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What Will the Next President Face? (Part 2)

In the days of biblical Israel a king had a unique type of adviser in his court to counsel him how to run the nation based on the Word of God. Samuel guided Saul. Nathan counseled David. The prophet Isaiah revealed God's will to Hezekiah. These men of God were independent of politics; they represented the Word of God to the king. Imagine a servant of God meeting the next president of the United States and giving him an analysis of the world and America from God's perspective, along with recommendations from the Bible about how God would expect the president to govern. Let's listen in again.

by Darris McNeely

Good morning again, Mr. President. It has been a busy week for you. I hope you have thought about what we covered last week. Especially the words of the prophet Daniel and his advice to a king that God sets the times and the seasons; He sets up world leaders and lets them be removed.

He, the Great God, controls history and the events that shape the destinies of nations and peoples. I know there are many items demanding your time, but these are foundational principles that need to be understood as your administration moves forward.

In fact, Mr. President, there is another "foundation stone" that you should consider. It is instruction from God to the rulers of His nation Israel. It concerns how kings could insure success and a peaceful reign.

Deuteronomy 17:18-20 states: "Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for him-



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"You are taking office at a pivotal moment. The world is at a crossroads of history."

self a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. 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, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to

(See "PRESIDENT," page 3)



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"Whom heaven must receive until the times of

Restoration

of all things ... ACTS 3:21

Mama Told Me...

My mother suffered through the Great Depression, and she never let me forget it. Poverty and hunger have a way of working their way into your memory and setting your course for life. I remember her frugality. She did not throw away any food. Her plate never left the table with a scrap of food remaining. And if a stranger appeared at the door hungry and needing a meal, she never turned him or her away.

She used to tell a story of a day when a bag of flour fell off a truck passing near her rural home. The driver went on, unaware of his loss. Word spread among the neighbors of the spilled flour mingled with the dust of the road. My mother went down and scooped up what she could, separating the dirt from the flour and taking it home to make biscuits. To her poor family, it was like manna from heaven.

"You'll see times like that again," she used to tell me, with her finger wagging in my face. But I was young and times were good, and I never knew a day of hunger or loss. So I would listen dutifully and then run out the door and get on with work and play and life. That was ancient history, I thought. It will never happen again.

But lately I am thinking we might see those days again.

I read that thrift stores are seeing a rise in traffic. Discount stores are doing very good business as people begin to tighten their belts and do with less. The major retailers are predicting leaner Christmas sales as layoffs mount and fears of harder economic times cause shoppers to rein in their buying.

In a sign that this will not be the typical recession, I also read that luxury items are seeing a drastic slump in sales. With their stock portfolios shrunk by one third or more, it appears the wealthy have to be economical in their shopping as well.

Are we beginning to see major cracks in the foundation of America's economy that will change the world we know?

A few years ago I heard a man warn, "Prepare now to reduce your standard of living!" This was said before America, and the world, embarked on the latest round of globalization. Like so many other warnings, this one was ahead of its time and quickly forgotten. But I have always kept it in the back of my mind, and now I pull it forward to the reality of today. Now indeed is a time when many in America and the West are having to reduce their standard of living because of economic upheaval. Will we heed this warning today?

There is a danger in the present crisis. It is that we look around and see that things look the same. The stores are still full of merchandise, even if people are not buying as much. We can fill our cars with gas, which has suddenly dropped in price by \$2 or more from where it was earlier this year.

Life looks like it is going along normally. We look fearfully ahead but are confused by the present reality. That is the problem. We are not moved with a sense of urgency to prepare ourselves for tough times.

Ecclesiastes 9:12 says, "For man also does not know his time: Like fish taken in a cruel net, like birds caught in a snare, so the sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them." The world can change suddenly, catching us all unaware—unless we heed the signs of warning in advance. A gracious and merciful God has given this generation ample warning of the coming times of change. We do not have to be "snared in an evil time."

I still see my mother standing in the doorway, finger raised as if pointing to the future. I hear her words, "you'll see times like that again," and I wonder if indeed we are.

—Darris McNeely



Darris McNeely

“PRESIDENT” (Continued from page 1)

the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.”

God’s Word, Mr. President, is the key to your success as a leader. Master its teachings and God will be with you. Ignore them and you run the risk of serious mistakes and problems ahead. Therein lies the key to wisdom and to understanding today’s world events, as well as what lies ahead for all nations. You are taking office at a pivotal moment. The world is at a crossroads of history. Today let’s discuss two critical matters.

A change in Europe

Europe, Mr. President, is a deceptive mix of conflicting images. The European Union forms a trading bloc larger than that of the United States. Its sheer size in terms of economics, population and global involvement makes it a major player on the world stage. In its more than 50 years of existence, it has continually grown and changed to become the large economic and monetary union of today.

Yet not all its members, notably Great Britain, use the euro as their currency. Twice in the last three years it has failed to ratify a comprehensive constitution meant to strengthen the political dimension of the union. The EU has no common foreign policy or military arm. The fact that each nation retains those unique elements is a key reason Europe is not the true superpower that America is or that Great Britain once was.

Europe has an aging population, and Europeans are not replacing themselves. At the same time there is a growing Muslim presence in all the major nations. This is a threat to the stability of the region as the Western Christian culture clashes with the Islamic.

Europe prides itself on its tolerant multicultural approach to world affairs. It sees itself as the home of the enlightenment values that form the basis for Western civilization. Yet the region that produced Bach, Beethoven and Mozart also produced two world wars in the 20th century, which cost the lives of tens of millions of people. Prejudice against ethnic religious and racial minorities still runs deep in Europe.



