

No 'Tricentennial' for America?

**Does the Bible
say anything
about the
United States?**

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Without question, the United States of America is the number-one world power today. But for anyone aware of its moral conditions, it seems to be in imminent peril. Our amusement-oriented, drug-crazed, alcohol-addicted, crime-ridden and pornography-obsessed society appears to be in a self-destructing mode. America's problems with abortion, homosexuality and violence certainly seem to cry for God's judgment. Will America celebrate its "tricentennial"? Indeed, will it last until the end of the century?

Those who have studied Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* see certain parallels between the decline of Rome and the impending disintegration of our nation. Exorbitant taxation, currency devaluation, moral degeneracy and the decline of family values seem to point to America's demise.

Doubtless there is validity in drawing implications about our nation's future by looking at the disturbing events of the present.

Ultimately, however, the only true answer is not found in inferences from society but through correct interpretation of the Scriptures. Predictions about America should lie within the parameter of prophecy.

With the events predicted of the Tribulation and the Second Advent drawing ever nearer, is it possible to infer from Scripture America's future?

Attempts to Discover America in Prophecy

As every informed Bible student knows, America is not directly mentioned in the Scriptures. While the nations of the world are mentioned at least 760 times in the Bible, many of them by name, not a single clear reference to the United States exists. Yet some expositors are more or less dogmatic that America is mentioned in prophecy.

Some identify the commercial Babylon of Revelation 18 as a specific reference to the United States. For example, Logsdon suggests that "the wealthy, powerful, wicked, God-forsaking end time nation, spiritually called Babylon in prophecy," is the U.S.A. (*Is the U.S.A. in Prophecy?* p. 55).

Others identify the nation of Isaiah 18:1 as the United States. They apply Isaiah's warnings to America: "Woe to the land shadowing with wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia."

Some interpreters see "the land shadowing with wings" as a reference to our country because of our aircraft industry. Others insist that because our national symbol is the eagle, the verse must refer to the United States. Only unwarranted spiritualization can lead to that conclusion. For one, the land is said to lie beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, something hardly true of the United States. Then, too, the eagle is not just America's symbol; it was a symbol of Rome and is presently the symbol of Germany, Austria, Spain, Poland and once again of Russia.

There are yet others who see a reference to the United States in Ezekiel 38:13: "Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto thee, Art thou come to take a spoil? hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey? to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take a great spoil?"

It has been suggested that "the merchants of Tarshish" in the prediction of an invasion of Israel by a northern confederacy of nations refers to England and that America should be identified with one of the "young lions" or "colonies" of England. To find England or the United

States in this passage involves unjustified eisegesis, as the interpreter first reads those nations into the text. Maxwell Coder's observation is straight to the point: "Many attempts have been made to find America in the prophetic Scriptures. All of them have been rejected by conservatives as violating sound rules of exegesis" (*The Final Chapter*, p. 84).

Absence of References to America in Prophecy

Why is America not mentioned in prophecy when other nations such as Edom, Moab, Ammon, Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia (Dan. 11:41-43), just to name a few, are prominently and repeatedly mentioned?

Some answer that the United States is absent in prophecy because by the time of the Rapture, America will have passed out of existence. Our country's crimes and corruption and its gross immorality and iniquity will have brought upon it divine judgment. But one should ask whether that explanation means that other prominent nations not mentioned in the prophetic Scriptures will also have passed out of existence. Will Australia, Japan or South Africa cease as nations before the events of the tribulation period?

Another popular position is that the United States will have been conquered before the Rapture by a nation such as a reenergized and remilitarized Russia or Red China. This scenario, while enjoying some popular support, is demonstrably false. If the United States were conquered by a nation today, the victorious nation would be a world power tomorrow. But according to Daniel 2 and 7, four and only four world empires can exist between Nebuchadnezzar's time (606 B.C.) and the setting up of Christ's Kingdom after the Tribulation. Those four kingdoms are identified as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. Also, until the middle of the tribulation period there will be two major centers of power on earth: the western confederacy and Russia with its confederates. Russia, which always wanted to be a world empire, will not succeed. The United States, which could have been a world empire after World

War II and in the present state of the world could aggrandize world power to itself, has always refused to exercise its enormous powers in imperialistic expansion. One wonders what Napoleon or Hitler would have done with the enormous power and prominence the United States possessed immediately after World War II and presently enjoys.

Does the fact that only four world empires are predicted before the second advent of Christ mean that nations such as Russia or Red China did not have or will not have designs on America? Lenin, the Russian tyrant, dreamed of the day when America would fall into Russian hands like a ripe plum. The Communists did have a precise timetable for the takeover of America. By way of personal testimony, I well remember the instructions we were given as young people in the Communist schools of East Germany about the inevitable and impending triumph of Communism over America. We were clearly told of those infidels' iniquitous intentions against the United States. But as young people who loved America from far away, we would twist our teachers' words by chanting, "America is at the brink of disaster, but Communism shall overtake them!" God has a timetable for the rise and demise of nations. While nations have plotted and will plot against us, God works according to His plan.

