

15/6/2008

Rev Robert Denham

Lately I have listened to a few politicians in parliament. If history were an art gallery, then the former government's picture of economy before the last election had some shadows in a bright and sunny scenery. The new government is now painting that same period of time in dark and gloomy skies, looking forward to a new day which now has dawned.

George Orwell's novel 1984 depicted this aspect of political colouring of history as rooms full of people rewriting history according to which of the superpowers were now in favour, and which were enemies.

In the Bible we have books which record history. Around the time of Daniel, 2 histories were freshly penned. The first was Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings. Those 6 books are written with the style and themes of Deuteronomy, and tell of God's people entering the land, winning and losing, their problems and glories, the rise of kings, the sad division of the kingdom into 2, the fall of the northern state of Israel, and then the fall of Judah. 2 Kings ends with an exiled king of Judah eating and drinking at a Babylonian king's table.

As it documents the victories and losses, the twists and turns, the uniform theme (as found in Deut) is God promised greatness for the faithful, and devastation for the faithless. They lost their promised land because they were faithless, and failed to keep their promises to God.

But soon after Babylon fell, a 2nd history was recorded, which is 1 and 2 Chronicles. These books give a briefer overview of Judah's history. Israel is not mentioned, because it was faithless from the start. As you read Chronicles, you will see that there is a lot of stress on showing that when God's people were faithful, God blessed them in marvellous ways. It was written to encourage them to live in a godly way when they returned to the land, so they would never be kicked out again.

In both histories, God's people are on centre stage, as they show either what God was doing in the world through His people, or what influenced them. When we come to Daniel 11, we get the angel's message about the future for God's people, what will happen after their return to Canaan.

But what struck me about this chapter was that God's people are no longer centre stage. It is full of battles between Norths and Souths. Jerusalem is mentioned only briefly. The Persians and Alexander the Great are mentioned, but the major players are the North kingdom (Syria) and the South kingdom

(Egypt) controlled by the Seleucids and the Ptolomies.

The angel shows Daniel the future, showing an insignificant Jerusalem, as the big guns blast round her.

For the Jews walking back to the promised land, full of hope and trepidation at what God had in store for them, this prophecy came as a sobering reminder that the days of glory, the days of King David, the days of regional domination had passed. Now they would be small fish in a large pond. Egyptian armies will come from the South, and Seleucid and Roman armies will come from the North. Invading armies will ravage. Jews will be pawns on the board with no in the real powerplay. Others will dominate. Other prophets spoke of a coming king like David, the branch from the burnt stump, who'd bring glory to Jerusalem. They spoke of the Messiah who would restore Israel's boundaries.

Those prophecies would be much more appealing to the hopeful returning people. It would be so easy for them to hear the hope and downplay the insignificance. Let us look forward to the Messiah coming! Let us achieve greatness for our God! Let us bring back the good old days! Those prophets called on the Israelites to be faithful and to persevere, and through their faithfulness, God will restore them. Yet the message of Daniel 11 showed times of relative insignificance.

Only once in all of Daniel 11 are the Israelites called to be faithful, and that is in v32 *With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him.*

Every other time a ruler dominates it appears as if that ruler will come and go when the time is right. (v3) *Then a mighty king will appear...*(v6) *In those days she will be handed over...*(v14) *In those times many will rise...* (v19) *After this, he will turn ... but will stumble and fall...* (v29) *At the appointed time...* (v35) *It will still come at the appointed time...* (v40) *At the time of the end...*

No longer does the history of the world spin around the faithfulness of the Israelites. Now it seems that the clock is ticking for some event that is coming. Just as Daniel was told after his prayer in Daniel 9, the 70 weeks or 70 7s have begun with his prayer, and the events will roll on.

It almost appears fatalistic. It almost appears that there is nothing anyone can do to stop the immediate push of mankind to some event that God had promised.

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From our perspective life was being written with fresh ink every day, but from this prophecy revealed to Daniel, God had it all planned and the clock was ticking to the inevitable.

Daniel 11 does not give us the final scene. That will come in Daniel 12.

But with this almost mechanistic view of history, it reminds me of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24 about what life will be like before he comes again.

*You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of the birth pains.* (He then warned them of major persecutions. and then in v15 says) *So when you see standing in the holy place the abomination that causes desolation, spoken of through the prophet Daniel – let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.* The warning continued for a few sentences.

The Christians took the abomination to mean when the Romans enter Jerusalem to flee, and many Christians were saved from the slaughter that befell so many Jews.

But for us, we need to remember that Christians may not be in powerful positions, and we may see dreadful things around our world, but we are not to be alarmed. Help where we can, but everyone will know when Jesus returns. The wars and quakes etc are BrankstonHicks warning us that time is heading for his return. He is coming, but when? Only God knows the answer to that.