

GOOD NEWS

Registered by Australia Post
Publication No. WBG0048

1991 Issue No 2

A U S T R A L I A



Whose side
was God
on
anyway?

Special Issue:
*Christian attitudes to War
and Apocalyptic events*

Editorial

Emotionally, Christians may find the Gulf War difficult. Some previous wars have been defined as being between Christian forces and the infidels or at least between the "correct" form of Christianity and the "incurred" form of Christianity.

Both the First and Second World Wars complicated the notion of which side God supported. Stories of bishops of the same denomination blessing workshops for both the Allied and Axis navies placed God in an insidious position.

Similarly, the Gulf War, despite Saddam Hussein's claim to be fighting "a holy war" against the infidels demonstrates mankind's facility for using God to justify their own ends, rather than following his injunction to be peacemakers.

Iraq had been regarded as most secular of the Islamic nations. The dress of women, attitudes toward alcohol and various forms of entertainment revealed a relaxed attitude toward the claims of Islam. The true defender of Islam in the Iranian-Iraqi War was always Iran.

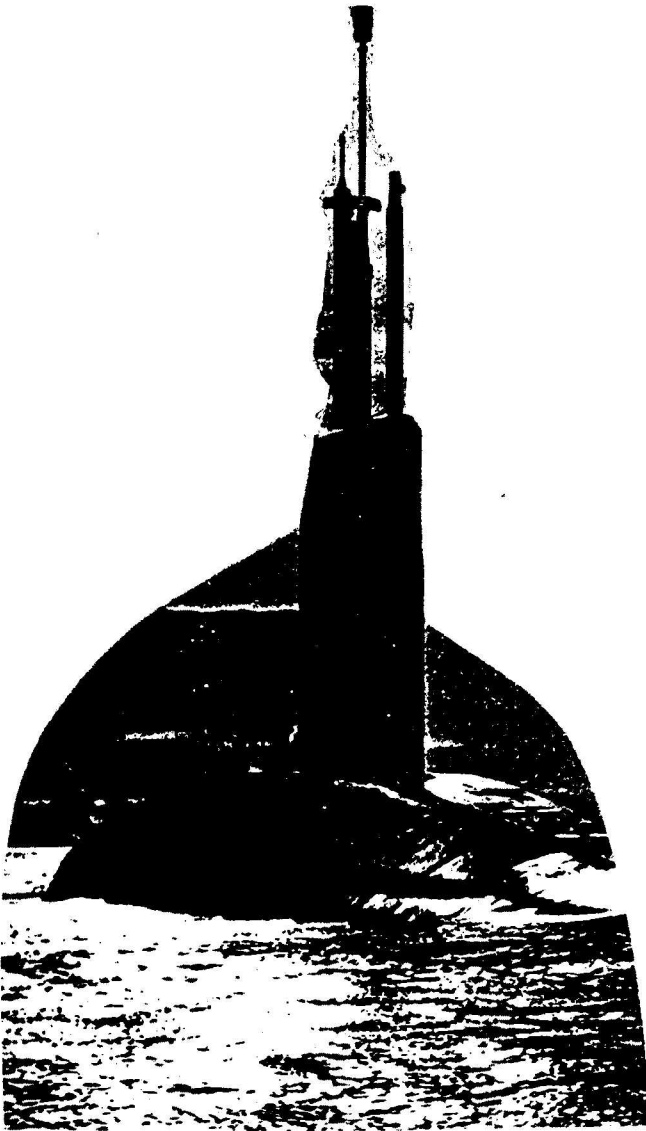
But, can Christians feel any more comfortable with their stance in this conflict? The middle pages of this issue are a collection of quotations uttered by various Christian and non-Christian leaders. Among them, are compelling recognitions of the dilemma war poses for Christians.

History is riddled with examples of Christianity's good name being sacrificed in the "holy" cause of self-interest. While we may acknowledge and draw comfort from the Rev David Gill's words: "... history is not in the hands of governments and armies. It is in the hands of God whose love is stronger than all forces of hate," Reinhold Niebuhr's words, "The tendency to claim God as an ally for our partisan values and ends is the source of all religious fanaticism", suggest that God is seen by many national leaders as merely a convenient propaganda tool.

This war occurs when many more citizens are well-educated. Many more Australian Christians see in war not only a fight between right and wrong. They see genuine causes mingled with national and personal self-interest. They see the possibility that their sons and daughters may be asked to fight a war in God's name, in which God sees nothing about disappointment and failure.

May God help Christians world-wide to be genuinely represent Him in their discussions of war, rather than use Him as a fanatical element to pump up inadequate, and self-interested arguments.

— Rob Cooper



Good News Australia is published each month by Good News Christian Ministries Limited (Incorporated in New South Wales and Queensland), PO Box 1603, Hornsby Northgate NSW 2077. Phone: (066) 743 232.

Editor: Robert Cooper. Layout and Typesetting: Heather Cooper. Printer: Spartan Press, Queens Park WA.

Good News Christian Ministries Limited is an interdenominational organization comprising a variety of Gospel ministries. This magazine is dedicated to proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ and His kingdom of grace. It also seeks to keep subscribers up to date on all aspects of other Good News Christian Ministries: pastoral ministry, preaching appointments, radio broadcasts, public seminars, congresses, audio and video cassettes, and printed publications.

Good News Christian Ministries Limited is a non-profit religious corporation supported solely by donations from those who believe in its ministries. Gifts are tax deductible in Canada, New Zealand and the USA.

Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome, but without guarantee of return. Please send typed (dot matrix OK), double spaced MSS of interest to Christians of all denominations to: Editor, GNCM, PO Box 1603, Hornsby Northgate NSW 2077.

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The Gulf War and Bible Prophecy – 1

The Gulf War has created a crisis over Bible prophecy. False interpretation is not just laughable it is dangerous. Jesus was crucified because of false understanding of prophecy.

