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Adherents of what is termed "militant Islam" dominate the news bulletins with their atrocities, causing the politicians of "the West" to rush about trying to decide what to do next. As Biblical Christians prayerfully seeking the Lord in His Word, the Holy Spirit does indeed graciously put into context for us the times in which we are living, with the often-dreadful events of these times.

We gather that "the times of the Gentiles" - that period since AD 33 when the Gospel has been entrusted to the Gentiles while the Jews were "cut off" - are now over. The Lord's attention is focussing once more on the Jews, "the apple of His eye", with the Jews' return to their own land after 1900 years, and their national survival since 1948, as clear testimony of this. The world is thus in an era of warning of impending judgement - though mercifully the door of salvation for individuals, by simple faith in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ, remains open for the time being.

The background to all this is simple: God is God, and when all is said and done, He will not be mocked (Galatians 6.7). As the Creator of, and over, this stupendous creation, He has shown extraordinary mercy, culminating in the ultimate self-sacrifice of Calvary in His Son Jesus Christ, to win back sinful, fallen humanity. Truly, He is indeed "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy" (Psalm 103.8).

But a time does come when He decides "enough is enough". His conduct is always the same - consistent and fair: first He gives warnings, with a reminder of the way back to Himself, and He is usually ignored at this stage; He then often allows troubles to gather pace, to emphasise His warnings; and finally He acts in the long-forewarned judgement. Prime scriptural examples include the Flood, the division of the kingdom, the defeat and exile of Israel and of Judah, and the scattering of the Jews after their rejection of their Messiah, and the final judgements yet to come.

Whether we see this recurring pattern of the Lord with His own people, with the Gentile nations, or with the Church, the Lord always retains a faithful remnant, and includes gracious promises of forgiveness, return and restoration. How often we read the words - "and they shall be My people, and I will be their God".

Once we have this broad understanding of both the Lord's ways and of the times we are in, events of today begin to make more sense. The Lord has greatly

blessed the Gentile nations of "the West" over the centuries, entrusting them, and the Church within them, with the Gospel itself. But we know full well what has happened within these nations. From early days the Church lost sight of the true Gospel, smothering it with man-made vanities and falsehood, so the Lord graciously restored His truth in the Reformation. Since then we have seen the Counter Reformation, the "Enlightenment" so-called, slavery, liberal theologians debunking the Holy Bible, the strange, "never-mind-the-scientific-facts" adoption of Darwinian evolution across the board, two World Wars, the replacement of Bible-based laws with Bible-flouting laws, plus widespread social breakdown and a yawning wealth gap. Too often Christ's Church, by now deeply splintered, has been fiddling about on the sidelines trying to keep up and stay relevant and acceptable.

Is this not a long story of the nations of "the West" turning their heads away from "the God of their fathers", back to the age-old, sinful folly of "We'll do it Our Way"? - with the Church playing permanent catch-up? No wonder we are seeing the Lord's warnings gathering pace! - as He gradually opens the tap for Man's true sinful nature to flow and display its ugly work.

Next time God willing we will consider the extraordinary march of Islam, one of the main means that the Lord is using as He very loudly addresses "the West". Meanwhile, yes, these are sombre truths for unstable times, but their very sombreness highlights the glory and the mercy of the Christian Gospel. Christ's redeemed people are bidden to "rejoice in the Lord alway; again I say, Rejoice!" (Philippians 4.4) - a heartfelt rejoicing indeed, held always alongside our heartfelt concern for the redemption of those who are yet outside Christ's flock.

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