

DESPERATION IGNITES MIDDLE EAST FIRESTORM

“Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation... For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.” Zephaniah 3:8-9

A firestorm is spreading throughout the Arab world. It ignited when a 26 year old university graduate could not find steady employment and had to resort to selling produce in the streets to earn money for his family. The authorities seized his fruits and vegetables robbing him of his livelihood and dignity. In protest the merchant set himself on fire and later died. One news commentator stated, *“this was a ‘let them eat cake’ moment.”*



This certainly was the spark that set in motion the fall of Tunisia’s oppressive regime, and the fire has rapidly spread to Egypt and Yemen. Many Arab countries are taking a neutral stand, because they see these revolts as a “good thing.” However, it could also be the opportunity Islamic radicals have been hoping for. Yemen, where they already have a strong al-Qa’ida presence, is especially vulnerable. What will this mean for the world? At a minimum, it is causing great distress among the nations. Israel is in an especially precarious position, to be sure. But all of these conditions are the fulfillment of Bible prophecy.

The Prophetic Symbol of Fire

Fire, as used in Scripture, is a fitting symbol of anarchy. It is a most destructive force, and there is nothing more destructive to society than anarchy. The prophetic description of anarchy is found in Ezekiel 38:21: *“Every man’s sword against his brother.”* While this sad prophetic statement of

final anarchy yet looms on the horizon of *end time* prophecy, *brush-fires* of revolution and anarchy such as these in Tunisia and Egypt have been flaring up around the world. Since 1998, in the Congo conflict, tragic loss of human life from tribal infighting is estimated to be 5.4 million. Rwanda, Kenya, Liberia, the Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone and Sudan’s Darfur are all crying for help. Even with international aid, however, the *fire* continues to spread.

Once the people topple the powers that be, a worse fate may rush in to fill the void. One need only look at Somalia, a country which has not been under the control of a single national government for over twenty years. Over 600,000 people have fled the country, escaping impossible conditions. Those who remain must fend for themselves, often resorting to piracy and other crimes of desperation.

In 2008 horrific scenes of tribal conflict erupted—even in postcard-perfect Kenya. This was followed by the repressive and destabilizing conditions in Tibet and Burma. Journalists were seizing upon the call to *“get the story out”* so that their leaders would know that the world is watching, and that *“they can’t get away with terrible mistreatment of their citizens.”*

Explosive conflicts such as these, bathed the last century with the blood of millions. Tragic scenes appeared briefly in the media but were soon replaced by our own personal crises or diversions. Few are prepared to keep these stories fresh in our minds, and much less able to offer meaningful help.

Though governments may quench the firestorms for a time, these struggles between the oppressors and the oppressed, will, as the Scriptures warn, eventually spread to anarchy worldwide. If it were not for the reassuring conclusion of Zephaniah's prophecy, the student of Scripture could become paralyzed with fear. Luke 21:26-28 says of our time: "*Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.*" But we are to *lift up our heads and rejoice*, because there will be a glorious outcome (see explanation, page 3).

WWI—A Turning Point in History

What brought about this significant, fiery change in international conflicts? World War I—*The Great War* of 1914—was a turning point in world history. It brought down the *crowned heads of Europe* and set in motion the breaking apart of colonized territories.

The *Russian Revolution* of 1917 was a benchmark of global change which evolved from *The Great War*. In addition, the imperialism that helped ignite World War I, also pressed African tribes and Eurasian ethnic communities together within artificial borders. The departure of imperial powers and the downfall of Soviet totalitarianism in Eurasia left behind powder kegs of resentment and mistrust ready to explode. And explode they did—Yugoslavia and Rwanda being just two examples. Previously, colonialism kept African tribes under its thumb. But as Britain, France, Belgium and Portugal fled Africa, artificially created neo-nations were left with new power bases, igniting tribal suspicions and rivalry. The results have been chaotic—and now anarchistic.

