

## 227 Whatever next?

Last week we reflected on Paul's ministry towards all the people with him on that ship as it sailed on towards its likely doom (Acts 27). Here was a man of settled Christian faith and courage who was able to speak God's words of comfort into a situation of great fear and danger. The Lord's people today are in a rather similar situation, some of them all too literally, for we too are living in times of apprehension: old assumptions and certainties are being swept away, being replaced by sudden shocks and widespread turmoil, so we needn't be surprised by the current sense of "Whatever next?". How important it is that Christian people can explain the scriptural answers to that question in appropriate places and ways.

Let us briefly remind ourselves of the yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecies the Lord has given to us in His Word, which hopefully are familiar to many of us since our having come across them sometimes in previous Weekly Reflections. (For a fuller coverage of these matters than is possible here, including the various approaches to prophetic passages in the Bible and why the so-called "pre-millennial" approach makes the most sense, please see on the website [www.fsmins.org](http://www.fsmins.org) the pdf book "Whatever Next?", under Our Publications, 04 God's Programme for the Future; this book is free to read online or download).

Here we go, adopting a standard "pre-millennial" approach. After the wonderful victories achieved by His death and resurrection (eg., Colossians 1.13-21 / Ephesians 1.20-23), Christ is now in heavenly glory, while here on the earth the Gospel is preached and souls are being saved. At the same time, what the late Henry Morris termed "the long war against God" continues in the world at a gathering pace towards some sort of climax in the future, for clearly things cannot go on like this indefinitely.

The next event, for which Christ's faithful sheep have always been told to watch and be ready, is when all those "in Christ" are to be removed from the earth to heaven, being delivered thereby from "the wrath to come" (eg., I Thessalonians 1.10 and 4.13-18 and 5.9-11 / I Corinthians 15.51-58) - what is termed the "rapture" of the Church.

This removal is to be followed by a 7-year period in the world termed "the great tribulation" – a repeat of the 7-year period of AD 26-33. That first period, involving the ministries of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ, was one of grace, yet both the Jews and the Gentiles rejected Christ as the Messiah, the Son of God. This second 7-year period, still to come, will be one of fearful judgement on Jew and Gentile alike, with the emergence of Satan, the antichrist, the beast and the false prophet (Daniel 9.26b-27 / Revelation Chapters 4-17), yet even then the door of salvation by faith in Christ will remain open and some will be saved. To dismiss this impending period of appalling tribulation as mere irrelevant picture-language of long ago, as some unfortunately choose to do, is surely the height of head-in-the-sand folly: would we wish anyone to have to pass through this awful time? And if not, then what we are doing about it?!

Christ is to return visibly in glory at the end of this tribulation period, to rescue His ancient covenant people the Jews; Satan is locked up, the unrighteous dead are reserved for judgement, and Christ's literal millennial kingdom is established on this earth (eg., Matthew 6.9-10 and 24.29-31 / Revelation 19-20). Then, after Satan's final rebellion and judgement, and the judgement of "the great white throne" come "the new heaven and the new earth" and "the eternal state" (Revelation 21-22).

So there in brief are the "Whatever next?" answers – a wonderful future full of reassurance and comfort for all those "in Christ", (and with echoes of the safe deliverance from that sea voyage of Acts 27 yet on a much grander scale), but a very different future for those who continue to turn their backs on Christ.

Now we know that many previous generations of Christians have believed that they themselves were living in "the end times" with "the rapture" nearly upon them – an apparently mistaken belief so far as it turns out, but at least our forebears were kept watchful and alert. Perhaps we are making the same mistake today? – or are there significant, scripturally-promised developments now in place today which have never occurred before?

The answer to that question is a solid and irrefutable Yes: in plain sight the Jews are now back in their land, with Jerusalem at its heart (Luke 21.24 / Romans 11, especially v 25b).

It is surely time for a good dose of I Corinthians 16.13!

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