. 'If a cow dies of anthrax it will bleed out its nose. All you have to do is scrape up a little blood'—or even get spores from the soil or a carcass—'put it in a petri dish, and you have anthrax' . . . Bubonic plague is also abundant in nature. 'There are little pockets of it in rodents throughout the world,' says Stephen Morse of Columbia University. Staphylococcus B enterotoxin comes from foodborne bacteria.

"A terrorist would not need to start with rotten chicken, however. The world's supplies of pathogens are ample, their security questionable. In Kazakhstan, site of the old Soviet Union's bioweapons plants, one research center keeps at least 80 strains of anthrax, as well as plague and cholera, at

**"No matter how robust our defenses, we will never be able to protect everything, everywhere, all the time from every potential adversary." That is why America needs so desperately to turn to God in repentance and seek His forgiveness and protection.**

its main facility and eight satellite labs" (Oct. 8, p. 25). Though security has recently been strengthened at the main facility, people previously got in—and the satellite labs still have security problems.

"Smallpox is harder to acquire. After the World Health Organization declared the disease eradicated in 1980, only two repositories of the virus supposedly remained—one in the United States and one in Russia in case the need to manufacture a vaccine arose again. "Both are well secured. But a classified 1998 report by the CIA concluded that clandestine stocks remain, probably in North Korea and Iraq (as well as secret sites in Russia). And China, Cuba, India, Iran, Israel, Pakistan and the former Yugoslavia might have retained smallpox samples from the days when the disease was rampant" (p. 25).

Yet it is important to recognize that it is not enough to just have the microbes on hand. As Aum Shinrikyo's failure illustrates, germs must often be "weaponized" into a dispersible form. With \$300 million, a half-dozen labs, experienced biologists

and a 500,000-acre sheep farm to test their methods, Aum Shinrikyo produced an effective biological killer.

"Weaponizing germs, says Sergei Popov, a Soviet biowarfare scientist who defected in 1992, 'is not a basement production.' It requires expertise. But there is, unfortunately, more of that on the loose than anyone dreamed" (p. 26). The former deputy director of the Russian bioweapons



program said that "more than 60,000 people were involved in the biological weapons program in the Soviet Union" (*Wired News*, Sept. 28). Of major concern is the fact that many of the specialists are unemployed now and some have disappeared—prompting examiners to worry that some are now working in Iraq or Iran.

"Terrorists who are quite obviously willing to sacrifice their own lives, however," reports *Wired News* regarding smallpox, "wouldn't need the former Soviet Union's technological capabilities. They would need only to contract the virus, and walk around coughing and sneezing on people"—as smallpox, unlike anthrax, is contagious.

### **Chemical, agricultural and nuclear terror**

In addition, there is always the threat of chemical warfare. After Aum Shinrikyo's failures with bioweapons in Japan, its members chose an alternative route. In 1995 they filled plastic bags with the nerve gas sarin, slipped into a Tokyo subway station and punctured the bags with umbrellas—and 12 people died.

“Chemical agents are easier in every way but are generally less lethal . . . Although you need more of a chemical than of a biological agent to kill people (probably thousands of pounds dropped over a city), delivery is an even lower-tech task than turning 767s into missiles. A truck, perhaps smashed into a concrete barrier, would do fine. Or, ‘just put an odorless poison into a building’s ventilation system,’ says chemist Igor Revelsky, who helped develop the Soviets’ chemical weapons. ‘You could take out half the Pentagon and you wouldn’t need to learn how to fly or train kamikazes’” (*Newsweek*, Oct. 8, p. 26).

America faces another potential disaster not widely considered—agrorterrorism. Reports MSNBC: “Fertilizers can be used to produce powerful bombs [as happened in the Oklahoma City bombing], pesticides can become chemical weapons and just a tiny amount of deadly bacteria can taint the food supply for thousands of people . . . Contagious diseases have the potential to spread rapidly in places where hundreds, even thousands of animals are confined in close quarters . . . And because farming takes place in rural areas, the nation’s corn,



**The Ebola virus is one of the most deadly pathogens governments fear could be used as a biological weapon by terrorists.**

wheat and peanut crops often have nothing more than scarecrows watching over them.

