

in a cave by the Dead Sea is dated to the second century B.C. or earlier, about a thousand years before the previous earliest known manuscripts. Yet there is no indication that the writer of the scroll considered there to be two books of Isaiah; chapter 40 begins at the bottom of a page. In the case of Daniel, for which there are twenty fragments of eight different manuscripts, some of the manuscripts are dated to the time when the book was allegedly first composed. In the case of other books which were once dated by some scholars to Maccabean times, such as Ecclesiastes and Chronicles, scholars have declared that the discoveries of parts of these books amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls has killed this idea altogether, but, inconsistently, they will not accept this about Daniel because it would mean admitting that the book predicted the future.

- 4 Scholars once thought that the Jews of the first century had abandoned Hebrew for Aramaic, and that Hebrew was revived by the later rabbis as a religious language. Yet Paul, we are told, spoke Hebrew to people who thronged the temple courts (Acts 21:40; 22:2). The Dead Sea Scrolls are in three languages, Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic, with Hebrew being the commonest, and most scholars now

think that Hebrew was commonly used at the time of Jesus.

- 5 From about A.D. 150 onwards Christianity was strongly affected by Gnosticism. Scholars have taken the view that some passages in New Testament epistles oppose Gnostic ideas that were beginning to enter the ecclesias, for example, Paul's condemnation of asceticism and the worship of angels in Colossians 2:18-23, and John's condemnation of those who denied that Jesus Christ had come "in the flesh" (1 Jno. 4:1-3). This was used as an argument for dating these epistles to the second century, thus denying their authenticity. Furthermore, the context of the Colossians passage, for example, contains clear references to Judaistic practices, yet Gnosticism, it was alleged, was the product of Greek thought, influenced by the Zoroastrians of Persia. Some of the Dead Sea writings, however, contain ideas similar to those of the Gnostics, indicating that such ideas were to be found in the Judaism of the first century, or at least parts of it. This explains why New Testament epistles seem to be countering both Judaistic ideas and Gnostic ideas in the same context, and destroys a scholarly argument against the authenticity of some New Testament epistles.

## Israel's enemies in the latter days (1)

Graham Bacon

### A. Introduction

**S**EVERAL PASSAGES in the Old Testament prophets describe attacks upon Israel in the period leading up to the return of Jesus to the earth and in the early stages of the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

In some cases the identity of the assailants is disclosed by the specific use of ancient names, such as "the Assyrian" and "Magog", names which need to be assigned a modern equivalent if we are to understand the geography of the prophecy. In other examples more general terms are employed, such as "the nations round about". In either case the translation of Old Testament terminology into modern geography involves a process of interpretation which may be subjected to conflicting views and the perils of human error.

It has to be recognised that any firm conclusions reached as to the positive identification of these forces opposed to Israel must be based on carefully assembled evidence. It seems that, in the pages of Christadelphian comment on latter-day prophecy, assumptions are made (for example, concerning the identity of 'the latter-day Assyrian') which need serious reconsideration.

The views of Brethren John Thomas and Robert Roberts need to be freshly examined. For example, the former clearly stated that when Jesus returns to the wilderness in the South and accomplishes the events surrounding the resurrection, judgement and marriage supper of the Lamb, he will deal with the Arabs, "by which time, probably, Russia will have made a move

against Constantinople".<sup>1</sup> His concept was that Russia would not get near Israel until the returned Jesus had dealt with the Arabs. Brother Thomas further describes how the "curtains of Midian" would shake, and makes the following interesting statement about the effect of the return and presence of Jesus: "it had cut off all communication with Mecca, to which it would allow no more pilgrimages".<sup>2</sup> His concept of a confrontation with the Arabs, so crucial to today's events, seem to have been lost by subsequent Christadelphian commentators.

By 1877, in *Prophecy and the Eastern Question*, Brother Roberts had converted any Arab references to apply to Britain. For example, when summarising events at the end of the sixth vial, he writes: "they comprise the Russian conquest of Turkey, the reorganisation of the Jewish nationality on a limited scale, war between England and Russia, the reappearance of Christ upon earth, to change the face of the scene". The con-

quest of the Arabs, to which Brother Thomas referred, had gone. This lamentable omission of any reference to the Arabs was repeated in the early 1900s by Brother J. W. Thirtle and others in summarising pioneer writings, setting aside any consideration of the role of the Arabs. We now can see that the Arab hatred of Israel is the dominant theme of current Middle East politics, a situation which would not have been ignored for so long had the writings of John Thomas been given proper attention.

This misguided emphasis on an initial Russian invasion should alert us to the fact that our appreciation of the latter-day implications of the Old Testament prophecies needs to be re-examined, not just from recent developments but, more importantly, from a fresh and unbiased examination of the Scriptures. This two-part article presents suggestions in the knowledge that no one possesses the full counsel of our wonderful Creator.

