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Prophetic Trends Observed as 2011 Begins

Economics was the force that determined the course of world history—and continues to be a primary force in the drive toward fulfillment of Bible prophecy.

by Melvin Rhodes

As we transition into a new year, it's interesting to see developments in the world that are leading toward the fulfillment of biblical end-time prophecies.

Bible students have long speculated on how the current European Union of 27 member countries will lead to the prophesied 10-member Beast power of Revelation 17.

Note verses 12 and 13: "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. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast."

As the EU grew over the course of five decades from the original six members to 27, many thought that all 27 would form a federation of 10 regions that would ultimately comprise the Beast.

An alternative scenario now seems possible: that the EU, as presently constituted, could collapse and be replaced with a new German-led economic power with fewer member states.

Germany is booming

According to today's GMT news program on BBC America (Dec. 17, 2010), German exports are up again as the country takes advantage of a weaker euro and increased demand



Reuters/Thierry Rogge

Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel speaks at the end of a European Union leaders' summit in Brussels Dec. 17, 2010. Germany was the fastest-growing economy in 2010.

worldwide for the quality engineering products Germany is famous for. As *The Economist* noted, "Yet the euro zone as a whole has grown at a decent rate for an ageing continent, thanks to oomph from Germany, the fastest-growing big rich economy in 2010" ("Three-Way Split," Dec. 11, 2010, emphasis added).

(See "TRENDS," page 3)



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"Whom heaven must receive until the times of

Restoration

of all things ... ACTS 3:21

Peering Into the Future

Several years ago my wife and I were spending a few days at a small inn near the town of Baddeck on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. One night I was drawn through the halls and into a parlor by the sounds of Celtic music performed by a small troupe for the benefit of the lodgers. That night a warm fire, soothing music and a friendly crowd formed a shield to the cold, autumn winds outside. When the entertainment concluded, I paused to look at a group of pictures on the walls and noticed one frame containing what looked like a poem.

It turned out to be a poem written in 1908 that was part of a broadcast made by England's King George VI at the end of 1939, just three months into World War II. Here is the portion of the poem the king quoted to the Commonwealth nations:

"I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.' And he replied, 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way'" (Minnie Louise Haskins, "God Knows").

That night I copied those words into my personal journal and have kept them ever since. When I read them, I am reminded of the true source of strength for each of us in time of doubt and fear. Perhaps they have immediacy each year in the midst of dark winter. From the long, cold nights we peer into the future looking for warmer, brighter days. But no matter when we face a moment of trial and suffering, these words point us to a sure way forward. It is with our confidence and trust placed firmly in the hand of God. From Him alone comes the true light and safety. We may think we know a better way, but if God is guiding our path, then in the end the path by which He leads will prove to be the better way.

Every year *The Economist* magazine publishes a special issue looking ahead to the new calendar year. They try to forecast trends in politics, business and world events. Like all prognostications, they have a mixed record of accuracy. No one really can tell exactly what lies ahead, but their special issue is always an interesting read. In world events, no one can predict what the future will bring. Looking back, we can always see what has occurred, but not always with clear understanding.

In *World News and Prophecy*, there is one biblical principle we clearly know. "He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him" (Daniel 2:21-22).

There are times in world events when God waves His hand over history, and events take place that confound the wise. With the events of recent months, I believe we are living in such a time. Only God knows where they will lead. He gives us the broad outline and a few enticing details in the Bible. We write our articles based on those sure words, seeking to help you understand the challenging time in which we live.

Until Christ restores His perfect way and guides the nations with His loving hand, we do well to remember the words of David: "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1). We have access to the Good Shepherd who guides and leads us to the good pastures of life, even when we lose our way or don't quite see the end of where our walk with God is leading.

(This article is reprinted from the January 2004 issue.)

—Darris McNeely



Darris McNeely

“TRENDS” (Continued from page 1)

But that weaker euro is part of a wider problem. There are serious financial problems throughout the 16-member euro zone (that is, the EU countries that use the euro as their national currency).

When the euro was started, there were strict rules about overspending. Member governments were not to overspend by more than 3 percent, a rule that seems to have been broken more often than kept. The result is that more profligate countries like Greece and Ireland have required bailouts accompanied by strict austerity programs and are struggling to stay in the euro zone. Other countries like Spain and Portugal are in serious trouble and may also need help.

“The euro zone’s political leaders, alas, are a fractious and underwhelming lot. An even bigger mess seems all but certain in 2011,” the same *Economist* article goes on to say.

Germany is key to helping the weaker members—but this is causing resentment at home, with many calling for the return of the deutsche mark, Germany’s former national currency that was the envy of other nations striving for financial stability.

There’s now speculation that some of the more economically challenged countries may switch back to their former currencies so that they can devalue and gain a trading advantage. In turn, this could lead to a more solid core of nations (10 perhaps?) that, together with Germany, would form the nucleus of an “ever closer union,” the stated intent of the 1957 Treaty of Rome. Keep watching Germany, the fastest growing economy in the world.

Protests in the United Kingdom

Looking back at European history, the metamorphosis from 27 to 10 may not be smooth. There could be violent convulsions ahead.

Conservative columnist Pat Buchanan blogged recently: “For those who have read about or vaguely remember the stolid British tribe of Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain and the Blitz, which held out in its ‘finest hour,’ last week brought a disgusting sight.

“Mobs in Parliament Square set

fire to the statue of 19th century statesman Lord Palmerston and urinated on the statue of Winston Churchill. Charlie Gilmour, son of Pink Floyd guitarist David Gilmour was swinging by a rope from the Cenotaph that memorializes the 700,000 British dead of the Great War.

“At night, hundreds of these anarchists peeled off to appear on Regent Street as the Rolls-Royce carrying the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, Camilla Parker-Bowles, entered. The Rolls was pounded with boots, bottles, sticks, fists and paintballs, as the mob howled ‘Tory scum!’ and ‘Off with their heads!’

“A sign was pushed through an open window into Camilla’s side. So precarious was the situation, Charles’ security detail was close to drawing guns to protect the first in line to the throne.

“What was the mob protesting? Tuition increases for students who pay less for college than the parents of American students. In Parliament, the ruling coalition’s 83-vote margin, after defections, was cut by three-fourths on the vote to raise the tuition fees.

