World News & Prophecy
BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CURRENT EVENTS

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Preparing for a Famine of the Word of God

Today the Bible—God's written Word—is so widely available, it's hard to understand how rare it was in the past, or how scarce God's Word might be in the future. What should we do to prepare for what God calls a coming "famine of the Word"?

by Mike Bennett

Throughout history, God's Word has been under attack by many enemies.

"In all the great and dreadful Jewish persecutions from Antiochus Epiphanes downwards, the chief aim of the persecutors has ever been to destroy the Book that made the Jews what they were. Infidels also have from time to time spent their strength in trying to destroy the Bible, while Rome has done her best to burn it and its readers out of existence" (Sidney Collett, *All About the Bible*, 1962, p. 61).

Until a few hundred years ago, economics and even the religious establishment kept the Bible out of the hands of the vast majority of people. But today, when it is widely available, its enemies have found new ways to discredit it in people's eyes or to just make it seem irrelevant.

Today many homes in Western nations have a Bible somewhere, mostly gathering dust. Few read it, and fewer still understand its meaning and apply its principles in everyday life.

A rare and precious book

Before the invention of the printing press, only a very few could own their own copy of even part of the Bible. Some estimate that it took a skilled and rapid writer 10 months to make a copy of it, and a finished and bound copy was worth the price of a landed estate!

Yet Christ told His followers to live by every word of God (Matthew 4:4). And Paul reminded Christians that the Holy Scriptures are able to make us wise to salvation, and are given by inspiration of God to teach us, correct us, instruct us and thoroughly equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:15-17).



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Until a few hundred years ago, economics and even the religious establishment kept the Bible out of the hands of most people.

God's people have always loved God's Word. Even if they could not own a copy, Christians throughout the ages found ways to hear it read often and even memorized portions of it.

Consider this vignette from the Middle

(See **"FAMINE,"** *page 3)*

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"Whom heaven must receive until the times of **Restoration** of all things . . ." ACTS 3:21

War's Long Memory

Virtually all nations have a national shrine to honor their war dead. Two examples are America's Arlington Cemetery in Washington, D.C., and Australia's Shrine of Remembrance near Melbourne. Such memorials, in whatever form they take, hold the memories of a nation formed around the causes that sent its men and women into war. These shrines hold an almost sacred place in the heart of a nation. Watch any Memorial Day observance and you will see the nationalistic emotions pour forth. Those who fought the wars have long memories.

One of those memories is bitter resentment. Events surrounding Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's visit to the United States last month demonstrate this. One of his stops was to be Arlington Cemetery. Japanese officials wanted the prime minister to give an address before Congress as well. That prospect was nixed when Representative Henry Hyde of Illinois objected to such an event. Hyde is the chairman of the House International Relations Committee as well as a combat veteran of World War II, in the Pacific theater.

Since 2001 Prime Minister Koizumi has made five visits to Tokyo's controversial Yasukuni Shrine. This shrine, run by Shinto priests, honors 2.4 million Japanese servicemen killed in Japan's wars of the last 150 years. The shrine also honors 14 executed war criminals, including General Hideki Tojo, the architect of Japan's World War II strategy. The site has become a flash point for Japan's attempt to play down the atrocities committed during the war. Approximately 20 million Asians died during the period of Japanese imperial expansion in the 1930s and 1940s.

It is easy to suggest that the survivors should forgive their enemies, but it is not easy to do. More than 90,000 American servicemen died in combat against Japanese troops. Japanese atrocities against captured American servicemen, such as the Bataan Death March, were particularly horrible. Torture, execution and the rigors of the march left 10,000 POWs dead. The 61 years since the Japanese surrender have not been long enough to erase the scars.

Henry Hyde is one of the few current congressmen who saw combat in World War II. When I saw that he objected to the Japanese prime minister addressing Congress, it brought back memories of the strong feelings I used to see among adults when I was growing up. My father's good friend was a veteran of the Pacific war. He operated a gas station and auto repair shop down the street from my dad's gas station. Marion Coburn would not let a Japanese-made vehicle on his property. He refused to work on them. I heard him use some pretty salty language whenever he would see one drive by. Whatever those men saw in their war service altered their lives and stayed with them.

The Yasukuni Shrine has become a source of controversy both within and outside Japan. The late Emperor Hirohito stopped his visits and his son, Akihito, continues to stay away. China and South Korea, both victims of Japanese atrocities, have called for official visits to cease. Japanese leaders are now calling for a less controversial shrine to be erected.

As long as nations continue marching to war, bitter memories of enemies will mingle with thoughts of honor for one's comrades. National shrines to the dead serve a purpose for each nation, but there is something missing. True restoration can only be achieved when forgiveness is practiced among all parties.

We have erected shrines and memorials to wars and their dead, but we sadly lack effective memorials to peace and its lasting benefits. Did you know that God has such peace memorials? His Word reveals His annual memorials to universal peace among all nations and families. Those memorials are annual festivals that enshrine an eternal blueprint for peace, first between man and his Creator and then with his fellow man. You can read more about these days in our booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind.*

—Darris McNeely


Darris McNeely

"FAMINE," *(Continued from page 1)*
Ages. Many believe that Peter Waldo was converted about 1160, and translated the Scriptures into French to spread the good news to all who would hear him. This led to persecution, as described in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs:*

"Soon the churchmen in the area, who would not explain the Scripture to the people, ordered Waldo to stop his work or face excommunication. Although Waldo ignored their orders, they persecuted his followers so badly that they were all forced to leave… So perfect were they in their knowledge of Scripture that unlettered country men were able to recite the entire book of Job by heart. Others knew the whole New Testament."

During those times, because of the scarcity of Bibles and the imminent danger to both the Bible and the person carrying one, it seems potential ministers had to memorize a large amount of Scripture, besides being able to explain it.

The struggle continued through the centuries. Consider that when William Tyndale made his English translation of the Bible, it had to be smuggled into England in bales of cloth or barrels of merchandise. The bishop of London tried to gather up all the copies in his area and publicly burned them. Tyndale himself was kidnapped from Antwerp, tied to a stake, strangled and burned in 1536.

It's hard, in this time when Bibles are so widely available, to imagine what it was like through most of history, but even today Bibles are hard to come by or even dangerous to possess in some nations, where conversion to Christianity can be punishable by death.

Prophesied famine of God's Word

Considering the proliferation of Bibles in hundreds of languages today—it remains the world's most translated, best selling and most freely given book—the warning in Amos 8:11 is surprising.

In the context of the time of the end marked by heavenly signs (Amos 8:9), Amos quotes God foretelling a time of famine—a famine of His Word. "'Behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord GOD, 'That I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD'" (Amos 8:11).

Why would this famine come? Because of stealing, injustice, oppression and other sins Amos records. And because the people hadn't listened to all the previous warnings, had not repented, had "put far off the day of doom" (Amos 6:3). The warning was to people who had not listened to God's Word.

