



Signs

Recognizing the times

By

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Signs – recognising the times

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INTRODUCTION

A memorable event for any Christian is the first time they have the privilege of standing on the Mount of Olives and look out over Jerusalem. If we were brought up in a Christian home, we will have heard so much about the place. Jerusalem is not just part of the Jews history. It is our history.

The Mount of Olives is very special for another reason. It is the place where one day Jesus Christ will return to this earth. We may not be able to tell you the day or hour of His return but within a few hundred yards we can tell you where He will return to. Jesus will come back to this earth as a man and stand upon the Mount of Olives. He will come as a glorified man with an appearance like that described by John at the beginning of the book of Revelation, but still a man.

Why does He need to come back to this earth?

To accomplish much of what is prophesied there is no need for Him to set foot again on this planet.

He does not need to set foot on the earth for the church. *"Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."* 1 Thessalonians 4: 17. Our assurance is that one day Jesus will appear and gather His church up into the clouds.

Nor does He need to return to pour out His wrath on a rebellious world. *"Then I heard a loud voice from the Temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth". Revelation 16: 1.* We understand from Revelation that these judgments are poured out from heaven.

It is not to renew creation that He comes. *"Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for a new heaven and a new earth in*

which righteousness dwells.” 2 Peter 3: 13. When Jesus returns He will restore creation, but our ultimate hope is a new heaven and a new earth.

And it is not to judge the wicked. *“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great standing before God, and the books were opened...” Revelation 20: 11,12.* That judgment takes place before the throne of God when neither heaven nor earth are present.

The only reason for Jesus to return to this earth is His unfinished business with Israel. The angel Gabriel said to Mary that the child that she would bear would one day be given the throne of David. *“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” Luke 1: 30 - 33*

Jesus will come back to reign. He will establish an eternal kingdom from Jerusalem. He will come at a time when Israel is facing her greatest ever calamity. He will fight for them as their king. At that time all Israel will recognise Him as their Messiah and cry out, *“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” Matthew 23: 39*

It is for this reason we recognise that when considering the end of the present age our focus needs to be on Israel and Jerusalem. In these last days Satan will do all in his power to frustrate the purpose of the Father to establish his King in Jerusalem.

Dates

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angel of heaven, but my Father only.” Matthew 24: 36

Almost from its inception the church has suffered from those who have predicted the date of the Second Coming. There have been literally hundreds of predictions. Nearly all are based on mathematical calculations of one form or another. Speculating on the day or hour seems to be doing exactly what Jesus warned us not to do.

We are not to predict dates, but Jesus did encourage us to look for signs. One example is the statement in Matthew's gospel, *"Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather"* Matthew 24: 27 NASB. This imagery would have been readily understood by what was a largely agricultural community. The circling vultures would be a sign that told a shepherd where his lost sheep had died.

One problem with date predictions of the past is that the scriptural signs were not present. Until the signs existed there was no point in looking for the return of Christ. But now that some of the major signs are present and the remaining ones could be fulfilled at any time we should be looking up in expectation.

First, there is a question which needs to be answered.

Does it matter?

Does the ordinary Christian need to know whether or not we are living in the last days? Many would respond that it is unimportant. They would say that we need to keep living our Christian lives, witnessing where we can and leave the timing of the Lord's return to Him. Jesus will come when He comes and there is nothing we can do about it. This is naive thinking. There are three very important reasons why we need to recognise that we are living at the close of the age.

1. To counter disillusionment
2. To be prepared
3. To pray

To counter disillusionment

In the UK over the last 40 years there have been many initiatives to counter the slide into a godless society. Christians have been encouraged again and again to campaign and pray in order to turn the nation around. Despite all our efforts the rejection of Christ has continued apace. Besides the initiatives there have been frequent false prophecies of imminent revival. Unfulfilled false hopes have discouraged, even demoralised many Christians. But what if God has already told us not to expect either a revival or restoration of our nation to faith in him?

An army may be given the order to attack or it may be ordered to hold its ground. These two orders require very different strategies.

By understanding the times we recognise we are heading towards the final end time rebellion against God. A counter offensive is coming which will sweep away all evil before it. But that offensive is not quite ready yet. For now we are here to hold the ground. We should battle to protect areas such as freedom of speech and stand with those suffering discrimination. We should seek to proclaim the gospel as long as the opportunity exists so that some will be saved. But we also recognise that in this hour we will lose many battles. There will come a time when open witness is impossible. A time when a false religion is promoted and the truth despised. We who recognise the times will not be discouraged. Victory will soon be ours when our king returns.

To be prepared

The need to be prepared is covered in the booklet 'Watch - preparing for the unexpected'. Jesus stressed that in these last days we need to watch. As we study his teaching we understand that to watch means to be prepared. We are not to take for granted that we will stand in these last days. Only in His strength will we overcome the enemy.

To pray

What happens in the coming years can be influenced by prayer. Some teach prophecy as if the end time events will run according to a predetermined pattern. For them it is all mapped out in great detail. This is an error, because it fails to recognise the power of prayer.

“Then He spoke a parable to them that men always ought to pray and not lose heart”, Luke 18: 1. In this parable (Luke 18: 1-8) Jesus praised the persistent widow. *“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” Luke 18: 8.* This last verse sets the context of the story as the time of Christ’s return. The point being that especially as this age draws to a close, we are to pray and not give up.

“On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; all day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the Lord. Take no rest for yourselves; and give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.” Isaiah 62: 6,7. We are to pray because not everything is predetermined. All prophecy will be fulfilled right down to the tiniest detail. There is not one scriptural prophecy which will not come to fruition. But the manner in which they are fulfilled is flexible.

By holding to rigid interpretations of prophecy both the priests and disciples failed to understand the nature of Jesus’ ministry. In our time we are also in danger of failing to recognise that Jesus may act in ways we do not expect. There are many events where a range of outcomes will still perfectly fulfil prophecy. Therefore we are to pray.

In these final days when Satan’s power will reach its zenith, prayer is a powerful weapon to use against him. But if we do not understand the battle in which we are engaged it will be used ineffectively.

Sign 1 - Israel

Replacement Theology teaches that the mission and promises to Israel all transferred to the Church. It is held that in rejecting their Messiah Israel was rejected by God. We accept that Christians have inherited the blessings that God promised to His people. Jesus warned that many Gentiles will sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out. Matt 8: 11. But that does not mean that God no longer has a plan for Israel.

The Jews will not be rejected for ever.

We explained in the introduction, that if the church has replaced Israel there would be no reason for Jesus to physically return to the earth. All could be fulfilled from heaven. Jesus returns physically to this world for the sake of Israel. Within the English Protestant church there has been an historic belief that the return of the Jews to the Land must precede the Second Coming.

