

The witness of fulfilled Bible prophecy

6. Distress of nations with perplexity

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Although there have always been godlessness, natural disasters and war amongst nations, the situation in the world today is unprecedented and is in fulfilment of the words of Jesus and the prophets. This article surveys conditions in the world and finds that they fulfil many Bible prophecies of the times before Christ's coming.

IN AN AGE when the truth, relevance and reliability of God's holy Scriptures are challenged daily, the witness of fulfilled prophecy gives eloquent testimony to support the Bible's claim that it is the Word of God. For a world immersed in disbelief and doubt about the existence of God, the prophetic Word clearly shows that there is a God and that He "ruleth in the kingdom of men".

When atheists launch a publicity campaign under the slogan *There probably is no God* they fulfil the statement of the psalmist, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Ps. 53:1), and do little to bring comfort and consolation to a confused and distressed population. In a world reeling from economic collapse, the news is filled with items concerning war and with natural disasters such as earthquakes of enormous proportions. Floods and famines appear regularly, followed by stories of immorality, abuse and violence.

In such a world Bible prophecy can bring calm and confidence to troubled minds. People need answers, people need reassurance, people need reasons as to why they should believe the Bible, why they should build their lives around the Bible and its teachings. To be able to look at the world we live in today and see the events described in the Bible centuries ago coming to pass, not only confirms the accuracy of the Bible but also encourages faith.

The Apostle Paul expressed this in these words: "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our *learning*, that we through *patience* and *comfort* of the scriptures might have *hope*" (Rom. 15:4). As one learns from Scripture of the plan and purpose of God, so the experience of patience and comfort become a reality in one's life. But above all there is hope; and who in this dysfunctional and desolate society and world

does not need hope as a strong anchor in life?

Whoso readeth, let him understand

When Jesus was talking to his disciples about the signs of the times for their generation, in what we call the Olivet Prophecy (Mt. 24:1-31), he drew

their attention to an Old Testament prophecy from Daniel 9:27: "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) then let them which be in Judæa flee into the mountains: let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house . . ." (vv. 15-17). Jesus expected his followers to be able to recognise the fulfilment of prophecy and to act accordingly.

Belief in God and Christ will not necessarily protect one from the troubles, hardships and difficulties that arise in the world. Indeed, they may be the very means of testing one's faith and belief. Jesus spoke of having to leave your home, to flee to another place, to be prepared to abandon possessions and the material substance you might have accumulated. He speaks about persecution, family betrayal, even death, for believers in a world that is in chaos and confusion. A faithful believer who had listened to Jesus and then read Daniel's prophecy would, if they were sensible, start to live lives in anticipation of what was to come. So what about us today?

Perilous times shall come

We have been provided with the holy Scriptures and the prophetic message concerning the times in which we live, the days that will herald the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. When the Apostle Peter wrote his second epistle warning the believers about the events of A.D. 70 he reminded them there existed "a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed . . ." Why should they have confidence in the prophetic Word? The answer is clear and unequivocal: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of

man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy [Spirit]" (2 Pet. 1:19-21).

Prophecy comes from God and is intended to influence, direct and motivate the thoughts and actions of the believer. Having given the prophetic message, Peter then challenges his readers and us with the statement, "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation [living] and godliness . . . ?". He describes the removal of the ruling powers and earthly institutions, and says that the believer will "look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (3:11-13). Prophecy is not an optional extra in the faith of the believer, something that some who have an interest in such things can follow while others can ignore it or claim it is confusing or too difficult to be sure about what is being presented.

The apostle then concludes his epistle with a warning: "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness" (v. 17). Even though we have been warned in advance of what the future holds prior to the return of Jesus, it is often difficult to see in our individual lives and the activities of our community the impact of the prophetic message. Our public message has less and less prophetic content and concentrates more on a social gospel.

If we do not tell our friends and neighbours and the society we live in what is coming, who will? We are surrounded by fulfilled prophecy and prophecy fulfilling, and, no matter how difficult life is, or may become, we can rejoice in the knowledge that God is in control, and our faith in the promise of eternal salvation can grow stronger. Let us reflect, then, on some of the current events that will cause us to 'be diligent' rather than distressed. We will briefly consider:

- the current financial crisis in Britain and the rest of the world
- world energy needs—developments in Russia and the Middle East
- the papacy seeking church unity and influence in political affairs in Europe
- the decline in morality and spirituality.

Take no thought for the morrow

The teaching of Scripture to avoid making materialism, and money in particular, the centre of one's life is very clear. Most people have the mistaken belief that possessions and wealth will bring stability and security and peace of mind.

Such things direct the gaze earthwards rather than heavenward towards the things of God.

