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“Islamic Imperialism” — The Commonality in Many of Today’s Conflicts

Were the events of Sept. 11 the result of U.S. foreign policy or part of a historic continuum that began with Islamic expansion in the seventh century?

by Melvin Rhodes

Since Sept. 11, 2001, there have been two basic explanations of what lay behind the attacks.

There are those who believe that 9/11 was part of a historic continuum, the beginning of another round in the “clash of civilizations” that began with the birth of Islam in the seventh century.

“Not so, argues a vast cohort of academics, journalists, writers and retired diplomats” who believe that “the attacks were a misguided, if not wholly inexplicable, response to America’s arrogant and self-serving foreign policy by a fringe extremist group, whose violent interpretation of Islam has little to do with the actual spirit and teachings of this religion.”

The quote is from a new book by Efraim Karsh, professor and head of the Mediterranean Studies Program at King’s College, University of London. His book *Islamic Imperialism: A History* (2006) details Islam’s imperial tradition that goes back well over a thousand years. Sept. 11 was indeed part of a historic continuum, the beginning of another period of Islamic expansionism or imperialism.

Note the following quotes from prominent Muslims down through the centuries.



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Saladin, who drove the Europeans out of Jerusalem in the 12th century, proclaimed in January 1189: “I shall cross this sea to their islands to pursue them until there remains no one on the face of the earth who does not acknowledge Allah.”

The prophet Muhammad in his farewell address in March 632 said: “I was ordered to fight all men until they say ‘There is no god but Allah.’”

Saladin, who drove the Europeans
(See “CONFLICTS,” page 3)



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"Whom heaven must receive until the times of

Restoration

of all things ... ACTS 3:21

Why Don't We Prepare?

The end of August was the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, the greatest natural disaster in American history. The region is slowly recovering, but the debate about who is to blame for the lack of preparation and the slow response continues.

Katrina struck with ferocity across 90,000 square miles of Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. Over 800,000 people were forced from their homes and up to 1,800 people died. Despite the warnings that such a disaster could strike the region, officials at the local, state and federal level were woefully unprepared for the disaster.

The days following the hurricane highlighted this state of unpreparedness as the poor who were left behind suffered from hunger, dehydration and lack of shelter. Who can forget the scenes of people floating through the squalid water seeking dry land or those on rooftops signaling desperately for rescue? I well remember the poignant picture of a mother walking out of the waters covering New Orleans with a small baby in her arms seeking help for the infant. That moment on TV seemed to epitomize the plight of the whole city caught in a perfect storm of human incompetence, lack of preparation and natural disaster.

What has been learned since then? Are other cities and regions better prepared for the next "big one," whatever it may be? What does the Katrina disaster teach us about the art of preparation for coming troubles—especially those we have ample warning are on the horizon? It is this last question that is most important for those of us who watch the growing threats on the international skyline.

An article in *Time* magazine, "Why We Don't Prepare," examined the human response to catastrophe. It said the real challenge is not predicting natural catastrophes—that can be done. The harder challenge is to prepare for them. "We know exactly—exactly where the major disasters will occur," said one expert. "But individuals underperceive the risk."

"There are four stages of denial," says Eric Holdeman, director of emergency management for Washington's King County, which includes Seattle and faces a significant earthquake threat. "One is, it won't happen. Two is, if it does happen, it won't happen to me. Three: if it does happen to me, it won't be that bad. And four: if it happens to me and it's bad, there's nothing I can do to stop it anyway" (*Time*, Aug. 28, 2006).

We can practice all the denial we want, but the fact is, these are dangerous times. We can take steps to prepare for calamity, whether in our neighborhood or the world at large.

Christ said, "Whenever you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming'; and so it is... Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time?" (Luke 12:54-56). Christ was challenging His audience to see the reality of the Kingdom of God before them, in His person. The context points to personal accountability based on repentance. None of us is exempt from unexpected calamities. We had better understand our times and live according to the teachings of the Kingdom while we have opportunity. That is the most important preparation.

Christ warned, "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:34-36).

I hope we have all taken steps to implement a plan for unexpected natural disasters that can strike us wherever we live.

Even more important, God's Word, the Bible, tells us a great deal about what is to happen to our world in the future. We have ample warning and time to decide how to prepare for the times ahead. Now is the time to act on the knowledge we have. Keep watching.

—Darris McNeely



Darris McNeely

“CONFLICTS,” (Continued from page 1)

out of Jerusalem in the 12th century, proclaimed in January 1189: “I shall cross this sea to their islands to pursue them until there remains no one on the face of the earth who does not acknowledge Allah.”

More recently, note the words of the leader of the 1979 Iranian revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini: “We will export our revolution throughout the world... Until the calls ‘there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah’ are echoed all over the world.”

Two months after Sept. 11, Osama bin Laden said: “I was ordered to fight the people until they say there is no god but Allah, and his prophet Muhammad.”

Perhaps more chilling are the words expressed by seventh-century Byzantine officials in Egypt of the Arab invaders: “We have seen a people who love death more than life, and to whom this world holds not the slightest attraction” (quoted by Karsh, p. 23). This description was penned by people who represented the superpower of their day—the Eastern Roman Empire. The same words could be written of today’s suicide bombers.

A biblical prophecy about the Arabs, the descendants of Abraham’s other son Ishmael, says something very similar: “He shall be a wild man; his hand shall be against every man, and every man’s hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren” (Genesis 16:12).

“The great Muslim historian and sociologist Abdel Rahman Ibn Khaldun (died 1406) expressed the same idea in a somewhat more elaborate form: ‘When people possess the right insight into their affairs, nothing can withstand them, because their outlook is one and they share a unity of purpose for which they are willing to die’ (Karsh).

Clash of civilizations through history

It should be noted that four of the six quotes cannot be blamed on U.S. foreign policy since the United States did not exist as a nation. Islamic imperial expansion in the seventh century had nothing to do with any of the Western powers since the West was in disarray at that time following the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West two centuries earlier.

It wasn’t until 732, exactly 100 years after the death of Muhammad, that advancing Muslim forces were halted at the gates of Paris by Charles Martel. He was the grandfather of Charlemagne, who was crowned by the pope in A.D. 800 in an attempt to revive a united Western empire.

