

Publishing Editor's column

WARS often do not go as planned, and often produce results that were never envisaged when they were started. When the First World War began, many thousands of young men set off blithely for the Continent, confidently expecting that the Germans would soon be defeated. The reality was very different, years of brutal trench warfare in which huge numbers perished. It was never envisaged at the beginning of the war that the outcome would be the end of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires, the overthrow of the monarchy in Russia and Germany, and the emergence of the USA as the world's greatest power. For students of Bible prophecy, what started as a European war resulted in the way being opened for the Jews to return to Israel in much greater numbers than before, something that could not have been anticipated when the war first broke out.

As students of prophecy we can, however, easily be misled on the outbreak of war into attaching more significance to what is happening than is justified. In the mid-1860s, when war was breaking out over Europe, there were great expectations that this would lead to the Lord's return. It did not, but the wars did lead to the loss of the pope's temporal power, and a fulfilment of the 1,260 day-for-a-year prophecy of Daniel 7:25. The initial success of Germany in the Second World War led some to think that Ezekiel 38 would be fulfilled by a Hitler-led Germany. It was not, but we can now see that the Second World War led to the independence of Israel and the beginnings of the move to European union.

These words are being written about ten days after the outbreak of the second Gulf War. There are already indications that it is not going to plan. Iraqi resistance has not immediately crumbled, and the invading armies have not been welcomed immediately as liberators. The optimistic view of the war is that it will result in peace and democracy spreading throughout the Middle East, with even that most intransigent of problems, Israel and the Palestinians, being resolved. The pessimistic view is that the allied forces will become bogged down, necessitating the use of more and more force, and that anti-Western and anti-Israeli sentiments will become worse. Who can tell what the eventual outcome will be?

It is, of course, how the war will affect Israel that interests us the most. There is not the same unanimity concerning latter-day prophecy as there was, and what we look for from the present situation may well vary. What of Israel dwelling safely, for example? Is this something only to be achieved when Christ returns? Will it come about by Israel triumphing over the surrounding nations? Will peace spread through the Middle East as an outcome of the war? Or is it simply a reference to Israel's confidence in its own defences? The present position does not give us much of a clue, but as events develop the outcome may well become clearer. And let us not lose the excitement of the situation. Nations are being drawn into the Middle East for war; Israel cannot be ignored, a problem for the world that only God can resolve. Events are leading to the Divinely ordained outcome, even though the way may not always be clear.

Tony Benson

Publication of articles in The Testimony does not presume editorial endorsement except on matters of fundamental doctrine, as defined in the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith.