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Breaking the Spell of Harry Potter

While America wages war in a "just cause" in Afghanistan, audiences are flocking to two current movies dealing with witchcraft and sorcery. How does God view this scene? Can a nation call for God's blessing while it exports witchcraft?

by Darris McNeely

"Oh, I feel so sorry for those American churches who keep Halloween and encourage their people to celebrate such a demonic custom. They don't know what they are doing!" So said a Bulgarian Protestant minister in a phone conversation with me a few months ago. The gentleman was calling to discuss the beliefs of the United Church of God. When I explained that we observed the biblical Holy Days rather than traditional holidays of the world, he mentioned how sad it was to watch his fellow Protestant churches observe what to him were obvious pagan practices.

We are seeing today a rise in fascination with the occult, in a far more focused way. This winter, movie audiences are being served a double dose of occult entertainment with the release of *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* novels. People, and in the case of the Potter movie, young children, are flocking to the cineplexes to watch the film incarnations of these fictional characters from the world of witchcraft and sorcery.

What does this say about the modern culture of America and Britain? These books and movies are the products of their artistic communities. More importantly,

what does God say about such practices and how might that affect the future course of both nations?

A boy named Harry

The Harry Potter phenomenon has grown out of four novels written since 1994 by the British author, J.K. Rowling. In the first book and the movie Harry Potter is an orphaned 11-year-old boy who lives with his uncle and aunt in London. Harry is treated poorly by his



family and lives in a small cramped space in a closet under the stairs of their home. When letters start arriving addressed to Harry, the secret of his past and the promise of his future come to light. Harry's parents were witches who were killed by an evil wizard, Valdemoot. The letters are summoning Harry to "Hogwarts," a school for witches. Harry's entrance into this school sets the stage for his adventures in witchcraft and sorcery

in the first of the books, titled *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*.

The books contain a great deal about the black arts. Author Rowling did her homework in researching the subject to fill the books with authenticity while coating the subject with a veneer of enchantment and fun. This makes the stories wildly interesting for young readers. Harry and his friends, Roy and Hermione, are typical kids dealing with the usual matters of peers, homework and over-

(See "HARRY POTTER," page 3)



The Coming "Utopia"

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Regular readers of this column will think its headline points to the biblical utopia of the Kingdom of God. Not so. Others speak of a different, man-made utopia. This attempt at utopia is slowly forming in Europe with its fledgling steps toward the status of superpower.

Last month Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair delivered a speech that clearly spelled out his vision of his nation's future course. Speaking before a prestigious audience at the annual Lord Mayor of London's dinner, Blair spoke of the "international community" effectively working together to address the problems so dramatically highlighted by the Sept. 11 attack. "Some say it's utopian; others that it is dangerous to think that we can resolve all these problems by ourselves. But...self-interest for a nation and the interests of the broader community are no longer in conflict" (Telegraph Group, speech by Tony Blair at the Lord Mayor's Banquet, Nov. 12, 2001).

The "broader community" to which he speaks is the European Community that, he went on to say, should take an even larger role in solving the immediate problems in the Middle East and Central Asia. In answer to those who say that Britain can't tilt toward Europe and maintain its historic "special relationship" with America, he added, "I hope we have buried the myth that Britain has to choose between being strong in Europe or strong with the United States. Afghanistan has shown vividly how the relations reinforce each other; and that both the U.S. and our European partners value our role with the other. So let us play our full part in Europe, not retreat to its margins; and let us proclaim our closeness to the United States and use it to bring Europe closer to America. The solidarity of our European partners in this present crisis has been total. It will remain so; and that is a real cause for hope" (ibid).

The prime minister has made no secret of his strong desire to see Britain adopt the new euro currency taking full effect on Jan. 1, 2002. Former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, among others, has maintained Britain must keep itself independent and autonomous in its relationship with the EU if it is to maintain its historic role as a buffer between the ideas of Europe and those shared by America and Britain. She is quoted as once saying, "...part of England's purpose, part of its historic mission, had been to stop the bad ideas of Europe from jumping quickly and completely across the Atlantic...like a great sneeze and [making] America and the rest of the West sick" ("There Will Always Be an England?", *Wall Street Journal*, June 8, 2001).

This growing continental alliance is destined to become part of a stronger economic and political power than people currently imagine. The Bible foretells a system in the end time that promises peace and freedom (call it "utopia"), yet it will turn into a monstrous system that will crush any who oppose its plans (Revelation 18).

In this issue we offer several articles that help focus our attention on the changing world order. January will see the conversion to the euro currency in the European Community, an unprecedented step in modern times. Efforts to clone human life present new questions and issues never before imagined. Many have said that we live in a different world since Sept. 11. Much seems to remain the same, but there is no doubt we need to remain alert to the large trends that will shape the future.

A Christian's hope is not in a humanly devised utopia, but in the real hope of the age to come, when all things are restored in the Kingdom of God.

—Darris McNeely

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“HARRY POTTER,” (Continued from page 1)
bearing adults. Readers have no difficulty relating. Values like friendship, loyalty and courage are wrapped around the symbols and imagery of the occult. This makes the books popular with children and with adults who are thrilled to see a child reading rather than playing a video game.

There is no question the books have introduced thousands of children to the pleasures of reading. But at what cost? As children process the stories of witches, magic and sorcery, what will the long-term impact be upon their perception of good and evil? More importantly, what place will remain in their minds for the source of all spiritual truth, the Bible? There is already enough deception in today's world. When black magic is used to convey positive spiritual values, how will the mind be able to discern truth from error?

One movie to bring them all

J.R.R. Tolkien's trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, has been called by many the “novel of the century.” First published in 1954, the series (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*), has sold more than 45 million copies in over 25 languages. These books arguably set the standard for fantasy books and movies during the past half-century. All three books have now been filmed and will be released one at a time over the next three Decembers. Predictions are that it will become the most successful movie series in history.

Tolkien was a professor of language at England's Oxford University when he created his fantasy world of characters, geography and language. Originally, he thought that no one outside his family would be interested in the story. How wrong he was. The stories, which deal with large human issues such as personal loss and the battle between good and evil, are written in a compelling style and have captured a loyal audience of devotees. The work has spawned a whole industry of commentary that speaks to the transcendent nature of the work. Tolkien captured eternal themes and cloaked them in a world of fantasy.

The cinematic versions of both the Rowling and Tolkien books will no doubt vie with one another for top honors of gross receipts and viewers. New audiences will be introduced to the stories and book sales will continue to increase. But what

does this say about the state of our nation? More importantly, what does God say about this fascination with witchcraft and sorcery in the midst of a people?

What would God do?

Witchcraft and sorcery were specifically condemned in ancient Israel, a people chosen to be a model of a godly nation. God laid out laws which addressed how to deal with this problem. God's laws stated that no sorceress was to live among the people and no one was to consult or listen to those who practiced the black arts (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19:31). Dabbling in magic cut one off from God and invited termination from the community.

“And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people.... A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones. Their blood shall be upon them” (Leviticus 20:6, 27). Divination with the spirit world was a common feature of the nations around them and something God knew would be a snare for His people.

During the reign of Saul, Israel's first king, the land was purged of witchcraft. Yet Saul is found consulting a witch during a time of crisis when God had departed from him and was no longer working with him as king (1 Samuel 28:7). In the depth of depression, Saul asks the medium to summon the spirit of the dead Samuel to advise him what to do in a time of crisis. The story shows the deceptive nature of the spirit world, as a demon appears in the form of the prophet of God and communicates with Saul, a man who once had the spiritual stature to be chosen the leader of Israel. Poor Saul had drifted far from God and this encounter with the black arts symbolizes the distance between truth and deception. God wanted none of it where the work of His Kingdom was being done.

