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Pride of America's Power: How Long Will It Last?

A prophecy in Leviticus 26:19 foretells a national decline in power for disobedience to God's law. First Great Britain declined in power. Will America be next?

by Darris McNeely

On July 17, 2003, British Prime Minister Tony Blair addressed the U.S. Congress. Near the end of his speech he had these words to say to, and about, America and the war on terrorism.

"I know it's hard on America, and in some small corner of this vast country, out in Nevada or Idaho or these places I've never been to, but always wanted to go... I know out there there's a guy getting on with his life, perfectly happily, minding his own business saying to you, the political leaders of this country, 'Why me? And why us? And why America?'"

"And the only answer is, 'Because destiny put you in this place in history, in this moment in time, and the task is yours to do.'"

The pinnacle of power

America stands at the pinnacle of power in today's world. No other nation comes close to matching the economic, political or cultural power of the United States. It literally strides the earth like a Goliath, doing its will in a manner that produces a lot of benefit and good for the world. In the process, it also garners a great deal of animosity and envy from other countries that resent its role and what it chooses to do.

Within the past five years America has invaded Iraq and Afghanistan, bringing about regime change. America is the only nation with the ability to airlift an army



Reuters/Jason Reed

British Prime Minister Tony Blair addresses a joint meeting of the U.S. Congress July 17, 2003, as U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney looks on.

anywhere in the world and engage forces on land, sea and air. Its ability to project power is unmatched in history.

Economically, America's consumer society is the engine that fuels the world economy. A steady stream of cargo planes fly daily out of Asia filled with products for the shelves of Wal-Mart, Target and Best Buy. Cargo ships tie up in Long Beach, California, and discharge Japanese and South Korean cars. America supplies enough demand to

(See "POWER," page 3)



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"Whom heaven must receive until the times of

Restoration

of all things ... ACTS 3:21

Who Will Bring Freedom to the Middle East?

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice last month called for the creation of a "new Middle East" out of the wreckage of the current crisis that erupted when the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers led to a confrontation between Israel and the militant group Hezbollah in Lebanon. Not long before Hamas in the Gaza area had kidnapped an Israeli soldier from his post.

A "new Middle East" will arise—but not in the way world leaders might imagine.

Most leaders agree this latest crisis has derailed any remnant of the "road map" to peace initiative. There is no viable peace plan in place now, and only the most optimistic hold on to the hopes of the Oslo peace plan begun in 1993. That plan created the Palestinian Authority, an organization that has now been eclipsed by the rise of the militant Hamas faction in this year's elections. One of Israel's greatest nightmares came to pass when Hamas, whose charter calls for the overthrow of the state of Israel, won a democratic election and came to the reins of legitimate power.

In Lebanon Hezbollah holds the largest set of minority seats within the Lebanese parliament. They, too, are dedicated to the elimination of Israel. These two groups, using democracy to further their goals of terrorism on Israel, present the gravest challenge to President George W. Bush's stated goal of promoting democracy in the Middle East. President Bush has expressed deep desire to see freedom influence the region, creating the setting for a peaceful resolution of the long conflict. To that end he has committed troops to Afghanistan and Iraq to change the regimes and install new democratic systems. Democracy has yet to defeat the totalitarian elements and secure the peace.

Some say President Bush has a naive faith in democracy. In the whole range of history, democracy is a relatively modern phenomenon. History is more the story of monarchies and totalitarian governments. The clash of events around today's world discourage faith that democracy, in whatever form, will secure the peace and freedoms of people. Students of history recall that Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany through the ballot box and within months had used the machinery of power to turn Germany into a dictatorship.

In the short term, U.S.-allied Arab states, such as Egypt and Jordan, may close down channels by which radical Islamist groups within their borders can gain power. They cannot risk the chance these groups could overthrow current governments. If this happens, don't look for America to offer much protest.

Where will a new Middle East arise? How will a lasting peace that ensures basic human freedoms be brought to the suffering masses displaced by war? In Lebanon and Israel we see the faces of people whose lives have been torn apart by bombs and killing that are ripping the fabric of their society. Innocents continue to suffer while governments pursue ineffective strategies that offer no hope for a prosperous future.

There is a crying need for a "new Middle East," but it will not come at the hands of humans. The Bible shows it will come with the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the King of Kings. Isaiah tells us, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Democracy will not vote this government into power. No peace conference will create the basis for the rule of Jesus Christ on this earth. It will come despite the best and worst of human efforts. Only then, with the restoration of the government of the Kingdom of God, will peace and freedom ring throughout the world.

—Darris McNeely



Darris McNeely

“POWER,” (Continued from page 1)

keep these economies growing at strong rates.

By importing far more goods than it exports, America has incurred a huge trade deficit resulting in a high debt. China holds a good share of America’s \$800 billion trade deficit.

Asian countries have held on to a huge stash of dollars in the last decade. This has propped up the dollar on international markets, allowing Americans to continue spending on consumer goods. The dollar is the world’s reserve currency, something that helps keep its standard of living high.

Soft power

There is another form of power, sometimes called “soft power.” It does not take the form of ships, missiles and guns. It is the vast cultural influence that America wields across the globe. American music, movies, brands and lifestyles have a wide market and influence among the world’s youth.

Last fall in Israel I observed a group of Arab youth in Tiberias, on the Sea of Galilee. In a restaurant one night I sat next to a table of young people out for a night of entertainment. I looked closer at what they were wearing and eating and smiled. They had on Nike tennis shoes and shirts and Levi jeans. They were drinking Coke and eating hamburgers and fries. It could have been a scene in any restaurant in America.

A recent article cited examples and surveys from the Muslim world that indicate not only the impact of this soft power but also the Muslim perception of moral decay in America and other Western nations.

Citing numerous examples of American cultural influence, including the reaction earlier this year of Muslims in Indonesia to the launch of a local version of *Playboy* magazine (done without nude photos), the article gave a well-known classical explanation for this power.

“Long before celluloid and pixels were invented, Plato understood that ‘those who tell the stories also rule.’ Philosophers tell us that images rule dreams, and dreams rule actions. And if music sets the mood for the multitudes, the warblings of Sinatra and Madonna are surely the muzak of the world order” (Nathan Gardels and Mike Medavoy, “The Fast-Fading Luster of the American Story,” *International Herald Tribune*, June 14, 2006).

