

Publishing Editor's column

IT IS customary for world leaders to issue a message at the beginning of a new year, usually looking optimistically into the future. Yet Prime Minister Tony Blair struck an entirely different note in his new year message to the people of Britain when he said: "I cannot recall a time when Britain was confronted, simultaneously, by such a range of difficult and, in some cases, dangerous problems". And one has only to look around the world to see what he means: a seemingly imminent war in the Middle East, terrorism striking in all manner of unexpected places, and an economic downturn which threatens to become much worse.

This situation is only to be expected, for we know that our Lord's coming will be preceded by perplexing problems inducing fearfulness in men's hearts. Some readers of this magazine live in parts of the world already suffering such problems, but most of us live in countries of the Western world which have hitherto largely escaped them, and are still living in prosperity, with pleasure and material gain the main aims of life. 2003 may mark the end of such times: a war with Iraq may get out of control, bringing widespread disruption to oil supplies; terrorism may strike in new and unexpected ways; the result of these things may be economic collapse. We preach the fact that increasing world problems are to precede the return of Christ; now perhaps we will suffer from them ourselves.

But will our faith hold if such is experienced? We should be able to be like the prophet Habakkuk, who, in times of great trouble for his people, was able to exclaim: "Yet will I rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (3:18). We have good reason to rejoice, for the past year has been one in which Israel has never been out of the news, and often dominant, a year in which the attention of the nations has been drawn to that tiny land with an all-important role to play in the world's future, just as many Bible prophecies say that it will be. The outlook may be dark for a world which has forsaken God. but it is bright for those who place their hopes in the coming of the Lord and the setting up of God's Kingdom.

We begin 2003 with a new cover, in full colour for the first time (except for Special Issues), showing the sun setting over the Sea of Galilee. The members of the Testimony committee hope that readers have enjoyed the magazine in the past year, and thank them for their continuing support, trusting that they will continue to benefit from it in the future if the Lord remains away.

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