

» COVER STORY



LAST DAYS FEVER

BY TROY ANDERSON



Some Christians say the world is coming to an end. Others reject that fear. What can we know for sure about the end times?



Journeying to the isolated state of Mizoram in northeastern India, Rabbi Jonathan Bernis and his team offer food and medical care to 5,000 Bnei Menashe—a starving community believed to be descended from one of the lost tribes of Israel, the Manasseh. Taken into captivity when Assyria conquered Israel 2,700 years ago, the tribe's oral histories suggest that a remnant migrated to India, where they continued Jewish traditions.

The Bnei Menashe is just one of the lost tribes of Israel scattered throughout the world. Anthropologists and rabbis—relying on DNA tests and oral histories—are discovering what they believe are other lost tribes in Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, China, Burma, Bangladesh and other places. But even more intriguing—and in fulfillment of biblical prophecies that say God would gather His lost sheep in the last days—Bernis says many are returning to the land of their forefathers and embracing the Messiah of prophecy, *Yeshua HaMashiach*.

These tribes are among a multitude of Jews embracing Jesus Christ as their Messiah in numbers not seen since the first century. Since the late 1960s, the number of Jews professing faith in Jesus has exploded from several thousand to anywhere from 250,000 to 500,000 worldwide.

From the day Israel recaptured Jerusalem in 1967 during the Six-Day War, fulfilling a prophecy that Jerusalem would be trampled by the gentiles until their time was fulfilled, the number

of Messianic Jewish congregations worldwide has grown geometrically from 10 to more than 500, Bernis says. And in what prophecy experts see as a fulfillment of a “super prophecy,” hundreds of thousands of Jews are returning to Israel from exile. The nation’s Jewish population recently surpassed that of the United States.

“I see this as a direct fulfillment of end-times Bible prophecy,” says Bernis, author of *A Rabbi Looks at the Last Days* and president of Jewish Voice Ministries International in Phoenix. “We are talking about a culmination of Bible prophecy here in the end of the age that is being directly fulfilled by the restoration of Israel, by the blindness coming off the eyes of the Jewish people and the regathering of the lost tribes.”

Now, only a few years after the release of the last of the 16 books in the apocalyptic Left Behind series, Bible prophecy experts say “last-days fever” is spreading virally around the planet as a confluence of world events is igniting widespread debate about the end times.

“It’s exploding all around the world,” says Mike Bickle, director of the International House of Prayer, a ministry based in Kansas City, Missouri, that features 24/7 live worship and prayer and end-times teaching. “The economic crisis, talk of globalization and the threats against Israel have just increased the hunger for knowledge about prophecy.”

Prophetic Events Point to End Times

Although most mainline and secular Bible scholars reject the so-called “Left Behind theology,” dispensational,

premillennial Bible scholars and prophecy writers argue that little is left on God’s “prophetic calendar” before the second coming of Christ.

“Jesus told us no one knows the day or hour, but we can know the season,” says Tim LaHaye, co-author of the Left Behind series, which sold more than 65 million copies. “And I would say that world events are ... shaping up so that we could be in the season when all these eschatological events take place.”

Described as a “prophetic perfect storm,” the fascination with ancient predictions has reignited among not only Christians and Jews but also

It’s not just Christians who are curious about signs of the last days.

Muslim and New Age movement believers as well.

LaHaye, John Hagee, Hal Lindsey, David Hocking, Paul McGuire and other prophecy teachers say the formation of Israel as a nation in 1948, the ingathering of Jews to Jesus, the rise of global anti-Christ political structures, the military alliance between Russia and Iran, and Iran’s threats to annihilate Israel are prophecy fulfillments or conditions that could allow for the fulfillment of prophecies regarding the rapture, Great Tribulation and Second Coming.

No other generation in history, they say, has witnessed the unparalleled acceleration of prophetic events that began when Israel became a nation in 1948. They contend that geopolitical events—the possibility of war between Iran and Israel; calls for a global government, economic system

and currency; increasing immorality and lawlessness; devastating natural disasters; global warming; the pending biometric national identification system; the rebuilding of Babylon and the drying up of the Euphrates River—foreshadow events prophesied in the Bible. They argue that the global recession, the United States’ soaring debt—now totaling \$53 trillion—and its dependence on foreign oil are setting the stage for the rise of a global leader and government.

