

QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

www.quantockministries.org.uk

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

D M HERRING
45 LUXBOROUGH ROAD
BRIDGWATER
TA6 7JN

01278 451297
qmins@aol.com

THE WATCHMAN ON THE WALL – EZEKIEL 33 v 1 – 9

Although this passage is addressed firstly to Israel the principle that lies behind the instruction is of such importance that it applies to God's people in all ages, including us in the Church age. Part of the watchman duties of His people is to make God and His grace known, and to inform all other people of their subsequent responsibilities towards their creator (Romans 3 v 19 & 14 v 12). After all, those who know God are well aware of His grace and will know also of His eventual judgement upon those who reject that grace. It is this very principle that lies behind the duty of the Church to preach the gospel with anointed passion.

In the years after the Second World War there was a great period of gospel witness in our land and many, many churches regularly preached the gospel. This was not just at weekly services, but evangelism was conducted in a wide variety of ways through Sunday schools, youth activities, and many other outreach opportunities. A multitude of evangelists were called to work in villages, towns, cities, nationally and internationally, and many people heeded a call to take the gospel to other lands, with missionary organisations of many kinds being well supported. Politically there was very little restraint on Christian witness in this country, and in society a general sense of acceptance prevailed towards Christian activities and standards.

The situation is rapidly changing today and the recent passing of Billy Graham would appear to mark the end of an era. Great numbers of churches and chapels have either closed altogether or are struggling with small numbers of mainly elderly folks attending. Gospel preaching is much reduced with fewer evangelists, growing hostility from outside, and within the Church a tragic onslaught of liberal and replacement theologies and moral relativism. Many communities, especially in rural areas and on large housing estates, appear to be devoid of any meaningful Christian witness. True, there has been a measure of blessing through Alpha, Christianity Explored, and similar activities, and some churches maintain a good presence with large congregations, family-centred arrangements, and social outreach in various forms. In no way do I decry such fellowships and I enjoy teaching opportunities with those where I am invited to serve. However, often the churches that are busy and being used of the Lord find that apart from Sunday morning services many of their other meetings are not so well attended, and even on Sunday mornings the gospel is not always preached with power and authority. In all honesty, the evangelical Christian voice in our land today has very little impact and we appear to be failing in our watchman duties. We may still have a name for good works, with churches often being social centres principally, but our biblical message is much muted and greatly ridiculed.

This being so, it is vital that we listen clearly to whatever the Lord is telling us through the Holy Spirit for these days. Of course, we must continue to preach the gospel until the Rapture but being watchmen, declaring all of God's revealed will is an essential part of our duties, to individuals and to communities. If we do not do this, the people of this day will never hear of God's righteous requirements through any other source, and the responsibility for their ignorance will be on our heads. If we are truly declaring God's clear word to this generation at this particular point in history then I believe it will be attended by appropriate power and authority, for that is how God works. In other words, if the day of effective gospel proclamation appears to be drawing to a close, what is the Church's message that must take centre stage now? We have been told to watch for the signs of the end of the age, and those signs seem to be multiplying. If this is the case then the words given to each of the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 are relevant and urgent: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches". This is essential listening for the watchman on the wall and we desperately need to be asking the Lord what He is saying to the churches today through the Spirit, that we are then required to go and declare to all around us. In order to hear the answer to this question we need first to understand three biblical principles.

1. God's ages of human history and their times of judgement.

I have set out these in some detail in other studies and so I will give just a short summary here. Scripture shows that God has dealt with human beings in various ways since the Creation and will continue to do so until, at the close of the millennial reign, the ages of time will come to an end and time will be no more. In the Bible we can identify seven ages altogether and at the end of each there is a time of judgement on that age. The age of the Law started at Sinai and finished on the Day of Pentecost, when the age of the Church commenced (Ephesians 3 v 2 – 6). The disciples were just beginning to understand this when they asked Jesus what the signs of the end of the age would be (Matthew 24 v 3). He gave a very full answer (also recorded in Mark 13 and Luke 21), including some detail of the time of judgement at the end of the Church age. Subsequent revelation to the apostles, especially to John on Patmos, has given us a lot more detail about that judgement, which will last for seven years and will be known as the Tribulation. It will also be a time of cleansing ready for the next glorious age. The Tribulation ends with the physical return of Jesus to Earth, with His bride (the Church), and that will also mark the final conclusion of the Church age, to be superseded by the age of the millennial kingdom.

2. Progressive revelation.

In each of the ages of human history, and throughout the passing of the ages, God has gradually revealed more and more of His nature and purposes. So, for example, the character of God came progressively into focus throughout the Old Testament period until the fullest understanding was brought to us through the presence on earth of the Lord Jesus (John 1 v 18, Hebrews 1 v 1 – 2). Similarly, the full nature of the plan of redemption was seen in type early in the Old Testament but became ever clearer until the Lord completed His redemptive work here in the flesh and the full canon of scripture was revealed through the apostles. In the same way details of the end of this age have become more understandable as we near the event. The early church argued whether the book of Revelation should be part of the canon of scripture and even at the Reformation commentators were very unsure how to understand it. With the Spirit-led rediscovery of the full literal integrity of scripture over the past 200 years, particularly that the Church is not, and cannot be, a replacement of Israel, the next phase of God's plan is becoming ever more apparent. We can now see what Revelation is telling the world about the time of judgement at the end of the Church age, and then what lies beyond.

