

RESURGENT GERMANY: A FOURTH REICH?

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As the German nation moves to the forefront of European politics, many are wondering whether history will soon repeat itself. The pages of history and your Bible agree on the answer!

What is Germany's future? Bible prophecy illuminates German history to offer important clues!

Germany has made astounding strides since the end of World War II. In 1945, the entire nation—broken into East and West—lay prostrate in defeat, its dreams of world conquest foiled, its economy ravaged and its cities reduced to rubble.

Six decades later, the German economy has rebounded. Again joined into one powerful nation, it is among the world's largest and strongest. Its wages and standard of living are among the world's highest. Its former militarism appears to have been replaced by peaceful democracy—which 60 years ago would have been unthinkable.

However, suspicions and even fears of Germany still linger in many countries, as Financial Times columnist Gideon Rachman noted earlier this year. But those suspicions appear to be fading. "It helps that Angela Merkel, the chancellor, is about as far as you can get from the caricature of a jackbooted Prussian," Rachman observed (Financial Times, July 16, 2007).

But are fears of Germany justified as the 21st century unfolds? Will a "Fourth Reich" rise? Will we see a "Europeanized" Germany blend into the fabric of a united continent, or will Germany try again to dominate Europe and exert its influence on the world? While many assume it is impossible to predict the future in the complex field of international relations, that simply is not true! The Bible outlines the future course of world history by predicting the actions of specific nations. One key to understanding Bible prophecy is to be able to identify the nations involved. Historical records provide important clues as to national origins, and national characteristics that remain consistent over the centuries also provide important clues. As we will see, Germany can be identified in the prophecies of the Bible, and its future course of action can be known. That identity is surprising and the future is sobering—in the short run—but exciting in the ultimate outcome of God's plan for humanity.

REASON FOR CONCERN

What worries many seasoned observers is that this remarkably gifted nation has other unique and ominous proclivities. Arnulf Baring accurately describes Germany as a "country of promising beginnings, dramatic changes and abrupt breakdowns" and as "a country with a neverending series of surprising inceptions and equally surprising finales" (Germany's New Position in Europe, p. 2). Many modern Germans are nervous that a developing crisis could push their newly united country "back into the continuity of German history" (ibid., pp. 10–11). That history, viewed from the perspective of centuries, reveals a marked tendency to undergo periodic and dramatic transformations in national character.

Many writers have described this sobering phenomenon of "the mutable Germans." When Italian journalist Luigi Barzini visited Berlin in the early 1930s as a war correspondent, he saw a city that was the "artistic capital of Europe" filled with avant-garde art shows, trail-blazing films and experiments of all kinds" (The Europeans, p. 75). Several years later, after the Nazis had come to power, Barzini saw a very different Berlin crowded with "stiff men in spotless uniforms," serious

businessmen, chic women and families (ibid., p. 78). Barzini comments, "I saw a strangely malleable country given a new shape by the Nazis" (ibid., p. 78). He continues, "frightening above all were the young, healthy, well-washed faces of the soldiers, their eyes shining with a fanatic faith as they marched by, singing martial songs."

It is this tendency toward a militaristic transformation that is the most worrisome aspect of the German people. German soldiers have marched out of Germany and across Europe as "a relentless unstoppable war machine" numerous times in history. World War II began in 1939 when Adolf Hitler openly broke agreements with neighboring nations. Elite Panzer tank units led the German blitzkrieg (lightning war). U-boats prowled the Atlantic in wolfpacks and newly developed U-2 rockets rained death and destruction on England. Millions of Jews, Czechs and Poles were deported to work as slave laborers in German factories and faced genocidal deaths in concentration camps.

The German war machine of World War II stands unequaled in modern Western civilization for its efficiency, destructiveness and brutality. But why did Germany descend into tyranny? Where do these tendencies come from? Could this happen again?

OBSCURING GERMAN ORIGINS

History provides remarkable insights into the origin and national character traits of the Germans. Coupled with Bible prophecy, these insights give us a divinely revealed window on Germany's future. Historical records show that German tribes descended from Indo-Europeans who migrated from lands around the Black or Caspian Seas where they had been "neighbors of the Hebrews" (Natural History, Pliny, Bk. 4, 12). Julius Caesar (60bc) and the Roman historian Tacitus (98ad) referred to tribes living along the Rhine as Germanii. Tacitus wrote that German men had "no taste for peace" and spent their time in warlike pursuits. From the earliest accounts, Germanic society was geared to waging war—and posed a serious threat to the Roman army.

