



# The Gulf War and Bible Prophecy—3

by Desmond Ford



*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.*

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hey 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 A.D. 70, 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 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

"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). 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 favoritism (Acts 10:34). In A.D. 70, 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 with 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 somber 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" (Mt 21:19). The ostentatious system that centered on the temple came to an end in A.D. 70. 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 Savior 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 recognize 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 overcomes sin. 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 slipups, but you've found your Messiah. Your heart's connection with the world has been sundere. 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 that 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 impor-



tant 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: "But 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 make up the holy nation.

### Scofield Bible

Let me just mention the Scofield Bible. It is a King James Bible edited with notes by C.I. Scofield. 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 Scofield'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, sex, 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. Scofield 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 around 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!

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. (In Revelation 1, Israel's seven-branched candlestick is used as the symbol of the entire Christian church.)

For example, 1260 days. That is the length of Christ's earthly ministry: three and a half years. When the anti-christ 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 souls 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" (v.11). 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 whole 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 one day. (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 center 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 worldwide 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-centered 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 center.

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 is 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 is 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 is 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-centered. 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 leprous 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 symbolized by "the kings of the east" or sunrising). With the brightness of his coming (2 Th 2:8), Christ 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 come 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..." (v.18).

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. ❖

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