

## Publishing Editor's column

**F**IVE YEARS AGO this month Britain came partly to a standstill when the depots that supply the country with fuel for its vehicles were blockaded by lorry drivers angry at the escalating costs of fuel. (I recall having to cancel a meeting of the Testimony committee because many members had insufficient fuel for the journey, a powerful reminder of how our lives depend today on the internal combustion engine.) Fuel prices have similarly been rising in recent months, to at least ninety pence a litre at the time of writing, and we may soon be paying a pound a litre, yet similar protests have so far been absent, and few people seemed alarmed at the situation.

Oil has been aptly described as the life-blood of our world today, especially the developed Western world, and rising oil prices threaten the economic growth and consequent high standard of living that many people have got used to. In this situation there is fear in the background that some catastrophe involving the oil industry will tip the world's already precarious economy into major decline or even collapse. Such a catastrophe could, for example, be a coordinated series of terrorist attacks on Saudi Arabia's oil wells or major earthquakes in Iran.

Saints are exhorted by Christ to "lift up [their] heads" when the world is fearful and perplexed about what is happening (Lk. 21:25-28), the lifting up of the head being in anticipation of the early return of the Lord Jesus Christ. An important aspect of this lifting up of the head is to consider the signs which point to the fact that Christ's return is near, and this state of fearfulness and perplexity is, of course, in itself one such sign. Some comments in a recent issue of *Newsweek* magazine (29 August) go beyond this, however, and indicate that the same factor which contributes to the fearfulness and perplexity may also help bring about the fulfilment of other signs of the times, that factor being this growing oil shortage and the rising oil prices which result.

The current situation regarding oil is, briefly, that the biggest oil resources are to be found in the Middle East, and also in Russia and some of her former Central Asia satellites. In contrast, Europe has very little, and the USA produces nowhere near enough for its enormous needs. This makes the Middle East enormously important in world affairs, puts Russia in a very powerful position,

and puts Europe in a position of dependency upon Russia and the Middle East. The significance of this in relation to Bible prophecy does not need spelling out, though we wait to see precisely what combination of factors eventually draws the nations into the Middle East, and in particular against Israel.

The USA is by far the biggest user of oil in the world, hence its active interest in the Middle East above all other areas. It has not accepted the case for global warming caused by the so-called greenhouse gases and has therefore not taken steps to reduce its oil consumption. Instead the enormous increase in the driving of gas-guzzling SUVs (four-wheel drive sports utility vehicles) has considerably increased the demand for oil. The other rapidly increasing consumer of oil is China, whose economy is growing fast, having seized the opportunity to meet the Western world's needs for huge quantities of cheap clothes and electrical goods.

A major cause of fear and perplexity in the world today is terrorism, especially by Islamic extremists. Islamic terrorism is mainly funded from (not necessarily by) Iran and Saudi Arabia, the two biggest Middle East oil-producing countries. As the *Newsweek* writer referred to above said, "Both Iran and Saudi Arabia are now awash in oil money, and no matter what the controls, some is surely getting to unsavoury groups". Thus the greed of the Western world is bringing about problems which could easily lead to its destruction. In particular, growing use of oil is feeding terrorism and threatening economic collapse, as well as, if what environmentalists say is true, bringing longer-term problems for our planet.

Although we hope and pray to be called away to the judgement seat before the worst of the calamities which man has brought upon himself take place, we cannot expect to be unaffected by the problems of the latter days. Have we the faith to accept what could be a considerable loss of our present prosperity? Are we prepared to adapt our life in the Truth so as, for example, to support each other locally rather than travelling considerable distances for fellowship or relying on speakers from a distance? Testing times surely lie ahead as the final troubles of the Gentile age develop, and we need to prepare in order that we might maintain our faith.

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