“With the proposal for a North American Union—a replica of the European Union—the idea is to have 10 regional global governments

across the planet, which will eventually merge into a global government,” says McGuire, who wrote *The Day the Dollar Died* and was recently featured on The History Channel special *7 Signs of the Apocalypse*. “The current economic global crisis ... is being used to bring in a one-world economic system.”

Left Behind series co-author Jerry B. Jenkins says Daniel 2:40–44 and 7:23–27 and Rev. 13:11–18 predict the emergence of this global government, religion and currency. In July, Pope Benedict called for a “world political authority” to manage the global economy. A few days later at the Group of Eight summit, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev—holding a golden coin engraved with “united future world currency”—told reporters national mints are excited about a post-dollar world.

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The Case for the Rapture

I believe the church will be 'caught up' with the Lord | PERRY STONE



Among Christians worldwide, there is controversy concerning teaching about the Rapture, an end-times event described by the apostle Paul in several Scripture passages (see 1 Thess. 4:16-17; Eph. 1:9-10; 1 Cor. 15:51-55, for example). The English word “rapture” is derived from a Latin translation by St. Jerome of the phrase “caught up” in the New Testament (see 1 Thess. 4:17, NKJV).

More accurate biblical phrases are “the gathering together” (see Eph. 1:10; 2 Thess. 2:1), the “catching away” (1 Thess. 4:17), and the “general assembly” (Heb. 12:23). The term “rapture” refers to Christ’s return for the living saints and the resurrection of the dead in Christ, a predicted event whose timing is not revealed in the New Testament.

A type of the Rapture appears in Exodus 19. Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Word of God. A “cloud” descended, and the “sound of the trumpet was very loud” as the “Lord descended” on the mount (Ex. 19:16-18). The “Lord came down” and “Moses went up” (v. 20).

This Old Testament event foreshadows a future happening described by Paul. He wrote that the “Lord Himself will descend from heaven ... with the trumpet of God. ... Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together ... in the clouds” (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

The trumpet is identified by Jews as the *Tekiah Ha Godolah*, which is the longest and loudest last trumpet blast played during the Feast of Trumpets, known to Jews as Rosh Hashanah—the civil New Year on the Hebrew calendar. The day and hour of this fifth Jewish feast was not known (see Matt. 24:36) but was recognized when two witnesses identified the silver sliver of the moon.

Critics claim that the Rapture is a contemporary doctrine, started in the 1830s when a woman gave a prophetic word. Yet

the concept of a pre-tribulation coming of Christ was taught by Dr. John Gill in 1748 and by Peter Jerihu in 1687. It was alluded to by Ephraim the Syrian in his writings in A.D. 373 and by the Shepherd of Hermes about 10 years after the Apocalypse was written about by John.

Though some suggest the Rapture is simply an escape teaching, they forget the principle of separation found throughout the Bible. Noah escaped death during the flood (see Heb. 11:7), Lot escaped the destruction of Sodom (see Gen. 19:29), the Hebrews escaped the destroying angel (see Ex. 12:23), Rahab was spared when Jericho’s walls fell (see Heb. 11:31), and in the coming tribulation a Jewish remnant will escape the Antichrist (see Dan. 11:41; Rev. 7:3).

The patterns of the fall feasts also reveal a pattern for the Rapture. Christ was crucified near Passover, in the tomb during Unleavened Bread and seen alive during First Fruits. The church was born at Pentecost (see Acts 2:1-4), and the three fall feasts all have a future fulfillment. The Rapture is a pattern of the feast of Trumpets, the Tribulation is parallel to events on the Day of Atonement (when the nation of Israel was judged) and Tabernacles represents the future kingdom of the Messiah ruling on earth.

Even the ancient Jewish wedding is a picture of the marriage of the Messiah. When the groom came to receive his bride, the wedding celebration continued for seven days. Some suggest this is why the church will be in heaven for the entire seven years of the tribulation.