Reuters/Yves Herman

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso and France’s President Nicolas Sarkozy at a news conference Nov. 7. Look for Europe to learn from the latest crisis and forge a stronger union.

An Austrian television commentator remarked after the recent American presidential election: “I would not want the Western world to be directed by a black man” (“Prejudice in Europe Is More Than Skin Deep,” *Financial Times*, Nov. 17, 2008). He would not retract his comment when asked and added: “Blacks aren’t as politically civilized.”

To be fair, this comment was met with a storm of criticism in Austria, but he did not lose his job. The article went on to say, “Too many Europeans still talk and act as though their task is to shore up Western civilization against barbarians.”

Europe was caught unprepared in the current global financial upheaval. The lack of economic unity was laid bare when EU nations went separate ways in dealing with the financial crisis. There was no coordinated plan to deal with failing banks and nations (Iceland) despite the efforts of the European Central Bank. It became apparent that Europe’s vaunted economic unity has a long way to go to deal effectively with future crises. The EU was no more successful than America’s Federal Reserve, Treasury and Congress were through the weeks of September and October.

This does not mean the European experiment is over. Far from it. Look for

the European nations to learn from this latest crisis and form a system that will bounce back from recession. It is likely that Europeans will learn they must rely on themselves and Asia, especially China and India, to insure continued prosperity and growth. Don’t count Europe out as a power to reckon with in coming years.

Bible prophecy, Mr. President, tells us a powerful political and economic system will emerge at the end of the age. It is called Babylon in Revelation 18, and it will involve the combined power of 10 rulers and 10 nations or groups of nations.

These rulers will give their power and authority to a single leader who will provide global stability and prosperity. A crisis similar to the one now upon the world could trigger such a remarkable surrender of sovereignty. We know this system will be anchored in the historic seedbed of Europe, as the prophecies of both Daniel and Revelation clearly show. Both these prophecies indicate a union of church and state that waxes and wanes through history, coming together at the time of the end in one final effort to dominate the world, all in the name of peace, prosperity and good will.

But the appearance of this system will have dramatic consequences for America and its historic ally, Great Britain.

America will no longer be the world's leading economic and political power. The Bible prophesies a time of trouble for these two nations unlike any in previous history. They will suffer a collapse from which there will be no recovery.

Mr. President, the country may not be at that point today. America is still standing strong, albeit weakened in many ways through the economic, political and military crises of recent years. You carry the hopes of many that a renewal of optimism and change is on the horizon. While many wish you every success, you must understand that the future of this nation rests on a different sort of revival that no one else is advising. This nation's future rests on a spiritual renewal based on the principles of the Bible. Let me trace some of its key elements.

Blessings and curses

Mr. President, this may be the first time you have heard this. Listen carefully and consider. I am going to take you through a brief study of a biblical pas-

sage that states the source of our national blessings and reveals the cause for what is now occurring. Take that copy of the Bible on which you swore your oath of office and open it to Leviticus 26.

In the opening verses you see that God states two inviolable commandments. First, do not make idols and bow down to them. Idols distort the true God and cause the worshipper to be blind, deaf and dumb, just as the graven image, to true spiritual values and principles. Idolatry is alive and well in our materialistic society, for it involves any pursuit that keeps people from seeing God and His teachings in the clear light of day.

Second, God says, "You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary: I am the LORD" (verse 2). God has ordained holy times for mankind to come and worship Him. These have long been neglected and ignored by humanity, but they are unchangeable laws that still have spiritual force in the universe.

On these two laws turn much of the remainder of this chapter. They form

the heart of how we come to love and obey the God who says He blesses the obedient and removes the blessings for disobedience.

Verse 3 is critical. God introduces what follows with, "If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments..." Blessing is conditional upon obedience. If His people obey His laws, God promises every conceivable blessing for which a nation could hope. Look at the following verses, which offer detailed promises for obedience.

"I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall last till the time of vintage, and the vintage shall last till the time of sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely.

"I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid; I will rid the land of evil beasts, and the sword will not go through your land. You will chase your enemies, and they shall fall by the sword before you. Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight; your enemies shall fall by the sword before you. For I will look on you favorably and make you fruitful, multiply you and confirm My covenant with you" (verses 4-9).

God's great desire, "to walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people" (verse 12), has not changed. He wants to dwell within a godly people who reflect the shining light of His way, not human tradition.

But there is a flip side to this agreement. As the promised blessings were conditional on their obedience, so also, the curses follow disobedience.

Prophecy at work in history

God went on to say, "If you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break my covenant, I also will do this to you: I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by

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your enemies. Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursues you” (verses 14-17).

The ancient nation of Israel, to which this prophecy was first directed, received the blessings in part in the Promised Land provided by God. They started with good intentions, but history shows they quickly fell into a pattern of behavior that did not allow God to give them the benefits He wanted them to have.

Despite the repeated warnings from God and His prophets and the multiple deliverances from potential disaster, the behavior of the people of Israel and Judah hardened in disobedience to these fundamental laws. God eventually had to remove them from the Promised Land. Ten tribes of the 12-tribed nation of Israel were “lost” to history, only to reappear in modern times as America, Great Britain and several other modern peoples.

A little-understood part of this story shows that God withheld the full promises of this and other prophecies until recent centuries. Verse 18 foretells that because of their sin: “I will punish you seven times more for your sins.” That happened to Israel and then to Judah. Yet because God had promised national blessings to Abraham’s descendents, He revisited the people of Israel in modern times with great blessings. That is why America and Great Britain have stood tall and strong for more than 200 years.

But the prophecy does not end here. Twice more in this chapter God says, “If you walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, I will bring on you seven times more plagues, according to your sins” (verse 21). Again in verse 28 God says, “I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins.” The original language indicates an increase in intensity of problems until such time that God will bring total destruction.

