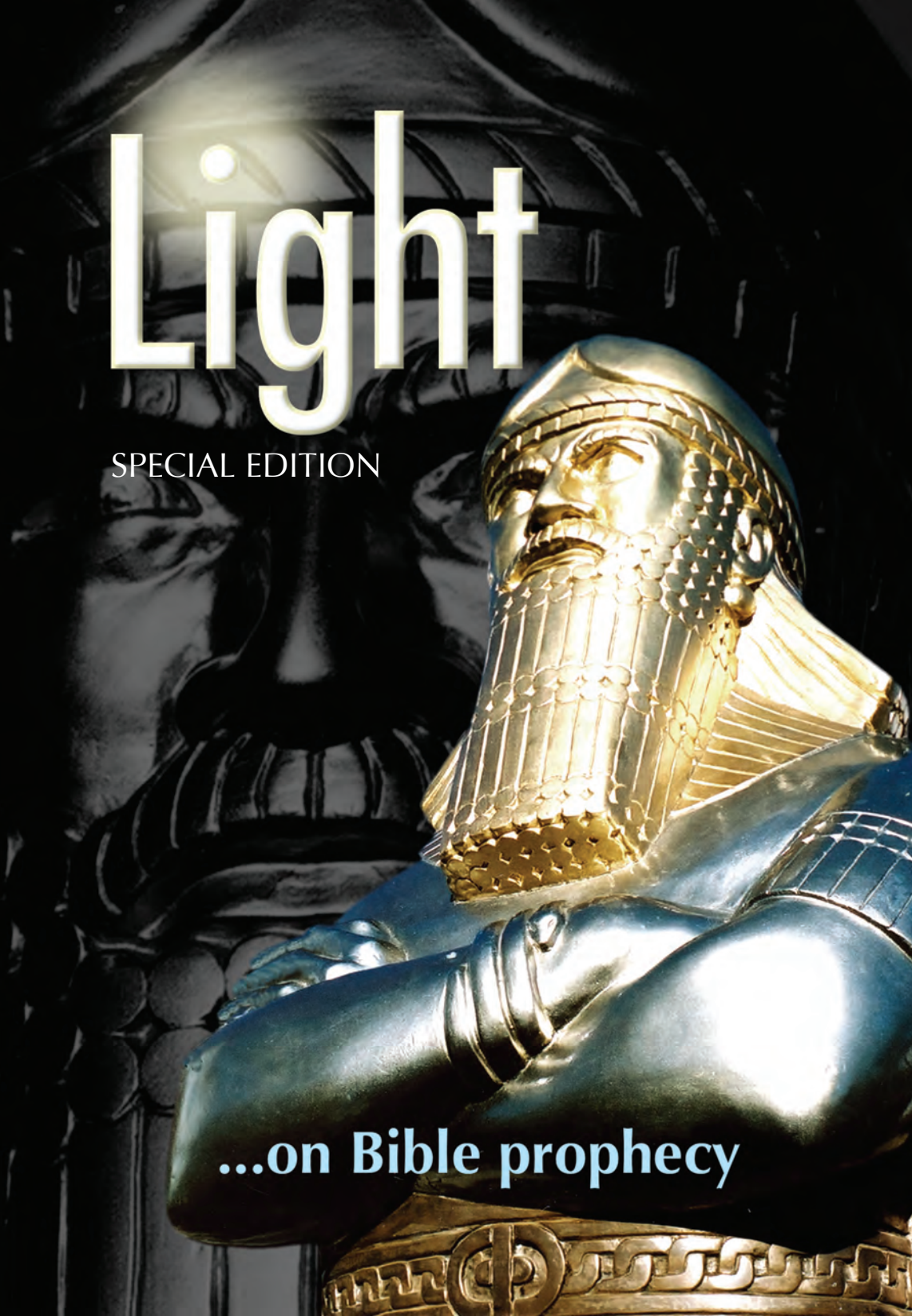


Light

The image features a close-up, low-angle shot of the Great Sphinx in Giza. The golden, weathered head of the Sphinx is the central focus, with its eyes and features clearly visible. The chest and paws are also shown, with intricate details of the scales and joints. The background is dark and shadowed, showing the face of another statue, possibly a pharaoh, which adds a sense of mystery and historical depth. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of the stone and the golden patina.

SPECIAL EDITION

...on Bible prophecy

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Editor: Colin Dryland
Correspondence Secretary:
John Carpenter

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LIGHT ON BIBLE PROPHECY

A special issue of the quarterly
magazine 'Light on a new world'

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Note:

*All Bible quotations are taken from the
New King James Version (NKJV) except
where another version is indicated after
the text.*

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What is prophecy?

Prophecy is the 'prediction of future events' (Oxford English Reference Dictionary 2nd Edition). Many people make predictions about possible incidents affecting themselves and others but they would hardly claim to be prophets! Newspapers and magazines give indications as to the likely effect that the position of the stars might have upon your happiness, wealth and peace of mind but they would hardly claim that their predictions are certain to come true.

Bible prophecy is entirely different.

It claims to be given by prophets whose predictions have come from God with the result that the details are clearly defined and the outcome certain. The Apostle Peter wrote about the origin and importance of Bible prophecy in these words:

'We also have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as to a light that shines in a dark place...for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were

moved by the Holy Spirit' (2 Peter 1.19-21).

The reason we should study Bible prophecies is that ultimately they will affect everyone. Many Bible prophecies have already been fulfilled and this gives us confidence that predictions relating to the future will also come true. The following articles invite you to consider some of these prophecies, showing how they relate to our own times and the ultimate accomplishment of God's plan for the world.

Consider carefully the examples of prophecy examined in this booklet, look up the Bible references and analyse the historical facts referred to. By so doing we hope that you will gain a strong conviction that God controls the affairs of all the nations and will shortly bring about the fulfilment of His plan.

THE PROPHETS OF ISRAEL IN THEIR HISTORICAL SETTING

DATE	PROPHETS	KINGS		EMPIRES
BC		ISRAEL	JUDAH	
900	Eljah Elisha	Ahab Ahaziah Joram Jehu Jehoahaz Jehoash	Jehoshaphat Jehoram Ahaziah Athaliah Joash Amaziah	ASSYRIA Shalmaneser III
800	Joel Jonah Amos Hosea Micah Isaiah	Jeroboam II Zechariah Menahem Pekahiah Pekah Hoshea	Uzziah Jotham Ahaz Hezekiah	Tiglath-Pileser III Shalmaneser V Sargon Sennacherib
700	Nahum Zephaniah Jeremiah Habakkuk		Manasseh Amon Josiah Jehoiakim Zedekiah	BABYLON
600	Obadiah Daniel Ezekiel Haggai		(Zerubbabel)	Nebuchadnezzar Nabonidus Belshazzar PERSIA Cyrus Darius
500	Zechariah Malachi		(Ezra) (Nehemiah)	Ahasuerus Artaxerxes I

God's plan in prophecy

How powerless we are when it comes to foretelling the future with any degree of certainty! Have you ever arranged to meet a friend at a particular place and then after waiting an hour, found he or she has been prevented from coming? Have you ever decided to go out somewhere and when the time has come, found you are not well enough? Have you ever wondered how you are going to live when you are too old to look after yourself?

The answers we give to these simple questions show what frail human beings we really are. We cannot tell what will happen next in our own lives, so what shall we say about men who foretell the destiny of a nation with absolute certainty? If their predictions all came true we would have no option but to admit that here was a power far greater than the human mind. In other words, such a person is speaking by the power of God.

The evidence of fulfilled prophecy

Many events are foretold in the Bible and we can conclude that

many prophecies have already been fulfilled whilst others are being fulfilled today. None of the prophecies have been proved wrong. Therefore the evidence of fulfilled prophecy provides one very good reason for believing that the Bible is true – that it is the Word of God.

In this special issue of **'Light'** magazine you will find examples of fulfilled prophecy including the overthrow of Babylon, the destruction of Jerusalem and the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland among many other examples. This evidence serves to confirm the reliability of the Bible and because of this we can equally rely on what it has foretold about the return of Jesus and the establishment of the kingdom of God on the earth.

The Bible contains the most confident assertions about the future; not just one or even a few but many prophecies. There are prophecies concerning individuals, powerful and weak nations and empires, some of which did not even exist at the time of the

prophecy. There are both long and short term prophecies; prophecies of things to come, the like of which had never happened before; of extraordinary experiences which nations would have – experiences without parallel and contrary to expectation.

God is in control

All this is found in the Bible. We discover that without exception none of the prophecies have been proved to be untrue. What are we to make of this? Could men predict the future in this way? Of course not – there can only be one conclusion – the men who wrote the Bible received direction from God Himself, as one of the prophets recorded:

‘Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure”’
(Isaiah 46. 9, 10).

Do not underestimate the force of Bible prophecy. The Apostle Peter described it as the ‘*more sure word of prophecy*’ (2 Peter 1.19 KJV) and

compared it to a light shining in a dark place. This is a very apt comparison. We look around the world and see confusion, with no apparent meaning or purpose to life. History seems just a haphazard sequence of events with no obvious aim, apart from the fleeting ambitions of those who pass across the world’s stage.

However a study of the Bible demonstrates beyond all doubt that human affairs are under Divine control and are moving forward to a totally unexpected climax. The outcome will be a complete



surprise to all but a few who understand what the prophet Daniel meant when he wrote:

‘the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he chooses’ (Daniel 4.32).

These words were addressed to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. He was no fairy-tale figure, but a powerful monarch in the ancient world. In recent times his capital city Babylon, has been excavated and proved to have been the immense city of which the Bible speaks.