This poem is about war. The poet rightfully saw that God's sons don't belong to any one country. They are in every country: Iraq as much as the United States, Australia or Canada.

Satan delights in war, the cross of war. He unleashes all the worst of human passions in war.

The Bible says war has a place. But it's the last place.

Gulf War tracts

Today, thousands of pamphlets and newsletters are being circulated trying to tie current events with Scripture. Here's one newsletter, "Prophecy Flash," of Altadena, California, asking, "Is SADDAM HUSSEIN the BEAST of Revelation?"

Right at the end of 5,993 years of man's rule on planet earth, just seven years from 6000 years since the creation of Adam and Eve, right at the beginning of the 'seven years' of Jacob's Trouble (Lev 26:18,21,24,28) and Great Tribulation, who should appear on the world scene, and SHAKE THE ENTIRE WORLD? . . .

Saddam Hussein! The fact alone, put together with all the other Biblical evidence, indicates that the BEAST OF REVELATION HAS RISEN UP – AND IT IS NONE OTHER THAN SADDAM HUSSEIN!!!

That's typical. Here is another, from Fredonia, Texas:

Using the three literal time periods of Revelation 9:5, 9:10 and

Desmond Ford

"God cried Himself to sleep last night. He saw ten thousand sons of His on cruel crosses slain."

– William Stidger

9:15, we can establish some approaching dates that current events may be following.

- 1 **2 August 1990:** 5 months talk and torment over the Invasion of Kuwait.
- 2 **2 January 1991:** 5 months of hurt under the destroyer.
- 3 **2 June 1991:** the end of the 1st woe and the beginning of the 2nd woe.

This newsletter goes on to talk about a united Arab world; war beginning in earnest with two million combatants; Jerusalem under siege by 29 July 1991; the fall of Egypt to Libya and Ethiopia; the fulfilment of Daniel 11:4-43, and so on.

Evidence of Ignorance

What about such materials? Personally, I would say they are the product of well-meaning but ignorant people. Why ignorant? Well, I can give you both general and specific reasons.

In general, our Lord told us very clearly; there will be wars and rumours of wars until he returns (see

Mt 24:6). "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (v.7). When one war is over it will be followed by another after a week, a month, a year, or a decade. The Bible does not distinguish one national conflict from another.

Now, some specifics that show most of those who write these tracts are not well-studied in Scripture, history, or general knowledge. First, "Prophecy Flash" alludes to the 6000 years nearly being up. Yet there is nothing in Scripture that teaches the world is nearly 6000 years old. That number comes from Archbishop Ussher [1581-1656]. He apparently did not know "begat" is sometimes used in the Bible to mean "the ancestor of" not "father of" as we use it. "Son" often means "the descendant of". Jesus is called "Son of David" and he is a thousand years after David.

Bible genealogies show the direction of descent. They are not a time line. Bible genealogies are chronography, not chronology. Chronography is a graph of time, teaching certain truths. Chronology is one year after another.

More evidence of ignorance

Second, the use of Revelation 9:15 shows little knowledge of scripture either in translated or original form. The writer assumes the hour, day, month, and year mentioned in the verse are linear. Thus, if you apply the year/day principle, there would be one year, plus thirty years for the

month, and 360 for the year. As a result, you have 391 years. Every modern translation makes it clear what the original Greek is saying: it is a point of time – the very year, month, day, and hour. It is a point of time, not a period of time.

Such ignorance led Josiah Litch in the nineteenth century to fix on August 11, 1840, which was soon linked with another false date, October 22, 1844.

Daniel 8:14 has been calculated using the year/day principle by many interested in the end of time. Let's read Daniel 8:14 in *Today's English Version*, "It will continue for 1150 days, during which evening and morning sacrifices will not be offered. Then the Temple will be restored." We can easily see that dogmatic assertion that this is 2300 years has no biblical basis. The word "day" is not in the original Hebrew. The original speaks of "evenings and mornings". Most scholars apply this to evening and morning sacrifices. With two sacrifices each day, 2300 sacrifices would yield 1150 days.

Third, such writers seem ignorant of the warnings of Christ. "No-one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mk 13:32). In his humanity, Christ did not know the time of his return. In his deity, he did; but he never used his deity for his own help.

Time-setting outlawed

"Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come" (Mk 13:33). We're so thick-headed Jesus has to repeat it: "So you must also keep watch because you do not know when . . ." (v35). You do not know when. Watch. Be ready every day.

The New Testament does tell us we should know when the great event of Christ's return is drawing near. When the fig tree sprouts leaves, we know summer is near. We should know when Christ's return is near (Mt 24:32-33; Lk 21:29-31). But all setting of specific dates is outlawed time and again by the words of Christ.

It seems to be a characteristic of believers to fall into time-setting. We see the same problem in Acts 1:6-7. The Apostles come together, and ask, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus said, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority." Holy Writ outlaws all time-setting speculation.

Brief history of time-setting

It is an old habit. Tichonius was one of the first. He said Christ would return in AD381. He read about a "time, times, and half a time" (Dan 7:25; 12:7; Rev 12:14). He assumed a time is 100 years, times 200 years, and half a time fifty years. This would add up to 350 years. Add that to the year of Jesus' death, AD31, and Jesus must return in AD381.

Hippolytus and other Christians fixed on AD500. At the turn of the millenium, AD1000, the whole western world was anticipating the end of things. They didn't know what we know: the birth of Jesus was before AD1. Therefore, the long-awaited AD1000 was more likely about AD1005.

Joachim of Flora was responsible for the year/day theory. This theory puts a year wherever you read "day" in prophecy. Joachim was a monk, and set the date of Christ's return at AD1260.

A friend of Martin Luther's settled upon AD1533. Luther wagged his finger at him and said, "Don't do that, don't do that. It may yet be centuries away."