This prophecy shows that because of moral decay there will be a time when God’s protective presence and blessing will be removed from the cities and land Americans so dearly love. If the nation ignores the final warning, the idols will be broken and God will enforce a “Sabbath rest” upon the land. See verses 29-39. God will use the power of this “Babylon” I described earlier to inflict this punishment upon the nation.



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Mussolini’s and Hitler’s rise to power shows how quickly history can change.

Do not lightly dismiss this warning based on what you currently see on the world scene. Even modern history, between World Wars I and II, shows us how quickly world powers can rise and fall.

You, Mr. President, have an opportunity to listen to the wisdom in this ancient prophecy. It is directly applicable to your administration today. There is time and opportunity to try to turn the nation around and chart a direct course back to the God of the Bible who stands behind these awesome prophecies.

This God today can hold off the darkening storms that hover over the nation. He is shielding America from its enemies and those who would directly attack its citizens with unspeakable destruction. While the country trusts in its military and intelligence capability to keep the walls secure, this passage we have read actually shows us the true source of the nation’s blessing and security. God is America’s refuge and its source of blessing. It is time this nation humbles itself in a deep and heartfelt repentance, unlike any this nation has ever seen. Sir, we need a great awakening of historic proportions.

You stand in a moment of opportunity. You can listen to this warning or ignore it. The choice is yours. We’ll continue this in my next appointment.

Later that evening in the private quarters of the first family, the president steps onto the Truman Balcony off the south side of the White House. Beyond the south lawn on the Mall stands the Washington Monument lit in all its subtle glory.

“How much more will this man of God tell me in our private talks?” he wonders. “Is this man mad or are his stories the edges of approaching history?” Below, the cars on the street move quickly on through the night. In Washington, the events of one day pass silently into the next. ❖

Recommended Reading

The United States, Britain, Australia, Canada 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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Will New Leadership at Home and Abroad Bring Israel Unacceptable Security Risks?

Not long after U.S. President-elect Obama assumes office, the Israeli nation will choose a new prime minister. The stark choice is very likely to be between Tzipi Livni and former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Provisional American plans for the road to peace may actually threaten Israel's future security.

by John Ross Schroeder

Columnist Jonathan Freedland wrote in *The Jewish Chronicle*: “With Obama in, Israelis now need to elect another dove—Livni—for the peace process to have a chance” (Nov. 7, 2008).

About a week later a *Sunday Times* report revealed that “Barack Obama is to pursue an ambitious peace plan in the Middle East involving the recognition of Israel by the Arab world in exchange for its withdrawal to pre-1967 borders, according to sources close to the American president-elect. Obama intends to throw his support behind a 2002 Saudi peace initiative endorsed by the Arab League and backed by Tzipi Livni, the Israeli foreign minister and the leader of the ruling Kadima Party” (Nov. 16, 2008, emphasis added throughout).

A dangerous future

If this report proves to be accurate and is implemented, Israel's security position may very well become even more dangerous. “Land for peace” has a bad history in Israel. Several strategic military advantages were gained by the outcome of the 1967 war. Israel would most probably lose them all if this peace plan were to become a reality—rendering the nation much more vulnerable to cross-border attacks in the future.

The successful Six-Day War in 1967 brought Israel the Golan Heights, the West Bank, the Jordan Valley, the Gaza strip, the Sinai Peninsula plus a reunified Jerusalem. Israel immediately annexed East Jerusalem with other conquered areas provisionally held hoping for future land-for-peace deals with the Arabs. Some of this territory has since been given back, but the parts most essential

for national security are still very much in Israeli possession.

Ceding Gaza has been a disaster for Israel. Hamas continues cross-border rocket attacks into southern Israel to this day. “Benjamin Netanyahu, the leader of [the] Likud [Party] is adamantly against withdrawing to borders that predate the Six Day War in 1967” (ibid.). Ehud Olmert, who submitted his resignation as prime minister Sept. 21, supports withdrawal from East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Golan. Tzipi Livni, possibly the next prime minister, generally backs withdrawal under certain conditions.

Blocking the path to peace

The Economist made an interesting observation about previous obstructions to the peace process. “It seems to happen every time. The moment Israel comes close to getting a prime minister serious about making peace with the Palestinians, fate steps in to block the way. Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated; Shimon Peres was rejected by the voters; no sooner had Ariel Sharon come round to ceding (far too little) land for peace than he was felled by a stroke. Ehud Olmert let himself be dragged into a calamitous war in Lebanon and now Tzipi Livni, a punchy politician from the right who has seen the light and started negotiating in good faith with...the Palestinian president, has tripped at the final fence in her bid to take Mr. Olmert's place [as prime minister]” (Nov. 1, 2008).

Who knows what may possibly happen in future? Perhaps these occurrences are strictly in the realm of sheer coincidence, but one wonders.

A September 2008 article in *Standpoint*, a new conservative commentary magazine pub-

In Israel's dangerous neighborhood, a misstep can have serious consequences.



Israel's Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert attend cabinet meeting Nov. 16. Livni, possibly the next prime minister, generally backs withdrawal from lands captured in 1967 under certain conditions.

lished in Britain, shed some light on the prospect of Israel being able to rely on diplomacy to solve the stubborn Iranian situation.

Clearly Iran is in the habit of testing Western resolve in many ways. The West has rarely enforced deadlines issued to Iran to halt activity that could lead to the development of nuclear weapons. Habitually Iran says “No” until the West’s deadline has expired, but the Western powers leave the offer on the table and then, if there is no change, the contents are altered in favor of Iran.

