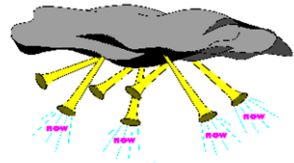


TRUMPET SOUNDS

Issue No 141

4th Quarter 2021



The gathering storm

If normal was how things were before the Covid pandemic, then there will be no return to 'normal'. Those who read the Bible can safely predict some of what the future holds.

There will be wars and rumors of wars with nations rising against nations. We look at two of the flash points, Taiwan and Iran, in this edition.

There will be famines. With the progressive breakdown of global supply chains even the comfortable western world will experience shortages of food and fuel. If we suffer inconvenience do not forget those in poorer countries who will suffer more.

Pestilence in the form of Covid has affected the whole world. This is just the beginning. The origins of this current virus lead to the belief that it will be followed by more.

Earthquakes will happen. They will be more frequent and of greater magnitude than experienced in the past.

The saints will be persecuted and hated by all nations. Many will fall away.

These things were all predicted by Jesus. In His description of the end of this age He added, *"See I have told you beforehand"*. Matthew 24: 25. Because Jesus revealed these things to us, we are not to fear.

"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8: 38, 39.

There is coming a time when to be a Christian is to be hated by all nations. It is already happening in many countries of the world. Persevere in these few years which remain for what lies beyond is a glorious eternity.

"Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

John the Baptist commenced his ministry with a simple message. It was a message of repentance. Likewise Jesus started His ministry with the same message *"repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* Matthew 3: 2, 4: 17.

John had a wonderful evangelistic style. Instead of wooing people with a message of 'God loves you', he got straight to the point. *"Brood of vipers! Who*

warned you to flee the wrath to come". Luke 3:7. Yes, the point is that if we do not repent we fall under God's wrath. Wrath which ends in destruction (Matthew 7: 13).

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus pressed the message home. *Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in Heaven.*" Matthew 7: 21. The gateway to salvation is faith but the continuance is obedience.

When asked, John made clear that repentance involved action. *"He who has two tunics give to him who has none, and he who has food, let him do likewise."* To the tax collectors he said, *"Collect no more than what is appointed to for you"* and the soldiers, *"Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely and be content with your wages."* Luke 3: 11 – 14.

We can look at the sorry state of the church in Britain today and see the need for repentance. It is easy to see the failings of others. However these simple words of John turn our attention around to examine ourselves. Do we live up to the standard set by John and Jesus?

Flee the Wrath

In my booklet 'Flee the Wrath to come' I wrote the following.

In past centuries if English speaking people read any book beside the Bible it would have been 'The Pilgrim's Progress'. Its message that we need to flee the wrath to come and be resolute in our journey to the celestial city, prepared the ground for the Methodist revival which, in the next century, transformed Britain.

The following quote is from a 19th Century book about that revival. "When people came to meet in the classes, which he [Wesley] had formed in different parts of the country, they were asked but one question, which was, "Do you desire to flee from the wrath to come, and be saved from your sins?" If they said 'Yes' and their conduct showed that they were sincere in what they said they were allowed to meet in class and no further questions were asked them."¹

Bunyan and Wesley saw themselves as rescuing people from the City of Destruction. They warned of the need to escape from the wrath of the final judgement.

Note: 1. 'A Few Plain Words concerning the Established Church and the Wesleyans' by a Methodist Minister.

The kingdom of heaven is at hand

In these days when once again the kingdom of heaven is at hand surely the church needs to proclaim this message. We all need to repent and do the will of our heavenly Father. The consequence of continuing in our rebellion and disobedience is to fall under the wrath of God.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is in land area about five times the size of England with a population of about 37 million. It is a rugged mountainous country with little rainfall. The South West is arid desert, the North East in the mountains is polar tundra. It suffers extremes of hot and cold. In places the temperature can fall as low as -25 °C in winter. Elsewhere the temperature will rise to 45 or even 50 °C in summer.

This rugged country has people to match. According to Wikipedia, "The population consists of numerous ethnolinguistic groups: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Aimaq, Turkmen, Baloch, Pashai, Nuristani, Gujjar, Arab, Brahui, Qizilbash, Pamiri, Kyrgyz, Sadat and others. Pashtun is the largest ethnic group, making up about 42% of the population. The second largest group, at about 27%, are the Tajik. Many Tajik fled from their homeland to the north of Afghanistan in 1920 following the conquest by the Red Army. Despite the variety of ethnicity there is a common culture.

