World News & Prophecy
BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CURRENT EVENTS

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The Role of a Watchman–What It Means for You

The Bible uses the role of a watchman to describe the work of a prophet among God's people. Is there more to this symbolism than many have understood? The role of a watchman is vital to a full understanding of the work of God in the end time.

by Darris McNeely

To the prophet Ezekiel God said, "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me" (Ezekiel 3:17).

Here is one of the most intriguing descriptive figures used by God in all of prophecy. It is repeated in chapter 33 for emphasis, and sets the stage for the prophet's ministry to the divided houses of Judah and Israel.



Fotosearch

The role of a watchman is critical for the safety and survival of a people.

Just what was the role of a watchman to an ancient city? How does God use the role of a watchman to warn and teach? What does it mean for the work of God today as this world comes to a prophetic crossroads?

It is vital you understand the answer to these questions as events grow increasingly tense in a rapidly changing world order.

A key figure

In the ancient world of agrarian societies, large towers were placed strategically in the fields. There, as the crops were ripening toward harvest, a man would stand watch for weeks at a time, guarding the fields from animals or from thieves who would make off with the crops. With the community's basic food stores at stake, the watchman's role was critical to the townspeople.

We have several references in Scripture to a watcher mounting the city walls in time of stress to survey the scene outside the fortifications. He was situated on a spot from which he could monitor the roads leading to the town. If an enemy approached, he would sound a warning; the town would close its gates

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

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Is All News Local?

Lately I have been reading a lot about the trend in newspapers toward mostly local coverage. Many of the large metro newspapers have cut their foreign news operations. I read a few days ago that the *Boston Globe* had done this.

A recent PBS *Frontline* series on the "news wars" focused on the ongoing woes of the *Los Angeles Times*. Viewing the shrunken profits and newsroom staff, one analyst was arguing that this venerable old paper should focus its efforts on local news and forget trying to be a national paper with an international focus.

I have watched this trend in my local newspaper, *The Indianapolis Star,* for several months now. To keep readership and circulation figures up, their focus has been on issues of local and state interest. A recent Sunday edition offers an example.

The front page had three articles. Above the fold, one dealt with financial aid available for adoptive families and another covered the governor's attempt to increase the cigarette tax. At the bottom an article covered the appointment of a new university president.

To find the first article on international news, you had to go to page 9 for analysis of President Bush's upcoming trip to Latin America. The only other international news item was on page 16, and it dealt with the war in Afghanistan. That's it—two articles.

Page 2 was devoted to promoting the Web version of the paper, which contains blogs, recipes, local sports and more local news coverage. Now all of this is very helpful, especially if I want information on a concert or to catch the latest local scores. And it echoes the trend of most American newspapers. Many newsrooms are equipping reporters with laptops and wireless modems. They are expected to spend the day in the field gathering news, writing on local issues and updating their news site several times a day.

Many newspaper executives feel this is the best way to do the job, while maintaining the attention of a younger, wired audience. And they are right. It is the future of newspapers and content delivery. Whether we will see the demise of newsprint is debatable.

But we are definitely witnessing a sea change in the way news is delivered, viewed and understood. More news is available to us than ever before. I can sit at my computer and gather information, including photos and video, from news sources throughout the planet. Most of it is free. We are awash in information.

Information by itself is not enough. We have to understand what it means. And we cannot fully understand today's world events without an understanding of Bible prophecy. A balanced, thorough knowledge of this unique source makes history come alive and helps us understand the complex, rapidly changing events of today's world.

If people's tastes are more to local news, they will not be keeping up with major international events that will shape our world beyond today.

Local news can be helpful. But it will be events in the Middle East, China, India, Europe and South America that will determine much of our quality of life over the next two decades. As America discovered on 9/11, we cannot take a holiday from history. Events and people can come knocking on our door with devastating consequences.

In Revelation 16:12-14 we see described a gathering of armies from the east and other parts of the world in a "place called Armageddon" (verse 16), in modern Israel.

There will also be a time of great spiritual deception worked by Satan. Christ pronounces a blessing on those who will watch and discern those times, thereby avoiding involvement with that satanic power. "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame" (verse 15).

So, go ahead and keep up with the scores. I do. But keep your eyes on the international horizon. There is a lot going on there that you need to be aware of. We will do our part to keep you informed. —*Darris McNeely*


Darris McNeely

"WATCHMAN" *(Continued from page 1)*
and prepare for battle.

You can also imagine the watcher standing vigil at other times, observing the daily life of the city. He could see much of the activity in the streets and markets. He knew the people, their work, their habits and their lifestyles. If his position was near the city gate, he could also observe the business of the city transacted by its officials (see Ruth 4:1-12).

No wonder God uses this role to illustrate the job of the prophets He sent to comment on society's behavior, as well as to deliver messages of warning and instruction.

Prophets set as watchmen

By focusing on the Old Testament prophets, we understand the full meaning of the symbolism of a watchman. There may be more than you have noticed before.

We have already noted Ezekiel 3 where God told the prophet to warn Israel of its sins and His impending punishment. He adds, "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me" (verse 17).

Notice it is God's message, not Ezekiel's message or any other prophet's message. It is always God's message delivered through the human instrument. The warning comes from God in language phrased to fit the situation and designed to bring people to repentance. Let's keep this point firmly in mind.

Continuing, "When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul" (verses 18-19).

The prophet had the duty to deliver the message: Unless the citizens of Israel and Judah acknowledged their sins, turned from them, repented and began again to obey God's law, they would die in their sins. Regardless of how individuals responded to the warning, if they heard the message, the prophet had done his job and was no longer responsible. Only if the prophet did not deliver the admonition would he be judged along with the wicked.

Verses 20 and 21 explain another aspect. If a righteous person turned to sin, he would suffer the penalty, but the prophet would also be held liable for not giving him instruction. If the prophet gave adequate warning, instruction and positive teaching, the righteous could understand the consequences of turning from the right path. This could help motivate him to stay firm to the faith, a choice that would vindicate the prophet's work.