The article in *Standpoint* specifically stated: “Iran has tested Western resolve in other blunter ways. It has breached its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and made a mockery of inspections. It supplied weapons to Shia militias in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan... It routinely announces that Israel should be ‘wiped off the map’” (“Points East and West”).

Official expertise on a nuclear Iran

Michael Ledeen is the Freedom Scholar at the Foundation for Defense

of Democracies and a contributing editor for *National Review Online*. He has served as a White House national security adviser.

In the conclusion to his speech last August he stated: “As for the question of nuclear weapons, it seems hard to imagine that Iran does not *already* have them... They have been at this for a minimum of 20 years in a world where almost every major component needed for a nuclear weapon—not to mention old nuclear weapons—are for sale. A lot of these components are for sale in nearby Pakistan.

“And if the Iranians do have a weapon, it is impossible to imagine that, at a moment of crisis, they will not use it. The point is, we have an implacable enemy, which has no intention of negotiating a settlement with us. They want us dead or dominated, just as our enemies did in the 1930s and ’40s... There is no painless way out, and the longer we wait the greater the pain is going to be” (*Imprimis*, October 2008).

Now a more recent news report emerges stating: “Iran has now produced roughly enough nuclear material to make, with added purification,

a single atomic bomb, according to nuclear experts” (*International Herald Tribune*, Oct. 21, 2008). There is very good reason to believe that Israel, the United States and Europe have a very serious problem on their hands that will not go away.

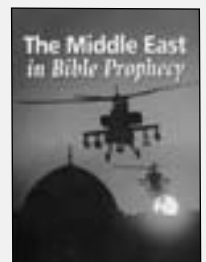
Clearly world leaders are concerned about the possibility of an Israeli attack on Iran and the consequences. In early September Nicolas Sarkozy warned Iran about pursuing a military nuclear capability. He stated, “One day it could find Israel had decided to attack” (*Financial Times*, Sept. 5, 2008). Longtime statesman Shimon Peres (now president of Israel) “warned the [Israeli] prime minister that a military attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities could provoke a broader conflict” (*The Times*, Sept. 7, 2008).

In its 60-year history, this relatively new nation has already experienced several wars and many skirmishes. The Israeli nation remains in a chronic cold-war condition. Peace processes with the Palestinians or Arab nations have never totally worked out (though the accords with Egypt and Jordan are somewhat of an exception).

What will happen in the Israeli national election in early February? Only time will tell. But to understand the historic backdrop of Israel’s place in the Middle East and how events there will affect the world, request or download our free booklet *The Middle East in 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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Syria, Small but Significant

Why should we be concerned with this small Middle Eastern nation? A prophecy in the small biblical book of Amos answers that question!

by Cecil E. Maranville

The United States attacked a strategic target in the Sukkiraya Farms near the Syrian town of Abu Kamal late on Oct. 26. A U.S. counterterrorism official said the target was the head of a network that funneled fighters, weapons and cash into Iraq. Syria claimed that the Americans attacked the occupants of a civilian building, killing a man, his four children and another husband and wife. (An eyewitness to the funeral the next day said that there were seven adult males and no young children.)

With the world's financial markets in meltdown, should we be concerned with what happens in faraway Syria? This event must seem unworthy of a second thought for most people. Perhaps you haven't even read or heard of this attack.

Abu Kamal is only about 5 miles from the border of Iraq. U.S. intelligence believes that 90 percent of the foreign fighters entering Iraq do so through Syria; many of them through this difficult-to-defend region. Frustrated with a lack of cooperation from Syria in shutting down this terrorist pipeline, the Americans took matters into their own hands.

Obama administration will continue policy

There are reports of a new executive order from the U.S. president, authorizing American troops to cross international borders for the sake of self-defense and protecting American lives. Already, the incoming Obama administration has indicated that it will not reverse this or related executive orders.

The U.S. mission in Abu Kamal ignited a diplomatic furor on several fronts. Syria's relationship with Washington had actually been improving of late, but this caused a furious anti-American backlash.



Reuters/Khaled al-Hariri

Syrians stand guard near a poster of the late President Hafiz al-Assad at Abu Kamal (2005 photo). The United States attacked a target in this area Oct. 26.

Thousands of Syrian citizens demonstrated angrily throughout the country. The BBC reported that, while the protests were government organized, an "angry mood... seems to have seized the whole nation."

In the interest of regional stability, the fledgling Iraqi government is seeking to build a good relationship with neighboring Syria. Yet Iraq just signed an agreement for American forces to remain in the country until 2011. The anti-American feeling in Syria makes for awkward times between Damascus and Baghdad.

There are also possible ramifications with Iraq's eastern neighbor, Iran, which is closely allied with Syria. Iran vigorously protested the American raid.

The difference Syria can make

Still, you might wonder, why should you care about what happens in Syria? Even though it is a military-dominated regime, it is relatively weak. When Israel recently

Syria, Iran and Russia strongly protested a U.S. attack on a target inside Syria. What role will Syria play in future events in the volatile Middle East?

bombed a suspected nuclear facility in Syria, Damascus lacked the ability and/or the will to do more than protest.

Syria is a poor country, and therefore its economy is not a crucial factor in the world market. And despite its Middle Eastern location, it is not a significant oil producer.

So why should anyone outside the region be concerned with Syria?

Another nation that voiced angry protests over the U.S. attack was Russia. It has probably not escaped your notice that Russia has all but publicly declared a return to the Cold War against the United States and U.S. interests. Stratfor, an independent intelligence organization, warns that there are many signs that Russia is beginning again to launch “proxy wars”—striking at the United States and American interests through any willing antagonist.

