

THE NEAR EAST IN PROPHECY

by Ray C. Stedman

The poet James Russell Lowell once spoke of "... one far-off, divine event toward which the whole creation moves." He meant by that the second coming of Jesus Christ to earth, the reappearance of the historic person of Jesus of Nazareth, not as he came the first time, in humiliation and weakness, as a man among men, but coming, as he himself declared, as the Son of God in power and great glory to establish a kingdom that will include the whole earth, and to rule over the nations. This event once was far off. It seems increasingly to be closer. There are many who feel we are perhaps drawing very near to the time, which our Lord revealed in Scripture, when he would return to earth again. Certain clues which he gave indicate this might be true.

The very fact that we have an overflowing audience this evening suggests that people feel perhaps there is something to this. It seems the events of this past week have served to heighten and sharpen the interest of thousands as to what is taking place in the interesting and historic lands of the Bible.

From time to time it happens in human history that the events which are recorded moment by moment on television and radio, and day by day in our newspapers, are most sharply and clearly commented upon in the pages of the Bible. When this happens interest in the biblical account always revives, and we are grateful for this.

As many of you know, it was my privilege to have been in this area just a few weeks ago, and I followed all of the events this past week with fascination, not only because of my interest in the prophetic parts of Scripture, but also because I could see in my mind's eye the very scenes where these events were occurring.

It would be impossible tonight for me to even begin to set before you in any detail the tremendous amount of information in the Scriptures concerning the nations which are involved in the Near East crisis -- Egypt, the other Arab states of Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, beside Israel itself. Egypt alone has enough about it in the Scriptures to warrant the writing of a sizable book which simply traces events predicted of Egypt in the Scriptures and fulfilled in history. The book is *Egypt in Biblical Prophecy* by Dr. Wilbur Smith. I am sure you would find it highly interesting during this time of crisis in the Near East. Yet it was written of but one nation, and we are trying to cover several in a brief time.

Material about these nations comprises much of the prophetic Scriptures. There are many predictions which together cover the entire scope of the centuries -- some which have already been fulfilled, others which are perhaps being fulfilled before our very eyes, and some which certainly and clearly remain to be fulfilled in the unfolding of history. Whether or not we are seeing events fulfilled according to Biblical predictions is, of course, the focus of our attention tonight. Though I can't show you the staggering amount of Scripture which bears on this question, I want at least to touch some of the highlights.

Let me point out to you several fascinating Scriptures which deal in one degree or another with some of the events which have been before us in the newspapers this past week. As I said, some portions of these prophecies are clearly evident to us as having been fulfilled for a long time. For instance, take a prophecy of Ezekiel in the Old Testament. Ezekiel, you remember, was a prophet who wrote during the time of Israel's captivity in the land of Babylon. During that time Ezekiel was granted visions of certain nations around Israel, as well as Israel itself. In the 29th chapter of his book, beginning with the 13th verse, speaking of the events that surrounded Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Egypt in about 568 B.C., the prophet says,

"For thus says the Lord God: At the end of forty years I will gather the Egyptians from the peoples among whom they were scattered; and I will restore the fortunes of Egypt, and bring them back to the land of Pathros, the land of their origin; and there they shall be a lowly kingdom." {Ezek 29:13-14 RSV}

Now, the restoration after forty years had long since been accomplished, back in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, as indicated, but this verse follows, concerning Egypt:

**"It shall be the most lowly of the kingdoms, and never again exalt itself above the nations; and I will make them so small that they will never again rule over the nations."
{Ezek 29:15 RSV}**

At the time this was written, Egypt was flourishing as the greatest empire of earth. Oh, it was in its decline a bit, but it was yet in the days of the Pharaohs who ruled in power over a wide domain. The prophet simply said that after the conquest by the Babylonians (which was shortly to follow his prediction) Egypt would be reduced to a secondary, even a third-rate power among the nations of earth, and would never again rule over the nations. For hundreds and hundreds of years now, that prophecy has been literally fulfilled. Egypt was never again sovereign even in its own right, from the days of that restoration until modern times when finally it broke loose from Great Britain, and when Nasser overthrew King Farouk modern Egypt came into being. But it has never ruled over other nations since that time, so here is a prophecy concerning this once-great power which has been literally fulfilled.