You get the sense here that a part of the prophet's message was showing the people how to live and maintain their faith. It was not just a strident message focused only on pointing out their problems. If the goal is to get people to turn back to the Word of God, then the message must also show the benefits of doing so. It must show the positive, better way of life that God desires His people to live.

Was the message delivered?

Did Ezekiel deliver this warning message to Israel? Consider this. Ezekiel was among the captives from the nation of Judah taken to Babylon during the first siege of Jerusalem in 597 B.C. He was a contemporary of Daniel. The nation of Israel, the northern 10-tribe nation, had been in captivity for over 120 years.

The house of Israel was to hear the message, but their sins had already caused them to go into captivity. They had already been punished. It leaves us with the question: Is there a future fulfillment of this prophecy? Was it to go to the modern descendants of the house of Israel living in different lands at a future time?



Scott Kelley

The northern 10 tribes, called the house or kingdom of Israel, had been taken captive more than 120 years before Ezekiel was given a warning message for them. How or when would they hear it?

The answer is yes! However, the explanation requires more detail than we can cover in this article. We present it in our booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy.* Write for your free copy or read it online at www.gnmagazine.org/booklets/US/.

This point has not gone unnoticed by scholars. Here is one observation by Hershel Shanks in his book, *Ancient Israel:* "The preaching of Ezekiel shows that not all of these communities (of deported Israelites) had been assimilated by pagan cultures; much of this biblical book is concerned with the reunification of the Judean and Israelite branches of the nation after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Indeed, some passages in Ezekiel read as if they are actu-



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God's people see the dark gathering clouds on the world's horizon that spell the end of Satan's time as the god of this world and author of all its evil.

ally directed at specific Israelites—that is, northern communities in exile" (pp. 130-131, 154).

The question then is, when would these prophecies apply to Israel again? And when would they be given? Ezekiel was captive, and we have no indication he went to Israel in his day to give this message. The answer must be that God's message has a direct application to the modern descendants of these ancient people.

What will the watchman say?

Let's look closer at what a watchman is to do by bringing in what Isaiah tells us about those who would preach the gospel of peace.

The role of a watchman is not limited to speaking only about the sins and problems of the society. The watchman was also charged with proclaiming good news about the paths of salvation.

Notice this in Isaiah: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!' Your watchmen shall lift up their voices, with their voices they shall sing together; for they shall see eye to eye when the LORD brings back Zion.

"Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem! For the LORD has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (Isaiah 52:7-10).

To Jerusalem and the land of Israel God says the watchmen will hold a vigil day and night for the peace of the people. "I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

"The LORD has sworn by His right hand and by the arm of His strength: 'Surely I will no longer give your grain as food for your enemies; and the sons of the foreigner shall not drink your new wine, for which you have labored. But those who have gathered it shall eat it, and praise the LORD; those who have brought it together shall drink it in My holy courts.'

"Go through, go through the gates! Prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway! Take out the stones, lift up a banner for the peoples! Indeed the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the world" (Isaiah 62:6-11).

Here we see the watchman role given to a group of people charged with a prayer vigil for the fortunes of Israel. These people, by their presence and their prayers, seek to keep the city from suffering the ravaging effects of evil.

These passages in Isaiah paint an image of godly people who are given unique vision into the world of today and the world to come. They understand the universal application of the gospel of the Kingdom of God. They see that Kingdom will be brought to earth and offer salvation not just to Israel but also to all nations. They see the reuniting of the houses of Israel within its ancient borders as the beginning of the times of restoration of all things spoken by Peter in Acts 3.

But they also have insight into the world at the end of this age. They see the dark gathering clouds on the world's horizon that spell the end of Satan's time as the god of this world and author of all its evil. This leads them to mount the "walls" of society and shout a warning to any who would hear. To say, "God is sovereign, He will bring a time of judgment on the world to prove that He alone is God. All other gods erected by humans to hide His truth will be destroyed."

This message will also include teaching that will show any who listen the way to personal peace. It will show the true teaching of God and the way to salvation. It will be a message to show how one can choose to escape this time of judgment God will bring upon the world.

We will show who this godly group of "watchmen" are, how they view this world and what it means for you in part two of this article. ❖

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.*

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50 Years After the Treaty of Rome: From the Battlefield to the Conference Table

After a long and bloody history, Europe has made amazing strides in the last 50 years. But now the European Union is at a crossroads. Where will it go from here, and what do Europe's choices portend for the future of the rest of the world?

by Paul Kieffer

On March 25, 1957, the representatives of six Western European nations met in Rome to sign a treaty that has since shaped a new Europe from a divided postwar continent. When the treaty took effect on Jan. 1, 1958, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands became the European Economic Community (EEC).

After centuries of warfare and bloodshed, the Treaty of Rome was an ambitious step forward on the path to securing a peaceful future for Europe. The founding members agreed to develop an integrated economic zone with freedom of movement for financial capital, goods, services and people.

They also committed themselves to be subject to common policies for agriculture, competition, trade and transportation, with "community law" taking precedence over national law. The concept of supranational law was a major leap in a Europe made up of competing national states.

Those founding members may have been motivated by different viewpoints. Under President Charles de Gaulle, France might have seen itself as the potential leader of the new project. Germany and Italy could have looked on the EEC as a further step in their rehabilitation within the community of European nations. The Benelux countries tended to have open economies anyway, and the integration of Germany into a larger European context held the promise of protecting them from again being overrun and occupied by their much larger neighbor.

"An ever closer union"

The preamble to the Treaty of Rome invited other European countries to participate in the EEC, promising to "lay the foundations for an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe." Only 10 years after its start, EEC members achieved a customs union for a range of products that has since been expanded to be nearly all-inclusive.



Reuters/Wolfgang Rattay

A worker prepares a European Union flag outside the assembly hall for a European convention in Rome in 2003.

