

Chapter 11

The Gap

The rapture and the Tribulation are never chronologically linked in scripture, and yet many Bible expositors teach that the Tribulation will begin immediately after the Church is translated. Why is that? Why not a gap of a thousand years? For that matter, why do they think the rapture will come before, not during or after, the Tribulation? (Actually, some do.) We need to look more closely at the scriptural evidence.

First, we must realize that the rapture concerns only the Church, the called-out assembly of Yahshua. **“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.”** (I Corinthians 15:22-23) The Tribulation, on the other hand, concerns only the nation of Israel: **“Seventy weeks are determined for your [Daniel’s] people [i.e., Israel] and for your holy city [Jerusalem]....”** (Daniel 9:24) The Church did not exist during the first sixty-nine of Israel’s seventy seven-year “weeks,” but was born fifty-four days after Christ fulfilled the required signs—on the Day of Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks. Yahweh has not been “officially” dealing with the Jews for all these years during the Church age, since their divine program is contained entirely within the prophesied 490 years—of which only seven (revealingly identified as “the Time of Jacob’s Trouble”) are yet future. Would it not, therefore, be reasonable to conclude that God will remove the Church (as He has clearly promised to do) *before* He resumes his program with Israel? He has never before run two dispensations concurrently; there’s no reason to believe He will start now.

The resumption of God’s dealings with Israel will be signaled by a treaty: **“Then he [the prince who is to come—i.e., the Antichrist] shall confirm a covenant with many for one week [specifically, the last one of the seventy]; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate.”** (Daniel 9:27) I realize most of that looks pretty esoteric. For now, let’s just concentrate on the timing. The last of the seventy “weeks” will begin when the Antichrist “confirms a covenant with many,” a treaty—probably a U.N. resolution—which somehow enables Israel to reinstitute their Levitical program of “sacrifice and offering” (since you can’t bring something to an end if it hasn’t started).

In order for the Antichrist to have the clout and influence necessary to engineer such a treaty—which in light of Muslim antagonism looks impossible to us today—he must already be in power as a national leader of some kind (since

nobody pays much attention to ordinary individuals). But the Church, or more specifically the Holy Spirit who resides within its people, will have been removed from the scene *before* this influential diplomat can be made known to the world, for we read: **“He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed...”** (II Thessalonians 2:7-8) So the order of events has been established. First the Holy Spirit is “taken out,” then the “lawless one is revealed,” then the “covenant is confirmed,” an event which by definition inaugurates the last seven-year period of Yahweh’s plan for Israel. If you’ll recall, this final septade pretty much wraps up the course of human history as we’ve known it: **“...to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.”** (Daniel 9:24). Therefore, one of two things must happen: either the rapture will precede the Tribulation, or the Holy Spirit will leave the Church behind when He goes. But option number two would make Yahshua a liar, for He said, **“I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.”** (John 14:16-17) Forever isn’t over yet.

Because the Antichrist won’t be revealed as the “lawless one” until after the Holy Spirit is taken out of the way, there is an implied time gap between the rapture and the beginning of the Tribulation. Even if he is already around—even if he is the President or Prime Minister of some existing nation—he won’t be “revealed” until he starts doing things that were prophesied in scripture. The catch-22 here is that when he does, there won’t be anybody left on earth who believes the prophecies, so they won’t understand what’s coming. The “man of sin” will come upon the world like a thief in the night, even though his moves were predicted in detail thousands of years ago.

And how long can we expect this gap to be? It could have been the better part of two millennia, because Christ could have returned for His Church at any time between the Day of Pentecost, 33 A.D., and today. But since Yahshua said that **“this generation [the one that sees the signs signaling the end] will by no means pass away till all these things take place,”** (Matthew 24:34) it’s obvious we have run out of the time that would have been necessary for a long gap. We are watching the “fig tree” sprout its buds. Israel is back as a national entity. World events, technology, and prophecy are all starting to converge. Summer is upon us, and it looks like it’s going to be a hot one.

But there *must* be a gap of some duration. As already mentioned, it will take time—at least a couple of months—for the Antichrist to solidify his political power base. And this must happen after the rapture, because if a “little horn”—the leader of a small nation or a previously unheralded political figure—were to

suddenly emerge as the undisputed leader of Europe (or a new super-state within Europe), touting a Mid-East peace plan that included a new Jewish temple in its blueprint, every halfway-educated Bible-believing Christian in the world would know exactly what had happened. The Man of Sin would be as good as “revealed.”

Also, let’s be realistic. Treaties of the type described in Daniel 9 don’t happen overnight. Though the problem that precipitates the covenant—a deadly and historic animosity between Muslims and Jews that threatens to drag us all into another global war—is clearly here already, no solution, however reasonable, would be accepted without debate. There are some thirty Islamic nations spread out between Morocco and Pakistan, all of whom would have something to say about a covenant that guaranteed Israel’s right to exist—much less their right to rebuild their Temple on their Temple mount. (*Why can’t they build it someplace else? they’ll whine. Our third-holiest shrine is there.*) And even though this treaty will look like the only possible hope for Israel’s long-term survival, even *they* will debate it. After all, there are more than three Jews in the country, and that pretty much *guarantees* an argument. Of course, the Americans, Brits, Germans, Russians, and French will feel they have to get their two bits in as well. All this debating will take time.

My guess for the duration of the gap? Two or three years, minimum. But it could be anywhere from two months to twenty years (from when I’m writing this). There isn’t enough sand left in the world’s hourglass for any more time than that.

It’s entirely possible that the rapture itself will play a major part in the rise of the Antichrist. Because the Event is so unprecedented and inexplicable, many will conclude that the whole world is facing a common enemy—as yet unidentified, which makes it even scarier. Sun Tzu put it this way in *The Art of War*: “The enemy of my enemy is my friend.” (He was wrong, by the way, but let’s not go there.) The conventional wisdom is that if we face a common foe, we must all pull together to defeat him. The earth will be more ready to accept a one-world government than it has ever been before. This mood will not be motivated by concerns about conquest or military threats, nor by economic uncertainty, nor by new-age fuzzy thinking, but by a widespread fear of a powerful and unknown common enemy—maybe even one who is “not of this world.” But the odd notion that this “enemy” could actually turn out to be the Creator-God of the universe will occur to very few. After all, there are still dozens of major religions represented, and hundreds of spin-off cults. They can’t *all* be wrong, can they?

What we need now, they’ll be thinking, is a strong leader, one who can pull us all together and show us how to work as a team for our own survival. We need someone who can identify this mysterious adversary and negotiate a peace

settlement with them—or failing that, lead us in a successful war against them. What we need is what the Jews would call a Messiah.

Our search for this leader begins, not surprisingly, in the writings of Daniel. **“I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.”** (Daniel 7:8) The prophet was mulling over the ten horns of the fourth beast (which we have positively identified as Rome and its successors—the last great gentile world power). Three of these “horns”—symbols of political power or authority—were **“plucked out by the roots.”** These “horns,” it seems, cease to exist as independent nations or peoples, becoming annexed or absorbed into the empire.

Whether or not the little horn represents a nation, he definitely represents a personality, for he is seen as having “eyes” and “a mouth speaking pompous words.” So we know he’s a politician, but an unusual one—one who has the ability to really perceive the world around him. Though a “little” horn, he struck Daniel in verse 20 as one **“whose appearance was greater than his fellows.”** Perhaps this means that his nation is small but his persona is large—like Hitler, who was born not in Germany but in Austria, or Napoleon, who came from Corsica, not France.

In his vision, Daniel asked for **“the truth of all this,”** to which an angel replied, **“The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom. And another shall rise after them; He shall be different from the first ones, and shall subdue three kings.”** (Daniel 7:24) Here we see that the ten nations were all to have been within the fourth kingdom (verse 23), the Roman empire, at one time or another. This confirms what we read in Daniel 9:26: **“The people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.”** The people who destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple marched under the auspices of Rome, led by Titus Vespasian. Therefore, it behooves us to look at the map and review which modern nations fit that description—and which don’t. The following descriptions are loose, of course. Roman provincial frontiers didn’t always line up neatly with modern national boundaries. But we can still get a rough idea of the prophetic geography.

