

# Like A Silly Dove

by Staff

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"Ephraim" is the name of the younger son of Joseph as well as of the Israelite tribe that descended from him (Genesis 41:50-52). This descent continues, we understand, to modern-day Britain and to the tattered remains of its once glorious Empire and Commonwealth. God's prophets record many things about Ephraim, not all of them complimentary. For example, the prophet Hosea writes, "Ephraim also is like a silly dove, without sense—they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria" (Hosea 7: 11).

Observations during a recent visit to England lead me to believe that this phrase "a silly dove without sense" is an accurate description of Britons today. However, Hosea's prophecy seems to carry both positive and negative connotations. In Hebrew and English, the positive noun *dove* indicates a desire for peace and a giving attitude, while the negative terms *silly* and *without sense* indicate an attitude and a lifestyle that are immature, materialistic, unbalanced and apathetic.

What is the present state of the British nation? How do current events there relate to the fulfillment of certain prophecies, like Hosea 7:11? Can we learn something from Ephraim that will help us spiritually?

Although, as a native Englishman, I feel I have a limited right to comment on the activities and practices of the people of my native land, I do not intend to sit in judgment of them. A hundred years ago, Mark Twain sagely warned that an observer—especially an outside observer—should never tar every resident of any nation with the same brush. Also, it is important for us to remember that, for good or bad, where the "Mother country" leads, the daughter nations will likely follow.

Nor do I claim to be an expert on the details of Bible prophecy. Others have greater knowledge in this area, and of course, our great God knows *all* the details. With their guidance, I will only speculate on the possibilities, apparent probabilities, and the signs of the times.

## **Standards and Priorities**

One of the first signs that struck me upon arrival is that many public areas in British cities are dirty and untidy. Older areas of airports, shopping centers, and other public buildings appear to be run down and poorly maintained. This is despite recent improvements, many of which were made possible by cash grants from the European Union (EU)—Britain being a member country.

In the Liverpool area, where most of my English relatives and friends live, lots left vacant after the demolition of once busy and useful buildings remain uncleared and filled with unsightly rubble and garbage. Many suburban streets, grass boulevards, and public areas are littered with trash and dog excrement. The local people, many of whom seem to have lost their pride in this still beautiful nation (Leviticus 26:19), do not take the time or effort to correct the problem by simply depositing it where it belongs. They prefer to point the finger of blame at the shortcomings of local governments.

I also observed that an embarrassingly high percentage of the English have poor standards of cleanliness and personal hygiene. In the worst cases—thankfully, not too many—offensive body odor

gives evidence of infrequent bathing. Despite subsidized dental service, Britons I encountered generally display low standards of dental hygiene, not just among the lower paid and unemployed, but even those in higher income brackets. Returning to Canada, I sat next to a pleasant, well-groomed, English lady who once owned a chain of hairdressing salons. Our conversation revealed that she was a non-smoker—but her teeth were as brown as berries!

While the problem of smoking in public places is—to a limited extent—being dealt with in the UK, I found an apparently higher percentage of smokers among our British friends and relatives than those in Canada. In addition, many British smokers seem to have little concern for the discomforts of non-smokers in their immediate vicinity—even in the comparatively smaller rooms of most British houses.

### **Of Pubs and Pints**

Mr. Average Briton would laugh out loud if accused of being an alcoholic, yet he seems totally incapable of making it through a 24-hour period without quaffing at least a couple of pints of beer. Although he seems to possess an unusually strong concern over the steadily rising beer prices, reducing his intake does not seem to be a viable option. Like the cartoon character Andy Capp, he will even spend much of his summer seaside vacation in drinking establishments. The only real competition the pubs have for the "British 20th century idolatry award" is sports, especially soccer.

Millennium-mania is already being aggressively marketed in Britain. Whereas North American future-watchers spend much time and energy arguing and worrying about the extent of the negative effects of the Y2K computer bug, their British brethren seem more concerned about how much their parties will cost them next New Year's Eve. Wages for musicians and for restaurant, pub and club employees are expected to be greatly inflated.

Today's Britons shield their eyes and minds from the major problems of their nation and the world by putting an unhealthy and excessive priority on entertainment. Older, poorly frequented pubs are being successfully replaced by newer and more lavish ones. Managers and owners of pubs, nightclubs, and other entertainment establishments go all-out in their efforts to attract more customers—especially among the young.

In recent years, the nation has adopted the commercial, high-profile, American version of Halloween along with other North American customs and ways. On my first visit to a pub during my recent trip, my senses were assaulted by the sounds of loud, discordant music and by the shameful sight of male employees and customers mincing about dressed in scanty women's clothing (I Corinthians 6:9). We had unwittingly walked in on a "Rocky Horror Picture Show" theme party!