Sir Isaac Newton is considered the greatest scientist of all time. His most interesting books are not about science, but about Daniel and Revelation. He wrote many, many good things. He wrote some foolish things. The most foolish is that the world would end in AD1715.

Bengel, a great Christian of the last century, fixed on 1836.

William Miller was a true and earnest Christian. The Millerite movement was primarily a revival of the excellent doctrine of the pre-millennial return of Christ. Miller never set an exact date originally. He

was pushed into it by a fanatic named Charles Snow. (Snow thought he was Elijah.) Snow came up with 22 October 1844 as the date of Christ's return. That date, too, passed away.

Joseph Wolfe decided on 1847. Someone asked, "What if Jesus doesn't return in 1847? What will you say?" Wolfe answered, "I will say I was wrong." He sure was.

Joanna Southcott fixed on 1884.

Mother Shipton's supposedly prophetic poems were published in 1861, and revealed that Christ would return in 1881. What wasn't known was that Charles Hindley had made his own additions to Mother Shipton. He put in the date. It, too, passed.

World War 1 ended on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. Christians everywhere began to say, "Midnight's approaching!" This was a reference the parable of the ten virgins were the bridegroom arrives at midnight (Mt 25:6). Christians expected the end in 1919. Charles Taze Russell, pioneer of Jehovah's Witnesses, fixed on 1914 for Christ's return and his successor Judge Rutherford predicted 1925 as a year of resurrection for OT saints.

Mistaking Antichrist

You find the same historically-narrow interpretation of the term "antichrist".

I have studied Daniel and Revelation for about fifty years. I began when I was about twelve.

Before I wrote my commentary on Revelation, *Crisis!*, I handled pretty much all the books in the Library of Congress on Daniel and Revelation. Hundreds and hundreds of them.

If you study those books you find that if they are written in the eighteenth century, Napoleon Bonaparte is the antichrist. If they are written about 1915, the Kaiser is antichrist. If written in 1939, Hitler is antichrist. If written in 1991, Saddam Hussein is antichrist.

Hal Lindsey's books

The most popular of this kind of writing are the books of Hal Lindsey. You cannot listen to Hal without

liking him. He is a Christian man.

It is a quirk of human nature that people like bad news and exciting news. You can write books that are perfectly inaccurate, totally unhistorical; but if they're exciting, they sell. Write a book that is as accurate as science and historiography, and research can make it; if it's dull, it won't sell.

Hal Lindsey's books are never dull. His basic point is that the pattern of future world events centres around the Middle East. About twenty million copies of his *The Late Great Planet Earth* were circulated. That book made millions of dollars.

"I wouldn't change a thing"

In *Hope for the Terminal Generation* he affirms all he has written before. He says, "Many times I've been asked, 'If you could rewrite *The Late Great Planet Earth*, would you change any of prophetic views?' I answer, 'I wouldn't change a thing'."

He wrote in 1969: "When the Jewish people after nearly 2000 years of exile under relentless persecution became a nation on 14 May 1948, the fig tree put forth its own leaves. Jesus said this would indicate he was at the door, ready to return."

Jesus said no such thing. Read what he said in context (Mt 24; Mk 13; Lk 21). Jesus did not say, "When the Jewish nation is restored, then..." It's not in Scripture. Eisegesis is when you read something into a passage that is not there. Exegesis is when you study and draw something out of a passage that is already there. Hal's method here is eisegesis.

Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened" (Mt 24:34). This comment is made after he has mentioned the gospel must go to all the world (Mt 24:14), and many other things. The one thing Jesus does not mention: when the Jewish nation will be restored.

What generation is Jesus referring to? Obviously, in context, the generation that would see the signs. Is the rebirth of Israel chief among these

signs? It is not mentioned in Matthew 24.

If Hal is correct, then within forty years (what he calls a generation) of 1948, all these things could take place. That's 1988, because modern Israel was established in 1948. Wait a moment. Hal believes in the secret rapture doctrine. Doesn't the secret rapture doctrine teach that seven years before the rapture, all hell breaks loose upon the earth? Are not Christians raptured to heaven before the great persecution of the Jews? That means all Christians left earth in 1981, seven years before the end in 1988.

Yet Hal is still around, making money on his books. Still around – amazing.

When someone challenged him about his use of "generation" he said, "Well, maybe a generation is sixty years, rather than forty." That sounds like a change to me. Then he was asked, "But what if you are wrong?" "There's not much difference between a hero and a bum," he answered.

Many writers who try to correlate current international events with prophecy, instead of "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15 KJV) frightfully divide it.

The great clue

Let me give you the great clue, the real clue, that will help you approach prophecy correctly, rightly dividing the word of truth. (It will seem irrelevant, but is exceedingly relevant.)

Why was Christ crucified?

"Everyone knows that," you answer. "He was crucified for our sins." Why wasn't he slain on the Temple altar then? I did not ask, Why did he die? I asked, Why was he crucified?

In Luke 4 we learn Jesus went into the Synagogue one Sabbath. He stood up to read and the Isaiah scroll was passed to him. He read,

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me; because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind.

To release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour' (Lk 4:18-19, NIV).

Jesus then went on to say the gospel of God's grace would be proclaimed to non-Jews, that is, to gentiles (v24-27). "All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff" (v 28-29).

Why did the religious leaders hand Jesus over to the Romans that he might be crucified? Why did people in Nazareth try to throw him off the cliff? Notice John 6:15: "Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again into the hills by himself."

Jesus crucified because of prophetic misunderstanding

Jesus was rejected because he did not fit into peoples' ideas about prophecy. The religious leaders had read the promises about a coming kingdom of God and destruction of all gentile powers that opposed God. They longed for the destruction of the Roman power. They longed for a Messiah who could provide food for an army, heal soldiers when wounded, and destroy the enemy. With such a Messiah, they would be invincible in war.