Rome made the Mediterranean their own private pond. They ended up controlling the entire perimeter. Italy was its heart, of course. Moving west, they conquered what is now Switzerland, France, Britain, Spain, and Portugal, reaching as far north as the Rhine, so Belgium, Luxembourg, and a portion of the Netherlands were in Roman hands. To their east, they took everything in Europe

south of the Danube: what is now Austria, half of Hungary, the Balkans (we'll come back to that one), Greece, and Turkey. They never held much of Germany, nor what is now called the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Rome also controlled parts of all the nations lining the northern edge of the African continent—most significantly, Egypt. They occupied a small portion of western Syria and most of Lebanon and Israel. Their client states, i.e., those not strictly speaking possessions of the empire but under its sphere of influence, included what is now northern Morocco and Algeria, Bulgaria, the eastern third of Turkey (Cappadocia), and Jordan, reaching down to the Sinai. And for a short time, the empire stretched to include Romania, Hungary, and the area east of Turkey containing bits of Iran, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

The Balkan nations, that area stretching down the east side of the Adriatic Sea from Austria to Greece, are a moving target. You used to just be able to name Yugoslavia and Albania and call it a day, but the whole area has now been split up six ways from Sunday. You've got Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia, and none of them are particularly stable. About a month before this writing, what was left of Yugoslavia (itself less than a century old) went the way of the dodo, becoming Serbia-Montenegro, a nation which no one expects to endure in its present form. So let's just say, "Rome controlled the Balkans," and leave it at that.

The Balkans could be significant, though, for several reasons. First, that part of the world is where trouble traditionally goes to start: World War I began in Sarajevo, in today's Bosnia. And World War II? Forget Poland. The real war started a few miles north of the Balkans when Neville Chamberlain sold out Czechoslovakia for thirty pieces of silver (or something like that). The Balkans are a powder-keg mixture of cultures and religions all living in close proximity. (Islam plus *anybody* is a formula for trouble.) Also, Daniel's prophecy says the "little horn" is a power who "shall rise after them," that is, after the other ten nations. All of "Rome's" newest nations are in the Balkans. They bear watching.

And then there's the matter of the goat. If you'll recall, in our chapter on God's Timetable, we reviewed a vision Daniel had of a male goat that attacked a ram, something that turned out to be a remarkably accurate prophecy of Greece under Alexander the Great subduing Media-Persia. The passage went on (in Daniel 8:21-22) to describe how Alexander's kingdom would be divided up among his four generals after his untimely death. Although much of the prophecy has already come to pass, some of it is yet future, for we read, **"And in the latter time of their kingdom, [that is, the divided kingdom of the post-Alexander Grecian empire] when the transgressors have reached their fullness, a king shall arise, having fierce features, who understands sinister schemes."** (Daniel 8:23) Daniel goes on to describe the Antichrist in detail, something we'll do as well in due time. But take

note: without actually *saying* so, Daniel has strongly implied here that the Antichrist will arise from the *Grecian* empire, although we have already seen that his ten-horned kingdom will be part of *Rome's* legacy. A contradiction? Not necessarily, for the two empires overlapped to some extent—primarily right here in the Balkans. We'll pursue this train of thought further in a moment.

In the interest of being thorough, we should explore the possibility that Daniel's ten-nation confederacy is comprised of the descendants—the grandchildren, if you will—of the old Roman empire. Because the text clearly states that the “*people* of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary,” we need to consider who those people are—or could be. From the standpoint of cultural heritage, language, and bloodline, the entire Western Hemisphere could be considered part of Rome (and to a lesser extent, Greece as well). Spain and Portugal settled (okay, *conquered*) the southern portion, while England and France dominated the north—Roman territories all. Also, by definition, these former colonies of European powers arose after their parent nations—another prophetic requirement. So why shouldn't the American nations be considered as candidates for members in the ten-nation Roman federation?

As tempting as this puzzle piece looks at first glance, I find it a less-than-perfect fit. The Antichrist is described as a “little horn,” arising after all ten of the other nations. I can see no way to squeeze the United States or any potential leader into that description. Our presidents become larger than life on election day. Also, though the U.S. is newer than most European nations, it is one of the oldest in the Americas, and the chances are vanishingly remote that we would, or could, absorb three other nations, whether in the Americas or Europe. Of course, there's more to the Western Hemisphere than the U.S. But try the scenario out on Paraguay and it gets even sillier. No, I think we're stuck with an all-European scenario. And in the Balkans particularly, one nation “consolidating” three others into its borders is a perfectly plausible scenario.

So who are these “ten horns,” these nations represented by the ten toes of the big statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream? Some theorize that the ten horns can be found in history. They are, they say, the people-groups—mostly Germanic tribes—who overran the Roman empire during the fourth and fifth centuries. The list, though variable, usually includes: the Alemanni (from the Black forest region of southwestern Germany, between the Rhine and Danube rivers); the Franks (who settled in Gaul—France—and western Germany); the Anglo-Saxons (who with the Jutes populated the eastern British Isles); the Burgundians (centered in today's Switzerland); the Visigoths (who ended up in Spain); the Suevi (who landed in Portugal); and the Lombards (late-comers to Italy—forcing out the Ostrogoths). These seven are said to be the nations that were left after three other “horns” were ripped out by the roots. And who were *they*? The Ostrogoths,

Vandals, and Heruli are said to have been so thoroughly defeated they've disappeared without a trace, thus fulfilling the prophecy.

I'll admit, at first glance this explanation looked quite attractive to me. (It helped me bridge my nagging mental dichotomy between real Roman territory—virtually all of it south of the Rhine and Danube—and a modern Europe in which Germany is a varsity player.) But when I looked a little deeper, the whole thing fell apart like a house of cards. First, far more than ten tribes took part in the “re-distribution” of the old Roman empire. What about the Frisians? What about the Thuringians? The Alani, the Avars, Gepids, Rugians, and Bavarians? What about the *Huns*, for cryin' out loud? And then there's the little matter of national existence. The Vandals, Ostrogoths, and Heruli weren't the only ones to completely fade off the scene. Met any Suevi lately? How about Alemanni, Jutes, or Visigoths? Fact is, among all these nations, only the Franks (French) and Anglo-Saxons (English) can trace anything approaching a direct line back to their barbarian ancestors. The others were all eventually swallowed by neighboring peoples, the Byzantines, or the encroaching Muslims. Most of these tribes moved around so much, pinning them down to a single modern nationality is a hopeless task.

So where did the theory come from? After a little digging, I discovered it was born of a religious agenda. Members of a certain quasi-Christian “denomination” (who shall remain nameless) formulated this clever but transparent scheme with one goal in mind: to pin the title of Antichrist on the Roman Catholic Church. You see, as the Germanic tribes one by one converted to Christianity from paganism, most of them embraced the “Arian,” or Celtic, form of the religion—not Roman Catholicism. Little is known of Arian theology, but it is evident that it depended upon a literal interpretation of the scriptures—something with which the Catholic Church would have had a serious problem (control and revenue issues aside). This turn of events hadn't occurred because the barbarians had weighed the views of Arius against the Creed of Nicaea and chosen between the two, you understand, but merely because they had been reached first by German-speaking Arian missionaries. The opposition of the Catholics, by the way, was not completely groundless, for a doctrine had spread among the Arians that Yahshua—being the “Son”—though Creator, was also created, and therefore couldn't be quite as divine as the Father. They were wrong about that, although admittedly, a real man possessing “all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9) is a difficult concept to grasp.

Anyway, the Vandals, Ostrogoths, and Heruli were the barbarian tribes that gave the most grief to the Church of Rome. Their defeat opened the door for unchallenged Papal supremacy after the middle of the sixth century. And this is where the theory gets completely out of hand. In March, 538, the Ostrogoths gave

up their siege of Rome, having been on the losing end of the affair for over a year. The theorists seize upon that year as the beginning of the Great Tribulation—the setting up of the Abomination of Desolation. *Why?* you ask. Good question, but you’re not going to believe the answer. By arbitrarily converting prophetic days into *years* (a formula that is never explicitly authorized in scripture) they make the “time, times, and half a time”, “forty-two months,” and “1,260 days” references in Daniel and Revelation come out to 1,260 *years*. Again, you ask, *why?* Because that year (1798) is when the Pope was taken captive during the French Revolution—the affront to papal power “proving” their contention that the Roman Catholic Church is the Antichrist—who had now been vanquished. I *told* you that you wouldn’t believe it. All of the contrivance, calculation, and selective history was for one purpose only: to “prove” something that just isn’t true. Don’t get me wrong; I’m not suggesting that the Papacy is innocent—or ever was. But that doesn’t make it the Antichrist. His reign is yet future—as is the Millennial reign of the Messiah that will follow.

