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Democracy Is More Than a Word

President George W. Bush recently declared America's commitment to democracy in the Middle East. But democracy in this and other regions of the world has not had much success. There are good reasons for this failure.

by Melvin Rhodes

The words *democracy* and *democratic* have been much abused.

During all the years that I lived with my family in Ghana, there were two German embassies in our neighborhood. There was the embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, which is still there. But, on the corner of a busy junction in the capital city of Accra, there was the heavily protected embassy of the German Democratic Republic.

This building represented the communist eastern part of Germany. The bars on the windows and the barbed wire at the top of high walls were as much to keep the employees in as they were to keep intruders out. It was often said that the GDR wasn't "German" or "democratic," nor was it a "republic," but countries can call themselves what they want. North Korea's official name is the "Democratic People's Republic of Korea."

What is a democracy?

Highlighting the problem of defining democracy was the recent Commonwealth meeting in Nigeria, where sharp differences emerged over how to handle the perennial problem of Zimbabwe. By any Western definition, Zimbabwe is a dictatorship. The president can do what he likes. The country does have a parliament, but so did Iraq under Saddam Hussein. Less than a

year ago, Iraq's parliament backed him 100 percent.

Zimbabwe's neighbor is Zambia. The Zambian president's comment on the Commonwealth dispute was rather interesting. He said Western democracies should remember that their democratic systems took centuries to evolve, so they should be more patient with Africa. Well, maybe, but if a country is going to call itself a democracy, it should be one, if only to avoid confusion. And confusion there is on this issue.

Democracy is defined in my 1982 *Collins Standard Reference Dictionary* as "government in which the people hold the ruling power either directly or through elected representatives; a country, state, etc. with such government; majority rule; the principle of equality of rights, opportunity, etc., or the practice of this principle."

Based on these definitions, few of the world's countries are democracies. Even those that call themselves democracies often don't make the grade.

Will Iraq be different?

The big question now is: Will Iraq be different? Iraq is not in Africa, but the challenge of bringing democracy to the country is the same.

President Bush recently said, "In the long run, stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty," going

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BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CURRENT EVENTS

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"Whom heaven must receive until the times of

Restoration

of all things ... ACTS 3:21

Peering Into the Future

Several years ago my wife and I were spending a few days at a small inn near the town of Baddeck on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. One night I was drawn through the halls and into a parlor by the sounds of Celtic music performed by a small troupe for the benefit of the lodgers. That night a warm fire, soothing music and a friendly crowd formed a shield to the cold, autumn winds outside. When the entertainment concluded, I paused to look at a group of pictures on the walls and noticed one frame containing what looked like a poem.

It was not a poem but a portion of a broadcast made by England's King George VI at the end of 1939, just three months into World War II. Here is what the king said to the Commonwealth nations:

"I said to a man who stood at the gate of the year: 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.' And he replied, 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way'" ("The Hand of God").

That night I copied those words into my personal journal and have kept them ever since. When I read them, I am reminded of the true source of strength for each of us in time of doubt and fear. Perhaps they have immediacy each year in the midst of dark winter. From the long, cold nights we peer into the future looking for warmer brighter days. But no matter when we face a moment of trial and suffering, these words point us to a sure way forward. It is with our confidence and trust placed firmly in the hand of God. From Him alone comes the true light and safety. We may think we know a better way, but if God is guiding our path, then in the end the path by which He leads will prove to be the better way.

Every year *The Economist* magazine publishes a special issue looking ahead to the new calendar year. This year's issue is titled *The Year in 2004*. They try to forecast trends in politics, business and world events. Like all prognostications, they have a mixed record of accuracy. No one really can tell exactly what lies ahead, but their special issue is always an interesting read. In world events, no one can predict what the future will bring. Looking back, we can always see what has occurred, but not always with clear understanding.

In *World News and Prophecy*, there is one biblical principle we clearly know. "He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things; He knows deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him" (Daniel 2:21-22).

There are times in world events when God waves His hand over history, and events take place that confound the wise. With the events of recent months I believe we are living in such a time. Only God knows where they will lead. He gives us the broad outline and a few enticing details in the Bible. We write our articles based on those sure words, seeking to help you understand the challenging time in which we live.

Until Christ restores His perfect way and guides the nations with His loving hand, we do well to remember the words of David, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1). We have access to the Good Shepherd who guides and leads us to the good pastures of life, even when we lose our way or don't quite see the end of where our walk with God is leading.

—Darris McNeely

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<http://www.ucg.org/wnp/>

“DEMOCRACY,” (Continued from page 1)

on to declare that America will help spread democracy throughout the Middle East. Right now, not one of the 22 Arab states in the region is an American- or British-style democracy. Other Islamic nations (as a democratic Iraq would be) have not had a good record in this area either.

When the former Ottoman Empire was carved up following World War I, the British were given responsibility for Iraq under the League of Nations. Britain established a constitutional monarchy in Iraq, British style. It lasted until it was violently overthrown in 1958 in a bloodthirsty revolution that led eventually to Saddam Hussein's reign of terror.

An interesting observation was made recently about Iraq's democratic period. *The Financial Times* article, dated Dec. 20, 2003, was titled, “Man With a Mission” and was about Ahmed Chalabi, Iraq's most prominent face at this time. He is the spokesman for the Iraqi National Council on which he sits. After 45 years in exile following the 1958 coup, he is now back in Iraq.

“Tamara Daghistani, a close friend, [was asked] what she thinks has kept Chalabi committed to Iraq for all those years of exile and she says her generation yearns to recapture a golden age for Iraq in the more liberal and tolerant 1940s and 1950s.”

Chalabi himself spent those exile years in both Britain and the United States. His observations on America are interesting. In the same article he states: “It's easy to be an American . . . it's a welcoming place and people are generally straightforward and open. I saw the good sides of being free, and I saw the idiotic sides. You can make stupid decisions but it's all part of the game and it's better than anything else. There are compromises to be made. There are winners and losers. *But the losers don't get killed and the winners don't own everything*” (emphasis added).

Here we begin to see why some countries cannot prosper. In many countries, political opponents are arrested, tortured and shot, often along with their wives and children, thereby removing all possible future opposition. Their property is then seized. Even when not all of

these things happen, leaders will often take everything for themselves.

In Africa, elected officials have diverted national funds to their own (foreign) bank accounts. They have also rigged elections, thereby making it impossible for them to be removed from office through peaceful means. All too often, as was observed recently by a group of people in Africa, “the only way to remove an African president is to shoot him.” This is generally done by the military, with resultant years of military dictatorship.

Not just Africa and the Mideast

It's not just Africa and the Middle East that have this problem. Recent

“Chalabi poses in the sharpest terms the dilemma of the American superpower. In giving a people freedom from tyranny, can it give them the order in which that freedom can be enjoyed?”
(Financial Times).

developments in Russia show that the country's president, Vladimir Putin, is becoming more dictatorial. Recently, he ordered the arrest of the country's richest business tycoon, an arrest that caused an immediate fall of 10 percent on the country's stock exchange, amid fears the government would seize more people and property.

The challenge for coalition forces in Iraq is this: After imposing a democratic system on the nation, will it hold?

The failure of most new nations, often called “failed states” today, lies in the reality that they cannot successfully transition peacefully from one administration to another. *The Financial Times* article speaks to the problem: “Chalabi poses in the sharpest terms the dilemma of the American superpower. In giving a people freedom from tyranny, can it give them the order in which that freedom can be enjoyed?”

