

“Lift up your heads, O ye gates”

Nigel Bernard

As prophesied in Luke 21, there is evidence to show that people are becoming more fearful and that rulers are being shaken. By comparing the Mount Olivet Prophecy with Psalm 24 we can increase our understanding of how we should lift up our heads in these last days.

LUKE 21:26 refers to “men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken”. These words of the Lord Jesus describe the days in which we are living. In this article we will consider some recent evidence that shows how these words are being fulfilled. We will then see how Psalm 24 helps us to understand this prophecy.

Fear

Are “men’s hearts failing them for fear” today? The results of a survey published in April by the Mental Health Foundation, a British organisation, provides evidence that people are indeed becoming more fearful.¹ In a sample of 2,246 people, thirty-seven per cent said that they “get frightened or anxious more often than they used to”. Seventy-seven per cent believed that “the world has become a more frightening place in the last ten years”.

A number of reasons were given by respondents for why they thought people were more fearful. These included: the current economic situation, a loss of solidarity and community, media coverage, a more dangerous world, terrorism, crime, loss of certainty and security, and, finally, an increase in the availability of information about threats to safety.

The report noted that the UK Government’s 2009 Psychiatric Morbidity survey found that 1.7% more people in England were suffering from anxiety-related common mental health disorders in 2007 compared with 1993. The report also says that “Anxiety UK, the country’s largest anxiety disorders charity, has reported a doubling of calls to its telephone helpline during the period January/February 2009”.

Shaken

Have the “the powers of heaven” been “shaken” recently? The “powers of heaven” symbolises political rulers. This can be proved by, for example, comparing “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth” in Isaiah 1:2 with “Hear . . . ye rulers . . . give ear . . . ye people . . .” in verse 10. The recent turmoil in the world has seen political rulers being shaken.

As the economic crisis began to deepen in October last year, the BBC had an online article with the headline, “US superpower status is shaken”.² In an address to a Joint Session of Congress on 24 February 2009, the American President, Barack Obama, spoke of how “our economy may be weakened and our confidence shaken”.³ On 9 March, an online article about a crisis in Bangladesh spoke of how the “government has undoubtedly been shaken”.⁴ In the *Financial Times* on March 12, an analysis of the financial crisis was advertised on the front cover with the words, “How the financial crisis is shaking global politics”. These examples show that the political heavens have truly been shaken in recent months.

Psalm 24

Having spoken of the shaking of the political heavens and the fear in the world at the time of the end, the Lord Jesus then says, “And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (Lk. 21:27,28). In saying these words, the Lord Jesus draws on Psalm 24. Verse 7 of this

1. Mental Health Foundation, (2009), “In the face of fear”. Follow link in <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/information/news/?EntryId17=71552>.
2. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/7645743.stm>.
3. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-of-President-Barack-Obama-Address-to-Joint-Session-of-Congress/.
4. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/7932659.stm.

psalm says, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in". The phrase "lift up your heads" is quoted by the Lord Jesus and applied to believers at the time of the end. We should be as open gates, ready at all times to welcome the Lord Jesus when he returns.

Psalm 24 appears to have an historical setting in the bringing of the ark into Zion by David, but it is primarily speaking about the Lord Jesus Christ entering Jerusalem as King when he returns. The psalmist says that the King "shall come", and the Lord Jesus spoke of himself "coming". The psalm describes Christ as the "King of glory" in verses 7-10. The Lord Jesus too spoke of glory, for he said he will come with "great glory".

The psalmist wrote: "This is the generation of them that seek Him, that seek Thy face, O Jacob. Selah" (v. 6). The "generation" is men and women from all ages who have been "born of God" (1 Jno. 3:9). This contrasts with the natural generation spoken of in Luke 21:32 "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled".

The parallel account in Matthew 24 also has allusions to the psalm. Verse 15 states: "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:) . . .". By comparing this verse with Luke 21:20, where the word 'desolation' also occurs, we see that this verse in Matthew is speaking of the Roman armies: "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh" (Lk. 21:20). The Romans would stand as victors in Jerusalem and the temple. The psalmist asked, "who shall stand in His holy place?" (24:3). There will come a time when only the righteous will stand in the holy place: "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully" (v. 4). The Lord Jesus

quotes from the psalm to make an ironic contrast between the Romans armies and the saints.

However, there is also a point of similarity between the Roman armies and the saints. When the Romans destroyed the temple and scattered the Jews, they were under the providential control of the Lord Jesus Christ and the angels. What the Romans did was wicked, but they were unwittingly used to further the purpose of God, bringing punishment upon the Jews. The Romans were, in that sense, the Lord's army. Likewise, when Christ returns, he will have an army to establish the Kingdom. This army will consist of the saints. This is spoken of in the last verse of the psalm: "Who is this King of glory? The LORD [Yahweh] of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah" (v. 10). The word "hosts" (or 'armies', as the Hebrew is sometimes translated) refers to the saints. Given the other links between Luke 21 and Psalm 24, we see that "hosts" contrasts and compares with "armies" in Luke 21:20.

In Matthew 24:33 Christ says, "So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors". This is another allusion to Psalm 24, where "doors" are mentioned twice (vv. 7,9).

Conclusion

By quoting the words "lift up your heads" from Psalm 24, the Lord Jesus is likening the believers to gates. In Scripture, gates are associated with praise. For example, the psalmist speaks of how he might be shown mercy so "that I may shew forth all Thy praise in the gates" (9:14). And Isaiah writes of how the gates of Israel will be called Praise: "Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise" (60:18). Therefore, while the world is full of fear and the rulers of the world are shaken, we should lift up our heads in praise to God.