

2008 In Review

The Year In Prophecy

By Ron Graff

First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." - 2 Peter 3:3-4 (NIV)

The Early Church expected Jesus to return soon, and so do we, two thousand years later! Skeptics have always had this same question. Jesus Himself warned believers that they could not know the date of His return to Earth (Matthew 24:36-37). But He did say it was right to be watching for the fulfillment of prophecy.

He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. - Matthew 16:2-3 (NIV)

What would the world look like if end-time prophecies were about to be fulfilled? First, according to Jesus' Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25), there would be a period of unrest, leading up to the Tribulation which would follow. Jesus said it would be characterized by wars and rumors of wars, famines, plagues, false Christs, terrors in the heavens and other signs of the times.

During this time there will be worsening conditions, like those we now see – all pointing to the need for a global government, and the hope of a great leader who could deliver the world from its many problems.

Our review this year will look at the **Top 10 Prophecy Stories** of the year. We will first consider "Wars and Rumors of Wars," then "Global Government", and finally, "Other Signs of The Times."

Documentation for every aspect of this report may be found on the corresponding topic pages in Prophecy Central. Scripture quotations are from the New International Version

TOP 10 PROPHECY STORIES OF 2008

WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS

At the end of 2008, GlobalSecurity.org listed 42 armed conflicts in the world, including 15 "major wars" (inflicting 1,000 or more battlefield deaths per year).

1 - Elusive Peace in the Middle East

The whole world is eager for peace to finally be established between Israel and the Palestinian people. Ever since Israel became a nation in 1948, there has been tension because the Palestinian people did not have a state of their own.

Many efforts have been made to solve this problem, but to date; there is still no agreement about how it can be done. The latest attempt was established by a summit meeting at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis in November of 2007. It used the "Roadmap" plan proposed by the so-called Quartet – the United States, the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia. Forty-seven countries attended, including most Arab nations. A joint statement by the attendees called for a permanent two-state solution, hopefully by the end of 2008.

Considerable progress was made toward the accomplishment of the peace plan during 2008, but there were serious set-backs during the year.

The most controversial aspect of the peace plan itself is the proposal to divide Jerusalem and even the Temple Mount in order to give Palestinians the ability to establish their capital there. According to the proposal, the Palestinian Authority could have a mayor and a police force for their side of the city. After five years, if everything is going well, the PA would be granted full sovereignty over the area.

Another sticking point is the continued growth of Jewish settlements in areas that will presumably be given to the Palestinians in the final agreement.

External antagonism against Israel by her neighbors has also impeded the peace process.

Iranian President Ahmadinejad has been a constant source of anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli rhetoric. He predicts that Israel will cease to exist. He has supported the Hamas terrorists in the Gaza Strip and Hezbollah terrorists in Lebanon. In the meanwhile, Iran is racing toward the development of nuclear power, and presumably nuclear weapons. This has drawn threats from Israel that they would attack Iran's nuclear sites, and counter-threats from Iran if Israel does attack them.

Syria and Israel have had separate peace talks about the possibility of Israel returning the Golan Heights, which was captured in the 1967 war. However, Syria is also supportive

of Hezbollah. During the year, Israel destroyed a secret site in Syria where work had started on a nuclear facility. Syrians have the capability of deploying the Iranian ZelZal missile with a 250 km range and the sophistication to reach specific targets in Israel, such as airports, ports and factories.

Toward the end of the year, an Israeli politician said that Egypt may be planning to attack Israel and place troops in the Sinai Peninsula in violation of their peace agreement with Israel.

On Dec. 15th the United Nations Security Council passed its first resolution on Middle East Peace in 5 years. It endorsed the Annapolis peace process that was started by President Bush a year ago, and encouraged its implementation by the next US Presidency.

President-elect Obama has shown strong support for Israel in his campaign promises, the choice of Rahm Emanuel as White House Chief of Staff, Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State, and Colin Powell in a newly created role as Special Envoy to the Middle East.

Analysts say that the result of the Israeli elections early next year will also have a bearing on the outcome of the peace process.

A peace agreement might be just another phase in the age-old struggle between these nations, or it could be the false peace mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 5:3. *While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.* (NIV)

2 - Threat of Nuclear Iran

When Israel finally is at peace, it will be the first time since they became a nation in 1948 that they have enjoyed such security. This could cause them to lower their guard, which would set the scene for yet another war.