Chalabi may or may not be the first post-Saddam Iraqi president, but his

Financial Times comments already indicate a questionable commitment to democracy: “I saw the good sides of being free, and I saw the idiotic sides,” he is quoted as saying. This reflects a deeply ingrained cultural difference between East and West.

I don't read the trashy tabloids that are readily available in the United States and Britain, but I recognize that they are part of the price we have to pay to maintain a free press. When governments decide what is “idiotic,” freedom is threatened. Democratic leaders cannot create a society in their own image, imposing their own likes and dislikes on a country.

Divided interests, divided nations

Some cultures seem to need a strong man to maintain order. This is problematic in many ways. Naturally, as in Russia, this leads to a more dictatorial form of government. But in most countries it will also lead to tribal or religious conflict.

A strong man in Africa, for example, must come from one tribe, which alienates all the other tribes. Tribal custom demands that he grant favors to his own tribe over others. This leads to resentment, which in turn leads to rebellion. One third of all the countries in Africa right now are fighting civil wars, disputes that have their origins in the tribal divisions within each nation. Add corruption to this, and it's a recipe for disaster.

Iraq will likely be no different. There are three dominant groups in the country: the majority Shiites, the Sunnis and the Kurds (an ethnically different people, although also mostly Sunni Muslims). Saddam was a Sunni Arab who persecuted the majority Shiites. Under a system of “one man, one vote,” the Shiites will inevitably become the next government and a Shiite will likely be president. This could lead to a theocratic republic as in neighboring Iran. Saddam was antireligious most of the time (finding religion, as so many do, towards the end, partly because he needed support). It will be a great irony if the new elected government of Iraq turns out to be an Iranian-style Islamic republic, America's worst nightmare come true.



An Iraqi man reads a newspaper with a front-page picture of captured Iraqi President Saddam Hussein talking with Iraqi governing council member Ahmad Chalabi Dec. 18, 2003.

The Kurds are another complicating factor. Each of these three main groups wants to control the country. None of them have the same cultural ideals that have helped preserve democracy in the Anglo-Saxon world.

Will democracy lead to chaos?

It is likely that the presence of coalition forces will guarantee a constitutional government for a while as Britain's presence in Iraq did. As also did Britain's presence in its colonies. For as long as a British governor was present, parliamentary government worked. But as soon as that governor was gone, along with British troops, democracy was threatened. The reason for this is inherent cultural differences. For democracy to succeed, there have to be effective checks and balances. There must also be a free press and an independent judiciary—if the government controls the courts, then

political opponents can be imprisoned simply for disagreeing. In the British and American systems, as the Zambian president pointed out, these things evolved over centuries.

Often overlooked today is the influence of the Bible in the evolution of the Anglo-American democratic model. The publication of the King James Version of the Bible four centuries ago revolutionized political thinking.

Prior to the Protestant Reformation, the established church taught that people could only go to God through a priest, who was also the only one authorized to read the Scriptures. Once people could read their Bibles themselves, they learned that they should “work out [their] own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). This was a revolutionary concept, which along with other factors had unexpected political consequences. Less than a century after the

publication of the King James Version, England's politics went through major turmoil, including a civil war, the execution of a king, a period of dictatorship and a bloodless revolution. But a more democratic system was the end result.

The foundation for right governing

A right knowledge and understanding of the Word of God should be required for all leaders. “When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you . . . and say, ‘I will set a king [or president] over me like all the nations that are around me’ . . . [H]e shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book . . . And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes” (Deuteronomy 17:14, 18-19).

Israel's King Solomon asked God for wisdom and discernment when he ascended the throne. “You have made your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in . . . Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” (1 Kings 3:7, 9).

Jesus Christ, soon to return as the world's first perfect leader, taught a different approach to governance: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25-28).

Self-seeking, tyrannical, despotic and authoritarian rule, abusing the people, is wrong. Leaders should rather emulate Christ's example of service, serving the people rather than abusing them. Giving, not taking. ❖

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Flash: Americans Believe in Prayer!

A new survey shows high interest and participation in prayer by Americans. But are they praying in the way the Bible speaks of Christians praying—or more like “consumers”?

by Cecil Maranville

You are going to be hearing and reading a great deal over the next few months about the implications of a recently released report by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press on a survey it conducted in the late summer of 2003. It's a comprehensive, 152-page document titled, “Evenly Divided and Increasingly Polarized—The 2004 Political Landscape.”

Even the section “Religion in American Life” is viewed in political terms. Candidates for all offices, especially those running for president, are weighing the implications of this major study and changing the way they “package” themselves accordingly. But I would like to zero in on what the survey reflects about prayer in the lives of Americans (and most probably the religiously minded in Britain).

The survey's question on prayer read: “Prayer is an important part of my daily life.” Participants had a choice of five possible answers: agree completely, agree mostly, disagree completely, disagree mostly or don't know. What would you guess the American consumerist society would say?

Believe it or not, 51 percent chose “agree completely” (up 10 percent from a generation ago.) Another 30 percent chose “agree mostly,” meaning that *81 percent of Americans* say prayer is an important part of their daily lives.

I was stunned. Could that many Americans have a clear understanding of who God is? If my reaction seems cynical, it's because I'm thinking of the way Americans live, listening to the way they talk and considering their choices of entertainment.

Surprisingly, 87 percent of the respondents to the survey said that they never doubted the existence of God (69 percent “completely agree”; 18 percent “mostly agree”). So, they must have some understanding of who God is.

But do they have a concept of how God expects them to live?

Some 80 percent (59/21) agreed with the next statement on the survey: “We will all be called before God at the Judgment Day to answer for our sins.” It would be interesting to learn what

“Judgment Day” and “sin” mean to people, for I suspect that we would find a wide diversity in the answers. Nonetheless, Americans indeed must have some understanding of what is right and wrong behavior in God's eyes. They presumably also are giving some thought to how they measure up to that standard.

Prayer more than recitation

Of course, the survey was about politics, so we wouldn't expect the researchers to ask more on the subject of prayer, but I would like to know what prayer itself means to the average American. Is it a momentary request that they offer up when a need arises? Is it a memorized sentiment that they recite, because they've learned to do so as a child—perhaps just before they drift off to sleep?

And, I would like to know if they have a high level of confidence that their prayers will be answered? Or do they approach prayer like purchasing a lottery ticket, hoping that it might bring them good fortune?

God is quite specific in saying that some prayers He listens and responds to—and some, He doesn't. In poetic but sobering language, the Bible says God's eyes are on the righteous and that His ears are attentive to what they pray about. It adds that His face is “against” people who do evil (Psalm 34:15-16). “Do evil” means more than making the mistakes that any human is bound to make. It implies habitually living contrary to what God reveals is good. We might use the expression, He “turns a deaf ear” to them.

The moral collapse that preceded the collapse of Judah as a nation parallels the end-time period in which we now find ourselves. Jeremiah was God's principal representative at the time. He was a passionate patriot and it grieved him to see people suffering. Naturally, he prayed for them. But God told him a remarkable thing: “Do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them; for I will not hear them in the time that they cry out to Me because of their trouble” (Jeremiah 11:14).

More than not responding to Jeremiah's prayers on their behalf, God would not even hear

Americans claim prayer is important to them, but do they really understand what God is looking for? God is quite specific in saying that some prayers He listens and responds to—and some, He doesn't.

prayers from the people directly. Matters had gone too far; the nation would have to go through the cleansing of captivity.

