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Visions of Judgment: The Coming Ride of the Horsemen of Revelation

The prophetic message of the infamous horsemen of the apocalypse forms a central part of the judgments poured upon the earth in the Day of the Lord. The news brought by these horsemen is not good, but bad. The implications for mankind are staggering. In this first article of a series, we introduce the overall prophecy and look in detail at the first horseman.

by Darris McNeely

Nothing can be more stirring than a scene of horsemen galloping across a landscape. Movie-makers use such scenes to add drama, mystery and power to their stories.

In Revelation chapter 6, Christ uses four horsemen to represent the first four of seven seals He opens from the scroll in His hand. These images have intrigued generations of Bible scholars and students. Riding across the prophetic landscape, these dramatic images of religion, war, famine and pestilence cast a pall of terror upon the world. Is there a meaning for our troubled and uncertain world today? Do these images foretell greater calamity for the earth's inhabitants?

Let's look and see.

One worthy to open

To understand the seals we need first to examine chapter 5. John is looking at a vision of the throne of God and he sees "in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals" (Revelation 5:1). No one in heaven or earth is able or worthy to



Artist's depiction of the horsemen of Revelation 6

open the scroll and reveal its contents. John despairs at the absence of anyone capable of opening the scrolls. But a voice from one of the elders around the throne says, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of

(See "HORSEMEN," page 3)



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Scriptural references are from the New King James Version (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers) unless otherwise noted.

Subscriptions: *World News and Prophecy* is sent free to the members of the United Church of God, and all who request it. There is no subscription price. To request a subscription, write to *World News and Prophecy*, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, telephone (513) 576-9796 or download it from our Web site at <http://www.ucg.org>

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The Clones May Be Frauds; the Issues Are Real

Lately I have been thinking about the scriptures that tell of God's action at the Tower of Babel. There God said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them" (Genesis 11:6). It is interesting to speculate just how fast humanity would have developed had the earth remained with one language. But one thing is certain—God knew that the results would have been horrendous.

A few weeks ago an organization with ties to a strange religious cult known as the Raelians said that they had succeeded in producing a cloned human baby. No proof of this claim was offered, and many experts feel it will prove to be a hoax. Raelians are members of an atheistic cult who believe that human life on earth was created by aliens, who cloned themselves. This was "revealed" to the cult's founder, a former race car driver named Claude. He says he came across these aliens one day near a volcano when they appeared to him and revealed the purpose of life. The group is bizarre; nevertheless, their claim again raises the issue of cloning human beings.

Clinics in both the United States and Italy claim to be close to producing the first cloned humans. President Bush has said this is "deeply troubling." Indeed it should be. Science is playing with the creation of human life, attempting to become "as God" in determining good from evil. At issue is not the ability of science to manipulate genes for the betterment of mankind. The sanctity of life is at the heart of this issue, closely tied to the abortion question. With abortion man plays word games with life in the womb, defining the process as nothing more than a biological action devoid of all human sanctity. Since 1973, when abortion was legalized in the United States, many politicians, judges, theologians and other leaders have lost any moral standing to take up the banner in this issue of human cloning.

God designed life to begin in the nurturing environment of the womb through an act of love between a husband and wife who are joined as "one flesh" under the protective, sanctified bond of the divine institution of marriage. This is where roots of the tree of life are sustained and nourished. But our modern world, in the name of convenience or "choice," rips this tree from its intended soil and tosses it aside with a beastly indifference, which offends God and those who have His spiritual perspective.

Human cloning plunges humanity further into an unknown realm fraught with many perils. Besides the many biological questions as to the quality of physical life produced, there is the question of spiritual potential. God created man in His image, with the great spiritual potential to one day become part of His family. God said to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you." God desires a relationship with man. Can this apply to cloned humans? These are deep moral and spiritual issues which science is not equipped to address.

We are deeply in need of restoring a relationship with God based on humility and submission to His will. Since our first parents made the decision to place themselves above God, humanity has been marching toward this day. We may be approaching the time when God will again say, "Now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them." We can be thankful that among the many things Christ will restore to the earth will be the understanding that He alone gives life.—Darris McNeely

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“HORSEMEN,” (Continued from page 1)

David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals” (verse 5).

What John saw next was the sight of the glorified Christ in the commanding position to receive and dispense the full power of God. “And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne” (verses 6-7). What follows from this awesome scene of angelic praise is the stirring anthem to Christ’s role in the plan of God. The four living creatures and 24 elders sing a new song. “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals,” they proclaim in unison.

To this scene is now added the voice of many angels, perhaps numbering into the hundreds of millions, all loudly proclaiming, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” (verses 11-12.) With a thundering crescendo the next stanza arrives from “every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them . . . saying: Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!” This song of praise concludes with a decisive “Amen!”

Such is the scene that stands as a prelude to the opening of the seals. Christ alone holds the fate of mankind in His hands. He alone is worthy of making judgment upon the nations. The destiny of humanity is not by chance or whim.

The setting

What is the time setting of these prophecies? Scholars offer divergent opinions, but Revelation in fact reveals the time setting for the prophecy is the Day of the Lord (Revelation 1:10), which puts it into the prophetic period mentioned in numerous scriptures. Notice how the prophet Joel described this period: “The sun shall be turned



Religion continues to be a powerful force. A great wave of religious change is moving continually throughout the world.

into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD” (Joel 2:31).

The Day of the Lord begins with God’s intervention in world affairs to spare human life from a combined period of global conflict and satanic deception. It is the time of world conflict described by Daniel as a “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation” (Daniel 12:1). Mankind has suffered for centuries from the combined impact of war, famine and disease, but no previous period of calamity will compare to this age-ending storm described in Revelation.

When the seals open before John, he sees the first four uniquely pictured. Four horsemen arise in eerie sequences that stand together as a fascinating unit of prophecy. Before we examine each one of these horsemen, let’s look at another prophecy Christ gave during His ministry.

The Olivet prophecy

Christ and His disciples were in Jerusalem. After looking at the temple’s buildings, they crossed the Kidron Valley, climbed the Mount of Olives and paused to ask how they would know the

signs of Christ’s coming and the end of the age (Matthew 24:1-3).

Christ gave four signs that correspond with the first four seals of Revelation 6: “And Jesus answered and said to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, “I am the Christ,” and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places” (Matthew 24:4-7).

Here is an overview of trends and conditions from the first century until the end of the age. False religion, war, famine and disease would be endemic to civilization. As this and later articles in this series will show, humanity has always suffered from the effects of these four signs. But nothing in history will compare to the deluge revealed by the opening of the seals by the Lamb. The devastation caused by the opening of the four seals will be unprecedented as they set the stage for the return of Christ as King of Kings.

Let's look now at what John saw.

The first seal: the conqueror

As the first seal opens, John writes the following, "Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, 'Come and see.' And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer" (Revelation 6:1-2).

White is a sign of purity and peace. Here is a rider who appears to come in

His plain teaching and leading many into destructive heresy. "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonder to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:23-24).

