Virtual Christian Magazine
Hope And Encouragement For The Real World

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."—Acts 1:8

Volume 5 Number 6 July 2003

Archaeology in Acts, Part 1

By Mario Seiglie

Page 4



After decades of examining the details mentioned in the book of Acts, Sir William Ramsay concluded: "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense... In short this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."

One Nation Under God?

By James Capo

Page 11



The pledge of allegiance, long recited by American schoolchildren, acknowledges that the United States is "one nation under God." But what place does God have in the country today?

You Are Free!

By Kevin Ford

Page 19



There have been many peoples over the years forced into slavery. Are we still enslaved today? Find out how, why and what can and will be done about it.

First the End of an Empire—Now the End of Britain?

By Melvin Rhodes

Page 22



Are we witnessing the end of the nation whose people, "relative to their numbers, contributed more to civilization than any other people since the ancient Greeks and Romans"?

The Coming European Superpower

By Gary Petty

Page 27



The dream of a united Europe—dating back to the Roman Empire—seems closer to fulfillment than ever. Bible prophecy reveals what will happen next.

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

Freedom of Choice

By Scott Ashley

Page 31



We want to make choices and have freedoms in our lives, but do we really know what we want or need? Do we make the right choices for ourselves, and does our government make wise choices for us?

Letters to the Editor

Page 33

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Archaeology in Acts, Part 1

By Mario Seiglie

After decades of examining the details mentioned in the book of Acts, Sir William Ramsay concluded: "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense... In short this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."



AS DISCUSSED IN A SERIES OF ARTICLES in the *Good News* magazine, archaeologists have made many discoveries that verify and illuminate our understanding of the four Gospels. After the Gospels, the next section in the New Testament we will survey is the book of the Acts of the Apostles, or simply Acts.

The book of Acts is simply a continuation of one of the Gospel accounts. Luke compiled his Gospel about Jesus Christ as the first volume of a two-part work. In his first manuscript he covered the life of Jesus; in the second he described the early history of the Church Jesus founded.

The Expositor's Bible Commentary notes: "The Acts of the Apostles is the name given to the second part of a two-volume work traditionally identified as having been written by Luke, a companion of the apostle Paul. Originally the two volumes circulated together as two parts of one complete writing" (Richard Longenecker, 1981, Vol. 9, p. 207).

The book of Acts is simply a continuation of one of the Gospel accounts.

Luke explains to Theophilus, to whom he dedicated this work, the purpose of his first volume: "The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up..." (Acts 1:1-2). The phrase *former account* in this first verse is *proton logos* in Greek, and refers to the first papyrus roll of a larger work, called in Greek *tomos,* from which we get our English word *tome.*

In the second scroll Luke relates events that took place after Jesus "was parted from them [the disciples] and carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:51). It covers about the first 30 years of Church history.

A scholar attacks Acts

About a century ago British scholar William Ramsay focused on the book of Acts to try to show it was rife with geographical and archaeological errors. After all, many scholars of his day, equipped with the modern tools of textual criticism and archaeology, had exposed many errors in other classic writings. This eminent humanity professor diligently prepared himself by studying archaeology and geography before departing for the Middle East and Asia Minor in his quest to prove Luke's history of the early Church was mostly myth.

His quest didn't turn out as he expected. After a quarter century of research in what is today Israel and Turkey, where he carefully retraced the steps of the apostles as described in the book of Acts, this famous unbeliever shook the intellectual world when he announced he had converted to Christianity. He confessed this radical change of mind and heart was thanks in great part to his surprise at the accuracy he found in Luke's narrative in Acts.

After decades of examining the historical and geographical details mentioned in the book, Ramsay concluded: "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense... In short this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians" (*The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament,* 1953, p. 80).

He went on to write many books about Acts and the epistles of Paul. Ultimately Ramsay was knighted for his contributions to the study of archaeology and geography.

The tomb of King David

When the Christian Church began on the Day of Pentecost, thousands of Jewish pilgrims were visiting Jerusalem worshiping at the time of that holy festival (Acts 2:1-5).



On that Pentecost, the apostle Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, delivered an inspired sermon to the Jewish crowd. Thousands heard and repented of their sins. Speaking of the recent resurrection of Jesus, he quoted from one of King David's prophetic psalms: "For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption" (Acts 2:27; Psalm 16:10).

Peter continued: "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and *his tomb is with us to this day"* (Acts 2:29, emphasis added). Peter, speaking in the temple area in Jerusalem, could point to the nearby tombs of the kings of Israel—specifically David's burial site.

Although it was not an Israelite or Jewish custom to bury the dead in towns or cities, royalty was an exception. The Bible records that "David rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of

David" (1 Kings 2:10). Many later Israelite kings were also buried in Jerusalem, although not all in the designated tombs of the kings. For instance, evil King Jehoram was buried "in the City of David, but not in the tombs of the kings" (2 Chronicles 21:20).

Several hundred years later, during the restoration of Jerusalem under Nehemiah, the area around the tombs of the kings was repaired. "After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk...made repairs as far as the place in front of the tombs of David" (Nehemiah 3:16).

Josephus, a Jewish historian who was born shortly after Peter gave his Pentecost sermon, wrote that a few decades earlier Herod the Great had broken into David's tomb at night to plunder its riches, only to discover a previous king had already looted it (*Antiquities of the Jews,* Book XVI, Chapter VII, Section 1). David's tomb was widely known even when Josephus wrote his account decades after Peter's sermon.

A.T. Robertson notes: "His [David's] tomb was on Mt. Zion where most of the kings were buried. The tomb was said to have fallen into ruins in the reign of the Emperor Hadrian [A.D. 117-138]" (*Word Pictures in the New Testament,* Bible Explorer software).

Although archaeologists don't agree on whether the extensive tomb area discovered almost a century ago in the southern end of Jerusalem is the location of the tombs of the kings of Israel, the location agrees with accounts mentioned in the Bible and does have the backing of some prominent scholars.

Hershel Shanks, editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review,* writes: "The proposed site of David's tomb, and of others adjacent to it, is precisely where one would expect to find the burial site mentioned in the Bible—in the southern part of the City of David, an area that would normally be forbidden to burials.

"In 1913 to 1914 a Frenchman named Raymond Weill excavated this area and found several tombs that he numbered T1 to T8... The most magnificent of these tombs is T1. It is a kind of long tunnel or artificially excavated cave 52 1/2 feet long, over 8 feet wide and over 13 feet high... The fact that some extravagant, even ostentatious tombs were located precisely where the Bible says the kings of Judah, including King David, were buried certainly suggests to a reasonable mind that the fanciest of these tombs (T1) may well have belonged to King David" (*Biblical Archaeological Review,* January-February, 1995, p. 64).

Precise identification is difficult because the area was heavily quarried in later centuries and only portions of the tombs remain. Whether more research can confirm this site as David's tomb or not, we can be confident that during Peter's sermon given on the Day of Pentecost, when the New Testament Church began, he could point to an area in Jerusalem where everyone knew David's tomb was located and could attest that his remains were still there.

David obviously had not risen from the dead, but now Peter and many other witnesses could confirm that it had been Jesus' tomb, not David's, that had opened and from which Jesus had come back to life, confirming He was the Messiah. Thousands of Jewish listeners could not refute the evidence. This proof, among others, led many to accept Jesus as the Messiah immediately (Acts 2:41).