I can’t believe I fell for this theory, even for fifteen minutes. But I went through the exercise of explaining it because it points out a very important truth. We must take the *whole* counsel of God, not just the parts we like or the parts that can be made to fit our preconceived agenda. Yahweh seldom tells us something only once; if it’s important, He’s invariably hits it from several different angles, so there can be no mistaking His intentions. As I said in the first chapter, the reason I took on this project was that no one (to my knowledge) had ever tried to cover *every* unfulfilled prophetic scripture chronologically in a single volume. The jigsaw puzzle can only be “worked” if you use all of the pieces.

So we’re back where we started, wondering who the “ten horns” are. If we take all the scriptures that describe the ten horns and look at them side by side, we can at least weed out some of the obvious errors. **“The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom [the fourth kingdom, Rome]. And another shall rise after them; He shall be different from the first ones, and shall subdue [or “pluck out by the roots”—7:8] three kings.”** (Daniel 7:24) The Antichrist will apparently take over and consolidate three “horns,” and then lead all ten. Then factor in: **“And in the latter time of their kingdom [that is, the Grecian empire], when the transgressors have reached their fullness, a king shall arise, having fierce features, who understands sinister schemes.”** (Daniel 8:23) The king who was described above as “another [who] shall rise after them” will also apparently rise from within Alexander’s empire. Confused yet?

John tells us, **“And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.... And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name.”** (Revelation 12:3, 13:1) Both Satan and his

Antichrist are thus directly associated with the ten horns. This is confirmed by the picture of the whore of Babylon—Satan’s system of false worship—riding upon the beast (Antichrist) who had the ten horns: **“And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.... The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.”** (Revelation 17:3, 9) The seven mountains, once again, seem to be indicating the legendary seven hills of Rome, confirming what was plainly stated in Daniel 7:24.

And finally, we see that these nations were still in the future from John’s perspective, and they would last but a short time: **“The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast.”** (Revelation 17:12). Here is corroboration that the ten horns form the Antichrist’s earthly power base. Therefore, it seems, they will be a ten-nation confederation within the old Roman empire’s territory, and probably Greece’s as well, within whom three nations will merge under the leadership of a single man (possibly from an eleventh nation, a small one which will rise after the others).

Comparing the prophetic picture with the reality of European politics today, we have what appears to be an unbridgeable chasm: Europe is consolidating alright, but not along the lines spelled out in scripture. At the moment, there are twenty-seven nations within the European Union—far beyond the ten specified in scripture. And even more significant (to me, at least) is the fact that Germany and the Scandinavian nations, varsity players in modern Europe, were never part of the Roman empire, nor were the old Soviet-block nations of Eastern Europe that are now, in our post-Cold-War era, starting to look toward the west—toward Europe—to redefine their destinies. Right now, it all looks impossible. But remember: as late as 1945, a Jewish state in Palestine, as required in scripture, looked impossible, too. Three years later, it was reality.

That being said, I have formulated a theory as to how this ten-nation empire of the Antichrist might come about. Please bear in mind that this is all somewhat speculative. First, let us quickly review the ground rules: The ten “horns” or nations of Daniel and Revelation (the Antichrist’s ten-nation kingdom) are defined as follows:

1. They must be part of the old Roman Empire, and include the city of Rome. (Daniel 7:7, 9:26, Revelation 17:9)
2. The final form of this nation (the “toes” of Nebuchadnezzar’s visionary statue) will be mixed, part strong, part weak; and its parts will not adhere to each other. Perhaps this implies a Orthodox/Catholic-Muslim mixture. (Daniel 2:40-44)

3. The Antichrist himself will apparently come from the Grecian empire, which under Alexander's successor, Antigonus, did not extend west of Albania or north of the Danube River. (Daniel 8:21-24) It should be noted that, like Napoleon or Hitler, the Antichrist will not necessarily be born in the same nation in which he rises to power.
4. Three of the original ten nations will be absorbed into the Antichrist's nation, perhaps an eleventh. (Daniel 7:8, 23-24, Revelation 13:1)
5. The Antichrist's nation is "little" and will arise after the others. (Daniel 7:8, 23-24)
6. The Antichrist will (as we shall soon learn) conduct a war against an Islamic confederation that includes Turkey. Thus Turkey won't be part of his kingdom, however well it fits the profile in other ways. (Ezekiel 38:3-6, Daniel 11:40-43)

Therefore, I believe (SF4) the nations in the Antichrist's ten-nation empire will be—drum roll, please—a Balkan-area superstate including the following nations: (1) Italy, the heart of the old Roman Empire and E.U. member; (2) Slovenia, E.U. member and northern anchor for the Balkan states; (3) Croatia, a current applicant for E.U. membership; (4) Bosnia-Herzegovina; (5) Serbia, which in 2003 joined itself tenuously to (6) Montenegro (The two nations have separate administrative functions and governmental leaders, but share economic and military ties. Together, they are known as "Serbia *and* Montenegro"—not Serbia-Montenegro—betraying a relationship that is every bit as separate as it is united); (7) Albania; (8) Macedonia, Alexander's original homeland (though much smaller than it was in his day); Bulgaria, an applicant for E.U. membership; and (10) Greece, E.U. member and Alexander's power base. Lands north of this block (i.e., north of the Danube) were never part of the Roman Empire, nor were they part of Antigonus' quarter of Alexander's kingdom. The Antichrist himself would (according to the theory) come from one of the newest nations in the group—definitely not Italy, because it was never a part of Alexander's empire. My own admittedly wild guess is that he hails from Macedonia, a recently independent fragment of the former Yugoslavia.

Here's the reasoning behind the theory: Most nations in Europe have relatively stable borders and identities, but the Balkans have been in a constant state of flux for the last century. Remember, Daniel 7:24 stated that the Antichrist's "horn" would "rise after" the others. All of Europe's youngest nations are in the Balkans. In addition, both Italy and Greece would be incorporated into the ten-nation confederacy, making it a force to be reckoned with. The thought behind this is the "shopping mall" concept: a couple of dozen small shops

scattered around town can't hope to generate much business, but if you put them all together in one place, with a Nordstrom's (Italy) at one end and Sears or Macy's (Greece) at the other, you've got something with the potential for real economic clout. Likewise, a Slovenia or Bulgaria alone couldn't hope to be heard over the voice of a Germany or France. But if ten regional neighbors joined forces—a sort of “United States of the Adriatic” *within the E.U.*—they could wield their collective clout with greater effectiveness. Indeed, it's not beyond comprehension that the Antichrist could become the dominant individual spokesman and leader in the E.U. through just such an arrangement—making him *de facto* a world leader to be taken seriously.

All he'd have to do is consolidate three (or is it four?) Balkan nations into one, perhaps recreating a new Yugoslavia out of Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia, and maybe Macedonia. And then, with his reputation as diplomatic genius expanding, he'd convince the other nations to join in the powerful regional partnership of which I spoke. With the right guy (so to speak) at the helm, all of this could all be accomplished in a couple of years.

The theory has a few obstacles to overcome, but they're logistical, not scriptural. First, competing religions: the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches have been at enmity with each other since they officially split in 1054, and the Balkan nations also have a large Muslim contingent. But a spirit of ecumenical compromise, a general seeking for the lowest common spiritual denominator (can you spell *Laodicea*?) has been gaining momentum since the early days of Pope John Paul II. Maybe they'll all get together and decide to live in harmony—*Any god will do, as long nobody calls him Yahweh*. Second problem: of the ten, only Italy, Greece, and Slovenia are now members of the E.U., and only two others (Bulgaria and Croatia) have even applied for membership. But if Italy and Greece threatened to pull out if their new confederation weren't recognized and admitted as a unit, I wouldn't be a bit surprised to find them welcomed in with open arms, especially with the wily Antichrist doing the negotiating. Together, they would be able to sit at the table as equals with the likes of Britain, France, or Germany. Being a part of the E.U. isn't required in scripture, mind you, but this general scenario smoothes over some logistical rough spots—like NATO ties (read: access to nuclear weapons), close relationships with European central banks, and the Antichrist's unquestioned diplomatic status in the world community of nations.