Does that sound “Godlike” to you? Perhaps it is surprising to read; look it up for yourself. As we draw closer to the end of the age, more people are going to come face to face with this reality—that the way they live is affecting whether God hears and answers their prayers.

Prayer, consumerist style

Presently, most people living in many of the Western democracies have what they want and more—much more. Clearly consumerism literally drives the U.S. economy, which is based upon people regularly buying vehicles, houses and countless things that they don’t necessarily have to have, but simply want. Once people have, they predictably want to upgrade. That’s not intended to be a criticism, but rather a reflection of the fantastic blessings God has given us, far beyond the basic needs of food and shelter.

When we are relatively wealthy (that is, in comparison with most of the rest of the world), we do not notice what we do not have. But when that wealth begins to diminish, as it surely will, we will become keenly aware of the fact that God is not answering our prayers.

The apostle James, writing of another time in the history of Israel (Americans, Australians, Britons and other English-speaking peoples, though they do not know it, are part of Israel; request our booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*), observes that anger and greed explode when people no longer have what they want. The norms of a peaceful and structured society break down. A free-for-all, lawless, “winner-take-all” attitude prevails.

He spoke specifically of prayers, explaining to his readers why their prayers went unanswered. It was because they were asking God for “things,” as if they were consumers and praying was shopping.

“Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask.

You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures” (James 4:1-3, New Revised Standard Version).

There is an obvious parallel with the American consumerist mentality. Do people today approach prayer like those supermarket promotions in which contestants are able to keep everything they can snatch from the shelves and cram into a shopping cart in 60 seconds?

Must be learned

Praying is not merely asking God for something. In fact, we must learn how to pray. It does not come naturally, even to people who want to do it properly, much less to people who only pray when they or a loved one are in a tight spot. Jesus’ disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1).

Millions of Christians, reflecting nothing less than the grab-and-run mentality of consumerism, snatch the answer Christ gave them, without bothering to “read the instructions.” Most of us know what Christ told them as “the Lord’s Prayer” (see Matthew 6:9-13). He gave it to them as an outline or model for them to use in learning how to pray, not as a canned message they were to recite to God. He specifically told them not to simply repeat prepared prayers (“do not use vain repetitions,” verse 7)! But countless millions of people do just that. Some even think that their problems can be solved through the prayers of relatives and friends.

Intercessory prayer is important. Jesus Christ is our great High Priest who ever lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25.) There are numerous examples in the Bible of individuals praying for other people—and many of these prayers were answered. But a person must come to develop a personal relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ in order to have an effective prayer life. No one can repent for anyone else. Biblical repentance involves an individual coming to recognize and admit his failings, as well as coming to know his weaknesses, recognizing at the same time his need for God’s forgiveness and spiritual strength. It’s impossible for one person to do that for another.

Simon the sorcerer did not understand that receiving God’s Spirit centers on repentance and faith in the sacrifice of Christ for the remission of sin. When he

saw that God gave the gift of the Holy Spirit to repentant sinners through the laying on of hands, Simon attempted to *buy* the office of minister (consumerism again and hence the term *simony*). Peter appropriately reprimanded the man in the strongest terms and told him to pray for forgiveness. Failing to grasp the fundamentals of prayer, which include a personal relationship with God, Simon asked Peter to get his sin cleared up by praying for him!

You can read the entire story in the eighth chapter of Acts. It is truly a consumerist approach to prayer.

In most cases we have to come to the place of truly needing help, having been humbled by suffering of some sort, before we are able to pray in the way that genuinely communicates with God. Anyone can ask for something; prayer is far more than that. It’s part of and grows out of a genuine relationship that people develop with God. The closest human parallel is that between parent and child.

In teaching His disciples about prayer, Jesus pointed out that even human fathers, who by nature are self-centered, give good things to their children. He then explained that our heavenly Father is infinitely more generous than that to those who ask Him (Matthew 7:11).

In another famous parable, Jesus told of the prodigal son. The story (found in Luke 15) is about a son who wasted every bit of his wealth in true consumerist fashion until he became destitute. The word *prodigal* means “wastefully extravagant.”

It isn’t my purpose here to explain how to pray, but rather to bring to your attention that there is much more to it than one with a consumer’s approach would understand. Will America and Britain, like Judah of Jeremiah’s time, have to go through the crucible of national collapse before its people learn that lesson?

Almost definitely so.

But not every citizen has to go through such a terrible time. Please request our free booklets *Transforming Your Life—The Process of Conversion*, *The Road to Eternal Life* and *You Can Have Living Faith* for a more complete picture of how one can turn to God and truly enjoy the Father-son and Father-daughter relationship. He would like to have with everyone. ❖

Krakatoa—Preparing for the Future?

Just over 120 years ago, a terrible catastrophe occurred that can help us fathom end-time warnings.

by Doug Johnson

They were just like any other family. They loved, laughed, cried, argued, fought, struggled. It had always been that way.

The parents were getting on in years. All but one of the children were grown now. The youngest was planning her wedding—hopefully within the year.

The weather had been a little unsettled lately. The local “nut” said there was trouble ahead, but who listened to him? He was building a boat miles from any water! And it was a boat like nothing anyone had ever seen; it was more like a barge, for it had no rudder. It looked finished now—after what seemed like over a hundred years.

The rain that had begun yesterday had continued through the night. This morning it was pouring. Vibrations deep beneath the surface shook the earth under their feet, and the rain pelted down so hard they could barely see. A sudden panic overwhelmed them and they ran to the huge boat, stumbling through the mud.

The animals that had gathered by the boat were nowhere to be seen. Rubbing their eyes in disbelief, they watched a searing light trace an outline on the side of the barge. When it faded, the huge ramp and entrance door to the side of the great craft looked as if they had been sealed with pitch by an invisible workman.

A catastrophic roar shook the ground. Great chunks of earth exploded skyward, followed by gushing torrents of water. They scrambled for the nearest hilltop, but there were hundreds of other panic-stricken people ahead of them. The water rose rapidly.

They were too late.

As it was in the days of Noah . . .

In Matthew 24:36-42, Jesus Christ compared the time of His return to the days before Noah’s Flood. He spoke of interrupted lives and people caught unaware by the events enveloping them.

It will be a time that’s hard to fathom, just as it’s difficult to envision what it must have been like to have been overtaken by the Flood. An unexpected catastrophe ended millions of

lives—and will again, according to Jesus Christ.

There is, it so happens, a historical account of a terrible catastrophe that happened just over 120 years ago, approximately the same amount of time Noah had to prepare. The year was 1883—and there’s a lesson in it for those who heed the warnings of Scripture.

Our story happens at the precise geographic location of 6 degrees 6 minutes south latitude, 105 degrees 25 minutes east longitude, which is in the ocean near the nation of Indonesia. This nation is composed of many islands, including Sumatra to the west of “our spot” and Java to the east. “Our spot” is a place that was once known as the island of Krakatoa. I say “once known” because . . . well, let’s just get into the story.

The Dutch had colonized the area, and were in control in the 1880s. They strung together the various islands in the area, forming one administrative region—which, with some adjustments, became the nation of Indonesia.

But that’s not where the history of Krakatoa begins (“K Krakatau” as the locals called it; an English newspaper printed it that fateful summer of 1883 as “Krakatoa” and the name stuck). The Javanese peoples to the east of Krakatoa tell us that the island of Krakatoa “blew its top” previously in about the year A.D. 535.

