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Western Thinking About Middle East Misses Key Factor

Say "Middle East" to people in other parts of the world, and they will think in terms of countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, etc. Recent events have forced the average Westerner to become aware of the factor of religious sects within these countries. There is yet another factor about which we need to be aware in order to anticipate future events.

by Cecil E. Maranville

In the Middle East of thousands of years ago lived a young man whose story is crucial to understanding the current configuration of the Middle East, as well as future events. When he was orphaned, he had an aunt and uncle who were childless, making them the logical ones to take him in. Not only was his uncle without any heirs, but he also possessed considerable wealth. So this young man stood to inherit a great deal.

The uncle took him in, but did not make the young man his heir, for the uncle and aunt eventually had children and direct heirs of their own. Years of living with and working alongside his uncle brought the young man a lot of personal wealth—so much so, that the time came when nephew and uncle had to separate their holdings. The temperament and character of the nephew was such that he put his own interests ahead of those of his uncle. Fierce rivalry between their respective clans made it impossible for them to live in close proximity to each other.

You know the nephew's name, as well as the uncle's, but let's speak of the uncle first. He was Abraham, father of the Arab and the Israelite peoples. In past issues of *World News and Prophecy*, we've chronicled the rivalry between the descendants of the two sons of Abraham: Ishmael,

father of the Arabs, and Isaac, father of Jacob and the Israelites, including the modern Israelis. But we've not told the story or the significance of the nephew who was left out. His name was Lot.

Muhammad identified with him

He's mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, as well as several times in the Koran. When Abraham graciously gave him the choice of land in which he would settle, Lot took the better-looking property. You may know how he eventually went to live in a morally depraved city, Sodom, after he split off his holdings from his uncle's. He was not completely without good qualities, for the Christian Bible tells us that Lot was "righteous" and "was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked" in the city (2 Peter 2:7). Muhammad identified closely with Lot, seeing himself in a similar role as he preached to the wicked citizens of Mecca in the seventh century.

What does Lot's story have to do with today's Middle East—or tomorrow's Middle East? In a somewhat oblique prophecy found in Psalm 83, the Bible foretells a conspiracy or a confederation of nations against Israel. While fulfilled perhaps many times in antiquity, this

(See "MIDDLE EAST," page 3)



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World's Greatest Nation?

Is America the world's greatest nation? President Bush and many other national leaders think so and have been vigorously proclaiming such in recent weeks. The nation is riding a wave of patriotism unlike any seen in this generation. In the midst of all the flag waving, this is a good question to ask.

Millions of immigrants have voted with their feet on this question. From the shores of Ellis Island to the deserts of the American Southwest, people have both legally and illegally sought to enter this nation for its promise of freedom and economic advancement. While regimes of repression have historically put up walls to keep their people from leaving, America has had to regulate the flow of people into its rich and abundant land.

There is no question the United States has been one of the most blessed countries. Supplies of food bearing the U.S. flag continually stream toward nations that are ravaged by war, famine and misguided governments. America is the richest and most powerful economy in today's global market. Daily closings on Wall Street impact world markets long after the close of each trading day. Foreign firms eagerly seek to distribute their wares on the shelves of American retail stores.

No other nation can match the military might of the United States. Many of its weapons are technically superior to anything produced by other international powers. American force can be projected anywhere in the world with deadly efficiency. And when the battle is over, America is historically the only great power to return home without taking any territorial advantages. After World War II U.S. largesse rebuilt enemy homelands with Marshall Plan dollars and democratic ideas. Winston Churchill called it the single greatest humanitarian effort in history.

No question, America is rich, blessed and powerful. But is it "the greatest" nation?

To answer the question, let's turn to the Bible and see what God says makes a nation great. His standards on the subject give an overlooked perspective.

In Deuteronomy we have the instruction God gave to Israel that defines greatness in a people. "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you . . . Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?" (Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8.)

True greatness in a people is rooted in obedience to the law of God. To reach the biblical definition of greatness and the full measure of blessing it entails, a nation must enshrine the commandments of God and treat them as inviolate. When God restores His righteous rule to this earth, the nations will consult with a renewed Israel and learn of God's law (Micah 4:2). In that day all nations will be great, as they learn and live the way of God.

—Darris McNeely

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“MIDDLE EAST,” (Continued from page 1)
prophecy has end-time applications. Students of prophecy know that the Old Testament prophets were stirred to forecast events up to and beyond the return of Jesus Christ.

(Israel in the end time includes but is not limited to the small nation in the Middle East. See our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* for more details.)

The prophecy reads, in part, “The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites; Moab and the Hagrites; Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek; Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assyria also has joined with them; they have helped *the children of Lot*” (Psalm 83:6-8). We may not be able to identify with certainty the modern descendants of all these strange-sounding tribes, but it’s evident that the descendants of Abraham’s nephew—“the children of Lot”—play a prominent role in this confederation of peoples who will oppose the descendants of ancient Israel.

After going his separate way from Lot, Abraham’s family eventually grew large; he was a patriarch or sheik. In time, his sons eventually became the patriarchs of their own large families, tribal chieftains in their own right. Where are their descendants now? Do they all fit neatly within the borders of this or that nation? Or should they still be thought of as tribes?

The Western view is, “Think in terms of nations.” But the Middle Eastern perspective is, “Think in terms of tribes.” While the Bible uses names that are the same as some modern nations (Egypt, Libya, etc.), it reflects the Middle Eastern way of thinking by speaking mostly in terms of tribes. There’s a profound difference between the two, and thinking only in terms of national boundaries prevents us from understanding present events and anticipating future ones.

History tells us that Lot and Abraham were both rich when they went their separate ways. However, Lot’s fortunes quickly reversed with the supernatural destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. His clan was reduced to merely three members, two daughters and himself. Contrasting that with the fantastic wealth of Abraham’s clan must have been humiliating for Lot. Bible students are familiar with the dreadful events that led to the

reestablishment of his family, which also eventually grew into several tribes.

After many years, when Lot’s clan was finally established, its members likely looked with envy upon the clans of Israel and Ishmael. Biblical history tells us that the two principal tribes that sprang from Lot were known as the people of Moab and Ammon (Genesis 19:37-38). Interestingly, these are two names that we read in the above prophecy of Psalm 83.

Families not the same as nations

If you think like a Westerner, you’re asking, “What nations are these people today?” But the Bible speaks in Middle Eastern terms. It simply identifies the people as having descended from the two patriarchs, Moab and Ammon. Although their beginnings were inauspicious, these people were treated with respect by the God of Abraham. He forbade the nomadic Israelites from troubling them. When traversing the wilderness between Egypt and Palestine, Israel was warned against harassing the tribe or clan of Moab. Remarkably, God said that He had given a specific territory to “the descendants of Lot as a possession” (Deuteronomy 2:9).

Ownership of land has always been important to the tribes of the Middle East, whether the tribes that sprang from Israel, Ishmael or Lot in antiquity—or their modern descendants.

