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# Churchgoing on Its Knees in Britain

*Within a generation, more Britons will probably be entering mosques than church buildings. Mainstream Christianity continues in freefall. What is the sure impact on British society?*

by John Ross Schroeder

Projections of historical and current trends tell us that by 2035 more Muslims will attend mosques than Christians will go to churches in Britain. And by 2050 there is even a possibility that the Hindu faithful will outstrip the Christians in religious attendance. British Christianity is well on its way to becoming a minority religion.

Several years ago it made the news when it was reported that more people attended mosques weekly than attended the Church of England, showing that Muslims had already overtaken Anglicans in attendance. Soon, it appears, they will overtake all churchgoers.

While this shows the growth of Islam in Britain, it also shows that plainly the present generation of churchgoers is dying out. *Times* columnist Ruth Gledhill lamented, "The decline forecast for the Church of England is so severe that its position as the established church of the nation with the Queen as Supreme Governor can no longer be tenable" (May 8, 2008). Only 5 percent of the 20 million registered, baptized Anglicans actually attend church services.

According to a front-page article in the *Daily Mail*, the Anglican bish-



*Church attendance in Britain continues its sharp decline.*

op of Rochester (Michael Nazir-Ali) recently warned, "*The collapse of Christianity has wrecked British society... It has destroyed family life and left the country defenceless against the rise of radical Islam in a spiritual and moral vacuum*" (May 29, 2008, emphasis added throughout).

These baleful predictions and observations have also been published by Christian Research as *Religious Trends*, a comprehensive statistical analysis of religious practices in Britain.

### Church buildings also in dire straits

This sharp decline in Anglican  
(See "BRITAIN," page 3)

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"Whom heaven must receive until the times of

# Restoration

of all things ... ACTS 3:21

## The Coming New Religion

It's called Memorial Day in America. Formerly it was known as Decoration Day. In other places it goes by Decoration or Veteran's Day. It is a time when those who died in service to their country are remembered. Flags fly and flowers are placed on graves. Not as many go to the cemeteries as in the past. I guess we are too busy sometimes to pause.



*Memorial Day remembers the sacrifice of those who gave their lives. What should we learn?*

This year I heard CBS newsman Andy Rooney's talk about the occasion on his popular commentary on *60 Minutes*. He was remembering his friends who died in their youth during World War II. His conclusion was powerful. We observe Memorial Day not for the dead, for they know nothing, but for ourselves—that we might learn. What we need to learn is the way to peace instead of war.

What is needed, he concluded, is a "new religion," Rooney's term for a new way of thinking. He is right. It will take a new religion, one not fully understood in today's world. It will take a new religion to learn the way to peace rather than war.

The prophet Isaiah talks of the day when rods will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. Nations will no longer go to war neither will the art of war be taught and studied in the war colleges. A new religion will be taught from Jerusalem. It will be based on the righteous teachings of the God of Jacob (Isaiah 2:2-4).

Go to Jerusalem today and it will be difficult to find any trace of this future religion. Jerusalem today is a city of many faiths, creeds and churches. All are dreams based on centuries of human tradition whose legacy is conflict more than peace. Even today walls surround Jerusalem to keep the peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Ironically, the coming of this "new religion" will involve the very element honored on Memorial Day—sacrifice. Through the ages men and women have given the ultimate sacrifice for their country, yet there remains no lasting peace. The Bible shows us true peace between people and nations is the result of a sacrifice of our will to the will of God. It comes as a result of deep, heartfelt repentance and acknowledgement of God. Nothing short of this will put us on the path to peace. This is the ultimate sacrifice that leads to the end of war.

This "new religion" will be different from the world religions of today. The kingdoms of this world will not bring this time to pass. Only the coming of the Kingdom of God will make it possible. It is time for us to start learning the ways of this Kingdom that will restore the pathway to peace.

—Darris McNeely



Darris McNeely

“BRITAIN” (Continued from page 1)

Church attendance is naturally matched by both a fall in numbers of church buildings and by the structural decay of existing buildings. Projections tell us that in the space of a generation one in five such edifices will close. Every week two Anglican churches close their doors. The repair bill to staunch the decline and restore church buildings to health is thought to be astronomical.

Observers fear that church parishes will be devastated and deprived. The

desecrating social effects are being projected as incalculable. So a Save our Churches Campaign designed to “resurrect our suffering churches” has been mounted.

A *Sunday Telegraph* lead editorial expressed the national legacy well. “The churches of Britain are one of its chief glories. They have been since the first great phase of medieval church-building began almost a thousand years ago. But we take our churches—and there are nearly 50,000 of them in Britain as

a whole—for granted assuming they will always be there. *Unfortunately, they will not. Our churches are fragile. They will disappear unless we take action to preserve them*” (May 11, 2008).

### Our increasingly fragile society

Far more disturbing than the fragility of Britain’s church buildings is how fragile its society is becoming. It is being built on the shifting sands of secularism rather than the solid foundation of God’s Word.

## Consumer Protection in Britain: The Thin End of the Wedge?

Sometimes we do not realize the end result of our actions. So it is when a law is passed that seems to be in the best interest of the community. Yet in the hands of clever prosecutors or corrupt officials, such a law may become a problem for honest people.

On May 26, 2008, the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations (CPR) came into effect in the United Kingdom and all member states of the European Union.

An article in a recent edition of *The Times* (London) explains: “Anyone offering a service must not engage in unfair commercial practice, misleading statement or omission or aggressive sales practice. This would criminalise practices such as ‘closing down’ sales that aren’t, limited time offers that then last longer and false testimonials left on websites” (May 23, 2008, [http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/law/public\\_law/article3987725.ece](http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/law/public_law/article3987725.ece)).

The regulations cover commercial practices that are directly connected with the promotion, sale or supply of a product (goods or services) to or from consumers. This may occur before, during or after a commercial transaction (if any) in relation to a product between traders and consumers.

This seems all well and good except that people whose activities are “faith-based,” such as faith healers and spiritualists, are realizing that they may be forced to describe their activities as “entertainment” to avoid prosecution. Why? Because such practitioners cannot guarantee the outcome of their service. They would be penalized because of unsubstantiated claims or misleading advertising.

Notice the reaction of some members of the public who read *The Times* newspaper report:

“Can we take this one small step further and apply it to religion as well?”

“Maybe there should be similar disclaimers outside churches or mosques. Then they can tell customers that what they offer is ‘for entertainment only’ and not ‘experimentally proven.’ What’s the difference? Fortune telling, soothsaying, whatever is as old as the hills. We’ll have witch burnings next.”

“But the main business of religions is the unproven prediction of life after death. This is essentially a denial of freedom of belief which I think even those wanting a secular society do not advocate. If there is equality under the law then this disclaimer MUST apply to the sale of every Bible.”

There are many more comments like these, as well as a number of other activities people find objectionable. The hostility toward what are considered unprovable religious concepts and beliefs predominate.

