



In This Issue:

February 2006 | Vol. 9, No. 2

Will Iran Provoke Nuclear War in 2006?

by Cecil E. Maranville 1

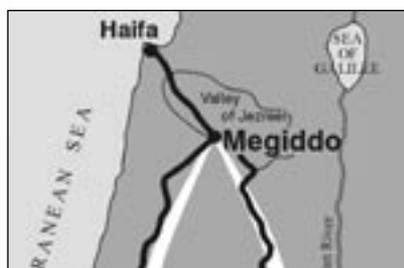
Restoration: An Incendiary Arc of Instability

by John Ross Schroeder 2

Is the EU an Attempt to Revive the Holy Roman Empire?

by Melvin Rhodes 5

A Place Called Megiddo: The World's Battleground



Dan Dowd

by Darris McNeely 7

Why Preach a Gospel With Urgency Today?

by John Ross Schroeder 10

In Brief. . . World News Review

by Cecil E. Maranville 12

This Is the Way... The City That Will Not Fade

by Robin Webber 16

Will Iran Provoke Nuclear War in 2006?

How far will Iran go with its nuclear program? Will diplomacy curtail it? Will the Israelis knock it out from the air? Will the United States soon be involved in another war?

by Cecil E. Maranville

The host of a popular *Fox News* program recently announced a survey question for viewers. It was a multiple-choice poll about the story they anticipated would be the biggest one of 2006. I don't usually pay much attention to such polls, but this one made me sit up straight in shock. Not because of what people said, but rather because of the huge story that Fox's producers did not even put on the list.

That's the story of Iran. No doubt, Iraq's rebuilding, the pursuit of terrorists, economic peaks and valleys, Israel and the Palestinians, as well as terrorist attacks will appear in 2006's headlines. But what Iran does could well affect one or all of these other major stories.

There have been rumors of Iranian involvement in Iraq since before the 2003 war began, including the funding of any group that would interfere with the American-led coalition's efforts to remove Saddam Hussein and to uproot those committed to his brutal dictatorship.

That might seem odd to many in the West, given the eight-year war Saddam's army waged against Iran in the 1980s, inflicting hundreds of thousands of casualties.



Reuters/NSA

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's decisions about defying UN nuclear watchmen and pressing ahead with Iran's nuclear program could enable it to detonate a dirty nuclear bomb over Israel in a matter of months.

But Iran's ruling mullahs' hatred of the West trumped any lingering bitterness they held for Hussein and his Baathist thugs.

In addition, Iran's small cabal of clerics has good reason to sabotage its neighbor's democratization. They fear democracy in their own country, which would surely overthrow the mullahs in a free vote.

Crackpot or crafty?

In a highly manipulated election last year, Iran installed a little known former university professor turned mayor as its president, Mahmoud

(See "IRAN," page 3)



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"Whom heaven must receive until the times of

Restoration

of all things ... ACTS 3:21

An Incendiary Arc of Instability

Here's a special guest column from contributing editor John Ross Schroeder.

Hamas' surprising victory in the Palestinian elections casts a giant shadow over the hoped-for road map to peace. It may even lead to a bloody conflict of massive proportions in the Middle East.

Harvard historian Niall Ferguson recently conceived the following apocalyptic scenario in reaction to Iranian calls for the forced removal of Israel from the Mideast. "The elements of a devastating conflict are taking form in the Middle East . . . Are we living through the origins of the next World War?"

This chilling observation could just as easily be applied to the terrorist organization Hamas being voted into power in areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority.

Western leaders seem to be waiting with bated breath trying to figure out what Hamas might do next. Media speculations run the gamut, from Gaza becoming a dangerous weaponry stronghold and a haven for other terrorist groups that wish to attack Israel, to a paradoxical "blessing in disguise" that will eventually lead to world peace.

At least in the short run, the leaders of Hamas show little willingness to depart from the intentions stated in their charter of 1988: "Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it . . ." (emphasis added). In a recent interview with *The Sunday Telegraph* (London), the group's most senior figure and cofounder of Hamas in 1987, Mahmoud Al-Zahar, stated: "We are not going to recognise Israel." He added, "We can reach out to them with a long-term *hudna* (truce)."

In an interview with *The Times* (London), he also said: "Sooner or later the European countries in particular are going to change their minds concerning their attitude [toward] Hamas." His view, however, of the United States is radically different. He stated: "I think nothing can be changed. In America there is a Christian Zionism. They believe that Jesus will return for the second 1,000 years . . . The pressure on you [Europeans] to help the Israelis and to consider Hamas terrorist is American."

So we see that dividing the Western allies remains a central theme of Hamas' policy. The problem should be seen in the context of the encirclement of Israel by intransigent enemies. In fact the whole Mideast and its environs is experiencing a resurgence of Islamic radicalism. To the north, the Islamist-based Justice and Development Party got 357 seats in the 550-member Turkish parliament in 2002. And the Iranian-backed radical Islamic group Hezbollah and allied parties won 54 of 128 seats in the June 2005 Lebanese elections.

Southward in Egypt, in December 2005 the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood won 88 seats in the 454-seat Egyptian parliament, almost six times the number it previously held. To the east in Iraq, Islamist parties dominated December's elections for the 275-member Iraqi National Assembly. And in June 2005, Iranian hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won the presidency with more than 60 percent of the vote.

Clearly in the last few years Islamic radicalism (in general terms mostly bitterly opposed to Israel and America) has been on the march, both politically and militarily. This represents a serious threat to world peace.

Many complex and even contradictory factors are at work. For instance, Hamas leaders are crucially dependent on the West, urging benefactor nations to continue their aid, while at the same time utterly rejecting pleas to amend their charter hatred of Israel. Yet practical dependence on Israel is still very much in evidence. So in the short term, no one can accurately predict the exact course of events. In the coming weeks we may see some sort of compromise truce or yet another bloody Intifada or possibly even a major war.

But we are mainly concerned with the long run of prophetic events. What will eventually happen is clearly set out in the Bible and our booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. Request your free copy or download it at wnponline.org/litreq/. —John Ross Schroeder

“IRAN,” (Continued from page 1)

Ahmadinejad. You now likely have heard or seen his name many times since he took office.

He projects a “man of the people” image with his ’70s-style leisure suits over open collared shirts. He even wore this casual outfit when addressing the United Nations General Assembly! That might strike Westerners as comical and tempt them to dismiss Ahmadinejad as an eccentric, to put it politely.

That would be a grave mistake.

After the speech, he claimed he felt a divine light surround him with an aura and that this same force caused his august audience to sit in rapt attention without so much as batting an eye throughout the discourse.

