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An important truth to be considered by those hoping for revival

"The word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah. I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD. I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem," Zephaniah 1:1-4.

As the year progresses from season to season we may inform ourselves as to the weather we are likely to encounter by simply looking back to what the same season brought in former years. There is a vital lesson there for the Christian. It is a truth found in the Bible. "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun," Ecclesiastes 1:9.

Has not the Bible been written for this very reason? It is there that we might know how the Lord has reacted and responded to rebellion and apostasy in former times for He will so respond again whenever such occurs!

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope," Romans 15:4. If we learn from the past follies of wicked men and the Lord's reaction to them we will find hope of escaping the judgment of God.

This being so, we may rightly anticipate what lies ahead for our nation by looking back in the pages of the Bible until we find a similar 'season' to that which we are in. Of course, that requires us to 'know the times and the seasons', the true character and nature of the days in which we live. I am afraid that there are all too many Christians who are blind and indifferent to just what is happening in the spiritual realm all around them!

In Matthew's gospel we read these words. "Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?" 15:15-16. God's people can be in great ignorance about many things concerning the Kingdom of God. Consequently, they cannot discern or rightly interpret the significance of events taking place around them.

How many of God's people are aware that the times spoken of by Paul in 1 Timothy 4 and in 2 Timothy 3 have come upon us! Paul said that the Holy Spirit has specifically informed the Church of Christ of evil times that would come. "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils," 1 Timothy 4:1. Paul further elaborates, or I should say, the Holy Spirit further elaborates on these evil times in 2 Timothy 3. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith," verses 1-8.

It would not be so very strange for these days to dawn with many believers failing to recognise that fact. Did not the time prophesied by many prophets as to where and when the Messiah would be born arrive with but a few realising that fact! The prophet Daniel had specifically said when the Messiah would be born. "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times," Daniel 9:25. The term 'weeks' is a translation of the Hebrew word for 'seven periods' of time, not necessarily days. Jewish history testifies to the accuracy of this prediction for the Saviour was indeed born and walked about the land of Israel in accordance with this prophecy.



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From the decree to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, given to Nehemiah by Artaxerxes, after their destruction by the Babylonians, there would follow a period of 69 X 7 periods of time or 483 years. The first 49 years (seven weeks) were taken up by the rebuilding of the walls and then 434 years later, we come to the period of the Saviour's appearance amongst men.

Yet, despite this clear prediction there were but a few who realised that the time of Christ's appearing had arrived. "And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ," Luke 2:25-26. There were some others as well as good old Simeon who knew the time had come. "And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem," verses 36-38. The word 'looked' carries the implication of 'expectation'.

But those waiting and expectant were but a few. John says: "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not," 1:10-11.

That darkness and ignorance is repeated today so that few have any awareness that 'the day of the Lord' is drawing very near. The signs are all around. The dark night of apostasy has descended upon the nations. In the case of our own, for nigh on 100 years the darkness has been intensifying. Professing Christendom has welcomed and embraced the 'anti-Bible' spirit of modernistic and liberal theology as far back as the early years of the last century. The 'infection' spread and the 'disease' developed and increased amongst the denominations. That became more and more evident. In 1949 the major denominations of the United Kingdom publicly and decisively embraced 'Ecumenism' as embodied in the World Council of Churches. The Pope was deemed by the leaders of the WCC as the only suitable and worthy religious personage to head up a united 'Christian' world!

From that time, the darkness has deepened and the impact of the 'religious plague' that had broken forth is seen today in the legalising of the murder of the unborn, the sanctioning of sodomy and the virtual outlawing of all protest against it; and the legalising of same-sex marriage. Marriage has almost ceased to be, as is evident in the openly wicked relationship that our Prime Minister unashamedly flaunts. The ranks of public figures in church, politics and the business world, are riddled with the most unseemly and scandalous relationships that but a few years ago would have necessitated the resignation of those guilty of such behaviour.

