

even Arab peoples, before Christ comes, but in recent years a distinct division has arisen between the nations of Arabia and the other Muslim nations around the Middle East. Also, one cannot bring Psalm 83 into the equation as this applies to a series of vitriolic Arab and Muslim attacks on Israel that have been repeated over and over again since Israel became a nation in 1948.

- 7 Looking at the bigger picture, we find that Islamic theology as such is not against the Jews, nor the Jewish religion. However, during the seventh century Muslims conquered the Holy Land, and, once it had been conquered in the name of Allah, in their minds it remains sacred to Allah and will always be Islamic territory. In the same way, Spain was conquered in the name of Allah, and is now regarded as occupied Islamic territory. In Islamic writings, Spain is considered the crown of their empire. The Muslims' biggest enemy is Zionism, the political movement that arranges and promotes the occupation of Israel by Jewish people. Muslims have no place for peace with Zionism, so the holy war, or Jihad, between them must continue, and no person, not even Yasser Arafat, has the right to interfere with the Jihad for the sake of bringing peace to a small region for his own political purpose. Conquering and occupying territory for Allah is more important to Muslims than making converts to Islam.
- 8 Even at this present time the distinction is quite clear; during the current Iraq crisis we see the Arab nations of Arabia once again

cooperating with the USA by allowing American forces and machinery to use their territories, though they are not altogether happy about it. We notice that all the other Muslim nations are against America invading Iraq.

- 9 From the evidence it would appear that the popular idea that the Arabs will one day attack Israel again is without foundation, as no place is found for it in the political arena, or in the Scriptures.

Keith Worthington
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What seems to define an Arab nation today is the speaking of Arabic as the main language, and by this definition many nations excluded by Brother Worthington would be counted as Arab, although Biblically he is correct. This widespread use of Arabic results, of course, from the Arab conquests which began in the seventh century, and these conquests also resulted in Arabs settling in many areas outside their original heartland of Arabia. Thus if we talk about the Arabs today it will naturally be assumed that we are talking about this wider Arabic world, unless we qualify our use of the word.

Brother Worthington's division of the Middle East into pro-Western Arabs and Muslim 'other nations' which are opposed to the West and to Israel does not account for some of the most significant of the Middle Eastern nations today, especially Syria and Iraq. They are clearly not part of the pro-Western group, nor are they listed as part of the Gogian invasion. Place must be found for them in the latter-day scenario and an explanation offered for their absence from the nations mentioned in Ezekiel 38.—T.B.

From the Editor's postbag

Comments on items received from readers

The search for immortality

At one time it was almost universally believed that there is life after death, either in the form of an immortal soul living on, or by reincarnation in another being, with just a few having the Biblical hope of resurrection from the dead. The advance of scientific rationalism has led many to abandon any expectation of life after death, but to

develop a greater expectation that this life will be prolonged.

The most extreme expression of this confidence in science to overcome man's inherent mortality is to be found in those who have had their bodies deep frozen with a view to them being thawed out at some future time when science has discovered a way to cure whatever they died of. According to an article in the

Daily Mail on 28 September, forwarded by a reader, this idea has been around for about forty years, but gained renewed publicity because the magazine *New Scientist* offered as a competition prize the options of a trip to Hawaii to view the stars through a powerful telescope or a place in a cryostat, the name given to a tank of liquid nitrogen in which dead bodies are frozen.

This prompted the BBC to run a poll asking people which option they would take, in which a quarter expressed a preference for the latter option.

The practice of freezing dead people in a tank of liquid nitrogen is known as cryonics, a term derived from cryogenics, the science of extreme cold. The suggestion began with science fiction, but was seriously advocated by an American physics teacher, Robert Ettinger, who wrote a book published in 1964 called *The Prospect of Immortality*. There are apparently now three cryonics centres, all in America, with some ninety dead bodies, each suspended in a bag immersed in liquid nitrogen at a temperature of -196° Celsius.

A further thousand people have signed up for the process, including sixty Britons, one a vicar from Nottinghamshire, who, one might think, shows an astonishing lack of belief in the teachings of his church. Not surprisingly, he has remained anonymous. People pay either a lump sum of £21,000 or a monthly fee of £36 for the rest of their lives. In the meantime they have to wear tags instructing that in the event of death a certain number must be rung, which will trigger off immediate action to ensure preservation of the corpse with a view to freezing it as soon as possible.