Since taking office, he has startled the world with speeches calling for wiping Israel off of the map, declaring the Holocaust a myth, then later backpedaling to proclaim that Europe and America should donate land for Holocaust survivors and their descendants (that is, all of the Jews in Israel). When Ahmadinejad was told of Israeli Prime Minister Sharon’s massive stroke, he shocked the diplomatic world with the decidedly un-presidential statement, “He is a crook; I hope he is dead.”

Again, it’s tempting to shrug off the president and his views as so silly as to be laughable. One might think he is an accidental leader, a coarse thug who finds himself out of his league and who will pass quickly from the world stage.

If only that were true. Actually, Ahmadinejad is giving voice to the true mind and heart of those who control the nation’s government—and its military.

The president’s tough talk about defying UN nuclear watchmen and pressing ahead with Iran’s nuclear research caused the most concern, because it could enable Iran to produce, deliver and detonate a dirty nuclear bomb over Israel in a matter of months.

We watched the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khameni (the actual chief of state) for his reaction to Ahmadinejad’s outlandish comments to see if the ayatollah would distance himself and the

country from the brash young president.

Khameni backs Ahmadinejad all the way

Ayatollah Khameni’s assigning former President Rafsanjani the responsibility of negotiating the nuclear research issue seemed at the time a possible sign of misgivings about Ahmadinejad. But Khameni has since made plain *his full endorsement* of the president’s views, including the eradication of the state of Israel and Iran’s intention to become a nuclear power. Indeed, both Khameni and Rafsanjani also made public statements in recent years calling for the destruction of Israel.

It seems to be hard for the world to awake to the possibility that we could be witnessing the buildup to a *nuclear war*.

Is that an overstatement? Consider the facts.

Many analysts believe that Iran would use a nuclear weapon if it had one, and the target would be Israel. Mohamed El Baradi, director general of the UN’s International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), revealed in December that Iran could be within three months of producing a nuclear weapon.

Israel is awake, however, and it is painfully aware of the stakes of this showdown. In mid-December 2005, Israeli Defense Forces Chief of Staff Dan Halutz echoed El Baradi’s warning: Iran would pass the point of no return in its nuclear program by March 2006. That is, it will have enough of an infrastructure to produce the type of material needed to create nuclear weapons.

How long it would take to create those weapons is unclear. It need not be a sophisticated device, only enriched uranium packed around conventional explosives.

Israel’s American-supplied anti-missile shield is unlikely to be able to stop all incoming missiles. Only one nuclear warhead need penetrate Israel’s defenses for a high altitude detonation over Tel Aviv in order to destroy the commercial heart of the nation. A single, inelegant assault like this would give Ahmadinejad his wish: Israel would no longer be a nation.



Reuters/Raheb Homavandi

Iranian athletes form a human chain around the Uranium Conversion Facility in Isfahan to show support for Iran’s nuclear program Jan. 22.

But not before Israel would retaliate with a full-scale nuclear response (with perhaps *hundreds* of nuclear warheads) that would, well, wipe *Iran* from the map. Hundreds of Israeli nuclear warheads would rain down on Iran, turning its sand into glass.

World community not united

Israel would prefer to have the world community deal with Iran, but will the UN really be effective? The EU appears to be over its attempt to talk the nuclear threat to death. With the EU’s added weight, the United States has been able to persuade reluctant Russia and China to join in reporting Iran to the UN Security Council.

However, it’s highly doubtful that Iran would suddenly change a course it has pursued for two decades!

Why has this been dragging on? It’s the old story of “follow the money.” Europe allowed itself its naïveté for this long, because it enjoyed its profits from lucrative trade with Iran without U.S. competition. Likewise, China and Russia are invested in Iran to the tune of multiple billions.

They have been gambling with the possibility of a nuclear war. Iran wouldn’t be just another nation joining the select few in the nuclear club—it would be a

nuclear-armed Islamic theocracy whose underpinning philosophy is a commitment to the destruction of Israel.

This isn't a WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction) scare. It is a WMD reality. Regrettably, the bad intelligence leading up to the 2003 Iraq war may have sounded the cry of "wolf" that dulled people's senses about the real deal.

Am I saying that there could be a nuclear war in 2006? Yes.

Does Bible prophecy say anything that hints at a nuclear war? When Jesus Christ exited the temple at Jerusalem for the last time in His human life, His disciples picked up on the fact that something major was afoot. You can read this in the first few verses of Matthew 24.

Christ may well have indicated the temple's destruction, for the disciples pointed out and commented on the massive size of the temple's building stones (Josephus reports some more than 55 feet long), as if to question Jesus' assertion.

The Bible gives us Christ's reply, "Do you not see all these things?"

Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (verse 2). That must have seemed utterly unbelievable to the men who heard Him. But He wasn't finished.

He added a list of startling events, including a warning of war: "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom [that is, wars of all sizes]. And there will be famines [and] pestilences [the common consequences of wars, as well as other causes]..." (verse 7).

As if this were not enough, Jesus told them that this was only the beginning of "sorrows" (verse 8) or "intolerable anguish" (*Online Bible Greek Lexicon*), revealing that eventually these conditions would pass the point at which the human race could survive (see verses 21-22). It will be at that point that Christ will return, literally to save mankind.

For a complete overview of end-time prophecy, see our booklet *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* You can

read it online or request a free copy from wnponline.org/litreq/.

Possible ways of dealing with Iran

Israeli acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Likud Party leader Benjamin Netanyahu (one of whom will be the next prime minister) have made it clear that Israel will not sit idly by while Khameni and Ahmadinejad hammer the last nails into a nuclear gallows with Israel's name on it.

Israel took out Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor to deny Saddam Hussein's ambitions to do what Iran is now attempting.

This time, the job would not be possible single-handedly. To reach Iran, the Israelis would have to choose between three possible flight paths: over Turkey, over Jordan and Saudi Arabia or over Iraq. Either of the first two could well be taken by these countries as an act of war against them, thus creating additional conflicts.

The third option is more likely, although it would mean U.S. knowledge of the attack and permission to pass through Iraqi airspace, as well as refueling from American tankers. Like it or not, the United States would be involved in a war against Iran.

Another major difference between 1980 Iraq and 2006 Iran is the fact that Iran has its nuclear infrastructure in scattered locations, as well as in deeply buried, hardened concrete facilities.

If Israel should preemptively strike Iran's nuclear infrastructure, Iran would surely unleash its terrorist lackey, Hezbollah, which could rain conventional missiles onto Israel's major cities. (Iran finances Hezbollah to the tune of \$100 million per year.)

