

1968, Apollo 8 and the time of the end

Nigel Bernard

The capture of Old Jerusalem by the Jews in 1967 was an important event in the fulfilment of our Lord's Mount Olivet Prophecy. This article shows that, in hindsight, the following year was also a significant year, with global unrest and the conquest of space further contributing to the fulfilment of the Olivet Prophecy.

IN JOEL 3 we read: "For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations" (vv. 1,2). There is a sequence of events here. Firstly the captivity of Judah is ended. The establishing of the State of Israel in 1948 can be seen as a fulfilment of these words. Secondly, the captivity of Jerusalem is ended. The capture of the old part of Jerusalem by the Jews in 1967 during the Six-Day War saw this come to pass. Since then, the process of the gathering of nations has been taking place.

In Luke 21 we read of Jerusalem being "trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (v. 24), followed immediately by the words: "And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth" (vv. 25,26). We might look at the earth since 1967 and conclude that indeed it has been a time of increasing perplexity and fear.

However, given that over thirty years has passed, we might think that there has been a delay between 1967 and the development of events of which prophecies such as Joel 3 and Luke 21 speak. In this article we will argue that, far from there being a delay, the *very next year*, in 1968, there were dramatic events which heralded in the new phase marked by the capture of Jerusalem. Moreover, the ramifications of that year are still being felt today.

A dramatic year

At the end of 1968 the Americans launched Apollo 8. It was the first manned spacecraft to orbit the moon. It was a mission which captured the imagination of the world. After returning to

earth the commander of the mission, Frank Borman, received an anonymous telegram which simply said: "You saved 1968".¹ What had happened in 1968 to make this year so bad that it needed saving?

From an American perspective, 1968 was a bad year. It was embroiled in the ongoing Vietnam War, and over 14,000 servicemen were killed that year. Compared with other years of the war, both before and afterwards, 1968 had the highest number of casualties. There were two high-profile assassinations that year. On 4 April the civil rights leader Martin Luther King was shot dead, and on 5 June Senator Robert Kennedy, brother of the late President Kennedy, was killed.

In addition, that year in America was marked by the emergence of mass protests by the young generation. These included sit-ins at universities and street protests, sometimes met with violence by police. At the same time it saw an increase in promiscuity, drug taking and the emergence of feminism. But America was not the only country experiencing a troubled year.

At the beginning of the year in various cities in Poland there were spontaneous demonstrations by students against the government, particularly with regard to its control of the press. These protests were eventually halted in March, by which time nearly a thousand students had been imprisoned. In Czechoslovakia during the early part of 1968 the communist leader Alexander Dubček sought to provide a more relaxed version of Communist rule, encouraging public debate and permitting a free press. This became known as the Prague Spring. But it caused consternation in surrounding Communist governments, and eventually, on 21 August, the Soviets invaded the country.

Meanwhile there were disturbances in other countries. For example, in France there were student protests leading to several weeks of violence on the streets. At one stage barricades were set up on the streets of Paris and cobblestones were being ripped up and hurled at police. As one writer stated: "In May France descended

1. Chaikin, A. (1998), *A Man on the Moon*, London, Penguin, p. 134.

into near anarchy and many feared that a revolution was about to take place".²

The summer Olympic Games were held in Mexico in 1968. Even these did not escape protest. Two black American athletes, who had won medals in the 200 metres, each stood with a fist raised wearing a black glove during the medal ceremony as the national anthem was played. They were supporting the Black Power movement which had been gaining momentum in America.

But this was not the only protest seen in Mexico that year. In the months leading up to the Olympics there had also been student protests. These came to a head on 2 October, less than two weeks before the Olympics began. At a student rally in a plaza in a place called Tlatelolco the army attacked the students with gunfire and bayonets. It is thought that over a hundred people may have been killed.

1968 was also the year the tragedy of Biafra began to unfold. This region in eastern Nigeria had declared independence in 1967, but the Nigerian Government responded with war and cut off all outside aid to the region. As 1968 progressed, thousands of people began to starve, and the images of emaciated children became indelibly associated with Biafra. It was a "human tragedy of epic scale".³

Rebellious spirit

Was 1968 that bad? The writer Mark Kurlansky argues a strong case that it was, and wrote a book about it entitled *1968—The Year that Rocked the World*. He states:

"There has never been a year like 1968, and it is unlikely there will ever be one again. At a time when nations and cultures were still separate and very different . . . there occurred a spontaneous combustion of rebellious spirits around the world".⁴

The use of the phrase "rebellious spirits" is interesting because it is reminiscent of the "unclean spirits like frogs" (Rev. 16:13). Indeed, the spirit which swept student populations across the world that year was precisely a froglike spirit of the type spoken of in Revelation 16.

