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THIS NATION UNDER GOD-- IN BIBLE PROPHECY

C. Mervyn Maxwell

The Bible clearly predicted the rise of the United States and reveals what is going to happen to it.

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What do you plan to do next weekend? Panel the family room? Take the kids on a picnic? Relax?

The book of Revelation at the back of your Bible may seem far removed from hammers, sandwiches, or daydreaming; but if it really means what many Christians think it does, it could have a lot to say about what you'll be doing come next Friday night.

For over a century now, careful students of Bible prophecy have believed that chapter 13 of Revelation refers to the United States of America, with profound personal implications for every individual on earth. So far there is good reason to think their interpretation is correct.

It will take you a few minutes, fifteen perhaps, to read this report; but when you get through, you may think it your best quarter hour so far in the Bicentennial.

Bible Prophets and Ancient Empires

In order to grasp so important a theme, it will be helpful to go back in history and lay a framework for understanding.

Centuries ago God had His prophets record messages about the nations of their own day and of their immediate future. Isaiah, for one, prophesied about ancient Assyria. Daniel wrote about the empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, and about the nations of Europe that live today where Rome used to rule. What they—and other prophets—wrote about these countries was not "political" in the ordinary sense but dealt with the relationship each nation held with the people of God. On the face of it, it seems at least reasonable to suppose that a Bible prophet must have been inspired to write about the United States of America, the great nation of the last days that has had so close an affinity with Christianity.

Sometimes prophets called countries by their common names, and sometimes they saw them in vision symbolized as animals. Nowadays Russia is a bear and England is a lion. In Bible times, Babylon was a lion, Persia was a bear, Greece was a

leopard, and the powerful Roman Empire was sometimes a dragon (and sometimes an indescribable monster) with seven heads and ten horns. The identity of these "beasts" and "horns" is perfectly clear. For example, Daniel 7:23 says, "The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom." "The rough goat is the king of Grecia," says Daniel 8:21. "The ten horns . . . are ten kings that shall arise," says Daniel 7:24. And so on.

World Powers in Revelation

Now, two additional animals are introduced in Revelation 13. In some ways they are different from each other, in some ways they are strikingly similar, and in the end the second one cooperates with the first.

1. The first of these symbolic beasts of Revelation 13 comes to view *rising up out of the sea*; the second appears *rising out of the earth*.

2. The first is a strange leopard which, like the dragon of Rome, has seven heads and ten horns, with crowns on the horns. The second animal's form is not described in detail except that it is said to have only two horns and *neither* of them wears a crown.

3. The first beast is given its *authority* and "*seat*" by the dragon of Revelation 12; the second beast *talks like the dragon*.

4. The first beast blasphemes and persecutes, but after carrying on its warfare against God for 42 months, it suffers a "wound" that appears deadly but from which it recovers. The second beast *subsequently* erects an "image" to the first beast and compels everyone in the world to worship it under pain of death. As part of its campaign of religious coercion, it causes fire to come down from heaven, gives to the image life and the power of speech, and orders everyone to receive the "mark of the beast" or be denied the right to buy and sell.

In order to understand the second beast—which is the one thought to represent the United States of America—it is necessary to identify the first one first, and happily this

really isn't difficult. It (a) gets its power from the dragon, (b) persecutes, (c) has ten crowned horns, and (d) flourishes 42 months. The dragon, of course, is ultimately the devil (Revelation 20:2); but in Revelation 12:3, 4 it is a symbol of the world empire through which the devil attempted to destroy Jesus Christ, and everyone knows that this was the Roman Empire. Herod the Great, who tried to kill Jesus as a baby, and Pontius Pilate, who crucified Him as a man, were both Roman operatives. It is interesting to learn that early church fathers like Tertullian and Victorinus, men who actually lived during the days of the Roman Empire, recognized this interpretation, as also have numerous other Christians in later periods.