Some analysts, therefore, predict Israel would have to launch a preemptive ground war against Hezbollah concurrent with a massive bombing run over Iran.

The United States may not force tiny but mighty Israel to take on Iran. President Bush and various administration officials have made it clear that America would not allow Iran to go nuclear.

This is not merely a philosophical debate. Nor is it a Hollywood make-believe plot. This is as real as it gets, and the clock is ticking... ❖

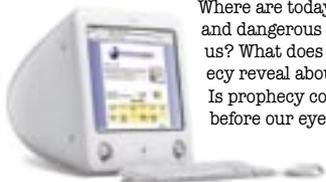
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Is the EU an Attempt to Revive the Holy Roman Empire?

Exactly two centuries after the fall of the Holy Roman Empire—the First Reich of the German Nation—the European Union seems set to revive this ancient institution.

by Melvin Rhodes

Friday, Jan. 20, was the 200th anniversary of the dissolution of a remarkable institution that had dominated Europe for over a thousand years.

The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation traced its origins back to the time of Charlemagne (Karl Der Grosse in German), crowned by the pope on Dec. 25, A.D. 800. It ended with Napoleon's victory at the Battle of Austerlitz, the Battle of the Three Emperors, when the empires of Russia and Austria were defeated. The Austrian Emperor Francis was forced to renounce the title of Holy Roman emperor, thereby formally ending an empire that had lasted a thousand years.

The coronation of Charlemagne was a deliberate act on the part of Pope Leo III. In crowning Charlemagne emperor, the pope was effectively declaring the rebirth of the western Roman Empire, which had collapsed in the fifth century.

The only Roman emperor in the year 800 was the ruler of Byzantium, the eastern Roman Empire, who ruled from Constantinople. To the Byzantines there could be only one "Imperator Romanorum" (Roman emperor). An earlier attempt to revive the western empire had been led by an eastern emperor, Justinian, in the sixth century. Pope Leo's crowning of Charlemagne, in their minds, was an illegal act and a deliberately provocative one.

Charlemagne's elevation to emperor was "the result of Charlemagne having defended the pope against the rebellious inhabitants of Rome, which initiated the notion of the *Reich* being the protector of the Church" (wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Roman_Empire).

Reich is the German word for empire. The Holy Roman Empire was the First Reich.

The French philosopher Voltaire in the 18th century famously said that the Holy Roman Empire was "neither Holy, nor Roman, nor an Empire."

Unique nature of the Holy Roman Empire

It's difficult for people to understand the nature of the Holy Roman Empire because it was so unlike any other empire. It was unique in world history, and it bears no resemblance to

nation-states like England or France. The Holy Roman Empire was more of an ideal than an ethnic grouping. At times that ideal could galvanize armies from various kingdoms and ethnic groups to create muscle for the emperor's goals.

In European history, whereas a king ruled over a single nation, an emperor ruled over a vast territory made up of many nations or ethnic groups. The Hapsburg emperors of Austria, for example, right up until well into the 20th century ruled over 11 distinct nations. And this was when they were in decline.

Charles V, one of the more famous emperors in the 16th century at the time of the Protestant Reformation, ruled over the Austrian Empire, the Spanish Empire (including Portugal), the Netherlands, foreign dominions including South America and the southwestern part of what is now the United States. He was also Holy Roman emperor and, like Charlemagne, crowned by the pope.

In fact, "until 1508, German Kings were not considered Emperors of the Reich until the Pope had formally crowned them as such" (ibid.). The reich was always considered the ultimate protector of the church based in Rome.

Although most of the empire's rulers and subjects were of German ethnicity, many ethnic groups constituted the empire, whose borders fluctuated down through the centuries. At its height the following countries were a part of the empire: "Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Czech Republic and Slovenia, as well as eastern France, northern Italy and western Poland" (ibid.). It was never Roman as was the original Roman Empire.

What made the empire unique was the fact that the various parts of the empire had a different connection to the center, to the emperor himself. The emperor was elected by seven electors. One of them, the elector of Hanover, became the British monarch in 1714, although England was never a part of the empire. "Numerous secular and ecclesiastical princes, prelates, counts, imperial knights, and free cities" constituted the empire, which made it rather unwieldy (ibid.).

It was a secular power, but one with strong eccle-

A Fourth Reich, another attempt to revive the Roman Empire, is already in existence in embryonic form.

siastical connections. It had a major role in being the protector of the church.

Church-state association

This church-state relationship was prophesied in the biblical book of Revelation. Whereas the Roman Empire, foreseen by Daniel almost six centuries before the time of Jesus Christ, was described as a “beast” in Daniel 7, Revelation describes the church as “the image of the beast” (Revelation 13:15). British historian Paul Johnson put it another way, describing the Roman Church as the continuation of the empire: “The Roman Church still spoke for the Empire” (*The Offshore Islanders*, 1972, p. 57.)

The church, however, needed a military power to defend its interests. Charlemagne provided that in the late eighth century and was rewarded with his coronation by the pope, the beginning of a close relationship between the reich and the church.

This ecclesiastical connection is the reason the empire carried the prefix *holy*. “The support of powerful kings was needed for the disciplining of local churches and the support of missionary enterprise” (J.M. Roberts, *A Short History of the World*, 1997, p. 227).

Relations were not always easy, however. “Papal power ebbed and flowed as the centuries went by” (p. 227). “The emperors were bound to find themselves in conflict with the Papacy sooner or later” (p. 233). In the late 11th century, the clash between the church and the emperor reached its climax with the humiliation of Emperor Henry IV who “waited in the snow barefoot until [Pope] Gregory [VII] would receive his penance” (p. 233).

This helps us understand how the church was the most powerful institution of the Middle Ages. From the fall of the Roman Empire until the Protestant Reformation, the church remained the one constant in Western Europe.

The relationship between church and state is described in the Scriptures as one of “fornication” (Revelation 17:2). Unlike marriage where two people give themselves to each other, a relationship of fornication between a man and a woman is a selfish one, with each trying to get from the other. This is exactly how the relationship has been between the church and the secular European leaders down through history, each seeking its own advantage over the other.

“The inhabitants of the earth [have

been] made drunk with the wine of her fornication” (Revelation 17:2)—the people have been deceived by this false religious system that has been backed up for most of its existence by the secular authority. Between them, the emperors and the popes kept the people under control for well over a thousand years, until the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century.