Three centuries later, it was another pope, Urban II, who called on Europeans to launch a crusade against encroaching

kings of the North and South, the modern successors of the Roman Empire and ancient Egypt. You can read about this in Daniel 11 beginning in verse 40.

“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.” An understanding of the United States’ identification in prophecy



Reuters/al-Jazeera Television/HO

Two months after Sept. 11, Osama bin Laden said: “I was ordered to fight the people until they say there is no god but Allah, and his prophet Muhammad.”

Islamic forces. Four crusades followed lasting over 200 years.

In the 16th and 17th centuries there were more clashes between Islam and Catholicism, as Europeans at the heart of Catholic Europe tried to halt Islamic expansion under the Ottoman Turks. It wasn’t until after World War I that the Ottoman Empire was finally driven out of almost all of Europe, leaving a sliver of modern Turkey on European soil, enough to give the Turks grounds to apply for European Union membership.

Clearly, there has been a clash of civilizations between Islam and the West throughout the centuries. This explains the current state of international relations better than simply blaming everything on U.S. foreign policy. Indeed, the Bible suggests that a time is coming when there will be another clash between these two civilizations, Islam and Europe, led by the

(see our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*) makes it clear that the United States is not mentioned in this passage. So this final clash is not provoked by American foreign policy. There is a seismic fault line between Islam and the West that will still be there even if the United States is taken out of the equation.

The “vast cohort of academics, journalists, writers and retired diplomats” will likely continue to deny the reality of a clash of civilizations, for the simple reason that they themselves do not take religion seriously, so how can they understand those in the Islamic world who do?

It is often said that generals are always fighting the last war. This is even more so with the intellectual elite, which has a collective mind-set frozen in Cold War time. ❖

Terror Alarm in Germany

An unsuccessful train bombing in Germany reveals a changing public mood on domestic security.

by Paul Kieffer

In the year prior to the U.S.-led military invasion of Iraq, the tone of the exchanges between the U.S. administration and Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein sharpened noticeably. U.S. President George W. Bush stated clearly that “all options are on the table” for enforcing any alleged arms violations by Iraq. Many observers in Europe and elsewhere surmised correctly that it would only be a matter of time before the military option would be exercised.

Recent events have awakened Germans to the fact that their cities are also potential targets for Islamic fanatics.

With the Iraq crisis looming ever larger on the horizon, Germans wondered whether their country would be asked to provide troops for any military action against Iraq. Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder gave a clear answer and preempted any such request with his unequivocal stance of “no blood for oil” during his bid for reelection in the summer of 2002.

While former Chancellor Schroeder’s unusually direct challenge to President Bush did nothing to promote better German-American relations, the thinking seemed to prevail among many Germans that their chancellor’s clear refusal to support the U.S. position would give Islamic extremists no reason to target their country.

The Islamic terrorist bombing of Madrid commuter trains on March 11, 2004, killing 191 people and wounding hundreds, seemed to prove the point. Spain was part of America’s “coalition of the willing” in Iraq, and the attacks contributed to the defeat of José María Aznar’s government in national elections held only three days later.

Terrorists like 9/11 pilot Mohammed Atta were known to have lived in Germany, but in the five years since the World Trade Center attack, the country had been spared any violent terrorist activity. But recent events have awak-



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On July 31, 2006, two suitcase bombs were placed on commuter trains at the Cologne main train station. Because of a minor design flaw, detonators set for 2:30 p.m. failed to ignite the charge.

ened Germans to the fact that their cities are also potential targets for Islamic terrorists.

Botched train bombings

On July 31, 2006, two suitcase bombs were placed on commuter trains at the Cologne main train station. One of the suitcases was put on a train headed for the city of Hamm, north of Cologne, and the other was deposited on a train headed for Koblenz, south of Cologne. The suitcase in the northbound train was discovered in Dortmund, and the other bomb was found when the southbound train reached Koblenz. Because of a minor design flaw involving the amount of fuel placed in the bombs, detonators set for 2:30 p.m. failed to ignite the charge.

After a thorough examination of the two suitcase bombs, Germany’s federal criminal bureau, the *Bundeskriminalamt*, released information about the destructive potential of the bombs. According to officials, the construction of the bombs reflected a considerable degree of skill and knowledge. The explosives were placed in

propane tanks and would have caused the trains to derail, leaving many dead and injured commuters in their wake.

The bombs were deemed powerful enough to have killed anyone within a 100-meter (325-foot) radius. The bombers also placed food starch and other substances inside the suitcases in an apparent attempt to give the impression that a chemical bomb had been detonated, if the bombs had gone off as planned.

Less than three weeks later, on Saturday, Aug. 21, a special police task force cordoned off the main train station and an adjoining hotel in the northern German city of Kiel. The police found what they were looking for: a 21-year-old university student from Lebanon, one of two prime suspects in the bungled suitcase bombing.

The suspect was later flown to Karlsruhe, where a judge at Germany's highest court formally charged him with membership in a terrorist organization and attempted murder. According to the *Bundeskriminalamt*, the suspect was positively identified by DNA evidence and fingerprints collected from one of the suitcases used for transporting the bombs.

Three days later the other main suspect was identified, a Lebanese student who had been residing in Cologne. After his accomplice was arrested in Kiel, he fled to Lebanon, where he was taken into custody in the Lebanese city of Tripoli. The two arrests eased the tension caused by the discovery of the two suitcase bombs and the media attention in the aftermath. The botched bombings dominated the national news in Germany for over three weeks.

Surveillance cameras provided the tip

The decisive clue for identifying the suitcase bombers came from a source that in the past has been at times a controversial topic among Germans. Surveillance cameras in use at the Cologne main station caught images of the two bombers depositing their bombs. Both were obviously of Middle Eastern background, and one was wearing a jersey featuring the number of German soccer star Michael Ballack.

Police released the surveillance vid-



Reuters/Tobias Schwarz

Surveillance cameras in German train stations helped police capture suspects arrested for placing two bombs that were found on trains in Dortmund and Koblenz.

eo, apparently causing one of the two suspects (the fellow wearing the jersey) to panic. His arrest at the train station in Kiel was a rapid response to his apparent attempt to get out of Germany as quickly as possible.

