

# Profits and Prophecy

## *Hayseed Stevens and Oil in Israel*

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*A fundamentalist oil entrepreneur mixes creation science, Biblical prophecy, and revivalist techniques for a program of oil exploration in Israel.*

DONALD U. WISE

When the local Pennsylvania newspaper announced that the Prophecy Club would be holding a three-hour seminar conducted by “Hayseed” Stevens concerning prophecy and oil in Israel, curiosity overwhelmed me. After a forty-year career of research and geology teaching, I had a fair idea of Israel’s geology and the origin of its tiny oil production. Such a case for personal “enlightenment” was not to be missed. The following report on that January 8, 1998, seminar is a small window on the fundamentalist movement in America and its application of creation science.

The Prophecy Club has a network of local chapters, with its headquarters in Topeka, Kansas. It is a fundamentalist

Christian organization with television programs scheduled on eight stations. It also has radio programs on fifty-eight AM and FM stations and six shortwave stations as well as on six satellite channels. Its January/February 1998 newsletter, distributed at the seminar, lists a total of "765 new conversions" and "2,441 rededications" during the last year as "determined by show of hands and public confessions at its sessions." This particular presentation was one of twelve being made from Boston to Spokane by "Hayseed" Stevens in January and February 1998. The newsletter lists fifty additional seminars to be taught across the nation by four other speakers during this same time period, each charging \$7 per person admission. Advertised seminar subjects

include how America is being taken over as part of a "New World Order,"

prophecies of

financial crisis, secret codes embedded in the Bible, and prophecy warnings about governmental plans concerning the use of UFOs to "destroy the religions of the world and switch them to the religion of the Antichrist."

Joining approximately 150 other people, I paid at the door and entered the rented lecture room at a local convention center. At the back of the room were five sales tables laden with video tapes, recordings, and a variety of pamphlets of prophecy and doom. Following an opening prayer, the head of the local chapter introduced Harold "Hayseed" Stevens, who responded with another prayer ended by a lackluster chorus of "Amen." Intent upon engaging his audience, Hayseed requested a lustier "Amen." Eagerly embracing his role as cheerleader, he cried, "If I told you that the Philadelphia Eagles had just won the Super Bowl, what would you say?" "Amen!" "Even better. Now what if I told you that Jesus Christ was coming tomorrow?" A thunderous "Amen!" followed. After finally warming up his audience, Stevens directed the group to repeat after him, "The greatest oil field on Earth is under the southwest corner of the Dead Sea." Throughout the rest of the talk, at about ten minute intervals, he led his audience in this same rousing cheer.

Now, with an involved and receptive audience, Stevens proceeded to describe his early fundamentalist religious life growing up on a sharecrop farm in Texas, his sinful life as a professional football player, and his final conversion to Christian evangelism. According to his tale, one day God told him to go into the oil business. With God's direction he developed Hayseed Stevens Oil, Inc., as well as an international oil com-

pany called Ness Energy International. After a few years, God told him to go drill for oil in Israel and He would reveal the oil's location.

Stevens described going to Israel in 1980 with eleven other Christian businessmen to meet with Menachem Begin. When Begin told them that he knew nothing about oil, Hayseed whipped off his Texas-style ten gallon hat and gave it to Begin announcing that the gift would help him understand the oil business. At once, the miracle occurred! The hat fit and Begin said to him, "Maybe you should be the one to come and find oil for us in Israel." As proof that such an event took place, Stevens showed a photo of the group with a big white Texas

hat in front of Begin and concluded that, "miraculously, within two hours

God showed me the location of the world's greatest oil field. . . . Now

repeat after me . . ."

And the crowd

thundered,

"The greatest

oil field on Earth is under the southwest corner of the Dead Sea."