The 42 months are to be equated with the 1260 days of Revelation 11:3 and 12:6; thus, 42 (months) X 30 (days in a month) = 1260 (days or years). In prophecies where symbolic beasts and horns represent literal kings and nations, symbolic days represent literal years. See Ezekiel 4:6. That the 1260 days do represent 1260 years was recognized as early as the twelfth century by Joachim of Flores, a devout and influential Roman Catholic monk; and it was taught later by Martin Luther, the Protestant Reformer, Isaac Newton, the scientist, and many other Christian thinkers.

Now a nation that persecutes and blasphemes has to be to some degree a religious power. This leads us to the question, What religious power, important enough to be mentioned in the Bible, grew out of the Roman Empire, was composed in some sense of "ten kings," persecuted, reigned for 1260 years, and then received—and recovered from—"a deadly wound"?

Well, as the Roman Empire grew old, it bisected itself for easier administration into two great eastern and western divisions. The decline continued, particularly in the west; and as the vast reaches of Western Rome lay panting with old age in the fifth century AD, its body was carved alive by invading Germanic tribesmen. In the course of time, these vigorous new

peoples—the “ten kings” of our prophecy—erected the nations of modern Europe. In the year 476 one of them deposed the final Roman emperor, the boy-ruler Romulus Augustulus, and set up one of their own number as king in his place.

Some of the invading tribes were Catholic; others were Arian Christians who denied the deity of Jesus and defied the authority of the pope. For a few decades Italy was controlled by Heruli and Ostrogoths, who were Arians and who therefore interfered with the plans of the Catholic bishop of Rome. In 533 the emperor of the eastern half of the empire—the remainder of the Roman “dragon”—dispatched an army from Constantinople that effectively destroyed the Arian powers and by the year 538 virtually vouchsafed control of the city of Rome (the “seat” of the “dragon”) to the Roman Catholics. As predicted centuries before, the dragon had turned over to the Christian church “his power, and his seat, and great authority.” Revelation 13:2.

Many factors, political, military, and economic, have divided the nations of

Europe from that day to this; but for over a thousand years one great factor united these “ten kings,” and this was their common acceptance of Catholic Christianity together with their veneration of the pope as their universal spiritual father. In effect, the Catholic Church was the most conspicuous religious and even political power in Europe for a very long time. Tragically, in the rough and tumble of the Middle Ages, even the medieval church partook of the spirit of its age and, especially from the twelfth century onward, persecuted “heretics” with astonishing enthusiasm. (This sin does not lie, of course, only at the door of Catholics. When the Reformation began in 1517, Lutherans and Calvinists, who were persecuted by Catholics, in their turn persecuted Anabaptists and Unitarians.) The frenzy of persecution and counter-persecution reached a peak of fury in the terrible Thirty Years’ War, 1618-1648, during which Catholic and Protestant armies are said to have destroyed one third of the population of Europe!

Fortunately, a reaction set in: European statesmen resolved never again to commit their nations to defend the Christian faith. The scientific Enlightenment in Germany, the British Evangelical Awakening, and the French Revolution also worked, for better or for worse, to undermine the influence of Catholicism as a unifying and guiding force in the affairs of Europe. The church’s long decline in power reached a dramatic climax in the year 1798. On the morning of February 15, 1798, French soldiers under General Berthier entered the Sistine chapel in Rome, arrested the gentlemanly but powerless Pope Pius VI, and carried him off to die in exile the following year. Not one nation in Europe rose to the pope’s defense. I have personally read the diary of Prime Minister Manuel de Godoy of Spain, the most staunchly Catholic country in Europe. The capture of the pope meant nothing at all, even to him! With the death of the pope, most of Europe assumed that the Catholic Church itself was dead.

Here without question, precisely 1260 years after 538, was the “deadly wound” of Revelation 13:3.

