

we should love one another.” We have seen that this “beginning” pertained to the organisation of Israel at Sinai as a kingdom of priests, when they received the Law.

We find the specific commandment that John is referring to in that Law: “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD” (Lev. 19:18). Here is the second greatest commandment of all. Note, too, verse 17: “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart.” This is exactly what John is saying in his epistle. If we hate our brother in our hearts, we are in darkness; we are not walking in light, and that makes us liars.

### The darkness is passing away

John says in verse 8 that “the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth”—or, as the RV puts it, “the darkness is passing away.” Here is the same Greek word that we find in verse 17, where John says that “the world passeth away.” John is making a contrast between “the world” and darkness. The Jewish world was about to pass away because of its darkness. Its inhabitants “loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (Jno. 3:19). In spite of Jesus’

repeated call for men to come to him, the light of the world, and to walk in his light, for the most part the world failed to recognise that light. Thus it was that, when they took him away to crucify him, Jesus said to them, “This is your hour, and the power of darkness” (Lk. 22:53).

Why did the Jews crucify Jesus? Because they hated him; in John’s words, they hated their brother. Jesus himself said so, and warned his disciples of a similar response to them: “These things I command you, that ye love one another. If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (Jno. 15:17-19). This was how the Jewish world responded to God’s love in Christ Jesus. God so loved that world that He gave His only begotten Son to die for their sins, but in return they hated the Son.

The lesson for us is very powerful. Plainly, John is saying that if we hate our brother in our heart then we are behaving just as did the Jews towards Jesus, and we shall be no better than that world, which crucified him. Just as they abode in darkness, so shall we, if we do not love our brother.

(To be continued)

Watchman

## “Annus mirabilis”

Jeremy Thomas and Eric Marshall

THE TITLE of this article comes from Brother John Thomas’s own preface to *Elpis Israel*,<sup>1</sup> where he uses the phrase to refer to 1848, the “Wonderful Year” in which many of the nations of the world rose up in reaction to the settlements imposed on them following the final defeat of Napoleon just over thirty years earlier. 1848 was indeed a year of phenomenal political upheaval, involving revolutionary change in more than fifty countries of Europe and Latin America. Such was the impression of this change

on Brother Thomas’s mind that he was motivated to pay his first visit to Great Britain the same year, both to gain a better appreciation of current events and to extend the work of proclaiming the gospel with which he had for some years been occupied in the United States. A request that the subject matter of his lectures in England and Scotland be made available in printed form led to the publication of *Elpis Israel* shortly afterwards.

Whilst there was no obvious collusion or co-operation among the numerous uprisings of 1848,

common factors amongst them were seen. These included dissatisfaction and disillusionment with political rulers, a call for greater democracy and a desire that the voice of ‘the man in the street’ should be heard—themes which have again been very much to the fore over the last twelve months. It should perhaps come as no surprise, therefore, to see comparisons being made between 1848 and

1. Birmingham: The Christadelphian, 1979 edition.

2011, two years of momentous political change. In a recent BBC News interview, for instance, the British (and Jewish) historian Eric Hobsbawm is quoted as saying of 2011, “It reminds me of 1848—another self-propelled revolution which started in one country then spread all over the continent in a short time.”<sup>2</sup> Even the phrase ‘Arab Spring,’ heard so much during 2011, may itself have its roots in 1848, which has been referred to as the ‘Spring of Nations’ or ‘Springtime of the Peoples.’ One is reminded, too, of the Lord’s words in the Mount Olivet Prophecy, in which he spoke of the shooting forth of “the fig tree, and all the trees” (Lk. 21:29) as a sign of the nearness of the Kingdom of God.

2011 has certainly been, as another BBC News article put it (rather more prosaically than Brother Thomas), “The year when a lot happened.”<sup>3</sup> A conscious decision has therefore been made to devote significant space, in this the first 2012 issue of the *Testimony* magazine, to a selection of the events we have witnessed, that readers might reflect on the nearness of our Lord’s return. Closest to home for many of us, some of the most significant events of Europe are given their own coverage in two other articles. We begin with events in the Middle East.

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## The Arab Spring—where next?

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**I**N THE Middle East, the unprecedented series of uprisings of thousands of ordinary men and women who had for decades laboured under oppressive régimes has, of course, far from run its course. At the start of 2011 no one could have predicted complete régime changes of the kind we have seen, with

dictators such as Egypt’s Mubarak and Libya’s Gaddafi—if not openly supported then for years at least tolerated by the West—swept from power. In some Arab nations the dust is still settling, and it will be some time before we can discern what kinds of systems will replace those which are no more.

At the time of writing, Egyptians are going to the polls in what are the first parliamentary elections in the lifetime of many citizens. The ecstatic scenes of liberty we witnessed in February, when Mubarak was forced from office, have quickly vanished. Instead there is widespread dissatisfaction with the allegedly temporary military government, whose abuses of power are deemed by many to be as bad as those of the earlier régime, and which is widely perceived to be reluctant to give up power to a democratically elected, wholly civilian government. Conspicuous by its silence in ‘round two’ of the Egyptian revolution is the Muslim Brotherhood, by far the most organised of Egypt’s opposition parties, and not a participant in the ongoing demonstrations in Cairo’s Tahrir Square.