Under such scrutiny it is good for a Christian to be able to prove the foundations of his or her beliefs. Those in society around may not accept our confidence, but can you and I prove God’s existence or the inspiration of the Bible? Are they, as Karl Marx stated, purely part of a religion that acts as an opiate for the people?

The writer of the book of Hebrews, most likely the apostle Paul, states with confidence that “without faith it is impossible to please [God], for he who comes to God must believe that He is [that He exists], and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Those whose minds are closed to biblical truths have proved hostile to those who follow God from time immemorial. Certainly Jesus Himself experienced the misuse of law to frame and convict Him of treason when He was guiltless.

We should examine the evidence and prove that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and is alive today. If He is not, we have no hope (1 Corinthians 15:12-19). One of the promises Jesus made was that after the resurrection He would live within every repentant Christian (John 14:23-24; Galatians 2:20).

It is important to know that the foundation of our faith is sure and absolute, not based on clever religious marketing. And the future God promises us is as sure as the rising sun!

If you need more help strengthening your faith and proving your beliefs, please write to us or download our publications *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*, *Life’s Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* and *Is the Bible True?*

Peter Hawkins

The biblical proverb tells us, “The curse causeless shall not come” (Proverbs 26:2, King James Version). What are some of the symptoms and root causes of the present plight of church buildings and churchgoing?

Writing more in terms of the Judeo-Christian ethic, London’s chief rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks stated: “We have become less religious, and religion was the classic source of our belief in a revealed morality, commandments engraved on tablets of stone [the Ten Commandments]. We have become more culturally diverse, and we now know that what seems wrong to one group may be permissible in a second, and even admirable in a third” (*Faith in the Future*, 1995, p. 17).

Another author wrote bluntly: “Children growing up today know nothing of the central tenets of Christianity: the Ten Commandments, the four gospels, the Sermon on the Mount... We are living in a religiously illiterate society...so ill informed about the reli-

gion which built our civilization” (Leo McKinstry, *Turning the Tide*, 1997, p. 6).

Said a recent article in the *Daily Telegraph*: “The [Anglican] Bishop of Rochester...claims that the social and sexual revolution, that began in the 1960s led to a catastrophic decline in the influence of Christianity over society, which church leaders failed to halt” (May 29, 2008). According to a similar article on the same day in the *Daily Mail*, “Church leaders have capitulated to Marxist revolutionary thinking.”

So some religious and secular leaders have not helped the cause of Christianity. Consider this unbiblical comment from an Oxford professor: “Some people think that the Ten Commandments are a set of universal moral rules, which everybody should obey. But they are not. They are addressed to the Jews... Again these are not universal moral rules for the whole world” (Keith Ward, *God: a Guide to the Perplexed*, 2002, p. 73).

Yet the New Testament reaffirms every one of the Ten Commandments—several of them many times. (Please request or download our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*.)

### Where do situation ethics inevitably lead us?

Abandoning the Ten Commandments has inevitable consequences. What are some of them?

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation Fund states, “Society has lost its ‘moral compass’ with government, big business and religion sharing the responsibility” (*Scotland on Sunday*, April 20, 2008). This foundation has correctly identified some of the symptoms, causes and effects of today’s immorality. Some of them are “the decline of community... consumerism and greed, a decline of values, the decline of the family, young people, as both victims and perpetrators, drugs and alcohol...crime and violence” (ibid.).

But the effects don’t stop there. Now we are beginning to see newspaper headlines actually saying such things as, “Religion is the new social evil” and “Might our religion be killing us?” Current verbal attacks are principally leveled at Christianity and the Judeo-Christian ethic in particular, meaning the Ten Commandments.

Mostly in response to the recently published findings about decreasing church attendance, Terry Sanderson, president of the National Secular Society in Britain, has stated, “Britain has had it with religion” (*The Sunday Times*, April 20, 2008).

One journalist countered by stating in her headline that “Britain Is Still a Christian Country.” But media debates about the plight of mainstream churches will not solve the attendance problem one way or the other.

### Threats to basic British identity

Ruth Gledhill wrote in a recent commentary: “The crisis facing Britain’s churches is linked directly to the crisis of British identity now being addressed by the government” (*The Times*, May 8, 2008). She writes of “a God-shaped hole at the heart of our society.” Clearly this consti-

(See “BRITAIN,” page 13)

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# God Blessed America

*The “special relationship” between America and Great Britain has been a great benefit to the world. But could it have been much more? What if the two had never divided? Will history correct this great event of modern times?*

by Darris McNeely

Every year America pauses on the Fourth of July to celebrate its independence, the event in 1776 when the 13 colonies separated from England to form the United States of America. It is a day of fireworks, picnics and parades. One person I know reads the Declaration of Independence each year to be reminded of the ideas that led to the country’s founding.

Most Americans today little understand the daring step taken by those 56 men who signed the Declaration and set the fledgling nation on a course for war with the world’s then-strongest nation.

There was no standing army, no money and certainly no support from allied nations. It was a “David vs. Goliath” situation. The outcome was not certain and there was every reason to believe the rebellion would be quickly put down and the men who signed the document hanged as traitors.

We believe this fulfilled a prophecy in Genesis 48 in which Jacob placed his hands on the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, pronouncing a blessing for the ages.

“God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth...

“He [Manasseh] also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother [Ephraim] shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations” (Genesis 48:15-16, 19). For more information on this story see our booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

God promised that the physical blessings of Abraham would be realized in the modern descendants of Joseph’s two sons. History and Bible prophecy show this has been done in the

two nations, America and Great Britain.

For many years I have thought about the events of America’s Revolutionary War. Every American child is taught the stories of American patriots like Patrick Henry, Paul Revere and George Washington, men who pledged their sacred honor to found the nation. There were issues of politics, taxation and colonization in the mix, but it was a rebellion and war that led to the start of the nation. Neither is the way God works.

Nevertheless, human nature does not know the way of peace; strife with bloodshed is often the way disputes are settled. Such was the case in the separation of two brothers, America (Manasseh) and England (Ephraim), on the way to their destiny.

## God determines history

The prophecies of Daniel reveal that God knows the rise and fall of nations, that He establishes or removes their rulers (Daniel 2:21). The apostle Paul told the Greeks on Mars Hill that God “has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings” (Acts 17:26). God knew that America and Great Britain would grow to become great.

But did it have to happen through a bloody war fought between the two? Did thousands have to die in the war between 1775 and 1783 and again in the War of 1812? What if Great Britain had been able to see that it was in its national interest to treat the 13 colonies in a different manner? What if the colonists had been more patient and a method of representation and cooperation toward mutual interests had been able to be worked out? Would not the prophecies have been fulfilled and the resulting nations have been even greater than they became? It is a question to ponder.