It did not take long after Christ's death for a different gospel to invade the Church, causing division and confusion. The apostles dealt with this problem, as evidenced by their writings to the Church. Paul warned the elders of the church at Ephesus to beware of false

ful have always been walking. Christ called it a straight and narrow way that few find.

Near the end of the first century the apostle John, last of the original 12 apostles, dealt with the brunt of the heresy and persecution on the Church. The reign of the Roman Emperor Diocletian saw a virulent strain of antagonism unleashed upon Christians. For a period, the government exiled John to the island of Patmos, where he received the book of Revelation in vision.

The three epistles bearing his name show the tension in the churches and John's desire to warn the members of the devastating impact of false teaching. He wrote of the individual responsibility to examine those teachers who presented themselves as spiritual guides and experts. He knew it was easy to claim divine authority and thereby deceive people into following ideas that were spiritually destructive. "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

We see the apostles warning of the corruption of the true faith brought by Jesus Christ. Jude summed it up perfectly when he wrote of the need to "contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

Within decades, the truth of God was corrupted by false teachers. The result was teachings that no longer resembled the gospel brought by Christ. Paul had to scold the Galatians for "turning away . . . to a different gospel" (Galatians 1:6).

From the teachings of these corrupters evolved a church vastly different in doctrines and practices from the Church we see in the New Testament. In fact, there were two Christianities—the followers of Jesus' teachings and the followers of a counterfeit Christianity. Over the centuries, the Roman persecution took its toll. This counterfeit church further compromised the faith under threat of death from the state.

By converting to Christianity, the Roman Emperor Constantine combined

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the name of and with a message of peace. But his methods are that of a conqueror, one who imposes his version of peace upon the world. Possibly this rider will bring about a pseudo-peace, a condition described by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:3, "For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape."

Some confuse this rider with Jesus Christ, whom Revelation 19 shows riding a white horse at His second coming. But a careful look reveals important distinctions. Christ is wearing "many crowns," not just one, at His return. Instead of wielding a bow, Christ is brandishing a sword with which He strikes the nations.

In contrast to the conquering nature of the rider in chapter 6, Christ wages a war with righteous judgment (chapter 19:11). The Bible further shows that the bow and arrow are weapons of the enemies of God's people (see Ezekiel 39:3 and Ephesians 6:16).

To be consistent with Christ's initial statements we must conclude that this rider represents false messiahs, appropriating Christ's name, but corrupting

teachers. "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:28-30).

As the apostle Peter came near the close of his life, God compelled him to give a stern warning to the churches about the apostasy that he saw on the horizon. The second chapter of his second epistle is a powerful rebuke of those who would carry false teaching into the Church. "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction" (2 Peter 2:1).

He went on to say, "Many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed" (verse 2). Peter calls the Church doctrine a "way of truth." It is like a trail of truth along which the faith-

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the power of the state and the ecclesiastical structure and authority of the church. This created a union of church and state with the ability to create order by squelching dissent. Thus, Constantine and succeeding Roman emperors mounted the symbolic white horse of peace, but in reality their mission was to conquer, in the name of Christ, all those who opposed them.

A final great deception

Christ's warning of false christs coming in His name came to pass. Church history is largely a story of teachings and practices of the counterfeit Christianity, fundamentally different from what the early New Testament Church believed and taught. The story of those who at times recaptured the essence of true Christianity is not easy to find or completely understood. Today, those who strive to practice the teachings that Christ put into His Church are few in comparison to the thousands of churches that call themselves Christian, but in fact, are descendants of the counterfeit group begun in the first century. Christ said that "wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

Yet even for these few, there is danger from a coming deception that will be Satan's final effort to conquer, defeat and enslave humankind, depriving him of his spiritual potential. Christ's Olivet prophecy progresses, in concert with the book of Revelation, toward the final events before His return. He said, "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24). The elect, the people of God who "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 12:17), would even be susceptible to this great deception.

The apostle Paul spoke of this time of deception in 2 Thessalonians 2. This prophecy of a man of sin revealed before the day of Christ stands out within Paul's writings. This end-time deception created by a figure "who opposes and exalts himself above all that is

called God or that is worshiped" will sit "in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." In Paul's day, this opposition to the law and doctrine of God was already at work. But prior to the coming of Christ it will grow "according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders" (verses 3-9).

This "son of perdition" matches the description of the figure described in Revelation 13 as "a beast," one of a pair in this section, with two horns like a lamb and speaking like a dragon (verse 11). This person acts in tandem with the first beast (verse 1), actually causing people to worship the first beast with great adulation (verse 12). "He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived" (verses 13-14).

Here is the description of Satan's final attempt to engineer a system based on his lying words of deceit and confusion. That it involves false religion is

"peace" that will seemingly bring security in which the world can prosper economically. It will be a global system unlike any previous system, and it will seem to work.

The ride of the first horseman, false religion, cuts a swath through the nations in the last days, gathering a religious movement without parallel in history. Religion continues to be a powerful force among the nations. A great wave of religious change is moving continually throughout the world. Not only are the large world religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism, growing and changing, but countless other new faiths are springing up on a daily basis. Scholars who keep track of the world religious scene identify more than 9,900 distinctive religions. Despite predictions at one time that religion would become extinct, it continues to grow, reinventing itself after the personal interests and whims of people.

False religion marches on at the same time that the world's citizens are desperately in need of hope and solutions for survival. Their desperation provides fertile ground for religious extremism.

False religion marches on at the same time that the world's citizens are desperately in need of hope and solutions for survival. Their desperation provides fertile ground for religious extremism.

obvious from all the markers we have seen in the New Testament Scriptures. A man claiming to be God, in the temple of God, performs signs with the intent of persuading men to worship a system that appears to be doing good for the world. This is the final resurgence of a system which God calls "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (Revelation 17:5). (For more information on this system, request our free booklet, *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.)

His allure will likely be to bring about a peaceful solution to a world crisis where no one else has succeeded. The world will wonder in amazement at the ability of this system to impose a

The rise of fundamentalist Islam has precipitated a cultural clash between north and south, which could lead to dramatic changes in the world geopolitical structure. Religious-based terrorism has implicated this major world religion in a radical movement, which will drag others, including Christian-professing nations, into a clash of civilizations—one that could trigger the age-ending crisis predicted by Jesus Christ.

Christ spoke of false religion as the precursor to "wars and rumors of wars." The second seal of Revelation 6 is a rider on a red horse said to be taking peace from the earth. Religious strife has often been the cause of war. We will see the connection between the two as we look at the ride of this next horseman. ❖

Islamic Extremists Attack the West in Many Countries

The murder of three American Baptist missionaries by an Islamic extremist in Yemen Dec. 30 highlights the growing threat to Americans living in other parts of the world and the increasing worldwide clash between the followers of Islam and those of traditional Christianity. The killer claimed he shot the Americans because "they were preaching Christianity in an Islamic country."

by Melvin Rhodes

From Africa to Indonesia, as well as at home, Westerners face increasing dangers.

After Sept. 11, travel inevitably was not to be the same again. Domestic flights require passengers to allow more time before departure. The same is true for international flights. Instead of being asked to be at the airport two hours ahead for an international flight, I was now advised to be there four hours ahead, because of increased security measures.

