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Worldwide Weather Chaos: What Does It Mean?

Devastating floods and summer storms have bombarded parts of Europe, Asia and America. Simultaneously, severe droughts afflict several areas of the globe. What does the Bible tell us about the significance of these natural disasters?

by John Ross Schroeder

The summer of 2002 won't be soon forgotten. Severe storms wreaked destruction across Central Europe. Dresden, Germany, and Prague in the Czech Republic were among several cities plunged into crisis as government officials declared states of emergency. Northern Italy and Austria were also badly affected. Devastating floodwaters forced tens of thousands to flee their homes, and well over 100 people were killed in Europe. The damage is estimated in the billions for Germany alone.

Floodwaters caught several thousand Russian tourists by surprise in the Black Sea area. Heavy rains in southern Russia caused flooding, leaving more than 100 dead.

Parts of the Mideast and Asia also suffered from the wrath of nature. At least 35 people drowned in flash floods that hit northeastern Iran. Meanwhile millions across Asia abandoned their homes fleeing from monsoons that took about 900 lives. China's summer floods have already killed nearly 1,000 people this year. In the Americas, the death toll from flooding in Mexico reached some 21 people with about 13,000 homeless.

Severe droughts in the U.S.A.

One of the worst droughts in a half century is presently afflicting America, with some 26 states seriously affected.

Parts of Maryland, New Jersey and Pennsylvania are suffering severe drought emergencies. Climatologist Mark Svoboda of the National Drought Mitigation Center (University of



Floods near Grimma, Germany

Nebraska) called this American drought the third worst in U.S. history. The wheat harvest may be the lowest in about 30 years.

From South Carolina to Southern California and from New Mexico to Montana, lots of American real estate has been badly affected by drought. About 75 percent of pasture and

(See "WEATHER," page 3)



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Shadows of the World to Come

This column seeks to highlight the hope of a future time of peace brought by Jesus Christ at His second coming. The "times of restoration of all things" will be more than another utopian ideal. For many readers of this column, the prophesied future provides a compelling vision that fills the days, weeks and years of life with meaning. Each article of this publication seeks to point the way to God's view of today's world and the spiritual solutions to its problems. Let me describe how this translates into a walk of faith.

This month of September, United Church of God members will be observing four of the seven biblical festivals: the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day. By the time most of you are reading this, members and other interested people will be gathering to keep the Holy Days as God commands. These festivals hold a message of hope and light for this world as it makes its way forward through challenging times.

- **The Feast of Trumpets** (Leviticus 23:24). This day foreshadows the return of Jesus Christ to the earth as King of Kings as described in Revelation 19:11-16. The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord, and Christ will reign on the earth.

- **The Day of Atonement** (Leviticus 23:27). This is a solemn day of fasting, picturing a time when all mankind will be reconciled to God. The source of all evil, Satan the devil, will be identified and removed from influencing the course of human events. Revelation 20:1-2 describes, "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years."

- **The Feast of Tabernacles** (Leviticus 23:34). This marvelous festival pictures a time of peace throughout the world. Christ's return will result in the establishment of a righteous government that will restore the elusive peace and goodwill among all peoples throughout the world. Zechariah 14:16 shows that eventually all people will be keeping this festival: "And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles."

- **The Last Great Day** (the eighth day of Leviticus 23:39). The meaning of this festival contains the most hopeful of messages. It coincides with the time spoken of in Revelation 20:11-12 when "the dead, small and great" stand before God in the judgment of the great white throne. This day pictures the time when all who have never had a chance will have the opportunity to receive the Holy Spirit and eternal life.

For more information about God's festivals, please request our booklet, *God's Holy Day Plan, the Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

These days define a deep-rooted faith among those who follow the words of Christ. God's message of hope in these festivals shows the positive future beyond today's headlines of human strife and tragedy. It is a time to step back from the world of today and renew the vision of the world to come. It is a time to view the problems of today's world from God's perspective. Those who observe these festivals receive training in the solutions to the great problems afflicting today's world. May God speed that day of restoration.

—Darris McNeely

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

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“WEATHER,” (Continued from page 1)

rangeland has been categorized as in poor to very poor condition in five Western states. “The National Climate Data Center said that at the end of July, 49 percent of the 48 contiguous states were affected by extreme drought” (*The Guardian*, Aug. 14, 2002).

In Nebraska alone, crop losses from drought conditions are estimated at \$1.4 billion. Governor Mike Johanns said, “Even some of the folks who lived through the ‘dust bowl’ years [in the 1930s] will say it is as bad as it has ever been” (Reuters, Aug. 8, 2002). One positive note is that farmers in Wisconsin are sending 15 railway boxcars of hay to Colorado ranchers suffering from wildfires and drought.

Drought-stricken Southern Africa

Thankfully, American generosity does not end at its own borders. In spite of bad drought conditions in its own homeland, the United States recently shipped 190,000 tons of food to Southern Africa—in an effort to feed the hungry in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland.

Zimbabwe has its own special problems as President Robert Mugabe seeks to cling to power no matter what the cost. Mr. Mugabe has ordered nearly 3,000 white farmers, for many decades the nucleus of the nation’s agricultural producers, to immediately leave their homes, land and livelihood.

Millions of Zimbabweans are threatened with starvation as a direct result of their government denying food to opposition members while giving it to loyalists. Bad politics is no help to a hungry population. “Like a roaring lion and a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people” (Proverbs 28:15).

Death by heat wave

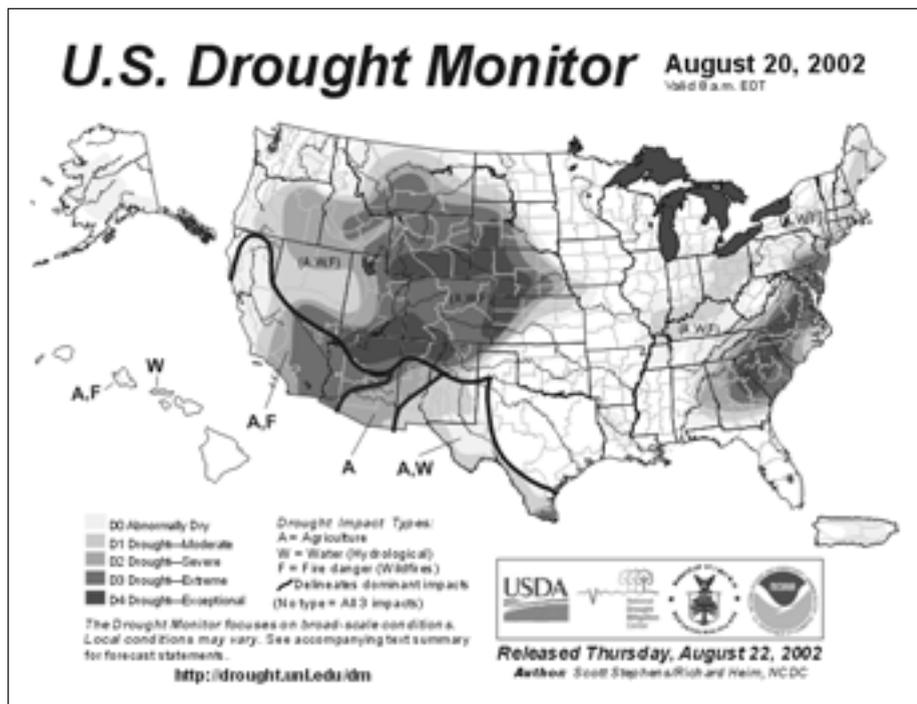
Although there have been pockets of colder weather in some areas, London’s *Guardian* reported, “The first half of 2002 was the warmest for the Northern Hemisphere in 143 years, according to the British meteorological office” (Aug. 20, 2002). We should

not underestimate the effects of heat waves, for they can be a major public health hazard.