In Saul's rebellion and God's rejection of him as king, we see the connection between witchcraft and idolatry, the breaking of the First Commandment. Samuel had told Saul “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry...” (1 Samuel 15:23). Sorcery and witchcraft are toxic elements that poison this vital first connection

between the Creator and the creation.

Israel historically was seduced by the mixture of false prophets and diviners whose work destroyed the nation's covenant relationship with God. Those teachers and sorcerers who claimed a higher or purer spiritual knowledge continually worked against the nation and were a prime part of why Israel and Judah went into captivity.

Ezekiel shows the murky mixture of false prophets and divination. “‘Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy out of their own heart, “Hear the word of the LORD!”’ Thus says the LORD GOD: ‘Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing!... They have envisioned futility and false divination, saying, “Thus says the LORD!”’ But the LORD has not sent them; yet they hope that the word may be confirmed. Have you not seen a futile vision, and have you not spoken false divination? You say, “The LORD says,” but I have not spoken.’ Therefore thus says the LORD GOD: ‘Because you have spoken nonsense and envisioned lies, therefore I am indeed against you,’ says the LORD GOD. ‘My hand will be against the prophets who envision futility and who divine lies; they shall not be in the assembly of My people, nor be written in the record of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD GOD’” (Ezekiel 13:2-9).

When Judah faced imminent destruction at the hand of Babylon, Jeremiah included sorcerers in his denunciation of the spiritual deception which hindered the people and their leaders from listening to the warning from God. “Therefore do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers, or your sorcerers, who speak to you, saying, ‘You shall not serve the king of Babylon’” (Jeremiah 27:9). “For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says the LORD” (Jeremiah 29:8-9).

Opposing the work of the gospel

The Bible clearly shows how the truth
(See **“HARRY POTTER,”** page 14)

Europe's New Money

The biggest currency experiment in all history starts at the end of the year when the euro becomes the official common currency of 12 European nations. But are the new bills and coins all that are being exchanged?

by Paul Kieffer

Has there ever been anything like it? Imagine yourself in Germany or France at the end of this year. On New Year's Eve you enjoy a quiet dinner in your favorite restaurant, paying for your meal with German marks or French francs. When you take a taxi the next day to attend the traditional New Year's concert played by your city's symphony orchestra, the bills and coins you used the evening before are no longer the official currency. Instead, you use one of the 12 billion new bills or a few of the 70 billion new coins that will have become the new official currency overnight.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2002, more than 300 million people in Europe will begin the adjustment to the new money in their wallets and purses. After three years of "existence" as a book value currency, the euro is about to make its official debut as real money. The opposition to the new currency, initially rather loud in countries like Germany and the Netherlands, has given way to quiet and at times begrudging acceptance of the euro's reality. That reality will soon be achieved by the culmination of the unforbearing timetable set for the euro by the finance ministers of the 12 European Union countries participating in the currency union.

According to that timetable determined three years ago, beginning on Sept. 1 the national banks of euro countries began distributing the new euro bills and coins to banks. Acting on their own responsibility, banks are now allowed to provide businesses an advance supply of the new money. On Dec. 17 private citizens will be able to purchase "starter kits" with euro bills and coins at their local banks. The value of these "starter kits" is approximately \$9 U.S. in local currency and customers will be allowed to purchase as many as they want as long as the supply lasts.

The architects of the euro transition realize that the new money available via the "starter

kits" will by no means suffice to pay for all needed goods and services at the start of the new year. For that reason there will be a transitional period lasting until Feb. 28, 2002. During this time both the old currencies of the 12 euro countries and the euro itself may be used. However, after Feb. 28 only the euro will be accepted as legal tender.

A logistical headache

At various times in any Western country, small parts of the money supply in hard currency are being renewed. Old bills are replaced by new ones, and new coins are minted to replace those that have become worn. However, nothing has ever been done on a scale like the exchange taking place in the next few weeks in Europe. If all the new bills printed in preparation for the introduction of the euro were stacked up, they would be 55 times higher than Mount Everest. Lined up end to end, they would cover four trips to the moon and back. Germany is an example of the Olympic proportions of the task. It has 15.5 billion new euro coins and 2.5 billion euro bills to distribute and the existing 29 billion mark coins and 2.6 billion mark bills to remove from circulation.

The distribution of the new currency to banks has already started. At the same time the normal exchange and transportation of German marks among banks continued via armored vehicles. Planners realized early that the estimated 2,300 armored vehicles used for transporting money in Germany would not suffice to distribute the euro on time. Additional trucks and security personnel were hired to meet the unprecedented need.

Some local banks in Germany had to reinforce their vault floors to stack the special containers for new euro coins. The critical phase of the exchange—at the end of December and in early January—will mean a lot of overtime for

In retrospect, the introduction of the postwar German mark is seen as the starting gun for Germany's unprecedented growth. Will history repeat itself with the launch of the euro?

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bank employees. Politicians, employers and unions held special talks to achieve a one-time allowance to deviate from the maximum of 53 work hours a week allowed for bank employees in the private sector (60 hours for employees of government-owned banks). Seventy-hour workweeks are expected to be the norm in early January.

Distributing Europe's new money is only half the challenge. The existing currencies have to be collected too. Financial planners had originally predicted that half the money now in circulation would be exchanged during the first two weeks of January. To help alleviate the expected crunch, especially with old coins, Germany's Bundesbank began an advertising campaign in May utilizing billboards and television commercials. The ads appealed to people to break open their piggy banks and deposit coins in an existing bank account. With their ads, Germany's bankers hoped to get an early exchange on the approximately one third of German coinage estimated to be held in private households as savings. The appeal is understandable when one realizes that the total weight of German mark coins in circulation totals nearly 100,000 metric tons.

Part of the logistical headache involved in the euro's debut is the design of its coins. Since each member country is allowed to place a national motif on the reverse side of the coins it mints, there can be as many as 96 variations of the eight euro denominations: 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents and the 1 and 2 euro coins. In addition, San Marino and the Vatican are allowed to mint their own euro coins, which gives the potential for a total of 112 different euro coins (currently there are 45 different designs planned). And all of these coins will be legal tender anywhere in the euro zone—a Greek 2-cent coin will be legal tender in the Republic of Ireland.

Printing the euro bills is by far the greater challenge. In an industry where tolerances are measured in nanometers (a millionth of a millimeter) it is impossible to achieve fully compatible banknotes when eight different paper suppliers and 12 different printers are involved in printing the new bills. Each printer insisted on incorporating his own anti-counterfeiting techniques. As a result, there will not be



A worker presents euro coins in the basement of the Bavarian central bank (Reuters/Michael Dalder)

any uniform recessed portrait on the front of the bills, which is common to nearly all bills printed outside the Muslim countries. However, secret chemical substances and physical coding are being used for the paper and colors in all euro bills.

What will change?

For most Europeans the initial change after Jan. 1 will be limited to getting used to the new coins and bills. The treaty creating the currency union prohibits price increases for existing contracts and products manufactured and priced in the old currencies in the last months of their existence.

The exchange rate for each national currency being replaced by the euro is set to the fifth decimal point. In converting to the euro, rounding up for decimal values greater than 4 and rounding down for decimal values less than 5 is permitted. For months prices in most businesses have been stated both in the national currency and in euros. In many cases the currency conversion has resulted in unusual prices in the national currency, but which are "even" figures in euros.

It remains to be seen which price levels will become the dominant ones in the euro. Currently it is estimated that 77 percent of all food items in Germany are sold

at only 10 different prices ranging from 0.99 to 5.99 German marks. To obtain new prices in euros ending in a 9, some adjustments will be required, which translates into increased prices.