The thousands of bricks that have been examined all bear the name of the proud monarch who ruled the world of his day. Indeed, Nebuchadnezzar could claim to be the first monarch of the world. It was he who was told that *‘the Most High rules in the kingdom of men’*, but he was told far more than that.

LEFT: reconstruction of the Ishtar Gate from Babylon in the Pergamon Museum Berlin.



A brick from Babylon impressed with Nebuchadnezzar's name

An amazing dream

One night, as Nebuchadnezzar lay on his couch, the king wondered what would be the fate of his vast empire after he had passed from the scene. Such thoughts have probably occurred to all men in positions of great authority: ‘On whom will my mantle fall? Will the mantle be torn in pieces by jealous rivals?’ Such questions normally go unanswered, for no man can tell what the future holds. However, Nebuchadnezzar was given the

answer by God as we read in Daniel chapter 2.

Please read it through – it is one of the most remarkable chapters in the Bible. It tells us about a dream in which the answer that Nebuchadnezzar sought was given to him in symbolic form. Why did Almighty God trouble to respond to the questioning of a pagan king; why did He choose to do so by way of a dream and in a form which the king could not understand, nor even remember on waking? The answers will serve to introduce the details of the prophecy and its fulfilment.

The importance of Nebuchadnezzar in the purpose of God lay not so much in the greatness of his empire, as in the fact that it included the land of Israel and that the people of Israel were taken as captives to Babylon for 70 years. God's land and God's people the Jews, were subject to Nebuchadnezzar's rule.

The method used to interpret the dream also brought Daniel, a Jewish captive, to the forefront – the only man who could explain the dream. This underlined the fact that the God *'who reveals secrets'* (Daniel 2.29) is the God especially of Israel – revealing a vital aspect of His plan

for the world (see section about Israel in prophecy on page 37).

The symbolic style adopted is a most effective way of conveying a great deal of information in a very compressed form. The modern political cartoon is an example of the same idea. However, the cartoon only illuminates events of the past and present, whereas Nebuchadnezzar's vision shone a great beam of light on the future.

The meaning of the dream

In his dream the king saw what he himself would probably have described as a 'god'. It was the image of a man composed of various metals – gold head, silver chest and arms, bronze belly and thighs, iron legs, feet part iron and part clay. This metallic statue stood erect until some unseen power directed a stone at its feet. The image crashed to the earth, its remains were ground to powder and blown away and the stone that had inflicted the damage *'became a great mountain and filled the whole earth'* (Dan.2.35).



What did all this mean? The clear words of the prophet Daniel placed the meaning beyond doubt. The image stood for the kingdoms of men in the ages that were to follow. The nations of the known world were at the time subject to the king of Babylon, who was represented by the golden head.

Daniel said to the king:

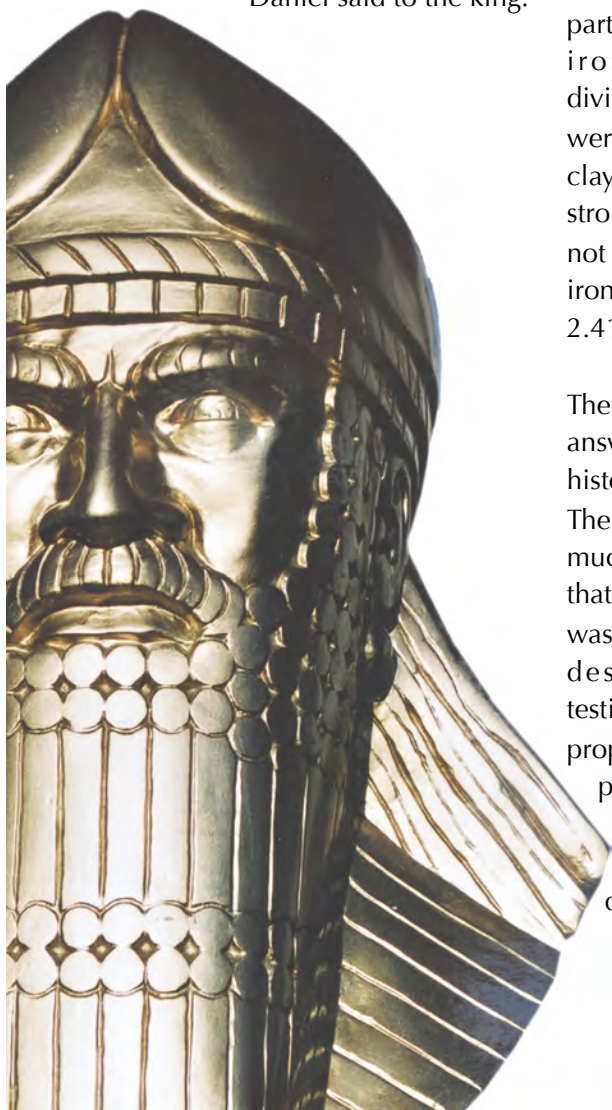
‘you are this head of gold’.

After this there was to follow a second ‘silver’ empire, then a third of bronze and a fourth. The fourth kingdom was to be ‘*strong as iron*’ (Daniel 2. 38-40). However, after the strength was to come weakness:

‘Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided... as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile... they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay’ (Daniel 2.41-43).

The question that must now be answered is how do the facts of history compare with this prophecy? The correspondence is perfect, so much so that some have tried to say that the second chapter of Daniel was written after the events that it describes! This is sufficient testimony to the accuracy of the prophecy but is plainly false, for the prophecy is still being fulfilled!

We can summarise the meaning of the dream as follows:



head of GOLD

BABYLON

**chest and arms of
SILVER**

MEDO-PERSIA

**belly and thighs of
BRONZE**

GREECE

legs of IRON

ROME

**feet - a mixture of
IRON & CLAY**

**DIVIDED
NATIONS**

'You, O king... are this head of gold...'

head of fine Gold = Nebuchadnezzar/Babylonian Empire

'...But after you shall arise another kingdom...'

chest and arms of Silver = Medo-Persian Empire

'...then another, a third kingdom of bronze...'

belly and thighs of Bronze = Greek Empire

'...And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron...'

legs of Iron = Roman Empire

'...the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay...they will not adhere to one another...'

feet of Iron and Clay = divided state of the nations

'And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed...it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands...the great God has made

known to the king what will come to pass after this.'

stone = Jesus Christ, the king over the kingdom of God.

An outline of world history

Four great empires followed each other. Consult any history book covering the period and you will discover how Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians, an empire in which first the Medes and then the Persians were predominant. Their supremacy was ended by Alexander the Great who founded the Greek Empire. This in turn yielded to Rome which was unquestionably the strongest and most durable of the four world empires.

The world had never known anything to compare with the '*strong as iron*' Roman Empire. What power on earth could ever break it or conquer it? No single power could, for as Daniel predicted, Rome was not to be superseded by another great empire. The strongest empire was destined to decay and disintegrate; a long drawn out process which has been traced in detail in Gibbon's monumental work entitled 'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.' Gibbon described the



Roman Empire at its height in these words reminiscent of Daniel's prophecy:

'The arms of the republic... advanced with rapid steps to the Euphrates, the Danube, the Rhine, and the Ocean; **and the images of gold, or silver, or brass, that might serve to represent the nations and their kings, were successively broken by the iron monarchy of Rome**' (Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of The Roman Empire*, Chandos Classics edition Volume 2 ch.38, page 576).

The decline of this great empire came about as decreed by Daniel's prophecy. Firstly the empire was split into two parts – the Eastern part was ruled from Constantinople and the Western part was ruled from Rome. It will be remembered that

the image had two iron legs. Later, both parts gave way to hostile forces from without and decaying processes within. Over the vast area once ruled by Rome a number of independent kingdoms emerged, some strong and some weak. This divided state of the nations has continued since that time.

There has been no fifth undisputed world empire in succession to the four represented by the image!

Many attempts have been made to unite the nations of Europe by conquest but all have failed. Philip II of Spain, Napoleon I of France, Kaiser Wilhelm II and Hitler in Germany and others have tried but failed. Today we see the countries of the old Roman Empire in Europe trying to weld themselves together into a united whole. What a task it is proving! True were the prophet Daniel's words:

'They will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay'.

Who could have foreseen all this as long as two thousand six hundred

years ago? Who could have asserted so confidently that there would be four empires, not three, or five, or six? Who, in a few bold strokes, could have delineated the outstanding features of their history and its sequel with uncanny accuracy? Could any man? From all that we know of human forecasts, the answer is NO!

We note that Daniel disclaimed all credit for his message: *'...the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure'* (Daniel 2.45). Men and women who have since studied this prophecy have found here solid grounds for confidence in God and His Word. It is a confidence that you the reader can share.

Part of the prophecy still future

Moreover, the accurate fulfilment of Daniel's words leads us to look with renewed interest at the last stage of the prophecy. What shall we make of that stone which fell with shattering effect on the feet of the image, grinding it to powder, and then becoming a great mountain to fill the world? If the image represented the kingdom of men,

the stone must stand for a power external to human rule, which is to establish itself as a world power upon the ruins of human governments. These it will *'break in pieces and consume'*. This is the explanation Daniel gave:

'And in the days of these kings (i.e. the divided state of the nations) **the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever'** (Daniel 2.44).