The success of the community attracted more members, and the original EEC was absorbed into the European Union (EU) in 1993. The unification of Europe via the EU was largely completed on May 1, 2004, when the biggest group of new members ever admitted (10) became EU members, bringing the total to 25. On Jan. 1, 2007, two new members in Eastern Europe, Bulgaria and Romania, brought the number of countries in the EU to 27.

The success of the Treaty of Rome can be measured by today's results. The EEC was to promote economic prosperity among its members by a system of economic integration. The EU has become the world's largest contiguous market in terms of its gross domestic product, and its largest national economy, Germany, leads the world in exports. Germany especially benefits from the customs union within the EU.

The subsequent Schengen Treaty has effectively removed border controls among participating EU members, and the euro was a further remark-

What does Bible prophecy have to say about Europe's future?

able step toward full integration by transferring domestic monetary policy—and with it a good measure of national sovereignty—to the European Central Bank (ECB).

Considering that 50 years prior to the Treaty of Rome, Europe was divided into a system of entangling alliances that led to World War I, the development of Europe since 1957 is amazing. How will the EU develop in the next 50 years?



Reuters/Jean-Marc Loos

German chancellor and president of the European Council, Angela Merkel, poses with German president of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Poettering, at the European Parliament Jan. 17, 2007.

Europe at a crossroads

With 27 members comprising most of Europe, the EU is confronted by various challenges and two major questions as it looks to the future. Many Europeans describe the union with comments like "eurocracy" or "eurosclerosis," reflecting the impression of a distant, cumbersome entity. That's borne out in its decision-making process, which needs to be amended as more members are admitted.

The original mechanism provided each member state the right to veto any agreement by the EU Council of Ministers. All decisions have to be unanimous, which worked reasonably well when there were fewer members. The veto right also meant that smaller countries like Luxembourg had the same negotiating power as the larger members. As a result, the final negotiations on EU internal treaties tended to become late-night bargaining sessions where smaller member states extracted favorable concessions in exchange for their votes to approve a decision.

It is clear that a 27-member EU cannot function efficiently on this basis. The proposed EU constitution was intended to rectify this weakness by instituting a "double majority" decision process: A majority of member countries comprising a majority of the EU's population would be sufficient to approve EU decisions. However, the constitution has to be approved by the existing approval process, meaning if only one EU member votes no, it is finished. That is exactly what happened in the spring of 2005 when voters in France and the Netherlands rejected it.

Officially the EU constitution is on hold during a "period of reflection." However, in January German Chancellor Angela Merkel voiced her commitment to get the ball rolling again and has made the issue a priority during her term as president of the rotating EU presidency of the Council of Ministers.

Chancellor Merkel told the European Parliament that not resolving the constitutional impasse would be a "historic failure." As long as any EU member is willing to put the issue to a national referendum, the chance of getting the constitution approved is marginal, even if the EU uses the familiar tactic of repeatedly putting the issue back on the agenda until voters give the "right" answer.

The other major question the EU must answer is how much farther its expansion should go. Balkan countries aspiring for membership are likely candidates, but what about Muslim Turkey? If Turkey is admitted to the EU, what about other Muslim countries on the fringe of Europe?

Europe's traditional population is declining, while its Muslim minority grows due to a much higher birth rate. The EU needs to consider the long-term implications of admitting predominantly Muslim states as full members, especially in view of existing latent tensions in several EU countries.

The EU also has several economic issues needing resolution. Social welfare reform and a leveling of tax rates are important considerations for the future health of the euro zone. Currently, some 40 percent of EU funds are allocated to agricultural subsidies. Joint economic and tax policies within the euro zone would likely mean a further transfer of sovereignty to a central authority.

Security concerns since Sept. 11, 2001, and the Madrid bombings of March 2004 have led to increased cooperation among the interior ministries of EU members. The EU has also deployed its troops in peace-keeping missions in the Balkans, the Congo and most recently along the border of Lebanon and Israel.

The basic question faced by the EU, as it looks to its next 50 years, is: Will the EU proceed on to full political union, or will it be largely a free trade zone with its members retaining sovereignty in key areas like foreign policy and defense?

Europe in Bible prophecy

What does Bible prophecy have to say about Europe's future? In Revelation 17 the apostle John saw a vision of a Beast that represents the revived Roman Empire dominated by religious influence. Centuries earlier, the prophet Daniel saw a comparable vision (Daniel 2 and 7).

John sees a "great whore," picturing a religious institution as one "with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication" (Revelation 17:2). Politics and religion have been inseparable through almost 1,700 years of European history

following the conversion of the Emperor Constantine to Roman Catholicism in the early years of the fourth century.

John then describes a union of "ten kings [leaders] who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour [a short time] as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast" (verses 12-13).

The "beast" appears to be some kind of central authority, to which the leaders of 10 nations or groups of nations voluntarily cede their power (sovereignty). In Europe's history, empires have been formed by conquest and intimidation instead of voluntary submission. The wording of verse 13 corresponds to a variation on that pattern, one already well established within the European Union.

Verse 14 reveals the time setting: "These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them..." The Lamb is none other than Jesus Christ. Clearly, at the time of the end of man's rule, there is to be a revived Roman Empire, whose armies will literally fight Christ at His return!

This is not to say that the European Union in its current form is the Beast or the exact configuration of nations that will make up those "ten kings" who cede their authority to the Beast. As some would point out, the EU currently has 27 members with other nations knocking on its door.

On the other hand, the Bible's use of the word *kings* in Revelation 17:12 does not have to mean literal kings. While in John's day it described a government or its leader, today's language and geopolitics could take on a different configuration.

The "kings" could represent national leaders or national entities that cede their sovereignty to a central source. In the case of the EU, that has been done most often by national governments proposing agreement with EU treaties and national parliaments approving the proposal, making it binding legislation.

Some predict the eventual collapse of the EU under the weight of its own institutions or a defection of several of its current members. Exiting the EU might not be an option. EU member states voluntarily became part of a mutually dependent community, making it more than just an alliance that one could leave at any time. Any country that leaves the EU would lose access to its huge internal market and financial institutions.

