

Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 13, Number 4

May 2004



The Four Horsemen

- 3 PERSONAL FROM JOHN W. RITENBAUGH
The Beast and Babylon (Part Two)
- 8 *The Pentecost Witness*
—David C. Grabbe
- 11 A READY ANSWER:
Fast-Forwarding the Tape
—David F. Maas
- 12 PROPHECY WATCH:
*The Four Horsemen (Part Two):
The White Horse*
—Richard T. Ritenbaugh
- 16 *Searching for Israel (Part Two):
Blessings in Faith*
—Charles Whitaker
- 23 WORLD WATCH
—Charles Whitaker
- 24 BIBLE STUDY
The Parables of Luke 15 (Part Two)
—Martin G. Collins

About Our Cover



Revelation 6 contains the intriguing prophecy of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

What fearsome diasters do they represent? Are they already riding?

Artwork by
Pat Marvenko Smith,
copyright 1982/1992 -
www.revelationillustrated.com

Forerunner Magazine

Editor-in-Chief
JOHN W. RITENBAUGH

Associate Editor
MARTIN G. COLLINS

News Editor
DAVID C. GRABBE

Contributing Writers
MARK BAKER, TED E. BOWLING, JOHN F. BULHAROWSKI, MIKE FORD,
RONNY H. GRAHAM, WILLIAM GRAY, PAT HIGGINS, BILL KEESEE, ROD KEESEE,
WARREN LEE, DAVID F. MAAS, BRYAN NELSON, JOHN PLUNKETT, JOHN REID,
MARK SCHINDLER, CHARLES WHITAKER, BRIAN WULF

Managing Editor
RICHARD T. RITENBAUGH

Graphic and Layout Editor
KRISTEN M. COLLINS

Circulation
DIANE McIVER

Contact Church of the Great God

PO Box 471846
Charlotte, NC 28247-1846
U.S.A.

No. 13 Mt. Daho
Amityville
Rodriguez, Rizal 1860
PHILIPPINES

Box 30188
Saanch Centre Postal Outlet
Victoria, BC V8X 5E1
CANADA

(803) 802-7075 / (803) 802-7811 fax
<http://www.cgg.org> or <http://www.sabbath.org>
or <http://www.bibletools.org> or <http://www.theberean.org>

Forerunner is published ten times a year as a free educational and religious service in the public interest. Articles, illustrations, and photographs will not be returned unless specifically requested, and if used, become the property of the Church of the Great God. Comments, suggestions, requests, and changes of address should be sent to the address listed at left.

This free publication is made possible through the voluntary tithes and offerings of its subscribers and members of the Church of the Great God. All American and Canadian donations are tax-deductible.

© Copyright 2004
Church of the Great God
All Rights Reserved
Printed in the U.S.A.

The Beast and Babylon

Part Two

As the last article began to show, Europe is not showing signs of the kind of unity and strength one would expect the Beast to have. An interesting news article by Ambrose Evans-Pritchard strongly accentuates how divided—and therefore weak—Europe is. His article, “1,000 changes sought in EU constitution,” appeared first in the United Kingdom’s *The Daily Telegraph* on February 28, 2003, following a meeting in Brussels, Belgium, the previous day of the Convention on the Future of Europe:

The Convention on the Future of Europe was in a ferment of revolt yesterday as delegates of all stripes assailed the leadership for refusing to listen to the people as they draft the European Union’s first constitution.

More than 1,000 amendments poured in demanding changes to the first 16 articles, which were released by the forum’s elite praesidium two weeks ago.

It is difficult to imagine a thousand change requests—and that after the first sixteen articles of the proposed constitution had been in existence only two weeks! The British put their finger on the central theme of almost every disagreement:

The British had other concerns. Still fuming over

federalist undertones at the convention, Tory and Labour members alike demanded the removal of a clause giving the EU “primacy over the law of member states.”

They are most alarmed by the concept of “shared competence” put forward in the text, an innocuous sounding term that would prohibit member states from legislating in everything from public health to social policy, transport, justice and economic management unless Brussels waived its powers first.

The British are upset over the same issue that erupted into the American Civil War: Which is supreme, the Federal government or the individual state governments? Slavery, though a reality, was the emotional flashpoint, but the real struggle was over who controlled what. Who had the right to determine what is right and wrong, which way a thing was to be done, or who was to do what and when? The British are concerned about this very thing regarding the new European Constitution.

David Heathcoat-Amory, a Tory MP on the convention, said the insiders had seized control and were pushing through a constitutional revolution that would leave the British Parliament an empty shell.

“This has now reached a dangerous stage,” he said. “What we are looking [at] is a completely different Union, with its own legal personality, endowed with rights by the constitution, not by member states,” he said.

Lord Stockton, a pro-European Tory MEP, said the convention had degenerated into a “power grab” by the political class, who had forgotten that the purpose of the forum was to bring Europe back closer to the people after anti-EU referendums in Denmark and Ireland.

Things are not going well in Europe, and they have not been going well for quite some time. The time the Berlin Wall came down marked a high point for European unity, but since then, Europe has backtracked in many areas important to national greatness.

Another report from *The Daily Telegraph* authored by George Trefgarne, economics editor, touches on the economic dilemma of one of its strongest member states:

Here is a surprising fact: 100 Germans are losing their jobs every hour. Imagine being Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. Like a starlet in a Hollywood disaster movie, he is trapped in a car heading over the cliff.

The speedometer just keeps whizzing round as he tries the door and screams for help. He pumps the brake and turns the steering wheel, but to no avail. Last week, the counter hit 4.4 million.

Apart from his own bad driving, who or what can Mr. Schröder blame? His predecessors, the world downturn and the Americans have all come in for criticism. But he may soon find the perfect culprit: the French. For although France and Germany are having a wonderful flirtation over the Iraqi question, they are actually star-crossed lovers. (“France and Germany will soon fall out,” March 10, 2003)

Elise Kissling, writing in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 7, 2003, touches on the same issue in her article titled, “Record Jobless Rolls Shock”:

Unexpectedly high unemployment figures for February have prompted calls for immediate action to propel the economy and stimulate job creation.

The jobless rolls jumped to 4.7 million in January from just under 4.3 million last February and up 83,000 from last month, the Federal Statistics Office reported on Thursday. The February figures, the third-highest level since World War II and the highest since unification, caught bank economists off guard.

German companies are hurting. Hugh Eaken writes in Australia’s *The Age*, “Deutsche Telecom has posted a loss of \$44 billion (American), the biggest annual loss in European corporate history” (“Deutsche Telekom Posts Europe’s Biggest Loss,” March 12, 2003). Where is all this heading? Journalists all over the world are beginning to publish their conclusions, which indicate a European economic and political world in its greatest turmoil since World War II.

The following article excerpt, “Germany Plans Two-Tier E.U. over Iraq Splits” by Geoff Meade, derives from *The Scotsman*:

Germany is reviving plans for a two-tier E.U., leaving Britain and Spain out in the cold in anger over the Iraqi crisis. The “two speed” Europe idea is not new; it has been mulled over in Paris and Berlin every time a policy difference casts Britain against the continental mainstream.

But Britain has repeatedly resisted being left in the European slow lane, and will not welcome any suggestion of a European “hard core” group driven by France and Germany—particularly one seeking to drive a wedge into the E.U. on the basis of policy towards Iraq.

“It looks as if Schroeder is out to reinvent the original founding group of countries—the old six against all those which have joined since,” stated the leader of Labor’s Euro-MPs, Gary Titley.

The Australian published an article by National Security Editor Patrick Walters, “Strategic alliance system in decay,” on March 13, 2003:

The world is witnessing a rapid breakdown of the US-led multilateral alliance system built up since World War II and with it the demise of the UN, according to a leading strategic analyst. “It’s a defining moment,” argues Francois Heisbourg, chairman of the London-based International Institute of Strategic Studies, and one of Europe’s most respected strategic analysts. “We are witnessing a sea change vis-à-vis everything which has been built up since the Second World War.”

Finally, from the February 11, 2003, DEBKAF file comes a four-part conclusion its authors see arising out of this present crisis:

- A. The steady disintegration of the United Nations for all practical purposes.
- B. The breakdown of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—the strategic pact binding the United States and Europe since World War II.

C. The serious erosion of the European Union as a West European-oriented community, followed by the redistribution of the continent's power centers to the nations supporting the US offensive against Iraq: the UK, Italy, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Denmark and the new NATO members of eastern Europe.

D. The race for domination of the Asian-Pacific region among the United States, Russia and China.

Revelation 13:4 says regarding the Beast, "So they worshipped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshipped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?'" The major point to remember from the previous article is that Europe is, at this time, missing the factors of national greatness that would cause it to be feared. In short, Europe is declining. Its trajectory is unlike what one would expect of a great power that other nations tremble before, as they will fear the Beast. In addition, no leader of the Beast's stature has appeared on the world's political, economic, and military scene.

As pictured in verse 1, God uses three fearsome animals, including the so-called "king of beasts," to portray the Beast. Instead, Europe is moribund. It has been steadily waning in world influence for the past decade or more. The nations' economies are shrinking and their populations declining. Even though each nation has its own

military, Europe is in fact dependent upon the United States to defend it should all-out war erupt. In reality, there is little in Europe to fear!

The first article suggested two conclusions:

1. If the Beast is indeed to rise in Europe, then either we have much longer to wait until Christ returns, or
2. absolutely miraculous events will have to happen rapidly to turn the tables completely. This would entail bringing down the U.S. while simultaneously raising the EU to the superpower status that other nations fear.

Please note that I have never said the Beast will not arise in Europe.

The last article also provided a brief overview of Nebuchadnezzar's image in Daniel 2, with its head of gold, chest and arms of silver, hips and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay. It also touched on Daniel's dream in chapter 7 of the four beasts, each of which corresponds to one of the four parts of the image of Daniel 2. Historically, the four parts and four beasts are the Chaldean, the Medo-Persian, Greco-Macedonian, and Roman empires. The Beast of Revelation 13 corresponds to the feet of iron and clay of Daniel 2 and the fourth beast of Daniel 7. All of them reveal aspects of the Roman Empire.