There are a few minority religions groups in Afghanistan including: Zoroastrians, Sikhs, Hindus, Bahai, Jews and Christians. These communities number from a few hundred to a few thousand. The rest of the population is Muslim with 80% Sunni and 19% Shia.

Who are the Taliban?

The Taliban are predominantly Pashtun who follow the Deobandi Islamic revivalist movement. Deobandi formed during the late 19th century around the Darul Uloom Islamic seminary in the town of Deoband, India. It was initially a response to British rule in India which was seen as corrupting Islam. It revived the early practices of Islam believing that an austere pristine vision of Islam was the way of salvation.

Deobandi adheres strongly to the Islamic doctrine of 'Taqlid' which means that they are bound by legal precedent. Therefore Deobandi are required to adhere to one of the four schools of Islamic law.

The Taliban follow the 'Hanafi' school which is followed by a third of Muslims worldwide. In the 80's and 90's money from Saudi Arabia was used to spread Wahhabism in Afghanistan. Wahhabism is a very conservative form of Islam which insists on a literal interpretation of the Qur'an.

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan

The Taliban ruled Afghanistan from 1995 to 2001 when the US coalition drove them out. Far from being moderate they applied a strict application of Islamic law which led to a cruel regime. They executed criminals by stoning, amputations and public hanging as well as killing opponents. They oppressed

women by denying education beyond the age of ten, refusing employment and enforcing the burqa; withholding food aid from any who did not comply. They banned films, music and other non-Islamic cultural influences.

The new Taliban leadership have said that they don't want Wahhabism in Afghanistan. However reports from the country indicate that an extreme form of Islam is being imposed.

Christians in Afghanistan

Prior to the US taking control Afghanistan was regarded as one of the hardest places in the world to be a Christian. If there were any Christians it was only a handful. This year there were several thousand. Some have escaped to the United States, others have chosen to stay. Only God's protection can preserve those who stay. We need to pray.

Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has recognised the threat to Afghan Christians. "Already, the Taliban is compiling lists of known Christians and their communities. They are going door to door searching Afghan homes for Bibles, even searching smartphones for Bible apps. Afghan Christians are being forced to flee the country, and it should be a priority of the United States government to do what it can to get them out of harm's way. Unfortunately, if the Biden Administration cannot even manage to get Americans out, there is scant hope they can be trusted to protect religious freedom as well."

The Last Trumpet

There are three verses in scripture that combine an end time gathering of God's people with the sounding of a trumpet; one is in the Old Testament and two in the New. In this study we look into the question of whether they are describing the same or separate events.

The first of these verses is found in Isaiah. *"And it shall come about in that day, that the Lord will thresh from the channel of the River to the Brook of Egypt; and you will be gathered up one by one, O you children of Israel. So it shall be in that day; The great trumpet will be blown; They will come who are about to perish in the land of Assyria and they who are outcasts in the land of Egypt and shall worship the Lord in the holy mountain at Jerusalem."* Isaiah 27:12, 13.

A time of judgment

The preceding chapters 24 to 27 describe the time when the Lord will act in judgement on the earth. This series of prophecies begin with the words; *Behold, the Lord makes the earth empty and makes it waste, distorts its surface, and scatters abroad its inhabitants.* Isaiah 24:1. There is coming a time when the earth will be devastated. When, to use the words of verse 20; *"The earth shall*

reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall totter like a hut; its transgression shall be heavy upon it.” Revelation 16:18 describes this shaking, *“there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth”*. And yet in the midst of this destruction there are those who *“shall sing”* and *“From the ends of the earth we have heard songs, glory to the righteous”* (Isaiah 24:14, 16). *“The moon will be disgraced and the sun ashamed”* (Isaiah 24: 23). As a prelude to the Lord reigning on Mount Zion.

The Banquet for all peoples

The prophecy flows on in the next chapter to speak of how God has been, *“a strength to the needy”* and *“a refuge in the storm”*. It then describes a feast that the Lord will make for all peoples. At that time the veil over the peoples will be removed, death will be swallowed up, tears will be wiped away and the rebuke removed from His people (Isaiah 25: 6 - 9).

