

## 319 Near of Time and Place – 2

In our awareness of the extraordinary times in which we are living, Christ's "faithful sheep" are well-advised to keep to that familiar saying – "keep your Bible open and keep your newspaper open, side by side".

In His words about the fig tree (Matthew 24.32 and parallels, mentioned last week), Jesus teaches that there will be visible "signs" when the end-time events He has been speaking of in that passage are indeed imminent, including "summer being nigh" for the Jews. These days we do not have far to look for one very clear such sign: against all conceivable human odds, yet clearly foretold in the Scriptures, the Jews are now back in the land of Israel, though as yet still generally in a state of unbelief concerning their Messiah. The existence of this tiny state of Israel, surrounded by powerful enemies who have repeatedly tried, and still have plans, to "drive the Jews into the sea", cannot be written off as spiritually irrelevant without riding a proverbial "cart and horses" through numerous Scriptures! – as some Christian denominations still try to do. What greater sign could we possibly have that "God is on the move" and that therefore we are correct in assuming we are either in, or are at least entering, "the last times"?!

The fact of the visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ at some stage is widely accepted across the Christian Church and is regularly repeated in its Creeds, as in for example, "And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead". But quite when this return of the Lord is to occur is debated, especially over how it ties in with various other prophesied events of "the last times", namely the event known as the "rapture" (I Corinthians 15.51-52 and I Thessalonians 4.13-18), the "great tribulation" or "time of Jacob's trouble" (egs., Matthew 24.21 and Jeremiah 30.7), and the "millennial kingdom" itself (eg., Revelation 20). Around such events there are numerous beliefs as to these events being allegorical or literal, whether all or some have occurred already or are yet to occur, and the actual sequence of their unfolding.

In these Weekly Reflections we hold to a conventional, orthodox, Protestant, "high view" of Scripture, taking the biblical text in its plain sense while allowing for the obvious use in places of idiom, parable, symbol or imagery. This approach is well-founded: it is adopted by the Lord Himself with regard to what for us is now the Old Testament (egs., "It is written ... (Luke 4.4,8,12) / "In the beginning ..." (Matthew 19.8) / "This day is this scripture fulfilled ..." (Luke 4.21) / "until the day that Noe entered into the ark ..." (Matthew 24.38); it is further substantiated by the numerous prophecies that were fulfilled so literally and extraordinarily in Jesus' own Person, ministry, death and resurrection (egs., Psalm 22 / Isaiah 53). If the "track record" of biblical prophecy is one of detailed, literal fulfilment so far, then surely the yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecies will be fulfilled in like manner?

Following such an approach we humbly accept the literal occurrence of the prophetic events still to take place - the rapture, tribulation, return of Christ in glory and His literal reign on this earth of a thousand years. This figure of a "thousand years", mentioned six times in Revelation 20, exactly fits as the "antitype" of the seventh day of the creation week when God rested after the 6 days of creation (Genesis 2.1-3). Those 6 days serve in turn as a "type" of the subsequent 6,000 literal years of

biblical creation history there have been since Adam and which are now at an end – another pointer for us as to the onset of “the last times” and the advent of the seventh day of “Sabbath rest”.

While much of the book of Revelation is clearly symbolic, the symbols obviously refer to the very real divine judgments and events to come on the earth. If these symbols are only allegorical with no attachment to time, or the events they refer to all occurred long ago with no relevance for today, as some argue, then why ever has the Holy Spirit had them included in God’s Word??

We have touched this time on some of the debates surrounding biblical prophecies which are found among Christians, and have given reasons to justify the long-established “plain reading of Scripture” approach. The scene is now set for us to consider next time the key questions concerning “the rapture”, a highly-significant event which strangely is omitted from the Creeds and from most pulpits these days. Yet as we shall see next week God willing, what “the rapture” involves, and its likely imminence, should surely be loudly proclaimed both within the churches and far beyond.

Meanwhile we pray steadily – as we keep reading those Bibles and newspapers!

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