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Could *The Passion of the Christ* Lead to Religious Revival?

Whatever you think of the movie, Mel Gibson's film on the last 12 hours of Christ's life is having a universal impact. Many people in today's world have little knowledge of the Bible. Could this movie help fill the gap and turn people to Jesus Christ?

by Melvin Rhodes

Perception is reality. And for better or worse, television and movies are the source of most people's perception of reality.

With this in mind, Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* will, for most people around the world, be the extent of their exposure to the Gospels and the account of the last 12 hours of Christ's life leading to the crucifixion.

Whatever you may feel about the movie, one thing is certain: One man, in one year, with his own money, has done more to preach the gospel (as he understands it) than many churches dedicated to preaching the gospel as their primary reason for existence.

For all the controversy, one fact remains indisputable—this movie will be watched by hundreds of millions of people around the world, even those in countries where Christianity is forbidden. Satellite TV brings international programming into some of the most primitive parts of the earth and movie channels are the most popular viewing. A few months from now, *The Passion of the Christ* will be showing on those movie channels.

What will this lead to? That's an open question. No movie in recent history has impacted people so deeply on a spiritual level.

Many may fault Gibson's movie for some of its detail. His devout and tradi-



Mel Gibson discusses his movie on The Tonight Show Feb. 26

tionist Catholicism is evident in the movie's emphasis on seeing the crucifixion of Jesus through His mother Mary's eyes. It can also be seen in the prolonged, harrowing scenes of whipping and scourging, followed by a much briefer period of suffering on the cross.

Many fear a rise in anti-Semitic feelings as a direct result of this powerful movie. Some of the Jewish religious leaders felt threatened by Jesus and wanted Him killed. As for myself, I was struck by the sadism and barbarity of the Roman soldiers. When Pontius Pilate "washed his

(See "PASSION," page 3)

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"Whom heaven must receive until the times of

Restoration

of all things ... ACTS 3:21

Coming Together?

As the articles for this month's issue came to my computer, it became evident there was a thread running through them dealing with the enlargement of the European Union this May. The current union of 15 nations will see its largest single expansion when it adds 10 nations. The size of this union will be 450 million people, stretching from the Atlantic to the borders of Russia. It will be the largest political and economic union on the Continent since the days of the Roman Empire.

Many feel the EU is a sterling example of global "conflict resolution." For centuries the struggles of individual nations on the Continent resulted in wars that ravaged its people and lands and at times impacted the whole world. Now, 25 nations are coming together to form a union, which many hope will forever end the conflict.

The sheer size of this union will eventually cause it to assert its leadership in the world. Already the euro is challenging the U.S. dollar as the world's reserve currency. What will this mean to America's superpower status?

Many see this emerging giant's potential to supplant America's current role. Columnist Andrew Sullivan wrote that Europe's "rationale—now and for a long time—has been precisely to regain global power for Europe, lost in two world wars and the American century. If the European Union can achieve this, if it can slowly absorb its member states into a uniform and vast new entity, then it will represent a real challenge to U.S. influence in Africa, the Middle East, and every major international institution" (*The New Republic*, June 16, 2003).

Will this coming together, this attempt to resolve age-old conflicts, result in lasting peace? Bible prophecy, as quoted in this issue, shows that this union, in its final form, will be like "iron mixed with miry clay"—a mixture ultimately lacking in cohesion. It will survive only a short time and will help precipitate the crisis at the close of this age. By the time America and the world awake to this fact, it will be too late.

Meanwhile, in Iraq we see another "coming together." A governing coalition of clerics and civil administrators has signed a draft constitution, thereby taking a major step in rebuilding the country. Sadly, there are those who oppose this attempt at democratization and continue to wage guerrilla warfare against these efforts. Regular bombings and shootings attempt to disrupt this fragile state and plunge it back into the dark abyss of dictatorship. In this volatile region, peace continues to be elusive.

The Bible shows us that human efforts to come together without God will eventually end in failure. There may be temporary periods of calm and peace, but the reality of human nature and self-interest will eventually assert itself. Without God in the picture, it will end in human futility. Psalm 2 asks, "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed" (verses 1-2).

God's Anointed, Jesus Christ, is the key. Isaiah's prophecy tells us the only circumstances by which the world will be brought together to form the perfect union. After Christ's return, "Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3).

Only when the nations of the world unite under the direction and will of God will we finally see the restoration of all things. —Darris McNeely

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“PASSION,” (Continued from page 1)

hands” of Him, regular Roman troops did the rest.

Roman Empire foretold by Daniel

In Bible prophecy the Roman Empire is the fourth beast of Daniel chapter 7. Centuries before the time of Jesus, Daniel’s prophetic book described this coming empire accurately as “dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong . . . [with] huge iron teeth [a great militaristic and cruel power]” (Daniel 7:7).

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown’s *Commentary* adds this observation: “Whereas the three former kingdoms were designated respectively, as a lion, bear and leopard, no particular beast is specified as the image of the fourth; for Rome is so terrible as to be not describable by any one, but combines in itself all that we can imagine inexpressibly fierce in all beasts.”

What is particularly frightening for us today is that Bible prophecy shows that this fourth beast is to be resurrected and will again have its despotic, cruel and oppressive way over other nations, albeit temporarily. Just two verses later we see this empire replaced by the promised Kingdom of God (Daniel 7:9).

Daniel 2:44 describes this more clearly: “And in the days of *these kings* the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.” What kings?

Note Revelation chapter 17, which talks of “ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings” (Revelation 17:12-14).

Earlier in the chapter we read: “The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition [destruction]. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel . . . when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is” (verse 8).

Revelation, chapter 13, adds to our understanding of this “beast that was, and is not, and yet is.”

Here we see that one head of “the beast” appears to have been “mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed” (verse 3).

We also see that there is a religious connection to this “beast,” which has “on his heads a blasphemous name” (verse 1). This leader “opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints [the true followers of God] and to overcome them” (verses 6-7). Note especially the words at the end of verse 7: “And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue and nation.”

“The image of the beast”

Further in the chapter, the religious element is referred to as “the image of the beast” (verse 15). If the Roman Empire was “the beast,” then what is *the image*?

An image is “a representation of a person or thing . . . a copy” (*Clarke’s Dictionary*, 1982). What then, is the image of the Roman Empire?

British historian Paul Johnson put it well: “The Church was the continuation of

This movie may go a long way toward turning people to Jesus Christ. The question is, which Christ?

the Empire . . . Politics and religion were inseparable” (*The Offshore Islanders*, 1972, p. 49). There is a universal, powerful church connected to the political system.

You see this clearly when you visit the ancient Roman city of York, in the north of England. Its famous minster (cathedral) is almost 1,000 years old. Excavations show that it was built on what was originally the Roman military headquarters. It was here that Constantine, who would be the first Catholic emperor of Rome, was proclaimed emperor in A.D. 306.

“The Roman Church still spoke for the Empire” (ibid., p. 57).

After the fall of the Western Empire in A.D. 476, the Roman Church simply took over the responsibility of administering the empire. Paul Johnson explains:

“Though the administrative center of the Empire had been transferred to Byzantium, the state religion was still conducted from Rome. Already indeed its chain of command, and its contact with outlying regions such as Britain, were maintained in a more regular fashion than

the political and military functions of the Empire. Christianity still had a working international infrastructure. This religion, by its very nature, was centralized, universalist, authoritarian and anti-regional. It was run by a disciplined priestly caste, commanded by bishops based on the imperial urban centres, under the ultimate authority of the Bishop of Rome itself, the spiritual voice of the western Empire. Its doctrines were absolutist, preaching unthinking submission to divine authority: the Emperor and his high priest, the Bishop of Rome, in this world, and a unitary god, who appointed the Emperor, in the next” (ibid., pp. 29-30).

