



In This Issue:

January 2002 | Vol. 5, No. 1

Europe at the Crossroads—What Does It Mean?

by John Ross Schroeder 1

Restoration Going Safely Into the Unknown

by Darris McNeely 2

Imagine a World Without the United States

by Melvin Rhodes 4



Photo © 1999-2002 www.arttoday.com

Asking the Tough Question: Has Religion Failed?

by Cecil E. Maranville 7

The Biblical Origins of the Arab Peoples

by Gary Petty 10

In Brief...World News Review

by John Foster, Cecil E. Maranville, Ken Martin and Jim Tuck 13

This Is the Way... How Strong Is Your Tea Bag?

by Robin Webber 16

Europe at the Crossroads—What Does It Mean?

The introduction of the euro coincides with the joint declaration of the European Union nations at the recent summit at Laeken, Belgium. These benchmark events will affect your life, long term—in ways you may not have envisioned.

by John Ross Schroeder

Where is Europe headed now? The leaders of the European Union (EU) recently declared that “the Union stands at a crossroads, *a defining moment in its existence*” (Laeken Summit text, emphasis added). They see the decisions made at Laeken as a far-reaching declaration for the future of Europe, heralding a new era in its long existence as a civilization. Coinciding with the EU’s secular mission statement is the emergence of the euro as a real in-pocket currency. Said Romano Prodi, president of the European Commission, “We will become a greater Europe with the euro. We shall become stronger, wealthier” (Associated Press).

The euro’s impact

A biblical proverb tells us that “money answers all things.” This is the real reason for a lot of things that may initially puzzle us. Clearly the euro will go a long way towards unifying Europe even further. Even the three EU countries that have not yet subscribed to the single currency will find themselves being irresistibly pulled towards the center of Europe.

Many familiar British retail chains like Virgin and Marks & Spencer have already decided to accept euro notes and coins in their shops, nationwide.

Undoubtedly many others will soon follow. Britons may face the prospect of having to cope with an extra currency in their own country. Seasoned observers feel that 15 million annual visitors from the European continent with euros in their pockets and purses, plus the inevitable effect of tourists from the British Isles visiting Europe, will help assure the eventual demise of the pound.

Envisioning the European future

But the stated intentions of the Laeken Summit leaders could turn out to be far more significant than even the impact of the euro. People with a sound understanding of both biblical prophecy and European history have very good reason to be seriously concerned about the recent joint declaration of the EU heads of government.

For example, one crucial portion of the final Laeken declaration states: “Fifty years on, however, the union stands at a crossroads, *a defining moment in its existence, the unification of Europe is near*. The union is about to expand to bring in more than ten new member states, predominantly Central and Eastern European, thereby finally closing one of the darkest chapters in European history: the Second World

(See “EUROPE,” page 3)



World News & Prophecy

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CURRENT EVENTS

January 2002

Vol. 5, No. 1

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. © 2002 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 members of the United Church of God, and all who request it. There is no subscription price. To request a subscription, write to *World News and Prophecy*, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, telephone (513) 576-9796 or download it from our Web site at <http://www.ucg.org>

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

FII: 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: info@gutenachrichten.org

ITALY: La Buona Notizia, Chiesa di Dio Unita, Casella Postale 187, 24100 Bergamo, Italy. Phone/Fax: 0039-035-582140 E-mail: redazione@labuonanotizia.org

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

E-mail: mauritiuss@ucg.org

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 81840, DCCPO, 8000 Davao City, Philippines. Phone: (+63-82) 241-0150

SCANDINAVIA: Guds Forenade Kyrka, Mailbox 144, 111 73 Stockholm, Sweden

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 Internet's 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 our booklets. The address <http://www.ucg.ca> accesses the Church's Canadian Web site, <http://www.ucg.org.au> the Australian Web site, <http://www.labuonanotizia.org> the Italian Web site, <http://www.goodnews.org.uk> the British Isles Web site, <http://www.ucg.org.ph> the Philippines Web site and <http://www.ucgsa.org> the Southern Africa Web site.



Restoration

ACTS 3:21

Going Safely Into the Unknown

The year 2001 is now history and the world anxiously awaits the events of 2002. America's war on terrorism in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks dominated all other events of the past year and will continue to shape events of the coming months. Most experts—and a majority of Americans—fully expect another major terrorist attack on American soil this year. Whatever type of attack comes, whether bio-terror, airplane hijacking or, God forbid, even nuclear, the effect on America is chilling as it waits "for the other shoe to drop."

It is a time of uncertainty. The military action in Afghanistan has gone well for America with only a few casualties and the successful ousting of the Taliban. Where American troops will go next is not widely known. Somalia has been mentioned as well as Iraq and Yemen. Officials caution that the war has only begun and that it will be a long period before its mission is complete.

The new year begins with a recession in America, a new currency in Europe and the nations attempting to peer into the future to see exactly what kind of post-Sept. 11 world we really do have. In this issue of *World News and Prophecy* we bring you several articles to help focus our attention on subjects vital to our understanding of today's world. Melvin Rhodes asks what would happen if America's influence was removed from international relations. Gary Petty examines the roots of the Arab nations. Cecil Maranville probes the powerful influence of religion during modern times.

This generation is facing a time of testing unlike any it has seen. Already many from all walks of life have stepped forward to provide a stabilizing influence. The days ahead will require further resolve and heroic actions. It is a time to go to the one source of help which will prove a deep well of true spiritual help. Psalm 91 shows that he who sets his eyes and affection upon God can expect help in time of crisis. "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust'" (Psalm 91:1-2). Read this entire psalm to glimpse God's promise to those who turn to Him. In this time of national self-examination we need to return to biblical passages such as these to guide our path to the future.

It was four months into the Second World War, in December 1939, when King George VI of Great Britain broadcast a message of courage to his beleaguered subjects throughout the British Empire. His words are important for us to hear again today. "A new year is at hand," he said. "We cannot tell what it will bring. I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year, 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.' And he replied, 'Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light, and safer than a known way.'"

Until the day when God restores His eternal kingdom to this earth, may His hand guide our steps through the darkness of this time.

—Darris McNeely

Read *World News and Prophecy* as soon as it is completed. The next issue is scheduled to be available by Feb. 13 on the Internet at:

<http://www.ucg.org/articles/wnp/>

“EUROPE,” (Continued from page 1)

War and the ensuing artificial division of Europe.

“At long last Europe is on its way to becoming one big family, without bloodshed, a real transformation clearly calling for a different approach from fifty years ago, when six countries took the

lead. Now that the Cold War is over and we are living in a globalised [British spelling], yet also highly fragmented world, Europe needs to shoulder its responsibilities in the governance of globalisation [British spelling]” (text quoted in *The Daily Telegraph*, Dec. 18, 2001, emphasis added).

What Others Are Saying About the Euro

This month the biggest currency swap in history took place across much of Europe. More than 300 million people in 12 nations began using the newly minted currency of the European Union. In a few months the German mark, Italian lira and French franc will become relics of the past.

Bible prophecy (Revelation 18) shows a coming world economic colossus will emerge to dominate the world. Europe’s monetary union could be a significant development toward that event. Read what other publications have said about the new European currency.

“The euro continues to be threatened by the problem present at its birth, which is whether a single fiscal policy can serve 12 (and eventually more) separate and different national economies. The euro arrives as both unifier and divider. The 12 members move closer to one another, but the gap widens between them and others, notably the new states scheduled to join the EU” (*International Herald Tribune*, Dec. 21, 2001).

“The euro ‘will be far more than a single currency for Europe,’ said Walter Eversheim, a spokesman for the committee that awards the International Charlemagne prize for the greatest contribution to European unity, which this year has been awarded to the currency. ‘It will contribute to a common European identity, stabilize the community and foster peace.’

“Whatever its strength against the dollar, the euro already is a global currency in every sense of the word. Its 306 million users in 12 countries, including three of the world’s seven biggest industrial powers, account for a sixth of the global economy. The euro takes over from the Deutsche mark as the world’s second most widely used reserve currency after the dollar. It will replace the Deutsche mark as the shadow currency across Eastern and Central Europe. Across North Africa, it will replace the French franc as a parallel currency.