In the time leading up to Amos' prophecy, God's words had been proclaimed through the preaching of Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Joel and Hosea. Today we have all these as well as the rest of the Bible in printed form. God's ministers today also warn of the consequences of sins and the need for repentance. But today, as in Amos' day, so few listen.

Amos prophesied during a time of national prosperity, at least for the upper classes of the northern kingdom of Israel. After years of national decline, Jeroboam II seemed to have turned the nation's fortunes around. But not for long. Perhaps 30 years later Israel would fall to the Assyrians and be taken into captivity from which they have not yet returned.



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It's hard, in this time when Bibles are so widely available, to imagine what it was like through most of history.

God's long patience finally came to an end with ancient Israel, and will again with our modern world. When people ignore His message one too many times, He promises to remove that message, for a time. Isaiah echoes the thought: "Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55:6).

When will this famine of hearing the words of the Lord come? Apparently it starts before the work of the two witnesses who will proclaim God's words publicly for three and a half years immediately before Christ's return (Revelation 11:1-3). How long will it last? This is not stated.

Will it mean all Bibles will be rounded up and burned? This does not seem to be necessary, since just having Bibles around doesn't mean they are read, believed or understood. As Paul said, "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not *heard?* And how shall they hear without a preacher? … So then faith comes by *hearing,* and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:14-15, 17, emphasis added). Amos also called it a famine of *"hearing* the words of the LORD."

So it does seem God's work of proclaiming His words through His ministers, as well as through the mass media, will be shut off, perhaps through economic downturns, persecution, governmental regulations or a combination of these and other factors.

So what happens when God's words are not readily available any more? Apparently some of those who rejected them previously will suddenly notice they are missing, and will conduct a fruitless search throughout the land (Amos 8:12-13). Isn't that typical of our human condition, to be unaware of what we really want and need until it's gone?

Preparing for the famine

So what can we do to prepare now for the famine of the Word prophesied to come?

Like Joseph back in ancient Egypt, we need to be preparing for the years of famine during the years of plenty. It starts with hearing God's words now, studying them, treasuring them and obeying them. God calls on all to repent of sin and to live by every word of God.

We offer many resources on our Web site to help all who are willing to listen and heed (www.wnponline.org/litreq). For example, our *Bible Study Course* explores some of the most important themes of the Bible, and gives even beginners a good starting place for understanding God's Word.

But it's not just about our own salvation. God is calling many now to help spread His Word. That's part of the mission He gave His Church, to preach His good news to the entire world (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).

"With the coming famine of God's Word in mind, His servants today should have the same urgent mind-set that Jesus Christ had in His human ministry. He told His disciples, 'I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work'" (Bible Reading Program on Amos 8-9, www.ucg.org/brp).

God has given His Church a job to do—to spread understanding of His Word, to preach the gospel, to warn the world. And the foundation of that is to study the Bible and understand it ourselves—to prepare ourselves to serve and help those God is calling now and into the future. Let's do it while there is still time. ❖

Are Things Really Better Than We Think?

How are we doing in the Western world? Clearly there is more than one viewpoint: Some scenarios are fairly rosy and others pretty gloomy. Which is the closest to the truth? Moreover, are people overlooking the most important judgment factor?

by John Ross Schroeder

A recent feature article in a major American newsweekly stated: *"Things are better than you think…* In 2005, as in 2004, the world economy grew by about 5 percent, according to the International Monetary Fund, and the IMF projects similar growth for several years to come… *The great engine of this growth is, of course, the United States*, which produces more than one fifth of world economic product and whose gross domestic product has been growing at around 4 percent—4.8 percent in the latest quarter" (Michael Barone, "Heard the Good News?" *U.S. News and World Report,* May 29, 2006, emphasis added throughout).

What is wrong with America and the Western world as a whole involves basic morality—not economics.

Of course, several other major economies are growing as well, a few at even greater rates than the American economy is.

Still, President George Bush underscored American economic achievements, saying, "This economy is powerful, productive and prosperous."

The author of the first article also pointed out that, overall, genocides and wars have decreased rapidly since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and he listed all the changes that benchmark incident produced. Violent conflicts in particular have apparently dropped by 40 percent since 1992. The writer concluded, *"In most important respects, our [Western] civilization is performing splendidly."*

But is this an accurate portrayal of what is happening to the United States in particular and the Western world in general?

A much gloomier picture

Curiously, the very next feature article in the same issue starkly presented the flip side of the coin! Its author stated, "Sadly, Katrina has become a metaphor for the nation, a symbol of what can happen when challenges to our well-being gain force, and we fail to address them" (David Gergen, "The Danger of Drift," *U.S. News and World Report,* May 29, 2006).



Reuters/Larry Downing

U.S. President George W. Bush and EU President Jose Manuel Barroso at EU-U.S. Summit in Vienna June 21.

He pictured the U.S. president as wounded, the Congress dogged by division, the American public in a state of increasing anxiety about the future and a divided nation in danger of merely drifting for the next three years or so.

As the author sees it, five big things are wrong with America: The "rising tide of mediocrity" in public education, an unsustainable health-care system, government spending gone amok, unacceptable energy dependence on foreign lands and an administration that refuses to recognize the dreaded implications of climate change.

The author concluded that these factors are tied together: "Mediocre schools mean we become less competitive. High medical costs make it impossible to bring our deficits down. A lack of energy independence makes us even more hostage to others. Losing our competitive edge lowers our incomes and makes it harder to pay for better schools and information systems that could help reduce healthcare costs. Each

gathers force year by year" (ibid.).

Which one of the two scenarios should we believe? It is certainly true that so far no other nation has so successfully first invented and then taken advantage of modern technology and globalization like America has. Yet only one in four of the citizenry apparently believes that the U.S. economy is now performing well.

Perhaps a mini crisis of confidence exists partially because the wage packet of the average person has apparently grown little in the last several years. "Factory-floor wages are now 10%-30% higher [in Japan] than in the U.S." (*World Business,* June 2006).

The traditional middle class feels economically squeezed and social mobility "from poverty to riches" is now greater in some European countries. Yet in any economic evaluation no one should underestimate the propensity of Americans to find the solution to stubbornly difficult, knotty economic problems. History shows America has enjoyed many such unexpected blessings. Will they continue?



Reuters/Joshua Roberts

Abortion supporters rally as U.S. Supreme Court hears abortion case Nov. 30, 2005.

A serious lowering of moral standards

The West's real problem has not even been addressed in these two disparate scenarios. What is wrong with America and the Western world as a whole involves basic morality—not economics. The fundamental problem is a moral one.

Many facets of Western immorality could be cited to support our case. For instance in America today, although the religious right is fighting a courageous battle, the gay agenda and same-sex marriage proponents are gradually gaining strength. A constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriages was defeated recently.

Also, hardcore pornographic films are readily available to travelers in most major hotels and motels. What one sees can often translate into what one does. Yet money talks, and what is morally best for the whole nation is not a serious consideration.