The next explosion was in 1680 and was witnessed by several ships’ captains. They reported the mountaintop smoking and belching fire. But the smoke stopped, and the island occasionally issued small wisps of cloud and smoke for the next 200 years.

Early on the morning of Thursday, May 10, 1883, things changed. Just after midnight the lighthouse keeper at First Point, a rocky headland on the southeast side of the Sunda Strait, felt a *tremor in the air*. The lighthouse seemed to shift on its foundations. The sea whitened, appeared to freeze briefly (like a depth charge going off under the surface), became oddly smooth, shivered slightly and returned to the usual motion of the waves.

Five days later it happened again. This time

Jesus Christ compared the time of His return to the days before Noah’s Flood. It will be a time that’s hard to envision. But considering the story of Krakatoa can give a hint of things to come.

it was stronger, and was felt to the west as well, in eastern Sumatra and western Java. One Dutch official in the Sumatran town of Ketimbang was awakened by the thudding, rumbling bangs under his feet on May 15, and five days later filed a report.

Beaches on fire

The ships were the next to notice. The Sunda Strait was then, as now, a very busy waterway. There were at least 10 ships in the vicinity when Krakatoa's first eruption began in May 1883. Each captain had a story to tell. Several reported large amounts of volcanic ash falling all over their ships. One told of his compass spinning crazily, finally settling at least 12 degrees off course, caused by the extremely high iron content in the ash. Dozens of other reports appeared, some official, some private.

In the Javanese coastal town of Anjer, fishermen came home that day with tales about the *beach splitting wide open, spewing black ash and red-hot stones into the air*. Two Dutch officials, disbelieving, raced out to the island in a small boat. They dodged floating pumice and massive charred tree trunks in the ocean, saw horrific thick clouds of volcanic ash and the *beach itself on fire*.

Two days later, it all calmed down. After six weeks a Dutch exploration mission landed on Krakatoa and examined the still charred island. They climbed the volcano's crater, burned the soles of their shoes, coughed through the sulfuric foul-smelling air and returned safely. On Aug. 11 a Dutch army captain, ordered to perform a geologic survey on the island, landed and spent two days. He left late on Aug. 12, reporting that all three peaks were emitting smoke and vapor. No less than 14 vent holes, or fumaroles, on the sides of the peaks were smoking. He concluded that Krakatoa could erupt again at any moment.

Two weeks later, the island proved him right.

On Sunday, Aug. 26, things were pretty much normal in the town of Anjer. Until 1:06 p.m. The telegraph agent for the port was sitting on the veranda of the Anjer Hotel smoking his cigar, looking out to sea, when he heard an explosion. He immediately looked to his left and saw an enormous cloud of white smoke spew-

ing from the mountain. The sea thrashed in turmoil, the water action unlike any tide known to man. Within minutes the town was enveloped in volcanic dust and ash. The sun was blotted out.

Ships in the area tried desperately to steam out of danger, dodging showers of rock and ash. One Dutch warship was picked up by the huge tidal waves generated and thrown *2½ miles inland* on Java. A British ship anchored in Batavia (80 miles east) reported "electrical disturbances" in the huge cloud mushrooming over the mountain, and estimated that the column of smoke this time was *more than twice as high as in May*—reaching over 17 miles up.

By 8 p.m. Sunday, the ocean began to cause the most grief. As the explosions continued and intensified, the sea itself was churned up at unfathomable levels. In Ketimbang residents fled in terror, up the mountainsides, away from the rampaging walls of water. Tsunamis *over 130 feet high* raced from the island at 60 miles per hour. Reaching the Sumatran shore, they slowed to 20 miles per hour and, slicing inland, slowed further still.

One family *literally outran the waves up the mountain*. They dodged chunks of smoking pumice hurtling from the sky, burning like meteorites. The mud and jungle reached out to slow them; the wife felt her throat constricting, and reached to find the reason for her difficulty. Leeches had attached themselves to her neck like some grotesque jewelry. This family reached its summer hilltop cottage at midnight all safe—husband, wife, three children and household servants. Thousands of others were not so fortunate.

Four more gigantic explosions were still to come. The first was at 5:30 a.m., Monday, Aug. 27. Forty-five minutes later, Ketimbang was destroyed by a monster wave. Shortly afterward Anjer suffered the same fate. The second explosion came at 6:44 a.m., 41 minutes after what should have been dawn that day. At 8:20 a.m., a third, terrible explosion was felt 80 miles away in Batavia. Buildings began to sway and "crackle," some residents said.

Unimaginably destructive force

Then, at 10:02 a.m., in a culminating, majestic, awful roar that was the loudest noise that has been reported since human

beings have inhabited this planet, the majority of the island of Krakatoa simply vanished. Six cubic miles of rock were blasted out of existence.

Captain Sampson of HMS *Norham Castle*, steaming near Sumatra, wrote these words in his log: "A fearful explosion. A frightful sound. I am writing this in pitch darkness. We are under a continual rain of pumice-stone and dust. So violent are the explosions that the eardrums of over half my crew have been shattered. My last thoughts are with my dear wife. *I am convinced that the Day of Judgment has come.*"

He and his crew survived. Many did not: 165 villages were destroyed; 36,417 people died—almost all of them drowned in the gigantic tidal waves following the explosion.

The eruption produced two kinds of shock waves. The first was a sudden burst of air pressure measured by a myriad of instruments in that age of immense interest in the new science of meteorology. That air pressure wave *circled the earth seven times*, finally dying away 15 days later as an echo too faint to measure! It traveled at the speed of sound (which varies with altitude and air pressure)—between 674 and 726 miles per hour.

The ocean waves (tsunamis) comprised the other shock wave. The town of Merak, 30 miles east of Anjer, lost all but two of its 2,700 residents—all drowned.

One woman in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), 2,000 miles away, was swept off the harbor sandbar when the wave hit the port city of Panama. She was deemed the most distant fatality.

The waves were distinctly measured at what seemed impossible distances. Over 3,000 miles away, in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, the wave was still *four feet high* when it arrived. A German South Polar expedition on South Georgia Island saw the icebergs lift 15 inches, a dozen times. Near the celebrated French resort of Biarritz, *10,720 nautical miles from Krakatoa*, seven undulations in the ocean, each 3 inches high, were measured. The wave finally died in the English Channel—at Devonport, England, where the harbor authorities witnessed the last vestiges of Krakatoa's explosion wave, 11,800 miles distant.

Then there was the *sound*. The explo-

sions were heard in Saigon, Bangkok, Manila and Perth—each nearly 2,000 miles away. Eighteen witnesses in Ceylon (also 2,000 miles away) reported the explosions. Stockmen driving their cattle across the Hammersley Range in Western Australia reported what they thought was artillery fire to the northwest.

On the island of Rodriguez, 350 miles from Mauritius, in a storm blowing in from the southeast, many of the island's 5,000 residents distinctly heard the explosions. They, too, thought they were hearing distant artillery fire. *Rodriguez is 2,968 miles from Krakatoa.*

Under the impact of Krakatoa's explosion, 13 percent of the earth's surface *vibrated audibly*.

And then there were the climatic changes. Modern experts estimate that ash from Krakatoa was thrown over 30 miles up—over 160,000 feet into the air. At that level, the tiny particles are virtually weightless, since they are in the lower stratosphere. The earth's sunsets were affected for three years, gradually returning to normal by 1886. Artists had a field day painting the red sunsets that resulted!