But, the Bible says, the deadly wound would be healed. For over a century the Catholic Church lay gagged, bound in bandages of relative helplessness. But no one today would say that the Catholic Church is dead and helpless, least of all in the strongest of all Christian nations, the United States of America. And this brings us to the second “beast” of Revelation 13.

The Beast With the Crownless Horns

The most conspicuous differences between the second beast and the first are (a) that the second one comes up out of the earth instead of out of the sea, and (b) that it has only two horns, which are lamblike and wear no crowns.

Most of the symbolic animals in the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation were associated at first with water in some form or other. The ram of Daniel 8 stood by a “river.” The beast that carried the woman of Revelation 17 stood in a lake of “many waters.” And the lion, bear, leopard, and seven-headed monster of Daniel 7 which we mentioned a few moments ago came up out of the “sea”—while “the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea.” One can almost hear the crash of breakers and see the wind catch at the salt spray and hurl it in their faces.

Because the various beasts are symbols, we expect the waters also to be symbolic; and we are right. “The waters,” says Revelation 17:15, “are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.”

How appropriate! Like most other empires since time began, the ones we have named rose to prominence in the populated areas of the earth. Assyria and Babylon, for example, and to some extent Persia resulted from successive jockeying for leadership over the inhabitants of the famous Emerald Crescent of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley and the eastern Mediterranean coastland. The great medieval church likewise exerted its influence in populated areas, this time in Europe.

Of course! How could it be otherwise? World powers are composed of people, and naturally exist where people live.

But the second beast of Revelation



13 defies the ordinary and begins its career not in the "sea" but in the "earth"!

And what great nation of history did in actual fact commence its astonishing rise to world prominence in a conspicuously *under-inhabited* portion of the planet?

Without a doubt, the United States of America.

The Puritans of Massachusetts aptly styled their mission to America an "errand into the wilderness." And how appropriate was the text chosen by preacher William Symonds on April 25, 1609, for the settlers in Southwark, Virginia: "The Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: and I will make of thee a great nation."¹

So much for rising up "out of the earth." How fitting, now, that America should have been symbolized further by an animal with two uncrowned horns "like a lamb." The 1976 Bicentennial celebrates the founding of "a state without a king and a church without a pope."

The second half of that familiar slogan demands explaining. The popes of the medieval church claimed openly to be temporal (political) princes as well as spiritual princes, and they and their bishops unapologetically pursued their political ambitions and enforced their religious convictions with equal zeal.

As the new nation became established, Catholics, Anglicans (renamed Episcopalians), and even Methodists ordained resident American bishops, but the U.S. Constitution provided that no religion or religious leader could employ the power of the state to compel religious conformity. They were bishops in name, but a whole new breed in actual power. Here then, truly, was a "state without a king and a church without a pope." Two uncrowned horns, "like a lamb."

A lamb is characteristically gentle, its horns virtually harmless. But this second beast with the lamblike horns was heard in prophetic vision to speak "like a dragon." How tragic!

An "Image" That Lives

After telling us that this second

And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.

And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.

And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast.

And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?

And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.

And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven.

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.

And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

beast talks like a dragon the Bible explains the phrase by saying that it "exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed." Here, incidentally, we have a time reference. The dragonlike activity of the United States is to follow the healing of the Catholic deadly wound.

The Bible continues: "And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men" and persuades the people of earth to "make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both

speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed."

Here is a prediction of persecution. But first: What is the "image of the beast"? Some modern translations instead of image give the word "idol." No matter. In any case it cannot be a literal idol. Beasts, horns, waters, days, and the deadly wound are all symbolic. The image, or idol, is symbolic too.

The Greek word underlying "image" in Revelation 13 is used also in the Greek translation of Genesis 1:26, where God makes man in His own "image." In Genesis chapters 1 and 2, when God made man in His own image, He first formed him of the dust of the ground and then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul. Here in Revelation 13 the United States sets up something similar to the old medieval Catholic Church, then breathes into it the breath of life, and gives it a voice of authority to compel conformity to its dictates.