Jesus said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Mt. 6:19,20). The words of Paul to the ecclesia at Colosse also emphasise this same point: "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:2,3).

The present credit crunch, as the financial crisis has become known, has brought such teaching into stark relief. The total panic and distress that the collapse of banks and financial institutions caused, as people saw savings and pensions and investments decimated, was worldwide, but the impact was most dramatic in the Western world. Governments and powerful institutions are still reeling and desperately trying to grapple with these problems nearly three years after they first started in the latter part of 2007. Now it is not just banks, companies and individuals that seek solutions, but nations balance on the edge of bankruptcy, as witnessed with Greece and Spain, Portugal and Ireland.

These conditions are the ones that will cause authoritarian leaders and political groupings to arise as foretold in Bible prophecy, particularly in relation to Europe with Germany, Russia and the European Union. They are a prelude to the final formation of those nations that will be allied with the king of the north and invade the Middle East. The words of Jesus are now seen to be so true. Thieves may not literally have broken into banks or homes, but the failure of governments, banks and financial institutions to be able to regulate the greed, corruption and incompetence so prevalent in human nature has meant that the wealth of thousands, perhaps even many millions, of people has been stolen. (It is interesting to note that, while major nations around the world struggle with the financial problems, Israel appears to very strong financially, again a prelude that will bring about future events as prophesied in Scripture. We will touch on this aspect later.)

These difficult times herald the coming of Christ, for, as Daniel prophesied, his coming will be when "there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time" (12:1). In the interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which Daniel

identifies as “what shall be in the latter days” (2:28), he states that the feet and toes of the image represent nations. The iron and clay speak of nations “partly strong, and partly broken” (v. 42). The word “broken” means brittle, showing them to be unstable and likely to collapse.

Such is the state of many nations in Europe. Even the government in Britain talks of a ‘time of austerity’, that there is no money, and billions of pounds-worth of cuts and savings have to be made, and that it may well take two generations to clear the nation’s debts! When we look at how God has brought judgements against nations in the past we see that it is not just military conflict that caused fear, distress and poverty. Through famine and natural disasters, social upheaval and disease, people and nations have been brought low.

In the time of the prophet Jeremiah the word was: “Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth” (Jer. 25:32)—this at a time when God has a controversy with the nations and will plead with all flesh. God’s judgements come not just to punish people but also to encourage them to repent and turn to Him. By showing how ‘uncertain’ riches are, by teaching us the ‘deceitfulness of riches’, He encourages us to put our trust in Him and to accept the instruction, “seek ye *first* the kingdom of God”.

The words of the wise man need to be taken to heart by all disciples in these last days: “There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing; there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches” (Prov. 13:7). We do well to examine our individual and ecclesial life styles and ask what sort of examples we are setting for the people around us and, even more importantly, for our children.

“Art thou come to take a spoil?”

This question, asked of the northern host that comes into the Middle East and seeks to destroy Israel, has become far more understandable in the last few years. Quoted in Ezekiel 38:13 and attributed to Sheba, Dedan, the merchants of Tarshish and the young lions thereof (those nations opposed to the invasion) it indicates that there is a wealth, a worthwhile benefit, that will be acquired by this military conquest. It used to be thought that the oil of Arab nations such as Saudi Arabia or Iraq was the draw. While that still exists, there is now oil and gas in Israel, as well

Russian Influence

“Our 2009 prediction that Russia would consolidate its influence in the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Balkans and Poland was borne out in several ways: Moscow intimidated the Baltic states, destabilized the Georgian government, forged a closer relationship with Azerbaijan, formed a customs union with Kazakhstan and Belarus, and deepened defense links in Central Asia and the Balkans.”

Stratfor Global Intelligence, Jan. 2010

as the world’s major electronics development and research facilities and major diamond-processing companies.

But this invasion is also an anti-Semitic war, driven by a hatred of the Jews, fuelled by the propaganda of the Palestinian movement and its supporters, supported by apostate Christian religion. In Europe the bringing together of nations through the European Union and the Lisbon Treaty, which all member states had committed to by the end of 2009, is augmented by the fact that Russia has become the dominant supplier of energy resources in Europe. Some forty per cent of the European countries’ gas needs will soon be supplied by Russia, who is also a major exporter of oil.

Through both these means, of political unity and energy requirements, the old division of Eastern and Western Europe has disappeared, supplemented by the working of the Catholic Church. Gazprom is the Russian state-controlled agency that dominates the energy market in Europe. Russia has forged a strategic alliance with Germany because it needs her engineering expertise and drive. The Russians are building pipelines for gas and oil that will go directly into Germany, bypassing the Baltic states on the west and the Ukraine on the east (areas that existing pipelines cross), by putting the pipelines under the Black Sea and Baltic Sea.