History clearly reveals that the German tribes absorbed Roman ways (imperialism, totalitarianism and the religion of a "Christianized" empire) and became the "heirs of Rome" with the rise of the Holy Roman Empire under Charlemagne and the German kings (Germany: 2000 Years, Reinhardt, pp. xxiii, 43). To find Germany leading the effort to unite Europe today is not surprising. This idea has been part of the German cultural heritage for more than a thousand years!

THE POWER OF IDEAS

But what accounts for Germany's tendency to undergo dramatic transformations in national character? Why did so many Germans accept the "master race" concept and the destructive policies of Hitler's Third Reich? Part of the answer is found in the cultural history of Germany. It has been said that the character of individuals and nations determines their destiny. A nation's character is molded by the religious and philosophical ideas of its people (ibid., pp. xxiv-xxvii). Ideas and ideologies have influenced cultural and political events in Germany "perhaps more than in any other nation in Europe" (ibid., p. xxvi).

The primary gods of German mythology—Thor and Odin/Wodin—exhibit strikingly diverse characteristics. Thor is a peaceful god of seasons and pastures, but also a god of war. Thor combines in himself two different personalities—the "contrasting elements of friendly guardianship, and dark and dangerous irrationality" (ibid., p. 15). Odin is a god of death, storm and battlefield, but also of wisdom and witchcraft. Odin exhibits "incalculable and unfathomable irrationality. He destroys heroes and protects cowards; he sows discord among friends... he changes his attachments and affiliations, deserting his friends when they need him the most" (ibid., p. 15).

Over the centuries, Germany has exhibited a similar tendency for dramatic shifts in national direction. Shaped by a mythology offering no real purpose or meaning for life, Germans have been left searching for a cause (ibid., p. 15). That void was once filled by the Holy Roman Empire, and in

the last century by Hitler's National Socialist movement. Today, for many Germans, European unification is their purpose-giving cause.

Ancient German philosophy spurred the Germans toward a "lust for adventure and love of warfare" which made them "frequently oblivious of humane considerations and inhibitions. They tortured criminals... and broke solemnly sworn treaties without scruples" (ibid., p. 10). Historically, the German sense of honor exalted vengeance. In Germanic tradition, loyalty, honor and heroism were more important than the humility, compassion and charity emphasized by Christianity. This fundamental conflict between traditional cultural influences and Judeo-Christian values begins to explain the paths Prusso-Teutonic forces have pursued.

LEADERS MAKE A PEOPLE

A powerful mixture of ideas, traditions and opportunities appears to merge in the lives of individuals who have molded German history. The German lands were part of the territories Charlemagne conquered in his attempt to reassemble the Roman Empire. Charlemagne was a powerful warrior with a powerful idea. That same idea of uniting Europe under the banner of Christendom burned in the hearts of the first German emperors of the Holy Roman Empire: Otto the Great and Frederick Barbarossa (Frederick I of Hohenstauffen—proclaimed "master of the world"). Under these strong warriors, the Germans became the most powerful kingdom in all Europe (960–1150ad). In the early 1700s, Frederick William I of Prussia revived the militaristic course of modern Germany. Following his Hohenzollern family tradition that land and military strength were keys to national power, he set out to build the strongest and best-trained army in Europe. When he died, Prussia was recognized as the most thoroughly militarized power in Europe and one of the most self-sufficient and prosperous.

Frederick William I's son, Frederick the Great, turned Prussia into the "drill-yard" of Europe and a first-class power. Frederick was a visionary administrator who established a centralized government and a professional civil service to rule his expanding realm. Frederick the Great was also an opportunist who learned from his mistakes. As king "he had no use for the forms of international law," invading without declaring war, then creating a pretext for his desired adventures (ibid., p. 15). For Frederick, war was serious business to be won as quickly and efficiently as possible. He favored tactics involving surprise, cunning and audacity for attacking enemies of superior strength. He amazed his adversaries with his "capacity to continually recover and rise up afresh" (ibid., p. 18). Frederick began his reign as a humanitarian, only to be transformed into a ruthless "hammer of the world"—emulating earlier German Fredericks (see Jeremiah 50:23).

THE PRUSSIAN INFLUENCE

The Prussian militaristic tradition begun by the Hohenzollerns eventually permeated all of Germany. Following Napoleon's defeat of Prussia, the Prussian Army was reorganized. Gerhard von Scharnhorst, a brilliant theorist and organizer, established military academies, built a new type of army, and laid the groundwork for what became the great German General Staff. This group of professional soldiers planned for war even in times of peace, and prepared future generations of officers. Under Scharnhorst's direction, the entire population of Prussia was indoctrinated into the purpose and glories of war.