The picture presented is not one of the Catholic Church itself reviving its own former persecuting ways, but of the United States of America setting up some new mediievallike religious-political combination that effectually harasses consciences.

The "Mark of the Beast"

Revelation 13 continues: "He causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast."

Much speculation has centered on the dread term, "mark of the beast." Some recent translations, influenced by this speculation, talk of a tattoo or brand; and some recent books have concluded that it will be just that, a literal brand on literal foreheads and on literal right hands. But like the "image" of the beast, the mark cannot be literal. The beasts are symbolic. The waters are symbolic. The horns are symbolic. The wound is symbolic. The healing of the wound is symbolic. It follows that the mark is symbolic too, and that it is not literally stamped on the skin of people's foreheads but is implanted (far more significantly) in

their minds and carried out in the activities of their lives.

It remains, then, for us to solve the question, What does the mark of the beast symbolize?

In order to answer this, we must first remember what the beast is. It is the Roman Catholic Church—as an institutionalized church, mind you. We are not talking about individuals within the church. Martin Luther, for all his anti-Catholicism, allowed the possibility that even popes could be sincere, godly men! It behooves every Protestant to realize that there are Christians in the Catholic Church fully as sincere and possibly more godly than he is.

Now what is the “mark” of a system or institution? In view of the symbolism we are dealing with here, it must be an outstanding characteristic. At the same time it must be, in this case, a characteristic that can be effectively implanted in people’s minds and carried out in the activities of their lives.

What is a basic characteristic or mark of the Roman Catholic church? To help answer this, let’s look again at the ten-horned “beast” which represents Rome in the book of Daniel, chapter 7. This animal represents both the Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church, for out of its head (the empire) there rises, among the ten horns (the nations of Europe), a further horn (the church) which dominates the others and develops eyes and a mouth. This new horn was seen in vision to “wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws; and they shall be given into his hand,” the Bible says, “until a time and times and the dividing of time.” Daniel 7:25.

The chronological reference clinches the identification of this horn as the Catholic Church. Comparison with Daniel 12:7; Revelation 11:1-3; and Revelation 12:6, 14 shows that “time” [= one year] plus “times” [= two years] plus a “dividing of time” [= half a year] is the same as the 42 months, and the 1260 symbolic days.

So prophecy saw that the medieval Christian church would “think” to “change” God’s laws—and in the twentieth century we find the Catholic Church astonishingly candid about

claiming to have done that very thing.

“The Church . . . instituted, by God’s authority, Sunday as the day of worship,” wrote Martin J. Scott a few years ago in *Things Catholics Are Asked About*. (New York: P. J. Kenney Sons, 1927, p. 136.) At the turn of the century, a well-known Catholic author, Father T. Enright, CSsR, repeatedly offered \$1000 “to anyone who can prove to me from the Bible alone that I am bound, under grievous sin, to keep Sunday holy. It was the Catholic Church,” he explained, “which made the law obliging us to keep Sunday holy. . . . The Catholic Church abolished not only the Sabbath, but all the other Jewish festivals.”²

No Christian of any persuasion has ever claimed Enright’s \$1000. Indeed

And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.

And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.

And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.

And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads:

And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.

Philip Carrington, Anglican archbishop of Quebec, is only one of many non-Catholics who have virtually endorsed the Catholic claim. According to a newspaper report, he “sent local clergymen into a huddle” one day by declaring to a hushed and solemn audience of fellow non-Catholics that “nowhere in the Bible is it laid down that worship should be done on Sunday.” Sunday was made a day of worship not by the Bible, he declared, but by *tradition*.³

Over the centuries millions of Christians have adopted Sunday worship as a birthright without intending for a moment to “change” the law of God. For them Sunday keeping has not really been rebellion against God; instead, with simplicity and innocence, it has been (in their own eyes) a symbol of their earnest dedication to God.