But when Jesus refused to fulfil their interpretation of prophecy, they handed him over to be crucified. Jesus died the way he did because of false interpretation of prophecy.

Many in ancient Israel were looking for redemption. But they thought of redemption from the Romans, not redemption from their selfishness, their covetousness, their evil passions and lusts. They wanted redemption from taxes. However sympathetic we may be to that, we perceive we need a much greater deliverance than redemption from taxes.

I need deliverance from my pride, my selfishness, my self-centredness, my covetousness, my impurity, my sloth. □

The Gulf War and Bible Prophecy – 2

*All prophecy is Christ-and gospel-centred.
Therefore it is also church-centred.
New Testament prophecy is spiritual,
and applies to spiritual Jews and spiritual Israel.*

"Christ is the end of the law" (Rom 10:4). 'All the prophets testify about him' (Acts 10:43). He is "the last Adam" (1 Cor 15:45), and the true Solomon, and the fulfilment of all the prophets.

The prophecy of Daniel 9:20-27 said the seventy weeks of years would bring the sign of the Prince who would fulfil (or "seal up") the prophetic vision. Christ is the fulfilment of all prophecy. **All prophecy is Christ-centred.**

If someone stands up at a Revelation Seminar (or anywhere else), and talks only about the Huns and the Visigoths, the French Revolution and the Ottoman Power – that's not biblical. All prophecy is Christ-centred. In the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch Paul said, "The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognise Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath" (Acts 13:27).

Christ and his Body

The Bible speaks about Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Because prophecy is Christ-centred, it is also church-centred. The church is the body of Christ (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:18). The body of Christ is a great theme of Scripture. (This body is not just a denomination, but all who put their trust in Jesus.)

Any passage of Scripture that doesn't ultimately yield the gospel,

Desmond Ford

is being misinterpreted. We would be guilty again of eisegesis, not exegesis. The Bible is Christ-centred, cross-centred, gospel-centred, and church-centred.

Why we love the spectacular

Why do people have a proclivity for spectacular prophetic "interpretation" (and all things spectacular)?

First, because most people are bored. We like something exciting.

War has always been – for men – the end of boredom.

Since the beginning of time, men who are out of harmony with God, who are at war in their hearts, have made war on their fellow men. In Genesis 3, man separates from his Maker. In Genesis 4, he murders his brother.

The further the spokes on a wheel get from the hub, the further they are from each other. The further you get from God, the further you are from your fellow humans. As soon as we turn from God, we turn on one another. That's why there will be war until Jesus returns.

Some say, "There's hardly been a war since World War II." The fact is there have been over sixty. In recent decades, not counting the Gulf War combatants, one-quarter of the nations of earth have been at war. These nations are tiny, most of them. We've been so preoccupied with the US

and USSR we have not noticed these wars, but they are going on. And wars will go on until Jesus returns.

Bored without God

Sinful creatures are bored, and they're bored because they were made for God. If we don't have God, we'll always be bored.

God "set eternity in their hearts." We were made for eternity, made for God. Nothing else will satisfy. God is the only answer to boredom.

It's difficult to believe that when you are young. I remember working on the college grounds, working on the gardens and landscaping. I didn't want the Lord to return too soon. I wanted to get married. I wanted to go out into the ministry, to be a big evangelist. I had all sorts of ambition. "Lord, don't return yet!" I didn't say it, but I felt it.

When you are young you think all sorts of things will satisfy. When you're in knee-pants, you think long pants will satisfy. When you're living at home, you think you'll be satisfied as soon as you leave home and get away from the tyranny of parents. When you're single, you want to get married. You are sure you will meet the perfect partner, and boredom will go. When you fulfil your ambitions in literature, or science, or business, then you will be satisfied.

But because we are made for God, none of these things ultimately sat-

isfy. So people grow bored, and love the spectacular.

Why we love the spectacular-2

A second reason for our proclivity for the spectacular is that we are so earth-bound, temporal things are more real to us than spiritual things. We like the tangible, the visible, and audible because it takes no faith.

When I step into my Mercedes (be sure I don't have one), I don't need any faith. There it is. See it. Touch it.

Furthermore, the tangible makes no demands. But if we decide the Bible is all about Jesus and the gospel, we're faced with a demand: to forsake all, and follow Jesus.

That's a big demand. It means we don't own anything. We're only stewards. We don't own a minute of time; God can take it away in a moment. I love to walk among the books in my library. But sometimes I say to myself, "What if God takes all these away from me? What if they burn up some weekend when I'm away preaching?" Then I think, and say, "Well, that will test whether I belong to God or not!"

The gospel makes a demand. Either God is everything or God is nothing. Either God matters tremendously or God does not matter at all.

The Bible, rightly interpreted, makes tremendous demands. My talents are not my own: they're to be used for Jesus and my fellow humans. My time is not mine. (I don't even know how much time I have.) Every moment belongs to God. My dollars are not mine. They're God's. If I use them unwisely, I'm a thief. My energies are not mine; they are to be used for God's glory.

Prophecy about the Gospel

Many Christians prefer to say, "Oh, no, prophecy's all about the Middle East, and events over there." That doesn't make a demand on them. The Middle East is far away.

But when you see that the Bible and prophecy are about the gospel and Jesus – you have to surrender. Now. Today is the day of salvation,

now is the appointed time.

Ultimately frustrated

Our proclivity for the spectacular and the tangible ultimately frustrates us. We were eager to hear all about the Gulf War when it began. When we first tuned in, we found it all-absorbing. Now we find it a little dull in its sameness.

Everything the world has to offer eventually palls the senses. Worldly things don't wear well. Spiritual things do.

The Bible says, "The man without the Spirit ["natural man" KJV] does not accept the things that come from the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14). We need to remember this when we seek to interpret the Bible and prophecy. Jesus said, "Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God" (Jn 7:17 NRSV). Obedience to Christ is the key to understanding the will of Christ.

