

WORLD NEWS *and* PROPHECY

Biblical Perspectives on Current Events

February 2001

Vol. 4, No. 2

Quake in Gujarat: Foretaste of the Future?

Most of us viewed the deadly quake in India from the comfort of our living rooms. What would we do if we had to experience such a disaster? The Indian victims had no warning. We do...

by Matthew Fenchel

Modern technology has again brought a crisis into our homes in real time and in living color. Perhaps you first saw scenes of the tragedy in India on the television in your living room. Or maybe you read an Internet report on your office computer. You could have heard a radio report, as you drove along a safe, modern highway. Or perhaps you read of it in your local paper over coffee and breakfast. In any case, you were probably warm, comfortable and safe—wherever you heard the news.

Coincidentally, I was in India at the time of the quake—but, fortunately, 800 miles from the epicenter. So I, too, was warm, comfortable and safe. Like you,

I only experienced the horrors of this disaster through the desensitizing filters of electronic media. From a distance you can find a little comfort in the fact that various national governments and independent relief organizations were marshaling their forces to provide assistance.

What if, though, everything I described were reversed? Instead of most of us watching the events on television in comfort, what if most of us were experiencing the agony of a disaster? What if those nations that are now rushing to



Digging through the rubble of an earthquake

provide help were the ones in need of it? What if we could not turn off the sights and sounds of horror with a flick

(See "QUAKE," page 3)

In This Issue...

**Germany and Russia: Shifting Balance of Power —
When the Angel Leaves the Storm — Sharing the Front Porch**

WORLD NEWS and PROPHECY

Biblical Perspectives on Current Events

February 2001

Vol. 4, No. 2

World News and Prophecy is published monthly by the United Church of God, an International Association, publisher of *The Good News* magazine, 5405 Dupont Circle, Suite A, Milford, OH 45150. © 2001 United Church of God, an International Association. Printed in the U.S.A. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form without written permission is prohibited.

The mission of *World News and Prophecy (WNP)* is to provide our membership and interested persons with commentary and analysis of selected world news topics in the light of Bible prophecy. Its purpose is to help readers discern the times and increase their awareness and understanding of the answers Christ gave to His disciples' questions: "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3).

Editor: Don Ward

Managing editor: Darris McNeely

Senior editor: Melvin Rhodes

Contributing editor: John Ross Schroeder

Copy editors: Doug Johnson, Cecil E. Maranville, Becky Bennett

Layout/design: Mike Bennett, Peter W. Eddington

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

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

Address changes: POSTMASTER—Send address changes to *World News and Prophecy*, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027.

International addresses:

AUSTRALIA: United Church of God—Australia
GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia
Phone: 0755 202-111 Fax: 0755 202-122

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

BRITISH ISLES: P.O. Box 705, Watford, Herts. WD19 6FZ
England. Phone: 020-8386-8467 Fax: 01257-453978

CANADA: United Church of God—Canada, P.O. Box 144,
Station D, Etobicoke, ON M9A 4X1, Canada
Phone: (416) 231-9379, (800) 338-7779 Fax: (416) 231-8238

FIJI: United Church of God, P.O. Box 10-577, Nadi, Fiji. Phone: 723-678

FRENCH-SPEAKING AREAS: Église de Dieu Unie—France, B.P.
51254, 45002 Orléans Cedex 1, France

GERMANY: Vereinte Kirche Gottes, Postfach 30 15 09, D-53195
Bonn, Germany. Phone: 0228 - 9454636 Fax: 0228 - 9454637
E-mail: gutenachrichten@compuserve.com

ITALY: La Buona Notizia, Chiesa di Dio Unita, Casella Postale
187, 24100 Bergamo, Italy. Phone: 0039-035583474 Fax: 0039-
035582140

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

The NETHERLANDS: United Church of God Holland, P.O. Box
93, 2800 AB Gouda, The Netherlands

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

PHILIPPINES: United Church of God, P.O. Box 4774, MCPO,
1287 Makati City, Philippines. Phone: (+63-82) 241-0150

SOUTHERN AFRICA: United Church of God, Southern Africa,
P.O. Box 2209, Beacon Bay, East London 5205, South Africa
Phone/Fax: 043 748-1694

SPANISH-SPEAKING AREAS: Iglesia de Dios Unida, P.O. Box
541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A. Phone: (513) 576-9796

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

Internet access on your computer:

The United Church of God, an International Association, has a home page on the World Wide Web. The address <http://www.ucg.org> gives you access to general information and news about the Church, issues of *The Good News* and *United News*, as well as booklets. The address <http://www.ucg.ca> accesses the Canadian site, <http://www.ucg.org.au> the Australian site, <http://www.labuonanotizia.org> the Italian site, <http://www.goodnews.org.uk> the British Isles site, <http://www.ucg.org.ph> the Philippines site and <http://www.ucg.org/html/rsa/> the Southern Africa site.

Contents

Quake in Gujarat: Foretaste of the Future?

by Matthew Fenchel page 1

Germany and Russia— Shifting Balance of Power

by Melvin Rhodes page 5

When the Angel Leaves the Storm

by Darris McNeely page 8

In Brief... World News Review

by Cecil E. Maranville page 12

This Is the Way... Sharing the Front Porch

by Robin Webber page 16

Read *World News and Prophecy* as soon as it is completed. The next issue is scheduled to be available on March 14 on the Internet at <http://www.ucg.org/articles/wnp/>.

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.

“QUAKE,” (Continued from page 1)
of a switch? Could that happen? And what would we do? Would there be anything we *could* do?

This was my first trip to India. I had lived in Europe for six years, and had seen some poverty in the countries then under communist rule. I had also seen various documentaries about the conditions in India. Yet no amount of video clips could have prepared me for the wretched conditions I saw firsthand in Bombay. There were miles of shanties, pollution of every sort and tens of thousands of suffering fellow human beings. And this city wasn't even hit by the earthquake!

A few minutes of television is nothing like seeing, hearing, feeling and smelling such horrors in person. I know the same could be said about the difference between viewing the effects of a tragedy and experiencing it firsthand.

Wrong to assume disaster always “hand of God”

Why do natural disasters, disease epidemics and other tragedies strike certain places, while leaving others unscathed? Are there lessons to be learned? Certainly scientists have provided some geological, social and climatic reasons. Some in the world of religion wonder if it is the hand of God at work, punishing the wicked. Or perhaps earthquakes such as just struck India and El Salvador are the first indicators of the “end of the world.” What does the Bible say?

The disciples asked Jesus Christ about signs of His return, the time the Bible calls the Day of the Lord. In Matthew 24:6–8, He said, “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all

these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.... And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.”