For instance, according to the Center of Climatic Research at the University of Delaware, about 1,500 American cit-

what are the causes of freak weather conditions that bring chaos, death, homelessness and economic hardship around the world?

Some scientists blame the weather phenomenon called El Niño. Basically



The drought has been called the third worst in U.S. history.

izens die annually from causes greatly exacerbated by extreme hot weather. Surprisingly, the figure is about 800 in usually cooler Britain.

New York City suffered a stifling heat wave in August that broke temperature records and severely strained municipal power supplies. Across the continent, 10 Oregon cities also experienced record-breaking heat waves, each at more than 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

(The public should take common-sense precautions because deaths from strokes and coronaries can more than double on unexpectedly hot days, especially among senior citizens and those already suffering with heart and/or respiratory difficulties.)

Causes of freak weather conditions

Often the first question human beings ask is, “Why?” Why is nature going on such frequent rampages? And

it is the warming of water temperatures in the eastern Pacific Ocean, which has a considerable secondary effect on wind and rains in particular. Some say that as the earth continues to warm, El Niño will become a causal factor of freak weather conditions more and more often.

At least a few scientists predict that global warming will turn Britain into a tropical country by 2052—accompanied by monsoon-like downpours and killer heat waves. They point out that British summers are already experiencing violent extremes of temperatures and brutal electric storms. Recently lightning struck four houses in the Milton Keynes area during a long-lasting thunderstorm.

It is not our purpose to categorically define the scientific causes of the recent spate of bad weather. However, we do seek to bring you God’s warning message about the serious shortfalls in our personal conduct and how He may use

the natural world to encourage our repentance.

The essential biblical perspective

The Bible is God's handbook for mankind. It would be odd indeed if its pages said nothing about the weather. Clearly, that is far from the case when we study and analyze its contents. The Creator of the heavens and earth is, by



Ecclesiastes, King Solomon offered observations about the earth's water cycles and the operation of basic weather patterns.

Then in the New Testament, a sudden and severe storm came up while Jesus was fast asleep on a fishing boat. Thinking their lives were in jeopardy, His disciples quickly woke Him up. Christ immediately rebuked the storm and calmed the raging wind and waves. His disciples remarked that even the wind and the sea obeyed Him. Later the apostle Paul prayed to God and a threatening Mediterranean storm was calmed. God had guaranteed the life of every man on board the ship.

The inescapable conclusion from the Bible is the simple fact that *God controls the weather!* However, that does not mean that He actively intervenes in every storm. Worldwide weather patterns were set in motion at the earth's creation and His direct interventions are most probably very rare, and then for a specific purpose. However, our Creator reserves the right to intervene in the weather at any time.

Asking God's help

Reuters news service reported, "They were praying at the St. Patrick parish church in Grand Rapids, Ohio, this week. With hands clasped and eyes cast downwards, about 100 desperate farmers and rural residents gathered at the church on Wednesday to seek divine intervention in an extended drought in Ohio and much of the United States that is fast becoming the worst in the last century."

Certainly, this is a very commendable reaction.

During the mid-1960s, I once attended an autumn religious convention in one of the southern states. Uncharacteristically, many things had gone wrong during the first five days and the personal behavior of the conventioners was very far from what it should have been. The weather was simply atrocious and an Atlantic hurricane was threatening us.

Then a minister joined us from another part of America. His first words were: "I understand you have some problems here." Then he immediately brought a very effective sermon about forgiveness, in his concluding remarks asking all in the audience to forgive each other and even to forgive him, the speaker.

The effect was electric! Our problems vanished, the sky cleared and we had wonderful sunny weather for the last three days. We all knew that God was behind what had happened. An attitude of repentance had taken hold of the whole convention and transformed those in attendance.

That is what needs to happen to our nations today in the beginning years of the 21st century. Frequent and freakishly bad weather is not inevitable. God controls the weather and if our nations would but repent of their massive transgressions against God's law, good weather would return, dependably and consistently.

But if we continue to ignore the voice of our Creator and persist in our national and personal sins, one can almost guarantee that the worst weather ever is yet ahead of us. ❖

Scripture records that God punished an ancient world gone badly awry for its enormous sins and blatant transgressions by bringing on a global flood that drowned all but eight persons—saved by means of Noah's ark.

definition, also the Creator of the planet's weather patterns.

Scripture records that God punished an ancient world gone badly awry for its enormous sins and blatant transgressions by bringing on a global flood that drowned all but eight persons—saved by means of Noah's ark. Hundreds of years later the Creator corrected the iniquitous northern kingdom of Israel by sending a drought that lasted for three and one half years. He brought about a sudden windstorm in the Mediterranean when the Hebrew prophet Jonah tried to run away from his God-given commission.

The Old Testament also says that God can cause it to rain in one place and not in another. In the book of

The Bible on Turning to God for Protection From Severe Weather

"Others there are who go to the sea in ships, plying their trade on the wide ocean. These have seen what the LORD has done, His marvelous actions in the deep. At His command the storm-wind rose and lifted the waves high. The seamen were carried up to the skies, then plunged down into the depths; they reeled and staggered like drunkards, and all their skill was of no avail.

So they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and He brought them out of their distress. The storm sank to a murmur and the waves of the sea were stilled. They rejoiced because it was calm, and He guided them to the harbor they were making for. Let them give thanks to the LORD for His enduring love and for the marvelous things He had done for mankind" (Psalm 107:23-31, Revised English Bible).

Palestine/Israel—Whose Land Is It, Really? Part 2

We ran an article on this subject in our June issue. Due to the response we received, we're following up with Part 2 about this complex question. Both Israelis and Palestinians claim legal and religious rights to the land. But whose land is it, really?

by Cecil E. Maranville

In the first article about who really owns Palestine, we reviewed the recent history of the conflict, including claims and counter-claims about who has a right to the land. Depending on which side is presenting the case, both groups present reasonable arguments for their cause.

The Palestinians are truly suffering, living in cramped conditions for literally decades while Israel, the Arab nations, the world's super powers and the United Nations have failed to resolve the land-claim issue to the Palestinians' satisfaction.