These include random and thorough searches of passengers and their personal effects. During 2002 I flew from Detroit to Ghana in West Africa five times. It seems that I am frequently put through one of these random searches. This could be because I look particularly suspicious, but I doubt it. It is likely it has more to do with political correctness. Political correctness makes it impossible to target young Middle Eastern-looking males (the most likely terrorists).

There is no direct flight from Detroit to Accra, the capital of Ghana, so I must change planes in either London or Frankfurt, Germany. Increased security at these two airports is noticeable. Transit passengers cannot enter the airport without going through a security check. On one recent trip, I was picked out for a random search on three out of four possible occasions.

Less security is visible in Ghana, but this hasn't always been the case. During former periods of military dictatorship the airport always had many armed soldiers around. As this always made visitors uncomfortable, it is not the case today, now that Ghana has returned to civilian rule. However, this does not mean that Ghana is immune from the world's problems.

Increasing conflict in West Africa

To the west of Ghana lies the former French colony of the Ivory Coast, independent since 1960. Once the most stable and prosperous nation in the region, today the Ivory Coast is in the middle of a civil war between the Muslims of the north and the Christians of the south. Government in the country has long been dominated by those

in the south, which has been greatly resented by those in the north. The continuing conflict has driven many Americans and other foreigners out of the country.

Other countries in the area have been caught up in this. Citizens of Burkina Faso and Mali, both predominantly Islamic nations, have been attacked by Ivorian southerners and have had to leave the country in the tens of thousands. Refugees have fled into neighboring countries, including Ghana. The Lincoln School in Accra, the school for the American community in the capital, almost doubled its enrollment one weekend in September with the arrival of about 300 schoolchildren evacuated from an American school in the Ivory Coast.

Ghana has long rolled out the welcome mat for refugees. Many came in the 1980s from Liberia, the next country over from the Ivory Coast going west. Liberia, founded by emancipated American slaves in the 1820s, went through a particularly gruesome civil war following one of the most violent coups in African history. Neighboring Sierra Leone (again, moving further west) experienced its own civil war in the last decade, ended only by the presence of British troops sent to aid their former colony. French troops are now in the Ivory Coast. Interestingly, the French, who long opposed the United States sending troops into Iraq without UN approval, dispatched troops to the independent Republic of Ivory Coast without consulting any other nation.

Liberia and Sierra Leone are also caught up in the international war on terror. The leaders of the two governments are accused of helping al Qaeda, effectively enabling considerable money laundering to take place using the diamonds that could make the peoples of both nations wealthy, but instead benefit only the few.

It is not only the countries west of Ghana that are in turmoil. To the east, Nigeria, the most populous African nation, regularly experiences conflict between Muslims and Christians. The Miss World

contest, due to be held in Nigeria, had to be moved to London when Muslims rioted and killed over 200 Christians to protest the presence of the contest in Nigeria and comments made by a "Christian" journalist suggesting that Muhammad would have approved and even taken a bride from among the contestants.

The Islamic-Christian fault line runs through Africa, from west to east. In the east, Sudan has long experienced civil war between the Muslims of the north and the Christians of the south, many of the latter having been taken away as slaves by the former. I am reminded of this almost every day, as my home city in Michigan has taken in over 100 Sudanese "boys" orphaned by the war and left to roam the countryside in armed gangs scavenging for food.

Now Kenya, too, has been affected by this on-going conflict between the world's two biggest religions. Americans woke up on Thanksgiving Day to hear that a terrorist bomb in the Kenyan Indian Ocean resort of Mombasa had killed a number of Kenyans and visiting Israelis. Although not a holiday in Kenya, the hotel lobby was filled with arriving Israeli visitors on Hanukkah vacations when the terrorists drove a truck carrying a bomb into the hotel. A few moments earlier, a departing Israeli plane had been fired at with missiles carried by terrorists, who narrowly missed the plane.

The missile attack is particularly worrying for travelers. My family and I lived through a terrorist war in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe 25 years ago. A major turning point was the downing of two full civilian aircraft by hand-held missile launchers. Technology today is much more sophisticated and the threat of further attacks of this nature is very real.

Middle East a continuing risk for visitors

Just across the water from Kenya lies Yemen, another country no longer safe for visitors. The deaths of the three missionaries followed attacks on tourists, the attack on the USS *Cole* in October 2000 and one on a French oil tanker (which terrorists thought was American) in October 2002.

Moving further east, throughout the Gulf, the threat of terror is constant. Above the Gulf there is Iraq, whose leader wants to destroy the West. Neighboring Iran is where Islamic fundamentalism first reared

its ugly head in 1979, with the overthrow of the shah and the seizure of the American embassy. Suicide bombings continue in Israel, with Americans and other Westerners among the victims. In Egypt and Jordan, Westerners have also been killed.

East of Iran are Afghanistan and Pakistan, both hotbeds of Islamic extremism. Pakistan's President Musharraf remains a U.S. ally in the war on terror, but recent elections have given the country a more radical religious government. Westerners remain unsafe in the country, where *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl was kidnapped and murdered and a van, full of French workers, was blown up. Attacks on Christian churches in Pakistan are frequent, with another one just a few days before the Yemeni incident.

Next to Pakistan is India, with a Muslim minority that is actually the second biggest Islamic population in the world after Indonesia. Conflicts between Muslims and majority Hindus are increasing in frequency. The disputed territory of Kashmir has seen increased conflict, but so have other parts of India.

Nor are visitors safe in the world's most populous Islamic nation, Indonesia, where a powerful bomb blast killed almost 200 tourists (mostly Australians) Oct. 12 on the predominantly Hindu island of Bali. Apparently, Americans were the targets. Americans have also been targeted in the Philippines, where Islamic forces are rebelling against the national government.

"Wars and rumors of wars" (Matthew 24:6) were prophesied by Jesus Christ to be a major area of concern at the time of "the end of the age" (verse 3). Interestingly, false religion was prophesied to precede these conflicts: "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (verse 5).

American interests threatened

So what should Americans and other Westerners do? Reading the above, many will conclude that it's not safe to go anywhere, so it's best to stay at home.

Such reasoning overlooks the fact that there are dangers at home, where American big cities pose greater dangers than many international destinations. Now there is the additional threat of more terrorism following 9/11.

But staying at home also ignores a

reality of the post-World War II world—that America's dominance of various regions of the world requires an American presence. Not just a military or diplomatic presence, but also the presence of businessmen, missionaries, aid workers and visitors passing through as tourists, stimulating the local economy. Together, all these people give America influence and promote diverse American interests.

My wife and I have three children. They are all now in their 20s, but when we lived in Ghana, they attended the American school. Without us and other Americans working there for churches and aid organizations, the diplomats there would not have been able to support an American school. Their children would have had to be sent overseas to attend boarding schools. Even with our children, there were only just over 100 students in the school. (There are now over 400, reflecting Ghana's return to stability during the '90s.)