Scharnhorst's most devoted pupil, Karl von Clausewitz, believed war was merely a continuation of politics by other means—a belief reflected in Bismarck's policy that "the great questions of the day will not be settled by resolutions or majority votes, but by blood and iron" (Barzini, p. 71). It was this Prussian tradition—authoritarian, anti-democratic, militaristic and expansionistic—that paved the way for the rise of Imperial Germany, the Nazis, and the military adventures, atrocities and disasters of the Third Reich.

Hitler rose to power during the turmoil of a worldwide depression, but his ideas were drawn from long-standing German values and traditions. Germany's warlike behavior and glorification of battle—recognized long ago by the Romans—reappears consistently in the nation's history. But where did the Germans develop the fixation for precision and martial behavior that so distinguishes their

national character? Who were the ancestors of the Germanic tribes that migrated from the shores of the Black and Caspian Seas?

STRIKING PARALLELS

If you consult a map showing the Black and Caspian Seas, and look in several history books for the nations that occupied this area of the world in the 1st and 2nd millennia bc and exhibited militaristic traits similar to the Germans, you quickly discover some very interesting facts. Assyria and a neighboring kingdom (the Hittites) dominated that part of the world. Read what historians and archaeologists have learned about these ancient nations. Notice their distinctive national character traits. Compare those traits to the ones for which Germans have been noted in the last 2,000 years. It will not take you long to begin to realize you are onto something! The most outstanding feature of Assyria and the Hittites, setting them apart from their contemporaries, was their militarism, which aided them in creating and maintaining an empire. The Assyrian army was the mightiest the ancient world had ever seen.

Hittite power also rested on military prowess. As were Prussia and Germany, Assyria was looked upon as a nation of warriors, and the Assyrian government was primarily an instrument of war. The Assyrians developed a strongly centralized form of government under an absolute ruler. Initially, Assyrian conquests gained and maintained control of vital trade routes, in order to translate the emerging economic unity of the Near East into political unity—as is happening in Europe today! The military tactics of the Assyrians and Hittites, like the Germans and Prussians, stressed rapid troop movements and surprise. Each developed a reputation for advancing the technology of war—chariots, cavalry, tanks, submarines and rockets.

The Assyrians, like the Germans at various times in their history, were notorious for using extreme acts of cruelty—blinding and mutilating victims, and stacking severed heads and corpses—to intimidate and control conquered peoples. Both nations deported conquered peoples to different locations on a massive scale to obtain forced labor and break morale. Both peoples also practiced genocide. Assyrian art and literature glorify the destructiveness and brutality of war. Virtually the same could be said for the writings of von Clausewitz and other Prussian and German authors.

Surrounding nations finally ganged up on and defeated the Assyrians—as Allied nations twice did to Germany in the 20th century. Assyria's sudden collapse poses problems for historians. The Assyrians seem to disappear into the mists of history, in the area of the Black Sea. Interestingly, the ancestors of the Germans emerge in the same region. Most modern historians hesitate or fail to make any connection between the disappearance of the Assyrians and the appearance of the Germanic tribes. But Germany's cultural history and national character resemble Assyria's like no other nation.

Both Assyria and Germany stand unique in history for exactly the same reasons: thoroughly militarized societies, the glorification of war, brutally efficient armies, deliberately calculated acts of extreme cruelty, mass deportations, slave labor camps, and genocide—all centrally administered with incredible efficiency. The histories of both nations reveal periods of powerful military resurgence after periods of decline. These parallels are striking and unique in the story of human civilization!

MORE CONNECTIONS

The Assyrian Empire developed from the city-state of Asur (named for Asshur, a son of Shem—one of Noah's three sons—see Genesis 10:1, 22). Asshur was a brother of Arphaxad—an ancestor of Abraham, who was the father of the Hebrews (Genesis 11:10–26). Thus, true Assyrians and the descendants of Abraham (the Israelites) are kindred peoples. The name Assur means "leader" or "successful." Josephus, writing in the first century ad, writes that the Assyrians "became the most fortunate of nations, beyond others" (Antiquities of the Jews, 1:6:6). In light of their abilities and contributions to Western civilization, this is also true for the Germans. Assur was worshiped as the chief god of Assyria—the god of war—and was portrayed as a solar deity with a winged disc. The Hittites also used both the winged disc and the swastika. The swastika is a symbol for the sun, power,

energy, Thor's hammer and the god of weather and storms. An ancient swastika has been found on a limestone slab in front of a temple of Assur (In Search of... The Origin of Nations, White, p. 311).