Of greater concern to many economists is the predicted leveling out of inflation within the euro zone. It is considered unlikely that the lower inflation rates of northern European countries will be "exported" to southern Europe. Instead, the generally higher inflation in the south will gradually level out within the euro area, resulting in a more uniform inflation rate, but one which would be traditionally higher than what countries like Germany and the Netherlands have known in past years.

On the other hand, for the first time in the history of the European Union, citizens of countries participating in the euro will be able to make quick, clear price comparisons across national borders. It will no longer be necessary to exchange money when visiting other euro countries, an advantage emphasized in television ads paid for by the German government, whose citizens are known for their vacation travel to sunny southern European countries like Italy and Spain. Observers predict that the convenience of the new currency across national borders will help to dispel any

remaining doubts among Europeans about to embark on this ambitious monetary adventure.

The euro and national sovereignty

Much less noticeable than the highly visible exchange of banknotes and coins at year's end will be the unavoidable final realignment of national sovereignty resulting from the euro's introduction. Control over a national currency has always been a vital element in any country's national sovereignty. National economic programs and national bank monetary policy traditionally are intended to some extent to strengthen or protect the national currency.

With the euro, however, monetary policy has been ceded to the European Central Bank (ECB), which as a supra-governmental agency already determines key interest rates and will set money supply levels for all 12 countries in the euro zone. The national banks of those countries are in essence now mere vassals of the ECB, implementing its policies on a national level.

The sovereignty issue is one of the reasons why some in those non-euro EU countries like Britain are reluctant to join the monetary union. There is no question that exchanging the British pound for the euro would mean a loss of monetary independence for the United Kingdom.

On the other hand, the other key element influencing the value of national currency remains in the hands of each national government: economic policies. Critics of the euro have warned for several years that the euro may experience difficulty in becoming a stable hard currency unless economic policy is coordinated among euro countries in the same way that monetary policy is determined by the ECB.

If those critics are proven to be correct, then the remedy will hardly be a return to individual national currencies. That would be a very expensive remedy. For example, the cost of refitting 2.4 million coin-operated machines for the euro in Germany alone has been pegged at \$1 billion U.S. For German banks the conversion is estimated to cost \$2 billion U.S., and the total cost to the German national economy will likely top \$10 billion U.S.

If the critics are right, then the more

likely scenario will be the establishment of centrally coordinated economic policy for the euro zone. This, in turn, would represent a further weakening of national sovereignty and require new political institutions to determine such policies.

In short, the euro is not a "make or break" situation for Europe, but simply a "make" situation! Once the euro is introduced, there will be no return to national currencies without irreparable damage being done to the European Union.

The debut of a world currency

On Jan. 1, 2002, the euro will become the official common currency of 12 European countries having a combined population of 302 million people: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain.

In addition, the euro will become the official currency of several other countries and territories administered by or with ties to EU countries: French Guyana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mayotte, Monaco, Réunion, St.-Pierre-et-Miquelon, San Marino and Vatican City. Three countries have unilaterally declared the euro to be legal tender as of Jan. 1: Andorra, Kosovo and Montenegro.

The European Commission has approved bilateral agreements by France and Portugal with former colonies whose own currencies will be convertible in unlimited quantities at fixed rates of exchange with the euro: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo.

Currently there are 13 European countries applying for membership in the European Union. Those countries make up a large portion of eastern Europe. Several of them have already announced their intention to seek membership in the European Monetary Union, and all are expected to tie their national currencies closely to the value of the euro.

Will history repeat itself?

For many Germans the euro will not be the first new currency they have experienced. After three years of economic doldrums following the end of World War II, post-war Germans awoke on Saturday,

June 19, 1948, to read a special proclamation issued by the military governments of the American, British and French zones (which later combined to become the Federal Republic of Germany). The introduction of a new currency was announced for the following day, June 20, 1948. It was to be called the "German mark" and was to replace the "Reichsmark" of Hitler's Germany.

Initially every resident of western Germany was given 40 marks in cash, and the balance of their "Reichsmark" holdings were later exchanged at a rate of 10 old marks for one new "German mark." Looking back, the exchange rate seems draconian, but the introduction of the new currency generated confidence and quickly ended the hoarding and rationing of essential goods.

In retrospect the introduction of the postwar German mark is seen as the starting gun for what came to be known as the German "Wirtschaftswunder"—nearly 15 years of unprecedented economic growth and full employment. The man widely credited with being the architect of Germany's post-war currency reform was Ludwig Erhard, who at the time was Director of Economics in the combined Western military zones.

In a radio address on June 21, 1948, Erhard issued an appeal that may well apply to the euro as well: "I appeal to your good sense and your ability to recognize things when I say to you that the new currency is in no danger of instability if we will only provide orderly public financial planning and as well responsible monetary and debt policies, to ensure that the production of goods is synchronized with purchasing power. That isn't a matter of chance and doesn't require luck, but instead unswerving willpower to act in accordance with the principles of an orderly currency."

The steady hand described by Erhard was first provided by the combined Allied military government and later by Germany's own national government. With the euro, it is a whole new ball game. If Ludwig Erhard's words apply today with the introduction of another new currency, who or what will supply the steady hand needed to guide the economic policies of the euro zone to monetary stability as a hard currency? Time will tell. ❖

Keep Your Eye on Gibraltar!

The Rock is back in the news. But why has this small narrow peninsula been such a bone of contention between Britain and Spain for nearly 300 years? Clearly the current promise of a solution is not good news to everyone involved.

by John Ross Schroeder

"Britain and Spain have set a timescale of until next summer to resolve their 300-year-old territorial dispute over Gibraltar and hope by September to have reached an agreement on all outstanding issues including sovereignty." This recent *Times* feature article (Nov. 21, 2001, issue) said a mouthful. And reactions have begun to emerge.

These intentions have raised a storm of protest on Gibraltar itself and somewhat less so back on the mainland in Britain. The Rock has long been a symbol of British security and stability. One famous financial and savings institution was named after it. The saying still goes that something is "as solid as the Rock of Gibraltar."

The continual Spanish claim

Ever since Spain ceded the Rock to Great Britain by the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), the Spanish nation has periodically laid claim to this small land area situated on a narrow rocky promontory on its border.

Currently Gibraltar is classified as a crown colony or dependency of Britain. The Rock has been a strategic naval and air base and, in the strong view of some observers, it still is. The Rock contains a NATO underground communications center and it is honeycombed by largely concealed defense works and arsenals.

But why is the current British administration so willing to discuss its sovereignty and other thorny issues with Spain? The simple explanation is that since both Spain and Britain are members of NATO and both countries are part of the European Union, Gibraltar is ostensibly now obsolete in terms of military defense. Besides that, the British seem weary of defending their historic role on the Rock.

Trouble is, the views of Gibraltar's indigenous population are not in accord with the apparent aims of the British foreign office.

Gibraltarians consider themselves British

The overwhelming majority of Gibraltar's current population is staunchly, even obsessively, pro-British. The locals simply do not want to become a part of Spain, notwithstanding their close geographical proximity.

As *The Daily Telegraph* put it, "The 30,000 residents of Gibraltar are intensely suspicious about the talks the British and Spanish governments will be holding about the colony later this month" (Nov. 10, 2001).

Writing from the Rock itself, author and columnist Peter Hitchens minces no words in articulating his intensely patriotic views. "The people of Gibraltar are as British as roast beef. They drink bitter [beer], play cricket and proudly fly our flag. So why is the [British] government so very keen to hand over

their home to their bullying neighbours [British spelling] in Spain?" (*The Mail on Sunday*, Nov. 25, 2001). Gibraltarians want to remain British.

