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(Second of Two Parts)

WAS THE CRYSTAL BALL CRACKED?

Time is shattering Hal Lindsey's predictions.

Hal Lindsey's 1980s countdown to Armageddon isn't being fulfilled by the rise of a Roman antichrist. We found this out last week in the first part. This week we'll find out if his ideas on rebuilding the Jerusalem Temple fared any better.

Along with a sudden rapture of Christians and the rise of a Roman antichrist, Lindsey predicted that the Roman antichrist will make the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple possible by making "a strong covenant" (Dan. 9:27, RSV)* with the Israelis. Accordingly, the Temple should be rebuilt by the middle of the last prophetic week of Daniel 9:27.

In Lindsey's prophetic timetable, that means the new temple should be completed by the mid 1980s, at the midpoint of the seven-year period he said terminates in 1988.

In 1970 Lindsey wrote that with the "talk of rebuilding the great Temple, the most important prophetic sign of Jesus Christ's soon coming is before us."¹ Now we need to ask, During the past 15 years, what happened to this "most important prophetic sign"?

So far all we have are stories. *Christianity Today* wrote in 1967, "A few years ago reports were widely circulated that a prefabricated temple for Jerusalem was seen at a port somewhere in Florida."²

That same year a British magazine,

* Bible texts in this article are from the Revised Standard Version.



The Christian and Christianity Today, reported news "received from authoritative sources in Sellersburg, Indiana" that "500 railcar loads of stone from Bedford (Indiana), considered to be among the finest building stone in the world, are being freighted precut to exact specifications, and one consignment has already been dispatched to Israel. Shipments are being handled by Pier 26 in New York."³

The entire story has been flatly denied both by the Israeli Government and by industry sources in Indiana. Such a fabrication reflects the interest of some dispensationalists to help God out in fulfilling what they believe to be a crucial end-time prophecy.

Theological Objections. The New Testament contradicts the idea of a literal rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple in the end-time. It shows that

the sacrifice of Christ on the cross fulfilled and terminated the Temple services (Matt. 27:51; Heb. 9:11-14; 8:13; 10:9).

The only new temple of which the New Testament speaks is the one being built, not upon Mount Zion during a future seven-year tribulation, but in the present "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:20, 21).

Practical Objections. Rebuilding the Jerusalem Temple on its ancient site meets several obstacles. Most seriously, the Muslim Dome of the Rock and the nearby Aksa Mosque are located on the probable ancient Temple site. Judaism would permit only the ancient site for a new temple. So someone would have to remove the Dome of the Rock. Such an action would precipitate an Arab holy war against Israel, besides violating Israel's commitment to respect the sacred sites of all religions.

The prevailing belief among Orthodox Jews that only the Messiah can rebuild the temple constitutes another practical objection. Because they believe that the Messiah has not yet come, Jews do not feel at liberty to rebuild the temple.⁴ Moreover, before they could consider rebuilding it, they would need to accept the notion of reviving animal sacrifices, which most Jews find repulsive.

BY SAMUELE BACCHIOCCHI

Egypt: King of the South. Another key piece of Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw puzzle looks for invasion of Israel by an Arab-African confederacy headed by Egypt, the prophetic king of the south (Dan. 11:40). According to Lindsey's calculations, this invasion will occur during the latter half of the seven-year countdown, immediately after the inauguration of the temple and its profanation by the Roman Antichrist. But it will prove a fatal mistake because the Russians, the king of the north (verse 40), "will double-cross the Arabs, Egyptians, and Africans, and for a short while conquer the Middle East."⁵

Basis of Lindsey's Prediction. The leadership role that Egypt enjoyed under Nasser, in whom Lindsey saw the king of the south, inspired this prediction. By interpreting the Libyans ("Phut") and Ethiopians ("Cush") in Daniel 11:43 to be "the black Africans and African Arabs, respectively," he predicted that "'black African' and 'Arab-African' countries will be involved with Egypt," first in invading Israel and later in suffering defeat at the hands of the Russians.⁶

The fact that Nasser already suffered poor health in 1970 did not deter Lindsey from predicting that Egypt would become the leader of a "Third World force."⁷

Since more than 15 years have passed since Lindsey made this prediction, we may ask, Has Egypt become leader of a "Third World force" of Arab and African nations? Has Egypt attempted to organize a Pan-Arab African army to invade Israel? The answer is evident.