Gamaliel the wise

During the days and weeks after Peter's sermon, the apostles faced violent opposition, including being thrown in jail.

During their trial before their incarceration, many Jewish authorities plotted to kill them, but one of the chief religious leaders spoke up in their defense:

This Gamaliel, who opposed the apostles' execution, was a teacher of Paul (Acts 22:3). He was the grandson of Hillel, the founder of a dominant school of the Pharisees, a major branch of Judaism.

"Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people... And he said to them: 'Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men... I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God.' And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go" (Acts 5:34-40).

This Gamaliel, who opposed the apostles' execution, was a teacher of Paul (Acts 22:3). He was the grandson of Hillel, the founder of a dominant school of the Pharisees, a major branch of Judaism.



Gamaliel's family name has been confirmed by archaeological findings. In a tomb in the catacombs of Beth-Shearim, near the Sea of Galilee, in a section called the Tomb of the Patriarchs, one of the graves has an inscription in Hebrew and Greek: "This [tomb] is of the Rabbi Gamaliel." The Gamaliel of Bible fame was the first of an illustrious rabbinic family bearing his name. This tomb was that of one of his descendants.

The historian Josephus and some Talmudic works also mention Gamaliel, describing him as a benevolent and brilliant man. William Barclay adds: "He was a kindly man with a far wider tolerance than his fellows. He was, for instance, one of the very few Pharisees who did not regard Greek culture as sinful. He was one of the very few to whom the title 'Rabban' had been given. Men called him 'The Beauty of the Law.' When he died it was said, 'Since Rabban Gamaliel died there has been no more reverence for the Law; and purity and abstinence died out at the same time'" (*The Daily Study Bible Commentary,* Bible Explorer software). So we see another biblical figure mentioned in the Scriptures confirmed by sources outside the Bible.

History confirms still another biblical character

As the gospel spread to the outlying areas of Israel, Peter arrived in Samaria to preach the Word of God. There he met a magician named Simon, who was baptized but was later rejected by Peter

and John for trying to bribe his way into a position of power and influence in the Church (Acts 8:18-24).

Nothing else is directly mentioned in the Scriptures about this shady character, known in history as Simon Magus. However, about a century after Simon's death, writings appear that describe his activities after the apostles rejected him.

Writing to the Romans, Justin Martyr comments: "There was a Samaritan, Simon, a native of the village called Gitto, who in the reign of Claudius Caesar [A.D. 41-54], and in your royal city of Rome, did mighty acts of magic, by virtue of the art of the devil's operating in him. He was considered a god, and as a god was honored by you with a statue, which statue was erected on the river Tiber, between two bridges, and bore this inscription, in the language of Rome: 'Simoni Deo Sancto' [To Simon the holy God]. And almost all the Samaritans, and a few even of other nations, worship him" (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers,* "The First Apology of Justin," p. 171).

In 1574 excavators found a fragment of marble on an island in the Tiber River with the inscription "Semoni Sanco Deu Fidio." Some interpret this as referring to a Sabine deity, Semo Sancus, but most likely it was part of the statue Justin Martyr described as having been dedicated to Simon Magus.

The editors of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* make this point: "It is very generally supposed that Justin was mistaken in understanding this to have been a statue erected to Simon Magus. This supposition rests on the fact that in the year 1574 there was dug up in the island of the Tiber a fragment of marble, with the inscription 'Semoni Sanco Deo,' etc., being probably the base of a statue erected to the Sabine deity Semo Sancus. This inscription Justin is supposed to have mistaken for the one he gives above.

When the Jews persecuted Paul in Damascus, his friends lowered him from the city's walls in a basket (Acts 9:25).

"This has always seemed to us very slight evidence on which to reject so precise a statement as Justin here makes; a statement which he would scarcely have hazarded in an apology addressed to Rome, where every person had the means of ascertaining its accuracy. If, as is supposed, he made a mistake, it must have been at once exposed, and other writers would not have so frequently repeated the story as they have done" (ibid., footnote, p. 171).

Whether the base of the statue was dedicated to Simon Magus or not, the historicity of this biblical personage is also confirmed in literature of the second and third centuries.

Paul in Damascus

After the gospel went to Samaria, it spread northward to Damascus, where a dramatic conversion took place—that of Saul, who became the apostle Paul. After his conversion God told him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do" (Acts 9:6).

After Paul arrived in Damascus, Jesus spoke in a vision to Ananias, one of the Christians living there: "So the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying'" (Acts 9:11).

The street called Straight was one of the main avenues in Damascus. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* explains: "The street called Straight was an east-west street that is still one of the main thoroughfares of Damascus, the *Derb el-Mustaqim*. It had colonnaded halls on either side and imposing gates at each end...and presumably was as well known in antiquity as Regent Street in London or Michigan Avenue in Chicago today. The directions included not only the name of the street but also the house where Saul could be found" (Longenecker, p. 373).



When the Jews persecuted Paul in Damascus, his friends lowered him from the city's walls in a basket (Acts 9:25). Archaeologists have discovered sections of this ancient wall, which the Romans built. John McRay writes: "Part of the Roman wall has been found about 1,000 feet south of the East Gate (Bab Sharqi) beneath Saint Paul's Chapel and Window. Under the present Ottoman gateway, this small chapel was built by Greek Catholics over a gate from the Roman period. Tradition associates the spot with Paul's escape by a basket that was lowered from a window in the wall (2 Cor. 11:33)" (*Archaeology and the New Testament,* 1991, p. 234).

Magnificent Caesarea

Meanwhile in Jerusalem, Peter had been arrested again and this time was sentenced to death by Herod Agrippa, grandson of Herod the Great. A few decades ago this ruler, too, was confirmed as a historical figure when Israeli archaeologist Benjamin Mazar found scale weights with Herod Agrippa's name and title that date to the fifth year of his reign.

When Herod Agrippa heard of Peter's miraculous escape (Acts 12:5-9), he flew into a rage. "But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed there" (Acts 12:19).

Caesarea was an impressive artificial port built by Herod the Great. Named in honor of Augustus Caesar, it became the Roman headquarters of Judea. Herod also had a magnificent palace there where he would court Roman officials.

"The city included buildings typical of a Hellenistic city, such as a theater, amphitheater, hippodrome, aqueduct, colonnaded street, and an impressive temple dedicated to Caesar" (*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* 1962, Vol. 1, p. 480). Most of the remains of these buildings have recently been found by archaeologists, including a stone plaque that mentions Pontius Pilate.

"I was on the supervisory staff at Caesarea from the beginning of full-scale excavations in 1972 until 1982," writes John McKay. "Our work has largely confirmed the impression given by Josephus in both his *Wars* and *Antiquities,* of the grand scale on which Herod built to satisfy his own vanity and that of the emperor Augustus" (*Archaeology and the New Testament,* 1991, pp. 139-140).

Herod Agrippa's death

The Bible also records Herod Agrippa's unexpected death at Caesarea. "Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country. So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!' Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died" (Acts 12:20-23).

Josephus offers additional details in his independent account of Herod Agrippa's death. "On the second day of which shows he put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theatre early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner...and presently his flatterers cried out... 'Be thou merciful to us; for although we have hitherto reverenced thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature.' Upon this the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery... A severe pain also arose in his belly... And when he had been quite worn by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life" (*Antiquities of the Jews,* XIX, viii, 2).