Data protection and police jurisdiction have always been somewhat sensitive issues in postwar Germany. With the shadow of the gestapo looming over them, the authors of Germany's federal constitution decided to prevent the establishment of a national police force. Each of Germany's 16 federal states has its own police force, and Germany's border police, the *Bundesgrenzschutz*, is charged with policing Germany's borders and other entry points into the country.

Each of Germany's federal states also enforces its own data protection laws, all of which are stricter than those of the European Union. The interpretation of these laws leads to strange results. Some see surveillance cameras, for example, as a potential threat to personal data protection, since the whereabouts of people in public places recorded on film could theoretically be used against them. That's the reason surveillance cameras installed at Berlin's main train stations only relay live images to

security personnel—no recordings are permitted.

The threat of terrorist activity in Germany and the apprehension of the two suspects in the botched train bombing have led to a remarkable change in the public mood. While no one supports nationwide video surveillance, recent opinion polls show as many as 80 percent of Germans are now in favor of expanding the use of security cameras in public places.

"When one remembers the hysteria that made data protection a mantra in the 1980s over a harmless issue like a [national] census, the mental change in recent years is enormous... The world has changed and with it the Germans, both in foreign policy and domestically. Today even the data protection watchdog voices support an anti-terror file," according to the conservative daily *Die Welt* (Aug. 21, 2006).

Response commensurate with the threat

A serious threat to personal or national security can evoke a response that might have been previously unimaginable. The changing mood in Germany over the use of surveillance cameras is not the first time things have changed following terrorist activity.

During the 1972 summer Olympic Games in Munich, Palestinian terrorists gained entry to the Olympic village and took nine Israeli athletes hostage after killing two other Israeli Olympians. After the terrorists and their hostages were flown by helicopter to Fürstfeldbruck airport, supposedly to be flown out of Germany by a Lufthansa plane, the German police bungled a rescue operation. The result was the death of all nine Israelis, five of the eight Palestinian terrorists and a German policeman.

Prior to the 1972 attack in Munich, Germany had no special antiterror unit. The amateurish attempt of Bavarian police to free the Israeli hostages led to the realization that Germany needed a highly trained, national special weapons unit to deal with any future crisis. The unit created, the GSG 9, today ranks among the top antiterror units worldwide and was used to free German hostages held on a Lufthansa Boeing 737 airliner that had been hijacked and flown to Somalia.

Today Germans aren't the only Europeans who wonder what future terrorist attacks loom on the horizon. With an increasing Islamic population and university campuses used by recruiters to persuade well-to-do Islamic students from the Middle East to become terrorist cell members, the threat is real.

Some commentators in Germany referred to the botched train bombings and the threat of future terrorist activity as "an attack on our freedom." How much freedom are Europeans willing to give up to live in a secure society?

The book of Revelation contains an interesting prophecy about a final resurrection of the Roman Empire in the end time. That final resurrection is the seventh head of the beast described in Revelation 17:3. The seventh head also has 10 horns, each of which represents a king (verse 12). Those 10 kings—each of whom is some type of political leader in a European context—will voluntarily cede their power and authority to a central authority called "the beast": "These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast" (verse 13).

This final resurrection of the Roman Empire will be remarkable in the sense

that in contrast to earlier resurrections, the composition of the empire is not achieved by military force or conquest, but by voluntary means.

History shows that nations are only willing to forsake or reduce sovereignty when they perceive that it is in their own best interest to do so. The pattern of trading national jurisdiction for the benefit of group cooperation is well established in the European Union, most likely a forerunner of the final configuration described in Revelation 17. An example is the formation of the 12-nation "euro zone," the block of EU members who use the euro as their common currency. The establishment of the euro is unique in modern times and probably throughout history.

The final union described in Revelation 17:12-13 appears to be not just a partial, but a total surrender of national sovereignty to a central authority. Some threat to Europe's security and future will lead to this development. Could it be a domestic security threat caused by multiple extremist attacks

coordinated to exact a maximum of destruction and terror?

Whatever the threat will be, Europe will respond in a way that no one could foresee in today's liberal environment—other than those who understand Bible prophecy. ❖

Recommended Reading

To better understand the roots of the conflict between Islam and the West, request a free copy of *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. This fully illustrated booklet takes you on an eye-opening journey through history and the Bible to grasp the roots of this conflict, and where it will lead.



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Pride of America's Power: Approaching the Breaking Point?

Last month in part one of this series we showed the vast power currently held by the United States. Could we see a time when this power, in all its forms, will be broken, no longer able to influence world events? The answer is found in Bible prophecy.

by Darris McNeely

In Leviticus 26 God told His chosen nation Israel, "...If you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. I will break the pride of your power; I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. And your strength will be spent in vain" (verses 18-20).

How does this prophecy apply to the United States and Great Britain today? Regular readers of *World News and Prophecy* understand the promises made by covenant to Abraham have been fulfilled in modern times through these two nations. The terms of that covenant, both the curses and blessings, still apply to the modern descendants of the 10-tribe nation of Israel. The words of the prophets God sent to Israel and Judah to stir them to repentance speak to these nations today.

America and Great Britain in particular, as descendants of Joseph, have been materially blessed beyond all others. In spite of our disobedience to God's laws, He has been faithful to His promise and extremely merciful. How long will this last? How long before He removes that blessing and allows the curses of Leviticus 26 to overwhelm the present power of the United States?

Shaping the world

At the close of World War II America stood alone as the strongest power on earth. No other nation held the ability or will to reshape the post-war world as did the United States. The United States helped not only Great Britain and other allies recover, but also helped the vanquished nations of Germany and Japan rebuild into thriving, democratic, free-market economies.

American military power provided an umbrella for Europe to rebuild itself from the ashes of war and shielded the continent from the threat of Soviet expansion. In Japan, Douglas MacArthur was an "American Caesar," virtually rebuilding the country along liberal democratic lines.

Throughout the following decades America



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At the close of World War II America stood alone as the strongest power on earth. In Japan, Douglas MacArthur was an "American Caesar," virtually rebuilding the country along liberal democratic lines.

fought wars in Korea, Vietnam and the Middle East. In each case America sought to contain communism and protect basic human freedoms. It has been said America has not won a war since 1945. It may be more accurate to say America has not won so decisively with the ability to shape a region or the world in the same way it did after World War II.