This soft power is seeing mounting

resistance from the Asian and Muslim world, notwithstanding the present Japanese prime minister’s fascination with the music of Elvis Presley.

The article goes on to cite a German newsweekly: “There is also resistance to the mere fact of America’s overwhelming cultural dominance. Josef Joffe, the publisher-editor of the German weekly *Die Zeit*, has put it directly: ‘Between Vietnam and Iraq,

have documented the double standard of many in this segment of American society.

This is the same moral decay that the prophet Isaiah saw in Israel of old. It has returned to inhabit the modern descendants of this same people.

Notice his words: “Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have



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America’s consumer society is the engine that fuels the world economy. By importing far more goods than it exports, America has incurred a huge trade deficit resulting in a high debt.

America’s cultural presence has expanded into ubiquity, and so has resentment of America. Soft power does not necessarily increase the world’s love for America. It is still power, and it still makes enemies” (ibid.).

The article quotes a recent Gallup Poll of 8,000 women in Muslim countries who cite “attachment to spiritual and moral values” as the best aspect of their own societies, while the most common answer to the question about what they admired least in the West was “moral decay, promiscuity and pornography” that pollsters called “the Hollywood image.”

The authors cynically comment that many American parents feel the same way about Hollywood values, including the ones who go to the large megachurches on Sunday morning and then return home that night to watch the latest installment of *Desperate Housewives*. Social observers

provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel . . . The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment” (Isaiah 1:4-6).

The United States, like Great Britain before it, had the opportunity to be a “holy” people based on the covenant principles God made with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God set Israel in a land of abundance and plenty, a land full of material opportunity. He gave them a set of moral, ethical and spiritual laws that would make them the leading nation of their day.

Look at what God said to them as He laid out a covenant based on His Ten Commandments. Leviticus 26 is a prophecy of blessing, punishment and restoration, all in one chapter. It opens with the twin pillars upon which the nation would swing,



In Britain today more Muslims attend a mosque on Friday than Christians attend a church on Sunday. A majority of Britons show little interest in the teachings of the Bible.

idolatry and Sabbath observance. Verses 1 and 2 warn them to stay away from the idols and gods of the nations and keep “My Sabbaths.” This summary of the first four commandments defines the basis of a relationship with God.

Israel was encouraged to obey and keep the commandments and statutes. The result would be “rain in its season” and agricultural abundance (verses 3-5). Other blessings included peace in the land, safety from foreign invasion (verse 6) and command of the field in military engagements (verses 7-8).

Israel would be emissaries of God’s Kingdom on earth and the favor of other nations would be given as they looked upon a people held high and blessed by the Eternal (verses 9-13).

For a brief period during the reign of Solomon, Israel did become a significant nation, a beacon of God’s way within a world of spiritual darkness. But because they did not remain faithful to the covenant with God, and particularly obey the

commands against idolatry and Sabbath breaking, they lost their sovereignty and went into captivity. All the tribes, save Judah, lost their identity and sense of national origin.

America and Britain’s opportunity

With the restoration of Joseph’s birthright to the modern nations of Great Britain and the United States, the same opportunity and obligations once more came into play. (To understand the biblical and historical connections, see our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

And while both nations had a sense of biblical destiny, their religious values were not quite in tune with God’s laws. Nevertheless, God bestowed the national blessings according to the terms of His promise made long ago to Abraham.

The result is that for the past 300 years, the modern world has been dominated by the twin powers of America and Britain. And despite their failings, many nations of the world have been blessed by their association with the power of these two countries.

Despite the anticolonial and anti-American attitude of recent years, America and Great Britain have been like a “fruitful bough,” a source of blessing, wherever their power has gone. This is as the prophecy of Jacob foretold (Genesis 49:22).

But the past 40 years have seen changes in the spiritual and moral center of both nations. Where Britain once carried the King James Bible around the world, now many consider it a post-Christian nation. Churches are shuttered and today more Muslims attend a mosque on Friday than Christians attend a church on Sunday. A majority of Britons show little interest in the teachings of the Bible.

America is perceived as a church-

going, Bible-thumping, fundamentalist nation. A majority professes to attend church, but the attendance figures don’t always match. In spite of the religious veneer, many aspects of American society reflect a coarse and filthy culture that glorifies violence, immorality and greed.

Abortions are routinely performed upon the unborn children. One’s stance on the matter becomes the litmus test for the appointment of judges to the highest court.

America professes to be Christian but fundamentally strays from the most basic elements of Christ’s teaching. For these great national sins, God’s Word calls it to account. We may be strong, we may be powerful in many ways, but inwardly we are corrupt from head to foot with sin that reaches to God in heaven. Those sins, which swell us with false pride, will be the reason for our downfall, just as God said ancient Israel would fall.

Pride of power

Leviticus goes on to show what happens to the special nation that does not obey the terms of God’s agreement. “But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break My covenant, I also will do this to you: I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart.

“And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies.

“Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursues you. And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. I will break the pride of your power; I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze” (Leviticus 26:14-19).

Verse 19 says God will “break the pride of your power.” What does this mean today when we look at American power? Could we see a time when this vast power, in all its forms, will be broken, no longer able to influence events? If that happens, what kind of world will we have? We’ll explore those questions in part two next month. ❖

Mumbai Terror Attacks Highlight Global Nature of Threat From Radical Islam

Political correctness is still making it difficult for people in the West to understand fully the seriousness of the threat from radical Islam.

by Melvin Rhodes

After the train bombings in the Indian city of Mumbai (formerly Bombay) on July 11, there was fairly extensive reporting on the terror attacks in the *Lansing State Journal*, the daily newspaper that serves the state capital of Michigan. The chief suspects, according to the Associated Press article, were “Kashmiri separatists.”

Not once were the words *Muslim* or *Islamic* mentioned, in keeping with the tenets of political correctness that still maintain that all religions are equally valid and that Islam is really a religion of peace! However, Kashmiri separatists are all Muslims, fighting to break away from predominantly Hindu India and unite with the Islamic nation of Pakistan.

At the same time, it should be noted that a number of trains were blown up in Mumbai, all within 11 minutes. Simultaneous attacks are a trademark of al-Qaeda. These attacks on the rapid transit system in India’s financial capital are very similar to previous attacks in Madrid in 2004 and in London in 2005.