There can be no doubt about the Second Coming context of these words. The banquet, the swallowing up of death and the wiping away of tears all speak of the time when the *“Lord for whom we have waited”*, returns.

The Lord’s chastening

The next chapter mixes rejoicing at all that God will do with acknowledgement that God has to chastise. *“For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.”* Isaiah 26: 9. It ends with a call to the faithful to hide during the time of judgment. *“Come my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves, as it were for a little moment. Until the indignation is past. For behold the Lord comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; the earth will also disclose her blood, and no more cover her slain.”* Isaiah 26: 20, 21. The chapter also contains the reassuring words, *“You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You.”* Isaiah 26: 3.

Chapter 27 moves on to say that this is the day when Satan will be punished and Israel will blossom and be fruitful. At long last Jacob’s iniquity will be forgiven and their sins finally pardoned. But pardon will come after a period of great suffering. The prophecies culminate with the words with which we started this study. At the sounding of a great trumpet the sons of Israel will be gathered and come to worship the Lord in the Holy Mountain in Jerusalem.

Two trumpet blasts

The Jews understand that there are two occasions when God will sound a trumpet blast. The first occasion was at Sinai when God made the covenant with Israel, Exodus 19:16, 19 (also Hebrews 12:19). The second time is when God will rescue Israel and gather them to Jerusalem. Isaiah 27:13 and Zechariah

9:14. The Jews refer to these as the first and last trumpets. The first trumpet is remembered at Pentecost when the law was given to Moses. The last is to be blown at Yom Teruah, the Feast of Trumpets, to announce the coming of the Messiah to rescue Israel at her time of greatest need.

The reading for Yom Teruah (also called Rosh Hashanah) is taken from Genesis 22 where Abraham is called on to sacrifice Isaac. The Jews regard this passage as Messianic but not in the same way as Christians do. They see the horns of the ram caught in the thicket as symbolic of the first and last trumpets.

The second blast

In the New Testament we read of the blowing of a great trumpet and the gathering of the elect in our Lord's final sermon. *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."* Matthew 24: 29-31

The timing of this gathering is after the tribulation and the darkening of the sun. Following these events the sign of the Son of Man will appear and the trumpet will sound. It is widely accepted that Jesus is referring back to the Isaiah passage we have just looked at. He is describing the time when He is coming in judgement on the earth. Similar thoughts are to be found in the book of Joel. *"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness. The LORD will also roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; The heavens and the earth will shake. But the LORD will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel".* Joel 3:14-16.

As we study these and similar passages the pattern of events becomes clear. There will be devastation and destruction with a violent shaking of the earth; the sun will no longer give light and the stars will disappear. And yet in all this the people who know their God are singing songs of Joy. Out of the chaos their Lord will gather them.

We now face the question of whether the next passage that brings together the sounding of a trumpet and the gathering of the elect is also describing the same event.

The Rapture

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.” 1 Thessalonians 4: 16-18

This is part of a passage in which Paul is encouraging those who mourn those that have died. He assures them that there is no need to mourn for when Jesus comes again He will bring with Him all who have passed away. At His coming we will be caught up to be with them. In common with the passages we have already looked at, the time when Jesus returns is marked by the sounding of a trumpet.

This is added to in Corinthians where the transformation that takes place at this time, when the trumpet is sounded, is described.

“Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on the incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” 1 Corinthians 15: 51-53

The transformation is described as a mystery for it had not been revealed in the Old Testament scriptures. Paul, a Jew, sets this transformation at the last trumpet, the meaning of which the Jews readily understood.

Always ready

The above starts to make the argument for a gathering up of believers after the outpouring of God's wrath. That would be at the last point at which it may happen. Personally I pray every day for the Lord's return. Jesus taught that we must always be ready. *“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”* Matthew 24: 44. That verse keeps the door open allowing us to live in constant expectation.

The Autumn Feasts

Another attractive interpretation is that at His return Jesus will literally fulfil the autumn feasts in the Jewish calendar.

The first of the autumn feasts is Yom Teruah, which literally translates as ‘the day of the awakening blast. It represents the day of awakening of those who sleep, some to everlasting life, others to everlasting contempt, as in Daniel 12: 2. The day starts with the sighting of the new moon at the beginning of the seventh month Tishri. Because there is some uncertainty over when the new

moon will be sighted, it lasts for two days, earning also the name the 'hidden day' or the 'day and hour no man knows'.

