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Photo courtesy Darris McNeely

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# Is Democracy the Answer?

*With Middle Eastern regimes toppling in the face of popular uprisings, many are hopeful that the region will soon experience newfound freedom and well-being through democratic reform. But if democracy comes, will it really lead to liberty?*

by Frank Dunkle

The Arab spring carries into summer. In several Middle Eastern countries ordinary people are organizing, protesting and even fighting to overthrow dictatorial leaders. They seek government by the consent of the governed. A Pew research poll conducted in April and May 2010 found that six in ten Egyptians favor democracy over any other kind of government. The vice-chairman of Libya's National Provisional Council said in an interview with the Associated Press, "Libyans as a whole, and I am one of them, want democracy, not dictatorship, not tribalism." The president of the Syrian Human Rights Committee, Walid Saffour, said, "The Syrians want their freedom, want democracy, want equality."

One may debate the validity of these statements, but why wouldn't the people of the Middle East want democracy? To all appearance, democracy has brought untold riches, power and happiness to Western nations. England, the cradle of modern democracy, built in the 19th century the most powerful empire the world has seen. Although that empire has since been dismantled, the democratic nations spawned by it, including the United States, Canada and Australia, have enjoyed the greatest prosperity in human history.

But is democracy really the answer to the Middle East's woes—



Reuters/Stringer Egypt

*A protester runs away from smoke after burning a police booth in front of the Interior Ministry in Cairo.*

or even those of the West and the rest of the world?

### The Middle East oppressed for millennia

The nations of the Middle East have had a very long history of domination by regional or foreign powers. From ancient times to the modern era, the region has been ruled by a succession of oppressive empires: Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman, fol-

(See "DEMOCRACY," page 3)



“Whom heaven must receive until the times of

# Restoration

of all things . . .” ACTS 3:21

## Under God—or Going Under?

**W**hen editor Darris McNeely asked if I could write for his column in this issue, I had just finished working on the concurrent issue of our sister publication, *The Good News*, focusing on America’s founding heritage—this July 4th marking the nation’s 235th birthday. Then an odd story in the news brought home again the sad reality of our drift as a nation from where we started. It highlights a growing problem in America today.

NBC network began TV coverage of the U.S. Open Golf Championship on June 19 with a pre-taped segment of children reciting the Pledge of Allegiance while patriotic military images were presented—and again while past U.S. Open winners were shown. But key phrases were omitted.

For our non-American readers, the voluntary pledge, often recited in schools, states, “I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

In the first TV recitation, the words “under God” and “indivisible” were left out—while in the second, these and “one nation” were cut. (It should be noted that the words “under God” were not in the original pledge from 1892. They were added in 1954—deemed, then and since, an important inclusion.)

Criticism ensued on Internet social media and comment boards, and an NBC commentator quickly apologized to viewers, stating that the editing out was not meant to offend. But there was no acknowledgment of what was left out. So even the apology left out “under God.”

Clearly, omitting these words from the Pledge was deliberate on someone’s part. What gives? It could have been an intentional antireligious jab, especially as there have been court challenges to remove “under God” from the Pledge. It’s also possible, while seemingly unlikely, that this was just an “artistic” decision or meant to save a few seconds—with those responsible thinking no one would really care about this. While it turned out people did care, it would still be sad to learn that broadcasting personnel could actually think people wouldn’t—and that they themselves didn’t.

My own speculation is that perhaps some deemed the God reference to be “controversial” and wanted to be politically correct and “not offend”—despite the deletion itself being highly offensive. Even if that didn’t happen in this case, this kind of thing happens all too frequently in our society.

And how strange it is that patriotism can now be separated from God. At one time that would have seemed, well, *un-American*. This is all symptomatic of a much larger problem.

In early America, God was an important focus of public discourse. Today, however, it’s becoming downright impolite to talk about God in public. That’s more than pathetic. It’s horrible—and perilous. God says, “I will honor those who honor Me, but those who despise Me will be disgraced” (1 Samuel 2:30, Holman Christian Standard Bible).

In the words of the late American president Ronald Reagan, “If we ever forget that we are one nation under God, then we will be a nation gone under.”

Tragically, that’s where things are headed. But you and I don’t have to be blown along with the winds of compromise. We can and must stand for God and His principles.

May the restoration we desperately need come quickly: not just returning to early American values, but the whole world united under God in His Kingdom—when He and His Word will be the focus of public discourse everywhere.



Tom Robinson

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lowed by centuries under Muslim rule, including empires of the Arabs and the Ottoman Turks. When the Ottoman Empire was defeated with the other Central Powers in World War I, Britain and France received mandates from the newly formed League of Nations to oversee much of former Ottoman territory, and they divided up the land into several new states and propped up figurehead rulers, some of whom became despotic rulers upon independence.

Egypt gained independence from Britain in 1922, establishing a constitutional monarchy that lasted until 1953. The Egyptian republic that was then formed has been democratic in name more than practice, seeing only three presidents over the past 58 years. The recently ousted Hosni Mubarak ruled for 30 of those years. Small wonder that, despite regular elections, Egyptians do not believe they’ve had an opportunity to try democracy.

The stories of two other Middle Eastern nations now experiencing popular uprising show a similar governmental history. Syria gained independence from France after World War II in 1946, but three years later a coup installed military rule. In 1966 Hafez al-Assad assumed the presidency and held that office until his death in 2000. His son Bashar succeeded him and is ruthlessly holding to power still. Libya, which Italy took from the Ottomans in 1911, before World War I, established a kingdom when it gained independence in 1951. But a military coup in 1969 installed Col. Muammar Gaddafi in the seat of power, and he has remained ever since.

Whole generations of Arabs have known no other rulers or government than that which they are currently revolting against. They are convinced that democracy will provide a cure for their woes, but there is much to suggest otherwise.

First of all, straight democracy or majority rule is itself a form of tyranny—and among a Muslim-majority populace, this means greater influence for Islam and the oppression that accompanies it (see “Majority



Reuters/Suhab Salem

*Eyes on the future, a boy sits in front of women gathered in an anti-government rally in Sanaa, Yemen.*

Rule May Spell Islamic Tyranny” on page 4).