Kurlansky identifies the twin developments that year of video-tape and the use of satellites in television news as key technological factors which enabled news of war and protest to spread quickly. However, there was no global organisation of the protests. He cites an exasperated President De Gaulle, the leader of France, as saying:

"It is not possible that all of these movements could be unleashed at the same time, in so many different countries, without orchestration".⁵ But they had not been orchestrated, at least not at a human level, although angelic control was no doubt at work.

Perhaps the most fascinating point which Kurlansky makes is that there was a link between the protests in 1968 and the victory of Israel in 1967. He writes:

"In 1967 the Slovaks defied the government and the Soviets by cheering Israel's victory in the Six Day War. By 1968 the Middle East had become a favorite political metaphor in the Soviet bloc. It was a sign of trouble in Poland that the Poles, instead of showing their loyalty to Soviet interests, thrilled to the spectacle of the Jews defeating Soviet-trained troops. In March 1968, when Romania wanted to assert its independence, it strengthened its ties to Israel".⁶

The victory of Israel against Arabs armed with Soviet weapons was used by those in Eastern Europe as an encouragement to challenge Communist rule. To put it in Scriptural terms, when Jerusalem was no longer trodden down of the Gentiles this caused the seas and the waves of the people to roar.

In fact, the Jewish connection was even more direct than this. In the October 1968 edition of *The Christadelphian* the involvement of Jews in Czechoslovakia was highlighted:

"Together with the liberalizing policy of Mr. Dubcek had gone a campaign, led by writers and students, for the re-establishment of diplomatic ties with the Jewish state. Moreover, many people of Jewish origin had been active in support of the movement towards greater democracy in Czechoslovakia and, according to the *Jewish Observer*, the position of Jews, anti-Semitism and 'Zionism' (the Soviet term for almost any Jewish activity), had

2. Matthews, R. (1992), *The Illustrated History of the Twentieth Century*, Godalming, Grenville Books Ltd., p. 384.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Kurlansky, M. (2004), *1968—The Year that Rocked the World*, London, Jonathan Cape (p. xvii). Readers should be warned that this book, as with many such books, includes some quotations which contain ungodly language.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

been a central element in the clash between the liberal Czechs and their Communist opponents".⁷

Jews were also involved in other countries that year, as Kurlansky comments: "Jews in disproportionate numbers were active in student movements in 1968 not only in Poland, but in the United States and France".⁸

Planet earth

Of the time of the end God said that "many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased" (Dan. 12:4). As people looked to the moon in December 1968 there was a sign that this verse was truly being fulfilled. Apollo 8 was made possible by a massive increase in knowledge, and the journey to and from the moon is likely to prove the furthest man ever travels.

Apollo 8 brought back incredible films and photographs of the moon. The mission is also remembered for the reading of the opening verses of Genesis 1 by the astronauts. However, ironically, it is the view of the earth which probably had the most profound effect upon mankind. For the first time man could see the earth as a globe. The photograph on the right of the earth 'rising' above the moon became an iconic picture. Such pictures as this are generally recognised as having provided an important motivation to the emergence of conservation and environmental groups. In a report in 1987 the World Commission on Environment and Development stated the following:

"In the middle of the 20th century, we saw our planet from space for the first time. Historians may eventually find that this vision had a greater impact on thought than did the Copernican revolution of the 16th century . . .".⁹

Stephen said of the Jews that "God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven" (Acts 7:42). Once the earth was seen from space it too became a source of worship. Movements such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace focus on the earth and not on its Creator. We should be like Abraham who was a "Friend of God" (Jas. 2:23), not a friend of the earth.

Michael Collins, one of the astronauts on the Apollo 11 mission, wrote of his view of the earth: "I can see it hanging there, surrounded by blackness, turning slowly in the relentless sunlight".¹⁰ That he describes it as "hanging" confirms the truth of Job's words when he said that God "hangeth the earth upon nothing" (Job 26:7). In



The earth photographed from Apollo 8

writing of the earth he says that it "appears 'fragile', above all else".¹¹ It is this appearance of fragility which caused many to become more concerned about the dangers to the environment. Prior to the Apollo missions the earth was pictured in books rather like man-made globes, with countries and geographical features clearly seen. The actual appearance is much different, with the effects of clouds and the blue of the sea much more pronounced.