However, this church was not the true Church of God established by Jesus Christ. That church virtually disappeared from history by the time of the early fourth century, when the newly converted Roman Emperor Constantine declared Sunday as the empire’s day of worship. He also made Easter Sunday the official annual commemoration of the death and resurrection of Jesus, thereby discriminating against those who kept the biblical Sabbath and the New Testament Passover. Intense persecution of God’s true followers continued unabated, just as prophesied.

(The true Church wasn’t completely extinguished, fulfilling Christ’s promise of Matthew 16:18 that it would never die out. You can still find it today. Request *The Church Jesus Built* to learn how.)

This false religious system was the most powerful institution in the Western world for well over a thousand years. Only the Protestant Reformation and the ascendancy of the English-speaking peoples, the descendants of the biblical tribe of Joseph, thwarted its power.

But the Bible shows this false religious system, together with the political system which is “the beast,” will rise again. “And those who dwell on the earth will marvel . . . when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is” (Revelation 17:8). The political system may not be in full existence at this time, but the “image” is still there and the full “beast” power will return once more to deceive the whole world (Revelation 12:9; 13:8).

Will the movie lead to the prophesied religious revival?

For Bible prophecy to be fulfilled, (See “PASSION,” page 14)

Who Will Lead the New Europe?

Few qualities in human affairs are more important than competent, capable leadership. With 10 nations joining the European Union (EU) on May 1, which nation or nations will exercise the most control, for good or bad? And even more importantly, who will govern Europe at the close of this age of man?

by John Ross Schroeder

During key periods of the 20th century, ruthless dictators like Hitler and Mussolini dominated substantial regions of Europe. Twice in that troubled century, world wars were centered on European soil, bathing it in blood.

The political, geographical and even religious spin-offs still have their deep effects on the nations of Europe. At least in part, the creation of the European Union itself has its roots in the deepest desire to prevent Teutonic control from ever surfacing on the continent again.

The implications of troubling newspaper headlines, such as, “The Frontier Moves East, With Germany at Europe’s Center,” send a historic message to other European nations (*International Herald Tribune*, March 2, 2004, emphasis added).

Vying for EU leadership

Julia Harvey-Brewer, political editor of *The Sunday Express*, minced no words in boldly expressing the paper’s editorial point of view. “Now is the time for Britain to muscle in and seize control. The arrival of 10 new member states on May 1 will see the EU grow to a vast empire. Yet their arrival offers Britain a unique opportunity to rip down the existing EU structure and to rebuild it in our own image, and more importantly, in our own national interest” (Feb. 22, 2004).

Recently British Prime Minister Tony Blair, French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder met in Berlin for very controversial trilateral talks. Despite some French objections, most observers concluded that the United Kingdom had at last entered the coveted European leadership circle.

This is no mean achievement. As veteran British journalist Ambrose Evans-Pritchard put it: “For the past 40 years the Franco-German motor has driven European integration, shaping every policy from farming and fishing to monetary union . . . Yesterday was the moment when the Franco-German duo—rocked by doubts and pre-

siding over two of Europe’s most sickly economies—accepted that they are too weak to keep control of an EU preparing to expand to 25 countries without Britain’s clout.

“For Tony Blair it was evidence that Britain can play in Europe’s top league and perhaps regain its historic role as a balancing power” (*The Daily Telegraph*, Feb. 19, 2004). The media language used to describe this major shift in the European power equation has been stark to the point of rudeness. “Blair butts in on old Europe,” said *The Telegraph*.

The Polish factor

However, the political editor of *The Sunday Express* considers that “the new [Eastern European] states are our allies against France and Germany.” She means if Britain plays its cards right, it can reshape the European Union and rid it of its federalist and superstate ambitions.

After all, Poland, only a budding new state, has already played a major role in delaying the adoption of a new European constitution, if only temporarily. The plucky Poles have displayed every intention of demanding a significant leadership role in the new Europe. Warsaw is by far the most vocal of the eight Eastern European nations joining the EU, already showing signs of becoming their spokesman. Poland is the largest of the new member states, both in area and population.

Yet as noted *Times* columnist and its former editor, William Rees-Mogg, observed: “We cannot leave it to Poland to rescue us twice from this Euro monster” (Dec. 15, 2003). He was also thinking of the historic Polish role in helping motivate Britain to finally declare war against Hitler in 1939. But mostly he was writing in reference to the at least temporary demise of the European draft constitution, which, in its inevitable effects, “would have destroyed the democracy of Europe.”

The stark language Mr. Rees-Mogg used clearly shows his concern about the general direc-

At least in part, the creation of the European Union itself has its roots in the deepest desire to prevent Teutonic control from ever surfacing on the continent again.

tion of the European Union. He titled his *Times* article “Dracula Is in His Coffin, but We’re Still Not Safe.” He is a realist, aptly concluding the feature piece with the declaration: “Bureaucrats never give up; we need a reliable stake to put through Dracula’s heart . . . Next time we cannot leave it to the Poles.”

Leadership and the politics of enlargement

Much has been written in the British press about the politics of enlargement of the European Union. Clearly Russia is very nervous about having several of the former Soviet Union’s satellite nations—especially the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania—join the European Union. Russia sees them as potential purveyors of Teutonic expansion and influence.

The Eastern European nations seek a power shift. Note the following *Time* magazine report on the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland: “Amid a mood of cautious optimism and transatlantic cooperation, many sessions were marked by small signs of tension *over the question of who is driving Europe*. At one lunch, the leader of an EU member-state-to-be bristled when a panelist referred to Britain, France and Germany as the leaders of European policy” (Atlantic Edition, Feb. 2, 2004, emphasis added).

Clearly certain smaller states, mostly but not all in the East, want Germany and France to share power as the European Union moves into the future. Even Daniel Gros, director of the Centre for European Policy Studies in Brussels, said, “Germany and France no longer have the moral high ground.” The principal reasons are divisive policies over Iraq and divergent views on state intervention. The *Time* feature article concluded with the observation, “If Germany and France want to stay at the head of the pack now, they’ll need to turn their idea of a ‘core Europe back into a motor.’”

Is a United States of Europe still feasible?

As the European Union’s borders move eastwards, is it now impossible to

conceive of a federal, superstate Europe? Some statesmen like Václav Havel, former president of the Czech Republic (a leader who spent time in prison because of his courageous opposition to Russian Communist domination of his country), are thinking in that direction.

He wrote: “All earlier expansions brought about a shift in the EU, but the current one will have a far more fundamental impact, both on the way the union works and on its policy priorities. Expansion eastwards amounts to a final break with the founding fathers’ vision of a homogeneous ‘United States of Europe’” (*The World in 2004*, published by *The Economist*, p. 44).

Set against this view are the so-called core countries of France and Germany. Stephen Castle reported from Brussels for *The Independent*: “A multi-speed Europe with France and Germany at its core appeared possible last night, as Paris and Berlin vowed to press for closer integration despite the collapse of talks on the European Constitution. A group of ‘core’ countries is ready to sign a declaration supporting the constitutional text drawn by the former French President, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, which failed to win

approval at the acrimonious Brussels summit.

“Four of the EU’s six founder members—France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg—have lined up behind the declaration and efforts are under way to bring the other two founders, Italy and the Netherlands, on board” (Dec. 18, 2003).

Although adding 10 new members to the union will inevitably slow down the drive for a federal superstate, an understanding of both history and biblical prophecy tells us that it will eventually happen. According to Revelation 17:12-13, 10 kings or leaders will receive power, and give that power (for a short time) to the Beast. How many nations will be involved is yet to be seen.