Former colonial and imperial powers will bear their share of responsibility for igniting the flames of anarchy. Adding to the complexity of social, political, economic and religious collapse is the culpability of corporate greed that has continued even until our present day. Multinational corporations are responsible for the mismanagement and selfish control of the world's resources and production. For example, the gold, copper and diamond-rich Congo is being pillaged while the profits earned never reach the native population. Congolese government leaders and their cohorts are kept well paid to achieve free rein for corporate exploits. A fiery day of reckoning is approaching. Yes, the Lord has good cause to be *angry* with the nations and will require justice on behalf of the innocents who have been victimized.



Common Elements Fanning the Flames of Desperation

The *war-revolution-anarchy* pattern is driven by any number of common factors—all leading to desperation:

- ❖ Economic collapse, overpopulation, under employment, famine, poverty, disease or fear of these events;
- ❖ Social jealousies, civil wars, ethnic or tribal revenge;
- ❖ Religious zeal to gain converts, dominate or annihilate;
- ❖ Selfish ambitions of the power-hungry;
- ❖ And education, leading to demands for personal liberties.

The growing world food crisis alone is enough to ignite the flames of desperation. *CBS News* recently reported the

staggering growth of world hunger, which is fueling the unrest of unstable third world countries. Riots for lack of food have been reported in Bangladesh, Egypt, Mauritania, Haiti, Mozambique, Senegal, Peru and even developed countries like Italy and Germany. What has driven the citizens of these countries to the breaking point?

- Soaring petroleum prices of greedy nations increase the price of fertilizers, transportation and food processing.
- A rising demand for food sources in overpopulated China and India affect the fixed law of supply and demand in smaller countries.
- Natural disasters linked to climate change destroy world harvests.
- The rising need for raw materials to produce bio-fuels reduces the availability of grain as a food source.
- And the lack of interest on the part of food-rich countries sparks jealousy and rage among the poor and starving.

Much like the French Revolution, it was the mothers' cry for bread which brought about anarchy in the streets. The cry of the world's poor will be one of the driving forces behind the fulfillment of Zephaniah's prophecy.

These religious, social, economic and political issues are the common elements which not only fuel the firestorms, but often give rise to terrorist activities throughout the world. The unfortunate fact is that unsolvable conflicts will continue to frustrate the nations and press many of earth's billions under the wheels of crushing war machines.

The Gathering of Nations

Throughout history, there have been pockets of conflict, revolution and anarchy among men ever since Cain's hand was against his brother Abel. So why have the past one hundred years been any more remarkable to indicate that we are now at the time period of Zephaniah's prophecy? It is the *gathering of nations* that makes this prophetic statement quite unique to our time.

The world is interconnected—*gathered*—as never before in history. Today, what happens on a street in Tunisia can be flashed in seconds around the world via cell phones to millions of outraged on-lookers. A global marketplace is further contributing to the instability of the social and financial fabric of nations large and small. The world's economies are now lined up like so many tottering dominos—any one could bring the others down. Investment giants are being bought out by the oil-rich United Arab Emirates, illustrating how even the growing credit crisis plays into the *gathering of all nations*.

Yes, God will “gather the nations” to pour out the “fire of His wrath.” And while all that sounds painful—there is hope. God has a plan which will bring healing! As Zephaniah prophesied, *after the fire of that day God “will turn to the people a pure language,”* and they will call upon His name and “serve Him with one consent.” Mankind will learn to work side by side—“*shoulder to shoulder*” (NAS)—instead of fighting against one another. The “*pure language*”—truth—will be given to those who have never heard of it before. And, because of the troubles they have experienced, they will now be ready to listen to God's *pure truth*—untainted by the erroneous doctrines of men.

Elijah's Climactic Vision

The Scriptures actually give us a model of the sequence that we have seen since World War I. When Elijah the prophet fled the death threat from his archenemy Jezebel, he escaped to Mount Horeb. (I Kings 19:1-12) There, the Lord produced an awesome display of power before His prophet Elijah—first a *wind*, then an *earthquake*, then *fire*, and, finally, a “*still small voice*.” That dramatic picture was a symbolic prophecy of the end time: *winds of war*; socio-political *earthquakes or revolutions*; and *the fire of anarchy*—all before the peaceable, *still small voice* of God's Kingdom.