A more likely scenario is one made possible by the treaty of Maastricht: Some EU members will be content to remain in the EU and utilize the advantage of being part of a huge economic zone, while other EU members will proceed along the path to full political union, including joint foreign policy and military authority.

What would prompt them to take these steps? Most likely it will be some major crisis requiring quick action, like a major upheaval on Europe's southern doorstep, the Middle East, or large-scale terrorist attacks within the EU.

Whatever the cause will be, out of today's EU will arise a group of 10 nations or a combination of nation groups that will fulfill the vision revealed to the apostle John: "These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast."

Believe it or not, this is what Bible prophecy reveals about where events in Europe are ultimately heading!

For more information, see our booklets *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy.* ❖

Recommended Reading



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

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How Can You Make Sense of the News?



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- Audio discussion (podcasts) of what's happening in the world around us.
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World News & Prophecy

International Power Shifts Threaten the Western World

Western global supremacy is definitely on the wane as key Asian nations make significant economic progress while Middle Eastern conflicts trouble the West politically and militarily. We are in desperate need of a biblical compass so we can grasp the tragic implications of how these potentially massive political power shifts will impact the West's way of life.

by John Ross Schroeder

A whole range of knotty global problems makes for an uncertain future. Clearly we need help from a force outside ourselves to ensure our survival.

The leaders of China, Russia and India seek a new multipolar world that would significantly counter U.S. political and economic power.

According to a recent article in *The Times,* "India, China and Russia account for 40 per cent of the world's population, a fifth of its economy and more than half of its nuclear warheads. *Now they appear to be forming a partnership to challenge the US-dominated world order* that has prevailed since the end of the Cold War" (Jeremy Page, "Giants Meet to Counter US Power," Feb. 15, 2007, p. 47, emphasis added throughout).

Foreign ministers from these three countries held a crucial February meeting to discuss the possibilities of a new world order—a world no longer dominated by America and the West, a world they can reshape more to their liking.

The decline of the West and the diffusion of world power

Author Samuel Huntington articulates an alternate view to the reality of present Western domination in so many aspects of our world. "The second picture of the West is very different. It is of a civilization in decline, its share of world political, economic and military power going down relative to that of other civilizations. *The West's victory in the Cold War has produced not triumph but exhaustion.*

"The West is increasingly concerned with its internal problems and needs, as it confronts slow economic growth, stagnating populations, unemployment, huge government deficits, a declining work ethic, low savings rates, and in some countries including the United States, social disintegration, drugs and crime.

"Economic power is rapidly shifting to East Asia, and military power and political influence are starting to follow. India is on the verge of an economic takeoff and the Islamic world is increasingly hostile toward the West" (*The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order,* 1998, p. 82).

Bear in mind that this book was written before 9/ll and the current Iraq war. Huntington's assessment is generally accurate, although some negative trends he predicted haven't happened in every single Western nation.

Notice a much more recent specific assessment by Timothy Garton Ash, noted British author and commentator: "China and India, playing the economic game on terms largely invented by the West, are beating the West at their own game" ("Davos 07: How Power Has Shifted," *The Guardian,* Jan. 24, 2007, p. 31).

Meanwhile Russia has petroleum resources in abundance, supplying most of Europe with its natural gas needs. The Russians, flush with cash from petroleum and gas sales, are currently seeking to vastly improve their military technology as well.

Here in the 21st century, different civilizations are forced to interact with one another in ways never conceived of in the 19th century and before. With some notable exceptions, powerful civilizations that existed simultaneously largely interacted on their peripheries. But starting with World War I in the early 20th century, every powerful nation (or alliance of nations) began to seriously impact others in the world. This interaction has grown exponentially in our technologically complex age.

Clearly globalization is a big deal for the 21st century, affecting economics, politics and culture. More and more political leaders are, in fact, sharing power with corporate

business giants that are beginning to dominate the world economically primarily through the Internet. American unipolarity is gradually disappearing.

The threats to America are multifaceted

The International Institute for Strategic Studies recently completed its annual global military survey. Journalist Ian Black summed up some of the difficulties facing America in particular:

"The United States is still powerful enough to shape an agenda for international activity, but too weak to implement it globally as it faces uncertain prospects in Iraq, an escalating confrontation over Iran's nuclear ambitions and a robust challenge to its military hegemony from an increasingly assertive China" ("Powerful Yet Weak—a US Dilemma," *The Guardian,* Feb. 1, 2007).

America is now tied down militarily on two fronts while much of the rest of the world is becoming increasingly resistant to American power and influence.

The United States is also confronted by an "arc of crisis" in the Middle East, a region racked by every type of instability. Western politicians seem to pin their hopes for a workable solution on somehow reactivating the moribund peace process between the Palestinians and Israel. But in spite of a Saudi-sponsored peace effort between rival Palestinian factions, the chaos tends to continue and such impediments seriously imperil the hoped-for "road map to peace."

Terrorist insurgents are, of course, a constant worry, whether in Iraq, Afghanistan or elsewhere. Their brand of warfare has seriously challenged the American military machine. Suitable adjustments to a different type of warfare are not easily forthcoming. Some experts say that better intelligence and more sophisticated psychological warfare are needed.

(To understand why the United States is experiencing such mega-difficulties today, the nation's ethnic and prophetic origins and where the country is ultimately headed, request our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy.* In today's world climate, we need to be very sure of the biblical identity of key nations.)

Where do we go from here?

As these shifting trends indicate, humankind's overall view of the future appears clouded and confused. Many are unhappy about today and increasingly unsure about tomorrow. A whole range of knotty global problems makes for an uncertain future. Clearly we need help from a force outside ourselves to ensure our survival. *U.S. News and World Report* once referred to the need for a "strong hand from someplace."

Nearly 62 years ago U.S. Gen. Douglas MacArthur stated that solutions have to be "of the spirit if we are to save the flesh." The missing dimension is God Himself. Only His revealed Word in the Bible can help us find our way out. We need a biblical compass to make our way through this maze of enormous problems.