Following the July 11 attacks, security was heightened in New York, America’s financial capital. It appears increasingly as if al-Qaeda is targeting financial centers in an attempt to bring down the Western financial system. Mumbai, the financial center at the heart of one of the world’s fastest-growing economies, was the most likely target in India for this reason.

The bombings all took place in the rush hour, again copying those in Madrid and London, indicating the bombings are the work of a regional al-Qaeda affiliate, as Muslim militants around the world increasingly work



Reuters/ Mian Khurshheed

Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, head of Jamaat-ud-Dawa, and Syed Salahuddin, leader of Kashmiri militant group Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, groups India mentioned in connection with the Mumbai bombings.

together to achieve the common goal of Islamic domination.

The attacks in Mumbai were just one incident that hit the headlines for one day in what is increasingly being called “The Long War,” a conflict seemingly without end.

Increasingly, it appears that the radical followers of Islam are winning against a Western world that is more and more divided, both between the various governments and also within the individual countries themselves.

The spread of radical Islam is becoming more evident, with Somalia being the latest country to fall under the control of fundamentalists.

Iraq is undergoing civil strife between its two main factions, the followers of Sunni Islam who supported the previous leader, Saddam Hussein, and the majority Shia Muslims who

Following the July 11 attacks on India’s financial center, security was heightened in New York. It appears increasingly as if al-Qaeda is targeting financial centers in an attempt to bring down the Western financial system.

receive much of their support from Iran.

In neighboring Iran, a theocratic government is threatening to develop nuclear weapons to rid the world of Israel. Its president promises a “real holocaust” against the United States and Britain. Iran supports the anti-Western regime in Syria and backs Hamas in the Palestinian territories.

Iran also supports Hezbollah, the group whose increasing rocket attacks on Israeli cities resulted in an Israeli counterattack in Lebanon. This now means that there are three ongoing major conflicts against radical Islam—Israel/Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Commenting on the international nature of the threat from radical Islam, syndicated columnist Cal Thomas wrote: “The turmoil in the Middle East will not stay in the Middle East. This is a world war and the first shots have already been fired in Europe and America” (“Foes Want Israel Gone,” *Lansing State Journal*, July 24, 2006).

He added: “The latest upheaval in the Middle East may subside but the objectives of those whose aim is Israel’s destruction will not. The enemies of Israel, Europe and America believe this is all-out war.”

Further east, it is becoming more clear that Afghanistan’s President Hamid Karzai controls very little of his country. The Taliban, ousted by U.S.-led coalition forces four years ago, are now back in force and, together with various warlords, control most of the country. The United States has redeployed many of its forces from the country, but U.S. allies Britain, Canada and Holland have filled the gap. These three countries are suffering heavy casualties in another war without end.

Homegrown terrorism

Meanwhile, at home, these same countries are worried about further domestic terror attacks, their homeland security agencies uncovering plot after plot. It can’t be long before they fail to uncover plans for another terrorist attack and ordinary people suffer again at the hands of religious



Reuters/Amit Dave

Students in India hold lighted candles as they take an oath to fight terrorism July 18, 2006. Millions of people in Mumbai stopped as the Indian city observed a short silence in memory of 182 people killed in the July 11 bombings.

fanatics, intent on bringing about a clash of civilizations between the West and Islam.

The attacks in Mumbai came a little over a year after the subway bombings in London.

July 7 was the one-year anniversary of the attacks that killed 52 innocent people. Increasingly concerned that the perpetrators of the 2005 attacks were all British born, fairly affluent Muslims, “no less than eight surveys of Muslim opinion in the United Kingdom” have been conducted within the last 12 months (Daniel Pipes, “Trouble in Londonstan,” *New York Sun*, July 11, 2006.)

There are nearly 2 million Muslims living in the United Kingdom, out of a total population of about 60 million. Fifty years ago, only a handful of Muslims inhabited Great Britain. Lax immigration policies and an emphasis on multiculturalism have encouraged the development of one of the world’s most diverse societies, a condition currently being exploited by militant Islamists.

These surveys show that the vast majority of Muslims in the United

Kingdom identify first and foremost with their religion. Only 7 percent in one poll and 12 percent in another said they identified more with Britain than with Islam.

Incredibly, 7 percent endorsed suicide attacks on civilians in the United Kingdom. Of even greater concern, 12 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds, the ones most likely to be suicide bombers, approved of this. Between 16 percent and 21 percent approved of suicide attacks on the British military, while 28 percent of those aged 18 to 24 approved. One percent, or 16,000 people, said they would be willing to blow themselves up in an attack on British civilians aimed at ending “decadent and immoral” Western society.

Cal Thomas observed: “In an online story the London *Daily Telegraph* subsequently removed ‘for legal reasons,’ Dr. Patrick Sookhdeo warned that British Muslims could soon form a state within Britain. Dr. Sookhdeo, a former Muslim, said, ‘in a decade, you will see parts of English cities which are controlled by Muslim clerics and

which follow, not the common law, but aspects of Muslim sharia law” (ibid.).

In a July 7 BBC World Service interview with Winston Churchill, the grandson of the wartime leader, Sir Winston Churchill, it was disclosed that 37 percent of British Muslims thought that attacks on British Jews were always justified.

Mr. Churchill also pointed out that the situation was worse in France where 10 percent of the population is already Muslim and 30 percent of those are under 20 years of age. In a generation or two, Mr. Churchill observed, the majority will be Muslim. Ironically, it was the French who first inflicted a major blow against Islamic forces in the Battle of Poitiers in A.D. 732, halting the spread of Islam into Europe.

It should be clear to all that the threat from radical Islam is growing. It should also be noted that a major focus of worldwide terrorism does seem to be on financial targets like London, New York and Mumbai, in a clear attempt to destroy confidence, upon which the Western economic system is built.

Fulfillment of Bible prophecy

In the biblical prophetic book of Revelation, we read an account of what are known as the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, four symbolic horsemen that bring destruction upon the world in the years immediately prior to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

The first horseman rides a white horse and carries a bow, a threatening weapon. This horseman “went out conquering and to conquer” (Revelation 6:2). He is followed in rapid succession by the second horseman, who rides a fiery red horse. The first symbolizes false religion, the second, war. One inevitably follows the other. (For a deeper understanding of this, please request our free booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.)