Secondly, even where democratic government has been more successful—limited to choosing representation and referendums on key issues—there have still been serious consequences. Let’s note an example from one of the world’s greatest democracies.

### **Democracy’s disastrous effects in California**

For many years, the American state of California served as an example of what people in the world strive for: a happy place to live with tremendous opportunities and a high standard of living. Yet in recent years it has been labeled dysfunctional and ungovernable. Its credit rating has dropped from the best there is to a level barely above that of junk bonds. One of the primary reasons for this dramatic change is California’s democratic government.

The cover of the April 23, 2011, issue of *The Economist* carried the title “Where It All Went Wrong: A Special Report on California’s Dysfunctional Democracy” (posted online April

20). The issue states, “California thus stands as a rare, and perhaps unique counterpoint to the many countries whose main problem is a lack of democracy” (“The People’s Will,” April 20, 2011). As this special report explains, California voters have often used ballot initiatives to overrule or bypass their state legislature, taking government into their own hands. This exercise of direct democracy on the surface sounds positive, but the results have brought the state to the brink of financial disaster.

The power of popular referendum is an important one for maintaining liberty, but this should be reserved for rare cases, such as ousting corrupt government, not as a routine way to govern.

The decline in effective government in California began in 1978 when voters overwhelmingly passed Proposition 13. This ballot initiative deeply cut property taxes and amended the constitution to require a two-thirds majority in the legislature for the passage of any future tax increases of any kind. Halting confiscatory taxation would seem to be a wise move except for the fact that the

## Majority Rule May Spell Islamic Tyranny

In discussing democracy, it's important to specify what is meant. Pure democracy is simply the rule of the majority. That may sound great and even practical—unless you are in the minority and the issues concern your well-being and perhaps even your life.

A popular adage, anonymous but often misattributed to Benjamin Franklin, says in one of its forms, "Democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch." Majority rule is, in essence, the tyranny of the majority, wherein dissenters are oppressed. At its worst, it can devolve into mob rule, a fearful circumstance that can break down into anarchy and calls for authoritarian clamp-down by a single leader.

American Founding Father John Adams said: "Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide. It is in vain to say that democracy is less vain, less proud, less selfish, less ambitious, or less avaricious than aristocracy or monarchy. It is not true, in fact, and nowhere appears in history. Those passions are the same in all men, under all forms of simple government, and when unchecked, produce the same effects of fraud, violence, and cruelty" (letter to John Taylor, April 15, 1814).

With such thoughts in mind, America was founded as a republic. In a republic, representatives represent the interests of constituents in a voting assembly. When these representatives are chosen by the populace, the form of government is called a democratic republic, which is the case with the United States. Of course, some countries refer to themselves as democratic republics even if truly free elections are absent. Communist regimes are notorious for this.

Yet even a true democratic republic does not necessarily promote freedom. The forces of democracy are still at work in selecting representation. A takeoff on the humorous quote up front notes that in a republic, *the flock gets to vote for which wolves vote on lunch*. The question is, what do the majority support? Are they selfish, or do they care about others? This is why Adams earlier said: "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other" (military address, Oct. 11, 1798). It is clear from other quotes that the religion he had in mind was Christianity. It certainly was not Islam, which he inveighed against severely elsewhere.

The religion of Islam has itself been an oppressive force in the Middle East. Yet ironi-

cally, it has been held in check by the totalitarian regimes of the recent past. The rise of democracy in this region where the common people are predominantly Muslim fundamentalists could spell increased imposition of sharia (Islamic law) domestically and a step up in jihad (struggle or holy war) abroad.

Consider the Palestinians. Free elections in Gaza handed the government over to Hamas, a terrorist organization devoted to wiping out the state of Israel. And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

There is great concern about Egypt, the most populous nation in the Arab world, as well as many other Muslim nations. One source reports: "Much of the Egyptian population that in recent days has rebelled against the thirty-year regime of Hosni Mubarak says that it prefers democracy to any other form of government. At the same time, however, and in an overwhelming majority, they want those who commit adultery to be stoned, thieves to have their hands cut off, and those who abandon the Muslim religion to be put to death. This is the result of a survey conducted in Egypt and in six other majority Muslim countries by the Washington-based Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, the world leader for research in this field" (Sandro Magister, "Democratic' Egypt Sends Apostates to Their Death," *chiesa.expressonline.it*, Feb. 3, 2011).

According to the survey, this is true of majorities in Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan and Nigeria. Only in Turkey and Lebanon were these minority positions. But fundamentalism has made headway in Turkey, while in Lebanon the terrorist organization Hezbollah has recently achieved a dominant position in the government.

The Pew survey further stated that 54 percent of Egyptians want to end their nation's peace treaty with Israel ("Egyptians Back Sharia Law, End of Israel Treaty, Poll Shows," Bloomberg, April 26, 2011). And "in a runoff between modernizers and fundamentalists, 59 percent of Egyptians say that they side with the fundamentalists, against 27 percent who root for the former . . . Returning to the death penalty for those who abandon Islam, *called for by 84 percent of Egyptians*, it must be pointed out that those who want it are men and women, old and young, educated and uneducated, without distinction. In Jordan, the level of support for sentencing apostates to death rises *all the way to 86 percent*" (Magister, emphasis added).

Here's a clear case, then, where democracy does not equate to freedom.

—Tom Robinson

people have also continued to vote for increased government spending.

In the decades since, one passed ballot initiative after another has required the state to spend minimum amounts on various measures, from teachers' salaries to clean parks. Unfortunately, these measures rarely include funding for their projects. Just where is the money supposed to come from when Proposition 13 impedes legislators from increasing state revenues? A lack of foresight and wisdom on the part of voters too often makes a mockery of democracy.

The number of initiatives placed on the California ballot has steadily increased—from 22 in the 1970s to 74 in the 2000s. Qualifying such initiatives has become a commercial business, with professional signature-gatherers earning impressive wages for convincing voters to sign. Once such a "democratic" initiative makes it onto the ballot, big-dollar media campaigns blanket the state in huge propaganda efforts to convince the voters. Karen Bass, a former speaker of the state assembly, said that because of the process, "any billionaire can change the state constitution. All he has to do is spend money and lie to people" (quoted in "War by Initiative: A Case Study in Unintended Consequences," *The Economist*, April 20, 2011). The inherent weakness in democracy, whether in the United States or in a newly constituted Middle Eastern government, is that it depends on the knowledge and virtue of the people, and both are too often lacking.