History shows us that the two countries each grew into world powers in their respec-

*God knew that America and Great Britain would grow to become great. But did it have to happen through a bloody war fought between the two?*

tive times and manners. England turned its interest to other parts of the world and during the 19th century grew, or stumbled, as one historian put it, into the largest land- and sea-based empire in history. It was said the sun never set on the British Empire. Queen Victoria at the peak of her reign ruled over one quarter of the earth's inhabitants.

America, once it established itself through a constitution, land expansion and ultimately a Civil War, grew to become the single most powerful nation in the world. Protected by its oceans and stable borders, it grew, unencumbered by conflicts with Europe or other powers.

When the world wars of the 20th century erupted in Europe and Asia, it was the United States that entered to make a decisive difference. America's arsenal proved virtually limitless in those critical events, even while Great Britain was declining as a world power. By the end of World War II, Britain's time of domination was ending, while America's was ascending.

The times of the English-speaking peoples have been a remarkable run in world affairs. With few exceptions, the time of England and America's supremacy has been one of blessing for the entire world. Due in large measure to a strong Judeo-Christian ethic, both nations considered it a moral duty to extend a civilizing influence to the world's poorer developing nations. Yes, there was a material gain to be had, but that does not explain the main goals and policies of nearly 200 years of democratic governments on both sides of the Atlantic.

Perhaps Britain's Lord Palmerston summed it up before the House of Commons in March 1848: "I hold that the real policy of England is to be the champion of justice and right...not becoming the Quixote of the world, but giving the weight of her moral sanction and support wherever she thinks justice is, and wherever she thinks that wrong has been done" (Andrew Roberts, *The History of the English Speaking Peoples Since 1900*, 2007, p. 6).

America has extended her birth-right around the globe through many

noble causes. American doctors, more than any others in the world, developed cures for crippling diseases, benefiting the entire world. The quest for knowledge is reflected in the fact that 270 Nobel Prizes were awarded to Americans between 1907-2004.

America's financial blessings have spread to various nations where the seeds were successfully sown in direct fulfillment of Genesis 49:22: "Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; his branches run over the wall." America and Great Britain together have formed what Roberts calls the "most decent, honest, generous, fair-minded and self-sacrificing *imperium*" (ibid., p. 648).

### But "what if"?

God established Israel to be an example of His laws and way of life. The nations of the ancient world worshipped pagan gods and goddesses of various forms—gods of war and goddesses of fertility. Deuteronomy 28 shows part of Israel's duty.

"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth... The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD and they shall be afraid of you" (verses 1, 9-10).

Israel was to have shown the benefits of living by God's laws, statutes and judgments, so that every nation could share in those benefits. Had they done so, this report would have gone around the world as Deuteronomy 4:6-8 describes.

Israel rarely lived up to this challenge. For a brief time under King Solomon, their wealth and power enabled them to play a key role in Middle Eastern affairs. Leaders of other nations, such as the queen of Sheba, came to Jerusalem to see firsthand the glory of Solomon's reign. But Israel finally passed into the dustbin of history because of sin and disobe-

dience to God. God used nations like Assyria and Babylon to punish Israel for their apostasy. Ancient Israel's time on the world stage had passed.

Yet God faithfully fulfilled His promises by raising up the modern nations of America and Britain. But the same requirement to obey God's laws applies to these nations today. The same God will call to account these peoples for their moral sins and mistakes. Unless there is a change of heart and an acknowledgement of the true God, there will be another day of reckoning and even the power of the mighty United States will fade, as Britain's has.

If America and Great Britain had been able to find a better way, completely founded on true godly principles, it is conceivable they would have had a far greater positive impact on the modern world than they have. But for now it is enough to look at the history and understand God has been completely faithful in fulfilling His promises. The prominence of these two nations in modern times is a sign and testimony that God will fulfill His spiritual promises to all nations and peoples as well.

The apostle Paul commented on this as he contemplated the history of his Israelite ancestors. He saw that God had not cast away His people (Romans 11:1). By God's grace, Israel's story did not end. They stumbled but did not fall (Romans 11:11). Salvation has come to all nations, in the sense that God is drawing from all nations to form His Church.

Of course, God hasn't finished with His plan. "Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!" (verse 12). Paul went on to say, "For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" (verse 15).

In a few verses Paul shows the deep ageless wisdom of God that is beyond human understanding. History and the rise and fall of nations and empires fit within God's overall plan to bring salvation to all peoples. History is not left to the accidents of

(See "AMERICA," page 13)

# “Intifada of the Crossings”

*Tiny, but forever pivotal to world politics, Israel is struggling with a new intifada, a concerted attack on all the Gaza crossings and one in particular—the crossing at Rafah. The strategic importance of “crossings” is identified in Bible prophecy, only by another name.*

by Cecil E. Maranville

**B**iblical Abraham was the common ancestor of both Arabs and Jews. Genesis 22 records a momentous event, when Abraham demonstrated his absolute loyalty and trust for God; it’s celebrated by Arab and Jew alike (although they differ on whether the child involved was Ishmael or Isaac).

Verses 16-17 relate directly to explosive events unfolding in Israel today: “By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall *possess the gate* of their enemies.”

A few decades later, when the son of Abraham was taking a wife, her relatives pronounced this unusual-sounding blessing on her: “Our sister, may you become the mother of thousands of ten thousands; and may your descendants *possess the gates* of those who hate them” (Genesis 24:60).

A “gate” in this context is symbolic of a choke point, a pivotal passageway, one that controls entrance and exit from the nation. If a nation controlled the “gates” of its enemies, it could defend against attacks.

## The “gates” are today’s “crossings”

Today in Israel, a term for these gates is *crossings*. When the political arm of the terrorist group Hamas took power in Gaza in 2005, Israel sealed all crossings going to and from this narrow strip, home to 1.5 million Palestinian Arabs.

One of these has been in the news all year—the crossing at Rafah, located in the southeast corner of the Gaza Strip. Rafah is Gaza’s main gateway to the outside world, since Gaza has no seaport or airport.

You can pull up a satellite view of it on Internet map programs and witness a sprawling city of 200,000 on the Israeli side of the border and a much smaller city of 40,000 on



Reuters/Mohammed Salem

*Palestinian women clash with Egyptian riot police after Palestinian protesters stormed the Rafah border crossing Jan. 22.*

the Egyptian side. You can even see the wall that Hamas breached in late January this year.