Germany is developing a lot of infrastructure in Russia, including railways, and a major project is a railway running east from Russia to China. Russia is seeking to dominate the energy supplies because this will bring great political control. Former Soviet countries such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, along with Turkmenistan, also produce oil, and a pipeline carries it to the Caspian Sea through Russian-controlled territory. Libya, another producer of oil, has had strong links with Russia over the past fifty years; and, since 2003 in

Panel 1 The nations of Ezekiel 38

Gog, chief prince	= Russia
in the land of Magog	= Germany/Ukraine
Meschah, Tubal	= Regions within Russia
Persia	= Iran
Ethiopia	= Sudan
Libya	= Libya
Gomer	= France/Turkey
Togarmah	= Turkey/Armenia

particular, Russian companies have been greatly involved in Libya's oil and energy fields.

Such is the determination to get control of energy sources and supply wherever they can be found in the world. Amazingly, it was reported just in April 2010 that Gazprom had approached the Israeli government to see if they could be involved in the work in several Israeli oil and gas fields! These gas field will make Israel a major exporter of gas to other countries, as well as causing her to be independent of outside sources for quite some time, so we can see the spoil that is so attractive to the northern host.

We know from the prophecy in Ezekiel 38 which nations will be involved in the confederacy that will come down on Israel. These are Gog, Magog, the chief prince of Meschah and Tubal, and Gomer and Togarmah. These European nations will be supported by Libya, Ethiopia (which includes Sudan) and Persia (Iran). The details in [Panel 1](#) above show the identity in the world today of the nations listed in Ezekiel 38. They are in fact the majority of the European nations seen as members of the European Union and those allied directly with Russia.

Most of the nations listed in Ezekiel 38 are to be found in Genesis 10:2,3, where they are listed as the sons of Japheth, a son of Noah. History records that, after the Flood, these were the families that migrated north of the Middle East, ultimately into the area that we know as Western and Eastern Europe today. It covers an area stretching from Portugal and Spain through to Siberia, an area where Germany and France, who

are becoming more and more dominant in the European Union, are linking ever closer to Russia. It is in these areas that we now see rising anti-Semitism, which has gathered pace since Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza two years ago. So Bible prophecy continues to give a clear light on world events, and warns the believer to be prepared for the coming of the Lord.

The Man of Sin revealed

Both the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church have a history of fomenting anti-Semitism and, with their desire to control their holy sites in Jerusalem, will clearly continue to do so. The greater involvement by apostate Christianity with the political powers in Europe is clearly shown in the book of Revelation, and this will certainly allow that bias against Israel to prevail.

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Thessalonica he pointed out that the return of Christ could not take place before apostasy had become dominant and blasphemous in its form, and that it would be destroyed by Christ at his coming: "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition . . . so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God . . . And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming" (2 Thess. 2:3-8).





Pope Benedict XVI and the Patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox Church join hands in a show of unity between the Eastern and Western Churches.

Paul knew that the pagan Roman system had to be removed to allow the corrupted Christian church to come into being. This it finally did under Constantine in the fourth century, and down through the ages it has developed into the form we see today. Originally there was only the one church, but in A.D. 1054 the Universal Catholic Church split in two because of a theological dispute and the political divide between the West and East (the two legs of Nebuchadnezzar's image). The West supported what was to be the Roman Catholic Church, with the pope as its head and Germany as the main political power in the Holy Roman Empire. The East supported what was to become the Orthodox Church, with the patriarch at its head and Russia as Holy Russia being the main political power. This came about with the fall of Constantinople to the Muslim advances and the retreat to Moscow, which became known as the 'third Rome'.

Both sections of the church have been responsible for pogroms and inquisitions against those who refused to accept their false teachings, and in particular against the Jews. Today we see moves to bring the separated churches together, and both are active in the political spheres of their respective geographical locations. It is quite probable that the churches will be united by the time Christ is revealed.

The tremendous influence that both have in social, commercial and political affairs becomes more apparent day by day. Since the fall of communism and the Soviet Union (to be replaced by a socialist Christian order) the leaders of Russia, particularly Putin and Medvedev, are regularly

seen attending religious services, and both were present for the enthronement of the new Patriarch Kyrill. Both these men have had audiences with the pope in Rome.

Western leaders are just as busy visiting the pope, and when Pope John Paul II died the number of leaders present for the funeral was staggering. The Apostle Paul states that because the apostate church has "received not the love of the truth" a strong delusion has gripped them, "that they should believe a lie"; and the consequence of this is "that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. 2:10-12).