On one hand, disasters and tragedies are regular events that come and go over the centuries. In some cases, of course, they are the result of human “cause and effect.” Galatians 6:6–8 tells us that if we do wrong, we will reap disaster. If we do right, blessings will come. This is true for whole societies, as well as for individuals.

Christ warned us, though, not to become too comfortable, confident or cocky if such tragedies don't happen to us. The lack of natural disasters is not necessarily proof of righteousness. In Luke 13:1–5, Jesus warned all humans to repent, or face the consequences.

*Isaiah 2 gives a
sobering and
frightening scenario of
rich nations,
descendants of
ancient Israel, that will
not be able to rely on
their wealth at the
Day of the Lord.*

“There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.’”

That should be a lesson for us, today. Punishment and destruction can happen to us. What would we do?

How to avoid divine punishment

Man's long history of disobedience to God will eventually result in a time when *all* will suffer unimaginable horrors, a period that the world has never experienced. In Matthew 24:21–22, Christ continues, “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.”

Because of the righteousness of those who obey God, Jesus will return and eventually stop the destruction. His second coming will certainly be good news for those who follow Him—but not for the vast majority of human beings who don't.

In verses 29 and 30, He says, “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

Amos, an Old Testament prophet, was inspired to warn those who would hear that God's intervention in human affairs would be unmistakable. One will not have to wonder or speculate if a localized disaster signals the end. The extent, force and unrelenting duration of catastrophes will make the truth self-evident. Amos 5:18 states, “Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! For what good is the day of the LORD to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him!”

The wealthy Western nations remain relatively unscathed—for now. That will not long be the case. Isaiah 2 gives a sobering and frightening scenario

Erratum

The article “What Lies Ahead for U.S. Leadership” in the December 2000 issue stated on page 4 that the angel who came to Daniel was Michael. Actually Michael came to assist that angel (Daniel 10:13, 21). Thanks to those who pointed this out.



Devastating earthquakes topple concrete buildings like a house of cards

of rich nations, descendants of ancient Israel, that will not be able to rely on their wealth in the Day of the Lord.

Verses 11 to 21 read in part, “The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the LORD of hosts shall come upon everything proud and lofty, upon everything lifted up—and it shall be brought low.... Upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up; upon every high tower, and upon every fortified wall; upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all the beautiful sloops....

“The LORD alone will be exalted in that day, but the idols He shall utterly abolish. They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily. In that day a man will cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which they made, each for himself to worship, to the moles and bats, to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the crags of the rugged rocks, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty, when He arises *to shake the earth mightily.*”

Another reference in Isaiah reads like a firsthand description of the recent devastating earthquakes. Survivors in the Indian quake zone wander about

with a dispirited, unbelieving gaze in their eyes. That’s a glimpse of what will

The time is indeed coming when tragedies like the one that happened in India will be on our doorstep. We will not simply be able to “change the channel” to a better picture.

strike the descendants of Israel—living today in the comfort and safety of the Western world.

Isaiah’s words are similar to Christ’s words quoted above: “Wail, for the day of the LORD is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will be limp, every man’s heart will melt, and they will be afraid. Pangs and sorrows will take hold of them; they will be in pain as a woman in childbirth; they will be amazed at one another; their faces will be like flames.

“Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and

fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold” (Isaiah 13:6–12).

Tragedy will strike “safe” sectors of earth

The time is indeed coming when tragedies like the one that happened in India will be on our doorstep. We will not simply be able to “change the channel” to a better picture. Our material wealth will not save us, nor will our insurance companies enable us to rebuild. No nation will come to our aid. What will we do? Jesus Christ said there is only one thing to do: repent.

Joel 2 describes the time of God’s anger, and what humans should do. Verses 12–14 say, “‘Now, therefore,’ says the LORD, ‘Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.’ So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm. Who knows if He will turn and relent...?”

Right now, distance shields us from the effects of most disasters. Besides giving monetary support, there is little we can do to help. It would be a real tragedy, though, if we ignorantly assumed that we will always enjoy such isolation. Experiencing suffering is a whole lot more agonizing than seeing a few pictures of it in wealthy comfort.

Could such calamities *really* happen on a worldwide scale? And what would or could we do if they did? Jesus Christ said they would happen. He also said what we should do. Unlike the victims in India, we have an advance warning. If we heed it, if we repent, a way of escape is possible. ❖

Germany and Russia— Shifting Balance of Power

More than a century after his death, Otto von Bismarck's dream for Germany seems closer to being realized.

by Melvin Rhodes

Otto von Bismarck, Germany's Iron Chancellor who presided over the unification of Germany and guided the new nation to great power status, was noted for his sometimes conflicting secret alliances that tried to secure Germany's future. Having secretly entered into a pact with the Austrian Empire in 1879, extended to include Italy seven years later, Bismarck then entered into a secret agreement with Russia, even though Russia and Austria were rivals in the Balkans.

Bismarck's great fear was of a Germany compelled to fight on two flanks, east and west. This is exactly what happened in both world wars with the result that Germany lost.

These two defeats contributed to a century of political upheaval in Germany.

In the 20th century there were six distinct Germanys, each in its own way different from the others. The Second Reich of Kaiser Wilhelm II (1888-1918), defeated in war, gave place to the Weimar Republic (1918-33). This was followed by Hitler's Third Reich (1933-45). Again defeated in war, the country came under Allied control for a brief period before the Federal Republic of (West) Germany was established in 1949, soon followed by the creation of the communist (East) German Democratic Republic. In 1990 these two were united, thereby establishing the sixth distinct German nation of the 20th century.

All six Germanys and previous ones were subject to what columnist Josef Joffe calls "the curse of geography." Geographical location has a profound effect upon national attitudes. The predominantly Anglo-Saxon countries are all protected by lengthy coastlines so that they do not have to greatly concern themselves with hostile neighbors. The result is a



Otto von Bismarck, first chancellor of the German Empire (1871-90)

certain complacency, even naïveté, in their citizens, who often fail to understand the complexities of the outside world. Germany is in an entirely different situation, almost completely surrounded by other nations, all of which it has been in conflict with at one time or another.

The curse of geography

The curse of geography has been a major contributing factor to Germany's history.

Having learned many lessons from history, the first chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Konrad Adenauer (1949-63), tried a different approach to diplomacy. Gradually a vision emerged of a new united Europe. Its nucleus was to be France and Germany, two

Bismarck always believed that a close relationship with Russia would secure Germany's eastern flank.



German Empire 1891



Germany pre-World War II



Germany today

region would make it seemingly impossible for conflict to rear its ugly head again.