A Babylon/Rome Connection?

We need to consider the Babylon/Rome relationship, first in regard to Rome's location and then to what Babylon is biblically.

Concerning the Roman Empire, the church has assumed that its prophetic usage is confined to the basic geography it occupied anciently or during the Middle Ages. But should we make this assumption? There is some possibility we should not do so, and we will see why as we proceed. For instance, consider the image of Daniel 2. Every time the metal changed—from gold to silver to brass to iron—the geographical location of the world power that the metal represented also changed. Why could this not also happen in its final change?

From gold to silver, the geographical location changed from Chaldea in the extreme south of the Tigris/Euphrates River valleys to Medo-Persia in the extreme north of Mesopotamia. From there, it moved to Greece in south-eastern Europe and then to Italy in south-central Europe. The history of the resurrected Roman Empire shows that through the ages its boundaries expanded and contracted as its various heads came and went.

Its seat of power was not the same under Justinian as it was under Charlemagne (western Germany), Otto the

Great (further east in Germany), the Hapsburgs (Austria), Napoleon (France), or Garibaldi (Italy). In prophecy, geographical location is a generality. Thus, location is not consistent in these fulfillments.

As for Babylon, some do not understand what it is. Biblically, Babylon can be a city or a nation. Though it is sometimes figuratively portrayed as a woman, it is not a church. In prophecy, especially in the New Testament, it symbolizes the worldly *system* opposed to God. One must discern from the context in which "Babylon" appears which interpretation is intended, but experience shows that Babylon overwhelmingly signifies a nation. Even when it suggests a city, we have to remember that God often uses a city to represent the entire nation.

Moses writes in Genesis 10:8-10:

Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD." And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

Babylon became established as a city through the man, Nimrod. A telling statement showing the attitude and conduct of the founder of this kingdom is “He was a mighty hunter before the LORD.” “Before” is a literally correct translation. However, a person standing “before” another can be either neutral, for, or against him. We understand that Nimrod was “before” God as an enemy; he was “against” God. Genesis 11:8-9 helps clarify this:

So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

God’s scattering the builders shows Nimrod’s and

therefore Babylon’s adversarial attitude toward God. From this beginning, Babylon eventually grew to become a worldwide political, military, economic, and religious *system* bearing the basic attitude as its founder. It can be a nation or a system that is against the Lord. “Babylon” thus became the Bible’s code word for what the New Testament writers call “the world.” They use the Greek term *cosmos*, implying an organized worldwide system opposed to God.

At the time of Genesis 11, the people scattered from the Tigris-Euphrates valley, taking much of the antagonism to God’s ways with them. To some degree, each language group adapted the attitude and system of Babylon to their ethnic traits. Undoubtedly, each group altered it somewhat, but secular evidence reveals a common strain connecting all civilizations worldwide to Mesopotamia. It took centuries for the people to migrate and settle in their new lands, but occur it did.

Not Everyone Migrated

Some remained in Babylon and through the centuries became the Babylonian nation, dominated by the Chaldeans. Babylon was the name of their capital city. One of their great early kings was Hammurabi, but Nebuchadnezzar became Babylon’s greatest king. God gave him the dream of a great image, and Daniel later told Nebuchadnezzar that he represented the head of gold (Daniel 2:38).

The other portions of the image represented powerful kingdoms—Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome—that, through the centuries, would follow Babylon in dominating the Western world. They did not dominate the *entire* world but perhaps could have. They certainly dominated

the part of the world the Bible is concerned with—the portion the Israelitish descendents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived in. Nevertheless, because the head represents Babylon, and the head directs the entire body, we can safely assume that this image confirms the continuation of the same general Babylonish system right on down to its end represented by the feet and toes.

Geographically, this interpretation of the image places the Babylonish system firmly in what media personalities, political figures, geographers, and anthropologists widely call the “West.” What is included in this term? We shall see.

Other vast Migrations Occurred

Just as the dominating power systems eventually geographically migrated from Babylon to Rome, so other massive, ethnic migrations also occurred. II Kings 17:6, 18 states:

In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. . . . Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone.

Assyria defeated Israel and relocated its people to Media more than a hundred years before the nation of Babylon arose to full strength. Then, in tandem with the Assyrians, they migrated, eventually settling in central and northwest Europe. They began settling there long before

Rome rose to power to continue the Babylonish system.

Another migration began when the Babylonians subjugated the Jews, beginning about 604 BC, taking many of them to Babylon as captives. II Chronicles 36:17, 20 adds detail:

Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand. . . . And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia.

Beginning about seventy years later, a small remnant of Jews began to return to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel and later under Ezra and Nehemiah, but the great bulk of Jews

remained in Babylon. Over the centuries, their descendants eventually migrated elsewhere, and many of them ended up in Russia and Eastern Europe.

In a paper published in the 1970s, Ernest Martin (former Worldwide Church of God minister and Ambassador College faculty member) established that the Chaldeans migrated first from Babylon to Tyre, but when Alexander the Great destroyed Tyre and Sidon, they migrated into Italy, eventually making up a large portion of Italy's population.

Notice how Babylon's influence spread into the Western world in much more concentrated doses than the

original migration at the confusion of languages. It directly affected the Israelitish people as they simultaneously carried and disseminated it through their migrations.

The New Testament's concept of Babylon is of a worldwide system. It began in the Tigris/Euphrates Valley, but it did not remain there. The Roman Empire was a dominant power within that anti-God system, and because of the migrations of ethnic groups it ruled over, the entire Mediterranean area and much of Europe, including the British Isles, became enveloped by this Roman/Babylonish system.

Rome Dominates Israelite Culture

Perhaps even more interesting is that almost all the people who inhabit the northern and western parts of the Roman Empire are Semitic. Israel, the Assyrians, and the Chaldeans are all descended from Shem: Israel from Shem's son, Arphaxad, through his descendant, Eber, and later Abraham; Assyria from another son, Asshur; and Chaldea also from Arphaxad but through another line.

Let us take this one step further. From where did the peoples who colonized Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, and the United States begin their colonization? Semitic Israelitish people from northwest Europe colonized every one of them. The first and the majority of the colonists came from within the vast area of the Roman Empire, and in the same manner that the people from Nimrod's domain took the Babylonish anti-God system with them, the colonists from Northwest Europe carried with them much of Rome's Babylonian culture—but with their own Israelitish, semi-biblical twist to it. English, Dutch, French, Scots, Welsh, Irish, Belgians, Danes, Norwegians, Swedes, Finns, and Germans colonized first. It was not until later, after the colonies were well established with Semitic peoples, that large numbers of immigrants from Eastern Europe came to the Israelitish colonies.

The Bible clearly reveals Babylon to be a worldwide entity. For the past two thousand years, the history of the Israelitish people has been culturally dominated by Rome's Babylonish system because they have been geographically within its borders and, more importantly, under its religious, economic, military, and political influence. Even though the Bible does not directly present Rome as being as geographically massive as Babylon, it is nonetheless culturally dominant on a worldwide basis because of the migrations and influence of the Israelitish people.

The dominant religions in all Israelitish areas are Roman Catholicism and its Protestant daughters. They all have a form of government based on Roman republicanism. Why, then, should we think the Beast must be geographically confined to Europe if Israelites have carried its influence everywhere they have traveled? Remember, too, that the Bible shows the geographic

location of the dominant powers consistently changing. The West consists of all those countries that are predominantly Semitic ethnically, Roman Catholic and Protestant religiously, and representative governmentally. This, then, could include Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States within the final Beast's sphere.

At present Europe is weak. It has no united army. The nations' economies are pathetically weak as is their current political and cultural influence. They are suspicious of each other and therefore very divided, even though their leaders are trying to unite them into a common market. They hate it, but they are dependent upon the United States economically and militarily.

If this is indeed the end time, and the Beast arises in and is confined to Europe, then—unless something truly unusual, even miraculous, happens to completely reverse America's and Europe's present conditions—we have a long time before Christ's return. Presently, however, the U.S. is acting much as we thought the Beast would. This, of course, does not mean America is the Beast of Revelation, but only that it is acting in that manner. It is the world's only military superpower, and it dominates the world economically, culturally, and politically. This makes no judgment regarding the quality of its domination, only that it is a reality.

The world has never seen one nation so dominant in all these critical areas. Not even Rome at the height of its power was as dominant. Even though other nations are envious of what God has given America, and some seem to hate it vehemently, they nonetheless eventually give it their grudging support. An example is the issue of Iraq. European nations are resisting the U.S. for a variety of reasons, perhaps most of all because they see their way of life, national interests, and influence on other nations severely threatened by a colossus they fear. They know they cannot control America, but they are nonetheless trying to do so because they feel that the towering and overpowering influence of the United States threatens their political and economic ideals.

(continued on page 17)

The Pentecost Witness

The day of Pentecost is typically associated with stupendous signs and miracles. Acts 2 records that when the Holy Spirit was given, the display of ability and power astounded everyone present. There was a sound like a mighty rushing wind (verse 2). It appeared that fire rested on the apostles (verse 3), and when they spoke, every person present could hear what was being said in his own language, even his own dialect (verses 4-11).

Because of the brief description given in Acts 2, various religious denominations have sprung up which practice speaking in gibberish—which the disciples definitely were *not* doing—and being “slain in the Spirit,” which is clearly not a biblical concept. These sincere but misled people focus on miracles and manifestations as “proof” that they have received the Holy Spirit. Every week they gather to “pray down” the Spirit—or at least a spirit—for their own use and gratification. The focus of their meetings is on the *experience* rather than on instruction, admonition, rebuke, or encouragement (see II Timothy 3:16).