“The euro will become the most widely circulating currency in Europe since the denarius of the Roman Empire” (ibid., Dec. 31, 2001).

“The new euro could challenge the U.S. dollar’s status” (“The New Europe,” *National Geographic*, January 2002).

“To displace the dollar, the euro would need to be known for the stability of its value attested to by its widespread use in foreign trade and international financial transactions...the euro still has to win its spurs. The euro will need a credible track record of some duration before it will win acceptance in world financial markets” (“Assessing the Euro Three Years After Its Launch” by Anna J. Schwartz, *The Region*, December 2001).

“The euro simply cannot fail.... Tomorrow, there is only one European currency. Long live the euro” (*Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 1, 2002).

“The euro will be in use in Britain within weeks and will soon be as readily accepted in the high street as sterling, according to Neil Kinnock, Britain’s most senior official in Brussels” (*The Sunday Times*, Dec. 30, 2001).

“In view of the enormous economic clout behind the euro, it will very quickly become either a parallel currency or, depending on the state of the country concerned, the only real accepted currency,” Herr Eichel [the German finance minister] said in an interview with *Der Spiegel*” (*The Times*, Dec. 29, 2001).

“We will become a greater Europe with the euro. We shall become stronger, wealthier,” said Romano Prodi, European Commission president (Associated Press). ♦

Concepts like the near unification of Europe and becoming one big family may sound innocuous on the surface, but when viewed from a biblical standpoint the eventual outcome of these trends takes on a more sinister note. From God’s point of view, unity among the nations of this world is not always a good thing. World leaders do not generally promote God’s way of achieving unity, but as much as possible each is seeking his own benefit and believing that his own way is the right path to a unified outlook and an absence of conflict. The Hebrew prophet Isaiah wrote: “The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways...Whoever takes that way shall not know peace” (Isaiah 59:8).

Remember the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). “And the LORD said, ‘Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose [imagine, KJV] to do will be withheld from them’” (verse 6). Whether or not they fully grasped it, the motives of

(See “EUROPE,” page 6)

A President of Europe

One of the major legacies of Laeken may turn out to be the proposal for a directly elected president of Europe. This post would be a vivid symbol of additional European integration. As Francis Elliott, deputy political editor of *The Sunday Telegraph*, expressed it: “The European Union last night set a dear course to create a directly elected president in a significant step towards a European super state” (Dec. 16, 2001, emphasis added).

As it was conceived at the Laeken Summit, this proposed post—though theoretically the same office—would eventually carry much greater authority than the presidency of the European Union, a position now occupied by Romano Prodi. The British prime minister, Tony Blair, conceded at a press conference that the creation of a super-state was back on the agenda. In reality it was never off. ♦

Imagine a World Without the United States

Sometimes it is necessary to imagine the unimaginable.

by Melvin Rhodes

Imagine the unimaginable. The president, in the White House, the vice president, at the National Observatory, and all Cabinet members, in their respective agency headquarters, are killed in a terrorist attack on downtown Washington. So are all members of Congress, except the few who happen to be out of town.

“What happens to the Republic? At the moment, the answer is alarming: chaos.”

So begins a sobering and disturbing article in the *St. Petersburg Times* of Dec. 10, 2001, credited to the *Washington Post*.

Continuing, the unnamed writer added: “The September 11th attacks and subsequent release of anthrax on Capitol Hill have left many lawmakers and constitutional experts concerned that the federal government does not have adequate succession and continuity plans in place to recover from a catastrophic terrorist attack on Washington.”

Pause for a moment and consider: What would the world be like without America?

A world without America

The world has not been the same since Sept. 11. The possibility of an even bigger terrorist attack on Washington in the foreseeable future cannot be ruled out. If such an attack were to take place, it is difficult to imagine how the United States could continue to lead the free world. The consequences would be unimaginable—*except for the fact that the Bible prophesies such a time.*

The biblical book of Revelation reveals that the world will come under the domination of a union of 10 kings (or heads of state) immediately prior to the return of Jesus Christ (Revelation 17:12-14). What could precipitate the transfer of dominance from the United States to this group of nations, who “will give their power and authority to the beast”?

Since World War II the United States has been the undisputed leader of the Western world. Before the United States, the British Empire was the world’s leading power for two centuries. The United States and Great Britain share similar values. Nobody alive today can remember a time when one of these nations was not the major force in the world. Certainly, neither the United States nor Britain has been a perfect world leader. But it is equally certain that domination by other nations would have made the world a very different place. A look back at fairly recent history well illustrates this fact.

Prior to the supremacy of the English-speaking powers, the major Western player was France, whose King Louis XIV (1643-1715) vainly declared, “I am the state.” The concept of the divine right of kings was essential to centralized state power. Prior to France, Spain was dominant. “His Most Catholic Majesty,” the king of Spain, saw himself and his country as instruments of God in spreading the faith of the “one true catholic church” to the four corners of the earth. If people did not willingly convert, then there were other means of persuasion.

England and her colonies were to struggle against these forces of despotism for over 250 years, from the time of Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603), until the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 when Napoleon’s dreams of world conquest were finally totally defeated. A century later there were further attempts at world conquest by Germany’s kaiser and later Hitler. Japan was also set on imposing her will on the world. Afterwards, Russian and Chinese communism threatened the peace of the world.

For most of this time the prophesied “multitude of nations” (Genesis 48:19) was the force that defended liberty. After Pearl Harbor, that was to change, with the United States taking over from Great Britain as the world’s lead-

What could precipitate the transfer of dominance from the United States to the group of nations referred to in Revelation 17, who “will give their power and authority to the beast”?

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.

ing military power. However imperfectly, both Britain and America based their political, economic and religious systems on freedom of the individual.

In contrast, most continental European nations historically have not—they have subscribed instead to a variant of Louis XIV's famous dictum, emphasizing strong central government at the expense of individual liberty. In Western Europe this has been tempered since World War II during America's period of supremacy.

A post-Anglo-Saxon world is frightening to contemplate. Whoever takes over as the dominant power will not share the same values as the United States and Britain. Maybe some of those values would remain, but certainly not all.

How it might happen is a topic for another article. But, for the moment, imagine the unimaginable—Washington gone. What would happen?

Who would lead the West?

"The West" is an all-encompassing term. The term goes back to the Western Roman Empire. When the military and political empire collapsed in the fifth century, the church became the empire. As historian Paul Johnson put it in his 1972 book *The Offshore Islander*: "The Church was the continuation of the empire." He added: "Politics and religion were inseparable."

The Roman Empire was the fourth empire of Daniel's vision. In biblical imagery it was one of the four beasts (Daniel 7:3, 7). For 12 centuries, from the time of the Emperor Constantine (306-337) when the church became the state church, until the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, the church was a powerful force in the history of the "West."

During the Protestant Reformation, England broke with the church. Theoretically, it was now free to act independently of Rome. But, until its ascendancy was fully realized, England had to defend herself against continental Catholic powers that were willing to use force to subdue her. In the course of time, Britain became the dominant Western power. Her multitude of nations spread around the globe were to go on to defend the West against Napoleon, the kaiser and Hitler.