Lindsey made the error of reading back into biblical prophecies the political situation in 1970. This arbitrary method of interpreting prophecy leads to disappointment, besides undermining confidence in the prophetic messages.

Another key element in Hal Lindsey's prophetic timetable has failed.

Other Pieces of the Puzzle. I won't attempt within the limited scope of this article to examine the remaining key pieces of Lindsey's prophetic jigsaw puzzle. He predicts a Russian invasion of Israel, the destruction of

the Russian Army by the forces of the Roman antichrist, and the battle of Armageddon between the two remaining world powers. We see no indication of these events taking shape now or of their likely occurrence during the eighties.

Russia in Prophecy. Lindsey fits Russia into his prophetic puzzle by interpreting Ezekiel's references to Gog, Magog, Meshech ("Moscow"), and Tubal as predictions about modern Russia and its invasion of Israel. He identifies geographical locations in Ezekiel by looking at a contemporary map instead of looking at a map of the ancient Near East.

But the New Testament applies Gog and Magog, not to modern Russia, but to the hordes of the wicked at the close of the millennium (Rev. 20:7, 8). Thus Ezekiel's battle of Gog and Magog against God's people (Ezekiel 38; 39) takes place, not before Christ's return, but at the close of the millennium.

Recalculating the Second Advent. In 1979 Lindsey explained that the budding of the fig tree (Matt. 24:32) includes the repossession of Old Jerusalem in 1967 as well as establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. This new interpretation enables Lindsey to gain another 19 years, and represents a clear shift away from his fixed point of 1948.

In 1970 Lindsey wrote in *The Late Great Planet Earth*, "A generation in the Bible is something like 40 years."⁸ But in 1977 he said, "I don't know how long a biblical generation is. Perhaps somewhere between 60 and 80 years."⁹

Lindsey endeavors to buy extra time also by shifting the emphasis from 1948 to floating events occurring in our time. In his latest book, *The Rapture: Truth or Consequences* (1983), he makes no mention of the rebirth of Israel in 1948—an event that in his previous books he called "the center of the entire prophetic forecast."¹⁰ Instead, he now uses indefinite time references such as "We are on the verge of this period [tribulation], which will last seven years," or "In all probability, most of the people reading this book will live to experience the answer" to whether the

rapture will occur before, during, or after the tribulation.¹¹ Unfortunately many uncritical believers accept the revised predictions, even when previous ones have proved false.

Impersonal Events Versus Personal Saviour. If we were to follow Lindsey's excessive preoccupation with constructing a prophetic jigsaw puzzle of last-day events, it could have an adverse effect on our Christian faith. It would lead us to look for impersonal events rather than for a personal Saviour. Basing the imminent return of Christ on datable world events leaves us waiting for the establishment of the State of Israel, the repossession of Jerusalem, the rise of a Roman antichrist, the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple, an Arab-African invasion of Israel, and the destruction of the Russian Army by a Roman dictator.

Waiting for such events causes feverish excitement and sore disappointments, both of which undermine the reality and value of the Advent hope. Instead we should follow 1 Peter 4:7: "The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers."

I urge Lindsey's admirers to remember the test of a true prophet: "When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously, you need not be afraid of him" (Deut. 18:22). □

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¹ Hal Lindsey with C. C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, 1970), p. 57. (Italics supplied.)

² Editorial, "Israel: Things to Come," *Christianity Today*, Dec. 22, 1967, p. 35.

³ *The Christian and Christianity Today*, Aug. 4, 1967, pp. 7, 8.

⁴ A. Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud* (New York, 1949), pp. 354, 355; Moses Bottenwieser, "Messiah," *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York, 1904), Vol. VIII, p. 511.

⁵ Lindsey, p. 158.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 77.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁹ Quoted in W. Ward Gasque, "Future Fact? Future Fiction?" *Christianity Today*, Apr. 15, 1977, p. 40.

¹⁰ Hal Lindsey, *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon* (Toronto, New York, 1981), p. 11.

¹¹ ———, *The Rapture: Truth or Consequences* (Toronto, New York, 1983), pp. 1, 23.

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