Sadly, the Bible is largely ignored in our increasingly secular world. Most who make up the intelligentsia blindly accept the theory of evolution and its corollaries, that there is no God and humankind itself is a cosmic accident. These false assumptions are the foundational basis for much of modern education.

But, in fact, the Bible is the basic textbook for all humanity and the nucleus upon which all right knowledge can be built. The monumental sufferings we see are a direct result of our turning away from its teachings and substituting our own ways for God's (see Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

What the Bible says about God's sovereignty

The Bible gives us a completely contrasting perspective from the shifting sands of our increasingly atheistic secular world. God challenges mankind to look to Him in its pages because He is always there. His Word tells us that our Creator is in control. He is absolutely sovereign!

Consider the words of the psalmist: "The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect. *The counsel of the LORD stands forever,* the plans of His heart to all generations" (Psalm 33:10-11). At the end of the day God's plan and purpose for humankind will prevail against any and all odds.

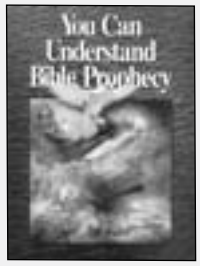
The psalmist continues: "The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth" (verses 13-14). The prophet Isaiah adds: "All nations before Him are as nothing" (Isaiah 40:17).

The Bible shows us how to stay sane and rational in this world of growing uncertainty. Between a fourth and a third of our majestic Creator's Word consists of prophecy that foretells the future.

Our free booklet *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* asks (and answers!) these crucial questions: "Why is our world so uncertain? Is nothing predictable? Must we live in ignorance of the future? Can we discover a source for information about where the world is headed?"

As this attractively presented publication shows, biblical prophecy has a structure and a firm foundation. It explains the fundamentals of biblical prophecy and takes the reader to the end of "this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4) and then through to the millennial reign of Jesus Christ and on beyond. Request or download your free copy of *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy.* ❖

Recommended Reading



Can you really know what the future holds? Request a free copy of *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy.* This booklet gives a helpful overall picture of God's prophetic plans for humankind and the good news beyond today's troubled world.

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

The World Is Watching Nigerian Elections

What happens in Nigeria, the world's sixth largest producer of oil, is of strategic interest to a host of nations. Internal issues also make the country a target for terrorist recruiting and a possible new front in the war on terror. These factors have the world's powers watching the April presidential election closely.

by Cecil E. Maranville

Nigeria is potentially one of the world's wealthiest nations. Its oil reserves rank it in the top 10 nations, and it has enough natural gas to light the entire African continent for nearly a thousand years! Yet it is one of the poorest nations and receives hundreds of millions in foreign aid annually. How is this possible?

International observers have called Nigeria the most mismanaged economy in Africa. As Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo "was pleading for more aid at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in February 2005, four of Obasanjo's state governors were being probed by London police for money laundering. The most galling was the case of Plateau State Governor, Chief Joshua Dariye, who was accused of diverting some $90 million into his private bank accounts…

The world is watching to see what the next president will do about Nigeria's monumental problems.

"In February 2005, Nigeria's police chief, Inspector General Tafa Balogun, was forced into early retirement after investigators probing money-laundering allegations found $52 million hidden in Balogun's network of 15 bank accounts. At the time of his early retirement, Balogun had been on the job for only two years.

"Even Nigeria's senate is riddled with scams and inflated contracts, with proceeds pocketed by sitting senators. According to the president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria, Chief Jaiye K. Randle, individual Nigerians are currently lodging $170 billion in foreign banks—far more than Nigeria's foreign debt of $35 billion" (Thompson Ayodele, Franklin Cudjoe, Temba A. Nolutshungu and Charles K. Sunwabe, "African Perspectives on Aid: Foreign Assistance Will Not Pull Africa Out of Poverty," CATO Institute *Economic Development Bulletin,* Sept. 14, 2005).

New management

In April of this year, Nigerians go to the polls to elect a new manager. President Obasanjo is concluding his second term and the constitution mandates that he must step down. The world is watching to see what the next president will do about the nation's monumental problems.

Nigeria is the fifth largest oil supplier to the United States (9 percent of America's needs). Under the Bush administration's post-9/11 energy plan, the United States will increase the Nigerian share to 25 percent of America's needs. Other customers include Spain, South Korea, India, France, Germany, Japan, China, Taiwan, the Philippines and Thailand.

Yet oil production in Nigeria is a profoundly troubled industry. U.S. counterterrorism officials fear that the country is a prime target for the next front in the war on terror. The American navy now patrols within Nigeria's 200-mile limit, helping to guard against oil theft.

You would think that oil wealth would propel this huge nation—the most populous in Africa—to prosperity. Yet while the nation has earned hundreds of billions of dollars in oil revenues between 1965 and 2004, World Bank figures show that the annual per capita income actually *declined* from $250 to $212.

It's one of the poorest countries in the world. "Between 1970 and 2000…the number of [Nigerians] subsisting on less than one dollar a day grew from 36% to more than 70%, from 19 [million] to a staggering 90 [million]" (Michael Watts, "Crisis in Nigeria," Feb. 1, 2007, www.counterpunch.org).

Where the money went

Where did the billions of oil revenues go? Four years ago, President Obasanjo appointed the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to investigate. He selected a former policeman and prosecutor as the chief anticorruption enforcer, Nuahu Ribadu.

Ribadu is a "lanky man with black-rimmed

glasses and a boyish grin… [and] doesn't come across as someone who [would] instill fear in Nigerian children—let alone corrupt politicians and businessmen… When Nigerian parents want their children to behave, they don't threaten them with a spanking. Nowadays, they say: 'If you keep that up, I'll tell Ribadu'" (David Clark Scott, "Strong Convictions: Nigeria's First Anticorruption Czar," *Christian Science Monitor,* Feb. 8, 2007).