In this context it is fascinating to see how accurate a description, based on Scriptural intuition, Brother Thomas gave of the planet earth: "This orb of the starry heavens shines with a glory similar to that of its kindred spheres. Viewed from them, it is seen sparkling 'like a diamond in the sky'; and with the rest of the heavens, declares the glory of God, and shows forth the handiwork of Him that did create it".¹²

The new view of the planet which people were left with at the end of 1968 provided a new basis

7. "Israel and the Czech crisis", *The Christadelphian*, electronic edition (2001), Oct. 1968, p. 462.

8. *Op. cit.*, p. 99.

9. World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), *Our Common Future*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 1.

10. Collins, M. (2001), *Carrying the Fire—An Astronaut's Journeys*, New York, Cooper Square Press, p. 469.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 471.

12. Thomas, J. (1924, eleventh edition), *Elpis Israel*, Birmingham, C. C. Walker, p. 1.

for contemplating the world. It provided a visual image for all nations to unite around. It contributed to the sense that a country's problem, such as pollution, had the potential to be a *world* problem. It enhanced the ability of man to worry about the world as a whole. From 1968 onwards people were more likely to think about "those things which are coming on the earth" rather than just worry about their local surroundings.

Conclusion

1968 was no ordinary year. The froglike spirits were at work throughout the world. Moreover, the permissive and humanistic society we live in today was framed very much by what happened that year.

Frank Borman did not really save 1968. But when Christ returns he will save the world from the consequences of 1968.

Moses' last words to Israel

9. Blessings for Naphtali and Asher

David Green

NAPHTALI

Deuteronomy 33

v. 23. O Naphtali, satisfied with favour,
And full of the blessing of the LORD,
Possess the west and the south.*

IT HAS BEEN suggested that there was an initial fulfilment of the first two lines of this blessing in the preaching of the gospel message by Jesus in the land of Naphtali, with his main residence being at Capernaum (Mt. 4:13-16). Certainly that was a great blessing for the people of Galilee, and favour from the Lord for those who hearkened and repented at his preaching, but the lack of response brought a curse rather than a blessing for the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum (11:20-24). Favour and blessing also came to Naphtali in the days of Joshua, in that they took possession of a well-watered and fertile area. This, when seen in vision by Moses the seer, resulted in the exclamation in which the blessing is couched.

Future fulfilment

Regarding the future, the first two lines of this blessing require no explanation and little comment. When the nation of Israel is given a new heart so that they respond to God in sincerity and truth, not only the tribe of Naphtali but all the tribes of Israel will receive His favour and blessings to the full: "they shall call on My name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is My people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God" (Zech. 13:9, AV).

The idea of blessing is connected with the name Naphtali, which is derived from the He-

brew word *pathal*, meaning to struggle or wrestle, for Jacob obtained a blessing by wrestling¹ with the angel of God (Gen. 32:24-28). The wrestling of the Lord Jesus against temptations and human adversaries "in the days of his flesh" (Heb. 5:7), and then against the enemies of God at his second advent, will bring the fullness of God's blessing on all Israel, both natural and spiritual: "with the froward Thou wilt shew Thyself froward [mg. wrestle, Heb. *pathal*]. For Thou wilt save the afflicted people; but wilt bring down high looks" (Ps. 18:26,27, AV).

"The west and the south"

The geographical area allocated to Naphtali in the days of Joshua was north of Zebulun and east of Asher (Josh. 19:34). Heading southward, its eastern border lay along the western sides of Lake Huleh, the River Jordan and the Sea of Galilee with its sunny, fertile shores. This area cannot be described as "the west and the south". In the days of Isaiah and Jesus the land of Naphtali was described as "the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan . . . Galilee of the Gentiles", with Capernaum being "upon the sea coast" (Isa. 9:1; Mt. 4:13-15, AV).

A number of modern versions, in seeking to make the words of Moses agree with the land allocation set out in the book of Joshua, have alternative translations, such as:

"he will inherit southward to the lake" (NIV);
"the Sea and the South are his domain" (Jerusalem Bible);

* All quotations from the NKJV unless stated otherwise.

1. Hebrew *abaq*, meaning 'to grapple'.