The next great war is predicted by Ezekiel (Chapters 38 & 39). Many prophecy scholars call this "The War of Gog and Magog" and relate it to the Second Seal of Revelation 6:3-4. The Seven Seals are developments during the future seven-year "Tribulation" period. The First Seal is the introduction of a world leader (Antichrist). The second seal is a great war. According to Ezekiel 38:1-2, the leader of this offensive is "Gog," the head of the land of "Magog."

The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal; prophesy against him."

Magog has been identified since before the rise of the Soviet Union as the area of Russia and the countries nearby. Magog and his allies are nations that have developed from some of Noah's close relatives in Genesis 10. They include other lands north of Israel,

but also Persia, which is modern Iran; Cush, the ancient name for Ethiopia; and Put, which is Libya.

Russia-

After the dissolution of the old Soviet Union, Russia pretended to be a model citizen of the world. But little by little, Russia has become less friendly and more threatening to her neighbors. Vladimir Putin, a former KGB agent served the maximum term allowed as President of Russia. Then, in order to maintain his control over the country, he hand-picked the new president, Dmitry Medvedev. Medvedev, in turn, appointed Putin as Prime Minister of Russia. From this new position he has continued their massive military buildup, started a new cold war with the United States, supported the nuclear ambitions of Iran, and developed close ties with other Islamic nations.

In August Russia invaded Georgia, a former member of the Soviet Union, over the issue of control of the break-away regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. World leaders protested loudly, but Russia took its time withdrawing troops, and left behind controls over Georgia's activities.

Georgia is vital to Russia's success in any attack to the South because it largely controls the Caucasus Mountain passes and has coasts on the Black Sea. It is possible that Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia came from the name "Tubal" in Ezekiel 38:2. The suffix "isi" means "land of." The first four letters, "Tbil" could easily be a later form of "Tubal."

Persia – Iran

Iran is on the verge of obtaining nuclear weapons and its radical president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad wants to eliminate Israel completely. In fact, he considers it his destiny to prepare the way for the imminent return of the Islamic Messiah, The Mahdi. Shiite Muslims believe that before the Mahdi returns there must be global chaos, and Ahmadinejad is willing to be the one who creates the chaos.

Russia has supplied the materials and know-how for the development of Iran's nuclear facilities. Russia supposedly agrees with Iran's claims that their nuclear plants will only provide power, not weapons. But experts say that by late January, 2009, Iran will have accumulated enough low-grade enriched uranium for its "break-out" to weapons grade material within a short time. In February, they can move on to start building their first nuclear bomb.

In December Russia shipped weapons to Iran, presumably including their sophisticated long-range S-300 missiles that could be used to protect its first nuclear power plant now under construction at Bushehr by Russian contractors.

Israel –

The target of the War of Gog and Magog is little Israel, miraculously re-established as a nation in the last days (Read Ezekiel 36 and 37). Israel is portrayed as a nation at peace when this attack begins.

This Great War could be a nuclear attack, or it could be another supernatural event like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire and brimstone.

The cause of this war could easily be the fact that Israel is simply not willing to allow Iran to have nuclear weapons. They have said so repeatedly, and the U.S. has echoed the sentiment. On the other hand, Iran's leaders have a deep hatred for Israel and the United States.

Both Israel and Iran conducted massive war games during the past few months to demonstrate their readiness for war over the issue. Israel deployed more than 100 jets to participate in exercises over the eastern Mediterranean Sea and Greece during the first week of June. Their planes flew a distance of about 900 miles, similar to the distance between Israel and the uranium enrichment facilities in Iran. Israel's F-16I Sufa ("Storm") fighter planes are considered the most sophisticated fighter bomber in the world today. They are specially equipped with aerodynamically designed external fuel tanks for added range. Israel also purchased two more Dolphin submarines from Germany able to fire nuclear-armed warheads. They already had three similar submarines.

In December Iran activated its 60-ship armada covering 50,000 square miles of the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz.

European leaders say war should not be considered.

In December an unnamed source said that U.S. President-elect Barack Obama's administration will offer Israel a "nuclear umbrella" against the threat of a nuclear attack by Iran. This means that an attack on Israel by Tehran would result in a devastating U.S. nuclear response against Iran.