The stone

This is one of many promises in the Bible assuring us that God has not forsaken the earth. He has devised a plan – the Master Plan for human salvation – and the Lord Jesus Christ is the focal point of that plan. Thoughtful readers will readily be able to identify the stone *'cut out of the mountain without hands'* with the one who was born the saviour of mankind. He was *'cut out'* of the mountain of humanity, not by human hands, but by the power of God through the miracle of his



birth. Jesus himself spoke of his future role as the stone:

‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner-stone. This was the LORD’S doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes...And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whoever it falls, it will grind him to powder’ (Matthew 21. 42, 44).

All the signs indicate that soon the stone will fall with devastating effect on an unsuspecting world. Will you be among those who escape the coming destruction? Will you share in the blessings of the age to come when the kingdom of God is set up on earth? Jesus alone has the power to save.

We now look at each of the empires in turn that followed the Babylonian head of gold. The next section focuses our attention on **Iran**, the nation known as **Persia** in ancient times, which defeated Babylon. It was the second of those four great empires and was represented by the chest and arms of silver.

LEFT: Herodian masonry of the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Jesus is described as both the cornerstone and the foundation stone of God’s purpose.

IRAN

in prophecy

The Bible gives a number of reasons why we should be interested in Iran. Firstly we find that it is mentioned under its classical name of Persia, as one of the four world empires described in Daniel chapter 2. It is also referred to as one of the countries that will invade the land of Israel *'in the latter years'*. This reference is found in the prophecy of Ezekiel chapter 38.

The Bible also uses a major incident in the early history of that nation as a pattern to foretell another event of the *'latter years'*, the way in which the kingdom of God will be set up on the earth. This pattern is found by reference to the prophecy of Isaiah and the book of Revelation (see pages 18–19).

The people of Iran are ethnically different from their neighbours. Though modern Iran is an Islamic republic, they are not part of the Arab family of nations. The language of Iran (called Parsee) is reckoned among the Indo-European



carved relief of Persian soldiers
from Persepolis, Iran's ancient
royal city



Tehran, the capital of modern Iran

group of languages. The name Iran is linked to the word 'Aryan', further evidence that Iranians are drawn from European stock.

Today Iran, or to give it its full title, The Islamic Republic of Iran, is a country openly hostile to Israel (see page 46). Public pronouncements from officials of the government frequently call for the destruction of the 'Zionist entity'. Iran finances the 'Hezbollah' faction in Lebanon which has been fighting a bitter guerrilla war against Israel. The hostility shown by Iran towards the State of Israel has not always been a feature of their relationship. Under the regime of the Shah, who ruled

Persia until 1979, relations had been much more cordial.

In 1960 Persia was one of the first countries in the Middle East to recognise the State of Israel. It became a trading partner and was at that time a major supplier of oil but things were destined to change. After increasing unrest in the country which was met by an unsuccessful policy of repression, the Shah was at length forced to flee in January 1979. The leading Muslim cleric Ayatollah Khomeini, who had been living in exile returned home in triumph and presided over the establishment of

RIGHT: Iran's nuclear facilities

an Islamic republic, but although Ayatollah Khomeini has passed off the scene, the attitudes he stood for are still in evidence.

Iran is a country that is rich in reserves of fossil fuels in the form of oil and natural gas. It has been a cause of concern therefore that the country in recent years has sought to develop a nuclear energy programme. For countries that have little in the way of fuel reserves such a programme is understandable but for a country with an abundance of oil, to do so invites suspicion about Iran's real aims. Nuclear power stations can be the means of producing materials to make nuclear weapons.

Russia has supplied the technology for the Iranian nuclear power programme and Pakistani nuclear scientists have passed further vital scientific information to Iran. The world's media is full of Iran's nuclear ambitions, such as the Bushehr nuclear power station in the south of the country, the Natanz underground uranium enrichment project in central Iran and intelligence that their scientists are designing a heavy water plant at Arak which could produce weapons grade plutonium.

The danger of this possible development of nuclear weapons by Iran is the threat posed to the stability of the region and even the whole world. Iran is clearly committed to the destruction of Israel and is a state sponsor of terrorism.

Ezekiel's prophecy

This is of particular interest to us today because it represents a situation envisaged by Bible prophecy. Ezekiel chapter 38 contains a prophecy of a time which it calls '*the latter years*'. Bible students have for a very long time interpreted this prophecy in terms of a strategic alliance which



includes Iran (Persia). This alliance will mount an attack against Israel in the final days before the kingdom of God is set up on the earth (see map on page 47). The prophecy, with some words of commentary in italics, is as follows:

‘...Thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords. **Persia**, Ethiopia, and Libya

are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops – many people are with you...In the latter years (*towards the end of man’s rule on the earth*) you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely (*the re-gathered nation of Israel*). You will ascend, coming like a storm, covering the land like a cloud, you and all your troops and



many peoples with you.” (Ezekiel 38.3-9)

These events are the prelude to the time outlined by Ezekiel, when God will intervene directly in the affairs of mankind (Ezekiel 38.18-23 – see section about the coming world conflict on page 44).

Iran’s history as a pattern

In the year 539 BC Iran, or Persia as it was then known, first appeared on the world scene in a dramatic way. Under their first great king Cyrus, in alliance with their neighbours the Medes (the chest and arms of the Image) they overthrew the Babylonian Empire and so fulfilled the second part of Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of empires. They executed the king of Babylon and set up their own empire that lasted for about two hundred years. Their empire was to hold sway over the civilised world until it was overthrown by the Greeks under Alexander the Great.

Both Biblical and secular history record how the forces of Cyrus laid



Clay cylinder of Cyrus recording his conquest of Babylon (British Museum)

siege to the city. To the defenders of Babylon this seemed like a futile gesture. The city they thought, could withstand an indefinite siege. The city was well able to provide food and water for its people from within its extensive walls. The river Euphrates ran through the middle of Babylon, but this was to prove its downfall. Where the river ran through the walls, the area was defended by double ‘gates’ consisting of a grid-work of bronze that stretched across the whole expanse of the river. It was this very feature that was to prove the means of Babylon’s downfall.

Unknown to the defenders of the city the forces of Cyrus were able to divert the flow of the river. They marched into the city along the

dried up bed of the river Euphrates and through the great bronze gates that sympathisers in the city had opened for them. The city was taken completely by surprise. So sure of their defences had the rulers of Babylon been, that they had spent the evening in feasting and drinking as recorded in the book of Daniel chapter 5.

These events of two and a half thousand years ago were foretold in detail by the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. They were of interest to the people of Israel at that time because they had a direct impact on their lives. The essence of what Isaiah and Jeremiah had prophesied about Cyrus and Babylon is set out as follows:

Isaiah prophesied that:

- ❖ Israel would be taken captive into Babylon (Isaiah 39.6, 7).
- ❖ Eventually Babylon would fall (Isaiah 13.19; 21.9).
- ❖ Babylon would be besieged by the Medes and Persians (Isaiah 21.2).
- ❖ Cyrus the Persian leader was called the Lord's 'Messiah' (a Hebrew word meaning 'anointed'; in Greek the word is 'Christos' or Christ - Isaiah 45.1). He is called the king from the east (or sun's rising - Isaiah 41.2) who would take the city by means of the dried up river bed (Isaiah 45.1,2).

Jeremiah prophesied that Cyrus would allow the return of the Jews to their land and the temple would be rebuilt in Jerusalem (compare Jeremiah 25.12,13 with 2 Chronicles 36.22,23).

The pattern of history as a prophecy

The fall of Babylon at the hands of Cyrus, this figurative 'Messiah', is taken in other parts of the Bible as a



LEFT: glazed bricks from the ruins of Darius' Palace at Shushan

pattern for the future work of Jesus the Jewish 'Messiah'. Jesus at his return will likewise decree the final regathering of the Jews to their land and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. This is the testimony of the prophets.

The book of Revelation chapters 16 to 18 uses this pattern of events to symbolise the things that are to happen when Jesus Christ returns to the earth. Leaving aside the details of what these things might symbolise we can clearly see that many of those same features are there:

- ❖ The drying up of the river Euphrates (Revelation 16.12).
- ❖ The unexpected coming (Revelation 16.15).
- ❖ The fall of Babylon the great (Revelation 16.19; 18.2).
- ❖ The kings from the east (the sun's rising) (Revelation 16.12).

The lesson for Bible students today is that the return of Jesus to the earth in these latter days will be just as unexpected as the coming of Cyrus at the fall of ancient Babylon. The Bible speaks of a confederacy of nations including Iran, which will attack and initially defeat Israel just

prior to Christ's return. But the confederacy will itself be defeated and destroyed through Divine intervention with the result that:

'...I (God) will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the LORD' (Ezekiel 38.23).

The warning that Jesus gave to his disciples is even more urgent as the time approaches:

'For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man' (Luke 21.35, 36).

We have considered some prophecies about Persia which have their fulfilment in the future. Let us now move on to the historical events which followed the fall of the Persian Empire.

GREECE

in prophecy

The third empire portrayed in Nebuchadnezzar's image was the bronze armoured Greeks represented by the belly and thighs of bronze. The period of transition from the decline of the Medo-Persian Empire to the rise of the Grecian Empire began around 359 BC with the rule of Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. Philip succeeded in uniting the warring Greek states and by 338 BC he had visions of the conquest of Persia.

Alexander's meteoric rise

Alexander began to rule at the tender age of 20 when his father was assassinated. It was under Alexander that we really see the rise of this third 'bronze' empire. The brilliant and daring exploits of Alexander began when he took his armies across the Hellespont or Dardanelles as it is known today and defeated a much larger Persian army led by Darius III near Zelea on the River Granicus.