Undoubtedly far worse things must come upon the world for us to see the total fulfillment of this passage of Scripture, but we are certainly now seeing a similar pattern emerging, of false religion intent on forcing itself upon the world—and the resultant conflict that is progressively worsening.

The Old Testament book of Daniel

also prophesies of an end-time clash of civilizations between the biblical king of the North (a successor to the Roman Empire) and the king of the South (a modern successor to the ancient Egyptian empire of the Ptolemys that ended with Cleopatra in the first century B.C.).

A powerful Islamic force is now starting to emerge that may contribute significantly to the fulfillment of this end-time prophecy. “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, with chariots, horsemen and with many ships” (Daniel 11:40).

It remains to be seen exactly what this “attack” is. Some translations use the word “push.” It could be an economic threat, like cutting off Mideast oil, on which Europe is heavily dependent. It may be terrorism. Whatever it is, it must be big, to bring about a coalition of European nations that sends a powerful military force into

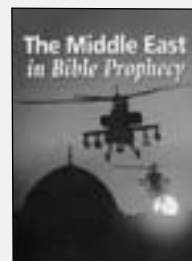
the nations of the Middle East.

We need to be aware of the growing threat from Islamic terrorists and the possible implications for the world.

For more information on this, write for our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. ❖

Recommended Reading

To better understand the roots of the conflict between Islam and the West, request a free copy of *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. This fully illustrated booklet takes you on an eye-opening journey through



history and the Bible to grasp the roots of this conflict, and where it will lead.

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New Middle Eastern Conflicts: A Wake-up Call for Mankind

Michael Elliott of Time magazine asked some of the right questions: "What is it about the Middle East that makes the conflicts so intractable, such that one summer's guns ineluctably conjure up so many early spasms of violence? Why the hate and where's the healing?" (July 24, 2006).

by John Ross Schroeder

Your life will eventually be affected by events in Israel and the Middle East. This would be true even if you could not locate Lebanon, Gaza and Israel on a world map. This would be true even if you have absolutely no interest in current affairs. Important aspects of your future will be determined by what will occur in this volatile part of the world.

The whole Middle East is now rife with violent hot spots. Any one of several unresolved issues could escalate into disastrous conflagrations.

The focus is Lebanon

As we go to press, the focus of the political world is on tiny Lebanon, a victim nation that continues to be a battleground over issues not really its own.

The current crisis was begun in southern Israel by Hamas kidnapping an Israeli soldier, following almost a year of Hamas regularly raining down rockets on southern Israel after Israel's withdrawal from Gaza.

It widened to Lebanon when Hezbollah fighters launched a rocket attack and crossed the border, killing eight Israeli soldiers and kidnapping two others. Then when Israel retaliated, Hezbollah began firing rocket barrages that hit Haifa and other cities in the north of the country.

As the Lebanese crisis accelerated, the usual calls for a cease-fire and peacekeeping forces from the UN and NATO soon began in earnest. Condemnation of Israel soon followed. Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero censured Israel's Gaza and Lebanon strikes (*El Pais*, July 15, 2006). Other European nations were furious with Israel just as they were in the early '80s.

The 1982-83 Lebanese conflict

History reminds us of what happened in



Reuters/Jamal Saïdi

Hamas' exiled leader, Khaled Meshaal, shakes hands with Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah during a solidarity conference in Beirut, Lebanon, March 30, 2006.

Lebanon nearly 25 years ago. British historian Martin Gilbert sums up those events. "The costs of the Lebanese war had been high for all combatants... an estimated 6,000 PLO troops had been killed, as had 460 Lebanese civilians, 600 Syrian troops and 368 Israeli soldiers" (*Israel: A History*, 1998, p. 512). Additionally, 280 United States marines were blown up by a terrorist attack on their barracks in Beirut.

The nation of Israel, always fighting for its very survival, now has to wage a very difficult war with hit-and-run cells from a notorious, well-armed terrorist group that hides among civilians. Islamic political leadership has now shifted not only to rogue nations like Iran, but to radical terrorist organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas.

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni summed up the seriousness of the Lebanese situation

for *Newsweek* magazine: “Hizbullah is a threat to the region and to the international community. *It is the long arm of Iran* that wants to keep an open front with Israel in order to destabilize the region. In UN resolutions 1559 and 1688, it was stated that there was a need for the Lebanese government to extend its sovereignty over the entire [country of] Lebanon and to *dismantle all militias including Hizbullah*” (July 31, 2006, emphasis added throughout).

Practically speaking, Lebanon is so weakened by years of civil war and foreign occupation that it could not then—and cannot now—accomplish this task without the aid of Israel, the cooperation of Syria and Iran, and a reliable and heavily armed peacekeeping force. Sadly, the UN peacekeeping record is undistinguished.

The growing danger posed by Iran

Iran has been warning the West that it had better not be ignored. Leon de Winter states in a feature article for the *Wall Street Journal*: “It is clear that the Iranian theocracy has set its sights far beyond its region. The rhetoric of the Iranian regime has been clear for years. As with Germany in the 1930s, anti-Semitism plays a key role in modern Iranian politics.

“If Iran succeeds, *its nuclear weapons will be controlled by people who believe that they should bring the End of Days closer*—a notion not dissimilar to Hitler’s apocalyptic visions. *An Iranian bomb threatens the very existence of Western civilization*” (March 7, 2006).

The primary targets are, of course, Israel and the United States—the latter at least presently beyond the reach of Iranian missiles. Israel is not so fortunate.

In October 2005 Iran’s President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad stated at a conference titled “The World Without Zionism” that “anybody who recognises Israel will burn in the fire of the Islamic nation’s fury [while] any Islamic leader who recognises the Zionist regime means he is acknowledging the surrender and defeat of the Islamic world . . . As the Iman [Ayatollah Khomeini] said, *Israel must be wiped off the map*”

(*The Times* [London], Oct. 28, 2005).

Hezbollah’s fighting force has long been financed, trained and armed by Iran. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah echoed the same general sentiments on April 9, 2000: “The Jews invented the legend of the Nazi atrocities. Anyone who reads the Koran and the holy writings of the monotheistic religions sees what they did to the prophets, and what acts of madness and slaughter the Jews carried out throughout history . . .