Significance for today

The same chapter 17 of the book of Revelation says that the church (pictured by a woman) would sit on “seven mountains” (great nations or empires, verses 3 and 9). The coming Kingdom of God is described as a mountain that “shall be established on the top of the mountains [other great powers], and shall be exalted above the hills [lesser nations]” (Micah 4:1).

Revelation 17:9-10 says, “The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. There are also seven kings...” This prophecy takes us down through the last two millennia, from the time of the apostle John who wrote these words until the second coming of Jesus Christ, which is still ahead of us. It’s a prophecy about the fourth beast of Daniel 7—the Roman Empire, the Roman Church and subsequent resurrections of the Roman Empire, among which was the Holy Roman Empire.

The Holy Roman Empire was the First Reich of the German Nation. It lasted for a thousand years. The Second Reich did not last as long, but led the world into the terrible global conflict of World War I (1914-18). Fifteen years later, the Third Reich began. It soon caused World War II, which devastated the continent of Europe and killed tens of millions of people, mostly civilians.

These three reichs are among the heads and the mountains prophesied in your Bible.

These same passages of Scripture tell us that another revival of the Roman Empire is to come immediately prior to the second coming of Jesus Christ. Revelation 17 tells us that a final union of 10 kings (leaders) will come together and “will make war with the Lamb [Jesus Christ, at His return]” (verses 12-14).

Revelation 17 implies that the church will be involved in the coming together of this powerful European Union, just as it has been down through the ages. However, this time, the church-state relationship will rapidly deteriorate. “The ten horns [kings or

leaders] which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot [the church that has sold herself spiritually for temporal gain], make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire” (verse 16).

Fourth Reich already begun

This Fourth Reich, another attempt to revive the Roman Empire, is already in existence in embryonic form. It’s called the European Union, currently a union of 25 European countries that increasingly resembles the Holy Roman Empire.

All member countries are pledged to work toward “an ever closer union.” When outsiders look at this attempt at unity, they imagine a “United States of Europe” similar to the United States of America—not the Holy Roman Empire.

But Europe is not going to be another United States. The relationship between the different members that constitute the EU and their respective relationships with the center is naturally affected by historical precedent. That precedent is the Holy Roman Empire, a motley assortment of nations that owed a common allegiance to an emperor, whose title was the same as the Roman emperors of antiquity.

In this republican age, the new leader is unlikely to have the title “emperor,” but his role will be similar and the union itself will likely resemble the Holy Roman Empire.

The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation was centered around Germany, which remains strategically placed in the middle of Europe. Germany is the number one trading partner of all the other EU members with the exception of Britain, which does equal trade with the United States. When the 10 kings come together to form the revived Beast power, it is likely that Germany, already the world’s biggest exporting nation and third biggest single economy, will again be at the head of the next reich.

Following the rejection of the new federal European constitution by Dutch and French voters in 2005, British historian Niall Ferguson wrote the following observation: “Without the new constitution, Europe will look less like the United States and more like the Holy Roman Empire...with a bewildering agglomeration of overlapping institutions and jurisdictions... Rather than a single, strong executive arm, it will have multiple, overlapping tentacles” (“Federalist Style,” *The New Republic*, June 20, 2005). ❖

A Place Called Megiddo: The World's Battleground

In northern Galilee of the state of Israel lies a legendary site, the world's most contested piece of territory. Bible prophecy tells us it will once again be a focal point for a battle almost beyond comprehension.

by Darris McNeely

Rising out of the pastoral Jezreel Valley is a hill containing the remains of a city whose foundations go back several millennia. On a modern map, it is called Tel Megiddo. A “tel” is a geographic feature, a hill rising out of a flat plain, marking the site of a city dating from ancient times. Megiddo is a site that has seen more battles than any other location on earth. It will be the staging ground for the final battle prior to Christ's return.

In Revelation 16:16 we read where the armies of the kings of the east are “gathered...together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.” This is the only place in Scripture where the term *Armageddon* is mentioned. The word *Armageddon* comes from the Greek rendering of the Hebrew name *Har Megiddo* (the Hebrew prefix *Har* means “hill” or “mountain”).

Today the site of Megiddo is one of the crown jewels of Israeli archaeology. Remains of more than 25 cities, representing every period of ancient history in the land of Israel, have been uncovered. Understanding why the armies of the world will gather here requires that we understand the history of the site and its importance in the ancient world.

Megiddo controlled a narrow strategic stretch of road called the Via Maris, “the Way of the Sea,” a major international highway in the ancient world. This road stretched from Egypt in the south to Babylon in Mesopotamia, linking the major empires and trade routes of the day. Megiddo's position on this highway made it a prime mercantile



Today the site of Megiddo is one of the crown jewels of Israeli archaeology. Remains of more than 25 cities, representing every period of ancient history in the land of Israel, have been uncovered.

city. Whoever controlled Megiddo controlled access to trade all along this road. Megiddo was a choke point, therefore, for the empires of the ancient world. Control of Megiddo was crucial to controlling any regional empire.

Many battles in history took place at Megiddo. In 1479 B.C., Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III launched a campaign near Megiddo to assert dominion over territories in and north of Canaan.

Thutmose marched his armies north and paused just south of Megiddo and engaged his generals in a war council. The Egyptian generals proposed attacking along a circuitous route that provided easy access to Megiddo and the flat Valley of Jezreel. Thutmose

Megiddo will play a role in the struggle for global dominion that involves the armies of the Beast power and armies from beyond the Euphrates River.



Megiddo overlooks the Valley of Jezreel with Mount Tabor in the distance. The area has never lost its significance as a battleground for control over this crucial crossroad of empires.

preferred a more direct, yet dangerous route. His generals said, “How is it possible to march upon this road which becomes narrower?”

Thutmose’s plan prevailed and caught the Canaanite troops completely by surprise, routing them easily. Megiddo eventually fell and the Egyptians asserted control once again over this vital location.

Megiddo in the Bible

In Joshua 12:21 we have the first reference to Megiddo in Scripture. Here is a list of Canaanite kings defeated during the Israelite conquest. In Joshua 17:11 we see that Megiddo fell within the inheritance of the tribe of Manasseh.

In 1 Kings 9:15 we see reference to the largest period of building at Megiddo during the reign of King Solomon of Israel. Solomon made Megiddo one of his district capitals as well as one of his three main fortress cities. Archaeologists have uncovered

evidence of several structures built by Solomon to garrison soldiers with their horses and chariots. The massive gates that stand today at the entrance to Megiddo date from this period and are evidence the city was a strategic regional site.