Presently, the Middle East has been carved up into nations that do not take into account or reflect *the tribal roots* of their citizenry. When England and France drew national boundaries after engineering the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, those boundaries were positioned for political reasons, irrespective of clans or tribes.

Bernard Lewis, the preeminent Middle East historian, wrote, “...Iraq was a medieval province, with borders very different from those of the modern republic; Syria, Palestine and Libya are but names from classical antiquity and hadn’t been used in the region for a thousand years or more before they were revived and imposed by European imperialists in the twentieth century; Algeria and Tunisia do not even exist as words in Arabic—the same name serves for the city and country. Most remarkable of all, *there is no word in the Arabic language for Arabia*, and modern Saudi Arabia is spoken of instead

as ‘the Saudi Arab kingdom,’ or ‘the peninsula of the Arabs,’ depending on the context” (“The Revolt of Islam,” *The New Yorker*; Nov. 19, 2001, pp. 51-52, emphasis added throughout).

Arab identity

Lewis continues, “This is not because Arabic is a poor language—quite the reverse is true—but because the Arabs simply *did not think in terms of combined ethnic and territorial identity*. Indeed, the caliph Omar, the second in succession after the Prophet Muhammad, is quoted as saying to the Arabs, ‘Learn your genealogies, and do not be like the local peasants who, when they are asked who they are, reply: “I am from such-and-such a place”’” (ibid.). Curiously, except for the Jews, most of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have lost their sense of genealogy and with it, their identity. Thinking in terms of their tribal identity is a key to understanding other prophecies of the Bible (see *The United States and Britain Bible Prophecy* for this amazing story).

That’s in contrast to the Islamic world where “the states are almost all dynastic, with shifting frontiers, and it is surely significant that, in the immensely rich historiography of the Islamic world in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, there are histories of dynasties, of cities, and primarily, of the Islamic state and community, but no histories of Arabia, Persia, or Turkey” (ibid.).

How does that relate to today? The Western way to project national policy is to think in terms of a national entity. If we want to know the direction U.S. policy will take, we focus on Washington. Now, Western thinking is beginning to include the multinational European Union, although it is still a developing entity. For the most part, we focus upon the administrations of Britain, France, Germany, etc. Doing so will enable us to ascertain the direction of national policy.

But if we think that way of the Middle East, we will be caught off guard. Nations such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan, for example, may announce national policies, but *the nations aren’t cohesive families grown great*. And, they aren’t like the legendary American “melting pot,” which theoretically amalgamates all ethnic groups into Americans. Irrespective of

(See “MIDDLE EAST,” page 15)

The Coming World Religion

New religions dot the world's nations like mushrooms after a rain. They help mold and shape the course of history. A "new" religion that is really the regeneration of an extremely old faith will soon spread out to dominate all nations.

by Darris McNeely

What will the religious landscape of the 21st century look like? Will another major new religion arise? The Bible talks of a major religious force to arise in the time prior to Christ's return. What can be discerned about this new world religion from today's religious landscape?

When it comes to predicting the "next new thing" in religion, most experts miss the mark. No one foresaw the force with which Islamic fundamentalism would hit the modern world during the last 30 years. That's why today many are scrambling to understand Islamic culture and religion. Books and videos on the subject are in major demand as the Western world seeks better understanding of this globe-girdling religion.

Most people are familiar with their own faith but don't always study other religions, particularly non-Western faiths such as Islam or Hinduism. That ignorance leaves out a majority of the world's faiths and creates a knowledge vacuum about forces shaping many parts of the world. Not understanding the ferment in the world of faith and religion can leave one unprepared for future developments on the world scene.

A recent article in *The Atlantic Monthly*, an American opinion magazine, tells of the new religious movements that are growing at phenomenal rates. Quoting David B. Barrett, editor of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, "There is enormous religious change going on across the world, all the time. It's massive, it's complex, and it's continual. We have identified nine thousand and nine hundred distinct and separate religions in the world, increasing by two or three new religions every day" ("Oh, Gods!," February 2002, p. 38, emphasis theirs).

These new religious movements are diverse and larger than one might imagine. Among the

many are: The Soka Gakkai International, a Buddhist sect with 18 million members in 115 countries; the Cao Dai, a 3 million-strong Vietnamese-based group found in 50 countries (a blend of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and a bit of Judaism and Christianity); and Umbanda, a spiritist movement based in Brazil with 20 million members which blends traditional African, South American and Catholic religious teachings.

These groups have two things in common. They all formed during the 20th century and have grown rapidly, going largely unrecognized in the West. New religious groups are studied closely by those in the field of religious studies. In 1991 the Vatican convened a gathering of cardinals to discuss, among other matters, the burgeoning success of these diverse religious movements. The Catholic Church wanted to understand the reasons and methods for the success of these groups.

All these movements have the ability to meet basic needs for people where larger, mainstream forms of religion have failed. People adopt a faith to find meaning and an identity in life. In many third world countries, religion helps people to survive socially and culturally. When the social fabric or traditional customs of a nation change or break down, people find their needs can be met by joining a group based on religious faith.

These new faiths give structure and substance to an otherwise precarious existence. The community thus created supports and sustains its citizens when there is a crisis. Along with meeting physical needs, these new movements often offer entrancing revelations or new ideas. They offer new insight into the mysteries of life for those disillusioned by traditional religions.

The Mormons and Seventh Day Adventists, both of which started as small "new religious

Today's religious scene is a multiplex of deception and confusion. Are we observing the mix that sets the stage for the final masterstroke Satan will lay before the world?

The United Church of God provides *World News and Prophecy (WNP)* as an educational service for interested persons. The purpose of *WNP* is to help readers discern the times and increase their awareness and understanding of current events in the light of Bible prophecy. Although the staff strives for truth and accuracy in its reporting, analysis and Bible commentary, *WNP* is not a doctrinal publication. Articles do undergo both an editorial and a review process.

movements,” have been successful at forming close communities of believers who are sincerely dedicated to one another and their faith. This has in turn fostered growth in the organizations.

Shift to North/South axis

This *Atlantic Monthly* article made another interesting observation while speculating on the 21st century landscape.

“One of the most remarkable changes already taking place because of the new religious movements is the underreported shift in the center of gravity in the Christian world. There has been a dramatic move from North to South. Christianity is most vital now in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where independent churches, Pentecostalism and even major Catholic Charismatic movements are expanding rapidly. The story of Christianity in twentieth-century Africa is particularly noteworthy. There were fewer than 10 million Christians in Africa in 1900; by 2000 there were more than 360 million. And something very interesting is happening; ancient Christian practices such as exorcism, spirit healing, and speaking in tongues—all of which are documented in the Book of Acts—are back in force” (ibid., p. 44).

The article goes on to show that many new religious movements from Asia, Latin America and Africa are successful in evangelizing the northern secular nations of America and Europe. Converts range not only from immigrants from these nations seeking something of “home,” but also include whites who are looking for something more substantial and meaningful in their worship. A concluding thought in the article indicates the future potential influence of these groups. “The present rate of growth of the new Christian movements and their geographical range suggest that they will become a major social and political force in the coming century” (ibid., p. 45).