The Israelis are truly suffering, enduring casualties at the hands of homicide bombers that proportionally far exceed the number of Americans who died in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Both peoples point back to the early 20th century when Palestinians lived in the land now called Israel and when Jews began to flee to it to escape mounting persecution in Europe. Both Palestinians and Jews cite political promises made and broken in the first half of the 20th century as evidence of their right of ownership.

Today, almost every day, terrorist attacks and corresponding reprisals take the lives of both Palestinians and Israelis. Along with the combatants, innocent people from both groups fall victim to the bombs and bullets. The mounting death toll and the accompanying fear and anger all tighten an already unyielding Gordian knot.

In the previous article, we also went back into ancient history to those who are believed to be the first peoples to occupy the land of Palestine—the Canaanites. We looked at biblical history and learned that the descendants of “Eber,” whose name meant “the other side,” came from the other side of the Euphrates into

the land of Palestine where the Canaanites lived. Also known as “Hebrews,” these peoples included a famous sheik named Abraham.

Abraham is significant still today in that his son Ishmael is a progenitor of the Arab peoples. Another son, Isaac, is the forefather of today's Jews. So, on top of all of the other aspects of this unique and complex conflict over the ownership of Palestine, the principals are distant relations.

Looking into the Bible, we saw from Genesis 12 that the God of Abraham declared that *He* owned the land and that He retained the right to give it to any people He chose. Further, He promised Abraham, “To your descendants I will give this land” (verse 7).

This puts the question of the ownership of Palestine in a different light. Rather than debate the question in terms of who was occupying the land, who is occupying the land as a prize of war or who has a claim by virtue of the promises of international power brokers, we have the greater issue of who can say, “God gave it to us”?

But, since both Arab and Jew are descendants of Abraham, can both claim the divinely ordained inheritance? The previous article cited God's choice that the descendants of Abraham's grandson Israel (Jacob) would have the land. To some, that settles the entire question, but there's more to it.

Three points of view

Before going into the rest of the story, I want to summarize three overall perspectives on the issue.

1. People from a traditional Christian background assume that the land belongs to the Jews because “they're God's chosen people.” They regard the establishment of the Israeli state in

The previous article cited God's choice that the descendants of Abraham's grandson Israel (Jacob) would have the land. To some, that settles the entire question, but there's more to it.

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The violence continues: Local leader of Al-Aqsa martyr brigades scuffles with an Israeli soldier

1948 as a fulfillment of prophecies that God would return Israel to this historic land.

2. Many Jews also believe that God gave them the land. A Jewish immigrant from the state of Ohio, who is now living in a Palestinian area with his family, was interviewed recently on a major U.S. television network. The reporter asked him why he believes that Israel should have control of territories where the Palestinians live. His clipped response was, “Because God gave it to us.” This man is not “an observant Jew,” meaning he does not practice the Jewish religion. Nonetheless, he embraces the idea that the land comes to the Jews by divine inheritance.

3. There is yet another angle, which has generated several comments from readers. God’s promises to Abraham were made in the context of a covenant. Because God always keeps His promises, these readers say that the land of Palestine goes to his descendants through Jacob or Israel, regardless of their attitude or actions.

There is some truth in each of these points of view, but some clarification is necessary with each of them.

More to the story

On point 1, most Christians are unaware of the fact that the Jews made up only a small percentage of the ancient nation of Israel. Jacob, or Israel, had 12 sons, each of whom became the father of a clan or tribe. Judah was one of the sons and is the forefather of today’s Jews.

Still today, the Jews constitute only a small percentage of the descendants of all of Israel. It’s true that God promised Israel that it would return to the land—but the promise is to *Israel*, that is, to all of the tribes, not just one. Read one of many promises to this effect: “‘Therefore do not fear, O My servant Jacob,’ says the LORD, ‘Nor be dismayed, O Israel; for behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet, and no one shall make him afraid’” (Jeremiah 30:10).

How could the establishment of the modern Jewish nation fulfill this prophecy? This is a question that we must answer.

Think of the question in terms of a modern analogy. A man who has a dozen children dies and leaves his wealthy estate to all of them. If one or a few of the children lay claim to the entire estate, imagine the legal battles that would occur!

I realize that the mind does a double take at the concept that the *modern* nation of Israel is not the same as the *ancient* nation of Israel, but that’s the truth. If that confuses you, you are not alone. Even some of the brightest Bible students overlook this fact.

(Where are the descendants of all of the other tribes? Within the answer to that question is the key to understanding current and future world events. In the previous article, we recommended that our readers ask for our booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. Again, we recommend that you read this booklet to learn the fascinating answer to the above question. It’s not without reason that the United States and Britain are among the foremost allies of the modern state of Israel.)

If point 2 reflects your thinking, you also need to be aware of the fact that God placed specific conditions upon Israel when He gave them the land. We will look at those conditions, for they are crucial to understanding the truth on this issue.

If point 3 reflects your thinking, you’re closest to the truth. But there’s still

more to the story, which we will explain here.

Think about the details of God’s proposal

What caused God to determine that Abraham would be the recipient of the special blessings? Without any question, it was Abraham’s obedience: “And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws” (Genesis 26:4-5).

God spoke these words to Isaac, recounting what He had said to Isaac’s father years before. God’s reference to Abraham’s behavior and His respect for it was clearly reinforcement of God’s desire for the same from Isaac and his family.

What would happen to the Israelites if they failed to meet the obligations God imposed upon them? They would lose the land. As noted in the first article on this subject, God did not just make promises to Israel; He entered into a covenant with them. There are two essential aspects to this type of agreement: *promises* from God and *obligations* He imposes on His subjects. The following words spell out the essential terms under which God would allow Israel to continue in the land—even before the nation took possession of the Promised Land the first time.

“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; *you shall not prolong your days in the land* . . . I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you . . . that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and *that you may dwell in the land* which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and

Jacob, to give them” (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

If God took the land from them, were there any circumstances under which they could return and reclaim their divine inheritance? Yes, the two conditions are *repentance and a return to obedience*, as this same covenant stipulates: “When . . . you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you . . . Then the LORD your God will *bring you to the land* which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it” (Deuteronomy 30:1-5).

Conditions for claiming divine inheritance never met

Over the course of history, 10 of the tribes seceded from the nation of Israel and formed their own nation. The tribes that retained control of Jerusalem were Judah, Benjamin and Levi. The tribes that seceded retained the national name of Israel. Eventually, both of these nations were conquered and taken captive by surrounding nations, because they failed to keep their part of the agreement—just as God had told them.

A small number of Jews returned to the area of Palestine after their captivity. Over the course of several decades, they reestablished a colony under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah worked with them. Theirs were some of the last voices to speak before the New Testament time.

In Jesus’ day, we read of a small Jewish nation occupied by the Romans. At that time, the 10 breakaway tribes of Israel remained scattered in areas away from Palestine. (James began his letter to “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad,” James 1:1.) Within a few decades after Christ’s death, the Jewish nation was broken up, not to be reestablished until 1948.

Clearly, the Jews of Jesus’ day were not living up to God’s expectations. The evidence of that is overwhelming, but read one of the most obvious testaments to that fact: “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This peo-

ple honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men” (Mark 7:6-8).