During the reign of Judah’s King Josiah, another Egyptian pharaoh, Necho, came to Megiddo to engage the king of Assyria. Against God’s instructions, Josiah involved himself in this battle and was killed (2 Kings 23:29). Josiah’s death at Megiddo was a stunning blow to Judah. He was the last good king before the nation’s destruction at the hands of Babylon.

Megiddo as a city went into decline during the Babylonian and Persian periods. However, in modern times the site continued to see battles. Both Napoleon (1799) and the British General Allenby (1918) defeated Turkish forces here. The area has never lost its significance as a battleground for control over this crucial crossroad of empires.

Megiddo in Revelation

Megiddo today is a major archaeological site that tells a rich story of past civilizations. But it is the future story that captures our attention. Holy Scripture reveals to us that this is more than simply one more tourist site of dust and bones from past times.

The living words of God in the book of Revelation convey to those who will understand, that the greatest gathering of armed forces in history is yet to occur here. At the end of the age, the Valley of Jezreel, in which Megiddo is located, will be the gathering place for an immense army that will fight the returning King of Kings, Jesus Christ, the Messiah. This will be the culminating event of the Day of the Lord.

The setting of this battle is found in Revelation 16 where we see “bowls of the wrath of God” poured out upon the earth. There are seven “bowls” of plagues representing God’s final terrible judgment upon an unrepentant humanity. The intensity of these judgments will be severe, indicating that time is very short till the coming of the Lord. The impact of these plagues alone would bring life on earth to a halt.

The first bowl brings painful sores upon those marked with the sign of the ruling Beast power. The second turns the sea to blood. The third fouls the fresh water of the earth by turning it to blood as well. A voice from the altar pronounces these as “true and righteous” judgments of God.

As if this is not enough, the fourth bowl impacts the heat of the sun as its energy is increased and scorches mankind with great heat. And still, there is no repentance from men to give glory to God. The fifth bowl brings darkness upon the throne of the Beast, and the pain and anguish produces only blasphemy against God (verse 11).

It is the sixth bowl that deals with the gathering of forces at Megiddo. “Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of

the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty... And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon” (verses 12-14, 16).

Powerful demons influence the political and religious leaders of the world to send armies into this region of the modern state of Israel. Prior to this there has been war, involving possible nuclear exchanges, between nations that has led to a movement of troops into this region (Revelation 9; Daniel 11:40-45).

It is a struggle for global dominion that involves the armies of the Beast power and armies from beyond the Euphrates River, all moving toward a final confrontation. It is the final battle that Christ prophesied when He said all life could be destroyed if not for divine intervention (Matthew 24:22).

Popular telling of this final battle has led to it being called the Battle of Armageddon. Armageddon has become the term to describe the war to end all wars. But notice that Revelation 16:14 calls this the “battle of that great day of God Almighty.”

Megiddo is merely the gathering place for the forces. Other scriptures tell us this is not the actual place of the battle. That takes place in Jerusalem, several miles to the south. The broad flat plains of the Jezreel Valley are only the staging area for this climatic confrontation.

Old Testament prophets speak

Zechariah 14 tells us more details of where this will be. “Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem... Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle” (verses 1-3).

Now go to the prophet Joel’s account of this time: “Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the LORD is com-

ing, for it is at hand” (Joel 2:1). Jerusalem is the location of Zion and God’s holy mountain.

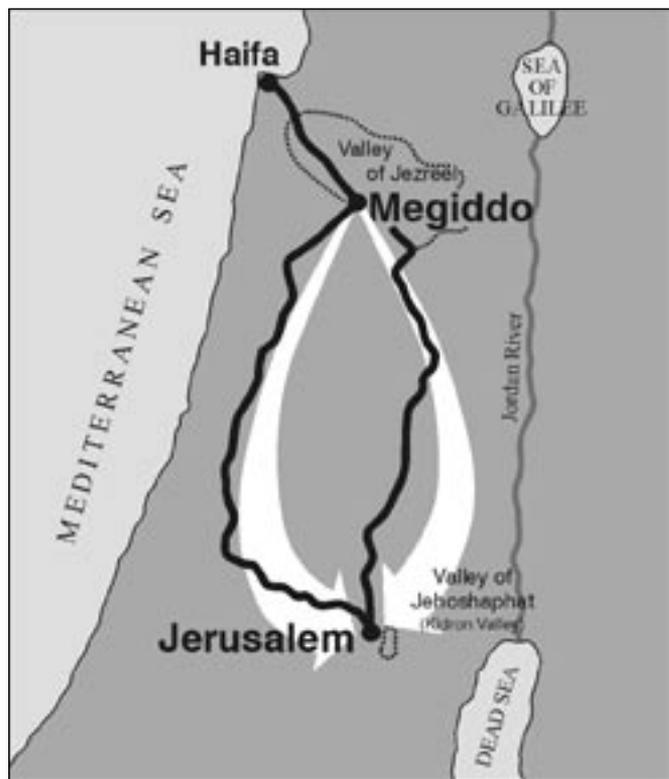
Joel also indicates the specific location within Jerusalem. Notice: “I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land” (Joel 3:2).

So it is in Jerusalem that the battle of the great day of God Almighty is fought. The steep valley that is today called Kidron, between the Old City of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives, will be the focal point. Christ will descend with a spirit army and tread the winepress of His wrath (Revelation 19). Revelation 14:20 indicates the blood from the carnage will run several feet deep. It will indeed be a great battle, the final battle that will end in the peace of the Kingdom of God.

Megiddo and the Jezreel Valley provide an ideal staging point for this battle. We can imagine forces flowing in through the port of Haifa, a few miles to the northwest.

Transport planes, helicopters, troop carriers and tanks will ferry men and materiel into the region. Jet fighters and missiles will no doubt be engaged in a battle that suddenly turns its attention to a force coming from an unexpected location—the heavens above Jerusalem. In their folly and deception, they will fight Christ, never recognizing Him as the Messiah.

It is difficult to imagine this today as we read these scriptures and ponder the modern geopolitical landscape. Not that we cannot easily see that the current Middle East conflicts could



Dan Dowd

quickly lead to war, even nuclear war between antagonists. But how could political leaders of nations in Europe and Asia be led by deceptive spiritual forces to move massive forces into Jerusalem and fight Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

The answer may lie in one verse we skipped over in Revelation 16. Notice that verse 15 is a thought injected by Jesus Christ, the author of the book. “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.” Here is Christ saying to those with ears to hear that there is a way to avoid being part of this great end-time deception.

Remember, we saw that Megiddo was a crucial site on the Via Maris. Whoever controlled Megiddo controlled this vital link in world commerce. Megiddo represents man’s last effort to control his world apart from the guidance of his Creator. Is there something deeper at Megiddo to help us understand this grand deception?