(I think you could hear better if you would permit me to pause and connect the other microphone. This is really a hot line to the Kremlin. We want them to get the full benefit of this message!)

Now let me show you a passage concerning this area of earth which clearly is not fulfilled yet. It is in the 17th chapter of Isaiah and deals with Damascus and Syria. The prophet begins with these words:

**An oracle concerning Damascus.
Behold, Damascus will cease to be a city,
and will become a heap of ruins.
Her cities will be deserted for ever;
they will be for flocks,
which will lie down, and none will make them afraid.
The fortress will disappear from Ephraim,
and the kingdom from Damascus;
and the remnant of Syria will be
like the glory of the children of Israel," {Isa 17:1-3a RSV}**

Clearly, here is a prophecy which remains yet unfulfilled. Damascus will cease to be a city, and as you read on further in the passage it seems to suggest that this will occur suddenly, perhaps as in some nuclear holocaust or other devastating attack. The accompanying circumstances are not detailed, but the results are clearly stated.

Another prophecy which is still unfulfilled, this one about Egypt and Israel, is found in the 11th chapter of Isaiah. This is one of the great formative chapters of prophecy, and it well warrants your careful study. Beginning with Verse 12 the prophet says,

**He will raise an ensign for the nations,
and will assemble the outcasts of Israel,
and gather the dispersed of Judah
from the four corners of the earth.
The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart,
and those who harass Judah shall be cut off;
Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah,
and Judah shall not harass Ephraim.
But they shall swoop down upon the shoulder of Philistines in the west,
and together they shall plunder the people of the east.
They shall put forth their hand against Edom and Moab, [These are the nations in the
southeastern part of Palestine, east of the Dead Sea and in the area called the Negev]
and the Ammonites shall obey them.
And the Lord will utterly destroy
the tongue of the sea of Egypt; [That is a very interesting note, referring
unquestionably to the Gulf of Suez, an arm of the Red Sea to the west of the Sinai Peninsula.**

The other arm, east of Sinai, is the Gulf of Aqaba, which is so much in the news today, with the Israeli port of Elath at its head and the Straits of Tiran at its entrance. The Egyptian blockade of these Straits helped to precipitate the recent conflict. But the western arm is the tongue of the Red Sea, which is called the Sea of Egypt in the Scriptures.]

**and will wave his hand over the River [That would be the Nile]
with his scorching wind,
and smite it into seven channels
that men may cross dryshod.
And there will be a highway from Assyria
for the remnant which is left of his people,
as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt." {Isa 11:12-16
RSV}**

Exactly what that means, it is hard to determine. Certainly it indicates that there will be some kind of change in the earth's surface in the vicinity of the Suez Canal -- that area where once the children of Israel passed out of Egypt into the desert of Sinai on their way to the Promised Land. It indicates, perhaps, some natural disturbance, changing the whole topography and emptying the tongue of the Red Sea. It is an instance of a prophecy yet to be fulfilled.

Other prophecies are also highly suggestive. The entire 19th chapter of Isaiah is devoted to Egypt. Much of it, most scholars feel, has been partially fulfilled long before this day. At least the opening part of this chapter has already been fulfilled, but the latter part (If you have a Revised Standard Version, you will notice that the latter part of this chapter is in prose, while the first part is in poetry, indicating a break between the parts.) seems to refer to a day yet to come. Some of it, in the light of the events of this past week, is highly suggestive of what has been occurring before our own eyes. Beginning with Verse 16 we read,

In that day the Egyptians will be like women, and tremble with fear before the hand which the Lord of hosts shakes over them. And the land of Judah will become a terror to the Egyptians; every one to whom it is mentioned will fear because of the purpose which the Lord of hosts has purposed against them.