God’s hand nonetheless involved

Did the present-day nation of Israel come into existence because of a profound spiritual repentance? No, political power brokering and war gave birth to the nation.

Does that mean that God didn’t have a hand in the fact that Jews were able to carve out a nation? Not at all, for *God’s intervention has ensured the survival of the Jewish nation throughout its difficult history*.

Why would He do that, when He plainly said that repentance was required before He would give Israel the land again? And why would He do that, when He plainly said that the land would belong to all of Israel—not to only a portion of the many tribes? For the fulfillment of prophecy, it seems that it’s necessary that some Israelites live in Palestine at the end of this present evil age.

Space prohibits going into detail on this subject here, but specific prophecies show that the descendants of Israel will reinstitute the practice of animal sacrifices before the return of Christ. And they will do so in Jerusalem (see our booklet *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*). Yet the Jews cannot legitimately claim the divine inheritance of the land. It is only by the grace of God that they are able to live there, just as it is only by God’s grace that Americans are able to possess their land and the British, theirs.

There is a time coming when all of the modern descendants of ancient Israel (far more than just Jews) will recognize that they have failed to honor the obligations God imposed upon them. They will realize that they have to make some profound and fundamental changes in the way they live. It’s not a matter of being “good people.” It’s a matter of doing what God expects us to do—there’s often a big difference between the two.

In the meantime, some of the descendants of Abraham (Arabs and Jews) will continue to fight

each other. The rhetoric will continue to resonate and explosions will continue to detonate and the blood will continue to flow.

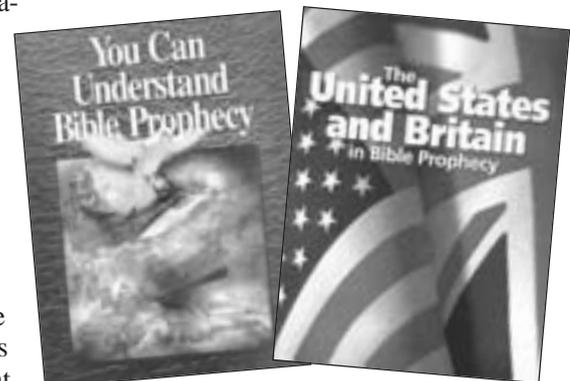
Time coming when Israel will lose its battles

For now, the modern nation of Israel is still winning its wars. *But the time will come when it will lose*. That would not happen if the modern state of Israel was the fulfillment of the prophecies about God returning Israel to the land, because God promises to guarantee its protection then (Ezekiel 36:28, 33-36).

Just as the nations surrounding the ancient nation of Israel occupied it, so also the nations will occupy the lands of the modern descendants of Israel—the Jewish state included—for a time. Non-Israelites will control the city of Jerusalem for a period of three and a half years immediately prior to the return of Christ (see Revelation 11:2).

After that brief time, Jesus Christ will return to the earth to liberate the descendants of Abraham (all of them, not just the Jews) and bring them to spiritual repentance. Only then will the Israelites legitimately be able to claim the right of divine inheritance of the land of Palestine.

Palestine/Israel—whose land is it, really? It’s God’s land to give to whomever He wishes. But the prize isn’t for the “winners,” leaving the “losers” to suffer humiliation. When the people who have divine right to Palestine receive the land from God, He will require them to be a model nation and a benefactor to all other nations. Nations will neither terrorize nor conquer each other any more. That’s the way the world will be under the firm but loving hand of the King of Kings. ❖



The Citadel and the Caravan

In explaining Europe to Americans, and America to Europeans, I have sometimes used the analogy of a citadel and a caravan. Europe is the citadel—America, the caravan.

by Melvin Rhodes

Prague, Budapest and Vienna are three of the most magnificent cities that any traveler can visit. Situated right in the heart of *mitteleuropa* (central Europe), these imperial cities of the Hapsburgs have often shared a common history. Although the capitals of three distinct peoples, each with their own language and customs, their histories have been intertwined for over two millennia.

What immediately strikes any American visitor is how old the buildings are. Most of the architecture predates America's birth as a nation. Yet these buildings are all still in daily use: Churches that go back the best part of 1,000 years, palaces of the nobility built during the golden age of the Hapsburgs in the 18th and 19th centuries, cobbled streets that were already there more than a thousand years ago, even an elaborately made church clock in Prague's market place that's about 700 years old (and still works, in contrast to the watch I bought in Hong Kong a few years ago).

These cities are living and breathing history.

It is difficult for those who have not had the opportunity to travel to other continents to sometimes appreciate and understand the differences in outlook that geography and environment can lead to. In explaining Europe to Americans, and America to Europeans, I have sometimes used the analogy of a citadel and a caravan. Europe is the citadel—America, the caravan.

A citadel is a solid, permanent building, a fortress designed to survive any crisis and protect those within it from all the dangers outside. It is a permanent dwelling. A caravan is constantly moving, seeking new horizons, leaving the past behind.

Citadels are built to last

Most buildings in America are built to last 50 years. After that, they depreciate as the buildings need more and more maintenance and start crumbling. It's hard for Americans to understand that while older buildings in the

United States generally are cheaper, older buildings in Europe are usually more expensive. The older the building, usually the better built (more solid), and the more likely to withstand the elements.

One reason for this difference is space. When Americans have made a mess of a big city, they can move out and build a new city in the suburbs. Europeans, due to lack of space, do not have that luxury. They have to rebuild the big cities. And when they rebuild, they tend to build with long-term needs in mind. Buildings are built to last.

It can also be said that the great royal dynasties of Europe were built to last. When Peter the Great founded his new royal Russian capital of St. Petersburg on the banks of the River Neva, he wanted a magnificent capital that would last for centuries, just as his dynasty would.

Similarly, the royal house of Hapsburg that ruled for centuries over Vienna, Budapest and Prague, built buildings to last. The Hapsburg dynasty lasted more than twice as long as the Russian Romanov family—over six centuries to the Romanovs' three.

Readers may remember the television series *Civilization* presented by the British architectural historian Lord Kenneth Clark, shown on the BBC and PBS over a quarter century ago. Lord Clark showed that the great architecture, literature and music of Western civilization was all produced in the absolute monarchies of Europe (a put-down, incidentally, to both Britain and the United States). The emperors, kings and princes of the various territories sponsored their protégés, their Bachs and their Michelangelos. Their heritage lives on to this day.

What 20th and 21st century heritage will be passed on to future generations?

Chaos versus continuity

The 20th century was the century of political chaos in Europe, with two world wars that

To Americans, sometimes it seems the European Union is coming together slowly. This has to do with the differences between the European and American approaches to building.

ended the continent's 500 years of world dominance. When the great European empires collapsed in the aftermath of World War I, fledgling republics replaced them that were soon overwhelmed by internal contradictions leading to dictatorship. The lowly born dictators of the various European countries turned out to be far worse than any of the monarchs that preceded them.