Stevens described the origin of this Israeli oil bonanza by using a

version of geology straight out of creation science. A large 1992 poster from the Creation Evidence Museum was displayed with the title "Creation in Symphony" as

Stevens gave glowing attribution of the work to his friend, the "brilliant" creationist writer Carl

Baugh. The proposed model involved a 6,000-

year-old Earth with a molten interior at 10,000

degrees. Floating above the molten interior and

keeping the surface "insulated" was a huge

layer of hydrocarbons, the mother lode of

Earth's petroleum resources. Above this and

just below the crust was a layer of water in

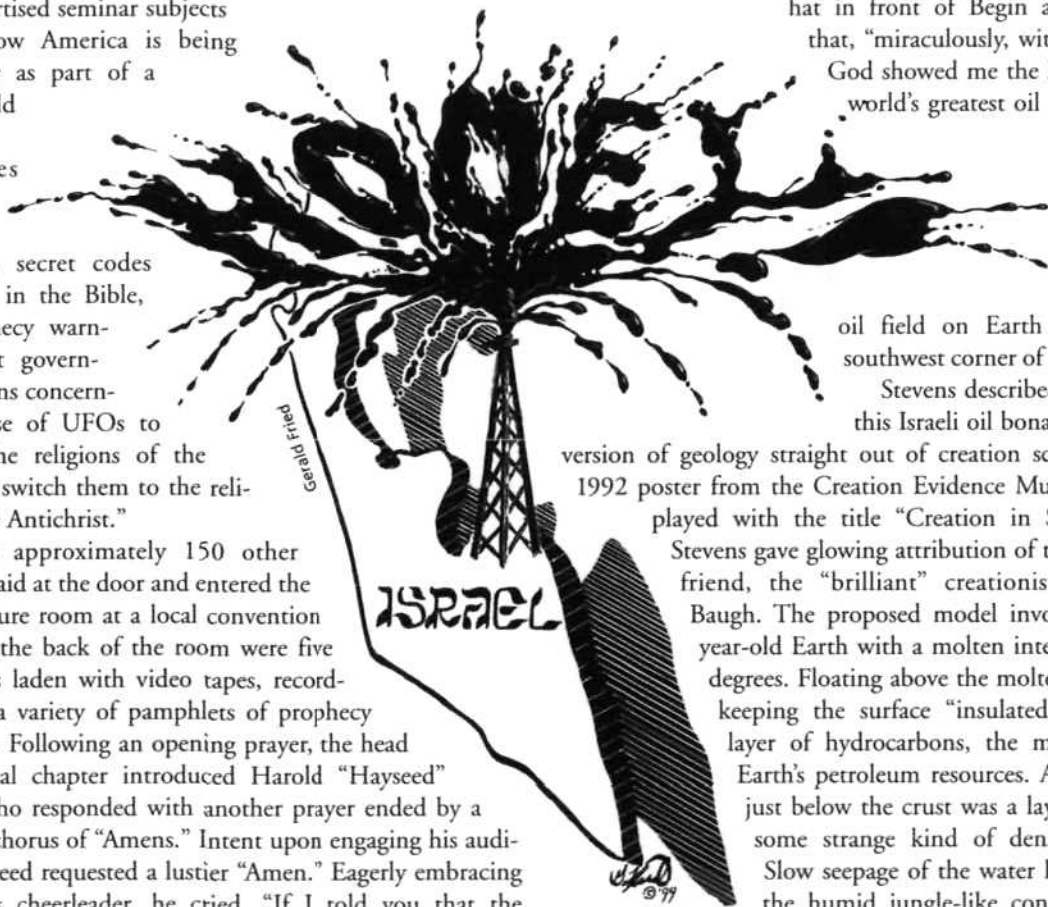
some strange kind of density inversion. Slow seepage of the water layer produced

the humid jungle-like conditions of the Garden of Eden with its great vapor canopy.

To create Noah's flood, God used an earthquake to rupture the crust and allow the trapped water layer to pour forth as the Biblical "fountains of the deep."