Spiritual not Literal

The New Testament applies truth in a spiritual rather than literal sense. It's talking about spiritual truth, not literal, Palestinian, Middle Eastern truth.

Said Jesus, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (Jn 4:21). "A time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks" (v23).

Worship is not tied to a place. Neither here, nor Jerusalem, but in Spirit and truth we are to worship – with our mind, our heart, our imagination, our warmest devotions.

Jews and Arabs

The Bible does say something prophetically about Jews and Arabs. But not as interpreted in the type of prophetic newsletters and tracts I quoted.

In mosque and synagogue and church alike, the patriarch Abraham is honoured as the friend of God.

Arabs trace their origins to Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar. The angel prophesied that Esau would be aggressive and strongly independent (Gen 16:12). We see this fulfilled in the destiny of the Arab people.

In Genesis 12, God said to Abraham, "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3).

Here's a wandering Bedouin, one of thousands. And God's word touches him. In the name of Abraham all the nations of the earth will bless themselves. From Abraham came the Jewish people, and from them the Messiah.

These prophecies accurately foretold the destiny of Jews and Arabs, without predestinating individuals to either salvation or damnation.

Christian prophecies not nationalistic

But when we come to the Christian era, prophecies no longer have national or racial application. Prophecies that apply from the death of Christ to the end of time, cannot be applied specifically to any nation or race.

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). When the original readers read this, what did they think Paul meant by "Greek?" Anyone who wasn't a Jew. In other words, there is neither Jew nor gentile.

Since the death of Christ, this is just one world now. God recognises no national, racial, or gender barriers.

No spiritual difference

The oppression of womanhood through all previous centuries is here condemned. Never does a woman in the Gospels speak against Christ. Women were last at the cross and first at the tomb. Romans 16 lists the female church workers who were preaching and teaching the Word in

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WHOSE SIDE WAS C

Christian attitudes to War

Mr Ted Lindsay (ALP member for Hobart):
"We all pray for triumph in battle."

Reinhold Niebuhr (US theologian):
"The tendency to claim God as an ally for our partisan values and ends is the source of all religious fanaticism."

Saddam Hussein (Iraqi President):
*"Let's pray that we don't go as far as using non-conventional weapons, that the losses aren't that great."
"I wish the Americans well and pray none of their sons will die."
"I can almost smell the scent of paradise . . . victory is ours in the support of God, and the attackers will rot in hell."*



The Most Rev Keith Rayner (Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne):
"Saddam Hussein needs our prayers as much as George Bush."

The Rev Dorothy McMahon (Pitt Street Uniting Church):

"We (Christians and Muslims) are all talking about holy wars. Some of us would believe we are praying to the same God and that the conflict is a human conflict."

If you all think God is on your side it brings in another element of danger. If you have a conflict in which you can see injustice, or the struggle for justice, it is subject to ordinary human analysis.

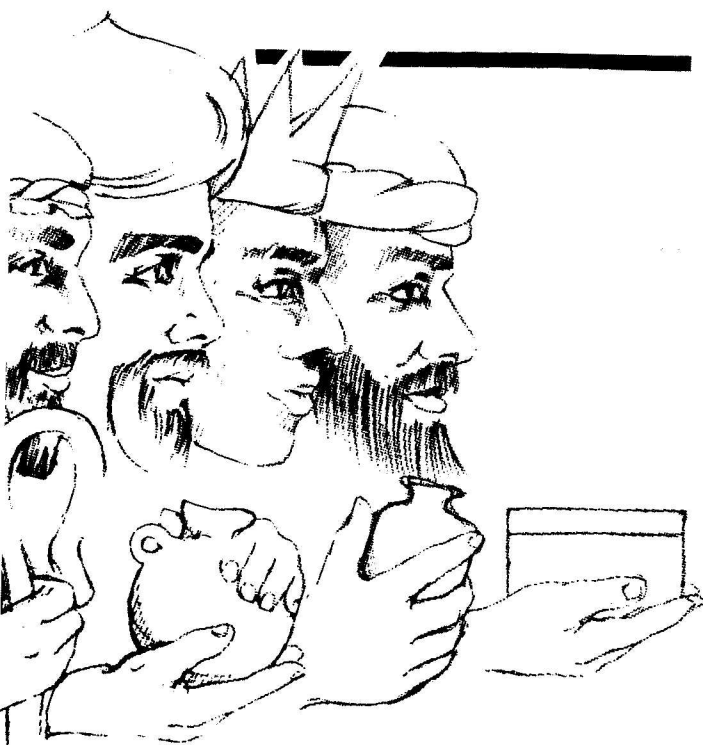
When you bring God in, you remove it from critical analysis."

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GOD ON ANYWAY?

and Apocalyptic events



The Rev David Gill (general secretary of the Australian Council of Churches), at a peace rally:

"We have not come here to claim there is a simple solution to the Gulf crisis. We have not come to score cheap points against world leaders. We have come as the representatives of many faiths and of none. We have come to bear witness to the madness of war."

"Remember that ultimately, history is not in the hands of governments and armies. It is in the hands of God, whose love is stronger than all forces of hate."

Dr Robert Runcie (Archbishop of Canterbury):

"This war is necessary in the way in which it is necessary to resist a tiger that is loose."

Iraq's military command:

"The enemy planes only hit the targets that God wanted."

The Pope:

"This is a war unworthy of humanity."

"Until the last moment, I prayed that this would not happen."

Donald Wilson (President of the Uniting Church Assembly):

"Urged prayers for . . . those who have to make decisions, including George Bush, Saddam Hussein and Robert Hawke."

The Rev Dorothy McMahon (again):

"By introducing God to the argument, we add a fanatical element which is very dangerous . . . from either side, American or Muslim."

