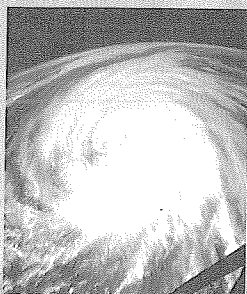


Second in a three-part series on the signs of the times



The Approaching Storm

A CONTEMPORARY INCREASE OF EVENTS

Last month we noticed how an increasing number of world events appear to have prophetic significance. These events, however, meet with a callous indifference in many people who should be alarmed with their destiny. The dedicated believer will make every effort to glean prophetic truths that give help and hope in these tumultuous times.

Presuppositions concerning the future

Before we begin studying signs of the times, we must understand some basic presuppositions.

First, prophecy, taken literally, allows believers to discern a general outline of things to come, even in discussions such as the identity of the Antichrist—Jew or Gentile? Prophecy clearly reveals main events such as the Rapture, the Tribulation, and the Second Coming.

Second, a normal interpretation of prophecy leads to a belief in a

pretribulation, premillennial return of Christ. If language means anything, Christ will remove the church before the exact time of worldwide testing (Revelation 3:10). Then He will return with the saints to set up His millennial Kingdom (Revelation 19:11ff.).

Third, the Rapture precedes the Tribulation. Three times the Holy Spirit revealed through the apostle Paul that the believer is not appointed unto the wrath of the Tribulation (Romans 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9). Other passages emphasize the expectation of the any-moment return of the Savior. The believer is encouraged to eagerly anticipate Christ's return from Heaven (Philippians 3:20; Titus 2:13).

Fourth, the believer looks for the *Savior* rather than for signs. The Bridegroom is preparing a Home for the Bride; thus she longs for His appearing.

Fifth, no prophecy needs to be fulfilled before the Rapture can occur. While hundreds of events are predicted before the second

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advent of Christ to rule (Revelation 4—19), no specific prophecy finds fulfillment prior to the Rapture.

Sixth, the date of the Rapture is fixed in God's eternal counsel. While in God's eternal plan the dates of end-time events are fixed and certain, from our perspective, the Rapture could occur at any moment. The believers in every generation have fervently hoped that they would be that blessed company who would meet the Savior without tasting death.

Seventh, future events predicted for the time after the Rapture cast their shadows *before* the Rapture. If, for instance, the Bible predicts that the nation of Israel will search for security soon after the Rapture and anticipates a United States of Europe, we would expect such developments in their early stages prior to the Rapture—as, indeed, we can witness today.

Portents of the future

Students of prophecy have observed that certain world events may or may not be related to specific Biblical prophecies. Those events fall into three categories:

1. *Illustrative events today.* Christ predicted that after the Rapture would come “wars and rumors of wars[,] . . . famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places” (Matthew 24:6, 7). These events do occur today, but the ones that will take place during the Tribulation will be unprecedented in severity. For example, one-fourth of the world's population will be slain as a result of the destruction brought on by the pale horse (Revelation 6:7, 8). Further, volcanic eruptions today are nothing compared to the fiery mountain that will be cast into the sea. This fiery mountain will kill a third of the living creatures in the sea and destroy a third of the ships (Revelation 8:8, 9).

2. *Imagined events incorrectly interpreted as prophetic fulfillment.* It is ever a temptation to read current events into Biblical texts. Nahum's chariots “with flaming torches” (Nahum 2:3) are hardly gasoline-powered automobiles. Nor are modern-day trans-oceanic travel and scientific knowledge predicted by an angel in Daniel 12:4. Contrary to the common but superficial reading of this verse, the increase in knowledge is related to the context of the passage, namely,

The believer looks for the *Savior* rather than for signs.

the “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time” (Daniel 12:1). The knowledge of prophecy, especially related to the Tribulation, would increase through diligently studying the book of Revelation. The phrase “run to and fro,” so frequently misinterpreted, is actually a Hebrew figure of speech, meaning “many shall peruse the content of a book,” namely, the book of Revelation.

3. *Incipient events that clearly anticipate the fulfillment of prophecy in the near future.*

Serious students of prophecy who are alert observers of the contemporary geopolitical developments are impressed by the multiplication of the signs of the times. Events in society, religion, and politics predicted for the Tribulation appear to already be in their developing stages. Never before in the history of the Christian church have there been so many prophetic portents—things that have prophetic significance and foreshadow coming events. The breathtaking convergence of the signs of the times cannot help but motivate believers to anticipate the Rapture, which will precede the culmination of the political and religious alignments. Here are six significant portents:

Establishment of the state of Israel

May 14, 1948, marked the establishment of the modern state of Israel, the miraculous revival of a country that had lost its independence through the Babylonian conquest in 586 BC. Prophetically there is no need for Israel to be back in the land until after the Rapture, when Antichrist will make a covenant with Israel, an event that commences the seven-year tribulation period (Daniel 9:27). In his vision of the valley of dry bones, the prophet Ezekiel reported God's statement of Israel's return to the land (Ezekiel 37:11, 12).

The fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy awaits further fulfillment and involves every Jew on earth, as promised in Ezekiel 39:28: “Then they shall know that I am the LORD

their God, who sent them into captivity among the nations, but also brought them back to their own land, and left none of them captive any longer.”

The fact that a partial return is taking place before the Rapture, which has led to the establishment of the state of Israel, is of momentous significance. The actual fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy will occur after the Rapture. The return of every Jew on earth may be due to the worldwide outbreak of anti-Semitism that will be even more virulent than what exists today, as anticipated by the Savior's warnings in Matthew 24:9: “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.”

Existence of the European Union

During the first half of the Tribulation, the ancient Roman Empire will be revived in the form of a ten-nation confederacy under Antichrist, the Roman ruler (Daniel 7:24). The ten toes on the spectacular image in Daniel 2, as well as the ten horns of the fourth and fearsome beast in Daniel 7, point to the final stage of the world's empires involving the Roman Empire's emperor.

Since the early 1950s, an economic union of European nations has been taking place. With the admission of Greece, the European Common Market included ten nations. Since then, other nations have joined what has evolved into a political entity, the European Union (EU). In the summer of 2005, ten other nations joined this political entity, now numbering twenty-five nations, all situated generally within the borders of the old Roman Empire. Elections are held every four years to select delegates to the governing body of the EU, the European Parliament, with headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, and in Strasbourg, France. The only thing lacking in this unwieldy conglomerate of nations is a strong political leader.

When on January 1, 1999, eleven nations adopted the new and common currency, the Euro, the news media heralded this event as *the* major step toward ultimate political union. The stage in Europe is set for a strong leader to step in and exert his dictatorial powers over the extraordinary colossus of the EU. Of course, all that's required for the emergence of the revived Roman Empire is

the subjugation of ten independent European nations by a Roman ruler.

In 2005 the world witnessed a dress rehearsal for such a scenario when Silvio Berlusconi, the prime minister of Italy and Italy's richest citizen, became president of the EU for six months. It's not difficult to imagine that the EU eventually will play a central part in a resuscitated Roman Empire.

Emergence of the ecumenical movement

For the first three and a half years of the Tribulation, Antichrist will tolerate a false religious system, pictured as a harlot in Revelation 17 and centered in Rome. The one-world church will apparently comprise Roman Catholics, apostate Protestants, and non-Christian religions.

Such a religious union began with the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Amsterdam in 1948. The WCC now comprises 340 denominations in more than 100 countries, boasting a combined membership of 550 million. The theological

spectrum of this religious body is so broad that it encompasses every form of heresy and apostasy. Especially significant are its efforts to unite all of the world's religions.

The late pontiff John Paul II spearheaded Roman Catholic overtures toward pagan religions by sponsoring in 2002 the Assisi, Italy, interfaith prayer meeting. In attendance were representatives of virtually every pagan religion, including the Dalai Lama, Shintoists, Confucians, and witch doctors. In an especially memorable visit to Benin, West Africa, the pontiff told the leaders of the voodoo religion, which began in central Benin, in Parakou, that their religion and Catholicism shared many things, such as a deep respect for one's ancestors.

Efforts of Russia

Ezekiel predicted that a Russian invasion of Israel will occur during the battle of Gog and Magog (Ezekiel 38; 39). That battle will take place in the middle of the Tribulation after Israel has been regathered from the nations and is living peaceably in