According to Stevens, that Dead Sea fault zone marks the boundary of Earth's greatest tectonic plates. (In reality the fault is only a medium-scale plate boundary separating the African plate from the Arabian plate.) After the escape of the

waters, this deep fracture tapped the mother lode layer of petroleum which bled upwards to form the asphalt and tar



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seeps in the region of Sodom and Gomorrah. According to Stevens's interpretation of prophecy, God originally intended all this oil to be the basis of Israel's future riches and greatness. But unfortunately, the people became evil and undeserving so God caused the fault to move. The resulting friction ignited the oil and it exploded under Sodom and Gomorrah. Somehow the heat was so intense that it created an "entirely new form of sulfur which melted at 10,000 degrees and rained down on those evil people as fire and brimstone." The intensity of the heat converted the rock to salt (a chemical process that would certainly have delighted the alchemists of the Middle Ages). As evidence of this, Hayseed showed satellite photos and crude versions of Geological Survey of Israel seismic cross sections with a big salt plug at the southwest corner of the Dead Sea basin in the vicinity of Sodom and Gomorrah. Encouraged, the audience enthusiastically joined him in his incantation, "The greatest oil field on Earth is under the southwest corner of the Dead Sea!"

Returning to his satellite photos, Stevens explained that the new salt plug blocked the upward flow of the huge petroleum layer destined for Israel. Thus diverted, the oil flowed eastward into the great reservoirs of the Middle East. Even though a geologic plumbing system that would allow this flow is almost impossible to imagine, problems such as that were never discussed. Instead, Stevens changed direction to focus on the fact that 85 percent of the world's known oil resources are presently under Islamic control. He assured his audience that with his drill hole through the salt plug to tap the mother lode of petroleum, he would change that imbalance by making Israel the greatest oil producing nation on Earth. Quoting Isaiah 60:5 he declared, "Then you shall see and be radiant, your hearts shall thrill at the glorious deliverance; because the abundant wealth of the Dead Sea shall be turned to you. Unto you shall the nations come with their treasures."

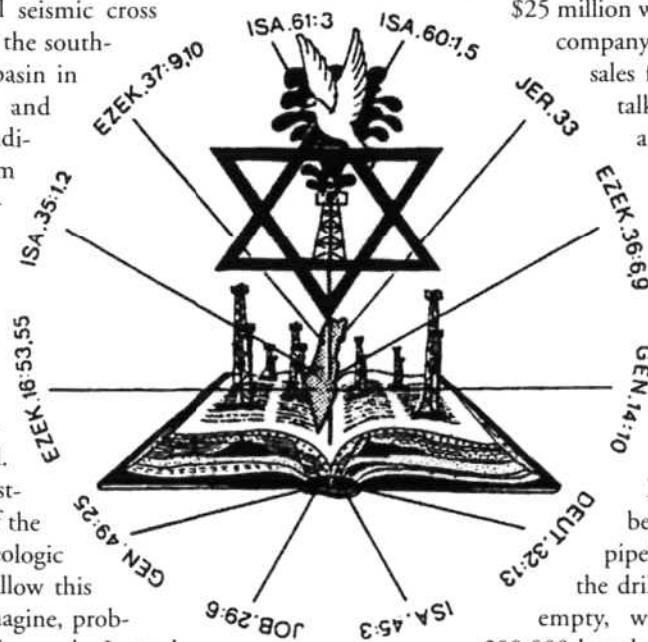
Stevens pointed out that this drill site along the Dead Sea is at the lowest point on Earth and as everyone knows, fluids flow downhill. Thus, the well will not only tap the mother lode but will eventually drain the Arabian oil fields (by some unstated but geologically unthinkable mechanism). In accord with prophecy, the enraged Arabs will attack Israel at the final battle of Armageddon. The plains near Mt. Carmel, according to Stevens, cover a vast reservoir of oil, and it is across these plains that the Arabs will attack. God will ignite the underlying oil to incinerate the Arabs and ensure the victory of the righteous, at least according to Stevens's reading of the book of Revelations.

