



## The Burning Bush - Online article archive

### How do we know that the return of Christ is truly near?

An interesting question was sent to me recently as a result of my correspondent hearing me comment on the nearness of the return of Christ in a sermon, "Guidance for the last days", which I preached in Kilskeery FPC on August 18th, a recording of which can be heard **here**. I referred to the signs that we see manifesting themselves all around us.

Here is the question asked.

*"Is it not however the case that many down through the ages have held that same view believing their time to be the end of the age (now exposed as being an incorrect reading of world events then)?"*

A very good and proper question which I welcome for it makes me gather together my thoughts and muster the reasons why I think as I do!!

#### I. FIRSTLY CONSIDER A CLEAR STATEMENT BY THE LORD.

Here is a vital word from the Lord on this matter.

*"But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased. . . . . And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end," Daniel 12:4, 8-9.*

**1. It is evident that prophecy concerning the very last days, the Antichrist and the return of the Saviour, is 'sealed'.** This word 'seal' first appears as 'stopped', Leviticus 15.3. So God has put a 'stop' on our understanding of these prophecies until 'the time of the end'!

The Hebrew for 'closed up' appears for the first time in Genesis 26:15 and illustrate just what the Lord is saying. "For all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth."

Genesis 6:13 helps us understand the meaning of the word 'end'! "And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth."

Daniel 12:4 is speaking of the end of this age when the Lord will come again to judge rebellion as He did in the days of Noah.

*"But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. 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. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come," Matthew 24:37-42.*

#### Past predictions

The fanciful notions put forward by men in the past, indeed the various views on eschatology largely stem from men's foolish attempts to open what the Lord had sealed!

In comparatively recent times, many saw the Pope, Napoleon and Hitler as the fulfilment of prophecy regarding the Antichrist. Time exposed their errors though, a simple look at God's Word showed how wrong they were.

There were those who did contend against these notions, stating that such views were wrong. These con-



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tenders for the truth of God set forth a plea to take God's Word literally and not place upon it a 'figurative' and 'spiritualising' understanding of what the Holy Scriptures were teaching.

**2. The Lord told Daniel that there would be an 'unsealing' of God's Word regarding the last things.** Understanding is promised to God's people regarding the prophecies of Daniel in particular at 'the time of the end'!

Has that time come?

Scripture shows that the 'last days' cover particularly a period just before the return of Christ and also after His return.

*"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come," 2 Timothy 3:1.*

*"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it," Isaiah 2:2.*

*"For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days," Hosea 3:4-5.*

However, there are Scriptures which indicate the marks of the 'beginning' of this latter time period.

*"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 2:18.*

This, our age, is called the 'last time'! Progressively the world has grown darker despite the presence of a gospel witness and the many times of revival blessing. It parallels the decline of Israel, despite the many times of revival under some of the kings such as David, Hezekiah and Josiah to name but a few. Those times of blessing saw at best a 'feigned' repentance and obedience to God's Word amongst many in Israel.

"The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also. And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD," Jeremiah 3:6-10.

Consider Paul's well known words of warning to the Church of Christ throughout the ages. "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.

(This time of deceit has to be before the return of Christ for Satanic influences and defiance of Christ's law will be suppressed at His return, Zech 14:9, 17-19; Rev 20:2-30)

Peter reiterates Paul's warning. "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts," 2 Peter 3:3.

This obviously is a time before the Saviour's return. Is not the return of Christ mockingly questioned and openly sneered at today as never before?

**II. I BELIEVE THAT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE 19TH CENTURY GOD RAISED UP MEN UNDER WHOSE WITNESS**



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IT WAS EVIDENT THAT AN UNSEALING OF PROPHECY REGARDING THE RETURN OF CHRIST WAS TAKING PLACE.

In the middle of the 1800s, there was a marked increase in the understanding of prophecy granted to some men and the views they set forth have been shown NOT to be illusionary or false but have been vindicated by events over the last 160-plus years.

I am referring to men such as Benjamin Wills Newton, 1807-1899, Andrew Bonar, 1810-1892, Horatius Bonar, 1808-1889. George Muller, 1805-1896, Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, 1813-1875. There are many others we could list who were supporters of the views of these men, including C H Spurgeon.

Their writings are available still at Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony website (SGAT.org). In them is no rash and foolish predictions but rather a careful and reverent exposition of God's Word, stating simply what it is God is plainly saying. Critics of the 'Post Tribulation, Pre-Millennial' view have never been able to find cause for criticising these writings on the basis of predictions that time revealed to be unfounded. Men such as B W Newton wrote extensively of what he believed was revealed in the Bible regarding the re-emergence of the unified territories of the old Roman Empire, and that at a time when Europe was rent asunder in the wake of the Napoleonic wars. Yet time has but vindicated such expositions of the Word of God. Time will continue to uphold and endorse such expositions for these men restricted themselves to simple explanations of what God plainly says in His Word and refrained from conjecture!

