



"It isn't that they can't see the solution. It is that they can't see the problem."

—G.K. Chesterton

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Crisis? What Crisis?

Probably everyone has heard and used the tired cliché, "He can't see the forest for the trees." *The Dictionary of Clichés* asserts that some form of this cliché has been making the rounds since at least the mid-sixteenth century. It means, of course, that a person is "unable to grasp the broad meaning of a situation or the point of an argument because of an excessive attention to details." One gets the picture of the proverbial absent-minded naturalist so busy inspecting the beautiful striped rope that he fails altogether to observe the tiger's fangs on the other end.

[Christians](#) can fall prey to the same misfortune in watching world news for signs of the times. It is easy to read so many news articles and watch so many news programs on this or that topic, becoming saturated with the nitty-gritty minutia of a story, that one can forget to step back to see it in context. Many pundits have made similar comments regarding this week's targeted killing of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi by Coalition Forces in Iraq. Sure, it was a victory for the good guys, but in the larger order of events, it is not necessarily earth-shattering. Good can come from it if the Iraqi government can use the opportunity to contain the insurgency and stabilize the country, but as with the capture of Saddam Hussein many months ago, this event will

probably not turn the tide. Someone will likely step in to take his place, and who knows if he will be more or less effective?

Along a similar vein, Strategic Forecasting (Stratfor), a global intelligence-gathering and forecasting service, made a striking comment on June 6 about China's mounting economic woes. Stratfor CEO George Friedman writes: "We have been writing about this problem for several years now, and people keep asking when the crisis will come. Our answer is simple: If this isn't a crisis, what would a crisis look like?"

His comment should make one think.

The church of [God](#) has been writing and speaking about "the crisis at the close" for many decades now. In fact, Herbert W. Armstrong, who died twenty years ago, often used this phrase as a synonym for the prelude to and the actual Great Tribulation. More recently, we have taken cues from William Strauss and Neil Howe's generational studies as found in *The Fourth Turning*. They predict, based on historical cycles keyed to the character traits of generation after generation of Britons and Americans, that we are just about due for a major Crisis. They have found that major crises descend on the English-speaking peoples with regularity, about every 80-100 years, once in every four generations. Since the last Crisis occurred during the Depression and World War II, we are on the verge of another in just a few short years.

We would recognize something as horrible as the Great Depression, right? We would surely realize we had plunged into another World War! We would know if we had entered the Crisis! Would we?

Perhaps, yet most people fail to realize that they lived through World War III. We know it better as the Cold War, but historians are now writing, with the benefit of hindsight, that the dangerous political games and arms races of the Fifties, Sixties, Seventies, and Eighties constituted a real war, despite the fact that American and Soviet armed forces did not pummel each other to bloody bits on battlefields. We admit that each side had the ability to annihilate all life on earth multiple times over (appropriately called "MAD," mutually assured destruction), but we are still reluctant to assign the term "war" to this tense, uncertain time. Nevertheless, each nation was for all

intents and purposes on a war footing for about 45 years. Ronald Reagan gets a great deal of credit for winning the Cold War for the West through economics - he essentially forced the U.S.S.R. into the ground by outspending it on arms and research.

With this in mind, how certain are we that we have a firm handle on world affairs? Maybe it is a good time to take a few steps back to look once again at the big picture, which should give us a new perspective on what is happening in [the world](#). Fresh eyes often spark fresh ideas. While we are taking in the view, we should ask ourselves a few politically incorrect questions:

- Where are the real points of conflict in the world? Who are the antagonists? What are their aims?
- What kind of character do current world leaders have? Would we buy a used car from any one of them? Are they politicians or statesmen?
- How vital is economics in the grand scheme of things? Are the industrialized nations really as prosperous as they are said to be? How stable is the world's economy?
- How are the major alliances in the world configured? Are they shifting? Do the world's international institutions have any power or prestige to bear on conflict resolution? Could they be counted on in crunch-time?
- What affect does migration have on world affairs? Births? Aging?
- Is multiculturalism and diversity helpful or harmful to a nation? Socialism? Religion?
- Finally, what is the true spiritual, cultural, political, and financial condition of the [nations of Israel](#)? Just where are they in the biblical and historical cycle of liberty, backsliding, war/captivity, and deliverance ([Judges 2:11-23](#))?

A look at the great expanse of the forest should help us regain our bearings as we move toward the coming Crisis and, beyond that, our goal.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

Why Study Prophecy?

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The study of prophecy has perhaps done more to divide than unify, so we need to approach it in a balanced manner. Generally, prophecy is anything spoken or written under the inspiration of God, not only foretelling but forthtelling—speaking out as well as speaking beforehand. The functions of a prophet include 1) foretelling the future, 2) carrying out a mission, 3) revealing sin, 4) revealing God, and 5) witnessing before the people. Jesus Christ is the focus of prophecy (Luke 24:27). We study prophecy to 1) know the general outline of future events, 2) be prepared for the next significant event, 3) understand God's will, and most importantly, to 4) understand God and His character. God's prophecies, bearing the stamp of His mind, are sure and do not require our private interpretation.

From the Archives: Featured Article

Christian Myopia

by Staff

Myopia, or nearsightedness, is not just an eye condition. It also describes a worldview that is quite limited and limiting. Understanding Christian myopia can help us to see the "big picture."

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