To date, Ribadu's commission has recovered about $5 billion of an estimated $380 billion that political and military leaders squandered or stole outright.

These comparisons give some perspective on how monstrous that theft is. "That is as much as all the western aid given to Africa [not merely to Nigeria] in almost four decades… [It is] equivalent to 300 years of British aid for the continent… [It is] six times the American help given to post-war Europe under the Marshall Plan" (David Blair, "£220bn Stolen by Nigeria's Corrupt Rulers," *The Telegraph,* June 26, 2005).

It would be naive to expect a quick turnaround in such massive corruption. Nonetheless, Ribadu's EFCC claims to have reduced theft of the country's oil revenues from a mind-boggling figure of 70 percent in 2003 to "only" 40 percent in 2005.

Initially, many Nigerians believed the EFCC was merely a pawn of President Obasanjo, for it appeared that far more members of opposition parties were being investigated than those of the president's PDP party. Even the vice president was charged with corruption and theft after he switched parties to oppose the president. The EFCC reported that he siphoned nearly $150 million dollars of federal oil money into his private accounts ($90,000 of which was linked to cash found in the freezer of U.S. Congressman William Jefferson).

However, on Feb. 19, Ribadu announced that the EFCC was now investigating President Obasanjo himself for possible illegal business dealings.

In a bizarre twist, the sitting president, vice president, governors and their deputies are exempt from prosecution, according to the Nigerian constitution. The clause was intended to prevent frivolous lawsuits from crippling the government, but it has provided unscrupulous politicians with a legal umbrella under which to pillage oil revenues.



Reuters

Chinese President Hu Jintao is welcomed by current Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo. The world is watching to see who will be Nigeria's next president.

A multitude of problems

Nigeria's oil production represents the worst of this present world in numerous other ways. Multinational corporations grow rich from the oil fields, working from within their walled compounds, where their employees live the lifestyle of any well-to-do Westerner.

Just outside the walls are the poverty-stricken Nigerian residents of the Delta State. Those who can get work perform menial jobs, literally cleaning up the remnants of oil spills with shovels. Others make a living by selling to the foreigners who leave their compounds to venture into the nearby towns. Prostitution is rampant, with all the diseases and humiliation it causes (there are 3.6 million HIV-infected Nigerians).

Only a small percentage of the youths can find work, and many of them migrate to other states. Those who stay drift into violent gangs that fight among themselves. In a further exploitive move, politicians hire the gangs to create problems and/or to provide protection in election season. At other times, the gangs take foreign workers hostage for ransom, which has become a thriving "business."

One of the ways that oil revenues have been stolen is through "bunkering," tapping into the maze of pipelines that crisscross the country and siphoning off oil for sale on the black market. Lately, the gangs are getting into the act, stealing and selling oil to Eastern European nations in return for still more weapons. The gangs are becoming so well-armed that they could fend off the Nigerian military!

Nigeria has natural gas reserves of over 600 trillion cubic feet. Sadly, since 1970, the gas is simply burned off or flared, because there is no infrastructure by which to capture and market it. People in some towns in the Delta literally haven't seen darkness in over 35 years, as they live in the light of pillars of flame hundreds of feet high, spewing smoke and toxins into their environment.

"Health problems associated with

(See **"NIGERIA,"** *page 13)*

Ghana at 50

Fifty years ago, on March 6, 1957, Ghana became the first independent black African nation. Expectations were high. What followed was decades of corruption, political instability and economic collapse. Today Ghana is finally on the road to recovery.

by Melvin Rhodes

Ghana turned 50 on March 6 this year. The British colony of the Gold Coast became the independent nation of Ghana in 1957; it was the first black African nation to receive its independence. Within a decade almost every African nation was a completely independent sovereign country.

After returning from a recent trip to Ghana, I learned that a person traveling with me had conducted a private survey of everybody old enough to remember, "Which was better, Ghana or the Gold Coast?" Without exception, all replied "Gold Coast."

Asked to elaborate, answers mostly revolved around the economic situation. Before independence, they felt, the economy was more stable. One man commented on how in colonial times money was worth something. Others commented on how the infrastructure was better.

There was also political stability prior to 1957. This came to an end with the first government, which rapidly became a dictatorship. Within a decade the first president was overthrown in a coup. Many coups and attempted coups followed in the next 20 years, with frequent changes of government. High inflation rates severely affected the economy, and it collapsed in the mid-1980s.

Ghana is now one of the first African nations to recover from the political cycle of instability that contributed to economic failure. Today the country again has a democratic system of government and is growing economically.

However, Ghana is now one of the first to recover from the political cycle of instability that contributed to economic failure. Today the country again has a democratic system of government and is growing economically. The currency has finally stabilized against the American dollar after years of rapid decline. Hopefully, other nations will follow Ghana's recent example.

Two movies highlight problems

Two of Africa's biggest problems have been accurately portrayed in recent movies. *Blood Diamond,* set in the West African nation of Sierra Leone (and filmed in South Africa), tells the story of an African man separated from his family and forced into slave labor in the country's diamond mines. The film accurately reflects the violence into which much of Africa has fallen since independence.

The Last King of Scotland is another film that highlights the violence and political instability that has plagued the continent in the last five decades. On Jan. 25, 1971, Ugandan President Milton Obote was overthrown in a coup led by the head of the army, Gen. Idi Amin.

A seven-year reign of terror followed, in which at least 300,000 people were killed. The economy was also devastated during this period. Uganda, too, is improving, but a significant part of the country is under rebel control.

Africa has suffered a repeating cycle. Following an election, politicians become corrupt, taking advantage of their influential positions. This then influences those under them, in the government bureaucracy and the police, to also be corrupt.

Eventually, the military intervenes as the politicians will not step down. The military, however, is frequently incompetent, so things only get worse. Eventually, the people demand a return to a civilian government, which then begins a repetition of the cycle.

Endemic corruption

During my latest visit to Ghana, on one 175-mile journey between two cities, we were stopped by the police seven times. Each time, police officers wanted something, usually a small amount of money that would enable them to buy a meal.