The dramatic end of this great war of the 2nd Seal could produce the treaty predicted in Daniel 9:27, which many prophecy scholars identify as the beginning of the seven-year Tribulation period

3 - Terrorism

Terrorism has had its ups and downs in 2008. Europe and the U.S. had periodic threats, but no serious attacks.

Iraq had the greatest number of casualties. The non-governmental organization, Iraq Body Count, said the number of deaths was between 8,315 and 9,028, or an average of 25 deaths per day. The good news is that this figure is down by two thirds from the previous year. Iraq became a safer place in June with the arrival of 30,000 additional U.S. troops in Iraq. This operation, known as "The Surge," launched an offensive against Al Qaeda northeast of Baghdad. The troops were accompanied by attack helicopters, Strykers and Bradley Fighting Vehicles.

Suicide bombing was down considerably in Israel, due in part to cease-fire agreements with Hamas. But incessant rocket attacks by Hamas toward the end of the year caused much fear in Israel and resulted in a large-scale bombing campaign by Israel against military targets in the Gaza Strip. There have been hundreds of casualties in the ongoing battle.

The focus in the war on terrorism shifted this year from Iraq to South Asia. Terrorist attacks across South Asia have been linked to Pakistan. At the same time, security is deteriorating in Afghanistan. The November terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India were apparently planned in Pakistan. India almost attacked Pakistan in retaliation, but was held back by U.S. and British diplomacy

In September North Korea reversed its commitment to disable its nuclear reactor because the U.S. had not yet removed their country from its list of terrorism sponsors.

Two reports in December predict rough times ahead because of terrorism. "Global Trends 2025 - a Transformed World" was released by the National Intelligence Council (US). It warned that by 2025 the world will be tense and unstable, and shadowed by war. There will be conflict over scarce resources, including food and water, and will be haunted by the persistence of rogue states and terrorist groups with greater access to nuclear weapons.

The government also published a report called "Commission on the Prevention of WMD Proliferation and Terrorism." It warned that the U.S. is in danger of an attack by weapons of mass destruction by 2013, and predicts that such an attack could originate in Pakistan. It said that terrorists would be more likely to use a biological weapon than a nuclear one.

4 - Rumors of War

You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.

- Matthew 24:6-8 (NIV)

The Greek word for "rumors" is usually translated "hearing." We have many wars going on, but in addition to these we hear about all kinds of conflicts that are brewing. Our age of constant news and Internet blogs keeps the rumors going all the time. For every actual act of terrorism there are many threats, carefully released to keep the population nervous. Every angry word spoken by the North Korean dictator or the Iranian President is reported and magnified until damage is caused, just by their rhetoric. The Cold War, which disappeared for a while after the break-up of the Soviet Union, is back. Talk abounds about untested methods, like an "electro-magnetic pulse" (EMP) bomb that even

an unsophisticated enemy could use to paralyze the United States. Then there is Cyber Warfare, and the list goes on. Only those who live in these last days could experience such a variety of “rumors of war.”

Internet Blogs and You Tube Submissions

While writing this story, my spell-checker didn't recognize the word “blogs.” It is such a new expression, but it has already had a huge impact, and will continue to be even more influential in the future. This phenomenon allows every person on the Internet to express his or her opinions, or in the case of war, to express his or her fears. Blogging allows you to “publish yourself.” And You Tube allows you to “broadcast yourself.” Information does not have to be true to spread like a virus on the Internet. This gives rise to rumors of all kinds, including rumors of war.

Threats

In an age of terrorism, a militant person doesn't have to actually detonate a bomb to cause chaos. He only needs to make an anonymous “credible threat,” to cause evacuation of buildings, shut down airports, and get the attention of the news media.

The New Cold War

The Soviet-era Cold War between Russia and the United States was probably the most dramatic example of “rumors of war.” The incessant build-up of nuclear weapons that would hopefully never be used; the policy of “Mutual Assured Destruction” (MAD) to keep the superpowers in balance; and the periodic displays of military preparedness kept war on our minds for decades.

It was a great relief for Russia and the United States to work together for a while after the fall of the Iron Curtain. But there are definite signs now that Russia, under Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, is returning to some of its old Communist ways.

In February a Russian Tupolev 95 bomber buzzed the USS Nimitz twice while a second bomber circled nearby. Four F/A-18 fighter planes were sent to intercept them but there was no further aggression.