American businessmen promote U.S. business interests overseas. If they live in a country, they will naturally do more business than if they simply pass through. This can help create jobs back home and can increase profits for U.S. investors. Already many businessmen around the world (and diplomats) have had to send family members home to be safe. If things get even more dangerous, they themselves will return to the United States and business will go elsewhere.

As Americans are driven out of countries around the world, others move in. During the '80s, when the Americans and British were forced out of Ghana, Libyans moved in along with people from other radical countries.

A great deal of attention was given by the American media to the events of Sept. 11, and rightly so. Often overlooked are incidents overseas where Americans and people from allied nations like Britain and Australia are killed by Islamic radicals. Yet these too are a serious threat to American interests. It seems as if the terrorists realize this and are deliberately targeting U.S. interests overseas where they have little to fear from American retaliation.

But these incidents, almost daily now, are very much a part of the continuing war on terror, an international conflict that will dominate our lives for years to come. ❖

Iran: Why Part of the “Axis of Evil”?

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon considers Iran to be as dangerous as Iraq and a “center of world terror.” Why should this be so?

by John Ross Schroeder

Philip Sherwell is the foreign affairs correspondent of Britain’s *Sunday Telegraph*, a highly respected newspaper, one of the nation’s very best. He titled one of his major international affairs articles, “Russia Adds Range to Iran’s Latest Missiles” (Nov. 20, 2002). His introductory words were: “Iran has long been supplied by Russia with powerful new technology and parts for long-range missiles that will put Israel and the whole of the Middle East—including British and U.S. forces in the region—within its reach.”

Mr. Sherwell then added: “The missiles’ range . . . would also allow Iran to strike parts of North Africa and of South-Eastern Europe.” Heavy stuff!

Earlier in November, two of *The Times*’ correspondents interviewed Ariel Sharon of Israel. Mr. Sharon commented: “Iran makes every effort to possess weapons of mass destruction . . . That is a danger to the Middle East, to Israel, and a danger to Europe” (Nov. 5, 2002). The Israeli prime minister regards Iran as “behind terror all around the world.” As soon as the Iraqi problem is resolved, Mr. Sharon would like to see Iran at the apex of America’s “to do” list. (Recent developments in North Korea may make that possibility unlikely.)

The *Daily Telegraph* correspondent in Washington, D.C., reported, “The White House expressed ‘great concerns’ over the secret Iranian nuclear plants which it suspects could be used to produce elements of atomic weapons” (Dec. 14, 2002). *The Economist* adds that “suspicion has just been heightened by [a] report of new evidence from satellite photographs of nuclear installations in Iran” (Dec. 21, 2002).

These news stories are merely the tip of the iceberg, reflecting expressions of concern about present-day Iranian activities. However, in order to properly understand current affairs in Iran, we first need to very briefly review the nation’s history.

What makes Iran dangerous

The Persian Empire was founded some 2,530 years ago. Like Poland, ancient Persia (officially renamed Iran in 1935) has been a crossroads country. As an inevitable consequence, it has suffered a turbulent and violent history. In their turn, both Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan conquered its territory.

But perhaps the invasion of greater concern for us today was when Islamic Arabs conquered Persia in the 600s. That is how Islam was seemingly permanently implanted in the nation. Then when the shah was exiled in 1979, governmental power passed directly into the hands of the Islamic mullahs.

According to the 10th edition of Andrew Boyd’s *An Atlas of World Affairs*, these mullahs imposed a regime which became notorious for religious persecution. They also “made ruthless use of fanatical assassins in Europe and elsewhere,” while enforcing a strict Islamic orthodoxy.

Former Middle Eastern correspondent Robin Wright (also author of a book about Iran) summed up the nation’s plight in *Foreign Affairs* magazine: “A generation after it seized power, Iran’s revolutionary regime is deeply fractured by intense political divisions, endangered by economic disorder, discredited by rampant corruption and smothered in social restrictions no longer acceptable to large sectors of its changing population.”

We may add to this tale of national woes a rogue death squad, newspaper censoring and closures, student unrest, political trials and persecutions against the Jewish minority. An Islamic theocratic regime with revolutionary goals and purposes far more sinister than that of merely helping Iranian citizens to find their way in the modern world, makes for a clear and present danger not only to its own people, but potentially to neighbor nations as well.

Of course, some observers hold the optimistic view that “whatever happens in the short

*“Iran makes every effort to possess weapons of mass destruction . . . That is a danger to the Middle East, to Israel, and a danger to Europe”—
Ariel Sharon.*

term, religious rule is doomed in Iran” (*The Economist*, Dec. 21, 2002). A vocal opposition to the clerical rule that now grips the country has emerged in recent years.

“Neighbours from hell”

The above phrase is the title of a recent *Economist* article about Iran and Iraq (Dec. 14, 2002). Iran’s rulers have no love for Saddam Hussein. After all, the 1980s war between the two countries cost Iran half a million lives and around \$70 billion.

But as *The Economist* article explains, “Iran’s anti-American ideology prevents it from allying itself wholeheartedly with Mr. Bush to unseat Mr. Hussein; there is a national animus against America’s president for putting Iran alongside Iraq in his ‘axis of evil.’”

Iran does not want future Iraqi leadership to be dominated by a government overly friendly to the United States. It’s as simple as that.

Yet Iran finds itself in a catch-22 dilemma. The *Daily Telegraph* observed, “Despite the deep hostility that exists between Washington and Teheran, America has reached some tentative understandings with Iran as the Bush administration prepares for a possible war with Baghdad, a common enemy” (Dec. 14, 2002).

Clearly there is a complex web of love/hate relationships between Middle Eastern countries, often further complicated not only by pressures from more powerful outside nations, but also by the presence of Kurdish and other minorities within each country.

The hostage crisis, beginning in late 1979, led to a steady deterioration in Iranian/American relations. It remains an unpleasant memory for many U.S. citizens.

The highly volatile Mideast

The perceived Iranian threat is just one more reminder that our 21st century world is both hopelessly divided and explosively dangerous. Much of this unrest is, of course, centered in the Middle East. In fact, Bible prophecy tells us that the final Armageddon—symbolic of the world’s last great battle—will occur in that region of the globe.



Russian Atomic Energy Minister Alexander Rumyantsev meets with Iran’s Speaker of Parliament Mehdi Karroubi, beneath a picture of the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, in Tehran Dec. 23, 2002 (Reuters/Raheb Homavandi)

You need to understand the intriguing details of these biblical prophecies as well as the overall framework in which they will play out. Our free brochure, *Is the Bible True?* has a chapter (“The Bible and Prophecy”) that focuses on Daniel 11—the longest continuous prophetic chapter in the Bible. The focus of that particular chapter is the Middle East.

What we can tell you now is the ultimate outcome of all these coming events. Oil, land, war and murky politics

will cease to be the primary focus of Middle Eastern life. Instead, this region will become the spiritual headquarters of planet earth with Jerusalem as the capital city of the world. From there the reigning Jesus Christ will look after the best interests of all countries, peoples and races. At last there will be peace on earth toward all men of good will.