In December 2010, the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) conducted a poll among voters in the state and discovered that many were badly misinformed about vital governmental issues. Nearly 80 percent did not realize that the public school system accounted for the largest share of the state budget. Four in ten people thought that the prison system was the largest expense category, when it was actually the smallest. Similarly, two thirds of voters were not aware that the personal income tax provided the main source of state revenue—many believing most income came from transportation taxes, which actually



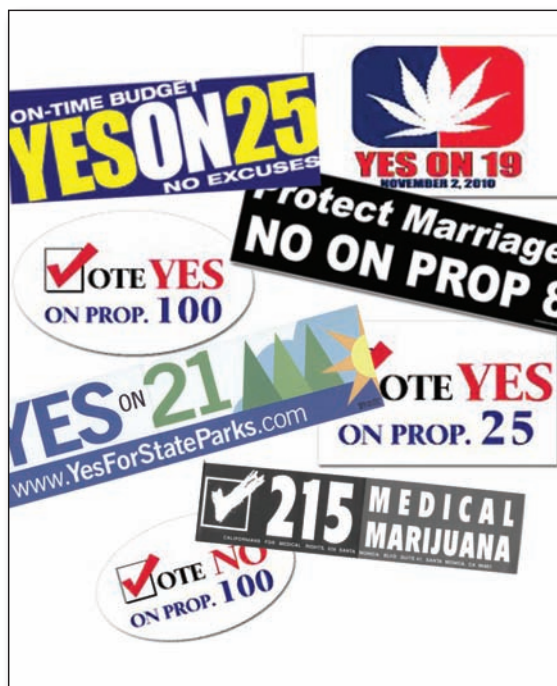
amounted to only two percent of revenues. The report from the PPIC said, “Most Californians’ views about the budget are not based on an understanding of where the money comes from and where it goes” (quoted by Dan Walters, “Voters’ Ignorance About Budget a Big Factor,” *The Sacramento Bee*, Feb. 2, 2011).

More than 200 years ago, the Founding Fathers of the United States distrusted the ability of the masses of citizens to exercise good government. Thus, they established a representative republic rather than a pure democracy. In it, the people do not pass laws themselves but, rather, elect representatives who do so. Theoretically, those representatives will be well-educated people of high moral integrity. Moreover, the necessity of gaining approval by two separate houses within the legislature prevents the passage of laws too quickly, under the heat of passion. Such a system is cumbersome and inefficient—as most Americans know all too well—but it was designed to avoid the type of problems caused by reliance on democratic ballot initiatives. Unhappily, both the U.S. federal government and the California state government are still susceptible to abuse because they are both based on a flawed foundation: human beings.

For good cause, Americans have lost faith in their elected rulers, yet the example of California indicates that the general populace does no better when it attempts to govern directly. What encouragement can this give to people of the Middle East who dream of overthrowing dictators and establishing democracy? Are the people of Egypt, Libya or Syria currently better educated and trained for governing than those of California?

### What will succeed?

Those behind the publication of this newsletter do not share the opinion of so many in the Western world who think democracy is the ultimate solution to the world’s problems and



*California is inundated by propositions up for popular vote. Many require funding, but a proposition passed earlier hinders that.*

that it’s the best form of government possible. Of course, it has served to some extent as a check on human tyranny. As Winston Churchill wryly observed, “Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time” (House of Commons speech, Nov. 11, 1947).

What, then, is the solution to mankind’s need for an effective, stable and reliable government? If people cannot trust themselves to govern, and monarchy and aristocracy have historically failed, what will succeed?

The type of government we live under is important, as some types violate liberty while others allow liberty. But no governmental system of men is inherently successful.

The answer is not to be found in the particular form of government people might choose, but ultimately in who will govern. One of the best known prophecies of the Bible says

of the coming of Jesus Christ to reign: “The government will be upon His shoulder” and “of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end” (Isaiah 9:6-7). We are also told of that time that “the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44; compare Revelation 11:15).

Few people would object to government by God Himself when they properly understand it, but is that really going to happen? The authoritative word of God says that it will. For an explanation of the Bible’s teaching on what lies ahead for the nations of the world and the Middle East in particular, please request or download our free booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom* and *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.

The Bible, while it stresses many principles of personal freedom, individual initiative and collective responsibility, does not teach democracy—though it also does not condemn democratic rule itself. Rather, it reveals that a world government ruled by Jesus Christ at His return is the real solution to governmental problems. It will succeed not ultimately because of the form of government to be imposed but because of the righteousness of the Ruler—as well as a miraculous change in the spiritual and moral nature of those governed.

The people of the world are watching the events of the Arab Spring, and many are praying for a positive outcome. Whether or not democracy takes root in the Middle East, this is all temporary. The ultimate solution to governmental problems lies beyond man’s control. But that solution will come—and soon, it increasingly appears. But you as an individual don’t need to wait to start submitting to God. You can experience the awesome benefits of His rule in your own life right now. ✦

# Europe's "Lost Generation"

*While many economic experts have focused on the Greek debt crisis and the future of the euro, the plight of unemployed youth in Europe has received less attention. Rising numbers may embrace political extremism.*

by Paul Kieffer

**H**undreds of young Spaniards began a three-week protest in mid-May at Madrid's Puerta del Sol plaza. With a play on the words of U.S. President Barack Obama's election campaign slogan, the young protestors proclaimed, "Yes, we camp!"

The city-center campout was a demonstration against high unemployment among Spanish youth and the Spanish government's response in the last two years to the worldwide financial crisis. More than 45 percent of job-seeking Spaniards under the age of 25 are unemployed, the highest level of unemployment among young people anywhere in the European Union. In fact, according to United Nations statistics, the average level of youth unemployment throughout the rest of the world is about 13 percent—Spain's being more than triple that. It is no wonder that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has characterized Spain's young unemployed as the "lost generation."