Whatever a person believes, we are to remain faithful till the end. We should plan as though we will be here a long time but live as though each day could be our last day. In this manner we are always prepared to meet the Lord.

PERRY STONE is the director of *Voice of Evangelism* (vov.org) in Cleveland, Tennessee. He is also the host of *Manna-Fest*, a weekly television program, and the author of *The Meal That Heals* and *Breaking the Jewish Code* (both Charisma House).

Since the recession began, evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal churches have seen significant surges in attendance by people curious about whether economic and Middle East turmoil are “warning signs” that the Second Coming could occur much sooner than people think. Nationwide, packed-out prophecy conferences are drawing thousands of people.

In Sync With God’s Plan

But it’s not just Christians who are curious about signs of the last days of history. Throughout the world, people are increasingly anxious, believing something cataclysmic is coming, says *New York Times* best-selling author Joel Rosenberg, a former communications adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In Israel—the centerpiece of God’s prophetic plan—Orthodox Jews are debating how soon the Messiah will come, the Sanhedrin has reconvened and the movement to rebuild the Temple is gaining momentum. In Iran and other Islamic nations, Muslim religious leaders are predicting the coming of the Islamic Messiah, the 12th Imam. They believe the way to hasten his coming is to “annihilate Israel and the U.S.,” Rosenberg says.

At the same time—in a development prophecy experts connect to Jesus’ warnings about false prophets and doctrines in the last days—New Age believers are intrigued by a Mayan prophecy predicting a global cataclysm on December 21, 2012. Tapping into the zeitgeist of cultural fascination with the end of days, Hollywood is releasing a blockbuster movie about the prophecy—*2012*—featuring John Cusack on November 13.

Rosenberg, who wrote the nonfiction books *Inside the Revolution* and *Epicenter*, says the world is in a “post-Left Behind moment” in which interest in the end times is being driven not by books but by specific world events.

“The first are actual geopolitical events and trends,” Rosenberg says. “The second is the president of Iran. Specifically, you’ve got the leader of arguably the most dangerous country on the planet talking about his belief that the end of the world is at hand, the Islamic messiah will soon return to Earth ... and he is feverishly trying to acquire weaponry capable

of bringing about the end of Judeo-Christian civilization as we know it.”

In his new book *The Late Great State of Israel*, *World Net Daily* Jerusalem bureau chief and *Jewish Press* columnist Aaron Klein warns that Israel faces unprecedented danger. As President Obama pressures Israel to accept a two-state peace plan, Iran is quickly developing nuclear capability.

“I think a big war is coming to the Middle East, and all sides seem to be preparing for it,” Klein says.

Rosenberg says the prophet Ezekiel foresaw the end-times war of “Gog and Magog,” a reference interpreted as an alliance between Russia, Iran and other nations to attack Israel (see Ezek. 38-39).

“In the 2,500 years since he wrote that prophecy, Russia and Iran have never had the type of alliance he describes,” Rosenberg says. “But in the last few years, these two countries, along with the others Ezekiel mentioned, are steadily developing a military alliance and a deep and outspoken hatred for the people of Israel. Russia is selling billions of dollars of weapons to Iran. Russia is helping Iran build its nuclear facilities, and Russia is training thousands of Iranian scientists and technicians.”

Demonstrating the importance God places on prophecy, eschatological experts say 28 percent of the Bible—including more than 150 chapters with most of the text focused on end-times themes—involves predictions about the future. The Bible contains nearly twice as many chapters describing Jesus’ second coming as it does His first coming.

Of these predictions, 87 percent have been fulfilled, Calvary Chapel Chino Hills pastor Jack Hibbs told 7,000 people gathered at the recent Southern California Prophecy Conference. Of the remaining 13 percent, 98 percent will be fulfilled during the Great Tribulation (a seven-year period of worldwide disaster), Hibbs says.

More Signs of the Last Days

A key unfulfilled sign involves a Matthew 24 prophecy that the gospel would be preached to the whole world “and then the end will come,” Bickle says. “The top mission agencies are predicting that within 10 years all of the earth’s 6,000 people groups will have the gospel preached to them.”