In the post-9/11 period America invaded Afghanistan and Iraq to bring about regime change and alter the regional balance of power. While Saddam Hussein was quickly overthrown, the progress since then has been slow and painful. Now into the fourth year, it is still hard to see where and how the war will end. Currently there is a democratically elected government in place but it has very little control over the insurgency that continues to commit violence against the citizenry. Both Iraqi and American lives are lost every week in bombings and suicide missions.

Far from achieving the American objective of reshaping the Middle East into a democratic oasis,

America and Great Britain have been materially blessed beyond all others. In spite of our disobedience to God's laws, He has been faithful to His promise and extremely merciful. How long will this last?



Anti-war activists march down Broadway in New York April 29, 2006, to protest the war in Iraq.

the region is on the brink of sectarian civil war. Iran, for the moment, has extended its influence into Lebanon in support of Hezbollah in the recent war.

The war in Iraq has now divided America very much like the war in Vietnam did nearly a generation ago. Opinion polls (June 2006) put American support for the war at below 40 percent. The shame of Abu Ghraib and the allegations of atrocity in the city of Haditha have served to resurrect ghosts of past atrocities and heighten the calls for withdrawal from Iraq.

As the 2006 midterm elections heat up, we will hear more politicians question American policy in the Middle East in the attempt to wrest control of Congress. The rapid decline in the will to stay the course in Iraq is now being called the Iraq Syndrome.

In an article in the June 2, 2006, issue of the *Wall Street Journal* titled, "Iraq Syndrome Has Finally Arrived," Daniel Henninger describes the Iraq Syndrome as a loss of confidence in America's military engagement in Iraq and elsewhere. As vio-

lence and unrest dominate the daily news, the American public continues to lose confidence in the U.S. administration's ability to bring peace to Iraq. The call to bring American troops home increases.

The disclosure of abuses at Abu Ghraib prison and an alleged massacre of civilians at Haditha add credence to those who demand a pullout of troops. Along with a tendency to pull inward, these problems could be enough to break the will of the American people to support a war that seems distant and irrelevant.

The increasing sectarian violence in Iraq, which some call a "mini" civil war, could have a significant impact on the upcoming midterm elections in America. Calls for withdrawal of troops are getting stronger as confidence in the manner in which the war is being fought drains from elected leaders.

The Iranian factor

Add to this the manner in which Iran's nuclear ambitions are being handled. Iran has made very clear its intent to develop

a nuclear weapon. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has made many incendiary remarks about Israel and the Jews prompting concern that he would use a nuclear weapon to achieve his ends.

President George W. Bush has stated in two State of the Union messages, and on other occasions, that he will not permit Iran to develop nuclear weapons. His position is that a nuclear-armed Iran is unacceptable.

However, some feel a pathway to appeasement is beginning to open. Last June, while appearing on NBC's *Meet the Press*, Gen. Barry McCaffrey, a retired officer and experienced statesman, answered a question about whether it was inevitable that Iran would get a nuclear bomb.

He answered, "I think so. I think they're going nuclear five, 10 years from now. We'll be confronted. And that's not a good outcome. That argues that perhaps Saudi money and Egyptian technology gets an Arab Sunni bomb to confront the Persian Shia bomb. None of us want to see proliferation in the Gulf. This is a time for serious diplomatic interventions."

It is the last statement, "serious diplomatic interventions," that raises the thought of appeasement in the face of a serious threat. Iran feels it has a moment in history to exert itself in the Middle East and achieve its own political/religious ends. Fighting Israel by proxy through Hezbollah in Lebanon is a case in point.

When Iran gets a nuclear weapon, it will become a means of exerting further influence over the West. Diplomacy has not deterred it from proceeding with plans for nuclear development. Rather, Iran uses diplomacy as a stalling tactic, a way to tie the hands of Europe, America and the United Nations with words, while it continues to develop the ultimate weapon.

While the American stand is adamantly against a nuclear Iran, U.S. ability to do something about it could be seriously hindered by world opinion, which currently runs strongly against American foreign policy.

Appeasement masked as diplomacy will only strengthen Iran's hand. There are increasing signs that the West, including America, is aiding that effort. Is this a sign of losing the will, that pride of one's power?

Leviticus 26 mentions many curses to come upon the nation because of sin

and breaking the covenant. Famine (verse 26), attacks by enemies (verse 25), disease (verse 21) are but a few of the disasters stemming from Israel's disobedience. All of these are common to nations and empires both small and great.

But the breaking of a nation's pride of power is different. This involves a nation's moral will to protect and maintain and cherish its unique qualities of nationhood that make it what it is. This pride or will or national character defines a people around a core set of values rooted in tradition, history or a spiritual destiny.

In recent decades the winds of post-modern multiculturalism have changed the character of both America and Great Britain. The acceptance of all racial, ethnic, religious and language groups into a nation, without holding to the unifying aspects of the host culture, is having a detrimental impact in America as well as other liberal Western democracies.

Immigration without assimilation into the accepted national culture creates a disunity that distorts national unity and purpose. The present debate in America over illegal immigration is a case in point. The problem highlights America's inability to control its borders, essential for any country, not to mention the cultural changes it portends. That it has produced such hostility and debate is evidence of the divisive nature of this issue.

From its start America, and especially its founding leadership, had a sense that the Divine was behind this venture. No matter what their individual faith called this Providence—whether God, Nature or Destiny—there was a sense that some “higher element” was empowering the country. Many of the founding fathers firmly believed the God of the Bible was shaping the country's destiny. No matter the modern arguments on this point, it is clear they felt strongly that America came into being at a unique moment and by more than a fluke of history.

Leviticus 26 shows that God expects more than lip service, good intentions or reasoned faith to maintain the special relationship He has with His people. He requires unyielding obedience to an agreement based on the eternal spiritual law embodied in the Ten Commandments. Nothing short of that will suffice, not even the traditions of men or well-intentioned religious faith that errs from the Bible.

Notice how God begins the section. “You shall not make idols for yourselves; neither a carved image nor a sacred pillar shall you rear up for yourselves; nor shall you set up an engraved stone in your land, to bow down to it; for I am the LORD your God. You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 26:1-2).

Two points of the law are pointed out, idolatry and the weekly Sabbath, the seventh day of the week. Here are mentioned two critical points of the law upon which the whole course of the nation would hinge. When you look at the history of ancient Israel, you will see that indeed the people had trouble keeping these laws.