The weight of European history

Not so long ago American President George W. Bush invited Romano Prodi, president of the European Commission, to the White House for lunch. Mr. Prodi pointed out to Mr. Bush that in 2004, “The EU would have 450 million citizens and its territory would stretch from the Atlantic to the borders of Russia” (*The Economist*, Jan. 3, 2004).

“Sounds like the Roman Empire, Romano,” came the quick rejoinder. The

Enlargement of European Union to Ensure Lasting Peace?

“A new era is dawning for the European Union. Ten new member states will join the union on 1 May, 2004, thereby bringing the post-war division of Europe to a peaceful conclusion. Enlargement lays the foundation for lasting peace, stability and prosperity for future generations. It is an inclusive and irreversible process” (*Enlargement of the European Union*, a European Commission document, 2003, p. 1).

These are the bold pronouncements of Günter Verheugen, member of the European Commission responsible for enlargement. Many of his contemporaries would agree with him. French historians also tend to link European unity with peace. One spoke of “the stable society created by Charlemagne.”

But as *The Economist* observed: “British historians are much less likely than their French counterparts to assume that European unity is necessarily synonymous with peace and cultural progress” (Jan. 3, 2004).

Only the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, can bring real peace to this war-weary world (Isaiah 9:6-7). Few regions have sustained more wars than Europe. Only divine intervention on a massive scale will turn the European continent and the entire world around and bless it with universal peace and prosperity.

The United Church of God provides *World News and Prophecy (WNP)* as an educational service for interested persons. The purpose of *WNP* is to help readers discern the times and increase their awareness and understanding of current events in the light of Bible prophecy. Although the staff strives for truth and accuracy in its reporting, analysis and Bible commentary, *WNP* is not a doctrinal publication. Articles do undergo both an editorial and a review process.

American president obviously grasps a very serious point. *The Economist* feature article continued: “The drive for ‘European Unity’ which will proceed further this year when the EU’s membership expands to 25 countries, *has deep historical origins. Indeed they do stretch back to the dissolution of the Roman Empire*” (emphasis added).

Interestingly enough, in A.D. 800, several centuries after the decline and fall of the original Roman Empire, the pope crowned Charlemagne in Rome as emperor. His political empire stretched across the map from the Pyrenees Mountains (separating France and Spain) to the Danube River—and from Hamburg in the north to Sicily in the south of Europe.

Translated from the Latin into English, Charlemagne’s imperial seal read: “The Renewal of the Roman Empire.”

Much later Hitler spoke of a 1,000-year reich with Germany at the helm of Europe. In 1933 his contemporary, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, predicted that “Europe may once again grasp the helm of world civilization if it can develop a modicum of political unity.” The dream of a united Holy Roman Empire has gripped many European leaders, both good and bad, throughout the centuries.

Remember that the Bible is the most important and far-reaching book of all. It gives mankind an overall perspective of past events that no history book can. Jesus Christ and His apostles entered the world

scene in the heyday of the Roman Empire. Even most of Britain had been invaded and conquered by Roman armies. The biblical books of Daniel and Revelation deal with the Roman Empire and its revivals—both historically and prophetically.

Europe in Bible prophecy

One doubts if any of the current crop of leaders of Europe envision the type of leadership that will eventually emerge within the general territory of the old Roman Empire. Certainly when Valéry Giscard D’Estaing urges other leaders to “dream of Europe,” he is not thinking of the troubling prophecies in the book of Revelation.

But the Bible speaks frankly of a two-pronged future leadership along both political and religious lines. It uses the stark terms of “beast” and “false prophet” to describe the true nature of two charismatic individuals who will dominate an end-time dictatorial reign—virtually holding the populace of the whole world in its grip. It will pale the brutality of the Axis powers of World War II into insignificance.

The magnetic personality of “the beast” will be so powerful that 10 other national leaders will voluntarily give their considerable power to this ruthless political dictator for a short time in future history. Even the apostle John “wondered” when Christ’s angel showed him a preview of this incredible spectacle in vision.

These end-time events are scheduled to take place in the years just before the second coming of Christ ushers in the glorious reign of God on earth—bringing humankind 1,000 years of peace, plenty and prosperity.

But in the meantime, you cannot afford to neglect reading the books of Daniel and Revelation. Properly put together, they reveal the future course of events in both Europe and the Middle East, the principal geographic areas where Bible prophecy will be fulfilled.

In order to understand the vital historical background as well as the prophetic events to take place in the future, please request our free brochures entitled *The Book of Revelation Unveiled, You Can Understand Bible Prophecy, The Middle East in Bible Prophecy and Are We Living in the Time of the End?* ❖



Charlemagne

Photo © 2004 www.photos.com

Member States of the European Union

State	Population in Millions	Members in Euro Parliament
<i>Initial countries that joined in 1957</i>		
1) Belgium	10.2	24
2) France	59.0	78
3) Germany (originally West)	82.0	99
4) Italy	57.6	78
5) Luxembourg	0.4	6
6) Holland	15.8	27
<i>Joined in 1973</i>		
7) Denmark	5.3	14
8) Irish Republic	3.7	13
9) Britain	58.3	78
<i>Joined in 1981</i>		
10) Greece	10.5	24
<i>Joined in 1986</i>		
11) Portugal	10.0	24
12) Spain	39.4	54
<i>Joined in 1995</i>		
13) Austria	8.1	18
14) Finland	5.2	14
15) Sweden	8.9	19
<i>Scheduled to join in May 2004</i>		
16) Cyprus	0.8	6
17) Czech Republic	10.3	24
18) Estonia	1.4	6
19) Hungary	10.1	24
20) Latvia	2.4	9
21) Lithuania	3.7	13
22) Malta	0.4	5
23) Poland	38.7	54
24) Slovak Republic	5.4	14
25) Slovenia	2.0	7

Source: United Kingdom Office of the European Parliament

Understanding Al Jazeera

Would it surprise you to learn that Al Jazeera is highly controversial in the Arab world? Is this new type of Arab media a threat to the peace and stability of the Middle East? Is it a threat to the West? Read on to understand what Al Jazeera is and what it can do.

by Cecil Maranville

Like most Westerners, I became aware of Al Jazeera during the Iraq War of 2003. I knew it was an Arab news service that reported on the war to Arab peoples throughout the region. Perhaps you first became aware of it with many others when Al Jazeera shocked the Western world by repeatedly displaying graphic pictures of dead Coalition soldiers. Its coverage often seemed unfavorable to the Coalition.

Not all of their reports put the West in a bad light. Early in the war, Al Jazeera correspondents had the advantage of being able to enter any Iraqi city or village, whereas the Western press pool received its briefings from the Coalition's Central Command in Qatar. At one point when Western journalists' reports talked of a possible uprising in Basra, Al Jazeera's correspondent reported from inside the city that everything was calm.

Al Jazeera describes itself as balanced, but its war coverage appeared weighted toward Saddam Hussein and the Baathist Party. A postwar scandal did not help. In May of 2003, *The Sunday Times* (London) reported that Hussein's intelligence agency had successfully recruited the director-general of Al Jazeera, Mohammed Jassem al-Ali, along with two other employees. Although unproven, the allegations forced al-Ali to resign his position and reinforced the suspicion that the satellite television and Internet news service was anything but balanced.

Later in the summer, when Al Jazeera ran video clips and audio recordings from Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders, its reputation in the West sank even lower. And in the fall, Spanish antiterror police charged Al Jazeera's top war correspondent, Tayseer Allouni (also spelled Taysir Alouni) with being connected with al-Qaeda.