The Middle East will again be a land of promise, a place that will spread peace, prosperity and godly spirituality to the entire globe. God speed that day! ❖

Essential Facts About Iran

- Population: an estimated 70 million.
- Ethnic groups: Persian (about half), Azerbaijani Turks, Kurdish and Arab minorities.
- Capital city: Tehran.
- Religion: primarily Islam.
- Government: a theocratic Islamic republic under the constitution of 1979 (revised, 1989).
- Law: codified Islamic principles of government.
- Economic mainstay: oil and gas (82.5 percent of export revenues).
- Oil reserves: estimated at 8.5 percent of the world’s proven reserves (end of 2001).

Sources: *The Columbia Encyclopedia* (6th edition), Economist.com.

Is There “Just Cause” for Nations to Intervene in the Affairs of Other Nations?

Should other nations intervene in Iraq or between the Palestinians and Israelis? Increasing mind-numbing conflicts around the world raise the level of debate over this difficult question.

by Graemme Marshall

Bible prophecy shows that human attempts to solve the ongoing crises will eventually fail. Soon God will step into human affairs by sending Jesus Christ to establish and rule over a world government. Only then will peace come to the nations.

Was there a moral responsibility for outside powers to intervene in Bosnia, Kosovo, Somalia, Kuwait and Afghanistan? The failure of the United Nations and major powers to intervene in the conscience-shattering ethnic cleansing in Rwanda provokes the dilemma: to intervene or not to intervene? That 1994 war resulted in an estimated death toll of between 500,000 and 1,000,000 Rwandans, mostly members of the Tutsi ethnic group.

When mass murder, ethnic cleansing, rape and enforced starvation are out of control, shouldn't other nations intervene? But who, how and to what extent? Adding to this dilemma is global terrorism's appalling attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, on New York and Washington, D.C.

A report presented to the UN outlines many of the problems. It is insightful in its recommendations.

For several years United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan has been urging the international community to forge a consensus on the sensitive issue of the right of humanitarian intervention. Responding to his challenge in the fall of 2000, Canada established the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), with a membership of 12.

After a year of intensive worldwide consultations, research and discussions, the ICISS released its report titled “The Responsibility to Protect.” The report wrestled with one major question: Should the international community accept the sanctity of state sovereignty and do nothing to stop massive human rights violations, or should it intervene to protect populations in danger?

Kofi Annan thanked Canada for establishing ICISS and lauded its work. He said, “You are taking away the last excuses of the international community for doing nothing when doing something can save lives” (*Canada World View*, Issue 15, Spring 2002, p. 17).

The report outlines the intervention dilemma for the international community, stating:

“‘Humanitarian intervention’ has been controversial both when it happens, and when it has failed to happen. Rwanda in 1994 laid bare the full horror of inaction. The United Nations (UN) Secretariat and some permanent members of the Security Council knew that officials connected to the then government were planning genocide; UN forces were present, though not in sufficient number at the outset; and credible strategies were available to prevent, or at least greatly mitigate, the slaughter which followed.

“But the Security Council refused to take the necessary action. That was a failure of international will—of civic courage—at the highest level. Its consequence was not merely a humanitarian catastrophe for Rwanda: the genocide destabilized the entire Great Lakes region and continues to do so. In the aftermath, many African peoples concluded that, for all the rhetoric about the universality of human rights, some human lives end up mattering a great deal less to the international community than others” (“The Intervention Dilemma,” 1.1, www.iciss-ciise.gc.ca).

Our 20th-century conscience

Increasing world crises after World War II clamored for humanitarian intervention. *Encarta Yearbook* prods us with uneasy reminders. “Social scientists estimate that since the end of World War II at least 16 nations have attempted or committed genocide. From 1975 to 1979 in Cambodia, the Communist Khmer Rouge killed close to 1.7 million Cambodians. During Guatemala's civil war, from 1960 to 1996, an estimated 200,000 people were killed or disappeared” (*Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2002*, “genocide”).

How quickly we forget. Or is it that one conscience-numbing event after another makes us lose track of what has been happening in the past century? But can we forget what has happened, or is happening today? We might want to forget the horrific murder and torture caused by despotic genocide, like the killings orchestrated by Ugandan presidents Idi Amin and Milton Obote during the 1970s and

early 1980s. Both Amin and Obote ordered the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Ugandans belonging to groups who had opposed, or whom they feared might oppose, their tyrannical rule.

The “right to protect and rebuild” vs. “the right to intervene”

Recognizing the need for change, the ICISS report proposes a challenging new approach. “Millions of human beings remain at the mercy of civil wars, insurgencies, state repression and state collapse. This is a stark and undeniable reality, and it is at the heart of all the issues with which this Commission has been wrestling. What is at stake here is not making the world safe for big powers, or trampling over the sovereign rights of small ones, but delivering practical protection for ordinary people, at risk of their lives, because their states are unwilling [or] unable to protect them” (“A New Approach: ‘The Responsibility to Protect,’” 2.1).

Along with protecting states unable to resolve their crises, the report also recognized the need to rebuild their structure after intervention. “The responsibility to protect implies the responsibility not just to prevent and react, but to follow through and rebuild. This means that if military intervention action is taken—because of a breakdown or abdication of a state’s own capacity and authority in discharging its ‘responsibility to protect’—there should be a genuine commitment to helping to build a durable peace, and promoting good governance and sustainable development. Conditions of public safety and order have to be reconstituted by international agents acting in partnership with local authorities, with the goal of progressively transferring to them authority and responsibility to rebuild” (ibid., “The Responsibility to Rebuild—Peace Building,” 5.1).

The problems of intervention

The report insightfully tackles the many difficulties facing peacemakers of today’s world. Here are some:

- “There is no longer such a thing as a humanitarian catastrophe occurring ‘in a faraway country of which we know little.’ On 11 September 2001 global terrorism struck the US homeland where around 40% of the victims of the World Trade Center were non-Americans, from some 80 countries. In an interdependent world,

fragile security and ill-will can constitute a risk to people everywhere” (ibid., “The Responsibility to Protect,” 1.21).

- “[If the international community] stays disengaged, there is the risk of becoming complicit bystanders in massacre, ethnic cleansing, and even genocide. If it intervenes, it may not be able to mitigate the abuses” (ibid., 1.22).

- Disarmament has been one of the most difficult tasks to implement. It has been extremely hard to collect all weapons, disarm warlords or prevent a trade in small arms long after withdrawal.

Problems for achieving consensus

The nature of the United Nations often precludes achieving a united front in handling conscience-shattering crises.

- The veto power of the five permanent members of the Security Council is too often exercised to serve individual ends. There is a need for a “code of conduct” among them so that they will not use that veto when there is a significant humanitarian crisis.

- Only the UN can authorize military action, yet the UN does not have its own military or police force. Most countries have shrinking military budgets since the post-Cold War era and peacekeeping states are often unable to maintain military commitments. Even Canada, as affluent a nation as it is, was unable to replace its military detachment on withdrawal from Afghanistan because there was no fresh operational unit available. UN peacekeeping peaked in 1993 at 78,000 troops but at the time of the report, including both NATO and UN missions, the number of soldiers in international peace operations had soared by 40 percent to 108,000.

