

QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

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*A Bible teaching and preaching ministry
for the Christian community*

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WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO THE CHURCH TODAY?

October 2022. After a long period of decline, and especially following the Covid pandemic with its lockdowns, much of the Christian church in the UK (and elsewhere) is now seriously asking what God is saying. It is right that we should do so, as Jesus often told us to observe the signs of the times in which we live. Each of the seven letters to the churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 conclude with the instruction that if we have ears to hear we must listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the churches. In the course of my own ministry in recent times I have sought to open up some of the areas I feel that God would have us hear, but this study is an urgent attempt to put the whole situation into an orderly and constructive setting. I will give Bible references very sparingly, as there would be so many, concentrating instead on the broad sweep of scriptural doctrine. We deal with this matter under four headings.

1. The importance of Israel

- Israel, God's ancient chosen nation, was the main channel of His revelation to the world before Pentecost. This laid the complete and unique foundation for humanity's understanding of God, eternity, sin, judgement, redemption, righteousness, etc. Even since Pentecost Israel has continued to fulfil this duty through the vital role of the Old Testament in the Bible.
- After Pentecost Israel was put temporarily to one side and the Church Age began. Since then the church is being built in all nations through everyone who puts their faith in Jesus, and God has spoken to the world through the church. The church is not a 'new Israel'. The Bible doesn't teach that it would be so; that is a man-made idea.
- The Church Age will conclude with a seven-year time of judgement, called the Tribulation. At some point before the Tribulation Israel would be restored to its promised land in readiness for its role during the Tribulation and the Kingdom Age thereafter.
- At the end of the Tribulation Jesus returns, standing on the Mount of Olives, and will take up His worldwide kingship for a thousand years on David's throne in Jerusalem. That will be the seventh and final era of the history of time, before the timeless permanence of eternity.
- In Jeremiah 16 v 14 – 15 and 23 v 7 – 8 it is foretold that the world will refer to Israel, not as the people who were brought out of Egypt, but as the people who were brought back from all the nations where they were banished, including the "land of the north" (Russia). When Jeremiah refers to "the days that are coming" we now know that that is actually referring to our day. Indeed, modern Israel is often referred to now as the place where Jews have come from many lands, without any reference to their historic homeland there since they left Egypt under Moses.
- We note that the Balfour Declaration in 1917 was the first time since the sacking of Jerusalem in 70AD that Israel had been promised a return to its God-given land. That promise triggered a vast global rise of fascist antisemitism, leading to Hitler and the Nazis, the Second World War, the holocaust, and the attempt to eliminate the Jewish people. Three years after the death of Hitler, Israel was back in its ancient homeland.
- The Bible, God's Word, makes the return of the Jews to Israel a most significant moment in world history. It would be hard to overestimate the importance of this event in God's plan. As if to underline His feelings, by grace God then appears to have given this world a celebratory seventy-year period of blessing, unparalleled in history. This grace has been seen in economics, politics, communications, medicine, science, culture, transport, etc. I cannot think of a similar short period in world history when there has been such a rapid and dramatic improvement in the condition of human existence. We can measure this period from about 1948 to 2018. At the same time God has given the world a seventy-year supreme demonstration of how Christian faith and lifestyle can mould a leading head of state - through the virtually concurrent reign of Queen Elizabeth II. Her amazing funeral events were recognised by almost every other world leader as marking the end of a unique time. The seventy years have been followed by a worldwide pandemic, international warfare following the release of terrible evil forces latent in Russia, great upheavals in the global environment, economic collapse in many nations, and really serious food shortages. Even the liberal democracies, including our own, are becoming ungovernable with bitter internal criticism and often violent discontent. This is putting democracy under enormous pressure as people in various countries are starting to look for a more authoritarian form of government and leadership.