The vital historical perspective

What makes the fate of Gibraltar so significant for us today? First and foremost, consider the Rock's important historical role. Even though this strategic small territory played an important military part in World War II (1939-1945), its true historical roots actually take us back to the time of the biblical patriarch Abraham. The Bible shows how the fulfillment of national prophecies became the centerpiece of the Rock's long-term significance.

God promised that certain descendants of Abraham would "possess the gate of their enemies" (Genesis 22:17). There can be no doubt that Gibraltar's strategic position at the mouth of the Western Mediterranean qualified it as a bona fide sea "gate" in the true biblical sense of the term.

When we come to understand the ethnic origins of the Anglo-Saxon peoples of Britain and the United States, this biblical passage comes alive in today's world news. If you do not yet have our brochure, *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*, please request your free copy. It explains the background of why certain strategic sea gates around the world have either been lost to Britain or their status is in imminent danger.

Hong Kong is already back in Chinese hands, Argentina still desires the Falkland Islands and Gibraltar's fate is beginning to hang in the balance.

A potentially dangerous future

In spite of recent military successes in Afghanistan, because of our national sins, the United States and Britain are still in jeopardy of losing their joint influence in the world.

Britain has already come some way down that road, no longer being the influential imperial power it once was. America will soon follow if its citizens do not thoroughly mend their ways and begin to govern their lives in tune with the Ten Commandments (see Jeremiah 7:3-7; 21:11-12; Exodus 20:1-17).

Recent events have clearly demonstrated that the famous special relationship between Britain and America is still very much alive and well. They are in fact brothers with the same progenitor, the patriarch Joseph. But biblical prophecy shows that both nations, if they do not repent of their national sins, are in danger of meeting the same fate as the ancient houses of Israel and Judah.

God does not change! He holds any nation responsible for its national behavior and moral conduct. ❖

Next on the Agenda— Mideast Peace

Wars change the world—often in unexpected ways. Their consequences can be far reaching, even “to the third and fourth generations” (Exodus 20:5) and beyond.

by Melvin Rhodes

A recent article in *World News and Prophecy* showed that all the major geopolitical problems that plague the world today can be traced back to one single event—the assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in June 1914. This led directly to World War I, which, in turn, has led us to the continual upheavals that dominate today’s headlines.

World War I saw the demise of the great European empires and the Turkish Ottoman Empire. This led, in turn, to the creation of the modern Middle East—the Ottoman Empire being divided up into individual nation-states that complicated the region irreversibly. Some of those nations came under temporary British or French control between the two world wars. The British gave up their mandate of Palestine and the new nation of Israel was established in May 1948. Nothing in the region has been the same since.

The presence of a non-Islamic, Western-style democracy has been a major source of contention for over 50 years. Israel is seen as a Western presence in a region that has been Islamic for centuries. From the moment that Israel was established as an independent nation, neighboring countries have wanted to destroy her.

Peace in the Middle East has been elusive. For over two decades American presidents have tried to bring peace to this troubled region of the world, but without success. Suddenly, following the dramatic events of Sept. 11, there is a renewed sense of urgency about bringing peace to the region.

Mideast remains biggest foreign policy challenge

Following the events of Sept. 11, the United States turned its attention increasingly to the Middle East. Suddenly, the Bush administration was aware of the dangerous consequences of leaving the Israeli-Palestinian struggle alone. Washington was not as involved in seeking a resolution to the struggle as many would like it to have been. Recent terrorist strikes against Israel have drawn the U.S. into making statements of

much stronger support for the Israelis, urging Yasser Arafat to insure that Palestine does not incite terrorism or harbor terrorist cells.

The problem is how to solve the insoluble

Whenever Western nations turn their attention to the Middle East, the pressure is always put on Israel. There is a failure to perceive the reality of the situation. The reality is that many Palestinians want Israel destroyed. They do not want a compromise that would give them an independent state—they want all of what is now Israel in addition to those territories already under the control of the Palestinian Authority. PLO leader Yasser Arafat has consistently promised the millions of Palestinian refugees that they will be able to go back to the homes they had before 1948. After more than 50 years, there is no more willingness to compromise now than there was then.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu put it well in an interview on BBC America’s *Hardtalk* (Nov. 19, 2001). Netanyahu, whose own brother was killed by terrorists in the raid on Entebbe 25 years ago, said that the only difference between Yasser Arafat’s PLO and Hamas, the “militant” Palestinian “liberation” movement, was that Hamas said the same things in English as in Arabic, whereas Arafat didn’t.

What Netanyahu was saying is that Hamas makes it consistently clear that it wants to destroy Israel. All its followers know that. They hear it said regularly in Arabic. The world knows it because Hamas regularly issues statements to the world press claiming the same end goal—the total annihilation of the nation of Israel.

But Arafat is not as consistent. To the world he speaks peace and conciliation, showing a willingness to compromise, blaming Israel for its intransigence. But in Arabic, to his own people, he promises the same as Hamas—the total destruction of the state of Israel.

His path is to keep pushing for the Palestinian refugees to be allowed back to their ancestral

No matter how much outside pressure is applied to the Mideast, whatever peace agreement is eventually signed won’t last.

homes, land and houses, which are now in the Jewish homeland. This sounds reasonable—everybody can sympathize with the desire of refugees to return to their homes. The problem for Israel, though, is that this would lead to a Palestinian majority in Israel itself. And as Israel is a democracy, with one man, one vote (the only real democracy in the Middle East, as it happens), this would mean the end of the Jewish state of Israel.

Arafat is busily pressuring the United States to force Israel into a “final settlement” of the Israeli-Palestinian problem. This would include the right of the refugees to return to their homes. For Israel, “the refugees would be given several options: to stay where they were, to settle in a third country, to settle in the new state of Palestine, or to settle in Israel in numbers to be agreed on. At Taba, the Palestinians reportedly said 400,000, the Israelis 20,000” (“America Tries, Again, to End the Endless Conflict,” Serge Schmemmann, *New York Times*, Nov. 25, 2001).

Columnist Michael Barone wrote: “One of the reasons Yasser Arafat gave for rejecting Barak’s Camp David offer was that it didn’t include a right of return for Palestinians to Israel. His motive was clear: Get enough Palestinians inside Israel and they’ll outvote the Jews. From the intifada that Arafat unleashed after rejecting Camp David, we know what life would be like for Jews in a Palestinian-majority Israel: kristallnacht every day of the week” (*U.S. News & World Report*, Dec. 3, 2001). Barone’s reference was to the night in 1938 when Jews and Jewish property were attacked by rampaging Nazis in Germany.

In effect, as Barone clearly stated, “...Israel is ready to accept a Palestinian state. The problem is that the Palestinians refuse to accept the Israeli state.”

Push for final settlement

Speaking at the United Nations recently, Mr. Arafat made it clear that the peace process required the United States to join with other countries “to introduce immediately a comprehensive framework for a permanent solution” to the Mideast problem.

Writer Schmemmann continued his article by stating that such a “framework already exists. According to published reports and interviews with some partici-

pants, it would probably include the following elements. . .”

Listed were Israeli withdrawal from some of the territories that now housed Jewish settlements, with compensatory land (desert) given to the Palestinians for other lost areas.

“A sovereign Palestinian state would be proclaimed, but would agree to remain demilitarized. Israel would retain three early-warning stations in the Jordan Valley, eventually in conjunction with an international military ‘presence’” (ibid.).

The Palestinian refugee issue was the next item listed.

“And finally Jerusalem.”