The past century has witnessed: *the winds of war*—two world wars and numerous other wars echoing from these; *earthquakes of revolution*—more than half of the world's population has been hit with revolutions and social upheavals; and several instances of full-scale *anarchy*—from the anarchistic genocide in Turkey in 1915 and hundreds of similar tragic scenarios since then. Yes, we are witnessing the progressive fulfillment of Elijah's vision that will soon explode into world-wide anarchy. Thankfully we can see, through faith, Elijah's prophetic vision of the peaceful “*still small voice*.”

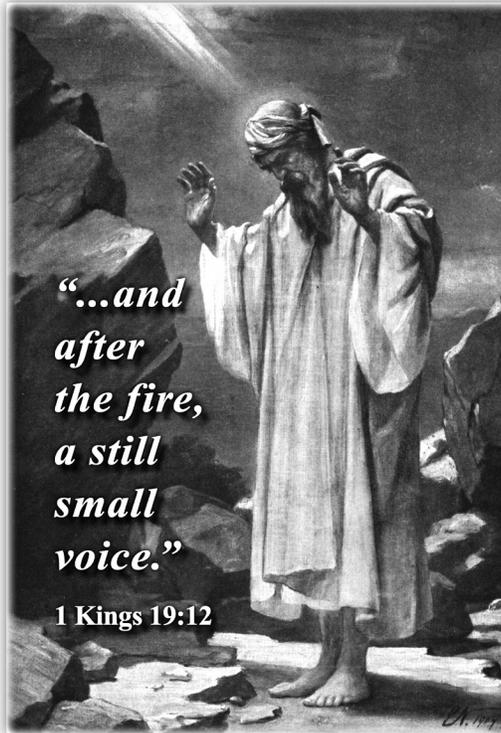
After the Fire—A Purified Earth

As has been seen, the term *fire*, as used in Zephaniah's prophecy, is not literal but symbolic of God's mighty power—destroying and removing the old structure of society to make way for the new. Who will make up this new society? Again, the prophet Zephaniah wrote that God will “*turn to the people*” the “*pure language*” of truth—which indicates they did not have it before. “*The people*” referred to will be the untold billions of mankind who have never heard the “*pure language*.” These will begin to *hear* God's Word as they are raised from their graves to a newly purified earth.

After these corrupting elements—political, financial, social and religious systems—are removed, resurrected mankind will see clearly the valuable lessons of the consequences of sin and selfishness. The Apostle Peter states that the “*heavens shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt...*” (2 Peter 3:7-13) These “*heavens*” and “*elements*” are not *people*—they are the oppressive *systems* that the selfish and power-hungry created.

The purpose of this apocalyptic fire at the return of Jesus is not to save a mere few and destroy the remainder along with the earth. The Scriptures say that the heavens retain Jesus until the *times of restitution*—the restoration of mankind to their Edenic-like home upon the earth. “... *He [God] shall send Jesus Christ... whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.*” (Acts 3:20-22) This *restitution of all things* will include all that Adam—and all of his children—lost: perfect life and home upon a perfect earth. “*For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.*” Matthew 18:11

The purpose of Jesus' return, therefore, is not to destroy but to restore the earth in *times of refreshing* as is stated in Acts 3:19. Yes, this will be a time for refreshment and healing after more than 6,000 years of trouble. As Revelation describes these “*times*,” the “*water of life*” will proceed “*out of the throne of God and the Lamb*,” and the symbolic “*leaves*” will be for “*the healing of the nations*.” (Revelation 22:1-2) Then, “*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.*” (Isaiah 11:9) This “*knowledge*” is the “*pure language*” of Zephaniah's prophecy. Instead of the *fire of anarchy*—with every man's hand being against his neighbor—earth's billions will serve God “*shoulder to shoulder*,” hand in hand, heart to heart.



“...and
after
the fire,
a still
small
voice.”

1 Kings 19:12



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