

Newsbytes

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“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” Tozer

...and now for a word from the Togarmah/Gomer corner:

Erdogan Claims Vast Powers in Turkey After Narrow Victory in Referendum

By PATRICK KINGSLEY APRIL 16, 2017

ISTANBUL — A slim majority of Turkish voters agreed on Sunday to grant sweeping powers to their president, in a watershed moment that the country’s opposition fears may cement a system of authoritarian rule within one of the critical power brokers of the Middle East.

With nearly 99 percent of votes in a referendum counted on Sunday night, supporters of the proposal had 51.3 percent of votes cast, and opponents had 48.7 percent, the country’s electoral commission announced.

The result will take days to confirm, and the main opposition party said it would demand a recount of about 37 percent of ballot boxes, containing around 2.5 million votes.

But on Sunday night the result was already a political reality, as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hailed his victory in front of a crowd of supporters in Istanbul. “We are enacting the most important governmental reform of our history,” he said.

The constitutional change will allow the winner of the 2019 presidential election to assume full control of the government, ending the current parliamentary political system.

The ramifications, however, are immediate. The “yes” vote in the referendum is a validation of the current leadership style of Mr. Erdogan, who has been acting as a de facto head of government since his election in 2014 despite having no constitutional right to wield such power. The office of Turkey’s president was meant to be an impartial role without full executive authority.

The result tightens Mr. Erdogan’s grip on the country, which is one of the leading external actors in the Syrian civil war, a major way station along the migration routes to Europe and a crucial Middle Eastern partner of the United States and Russia.

Many analysts were surprised by the close result, saying they had expected Mr. Erdogan to achieve a

larger majority because he had held the referendum within an atmosphere of fear.

Since a failed coup last summer, Turkey has been under a state of emergency, a situation that allowed the government to fire or suspend about 130,000 people suspected of being connected to the failed putsch, and to arrest about 45,000.

The campaign itself was characterized by prolonged intimidation of opposition members, several of whom were shot at or beaten while on the stump by persons unknown.

The opposition questioned the legitimacy of the referendum after the election board made a last-minute decision to increase the burden needed to prove accusations of ballot-box stuffing. At least three instances of alleged voter fraud appeared to be captured on camera.

“We are receiving thousands of complaints on election fraud,” said Erdal Aksunger, the deputy head of the main opposition party, the Republican People’s Party, known as the C.H.P. “We are evaluating them one by one.”

The new system will, among other changes:

- Abolish the post of prime minister and transfer executive power to the president.
- Allow the newly empowered president to issue decrees and appoint many judges and officials responsible for scrutinizing his decisions.
- Limit the president to two five-year terms, but give the option of running for a third term if Parliament truncates the second one by calling for early elections.
- Allow the president to order disciplinary inquiries into any of Turkey’s 3.5 million civil servants, according to an analysis by the head of the Turkish Bar Association.

Academics and members of the opposition are concerned that the new system will threaten the separation of powers on which liberal democracies have traditionally depended.

“It represents a remarkable aggrandizement of Erdogan’s personal power and quite possibly a death blow to vital checks and balances in the country,” said Professor Howard Eissenstat, a Turkey expert at the Project on Middle East Democracy, a Washington research group. “Judicial independence was already shockingly weak before the referendum; the new system makes that worse.”

Mr. Erdogan’s supporters deny that the new system will limit political and judicial oversight. If opposition parties win control of Parliament, they could override the president’s decrees with their own legislation, while also asserting greater control over judicial appointments, supporters of the new Constitution contend.

The victorious “yes” camp also argues that a strong, centralized government will make Turkey better able to tackle its many challenges, including a troubled economy, the world’s largest population of Syrian refugees, two terrorism campaigns, a civil war against Kurdish insurgents and the Syrian war across Turkey’s southern border.

“A new page opens in our history of democracy with this vote,” Prime Minister Binali Yildirim, an Erdogan loyalist, said in a victory speech on Sunday night. “Be sure, everyone, we will use this result as best as we can — for the wealth and peace of our people.”