Schmemmann added: “There could be some form of international stewardship over the holy places. Or the Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif could be shared, with the Palestinians controlling the surface plateau and the Israelis holding sovereignty underneath, as well as over the Wailing Wall. The rest of the Old City would be divided up, as it already is, and the outlying portions of the city divided roughly along the lines of who lives where now.”

Note the stark contrast between what the *New York Times* writer, Serge Schmemmann, is saying and the earlier words from Benjamin Netanyahu. The difference is quite simply explained—one lives in the United States, the other in Israel. Peace in the Middle East looks easy when viewed from the peace and stability of a distant Western democracy. It’s clearly not so simple when you live in Israel, when your freedom and security have been threatened daily for over 50 years.

Achieving a peace settlement in the Middle East will not be easy. However, in some respects, it is more likely now than it has been for many years.

The explosion of terrorist attacks in Israel in recent weeks brought home to all Western nations the urgency of ending the stalemate in the Middle East. The United States is the only nation that can put pressure on both sides. The European Union is the biggest financial backer of the Palestinians, the United States of the Israelis. The two should be able to impose an agreement on both sides.

Additionally, Arafat is central to any deal. He has been the chief leader of the

Palestinians for decades and knows that he will not be around much longer. The Israelis fear that his successor will be more militant, making a peace agreement even more difficult. At the same time, Yasser Arafat knows that he will lose much international support if he is seen to be the cause of failure.

Will peace last?

Whatever peace agreement is eventually signed, it won’t last. Netanyahu made it clear when he reminded BBC viewers that the Palestinians want to destroy Israel. This is a part of the world where people have long memories that go back thousands of years. They also think long-term, whereas we in the West think short-term, usually seeing no further than the next election. If a peace agreement is desirable now, the parties may sign, but it won’t change the long-term goal, which is to rid the world of the state of Israel, to return the Middle East to its former state—one of Islamic domination that went back centuries.

Netanyahu reminded the West that it is not just Israel that is threatened, but the West itself. Israel is simply an extension of the West. Whereas the PLO leader may talk peace, the reality is that young children, not even old enough for kindergarten in America, are being trained for suicide missions in PLO-run schools in Gaza. As any such mission would be years in the future, clearly there is no serious intent on peace.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ foretold that Jerusalem would be at the very center of world conflict immediately prior to His return (Luke 21:20; Mark 13:14). Aware of these prophecies, the apostle Paul later wrote that “the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3).

The whole world will rejoice when a peace agreement is signed in the Middle East. Christians are warned not to be complacent at such a time, but to realize that a brief period of peace may happen before “sudden destruction comes upon them”—a return to the violence that has been so much a part of our modern world. ❖

Making Sense of the Cloning Claims

Fantastic claims about humans being cloned for the first time splashed across newspaper headlines and were broadcast from the electronic media on the weekend of Nov. 25-26. Are they true? Have human beings been cloned by a biotech lab in Massachusetts? What is the significance of this unbelievable claim?

by Cecil E. Maranville

With superb coordination more indicative of a marketing ploy or a political strategy than a scientific announcement, Advanced Cell Technology, Inc. (ACT) declared to the world in late November that its Massachusetts facility had successfully cloned a human being on Oct. 31, 2001. Most news media dutifully reported the announcement as fact. But is the company's claim true?

You would assume so, on the basis of most press reports. "First Human Embryo Is Cloned," reported David Derbyshire, science correspondent for the U.K.'s *Electronic Telegraph*. "U.S. Scientists Cloned Human Embryos," penned Rick Weiss of the Nov. 25 *Washington Post*. NewScientist.com headlined the story, "First Cloned Human Embryos Created." "The First Human Cloned Embryo" is the title of an article published in the January issue of *Scientific American*, written, by the way, by the principal corporate officers of ACT.

Joannie Fischer of *U.S. News & World Report* wrote the cover story for its Dec. 3 issue: "Scientists have finally cloned a human embryo," says the subtitle. "The breakthrough promises cures for terrible diseases." Ms. Fischer has been reporting on the issue for the past 18 months and is no stranger to the details of the cloning process or to ACT's research findings. She appeared in a split-screen interview with Dr. Michael West, CEO of ACT, on NBC's *Meet the Press* program Sunday Nov. 25, speaking glowingly of Dr. West's and ACT's "breakthrough."

Much of the press coverage has focused upon this angle and has featured interviews with people who would potentially benefit from new cures for disease.

Achievement questioned

But did ACT achieve this technological marvel? And does it promise cures for terrible diseases? Some scientists were much less enthusiastic about the ACT announcement than was the press in large measure. Dr. Ian Wilmut of the Roslin Institute, leading scientist in the creation of Dolly the cloned sheep, says that ACT's results should at best be described as "preliminary."

He explained that "a human embryo is expected to double its number of cells every 24 hours, but even ACT's most developed embryo had not done this. The furthest it got to was to have six cells, at a time it should have had 60..." Rather than prove that it was a viable human embryo, this fact proves that "it had already died" (op. cit., NewScientist.com).

Other scientists agreed with Wilmut's perspective.

"From what I saw... these guys didn't get very far," Kevin Wilson, spokesman for the American Society for Cell Biology, said in a telephone interview. Leading stem cell researcher John Gearhart of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore agreed. "The data is not very convincing," Gearhart said ("Human Embryo Cloning Draws Fire," MSNBC, Nov. 26, 2001).

Dr. Glenn Agee, professor of ethics at the University of Pennsylvania, notes that ACT has a history of selectively releasing details of its work through media outlets—a tacky approach in the field of science.

Dr. West attempted to minimize the criticism, telling NBC's Katie Couric in a Nov. 26 interview on *The Today Show* that it's easy for others to say ACT scientists should have taken their procedure a step further. But the above comments show that there's more to the criticism than sim-

ple Monday-morning quarterbacking.

ACT published its findings on Nov. 25 in an on-line scientific journal, *e-biomed: The Journal of Regenerative Medicine*, coincidental with a number of press releases and interviews. Publishing the results of a scientific study in an official journal is a serious step in the scientific community. Doing so prematurely would jeopardize the credibility of ACT's work. Why would the company be willing to go forward with the claim to have cloned human life if there were a serious question about its work?

Superlatives are inadequate to describe the implications of actually cloning human life. To be able to claim, "We did it first," would guarantee not only the highest of notoriety, but also billions of dollars in the field of biotech/medical research.

Grow embryos to kill them

The goal ACT is pursuing is that of growing human embryos long enough that they would produce stem cells from which ACT would hope to grow any cell doctors might need to treat patients—pancreatic cells for diabetics, nerve and muscle cells for people suffering from Alzheimer's, Parkinson's disease and spinal cord or brain injuries. Stem cells are the building blocks of human growth. They're the cells that scientists "harvest" from embryos discarded by in vitro fertilization (IVF) clinics.

We say ACT *hopes* to grow these cells, because there is no proof that this can actually be done, and it certainly hasn't been accomplished yet. In a television interview, Dr. West's own assessment was, "this could be years off" (op. cit., *The Today Show*).

ACT's announcement ignited a maelstrom of controversy from another per-



Dr. Michael West, CEO of Advanced Cell Technology, Inc. (Reuters)

spective. In order to harvest stem cells, it's necessary to kill the embryo that grows them. Those who recognize that life begins at conception understand this is murder. Dr. West sidesteps the criticism, declaring that he is "pro-life" and labeling his laboratory's creations "cellular life" as opposed to "embryonic life."

In ACT's own words, it has made "a new type of biological entity never before seen in nature" (op. cit., *Scientific American*). What the company is referring to is producing embryos—"cellular life" as it has coined them—from egg cells without fertilizing them. The biological term is *parthenogenesis*, which is from the Greek language and means, "virgin birth." Parthenogenesis actually does occur in nature—in many insects, for example—but there's a reason why ACT seeks to define its work as "new."

