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The Terror of Cocaine— "In Dust We Trust"

Why do people use cocaine, in spite of the widespread knowledge of its dangers? What are the costs, both to the individual user and to our society? None of us is immune to the clutches of cocaine.

by Cecil E. Maranville

In our post 9/11 world, few people object to governments allocating billions of dollars to fight the war on terror overtly and covertly. The memory of the terrible human and financial cost of the events of that single day continues to burn in our minds.

On that tragic day, foreign terrorists killed slightly under 3,000 people in the United States. How would you react if terrorists had actually killed thousands more Americans that year—and every year since then?

What if the acts of those terrorists also cost the national economy \$36 billion—not just one time, but every year? That would be approximately \$170 billion from September 2001 to the present.

What action would it stir if America learned that terrorists were responsible for as many as 200,000 visitors to the emergency room each year? Wouldn't you think that there would be a literal revolution if Americans learned that foreign terrorists had been able to take over the minds of more than 2 million Americans between 20 and 34 years of age, forcing them to fulfill terrorists' agenda within the country's borders?



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To their peril, people sorely underestimate the addictiveness of the drug, believing that they will be able to control their use of it.

Finally, consider a terror greater than all of the above, that of terrorists finding a way to attack thousands upon thousands of babies in the womb, afflicting the unborn with a host of neurological problems, killing many and leaving many others with lifelong disabilities.

This is not a drill

This is not merely a mental exercise. This is not a drill. This is really (See "COCAINE," page 3)



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"Whom heaven must receive until the times of

Restoration

of all things ... ACTS 3:21

Of Time and the River of Life

Last month my wife, Debbie, and I took a southward drive for a few days and landed in Asheville, North Carolina. Our goal, beyond a few days of relaxation, was to visit two famous homes. Asheville is the location of the Biltmore House and Gardens, as well as the Thomas Wolfe home, a home immortalized as "Dixieland" in his novel *Look Homeward, Angel*. Biltmore House, a sprawling 262-room chateau set within 8,000 acres, was completed in 1895 as a second home for George Vanderbilt, a member of the famous New York Vanderbilt family. These two homes represent two different worlds, yet one common hope. The residents of both houses never realized the hope sought within their walls—a hope common to all our homes and lives. It is a hope sought by all men and all women connected by the one blood of life from God, the Creator.

George Vanderbilt, like many a modern-day Solomon, built a lavish home complete with indoor conservatory, swimming pool and a banquet hall that could seat a squadron. Dozens of housekeepers, cooks, butlers and maids were required to keep the main house going, while many more hands kept up the grounds, gardens, forests and fields of the vast estate. An entire village sprang up outside the main gate just to accommodate the families that made a good living keeping up the estate. To visit this complex today is to see the lavish wealth of America's Gilded Age as it was transplanted to the southern Appalachian Mountains—at once both a display of raw wealth and a modest social experiment that has evolved and survived into the 21st century. Biltmore is still a private enterprise, owned and managed by its builder's heirs.

The Thomas Wolfe home is totally different. Set within the city of Asheville, it was a boarding home owned by Wolfe's mother, Julia. Young Tom spent his formative years in the home with his siblings and a constantly revolving cast of boarders who passed through the halls and rooms of this modest yellow clapboard home. Wolfe put fictional names to these people, but the lives and experiences are the common grist of every life. Wolfe's lyrical use of English has stood the test of time. He tells his life story within the larger search for meaning. In telling the story of his youth in a small southern town, he sought to discover who he was within the larger scheme of life beyond the town square. His book endures because it strikes universal themes and aspirations of all peoples at all times—a burning desire to know who we are and why we were born.

In parts of our world today we see civil strife, poverty and disease eating away the fabric of life. *Time* magazine ran an article detailing the mounting human tragedy in the Congo, the heart of Africa. Years of bloodshed ripped the soul out of a people who, with proper government, could have a high standard of living. It is a nation brimming with unrealized potential. Whether it is in the Congo or any other developing nation, people want a life free of disease, poverty and strife. Like all people, they want a government that provides a safe environment in which they can achieve their true potential.

In the opening line of Wolfe's novel he put to words his personal desire to know who he was and the vast meaning of life. He wrote, "Each of us is all the sums he has not counted: subtract us into nakedness and night again, and you shall see begin in Crete four thousand years ago the love that ended yesterday in Texas... Each moment is the fruit of forty thousand years... and every moment is a window on all time." After 521 pages, Wolfe still searches in vain for understanding about his life. The hope undiscovered in both these Asheville homes is the hope entwined within the message of the Kingdom of God brought by Jesus Christ (Mark 1:14). It is the hope of a world where justice will "run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream" (Amos 5:24).

It is the hope of a time beyond all time when the earth will see the restoration of all things good, wise and beautiful.

—Darris McNeely



Darris McNeely

“COCAINE,” (Continued from page 1)

happening—not at the hands of foreign terrorists, but strangely, at the hands of Americans themselves. Moreover, Americans are not alone. Cocaine addiction, cocaine-caused hospitalizations, deaths and health-care costs related to cocaine are comparable in Britain and the rest of the European Union, as well as in Canada and Australia.

Cocaine has a reputation for being the drug of the upper class, but in reality, users come from every social and economic group, as well as both sexes.

Another inaccurate stereotype is the idea that cocaine, like most other drugs, numbs the senses, impairing a user’s reaction times and dulling his thoughts. To the contrary, it’s a performance enhancer. It wards off feelings of fatigue and hunger, while it boosts energy and delivers a strong general sense of well-being.

Centuries ago, the indigenous Incan royalty were the privileged users of this white powder that comes from the coca plant grown in Peru, Bolivia and Colombia. In time, usage became more widespread among the general population for mystical, religious, social and medical purposes. Their Spanish conquerors learned that field workers produced much better, if they had coca leaves to chew on all day long.

From the early 1850s to the early 1900s, cocaine use spread throughout Europe and the United States. The French sold Vin Mariani, a cocaine-laced wine. Famous people, including Thomas A. Edison and Sarah Bernhardt, touted the feel-good properties of the white powder. Doctors used it in surgeries, and psychologists, led by Sigmund Freud (who eventually died a coke addict!), raved over its ability to cure depression.

Strange as it sounds today, everybody claimed that cocaine was free of any side effects! That ignorance did not last long, as many users began to evidence psychotic behavior, including hallucinations, delusions and suicidal tendencies.

Cutting into the reward pathway

Michael Quick, a professor of biological sciences, explains that the brain

has a neurological pathway that delivers feelings of euphoria that come as a reward for accomplishment (“Expert: Cocaine Has Lasting Impacts,” *Daily Trojan*, 2005, www.stopaddiction.com).

Cocaine taps into what the professor calls “the reward pathway” in the brain. It enables a person to bypass actually doing things to bring about good feelings. By analogy, think of being able to tap into the source of paychecks, without having to work for them. It’s party time!



People often snort cocaine using U.S. dollars rolled into a straw. How contemptuous of the motto, “In God We Trust.”