“That’s been the case on Frank Lipinski’s 360-acre farm near Buckley, Mich., for as long as he can remember. But lately, much of his time has been spent thinking about security, concocting elaborate doomsday scenarios: fertilizers and equipment turned into weapons, crops blighted, milk tanks sabotaged, livestock infected. ‘If you think like a terrorist, I guess there’s no end to the things you could do,’ Lipinski said. ‘It’s kind of mind boggling’” ([www.msnbc.com](http://www.msnbc.com), Oct. 15).

At the top of these concerns is the fear that terrorists could obtain nuclear materials. “The biggest potential source of such material is Russia and other parts of the old Soviet Union . . . Take the Russian ‘suitcase’ bombs.

Republican Congressman Curt Weldon of Pennsylvania recalls that in hearings held in 1997, retired Russian Gen. Alexander Lebed testified that Russian authorities couldn’t account for dozens of portable nuclear bombs once in the Soviet arsenal and designed for use behind enemy lines . . . Mr. Weldon said other top Russian military officials, including former Defense Minister Igor Sergeev, told him directly that such devices existed” (*Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 17).

If we thought the World Trade Center attack was devastating, imagine what would happen if someone set off a small nuclear weapon in New York, Chicago or Los Angeles. If terrorists get one, does anyone doubt they would try to use it?

Further, if they don’t buy or steal a bomb, terror groups could make one. “Making a nuclear weapon is relatively easy if you have the basic design, a good machine shop and enough weapons-grade uranium” (*Newsweek*, Oct. 8, p. 28). According to *The Wall Street Journal*: “Some bomb-grade material does seem to have made its way out of Russia. In 1994, Czech officials seized nearly six pounds of enriched uranium from a car in Prague. Investigators in that case believed that the material came from one of two Russian facilities.”

Perhaps of more immediate concern is that, even barring terrorist possession of actual nuclear weapons, “the United States faces risk from two crude but effective terror stratagems. One is a ‘dirty bomb,’ or radioactivity dispersal device (RDD). An RDD consists of conventional explosives wrapped in a shroud of radioactive material that creates fallout when the bomb explodes.

“Intelligence officials think Al Qaeda has already obtained black-market cesium-137 and cobalt-60 and may be experimenting with RDDs in Afghanistan. The other gambit would be a suicide attack on a nuclear power plant, most likely using an airplane, . . . [which] could create a Chernobyl-like radioactive disaster with widespread fallout and many casualties” (*Newsweek*, p. 28).

Other threats include e-bombs, or electromagnetic-pulse (EMP) devices. Put together for a mere \$400, says an article in *Popular Mechanics*, such a bomb could “shut down a U.S. city, destroy all its electronics, its electricity supply, automobiles, computers, phone lines and just about all the modern technological devices and systems we now take for granted” ([NewsMax.com](http://NewsMax.com), Sept. 21).

Although it would directly kill no one,

a device of this sort would wreak havoc in major population centers and leave citizens much more vulnerable to greater atrocities.

### Our only real refuge

Scenarios for the future do not bode well. More important, Bible prophecy warns us that calamitous times lie ahead. Jesus Christ foretold an increase of “pestilences”—massive disease epidemics—before His return to earth (Matthew 24:7). Revelation 9:1-12 apparently describes the use of weapons that cause pain and suffering without killing. The rest of the chapter mentions an incredible army of 200 million that kills a third of mankind. Clearly, weapons of mass destruction will be used.

Jesus told us to watch world events—“and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36).

Our only real refuge lies in the Creator God (see Psalm 91). Scripture warns: “Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain” (Psalm 127:1).

In his testimony before the U.S. Senate committee, Frank Cilluffo warned, “No matter how robust our defenses, we will never be able to protect everything, everywhere, all the time from every potential adversary.” That is why America needs to turn to God in repentance and seek His forgiveness and protection.

As conditions around us worsen, it is imperative that we repent of our personal sins and draw close to Him in faith. He will never fail us—if we live for Him and put our trust in Him. **GN**

### Recommended Reading

Are we living in the biblical last days? Is this the end time?

To learn more about the Bible’s prophecies of the age just before Jesus Christ’s return, be sure to request your free copy of *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* To better understand the overall themes of Bible prophecy, request *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*, also free.



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).