This leader is the one identified by Daniel as the “little horn.” The prophet’s description continues: **“He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law.”** (Daniel 7:25) This is our first indication of whom this man considers his enemy: Yahweh himself. I believe that his words and deeds will, in the beginning anyway, be couched in terms calculated to avoid alienating any religious group still on earth after the rapture—whether apostate “Christians,” Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, or even secular humanists. As the Psalmist said, **“The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords.”** (Psalm 55:21) His persecution of the saints—repentant Jews and “Laodicean” Christians—will pick up steam as his regime gains power. But as we shall see when we explore his relationship with “Babylon” in a later chapter, he will enter the world’s stage by being the world’s most tolerant diplomat—a champion of all religious heresies, come one, come all.

The enigmatic phrase **“shall intend to change times and law”** raises all sorts of questions and suggests all sorts of theories. Out of convention and convenience, the whole world uses the Gregorian calendar that starts with the (incorrect) birthday of Yahshua, although there are other systems in local operation. The Jewish calendar, for instance, supposedly begins with the first day of creation. The Islamic calendar, not to be outdone, dates time from when Muhammad beat it out of Mecca three steps ahead of a lynch mob (okay, they were trying to stab him to death, but who’s counting?)—622 A.D. became A.H. (“after *hijrah*”) 1. But once the pesky Christians are gone, what’s to keep the whole world from adopting a new religion-neutral dating system? Why should everyone have to be reminded of a God they don’t believe in every time they write the day’s date on a check? *It’s not fair.* But the phrase Daniel uses, “shall *intend* to,” suggests that there are some things even a guy who runs the whole world can’t quite accomplish. Imagine having to tweak the operating systems of every computer on earth. And you thought the furor surrounding the Y2K bug was ridiculous....

I’ve also heard a theory that the Satan-worshipping Antichrist “shall intend to change times and law” by making religious gatherings on any day but Sunday—the day honoring the sun god, Lucifer—illegal. Yahweh clearly set aside the Sabbath—the sixth day, Saturday—as His day of rest and reflection. Observant Jews follow this directive, but it’s something the Church has somehow managed to institutionally sabotage ever since the days of Constantine—another devotee of the sun god. The Muslims, not to be outdone, worship on Friday. Based on logistics, the “Sunday” theory couldn’t kick in until the mid-point of the Tribulation, when the Antichrist has become unquestioned dictator of the earth, after the house of Islam has been quelled, and the reawakened Jews have been driven into hiding. These things *will* happen, but I’m getting *way* out ahead of our story.

Daniel's visions of the Antichrist weren't finished. Morphed into another description of Antiochus Epiphanes, we find these clues: **"And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their fullness, a king shall arise, having fierce features, who understands sinister schemes. His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power. He shall destroy fearfully, and shall prosper and thrive. He shall destroy the mighty, and also the holy people. Through his cunning he shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; and he shall exalt himself in his heart. He shall destroy many in their prosperity. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes."** (Daniel 8:23-25)

Notice first that Yahweh waits, as usual, for things to get hopelessly rotten before He visits us in judgment. I can't help but think of Noah's generation, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Canaanites in Joshua's day. Every one of them had many years to repent—and didn't. Just like us today.

Next we see a bit more information about the Antichrist. He will be intense and brilliant, impossible to fool (unlike some presidents I could name). He won't be what you'd call "a fun guy." Rather, he will be ruthlessly successful at everything he turns his hand to, crafty, suave, and cunning. His power, hinted at here and spelled out in other passages, comes from Satan himself. He has two targets: the mighty (because they stand in the way of his domination of the world) and the holy people, Jews (because they are Yahweh's chosen people) and neoChristians (because they have been set apart by God and enjoy the love and forgiveness of Yahweh—something he and his devilish mentor will never experience).

We shouldn't gloss over the phrase **"He shall destroy the mighty."** That thought is fraught with portent. Daniel is not so much talking about individuals here as he is about nations. Who holds power today? Who is "mighty?" America, most certainly, but also Europe (which will fall under his domination before anyone else), Russia (always a threat, down and out or not), China (a military time-bomb) and *dar al-Islam*, the house of Islam, the wildest of wild cards. Antichrist will "destroy" them all, one way or another.

In this age, we have a proverb: "Crime doesn't pay." But under Antichrist's reign, it apparently will. **"Deceit will prosper under his rule."** Those whose consciences are still tempered by Judeo-Christian ethics will be considered sad relics of a bygone age, fair game for anybody smart enough to steal from them. It's evolutionary theory at its finest: survival of the most deceptive. Your money won't buy you shelter or security like it does now. But we're not talking about anarchy, exactly, at least not at first. It's state-supported crime, insidious, destructive, and impossible to fight (kind of like the IRS). It's the inevitable path for a world that has rejected its maker, and a world leader who "rises against the Prince of princes."

Eventually, this leader will show his true colors. No more diplomacy; no more politically correct peace process, no more Mr. Nice Guy. When he finds himself on top, the mask will come off. **“Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done.”** (Daniel 11:36) It’s not unusual for godless rulers to “do according to their own will.” What’s unusual here is that no matter how much he blasphemes Yahweh, no matter how evil his empire becomes, he will prosper—right up until his horrible end. In fact, his prosperity is part of God’s plan. If he looks like a winner to those willing to shut their eyes to the truth, he will present the clearest possible choice: Yahweh or Satan, Christ or Antichrist, God’s way or Man’s way. The Antichrist is given free reign for a time so God’s overdue wrath may be accomplished on an unbelieving world. It’s a question of permission, not volition. God won’t have to lift a finger to effect wrath upon the earth, at least at first; all He has to do is stop protecting us from ourselves. The Antichrist will be everything the world thinks it wants—he will certainly be what the world deserves.

Yahshua saw it coming: **“I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.”** (John 5:43) Because the Jews rejected the “good shepherd,” they would be given a bad one. **“And Yahweh said to me [Zechariah], ‘Next, take for yourself the implements of a foolish shepherd. For indeed I will raise up a shepherd in the land who will not care for those who are cut off, nor seek the young, nor heal those that are broken, nor feed those that still stand. But he will eat the flesh of the fat and tear their hooves in pieces.’”** (Zechariah 11:15-16) “Hooves” is the Hebrew: *parsa*—metaphorical of “the might of an enemy raised by God Himself against His people,” according to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. The Antichrist will pose as the shepherd of Israel—their savior and Messiah, defending them against their mortal enemies (as we shall see). He will even occupy the Land (see Daniel 11:40). But his real agenda is personal power, and he doesn’t care how many Jewish sheep he has to fleece to get it.

Daniel’s next few verses explore the Antichrist’s “religion.” The picture is disturbing, for its roots go back to the very beginning of man’s purposeful rebellion against Yahweh. **“He shall regard neither the God of his fathers nor the desire of women, nor regard any god; for he shall exalt himself above them all. But in their place he shall honor a god of fortresses; and a god which his fathers did not know he shall honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and pleasant things. Thus he shall act against the strongest fortresses with a foreign god, which he shall acknowledge, and advance its glory; and he shall cause them to rule over many, and divide the land for gain.”** (Daniel 11:37-39) The prophet is saying that he will follow no traditional religion. If he’s a European, the “God of his fathers” would most likely be the liturgy-encrusted caricature of Yahshua promulgated by the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox

churches. It's also possible, considering the part of the world he comes from, that he will arise from Muslim stock, in which case the god he *doesn't* bow to would be Allah. (Few secular Muslim leaders really do, in point of fact.) Roman Europe has a steadily increasing Muslim population both in the east and the west. Think about this: if Nebuchadnezzar's big statue, the one Daniel interpreted as four coming gentile empires, has ten toes, it stands to reason that five of them were seen on each foot. Is the right foot Catholic and the left Islamic? All of Rome's eastern component, Byzantium, is now in Muslim hands, so it's dangerous to dismiss the notion out of hand. What's clear from the passage at hand, though, is that no matter his cultural heritage, the Antichrist won't bow to anybody's god, not to the Christians' Jesus, the Muslims' Allah, or the Jews' *ha-Shem* (known to you and me by his real name, Yahweh). He won't worship any god in anybody's pantheon.