However, Professor Quick explains that neural pathways cross over each other and that drugs like cocaine can cause the pathways to misfire. For example, in addition to the reward pathway, cocaine affects the areas in the brain responsible for motor activity. Consequently, people on cocaine often find that they cannot sit still. Still another neural pathway crisscrossed by cocaine is the one responsible for blood pressure and heart rate. It’s primarily this “crossed wire” that causes cocaine’s most serious side effects—arterial breakdown and stroke.

But how can the “feel-good drug” cocaine cause depression? In addition to tapping into the reward pathway, cocaine forces the brain to keep that gateway open, nearly exhausting its capacity to deliver euphoric feel-

ings. God designed the marvelous neurotransmitter dopamine to deliver “feel-good sensations” regularly. In the normal course of things, the brain never exhausts its supply of dopamine, so that it always has some when needed.

However, cocaine causes the brain to burn up nearly all of its dopamine. Consequently, it leaves a person without the capacity to feel good and indeed, feeling worse than he did before taking the drug.

Can’t get enough

Herein lies the basis for cocaine addiction: Because the user has an all-consuming craving to renew the sense of feeling good, the only way to do that is to take another dose of the drug. The user needs more with every dose to recreate that coveted euphoric feeling.

Since cocaine consumes the brain’s chemical resources instead of adding to them, there are only so many times that the user can get that pleasant feeling. The brain needs time, nourishment and rest to produce more dopamine.

The craving for cocaine is so overpowering that it consumes the addict’s every thought. One 25-year-old woman tells that once she started using crack cocaine (a variety of the drug that users burn to smoke; the sound the burning material makes gives it its name, “crack”), the desire to have it obsessed her constantly.

“I spent all my money I had from working on crack. I also started to con my parents to say I needed more money... It was like a hurricane. I sold everything in my house to pay for it, except my bed. At 25, I didn’t have a life. I was sitting in my room by myself. I was psychotic and I was hallucinating. I was transformed into a wild animal and would hobble around the streets” (“Crack Cocaine Nearly Killed Me,” BBC News, June 24, 2002).

There are always lowlifes around to take advantage of people like this young woman. She explained that her dealer was completely clean; he did not use drugs. He merely used people.

To their peril, people sorely underestimate the addictiveness of the drug, believing that they will be able to control their use of it. However, no animal ever tested with cocaine has been able to

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tolerate its effects, and every test animal used the drug to excess (Gary Hopkins, M.D., Ph.D., “Killer Cocaine,” www.vibrantlife.com).

Cheap curiosity, costly consequences

The 25-year-old woman mentioned above started using cocaine on a whim. She drank alcohol heavily as a teenager, dabbling in other drugs.

Another user explained that she took cocaine out of curiosity, hanging with the wrong crowds. She lost all her friends who did not use drugs. Then she lost her job and her university expelled her. She ruined all of her family relationships. Nothing mattered more than getting her next “hit.”

She writes, “Cocaine makes you mean, makes you say horrible things to people you love, makes you lie, makes you cheat, makes you steal and turns the person who is a non-criminal into a criminal” (Susan Wood, “From Cocaine to Christ,” www.notalone.org).

One of the greatest horrors is what the drug does to the unborn. Many women cannot stop using cocaine even during pregnancy. Their children can be born addicted to cocaine, in need of expensive hospital care. These babies instantly begin screaming inconsolably when they first wake from sleep, their tiny nervous systems hypersensitive to sight and sound. Both literally cause extreme pain sensations to the infant.

Cocaine babies are much more susceptible to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome—even strokes. Alarming, surveys indicate that in some areas the *number of pregnant women using cocaine is over 20 percent*. The lifelong physical, emotional and financial cost is devastating.

A people of hollow character

With all of the information available today about the devastating effects of cocaine, why do people even consider using it? Some of what you read above explains why. It is incredibly shallow to start using something so profoundly dangerous, so insidiously evil, merely because friends are doing it.

It’s just as shocking to think that anyone would pursue cocaine’s pathway merely because he or she wanted

to feel good. Many people say their drug use began as part of getting ready to go to a party. In other words, they made this giant leap of irresponsibility for no greater reason than looking for a Saturday night’s entertainment.

God gave the apostle Paul a piercing insight into the type of individual character we would encounter at the end of the age: “The Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared...” (1 Timothy 4:1-2).

While he is speaking principally of doctrine, the prophecy also encompasses individual character.

Remaining in “the faith” involves more than following prescribed religious ceremonies; it involves *being* sound-minded, exercising good judgment in the way that you live (2 Timothy 1:7). The cocaine addict gives in to a spirit of seduction, believing the lie that using the drug is harmless. His or

her character values, regardless of how honorable they once were, can quickly disintegrate into abject criminal behavior. They become incapable of healthy family or friend relationships and no one can depend on them for work.

Are people in today’s world so shallow that we place self-gratification even above caring for the most innocent of children, the unborn? Are we so lazy that we think we have to grab good feelings from chemicals, instead of generating them by actually accomplishing something?

Are we becoming devoid of the ability to put the interests of others before ours? In a word, such character is selfishness—a quality that we learn from 2 Timothy 3:2 will be prevalent at the end of the age of humankind.

Is our need to feel good so important to us that we would impose a monumental financial burden on others to pay for our indulgences?

The American government is proposing a \$12.7 billion budget in 2007

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for national drug control, including education and community action, intervening and healing drug users, as well as disrupting the market. None of that would be necessary if people exercised self-control, and if they had meaning and hope in their lives, instead of the meaninglessness and hopelessness so pervasive today.

There is a terrorist connection

I began this article by drawing a comparison between the cost of the war on international terrorism and the cost of cocaine abuse. There is actually a direct connection. The American government, the European Union and other governments facing the terrorist threat recognize that drug abuse plays into the terrorists' hands. It causes chaos in the nation they seek to overthrow.

Further, terrorists raise money to fund their operations by tapping into the international drug trade. The entire cost of the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States could be met by *less than one hour's worth* of revenue from the illicit cocaine market in the United States, says Mark A.R. Kleiman in "Illicit Drugs and the Terrorist Threat: Casual Links and Implications for Domestic Drug Control Policy" (2004, The Library of Congress).

We are actually contributing to our own destruction in many ways, if we fall prey to the temptations of cocaine addiction. If you or someone you know has a problem with cocaine and wants help, there are many resources available, such as Cocaine Anonymous. Patterned after the 12-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous (although not connected with an organization), CA is highly successful in helping people regain their lives. They are available on the Web at www.ca.org.

"In dust we trust"

Curiously, one of the most common delivery methods people use to snort cocaine is paper currency, which the user rolls tightly into a straw. On the American currency are the words, "In God We Trust." Yet everything about this action is a contemptuous, capricious spurning of those powerful, albeit humble words.

God calls on all who read this article



One of the greatest horrors is what cocaine does to the unborn... These babies instantly begin screaming inconsolably when they first wake from sleep...

to repent. Adults need to repent of their selfishness, exercising whatever effort is necessary to put the needs of others before their own. This simple principle is easy to say, but it is extremely difficult to practice in all areas of life.

Apart from a cocaine addiction, this rudimentary selfishness is part of the inner nature of every person. Coincidentally, the pathway that will help the addict to break free from his chemical prison is identical to the pathway to salvation that every person must follow.