Why, then, is America not mentioned in prophecy? It appears that the prophetic Word is primarily concerned with Israel and its immediate neighbors. Because of this concern, writes John Walvoord, "It is not surprising that geographical areas remote from this center of biblical interest should not figure largely in prophecy" (*The Nations in Prophecy*, p. 72). The silence of the Bible concerning America in the end times argues neither for nor against its existence as a nation at the time of the Rapture.

Activities of the Nations after the Rapture

A. *The Revival of Rome*

The Confederation of the Ten Kingdoms. After the Rapture of the Church, a revival of the Roman Empire in the form of a ten-

nation confederacy will take place. Daniel 2 describes a remarkable image. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, dreamed of a great image, portraying the four major world kingdoms between Nebuchadnezzar's time and the establishment of the millennial Kingdom. A revived Rome, symbolized by the image's feet comprised of iron and clay, will be annihilated by Christ's Kingdom (Dan. 2:35, 44).

Daniel 7 portrays four ravaging beasts. In a spectacular night vision Daniel saw four beasts, each representing a world kingdom from Daniel's day until Christ would replace the counterfeit christ. The fourth beast—succeeding the lion (Babylon), the bear (Medo-Persia) and the leopard (Greece)—has no counterpart in nature but contains the worst features of the preceding three. Conservative students of prophecy are generally agreed that this ferocious beast represents Rome in its final form. The beast's ten horns are ten kings and their realms (Dan. 7:20, 24). Another horn, representing the Antichrist, will rise, and he will subdue three kings. The seven others apparently will voluntarily subject themselves to his rule. The ten horns of Daniel 7 appear to correspond to the ten toes of Daniel 2 and involve a ten-nation confederacy emerging out of the former Roman Empire.

The Coming of the World Ruler. After the Rapture, a fearsome ruler will plague the world. He will be the Roman prince with headquarters at first in Rome (Dan. 9:26). While we normally refer to him as Antichrist (1 John 2:18), he will be given numerous titles and designations such as little horn (Dan. 7:8), the willful king (Dan. 11:36) and the beast out of the sea (Rev. 13:1). For three and a half years he will rule over ten nations. He will desire to be a world dictator, but Russia, a strong military confederacy, will prevent him at first from exerting worldwide rule.

After the destruction of Russia during the last half of the Tribulation, he will extend his reign of terror worldwide: "Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which

shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces" (Dan. 7:23).

B. The Revolts in the Tribulation

At least two major military actions are predicted for the Tribulation. One involves the attack of Russia against Israel; the other, the campaign of Armageddon.

In the middle of the tribulation period, Russia and her satellites will invade Israel (Ezek. 38; 39). The invaders will be totally decimated on the mountains and in the valleys of Israel. Eight distinct divine judgments will annihilate the attackers (Ezek. 38:17–23). It has already been suggested that, interestingly, until the middle of the tribulation period there will be two major focal points of power on this globe, represented by the western and eastern powers, much like the situation in recent years. Significantly, the eastern border of the old Roman Empire in Europe was positioned almost precisely where the Iron Curtain separated the two power blocs in Europe in recent years. Russia seems to be anything but a world power today but will experience a return to imperialism after the Rapture.

Even though Antichrist will emerge as world ruler during the final half of the tribulation period, there will be challenges to his rule. A series of battles will erupt. This campaign is named after Armageddon (Rev. 16:16), the place where the bloodiest battle will be fought. The resultant river of blood will reach up to the horses' bridles and will extend for 200 miles (Rev. 14:20).

Through Daniel, God outlined the well-defined sequence of attacks against Israel (Dan. 11:40–44). He describes the action by Egypt, the attack by a Russian remnant, the advance of Rome to Israel and the approach of 200 million Asiatics (cf. Rev. 9:16). Eventually all armies of the world will converge on Jerusalem, and this group would involve the American army as well (Zech. 13:3; 14:2). When all seems lost for Israel, a fifth army will move into the land, supplanting all others. It is the army of the King of Kings and the armies of Heaven (Rev. 19:11–20).

America's Association with Prophetic Developments

While the prophetic Scriptures lack specific references to the United States, it is possible to suggest in a general way what will happen to America in the end-time scenario as part of the world's nations. References in the Bible to the whole world, all nations and every tongue certainly would apply to America. A number of specific developments for America can be suggested.

1. At the Rapture every Christian from America will be removed. The devastating consequences to our society and government, with possibly one-tenth of the nation's population gone, defies the imagination.

2. With the disappearance of believers due to the Rapture, the United States will become anti-Semitic (Matt. 24:9b). Every last Jew will eventually return to the land (Ezek. 37:21; 39:28c). As American Jews return to Israel, our nation will lose many of its most capable leaders in government, business, science and medicine.