Instead, he will worship *himself*, following the tradition of the ancient Babylonian mystery religion of Nimrod. This cult is the original Satanic sun-god counterfeit of Yahweh's grand plan of salvation for all mankind, and it still exists today. It began within a few generations of the flood. Emulating the true God, this bogus religion presents a trinity of sorts. The "father" figure is Cush, Noah's grandson. As this false faith spread, he became known as Bel, Belus, or Ba'al, Hermes, Mercury, Nebo, Janus, Chaos, Vulcan, and Merodach, among others. The "son"—the false Christ—was Nimrod himself, who took the personae of Tammuz, Osiris, Jupiter, Pluto, Kronos (otherwise known as "the horned one," as was his Nordic counterpart, Gesus), Bacchus, Cupid and others, depending on where you were and when you lived.

Rounding out the hellish trio was the "Madonna" figure. Semiramis, Nimrod's wife, morphed into Astarte or Ishtar (where we get the name "Easter"), Isis, Cybele, Fortuna, Rhea, Ceres, Minerva, Athena, Venus, and Diana. Satan apparently figured it would be easier to sell people on a tangible goddess than on an ethereal forgery of the Holy Spirit. But in a rare turn of fortune, we can learn something significant about the real thing from studying the counterfeit. The real "Trinity's" indwelling manifestation of Yahweh, the Holy Spirit (*Ruach Qodesh* in Hebrew) is actually a *feminine* noun in the original language. So in a very real sense, "She" is our "heavenly Mother," and indeed, we find that the functions of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us are *maternal* in nature: comforting, nurturing, gently but firmly confronting us with our shortcomings. It all puts the fifth commandment, "**Honor your Father and your Mother,**" in a whole new light: Yahweh structured our families—going so far as to design our anatomies as male and female—to teach us what God is like.

By the time of Christ, the mystery religion started by Nimrod had, in one form or another, spread from the British Isles to China, from Africa to Scandinavia.

Today, its rituals and superstitions subtly permeate most every culture on the face of the globe, and show up where you'd least expect them: Roman Catholicism is to this day immersed in the trappings of Babylon.

The key to the Antichrist's beliefs is found in Daniel's mention of "a god of fortresses." This is far more significant than merely saying he relies on the force of arms, like a thousand rulers before him. This is actually a reference to Nimrod's mystery religion. Many permutations of the Babylonian Madonna (Rhea, Cybele, and Diana, for example) were depicted wearing a crown resembling a tower or fortress. The root of the matter is that Semiramis was credited with building the first city fortifications in the post-flood world, making her the *goddess* of fortifications, and her husband, Ninus/Nimrod, the god of fortresses.

You may be asking, "Why should I care about all this ancient mythology?" It's because these myths have a basis in history—the history of a powerful ruler selling out to Satan and deceiving much of the earth into believing that God is something He's not. History is about to repeat itself. Satan doesn't much care what you believe, as long as it's not the truth. The truth, after all, will set you free.

So just as Nimrod set himself up as god, the Antichrist will too. And just like the real God, he will honor those who follow him. How? **"He shall cause them to rule over many, and divide the land for gain."** That is, he will split up the spoils among his "worshippers." Good grief; this is such a tired old tune. The Antichrist, in the end, is nothing but a thief; he's in it for the money, for the power, for the glory. The only difference between him and a hundred other wannabes throughout history, from Alexander to Attila, from Hannibal to Hitler, from Muhammad to Mussolini, is that he will be very, *very* good at what he does.

It has been said that Daniel and Revelation are the bookends of prophecy. It certainly seems that way as we jump to John's narrative without missing a beat: **"Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name."** (Revelation 13:1) The imagery has shifted subtly here. The "beast" is seen coming from the sea—a consistent Biblical metaphor for the gentile nations. The political reality is that there are ten horns (national entities) but only seven heads (governments or national leaders). This is a refinement of what we read in Daniel: three of the original ten nations have ceased to have their own independent identities. Again in John's vision we see the Antichrist's kingdom united in blasphemy against Yahweh.

Now we get a more detailed picture of this beast: **"The beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority."** (Revelation 13:2) The symbols describing him speak of his nature. Leopards are known for their ability

to kill swiftly. The bear's feet speak of brute strength. And the lion's mouth is indicative of the beast's verbal authority—his roar commands attention. But for all his ruthlessness, power, and charisma, the beast is nothing without the Dragon—Satan—the real source of his strength.

That's why Paul calls him **“the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”** (II Thessalonians 2:3-4) Sounds like our old buddy Nimrod. The Greek word for “perdition” is *apoleia*, which means destruction, perishing, ruin, or waste. In other words, the apostle begs to differ with Antichrist's self-assessment of his own wonderfulness.

God will too, when the time is right. **“Yahweh will consume [him] with the breath of His mouth and destroy [him] with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason 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.** (II Thessalonians 2:8-12) A great many will eventually believe that this politician is God, or at least *a* god, because he will apparently be able to perform all kinds of miracles—including rising from the dead. After all, what would a false Christ be without signs and wonders? Of course, it's all Satan's sleight of hand—lies and trickery—but those who have rejected the real Messiah will swallow it whole.

This is not the first time God's role in man's condemnation has been addressed in scripture. Since some folks look at these passages and grumble, “How unfair of Him,” we need to clear the air. As far back as the Exodus, we see the same sort of thing. There it is said that God “hardened Pharaoh's heart.” In the first chapter of Romans, He is said to have given sinners up to “uncleanness,” to “vile passions,” and to a “debased mind.” Here He is seen “sending them strong delusion.” *What gives? I thought God loved sinners!* He does—so much that He set aside His glory, became a man, and sacrificed Himself to pay the penalty for their crimes. But when people purposely turn their hearts from God's mercy, there is a limit to how much time He will give them to repent. Remember Noah? Remember Sodom? God never closes the door on people who are looking for Him, but he sometimes locks doors that people have already slammed shut. There is a difference.

Without getting prematurely wrapped up in the things the Antichrist will do during the Tribulation, we have explored his appearing, his political situation, and his character. We know that he comes from somewhere within the old Roman and Greek empires, emerging as a world figure in the days following the rapture. He overcomes three nations on his way toward dominance of an influential ten-nation

league. We know that he's an oily-tongued politician whose solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict makes him the most respected diplomat on earth. And we know that he, empowered by Satan himself, has ambitions—concealed at first—to become a god on earth, worshipped as the promised one, the Messiah.

There is more to the geopolitical nature of earth in the days following the rapture of the Church than the rise to power of one man, of course. One of the most frequently asked questions concerning prophecy is “Where does America fit into the last days?” It's a good question, considering how close we seem to be to the end and considering the current status of the United States as the last of the world's superpowers. Is it possible that Yahweh didn't know about us when he delivered His prophecies? In a word, no.

But there aren't any obvious scripture passages referring to a great nation beyond the western sea. Why is that? Don't we count? If the genealogy of the seven sons of Seir the Horite could be enumerated in such detail in Holy writ, why aren't Washington, Lincoln, and Chester A. Arthur given equal billing? The answer, obviously, is that the Bible is not a book *about* important events, history, prophecy, religion, good people, or bad people *per se*. It is, rather, a record of how Yahweh is saving his creation, the unfolding of His plan of redemption through His Son, Yahshua. That's why its narrative is restricted to stories and information that help explain who He is, what He accomplished, what is expected of us as a result, and what He has planned for our future. There are huge hunks of otherwise noteworthy human history that have absolutely nothing to do with any of that.

Thus the very nature of scripture dictates very good odds that when future events are prophesied, they'll have something to do with the nation of Israel, the Church, or Christ Himself, for these are Yahweh's chosen tools for achieving and communicating our redemption. In fact, people who have no contact with, or impact upon, the Jews—past or future—have little chance of being mentioned in the Bible, no matter how influential or infamous they are otherwise.

That being said, both Israel and Christians have played significant roles in the unfolding of U.S. history, such as it is. So it's not surprising that we tend to see ourselves in a generalized way in passages like the great commission: we are thankful to comprise one of “the uttermost parts of the earth.” Or we picture ourselves in obscure passages like the Psalm we explored earlier predicting the Holocaust: “**This will be written for the generation to come** [literally, ‘the last generation’], **that a people yet to be created may praise Yahweh.**” (Psalm 102:18) The

United States was instrumental in creating a homeland for the Jews after World War II, and we have been their staunchest ally (sometimes their only ally) for over half a century since then—even though we have often pressured them to do things contrary to their own national interests. We have supported them with our money, our munitions, and our prayers. Beyond that, the world’s largest concentrations of Bible-believing Christians live in America, though we’re a minority. Our founding fathers had the foresight to build religious freedom into our national structure, a concept that allowed Christianity to flourish as it had nowhere else on earth, even though it also allowed scores of false religions to flourish right alongside us. It’s the price we pay for the freedom to worship however and whomever we want.