More seriously, a recent episode of *Oprah Winfrey* highlighted the problem of child slavery in Ghana, a practice the police ignore. The program was inspired by an article in the *New York Times* that showed a 6-year-old boy named Mark who was sold by his parents to fishermen for a small sum. Mark's responsibility under his new "owners" was to keep bailing water out of their boat. Other boys that he worked with were purchased by the fishermen to dive into deep waters and untangle the nets. Many die doing this.

It's ironic that the *Oprah Winfrey* program was shown early in 2007, the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade throughout the British Empire. Following that significant event,

the British Royal Navy patrolled the seas along the West African coast for over a century, with the authority to stop the ships of any nation and free the slaves. Slavery itself was abolished throughout the empire in 1833.

Ghana today is not the only nation where slavery is back. According to UNICEF, slavery is back in every single African country. It has again become a major problem.

Ghana's President John Kufour has condemned slavery, speaking in particular of the custom of *trokosi,* in which people will give their daughters to traditional healers as payment for services rendered. The president has also apologized for the country's contribution to the slave trade that was practiced throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, acknowledging that slavery would not have been possible without the involvement of the indigenous population.

Ghana has improved considerably under the present government, but the economy has still not fully recovered from five decades of mismanagement. The standard of living for most Ghanaians remains painfully low. Fifty years ago the per capita income was higher than in some European countries. Today, many Ghanaians seek employment in Europe, so that they can send money home.

Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of the independent Republic of Ghana is that it has avoided the tribal conflict that has plagued so many African nations. Although Ghanaians still identify strongly with their tribe of origin, they also identify with Ghana as a country. Intertribal marriages are also common and many people live in areas populated by members of other tribes, reflecting that they feel quite secure.

Another significant achievement is Ghana's continuing dedication to freedom of religion. Churches flourish in the country. People can frequently be seen reading their Bibles and most attend church more than once a week. Religious services often last for hours. Everybody dresses his or her best as Ghanaians fervently believe that they are coming before God when attending a worship service. They show enthusiasm that is often sadly lacking in many of today's Western nations.

However, this enthusiasm for worshipping the God of the Bible does not always change peoples' lives the way that it should. If people took their Christianity more seriously, there would be no problems with corruption or abuse of children.

This is how individual Ghanaians themselves can make a big difference to their nation. Those who study their Bibles should be familiar with a passage of Scripture in the book of Romans that encourages Christians to be different. "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

It's not easy to make a difference, to determine that, in the midst of a continent renowned for corruption, you yourself will not be corrupt, but this is what is needed. It's the only way Africa can move forward as people change individually, one by one. ❖

"NIGERIA," *(Continued from page 11)*

gas flares include respiratory diseases, cancer, acute nonlymphocytic leukemia and a variety of blood-related disorders. The environmental problems, including acid rain and damage to water bodies and farms, are no less horrendous" (Nnimmo Bassey, "Trade and Human Rights in the Niger Delta of Nigeria," June 2, 2006, www.worldhunger.org).

Bad news, good news

Currently, with the help of the World Bank, Nigeria is constructing pipelines by which it can begin to market its natural gas to its neighbors. Environmentalists warn that will not end all of the flaring, but the federal government promises to spend 13 percent of oil production royalties on improving life in the Delta.

Nigeria is clearly an important country to Africa and to the world. It is blessed with a number of resources. Yet it has been cursed with some leaders who put personal greed ahead of their responsibility to care for the governed. However, it is a bad-news, good-news situation, with the policing of corruption and the institution of clean-up programs.

Nigerians want—and they should have—a peaceful, secure existence, being able to work and enjoy reasonable health. Some positive steps have been taken in that direction, but many more are needed. A truly perfect government in the hands of any man or woman is impossible for the simple fact that the task is beyond human abilities. That lesson is written in the histories of every type of government known to humanity.

Nigeria is far from unique in this, and the point of this article isn't to point an accusing finger. To the contrary, we applaud the recent courageous efforts to stem the overwhelming tide of corruption. That is a marvelous example of good leadership.

Yet we don't anticipate that the problems will end until every national government comes under still different management, the leadership of Jesus Christ.

Did you know that Christ plans on returning to this earth to clean it up? He isn't merely going to snatch away a few believers and leave the rest of the world to suffer. He preached, and He told His Church to preach, the gospel of the *Kingdom,* which announces this hopeful change. Read about it in our booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, which shows you from the Scripture that this has been God's plan all along.

The prophet Isaiah tells us, "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

"His delight is in the fear of the LORD, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist" (Isaiah 11:1-5).

Only then can there be the kind of life that all humanity desires. The prophet concludes: "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (verse 9). ❖

"MISSION," *(Continued from page 16)*
pent, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15).

The reality implied by the "bruising of the heel" is that there would be setbacks for the hopes of mankind, including the death of the Savior. But He didn't stay dead, and our hope continues. The clear picture implied by the "bruising of the head," though, is that there would be a vital deathblow delivered to the kingdom of Satan. Crushing a snake right on its head denotes certain destruction.

The epistle of Jude offers insight that some even before the time of Noah's Flood knew this reality of complete victory. Jude shares oral tradition as he describes how "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly'" (verses 14-15).

This vision and reality was not lost on the apostle Paul, who offered this encouragement to embattled believers: "The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly" (Romans 16:20). *Suntribo,* the Greek word for "crush," is defined by Strong's as "to crush completely," "to shatter," "break (in pieces)" and "bruise." The Bible does not offer politically correct terminology as to how God is going to deal harshly and victoriously over a spiritual dictator who cloaks himself in being misunderstood.

"The gates of hell shall not prevail"

The Church gained such confidence from Jesus' own words in Matthew 16:18: "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades [the grave] shall not prevail against it." This simple statement proclaims that nothing can thwart the advancement of the Kingdom of God or claim victory over those who belong to God.

Jesus was throwing down the gauntlet and declaring henceforth from that time till He returned to this earth that the people of God would prevail, even with incredible human odds stacked against them.