Having secured its western flank, in 1969 Germany started reaching out to the East. Chancellor Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik (Eastern Policy) was aimed at building closer ties to the communist countries of the East, with particular emphasis on East Germany and its master in Moscow. It was to be a further 20 years before the collapse of the communist East and the reunification of Germany. United Germany has recently moved its capital from Bonn back to Berlin, the former Imperial capital, now more appropriate for the nation that has become the dominant power in Europe.

There was a price for unification. Not only was there the economic cost of absorbing millions of poorer East Germans into the new Germany, there was also a cost that had to be paid for French support for reunification. Chancellor Helmut Kohl promised French President Francois Mitterand German support for a new European currency that would bind the two nations even closer together, thereby lessening French fears of reunification.

"...Like Bismarck, Kohl understood the precarious position of Germany—about to become the dominant power in Europe again.... Like Adenauer and Brandt, Kohl knew that Germany was too weak to stand alone but too strong to be left alone....

"Germany's Cold War chains were about to drop off, and so Kohl sought to reassure France and the rest of Europe by replacing the Cold War bonds with those forged by integration. The deutsche mark (Germany's own currency) was the very symbol of German primacy. What better way to soften its edge than to multinationalize the country's currency? By way of the euro, Germany proposed to tie itself down. To the

French, invaded thrice by Germany in the space of a lifetime, the euro offered perfect compensation.... Kohl's gracious offer of the deutsche mark as the foundation for a European currency was a godsend for France" (*A Century's Journey* edited by Robert Pastor, p. 129, chapter "Germany" by Josef Joffe, editorial page editor and columnist of the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, 1999).

"Never sever the tie to St. Petersburg"

Because of Bismarck's pivotal role in the defeat of France in the war of 1870-71, Germany under the kaisers never really had a hope of an alliance with France. But Bismarck, a former ambassador to Russia, always believed that Germany should "never sever the tie to St. Petersburg," the former capital of Russia. A close relationship, even an alliance, with Russia would secure Germany's eastern flank.

After Bismarck, Wilhelm II desperately tried to reach out to Russia, but failed when Russia and France became allies in 1893. This was to prove fatal in World War I when Germany had to fight on both flanks. Following the Russian Revolution in 1917, the Germans and Russians signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which effectively gave the Germans victory in the East. As a result of this treaty, Germany was free to mount a major offensive in the West.

Hitler's strategy was to defeat France first, then turn on Russia. What enabled him to do this was the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939, between the Soviets and Germany. After defeating France, Hitler invaded Russia. After D-Day Germany ended up fighting on two flanks and lost.

Germany is again turning its attention to its eastern flank. The two countries are forging an economic deal that could shift the balance of power in Europe. The two ministers responsible for the economies of both countries met in December to debate details of a plan to exchange Russian debt for German equity in Russian companies. This would be a roundabout way for German

nations that had been at war with each other three times in 75 years. These two nations were to be so closely bound to each other economically that they could never go to war again. The nations of Western Europe were able to rebuild while under the protection of the American nuclear umbrella during the Cold War. Closer economic ties between the various nations of the

banks to get back some of the money they have lent to Russia, which Moscow has not been able to repay.

Stratfor, an Internet news service, carried an article December 20, 2000, that stated, "Such a development would significantly weaken U.S. influence in Europe while dramatically strengthening Germany and Russia and helping them to advance to the front stage of world geopolitics." If successful, the deal "may help Russia's revival and Germany could emerge as the leader of a united Europe with Russia on its side."

The article, titled "Shifting Europe's Power Balance," added that "Germany would be glad to see Russia's vast resources come to Germany and Europe rather than to the east.... Berlin would also prefer these resources do not move overseas to the United States, *Germany's current geopolitical rival*" (emphasis added). Interestingly, Hitler thought that eventually "the struggle for global hegemony would come down to two contenders: Germany and the United States. The struggle was not just for Europe but, ultimately, for the whole world" (*A Century's Journey*, pp. 109-110).

In the 1880s Bismarck remarked to a friend: "I will tell you the secret of politics: friendship with Russia" (*The Kaiser*, by Virginia Cowles, p. 85). In a series of articles in the *Hamburger Nachrichten* in 1895 he emphasized "that Germany was only secure when she had a firm understanding with Russia" (*ibid.*, p. 118).

During the first decade of the 20th century Kaiser Wilhelm II tried to build bridges between Germany, France and Russia. Prior to the Russian czar's visits to Paris and Berlin, he warned his uncle, the English King Edward VII, that these ties were intended to threaten British dominance. "'England could not fail to observe,' he said darkly, 'the strong movement among the countries of the continent towards an economic union to counter British influence, and she would do well to ponder over it'" (*ibid.*, p. 196).

Realizing the threat that these developments posed to the English-

speaking world, British Foreign Secretary Joseph Chamberlain wrote on September 10, 1900, "An alliance between Germany and Russia, entailing, as it would, the co-operation of France, is the one thing we have to dread..." (*ibid.*, p. 187).

Shifting balance of power

It is a fact that a closer relationship between Berlin and Moscow would diminish Germany's dependence on the Western alliance. At the same time, closer European union, about to take a major leap forward in January 2002 when the euro replaces national currencies, will lessen Europe's need for America. Germany is and will remain the dominant force in the European Union. "Europe [is] a formalized deutsche mark zone in everything but name" (*A Century's Journey*, p. 130).

Whatever the outcome of the financial deal between Moscow and Berlin, one fact is clear: Germany has become a major economic power, set to be America's "geopolitical rival" in the years ahead.

Through the EU and closer ties to Russia, Germany ironically will have accomplished peacefully what the Second and Third Reichs failed to achieve—a united Europe built around Germany, providing limitless opportunities for German companies to expand, plentiful raw materials from undeveloped Russia and Siberia and trade access to former British and French colonies through the Lomé Convention that ties African, Caribbean and Pacific nations to the EU. Germany also will have secured both flanks, with strong economic ties east and west.

After Bismarck, Wilhelm II was obsessed with building up Germany to rival Great Britain, then the dominant global power. A century later British preeminence has been replaced by American hegemony. The new century will likely see a further change. The Bible tells us that God "removes kings and raises up kings" (Daniel 2:21). God also warns the modern descendants of ancient Israel, the American and British peoples, that He "will break the pride of [their] power" (Leviticus 26:19), a punishment for national sin. A time is coming when the United States will be replaced as the world's leading power, just as Britain lost her leadership role.