There are various problems associated with the practice, however, as brought out in the article:

- Although it is conceivable that advances in medical techniques might enable complaints which are now incurable to be cured in the future, medical science cannot conceive of it ever being possible to restore the func-

tions of the brain. And if it was so, would it really be the same person restored to life?

- An impossible dilemma is presented to believers in an immortal soul, who believe that the soul departs from the body on death. What would happen to the soul if the body were brought to life again in many years' time? Being dragged back to resume a life on earth would hardly be a benefit to a soul experiencing bliss in paradise, nor would it be reasonable for a soul suffering torment in hell to be suddenly relieved of a deserved punishment.
- The founder of cryonics, Robert Ettinger, has outlived two wives who are now both frozen. He, of course, has arranged to be frozen when he dies. When in due course he and his wives are restored to life, there is a potential problem!
- The first cryonics centre went bankrupt because the money paid in advance of death ran out and relatives of the frozen deceased failed to pay to keep it going. Consequently the frozen bodies soon thawed and have gone the way of all corpses.

In truth, of course, God has decreed a sentence of death on the whole human race which no ingenuity of man can overcome. The power of the One Who originally created man from the dust of the earth and gave him life can restore a person to life again in an instant, even, as in the case of Lazarus, one who has experienced corruption. Only through this power can a person truly become immortal. How foolish to trust in man's ability to overcome death at some unspecified future time, when the

sure and certain hope of living for ever is offered through the Lord Jesus Christ!

Corruption of a different kind

An article in the *Financial Times Weekend* for 12/13 October, and passed to me by a reader, highlights corruption of a different kind, and reminds us that, while a small minority in the wealthy Western world are prepared to spend considerable sums of money in trying to secure life for the future, hundreds of millions of people are living a hand-to-mouth existence in poverty, oppressed by corrupt governments.

The article highlights the position in India, the world's largest democracy. In the state of Uttar Pradesh, for example, overpopulated and desperately poor, only a third of the funds made available for development reach the intended beneficiaries; the rest is siphoned off by corrupt officialdom. New laws favour the so-called 'Untouchables' (low caste people) when it comes to government jobs, but many of them, on obtaining such jobs, take every opportunity to line their pockets at the expense of the poor. An estimated forty per cent of food provided under famine relief schemes is sold off on the black market, instead of going to those for whom it is intended. Large construction schemes are favoured, rather than small projects, because of the scope these provide for extracting bribes from contractors wishing to be successful, although the smaller projects would do more good overall and the large projects often fail through lack of maintenance. In New Delhi only 18,000 of the 42,000 municipal employees attend for work, others split their

salary with corrupt officials and do other things. Few government officials will do anything without a bribe.

Such corruption is rife in many Third World countries, and is the cause of much suffering by the poor. It is a situation which reflects a number of passages in the writings of the prophets of Israel, as for example Micah 3, where the princes are condemned because they "eat the flesh of My [God's] people, and flay their skin from off them . . . [they] pervert all equity . . . [and] judge for reward" (vv. 3,9,11). Only when "a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment" (Isa. 32:1) will this situation be reversed, for the Lord Jesus Christ will "deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper" (Ps. 72:12).

Christian Zionists

It is well-known that Jews are very influential in American politics, and it is sometimes asserted that they are the reason for America's backing of Israel. An article in the *Guardian* for 28 October, sent me by a reader, argues that in fact it is what is known as the 'religious right' which is the greatest influence in America on the side of the Jews.

The 'religious right' consists of fundamentalist Christians, and they make up about a sixth of the electorate in a land where about half the population attend church regularly. Many people on the religious right strongly support Israel on the basis of Bible teaching, and exert pressure on the President to support Israel; allegedly the White House received 100,000 e-mails in protest when President Bush demanded that Israel withdraw its tanks from the West Bank at

the height of the troubles last April, causing him to backtrack.

The *Guardian* article was prompted by a rally in Washington of an organisation called the Christian Coalition of America, at which the right-wing mayor of Jerusalem, Ehud Olmert, spoke to rapturous applause and delegates proclaimed the right of the Jews to all the land of Israel, including all the West Bank. The conference began with a video-taped blessing from the White House, and was attended by influential republican party leaders.