“And Europe is only at the beginning of this age of austerity.

“Across the Irish Sea, the 50,000 protesters have departed from the General Post Office where the Rising of 1916 took place. But the government’s budget to meet the demands of the European Union for a bailout of Ireland passed in the Dail [Ireland’s lower parliamentary house] by just five votes, 82-77” (www.buchanan.org, “Can Democracy Cope?”, Dec. 14, 2010).

Although not an EU member, Russia saw violent protests the same week against immigrants. With rising



Reuters/Eddie Keogh

A demonstrator burns a sign during a protest in central London Dec. 9, 2010, over tuition increases.

unemployment and serious economic difficulties, added to which are fears of terrorism, anti-immigrant feeling is only likely to get worse across the European continent.

Democracy itself could once again be in peril, as it was in the 1930s during the Great Depression. “Though the trend hasn’t received much attention, the world is now experiencing a democracy recession,” observed an editorial in *The Wall Street Journal* (“The Democracy Recession,” Dec. 13, 2010). “What are the reasons?” asks the paper. “Hard economic times can lead to harder politics, and some authori-

tarians have exploited economic anxiety with populism to extend their political power.” While the nations of the EU have not been affected this way yet, history suggests that could quickly change.

Trends in Asia

The title of the *Economist* article earlier quoted, “Three-Way Split,” refers to the fact that the world economy is going off in three different directions. While Europe practices austerity, with all its serious possible ramifications to the very future of the EU and of democracy itself, the United States is overspending, and the big emerging markets, mostly in Asia, are booming. The two biggest emerging markets are China and India, two countries that seem destined to form closer economic ties.

While visiting New Delhi, “Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao... announced \$16 billion in deals between Chinese and Indian companies as Beijing tries to make its mark on the economy of its neighbor, long closely connected to the U.S. and other western countries,” wrote Tom Wright in *The Wall Street Journal* (“Wen Touts China-India Ties,” Dec. 16, 2010). “Mr. Wen on Wednesday made a broad bid to pull India tighter into China’s economic orbit, seeking to draw attention to the burgeoning trade ties between India

and China with deals in sectors such as telecom, power and commodities, and holding out the promise of massive investments and of China opening its doors to Indian exports” (ibid.).

Mindful of China’s growing economic, political and military clout, Japan announced two days after Wen’s visit that it is building up its military to counter China’s influence in Asia. This, in turn, is causing concern throughout Asia, since people there are still mindful of Japan’s aggression against its neighbors just 70 years ago.

Of course, the primary reason for the changing face of Asia is the economic decline of the United States.

Prior to World War II, Britain was the dominant power in the region. With the end of the British Empire after World War II, the United States was able to step in and provide security for the region against the advance of communism, at the same time channeling investment into many countries that consequently boomed. Now those nations are among the fastest growing countries on earth and increasingly threaten the United States economically.

The biblical book of Revelation, which presents a number of end-time prophecies, shows that immediately prior to the second coming of the Messiah a great military superpower

will exist in the Far East, a nation or group of nations powerful enough to put together a 200-million-man army. This army is set to clash with the prophesied European-centered Beast power. The two military forces will meet at the River Euphrates, the eastern border of the Roman Empire in ancient times.

You can read about this in Revelation 9. “Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, ‘Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.’ So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind. Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them” (verses 13-16).

In order to put together a major military force of that size, a nation or group of nations would have to be a powerful economic force. This passage shows that a major economic power will exist in Asia at the same time the Beast power rises in Europe. The two will ultimately clash in the Middle East, another focus of Bible prophecy. Could the region’s oil resources be part of the reason? Could these powers both be there to guarantee their own access to dwindling oil supplies?

Serious economic problems in the United States

“Pending catastrophe is not an easy notion to entertain, much less sustain. Americans moreover have a low tolerance for doom and gloom. We are the nation of optimism, after all. We elect leaders who promise hope and change. We are the shining city on a hill. But what happens when the lights go out?” asks syndicated columnist Kathleen Parker (“U.S. Must Regroup, Fix Its Finances,” *Lansing State Journal*, Dec. 13, 2010).

She references an article in the Dec. 3 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, “where Roger Altman, former U.S. deputy treasury secretary, and Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, describe a nearly

(See “TRENDS,” page 13)



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Where Is Our World Headed?

It's that time again for an annual analysis and assessment. That's when many observers look back to yesteryear—and also peer into a somewhat clouded future. Secular predictions for 2011 and beyond are multiple and varied. But does the Bible have a far bigger say in our future?

by John Ross Shroeder

Some two decades ago when communism ceased to be a relevant force, world leaders looked forward to a so-called new world order. As James Hoge Jr., the editor of *Foreign Affairs*, stated, “Many observers foresaw a placid future with few challenges to approximate the hot and cold wars that had so scarred the twentieth century. *Peace and prosperity were predicted*” (“The World Ahead,” November-December 2010, emphasis added throughout).

Just the opposite has actually happened! World peace has eluded us by a long shot, and we were eventually plunged into the worst recession, perhaps since the 1930s. What went wrong? Why are we witnessing what we now see afflicting this tragic world of ours? Is our plight strictly accidental (void of cause and effect)—or is there some purpose and pattern behind current world affairs?

Is there an unseen force that has been guiding and directing trends and events according to an ancient master plan set out well in advance of today's troubled age?

The Western world past and present

A special edition of *Newsweek* titled “Issues 2011” reports: “As the world enters 2011, we are adapting to the new reality of the post-crisis era. At its roots, the crisis was a symptom of a broader dysfunction in our global, political, economic and social order. *We are now paying, and continue to pay, for the sins of the past*” (“To Our Readers,” December 2010 to February 2011).

It becomes a matter of far more than passing interest that our present plight should be so described in biblical terms by those heading up a popular American newsweekly with an international edition. According to the Bible, “Sin is lawless-

ness” (1 John 3:4)—the violation of God's law. Sooner or later, transgressing God's law exacts an inevitable penalty. Even nations pay that penalty!

This *Newsweek* preface goes on to depict some of our specific economic sins: “Governments have assumed massive debts to save the global financial system from total collapse. As a result, countries are now grappling with higher taxes, severe reductions in public goods and services, and dwindling investments in education and infrastructure. Public disillusionment in business and political leadership is dangerously high. *Because of our continued tendency to put off problem resolution, to the detriment of our children and grandchildren, we may yet trigger a deep social and generational crisis.* All these are the defining features of our new reality.”