It is recorded that C.H. Spurgeon did not major on preaching on the Second Coming of Christ. His reason being that one primary precondition had not been fulfilled. To quote him; "I imagine that you cannot read the Bible without seeing clearly that there is to be an actual restoration of the Children of Israel". Spurgeon understood that the Jews must return to Israel before Jesus could come again. Until that time he considered that our priorities lay in fulfilling the great commission.

The 19th Century Bishop of Liverpool J C Ryle also spoke on this subject. "I believe that the Jews shall ultimately be gathered again as a separate nation, restored to their own land, and converted to the faith of Christ." Ryle saw in scripture that the Jews would first be gathered as a nation to their land and then converted.

In Britain in the 19th Century there was a groundswell of support for the return of the Jews to Israel. 'The Destiny of Britain' is the title of a DVD by Hugh Kitson. It goes into much more detail on this subject. If you haven't watched it, get hold of a copy.

Scripture confirms the return of the Jews

"For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that a blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins."Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable." Romans 11:25 -29

In Romans 11 the salvation of the Jews is promised following the completion of God's work among the Gentiles. A deliverer will come to remove their ungodliness, because they have an irrevocable calling from God.

"Then I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; then I will say to those who were not my people, you are my people! And they shall say you are my God!." Hosea 2: 23.

Hosea 2: 14 – 23 confirms that the rejection of Israel is not final. At the beginning of Hosea, God says that He will no longer have mercy on Israel and they will no longer be His people. In this later part of the prophecy God assures Israel that this judgment will not be final. One day the Lord will betroth Israel to Himself forever.

The prophecy goes on to warn that because of her sins Israel will have to abide many days without Prince and sacrifice. Afterwards in the last days they will come trembling to the Lord, Hosea 3: 4-5.

First gathered then cleansed

It is sometimes argued that the promise of return in Deuteronomy 30: 3 is conditional on repentance. Therefore the present return of the Jews cannot be a fulfilment of prophecy for there is no sign of real repentance.

“For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all the countries, and bring you to your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.” Ezekiel 36: 24,25. Ezekiel 36: 22 – 28 describes a process whereby Israel is first gathered out of the nations, then brought to repentance v.25. They will be transformed by the Holy Spirit and then God will call them His people. Note the reason given in verse 22 is not that Israel is repentant but that God does it for His holy name’s sake.

Also In Ezekiel 20: 44 we read of a gathering of Israel not due to their repentance but because the Lord will glorify His name. And in Jeremiah 16: 14 – 18 we read that there will come a time when the Lord will drive them back to the land He gave their fathers. There is no mention of repentance.

In the Land

“For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem.....Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations as He fights on the day of battle. In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives,” Zechariah 14: 2,3,4. Where do these events take place? Clearly they happen in the land of Israel.

“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on me who they pierced.” Zechariah 12: 10. Where does this national repentance take place? As in Ezekiel it is set in the land.

This is the understanding which Paul has when quoting Isaiah 59: 20. *"The deliverer will come out of Zion and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob."* Romans 11: 26. When the Messiah comes He will bring Israel to repentance. The order of events in Isaiah 59: 16 -21 is the same, first the Messiah then repentance.

Prophecy could not have been fulfilled

The Jews were dispersed from their land following the Jewish revolt and fall of Jerusalem in AD70. The land was completely cleared of Jews by Hadrian in 135 AD. From that time right up to the 1880's very few Jews lived in the land. There were small Jewish colonies in Hebron, Jerusalem and Tiberias. Following the Spanish inquisition another group formed a colony of Safed in Galilee. For most of the intervening centuries the number of the Jews living in the land did not exceed 5,000. Only in the 20th century with the nation re-established has this precondition of the Second Coming been met.

Having established that Scripture foresees a return of the Jews to the land prior to the Second Coming we move on to some teaching which Jesus gave on this subject.

A Jewish Reception

Jesus confirmed His expectation of a Jewish reception committee when He returns to Jerusalem. *"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"* Matthew 23: 39, is the traditional Jewish greeting for the Messiah and is used by the Orthodox Jews to this day (Psalm 118: 26. Matt 21: 9). It only has significance for the Jews. Therefore once again we have confirmation that the Jews will have returned before Jesus comes again.

The Fig Tree

"A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard and came seeking fruit on it but found none". Luke 13: 6. There is in Luke 13:6-9 a parable about a fig tree which bore no fruit. For three years the owner came looking for fruit but didn't find any. Considering it a waste of space he orders the tree to be cut down.

In the same way Jesus came to the Jews for three years looking for fruit. He only found corruption. After a period of delay He sends His armies to destroy the city Matt 22:7, Dan 9:26. The fig tree is cut down.

When Jesus enters Jerusalem at the beginning of the last week, His first action is to drive out the money changers Matt 21:12. This action confirms His disgust at their failure to respond to His ministry.

"And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, "Let no fruit grow on you ever again." Immediately the fig tree withered away." Matthew 21: 19. This takes place the morning after the Temple has been cleansed. Jesus curses a fig tree, saying that it will never again bear fruit. The tree immediately withers. As in the earlier parable the fig tree is used to represent Israel which has not produced any fruit.

"Now learn this parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near." Matthew 24: 32. Later that day Jesus takes His disciples to the Mount of Olives. There He answers their questions about the future of Jerusalem, and the end of the age. From the Mount of Olives they would have seen most of the route from the Temple. It is possible that the withered fig tree was in view. During the sermon Jesus says to the disciples, learn this parable from the fig tree. I think that all of us in that situation, whether or not we could see the fig

tree, would have made the connection. That morning they had seen a fig tree miraculously wither and die. That fig tree representing Israel which had died will one day come back to life. What a dramatic visual aid which must have stuck in their memories.

The fig tree parable is a clear reference to the time when Israel comes back to life as a nation. It is the herald of the summer which represents the glorious time when Jesus returns.

The word generally translated generation v.34 could also mean race. If we use the word race this becomes a promise that God will preserve the Jews until such time as He brings them back to their land. It is remarkable that the Jews have survived as a people throughout 2000 years of dispersion among the nations.

We could also understand this statement to refer to the generation which sees the restoration of Israel. It then becomes an assurance that from the restoration of Israel to the return of Christ no more than a generation will elapse. In Genesis 15: 13- 16 a generation is specified as 100 years. We live in the hope that will prove true and that Jesus will not delay.

Conclusion

At various times down the centuries, there have been predictions of the date of the Second Coming. But the return of Christ could not have happened prior to the 20th Century, as the Jews had not returned to Israel. Jesus is coming back to an Israel dwelling in her land. Now that Israel is in the land we can live in the expectation of the Second Coming. We don't know the date of His return but a major precondition has now been fulfilled.

Israel is the first sign that the return of Christ is drawing close.

Sign 2 - Jerusalem

Zechariah is listed in Nehemiah 12 as one of the priests who made the journey back to Jerusalem after the exile in Babylon. The party returned to a city in ruins. Soon work was started on rebuilding the Temple. We read in the book of Ezra how the people living around Jerusalem discouraged the Jews in an attempt to stop them building. Failing to stop the work, they appeal to the king of Persia and obtain a royal warrant to stop the building.