Even more disturbing, "A sample of 10 million U.S. Internet users shows the most trafficked sites by category during the week ended May 26, [and] X-rated fare [adult entertainment] leads the pack" over e-mail services, more acceptable entertainment, search engines, business and finances, shopping and classifieds, etc. (ibid.).

Then there is the subject of aborting unborn human beings. Many pro-choice proponents claim that abortion is acceptable in early stages of pregnancy. Others claim that abortion should be legal during any stage.

A professor at Princeton University took the debate even farther. Dr. Peter Singer, a professor of bioethics, maintained that mothers should have the right to kill any baby that is physically or mentally disabled for up to 28 days after birth. His rationale was that a baby isn't a thinking, self-aware person at this time (Gary Petty, "The Abortion Quagmire," www.ucg.org/reprints).

Even most pro-choice proponents would find Professor Singer's position repugnant. Yet it highlights the all-important question: Who determines the point when an embryo or fetus is no longer considered mere tissue but a distinct life with the moral right to live?

Obviously the Creator God would have that right. We need to ask ourselves: What does God think? Doesn't He always think in terms of what we could be and will be rather than what we are now? It was God who said to Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and multiply." Conception should lead to birth!

Somehow too many have lost their appreciation of the wonder of conception. Two scientists described it this way: "Human life begins in…cooperation of the most intimate sort. Two cells wholly merge. They combine their genetic material. Two very different beings become one. The act of making a human being involves…cooperation so perfect that the partners' separate identities vanish" (the late Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan, *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors,* 1992, p. 199).

This description by a husband and wife team, whatever their religious beliefs, gives at least an inkling of understanding about the providential purpose of human life.

The Hebrew prophets condemn our way of life

Isaiah spoke to the whole human race in his long prophecy. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear O earth" (Isaiah 1:1). He firmly warned: *"Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity* [lawlessness], a brood of evildoers,

children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel. They have turned away backward" (verse 4).

These words were written to our peoples in the Western world (primarily the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel during the end time) as much as to the ancient nation of Judah. Biblical prophecy is often dual in nature, a principle we explain in our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy.*

Continuing in this passage we read: *"The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints*. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment" (verses 5-6). Isaiah is speaking figuratively of what our spiritual sins look like to God.

He then calls our peoples by some very unpleasant but appropriate names. "Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah" (verse 10).

Increasingly Western governments are giving legal endorsement to a false way of life that is directly condemned in the Bible in both Old and New Testaments—even now threatening to enact into national law provisions that would punish those who would stand up for God's great spiritual law and His way of life. Nearly 2,000 years ago John the Baptist paid with his life for boldly telling the vassal ruler of Judah that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife.

God's advice to us today through Isaiah is simply this: *"Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good;* seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow" (verses 16-17).

The prophet Hosea hits the problem from a slightly different angle, but the overall message is virtually the same. "Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel, for the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: 'There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed. Therefore the land will mourn'" (Hosea 4:1-3).

There is now a growing rejection of the Ten Commandments in the whole Western world. Violence is a problem in particular. One murder often follows another just like links on a chain. Serial killers are at large in our world.

Hosea goes on to say: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). Clearly our peoples are in the process of rejecting the knowledge of God's basic spiritual law embodied in the Ten Commandments (verse 2).

We don't seem to grasp the fact that the price of breaking God's law results in severe penalties that we are presently paying and will increasingly pay in the future—unless we turn away from disobedience and begin to learn about and follow Jesus Christ's biblical way of life.

Of course, real repentance and accepting Christ's sacrifice for our past sins and mistakes are a big part of our responsibility to God (Isaiah 1:18; 1 Peter 1:18-19; 1 John 1:9).

A sorely needed standard: the Ten Commandments

Are things really better than we think? Not when we consider the things that truly count. When are we in the United States and the Western world as a whole going to return to keeping the Ten Commandments? Do many of us even know what all 10 are?

No matter what your neighbor does, you can personally decide to swim upstream and begin leading a truly abundant moral life (John 10:10). The United Church of God publishes a free booklet that will help you get started in the right direction.

Please request or download our 80-page publication titled simply *The Ten Commandments* (www.wnponline.org/litreq). Using sound biblical principles, we explain each one in a careful, thoughtful and in-depth manner, showing how they all apply to our everyday lives. ❖



Indonesia's Bashir a Lightning Rod

Indonesia is the scene of some of the world's greatest tragedies of modern times. Much more than a region in need of aid, it is rich in history, the largest Muslim nation in the world—and a democracy. The recent release of militant Muslim cleric Abu Bakar Bashir reopened old wounds and may indicate a future direction away from the West.

by Cecil E. Maranville

On June 14, Indonesia released Abu Bakar Bashir from prison. Little known in most of the world, his name stirs instant anger in the hearts of Australians and the citizens of Bali—relatives and friends of the 202 people killed in the Bali bombing of 2002. Australian Prime Minister John Howard vigorously protested Bashir's release to Indonesian President Yudhoyono.

Bashir is a 68-year-old Muslim cleric and the believed leader of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), a militant Islamic terrorist group, committed to creating a super-Islamic state by combining Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, the southern Philippines and southern Thailand. Active in all of these countries, JI also has ties to al-Qaeda.

For decades, Bashir operated a *pesantren* in Java. A *pesantren* is a religious boarding school, with its curriculum based upon the Koran. Perhaps our readers are more familiar with the term *madrasa* for a Muslim religious school.

In the early months following Sept. 11th, the Western press generalized about madrasas, viewing all of them as hotbeds for Islamic radicalism, but many of them are simply alternatives to unaffordable "public" education.

In countries like Pakistan and Indonesia, many people cannot afford public education (which is not free as it is in the West), so they send their children to madrasas instead. (Most madrasas do not promote terrorism, but some notoriously advance the strictest interpretation of Saudi Wahhabism.)

Muslims regard a *pesantren* school as higher ranking than a madrasa, because of its more conservative curriculum.

It is a residential learning center that completely immerses students into strict Islam. "Usually in rural areas and under the direction of a Muslim scholar, *pesantren* are attended by young people seeking a detailed understanding of the Quran, the Arabic language, the sharia [the body of Islamic law based solely upon the Koran] and Muslim traditions and history" ("Indonesia: Islamic Schools," Library of Congress Country Studies, November 1992).



Reuters/ Dadang Tri

Indonesian Muslim cleric Abu Bakar Bashir speaks at his boarding school in Solo, Central Java, June 16.

When it became evident in the aftermath of the 2002 Bali bombing that the terrorists all graduated from Bashir's *pesantren*, many countries, including Australia and the United States, urged Indonesia to take action against him. Other graduates of the school perpetrated additional terrorist attacks throughout Indonesia.

However, prosecutors were not able to prove that he helped to plan or execute the attacks. Initially, they sought a sentence of 15 years, but the courts sentenced him to much less, and after standard sentence reductions, he served only a little more than two years.