My strongest impression of the evening was of the interplay of prophecy, prophets, and profits. The entire talk was sprinkled with overhead projections and handouts of about twenty verses of Biblical prophecy. Most prophecies were supplemented by Stevens's interpretation inserted in parentheses. Considerable strain seemed to be required of the English language to make Biblical statements conform to oil exploration and the present world of geopolitics. However, once these prophecies were accepted there could be no doubt that, "Repeat after me . . . !"

In 1985 Stevens organized a consortium to drill at the Dead Sea site, but the drill string sheared off at about one mile depth. He is now planning to drill a 19,000-foot, \$25 million well through the salt plug, and his company is about to offer public stock sales for this venture. If the evening's talk was a promotion, it was done as a soft sell but the phone number listed on the handouts to reach his company was clear, as was the possibility of merging prophecy with profits. Stevens pointed out that God's plans even include the former Shah of Iran's financing of a 42-inch oil pipeline that was completed across Israel from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, but never used because of the Shah's fall. This pipeline passes within a few miles of the drill site and is now standing there empty, waiting to take the supposed 200,000-barrel-a-day production that will result just as soon as the well is completed.

The more immediate financial aspects of the evening were well covered starting with the \$7 admission charge (\$7 × 150 = \$1,050) to cover rental of the room, etc. The plethora of video tapes for sale, mostly at \$20 to \$40, certainly met their production cost as did several thin pamphlets selling at \$5 to \$10 each. Considering the admission cost it was surprising to see an additional offering with helpers passing collection plates through the audience. The number of \$10 and \$20 bills and personal checks in those plates was impressive. Following the mid-evening break Stevens proceeded to extol the great works done by the Prophecy Club and to propose that this warranted an unheard-of *second* special collection. He noted that no one should feel any pressure to contribute and that this offering should be from the heart. He made a show of announcing his personal check for \$1,000. As the plate was passed this second time, he kept rephrasing the theme that this offering should be voluntary, that there was no peer pressure to do God's work, and so on. I watched in amazement as people around me wrote additional checks and put more \$10 and \$20 bills into the plate.

The evening concluded with a revival-style prayer session



complete with exhortations to anyone who had sinned and wanted redemption to raise their hands while everyone, with one exception, bowed their heads. Stevens acknowledged these secret hands and counted them as part of the increasing list of recipients needing prayer. With an "Amen," Stevens invited everyone who felt the evening had been a success to stand and let it be known. In response, 149 people stood, waved their hands in the air and shouted "Hallelujah" and "Amen."

Hayseed Stevens folded his oil operations into and took over the Kit Karson Corporation, a 19-year-old oil company listed as KTKC on the NASDAQ. In 1996 KTKC reported its total assets as \$1,604 with a net loss of \$1,179. After the takeover, the July 23, 1998, SEC annual report for KTKC lists Stevens as president, holding 56.5 percent of the common stock, which has "no par value."

The latest Church of the Mail Newsletter from Hayseed Stevens announced that on October 13, 1998, the Israel Oil Company had granted him drilling rights for 32,000 acres at the southwest end of the Dead Sea. The first was well slated for April 2000 at a cost of \$30 million and an expected depth of 19,000 feet. To judge the effect of this news on the market, the December 8 share price of KTKC was \$0.24, nearly its lowest point in a 52-week trading range of \$0.21 to \$13.75. In early summer 1999 KTKC changed its name on the NASDAQ to NESS, one of Hayseed's early names for his company. On July 2, 1999, NESS traded at \$0.48 per share.

Whatever happens with his oil explorations, I'll always find that January evening one to be remembered and certainly one not easily confused with any other lecture on oil resources. "Right now we are only one well short of finding (repeat after me) the greatest oil field on Earth . . ." □

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