

his birthday instead? The article referred to the researches of Brother Stephen Snobelen, and trailed a television programme, which appeared on 1 March.

Returning to the "creation" (as the letter put it) of a Darwin Day, the response of one reader the next day was to suggest that

"the day should be left to evolve through natural selection"! We hope and pray that by the time the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birthday arrives in 2009 our Lord will have returned and made clear the falsity of the teachings of Darwin and his followers. However, if Newton's

conclusions on Bible prophecy are right, we shall have to wait rather longer for this to happen, for according to the article he "set 2060 for the end of the world". Perhaps we shall be able to report further on this in a future issue.

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Joel 3, two sickles and two psalms

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IN JOEL 3:9 we read: "Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up". As we see the military might of America deployed in the Middle East, these words in Joel take on a special relevance. In an address to a Joint Session of Congress given on 20 September 2001, President Bush stated: "Tonight we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom".¹ The mighty man of America has indeed been woken up, and the presence of American forces in the Middle East is evidence of this awakening.

The vision of peace

The purpose for gathering the nations to the Middle East is stated in verse 2: "I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for My people and for My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted My land". The nations, of course, do not have this intention in mind. America has its own vision of what will happen in the long term. In a speech given on 15 March 2003, President Bush stated: "We have reached a hopeful moment for progress toward the vision of Middle Eastern peace that I outlined last June. I spoke of a day when two states, Israel and Palestine, will live side by side in peace and security".²

There are three points which can be made about these words in relation to Bible prophecy.

Firstly, notice the phrase "peace and security", a recurring theme in international affairs, and which shows that the time of the end is near: "For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape" (1 Thess. 5:3). The second point is that the goal of peace in the Middle East coincides with what is required by Bible prophecy, for, at the time of the invasion by Gog, Israel will be "at rest" and dwelling "safely" (Ezek. 38:11).

Thirdly, we see that America is working towards the formation of a Palestinian state. When Gog invades there will be a significant Palestinian power which will join with him in spoiling Israel, as shown in Joel 3: "Yea, and what have ye to do with Me, O Tyre, and Zidon, and all the coasts of Palestine? will ye render Me a recompense? and if ye recompense Me, swiftly and speedily will I return your recompense upon your own head; because ye have taken My silver and My gold, and have carried into your temples My goodly pleasant things" (vv. 4,5). The "coasts of Palestine" correspond to the Gaza Strip. America envisages both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank to be part of a future Palestinian State. Whereas Ezekiel 38:8 indicates that the mountains

1. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>.
2. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/2851525.stm.

of the West Bank will be under Israeli control, the establishment of a Palestinian power-base in the Gaza Strip, whether a state or not, fits the prophecy in Joel 3.

The two sickles

The "vision of Middle Eastern peace" which the President laid out is flawed, but nevertheless we can see that his words show that the situation depicted in Joel 3 is coming to pass. Joel goes on to describe the coming judgements as a harvest: "Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great" (v. 13). At first glance this verse may seem to be talking about one great judgement to be carried out upon the nations. However, there are two separate phases of judgement. Firstly there is a grain harvest: "the harvest is ripe"; the second phase is that of grapes in the winepress: "for the press is full".

We will now consider this verse in the light of other scriptures. In particular we will see how this verse can be linked with Psalms 1 and 2. As events unfold in the Middle East it is a time of fear and uncertainty for the world. For ourselves it should be a time of hope and expectation as we lift up our heads knowing that our redemption draws nigh (Lk. 21:28). Sometimes, however, our faith may waver, and therefore we need to use every opportunity to strengthen our faith in these last days. The psalms contain much comfort and exhortation for the days in which we live.

The two phases of judgement mentioned in Joel 3:13 are spoken of in Revelation 14. The first phase is spoken of as follows:

"And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped" (vv. 14-16).

This harvest of grain corresponds to Armageddon. Indeed, one suggested meaning for the Hebrew word Armageddon is 'heap of sheaves in the valley of judgement'. The cloud in this vision represents the saints, the "cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1), who will be with Christ as

they march into the land of Israel. In Daniel 2 we read: "Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth" (v. 35). This great grain harvest will occur when the Gogian force is defeated on the mountains of Israel.

After Armageddon the Lord Jesus will then establish himself as King in Israel, and his attention will turn to dealing with the European "kings of the earth". In Revelation 14 this is symbolised by another angel with a sickle:

"And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God" (vv. 17-19).

Here the angel with the sickle is "in heaven". This is the political heaven, and symbolises Christ and the saints ruling in Jerusalem. From Jerusalem they set out to conquer the European beast: "And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God . . . And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army" (19:15,19).

The two psalms

The phrase "rod of iron" is a quotation from Psalm 2: "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (v. 9). This is a psalm which concerns the judgement of the nations when Christ is King in Zion: "Yet have I set My king upon My holy hill of Zion" (v. 6). The phrase "kings of the earth" is also a quotation from this psalm: "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD [Yahweh], and against His anointed . . ." (v. 2).

Psalm 2 is a psalm relating to the angel with the second sickle. It is a psalm which concerns the gathering of the grapes and the winepress.

For this reason it is directed, not to the saints, but to the nations: "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth" (v. 10). When Christ is beginning his reign in Jerusalem, Psalm 2 will be a key passage which the saints will use to speak to the nations.

If Psalm 2 prepares the nations for the winepress of the wrath of God, what of Psalm 1? The psalm opens by speaking about the godly:

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD [Yahweh]; and in His law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" (vv. 1-3).

Then the psalmist speaks about the ungodly: "The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away" (v. 4). This is the language of the grain harvest, the time of the first sickle when at Armageddon the image of Daniel 2 will become "like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors" (v. 35).

As we see the mighty awakening, and Armageddon approaching, the early verses in Psalm 1 provide us with instruction as to how to prepare for that time. We should remain separate from the ways of the world and delight in reading and studying the Bible.

As we see events unfolding in the Middle East we need have no fear for what is coming on the earth. We need not feel overwhelmed, for "the LORD [Yahweh] knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish" (v. 6).