3. Soon after the Rapture, the United States will probably become a territorial extension of the Roman Empire under Antichrist's control. After all, the United States has its cultural, religious and linguistic roots in Western Europe. The revived Roman Empire need not necessarily be precisely within the borders of the territory controlled by the Romans in antiquity. After the Rapture, the seat of western power will shift from Washington, D.C. to Rome. During the final half of the Tribulation, Antichrist's dreadful dictatorship will definitely be felt in the United States: "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations" (Rev. 13:7).

4. The United States will experience a time of unprecedented trouble, turmoil and tribulation: a "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time" (Dan. 12:1). Since this "indignation of the LORD [will come] upon all nations" (Isa. 34:2), this dreadful time will also affect the United States.

5. A time of unparalleled salvation will characterize the world as God's 144,000 witnesses from among the twelve tribes of Israel will minister, resulting in the salvation of vast numbers of people, "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" (Rev. 7:9). Even in the United States where the gospel has been preached for centuries, hosts of individuals will be redeemed.

6. For a thousand years America will be ruled by the Lord Jesus Christ (Rev. 11:15). A benign dictatorship (Rev. 12:5), emanating from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:3), will bring an end to all wars. The psalmist predicts that all nations, including America, will bless the Lord: "His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed" (Ps. 72:17).

7. At the end of the Millennium, the New Jerusalem will descend from Heaven (Rev. 21:1, 2), resplendent in God's glory. God promises that "the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it" (Rev. 21:24). The eternal praise of the Savior by all nations in the eternal state would certainly include the United States.

Acknowledgment of America's Destiny

Will America survive until the Rapture or perish in the near future? Before we give credence to those who predict an imminent societal or economic collapse of our nation, a few considerations are in order.

The apostle Paul, speaking to the Athenians on Mars Hill, told them a profound truth about God and His relationship to nations. Paul observed that God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). It is clear that God has appointed concerning each nation its times and bounds, or its chronological and geographical boundaries.

This passage argues forcefully for the fact that God has a purpose for each nation. God brings a nation about at a specific point in time and at a particular location on earth because of a divine destiny for that nation.

While our nation is not mentioned specifically in prophecy, we can nevertheless infer God's destiny for the United States by consulting the convictions of our Founding Fathers and contemplating the course of our country. There appear to be three discernible reasons why God has raised our country.

First, the United States promotes missionary activity. The first settlers (Pilgrims) testified that they came here, as the Mayflower Compact states, "for the glory of God, and the advancement of the Christian faith." In the New England confederation of 1643, the uniform testimony is "we all came into these parts of America with one and the same end, namely, to advance the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ and enjoy the liberties of the gospel in purity with peace."

God has honored America for its missionary efforts. By far the majority of the world's evangelical missionaries come from the United States. God needs a lighthouse for the world's unsaved until the Rapture, after which the 144,000 witnesses will be ministering.

Second, America protects the chosen people. Ever since Roger Williams encouraged the persecuted Jews of Europe to settle in his colony, America has been a refuge for Jews. Of the world's approximately 17 million Jewish people, about 7 million live in the United States. It was with our national efforts that the modern state of Israel was established. Its continuation has been assured by the consistent support of the United States. God promises to bless those who bless Israel (Gen. 12:3). God is blessing us and will bless us because of our special relationship to His special people, a relationship no other nation can boast. Maxwell Coder has sound reason for suggesting America will continue as a nation. "In favor of the continuing existence of the nation we love are the undeniable facts that America has always been a haven

for God's ancient people Israel. He has wonderfully kept His promise to bless those who bless the children of Abraham. We may well believe He will bless America by preserving it until the coming of His Kingdom, in spite of its present sins" (*Jesus the King Is Coming*, p. 109).

Third, America provides a home for the politically and religiously persecuted all around the world. The Statue of Liberty best represents one aspect of America that appears to point toward our destiny as a home for the world's oppressed. It may well be that God has raised the United States in part to be a "Mother of Exiles." The world still needs such a nation where persecuted individuals and refugees from tyranny will find a home. That seems to be part of our national destiny, and God has blessed us and will bless us for showing kindness to millions of immigrants from around the world.

One can only concur with Coder's comments about America's continuation:

There can be no doubt that America has as good a chance as any nation of being in existence in the closing days of history. No other nation has gone beyond America in honoring the principles of Scripture. Few have equaled it. The Ten Commandments underlie our laws. We have befriended the Jewish people. Our land has been a missionary stronghold. Despite our tragic failures, there is reason to hope America will not perish from the earth (The Final Chapter, p. 85).

God will not let America's sins go unpunished. But the well-deserved and long-delayed judgment will not come until the righteous have been removed. As He removed Noah and his family before He brought the Flood and as He removed righteous Lot before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, so God will remove the believers through the Rapture before He sends His judgment upon the earth, including our beloved nation. ■

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