The two accounts, the Bible and Josephus, in this complement each other. Josephus does not mention the origin of the stomach pain, but the Bible mentions it was because of "worms." Luke, the physician, used the Greek word *skolekobrotos* in reference to Herod Agrippa's terminal condition. The word refers to tapeworms or other intestinal worms, which can block the intestinal tract and cause great pain and sometimes lead to death, as was the case here.

We will continue our survey through the book of Acts in the next installment.

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One Nation Under God?

By James Capo

The pledge of allegiance, long recited by American schoolchildren, acknowledges that the United States is "one nation under God." But what place does God have in the country today?



WHEN OUR LAST PRESIDENT was sworn into office, it marked the 42nd time Americans witnessed an orderly, peaceful and voluntary transfer of power and authority from one leader to another.

In the history of nations, that is a remarkable, unprecedented accomplishment. It is a testimony to the wisdom of the nation's forefathers that the United States has enjoyed such a long, peaceful and prosperous history.

What principles were in the minds of the forefathers that allowed them to establish such a remarkably stable, farsighted system of government? On what values did they establish their new nation? An unbiased study of American history clearly shows that those values are based squarely on the book on which President George W. Bush placed his left hand as he took the oath of office—the Bible.

The United States was founded on Christian ideals and values, by men who were, for the most part, deeply religious.

It was clear to the founding fathers that an individual would answer to God.

The official oath of office as written by the founding fathers states: "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of the president of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

When George Washington was sworn in as the nation's first president in 1789, he spontaneously added the words, "I swear, so help me God" and kissed the Bible. As near as historians can tell, every president since has followed Washington's example in adding these words, "so help me God," at the end of the presidential oath.

Growing disunity in the United States

Though you rarely read about it in today's history books, the religious faith of the founding fathers guided their deliberations that formed the foundation of the United States' legal system and established the standard by which they expected the nation to operate.

But today, rather than being the unifying glue that in past years bound the country and its leaders together, religion—especially living in accordance to the Bible—has become a point of division and contention.

The cabinet nominee who drew the sharpest criticism in Senate hearings, former Missouri governor and senator John Ashcroft, was denounced by a broad range of special-interest groups (and some senators) who argued that his Bible-based beliefs rendered him unfit for a position as the nation's chief law-enforcement officer.

While many great things are taking place in the United States, and it remains the undisputed leader of the free world, we see many disturbing trends. What factors contributed to making this country great? But why does it seem we have now lost our way? Where are we going?

Building on the Bible

The greatness of the nation was once inseparably linked in its citizens' minds with the nation's purpose to God and the principles of morality and character taught in the pages of the Bible.

As delegates from the states met to craft a national constitution in the summer of 1787, Benjamin Franklin, governor of Pennsylvania, addressed the group: "If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His [God's] notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the Sacred Writings, that 'except the Lord build the House, they labor in vain that build it.'"

Franklin then called on the group to offer regular, daily prayer to ask for God's assistance and blessings in their deliberations (William Federer, *America's God and Country Encyclopedia of Quotations,* 1996, pp. 248-249).

Presidents and politicians routinely made mention of God and biblical principles in their public statements. In 1778 James Madison, one of the primary architects of the Constitution and a future president of the United States, remarked: "We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future of all of our political institutions ... upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves ... *according to the Ten Commandments of God*" (Federer, p. 411, emphasis added throughout).

The founders of the United States clearly wanted God's blessing on their endeavor and recognized God's laws. They knew the nation's success and greatness would come in proportion to the favor God granted them.

Regrettably, we seldom find such statements by the founding fathers in modern history books. Most have been carefully expunged. But when you do find them, they reveal the thoughts and beliefs that motivated these men. Let's notice a few such comments:



Patrick Henry, member of the Continental Congress and five-time governor of Virginia, declared: "It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded ... by Christians; not on religions [i.e., denominations], but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (Federer, p. 289).

John Adams, member of the Continental Congress and second president of the United States, remarked: "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and a religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other" (Federer, pp. 10-11).

His son, John Quincy Adams, the sixth president, stated: "... The Declaration of Independence first organized the social compact on the foundation of the Redeemer's mission upon earth ... *it laid the cornerstone of human government upon the first precepts of Christianity ...*" (Federer, p. 18).

These men were bold and outspoken in declaring that the United States and its government were founded on Christian principles and beliefs. They were not the only ones.

Political science professors at the University of Houston assembled 15,000 writings from the founding fathers in a research project that lasted 10 years. They isolated 3,154 direct quotes cited by the founding fathers. They discovered that they quoted from the Bible *four times more often* than any other source.

More than a third of their quotes came directly from the Bible. Another 60 percent of their quotes were taken from men like William Blackstone (who wrote the then-standard text on law) who had used the Bible in their conclusions. All told, they found that 94 percent of their quotes had some biblical foundation!

Government modeled after the Scriptures

The Bible and its principles were integral to the thinking and acting of the majority of our founding fathers. It even influenced the structure of the government.

For example, historical sources show that the founding father's concept of three branches of government was inspired by Isaiah 33:22: "For the LORD is our *Judge,* the LORD is our *Lawgiver,* the LORD is our *King* ..." From this they derived the idea for judicial, legislative and executive branches of government.

Their inspiration for separation of powers into three equal branches of government also came from Jeremiah 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (New International Version). Recognizing what the Bible said about the condition of the human heart, they did not want to vest too much power in the hands of one man or a small group.

They even decreed that government should exempt churches and religious organizations from taxation based largely on Ezra 7:24: "... You have no authority to impose taxes, tribute or duty on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, temple servants or other workers at this house of God" (NIV). The Congressional Record of Sept. 25, 1789, showed that a discussion of 2 Chronicles 6—Solomon's dedication of the temple—led to declaring the first Thanksgiving holiday.

John Quincy Adams said in 1821 that "the highest glory of the American Revolution was this; *it connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity"* (Federer, p. 18).

The United States Supreme Court, in a decision in an 1892 case, declared: "Our laws and our institutions must necessarily be based upon and embody *the teachings of the Redeemer of mankind*. It is impossible that it should be otherwise; and in this sense and to this extent *our civilization and our institutions are emphatically Christian"* (Federer, p. 599).

Their decision quoted 87 precedents, including quotes from the founding fathers, acts of the founding fathers and those of the congresses and state governments. At the end of the list, the justices said they could cite many more, but that 87 should be plenty to show that the nation's laws must be based on and include the teachings of the Bible.

Separation of church and state?

Today, however, we're told the founding fathers wanted separation of religious principles from our laws and the operation of our government. As we have seen, nothing could be further from the truth. These farsighted men knew that taking God out of the picture—separating religious principles from our government and society—would lead to disaster.

What principles were in the minds of the forefathers that allowed them to establish such a remarkably stable, farsighted system of government?

President Washington, in his 1796 farewell address, reminded the people of what had brought success and warned the nation what must be done to continue it. Several of his warnings—points he considered essential for the nation's future success—were overtly religious. He pointed out that the two foundations for political prosperity in America were religion and morality, and no one in America could ever be called a patriot "who should labor to subvert these great Pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men and Citizens" (Federer, p. 661).

That statement alone makes it hard to reconcile today's concept of the separation of church and state with the original path suggested by the "father" of our country.