Shortly after that, Iraq's Governing Council (IGC) banned Al Jazeera (and Saudi Arabian Al Arabiya) from covering its activities, as well as from official press conferences. Both those organizations were charged with "giving too much prominence to anti-US attacks, and of providing a forum for backers of ousted president Saddam Hussein" (AFP, "Al-Jazeera Banned From Iraq," Sept. 24, 2003). Of course, this action was largely symbolic, for the IGC couldn't "ban" the satellite

television-Internet news from broadcasting.

All of this certainly serves to paint a negative picture about the Al Jazeera organization in the minds of Westerners. But is that view a true one?

Enemy of the West?

Is Arab media the enemy of the West? In his editorial of Jan. 18, 2004, *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman represented Al Jazeera and the Internet as formidable forces that he believes will shape the future of the Middle East in general and Arab-Israeli relations in particular. Friedman urged the American government to tell Israel to get out of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip ASAP. He cited two reasons.

The first was the Arab nations' awakening to "globalization, modernization and liberalization." Before the Arab Muslim states come up to speed in these areas, they will go through a period of "unstable and at times humiliating catch-up," according to Friedman.

His second reason was divided into three parts: (a) a massive Arab population explosion underway, which oil revenues can no longer support; (b) worst-ever violence between Israelis and Palestinians; and (c) the dramatic increase in Arab media. The latter, says Friedman, is pouring into the heads of young Muslims the idea that the biggest threat to their future is "J.I.A.—'Jews, Israel and America.'"

Does Al Jazeera have the power to shape world politics? Could it truly affect the future of the Middle East and therefore that of the entire world?

When God gave the prophet Daniel a series of visions about "world politics," he did not fully understand their meaning. When Daniel asked for an explanation, God told him, "Go your way, Daniel [that is, go on about your business], for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end" (Daniel 12:9, Revised Standard Version).

In the same context, God told Daniel to "shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase" (Daniel 12:4). This encapsulates today's passing of information with ease and speed—and at minimal expense—through the Internet and via satellite television.

Is Al Jazeera good or evil? Will it, along with other Arab media, be a major player in the shaping of events in this pivotal region?

The New Revised Standard Version offers a different nuance of the last part of Daniel 12:4: “Many shall be running back and forth, and *evil* shall increase” (emphasis added).

A lesson from the Garden

Any knowledge can be used for good or for evil, including “the news.” It’s interesting that a contingent of Coalition forces in Iraq is based at Camp Eden, so named because it’s traditionally believed to be the location of the Garden of Eden. Personally, I believe Eden was in a different locale. Regardless, what took place in the real Eden has a direct bearing on our topic.

One of the trees in the biblical Garden of Eden was “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:9, 17). It symbolizes the fact that knowledge is a two-edged sword, slicing for good one way and for evil the other way.

Is Al Jazeera good or evil? Will it, along with other Arab media, be a major player in the shaping of events in this pivotal region?

Until the launch of Al Jazeera nearly eight years ago, Arab media was typically dull reporting, for every portal was tightly state-controlled. Al Jazeera came on the scene as a revolutionary and different source of news for the Arab people.

When Gulf politics drove Arabic BBC television out of business in 1996, Sheikh Hamad ben Khalifa Al-Thani, the leader of Qatar, saw an opportunity. He wanted to establish a strong identity for his tiny country in the Saudi-dominated region and personally funded the start of Al Jazeera, putting up \$140 million to finance the first five years of the channel’s operation. He recruited virtually the entire staff that formerly worked for the BBC—so the journalists of Al Jazeera aren’t newcomers by any means.

It is small by Western standards, with about 750 employees, compared with CNN’s 4,000 or NBC’s 3,300. The name “Al Jazeera” was chosen to symbolize both their location in tiny Qatar and their philosophy; it means “peninsula” or “island.”

Unpopular to Arab countries

As surprising as it might seem to Western readers, Al Jazeera has been something between a nuisance and a shock to the governments of the Arab nations! It invites guests to present controversial per-

spectives that typically challenge the conservative Islamic line. It features lively debates between people with extremely divergent views. Al Jazeera has interviewed Tony Blair, Colin Powell, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice and a number of other Western government officials, allowing them to give the West’s perspective to the Arab world.

This type of openness has been nothing less than revolutionary to the region. Because many people have access to the Internet and to satellite television, governments can do little to control the Al Jazeera phenomenon. While people in the West think of Al Jazeera as pro-Arab, it’s taking heat on its home turf for being pro-West! Arab states have variously accused it of being a front for the CIA or for the Israeli intelligence organization, Mossad. Bahrain banned Al Jazeera from covering its elections last May, because it said the station was biased toward Israel.

A recent incident illustrates how Al Jazeera manages to be provocative to both the Arab and Western worlds. Al Jazeera’s Internet cartoonist had drawn a caricature that showed the World Trade Center towers being replaced by two mammoth gasoline pumps. The White House got wind of it somehow and called the emir of Qatar immediately—in the middle of the night. The emir in turn woke Al Jazeera’s director, who pulled the cartoon. The cartoon would have angered Westerners, but the fact that the emir caved to U.S. pressure angered the Arabs.

The governments of the Gulf States are attempting to strangle or at least control Al Jazeera by banning all advertising on the station. The ban has indeed made it difficult for Al Jazeera to survive. The emir had to bail it out and extend his funding to keep it in business. In an attempt to provide competition, Saudi Arabia launched its own satellite television channel, Al-Arabiya—with slick graphics and a deep well of funds to draw upon. But it is still controlled by the Saudi royals.

The Al Jazeera phenomenon

Al Jazeera’s popularity has encouraged similar openness in other Arab media, including Abu Dhabi TV and Lebanon’s Al-Manar, which along with Al Jazeera are giving powerful voice to *dissenters* in the Arab world.

How influential is Al Jazeera? It has

grown from six-hours-per-day to around-the-clock programming, seven days a week, with an audience of 35 million Arabs. In addition to its satellite television channel, it also has both Arabic and English Web sites. (The English URL is <http://english.aljazeera.net>.) Its English Web site advertises the fact that one can now purchase “Al Jazeera Mobile,” whereby the subscriber can watch Al Jazeera television on a video cell phone.

Facts can be assembled and emphasized in many ways. Al Jazeera is not tabloid journalism or simple propaganda, but it does have an Arab bias. It refers to Palestinian suicide bombers as “martyrs.” While Arab governments aren’t happy with its reporting, the average Arab citizen is. Ian Urbina of the Asia Times Online observes: “Like it or not, Al Jazeera indeed reflects widespread sentiments in the Arab world” (“Al Jazeera: Hits, Misses and Ricochets,” www.atimes.com, Dec. 25, 2002).

The potential impact of satellite television and the Internet on the Arab world is truly difficult to fathom. But I have no doubt that what we see today is only the infant of what we will see tomorrow.

Is this burgeoning force able to influence international politics? Absolutely! It is indeed fruit from the tree of knowledge—equally capable of accomplishing great good or of marshalling the forces of war and destruction. The full picture of Bible prophecy shows that future conflict in the cauldron of the Middle East will boil over to scald the entire world, before mankind finishes writing its history. ❖

Recommended Reading

You need to understand what is prophesied to yet happen in the Middle East. Whether you realize it or not, events there are destined to affect the lives of every person on earth. Request



The Middle East in Bible Prophecy to explore the Bible teaching on this vital subject. It is provided free of charge.

Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our

Web site at
www.ucg.org

Has the Third World War Already Begun?

A provocative new book by a French journalist says today's clash of civilizations constitutes the opening phases of a devastating global conflict.

by Joel Meeker

Has the Third World War already begun? According to French journalist and geopolitical thinker Laurent Artur du Plessis, the answer is “*Oui!*” In his recent book, *La Troisième Guerre mondiale a commencé* (“The Third World War Has Begun”), published by Godefroy and not yet available in English, he details the reasons he believes the world is already in the opening phases of what will eventually become a war that will devastate the world with nuclear and biological weapons.