Construction is delayed 20 years until the prophets Haggai and Zechariah encourage the people to try again (Zechariah 5). Under Zerubbabel's direction the building restarts. The Governor of the province tries to prevent the rebuilding work. When the Jews refuse he sends a petition to Darius King of Persia. In the second year of Darius permission is received to resume building. The Temple was rededicated in 516 BC, the 6th year of Darius. This was 70 years after the destruction of the first temple in 586 BC. At the time of the destruction Jeremiah had prophesied that the desolation would last 70 years (2 Chronicles 36: 21).

Zechariah dates his prophecies to these years when construction of the Temple had resumed. The prophecies start with a word of encouragement to the people to return to the Lord (Zech 1:3). They end with a vision of the Lord reigning over all the earth (Zech 14:9). At that time all the nations will come up to Jerusalem to worship (Zech 14:16). In between, Zechariah's prophecies contain both words of encouragement and warnings.

Jerusalem a cup of Reeling

"The burden of the word of the Lord against Israel. Thus says the Lord, who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him: Behold I will make Jerusalem a

cup of reeling to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege to Jerusalem. And it will happen on that day that 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 the nations of the earth are gathered against it.” Zechariah 12: 1 – 3. In this prophecy a time is foreseen when Jerusalem becomes a cup of reeling for the surrounding nations and a heavy stone for all peoples.

Has that time already been fulfilled?

It is said of Jerusalem that she, the city of peace, has never known a day's peace in her history.

At the time when Zechariah prophesied the Persians ruled Israel. After the Persians came the Greeks. Under Greek rule Jerusalem was caught in a conflict between the King of the North and the King of the South. The conflict which lasted for two centuries is prophetically described in Daniel 11. Greek rule was thrown off by the Maccabees. Then in 63 BC the Romans conquered Israel. Throughout their rule there were periods of Jewish resistance. Major rebellions occurred during 67 to 70 AD and 132 to 135 AD. Following the crushing of the rebellion in 135 BC the Romans removed all the Jews from Israel and founded a city named Aelia Capitolina on the ruins of Jerusalem. Over the following centuries Jerusalem continued as a centre of conflict. For a short time the Parthians ruled the city, then the Muslims came. The Crusaders came and went. Various Islamic factions fought over the city. Finally the Ottomans took the city in 1517 ushering in a period of relative peace. The only time Jerusalem changed hands without a fight was in 1917 when General Allenby walked into Jerusalem to accept the surrender of the Turks.

Still future

Despite all this conflict we do not believe that the prophecy that Jerusalem will be a cup of reeling for the surrounding nations has

been fulfilled. The reason is that the time prophesied by Zechariah ends with the coming of the Messiah. *"They will look on me who they pierced" Zech 12:10*

At the time our Lord returns Jerusalem will not be at peace but will be the centre of conflict.

In 1947 the United Nations agreed to partition Palestine. There were to be separate Jewish and Arab homelands. At that time the future of Jerusalem was placed on hold. Further talks were planned to decide the future administration of the city.

In the war of independence of 1948 the fledgling Jewish state was attacked by the surrounding nations. The war decided for a time the status of Jerusalem. The old city was captured by Jordan and remained in their possession until 1967. During that time Jews were forbidden entry and denied the right to worship at the Western wall. The Jordanian occupation was illegal and the denial of access by Jews to the city contrary to the United Nations resolution, but drew little protest.

The Focus of World attention

In the six day war of 1967 Israel captured the old city from Jordan. From 1967 onward Jerusalem has become a cup of reeling for all the surrounding peoples and a heavy stone for all the nations of the world. The surrounding nations want to see the city restored to Arab rule. The world sees Jerusalem as the greatest obstacle to world peace. Never before in history could it be said that all the peoples of this world see Jerusalem as a heavy stone. The prophecy of Zechariah is being fulfilled today and is a sign that the time of the Messiah's return is drawing near.

"And Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled." Luke 21: 24. The times of the

Gentiles will be fulfilled when as Paul says in Roman's 11: 25, *"the fullness of the Gentiles has come in"*. It will continue until the harvest among the Gentile nations is complete. Then Jesus will return.

Although Israel has sovereignty over the city, it is still trampled. The holy mountain of the Lord is defiled by a temple to a false antichrist religion. The temple carries the repeated declaration that God has no son. In denying the Father and the Son it is an abomination to God.

There is coming a time when Jerusalem is no longer trampled. It will become the throne of the King of Kings.

That Jerusalem has become in our days a heavy stone for all peoples is the second sign that the end of this present age is drawing near.

Sign 3 - The Surrounding Nations

Psalm 83: 1 – 8

"Do not keep silent O God! Do not hold your peace, and do not be still, O God! For behold Your enemies make a tumult; and those who hate You have lifted up their head. They have taken crafty counsel against your people, and consulted together against your sheltered ones. They have said, "Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more." For they consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against You: the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelite; Moab and the Hagrites, Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek; Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assyria has joined with them; they have helped the children of Lot."

This psalm describes a group of ten nations which unite in their plan to wipe out Israel. Is the Psalm recounting history or is it a prophecy of events in the future?

This is one of the Psalms attributed to Asaph. He was chief of the Levite musicians appointed by David to minister in the Tabernacle. At the time this Psalm was written Israel, under King David, had subdued the surrounding nations. His conquests are listed in 2 Samuel 8: 1 – 18 and cover a similar area to that described in the Psalm. The territory of Zobah corresponds to that of the Hagarites in the Psalm. The Ishmaelites would conquer the lands east of the Jordan in the following centuries. Assyria which would conquer Syria was still a rising power.

In David's time there was an enforced peace. Therefore this Psalm is not a plea for help in the midst of a current onslaught by Israel's enemies.

Nor is it a reflection on events of the past. There had been alliances against Israel prior to the days this Psalm was written, but **never all of these ten together.**

If the confederacy was neither past nor present then at the time this Psalm was written it was still future. The Psalmist has been inspired to write about future perils and to intercede for events which lie ahead. Does history record a time when this alliance of surrounding nations comes against Israel?

It does but not until nearly 3000 years have passed.



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If you look at a current political map of the Middle East none of the names of the nations listed in the Psalm appear. The exception is Tyre which continues in the city of that name. When plotted on the map we see that the territory of these ancient nations surrounds Israel. We can also identify the modern nations which cover their former territory.

The names of the nations disappeared following the conquest of the area by succeeding empires. But the nations themselves did not disappear. They were eventually assimilated into the Arab world following the Ishmaelite Arab conquest of the Holy Land and the surrounding area.

Among Israelis there is diversity of physical characteristics due to many centuries of marriage to proselytes in distant countries. Yet Israel remains Israel, both in its national consciousness and in biblical prophecy.