Europeans learned the lesson of Ecclesiastes 10:16-17, that rule by nobles is preferable to rule by the worst elements of society.

Only recently are many of these nations finally coming out of the dark age of despotism and tyranny that succeeded the Romanovs, the Hapsburgs, the Hohenzollerns (Germany) and the other smaller dynasties that fell at various times throughout the 20th century.

The Hapsburg dynasty that ruled over central Europe from Vienna was particularly progressive. One of the most famous modern Hapsburg monarchs was the Empress Maria Theresa, a great reforming monarch who ruled the empire in the middle of the 18th century up until the time that the United States became a nation.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the Hapsburgs was to rule peacefully and progressively over many nations in central Europe, uniting them when they might otherwise have been constantly fighting each other. This unity also enabled most of Europe to avoid rule by the Islamic Ottoman Turks who conquered most of southeastern Europe, but were held back at the gates of Vienna in 1688 by fighting men from all the nations that then comprised the Austrian Empire. The Polish pope, John Paul II, joined in the tercentenary celebrations marking this victory 14 years ago, remembering the sacrifices of his Polish ancestors in the battle.

Religion—Catholic and Protestant, Muslim and Jewish—has played a major role in central Europe's history.

EU built like a citadel

Austria's name in German is *Osterreich*, the eastern empire. Whereas the other reich, the German Reich, historically looked west, this Germanic Reich looked east. The weaker nations

of the east became a part of the Austrian Empire, the lands of the Hapsburgs. They were subdued, yes, but they also benefited from the peace that unity brought. The peoples of these other nations looked west, to Vienna, for hundreds of years. The pope's home city of Krakow did not look to Warsaw, Poland's present capital, but to Vienna, the capital of the empire of which it was a part. The same was true of Prague, Budapest, Sarajevo and Bratislava.

Is it any wonder then that the newly freed nations of eastern Europe are now looking west, to Vienna and through



The EU progresses slowly, in an attempt to ensure that each level and every step of the citadel is built to last.

Vienna to the nations of the European Union, of which Austria is a member? Anxious to distance themselves from their former Soviet masters, these nations seek rapid membership in the European Union.

But the EU is being built in typical European fashion—like a citadel. And it takes time to build a citadel. One of the most magnificent buildings in Prague took almost 600 years to complete. The vision of those who laid the foundation stone of this great cathedral was not realized in their lifetime, but they still built it because they were convicted it needed to be built.

The EU began in a small way shortly after World War II, with just three small nations, Belgium, Luxembourg and Holland. By 1957 it had become the European Economic Community with six members (West Germany, France and Italy were added). Sixteen years later it was enlarged to include the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark. Now there are 15 member countries and a long waiting list.

Steady progress in the EU

But expansion does not take place until previous gains have been solidified, just as a building must have a solid foundation before a higher floor is added. A badly built building in the United States may fall down with only minor consequences, but when there is no space to maneuver—as in Europe—the result could be disastrous. There were many badly built “buildings” erected in the 20th century—Germany's Second and Third Reich, the communist Soviet Union, Franco's Spain, Vichy France and the Fourth Republic; along with artificial nations like Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia that could not hold their minorities together under one flag.

The EU progresses slowly, in an attempt to ensure that each level and every step of the citadel is built to last. The most demanding construction work still lies ahead—following the introduction of the euro with further steps to full political and military union.

Revelation 17:12-13 suggests a future action that would lead to a supranational leader who will preside over the new united Europe. “The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast.” This scenario is similar to the cautious manner in which other steps have been taken on the road to European unity.

“Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it,” says Psalm 127:1. Prophecy shows that this attempt at full European unification will not last, and that the Kingdom with the most solid foundation of all will replace it—the true citadel built to last for eternity, the Kingdom of God. ✦

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The Millennium, an Eternal Idea

The teaching of the Millennium, which dates from the earliest statements in the Bible, continues to hold the imagination of many despite the attempts to stamp out and destroy it.

by Darris McNeely

In 1972 President Richard Nixon made a historic trip to China and met with the Communist chairman Mao Tse-tung (Zedong). President Nixon observed that “the Chairman’s writings moved a nation and have changed the world.” Chairman Mao more realistically replied, “I have not been able to change it. I have only been able to change a few places in the vicinity of Peking [Beijing].” This was the assessment of one of this century’s most powerful rulers about the lasting effect of his ideas and reforms upon the world’s most populous nation.

There is one idea, not born of human imagination, that promises a world of peace and prosperity for all. It is the biblical teaching of the 1,000-year reign of Christ upon the earth—the Millennium.

In a later reflection, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger reflected that Mao “could not escape the nightmare that shadowed his accomplishments and tormented his last years: that it might all prove ephemeral, that the exertions, the suffering, the Long March, the brutal leadership struggles would be but a brief incident in the triumphant, passive persistence of a millennial culture which had tamed all previous upheavals, leaving little more in their wake than the ripples of a stone falling into a pond.”

What a commentary about one of the 20th century’s most significant political ideas. Communism, like so many other human ideas, has risen and fallen upon the tides of time. Like many other movements, Communism may yet see itself fall into the “dust bin of history.” Another human effort at creating a “utopian” world will have been tried and found wanting.

Yet there is one idea, not born of human imagination, that promises a world of peace and prosperity for all. It is the biblical teaching of the 1,000-year reign of Christ upon the earth—the Millennium. This teaching, which dates from the earliest statements in the Bible, continues to hold the imagination of many despite the attempts to stamp out and destroy it as an article of truth.

God’s promise of a millennial kingdom stands as a sign of hope for mankind. A study of what the Scriptures say and a review of the



Mao Tse-tung in a propaganda poster. Realistically, he saw he hadn’t changed much.

efforts to destroy this teaching can help us understand today’s world and the promised peace of God’s Kingdom.

The idea

In Revelation, the apostle John records that after the second coming of Jesus Christ the saints will reign and rule for a thousand years.

“And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years . . . Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4, 6).

These verses are a capstone to the multiple references that describe the age to come. It is

from this verse that we define the period as the Millennium, from the Latin *mille*, meaning one thousand.

What John describes in detail is a summation of all the previous descriptions and promises about the age to come. God, through His servants, has continually foretold this period. It was a hope of the prophets of Israel during its captivity and of the apostles as they questioned Christ about the restoring of the kingdom to Israel.

Isaiah offered a clear picture of this future when he wrote of a time when Israel would be reunited under one Head and the knowledge of God would cover the earth. He wrote this during the period of Israel's decline.

"There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD . . . The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

"The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, who shall stand as a banner to the people; for the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11:1-10).

Isaiah's words crystallize the idea of the Millennium and show a multifaceted concept that encompasses all aspects of life. He describes a complete change in all parts of the physical order. No part of the world we know today will be left unchanged. Wisdom and knowledge will grow by quantum leaps under the rule of God. The nature of man will change, and people will build a just world upon the base of the Word of God and His laws. The deception gripping the world will be turned back, as the true knowledge of God's plan is spread



When God's Kingdom arrives, there will be nothing to deny its long-held promise and hope of bringing peace on earth.

throughout the human family. This will happen only through the appearance of the Son of God—the "Root of Jesse," as Isaiah called Him.