The fearful environment in which the referendum campaign was held has led watchdogs to question its fairness. In addition to the vast purges of perceived opposition members, the authorities also often prevented “no” campaigners from holding rallies and events. And Mr. Erdogan and his supporters often implied that their opponents were allied with terrorist groups or those suspected of plotting last year’s failed coup.

“It’s been a completely unfair campaign,” said Andrej Hunko, a German lawmaker assigned by the Council of Europe to observe the election.

Hundreds of election observers were also barred from monitoring the vote, and thousands of Kurds displaced by fighting in southeastern Turkey may not have been able to vote because they have no address, according to the Independent Election Monitoring Network, a Turkish watchdog.

Despite this, Mr. Erdogan’s victory fell far short of the 20-point majority that he and his supporters had expected. “This is a little bit bittersweet,” said Cuneyt Deniz, an Erdogan supporter celebrating in Ankara. “We were expecting above 60 percent.”

The result revealed a deeply divided country, nearly half of which now feels highly embittered. “I am incredibly sad right now,” said Yesim Kara, 37, a “no” voter in Istanbul. “Dark days are ahead.”

Mr. Erdogan’s victory “will enhance the stability of the government, but it will weaken social stability,” said Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, the director of the Ankara office of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, a research group.

“The new social contract that is being built in Turkey is being based on a very weak foundation,” he added.

Referendum Inflames Concerns Over Turkey’s Grip in Germany

By ALISON SMALE APRIL 15, 2017

COLOGNE, Germany — The impressive Islamic complex here, Germany’s largest, boasts towering minarets and a soaring prayer hall. But what Turkish officials here seem most proud of are the hundreds of windows, which allow outsiders and Muslim worshipers to glimpse each other’s worlds. The idea, they say, is transparency.

Yet it is what lies beneath the surface these days that concerns both Germans and Turks as Turkey prepares to vote on Sunday in a referendum that could vastly expand the powers of its already authoritarian president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose reach into Germany — both open and concealed — has become an increasing point of friction.

Since Turks arrived for work in the 1960s, Germany has maintained the largest Turkish diaspora in Europe, now some three million people. For many years, Germany was happy to let the Turkish state provide and pay for prayer leaders and other provisions for its emigrants. This now includes overseeing more than 900 Muslim associations and training and appointing many of Germany’s imams. The large mosque complex here is a part of that network.

But Turkey’s resulting grip in Germany is coming back to haunt both sides. German intelligence agencies and politicians now charge that Mr. Erdogan is using the decades-old arrangement to hunt down and punish opponents as he pursues a desperately wanted victory that would make his authority all but unchallengeable. Roughly half of the Turks who live in Germany hold Turkish

citizenship and are eligible to vote.

The Germans have accused some imams sent by Turkey of spying on Turks living in Germany and of denouncing individuals and institutions critical of the president — right down to kindergartens. Such spying, the Germans said, has allowed the Turkish government to track down, detain and harass their targets' families and associates back home in Turkey as part of a sweeping purge of Erdogan opponents.

Already, Mr. Erdogan's long shadow over Germany's Turkish communities is palpable. On the heavily Turkish Keupstrasse, a street in Cologne, some Erdogan critics voiced apprehension about posting opinions on social media. They waited until they were alone with reporters to express their opinions, speaking freely but then declining to be identified by name.

"Do not underestimate the danger," said Lale Akgun, a former Social Democratic member of the federal Parliament, an Erdogan opponent and a longtime observer of German-Turkish relations. "This is like a mini-Turkey. Everything they have there, we have here, too," she added, alluding to Turkey's many potentially explosive political rifts.

The tensions and the turn toward a more authoritarian Turkey carry worrying implications not only for Germany, but for all of Europe.

In neighboring Belgium, the Flemish authorities this month shut down a Turkish mosque — the second biggest in the country — over its alleged ties to Mr. Erdogan's governing party. Since then, Belgium's intelligence chief said, Turkey has halted intelligence cooperation.

In Germany, the spying accusations surfaced in February. Afterward, Turkey's state religious authority, Diyanet, said it had quietly withdrawn an unspecified number of imams "in order not to damage 40 years of relations."

Nonetheless, the matter is roiling relations across the board. Turkish-Germans who have lived here for decades said they had trouble recalling a tenser time between Turkey and Europe.