In the same way, the ten nations of Psalm 83 still exist, though mixed and not distinct. Those who are familiar with the Middle East say that there is still a diversity of facial characteristics which can be observed as you travel from area to area. This is the legacy of their former national identities.

Another legacy is their hatred of Israel. They cling to the antagonism prophesied against them.

On the day Israel declared its independence in 1948 she was immediately attacked by Arab armies.

The resident Arabs were supported by armies from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Trans Jordan and Egypt with promised support from Saudi Arabia. If we look at the map these nations occupy the same territory as that occupied by the nations listed in the Psalm. The confederacy described in Psalm 83 came into existence and exists until this day.

Despite overwhelming odds God did answer and as in the words of v.17 they were confounded and dismayed.

The Surrounding Nations

There are a number of scriptures in which the Lord identifies the surrounding nations as the recipients of His divine judgment.

*“Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; For there I will sit to judge all the **surrounding nations**.” Joel 3:12.* In Joel 3: 11 the same order of words is used in the Hebrew. So instead of ‘gather together all around’ that verse could read ‘all you surrounding nations’.

The earlier verses of Joel 3 describe the crimes committed against Israel which have called down the divine wrath. One of the crimes is that they have divided the land.

Tyre, Sidon and Philistia are listed as guilty of robbing God and selling His people into slavery. Egypt and Edom are named in Joel 3:19 because of violence against the people of Judah and shedding innocent blood in the land. They will be made desolate.

The punishment of the surrounding nations is confirmed in Zechariah. *“Judah also will fight at Jerusalem. And the wealth of all the **surrounding nations** shall be gathered together: Gold, silver, and apparel in great abundance.” Zechariah 14: 14.*

Isaiah 11 describes the time when Christ establishes his reign on the earth. *“But they shall fly down upon the shoulder of the Philistines toward the West; together they shall plunder the people of the East; They shall lay their hands on Edom and Moab; and the people of Ammon shall obey them.” Isaiah 11: 14.* Here again we see that there is particular mention of the surrounding nations as the recipients of God’s judgment.

The whole of Ezekiel 35 is a condemnation of Mount Seir, which is another name for Edom. They are punished because of their ancient hatred of the children of Israel. They coveted the land and rejoiced when the inheritance of Israel was made desolate. Therefore the Lord will make their land desolate.

The next chapter continues the theme. *"...thus says the Lord God: Surely I have spoken in My burning jealousy against the rest of the nations and against all Edom, who gave My land to themselves as a possession, with whole hearted joy and spiteful minds in order to plunder its open country. Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and say to the mountains, the hills, the rivers and the valleys, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold I have spoken in My jealousy and My fury, because you have born the shame of the nations." 'Therefore thus says the Lord God: I have raised my hand in oath that surely that the nations that are around you shall bear their own shame."* Ezekiel 36: 5 - 7.

Once again we find that the surrounding nations are singled out for special mention due to their treatment of Israel. But for Israel there are promises of great blessing.

We are seeing that one of the signs of the end of the age is that there will be resurrection of the ancient hatred of the surrounding nations towards Israel.

There is an interesting note in Daniel 11: 41. In that verse it speaks of when the King of the North surges through the lands in a flood of destruction. At that time Edom, Moab and Ammon escape his attack. The King of the North is one of the names of the Antichrist who sets himself against God. These nations are not spared due to God's protection because as we have seen they become the recipient of His wrath. Another conclusion is that the end time Antichrist has a special connection with that land and protects them. Perhaps he was born there. The former territory of Edom, Moab and Ammon is similar to that of modern day Jordan.

Does Jesus speak of this end time enmity between the surrounding nations and Israel?

All the trees

In the second chapter we referred to the fig tree coming into life. The tree represents the rebirth of Israel. Jesus is recorded as adding another comment in Luke's gospel. *"Look at the fig tree and all the trees". Luke 21: 29.* He mentions all the trees.

The rebirth of Israel is a sign that the end is approaching. But it is not just Israel but all the trees, ie: the surrounding nations who will come to play a decisive role in the end time events which will be reborn. That is exactly what has happened. Around the time Israel was established all the surrounding nations gained their independence. Jesus was aware of the significant role that these nations would play in the events which close this present age.

Conclusion

At the time of the end the nations which surround Israel will be reborn. They will persecute Israel with an ancient hatred. Because of their treatment of Israel they will be the recipients of God's wrath.

The rebirth of this ancient antagonism is the third sign that the end of the age is near.

Sign 4 - All the Nations

The establishment of Israel as a state in the Middle East has from the start been controversial. The Arabs opposed it. Britain washed its hands of it. The United Nations was divided over it but eventually the required two thirds majority in favour was achieved.

Although Israel is recognised by most nations it has, throughout its existence, been the subject of critical resolutions in the UN. The United States has regularly had to veto the resolutions to prevent them taking effect. Despite having diplomatic relations there are few countries which Israel can regard as real friends. Surprisingly in public opinion polls it is India not the USA which heads the list of supporters. Nearly 60% of Indians support Israel. In the UK similar polls record about 30% support.

False Accusations

In the early 21st Century the limited goodwill that existed for Israel has been eroded by a campaign which labels it as an apartheid state. The comparison with apartheid in South Africa breaks down on many points but it is the sort of easily understood, catchy word bite which sticks.

One of the criteria used to assess whether Israel operates a form of apartheid is the amount of suffering caused. Under this assessment the suffering of the Arab population of the West Bank and Gaza is reminiscent of the conditions of black people in South Africa under apartheid. But the causes of the suffering are entirely different. Responsibility for much of the suffering rests with the Arabs themselves. The corruption and intransigence of their leaders, has added significantly to the distress of the ordinary people.

Building on the success of this apartheid campaign, the Palestinians seek to persuade the General Assembly of the UN to recognize a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. If they are ever successful, it will create an immense security problem for Israel which will in time demand a firm response.

Hated by the nations

In the previous chapter we listed the reawakening in the surrounding nations of an ancient hatred toward Israel as the third sign that the end of the present age is approaching. In the chapter in Joel which describes the surrounding nations coming against Israel there is also mention of all the nations.

"For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations, and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat. Then I will enter into judgment with them there on behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; and they have divided up My land." Joel 3: 1,2

Scriptural phrases such as 'all the nations', do not necessarily convey a 21st century global meaning. In the Bible 'all the nations' can be limited in its scope. Daniel chapter 2, describes Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom as extending to wherever the sons of men dwell. Also the third kingdom that arises is said to rule over all the earth. We know that both these empires were limited to the Middle East. Even in the New Testament all the inhabited earth is used as a reference to the Roman Empire. But Rome did not rule the whole earth as we know it. To the East of Israel was the Parthian Empire. They were the enemies of Rome and certainly not under Rome's rule.