“Anyone who reads these texts cannot think of co-existence with them, of peace with them, or about accepting their presence, not only in Palestine of 1948 but even in a small village in Palestine, because they are a cancer which is liable to spread again at any moment.”

Two years later, in comments to Lebanon’s *Daily Star*, he said, “If they [the Jews] all gather in Israel, it will save us the trouble of going after them worldwide” (quoted by Michael Rubin, “Eradication First, Before Diplomacy,” *National Review Online*, July 17, 2006).

Over the years, many are the statements from radical Islamic leaders—and some secular ones—about wiping out the nation of Israel. The late President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt stated just prior to the Six-Day War on May 26, 1967: “Our basic objective is to destroy Israel” (Martin Gilbert, *Challenge to Civilization*, 1999, p. 366).

An axis of hatred—not peace

The whole Middle East is now rife with violent hot spots. Any one of several unresolved issues could escalate into disastrous conflagrations. God says through one of His prophets that He would “make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it” (Zechariah 12:3). God clearly states that Jerusalem, and thus the surrounding area, would be an unsolvable riddle that would exhaust the world community.

But diplomats, world leaders and even theologians don’t really grasp the message of the Bible. In the *Olivet Prophecy*, far from foreseeing a success-

fully negotiated peace, Jesus instead saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies at the time of the end (Luke 21:20).

Eventually Israel will become subject to a European-centered superpower (the “king of the North”) who will invade the Holy Land as a result of a “push” by the “king of the South” (possibly an Islamic group of peoples) as explained in Daniel 11:40-45. (For more information, please request a copy of our booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.)

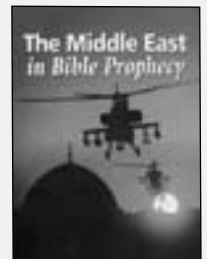
Trying to bring peace to the Middle East during this age of man is a dangerous and impossible proposition. Let peacekeeping forces beware! It is so easy to be inexorably sucked into the swirling vortex of stubbornly unbridgeable divisions and deep-set animosities.

Particularly at the time of the end, the focus of this world will be on the Middle East, just as much of it is now. The final conflagration will finish only with the return of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the true Messiah Jesus Christ (Revelation 19:11-21).

Wherever you may reside, you need to be concerned about important events in the Middle East. As King David said some 3,000 years ago, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (Psalm 122:6). The one and only true Messiah, the Prince of Peace, will come back to earth and bring real peace to Jerusalem, Lebanon, the Persian Gulf region, the entire Middle East and finally the whole world at large. That is His mission. ❖

Recommended Reading

To better understand the roots of the conflict between Islam and the West, request a free copy of *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. This fully illustrated booklet takes you on an eye-opening journey through history and the Bible to grasp the roots of this conflict, and where it will lead.



Contact any of our offices listed on page 15, or request or download it from our Web site at www.wnponline.org

Suez—Important Lessons From an Event 50 Years Ago

When Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal 50 years ago, it started a chain of events whose results are still being felt today.

by Melvin Rhodes

The late U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower reportedly once said his biggest regret was “Suez.”

The event he was referring to began 50 years ago, on July 26, 1956, when the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the British- and French-owned Suez Canal.

A few months later, British, French and Israeli forces were all involved in a conflict against Egypt. Militarily, they won. But President Eisenhower, against the advice of his cabinet, refused to support them. When subsequent British economic problems threatened a run on the British currency, a requested IMF loan had to be approved by the United States. Eisenhower refused and Britain had to withdraw.

The loss of the Suez Canal very quickly led to the dismantling of the British Empire. Within a decade almost all of Britain’s colonies had gone, mostly replaced with unstable, often despotic, dictators that lined their own pockets at the expense of their own people.

The British learned through the Suez crisis that they could not do anything independently of the United States; the French learned never to trust America.

The Arabs were emboldened by Suez. Arab nationalist movements spread throughout the region, resulting in the overthrow of moderate, pro-Western monarchs like King Faisal II of Iraq in 1958, whose country had a functioning parliamentary system. His violent overthrow led eventually to Saddam Hussein’s reign of terror, U.S. and British intervention and a war that is seemingly without end.

Disillusioned with Arab nationalist leaders like Gamal Abdel Nasser and Saddam Hussein,



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The Suez Canal has been an important sea gate since it was built by a French corporation between 1850 and 1869. The British obtained controlling interest in 1875. The Egyptians nationalized it in 1956.

many, if not most, of the peoples of this unstable region are now turning increasingly to Islamic fundamentalism, further destabilizing the area.

Eisenhower later recognized the best solution at Suez would possibly have been for the United States and Britain to work together to ensure permanent control of the canal so that the free flow of oil would continue. A joint Anglo-American presence likely would have kept the region free of Soviet domination, important at the time. Such a presence would also have been an effective buffer between Israel and the hostile nations that surround the fledgling Jewish state.

There are also a couple of sobering lessons for the United States from the Suez crisis of 50 years ago. It was a friend that pulled the plug on Great Britain and its empire. Following two world wars, the British had run up considerable debt, weakening their dominant position

The Arabs were emboldened by the Suez crisis. Arab nationalist movements spread throughout the region, resulting in the overthrow of moderate, pro-Western monarchs.

in the world. They were also militarily overextended.

Sound familiar? The United States is also militarily overextended and has run up considerable debt. In fact, the country is borrowing about \$2 billion per day, which means the war in Iraq is being financed by foreign money. That, in turn, means “friends” can pull the plug any time!

The other lesson for America is just how quickly things can change. Three years prior to the Suez Canal crisis, Queen Elizabeth II was crowned as the head of the world’s greatest empire. Leaders of the many nations that made up the Empire and Commonwealth were present, and the coronation was followed by an incredible display of military power. Nobody that day would have predicted that it would all unravel within a few years and that Great Britain would never be great again.

Suez spelled the death of the British Empire. It was also a big American blunder and a major contributor to the catastrophic events of today.