Germany's foreign minister, Sigmar Gabriel, recently held urgent meetings with Turkish community leaders, worrying aloud that 20 to 30 years of "successful work at living together can get broken."

Mr. Erdogan and his associates hurled charges of Nazism at leaders in Germany and the Netherlands after those countries, sometimes citing sudden security concerns, banned rallies by Turkish ministers ahead of Sunday's vote.

German leaders have denounced a retreat of democracy in Turkey, citing especially the detention — so far, without charges — of the German-Turkish journalist Deniz Yucel.

The rise of a populist right wing in Germany does not help, she noted. "Integration requires moderation, not populist, illusory solutions," she said.

The Number One Prophetic Sign: Convergence

www.prophecynewswatch.com

What is the number one prophetic sign? What sign more than any other, points to the soon return of Jesus Christ?

While any number of signs are present, I believe one stands out above all others. In fact, Jesus Himself told us what it is.

When the disciples said, "Tell us the signs of your coming and the end of the age" (Matthew 24:3), Jesus detailed a number of things to look for.

He then said, "When you see all these things, you can know my return is near. I'm right at the door" (Matthew 24:33).

He also said, "When all these things begin to happen, look up for your salvation is near!" (Luke 21:28).

This means the number one sign of Jesus' return is all the signs appearing together.

Both Jesus and the prophets told us what signs to look for, and the appearance of just one is reason enough to take notice.

But the arrival of one sign after another should really get your attention. This convergence of signs is the number one prophetic sign - the number one reason to believe Jesus is right at the door.

The Convergence of Signs

The Bible tells us a number of events will take place just prior to the return of Jesus. Generations of Christians lived and died without witnessing one of these signs.

Yet our generation is witness to all of them. Those signs include:

Israel Back in the Land - God promised to bring the Jewish people back into the land of Israel before He returned (Jeremiah 23:7-8). He said He would call them from "among the nations" (Ezekiel 39:28), from "the farthest corners of the earth" (Isaiah 11:12), and from "north, south, east, and west" (Psalm 107:3).

He promised to welcome them home from the lands where they were scattered (Ezekiel 20:34). When they did, He promised to return and establish His everlasting kingdom (Isaiah 11:11-12).

The Jews Back in Jerusalem - Jesus said armies would surround Jerusalem, destroy the city, and enslave its citizens. This happened in A.D. 70 when the Roman legions did exactly that.

Jesus then said people other than the Jews would control Jerusalem for a time, then the Jewish people would once again control Jerusalem. When they did, Jesus promised to return (Luke 21:24-28). Since 1967, the Jewish people have been in possession of Jerusalem and will be celebrating their 50 year reunification this June.

The Gospel Preached Throughout the World - When asked about the end of the age and the signs of His coming, Jesus said to look for a very specific sign.

He said the gospel will be preached throughout the entire world. Every nation will hear it. And then? And then, the end will come (Matthew 24:14). For centuries after the crucifixion, the gospel was confined to a small area surrounding the Mediterranean Sea.

In the past two centuries, Christians have brought the gospel to every nation in the world. Today, missionaries are in every nation.

The Bible is translated in hundreds of languages, and the message of Jesus is sent around the world by radio, TV, satellite, and the Internet. Our generation is literally on the verge of spreading the gospel to every last person on earth.

An Increase in Travel and Knowledge - Six hundred years before Jesus, an angel gave Daniel a special message. He said "travel and knowledge" will increase in the end times (Daniel 12:4). For centuries of human history, dramatic gains in travel and knowledge did NOT take place.

Yet the last two hundred years have seen explosions in the speed and frequency of travel as well as the amount and availability of knowledge.

Arrival of the Exponential Curve - Jesus said a variety of global signs will come before His return and the end of the age. These signs will be spiritual, natural, societal, and political in nature. And He said they would appear in a distinct way - "like birth pains" (Matthew 24:3-8).

This means the frequency and intensity of these signs will increase as we near His return. Our generation has seen the exponential increase in war and famine Jesus said to look for.

In the 20th Century alone, more people died from war and famine than lived on the earth when Jesus spoke these words.