In that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt which speak the language of Canaan [Most Bible scholars feel that probably means Hebrew.] and swear allegiance to the Lord of hosts. One of these will be called the City of the Sun. {Isa 19:16-18 RSV}

Perhaps you know that there is a city in Egypt called "Heliopolis" which, literally translated, means "City of the Sun".

Well, these are interesting, aren't they? We only wish we could know fully all that is involved in these prophecies, but I am simply giving you a smattering of much that is here, to capture our interest, as we contemplate the events of the past week. However, to me the most staggering commentary which could be made on the events in the Near East this past week is that of our Lord's own remarkable predictions, found in three places in the Gospels -- in the 13th chapter of Mark; the 21st of Luke; and the 24th and 25th of Matthew. These three passages together make up what is called the Olivet Discourse. It was delivered by Jesus as he sat on the Mount of Olives looking out over the city of Jerusalem just the day before he was taken, betrayed at the hands of Judas, to be crucified.

A few weeks ago I sat in that same spot on the Mount of Olives, looking out over the Old City lying before me. At that time it was still in the hands of the Jordanians, the Arab people. The Dome of the Rock, a Moslem mosque which stands on the site once occupied by the great Jewish temple, was the most prominent aspect of that city lying there in the sunshine beneath us, as we looked out from the Mount of Olives. I couldn't help but remember the prediction of Jesus which was so remarkably fulfilled some 40 years after he uttered it. It is recorded for us in the 21st chapter of Luke, beginning with Verse 20. Jesus said to his disciples,

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it; for these are

days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. Alas for those who are with child and for those who give suck in those days! For great distress shall be upon the earth and wrath upon this people; they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led captive among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." {Luke 21:20-24 RSV}

Forty years after Jesus uttered that word, it was literally fulfilled in the coming of the armies of the Romans under the generalship of Titus, who later became the Emperor of Rome. The Roman armies came in and surrounded the city of Jerusalem, taking positions on the mountains around it. They built catapults and threw great rocks into the temple area, together with flaming darts and arrows. They besieged the city, and none could go out or enter. Josephus, the Jewish historian, describes for us in vivid detail the awful sufferings of the Jewish people during that time. Conditions became so terrible within the city that people had to resort, finally, to eating other humans in order to survive. Bodies were stacked like cordwood in the streets of Jerusalem. When the Roman armies finally broke through, they were so angered by the long resistance of the Jews that they set fire to the temple in order to destroy the entire area, and the treasures of gold and silver which were stacked up within the temple melted and ran down between the rocks. In order to get at them, the Roman soldiers took iron bars and pried apart the rocks, got the gold and silver out, and thus literally fulfilled Jesus' words concerning the temple, "Not one stone shall be left standing upon another."

From that day (A. D. 70) to this, there has never been Jewish sovereignty over the Old City of Jerusalem nor Jewish control of the temple site. As the Lord Jesus predicted, it was exactly true that Jerusalem was trodden down by the Gentiles. It was in the hands of the Gentiles unbrokenly from that day until June 7, 1967, when for the first time in 1897 years Jerusalem, the Old City, came again into the hands of the Israelites, into the hands of the Jews. This week Gentile sovereignty over the Old City and Gentile physical control of the temple site ended.

The times of the Gentiles actually began with the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar back in 587 B.C. when the Babylonians sacked the city of Jerusalem, destroyed the temple built by Solomon, and took the Israelites captive. Later in the same century the Israelites were restored to their homeland and rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem. But the Jews were not an independent, sovereign nation in Palestine until A. D. 1948, though under a succession of foreign governments they did, for the most part, retain control of the temple and the worship practices therein until A. D. 70. But then came the destruction of the second temple, the second removal of the Jews into exile, this time by dispersion among the nations, coming right down to our own day when we have witnessed the accomplishment, fully manifest in 1948, of the second restoration predicted so long ago by Isaiah in Chapter 11, Verse 11, of his book:

In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant which is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Ethiopia, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea. {Isa 11:11 RSV}

So, from the time of the Babylonian captivity until, perhaps, June 7, 1967, the times of the Gentiles have run their course.

