

THE DAY WHEN “HELL AND ITS FURY” VISITED VICTORIA



Feb 09. The second week of February witnessed the worst wildfires in Australia's history.

At least 400 separate bush (forest) fires were racing across the state of Victoria bringing enormous destruction to forests, towns, human lives, animals and wildlife. Several towns were literally wiped out, including Marysville. (see below)

By the end of the week the death toll rose by eight to 181, but has since increased to 200. The final number will be more as more bodies are found, and as some of the serious burn cases die. More than 100 people had been admitted to hospitals across Victoria with burns. At least 20 were in critical condition.

The inferno has led to the destruction of more than 1,500 homes with some towns totally razed to ashes. More than 7,000 people were left homeless.

Fires are a regular occurrence in the Australian bush, but no-one was ready for the conflagration that raced through the forests and many towns of the state on Saturday Feb 7.

The fires occurred during an exceptional heat wave, on a day when several localities across Victoria experienced their highest temperatures - 47-48°C (117-119°F) since records began in 1859.

Fierce winds fueled the fires at up to 120km per hour. Huge fireballs raced through fields, cars, houses, shops and schools. It took only a few minutes for smoke on the horizon to become an inferno engulfing homes.

One witness described this scene: Barely 2 minutes passed from when he first heard the roar of blaze until his house burst into flames. The blaze raced across pine plantations, driven by fierce winds that launched a barrage of fireballs onto the town. All those pine trees started to explode, and embers “the size of your fist” started falling from the sky. Cars simply melted.

Some house owners who chose to stay and defend their homes, lost their lives.

Shocking stories came out of the horrific disaster. The remains of four children were found huddled together. A man trying to escape on his motorbike, crashed it, and he died as he tried to outrun the fires.

Another man put his children in the car and dashed back to the house to collect something. When he returned the car was on fire and the children were dead.

The Country Fire Authority (CFA) has defended its firefighters and the "stay and defend" policy, but "people need to understand that a late departure is the most deadly," a CFA official said. "We have said, and it is clearly evident, that fires can come without warning and very rapidly, and that you may not receive a warning and that you may not have a fire truck at your front gate."

The majority of the deaths occurred during the first weekend but fires continued to threaten towns across a huge area north and east of Melbourne the following week.

The Churchill Jeeralang fire has so far ravaged 40,000ha. It has a 130km perimeter.

Twenty-one people have so far been found dead in the ruins of the Gippsland inferno.

Fires in East Kilmore, between Yea and Seymour, started on Saturday and merged with the Yea-Murrindindi fire creating the massive Kinglake Complex fire. This fire has burnt almost 230,000 hectares, destroyed 550 homes and killed at least 147 people in a wide area from Wandong, north of Melbourne, to Marysville and Taggerty.

The worst hit towns were Kinglake, Strathewen, St Andrews and Marysville.

Police are now working their way, road by road, house by house, in search of fire victims.

In the third week of the disaster, about 4,000 firefighters were still battling nine blazes, but which were not thought to be life-threatening.

US firefighters from the US and New Zealand have arrived in Victoria to join the ranks of Australian crews to tackle remaining fires.

At the same time, dozens of fires were blazing in the neighboring state of New South Wales.

"MARYSVILLE INFERNO COULDN'T BE STOPPED"

Marysville is being referred to as [Ground Zero of Black Saturday](#). The inferno that wiped the quaint town off the map was spewing flaming branches kilometres ahead of the fire front, a survivor says.

The man said the town went from being under [no threat](#) to [under siege](#) in minutes and there was nothing anybody could do. "The firestorm that enveloped the town is something that I'll never forget." The evacuation was a shambles and the fire was travelling at such speed there was no time to warn people.

He said he evacuated with about two minutes to spare and watched from the Buxton-Marysville Road as the town was swallowed by the flames. "It was like a big cauldron that was boiling over and it was running over the lip, you could see the cloud sort of rolling, which was the fire front and the wind."

The blaze is believed to have claimed about 100 people - one fifth of Marysville's population.