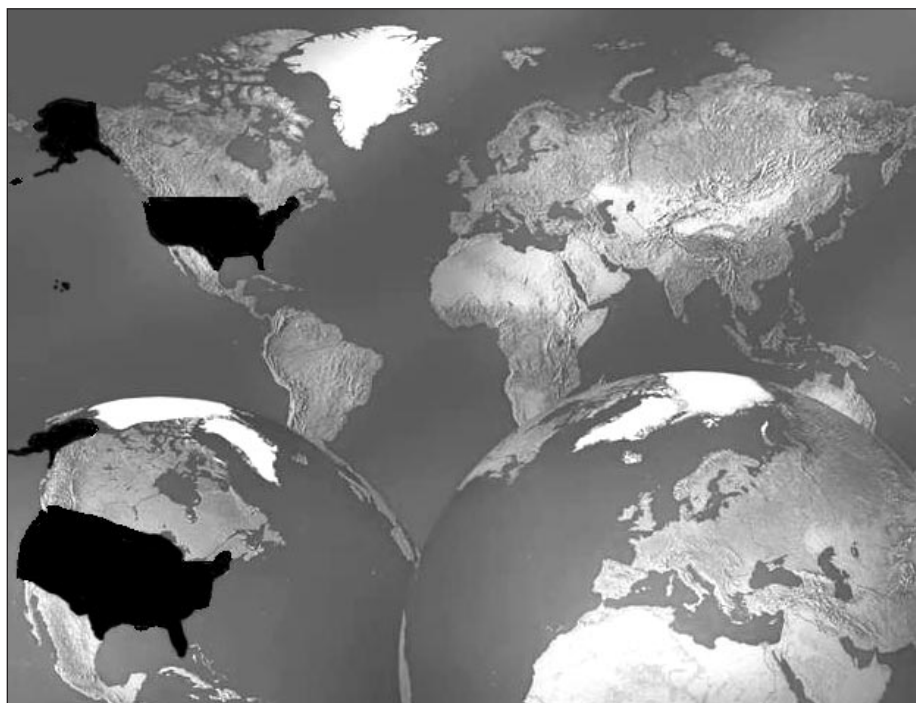


Photo © 1999-2002 www.arttoday.com

Pause for a moment and consider: What would the world be like without the United States of America?

America was to continue that role as the leader of the free world.

What then is the West?

To people in Britain and the United States, the emphasis is on freedom of the individual, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, democracy and human rights. Neither country has been perfect in these areas, but this is where most people would put their emphasis.

But in a wider sense, "the West" comprises all the nations that can trace their history and culture back to the nations that once comprised the Western Roman Empire. England and some other countries of northwestern Europe separated themselves from the Western church in the 1500s. These nations went on to embrace democratic systems of government, with emphasis on basic freedoms for the individual citizen. Most of the other Western nations maintained their loyalty to the mother church and, until well into the 20th century, retained strictly hierarchical, monarchical forms of government.

But their common cultural heritage goes back to Rome. Interestingly, the 1957 Treaty of Rome began the long and arduous process of bringing most of

these nations back together in the European Union.

These nations make up the majority of Western nations. They have tacitly recognized American leadership of the West since 1945. But if America suffers more major setbacks in the form of terrorist attacks, what would these nations do? Would they sit back and let themselves be defeated by the forces of militant Islam, a force that has threatened them previously in their history? Would they wait and see if somebody else replaced the United States as leader of the "free world"? What is the "free world" anyway?

Uppermost in their minds would be the need to preserve their independence, economic well-being and way of life. All Western nations are trading nations. They all depend on trade, on business, on the prosperity of the capitalist system. Never mind freedom of religion or freedom of the individual. Historically, they only became important during Britain's and America's preeminence. With America gone, who would care about such expensive niceties? The security of the state would be of paramount importance. Jobs and the economy would be next on the list.

Daniel 11 predicts that a powerful force known as the “king of the South” will push against the “king of the North,” “at the time of the end” (verse 40). This threatens the security and prosperity of those under the “king of the North.” They react with massive military force, suggestive of advanced technology, which is not possible without wealth.

Right now, the United States and Canada are in alliance with the other Western nations. They will not be a part of the 10 nations that come together in the prophesied revival of the Roman Empire. These nations most likely will come from the same geographical area as the nations that made up the original Roman Empire, nations that have signed the Treaty of Rome, the economic union that is rapidly being transformed into a political and military union.

An ever closer union

Some of these nations, as you read this article, are in the midst of a dramatic and significant change—the replacement of their national currencies with one multinational currency, the euro. Of the 15 European Union (EU) nations, 12 have become one single market. At the same time, the 15 are busy negotiating with 10 other European nations who are likely to be members of the EU by 2005. Additionally, France and Germany have proposed a new European constitution that would unite the EU nations politically.

Militarily, a significant step has been taken, as a direct consequence of the events of Sept. 11. To the surprise of everyone concerned, all 15 members of the EU have agreed to send troops as part of the international security force for Afghanistan. This is unprecedented. Three of the 15 are neutral countries. Never before have all 15 agreed on anything militarily. This is a reflection of the dramatic

shift that has and is changing thinking around the world since the terrorist attacks on America.

At the present time, most of the nations of the EU are also members of NATO, the military alliance that links North America and Western Europe together.

After Sept. 11 the United States asked NATO to invoke Clause 5 of the NATO Treaty. This clause enables any member country to claim the military support of other members when attacked by a nation from outside the alliance. Originally this was intended to help any European nation attacked by the Soviet Union or its allies. Clause 5 had never before been invoked.

It is of supreme irony that the first nation to request that Clause 5 be invoked was the United States, until now the ultimate guarantor of the freedom of the other member states. This in itself could mean a significant change in the balance of power, still unclear so soon after the recent terrorist attacks.

As has often been said since the attacks on New York and Washington, the world will never be the same again. It's going to be some time before the full implications and consequences will be fully realized.

Sept. 11 has frequently been compared to the attack on Pearl Harbor, America's second single biggest loss of life in one day. That attack woke a sleeping giant, the United States of America. By the end of the war less than four years later, the United States was the world's greatest military power. Her ally, Great Britain, together with the other nations that formed her empire and commonwealth, though victorious, was exhausted. Could it be that one of the consequences of Sept. 11 will be the awakening of another sleeping giant, the European Union, out of which will rise the final resurrection of the Roman Empire? Only time will tell. ❖

Could it be that one of the consequences of Sept. 11 will be the awakening of another sleeping giant, the European Union, out of which will rise the final resurrection of the Roman Empire?

“EUROPE,” (Continued from page 3)

these ancients were not right. Their Creator had explicitly told them to spread out, but they wanted to stay together in one place. They sought unity for the wrong reasons.

Another case in point is the historic division of ancient Israel, divinely imposed as a penalty for their national sins. God saw to it that the nation was divided in two, and He later prevented an attempt by King Rehoboam to reunify the two separate countries (1 Kings 11:9-13; 12:23-24).

Planning a European constitution

The European Council in Laeken decided to convene a special constitutional convention in the interest of further steps towards unity. It has appointed former president of France Valéry Giscard d'Estaing as chairman of this convention. This proposed constitution would most probably redefine the four treaties that undergird the EU.

Also on the agenda is the selection of a president of the European Commission who will be directly elected by the citizens of Europe. Potentially this is an office of vast powers, which could emerge in just a very few years, with authority over perhaps as many as 25 nations.

If the EU leaders really understood human nature as the Bible views it, they might have paused to consider where the course of events laid out at Laeken will really lead us. But most leaders of secular Europe today pay little if any attention to the wisdom of the Bible. If they did, they would understand with the prophet Jeremiah that “the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). Mankind desperately needs divine guidance (verse 24).

You can understand where these key events in Europe are taking us. Please request our free brochure, *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. This final book of the Bible is particularly pertinent to current trends on the European scene. The booklet will not only show you where world trends are leading mankind, but also reveal what steps you can take to cope with these coming events in your personal life. ❖

Asking the Tough Question: Has Religion Failed?

Public figures speak warmly of all religions, attempting to foster unity and to ratchet down the hostility in the many current religious-based confrontations. But let's ask the tough question: Has religion done for mankind what it purports to do? Is the world community more peaceful? Are the individual citizens of the world more moral for the presence of religion? What can we anticipate the future will bring vis-à-vis religion?

by Cecil E. Maranville

Only a few months ago, religion was relegated to rarely read weekend segments of Western newspapers and the occasional television or magazine piece. When it was featured in the major press, it was usually in relation to enigmatic prophecies. Today, religion is front page news. During the Cold War, the world was divided between Christianity and atheism, although the confrontation was not typically defined in terms of religion. Now the lines have fallen in an older place, with the world's peoples increasingly defined as Christian or Muslim.