Though he bases his analysis on simple observation of the current world situation, many of his conclusions bear a striking similarity to elements of Bible prophecy contained in Daniel 11 and Revelation 13, among other chapters.

Artur du Plessis’ thesis is that the dominant geopolitical event now and in the near future will be the confrontation of the world’s two main civilizations: the Western democracies and radical Wahhabist Islam. In the first section of the book, he explains why this war of civilizations will continue.

One reason is quite simple: The opposing civilizations have underlying motivations that inexorably lead to conflict. The dominant value identifying Western civilization is individualism and liberty (p. 35). The opposing Islamic civilization, however, is based on a religion. He maintains that all religions have a “spirit” (in the sense of an “attitude”) about them, and the spirit of Islam is violence (p. 62), a violence used to expand its own domination by force.

The resulting tension and violence are already being felt around the world, in obvious places like the Middle East, but also between India and Pakistan, in Indonesia and multiple nations in Africa. Pakistan recently revealed itself as a nuclear power; if it fell to Islamic extremists, as Artur du Plessis believes it will, those extremists would have their fingers on the nuclear trigger.

The confrontation between these two civi-

lizations, he continues in the book’s second section, will be exacerbated by a worldwide economic crash brought about by gross misuse of borrowing (what he calls in one chapter title the “crash by overdose of credit”), especially national budget deficits, oppressive taxation and financial policies that squelch productivity and impede businesses from prospering.

While this global economic meltdown would make life very difficult in the West, it will make life in the “developing world,” including almost all Islamic countries, absolutely miserable—if not impossible. As sources of financial aid dry up in the economic famine, health infrastructures in the third world, already poor in many areas, would deteriorate even further, leading to a sharp rise in disease epidemics.

Indeed, in scriptures such as Revelation 6:5-8 and Matthew 24:7, the Bible does foretell that before the return of Jesus Christ, there will be a calamitous rise in famine and disease epidemics.

A modern caliph

The economic crisis, continues Artur du Plessis in the book’s third section, will propel radical Islamic groups to power in all countries of the Arab and non-Arab Islamic world. Artur du Plessis believes that out of the weak nation states of the Arab world will come one united Islamic movement, encompassing Arab and non-Arab Islamic nations.

He foresees a restoration of the caliphate, probably under a Turk. In Islam, a caliph is a leader having both supreme religious and temporal power over all Islamic nations. Having one such recognized supreme leader would allow for coordination of efforts by the whole of the Islamic world. He points to several Islamic extremist organizations rising in Muslim central Asia, groups such as the Uzbekistan Islamic Movement and the Hizh ul-Tahir “Liberation Party” that are actively seeking to build support in the Islamic world to reestablish the caliphate.

Artur du Plessis’ thesis is that the dominant geopolitical event now and in the near future will be the confrontation of the world’s two main civilizations: the Western democracies and radical Wahhabist Islam.

Artur du Plessis believes that it is not far-fetched to believe this could occur since “the alchemy of history suddenly propels out of anonymity exceptional people at exceptional times” (p. 235).

This rising tension between Islam and the West will also have an interesting side effect in Europe, he believes. He foresees a fervent renewal of religious sentiment and practice (p. 44). This shock of civilizations will, he thinks, propel Europe back to the Christianity of its roots.

Finally the stage will be set for a paroxysm of violence and warfare. The author foresees terror attacks against the Western democracies: chemical, biological or nuclear attacks on major ports (perhaps hiding weapons in cargo containers, whose security is very hard to guarantee); commercial airliners shot down with portable missiles; dirty bombs detonated in large cities; surprise attacks on nuclear power stations; suitcase nuclear weapons. All are within the realm of possibility and could be used by kamikazes seeking martyrdom.

Artur du Plessis concludes that the Western countries will finally use their nuclear arms as the only way to make the terrorism stop. Entire cities and even nations will be leveled. Virtually all nations in the world will be forced to take sides in this conflict. It will be the final act of a world war more devastating and horrible than any other conflagration in world history.

Interestingly, he foresees the possibility that Russia might not side with Europe, but rather with the Islamists in exchange for the possibility of some acquisitions in Europe. This would set the stage for a military conflict between Europe and Russia during the same time that Europe would be confronting the united Islamic world.

To students of Bible prophecy, much of this scenario is familiar.

Biblical parallels

Daniel 11 is a detailed prophecy about two major powers, the king of the

North and the king of the South. Most of the prophecy was accurately fulfilled in ancient times by the Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties. Part of the prophecy remains to be fulfilled at the end time. Directions of north or south in these prophecies are in relation to the city of Jerusalem, so this king would come from somewhere north of that city. Other prophecies show that at this same time there will be a final resurrection of the Roman Empire in



Europe (for more details, see our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*). This king of the North is also the powerful politico-military leader at the head of the restored Roman Empire. He is called “the beast” in Revelation 17:11-18.

Now Daniel 11:40 says, “At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack

him [the king of the North]; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind . . .” In the end time there will be a powerful military leader in Europe and another to the south of the Holy Land.

The countries generally to the south of present-day Israel include Islamic countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Yemen, Libya and Ethiopia (Ethiopia has a large Christian population, but the largest religion is still Islam). So it is very likely that the domain of the king of the South would include these areas (Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia are specifically mentioned in Daniel 11:43 as countries conquered by the king of the North after his military attack on the king of the South).

A caliph could be just the kind of leader described as the king of the South, and as we have seen, Artur du Plessis believes that a united Arab world will indeed attack Europe, using weapons of mass destruction, and that Europe will respond militarily, eventually resorting to nuclear weapons. A

nuclear or biological attack on European soil would certainly motivate a European military leader to retaliate. This is indeed what God told Daniel would happen next—that the king of the North will “come against him like a whirlwind” (verse 40).

After the northern king’s conquest of much of the Middle East, “news from the east and the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many” (Daniel 11:44). As Artur du Plessis foresees, if Russia (to “the east and the north” of the Holy Land) did indeed side with a terrorist Islamic power, it would lead to conflict between Russia and Europe.

World religion and world politics combine

Revelation 17 shows the imagery of a prostitute sitting on the blasphemous “beast” that has seven heads and 10 horns. The animals or beasts in Revelation represent governments, nations or rulers, and women represent religions (see our booklet, *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*). This prostitute represents a false religion that will, for a time, dominate the government of “the beast” that will fight against the Lamb (Jesus Christ) at His return. Again as Artur du Plessis foresees, religion will play an important role in establishing the cohesion of the coming European power.

It must be stated that Artur du Plessis’ scenario does not completely follow the future predicted by the Bible. He believes, for example, that Europe and the United States will work together during the coming world conflagration, and that the United States will come out of the future war the big winner. This is not what the Bible predicts (to learn more about this, order our free booklet, *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*).

Of course, Artur du Plessis does not understand what God has revealed through Daniel, Jesus and John. It is striking to note, however, that informed people who study the current geopolitical scene are coming to conclusions that in many ways mirror what was preserved in the Scriptures thousands of years ago. This is just another chilling indication that we are very near what the Bible calls “the time of the end.” ❖

In Brief...

World News Review

Same-Sex Marriages—Why Religion Is Losing the Debate

Have you noticed anything missing in the arguments Christian-minded people are using to oppose same-sex marriages? We hear: “For thousands of years, marriage ‘has meant’ a union between a man and a woman.” Who says so?

The answer is, God defined it. After completing His creation of mankind, God announced: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). God also told the man and the woman, the husband and the wife, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). So one of God’s purposes of marriage is for the man and the woman to have a family.