Israel cannot afford not to accept this support, but is wary of it. This is because of the widespread acceptance by fundamentalist Christians of a scenario of prophetic fulfilment involving the conversion of many Jews to Christianity as part of a sequence of events involving also a future worldwide dictatorship by the Antichrist. (This is, of course, all based on a total misinterpretation of the book of Revelation.) Perceptive Jews recognise that in the end fundamentalist Christians have no place in their theology for Jews who hold to their Judaism. We can see, however, the hand of God in this, ensuring that Israel has the support of the world's most powerful nation, although it is a support which in the end will not prevent Israel from being invaded by other nations.

Death of an influential rabbi

One of the most remarkable features about the Jews is their adherence to the tenets of Judaism, and they are right to be wary of attempts to make them part of apostate Christendom. A reader copied me the *Times* obituary notice of Rabbi Zerach Warhaftig, one of the thirty-seven signatories of Israel's

Declaration of Independence in 1948 and a member of every Israeli government for the first twenty-six years of its existence as a state, mostly at the Ministry of Religious Affairs. He was to a large degree responsible for the fact that the principles of Judaism are enshrined in the State of Israel, thus preventing it from being just another of the many nations that became independent in the years following the Second World War.

According to the obituary:

"From within the centre of power he helped to impose upon the new life of a largely secular population a strict religious regime affecting much of their daily life . . . With his mastery of both civil and Jewish religious law, and a creative political astuteness, he thwarted all secular resistance. He gave Israel's orthodox rabbinic courts complete control over marriage and divorce, which they retain to this day.

"The Sabbath and all Jewish religious festivals were made national holidays, and ham sandwiches and other forbidden foods were banned from the Army, the canteens and dining rooms of Parliament, the Knesset, and from all embassies and government agencies, where the observance of Judaism's strict dietary laws was made compulsory . . . With all those measures, he took Israel considerably farther down the road towards theocracy than many of its citizens wished".

Vain repetition

Modern Judaism is, of course, far removed from the Truth, valuable though it has been in holding the Jewish people together.

In some respects it is similar to Roman Catholicism in its insistence on rules and rituals. Both Jews and Catholics practice repetition in prayers, although the practice is a heathen one, and forbidden by Jesus to his followers: "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking" (Mt. 6:7). Following this, he went on to teach his followers to pray in the simple yet profound statements of what we know as the Lord's Prayer, though not to be recited unthinkingly by rote.

According to a report in the *Guardian* for 16 October, forwarded by a reader, the pope has added five extra prayer cycles to the loop of beads traditionally worn by Roman Catholics and known as the rosary. The rosary has been around since the Middle Ages, but its use has apparently declined in recent years in the West. The pope is, however, very keen on it, and uses it himself regularly.

Within the rosary each bead represents a prayer. Use of the rosary involves reciting a fixed prayer, then moving a bead along the string, and so on until a prayer has been said for every bead. This involves reciting the Lord's Prayer a number of times, but reciting the Hail Mary ten times as often. The more times the rosary prayer cycle is repeated, the greater the merit, so the Church says. Quite what the pope's revamp of the rosary involves is not quite clear, but use of the rosary is in clear contravention of our Lord's teaching on prayer.

The Bible Code again

In 1997 the publication of a book called *The Bible Code* created

something of a sensation. This book asserted that the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses) contains coded information accessible only by computer. This information is derived by taking Hebrew letters at regular intervals in the text, the computer being asked to find particular words or short phrases.

This received a mixed reaction in the Brotherhood. Some thought it was evidence for the inspiration of the Bible, others were sceptical of its validity and value.

A number of articles and letters presenting both points of view were published in *The Testimony* during 1997, 1998 and 1999. After that I heard little about it until receiving from a reader an abridged extract, published in the *Daily Mail* on 2 December, from a new book by Michael Drosnin, *The Bible Code 2*.

In his new book Drosnin says he found various words and phrases connected with the terrorist attacks on America on 11 September, such as 'twin towers' and 'airplane'. He claims that this proves the validity of the Bible code, but his search was conducted after the event, he did not predict the disaster using the Bible code. However, he does say that in October 1998 he deposited a sealed letter with his lawyer, to be opened in October 2002 and making the following predictions from the Bible code:

- "(a) The world will face global 'economic collapse' starting in the Hebrew year 5762 (2002 in the modern calendar);
- (b) This will lead to a period of unprecedented danger, as nations with nuclear weapons become unstable, and terrorists can buy or steal the

power to destroy whole cities;

- (c) The danger will peak in the Hebrew year 5766 (2006 in the modern calendar), the year that is most clearly encoded with both 'world war' and 'atomic holocaust'".