In the immediate context of Joel chapter 3 it would be reasonable to understand 'all the nations' as referring to the surrounding nations. Therefore the nations which will be judged

could be limited to the Middle East. In the broader context of the whole of scripture we find that all the nations has a more inclusive meaning.

The gathering of the nations is repeated in Zechariah.

"On that day when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations." Zech 12: 3

"I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it then the Lord will go out to fight against those nations as He fights in the day of battle." Zech 14:2

As in Joel we could read these verses as referring only to the nations of the Middle East. However if we are to be consistent the reign of the Lord over all the earth in Zech 14:9 would then also be limited to the Middle East.

Revelation picks up the theme of the gathering of the nations for judgment.

"And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called HarMagedon". Revelation 16: 13 - 16

These verses are a much clearer reference to a universal gathering of the nations to the land of Israel. The outcome of this battle is already decided. We read in Revelation 19: 19 -21 that the King of Kings and Lord of Lords will destroy His enemies.

Armageddon

There is an objection which could be raised to the above verses describing the same event. Three locations are identified, the Valley of Jehoshaphat, HarMagedon and Jerusalem. In answer to the objection, it is probable that the first two are intended as symbolic not geographical locations.

The Valley of Jehoshaphat is only mentioned in Joel 3. Jehoshaphat means Jehovah judges. In the early centuries AD it became identified with the Kidron and Hinom valleys but that is not a scriptural location. It is more probable that the prophet is referring his readers back to the story recorded in 2 Chronicle 20. A victory was won over Amon, Moab and Edom without King Jehoshaphat and his army having to fight. The chapter contains the wonderful words, *“stand and see the salvation of the Lord”*. A similar victory will be won on behalf of Israel when the Lord returns.

Likewise HarMagedon means the mountain of Megiddo. Revelation 16 is the only place in the Bible it is mentioned. But Megiddo is situated in a plane. There is no mountain in the plain. To the North of Megiddo is the Carmel mountain range. It is possible that the prophecy is reminding us of the events which took place on that mountain when God through Elijah worked a victory over the prophets of Baal. Elijah is short for God Jehovah. There will come a day when Elijah Jesus will win another great victory over the assembled forces of darkness.

The specific locations may be symbolic but the general location is without doubt the land of Israel and particularly Jerusalem.

The nations deceived

In Revelation 16 three unclean spirits are sent out to gather the kings of the whole world together for the war on the great day of

God, the Almighty. A story is recorded in 2 Chronicle 18 of how Jehoshaphat allies himself with Ahab to recover Ramoth-gilead. The prophets of Baal assure the kings that victory is certain. At Jehoshaphat's insistence a prophet of the Lord is summoned. It is Micaiah, who warns that Israel will be defeated and scattered. He adds that he saw in a vision a deceiving spirit which was sent into the mouth of the prophets. Through the false prophets the deceiving spirit would entice Ahab to go into battle to bring about disaster.

In the same way the unclean spirits described in Revelation 16, go out into the world to spread lies and to deceive. They are used by God to gather the nations to war and judgment. Although these prophecies are about future events we see the beginnings of the fulfilment already coming about.

An example of how lies are used is the Goldstone report into Israel's 2008/2009 offensive against Hamas in Gaza. In his report Goldstone said that there was evidence of potential war crimes and possible crimes against humanity by both Israel and Hamas. Writing in the Washington Post 2nd April 2011, he accepted that there was no evidence of Israel targeting civilians, whereas Hamas purposefully and indiscriminately targeted civilians. He also accepted that while Israel was thoroughly investigating allegations regarding individual soldiers, Hamas made no effort to investigate similar accusations. In the Washington Post Goldstone writes, "If I had known then what I know now, the Goldstone Report would have been a different document." The problem is it is too late to admit that he got it wrong. The accusations of war crimes have been made and contribute to the ongoing delegitimisation of Israel.

The lies and rising universal hatred of Israel is the fourth sign that we are approaching the end of this age.

Sign 5 - Hated by all Nations

Jesus is coming again. There is nothing more certain about the future than His return. But when He comes what will this world be like? Will Jesus be welcomed by cheering crowds and celebrations? Will there be fireworks and street parties? Will the rulers of this world willingly stand aside and let the King of Kings take over the reins of power?

There are many who believe and teach that this is how it will be. They believe that the church in our time will be the catalyst for ushering in an age of peace. Does the Bible endorse the idea that Christians will bring in God's kingdom on earth? It doesn't take an extensive reading of scripture to conclude that it doesn't.

"Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" Revelation 6: 15 – 17. The above is one of many passages which confirm that Jesus will return to a world which is in rebellion against Him.

For the Christian the coming of the Lord is our blessed hope. For the world it is the worst thing that can happen. The gospel is to be preached to all nations. But when Jesus returns it is to a world which has rejected the gospel. That rejection will be displayed in the persecution of the church. When Jesus comes He will bring judgment on a rebellious world.

Jesus recognised two types of people. *"This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather*

*than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."*John 3: 19,20. There are those who are of the light and those who are of darkness.

Those who walk in the light have no fear of God. Their sinful deeds have been confessed and forgiven. The Holy Spirit has entered their lives to cleanse and renew them. When meeting Jesus there is nothing to fear because there is nothing to hide.

Those who walk in darkness seek to hide their evil deeds. When Jesus comes again everything that they have done will be exposed [Luke 12: 1-3]. Of course the idea of Jesus coming to judge this world is dismissed as naive nonsense by those who hate the idea of being held responsible for their actions. It is only when the earth is shaken and the sky split apart that they will be confronted with the reality of His return.

Until that day their hatred of the light will be directed towards those who walk in the light. Jesus said that just as the world hated Him it would hate His disciples [John 15: 18-21]. We should expect no better treatment than that received by our master. This has been true since the birth of the church. Persecution has been the lot of true believers down through the centuries. The end of the age will be no different.

In this chapter, we move the focus from Israel to the believing church. We ask the question, whether hatred of those who walk in the light is to be a particular feature of the end of the present age.

"Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow

cold. "But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come." Matt 24: 9.

If believers are to be hated by all nations it has to be at a time when there are believers to be found within every nation. The above statement is set at the time when the Gospel has at last been preached in the whole world. It is also, as the passage above states, to be a time of falling away from the gospel, internal divisions within the church, false prophets and lawlessness.

Therefore we conclude that the final years of this age will be marked by a final thrust to take the gospel to the nations. In response there will be a rejection of the gospel coupled with a universal hatred of the followers of Christ.

In his first letter John says, *"Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you". 1 John 3:13.* John refers back to Cain who killed his brother Abel, because his deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

Noah also was an example of righteousness in an evil world. *"By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith". Hebrews 11: 7.* Because of Noah's faith the world at his time had no excuse. If he could hear from God and obey so could everyone else. They ignored the word of God and were taken by surprise by His judgment. Jesus said that the time before His return would be just like the time before the Flood. Like Noah we who are faithful to Christ and believe in His return, by our faith, condemn the world. For this reason we will be hated.