However, many Bible scholars at secular

The Case for Dominion

Our focus should be on advancing, not escaping | C. PETER WAGNER



I can still remember prophecy teachers who tacked rows of charts and diagrams on the church wall and explained spell-binding details of the past, present and future. I cut

my spiritual teeth on the Scofield Bible and devoured Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth*. My seminary professors instructed me in pre-tribulationism and premillennialism. I quickly categorized anyone who disagreed as a “liberal.”

Now I look back on those days with a strange combination of regret and amusement. How is it that I was so wrong for so long? As I analyze my change, I can sum it up by admitting that I simply did not understand the kingdom of God.

Let me explain what I mean by starting with the Great Commission. The Great Commission has been central to my life. I committed myself to missions the night I was saved when I was 19. I spent my first 16 years of ministry as a field missionary and the next 30 as a professor of missions.

My heart’s desire was to help fulfill Jesus’ mandate to “make disciples of all nations.” However, the time came when I had to make a radical shift in the way I interpreted those words of Jesus.

Formerly, I thought my task was to go to as many nations of the world as possible and save as many souls as possible and plant as many churches as possible. Now I take the Great Commission more literally when it tells us not to make as many individual disciples as we can but to disciple whole social groups—such as entire nations. This is kingdom theology.

When God created Adam and Eve, He told them to take dominion over all His creation (see Gen. 1:28). This was God’s plan until Satan succeeded in persuading Adam to obey him rather than God. The result was that Satan usurped Adam’s authority and took dominion himself.

But Jesus came as the second Adam. He brought the kingdom of God to

earth and sent His disciples out to preach the gospel of the kingdom. He has now commissioned us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to advance His kingdom, to push Satan’s kingdom back and to retake the dominion that rightly belongs to the human race.

This is the Great Commission. It still includes healing the sick, casting out demons, saving souls, multiplying churches and feeding the hungry, but it goes far beyond these activities. It is putting feet to the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray: “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

How has this played out? The human race is enormously better off now than it was when Jesus died and was raised from the dead 2,000 years ago! Satan is losing ground more and more rapidly.

Those who think the world is getting worse and worse are missing the big picture of human history. I now regard my former pre-tribulationism and premillennialism as escapist eschatology.

I do not plan to give any territory back to Satan or his Antichrist. Yes, there will be setbacks, but the advances will far outnumber them. Instead of an escapist eschatology, I expound a victorious eschatology!

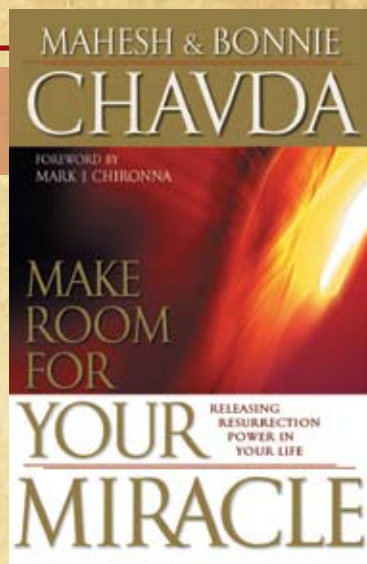
My favorite term is “dominion eschatology.” Why? Because Jesus did not give His Great Commission in vain.

The battle will be ferocious, and we will suffer some casualties along the way. However, we will continue to push Satan back and disciple whole nations.

We are aggressively retaking dominion, and the rate at which this is happening will soon become exponential. The day will come when “‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever’” (Rev. 11:15, NKJV)!

C. PETER WAGNER is president of *Global Harvest Ministries* (globalharvest.org), chancellor of *Wagner Leadership Institute* and presiding apostle of the *International Coalition of Apostles*. He has written numerous books, including *Dominion!* (Chosen).

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Through a Glass Darkly

For centuries Christians have held very different eschatological views. Here are the four primary perspectives. | BY TROY ANDERSON

As experts in eschatology (the theology of the end times) and Bible scholars have sought to decipher biblical prophecies through the centuries, they have raised a number of enigmatic questions. Poring over the Scriptures, they have found a variety of ways to interpret the portions of the Bible that contain end-times prophecy.