The protest in Madrid served notice on Spain's political leaders and union representatives that frustration among Spanish youth is slowly turning to anger. Prior to last month's demonstration, things had been quiet in the country's cities for months despite high unemployment. Young job seekers in Spain are challenged by the reluctance of employers to offer them regular employment with the accompanying benefits that their colleagues with seniority enjoy. Instead, they are given short-term contracts without severance benefits, making them the first ones to be laid off in any economic downturn.

Spain's government can offer little

hope of relief or improvement for the hordes of young unemployed Spaniards. The Spanish economy is still suffering the after-effects of its housing industry having gone from boom to bust. The country's own debt crisis means billions of euros in budget cuts to position itself for any emergency loans that might be needed in the future from other eurozone members and the IMF.

The demonstration in Madrid prompted similar protests not just in other Spanish cities, but in other EU countries as well. What impact might this ultimately have?

## Europe's youth unemployment problem

While Spain holds the dubious record of the highest youth unemployment rate in Europe, the "lost generation" of unemployed youth is expanding throughout the Continent. Currently, 19 of 27 European Union members have a youth unemployment rate exceeding 20 percent. There are only three EU countries where the youth unemployment rate is less than 10 percent: Germany, Austria and the Netherlands. In other words, youth unemployment is not only a problem for EU countries viewed as weak economically, like Greece, Lithuania and Latvia, but even for industrialized nations like France and Italy.

It's only a matter of time before Europe will pay dearly for the lost generation's missing contribution to the European economy. Without regular income these young people will not contribute as consumers to the normal economic cycle. With no income they will not be paying taxes and helping to reduce their country's

fiscal problems, and they will be a drain on unemployment and welfare funds instead of contributing to them through their earnings.

Then there is also the aspect of mental and emotional well-being for those who experience long-term unemployment or fear losing their jobs. According to Dr. Matthijs Muijen of the United Nations World Health Organization in an interview with Britain's *Public Service Review*: "Employment is a very powerful predictor of depression and anxiety. Unemployment poses the risk of poverty and leads to individuals losing social connections and feeling marginalised. At the peak of the economic crisis, people were very fearful, which led to a change in behaviour; they were loathe to take sick days and were going into work even if they were ill" (June 13, 2011).

Depression and anxiety are not the only reactions to unemployment. When young French protestors gathered in May at the Place de la Bastille in Paris to sympathize with Spanish youth demonstrating in Madrid, anger and frustration were evident, prompting *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Germany's largest national subscription newspaper) to wonder whether the recent angry protests in North Africa had boiled over into Europe. "Our goal is a world revolution," was how one of the French demonstrators described the protest (May 31, 2011). Calling themselves the "Indignant Citizens," their protest was directed against the fruits of the Western capitalist system.

Using social media like Facebook and other websites, the "Indignant Citizens" quickly organized similar demonstrations in Lisbon, Budapest,

Athens and Berlin. The brunt of their wrath was directed at budget cuts and a perceived unfair distribution of wealth. French foreign minister Alain Juppé admitted that the “unbridled greed of the rich” and the growing needs of the poor were fueling the perception of injustice (ibid.).

Unfortunately, it seems that European and world economists have little hope of reducing Europe’s growing army of the young unemployed. A *New York Times* article by Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman quotes the secretary general of the 34-nation Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as stating, “The room for macroeconomic policies to address these complex challenges is largely exhausted” (May 29, 2011). Krugman himself says: “On both sides of the Atlantic, a consensus has emerged among movers and shakers that nothing can or should be done about jobs. Instead of a determination to do something about the ongoing suffering and economic waste, one sees a proliferation of excuses for inaction, garbed in the language of wisdom and responsibility” (ibid.).

### The potential for radical change

So far Greece is the only country where recent protests over unemployment and austerity measures have turned violent. A report from the German Press Agency (Deutsche Presse-Agentur) described the scene in Athens at the beginning of June:

“Resistance is also coming from the ‘Indignant Citizens,’ a protest movement organized on the Internet. It has occupied Athens’ main square in front of parliament every evening for almost the last two weeks, demanding a type of ‘direct democracy.’ Members of parliament are



Reuters/Andrea Comas

### *Demonstrators protest against collective bargaining reforms in front of Spain’s labor ministry in Madrid.*

called ‘thieves and traitors’ and are spat upon, called names and on occasion become the target for stone-throwers. The crowd is mixed, and the mixture is highly explosive. The anti-system group dominates part of the square, along with unemployed people and their families, members of the political opposition, disappointed socialists, monarchists, housewives who bang on their pots, students and university graduates who have no hope of finding a job. The extreme right is also represented, occupying a corner of the square right in front of parliament. There are fears that the slightest incident could ignite an explosion” (June 5, 2011, translation ours).

The head of the Greek Orthodox Church, Archbishop Ieronymos, said the financial crisis provided Greece

an opportunity for change but not, he warned, “that we destroy ourselves” (*Kathimerini*, June 5, 2011).

The “Indignant Citizens” movement of recent weeks has demanded not just an end to high unemployment, but also an overhaul of the European political system, which is viewed as incapable of solving current problems.

Germany’s experience with right-wing extremism offers an interesting insight into the attractiveness of fringe movements. In recent years Germany’s three extreme right-wing political parties have had their biggest electoral successes in areas where unemployment is well above the national average. A study conducted two years ago by the Department for Medical Psychology and Sociology at the University of Leipzig concluded that unemployment was a motivating factor for male voters in deciding to vote for one of the three parties. Of those surveyed, one third who voted

for an extreme right-wing party were unemployed, and other voters listed fear of losing their job as a reason for choosing a right-wing party. The survey also revealed that the majority of respondents who voted for right-wing parties were from low-income households.

With experts predicting that Europe’s unemployment malaise will last for years, the potential is very real that disaffected youth may embrace alternative solutions rooted in political extremism that offer radical change in a crisis situation.

### Where is this headed?

Will history repeat itself? Will Weimar be the model for Europe? The last years of Germany’s post-World War I Weimar Republic were plagued

(See “GENERATION,” page 11)



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# Does Israel Matter?