As it did decades ago, Russia is renewing military ties with Syria. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad traveled to Moscow in August to discuss how to expand weapon purchases and the sharing of military technology, including having Russian missiles on Syrian soil.

For its part, Moscow hopes to establish a naval base in the Syrian port of Tartus on the Mediterranean Sea. It’s possible that a Russian warship fleet will soon be stationed in the Mediterranean!

The Russians are likely to seize upon the recent American raid as an excuse to further the course they’ve already embarked upon with Damascus.

Syria’s strategic past, present and future

Centuries ago, Syria’s location was strategic, as it was on the main land route between Asia, Europe and Egypt. It partially fulfilled a major biblical prophecy as a king of the North, mentioned in Daniel 11. (A king of the North will come on the scene again at the end of the age.)

Later, it figured prominently in Islamic conquests, becoming part



Reuters/Khaled al-Hariri

Syria’s President Bashar al-Assad welcomes Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov before a meeting in Damascus March 20. Russia is renewing military ties and seeking a naval base in Syria.

of the Ottoman Empire. Of course, Syria’s present geographical boundaries didn’t exist until created by the victorious allies after World War I. (All of this history, including an explanation of Daniel 11 and the kings of the North and South, is presented in our booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.)

With the increasing dominance of sea and later air travel, Syria’s location is no longer pivotal to commerce. Even so, it remains strategically important today, bordering Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and Israel.

The infamous Bekaa Valley lies just across the Syrian border in Lebanon, which is the principal training area for Hezbollah. Syria helps finance and protect this Iranian-backed terrorist group, as well as allowing itself to be a virtual pipeline through which Iran pumps additional arms and funds to Hezbollah.

Syria gives safe harbor to additional terrorist groups, including Hamas and lesser-known militant groups operating in Israel.

A massive al-Qaeda terrorist attack on Jordan was planned and launched from Syria a few years

ago. Thankfully, it was discovered and thwarted. Jordanian intelligence estimated it could have killed 60,000 people with chemical weapons that are believed to be part of Saddam Hussein’s weapon stockpiles now hidden in Syria.

Turkey, just north of Syria, is presently seeking membership in the European Union. Turkey would also like to extend its influence in the Middle East after the United States withdraws from Iraq. A stable Syria is greatly in Turkey’s interest.

Syria and the prophet Amos

God speaks through the ancient prophet Amos about Syria’s significance in the end time. Amos is called a “minor prophet” not because of importance, but simply because it is a shorter book than others. Amos’s warning to Damascus (Amos 1:3-5) was one of eight prophecies given to tribes or countries in the region of Syria and Israel.

Damascus was one of Israel’s long-term rivals. Verse 3 says Damascus has “threshed Gilead with implements of iron.” It is likely that the threshing attack is the



Ancient temple to the sun in the Roman city of Baalbek in the Bekaa Valley during a snowstorm Jan. 30, 2008. The book of Amos predicts dramatic events in this area in the end time.

same incident referred to in 2 Kings 13:7. “The metaphor Amos used is that of a threshing sledge, an agricultural implement made of parallel boards fitted with sharp points of iron or stone... The intensity of the metaphor, however, implies the most extreme decimation and may hint at especially cruel or inhuman treatment” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on Amos 1:3).

Verse 4 mentions Hazael and Ben-Hadad. They were father and son, both kings of Syria, noted for their cruel treatment of Israel (see 2 Kings 8:12-13).

The reference in verse 5 to Aven (*Awn* in Hebrew) “may be...to the valley between Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon, called *El-Bekaa*, where are the ruins of the Baalbek temple of the sun; so the LXX [i.e., Septuagint] renders it *On*, the same name as the city in Egypt bears, dedicated to the sun-worship (Gen. 41:45; Margin, Ezek. 30:17, *Heliopolis*, ‘the city of the sun’). It is termed by Amos ‘the valley of Aven,’ or ‘vanity,’ from the worship of idols in it” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown’s Commentary*, note on Amos 1:5).

The possible detailed mention of the Bekaa Valley is startling, given its position today in Middle Eastern geopolitics. Specifically, the prophecy says, “I [God] will also break the gate bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the Valley of Aven” (verse 5).

“A cosmic holocaust”

Throughout this short prophecy is the repeated theme that God’s punishment is to send “fire” that will “devour.” *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown’s Commentary* explains this as “flames of war (Ps. 78:63),” and explains that it “occurs also in vss. 7, 10, 12, 14, and 2:2, 5” (note on verse 4). In addition, Amos 4:11 speaks of an actual conflagration, such as destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

This “fire” is much more than one of the countless cross-border wars between Syria and Israel. After introducing fiery destruction in the prophecy, Amos later refers to this war as “it” in Amos 1:14 and Amos 2:2, 5. The *Anchor Bible Commentary* states: “All eight oracles refer to the same ‘it’, which will not be retracted or reversed. There

was a single decree covering them all...declaring judgment on the entire region as a unit... This unity suggests *one cosmic holocaust*, not just several invasions that would pick these countries off one by one” (note on Amos 1).

In its somewhat difficult-to-follow language, Amos warns of a great end-time destruction that is tied in with the nation of Syria and that will engulf many nations.

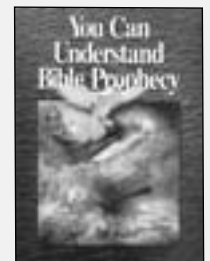
Jesus spoke of such an ultimate catastrophe, which will threaten the continued existence of the world: “For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive” (Matthew 24:21-22, New International Version).

Therefore, the future of seemingly insignificant Syria is crucial to the entire world! We need to keep a watchful eye on what happens there, for it is a trigger point, leading to a cascade of events that will change the world forever.