People who think in terms of others will possess a strong motivation to contribute to their community, their workplace and their families. They will be unwilling to live off the generosity of others. They will give rather than take.

The second overall element of godly repentance is taking full responsibility for one's actions. While other people undoubtedly were involved in causing someone to become an addict, no one can repent for anyone else's wrongdoings. We can repent only for our own sins. Moreover, pointing out how someone else is to blame will never bring about a change in you.

Our society urgently needs to embrace these principles and to return

to teaching them to our young children. Plainly, one of the reasons our young adults are plagued with selfishness and susceptible to the ravages of drug addiction is that they are part of a coddled generation. I do not mean to imply that all addicts grew up in a home that failed to teach them to exercise self-control or to take responsibility for their actions. Nonetheless, the fact is that our society neither teaches these values nor champions those who exemplify them.

Parents who wisely administer moderate yet meaningful discipline when their children act selfishly and irresponsibly are, in fact, doing them a great favor. Doing so can help their children to avoid the infinitely more painful consequences that life administers to adults who choose lives of self-indulgence and self-gratification.

The consequences of cocaine addiction are as serious as any crisis confronting us in modern times, including terrorism. Nonetheless, the way out of this abysmal situation is not super-sized government budgets. The way out is individual repentance and embracing godly character on a person-by-person basis. Until that happens, the evil of cocaine will continue to terrorize us all. ❖

Egypt's Coming Transition

Egypt's president recently turned 78 years old and a change of leadership is the subject of speculation. What does the future hold for this large Arab nation?

by Darris McNeely

On a recent trip to Egypt I was the typical tourist, traveling by bus to the major tourist sites at Giza and Luxor. We sailed on the Nile and put our lives in danger crossing the busy streets of Cairo. But behind the tourist façade, it was evident that Egypt has a measure of domestic turmoil that could lead to major changes in the future.

Armed soldiers are everywhere, not only at the tourist sites where terrorists struck in the past. In 1997 terrorists bombed a German tour group at Luxor. Now you see dozens of armed soldiers around hotels and shopping areas throughout the city. A little study into the current Egyptian political climate shows the soldiers are not only protecting the tourists but the political regime as well.

Since the start of this year, President Hosni Mubarak has made strong moves to stop dissent among political opponents. Charges of fraud have been made against a lawyer who opposed Mubarak in last fall's elections. Two judges who accused the government of rigging the elections are facing dismissal from the bench for making public comments. One of them, Judge Hisham Bastawisi, suffered a major heart attack last month, which aroused the seething anger of a sympathetic public, resulting in large public demonstrations against President Mubarak.

The Egyptian judiciary was responsible for calling the fraud of last year's elections. Thousands of judges called for reform that would create an independent judiciary. Reports suggest that these opposition judges are joined with a coalition of religious and secular organizations that seek an end to the Mubarak era.

Hosni Mubarak has been president since that fateful day in 1981 when religious fundamentalists stormed a reviewing stand and assassinated President Anwar Sadat. Mubarak sat next to Sadat that day and no doubt vividly remembers the brutal power of religious fury.

In recent weeks, protestors on the streets of Cairo have suffered beatings and some female protestors have been sexually abused. Laws governing presidential voting in Egypt are under the complete control of the president, despite limited reforms.



Reuters

Egyptian women gather in front of a polling station after they were denied entry during voting Dec. 7, 2005.

On May 25, 300 Egyptian judges stood in a silent protest on the steps of the high court in Cairo to press their demands for full independence. "We are calling for the independence of the judiciary...and our complete supervision of elections if there is to be supervision from now on," said Ahmed Salah, a judge at the protest. One observer said, "It's like Egypt has been reborn" (www.gulf-times.com).

Muslim Brotherhood

Last month more than 200 members of the Muslim Brotherhood were arrested in the latest wave of demonstrations. This banned Islamic organization, whose roots are deep in fundamentalist Islam, has done well in parliamentary elections, demonstrating its broad base of support.

In recent months, the Muslim Brotherhood adopted a moderate position on political issues. Leaders continue to call for a democratic government that respects the rights of all minorities rather than establishing an Islamic state. Whether this would change should the group gain control of the government is another matter. So-called moderate approaches often are only skin-deep and merely mask the true nature of movements.

Since the start of this year, President Hosni Mubarak has made strong moves to stop dissent among political opponents. But will these moves stem the growing tide of turmoil or fuel it, especially as President Mubarak gets older?

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt in 1928. It is a religious, political and social movement with membership throughout the Arab world. Its mission seems summed up in its creed, "God is our objective; the Koran is our constitution; the Prophet is our leader; struggle is our way; and death for the sake of God is the highest of our aspirations."

In its early decades, it was a political and social revolutionary movement. In 1954, the group was implicated in a plot to assassinate then President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Since then, the government has treated the group as illegal, yet has shown the group sporadic toleration.

Present trends indicate large grassroots support. In last fall's parliamentary elections, Muslim Brotherhood candidates won nearly 20 percent of the seats. They now form the largest body of opposition to the government. Clearly the group will be a player in Egyptian politics going forward.

Last month President Mubarak turned 78, and while he still seems to be fit and in control, speculation has already started as to who will succeed him in office. That may be why we are seeing popular agitation over the electoral process.

It is well known that President Mubarak has been grooming his son, Gamal, to take over. But by all appearances, this is an unacceptable solution for most Egyptians. A sign of the Bush administration's awareness of this reality came last month when Gamal Mubarak was in Washington on private business and had a meeting with National Security Advisor Steve Hadley. While he was in this meeting, President Bush dropped by to greet Gamal Mubarak and to send his best wishes to his father, President Mubarak.

The United States is walking a fine line in Egyptian relations. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has been in the Middle East saying America would no longer stand by despots but would press for democratization in countries where absolutism prevails. The Bush administration's policy is to push democratic reforms. Iraq is the primary focus for this experiment in creating democracies in this volatile region. Critics of American foreign policy claim a double standard when countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia seem to get a "pass" for democratic reform.

The practical reality is that Egypt, and

President Mubarak specifically, is a major ally in the Middle East. Egypt has been the recipient of more than \$2 billion in direct economic assistance from the United States each year since signing a peace treaty with Israel in 1978. The Egyptian army is one of the largest and best equipped among Arab countries. America needs the support of this country. That is why it has ignored some of these "undemocratic" moves.

The question is whether this will prove to be a problem should a more fundamentalist Islamic government come to power in the future. This is what happened in the late 1970s when the shah of Iran, a key American ally, was deposed in the Islamic revolution that swept the Ayatollah Khomeini and other clerics into power. American intelligence failed to foresee this event, which has continuing repercussions on American influence in the region to this day. The loss of Egypt in a similar manner could lead to major changes, ones that would not bode well for Western interests in the region.

The Bible points to Egypt

The Bible centers on this area of the Middle East in the fascinating prophecy about the king of the South in Daniel 11. In this prophecy (set at the time of the end, prior to Christ's return to earth), a conflict arises between two figures, the king of the North and the king of the South.

Notice verse 40: "At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through."