**1. The Scriptures do indicate that there will be a rising of the territories of the old Roman empire as a centre of political and commercial activity.** The present controversy on 'Brexit' demonstrates that such a time is dawning! The present chaos and disarray within the European Union is, I believe, the forerunner of its dissolution and the emergence out that confusion the final fashion of the 10 kingdoms spoken of in Holy Scripture and of which England will be a part. Neither Scotland nor Ireland were ever part of the Roman Empire and they will not be part of its re-emergence.

**2. One of the features of the days before the return of Christ is the re-emergence of the dreadful immorality that damned Sodom.**

*"Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed," Luke 17:28-30.*

Today, we see an unprecedented rise of sodomy and its related immoralities, and that supported by all and sundry throughout society and those who reject this wickedness are but a small ignorable minority! This has never been seen before!

The Saviour's mentions of the days of Noah, remind us that they were days of violence. "And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth," Genesis 6:13.

Is there not an unprecedented rise of violence across the world as was never seen before! We see demonstrated daily in the actions of mothers and fathers and nurses, social workers and carers that manifestation of a wickedness of which Paul spoke as "without natural affection", 2 Timothy 3:3.

**3. We are told that a time of 'trouble' for the Jewish people will come just before the return of Christ.** It is referred to by Jeremiah as the "time of Jacob's trouble."

*"And these are the words that the LORD spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus saith the LORD; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers*



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*shall no more serve themselves of him: but they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them. Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid," Jeremiah 30:4-10.*

That trouble will be the result of the 'revealing' of the Antichrist and his attack upon the people of Israel.

*"When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) 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. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened," Matthew 24:15-22.*

These words of Christ are specifically directed to those dwelling in the land of Israel at the end of this age as the terminology clearly demonstrates.

The Middle East pot is already beginning to 'boil' with the Muslim nations, particularly Iran, mouthing the most aggressive threats against Israel,

#### **4. The manifestation of the Antichrist is termed a 'revelation'.**

*"Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. and then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved," 2 Thessalonians 2:5-10.*

The word 'revealed' means 'to uncover'. Presently, the 'mystery of iniquity' is working but not fully revealed. But it will be with the emergence of the Antichrist. However, we do have evidence of that 'iniquity' at work in the flourishing of apostasy and lawlessness in the religious, political and commercial spheres.

#### **View**

The fullest view we have of the A/C is Revelation 13.

He is introduced in verses 1-2. "And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard (chief feature), and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority."

**1. The 'sea' is the Mediterranean Sea.** Thus the general location of the emergence of the Antichrist is identified for us.

**2. The 'Leopard' is the scriptural image used of Greece.**

*"After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it. . . . I Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me. I came near unto one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things. These great beasts, which are four, are four kings, which shall arise out of the earth. . . . And*



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*the rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. Now that being broken, whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power. And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people. And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand," Daniel 7:6, 15-17; 8:21-25.*

Here we have the 'leopard-like' kingdom identified by Gabriel the Archangel as Greece and out of his territories the 'king of fierce countenance', who 'shall be mighty, but not by his own power,' (Revelation 13:2) and who 'shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand' is the Antichrist.

I preached on Greece in prophecy back in 2015. [Click here to listen](#)

Below are also my notes of that message, much of which I have developed in my article above.

### The Greek Crisis in the light of prophecy

Revelation 13:1-2.

\* The Book of Daniel was, like all Scripture, given for our instruction and edification, Rev 1:3 Rom 15:4. The Author of Daniel 1, 3, 5 & 6 is also the Author of 7-8, 10-12 with its prophecies. They likewise are meant for our 'blessing', 'learning, patience and comfort.'

Let us never forget this and ignore prophecy.

\* A mere glance at recent news reports about matters in Greece can suggest only one word to us - CHAOS! Social, political, financial confusion dominates that country. Its problems surely must be rooted in the profligate economic policies pursued by recent governments and the determination of its present government and its citizens to refuse to face up to the disaster such policies have brought upon them. It would appear that to the Greek mind the problems they face are the responsibility of anyone and everyone but themselves!

\* Their thinking is but an echo of the Greek government's stable-mate, Sinn Fein. In a similar fashion, Sinn Fein has sought to ring-fence the financial benefits and allowances that the community they represent has particularly enjoyed in recent years. They will have no part in any cut-backs in public spending which may be necessary for any correcting and bringing into a proper balance public expenditure.