The state of the union

Washington repeatedly mentioned God and the need for His blessing in his farewell address. A little more than 200 years later, Bill Clinton, in his farewell address, reflected on the condition of the nation and told the American people:

"You have made our social fabric stronger, our families healthier and safer, our people more prosperous ... Our families and communities are stronger ... Our economy is breaking records ...

Incomes are rising across the board ... America is in a strong position to meet the challenges of the future ... [I'm] confident that America's best days lie ahead."

No doubt the United States is a more prosperous nation today than a decade ago. The nation has seen the greatest economic growth in history over recent years. And while the economy has slowed, it remains an enormously powerful economic engine. America's people enjoy one of the highest standards of living in history.

But what of our social fabric? What of our families? Are they indeed healthier today, as former president Clinton claimed? While it is needful for a leader to sound a positive and hopeful tone, we should also ask what this hopefulness is based on. Without God in the picture, truly that is a hope built on sand.

Where does God fit in the picture in today's society? Regrettably, He is relegated to the churches, and not even allowed out in public.

As recently as 1957 an act of Congress made "in God we trust" our national motto. Today we can't imagine such a proposal coming to the floor of Congress, much less being accepted. A similar motto adopted by the state of Ohio, "With God all things are possible," was declared unconstitutional because, said one of the ruling judges, it was "an endorsement of the Christian religion."

What has happened? How have we moved so far, from a time when debates on the floor of the Congress, and even arguments before the Supreme Court, were settled by references to Scripture, to the present, where even alluding to the Bible is cause for having a case thrown out of court?

Have the courts' decisions to change national policy and separate God's principles from its rulings had any effect on the course of our country?

One of the warnings George Washington listed in his farewell address was this: "... Let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion ... Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle" (Federer, p. 661).

Did Washington's prediction prove true in regard to morality? If we take the 1963 Supreme Court decision removing Bible classes and religious instruction from public schools as the point at which religious principles were effectively separated from our public and educational policy, what do we see?

The founders of the United States clearly wanted God's blessing on their endeavor and recognized the laws of God as their guiding principles.

Statistics cited by David Barton in the 1993 video, "America's Godly Heritage" show that among students, pregnancies of girls ages 10 to 14 increased 553 percent from 1963 to 1987, and births to unwed girls ages 15 to 19 have increased every year since 1963. Rates for both had been stable for decades before 1963. Infections of sexually transmitted diseases among high school students shot up 226 percent in only 10 years.

Among American families, divorce rates, which had been declining before

1963, begin to skyrocket, climbing 117 percent in 15 years. Single parent families are up 140 percent and unmarried couples living together up 536 percent.

In schools, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores dropped each year for 18 consecutive years beginning in 1963. Today there is an 80-point difference in average SAT scores compared to 1941 (we've used the same test since then).

In American society, violent crimes are up 794 percent.

Which way is better?

Jeremiah 6:16 has good advice: "Thus says the LORD: 'Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, "We will not walk in it."'"

The Pennsylvania and Vermont constitutions required that "each member [of the legislature], before he takes his seat, shall make and subscribe the following declaration ...: 'I do believe in one God, the Creator and Governor of the universe, the rewarder of the good, and punisher of the wicked ...'" (Federer, p. 504, 623). In other words, it was a public proclamation that a politician acknowledged that he wouldn't answer only to voters—he would be accountable to God for what he had done in office. Other state constitutions were similar. This was consistent with the first amendment because it did not require membership in a specific denomination.

People and nations accountable to God

It was clear to the founding fathers that an individual would answer to God. But they believed that a *nation* also would answer to God! On the floor of the constitutional convention in 1787, the difference between individual and national accountability was explained. An individual answers to God in the future, in the resurrection. But when a nation dies, it is *forever* dead.



So when does a nation answer to God? Virginia delegate George Mason, known as the father of the Bill of Rights, explained: "As nations cannot be rewarded or punished in the next world, so they must be in this. By an inevitable chain of causes and effects, Providence punishes national sins, by national calamities" (Federer, p. 423). The founders felt a nation would directly answer to God for its sins and rejection of its Creator.

As students of the Scriptures, they understood its many lessons. They knew God was patient with the kingdom of Israel for more than 200 years. They understood that He was patient with the kingdom of Judah even longer. But eventually the day of reckoning arrived. They wanted the United States to be a Christian nation—in substance, not just in name only—to forestall a similar day of reckoning.

The prophet Daniel was no stranger to the rise and fall of kingdoms. He lived through the fall of the kingdom of Judah and the downfall of mighty Babylon. God prophesied through him that, at the end of this age, "there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time" (Daniel 12:1).

Other biblical prophecies detail the rise of new international powers—and the fall of existing powers, including the United States and other English-descended nations.

Jesus Christ similarly predicted that the time of the end will be marked by "great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again." He explained what that meant: Unless that time of world upheaval and terror is cut short, *no living thing will survive* (Matthew 24:21-22).

God is patient both with people and nations, "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). When we consider whether we are still "one nation under God," we would do well to heed not only the warnings of the founding fathers and biblical prophets, but also the lessons of history.

Recommended Reading: What lies ahead for the United States, Britain and the other English-descended peoples? How do they measure up to the biblical values and standards they once professed? Does Bible prophecy tell us anything about where they are headed? Be sure to request your free copy of our book *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* to discover the surprising answers. Click here to order or read it on-line.

Separation of Church and State?

The first amendment of the U.S. Constitution states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof ..."

The first 10 amendments, known as the Bill of Rights, were adopted by the first U.S. Congress in 1791. The first amendment went through extensive discussions and nearly a dozen drafts. They show the intent of the founding fathers—that they didn't want one denomination running the nation. They did, however, believe Christianity and biblical principles should be a part of American life.

The courts clearly recognized this. For example, in a unanimous 1799 decision, the Maryland Supreme Court declared: "By our form of government, the Christian religion is the established religion; and all sects and denominations of Christians are placed on the same equal footing, and are equally entitled to protection in their religious liberty" (William Federer, *America's God and Country Encyclopedia of Quotations,* 1996, p. 422).

In 1801 a Danbury, Connecticut, Baptist church wrote to President Thomas Jefferson after hearing a rumor that Congregationalism was to be made the national religion. Jefferson wrote back assuring them that the first amendment built "a wall of separation between church and state."

For a century and a half, the clear understanding of the first amendment was that it prohibited establishing a single national denomination. It was to keep government out of religion, not the other way around. Policies and rulings reflected that understanding.

For example, in 1854 a report of the House of Representatives judiciary committee stated: "At the time of the adoption of the Constitution and its amendments, the universal sentiment was that Christianity should be encouraged, but not any one sect [denomination] ... In this age, there is no substitute for Christianity ... That was the religion of the founders of the republic and they expected it to remain the religion of their descendants" (David Barton, *America's Godly Heritage* video, 1993).

The same committee later stated that "the great vital and conservative element in our system [the component that conserves and holds our system together] is the belief of our people in the pure doctrines and the divine truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (Barton).

In the 1870s a group tried to have specific Christian principles removed from government. The courts cited Jefferson's letter not to support that removal, but to prove that it was permissible to maintain Christian values, practices and principles in official policy. For the next 15 years during that controversy, the courts used Jefferson's letter to insure that Christian principles remained a part of government.