The Good Book simply says, “For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children” (2 Corinthians 12:14).

The editor of the previous piece in *Foreign Affairs* frankly stated, “*The United States' influence, diminished by the rise of other states and nonstate actors, will be fatally undercut if the country does not curb its unsustainable reliance on debt.*” (As an aside, if you would like help in coping with any personal debt problems, request or download our free booklet *Managing Your Finances*.)

Paradise lost in one morning

British author Robert Harvey described the seismic significance of 9/11 in terms of America's previously vaunted national security: “The sudden, tragically devastating spear thrust at the commercial and military heart of America by a handful of religious (although technologically educated) fanatics graphically demon-

“As the world enters 2011, we are adapting to the new reality of the post-crisis era. At its roots, the crisis was a symptom of a broader dysfunction in our global, political, economic and social order. We are now paying, and continue to pay, for the sins of the past”
(*Newsweek*)

strated that the continental United States, for all of its two-ocean barriers against the rest of the world, is no more insulated from its tragedies and struggles in an era of mass communication, than it is from global economic shocks” (*Global Disorder*, 2003, p. 9).

Meanwhile, many nations in the world are entering the economic high ground America has held for so long. As columnist Roger Cohen wrote in the *International Herald Tribune Magazine*: “Although there’s talk in the West of a new Age of Anxiety, the neurosis is in fact fairly narrowly confined. True, the unease lies in what is still by far the world’s largest economy—the United States—and is shared by the European Union. The problems there—of soaring deficits, high unemployment, aging baby-boomers and sporadic anti-immigrant anger—are intractable. Excess has given way to distress... *But the vast bulk of the world’s population lives outside these enervated and overextended enclaves. For billions of human beings opportunity is expanding rather than contracting, if very unevenly*” (“The Age of Possibility,” Dec. 2, 2010).

Stories about the economic emergence of China, India and Brazil fill our newspapers and newsmagazines. But more economic activity is taking place among other countries. For instance, the 540-mile border between Syria and Turkey was once pockmarked with some 60,000 land mines. Now \$2 billion in mutual trade moves freely across this formerly hostile border. Turkey is increasingly labeled “the hub of Eurasia.” During the last 10 years, trade between China and African nations has expanded from \$10 billion to \$100 billion. India and Peru have grown much closer as well. More and more South American nations are looking in the direction of Asia.

A new world economic and political order is taking shape. Noted columnist Philip Stephens of the *Financial Times* put it this way: “We are living through one of history’s swerves. A multipolar world

has been long predicted, but has always seemed to be perched safely on the horizon. Now it has rushed quite suddenly into the present. *Two centuries of western hegemony are coming to a close rather earlier than many had imagined*” (“On the Way to a New Global Balance,” Dec. 16, 2010).

But why is the United States not a full participant in this new economic age?

America’s decline foreseen in Scripture

The last book in the Bible, Revelation, was penned by the aged apostle John in the final decade of the first century, nearly 2,000 years ago. Yet the Bible remains the most up-to-date book available to our modern age. It reveals both the origins and the prophetic destiny of America and the British Commonwealth of nations, including Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

Our free 110-page booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* charts the whole course, showing where we have come from and where we are headed. The final chapter of this attractive, full-color booklet sets out America’s future—first severe national punishment but mercifully followed by a dramatic divine restoration accorded to the remnant of its peoples.

Far too many present-day Americans, Australians, Britons and Canadians have refused to acknowledge the true God and the bountiful, undeserved blessings He has bestowed upon our nations. Instead many have chosen to deny the very existence of their Creator and have even accepted the false theory of evolution as well as secularism in general. Some have embraced a false version of Christianity—one generally void of obedience to God’s spiritual laws.

Many prefer to believe that the awesome blessings of national wealth and power came either by happenstance or are the results of their own efforts. Like their ancestors in ancient Israel, they have chosen

and are currently choosing to ignore God’s patient warnings in the Bible. The inevitable outcome of such persistent behavior has already been recorded in the pages of Scripture (see Deuteronomy 8:10-14).

Yet many biblical prophecies portray real repentance at the return of Jesus Christ to this earth. At that time Americans, Australians, Britons, Canadians, New Zealanders and South Africans will turn to God. But only *after* they have suffered severe crises worse in many ways than the catastrophes that befell the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

The latter-day deliverance of the modern descendants of the patriarch Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, has been recorded in the major prophets of the Hebrew Bible. Read just one. “How awful that day will be! [the Great Tribulation also described in Matthew 24:21 and Daniel 12:1]... It will a time of trouble for Jacob, *but he will be saved out of it*”—after suffering through it, sadly (Jeremiah 30:7, New International Version).

What will happen next?

Our world today seems more unpredictable and unstable than perhaps at any time since 1942 during World War II, when it appeared that the tide could turn sharply in favor of the “Axis Powers.” Many observers don’t really know what to expect next. Any one of a number of current crises could very well explode into something very big.

What true Christians do have is the comforting words of the Bible promising eventual deliverance as well as a general outline of biblical prophecy. What the Scriptures give us is an overall outline of events to come—highlighting the signs and trends that would accompany the close of our present age of human misrule. Our 80-page booklet *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* explains that a time of global conflict is on the horizon. But this booklet also depicts a wonderful world beyond that. Request or download your free copy. ❖

Populism and Europe's Future

Populist sentiment may be just a groundswell of discontent and concern among a minority, but it can also affect major political developments, depending on its momentum and the issues involved.

by Paul Kieffer

Populist movements have played an important role in calling for change in democratic—and non-democratic—countries over the last 150 years. Derived from the Latin word *populus* (people), populism generally refers to a political movement that capitalizes on dissatisfaction with the status quo, social conflict or fear and unrest. Populism often rears its head during times of rapid societal change and is usually identified with a charismatic personality who leads the movement or personifies its goals.

The Encyclopedia of Democracy defines populism as “a political movement that emphasizes the interests, cultural traits, and spontaneous feelings of the common people, as opposed to those of a privileged elite. For legitimation, populist movements often appeal to the majority will directly—through mass gatherings, referendums, or other forms of popular democracy—without much concern for checks and balances or the rights of minorities” (Seymour Lipset, ed., 1996, p. 985).