To understand events as they unfold, continue reading *World News and Prophecy*. And in addition to the booklet mentioned earlier in this article, request or download *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* All of our literature is available at www.wnponline.org. ❖

Recommended Reading

Can you really know what the future holds? Request a free copy of *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. This booklet gives a helpful overall picture of God’s prophetic plans for humankind and the good news beyond today’s troubled world.



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Farewell to America as a Financial World Power

A major shift in world financial power centers is on the horizon. America is on the decline, while Asia and Europe are on the rise.

by Paul Kieffer

Just five years ago, it would have been hard to imagine an official representative of the German government making such statements in a speech outlining his government's position in Germany's parliament, the Bundestag. Yet at the end of September German Finance Minister Peer Steinbrück bluntly stated his view of the world financial crisis.

For Steinbrück one thing is absolutely clear: "The United States is the place of origin and the focal point of the crisis." Although the long-term effects of the crisis are as yet undetermined, Germany's finance minister prophesied that America "will lose its status as [the] superpower of the world's financial systems."

It doesn't take a lot of insight to identify America as the cause of the turbulence in the world's financial markets. The third quarter of 2008—especially the month of September—will go down as one of the most noteworthy chapters in the history of the modern financial system. In less than 30 days the world witnessed several alarming developments in the United States:

- The U.S. Department of the Treasury nationalized mortgage lenders Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

- The investment bank Lehman Brothers declared bankruptcy, making it the largest insolvency in American history with a \$600 billion loss. Several German institutions had holdings in Lehman Brothers, including the Postbank, various national health insurance carriers and even the German national social security system.

- The investment banks Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley applied to operate as commercial banks to gain access to the FDIC for securing investor deposits. In so doing, both banks voluntarily accepted regulation by the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank.

- The U.S. Congress approved an emergency aid package worth \$700 billion.

According to Steinbrück, the financial



Reuters/Pascal Deschamps

Peer Steinbrück, Germany's finance minister, arrives at a euro zone conference Sept. 12.

malaise in the United States has "spread like a poisonous oil spill." The European Union and several Western countries have adopted their own emergency measures to cope with the crisis. The Bundestag passed emergency legislation authorizing the establishment of an emergency fund for German banks that is proportionately even larger than America's \$700 billion plan.

One result of the worldwide financial crisis is already foreseeable: "The world will not be the same again as it was before this crisis," was Steinbrück's prediction. Europe's response to the crisis is likely an indication of the shape of things to come.

In September German Chancellor Angela Merkel flatly rejected any possibility of Germany's participation in America's relief fund. She also criticized the United States in unusually direct public comments for delaying implementation of the Basel II agreement, which was initially published in June 2004 and creates an international standard that banking regulators can use when implementing regulations on how much capital banks need to set aside to guard against financial and operation-

The financial malaise in the United States has "spread like a poisonous oil spill," said German Finance Minister Peer Steinbrück. What will international perceptions portend for America's future in the world economy?



Former U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan testifies before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee in October. "I made a mistake in presuming" self-interest would protect the economy, he said.

al risks that banks encounter in doing business.

The EU and Asia are also pushing for new regulations to oversee the world's financial markets. President Bush reluctantly approved additional regulation, although he clearly still embraces the traditional American free-market philosophy.

For 40 years former U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan has championed unregulated capital markets. "I made a mistake," Greenspan said in recent Congressional hearings, "in presuming that the self-interest of organizations, specifically banks and [other financial institutions], were such that they were best capable of protecting their own shareholders and the equity in the firms." Some analysts called this a non-apology apology, an attempt to deflect blame away from his management decisions.

An alternate view is that the U.S. Congress is itself largely responsible for the crisis because it interfered too much in the mortgage industry. It ordered lenders to give mortgages to people who would otherwise not be able to obtain

one, leading to the now infamous subprime mortgage.

Regardless of the political viewpoint, it is naive to fail to account for human nature's ability to make use of an opportunity for personal enrichment at the expense of others. "Love of money" is one of the characteristics of those perilous times to arise in the last days, according the apostle Paul (2 Timothy 3:1-2). Even without the current crisis, though, the U.S. position as the world's financial leader has been threatened by America's risky financial policies.

A developing shift in the geopolitical balance of power

With the turbulence in world financial markets, "small" investors are understandably concerned about the safety of their deposits and investments. However, the current situation is more than just a financial crisis. It signals an impending irrevocable shift in global power. The age of America's dominance as the world's financial superpower is coming to an end.

The damage to America's standing in the world community as a result of the current crisis will be irreversible. Government intervention in the U.S. economy and the nationalization of financial institutions defies the principles of free capitalist markets. The inherent weaknesses in America's economic system are being exposed, just as were those of the Soviet system.

The American system operates on the premise that capital markets will be self-regulating to everyone's benefit, assuming that human nature under Satan's influence is good. The result of this false premise—as the current financial crisis clearly demonstrates—is a "predatory capitalism" where quick profits are sought using greed techniques like short-selling, leveraged buy-outs, speculative hedge funds, etc., that provide no real economic value.

For years American administrations seemed to be schoolmasters, lecturing other countries on the virtues of sound financial planning, budget deficits and related issues. American influence within the International Monetary Fund was the reason countries like Argentina, Indonesia and Thailand went into recession when their governments were

forced to cut government spending in exchange for funding via the IMF.

However, the United States did not practice what it was preaching. Overspending and the burden of unforeseen military obligations have led to an unprecedented increase in the federal budget deficit. At the end of September the U.S. national debt exceeded \$10 trillion for the first time in history.