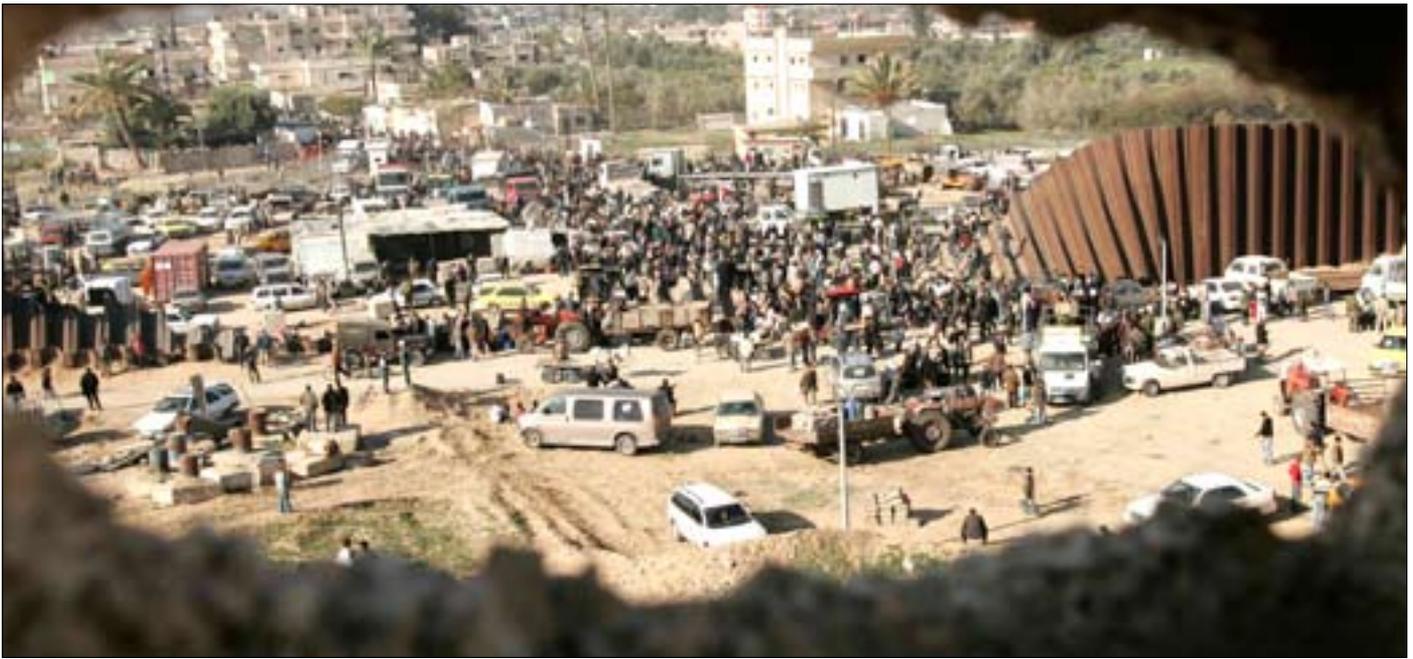
Until 1982, Rafah was one city. It was divided into two as part of the Camp David Peace Accord. But instead of guaranteeing peace for the families and friends living in Rafah, it ended up dividing them. Initially, they traversed the border with relative ease, but mounting violence within Gaza by the late 1980s and early '90s changed that and the border tightened.

By 2000, Gaza’s Rafah was one of the region’s most violent cities, and the Israelis constructed the present wall (destroying a swath of homes to open up enough land to do so). And when Hamas took power, the Rafah crossing was almost completely closed.

Terrorists and thieves continue to cross the border through a network of tunnels to smuggle arms and other contraband. But the average citizen is unable to go back and forth easily if at all; many haven’t seen relatives or friends for years.

When Hamas broke open the border

*The Egyptian government believes that Hamas conspired with the Muslim Brotherhood (an Egyptian-based terrorist group and the parent organization of Hamas) to breach the wall at Rafah. What is the long-term significance of these events?*



Reuters/Ibraheem Abu Mustafa

*Palestinians pass through the destroyed border wall into Egypt near the Rafah border crossing Jan. 24.*

in January, one Gazan resident of Rafah told of reuniting with his six siblings after an 11-year separation, as well as of visiting his father's grave in Egypt's Rafah for the first time. The man wasn't permitted to cross to attend his father's funeral at the time (Ibrahim Barzak and Omar Sinan, "Border Town United by Gaza Border Breach," AP, Jan. 26, 2008).

Among the first to cross was Naimeh Bayah, a wheelchair-bound mother, traveling from Jabaliya refugee camp to Egypt for surgery. A 52-year-old woman from central Gaza came to Egypt to buy the cement she needed to construct a proper Muslim grave for her son who had been killed in fighting between Hamas and Fatah. (Cement is but one of countless essentials in short supply in Gaza.)

Another Gazan on crutches slipped and fell in front of TV cameras, knocked down by the press of bodies rushing to get through the breaches in the wall between the two Rafahs.

Eighty percent of Gazans must rely on international charity for food. They poured into Egypt for nearly everything imaginable, including cows, camels, electronics, fertilizer, building materials and medicine.

But compelling as they are, these stories give only part of the picture.

### **Breaching the wall at Rafah far from spontaneous**

The Egyptian government believes that Hamas conspired with the Muslim Brotherhood (an Egyptian-based terrorist group and the parent organization of Hamas) to breach the wall at Rafah. An editorial in the *Middle East Times* cast doubt on the suggestion that anything about it was spontaneous.

"Hamas knew that Egyptian troops guarding the Rafah border crossing would not fire on fellow Arabs and Muslims. Had they done so, the results would have reverberated across the Muslim world" ("Gazans' March on Israeli Border," Feb. 25, 2008).

The word *conspired* may seem inappropriate in light of how Hamas' action was portrayed in the Western media and even more so in the Arab press. Blasting and bulldozing holes in the border wall was described in heroic terms, including, "The greatest jail breakout in history."

However, the reason that Israel closed the Gaza Strip crossings is the continuing terrorist acts upon Israel by Hamas and various other Arab terrorist cells. Hamas hardly should

receive praise for pulling people from a burning building that Hamas itself set on fire!

That seems lost on throngs who poured through the 15 holes Hamas blasted through the wall at Rafah. Estimates run as high as several hundred thousand people, or nearly half of the entire population of the Gaza Strip! Hamas gunmen are thus both the liberators of the Gazans and also the cause of their captivity.

### **"The intifada of the crossings"**

The crossing at Rafah is under a strange security arrangement. Supposedly, the control of it passed from the hands of the Israelis after 40 years in November 2005.

At that time, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said the new crossing "is intended to give the Palestinian people freedom to move, to trade, to live ordinary lives," adding, "for the first time since 1967, Palestinians will gain control over entry and exit from their territory" (David Morrison, "How the EU Helps Israel to Strangle Gaza," *The Electronic Intifada*, Feb. 14, 2008).

In reality, it's a mess and far from Palestinian control. The Palestinian Authority has only a token force of police at Rafah. Egypt, by treaty can

have only a small military contingent on the border. The entire operation is under the supervision of the EU, which also garrisons a small military contingent at Rafah.

However, even though the Israeli Defense Force no longer guards the crossing, the treaty stipulates that Israel must have personnel monitoring TV cameras posted at the crossing—or the EU won't open it! So, to shut the border, all Israel has to do is not make anyone available to watch the TV monitors! As silly as that might sound, it effectively leaves the power to close the crossing in the hands of the Israelis.