I am sure that it is for this reason that there has been a drawing of a parallel between what has been happening in Athens and in Stormont by the Northern Ireland Secretary of State, Theresa Villiers. Though in the usual 'pussy-footing' style of Westminster politicians she does not name the culprits, Sinn Fein and the SDLP. Political writers however have remarked that her comments "will be seen as a rebuke for Sinn Fein and the SDLP". Mrs Villiers argued that without the cutbacks "the finances of the Executive simply do not add up" (Belfast Telegraph, July 2nd, 2015).

\* Of course, the situation in Greece is very, very much worse than the situation here. Greece is £billions in debt to the EU banking system. It has defaulted on a payment of €1.5 billion already. Furthermore, its citizens have voted to reject utterly the plan offered by neighbouring nations to resolve her financial ailments, though now it seems that the Greek parliament has reluctantly had to submit to the very cutbacks the country rejected.

\* What does the near future hold for Greece? I do not know but this I do know from God's Word that Greece will play a major part in the kingdom of Antichrist and the events which will lead up to the return of the Lord



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Jesus in power and great glory.

\* History teaches us that despots have arisen to prominence and power out of national confusion and chaos. We need think only of Napoleon, Stalin and Hitler as prime examples of this in recent times.

\* I believe it very likely that just such a situation will take place within the territory of Greece when a leader will arise to whom the people will give support and permit him to exercise the powers of a dictator over them because the chaos they are in appears to justify such leadership. He will then go on to rise as the Antichrist.

### I. ANCIENT GREECE, ABOVE ALL EMPIRES, LEFT ITS MARK UPON THE GENTILE WORLD

In the New Testament, the world is divided between Jew and the Gentile. However, oftentimes the word 'Greek' takes the place of the word 'Gentile', Acts 20:21; 1 Cor 1:22-24. This indicates just how influential the Greek culture was in the Gentile world within the Roman empire.

It will be so again as this part of the world sinks down into the moral decadence that marked ancient Greece.

### II. GREECE FEATURES IN THE PROPHECIES OF THE LAST DAYS

Daniel 7-8 makes that clear. Here are prophecies related to Medo-Persia (the Ram) and Greece (the He Goat), 7:3-8, 8:21-23. These words were written some 15 years before the setting up of the Medo-Persian empire and over 200 years before the Greek empire.

1. The time indicated by the prophecies. Daniel enquires about what he has seen in the vision. "And it came to pass, when I, even I Daniel, had seen the vision, and sought for the meaning," Daniel 8:15. He received his answer, 8:17, 19, 23. This prophecy was given 220 years before Alexander's defeat of the Persians in 335 BC and relate to Greece back then and also to her at the end of this age as verses 17, 19 & 23 show.

2. We are told that the chief feature of the Antichrist is that of a leopard. Daniel 7:6, Revelation 13:2. The foremost feature of the "Wicked One" is the leopard, then the bear and the lion are further employed to describe to us the character of the A/C.

3. The "little horn", the A/C, will arise from amongst the 10 kingdoms of the Roman Empire. Daniel 7:7-8. This is further detailed in chapter 8:8-9. The "little horn" shall arise to prominence amongst the other horns or kingdoms of the Roman empire in its latter-day manifestation and particularly out of one of the 4 territories into which Alexander's kingdom was divided after his death, 8:8-9. Verse 9 indicates the location of the A/C's home domain - Greece. "Little" suggests that at the first he will be insignificant but will rise to greatness later.

4. This man, characterised by a 'leopard' is also described as having 'eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things'. 7:20. This man will be marked by the beauty and stealth of the leopard as well as possessing great intelligence and boldly speaking 'great things' against the Almighty. See also 8:23, 25. This is evident from the fact that he is judged by the Lord for these utterances, Dan 7:8-11, 17-20.

The fullest view we have of the A/C is Revelation 13.

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1. He rises from the area of the Mediterranean Sea.

2. He is characterised by the Leopard - Greece,



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3. Origins of the A/C: "And I saw him come close unto the ram, and he was moved with choler against him, and smote the ram, and brake his two horns: and there was no power in the ram to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground, and stamped upon him: and there was none that could deliver the ram out of his hand. Therefore the he goat waxed very great: and when he was strong, the great horn (Alexander) was broken; and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven. And out of one of them came forth a little horn (A/C), which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land. And it waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them," Daniel 8:7-10.

These things considered together indicate the time is near. There is a coming together of events that have never been seen before in the history of mankind and for that reason, as we seek to rightly understand the times by the signs the Lord has informed us of.

I believe that we can begin to ready ourselves to look up for our 'redemption draweth nigh'!

I trust this is a help to all.

Ivan Foster.

29th August 2019.