*U.S. President Barack Obama recently called on Israel to return to its pre-1967 borders as the basis for a solution to its conflict with the Palestinians. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu countered that this is a non-starter. Why is this so critical, and does Israel really matter in the scope of things?*

by Darris McNeely

**F**orty years ago I traveled to Israel to spend the summer working on an archaeological dig at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. When our group arrived we were put to work at the base of the southern wall in the shadow of the Al Aqsa Mosque.

We spent about two months clearing the dirt and debris and in the process uncovered the topmost level of the monumental steps by which people entered the Temple complex in Jesus Christ's day. Today you can see those steps and much more when you visit the Jerusalem Archaeological Park.

We also traveled throughout Israel exploring many sites mentioned in the Bible. That summer remains among the highlights of my life. I met people from around the world and saw places I had only read about in books. It was quite an adventure.

Israel garners a lot of attention in the news. Is that warranted? Why should we even care about this place that, for many, is so far away?

## **Country's expansion after enemy attack**

Had Israel not annexed the territory it captured in the 1967 Six-Day War, I probably would not have made the trip I was on. Certainly there would not have been an archaeological excavation at the Temple Mount. Before 1967 the Arab nation of Jordan controlled that area, and Jews were not allowed there. Jerusalem was a divided city, and certain sections were off limits.

But with the 1967 war this all changed. Israel's borders were expanded, giving Israelis some "breathing room" to defend themselves against their enemies. Israel fought one more all-out war, the

near-fatal Yom Kippur War of 1973, wherein Egypt nearly defeated the Israeli Defense Force. The Israelis, aided by America, rallied and won that war, and years later they signed peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan.

Since that time a tenuous relationship has existed between the Jewish state and Palestinians who continue to seek the return of lost lands as part of a final settlement.

The lack of a permanent treaty and establishment of a single Palestinian state is at the heart of the ongoing dispute in the region. Many expect a push at the United Nations this autumn to declare the existence of a Palestinian state, which would place Israel in a major dilemma.

## **Renewed call for pre-1967 borders**

Since January the Middle East has been in turmoil, with leaders ousted in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen. Others may yet follow. The so-called "Arab Spring" has not created new democracies. Rather it has destabilized the region in a manner not seen since the creation of the modern Middle East at the close of World War I.

The Obama administration is carefully watching these events. Its members want to come down on "the right side of history," even if they may not grasp what that "history" might be. President Obama has not made any positive progress with the Arab world since his much-vaunted speech in Cairo two years ago. His recent call for Israel to return to pre-1967 borders with "agreed-upon swaps" of land is ill-defined.

What would a return to pre-1967 borders mean? In key areas, Israel would be only about 10 miles wide,

allowing enemy armored forces to easily cut the country in half in time of war. Israel's one large airport near Tel Aviv would be just a few miles from enemy territory, exposing departing and arriving flights to missile attacks.

Syria would again control the Golan Heights, a high plateau overlooking northern Israel and an advantageous area from which to fire on or attack exposed cities and towns below. And the Old City of Jerusalem would again be under Muslim control, cutting off access to Jewish and Christian holy sites—or at least making them unsafe for Jews and Christians to visit.

Israel knows it must have defensible borders. Its troops must have room to maneuver and protect its people. The Israelis have no room to make mistakes. Just one could be fatal. They know that they, not unreliable allies, are responsible for their survival.

Israel understands it must negotiate an agreement that provides for a Palestinian state alongside a *defensible* state of Israel. And the Israelis have confirmed that Jerusalem must remain their *united* capital. They will settle for nothing else. They're in the land to stay and will not be moved.

## **Some benefits of expanded Israeli rule**

What have the Israelis done with the land they gained in the 1967 war? They opened the land and made it productive. It has been cultivated to grow crops that not only feed the nation, but provide exports to the world. You can drive through these areas and see the progress that stable democratic government has brought to the land and its inhabitants, Jew and Arab alike. More than 1.5 mil-





Photo courtesy Darris McNeely

*The author, at left, in a 1971 excavation helps clear rubble from atop the first-century steps leading to the southern entrances to the temple complex built by Herod the Great in Jerusalem.*

lion Arabs actually live in peace and freedom *within* Israel—a fact seldom reported.

I have seen the benefits Arabs living in Israel enjoy. Travel through the Jordan Valley, to Jerusalem, to Nazareth and Galilee and you will see the signs of prosperity where mutual cooperation is maintained.

There is another benefit gained in the more than four decades since the 1967 war. It is the rich knowledge of the archaeological finds that have opened up the history of the land. The Bible, along with many of its characters, has been confirmed historically by these finds. The field of Bible archaeology has exploded, and the world is better for that.

I earlier mentioned that the dig I worked on at the Temple Mount would not have been possible were the area still controlled by Muslim Arabs. Likewise, to the south of this area, in what is called the City of David, various digs have unearthed the history of the city, confirmed the ancient Jewish presence and affirmed the accuracy of the Bible. We would know little of this rich history were it not for the openness fostered by the State of Israel.

### Israel a crucial focal point

Walter Russell Mead spoke to Israel's role in a recent piece at *The American Interest*. Israel matters to America like no other nation on earth, he wrote. "The people and the story of Israel stir some of the deepest and most mysterious reaches of the American soul . . . The belief that God favors and protects Israel is connected to the idea that God favors and protects America.

"It means more. *The existence of Israel means that the God of the Bible is still watching out for the well-being of the human race . . . The restoration of the Jews to the Holy*

Land and their creation of a successful, democratic state after two thousand years of oppression and exile is a clear sign that the religion of the Bible can be trusted" ("The Dreamer Goes Down for the Count," May 25, 2011, emphasis added).

The existence of Israel *does* matter in today's world. It is larger than a Palestinian refugee problem. It is even more than the survival of one ethnic group over another. The ancient land occupied today by the remnant of mainly one tribe of the biblical nation of Israel is the site of God's story of eternal salvation for *all* the tribes of mankind. It is the culminating spot where the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will show Himself once more

for the good of *all* people and bring *all* nations before Him in judgment.