Before this event in Acts, Jesus Himself explained to His disciples

the importance of their receiving the Holy Spirit, as well as what signs would be shown as a result:

And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, *but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.*” Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*” Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. (Acts 1:4-9, emphasis added)

The very last thing the resurrected Christ said before He ascended to the Father was, to paraphrase, “You will receive power when you receive the Holy Spirit, and this will enable you to be witnesses of Me.” Through the giving of the Holy Spirit, Christ’s disciples would have the necessary means to be lights to the world and to demonstrate a way to live that glorified God.

Israel’s Calling

God chose ancient Israel out of all the nations of the earth and determined that they would be a holy nation. He ordained that they would be a people set apart from the rest of the world. The Old Covenant was intended not only to be a schoolmaster to teach Israel how to live in such a way that they would recognize the Messiah when He came (Galatians 3:24), but it was also intended to set Israel apart—to make them holy. In so doing, He intended the entire nation to be a witness of Him. Deuteronomy 4:5-10 demonstrates this:

Surely I [Moses] have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day? Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your chil-

dren and your grandchildren, especially concerning the day you stood before the LORD your God in Horeb, when the LORD said to me, “Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.”

God proposed the Old Covenant to Israel on this same day—the day of Pentecost. Israel accepted the terms of the agreement and thereby signed up to be a light to the rest of the world. God had given them the most superior set of laws that mankind had ever encountered, which would leave the rest of the world in awe due to the beneficial effects that would come from it.

We know from the New Testament that the only problem with this covenant was the heart of the people entering into it (Hebrews 3:10-12; 8:7-8). The God-given terms of the agreement were absolutely perfect for what He wanted to accomplish. One of His main purposes was for Israel to be an example, a witness, to the rest of the world of the right way to live. Incidentally, the Tabernacle that Israel carried with them in the wilderness was even called “the Tabernacle of witness” (Numbers 17:7; Acts 7:44).

If Israel had been faithful to the covenant, they would have received blessings beyond belief. In the blessings portion of Deuteronomy 28, God was prepared to set Israel high above all the nations of the earth. Their cities and farms would be prosperous; their children would be healthy and strong; their herds and flocks would be numerous; they would have an abundance of food; and they would have protection from their enemies. They would have rain in due season, and everything they put their hands to would be blessed. They would have enough that they could lend to other nations and not borrow. God intended them to be a holy people whose behavior and prosperity would make it obvious to the rest of the

world that God had set them apart. The effect would be so dramatic that Israel would be *feared!*

However, as we know, Israel failed. The accounts of the Old Testament prophets show the great lengths to which God went for Israel in cleaning her up and taking her under His wing. Yet, once she caught a glimpse of her God-given beauty and wealth, all she did was play the harlot with the surrounding nations, rather than being a witness to them (see Ezekiel 16).

Today, the United States is the richest nation on earth, which seems to coincide with God’s promise of blessing until we realize that America is also the greatest *debtor* nation. Parts of the nation suffer drought, and other parts are practically floating away. Much of our food is either imported or grown from genetically mutated seed. Our cities are filthy, crowded, and corrupt, and our family farms are dying through environmental regulation and corporate buyouts. We live in abundance yet cannot afford our lifestyles, plunging further into personal debt. The nation’s churches are pathetically weak, barely standing to fight the onslaught of secular culture—and, in fact, accepting much of it in a misguided spirit of tolerance. In short, America is the farthest thing from being a kingdom of priests or a holy nation. Our entertainment industry shows, like nothing else, what sort of “witness” we are making to the world.

Israel failed because her heart was not right. Biblically, the word “heart” is synonymous with “mind” and “spirit.” We know that God desires that all Israel be saved (Romans 11:26; II Peter 3:9) and that in the future He will replace Israel’s heart of stone by pouring out His Spirit (Ezekiel 36:26-27). However, for a few—known as the remnant, the church, the Body of Christ, spiritual Israel, the Israel of God, or the *firstfruits*—God decided to do this ahead of time.

He gave His Spirit on the Feast of the Firstfruits, the day of Pentecost, AD 31, so that a remnant of Israel would have a heart of flesh and not

of stone. God gave His Spirit so that spiritual Israel could obey God both in the letter and in the intent of His law. In addition, as we saw in Acts 1, just as He gave Israel His law so she would be a witness, God gave the church His Spirit so that Christ’s disciples would be witnesses. By receiving a portion of the Spirit that proceeds from the divine Lawgiver, the firstfruits are able to understand the intent behind God’s laws. More than this, by yielding to the promptings and motivations of God’s Spirit, they can begin to take on His character and actively *do good* rather than merely avoid sin.

God’s Image in Us

If we are begotten children of God and led by His Spirit, we will exhibit His character and spiritual image:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by which we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (Romans 8:14-17)

Before God summoned us, began to reveal His truth to us, forgave us, justified us, and imparted His Spirit to us, our spiritual father was Satan! We were no better than the Pharisees, whom Christ told that they were of their father, the Devil, because they were doing Satan’s works (John 8:39-47). Children display the characteristics of their parents, so Christ judged the Pharisees to be the children of Satan because they were exhibiting the Devil’s characteristics.

Before God intervened in our lives, we, too, were the children of Satan (Ephesians 2:1-3), because we

were exhibiting his spiritual characteristics. However, God began to redeem us and called us into a relationship with Him, which, as Romans 8:15 says, was symbolically an adoption. God was not our original father, but He took on that role after He extracted us from the grasp of Satan, sin, and this world.

Verse 16 reiterates that the Holy Spirit is intended to provide a *witness* of who we are and who God is. If we allow the Spirit to lead us, we are sons of God. It follows that, if we are sons of God, then we will be exhibiting the same characteristics as our Father! When we exhibit God's characteristics, we are a witness to the world of His character and the way He lives.

Under the New Covenant, with access to the Holy Spirit, the quality of our witness must be much higher than what God expected of physical Israel. To whom much is given, much also is required (Luke 12:48)! If our neighbors, co-workers, or family members look at us, and all they see are people who go to church on different days, do not eat certain foods, give multiple tithes on their income, and do not believe in the Trinity, are they seeing anything different than Old Covenant Israel, who did not have the Holy Spirit? Certainly, God's law *will* set us apart from the world because the world is against God, but merely keeping the letter of the law will not provide the complete witness that God is looking for.

This is not to denigrate the royal law of liberty to any degree. Acts 5:32 says God gives His Spirit only to those who obey Him. However, one can be *nominally* obedient, keeping God's law in the letter, without making a truly effective witness for God.

Flesh or Spirit

Paul lists various "works of the flesh" in Galatians 5:19-21:

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred,

contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Consider this passage in light of the laws and beliefs that we frequently point to as setting us apart from the world. A person can keep the Sabbath, at least in the letter, and still display drunkenness, hatred, contentions, outbursts of wrath, and dissensions. One can reject the Trinity doctrine, the doctrine of eternal security, and the immortality of the soul yet promote and practice heresies, since a heresy is simply any deviation from truth. An individual can tithe yet exhibit selfish ambitions, envy, and jealousy. Someone can observe the laws of clean and unclean meats and still be unclean in his heart and in the decency of his life. A man can be physically pure in his relationships while living vicariously through revelries, which Adam Clark's commentary defines as wild parties and obscene music.

The warning at the end of verse 21 is explicit: Those who practice such evils or make them a part of their lives *will not* be in God's Kingdom because they simply would not fit in. Their lifestyle is contrary to the quality of the life God lives and expects His children to live.

To put this another way, what kind of witness does a person make who keeps the Ten Commandments (including the Sabbath and holy days), eats only clean meats, tithes faithfully, and rejects false doctrines, yet has a temper, curses, tells dirty jokes, has a perpetual chip on his shoulder, always has a complaint against another, always looks out for "number one," drinks too much, and revels in perverse entertainment? Such a witness of nominal lawkeeping is useless to God, just as ancient Israel's witness to the nations gave the enemies of

God an occasion to blaspheme (Ezekiel 36:20-23).

When Jesus Christ introduces Himself in the letter to the Laodicean church, He highlights the fact that He is "the Faithful and True Witness." He points to this title to show where the Laodiceans fall short. They are so enamored of the world and so much a part of it that it is difficult for an observer to tell them apart from the rest of Babylon! Their lives do not glorify God because they do not demonstrate a separation from the world. They do not demonstrate holiness or sanctification.

In contrast, the result of the Holy Spirit being active in a person's life will be love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness (meekness), and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). These attitudes are not manifested all at once, which is why Paul calls them "fruit." Fruit takes time to develop and mature. Nevertheless, one whose life God dominates, who is led by His Spirit, will be exhibiting these things *in addition* to obeying God's law. He will be not merely obeying but also imitating God. He will be exhibiting these characteristics because he is a begotten son of God who expresses the traits of his Father.

God has given us His Holy Spirit so we can fulfill His purpose. A primary responsibility that God has given to those He has set apart over the years—whether physical or spiritual Israel—is to be a witness to the rest of the world of God's way of life. Physical Israel failed in this, and the Laodicean Christian is currently failing in this.

Yet, if we have received the Holy Spirit and maintain a close relationship with its Giver, we have the means to be the true and faithful witnesses that God desires and commands His people to be. We will obey the laws that God rehearsed to Israel on Pentecost, be led by the Holy Spirit that God endowed His people with on another Pentecost, and ultimately be unified with the rest of the firstfruits of God's spiritual harvest.

—David C. Grabbe

“A prudent man foresees evil
and hides himself;
the simple pass on and are punished.”

Proverbs 27:12

Fast-Forwarding the Tape

Do you like to see the ending of the movie or read the ending of a book to get a sneak preview of the conclusion? Have you ever asked a friend who has previously seen a certain movie or read a particular book how it all turns out? Some people do and have, their curiosity getting the best of them.

A few years back, when my family and I went to the movie *Cast Away*, we arrived at the tail end of the previous showing. Instinctively, I walked into the dark theater to see the final few moments of the movie—seeing the hero with a FedEx box, walking around the veranda of a rural farmhouse. Immediately, I felt a tug at my arm as Julie pulled me back into the lobby, insisting that I would spoil the movie for everybody.