Among the most serious sins of the ancient house of Israel were idolatry and Sabbath breaking, by which Israel aban-

The United States is the most powerful nation the world has ever seen. Its power comes from the blessings of God, made to Abraham long ago in a covenant that still stands in our time. But we can see the handwriting on the wall. The United States is vulnerable in many areas.

doned any regular pattern of hearing and learning more about God's Word.

Notice what God said through the prophet Ezekiel after Israel fell into captivity: “Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. Yet the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes; they despised My judgments, which, if a man does, he shall live by them; and they greatly defiled My Sabbaths. . . . They despised My judgments and did not walk in My statutes, but profaned My Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols” (Ezekiel 20:12-13, 16).

As a result they began to believe that one religious belief or practice was no better than another—that they could change the rules of life as they pleased. Because of these beliefs and their sins, God allowed them to go into captivity.

The same is true today. The words of

the prophet Hosea are a chillingly accurate description of the United States and Britain: “Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel, for the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: ‘There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed. Therefore the land will mourn. . . .’

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. . . . The more they increased, the more they sinned against Me They set their heart on their iniquity So I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their deeds” (Hosea 4:1-3, 6-9).

Just as God punished ancient Israel for its sins, He plans to punish its modern descendants for their persistent disobedience.

America and Britain today

These prophecies apply to America and Great Britain today. These two nations, blessed by the God of Abraham, have both had their time in the sun and will both experience serious decline unless a national repentance occurs. God will break the pride of U.S. and British power, in all its forms, and the result will usher in a major shift in global power and politics.

It is fashionable in many parts of the world today to hate America. As we showed in the first article, that hatred is sometimes justified because of the corrupt values and morals exported through its media. Yet, for all its sins, America has been a powerful force in the world, much of it for good. When it no longer holds the dominant economic, political and military power, things will change, and it will not be all good. America, loved and hated, will be missed.

The words of the prophet Ezekiel have particular relevance. “I will judge you according to your ways, and I will repay you for all your abominations. My eye will not spare you, nor will I have pity; but I will repay your ways, and your abominations will be in your midst; then you shall know that I am the LORD!” (Ezekiel 7:3-4).

God used Ezekiel to deliver a powerful warning message to Judah and Israel to wake up from a spiritual slumber, repent and return to the sound and basic paths of righteousness based on His laws. The nations of Judah and Israel had long since

(See “**POWER**,” page 12)

What We Don't Know Can and Will Hurt Us

While technology expands exponentially, the kind of knowledge we urgently need to survive ebbs and wanes.

by John Ross Schroeder

A feature article in *USA Today* tells us, "Most American kids and adults don't even have a basic knowledge of our Constitution" (Nat Hentoff, "What You Don't Know Can Hurt You," *USA Today*, International Version, July 14, 2006). This is virtually the same thing as saying Americans' grasp of their own history and government is becoming very feeble.

Indeed retired Supreme Court justice Sandra Day O'Connor said some shocking words about modern education. "*Public schools have pretty much stopped teaching government, civics and American history... I truly don't know how long we can survive as a strong nation if our younger citizens don't understand the nature of our government... That is something you have to learn*" (ibid., emphasis added throughout).

Many Americans are also somewhat ignorant of their national heroes. Take George Washington, called the father of America.

As noted British historian Paul Johnson cannily observed, "George Washington is at present an unfashionable subject in American historical writing. Joseph Ellis [author of *His Excellency George Washington*] points out that 'any aspiring doctoral candidate who declares an interest in Washington's career as commander-in-chief or president has inadvertently confessed intellectual bankruptcy.' More 'fashionable' he says, would be to study 'ordinary soldiers in his army or the slaves at Mount Vernon'" ("America's Greatest Stroke of Luck," *The Daily Telegraph*, March 20, 2005).

Political correctness has reached new heights, especially in the academic world.



Reuters/Jeff Topping

Retired U.S. Supreme Court justice Sandra Day O'Connor said: "Public schools have pretty much stopped teaching government, civics and American history..."

A small-town education in Texas

Some 50 years ago my own experience was not by any means unique, but it apparently would be now. My junior year in high school (Kenedy, Texas) was transformed by a teacher named Leonard Harold Menn. He taught both American and world history in a manner that inspired many of my classmates to hit their history books and bone up on current affairs. We regularly had to write essays on such concepts as the American federal system, the separation of powers and other subjects of a similar nature.

To seniors Mr. Menn taught civics and English IV. We learned the importance of government and the American constitution from this scholarly gentleman who commanded great respect.

It seems this type of education is not so readily available to our young people today. In

British Home Secretary John Reid described the ongoing struggle with international terrorism as one involving "the core values of a free society." Yet many of us have seemingly forgotten what these really are.

a recent American Bar Association poll, fewer than half of the respondents had any idea of what the “separation of powers” was all about. Too many Americans don’t know the basics of how their own government operates, whether federal or state. Long-term, this clearly constitutes a serious and disturbing threat to the American democratic way of life.

As another article in *USA Today* explained, “Cocooning is back with a vengeance.” It seems as the world gets scarier and more stressful, more people are turning their homes into entertainment centers and burrowing in with their stuff (Mike Snider, Oct. 5, 2004).

Many today prefer trivia

My memory is filled with major

league baseball statistics learned in my youth. Their only benefit now is in remembering credit card pin numbers by association. How many number one hits has Madonna made? Her fans know. We are deeply into trivia today and its endless availability on the Internet is almost incomprehensible.

Many have cocooned into their own little worlds, whether it’s watching time-wasting soap operas, frittering away money gambling on the Internet or some other useless and at times hurtful pursuit. Meanwhile essential biblically based spiritual knowledge, also readily available on the Internet, goes begging. It won’t be there forever!

The Hebrew prophet Hosea resolutely recorded God’s words: “My

people are destroyed for lack of knowledge... You have forgotten the law of your God” (Hosea 4:6). Earlier in this chapter we learn that “there is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed” (verses 1-2).

Does this passage go a long way in describing the state of our Western societies today and how we break the Ten Commandments with impunity?

Understanding our core values

During the recent crisis where terrorists allegedly intended to blow up airplanes crossing the Atlantic, British Home Secretary John Reid described the ongoing struggle with international terrorism as one involving “the core values of a free society.” Yet many of us have seemingly forgotten what these really are.