By emphasizing that they are doing "therapeutic cloning," not "reproductive cloning," the biotech corporation hopes to separate itself from the likes of IVF. Dr. Panos Zavos (who says he will have cloned babies for infertile couples within months) and the Raëlians (a religious group that is working on cloning to make people immortal—and has hundreds of women volunteers who will donate eggs).

But, therapeutic cloning doesn't mean that human embryos will not be killed. The distinction means only that the clones ACT produces will never be allowed to be born. ACT's creations have to be placed in women who will host their development in order to produce the desired stem cells. When they reach that stage of develop-

ment, they will be killed and the cells harvested.

ACT assembled a team of ethicists, which decided that ACT's cloning method was "morally acceptable." But they have yet to decide at what point it would be "morally acceptable" to terminate the "cellular life" growing in its host's womb. A handful of people from the scientific community have taken upon themselves a decision not given to mankind to make.

An attempt to force acceptance

ACT knows its work won't be accepted easily. The White House immediately announced that President Bush was opposed to cloning in *any form*. The U.S. president issued an executive order last August that barred the use of federal funds for research involving stem cells derived from cloning, but ACT is a private company with private funding—not subject to the president's ruling.

More to the point is a bill before the U.S. Senate, which would institute a broad ban on all types of cloning—including what ACT calls "therapeutic cloning." The bill was passed by the House of Representatives in July and will be debated by the Senate early next year. It's no trifling law, for it would impose prison terms of up to 10 years and fines of \$1 million for cloning in any form—regardless of whether it is funded by federal or private money. Leading senators from both the Republican and Democratic parties told NBC news that they expect the bill to pass (op. cit., *Meet the Press*).

When asked by Katie Couric how far he was willing to go in the face of such legislation, Dr. West did not give a direct reply. He said that he hoped people would take a compassionate view of the subject, meaning that he hoped they would focus upon the potential medical benefits rather than on the profoundly weighty ethical questions involved.

In a CNN interview, Dr. West hinted that the timing of the announcement (and presumably, the strategic manner in which it was packaged) was to pressure the Senate to allow therapeutic cloning for medical research purposes (op. cit., *The Washington Post*). In essence, ACT announced as loudly as possible, "It's already been done."

Across the pond, the British Parliament is currently debating a ban similar to that

before the U.S. Senate. However, the British government favors cloning for the purpose of medical research. The bill to ban cloning is being lobbied by groups that oppose abortion and clearly has some support in Parliament. The law as proposed would be incomplete, however, because it only addresses placing "in a woman human embryos that have been created by a method other than by fertilisation [British spelling]" (ibid, *NewScientist.com*). That is, it doesn't forbid the *process* of creating what ACT describes as "cellular life." Some fear that if this technical point isn't clarified, Britain is likely to become a haven for scientists pursuing "therapeutic cloning."

Sin to take human life

Is it plausible that anyone would accept the argument that killing what ACT calls "cellular life," which could be born as a human being, isn't human life? Actually, millions of people have already accepted the argument, haven't they? For those who would abort the life of an unborn child or support that action, there is no moral issue in therapeutic cloning. They've already crossed the moral divide.

Why has much of the press been willing to inflate what ACT has done? Certainly, good investigative reporting should have uncovered the fact that their claims to have cloned human life were overstated. Could it be that the largely liberal press sees this as an opportunity to leverage the argument that ending the life of a human embryo is no sin? More and more, people who sincerely believe God are being marginalized as "the religious right" or as extremists.

God inspired the prophet Isaiah to pen this warning: "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil... Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" (Isaiah 5:20-21). To decide what is "morally right," we must look to God and His Word—not to human reasoning.

It was easy for the Western world to recognize the recent terrorist attacks as "evil." It's not so easy for the same people to see that killing human embryos is "evil." To his credit, President Bush immediately said that it was "morally wrong." However, his voice is likely to be drowned out in the long term by the Western world's decades-long drift into moral bankruptcy. ❖

God's Wake-Up Call

The United States and most other nations are at war against terrorism! In this crisis many people are returning to their churches in search of peace and comfort. Some religious leaders claim that God is displeased with the United States and have found themselves branded as religious fanatics. Is there a message from God to all peoples in the midst of all this suffering and uncertainty?

A Good News radio broadcast by Gary Petty

None of us will ever forget where we were on Sept. 11, 2001. In a few hours we saw the world in which we live change forever. We watched unbelievably, on live television, pictures of hijacked commercial airliners slamming into the towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Over the weeks since then we have remained transfixed before our televisions and radios listening to heart-wrenching stories of people searching for missing loved ones and experiencing mixed emotions as U.S. warplanes bomb Afghanistan. Many Christians wonder, "Is this the beginning of end-time events written about in the Bible?"

In the days that followed the attacks, Americans struggled with the numbness of a nightmare that just would not go away. On Sept. 14, interdenominational religious services were conducted in the U.S. National Cathedral. Religious leaders spoke of hope and God's love. The comfort was encouraging and many felt it was exactly what the nation needed.

But is comfort God's only message to this nation in this time of crisis? We will begin our search to answer this question by looking at a message God gave to an ancient people who were suffering internal social and moral difficulties and external strife much like our nation today.

The prophet Hosea

The biblical prophet Hosea lived in the eighth century B.C. God sent him to proclaim a warning message to the northern kingdom of ancient Israel

concerning His view of their societal conditions. Bible students will recall that upon the death of Solomon, his kingdom was divided into two separate nations—the southern kingdom consisting of Judah and Benjamin (Judah), and the northern kingdom consisting of the other 10 tribes (Israel).

Hosea was inspired to clearly distinguish between the two kingdoms (Hosea 1:4, 7). The northern kingdom went into captivity to the Assyrians in 721-718 B.C., while the southern kingdom (Judah) went into captivity to the Babylonians in 604-587 B.C.

It is obviously true that very often the name "Israel" refers to all 12 tribes. But God specifically sent Hosea to the northern kingdom. Since Ephraim was the leading tribe, the name "Ephraim" is oftentimes used by Hosea to refer to the northern kingdom—all 10 tribes. Hosea's message was not just to the tribe of Ephraim, but to the entire northern kingdom.

Notice the indictment God brings against ancient Israel. Hosea cries out, "There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed" (Hosea 4:1-2).

Later Hosea writes, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children" (Hosea 4:6).

This knowledge isn't a lack of for-

mal education, religious teachings or technical know-how. The northern kingdom was not lacking in religious fervor. They were very faithful to offer sacrifices. They had a form of religion, but lacked the real spiritual knowledge of how to live life by the blueprint given by the Creator of life.

Hosea's message continues: "The more they increased, the more they sinned against Me; I will change their glory into shame. They eat up the sin of My people; they set their heart on their iniquity. And it shall be: like people, like priest. So I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their deeds. For they shall eat, but not have enough; they shall commit harlotry, but not increase; because they have ceased obeying the LORD."

Amid the current rush of patriotic fervor it's easy to condemn this message as religious fanaticism. Or we can take another approach and shift personal responsibility by claiming that recent events constitute punishment from God because of homosexuals or abortionists. The reality is that recent events are a spiritual wake-up call for everyone. This doesn't mean that God caused the acts of terrorism, but this horrific tragedy is a wake-up call for all people to return to the Creator. We proclaim "United We Stand," but did the bombing of the World Trade Center stop crime in Chicago or Houston? Since the hijackings, how many illegal drug dealers have shut down operations? How many abortion clinics have closed their doors?