To blame it on President Eisenhower may be too simplistic. Daniel 2:21 reminds us that God “removes kings and raises up kings”—He is the one behind the rise and fall of nations. God, who gave the British their preeminence, as promised to their ancestor Ephraim thousands of years ago, also broke the pride of their power (Leviticus 26:19), leaving them defeated in the eyes of the world by an inferior force of an upstart nation. ❖

Recommended Reading

The United States, Britain, Canada, Australia and other English-speaking peoples have played a major role in modern world history. What does the Bible say about the role they will play in the future?

Request a free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.



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In Brief... World News Review

Hugo Chavez Goes Shopping

A world tour by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez took him to Belarus, Russia, Iran, Vietnam and Qatar.

While in Russia in late July he used his petrodollars to purchase a shopping cart full of fighter jets, helicopters, Kalishnikov assault rifles and even a submarine. To top off the list he also purchased a license to build a Kalishnikov factory in Venezuela.

Observers surmise the rifles will be exported to resistance groups in Peru and Colombia. The U.S. State Department has expressed concern that with this massive amount of arms going into the region, a serious imbalance will be created.

President Chavez is an outspoken critic of the United States and is presently courting other nations with ideologies that differ from the Bush administration. Russia’s relations with America have recently cooled, and President Vladimir Putin is willing to create links with Chavez as a gesture of independence and solidarity with another anti-American state.

Venezuela is seeking a seat on the United Nation’s Security Council, and some feel this is possible. A seat for President Chavez on the council would give him a stage from which he could oppose every U.S. initiative and serve as a voice for all other states that oppose American policy and wish it to fail.

President Chavez is far from a direct threat to Washington. The United States is Venezuela’s main customer for exports, so it is unlikely he wants to sever all relations. But such an accumulation of arms creates instability in Latin America. At some future point this could escalate into another major front, something America, and the world, does not need.

Anytime we see a growing anti-American force, it spells potential trouble, not just for U.S. interests, but for the

global stability that leads to productive commercial growth among the nations. It is also another marker on the road to the prophesied American decline. This will not be good for anyone.

Sources: AFP, Reuters

Europe’s Responsibility for the Middle East

As the Middle East crisis continues, there are increasing calls for an international force to enter Lebanon to enforce a peace that has not been made. How such a force would conduct itself is far from clear. Would it root out Hezbollah forces? Would it protect Israel?

What is most interesting, in light of certain Bible prophecies, is the call for European troops to be committed to such a force. Timothy Garton Ash had an interesting column in the *Los Angeles Times* July 27 that brought up Europe’s historic role in creating the current crisis.

“I don’t think any European should speak or write about today’s conflict in the Middle East without displaying some consciousness of our own historical responsibility. I’m afraid that some Europeans today do so speak and write; and I don’t just mean the German right-wing extremists who marched through the town of Verden in Lower Saxony on Saturday, waving Iranian flags and chanting ‘Israel—international genocide center.’ I also mean thinking people on the left.”

He goes on to mention the possibility of sending European troops to the region, which Israel has signaled it could accept.

“Does it follow that Europeans have a special obligation to get involved in trying to secure a peace settlement in which the state of Israel can live in secure frontiers next to a viable Palestinian state? I think it does. Even if you don’t accept this argument from historical and moral responsibility, Europe’s vital interests are plainly at stake: oil, nuclear prolifer-

eration and the potential reaction among our alienated Muslim minorities, to name but three.

“It’s less clear what that involvement should be. One proposal is for European forces to participate in a multinational peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon, but that only makes sense if realistic parameters are established for a clear, feasible and finite mission. Those are not yet in sight. Even a cease-fire is not yet in sight.”

Professor Ash does not deny the critical role of America in the process. But we are likely to see more discussion like this.

Sources: LATimes.com, EUObserver.com

Japan Considers Preemptive Strike on North Korea

After North Korea’s provocative missile tests in early July, Japan said it was considering whether a preemptive strike on North Korea’s missile bases would violate its constitution.

According to Mari Yamaguchi (AP, July 10), several government officials openly discussed whether the country ought to take steps to better defend itself, including setting up the legal framework to allow Japan to launch a preemptive strike.

“If we accept that there is no other option to prevent an attack... there is the view that attacking the launch base of the guided missiles is within the constitutional right of self-defense. We need to deepen discussion,” Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe said.

“With all of Japan easily within range of North Korean missiles, an opinion poll conducted by Japan’s NHK television showed that 82 percent of respondents in Japan said they felt ‘fearful’ or ‘somewhat fearful’ of the seven or more missiles that North Korea shot into the Sea of Japan on July 4,” reported Anthony Faiola in the *Washington Post* July 11.

Japan’s constitution, written after World War II, prohibits the use of military force, though Japan does maintain a 240,000-strong self-defense force.

However, AP quoted a Japanese Defense Agency spokeswoman as saying Japan has no attacking weapons such as ballistic missiles that could reach North Korea. Its forces only have ground-to-air

missiles and ground-to-vessel missiles, she said on condition of anonymity.

For their part, North Korea scoffed at the UN Security Council resolution asking it to quit launching missiles and return to six-party talks. “The vicious, hostile policy of the U.S. and the irresponsibility of the UN Security Council have created an extremely dangerous situation on the Korean Peninsula,” said a North Korean Foreign Ministry statement (*The Week*, July 28, 2006).

Sources: AP, *The Week*, WashingtonPost.com

Teenagers Face Date Abuse

Jenny Deam, *Denver Post* staff writer, reported: “According to a March survey of 13- to 18-year-olds, nearly one in three teenage girls in dating relationships say they have feared being physically hurt by a partner. Almost one in five admit being hit, slapped or shoved by a boyfriend.

“Nevertheless, in the same online poll conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited marketing firm, many young people not only accept such behaviors but consider them normal and exciting:

“Nearly half admitted doing something that conflicted with their personal values or beliefs to please a boyfriend or girlfriend. Some said they would ‘do almost anything’ to hold onto a relationship.

“One in four teens in a relationship said their boyfriend or girlfriend tried to prevent them from spending time with friends or family. But more than a quarter said it was

OK and even flattering for someone to ‘act really jealous’ or ‘be in charge.’

“As many as 60 percent of teens in relationships acknowledged their partner made them feel bad or embarrassed about themselves. And 7 percent said their boyfriend or girlfriend had threatened to kill them or commit suicide if they broke up.”