A *Financial Times Magazine* columnist understands that our liberal world “has raised the pursuit of wealth, hedonism and distraction to great heights,” but also writes that “the core tenets of a free society are hard to define.” He wonders “how they may be expressed and lived” (Aug. 19, 2006).

Jesus Christ was also supremely concerned about core values. He knew exactly what they were from eternity and taught them to His disciples and future apostles. He further instructed this group of specially chosen men to preach and teach these biblical values to the nations of the world. “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you*” (Matthew 28:19-20).

The knowledge of these core values is far more important than knowing how our respective national governments operate (although this is also essential for our general well-being), wherever we may reside. Ignorance of God’s law endangers our spiritual salvation. What we don’t

The Knowledge of God and Jesus Christ

Many passages in the Bible make it clear that knowledge of and about God the Father and Jesus Christ is intensely important. For example, the apostle Peter emphasizes this particular theme in his second New Testament letter.

The introduction to Simon Peter’s second general epistle states: “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord” (2 Peter 1:2). The next passage talks about “the knowledge of Him who called us” (verse 3). Other Scriptures show us that it is the Father who does the calling of the firstfruits into the Church (John 6:44, 65), “as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39).

Adding true knowledge should be a spiritual pursuit of every Christian (2 Peter 1:5). If we grow substantially in the qualities of faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love, then we will be “neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (verse 8).

Not only does Peter urge Christians to add knowledge to their spiritual armor, he also reminds them of the importance of the true knowledge that they already have (verses 12-13).

The firstfruits who have escaped from worldly pollutions and defilements have done so “through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 2:20). In his conclusion, Peter gives us a warning about twisting the truth of God (2 Peter 3:16). “You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked” (verse 17).

Then in the closing verse Peter concludes with the positive admonition to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (verse 18). Reading and studying the four Gospel accounts would be a good start.

John Ross Schroeder

know about God and His way of life can and will hurt us!

A famine of the Word coming

We need the knowledge of God, and we need it now. The time is prophesied to come when there will be a famine of God's Word. When the knowledge of God is no longer available, people paradoxically will want and search diligently for it. But then it will be too late.

“Behold the days are coming,” says the Lord GOD, “that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, *but shall not find it*” (Amos 8:11-12).

Now is your opportunity! The United Church of God publishes several magazines including this one, about 50 booklets and reprint articles and also offers a 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*. Please don't ask for them all at once, but everything is free and is available in print or on the Internet (www.gnmagazine.org).

Why not take advantage of these valuable spiritual resources while they are still available? Then God can say to you: “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jeremiah 33:3). ❖

Recommended Reading

The Bible reveals what is coming in the future and what God wants us to do to prepare for what's ahead. To help you understand this best seller, request a subscription to the 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*.

This fully illustrated course is helpful, enlightening—and it's free.



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“POWER,” (Continued from page 9)

abandoned the covenant. And though they had an outer semblance of the relationship, it was in name only.

God had pulled the plug on Israel, and now Judah was about to experience captivity. Jerusalem, the symbol of unity and focus of God's love, was to fall. God's presence would leave the people and only a hollow core would remain.

In Ezekiel 10 we see the presence of God leave the tabernacle in a stunning vision. Notice: “Then the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight” (verses 18-19).

Just as God's presence—meaning His mercy, protection and favor—left the nations of Israel and Judah, so it will eventually leave the modern descendants of Joseph—America and Great Britain—in a final moment that will leave them vulnerable to powerful forces that will usher in a time of change unseen in modern times. When this happens, the stage will be set for major end-time prophecies to align.

God has yet to pull His hand of blessing off the United States. That is very clear from what we can see in today's world. America is not broken. There are deep systemic problems creating decay within, but it still stands strong and powerful in many key areas. America stands astride today's world as a colossus—a reluctant empire in every sense of the word. The United States is the most powerful nation the world has ever seen. Its power comes from the blessings of God, made to Abraham long ago in

a covenant that still stands in our time.

But we can see the handwriting on the wall. The United States is vulnerable in many areas. Like the giant Goliath, it could be brought down very quickly. There is still time for you, the reader, to grasp the truth of these and other prophecies and heed the warning to repent and seek the true God who stands behind His Word. A famous poem dealing with these empires echoes a hope that God, the “judge of the nations” might “spare us yet.”

In the beginning of this series we quoted a speech by British Prime Minister Tony Blair before the U.S. Congress. He concluded his remarks with a statement he learned from his own nation's history. “All predominant power seems for a time invincible, but in fact, it is transient.” It is not too late for America, but time is running out. ❖

Recommended Reading

The United States, Britain, Canada, Australia and other English-speaking peoples have played a major role in modern world history. What does the Bible say about the role they will play in the future?

Request a free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.



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A Page on the World

Reviews of books that count, endure and light the path ahead

American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation

Jon Meacham writes an insightful book about America's historic relationship with God (2006, ISBN 1-4000-6555-0).

Reviewed by Larry W. Greider

Jon Meacham, the managing editor of *Newsweek* and author of the *New York Times* best seller *Franklin and Winston: An Intimate Portrait of an Epic Friendship*, writes an insightful book that should be of great value to all those interested in America's relationship to God.

While biblical and historical research shows that God was involved in the blessings experienced by the United States (see *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*, www.wnponline.org/litreq), the many religious groups that found their way to America did not always represent the mind of God.

Mr. Meacham suggests that a grasp of history is essential for Americans to decide how much weight to assign a religious consideration in a public matter. He feels that the crisis of our time clouds the truth of the genius of the founding fathers and leaves Americans with a simplistic view of their heritage.

Toward the end of his treatise Mr. Meacham writes: "There is no doubt, as we have seen, that the Founders lived in and consciously bequeathed a culture shaped and sustained by public religion, one that was not Christian or Jewish or Muslim or Buddhist but was simply transcendent, with reverence for the 'Creator' and 'Nature's God'" (p. 233).

(This was a major factor in allowing religious freedom in the United States, but of course this doesn't mean that their various views of God are exactly the same as that taught in the Bible.)

You can't read of these amazing men without discovering that they were gifted with an uncommon vision and wisdom. While partisan politics often stemmed from religious dogma, the higher ground of liberty and freedom insured that freedom of religion would allow the gospel of the Kingdom to be preached without constraint. Just imagine the situation if the Puritans or Lutherans or any sect had secured exclusivity in the new nation.