Israel Surrounded by Enemies - The Bible says enemies will surround Israel in the end times. Those enemies will say "Come, let us wipe away the nation of Israel. Let's destroy the memory of its existence" (Psalm 83:4) and "Let us take for ourselves these pasturelands of God" (Psalm 83:12).

Ezekiel said Israel's neighbors will say "God has given their land to us" (Ezekiel 11:14-17), and "Israel and Judah are ours. We will take possession of them. What do we care if their God is there?" (Ezekiel 35:10).

Ever since the rebirth of Israel in 1948, the daily headlines have included these Bible verses. Israel's Muslim neighbors claim the land of Israel for themselves, and they have no regard for the God of Israel.

Israel's Exceedingly Great Army - Ezekiel said, in the end times, Israel will field "an exceedingly great army" (Ezekiel 37:10). Zechariah said Israel will be like a fire among sheaves of grain, burning up the neighboring nations (Zechariah 12:6) and even the weakest Israeli soldier will be like David (Zechariah 12:8).

Since 1948, Israel has fought no less than four conventional wars against its neighbors. Despite being outnumbered more than 50 to 1, Israel has achieved overwhelming victory every time.

Rise of the Gog of Magog Alliance - The Bible says a military alliance that includes Russia, Iran, Turkey, and a number of Muslim nations will attack Israel "in the latter days" (Ezekiel 38:8) when God brings His people home from among the enemy nations (Ezekiel 39:27).

Today, we see those very nations coming together - an alliance that has never existed in world history.

Rise of a United Europe - The Bible says a revived Roman Empire will come to power in the end times (Daniel 2, Daniel 7, Revelation 17). According to Daniel, it will be a ten nation alliance of weak and strong nations.

Some parts will be as strong as iron, while other parts will be as weak as clay (Daniel 2:42). We see the beginning of this alliance in the European Union - a coalition of weak and strong nations struggling to stay together despite the efforts of Britain to leave through Brexit.

The Rise of Global Government - The Bible says a single government will rule the world politically (Revelation 13:7), religiously (Revelation 13:8), and economically (Revelation 13:16, 17) in the last days.

It will rule over "all people, tribes, and languages" on the face of the earth (Revelation 13:7). Its authority will be so complete no one will be able to buy or sell anything without its permission (Revelation 13:16-17).

For centuries, a true global government was impossible. Today, world leaders openly discuss it.

Denial of the Signs - Almost two thousand years ago, Peter issued a warning. He said in the last days people will mock the idea of Jesus returning.

They will make fun of those who believe in the Second Coming and say exactly what we hear today - things like, "I thought Jesus was coming back?"

What happened to His promise? Generation after generation has said He's coming. Yet, since the beginning of the world, everything has remained the same!" (2 Peter 3:3-4).

Conclusion

Despite the naysayers, Jesus is coming, and the signs indicate that ours is the generation that will witness His return.

The convergence of all these signs confirm it. Jesus Himself said to look for these signs, and when you see them, He said you can know His return is near. He's right at the door (Matthew 24:33).

In fact, He said the generation witnessing these signs will not pass away before He returns (Matthew 24:34).

"But Britt," you might say. "These are the same signs you keep pointing out. You keep saying the same thing over and over."

That's right. I do. And that's because the truth doesn't change. These signs were present yesterday, and these same signs will be present right up until the rapture.

But keep this in mind - for 1,878 years of Christianity (A.D. 70 - A.D. 1948), none of these signs were present. Today, all of them are.

I repeat myself because this is a message people need to hear. It's the message every Christian should brand in his or her heart. Advertisers say you need to hear a message at least seven times

before it sinks in.

Looking around, I don't think it's sunk in. Too many people are asleep when it comes to the signs of the Second Coming.

Sadly, many of these people are Christians. If you're one of them, it's time to wake up.

Jesus warned us not to be caught sleeping when He returns (Mark 13:36). He commanded us to watch.

Today, the signs of His return are all around us. Jesus is coming, and it can't be said enough... Now is the season of His return.

Britt Gillette is author of the book *Coming to Jesus: One Man's Search for Truth and Life Purpose* as well as *Signs of the Second Coming: 11 Reasons Jesus Will Return in Our Lifetime*.