The Western nations are said to be "Christian," but that label is more a political than a moral descriptive. Only a minority actually pursues or practices Christianity, which is fragmented into a kaleidoscope of forms that little resemble the Christianity of the early New Testament Church of God.

Islam is as divided as Christianity

In contrast to the Western label of Christianity, increasing numbers of nations are said to be Islamic. They include most Arab nations, Iran and Indonesia. But that label, too, is a political descriptive, for Islam is as divided as Christianity. Long-time Middle East journalist Judith Miller analyzes the militant Islamic movements within 10 Middle Eastern countries in *God Has Ninety-Nine Names*. Her title is a play on the fact that there are 99 different names for God in the Koran, as she explains that there is no singular cohesive Islam.

Muslim clerics and political leaders use the sayings of Muhammad as the basis of their religious rulings and government policies, emphasizing particular passages to their own advantage. The Koran is interpreted differently by whomever happens to be in authority at a given time, as is *sharia* (holy law). An action con-

sidered worthy of the death penalty in Islamic Sudan isn't necessarily even punishable in Islamic Iran. And Islamic governments that consider themselves fully compliant with Islamic law aren't considered "Islamic enough" for militant factions in their own countries.

Often sayings that are attributed to Muhammad are frauds. The first biography about him wasn't written until 125 years after his death. "Muslim historians and jurists admitted that many of the stories circulated about Muhammad—the so-called *hadith*, literally the 'narratives' or the Prophet's recorded deeds and sayings—were fabricated to support a particular political faction or opinion. Less than 200 years after Muhammad's death, one celebrated Muslim scholar is said to have discounted 596,725 *hadith* then in circulation" (Miller, 1996, p. 88).

There are obvious parallels with today's widely divergent Christian denominations, which compete for followers and financial support. On the other hand, Muslim countries that enforce *sharia* stand in stark contrast to countries that are considered Christian, where one's religion is his choice. Has either force or freedom brought people to God and nations to godliness?

Life and death power in the hands of human beings who claim the authority to act and speak for God—whether in Christian or Muslim nations—has resulted in the abuse, torment and wrongful death of uncounted millions of people. But the Christianity nominally embraced by hundreds of millions around the world has also hurt, rather than helped, mankind.

How Christianity has failed

How does the modern Western approach to religion hurt people? In contrast to the father-

Life and death power in the hands of human beings who claim the authority to act and speak for God—whether in Christian or Muslim nations—has resulted in the abuse, torment and wrongful death of uncounted millions....

child relationship between God and humanity that the Bible reveals, the Western approach to religion is more aptly described as a partnership. The senior partner in the relationship is the human being; God is the junior partner. The senior partner has full authority to disregard the opinions of the junior one. That is, if people disagree with what God's Word says about how they should live, they interpret the biblical passages in the light of their own beliefs or simply ignore them.

Free from the fear that a state-controlled religion is going to impose its interpretation on him, the Westerner decides for himself what is right and wrong. He has chosen poorly.

Wealthy Western nations are like large families that have no authority figure as a parent. For the most part, their citizens cultivate the pursuit of their self-destructive appetites instead of advocating a moral culture of self-control. Spiritually, they're like spoiled children.

A burgeoning theme since the terrorist disasters of late 2001 has been "there is good in all faiths." It's a variation on the proverbial "many roads lead to heaven." U.S. President Bush has voiced this concept numerous times in the past few months, as he seeks to inspire harmony between the diverse religions of the United States.

In her 50th Christmas message, the British queen urged people of all faiths to set aside their differences that have led to global violence. She said we can all learn from each other, "whatever our faith—be it Christian or Jewish, Muslim, Buddhists, Hindu or Sikh" ("Faith Can Conquer Evil Says Queen" by Caroline Davies and Victoria Combe, *The Telegraph*, Dec. 26, 2001). Of course, she's trying to be all-inclusive and promote harmony. The pope attempted to strike a similar note in his Christmas message, saying, "May the gentle face of the Child of Bethlehem remind everyone that we all have one Father" (ibid.).

Christians are confused

Instead of leading the West to preserve and practice Christianity, this attempt to embrace all religions fosters a culture similar to that of Old

Photo © 1999-2002 www.antdaily.com



Much human suffering is prophesied to occur before genuine peace is established. Religion will play a major role in that suffering.

Testament Israel. Confused about her religious identity, she incorporated and embraced customs of many other religions. Surprisingly, those ancient religions included practices that today masquerade as Christian, such as worship of the sun. (For more information about this startling fact, see our publications *Sunset to Sunset—God's Sabbath Rest* and *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?*) The result was a multicultural society, which was superficially desirable, but slowly and surely led to the moral corruption and collapse of the nation.

In Israel's formative years, God told its people to keep the unique religious code He had given them. Specifically, He warned them not to incorporate the religious practices of others. Paraphrasing His words: "Don't look at what others do in their religions and say, 'That's an interesting custom. Let's add that to how we worship.' It's Me that you are worshiping, so worship Me in the way that I ask you to. The consequences of dabbling in religious multiculturalism are far worse than you could imagine" (see Deuteronomy 12:29-32).

With the passage of time, Israelites chose to make peace with their neighboring nations by doing exactly what God counseled them not to do—the y mixed the neighbors' religions in with the code God gave to them. We learn from biblical history that the Israelites corrupted God's revealed way of life

more than any people ever had (Ezekiel 5:7, 9).

Is this merely a subject for a History Channel special? Stephen, one of the leaders of an infant Christianity, recited the lesson to Jewish religious leaders as a warning to them (Acts 7:42-43). And the apostle Paul wrote that Christians have these Israelite histories so we will know what mistakes to avoid (1 Corinthians 10:6).

Clearly, Israelite history should have a strong impact on Christians. People whose minds are spiritually alert will listen to and heed the lesson.

The Christian Western world is as confused about true values as it is about true worship. After suffering attacks by Muslim fundamentalists, U.S. political, business and religious leaders urged its citizenry to "return to the way of life that makes America a great nation." Included in that definition were recommendations that people travel, continue to buy new pleasure vehicles and return to normal shopping patterns for Christmas. True values have been obscured by commercialism and a religious holiday that has nothing to do with the Christianity of the Bible—Old or New Testament.

Many religious people in the West spoke of the terrorist attacks on the United States as "a wake-up call from God." If it was, people have gone back to sleep. Religious talk has abounded, as everyone from heads of state to the man on the street invoked God's name for comfort in the wake of fear and death.

Religious *information* has flourished, as countless articles on Islam appeared in the Western press in an effort to understand the faith in whose name a fist of terror hammered the United States. But religious *action*—apart from funerals and memorial services—has been minimal. George Barna reports that church attendance in the United States is the only religious practice to have increased after Sept. 11, and that it was gradually returning to pre-attack levels (*The Barna Update*, Nov. 26, 2001).

Returning to corrupted religion

Not that it would necessarily have been better if people had gone to church. I noted above that few people actually practice Christianity in so-called “Christian” nations. Fewer still of the people who consider themselves Christian practice the Christianity of the early New Testament Church of God. Instead, they have unwittingly embraced a counterfeit Christianity. Biblical history records the inception of this impostor faith, which eventually became accepted over the true one.

Consequently, many sincere “defenders of the [Christian] faith” are defending a fraud. Content with having their religion interpreted for them by others, few Christians have taken the time to compare their church with the Church of God described in the Bible.

You can read about the beginning of this counterfeit Christianity and its evolution throughout history in our booklet, *The Church Jesus Built*. The booklet also shows the doctrines and way of life of the early New Testament Church of God from the Scriptures. If you’ve never made the comparison between today’s Christianity and the Christianity of Christ’s disciples, you’re in for a surprise.

Violent terrorist acts committed in the name of religion should cause people to reevaluate religion’s contribution to the present world. Has religion helped individuals and ethnic groups in this present world draw close to God? What does it mean to be near to God?