Perhaps a key to the answer lies back at the site of ancient Megiddo. We’ll go there in the second part of this article, to appear next month. ❖

Why Preach a Gospel With Urgency Today?

The onrush of disturbing national and world conditions challenges the Church to preach the gospel in ever-greater intensity.

by John Ross Schroeder

Some of the current advice doled out by liberal academics and educators in the West is symptomatic of the problems that plague society today. Consider for a moment just the subject of education and child rearing. Recent newspaper articles have been headlined as follows:

- Children of 5 should be given lessons in sex.
- Teacher-pupil affairs can be a good thing, says academic.
- Unruly pupils need praising not telling off, teachers are told.
- Don't blame the bullies! It's not their fault.
- Don't jail young muggers.

The Church's role to alert people of their sins and the consequences of those sins is not only a message found in Ezekiel and Isaiah, but also in Jeremiah, Daniel and the 12 Minor Prophets.

The cultural and moral problems that currently afflict our Western nations call to mind a crucially important passage in the book of the major prophet Ezekiel: "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men and women that sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it" (Ezekiel 9:4).

Jerusalem is figuratively a type of a whole nation, and this basic principle applies prophetically to our nations today. Those who take God at His word are aghast at and appalled by the erosion of biblically based standards that has taken place in Western nations. (To understand more, please request our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

The Church as modern watchman

Twice God told Ezekiel: "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me" (Ezekiel 3:17; compare Ezekiel 33:1-9).

In more ancient times, watchmen were appointed for sentry duty, an essential post for the protection of a tribe or nation. This group of men was charged with alerting their fellow citizens about hostile military movements.



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If a student shoved another child into a school locker, should you follow this recent headline's advice: "Don't blame the bullies! It's not their fault"?

The watchmen's presence constituted an early warning system that often saved lives. Theirs was an awesome responsibility.

Ezekiel's role was to articulate a warning from God to Israel about the very unpleasant consequences of their unacceptable moral behavior. In discharging this solemn and sacred duty today, it is no easy task to be both an effective tool in God's hands and simultaneously be sensitive to the more positive spiritual needs of the nation.

But to foolishly neglect this awesome responsibility because of national hurt feelings or fear of disturbing a country's spiritual sleep would be an unconscionable betrayal of biblical duty with unpleasant consequences for the watchman.

Ezekiel wasn't the only Hebrew prophet to occupy the role of a watchman. For God had also told Isaiah: "Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he sees" (Isaiah 21:6).

The Church's role to alert people of their sins and the consequences of those sins is not only a message found in Ezekiel and Isaiah, but also

in Jeremiah, Daniel and the 12 Minor Prophets. It is discovered in Christ's Olivet Prophecy, Paul's prophetic warnings and the book of Revelation. The words of Paul in Colossians 1:28 compel us to "preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

Isaiah 58:1 sums up the essence of this particular aspect of the overall gospel message: "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." Remember that sin is the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4, King James Version).

The Great Commission: Also a warning message?

The closing passage in Matthew's Gospel account sums up how Jesus set out the mission of the Church down through the centuries: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Christ's gospel constitutes more than the recorded life of a good man and a personal savior. It includes the news that the living Jesus Christ, ascended on high, is literally returning to this earth and into your life. It is the good news of the coming Kingdom of God. It is the only lasting hope for a troubled world. Yet there remains a crucial element of warning within the scope and spectrum of the overall gospel message. This important dimension is described within the context of Jesus' Olivet Prophecy in Matthew 24.

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world *as a witness to all the nations*, and then the end [of this age] will come" (Matthew 24:14, emphasis added). Jesus characterized this particular period in future world history as "the days of vengeance, that all things which are written [in the Old Testament] may be fulfilled" (Luke 21:22).

This will be a time of "great distress"—a prelude to the second coming of Jesus Christ (verses 23-27). The prophet Jeremiah wrote, "How awful



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The watchmen's presence constituted an early warning system that often saved lives. Theirs was an awesome responsibility. Does the Church have a similar role today?

that day will be! None will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it" (Jeremiah 30:7, New International Version).

Mark's version of the Olivet Prophecy emphasized the role of the watchman. Three times within five verses we are told to watch for the second coming (Mark 13:33-37). One of the functions of the Holy Spirit as an agency of God is the revelation of "things to come" (John 16:13).

An increasingly sad world scene

The many moral ills of today's world are far too numerous to cover comprehensively in one article. But consider a comment about our present world. Sir Jonathan Sacks, Britain's chief rabbi, recently warned of the mounting threat of Holocaust denial and a tsunami of anti-Semitism engulfing Europe.

Our soap operas on television are awash with offensive language, illicit sexual relationships and gratuitous violence. The overconsumption of alcohol and the illegal and reckless use of drugs remain a social and moral plague in our land.

We also see traditional marriage increasingly undermined by the gay political movement. So the Church has a grave duty, as a watchman, to warn the world where all these trends are taking us. Along with this, the Church pro-

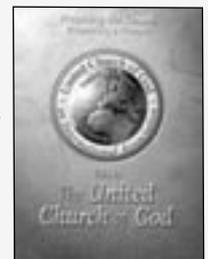
claims the good news of God's coming Kingdom.

To understand more about this important aspect of the role of the Church in our 21st-century world, please request our free booklet *This Is the United Church of God*. It defines and explains the Church's dual functions of preaching the gospel and preparing a people. It is a message that proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God in all its fullness under God's literal millennial reign.

I believe you will truly be heartened as you read in detail the true mission of God's Church today. ❖

Recommended Reading

God gave the Church the job of preaching His good news and preparing a people for His Kingdom. The publishers of this newsletter take this mission very seriously. For more information, request our free brochure *This Is the United Church of God*.



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

In Brief...

World News Review



Palestinians attend a Hamas rally in Khan Younis Jan. 27 celebrating their victory in the Palestinian election. The Islamist movement is poised to form the next Palestinian government to end Fatah's 40 years of political dominance (Reuters/Ahmed Jadallah).

Palestinian Vote a Step Toward "Hamastan"?

In a bizarre twist, a group that both the United States and the European Union consider to be a terrorist organization won the free election held in the Palestinian territories in late January. Hamas defeated the party of Arafat, Fatah, by taking a majority of seats in the Palestinian parliament, and it will form the new government.

Months before the election, rumors were circulating that the terrorist group wanted to create Hamastan, a new Islamic state out of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The already complex Middle East peace process just got incredibly more complex. Neither Washington nor Jerusalem will deal with Hamas. (Even the Fatah party is initially refusing to participate with Hamas in forming a government.) The EU wants Hamas to renounce its commitment to the destruction of the Jewish state, which Hamas adamantly refuses to do.