As this age draws to a close the rebellion against God will intensify and be focused on one man. He is called the man of lawlessness who opposes even God [2 Thess 2:3 – 9]. His appearing

will be linked to the falling away. All who have not loved the truth will be caught up in this delusion. They will hate those who have not bowed down to the lie.

That final period of lawlessness is still future. But we should note that God allows it to happen because men did not recognize the truth [2Thess 2:10 – 12]. They have already turned their back on Jesus. We are to expect that as the end of the age draws near there will be a hardening of attitudes against believers.

The particular feature of the end of the age will be the universality of the hatred. At other times and in different places there have been periods of persecution of the church. But it has never before been global.

There was a time when in the historically Christian countries, such as the USA or UK, it was possible to agree to differ. Opposing views were respected. That has changed. A fanatical opposition to all things Christian has developed. In other parts of the world persecution of Christians by members of other religions has intensified during the last few decades. Still other countries are under the sway of oppressive political regimes that see Christians as a challenge to their despotic rule.

It is remarkable how that opposing atheistic, religious, and political ideologies all combine when their objective is to attack Christianity. This should come as no surprise as each is the product of the darkness which blinds people to the truth.

Therefore a fifth sign that we are approaching the end of this present age is the hardening of opposition to the gospel into a global hatred of Christians.

Sign 6 - Apostasy

“Let no one in any way deceive you, for it (the day of the Lord) will not come unless the apostasy comes first”, 2 Thessalonians 2: 3.

The Thessalonian Church had been disturbed by a message or letter falsely claiming to have come from Paul. It made out that the gathering of the believers to be with Christ had already taken place. The Thessalonians' faith had been shaken by the report that they had been left behind. To assure the church that such teaching was nonsense Paul describes two events that will precede the day when our Lord comes for His own. One is the revealing of the man of sin. The other is a falling away from the truth.

Jesus also taught that there would be a falling away before His return. *"And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. Matthew 24: 10 – 12.* The time He is referring to is the end of the age. This sign is closely interwoven with the previous sign of the followers of Christ being hated by all nations. The effect of widespread hatred on the church will be to cause many to fall away. In addition to hatred, false prophets and a disregard for God's laws will also play their part. Not just a few will cease to follow Christ. Jesus foresees a time when the majority lose their love for Him.

Apostasy in the UK

Living in the UK it is easy to believe that this period has arrived. A once Christian country with laws based on the Bible has turned its back on that heritage. A hundred years ago it was only a small minority who did not go to church. Today it is a minority who regularly attend.

In Britain hatred was not the major cause of the falling away. It began long before the current hostility developed. False prophets deluded by secular knowledge undermined confidence in the infallibility of scripture. If the Bible cannot be trusted as the authoritative word of God then Christianity becomes just one of many competing philosophies. People are free to believe what they like.

Going back to Second Thessalonians Paul adds that a deluding influence will be sent by God to cause people to believe that which is false (2 Thess 2:11). God will send it because they did not love the truth. In Britain as in many other countries the falling away from the church has been fuelled by a delusion. Two hundred years ago it was impossible not to believe in a god. A person may not have wanted to obey God but the existence of a creator god in some form was beyond doubt. Then came the wide spread acceptance of Evolution. It now seemed that there was an intellectually credible alternative to belief in God. This has led on from abandoning the faith to open hostility toward God. Was this a delusion from God to demonstrate that out of the mass of church goers' there were few who really loved Him?

Over time rejection of God has been followed by rebellion against His laws leading to lawlessness. Lawlessness is the fruit of apostasy. Any society which loses the fear of a righteous God who will hold each of us to account will end up as described in 2 Tim 3: 1-5.

Jesus also spoke of those who fall away as having no roots (Luke 8:13). Once the authority of scripture is denied its study becomes less imperative. Faith not rooted in God's word will fail when temptation comes. Therefore out of those who remain in the church there are many who are ill equipped to stand when the final rebellion comes.

Our first love

Jesus said that at this time most people's love will grow cold. The book of Revelation contains a letter to the Church at Ephesus. Jesus commends the church for its stand against the Nicolaitans and for their hard work and perseverance. But they are also rebuked, *"But I have this against you, that you have left your first love."* Revelation 2: 4. This is not a trivial matter. It is so serious that they are warned that if they do not repent their lamp stand will be removed. Put another way, they will be closed down.

My father told a story which must have taken place when either I was very young or before I was born. On holiday he saw a boy in trouble out at sea. Being a strong swimmer he swam out and brought the boy back to land. It turned out that he had rescued the son of his bank manager. From then on as a business man he enjoyed an exceptionally good relationship with his bank manager. If someone renders us a real service it is natural to want to express our gratitude, the greater the service the greater our gratitude. At Ephesus they had forgotten just how much Jesus had done for them.

Churches which are sound in doctrine can fall into this more subtle apostasy. It creeps in when we lose sight of the awfulness of sin, when we think in terms of rehabilitation rather than rescue.

First Chronicles contains a story which tells us the extent to which David inspired devotion from his men. The Philistines had a garrison in his home town of Bethlehem. One day David said that he longed for a drink from the well by the city gate of Bethlehem. On hearing this, three of his strong men broke through the enemies lines to fetch water from the well. They risked their lives to please their leader. David was humbled by their devotion. He knew that he was not worthy to receive a gift which could have cost the lives of his men (1 Chronicles 11: 16 – 19).

We serve a king who is worthy of far greater devotion than David ever was. David risked his life for his men and his people. Our King gave His life for us.

How much do we really love Him?

Jesus was invited to a meal at the house of Simon the Pharisee. A woman, a sinner, enters the house and pours perfume over Jesus' feet. She washes his feet with her tears and wipes them with her hair. It is an expression of gratitude by a sinner who has been forgiven. Simon the Pharisee is offended that Jesus should allow such a person to touch him.

Jesus turns the issue round telling a story about two debtors, one who owed a lot the other only a little. Jesus asks Simon, if each were let off their debts who would be most grateful. Simon replies that the one who has been forgiven most. He then comments on how Simon had not shown any tokens of respect or courtesy. He had not greeted Jesus with a kiss, or supplied water to wash his feet. There was no oil for an honoured guest. But this woman who he holds in contempt had done all these things. *"For this reason I say to you, her sins, which were many have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little loves little."* Luke 7: 47.

There is a danger that in an increasingly hostile world we become like the Ephesian church. We are so focused on the world's disregard for God's law or the need to defend the truth within the church that we lose the most important part of all, our love for Jesus. We forget that He gave everything for us. He is worthy of total devotion.

The World

A natural response to what has been written so far is that Britain and Europe are not the world. Decline here has been more than matched by growth elsewhere. Some claim that the church is reaping

the greatest harvest in its history. If so, this would be a strong argument against the belief that we are in the middle of the falling away that will precede the coming of the Lord.