The Bible reveals that God is indeed our Father, and that He wants us to choose to have a relationship with Him. It is His will that human beings pattern the way

they think and live after His nature and His ways. It is His will that the nations learn to live together in peace.

Has religion succeeded in helping individual human beings live more like God? Has religion succeeded in helping the community of nations live together in a godly way? Many will argue that their religion has helped them as individuals or that it has helped promote their political cause, but the record of history argues that religion has failed miserably in accomplishing what it ought to achieve. Religion has been the key to war, not the way to peace.

Religion will spawn war, not peace

True religion will indeed bring about lasting peace within individuals and between ethnic groups when the Kingdom of God is established on earth after Christ returns. But much human suffering is prophesied to occur before genuine peace is established. *And religion will play a major role in that suffering*. The so-called Christian nations of this present world will again live under governments that sponsor and cooperate with religion, lending full judicial and military authority to religious leaders.

These words sound preposterous in today’s world, where they are fulfilled only in governments under the control of religious extremists. Of course, centuries ago the Christian religion was imposed and enforced in the Holy Roman Empire, which was a marriage of church and state. Bible prophecy shows that history will repeat itself. (Request our booklet, *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*, for a study of the prophecies that foretell this incredible development.)

Recent events have shown how violent Muslim extremists can be, which may give us a window on future forces that will trigger the realignment of nations along religious lines. Setting aside for a moment the more radical Muslim states like Libya, Sudan or Algeria, consider developments in the more stable countries of Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Judith Miller quoted a friend on whether Saudis would choose Islamic fundamentalism: “If the average Saudi is given a choice between revolu-

tion and a bonus, he’ll take the bonus” (Miller, p. 126). You have to be over 40 to remember anything but wealth in the Saudi kingdom. In 1992, 68 percent of Saudis were less than 25 years old (ibid., p. 106), meaning their only memory is of the wealthy royals generously sharing with all Saudis.

The 1990s saw a dramatic economic shift. “Years of massive spending on national infrastructure and extravagant industrial projects as well as widespread corruption had finally caught up with the Saudis, whose population had risen since the 1970s from an estimated 6 million to 12 million. After a decade of stable oil prices and a 100 percent increase in population, Saudi per capita income had dropped to half of what it was in the 1970s” (ibid., p. 86). There are no more bonuses—and Saudis are choosing revolution. Of the 19 suicide terrorists in the Sept. 11 attack on the United States, 15 were Saudis. They were educated men and the sons of educated men, in contrast to the stereotypical terrorist of the recent past.

Until recent years, young Egyptian men relied heavily on income from jobs in the Saudi oil fields. Not only did the money they sent home help their families, having such a job often meant the difference between staying single and being able to be married at all. Now, those jobs have largely dried up. As of 1994, 54 percent of Egyptians live below the poverty line (ibid., p. 68). People historically turn to fundamentalism when democracy and capitalism have failed them. Militant Islamic fundamentalism has fertile soil in which to grow in these two major Middle Eastern countries—and in many more countries.

Nothing in the foreseeable future indicates a reversal of this ominous trend. Will we see a violent upsurge in Muslim fundamentalism worldwide? Will worldwide religious terrorism motivate people in the West to forgo their religious freedom and seek a return to the “protection” that a state religion would provide?

Regardless of how the details play out, there can be no doubt that religion will redefine the alignment of nations in the next few years. And until God steps in, religion will spawn war, not peace. ❖

The Biblical Origins of the Arab Peoples

Why is there so much unrest in the Middle East? Why is there constant strife between the Israelis and Palestinians? The answers to these questions didn't begin with the formation of the state of Israel in 1948. The history of these conflicts goes back 4,000 years and is recorded in a place many people would never think to look—the Bible!

by Gary Petty

Until recently many Americans envisioned the Middle East as an exotic, far-away mixture of the ancient past and the modern world. This area of conflict between Arab and Jew is the land of the Bible, of Moses and Jesus, of prophets bringing messages of God's wrath and apostles proclaiming God's love.

The United States has been politically, economically and sometimes militarily involved in the Middle East for decades. The United States supported the United Nations' creation of the state of Israel in 1948, and U.S. dollars and military hardware enabled Israel to win its wars with Arab neighbors.

America's roller coaster relationship with Arab nations has run the gamut from alliance to hostility. In 1956 the United States was instrumental in putting pressure on Great Britain, France and Israel to withdraw from the Suez Canal after a lightning strike that seized the waterway from Egypt. It was a U.S.-led coalition that drove the Iraqis from Kuwait during the Gulf War of the early 1990s.

The biblical origins of Middle East conflict

The World Trade Center attacks raised American consciousness of the age-old conflicts of the Middle East. Westerners are trying to understand the reasons for the hatred between Jew and Arab and why it spilled over into the Western world.

For students of biblical prophecy these events aren't a complete surprise. The Middle East is the focal point of biblical prophecy. Jerusalem is where Jesus the Messiah delivered the gospel of the Kingdom of God and it is where He promises to return to set up that Kingdom. The Bible also contains a great deal of information concerning the roots of the bad blood between Israeli and Arab.

The Arab peoples comprise numerous clans and tribes. Many historians trace the peoples of

the southern Arabian Peninsula to Joktan, who is mentioned in the Bible. Other Arab peoples are descendants of Abraham's nephew Lot, who fled Sodom. But to really understand the history of the Arab peoples, we must study the life of Abraham.

Abraham and Sarah

We begin our search almost 4,000 years ago in the city of Ur, a thriving metropolis on the eastern curve of the Fertile Crescent. It was in this crescent-shaped strip stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Egyptian Nile that the first great civilizations appeared. It was in Ur that the Creator appeared to a man named Abram who would become a central figure in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

God's relationship with Abram starts in Genesis 12:1-3: "Now the LORD had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation...'"

Genesis 16 contains the fascinating, but ultimately tragic, story of Abram's and Sarah's attempt to bring about God's promise through human means. Since it was physically impossible for Sarah to bear children, she gave an Egyptian servant girl to Abram as a surrogate mother. The child of this union was named Ishmael. For 13 years Ishmael was probably told that he was the son of promise, the recipient of God's promises to Abram.

God appeared again to Abram as we read in Genesis 17:1-2: "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.'"

God made an amazing promise to Abraham—his descendants would be a special people for God's purposes for generations. God previously told Abraham that in him all the

To really understand the history of the Arab peoples, we must study the life of Abraham.

nations of the earth would be blessed. The promise also included the land of Canaan (Genesis 17:8).

Canaan is the geographically diverse strip of land running along the eastern Mediterranean Sea that is the center of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict today. God reestablished His covenant with Abraham, but there was another stipulation that would come as a shock to this man to whom God had promised so much.

"Then God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife...I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her'" (Genesis 17:15-16).

God's statements seemed incredible. Not only had Sarah been barren all her life, but she was now well past normal child-bearing age. What God was promising could only happen through divine intervention. Besides, Abraham already had a son, whom he loved dearly. In Genesis 17:18 Abraham says to God, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!"

Abraham believed for many years that Ishmael was the son of promise, but God informed him that the Sovereign Lord of history had other plans. It was always God's plan for the son of promise to come from Abraham and Sarah. The use of Hagar as a surrogate was of their devising, not God's.

What an important lesson. How many times do we proceed with our own ideas of God's will, while in reality He has totally different plans? Abraham and Sarah tried to fulfill God's promise by human means on a human timetable. What happened next shaped the history of many generations.

Ishmael's fate

God promised a son to Abraham through his wife Sarah, but what about Ishmael? Abraham asked God if Ishmael could be the son of promise. God's answer is recorded in Genesis 17:19-20. "Then God said: 'No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly.

He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.'"

As God promised, Sarah became pregnant and gave birth to Isaac. The hurt and anger of the teenage Ishmael towards this half brother Isaac led Abraham to send him and his mother Hagar into the wilderness. The young man, told since childhood that he was the son of promise, found himself an outcast from his father. This set the stage for generations of strife between him and Abraham's other son, Isaac. Ishmael went on to become the father of many Arab nations.