Some of the colorful leaders are reported to have had some eclectic views of organized religion, but still God was frequently invoked in the formation of the American nation.

George Washington improvised "so help me, God" at the conclusion of the first presidential oath and kissed the Bible. This tradition of using the Bible at inaugurations continued, and it speaks volumes about the true source of America's blessings.

Excellent resource

The rich appendices that accompany the work consist of 148 pages and have incredible source material, including records of which



passage the Bible was opened to for 34 presidential inaugurations. For example, Ulysses S. Grant, at his 1873 inauguration, chose Isaiah 11:1-3: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots..."

William McKinley, inaugurated 1897, chose 2 Chronicles 1:10: "Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people that is so great?"

Theodore Roosevelt, 1905, selected James 1:22: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

Woodrow Wilson, 1917, used Psalm 46: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea..."

Warren Harding, 1921, had Micah 6:8: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humble with thy God?"

Harry Truman, at his 1949 inauguration, was sworn in on two Bibles—one opened to the Beatitudes, the other to the Ten Commandments.

Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953, also used two Bibles, which were open to Psalm 127:1: "Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it," and 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

I found it curious that Bill Clinton, in 1993, chose Galatians 6:8, "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (these records cited from Appendix B, p. 267 ff).

Appendix A contains some great material, including Jefferson's Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, Washington's Farewell Address, Jefferson's Letter of the Banbury Baptist Association (the origin of the wall of separation between church and state, etc.).

Jon Meacham tells the story of two Protestants from different denominations, one a minister, the other a layman, who met and discussed the differences between their faiths. The two walked amicably, and as they parted, the minister said, "Yes, we both worship the same God, you in your way and I in His."

American Gospel is worthwhile reading, and it is filled with insights that are balanced and inspiring. ❖

“PICKED,” (Continued from page 16)

Lebanon, a steady supply of labor would come over the nearby border. But when the Israeli army moved out of Lebanon in 2000, the border was sealed from any foot traffic. Thus, foreign workers such as the Thais have been used, as well as Israeli Arabs. But naturally, due to circumstances, many foreign workers were warned by their embassies in Israel to get out of the range of the Hezbollah missiles.

“You sit there and cry”

Ken Ellingwood, the reporter, estimated that just in the first three weeks of the conflict, \$20 million in earnings had gone to rot in the orchards. Desperate owners, frustrated by the lack of field hands, had striven to do it all themselves, from the picking of ripened fruit to packaging it while still fresh.

Yossi Levit, whose family has worked this land for nearly a century, gives voice to this frustration: “You work for these days to pick the apples and peaches, and you can’t do it.”

As the Israeli army widened its offensive, it closed the areas nearest the border and began to maneuver tanks and vehicles in through the narrow rows of orchards, only to decimate the fragile trees, even as farmers pleaded with them not to use their orchards for maneuvers. Once the military is in an orchard, the area becomes off limits. “Today, you go and look—it’s like war. You sit there and cry.”

Out of desperation to harvest, the farmers have tried every means at their disposal. Mr. Bierenboim tried to keep his crew by bumping their daily wages from \$23 to \$34. Even so, he was only able to convince six of his 15 workers.

During the interview, another farmer called on Mr. Bierenboim’s cell phone desperately seeking any packers for his picked crop. He simply replied that he had six and none to spare. Yossi Levit was fairing no better! Only five of his 31 Thai workers had not evacuated the area, and those who stayed remained in the shelters afraid of the bombings.

Beyond that comes the sobering news that Ken Ellingwood gleans from Giora Sela, chief executive of Israel’s fruit growers’ association, who said that the full extent of the losses might not be known for months. At the time of the interview, the military engagement was in full swing, and

no one had an idea of when it would end. Also, much of the Israeli population had been displaced, and their shopping patterns had been dramatically altered. And finally, a consideration beyond the immediate season is the thought of long-term infestation, as the farmers were unable to spray insecticide on their groves for such pests as the Mediterranean fruit fly.

Another stand of trees, another time

It has been said that war never leaves a nation where it found it, and that certainly applies to the orchards of northern Israel. But it wasn’t meant to be this way. Long ago, probably not too far from this area, God planted two other trees. These special trees had a purpose beyond simply quenching our natural thirst and hunger. These trees would determine how we would choose to satisfy the spiritual hunger that lies deep down inside of each of us.

They were known as the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:9). And while they were in the same garden, and while they both produced fruit that looked suitable for human consumption, the fruit of each led the consumer down two different paths. God had placed no bounds on the tree of life, whose fruit would have directed humans to positive and constructive relationships with their Maker and their fellow humans.

There were no moats or barbed wire around this tree of life. Adam and Eve could have safely enjoyed its benefits of shade and fruit. It was there for the picking! But God told the first man and woman not to go near the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, whose fruit would direct man toward making his own decisions apart from God (Genesis 2:15-17).

We know from the facts shared in Genesis 3 that Adam and Eve decided to take matters into their own hands (verses 1-6). It is from this initial act of rejecting God’s instructions that the “fruits of war” find their origin. Taking of this fruit told God that man had set a course for himself because he thought God’s ways were too restrictive. Man determined that he would write his own rules and use his own reasoning. Perhaps it is best encapsulated in the words of Solomon: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12).

It’s interesting that, at the start of human

history, those who walked among the trees thought somehow God’s ways were too binding and He wasn’t giving them the complete picture. Long ago, the prophet Isaiah spoke of societies that would separate from their Creator and seek to plant their own form of civilization. God’s indict-



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In today’s world, the sweet harvest of fruit is too often interrupted by the horrors of war.

ment of them is rendered as follows:

“Because you have forgotten the God of your salvation, and have not been mindful of the Rock of your stronghold, therefore you will plant pleasant plants and set out foreign seedlings; in the day you will make your plant to grow, and in the morning you will make your seed to flourish; but the harvest will be a heap of ruins in the day of grief and desperate sorrow” (Isaiah 17:10-11).

How did Yossi Levit put it? “You sit there and cry”!

A future joy of harvest

But this will not always be the case. Human history is going to be interrupted by none other than Jesus Christ. The scriptures of your Bible clearly declare He is coming back to establish the Kingdom of God on this earth (Revelation 19:11-16; Zechariah 14:4; Isaiah 2:1-4).