- UN membership has grown from 51 member states in 1945 to 189 today. This brings a whole new array of voices, interests and competing aspirations.

- The “CNN effect” of media with satellite images of suffering from troubled states can make it difficult for the UN and Security Council to take the time to properly assess what action to take.

Will the world respond?

Will our world meet the challenge? The ICISS report champions civilized aspirations. Notice their heartfelt warning. “Meeting this challenge is more than a matter of aspiration. It is a vital necessity.

Nothing has done more harm to our shared ideal that we are all equal in worth and dignity, and that the earth is our common home, than the inability of the community of states to prevent genocide, massacre and ethnic cleansing. If we believe that all human beings are equally entitled to be protected from acts that shock the conscience of us all, then we must match rhetoric with reality, principle with practice. We cannot be content with reports and declarations. We must be prepared to act. We won’t be able to live with ourselves if we do not” (ibid., “Meeting the Challenge,” 8.34).

“Won’t be able to live with ourselves!” We give full credit to all with a humanitarian heart who are trying to ease suffering in this world. But will they be successful?

Bible prophecy shows that human attempts to solve the ongoing crises will eventually fail. In fact, crises will worsen to the point of bringing the earth to the brink of self-annihilation. See our booklets *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*

God will intervene

We learn by hard experience that man often needs outside intervention to bring him back to decent values in life. However, God gives man the freedom of choice, and that choice does not always involve God. Man does not want his Creator intervening in his life or the lives of the nations, and mostly God has accommodated mankind’s wishes. He lets people write the painful lessons that hopefully will eventually result in repentance. “Your own wickedness will correct you, and your backslidings will rebuke you” (Jeremiah 2:19).

Soon God will step into human affairs by sending Jesus Christ to establish and rule over a world government. Only then will peace come to the nations. Zechariah shows how God will intervene in the affairs “of all the nations” who fail consistently to respond to His way. Chapter 14 tells us that when Christ returns, God will act when needed on all “the families of the earth” who refuse to worship Him at the Feast of Tabernacles (Zechariah 14:16-19). We might say His withholding of rain is a way of imposing economic sanctions to bring people around.

God’s soon-coming intervention will enable all nations to be prosperous and secure. ♦

New Sexual Revolution

Counterculture parents of the '80s, feminists, the entertainment industry and thinking people who wanted to change a culture that mistreats women unwittingly worked together to start a revolution. The result is a raging social trend that threatens our teens.

by Cecil Maranville

*God created
sexual
attractiveness. It
isn't evil, nasty or
wrong in any way;
it's wonderful . . .
But what's
transpiring today
is a weird,
damaging and
costly perversion
of His intent.*

As much of the world rivets its attention on Iraq, hoping for or ready to force a revolution to overthrow the government, a different revolution is already underway in the Western world. It began when parents in the 1980s questioned every fundamental value, especially the traditional male-female roles. They passed their misgivings on to their children who are now teenagers.

Feminists in the 1980s added to the mix by pushing their agenda for female dominance, despising a culture dominated by males.

Parents, teachers and other people of influence contributed by setting out to correct the wrongs of a culture that suppressed women.

It continued in the 1990s when the entertainment industry found that it could sell sensuality to preteens and young teens who had money and the freedom to spend it on the trend of the moment.

It is a sexual revolution—not among the college-age young adults like the 1960s parallel. This time it's among kids, children and young teens just entering puberty. Promoting crude sensuality isn't new, but what's happening in today's teens is—and it's alarming.

Two choices

There are two ways to go: with the new sexual revolution or with the purpose for which God created sexuality. God created sexual attractiveness. It isn't evil, nasty or wrong in any way; it's wonderful. He intends that it motivate young men and young women to build friendships, date, marry and have a family, in that order and all in due time. And that time isn't the preteen and early teenage years. But what's transpiring today is a weird, damaging and costly perversion of His intent.

Pop-teen idols are at the top of the list of influences that twist sexual attractiveness into crude sensuality.

Posters of Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera adorn the walls of millions of teens' bedrooms. Their strong, talented voices pulse through the headphones of those same preteens and teens with messages of touching, kissing,

holding and love. Their images and lyrics decorate the T-shirts that teens buy (at no small cost).

Aggressive female characters appear in television series and movies. It's popular for sensual women to dominate men even in confrontations with brute strength, martial arts or deadly weapons.

The TV series *Sex and the City* popularized female aggressiveness toward men in sexual themes. A teenage movie last summer titled *Swimfan* featured a reversal on the theme of a male taking advantage of a female. Its main character is a beautiful teenage girl who pursues, seduces, dumps and then stalks the teenage boy star of the swim team.

MTV portrays successful teen girls dressed in sexually provocative styles. Now teen clothing styles show lots of flesh. And it's a status symbol in middle school to be the first one dating.

The common problem with all these trends is that they disconnect girls from true relationships. Dating isn't an outgrowth of friendship. The "love" of the music videos has nothing to do with the type of love that leads to lasting marriages and the foundation of solid families. And preteen and teen illicit sexual activity is in a different universe from the way God intended sex—to express love between a husband and wife.

The tawdry results of the revolution

Capturing a niche in the market and proudly advancing the trend is the magazine *Boy Crazy!* It runs photos of 14-year-old boys to young men in their 20s on its covers.

Not stopping with the printed page, *Boy Crazy!* also sells trading cards (seriously!) with photographs and biographies of each of the "cover boys." Fans can E-mail the "cover boys" and buy *Boy Crazy!* products via the Internet.

The new sexual revolution resulted in girls being more assertive—shockingly so—about sexuality. What you are about to read is terribly distasteful, but unfortunately true.

John Bernard, 16, declares, "The girls are way more aggressive than the boys. They have more attitude. And they overpower guys more. I

mean, it's scary" (Alex Kuczynski, "She's Got to Be a Macho Girl," *The New York Times*, Nov. 3, 2002).

Tabi Upton, a counselor at the Johnson Mental Health Center in Chattanooga, Tennessee, relates that teenage boys often say *the girls push them for sex, expect the boys to ask for sex or will bring it up if the boys don't ask*. Says Ms. Upton, "There has been a shift where girls now see themselves sexualized and approach men with pretty much the attitude, 'This is all I have to offer'" (ibid., emphasis added throughout).

Dr. Linda Carter, a Manhattan psychologist, describes the present culture as if *Sex and the City* habits trickled down to 14-year-olds instead of 40-year-olds. "Watching Britney Spears—or who is that other girl, Christina Aguilera?—empowers them to be more aggressive. It started among young single adults with *Sex and the City*, and there has been so much talk and thinking about female sexual assertiveness that it has finally come to influence adolescents" (ibid.).

Generation SLUT

Marty Beckerman is writing a book titled *Generation SLUT*. ("SLUT" is an acronym for "sexually liberal urban teenagers.") He states, "There is a kind of machismo among girls now. They have the male-conquest attitude."