Sources: DenverPost.com, loveisnotabuse.com

Christianity Growing in China

On June 27, the *Rocky Mountain News* published an article by Nicholas Kristof of *The New York Times* that reported about spiritual hunger in China:

“Christianity is booming as never before in China, and some giddy followers say China could eventually have hundreds of millions of Christians—perhaps more than any other country in the world...

“This boom in religion, particularly Christianity but also including the Bahai faith and various cults like Falun Gong, reflects a spiritual yearning among many Chinese. While China has official Catholic and Protestant churches, the fastest-growing churches are the underground ones—usually evangelical without any specific denomination—that are independent of the government. The total number of Chinese Christians today probably exceeds 40 million, and some estimates go far higher.”

Sources: *Rocky Mountain News*, www.pekingduck.org

Contributors: Darris McNeely and Mike Bennett



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A Page on the World

Reviews of books that count, endure and light the path ahead

Londonistan: How Britain Is Creating a Terror State Within

Melanie Phillips shows that Britain has become a gathering ground for Islamist terror groups, while the British establishment is in denial (2006, ISBN 1594031444).

Reviewed by John Ross Schroeder

I would like to begin with the credentials of the author. Melanie Phillips is the leading political and current affairs columnist for the *Daily Mail*. Her insightful, common-sense assessments of modern political life in Britain are hard to equal in the world of British journalism because they are generally based upon the backdrop of the traditional values that built the United Kingdom.

Her latest book, *Londonistan*, points out that Britain has become the leading European gathering ground for recruitment and financing of Islamist terror groups. The sheer scale of these activities has earned the area the label “Londonistan” by antiterrorist specialists elsewhere in the world.

Mrs. Phillips addresses the overall problem from a number of different angles. For instance, she shows that radical Islamic demands are being appeased by multiculturalism and by a so-called *replacement theology* put forward by certain Christian theologians who seriously question the necessity for the state of Israel (Mrs. Phillips is Jewish).

Franklin Littell calls this replacement theology Christian anti-Semitism that “rings with the genocidal note. This is the myth that the mission of the Jewish people was finished with the coming of Jesus Christ, that ‘the old Israel’ was written off with the appearance of ‘the new Israel.’ To teach that a people’s mission in God’s providence is finished, that they have been relegated to the limbo of history, has murderous implications, which the murderers will in time spell out” (*The Crucifixion of the Jews*, 1996).

The gravity of the problem

Although she allows that the majority of the Muslim community in Britain is law-abiding, Melanie Phillips does insist that “the evidence suggests that the numbers who do support either the aims or the tactics of the jihad are terrifying. According to British officials, up to sixteen thousand British Muslims either are actively engaged in or support terrorist activity, while up to three thousand are estimated to have passed through Al Qaeda training camps, with several hundred thought to be primed to attack the United Kingdom” (p. 9).

But why would Britain allow such reprehensible activities



within its borders? Mrs. Phillips states the obvious when she notes that Britain is a country “where traditional morality has been systematically undermined and replaced by an ‘anything goes’ culture in which autonomous decisions about codes of behaviour have become unchallengeable rights” (p. 25).

This reminds one of the descriptions of ancient Israel in the days of the judges when “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6;

21:25).

The author also takes pains to point out that the threat is not just from a few radical extremists who might rarely succeed like they did when suicide bombers wreaked havoc on the London Underground with the loss of many lives. She believes that the British establishment is in denial about how widespread the threat really is.

Too many erroneously pin the blame on the United States, Israel and even on Britain itself instead of the guilty culprit, which she identifies as radical Islamic ideology.

Melanie Phillips concludes that “the West is under threat from an enemy that has shrewdly observed the decadence and disarray in Europe where Western civilization first began” (p. 285). Those weaknesses are now being exploited on many fronts by those determined to bring down Western civilization as we know it and replace it with a worldwide “umma”—a global community of Islamic believers in submission to Allah.

She further points out that Britain has been the cradle of Western liberty, but urgently needs to squarely face this growing problem and counter it with policies based on “absolute consistency and moral integrity, which arise from the strength of belief in the values that are being defended” (p. 273).

This book review highlights a few crucial points, but cannot really do justice to the massive evidence proffered within its pages that identifies the causes of this disturbing trend threatening Britain’s—and Western civilization’s—stability and way of life.

The recent deadly train bombings in India, plus a fresh outbreak of violence by terrorist groups against Israel (involving Gaza and Lebanon) that prompted a response unprecedented in recent times, underscore the importance of her warnings and the peril our Western democracies face. ❖

“WEDDING,” (Continued from page 16)

the very Lord of the universe. Imagine that! And our spiritual Fiancé is coming back to make good on His pledge to be our Husband.

The marriage of the Lamb has come

But the book of Revelation not only speaks of the bride, but also describes the marriage itself and something very special that comes with it—a blessing. Notice how the invitation is sent out and what it says.

“And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunders, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.’

“And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the clean linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!”’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true sayings of God’” (Revelation 19:6-9).

Weddings and the accompanying festivities are always special. But, back when this was written, these activities had an even more incredible status. It was a time before people traveled for pleasure or had 24-hour entertainment brought into their homes. It was a world that was not living to eat, but eating to live—a world of survival! Thus, in a world of drudgery and daily survival, a wedding was a “show-stopper.” In fact, the entire village or town would come to a halt.

A wedding of old

Ralph Gower, in his book *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* under the headings “The Wedding” and “The Wedding Feast,” grants us a glimpse of some of these customs.

The wedding involved dressing up. The bride was literally adorned like a queen (see Revelation 21:2). She was bathed and her hair was braided with as many precious stones as the family possessed or could borrow (Psalm 45:14-15; Isaiah 61:10; Ezekiel 16:11-12). The bridegroom, too, was dressed



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But my ponderings about life and marriage are actually designed to guide our minds and hearts to another wedding of a much greater magnitude. While grand, it will be very personal, because you are invited—in fact, you have the opportunity to be the bride!

in finery and jewelry (Isaiah 61:10). The dressing up for the wedding was so important that it was unforgettable (Jeremiah 2:32).

Another important element of the wedding was the procession at the end of the day. The bridegroom set out from his home to fetch his bride from her parents’ home. At this point the bride was wearing a veil. At some point the veil was taken off and laid on the shoulder of the bridegroom.