# America's Astounding Destiny

## A Nation Losing Its Way

*In parts 1 and 2 of this series we saw the birth and expansion of the United States fulfilling Bible prophecy. We end with a look at America's replacement of Britain as global protector and how a nation's turning its back on God threatens its existence.*

by Melvin Rhodes

**A**t the end of World War II the two English-speaking victorious allies seemed destined to dominate the world for centuries. Germany and Japan were in ruins, Hitler's 1,000-year *reich* ended after little more than a decade. The ancient countries of Central Europe lay devastated by years of war and carnage. The Soviet Union had suffered so much from two world wars, revolution, civil war and the purges of the 1930s that it seemed it would forever remain a nonthreatening backward power.

It may have looked that way in 1945, but it was not to stay like that for long.

Soon the British started dismantling their empire, exhausted after years of war and almost two centuries of playing the role of international policeman. Germany, though in ruins, began rebuilding almost immediately. With help from the United States and Britain, the Federal Republic of Germany organized in 1949. Monetary reform the previous year laid a solid foundation for prosperity to come. The Soviets responded by forming the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), a communist state whose very existence divided Germany in two and contributed to the Cold War, which was to separate the halves of Europe for more than 40 years.

### Standing against tyranny

With Britain in seemingly terminal decline, the role of international policeman fell to the United States. If America had repeated its post-World War I isolationist withdrawal from international affairs, no one could have doubted that the whole of Europe would have fallen to communism. Instead the Cold War began while the Soviet Union strengthened its military hold on Eastern Europe, ringing down an "iron

curtain" across the middle of the Continent. The United States would now serve as leader and defender of the free world.

Before World War II, Moscow had expected communist revolution to break out everywhere—and was surprised when it didn't. Instead, many nations had turned to fascism in the two decades that followed World War I, with the Second World War the inevitable result. But what the communists had failed to gain at the ballot box or through internal revolution they could now conquer in the aftermath of war.

As Moscow's forces swept across the nations of Eastern Europe to defeat Germany, they essentially *annexed* them. The Baltic countries became a part of the Soviet Union. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria kept nominal independence, but in reality had to toe the Soviet line. Communists also led Yugoslavia and Albania, but those nations remained free of Moscow's direct control.

Within a short time the Western democracies had exchanged one enemy, fascism, for another, communism. Only American power could help save the world from further tyranny. Only the United States had emerged from World War II powerful and prosperous enough to take up the role of world policeman.

But the United States could not enjoy anything like the century of world supremacy that the British had maintained from the defeat of Napoleon to World War I, a century that saw no major challenges to British power. Instead, America found itself facing another nuclear power. In 1949 the Soviets developed their own atomic bomb and, four years later, the hydrogen bomb. A new arms race had begun, with far more deadly potential than any previous arms rivalry in history.

Before the end of 1949 the world's most populous nation, China, also fell to communist control. The north of Korea and the north of Vietnam were soon added to the list of communist powers. The "domino theory" became the prevailing wisdom—that one nation after another would fall to communism unless something were done to stop it.

America's response was to create alliances around the world, such as NATO, that would enable the United States and smaller nations to work together to stop the spread of communism.

Realizing that alliances on paper would achieve nothing without prosperity, America's Marshall Plan helped resuscitate Europe's moribund economies after World War II. No nation had ever been so generous, with much of the generosity benefiting its defeated enemies, Germany, Austria and Italy. Japan also received aid and investment, enabling it to eventually become one of the world's great industrial powers.

### A bulwark of freedom

Lutheran clergyman Heinrich Richard Wurmbrand eloquently described the crucial role America would play in the decades of the Cold War and beyond. Persecuted for his religious beliefs in his own country of Romania, he left prison in 1964 after serving a 14-year sentence. In 1967 he said:

"Every freedom-loving man has two fatherlands; his own and America. Today, America is the hope of every enslaved man, because it is the last bastion of freedom in the world. Only America has the power and spiritual resources to stand as a barrier between militant Communism and the people of the world. It is the last 'dike' holding back the rampaging floodwaters of militant Communism. If it crumples, there is no other dike, no other dam; no other

## America's *Forgotten Inheritance*

Previous articles in this series have shown that America's founders saw the United States as necessarily a Christian country. Separation of church and state meant that Christianity was to be protected from the state and no church was to enjoy a privileged position in the federal government. Thus all Christian religions were to be free to worship as they saw fit without hindrance from governmental authority.

