



Watch Turkey

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WE MIGHT intuitively associate the River Euphrates with the east of Israel. After all, if we follow a line approximately due east from Jerusalem we arrive at the site of Babylon, which was by the River Euphrates. But the river actually originates far to the north of Israel, and indeed it is spoken of in this way in Scripture. This is shown by the following two verses from Jeremiah 46: "Let not the swift flee away, nor the mighty man escape; they shall stumble, and fall toward the north by the river Euphrates" (v. 6); and: "the Lord GOD [Yahweh] of hosts hath a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates" (v. 10).

The source of the River Euphrates lies far to the north of Israel in the modern country of Turkey. In fact around eighty-nine per cent of its water enters the river in Turkey.¹ In Revelation this Turkish river is mentioned twice. In 9:14 it is the site where four angels were bound and then loosed. These represent four waves of attack that swept westward against the Byzantine Empire, culminating in the fall of Constantinople at the hands of the Ottomans in 1453. The Ottoman Empire which developed held sway for several centuries. But in Revelation 16 the total end of this Euphratean power is predicted: "And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared" (v. 12).

During the nineteenth century the Ottoman Empire slowly but surely began to dry up as it lost one country after another. Throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century *The Christadelphian* magazine contained numerous reports and accounts of how this prophecy was being fulfilled. The following extract from 1889 gives a taste of the excitement that our brethren felt as they watched prophecy being fulfilled before their eyes: "The whole area of the Euphratean-empire is a-smoke in the intense drying action that is going on in the bed of the political river. Crete, Armenia, Servia, and Bulgaria are all cen-

tres of acute disturbance. In Crete, insurrection is rife throughout the island, the population of which is aiming desperately at emancipation from Turkish rule, and annexation to Greece".²

Our brethren in the nineteenth century were not simply looking for the demise of the Ottoman Empire. Revelation 16:12 does not say that the river will simply run low, but that it will dry up. Turkey, the last remnant of the Euphratean power which emerged as a consequence of the four angels in Revelation 9, must dry up. This is what our brethren were ultimately looking for. In 1866 Brother Roberts wrote the following: "... they [the believers] know that French influence must develope [sic] the situation, that Turkey must disappear, and that Russia must triumph, and lead the combined armies of Europe into Asia Minor to meet their overthrow on the mountains of Israel... They desire to behold the downfall of Turkey, and the triumph of Russia throughout the continent, because they know that this is the immediate presage of the end. When Russia is in Constantinople, the day of retribution and redemption is at the door".³

The Euphrates has not yet fully dried up. This will not occur until Russia invades south as the dragon power of Revelation 16. Just as our brethren looked for signs that the Ottoman Empire was drying up, so we too should look for signs of the demise of Turkey at the hands of Russia.

During the nineteenth century the problem of filling the vacuum left by the gradual decline of the Ottoman Empire became known as the Eastern Question. Increasingly in current times a question mark hangs over the rather ambiguous position of Turkey. Recently Turkey was responsible for blocking an agreement between NATO and the European Union (EU) which would have ensured that NATO had a leading

1. <http://www.turkey.org/groupc/Water/CHAPTER1/CHAP1C.HTM>.

2. *The Christadelphian*, Oct. 1889, p. 504.

3. *The Ambassador of the Coming Age*, June 1866, p. 116.

role in European security. Turkey's objections are based on its reluctance to legitimise a European defence force. As a writer in *The Economist* has written: "Instinctively, Turkey dreads the idea that the EU, which has kept it at arm's length for nearly 40 years and includes its historic rival Greece, should play any role at all in matters of defence".⁴ And all this is set against a backdrop of Turkey applying for entry into the EU.

As a member of NATO, Turkey hosts the Allied Land Forces South-Eastern Europe Headquarters and the Sixth Allied Tactical Air Force Headquarters. Over 200 UK and over 3,000 US personnel are based in the Incirlik air base in southern Turkey. When Turkey joined NATO it perceived itself as a buffer between the Middle East and Russia.

In speaking of this time the writer Andrew Mango wrote the following:

"... the Turkish Foreign Minister Fuat Köprülü, [according to the then US ambassador to Turkey] 'repeated the by then familiar thesis that the defence of the Middle East was essentially the defence of Turkey, since Turkish forces constituted the bulwark of regional defence and since the Soviets would be forced to attack Turkey and neutralize it before launching an attack on Iran and Iraq'".⁵

Today Turkey is recognised as having a vital role in the maintenance of peace and stability in the area. In 1999 the US ambassador to Turkey, Mark Parris, stated: "[Turkey is] now an indispensable country in its region. A country that can make, and is making daily, a unique contribution to the peace, stability and prosperity of a region extending from Europe to Central Asia to the Middle East".⁶

Such comments as these by the Americans show the importance the Western powers place in maintaining Turkey as their ally. The ambassador was speaking in the context of Turkey deploying a squadron of F-16 aircraft in the war over Kosovo, but the scope of the comment shows the pivotal role that Turkey, because of its strategic location, has in the region as a whole. As the article in *The Economist* also stated, Turkey is "a country whose strategic value to the West goes far beyond the confines of the Atlantic alliance".⁷ Of course, Russia will be aware of the importance of the strategic position of Turkey. It is a key stepping stone to gaining control of the Middle East.

We know from Bible prophecy that the Euphratean power is to dry up and that the Gogian force is going to move south. The last vestiges of the Eastern Question will be answered by Russia achieving its deep-seated historic desire to capture the former Constantinople. The Turkish fears of the 1950s that Russia may move to 'neutralise' Turkey will then be realised.

It is perhaps understandable that we have paid less attention to Turkey in Bible prophecy than our brethren did in the nineteenth century. Then the Ottoman Empire was drying up before their eyes. Since the end of the First World War there has been little further development in relation to this prophecy. But the drying up is not yet complete. Turkey in Bible prophecy is unfinished business. If our Lord does not return in the meantime, events in Turkey will provide us with important signs in the days to come. Will we see Russia invade Turkey before our Lord returns?

In 1876 this question was addressed by Brother Roberts in *The Christadelphian*. He thought it possible that the household of faith would witness the invasion taking place:

"When a river is dried, people can cross and recross throughout the entire length. The drying-up which prepares the way of the kings of the east, opens also the path of the king of the north, in so far as the exhaustion of Turkey makes her northern territories an easy prey for Russia. Therefore Russia may be in possession before the Lord appears to his household".⁸

As Brother Roberts indicates, this "may" be the case, but we cannot be sure. The saints by this time may have been called away to judgement. We should be looking for signs that the Russian advance south is nigh, but it would be wrong to assume that we will necessarily witness this taking place. Either way, we would do well to rekindle the spirit of our pioneering brethren by watching Turkey with renewed interest.

4. *The Economist*, 23 Dec. 2000, p. 52.

5. "Turkish policy in the Middle East", Andrew Mango, in C. H. Dodd (ed.), *Turkish Foreign Policy—New Prospects*, The Eothen Press, Huntingdon, 1992, p. 61.

6. Julie Flint, "Our ally tramples on human rights", *New Statesman*, 31 May 1999, p. 21.

7. *Op. cit.*, p. 52.

8. *The Christadelphian*, Jan. 1876, pp. 39-40.