Most nations in the region ban JI, but not Indonesia, perhaps in part due to the fact that the governing political party has several hard-line Islamists as members. Furthermore, a vocal minority of Indonesia supports militant Islamism.

A nation of diversity

Indonesia is unique. The largest Muslim nation

When it became evident in the aftermath of the 2002 Bali bombing that the terrorists all graduated from Bashir's pesantren*, many countries, including Australia and the United States, urged Indonesia to take action against him.*

in the world, it has a population of approximately 245 million (85 percent of which are Muslim) and spans more than 17,000 islands. It is also a democracy, whose government is successfully amalgamating a truly diverse people: Javanese 45 percent, Sudanese 14 percent (over 13 million), Madurese 7.5 percent, coastal Malays 7.5 percent and the last 26 percent a mixture of a wide variety of additional ethnic groups (*CIA World Fact Book*).

Islam came to the islands centuries ago, preceded by Hinduism and many animist religions. The earliest form of Islam was the mystical Sufism, and converts to it typically combined elements of their existing faiths with it.

Travel to the Middle East was extremely difficult in the early centuries of Indonesian Islam, so few people made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

With the advent of steamship transportation, more made the journey, which resulted in a movement to establish an Islam in the islands that was more like the faith practiced in the Middle East. Proponents of the change were the Muhammadiyah or "modernists." Those who held to the syncretistic or mixed faith are the Nahdlatul Ulama or "traditionalists" (Sejarah Indonesia, "An Online Timeline of Indonesian History," www.gimonca.com).

These two principal divisions of Islam dominate present-day Indonesia. Even though the nation taken as a whole is approximately 85 percent Islamic, the religion is not evenly dispersed throughout the islands.

For example, Aceh, a province known the world around due to the tsunami of December 2004, is 97.8 percent Islamic ("Indonesia: Islam," Library of Congress, November 1992). Bali (site of the 2002 bombing that killed over 200, injuring more than 300 others), by contrast, is majority Hindu.

Indonesia key strategic partner to West and ASEAN

If for nothing more than its huge Muslim population, Indonesia is a key strategic partner in today's world. Clearly, it carries weight with the worldwide Muslim community. In addition, the fact that it has a functioning democracy makes it a sought-after ally to the West.

Moreover, Indonesia is the largest member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), economically important to the United States and the West in an increasingly globalized market and strategically important in the worldwide effort against terror. Indonesia sits across the key choke point of the Strait of Malacca, through which more than 50,000 ships pass every year. It is the shortest sea route connecting Indonesia, India and China—three of the world's most populous countries.

"They transport about 30 per cent of the world's trade goods and 80 per cent of Japan's oil needs," according to C.S. Kuppuswamy in his paper, "Straits of Malacca: Security Implications," written for the South Asia Analysis Group in June 2004.

Because the strait is essential to world commerce, it is a prime target for terrorists, including JI and al-Qaeda. Therefore, the strait is of keen interest to the United States and other Western powers.

Indonesia's President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has visited the White House, as did his predecessor, Megawati Sukarnoputri. Recent visits to Jakarta by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld show America's wish to continue to develop a friendly relationship between Washington and the huge Muslim democracy.

Washington seeks and receives cooperation in the war on terror. The United States is also providing $157 million to enhance the country's educational system, particularly in math and science—clearly wishing to stem an anti-American prejudice.

Prior to her visit in March 2006, Secretary Rice said that she would be discussing the Palestinian elections with the Indonesians, noting that they have input, as well as influence with the newly-elected Hamas government. She made it plain that Washington hopes the Indonesians would encourage Hamas to align itself with the international community. She emphasized the "vibrant democracy" in Indonesia, where people can protest and speak their minds openly—unlike the autocratic, despotic and chaotic government of today's Palestinians.

Anti-American, pro pan-Islamism

Anti-American feelings ran high in Indonesia before the December 2004 tsunami crushed the primarily Muslim province of Aceh. That changed temporarily in the wake of the outpouring of enormous generosity by Americans to help them rebuild their destroyed infrastructure. More recently, American aid following the devastating earthquakes that took out more homes in Central Java than the tsunami did in Aceh, caused Indonesians to look at the United States more favorably.

Regrettably, there are signs that positive opinion is already fading, perhaps because it also reminded Indonesian Muslims of what they see in the broader worldview: Muslim countries dominated by a much wealthier Western world, principally the United States.

Jemaah Islamiyah preaches that message, sprinkled with readily available examples of Western decadence. (It also offers financial enticements to young men with no hope for profitable jobs elsewhere.) Few Indonesian Muslims adhere to the militant philosophy of using violence to establish a pure Muslim state, but *many* seek such a government by peaceful means.

Indonesia's millions would definitely like to see a reversal of Muslim fortunes in the world, although there isn't any single issue, or more importantly, any single leader presently on the scene to unite them with the Muslims of North Africa and the Middle East. Bible prophecy indicates that will change.

First, it shows that the United States will decline sharply, moving from the top to the bottom in many respects. For this story, see our booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

Second, it indicates that an issue or issues, as well as galvanizing leadership will emerge in the Islamic community. For that story, see our booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.

Lastly, we anticipate that it is possible Indonesia will figure into one of the last events to occur before this age of humankind comes to an end. The final cascade of events described in prophecy is the seven trumpet plagues, the sixth of which involves an army of seemingly impossible size. Revelation 9:16 says, "Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them."

There are few configurations of nations that could field an army of that size. These would include China, India and Indonesia. China's available force for military service is approximately 550 million; India's numbers are about 430 million; Indonesia's are almost exactly 100 million (figures include men and women, based upon 2005 estimates, *CIA World Fact Book*).

Some or all three nations will be a part of the fulfillment of Revelation 9. ❖

A Growing Confederacy Against Modern Israel

Somalia is the latest nation to fall to the forces of radical Islam. Militant Muslims have also made advances elsewhere. Additionally, it's becoming clear that the Russians and the Chinese are acting against U.S. interests, even inviting Iran's leader to the Shanghai Cooperation Council meeting, while denying the United States observer status. Are we seeing a growing confederacy against the United States and Britain?

by Melvin Rhodes

"Europeans see the U.S. as a greater threat to global stability than either Iran or China, according to a Harris opinion poll conducted in association with the *Financial Times"* ("Europeans See US as Threat to Global Security, Says Poll," *Financial Times,* June 19, 2006).

Three days earlier, columnist Quentin Peel wrote in the same paper, "it is scarcely news these days to report that America's image in the world is sliding… But the latest edition of the excellent Pew Global Attitudes Survey—the seventh since 2001—shows that favorable opinions of the U.S. have fallen again in 12 out of 15 countries polled" ("Old Europe Loses Enthusiasm for US").

Part of the reason for this, as Mr. Peel pointed out, is the continuing war in Iraq, which "is seen by a clear majority in all the countries surveyed, except India and Nigeria, as having made the world more dangerous."

A report in the same newspaper a few days later highlighted the dilemma of the crumbling coalition as countries pull troops out of Iraq to appease public opinion back home.