Although there is no prophetic passage exclusively addressed to America, there is one—and only one—that is so striking in its descriptions that some expositors (like me) can’t help but see the United States in every line. Isaiah 18’s near-term application was to sub-Egyptian Africa (Cush, or Ethiopia) and their relationship to Assyria. But as we have seen, Yahweh often reveals prophecies with both near and far fulfillments in mind. It’s entirely possible that though already fulfilled in history, this one still has some life left in it. In fact, it seems obvious to me that Cush was only a whispered hint of the prophecy’s primary objective.

Isaiah wrote at a time when Assyria was emerging as the dominant world power. Egypt was at the time under the sway of its southern kingdom, Ethiopia—centered in today’s southern Egypt and Northern Sudan, stretching up the Nile from Aswan to Khartoum. (Modern Ethiopia was then known as Abyssinia.) They watched with trepidation as Assyria gobbled up one country after another, and were relieved beyond words when Sennacherib’s army was “pruned” by Yahweh at the gates of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. (see Isaiah 37). But Israel was warned not to enter into alliances with the anti-Assyrian government of Egypt, for they *would* be conquered by Assyria. (This happened in 671 B.C., by Esarhaddon.) Hence the “woe” in verse 1.

So the prophecy has seen an historical fulfillment already. But what about a secondary fulfillment? Is there one? I think there is. Let’s take this thing apart and look at it. **“Woe to the land shadowed with buzzing wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, which sends ambassadors by sea, even in vessels of reed on the waters, saying, ‘Go, swift messengers...’”** (Isaiah 18:1) This nation is identified as someone who sends ambassadors, or messengers (Hebrew *malak*—a word often used for angels). It is a land of “whirring wings,” as it says in the KJV—the single Hebrew word (*tsalatsal*) rendered “shadowed with buzzing” here is the same as that used for locusts. These days it’s hard to hear of whirring wings without thinking of helicopters—the quintessential American military machine. (Some commentators

have taken the questionable translation of “shadowed” and seen America’s national symbol, the spread-winged eagle. I don’t buy it.)

There is some confusion as to whether this nation is the sender of the following message (as it is rendered here in the New King James) or the recipient. The word “saying” isn’t actually there in the Hebrew, although supplying it is not necessarily incorrect. But since it makes more sense in the context of a secondary fulfillment, I’d like to suggest that this verse should read, **“Woe to the land of whirring wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, which sends ambassadors by sea, even in vessels of reed on the waters. Go, swift messengers....”** In other words, the land with the whirring wings is the same land as that described in the subsequent verses. The one against whom woe is pronounced is the same as that to whom the messengers (or is that angels?) are sent.

There’s another reason I think they may be the same. If you’ll recall, in the previous chapter I pointed out that Zephaniah 3:10, **“From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my worshipers, the daughter of My dispersed ones, shall bring My offering,”** clearly fit America like a glove, although it was true in a limited sense of Egypt’s southern kingdom, “Ethiopia,” as well. It seems that the phrase “beyond the rivers of Ethiopia” has a double meaning, a near and far perspective. These are the only two occurrences of this geographical description in scripture, however, so it’s hard to be dogmatic. At any rate, “woe” is pronounced, so it’s clear God is unhappy with them—it could be rendered “alas!” It’s as if Yahweh is in agony over their fate.

“Go, swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth of skin, to a people terrible from their beginning onward, a nation powerful and treading down, whose land the rivers divide....” If you look at several English translations here, you’ll notice a remarkable lack of unanimity. What the NKJV (and the NIV) renders as “tall and smooth of skin,” the KJV translates as “scattered and peeled.” What gives? *Mashak* means “to draw out,” hence either “tall” or “extended, stretched out, or scattered.” And *morat*, interestingly, means obstinate, in the sense of being independent. Somehow they also get “peeled” out of it. I would render the phrase **“a nation spread out and independent.”** Either way, it sounds like America to me. So does the rest of the description. America began its history by defeating the greatest military force on earth; Britain thought we were “terrible,” even if no one else did. We are definitely “powerful.” And what about “treading down?” The KJV renders it “meted out,” i.e. measured (which is primarily what *kavkav* means). No nation has *ever* been so thoroughly meted out.

And divided by rivers? Assyria, of course had both the Tigris and Euphrates running through it. But the description fits America as well. I once read a book called *River Horse* which chronicled the author’s river journey across the entire North American continent from east to west in a small boat, portaging only short

distances; the same sort of thing is possible going from the Gulf of Mexico to the Canadian border.

The description continues: **“All inhabitants of the world and dwellers on the earth: when he lifts up a banner on the mountains, you see it...”** The whole world is commanded to take note of something, and only by sorting out the pronouns can we perceive what that is. I believe the “he” here should actually read “He,” that is, Yahweh; and “you” refers to the subject nation being described. The key here is the word translated “banner.” According to Baker and Carpenter, the Hebrew *nes* means “a banner, a standard. It refers to a symbol or sign representing a cause, a person, or God. It indicates a pole on which to display something, a tragedy that could serve as a warning or a sign, or a symbol to rally around.” It’s the same word used for the pole lifted up in the wilderness for the healing of Israel (Numbers 21:8-9), which is in turn a picture or symbol of the cross (Greek *stauros* = “pole”) of Christ (cf. John 3:14). What Isaiah is saying, then, is that the sacrifice of Yahshua will be “seen” (*ra’ah*: beheld, perceived, considered, approved, and taken heed of) by this nation, and “all inhabitants of the world and dwellers on the earth” will identify this nation with that banner or standard. Again, America is a perfect fit: never has a nation’s history been shaped by its “taking heed” of the Cross as much as America’s. And even though we have fallen from the pure faith, the rest of the world still identifies us with this same symbol. It’s the very reason Muslims call America “the Great Satan.” They perceive us as a Christian nation, thus infidels and enemies to the cause of Islam. If only it were that simple.

“And when he [Yahweh] blows a trumpet, you [America] hear it....” In other words, Isaiah’s subject nation will hear and respond when Yahweh blows the trumpet. As we saw in chapter 8, God’s *shofar* blown on the Feast of Trumpets is the signal for His saints to join Him in the air—I believe this is referring to the rapture! And if I’m right, America is being characterized as *the* nation who, more than any other, will “hear” (Hebrew *shama*: to hear intelligently with attention or obedience: to call or gather together, consent, consider, or give ear to) the trumpet calling Yahweh’s people home.

“For so Yahweh said to me, ‘I will take My rest, and I will look from My dwelling place like clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest....’” I love the way the New Living Translation puts this: **“I will watch quietly from my dwelling place—as quietly as the heat rises on a summer day, or as the dew forms on an autumn morning during the harvest....”** God will unfold His plan quietly and calmly, in His own good time. He doesn’t panic; He doesn’t get excited. He knows exactly what He’s doing, and why. He has His own timetable, and He’s right on schedule. Significantly, He has also indicated that the rapture of His saints will occur “during the harvest,” in the autumn of the year, at the Feast of Trumpets.

Okay, so what is He doing? First, ask yourself if you see America in these verses. You do? Then hang on to your hat. Here comes the bad news. **“For before the harvest, when the bud is perfect and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, He will both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks and take away and cut down the branches. They will be left together for the mountain birds of prey and for the beasts of the earth; the birds of prey will summer on them, and all the beasts of the earth will winter on them.”** (Isaiah 18:2-6) That’s right. America is going to get “pruned” like an unruly and diseased grapevine. Yahweh is going to take some things away from us that we thought were promising. He’ll do it for our own good, because He loves us, but that doesn’t mean it won’t hurt. Birds in scripture are a common metaphor for evil. What Isaiah seems to be saying is that the evil influences around us will prosper at our expense, benefiting from our national misfortune, perhaps taking the opportunity to kick us while we’re down. “Beasts” is the Hebrew *behemah*, meaning mute—it’s therefore normally used of “dumb” animals like cattle. These *behemah* take over where the birds left off, surviving the “winter” on the “branches” Yahweh has pruned. This seems to mean (at least to me) that those who don’t have a voice, those whose place in the world is quiet service, will somehow be nourished by the results of God’s pruning.