Yom Teruah is followed by the ten days of awe, which call on people to repent and purify themselves. This could be the period when God outpours his wrath in a last bid to call on people to repent. I do not think that this world could stand more than ten days of God's wrath.

Then comes Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) which is also understood to be a day of judgment. Succoth (Feast of Tabernacles) follows on the 15th of the month, which besides remembering God's provision in the past, looks forward to the wedding feast at the coming of the Messiah and His millennial kingdom.

Will Christ's return not just follow this pattern but even keep to the dates? We will wait and see.

China

In the last edition of Trumpet sounds the question was posed, "What will the United States do if China invades Taiwan?" It was asked in the context of the Thucydidian Trap in which a challenge by a rising power to the supremacy of a declining power frequently ends in war,

That question was raised before the debacle in Afghanistan. Since that time the messages coming out of Beijing have become more bellicose. Typical of what is coming out of China is this, which was printed in the Chinese Communist Party's 'Global Times' on October 14, referring to Taiwan, "The island's (Taiwan) society must be warned that they better not believe the 'rock solid' promise of the U.S. because Washington will never fight to the death with the Chinese mainland for the island's secession," Appearing in the Global Times it almost certainly reflects the communist leadership's views on Taiwan.

On August 10, as Afghanistan was failing, Chinese propagandists went on the attack. The People's Daily, China's most authoritative publication, ran a piece titled "U.S. No Longer Has the Position of Strength for Its Arrogance and Impertinence."

Another editorial in the Global Times stated, "The DPP authorities need to keep a sober head, and the secessionist forces should reserve the ability to wake up from their dreams," the DPP being the Democratic Progressive Party which governs Taiwan. The editorial goes on, "From what happened in Afghanistan, they should perceive that once a war breaks out in the Straits, the island's defence will collapse in hours and the U.S. military won't come to help." China, apparently believes it can make Taiwan its 34th province without risking America interference.

Avoidance of war

For war to be avoided the United States needs to make a firm response in support of Taiwan. A defence treaty with Taiwan would be a sign of American will. This would be a reversal of Washington policy which, when it switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979, terminated the 1954 mutual defence treaty with Taiwan. In its place Washington adopted a policy of "strategic ambiguity". It neither told Taipei nor Beijing what it would do when conflict is imminent. On the 21st October President Biden appeared to deny this policy by saying that the US would defend Taiwan. His administration quickly back tracked, denying that there had been any change of US policy.

Taiwan is critically important to America. The island makes advanced chips for U.S. products, anchors America's western defence perimeter, and is a beacon of democracy. After the fall of Kabul, Taiwan will be the next test of U.S. resolve.

Nuclear build up

The last edition of Trumpet Sounds commented on the increasing number of missile silos being constructed by the Chinese. It appears that the number given then was an under estimate. The latest information is that China is constructing 300 new missile silos. This is the largest nuclear missile construction programme since the end of the cold war. It will give China parity with the United States in numbers of missiles. In addition the Chinese military have road mobile missiles which have a range of 15,000 km, sufficient to reach the US. The navy has a growing fleet of nuclear missile quipped submarines. Their latest submarine launched ballistic missile is reported to have a range of 10,000 km. The above doesn't take into account the recent reports of China testing a hypersonic missile which can evade US missile defence systems.

Chinese intentions were reported in the Global Times, "the dynamic equilibrium will be achieved when the radical elites in the US completely lose the courage to even think about using nuclear weapons against China, and when the entire US society is fully aware that China is 'untouchable' in terms of military power."

China intends to have military might sufficient to deter the US from interference in their ambition to take Taiwan. But it won't stop at Taiwan. President Xi Jinping has spoken of the aim to achieve global domination. He has also said that he won't be passing the problem of Taiwan down to the next generation.

Biden's health

Part of a nation's intelligence gathering about other nations is understanding the 'leadership's intent'. Just as the US is seeking to understand the intentions of Xi Jinping, so the Chinese are assessing what to expect from President Biden if they invade Taiwan. A significant factor in this assessment is Biden's health.

Former member of the US House of Representatives and chairman of the House Intelligence Committee Peter Hoekstra believes that the Chinese are already considering, if Biden stepped down due to ill health that would be an opportune time to invade Taiwan.