Many of us enjoy a pint of good ale, and it is a pleasure to watch the occasional sports game. The average modern Ephraimite, however, goes overboard—at his own peril:

Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower which is at the head of the verdant valleys, to those who are overcome with wine! . . . The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trampled underfoot. . . . (Isaiah 28:1, 3)

### **Public Immorality**

Only twenty or so years ago, the British media ridiculed BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) television and radio content as being overly prudish. Now the UK has leaped past America in the contest for what can only be termed as *public immorality in entertainment*. The major U.S. television networks apparently turned down offers to air the BBC's original version of the "Men Behaving Badly" sitcom because the sexual content and language were—even in Clinton's America—too extreme.

Unabashed depictions of adultery and fornication are common in prime-time television soap operas such as "Coronation Street" and "East Enders" watched by millions of Britons, including young viewers. The new British cable television companies include two or three pornographic channels at no extra charge—not pay-per-view—not special order!

Even in the "Swinging Sixties," divorce, adultery and fornication were much less common and were still frowned upon. People talked about these matters only in whispers. Time has changed the British public attitude on them to the point that there seems to be very little restraint and even less shame.

Most British newspapers—even the once-conservative *Daily Express* and the *Times*—carry little important world news. The expansive sports section of the average newspaper far exceeds what can honestly be considered "real news." Many articles and advertisements seem to lean towards the irrelevant and unnecessary promotion of sex—illicit and otherwise. With few exceptions, much of the smutty content of the majority of newspapers compares to that found in North America's gossip tabloids.

In Peter's description of worldly, false teachers, we can see modern Britain: ". . . having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, beguiling unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children" (II Peter 2:14).

### **Rich Lifestyles**

Although British family income is generally lower than in North America—and most prices higher—many Britons put an unusually high priority on the purchase of luxury items, lavish Christmas and birthday gifts, and pricey holidays abroad. In most families, this demand for the rich lifestyle requires two full incomes, imposing the resultant penalty of its effects on working mothers and their young children.

Instead of working and preparing for the future, Britain seems to be trying to get by on its past efforts and glories. The words of one of Jesus' parables comes to mind: "And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry'" (Luke 12:19).

Besides their great efforts and sacrifices in the two World Wars, people in the Liverpool area still seem to gauge the city's greatness by the success of its seaport and the associated hinterland businesses. Much of this business has faded, however, for two reasons. First, trade with Europe is largely replacing trade with North America. This is more efficiently carried out from seaports on the eastern and southern UK coasts.

Second, Liverpool dockers (stevedores or longshoremen in North America) have priced themselves out of the market with totally unreasonable demands. In the 60s, when my brother and I worked in

dockland businesses, the dockers were demanding a full, eight-hour daily wage for only four hours' work—one hour on and one hour off. This system's inefficiency, of course, could continue only for so long before it was bound to collapse. And it did.

Some of Britain's "former glories" are somewhat dubious and unimportant in the greater scheme of things. Programs and conversations on local TV and radio stations reveal that Liverpoolians still revel to a surprising extent in past successes, such as their two first-division professional soccer teams and the Beatles and other bands of the 60's "Merseybeat" era.

## **Relationship to Europe**

Britain's relationship with the European Union also demands examination. In early January, the European media reported on the initial stages of an inquiry into fraud, mismanagement of funds and cronyism within the European parliament. This item made headlines for a few days. Then suddenly, when a vote was tabled to continue the case against the MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) known to be implicated in the case, EU President Jacques Santer threatened to resign if the inquiry continued. Although most news-watchers expected parliament to call his bluff, a majority of MEPs backed down, and parliament dropped the case. Rather than pursuing this apparent setup, the European media also dropped the story like a hot potato. Even the Internet contained few details about it.

Another big and prophetically important story concerns the introduction of the new European currency—the euro. Although euro-cash will not be introduced for another couple of years, money market trading and credit card purchasing using the new currency got off to a solid start.

Shortly after the introduction of the euro, the German government and the European parliament began issuing dire warnings to Britain that it will suffer if it fails to get quickly into step with the other EU nations' new currency, taxation, and customs duty policies. This "suffering" may have already begun. Due to the new semi-open borders between EU countries, truckloads of goods (notably alcoholic beverages and tobacco products) from the lower-taxed European nations are pouring into the UK.

A Scot can pay far less in Paris or Dublin for a bottle of his beloved scotch whisky than at home in Edinburgh or Glasgow. Britons can save thousands of pounds each by buying new cars (even British-built models!) in a lower-taxed EU country than at home. In addition, British families are finding holidays abroad cheaper than in their own country—and of course, the weather is usually better! Apparently ignorant of the long-term danger of such practices, the British people are buying these lower-priced European goods and holidays in large quantities.