Now, what does this phrase "the times of the Gentiles" mean? What is involved in its fulfillment? That is not easy to answer because this is the only time the phrase actually appears in Scripture. There is a related phrase in Paul's letter to the Romans (11:25) in which he speaks of the fulness of the Gentiles. He says Israel shall be blind to its Messiah "until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in," {Rom 11:25b KJV}. Perhaps this time is linked to the times of the Gentiles.

At any rate it seems apparent that the times of the Gentiles covers the period in which Gentile nations are permitted more or less to run their own affairs under the overruling providence of God, with God allowing them to do very much what they will within certain limitations, interposing only now and then to prevent overall catastrophe or to prevent mankind from destroying itself, as it certainly would have hundreds and hundreds of years ago, had not the intervening hand of God often prevented it. He allows all this to happen (as he announces repeatedly) in order that men may see for themselves the results of human independence -- the choice of evil -- the desire and attempt to run life without any relationship to the God who loves man and who

desires to bless him, strengthen him, and to supply all it takes to make life worthwhile for him.

Man, in his evil, has chosen to go his own way. As the prophet Isaiah says, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have each turned to our own way," {cf, Isa 53:6a}. But, you remember, Isaiah goes on to predict that on the cross God would lay upon the Lord Jesus the iniquity of us all in order to make righteous any of us who will accept Jesus as our intercessor. Christ's resurrection is God's seal signifying that all this has been accomplished and is available to anyone who will have it. Thus the message of redemption is able to go out to all the human race everywhere -- that God is ready to forgive and to restore man to the sovereignty he once had. The times of the Gentiles, therefore, is that period when God allows the nations to run their own course so that men individually can evaluate the results and therefore choose God's Way, rather than their own.

So if, as seems indicated by the words of Jesus, the times of the Gentiles have ended, then we might expect that we are now coming into a period when the events on earth will be keenly and carefully controlled by a Divine hand much more visibly and evidently than before. Now the "times of the end" or the "latter times" or "the last times," as Scripture variously terms this period, are perhaps beginning.

I don't wish to be dogmatic about this. I realize that oftentimes in the past there have been crisis periods -- times when it looked as though the coming of the Lord was drawing nigh -- times when great numbers even of God's people have expected him, have gone to the mountain tops and waited for him, and so forth. There have been those from time to time who have set dates for the coming of the Lord. Of course, all this is in direct opposition to what Christ himself said: "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only," {cf, Matt 24:26, Mark 13:32}

So you can be sure that anyone who sets a date for Christ's coming doesn't know what he is talking about, and that the date he sets is certainly not the time Jesus Christ will come. But it is true, as the Lord himself indicated, that there will be certain "signs" which will occur to indicate a drawing near of his return, and one of them is an indication that the times of the Gentiles have run their course, when Israel will be again in control of the Old City of Jerusalem and the temple site. The very survival of Israel through all these centuries, without a homeland, without a central government, without anything to tie it together as a nation, is one of the most miraculous developments of history. The fact is, it rose again from obscurity, even disaster, to become a nation of the modern world as recently as 1948. And it is now fulfilling the clear indication of the Scriptures that in the last days there would be three major powers in the Near East: Assyria in the north (which is modern day Syria and Iraq taken together), Egypt in the south, and Israel. Certainly this is what we see in our own day.

In all our consideration of these matters we must remember that both in Christ's words recorded in Matthew 24 and in Paul's letters to the churches there is careful indication that the next great event of prophecy is not going to be something we see fulfilled in Jerusalem, or Egypt, or Rome, or any other particular place. The next great event is the unexpected, sudden, dramatic disappearance from earth of the church -- the body of Christ. In First Thessalonians 4:16-17, Paul predicts this very clearly in detail,

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. {1 Th 4:16-17 RSV}

Those words have given great trouble to Bible students. They have wondered when this would occur, how it could occur, what would happen on earth when it did occur, and whether this is a visible or invisible coming of Christ. There is much we could say about this. I merely want to touch upon it, but it is my solid conviction this event will occur before what Jesus called "the great tribulation."