However, history would suggest that relations between Germany and Russia can suddenly turn sour. Bismarck's overtures to Russia were reversed when he was no longer chancellor and Wilhelm II took a closer interest in foreign policy. The kaiser tried to build closer ties with Russia but failed. Over 20 years later, Hitler's alliance with Stalin ended when the Soviet Union was attacked in June 1941. After World War II, Moscow's offer of a reunited but neutral Germany in the 1950s was rejected due to lack of trust. The Federal Republic felt more secure tied to the United States through the NATO alliance.

Bible prophecy also suggests that Russia and Germany will not be in alliance as end-time events unfold. Following an invasion of the "Glorious Land" (Holy Land) by the resurrected beast power (Daniel 11:40-43), "news from the east and the north shall trouble him" (verse 44), a likely reference to Russia in alliance with other military forces from the east. Revelation 9:16 prophesies of an "army of...two hundred million," suggesting an alliance of major powers to the east. Further, prophecies regarding Russia in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39 do not show any alliance with the beast power.

Whatever the outcome of the financial deal between Moscow and Berlin, one fact is clear: Germany has become a major economic power, set to be America's "geopolitical rival" in the years ahead. ❖

When the Angel Leaves the Storm

In his inauguration, George W. Bush referred to an observation by a founding father that an angel was directing the storm surrounding the United States. Today, the storm is here, but is the angel?

by Darris McNeely

Historians would record that the day dawned cold and bleak that January morning. The black limousines carrying the president and president-elect crept slowly through the wet streets with headlights on at midday. Along the route protestors registered their complaints over the election outcome.

According to law, at noon the peaceful transfer of power took place and George W. Bush became the 42nd successor to George Washington. His speech contained a pledge to unify the fractured country and drew appropriate applause.

Near the end, he referred to an observation from a founding father at the time of the American Revolution. Virginia statesman John Page wrote to Thomas Jefferson soon after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, "We know the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. Do you not think an angel rides in the whirlwind and directs this storm?"

The new president concluded, "This work continues. This story goes on. And an angel still rides in the whirlwind and directs this storm." Some thought the quote seemed lost and little noticed at the end of the speech. By four o'clock, it was dark again.

For two hundred years, America has been blessed by the presence of that metaphorical angel watching over its growth into the most powerful and prosperous single nation in world history. Has it come to the time when the angel's presence might vanish, leaving the country to the violent winds of time and history? How can one know the outcome of this critical period in history? Does history

provide a parallel to help see the future outcome?

The context for understanding America in the 21st century is found in the story of its ancient forefathers, the nation of Israel—specifically Israel and Judah of the middle eighth century B.C. The similarities between Israel of that period, split into two countries, and America today are both striking and instructive. The story is best understood as it is told in the words and through the eyes of the prophets sent by God to waken the nation from its sins and transgression of the covenant.

The context

The united nation of Israel had been split into separate sister nations after the death of Solomon. The northern 10 tribes had formed a separatist government in the north with its capital at Samaria. Jerusalem, the traditional capital since the days of David, remained the seat of power for the nation of Judah.

Israel had existed for roughly five hundred years in its land. Though she had suffered internal strife, periodic incursions from smaller nations and a civil war that split the nation, she continued to survive. "No empire had existed that had been in a position to trouble her deeply and permanently. As a result, she had never known an emergency that she had not in some way been able to master, and so to survive" (*A History of Israel*, John Bright, p. 269).

Israel in the mid-eighth century B.C. survived in a Middle East power vacuum. Babylon had yet to pull itself together into the great empire to come. Assyria was still a small cloud on the horizon and Egypt had relinquished its influence this far from its homeland. Israel and

How can one know the outcome of this critical period in history? Does history provide a parallel to help see the future outcome?

Judah still stood as a regional influence in a pivotal geographic spot.

Jeroboam II

In 786 B.C., a new king, Jeroboam II, came to the throne of Israel. He reigned for 41 years. During his time, Israel saw a resurgence of power and wealth that bear striking similarities to 21st century America. We have a brief record of him in the book of 2 Kings.

“In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, became king in Samaria, and reigned forty-one years. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin.

He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath [today in Syria] to the Sea of the Arabah [the Dead Sea], according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hepher. For the LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter; and whether bond or free, there was no helper for Israel” (2 Kings 14:23–26).

Jeroboam was a strong leader whose campaigns extended the borders of Israel to match that of Solomon’s reign. He ejected the Moabites and Ammonites from the territory and kept others at bay to restore Israel to a point of regional dominance. Similarly, to the south, Uzziah, the king of Judah, brought Judah to a position of strength that further stabilized the region, allowing trade to flow throughout the Middle East. Taken together, the two nations achieved a level of power, peace and prosperity unknown since the time of Solomon.

Ancient period of globalization

During this period, the major trade routes up and down the Mediterranean coast were opened and allowed freedom of transport for goods to flow from Africa into the Middle East and Asia. As caravans passed through Israel, tolls

were exacted, which poured wealth into the country. It is likely that oceangoing trade again played a major role in the creation of wealth. Ships from Tyre and beyond could go through the Mediterranean. The Red Sea opened possibilities of trade further south into Africa.

In Judah, the cities grew with wealth and people. Archaeological evidence shows that citizens overflowed the walls of their cities, and the population spread southward into the desert. Uzziah, Judah’s king at this time, replicated the advances of the north. He opened trade routes to the south, expanded the frontier boundaries to the west and as far south as Elath on the Red Sea (2 Kings 14:22).

The middle-class citizen of Israel and Judah was better off than he had ever been at any time before. It was a

This prosperity was interpreted, wrongly, as a sign of God’s favor. They failed to understand their duty and obligation to God under the covenant.

euphoric period of optimism. “All this resulted in a prosperity such as no living Israelite could remember” (Bright, p. 259). With this economic boom, new and bigger buildings arose. The finest of furnishings filled these homes and businesses. It is likely that Israel was trading with every significant nation on earth at that time. A rich merchant class developed. Venture capitalists made a lot of money, and made it very quickly. What we see is an ancient form of “globalization.”

Israel outwardly professed belief in God, but there remained at the core the pagan cult of Baal. The name *Baal* was so prevalent that records show many men took the name *Baal* to form part of their own. “A great gulf separated the

rich and the poor. Trade was good; architecture and the arts flourished; but fundamentally the revival was unsound and could not last” (*Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, “Jeroboam II,” p. 842).

In Israel there was great confidence in God and the future of the nation. This prosperity was interpreted, wrongly, as a sign of God’s favor. They failed to understand their duty and obligation to God under the covenant. Instead of using a period of freedom and prosperity to acknowledge God, examine their way and repent of transgressions, Israel drifted further from the true faith and corrupted the worship practices God had given them.