Israel never experienced this type of society. Years later, from the bleakness of captivity and loss of national sovereignty, the prophet Daniel was given the promise of an enduring kingdom that would replace the failed efforts of human rule. His interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream was an overview of political history that ends with the appearance of God's Kingdom.

"And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44).

In another vision, Daniel saw the promise of a literal earth-dominating kingdom.

"I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His domin-

ion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed . . . Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him" (Daniel 7:13-14, 27).

In the midst of the Babylonian captivity God showed His people there would be a future kingdom on the earth under the Son of Man. To the Jews of Daniel's time there was no doubt this promise was a literal earthly kingdom. They expected the Messiah to restore the sovereign kingdom to Israel. But just as a fuller understanding of the words of Daniel's prophecies was for a future time, so would the coming of this everlasting Kingdom have to wait.

Christ's intent to fulfill the prophecy

The angel Gabriel revealed to Mary that her Son would be the head of this Kingdom: "And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:33).

During His ministry, Christ spoke clear words about His intent to fulfill

these Scriptures. He showed that His followers would be among those who would be ruling in this Kingdom. “So Jesus said to them, ‘Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel’” (Matthew 19:28).

Christ’s message showed a fuller dimension to the Kingdom than any previous prophet. He showed the spiritual aspect of its laws and that those who would administer the government would be spirit beings who by a lifetime of overcoming had qualified to rule.

“But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection” (Luke 20:35-36).

The expectation in Christ’s day was that a Messiah would restore the Davidic monarchy and overthrow the Roman rule. Many who followed Christ, including His closest disciples, invested their hope in Him as the one who would restore the kingdom to Israel. But on the day of His death, He said that His Kingdom was not now of this world. “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36).

The time for the Kingdom to be established was not at hand. Before His ascension, Christ showed it to be a future event. “Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority’” (Acts 1:6-7).

After starting the Church, Christ inspired His ministers to continue preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God throughout the world in the following decades. It was the central idea and hope for which they gave their lives in devoted service. The apostles preached of the world to come and the Church modeled that way of life.



Augustine proclaimed that the church was the Kingdom of God on earth.

Persecution and heresy

Near the end of the first century, the Church and the truth of God’s Kingdom came under severe attack both from within and without. The Roman government killed Christians and exiled the leaders. The apostle John was imprisoned on the isle of Patmos. The integrity of Christ’s teachings was subverted by heresy. At the height of this crisis, John received Christ’s Revelation, which affirmed the truths of the triumphal establishment of the Kingdom of God. The knowledge of the Millennium gave the Church encouragement then, as it always has for those who look to God for their hope (1 Peter 1:3; 5:4).

During this tumultuous epoch the teaching of a literal Kingdom of God on earth became mixed with heresy, discrediting it in some circles. During the second, third and fourth centuries, the idea of a literal earthly reign of Christ endured its most severe attacks. It seems that all the forces of evil were aiming and firing their weapons in unison. First, there came the misguided attempts by heretics to predict the coming of Christ, a direct violation of His teaching. Montanus, a third-century self-proclaimed prophet, founded a movement which included predicting the imminent second coming of Christ. Other heresies, including

Gnosticism, believed in a form of millennial teaching.

The influence of Greek thought upon church fathers also had a profound effect. In particular, Origen, a third-century Alexandrian Christian thinker, drew a different conclusion from the straightforward teachings of the gospels. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, his “focus was not upon the manifestation of the kingdom within this world but within the soul of the believer, a significant shift of interest away from the historical toward the metaphysical, or the spiritual” (article, “Millennialism”). For many the Scriptures had become allegory, symbolical generalization not taken literally.

In the midst of these attacks many still held to a faith in a coming Kingdom as it had been received from the apostles. Notice this quote from the *Catholic Encyclopedia*: “Bishop Papias of Hierapolis, a disciple of St. John, appeared as an advocate of millenarianism. He claimed to have received his doctrine from contemporaries of the Apostles, and Irenaeus narrates that other ‘Presbyteri,’ who had seen and heard the disciple John, learned from him the belief in millenarianism as part of the Lord’s doctrine. According to Eusebius (Hist. Eccl., III, 39) Papias in his book asserted that the resurrection of the dead would be followed by one thousand years of a visible, glorious earthly kingdom of Christ, and according to Irenaeus (Adv. Haereses, V, 33), he taught that the saints too would enjoy a superabundance of earthly pleasures” (article “Millennium”).

Among the last known adherents of the teaching of the thousand-year earthly reign of Christ’s Kingdom is a bishop of Laodicea named Apollinaris. By the fifth century, the doctrine was overwhelmed by the views of Augustine, the most influential theologian of early church history. His teaching that the church was the Kingdom of God on earth replaced the truth that God would intervene in history and plant a kingdom that would never end.

For Augustine, God had already triumphed over Satan and His Kingdom was a totally spiritual matter in the hearts of men and manifest in the role of the church on earth. “For [Augustine] the millennium had

become a spiritual state into which the church collectively had entered at Pentecost—the time of the reception of the Holy Spirit by Christ’s disciples soon after his Resurrection—and which the individual Christian might already enjoy through mystical communion with God” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Millennialism”).

This coincided with the Roman Emperor Constantine’s official adoption of Christianity as the recognized religion of the empire. From this point there was no need for a literal belief in Christ’s reign on the earth. The church had become politically and spiritually wedded to the power of the Empire.

What historian Edward Gibbon called “the ancient and popular doctrine,” now became an appendage with little use or support. He writes, “But when the edifice of the church was almost completed, the temporary support was laid aside. The doctrine of Christ’s reign upon earth was at first treated as a profound allegory, was considered by degrees as a doubtful and useless opinion, and was at length rejected as the absurd invention of heresy and fanaticism” (*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1952, p. 188).

A dark age descends

Augustine’s view became the accepted teaching of the church. Whatever remained of the belief in the literal rule of the Kingdom of God on earth went underground. It is virtually unheard of for approximately a thousand years, until the period that followed the Protestant reformation. It is interesting to note that this medieval period has been called “The Dark Ages” of Western civilization. It is as if the lights went out on learning and the advancement of culture on all fronts.

The combination of church and state stifled the life and welfare of the common man. It held an iron grip not only on the political power but on the mind and the spirit. Historian William Manchester describes the period as a “portrait . . . of incessant warfare, corruption, lawlessness, obsession with strange myths, and an almost impenetrable mindlessness” (*A World Lit Only by Fire*, 1992, p. 3).

A close look at this “medieval mil-

lennium” reveals a time when religious authority took on the form of a literal triumphant kingdom on the earth.

Manchester continues, “As aristocracies arose from the barbaric mire, kings and princes owed their legitimacy to divine authority, and squires became knights by praying all night at Christian altars. Sovereigns courting popularity led crusades to the Holy Land. To eat meat during Lent became a capital offense, sacrilege meant imprisonment, the Church became the wealthiest landowner on the Continent, and the life of every European, from baptism through matrimony to burial, was governed by popes, cardinals, prelates, monsignors, archbishops, bishops, and village priests. The clergy, it was believed, would also cast decisive votes in determining where each would spend the afterlife” (*ibid.*, p. 11).