There is good news in the continu-

ation of God's message to His people, "Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up" (Hosea 6:1). The hope of this good news depends upon the response of people to God's warning.

What Jesus taught

When Jesus walked the earth He used catastrophes of that day to accentuate the same message proclaimed by Hosea. An example of this type of teaching is found in Luke 13:1-5. "There were present at that season some who told Him [Jesus] about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices."

Here we have a terrible tragedy. Godly people bringing sacrifices to the temple were brutally executed. It would be easy to conclude that these Jews must have been especially grievous sinners who deserved punishment.

Luke continues: "And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.'"

Jesus used these examples to turn His audience toward God as the only one with the solutions to humanity's problems. What this country needs isn't just a national day of prayer and mourning, but a day of fasting and crying out for repentance. A heartfelt seeking of God's will, faith and obedience. A desperate return to the gospel preached by Jesus Christ.

God is merciful and not willing that any should perish. Even people who commit such heinous acts of violence and hate as those that were carried out against America on Sept. 11 can be forgiven if they will repent

and turn to the God of the Bible. But if we are to call upon God to help us in our national time of darkness, then we must first look at ourselves in the light of His Word. We are a people who murder tens of thousands of fellow citizens every year. We are a people who promote homosexuality, divorce and pornography. A people on the one hand singing "God Bless America," but on the other hand not even allowing prayer in public schools. We are a people who worship God in ways that are convenient for us, yet refuse to submit ourselves to Him.

Is this an unpatriotic message or fanatical Christianity? Or is this the message brought by Jesus who said "unless you repent you will all likewise perish"?

Our nations are in need of a spiritual awakening. Not "spiritual" in the New Age ecumenical way the word is commonly used, but spiritual in the sense of returning to the true God of the Bible. We need to take a hard look at the religious and materialistic idolatry that passes for spirituality in our post-modern world.

Do you even know what the Bible really teaches about God's purpose for creating humankind? Do you know the real teachings of Jesus Christ? It is not enough to memorize a few of Jesus' sayings and attend church to be a true follower of Jesus. Christ proclaimed, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

This isn't meant as a judgmental condemnation, but a sharing from one sinner to another the words of our Savior in a dark and evil age.

America's wake-up call

We return to the biblical message of the prophet Hosea. Even most people who read the Bible haven't spent much time in this small book contained in the section of the Bible commonly called the Minor Prophets. The story of Hosea is a tragic one. God actually commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute. On numerous occasions

she would run away and return to selling herself to other men. God then instructed Hosea to go find her and bring her back to his home.

God's consistent message to the northern kingdom through Hosea and Amos is that He loves them and pleads with them to return to Him. But they continued to commit spiritual whoredom just as Hosea's wife was unfaithful. Thus God was forced to give them a bill of divorcement.

We can take the name Christian upon ourselves, but it is time we search the Bible, cry out to God and question if our religious beliefs are no more than habitual ceremonies based on human traditions.

Jesus Christ makes one of the most chilling statements in all the Bible at the end of His famous Sermon on the Mount: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

We must ask ourselves, are we a nation that cries "Lord, Lord," but refuses to follow His commands? Do we claim to be a Christian people, while in reality we're a society awash in moral relativism where the law of Christ is replaced with meaningless catch phrases like "just do what's right in your own heart"?

We have received a wake-up call from our Creator. Will we answer?

The Good News radio broadcast can be heard on stations across the country. For a listing of stations and times or to download radio programs, go to www.ucg.org/radio. While online you can also order the booklet offered on this program, Are We Living in the Time of the End?

“HARRY POTTER,” (Continued from page 3)

of the gospel of the Kingdom of God is unalterably opposed to witchcraft and sorcery. Wherever the gospel is preached and practiced, Satan and his agents appear to hinder its work of redemption and salvation. Jesus Christ repeatedly encountered the spirit world (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 8:26-39).

The book of Acts lists four separate encounters with sorcerers and those who practiced divining as the Church of God spread the gospel through the Roman world of the first century (Acts 8:9-11; 13:8; 16:16; 19:13-15).

In Ephesus, where Paul saw significant success, the impact of the Church caused many who practiced black magic to reject sorcery by burning their books in a public display. “Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver” (Acts 19:19).

Satan has deceived the whole world, hiding the plan of God from human comprehension (Revelation 12:9). He has cleverly counterfeited the details of God’s purpose through the ages. Whether it is false religion, science fiction, fantasy creations or outright witchcraft, the objective of each is to hide the true purpose of human life and the means that will bring His spiritual creation to completion.

When we read human works such as the *Lord of the Rings* or view the hugely popular *Star Wars* series, we see the significant themes that God first set down in Scripture. When we read of the cosmic struggle between forces of good and evil, light and dark and the movement toward a final titanic struggle where good triumphs over evil, we are reading, or viewing, as the case may be, human recreations and retelling of the biblical epic. The Bible shows the true source of both good and evil. It reveals how and why physical suffering and loss on the human level came about. It also shows that God in His divine wisdom provided a Redeemer, Jesus Christ, long before the foundation of this present age (1 Peter 1:20). The Bible contains the original and true story lines of all time. Everything else is second-rate literature.

We need to understand this when we see these movies or read this literature. The

danger lies in misunderstanding that the source of spiritual deception is Satan. The devil uses many tools to cloak his presence and influence. The apostle Paul wrote, “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Ephesians 5:6-11).

Can God bless America?

Today America, with its chief ally Great Britain, wages war against terrorism. The wake-up call of Sept. 11 has galvanized the nation to defend its freedom and way of life. Young men and women bravely march off to war in a valiant effort to prolong and extend our way of life. The plea that God will “bless America” has resounded from millions who are both outraged and troubled at what happened on that dark and fearful day.

Since Americans have asked God’s blessing on the nation’s efforts, they should also ask what God truly thinks about its culture and what it exports to the world through movies, music and literature. In the end, His opinion is all that matters. Let’s ask what can happen to a people called by God to a high and noble purpose, who then turn from the way and follow after wickedness.

Return again to the scene of ancient Israel. In Deuteronomy 28 God laid before them their potential and their destiny. “Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth.... The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you” (Deuteronomy 28:1, 9-10). Incredible national blessings would come to Israel if they obeyed God’s way

and modeled that way before all the nations.

In verse 15 God shows what would happen if they failed in their mission and turned away from the commandments. “But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.” He goes on through the rest of the chapter to show the fruit of a long national decline that could end in either of two ways—captivity or repentance and ultimate restoration. Sadly, the story of Israel ended in captivity after many years of warning by God through His prophets. Israel would not turn from its many sins, among them idolatry and witchcraft, as we have seen.

America and Britain are a modern parallel to ancient Israel. They have been blessed among all the nations of the earth, yet have not kept faith spiritually with the Creator. The words of Isaiah describe much that our nations need to understand. “Israel does not know, My people do not consider. Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD...they have turned away backward...The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it” (Isaiah 1:3-6).

For more than two hundred years America and Britain have been a deep well of blessing poured upon the world. In today’s globalized world America leads the way in exporting a popular culture that has an aura of freedom, but contains corrupt seeds. Movies which popularize witchcraft and sorcery do not do us credit. I can only repeat the words of my Bulgarian friend, “how sad.” One day our nations will be held accountable for purveying such a culture of deception.

In the coming Kingdom of God there will be no room for those who practice sorcery. “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie” (Revelation 22:14-15). ❖

“GAME OVER,” (Continued from page 16)

against the walls like thickets of dead branches or they lie beside a man’s plate as he eats. At prayer time, guns are kept within reach, placed on the ground in front of the prayer rug.”