Not long thereafter, my son watched a John Wayne picture that his friend Tim had previously seen. I kept asking him to tell us what would happen, only to hear Julie retort, “Don’t you dare!”

I have a collection of favorite movies that I have played repeatedly: Gene Autry and Gloria Henry in *The Strawberry Roan*, Clark Gable and Joan Crawford in *Strange Cargo*, Lloyd Bridges and Marie Windsor in *The Tall Texan*, and Gregory Peck and Ingrid Bergman in *Spellbound*. The tension, anxiety, and suspense of these stories do not bother me because I already know how they end.

I have always had a curiosity about what is going to happen—or where the events in which I am involved will lead. Before our son Aaron was born, the nurse took a sonogram. She asked if we wanted to know what gender our child was. We did, and this gave us several more months to choose a name. I do not feel that fast-forwarding the tape to see what happens is necessarily a bad thing.

God’s Word tells us that there are occasions when fast-forwarding the tape may be beneficial and even life-saving. We fast-forward the tape when we count the cost, when we look for dangers on the road ahead, when we are tempted to sin and need to understand the consequences, and when we need to detach ourselves from a grim trial—looking forward to a happy ending or a transcending meaning to it all. In addition, we can fast-forward the tape to provide ourselves motivation and hope. Several years ago, Herbert W. Armstrong, with a mischievous grin, said, “Brethren, I’ve looked ahead to the end of this story—and you know what? We win!”

Sneak Previews

Proverbs 29:18 teaches that without vision (some translations have rendered this “prophetic vision” or “revelation”) people perish. Anticipating and preparing for danger requires that we fast-forward the tape, as Proverbs 27:12 says, “A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself; the simple pass on and are punished.”

At our baptism, we are encouraged to move forward in time mentally, thoughtfully counting the cost of our discipleship: “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it” (Luke 14:28). We need to be sure that we are willing and able to see our course through to the end.

Sneak previews of specific consequences of keeping God’s laws are given in Leviticus 26:3-13 and Deuteronomy 28:2-14, while sneak previews of specific consequences for breaking God’s laws are presented in Leviticus 26:14-39 and Deuteronomy

(continued on page 20)

The Forer

Part Two: The

*“Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals;
and I heard one of the four living creatures
saying with a voice like thunder, ‘Come and see.’
And I looked, and behold, a white horse.
And he who sat on it had a bow;
and a crown was given to him,
and he went out conquering and to conquer.”*
(Revelation 6:1-2)

We live in an age of information and ideas. Granted, most of them are not worth the electrons upon which they zoom through cyberspace, but a handful of them receive enough traction to influence wide audiences. It is conceivable that someone tapping away at his keyboard in Pocatello could, under the right circumstances, affect events or attitudes in Paris or Pyongyang. Like nuclear energy, today’s unregulated flow of ideas has the potential for both great benefit and great harm.

One can argue that this has always been the case, which is true. However, modern rapid and mass communication methods make the dissemination of information and ideas almost instantaneous. It no longer takes weeks or months—even years—for a document to travel from one point to another, as it took for, say, Paul’s epistles to reach their intended recipients. Now, with a few keystrokes, the church can send out a letter, article, or an entire magazine to anyone in the world with an email address, and it will arrive at its destination in seconds.

Information and ideas are the lifeblood of every human endeavor. Nothing progresses far without communication among the participants in a scientific enterprise, a business venture, a political movement, a military operation, or a religious cause. Usually, the better a group’s communications are the more successful its results.

Perhaps this can be seen no better than in religion. Beginning with its most fundamental elements, communication plays a major, vital role. In Christianity, everything its adherents know about it has been revealed—or communicated—to men through the Word (John 1:1-18; Matthew 4:4). The Bible, one could say, is merely God’s communication device to wayward man, informing him of the right way to live to attain eternal life. The church takes the message of Scripture and broadcasts it, both to its own members as well as to potential converts, through a variety of methods, all of which entail some form of information- and idea-

transfer. Without communication, religion cannot exist.

The white horse and the crowned bowman on its back, embodying the first seal of Revelation 6:1-2, are all about religious communication. Like his fellows, this horseman has nothing benign about him—he goes out “conquering and to conquer.” He is the one who commences—some would say ultimately causes—“the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:8) that results in the death of a quarter of earth’s population (Revelation 6:8)!

A White Horse and a Bow

The descriptions of the horses and their riders in Revelation 6 are spare, but the intended symbolic meanings become plain enough once we allow the Bible to interpret its own symbols. The paucity of detail may be frustrating to some interpreters of prophecy, yet it is sufficient to get across Christ’s intent in sending out these fearsome judgments. For the white horse and its corresponding horseman, the symbols are the color white, the bow, the crown, and its activity, conquering.

Biblically, white is an interesting color. In our day, it is immediately associated with cleanliness and purity, as all advertisers know: Marketing a cleanser that is itself white or comes in predominantly white packaging helps to convince the consumer that the product is effective. However, an ancient Israelite might not see white that way. In Leviticus, white appears as the color of leprosy more than a dozen times (see, for instance, Leviticus 13:3). In Genesis 40:16, white baskets presage the death of Pharaoh’s baker, and in Joel 1:7, it is the color of a land stripped bare by an enemy.

Conversely, at other times it represents the more positive associations we are accustomed to. In Ecclesiastes 9:8, Solomon writes, “Let your garments always be white,” which most commentators feel refers to the joy, purity, and beauty of a righteous, godly individual. The Shulamite describes her Beloved, a type of Christ, as “white” (Song of Songs 5:10), implying His spotless and holy character. Similarly, Daniel sees “the Ancient of Days” clothed in a garment “white as snow” and with hair “like pure wool” (Daniel 7:9), reminiscent of John’s description of the glorified Christ in Revelation 1:13-16.

In the book of Revelation itself, white is predominantly positive in meaning, as most of its appearances describe God, Christ, glorified saints, or associated

Horsemen

e White Horse

objects like the Great White Throne. Overall, white suggests purity, righteousness, holiness, glory, victory, and perfection. This preponderance of positive, symbolic meanings for the color white—without considering the mainly negative aspects of the other symbols—has led many interpreters to misidentify this horseman as a positive, even divine, image.

For starters, the white horseman carries a bow, a weapon of war. Strangely, John makes no mention of arrows or a quiver, although we may infer the former, since a bow is nearly worthless without arrows. (Then again, the lack of arrows may suggest war fought, not with blood-letting weapons, but with words or ideas; see Psalm 11:2; 64:2-4; Jeremiah 9:8; Ephesians 6:16.) A bow is a purely offensive weapon, even more so than a sword, and is highly effective from long range (for example, archers killed Uriah the Hittite and kings Ahab of Israel and Josiah of Judah). Thus, the foremost idea behind this biblical symbol is powerful, penetrating, deadly accuracy with an intimation of distance.

A sidelight of the bow's imagery is the frequency of its use as a symbol of God's judgment. Job complains, "His archers surround me. He pierces my heart and does not pity; He pours out my gall on the ground. He breaks me with wound upon wound" (Job 16:13-14). In his dirge over the fall of Judah, Jeremiah writes:

Standing like an enemy, He has bent His bow. . . .
On the tent of the daughter of Zion, He has
poured out His fury like fire. . . . He has bent His
bow and set me up as a target for the arrow. He
has caused the arrows of His quiver to pierce my
loins. (Lamentations 2:4; 3:12-13)

Interestingly, Jeremiah also uses the bow in his prophecy of God's judgment on Babylon:

For behold, I will raise and cause to come up against
Babylon an assembly of great nations from the
north country, and they shall array themselves
against her; from there she shall be captured. Their
arrows shall be like those of an expert warrior;
none shall return in vain. . . . Put yourselves in array
against Babylon all around, all you who bend the
bow; shoot at her, spare no arrows, for she has
sinned against the LORD. . . . Call together the
archers against Babylon. All you who bend the

bow, encamp against it all around; let none of
them escape. Repay her according to her work;
according to all she has done, do to her; for she
has been proud against the LORD, against the Holy
One of Israel. (Jeremiah 50:9, 14, 29; see 51:3)

The white horseman's bow, then, represents an effective instrument of God's judgment on the world for rebellion against Him. Unlike the sword that Christ wields (Revelation 19:15), the bow's long range hints at God being somewhat removed in His judgment, yet it is just as devastating in its effectiveness at meting out justice. In addition, whereas the sword symbolizes the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12)—His truth—the bow suggests a counterfeit "truth" or a false gospel. As II Thessalonians 2:11-12 says, "God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

A Crown and Conquering

The rider of the white horse is given a crown to wear, after which he goes "out conquering and to conquer." These two symbols are related both in their proximity in the verse and in their meanings. First, the word order suggests that being endowed with a crown allows or authorizes the horseman to go to war. Who gives him this crown? Notice Romans 13:1: "For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." An angel tells Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:17, "The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men." God is sovereign over all earthly authority, and it is from Him that this horseman receives his crown and purpose.

Second, crowns generally represent some state of honor or blessing for the wearer. We normally associate crowns with royalty, which in Classical Greek is represented by the word *diadema*, which has come down to us as "diadem." The word in Revelation 6:2, however, is *stéfanos*, a circlet, wreath, or garland, oftentimes made of leaves and twigs but sometimes of precious metals. It was awarded as a prize of victory or triumph, as a symbol of honor or authority, as a badge of civic worth or military valor, or as a sign of

(continued on page 19)

SEARCHING FOR ISRAEL

Part Two: Blessings in Faith

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

By faith Jacob . . . blessed each of the sons of Joseph"

(Hebrews 11:20-21)

Last month, we identified the promises God made to the patriarchs as search criteria that point to modern-day Israel. This month, our quest for search criteria takes us from promise to blessing. These blessings also serve as the search criteria we seek.