During this time the advancement of Western civilization had largely halted. “Nothing of real consequence had either improved or declined. Except for the introduction of waterwheels in the 800s and windmills in the late 1100s, there had been no inventions of significance. No startling new ideas had appeared, no new territories outside Europe had been

many attempts to discard the idea, the truth about the “kingdom which shall never be destroyed” (Daniel 2:44) has survived.

The world of God’s Kingdom will be far different from anything produced by any humanly devised idea. Nations will seek out the way of God and desire to know His ways. Fear will be banished from among the peoples of the earth, when righteousness guides international relations. The endless conflicts will disappear and the art of warfare will be forgotten. Families will grow stronger with each generation and produce a tightly knit society that will not come unraveled (Micah 4:1-5). When God’s Kingdom arrives, there will be nothing to deny its long-held promise and hope of bringing peace on earth.

As we have seen from this overview, the teaching of the Millennium begins early in the Scriptures and continues through the book of Revelation. Christ’s last words on the subject are perhaps the clearest and plainest on the subject. Jesus Christ, the Revelator, says there will be a period of 1,000 years when the resurrected saints will rule with Him in a just and benevolent

Jesus Christ, the Revelator, says there will be a period of 1,000 years when the resurrected saints will rule with Him in a just and benevolent Kingdom on this earth. Taking Christ at His word and believing what He said is our challenge.

explored. Everything was as it had been for as long as the oldest European could remember” (*ibid.*, pp. 26-27).

This is the culture created and fostered by Augustine’s “city of God.” And yet it came to a close with a gust of wind we call the Renaissance, a period of rebirth in all areas of knowledge. Roughly one thousand years after Augustine’s proclaiming the church was the Kingdom of God on earth, it lost its dominant hold upon men’s minds.

Rebirth of the idea

Along with the awakening of knowledge that began with the Renaissance came also the stirrings of belief in a coming Millennium. In spite of the

Kingdom on this earth. Taking Christ at His word and believing what He said is our challenge.

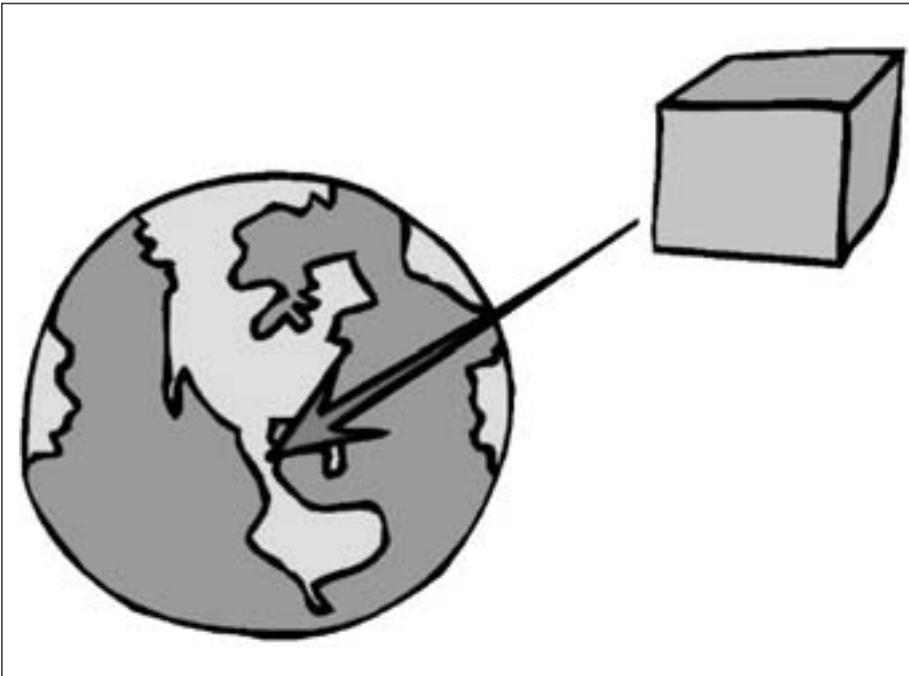
Ideas are a powerful force in human affairs. They spark revolutions that can topple centuries-old dynasties, and they can arise in the humblest of ways to create large followings. Mao Tse-tung took a relatively modern idea and with it ruled the most populous nation on earth. And yet, in his words, he failed to change a deeply rooted ancient culture. The millennial age of Jesus Christ, an idea that is older than time, will endure and ultimately transform the world. ❖

This article originally appeared in the January/February 1998 Good News.

“NEIGHBOR,” (Continued from page 16)

life, heart and purpose. At the end of the famous story, He asks a simple question: “Which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” (It is interesting that the term “good” is never used in the story, but rather has been attached to the parable by its readers.)

Christ puts none above another in the way that He tells the parable, challenging the human tendency towards prej-



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How big is your box? As human beings, all of us have our own lines that we like to draw and boxes that we like to fill, boxes filled with “us” and lines that separate us from “them.” But that is not being Christlike.

udice. He powerfully illustrates that it’s not who you are or what you know, but it’s *what you do* that is essential.

But this was not simply a token gesture. At another time and place, while visiting a Samaritan village, we again find Christ boldly taking the initiative in dealing with “others.” In John 4, we find Him tired, resting and sitting by a well. A Samaritan woman approaches. He does what would have been unthinkable in light of the common custom of the day. He asked, “Give Me a drink” (verse 7). The very fact that He speaks to the woman is remarkable in the social context. The startled woman replies, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” (verse 9). He goes on to explain many things to her.

When the disciples returned, they reflected common prejudices—“they marveled that He talked with a woman” (verse 27). As human beings, all of us have our own lines that we like to draw and boxes that we like to fill, boxes filled with “us” and lines that separate us from “them.” But that is not being Christlike. And we don’t always get it all at once or in one sitting. The original disciples certainly didn’t.

Have you ever noticed who it was that James and John wanted supernatural fire to consume? Notice in Luke 9:52, “And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him.” The zealous sons of Zebedee were set for action! When rebuffed, they asked Christ, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?” (verse 54).

It is important to consider that many communities throughout Judea and Galilee had rebuffed Jesus, but the disciples hadn’t expressed a desire that they be burned in similar manner. Why Samaritans and not Jews? Simply put, dealing with “others” is not always how we deal with ourselves. It rolled off the lips much more quickly to miraculously “nuke” the Samaritans rather than their fellow citizens.

You see, even religious folk may have tough times with the powerful question, “Who is my neighbor?” But, Christ didn’t. He answered, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them” (verses 55-56). Yes, even Samaritans.

God shows no partiality

God is exceptionally patient and He brings the lesson back to us until we get it and do like He does.