Illustrating the weirdness of this result is the fact that 31 of the candidates Hamas fielded in the election are in prison! So, the Palestinian Authority may have lawbreakers for lawmakers.

This story is just breaking as we go to press with this issue, so it is too

early to tell the full consequences of it. But it could move Israel to elect conservative Likud Party candidates and make Benjamin Netanyahu the prime minister again.

***Brokeback* Reshaping Public Opinion?**

You have no doubt heard of *Brokeback Mountain*, the movie about two "cowboys" (who actually herd sheep!), married men with children, who hide a lifelong homosexual relationship from their wives, children and friends. Did you notice the announcement of Hollywood's Screen Actors Guild's awards before the movie was fully released to theaters?

In fact, the movie was prereleased to just five carefully selected theaters in New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco, chosen for their likelihood of drawing large crowds.

The statistics on the high per-screen take in earnings was then included in write-ups on how popular and successful the movie was, which in turn garnered more interest and more success, as the movie was selectively released in ever wider markets. It wasn't actually fully released in theaters until late January, even though it has been in the news since early December 2005.

You may have also noticed the numerous entertainment news articles on the movie, gushing with glowing praise for all aspects of the film, predicting it would win Golden Globe awards (which it did) and eventually, Oscars.

Wrote Claudia Puig of *USA Today* over a month before the movie was released to all theaters: "With its epic feel, powerful performances and heartbreaking story with a timely theme about gay love, it would seem to have everything voters at the

Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences look for. Signs indicate that this might be the right movie at the right time" ("*Brokeback Rides Into the Mainstream*," Dec. 14, 2005).

Eve more likely to bite the apple

Puig reported on an owner of two California theaters, who related that he screened the film in his Los Angeles venue, but he delayed showing it in a different, more conservative, city until enthusiasm for it had built around the country. He opined that women would be more likely to see it than men would.

Puig cited the film's producer, James Schamus, who said, "The culture is finding us," implying the present-day society is seeking out entertainment with this theme.

But later in the same article, Schamus is quoted as saying, "It's nice when art can be used to really transform people's understanding of what it means to be a human being and what it means to be accepting of other human beings." (Read "gay person" for "human being.")

Puig adds, "The film might find its place in history as a *cultural landmark*" (emphasis added).

So, which is it? Is *Brokeback* intended to shape the public's view of gay love or is it intended to reflect the public's acceptance and tolerance of gay love?

It's both. Let's go back in time to December 2004 to a *New York Times* piece (and the *Times* is certainly not a conservative paper) by John M. Broder about the beating that gay rights proponents took in the November polls when 11 states passed prohibitions against same-sex marriages. Broder reported that the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the largest gay and lesbian advocacy group in the United States, announced it was changing its approach on how to promote a gay agenda.

Having suffered a serious setback in the legal arena, the group said it would put more emphasis on telling the personal relationship side of gay couples. HRC Board member Michael Berman said, "We need to reintroduce ourselves to America with the stories of our lives" ("Groups Debate Slower Strategy on Gay Rights," Dec. 9, 2004).

Creating a gay culture

HRC's communications director, Steven Fisher, said that in the coming months they would communicate "the struggles of gays in their families, workplaces, churches and synagogues ... When you put a face to our issues, that's when we get support. We're not going to win at the ballot box until we start winning at the water cooler and in the church pew" (ibid.).

"Win at the water cooler" means, of course, that it would be the topic of casual conversation. Back to the present, Paul Dergarabedian, president of box office tracker Exhibitor Relations, Inc., said of *Brokeback*, "It's the water cooler movie of the moment" ("Despite Subject, *Brokeback* Finds Success," Dow Jones, Jan. 17, 2006).

So, HRC is achieving what it targeted only a little over a year ago.

Whether cognizant of it or not, a film producer and the chair of the University of Southern California's School of Cinema and Television described *Brokeback* in the terms that the HRC laid out for achieving their agenda. He said that the movie "humanizes" the icon of the cowboy—by portraying him as gay. Numerous reviews and ads for the movie describe it as a "love story," continuing the theme of portraying this issue in terms of personalities and relationships.

Brokeback took Golden Globes for best movie drama, best screenplay, best

original song for a motion picture and best director. It failed to win the best actor and actress, but they were taken by the leads in *Capote* (about homosexual Truman Capote) and *Transamerica*, in which a woman played a transsexual male. So, those categories also furthered HRC's objectives.

The Golden Globes are awarded each year by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (HFPA), a group of journalists who work for foreign press outlets. *Brokeback's* prerelease was timed so as to enable it to qualify for the awards for 2005.

HFPA's mission statement reads in part, "To establish favorable relations and cultural ties between foreign countries and the United States of America by the dissemination of information concerning the American culture and traditions as depicted in motion pictures and television through news media in various foreign countries" (www.hfpa.org/). So, their Golden Globes this year announce to the world through *Brokeback* that America accepts gay romance.

Brokeback Mountain seems to have found a winning strategy in the culture wars for hearts and minds. The movie's production, release, marketing and awards are all coordinated in such a way as to imply that the movie reflects America, while at the same time, it clearly seeks to shape America.

Contributor: Cecil E. Maranville

World News and Prophecy Seminars

People are often heard to say, "What in the world is going on?" The editorial staff of this publication is dedicated to making sense of today's news within the framework of biblical understanding and prophecies that God's Word indicates are yet to occur. If you appreciate what you are reading in this publication, then you may desire to attend a weekend *World News and Prophecy* seminar.

If you would like to experience the pages of this publication live and in person, please contact Darris McNeely at Darris_McNeely@ucg.org.

Upcoming Seminars

- **Akron, Ohio, March 18**, 2 p.m., North High School Auditorium 985 Gorge Blvd. (corner of Rt. 8 and Tallmadge Ave.), Akron, OH 44310
- **Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 19**, 1 p.m., Holiday Inn – Parkway East 915 Brinton Rd., Pittsburgh, PA 15221

“CITY,” (Continued from page 16)

which I shall tell you” (Genesis 22:2). This patriarch of the faithful would oblige and would lift up his eyes and see the place, the marker, afar off (verse 3).

It’s noteworthy that God always guides man to look up, not around. He beckons humanity to seek His help instead of looking to itself. Tradition has it that this “hill” to which Abraham looked would come to be known as Mt. Zion. Yes, right within the city of Jerusalem today. He lit a bright guiding light for all



Tradition has it that this “hill” to which Abraham looked would come to be known as Mt. Zion. Yes, right within the city of Jerusalem today.

humanity to emulate by his example in trusting and following God. The concept of looking to a hill, making a sacrifice and setting a light-filled example began.