2. The decline of the church

At the same time as the world enjoyed a seventy-year period of great blessing, the church has gone the other way, certainly in many countries where the Gospel was once proclaimed and understood. The exception in recent times has been when lands previously denied the freedom to worship and preach God's Word have later enjoyed an outpouring of Gospel grace and freedom. This has been especially so in former communist-led countries and the 'third-world'. The sad decline of the church in lands like the UK has a number of causes foretold in scripture, including:

- Romans 1 v 18 – 32. God is angry because of the widespread denial of His eternal power and divine nature, leading to many people, Christians included, glorifying creation as self-made (evolved) rather than God-made. This has resulted in God giving societies over to sexual obsession, sexual perversion and ultimately to social breakdown. The power and nature of God are perfectly capable of creating a universe such as we can now observe so clearly, without the need for taking any time longer than six literal days if that is what He has said He did. Christians especially should glorify Him for doing just that, rather than trying to explain it away. There is no reconciling of great eons of 'evolutionary' time with God's perfect creation and the human origin of sin and death.
- 2 Timothy 3 v 1 - 9. This describes in detail the social breakdown foretold in the previous reference in Romans. The church displays a form of godliness, but denies its power, because it has lost its understanding of what sin is. The word 'sin', and its concomitant word 'repentance', are now ignored by many churches.
- 2 Timothy 4 v 3 – 4. The task of the church has been to declare God's truth to the world, and the Holy Spirit has led God's people to do this over the centuries. Now truth has become whatever people want it to be.
- Matthew 24 v 24. False prophets and messiahs are flourishing with all sorts of false teaching and "miracles", both in the church and in society at large. Christians, the "elect", would even be deceived and today this includes many who follow conspiracy theories and all sorts of other ideas that deny the provision of God's grace.

All these features of decline have a common theme – deception. With the decline of Bible based doctrinal and expository teaching many Christians are unsure of what they are meant to believe. Then churches are left with music, entertainment and social concern as their main activities. These have their place, but on their own they have no power to prevent deceptively false thinking and activity.

3. The task of the church in the last days

With Israel back in its land, followed by God's approval as indicated by those seventy blest years, and now with the onset of apocalyptic disasters, scripture would suggest we are in the last days of the Church Age. Even the Lord's own prophetic words to the disciples just before His crucifixion would lend great weight to this view. The decline of the church as mentioned above is also a relevant confirmation. But while we as Christians are still here, and before we are raptured away prior to the Tribulation, we have work to do.

- Matthew 24 v 14. We must continue to preach the Gospel while it is still the "day of salvation". This is one reason we can be so thankful for the witness of Queen Elizabeth and her recent funeral service.
- Ezekiel 33 v 1 – 9. Watchmen on the wall. This is a very important principle, continued in the New Testament where we are described as salt, light and ambassadors. If we know the truth and see the danger, we are under an obligation to tell others around us that these conditions are the foreshadowing of terrible judgement ahead.
- Matthew 16 v 13 – 17. The importance of revelation over fear. The disciples reported the reluctance of the crowds to openly declare Jesus to be the Christ (the Messiah), which was due to the fear people felt (John 9 v 22). The disciples could be confident because the truth had been revealed to them. A day is coming, and may be here already, when people's hearts will be full of fear as to what is happening to planet Earth. At such a time our response must constantly be based on the Holy Spirit's confirmation of God's Word and of our subsequent duty. We must not rely on the past and our traditional ways of operating, or on the plans and arrangements we try to make by our own 'wisdom'. This is a similar situation to the early Christians when they had no past experience to go on. They had to rely on the revelation given to them step by step as they were led by the Holy Spirit.
- Isaiah 43 v 18 – 19 and 46 v 9 – 10. God is sovereign in everything. We rejoice to walk in the light of that fact and not according to our own ideas and judgements, and certainly not on what may have happened in the past.

4. The true Kingdom

- Luke 17 v 21. The Kingdom of God is within us. We often refer to Jesus as King, but in the Church Age He is King personally of all who own Him as Saviour and Lord. He is not yet king of the world at large.
- Isaiah 9 v 6 - 7, Zechariah 14 v 1 – 9 and Philippians 2 v 9 – 11. Jesus will be King on David's throne. This will be the end of the Church Age and the beginning of the millennial Kingdom Age. We (the "Holy Ones") will be with Him in our eternal resurrection bodies following the marriage supper of the Lamb. It will be a vastly different period of history on Earth: Satan bound; the planet cleansed; great harmony politically, economically, environmentally and spiritually; long lifespans for the ordinary humans living in that era; an end to imperialism; and the absence of satanically inspired evil in every society. "Come, Lord Jesus!"