Last month Pope John Paul II convened another ecumenical gathering of religious leaders from around the world (see page 13). Meeting in Assisi, Italy, the more than 200 religious leaders representing such diverse faiths as Hinduism, Islam and African tradition-



Pope John Paul II welcomes Islamic delegates during the peace summit in Assisi, Italy, Jan. 24 (Reuters/Vincenzo Pinto)

al religions prayed for peace and made pledges of support for the pontiff’s goal that religion would not be the cause of strife in this century. Unfortunately, history runs against this desire, since religious differences have been the cause of much strife throughout human history. Such a gathering, along with the information presented in the *Atlantic Monthly* article, emphasizes the fact that religion will play a significant role in the future.

This corresponds with what Bible prophecy says will shape the world in the end time prior to Christ’s return. One key event is Daniel’s prophecy of the conflict between the king of the North and the king of the South. “At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through” (Daniel 11:40).

The source of this conflict can arise from a combination of economic, political and even religious sources. Given the volatility of Islamic fundamentalism today, it is reasonable to imagine religion being a part of this rapid chain of

events that will culminate in Jerusalem (verse 45).

A coming man of sin

What else does the Bible indicate will be shaping the end time stage? One major prophecy, uttered by the apostle Paul, is found in 2 Thessalonians 2. It foretells a time of religious deception to come, which will be unlike any previous period. The deception comes from the actions of a notable person called “the man of sin.”

Notice what it says: “Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (verses 1-4).

The actions of this “man of sin” will go beyond the actions of any previous

prophetic figure when he proclaims “he is God.” Note that he does not claim merely to represent God or to be as God, but rather he claims he *is* God. To pull this unprecedented work of deception off will require the behind-the-scenes help of the arch-deceiver of mankind, Satan the devil, who will provide “signs, and lying wonders” (verse 9) to accomplish the job.

Revelation 13:11-14 describes a “beast” who looks like a lamb but speaks like a dragon, who will perform great signs such as calling fire from heaven. This beast causes the world to worship another beast (verses 1-9). The deception that these two men bring on all the earth’s inhabitants mirrors the description we read from 2 Thessalonians. These two figures are called “the beast and the false prophet” (Revelation 16:13). Together they preside over a powerful religious and political system called “Babylon” which dominates the world order and marshals the nations of the world to fight Jesus Christ at His second coming (Revelation 16:14).

Here is a system, a new religious movement, that arises very suddenly. The world will marvel (Revelation 17:8) at what is promised and accomplished by this system. Revelation 18 indicates the world will seem to prosper and a global image of peace and unity, unlike any previous period in history, will be created. In the minds of the masses this coming world religion will offer the solution to human survival. With all faiths seeming to work together, there will be cause to think that religious strife can be eliminated. Any who resist this philosophy, or refuse its “mark,” will be persecuted. They will be denied access to the spoils of the new world system (Revelation 13:15-17).

Christ foretold the rise of religious confusion in the time prior to His return (Matthew 24:4, 24). Today’s religious scene is a multiplex of deception and confusion. Are we observing the mix that sets the stage for the final master-stroke Satan will lay before the world?

Many times over the centuries, both religion and God have been pronounced dead. But to paraphrase the famous saying of Mark Twain, the announcement of their death has always been exaggerated. Religion will continue to be a fun-

damental force among the families of the earth. The Bible shows a world religion will arise that will be both old and new. It will combine the age-old deceptions that hide the true God and His eternal plan from man. It will promise peace and prosperity, but in reality it will spiritually enslave those who are willing to trade the truth for a lie.

How will you escape?

How will you tell the difference between this new world religion with all its clever deceptions, and the faith of those “who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17)? When a charismatic leader performs spiritual signs and miracles before the public, he will attract tremendous attention and allegiance. Global technology will magnify the impact of such a figure, overnight creating a “religious super-

It will take a mind that has been convinced through the crucible of obedience to cling firmly to the teachings of Christ during a storm of heresy and doubt.

star.” It will seem right and good and be very hard to resist when the mass culture moves to support the hope and promise of this new religion. For the remnant of God’s faithful, it will be a time of great testing.

Let’s go back to Paul’s prophecy in 2 Thessalonians 2. After describing the signs and lying wonders of the lawless one, he shows the work will be “...with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (verses 10-12).

Paul speaks of having a “love of the truth.” Here is a key to avoiding religious deception. God’s Word is truth (Psalm 119:160). God has revealed the

answers to life’s big questions from His Word, the Bible. Philosophers and theologians have attempted to explain the purpose of man’s existence and why the universe exists. The revealed answers from the Bible form a grid-work of truth which overlays a world of understanding for those whom God calls.

But to know the truth and even to obey the truth is only part of the answer to our question. We must also come to a point where we love the truth. To be willing to hold on to true doctrines and teaching in the face of universal opposing opinions will be extremely challenging. It will take a mind that has been convinced through the crucible of obedience to cling firmly to the teachings of Christ during a storm of heresy and doubt.

Paul wrote about the impact that obedience to the truth has on a Christian. “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). When you prove God’s Word through obedience, you will come to love the truth. Holding fast to the truth enables one to clearly hear the voice of Christ (John 18:37).

Despite the massive deception wrought by this end-time religious movement, the prophecies show that the remnant of God’s faithful will hold to the biblical truths. The marriage scene between the Lamb and His wife who “has made herself ready” shows that the people of God, the Church, have been prepared for this royal marriage. Righteous acts clothe God’s elect in the clean and bright linen garments (Revelation 19:7-8).

Take heart that God will help you endure to the end and survive any deception Satan casts upon the world. “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work” (2 Thessalonians 2:15-17). ❖

Meeting Our Moment of Maximum Jeopardy!

Human survival has been at stake in times long before our own. Mankind has already passed through several periods of extreme crisis. But the one up ahead may just be the granddaddy of them all.

by John Ross Schroeder

Over the millennia mankind has faced several crisis periods when the survival of the species was in doubt. In more contemporary times one thinks of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 when the world was brought to the brink of nuclear war between the former Soviet Union and the United States. Fortunately, wiser heads prevailed on both sides and the critical issues were resolved in the realm of diplomatic activity rather than nuclear conflict.

A historic moment of maximum jeopardy

Perhaps mankind's most critical past crisis occurred over 4,000 years ago. The biblical background of it is crucial to our understanding. Those ancient peoples were in the midst of a population explosion and the Bible records the on-the-spot assessment by the Creator Himself.

God was enormously displeased with the chaotic moral state of that ancient world. Those early peoples had strayed so far from their Creator's way that He pronounced the death sentence upon them. Clearly their crimes were capital in nature.

"And the LORD said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh [mortal, NIV]; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years'" (Genesis 6:3). Implicit in God's pronouncement was His longsuffering to provide sufficient time for a wholesale repentance, but it did not occur (see 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5).

The Bible is an unusual book in that it records the actual thoughts of the Creator God. He not only observed the wickedness of those ancient peoples, but He also knew of the continual succession of evil thoughts that dominated their minds and resulted in barbaric actions of murder and mayhem (Genesis 6:5).

So horrendous was the general state of mankind that "the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and *He was grieved in His heart*" (verse 6, emphasis added throughout). The biblical picture we have of God is one of a caring Creator very concerned when we go badly wrong.

Does God suffer? Most certainly He does, and our bad behavior occasions that suffering.

"So the LORD said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth . . . for I am sorry that I have made them'" (verse 7). Remember men and women were made "in the image of God" (Genesis 1:26-27), rendering their ungodly conduct, their cunning chicanery, all the more blameworthy in our Creator's sight.

The grace of God in action

Fortunately for us all, God was still in direct communication with one man on earth—the patriarch Noah. He shared His thoughts with him: "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence" (Genesis 6:13). This was a time not so very different from our modern world. Today terrorism, war, civil conflict and domestic violence plague our lives.

Back then the Creator issued specific instructions to Noah on how to build an ark for the saving of his family and a sampling of the animal species. But why would God save Noah while destroying the rest of mankind? The Bible leaves us in no doubt as to the answer.

We need only to read how this patriarch reacted to these divine instructions. "Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did" (verse 22; compare Genesis 7:5). Noah prized obedience to his Creator. It was at the top level of his personal priorities. He habitually walked with God (Genesis 6:9).

"Then the LORD said to Noah, 'Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation'" (Genesis 7:1). Righteousness means obedience to God—keeping His commandments (see Psalm 119:172).

Now Noah wasn't perfect as later events showed. Nonetheless he found "grace in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:8). While walking with God as a way of life, he did stumble and fall occasionally as we all do. But he was soon back on his feet in real repentance.

On that momentous occasion in human histo-

Both the great Flood of Noah and the dilemma of Lot presage a major world crisis yet to fully dawn on mankind.

ry mankind was spared by the grace of God responding to the obedience of just one man. It was a defining moment for the entire cosmos and for what will surely come in future ages. Noah had successfully tunneled through mankind's first real moment of maximum jeopardy.

Learning from the past

During recent years the study of history has been downplayed in educational circles. Some people even seek to rewrite history according to their own biases and prejudices. But true knowledge of the past, particularly biblical history, is essential to wise and beneficial conduct (Romans 15:4).



PhotoSpin

*God will save us from ourselves.
We have His Word!*

Centuries after Noah's Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah became centers of gross immorality: "But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD" (Genesis 13:13). Later we learn that one of their prominent sins was practicing homosexuality (Genesis 19:1-5). Although sinful human behavior often impacts others in major ways, all sin is against God as King David indicated in Psalm 51.

So God decided on a surgical strike in order to prevent the problem from spreading, saving only righteous Lot and two of his daughters (2 Peter 2:7-8).

The Bible is very big on learning lessons from the lives of others—and avoiding their mistakes. The apostle Peter wrote: "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer" (1 Peter 4:15). We've all seen that those individu-

als who make mistakes of that nature usually wind up in prison, or worse.

This basic biblical principle applies nationally and regionally as well as individually. Learning lessons from ancient history is not precluded. Writing prophetically as well as historically, the apostle Paul stated: "Now these things [in Hebrew history] became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they [the ancient Israelites] also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them . . . Nor let us commit sexual immorality as some of them did . . . Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Corinthians 10:6-11).

The great crisis to come

Both the great Flood of Noah and the dilemma of Lot presage a major world crisis yet to fully dawn on mankind. We should carefully note that Jesus Christ compared the days of Noah and Lot to world conditions signaling the great crisis that would precipitate His second coming to this earth (Luke 17:26-30). Then in His Olivet prophecy Christ said that in the end time the human condition would become so perilous that "unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be spared" (Matthew 24:22). Herein is another moment of maximum jeopardy which would surely imperil human survival.

Jesus also called this unique period of time "the days of vengeance" when all the major prophecies of the past would be fulfilled (Luke 21:22). Jeremiah called it "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7). The prophet Daniel predicted "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation" (Daniel 12:1). Then hundreds of years later the apostle John quoted Jesus Christ's declaration of "the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world" (Revelation 3:10).

A careful study of the Scriptures shows that these critical biblical passages are speaking of the same basic period in future world history. Together they describe one last time of maximum jeopardy in the life of mankind. James Moffatt called this unique period "the crisis at the close" in his translation of the Bible.

The time of God's intervention

In ways small to us, sometimes unno-

ticed even by the recipients, God regularly intervenes in the lives of His true servants. But major public interventions on the national and world scene are relatively rare. One thinks of Noah's Flood, the Tower of Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Exodus events and the first coming of Christ. Another big intervention is yet to occur.

Since Christ commissioned it to do so, God's Church has been warning and witnessing of the many events that will portend a major world crisis and Christ's return to this earth. That is one of the crucial purposes of this publication. Paul tells us that "Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Hebrews 9:28). God will begin the process of delivering mankind as a whole at the time of the second coming.

But who will be responsible for saving us this time around? Thankfully more than one "Noah" will be present during this crucial period in human existence. Jesus Christ promised that "*for the elect's sake* those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:22). That is, because of those who are called, chosen and faithful Christians, the world will be spared again. Mankind will pass through this coming world crisis to the other side. We will meet our moment of maximum jeopardy. God will save us from ourselves. We have His Word!

The carriers of the message

The Bible says that there will be an elect people on earth at this critical time in history. They are variously called the firstfruits of God, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a special people whose very presence will call forth Christ's intervention in world affairs to save mankind from itself.

These people compose God's Church. An important aspect of their basic mission is to warn the world of what is surely coming, often using the exact words of Jesus Christ: "There will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21).

This is our future moment of maximum jeopardy, but God guarantees in His Word that mankind will come through it all. Human survival is sure! ❖

Fifty Years of the African Queen

Britain's Queen Elizabeth will celebrate 50 years on the throne this year. Few could have imagined the astounding changes in the nations of the British Commonwealth—particularly those in Africa—during her lifetime.

by Melvin Rhodes

When Elizabeth II ascended the throne 50 years ago, Britain's African possessions were larger than the entire United States. Today Britain has no African empire. Yet the queen herself remains popular throughout the continent. Africa's post-colonial realities help us understand why.

Extensive celebrations will be held across Britain this year to celebrate the queen's Golden Jubilee. Her 50-year reign has seen the United Kingdom transformed beyond all recognition, from the head of the world's greatest empire, to a member of the European Union. The demographic makeup of the country differs greatly from when she became queen, and the morals and way of life of the people have been radically altered.

Much appreciation will be showered on Queen Elizabeth II, whose position as head of state for 50 years has greatly contributed to the nation's stability during a period of radical change.

During the celebrations, it is unlikely that much attention will be given to the queen's African role. At one time each of Britain's African possessions had its own parliament with Queen Elizabeth as head of state—reflecting the political system evolved over centuries in the mother country, often called “the mother of parliaments.”

In a continent that has since become a byword for political instability, Britain's African territories were outstanding examples of political stability. Often overlooked today is the fact that those nations around the world that have shared in the British system of government have enjoyed political stability for centuries.