Russia's August invasion of Georgia, which was part of the old Soviet Union, was “A signal to everyone,” according to Russian scholar Michael McFaul of Stanford University that, “Russia is going to try and dominate this region of the world.”

In November, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev visited Venezuela, and the two nations conducted joint naval exercises in the Caribbean. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice countered by announcing that the US will not go forward at this time with an exchange of nuclear technology with Russia.

Three Russian warships then traveled to Cuba for the first time since the 1991 Soviet collapse.

China is also building its military might. In January, Admiral Timothy Keating, the head of the US armed forces in the Asia-Pacific, said that it is troubling that China's new weapons are apparently able to go far beyond their stated goal to "to protect those things that are ours". In March China announced a 17.6% increase in its military budget (US\$57.22-Billion). This marks the 19th year in a row that China has allocated a double-digit increase for military spending. They have the most active cruise and ballistic missile development in the world.

EMP Bomb

Periodic warnings are made by nuclear watchdogs that a country like Iran or North Korea would not need to deliver a barrage of nuclear bombs to heavy population centers with sophisticated guided missile systems. They could simply explode one atomic bomb at a high altitude above the U.S. and the "electro-magnetic pulse" radiation would disable the countries electrical and communications systems.

Cyber Warfare

Now that our whole culture is so dependent on the Internet, authorities are concerned about two kinds of cyber warfare that could do considerable damage. The most obvious one is cyber-espionage. This is no longer the domain of a few relatively harmless hackers. Large governments like China have developed the capacity to spy on a huge scale using the Internet.

The other threat is disruption of the Internet. The country that is able to disable or subvert the Web will have a great military advantage.

GLOBAL GOVERNMENT

5 - Global Financial Crisis

Not only is the world racked by wars and rumors of war, but it is in danger of financial collapse because of the events of this past year.

The United States experienced a domino effect leading to the worst financial conditions since the Great Depression. For some time unwise mortgage lending practices were used to allow many people to own homes they couldn't really afford. People bought homes at the peak of their inflated value. As early as June, clients of Royal Bank of Scotland were advised to prepare for a full-fledged crash in the global stock market. Other experts sounded the alarm as well. Then the cost of oil skyrocketed, causing a financial crisis in both families and in business. Bankruptcies spiraled out of control. Unscrupulous heads of financial companies bailed out with their multi-million dollar "golden parachutes," leaving their companies vulnerable to failure. A trickle of bank closings led to a massive failure. The stock market plummeted. The government tried to stem the tide by

appropriating unimaginable amounts of “bail-out” funds (that they didn’t have, and would have to borrow from some of our world enemies).

(Conspiracy Side-note: During the heyday of the John Birch Society in the ‘60’s and ‘70’s, we had fascinating literature about the “Invisible Government” that picked candidates for office and controlled the finances of the world. The belief then was that the super-rich would periodically engineer events and prices so that stock market crashes would strip the wealth from ordinary people and make the rich richer. We don’t hear much about this any more, but one can’t help wondering if that is what has just happened to us.)

By Nov. 24, Bloomberg.com announced that the latest tabulations of what the government was prepared to provide comes to more than \$7.76 trillion. This amounts to half the value of everything produced in the nation last year. Another way of looking at it, is that it equals \$24,000 for every man, woman and child in the country. This total could pay off more than half the country’s mortgages.

It became painfully obvious that The International Monetary Fund (IMF) was out of date, and neither the IMF nor the World Bank had the power to police the global financial system in time of such an economic crisis. Even the newer G8 group of industrialized nations was hopelessly out of date without the emerging economic giants of Brazil, India and China among its ranks.

On Dec. 9th, Gideon Rachman of the UK’s Financial Times wrote an article entitled, **“And now for a world government.”** He argued that global warming, global financial problems, and a global war on terror, may cause us to accept the concept of a world government. Jacques Attali, an adviser to President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, says that that the "core of the international financial crisis is that we have global financial markets and no global rule of law". He suggested that we consider The European Union as a model for world government. He added that President-elect Obama is more inclined to global governance than President Bush.

6 - Preparation for a World Leader

The European Union itself has not seen much progress this year. There is not general agreement on a constitution for the group, and they have not succeeded in getting a temporary governance instrument called the Lisbon Treaty ratified. In addition, no personal leader has emerged that could inspire confidence and unity.