Today Jerusalem may be a "heavy stone for all peoples" (Zechariah 12:3), but one day it will become a place where people dwell in peace, for "Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited" (Zechariah 14:11).

Over the years I have made several visits to Jerusalem. In spite of its current troubles I have always felt safe. I've been able to place my hand on the Western Wall and walk around the Dome of the Rock. I've been able to see all its fabled streets and buildings, taking in all its history. I've been able to do this because it has been a free and united city. That is the way it should always be. ❖

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### "GENERATION" (Continued from page 7)

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by high unemployment. When unemployment reached about 35 percent, Germany got a new chancellor who promised to solve the unemployment problem. His name was Adolf Hitler.

While disturbing to contemplate, this should come as no surprise to students of Bible prophecy. *World News and Prophecy* has long warned of the coming rise of a new dictatorship in Europe following a long tradition. This leader and his empire, both referred to in the book of Revelation as "the beast," will plunge the world into its darkest period. (For much more on this, see the March-April 2010 issue of our sister publication, *The Good News*.)

But that's not the end. Thankfully, evil will be vanquished, the darkness will be lifted, and the problems of this age will be solved the right way.

The Bible shows that a time is coming when the youth of all nations—and older folks too, for that matter—will not have to deal with the uncertainties of today's world. Jesus Christ has promised to return to restore equity and justice so that all, starting with the people of Israel, may live in peace and enjoy the security of homes and long-term employment (see Ezekiel 28:26; Isaiah 11:1-5; Micah 4:1-4).

Again, though, dark times will come first. Are you prepared? The time for drawing near to God is now. ❖



# In Brief

News and trends that affect your life

## Flooding Superstorm May Menace California

Scientists with the U.S. Geological Survey have warned about the prospects of a superstorm hitting California at some point. Apparently such a storm hit the state in 1861-62 and continued over 45 days. Because of massive flooding, the state capital had to be moved from Sacramento to San Francisco for a time (Felicity Barringer, “If Quakes Weren’t Enough, Enter the ‘Superstorm,’” *The New York Times*, January 11, 2015).

Witnesses described a “river that swept away people and livestock. California’s central valley, now America’s breadbasket [of fruits and vegetables] was turned into an inland sea, impassable for months” (John Harlow, “Biblical ‘Arkstorm’ Threatens LA,” *The Sunday Times*, March 6, 2011).

Scientists have further warned that if the Los Angeles area were hit by such a storm in the next decade, more than 1.5 million people would be rendered homeless, and the cost could be three times as high as a major earthquake.

A writer for the British magazine *Geographical* reports that “all around the world extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and more severe. And while the UK has been hit by several devastating floods in recent years, developing countries continue to be profoundly affected, with Pakistan an obvious recent example” (Mark Rowe, October 2010).

Upsets in the weather and natural disasters both play their part in the prophetic framework given in the Bible. Jesus warned of “great earthquakes” (Luke 21:10), which are part of the “beginning of birth pains” (Matthew 24:7-8,

New International Version)—signifying that they will, as labor contractions, increase in frequency and intensity as the return of Christ draws nearer. Yet the word for earthquake here, *seismos* (from which we get *seismic* and *seismology*), literally means “shaking” and applies to shakings of the atmosphere (storms) as well as the ground. In fact, the word *seismos* is elsewhere translated “tempest” (Matthew 8:24) or “storm” (NIV).

So the many hundreds of tornadoes this year, and even Hurricane Katrina of 2005, are by no means the worst weather we can expect. As we approach Christ’s return, we will see more and bigger storms, with accompanying flooding, than we’ve already seen. Yet even a superstorm hitting California may not be the worst of it. Consider that a comet or asteroid impact, which the Bible also seems to warn will come near the very end (see Revelation 8:6-12), could conceivably raise atmospheric temperatures enough to produce massive hypercanes hundreds of miles across with winds over 500 miles per hour. (Sources: *The Sunday Times*, *Geographical* [both London], *The New York Times*.)

## Failed Rapture and Doomsday Prediction—Again

The end of the world didn’t happen. The prediction had been all over the press after a California preacher blanketed the country with ads warning: “Global Earthquake: The Greatest Ever! Judgment Day May 21, 2011.” ABC News reported that “the expectation [for this day] was that . . . more than 200 million people would be swept up to heaven in the Rapture while the rest of humanity would suffer five months of unspeakable misery before the ultimate end of the world in October” (“Apocalypse Now?: ‘Rapture 2011’ Comes and Goes Quietly,” May 21, 2011).

While the vast majority of people mocked the notion, a number of supporters were utterly convinced, despite a failed prediction of the end of days in Sept. 1994. One man spent his entire life savings of \$140,000 on subway and bus system ads in New York City (NewsCore, “New York Man Spends Life Savings Ahead of May 21 Doomsday,” May 14, 2011).

Of course, many mocked when nothing happened—especially when right away the end was simply declared to be five months later (Josh Vorhees and Ben Johnson, “. . . New Rapture Date of Oct. 21: California Preacher Says May 21 Was Only ‘an Invisible Judgment Day,’” *Slate.com*, May 24, 2011).

There are a few issues that should be highlighted here. Perhaps the most obvious is the gullibility of people to believe the false predictions of those who’ve already proven themselves false. The Bible tells us: “If what a prophet



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*“If the Los Angeles area were hit by such a storm in the next decade, more than 1.5 million people would be rendered homeless.”*



proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed” (Deuteronomy 18:22, NIV). But people become invested in their choices and loyalties—and, the human heart being deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9), stubbornly persist in error.

One resultant tragedy of such false predictions is that they tend to discredit the truth of what the Bible actually does say about Christ’s second coming in the minds of many unfamiliar with God’s Word.

Something further to note are the reasons people reject such predictions. Many who believe Jesus Christ will return to the earth reject date setting on the seemingly reasonable basis of what He said about the timing of His coming: “But of that day and hour no one knows . . . but My Father only” (Matthew 24:36). Certainly date setting has had a rather poor track record. However, we need to realize that many of this mind-set take Christ’s words to mean that He could return at any moment, which is wrong according to the Bible.

Jesus in the same passage gave indicators to signal when His coming was near. And other passages actually lay out a

*Unveiled*).