Most Bible scholars at secular universities and mainline seminaries believe the book of Revelation and other prophetic books are allegories or pertain to people and events in the first century. Bible scholars at conservative seminaries and popular prophecy writers argue that these Scriptures contain predictions about the future of the world.

For 2,000 years, Christians have held a combination of these different views. The four most common are dispensational

premillennialism, covenant premillennialism, postmillennialism and amillennialism. And although they disagree about the details, most Christian scholars teach that Jesus will return one day to judge the earth.

"These controversies are eternal," says Stephen D. O'Leary, an associate professor of communications at the University of Southern California and an expert on Armageddon and apocalyptic events. "But at some point [the Second Coming] will happen. Our job as followers of Jesus is to remember that of that day and hour no man knows."

• **Dispensational premillennialism** is the most widely known eschatological view and the predominant view among modern evangelicals. Adherents believe the second coming of Jesus will be preceded by wars and natural disasters as well as a widespread

universities and mainline seminaries reject the premillennial interpretation of prophecy. Known as preterists, they say the visions described in the book of Revelation pertain to people and events in the first century.

"The bottom line is that critical scholars of Revelation read the book as anti-imperial resistance literature," says Stephen D. Moore, a New Testament scholar and expert on the book of Revelation and professor of New Testament at The Theological School at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. "It's sort of a vitriolic tirade against the Roman Empire of John's day."

But David Criswell, former editor of the *Evangelical Standard* at Tyndale Theological Seminary and Biblical Institute in Fort Worth, Texas, says writings from early church fathers show they believed prophecies in the book of Revelation referred to future events. Criswell says it wasn't until the Middle Ages that preterist theology gained momentum as Catholic scholars attempted to discredit the Reformation.

"The Bible says there will be scoffers in the last days, which will cause the hearts of many sincere people to disregard the reality of the last days," says Jim Tolle, pastor of the 25,000-member Church on the Way in Van Nuys, California.

"But there is a convergence of far more things than ever in the history of the world that point to the fact we are in the last days. There is more deception today than ever before. We are seeing a geometric increase in the amount of earthquakes, natural disasters and diseases. And there has been a multiplication of military conflicts."

A recent poll by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life found 79 percent of American Christians believe in the Second Coming. But on the timing and circumstances of Christ's return, Christians are divided. About a third—34 percent—say it will occur after the world situation reaches a low point, 37 percent say it's impossible to know the circumstances preceding Christ's return, and 4 percent say Christ will return when the world situation improves.

Peter Wagner, president of Global Harvest Ministries, is an adherent of partial preterism, believing most end-times prophecies were fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. However, unlike full preterists, Wagner believes Christ will return after Christians transform the culture and people move into "God's prosperity."

Richard J. Mouw, president and professor of Christian philosophy at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, says he was raised to believe that



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turning away from God, the appearance of the Antichrist, and the Great Tribulation—a seven-year, unprecedented time of trouble throughout the world (see Matt. 24:3-31). Then Jesus will return and establish an earthly kingdom for 1,000 years. This period, known as the Millennium, will be one of peace and righteousness because Satan has been bound and thrown into the pit (see Rev. 20:1-10).

Premillennialists are divided in their opinions about whether the “Rapture”—the sudden disappearance of believers who are “caught up” to meet the Lord in the air (see 1 Thess. 4:15-17)—will occur before, during or after the tribulation.

- **Covenant premillennialism** is similar to dispensational premillennialism. However, adherents believe the church has replaced Israel in God’s prophetic plan. Dispensationalists, on the other hand, put Israel at the center of God’s prophetic calendar. They see current events involving the Middle East and the Jewish people as clear signs of the last days.

- **Postmillennialists** believe the world will continually get better as more people become Christians, and then Jesus will return. This view was popular at the beginning of the 20th century but lost some of its appeal as a result of the world wars and the Great Depression.

It has experienced a resurgence in recent years as “dominion” theology, along with preterism, a belief that most of the Bible’s prophecies were fulfilled by the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

The underlying concept of postmillennialism is that Christians are responsible for ushering in the millennium—and ultimately Christ’s second coming—by preaching the gospel and taking dominion over the earth (see Gen. 1:26), thereby

pulling down Satan’s kingdom and advancing the kingdom of God.

