

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Waiting for Armageddon

Tension is in the air as I write. Will the horrors of Syria lead to a regional war? Will it spread globally—World War III? Will the nation of Israel experience a deluge of missiles from Iran, from Lebanon? The situation is deadly serious, and far surpasses the local wars and rumours of wars to which we have become accustomed.

In recent years we have been primed by movie after movie concerned with ‘the end of the world’. Deadly plagues, earthquakes, calderas, tsunamis, asteroids. Most scenarios end happily when the hero thwarts the destructive force. What is the reality?

In religious circles there is heightened expectation that we are indeed facing ‘the end’. For some Christians, the hope is to be whisked off to a place of safety—to heaven or to a physical location on earth. Some in Islam seek martyrdom and to be rewarded in heaven. And there is no doubt that religious texts forewarn that human civilisation will one day grind to a halt in global disaster.

[Note: In Bible terms the ‘end of the world’ (more accurately. The ‘consummation of the age’) refers not to complete extinction of mankind but to the end of his misrule

and the imposition of divine rule.]
End-time Scene

The Christian Scriptures have spawned a wide range of end-time scenarios, based largely on the book of Revelation and with reference to many other prophecies. Most common is that the mysterious events there depicted refer to the time from the resurrection of Jesus until his promised return.

Others [see box] assign the various events to the time leading to the return of Jesus. But whatever scheme is selected, interpretation is anything but unanimous. It is useful to recall Deuteronomy 29:29: ‘...The secret things belong to Jehovah our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our sons

forever, so that we may do all the words of this Law’!

The safest guide through the maze are the words of Jesus to the disciples in the so-called Olivet Prophecy—Matthew 24, Luke 21. Indeed this prophecy gives credence to

our inset outline, and provides a helpful structure to what Jesus reveals to John in the book of Revelation.

Prophetic Scroll

John saw the future (Revelation 6) depicted on a scroll with seven seals, the first six of which equate, as outlined by Jesus in Matthew 24, to religious deception, wars, famine, disease, religious persecution (‘tribulation’), and signs in the

Key to Revelation

Seals 1-6
Seal 7 composing
...Trumpets 1-4
...Trumpet 5 known as
.....Woe 1
...Trumpet 6 known as
.....Woe 2
...Trumpet 7 (‘the last’)
.....Woe 3: heralds the
return of Christ
.....The 7 last plagues

heavens and on earth.

The final, 7th, seal comprises seven symbolic ‘trumpets’ - called (*ch* 6:17) ‘...*the wrath of God*’. We find a description of the effect of the first four of these judgments in Revelation 8. *Trumpets* five, six and seven are well-named as ‘*woes*’ (*ch* 8:13) given the cost to unrepentant human life and to the planet. Two *woes* are described in chapter 9-10.

Jesus Returns

Note that up to the point of the blowing of the seventh *Trumpet* Jesus Christ has not yet returned! Earth is in chaos. The ‘great tribulation’ is history. Mankind remains unrepentant. It’s time for the seventh angel to sound his warning trumpet—the ‘*last trump(et)*’ of I Corinthians 15: 52. Bible students will recognize this as the time for all the faithful down the millennia to be resurrected from their graves or, if still alive, to be transformed as spirit in the Kingdom of God.

And, of course, this is the time Jesus will return, at the ‘...*last trumpet*’ (I Thessalonians 4:16). It is, too, the time of that ‘third *woe*’. The surviving humans—despite all that God has been doing—will *still* be worshipping the powerful dictator (the ‘Beast’) who has ruled earth in recent years. This *woe* is known in Scripture as ‘...*the seven last plagues*’ (Revelation 15:1), which are ‘...*the vials of the wrath of God*’ (*ch* 16:1). (Their effect is described in this sixteenth chapter.)

Note that at this point Jesus has now returned, for the plagues are delivered ‘...*in the presence of the Lamb*’ (*ch* 14:10). The resurrection of believers has taken place at this moment and they are now, as spirit beings, family members of the Kingdom of God—and not physically affected by the horrors on earth.

Syria

We must ask, in light of these prophetic indicators, where the on-going Syrian (Heb. *Aram*) crisis fits in our depiction of the end. It may, of course, fall into the period of ‘*wars and rumours of wars*’ (Matthew 24:6), when, says Jesus, ‘...*the end is not yet*’. There have been such wars since mankind’s infancy! The Syrian conflict

may just be one of those repeated mad inter-faith battles (between Sunni and Shia Muslims) that have pock-marked history, spitting Satanic venom at the innocent bystanders. Or, it may spill over into a destructive war between major nations.

Caution

Moving forward to the ‘Seals’, the second of which also depicts wars—we ask, what marks the *opening* of the Seals? Or, have they already been opened? Certainly religious deception abounds—the first of the seven Seals. But that was also encountered by the apostles two millennia ago. As to the remainder of the Seals (two to six—wars, famine, disease, religious persecution, amazing activity in the heavens and on earth—Revelation 6), they too are reflected throughout human history.

Especially in the light of failed prophecy after failed prophecy, caution is urged. Ultimately the time for the return of Jesus is determined by the Father. They are in complete control of world events, using mankind’s incompetence to further the unwavering divine purpose.

One clear sign of the approaching end of man’s rule is ‘...*the abomination of desolation*’ (Matthew 24:15), interpreted by Luke as ‘...*when you see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that its destruction has come*’ (*ch* 21:20). It applied in 70AD, and will again apply at the end. Could this be a guide for us to the time of the opening of the Seals?

Prophesied is an end-time universal religious dictatorship intent on the destruction of Israel—false Christianity leading to global warfare, and an enactment of Psalm 83: ...*Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, so that the name Israel may be remembered no more*’.

Whatever the outcome of this festering sore in Syria, Christians can remain calm with the assurance of God’s loving care, and knowing His sovereign power (Psalm 91). We should each don our spiritual armour, as outlined in Ephesians chapter six, ‘... *that you may be able to withstand in the evil day [in adversity], and having done all, to stand*’. Ω