Beckerman continues, "All kids are scared of long-term relationships now. Our parents are all divorced, and we have never seen a successful long-term relationship. Girls don't want to think of sex as something which is about love because that will just come back and bite them later. The sex thing is just the most visible sign of the *disconnectedness* we feel" (ibid.).

Illustrating how disconnected from feelings, from true friendship, from genuine love, teens are, a study published by *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* showed that one third of the teens in the study group (out of 1,678) had sex by age 16. That's bad enough, but even more devastating is the fact that one in eight of those who had sex did so *without ever even going out on a date* ("Childhood Friendships Linked to Teen Sex," *TheOmahaChannel.com*, Nov. 15, 2002).



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The "love" depicted in movies and music videos has nothing to do with the type of love that leads to lasting marriages and the foundation of solid families.

Often lacking the positive influence of proper parental guidance, the thinking of teenage girls is so detached from the way God intended them to react to sexual attractiveness that perhaps without realizing it they assume the mental attitude of prostitutes.

The news gets worse. The Centers for Disease Control's 2002 report on the sexual behavior of adolescents showed a decline in the numbers having sexual intercourse, from 54 percent in 1991 to 46 percent last year. A decline is good, isn't it? The statistics do not tell the entire story.

Please pardon the frankness, but they reflect only sexual intercourse, not a different, rapidly growing type of sex act. Due apparently in part to the widely publicized example of the previous U.S. president, teens engage in oral sex in ever-increasing numbers. Richard Trubo in "Best Way to Teach Teens About Sex" says: "To complicate the sex-education picture, some adolescents who are refraining from sexual intercourse are engaging in oral sex instead. Oral sex, according to some teenagers, is 'not really sex,' and is a way of protecting their 'technical virginity'" (WebMD, 2002).

Apart from the bare-midriff Britney/Christina look, away from the parties and the "game aspect" of the new sexual revolution, the painful truth is that HIV, herpes and other STDs are still transmissible through oral sex.

There are approximately 3 million STD cases in teens in the United States every year, according to the CDC. That breaks down to between 8,000 to 9,000 *every day*. "Diseases such as chlamydia, herpes and human papilloma virus [commonly called genital warts] can lead to reproductive cancers and infertility. More ominously, *AIDS has become the sixth-leading cause of death during adolescent years*" (Georgia East, "Conference Focuses on Teen Sex, Dangers," *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, Nov. 17, 2002).

Where is this sexual activity occurring? Why, at home, believe it or not. More than half of teens who engage in sex did so in their own homes. Another 12 percent were at a friend's house. You might suspect that these sin scenes occur after school in homes without parents, but that's not the case. They take place at times when parents are likely home—between 6 p.m. and 7 a.m. ("Study:

Teens Most Likely to Have Sex at Home,” TheOmahaChannel.com, Sept. 26, 2002.)

For lack of the right foundation

How did our society get here? Reformers and revolutionaries wanted to change perceived wrongs in male-female interactions. Each group went after change from a different point of view—some to promote radical feminism, some to make money from changing trends and some to sincerely make needed corrections. Why did it go so wrong, putting our teens at such terrible risk?

In a society that gingerly steps around the reality of an identifiable God, people did not base their agenda for change on the right foundation. As noted, the godly foundation is viewing sexual attraction in the context of drawing males and females together in friendships, then dating relationships, then marriage and then families. Where is sex in this picture? It comes in marriage and not before.

Teasing and pushing 12-year-old girls and boys into sexual thinking, wrapping the package as “promoting womanhood” or as “entertainment” or “correcting wrongs done by men” is so irresponsible as to amount to abuse in this author’s opinion.

How difficult it is for teens to think clearly about this powerful topic when the world around them is in revolution about it. The sensuality of the Britney Spears of today is worlds away from the sexual attractiveness/friendship/dating/marriage/family at a mature age of God’s design.

Tabi Upton, quoted earlier, tells the story of a 15-year-old girl she counseled. The girl saw and chose the “hot” way of life portrayed by MTV videos, movies, TV and the pop culture. She cast herself in the role of a tough vixen and had sex with several guys. Is she on the road to a fulfilling, happy life? No, she has an STD, and she is pregnant. She’s “relatively certain” that she can narrow down who the father is to one of two guys. This is not a pretty picture—but it is reality.

Take a look at the top teen idols, young people. Do you remember the early pictures of them when they first hit

the entertainment scene? They were sweet, innocent and clean looking. Now, compare how they appear to look now—arrogant, hard and angry. Are they models for the rest of your life or a tease for a temporary good time that leads to much pain and suffering?

Not all teens buy into the new sex revolution. When asked by a father why she did not have posters of the latest teen idol on her bedroom wall, one intelligent, attractive and athletic teenage girl replied indignantly, “I wouldn’t put pictures of that slut in my room!” More power to clear-thinking teens like her!

Teens help themselves by seeking God and His way of life. It’s enriching, wholesome and happy.

Parents can help their teens by being aware of the new sexual revolution. Who are your children’s models, their heroes or heroines? Whose posters are on their bedroom walls? What are the values of their friends and their friends’ parents?

Take stock of your own values. Do you know there is a God? Do you know how He expects you to live? Do you know how to communicate with Him? Do you realize that He cares about you and your family? Do you respond to His expectations responsibly? (Please request our free booklet *Making Life Work* for guidelines on dating, marriage and your relationship with God.)

When the answer to all these questions is yes, then transmit these values to your children. Studies show that teens often do not know what their parents think on these incredibly important issues. They don’t know if you don’t tell them.

Teens specifically need to hear what their parents think about the sexual revolution. Perhaps without realizing it, do you promote the idea of sex for the sake of sex, disconnected from warmth, love and health? Or, do you promote sex only within marriage, preceded by wholesome friendships and dating?

There are only two choices, but there are so many ramifications to both. Will it be God—or gaudy? We have a choice. God appeals to us all: “I have set before you life or death, blessing or curse. Oh, that you would choose life; that you *and your children* might live!” (Deuteronomy 30:19, The Living Bible paraphrase). ❖

“FIRE,” (Continued from page 16)

president publicly chastised him; some Democrats called for his ouster; and eventually some of his Republican colleagues fled their leader, striving to distance themselves from the perceived odious comments. Lott had no other course but to resign as majority leader.

This tragic episode is far too important as a teaching tool to melt away in the recesses of our mind. Words are the sparks that light the fires of biblical episodes, fuel the emotions of current dilemmas in world news and, to a great degree, enflame prophetic events yet ahead. Words are what convey Adam’s folly when he sheepishly replies to his Maker, “I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself” (Genesis 3:10). Words make up Cain’s weak-spined retort, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9). Words coupled with actions make up the prophesied arrogance of “the man of sin” of 2 Thessalonians 2:3-5. Imagine! A human being who will proclaim himself as God.

Dynamite in our dentures?

Yes, what we say and how we say it says a lot about us. Even when we don’t think anyone is listening or taking us seriously—like a birthday toast or a chat in a hallway or a joke in a locker room. And, yes, it can change the course of history of a nation, a church or a family.