In two separate incidents in the northeastern United States, fire companies answered calls in the early evening hours, sure they had a fire to put out. It was the sunset glowing red from the ash from Krakatoa.

Probably the most grotesque development was the washing up on shores, hundreds of miles away, of corpses trapped in pumice "rafts." This went on for over a year.

What about Christians?

This tragic event has now receded so far into history that few are aware of the sheer power of the cataclysm. My source for the information in this article was the book *Krakatoa, the Day the World Exploded*, by Simon Winchester. According to the author, Krakatoa is "only" the fifth-most powerful volcanic explosion in earth's history, when all factors are taken into account. But its unique placement in the ocean, near several settled areas, contributed to the huge destruction it wreaked on this planet in 1883.

Krakatoa has a message for us as we anticipate the return of Jesus Christ to inaugurate the earthly rule of the

Kingdom of God. That future time will be one of tremendous spiritual and physical upheaval on this earth, according to God's Word. We read of earth's inhabitants fleeing to the mountains and caves, begging the rocks to fall on them, when they observe some of the heavenly signs (Revelation 6:16). There will be nowhere to hide from the incomprehensible events shattering their lives.



Krakatoa has a message for us as we anticipate the return of Jesus Christ to inaugurate the earthly rule of the Kingdom of God.

Christ's revelation to the apostle John shows apocalyptic events that will make the earth itself seem on the verge of destruction. "And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth . . . Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found" (Revelation 16:18, 20).

The events surrounding the explosion of Krakatoa in August 1883 involved *one volcano!*

Where does that leave the disciples of Jesus Christ in this world? It places them in the position they must always be in—living life in such a way as to be ready for the events that lie ahead. Christ Himself said it best in Matthew 24:46: "Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing."

Is there any other way to live a godly life?

And the future?

In 1919, a survey was made of the area where Krakatoa Island had stood. After the 1883 explosion, all that remained was Rakata, the southernmost peak. It looked like a laboratory cross-section of the earth itself, sliced straight down into the Indian Ocean. But by 1919, a small shoe-shaped ridge had developed just north of Bosun's Rock, one of two small islands that had enveloped Krakatoa.

In June 1927, ships' companies reported seeing a distinct line of froth, bubbles and steam in the water; by year's end, a quarter-mile course through the water mirrored a great rending of the sea bottom, a thousand feet down. On Jan. 26, 1928, the volume of bubbles and flame changed form again—a plume of ash and a tiny mass of solid rock broke the surface of the ocean. A thin curve of brand-new land appeared, forming a scimitar-shaped island, a sandbar 500 feet long and 10 feet high, with smoke and explosions discharging from its base. It was named "Anak Krakatoa" ("son of Krakatoa"). The water's erosion forced it below the surface in less than a week.

For three years the ocean and the "son of Krakatoa" did battle. On Aug. 11, 1930, the submarine vents in the sea made their fourth attempt to reclaim a spot above the surface. On the second day, a massive eruption sent clouds of vapor, steam, ash and magma over a mile high, settling back down on the base.

The volcano was winning. Anak Krakatoa was now 20 feet high and half a mile long. By 1950, the new peak was 500 feet high, half a mile wide and a mile long.

Today, Anak Krakatoa is 1,500 feet high, with massive twin craters near its apex. The flora and fauna have returned; plants, animals, birds and insects have flourished. But since the 1960s, some of the vegetation has been destroyed. How?

By lava. The mountain is no longer silent.

It is gurgling, rumbling, steaming, convulsing. Perhaps it is preparing for Revelation 16:20. In any case, it is preparing, once more, behind the scenes, to be heard and seen by the entire world.

Are God's children similarly preparing? ❖

Does God Have a Plan for Humanity?

Put another way, does our Creator have a divine purpose for human beings? And does He have a prophetic plan whereby His purpose may be worked out here on earth?

by John Ross Schroeder

We are all dismayed at the death of every single soldier (hopefully, whether friend or enemy) who has perished in Iraq. The killing of 23-year-old S. Sgt. Morgan Kennon on Nov. 7, 2003, touched many of us in particular.

He became Memphis, Tennessee's, first soldier to be eulogized as a war casualty of the second Iraq conflict. A *USA Today* feature article said that Morgan Kennon "was a religious man whose poetry gave voice to private feelings and who fussed over a family left in Memphis" (Dec. 24, 2003).

While reassuring his mother during their last transatlantic telephone conversation, he told her "not to worry . . . 'God has a plan for me'" (emphasis added). Though a precious life was lost in a split second due to a rocket-propelled grenade, and his family was shattered with grief, the divine plan of God transcends every human death.

His girlfriend in Texas said: "I always thought there was something special about him." Though every prospective bride probably feels this way about her future husband, she is so right. Every human being is important to God—special to Him. Which normal family does not regard their children in that manner? My wife Jan and I have three children and each one is special to us.

The Bible's first book tells us that men and women were made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). God does things step-by-step. In other words, *God plans!*

God's overall plan can be discerned in the voluminous pages of the Bible. Yet it may be compared to a jigsaw puzzle in the sense that vital bits and pieces of that plan are discovered in different books. It is the Church's sacred task to preach it to this world—crafting it together correctly, "rightly dividing the word of truth" as the Bible puts it (2 Timothy 2:15).

Mankind's part in the plan began in the Garden of Eden. The first 11 chapters of

Genesis summarize approximately 2,000 years of the activities of humankind. Beginning with chapter 12 the Creator abruptly narrows our focus to the one patriarch Abraham (Abram) and his progeny. His grandson Jacob (Israel) had 12 sons and most of the Hebrew Bible is concerned with how their descendants played their part on the world scene.

We are introduced to Hebrew prophets, priests, judges and kings as we progress through the Old Testament—culminating in the arrival of Jesus Christ on this earth some 2,000 years ago. He appointed His apostles who guided the early New Testament Church.

God's great plan revealed

Always God is working toward a grand goal—the climax of His purpose on earth. The book of Ephesians gives us an awe-inspiring insight into His objective. The subject of the first chapter is the divine activities and purposes of "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (verse 3, Revised English Bible). The apostle Paul explained: "In Christ our release is secured and our sins forgiven through the shedding of his blood. In the richness of his grace God [the Father] has lavished on us all wisdom and insight" (verses 7-8, REB).

The sacrifice of Christ constitutes that important first basic step in God's majestic plan of salvation. That sacrifice was not an afterthought, but was envisioned from the beginning. Revelation 13:8 tells us that "the Lamb [was] slain from the foundation of the world." Nonetheless, a subsequent passage in Ephesians shows other essential steps.

Notice the incredible impact of this first fundamental step and the prophetic revelation that would ensue. "He [God the Father] has made known to us his secret purpose, in accordance with the plan which he determined beforehand in Christ, to be put into effect when the time was ripe: namely, that the universe, everything in heaven and on earth,

Always God is working toward a grand goal—the climax of His purpose on earth. Though it remains a mystery to most of mankind, God reveals it in a step-by-step way through His festivals.

might be brought into a unity in Christ” (1:9-10, REB).

Understanding the meaning

These two verses should tug at our imaginations to plumb the depths of their incredible meaning for mankind. One cardinal point is God promises a permanent end to the divisions, chaos and confusion dogging our present world. The second coming of Christ will herald the utopian unity mankind has sought for so long.