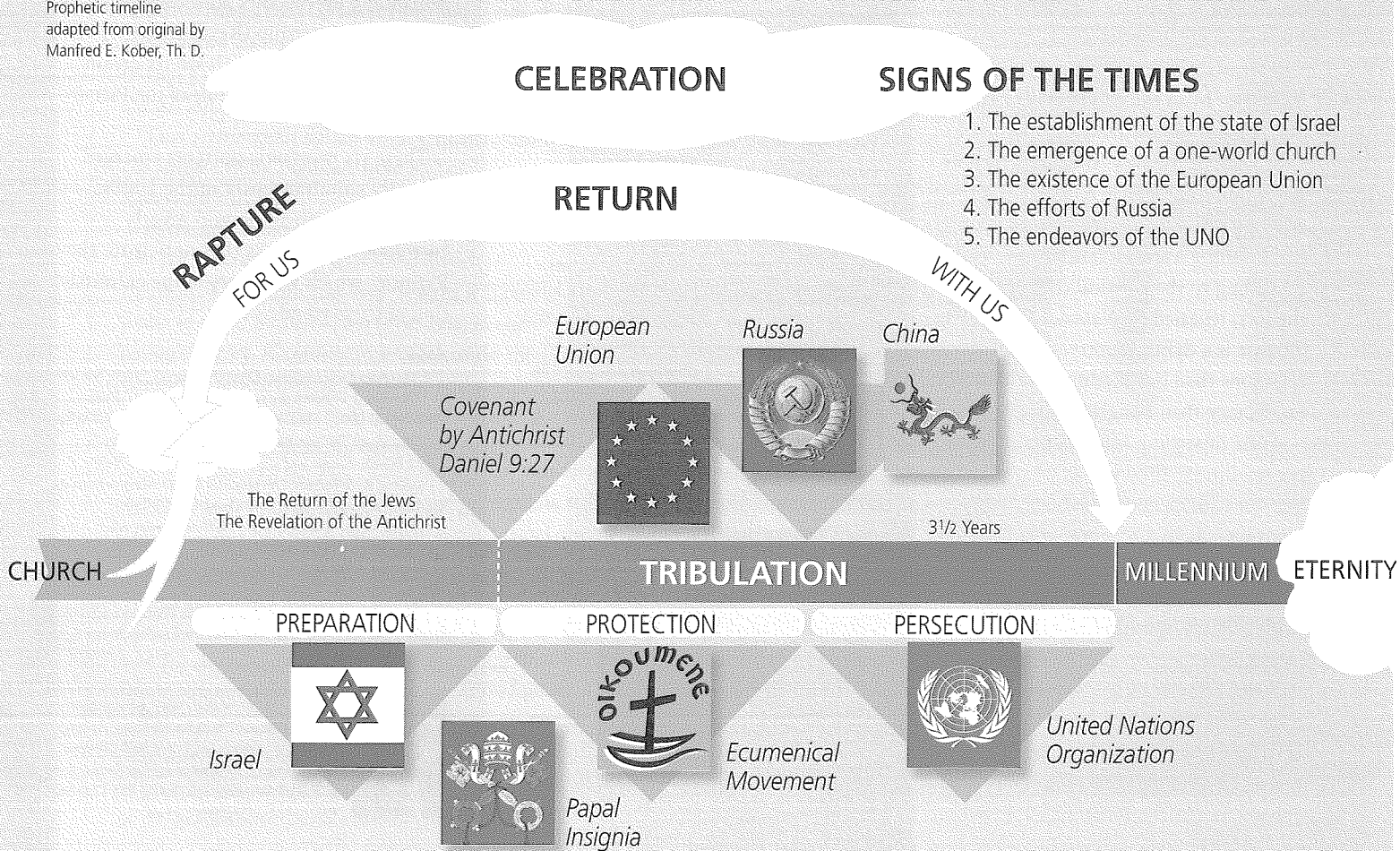
settlements without walls. Only one time in Israel's future will these conditions exist prior to the Second Advent, and that is during Antichrist's protection of Israel, spanning the first half of the Tribulation. Ezekiel foretold a decimation of the invaders through eight distinct divine judgments. The reasons for the invasion are spelled out in Ezekiel 38:10-12 and involve Russia's hatred for Israel, a desire for Israel's riches, and an effort to gain a strategic position in that area of the world.

Interestingly, since Israel became a nation in 1948 (and Russia a world power in 1949), the Arabs have launched five wars against this fledgling nation to exterminate it. In each case Russia has supplied arms and military advisors to Israel's enemies.

While Russia does not seem to be a strong military power at present, the situation could change suddenly and drastically. Russia's head of state is Vladimir Putin, a former KGB officer. The *Omega Letter Intelligence Digest* reports that after being elected president in March 2000, Putin set about the undoing

Major Movements as Prophetic Portents

Prophetic timeline adapted from original by Manfred E. Kober, Th. D.



of the democratic reforms of the past several decades by stacking the Kremlin with former KGB colleagues; by March 2000, seventeen of the top twenty-four Kremlin jobs were filled by former KGB Secret Police officers.¹

The reemergence of the “undead” hardliners is rapidly transforming Russia into a dictatorship. The Austrian newsmagazine *Profil* quotes Vladimir Ryzhkov, a member of the Russian parliament (or Duma) as saying that Russia is “a cemetery of lost freedoms.”² Ryzhkov adds that public criticism of Putin is equivalent to political suicide. A free mass media in Russia is a thing of the past.