The Lord predicts the great tribulation in Matthew 24, beginning with Verse 15, but especially in Verse 21:

"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be." {Matt 24:21 RSV}

This will be a time of terrible cataclysmic catastrophes throughout the whole earth, whether by nuclear warfare or by the direct intervention of God is not always clear. But it will be a time of violence, of worldwide conflict, of great destruction, of strange, horrifying sores breaking out upon the bodies of men, and of death. All this is described very vividly in the book of Revelation. (This is what frightens most people who read that book.) Yet all of these things will be occurring under the overruling hand of God, precisely according to schedule and running their course to accomplish their purpose as God has outlined. That will be the great tribulation period.

The Scriptures indicate that God will take the church out of the world before this time -- not, of course, the entire body of Christendom (that is, all those who *say* they are Christians), but those who have come into a genuine, saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, who are (to use his own words to Nicodemus in Chapter 3 of John's Gospel) "born again," who have become "new creatures" in Jesus Christ by having received the life of God into their own hearts and lives. These are the ones he comes to take out of the world before this judgment period begins.

This view of the sequence of events is called the *pre-tribulation rapture*. Rapture is the word applied to the departure of the church to be with the Lord. It is my personal conviction that the rapture will occur before these great tribulation events -- therefore it is pre-tribulation. The view which sees the rapture as occurring after the tribulation is called "post-tribulation." There are still other views which are held about the sequence. Regardless of the view of the timing of the rapture with respect to the tribulation, it is clear that Christ's return in power and glory follows the tribulation and brings it to a close. Thus it is my conviction that the rapture precedes the coming in power and glory and is separated from it by the events of the great tribulation.

So, with the rapture and the tribulation in mind, let us consider that the Bible predicts certain patterns of events which will occur before the actual closing of the age and Christ's return:

According to the Biblical pattern, there are four great powers which will emerge upon the world scene during the last days, either immediately preceding the disappearance of the church or immediately following it. (So what portion of the attendant developments Christians will witness before the rapture cannot be determined precisely.) These powers are called by various names in various parts of Scripture.

Many of you know that the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation correspond beautifully, even though they were written hundreds of years apart by two quite different kinds of men. Yet if you compare these two books, you can see that a single Mind has inspired them. They obviously dovetail, with their prophecies and predictions fitting together remarkably.

The second chapter of the book of Daniel constitutes a preview of the times of the Gentiles. Perhaps you would like to read that chapter before you go to bed tonight, because it is an amazing prediction of the whole course of history from Daniel's day until the time of the end. It covers all the intervening centuries between his day and ours, described in the figure of an image with a head of gold, shoulders of silver, thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet of mingled iron and clay. Daniel was told that this image indicated four great world empires which would arise.

1. The first one was already reigning in his day -- Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian empire.
2. It would be followed immediately by a divided kingdom, symbolized by the shoulders -- the Medo-Persian empire.
3. This was to be followed by the Greek empire under Alexander the Great, symbolized by the thighs of brass.
4. That, in turn, was to be replaced by the Roman empire (the legs of iron depicting the division of the eastern from the western branch) which would in some remarkable sense continue right on to the end.

Now, it is easily recognizable that, though the Roman Empire fell about A. D. 800; nevertheless, Roman ideas, Roman government, and Roman forms of thought and modes of living have prevailed in Western Europe and the entire Western Hemisphere from that day to this. The entire western world as we know it today is clearly and definitely Roman to the core, as can easily be demonstrated. So in this hidden, rather mysterious sense, the Roman empire continues right to the end, finally culminating in a ten-kingdom federation of states,

blending their power together (symbolized by the ten toes of the image), comprising the western powers -- a western confederacy of nations in these last days. This is why many of us regard with great interest the trends these days to join the nations of western Europe and the Americas into defense treaty organizations, common markets, and other arrangements. These are not necessarily the fulfillment of this prediction but they may be precursors of such fulfillment.