Another important aspect is that God does things on time—according to His schedule, not ours. For instance, the first coming of Christ occurred when the Father determined the time was right. “But when *the appointed time* came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4:4, REB). Be assured that when the time is right, the Father will send Jesus Christ back to this earth to rule it in righteousness, accompanied by a previously undreamed period of peace and prosperity.

Finally, this illuminating passage indicates a never-ending period even beyond Christ’s millennial reign, when the union of God with His spiritually transformed peoples will reach the ultimate in happiness, purpose, design, planning and glory.

The universe itself (the new heavens and the new earth) will bear the marks of this unified happiness in the glorious Kingdom of God. The last two chapters in the Bible, Revelation 21 and 22, reveal the exciting details.

Not yet understood by most

God’s purpose for humanity was never far from the thoughts of the apostle Paul. He normally concluded his letters with a reference to the grace of Jesus Christ followed by the word, “amen.” His epistle to the Romans was no different: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. *Amen*” (Romans 16:24).

What follows is a postscript, an important afterthought about God’s plan and purpose: “Now to Him [the Father] who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery *kept secret since the world*

began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations” (verses 25-26).

Other passages in the Bible show that even in Christ’s time this precious knowledge of God was withheld from the vast majority, *as it still is today*. Notice Matthew 13:10-11: “And the disciples came and said to Him [Christ], ‘Why do You speak to them in parables?’ He answered and said to them, ‘Because it has been given to you to know the mys-



U.S. troops carry the casket of a soldier killed in Iraq. Our Creator has a plan for this soldier and for every other human being.

teries of the kingdom of heaven, *but to them it has not been given.*” Plainly, only Christ’s disciples understood the true meaning of life. The Father had revealed it to them through Christ.

Even the most intelligent people cannot deduce God’s plan. “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him’” (1 Corinthians 2:7-9).

The wise of this world often exalt life itself as the meaning for mankind’s existence. But if there is no afterlife, any such meaning will ultimately die out. As the apostle Paul observed, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable” (1 Cor-

inthians 15:19). In reality, however, as we shall see later, the resurrections are an integral part of God’s divine plan.

Not fully known—even by God’s Hebrew prophets

Talking to His disciples, Jesus Christ said: “But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it” (Matthew 13:16-17).

The apostle Peter also addressed this particular declaration. He wrote: “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow” (1 Peter 1:10-11).

Daniel said: “Although I heard, I did not understand . . .” (Daniel 12:8). Like him, many of the Hebrew prophets sought more knowledge and comprehension about God’s divine plan for humanity than was ever given them during their lifetimes—though they had personally prophesied about various aspects of it.

Yet those who are called to salvation now in this present age have been given precious understanding of the divine purpose of God. Paul wrote about “the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, *but now has been revealed to His saints*” (Colossians 1:26).

God’s Holy Day plan

So far we have discussed God’s divine plan in a general sense with few specifics. But the Creator has a habit of planning and acting in logical stages—a series of step-by-step occurrences leading to His overall goal—the salvation of humankind as a whole. To this

end He revealed His annual Holy Days and festivals to ancient Israel when the Old Testament Church began (Acts 7:38).

These festivals have generally been thought of as exclusively Jewish occasions. But nothing could be further from the truth. Notice what God reveals in Leviticus 23: “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel [all 12 tribes, not just Judah], and say to them: *The feasts of the LORD*, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations [or commanded assemblies], *these are My feasts*” (verses 1-2). These annual festivals belong to God. They are His and they are meant for all mankind, not for one ethnic group.

Notice further: “These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at *their appointed times*” (verse 4). These annual Holy Days and festivals happen exactly when God wants them to occur. They are specifically scheduled occasions, the dates of which may be known many years in advance. They are related to the harvest seasons in the Holy Land, in the northern hemisphere.

In briefest summary, there are seven major yearly festivals generally corresponding to the seven annual Holy Days. The first festival is the spring Passover service picturing the sacrifice of Christ for our sins (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). It is not, however, a Holy Day. Following almost immediately is the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, which symbolizes our living a life free of sin (1

Corinthians 5:6-8). The first and last days are Holy Days in which no occupational work may be done.

The Day of Pentecost follows in early summer and is both an annual festival and a Holy Day. It pictures the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2) and is known in the Old Testament as the Feast of Weeks or Firstfruits. It also symbolizes the advance calling of God’s people as His firstfruits in anticipation of the autumn festivals that picture the time when God will offer salvation to all of mankind.

The four autumn festivals

The four autumn festivals beginning with the Feast of Trumpets prefigure a time when God will intervene directly in world affairs on a global basis. This first annual autumn festival anticipates the second coming of Christ and the first resurrection to eternal life in God’s Kingdom.

The Day of Atonement is a fast in which Christians abstain from food and water for 24 hours from sunset to sunset. Atonement pictures the putting away of Satan for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1-3). The apostle Paul predicted: “And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly” (Romans 16:20). There could be no permanent peace while the “prince of the power of the air” freely roams the earth.

An important auxiliary meaning is the poignant reminder of the forgiveness of sins made possible by Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

The seven-day Feast of Tabernacles or Festival of Ingathering pictures the time when Jesus Christ and the resurrected saints will rule on this earth for 1,000 years. Peace, plenty and prosperity will be the basic norm for most of this period. The first day of this festival is an annual Holy Day.

The final festival of the spiritual year, occurring on the eighth day, the day immediately following the Feast of Tabernacles, has become known as the Last Great Day.

This last annual Holy Day prefigures a resurrection for all who have died never knowing or really understanding Jesus Christ and the divine plan of God. It will be a period of time sufficiently long to give all people *their only* opportunity for salvation.

This general resurrection to physical life will embrace the time when “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26; Ezekiel 37). Even the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah will be resurrected and given an opportunity to repent of their deeds and live forever in God’s everlasting Kingdom.

Summing up, God’s Word clearly tells us that the awesome destiny of men and women is to become the literal children of God—divine members of His immortal spirit family.

Since it is impossible to tell the whole story in just one introductory article, please request our free booklets *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* and *What Is Your Destiny?* ❖

God’s Prophetic Plan for the Nations

The biblical table of nations is found in Genesis 10. It deals with the time immediately after Noah’s Flood, giving a general picture of how the earth was to be populated by various ethnic groups. The Song of Moses speaks of the time “when the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples” (Deuteronomy 32:8).

The apostle Paul picked up this theme in the New Testament when confronting the Athenian philosophers with God’s true gospel. He told them: “And He [the Creator] has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined *their preappointed times* and the boundaries of their dwellings” (Acts 17:26).

God is and always has been in overall control. He knows exactly where specific ethnic groups live and what they are now doing. He guided them there. True, our Creator has given mankind a lot of room in which to maneuver, so that we may exercise freedom of choice or free moral agency. But God the Father still remains “Lord of heaven and earth,” as Jesus said (Matthew 11:25).

Ultimately the Father will solve our national problems by sending Jesus Christ back to this earth. Then, “The kingdoms [nations] of this world [will] have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Revelation 11:15). More information may be obtained by requesting our free brochure *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. ❖

Running Dry

Worldwide consumption of water is doubling every 20 years. Aquifers are already overexploited, creating serious shortages; the future looks even bleaker.

by Graemme Marshall

Government Water Commission maps show 96 overexploited aquifers in Mexico. Seawater has polluted 17 others because of too much pumping, while toxic seepage is spreading fast. Mexico City, built eight centuries ago atop vast lagoons, cannot adequately supply water for its 22 million inhabitants.