## B. Zechariah 12–14\*

**W**E first look at Zechariah 12–14. Each of these three chapters contains a time/event sequence, and, for a certain period, they overlap each other.

### Zechariah 12

The sequence in chapter 12 runs from verse 2 to verse 10. It essentially commences with the proclamation of the modern State of Israel, which was, and still is, a partial restoration of the ancient lands, that is, "Judah". This chapter presents Jerusalem as a "burdensome stone" (v. 3, AV) when "the surrounding peoples . . . lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem", as they have done since 1948.

Verse 6 describes "the governors of Judah" as "like a firepan in the woodpile, and like a fiery torch in the sheaves". There is a dramatic aerial photograph on pages 72 and 73 of the book *The Swift Sword* of a long line of burnt-out Egyptian army vehicles, a blackened line snaking out into the desert from the Mitla Pass, destroyed by the Israelis in the 1967 desert war. Judah was literally like a firepan and a fiery torch.

Verse 7 declares that "The LORD will save the tents of Judah first, so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall not become greater than that of Judah". The facts corresponding to this part of the prophecy are that in the War of Independence of

1948 a smallish portion of ancient Israel was retained by the Jewish army but the Arab Legion captured the Old City of Jerusalem. The city fell on a sabbath day, and the rabbis, who refused to walk out as the Arab soldiers approached, were carried out on the backs of the Jewish soldiers. The details are recorded in *O Jerusalem* by Collins and Lapierre. So the tents of Judah were saved before ancient Jerusalem, and the glory of the trappings of Old Testament Jewry was humbled on the backs of Jewish soldiers in fulfilment of this prophecy.

The Old City of Jerusalem was regained by Israel in the 1967 war, as verse 8 indicates, and the promise in verse 9 that the Lord will "destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem" has yet to be realised.

The chapter then discloses the means by which the Jews will recognise and accept Jesus as their Messiah. "The Spirit of grace and supplication" is poured out on them, and "then they will look on Me Whom they have pierced" (v. 10). There follows a nationwide mourning period when Israel will realise the great tragedy they brought on Jesus and themselves.

\* Quotations are from the Revised Authorised Version.

1. *Eureka*, vol. 3, 1921 edition, p. 602.  
2. *Op. cit.*, pp. 599-601.

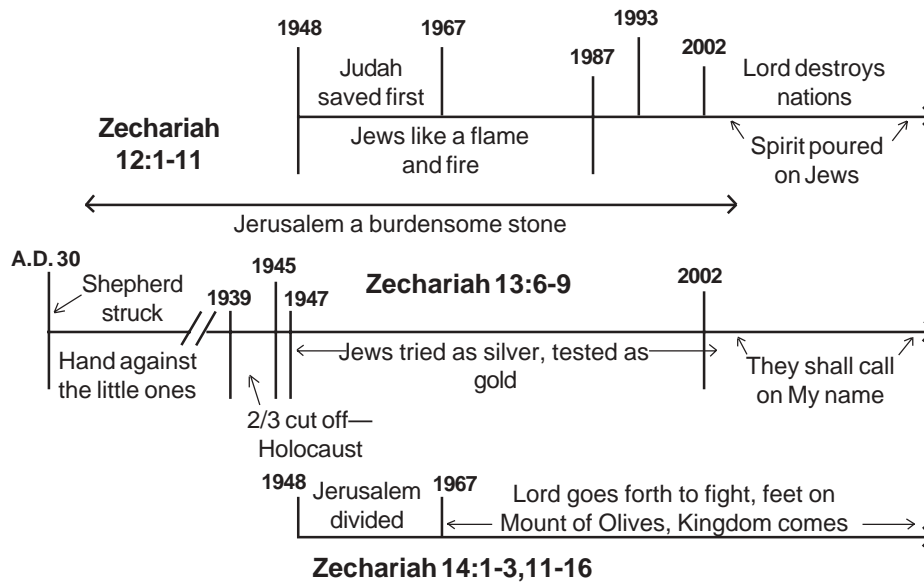


Chart showing Zechariah chapters 12,13 and 14 as partly overlapping chapters

There is a sequence of events in this prophecy which is very appropriately applied to events since 1948 to beyond our present time. In this sequence there are at least three details which apply to the conflict between the Arabs and Israel in the last fifty years. It seems eminently reasonable to identify “the people round about” (AV), rendered “the surrounding peoples” (v. 2) by the RAV, as those involved in the battles outlined above, that is, the Arabs.

**Zechariah 13**

The beginning of this chapter adds some detail to that of chapter 12, but a new sequence is contained in verses 7-9.

“Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, against the man who is My Companion’, says the LORD of hosts. ‘Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; then I will turn My hand against the little ones . . .’” (v. 7). Part of this verse was quoted by Jesus as applying to the time of his arrest and crucifixion (Mt. 26:31), so there can be no dissent about the time of the beginning of this sequence. Here in a few words is foreshadowed the rejection of Jesus by the Jews, and their exile among the nations, which God intended to be a fearsome experience—His “hand against the little ones”.

“ . . . And it shall come to pass in all the land’, says the LORD, ‘that two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it . . .’” (v. 8). The numbers are highly significant. “The

land” is that land in which God’s hand was turned against the little ones, that land about which Moses foretold:

“And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life. In the morning you shall say, ‘Oh, that it were evening!’ And at evening you shall say, ‘Oh, that it were morning!’” (Deut. 28:65-67).

The land in which all these terrifying experiences occurred was Europe. They lasted 1,880 years and culminated in the Holocaust. Martin Gilbert estimates the Jewish population of Europe in 1937 as 8,869,000,<sup>3</sup> let us say nine million by 1939. Six million, exactly two thirds, were killed during World War 2, leaving one third to provide a nucleus to form the State of Israel. The details conform exactly to Zechariah’s prophecy.

“I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested” (v. 9). Only 660,000 Jews were in the Promised Land when the State of Israel was declared, but about one-third of world Jewry is there now. For forty years the defenders of modern Israel were refined, tried and tested in four major desert wars and innumerable

3. *Jewish History Atlas*, p. 85.

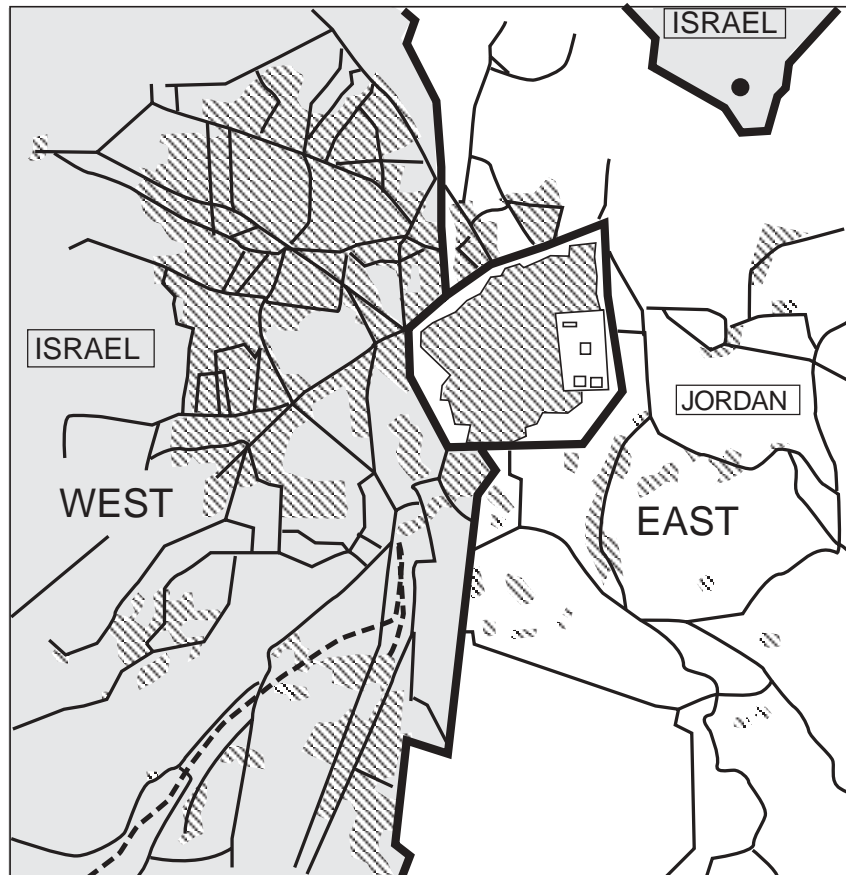
campaigns of terror against them led by the Arabs. The sequence is yet to reach its conclusion when Israel will call on God and be reconciled with Him.

The last sixty years have seen the fulfilment of the major portion of this chapter. The instruments in God's hands to effect His purpose with the Jews have been the West Europeans, particularly the Nazis, and the Arabs. There is nothing to indicate any other outside forces becoming involved.

#### Zechariah 14

The sequence here begins in the first verse: "Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst". The division of the Holy Land between the Jews and the Arabs has existed since 1948, and conflict between Jew and Arab over the land is reaching its climax today. In 1947 the United Nations proposed that the land of Palestine be divided between Jews and Arabs but that the whole city of Jerusalem be administered internationally. The Jews reluctantly accepted the plan, but the Arabs rejected it, and the 1948 war broke out.

