

years after its destruction by the Israelites, he rebuilt Jericho. But who had allowed such a blasphemous initiative to advance? King Ahab; he was the man!

Notice how similar the language is to that which Nathan the prophet used to reproach King David, after the evil he had brought upon Uriah's household: "Thou art the man" (2 Sam. 12:7). Ahab was "the man" because he had "forsaken the commandments of the LORD" (1 Kgs. 18:18). Therein lies the heart of the problem; Ahab had wilfully thrown aside the Divine yoke and refused to be subjected to the Almighty, the great Sovereign.

"Thou hast followed Baalim"

Though the Law had commanded the worship only of the God of Israel, Elijah could truthfully pronounce to Ahab: "thou hast followed Baalim" (v. 18). The Hebrew for "followed" can be rendered as 'to go away'. How apt this expression

was for Ahab, as well as his courtiers and subjects, for they had all departed out of the narrow way, and entered into the broad way "that leadeth to destruction" (Mt. 7:13). The term "Baalim" (1 Kgs. 18:18) is the plural of Baal, and refers to the many images of the false deity which existed, besides those of numerous other heathen gods (cf. Judg. 2:11,12; 1 Sam. 7:4).

What blasphemy! For Moses had declared: "the LORD He is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else" (Deut. 4:39; cf. v. 35; 1 Kgs. 8:60; Isa. 45:5; Joel 2:27). To Yahweh, the God of Israel, Ahab's idolatry was a gross challenge to His declaration: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deut. 6:4). But the kingdom continued in such evil practices with great fervency, and so the Divine hand of judgement would come severely upon it, and many lives would soon be lost in one of the most memorable scenes in the annals of history.

(To be continued)

From the Editor's postbag

Comments on items received from readers

When Britannia ruled the waves

The January four-page centre spread, "[Britain in Bible prophecy](#)" (p. 17), drew attention to Britain's naval power, which was developed over the centuries. A Canadian reader (prior to publication of the article) has forwarded to me details of a book, *To Rule the Waves: How the British Navy Shaped the Modern World*, by Arthur Herman, published by HarperCollins (ISBN 0060534249). Here is what the publisher's website (www.harpercollins.com) says about the book:

"*To Rule the Waves* tells the extraordinary story of how Britain's Royal Navy allowed one nation to rise to power unprecedented in history. From its beginnings under Henry VIII and adventurers

like John Hawkins and Francis Drake, the Royal Navy toppled one world economic system, built by Spain and Portugal after Christopher Columbus, and ushered in another—the one in which we still live today.

"In the sixteenth century, such men as Hawkins, Drake, and Martin Frobisher were all seekers after their own fortunes as well as servants of their nation. But at the moment of crisis in 1588, they were able to come together to thwart Philip II of Spain and his supposedly invincible Armada. In the seventeenth century, the navy became the key to victory in the English Civil War and played a leading role on the world stage in the years of the Commonwealth and

Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate. The navy's dominance allowed England's trade to boom and prosper. It sustained its colonies, reshaped its politics, and drew England, Scotland and Ireland together into a single United Kingdom.

"It was this system that Napoleon had to break in order to make himself absolute master of Europe. And it was the Royal Navy, led by men like Horatio Nelson, that stopped him in his tracks and preserved the liberty of Europe and the rest of the world. That global order would survive the convulsions of the twentieth century and the downfall of the British Empire itself, as Britain passed its essential elements on to its successors,

the United States and its navy”.

Russia's growing grip on energy supplies

In the previous Editor's postbag ([Dec. 2004, p. 461](#)) I commented, under the heading “Russia resurgent”, on the growing power of Russia after a period of decline. *The Times* in successive issues in December commented on the way Russia's extensive oil and gas resources are making Europe more and more dependent on her. This was in the context of President Vladimir Putin's war against the energy giant Yukos, owned by a Jewish businessman, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a critic of Mr Putin. Mr. Putin's aim seems to be to bring all Russia's oil and gas businesses under the control of the state-owned company Gazprom.

An article published on 22 December was entitled, “We must bow to Gazprom ‘gang’ as West loses its grip on energy”. It drew attention to the way German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has refused to comment on the Yukos affair, saying that it was an internal Russian matter, and complaining that journalists were trying to “drive a wedge” between Russia and Germany. The article comments that it would be difficult to do this, “so tight is the embrace between Berlin and Moscow”, and states that “Germany works because of Gazprom”, referring to the heavy dependence of Germany on natural gas supplied by Gazprom.

There are wider implications than this, however. The article states:

“Does it matter to us if Yukos is expropriated and its oilfields shuffled into the Gaz-

prom portfolio? It matters because the West is losing its grip on the energy business. The oil industry was a creation of American and European capitalism but over the next two decades it will be captured by state enterprises, its future governed by corrupt bureaucrats in the Middle East and Russia”.