Reuters/ Larry Downing

Much has been said about the day in May 2003 when President Bush stood aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln. *But the big question for readers of this column is: Do we know when the "Mission Accomplished" banner will come out and stay out in God's plan?*

But, even with this good news, Jesus also realized that many would plant their own flag of victory and lose sight of the goal. Some would tire of the challenge. Some would sincerely want to follow Him (Luke 9:57-62), but would wind up being "sunshine patriots."

False starts and early exits serve no one, then or now—including you and me.

Jesus realized some would kidnap His message for their own gain and attempt to redefine the terms of times, places and victory. In Matthew 24:23 He warned, "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect."

Some great church organizations have proclaimed that Christ is victorious and, yes, "Mission Accomplished," merely because of the establishment of His Church on this earth under the rule of a man. Other preachers have planted the flag of victory and proclaimed the gospel has been preached, and now we wait and wait and, yes…wait.

Even to the end of this age

But how does the Bible itself define "Mission Accomplished"? Jesus gives us the breadth of the mission in some of His last recorded words on earth in Matthew 28:18-20. He states, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

At first read, doesn't it sound like we are supposed to be about our "Father's business" till the "end of the age"? It doesn't sound like we do this only till a church is set up or a man says our part in this commission is

complete or you tire of the challenge and decide to redeploy yourself out of harm's way.

And that's what some do not fully recognize—that the Christian walk is a contact sport in every sense of the phrase, with personal responsibility not to be given away to another.

When does the banner come out?

Scripture clearly defines when the "Mission Accomplished" banner comes out in the future. Let's take a look at four sets of verses to help us remain focused in the fog of spiritual warfare down here below.

Revelation 19:11-16 offers some needful parameters. "Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war… And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron… And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

Has this occurred yet? No! Thus, neither God nor we are done yet!

Paul vividly describes how "the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

Has this occurred yet? No! Thus, neither God nor we are done yet!

Zechariah 14:4 spells out exactly where our victorious spiritual champion touches down when it describes, "And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east."

Has this occurred yet? No! Thus, neither God nor we are done yet!

But ultimately "Mission Accomplished" is realized in a set of verses in Revelation 21 in which God describes the ultimate product of Christ's sacrifice at His first coming and His earth-rescuing second coming.

"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' And He said to me, 'Write for these words are true and faithful'" (Revelation 21:4-5).

Yes, it is then, and only then, that Christ alone has the privilege of bringing out the "Mission Accomplished" banner and stretching it across this earth.

Running the race of endurance

Until then, as people of God, we have been granted a calling to "run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). At times it is very human to view this world and its ills or, to look closer to home, our own human frailties, and simply define victory on our own terms, plant our own homemade flag of victory and withdraw.

At times, the world around us and that world that spins around inside our heads can seem like quagmires. But that's why God offers prophetic understanding to help us grasp that a better world, the real world of God, is coming our way. And God knows exactly when, where, how and why He is doing exactly what He is doing.

Until then, before we have any future notions of planting flags of victory or unfurling banners of "Mission Accomplished," perhaps we can best learn the lesson of "This is the way, walk in it" (Isaiah 30:21) from the inimitable wisdom of Yogi Berra. The famous American baseball catcher put it this way: "It ain't over, till it's over."

Until then, Christ's words in Matthew 24:13 remain in place, "But he who endures to the end shall be saved."

We just need to make sure God's end and our end are found on the same page. ❖



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by Robin Webber

Mission Accomplished? Not Yet!

It was back in May of 2003 that one of the defining moments of the Iraq War was freeze-framed in our minds. It didn't take place on the battlefields of Iraq, but in the public relations trenches agonizingly fought over for each minute of potential gain on the nightly news.

The commander in chief of the United States came roaring through the sky on a Navy S-3B Viking marked "Navy 1" and onto the flight deck of the USS *Abraham Lincoln* for a challenging tail-hook landing. He jumped out with a full flight suit and offered a crisp salute to the sailors on board. Tom Cruise—step back!

This was a macho moment of the nation's man-in-charge taking center stage for the "mother of all photo-ops." Nothing could be better!

And, to top it off, right behind him on the ship's main tower was a sprawling banner declaring "Mission Accomplished." This was supposed to be the "cherry on top" of the supposedly dazzlingly quick victory over the forces of an evil tyrant who had thumbed his nose at the world and butchered his own people.

People debate what mission was accomplished by that time, but no one disputes the fact that, four years later, the greater mission in Iraq is far from complete. American troops remain deeply entrenched.

Some thought that the primary challenge was deposing Saddam Hussein, after which the majority of Iraqis would eagerly cooperate in setting up a democracy in the heart of the Islamic theocracies and dictatorships. But then reality set in and any naïveté was swept away. America and its allies discovered again that the evil wasn't quarantined to one man.

How do we define victory?

Since that day on the USS *Lincoln,* politicians, pundits and talk show veterans have tried to explain what that banner really meant. It meant this. It meant that. My favorite diagnosis is, "It doesn't really mean what it seems to mean." Oh, we've heard all the chatter.

But the big question for readers of this column is: Do we know when the "Mission Accomplished" banner will come out and stay out in God's plan for humanity?

Why is that important for us to know? One of the pivotal lessons to internalize from this ongoing conflict and from this particular incident is to be careful how and when we define victory, because we may have to live with it for a long time.

Understanding and having the same finish line as the Captain of our salvation is crucial in effective service toward God. The Christian calling has been likened to warfare as well as to a race. False starts and early exits can thwart any notion of victory, be it on the battlefield, track or our own race of faith.

Allow me to share a few thoughts about how God defines victory in His action plan. It's found in the Bible from beginning to end.

Did you realize the first prophecy in Scripture was uttered in the Garden of Eden? Upon Adam and Eve's rejection of God's way of life, the Creator plainly stated how He defined victory. In the first hope-filled messianic prophecy offered to mankind, God said to the ser-

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