



The Gulf War and Bible Prophecy—2



by Desmond Ford

*All prophecy is Christ- and gospel-centered.
Therefore it is also church-centered. 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 fulfillment 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 fulfill (or “seal up”) the prophetic vision. Christ is the fulfillment of all prophecy. **All prophecy is Christ-centered.**

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-centered. In the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, Paul said, “The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize 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-centered, it is also church-centered. 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, is being misinterpreted. We would be guilty again of eisegesis, not exegesis. The Bible is Christ-centered, cross-centered, gospel-centered, and church-centered.

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 fellowmen. 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 USA 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 fulfill 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 satisfy. So people grow bored, and love the spectacular.

Why We Love the Spectacular

A second reason for our proclivity for the spectacular is that we are so earthbound, 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). "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (v.23).

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 honored 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 recognizes 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 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 recognize a 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 circumcision' (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 covenant 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).

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Christ made peace between Jew and gentile (v.14). They are now one. Christ broke down the dividing wall of hostility (v.14).

God does not recognize 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 loved the Iranians. God so loved those of Haiti, Germany, Russia, and the USA, 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. ❖