The recent Tea Party movement in the United States is characterized by some, such as Howard Fineman writing in *Newsweek*, as populist sentiment that “is nothing new. If you don't count Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, it goes back at least to the anti-immigration Know Nothings of the 1840s... In the decades after [the Civil War], populist movements rose on the left, from Wobblies to progressives. Their energy and agendas found their way into electoral politics, especially in the first half of the last century, and in the civil-rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s and early 1970s” (“Party Time,” April 6, 2010).

Fineman's perception that populist agendas are later reflected in electoral politics is evident in two populist movements dating back to the end

of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. The Populist Party advocated a graduated income tax and the direct election of senators (two ideas that became popular among the larger two political parties and resulted in Constitutional amendments establishing them). The Progressive Party in the early 20th century promoted regulations for business and civil service reform (both ideas became reforms of the government, involving such ideas as antitrust legislation and civil service exams).

In these examples, what began as a groundswell of concern and discontent wound up influencing legislation. In other words, when populist ideas get too popular to successfully resist, they can be adopted by the established political parties to prevent erosion of their base of support. In this way, populist movements “can provide a useful ‘wake-up call’ to elites and public officials who have grown too cozy with their privileges and too remote from the concerns of public opinion” (Marc Plattner, “Populism, Pluralism, and Liberal Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy*, January 2010, pp. 88-89). Moreover, modern populist movements may provide a challenge to the political correctness practiced by governments and the established political system.

Islam and political correctness in Europe

One major challenge in Europe is the acceptance of the Islamic religion and culture in an environment that has been predominantly non-Islamic for centuries. The tension created by what some view as Islam's “encroachment” via population growth generates the kind of fear that provides a fertile ground for populist sentiment.

If the growing Muslim population in Europe is creating a breeding

Modern populist movements may provide a challenge to the political correctness practiced by governments and the established political system.



*Former German central bank executive Thilo Sarrazin signs a copy of his book *Germany Is Eliminating Itself: How We Put Our Country at Risk*. Politicians and media criticized him for being intolerant. Others, however, welcomed Sarrazin's book as an opening to discuss subjects that have been off-limits in Germany for years.*

ground for apprehension, the political correctness of Europe's traditional political parties and governments is adding fertilizer to the mix.

Consider that mainstream European media and political leaders often emphasize that the vast majority of Muslims living in Europe are peaceful and nonviolent—that it is only a minuscule minority of radical Islamists who are giving their religion a bad name.

Europeans concerned about the population growth of Europe's Muslim minority are wary of Turkey's bid to join the European Union. Were Turkey to become a member of the EU, the percentage of Muslims living in the EU on that day would jump from about 5 percent currently to more than

20 percent. Supporters of Turkish EU membership generally follow the politically correct position of proclaiming the need for Turkey to be fully integrated into Europe's institutions. However, it is no small number of Europeans who are more concerned about the potential onslaught of Muslim migration from Turkey into countries like France, Germany and the Netherlands, once Turkish citizens are granted the right to live and work anywhere in the European Union.

In 2005 an opinion poll in France showed that 35 percent of those who voted against the EU constitution were influenced by the possibility that Turkey might some day become an EU member. In what might be considered a populist move, former French President

Jacques Chirac—recognizing the misgivings his countrymen had about Turkish EU membership—promised that France's decision on Turkish EU membership would be made by a national referendum.

Populist sentiment grows in Germany

The perception of a threat to traditional European culture by a growing Muslim community provides a classic impetus for populist sentiment. Last summer traditional political parties and news media in Germany were surprised by the support voiced for Thilo Sarrazin, who at the time was on the board of directors of Germany's federal bank (Bundesbank).

In August Sarrazin published a book titled *Deutschland Schafft Sich Ab: Wie Wir Unser Land Auf's Spiel Setzen (Germany Is Eliminating Itself: How We Put Our Country at Risk)*. In the book Sarrazin criticized Muslim immigrants for being unwilling to integrate fully into German society, causing additional social costs to German taxpayers. Sarrazin's opinion on this subject had not changed much since September 2009, when he said in an interview that he did “not have to acknowledge anyone who lives at the expense of the state that he rejects, does not provide for the education of his children in a reasonable manner and continually produces new little girls wearing a head covering.”

The “official” reaction to Sarrazin's book and a controversial speech he had given in June was predictable. Politically correct politicians and media criticized him for being intolerant, and he later resigned from the Bundesbank's board of directors. Others, however, welcomed Sarrazin's book as an opening to discuss subjects that have been off-limits in Germany for years. A public opinion poll conducted by the Allensbach Institute found 60 percent of those surveyed describing Mr. Sarrazin as saying “many things that are

correct,” while only 13 percent disagreed with his viewpoint.

Populist sentiment was also evident when Dutch Member of Parliament Geert Wilders spoke in Berlin on Oct. 2, 2010, to 700 invited guests who had assembled to celebrate the birth of a new political party in Germany: the Freedom Party of conservative Berlin politician René Stadtkewitz. Stadtkewitz had earlier been expelled from the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) for having invited Wilders to Berlin. Called a “rightist populist” by German media, Wilders had no qualms about describing his perception of what Germany needs in his Oct. 2 speech:

“Germany needs a political movement to defend German identity and to oppose the Islamization of Germany. Chancellor Angela Merkel says that the Islamization of Germany is inevitable. She conveys the message that citizens have to be prepared for more changes as a result of immigration. She wants the Germans to adapt to this situation.

“The Christian-Democrat leader said: ‘More than before mosques will be an integral part of our cities.’ My friends, we should not accept the unacceptable as inevitable without trying to turn the tide. It is our duty as politicians to preserve our nations for our children... A Germany full of mosques and veiled women is no longer the Germany of Goethe, Schiller and Heine, Bach and Mendelssohn.”

In the same speech, Wilders also indirectly addressed the controversy over failed integration policies in Germany by referring to a controversial visit made by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan to the Turkish community in Cologne in 2008:

“When the Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan visited your country in 2008, he told the Turks living here that they had to remain Turks. He literally said that ‘assimilation is a crime against humanity.’ Erdogan would have been right if he had been addressing

the Turks in Turkey. However, Germany is the land of the Germans. Hence, the Germans have a right to demand that those who come to live in Germany assimilate; they have the right—no they have a duty to their children—to demand that newcomers respect the German identity of the German nation and Germany’s right to preserve its identity.”