The judgement on this false church is also clearly seen in Revelation 17 and 18, where the graphic symbolic language portrays it as a "great whore" and a "woman sit[ting] upon a scarlet coloured beast", a woman arrayed in purple and scarlet, wearing gold, precious stones and pearls, and carrying a golden cup in her hand. Here is a picture of a false religion being carried by and influencing this beast. (The beast is Western Europe, a political confederacy of nations. It has existed in the past and reappears prior to the return of Christ. But the harlot's influence also spreads further than just Western Europe in the prophecy.)

The acceptance of the Lisbon Treaty by member states of the EU put onto a legal basis the ability of the church to influence the political decisions made within the EU. The Catholic Bishops Conference in December last year reminded the European Union member states and politicians, churches and their members, of the facility that is now available for religious input into the forming of political decisions. A clearly worded press release set out the new position (see [Panel 2](#) overleaf). But this Mother of Harlots (she likes to call herself the mother of the churches!), this Babylon the Great, is destined for destruction, to be made desolate. The return of Christ will usher in the cry, "Babylon the Great is fallen". We are to ensure that we "be not partakers of her sins".

Perilous times shall come

We have seen how the Bible has accurately foretold what the state of the world will be like prior to the return of Christ: economic difficulties, powerful groupings of nations intent on exercising their authority and philosophy (and in the course of this destroying God's people), a corrupt church interested in human aspirations rather than Divine ones. Even if the believer can chart a course through life observing all this while

**Panel 2 Press Release:
Catholic Bishops Conference, December 2009**

“The Treaty introduces into EU law an Article of notable importance for the Churches. By means of Article 17 of the treaty on the Functioning of the EU, the EU recognises the identity and specific contribution of Churches and engages on this basis ‘an open and transparent and regular’ dialogue with them. Thanks to this Article, Churches and religious communities will be able to strengthen their Dialogue with the European Commission, Council and Parliament, and so contribute more efficiently to reflecting on European policy. Inspired by Catholic social teaching and strengthened by their background experience, Churches will be able to pursue a critical and constructive Dialogue with EU decisionmakers on the policies put forward by the EU . . .”

remaining apart from it, there is one danger that lurks around the corner waiting to pounce: our human nature!

The second letter that Paul wrote to Timothy, just before his death, really brings this aspect home to the believer in the twenty-first century. Here we are confronted by a long list of undesirable characteristics that will be the hallmark of the age Paul describes as “the last days”. It is to be expected that there will be a noticeable and sharp decline in moral standards and understanding of the truth. 2 Timothy 3:2 begins by describing men as “lovers of their own selves, covetous . . .”, and the passage finishes by saying that such have “a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (v. 5).

In using the Greek word *philautoi*, translated “lovers of their own selves”, Paul does not mean ‘some men will be’, but that ‘men in general will be’; in other words, it will be the prevailing characteristic of the age.¹ Having started at the point where self-interest dominates, where being self-centred is normal, Paul’s every subsequent word is a natural extension or consequence of what has gone before. For example, if you are self-centred then it is inevitable you will become covetous, and if covetous then you will become a boaster because of what you have acquired, and so on down the list. It is a description of humanism, which ultimately distorts true religion because it leads to a worship of the created (man himself) rather than the Creator.

It is these characteristics that have caused our society to become immoral and full of violence, where millions suffer from drug abuse and many are in poverty, with a breakdown in family life and the family unit. The really alarming aspect of what Paul has to say, though, is that he saw such things coming into ecclesial life, and he is instructing Timothy in his day to watch out for

such tendencies. A quiet reading and meditation on this chapter will be a beneficial exhortation for all of us, a basis for searching self-assessment.

Society is becoming more secular day by day, the Bible’s influence has been removed from schools, with humanism dominating the curriculum, and the rights of children are elevated above those of parents in the name of freedom. In a recent law case the judge, Lord Justice Laws, attacked religious faith, dismissing it as ‘subjective’ and having no basis in fact. He condemned any attempt to seek protection for beliefs under the law as “irrational” and “capricious”. He said that such action would put the country on the road to being a ‘theocracy’. Little does he realise the whole world is heading towards being a theocracy!

The antidote to all this for the believer is there at the end of the chapter. As evil men wax worse and worse it is the “holy scriptures, which are able to make [us] wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (v. 15). While thinking men and women worry about what is happening in the world; while millions are distressed by the judgements of God presently at work in the world; and while the world sinks deeper and deeper into the morass of sinfulness and estrangement from God; the believer is exhorted and encouraged by the Apostle Paul so that we are not downhearted, or discouraged, or distressed . . .

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man [or woman] of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (vv. 16,17).

1. See p. 299, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, by Brother Alfred Nicholls, published by the Christadelphian Office.