

## **Parched West Is 'Ready To Burn'**

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"Fire has devoured the open pastures, and a flame has burned all the trees of the field. . . . For the water brooks are all dried up." For those living in the American West, the words of Joel 1:19-20 ring especially true this summer. Though the spring rains fell more heavily than normal, effectively ending the drought, the West may experience its most explosive wildfire season in decades.

An astounding 60,000 fires have been reported across the U.S. this year, comparing with 39,000 at this time last year, and most have occurred in the West. At this point, however, the fires have been confined to small areas because of rain and low temperatures.

Some regions are tinder-dry, needing an average year's rainfall to return them to normal. The six-year drought killed off large sections of chaparral. Add to that an insect infestation that decimated tree populations, increasing the stockpile of timber to be burned. Fire-fighting agencies warn that many parts of the West are in more danger than in 1988, when fires ravaged a million acres of Yellowstone National Park. Interior Department officials are boosting staff and preparing new technologies in anticipation.

Bureau of Land Management fire program director Jay Thietten remarked, "The drought is extreme. It is as bad as it has been in modern history. Much of the West was ready to burn a few months ago."

The dire situation is reflected in other parts of the world as well. Somalia, located on northern Africa's eastern coast, reels under a severe drought that is killing hundreds of Somalians—possibly thousands, some say—every day. Drought ravages southern Africa also, to the point that government agencies have killed wildlife on the animal preserves to feed the people.

Famine, the third seal of Revelation 6:5-6, is most often caused by drought and exacerbated by war. High temperatures and scarce rainfall wither plant life, raising the chance of lightning-sparked, out-of-control wildfires. What little food remained from the drought goes up in flames. If war is also involved, relief supplies may never get to the starving people.

God uses drought and fire as signs of His displeasure. In a prophecy known as the Song of Moses, God traces His dealings with Israel to the end time, and shows end-time Israel plagued by fire and drought. "For a fire is kindled in My anger. . . . It shall consume the earth with her increase. . . . They shall be wasted with hunger" (Deuteronomy 32:22, 24).

Isaiah also warns Israel that fire is a punishment for apostasy: "You will be punished by the Lord of Hosts with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with storm and tempest and the flame of devouring fire" (Isaiah 29:6). His wrath is not confined to Israel. "For by fire and by sword the Lord will judge all flesh" (Isaiah 66:16). And as a result of the first trumpet of Revelation 8:7, "hail and fire followed . . . and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up."

As the clock winds down toward Christ's return, the incidence of drought and fire will increase dramatically. They point out how close the fulfillment of our hope really is.