The same situation exists today. While America experiences unrivaled prosperity and freedom, it fails to understand the true source of its blessings. Americans think that their wisdom and ingenuity have achieved greatness. But in truth, the United States inherited the birthright, as God promised to Abraham and his descendants.

In walks Amos

Yet all was not so good for affluent Israel. Just as we can look around us today and see beyond the outward signs of prosperity, so it was in Israel. The northern nation was in a state of decay. The good times were about to end. What was thought to be unending wealth was but a final revival before the fall.

It was during this prosperous period that the prophet Amos strode into Israel’s capital city, Samaria, with a warning message that goes to the seat of political and religious power. Amos finds a nation awash in a sea of lies. Everywhere he looks, he finds untruth, injustice and inequity. Under the veneer of stability and prosperity, he finds a decaying structure on the verge of collapse.

Amos was not a traditional religious figure. Like his contemporary Hosea and others, he felt a unique and divine call to deliver a message to the nation. Because he was outside the mainstream, he could speak to the heart

of the problem without feeling defensive about any previous experience. He was not defending a position, but rather merely speaking the truth.

Spiritual truth was gone. Jezebel had introduced the cult of Baal and its corrupting influence remained. It transformed the truth of God into a system that hid Israel's identity as God's special covenant people. "Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have despised the law of the LORD, and have not kept His commandments. Their lies lead them astray, lies which their fathers followed'" (Amos 2:4).

Those who spoke the truth were ridiculed and marginalized within society. "They hate the one who rebukes in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks uprightly. Therefore, because you tread down the poor and take grain taxes from him, though you have built houses of hewn stone, yet you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink wine from them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: afflicting the just and taking bribes; diverting the poor from justice at the gate" (Amos 5:10–12).

Let's look more closely at the problems he addressed.

Disparity between the rich and poor

The wealth produced by the strong economy was not evenly distributed. The economic tide tends to lift all boats, but some boats displace more water than others. There was a gap between rich and poor with its attendant social problems.

"Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals. They pant after the dust of the earth which is on the head of the poor, and pervert the way of the humble. A man and his father go in to the same girl, to defile My holy name'" (Amos 2:6–7). The state did not properly address the

social inequity and provide for the basic needs of people.

Periodic and localized drought could throw many off the farms and into bankruptcy from which there was no hope of redress. "Also I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities. And lack of bread in all your places; yet you have not returned to Me," says the LORD. 'I also withheld rain from you, when there were still three months to the harvest. I made it rain on one city, I withheld rain from another city. One part was rained upon, and where it did not rain the part withered. So two or three cities wandered to another city to drink water, but they were not satisfied; yet you have not returned to Me,' says the LORD.

"I blasted you with blight and mildew. When your gardens increased, your vineyards, your fig trees, and your olive trees, the locust devoured them; yet you have not returned to Me,' says the LORD" (Amos 4:6–9).

Here are described times of drought which might put a farmer into bankruptcy. Over the past 20 years, America has seen a decline in small family farms. Witness the popularity of "Farm Aid," a series of musical concerts that raised money for farmers who lost their land. American agriculture has been transformed in the past 75 years. Mega-farms utilize modern technology to keep supermarket shelves abundantly supplied.

But it is not just a question of the food supply—it is important to understand what the system has spawned.

Amos understood that the basis of the nation was broken and changed beyond repair. They had rejected God's way of life. Originally, God had placed within Israel a system and way of life that would preserve His law and truth from generation to generation. There was strength in the core family unit. Society would grow with the family, and families would take care of one another within their ability.

The key to this was the law of the Jubilee (Leviticus 25), a 50-year reset button designed to keep families intact along with the inherent values that come from properly functioning units

of a nuclear family. Amos understood that in the homes of the farmers, tradesmen and small town merchants, the truth of God was preserved and passed on from one generation to another.

This was the major change from the earlier period of the judges. At that time, the social structure had been more unified. Now, it had broken up and been reformed into a more urban, class-differentiated system.

"The rise of the monarchy, with the attendant organization of life under the crown, had transferred the effective basis of social obligation to the state and, together with the burgeoning of commercial activity, had created a privileged class, weakened (family) ties and destroyed the solidarity characteristic of tribal society" (Bright, p. 260). God said this would happen when the Israelites wanted to radically alter their government and place a king over themselves.

Look at the recent presidential campaign. Social Security was a major issue. Insuring that the nation's retirement program for seniors stays solvent for the coming rush of "baby boomers" is a priority item for the nation. It will continue to be in coming years. Education reform is another major issue facing the new administration. America's public schools need help, but the answer is not just more money. America's families need help too. No amount of money will fix some of the systemic ills afflicting families.

Health care and abortion are major problems in the nation to which there are no easy answers. Together, they pose a major challenge—some may even say a threat to the stability of our present culture.

The multicultural utopia

Israel had another issue that threatened to unravel its society. The problem afflicts its modern descendants, the British and American peoples, as well. It is the issue of multiculturalism—many peoples living within the same borders and under the same flag.

Israel had always had within its midst those who were not native born

Israelites. When they left Egypt, it appears that even some non-Israelites went with them. When they entered Canaan, they were instructed by God to move out all non-Israelite peoples, but they allowed some to remain and mix with them. There was good reason for God's instruction within the context of His purpose for the nation and His overall plan for mankind. Through the years, there had also been immigration. Ruth is one example. The key to making it all work had been the strict rules that there was one law, one way, one culture for all: "One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you" (Exodus 12:49).

However, over time the immigration of non-Israelites had changed the balance of society. Instead of adopting the culture of their new homeland, they brought with them beliefs and ways that steadily weakened the structures of traditional Israelite society. A mixture of religious beliefs, languages and cultural standards had transformed Israel into a nation of distinctions rather than a unified system.

Notice what Hosea described, "Ephraim has mixed himself among the peoples; Ephraim is a cake unturned. Aliens have devoured his strength, but he does not know it; yes, gray hairs are here and there on him, yet he does not know it" (Hosea 7:8-9).

Recently released statistics suggest that the United States is losing its historic ability to assimilate people from diverse cultural and political backgrounds into the fabric of its representative republic. Of the 275 million people comprising the current U.S. population, nearly 1 in every 10 was born outside the country.

Consider the language issue. Increasingly controversial measures to legislate or to deny bilingual education resound in states with large Hispanic populations. Some 6.5 million people speak little English, while 17.3 million speak exclusively Spanish. The recent U.S. presidential election campaign demonstrably illustrated the need to reach out to and

include the sizable block of Hispanic voters.