The patriarchs granted these blessings in faith, as Hebrews 11:20 (speaking specifically of Isaac) attests: "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come." Isaac's blessing of Jacob is important for two related reasons:

1. God renamed Jacob to *Israel*. The children of Israel were literally just that, the descendants of Israel, through his twelve sons. In renaming Jacob, God identified the principal characteristic of Israel—when it is faithful to God. (See "Jacob's New Name and the Character of True Israel" on p. 16.)
2. Jacob's blessing concerns "things to come." It is prophetic, looking forward to Israel's future.

Genesis 27:28-29 records Isaac's blessing of Jacob. Isaac says,

Therefore may God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you!

Notably, this blessing includes wealth and power.

Israel would be served by peoples and nations, and Israel's posterity would have a preeminent place among the nations.

However, there is something else. Jacob's mother had only two sons, Jacob himself, of course, and Esau. Yet, Isaac, speaking to Jacob, uses the word "sons," plural, as if Jacob had more than one brother. In fact, God's Word says nothing of Rebekah having three or more sons. This perplexes us as much as it must have perplexed Jacob when he heard these words. Why does Isaac use the language he does?

Clearly, Isaac is speaking of Abraham's *extended* family. The word "brethren," which is an old form of the plural of "brother," refers to *all* the descendants of Abraham, those through Hagar and Keturah, as well as the descendants of Esau himself. Jacob's "mother's sons" refers to all the progeny of Rebekah, falling through Jacob himself and Esau. "The blessing here raises to the idea of universal domination" (*Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, p. 177).

Therefore, the blessing points to future generations, not just to the lifetime of Jacob himself. Its thrust is for the Israel of a future time. Here, then, are important search criteria.

Jacob as Prophet

Jacob, like his father, was a prophet with insight into the nature of Israel's future. Genesis 49 records a number of prophecies concerning his sons "in the last days" (verse 1). Since these prophecies refer to these last days, we are on solid ground adding them to our list of search criteria pointing to modern-day Israel.

- Verses 2-4: Reuben, “unstable as water,” would “not excel,” because of his sexual depravity. Although he was the firstborn, he did not receive the birthright blessing, as we will see later on.
- Verses 5-7: Simeon and Levi, treated together, would be “divided” in Jacob, “scattered” in Israel, because of their “fierce” and “cruel” anger. (Jacob is referring to the duplicity and brutality they displayed in the slaying of the men of Shechem. See Genesis 34.)
- Verses 8-12: About Judah, Jacob asserts, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes.” Judah was to remain the princely tribe indefinitely.
- Verse 13: Zebulun would “dwell by the haven of the sea” and “become a haven for ships.” His descendants would be a seafaring people.
- Verses 14-15: Issachar would become a “band of slaves,” bowing his shoulder to bear a burden.
- Verses 16-18: Dan would judge, though he would have to wait for his salvation. He is also described as a viper who lies in wait, biting “the horse’s heels so that its rider shall fall backward.” Snakes leave markings as they crawl over the ground. Everywhere Dan has traveled, he has left his name as a marker.
- Verse 19: Of Gad, Jacob simply says, “A troop shall tramp upon him, but he shall triumph at last.”
- Verse 20: Jacob says that “bread from Asher shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties.”
- Verse 21: “Naphtali is a deer let loose; he gives goodly words.”
- Verses 22-26: Jacob devotes quite a few words to Joseph, “who was separate from his brothers.” He will become “a fruitful bough by a well; his branches run over the wall.” Although he would be “bitterly grieved” in war, his strength would be made strong “by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob.” Joseph would be blessed “up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.”
- Verse 27: Jacob calls Benjamin “a ravenous wolf.”

The Blessing of Joseph’s Sons

Finally, the blessings Israel (Jacob) bestowed on Joseph’s two boys, Ephraim and Manasseh, generate some firm search criteria pointing to the whereabouts of Israel today, especially the part of Israel that descended from the two brothers. The account appears in Genesis 48:14-20, where Jacob

stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim’s head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh’s head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn. And he blessed Joseph, and said: “God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.”

Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father’s hand to remove it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. And Joseph said to his father, “Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head.” But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.” So he blessed them that day, saying, “By you Israel will bless, saying, ‘May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!’ ” And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh.

Israel did not bless his grandsons in this way simply because they were “nice boys.” Rather, he had come to understand the substance of the promises God had given him, his father Isaac, and his grandfather Abraham. Accordingly, he blessed the boys, as Hebrews 11:21 states, “by faith.” His conviction that those promises were sure led him to bless his grandsons as he did.

It is important to understand the first part of the blessing. Israel granted none of his *own* sons the birthright blessing. That went to Joseph’s sons instead. That is why he goes out of his way to inform Joseph, “Your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt . . . are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine” (verse 5). As part of the blessing itself, he makes his wishes clear; the brothers are to bear the name of Israel: “Let my name be named upon them” (verse 16). This is important: Ephraim and Manasseh were born in Egypt (Genesis 41:50-52). Jacob wants to establish legally that they were *not* Egyptians, but were of the family of Abraham and therefore part of the structure of promises given by God to the patriarchs.

With that important legality out of the way, Jacob continues to bless his grandsons. He blesses Manasseh, the firstborn, with greatness; he blesses Ephraim, the younger boy, by saying that he would be still greater, not only a people but a multitude of nations (Genesis 48:16, 19).

Much to the consternation of Joseph, Jacob crosses his hands, placing his *right* hand on the head of the *younger* boy, Ephraim, and his *left* hand on the head of

the *older* boy, Manasseh (verse 14). This was unusual, as the right hand, signifying the greater blessing, generally was placed on the head of the older son. Jacob refuses to realign his hands, telling the concerned Joseph that his actions were no mistake. He had “guid[ed] his hands knowingly” (verse 14) when he placed them on the boys’ heads. Jacob knowingly bestows the greater blessing on the younger son, Ephraim, reserving a lesser blessing for Manasseh, the firstborn. This crossing of the hands is very important to the understanding of the whereabouts of modern-day Israel.

The promises God made the patriarchs, as well as the blessings those patriarchs bestowed in faith on their sons, describe Israel. Considered in aggregate, the promises and blessings provide a good part of the information necessary to identify Israel throughout history. However, God has provided more. Next month, focusing on the covenant God made with the children of Israel at Mount Sinai, we will continue our quest.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

—Charles Whitaker

What makes the promises and the blessings so important today is the fact that *they have not been finally and fully fulfilled*. The writer of the book of Hebrews makes it plain that the faithful of yesteryear—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and so many others—died without receiving the promises. Hebrews 11:39-40:

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

Notice the record:

- In Genesis 17:6, God promises that kings would come from Abraham. Yet, neither Isaac nor Jacob were ever kings, nor did

Jacob's New Name and the Character of True Israel

God's renaming of Jacob to Israel is so important that God's Word provides two witnesses of the event. God actually tells Jacob about his new name twice. That new name, Israel, instructs us considerably about the nature of the true Israel.

The first mention of Jacob's new name was during the all-night wrestling match recorded in Genesis 32:22-32. Near the end of the struggle, the dialogue between God and Jacob goes like this (verses 26-28). God begins,

“Let Me go, for the day breaks.” But he said, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!” So He said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” And He said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.”

This is the first appearance of the word *Israel* in God's Word.

Jacob's request for a blessing shows that he knows with whom he is wrestling. In fact, he later names the place Peniel (or Penuel), which means, “the Face of God,” for, as he explains, “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved” (verse 30). Jacob clearly understands that God could have prevailed in the wrestling match, but that *He chose not to do so*.

He realizes that God spared his life because He had other plans and purposes in mind. He realizes that God can empower human beings to overcome.

In Genesis 35:10, God reminds Jacob of his new name. This, the second witness to the renaming of Jacob, takes place in Bethel. God asserts, “Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name.” On this same occasion, God reiterates some of His promises to Abraham (verses 11-12).

True Israelites are those who, like the patriarchs in Canaan, are persuaded that God prevails for them—provides for them—according to His purposes. This is a persuasion of faith that defines a true Israelite; it is a faith totally foreign to the rationalism of today's secularists, many of whom, sadly enough, are descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In their rejection of the sovereign God, these secularists adopt the fatalistic and deterministic view that history is blindly automatic, and that what we have today (capitalism, democracy, America, al Qaida, etc.) is the result of a natural progression (or evolution, if you will) of the actions and ideas of the past.

God's people understand that such a purblind progression simply does not take place. They know that God intervenes in the affairs of men and that His plan moves inexorably from promise to prophecy to reality.

Fulfilled

they even beget kings. (Genesis 41:40-44 indicates that Joseph came to great power in Egypt, but remained only second-in-command under Pharaoh.) The first king to come from Abraham's descendents was Saul (of Benjamin), who was born hundreds of years after Abraham's time.

- It is true, according to Genesis 13:2, that Abraham became "very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold." However, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph *never owned any land in Canaan besides a burial plot* (Genesis 23). Hebrews 11:9 describes Abraham as an alien, sojourning "in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." Stephen says that God gave Abraham "no inheritance" in the land, "not even enough to set his foot on" (Acts 7:5).

God did not bring His promises to the patriarchs to fruition in their days. Indeed, in spite of all the

promises God made to Abraham concerning land, he himself came to own only one small parcel. Reminding the sons of Heth that he was "a foreigner and a sojourner" among them, he purchased a field with a cave on it to serve as a burial place for Sarah. Later on, Ishmael and Isaac buried him there as well (Genesis 25:7-10). Isaac and his wife Rebekah, as well as Jacob and his wife, Leah, were also buried there (Genesis 49:29-32). Importantly, Abraham had to buy that land; it was not given to him as an inheritance. The patriarchs never come into possession of the land as a legal, eternal inheritance.

- The patriarchs of course witnessed some population growth in their own children and grandchildren. In fact, Joseph saw Ephraim's children to the third generation, Manasseh's to the second (Genesis 50:23). But, the patriarchs never saw their descendants measured as the sand of the seashore.

The patriarchs admitted openly that they were "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13). They "all died in faith, not having received the promises."

PERSONAL ➤

The Beast and Babylon

(continued from page 7)

their political and economic ideals.