C. Peter Wagner, a partial preterist and former professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, says Jesus will return after Christians transform the seven “mountains” of culture—religion, family, government, arts and entertainment, media, business and education.

“Our goal is to change whole cities, states, nations and regions for the kingdom of God,” Wagner says. “I see huge change coming, particularly in the next generation of Christians being much more involved in things of the world rather than just hiding ... in what we call the religious mountain of the church.”

- **Amillennialism** was the popular eschatology for most of the 2,000 years of church history. Proponents believe the millennium is not a future event but simply the time period between the First and Second Coming. They believe we’re living in the millennium now—and that we will experience both good and bad together until Jesus returns at the end of history and conducts the final judgment. ■

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the pope was the Antichrist; later it was Stalin; and today Islam “seems to be the likely target”—making him nervous about these sorts of identifications. However, Mouw says he believes the world “could very well be in the last days.”

“Humankind seems more and more lawless, and life is getting increasingly fragmented and chaotic. This is how the devil works, causing fragmentation and confusion,” Mouw says. “We need to preach more about the possible return of Christ in our own lifetimes—but without the highly speculative interpretations that [were] so prevalent in the past.”

Is Jesus Coming Back?

Some Christians are convinced that Jesus’ return is imminent. Doyle W. Flowers Jr. of Atlanta, author of *Jesus Really Is Coming Back ... Soon!* says the Second Coming is less than two decades away. “God confirmed to me about two years ago that the return of Christ was at the steps,” he told *Charisma*.

In his book, Flowers describes a vivid

dream in which he was picked up by a tornado. He says God revealed to him that he would be taken to heaven in the Rapture at some point in his lifetime.

Yet critics of premillennialism are quick to remind us that preachers have unsuccessfully predicted Jesus’ return many times during the last 2,000 years, including farmer William Miller, who unsuccessfully calculated the end of the world in the early 1840s, and Edgar C. Whisenant, who wrote the controversial best-seller *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*.

Hal Lindsey’s 1970 mega-seller *The Late Great Planet Earth* popularized prophetic beliefs about the last days. Lindsey has since been criticized for a portion of the book in which he quotes Jesus in Matthew 24:34 saying the generation that witnessed the signs given in the Olivet Discourse would not die before their fulfillment.

“What generation?” Lindsey wrote in what became the world’s best-selling non-fiction book of the 1970s. “Obviously, in context, the generation that would see the signs—chief among them the rebirth of the State of Israel. A generation in the Bible is

something like 40 years. If this is a correct deduction, then within 40 years or so of 1948, all these things could take place.”

Lindsey, whose book was read by Israel’s first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion shortly before his death, says critics have misconstrued what he wrote, claiming he stated Christ would return 40 years after Israel’s rebirth. When 1988 came and went, many pastors shied away from teaching about prophecy, believing it had become too controversial.

“It’s almost like the body of Christ went into embarrassment mode about the end times,” Bickle says. “But then in the last four or five years ... the signs of the times are beginning to make more sense.”

Lindsey says he never set a precise date for Christ’s return. But he claims this is “the generation that will live to see the fulfillment of the ‘birth pangs’ that Jesus predicted would all come together in one time frame shortly before the tribulation’s events that bring about His return.”

Experts say one of the key signs of the last days is the growing interest by Jews in the question of whether Jesus is the Messiah. David Brickner, executive director of the San Francisco-based Jews for Jesus, says a growing number of the world’s nearly 14 million Jews are discovering Jesus as their Messiah and revival is beginning in Israel.

“What we are seeing now in the beginning of the 21st century is openness and a surge of Israeli believers in Jesus,” Brickner says.

For Bernis, Yeshua’s return centers on the “divine timing that God has ordained.”

“I’ve been in 50 countries ministering to Jewish communities,” Bernis says. “There are Jews in just about every country in the world. These are clear signs of the last days that are often overlooked when we talk about end-times prophecies. Israel is restored, Jerusalem is restored, the Jews are coming back from the four corners of the earth and they are being restored to Jesus, their Messiah.” ♦

TROY ANDERSON is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.

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