The last four decades have seen a marked departure from this concept. Present-day interpretation of separation of church and state is wildly different from the founders' original intent. Today non-Christian religions also flourish, and secularism has replaced God in the classroom. America's prevailing culture sees God as remote or not even existing. Americans increasingly see their wealth and success as something they have created for themselves without divine involvement.

So it was somewhat surprising, after two decades of internal divisions that had left the United States severely weakened both internally and internationally, to see the following congressional resolution passed in 1982: "Whereas the Bible, the Word of God, has made a unique contribution in shaping the United States as a distinctive and blessed nation and people; Whereas deeply held religious convictions springing from the Holy Scriptures led to the early settlement of our Nation; Whereas Biblical teachings inspired concepts of civil government that are contained in our Declaration of Independence and Constitution of the United States;

"Whereas many of our great national leaders—among them Presidents Washington, Jackson, Lincoln, and Wilson—paid tribute to the surpassing influence of the Bible in our country's development, as in the words of President Jackson that the Bible is 'the Rock on which our Republic rests'; Whereas the history of our Nation clearly illustrates the value of voluntarily applying the teachings of the Scriptures in the lives of individuals, families and societies; Whereas this Nation now faces great challenges that will test this Nation as it has never been tested before; and Whereas that renewing our knowledge of and faith in God through Holy Scripture can strengthen us as a nation and a people:

"Now, therefore, be it Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the President is authorized and requested to designate 1983 as a national 'Year of the Bible' in recognition of both the formative influence the Bible has been for our Nation, and our national need to study and apply the teachings of the Holy Scriptures" (quoted by Federer, pp. 709-710).

Less than 20 years later America has changed so much it is doubtful that such a resolution could be passed today.

The Bible is the most important book in American history. Its importance has not diminished with time. We may not realize the for some decades the consequences of neglecting it, but its relevance for us is just as great as it was for the people of ancient Israel.

line of defense to fall back upon.

"America is the last hope of millions of enslaved peoples. They look to it as their second fatherland. In it lies their hopes and prayers. I have seen fellow-prisoners in Communist prisons beaten, tortured, with 50 pounds of chains on their legs—praying for America . . . that the dike will not crumple; that it will remain free" (quoted by William Federer, *America's God and Country*, 1994, pp. 705-706).

American resolve was to be sorely tested.

### The tide turns

The 1950s saw many English-speaking nations, led by the United States, embroiled in the Korean War. But something went wrong. Here, only a few years after its triumph in history's greatest war, the United States failed to gain a clear-cut victory. North Korea's goal of an undivided communist nation was thwarted, but North Korea was not defeated. It remains a hard-line Stalinist nation, a relic of a monolithic communist past—and still a major threat to world peace almost 50 years after the cease-fire that ended hostilities on the Korean peninsula.

Other conflicts broke out, seemingly everywhere. Political contenders campaigned in the American election of 1956 against the backdrop of war in the Middle East and a crushed uprising in communist Hungary. Cold War tensions reached their height, and the growing Arab-Israeli conflict provided another avenue for Soviet expansion. Moscow was to be the main

supporter of the Arab powers in the years to come while the United States backed Israel.

In 1962 the two major nuclear powers came their closest to direct conflict, a war that might have destroyed civilization. After the fall of Cuba to communist forces in 1959, Moscow started positioning nuclear weapons on that island, aimed at the American mainland. President John F. Kennedy demanded the Soviets withdraw their nuclear missiles from Cuba or face drastic consequences. Although Moscow backed down after a few days of rising tension, Cuba remains a communist country.

### Faltering resolve

More war was to follow. The next major conflict was to see the United States in alliance with Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand and South Vietnam to preserve the freedom and independence of the latter. Yet, at the height of the Vietnam War, it seemed as if America itself were falling apart. Antiwar sentiment divided the nation while race riots and assassinations threatened the cohesion of the republic.

America lost the war after its withdrawal as South Vietnam fell to communist forces in 1975. In rapid succession Mozambique, Angola, Ethiopia and Afghanistan all likewise fell.

The Cold War was not so cold anymore. Although the two major nuclear powers managed to avoid direct confrontation, their proxy states around the world often fought each other, with dire consequences for their

citizens. America was clearly losing its battles for the hearts and minds of people.