3. Foreshadowing

God's long-suffering grace means that He always gives warning of judgement to come, with the provision of a means of escape for anyone who heeds the warning. Noah spent up to 120 years building his ark, preaching a warning about the Flood while he did so. Both John the Baptist and Jesus Himself clearly warned Israel of the new age that was about to dawn and the danger facing those in Israel who ignored what God was doing. It is to be expected that events and the Spirit will deliver a clear foreshadowing, both of the terrible nature of the Tribulation judgement and also of the golden age which is to follow.

From these three principles we can see that at some point in history there will be a definite winding down of the Church age (e.g. Matthew 24 v 12, Luke 18 v 8), with an anointing being given to the Church to point out to a lost world that the signs herald the time of God's wrath prior to Christ's return to rule and reign. *Being watchmen inevitably means that the generation of Christians living in the years just prior to these events will be given the clarity of understanding of God's purposes that will enable them to declare those purposes to a world that is just about to experience them.* We also know this must happen because before the worldwide Tribulation breaks out in all its terror the Church, as the watchman, will disappear at the Rapture, leaving just Israel as God's mouthpiece on earth, as it was in Old Testament times (Zechariah 8 v 23). (This will mark the final seven years of Israel's history prophesied by Daniel (Daniel 9 v 27).) Sadly, as happened to John the Baptist when his prophetic authority was derided by the very people who should have known what God was doing, today many in the Church will seek to ridicule and undermine those watchmen who desire to obey God by declaring the truth relevant to the approaching day of His wrath (Revelation 3 v 10).

The first phase of the Tribulation is described in Revelation chapter 6 and as the time draws near maybe enough light is now being shone on this passage, and enough foreshadowing is taking place, for us to sound a fairly specific warning. Jesus the Lamb opens the seals on these judgements and in the light of 5 v 13 and 6 v 15 we can reasonably conclude all these judgements are global in their significance. The first four seals announce what is popularly known as the four horses of the apocalypse.

v 2 – The white horse. This denotes the emergence of a determined conqueror whose crown (authority) has been given to him, rather than assumed by force, and who stops at nothing to achieve his global aims. This reasonably links with all the prophetic scriptures regarding the antichrist. Such a world-wide dominant figure is entirely plausible in today's technological age and especially in the traumatic aftermath of the sudden disappearance of untold millions of people at the Rapture.

v 4 – The red horse. The word used here for a large sword (rhomphaia) denotes not a specific weapon but general killing. Here in the context of taking peace from the earth and mass slaying it suggests a level of inexplicable bloodshed we already see building up with mass shootings, stabbings, terrorist atrocities, ethnic cleansing, events such as the German co-pilot deliberately flying his full plane into a mountain (March 2015), and many other killings on a huge scale. Again, today we have the technology.

v 5 & 6 – The black horse. The precise measuring out of commodities with firm instructions sounds like planned central control rather than acute shortages. This could be bureaucratic and moralistic control over all supplies of food and goods, as in Marxist or socialist command economies or centrist systems as is suggested in a federal EU. Such ideas are rapidly gaining popularity now.

v 8 – The pale horse. Here a quarter of the world's population perish by means of four dreadful causes: 1) sword, suggesting general warfare involving armed forces; 2) famine, suggesting actual chronic shortages, possibly caused by the failure of the central control under the black horse, as in Venezuela now (2018); 3) plague, the word meaning natural calamities, especially diseases; and 4) wild beasts. This last great cause of death is not the word normally used in scripture for animals (zōon), but rather the word used for beastly as a characteristic (thērion), as in the descriptions of the antichrist and false prophet in 13 vv 1 & 11. 'Wild beasts' suggests 'out of control beastliness'. With computers now controlling everything, universal hacking, cyberwarfare and malware could well result in out of control destruction. Transport and industrial machinery; military equipment and weapons; energy, banking and media systems; artificial intelligence robots; etc, could all be harnessed for evil, causing world-wide mayhem and death. On the internet rampant terrorism, pornography and paedophilia exposure could have a universal corrupting influence. Silicon (quartz, sand) is the basic building block of computer microchips, so the whole "house" is now built on sand!

The fifth seal (v 9 – 11) describes the anguish of the tribulation saints in all this. The sixth seal (v 12 – 14) denotes a vast upheaval of the earth's crust and near space. The possibility of such an event is already exercising minds and imaginations of people today. The result of all these events is mass panic, but also a realisation that this is God's judgement (v 15 – 17). The interesting question then arises, how would they know that? This brings us right back to our starting point - it would be largely through the witness of us Christians before we left, and this shows how important it is that each of us is a watchman on the wall, here and now.