Tony Blair, past Prime Minister of Great Britain has served as the EU’s special envoy for the Middle East peace process. He has been telling some of his oldest allies that he might be willing to campaign for the new position of full-time president of the EU council. This role is characterized as "president of Europe".

Last month, Benjamin Crème of Share International again stated that Maitreya, a messiah for the world, is living in London but has not yet been revealed. An announcement from the organization says that a great miracle will soon appear. It will be a large, bright star in the sky "visible to all throughout the world -- night and day." Most people do not expect anything to develop from this since Crème has sounded false alarms in the past.

Since the great crisis that calls for a world government is an economic one, there may be a financial genius waiting in the wings to be revealed.

The question remains: Who could lead the world into a successful global government?

This year's Presidential election shows how a person can rise quickly from relative anonymity to a place of great prominence and leadership. President-elect Barack Obama made a truly amazing entrance onto the world scene, causing some people to ask the question, "Could he be the Antichrist?"

In a sense, any powerful and charismatic person could be Antichrist. For that reason, people have suggested that most American Presidents in our generation might be that ruler of the predicted final one-world government.

We can not know who Antichrist will be until the Holy Spirit, the One who holds back sin, has been taken away, presumably by the Rapture. People may have suspicions about one person or another, but they can not know for sure who he will be until that time. The Apostle Paul wrote:

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. 3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

5 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders,

- 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8

There has already been a great deal of talk, even among non-Christians, that Obama is a messiah figure. Only time will tell what will come of all this speculation. It is not wrong

to wonder about the possibility of any great person somehow becoming the predicted False Christ. But it is wrong to make unprovable accusations.

Technological Progress

One day Jesus Christ's will return to take His church away before the coming "Tribulation." After the true Christian believers have been removed, the identity of the one-world ruler will be confirmed and people will be forced to receive "The Mark of the Beast" in order to be permitted to buy or sell.

He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, 17 so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.

18 This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666.

- Rev 13:16-18

For years now we have known that we have enough computing and communications power to make the fulfillment of this prophecy possible. Computers continue to become more powerful. This year IBM developed a new US military supercomputer called "Roadrunner." It sets a new speed record of 1.026 quadrillion (thousand trillion) calculations per second. They have also started work on a government-funded project to develop computers that mimic human brains. They call this "cognitive computing", and their research will bring together neurobiologists, computer and materials scientists and psychologists.

There is also a new version of the Internet called "The Grid." It was created at Cern, the particle physics centre that created the original web. It is incredibly faster than the Internet because it uses dedicated fiber optic cables and doesn't have speed-limiting telephone switching equipment. The 55,000 servers already installed are expected to rise to 200,000 within the next two years.

One additional development this year could hasten the day that the Mark of the Beast could be implemented. VeriChip, the implantable radio frequency identification (RFID) chip has been available since 2004, but most people have not wanted to accept one, even though it would be helpful for some, like Alzheimer's patients, if they get lost.

Microsoft now offers an Internet program called HealthVault, where users can view their health data and can input helpful information. And now some people with a VeriChip will be allowed to access Health Link to interact with their health information online.

Many will accept the chip for practical purposes, like they have accepted Social Security numbers and credit cards.

The chip itself is not the Mark of the Beast. The actual mark is a visible sign of allegiance to the world ruler. However, the chip may be the technological link that makes world-wide control of buying and selling possible.

OTHER SIGNS OF THE TIMES

7 - Apostasy (and Revival)

Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,
Matt. 24:12 (NIV)

Apostasy is the “falling away” of the church. The two issues of greatest concern in recent years have been abortion and homosexuality. The younger generation has been raised on post-modern views of relativism. To many of them the question is no longer, “What is truth?” Rejecting the notion of any absolute truth, they seek to define their own truth and be tolerant of what other people consider to be their truth. From this philosophical framework they do not see abortion and homosexuality as intrinsically evil.

The main focus on the abortion this year was the Presidential election. Barack Obama had the most radical abortion voting record in the U.S. Senate, while John McCain held traditional anti-abortion views and reinforced them by his choice of Sarah Palin, an outspoken pro-life governor as his vice-presidential candidate. The outcome of the elections shows an erosion of traditional values in this area.

The Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Church is going through a serious split over the issue of homosexual clergy. In June Anglican Bishop Gene Robinson and Mark Andrew were "married" in a civil ceremony. This was an outrage to the conservative membership of the Episcopal Church in the United States, and to the global 77 million-member Anglican Communion. The denomination had already been in upheaval since 2003 when the Episcopal Church consecrated Robinson as the first bishop known to be in an openly homosexual relationship. In July, one fourth of the 880 bishops of the Anglican Church boycotted the Lambeth conference in Canterbury, England. The church is on the brink of schism over the issue.

Conservative Anglican leaders staged their own conference in Jerusalem and pledged to form a council of bishops to provide an alternative to churches that preach a "false gospel" of sexual immorality.

State Constitutional Marriage Amendments

Christians took a stand in three states on the issue of traditional marriage, approving state constitutional amendments that specify that marriage is between a man and a woman. The total number of states with such an amendment has risen to 30.

California was one of the states with a marriage amendment (Prop. 8) on the ballot. Hollywood and the liberal majority in the state's legislature fought the measure, while Evangelicals, Catholics and Mormons led the charge to victory. It was the most expensive measure on any ballot in the nation this year. It was immediately challenged by three lawsuits claiming that it was unconstitutional. The same state Supreme Court that struck down the earlier marriage initiative (Prop. 22 from the year 2000) will hear the case some time in January, 2009. Kenneth W. Starr, the former U.S. Solicitor General who led the inquiry into President Bill Clinton's affair with Monica L. Lewinsky, will argue the case for upholding Prop. 8.

Two side-effects of the marriage amendment campaign in California were angry outbreaks against churches by opponents of the proposition, and a call to fasting and prayer for revival. Some 40,000 young Christians gathered in San Diego's Qualcomm Stadium for a 12-hour prayer and praise meeting ("The Call") just before the elections.

8 – Persecution

Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.

- Matthew 24:9

Persecution of Christians is a huge problem, and it is continuing to grow, both on the world scene, and here in the United States.

World Persecution

According to estimates by human rights organizations, 200 million Christians suffer discrimination for their faith. Every year 170,000 Christians die a martyr's death. Here are a few examples from the world scene.

Ethiopia, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia – Civil and local wars in these African nations have taken the lives of a staggering, but not definitely known, number of Christians.

North Korea - The Center for the Study of Global Christianity estimates that there are 467,894 Christians in North Korea and 10,592 Christian martyrs each year. Open Doors ministry lists the country as the world's worst religious persecutor

Iraq - Christians were systematically driven out of various parts of Iraq during the course of the war there. In October Christians were being persecuted in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, considered the last bastion of Christianity in the country. About 3,000 Christians fled the city in just one week to escape threats and attacks by al-Qaeda-linked Sunni Muslim groups.

China - During the Olympics this year China tried to hide the fact that they conducted a crack-down on house churches before and during the Olympics.

India - Christian persecution is on the rise all over India, but it is especially bad in Orissa. Hindu militants there force many Christians to turn over their Bibles, hymnals and images of Christ to be burned. If they fail to comply their home will be burned and they will be driven out of their village or killed. In Kandhamal more than 30 people have been killed, 3,000 homes burned and over 130 churches destroyed.

Russia - In December the Russian Ministry of Justice announced plans to "liquidate" 56 religious organizations from the country, including World Vision, Youth With A Mission, A Russian branch of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and three regional districts of the "Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists," the Assemblies of God, and others. The pressure on evangelical groups is coming from a combination of resurging Russian hatred for the West, and pressure from Orthodox churches to ban outside organizations.

Prejudice against Evangelical Christians

In October the Ecumenical Confessional Convention in Blankenburg, East Germany warned that an increase of persecution is coming to Western culture. It said that the trend is a dangerous anti-Christian influence on legislation, academic life and school education. Home-schoolers in Germany are subject to fines and imprisonment.

Marriage Amendments - After the November elections, members of a pro-homosexual, pro-anarchy organization named Bash Back lured the security staff of Mt. Hope Church in Lansing, Michigan outside the church where they were demonstrating during the church service. Then protestors who had mixed with the congregation inside stood up and began a major disruption. They shouted "Jesus was gay" and other profanities, threw flyers, condoms, and confetti into the crowd. Two women went to the pulpit and began to kiss. The congregants did not react violently, and the pastor prayed that the people so full of anger and hate would know Jesus' love in their lives.