Like many cities in the world, less than half of the city's waste is treated. The rest sinks into underground lakes or flows toward the Gulf of Mexico, turning rivers into sewers. This presents a chilling prospect for Mexico's future. Cantu Suarez, a deputy director of the Mexican National Water Commission, lists 35 cities that must shrink dramatically unless more water can be found. Cities shrinking? Most cities continue to expand through real estate development. Suarez says, "We would have to evacuate people. Without water, it is the only way" (Mort Rosenblum, *The Brownsville Herald*, Associated Press, Aug. 2, 2003).

A forced exodus from parched cities seems far-fetched, and no one suggests it will happen next week. But it is a specter haunting Mexico's future. Could a forced exodus of people from one city to another occur because there is no water for them? The scenario isn't that far-fetched if you believe Scripture.

Read what the ancient prophet Amos wrote: "I [God] also withheld rain from you, when there were still three months to the harvest. I made it rain on one city, I withheld rain from another city. One part was rained upon, and where it did not rain the part withered. *So two or three cities wandered to another city to drink water, but they were not satisfied; yet you have not returned to Me, says the LORD*" (Amos 4:7-8). This does sound remarkably like a forced exodus in search of water.

Suarez explains, "We have lots of water in some places but not where the people are." And much of the water Mexico depends upon is the same water that is badly needed in California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. One forecast is that Corpus Christi, Texas (population 277,454), will run out of water around 2018. In the meantime the problem is getting worse, reports Rosenblum: "In Oaxaca, south of Mexico City, women line up at dawn to fill a few plastic containers from a passing water truck. In Alamos, far to the north, ancient aquifers are pumped at five times the sustainable rate."

Appearances are deceptive

Canada is a land of lakes and rivers. And most people would view Canada as having an inexhaustible water supply. By comparison to Africa and other dry places, most of Canada's waters are pristine. But the cumulative effect of mistreatment over the years has taken an evident toll. The cities of Victoria on the west coast and Halifax on the east still dump billions of liters of raw sewage into their oceans. The world's biggest freshwater basin, the Great Lakes, are described as a chemical soup that's not fit to drink or swim in. Some concerned experts view them as loaded with toxic chemicals, heavy metals, pesticides and sewage. Far too many rivers and streams in Canada have been badly contaminated by industrial activity.

We humans can live about a month without food, but only a few days without water. Because 70 percent of the human body is water, quick diets are dramatic at first through water loss. Of all the water in the world, only 2.5 percent is fresh and two thirds of this is locked up in glaciers and ice caps. Nobody knows how much water is underground or in permafrost. All life on earth is sustained by a fraction of one percent of the world's water. *If a five-liter jug (about 1 1/3 gallons) represented the world's water, the available fresh water would not quite fill a teaspoon.*

Uneven spread

Mexico is only one example of desperation in a world running short of water. Parts of the earth are dying, with fields poisoned by salt and village wells running dry. And there are diplomatic and legal battles looming. The Colorado River, drained by 10 U.S. states with their own water crises, is a muddy trickle by the time it reaches the rich farmland of Baja California. Under complex water agreements with the United States, Mexico can take water from the Rio Grande but must pay it back. President Vicente Fox has promised to pay the debt, which amounts to enough to put the state of Delaware under a foot of water. But with Mexico already so short of water, it isn't realistic to think it can happen.

Consider water distribution around the planet. While Canada and Brazil are water blessed, Saudi Arabia and South Africa are water stressed! The combined renewable water resources of Israel, Jordan,

All life on earth is sustained by less than half of one percent of the world's water. And that water supply is severely threatened.

Lebanon, Syria and Egypt are less than those of Nicaragua. Each Canadian has almost 100,000 cubic meters available, while each Kuwaiti has only 95. While 99 percent of the U.S. and Canadian populations have access to safe water, only 53 percent have it in Nicaragua and only 44 percent in Paraguay. Now Las Vegas, Nevada, is a pretty dry place with only 8.9 centimeters (3.5 inches) of annual rainfall. Yet its city planners allow hotels and casinos to build artificial lakes, waterfalls and swimming pools of immense proportion. The contrast: affluent millions enjoy pools and fountains for recreation, while one billion others live without access to adequate drinking water or basic sanitation.

Overall there is plenty of water on the planet, because God made it a habitation for mankind. The huge problem is burgeoning populations in places that lack adequate water resources, as well as mismanagement of available resources. Canada, with only 0.5 percent of the world's population, has 5.6 percent of its usable fresh water supply. China, with 22 percent of the population on earth, has only 5.7 percent of the usable fresh water. We cannot just move fresh water to where it is most needed, like in the Sahara, Ethiopia, Somalia or India.

Is disinfecting the solution?

Disinfecting city water supplies can also cause problems. In January 2000, the Newfoundland government identified dozens of its communities with high levels of potentially dangerous THMs (trihalomethanes) in water supplies. Drinking such water over a long period can cause bladder and colon cancers, but health experts maintain the benefits of sterilizing water far outweigh the small risk of cancers. And so bottled water is booming. But is it safe? Canadian standards for testing bottled water are lower than those for municipal supplies, so there are no assurances that bottled water is any better than tap water.

A great thirst to come

At the start of the 20th century there were 1.65 billion people; 100 years later there are more than 6 billion, and the United Nations estimates there will be nearly 9 billion by 2050. But the annual supply of renewable fresh water will remain the same, so the amount of water

available to each person decreases as the population grows, raising the possibility of water shortages. Currently 300 cities in China suffer from water shortages. Hydrologist Peter Gleick wrote in *The World's Water 1998-99*: "In India, 60 million people have been poisoned by fluoride. Roughly 11,000 children die every day because of a lack of safe drinking water and sanitation. In Bangladesh, one in five water pumps have been found to be contaminated with a high level of arsenic. Water in Nairobi, Kenya, is so scarce that slum dwellers tap into waste water pipelines to get access to the precious, though dirty liquid" (cited in *Canada and the World Backgrounder*, May 2001).

Good news of abundant water

Today we know our reality. As farm pesticides run off into streams, factories and industries leach their effluent into rivers and mines pour sludge into streams, our water resources are increasingly contaminated and unfit for human use. But look at an almost hard-to-imagine future. Prophesied is a river that actually heals and cleanses everything wherever it flows. This isn't just a dream, but rather a guaranteed promise for mankind from the Creator of all life. Notice what Isaiah says: "The poor and needy seek water, but there is none, their tongues fail for thirst . . . I [God] will open rivers in desolate heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water" (Isaiah 41:17-18).

At Christ's powerful return to earth, He will initiate a river that will do wondrous things for mankind. "When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed. And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there" (Ezekiel 47:8-9). What is pictured is the answer to so many pollution problems. As this river reaches the oceans, all the pollution from oil spills, nuclear submarine contamination and sewage dumped into the seas will be healed. All the depleted fish stocks around the world will be restored.

What a day it is going to be for farmers, fishermen and the environmentally concerned. And no more will thirst be a curse to the planet. No more will the water run dry! ❖

"CODE ORANGE," (Continued from page 16)

As subjects of the Kingdom of God, we must realize we are targets of such a stealthy and dedicated foe. The apostle Peter places all the people of God on alert by stating, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

So how are we doing?