Without political stability, there can be no economic progress. Sadly, since independence, most African nations have gone backwards economically. At least one reason for this has been a lack of political stability. No country in Africa has developed a political model that works as well as the British colonial political system.



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Perhaps this is one reason for what the British publication *The Economist* has referred to as Africa's continued fascination with Britain's monarchy, a fascination the publication does not share, having called for the abolition of the institution in Britain itself.

Major changes in postwar Africa

After World War II, Britain's royal family toured their African possessions to say thank you for their vital contributions to the allied war effort. Wherever they went, they were mobbed by millions of their subjects, who at that time still gloried in being part of “the empire upon which the sun never set.”

It was to be the last such tour before the African world was turned upside down. Present on the tour were King George VI and his wife, Queen Elizabeth, parents of the present monarch. They were accompanied by their two daughters, princesses Elizabeth and Margaret.

While in Johannesburg, South Africa, in the year that preceded the coming to power of the Afrikaner Nationalist Party that introduced apartheid, Princess Elizabeth turned 21. On her birthday she broadcast by radio to the nations of the British Empire and Commonwealth.

It was to be less than four months before Britain started dismantling her empire by granting independence to India and Pakistan.

Considering the last 50 years, it's no wonder that African nations and other countries in the Commonwealth continue to be fascinated by Queen Elizabeth II.

In her broadcast, Princess Elizabeth dedicated her life to the service “of the great imperial family to which we all belong,” the prophesied commonwealth of nations which had been the world’s foremost power for much more than a century. Few at that time realized the end was near.

Less than five years later the princess was again in Africa, this time accompanied by her husband, having married in November 1947, a few months after that first tour. During a visit to Kenya Colony’s Treetops game reserve, the 25-year-old princess became queen following the death of her father.

Britain’s African possessions still seemed secure. Members of the royal family were always warmly received wherever they went. A year later loyal African troops who had helped fight World War II in the jungles of the Far East and the deserts of the Sahara were in Elizabeth’s coronation procession through the streets of London.

Meanwhile, African nations were moving forward. World War II had seen attitudes change. Fighting alongside British soldiers had altered perceptions. No longer were Africans content to be subservient to their British rulers; they now saw themselves as equals. African nationalist movements were to spring up throughout the continent.

The franchise was widened in many countries enabling more people to vote. Although the franchise in Britain’s colonies was designed to be nondiscriminatory, before the Second World War parliaments were usually dominated by peoples of European descent. This was changing rapidly. Only two years after the queen’s coronation, Britain’s most progressive African colony, the Gold Coast (now Ghana) was negotiating for independence. Its African chief minister (prime minister), Kwame Nkrumah, was in London drawing up a proposed constitution for the new nation of Ghana.

The independence model to be introduced was the one that had worked successfully in other former colonies, notably Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. All had opted for “dominion” status, whereby their countries became completely indepen-



Ironically, the queen seems to be more appreciated in Africa than in those countries where she is still head of state.

dent of British control, but retained loyalty to the British monarch as their own head of state, thereby sharing in the benefits of the most stable political system in the world, one which dates back to 1688.

These independent nations, all constitutional monarchies, formed the British Commonwealth, often described at the time even by non-members like the United States as “an association of free peoples.” The Commonwealth was renowned for its political stability, the rule of law and the basic freedoms (of speech, the press and religion) granted to all citizens. Sadly, this was all about to change.

Changes affect the Commonwealth

In fact, change had already started. Two years after independence from Great Britain, the Indian government had expressed its desire to remove the British monarch as India’s head of state but, at the same time, had emphasized its desire to remain in the British Commonwealth.

A formula had been worked out that would enable India to become a republic but retain its membership in the Commonwealth recognizing the

monarch as “Head of the Commonwealth,” a title the queen still holds. The groundwork for significant change had been laid. Regrettably, dictatorships were to follow independence in many of Britain’s former colonies, with resulting negative economic effects, the breakdown of law and order and loss of freedoms.

Ghana is typical of this trend.

Even before independence, Kwame Nkrumah told his British advisors that he could “ride a coach and horses” through the constitution once his country was independent. This is exactly what he did, with other nations following in Ghana’s footsteps.

On March 6, 1957, the modern nation of Ghana was born. Tens of thousands of people carried placards bearing the words “Elizabeth and Nkrumah forever,” reflecting their commitment to their new nation and the monarchy that it wished to retain. Two years later Nkrumah proposed abolishing that tie. A referendum was held. Many older people will tell you the vote was rigged.

Nkrumah became president, the tie with the crown abolished. One year later parliament proclaimed Nkrumah “president for life.” A year after that, parliament was abolished. In only four

years Ghana's parliamentary democracy that had given the country stability for a century was no more. At the same time, one of the wealthiest African nations was bankrupt following government mismanagement and endemic corruption. Ghana and the rest of Africa were well on the way to disaster.

Following the loss of the Suez Canal in 1956, Britain rapidly dismantled its African empire. The Conservative British prime minister, Harold MacMillan, addressing the South African parliament in Cape Town, warned that "the winds of change" were sweeping across Africa. Not wanting those changes, South Africa left the Commonwealth and ended its tie with the queen. With the end of apartheid in 1994 it rejoined the organization as a republic.

The neighboring self-governing Colony of Southern Rhodesia, fearful of the rapid changes in Africa that inevitably led to dictatorship, corruption and nepotism, with an accompanying "white flight" as skilled Europeans fled from civil wars or chaos, unilaterally declared itself independent of Great Britain in November 1965, while trying to remain loyal to the Crown.

This ill-fated attempt at halting the tide of history led to seven years of bloody civil war and the ultimate birth of Zimbabwe. One of the most prosperous nations of Africa in colonial times, Zimbabwe is today the world's most rapidly declining economy as it descends into dictatorship and economic chaos.

Changing role for the queen

Is there any wonder that African nations and other countries in the Commonwealth continue to be fascinated by Queen Elizabeth II? Older people remember a time of political stability and economic progress, of law and order and guaranteed freedoms. It wasn't perfect, certainly—only the Kingdom of God will bring perfect government to the earth. The problem is that nothing better has replaced it.

Perhaps a Ghanaian market woman summed it up best when I opened my wallet to buy some produce. She saw there a British bank note with the queen's portrait on it. "Ah, Queen

Elizabeth," she said. "She used to be our queen, too. Since then we have had many, many presidents, coups and military dictatorships. And we are worse off. In England, they still have Queen Elizabeth."

The queen continues to play a role in Africa and elsewhere, visiting Commonwealth nations on the continent and in other places whenever local circumstances make this possible. At the biannual Commonwealth Heads of



Perhaps a Ghanaian market woman summed it up best... "Ah, Queen Elizabeth. She used to be our queen, too. Since then we have had many, many presidents, coups and military dictatorships. And we are worse off. In England, they still have Queen Elizabeth."

Government Conference to be held in March in Sydney, Australia, every single head of government of the 54-nation Commonwealth will have a private audience with the queen. This includes African leaders who also see the queen on visits to London.

Ironically, the queen seems to be more appreciated in Africa than in those countries where she is still head of state, notably the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and some of the islands of the Caribbean and Pacific.