A small group of protestors assembled across the street from the hotel where Wilders spoke, carrying signs warning about the danger of neo-Nazism, including caricatures of Adolf Hitler. Perceptive analysts realize, however, that Wilders is no neo-Nazi. Instead, the response to his message—along with the reaction to Thilo Sarrazin’s book—reveal a potential populist vote perhaps as high as 20 percent “to the right of the CDU,” Chancellor Merkel’s own party.

Germany’s conservative shift

As noted earlier in this article, “populist movements can provide a useful ‘wake-up call’ to elites and public officials” (Plattner, *ibid.*). As quoted earlier, Howard Fineman observed in *Newsweek* that populist “energy and agendas found their way into electoral politics” in the United States. Are there indications that the same thing is already happening in Germany, the country that Geert Wilders



Dutch politician Geert Wilders gives a speech at a meeting of the German political movement “Die Freiheit” (“The Freedom”) Oct. 2, 2010. Wilders has spoken out against failed integration policies in Germany.

further described as “a benefit to all of us, because the well-being and prosperity of Germany is a prerequisite for the well-being and prosperity of Europe?” (Berlin speech, Oct. 2, 2010).

If populist sentiment were to mobilize 20 percent of eligible voters in Germany “to the right of the CDU,” the big losers would be the CDU itself and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Socialist Union (CSU). One reason for the current sentiment is that the CDU/CSU coalition itself is no longer as conservative as it once was.

(See “POPULISM,” page 13)

Germany's New Mind-Set: Where Will It Lead?

Many see a changing mind-set among the German people. A growing self-confidence and assertiveness is emerging 65 years after World War II and two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany. Where is Germany ultimately headed?

by Rod Hall

Some diplomats and politicians voice rising concerns over Germany's growing assertiveness, like its agreeing to a contentious gas pipeline deal with Russia and blocking NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine.

Many see a changing mind-set among the German people. A growing self-confidence and assertiveness is emerging 65 years after World War II and two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany. Where is Germany ultimately headed?

For decades Germans tended to define themselves as a powerhouse of productivity, with prestigious manufactured products like complex high-end technology, cars and audio equipment.

The cliché of German efficiency is a reality of daily life. Germany is the fifth most competitive country in the world, just behind the United States, and the value of its exports is only surpassed by China.

Germany's European partners see the most populous nation in the heart of Europe as its economic backbone, having the world's fourth largest economy.

Germany's reemerging mind-set

Emerging along with this major economic influence is a new, less restrained mind-set. The sensitivity of the collective psyche over painful Nazi-era history is fading as Germany takes on a more assertive role in the international arena.

The New York Times highlights the change: "Twenty years after reunification, Germany has come to terms with itself in a way that the postwar generation proclaimed would never be possible and the post-Berlin Wall generation finds completely natural.

"The shift is evident on the airwaves, where German songs are staging a

comeback against the dominance of American pop, and in best sellers about Goethe and Schiller...

"German pride did not die after the country's defeat in World War II. Instead, like Sleeping Beauty in the Brothers Grimm version of the folk tale, it only *fell into a deep slumber*. *The country has now awakened*, ready to celebrate its economic ingenuity, its cultural treasures and the unsullied stretches of its history."

"...The battle over how to navigate the financial crisis helps display Germany's emerging post-cold-war identity as a country less tolerant of foreign demands and lecturing, one with a tenser relationship with European partners... [Germany] has also become less obsessed with its historical crimes and more enthusiastic about its economic model, its culture and its improved standing in the world.

"All in all, the global slowdown and recovery underscored the differences between Germany and its neighbors, and *saw Germany taking a newly assertive role in foreign affairs*" ("Overview," Sept. 13, 2010, emphasis added throughout).

More assertive foreign policy

Germany is trying to balance European cohesion with the pursuit of its national interest. Some diplomats and politicians voice rising concerns over Germany's growing assertiveness, like its agreeing to a contentious gas pipeline deal with Russia and blocking NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine.

"Chancellor Angela Merkel has led a bloc of countries fending off President

Obama's calls for stimulus spending to combat the economic crisis, certain that the world should follow Germany's example of austerity" (ibid.).

In opposition to Britain, France and some other European Union countries, Germany is pushing to impose tough new budgetary rules to prevent a repeat of Greece's debt crisis.

Germany also continues to push for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. The country has the largest armed forces in the EU and is the third-largest contributor of troops in Afghanistan. It has also been involved in conflicts in the Balkans, the Middle East and Africa.

Furthermore, Germany is aggressively expanding trade with those inside and outside the EU, especially with Russia and China. Per capita, Germany is now out-exporting America to China by a factor of 3 to 1.

Growing nationalism

Along with this growing assertive foreign policy is a return of patriotic nationalism. "The question of 'German identity' is still a matter of lengthy and heated debate.

"The football World Cups of 2006 and 2010 have played their part in creating what bestselling author Dirk Schuemer calls 'patriotism lite,' meaning that a light-hearted form of nationalism, including the sort of flag-waving that was taboo for decades, has become at last socially acceptable" ("After the Wende: German Identity 20 Years After Unification," Deutsche Presse-Agentur, Sept. 30, 2010).

One of Germany's most influential sociologists and leading philosophers, Jürgen Habermas, emeritus professor of philosophy at the University of Frankfurt, says in Britain's newspaper *The Guardian* that Germany has become self-absorbed:

"What has disappeared is the anxiousness of a people, who were also defeated morally and compelled to engage in self-criticism, to find

their bearings in the postnational constellation. The solipsistic [belief in self only] mindset of this *self-absorbed colossus* in the middle of Europe can no longer even guarantee that the unstable status quo in the EU will be preserved" ("Germany's Mindset Has Become Solipsistic," June 11, 2010).

The New York Times' Nicholas Kulish comments in his article



The sensitivity of the collective psyche over painful Nazi-era history is fading as Germany takes on a more assertive role in the international arena.