It will not stop here. It will continue to grow darker until the era of the final Antichrist, the Beast of Revelation 13, is manifested and he will exalt himself "above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God," 2 Thessalonians 2:4. That is the final chapter of man's apostasy and will bring down the holy wrath manifested at Christ's return.

Sadly, all too many of God's people view the events of today in anything but their true light. To me there is indeed the spirit abroad that marked the days of Noah, just before the flood. There was no awareness of the approach of God's judgment and wrath! "For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be," Matthew 24:38-39. There seems to be no awareness of the judgment of God breaking forth amongst the nations. Rather, many Christians deem the troubles and afflictions to be but a mere 'spiritual hiccup', a mere aberration, which a little blessing from on high will set right!

Nothing could be further from the truth and that our text shows us to be so.

- 1. THERE COMES A TIME WHEN A PRIVILEGED BUT DISOBEDIENT AND DEFIANT PEOPLE CROSS A LINE IN THEIR REBELLIOUSNESS THAT PLACES THEM BEYOND MERCY AND RECOVERY!**



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That was the case with those spoken to by the Lord through His servant Zephaniah.

Zephaniah preached in the days of Josiah. "The word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah," verse 1. Josiah was a good king and sought to turn his kingdom back to God and urged repentance and reforms upon his people. You have only to read the accounts of his actions in 2 Kings 22 and 23 to see that to be so. However, another prophet, even Jeremiah, tells us that whatever reforming amongst the people that took place was far from being genuine. In and about the same year as Zephaniah preached, Jeremiah uttered these words from the Lord. "And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD. And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah," Jeremiah 3:10-11.

The word 'feignedly' means 'deceitfully, falsely, lying'. That was the state of religion in Judah when Zephaniah preached, despite the great religious gatherings and stirrings there had been and of which we may read in 2 Kings 23 and 2 Chronicles 34 -35. Yes, King Josiah was earnest in his efforts but the response of the people was 'feigned'!

The king's earnest spirit spared him from the judgment that Zephaniah spoke of. The prophetess Huldah is recorded as saying in 2 Kings 22: "Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read: because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched," verses 16-17.

However, the Lord makes an exception for Josiah. "But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard; because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD. Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again," verses 18-20.

The nation had crossed a line and there would be no repentance or mercy granted to it by the Lord. I say that our nation has reached that point. In the midst of all the spread of the coronavirus there has been no mention of God by the religious or political leaders. The people have shown themselves to be utterly indifferent to death and to eternity throughout the pandemic. Regulations designed to hinder the spread of the disease have been defied and that in order that the pleasures of the flesh might be pursued. It is true that some Christians have engaged in such defiance but for reasons without foundation in God's Word. They are but a reflection of the depths of the blindness and folly that has spread over the nation!

It is because I consider a line has been crossed that I believe that there will be no reformation or revival granted, no matter how much earnest prayer is offered by Christians. Please remember that Jeremiah was told NOT TO PRAY FOR THE NATION at the very same period of time as Zephaniah was writing!

"Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee. Seest thou not what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger. Do they provoke me to anger? saith the LORD: do they not provoke themselves to the confusion of their own faces?" 7:16-19.

"Therefore thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon them, which they shall not be able to escape; and though they shall cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them. Then shall the cities of Judah



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and inhabitants of Jerusalem go, and cry unto the gods unto whom they offer incense: but they shall not save them at all in the time of their trouble. For according to the number of thy cities were thy gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set up altars to that shameful thing, even altars to burn incense unto Baal. Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble," 11:11-14.

Shortly after the time in which Jeremiah was told this by the Lord, Ezekiel the prophet was told the same but even more emphatically.

"Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it: though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD. If I cause noisome beasts to pass through the land, and they spoil it, so that it be desolate, that no man may pass through because of the beasts: though these three men were in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters; they only shall be delivered, but the land shall be desolate. Or if I bring a sword upon that land, and say, Sword, go through the land; so that I cut off man and beast from it: though these three men were in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they only shall be delivered themselves. Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my fury upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast: though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness," Ezekiel 14:13-20.