In the past, concerns over America's growing national debt were countered by the argument that the creditors were largely Americans themselves, who bought U.S. treasury bills. Today, however, 25 percent of America's annual federal budget deficit is paid for by foreign purchases of treasury bills.

The percentage has doubled in just the last 20 years and is set to continue to increase. Why? The average savings rate of the American public—the percentage of disposable income set aside in savings—is at an all-time low and is actually negative at about 2 percent. That means that the average American is actually spending more money each year than he has available to spend. By contrast, the German savings rate is at a postwar record level at 11.2 percent.

America's emergency aid package will lead to more deficit spending, which is being financed increasingly by foreign nations like China. Oddly enough, China has been one of the nations that Washington lectured in the past on sound fiscal policy. Today there don't appear to be any Chinese banks on the verge of bankruptcy.

Will China and other nations that have been major purchasers of U.S. treasury securities in recent years—countries like Russia and the petrodollar nations lining the Persian Gulf—continue to support the U.S. dollar as the world's leading currency? Or will the current crisis be the impetus that eventually leads to moving away from the dollar?

Whatever the answer is, the United States won't be determining the answer on its own. The current financial mess can only be solved via cooperation among the affected regions of the world.

The national debt trap

The U.S. economy is not about to collapse. It will remain the world's largest economy for the time being.

However, the demise of former world empires was often tied to the adverse effects of financing military expenditures, with one adverse effect being the rise in national debt.

For example, the British Empire began to buckle under the weight of its colonial obligations in the 19th century, and expenditures for World War I pushed Britain further down the road to losing its position as the world's financial center. One of the reasons for the collapse of the Soviet system was the failure of its economy, which was strained by the war in Afghanistan and the attempt to keep up with the United States in the arms race.

It won't be any different for America when it comes to the impact of military costs and deficit spending. In the five years since the United States invaded Iraq, the national debt has grown by \$500 billion annually. This trend would have threatened America's position as the world's primary financial center even without the current crisis.

Currently the publicly held portion of the national debt accounts for about 37 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product. When that portion of the national debt held by U.S. governmental agencies is factored in, the percentage rises to 65 percent. That is twice as high as at the end of World War II, which was the most expensive war in U.S. history. By contrast, the current ratio of national debt to GDP for China is only about 19 percent.

If current trends continue and legislated increases in U.S. entitlement programs and deficit spending for unfunded Social Security obligations are factored in, then America's national debt will be well over twice the country's annual GDP by the year 2040. "Who will want to lend us money then?" asks financial expert David Walker.

Proverbs 22:7 reveals an interesting principle that this development will have on America's status as a world leader: "The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender." Most Christians do not realize that America's greatness as a nation—and her impending decline—was prophesied in the Bible. America's real heritage can be traced back to the ancient nation of Israel, comprised of the 12 tribes of Israel.



Reuters/Mike Segar

The National Debt Clock is seen near Times Square in New York Oct. 9. The sign has run out of digits and has had the dollar sign replaced by the figure "1" to count above \$10 trillion.

One of the blessings promised Israel for its faithfulness to God was a solid financial standing among the community of nations: "You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath" (Deuteronomy 28:12-13). Conversely, Israel was prophesied to become a debtor nation if it chose to disobey God (verse 44).

Bible prophecy indicates a shift in the balance of power among the world's

major regions for the period preceding Jesus' return. The main focal point of that development will be the continued decline of the English-speaking peoples that descended from their British homeland, including the United States. That's the real story behind the current financial crisis and the impact it will have on the future of the United States.

You can find more information on America's unknown heritage by reading our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. ❖



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“WITNESSES” (Continued from page 16)

At the end of this age a greater Nebuchadnezzar will come on the world stage, and once again men will be mesmerized by his power and wealth and proclaim, “Who is like the beast?” (Revelation 13:4).

It is at that time that two individuals will come onto the world stage and unmask this carnal villain and his system. You might say they are going to “rain on his parade.” In fact, they will hold up rain altogether to disrupt Satan’s pawn.

It is noteworthy that God compares the actions of the two witnesses with previous exploits of Moses and Elijah. The vivid description reads, “These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy [as did Elijah]; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire [as did Moses]” (Revelation 11:6).

Just like Elijah, they are going to turn the tables on “the golden boy” of their day and define what is truly happening rather than being defined by evil.

Who is troubling whom?

Remember the sparring between King Ahab and Elijah? Ahab said to Elijah, “Is that you, O troubler of Israel?” But Elijah boldly answered, “I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and have followed the Baals” (1 Kings 18:17-18).

But what is fascinating about

the two witnesses is that not only will they warn this future evil ruler, but they also have power to protect themselves. “And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner” (Revelation 11:5).

But why two witnesses? Why not one? For a moment, let’s focus on the term “witness” and discover what kind of individual is being called upon. The word for witness in the Greek language is *martus*. In a judicial sense, it means “one called to give testimony in a court of law.”

These two future individuals are witnesses for the divine prosecution of God’s heavenly court. But what is the charge? The crimes committed by the Beast against the Kingdom of God are “blasphemy against God...His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven” (Revelation 13:6).

But again, why two witnesses? Today, we live in an accusatory culture. Baseless accusations fly all over the place, and unfortunately, they sometimes stick! All the more reason we should note the startling contrast between how God exercises judgment and how humankind does. Let’s come to understand that these witnesses don’t bring a personal case; they bring God’s case against His earthly opponents.

How does God prosecute a case and come to judgment? Psalm 9:7-8 describes how God “has prepared His throne for judgment. He shall judge the world in righteousness,

and He shall administer judgment for the peoples in uprightness.”