"The shrinking U.S. 'coalition of the willing' in Iraq has come to resemble more a coalition of the reluctant, as allies weigh up the costs of continued involvement in an unpopular war against the benefits of backing President George W. Bush for the rest of his second term" ("Iraq Gets 'Coalition of the Reluctant' as Allies Retreat," June 20, 2006).

Patrick Buchanan observes, "U.S. foreign policy appears to be disintegrating… On the Horn of Africa, Islamic warriors have seized Mogadishu. The warlords, our allies, are on the run. In Islamist Sudan, the Darfur horror rages on" ("Time for an 'Agonizing Reappraisal,'" *The American Conservative,* July 3, 2006).



Reuters/China Daily

Chinese President Hu Jintao waves as he poses with other leaders during group photo session at summit of Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

In Egypt, a truly free election could unseat American ally Hosni Mubarak and replace him with the Islamic Muslim Brotherhood. Free elections elsewhere in the Middle East have already brought Islamists into the government in the Palestinian territories, in Lebanon, in Turkey, in Iraq and in Iran—although the latter's election wasn't truly free.

Meanwhile, violence in Afghanistan has increased significantly in recent months. "In Afghanistan, the resurgent Taliban roam half a dozen of the southeast provinces," continues Mr. Buchanan. Coalition forces in conjunction with Afghan military mounted a massive counterattack in the south, beginning in May.

Tension between the United States and Iran has also been increasing as Iran moves seemingly inex-

Faced with continuing economic challenges, the relentless spread of Islamic fundamentalism throughout the Middle East, the possibility of future nuclear attacks on their interests and now an alarming and growing confederacy among many of their former friends, Americans need to focus upon reality...

orably toward possession of its own nuclear weapons. Public opinion in neighboring countries appears to favor this development, rather than seeing it as a threat.

"In a series of recent polls, Terror Free Tomorrow, a non-partisan group, finds that Iran's Turkish, Saudi and Pakistani neighbors want the United States to accept a nuclear-armed Iran rather than take military action to prevent it. Terror Free Tomorrow said, moreover, that two thirds of Pakistanis, one third of Saudi Arabians, and more than one fifth of Turks actually support a nuclear-armed Iran.

"Ken Ballen, president of TFT, said the results indicate 'the radical Islamist propaganda which portrays the West as the enemy of Islam is gaining dangerous ground'" ("These Folks Want Iran to Get the Bomb," *U.S. News and World Report,* p. 21, June 26, 2006).

Setbacks to United States in Central Asia

But it's not only in the Islamic world that the United States is faced with increasing hostility. Other countries, former enemies who seemed to be moving favorably toward Washington, are now turning against the United States.

"…U.S. intervention in elections in Ukraine, Georgia, and Belarus and our in-your-face bellicosity toward Putin's Russia are producing the predicted blowback. The decade-old Shanghai Cooperation Organization [SCO], consisting of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, is evolving into an alliance to expel the United States from Central Asia. The SCO appears about to offer membership to India, Pakistan, Mongolia and Iran" (Buchanan).

Pointedly, Iran's belligerent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was invited to attend the SCO as an observer, while America's request to send an observer was turned down!

Additionally, in the midst of all the above bad news, while attention was frequently focused on Iran's bid to become a nuclear power, North Korea launched several short-range missiles, while attempting to launch its latest three-stage missile, the Taepodong-2, capable of striking a large portion of the U.S. mainland with chemical, biological or nuclear warheads.

While the test on the Taepodong-2 failed, the North Koreans could have learned valuable lessons, which would enable them to move into mass production of the Taepodong-2—they have done so with an earlier type of missile. Only China could stop Pyongyang, but Beijing seems reluctant to rein in North Korea's dictator. This could mean that North Korea's actions fit with China's goals, one of which is to increase Chinese power at the expense of American power.

Are we seeing a confederacy against America?

Among the Old Testament Psalms is one warning of a growing confederacy against Israel. The psalm is a prayer against those who conspire against the nation.

A similar situation is arising today for the United States—increased hostility from nations once considered friends, together with long-standing enemies, sometimes strange bedfellows, but sharing a common desire to see an end to America's global supremacy.

"They have said, 'Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more.' For they have consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against You: The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites; Moab and the Hagrites; Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek; Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assyria also has joined with them; they have helped the children of Lot" (Psalm 83:4-8).

As the psalmist realized three millennia ago, only God can save the situation.

"O my God, make them like the whirling dust, like the chaff before the wind! As the fire burns the woods, and as the flame sets the mountains on fire, so pursue them with Your tempest, and frighten them with Your storm. Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek Your name, O LORD. Let them be confounded and dismayed forever; yes, let them be put to shame and perish, that they may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth" (verses 13-18).

One of the promised blessings for obedience that God made to ancient Israel is that they would be victorious in their battles. "The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways" (Deuteronomy 28:7).

Conversely, disobedience to God's laws would result in defeat. "The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them; and you shall become troublesome to all the kingdoms of the earth" (verse 25).

As the last few words of the verse point out, one consequence of disobedience would be that other nations would not want anything to do with Israel or its modern descendants, which include the United States and Britain.

Faced with a nuclear threat from both Iran and North Korea, two of the three countries President George W. Bush labeled an "axis of evil" in his 2002 State of the Union address (the other being Saddam Hussein's Iraq), most Americans seem oblivious to these growing threats to their security.

During a two-week trip to Ghana, I had followed news of these developments with great interest. When I returned to the United States, I turned to the TV for news on my first day back. The big news that day was the birth of a baby in Namibia to two of Hollywood's big-name celebrities.

Few people are able to see clearly the increasing threats to American security and the country's continued leadership of the Western world. The mainstream media remains more concerned about ratings than in helping the American people to understand the growing threats to their nation.

These threats are continuing to mount. Faced with continuing economic challenges, the relentless spread of Islamic fundamentalism throughout the Middle East, the possibility of future nuclear attacks on their interests and now an alarming and growing confederacy among many of their former friends, Americans need to focus upon reality, rather than on totally unimportant gossipy news stories. ❖

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? Request a free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy.*

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

Europe's Growing Energy Worries

To what extent should the European Union be dependent on foreign sources of energy? That question is a matter of growing concern for EU leaders. Case in point: Natural gas.

by Paul Kieffer

When European Union Commission President José Manuel Barroso, EU chief foreign diplomat Javier Solana and Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel visited Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Black Sea resort of Sochi on May 25, they were not in a holiday mood. Instead, their agenda consisted mainly of two important questions for the Russian leader: What does the future hold for the EU-Russian economic partnership, and how dependable are Russian energy deliveries to Europe?



Reuters/Alexander Natruskin

Russian gas giant Gazprom CEO Miller and BASF AG Board Chairman Hambrecht exchange documents as Russian President Putin and German Chancellor Merkel watch.