Whereas oil production and distribution was at one time mainly controlled by Western companies such as Exxon and Shell, control of actual production has now largely passed to government-owned oil companies, making the countries of the West, especially the USA, vulnerable to political actions. Whereas private companies are only interested in making profits, governments are prepared to use their control of natural resources for political ends.

The following day's *Times* contained an article, “Never trust a former Soviet agent, especially if he supplies your gas”, the former Soviet agent being, of course, Mr Putin himself, an ex-KGB man. The article says that the West is not taking Russia seriously because two key elements of the old Soviet Union are missing: a strong military and an aggressive Communist ideology.

However, they should do, because “Mr. Putin has been developing a new policy instrument: the Russian gas and oil-exporting companies that already all but dominate Europe's energy supplies”.

The article says that the real reason for Mr Putin's vendetta against Yukos is the fear that the company might be taken over by an American oil giant, so diminishing Russia's control. Regarding this control, the article says:

“Gazprom has woven a web of energy dependencies from Turkey to Turkmenistan, from Berlin to Baku. The International Energy Agency estimates that gas will account for 62 per cent of European energy consumption in 2020. Two thirds of it will come from Russia . . . The gas supplied to Russia's ‘near abroad’—the republics of the former Soviet Union—is subsidised. Many countries in the new EU borderlands—Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova—are heavily in debt to Gazprom. A threat to turn off supplies because of unpaid bills immediately destabilizes the country and makes them vulnerable to Russian demands . . . This is brute power and Mr. Putin is the master of it”.

Thoughts on the fulfilment of prophecy

A reader from abroad has offered some thoughts on the fulfilment of latter-day prophecy. His letters are too long for publication, but here are some ideas taken from them:

- Just as the Old Testament kingdom declined in power over the years before finally coming to its end, so Israel in modern times has increased in power. The current Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's forceful response to Palestinian terrorism, coupled with the removal of Iraq as a threat, has strengthened Israel in recent years. He suggests that continuing Palestinian terrorism may lead to Israel annexing West Bank territory, perhaps under an even more forceful leader than Mr Sharon. This would enforce Israel's hold on “the mountains of Israel” (Ezek.

38:8), which must be in Israel's possession when Gog invades. American actions in Iraq make it difficult for them to oppose Israel's taking action against the Palestinians.

- A continuing American presence in Iraq for several years would seem necessary to allow Israel to expand her power. However, eventually America will be forced to withdraw, as she was from Vietnam, leaving a state of disorder behind. This would give the northern confederacy an excuse to invade the Middle East with a view to establishing order.
- The European Union is expanding in area with the coming into membership of ten more countries, and the development of a new constitution may be seen as part of a process of the kings giving "their power and strength unto the beast" (Rev. 17:13). At the same time the major churches of Europe—the Roman Catholics, the Orthodox churches, Anglicans, Lutherans and Calvinists—seem to be coming together in an ecumenical movement under the general headship of the Roman Catholic Church.
- In the USA militant evangelicalism is growing in influence. It is characterised by intolerance of others and enthusiasm for 'big business', both speaking of its origin in Calvinism. It is not only Islam that justifies war on religious grounds, American evangelicals do also, and this appears to link with the gathering of the nations to war foretold in Joel 3, where we have the phrase, "Sanctify war" (v. 9, mg.).

Bias against Israel

In a recent poll asking a selection of British people what nation is the greatest threat to world peace, apparently Israel came out top. This is likely to be because the media is currently on the whole hostile to Israel and pro-Palestinian. A reader has sent me an example of this, taken from a journal called the *Londoner*. The article is about a Palestinian trade fair held at the Arab-British Chamber of Commerce in London, apparently part of a whole series of such events being held across Europe with the backing of the European Union, which takes an increasingly pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel stance these days.

Part of the article reads as follows:

"The purpose of the trade fairs is to boost the Palestinian handicraft sector in the context of the devastation and dislocation of the Palestinian economy. Israel's military occupation of the area since 1967, the construction by Israel of illegal settlements all over the West Bank and the slicing up of the territories with military checkpoints and other obstacles cutting Palestinians off from their lands and markets have resulted in an economic collapse.

"Since Israel illegally occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967, it has either confiscated or declared as closed areas over 55 per cent of the West Bank and 25 per cent of the Gaza Strip. Israel has built 130 illegal settlements in the West Bank, 11 in East Jerusalem and 16 in Gaza.

"The present Israeli government has set up hundreds of military checkpoints in the

areas it occupies in defiance of United Nations resolutions. These prevent free movements of people and goods and are strangling the Palestinian economy.