Verse 16 in the same chapter declares, “The LORD is known by the judgment He executes,” thus revealing God as just, fair and beyond challenge. Being “known by the judgment He executes” leads us back to the Old Testament to understand why there are two witnesses and not just one!

We discover a powerful reason back in Deuteronomy 17:6. Here we discover how meticulous God’s laws are in passing judgment on others. Great care is given! These verses clearly state, “Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness.”

Again in Deuteronomy 19:15, God decrees “by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.”

Here in Revelation we are speaking of a complaint registered not simply against an individual, but an entire bestial system and, for that matter, the majority of humanity who delight in the demise of God’s servants (Revelation 11:10).

Can we fully appreciate how their ministry to inform, warn and indict is a solemn occasion before divine judgment is executed in what Scripture calls “the Day of the Lord”? It is here we discover amazing consistency between the words of the Old Testament and those of the New Testament.

What is the source of their power?

But now let’s ask the big question: What empowers this godly “dream team” to function against incredible odds? Here before us are the last in a line of servants of Jesus Christ who, from the days of His ministry in Galilee, have been sent out “two by two” (Mark 6:7).

What is the source of their abilities? It is perhaps understood by their other titles—two olive trees and two lampstands (Revelation 11:4). These titles are spoken of

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- **San Antonio, Texas**, on Jan. 31 (Darris McNeely and Robin Webber).

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in Zechariah 4, where an angel of God describes the interplay between a continuing supply of oil to fuel the lamps and the power of God. Zechariah is bewildered and asks, "What does this symbolize?" The angel responds, "Do you not know what these are? ... These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth" (Zechariah 4:13-14).

In ancient times, olive oil was used for anointing or ordaining God's holy servants. It is symbolic of the presence and power of God—the Holy Spirit.

The two witnesses' source of strength in incredible times does not lie within themselves! Embedded in this chapter is the key to their ability: "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the LORD of hosts" (verse 6).

Anchored in this platform of humility, the two witnesses will personify Christ's encouragement in John 12:35-36: "Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." Yes, they will be two lampstands, two sons of light, shining brightly in a gloomy future world.

Yet not even these witnesses can operate by their own devices. In such tumultuous times, they will need to remember the source of their abilities. They will face times that will ultimately lead to their martyrdom in the streets of Jerusalem before a global audience (Revelation 11:8-10), as the Beast marshals his earthly forces to "make war" on just two individuals (verse 7).

Standing on the promises of God

Staying connected to the divine source of their power, they can be assured of the comforting reality of Christ's words regarding that same Spirit. It will "bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26). For example: "Do not worry about how or what

you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say" (Luke 12:11-12). And, "'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we may boldly say, 'The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5-6). Also, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Remembering such promises and standing on such reality will allow the two witnesses to stand before the Beast and speak God's words. Oh yes, their knees may be shaking, but their hearts will be firm. They will be at peace, because it's not about them. It's all about God!

The same peace will be flowing in them that Jesus promised in John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

God has a future work for these two servants just as much as He has personally called you to honor Him in this current troubled age of man. His desire—that His light will shine forth from His chosen vessels—never changes. It is not easy, but one constant does remain.

God's prescription for justice, judgments and promises remains the same. He is no respecter of persons or times. The God who declared to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14) and refreshes our memory in Hebrews 13:8 that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" stands by His Word and His promises. He will stand by you in your times of personal challenge.

It is the words of Zechariah the prophet that grant us guidance in the godly admonition of "this is the way, walk in it" (Isaiah 30:21). God's words, whether they be for the two witnesses or you, remain the same: "'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts." ❖



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by Robin Webber

The Two Witnesses and You

Students of prophecy have long been intrigued by the subject of the two witnesses. Questions like who, what, where, when, why and how flood into our minds regarding these fascinating human instruments who will be used by God in a dynamic ministry to a spiritually darkened world. All the above-listed questions beg answers! Some elements may be fully understood, while others may not be comprehended until a future moment in God's perfect time of revelation.

What can we know about these two individuals? What do they draw upon to sustain their lonely, but spiritually rewarding mission? Rather than focusing on their personal identities, let's focus on why God has selected two witnesses and what will be offered to them in their moment of greatest need.

As we do, I think you will be encouraged to see how God is faithful to His unchangeable Word. A consistency of purpose and promises underlies God's actions, whether He is dealing with the macroworld of end-time prophecies or our microworld of personal needs in 2008.

Stepping into the scriptural spotlight

The entrance of the two witnesses onto the world stage is found in Revelation 11. It is at the beginning of the Great Tribulation (the fifth seal of Revelation 6) that the biblical spotlight shines on these two individuals. They are also referred to as two olive trees and two lampstands (Revelation 11:4), as well as two prophets (verse 10). Their

tasks are truly multidimensional. Just when you think you know their function, it moves into a different sphere. All elements honor the one true God!

It is a dangerous world they enter. They confront none other than the end-time character known as "the beast." This final beast is the last in a long line of rulers down through the ages that confront the living God.

Their age-old evil portfolio of rebellion against God and persecution of His people stems from the time of Nebuchadnezzar the Chaldean of the sixth century B.C. Yes, the one who said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" (Daniel 4:30).

The world marveled at this glistening city, but God saw something different, for He sees things as they truly are and "calls them as He sees them." For after all, "not all that glitters is gold."

God sees things as they are!

God looked deep down inside this man and saw the heart of a "beast." Nebuchadnezzar could fool everyone but the Supreme Ruler of the universe. In effect, God said, "I'll turn him inside out to show what's really happening!" So God ordered, "Let his heart be changed from that of a man, let him be given the heart of a beast" (Daniel 4:16). The rest is history.

(See "WITNESSES," page 14)