"German Identity, Long Dormant, Reasserts Itself":

"In ways large and small Germany is flexing its muscles and reasserting a long-repressed national pride. Dozens of recent interviews across the country, with workers and businessmen, politicians and homemakers, artists and intellectuals, found a country more at ease with itself and its symbols, like its flag and its national anthem—a people *still aware of their country's history, but less willing to let it dictate their actions...*

"A significant generational shift has taken place as the World War II

generation has been dying off. For younger Germans, war in Europe is no longer a palpable memory or a tangible fear...

"It's not like the 1930s, where the jackboots are going to be stomping into other countries," said William M. Drozdiak, the president of the American Council on Germany. "But having moved the capital from Bonn back to Berlin, there has been a *profound psychological change, shifting the center of gravity to the east, with Germany thinking more like a Central European power,*" (Sept. 10, 2010).

Emerging right-wing sentiment

Along with growing nationalism in Germany has been a noticeable move toward the right, as expressed by *The New York Times* headline "Right-Wing Sentiment, Ready to Burst Its Dam."

The report explains: "The nation's political geography is being reshaped by strong gusts of discontent blowing in from different directions. Public resentments toward Europe were fanned by the German-led bailout of Greece, which Germans saw as paying for the profligacy and irresponsibility of others. At the same time, Germans, particularly younger generations, are feeling less constrained by their history and more comfortable in their national skin than at any time since World War II..."

"At the moment, no one here is predicting the rise of a successful right-wing party, but that is because the main ingredient is missing: *a charismatic leader to rally the public*" (Michael Slackman, Sept. 21, 2010).

This may be the case, but polls show a right-leaning party could garner up to 20 percent of the vote.

Into this growing right-wing environment came the popular and controversial book by the banker Thilo Sarrazin. It is probably the best-selling political book in postwar Europe, with over a million copies sold. *The Washington Post* called Sarrazin, "The most talked-about man in Germany... whose hot new book and sudden groundswell of popular support have

the media dubbing him a folk hero” (Anthony Faiola, “Economist’s Views on Muslim Immigration Divide Spark Controversy in Germany,” Sept. 9, 2010).

He “has divided the nation by postulating the theory that Germany is being ‘dumbed down’ by Muslim immigrants and their children... He delves into territory largely taboo here since the Holocaust, suggesting that ‘hereditary factors’ are at least partly to blame. Turks and Kurdish immigrants, he asserts, are genetically predisposed to lower intelligence than Germans and other ethnic groups, including Jews.

“His statements have shocked many in Germany, not only because of a national sensitivity to anything remotely smacking of genetic superiority claims in the post-World War II era. What has also shocked many is that so many Germans have rallied to his side” (ibid.).

Nearly one in five Germans in a survey said they would vote for a party led by Sarrazin (Deutsche Welle, Sept. 5, 2010).

Far-right neo-Nazism

In addition to the broad right-wing sentiment sweeping the country, Germany’s international broadcasting outfit Deutsche Welle sees the growing influence of the far-right neo-Nazi movement—especially in the East, which has “a reputation for neo-Nazism” rooted “in economic hardship,” (“The Rise of the Far-Right in the East,” Sept. 21, 2010).

The same source points to higher unemployment and lower wages in the East, along with the fact that the former socialist state within the Soviet sphere did little to remove the Nazi influence remaining after the war.

While the largest neo-Nazi party, the National Democratic Party (NPD), has only about 7,000 members and representation in just two of Germany’s 16 state parliaments, far-right influence is growing nonetheless.

“As state authority began to re-assert itself in the East, the far-right developed more subtle ways

to organize. ‘The structures have become smaller,’ said [researcher into right-wing extremism at the University of Bielefeld Dierk] Borstel ‘They no longer rely on large parties like the NPD, but rather local cells, which are more difficult for the state to break up. They have become anchored in local communities in a way I thought would never happen’” (ibid.).

Deutsch Welle also cited a study completed in 2003 that found that 16 percent of Germans (23 percent in the East and 14 percent in the West) had an “extreme right-wing world-view—that is, they expressed chauvinistic, anti-Semitic, social-Darwinist or xenophobic opinions, and tended to trivialize the Nazi regime” (ibid.).

Germany’s role in end-time events

What this all adds up to is a more independent and assertive economic colossus in the heart of Europe, pushing its own national interest with a mind-set less restrained by its scarred past and more influenced by growing nationalism and right-wing sentiments.

Germany’s resurgence and Bible prophecy indicate that it will likely play a key role in the final group of 10 nations that form the “beast” (Revelation 17:12).

This beastly system will become a worldwide economic, political and military colossus (Revelation 13:7, 16-17). Its leader, also referred to as the “beast,” will rally the masses with eloquence and persuasiveness. Millions will marvel and follow him to the point of worship (verses 4-5).

Leaders of nations do not always understand the factors driving their own intents or motives—or what they’re aiming toward. Sadly, God’s people of the modern-day descendants of Israel will suffer greatly during the coming crises at the close of this age. Jesus Christ describes this time of worldwide trauma as the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21-22; Mark 13:19-20).

Time of Jacob’s trouble

The prophet Jeremiah also reveals that the peoples of modern Israel will be specifically targeted for correction. His message was sent to the house of Israel more than a century after its people were carried into captivity, showing much of it is intended for the modern descendants of Israel.

It will be a time of national calamities like no other in history: “Alas! For that day is *great*, so that *none is like it*; and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he [after going through it] shall be saved out of it” (Jeremiah 30:7).

The modern-day descendants of Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, are the people of northwest European heritage, foremost among these being those of the United States and Britain, along with others of British descent in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. (For detailed biblical and historical explanation, see our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

Tragically, just as ancient Israel rejected God’s calling and way of life over 2,700 years ago, so modern Israel is doing the same thing today.

Britain and America and their allies suffered greatly through two world wars against Germany and her allies. But God miraculously intervened to give them victory while they were in the midst of receiving many of His promised blessings (Genesis 12:1-3; 48:1-6).

The time is coming when God will remove His protection and blessing. Many who survive in captivity will turn to God for deliverance. “It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set His hand again the *second time to recover the remnant of His people who are left, from Assyria*” (Isaiah 11:11).