Syndicated columnist Charles Krauthammer addressed "American Unilateralism" at a dinner sponsored by Hillsdale College on December 4, 2002, in the nation's capital:

At the end of the Cold War, the conventional wisdom was that with the demise of the Soviet Empire, the bipolarity of the second half of the 20th century would yield to a multi-polar world. You might recall the school of thought led by historian Paul Kennedy, who said that America was already in decline, suffering from imperial overstretch. There was also the Asian enthusiasm, made popular by James Fallows and others, whose thinking was best captured by the late-1980s witticism: "The United States and Russia decided to hold a cold war. Who won? Japan."

Well, they were wrong, and ironically no one has put it better than Paul Kennedy himself, in a classic recantation emphasizing America's power: "Nothing has ever existed like this disparity of power, nothing. Charlemagne's empire was merely Western European in its reach. The Roman Empire stretched farther afield, but there was another great empire in Persia and a larger one in China. There is therefore, no comparison."

We tend not to see or understand the historical uniqueness of this situation. Even at its height, Britain could always be seriously challenged by the next greatest powers. It had a smaller army than the land powers of Europe, and its navy was equaled by the next two navies combined. Today, the American military exceeds in spending the next twenty countries combined. Its Navy, Air Force and space power are unrivaled. Its dominance extends as well to every other aspect of international life—not only military, but economic, technological, diplomatic, cultural, even linguistic, with a myriad of countries trying to fend off the inexorable march of MTV English. . . .

So we bestride the world like a colossus.

Journalists are awake to the fact that the stakes in what is happening with Iraq are exceedingly great. Iraq's threat is not military but geopolitical and economic—and to the whole world, not just to Europe, Israel, and America. We may be seeing the first major, visible steps to fulfill the prophecies of the Euphrates River drying up and the armies of the great, populous powers of the East marching westward toward Jerusalem.

(see next page)

The Church Is Worldwide Too

Might it not have been a coincidence that the church we came out of was called the *Worldwide Church of God*? In one sense, God's church was planted and took root in His calling of Abraham, to whom He made the promises. By and large, Abraham's descendents were confined to Canaan until Joseph was sold into slavery and famine drove Jacob and his family of seventy-five into Egypt.

There they prospered and grew to a couple of million people, but they eventually became slaves of the Egyptians. Under Moses, God released them from their slavery, and after a forty-year trek, Israel returned to the Promised Land—Canaan. Once there, another 400 years passed until they were united as a nation under David.

In the same location about a thousand years later, Christ was born, and to those in that New Jersey-sized area He preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God. After His crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven, and the church of God was born in Jerusalem.

By that time, over 1,800 years had passed since the birth of Abraham and around 4,000 years since the creation of Adam and Eve, and God's spiritual purpose was still confined to a tiny area of the earth. However, that changed dramatically once God gave Peter the

vision of the unclean animals and sent Cornelius, a Gentile, to seek him out. God was opening a door to the conversion of the Gentiles, the other nations of His creation besides Israel. In a few years, before the conclusion of the first century and the death of the apostle John, the church had expanded all around the Mediterranean Sea and had leaped into northwest Europe as far as the British Isles.

The church, like Babylon and the Roman Empire, was becoming a worldwide entity. This was achieved long before the twentieth century. It never had influence like either of those two, but a corrupted version of it, created by combining some of its tenets with outright paganism from the Babylonian system, did become very influential worldwide. The corrupted version's greatest influence has historically existed primarily in the Semitic, Israelitish nations. The true version is primarily located in the United States although small numbers of its members are also scattered in the other Israelitish nations, Germany, some Latin American nations, and the Philippines.

In summary, five entities are the focus of prophecy at the time of the end: the true church, the false church, the Israelitish people, the Beast, and Babylon. All possess some measure of worldwide influence. None of them is contained solely within the place of its origin.

Summary of the Five Entities

Israel: It began as a small nation confined to the area of Canaan, but because of God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promises to Abraham, Israel has grown to become the most powerful group of nations the world has ever beheld. Though not completely united, they hold a great deal in common. Its dominant nations are of the families of Joseph, Reuben, and Judah. God's relationship to national Israel was altered by a divorce, but He has made clear that, despite Israel's whoredom, His faithfulness to His promises remains unbroken. He will move to rescue Israel from their stubborn blindness.

The True Church: When begun by God, it became the spiritual Israel of God (Galatians 6:15-16), showing that this Israel, not the physical nation, was His focus. His spiritual purpose moved ahead. However, at the end, the church is influentially weak, scattered, and without an administrative headquarters.

Babylon: This entity is no longer a secular nation but, in one sense, is like the church, a spiritual entity. It has no physical place specifically designated in the Bible as its headquarters, but as we shall see in Revelation 17, it has a geographic focus, a place where it reaches the height of its influence. Perceived spiritually, it exists in all nations, and in that sense it is the entire world. It is the worldwide, anti-God system called "the world."

The Beast: Rome was the administrative center of the Roman Empire when it was at its peak of influence, and it is also headquarters of the world's largest religious organization. In the Bible, Rome is never directly mentioned as anything more than a city where church brethren are located. However, its operations and influence in secular history are significant, and geographically it seems to be the most likely administrative center of the coming Beast.

The False Church: Begun a few short years following the birth of the true church, the counterfeit church has far exceeded the true church in its influence worldwide. Like Europe, it is in disarray, fractured by division, badly bruised by blatant immorality, and led by men of liberal bent who have tolerated and even seemingly promoted conduct clearly condemned in the Bible.

The stage is worldwide in scope, and the major players are moving into position. The roles to be played are clear, but the specific personalities who will play the leads have not yet been revealed. Stay tuned.

In Christian love,



(continued from page 13)

nuptial joy or festal gladness. Due to the verse's heavy martial emphasis, it is likely that the horseman's crown signifies triumph, authority, or military valor.

Third, this horseman goes "out conquering and to conquer," a fairly literal rendering of the Greek. To us, this phraseology sounds strange, but it is merely expressing two different tenses of the same verb (*nikao*, "conquer," "subdue," "overcome," "prevail," "get the victory"): the present participle and the aorist subjunctive. In other words, John is telling us that the horseman begins and continues to conquer, and he will certainly conquer or will ultimately conquer (see A.T. Robertson's *Word Pictures in the New Testament* on this verse). The implication is that his entire purpose is to conquer, to dominate, to subjugate the peoples of the earth.

Overall, the white horse and its rider are vivid representations of a powerful, aggressive, victorious force running unrestrained over mankind. Like a knight in armor or a soldier in full dress uniform, the first horseman appears to the eye as glorious and noble, but its intent is to kill, destroy, and subdue its enemies. Its white façade is deceptive, concealing a deadly, unholy purpose.

Jesus' Interpretation

These interpretations of the symbols may seem highly speculative and arbitrary until we unlock their mystery with the key supplied by Jesus Christ Himself in the Olivet Prophecy. In a series of four verses, He decodes the meanings of the Four Horsemen. Of the white horseman, He says: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, I am the Christ, and will deceive many" (Matthew 24:4-5; see Mark 13:5-6; Luke 21:8). The white horse and its rider represent religious deception.

First, notice to whom He is speaking, His disciples. They had come to Him, asking Him to tell them the sign of His coming and of the end of the age (verse 3), and He proceeded to do just that. His remarks are pointedly toward His disciples, that is, He presents these signs from their perspective. In the first seal, He is concerned that they, specifically, not allow themselves to be deceived because the effort to deceive the elect would be potent.

Second, the number of deceivers would be multitudinous: "many will come." This should be seen in contrast to the frequent description of His own disciples as "few," a "little flock," "a remnant," "not many," etc. The true disciples of Christ could be overwhelmed by the seemingly inexhaustible supply of false teachers, liars, and spiritual cheats that would be thrown against them.

Third, these frauds and double agents would come in His name, that is, appearing to bear His authority. In particular, the name of "Christ" would be exploited as cover for their nefarious trickery, and by this ruse, great numbers of people would be deluded. The phrase, "saying, I am the Christ," should not be understood, as the New King James Version has punctuated it, to mean that many would come claiming to be the Mes-

siah. No, they would come claiming that Jesus is the Messiah—a truth—and thereby gain people's trust. From that point forward, deception through doctrinal change, both major and minor, provides the means of deception. As the anonymous maxim puts it, "The nearer a lie to truth the more deceitful it is."

If not earlier, this first seal must have been opened very soon after the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation. Once the last of the original apostles was dead, the false "Christian" church began its swift and steady rise to dominance, eventually collaborating with Emperor Constantine (reigned AD 306-337) to become a major influence in the Roman Empire. This church, with its pompous ecclesiastical politics and Christianized pagan practices, looked nothing like the church the New Testament describes. The relatively tiny true church, often persecuted for its "primitive" beliefs and demeaned for its "Jewish" practices, was forced to flee to the relative safety of frontier lands and wilderness areas where its members could practice their biblical beliefs more freely.

It was not until the age of the Protestant Reformation, when the power of the Catholic Church began to wane, that Sabbath-keepers could once again express their beliefs openly. Even so, Protestantism—its various denominations merely rebellious daughters of the Universal Church—has not been entirely sympathetic to the law-keeping elect. Even today, a spirit of antagonism and condescension exists within Protestant circles for anyone who really believes and practices the doctrines of Jesus and the first-century church.

Still Riding

Religious deception, false gospels, and unchristian philosophies have continued unabated to our own day. Mainstream Christian churches continue to teach an antinomian gospel about the person of Jesus rather than proclaiming the true gospel of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:15). They still lead their members to worship an unbiblical triune God, constructed out of a hodgepodge of Jewish mysticism, Gnostic Christian belief, and Greek philosophy a few centuries after the apostle John completed the New Testament canon with the book of Revelation. They continue to refuse to keep the biblical weekly Sabbath made for man (Mark 2:27), as well as the annual holy days that reveal God's plan for mankind. The churches also teach the pernicious doctrines of the immortality of the soul and eternal security, leading adherents to believe they already have eternal life and their place in "heaven" is guaranteed.