Bible scholars have long identified the king of the North as the leader of a power centered in Europe. The king of the South is a leader of a power to the south of Jerusalem. (Directions in this and other biblical prophecies are determined from Jerusalem.)

Looking at the modern geopolitical picture, we conclude that this person, the king of the South, will likely be an individual who manages to unite the Arab/Islamic powers of the Middle East and mount some kind of push or attack that threatens the growing power of the king of the North. (We do not have space for all the details here, but please read our booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*

for a more detailed examination of this prophecy.)

Who this person will be and exactly which nations will make up this southern power is not known at this time. History teaches us that times and events usually bring great men to power at the moment of crisis to lead major movements. Often these people come out of relative obscurity and can be someone least expected to lead powerful forces.

But to carry on with Daniel's prophecy, verses 41-43 show the path that the king of the North takes in his response to the move of the king of the South.

"He shall also enter the Glorious Land, and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon. He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape. He shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt; also the Libyans and Ethiopians shall follow at his heels."

Egypt and Libya are two North African countries specifically mentioned. This power from the north will occupy them.

Why is Egypt targeted? Is it the political center of this southern alliance? Egypt has once before attempted to unite Arab power into one bloc. In 1952 Egyptian General Gamal Abdel Nasser overthrew the corrupt monarchy of King Farouk. His dreams of a pan-Arabic league of states were never fully realized.

As mentioned earlier, Egypt has a large, well-equipped modern army, among the largest in the Middle East. If this army were to form the nucleus of a regional force, it would be logical the country would be taken out by a counter-attack. The Bible mentions these nations for a reason. We can only look at the current geopolitical scene and watch closely the events taking place in these areas mentioned in prophecy.

Egypt was the breadbasket of the ancient Roman Empire. Her political stability was crucial to the long-term prosperity of Rome. Egypt and its leaders attracted the interests of Julius Caesar, Mark Antony and Pompey. Perhaps the long ago battles and intrigues in that fabled land presage a future conflict that draws forces across its borders. Time will tell. ❖

Energy Costs, the Mideast and Illegals Are Americans' Biggest Concerns

A recent poll on NBC's Meet the Press showed Americans are primarily concerned about the price of gas, Iran, illegal immigrants and Iraq. All four concerns are interconnected.

by Melvin Rhodes

Gasoline has been gradually increasing in price for some months now, reaching almost \$3 a gallon by the end of April, an increase of over 50 cents in two months. That's still less than 80 U.S. cents a liter. In the United Kingdom, the same gas was selling for just over one British pound per liter, roughly the equivalent of \$2—or two and a half times the American price.

But Americans are more dependent on gas than other nations are. This is because the United States is so spread out. The local grocery store in England is often within walking distance, while in America it is more likely to be miles away. The same goes for the workplace, school, medical facilities and places of entertainment—everything is miles away, an impossible distance to walk or even to cycle. Public transport is very limited and nonexistent in some areas.

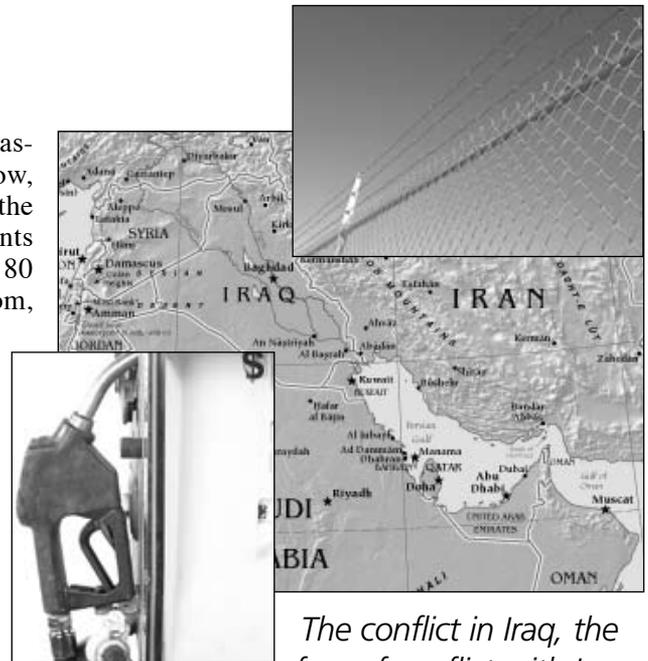
Not only are the American people dependent on gas, they are dependent on *cheap* gas! Any increase in the cost of gas will inevitably have a greater effect on the U.S. economy than a similar increase would have elsewhere. In fact, since World War II a recession has followed every significant increase in the U.S. price of gas.

So it's understandable that the price of gas is the number one concern of most Americans.

What I found particularly interesting in this survey is that all four major concerns are interconnected, but none of the panel on *Meet the Press* mentioned this. It's as if the price of gas is somehow not connected to events in the real world.

As if to emphasize this, a letter to our local newspaper a few days later said that

It's understandable that the price of gas is the number one concern of most Americans. Interestingly, concerns about the Middle East and immigration play a role in the increasing prices.



The conflict in Iraq, the fear of conflict with Iran and even illegal immigration across the U.S. border affect gas prices.

Washington should simply order suppliers to sell gas at \$1 a gallon and then enforce the price! Clearly, not everybody is aware of the law of supply and demand.

Among the causes of the gas price increase are uncertainty over Iran and the continuing war in Iraq, numbers two and four of the primary concerns of the U.S. electorate. What happens in the Mideast largely determines the price of oil. If there are any jitters in and around the Persian Gulf, the price will inevitably go up.

Just as serious weather problems in California can push up the price of strawberries and other fruits, so problems in the Persian Gulf push up the world price of oil. The American president has no control over this. Washington can't suspend the law of supply and demand!

Mideast oil supply at risk

Before the current war in Iraq, Iraq produced 3.5 million barrels of oil a day. Now, it produces only 2 million, creating a 1.5 million barrel per day shortfall. This alone pushed up the world price of oil.

The fear of another conflict in the region, this time with Iran, is enough to send oil futures skyrocketing as buyers look to secure oil for their clients. Also in the Persian Gulf, terrorist attacks by Islamic radicals in Saudi Arabia are on the increase, causing further instability over oil futures.

There's also uncertainty in Nigeria, where local rebels disrupt oil production by frequently kidnapping oil workers. Venezuela, the fourth biggest producer in the world, keeps making anti-American noises, which only add to the uncertainty of supplies from that country. There are also refining problems in the United States, which further erodes supply.

Americans account for less than 5 percent of the world's population, but consume 25 percent of the world's oil. These disparities are unlikely to change in the near future, particularly when you consider that every year the United States adds a few more million people to its population.

Illegal immigration has become an issue recently. Estimates of the number of illegals run as high as 12 million. Whether illegal or not, immigrants are also energy consumers. Moreover, they send home tens of millions of dollars, adding to America's growing trade deficit, a major factor in the current fall in value of the U.S. dollar. This is yet another factor that could add to the price of gas.

It's understandable that people who are suffering economically should want to move to the United States, but it seems that American politicians are unwilling to consider the negative consequences of this massive movement of people.

The spreading urban sprawl is another factor, as people live further and further from their places of work, consuming increasing

amounts of fuel in their daily commute.