The meeting between Putin and his European visitors reflects Europe's increasing dependence on foreign energy supplies, primarily from the Persian Gulf and Russia. Of the two regions, Russia is currently the greater source of concern. Russia is viewed by many in Europe as using its vast energy resources to position itself as a global "energy player," a type of "fossil fuels superpower."

In an analysis published in November 2000 on the subject of energy security, the EU Commission warned that by the year 2030 Europe would be importing 90 percent of the petroleum it needs, up from the current 76 percent. The same trend is predicted for natural gas, the other leading component in Europe's energy mix. This year Europe will import about 40 percent of the natural gas it consumes. Three fourths of those imports come from Russia and the rest come mainly from the Persian Gulf. With Europe's own natural gas reserves being depleted—largely in the Netherlands and the North Sea—Russia will be supplying well over half the natural gas used in Europe by 2030.

Russia's energy giant Gazprom is already the dominant energy supplier for natural gas in several new EU countries in eastern Europe. It has a market share of 100 percent in the Baltic States and in Slovakia, 99 percent in Poland and 82 percent in the Czech Republic. Gazprom's current market share of 35 percent in Germany will jump in 2010 when the new North European Gas Pipeline comes on line, supplying Germany directly from Russia via a pipeline that will be laid on the floor of the Baltic Sea.

Limited options

Europe's options for reducing its dependence on foreign energy are limited. Gas and oil account for 60 percent of the energy used in Europe. The rest of Europe's energy comes from domestic sources: Nuclear power (15 percent), coal (18 percent) and renewable energy sources (about 7 percent).

However, environmental concerns create considerable resistance to expanding the use of nuclear power and coal. In Germany, for example, all nuclear power plants currently in use are required to be phased out by 2020. Renewable sources of energy won't make up the gap caused

Europe's options for reducing its dependence on foreign energy are limited. Gas and oil account for 60 percent of the energy used in Europe.

by using less nuclear power and coal. The result? An increase in the demand for oil and natural gas, which have to be imported.

Some argue that Europe's concerns about its growing dependency on Russian natural gas are unfounded. After all, the European Union is Gazprom's main customer. About three fourths of Russian gas exports are delivered to Europe, and the rest is sold to former Soviet republics who generally pay much less than Europe does. In 2005 the EU accounted for 65 percent of Gazprom's total gross receipts, with the bill for imported gas totaling approximately 19.6 billion euros.

It's no surprise that Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller, handpicked by Vladimir Putin for his job, once remarked that "in this century there won't be any problem meeting Europe's gas requirements. Whatever amount of gas Europe needs, that's what Gazprom will deliver."

That seemed to be the sentiment when the first section of the new North European Gas Pipeline was welded together on Dec. 9, 2005, at a ceremony 250 miles northeast of Moscow with Gazprom officials and Germany's new economics minister, Michael Glos, in attendance. According to Glos, the new pipeline highlighted a "further milestone of German-Russian cooperation," important for ensuring Europe's future energy needs.

Wulf Bernotat, head of German natural gas provider E.ON, described the new pipeline as "a direct and reliable connection to Russia's huge natural gas reserves" (*Hamburger Abendblatt,* Dec. 10, 2005).

It seems odd, then, that just five months later concerns about Russia's reliability had become so important. What influenced European thinking?

When the lights went out in the Ukraine

As part of the former Soviet Union, the Ukraine had been one of Gazprom's "special" customers, getting natural gas at a price well below the world market price. However, when Gazprom announced well ahead of January 2006 that a different price structure would take effect this year, the Ukraine balked at the new price. In late December 2005, Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko refused a last minute offer by Russian President Vladimir Putin to continue receiving cheap gas for another three months in exchange for a promise to accept Gazprom's new price starting April 1, 2006. On Jan. 1, 2006, Gazprom engineers cut off supplies of natural gas to the Ukraine.

Gazprom actually runs five gas lines into the Ukraine. Two lines are for the Ukraine, and the other three are transit lines into Europe to supply some of Gazprom's European customers. About 80 percent of Gazprom's natural gas for Europe runs through the Ukraine.

When pressure in the three transit lines started to drop, Gazprom accused the Ukraine of stealing natural gas. Ukrainian officials responded by referring to the transit fees Gazprom had agreed to pay for routing the lines through Ukrainian territory. The fees—paid in natural gas, not cash—could not be collected any other way since the Ukraine had been cut off from Gazprom gas.

When pressure in the gas lines supplying European customers began to drop—especially in Austria—EU leaders urged Russia and the Ukraine to resolve their dispute. Four days later Russia and the Ukraine settled their dispute with a new five-year agreement, and Gazprom turned on the gas again. The mid-winter gas dispute had European analysts and commentators warning about a new "cold war" of a different sort, since much of the natural gas exported to Europe is used for heating.

In the aftermath of the Ukrainian gas crisis, European leaders wondered how reliable Gazprom really is as a supplier. Gazprom's tactics toward the Ukraine were a reminder of what happened when Lithuania became the first of the former Soviet republics to declare its independence from Moscow in 1990. Moscow reacted by simply cutting off oil and gas deliveries to Lithuania. Those facts belied reassurances that gas supplies to Western Europe were never interrupted for political reasons during the Cold War.

EU disunited energy policy

Europe's dependence on imported energy is aggravated by the lack of a joint energy policy for the European Union, which is all the more remarkable since the EU is the world's largest importer of energy. Like other critical areas, including taxation and economic policy, energy policy is still determined at the national level. The result is that Europe has no common approach to dealing with Gazprom. Each individual EU member negotiates its own contracts with the Russian energy giant, and Gazprom has been more than willing to utilize a "divide and conquer" strategy.

The lack of a unified European energy policy also results in contradictory approaches among EU members. While Germany is scheduled to phase out all nuclear power generation by 2020, a large portion of France's electricity is produced by atomic energy. Some of France's excess capacity is occasionally sold to German utility companies—a common practice in Europe. So even though nuclear power will soon no longer be used to generate electricity in Germany, some Germans may still be

(See **"GAS,"** *page 15)*



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The West's Last Chance

Tony Blankley's subtitle asks, "Will We Win the Clash of Civilizations?" (2005, ISBN 0895260158).

Reviewed by Melvin Rhodes



"In much of the West, and particularly in Europe, there is a blind denial that radical Islam is transforming the world. Most European elites and far too many American politicians and journalists believe that our challenges are business and politics as usual."

These are the words of Tony Blankley, a former Brit who now lives in the United States and is editorial page editor of *The Washington Times* and a regular panelist on PBS' *The McLaughlin Group*. They are taken from his new book, *The West's Last Chance: Will We Win the Clash of Civilizations?*

Don't let the first chapter put you off reading the rest of the book! Mr. Blankley begins, incorrectly I thought, by suggesting a fictional scenario that finally makes people realize there really is a clash of civilizations taking place between radical Islam and the West.

That aside, the book is an excellent read. It is thought-provoking, shocking, sobering and even depressing all at the same time.