Thousands of people in the United States are unashamedly challenging this *legal* definition of marriage. We’re not speaking of the California proposition that defined marriage as between a man and woman; we aren’t referring to the statutes on the books of nearly 40 states that order marriage to be between a man and a woman; we aren’t referring to or joining the national debate over a constitutional amendment.

We’re referring to God. His Word is law.

That’s a reality that all too many Christian-minded people shy away from, and it’s failing them and their leaders in the culture war raging in America. Christian religions have long taken a “politically correct” approach toward God’s law, instead of a biblically correct one. Most have sought to “soften” the force of God’s law. In the current debate, their wrong-headed theology makes their words hollow.

Christianity has run from the law of God for so long, it cannot say with clarity what sin is. What is it? Is it doing something that hurts others? Is it going against your conscience? This approach has no form or shape. God is love. True. In love, God told the man and the woman He made how they and their children should live for their own happiness. When people fail to live by those rules (God’s laws), they sin.

Breaking the law of God is sin (1 John 3:4). Many Christian teachers talk of “grace” without understanding. God’s grace is the extension of a pardon, the suspension of the death penalty. It is only common sense, as well as the teaching of the Bible, that God expects the pardoned individual to be law-abiding, submitting to His spiritual law from that point on. There is freedom in grace—freedom from the death penalty, as well as freedom and help to live life the way God wants us to live.

But it does not include the freedom to break the law of God.

Compare the law of God with the rules of a household. God’s laws are simply rules for His household. In a healthy family, parents lay down reasonable rules or boundaries out of love for their children. Just as obeying one’s parents is normal

and healthy, so obeying God’s law is spiritually healthy. Plainly, a loving and respectful child of God will live by the rules He has set for the household.

Society expects every citizen to be law-abiding. Indeed, a citizen who refuses to submit to law is a criminal! How strange that some who teach the Bible think there’s something wrong with believing that God’s children need to be law-abiding.

So long as Christians remain ignorant about God’s law, their arguments about same-sex marriage will continue to be hollow, without a center. So long as the debate before Western culture pivots on human opinions, society will drift further and further from the way God told us to live.

We are the children of the man and the woman He made in the Garden. We’re supposed to live by the rules He gave them.

Are you aware of God’s law? Do you know how it applies to you? Are you wandering in the fog of today’s Christianity’s view of law? You can’t afford to be wrong on this. Request our booklet *The Ten Commandments*.

A Passion for Ecumenism?

The Passion of the Christ continues to ignite controversy. People are debating its accuracy, whether it is anti-Semitic, if it is too violent. Yet people continue to flock to theaters to watch it. The results of one major news service poll indicated that 59 percent of people (in the United States) who intend to see the film have not yet done so. That could mean that the total box office take will rival the highest sales for any movie ever made.

Protestant pastors and leaders see the movie as a tool of evangelism. Catholic bishops and priests see the movie as a motivator to cause their members to renew their faith.

Could something else be happening? Could Protestants be warming towards Catholics and vice versa? Protestants have long thought of their denominations as a universe apart from Catholic theology and seem to be shocked—and pleased—to see that the two religious philosophies are actually in the same universe. They revolve around the same core. They believe in Christ. They believe He died for the sins of humanity. They put much stock in “the passion,” the torment and eventual execution of Christ. They focus on “the cross.”

Many in both major faith groups appear to be concluding, “We aren’t that different from each other.”

In light of this, could the most significant consequence of *The Passion of the Christ* phenomenon be an ecumenical movement? Bible prophecy indicates a coalescing of religions at the end of the age. For more information on this timely segment of prophecy, see our booklets *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.

Contributor: Cecil Maranville

Hungary Looks West—Again

What may expansion of the European Union portend? What impact could it have on the prophesied formation of a European superpower? What part will Hungary play in an expanded Europe?

by David Dobson

Ten additional nations will enter the European Union on May 1, 2004, raising its total membership to 25 countries. Another 80 million people will join the existing 370 million to create one of the world's largest economic markets. Current accession nations are Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia.

In November of 2003, I had the opportunity to spend a week in Budapest, the capital city of Hungary. The independent cities of Buda, Óbuda and Pest combined to form Budapest in 1873. Buda was the old royal city built on a bluff overlooking the Danube River, and the castle of the Hapsburg dynasty is situated there. Pest was built across the river on the plains to the east and is the location of the Hungarian Parliament Building. Óbuda (Old Buda) lay north of Buda and is the site of the ruins of the Roman city Aquincum.

Hungary's place in history

To understand Hungary's place in an expanding European Union (EU), we need to first consider its rich history. In the first century after Christ, the Roman Empire established an outpost on the west side of the Danube River that served as their provincial seat of government. From the old Roman town of Aquincum, military consuls governed the province of Pannonia. The river marked the frontier between Rome and barbarian tribes to the east. Signs of Rome's presence are abundantly evident in the ruins of buildings, amphitheaters and baths.

One morning in Budapest, I rode Metro Line #1 from downtown to Heroes' Square. This underground rail opened in 1896 and is continental Europe's oldest subway. After disembarking, I made my way up the stairs to the plaza above, and a most remarkable sight lay before me! An imposing 118-foot column named the Millennium Monument rises in the center of the square.

Construction on the column began in 1896 to commemorate the 1,000-year anniversary of the conquest of the Danube River plains by Magyar tribes. Atop the column is a statue of the archangel Gabriel, who holds the crown of St. Stephen in one hand and a Christian cross in the other, symbolizing the unification of church and state through many centuries.

Surrounding the base of the column are equestrian statues of Magyar chieftains who appeared out of the Asian steppes to occupy

the country beginning in A.D. 896. The armies of Otto the Great (later crowned Holy Roman emperor) finally stopped their marauding incursions into Europe in 955 at the Battle of Augsburg, and seven Magyar tribes returned east to settle the sparsely populated Carpathian Basin.

The identity of this people remains a mystery to historians, but their descendents inhabit Hungary to this day, calling themselves the Magyar. Their physical statures and facial features resemble those of the people of Western Europe, rather than Asia. However, the Hungarian language, called "Magyarul," is not among the family of Indo-European languages, instead having Asiatic roots.

Behind the Millennium Monument are 14 bronze statues of kings and other national heroes of Hungary, with seven on each side in a semicircular colonnade. The first statue is of King Stephen, who ruled from A.D. 1000 until 1038, and who received posthumous sainthood in 1083.

The bas-relief below the statue depicts his coronation by representatives of Pope Sylvester II, who supplied a crown blessed for the occasion. This act gave Hungary symbolic recognition as a Christian nation, and affirmed the papacy as the source of authority for the highest political office. Other statues depict men who arose later in history to lead Hungary against military forces intruding from both east and west.

Often the nation has been caught in the middle of other people's fights. In the recent past, the Soviet Union, COMECON (the Soviet-bloc trade organization) and the Warsaw Pact collapsed, and Hungary once again began looking west for allies.

Membership in the European Union

When the time came to vote, 80 percent of Hungarians eligible to vote cast ballots in favor of EU membership. They have not chosen an easy path, but many view it as their only possible path. However, joining the EU poses many challenges for the nation. Other

countries that have come into the EU have experienced price increases for goods and services while wage levels have risen slowly.

Hungarians have already experienced price increases due to a combination of several factors. Among these are excessive national spending, a high unemployment rate, large foreign investments, removal of price controls and profits going increasingly to private enterprises rather than the government. The euro is not to be adopted as the official currency until 2007, a development that will likely exacerbate this problem.

Several factors should aid Hungary's transition into the EU. For instance, Hungary rapidly transitioned to a market economy after the end of Soviet domination. The Budapest Stock Exchange began trading in 1990 and was the first such institution in post-Communist Eastern Europe. This should give Hungary an advantage as it merges with the existing EU market.