Over 800 years ago, Henry II of England fell into a verbal rage because of his perceived conflict with Thomas Becket, the archbishop of Canterbury, over the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical courts. King Henry raged, “What a pack of fools and cowards I have nourished in my house, that not one of them will avenge me of this turbulent priest.”

What did he mean by this? It seemed plain and clear. At least to four men within earshot who took it as license to slay the archbishop right on the steps of his cathedral. Others perceived it meant more aggressive council action to wrest power from the archbishop. But it was too late! The spoken word had gone out. Henry II would go on his own apology tour from castle to castle and abbey to abbey and make all the ample penance he could for his one time closest associate. But one man would never have a chance to hear “I’m sorry.” Who was that? Thomas Becket!

So where do we personally go from here? Our parents told us over and over again to “think before you speak.” Yet so often we recklessly utter our words in the sequence of “fire, ready, aim.” We would never carelessly shoot off a firearm without the sequential thought of “ready, aim, fire.” Yet how often do we just shoot off our mouths with the live ammo of hurtful words with damaging results? It’s almost as if we have dynamite in our dentures! So what do you and I gain from the current sad episode of “this is what I really meant to say”?

Your heart has a shadow

Most importantly, we need to firmly grasp that our tongue is tied to our heart. They are tightly woven in a knot. As your body has a shadow, so the heart has a tongue. Both travel together. Wherever your heart is headed, you can be assured your tongue isn’t too far behind. So it is wise to contemplate the travel plans of your life for, as Christ plainly stated in Matthew 12:34, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”

Yes, at times we speak before we think, and at other times, we speak exactly what we are thinking! That’s when it can get scary. Sometimes we say “silence is golden,” but let’s get real—it is no substitute for the wise use of speech. Holding your tongue or transforming your heart because you are thoughtful and caring are two very different values with two distinct destinations. I’ll give you a hint. One will last only so long, and ultimately send you back on the apology circuit. Hmm?

It’s good to remember that so often we can speak too quickly and be too slow in forgiving. People who live in “glass houses” love—and yes, I do mean love—to keep people sweltering in the mud hovel of their own mistakes. Oh, how easy it is to condemn others when they are dangling on the ropes. In John 8:7 Christ’s words are important: “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” Not once did Christ excuse the sin, but He asked for those who witnessed the sin to undergo serious self-examination of their own lives. Not once did Christ excuse the sin, but He chose to forgive the sinner.

Hmm? For those who still choose to fancy themselves living in “glass houses,” a suggestion—be careful! Is Trent Lott a

racist in 2003? I don’t think so. And I don’t condemn him. But I do think he made an incredibly foolish and distasteful comment that revealed to him and all of us that we have some distance yet to travel to understand the wounds and sensitivities created by our common past.

What wounds? Shakespeare said it best when he stated, “He jests at scars that never felt the wounds.” What wounds? Just go to an American history book and

use words correctly the first time. Isaiah prophetically speaks of His coming rule over all the earth as, “The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel” (Isaiah 11:2). Oh, to have such leadership not based on election by men, but selection by God. Someone like “the Word” who will speak with prudence, comfort and unifying words that bring together all people.



Reuters/Kevin Lamarque

The small flicker on the media radar screen swiftly became a blaze that would engulf Trent Lott. Did he simply trip over his words?

start by looking in the index for “Jim Crow laws.”

Let’s remember that getting the “art of apology” down to a fine science is no substitute for speaking correctly the first time around with truth, love and maturity. We are indeed known by our words, and our words know us, for our words are us. We own them, so it’s important to take inventory of ourselves before we display our wares.

Wisdom from “the Word” of wisdom

What a joy it is that we can look forward to the loving and sensitive reign of Jesus Christ upon this earth. It is of significance to understand that the Holy Scriptures reveal that one of His names is “the Word” (John 1:1). But oh, what a difference. Why? Because He knows how to

Edmund Morrison understood the reality that there are three items that do not return—a spent arrow, a spoken word and a missed opportunity. He once said, “Like stones, words are laborious and unforgiving, and the fitting of them together, like the fitting of stones, demands great patience and strength of purpose and particular skill.” Morrison’s words are but a reverberation of the wisdom of old by another man of politics—King Solomon.

It is his God-inspired utterance of Proverbs 15:28 that captures the spirit of Isaiah 30:21—of “This is the way, walk in it.” (Or should I say, “This is the way, *talk* you in it”?) It’s nearly 3,000 years old, but not a moment too late for any of us—“The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.” No “fire, ready, aim” here. God means every word of it! ♦



This is the Way

ISAIAH 30:21

by Robin Webber

Fire, Ready, Aim—Huh?

It's been said of old that "there are three items that don't come back—a spent arrow, a spoken word and a lost opportunity." Is this simply a trite phrase of days gone by or is there a powerful lesson for us to consider? You might want to call up U.S. Senator Trent Lott and ask him what he thinks. I'm sure he has a few words to share on the subject, but only now after uttering a string of 27 unforgettable words that will trail him the rest of his life.

Until recently, Lott was expected to resume the office of Senate majority leader, which is arguably the second or third most influential office in American politics. Lott had certainly come a long way from his humble beginnings as the son of a sharecropper turned shipbuilder in Pascagoula, Mississippi. But how far he had stepped out of his past remained uncertain to some of his fellow citizens, especially after comments made at a gathering for a retiring senator.

Let's rewind the tape

Let's rewind the tape so we can understand what happened. In the beginning of December there was a birthday celebration for retiring 100-year-old Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina. Many assembled dignitaries offered congratulations and sentimental thoughts regarding the Senate's senior member. But what Lott said regarding the legacy of the retiring centenarian is what would be remembered. More than birthday candles were about to be blown out that day.

Lott rose and offered what he considered a friendly and gracious reminiscence regarding the retiring senator. He began by reminding the audience that Mississippi was one of four states that had voted for Thurmond on the Dixiecrat ticket of 1948. And then the inflammatory 27 words would follow as

Lott further embellished, "We're proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over all these years either."

The meaning of "problems" and "followed our lead" were left to the imagination and interpretation of the hearer. "Problems?" What problems? And where would such a vote for Thurmond have led if more states had "followed our lead"? What political platform was Thurmond promoting on the heels of World War II?

Let's understand the times. America was still a politically and institutionally segregated society. Black servicemen returning from Europe, who had helped free the world from tyranny, now had to go back to using restricted restrooms and drinking fountains, sitting on seats at the back of the bus, sitting on the second floor of movie houses and being challenged as they went to vote. Strom Thurmond at that time was running on a "States' Rights" platform that endorsed the status quo of enforced racial segregation. Was Lott suggesting that not having this system currently in place was somehow a "problem"? Was his head and heart stuck in 1948 or 2002?

Groping in verbal quicksand

What started as a small flicker on the media radar screen swiftly became a blaze that would engulf Lott. Did he really mean it? Did he simply trip over his words? Or did he mean something else? Did he put his foot in his mouth or had he swallowed his whole leg? Would people accept the response of "this is what I really meant to say"? Was there any way back? Should he come back? He went on what might literally be called an "apology tour." But the damage was done. The

(See "FIRE," page 14)