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the first century. All ancient prejudices between the sexes are here discounted because of the cross.

No-one can deny the differences. Men cannot bear children. But spiritually, women are not inferior, nor superior to men.

There is no superiority to any national group either. Arabs, Americans, Australians, Babylonians, Canadians, or Israelis, are not superior. We are all one in Christ. The New Testament does not recognise spiritual plus or spiritual minus because of who you are by birth.

We are one in Christ

"You who are Gentiles by birth

and called 'uncircumcised' by those who call themselves 'the uncircumcision' (that done in the body by the hands of men) – remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ" (Eph 2:11-13).

Christ made peace between Jew and gentile (v14). They are now one. Christ broke down the dividing wall of hostility (v14).

God does not recognise any national prejudices, or national superiority

or inferiority according to the geographical fluke of where we were born.

"For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him" (Rom 10:12).

God so loved the world he gave his Son (Jn 3:16). God so loved the Iraqis. God so love the Iranians. God so loved those of Haiti, Germany, Russia, and the US, that God gave his Son.

Patriotism is the cheapest of virtues. We ought to be patriotic. It's a virtue.

But it's the cheapest of virtues because it's the result of a fluke. I could have been born in Baghdad.

The Gulf War and Bible Prophecy – 3

*All who trust in Jesus make up the Israel of the New Testament.
Armageddon is a universal battle between spiritual Babylon and Spiritual Israel.
Our only safe preparation is to be clothed in the robe of Christ's righteousness.*

They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Lk 21:24). This is a verse almost universally misunderstood. What does it mean?

We've already seen from Ephesians 2 that anyone who's a stranger to the covenant of promise is a gentile. Gentiles are those outside the covenant of promise. That includes unbelieving Jews. God counts you as a gentile, whatever your name or sign, if you're not in the new covenant through faith in Christ.

Luke 21:24 is saying that after AD70, when Jerusalem was trodden down, that city would never again be the central focus of the work of God. It would be inhabited, until the

Desmond Ford

end of time, by people not in the divine covenant by faith.

Once you are in the new covenant by faith, you are no longer a gentile, whoever you are. Within the covenant there is neither Jew nor Greek. If you're not in the covenant, you're a gentile.

Kingdom of God for all

"I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Mt 21:43). Jesus is speaking to the Jewish religious leaders, and foretells the Christian church.

Every Jew is as precious to God as any individual in any nation. God is not guilty of favouritism (Acts 10:34).

In AD70 when Jerusalem was destroyed, and probably one million Jews perished, the kingdom was taken from one nation. It was given to all people who believe the gospel and produce the fruit of the kingdom. When the Temple and its sacrificial paraphernalia was destroyed it was because the true Sacrifice – Jesus – had come.

True tree and fruit

Hal Lindsey teaches that the time is coming when 144,000 Jews will be so blessed by God that they will make more converts to Christ than the church has in twenty centuries. This would be wonderful, but Jesus had a more sombre view.

"Seeing a fig tree by the road, he [Jesus] went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said

to it, 'May you never bear fruit again!' Immediately the fig tree withered" (Lk 21:19). The ostentatious system that centred on the Temple came to an end in AD70. That nation would bear no more spiritual fruit.

That fruit is now borne by the olive tree mentioned in Romans 11:11-24. Only when an American, Australian, Canadian, or Jew trusts in Jesus as Saviour from condemnation and sin and death, is that American, Australian, Canadian, or Jew grafted into that olive tree. Those grafted in are true Jews.

A true Jew

What is a true Jew? Revelation 2:9 says, "I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not." Also, "I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not . . ." (Rev 3:9).

Jesus is pointing out bad Christian churches, churches where people say they are Jews, but are not.

If this is a literal Jew it makes no sense. If a Jew said he was not a Jew he still would be. What these verses refer to is that true Jews are now those who believe in Jesus. "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed" (Gal 3:29) is the teaching of the New Testament.

A true Jew in the New Testament is a believer in Jesus. People who claim to be Christians and are not, God does not recognise as belonging to his Jewish family.

You have to be an Israelite to be saved. God's new covenant is with the house of Israel. The first meaning of Israel (Gen 32:28) is "one who struggles with God." A true Israelite is one who wrestles with God and is an overcomer. Once you believe in Jesus, God counts you as a true Israelite because you've chosen him rather than the world.

You'll make lots of mistakes. You'll have a thousand slip-ups, but you've found your Messiah. Your heart's connection with the world has been sundered. Despite bad habits yet to be conquered you are already an overcomer. "It is not externals that

make a Jew, nor an external mark in the flesh that makes circumcision. The real Jew is one who is inwardly a Jew, and his circumcision is of the heart, spiritual not literal; he receives his commendation not from men but from God" (Rom 2:28-29 REB).

Holy nation

The New Testament says it's not circumcision or uncircumcision that counts, not Jew or gentile (Gal 3:26-29; 5:6, 6:15). What counts is – by faith – being part of the new creation Christ has ushered in. What is important is faith working by love, and manifesting obedience to God and response to God's great salvation.

Jesus said to the religious leaders of his day, "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Mt 21:43). What people, what nation is that? The American nation? The British? I had a grandmother who was a British-Israelite. She was Methodist, I think, but you could also be a British-Israelite whatever your denomination. British-Israelites believe the British are the lost tribes of Israel. Well, the British are good cricketers, so why not?

Peter tells us who is truly God's nation: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pe 2:9). Who is the holy nation? The church of God!

All who come out of the darkness into the light, that's the holy nation. Every believer in Jesus, Catholic or Protestant, Methodist or Episcopalian, Seventh-day Adventist or Seventh Day Baptist, every believer in Jesus – that's who makes up the holy nation.