A "Trojan horse"

Unnoticed by most people was Executive Order #13166, signed on August 11, 2000, by former President Bill Clinton, which took a significant step toward turning America into a multilingual nation. The order requires all federal programs using federal funds to guarantee that "language barriers" do not "exclude" non-English speakers from "participation" in all "benefits and services." The order applies to any foreign language in America where enough immigrants would petition the government for recognition. This order now places foreign language rights on a par with civil rights, a first for the nation.

Columnist Georgie Ann Geyer

Amos' message applies today to the United States, Britain and other peoples of the world who have sprung from common ancestors.

reported this action in her syndicated column. She called the order "a Trojan horse rolled into the citadel of American Society."

Immigration during the years of nation-building for the United States was chiefly from European nations and other Anglo-Saxon peoples. However, a fundamental shift is underway that portends political and cultural changes in years to come. Within the next 50 years, African-Americans, Hispanics and Asian-Americans will become the majority population.

Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher labels multicultural efforts as an act of "devolution," which is moving the British and American peoples toward "a system in which the

government presides over a number of different social groups, some of which have their own language and type of education. This approach undermines social unity and allows construction of a multicultural society which is the very opposite of America's previous practice" (speech before the Hudson Institute, www.worldtribune.com). America has historically been tolerant of immigrants seeking to join its melting pot. The key to its status, described in the phrase *e pluribus unum*, was the unified culture built upon one language and a culture of patriotism and loyalty to a unique idea of freedom.

Like prophetic Ephraim, America may not see its gray hairs until it is too late. The 2000 election revealed a significant cultural divide.

Amos looked at the state of Israel in the mid-eighth century B.C. and saw there was little to salvage. The moral and ethical condition of the state was precarious. In his summation, Amos saw the Lord standing by the altar and pronouncing a fierce judgment from which few would escape. There would be judgment on the nation that turned from the covenant (Amos 9:1-4).

Yet, there was hope. Israel would be restored! Israel would not be destroyed. Amos shows that God will again restore Israel to a place among the nations. Waste cities would be rebuilt and captivity and destruction are promised to never happen again (Amos 9:8-15). The promise of Israel, as a nation setting the example of God's way to the world, will be fulfilled. There is a literal angel, Michael, "...who stands watch over the sons of your people" (Daniel 12:1).

Amos' message applies today to the United States, Britain and other peoples of the world who have sprung from common ancestors. Today's headlines can be found in these prophecies given to Israel more than 2,800 years ago. In part two of this series, we'll look at the divisions confronting America today and the state of its spiritual life. We will see that what Amos said to Israel has come to pass today among the descendants of that ancient people. ❖

In Brief...

World News Review

News Trends Among Youth: *Telephone Chatlines Trap Teens*

Many parents are aware of the dangers of Internet chatrooms, which are often visited by sexual predators looking for child victims. Parents now need to be aware of the danger of their home telephones, which some officials have dubbed a “poor man’s Internet chatroom.”

Teens alert each other to telephone numbers where they can hear “party talk” and “party action.” Far from the kind of parties they are looking for, teens are often put in contact with predators seeking to lure them into prostitution. Atlanta, Georgia, has experienced a number of problems with telephone chat lines, which have led to the disappearance of many teens. At least one girl was violently assaulted.



Heroin Use on the Rise

Flush with increased spending money and the availability of a lower-priced, purer product, U.S. teens are using heroin at an increasing rate. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) reports an estimated 81,000 new heroin users in 1997—and suggests that this estimate may be on the low side. Nearly 90 percent of new users were under the age of 26. (In 1992, only 61 percent were under 26.)

A branch of NIDA that collects data on drug-related hospital emergency department episodes (ED) from 21 metropolitan areas, estimates that 14 percent of all drug-related ED episodes involve heroin. ED episodes more than doubled between 1991 and 1996. During the same time, ED episodes involving youths aged 12 to 17 *nearly quadrupled*.

NIDA also provides information about the nature and patterns of drug abuse in 21 cities. Heroin was the primary

drug of abuse recorded in drug abuse treatment missions in Baltimore, Boston, Los Angeles, Newark, New York and San Francisco.

Sources: Cox News Service, National Institute on Drug Abuse *Research Report Series*.

News in the Race to Clone Humans

This January, an Italian doctor announced in Lexington, Kentucky, that he plans to clone a human in 2001. Defending his project in the name of helping couples unable to have children, the fertility expert said, “The goal to be a father, to be a mother, is a human right, *an absolute human right*.”

Addressing the weighty moral objections to cloning, Dr. Severino Antoniori of Rome declared that humans will be cloned in the very near future, “whether we like it or not.”

In a related development, the U.K. government voted January 21 to allow British researchers to clone the genetic material of humans to pursue treatment of several serious diseases. The controversial vote was defended by some as having nothing to do with the cloning of humans and everything to do with the compassionate treatment of the ill.

Others said it had everything to do with cloning humans. The bill was challenged with equal passion by Lord Alton who warned that it was wrong to treat the human embryo as “just another accessory to be created, bartered, frozen or destroyed.” He added, “These are not trivial questions that preoccupy a few moral theologians. They are at the heart of our humanity.”

Half a world away, Japanese scientists have succeeded in circumventing that country’s law banning the cloning of humans. They have, instead, succeeded in creating the technology that will allow them to clone human sperm. The scientific team from Tokyo believes they will also be able to reprogram cells from men, literally producing eggs—so that a man could both “father” and “mother” children. In this confused world, their research would enable homosexual couples to reproduce.

Finally, the creation of “ANDi” was recently announced. ANDi is an anagram for “inserted DNA” spelled backwards. DNA from a jellyfish was inserted into the genes

of a rhesus monkey, as an experiment to determine if genes could be transferred from one species to another. So far, it appears that the jellyfish gene is present in all of the monkey's cells. The next step is to determine if the monkey will reproduce itself, with its engineered genetic makeup.

Conservative columnist George Will warns that this is but a step away from human genetic "enhancement" and human cloning. He foresees that parents will "design" their children by selecting the traits they would prefer their offspring to possess.

Genetic engineering is being conducted in the name of medical research. Quoting biologist and ethicist Leon Kass, Will called it "moral myopia to think that all values must yield to the goals of better health and desirable traits. A cost of such yielding can be the reduction of human beings to the status of just another man-made thing. But such warnings may be overwhelmed by what Kass calls 'the technological imperative'—whatever science can do will be done."

Will concluded his column with this sober and stark warning: "ANDi is an intimation that nuclear explosions are not the only way science can end the human story. Biology might do that more gradually than physics can, but no less decisively, and even more repugantly."

Sources: UPI; BBC; Times Newspapers Limited, "The Monkey That Could Mean the End" by George Will, January 22, 2001.