What an incredible reversal of news will greet the blessed recipients who will have access to the tree of life rejected by their ancestors. Let’s consider the biblical words

of this event. Notice Isaiah 27:1-3: "In that day the LORD with His severe sword, great and strong, will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent... In that day sing to her, 'A vineyard of red wine! I, the LORD, keep it, I water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I keep it night and day.'"

God is going to partner with the subjects of His future Kingdom and guarantee the work of their hard labors in the field. The seed will be planted, the bloom of spring will bud, and the fruit of harvest will be picked. Isaiah 9 speaks in part to the first coming of Christ, but gains greater stature when one contemplates the fulfillment of these verses at His second coming.

"Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed... By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles. [Where were the rockets hitting? Northern Israel.] The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined. You have multiplied the nation and increased its joy; they rejoice before You according to the joy of harvest" (Isaiah 9:1-3).

Oh yes, the Bible clearly points to a different world from the current existence of the Bierenboims and Levits and, for that matter, all the Lebanese farmers on the other side of the border. Micah 4:3-4 speaks of a time when "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid."

Why? "The mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken." Again, why? Because His Kingdom will be set up on this earth! Folks, I have read this last verse literally scores of times over the years, but had never realized the full dimensions of its meaning until reading Mr. Ellingwood's article and coming to understand the plight of the Bierenboims and Levits.

I think far too often my focus in reading this verse has been on the benefits of a rural setting or the aspect of ownership. But the clear intent is that of peace and safety. Yes, of being able to sit in your garden or orchard in peace without missiles or mortars screaming overhead.

Amazingly Zechariah 3:10 builds upon the foundation set in Micah and mentions, "In that day," says the LORD of hosts,

"Everyone will invite his neighbor under his vine and under his fig tree." Imagine if that were today and Mr. Bierenboim invited Mr. Levit over to his place under the shade of the ol' apple tree? But there is such a world ahead for each of us.

"Pass it on"

When that time of ultimate peace comes is God's business. But as "Christian farmers," we need to continue to plant and sow the good news of this coming Kingdom of peace. Planting the seeds of awareness, understanding and hope will always bring a harvest to be tasted by some even in troubled times such as now.

I'm reminded of a story I heard long ago of an aged man who was digging a hole in his front yard. A little boy came up to the tired and sweaty old man and asked, "Pops, what are you doing?" And the old man looked down and said, "Son, I'm planting an apple tree." The little boy looked at the size of the tree and then looked up and saw the age of his elderly friend and said, "But, Pops, you won't be around to taste the apples when they do come."

The old man looked down with a generous smile at the face of his young friend, and said, "Long ago, someone I never met planted that old apple tree right over there just for me so that I could take a bite today. So, Sonny, just pass it on and learn the lesson."

It is in the words of this story that we keep on digging into the Scriptures and planting seeds of hope for those who will learn and pass it on. A new and better world is coming. It is in the words of "Pops" when he says, "pass it on" that we hear the reverberations of "This is the way, walk in it" (Isaiah 30:21).

And so I do, as I plant a seed in your mind and heart of a different picture than the one that confronted me in the *Los Angeles Times*. Yes, it's a hope-filled picture of the descendants of the Bierenboims and Levits and Lebanese and, yes, yours too, leaning back on a tree in an orchard munching on the fruit of their labor and inviting us over to sit and enjoy. Oh, yes, there will be trees waiting to be picked, and they will be in due time—for the loudest sound overhead will be the buzzing of the bees. Now, "pass it on." ❖



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by Robin Webber

Waiting to Be Picked

There is something incredible about holding a piece of freshly picked fruit in your hand. Here in Southern California, fresh fruit is a constant companion. Out my back door, we grow apple, orange, tangerine and grape-fruit trees.

It is one of life's simple pleasures to go out and allow the ripened product to literally drop in your hand at the slightest touch and pull. It is the natural completion of the yearly cycle of dormant winters, springtime blossom aromas and sun-kissed summer days that all lead to the moment of triumphal harvest.

Such sweet and fond thoughts were recently dampened by tidings out of the Middle East. There from this original fruitful land that God described as "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8) comes news of agricultural ruin. It comes as a result of the conflict between the nation of Israel and the terrorist entity known as Hezbollah.

Wars can be complex, so much so that we talk about "the fog of war," because the picture of what's really happening can at best be shrouded in layers of intrigue and misperceptions. That's why often a picture is worth a thousand words. Such a picture can tell what went wrong, as well as what needs to be made right.

A different harvest

Such a simple picture of this complex Middle East tragedy from the *Los Angeles Times* jolted me into reality. It portrayed the utter contrast between the sweet tastiness of fruit and the distasteful nature of war. This picture allowed me to wander right behind the photographer into a small clearing in an orchard. There standing in an attentive and cautious pose was

a fully uniformed and armed Israeli soldier with his finger on the trigger of his machine gun.

This photographic glimpse of man and war was carefully framed by the abundant bounty of fruit-laden branches, squeezing the conflicting notions of war and peace into one surreal form. The contrast could not have been more vivid.

Underneath the arresting picture was a title that said it all—"A Different Harvest." This teaser picture did its work in getting me to turn to an article that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 4, 2006, p. A-12, titled "At Harvest Time in Israel, There's No One to Pick the Fruit" by Ken Ellingwood, *Times* staff writer. What greeted me on page 12 was not another picture of fruit, but real, everyday people whose plight and challenge opens up a whole world of understanding for us to consider.

Mr. Ellingwood opens his article by describing the human and economic woes facing the Northern Galilee area of Israel as "mounting by the bushel." He introduces us to Haim Bierenboim whose orchards lie next to the border of Lebanon. Rather than the common sounds of birds and the buzzing of bees associated with orchard life, there was only the whizzing whirl of Katyusha rockets and the dull thunder of mortar rounds that were coming routinely.

The hired hands simply would not go out into the field to pick the crops. Thus the fruit was just rotting on the trees. Mr. Ellingwood captured the frustration of Mr. Bierenboim's dilemma when he quotes him saying, "It's very difficult. I have a lot of problems with the workers. They don't want to work. They only want to stay in the shelters."

These workers come from as far as Thailand to be used in the fields of Israel. When Israel controlled the southern part of

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