The 1970s saw little improvement. A major war in the Middle East led to worldwide inflation as the price of oil quadrupled. Scandal in Washington brought down a president. Before the decade was out, Islamic-fundamentalist Iranians held Americans hostage in the U.S. embassy in Tehran for 444 days.

President Jimmy Carter called America's difficult time a malaise. French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing remarked of Americans, "You have begun to question your identity . . . You have ceased to believe in your destiny" (*Time*, May 24, 1976).

The 1980s, however, were to see marked improvement in the U.S. situation as a popular conservative president made Americans feel proud again and raised American prestige around the world. By the end of the decade communism was in retreat as nation after nation behind the iron curtain overthrew its communist rulers and embarked on democratic and free-market reforms.

The fall of communism, however, did not mean the end of conflict. In fact, the demise of the Soviet Union led to a proliferation of conflicts around the world. Iraq seized Kuwait, triggering the 1991 Persian Gulf War. The United States again led the way in repelling aggression but ended up with another long-lasting and costly stalemate.

### Where to go from here?

The beginning of the 20th century saw

America emerge as a world power after victory in the Spanish-American War of 1898. The 20th century was to become known as America's century. But what is America's destiny in the 21st?

Previous articles in this series, published in the last two issues of *The Good News*, have shown that the Bible predicted America's destiny thousands of years ago. The United States was to become the world's greatest single nation in history; Great Britain and her overseas possessions were to become a multitude of nations.

God would give incredible wealth and

prosperity to the two peoples, the descendants of the biblical patriarch Joseph. Through them great prosperity would come upon the rest of the world as Joseph's descendants were prophesied to be, in the "last days," a "fruitful bough" (Genesis 49:1, 22-26), exporting capital and expertise around the globe.

These two nations were also destined to struggle against the hostility and attacks of others (verses 23-24) to preserve peace and freedom around the world. How remarkably America and Britain have fulfilled these prophecies!

---

## More Disasters on the Horizon?

**T**he shocking events of recent times should serve as a powerful wake-up call to the United States and other nations that sprang from Britain. God repeatedly warns that He will bring punishment on the modern descendants of Israel until they turn from their disobedience and repent.

Notice the following message God gave through the prophet Ezekiel: "Son of man, this is what the Sovereign LORD says to Israel: The end is here! Wherever you look—east, west, north, or south, your land is finished. No hope remains, for I will unleash my anger against you. I will call you to account for all your disgusting behavior. I will turn my eyes away and show no pity, repaying you in full for all your evil . . . With one blow after another I will bring total disaster!

"The end has come! It has finally arrived! Your final doom is waiting! O people of Israel, the day of your destruction is dawning . . . Soon I will pour out my fury to complete your punishment for all your disgusting behavior. I will neither spare nor pity you. I will repay you for all your detestable practices . . . None of these proud and wicked people will survive. All their wealth will be swept away. Yes, the time has come; the day is here!" (Ezekiel 7:2-12, New Living Translation).

Ezekiel's prophecies are remarkable in that he prophesied *long after* the ancient kingdom of Israel had been crushed and its people taken away at the hands of the Assyrian Empire. His message could not have been for exclusively for ancient Israel—because that kingdom *no longer existed!*

No doubt Ezekiel directed some of his message toward the kingdom of Judah, at that time threatened by the Babylonian Empire. But parts of his message were unmistakably directed to the "*whole house of Israel*"—*all 12 tribes* (Ezekiel 39:25)—and are applicable to the time of the end.

The book of Ezekiel contains many similar warnings that are applicable to the modern descendants of Israel—both from the house of Israel and the house of Judah. God condemns their rampant corruption, greed, violence, oppression and immorality. He abhors their self-inflicted defilement with corrupt religion and their profaning of His holy things and His Sabbaths (Ezekiel 22:7-13).

Because of their moral degeneracy, as descendants of the ancient house of Israel, God also says: "I will *scatter* you among the nations, disperse you throughout the countries, and remove your filthiness completely from you. You shall defile yourself in the sight of the nations; *then you shall know that I am the LORD*" (verse 15-16).