Middle East: War Exercises and Water

Responding to the increasing tensions between Israel and the Palestinians, the United States recently sent a Patriot anti-missile defense battery to Israel. The battery is manned by 400 members of the 69th Air Defense Artillery Brigade who will participate in a joint exercise with Israel beginning February 8 in cooperation with the newly elected Israeli government. The exercise will last 15 days.

An increasingly important issue in the Middle East is water. The availability of water is important enough a concern to be included in the "final status" issues yet to be resolved between the Israelis and Palestinians. It's also a key element in Israel's reluctance to surrender the Golan Heights in order to achieve a peace agreement with Syria.

Arabs are understandably jealous over the amount of water possessed and used by Israel. Israel's per capita daily use of water is about 66 gallons. In Syria, the average citizen uses 50 gallons of water per day. In Lebanon, the rate is 41 gallons per day in contrast to Jordan, where the average citizen uses 25 gallons every day. In stark contrast is the consumption rate of Palestinians in the West Bank and

Gaza, where the people manage on only 20 gallons per capita per day—and their water is heavily polluted with nitrates.

Sources: WorldTribune.com; WorldNetDaily.com, Inc.; Time, Inc.

Persian Gulf Council Meets, Acts

The six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) angered Iran and Iraq with the communique issued at the end of their December 2000 summit. The communique called on Baghdad to comply with UN resolutions, as well as to end its criticism of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The GCC backed the United Arab Emirates in a territorial dispute with Iran over three Gulf islands.

Iran and Iraq both accused the GCC of being puppets of American foreign policy.

However, many Westerners will not view the GCC as friends in light of its decision to reduce oil production to counter falling prices and boost profits. Even Saudi Arabia pushed for a cut in production of between 1.5 million and 2 million barrels per day. The six Gulf monarchies, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, account for 45 percent of the world's reserves and

presently provide about 20 percent of the world's crude.

The GCC members were able to set aside differences and reach an agreement on plans that could boost their 5,000-member Peninsula Shield defense force to 25,000. In the immediate future, this development could reduce the dependence of GCC members on the U.S. military for defense.

Persian Gulf nations, as well as Israel, may again be looking to

the United States and its European allies for protection from the Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein. An Iraqi military engineer who recently defected to the West claims that Hussein has at least two operational nuclear bombs and is working on more.

Hussein has threatened to destabilize the efforts of the United States to negotiate a peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians with any means at his disposal. U.S. officials, including President Bush, Vice President Cheney and Secretary of State Powell, have warned that any attempt by Hussein to build a weapon of mass destruction could lead to military action.

Sources: BBC, Telegraph Group Ltd.

by Cecil E. Maranville



“PORCH,” (Continued from page 16)

mon in our country. With a simple oath we affirm old traditions, and make new beginnings.” Everyone being invited to “the porch” makes his presidential rhetoric dramatically real.

When the talking has stopped

Now you may be saying, “C’mon, I have never seen such a big group of hypocrites in my life,” or “Look, the ‘honeymoon period’ in Washington is already over! Just look at the Senate hearings.” If that is your response, yes, you have a point. We could focus all day long on what politicians do or don’t do after this majestic moment on the nation’s front porch, but that’s another story.

The question I would like to ask the reader is, How much room do you have on your “front porch” for those who don’t see eye to eye with you on every issue? Sometimes “the talking has stopped” for one reason or another even among those who have a love of God and family. Although the porch is still there, no one is on it. We haven’t even taken the first step of coming together if but for a moment. Therefore, criticizing the politicians is off limits until we do some serious thinking about ourselves.

Why is this so often the case? What we ideally desire and what we practically absorb are often two different things. Personal perspectives of what is “absolute” can thwart meaningful dialogue. This reminds me of the story of three people who were visiting and viewing the Grand Canyon—an artist, a pastor and a cowboy. As they stood on the edge of that massive abyss, each one responded with a cry of exclamation. The artist said, “Ah, what a beautiful scene to paint!” The minister cried, “Ah, what a wonderful example of the handiwork of God!” The cowboy mused, “What a terrible place to lose a cow!” Amazing! Same ridge, same view, same canyon—three different perceptions.

The question is: Who is willing to go first to create the dialogue towards understanding? We all learned in geometry that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, but have you ever noticed how most people prefer to go around in circles?

Long ago, the early Church was making a lot of news and headlines in and around Jerusalem and seemed to be on the move. But they hadn’t yet fully engaged at the “front porch.” Unbelievable news had come to the Jerusalem congregation that none other than Paul of Tarsus, the great antagonist of all Christians, had become a disciple. Unbelievable! That would be like F.D.R. becoming a Republican, Marx becoming a capitalist or Ronald Reagan becoming a communist. Some things in life are simply irreversible, or so they



seem. It sure seemed that way to the disciples and apostles in Jerusalem. Acts 9:26–27 tells us, “They were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.” The “front porch” was suddenly off limits. Unlike Motel 6, the light was not left on! Thankfully, then comes one of the great introduction words of the Bible, *but*. Acts 9:27 tell us, “But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles.” In the early Church, the “front porch” would never be the same. Barnabas recognized the need to share the “front porch” of

Christianity right in Jerusalem. He recognized a “front porch” happening when it came along. He threw out all the ifs, ands and buts that had been building up against Paul about his former persecution and, perhaps, how he had handled his ministry in Damascus. Who was he to come among them? Why make room for him on the porch? How could there possibly be any dialogue—much less any relationship building?

What made Barnabas, the man of Cyprus who we know by his nickname, “son of encouragement,” different from the rest? Barnabas had the unique gift of seeing people for where they were headed, rather than where they were coming from. He had the ability to focus on what people could be, rather than what they appeared to be. He was not stuck on “the baggage.” He understood a fundamental truth—that we of all people, we Christians, have a challenge of pointing people to the Great Reconciler. We must first be reconciled to one another, as individuals, families, congregations or church organizations. Yes, “but” is a powerful word in the Bible. It can mean the difference between life and death. Barnabas had come to realize it wasn’t his job to choose God’s family, but to accept them and make some more room on “the porch.” Where did he learn to extend the invitation to the “front porch”? Through the example of Jesus Christ.

Touching the untouchable

Early in His earthly ministry, Christ dramatically altered the rules of who is invited to the “front porch.” In Luke 5:12–13, Christ chose to respond to the initiative of a leper who pleaded for healing: “‘Lord if You are willing, You can make me clean.’ Then He put out His hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’” Due to restrictions dating back to the Old Testament, the leper was completely isolated from any community. No invitations were coming his way. No one would dare share common space or even dare to be seen in his vicinity. This is the type of person who came to Christ. These are the ones whom Christ purposefully sought.