Picture: The Parthenon, Athens



Daniel's prophecy refers to Alexander as a '*mighty king*' (Daniel 11.3). He thrust across Asia Minor defeating the armies of Darius again at the Battle of Issus. There was now no stopping this ambitious warrior, for his armies next swept southwards into the Holy Land. Although the Jewish historian Josephus says that he entered Jerusalem, it seems he was more intent on taking strategic cities. He crushed Tyre the capital city of the Phoenicians, a vital seaport that

gave him control over much more of the Mediterranean.

Alexander pushed south conquering Philistia and taking Gaza on the way to his real objective, Egypt. When he had subdued Egypt, he founded the city of Alexandria, a centre of Greek culture that made its mark on the Biblical world in many ways.

Alexander then set out to take the rest of the Persian Empire. Marching his armies northwards he captured Syria, traversed the Fertile Crescent, entered Mesopotamia (now Iraq) seizing Babylon, then on

Alexander defeating the Persian King Darius at the battle of Issus - from a mosaic at Pompeii



eastward into Persia's heartland (now Iran) capturing the major cities of Susa and Persepolis, with their enormous treasures.

Not satisfied with these conquests, Alexander then pushed further eastwards, occupying today's Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Indus basin, with the Indian sub-continent now lying before him. But at this point, after travelling thousands of miles in his quest to conquer more territory, his generals and soldiers were exhausted and threatened mutiny. Reluctantly he turned back, but now disaster set in. By the time he returned to Babylon he had only a quarter of his original army left.

Alexander himself was taken ill with a fever in Babylon and within two weeks he was dead, a young man aged only 32. The history books give the exact day he died as June 13th in the year 323 BC. In the short space of twelve years, Alexander had established a Greek Empire in complete control of the ancient world. In all the lands he conquered he founded new cities, some named after him, and a system of rule and culture that transformed the world. It can be truly said that Alexander the Great appeared like a meteor in the political heavens and blazed his trail in history. But now that its

MAP: Alexander the Great's Empire



charismatic leader had gone, what was to happen to this great empire?

The prophecies of Daniel

How telling are the words of the prophet Daniel, explaining the meaning of the Image and the rise and fall of these empires. He said to the king of Babylon: *‘...he (God) changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings’* (Daniel 2.21). We also see how striking the prophecies of Daniel are in describing the rise of Alexander and Greece to power and its subsequent demise:

‘And as I was considering, suddenly a male goat came from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground; and the goat had a remarkable horn between his eyes...I saw him confronting the ram (Medo-Persia); he was moved with rage against him, attacked the ram, and broke his two horns. There was no power in the ram to withstand him, but he cast him down...and trampled him; and there was no one that could deliver the ram from his hand. Therefore the male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four notable ones came up towards the four winds of

heaven...the male goat is the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king (Alexander). As for the broken horn and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power’ (Daniel 8.5-8, 21, 22).

This prophecy is colourful and specific, the vision of the powerful one-horned Grecian goat attacking the Persian ram, bounding along hardly touching the ground, is exactly right as a dramatic representation of Alexander’s swift triumphant march from Macedonia to the borders of India.

The divided Greek Empire

Daniel tells us in advance what was to happen to this empire. In another prophecy he likens the Greek Empire to a leopard:

‘After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it’ (Daniel 7.6).

These visions in chapters 7 and 8 of Daniel’s prophecy foretold the sequence of events. Alexander had no heir and on his death his

Macedonian generals scrambled among themselves to carve up the empire between them. It split into four parts at first, represented by the four wings, the four heads and the four horns. With the death of Alexander the *'remarkable horn'* was broken and the four *'notable'* horns took its place, as Daniel foretold: *'four kingdoms shall arise...but not with its power'* (Daniel 8.22).

The generals Seleucus, Ptolemy, Lysimarchus and Cassander controlled the four major parts of the empire. Then after more conflict among these generals the empire split into two parts in the hands of Seleucus and Ptolemy, just as the sections of the Image demanded – the belly and two thighs. The first, called the Seleucid kingdom, ruled to the north of Israel from Macedonia to the borders of India. The second, the Ptolemaic kingdom in the south took control of Syria, Cyprus, Palestine (now Israel), Libya and Egypt.

The influence of Greece

History shows that these two dynasties were then regularly at war with each other to gain control over Syria and Palestine. This meant that the Holy Land and Syria were the unfortunate battlegrounds for these

LEFT: 2nd Century Septuagint manuscript showing part of the Book of Leviticus

Scythopolis. In the time of Jesus some of the places where he preached had retained their Greek names, as we find in the gospel records, names such as Perea, Trachonitis and the Decapolis.

Even more influential was the fact that Greek was the dominant language in the time of Christ. The New Testament was written in Greek, with many manuscripts surviving to the present day. Long before this, in 273 BC, the Old Testament had been translated from Hebrew to Greek by order of Ptolemy II of Egypt for his library in Alexandria, giving us the valuable **Septuagint** Version.

The famous **Rosetta Stone** found in Egypt in AD 1799 and now kept in the British Museum, contains an inscription written in three languages to commemorate the reign of Ptolemy V (205-180 BC). The Greek language and Demotic script on the stone enabled the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics on the stone to be deciphered.

The decline of the Greek Empire

The division of the Greek Empire and its warring factions had its weakening effects. Palestine fell to the northern Seleucid kingdom in 200 BC and one of its kings, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, went too far in trying to force Greek culture on the Jewish people. In 168 BC he set up an altar to the Greek god Zeus in the temple in Jerusalem. This event was also foreseen by Daniel: '*...they shall defile the*



RIGHT: The Rosetta Stone (British Museum)

sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation' (Daniel 11.31). This blasphemous act was too much for the Jews, sparking a revolt headed by the priestly family of Maccabees, leading eventually to a period of independence for Palestine.

But Rome, the fourth empire of Nebuchadnezzar's Image, was now coming on the scene. In time, the Maccabees set up their own dynasty known as the Hasmoneans, even taking the title of kings. They

cultivated good relations with Rome, removed the Greeks from power in Samaria and Galilee to the north and ruled most of 'The Holy Land'. This continued until 63 BC, when the Roman general Pompey occupied Palestine and Syria, creating a Roman province in the former Seleucid dominions and giving power over most of Palestine to Herod the Great.

During the last century of Grecian Ptolemaic rule, Egypt came under Rome's protection and guidance, being finally annexed by Rome in 31 BC. The mixture of Roman and Egyptian politics at this time can be seen in the romantic affairs of Julius Caesar and Mark Anthony with Cleopatra. This situation ended in tragedy with Cleopatra committing suicide. She was the last sovereign of the Macedonian dynasty that had ruled Egypt from the death of Alexander.

This brings us to the end of the bronze empire of the Greeks and the rise of the fourth Empire represented in Nebuchadnezzar's Image by the two legs of iron.

Fragment of a relief of Cleopatra, the last of the Greek rulers of Egypt



ROME

in prophecy

Popularly known as 'the eternal city', Rome was home to the Caesars. Today the Pope, from inside Vatican City, presides over the universal Catholic Church. The city centre, which is only two miles across, is like an open museum. Tourists walking through the streets of the Forum are able to admire the many well-preserved buildings, once part of the nerve centre of the political and judicial life of ancient Rome. Close by stands the Colosseum, where Christians died rather than renounce their faith.

Rome and Christianity

The beginnings of Christianity in Palestine are rooted in the wider Roman world. The circumstances of the birth of Jesus came about because *'In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world'* (Luke 2.1 NIV). Later Jesus stood trial before a Roman governor named Pontius Pilate.

Picture: The Colosseum, Rome





By this time Rome was approaching the zenith of its imperial greatness. From small beginnings as a city-state in central Italy, its dominions came to include much of Europe including Britain and Spain, North Africa, Arabia and the Black Sea area. Covering an area of over one and a quarter million square miles, the Empire ruled over one hundred million people. Historians know the period 30 BC to AD 180 as the 'Pax Romana' or 'Roman Peace'. As long as provinces stayed on peaceful terms with Rome, they were allowed self-government and were able to keep their own language and religion.

The rapid spread of Christianity owed much to the infrastructure of

military roads and open borders maintained by the large standing army, which enabled freedom of travel throughout the Empire. With Latin and Greek widely used and a common legal administrative structure, the scope for preaching the gospel was vast. But in time Christianity was corrupted by paganism to become itself a political force. The two chief cities of the Empire, Rome in the West and Constantinople (now Istanbul) in the East, developed into the headquarters of the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches respectively.

The decline and fall of the Roman Empire is well documented by the historian Gibbon in his book of that

name. By AD 476 the city of Rome had been overthrown by Odoacer, a Germanic warrior who became the first barbarian king of Italy (AD 476-493). The Holy Roman Empire eventually replaced the rule of the barbarians in the West. In this dual system involving secular and ecclesiastical powers working together, the Roman Catholic Church effectively ruled Europe for more than one thousand years. One historian described the rule of the Pope in these words:

'In many ways, indeed, the Church was comparable to the Roman Empire of old, whose territorial and administrative organisation it had taken over, and whose official language, Latin, it still maintained in its services, records and literature. Both were international in character. Everyone recognised the Pope as everyone had worshipped the Emperor ... At the head and centre of it all, watching over the whole world, interfering in everything, exercising temporal as well as spiritual power sat Innocent III, with an authority quite comparable with that of a Trajan or

a Diocletian' (Thorndike, *Medieval Europe*, P 14).

The Pope may have lost his temporal power in AD 1870, but his spiritual powers are as great now as when the Papacy held sway over Europe in the Middle Ages. Today Rome is still at the centre of Christendom through the authority of the Roman Catholic Church which has around one billion members worldwide.