It should be stated that the Hebrew year begins in our autumn, and the Hebrew year 5762 ran from autumn 2001 to autumn 2002.

Drosnin's claim is that his prediction of economic collapse is being fulfilled in the fall in the world's stock markets since September 2001, along with the general economic slump which has taken place. Whether this is leading to a total economic collapse remains to be seen, but it is certainly possible. The remaining predictions are stated to depend on the first but are clearly also possible in our present world. Drosnin does not, in the published extract from his book, give the basis for his predictions, however, and it must be remembered that the Bible code computer programme only looks for words and phrases that people put into it, so Drosnin must have already thought that these things might happen. The Bible code does not predict anything; at best it can only confirm what a human being has already decided might happen.

We shall see to what extent Drosnin's three predictions come to pass. But it must be remembered that Drosnin has already made predictions which have not come to pass and thus has already failed the test of a true prophet in Deuteronomy 18:22. There is nothing in these predictions of his that could not have been foretold by someone looking at the state of the world and projecting how things might develop. Indeed, Drosnin does

not claim to predict the future from the Bible code, but rather claims that it provides warnings about what might happen in order that these happenings can be avoided.

Drosnin is in fact an atheist who claims that the coded information in the Bible has been put there by aliens from space with the ability to foretell the future. He claims that world governments have five years from 11 September to save themselves from disaster. There is a crucial difference between this and Bible prophecy, which is not mere prediction of the future by one who can see ahead, but a declaration of intent by One Who has a purpose with the earth and the power to carry it out. The Bible code is of doubtful authenticity, and no spiritual value even if true; let us not confuse it with the living Word of the all-powerful Creator.

Weather and war

There is abundant evidence from Scripture and history that God uses weather and climate to fulfil His declared purpose, and I have written extensively on this in *The Testimony* over the last twenty-five years. During this time the subject of the influence of the weather and climate on history has become more prominent in academic circles, and I was interested to re-

ceive from an Australian reader a copy of an article entitled, "Weather, Climate and Warfare", published in the October 2002 edition of *Australasian Science*.

The article begins: "Throughout human history, weather and climate have impacted greatly on warfare". It goes on to cite examples dealt with in this magazine previously, such as the destruction of the Spanish Armada, the way in which heavy rain severely hampered Napoleon's attempt to overcome the British forces at Waterloo, the impact of severe winter weather on the attempts of Napoleon and Hitler to conquer Russia, and the way weather conditions benefited the American and British forces on D-Day.

I had assumed that modern technology would enable the armed forces of today to overcome unfavourable weather conditions, and was therefore interested to read in the article that this is not so. This is how he concludes the article:

"The increased sophistication and technical complexity in the development of weapons, equipment and communications systems raise questions about their reliability under extreme climate and weather conditions. If these weapons, communications systems and equipment become af-

ected by even a small change in weather conditions, how easy are they to repair? Do we actually know how sensitive or robust these new technology items are to changes in weather conditions?"

"The changing face of warfare during the 20th century has been one of transformation from one where large armies faced each other over set battles to one where fighting occurs by more remote means such as air wars and 'smart' bombs and armies that are more attuned to mechanisation and rapid movement in smaller groups. This transformation has meant that the influence of weather and climate is becoming of increasing and critical importance, both in terms of the accuracy of weather forecasts and in the effects of weather on sophisticated machinery.

"With the growth of importance of warfare, military personnel therefore need to ensure that weather and climate are incorporated as major factors to any decisions that are being made. To ignore such considerations could be at their own, their servicemen's and possibly their country's peril".

Tony Benson

Milestones 2002

The 2002 edition of *Milestones* is now available from Brother Don Pearce, 76 High Street, Hillmorton, Rugby, CV21 4EE; e-mail MilestonesUK@aol.com; tel. 01788 542408; at £2.50 including postage. Overseas, please apply to local Christadelphian Scripture Study Service agent. *Milestones 2002* is 100 pages long, and among the matters covered are:

- Britain's growing isolation in Europe
- The Vatican's drive for Europe to recognise its roots
- The prospects for Israel to dwell in peace before the Gogian invasion
- Russia's growing power and increasing links with Europe
- The growth of the European superstate
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