The EU should greatly benefit from Hungary's bountiful natural resources, perhaps the greatest of which is the rich, black soil of the Danube Plains that has sustained the nation for over a thousand years. The country has sizable deposits of bauxite, most often processed into aluminum. Its mines also yield coal, iron ore, copper, gold and uranium.

Immigration concerns

Perhaps the hottest topic in Europe today is immigration. The current 15 EU member countries are deeply concerned about a possible flood of immigrants from the new EU member countries and elsewhere. Industrial leaders have legitimate fears regarding any sudden influx of workers from these low-wage countries. Legislation has been proposed in several nations that would prohibit residents of former Communist countries from freely moving to EU nations for several years when EU enlargement occurs this May.

In Hungary's case, joining the EU may not mean that its citizens can immediately travel to another EU country and begin working there. The implementation of immigration policy throughout the EU remains an area of concern and development. The 2003 *Comprehensive Monitoring Report on*

Hungary's Preparations for Membership states, "For the first two years following accession, current Member States will apply national measures, or bilateral agreements, to regulate the access of workers from Hungary to their labour markets. These arrangements may continue up to a maximum of seven years." After this adjustment period, movement between Hungary and other



Bridge across the Danube River in Budapest, Hungary

EU countries will be less restricted and controlled.

The March 1, 2004, *Budapest Business Journal* interviewed Jürgen Köppen, the EU's last ambassador to Hungary (his position ends with accession), who made this statement about free movement of workers: "During the transition period, some of the old member states will maintain their restrictions. Your guess is as good as mine as to whether this will really prevent Hungarians from seeking work in Germany and Austria and elsewhere in the EU. Some people tell me that any Hungarian who wants to take up a job in Austria or Germany just does it despite the formal restrictions. So it may be just a theoretical discussion. I cannot see Hungarians flooding the EU's labor market in large numbers."

Europe's buffer zone

From the first century after Christ, Hungary has served as a buffer between East and West, and numerous battles have been waged on its soil. The

Danube River marked the border between provinces of the Roman Empire and barbarian peoples to the north and east. Much later, the Islamic Ottoman Empire expanded northwest and subjugated Budapest for nearly one and a half centuries. In 1686, Austrian imperial forces drove the Turks from Budapest and a few years later regained complete control of the country.

For hundreds of years Hungary was part of the Austrian Empire, and Hapsburg rulers during the Dual Monarchy years of 1867 to 1918 possessed the crown of St. Stephen, the official crown of the king of Hungary. The double-headed eagle is the traditional symbol of the Hapsburg royal family, the image representing Austria's geographic location in the center of Europe, ruling over lands to the east and west. Some have suggested that the double eagle also represented the union of church and state under the

Hapsburg rulers of the Holy Roman Empire.

Before World War I ended, Hungary had the same strong ties to the West. Following World War I, the victorious Allies dramatically reduced Hungary's size. The Treaty of Trianon, signed in June of 1920, forced Hungary to relinquish claim to nearly 90,000 square miles of territory and over 13 million citizens. More than 3 million Hungarians came under Romanian, Croatian, Serbian or Slavic rule.

Following World War II, the entire region fell under the shadow of Communism. With the breakup of the former Soviet empire, relations between neighboring countries have been strained many times, but as long as the rights of Magyar minority populations are respected, Hungary can remain at peace with its neighbors.

Hungary is expected to continue its role as a buffer nation—only now from the western side of the equation. The border between West and East is making a considerable leap toward the east

as the EU expands, and Hungary finds itself again placed in an uncomfortable, or even dangerous, position.

In February, a former Soviet intelligence officer was caught in Ukraine trying to smuggle 400 grams of uranium into Hungary. He said it was for dental use, but who knows the real reason?

To the east and south of Hungary lie countries that have been its enemies in the past. How will the story unfold with Hungary and Slovenia serving as the buffer between EU countries and the sometimes turbulent Balkan states?

The EU border may soon be pushed even further to the east, as negotiations with Bulgaria and Romania regarding EU membership are expected to conclude by 2007. Romania is a historic enemy of Hungary.

One extremely important question regarding future expansion is to be decided by the EU later this year: Should negotiations commence with Turkey regarding EU membership? If the EU border ultimately becomes that of Turkey, Europe's new neighbors would be the volatile nations of Syria, Iraq and Iran. Recent terrorist bombings in Istanbul may persuade the EU to stop expansion short of Turkey, making that country serve as their buffer with the Middle East.

Looking to the future

Hungary is one of many smaller countries in central Europe trying to find its place in a rapidly changing world. Much ground remains to be covered before it emerges as a member country of a prosperous and growing EU. The push toward free-market capitalism has gone too far to easily reverse. In the short term, continued high unemployment and increased cost of living are to be expected. Hungarians hope peace and prosperity lie over the horizon as they are woven into the fabric of greater Europe.

On Nov. 12, 2003, Anthony Gooch, spokesman for the European Commission Delegation to the United States, lectured at Kent State University in Ohio. Regarding the decades-old EU dream, he stated, "What has been achieved so far is nothing short of miraculous, and there is every reason to hope that the long-term effect of the new members joining will be to inject a new dynamism for the European Union for years to come. The

dream will have become reality and whilst, as always, that brings with it certain reality checks, it remains an enormous source of pride and satisfaction for all concerned. The European experiment that is only fifty years young is on the brink of its biggest transformation to date."

Students of Bible prophecy look to a final resurrection of the Holy Roman Empire on the European continent. Revelation 17:12-13 states, "The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast."

In May, the EU will consist of 25 member nations with the possibility of more joining in coming years. How will the prophecy of 10 kings be fulfilled? Perhaps some current nations will be combined. For example, the Iberian peninsula countries constituting Spain and Portugal could be considered as one and the three Benelux countries as one. Austria and Hungary were combined under the Hapsburg crown for centuries; perhaps they will be viewed as one nation.

It is significant that many of the newer member nations come from the area of Eastern Europe, the same region once occupied by the Eastern part of the Holy Roman Empire—perhaps as depicted in the prophecy of the great statue of Daniel 2. Several times in the past, one "leg" of Rome has been firmly placed in Western Europe with the other "leg" in Eastern Europe.

One way or the other—however God chooses to work it out or allows it to come together—10 "kings" will yet rise as a great final enemy of God's people. Satan will orchestrate developments and turn the purpose of Europe to his own. The end-time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation will be fulfilled!

This year, Hungary's future is firmly merging with that of greater Europe. Raymond Hill gives us a clear summary: "So, for the time being, Hungary remains in a kind of holding pattern. It knows where it wants to go. It is just not quite sure how it will get there" (*Hungary*, 1997, p. 169). Citizens of Hungary may be astonished to discover what lies in the future. ❖

"**PASSION,**" (Continued from page 3)

there must be a revival of this false religious system "with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication" (Revelation 17:2).

When the disciples asked Jesus, "What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" in Matthew 24:3, the first thing He warned them about was false religion (verse 5). He further told them not to be misled by "great signs and wonders," which could "deceive, if possible, even the elect" (verse 24).

The apostle Paul, the first-century apostle to the gentiles, warns us about this false religious system that calls itself Christian in 2 Corinthians 11:14-15: "And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."

This movie may go a long way toward turning people to Jesus Christ. The question is, which Christ? The genuine Savior—or an impostor? (Be sure to request our new booklet, *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.)