Why would the Vinedresser cut off sprigs that already have grapes budding out on them? Isn’t any fruit good fruit? No, not if the branch is endangering the vine. If it’s diseased, or even if it has merely grown so large the vine can’t support it—can’t bring nourishment to it without compromising the entire plant—then the vinedresser would be wise indeed to cut it back. In the previous chapter, Isaiah put it all into perspective: **“Because you have forgotten the God of your salvation, and have not been mindful of the Rock of your stronghold, therefore you will plant pleasant plants and set out foreign seedlings; In the day you will make your plant to grow, and in the morning you will make your seed to flourish. But the harvest will be a heap of ruins in the day of grief and desperate sorrow.”** (Isaiah 17:10-11)

Who among us is so blind that he can’t see that America has picked up a nasty blight? Who would deny that we as a nation have “forgotten the God of our salvation?” If Isaiah 18 is talking about America, (and I firmly believe it is: SF1) then we should be prepared to see our nation get pruned back—severely. To use a more familiar metaphor for us non-agricultural types, America has a cancer that’s growing out of control and threatening to kill our entire nation. Yahweh has already tried all the standard non-invasive procedures, and nothing has worked. So now He must operate—surgically remove the tumors of sin from our land. It won’t be pleasant, but if that’s what it takes to save us, may God’s will be done.

But notice something else. When is Yahweh going to get out His pruning hook? “Before the harvest.” It’s possible—even probable, considering the remarks made in verses 3 and 4 about trumpets and harvests—that this means

America is going to get clipped back *before* the rapture (which is aptly described as a harvest of souls). Why? Because “He is not willing that *any* should perish.” God wants to have the biggest harvest possible—a bumper crop. To do that, the vine needs to be healthy. A moment ago, I flippantly called this the “bad news.” It’s not, not really. God cares enough about us to attend to our needs, even if it’s painful. That’s *good* news. It could be worse; He could rip us out by the roots, like He did Sodom, or abandon us to our own fate, as He apparently has today’s Europeans who have abandoned Him. But no. The divine Vinedresser cares enough about America to snip and prune and cut away at the unhealthy growth until the nation that once “heeded His banner” regains her vitality.

That being said, even if the pruning begins before the Church is harvested, the *ultimate* “harvest” of which Isaiah speaks is surely inclusive of the final separation of God’s people from those who choose to reject Him at the second coming of Yahshua—years after the rapture. Indeed, that very picture is used in one of Christ’s parables, where the Kingdom of Heaven is compared to a field in which both good grain and weeds are growing. Yahshua explained: **“He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”** (Matthew 13:37-43)

If the “harvest” referred to in Isaiah 18 is ultimately the end of the age, then America can expect to get pruned back anytime between now and the end of the Tribulation, and more vigorously as the Day approaches. America has gotten used to the idea of having God’s blessing and protection 24/7 ’cause we held the world’s moral high ground (such as it is) for so long. But in case you didn’t notice, we left that place—of our own accord—when we took God out of our public life. In a nation that prides itself on freedom of speech, it has become practically *illegal* to say we’re “one nation under God.” Another symptom of our illness has been our uneven handling of our support for Israel. Sure, we’re her staunchest ally, but at the same time, we’ve all too often asked—no, *demand*—that she not defend herself against Islamic aggression, threatening to take away with our left hand what we’ve given with our right.

What, precisely, do I mean by “pruning?” No, I don’t think we’re going to lose California and Arizona back to Mexico (as poetic as that might be). September 11, 2001 showed us all what can happen when Yahweh removes his protection from us for one brief moment. We lost 3,000 of our best and brightest,

along with a symbol of our financial preeminence and national pride. The experience reminded some Americans that there is a God, though God Himself had nothing to do with the attack except refusing to miraculously prevent it. Hurricane Katrina is another example of what it might mean to get pruned. It's painful surgery on a national scale that has the potential to make us stronger in the end by waking us up to the reality of our situation. The question is: how many branches will America have to lose before we're healthy again?

Remember what I said about the evil birds and the beasts of the earth being nourished in turn by God's pruning? As far as 9/11 is concerned, the cause of Islam—its irrational hatred for Christians and Jews—was “fed” for a while by this attack on our nation. But now, it's the time of the *behemah*. I am one of those “beasts,” these formerly “silent ones.” The treachery of Islam started me on a crusade for truth that has led me step by step to this present work. And I am not alone.

Before we leave the subject of America, I'd like to consider one more verse—the one immediately preceding the passage we've just explored. The context is judgment upon the nations, but if the shoe fits.... **“Then behold, at eventide, trouble! And before the morning, he is no more. This is the portion of those who plunder us [that is, Israel], and the lot of those who rob us.”** (Isaiah 17:14) Pop quiz. Who has plundered and robbed Israel in the last half century? *Oh, that's an easy one, you say. The Egyptians, the Syrians, the Jordanians, the Palestinians—in other words, the Muslims.*

Are you sure? Oh, they've tried, all right. But every time they've attacked Israel, they've lost far more than they gained. Yahweh has seen to that. So why aren't Israel's borders any bigger than they are? After all, at one time they controlled all of the Sinai Peninsula and half of Lebanon. Why did they give these strategic buffers back so they could be used as launching pads for invasion? Out of the goodness of their hearts? No. It was because of political pressure from the one nation on earth in a position to bring it to bear: the United States of America. We threatened to cut them off without support, leaving them without a friend in the world, if they didn't give their war gains back to their attackers. And why would we apply this pressure? For the prospect of cheap Arab oil and hollow promises of peace from people who are commanded by their religion to kill every Jew who falls under their control. Did we forget that Yahweh promised to “bless those who bless you [the Jews], and...curse him who curses you?” Did we ever really believe it? Or are our elected leaders merely paying lip service to God?

Even as I write these words, the most vocally “Christian” President to come along in many years is applying pressure on Israel to give up the West Bank to the Muslims, a move that without divine intervention would eventually spell certain death for the Nation of Israel. He has already succeeded in forcing them to

abandon the Gaza Strip to the Palestinians. And if you don't see the connection, remember this: Gush Katif was surrendered to the Muslims just hours before New Orleans was sacrificed to Hurricane Katrina. It didn't have to happen. It is *we* who are plundering and robbing the Jews. Sackcloth and ashes are in order here; it's time to repent.

The prophet Isaiah finishes chapter 18 by reprising the description of the subject nation, but with a twist: all is not lost—we will not be utterly uprooted. Ryrie points out that both of the “froms” in this verse should be omitted—they're not in the Hebrew text: **“In that time a present will be brought to Yahweh of hosts: (From) a nation spread out and independent, and (from) a people terrible from their beginning onward, a nation powerful and treading down, whose land the rivers divide—to the place of the name of Yahweh of hosts, to Mount Zion.”** (Isaiah 18:7) This nation, this judiciously pruned grapevine, will not *send* a gift; they will *be* a gift, presented to Yahweh. Note that the “present” (Hebrew *shay*: a gift presented in homage), this nation we've identified as America, will not only be given to Yahweh, it will be “brought to” Him. The Hebrew *yabal* means to bring, to bear or carry along, to lead or conduct. It can also connote deliverance. If I'm not mistaken, Isaiah is once again referring to both the rapture and the final gathering of Tribulation martyrs and survivors at the commencement of the Millennium—the times of the harvest. We have tons of information to cover before we get to that place in our study, however. So for now, just take note that the subject of the prophecy, America—as a nation—will comprise this gift presented in homage to Yahweh. But remember, the passage began with “woe.” We have a whole lot of repenting to do first. Through His pruning of our nation, the removal of the diseased and unruly parts of the vine, Yahweh is encouraging us to do that very thing. We will be fruitful, or we will find ourselves cut off. Yahweh has spoken.

Even if the U.S. weren't to be drastically trimmed back with Yahweh's pruning shears before the rapture, it most certainly will be afterward. No nation can afford to lose such a large percentage of its most faithful citizens (whatever that percentage might be) and expect to pick up the pieces without missing a beat. I mean, if God were planning to rapture only repeat felons and their lawyers, it might be a different story. Nobody would miss them much. But the people who meet Yahshua in the air will be the backbone of American society. They aren't necessarily the richest or most successful, the most powerful or influential, but they tend to be folks who are willing to show up for work every day intending to give a full day's labor for a full day's pay. They aren't working the angles or trying to figure out how to beat the system, but are rather content to serve their

employers or clients with the same enthusiasm and dedication they would display if they were working for Yahshua Himself, because they know that in the end, they are.