"Israel has now started building a wall which will eventually effectively annex up to 50 per cent of the West Bank to Israel, severing communities and even individual farms. As a result of all this, trade has come to a standstill, more than half the population is unemployed and average incomes have fallen below the poverty line of two dollars a day".

This article seriously distorts the position by misrepresenting the situation and ignoring important facts, as most readers will be aware. It is typical of much pro-Palestinian propaganda being promulgated, which is preparing the way for an attack on Israel that will be accepted by much of the world. Among the significant distortions are the following:

- The West Bank and the Gaza Strip were occupied by Israeli troops in 1967 as pre-emptive action against a combined attempt by Egypt, Jordan and Syria to destroy Israel. Prior to that time they were under occupation by Jordan and Egypt respectively, having been taken over by these countries during the 1948 War of Independence which arose when the State of Israel was declared under the auspices of the United Nations. There has never been a Palestinian state in these territories, though if the Arabs had been prepared to accept the United Nations partition proposals in 1947, as Israel did, there could have been.

- In negotiations which took place in 2000, Israel offered the Palestinians virtually all the territory taken in 1967, but the Palestinians refused the offer. Instead, their leader, Yasser Arafat, instigated the Intifada which broke out later in the year.
- Israel has set up military checkpoints and is building the wall in order to protect itself from suicide bomb attacks which have killed many hundreds of men, women and children in buses, restaurants and so on.
- The Palestinians were prospering more under Israeli rule than they ever did under Jordanian and Egyptian rule. It has been the Intifada which has devastated the tourism industry and caused severe restrictions to be placed on movement of goods. The current parlous state of the Palestinians is largely self-imposed.

The United Nations remembers the Holocaust

Last January was the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of the biggest of the Nazi death camps, at Auschwitz in Poland. Here alone over a million Jews perished. The event was remembered by a special session of the United Nations, attended by representatives of thirty sen-

ior UN members and survivors of the Holocaust.

In a special press conference the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan drew attention to the fact that the Nazi death camps were built with the intention of exterminating an entire people. Given the current hostility to Israel—some Islamic nations deny that the Holocaust ever occurred and others seek to minimise it—it is remarkable that the event took place at all.

It was, in fact, the Holocaust that led to the State of Israel being established, for it influenced the required majority of the members of the UN to vote in favour of a resolution giving Israel its independence. Since then it has been fear of another Holocaust, this time carried out by Arab nations, that has largely driven Israel's policies and has led to the current situation.

Information provided

Two items in the January issue have resulted in readers writing in with more information. The review "[The temple worship in the time of Christ](#)" (p. 12) mentioned Alec Garrard's model of the temple, and in a footnote I asked for information about its current location. One reader has written to say that in the summer of 2002 it was located in a barn at the Bullock Fair Centre near Harleston, Norfolk. There

is no general opening time and arrangements to see it need to be made with Mr Garrard on 01379-855361.

In the same issue mention was made of the entertainment industry which existed at Caesarea at the time of Christ (p. 29). A reader writes:

"Your account of the entertainment attractions of Caesarea brought to mind *Cornelia's Story*, a remarkable book edited by Brother Alan Eyre and Sister Gerzel Gordon. This historical novel tells the tragic story of an imaginary young convert to Christianity in the decade of the sixties A.D. in Caesarea. It gives a vivid picture of ecclesial life in a hedonistic and violent society. The anonymous author has an extensive knowledge of Roman society and the book is profusely illustrated with contemporary material and has detailed scholarly footnotes".

Attention was drawn to this book in *The Testimony* when it was published (Jul. 2000, p. 274). It is still available from the Christadelphian Scripture Study Service worldwide. The UK agent is Brother Peter Talbot, 6 Ridge Lane, Radcliffe-on-Trent, Nottingham, NG12 1BD, email TalbotPJ@aol.com. UK price £6.20 plus postage.

Tony Benson

Milestones to the Kingdom 2004

The latest edition of Brother Don Pearce's annual survey of the signs of the times is now available. This year's edition has a greater emphasis on expounding prophecy, with four chapters each headed "Prophecies for today", and covering prophecies for the saints, about Israel and about the Gentile nations. There follows a review of events during 2004, under such headings as "The dividing lines in Europe", "The dragon asserts his power" and "The beast extends his embrace". *Milestones 2004* is available in the UK at £3.00 per copy post paid from Brother Pearce at 76 High Street, Hillmorton, Rugby, CV21 4EE; 01788-542408; MilestonesUK@aol.com. Overseas orders please contact local Christadelphian Scripture Study Service agents or the CSSS itself at 85 Suffolk Road, Hawthorndene, South Australia 5051, Australia; csss.adelaide@bigpond.com.