The Crown of the Holy Roman Emperor, from about AD 1000



St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican City

The challenge of prophecy

The complex history of Rome stretches over two thousand years or more and involves many lands and peoples. This was a period of great political and religious change and no man could have forecast these developments. Prophecy is important for establishing the authority of the Bible and the ability of God to control human history, as we read in the prophecy of Daniel:

‘Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever, for wisdom and might are his. And he changes the times and the seasons; he removes kings and raises up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge

to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things...’ (Daniel 2.20-22).

The book of Daniel contains many very specific prophecies, some of which have already been referred to. In the context of Rome the visions of the great metallic Image in chapter two (see page 6 onwards) and the four beasts in chapter seven are important. They give an outline of the sweep of world history.

Nebuchadnezzar’s Image had two legs of iron which answer to the two divisions of the Empire in the East

and the West, established by Diocletian in AD 287. The Eastern Empire finally came to an end in AD 1453, when the Turks captured Constantinople. The chief characteristic of this section of world history as defined in the Image, was to be the iron strength of Rome:

‘...the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters all things; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others’ (Daniel 2.40).

Daniel chapter 7 tells us about a vision of four beasts seen by the prophet which is very closely linked with Nebuchadnezzar’s Image (see chart below).

The fourth beast

Daniel’s vision of the four beasts highlights the iron strength of the fourth beast. The prophet wanted to know its meaning, for it was *‘different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its nails of bronze, which devoured, broke in pieces, and trampled the residue with its feet’* (Daniel 7.19). The explanation was given to Daniel:

‘The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all other kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, trample it and break it in pieces’ (Daniel 7.23)

With ruthless efficiency the Roman legions marched under the banner of the eagle to conquer and put down rebellion. The Jews were

THE BEASTS (Daniel ch 7)	THE IMAGE (Daniel ch 2)	THE MEANING
Lion with Eagle’s wings	Golden head	Babylonian Empire
Bear raised on one side	Silver chest & arms	Medo-Persian Empire
Leopard with 4 heads	Bronze belly and thighs	Greek Empire
Beast with 10 horns	Iron legs	Roman Empire

warned early in their history of the curses that would befall them if they disobeyed God:

'The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose

language you will not understand, a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young...They will lay siege to all the cities throughout your land until the high fortified walls in which you trust fall down...'

(Deuteronomy 28.49-52 NIV)

This prophecy was fulfilled when the Roman armies under Titus crushed a Jewish rebellion. After a horrific siege, Jerusalem, including Herod's temple, was destroyed in AD 70. Jesus also foretold this event and the subsequent dispersion of the Jews throughout the world. This is part of the Mount Olivet prophecy found in the Gospel record of Luke:

'But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near... For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled... And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled' (Luke 21.20-24).



LEFT: the Eagle Standard carried by the Roman legions

No fifth world empire

A feature of the visions in the book of Daniel is that they do not go on to describe a world empire to take over from Rome. The Arabs and Turks came close, whilst the ambitions of men like Napoleon, Hitler and others were thwarted.

The final phase of Nebuchadnezzar's Image – the feet and toes part iron and part clay, suggests a collection of smaller kingdoms, some weak and others strong:

'Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided...And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile...but they will not adhere to one to another, just as iron does not mix with clay.'

(Daniel 2.41-43)

When we read about the fourth beast in Daniel chapter seven, we note that it had ten horns instead of ten toes. In the vision Daniel saw another little horn come to prominence:

'...in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words...the same

horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them...The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom. And another shall rise after them...different from the first ones...He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law' (Daniel 7. 8, 21, 24, 25).

The point to note here is that Daniel was prophesying about the Roman Empire some five hundred years before its rise to power. By the time Jesus Christ was born in Palestine, the land was under Rome's domination and ruled by a puppet king, Herod the Great. This empire was greatly involved in the events surrounding the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the spread of Christianity.

Jesus himself predicted the future decline of this empire. The last book of the Bible is entitled 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ' and there are sections that have striking similarities to the prophecies of Daniel. After the time of Christ, the Roman Empire was first 'Christianised' and then broke up into strong and weak independent

nations represented by the iron and clay feet and toes of Nebuchadnezzar's Image – but these nations, as history shows, were held together by the influence of the Roman Catholic Church.

Rome in the book of Revelation

The last book of the Bible is concerned with events to take place after the Revelation was communicated to the Apostle John around the end of the first century AD (see Revelation 1.1). The key to its interpretation lies in a careful comparison of the symbology of the book with similar symbols found in other parts of the Scriptures. Like Daniel's vision of the fourth beast, the book of Revelation describes the continuing importance of Rome in the unfolding of God's plan. Its role is depicted by four beasts, three of which have ten horns like Daniel's fourth beast. All four beasts are seen persecuting the 'saints', the word used to describe all genuine followers of Christ.

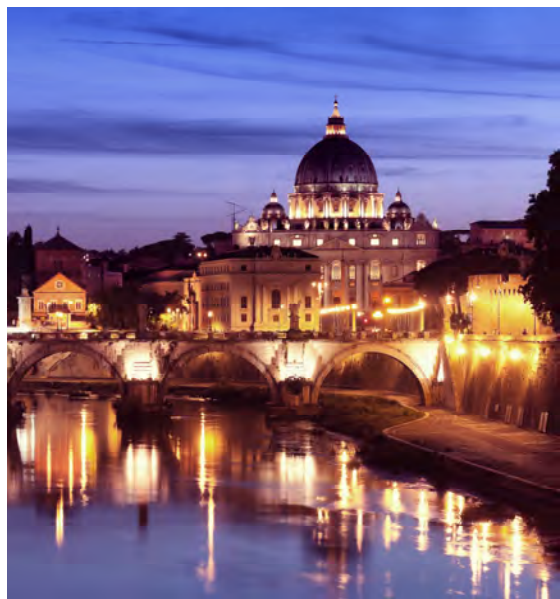
The visions of Daniel and Revelation consistently define the persecuting role of the Roman Catholic Church that developed out of the Roman Empire. History bears

witness to the brutality of the methods used for stamping out opposition to the power of the Papacy.

Blasphemer against God

The Apostle Paul foresaw a development that would take place before the Second Coming of Christ:

'Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself



The Vatican, Rome

up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God' (2 Thessalonians 2.3, 4 NIV).

The blasphemous words spoken against God by Daniel's fourth beast also feature in Revelation. For example the *'beast rising up out of the sea'* had *'on his heads a blasphemous name...And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies'* (Revelation 13.1,5).

The *'woman sitting on a scarlet beast'* was *'full of names of blasphemy'* (Revelation 17.3). Note the significant point of identification with Rome: *'...the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth'* (Revelation 17.18).

The future of Rome

All the prophecies we have briefly considered have a time limit set on them to bring to an end all human rule. When the stone strikes the feet of iron and clay, the metallic Image is standing erect on its two legs, the symbols of the Eastern and Western divisions of the old Roman Empire – now principally the nations of Western Europe. A similar limit is

set on the war waged by the little horn of Daniel's fourth beast:

'...the court shall be seated, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it for ever. Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him' (Daniel 7. 26,27).

In the symbology of Revelation the scarlet coloured beast gathers support for the final confrontation:

'And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast...These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings...' (Revelation 17.12, 14).

Rome, the *'great city'*, is also described in Revelation as *'Babylon the great'* (Revelation 18.2). It is not difficult to see the connection with Babylon of old, the head of the image, whose overthrow was foretold by Jeremiah (see Jeremiah



*The signing of the Treaty of Rome
in 1957*

History is repeating itself, for this is what happened when Charlemagne became the first Holy Roman Emperor. His administration was noted for constant interference in the lives of his subjects and we see it happening again.

chapters 50 and 51). In the same way the final destruction of Rome *‘that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth’* is graphically described in the symbology of Revelation:

‘Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found any more”’ (Revelation 18.21).

The countries of the enlarged European Union are being drawn closer together both politically and economically, structured on the **Treaty of Rome** and influenced by their spiritual head, the Pope. The tentacles of this new political system extend from Brussels in all directions, affecting many aspects of the lives of its citizens.

Rome has yet to play its part in the events which are to lead to the overthrow of all human government and the establishment of the kingdom of God.

[In the first section we indicated that the land of Israel and its people the Jews had a significant part to play in Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of empires and God’s plan for the world, represented by the Image. The next section examines prophecies relating to this tiny nation of Israel.](#)

ISRAEL

in prophecy

Israel is the most important nation in the Bible. The Lord Jesus, who was a Jew by birth, said '*salvation is of the Jews*' (John 4.22). Other than Jesus, most of the outstanding Bible characters such as Abraham the 'father of the faithful' and king David, the 'man after God's own heart', were also Jews. Israel is the nation through whom God chose to reveal His plan of salvation for the human race.

The origin of Israel

In view of Israel's importance in the Bible, it is not surprising that there are many prophecies about the Jews. Israel's national history was marked out in advance, in a way no other nation can begin to rival. Abraham was of course the progenitor of the Jewish race (Genesis 12.2). Because of his faith, promises were made to Abraham which indicated that he would father a nation through whom all nations would be blessed (Galatians 3.8). He was told that his descendants would grow in number and



The modern city of Tel Aviv

flourish despite being enslaved for many years in Egypt. Afterwards they would escape and possess the land of Canaan (an old name for Palestine or Israel – see Genesis 15.13-21). This period of their history is known as the Exodus.

After the Exodus from Egypt, God confirmed His choice of the children of Israel as His special people (Exodus 19.1-8). Not only were they given a uniquely moral and just set of laws and a system of religious worship, but also through their leader Moses, more prophecies were given about their future. The Israelites were offered great incentives for obedience to God and the threat of dire punishment for disobedience (See Leviticus chapter 26; Deuteronomy chapters 28 and 31.24-29).