Luke 19:10 magnifies Christ’s purpose: “For the Son of

Man has come to seek and save that which was lost.” Ultimately, by applying the geometric principle that the “shortest distance between two points is a straight line” to human relationships, Christ offered a place on “the porch” for those who would be about the business of personal engagement with the lives of others. He offered dignity to those who were considered undignified. He touched the untouchable, loved the unlovable and forgave the seemingly unforgivable. Oh, yes, Barnabas had a great teacher; so did Paul.

Later on, Paul and Barnabas would have their own squabbles to work out. Somehow they, too, were looking from “the same ridge, same view, same canyon,” but coming up with different perspectives. But this time it wasn’t a canyon—it was the young minister, Mark. Paul didn’t want him to be a part of their ministerial team. Acts 15:37–38 tells us Paul “insisted” and Barnabas was “determined.” Their ideas became bigger than their Christian ideal. Paul saw a problem; Barnabas saw a man with the potential to fulfill a high calling; and God was watching all along to see what they would do.

Well, everyone took off for a while. But it’s interesting to note that Paul later mentions the ministry of Barnabas in relationship to his own in a positive light (1 Corinthians 9:6). Again, it becomes “Barnabas and I.” Not a whole lot is mentioned, but enough that we can perceive a start in the right direction. “From little acorns do great oak trees grow.” Later on, even Mark is welcomed back to the “front porch.” In 2 Timothy 4:11 Paul writes, “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.”

The big question for you, the reader, to answer is not what politicians will do or not do after inauguration day, nor why Paul had a falling out with Barnabas. The point is, at least they came back to common ground, even though they had their differences. The big question that each of us must answer is: Who is not on our “front porch” at this time? What family member, Church member, community member or church group remains in isolation like the leper of Christ’s time? Let me quote from President Bush’s inaugural speech to help bring us to the point of perhaps touching the future in new ways.

“Everyone belongs; everyone deserves a chance”

“We have a place, all of us, in a long story—a story we continue, but whose end we will not see.... The grandest of these ideals is...that everyone belongs, that everyone deserves a chance, that no insignificant person was ever born.... And sometimes, our differences run so deep it seems we share a continent, but not a country. We do not accept this, and will not allow it. Our unity, our union, is the serious work of leaders and citizens in every generation. I know this is in our reach because we are guided by a power larger than ourselves who creates us equal in His image....

“America has never been united by blood or birth or soil. We are bound by ideals that move us beyond our back-

grounds, lift us above our interests and teach us what it means to be citizens.... America, at its best, matches a commitment to principle with a concern for civility. A civil society demands from each of us good will and respect, fair dealing and forgiveness....

“America, at its best, is also courageous.... America, at its best, is compassionate.... America, at its best, is a place where personal responsibility is valued and expected....

“Americans are generous and strong and decent, not because we believe in ourselves, but because we hold beliefs beyond ourselves.... When this spirit is present, no wrong can stand against it.”

Think beyond the man and the political party. Readers who do not live in the United States, think beyond national identity. Just allow the words and concepts to sink in. Each of us, from whatever country, needs only to substitute the word “Christian” for “America,” and it becomes our story. It truly does take a new civility, a new round of courage, an expanding compassion and recognized self-responsibility to open your “front porch” when it’s been off limits to some for so long.

World News and Prophecy is dedicated to the “long story that continues.” We do see the end, a different end from what most of humanity is experiencing today. We look to a future dedicated to the reality of foes becoming friends, the lost being found and people with the same ideals being able to disagree without being disagreeable. While the staff and contributing writers of *World News and Prophecy* feel a responsibility to alert readers to the troubling predicaments of human society in today’s world, we want our readers to understand the good news at the end of the story. The same Christ who touched the leper is returning to touch this earth with an administration that is going to move beyond four or even eight years and move beyond the best intentioned inaugural rhetoric and truly bring people together on the “front porch”—not simply for a moment, but forever.

Looking into the future through the window of Bible prophecy, see the time of reconciliation that’s coming. Isaiah 19:23–24 says, “In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will serve with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria—a blessing in the midst of the land, whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, ‘Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.’”

No more circles! Highways—straight lines—will be going everywhere to everybody. Everyone will be invited to take his or her place on the “front porch,” not for a quick handshake, sound bite or photo, but to stay and build. The words of God found in Isaiah 1:18 will be the welcome sign to all future generations, “Come now, and let us reason together.” Yes, that brief moment of togetherness on the nation’s front porch is not the end of the story, but points to a bigger story that bids our reading audience to consider the millennial refrain of “this is the way, walk you in it”—right up to my front porch, right now, whatever it takes, whoever is willing. ❖

This Is the Way... Sharing the Front Porch

by Robin Webber

Last month, on a dreary winter's day in Washington D.C., something marvelous occurred that captured my imagination. On the one hand, it was startling, and on the other, it was routine, something that occurs like clockwork every four years on the steps of the Capitol of the United States. We all tend to view a snippet or two of this historic event on our televisions, but allow me to focus a zoom lens on a specific setting and then freeze frame it in our collective view.

It's the picture of political foes coming together. Yes, they are implacable, seemingly irreconcilable opponents who have waged an exhaustive campaign for the presidency of the United States and thereby control of the national agenda for the next four years. No expense has been spared, whether of money, campaign stops, photo ops, sound bites or demeaning caricatures of their rival. Indeed, all-out political warfare has been waged.

Nonetheless, now at this supreme moment of the republican ideal of the peaceful transfer of power to another citizen of the land, everyone is there together to watch and embrace, if only for a moment. The steps of the national Capitol have often been called "democracy's front porch." A front porch is a powerful emblem in the mind of anyone who has a home. It is where we come and go. It is

where we intersect with family and neighbors. It is where we "put out our welcome mat," both literally and figuratively. Our front porch light bids "welcome" to those who would come in from the cold and the dark. Simply put, our front porch says something about us.

The "nation's front porch" on this given day says something about America. It says something about its citizens, whether Republican, Democrat or independent. It says that America is built on an ideal that is bigger and greater than the sum total of any individual or particular party's platform. At this moment in time all agendas, ideas and perceptions lie subordinate and prostrate before the greater ideal of "one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

It is a time when, through much symbolism and custom, the former and new administrations pass and accept the baton of responsibility. Presidents and vice presidents take the walk of unity up to the porch for all to see. Walks and talks, handshakes and embraces, words of encouragement are exchanged, if but for a moment. Some do it better than others, but nonetheless, they all do it. On this particular day, President Bush would open by stating, "The peaceful transfer of authority is rare in history, yet com-

(See "PORCH," page 14)