Now to pray for a nation in this state is wrong. Answers to prayer are only promised when we pray according to God's will. "This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us," 1 John 5.14. But if we pray when He commanded us not pray then such prayers will fall to the dust!

I say again, a line had been crossed and there will be no lifting or staying of the coming judgment. I believe that is where our nation is.

2. CONSIDER EXACTLY WHY THE NATION FOUND ITSELF IN SUCH A DIRE SITUATION.

The prophet was instructed to inform Judah just why things had come to this terrible state.

"I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests; and them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham; and them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him. Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD: for the day of the LORD is at hand: for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests," 1:4-7.

Note the names of the false gods worshipped in Judah, usurping the place of the Jehovah! 'Baal', 'the host of heaven', the sun moon and the stars. There was 'Malcham' or 'Molech', the infamously cruel deity the worship of which involved the sacrifice of infants.

The worship of the Lord had been utterly abandoned. They "have not sought the LORD."

How closely the Lord will search out the nation's sin! "And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil," verse 12.

This is a day in which sin largely goes unpunished, largely because it is no longer considered sin or else because it is deemed 'injudicious', ill-advised' to act against certain breaches of the law. We have an ongoing example of that in the large-scale violation of the 'social distancing' laws by senior members of Sinn Fein



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and thousands of their supporters at the funeral of IRA man, Storey, last summer. The police apparently have still to initiate any form of proceedings against the law breakers even though fines amounting to many thousands of £s have been issued by the police against 'lesser mortals'!

There will be no such failure to apply the law fairly and impartially with the Lord when He comes to "judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained," even the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. IF WE INDEED HAVE REACHED THE 'POINT OF NO RETURN' THEN WE NEED TO ACT AS THE LORD WOULD HAVE US ACT.

There has to be a withdrawing from all that is of the world today. The Saviour told His people that when they saw the events in Jerusalem that would signal the fulfilling of 2 Thessalonians 2:4, the Antichrist seating himself in the temple in Jerusalem and declaring himself 'God', then they were to immediately flee out of the city. Their flight was to be immediate. "Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes," Matthew 24:15-18.

Now, such a degree of haste is not incumbent upon us today for the simple reason that the awful danger from which the believers in Jerusalem were to flee will only manifest itself AFTER the 'revelation' of the Antichrist and the beginning of the terrible tribulation which that unveiling of the 'man of sin' will bring.

However, as John the apostle says, the spirit of the antichrist is already at work in the world and that increasingly so. We are therefore to "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time," 1 John 2:15-18.

Separation from the world has ever been the duty of the Christian but it will become even more imperative as the world descends ever deeper into sin.

I cannot improve upon the illustration found in John Bunyan's 'parable', "Pilgrim's Progress", in which he sets forth wonderfully the dilemma faced by Christians passing through this world.

"Now, these pilgrims, as I said, must needs go through this fair. Well, so they did; but behold, even as they entered into the fair, all the people in the fair were moved; and the town itself, as it were, in a hubbub about them, and that for several reasons:

First, The Pilgrims were clothed with such kind of raiment as was diverse from the raiment of any that traded in that fair. The people, therefore, of the fair made a great gazing upon them: some said they were fools; 1 Cor. 4:9,10; some, they were bedlams; and some, they were outlandish men.

Secondly, and as they wondered at their apparel, so they did likewise at their speech; for few could understand what they said. They naturally spoke the language of Canaan; but they that kept the fair were the men of this world: so that from one end of the fair to the other, they seemed barbarians each to the other. 1 Cor. 2:7,8.

Thirdly, but that which did not a little amuse the merchandisers was, that these pilgrims set very light by all their wares. They cared not so much as to look upon them; and if they called upon them to buy, they would put their fingers in their ears, and cry, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity," Psa. 119:37, and look upward, signifying that their trade and traffic was in heaven. Phil. 3: 20,21.