In fulfilment of such prophecies, the whole history of the nation of Israel is a story of blessing and cursing – of high points and extreme low points, depending on whether they obeyed or disobeyed their Divine calling. During their wanderings in the wilderness, prior to occupying the land of Canaan, the great majority perished due to their lack of faith. On the other hand, it was those wanderings that produced a

new generation, including men like Joshua who obeyed the voice of God and showed great discipline and faith in the face of their enemies during the conquest of the land of Canaan.

The kingdom of Israel

The period of the Judges followed and then Israel became a kingdom, just as Moses had predicted (Deuteronomy 17.14-20). David was a man of great faith and he was the ancestor of a line of kings



through whom it was prophesied that the Messiah would come. Messiah (Hebrew) = Christ (Greek) and means 'anointed' (see 2 Samuel 7.12-16; Psalm 89.34-37).

Eventually the kingdom became so corrupt that it was brought to an end as predicted by the divinely inspired prophets of Israel. After the death of King Solomon, the kingdom was divided into two parts – the northern kingdom of Israel with its capital in Samaria and the southern kingdom of Judah with its capital in Jerusalem. The northern kingdom was attacked by the Assyrians and the Jews were taken into captivity in 722 BC. The southern kingdom of Judah lasted a little longer and the Babylonians took the Jews as captives to Babylon in 586 BC for seventy years. When they returned (see the books of Ezra and Nehemiah) the Jews remained subject to a succession of conquerors i.e. the Persians, Greeks and Romans right up to and including the time of Christ.

A nation scattered

But it was the Jews' rejection of Jesus (their Messiah or anointed king) that finally brought about the scattering of the nation and the



(above) the Temple furniture being carried off from Jerusalem – detail from the Arch of Titus in Rome (below)



destruction of Jerusalem and its splendid temple by the Romans. Jesus himself predicted this in his well-known Mount Olivet prophecy found in three of the Gospel accounts (Matthew 24.1, 2; Mark 13.1, 2; Luke 21.5-7, 20-24). In the last of these accounts, Jesus also predicted that one day the Jews would again recover control of Jerusalem, a development which only took place as recently as 1967, so this prophecy about Jerusalem took around 1900 years to be fulfilled! (Luke 21.24).

However, the prophets of Israel had long before these events, predicted the scattering and subsequent re-gathering of Israel (Isaiah 8.6-22; 52.1-10; Jeremiah 31.4-14; Ezekiel 37.1-14). Long before this, the prophetic words of God through Moses, in Leviticus chapter 26 and Deuteronomy chapter 28, had predicted the many sufferings and persecutions that Israel afterwards endured in the periods of exile from their land.

Despite being persecuted like no other nation since the time of the Romans (including six million Jews killed by the Nazis during the Second World War), the Jews have survived because they are God's

chosen people and for the sake of God's covenant made with their fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Jeremiah 30.10,11; Romans 11.25-29).

A nation re-gathered

By 1850, Palestine had for many centuries been ruled over by the Turkish Ottoman Empire and had become a desolate wilderness for the most part. The Turks were certainly not in favour of any mass immigration of Jews back to Palestine, even if it could be made to sustain the many millions of Jews scattered across the globe.

The majority of Jews were in Europe and North America and they enjoyed a level of prosperity that was hardly likely to motivate them to leave their homes and businesses for the hardships of the deserts of Judaea or the malarial swamps of Galilee. Yet the Bible's prophecies demanded that the Jews must return to their land.

Because of the anti-Semitism he witnessed, Theodor Herzl, an Austrian Jew wrote a book in the 1890's calling for the creation of a Jewish State in Palestine. The idea was taken up by prominent Jews

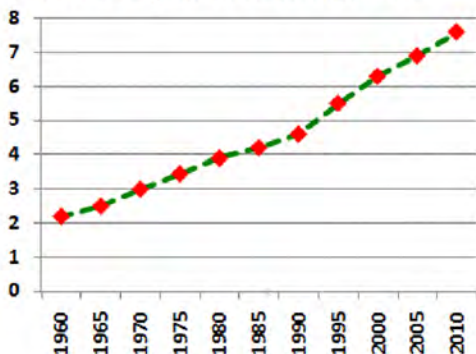
and the World Zionist Organisation was created resulting in small numbers of Jews returning to the land. In 1917, during the First World War, the British armies drove the Turks out of Palestine. As part of the peace settlement the British government was given the Mandate over Palestine and stated that they 'viewed with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people'.

Subsequent British governments failed to fulfil this promise in the face of fierce Arab opposition, and eventually on 15th May 1948 gave up the Mandate to the United Nations. The Jews in Palestine, now numbering about 600,000, declared themselves an independent State and were recognised by the United Nations. Despite being attacked by



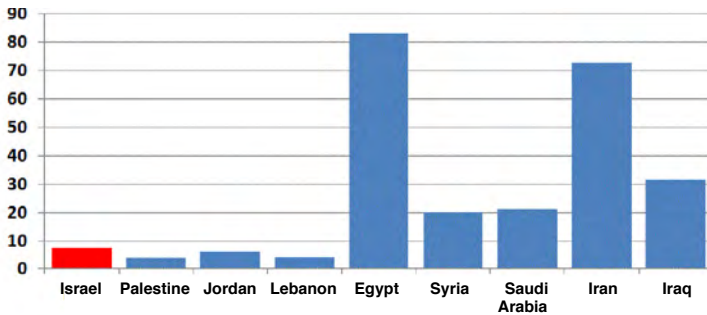
the armies of the surrounding Arab nations, the newly-formed State of Israel miraculously survived and immediately opened its doors to the persecuted Jewish refugees of Europe and to Jews from all over the world. Since then the Jewish population of Israel has grown to about 6 million (2012).

Israel Population in Millions



Israel today

So it was that, despite being driven from their homeland, persecuted like no other nation and separated from their land for many centuries, the Jews retained their identity. Israel has not only survived but has also revived and become



Population of Israel compared with its neighbours (in millions)

established as a nation state. All this must demonstrate the hand of God at work to fulfil the many prophecies in His Word about the restoration of His people.

The prophet Ezekiel was shown in vision a valley full of dry bones and told: *'these bones are the whole house of Israel'*. But God predicted a national resurrection:

'...Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, O my people, I will open

your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel...Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land' (Ezekiel 37.12, 21).

For the second time in their long history the Jews have returned to their land, in fulfilment of the words of their ancient prophets.

THE RESURRECTION OF ISRAEL SEEN BY EZEKIEL

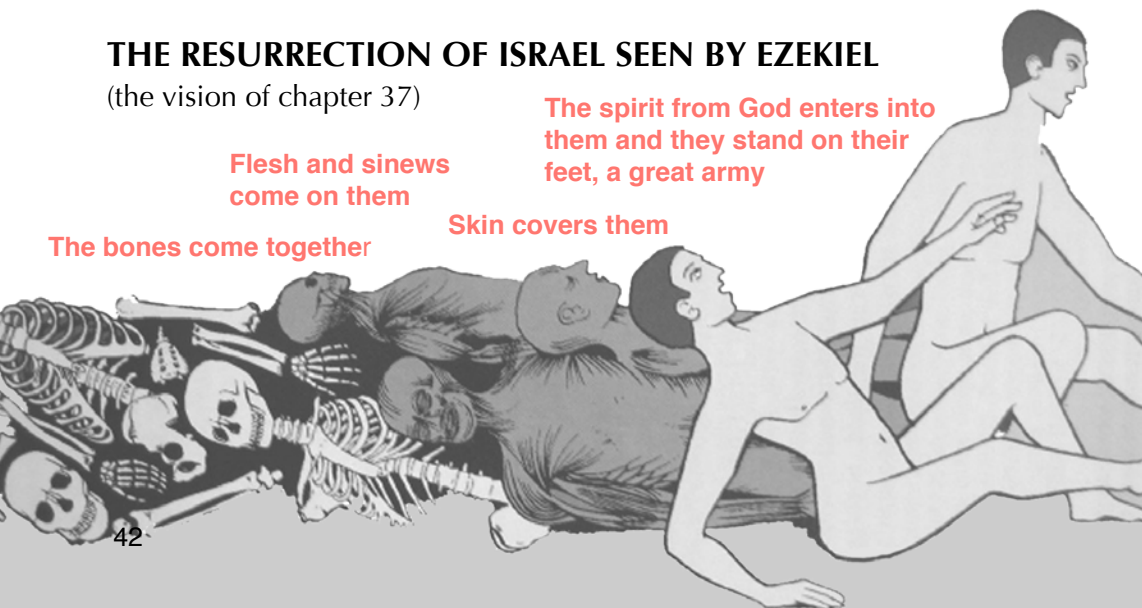
(the vision of chapter 37)

Flesh and sinews come on them

The spirit from God enters into them and they stand on their feet, a great army

Skin covers them

The bones come together



The Scriptures reveal that the most important event is yet to happen – they will return to their God. Very few Jews living in Israel today believe in Jesus Christ as their Messiah, although central to Judaism is the belief that the Messiah is yet to come. A return to their God must involve acceptance of Jesus Christ, the heir to David's throne in Jerusalem (Luke 1.26-33). Many prophecies about Israel foretell the future restoration of their kingdom (see for example Psalm 2; Psalm 72; Isaiah 9.1-7; 11.1-12; Micah 4; Zechariah 12).