There are people like that in other countries, of course, just as there are non-Christians in America who behave in more or less the same responsible way (though not for the same reasons). I'm obviously speaking in sweeping generalities. My point is that the United States will be affected more directly and more dramatically by the rapture than any other country. And when you're the world's only superpower, the ramifications are serious. The geopolitical balance of power will begin shifting away from America almost immediately after the rapture (if not before)—subtly at first, and more markedly as time goes on.

But shift to whom? Who is ready to fill America's role as the big dog on the block, for good or ill? Russia would like to fill the gap, and they'll always be a force to be reckoned with, but after enduring seventy years of Communist rule, they've lost the ability to think like world leaders. Now they find it hard enough trying to run their own fragmented country. China? It's certainly large enough and belligerent enough, but the idea of dominating the world is foreign to them, at least for now. (But things change: stay tuned.) They have always been an introspective people, and their new brand of communo-capitalism has focused their attention on their own issues and opportunities more than ever. Sub-Saharan Africa is, between AIDS and genocidal wars, seemingly bent on self-destruction. South America can't seem to get its act together, as much as they might like to.

That leaves two candidates: Europe and the house of Islam. The Islamic nations, mostly in the Middle East, will play a unique and largely unforeseen part in the unfolding of the Last Days. They have both an historic agenda of world domination and a major role to play in Biblical end-times prophecy. But because Islam is so thoroughly misunderstood, I would like to save the discussion of this whole subject for a separate chapter.

Although most Americans are blissfully unaware of the fact, Europe *is* a viable contender for the title of "future superpower." Several lines of inquiry lead us to this conclusion. Historically, and especially for the last half millennium, Europe has been the most expansionist region on the planet. World conquest is in their blood. Spain, France and Germany held vast tracts of land outside their borders. And even smaller nations like Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Portugal extended their influence and dominance over far-flung empires. And we have already seen that part of Europe, specifically ten nations once within the Roman Empire, will comprise the Antichrist's seat of power when he appears.

How does all this square with present reality? Perfectly. Why? Ask the French. For some reason, they got tired of getting pummeled by Germany every thirty years or so. As early as 1929, their Prime Minister Aristide Briand proposed

a political integration of Europe. After World War II, Winston Churchill (equally tired of having to bail the French out) said, “We must now build a kind of United States of Europe.” He went on to say, “The first step must be a partnership between France and Germany.” Actually, the first step would turn out to be the Benelux agreement—an economic union of sorts between three small western European monarchies—Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg—implemented in 1947-48, a union that proved to be the precursor to today’s 27-member European Union.

Europe was coming to the realization that unless they banded together—politically, economically, and even militarily—they would continue to find reasons to kill each other. In recent years the focus has shifted toward countering the growing dominance of the United States, a nation Europe has increasingly come to regard as its own willful child, grown too strong to be trusted and too independent to be reliable as an ally—“a nation spread out and independent, and a people terrible from their beginning onward, a nation powerful and treading down,” as Isaiah put it. Today, Europe sees America’s penchant for acting unilaterally in its own interests as arrogance—a dangerous tendency that precipitates disillusionment and fear among its fellow nations. With the implosion of the Soviet empire, Europe has come to feel that America needs to be countered by another superpower to keep our imperialist tendencies in check—how’s *that* for hypocrisy? It’s ironic, really. If only they knew how much the average American citizen detests the foreign adventures in which we find ourselves embroiled, whether for our own survival, the arrogance of our politicians, or because of our Judeo-Christian humanitarian ideals.

For our part, Americans have a hard time taking Europe seriously, finding it impossible to forget that we were forced to risk our life like a reluctant policeman *twice* during the last century in an effort to quell Europe’s self-inflicted turmoil. Now, when Europe insists on peace at any price, chiding us for defending ourselves against terrorists and attempting to forcefully impose peace, or at least order, on implacable enemies in other parts of the world, we can’t help rolling our eyes. How can a region that has known little but war for the last two thousand years possibly presume to be the arbiters of peace?

Another factor in the rise of a unified Europe is what I’d call the gang mentality—it’s the same reason inner city kids join street gangs, whether or not they like what goes on among the membership. It has to do with safety in numbers and a sense of belonging. In the same way that Alabama or Massachusetts couldn’t wield much international clout as independent states, neither could Sweden or Luxembourg. But as “states” in the European Union, they are a part of something larger, more significant. Suddenly, they wield power, if only vicariously.

The European Union isn't quite "there" yet. They have not adopted a Europe-wide constitution, although polls indicate that two-thirds of the Union's populace would favor such a move. Nor has every member nation switched to the Union's common currency, the Euro; Britain is conspicuously absent from the list of nations using it. But the EU has nevertheless become an economic powerhouse—their combined GDP is eighty percent of that of the United States, and growing. The U.S. Federal Reserve and the European Central Banks are poised to compete for control of the international monetary system. (That in itself is a truly scary thought.) But most people in the United States are oblivious to the challenge Europe poses to their position at the top of the geopolitical hill.

What would it take to tip the scales? A few more September 11 or Katrina-style events? A few more unwinnable military adventures? The sudden disappearance of every Christian in the country? Yeah, *that* would do it. Especially if the "right" man were poised to take the reins in Europe, pull it all together, and rally the troops. America would not only slip into second place, I have a feeling many would feel relieved to be there. *It's lonely at the top. Maybe if we weren't the world's policeman, people wouldn't hate us so much.*

What started out as the Benelux Customs Union eventually became the European Common Market and then the European Economic Community. It is now called the European Union. Why the shift? Because their cooperation is now more than economic; it is becoming increasingly political—and military. The EU's own military force has been an operational reality since late 2001. Tasked with humanitarian and rescue missions, crisis management, and "peacekeeping," the force is mandated to be capable of keeping 60,000 troops in the field for up to a year, which implies a standing army 180,000 strong. There is provision for a moderate air force, as well as a small navy—including four aircraft carriers, one each from France, Britain, Germany, and Spain.

The EU's new military is an outgrowth of a joint U.K.-French declaration signed at St. Malo in December 1998, which bluntly stated that the EU should have the capability for "autonomous action backed up by credible military forces." But doesn't that already exist with NATO? Indeed. In fact, many of the resources mentioned are tasked to both the EU and NATO. But the stated European goal is to be able to project power without relying on support from the U.S. Although NATO and the ESDP (European Security and Defense Policy) intend to work hand in hand, it remains to be seen what will happen if and when disagreements arise.

Europe has clearly made its first moves toward the kind of confederation required in Biblical prophecy. In the months following the rapture, expect their situation to quickly fall into line with what the prophets predicted: a ten-nation alliance will be formed from nations situated within the old Roman empire. My

guess (SF3), based on the scriptural evidence, is that the Antichrist will engineer a Balkan Confederacy capable of functioning like a single large nation within the European Union. Within this confederacy, three of the original nations will cease to be independent political entities, but rather will be joined under one national flag. Leading this confederacy—and through it, all of Europe—will be a leader so charismatic and brilliant, the entire world will sit up and take notice. His proven and unprecedented ability to impose peace on traditionally hostile parties will thrust him to the forefront of international diplomacy. If I'm right, the Antichrist's Balkan superstate will serve as a model for solving the unprecedented problems of a new Europe that is now as fragmented as the Balkans had been, with large Muslim immigrant minorities that have consistently failed—or refused—to assimilate into the cultures of their host nations. The Antichrist's apparent successes on his home turf will make him Europe's Messiah figure *du jour*—and then the world's.

Meanwhile, America will have taken its first steps toward its new status as a second-tier world power. This, of course, will distress some Americans no end. Their politicians and military professionals will find it hard to take a back seat to anyone, especially the Europeans. But in the end, with its economy in shambles and its leadership in disarray, America will join Russia in the has-been section, biding its time and waiting for an opportunity to regain its former glory.

Once the rapture scene has been performed, the curtain will fall upon earth; the house lights will dim. And the stagehands—the politicians, the media stars, and the robe-wearing religious establishment—will quickly busy themselves setting the world's stage for the final act. Unfortunately, they don't really understand what the play is all about, for everybody who comprehended the script has exited stage right, and the Playwright is nowhere to be seen. But the show must go on. Cue the Antichrist...