Problems show a lack of vision

The Bible says "a prudent man foresees evil and hides himself" (Proverbs 22:3). "Hides himself" means that he takes steps to avoid it. Proverbs 27:12 repeats the principle, adding another thought: "A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself; the simple pass on and are punished."

The book of Proverbs contrasts the "simple" with the "wise" throughout. A simple person is one who is immature and perhaps irresponsible. Failing to anticipate the future, the shortsighted will reap the unpleasant consequences.

America should learn a lesson from the example of its ancestor, the Old Testament patriarch Joseph. With God's help, he was able to interpret the Egyptian pharaoh's two dreams, which revealed that seven years of plenty would be followed by seven years of scarcity. You can read all about this in the book of Genesis, chapter 41.

Taking full advantage of the seven years of warning, Joseph led the nation to prepare itself for massive food shortages that lay ahead. The principle to note here is the need to plan ahead, to prepare for times of scarcity, whether it be fuel or food, or both.

Remember that even food production today is heavily dependent on cheap oil. The United States has had 30 years of warning of possible fuel shortages but is still unprepared. In an emergency, the strategic oil reserve would only provide fuel for a few months. Politicians are calling for the use of the oil reserve to bring the price down now, which defeats the purpose of a strategic reserve, for emergencies only.

The first warning of problems ahead for U.S. fuel supplies came in the aftermath of the October War of 1973, during which Arab OPEC members, angry at U.S. support for Israel, nearly quadrupled the price of oil and reduced the supply. There were long lines of cars at pumps around the world.

Over 30 years later, Americans are even more dependent on cheap gas,

and additionally, the population has risen dramatically, adding to the pressures. Growth is still the nation's top economic priority, but perhaps it's time to do a rethink, to ask if the country has reached the limits to growth, at least in some areas.

It's not only fuel that is likely to be a major issue in the future. Food supplies may be also. Last year was the first year in which the United States imported more food than it exported, at least in dollar terms.

CNN's Lou Dobbs has frequently highlighted the fact that by 2020, the United States will be heavily dependent on food imports. This could happen sooner if there is a problem with the oil supply, since oil is needed in the production of fertilizers. Mr. Dobbs has been emphasizing the need to do something about immigration, because it only exacerbates the problem.

The price of fuel is a major priority for Americans. An increase in the gas price will inevitably give a spurt to inflation as the price of gas affects the price of just about everything else. Inflation will also be boosted by the falling value of the dollar, down 7 percent in April, a move likely intended to reduce America's international debt burden and make U.S. manufacturers more competitive. An added threat is the Iranian move to start pricing oil in euros. Other oil producers are likely to follow. This would also push up the price of fuel in the United States.

This world needs leaders with clear vision about how to resolve the mounting problems that face it, not the typical politicians who busy themselves with getting votes and by pointing fingers of accusation at their opponents.

Both major U.S. political parties are quick to accuse the other of being guilty of "a culture of corruption." They may be right. God foretells of our leaders, "...your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; everyone loves bribes, and follows after rewards. They do not defend the fatherless, nor does the cause of the widow come before them" (Isaiah 1:23).

The United States is still within a time frame for action, but the clock is ticking. ❖

The Man Who Saw It All in Advance

The greatest news forecaster in all of history walked on this earth about 2,000 years ago. What do His insightful prophecies tell us about future world conditions?

by John Ross Schroeder

This Man's disciples were not all that different from modern men today. They wanted to know what would happen to their world in the immediate future. They were anxiously concerned about oppressive national conditions in their nation of Judah.

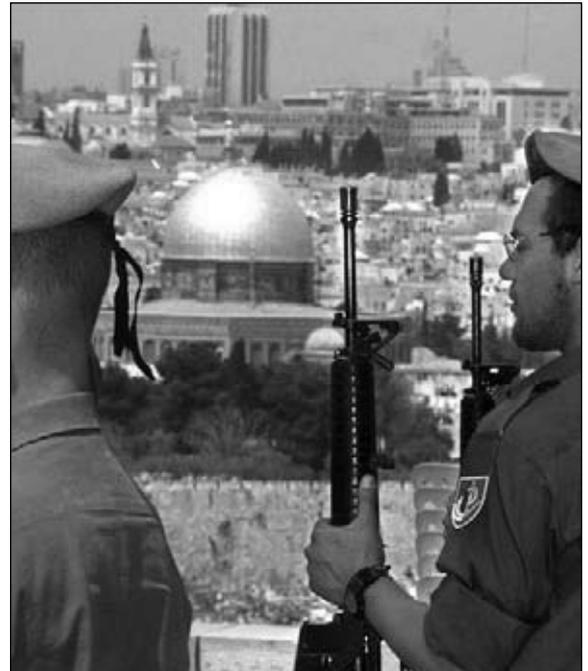
Given 9/11, the Asian tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, thinking men and women today cannot help but conceive of the future with a certain amount of trepidation, especially if they do not understand God's plan and purpose for humankind.

Yet the original disciples were not free men in the same sense we still are today in the Western world. Their birth nation was in the grip of a galling national captivity to the most powerful empire the world has ever known. Their primary concern revolved around getting Judah out from under the Roman yoke. Understandably, they wanted to be free! When would God deliver them from the Roman occupation?

Even after Christ's resurrection to eternal life and miraculous appearance and ministry to them over a period of 40 days, their main concern was still independence from Roman domination: "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

A Man of unparalleled vision

However, their Leader and Lord and Master had a much larger vision of the future than just the fortunes of Rome and Judah. Prophets are usually seers of events that will happen after their own days. This particular Prophet saw far beyond first-century national conditions all the way to the time when the Kingdom of God would reign on earth—and on into eternity when a new race of totally transformed human



Reuters/David Silverman

This particular Prophet saw far beyond first-century national conditions all the way to the time when the Kingdom of God would reign on earth—and on into eternity when a new race of totally transformed human beings would rule the universe forever.

Israeli soldiers present arms in a small military cemetery on the Mount of Olives overlooking the Old City of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount.

beings would rule the universe forever.

This Man was Jesus Christ of Nazareth—the one Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5).

Not long before His crucifixion, the disciples pointed out to Him the impressive buildings of the temple complex in Jerusalem. His view, however, was always long term. Jesus told them that their much-revered temple would be destroyed—and that indeed happened before 40 years passed.

His shocking words must have had a troubling impact on their thinking. How could the temple of God possibly be

destroyed? Surely that must mean the time of the end of the age and Christ's second coming, they must have thought. Jesus' stark observation undoubtedly disturbed them deeply and stirred their troubled imaginations.

Later, as He was seated on the Mount of Olives, they asked Him: "Tell us...when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your [second] coming and of the end of this age?" (Matthew 24:3, NIV).