Interestingly, John was given another opportunity after Christ’s earthly departure to “get it right.” Have you ever noticed who were the first two apostles to follow Philip into Samaria and assist in baptizing the

Samaritans? One was John—the same John who had wanted to “nuke ’em.” Every step into Samaria must have weighed heavily on his mind. But when the big moment came, “they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:17). Such an act for a Jew was one of ritual uncleanness! John had now embraced the “others” in a daring act of spiritual courage.

Not only John, but also the entire Church would be taken back to another point of initial failure in understanding the powerful lesson of “who is my neighbor?” The port of Joppa had long ago been the point of departure for Jonah’s ill-fated cruise to escape his responsibility of dealing with his “others,” the Assyrians. Have you ever noticed in Acts 10:5 where Peter was staying when he received the vision to go to the gentile Cornelius? That’s right, it was Joppa.

It was here that Peter had to make a decision. Ultimately, the risk was even greater for him and the Church, for the call was not only to preach repentance, but also to embrace the gentiles. What would people think? Who gave him permission to “draw new lines,” to step “out of the box” and to con-

clude: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (Acts 10:34-35)?

Luke, the author of Acts, must have been smiling when he wrote these words, for he himself had been, in the eyes of the Jews, an "other." Luke is the one who shares the story of the Good Samaritan as well as the story of the healing of the lepers in Luke 17. He specifically points out in verse 16 that the grateful one was a Samaritan. Luke is the one who shares the story of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. He is the only one of the synoptic authors who quotes the fullness of John the Baptist's reference to Isaiah 40:5, "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:6).

Luke recognized the difference that God's Holy Spirit made in people before and after conversion. He recognized that his own Greek people had their whole list of "others." They had a concept referred to as "autochthonous" which means, "springing up from the soil of Attica." To not be of Attica was to be a "barbarian." That is the Greek term they used for everyone other than themselves. Perhaps that is why Luke wrote a detailed record of Paul's powerful address to the intellectual leaders of Athens, people who would have been steeped in this notion. Paul challenged their perspective with the words: "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26).

"Hath not a Jew . . . ?"

Common blood, a common father and common hopes and aspirations was a theme to which William Shakespeare gave voice through Shylock the Jew in *Merchant of Venice*. At this time, the Jews were the "others" in Italy.

In Act III, Shakespeare's character Shylock bellows: "He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million; laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, hated mine enemies; and what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that."

The big question that remains after reading such a passage is, Do you have the same eyes and heart of a Shylock? For what you choose to focus on is what you will see. And make no mistake, it is a choice!

Yes, we can read the examples of Christ, take encouragement from fellow Christians like John, Peter and Paul—even marvel at the wisdom and eloquence of Shakespeare and draw new or renewed insight and strength. And we need to, because it's a tough world out there on the job, in the schools or in the neighborhoods. We need to recognize that even "good people" can be pushed back into small boxes and reverse their growth steps. You may think that you would never say disparaging remarks toward someone else

of another racial or ethnic group or disassociate yourself from certain friends when the pressure is on. Be careful. Notice a powerful drama played out in Antioch.

"Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face . . . for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy" (Galatians 2:11-13). When the Bible states "even Barnabas," it is making a powerful point! Barnabas was "the son of encouragement," Paul's mentor, the one man who always stood up for people—but he also had human failings. The lesson is that any of us can make this all-too-human mistake. We don't find our values in a trial; we take them into the trial with us.

Birds of a feather

I have been raising chickens for nearly 25 years. Many nights I go out to see if my birds are all right, shining my flashlight into the coop. No surprises there! True to the old saying, "birds of a feather flock together" to stay warm and cozy, even in the darkest night. People can be a lot like chickens in so many ways. In fact, sometimes I think that people are simply chickens without feathers.

But the grand reality is that God has called us to be more than our barnyard friends. Yet I know some people who have never gotten past "the feathers" of other people. But the enduring and overwhelming message and example of Christ's time on earth is that He never looked at "the feathers," but simply focused on hearts.

As we continue to read the headlines and articles in our newspapers or the subjects we cover in *World News and Prophecy*,



let's realize many of these articles will deal with people different from us. They will deal with racial tension, conflict and, unfortunately, even death, because humanity as a whole hasn't gotten beyond "the feathers." Racism, culture wars and ethnic tensions

will continue to intensify. Right now, a Christian's responsibility is not to change the world. Only the literal rule of Jesus Christ on earth is going to accomplish that. But we are to change ourselves and be responsible for our actions within our spheres of influence, whether our families, our schools or our jobs.

It is none other than Jesus Christ Himself who echoes the millennial refrain of Isaiah 30:21 of "this is the way, walk in it" with His simple yet heart-expanding reminder, "love your neighbor as yourself." ❖

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This is the Way

ISAIAH 30:21

by Robin Webber

Who Is My Neighbor?

All of us are challenged by this ever-changing world. For those of us who are middle-aged or older, society is much different from what we knew as children or even as young adults. For those of you who are young adults, the plain reality is that this is not “your grandfather’s world.” One of the great dynamics of our age is the number of new and different faces that are entering our lives whether through the media, in our schools or right next door in your neighborhood.

In one sense, the growing reality of globalization is pushing us together with people we have never dealt with before. The global neighborhood is getting crowded. Dynamic advances in technology, transportation and communication have brought new faces, accents and traditions into our everyday lives. Our comfortable world of “sameness” is being stretched, if not literally shaken.

This is no longer simply a New York, London or Los Angeles phenomenon, but it’s happening everywhere—just look out the door, or pick up your local newspaper, or look at the names in your phone book. How we deal with “others” is going to be one of the great personal challenges of the 21st century. Society today is split on dealing with this issue of “others.” In one sense, society has become more tolerant of people from different backgrounds. Today, we see much more interaction between different groups and an appreciation of others. Yet, at the same time, other parts of society are fragmenting into isolation and tribalism.

We find this in all the various racial and ethnic groups. “Balkanization” of nations, states, counties and cities is an ever-present dilemma facing responsible peo-

ple. These two terms, *globalization* and *balkanization* are two very real dynamics that will affect your world, your church and yourself in the 21st century.

How you view “others” is very telling as to how you view yourself, and ultimately how you view God. Let’s look through the lens of Scripture and see how Jesus Christ and His followers dealt with their own multicultural world. We’ll come to see that each, in his way and in his time, made real headway in dealing with “others.”

How big is your box?

Jesus was conversing with a young lawyer (Luke 10:25-29). Turning his question back on him, Jesus asked the attorney his opinion of the law’s answer to how one inherits eternal life. The man’s response was: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”

Christ encouraged the man, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.” But the young man, being a lawyer and perhaps looking for the “loophole” in the law asked, “And who is my neighbor?” Without missing a beat, Christ moved into the story that has come to be known as the “Parable of the Good Samaritan.” In speaking to conservative religious folk of His day, He purposefully inserts the example of a Samaritan. The Jewish community at this time viewed Samaritans as a mixed breed of people, and had nothing to do with them!

In this environment, Christ breaks the mold and daringly inserts the reference to “another,” and gives him

(See “NEIGHBOR,” page 14)