Whichever way things turn out, it is difficult to see Egypt’s 1979 peace treaty with Israel—in one sense the cornerstone of America’s policy in the Middle East—not coming under scrutiny, not to say strain. Israel has been vocal in its expectation that, whoever ultimately took over in Egypt, the Camp David agreement should be honoured. On Egypt’s part, however, there is no such guarantee. As far as her Prime Minister Essam Sharaf is concerned, the peace treaty is not sacred, and it may well be subject to alteration in the interests of regional peace—

whatever he means by that.<sup>4</sup> It is not difficult to see Israel’s increasing isolation, and, with Egypt’s place in last-days prophecy not in doubt, we watch developments with interest.

Meanwhile, on Israel’s northern border, her traditional arch-enemy is undergoing her own revolution, one which appears to be turning increasingly nasty as oppression of opponents to Bashar al-Assad’s government is stepped up. Syria’s isolation has been emphasised by her suspension, in November, from membership of the Arab League (a rebuke also levelled, it might be remembered, against Egypt in the wake of the peace treaty mentioned above). Things took an apparent turn for the worse on 23 December, with suicide bombings in Damascus just one day after the arrival of Arab League observers, and many are predicting civil war. Israel watches nervously.

For the Bible believer, events in the Middle East fascinate us, not only because of the way in which they remind us of the nearness of the Lord’s return, helping to maintain a state of watchfulness in each one of us, but also because they often provide us with a direct link to the places and events recorded in Scripture. The current unrest in Syria has by some observers been traced back to the heavy-handed arrest of a group of teenagers for posting anti-government graffiti in the city of Daraa.<sup>5</sup> Curiously

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2. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-16217726>
  3. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-16089232>. The article includes reference to events of no Biblical relevance.
  4. <http://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCATRE78E5NT20110915>
  5. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege\\_of\\_Daraa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Daraa)

enough from our point of view, this is not the first time in its long history that Daraa has witnessed violence, for it is the Biblical city of Edrei, where King Og of Bashan met the Israelites as they approached the Promised Land, only to be defeated by them in battle (Num. 21:33).

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## A world under pressure

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THE Lord's Mount Olivet Prophecy, already referred to, speaks of the final days of what he calls "the times of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24) being characterised by a sense of "perplexity" (v. 25), a word which—perhaps we have heard many times—carries the idea of being at one's wits' end, at a loss for finding a way forward from a particular crisis. One of the many ways in which Planet Earth's finite resources are coming under increasing pressure is via population growth. World population is estimated to have passed the seven billion mark around the end of 2011 (give or take a few months—understandably, no-one is able to say on precisely which day this milestone was reached). To commemorate the event, the United Nations Population Fund ('UNFPA') chose 31 October as 'the Day of Seven Billion,'<sup>6</sup> the date on which the event would be commemorated; and a child born on that day in one of the world's developing countries was 'officially' designated number 7,000,000,000 (although the child in question varied according to which news report was consulted).

It is only twelve years since world population is estimated to have reached six billion (equivalent to a daily increase of more than a quarter of a million people). According to United Nations

estimates, it will be sixteen years before the total reaches eight billion, and another nineteen years before world population climbs to nine billion, suggestive of a slight decrease in the rate of growth, the reasons for which are numerous. With fossil fuel naturally limited, however, and food and water resources under pressure as mankind currently uses them, it does not take a genius to foresee rising tensions among the nations of the world as these resources on which we rely become steadily more precious—and, doubtless, in many cases failing to reach those in greatest need. Such are the concerns which the Lord Jesus and the immortalised saints will remedy in the Kingdom age (see Psalm 72, for instance).

Perhaps one of the more unsettling aspects of the troubles faced by the world is the gross inequality between those in developing countries and the much wealthier citizens of the Western world. That the West continues to live beyond its means is the main factor contributing to the instability we continue to see in world financial markets, and for anyone with a conscience the immorality of this is brought into sharper relief by the pictures we see from time to time of those in other parts of the world with nothing.

In the West we are hearing more and more about times of austerity; yet while some, doubtless, are having to tighten their belts, the sheer amount of waste we continue to generate is shocking. In the United Kingdom in November a group of charities and farmers joined forces to bring public attention to the problem, and to do so they chose for the event a name with particular resonance for the Bible reader—'Feeding the

Five Thousand.' Five thousand needy people were assembled in Trafalgar Square in London and treated to a free curry lunch made entirely of food rejected as unsuitable for sale by supermarkets.<sup>7</sup>

Much of the food in question was deemed unfit for no other reason than that it was the 'wrong' shape—carrots which were too crooked, potatoes which were too small, and so on. While many in the world starve, Western consumers turn up their noses at vegetables which do not meet their fastidious aesthetic expectations. UK Government figures indicate that, on average, each family throws away food worth £680 (more than US \$1,000) every year. No less than 4.4 billion tonnes of food discarded annually in the UK could be eaten. Surely there is something fundamentally wrong with a society guilty of such profligate waste.

