



The Gulf War and Bible Prophecy—1

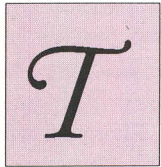
by Desmond Ford



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.

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

—William Stidger



his 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 6,000 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! That 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’s another, from Fredonia, Texas:

Using the three literal time periods of Revelation 9:5, 9:10, and 9:15, we can establish some approaching dates that current events may be following.

1. August 2, 1990: 5 months talk and

torment over the Invasion of Kuwait.

2. January 2, 1991: 5 months of hurt under the destroyer.

3. June 2, 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 July 29, 1991; the fall of Egypt to Libya and Ethiopia; the fulfillment 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 rumors 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 6,000 years nearly being up. Yet there is nothing in Scripture that teaches the world is nearly 6,000 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’s 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’s a point of time—the very year, month, day, and hour. It’s 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 1,150 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 2,300 years has no biblical basis. The word “day” is not in the original Hebrew.

The original Hebrew speaks of “evenings and mornings.” Most scholars apply this to evening and morning sacrifices. With two sacrifices each day, 2,300 sacrifices would yield 1,150 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 thickheaded Jesus has to repeat it: “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when ...” (v.35). 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’s an old habit. Tichonius was one of the first. He said Christ would return in A.D. 381. 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, A.D. 31, and Jesus must return in A.D. 381.

Hippolytus and other Christians fixed on A.D. 500. At the turn of the millennium, A.D. 1000, the whole western world was anticipating the end of things. They didn’t know what we

know: the birth of Jesus was before A.D. 1. Therefore, the long-awaited A.D.1000 was more likely about A.D. 1005.

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 A.D. 1260.

A friend of Martin Luther’s settled upon A.D.1533. 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 A.D.1715.

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 premillennial 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 October 22, 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 I 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 to the parable of the ten virgins where 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. His successor Judge Rutherford predicted 1925 as a year of resurrection for Old Testament saints.

Mistaking Antichrist

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

I’ve 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’re written in the eighteenth century, Napoleon Bonaparte is the antichrist. If they’re 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 can’t listen to Hal without liking him. He’s 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’s 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 centers 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 your 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 May 14, 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's not there. Exegesis is when you study and draw something out of a passage that's 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's not mentioned in Matthew 24.

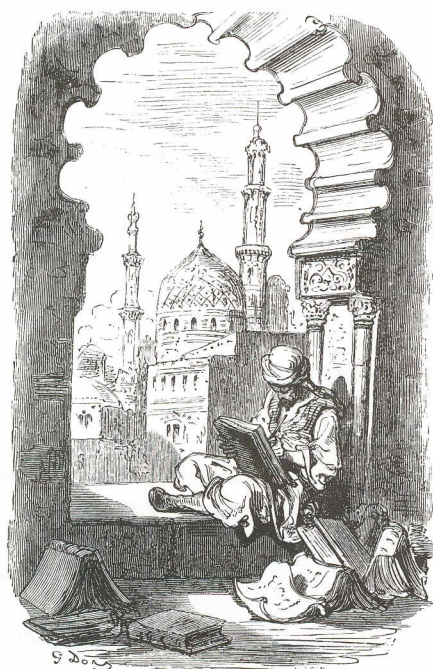
If Hal is correct, then within forty years (what he calls a generation) of 1948, all these things could take place. That's 1988, because modern Israel was established in 1948. Wait a moment. Hal believes in the secret rapture doctrine. Doesn't the secret rapture doctrine teach that seven years before the rapture, all hell breaks loose upon the earth? Aren't 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're 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 Ti 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 didn't 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 favor" (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 (vv. 24-27). "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" (vv.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 people's 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 fulfill 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-centeredness, my covetousness, my impurity, my sloth. ♦