This western grouping of nations will be opposed by a northern confederacy predicted several places in Scripture, (e.g., Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Joel, clearly identifiable as Russia and its satellite nations. From these opposing confederacies will come two of the great powers. Another will arise south of Palestine, with the fourth coming from the Orient. In Daniel 11, two of the powers are referred to by geographical names -- the "king of the north" and "the king of the south." These would be identified as leaders of Syria, or in a fuller sense, Syria plus Russia (north), and Egypt, possibly with allies (south). The third is the western leader, who is closely allied with the anti-Christ who will be headquartered in Jerusalem, and the fourth is "the kings of the east," probably from China and India.

The 10th and 11th chapters of the book of Daniel are one of the greatest predictive sections in all of Scripture. This section is a bit difficult to follow, because it covers in rather close detail a long, long range of history. Daniel was given a vision of all that would happen between his own day and the time of the end, concluding with the second coming of Jesus Christ. The fact that much of what is predicted here has already come to pass, and most of the rest has been fulfilled partially, in a preliminary way, as is usually the case with Biblical prophecy, serves to reinforce the credibility of all which yet remains in the future.

There is a gap in the coverage of the 11th chapter from the time of the first appearance of Christ until just before the second appearing. This gap is what Bible students call "the great parenthesis," and it can be detected many places in the Scriptures. In this 11th chapter there is a very interesting prediction of all the struggles between Egypt and Syria which took place during the long period before the days of our Lord, including the stirring events involving the Maccabees and others before the time of Christ. Then between Verse 35 and Verse 36 this great gap occurs, passed over without a word, and suddenly the passage views the days of the end. The closing words of Verse 35 indicate this. We are told there,

"... and some of those who are wise shall fall, to refine and to cleanse them and to make them white, until the time of the end, for it is yet for the time appointed." {Dan 11:35 RSV}

Then, beginning in Verse 36, the events which mark these last, closing days before Christ returns are disclosed. There is a personage called "the king" here, a willful king who seems to be identical with the "man of sin" whom Paul describes in Second Thessalonians 2, and is also identifiable with the "king of Assyria" in Isaiah 10. There are also other titles for him. In general, we can call him by the name which John used for him in his first letter -- *the anti-Christ*. Jesus said to the Jewish nation in his own day,

"I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive." {John 5:43 RSV}

You know that the Jews have long been looking for the coming of the Messiah. They still are. And they expect him to be a man of wisdom, power, and diplomatic prowess, who will enable them to solve the problems of the present Arab-Israeli conflict and establish what looks like permanent and lasting peace in the Near East. Such a man will be the figure known as the willful king of Verse 36 in Daniel 11.

Read the description and you can see how this accords with the description of the man of sin (lawlessness) in Second Thessalonians 2:

"And the king shall do according to his will; he shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods. He shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished; for what is determined shall be done. He shall give no heed to the gods of his fathers [That would indicate that he is to be a Jew], or to the one beloved by women [That means the Messiah, the One whom all Jewish women

look forward to bearing]; he shall not give heed to any other god, for he shall magnify himself above all. He shall honor the god of fortresses [That is, the god of force, of war] instead of these; a god whom his fathers did not know he shall honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. He shall deal with the strongest fortresses by the help of a foreign god; those who acknowledge him he shall magnify with honor. He shall make them rulers over many and shall divide the land for a price." {Dan 11:36-39 RSV}

In view of the present controversy over the borders of Israel, this last clause is most interesting.