"For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city" (v. 2). The State of Israel was declared on 14 May 1948 and the battle for Jerusalem raged for two months. By July the Old City with all its sacred sites had been taken by the Arab Legion. The Jews, after having nearly lost the entire city, managed to establish a line of supply into the new section. A wall divided the Jewish part from



Jerusalem divided, 1948-67. The Old City (centre) was ruled by Jordan for this period.

the Arab section, with a heavily guarded gate connecting the two portions. *O Jerusalem* describes the hour-by-hour details of the fighting in the city, the killed and wounded, the destruction. For the next nineteen years Jerusalem was a city divided in two. Verse two had been fulfilled.

"Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations" (v. 3). There was never such a spectacular defeat in battle of the Arab forces arrayed against Israel as in the 1967 Six-Day War. The Israeli army was across the Suez Canal and on the main road to Cairo when the United Nations ceasefire saved the remnants of Egypt. No prophecy had ever stated that Israel would occupy Cairo or any part of Egypt, and so, under the terms of the ceasefire, Israel retreated from Egyptian soil and eventually returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt.

The prophecy immediately moves to the time when "his feet will stand on the Mount of Ol-

ives" (v. 4), and there begins a long section concerning the details of new Jerusalem and the worship of nations. However, the Arab Legion was the force involved in dividing Jerusalem.

### Summary

Each of the three chapters considered above encloses a time/event sequence in which can be identified several common features. These include:

- 1 A period of trouble for the Jews.
- 2 God's hand in involving and/or saving His people from this time of trouble.
- 3 Unnamed enemies associated with the troubles of the Jews.
- 4 Events associated with these unnamed enemies that can reasonably be identified with Israel's recent battles with the Arabs.
- 5 A continuous sequence which progresses to Kingdom happenings.

In interpreting these chapters and identifying the participants involved there is no occasion for the introduction of any of Israel's enemies other than the Arabs. Concerning the division of Jerusalem, there is no need for any future captivity of the city. It is a matter of some surprise that the halving of the city in 1948 is not generally regarded as the prophecy having been fulfilled. The lack of recognition of the 1948 division as corresponding to Zechariah 14:2 seems based on the outdated notion that this will be done by Gog, despite Ezekiel 38 and 39 being devoid of any reference to such an event.

(To be concluded)

### Comment

Brother Bacon expresses surprise at the end of his article that the view that Zechariah 14:2 was fulfilled by the division of Jerusalem between Jew and Arab in 1948 is not more widely held, and attributes this to students of prophecy holding to the view that it is Gog which fulfils this. Though I am aware that the view put forward by Brother Bacon is held in some parts of the world, I have not come across it in Britain, and I suspect it will come as a surprise to many readers of this magazine. In my experience the view that the fulfilment of this verse still lies in the future is widely held by those who would agree with Brother Bacon that the events of Ezekiel 38 and 39 are distinct from and later than those of Zechariah 14.

In my view, the reason why the idea that Zechariah 14:2 was fulfilled in 1948 is not widely held is that the case is not a convincing one; what happened in 1948 does not fit what the verse says. What happened in 1948 was that part of Jerusalem was taken by the forces of Jordan, and the city partitioned between Jordan and Israel. Significant numbers of Jews did not go into captivity; the part that was taken over by Jordan was almost entirely occupied by Arabs already. This does not correspond to what Zechariah says.

Furthermore, this view still necessitates placing verse 4 in the future, and yet it is fulfilled "in that day", surely the "day of the LORD" of verse 1 in which the nations are gathered against Jerusalem to battle. If this is so, then can this "day" have begun in 1948 and continue to times yet future, even allowing for the fact that it is clearly not a twenty-four-hour period?

Applying this verse to the past is also inconsistent with the fact that the wording of Zechariah 14:2 is very like that of Revelation 16:14, which surely does not apply to 1948. Compare "I will *gather all the nations to battle* against Jerusalem" with "spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to *the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle* of that great day of God Almighty".

Though I believe Brother Bacon is right when he says that the Arab hatred of Israel is the dominant theme of Middle Eastern politics today, and that what is regarded as our traditional understanding of latter-day prophecy does not really take account of this, I cannot go along with his conclusion that the Arabs are the only enemies of Israel spoken of in Zechariah 12-14. Surely Zechariah 12:3, "I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though *all nations of the earth are gathered against it*" (note the link with 14:2 and Revelation 16:14 indicated in italics), refers to more than just the Arab nations around Israel.

One of the most significant signs of our times is surely the way the nations of the world are being drawn to the Middle East in an attempt to solve the Jew/Arab problem. Over half the resolutions passed by the United Nations over the years have been to do with Israel, and we have recently seen heavy involvement by the nations of Europe, as well as the USA, in unsuccessful peace attempts.

Tony Benson