As for this conception of the rapture, the Bible doesn’t teach it. It should be clarified, however, that the English word rapture itself literally just means being “suddenly caught up,” and the Bible does mention that happening. The apostle Paul states in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 that at Christ’s triumphant return to the earth, living believers “shall be caught up together with [those who died in the faith] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”

Yet while the catching up of believers to meet Christ is certainly biblical, where many have placed the timing of this event with the rapture doctrine is not.

Most who espouse “the rapture” are more technically described as “pretribulationists” who believe in a “pre-Tribulation rapture”—typically mistaken in thinking the Tribulation is seven years, with it turning “Great” at the halfway point. There are also “midtribulationists” who believe in a “mid-Tribulation rapture,” thinking the catching away occurs at that supposed halfway point, 3½ years before Christ’s return. Finally, there are “posttribulationists,” who believe in a “post-Tribulation rapture,” wherein the catching up of believers to meet Christ in the air comes at the end of the 3½-year Great Tribulation period. While the latter position is closer than the others to what the Bible teaches, the term rapture is still problematic, given all the false conception surrounding it.

To be clear, the popular rapture doctrine is false. There is no rapture of believers months or years in advance of Christ’s actual second coming. Rather, believers will be caught up to meet Christ right before returning with Him to the earth—after having been alive on earth through the 3½-year Tribulation period.

So again, Christ will not return tomorrow—because the conditions for His return have not yet been met. Nor will He return next year in 2012, when many think the world might end, as the length of time required for the Tribulation will not allow for that.

Sadly, many people shook their heads at the recent pronouncements not because the predictions are unbiblical, as they clearly are, but because these people don’t believe in Bible prophecy or Christ’s soon coming at all. Some even reject the Bible altogether. Tragically, here is more fuel for that fire—false predictions and gullible followers creating an opportunity for the mocking of Bible believers by painting all with a broad brush.

Lastly, this has been a cause for more of what is prophesied in the Bible about the time before Jesus’ return: “Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come . . . They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation” (2 Peter 3:3-4, NIV). The more failed predictions there are, the more of such scoffing there will be. There will no doubt be more after October. And there will be more when the world doesn’t end in 2012.

The enemy, Satan the devil, is working to get people to have wrong notions about the end of the age—and to get many to pay no serious attention at all to *any* notion of the end. (Sources: ABC News, NewsCore, Slate.com.)

*Contributors: John Ross Schroeder and Tom Robinson*



Reuters/Stephanie Stapleton

### *Thousands of ads like this New York subway poster warned of impending doom*

timeline of events that must transpire before Christ comes—including the cutting off of sacrifices in Jerusalem and the commencement of the Great Tribulation 3½ years before (request or download our free booklets *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*). Since sacrifices haven’t even started yet, we can’t claim that the Tribulation will start tomorrow—much less that Jesus will return tomorrow.

Many get around this with their concept of “the rapture.” They argue that Jesus could return at any moment to take believers to heaven and that the prophesied events such as the Tribulation will come after that—at the end of which Jesus will return again with believers to reign. Yet while God does offer protection for His people during the time of Tribulation, nowhere is it stated that this will be in heaven. Rather, the prophetic outline makes it clear that believers do not ascend to meet Christ until He returns at the last of seven trumpets (see our free booklet *The Book of Revelation*

## Christ in the midst

As students of the gospel, our proper prophetic focus needs to center where the Bible clearly and loudly focuses, directing our attention to the Shepherd in whom we shall not be in want. Have you ever considered how the book of Revelation opens with this centering narrative? “. . . And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man” (1:12-13). These lampstands represent “the seven churches” (verse 20), seven signifying completeness and thus the totality of God’s Church. And in the imagery here we discover Jesus Christ *in the midst of* His Church down through the ages. A central and centering figure, He dominates the prophetic landscape. Christ is figuratively revealed as no stranger to His flock and is not distanced from His followers even when it might seem darkest in our lives.

The recorder of this revelation, the apostle John, in another of his writings presents this self-disclosing statement of Jesus: “I am the good shepherd; and I know my sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep” (John 10:14-15). This proclamation introduces the sacrificial key that unlocks the prophetic realm of

Revelation, as the Good Shepherd is extolled in the heavenly realm with these words: “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God” (5:9, English Standard Version). His sufficiency is without question, and His provision for those He loves is met with one answer: “I died for you.”

What is fascinating with the fullness of scriptural revelation is that Jesus Christ is simultaneously the “Good Shepherd” and the “Lamb” of God (mentioned 27 times in Revelation). He understands both the role of guide and follower. In Him, they become one. He is indeed a Shepherd in whom we shall not want or lack.

The beloved 23rd Psalm is meant for more than word filler in funeral folders. It’s offered as a guide to our day-by-day walk into the future—in both the succeeding chapters of our personal lives and the unfolding tapestry of prophecy. Written by King David, who had worked as a shepherd in his youth, the psalm presents life as a follower of the ultimate Shepherd.

As we center on the Good Shepherd in whom we “shall not want” (verse 1), we are immediately reminded that He directs and enables us “to lie down in green pastures” (verse 2). Thus, our faith in Him is immediately challenged by whether we will obey His

direction. With the Shepherd’s help, we respond by faith-filled action to “lie down” where He sets us to feed and grow spiritually. I’ll be the first to admit that “spiritual green pasture” doesn’t always match our human color charts. Our circumstances don’t always look so lush. But the Shepherd knows what is best for us.

Psalms 23 then mentions that He leads us “beside the still waters” (still verse 2). Drinking in of the “waters” of God’s Spirit and Word quenches our spiritual thirst and clears up our thinking (see John 7:37-39; Ephesians 5:26). Taking in of God’s mind and what is written in Scripture gives us continuing assurance, beyond personal anxiety or global trepidations, that God’s purpose, plan, promises and provisions are true and right on schedule—*His* schedule!

Like scattered sheep, the flock of God can become spiritually disoriented by fear of predators, tension with other sheep, or hunger. God’s Word says: Trust where I place you and enjoy the still waters. It is only then that you can “be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).