One chanced, mockingly, beholding the carriage of the men, to say unto them, "What will ye buy?" But they, looking gravely upon him, said, "We buy the truth." Prov. 23:23. At that there was an occasion taken to



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despise the men the more; some mocking, some taunting, some speaking reproachfully, and some calling upon others to smite them.

At last, things came to an hubbub and great stir in the fair, insomuch that all order was confounded. Now was word presently brought to the great one of the fair, who quickly came down, and deputed some of his most trusty friends to take those men into examination about whom the fair was almost overturned. So the men were brought to examination; and they that sat upon them asked them whence they came, whither they went, and what they did there in such an unusual garb. The men told them they were pilgrims and strangers in the world, and that they were going to their own country, which was the heavenly Jerusalem, Heb. 11:13-16; and that they had given no occasion to the men of the town, nor yet to the merchandisers, thus to abuse them, and to let them in their journey, except it was for that, when one asked them what they would buy, they said they would buy the truth.

But they that were appointed to examine them did not believe them to be any other than bedlams and mad, or else such as came to put all things into a confusion in the fair. Therefore they took them and beat them, and besmeared them with dirt, and then put them into the cage, that they might be made a spectacle to all the men of the fair. There, therefore, they lay for some time, and were made the objects of any man's sport, or malice, or revenge; the great one of the fair laughing still at all that befell them.

But the men being patient, and "not rendering railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing," and giving good words for bad, and kindness for injuries done, some men in the fair, that were more observing and less prejudiced than the rest, began to check and blame the baser sort for their continual abuses done by them to the men. They, therefore, in an angry manner let fly at them again, counting them as bad as the men in the cage, and telling them that they seemed confederates, and should be made partakers of their misfortunes. The others replied that, for aught they could see, the men were quiet and sober, and intended nobody any harm; and that there were many that traded in their fair that were more worthy to be put into the cage, yea, and pillory too, than were the men that they had abused.

Thus, after divers words had passed on both sides, (the men behaving themselves all the while very wisely and soberly before them,) they fell to some blows among themselves, and did harm one to another. Then were these two poor men brought before their examiners again, and were charged as being guilty of the late hubbub that had been in the fair. So they beat them pitifully, and hanged irons upon them, and led them in chains up and down the fair, for an example and terror to others, lest any should speak in their behalf, or join themselves unto them.

But Christian and Faithful behaved themselves yet more wisely, and received the ignominy and shame that was cast upon them with so much meekness and patience, that it won to their side (though but few in comparison of the rest) several of the men in the fair. This put the other party yet into a greater rage, insomuch that they concluded the death of these two men. Wherefore they threatened that neither cage nor irons should serve their turn, but that they should die for the abuse they had done, and for deluding the men of the fair."

Vanity Fair is strengthening in its lewd vileness all around Christian. Take heed.

The events at the time of the Exodus and again in the days of Noah give us clear instruction. In both cases the believers acted so as to bring their families and loved ones into the place of safety ordained by the Lord. In the day of the Exodus, it was through the blood-sprinkled doorway in to the home. In Noah's case, it was into the Ark of God' provision.

Likewise, we must strive to gather our loved ones into the place of safety, even into the arms of Christ. The Philippian jailer shows us the way. "And they (Paul and Silas) spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house," Acts 16:32-34.



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We need to awaken from carelessness and ready ourselves for the return of the Saviour. The wise virgins point us the way. "And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut," Matthew 25:6-10.

Surely it will be acknowledged by the best of us that we are 'unready'! What oil-filling and lamp trimming must take place before we are ready to go 'in with him to the marriage'!

We need to return to our 'first love' and to first century Christian standards. The spirit of the early Church was seen in that they believers were very much "waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body," Romans 8:23.

We need to pray for that grace to be granted to us. May the Lord indeed "direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ," 2 Thessalonians 3:5.

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