Jefferson's letter was then largely ignored until 1947 when, in the case of Everson v. Board of Education, the U.S. Supreme Court quoted Jefferson's letter. However, they only quoted his phrase about separation of church and state, not the context. They wrote: "The first amendment has erected a wall between church and state. That wall must be kept high and impregnable."

This was a new philosophy for the courts. The phrase began to be used repeatedly as an indication of the wishes and intent of the founding fathers. In 1962 the Supreme Court made its first ruling (Engel v. Vitale) which completely separated Christian principles from education when it struck down school prayer. The case was over the use of a voluntary, 22-word nondenominational prayer in school: "Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers and our country."

This prayer only acknowledged God once. It didn't mention Jesus Christ. The prayer acknowledged God as many times as the Pledge of Allegiance. The Declaration of Independence acknowledges God four times. But somehow this prayer was unconstitutional!

In this 1962 case the court redefined the meaning and application of the word "church." Before this time the court had defined "church" as being a federally established denomination. Observes David Barton: "Now the word was redefined to mean any religious activity performed in public. Now the first amendment would not simply

public settings."

School prayer was the first casualty of this new definition. Engel v. Vitale was the first case in Supreme Court history to use *zero* court precedents! Within 12 months, in two more court cases, they removed Bible classes and religious instruction from public schools. In explaining their reasoning, the court stated: "If portions of the New Testament were read without explanation, they could be and ... had been psychologically harmful to the child ..." (Barton). This was the second time in a year that the court issued a ruling without any legal precedent being cited for its decision.

The courts continued to expand their "separation" doctrine in subsequent years. In 1967 the court even declared a four-line nursery rhyme unconstitutional in a kindergarten class. Why? Because, though the word "God" was not mentioned, if someone were to hear the rhyme he might think it was talking about God. So out it went.

Subsequent court rulings have gone so far as to declare it unconstitutional for a copy of the Ten Commandments to hang in a school hallway and for teachers to have a Bible visible on their desks. We increasingly no longer have freedom *of* religion, but rather freedom *from* religion.

You Are Free!

By Kevin Ford

There have been many peoples over the years forced into slavery. Are we still enslaved today? Find out how, why and what can and will be done about it.





EVERY YEAR AT THE PASSOVER SEASON we are reminded of those momentous events so long ago when God reached down to break the pride and power of one of the greatest nations on earth and lifted a slave community from oppression and misery to the exalted status of "God's own people"—governed, protected and blessed by the Creator Himself. Perhaps only those who have actually experienced slavery can fully understand the meaning of freedom. However, as the history both of ancient Israel and of mankind since that time also demonstrates, experience of slavery is no guarantee of an appreciation of freedom. History itself has often appeared to be little more than the endless cycle of the strong conquering the weak, and one dictator succeeding

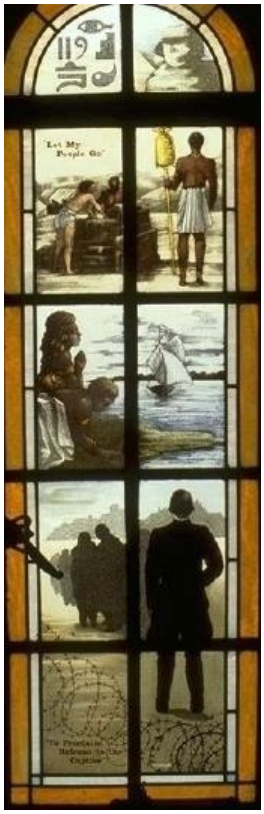
another. Novelist Charles Dickens cuttingly described the instigators of the French Revolution as "long ranks of the new oppressors risen on the destruction of the old ..."



"Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun: And look! The tears of the oppressed, but they have no comforter—on the side of their oppressors there is power, but they have no comforter" (Ecclestiastes. 4:1).

Some years ago, on the 40th anniversary of the end of World War II, a newspaper carried a moving account of the day Allied tanks arrived at Belsen concentration camp, as related to the reporter by a survivor.

"'The day before we were freed was Saturday and we heard distant guns and watched the S.S. abandon the camp,' he said. Sunday afternoon the single-story military-style barrack blocks slowly began to empty of those who could still walk. They came out into the spring sunshine in striped robes, pajamas and ill-fitting civilian remnants. At the wire they peered south through starvation-weakened eyes along the track in the sun-dappled forest, hearing the diesel thunder of the British and Canadian armor rise and fall as the tracked giants crawled toward the hidden horror that was Bergen-Belsen. As the tank column neared the gate, the prisoners could feel the buildings tremble." (*Winnipeg Free Press,* April 13, 1985).



For the vast majority of us who have never experienced imprisonment, much less the brutal captivity of a concentration camp, it is impossible to imagine what this must have been like. We may tend to think of it as a moment of undiluted joy, but the reality is that joy may not be possible for those whose spirits have been broken.

"The first Sherman tank snarled and roared its way up the narrow, tree-shaded road and stopped at the brick guardhouse. The British commander climbed down from the turret, walked under the raised gate barrier, and stared in shock at the faces seeping hopeless tears on the other side of the wire. 'You are free. You are no longer prisoners of Germany,' he said. Then he cried. And the Canadian and British tank crews cried as they gave food and treats to the wraiths framed in the barbed wire that would become an ensign of Nazi brutality and massacre" (ibid.).

Some 1,900 years earlier, in a synagogue in Galilee, the Son of God had risen to His feet, opened the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and announced to the hushed congregation: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound" (Isaiah 61:1 Revised Standard Version, also Luke 4:18).

"The day before we were freed was Saturday and we heard distant guns and watched the S.S. abandon the camp."

In the prophecies of the end-time, God reveals a coming time of tribulation and captivity on Israel on a greater scale than even the horrifying events of World War II, "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time" (Daniel 12:1), events so traumatic that if God did not promise to cut them short, there might be no survivors (Matthew 24:22). This time, only the direct intervention of Jesus Christ at the head of angelic armies will bring deliverance and repatriation to the survivors of this last great captivity (Revelations 19:11-14), and the new world government, with a resurrected King David having direct responsibility for Israel, will finally restore freedom to the earth.

"'For it shall come to pass in that day,' says the LORD of hosts, 'that I will break his yoke from your neck, and will burst your bonds. Foreigners shall no more enslave them. But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them" (Jeremiah 30:8-9).

Millions are enslaved by false religions, others by substance addictions of various kinds.

But there are other, more subtle, forms of slavery than that perpetrated in prison camps. Millions are enslaved by false religions, others by substance addictions of various kinds. There are those we call "workaholics," enslaved by their work and the pursuit of material wealth. And, throughout all history, and without exception, the human race has been enslaved by its own nature, the mind that is naturally hostile to God and His laws (Romans 8:7).

"And you shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free," Jesus told the Jews of His day (John 8:32). This was puzzling to them; surely they were already free? True, they lived under Roman domination, but it was not especially harsh for those who did not challenge Rome's authority, and they were free to worship God according to the Scriptures. Jesus had to explain that He was referring to something far more important.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not continue in the house for ever; the son continues for ever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:34-36 RSV). Two thousand years ago, the Creator took on the form of man, engaged Satan and the world head-on in a titanic struggle that was to determine the destiny of humanity, and emerged victorious. In His parting words to the disciples, He said, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The inspiring account of the Exodus and Israel's deliverance from Egypt is only a pale shadow of the real story of human history—the deliverance from sin that has already begun in the lives of Christians and will reach fulfillment at Christ's Second Coming, when we will be freed for all time from the "bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:21).