As Jesus Christ sets up his millennial Kingdom and restores the people of Israel to their original homeland (verses 1-16), those of other nations, including Germany, will also turn to God. They will be a “blessing,” and God will call them the “work of My hands” as they dwell peacefully together with Israel under the government of God (Isaiah 19:24-25). ❖

“POPULISM” (Continued from page 9)

In her keynote address at the CDU party convention in November, Chancellor Merkel appeared to respond to populist concerns in the ongoing debate on the assimilation of immigrants: “Whoever wants to live here has to learn German. Whoever lives here has to respect our laws and values... Those who do not follow the rules can expect to face sanctions” (<http://www.dw-world.de>).

Merkel went on to say that Germany’s problem is not too much Islam, “but too little Christianity. We speak too little of our Judeo-Christian heritage” (*Der Spiegel*, Nov. 15, 2010) She called for more emphasis on Christian values—an interesting statement at a time when Pope Benedict XVI has declared the “re-Christianization” of Europe to be a major goal of his papacy.

It is clear that leaders of Merkel’s sister party are also considering the impact of populist sentiment. On the weekend that Wilders spoke in Berlin, CSU minister of defense Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg called him “one of those charlatans making the rounds these days.” However, Zu Guttenberg admitted what was obvious: “We haven’t sufficiently led the discussion” on citizens’ concerns about Muslim immigration.

Zu Guttenberg’s CSU party colleague, Bavarian governor Horst Seehofer, pulled no punches in an interview and a speech given just two weeks after Wilders’ visit to Berlin. Seehofer said that Germany “did not need any additional immigration from Turkey and Arab countries,” adding that Germany “is not the welfare office for the entire world.” Seehofer’s comments on immigration from Islamic countries would have been unthinkable just 10 years ago, but public opinion surveys showed roughly half of those responding agreeing with him.

Seehofer also denounced the multicultural approach of so-called parallel societies existing with each other. “Multicultural is dead,”

he declared, emphasizing that immigrants had to be absorbed into the dominant German culture (*Leitkultur*) with its value system based on the Christian heritage. Just days after Seehofer’s speech, Chancellor Merkel agreed with him that the multicultural approach had failed.

How far will Germany’s conservative political parties go in their response to growing concerns over Germany’s immigration and integration policies? What if they are unsuccessful in assimilating those motivated by populist sentiment? When asked about the ongoing debate over the Muslim community in Germany, former chancellor Helmut Schmidt admitted that Germans had not been able to integrate the 4 million Muslims already living in his country. He also indirectly confirmed the negative connotation that “populism” tends to have in Germany. “So far,” he said, “we don’t have that [rightist] party” to the right of the CDU/CSU. “The reason is Nazism and Auschwitz. This is the reason for the time being, and hopefully for the future” (as quoted in “Germany Risks a Lurch to the Right,” *New York Times*, Oct. 11, 2010).

In today’s liberal environment in Europe, there would have to be a radical shift in thinking for a neo-Nazi movement to gain a following large enough to influence German—or larger European—politics. A more likely possibility, based on current developments, is a future combination of populist sentiment and reawakened religious fervor.

The papacy’s emphasis on promoting a rebirth of Christianity in Europe, coupled with populist concerns over growing Muslim influence, could prepare the stage for a future charismatic Christian leader to play a dominant role in shaping Europe’s future. Bible prophecy indicates that this scenario is more than just a speculative possibility. It will one day be the wave of the future. ❖

“TRENDS” (Continued from page 4)

apocalyptic future—just around the bend—if we do not act yesterday.”

Continuing, Parker writes: “The instability inherent in the world’s biggest economy being the world’s biggest borrower is problematic beyond the obvious. Not only will we be limited in the extent to which we can fight necessary wars, but our financial constraints will affect homeland security, intelligence and foreign aid, according to Haass and Altman. Most important, our global clout will be increasingly diminished. Haass and Altman offer two scenarios: One, our president and Congress get their deficit-reduction act together... Or, two, global capital markets will impose a solution, which likely would be ‘ugly and punitive.’”

The first scenario was even less likely by week’s end when the president and Congress agreed to maintain the tax cuts in place since the Bush administration, continue unemployment benefits and cut the payroll tax, measures expected to raise the deficit by even more billions! Hold your breath for the second option!

On PBS’s *McLaughlin Group*, Dec. 12, regular contributor Pat Buchanan, quoted earlier here, observed that “this country has never been so close to a default”! A member of the bipartisan commission looking into solving the country’s debt problems, interviewed on BBC America, warned that we may only have weeks to solve the nation’s debt crisis.

This article has only looked at the economic turmoil that continues unabated around the world. But economics determines a great deal when it comes to national domestic politics, geopolitics and military power. Without economic power, military power is almost impossible. Economic trends are a reliable indicator of future political and military developments. And the economic trends we see in the world at this time clearly show that prophecies in your Bible are heading toward fulfillment.

The final sentence in the previously quoted article in *The Economist* sums up the new year: “A more divided world economy could make 2011 a year of damaging shocks.” ❖

“CROWN” (Continued from page 16)

action from the humble and faithful attitudes of the saints of Smyrna?

Incredibly, not much more than 11 years from crowning himself, Napoleon would be exiled. The “little corporal,” a self-proclaimed emperor, would ultimately be stuck alone on an island, become sickly and die far from his homeland.

The profound biblical declaration is that not only Napoleon or the saints of Smyrna are to wear crowns and rule the nations. You and I are too. But, unlike Napoleon, we aren’t going to *seize* a crown but will be *given* a crown—not because of what we have conquered, but rather, because we have allowed “territory” within our hearts to be conquered by the King of Kings—Jesus Christ. Most importantly, after being crowned, our reign under Christ will expand to encompass the entire earth for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:4).

The apostle Paul, who had most likely visited Smyrna when he lived in the nearby city of Ephesus for three years, fully embraced the reality of being granted such a crown by Jesus Christ for faithful service. This soldier for Christ penned in his last letter to the Church: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7-8). Paul’s exclamation of hope emphatically applies to you and me as well, doesn’t it?

Our destiny of wearing a crown

Before “that Day” arrives, let’s consider our destiny to wear crowns as children of God. God has destined you to wear a crown. The prophetic declaration of Revelation 5:10, speaking of those who have been redeemed to God by Christ’s blood, says it all: “You have made them into kings and priests for our God. They will rule on the earth” (Worldwide English New Testament).