Although a few new jobs have sprung up in Britain as entrepreneurs buy and resell European goods to the public, British factories and associated wholesale and retail businesses are already being closed because they can no longer compete with their European counterparts. It is not hard to foresee the long-term detrimental effects as these policies are expanded.

## **Health Care**

Another of the relevant news stories involves the woes of the British health care system, particularly the shortage of available hospital beds and the understaffing of hospitals. During the December 1998 flu outbreak (described as a near-epidemic), reports aired of seriously ill patients waiting fourteen

hours on stretchers in hospital corridors because no beds were available. The government has closed many hospitals in recent years, and staffing levels have not kept pace with demand. As I left England, a scandal was brewing over serious problems at Ashworth, a special hospital for the criminally insane, said to be so seriously understaffed that mentally handicapped patients were doing some of the administrative work—and in some cases running whole departments!

During my stay, I had a first-hand experience with British health care. My right leg and ankle were in a fiberglass cast due to a severe sprain suffered a month or so before my trip. Because I was having some trouble with the cast, my brother-in-law drove me to the Fazakerly Hospital near Liverpool. Despite my explanations regarding my Canadian citizenship and offers to pay for treatment, they repaired my cast without charge.

Although this sounds like a friendly, positive and humane (dove-like) policy, it reveals a well-known problem: Foreigners can obtain free medical treatment and other social benefits in the UK. Britain's current health care crisis is not the sole result of illegal immigration, but many *are* taking advantage of slack and ultimately damaging policies and procedures. Instead of being returned to their countries of origin, large numbers of illegal immigrants from outside the EU are shuffled through the low security, inter-EU border crossings, and like an electric current seeking the path of least resistance, many end up in Britain—apathetic and humane Britain with all of its internationally renowned social programs. On arrival at a British port, one new immigrant supposedly asked a customs officer, "Where do I go to get my doing-nothing money?"

Scripture rightly condemns racial prejudice and encourages aid for the truly needy. However, history and recent experience have proved that poorly controlled immigration policies are harmful. They may even be instrumental in modern Israel's eventual downfall. As the British people ceaselessly complain about these problems, and their governments—fearing to be criticized and labeled as "racist"—continually fail to take decisive and corrective action, the problems worsen.

## **Religion in the UK**

Despite the influx of Eastern and other immigrants with their associated faiths, traditional mainstream Protestantism and Roman Catholicism are still the main religions in the UK. True Christian knowledge, conviction, and faith, however, are scarce. Sincere interest in God, religion and church attendance is diminishing—the numbers of worshippers inversely proportional to the nation's desire for the materialistic lifestyle. Britons are, as Paul says in II Timothy 3:4, "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." He writes another good description of them in Ephesians 4:17-19:

. . . in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to licentiousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

Liverpool boasts two magnificent cathedrals—one Anglican and one Roman Catholic—but the city's religious divisions, although not as violent, are similar to those of Northern Ireland. As in that troubled province a mere hundred miles distant across the Irish Sea, Protestant Orange Lodge groups and bands inflame Catholic passions by marching through Liverpool each July 12 to commemorate King William III's 1690 victory over the Catholic James II at the Battle of the Boyne. The annual

perpetuation of these parades is not a product of true Christian knowledge and conviction, but rather of blind, carnal patriotism and party spirit. Orange Order Protestants accuse the Catholics of being more loyal to the Pope in Rome than to the British throne.

John Ritenbaugh once said he perceived that traditional religions generally lack humility, and instead of giving the glory to God, they frequently boast about the good works they perform. Having been a member of a Church of England congregation until age 15, I did not remember this to be the case. On my flight back to Canada, however, the lady next to me proudly displayed gold cross and fish brooches on her suit lapel. Although she was generally pleasant, much of her conversation concerned self-congratulation for her own and her church's services to her community and to the handicapped. Notice Christ's warning:

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Matthew 7:21-23)

### **Turning Their Backs**

During my time in England, members of the nation's religious minority publicly complained that not one of the television networks had broadcast the traditional Christmas Day church service. This season's Christmas programming, they said, reeked of immorality and violence rather than peace and goodwill towards men. This nation that God loves so much—the people that I love so much—is turning its back on the One who so richly blessed it.

The people have allowed their standards to plummet. They are in danger of being sucked under the power and influence of what may turn out to be the Beast of Revelation 13—or of being punished for resisting it. They have turned away from God.

Britain—once Great Britain—has become the world's "silly dove." We cannot forget, though, that Ephraim can also symbolize God's New Testament church. We should also beware of lowering the high standards God has revealed to us, receiving the mark of the Beast, and turning our backs on God. With diligence and dedication, we can excel the glories of the past by attaining "the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).