Recommended Reading: It is easy to be doubtful and many people don't have the faith they need in times of trouble. What is faith? Find out and see examples of living and growing faith by reading or downloading a copy of our free booklet *You Can Have Living Faith* or request a free copy by mail.

First the End of an Empire—Now the End of Britain?

By Melvin Rhodes

Are we witnessing the end of the nation whose people, "relative to their numbers, contributed more to civilization than any other people since the ancient Greeks and Romans"?



I CAN STILL REMEMBER when the news came over the radio. It was a Sunday morning in late January 1965. Sir Winston Churchill had died.

His funeral was the following Saturday. He was only the second commoner in the history of Great Britain accorded a state funeral, normally reserved for royalty. The first had been for the duke of Wellington, the military genius who thwarted Napoleon's plans for world conquest at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, thereby ushering in a century of Pax Britannica.

Sir Winston had defeated an even greater evil, Hitler's Third Reich. He didn't do it single-handedly, of course, but without him the outcome could have been entirely different.



I remember the silence after the funeral. It was the only time I can remember all the television and radio stations closing down in honor of the great old man to whom Britons owed so much. People were truly thankful that Winston Churchill had led them to victory in World War II--at a time when everybody else seemed inclined to compromise with Nazi Germany. Churchill rejected the honor of a dukedom and turned down the opportunity to be buried in Westminster Abbey along with many other famous Britons.

Churchill's funeral was, for Britain, the end of an age. Ironically, his death came at the end of a 20-year period that had seen the nation reject just about everything he stood for.

Postwar Britain

It had started 20 years earlier, shortly after VE Day. With the European war ended, Churchill called an election. Almost everyone thought his Conservative Party would win. People the world over were shocked when the results came in: The Labor (socialist) Party won by a landslide. Although grateful for Churchill's role as a wartime leader, people had decided they wanted change; they longed for a different world. They didn't want their young men fighting wars in far-off places they had never heard of, nor did they want them coming home to low-paying jobs or unemployment.

Sir Winston had defeated an even greater evil, Hitler's Third Reich. People were truly thankful that Winston Churchill had led them to victory in World War II.

After universal acclamation as the British lion that roared in defiance of Hitler and the man who had led Great Britain to victory, Churchill appeared to be headed for a win. But, seemingly, it was time for Britain's rapid decline to begin. The prophet Daniel reminds us that it is God who "removes kings and raises up kings" (Daniel 2:21). The same God who had given Britain its victory took away the empire He had given them, the multitude of nations promised to Joseph's son Ephraim (Genesis 48:19).

The next few years saw massive changes, including the nationalization of industries (steel, railways, coal mines) and the institution of a government-run medical system. To concentrate on these radical reforms, the country turned its back on an empire that had built up over the course of 400 years. Britain granted India and Pakistan independence in 1947. By the time of Churchill's death the major colonies were gone. Britain had, to quote American statesman Adlai Stevenson, "lost an empire and not yet found a role."

It might have been different if Churchill had won that pivotal election. He was an empire loyalist. His love of history taught him that Britain's security lay with its multitude of nations it had built up gradually since the time of Queen Elizabeth I. Later, after he won the 1951 election as prime minister at the time of the accession of Queen Elizabeth II, he talked of a "new Elizabethan age" that might surpass the first in greatness. But it was not to be.

Britain had embarked on a new course that continues to this day. With the British Empire gone, it is Britain's turn to be dismantled. The present Labor government has set the course.

The abolition of Britain

A thought-provoking book on the subject by British writer Peter Hitchens, *The Abolition of Britain,* contrasts the country at the time of Churchill's funeral with the nation 32 years later at the funeral of Princess Diana. By his own account it is as if he is looking at two different countries.

Outside the British Isles people are confused at what constitutes Britain and where England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland fit into the equation. At one time all four nations were separate entities. Their eventual union came about over a long period.

England conquered Wales during the time of Edward I in the 13th century. Edward proclaimed his son the prince of Wales, emphasizing that Wales is a separate principality but was to be administered as a part of England. For 700 years the heirs to the British throne were given the title "Prince of Wales."

Scotland and England (with Wales) united later. When Elizabeth I died, in 1603, she left no heirs. Historically, Scotland had often allied itself with France against England. It was time for the two countries to unite so this could never happen again. Upon her death her cousin's son, James VI of Scotland, became King James I of England. James gave the country its new name, Great Britain (and was instrumental in giving the world the King James Version of the Bible). The new flag was nicknamed the Union Jack.

The two kingdoms were administered separately, but they had the same monarch. A century later (1707) they fully united under one parliament, giving Scots a share in the benefits of the growing empire. Another century later the Irish parliament was abolished, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland formed (1801).

Reversal of direction

The dismantling of the kingdom began 80 years ago when most of Ireland was given its independence as the Irish Free State, theoretically still subject to the crown. In 1949 the Free State became the Irish Republic, severing its tie with the United Kingdom.

The six counties of Northern Ireland that have remained within the United Kingdom have been strife-torn for over three decades. Although in recent years strenuous efforts have been made to negotiate a permanent peace, he problem remains virtually insoluble. At some point it is likely that another "reform" government in London will force a change on the province because British governments since Churchill's time have eventually given in to terrorists in every disputed territory.



With increasing support for Scottish and Welsh nationalists, the present British government, led by Prime Minister Tony Blair, came to power in 1997 promising "devolution." The two ancient Celtic peoples would acquire their own parliaments and be responsible for their own internal affairs. London would still conduct foreign policy. Both Scotland and Wales now have their own assemblies and are increasingly calling for full independence.

Some of the English, meanwhile, are resentful that they do not have their own parliament. Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish members still sit in the House of Commons in London and can vote on legislation that affects the English people, but the English people do not have a say in the internal affairs of the Celtic nations around them.

Meanwhile, the European Union is busy fulfilling its dream of an ever-tighter union. The Irish Republic has benefited from its membership in the EU, ironically partly subsidized through Brussels by U.K. taxpayers. This has reduced some fears of Irish unity in the North. The South has always been poor, the North far wealthier, so even Catholics are somewhat apprehensive of unity with the South—but not anymore.

Polls show the English as increasingly weary of the EU. Scottish nationalists, however, see the EU as increasing the likelihood of Scottish independence. No longer would the 5 million people of an independent Scotland economically not be able to make it on their own. Within the EU they would prosper, just like Ireland and other small countries. Similar sentiments are evident in Wales.

In coming years the English could find themselves outside of a politically unified European Union, with the Scots, Welsh and Irish inside. Queen Elizabeth I's worst nightmare would have come true, four centuries later, of an England surrounded by hostile nations in alliance with the continental powers.

In coming years the English could find themselves outside of a politically unified European Union, with the Scots, Welsh and Irish inside.

Historians such as Norman Davies think that none of this matters. In his recent book *The Isles,* he reminds readers that England at one time was physically a part of the European landmass. At other times it was a part of Europe. It was the westernmost province of the Roman Empire from A.D. 43 to 410, a span of almost four centuries. The English church was a part of the Roman church for almost 1,000 years. The Plantagenets in the Middle Ages ruled England as well as parts of France, spending most of their time in the bigger and warmer part of their territories.