Turning over to Second Thessalonians 2 we read, beginning at Verse 3,

Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. {2 Th 2:3-4 RSV}

Now, do you see the full import of the Israelis' capture of the temple site this past week? The anti-Christ will establish the seat of his authority in the temple and his true nature will be revealed there. In order for him to be able to do that, the temple will have to have been rebuilt by the Jews on the proper site. They can do that only if they control the site -- but it is this they gained this week!

You can link this also with the book of Revelation, the 13th chapter, where you have two very strange figures called "beasts." The second beast mentioned is called a "false prophet," and seems again to be identified with the willful king of Daniel 11. The first beast is the great political power who heads the western federation, yet to arise on the scene. This is the "foreign god" who is mentioned in Daniel 11.

Now, continuing in Daniel 11, beginning with Verse 40,

"At the time of the end the king of the south [Egypt] shall attack him [the willful king]; but the king of the north [Syria, backed by Russia, attacking from the north, while Egypt attacks Palestine from the south, against this willful king in Jerusalem] shall rush upon him like a whirlwind, with chariots and horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall come into countries and shall overflow and pass through. He shall come into the glorious land [Palestine]. And tens of thousands shall fall, but these shall be delivered out of his hand: Edom and Moab and the main part of the Ammonites. [That is, he doesn't invade the desert area of Edom and Moab but sweeps right through into Egypt.] He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape. [At first Egypt and Russia have been in league with one another, but now there is a double cross and the king of the north comes right on through into Egypt. You can see how the Arabs are setting themselves up for this in their flirtations with the U.S.S.R.] He shall become ruler of the treasures of gold and of silver, and all the precious things of Egypt; and the Libyans and the Ethiopians shall follow in his train. But tidings from the east and the north shall alarm him," {Dan 11:40-44a RSV}

At this point he is down in Egypt, southwest of Palestine. Something is happening back to the east and north in the land of Palestine, and perhaps beyond, that alarms him. We are not told what it is in Daniel, but other Scriptures fill in what happens. The western powers, with whom the willful king in Jerusalem is in league, have evidently sent a landing force into the area of the port of Haifa, at the foot of Mount Carmel. Stretching out some 20 or 30 miles inland, between there and the mountains west of the Sea of Galilee, is the great valley of Esdraelon, otherwise known as the valley of Jezreel or the plain of Megiddo. The Bible says that here, already the most fought-over battlefield of the world, the battle of Armageddon will occur.

So, the western powers land there at the only port which can support sizable forces in Palestine, and their armies drive inland to cut across the supply lines of the great northern armies. Thus "tidings from the east and north" alarm the king of the north. We read,

"...and he shall go forth with great fury to exterminate and utterly destroy many. And he shall pitch his palatial tents between the sea and [or on] the glorious holy mountain; [Literally, in Hebrew, it is "between the seas " (plural), indicating the area between the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. The glorious holy mountain is Jerusalem and the highlands of Judea.] yet he shall come to his end, with none to help him." {Dan 11:44b-45 RSV}

That is all we are told in Daniel about what happens to this great, invading northern army, but if we compare this with Ezekiel 38 and 39 we are told of a great northern army which will come sweeping down into the land of Israel, between the seas. Notice the opening words of Chapter 38 in Ezekiel:

The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophecy against him [These are identifiable for us geographically. Gog and Magog are ancient names for the peoples of the whole area now occupied by Russia, and many Bible scholars feel that Meshech and Tubal are ancient forms of the present names of Moscow, and of Tobolsk, an ancient capital of Siberia.] and say, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, chief of Meshech and Tubal; and I will turn you about, and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you forth, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed in full armor, a great company, all of them with buckler and shield, wielding swords; Persia, Cush, and Put are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer and all his hordes; Bethtogarmah from the uttermost parts of the north with all his hordes -- many peoples are with you." {Ezek 38:1-4 RSV}

These are ancient kingdoms. Persia is Iran. Cush and Put are in Africa, south and west of Egypt, suggesting the initial alliance with the king of the south mentioned by Daniel. Gomer and Togarmah are often identified with Germanic peoples.