But serious reflection puts Sunday keeping in a very different light. The Bible says, “I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctify them.” Ezekiel 20:12. The Sabbath commandment is one of the Ten Commandments! It is a special sign (or mark) that God has chosen to designate His true people as His own! How brazen for anyone deliberately to change the Ten Commandments! How sadly sinful for a church to change them! Here indeed is the “mark” of the church-gone-wrong.

A chief characteristic of the church at its worst, then, is that instead of teaching obedience to God’s law it teaches disobedience. Paul was aware that this tendency was beginning among Christians even in New Testament times and sounded the alarm: “The mystery of lawlessness is already at work.” 2 Thessalonians 2:7, RSV.

In the second and third centuries the principal argument used by Christian writers to oppose Sabbath and introduce Sunday was that Christ was the new law and in Him there was no longer need to keep the fourth commandment. What a tragic misapplication of the cross! “Sin is the transgression of the law,” says 1 John 3:4. Jesus died that sinners might be forgiven their transgressions, not that they might be emboldened to go on transgressing! “Think not that I have come



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to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished." Matthew 5:17, 18, RSV.

The Image and Mark in the United States

The picture that emerges from our study is that one of these days the United States of America, that grand bulwark of freedom, will set up a religiopolitical situation analogous to the medieval church of Europe and through it persecute those who insist conscientiously on keeping holy the day God made holy in the Ten Commandments, and who refuse to keep holy a day God never made holy.

Is such a development possible?

It has already happened—to a limited extent, that is; and there is no reason to believe that it will not happen more fully in the future. The other prophecies we have studied have been fulfilled or are in the process of fulfillment. Why not this one?

Perhaps by coincidence, it was only two years after America's first centennial that a protracted persecution began against the then very limited number of Christian Sabbath keepers in the United States. "Before me,"

wrote J. N. Loughborough about thirty years later, "is a list of one hundred and sixteen arrests of Seventh-day Adventists in America, from the year 1878 to March, 1896. Of these," he went on, "one hundred and nine were convicted. Many of these have been imprisoned from twenty to sixty days, and about a dozen of them were compelled to work in the 'chain gang' with murderers, thieves, and the worst sort of criminals."⁴

Statistics are impersonal. Stories about the hundred and nine who were convicted then—and the many others who have been convicted since—are not impersonal. You can read many of these stories in *Dateline Sunday, U.S.A.*, by Warren L. Johns.⁵

Appeals to the United States Supreme Court through the years have brought mixed interpretations of the First Amendment. One of the more frightening was the majority decision against a Mr. Braunfeld, an orthodox Jew who operated a small business in Philadelphia and whose conscience compelled him to close on Saturday. When a Sunday law required him to close on the first day of the week as well, he was threatened with ruin. The Supreme Court, frankly admitting that his religious convictions were involved and that endorsement of the law would "render appellant Braun-

feld unable to continue in his business, thereby losing his capital investment," nonetheless voted 6-3 to enforce the law against him.

America's Future and You

The issue at stake is not merely whether a Sabbath keeper can make a living. The real issue is where you choose to stand in relation to the Ten Commandments, to sin, and to the Jesus Christ who died on the cross to forgive you and to give you victory over sin.

Now that you have read this article, what will you do next weekend? Will you carry on with whatever plans you had to panel the family room, or take the kids on a picnic, or just relax and do nothing? Or will you read the evidence again and decide to keep God's Sabbath holy as a day of worship, whatever the price may be?

FOOTNOTES

1. Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, p. 16.
2. In a letter addressed to "Dear Friend" and dated, "St. Alphonsus' (Rock) Church, 1115 North Grand Avenue, St. Louis, June, 1905."
3. News Item, *Albertan* (Calgary, Alberta, Canada), Oct. 28, 1949.
4. *The Great Second Advent Movement* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1905), p. 452.
5. *Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1967.* ◇