The crucial Olivet Prophecy

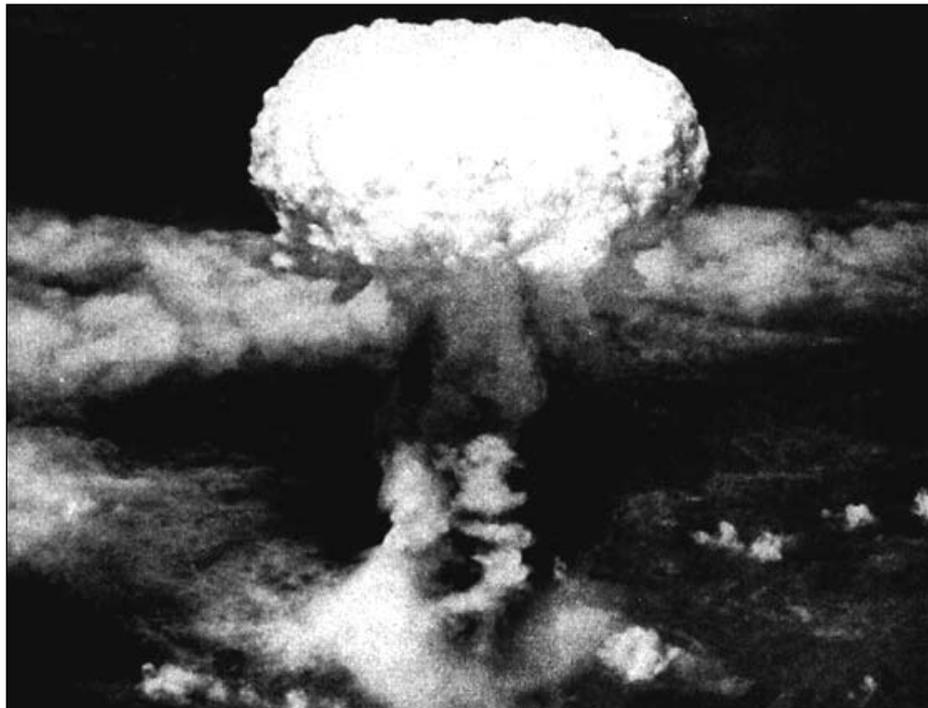
Jesus' reply to the 12 disciples has come to be called the Olivet Prophecy. Three chapters in three Gospel accounts cover this basic prophetic outline of the future, each one complementing the others with its unique emphasis on certain key events. They are Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21.

In summary, Jesus told these disciples that the world from that time to His second coming would be characterized by religious deception and confusion, wars and rumors of wars, famines, disease epidemics and earthquakes in different places—such as the terrible killer quake that recently struck Indonesia.

History has shown that these specific human crises ebbed and flowed over the many centuries, and prophecy shows that each one of these plagues will intensify during the time of the end—culminating in a catastrophic period called the Great Tribulation. For instance, the book of Revelation describes the "granddaddy" of all earthquakes.

(If you would like to understand the present and future implications of this prophecy, please request our free booklet *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* There is a two-page spread on pages 12 and 13 aptly titled "Jesus Christ's Olivet Prophecy: Where Are We Now?")

Eventually world conditions would become so supremely dangerous that Jesus stated, "For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again" (Matthew 24:21, NIV). Some astute observers believe that we are



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In the middle of the last century, we reached that time in history when all life could be taken from the earth via atomic warfare. Since that time, the number of factors that threaten human survival has multiplied several times over.

now finally on the threshold of the Great Tribulation today.

Human survival itself would be at stake, just as it plainly is at this present time. In the middle of the last century, we reached that time in history when all life could be taken from the earth via atomic warfare. Since that time, the number of factors that threaten human survival has multiplied several times over.

Lest we forget, the Russians still have (and are constantly upgrading) their nuclear arsenal. The proliferation of nuclear weapons remains one of the biggest problems humankind is saddled with today. Witness the growing danger in Iran. Its leader threatens to wipe the nation of Israel off the map.

Do you feel safe? Humanly speaking, you are not. *Only God can ensure your survival!*

Christ went on to say: "In fact, unless that time of calamity is shortened, the entire human race will be destroyed. But it will be shortened for the sake of God's chosen ones" (verse 22, New Living Translation).

Can we grasp the stark implications for us today of that one passage in the Bible?

Christ the Revelator

The Olivet Prophecy is very well complemented by a much longer prophecy contained in the Bible's final book, Revelation. It has the very same author. Notice the book's opening statement.

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw" (Revelation 1:1-2).

Christ's overall prophetic vision of future events in Revelation goes far beyond the Olivet Prophecy, which primarily highlights key occurrences before and during His second coming to this earth. The book of Revelation dovetails well not only with the book of Daniel, but also with Jesus' words on the



An unseen hand is guiding events in this world as these end-time prophecies begin to unfold.

Mount of Olives. Matthew 24 and Revelation 6 have much in common.

Revelation's final three chapters include an important outline of events beyond the second coming: Christ's 1,000-year reign, followed by the Great White Throne Judgment period and then by the eternity on beyond. This is the length and breadth of Christ's unique vision of future events. Remember the entire book consists of "the Revelation of Jesus Christ." He saw it all in advance! (Further information is available through our free booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.)

Old Testament prophecies included

A key verse in Luke's account of the Olivet Prophecy brings in many Old Testament prophecies as well. Christ's description of catastrophic

events just before His return to earth includes this important passage:

"For this is *the time of punishment* [the days of vengeance, NKJV] in fulfillment of all that has been written [by the Old Testament prophets]" (Luke 21:22, NIV). Jesus often used the expression "It is written" when referring to an Old Testament passage.

Note an important clarifying passage written by the apostle Peter: "Concerning this salvation, the [Hebrew] prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which *the Spirit of Christ in them* was pointing when [it] predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (1 Peter 1:10-11, NIV).

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of both God and Christ. It would inspire

the New Testament apostles to have prophetic understanding of future events. It would show them things to come (John 16:13).

It was that same Spirit that inspired the Old Testament prophets. "For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke [as they were] moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). The Church is built on both the apostles and the prophets (Ephesians 2:20).

An unseen guiding hand

While we may be justly concerned about the prospect of future events, there are no grounds for harboring the worried anxiety sometimes manifested by people today.

Even when catastrophic occurrences strike out of nowhere as we move closer to the end of this age, Christians are assured by the words of Jesus Christ in the Olivet Prophecy: "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, *because your redemption is drawing near*" (Luke 21:28, NIV).

An unseen hand is guiding events in this world as these end-time prophecies begin to unfold. After all, human survival is assured because of the elect's sake (Matthew 24:22)—those true servants of God who are busily carrying out His will in proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom to this world as a witness (verse 14). ❖

Recommended Reading

The book of Revelation remains mysterious to most people today, but offers great insight into the events leading up to one of the world's most momentous events—the return of Jesus Christ! For more information, request a free copy of *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.



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

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A Page on the World

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

Secrets of the Kingdom

Gerald Posner gives “the inside story of the Saudi-U.S. connection” (2005, ISBN 1-4000-6291-8).

Reviewed by Cecil E. Maranville

Gerald Posner presents a detailed history of Saudi Arabia, “the House of Saud,” focusing particularly on the unusual linkage between it and the United States from its creation through to the present. What he has to say isn’t always flattering to either nation, but it is eye-opening. Much of current politics hinges upon a covenant that a sheik struck with a religious zealot nearly three centuries ago.