But Paul Johnson, another British historian, sounded a warning in the pivotal year 1972 (between the British Parliament's vote to join Europe and Britain's accession the next January): "Disunity has always proved fatal to the offshore islanders." (*The Offshore Islanders* was the title of his book dealing with Britain's relationship with Europe throughout history.) In other words, the disuniting of the United Kingdom has always proved fatal, enabling hostile powers to invade the country. Why should it be different this time?

Biblical wisdom holds true: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand" (Matthew 12:25).

New generation, new outlook

A new generation is in power now. Mr. Blair, British prime minister, prefers to identify with a new age. He is the first prime minister who does not remember Winston Churchill. In a speech just before the election that brought him to power, he described himself: "I am a modern man. I am a part of the rock and roll generation—the Beatles, color TV, that's the generation I come from" (Peter Hitchens, *The Abolition of Britain,* paperback edition, p. xix).

The current generation is a victim of revisionist history. It's a history with an emphasis on multiculturalism, which downplays Britain's role in frequently leading its empire into conflict against despotic European powers that wanted to conquer the world. At the same time, the revised version of history emphasizes the mistakes Britain made, negatively presenting the empire as a shameful era.

What's behind the remarkably rapid dissolution of the British Empire?

It's also a generation that, as in the United States and other Western countries, has grown up with emphasis on material values, with little concept of morality and often lacking any knowledge of God. Many in the new government reflect these realities.

Writing of "the end of Britain" in *Newsweek* magazine (July 10, 2000), columnist George Will reminded readers of George Orwell's dismissive comment on English intellectuals: "England is perhaps the only great country whose intellectuals are ashamed of their nationality." (Orwell died in 1950 before this disease spread to America.)

Mr. Will added, "Many Europhiles are English intellectuals of the sort George Orwell despised because they despised their nation." It's hard to understand the hatred so many people have for the old values Sir Winston Churchill symbolized. "God, king and country" have no place in the minds of many, including most English intellectuals.

Does this matter to Americans and the rest of the world?

Let George Will have the final say: "What is vanishing, and not slowly, is the nation to which the United States traces much of its political and cultural DNA. Unless this disappearance is resisted, and reversed, soon all that will linger ... will be a mocking memory of the nationhood that was the political incarnation of a people who (as has been said), relative to their numbers, contributed more to civilization than any other people since the ancient Greeks and Romans" (ibid.).

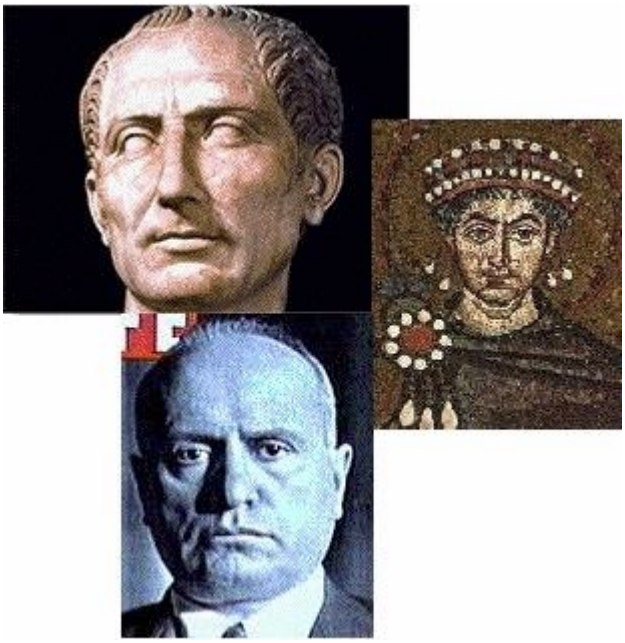
Recommended Reading: What's behind the remarkably rapid dissolution of the British Empire? How--and why--did the world's greatest empire disappear in a few short decades? Does Bible prophecy give us any indication?

Strange as it may sound, this remarkable turnaround was written about well before it happened *in the pages of the Bible almost 3,500 years ago*. The United Church of God has produced an eye-opening book, *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy.* You'll be astounded to learn the truth about where these nations appear in Bible prophecy. You'll learn what Scripture says will happen to them in the end time. Click here to order a copy or read it on-line.

The Coming European Superpower

By Gary Petty

The dream of a united Europe—dating back to the Roman Empire—seems closer to fulfillment than ever. Bible prophecy reveals what will happen next.



THE RECENT UNITED STATES-LED WAR against Iraq demonstrated American military power is unchallenged in the world. Even though traditionally major players on the international scene—such as Russia, France and Germany—made every effort to prevent American action, the United States, along with Great Britain, unilaterally conquered Iraq in the course of a month.

These traditional European powers have seen that they no longer can individually play a major role in world affairs. Will they be content to sink into the background and allow the United States to function as the sole international superpower, supplanting not only their traditional role, but that of the United Nations as well?

The reality is that another superpower is forming on the European continent that will in the near future compete with the United States both economically and politically. Before and during the war against Iraq, French officials stated the need for a "counterbalance" to the United States.

For centuries the concept of Pax Romana fired the imagination of many Europeans.

The dream of a united Europe is an old one. The ancient Roman Empire created a network of roads, a postal system and economic cooperation, merging cultures and religions. For centuries the concept of Pax Romana—a peaceful, united Empire enforced by Roman law—fired the imagination of many Europeans.

The Romans found that the strain of maintaining an empire stretching from central Europe to North Africa, and from Britain to the Middle East, eventually proved unmanageable. Rome slowly

fell into political, social and economic decay only to be conquered by Germanic invaders. In A.D. 476 the Western Empire seemed to suffer a mortal wound, but the dream never completely died.

There have been numerous attempts to reunite Europe's sundry peoples into one empire, many times by force of arms. Charlemagne, Napoleon and, in more recent times, Adolf Hitler have tried to resurrect a united Europe. From the destruction and death of World War II rose the dream of a peaceful European unity, in spite of the division of the continent with the eastern half under Russian domination.

A new Europe rises from the ashes

In 1945, after two world wars in 30 years, Europe was in shambles. Many venerable cities were bombed into rubble. The dead were counted in the tens of millions. Old institutions and organizations ceased to exist. What happened next, fueled by U.S. dollars supplied under the Marshall Plan, was nothing more than an economic miracle. Western Europe rebuilt and retooled its industry. Modernized from the ground up in the 1950s and 60s, many of defeated Germany's factories began to outclass the factories of her United States benefactor. The old dream of a peaceful European union became an organization known as the European Common Market.



In the last half of the 20th century, the Common Market gave way to the European Union, a powerful alliance with old enemies, France and Germany, at the center. The amount of international integration achieved under the European Union is staggering. Sergio Romano reports for *Time* magazine's European edition: "Europe has a single market, a single currency, a central bank. No member country can build an airport, decide on how much milk can be produced by national cows or call something chocolate without consulting Brussels or conforming to the Commission's guidelines. No important merger or acquisition can proceed unless [the] E.C. competition commissioner... has nodded his head."

Facing new challenges

For all of its economic growth, Europe is facing new problems in the 21st century. The euro, the Union's common currency, hasn't been as strong as many predicted. And for all of its marketing clout, the EU still plays second fiddle to the United States both politically and militarily.

