

Publishing Editor's column

RECENT news bulletins from the Middle East will have alerted readers to the surge in political unrest that is occurring in Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt, and the consequent concern of the rulers in Syria and Jordan. Readers will also know of the extreme weather conditions that have affected the Philippines, Australia and parts of North and South America. In two ways "the sea and the waves roaring" is an apt description of the situation in the world: physically and politically—a point developed in the World watchman article.

In his book *Stormy Wind Fulfilling His Word* Brother Tony Benson produced convincing evidence that years of greater earthquake and volcanic activity, extreme weather conditions and strange heavenly phenomena preceded great upheavals in human affairs. We therefore look with interest and expectation at a world where these things seem to occur with increasing frequency. It is normal for the media to account for these incidents by reference to undue severity of natural phenomena, for example the La Niña effect, which is said to be the cause of flooding in the Philippines and Australia. However, identifying and naming a natural phenomenon does not explain its origin or why the manifestations are, on occasion, more severe.

It is clearly declared in Scripture that the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth, is in control of all nature and that He will use it to achieve His purpose as He sees fit. He confronts Job with His power, and says: "Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war?" (Job 38:22,23). Intervention at the Flood and through the plagues on Egypt at the Exodus, which from a human perspective were 'natural' catastrophes, does show that God uses the natural phenomena to further His purpose. Even so, what precise features of His purpose God is progressing in the current trends in weather, volcanic activity and earthquake, and also in the political sphere, are more difficult for us to identify as they occur.

It does seem that increased instability in the natural order is being reflected in increased political unrest. What should our response be? This writer is aware that we quickly forget dramatic events, especially if they occur somewhere else in the world. It is easy to talk of the 'signs of the times' yet fail to act appropriately as a consequence. Jesus

criticised his contemporaries, particularly those who were well off and in comfortable circumstances, for such indifference: "O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?" (Mt. 16:3).

In Luke 21:34,35 Jesus described the factors that lead to indifference or misinterpretation of the signs of the times. He said: "take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth." While this was true for the events of A.D. 70, the points that Jesus made are valid particularly at the end of other eras in history, including our own.

The opportunities and cares of this life so easily crowd out an awareness of God at work. Additionally, our exposure to the relentless stream of humanistic and materialistic thinking through the media can dull the focus that we as "strangers and pilgrims" are meant to have. Our readings in Exodus remind us that, while Moses was away in the mount, Israel quickly reverted to the cultural norms of Egypt and made a golden calf—a god made in their image! It is salutary to see the similarity of the situation for believers now awaiting the return of their Lord from heaven.

Jesus provides a clear example of the need for personal focus and vision in life. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that "Jesus the author and finisher of our faith . . . for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (12:2). Paul encourages a similar clear-sighted view of the wonderful fulfilment of God's promises when he says, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

So we note that God is at work in the world, and that this will result in the coming of His Son. But, as Peter, quoting Jesus, tells us (2 Pet. 3:10-14), "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." For this we need to be ready. We need to be looking for the "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

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