And for the present, Israel still possesses this gate of its enemies (the terrorists within the Palestinians).

Roni Shaked wrote in an opinion piece for Ynetnews.com, "The battle of the crossings, launched several months ago [the Rafah 'breakout' being part of it], took a great leap forward Thursday [May 22, 2008]. Hamas leaders, disappointed with the failure to bring about a ceasefire and remove the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip, are encouraging the ongoing activity against the crossings and are trying to instigate a third intifada—the *intifada of the crossings*" ("Thursday's Truck Bomb Part of Hamas' Attempt to Force Israel to Lift Seize on Gaza," May 24, 2008, emphasis added).

So, it's war on the crossings, on "the gates" spoken of in the ancient Scripture, showing that the Bible is remarkably relevant to this perennially peaceless land.

The breaching of Rafah's wall was part of a strategic effort by Hamas, calculated to bring international pressure on Israel to open all the crossings. In late May, Hamas demanded that Israel open Rafah immediately or that Egypt step in to take over. Hamas believes that Egypt can't openly resist

such pressure, lest it seem to be against fellow Arab Muslims.

However, Egypt has good reason to resist, because it is afraid of Hamas. How could that be, when Egypt has more than 50 times the population of Gaza and 2,800 times the landmass?

### A Hamas-Muslim Brotherhood conspiracy against Egypt

Bret Stephens, a reporter for *The Australian* wrote in January: "Egypt—not Israel—is the country that has the most to fear from a statelet that is at once the toehold, the sanctuary and the springboard of the Islamist revolution" ("The Gaza Breakout," *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 29, 2008).

Stephens noted that Egypt's reaction to the Gaza breach was "near hysterical." Hamas' parent organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, launched approximately 70 demonstrations of support in Egypt simultaneously with Hamas' blasting open the border.

Stephens called the Hamas plan "a masterstroke." Breaching the wall was technically an act of war against Egypt, but Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood masterfully presented it as a humanitarian crisis and a bid for freedom. Because of the abundant publicity gained by Hamas in framing the crisis as precipitated by "cruel Israeli policies," Egypt would have great difficulty turning Gazans away.

Internal politics in Egypt put the government in a precarious position. The Muslim Brotherhood has a political foothold there, as well as continuing to sponsor terrorism. With the help of Hamas and the international publicity over the Rafah crossing, the Muslim Brotherhood has a real chance of seizing control of Egypt, making it an Islamic state.

The octogenarian Egyptian

President Hosni Mubarak has groomed his son to succeed him in the presidency, but the younger Mubarak has no military experience in a country where the generals have a great deal to say about who will lead the nation.

### Only the beginning of trouble at the crossings of Israel

So, the intifada of the crossings is on. For its part, Israel recently announced plans to build yet another wall at Rafah within the next 18 months; it will be as large as the wall Israel has been building in the West Bank!

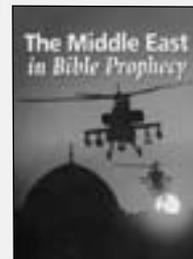
God warned Israel of old that should it fail to live by His laws, He would allow Israel's enemies to "besiege you at all your gates until your high and fortified walls, in which you trust, come down throughout all your land"; that "your enemy shall distress you at all your gates" (Deuteronomy 28:52, 55).

Like its brother and great ally, the United States, the nation of Israel today is a generous and prosperous nation. Yet these descendants of the people to whom Deuteronomy was written break the laws of God in countless ways. Although they are both powerful nations still, the handwriting is on the wall for trouble "at the gates."

For more information, see our booklets *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*, *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. ❖

## Recommended Reading

To better understand the roots of the conflict between Islam and the West, request a free copy of *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. This fully illustrated booklet takes you on an eye-opening journey through history and the Bible to grasp the roots of this conflict and where it will lead.



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## World News and Prophecy Seminars

If you find this publication interesting and helpful, you may be interested in attending a weekend *World News and Prophecy* seminar. A seminar is planned for:

- Las Vegas, Nevada, June 28 (Darris McNeely).

For more information, please go to [www.wnponline.org](http://www.wnponline.org).

# In Brief...

## World News Review

### Brussels' Plans for Britain

"Great Britain off the Map of Europe?" has reemerged in the news. This is the title of a previous article published in the November 2006 issue of *World News and Prophecy* ([www.wnponline.org/wnp/wnp0611/greatbritain.htm](http://www.wnponline.org/wnp/wnp0611/greatbritain.htm)).

Michael Lea, political correspondent of the *Daily Mail* (April 23, 2008), wrote: "The Tories [British Conservative Party] have issued a St. George's Day rallying cry against plans by Brussels to 'wipe England off the map' and create a United Europe..."

- "Under the programme, known as INTER-REG, counties along England's south coast form the 'Manche Region' along with Northern France.

- "The 'Atlantic Region' takes in western England, along with Ireland, Wales and parts of Portugal, Spain, France and Scotland.

- "And eastern England is part of the 'North State Region', which covers areas of Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Belgium, Norway and the Netherlands."

According to Mr. Lea, "The UK government is fully behind the project," slated to be funded with many millions of euros.

We quote from the concluding paragraphs of our article published in November 2006. "The prophetic implications of what is being planned in Europe and Britain are truly frightening. Bureaucrats in Brussels don't always realize the potential repercussions of their plans and edicts. They can have dire consequences in the future, especially under a more autocratic, federal EU."

To understand much more, request or download our free booklets *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*, *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*

### Antiforeigner Violence in South Africa

Former President Nelson Mandela supported the idea of *ibuntu*, the principle that strangers are always welcome in the Republic of South Africa. But immigrant violence has stalked certain of the nation's streets—poor against poor—resulting in at least 24 dead and many injured.

Despite a 5 percent growth in the economy and a commodities boom, frustrated citizens have unleashed their anger against foreigners. The increasing wealth of South Africa has not trickled down to those now trapped in poverty. Governments never seem to deliver enough jobs, housing and schools. Such is the byproduct of deficient human administrations.

The Bible teaches that poverty will finally be abolished

during Christ's coming millennial reign. But until that time it declares in the Old Testament, "The poor will never cease from the land," and in the New Testament, "For the poor you have with you always" (Deuteronomy 15:11; John 12:8).

As *Time* magazine reported, "Xenophobia can be as much about poverty as skin color. The grim tide of killing, raping, burning and hacking that has torn through the northeastern province of Gauteng is centered on shanty towns such as Alexandra and Kya Sand that form a ring of destitution around [South] Africa's commercial capital [Johannesburg]" (June 2, 2008).

It is interesting to note that "the hot spots of anti-immigrant brutality today were the furnaces of anti-apartheid rebellion two decades ago" (ibid.).