Another modern false gospel—endorsed by many, especially those who embrace New Age beliefs—is the "tolerant" idea that there are many roads to salvation. This notion posits that all religions are equal, and each is effective in bringing a person to eternal life. In other words, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, and Christians will receive the same salvation and after

(continued on page 22)

“A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself; the simple pass on and are punished.”

(continued from page 11)

28:15-68. These are known as the “Blessings and Cursings” chapters.

As our forebears with foresight contemplated the prospect of being smitten with madness, blindness, and confusion of heart, groping at noonday as a blind man, oppressed and plundered continually (Deuteronomy 28:28-29), some probably had second and third thoughts about transgressing God’s statutes! Looking ahead is not so bad, after all!

Recently, having not ruminated enough about the consequences of certain driving behavior, I found myself again participating in a defensive-driving class. One of the most valuable concepts taught by instructor Lee Stolley was the “What If?” game, in which we had to anticipate a host of possible, potential mishaps. He told a personal story of parking his squad car right next to an elderly, handicapped driver when there were many other available parking spots. He related that, moments before he drove into the parking place, numerous alarm bells went off in his head warning him not to park there. Ignoring his anticipatory instincts cost the city of Big Sandy, Texas, \$800 in damages.

The Bible is replete with “What if?” scenarios, warning the foolish and unwary to turn back. As wisdom personified calls the youthful, she gives a sneak preview of the consequences of ignoring her counsel:

Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, because you disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, when your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. (Proverbs 1:24-27)

Proverbs 7 presents a Technicolor® movie of a lurid, adulterous affair

replete with temptation, allurements, and intrigue. Fortunately, as we fast-forward to the end of the story, the gory, destructive consequences of this initially pleasant encounter are revealed as a warning to us:

Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, till an arrow struck his liver. As a bird hastens to the snare, he did not know it would take his life. Now therefore, listen to me, my children; pay attention to the words of my mouth: Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, do not stray into her paths; for she has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men. Her house is the way to hell, descending to the chambers of death. (Proverbs 7:22-27)

Another, more succinct sneak preview of the consequences of adultery appears in Proverbs 9:17-18: “‘Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.’ But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of hell [the grave].” We can use these cause-and-effect illustrations to help us avoid, not just sexual sins, but many others, including devastating spiritual sins like idolatry.

These biblical scenarios followed by the gruesome consequences remind me of a haunting *Twilight Zone* episode I saw many years ago. A young lady is pursued by a threatening apparition riding a horse. The viewer later discovers that the rider of the horse is actually herself, coming back from the future to warn her not to pursue her life’s course any further lest it destroy her.

God has given us a mind with a fast-forward mechanism to look at the consequences. When we are tempted to sin in any way, we should be looking ahead to discern the results of our behaviors. Yet, all too frequently, we fall prey to cognitive

distortions (twisted thinking patterns). In other words, instead of looking at things God’s way and choosing to do the right thing, we allow our carnal human nature to skew our judgments and make wrong decisions.

In his book, *The Feeling Good Handbook*, Dr. David Burns provides a self-awareness test for confronting temptations. He lists the pleasant allure of the temptation in one column and the cognitive distortion beside it. Here is a brief, representative segment illustrating an alcoholic struggling with a habit:

Temptation: I’ll really feel good if I have a beer now. And it will taste so good.

Cognitive Distortion: This is another example of “fortune telling” because Frank is predicting something very unrealistic. While it is true that an occasional beer is harmless, Frank won’t stop after just one. Once he starts drinking, his inhibitions will disappear, and he will quietly devour one or two six-packs.

All of us have repertoires of poignant lessons from past sins, replete with shame, guilt, and embarrassment. As we are tempted to give an encore performance, we need to ruminate about what those unchecked behaviors and thoughts have brought us in the past. One should not stop reflecting on the sin itself, but should fast-forward the tape to the sure consequences.

Seeing the Future

A parallel reason for fast-forwarding the tape is to maintain stability in a trial. In one four-month period, I lost my firstborn son and my job unexpectedly, throwing me into an emotional tailspin. In times like these, one has to be resourceful at locating shreds of hope. Like all individuals, my inclination was only to look regretfully back, seething in bitterness

about loss and the impossibility of recovering what I had lost.

One resource I found valuable was an account of a man’s experience in a concentration camp, Viktor Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Frankl developed some profound insights, survival skills, and techniques for building inner strength when the external world around him was going to perdition.

Frankl suggests that “a man who let himself decline because he could not see any future goal found himself with retrospective thoughts [riveted to the past].” He goes on to say, “Any attempt at fighting the camp’s psychopathological influence on the prisoner by psychotherapeutic or psychohygienic methods had to aim at giving him inner strength by pointing out to him a future goal to which he could look forward. Instinctively, some of the prisoners attempted to find one on their own.” Frankl explains that it is a peculiarity of man that he can live only by looking to the future. And this future-looking capability is his salvation in the most difficult moments of his existence, although he sometimes has to force his mind to the task.

Amidst the most degrading kind of human slavery, Frankl formed in his mind’s eye a picture of his future freedom—when he could reclaim his dignity. He described in vivid detail the picture that he created to help him fast-forward the tape to some distant time in the future:

I saw myself standing on the platform of a well-lit, warm and pleasant lecture room. In front of me sat an attentive audience on comfortable upholstered seats. I was giving a lecture on the psychology of the concentration camp! All that oppressed me at that moment became objective, seen and described from the remote viewpoint of science. By this method I succeeded somehow in rising above the sufferings of the moment, and I

observed them as if they were already of the past.

Frankl concludes this account by affirming that the prisoner who had lost faith in the future—his future—was doomed. With his loss of belief in the future, he also lost his spiritual hold and became subject to mental and physical decay. His insights are a rediscovery of vital truth that psalmists and prophets of the Bible practiced faithfully.

In the early days of my grief, when I was preoccupied with feeling sorry for myself, I would instinctively incorporate many psalms of despondency into my prayers and meditation. In the abundant greenery of the Tyler State Park, I would recite over and over the contents of the supplicative psalms—Psalms 51, 60, 69, 88, 60, 71, 90, 143—really letting the emotions have free reign as I cried:

Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I have come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. (Psalm 69:1-2)

Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength fails. (Psalm 71:9)

I have been afflicted and ready to die from my youth up; I suffer Your terrors; I am distraught. (Psalm 88:15)

These words easily rolled off my tongue as I identified with the mindset of the psalmist. Then I learned a peculiar thing about many of these supplicative psalms. The psalmist would fast-forward the tape to a time of hope and deliverance. Space does not permit me to go to all the sneak previews of happier times provided by these supplicative psalms, but consider, for instance, the one in Psalm 69:35-36:

For God will save Zion and build

the cities of Judah, that they may dwell there and possess it. Also, the descendants of His servants shall inherit it, and those who love His name shall dwell in it.

In the melancholy and reflective Psalm 71, the psalmist fast-forwards to an expected future time of hope:

You, who have shown me great and severe troubles, shall revive me again, and bring me up again from the depths of the earth. You shall increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side. (verses 20-21)

A despondent Moses quickly fast-forwards in Psalm 90:13-14, crying,

Return, O LORD! How long? And have compassion on Your servants. Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days!

In Psalm 37, where David warns us not to fret because the evildoers literally get away with murder, he fast-forwards the tape in verse 34, promising,

Wait on the LORD, and keep His way, and He shall exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you shall see it.

Coming Attractions

Another whole section of the Bible provides fast-forwards to buoy the depressed and afflicted: the Minor Prophets. After detailed descriptions of mayhem and affliction, the prophet fast-forwards the tape to the solution. Notice, for example, Habakkuk 3:18-19:

Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer’s feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills.

PROVERBS 27:12

"A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself; the simple pass on and are punished."

In numerous other passages, the prophets assure us that the future is brighter than the past (see Joel 3:16-21; Amos 9:11-15; Zephaniah 3:8-20; Haggai 2:23; Zechariah 14:16-20; etc.)

When our Elder Brother Jesus Christ said in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Your will be done, not mine," He was fast-forwarding to the time all of His suffering would be over. This glimpse of His glorious future helped Him to endure all the pain, ignominy, and loneliness He knew He was about to experience.

Like all the other holy days, Pentecost is a preview of coming attractions. Romans 8:20-21 describes the present distress and futility that the entire creation is subject to, groaning as if with birth pangs. But Paul does not leave us suffering in this state of corruption but mercifully fast-forwards the tape to the time of redemption:

Not only they, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for

the adoption, the redemption of our body. (Romans 8:23)

The day of Pentecost provides a fast-forward for the firstfruits—a sneak preview of the way the entire creation will be brought into God's Kingdom. Just knowing that our present distresses will turn out so wonderfully makes life more bearable. We have so much to look forward to!

See, knowing how it all turns out is not so bad after all, is it?

—David F. Maas

(continued from page 19)

life despite their markedly different beliefs and practices. This also means that there is no reason for a person to convert to another religion, so each faith should accept and acknowledge the others in a spirit of goodwill and ecumenism. Of course, this flies in the face of Acts 4:10-12, in which Peter asserts that only by the name of Jesus Christ is salvation possible.

In addition, as God maneuvers events in preparation for His Son's second coming, a great deal of prophetic speculation—which many call outright heresy—is appearing in the major media. No more successful example can be found than the twelve-volume *Left Behind* series by authors Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. Millions of copies sold in the U.S. and abroad have made these men wealthy and famous. They have also garnered their share of critics who see end-time prophecy somewhat differently.

For instance, the books' major premise is the authors' belief in an unscriptural "rapture" of believers to heaven before the Great Tribulation begins. How many people will profess belief in Christ because of their reading of these books, expecting to be spared the hardships of the Tribulation, yet will be forced to endure the time of greatest trouble ever to occur on the earth (Matthew 24:21-22)? At the very least, these books provide false hopes of physical deliverance from destruction. The Bible, on the other hand, tells Christians to be prepared for Christ's return through watchfulness, overcoming sin, growing in character, prayer, and enduring to the end (Matthew 24:13; Luke 21:36; I Thessalonians 5:4-8; I Peter 3:10-18).