How have we come to this point? Massive numbers of immigrants from Islamic countries have been arriving in the West since the end of World War II, filling the labor shortage gap created by two world wars and a rapid expansion of Western economies in the last six decades. These immigrants, their children and their grandchildren have now been living in their adopted homes for many years. It is all that the second and third generations know.

But they are not assimilated as other immigrants have been. Moreover, they suffer from a major identity crisis, unable to reconcile the teachings of their Islamic religion with the liberal, permissive attitudes of the West.

Mr. Blankley points out, "We need to grasp the idea of discontinuity." Life as it has been lived the last 60 years is not going to go on indefinitely. The problem of Islamic radicalism has been growing for three decades, is spreading in influence and is building up to a major crisis—the clash of civilizations we have often written about.

"The first discontinuity we must recognize is that the mortal threat we face comes not merely from Osama bin Laden and a few thousand terrorists. Rather, we are confronted with the Islamic world—a fifth of mankind—in turmoil, and insurgent as it has not been in at least five hundred years, if not fifteen hundred years.

"The magnitude of this cultural upheaval cannot yet be measured. Efforts to count the 'jihadist' percentage are pointless, if not dangerously misleading. There is a dynamic process under way that may peter out before it touches one in a hundred Muslims. Or it may impassion a vastly greater number. The latter is more likely."

We should be thankful that at least one media figure is correctly reminding us that the death of a single terrorist, no matter how influential, is not going to make any difference in this growing conflict.

Pointing to historical precedents, Mr. Blankley writes of how our world could suddenly be turned upside down, even more so than on Sept. 11th five years ago.

"King Darius of Persia never imagined—even as he faced Alexander at the Battle of Issus in 333 B.C.—that within three years he would be dead, his Achaemenid Dynasty ended, and the great hegemonic Persian Empire crushed and conquered as a result of that outnumbered Macedonian upstart. American farmers in 1860 never dreamed that within months their husbands, sons, and brothers would be killed in battle and that America would be transformed by continental war. And Londoners in the summer of 1939, my parents included, never expected that forty thousand of their fellow Londoners would soon lie dead in the streets from German bombings, and that within five years Great Britain would never be great again."

It is difficult for most people to comprehend that we in the United States could now be living through our own summer of 1939 with our world about to come crashing down. These are sobering words, but necessary ones. This is a much-needed reality check for everybody enjoying the liberties we have in the West at this time—a warning that they may not continue for much longer!

Mr. Blankley brings attention to Europe's low birthrate compared to the very high birthrate in Islamic countries.

"Europe's problem is compounded by its below-replacement birthrate. Until recently, European elites expected to make up for this potential taxpayer shortfall through immigration, largely from Islamic countries. Now it is beginning to dawn on Europeans that the combination of a shrinking ethnic European population combined with an expanding and culturally assertive Muslim population might lead to the fall of Europe's Western civilization within a century."

He also helps us understand the role the Internet has played in encouraging the spread of terrorism. The Internet has made terrorist training camps redundant—terrorists can now train in the comfort of their very own homes.

"The number of explicitly terrorist-supporting Internet sites has risen from twelve to over two thousand in only a few years. The number of websites engaged in general Islamic argument and propaganda are too numerous to be counted."

Although Mr. Blankley writes from a purely secular viewpoint, it is amazing how his words keep bringing the readers' thoughts back to Bible prophecy, especially the clash of civilizations between the kings of the North and South prophesied in Daniel 11:40-44.

The author also sees clearly the creation of a spiritual vacuum in the West by the decline of religion and how this has contributed to the present crisis with militant Islam.

The book is a must-read for anybody who wants to understand fully the dilemma we are in at this time! ❖

"WHEN," *(Continued from page 16)*
tives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD" (Luke 4:18-19).

To understand the prophetic impact of His words, we must couple them with the words of the Song of Mary. After the angel told her about giving birth to the prophesied Messiah, she declared: "For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name, and His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty" (Luke 1:49-53).

This song of exultation echoes the words of Isaiah, when the prophet describes a world in which "every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together" (Isaiah 40:4-5).

More than simply a miraculous realtering of the surface of the earth, the word "mountain" is used to convey nations, kingdoms, power and authority. This is directly speaking of the total collapse of human society and God's reordering of civilization from top to bottom. These passages define a revolution that is on its way—a revolution advanced by none other than God.

The "when" of timing is essential

Jesus' first visit to this earth in human form certainly conveys the urgency of "when in the course of human events it becomes necessary…," for indeed humanity needed a way to spiritual salvation. In fact, it's interesting how the apostle Paul conveys the special timing: "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Galatians 4:4).

"When" did Christ come? When the Greek tongue was widely spoken, when Roman roads made travel easier and when Jewish synagogues were dispersed throughout the empire—all factors that allowed the rapid spread of the gospel.

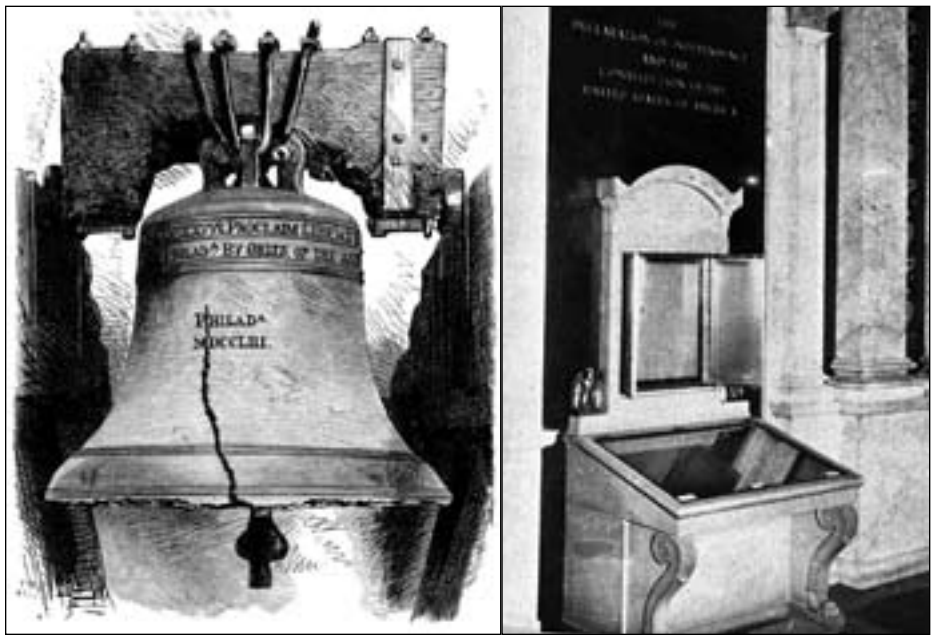
However, Jesus' first coming did not accomplish the transformation of humanity that the prophecies foretold. The human condition shows this to us plainly, with today's North Korean missile launches, anti-Semitic rhetoric coming out of Tehran, butchery in Baghdad and the human hopelessness of Darfur.