Scotfield Bible

Let me just mention the Scotfield Bible. It is a King James Bible edited with notes by C I Scotfield. This Bible has been scattered like the leaves of autumn. As is true of every book – including my books – there are good

things in it and bad things. But Scotfield's book says all the prophecies are about the Middle East.

That immediately removes all stress. If the prophecies are about the Middle East, then they have no bearing on me. They have nothing to do with how I shall eat, drink, speak, think, see, spend, work. That's comfortable. The Middle East is a long way away. I can just read the prophecies for excitement and recreation.

Revelation of Jesus

Now to my last Scripture book.

"The revelation of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1:1). Why did I turn to this verse? Because Dr Scotfield makes the Book of Revelation revolve around the Middle East. Hal Lindsey makes this book revolve around the Middle East. Those newsletters I read at the beginning make this book revolve the Middle East.

But this verse says the Book of Revelation is about Jesus Christ. This book is from Jesus, and about Jesus. The Book of Revelation has twenty-five names for Jesus. One of those names, "the Lamb" is used twenty-eight times. He's mentioned 137 times in the first three chapters alone! In Revelation 1, Israel's seven-branched candlestick is used as the symbol of the entire Christian church.

When this book speaks of the church, the church is understood as the body of Christ. Thus, facts associated with Christ's life on earth are used as symbols when speaking of his body, the church.

For example, 1260 days. That is the length of Christ's earthly ministry: three-and-a-half years. When the antichrist is mentioned, antichrist is described as a parody of the true Christ. Antichrist is wounded to death, buried, resurrected, just as the true Christ was.

In other words, whether the Book of Revelation is talking about the church or wickedness, everything revolves around the cross. The language is cross-saturated.

Revelation sees the future through

the lens of the cross. It foretells that the whole world will one day become a gigantic Calvary. Not in a redemptive, salvific sense. Simply, that as the Head of the church was crucified, so the body (the church) will be threatened with cruel death.

The Church persecuted

"When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the soul of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?' (Rev 6:9-10).

They are told, "Until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed" (v11). Then symbols and pictures are used to describe the great tribulation and shaking to come upon the church. "There was a great earthquake [shaking of the church]. The sun turned black like sackcloth [the darkness of apostasy] . . . the moon turned blood red [the moon, a symbol of the church, is persecuted], and the stars in the sky fell to earth [leaders in the church fall], as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind" (Rev 6:12-13).

That's a description of the great persecution of the church that will take place. (Revelation 13 also speaks of it.)

Armageddon

I want to look at Revelation 16. This is a key chapter for those who believe the Middle East is the centre of all Bible prophecy. The Middle East is tremendously important – but not prophetically. It's important politically, and we'll see many more storms there. But it's no more important prophetically than Australia, Canada, or South Africa.

Let's look at the verse that is focused on so much: "Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in the Hebrew is called Armageddon" (Rev 16:16).

Writers such as Scofield and Hal

Lindsey say that Russia, the king of the north, will come down; Egypt, the king of the south, will come up; and they will menace Israel. The last great battle will then be fought at Megiddo.

Dear friends, it's got nothing to do with it. **Every place name, every proper name, in the Book of Revelation is a symbol.**

All the things in the Old Testament which once were literal and local become, in New Testament prophecy (and especially in the Book of Revelation) spiritual and world-wide in their application. When Israel is mentioned in Revelation, it is referring to true Jews who make up spiritual Israel – the church. Abraham does not have many seeds. Only one, the nation of those who have faith in Jesus – the church.

Mount Zion (Rev 14:1) is the church, not a literal mountain. The Temple is the church. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17 says clearly the church is the temple of God.) There is much material in the newsletters about plans for building a new temple in Jerusalem. It may happen, but it has nothing to do with the prophecies of Revelation. The temple in Revelation is the church. The Book of Revelation is about Jesus, his church, his gospel, not the Middle East.

Babylon

Babylon was the ancient enemy of Israel. The name comes from "Babel" which means "gate of God," but came to mean "confusion" (Gen 11:1-9). "They said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves'" (Gen 11:4).

Babylon is the symbol of man-centred religion. It can be in any church. Any church which puts its emphasis on how we're doing rather than on what Christ has done, that's Babylonian. We worry about the New Age because the movement makes man God. Some churches do much the same when they insist that unless you are perfect, you will lose salvation. That makes humanity the

centre.

If I'm going to be saved because of what I do, I haven't a hope. I never do anything just right. Not anything.

Megiddo

Megiddo is found thirteen times in Scripture. It's first found in Judges 4 and 5 (see 5:19), when the sun-worshipping Canaanites attack the Sabbath-keeping Israelites. The Canaanites did not know how to rest; they could rest only in war. Many people are like that: never at rest unless having an argument, or at war.

The Sabbath's important because the physical rest is a sign of the rest of heart we have all the time as we trust in the finished work of Jesus. The first time the Sabbath's discussed in the New Testament is immediately after Jesus invites us to come to him and he will give us rest (Mt 11:28-12:14). The Sabbath's a sign of the gospel; it's a sign of rest in Christ.

The Canaanites fell upon Israel, but "From the heavens the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera" (Jdg 5:20). Sisera and the Canaanites were destroyed.

Thus Megiddo became a symbol of the conflict between good and evil, between the people of the true religion and the people of the false. In Revelation 16 it's a symbol pointing to the last events when Jesus is just about to return.

Apostate religion will link with an apostate civil power and say, "Look, we've got to get everybody to conform. We haven't been able to find peace through technology, through politics, through education. We've failed. Let's try religion."

But this religion will be man-centred. It will be Babylonian. It will be religion not true to the Bible and the gospel.

Last great conflict

God will have a people true to the Bible, the gospel, and God's law. (We must always carefully distinguish gospel and law while never separating them.)

The last great war in this world will occur when those who refuse to compromise over Scripture, gospel, and law, will suffer the wrath of a united apostate church and state.