A new generation of strife

The biblical story doesn't end with Ishmael and Isaac. One generation later there was competition between the sons of Isaac, Jacob and Esau. Genesis records

*How many times do we
proceed with our own
ideas of God's will, while
in reality He has totally
different plans?*

how the eldest, Esau, sold his birthright to his twin Jacob.

In Genesis 27 we find the oft-told story of how, when Isaac was old and blind, he was tricked by Jacob into giving him the birthright blessing. It would be through Jacob's lineage that God would fulfill His covenant with Abraham. God assured Jacob that this was His will, but Esau's hatred for what he perceived as a theft of his birthright drove him to plot Jacob's murder. Jacob fled for his life, living estranged from his family for many years.

The descendants of Jacob would become known as the Israelites. Esau became the father of the people the Bible calls the Edomites or Idumeans. The relationship between these two peoples has at times been peaceful and at other times bordered on genocide.

The Arabs and Islam

By A.D. 610 the Arab peoples of the Middle East were divided into numerous

tribes. All the tribes were steeped in the various pagan practices of the Middle East. It was in that year, during the month of Ramadan, that Muhammad received the first in a series of what he proclaimed were divine revelations. These revelations eventually became the basis of the Muslim holy book—the Koran.

The Koran contains alternative stories of such biblical notables as Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Job, Jonah, Saul, David, Solomon, Mary and Jesus. Muhammad claimed that Islam was a return to the religion of Abraham while Judaism and Christianity were corruptions of this true religion. In Islam's interpretation of God's plan, Ishmael takes on the role of the son of promise.

The Koran presents radical differences from the Bible concerning God's interaction with mankind. These differences are most apparent in the Koran's explanation of the nature of Jesus Christ. Christians believe that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, the Messiah foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures, who would come to save humanity. While some in Judaism may accept the first-century Jesus of Nazareth as a special rabbi, and Muslims accept Him as a great prophet, Christians ascribe to Jesus the remarkable status of divinity in a personal relationship with the Father. To many devout Muslims, this is polytheism.

Where Jews believe that Palestine was promised to them through God's covenant with Abraham and Isaac, and Muslims believe that Allah promised it to them through Abraham and Ishmael, European Christians of the Middle Ages believed that Palestine belonged to them because of God's fulfillment of His promise to Abraham in the person of Jesus. They claimed that God's promise to bless all nations through Abraham was a prophecy about Jesus.

In 1095 Christian Europe organized an army for a crusade to wrest Jerusalem from Turkish Muslims. After terrible fighting, Jerusalem fell to the Crusaders in 1099. The Muslims continued to battle for Palestine and a second crusade was launched in 1147. Finally, in 1291 the Muslims drove the Europeans from the region. Further crusades failed to recapture the city.

One of the saddest incidents in histo-

ry took place with the Children's Crusade. Thousands of children from France and Germany began the difficult journey from Europe to Palestine to take Jerusalem. Many died from disease and starvation; the rest were captured and sold as slaves.

The area around Jerusalem remained in Muslim hands until the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I when it came under British jurisdiction. In 1948 the United Nations founded the modern state of Israel and hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Nazi concentration camps fled to their new home. Many Arabs felt betrayed by Europe and the United States. The last half of the 20th century experienced rocky relations between the Arab world and the West.

The Middle East in prophecy

During the Jewish Babylonian captivity of the sixth century B.C., God revealed a historical outline of prophecy to a prophet named Daniel. In Daniel 2 the prophet records a vision concerning four great empires that would interact with the land of Palestine: the Babylonian, Persian, Greco-Macedonian and Roman. Later, God shows Daniel details concerning these empires.

The first 14 verses of Daniel 8 chronicle Daniel's vision of a ram and a goat. Daniel writes of a two-horned ram attacked by a male goat, arriving from the west, with a large horn between his eyes.

There have been numerous attempts to explain these passages. An important rule of Bible study is to let the Bible interpret itself. In this same chapter an angel appears to Daniel and tells him the meaning of the vision. Daniel writes what the angel says in verses 19-22: "Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in the latter time of the indignation; for at the appointed time the end shall be. The ram which you saw, having the two horns—they are the kings of Media and Persia. And the male goat is the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king. As for the broken horn and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power."

This incredible prophetic passage concerns events that occurred in the centuries immediately after the time of

Daniel. The Babylonian Empire of Daniel's day was overthrown by the Medo-Persian Empire. Centuries after Daniel received this vision, the Greeks, under Alexander the Great, would invade and conquer Persia. The "large horn" of the male goat is this "first king" of the Grecian Empire. At the height of his power Alexander suddenly died and his empire was divided among four generals, fulfilling the prophecies of Daniel 8.

But there's more, as we see in the very long prophecy of Daniel 11. By this time Babylon has been conquered by the Persians and Daniel now serves under the Medo-Persian king Darius. Daniel is once again visited by an angel from God who explains future events.

Notice Daniel 11:2-4: "And now I will tell you the truth: Behold, three more kings will arise in Persia, and the fourth shall be far richer than them all; by his strength, through his riches, he shall stir up all against the realm of Greece. Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. And when he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken up and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not among his posterity nor according to his dominion with which he ruled; for his kingdom shall be uprooted, even for others besides these."

After Daniel's time there would be numerous Persian kings, but these three would be prominent in the history of the empire. A fourth king would undertake a war with Greece. The Persian Empire would prosper, but it would eventually fall to a Grecian monarch whose kingdom would be divided into four parts.

It is important to understand that most biblical prophecy is in relationship to Jerusalem. Daniel 11:5-39 records prophecies concerning the "king of the South" and "king of the North." History shows that these prophecies were fulfilled in the generations of two Greek families, the Ptolemies (who ruled from Egypt as the kings of the South) and the Seleucids (who ruled from Syria as the kings of the North). These two families marched across Palestine in numerous wars for control of the Middle East until the Maccabees led the Jews to independence in the 160s B.C.

This brings us to an important part of the prophecy in Daniel 11:40-45: "At the

time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through. He shall also enter the Glorious Land, and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon.

"He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape. He shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt; also the Libyans and Ethiopians shall follow at his heels. But news from the east and the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many. And he shall plant the tents of his palace between the seas and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and no one will help him."

When does this invasion of Egypt and much of the Arab world, the king of the South, and the "Glorious Land" of Israel by the king of the North take place? In Revelation 11:1-2 the apostle John is inspired to write that at the time just before the return of the Messiah the "holy city," Jerusalem, will be occupied by outside forces for 42 months or three and a half years.

At the end of that three and a half years, the stage is set for the greatest battle in human history as armies of the prophesied "beast" power and hordes from the East gather in the Valley of Megiddo.

Watch!

Some Islamic leaders claim that a descendant of Muhammad will come and unite the Muslim world in preparation for God's final judgment. Jews wait for the coming of the Messiah to restore their birthright. Many Christians await the return of Jesus as the Christ to rule from Jerusalem. The irony is that many Muslims, Jews and Christians won't recognize the Messiah when He does come to establish God's Kingdom.

Watch events in the Middle East, for this is the focal point of biblical prophecy. ❖

This article is based on a script from a Good News radio broadcast. For a listing of stations and times or to download radio programs, go to www.ucg.org/radio.

In Brief...

World News Review

Brushfires Ravage Southeastern Australia

"There are many broken-hearted people here," wrote an Australian citizen to a member of our *World News and Prophecy* staff about the nightmarish brush fires ravaging the New South Wales state in Australia. As we go to press, the fires are well into their third week and constitute the greatest disaster of this type that Australia has seen, according to New South Wales Emergency Services Minister Bob Debus.

After 15 days of burning, the fires have destroyed more than 170 homes and a million hectares or 1.235 million acres. Thankfully, there hasn't yet been any loss of human life, although some firefighters have been injured.

The destruction is devastating enough in itself, but adding to the grief is the fact that many of the fires have been started by arsonists. As of Jan. 6, 2002, 26 people have been arrested and charged with arson. The public anger is justifiably great, and there is talk of creating a public register of arsonists similar to that for pedophiles. Additionally, a new law requires convicted arsonists to be confronted by the victims of the fires they set and to help regenerate burned out land.