## Restoration: now and ever

The next famous phrase in Psalm 23 describes how the Good Shepherd “restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake” (verse 3). Sheep are creatures of habit, and if not properly led they will turn good ground into ruts and turn pastures into deserts by overstaying their welcome—and they will pollute the ground beneath them with their own waste. The most important function of a shepherd is to keep the flock on the move!

Sometimes as sheep we forget this. We don’t like the new path, or we stare at the sheep rather than focusing on the Shepherd and bolt. It’s here we’re reminded that the spiritual walk is not a quick escalator ride to salvation, but at times has detours of our own making. Yet we have a faithful Shepherd who restores us on course and puts us back on the path of His choosing. Restoration is not marginal to the Christian experience but central. What Christ told Peter just before he was to veer from the right path for



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*“Long ago, I learned something in the still of the night. I stopped counting sheep and focused on the Shepherd!”*



a while, confident in “*when you have returned to Me*” (Luke 22:32), should echo down to us today.

Jesus was always blatantly honest, then as now, as to where the path might lead. He never said the journey would be easy, but He did promise it would be worth it. Acts 14:22 echoes, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” Psalm 23 bluntly describes periods of our own walk with God as well as the forward motion of the Church down through the ages: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over” (verses 4-5).

It is noteworthy that Jesus never said that “evil” would not be visited upon His followers or the Church as a whole. But as the psalm encourages, we need not fear it. What Jesus did say is: “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades [the grave] shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Take a careful look at this verse! The ultimate fulfillment of prophecy is not a church on the run, but the doors of Hades, death itself, being broken down and surrendering its grip on us.

The living Christ, at the right hand of the Father on high, shepherds and rallies His elect, proclaiming: “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death” (Revelation 1:17-18). The Good Shepherd of prophecy has traversed both life and death and emerged triumphant!

And yet, despite knowing this, the knees of our heart can get a little wobbly along the way. Consider, please: When His precious flock is on the move down the path of history, it is here that the Great Shepherd is at His most intense and intimate best in guiding the flock over challenging terrain to the good pasture He has already gone ahead to prepare.

It is here in “the valley of the shadow of death” that the cry of the sheep down through the ages can be heard echoing through the canyons

of time: “How long, O Lord . . . ?” (Revelation 6:10). It is here that the flock must know that the Shepherd it follows never sleeps (Psalm 121:4). He is dedicated to preserving all who would follow Him into the abyss of darkness. Of His sheep who hear His voice, He declares: “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand . . . And no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand” (John 10:27-29).

### “I am with you always”

Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd of prophecy, is guiding His flock through the winding twists of history and prophecy to one ultimate destination—the great culmination at “the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power” (1 Corinthians 15:24). This unique moment in time, as time itself passes away and melts into eternity, is the sublime experience we are being led forward to. It will fulfill the grand crescendo of the 23rd Psalm’s final words: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (verse 6).

We still have some paths to walk down and valleys to pass through in the seasons of our personal lives, along with the unfolding chapters of prophecy. I don’t know how long the journey is, but I know what’s been promised if we stay on the trail and stay focused on the Good Shepherd of prophecy. As we do, let’s remember that the will of God will never lead you to where the grace of God cannot keep you. The encouraging directive of, “This is the way, walk in it” (Isaiah 30:21) is reformed in the sureness of the Chief Shepherd’s promises. “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” He said (John 14:6). “And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

The remedy for those sleepless nights is right here. “For so He gives His beloved sleep” (Psalm 127:2). Sleep tight! ❖



Robin Webber

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by Robin Webber

## The Good Shepherd of Prophecy

**R**ecently, I had one of those sleepless nights in which I was wide awake, staring into darkness, with seemingly tons of thought pressing on me. My mind was whirling on overdrive with all gears greased with worry. I’m sure we’ve all shared that common pillow of despair. Sometimes when people reach this point of sleepless frustration, they commence with the well-known exercise of “counting sheep,” imagining one after another bounding over the pasture fence. But there’s a better way to peaceful slumber.

Long ago, I learned something in the still of the night. I stopped counting sheep and focused on the Shepherd! It was that simple and yet that profound. I began to simply repeat the 23rd Psalm with its opening line that centered my thoughts: “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want”—that is, “not lack.” What a difference! Everything else melted into insignificance.

### Stay focused on *Him*

Just like a restless night’s sleep, this wayward age of man with its 24-hour news cycle of despair can disturb our spiritual life’s rhythms and “do a number on us” if we don’t keep “looking unto Jesus . . . the great Shepherd of the sheep” (Hebrews 12:2; 13:20), also called “the Chief Shepherd” (1 Peter 5:4). Make no mistake about it. Where and on whom you focus makes all the difference when it comes to meaningful outcomes.

And we might as well get a head start before matters heat up even more. The book of Daniel and Jesus Christ, the ultimate foreteller of future events, both prophesied a time of coming worldwide trouble that

will be the worst ever—imperiling all life on earth (Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:21-22). Now reading such prophecy without proper perspective from the whole of God’s Word could keep you wide awake for multiple nights on end. Again, right focus is essential.

Let’s be honest and recognize that, as students of the Scriptures, while peering into prophecy we can become sidetracked with numerous items that seem to be sure-cure fixes to calm our hearts. Sadly, some sincere folks spend countless hours diligently going over and over (just like counting sheep) the study of some obscure biblical personality, place name or time sequence to somehow assure themselves that they can rest at night—because they know something no one else is privy to except them and, in their mind, God.

One problem though: God sees matters differently! Some things just can’t be known at a given time—being reserved to God alone (compare Acts 1:6-7). Moreover, Jesus criticized those who focused on smaller issues while ignoring “weightier” or more important spiritual matters (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42). The apostle Paul warned Christians regarding such issues as “endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith” (1 Timothy 1:4).

To be frank: Those who are always pursuing the arcane and unknowable will always remain spiritually exhausted and exhausting to others. They have not settled for the true peace that comes by centering on the Chief Shepherd, the Good Shepherd of prophecy, Jesus Christ—but, rather, have settled for a substitute gospel of esoteric biblical conjecture.

(See “GOOD SHEPHERD,” page 14)