Skipping down to Verse 18, we read,

"But on that day, when Gog shall come against the land of Israel," says the Lord God, "my wrath will be roused. For in my jealousy and in my blazing wrath," I declare, "On that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel [There will be a great earthquake. You also will find reference to a great earthquake at the time of Armageddon in Revelation 17:18.]; the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, and the beasts of the field, and all creeping things that creep on the ground, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall quake at my presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the cliffs shall fall, and every wall shall tumble to the ground. I will summon every kind of terror against Gog, says the Lord God, every man's sword will be against his brother. With pestilence and bloodshed I will enter into judgment with him; and I will rain upon him and his hordes and the many peoples that are with him, torrential rains and hailstones, fire and brimstone. So I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord." {Ezek 38:18-23 RSV}

The 39th chapter gives additional details. We are told that the bodies are so numerous it will take months to bury them. Joel adds certain details, too. In the second chapter of Joel, after a vivid description of the coming of a northern army down against the land of Israel, in Verses 20 and 21, the prophet is told by God,

**"I will remove the northerner far from you,
and drive him into a parched and desolate land,
his front into the eastern sea [the Dead Sea],
and his rear into the western sea [between the seas, again];
the stench and foul smell of him will rise,
for he has done great things.**

**"Fear not, O land;
be glad and rejoice,
for the lord has done great things!" {Joel 2:20-21 RSV}**

Then he goes on to show how he will restore Israel once again to a place of blessing among the nations. This includes a prophecy to which Jesus himself referred, beginning with Verse 30:

"And I will give portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes." {Joel 2:30-31 RSV}

In Matthew 24 you will find that Jesus himself says the same thing. In the book of Revelation (8:14-19, 16:12-16) we also learn that the huge armies of the kings of the East come to Armageddon, as well. So all the nations are literally gathered together into the land of Israel for various reasons, some as allies, some as enemies. They all come together into this great valley. Zechariah gives us the final picture when he says in his 14th chapter,

Behold, a day of the Lord is coming, when the spoil taken from you will be divided in the midst of you. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women ravished; half of the city shall go into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward, and the other half southward. And the valley of my mountains shall be stopped up, for the valley of the mountains shall touch the side of it; and you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord your God will come, and all the holy ones with him. {Zech 14:1-5 RSV}

There are many other details which could be supplied from other Scripture, but these all agree together, as Jesus himself said, "Then shall be days of great tribulation, such as have not been since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be," {Matt 24:21 KJV}. And he also said,

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and ... then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" [to establish his kingdom upon the earth]. {Matt 24:29-30 RSV}

To conclude, we can read these words from Christ's own lips, recorded in Matthew 24:

"From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near." {Matt 24:32 RSV}

So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates:

"Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place. [The word *generation* here means "the nation of Israel."] Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage [That is, life was going on normally], until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man. Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect." {Matt 24:34-44}

RSV}

How do you get ready? There is only one way. The Lord says,

"Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matt 11:28-29 {RSV})

The parable of the maidens in Matthew 25 makes clear that only those who possess the oil of the indwelling Spirit of God will be ready for the Bridegroom -- Christ -- when he comes. Are you among them?

Take these prophecies to heart, now, and think about them. Read your Bible. It is the best commentary available on today's newspapers.

Prayer

Thank you, Father, for these amazing words out of your ancient and holy book. How vividly these bring to our minds highlights of the events of this past week, as we see you, the God of history, still moving in the affairs of men, controlling events just as you predicted you would. Our Father, we know that every word of this book will be fulfilled exactly as written. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the words of Jesus Christ will never fail. God grant that we human beings will have the good sense to believe you, the God of truth, and to adjust our lives in accordance with your purposes, and not to insist on running our own lives as though we were God in your place. Thank you for the love which has told us all this, and above all, has sent your beloved Son to die upon the cross of shame in the very world his hands had made, in order that we might be free to be made part of his life, and to enter into the liberty that is in him. We thank you, in Jesus' name, Amen.

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