

181 "The fulness of the Gentiles"

"Watchman, what of the night?" - that cry of concern in the darkness and a longing for the brightness of dawn: in last week's Reflection we asked that question ourselves of the Lord, the divine Watchman, seeking to apply the "two-edged sword" of Scripture to current world events, so as to understand more of where the Lord God is up to in His dealings with Planet Earth.

We saw that the Holy Spirit tells us plainly through Paul (notably in Romans Chapters 9 - 11) that the Lord has not finished with His covenant people the Jews, despite what some seem to think today. The Lord Jesus Himself also demonstrates that His fellow Jews still have a central role in the divine plans and promises - notably in what is known as His "Olivet discourse" in Matthew 24 (with parallels in Mark 13 and Luke 21).

Jesus speaks there of false Christs and false prophets, persecution, deception, betrayal and of love "waxing cold" because of rampant iniquity (vv 3 - 12). He assures that those who endure these awful times shall be saved (v 13). He explains that "the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and then the end shall come" (v 14).

So far, there has been little specifically Jewish in Jesus' words, but then the strongly Jewish context of this whole passage becomes very clear. For Jesus then refers to "the abomination of desolation" in the temple; the need to flee from Judea to the mountains; this journey to be taken hopefully not in winter nor on a sabbath. These words are followed by news of the coming of great and unparalleled tribulation, with yet more falsehood and deception, and finally "the coming of the Son of man" (vv 15 - 27).

So the divine Watchman is telling us here of terrible times coming on the world and on the Jews within the world, culminating in the return of the Son of man Himself, the details of which are explained in Chapters 24.27 - 25.46. Like many such passages, this prophecy had a partial fulfilment - in this case with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 - but the main fulfilment is clearly yet to come.

Now here is a crucial point: these still-future, bad times do not involve the true Church, for the true Church will be no longer on the earth. We know this fact from our placing this precious Olivet passage in the broader context of other prophetic

passages concerning what are called "the end times", in both the Old and New Testaments. Notable among these passages is our "old friend" I Thessalonians 4.13-18, in which the "coming of the Lord" that is described there is plainly a wholly different occasion from the return of the Lord as described in the Olivet Discourse.

God's Word is thus quite clear on this - the Lord Jesus is due to return to this earth twice more: a Second Coming, known as "the Rapture", for His Bride, the true, believing Church; and then, after the 7-year "Great Tribulation", a Third Coming, in power, glory and judgment, to rescue His chosen people the Jews, and to set up His literal "millennial" Kingdom on this literal earth, as explained in Matthew 24 and elsewhere.

That is what the divine Watchman has promised, and "the signs of the times" around us point strongly to these promises being, at the very least, neither merely allegorical, far-fetched or distant. The main "sign" before us is the extraordinary return of the Jews to their land - repeatedly promised in Scripture, and foretold by those faithful Bible watchmen we have recently come across. By studying God's use of Time in His Word, these watchmen were able to draw attention to the dates likely to be of significance in this process (1917, 1923, 1948), decades before anything was happening on the ground.

Alongside all that we see happening in the world around us today, the very existence of the State of Israel remains a clear pointer to the fact that "the fulness of the Gentiles" is nigh, (that is, the harvest of the "elect Gentiles" being fully gathered in), and that "the blindness of Israel" is coming to an end (Romans 11.25).

Meanwhile, we are to worship the Lord in beauty and holiness (Psalm 29.2), in part for His exquisite oversight of His creation. We are to watch. We are to witness. We are to warn, playing our part as watchmen ourselves, with ready answers to that timely question, "What of the night?".