Over the past year, Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* has been a media darling, ranking in the top three for 57 straight weeks on the *Publishers' Weekly* fiction list. Its many unorthodoxies appear not to matter to its millions of readers, many of them Christian:

[It] is a thriller whose characters malign traditional

Christianity as fraudulent. But both liberal and conservative writers say it's rife with errors.

Among inaccuracies they list: The characters' claims that belief in Jesus' divinity appeared in the fourth century rather than the first century; that the four New Testament Gospels became authoritative in the fourth century rather than the second century; and that the Dead Sea Scrolls and Gnostic writings (deemed heretical by the church) contain the earliest Christian records—though one Gnostic text does have some scholarly promoters.

"Da Vinci" [sic] also supposes that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and sired a royal Judeo-French bloodline that still exists—and that sinister Christians suppressed information about this. ("Furor Over Popular Religion Novels," CBSNews.com, April 15, 2004)

These are just a few examples of the white horseman's work. He is still riding throughout the world, spreading counterfeit "truths," conquering through the communication of lies. He has used His bow mightily to shoot false ideas and plausible but erroneous beliefs into the minds of men cut off from God and opposed to His way of life (Romans 8:7). He has used his whiteness as a façade to trick the world into thinking he has come in peace and righteousness, when the truth is just the opposite.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:15-16, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits." It is not difficult for us to observe the fruits of false teaching masquerading as the truth in today's world. Next time, we will see that the red horseman's mission is at least in part a product of his white counterpart's work.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

<http://www.worldwatchdaily.org>

No Money, No Empire

Is America destined to lead a globe-encircling empire for years to come? Not if the analysis of Niall Ferguson and Laurence Kotlikoff in their article, "Going Critical" (*The National Interest*, Fall 2003), is correct. Their reasoning: no money, no empire. "Chronically unbalanced domestic finance, primarily the result of a mismatch between earlier social security legislation . . . and the changing demographics of American society" will render the maintenance of any American empire impossible.

In just five years' time, 77 million 'baby boomers' will start collecting Social Security benefits. In eight years, they will start collecting Medicare benefits. By the time they are all retired in 2030, the United States will have doubled the number of its elderly population but increased by only 18 percent the number of workers able to pay for their benefits.

The size of these pension liabilities "is so large as to render the U.S. government effectively bankrupt." How big is the government's debt to pensioners? If the federal government could get its hands *today* on all the revenue it could hope to collect between now and 2030, and use that money *today* to pay all projected pensioners' claims up to 2030, the government would still find itself with a *shortfall* of \$45 trillion. That figure is "twelve times larger than the current official debt and roughly four times the size of the country's annual output."

What would the government have to do to generate that \$45 trillion? It would immediately have to "raise income taxes (individual and corporate) by 69 percent, or . . . raise payroll taxes by 95 percent or . . . cut Social Security

and Medicare benefits by 56 percent." Or, of course, it could default on pension liabilities. Only a politician intent on political suicide would consider that course of action.

The signs of economic meltdown appear here and there. However, no one, least of all government officials, wants to admit the impending crisis in "generational accounts." Even investors in government bonds seem largely to be in a state of denial. Reality has not yet hit home.

It is only a matter of time before the realities of a \$45 trillion shortfall do. When that happens, "rational gloom" will set in, and the "U.S. economy will likely 'go critical.'" Foreign investors will dump U.S. Treasuries in favor of euro-denominated securities. America, "the much-vaunted 'hyperpower,' would quickly find itself humbled." To meet its debt payments, the government would probably turn to the time-honored trick of printing money, thereby causing inflation, possibly of the triple-digit variety. The nation would enter economic doldrums. America's pretensions of empire would end.

Three steps could help resolve the "generational accounts" imbalance:

1. "Break . . . the link between state pensions and wages." The Israelite nations of Britain, Australia, Canada, Ireland, and New Zealand have already done this. These nations could balance their books "with tax increases of less than 5 percent."
2. Control Medicare costs, which account for 82% of that \$45 trillion shortfall. But, the current President's bribe to gain votes by creating a "fabulously expensive" drug-benefit program indicates how politically tempt-

ing such entitlements are. Do not look for sanity in the government's Medicare planning.

3. Privatize Social Security, which would go a long way to filling up the \$45 trillion "black hole." However, AARP and other strong interest groups would assert political pressure to halt proper privatization.

All three options mean sacrifices on the part of seniors, few of whom are in any mood to forfeit a penny of their "well-earned" pensions. In fact, American seniors are on an unprecedented spending binge. "Economic research shows conclusively that the elderly as a group are indeed consuming with next to no regard for their adult children." Expensive retirement communities, transcontinental RV caravans, and ocean cruises are among seniors' favorite pastimes. Since the inception of Social Security about 50 years ago, "consumption per retiree relative to consumption per worker" has *doubled*. Seniors' materialism is reflected in a bumper sticker seen commonly today: "I'm Spending My Kids' Inheritance." All this in defiance of Proverbs 13:22: "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children."

In an economic meltdown, a public mood of isolationism would probably gain ground; "discretionary" federal spending would be curtailed. Expenditures associated with nation-building in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kosovo would be among the first to go. "The decline and fall of America's undeclared empire will be due not to terrorists at our gates nor to the rogue regimes that sponsor them, but to a fiscal crisis of the welfare state. . . . In short, the colossus that currently bestrides the world has feet of clay."

NEWS AND TRENDS Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man is coming. (Matthew 25:13)

BIBLE STUDY: THE PARABLES OF LUKE 15 (PART TWO)

In analyzing the illustration of the Lost Sheep, we saw that the sheep that was lost was worth saving, and the shepherd's pity for it motivates him to rescue it. In the next illustration, what many Bibles title the Parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10), the value of the lost silver piece motivates the woman to search her house diligently until she finds it. Concern over something lost and the joy at recovering it are the fundamental issues of each illustration.

Unlike the lost sheep, the coin is lost inside the house, not in a vast wilderness, and since it is not alive, it has no consciousness of being lost. In the same way, its lost condition does not bring upon it discomfort or anxiety. The silver piece is lost, not because of any inferiority in its composition, but because it was either badly handled or unconsciously misplaced. Part Two of this three-part study will consider the lessons of Jesus' second illustration.



1. Who does the lost coin symbolize? Luke 15:8.

COMMENT: The sinner who is largely ignorant of himself and passive in the hands of those with whom he associates is symbolized in the lost coin. People can be lost not only in dens of iniquity but also in good homes and churches (Revelation 3:14-17). The Garden of Eden was the most conducive of environments, but it did not guarantee that man would live God's way of life. This does not negate the value of a godly home (Proverbs 3:33). Such a home obviously gives a person a far greater advantage in learning how to live God's way of life compared with an ungodly one. This illustration teaches that, even in a good environment, a person may still be lost.

2. What causes the coin to become lost? Luke 15:8.

COMMENT: Unlike the lost sheep that wandered away and became lost, the coin's lost condition is due to the carelessness of another. The coin is lost because it had fallen from its intended place, just as sin always lowers a person and never lifts up (Proverbs 14:34). This negligence of another reminds us that the sin of one person can bring tragic, spiritual consequences upon another. As an example, the backsliding dissenter almost always takes others with him, because it is sin's nature to take others down with it (II Peter 2:1-2, I Timothy 6:3-5, 20-21). False teachers and church dissidents put many coins on the floor spiritually.

3. What are the consequences of the coin's lost condition? Same verse.

COMMENT: The coin becomes useless and unclean, just as a person does through sin. While lost, the coin is essentially worthless. Likewise, an unrepentant sinner is useless to God and of no benefit to others. The apostle Paul was a lost coin, as it were, until he met Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-6). Sin destroys our value in service to both God and man; we become useless.

If the coin fell on the floor, it fell onto one of the dirtiest places in the house, making it unclean. The woman's sweeping of the floor indicates it was dirty. This defilement of the coin shows what sin does to a person: It pollutes, thereby defiling him (Titus 1:15-16). The only spiritual cleansing agent that will cleanse away the filth is the blood of Jesus Christ (I John 1:7-9).

4. Why is finding the coin so important? Luke 15:8-10.

COMMENT: Several things are involved in the woman's searching for and eventually finding the coin. Her motivation to find the coin is due to the value she placed upon it. She also suffers from the loss of the coin, while the coin, of course, feels nothing. The woman represents the church through which God works.

In the eyes of God, the sinner, represented by the coin, is not only a suffering being, like the sheep on whom He takes pity, but he is also precious, created in God's image and assigned a part in the accomplishment of His plans. In the illustration of the sheep, the lost person is viewed from man's perspective—he is one who suffers and therefore needs salvation. In the illustration of the coin, the lost person is seen from God's perspective—he is one who has great value, the loss of which God feels. In considering this, we should realize the great effect of sin upon God's glory and interests.

The lamp represents both the Word and the Spirit of God (Psalm 119:105). Both shed light on the plight of sinners and give solutions to their problems. Spiritual illumination enables the church to see how to help sinners who cannot see their fruitless condition. Just as the woman has to sweep the floor of debris, the church must make its surroundings clean and pure by sweeping away the filth from its domain (Isaiah 52:11). Doctrinal corruption makes it hard to see through the debris of false teachings. Today, doctrines have been so corrupted in mainstream Christianity that it is impossible to find spiritually pure teachings within it.

That the woman seeks the coin diligently shows a dedication to looking cautiously and continuously (Ecclesiastes 7:25). She is not haphazard in looking for the coin but organized and systematic, and she persists in the job until it is completed. Sadly, there are always those who attend God's church who work vigorously and earnestly for a short time then quit.

Finally, the whole illustration depicts her as enthusiastic, hopeful, and joyful in her responsibilities. This is the attitude we must have as we do God's work in preparation for His coming.