In an age of spiritual darkness, where most people live empty lives, there is a deep yearning for something to fill the yawning spiritual chasm. Lacking knowledge of the truth, most will simply turn to counterfeit Christianity. Lacking knowledge of history, few will realize that they may be unwittingly contributing to the eventual rise of the prophesied "beast" power! ❖

Recommended Reading

The book of Revelation remains mysterious to most people today, but offers great insight into the events leading up to one of the world's most momentous events—the return of Jesus Christ!



For more information, request *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*, as well as *The Church Jesus Built* and the new booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*. They are free of charge.

Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our Web site at www.ucg.org

“GOD HASN’T” (Continued from page 16)

port of their Port-au-Prince home, puts it bluntly: “What’s keeping us here is knowing that if we walked out, things would just completely fall apart.”

She knows firsthand what can occur when she and her husband go home for just two months’ leave. One boy almost died during their absence because he was reduced to eating dirt.

Reporter Dahlburg quotes U.S. embassy spokeswoman Judith Trunzo: “First we asked people to consider leaving, then we asked them to make plans for leaving, then we told them to leave!”

Susan Hill told Mr. Dahlburg, “Not a single person wanted to leave. They were crying as they left.” But the facts are that most of the larger religious organizations withdrew their missionaries and educators as the news grew worse and worse. Unlike the many missionaries who are supported by major organizations, Tom and Linda Counts remained. They support their English-language school through their own retirement account, which is monitored by a board of trustees composed of other family members. The board simply trusts their judgment. Reporter Dahlburg captures the Counts’ determination: “When we said we are going to stay, the board said, ‘Go for it!’”

“If you faint in the day of adversity”

Long ago a mission board wrote to David Livingston: “Have you found a good road to where you are in Africa? If so, we want to know how to send other men to join you.”

Livingston responded: “If you only have men who will come only if there is a good road, I do not want them. I want those who will come if there is no road at all.”

If you will allow me, let’s take Livingston’s thought a step further. What if once you get there, having blazed the road, you now know the way out as well as the way in? In other words, you know right where the emergency exit is when the fires of life break out. Some people in Haiti recently had to decide if they would head for the exit to save themselves. God asks us to figure out what we are really made of.

In Proverbs 24:10-12, we are challenged to consider: “If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small. Deliver

those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, ‘Surely we did not know this,’ does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?”

Long ago in Persia, a certain Jewess named Esther had to make a determination whether to hide behind her role as the queen of Persia, or stand up for what she was and make a difference for others about to be overrun by their enemies. Humanly, it had to be tempting to shrink away and slip out of sight into the confines of her palace.

But her cousin Mordecai reminded her: “Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:13-14).

“The good Shepherd vs. the hireling”

The Bible is plain about the fact that the people of God have never been promised reserved seating in the soft-cushion section of life. On the contrary, they have been challenged to rise to the challenges of life and follow the example of Jesus Christ as found in His own words in John 10:11-14:

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.”

It’s been said that dedication is signing your name on the bottom of a blank check and handing it over to God to fill in as it pleases Him. That’s what each of us do when we commit ourselves to follow Jesus Christ. We not only accept His death for us, but also say we will strive to live His life in us—the life of one who cares for others, in spite of what it might entail for us. That life is exactly opposite of the life of the hireling who is looking

for the closest escape route available. I think the people in Haiti that are acquainted with Susan Hill and Tom and Linda Counts know that they aren’t “hirelings,” because they are still there in the thick of the troubles.

Haiti can be a state of mind

Perhaps the bigger question is the headlines, or rather the “heart-lines” that you are making in your own life. For you see, “Haiti” can actually be a state of mind. Life can seem out of control and just as turbulent as any Port-au-Prince street scene you have viewed. Just like Haiti, it may seem as if the swirling state of affairs threatens to overwhelm you. And, right now, all you know is that you want a “one-way ticket” out of despair.

But what will you leave behind? All Linda Counts could remember is the little boy eating dirt. What will you remember? Or are you even thinking of that person—be it your mate, child, parent or good friend? Do those who need you know you are sticking with them for the long haul? And that nothing, absolutely nothing, is going to separate you from your care and concern for them?

Before you answer, allow me to acquaint you, courtesy of Dahlburg’s article, with one more person with a story. Her name is Dorothy Diehl. She is a 59-year-old former supermarket manager from Bethel, Ohio, who now distributes Creole-language Bibles and operates a mobile health clinic in the Haitian countryside. She, too, has not had any seats reserved for her in the soft-cushion seating row of life. Dahlburg reports how Diehl had to run gauntlets of armed thugs to escort a departing couple to Port-au-Prince and how her Chevrolet’s windshield was almost smashed in by youths as she left the airport.

Nothing is holding her there. She’s free to decide whether to depart. But you see, she is waiting for notification from just one more source. In her statement we can hear the echo of the millennial refrain of Isaiah 30:21, “This is the way, walk in it.” Dorothy Diehl says it this way, because her faith is bigger than her eyes: “God sent me to Haiti, and God hasn’t told me to leave.”

For her, it was for such a time as this that she came to Haiti. We, too, need to be sure we’re waiting on God’s voice. ❖



by Robin Webber

“God Hasn’t Told Me to Leave”

Right now, the little country of Haiti is on the world’s radar screen for at least a couple of weeks. Once again, this one-time financial jewel of the long-ago French Empire has had another change of government, which is about as common as the annual hurricane season.

The most impoverished nation in the western hemisphere is once again experiencing a frightening cycle of violence and destruction.

By the time you read this column, the nation of Haiti and its inhabitants may already be fading into the recesses of our minds as the bigger headlines of the American political season, a potential trade war between the European Union and America, issues over Iraq and the same-sex marriage phenomenon claim the bold type on our news pages. Awareness of Haiti’s plight will again dim for perhaps a few more years until the next volcanic eruption of spoil, greed and corruption spews from a would-be dictator.

Values that guide beyond the bullets

But I’ve got a story to tell you that can’t wait. It is a story of courage—of men and women with a calling that moves beyond common sense. This is a sense of duty based on faith toward God and devotion to those less fortunate. As I was thumbing through the front section of my Saturday newspaper, skimming over the headlines, I came upon an article that grabbed my attention. It made me ask, “What would I do?”

The article, which appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* of Feb. 28, is titled “Standing on Faith, Some U.S. Citizens Stay in Haiti.” *Times* staff writer John-Thor Dahlburg guides us beyond the bullets, fires and throngs of angry people into the rock-solid value system that allows some to stand and not run.

Before I picked up the paper that morning, I was thinking of the fate of the Haitian people. I had heard that the rebel guerrillas were slowly but surely approaching the capital of this nation of 7.5 million people. As is often the case, a state of anarchy was created. A decade ago, in my own city of Los Angeles, when much of the city exploded in riot and anarchy ruled the darkness, violence spilled over into areas thought to be previously untouchable. I remember the next day as the freeways were clogged with cars trying to make it home to safety before darkness would once again unleash lawlessness. No cars were headed into the city—only out! Mr. Dahlburg’s article speaks of people who never left the storm, and it spoke volumes to me.

Knowing why you risk loving

Dahlburg describes a political climate in which the embassies of nations have been shuttered for a week and all foreigners have been encouraged to evacuate. The U.S. embassy at the time of his report had sent all nonessential personnel away. Marines guard the premises in machine-gun nests. He then focuses our attention on what may be the largest professional base of U.S. citizens left in the country, missionaries. These are individuals emotionally tied to the people they serve and philosophically attuned to the risk they are undertaking.

Susan Hill, a Buffalo, New York, native and office manager of the largest nondenominational church in the country, put it this way: “If we leave, we are saying that our trust no longer is in our God, and the needs of the people are not important.” Linda Counts, another church aid worker, who along with her husband, Tom, runs a free English-language school in the car-

(See “**GOD HASN’T**,” page 15)