These countries have continued to enjoy political stability as constitutional monarchies on the British model, stability that is largely taken for granted by many of their citizens. Even *The Economist*, at the forefront of advocating the abolishing of the monarchy in

Australia, derisively referring to the queen as "Elizabeth the Last," wrote in its latest yearbook that the introduction of a republic in Australia "would probably require an extensive rewrite of the constitution if it were not to introduce the danger of an over-powerful head of state" (*The World in 2002*, p. 42).

In other words, political instability would likely be the outcome of removing the hereditary monarch as head of state, exactly what has already happened in dozens of nations that were also once a part of the British Empire.

Often underappreciated, even at home in England, is the primary purpose of the restoration of the monarchy in the 17th century—the desire on the part of the people never to experience another dictatorship, whether royal or republican, which was England's experience during the reign of Charles I and under the ill-fated republic of 1649-60. America's founding fathers were to attempt another republic more than a century later with weaker central government, a system that has worked well for the United States but that many observers feel has not been successfully adopted anywhere else, including Africa.

As for Africa, hope for this dying continent lies in the future when African countries will once again come under a constitutional monarchy. This time it will be a perfect government that will last forever. The King will be Jesus Christ, the constitution the laws of God. You can read about this future constitutional monarchy in your Bible. Note the following verses:

"Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever" (Isaiah 9:7).

"'He [Jesus Christ] will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3).

What's behind the surprising rise and sudden decline of the British Empire? For a deeper understanding of the British Commonwealth in Bible prophecy, be sure to request our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. ❖

In Brief...

World News Review

Congo Tragedy Compounded by “Helpers”

Congo’s Nyiragongo volcano exploded in a massive eruption on Jan. 18, instantly killing 45 people in the city of Goma. In the aftermath, burning lava caused unearthed storage tanks at a gas station to explode when large numbers of people were attempting to siphon off fuel for their vehicles. An additional 50 people were killed in the explosion. UN estimates of the displaced and homeless run as high as 350,000.

As great as the tragedy is, it is compounded by competition between rival factions over the right to receive and distribute international aid. Congo has been torn apart by a civil war that has cost millions of lives. The Congolese Rally for Democracy controls most of the eastern part of the country, and its headquarters were located in Goma. Congo’s government, the Democratic Republic of Congo, claims the sole right to represent and care for the people of Goma—despite the fact that the rebels have been in full control there since 1998.

Complicating matters still further is the government of neighboring Rwanda, which would like to secure the leadership of relief efforts for itself. “‘Everyone is trying to make political mileage out of this,’ says the head of one aid organization, speaking on the condition of anonymity. ‘Each side is trying to bend the ear of the donor community, get their hands on the funds and raise their own status. There is a major catastrophe at hand, but the political leaders can’t put aside their egotistical interests even for a second’” (“Politics Mar Congo Relief Efforts” by Danna Harman, *The Christian Science Monitor*, Jan. 23, 2002).

The amount of money needed is staggering. Initial appeals from the UN were for \$15 million—which would fund the cost of food, shelter and medicine *for only about two weeks*. Why is there such competition at a time when hundreds of thousands of people are in desperate need? In plain language, money is power. Being able to control multiple millions of dollars in international aid could well be the determining factor in who ultimately wins control over that part of the country. Additionally, there is the ever-present possibility that some of the aid money would find its way into the pockets of local administrators.

What a gross contrast to the intended purpose of government, to serve its citizens. The apostle Paul urged Roman Christians to think of governing authorities as servants of God, allowed by Him to be in office to do good for all citizens (Romans 13:1-4). Self-serving governing authorities are, unfortunately, all too common. From Jesus’ comment about

the general practice of His day, it’s clear that the norm then was greed instead of giving: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.” He went on to urge Christians to understand the authority to govern in a different light, “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant” (Matthew 20:25-26).

Ripple Effect of War on Terror

U.S. President Bush declared in his State of the Union address that America “will renew the promise of the Peace Corps, double its volunteers over the next five years and ask it to join a new effort to encourage development and education and opportunity in the Islamic world.” His promise to aid Islamic countries, although generous, is likely to leave a bitter taste in the mouths of many.

Without argument, Islamic countries need help, but it is painful to receive it from the United States.

Osama bin Laden played on the jealous hostility felt by citizens of Middle Eastern Islamic countries toward the wealthy United States, in order to recruit volunteers for his al Qaeda terrorist squads. Oil revenues have fallen steadily in the Gulf states, a principal factor in the plummeting average income in both oil-producing states and neighboring ones. Salaries earned in the oil fields have also fueled the economies of the region’s oil-poor countries.

Washington is also pushing for the development of the Alaskan oil fields, as well as alternative fuels in an effort to reduce dependency on foreign (read, “Islamic”) oil. While strategically wise from a U.S. point of view, this policy further threatens the livelihood of citizens of Islamic countries in the Middle East.

Rescuer though it has been, the United States isn’t universally applauded by Muslims for its liberation of Afghanistan. Author and authority on the Middle East, Thomas L. Friedman, says his recent trip to Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Persian Gulf, London and Belgium left him with a shocking awareness. After meeting with Arab and Muslim journalists and business people, along with Muslim community leaders in Europe, Friedman reports that virtually none of them believed that Osama bin Laden was guilty.

He asserts that any U.S. ambassador from Morocco to Islamabad “will share with you the cocktail party chatter about ‘the American conspiracy’ against the Muslim world that will curl your ears.”

Friedman’s conclusion is chilling: “While America has won the war in Afghanistan, it has not won the hearts and

minds of the Arab-Muslim world" ("Run, Osama, Run," *The New York Times*, Jan. 23, 2002).

Looking beyond the immediate threat of the estimated 100,000 "graduates" of al Qaeda terrorist training camps, the repercussions of the war on terror have not yet begun to manifest themselves. Could it be that we are witnessing the sowing of the seeds that will eventually bring into being the prophesied "king of the South"—a key player in the end-of-the-age events (Daniel 11:40)?

Pope Holds Peace Ceremony

"Violence never again! War never again! Terrorism never again! In the name of God, may every religion bring upon the earth justice and peace, forgiveness and life," said Pope John Paul II.

On Jan. 24, in the Italian city of Assisi, the pope met with over 200 leaders of the world's religions to pray for peace. The pope said he wanted "to help overcome contrasts and promote authentic peace." He also said, "Humanity needs to see gestures of peace and listen to words of hope." Vincenzo Fortunato, a spokesman for the Franciscan order in Assisi said, "For us, this shows once more the spiritual genius of the pope who is again trying to influence the world with the power of prayer." This peace initiative appears to be an attempt to bring about unity between Christians, Muslims and the other religions of the world. But, no matter how ambitious the efforts, neither the pope, nor any of the other religious leaders will be able to bring about a lasting peace.

Notice Jeremiah 6:13-19: "Because from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely. They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, 'Peace, peace!' when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time I punish them, they shall be cast down,' says the LORD . . . 'Hear, O earth! Behold, I will certainly bring calamity on this people, the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not heeded My words, nor My law, but rejected it.'"