Hoekstra wrote in an article for the Gatestone Institute, "Put this in the larger context of what we, and the Chinese communists, already know. We have a politically weakened president whose poll numbers continue to drop precipitously, a massive foreign policy disaster in Afghanistan, an administration that has exhibited a strong preference for dialogue instead of action, and a country whose leadership has shown a weak hand in its foreign policy direction. Take that, along with some reporting that Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman, General Mark Milley, may have hinted in his conversations with the Chinese communists that the U.S. would not militarily intervene to assist Taiwan. The bottom line, their assessment is probably that Biden is a weak leader with a very fragile political standing. An assessment, it might be worth noting, that is held by many in the U.S. as well."

A Palestinian Cartoon

This cartoon was prepared by Fatah to mock Hamas. It says what we all know but Western media wilfully ignores. (From Palestinian Media Watch).



Israel and Iran

On the 10th October the new head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, Mohammad Eslami, announced that Iran had enriched 120 kilograms of uranium to 20% level. This is a jump from 84 kilograms the previous month. If this quantity of uranium is enriched to 90% it would be nearly enough to build a single nuclear bomb. Iran had already announced that it had enriched smaller amounts of uranium to 60%. This level of enrichment is not necessary for a civilian nuclear programme.

President Biden wants Iran to return to the nuclear deal agreed by Obama's administration. A deal which Iran never signed or kept to. The renewed negotiations are going nowhere. They have halted, with no meetings having taken place since June. The stalemate, with its lack of maximum pressure and absence of a deal, suits Iran who, as illustrated above, are pressing ahead with their enrichment programme.

Meanwhile, Iran has further limited the IAEA's (International Atomic Energy Authority) access to supervise the nuclear sites, indicating that there are many things which are not to be seen.

President Trump's sanctions on Iran are still in place, but not being enforced, China being one nation which has broken them with a deal for Iran to supply crude oil.

Still time

Although Iran may only be weeks away from having enough enriched uranium for a bomb, it is still probably 18 months before it can deploy it as a weapon. The next step would be to test it with an underground nuclear explosion. Iran is hesitant to take that step, as this would underline to the world their true intention. There is time to apply real pressure to bring Iran back to real negotiations. However pressure at this stage would involve a credible military threat by both the United States and Israel.

The final option

If all else fails Israel may have to take military action. The risk of such action will be Iran using its proxy forces, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza and its own forces in Syria, to launch an all-out attack on Israel.

Israel has been developing its military capability, for stopping Iran from becoming armed with a nuclear bomb, since 2004. Recently it has ordered from the United States another squadron of F35I stealth fighters and the latest refueling aircraft, plus unspecified munitions. Possibly these form part of Israel's plans to strike Iran but may also be a way of signaling to Iran that Israel is able to launch a credible military threat.

Valneva Val 2001

The French vaccine company Valneva has been developing a Covid-19 vaccine. Quoting a press release from Valneva, “Val 2001 is currently the only whole virus, inactivated adjuvanted vaccine candidate against COVID-19 in clinical trial in Europe”. Inactivated virus adjuvanted vaccines have been used since the 1930's and therefore we could refer to VAL 2001 as a ‘traditional’ vaccine. Aluminium salts were initially used as an adjuvant with diphtheria and tetanus vaccines after it was found they strengthened the body's immune response to these vaccines.

The published results for the stage 3 trials show it achieved a better level of immunity with far fewer side effects than the AstraZenica vaccine, against which it was compared. The trial's chief investigator, Professor Adam Finn, described the immune response as “both impressive and extremely encouraging”. In theory this type of vaccine should give longer lasting immunity and be more effective in dealing with future COVID variants than the mRNA vaccines. As yet this has not been demonstrated.

The UK Government pre-ordered 60 million doses of the vaccine and invested in a new production facility in Livingston, Scotland. In September the Health Secretary Sajid Javid cancelled the order. He accused Valneva of breach of contract and that the vaccine would not get MHRA (Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Authority) approval. Both accusations are denied by Valneva.

As the only inactivated viral vaccine candidate on trial, it removes many of the objections surrounding the Pfizer type experimental mRNA vaccines. Also it does not use human embryonic stem cells in its production. Unfortunately as the order has now been cancelled it is unlikely to be available in the UK.

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