Prop. 8 - Shocked California activists reacted to the passage of the Prop. 8 (marriage amendment to the state constitution) by mass rallies and protests in front of churches. Some churches were defaced with graffiti as well.

Sixty-nine-year-old Phyllis Burgess tried to show her belief in traditional marriage at a Palm Springs rally after the election. She came to the event carrying a large, Styrofoam cross. The "No on 8" demonstrators yanked the cross from her hands and trampled on it.

Opposition to Christmas - Atheists and humanists were also apparently emboldened by the elections. They promoted a number of anti-Christmas campaigns across the nation. In Washington D.C., The American Humanist Association bought ads on Metro busses that said, "Why believe in a god? Just be good for goodness' sake."

The Freedom From Religion Foundation put up billboards in various places. One in Rancho Cucamonga, California had a stained glass background, and the words, "Imagine No Religion." The words were taken from John Lennon's song, *Imagine*.

In the Washington State Capital atheists were allowed to display a sign next to the nativity scene that read, in part, "Religion is but myth and superstition that hardens hearts and enslaves minds."

9 - Natural Disasters

There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.

- Luke 21:11

Natural disasters killed over 220,000 people in 2008. The actual number of disasters was higher in 2007, but this year's catastrophes were worse in terms of the number of victims and the financial cost. Some of the events were:

Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar (Burma) - May 2-3 - This cyclone killed more than 135,000 people and left more than one million homeless. It was the worst natural disaster in the country's history.

Earthquake in China's Sichuan province – May 12 - This 7.9 magnitude quake killed 70,000 dead, left 18,000 missing and almost five million homeless.

Hurricane Ike in Texas and other southern U.S. states – September – This was the third most destructive hurricane in U.S. history. With insured losses of 10 billion dollars, it was the industry's costliest catastrophe of the year.

In December, top scientists from the National Academy of Sciences met to try to determine the best way to detect and ward off any wandering space asteroids that might be on a collision course with Earth. Congress asked the academy to conduct the study after astronomers were unable to eliminate an extremely slight chance that an asteroid called Apophis will slam into Earth with devastating effect in 2036.

10 - March toward 2012

We need to brace ourselves for a flood of speculation about the year 2012. Students of Mayan culture in South America have always known that the unique dating technologies of the Mayans includes a "Long Count" calendar that ends at the Winter Solstice (Northern Hemisphere – Summer Solstice in the Southern Hemisphere), Dec. 21, of the year 2012. It is doubtful that the Mayans themselves thought that this end would bring great disasters. Mayan scholars think they just expected a new beginning. But later speculation, New Age teaching, and some prophecies have added this fear factor.

Hysterical claims – With little or no scientific evidence, claims have been made that the magnetic poles of the earth will reverse in 2012. This, of course, could cause unimaginable consequences, but we need much more scientific proof before believing this will happen.

Questionable prophecies – Some writers claim that Pacal the Great, a 7th Century Mayan king (Quetzalcoatl), who was later worshipped as a god, made a prophecy about the end-date of the calendar, but there is no general agreement about this. Others have identified one of Nostradamus' quatrains with 2012. Nostradamus is not considered a true prophet by biblical scholars, and his writings have been interpreted to mean almost anything people want them to mean.

Sensational documentaries – The History Channel is already advertising “Nostradamus 2010”, a two-hour special on the subject. It will air on Jan. 4, 2009 at 9 p.m.

Extravagant movies – On July 10, 2009, Sony Pictures plans to release “2012,” a major movie, with a production budget of \$150,000,000. The Wikipedia article gives this synopsis:

Never before has a date in history been so significant to so many cultures, so many religions, scientists, and governments. "2012" is an epic adventure about a global cataclysm that brings an end to the world and tells of the heroic struggle of the survivors.

We will be tracking this phenomenon during the next four years. It would be unfortunate if respected Christians added their prestige to this movement and were discredited along with the non-Christians when this “end-of-the-world” event fails to happen.

On the other hand, we are obviously living in the last days, and expect other apocalyptic events to increase as time goes on. We must be diligent to test everything against the Bible, the one proven source of accurate prophecy!

Documentation, Scriptural references and illustrations may be found in the various sections of Prophecy Central, “A World of Information About Bible Prophecy.”
www.Bible-prophecy.com

Copyright © 2008 by Ron Graff.

Permission granted to use in churches or post on other websites as long it is printed or posted in its entirety.