

to the circumstances of life, and, regarding such issues as those raised in this article, the Christadelphian must exercise his or her conscience in the light of Scripture.

This is not intended to be a 'let-out clause', however. The writer of this article believes that a

Christadelphian who happens to have surplus money to 'invest' should remain separated unto God from the world, abhorring the gain of oppressions, and thus refraining from investing in stocks and shares. If this means accepting a lower financial return, then so be it.



Watchman

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The nations gather following terrorism in America

Nigel Bernard

IT IS WRITTEN concerning the days of Noah: "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence" (Gen. 6:11). The Lord Jesus said: "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Mt. 24:37). Whilst the Lord Jesus was alluding to other aspects of Noah's day, and not particularly to violence, nevertheless his words surely lead us to expect that in the days leading up to his return there will also be great violence.

The terrorist attacks in the United States of America on Tuesday 11 September 2001 show that we are indeed living in a brutally violent world. The callousness of the attacks, leading to thousands of people dying, defies the best efforts of the commentators to describe the enormity of what has happened. It is only by seeking help from the Word of God that a true perspective of events can be gained.

In the aftermath of the events, one of the common themes that emerged was that 'everything has changed'. There is a recognition that the world has now entered a new phase. People were quick to make a comparison with the effect that the attack on Pearl Harbor had on America in the Second World War, and the national trauma caused by the death of President Kennedy. But even these comparisons were seen by many as inadequate.

It is easy to overstate things. This is true not only of the world but also of ourselves, who are

alert to any small sign relating to the time of the end. However, it is clear that such an assessment of the events is not an exaggeration. The events have touched the hearts of people worldwide. The world is now seen as a more fearful place to live in.

The US President stated that America was now at war. This in itself is a fearful thing, but the nebulous nature of terrorism, as opposed to, for example, the clear identification of Japan as the enemy after Pearl Harbor, only serves to heighten fear and uncertainty. The Lord Jesus spoke of "men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken" (Lk. 21:26). If these words are intended to be applied to the last days of the Gentiles then recent events show that they are being fulfilled, as men's hearts are now more fearful than they were before.

In addition to an act of war against America, the attacks were also portrayed as an attack against democracy. Soon after the attack the Secretary of State, Colin Powell, assured people that "the spirit of democracy" would not be destroyed. The spirit of democracy in Scripture is likened to frogs: "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth

unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (Rev. 16:13,14).

The frog is a symbol associated with France, and these spirits leapt onto the world stage during the French Revolution. The Statue of Liberty, a potent American symbol, was actually a gift given to America by France. The providential function of the froglike spirits is to bring nations together, and this has been a consequence of the terrorist attacks. The atrocities have been seen as an affront to humanity, and the mourning has not respected national boundaries. At the level of international relations many countries are gathering together to help the Americans in the war they intend to fight. This has included the members of NATO, which has interpreted the attack on America as an attack on all its member states.

In Ezekiel 38 the grouping of nations to the south of Israel is described: "Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto thee, Art thou come to take a spoil? hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey? to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take a great spoil?" (v. 13). There are two main components to these nations. There are the indigenous peoples of the southern Arabian countries and there is the British power of Tarshish, together with its allies such as America. We would therefore expect to see a buildup of British and American forces in this area.

There has been a long-standing presence of both British and American forces in the Gulf, especially since the Gulf War. However, this presence is now going to be dramatically increased. At the time of writing it is suspected that the terrorist Osama bin Laden is the mastermind behind the attacks in America. It is known that he has been operating out of Afghanistan. American forces are therefore heading towards the Persian Gulf in preparation for presumed attacks into Afghanistan and other areas suspected of harbouring terrorists. America is being drawn into the Middle East despite the previous efforts of its present Administration to take a more detached view of this aspect of its foreign policy.

By a remarkable 'coincidence' a British force was already planning to head for this area anyway. An exercise known as Saif Sareea II is due to begin at the end of September off the coast of Oman, and in connection with this Britain is sending its biggest taskforce since the Falklands War.

A consequence of the terrorist attacks has therefore been to further develop the power to the south of Israel, the southern brass mountain of Zechariah 6:1.

Another element of Ezekiel 38 is that Israel will be at rest when Gog invades: "and thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates" (v. 11). In the immediate aftermath of the attacks in America there was an increase in attacks on the Occupied Territories by Israel. However, just over a week after the terrorism attacks in America Israeli forces withdrew. As *The Times* reported: "Israel ordered the withdrawal of troops from Palestinian areas last night in a sudden advance for the Middle East peace process and a boost for President Bush's hopes of building a powerful coalition against terrorism".¹ In conjunction with this, Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader, told his forces not to fire on the Israelis. There have been reports of fighting since then, but it is remarkable that another outcome of the terrorist attacks has been, in the short term at least, to cause "a sudden advance for the Middle East peace process".

In Isaiah 60 God speaks of the lasting peace that will come upon Israel when Christ returns: "Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise" (v. 18). At the end of the passage God says: "I the LORD [Yahweh] will hasten it in his time" (v. 22).

The terrorist attacks have certainly caused events to move quickly in relation to the gathering of nations. When speaking of the gathering of the nations to Armageddon, Christ says: "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame" (Rev. 16:15). These words should cause us all to reflect on our own personal preparation for the return of Christ. The fleshly tendency is to despise the garments of others, making "a man an offender for a word" (Isa. 29:21), adopting a self-righteous attitude, like the Pharisee did towards the publican (Lk. 18:11). Instead we should rather be like the publican, who prayed: "God be merciful to me a sinner" (v. 13).

1. 19 Sept. 2001, p. 1.