Wikimedia Commons

When Pope Pius VII came to crown him, Napoleon seized the crown from the pope’s hands and crowned himself. But, unlike Napoleon, we aren’t going to seize a crown but will be given a crown—not because of what we have conquered, but rather, because we have allowed “territory” within our hearts to be conquered by the King of Kings—Jesus Christ.

Just imagine for a moment: God is molding us as His spiritual jewels into a display of His glorious rule over the nations. We have not been selected for such position through force of arms, popularity or cunning, but because we have been chosen by God’s grace to such divine inheritance. Upon full awareness of such an honor of divine selection and future reward, we surrender our “personal kingdoms” in the here and now, so to speak, but it comes at a present cost for each of us.

Bearing a crown of thorns

What cost? Before we wear a glorious crown in “that Day,” we must bear another type of crown for now. Hebrews 2:9-10 sheds light on such a crown by proclaiming, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower

than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”

It has been stated by others, “We must bear a cross before we bear a crown.” Perhaps even more poignant for our consideration is the proposition that “a life without thorns is an eternity without a crown.”

But why? When Christ places His saints over the peoples of the Millennium, He desires us to convey “a spirit of experience.” Those under our tutelage need to know that those placed over them have not merely existed in a world of plastic and Teflon, but that they

have struggled in the challenging world of flesh and blood. Yes, a world of consternation, and yet a life of overcoming and spiritual success by God's grace.

Oh yes, the future subjects in the coming wonderful world of tomorrow will appreciate following those who are the "real deal"—rulers who sympathize with their life experiences and what they are going through. Shakespeare put it so eloquently in *Romeo and Juliet* when he penned, "He jests at scars that never felt a wound." Isn't our relationship with Christ strengthened by what He experienced? (See Hebrews 4:15.) We should expect that our walk toward our future crowning moment will follow in the path of the King of Kings.

Even with this needed job description in place, let's take a present-day reality check. At times, we spiritually grind down to almost a halt because of existing in this age apart from God and being subject to the whims of Satan and the ravages of human nature. It can seem very attractive to go back to the flow of society. All of us can sympathize with the pleading cry of the saints down through the ages of "How long, O Lord?" (Revelation 6:10).

"I am the path"

Yet this is the crucible of learning each of us must step through. We must fully experience it to full completion rather than "throwing in the towel."

In ancient times, those endeavoring to participate in the Olympics had to state on oath that they had fulfilled the required 10 months of strenuous training before being allowed to enter the contest. Any athlete who had not submitted himself to this necessary discipline of spirit and flesh would have no chance of winning and would seriously lower the standards of excellence demanded in the games. All this for a corruptible wreath of laurels that were already decaying when placed on the victor's head.

In contrast, the apostle Paul, who was no stranger to the crown

of thorns placed on him in his ministry, said to "run in such a way that you may obtain...an imperishable crown" (1 Corinthians 9:24-25).

Caring for those crowns—now!

Finally, we must now care for that crown! Christ directly admonishes and exhorts Smyrna's neighboring saints in the city of ancient Philadelphia to "hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown" (Revelation 3:11). It is His same message to us today. Jesus Christ always remembers the value of the reward that lies ahead of us.

Perhaps the echo of the prophet Isaiah of "This is the way, walk in it" (Isaiah 30:21) is best underlined by the response of one earthly ruler who, rather than seizing a crown like Napoleon, seemingly was willing to cast aside the one on her head.

When Queen Victoria had just ascended her throne, she went, as is the royal custom, to hear a performance of Handel's *Messiah*. Her advisers informed her that she must not rise as the audience stood at the singing of the "Hallelujah Chorus." When that magnificent chorus was being sung and the singers were shouting "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth," she sat with great difficulty.

It seemed as if she would rise in spite of the custom of kings and queens, and finally when they came to that part of the chorus where with a shout they proclaim Him "King of Kings," suddenly the young queen rose and stood with bowed head, as if she would take her own crown from off her head and cast it at His feet.

As we walk through the portals of our daily existence and the unfolding doors of biblical prophecy, let us be willing to equally rise to the occasion and cast aside our pride, as well as our doubts and fears, and realize that the Ruler of our life has said, "I will give you a crown." ❖



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by Robin Webber

“I Will Give You the Crown of Life”

The book of Revelation, at the time it was written, spoke in a figurative and colorful manner to dispossessed or persecuted followers of Jesus Christ to assure them of a brighter future. Embedded in this prophetic declaration of color and imagery is a startling statement that demands our attention to explore and embrace with living faith, as if our life depends upon it—because, after all, it does!

In Revelation 2, Christ speaks directly to the church of Smyrna in Asia Minor. This 2,000-year-old missive, initially written to seven specific churches, is just as relevant today. The church at Smyrna is described as experiencing times of tribulation (verse 9). Jesus had plainly stated during the course of His earthly ministry, “If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20).

When persecution came, it must have seemed very lonely and scary to see the bright hope of salvation darkened by the forces of evil. These folks had most likely been dispossessed by their families and persecuted by their communities. In the streets and alleys and shopping stalls of the Roman world, they had walked in the spiritual footsteps of Christ.

Then, it’s as if the exalted Jesus Christ walks up alongside them and shares the realities on the ground, as well as the realities of God’s future blessings. He speaks truth and speaks to their hearts by stating, “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be

faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

Let’s stop for a moment and consider a profound biblical reality that cuts to the quick of our spiritual lives. The seamless rhythm of the Scriptures continually reminds us that Christ never promised His followers it would be easy, but He did promise it would be worth it! Here in these verses, the King of Kings speaks of the gift of the “crown of life.” He dynamically deems those He addresses worthy of such honor because of their sacrifice of self for Him. Now, in return, He speaks of a glorious reward that He earnestly desires to place on their heads.

This crown is synonymous with the victor’s laurel wreath granted to victorious Olympian runners or triumphant Roman generals. But first, before gaining such a crown, they would have to give themselves away.

The vast contrast between two coronations

Consider for a moment how different this future crowning is from the coronation of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1804 when he was crowned as the French Emperor. He was not alone but surrounded by a throng in a cathedral. He was not dispossessed. He ruled much of Europe and all its riches. There is one more outstanding difference between his crown and that mentioned in Revelation. When Pope Pius VII came to crown him, Napoleon seized the crown from the pope’s hands and crowned himself. How far removed is such a dramatic and self-aggrandizing

(See “CROWN,” page 14)