Therefore we need an answer to the question; what is the real state of the global church?

This is a topic swamped with conflicting reports. For instance it has been claimed that in Mongolia over the last couple of decades over 60,000 have converted to Christianity with 500+ new churches. A missionary contact working in that country says that such claims are nonsense. In reality this supposed church growth is based on a fusion of traditional religion and the prosperity gospel. The intensely materialistic attitudes of these supposed Christians has brought the Christian faith into disrepute.

Without doubt there are parts of the world where the Lord is working and where the true church is growing. But much claimed growth is the product of a false prosperity gospel. Only Jesus knows the true state of His Church in this world. Even if the church is experiencing growth today will it produce lasting fruit? The Bible clearly teaches that there will be a falling away before the Lord returns.

The falling away which we have seen in recent decades is a pointer to what is to come. It is paving the way for the final revealing of the man of sin. When that time comes all who do not love the truth as found in Jesus will be swept up by the final deception. **The growing apostasy is the sixth sign.**

Sign 7 - Islam

The final sign in this series is both controversial and not as yet so widely accepted.

At the end of this present age an empire will gain ascendancy. In Revelation it is described as a beast which the whole earth follows after (Rev 13: 3). The beast is both an empire and a man who heads the empire and leads the final revolt against Christ (Rev 19:19). It has been generally accepted that this beast is also the one who is described elsewhere as 'the man of lawlessness' (2 Thess 2: 3).

Over the centuries various interpretations have been offered with regard to this man. The Westminster Confession declared; "nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ, and all that is called God". The Pope was identified as the man of sin and the Roman Catholic Church as the Harlot of Revelation 19. More recently interest has switched to either a revived Roman Empire in the form of a united Europe or a Globalist conspiracy. Both are seen as the possible background to the rise of the man of sin and the beast empire.

An alternative view is that Islam is the best placed to fulfil the prophecies regarding the Beast and his empire.

Islam the Beast

Set out below are some reasons for identifying Islam with the Beast.

Doctrine

"This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son."
1 John 2: 22

"Say (O Muhammad): "He is Allah, The one and only; Allah to whom all creatures turn for their needs; he begets not, nor was he begotten; there is none like him."" Qur'an 112: 1-4.

From its inception Islam denied that God had a son. No other world movement, philosophy or religion has so emphatically denied the fatherhood of God. There have been many movements which have denied the existence of God or tried to supplant Him. There has been much false teaching and misrepresentation of God. But only Islam has built its whole creed on the denial of the Father and the Son. The oldest Islamic writings in existence are the mosaics in the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem. They contain an emphatic denial that Jesus is the Son of God.

Character of Islam

"its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and baked clay." Daniel 2:33

This is part of the prophecy of the statue to be found in Daniel 2. The prophecy sees five empires which will arise in the future. The first kingdom is Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon. The final empire is described as feet and toes made of iron and clay which will be shattered at our Lord's return. It is a fitting description of Islam, which in some ways is strong but is also deeply divided into factions.

"You belong to your father the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." John 8:44

Jesus said of the Jews that their father was the devil because they refused to accept that he came from God. The same can be said of Islam for it twists the truth about Jesus Christ. The Jesus of Islam has no resemblance to the Jesus of the Christian Gospels. Islam says that Jesus was a great prophet but denies that he was divine and that he was crucified for our sins.

The time of the Antichrist's kingdom

"And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings, who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour". Revelation 17:12

It is difficult to reconcile this prophecy of the kings, only holding power for one hour, with the nations of Western Europe. The

kingdoms of Europe have exercised considerable authority over this world for many centuries. In the Middle East there are ten nations, which have only recently gained independence. The time of their formation corresponds to the same period in which the new nation of Israel was established. They are all Muslim and have yet to achieve authority over other nations. The rise of these nations was covered under the third sign 'The Surrounding Nations'.

The beliefs of Islam

Muslims believe that Jesus was born supernaturally of the Virgin Mary, but he was only a man. He was a great prophet, but little of his teaching is found in the Bible as the early church tampered with the records. He was not crucified. Someone else was mistaken for Him and crucified in His place. At the end of his ministry, He was taken up to be with God in heaven and it is from there that He will come again. The main beliefs about his coming are:

- He will descend from heaven, although it is not known where. Mecca, Damascus and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem are all considered possible sites.
- He will declare that he is a man and not God and will oppose and seek to eradicate all false teaching that he is divine.
- He will pledge loyalty to the Mahdi and together they will overthrow the Dajjal (the antichrist).

Others have undertaken more detailed studies on this subject. The Islamic beliefs about the return of Christ parallel the Bible's teaching on the Antichrist. In consequence a large proportion of the world's population is already programmed to receive the man of sin when he comes.

The Empire which died

Revelation 17: 10 identifies the seven heads of the beast as seven kings. These are usually interpreted as the seven empires which have dominated the Holy Land. In turn these empires were: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. We are told that five have fallen and one is. At the time the prophecy was written Rome the sixth

empire ruled Israel. In the succession there is a seventh empire. History tells us that following the fall of Rome, Islam controlled the Holy Land for the next 1300 years. The phrase in verse 10 that 'he must remain a little while should be interpreted in the context of Revelation which sees the coming of the Lord as 'soon'. Against the immediacy of all the other prophecies this one has a period of time connected to it. An eighth empire which is one of the seven will close this sequence.

In another description of the beast empire in Revelation 13:3 one of the heads has received a fatal wound. To the amazement of the world it recovers from this wound coming back to life. Therefore this eighth empire which is the beast empire is one of the former empires which has recovered from a fatal wound to the amazement of the world. Some look to a revived Roman Empire to fulfil this prophecy. But Rome did not die from a fatal wound. It petered out over a thousand years. The empire which did die was Islam. With the removal of the Caliph in 1924 the heart of Islam was ripped out.

One Islamic group has described the event in these words: *The 3rd of March, 1924—the world was plunged into darkness. The Khilafah—His light, spread from East to West for over a thousand years—was brought to an end. The consequences were unimaginable: death, destruction, chaos, exploitation. After 80 years of the absence of the Khilafah, the Muslim world has awakened from its slumber, and the Ummah [the community of all the world's Muslims] is ready to resume its political destiny. From the darkness will emerge a new light.*

For decades Islam was seen as a moribund religion. Even in Islamic lands there were strong movements to abandon Islam and copy the West. Then came the Islamic revival. Islam is growing in influence day by day.

Location of the Antichrist's Kingdom

In his book "The development of Antichrist" published in 1852, Andrew Bonar demonstrates that scripture identifies the Eastern part of the Roman Empire not the West as the place where the Antichrist takes power. He was writing to challenge the then popular view that the Pope was the Antichrist.

The Antichrist when he arises will reign over the area formerly ruled by the Greek, Persian and Babylonian empires, the area we know today as the heartland of Islam.