More than half of the beautiful Royal National Park has been destroyed in the fires, killing countless animals and injuring hundreds that survived. On the positive side, several types of plant life have already begun to put forth new shoots in the park. Included are the phenomenal banksias, an evergreen shrub or plant whose seeds actually open only in the intense heat of such a fire. The encouraging early growth in the park shows the marvelous capacity for survival that God designed, even in the face of disaster.

Approximately 10,000 volunteer firefighters have battled nearly 100 separate fires and are near exhaustion. Many of them were on year-end vacation time when the crisis struck, but the fires may burn for weeks to come. Authorities are appealing to employers of the volunteers to be patient.

The 100 fires constituted a front of 1,250 miles around the city of Sydney. Early damage estimates run into the tens of millions of dollars, but that does not include insurance claims. When all of the costs are tallied, claims from the brush fires are expected to add several billion dollars to an already massive \$100 billion insurance crisis that threatens to rock the Australian economy.

Perhaps the greatest grief is caused by the fact that a large number of the people arrested for arson are youths, ranging in age from 9 to 16! Further, these arsonists have continued to set new fires while firefighters combated those that were already burning. "Why would people want to do this to other

people?" cried the young daughter of one of the volunteer firefighters when she saw a televised news report about the destruction. That's a question to which many people would like an answer. Are these young arsonists so detached from a sense of right and wrong that they do not realize the horrible crime they have committed? Are they so inured to the pain of others that they do not care what hurt they have caused?

It's chilling to contemplate what has gone wrong in the homes and the society from which these young people have come. God long ago prophesied that "in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves [selfish]...boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty" (2 Timothy 3:1-4). These gruesome qualities describe the kind of character that would inflict such wanton evil.

Sources: News.com.au, *The Sunday Herald Sun*, BBC, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Australian*, Reuters.

Saudi Crown Prince Cautions Islamic Leaders

Crown Prince Abdullah recently warned senior Saudi Islamic leaders to be careful and avoid provocative remarks in their religious speeches. Prince Abdullah cautioned them to "not be emotional or provoked by others," the official Saudi daily *Arab News* reported. Abdullah exhorted the religious elite to "weigh each word before saying it." The royal family is closing ranks as it faces trouble on several fronts, but they are cautious to avoid alienating Saudi Arabia's religious elite and increasing opposition to Crown Prince Abdullah's reign. Abdullah became Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler after King Fahd had a stroke in 1995.

The royal family has at least momentarily laid aside internal conflict in the face of trouble on various fronts with growing Islamic extremism and Saudi-U.S. relations strained. Still, Abdullah's strategy may alienate one of his key bases of support and undercut his political clout in the long run. This is the first time an effort to rein in the mainstream religious elite has been made as growing concerns over political dissent surface. The warning serves to make it clear that fueling opposition to the regime will not be allowed.

As a religious monarchy, Saudi Arabia's government tries to balance the state's cooperation with the secular West with its strict religious society. Complicating the secular versus religious dilemma is a complex web of tribal affiliations and loy-

alties. Originally divided into warring tribes, Saudi Arabia was united in 1932 by Abdul Aziz al Saud, father of King Fahd, who is officially the current ruler, as well as Prince Abdullah and Prince Sultan. Abdullah, known for his personal piety, relies on support from the country's religious elite as leverage in countering his rivals—the faction of the royal family led by King Fahd and Prince Sultan.

Abdullah hoped to reduce what was perceived as Washington's inordinate influence over Saudi foreign and domestic policy, a perception stemming partly from the basing of several thousand U.S. soldiers on Saudi soil.

The U.S. war in Afghanistan has revived the debate over Riyadh's close cooperation with Washington. Immediately before the launching of air strikes, several Saudi clerics condemned the anticipated U.S. actions and criticized the royal family for working with the United States.

In his speech Nov. 14, Abdullah said, "We are now passing through critical days, and our duty requires that we be mindful," the Associated Press reported. For the usually cautious Saudi leadership, the recent statements are a glaring admission of troubled times.

Abdullah's effort to moderate the situation could backfire and have devastating consequences for his legitimacy among his own supporters, especially the country's more religiously hard-line factions. Once he weathers the current situation, the crown prince may find his political clout eroded and his position as the country's heir apparent in jeopardy.

Sources: Stratfor, WorldNetDaily, AP.

Algeria's Woes

While the rest of the world wasn't watching, well over 600 Algerians are known to have died in recent floods, and thousands of others have lost their homes. In the capital alone, more than 500 bodies were pulled from the mass of mud, collapsed buildings and mangled motor cars left by the storm. Officials said it was a freak of nature that sent a wall of water rolling down the steep, narrow streets of the slum district of Bab al-Oued. The torrential rainfall was indeed the heaviest recorded in 20 years after two years of drought.

Yet the residents of Algiers have reason to complain. The police failed to stop cars approaching danger zones despite signs of rising water. Hundreds of stranded motorists and bus passengers were flushed into chutes that carried some for miles, all the way to the sea. Storm drains in the valleys of the capital were known to have been intentionally blocked up in 1997 to prevent Islamic extremists (then engaged in a gory bombing campaign) from using them as hideouts. Residents also complained that the government's rescue efforts were so scarce that they had to dig out victims bare-handed.

Not surprisingly, scattered riots broke out two days after the flooding, with angry crowds marching on the center of the city. But the anger goes beyond those directly affected by the floods, because many are very bitter against the government over past actions. In 1992 the army stopped an election which would have brought about a moderate Islamic government. An

estimated 150,000 have been killed, most of them civilians.

The past year, however, has seen embarrassingly credible revelations of army involvement in past massacres. It has also seen a surge in popular unrest. Around 100 people have been killed in spontaneous rioting across the country, often in protests against police brutality.

Ironically, this disintegration of central control comes at a time when the country's economic prospects are at last improving. Private investment, particularly in oil and gas but also in telecoms, transport and, soon, in power distribution, is beginning to reshape the economy.

In Search of the Next Pope

The maneuvering for the next pope is in full but silent swing during what Pope John Paul II, now 81, calls the "twilight years" of his papacy.

The Polish pope's election over 23 years ago broke with a tradition of Italians for nearly 500 years, and opened the way for a surprise pope from the Third World. The chances of that have improved since John Paul elevated 44 new members to the College of Cardinals, from which a future non-Italian pope could be elected. Though Italian cardinals are still the largest contingent, no cardinal has sufficient support. Latin Americans are the largest geographic bloc after the Europeans, and they minister to about 500 million Catholics. The church is expanding fast in Africa and Asia.

The most closely watched cardinals are six from different countries and cultures, who share certain attributes. All are multilingual men of the world, all hold high-profile posts at home or at the Vatican, and all are of the Third World.

One example is the primate of Mexico, Cardinal Norberto Rivera Carrera. He is athletic, 59, of Tepehuene Indian ancestry and lives in his native state of Durango. He gained a reputation as a strict conservative at a time of liberal theology and doctrine. He has spoken out against Mexico's elite for corruption and failure to help the nation's poor. He could be the next to sit in the seat now occupied by John Paul II.

Another is Nigerian Cardinal Francis Arinze, 68, born in eastern Eziowelle. His older brother recounts that as a youth, he excelled academically and entered the seminary at 15.

Arinze gained notoriety during the Biafran civil war in the late 1960s and early 1970s when he was forced, overnight, to transform missionary schools under his charge into camps for starving refugees. He has also served for two decades at the Vatican as a key figure in arranging interfaith dialogue among Catholics, Muslims and Hindus.

Among the others being watched are cardinals from Vietnam, Colombia, Honduras and Cuba.

John Paul's papacy saw the fall of the Berlin Wall, the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of terrorism in the world. The next pope will likely be thrust into a world with equally diverse problems.

Source: AP.