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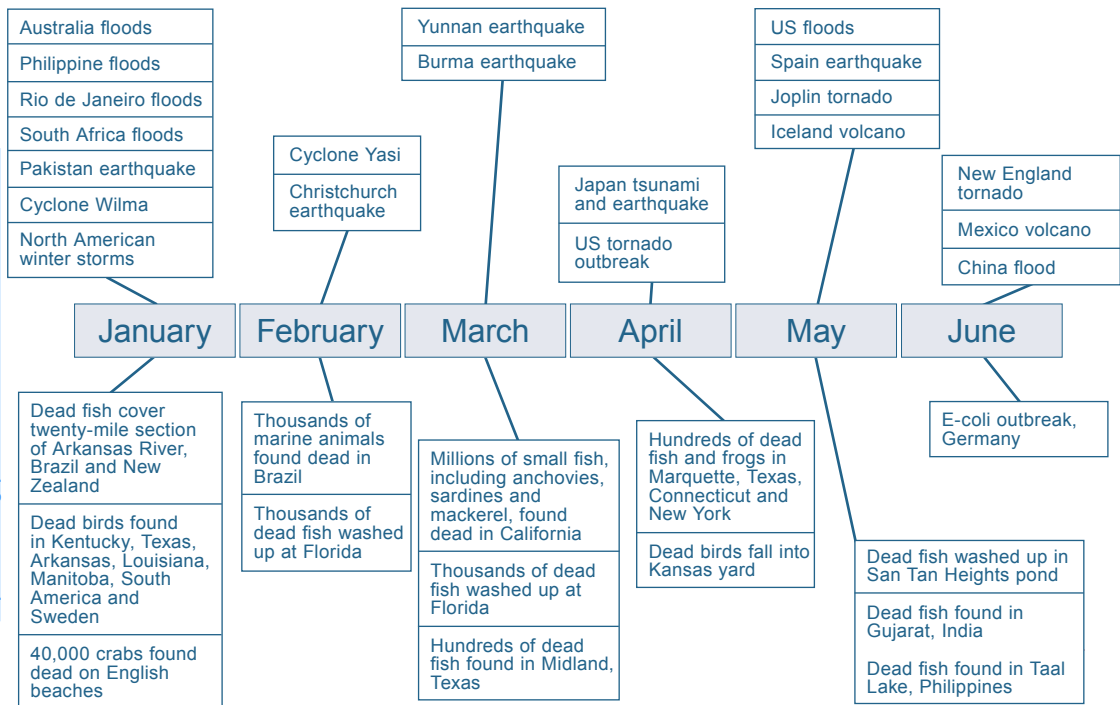
## And an exception

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STILL bucking the trend, to some extent, in financial terms is little Israel, which has, in the words of one recent report, "managed to transform itself from a stretch of farmland into a high-tech wonder."<sup>8</sup> Israel is presently benefiting from nearly 4,000 active technology start-up businesses, second only to the United States (which is forty times as large, measured by population, and over four hundred as big in terms of land area). The inward flow of venture capital to Israel in 2010 was

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6. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Day\\_of\\_Seven\\_Billion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Day_of_Seven_Billion)
  7. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-15772773>
  8. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-15797257>

Taken from: <http://baleta.blogspot.com/2011/03/natural-disasters-2011.html>



\$884 million (clearly, not everyone in the world has run out of cash!), and the annual value of Israel's high-tech exports is over \$18 billion a year, representing almost half of her total exports. This, in a country whose population is less than that of New York, is nothing short of astonishing.

Quizzed on what might be the reasons for Israel's success in this field, one local entrepreneur attributed it to the mindset of the individuals who contributed towards the rebirth of the nation in modern terms. This is a conclusion we would readily share, even if we might not put it in quite the terms the interviewee did: "A bunch of crazy people came here, trying to pursue a dream of 2,000 years." The dream of the Jews returning to their ancient homeland is one we are well acquainted with, though we would do well to attribute Israel's present-day blessings to a Power higher than their own initiative. Nevertheless, how true

it is that "the story of the culture and the spirit [of modern Israel] is part and parcel [of] . . . the cultural genes of the people."

## Natural disasters

THROUGHOUT 2011 there has been a continuing succession of natural disasters. The following comments are typical of media reports last year:

- [msnbc.com](http://www.msnbc.com) reported: "2011 already costliest year for natural disasters." An expert said, "We are rewriting the financial and economic history of disasters on a global scale."
- The *Huffington Post* reported: "US Natural Disasters: 2011 an Extreme and Exhausting Year."
- The *Guardian* for 21 September 2011 reported: "Lloyd's of London hit by record claims for natural disasters."

The wide and varied nature of the events is given in the two

diagrams [above/below](#), which are not exhaustive. We are reminded that God warned Israel: "Ye shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you: (for all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled;) that the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you" (Lev. 18:26-28).

It is not unreasonable, therefore, to see what is acknowledged to be an unprecedented level of natural disasters as evidence that God is expressing His displeasure at man's increasingly ungodly activities. The need for intervention as promised to take place at the return of Jesus is evident and much hoped for by disciples today.

