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The Day of the Lord . . . A strong wind is blowing

As we have been watching the events in the Middle East unfold, and sending out various testimonies and pointers for prayer, I have felt at times as though we have been praying in response to events rather than with visionary insight. There are risks in offering analysis when what is really needed is the clarity and authority of the Holy Spirit, but we hope you will find the insights we have felt led to share here helpful. There is a very strong wind blowing through the region, and this is expressing itself through the intense pain, frustration and sheer naked courage of predominantly young populations, who know from the Internet what western life has to offer, and who are rising up against years of repression and corruption.

In Ezekiel chapter 30, **Libya** is mentioned along with Egypt (30:5). The NIV Study Bible reminds us,

There is a tendency to assume that the phrase “the day of the Lord” is a technical theological phrase with a single meaning. This idiom does indeed often refer to the Day of the Lord at history’s end, when God will execute final judgment and blessing on Israel and the nations, but a “a day of the Lord” may also indicate any specific time period when God is doing a special work.

Such appears the case in this passage – and such undoubtedly appears to be the case for **Libya** today. Already in the most recent version of Operation World, the editors were reporting that,

“God is doing a new work in this land (no doubt in response to the sustained and specific intercession of recent years). There is notable spiritual hunger among Libyans, but not enough Bibles for those seeking them. Increasing numbers of Libyans are coming to Christ (though still only a few).

The opposition to Colonel Gaddafi is coming from at least three very different strands: fundamentalist Muslims, genuine seekers after greater freedom, and those who long to restore the monarchy. Who knows what the Lord can do as His wind sweeps many things aside and speaks gentle holy things into people's lives? Pray for the Lord to bring about something precious from so much suffering. May the process not grind to a halt in the wrong way or be hijacked by other spiritual forces.

Pray that the convolutions that are taking place even as we write will represent a day of much greater openness to the Lord in the land of Libya. The courage the people are showing in opposing their despotic leader almost defies belief. May many receive the Lord's help in these utterly traumatic times. Remember, the handful of British nationals have been well treated compared to the 1.5 million Egyptians, and all the other foreign workers, still in the country.

Wider Implications

There are major questions to be asked (i.e. matters for repentance) as to why the West has long been prepared to cosy up to a known terrorist tyrant. Effectively, the US, backed all the way by Britain, has been exercising considerable influence in the Arab world area by developing close relationships with local dictators, delighting in full order books for advanced armaments, whilst closing their eyes to issues of human rights. This stinks in the Lord's nose!

There are implications here for America too. Undermined by the financial debacle, whose implications have perhaps yet to be fully felt, The US has been left massively dependent on China, its global rival. Pray for how America itself handles this. It says it wants democracy in the region, but democracy means people being free to choose not to be pro American. It is unlikely to find the new regimes in the Middle East as pro American as the previous ones have been.

The strategic significance of Bahrain

You will obviously be aware of the considerable unrest in Bahrain, which lies 'sandwiched' between two neighbours who do not get on with each other: Iran and Saudi Arabia. If the present government is overthrown and the Shia population comes to power, then Iran will effectively be in charge of both banks of the narrow Straits of Hormuz, through which 40% of the world's oil is shipped. That is why what is happening there is of such significance for the rest of the world.

Bahrain has had a noticeably more relaxed atmosphere than Saudi Arabia, and this has meant that Christians have been comparatively free to practise their religion. Many Saudis and Kuwaitis come here to enjoy the place (which is not without its vices). *Operation World* encourages us to pray that they will meet Christians and hear the gospel while they are there.

For over a century, the American Mission Hospital has been well known and highly regarded. Pray for what happens next in this country, and for more fruit from the tactful witness of the believers there.

Were things to spread across the border from Bahrain into Saudi Arabia, and the Shia population rise up there, we really would be in a new ball game, leaving Iran still more the sole regional superpower.

The Saudi leadership has been offering major financial incentives to the people, in the hope of preventing a revolution breaking out; that might well suffice if the issues they are facing were purely economic, but since they are also political the outcome is less clear cut.

A side issue that emerges from all this concerns the unexpectedly deep cuts to **our own Armed Forces**. The decision to scrap the Harriers as well as to reduce the number of naval ships seemed extreme at the time, and is already being exposed as short sighted. The UK now has extremely limited capability to support ground troops in a combat zone. Perhaps it is still not too late for second thoughts?

It would seem that the Arab nations are basically responding in one of two ways: those such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, where there is full blown rebellion on the streets, and those like Morocco and Saudi Arabia, who are trying to make their leadership appear more 'constitutional'. Incidentally, don't be too quick to praise Arab armies (in Tunisia and Egypt, let alone Libya). As the Qatar newspapers have been reporting, 'these armies have always conspired against the interests of the peoples, and propped up Presidents who sold the nations' affairs and spent all its capital.'

In all the work that is going on backstage behind the scenes (and that is, after all, quite probably the greater part) pray for David Cameron and his team. There are many pitfalls to beware, not all of which he will be fully conversant with in these early days of his Premiership. As Charles Moore warns, there are real dangers of our government siding with the wrong lot!

Powerful Perspectives by Charles Moore

In a book review about Ian Johnson's book 'A Mosque in Munich,' Charles Moore, has written an insightful article about how western governments played their part in advancing the cause of Islamisation in western Europe. Much of this perspective was new to me. www.telegraph.co.uk/comment

Charles Moore has written other important articles on what is happening in Egypt Tunisia and Lebanon after the world's media has moved on. These also need to be read and digested. They make for extremely sobering reading.

See for instance,

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/charlesmoore/8348516/Libya-What-happens-after-we-stop-watching-these-revolutions-against-Col-Gaddafi.html>

Do pray for historians such as Charles Moore who see clearly: that their words may have influence where it is most urgently needed.

Keep praying for the Word of God to go forth

In the midst of turmoil it is lovely to have some good news to share. We continue to hear encouraging stories of how the Lord is using the Scriptures that are being circulated – at great personal risk – inside Iran.

We asked prayer recently for Said Musa, whose amazing letter from prison in Afghanistan we passed on. We are delighted to be able to let you know that he has been released and is now safely out of the country.

Others however remain in intense danger – particularly Shoaib Assadullah. An Afghan convert to Christianity, Shoaib is facing the death penalty after being given a week by a judge to return to Islam or be executed for apostasy.

Shoaib was arrested after handing a Scripture to a man who reported him. (That is why we asked for prayer for the safety of those handing out Scriptures in Iran). A hearing scheduled first for Monday and then Tuesday has been postponed because the attorney general is looking into the case. Shoaib says that he is completely ready to die for his faith.

At a time when governments appear far more concerned with matters of trade than with human rights, pray for more pressure to be brought on Afghanistan regarding the draconian treatment of converts to Christ.