The Hittites and Assyrians also used a double-headed eagle to symbolize the sky gods—storm, thunder and the sun. These symbols reappear in the culture of Germany, Prussia and Austria, and especially the Third Reich. The Hittites (whom Assyria eventually conquered and absorbed) show linguistic and cultural links with two of the German tribes—Hessians and Prussians. Even more interesting, as historian Josef Bihl noted, are legends that Germany's oldest city, Trier, was founded in about 2000bc by Trebeta, the son of an Assyrian king named Ninus (In Deutschen Landen, p. 69). Visitors can still read an inscription on a historic house in Trier's marketplace, stating that this Assyrian colony was founded 1,300 years before Rome.

Some historians have described the Assyrians as the "Prussians of the Ancient World" (The Ideal and Destiny, McCulloch, p. 224), submissive to centralized authority, with a "deep rooted feeling of superiority"—the idea of being a "master race" (Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, Obed, p. 89). The Assyrians were extremely nationalistic, with "a strong sense of participating in a common and native way of life" (ibid., p. 66)—similar to the German idea of a *volk* or a people. After the fall of the Assyrian Empire, the Roman historian Pliny mentioned a tribe of the "Assyriani" among the Scythian peoples in the Crimea north of the Black Sea (Natural History, Bk IV. XII. 81). The historian Jerome, writing in the 4th century ad, said that the "descendents of Assur" were among the Celto-Scythian-Hun hordes then invading Europe (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Jerome Letter 123, section 16). Researcher Leon Poliakov notes the ancient Bavarian account that the people of Bavaria came into central Europe from the region of Armenia by the Black Sea (The Aryan Myth, p. 76). Considering this information, it is not surprising to find medieval Arab writers describing the Germans as "Assyrians" (Israelites und Hyksos, Germol, pp. 89–90). The links between Germany and Assyria can be found, and are neither far-fetched nor imagined.

GERMANY IN PROPHECY

Just what is the significance of the striking parallels between ancient Assyria and Germany? Numerous Bible prophecies clearly indicate that at the end of this age, just before the return of Jesus Christ, Assyria will once again play a pivotal role in world affairs (see Isaiah 10; 11). Yet, when the Medes, Babylonians and Scythians conquered Assyria in 612bc, its ruling class scattered to the north, east and west, leaving behind the conquered peoples the Assyrians had imported to work as laborers (White, p. 15). Some of those polyglot peoples are found today in Iraq, Syria and the Caucasus. The Assyrian nation ceased to exist, but history and prophecy confirm that its cultural heritage can be traced to the modern nation of Germany. When the Bible speaks of Assyria in the end times, it is speaking of Germany. No other modern nation fits the description so completely.

Germany's return to power in the years since World War II is no accident. God prophesied more than 2,500 years ago that He would bring certain events to pass to accomplish His purpose (Isaiah 46:9–10; Revelation 17:17). Germany is again the leading player in the effort to unite the nations of Europe. Events now underway in Europe will lead to the long-prophesied ten-nation beast power that will again rise out of the ashes of the Roman Empire (Revelation 17:9–14).

The Bible shows that Germany will again use religion to help forge a unified European power (Revelation 13; 17:1–7), much as was done under Charlemagne. This emerging configuration will become a global economic power (Revelation 18:2–3, 9–14) and will use that power for political purposes. It will appear peaceful at first, but will be transformed into a devouring, war-making beast (Daniel 11:21; Revelation 13:2–3; Revelation 17:12–14). Daniel describes this end-time kingdom as a strong and ferocious beast with "iron teeth," which Christ will conquer and punish at His return (Daniel 2:40–45; 7:7, 19–23).

Yet, amazing as it may seem, Bible prophecy also indicates that God will eventually use Assyria—the remarkable German people—as a leading nation for peace in the coming Kingdom of God (Isaiah 19:23–25). God will use the outstanding intellectual and cultural strengths of the German people to help enrich the world during the coming millennial rule of Jesus Christ. As do all peoples of the earth,

the Germans have in their national character both strengths and weaknesses. Just as God will use the modern descendants of Assyria to fulfill end-time prophecy in the years ahead, in Tomorrow's World He will use the remarkable strengths of the German people to serve their fellow human beings!