Revelation 16 foretells a world that has sinned against God. This is the unpardonable sin. The world's inhabitants are considered lepers. (The word used for "sore" in the first plague is the word used in the Greek Old Testament for leprosy. Leprosy is a symbol for sin.)

Here are people with leprosy sores; symbolic of the fact they are now lepers outside the camp of God. They are drinking blood because they have condemned the people of God to death. They are pictured as engaged in war – terrible war. All the rivers and fountains become blood, which is symbolic of war everywhere.

The sun hurts them with its fierceness. The wrath of God begins to beat upon them. They suspect they are doomed and lost, and great darkness falls, symbolic of their hearts. In their anger, they rush upon the people of God to destroy them for they think the people of God have triggered all their sufferings.

When they are about to wipe out the people of God, Christ returns (he and his angels from heaven are symbolised by "the kings of the east" or sunrising), and with the bright-

ness of his coming (2 Th 2:8) destroys, or dries up, the wicked (Rev 16:12).

Drying up of Euphrates

This is what the *drying up of the Euphrates* means. The great swelling Euphrates was the river of Babylon. In Revelation 17:15 the angel says, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages." The angel is referring to the Euphrates. The river represents all the people who support the Babylon of apostate church and state. Like a rushing flood they try to drown the people of God. But Christ returns and destroys them with the brightness of his coming. They are dried up.

Clothed in Christ's righteousness

"Behold, I come like a thief? Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed" (Rev 16:15).

This is immediately before the Armageddon verse. Armageddon means mount of slaughter. Armageddon is when the whole world is convulsed by the second coming of Christ. The wicked, who are about to destroy the saints, are themselves destroyed. Just before this, Christ

gives the warning, "Be sure you have your clothes with you."

Earlier in the Book of Revelation, Jesus said, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20). "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness" (v18).

The only way to be ready for final events is to have on the garment of the righteousness of Christ. All that Jesus ever did in his life and death is put to your account the moment you believe. And this despite all our failures, despite all our stupidities.

The moment you believe, all the virtues, all the merits of Christ's life and death are yours. You are counted as a perfect commandment-keeper. You may still be slipping, but you are counted as perfect. You have paid the penalty of the broken law because you are in Christ: Christ died for you at Calvary.

Dear friends, the way to be ready for the end of time is to have the garment, the white clothes on – the garment of Christ, our righteousness.

[This sermon was preached 19 January 1991, at the GNU Fellowship, Auburn, CA. Katie Lynch, of Newcastle, CA transcribed it.]



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The Editor
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Hornsby Northgate NSW 2077

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RELIGIOUS NEWS

Armageddon re-defined

Bishop David Jenkins, the Bishop of Durham identifies Armageddon with the western world's preoccupation with "greed" and the environmental crisis.

Jenkins claims that the world is undergoing apocalyptic pressures which should be read and responded to as the pressures of the judgement of God.

In his new book, *God, Politics and the Future*, he asserts: "We are collectively and comprehensively failing in our stewardship of the Earth and we are worshipping and giving ourselves up to greed, consumption and sensuality."

"These are the perennial, simple and basic sins against the great commandments . . . greed, consumption and seeking more and more are simply idolatry of ourselves and once you put yourself and its indulgences into centre you get not a god but a devil, and all the good things of ourselves which are open to God and related to neighbours are lost."

World Council of Churches . . . 1

The Assembly in Canberra, while having Catholic participants once again, saw Christianity's largest denomination refusing to seek membership now or in the foreseeable future.

Vatican observer, Archbishop Idris Cassidy, said: "The nature and identity of our church make it hard to fit us in."

It is assumed that this is a reference to the Catholic teaching that the Catholic Church is the body founded by Christ, possessing the whole truth.

World Council of Churches . . . 2

The major headline within Australia focussed on the WCC's criticism of Australia's attitude toward its Aboriginal people. They claimed that "the impact of racism by Australians on the Aboriginal people in this nation is not just horrific, but genocidal. How can this nation justify the destruction of an indigenous culture, language and spirituality?"

While most observers acknowledged the gravity of the Australian problem, the WCC's position was criticised on a number of grounds. Firstly, the WCC wrongly assumes that the "indigenous culture" is one culture. Secondly, that the aboriginal people themselves have

some responsibility to redress their plight. Thirdly, that the Australian Government's expenditure upon Aboriginal welfare is hardly an indication of a policy of genocide.

Australians and Christianity

Latest Australian Bureau of Statistics show that 11.4 million Australians – or 73 percent – said they were Christians, while 1.9 million (12 percent) said they had no religion and another 1.8 million (12 percent) refused to answer.

But the percentage of Christians dropped from 78 percent to 73 percent between 1976 and 1986. These figures are taken from the 1986 census.

During the same period, the number of Christians grew from 10.6 million to 11.4 million, but was offset by the greater rate of population increase.

The five percent drop in Christian adherents was largely replaced by an increase of four percent in people with no religion – from eight to 12 percent – and a one percent increase in membership of non-Christian religions.

Roman Catholics have become the largest religious group for the first time, with 4.1 million adherents or 26 percent of the Australian population.

The percentage of Anglicans had dropped from 28 percent in 1976 to 24 percent in 1986, or 3.7 million adherents.

Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras

Billed as the world's largest "gay" party, the Mardi Gras escaped rain despite Fred Nile's prayers.

One of the organisers, Bill Whittaker, believes that most heterosexuals don't discern what they see at the Mardi Gras. He said, "I don't want it to be a show we put on for the heterosexual community. If heterosexuals come along to celebrate with us, that's wonderful, but I don't want it to be a side show."

"If people go away with greater tolerance and promote that tolerance in their communities, that's very good. But if some people come along to gawk and laugh, I don't want them there. It's our celebration. It's our parade. It's for us."

One wonders if any other social grouping would claim such exclusive rights to the streets of Sydney!

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