The future for Israel

How then is Israel to be brought to accept Jesus Christ as their Messiah? Again, prophecy provides the answer (see Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39; Daniel 11.40-45; Joel chapter 3; Zechariah chapter 14). These passages combine to give a picture of a devastating future attack on Israel, which the Bible describes as *'the time of Jacob's trouble'* (Jeremiah 30.7). This conflict will follow a period of peace and prosperity (Ezekiel 38.10-13) and will shatter their State and leave them with only part of the city of Jerusalem under their control, but in a state of siege

(Zechariah 14.1, 2). It is at this time of crisis, when Israel seems to face certain destruction, that Divine intervention will take place.

Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, will come and vanquish the enemies of Israel and reveal himself to them. What better opportunity could there be to win Israel over to Christ than for him to effect the complete overthrow of Israel's latter day enemies and persecutors? They will then recognize Jesus Christ as their Messiah as foretold by the prophet Zechariah:

'...they will look on me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for him as one mourns for his only son...' (Zechariah 12.10).

Then the promised kingdom of God on earth will become a reality and with it will come the blessings for all nations as promised to Abraham (Genesis 12.2,3; Galatians 3.8). This is the hope of every true Christian and this is what Jesus meant when he said *'salvation is of the Jews'* (John 4.22).

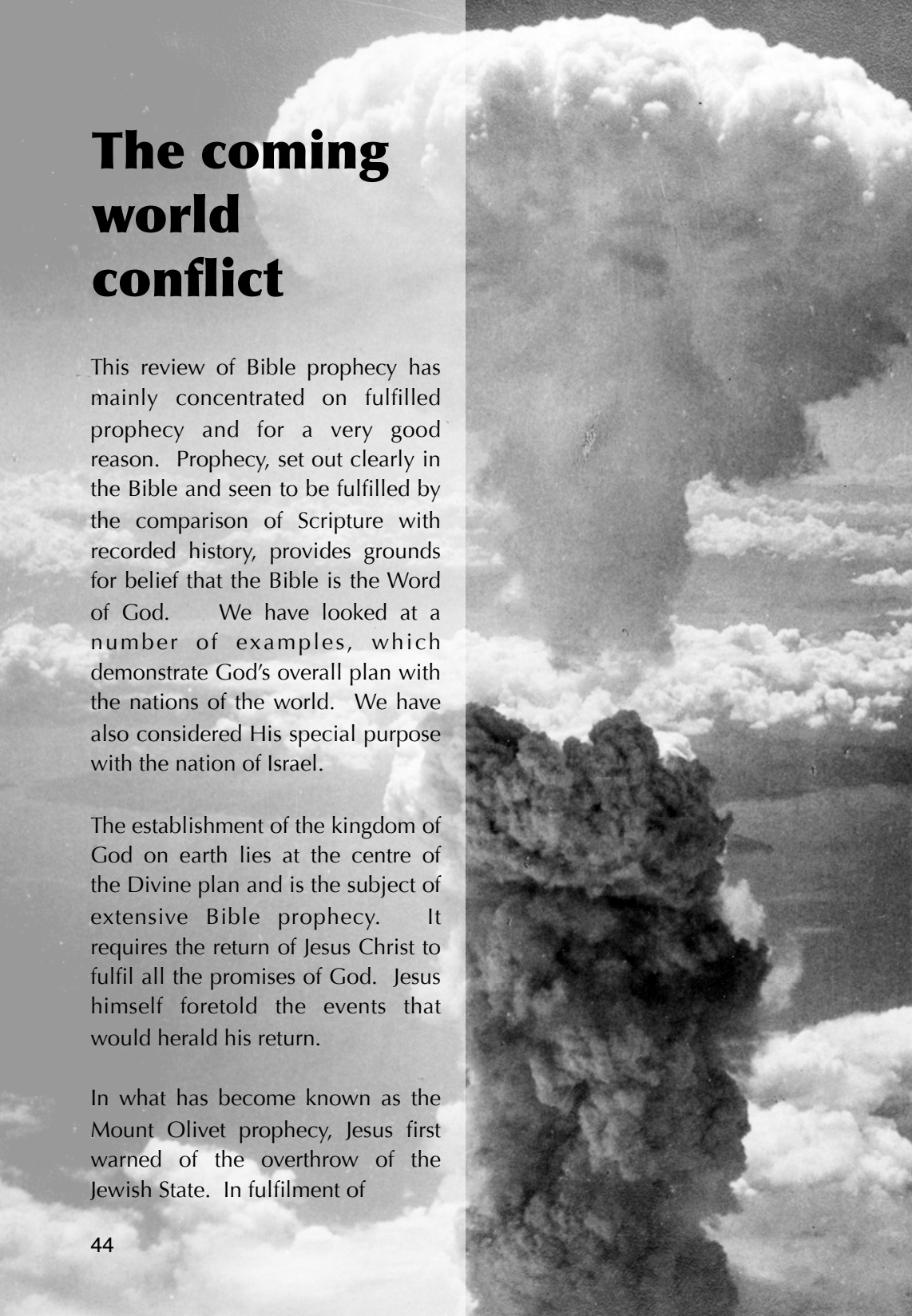
[How this will come about is the subject of the next section.](#)

The coming world conflict

This review of Bible prophecy has mainly concentrated on fulfilled prophecy and for a very good reason. Prophecy, set out clearly in the Bible and seen to be fulfilled by the comparison of Scripture with recorded history, provides grounds for belief that the Bible is the Word of God. We have looked at a number of examples, which demonstrate God's overall plan with the nations of the world. We have also considered His special purpose with the nation of Israel.

The establishment of the kingdom of God on earth lies at the centre of the Divine plan and is the subject of extensive Bible prophecy. It requires the return of Jesus Christ to fulfil all the promises of God. Jesus himself foretold the events that would herald his return.

In what has become known as the Mount Olivet prophecy, Jesus first warned of the overthrow of the Jewish State. In fulfilment of



prophecy, the Romans ruled over the land of Palestine at the time of Jesus and the Jews were a subject people. Jesus prophesied that the Romans would soon execute the plan of God and disperse God's chosen people throughout the world:

'...they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations...Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled' (Luke 21. 24, 25).

The disciples of Jesus had asked him about the signs of his Second Coming. Jesus set out very clearly the signs which would prevail and which would lead up to his return in '*power and great glory*'.

'And there will be signs in the **sun**, in the **moon**, and in the **stars**; and on the **earth** distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of **heaven** will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.' (Luke 21.25-27)

The return of the Jews to their own land and the restoration of Israel as a home for the Jewish people in 1948, is a part fulfilment of prophecy already considered in the previous article. In the decades that have followed there have indeed been signs among those symbols of the ruling powers of the nations, in the '**heaven**' and in '**the sun, moon and stars**'. There is much 'perplexity' as to how the problems of the world can be solved by human government. Wars, terrorism and violence continue particularly in the area known as the Middle East and there seems to be no solution to these problems. Jesus said that this would be another sign of his impending return.

The prophets of Israel foretold the events affecting Israel and all nations, just prior to the return of Jesus. Consider the following example mentioned in the earlier section on Iran (see Page 15). In the prophecy of Ezekiel we are given the description of a group of nations hostile to the restored nation of Israel. This is how the group of nations are described:

'Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal,

and prophesy against him, and say, "Thus says the Lord GOD..." (Ezekiel 38. 2, 3).

Careful reading of this chapter leaves us in no doubt that this group of nations, including Persia (Iran), Ethiopia and Libya, are to be compelled by God to attack the land of Israel: *'...In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations...'* (Ezekiel 38.8).

This federation of nations is centred upon a power which is situated to the **north** of the Holy Land and it is interesting to note that Israel, both in the past and even at the present time, has needed to look carefully to the security of her **northern** borders. The Syrians of course are a threat from that direction, just as the Assyrians were some 2,800 years ago.

God, speaking through the prophet Ezekiel concerning this **northern** aggressor said: *'Then you will come from your place out of the **far north**, you and many peoples with you...You will come up against my people Israel like a cloud, to cover*

the land. It will be in the latter days...' (Ezekiel 38.15, 16). The identity of this federation, to be gathered against Israel in the very near future is not difficult to assess. Magog, Meshech and Tubal, the descendants of Japheth, one of the sons of Noah (Genesis 10.2), in ancient times settled in countries to the north of Israel (see map on page 47)

Persia (now Iran), Ethiopia and Libya are nations antagonistic to Israel. These are well known to us today, and the prophet Ezekiel, speaking with Divine authority, tells us they will be joined by the descendants of Japheth, the **'latter day'** occupiers of the **'far north'**. Directly to the north of Israel as mentioned above, is Syria, one of Israel's many Arab enemies. Further north through Armenia we come to the troubled, now largely independent states of the former Soviet Union. We note with interest the high Islamic following among this group of nations.

Now it would be foolish for students of prophecy to dogmatise on the outcome of unfulfilled Bible prophecy. God alone has the right to determine the outcome of His plan for the world – a plan



The confederacy of nations described in Ezekiel chapter 38

remember, which will be realised in the establishment of the kingdom of God and the commencement of the Millennium – a thousand year reign of Christ upon earth (Revelation 20.4). If we are true students of God's Word, then we are also watchmen. Christ's warning to his followers was that they should watch!

'Watch therefore, for you do not know at what hour your Lord is

coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect him' (Matthew 24.42-44).

As we survey the world scene now in the 21st Century, what do we see? We see the nation of Israel, returned

to their land in fulfilment of such prophecies as Ezekiel chapter 37. We see hostility towards Israel on every border. The Arab (Islamic) nations are truly confederate against God's people and have tried to destroy them more than once: 'They have said, "*Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more*"' (Psalm 83.4).