The apostle Peter's words clearly place Christians on a wartime footing against a spiritual adversary. We are plainly told to be alert, attuned and active. But even so, on the human level, there is only so much that we can do now. What about the future? As incredibly stressful as the world has become in the last couple of years, the Scriptures clearly indicate there is going to be yet ahead an even more dynamic period of time.

Matthew 24:21-22 poignantly states, "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened." With this prophetic reality in full view, let's take a step back and ask ourselves, "So how are we doing now?" If we aren't handling "now" too well, how could we ever possibly handle "then" when the color for unimaginable chaos goes off the charts?

The simple, powerful and wonderful news is that God has not left us alone in these shaky times. Did you realize that in a very real sense God has His very own "Homeland Security" operation to project and protect His perfect will for each of us? Well, who and where are they? Am I speaking of sky marshals? No, I'm speaking of something even more effective and ever more present.

"Surely, He shall deliver you"

God grants the subjects of His Kingdom an incredible promise through the words of David in Psalm 91:1-7.

"He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the

shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust.' Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with His feathers and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler. You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day . . . A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you."

The covering of feathers and wings that we are to come to trust in as the shadow of the Almighty is defined just a few verses later in verse 11: "For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways."

But how does this relate to our world today and in the near future? Daniel 12:1 gives us a reality check to the seriousness of what lies ahead and the safeguards in place. "At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time." We are offered assurance that as events escalate even beyond a Code Orange, a specific angel has been given charge over people who have made a covenant with God.

"The ones whom the LORD has sent"

But if that's not enough to give us a boost of encouragement, your Bible indicates that there are angels who literally set watch among those with whom God would deal. Let's take note of the prophet Zechariah's experience as he comes to terms with the reach of God's attentive care through His angels.

"I saw by night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse, and it stood among the myrtle trees in the hollow; and behind him were horses: red, sorrel, and white. Then I said, 'My lord, what are these?' So the angel who talked with me said to me, 'I will show you what they are.' And the man who stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, 'These are the ones whom the LORD has sent to walk to and fro throughout the earth.' So they answered the Angel of the LORD, who stood among the myrtle trees, and said, 'We have walked to and fro throughout the earth, and behold, all the earth is resting quietly'" (Zechariah 1:8-11).

So we come to see that angels are assigned here below to allow God to meet our needs. But we also know that the earth is not always "resting quietly." What do we do then?

Let's take a cue from King David. He asked God to "keep me as the apple of Your eye; hide me under the shadow of Your wings, from the wicked who oppress me, from my deadly enemies who surround me" (Psalm 17:8-9).

David was spiritually aware and bold enough to ask God to keep him as the apple of His eye. He understood, and prayed like he understood, how much God loves us. With all this said and written before us, why is it we are drawn by fear to the moment of surrounding events? Because, simply, we are human beings.

Do not fear

But let's consider one more episode that specifically dealt with a terrorizing event and learn a lesson. It's the story of

Elisha and his servant who were targeted for elimination in the city of Dothan by the armies of the king of Syria. The king's forces had stealthily sneaked up on them at nighttime. Seemingly there was no way out. In 2 Kings 6:15-18 we find the details of what happened next.

"And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, 'Alas, my master! What shall we do?' So he answered, 'Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' And Elisha prayed, and said, 'LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. So when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, and said, 'Strike this people, I pray, with blindness.' And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha."

Does that mean that angels are simply spiritual firemen, policemen and paramedics who rush in and protect us from every blow in this life and offer us soft cushions for every fall or hazard that comes our way? Not at all. If that is their mission, they have a spotty record. Just look in Acts 12 where we learn that one apostle, James, was killed with the sword (verse 2), while Peter was put in prison (verse 3). Why was this? Do angels go to sleep on the job? Or does God play favorites?

Let's first and foremost remember that angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). Humanly, we would like to equate physical deliverance with spiritual salvation. But they are not synonymous. A purpose is being worked out here below. And people of purpose come to grips with the understanding that God will answer at the right time, in the right way—and that may mean the resurrection itself. For even in death, it can never be underestimated how one life can touch others and bring people of purpose to a deeper spiritual insight.

We truly are not alone

My writing for this month's column is nearing completion, but I just checked and the security threat of Code Orange is still on. So I've got to go out now and practice what I've written. I must remember that God's perfect will for me is not written in one day or on a monthly deadline like this column. It is written in a lifetime of faithful confidence that God loves me and those near and dear to me. I need to remember that as I pass through airport security checks, amusement park turnstiles and mill about in large urban crowded areas.

No, I can't stop living. And, for sure, I can't stop believing that there is a cure for the Code Oranges of this lifetime. The words of encouragement from Elisha for times like these echo Isaiah's refrain, "This is the way, walk in it." The lesson is for now and for always, to help us confidently remember that we truly are not alone.

Elisha tells us, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them . . . LORD . . . open [their] eyes that [they] may see." ❖



by Robin Webber

A Cure for Code Orange

Terror is in the wind! Over the last couple of weeks, the media have been bringing us the chilling news that there is "chatter in the air" among various terrorist cells. Apparently, there is enough credible concern that the public has been notified and extra security precautions have gone into effect.

We now measure our days in color codes. At this writing America is at "Code Orange." While the major nations of the Western world are putting on their best faces and encouraging the public to go on with a business-as-usual attitude, nonetheless the entire world is looking over its shoulder and, for that matter, under every concealed box or suitcase.

Perhaps as you traveled by jet over this winter-break period you looked just a bit more closely at the person seated next to you. And, turn about being fair play, just maybe they were giving you "the once over" as well.

How sad that such a beautiful color as orange is now synonymous with terror. I've always had a certain partiality for the color orange. I've always thought of orange pumpkins as a hint of autumn harvest. I think of orange as a charming earth color that adds to the decor of a Thanksgiving table. Being from Southern California, I think of all the lush rural citrus orchards dotted with speckles of orange. I remember how excited I was when as a youngster in school I learned that orange was really a mix between the two other colors of red and yellow. I thought I was really on to something big!

Putting our butterflies into formation

But that was then, and now is now. Orange is no longer

simply about autumnal bounty or childhood memories. Orange is synonymous with vigilance toward potential catastrophes perpetrated by terrorists. Since 9/11, the world has never been the same. And maybe the same can be said for the color orange. But adversity often allows our minds to come to a positive focus on "what really is real" and where our life's energies should be directed. Adversity can add up to personal growth as much as red and yellow add up to orange.

Terror in our lifetime is not going to dissipate. In fact, put your seatbelts on, the Bible clearly states it is going to escalate to an astounding crescendo. But there is a cure for the very real psychological trauma sparked by Code Orange. It will not necessarily always stop the shaking of our knees, which is simply the extension of a wobbly heart. But it should place our butterflies into a positive formation. What can we learn from a given negative and how can we transform it into a winning positive?

As Christians, the specter of Code Orange should be a vivid reminder to maintain the same kind of vigilance in our daily spiritual walk in a world that is increasingly alien and threatening to the ways of God.

Just like the Islamic terrorists who threaten America and its allies, there is another terrorist, operating in a far greater spiritual sphere. This terrorist despises our personal heavenly citizenship and all for which it stands. Frankly, what we are about is diametrically opposite of this other kingdom's culture. This other spiritual kingdom feels threatened, thwarted and sees its very existence in jeopardy.

(See "CODE ORANGE," page 14)