A procession then set out from the bride’s home to the couple’s new home. The dark roadway would be lit with oil lamps held by wedding guests. In the story told by Jesus, the groom was later than expected so the oil in the lamps began to run low. Only those who brought a reserve flask of oil were able to refill their lamps and welcome the groom (Matthew 25:1-13, especially verses 8-9).

There was singing and music along the way (Jeremiah 16:9), and sometimes the bride herself would join in the dance (Song of Solomon 6:13).

Then would come the wedding feast or “supper.” The bride and groom entered under a canopy when they arrived at the house. Very wealthy families would actually provide guests with wedding garments. The couple along with their guests spent a great deal of time in eating and drinking. Festivities often lasted for seven days (Judges 14:12) or even longer.

During the festivities, God’s blessing was asked upon the couple, and it may well have been for this reason that Jesus was invited to the wedding at Cana (John 2:2).

Lifting our sights

Much like the villagers of antiquity, today we, too, live in a world of drudgery

ery and survival. It is simply wrapped in the illusionary safety blanket of technology and materialism. Ever since Eden, humanity at its best has traveled 7 feet—1 foot backwards and 6 feet down.

Through His Holy Word, God lifts our souls and raises our spirits to a future event that will break the cycle of human history.

Even as I write today, Israel and the Hezbollah terrorists are locked in mortal combat in the hills and valleys of Lebanon. North Korea and Iran are playing the fatal game of nuclear brinkmanship with the West. Tonight people will go to sleep hungry in Africa and Asia never to wake up in the morning.

Europe continues to slide into the bog of human secularism, and America keeps tossing the coin to see what part of its split personality it will demonstrate today—"In God we trust" or the lust and greed of materialism.

God lifts our sights to a time when all His preparations and longings come together with those who truly seek Him. Do the words of Isaiah 61:10 match the message that God finds in your heart for Him, today?

"I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."

God has not held back in spiritually equipping and dressing us with everything needed to shine before Him at that moment mentioned in Revelation.

Get in the picture!

Yes, He uses the analogy of a marriage and a wedding feast to give us a hint of what that moment will be like when faith, sacrifice, relationship, longing and fulfillment all come to the fore. He wants you to see yourself in that picture. He wants you to see Christ, the Bridegroom, coming down from the heavens from His home to ours on earth and "fetching" His bride. He wants us to lift our spiritual veil and declare, "the government shall be upon His shoulders."

He wants us to picture a time of celebration and quality feasting that has

no end. God wants us to remember and rejoice in the fact that our Groom is the same One whose first miracle was turning the water into quality wine at the wedding feast at Cana (John 2:1-10). Yes, He is the same One who said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

Just imagine that future celebration, as Christ greets and spends time with every member of the wedding party—yes, with you. And imagine the eyes of God the Father filling with tears of joy as He sees it all come together before Him. And, best of all, it's not the end of life, but really just the beginning of the rest of forever.

When we understand the immensity of what God is calling us to—literally being the Bride of Christ—and our eyes are set on being there at that moment for Him—everything changes in between as we prepare, anticipate and measure our movements toward Him.

We'll begin to listen and take more earnest heed to the words of our spiritual Fiancé who encourages us to be wise in the provisions He has granted us of "oil" so as to keep our human vessels burning brightly in anticipation of His arrival.

"Come!"

Meanwhile, things are still buzzing here as we prepare for Amy's wedding. I'm sure all is going to work out just fine. And I still wish all of you could come. But I'm even more confident of a future wedding event to which you are all invited.

Perhaps the words found in Revelation 22:17 sum up the direction we should all be headed as they resonate with the echo of Isaiah 30:21—"This is the way, walk in it." It is a walk toward God's gift and blessing to you.

"And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely."

The invitation has gone out! The fulfillment of this part of prophecy and your part in it awaits. ❖



Robin Webber

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by Robin Webber

You're Invited to the Wedding!

Three days from now our youngest daughter, Amy, will be taking her wedding vows. She is the last of our three daughters to get married. Most of the preparations are complete. That's a big relief! She has done a wonderful job of preparing for this treasured moment.

But, there are still enough little items popping up to keep the family on the move and a little anxious until the big day comes. Indeed, it will be a memorable day as Amy will take the arm of Ben, her fiancé, and make a commitment to live with him and love him for better or for worse “until death do us part.”

As the ceremony commences, those who love her and have watched her wind through life to this special moment will surround her. Embracing her with the sureness of their presence and hopes for success will be her family members and lifelong friends, as well as Ben's family welcoming her into their own lives. Yes, it's a day of powerful and meaningful transitions.

As the officiating minister, mine is a unique opportunity, as I will not only be looking into the young couple's eyes, but also the eyes (and maybe, too, the hearts) of the audience as they reflect on life. Weddings are unique that way. There will be moments of glee, a hush, a chuckle, a tear or two, an elongated “ooh” or “aah” as the circle of life takes one more joyful turn.

And then comes the wedding supper! Now, with the formalized ceremony over and all the legal documents signed—it's real. They are married! Now, we can celebrate and relax with good food, music, dancing and laughter. We can catch up on family news and meet new family members.

All the effort has paid off. All those anxious moments between frustration and prayers, joy and disappointment are eased and tucked aside in the wake of the reality that a new family has indeed come to life.

I wish you could all join us for the occasion, but seeing my wife and I are paying for the wedding and the meal, we can only invite so many. Sorry! But, I'm sure many of you have “been there” and fully understand.

A Bride adorned for her Husband

But my ponderings about life and marriage are actually designed to guide our minds and hearts to another wedding of a much greater magnitude. While grand, it will be very personal, because you are invited—in fact, you have the opportunity to be the bride.

Imagine that! And that's exactly what I want you to do. Yes, even you guys. Get your imagination gears humming. Revelation 19 talks about an incredible wedding between the Lamb (Christ) and His Bride (the Church—see Ephesians 5:23-32).

Just imagine the size of the wedding party! The first-fruit saints of God are going to enter into a deep and everlasting relationship within the family of God. These are individuals—past, present and future—who have entered into a compact with Jesus Christ toward this ultimate end of a divine marriage union.

The apostle Paul speaks of the relationship in 2 Corinthians 11:2: “I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” Simply put in modern-day terms, as Christians we are engaged to

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