A study of Psalm 83 will enlighten the student of Bible prophecy concerning the identity of the nations mentioned in this intriguing Psalm. They are the ancient enemies of Israel and they find a territorial identity with the current enemies of God's people.

The northern aggressor of Ezekiel chapter 38, in association with the clearly identified nations, who currently have no time for the Jews who occupy '*the land brought back from the sword*', are those whom God will draw into a final conflict against Jerusalem: '*For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem*' (Zechariah 14.2). Another of God's prophets adds: '*...in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also*

gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat...' (Joel 3.1,2). We are left in no doubt that this is the day when God will intervene directly in human affairs once again and cause His will to be done on earth:

'Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near...The LORD also will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; The heavens and earth will shake; but the LORD will be a shelter for his people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion my holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again' (Joel 3.14,16,17).

We are convinced that we are living '*at the time of the end*' described by the prophet Daniel (Daniel 11.40-12.2). This is the time that will witness the return of Jesus Christ, the future ruler of the earth. These prophecies, and particularly those of Joel and Zechariah, together with the great prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel, present to us God's plan for the world.

Isaiah has been referred to as the prophet of the Kingdom. The

prophetic words of Isaiah give us a graphic word picture of the age to come:

‘...They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more’ (Isaiah 2.2-4). These words are used by the United Nations to epitomise their aspirations for world peace.

As watchmen, we should seek to identify every step forward in this plan. For every step forward brings closer that day of final conflict, known also in the Bible as Armageddon (Revelation 16.16), when in the words of Zechariah:

‘...the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be – “The LORD is one”, and his name one’ (Zechariah 14. 9).



‘We shall beat our swords into ploughshares’ – sculpture outside the UN Building in New York

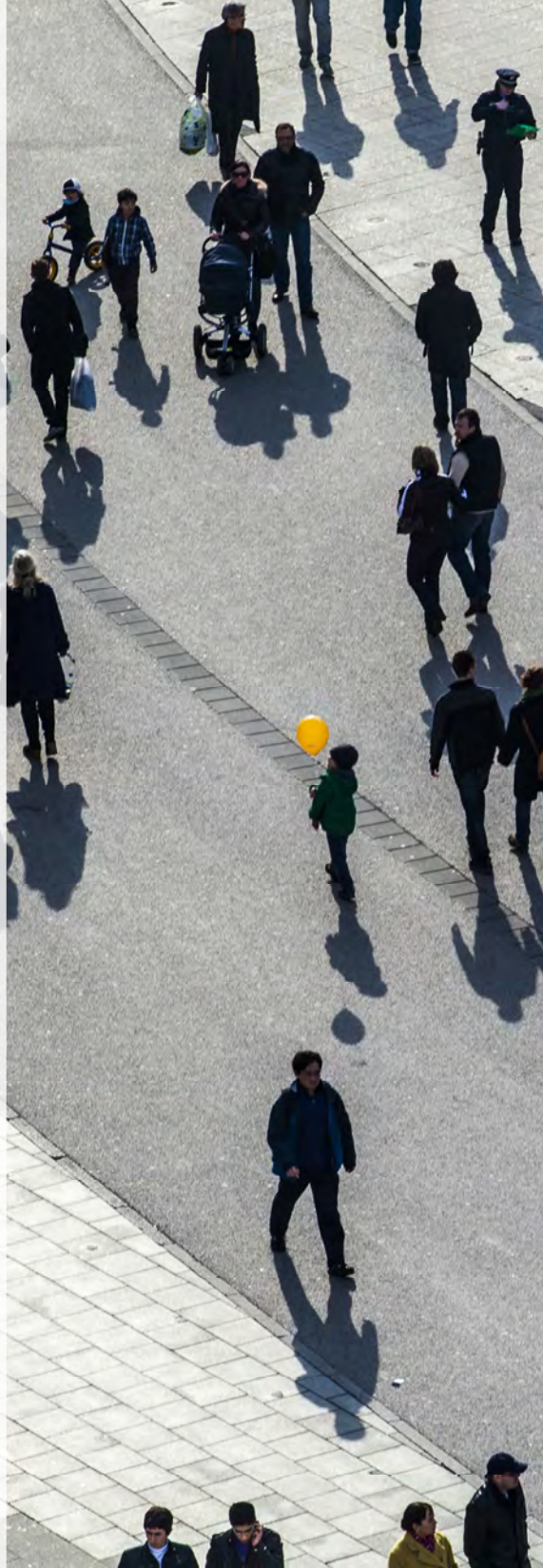
**time for mankind is fast running out -
will you be ready for Christ's return?**

What about your future?

When we look at history it is usually in an abstract way because we are not involved in the events that took place; but Biblical history is different. It is presented as material evidence in support of the claim that its prophecies were given by the power of God, for we read *'holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit'* (2 Peter 1.21).

This should lead us, not merely to hold these ancient prophecies in high esteem but to recognise that the Bible is divinely inspired, for it contains the record of God's plan as dictated to His servants the prophets. The purpose of recorded Scripture is not for us to look back at what might have been, but to recognise from the past that history is the result of a carefully planned purpose in which the Creator's aim is quite clear:

'For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea' (Habakkuk 2.14).



Remember that the prophecy connected with the Image shown to the king of Babylon in Daniel chapter 2 still remains partly unfulfilled – the final part relates to the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth when Jesus returns.

God has a purpose with His people that will be fulfilled in the setting up of the restored kingdom of Israel. Jesus is destined to be king ruling over the whole world from Jerusalem. We are therefore able to look forward with hope to the future, because we have the evidence of fulfilled prophecy on which to base our confidence. It can only be a hope though, to those who believe it, for as we read in the letter to the Hebrews: *‘...for he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him’* (Hebrews 11.6).

The purpose of the Scriptures is to enable individuals to participate, through God’s mercy, in His future plans. This is the essence of *‘the gospel of the kingdom of God’* preached by Jesus (Mark 1.14). This hope of the gospel was held by men of faith like Abraham, for the Apostle Paul wrote: *‘God...preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand,*

saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed”’ (Galatians 3. 8).

The faith of Abraham and others is referred to in Hebrews chapter 11. Read the chapter carefully, for it tells us that true faith is an essential characteristic of all those who will have a part in God’s plan for the future. We are told that *‘all these (men and women of faith), having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us’* (Hebrews 11.39,40). Do you want to participate in *‘something better’*? Can you accept the certainty of God’s promises, based on the fulfilment of prophecy to date?

To those who heed the *‘more sure word of prophecy’* (2 Peter 1.19 KJV), the wise man Solomon, after carefully considering life with all its aims, challenges and achievements, had this to say: *‘Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man’* (Ecclesiastes 12.13). One of these commandments requires a person to be baptised having fully

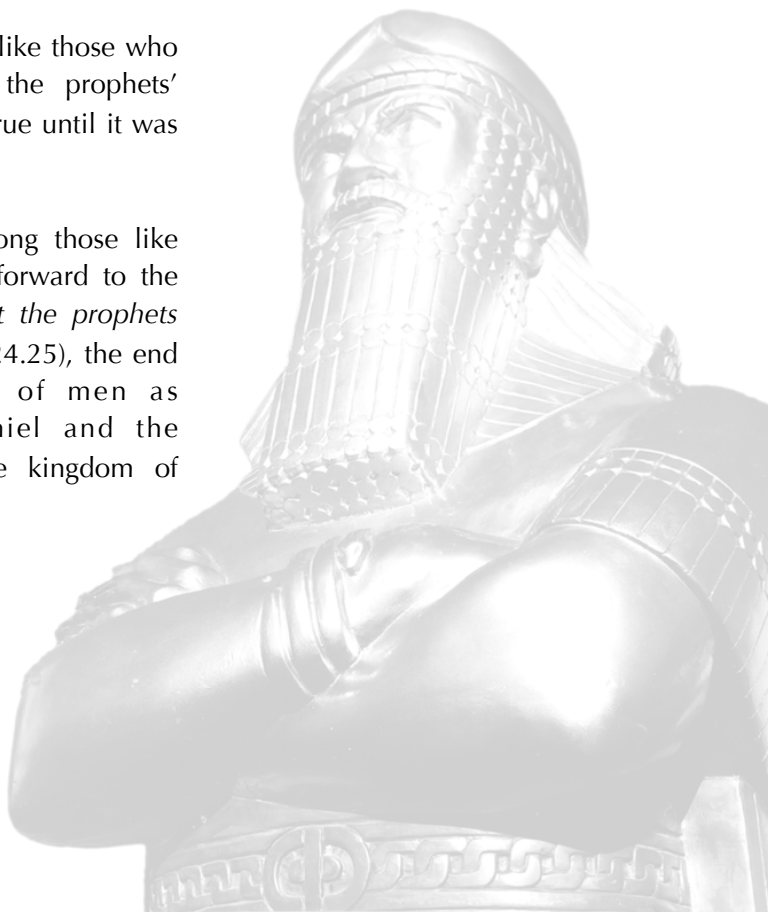
believed the gospel of the kingdom of God.

In Acts chapter 10 we read about a Roman centurion called Cornelius, who was *'a devout man and one who feared God,'* but, as the Apostle Peter told him, this in itself was not enough. After he had satisfied himself that Cornelius fully understood and believed the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, Peter baptised him.

Your future - your choice...

Are you going to be like those who didn't believe that the prophets' words would come true until it was too late?

Or will you be among those like Cornelius and look forward to the fulfilment of *'all that the prophets have spoken'* (Luke 24.25), the end of the kingdoms of men as predicted by Daniel and the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth?



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