



Issachar Comments Papers

Expounding biblical concepts on the world scene today

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PROPHETIC INSIGHT Discerning the Hand of God

Prophecy Fulfilled

"We are seeing more biblical prophecy fulfilled today than at any time in the past 2000 years." That was a statement by David Hathaway in a speech in Westminster last month. He was reporting on the large number of Russian Jews in Israel (particularly of the older generation) recently becoming believers in Jesus as their Messiah. David Davies, who pastors a church on Mount Carmel near Haifa said that he is seeing Jews become believers in Jesus "by the hundred". This is something that has not happened since Apostolic times. In the Acts of the Apostles we are told that 3000 became believers in Jesus on the Day of Pentecost when Peter preached the gospel in the streets of Jerusalem.

The account in Acts of the growth of the church in Jerusalem and Judaea moves from 'addition' to 'multiplication'. Throughout the first century the church continued to look to Jerusalem as the centre of the faith and to the Apostles and their Jewish successors as leaders of the church. After the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 135 and the expulsion of Jews from Judaea and the Galilee by the Romans, the Church rapidly lost its Jewish members becoming a largely Gentile community. By the time of the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 325 there was not a single Hebrew speaker to maintain its Hebraic roots.

Today, 2000 years later, that is all changing. The Jews from many nations are back in the land. Jerusalem has a Jewish Mayor and is the capital of Israel. Jews are now becoming believers in Jesus in significant numbers for the first time since the days of the New Testament church. They are becoming "*grafted into their own olive tree*", which is the figure of speech used by Paul in prophesying that the day would come when the Hebrew nation would recognise Jesus as their Messiah. Paul says, "*Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved*" (Romans 11.25/6). Are we nearing the day when the full number of Gentiles has come in? This is a question that Christian theologians are beginning to ask.

Understanding the Signs

The call of God to those who have prophetic insight is to understand how God is working out his purposes in our generation. This is not easy because there is plenty to confuse us. We are living in a time of enormous social change which appears to many to be a time of disaster as we witness the dismantling of great institutions that were part of what was perceived as our Christian heritage. Everything is being shaken - not just the Banks and the Economy - but even the Church and the Family.

Many Christians are dismayed as they see the Roman Catholic Church torn asunder by scandal, and church attendance declining throughout the Western nations. They are dismayed as they see the foolishness of politicians trying to redefine marriage and destroying the pillars of society. They are dismayed at what they see as the disintegration of our Christian civilisation with its biblical foundations. Every day the news seems to get worse.

Shaking Everything

What they fail to see is the hand of God in all this. They do not understand how God is working out his purposes because they do not really know the God of the Bible who has declared that the day would come when he would shake everything. These declarations are in both the Old Testament and the New Testament in passages such as Isaiah 2, Haggai 2 and Hebrews 12. In order to understand the reason why God has said that he would shake everything that can be shaken, this can best be seen in what God did during the lifetime of the Prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah had been set aside by the Lord from the moment of his conception in the womb (Jeremiah 1.5). As a young

man God commissioned him to his Ministry and he had to face the unpleasant reality that he would have to witness God dismantling most of the national institutions before creative building could begin. At the very beginning of his Ministry God said to him, *"See today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant"* (Jeremiah 1.10). Jeremiah must have been dismayed to hear such a commission, but he knew that God had spoken to him and that in due time he would understand.

Throughout the first part of his Ministry Jeremiah had to keep condemning all the wickedness that he saw around him from idolatry to adultery and warning of their disastrous consequences. But his calls for repentance and turning the nation into ways of righteousness all fell on deaf ears. Eventually the day of disaster became inevitable and at that time God told Jeremiah to change the message and begin to look beyond the great shaking of the nation to a time of restoration and spiritual renewal. That point was reached in Jeremiah 31.27 - 37, which encompasses the giving of the New Covenant. The people of Israel had to see judgement come upon Jerusalem and their nation before they could enter into the New Covenant relationship with God which in due time was opened to Gentiles as well as Jews through Messiah Jesus.

Prophecy Today

Thirty years ago, when the Lord commissioned me to publish the magazine "Prophecy Today", I had to face the same unpleasant reality. My calling was to bear witness to the gospel at a time of incredible social change when most of the old institutions in which people trusted would be torn down, but through all of this I had to learn to recognise the hand of God and to distinguish between what the enemy is doing and what God is doing. Sometimes there is a fine line between these two, because God is well able to use enemy action for his own purposes.

The only way that we can understand what God is doing is by having a thorough knowledge of the Bible and being open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Bible shows us what God has done in the past which reveals to us both his nature and his purposes. The Ministry of the Holy Spirit enables us to understand what God is doing today and how he is working out his purposes in our lifetimes. If we are dismayed when we see what is happening around us it is probably because we have not fully understood the nature and purposes of God. It is only through study of the word of God and through prayer that we can grow in discernment.

Insight and Maturity

"Discernment" is not a spiritual gift that is only given to a few believers; it is something that every Christian can have. This is spelt out in Hebrews 5.11 to 6.3, where spiritual maturity is linked with distinguishing between good and evil rather than simply knowing a lot about points of doctrine. Paul underlines this in Philippians 1.9/10 where he says, *"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory and praise of God."*

There are no shortcuts to gaining this maturity, just as there are no quick fixes for a nation that has deliberately turned away from the word of God and rejected 'Truth'. All its standards of behaviour, including personal and corporate values, are affected and corruption creeps into every part of society. This is what has happened to our nation and this is why God is shaking everything that can be shaken so that the corruption is brought into the light. God is doing this for the good of the nation in the hope that we will recognise how we have gone wrong and turn to him for help.

Last Chance

Long ago, back in the 1960s, '70s and '80s when the Abortion Act, the Divorce Laws, the Sunday Trading Act and many more were passed by Parliament, God said to the nation, *"You have chosen the way you wish to go and I will let you go until you recognise the mess you have made of everything."* Who can deny that we are in a mess today? The finest brains in the country cannot solve the problems of the economy as we lurch towards national bankruptcy and as we watch the moral bankruptcy of the nation being exposed as surely as Jimmy Savile, Chris Huhne and the bankers. Only one question remains, will we recognise the mess we have created and cry out to God for help before disaster encompasses us? At the moment, repentance is still an option. But the midnight hour cannot be long delayed.

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