A *Wall Street Journal* editorial sums up what may lie in the relatively near future. "In its Pan-African enthusiasm the government has now signed a protocol allowing free movement of people within the 15-nation Southern African Development Community. *When this comes into effect shortly, many million more Mozambicans and Congolese could well attempt to move to South Africa.* Apostles of African unity like Mr. [Thabo] Mbeki [present president] cannot see why Africa should not follow the example of the European Union. In effect the street mobs are demanding the opposite. Future collisions can hardly be ruled out" (May 27, 2008, emphasis added).

### California Court Supports Gay Marriages

The California Supreme Court voted by a narrow 4-3 margin to cancel a state ban on marriages between homosexuals. Massachusetts was the first state to approve same-sex unions. In addition, four northeastern states allow civil unions.

Polls reveal that the majority of Americans oppose gay marriages. And 27 states have passed constitutional bans on such gay marital unions.

An article in *USA Today* stated: "The California court based its decision on its state constitution. As a result, the decision sets no legal precedent beyond California's borders. Yet the ruling is likely to add momentum to the ongoing legal fights over gay marriage across the country and could reshape the politics of the upcoming November election in California and nationally" (May 16, 2008).

What does the Bible really say about homosexuality and the divine basis of marriage? Request or download our free booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*.

Contributor: John Ross Schroeder

# Europe and the Church, Part 2

## What Led to Rome

*Two thousand years ago the Roman Empire held sway over Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. Its legacy was to continue down through the centuries and is with us to this day. (The first part in this series ran in the May issue as “Who Will Be the Next Superpower?”)*

by Melvin Rhodes

**T**he 12 disciples of Jesus Christ were not perfect, just as we are not perfect, for “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Like people throughout history, they were much influenced by what was taking place around them.

There is an interesting account of an incident in Matthew chapter 20 that helps us get a glimpse of life in the Roman Empire at that time.

“Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Him [Jesus] with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. And He said to her, ‘What do you wish?’ She said to Him, ‘Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your Kingdom’” (verse 21).

Here we see a clear case of political ambition. Knowing that Jesus Christ came preaching the good news of the coming Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14), the two men, with support from their mother, were making a power play for the two top positions after Christ in the Kingdom.

“And when the [other] ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers” (Matthew 20:24).

Jesus then had the task of correcting the two brothers, reconciling all 12 disciples and, at the same time, enlightening them all on the clear contrast between carnal, secular, worldly power and the type of government that He will bring to this earth when He returns to establish His Kingdom.

“But Jesus called them to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many’” (verses 25-28).

Here, Jesus Christ was teaching His disciples an important Christian principle, that ruling

is about service. Jesus Himself set the perfect example by laying down His life for all mankind.

### Leadership, Roman style

This was in stark contrast to the world around them. The disciples lived under the rule of the Romans who had taken control of Judea decades earlier. The disciples had had plenty of opportunities to see how the Romans operated. Not only could their empire be despotic and cruel, it was also prone to political upheavals at the highest level.

The Roman Empire had started out as a republic, with an aristocratic ruling class known as the patricians. At the time of Christ’s birth it was no longer a republic, but an empire under the rule of Augustus Caesar.

“Half a century earlier, when he was an unknown boy named Gaius Octavius whose mother happened to be the niece of Julius Caesar, the dying Roman Republic had been torn apart by a seemingly interminable series of fratricidal civil conflicts waged by rival warlords and ruthless demagogues such as Pompey, Catiline, Crassus, and of course Caesar himself, all of whom treated the increasingly feeble and fractious Senate—ostensibly the supreme authority in the land—with the disdain it deserved.

“In the year which we know as 49 BCE [before the Common Era], Caesar had emerged triumphant, parlaying his command of the western legions into a civil dictatorship.

“Unfortunately, the noble Julius combined incomparable political and military abilities with an appalling lack of tact and an undisguised contempt for the time-honored forms of republican rule. Hence his assassination in 44 BCE, by a clique of aristocratic reactionaries who feared that Caesar, after being named perpetual dictator by the Senate, would seek to establish an absolute monarchy in the manner of an oriental potentate” (William Klingaman, *The First Century*, 1986, p. 20).

They singularly failed in their attempt to

*The Roman Empire, under the Caesars, set a precedent for European history right down to modern times!*

save the Republic, “for seventeen years later Caesar’s great-nephew Augustus became Emperor of Rome. The next four emperors also belonged to the family of the Caesars, and the imperial name thus gained such dignity that it was retained henceforward as a title of honor, surviving the First World War (1914-1918) in the official designation Kaiser of the German and Austrian rulers, and until 1946 in that of the Czar of Bulgaria” (*The Book of Knowledge*, Vol. 2, p. 163).

The Roman Empire, under the Caesars, had set a precedent for European history right down to modern times!

“To the surprise of nearly everyone in Rome, the nineteen-year-old Octavius, who had been serving as a staff officer at the right hand of Caesar, was named sole heir in the great man’s will. Those who scoffed at the sudden elevation of an untried boy to such an exalted position discovered to their peril that Octavius was an exceptionally hard, cunning coldly ambitious young man, with a generous measure of cruelty in his character.”

By 31 B.C., “Octavius emerged as the sole ruler of the Roman world. The old Republic was dead, with all of its internal chaos and constant bickering and private warfare among the rich and powerful oligarchs, and many Romans mourned its passing not at all” (*ibid.*).

### Four empires lead to Rome

Interestingly, the 500-year-old prophecies regarding the Roman Empire, the “fourth beast” of Daniel chapter 7, accurately showed the internal contradictions at the top, the constant power struggles and instability, in contrast to the first beast, Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon. (For more on the four beasts of Daniel 7, see the first article in this series, “Who Will Be the Next Superpower?” in the May issue, page 13.)

The four beasts of Daniel 7 correspond with the four empires portrayed in the image in Daniel 2. There Daniel reminded King Nebuchadnezzar of his dream, in which he had seen a great image.

“This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you and its form was awesome. This image’s head

was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces” (Daniel 2:31-34). This verse ends with the coming of God’s Kingdom (see also verses 44-45).

Daniel explained to Nebuchadnezzar, “You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you are this head of gold.

“But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others” (verses 37-40).

In this vision, we see successively baser metals, implying a growing degeneracy from empire to empire. Of course, none of these empires was godly, but God pictured Nebuchadnezzar as the head of gold, the most valuable of the metals mentioned. Jamieson, Fausset and Brown’s 19th-century *Commentary on the Whole Bible* explains it this way: “The metals lessen in specific gravity, as they go downwards; silver is not so heavy as gold, brass not so heavy as silver, and iron not so heavy as brass, the weight thus being arranged in the reverse of stability” (comment on Daniel 2:32).

Nebuchadnezzar’s empire was extremely powerful. He had absolute power. We see this in Daniel 5:18-19: “O King, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down.”

The second empire, Persia, had a more confusing system of government,

and the king’s power over his princes was limited.

“And the king...was greatly displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him... Then these men approached the king, and said to the king, ‘Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed’” (Daniel 6:14-15).

Even though he wanted to, the king was not able to save Daniel from the princes’ plot.