Because of Abraham’s obedience here and elsewhere, God declared, “I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:2-3). This was fulfilled in the greatest way by Christ, but it was also to apply to the physical descendants of Abraham who were to

be a blessing to the nations around them, reflecting God’s blessings that shined on them.

God would place those descendants, known as the children of Israel, by the “Way of the Sea,” the ancient thoroughfare of civilizations, to be a city on a hill. The Lord, the One who would later become Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4), again required of His chosen a standard above that of their heathen neighbors, so as to show them the way of His Kingdom.

“Your understanding in the sight of the people”

God admonished the Israelites, in regards to the land they were to possess, “Therefore be careful to observe [His statutes and judgments]; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?...”

“Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life” (Deuteronomy 4:5-9).

Yes, Israel, formerly a conglomeration of enslaved tribes, now touched by divine favor, was to be an example of God’s way among the heathen—a city on a hill.

Israel (and its sister nation, Judah) failed its God, but the ideal and the charter of a city on a hill would not be buried along with the bones of the disobedient—for it is a city that does not fade away!

The instruction of the Lord through Moses and the teaching of Jesus were coupled together by the words of John Winthrop’s famous sermon given in 1630, entitled, “A Model of Christian Charity”: “For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken... we shall be made a story and a byword throughout the world.”

The early settlers of America felt that they were entering another promised land. They claimed the mantle of responsibility of a covenant peo-



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“For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill”—John Winthrop, 1630

ple found both in the Old and New Testaments. They sensed an emerging destiny to be a light to the nations.

They did not know how right they were, for they were beginning to fulfill the prophetic blessing bestowed upon the descendants of Joseph (the great-grandson of Abraham and heir to God’s favors because of his forefather’s faithfulness) in Genesis 49:22: “Joseph is a fruitful bough [branch], a fruitful bough by a well; his branches run over the wall.”

Yes, America and the British peoples were destined to be used of God to reach beyond their borders and touch other nations and peoples with goodness, just as the patriarch Joseph had done in times of worldwide disaster. God caused America to come into existence as part of His design (for the full details of this part of the story, see our booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

While America in no way is synonymous with the Kingdom of God, it has been unique among the nations of the earth acquainted with God’s

Word to build itself upon the principles and laws of the Scriptures. As the 19th-century French observer of America, Alexis de Tocqueville, noted in *Democracy in America*: “Religion was the cradle, not the grave of American democracy.”

Even so, Winthrop’s early concerns were justified. America has not always upheld its destiny of being a city on a hill. At times, it has lost its way, and at other times has just forgotten. And then, it is brought back to remembrance of a unique calling.

The shining city

Three and a half centuries after Winthrop’s pronouncement, President Ronald Reagan reiterated and embraced the vision of a city on a hill. In his second inaugural address, he offered these elegant words:

“I’ve spoken of the shining city all my political life, but I don’t know if I ever quite communicated what I saw when I said it. But in my mind it was a tall proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind-swept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace, a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity, and if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here. That’s how I saw it and still see it.”

Increasingly and tragically, the nation that could be a city on a hill is rapidly distancing itself from the ultimate Author of its blessings and prosperity.

“In God we trust” continues to be minted on America’s coins, but less and less stamped on the hearts and minds of her people. Like all nations here below, America will rise and fall. But the ultimate reality of God’s plan is yet to emerge.

Prophetic words to light a candle

That reality is given voice in the words of the prophet Isaiah. Through this man, God shares what He envisioned from the beginning and what He still sees. And He gives us these prophetic words through Isaiah that

we might gain a glimpse and to light a candle within us.

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all



nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem’” (Isaiah 2:2-3).

The prophet further defines this reality by proclaiming: “Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising” (Isaiah 60:1-3). This is why Jerusalem is the bull’s-eye of biblical prophecy.

While nations, personalities and cities will come and go, there is one city that simply shall not fade away—the city on a hill, the city that will shine forth in light, the city that will be inhabited by those who take Jesus at His word to be the “light of the world.”

Until that time, God gives us a voice from not so long ago to remind us of “this is the way, walk in it” (Isaiah 30:21). They are the living words of the late American president in how he summed up the invitation to a city on a hill:

“And if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here.” ❖

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by Robin Webber

The City That Will Not Fade

Cities are pivot points of history, current events and prophecies. History is sketchy and somewhat abstract until cities began to take root along the river valleys of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Such ancient sites as Ur, Memphis or Nineveh give us place markers to measure the spread of human development. Today, our reference points might be New York, London, Berlin or Tokyo.

God also uses cities as reference points in His Word: historically, metaphorically and prophetically. Yes, the names of cities are designed to be a place marker of memory and foresight for humans to gauge our existence.

Each of the great cities of antiquity has ultimately crumbled and been buried by sand, volcanic ash or the layered rebuilding of its current inhabitants upon the faded ruins of the old. Today's "great" cities will no doubt fade as well.

A city that transcends two worlds!

But there is one city that does not fade away with the sweeping tides of time. It's a city given birth by idea, anchored in antiquity, manifested in the present, which will fully crystallize in a world yet to come.

Imagine a city that transcends two worlds! How could this be? Well, its creator and designer is God. It's named a city on a hill. You won't find it on a map, but you'll find it in your Bible. Those who embrace its charter are destined to change the course of history and be touched by the providence of God. Those who internalize its values stand on the threshold of eternity.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus granted privileged access to this city when He proclaimed to His followers, "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matthew 5:14). Such an incredible statement toward mortal man! Jesus had declared, "As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world" (John 9:5).

Now, with this statement, He was notably expectant, actually demanding, that His followers be no less than like Him. They were to be points of reckoning to be seen by others and guiding instruments in dark paths.

Jesus was sketching a word picture of the world in which He had grown up—the hills of Galilee where cities perched on hilltops. In the dark of night, light from a single oil lamp placed on a window's ledge could pierce a hole in the blackness and be seen a great distance away by the sojourner.

Imagine then, a whole city aglow! The wanderer's approach was made sure by the beckoning rays coming from on high. Likewise, the people touched by God's goodness were instructed by Christ to offer those around them similar beacons of hope.

Look up, not around

But this declaration of opportunity and responsibility had its roots 2,000 years before.

It started with a man named Abraham, whom God told to "go to the land of Moriah, and offer him [Isaac] there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of

(See "CITY," page 14)