

## 180 "Watchman, what of the night?"

In a passage of divine warnings against various nations surrounding Israel, we read in Isaiah 21.11-12 of "The burden of Dumah", referring to the kingdom of Edom, the descendants of Esau. The watchman would stand on guard in the watchtower of the village through the hours of darkness to warn of any danger, and he was frequently asked, "Watchman, what of the night?" - in other words, "How long till dawn?", the time of greater safety. In this passage the question is repeated, revealing some anxiety (verse 11). The watchman replies (verse 12), "The morning cometh, but also the night" - that is, safety soon, but not for long; "if ye will enquire, enquire ye" - follow up your anxiety by doing something about it; and, "return, come" - a call from the living God to the Edomites to come back to Him in repentance.

"Watchman, what of the night?" is a timely question for us all in these dangerous days, and of course the Watchman we are calling to is the Lord Himself, who answers in the light of His straight-edged, clutter-freed, two-edged Word.

It is notable that so much of the current global chaos emanates from the Bible lands of the Middle East now in the grip of Islam, yet in the eye of this storm, and rarely mentioned, is the little nation of Israel. The fact that the Jews, the children of Israel, the covenant people, the "apple of God's eye", the possessors of all those God-given blessings (eg., Romans 9.1-5), are now back in their God-given land after two thousand years' of wandering, against every conceivable set of odds that anyone could imagine, is in itself the crucial part of the Watchman's reply to us. Why is the existence of this Jewish State so very, very significant in terms of "What of the night?"

First, we have to dispose of some "clutter" - the notion prevailing in some Christian quarters that God has "washed His hands" of the Jews, that any reference to His future blessings regarding Israel obviously apply now to the Church and not to the Jews, and that therefore the existence of the State of Israel is wholly irrelevant in terms of God's dealings with this planet. Frankly, this notion, (known as "replacement theology"), blatantly contradicts the straight-edge of God's Word - the ultimate proof-text of this contradiction being found in Romans Chapter 11.

This serious error has crept in through the blurring of the distinction in Scripture between, on the one hand, the Lord speaking to and about the Jews in their "times", and then on the other, His speaking of the "Church age", the "times" and "age" of the Gentiles. So, in what is for us now, who are living in the Church Age, referred to as the "Old Testament", there is no mention of the Church at all! After

Genesis Chapters 1 - 11, (which, being before the covenant with Abram, apply to all mankind), the rest of the Old Testament concerns God and the Jews. While of course many of the blessings, and warnings, we come across in those pages have strong relevance still for the Church and wider world, we must always remember that they primarily concern the Jews.

The long-promised, long-awaited, Jewish Messiah came to His people, and His people rejected Him. It is at that point that the Lord God put His covenant Jewish people "on hold", because of their unbelief, and entrusted the Good News, of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ alone, to the Church. This wholly new "thing" consisted of Jew and Gentile, (and still does!), which, as we see from Acts and the Epistles, was a complete surprise to the Jewish believers in their Messiah.

Then, in Romans Chapters 9 -11, the Holy Spirit tells us very clearly through Paul as to "What of the night?". The Jews are to remain "broken off" from the olive tree, remaining in "blindness" UNTIL "the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Chapter 11. especially verses 15-36).

We see from such passages that there is not a breath of a hint that the Lord has washed His hands of His people: absolutely the opposite is the case. Next time God willing, we will explore the link between "the fulness of the Gentiles", and the return of the Jews to their Promised Land. But for now, Christ's faithful sheep do well to keep a very close eye on anything to do with Israel, for it is in that tiny part of the world that the real answer lies to our question, "Watchman, what of the night?".

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