The third empire, Greece, had a still weaker structure, as a result of the premature death of its founder, Alexander the Great. After his death in 323 B.C., his extensive empire was divided among his four generals. “The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it” (Daniel 7:6).

### “As strong as iron”

Finally, the fourth kingdom, the Roman Empire was to be “as strong as iron” (Daniel 2:40). “Iron is stronger than brass, but inferior in other respects; so Rome hardy and strong to tread down the nations, but less kingly and showing its chief deterioration in its last state” (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, comment on Daniel 2:32).

It should also be noted that each successive empire incorporated its predecessor. In Daniel 5:28 Daniel tells Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon: “Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.”

“That very night Belshazzar...was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom” (verses 30-31).

The Roman Empire may have had serious weaknesses in its governmental structure, but it was to be the biggest empire in history, until the British Empire almost two millennia later. It was also to last the longest. After its fall, it was so envied that attempts were made to revive it right down until our modern times. Not only was the title *Caesar* to survive among the kaisers and the czars of different European countries, but its system of government, its religious beliefs and even the influence of its language survive to this very day.

Rome set the standard, as we shall see in future issues of *World News and Prophecy*. ❖

“AMERICA,” (Continued from page 6)

men and women or to their vain strivings. It follows a well-charted course set from the beginning of time.

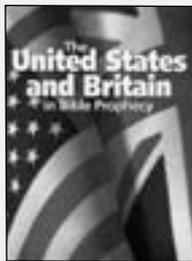
Although God allows free choice, He reserves the right to intervene enough to cause His intended final result. He will grant the opportunity for salvation to all peoples. His work and faithfulness to Israel backs up that promise.

But God is not finished with America, Great Britain or any other nation. The good news is that the same kingdom they were to model, the Kingdom of God, will become a reality on the earth. Not through human effort or politics. Prophecy shows God will intervene in world affairs at our greatest time of peril, saving all human life. The glorious Kingdom will become a reality, producing a time of peace, security and abundance beyond any previous period.

So you see, when I take part in my country's Fourth of July festivities, I do so with more than a national celebration in mind. I have a keen appreciation for what God has given to my country and what it means to the world. But I also understand that America's great role is part of something infinitely greater—the plan of God to bring to this world His eternal Kingdom of peace and good will for all. When I sing “God Bless America,” I know just how great that blessing is. ❖

## Recommended Reading

The United States, Britain, Canada, Australia and other English-speaking peoples have played a major role in modern world history. What does the Bible say about the role they will play in the future?



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“BRITAIN,” (Continued from page 4)

tutes a threat to Britons' basic British identity as a Christian nation.

The Anglican bishop of Rochester also declared, “*The decline of Christian values is destroying Britishness* and has created a moral vacuum that is being filled by radical Islam” (*The Daily Telegraph*, May 29, 2008).

Yet there remains a residual Christian identity still present in the country. It is stronger in some parts of the British Isles than in others. The 2001 census showed that “seven in ten people [in England] considered themselves Christian” (ibid.).

In the midst of the overall decline in churchgoing, some encouraging trends exist, especially among young people. Ms. Gledhill writes: “As the [*Religious Trends*] report notes, the decline in attendance coincides with a surge of interest in religion reflected in the growing number of children opting for religious studies at GCSE and A level [somewhat equivalent of American high schools]. There are also increasing numbers of students at theological and Bible colleges” (ibid.).

But in their quest for truth, they should first understand the basic nature of the biblical Church of God itself.

## What is the Church?

The Church is not a building. The glossary of the *Translator's New Testament* clearly tells us: “Church in [the New Testament] *never means a building*. It always represents either a group of committed Christians in any given locality [who] meet to practice their religion, or the totality of these groups scattered throughout the world” (pp. 557-558).

The apostle Paul defines the Church as “the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12). It is a *spiritual organism*, not a physical edifice or even a corporate organization, but surely those few Church organizations who “keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17) have most of the true membership within them.

So members of the Church go to the building where they meet. Or a small congregation may gather

together in a member's house (see Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19).

## A true and false Christianity

Frankly, in the last three paragraphs we have been speaking of the true Body of Christ, which has always been relatively small in terms of sheer numbers. Jesus spoke of the “little flock” to whom the Father was pleased to give the Kingdom (Luke 12:32).

The idea of a religion calling itself “Christian” yet holding teachings and traditions different from what Christ taught may strike some as shocking. Yet Jesus Christ Himself told His disciples to “*take heed that no man deceive you*. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am Christ,’ and will deceive many” (Matthew 24:4-5). Religious imposters are everywhere today—not only in other religions, but also within Christendom itself.

How can you tell the difference between the true Body of Christ and the false imitation? For some fundamental guidelines based on the Bible itself, request or download our free booklet *The Church Jesus Built*. This eye-opening publication shows the true nature of a spiritually transformed people, the genuine mission and responsibility of the Church, how a counterfeit Christianity came to hijack it and where the true Church of God can be found today.

You cannot afford to be without this crucial free booklet. Request or download *The Church Jesus Built* today. ❖

## Recommended Reading

Jesus Christ said, “I will build My church.” He declared that His Church would never die out. But can we know whether Christianity's bewildering variety of customs and teachings faithfully represents those of Jesus Christ? Request or download a free copy of *The Church Jesus Built*.



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**“FORGIVING”** (Continued from page 16)

war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.” Lincoln understood that men of ability had finally exhausted their imagination and in that moment of fatigue that besets nation builders, those baser passions rose to the surface.

But in an epic moment of full disclosure of what ailed all America, Lincoln was now willing to confront the ongoing enigma sewn into the fabric of the American experiment of liberty. It had been there from the beginning. It had been encapsulated in the American Constitution when a part of the nation’s populace was accorded only three-fifths status in being counted as human beings for state-by-state census counts.

With all their genius expended, the early forefathers had chosen to postpone any thought of how to deal with the issue of slavery. They would mortgage their great-grandchildren’s peace for a temporary solution to procure tenuous union among 13 sovereign states.

As Lincoln would say as he moved into his message, “These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was somehow the cause of the war.”

He then reminded the nation that war never leaves a nation where it found it. He echoed the sentiments of his own foe, Robert E. Lee, who said, “It is well that war is so horrible lest we should grow fond of it.” Lincoln stated, “Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained... Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding.” No one, simply no one, could have imagined the death and destruction that lay ahead. And slavery? To completely repeal slavery throughout the United States had not been the first thought, but simply to control its spread. Now came a new and daring reality—slaves becoming citizens of the United States.

### **“The judgments of the Lord are true”**

He then thoughtfully chided both sides by lamenting, “Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other.” Further into the speech Lincoln reaches a



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*Lincoln said, “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds...”*

startling conclusion, “The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully.”

The next lines clearly show us that religion was not marginal to Lincoln’s thoughts, but was the core of his understanding of the national dilemma. Please remember, he wrote this speech himself. Presidential speechwriters would not appear on the scene till after World War I. Therefore his next thoughts were not a prepared script, but the inner substance of the man.