Since humanity has rejected God and His ways, true peace will not come through human activities or human interven-



Religious leaders receive lamps from Franciscan monks during peace summit (Reuters/Paolo Cocco)

tion. It will only come when Jesus Christ returns to this earth and establishes the Kingdom of God for all peoples.

Source: Reuters.

Former Enemies Embrace Against United States

Iran and Iraq fought the longest war in modern history between 1980 and 1988, and one million Iranian and Iraqi troops are believed to have been killed in the conflict and thousands more are still listed as missing in action. No peace agreement has ever been signed.

On Jan. 26, Iraqi Foreign Minister Naji Sabri was in Iran for discussions aimed at normalizing relations with its long-time enemy. Sabri said he was invited to Iran to try to resolve "the outstanding problems which were left on the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s and later on."

One of the main problems is Iraq's support of opposition groups in Iran and the Iranian government's support for Iraqi opposition figures. Iran also demands war reparations from Iraq.

The latest push comes as a growing number of officials in the United States are urging the overthrow of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein as the next step in the war against terrorism. An alliance between the two countries could make it harder for the United States to bring the war on terrorism to the region. Despite their longstanding differences, the two countries have made progress in recent months. At the end of January, Iran released more than 500 Iraqi prisoners, some of the last POWs from the Iran-Iraq war.

Iran and Iraq have also agreed to resume direct flights between their capitals, Tehran and Baghdad, for the first time in two decades.

Both countries are majority Shi'ite, and in 1998 Iraq agreed to allow Iranian pilgrims to visit holy sites in Iraq for the first time since the war.

Source: CNN.

Saudi Arabia May Seek American Departure

Saudi rulers are increasingly uncomfortable with the American military presence in their country and may soon ask that it end, according to several Saudi Arabian sources. Such a decision would deprive the United States of regular use of the Prince Sultan Air Base, from which U.S. power has been projected into the Gulf region and beyond for more than a decade.

Senior Saudi rulers believe the United States has "overstayed its welcome" and that other forms of less conspicuous military cooperation should be devised once the United States has completed its war in Afghanistan,

(See "NEWS," page 15)

“SPECTACLES,” (Continued from page 16)

ernment and those wanting looser decentralized states was already in full sway. Which direction would the army go? Who would they turn their wrath upon? They held a deep conviction that an ungrateful government had ignored them.

The indispensable man

One man would reach for his glasses, but not quite yet. The man was none other than George Washington. James T. Flexner calls him “the indispensable man.” In his book by the same title, Flexner describes how Washington was being encouraged towards “brinkmanship” with Congress over this matter with a standing army at his “beck and call.” On page 171, the author describes how the young Alexander Hamilton, then both a congressman and colonel, reported to his mentor, “‘There were no further possibilities of supplying the army; by June the troops would have to take everything they need by bayonet point.’ Hamilton went on to make plain that Washington’s own command was in danger. They might very well act without him. Then the ‘difficulty will be to keep a complaining and suffering army within the bounds of moderation’” (Washington, *The Indispensable Man*, James Thomas Flexner, 1974).

Washington would spend weeks deliberating on the words that had come to him. Here at Newburgh, New York, he would puzzle over the “predicament of which I stand as citizen and soldier.” As Flexner points out, “The efforts of the United States to form a republican government were unique in the world. Modern history presented no evidence that people could rule themselves.” It was thought that a republic could only exist on a much smaller scale.

Why not accept the inevitable and be in step with his officers? Flexner conveys, “The injustices being visited upon the army were obvious and no peaceful remedies were in sight” (ibid., p. 172). Flexner deliberates with powerful musing, “In a world of kings, why should not George Washington also be king?” Washington ultimately concluded in a note to Hamilton in early March, “I shall pursue the same steady line of conduct which has governed me hitherto.” The die was cast. Washington, the most powerful man and natural leader in the fledgling confederation of former colonies, would be subservient to a civilian government.

Through the camp at Newburgh, anonymous letters began to circulate. Some called for clandestine meetings in defiance of Washington’s authority. Another letter urged its readers “to suspect the man who would advise to more moderation and further forbearance.” Finally, Washington struck a preemptive blow and called his own meeting to head off any clandestine gathering.

The meeting began with an icy chill in the air between this living legend and his officers.

He reminded them of his care for their country and for them. He asked them to reflect on the fact that the possible foe that lay ahead of them was actually their own country made up of our “wives, children, farms and other property.”

In deriding the anonymous letter’s insult regarding his own moderation, he retorted this would mean that “reason is of no use to us. The freedom of speech may be taken away, and dumb and silent, we may be led, like sheep, to the slaughter.” Flexner goes on to share the appeal of a man who, as we would say, “went for broke,” as he finished by imploring them “not to open the gates of civil discord, and deluge our rising empire in blood.” Encouraging them to maintain their composure under incredible pressure, he concluded, “Had this day been wanting, the world had never seen the last stage of perfection to which human nature is capable of attaining.”



“Permit me to put on my spectacles”

The audience remained unmoved. Talk about the proverbial “tough crowd”! Their initial chill toward the speaker had remained firmly in place; in fact, the general mood was one of deep anxiety. To this point, Washington had failed to move his audience. He then remembered a reassuring letter that a congressman had written him that he thought might encourage his audience.

Author Flexner paints the rest of the picture as if we were invited into the room. “He pulled the paper from his pocket, and then something seemed to go wrong. The General seemed confused; he stared at the paper helplessly. The officers leaned forward, their hearts contracting with anxiety.

Washington pulled from his pocket something only his intimates had seen him wear; a pair of eyeglasses. ‘Gentlemen,’ he said, ‘You will permit me to put on my spectacles for I have not only grown gray but almost blind in the service of my country.’”

It’s often been said that a picture is worth a thousand words. As Flexner so clearly defines, “This homely act and simple statement did what all of Washington’s arguments had failed to do. The hardened soldiers wept.” Thomas Jefferson, another of the founding fathers, would later record his thoughts regarding Washington’s actions in this matter. He wrote, “The moderation and virtue of a single character probably prevented this revolution from being closed, as most others have been, by a subversion of that liberty it was intended to establish.”



Washington clearly had the big picture of what was needed for his country in the years to come. His vision reached far beyond his spectacles.

You might say, “Nice story, but can I put my glasses down now?” No, keep them on and let’s understand the significance of this one man’s impact on human history to our day. Washington was a man who understood power and its limits. His submission to the Continental Congress in 1783 set in place the principle that the American armed forces would always be subject to civilian authority. That has produced an incredible stability in this nation that remains to this day. Beyond that, he was willing to walk away from power again and again. As he sought to give it away, more was given to him because he could be trusted.

A little more sweet reasonableness

At Newburgh, Washington was vilified by his opponents for his “more moderation and further forbearance.” Amazingly, this is a quality that God encourages. The apostle Paul in Philippians 4:5 (KJV) encourages that our “moderation be known unto all men.”