This prophesied "scattering" will come at the hands of a foreign power. Other prophecies indicate that this power, unwittingly acting as God's "rod" of punishment (Isaiah 10:5-7), will be a modern revival of ancient Assyria and Babylon. Centered in Europe, it will also be a resurrection of the Roman Empire. The book of Revelation calls this power the "beast." It will be ruled by a coming totalitarian dictator—*also* referred to as the beast. (To learn more, please request our free booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.)

When strong, the United States has been a restraining force against tyranny in the world as we've seen. But, sadly, America's decline, beginning at its moral foundations and ultimately extending to its national power, will open the door to the worst tyranny ever to envelop the world—the final beast power. America, which values freedom so greatly, is in danger of having its freedom ripped away—as its civilization is destroyed, its abundance turned to ruin and its populace decimated and scattered.

Unless America repents, this is the future that prophecy indicates awaits it.

—Tom Robinson

## Blessings tied to obedience

In the role of international peacekeepers, these nations would help bring religious freedom to much of the earth. People from the two nations have also been at the forefront of translating and distributing Bibles to the nations.

Clearly, the God of the Bible and His Word are recognized as having played a major role in America's history. America's founding fathers intended to build a Christian country, realizing that a nation would prosper to the extent that it was built on and lived by the Ten Commandments. The founding fathers gave no one church pre-eminence, as England had, but they understood that the laws of God were to be the foundation of the nation's laws.

This was true until the 1960s.

That decade of great turmoil in the United States was also the decade that saw the nation turning away from its biblical foundation. Pressure began building to adopt the same permissive laws that had already been introduced in many European nations. Advocates of "free love" spurned marriage and family life. The birth-control pill, introduced in 1960, made it possible for people to adopt sexually promiscuous practices without the fear of pregnancy (though the consequence of sexually transmitted diseases remained, and infections skyrocketed). Marriage rates declined as more and more couples simply cohabited.

Within a few short years, states introduced no-fault divorce, legalized homosexual practices and sanctioned abortion. The U.S. Supreme Court decided that the First Amendment to the Constitution protected pornography. Like ancient Israel thousands of years before, Americans were rejecting the moral laws of God.

The social consequences of such thinking and practices are not hard to see. Broken homes, violence, sexual perversions and licentiousness grew out of control. Today America is a hedonistic society. With other Western nations, the United States is fulfilling a prophecy of the apostle Paul, who warned us of "perilous times" in the "last days."

" . . . For men will be lovers of themselves," he wrote, "lovers of money, . . . proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God . . ." (2 Timothy 3:1-4).

It is not mere coincidence that America started to fall apart internally in the 1960s as the country was turning away from the

moral laws of God. Twenty years later the moral climate improved after a minor resurgence of traditional values, but that was short-lived and too weak an effort to undo the damage or restore godly laws needed for a meaningful societal change.

### Consequences aren't always immediate

The Bible reminds us that the consequences of a nation's turning away from God are not always immediate. In fact, they may be delayed or extend over generations. Note these words in the giving of the Ten Commandments: "You shall have no other gods before Me . . . For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me" (Exodus 20:3, 5).

Consider, for example, slavery as practiced in the early United States. Although this great evil was finally abolished by the Civil War, the negative consequences of racial tension linger to this day, affecting virtually the entire country.

In a similar way we see more clearly the negative consequences of the liberal agendas of the '60s and '70s. Almost two generations later, the consequences of rejecting God's laws become more obvious. America may be richer than in the past, but morally the country is bankrupt, its society in decline.

God warns His people to remember that *He* is the source of blessings: ". . . When you have eaten and are full—then beware, lest you forget the LORD" (Deuteronomy 6:11-12). This passage reminds us that God gave us the land on which we dwell as well as its great material abundance. Yet failure to remember and obey God will result in dire consequences (Deuteronomy 8:18-20).

Deuteronomy 28 sums up well the consequences for a nation that abandons its Creator. A nation that is faithful to God and His laws will be blessed, and the nation that rejects God and His laws will be cursed. Curses come on the United States and other nations when they turn away from their Creator.

It wouldn't take much for the situation to dramatically worsen. America's whole way of life is built on its enormously powerful economy. But what would happen if the economy took a dramatic downturn? Would the nation hold together? What would happen if the country were defeated in a major war?

Indeed, America dare not allow its wealth to make it complacent. It has built much of its material prosperity on borrowed money. The physical blessings it

enjoys now could easily become the curse of unpaid debt if the economy plummets.