Are the words of Jesus, Mary and Isaiah just lost in the wind, or is there yet one more dynamic convergence of time when "in the course of human events it becomes necessary" for actions that will alter all human history—not merely for 230 years, but forever?

Matthew's Gospel speaks of the time in which God must forcibly stop man's inhumanity to man, if the human race is to exist for even one more day. Christ is the speaker: "Unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:22). The Creator of time is also the master of timing, and He is going to intervene to save humanity from itself. If He intervenes too soon, an unappreciative humanity would decry Him as unfair, claiming they could have handled their own problems. If He comes too late—well, there is nothing left to save.

Yes, the Jesus of the manger and the cross is returning as the literal King of Kings and Lord of Lords over this earth and its by then abolished political systems that proved incapable of governing. Talk about a revolution. But not in the historical sense—from below—but from above!

And then, God is going to proclaim liberty to all the world's inhabitants in the fullest application of Jubilee. Imagine a world that is going to be free from the spiritual tyranny of Satan, free from selfishness, free from sin, free to start over, free to make good choices, free to fully understand, embrace and experience God's great love for His creation. Just imagine the collective sigh of relief that will reverberate across the heavens as spiritual, mental and emotion burdens are lifted off the backs and hearts of humanity.



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The Liberty Bell, used to summon citizens to the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence, has the inscription, "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants" from Leviticus 25:10.

God reveals this moment through Paul: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of

God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now" (Romans 8:18-22).

Sounds like a time of Jubilee, doesn't it?

Freedom comes with a price

But none of this comes cheaply. Freedom always demands sacrifice. God gave His only Son that we might have a way back to Him (John 3:16). This price is precious beyond comprehension. Notice in the above passage from Romans that God says believers would suffer in this present age. So suffering is not a stranger to the Christian experience. We need a clear vision of our purpose and our potential, lest the suffering overwhelm us.

Ask yourself, Is the prophesied freedom, instant and forever, worth it? Your answer will determine how you will "walk the walk" the remainder of your days.

Funny, I haven't even thought about how hot this June day is for the last couple of hours. Maybe there is a lesson here. When your mind is on big things, all the little things just seem to melt away, leaving us a clear view of what is truly important.

I wonder if Jefferson, Franklin, Adams, Livingston and Sherman had the same experience as they toiled away at explaining in detail how "in the course of human events it becomes necessary" to do what they were about to do. Did they have a vision that would match their values, and thus allow them to deal with all that was about to befall them? We find their answer in their concluding lines.

Enter with me into that room in Philadelphia of old and look over their shoulders as they, one by one, apply their affirming signatures under these words: "And for the support of this declaration with a firm reliance on the protection of the Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."

Their words also echo God's freedom directive of Isaiah 30:21, "This is the way, walk in it." It is "the way" of sacrifice based upon an understanding that freedom does not come cheaply, whether for temporal gains or spiritual causes. ❖



Robin Webber

"GAS," *(Continued from page 13)*

using electricity generated by nuclear plants in neighboring France.

The lack of a joint energy policy has also delayed any attempt to look for other countries as possible sources for imported energy, which would lessen Europe's heavy reliance on just two regions as suppliers.

For far too long European countries simply relied on free market forces to determine energy pricing. With China's and India's needs for imported energy growing at a fast pace, it will be difficult—if not impossible—for Europe to dislodge itself from its dependence on its current suppliers. With an ever-larger energy crunch looming on Europe's horizon, look for energy policy within the European Union eventually to be decided on a supranational level.

Don't be surprised if Europe's energy crisis begins to affect its foreign policy decisions, especially vis-à-vis the two regions that supply the bulk of European energy imports: Russia and the Persian Gulf. The end-time "king of the North" spoken of in Daniel 11 apparently will be the final ruler of an end-time, European-centered superpower, the same one called "the beast" in Revelation 17.

The final resurrection of the Roman Empire can be seen today in embryonic form in the European Union. This is not to say that all current EU nations will be part of the final configuration, but those that choose to participate will combine to form a powerful military force. Daniel 11:40-43 shows that the end-time king of the North will move against the Middle East.

Other prophecies indicate that religion may be part of the reason for Europe's interest in the Middle East. However, history shows that economic reasons can be a major cause for warfare (James 4:1-2), and Europe's economy depends on oil imports from the Persian Gulf.

Once the king of the North has occupied a considerable portion of the Middle East, news from an area northeast of the Holy Land (verse 44) will be the catalyst for further military action. Is there an important economic factor for Europe northeast of Jerusalem? Yes—the vast natural gas deposits of Russia, located largely in Siberia. ❖

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by Robin Webber

"When in the Course of Human Events..."

It's a muggy and sultry afternoon as I sit down to write this column. The feel of the air and the time of month take me far back to a long-ago summer when others gathered to write in these same last weeks of June.

In the sweltering heat of colonial Philadelphia, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Livingston and Roger Sherman were crafting a document that would revolutionize Americans' social contract with one another. It would come to be known as the Declaration of Independence. How important was its message? Abraham Lincoln would later call it the "sheet anchor" of all American liberties. Its theme? Freedom!

America's republican experiment exploded on the world stage in that summer of 1776, but it had been simmering over a decade, as the British crown, parliament and the colonials could not agree on the colonies' future. But events didn't just hit a flash point on July Fourth. Freedom never simply just happens. It has to be envisioned, considered and, yes, at times given birth through great sacrifice. Before one can reach a destination, the course must be laid out.

As the time of full fruition had now come, the chief drafter, Thomas Jefferson, would throw down the gauntlet in penning the now-famous words, "When in the course of human events it becomes necessary…" The founders of the republic would securely wrap themselves in the rightness of their cause by affirming their position and timing in relationship with the "laws of Nature and Nature's God."

Proclaiming liberty throughout the land

But is such a phrase now lost to history past? Have you considered when else in the course of human events it will become necessary for an even greater revolution to occur? Consider what we find on another piece of iconic Americana that was used to summon the citizenry of Philadelphia to hear the first public reading of this revolutionary document on July 8, 1776.

Engraved on the Liberty Bell is the inscription, "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants." While the bell no longer rings, these words yet speak of a liberty in the making, a course of events still to come.

Let's understand the significance of the context of these words, taken from Leviticus 25:10. The following verse deals with what the Bible refers to as the "Jubilee." This was declared every 50 years on the biblical Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). In the Jubilee year, families that had lost their land had it returned; people who had become indentured servants due to economic conditions were released; debts in general were forgiven.

Talk about a revolution in living! Imagine a brand-new start. Indeed, it was a chance to have a brand-new future without being chained to a past full of mistakes. Yet the Jubilee was not an end in itself, for God used the covenant people of Israel to point to an even greater time of liberation that He had in mind.

To set at liberty those who are oppressed

The thought of Jubilee is not simply an Old Testament concept. Jesus further demonstrated this future focus of Jubilee. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the cap-

(See **"WHEN,"** *page 14)*