But what is the end result? Dixon goes on to say, “Decades of war have militarized the society, left thousands of widows and fatherless children, and spawned thousands of boys with grudges to repay, on both sides of the country’s civil war.” They grow up wanting to be like the role models before them, mujahedin or “holy warriors.” In villages you are more likely to see young teens toting Kalashnikovs rather than schoolbooks. Beyond what’s on their shoulders, their faces are set in hard expressions of what they feel a fighter should look like. Beyond their faces is what is built up in their hearts. Along with inheriting their fathers’ guns, they absorb their desire for vengeance and their fatalistic view of war.

“It was fate”

Abdullah’s son, Kodratullo, began fighting in the 1980s at the tender age of 13 as one wave after another of oppressors came into their lives. As Dixon sums it up, “As a boy, Kodratullo had no fear of death and no appreciation of the value of a life.” It is a brand of fatalism that creeps down and through one generation to the next. Asked about his older son, Amanullo, who was wounded at age 14 fighting the Soviets, Abdullah offered without any emotion the common understanding. “It was fate. We didn’t think about it. It had to be that way. If he’d died, that would have been his fate too.”

Abdullah and his sons look upon Abdullah’s father, Mohammed, with great veneration. He is not only the patriarch of their clan, but he is also the village leader. He is most likely over 80 years old now. He wasn’t always blind or needing comfort from blankets to keep him warm. He has no idea exactly how old he is. He states the time of his birth in terms of “ten changes of kings and governments of our country.” He grew up with inspiring legends of Afghan fighters battling the British with only primitive hunting rifles and sabers during the Third Anglo-Afghan War. In 1979, already too old to fight, it would be Mohammed who would give “the call to arms” to his sons and fellow villagers to rise up against the Soviet incursion.

But his biggest battle seems to be the plight of everyday life for his people. There is a shortage of schoolteachers and books for his people. Many of his neighbors are drifting away looking for a better life. His son Abdullah will in time become leader of the village. But soon he too will be gone. Reporter Dixon informs us, “Abdullah is not sure whether any of his sons will command enough respect to lead the village, where most people do not read or write, and one doesn’t bother to count how many children die of malnutrition, even though they do count the bodies of their dead warriors. Kodratullo’s illiteracy worries his father, who sees it as a testament to the family’s decline and a threat to its prestige in the close-knit Salang Gorge community.”

Abdullah is wise in recognizing his family’s authority lies not in their name, but in their ability to read, write and resolve quarrels between local families before they reach for their Kalashnikovs or sabers to settle their feuds. Abdullah reflected sadly on the results of 22 years of war upon the children

of his country. He lamented, “In other countries of the world, they teach their children to do something, to be engineers. In our country, we teach our children how to kill people.”

“I’m dreaming of the day”

The incredibly wonderful news is that “The Great Game” that has not only been played out in Afghanistan for a century, but in reality in the entire world for millennia, is coming to an end. Yes, there will be more moves that will imperil the entire earth. But the returning Jesus Christ, the great hope for all humanity, is going to not only “check” human aggression, but also “checkmate” the ultimate spiritual terrorist—none other than Satan.

This liberator, described in Isaiah 9:6 as the Prince of Peace, is going to liberate all the pawns of humanity stuck in the endless cycle of “The Great Game” of human stealth and craftiness. In fact, a new game plan is on the way!

Where can you find this in Scripture? Notice Daniel 2:44: “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.” The ushering in of the Kingdom of God under Jesus Christ breaks all human rules. In fact “The Great Game” is thrown out and a new game plan goes into action.

Did you notice the history-making news in verse 44? “And the kingdom shall not be left to other people”! The wonderful and loving Kingdom of God is not simply one more link in a succession of human-led, world-ruling empires, but is a spiritually liberating force that is going to lift a curtain of spiritual, emotional and cultural darkness.

Who better to guide this liberating game plan than one who has been in “The Great Game” and suffered its fallout? When you consider the prophecies related to Christ’s earthly experience and the images of Afghanistan today, they sound so similar.

Read the words of Isaiah 53:2-3, “He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised and we did not esteem Him.” Where does the life that Jesus experienced as a man leave off and where does the daily life of today’s Afghans begin? In the age to come, I think they will have something to talk about, because they have spoken the same language of experience. Shakespeare put it this way: “He jests at scars, who never felt the wounds.”

Reporter Dixon captures the essence of one man’s hope, when at the end of her article she echoes Abdullah’s prayer of prayers. “I’m dreaming of the day when my daughter and some of my grandsons will get an education and become doctors. This is my only dream. I don’t want them to go up to the mountain and fight. I want them to live like human beings.” Abdullah’s “only dream” is a reality which will come to this entire earth when he, you, I, and all humanity will have the opportunity to respond to the caring voice of Isaiah 30:21 when it states, “this is the way, walk in it.” Oh yes, what a wonderful day that will be when “The Great Game” is over! ❖



This is the Way

ISAIAH 30:21

by Robin Webber

When “The Great Game” Is Over

Nearly 100 years ago, the famous British author Rudyard Kipling wrote of “The Great Game.” Kipling, known for many a verse addressed to young people, was alluding to something far more complex than any child’s pastime. He was speaking of the centerpiece of a great geopolitical chessboard that sat between two rival empires. The chessboard of “The Great Game” was none other than Afghanistan.

In Kipling’s time, Russia was in pursuit of a warm water port to the south, and Britain was determined to protect its empire on the Asian subcontinent. Afghanistan was the intersecting crunch-zone for all would-be power seekers to enter. It has been so since the days of Alexander the Great. Intrigue, political seduction and skirmishes brokered by the “big powers” through their tribal surrogates all played out like a game of chess. Isn’t it incredible how some things just don’t change?

Unfortunately, the pawns were not funny shaped carvings of wood, ivory or plastic, but very real flesh and blood people with hopes and dreams like you and me. It’s been said, “When war visits a nation, its people are never the same.” Unfortunately for Afghanistan, war has never left. In 2001, we are simply witnessing the latest moves of the pawns on the “great game board” by powerful outside interests.

A warlike rite of passage

Such an unsettled climate has created a warlike rite of passage handed down from one generation to the next. A warrior culture has become entrenched in the minds and hearts of the everyday man. “On the ground” in Afghanistan there are no games, only the reality of day-to-day survival.

Robyn Dixon, a *Los Angeles Times* staff writer, captures the essence of the problem in an article titled “Learning the Way of a Warrior” that appeared in the Nov. 9, 2001, edition. She tells the story of three generations of fighters from one family. Over the last two months, all of us have become acquainted with place names like Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif and Kandahar. But rather than share one more place name, I would like to convey the generational trauma and, yes, the hopes and dreams of three men named Mohammed, Abdullah and Kodratullo.

Robyn Dixon begins her compelling story with the most important centerpiece of one family’s home. It is a Russian Kalashnikov rifle. Abdullah Jah had lifted it years before from the corpse of a Russian soldier high in a snowy pass. The rifle had become so defective it had failed to protect its former owner.

Dixon goes on to poignantly share the budding relationship between Abdullah and his newfound friend, the rifle. “He took it apart, cleaned it fastidiously, oiled it and whispered sweet words to it. ‘You are my friend, and I will take care of you.’ After that it never let him down.” That is, yet! This treasured object hangs on the bedroom wall. It is always within reach for the family to use against their foes.

“The Kalashnikov” is at the center of Afghan life. As reporter Dixon so aptly describes, “a few weeks in Afghanistan and you develop ‘reflexive Kalashnikov blindness.’” You forget to be surprised by them everywhere. She paints a vivid picture, writing, “In Afghanistan’s bazaars, men carry Kalashnikovs, slung over their shoulders. In the teahouses, guns lean propped

(See “GAME OVER,” page 15)