In the 1700s, the Arabian Peninsula was a desolate stretch of desert, broken by the occasional oasis and inhabited by many nomadic tribes that constantly battled each other for control of the sand.

At that time, a local tribesman named Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab tried to persuade all who would listen that they should follow a strict interpretation of Islam. He memorized the entire Koran by the age of 10, and then traveled to what is now Iraq and Iran to study Islamic law further. He returned to the peninsula to preach against paganism and to advocate a pure Muslim faith. His students called themselves *mujahideen* (“holy warriors”), and they condemned nonbelievers as infidels.

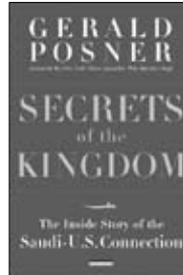
Their detractors referred to them as Wahhabis.

Wahhab had a militant political dimension to his preaching, which attracted the attention of the emir of a tiny oasis town, Ad Diriyah. That emir was Muhammad Saud. The two leaders “... swore a traditional Muslim *mithaq*, or covenant, promising to work together to establish a state based on the most austere Islamic principles. It was an oath that would change history.”

Eventually, Saud subdued all other tribes, creating a kingdom. The West largely discounted it by the turn of the 20th century, expecting it to collapse from bankruptcy. In 1932, geologists discovered oil, and suddenly the Saudis were wealthy and their nation viable. From the beginning, the royals shared their wealth with the Wahhabis, funding religious training.

Initial oil exploration and production was under the control of an American company, which paid royalties to the Saudis, but took most of the profits. That changed in the 1970s, when the oil-producing nations formed OPEC and began a slow nationalization of oil production.

Angry at the Nixon administration for resupplying Israel after the Yom Kippur War, the kingdom led OPEC to raise the price of oil 70 percent in a single jump! Emboldened by what it perceived to be a weak response by the United States, King Faisal pushed OPEC to double its price of crude on top of that increase. Today, the increase of a few dollars per barrel makes headlines. Imagine, by comparison, the price of crude jumping from \$65 to \$110 overnight—and then, jumping again to over \$220 per barrel!



The kingdom discovered the awesome political power of its oil. OPEC embargoed oil production to force the United Nations to pass resolution 242, which called upon Israel to withdraw from land captured in the 1967 war.

Not only could they influence world politics, the Saudis also could enrich themselves. Coincidental with the increase in the cost of a barrel of oil, their share of profits went up, because they were negotiating more and more ownership in the oil companies. Profits before 1973 were about \$2 billion

per year. After the end of the embargo in March 1974, their income ballooned to more than \$100 billion per year!

Recognizing the opportunity, the kingdom’s chief Wahhabi cleric approached then King Faisal about using the mushrooming wealth to promote Wahhabism. The king agreed. With the Wahhabi leaders, he created the Muslim World League to spread Wahhabism, kicking it off with \$50 million.

The king placed important ministries under Wahhabi direction, including education. The king himself was a bitter anti-Semite, believing that Jews were attempting to take over the world. In 1972, he told a reporter that when he was on a trip to Paris, police discovered five murdered Arab children, whose blood their Jewish killers drained to make matzo bread for Passover. He repeated this story to others as an illustration of the evils of Zionism.

Under Wahhabi oversight, all Saudi children received an education in anti-Semitism. “A mandatory Saudi textbook, *Introduction to the Science of History*, condemned Jews as intrinsically evil, and taught that they were a ‘corrupt and deceitful’ race. A 1968 conference of the Academy of Islamic Research had produced a body of virulent anti-Semitism from Muslim scholars, calling Jews a ‘pest and plague,’ ‘cursed by Satan,’ and ‘thirsty for drinking more blood of Muslims’” (page 45).

Religious police rigorously enforced Islamic law. They patrolled the Safeway and A&P supermarkets, on the alert for unmarried couples shopping together, which was a “crime” punishable by three days in jail and 80 lashes.

The kingdom continued flexing its political influence, building a powerful pro-Arab lobby in Washington and pressuring the UN to give Yasser Arafat’s PLO observer status.

As oil revenues increased, so also did funding for Wahhabi education, including schools *outside* the kingdom, called madrasas. By the mid-1990s, more than a million children outside the kingdom received a Wahhabi education in these schools, including some who later became Islamic terrorists. As the Saudis’ largest customer, the United States contributed hundreds of billions of dollars over the years to the kingdom and, therefore,

(See “SECRETS,” page 15)

“CHOOSING,” (Continued from page 16)

States are bound together by history and by values. We share a deep and abiding belief in the power of freedom of faith and of finding virtue in work for the common good. The national motto of Liberia—founded, as you know, by freed American slaves—is ‘The love of liberty brought us here’...

“But our ties greatly exceed the historical connection. I stand before you today, as the first woman elected to lead an African nation thanks to the grace of Almighty God; thanks to the courage of the Liberian people who chose their future over fear...”

“No one would have picked me”

President Johnson-Sirleaf goes on to explain her humble origins: “My family exemplifies the economic and social divide that has torn our nation...”

“Both of my grandmothers were farmers and village traders. They could not read or write any language, as more than three-quarters of our people still cannot today—but they worked hard, they loved their country, they loved their families and they believed in education. They inspired me then, and their memory motivates me to serve my people, to sacrifice for the world and honestly serve humanity. I will not—I cannot betray their trust.”

She plainly and honestly goes on to state, “I was not born with the expectation of a university education from Harvard or being a World Bank officer or an assistant secretary-general of the United Nations. When I was a small girl in the countryside, swimming and fishing with twine made from palm trees, no one would have picked me out as the future president of our country.”

“My feet are in two worlds”

“I graduated from the College of West Africa, a United Methodist high school. I waited tables to support my studies in the United States—college in Wisconsin and graduate school in Massachusetts. I went on to enjoy the benefits and advantages of a world-class education.

“So my feet are in two worlds—the world of poor rural women with no respite from hardship, and the world of accomplished Liberian professionals,

for whom the United States is a second and beloved home. I draw strength from both. But most of our people have not been as fortunate as I was. Always poor and underdeveloped, Liberia is only now emerging from two decades of turmoil that destroyed everything we managed to build in a century and a half of independence.”

President Johnson-Sirleaf nearly perished at one time. “In 1985, after



Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf addresses a joint meeting of the U.S. Congress March 15.

challenging the military regime’s failure to register my political party, I was put in jail with several university students who also challenged the military rule. This house [the U.S. Congress] came to our rescue with a resolution threatening to cut off aid to the country unless all political prisoners were released.

“Months later, I was put in jail again, this time in a cell with 15 men. All of them were executed a few hours later. Only the intervention of a single soldier spared me from rape. Through the grace of Almighty God and the mercy of others, I escaped and found refuge here in Washington D.C.”

Face to face with war’s devastation

She then spoke of what she discovered traveling her country during the election campaign: “I came face to face

with the devastation of war, which killed a quarter of a million of our 3 million people and displaced most of the rest. Hundreds of thousands escaped across borders. More—who could not—fled into the bush, constantly running from one militia or another, often surviving by eating rodents and wild plants that made them sick...

