

Publishing Editor's column

AT THE TIME of writing these words, war with Iraq seems unavoidable and imminent. There have been massive protests all over the world, often centring on the lives that will inevitably be lost in any American attack on Iraq. When war finally breaks out, images of death and destruction will fill our television screens, and the screams of terror-stricken children and the wailing of bereaved women will echo through our minds. How do we react to all this? Certainly we should be longing and praying for the time to come when there will at last be true peace in the earth. Should we be praying that war might be averted or that it might be over quickly? Does the contemplation of such suffering make us wonder if there is really a God Who is loving and merciful?

We in the Western world have become accustomed to living in a society in which pain and suffering have greatly diminished, though far from being removed altogether. Also, it is assumed that Christianity will be a force for world peace, and that individual believers should desire peace, and even actively promote it. In such an environment it is sometimes difficult for us to accept that wars have their place in the purpose of God, and that to work for peace, or even pray for the world as it is today to be at peace, is not compatible with our belief that God is working out His purpose in the world.

We are more affected by events which come within our personal experience than by those which are remote from us. The same applies in time; contemporary events will affect us more than ones that happened hundreds of years ago. Television has, however, served to change our perception of the world; images of death and destruction from the other side of the world can be brought into our homes. But there were no cameras in previous times. We read with equanimity accounts of massive losses of life in Biblical times. We would react very differently if we were able to witness television pictures of people frantically trying to escape the relentlessly rising waters of the Flood, the wholesale massacres of people when Joshua and the Israelites conquered the land, the ruthless butchery of Jews by the Romans when they took Jerusalem. But it was God Who brought the waters of the Flood upon the earth, it was God Who commanded the Israelites to put to death all the Canaanites, it was God Who brought the Romans upon Jerusalem in judgement.

If we accept Bible teaching we must accept that God is a God of judgement as well as mercy, and that He works in the earth through the actions of men. When Nebuchadnezzar conquered nation after nation, including Israel, in establishing his empire, he was God's servant (Jer. 25:9). War in the Middle East today must surely be fulfilling God's purpose, and it follows that George Bush and even Saddam Hussein may be described as God's servants too. We look and pray for a Kingdom of righteousness and peace to be established in the earth, but the Bible tells us that there must first be much war and bloodshed, and until we are called away to our own judgement it is likely that we shall see much that will distress us and make us long for the coming of the Lord.

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