The Heritage Foundation and *Wall Street Journal*, in their *Index of Economic Freedom*, moved Russia to 122nd place (of 157), a descent of ten positions in 2006. What’s more, the organization Reporters Without Borders places Russia’s freedom of the press in the position of 147th place (of 168). The prestigious German magazine *Der Spiegel* writes incisively that Russia is an ambivalent nation, “gravitating between imperialistic euphoria and national inferiority complexes.” Internally, the Russian leaders are restoring patriotism based on a Soviet-type military buildup. Externally, the hardliners wish to dupe the world by presenting a softer image.³

International experts on Russia sound warnings. In an extensive article in the *International Herald Tribune*, Kremlinologists warn of Russia’s “slide into authoritarianism.” The article relayed, “Russia is emerging from a 20-year cycle of decay and is rebuilding a strong central state.”⁴

Adding to the political convulsions is the fact, revealed by *National Review*, that “Russia is a dying country—literally: more abortions than live births, lesser male life expectancy than Bangladesh.”⁵

These unsettling facts are well-known to the hardliners. Who knows what convulsions will yet rock modern Russia and what secret plans for a foreign adventure the Kremlin is harboring to deflect from its internal problems? A Russian invasion of the oil-rich Middle East is not difficult to imagine; in fact, Russian leaders have predicted it.

Former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev made no secret of Russia’s goals: “Our aim is to gain control of the two great treasure houses on which the West depends—the energy treasure house of the Persian Gulf

and the mineral treasure house of central and southern Africa.”⁶

A Russian invasion of the Near East is predicted for the Tribulation. Such an invasion has been contemplated ever since tsarist Russia, long before Communism existed. The attack on Israel almost became reality when Russia began to move its troops to the south during the Yom Kippur War in 1973. Only an urgent call on the red telephone by President Richard M. Nixon to the Kremlin leaders prevented the Russian army’s advance toward Israel.

The alert believer who observes the current posturing of Russia and knows of prophetic predictions for Russia is justified in considering the menacing Russian bear as a sign of the times.

Exertion of China

China has emerged as a strong political and economic colossus. What has attracted little attention is China’s emergence as the world’s fastest-rising military power. Former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld warned the world at a June 2005 security forum in Singapore that China’s military buildup exceeds any realistic domestic needs and poses a threat to Asia’s delicate security balance.

A lengthy article in the *Wall Street Journal* is devoted to Michael Pillsbury, arguably the most influential and knowledgeable China expert in the U.S.A.:

Pillsbury, with ties to the Chinese military, warns the US Defense Department that the Chinese military is obsessed with the inevitable decline of the United States and China’s commensurate rise. He cautions that beneath China’s growing trade ties with the USA runs a nationalistic fervor which aims for an economic and military defeat of America.⁷

Interestingly, the prophetic Word anticipates a strong military participation at Armageddon. Daniel predicts that an army from the north and east will invade Israel, prompting Antichrist to shift his military headquarters from Rome to Jerusalem (Daniel 11:44, 45). Many students of prophecy believe this army is the one described in Revelation 9:16, comprising two hundred million demonized horsemen.

While the army’s national identity is not indicated, only one nation could logistically muster such an immense force, and that is

China. The reference is possibly to a confederation of Asiatic nations, perhaps with China in a leading position. The meteoric rise of a militaristic China in our day may signify a preparatory step by the world’s most populous nation to extend its despotic powers far beyond its borders, a development consistent with its contemporary military doctrine.

Endeavors of the UNO

The United Nations Organization (UNO), established in San Francisco in 1945, assumes the role of a supranational government. The world has witnessed its greed for power, but also its dereliction of duty, such as the liberation of Iraq, failing to hold Saddam Hussein responsible for the failure to abide by fourteen binding UNO resolutions.

The UNO makes no secret of its aim to establish a one-world government. Prophetically this will take place after the Rapture. As mentioned, during the first forty-two months of the Tribulation, Antichrist will revive the ancient Roman Empire by exerting his rule over a tenation confederacy (Daniel 7:24). For the last half of the Tribulation, he will be the absolute world ruler, empowered by Satan, demanding everybody’s political allegiance and religious worship (Revelation 13:1–10).

In effect, the UNO will see its dream fulfilled in the autocratic rule of the Pseudo-Christ.

These six prophetic portents emerged virtually simultaneously in the 1940s. These developments should greatly encourage believers as they anticipate the Rapture, which will precede the culmination of these trends.

Notes

¹ *The Omega Letter Intelligence Digest* (February 5, 2005): line 41.

² “Russland: Friedhof der verlorenen Freiheiten,” *Profil Online* (April 2005). Portion used was translated by Manfred Kober.

³ “Russland: Bär mit Balalaika,” *Der Spiegel* (January 5, 2006): 86–88. Portion used was translated by Manfred Kober.

⁴ Steven R. Weisman, “A confident Russia emerges from its lair,” *International Herald Tribune* (April 10, 2006): 3.

⁵ Mark Steyn, “Future Shock,” *National Review*, vol. 57, no. 18 (October 10, 2005): 60.

⁶ “Quote of the Month,” *The American Legion Magazine*, vol. 123, no. 2 (August 9, 1987).

⁷ Neil King Jr., “Secret Weapon: Inside Pentagon, a Scholar Shapes View of China,” *The Wall Street Journal* (September 8, 2005): A1, A8. ■



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