“Our precious children died of malaria, parasites and malnourishments. Our boys, full of potential, were forced to be child soldiers to kill or be killed. Our girls, capable of being anything they could imagine, were made into sex slaves, gang-raped by men with guns, made mothers while they were still children themselves.

“But listening to the hope and dreams of our people, I recall the words of a Mozambican poet who said, ‘Our dream has the size of freedom.’ My people, like your people, believe deeply in freedom—and in their dreams, they reach for the heavens.

“I represent those dreams. I represent their hopes and their aspirations. I ran for president because I am determined to see good governance in Liberia in my lifetime. But I also ran because I am the mother of four, and I wanted to see our children smile again. Already, I am seeing those smiles. For even after everything they have endured, the people of Liberia have faith in new beginnings.”

A new beginning

I could not help but propel myself forward in time and think of Liberia as a microcosm of year one of that thousand-year period mentioned in the Bible as the reign of Jesus Christ, when a jubilee of restoration begins for all who will yield to His righteous rule (Revelation 20:4). This restoration will have a global focus, for the entire earth will need restoration—physically, emotionally and spiritually.

God says that He is going to make kings and priests of His saints and have them rule the earth (Revelation 5:10). This fantastic calling supersedes the marvelous story of President Johnson-Sirleaf. Just like her, these are individuals with feet planted in two worlds—the present and the future.

Their beginnings are humble and their lives may be frustrating, like that

Reuters/Jim Young

little flower of Thoreau's story. They are unlikely leaders, "Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth" (1 Corinthians 1:26, NIV).

Verse 27 describes "the why": "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong." Just like the Liberian leader, no one would have picked us out to be a president of a country, much less a king and priest under the reign of Jesus Christ.

Paul plainly declares our ultimate citizenship as part of the Kingdom of heaven (Philippians 3:20). God wants us to take that citizenship and the opportunities it affords us literally. We may not have the opportunity to travel abroad and go to a university, but much more significantly, we can receive an education from the Holy Spirit of God. Moreover, we can understand the purpose, plan, provisions and promises of God to allow us to flourish as if we had a thousand acres of untrodden space around us.

It is not where we were planted on the road of life that determines our destiny, but what God can do with us. So what is in that heart of yours? Are you getting more and more bitter—or growing better and better?

I hope the latter, because Christ wants to call on you for service to Him for others if only your "dreams will have the size of freedom"—freedom from anger, freedom to forgive, freedom from Satan, freedom from sin, freedom from self, freedom to give and freedom to smile like the children of Liberia are learning to do once again.

"This is the way, walk in it" (Isaiah 30:21) resonates in the words of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as she extols "the courage of the Liberian people who chose their future over fear." Isn't that a choice each of us has to make?

What do Thoreau's flower, the people of Liberia and you have in common? Choices! A choice to see what is or what can be. Like the flower of old and the people of Liberia, choose wisely. ❖



Robin Webber

"SECRETS," (Continued from page 13)

indirectly to the promotion of Wahhabi theology.

Posner details the profligacy of the royal family. He relates numerous anecdotes about the absurd abuse of wealth, including this one: On one occasion, the king purchased a new luxury automobile, merely because the one he had ran out of gas.

For decades, the royals consumed oil revenue as personal income, with almost nothing trickling down to the average citizen. Perhaps a sense of guilt encouraged them to promote the ultraconservative Wahhabism.

Posner also explains the delicate and controversial internal politics behind Saudi Arabia's invitation to the United States to base troops there in preparation for the first Gulf War. In spite of the great wealth the kingdom gained from doing business with America, it holds the country in contempt. Only the Saudis' fear of Saddam Hussein and/or Iran's Shiites overrunning their borders was stronger.

Given the current geopolitical scene, the latter issue should get our attention. Saudis, like most Muslims, are Sunnis. They do not appreciate Iranian President Ahmadinejad's nuclear saber-rattling, and they do not share his theological view of an end-time Mahdi.

In fact, Posner asserts, the Saudis have a doomsday plan, which would prevent anyone from profiting from their oilfields. They have conventional explosives packed around radiological material in their oilfields, pipelines and ports, which they can trigger should anyone overrun the country. Not only would the explosives destroy the infrastructure, but also the radiological material (essentially, a number of "dirty bombs") would contaminate the sand, as well as the oil and natural gas it contains, for generations to come.

Moreover, they have an underground city beneath Riyadh, built to withstand nuclear, radiological, biological and chemical attacks, for the purpose of allowing the royal family and its billions to survive, even if the nation did not.

Lastly, the Saudis, in turn, invested hundreds of billions of their oil revenues into the American economy. President Bush said recently that America was addicted to Arab oil. It is also addicted to Arab investments. Saudi investments are responsible for several hundreds of thousands of American jobs. ❖

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by Robin Webber

Choosing a Future Over Fear

Nearly 150 years ago the New England philosopher, Henry David Thoreau, penned an observation about something very small that, in turn, left a huge impression. It was just a tiny flower on an old country road. But this flower spoke volumes to him and perhaps to us as well.

Thoreau mentioned, “I saw a delicate flower had grown up two feet high, between the horses’ path and the wheel track. An inch more to right or left had sealed its fate, or an inch higher; and yet it lived to flourish as much as it had a thousand acres of untrodden space around it, and never knew the danger it incurred. It didn’t borrow trouble, nor invite an evil fate by apprehending it.”

Like the flower, we cannot always choose the spot or season in which God planted us to bloom. Neither can we necessarily control what heads our way down the road of life.

Sadly, many people never get beyond the spot of their seeding. They simply look around and say, “Is this it?” Then they proceed to slowly wither in despair. They didn’t have a choice where they started, but they made a choice as to how to grow from whence they were planted. They chose to be bitter, not better. And that, my friends, is a choice before us all.

A story about such choices recently crossed my desk featuring someone choosing to be better, not bitter. It’s a powerful saga with a conclusion still in the making. It’s the story of where a person was planted in life and what she has done to make a difference. Yes, a growing and blooming difference like Thoreau’s “thousand acres of untrodden space.” Yet this story takes place far apart from the woods of New England.

“The love of liberty brought us here”

It’s the story of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. You may never have heard of her, but I think you’ll come to appreciate getting to know her. She is the newly elected president of the African country of Liberia.

She recently had the privilege of addressing a joint session of the U.S. Congress. It is a rare individual who receives the honor to address this august body. But upon reading the transcript, I would say it was the listeners who had a special opportunity and honor that day. Her words are a witness of a life well lived, a life of right choices in difficult times, spots and seasons in her nation’s history.

Liberia’s legacy goes back to the 19th century when African-Americans returned to the continent of their ancestors and strove to develop a nation in the mold of America. But like much of Africa, its recent history has been one of civil war, dictatorship and untold human misery. From the ashes of Liberia’s recent turbulent past of brutality and mayhem has arisen this lady—the first elected female president of an African nation.

Let me rest my pen and allow her to do the talking. She began by stating, “I am deeply touched by the honor bestowed on my small but proud West African Republic of Liberia and on myself by inviting me to address this body of representatives of the people of the great United States of America. By this invitation, you have paid one of the greatest tributes there is to those who laid down their lives for my country to be free and democratic. I can only say a big thank you.

“The people of Liberia and the people of the United
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