Contributors: John Foster, Cecil E. Maraville, Ken Martin and Jim Tuck

“TEA BAG,” (Continued from page 16)

been in the news for over a month. And the remainder of the New York skyline is still standing. So let's move on. Right? Let's consider the times we live in.

The emerging world superpower of China is still emerging. The European Union, now anchored by the common currency of the euro, is slowly and steadily forming into a singular superpower, which increasingly is expressing its own agenda. India and Pakistan “saber rattle” with nuclear weapons close at hand before a skittish world. Israel and the Palestinians continue to stumble over the fate of the Holy Land. The whereabouts of certain elements of the former Soviet Union's nuclear materials elicit concern—are they in terrorists' hands? America's titillation with humanism continues in a downward spiral as we masquerade violence and pornography as entertainment.

Not only that, but what about the personal front pages in our lives, those large personal headlines that will dominate your family's life this year? The unexpected death of a loved one, the house that goes up in smoke, the job that no longer exists, the vehicle that gets totaled, the business deal that goes sour and the stocks that “go south.” All the good things of life can collapse in minutes, if not seconds—our own personal World Trade Center towers knocked over in a time and manner not of our choosing.

I know of no one who deliberately sets his or her alarm clock for misfortune to strike; it arrives on its own schedule. Yes, it's going to be increasingly important to learn the inner quality of being calmer than the guy or gal next to you. How do we go about digging ourselves out of trial in a calm and deliberate manner?

“I am leaving you a gift”

Two thousand years ago, the apostle Paul addressed this point in Philippians 4:6-7. He encouraged Christians, then and now, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” He goes on to encourage us with the results that will follow by stating, “and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

The kind of peace that Paul is describing cannot be purchased or obtained simply by knowing some “witty piece of advice.” We discover that it is an incredible gift that is meant to guide us past any momentary setback that might affect our lives this coming year. The apostle John puts it this way in John 14:27: “I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart! And the peace I give isn't fragile like the peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid” (The Living Bible). The Life Application Bible further defines this gift: “Peace is resting in God's sovereignty.... Unlike worldly peace, which is defined as the absence of conflict, this peace is confident assurance in any circumstance....”

It is a peace that is centered on the reality that bad things can happen to good people just like in New York, Pennsylvania and Washington D.C. on Sept. 11. It is a peace that is based on the realization that 2,000 years ago a perfect Man was terrorized over one long night by others who invaded the territory of His life. It was a nightmare sequence of events that was all too real—for it was true. His crime—living perfectly!

How? By walking among the poor, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, saving hapless victims of wrong spiritual influences, picking up babes in His arms and blessing them. He helped peo-

ple dig out of their own rubble and offered them peace and calm.

But on that night of nights, His followers had the same heart-sick feeling as the people of America did last September. Unlike the brave firemen of New York in the Sept. 11 disaster, they ran away from the fire rather than running towards the flame. How could they ever dig themselves out from such conditions? The ruins of their own lives were smoldering days later when the most incredible message was given to them.

Unexpectedly, the greatest news headline in human history and the greatest fulfillment of prophecy to that point had come about when they simply heard these three words, “He is risen” (Matthew 28:5-6). It changed their viewpoint of events, and it can change ours. Consider these points in establishing an atmosphere of calm when the world seems to be coming down all around you.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ proclaims that the Kingdom of God has broken into human history by design. Now humanity is not headed for disaster but redemption. As Winston Churchill long ago acknowledged, “There is a purpose being worked out here below.”

The resurrection of Jesus Christ offers us hope and amazingly deep perspective, even in great tragedy, that no matter what happens, no matter how heavy the stone, no matter how thick the veil—they will be removed.

The same power that brought Jesus Christ back from the dead is available to us even in our darkest hours, if we understand, sincerely believe and ask God for it.

This seminal event in human history gives the servants of God, then and now, the authoritative witness to proclaim peace within chaos, point to light within darkness and share quiet in a world that is screaming. The fact that “He is risen” allows the staff of this publication to move beyond the darkness of today's headlines and help shed light on the reality that this is not a world forsaken by God, but rather a world to which Jesus Christ is returning as Ruler, Lord and Master.

Like a clock in a thunderstorm

What's coming next as far as terrorism, assassinations, geopolitical turmoil and acts of nature or personal tragedies? I don't know and neither do you. But God says He has given us a gift—a peace of mind that comes by recognizing that our dead-ends as mortals are simply the beginning of God's greatest miracles. But gifts have to be opened up. They must be untied and put to use even under incredibly difficult circumstances. Over 100 years ago, Robert Louis Stevenson put to pen this amazing thought, “Quiet minds cannot be perplexed or frightened, but go on in fortune or misfortune at their own private pace like a clock during a thunderstorm.”

Such a proverbial thunderstorm poured down on New York City on Sept. 11, but one man took the storm and transformed it from disaster to resurgence, not only for himself, but also for his city. In his discussion with Tim Russert we hear the echo of Isaiah 30:21: “This is the way, walk you in it.” It is an echo that reverberates with the wisdom of one man's father, “Be a little calmer than the next guy.” Mayor Rudy found out what was in his tea bag early on a September morning. The question remains, “How strong is your tea bag?” You're about to find out. And when you do, follow this advice, “Keep calmer than the person next to you.” ♦



This is the Way

ISAIAH 30:21

by Robin Webber

How Strong Is Your Tea Bag?

It's been said, "You never know how strong a tea bag is until you put it in hot water." On Sept. 11, 2001, America came to that boiling point. The United States was catastrophically struck in a series of surprise attacks by foreign invaders. Wall Street, the Pentagon and airspace over Pennsylvania became battlegrounds. Moments after those attacks occurred, before the smoke began to clear, the natural questions arose: What do we do now? How do we go about doing what must be done?

One man who stepped up to the plate and delivered the needed answers was New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani. Often at the center of controversy due to his personal life or his political agenda, Giuliani nonetheless created an entirely new impression overnight upon his fellow Americans and people around the world.

Suddenly, this man who had seemed arrogant, strident and aloof was everywhere throughout lower Manhattan offering comfort and encouragement to his fellow New Yorkers. With President Bush being kept out of possible harm's way on Air Force One, it was Giuliani who set the first tones of resurgence as he moved through the rubble of lower Manhattan with a New York fire department cap on his head. It was his voice of reassurance and comfort that first allowed us to know that New Yorkers could dig themselves out of what had befallen them. What inner strength allowed this man to carry on in a world seemingly gone mad?

Keeping calmer than everyone else

A part of the answer emerged in an interview on Dec. 16 with Tim Russert, the moderator of NBC's *Meet the Press*. Russert set the stage for the answer to come by describing a mayor who had reported to work very early on that fateful day.

As the suicide pilots guided the jets into the twin towers of the World Trade Center, the mayor and a part of his office staff immediately responded to the emergency. They came so quickly that they were momentarily trapped in the city's command bunker as debris fell from the second terrorist attack.

What allowed him to emerge in a war zone as the man who regvanized New Yorkers and a nation? How was he able to carry on with such cool dispatch as the two tallest buildings in the city collapsed, thousands of New Yorkers died and hundreds of firefighters and police personnel vanished?

Giuliani's answer was simple and yet profound. He told Russert that he drew upon advice his father, Harold, had given him as a boy. He was told simply that in tough times, when everyone else might panic, it is important to keep just a little bit calmer than everyone else around you.

What a day to bring that lesson home. As people were jumping out of windows, buildings were crashing down around him and 300 of his own city's protective service personnel were losing their lives, the mayor took one simple lesson from his dad and turned the day around, not only for him, but also for many others. "Mayor Rudy" was behind the microphone answering every question with patience, thoroughness and a calm demeanor that allowed many to begin to make sense of the senseless.

But wait a minute! Everything's getting better, isn't it? Seemingly America has come together, the terrorist Osama bin Laden is either on the run or dead and the nations of the world step back in awe at America's military technology. Can't we just go back to how things were?

Yes, for the moment Afghanistan is quiet. Anthrax has not
(See "TEA BAG," page 15)