"The people that went back later said, "It's absolute decimation, everything is just powder and ash, it's a modern day Dresden, you know Dresden that suffered the bombing in the Second World War."

SOME FIRES DELIBERATLY LIT BY ARSONISTS

The numerous fires are largely the result of lightning strikes – but some are suspected to be the result of arson. These suspicions led police to declare more than half of the state [a crime scene](#).

Forensic teams of investigators are now moving into burned out houses and farms, looking for evidence of how the infernos were started, and who could have lit them.

Victorian Police Chief Commissioner Christine Nixon said police were continuing to investigate whether arsonists caused more of the devastating bushfires.

She said police now believed the Churchill fire, which claimed 21 lives, and the Marysville fire, where 100 people died, were deliberately lit. And police were prepared to lay a charge of murder by arson - with a 25-year jail penalty - against anyone believed to have caused one of the fatal bushfires.

Prime Minister Rudd suspended parliament and toured the affected region. "What can you say? What can you say?" asked a shaken Rudd. "There are no words to describe it other than mass murder," he said.

A MILLION ANIMALS MAY HAVE PERISHED

Hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, of animals and native wildlife may have perished in Victoria's fire inferno.

"It is devastating, the actual size of the destruction is devastating to a number of wildlife populations. Not just pets and farm animals, but also there are gliders and all sorts of possums, bandicoots, birds ... there's so much wildlife," said a spokeswoman.

RSPCA shelters and inspectors have been working around the clock to provide emergency assistance also to family pets, livestock and wildlife hurt in the ferocious Victorian bushfires. "We are able to offer short term emergency accommodation and veterinary care to pets at our shelters across Victoria." The animals are then being treated and assessed by vets at nearby shelters, who make the agonising decision about which ones need to be euthanased.

MEMORIAL SERVICES HELD ACROSS AUSTRALIA

Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd promised to provide support for the communities ripped apart by the disaster. "We rebuild, and we rebuild together," he told mourners at one of a number of memorial services on Feb 15. "And not just for tomorrow, and not just for next week, and not just for next month, but until this community is rebuilt completely."

More than \$100 million was raised from the public during the week, to aid victims of the inferno. A DAY OF MOURNING will be held on Sunday Feb 22nd.

A FORETASTE OF THE GREAT TRIBULATION

The Victorian inferno brings to mind the prophecy of Malachi.

"Look! The day is coming, **burning like a furnace** ... and the day that is coming will set them ablaze, says YHWH of Hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." (Malachi 4:1)

The great prophet, Isaiah, also refers to the seven-year Tribulation - a fiery judgment:

"The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants, for they have transgressed the teachings, changed the laws, and broken the everlasting covenant.

Therefore a curse devours the earth, and those who live in it are held guilty. Therefore **the inhabitants of the earth are burned up**, and few men are left." (Isaiah 24:5-6)

"By the fury of YHWH of Hosts **the land is burned up**, and the people are like fuel for the fire." (Isaiah 9:19)

These passages are speaking of the Tribulation judgment. What we have seen recently, in the horrendous fires in California, Greece and Victoria, as well as the earthquakes, cyclones and famines, may not yet be judgments – but they are indeed warnings of the judgment to come on the whole world, because of the wickedness that is multiplying throughout the nations.

We – the nations – are living in the "days of Noah" when then world was filled with corruption and violence. (Genesis 6:11). And we have a clear message from the words of the apostle Paul:

"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent because He has fixed a day in which **He will judge the world in righteousness** through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:30-31)

But the apostle Paul also gives the word of the Gospel:

"**THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART** – that is, the Word of faith which we are proclaiming, that if you confess with your mouth Y'shua as *Master*, *LORD*, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart man believes, *resulting* in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, *resulting* in salvation. For the Scripture says, **WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED**. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek (*Gentile*); for the same Master, the *Master* of all, is

rich to all who call upon Him, for **WHOEVER WILL CALL UPON THE NAME OF YHWH-Y'SHUA the LORD WILL BE SAVED.**" (Romans 10: 8-13)