Sergio Romano continues: "Most federations, in their formative years, begin by tackling the problem of political institutions and leave money and the market to a later stage. The American Federal Reserve was created when the country already had a president, a parliament, a judiciary, an army and a diplomatic corps. Europe has done exactly the opposite, and has now reached a stage where the amount of economic integration clashes with the political institutions. Without a European government, the euro will have no face, as Henry Kissinger once said, no telephone number."



Many Eastern European nations clamor to join the Union, which some analysts say could balloon to almost 30 countries. Yet there are those in the EU who believe that the Union isn't developing fast enough or flexing enough muscle on the world scene. There has even been discussion of forming a coalition within the Union, led by France and Germany, that would speed up political unity.

Some European leaders aren't just working for political unity, but hope to create a military force. This military might won't be just for defense but to exert European Union influences into far-flung areas of the world. Not all Europeans are greeting the concept of an EU military with open arms. The joint U.S.-European incursion into Kosovo in the late 1990s revealed the general reluctance of many European states to play a part in using military force. The combined EU members sent only 50,000 troops to the Balkans when they have almost two million men under arms. More recently, traditional Western European powers stood by while the United States and Great Britain committed over a third of a million troops to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

Europe's prophesied future

The events in Europe are following a historical pattern—an attempt to unite the Spanish and Italians, Germans and Slavs, French and Scandinavians, into one empire. The prophet Daniel was given divine inspiration to tell the meaning of a dream. In Daniel 2 the prophet tells of four successive empires, including one that will be ruling at the time of the coming of the Messiah to establish God's Kingdom on earth. The first empire was Babylon; the second, Persia; the third, Greece; and the fourth, none other than the Roman Empire.

There have been numerous attempts to reunite Europe's sundry peoples into one empire, many times by force of arms.

In the book of Revelation we find a prophecy about a ruling empire at the time just before Christ's return. It is called Babylon, not because it is ruled from Babylon in modern-day Iraq, but because the end-time resurrected Roman Empire is simply an extension of the ancient dream to unite all humankind under one world government revealed to Daniel so many centuries ago.

This passage tells us of the future of this empire and gives a warning to the people of God. We pick up the story flow in Revelation 18:1: "After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.'

"And I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.'"

Here, the word *fornication,* a term used to designate sexual sin, is used to show the depths of economic power and seduction this resurrected Roman Empire will exercise over other nations. This is also an important warning to Christians not to be involved with the politics of this end-time empire.

The final fall

Some European leaders aren't just working for political unity, but hope to create a military force. This military might won't be just for defense but to exert European Union influences into far-flung areas of the world.

The dreams of Julius Caesar, Justinian, Charlemagne and Mussolini will revive and end in disaster. If we turn to chapter 19, we find out who destroys the next Roman Empire. In verses 11 through 16 we see the apostle John writing about a vision he received concerning the future: "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. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God." This is the one we know as Jesus Christ.

"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. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

The recent events in the Middle East are but a very light foretaste of tremendous military and political events, which will shake the world to its very foundations. An end-time alliance of European powers will emerge as the single greatest military power in the world's history just before Jesus' return to this earth. This military power, which will be the greatest and final revival of the ancient Roman system, will oppose Jesus at His return. It will be overthrown by Him as He establishes a just world order which will finally rule for the good of all.

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

Freedom of Choice

By Scott Ashley

We want to make choices and have freedoms in our lives, but do we really know what we want or need? Do we make the right choices for ourselves, and does our government make wise choices for us?



WE PRIZE OUR FREEDOM OF CHOICE. We want freedom to choose what we do, where we live and who we will elect to government office. We want the liberty to decide how we will spend our time and money. We'll decide how to entertain ourselves—what music we'll listen to, what movies and television shows we'll watch, what magazines and books we'll read.

We'll decide how we want to live and what standards we'll live by. After all, we know what's best for ourselves, don't we?

Maybe not.

We want the liberty to decide how we will spend our time and money.

Freedom of choice, you see, also involves freedom to make *bad decisions:* decisions that are shortsighted and uninformed; decisions that will come back to haunt us; decisions that look good on the surface but have unforeseen, unintended and untoward consequences.

We humans are notoriously shortsighted. We're used to thinking in the here and now, not considering where we'll be and what we'll have to deal with 10 years, 20 years, 30 years out into the future.

That kind of thinking gets us into serious trouble.

A generation ago many Americans demanded greater freedom. They wanted more freedom of speech and expression, so obscenity and pornography laws were struck down. Standards in television, movies and music were relaxed to the point that today virtually anything goes.

They demanded a right to privacy and freedom of choice that encompassed all things sexual, including various sex acts, the number and sex of partners and the means for prevention and even termination of unwanted pregnancies. Judges and lawmakers relaxed laws to accommodate their demands.



People also demanded religious freedom—not freedom *of* religion, but freedom *from* religion. Religious authority and influence had to go lest they might infringe on other freedoms. So school prayer was banned. God was evicted from classrooms and government corridors and forbidden to show up in public. Over time, even history books were rewritten to remove most references to the strong Christian convictions and beliefs of America's founding fathers.

Now we wonder why rape, murder, robbery, assault, venereal disease, divorce, illegitimate births, mental illness and a whole host of other social problems have grown dramatically.

Regrettably, many other nations have followed the United States' example when it comes to such matters of culture. They, too, are experiencing the sad consequences of their choices.

Why have so many presumably enlightened choices turned out so badly? Quite simply, we didn't consider the consequences. We didn't appreciate *why* certain standards had passed down from generation to generation. Nor did we appreciate the original *source* of many of those standards.

The founding fathers were clear about what they believed and why. George Washington, the nation's first president, affirmed his faith in the religion of Scripture. "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible," he wrote.

John Adams, who succeeded Washington as the nation's second president, in an address to the nation's military said: "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

In the same speech Adams noted that the government had no power "capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion." He recognized that freedoms must be tempered by self-control, wisdom and sound judgment rooted in biblical standards and values. Without them, freedom is little more than license to gratify our baser instincts and selfish desires.

George Washington, the nation's first president, affirmed his faith in the religion of Scripture.

Right and wrong ultimately come down to their long-term consequences. Are the consequences good? Then the choices and actions are likely right. Are the consequences bad? They're almost always the result of wrong decisions we've made.

The right choice is the one that reaps widespread and lasting benefits. The choice is wrong that ultimately makes things worse—that produces sorrow, suffering and problems.

When it comes to choosing right and wrong, we should remember the words of Moses recorded in Deuteronomy 30:19 when he presented his countrymen a choice regarding right and wrong: "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore *choose life,* that both you and your descendants may live."

Letters to the Editor

Why No Spectacular Miracles Today?

I really enjoyed this article. Thank you.

— Annette Kastner

St. Valentine's Day

Thank you for the article on St. Valentine's Day. It has been an eye-opener for me. May the Lord God richly bless you.

— Internet

The Amazing Engineering of the Dragonfly

Thank you for this amazing article that shows that God exists! We have nothing in our military that can do what this thing seems to do as easy as we walk. God's wisdom leaves me breathless and amazed! Thank you Victor Kubik for this article.

— Barry Knox

When I Die, Will I Go to Heaven?

So you are saying there is a hell and heaven?

— Internet

Yes, the Bible does talk about heaven and hell, but not in the traditional sense. We do not believe people are sent to an ever-burning hell or heaven at death. To get a full explanation of heaven and hell, we recommend that you ask for the free booklet Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach? or read it on-line by clicking here.

Letters may be edited for length and clarity.