Interestingly, in the Revised Standard Version the word “forbearance” is used. The original Greek word *epieikes* denotes a “sweet reasonableness.” Other renderings suggest a certain pliability or yieldedness. Oh, how world news, and the prophecy yet ahead of us, would be so different were there leaders with a little more “sweet reasonableness”! Our present time calls for leaders who are moved by principles and motivated by sound character.

When Washington needed to strengthen his vision, he reached for his spectacles. By doing so, he brought the curtain down on a brewing revolt. He clearly had the big picture of what was needed for his country in the years to come. His vision reached far beyond his spectacles.

Isaiah 30:21 exhorts us, “This is the way, walk you in it.” Perhaps this biblical encouragement is echoed best in the sentiments of George Washington when he was later to thank the Ruler of the Universe, “the Greatest and Best of Beings,” for having led him to “detest the madness and folly of blind ambition.” Oh, by the way, you can put your own spectacles down now; I think you’ve got the picture. ❖

“NEWS,” (Continued from page 13)

according to a senior Saudi official.

Saudis give several reasons for deciding that the Americans should leave, beginning with their desire to appear self-reliant and not dependent on U.S. military support. The American presence has become a political liability in domestic politics and in the Arab world, Saudi officials say. The Saudi government has also become increasingly uncomfortable with a role in U.S. efforts to contain Saddam Hussein.

The withdrawal of U.S. aircraft would end an American presence that began during the Persian Gulf War and, administration officials warn, would seriously undermine America’s ability to protect Saudi Arabia or Kuwait as well as carry out all future operations in Iraq.

Past and present U.S. officials have said a Saudi decision to ask the Americans to pull forces out of their country could also complicate the Saudi-American relationship, which was put under great strain by the events of Sept. 11, and appear to give the impression of rewarding Osama bin Laden, who has vilified the royal family for hosting American troops, about 5,000 at the present time.

Saudi officials who spoke about a U.S. withdrawal emphasized that nothing would be done precipitously. They said Crown Prince Abdullah was sensitive to the need to avoid creating the impression that he was responding to pressure from bin Laden. These Saudis emphasized that Saudi-American relations would remain close and would continue to include a military component.

U.S. troops went to Saudi Arabia in 1990 to fight the Persian Gulf War against Iraq at a moment when both countries feared that Iraq might march from Kuwait into the kingdom. The two governments never signed an agreement about their presence in the country. Though it has long been considered an intimate ally of the United States, Saudi Arabia is the only Persian Gulf nation with which the United States has no formal defense cooperation agreement. “The Saudis argue, ‘We’re such good friends, there’s no reason to put anything in writing,’” said a Defense Department official who has worked intimately with Saudi Arabia.

Sources: AP, *The Washington Post*.

Contributors: John Foster, Cecil E. Maranville and Jim Tuck

“MIDDLE EAST,” (Continued from page 3)

national boundaries, tribes are scattered throughout the region. Of course, there are national allegiances and identities, but they are familial ones, too, which aren’t limited to the countries in which they live.

A wild card dynamic

Anticipating their actions and reactions is a wild card, and cannot be ascertained by official statements that come from the national capitals in the Middle East.

Clearly, Jordan’s capital, Amman, is associated with the people called “Ammon” in Psalm 83. But that doesn’t mean that all the people of Jordan are necessarily from that tribe—or that all of that tribe lives within Jordan’s boundaries. Jordan’s boundaries also were not drawn with regard to tribal or clannish populations, but rather for artificial and political motives. “To protect against French encroachment of British interests in Palestine, Britain had excluded from Syria the desert and mountainous region east of the River Jordan, the land that became Transjordan. In 1921, Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill carved out the emirate of Transjordan, agreed to finance it with a modest subsidy, and gave it to Abdullah [the great grandfather of the present king]. . .” (*God Has Ninety-Nine Names* by Judith Miller, 1996, p. 334).

Yet, as we see in the prophecy of Psalm 83, the Bible is written from the perspective of Middle Eastern *families*, which will not necessarily coincide with the boundaries of Middle Eastern *nations*. Some Bible students are aware of the historic rivalry between the sons of Abraham—the Arabs and the Israelites. This prophecy injects a reminder of another historic rivalry—between the tribes of Lot and the tribes of Israel. Further, it shows that the children of Lot are still a component of the Middle East at the end time.

How the people will align themselves and who will conspire with “Assyria” against the modern descendants of Abraham’s grandson Israel isn’t yet clear. But we shouldn’t limit our thinking to national boundaries. As we watch events in the Middle East develop toward their inevitable grand conflict, which will realign the world’s great powers, we need to add this biblical perspective to our thinking. ❖



This is the Way

ISAIAH 30:21

by Robin Webber

A Vision Beyond the Spectacles

All of us who are a little bit older have those anxious moments, when we have forgotten where we last placed our glasses. We simply can't read the newspaper in front of us without our spectacles. Momentary panic sets in, and we fully realize how fragile our ability is to function without them. Are they lost? Will I find them? Why didn't I just keep them on?

Reaching for glasses and knowing the benefit they provide are comforting feelings. This marvelous combination of wire and glass or plastic enables us to move forward in the world of thought and letters. Fortunately, hundreds of years ago, one older man knew right where to reach when he needed to correct his vision, and as the saying goes, "the rest is history." But it wasn't necessarily what he placed on his nose, as much as it was what lay in his mind's eye that allowed America to become what it is today.

Most Americans and many people around the world have heard of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, Washington's Farewell Address or Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. But most people haven't heard about the "Newburgh Address." This speech was given at what some consider the most important single gathering in American history. The man who reached for his glasses that day extended his influence to this present time. The question is, What did that man see that others around him could not discern? You may want to reach for your own glasses and take a closer look.

When the "fog index" becomes too high

Just like people without glasses, nations can lose their vision, and simply not know what to reach for to correct it.

Oftentimes the tried, true and faithful troops of the innumerable revolutionary movements have been marching for so long, they forget what their starting point was all about. At times, it is remarkable how God intervenes in the affairs of humanity and plants indispensable men and women who allow us to answer the historian's ever-present dilemma: Does history make the man, or does the man make history?

History was in turmoil in 1783. The American colonies were two years beyond their major victory at Yorktown, but no formal peace treaty with "Mother England" had been ratified. "The Great Experiment" of establishing a republic in the New World seemed ready to blow up in everyone's face. Donald T. Phillips, in his book *The Founding Fathers on Leadership*, offers an accurate portrayal of this period in the chapter titled "Human Nature." Allow me to share just three of 12 points he offers on page 211: 1) New problems are often created after a revolution is won. 2) A period of transition can be more dangerous and turbulent than war itself. 3) Remember that whenever there is an interest and power to do wrong, wrong will generally be done.

Years earlier, in his revolutionary pamphlet *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine had penned, "These are the times that try men's souls." But now in 1783, an infant nation was being "weighed in the balances." For many officers, it had been years since they had been paid for their services to their new country. An enfeebled Congress attempted to pawn off the responsibility to the local states. The power struggle between those wanting a centralized federal gov-

(See "SPECTACLES," page 14)