It is good to remember that at the dawn of the 20th century British power seemed, in the words of a German nationalist newspaper at the time, "practically unassailable" (quoted by J. Morris, *Pax Britannica*, 1968, p. 28). How quickly this changed in just a few decades! American power, too, can diminish overnight.

Mankind in general has always had the freedom to make its own choices. The descendants of the men who built the United States on a foundation of their understanding of the Ten Commandments were free to reject those laws, but the consequences of having done so are inevitable.

Perhaps the biggest difference between the people who dominate our culture and those who led the country at its founding is that people today believe America can succeed without God. Right legislation can solve any problem. All it takes is the right allocation of funds.

The reality is that the further the nation drifts from God the more complex—and costly—the problems become. Only a return to the laws of God will solve the nation's ills.

### God's promises are sure

If the United States—and other English-speaking nations that sprang from the biblical tribe of Joseph, including Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa—doesn't genuinely return to God, terrible consequences will result, warns biblical prophecy. Some of these nations have already fallen far from their peak of power. But things could get much, much worse. The Bible speaks of the time of "Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7), when the United States and other descendants of ancient Israel will suffer the severe consequences of turning away from God (see "More Disasters on the Horizon?," page 30).

We have seen in this series of articles how America's birth and rise to power have been an astounding fulfillment of Bible prophecy. But let us also recognize that, just as the prophecies of national greatness have come to pass, so will the prophecies about America's *fall* from greatness because of its continuing drift from God and slide into greater and greater sins.

Yet it is not too late. God says, "The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I

thought to bring upon it" (Jeremiah 18:7-8).

America has tragically lived up to the negative side of its biblical name, *Manasseh*, which means "forgetting." The nation has lost its way, and God pleads with it to find its way back to Him. "Yet the Lord pleads with you still: Ask where the good road is, the godly paths you used to walk in, in the days of long ago. Travel there and you will find rest for your souls. But you reply, 'No, that is not the road we want!'" (Jeremiah 6:16, *The Living Bible*).

Sadly, as a whole, America and the other modern nations descended from Israel are not likely to heed God's warning before suffering calamity the likes of which has never been. But, as individuals, each of us still has the opportunity to repent of his sins. We can turn our lives around to serve the great God. "Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the LORD's anger" (Zephaniah 2:3).

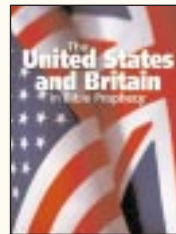
True repentance, committing from the heart to obey God from now on, is the only way to find forgiveness of sins and true happiness—and ultimate freedom.

The Scriptures show us that, after America experiences the negative consequences of rejecting God, there will come a time of national repentance—and Americans, together with the other descendants of Israel, will turn back to their God. After that happens the nation will once again be one set on a hill, an example for other nations to follow.

But you don't have to wait until then. You can repent now—and be an individual example of the blessing and freedom that comes from following God. **GN**

### Recommended Reading

To learn more about the astounding Bible prophecies about the United States, and the predictions of its future, be sure to request your free



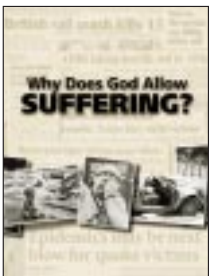
copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. To learn more about what the Scriptures reveal about the future, request *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*, also free.

Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).



AFP Photo

**H**ow do we make sense of suffering? How do we reconcile the reality of so much suffering, anguish and misery with a divine being who is all-loving and infinitely merciful? This quandary has plagued theologians and philosophers for centuries. But they have failed to give us a satisfying, rational answer. Is there more to the story we haven't considered?



Through the prophet Isaiah God tells us, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways" (Isaiah 55:8). God thinks and acts on a level different from ours. He sees things

in an entirely different way. From our perspective, it's as though we were putting together a jigsaw puzzle with many of the pieces missing. What part of the picture are we failing to see?

*Why Does God Allow Suffering?* addresses these questions head on. This crucial booklet reveals the source of so much human suffering, helps us understand why God allows it, shows His different perspective on it and lets us understand how and when all suffering will eventually cease.

For your free copy, visit our Web site or contact any of our offices listed on page 2.

**United Church of God**  
*an International Association*

Visit us on the Web: [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org)