In this remarkable message, he did not simply appeal to a heavenly deity for blessings, but explained the divine rationale by stating, “The Almighty has His own purposes.” Instead of trumpeting the North’s own righteousness, Lincoln applies the broad brush of God’s wrath on both sides by humbly admitting that “He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came.”

And yet Lincoln recognized that perhaps there were more lessons to learn. No one loves correction, but Lincoln squarely places the American peoples on the altar of God’s judgment in proclaiming, “Yet, if God will that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman’s two

hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, ‘the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.’”

### **Throwing away the box**

To this point, Lincoln is a chronicler of the past and of where others’ actions have led or not led. Now comes the moment of breaking with the past and even the plight of the present, and he offers his vision of the future. It is this last paragraph in which he guides a nation toward the challenge of “let us” forgive the unforgivable and offer dignity to those in the throes of defeat. It is in these lines of biblical proportion that we see the courage of one man as he throws down the gauntlet of peace to a crumbled Confederacy.

In this moment, he is not simply thinking outside the box, but he is throwing out the box to make a fresh start.

Lincoln said, “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds,

to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

At the time, the speech was not critically acclaimed or widely admired. But Lincoln liked it. He thought it was his best. Those around us do not always immediately recognize our best before God and man. But just 42 days later Lincoln would be dead.

### Are you hysterical or historical?

Forgiving others and being willing to work for a common peace are incredibly hard things to do. When nations, peoples, families or individuals allow themselves to become “prisoners of their past,” they remain hostage to their emotions in the present, and any meaningful future is thrown out the door.

Such circumstances remind me of the plight of a man who was complaining to his family marriage counselor that his wife was “historical, historical!” The counselor kindly interrupted, “You mean to say hysterical, don’t you?” The man came back immediately with, “No, I mean historical—she keeps bringing up the past.”

Why is it easier not to forgive than to forgive? Why is it we want to go on poking at people, “eye for an eye,” rather than looking them in the eye and seeking solutions?

Tim LaHaye in his book *Anger Is a Choice* quotes David Augsburg as stating, “The man who forgives pays a tremendous price—the price of the evil he forgives!” (pp. 111-112).

LaHaye then adds, “Forgiveness is very costly. It costs you, not the person being forgiven. Forgiveness means that justice will not always be fulfilled. Forgiveness does not rebuild the house that has been burned down by someone carelessly playing with matches. Forgiveness does not always put a broken marriage back together. Forgiveness does not restore virginity to the rape victim. Forgiveness is letting go. It is the relaxation of your ‘death grip’ on the pain you feel.”

LaHaye seals the thought by sharing Archibald Hart’s poignant conclusion, that “forgiveness is surrendering my right to hurt you back if you hurt me.”

### Cutting down the oak trees of life

Yes, easier said than done. And yet it has been done and will need to be done again and again! Perhaps even by you. If so, take the power of this story to heart. In his book *Lee: The Last Years*, Charles Bracelen Flood tells of a time after the Civil War when Robert E. Lee visited a Kentucky woman who took him to the remains of a grand old oak tree in front of her home. There she complained bitterly that its limbs and trunk had been destroyed by Union artillery fire. She waited for Lee to condemn the North or at least sympathize with her loss. Lee paused, and then said, “Cut it down, my dear madam, and forget it.”

In today’s world many nations, families, individuals, Christians and, yes, perhaps even you, the reader, are nursing a whole forest of oak trees that we keep propped up by our unwillingness to forgive the unforgivable. Oh, how the headlines of our newspapers around the world would change if only we could look beyond the oak trees of life and see a bigger picture. Yes, a better picture! Imagine the impact on prophetic headlines and datelines if only people would take the time to see their own shortcomings and lacks as the man from Illinois did. Perhaps that’s why such a man truly does “belong to the ages.”

With Lincoln, his time-honored phrase, “with malice toward none, with charity for all,” was not from someone else’s script, but from his inner character. His was a character borne out in the understanding of a verse like Psalm 86:5 that declares, “For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You.”

Someone once asked Lincoln what he would do when the South had been defeated and forcibly returned to the Union. The questioner was naturally expecting a vengeful threat and was dumbfounded by the response. It is, perhaps, that response that best echoes the millennial refrain, “this is the way, walk in it.” Lincoln simply replied, “I will treat them as if they never went away.” ❖

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by Robin Webber

## Forgiving the Unforgivable

**T**oday our world is besieged with a seemingly never-ending cycle of violence. Unfortunately, this cycle of “pay-back time” appears alive and well wherever humans draw breath and are willing to use their last ounce of energy to exercise their own perceived right to exact revenge. Be it in the lanes of Belfast, the barrios of Bogotá, the streets of Jerusalem or the back alleys of Karachi—the threat is ever present.

And yes, sometimes all we have to do is look over the top of what we are reading this very minute and recognize it might be in our very own homes. The normal line of thought behind the plague of revenge goes something like this: “You poked me, so I am going to poke you back twice as hard. And we’re going to keep up this routine till one person doesn’t return the counterstrike.”

In other words, I am going to exact my rightful pound of flesh from your hide, because the rules of survival dictate “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”

But let’s consider the ultimate ramifications of this age-old adage. Carrying that thought to its logical conclusion would mean that our world would wind up both blind and toothless. But thankfully, occasionally the mold is broken; and when it is, we need to take a good hard look and understand a little more deeply the power of the moment.

More than 140 years ago, one man offered a tremendous vision after an incredibly tense time in the affairs of his country. He willingly offered terms to a vanquished foe that were very different from those any victor had previously offered. Such thoughtful words were offered after four intense years of war between the states of a young American republic.

It was a time of brother against brother, cousin against

cousin and neighbor against neighbor. It was a war in which the technology of weaponry had decimated the antiquated methodology of regimental troop movements. So many times, the slaughter was intense and immediate. In one such battle almost the entire male citizenry of one county lay dead within minutes.

Ultimately 600,000 people would die in this conflict. We can only imagine the desire for total revenge. As the war was painfully drawing to a sure conclusion, the big question was: How would the North behave toward the once proud South? What “pound of flesh” would the wartime president, Abraham Lincoln, exact from a now prostrate South?

Just over a month before the war’s end, Lincoln gave his second inaugural address to a spiritually and physically exhausted country. On March 4, 1865, the 703 simple words that he would offer would not sound the trumpet of victory over a crushed foe; nor would they outline a series of policies to bolster his own political standing. It simply spoke to the heart of a scattered national family that had problems.

You see, there was something deeply embedded within the national body that had to be dealt with—a cancer of the national soul. Lincoln rightfully understood that we can’t really expect to deal with others until we have squarely faced ourselves in the mirror and dealt with ourselves.

### “And the war came”

He began by reminding his audience how four years earlier at his first inaugural address “all thoughts were directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it—all sought to avert it. Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would make

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