This geographical location is underlined in Daniel 11 which describes a conflict between the King of the North and the King of the South. Much of this prophecy is now history. The history firmly anchors the context in a struggle between two powers which seek to dominate the Middle East. One power based in Egypt (the King of the South) the other in Syria/Babylon (the King of the North). It is widely accepted that the final part of this prophecy has a future fulfilment. In the divided context of Islam it is easy to envisage how such a conflict may arise. There are deep tensions between the rival factions in Shiite dominated North and the Sunni dominated South.

The Lord loves the descendants of Abraham's other son Ishmael. In the above interpretation there is hope. The move to restore the Caliph is widespread within Islam. There a longing for Islam to regain its former glory. Many Muslims believe that the restored Caliph will be their promised Mahdi who will usher in a reign of peace over the whole world. Initially all Muslims will welcome him. But according to the Bible there will come a time when he requires worship. At that time their eyes will be opened to the deception. The worship of a man is an anathema to the true Muslim. Too late they will realise that they have been deceived and rise up against the imposter (Daniel 11: 40). We pray that in defeat many will turn to their true Saviour Jesus Christ.

The rise of Islam to fulfil its destiny as the eighth and final empire is the seventh sign that we are approaching the end of the age.

Other Signs

Seven signs have been listed in this booklet. These are the signs which convince the author that we are living in the period leading up to the return of Christ.

Others have produced different lists of signs. Matthew 24 refers to wars, famines, pestilence and earthquakes as the birth pangs. They see the vast increase in the ravages of war, plague and famine in the 20th Century as indicators that this age is coming to an end.

In this context it is significant that the Balfour Declaration which raised the hope of a Jewish state came about at the height of the First World War. Surely the senseless carnage of that war fought between the leading Christian nations of the world would have caused God to decide that the time had come to draw this age to a close. God said to Noah that it was due to the earth being filled with violence that He was sorry that he had created man (Genesis 6: 11, 13).

The increase in lawlessness and sexual immorality are also seen as signs. When society runs out of control God will intervene.

The ministry Trumpet Sounds draws its name from an interpretation of Revelation chap 8. In that chapter four trumpets are sounded. Each announces a particular destruction coming on the earth. All the judgments contain an element of fire. This fire is symbolic of angels: *"He makes His angels winds His servants flames of fire"* Heb 1: 7.

The trumpets warn of destruction coming on the earth. They also announce victories in heaven. A later vision tells of the warfare in heaven between Michael and Satan. Each victory in heaven causes demonic forces to be cast down to earth where they wreak their own forms of havoc. The demons spur men on to do their will causing immense destruction.

The trumpets started to sound in the 20th Century. From that time on the earth has seen unprecedented war, famine, death and

destruction. Not just people have suffered. The whole environment is under threat.

“And the first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up and all the green grass was burned up.” v.7

In the last century deforestation has taken place on an enormous scale. Grasslands have turned to desert. Diseases have wiped out whole species of trees.

“Then the second angel sounded: and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea was turned to blood. And a third of the living creatures in the sea and a third of the ships were destroyed.” V.8,9

In the wars of the 20th century a vast tonnage of shipping was sunk. The seas have been polluted and fish stocks depleted to the point where many species are nearing extinction.

“Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water because it became bitter.” V.10,11

There has been wide spread pollution of water sources. A vast proportion of the world's population does not have access to clean drinking water. They are forced to drink from polluted sources with the consequent risk of disease. Wormwood is a plant with a strong bitter taste.

“ Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine and likewise the night.

Burning rain forests in the Far East have blotted out the sun. Air pollution is a problem in every industrialized country. Over the final 30 years of the 20th century the intensity of sunlight reaching the surface of the earth reduced. The reduction caused by particle pollution in the

air has been measured as 16% in the UK, 22% in Israel and 30% in Russia.

These judgments will intensify as we near the end of the age. As with the judgments that fell on Egypt, it is the natural world, which is first to feel the wrath of God as the Lord in judgment uses natural forces. Christians and unbelievers suffer alike under these judgments. Trees, grass, rivers, lakes and atmosphere are all part of our common heritage and responsibility. The present environmental crisis is a warning of greater judgments to come.

For the Christian despite the warnings that Life will not be easy, it should be a time of great joy. Times of trouble and persecution may well come but we have a blessed hope. It is in the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We study prophecy not to amuse ourselves through solving scriptural riddles, or speculation about times, but to ensure that we are prepared and equipped to stand in the final days. The scriptures are given to guide us. In the final days of darkness we will need that guidance to bring us safely through to our glorious destiny in Christ. Our reward is the resurrection. On the day that the last trumpet sounds we will be transformed into His likeness to live with Him forever.

“The question is not how much we are interested or how correct our conclusions may be, but how are we profiting by the disclosure we shall find of such terrible and at the same time glorious realities as the sure word of prophecy declares to be coming upon the earth? Without a corresponding result in our life and conversation we are but trifling with this as with other scripture....” Andrew Bonar writing on why we need to study prophecy.

Promises to the Overcomers

Those who understand will in His strength overcome.

“To Him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” Revelation 2: 7

*“He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death”.
Revelation 2: 11*

“To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.” Revelation 2: 17

*“ And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations, ‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like potters vessels’, as I have received from my Father; and I will give him the morning star.”
Revelation 2: 26 – 29.*

“He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” Revelation 3: 5

“ He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him my new name.” Revelation 3: 12

*“ To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”
Revelation 3; 21*

We recognise the signs of His coming so that we may remain faithful and enter in to all the promises made by Jesus to those who overcome.

Notes

Trumpet Sounds has for more than 25 years published a quarterly newsletter commenting on the significance of world events in the light of Bible prophecy. The newsletter is available free of charge either by email or printed copy by post. To request a regular copy please use the contact email at the bottom of the page.

Our Beliefs

We believe: in one God eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that Jesus Christ is God manifest as man, His virgin birth, His sinless human life, His atoning death and bodily resurrection, His ascension into heaven and His return in power and glory to judge the earth.

We believe: that salvation is only through faith in shed blood of Jesus Christ which paid the debt of our sin, that we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to lead a victorious Christian life, that all people who have ever lived will be raised from the dead some to eternal judgment and some to eternal life.

We believe that the Bible does not just contain but is the uniquely inspired and inerrant word of God. The Bible is the revelation of God's truth to men, truth which has been safeguarded by the Holy Spirit. We believe that the true meaning of scripture is the natural and most obvious interpretation. We pray that the Holy Spirit may lead us into that understanding and enable us to hold firmly to the truth.

The study of the prophetic events leading up to the return of Jesus Christ has suffered from many imposed systems of interpretation which have brought about considerable confusion within the church. We pray that the simplicity of the teaching of Scripture with regard to the Second Coming will be restored.

We pray that any who read this book who have not already trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ will be challenged to make that commitment. Further help is available from the email address below:

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