



PROPHECY *Today* UK

Bringing the unchanging word of God to a changing world

THE POST-PANDEMIC CHURCH

What will the future look like?

Rev Dr Clifford Hill

Despite the easing of restrictions in Britain, most churches are still closed. Even if a few people meet for prayer, at the time of writing they are forbidden to worship God in communal song. This is highly significant. The singing of praise to God can be traced back to the time of Moses when, under his leadership, all Israel sang to the Lord (Exodus 15).

Moses himself sang (Deuteronomy 32) to teach the people the great things God had done. We all

For Christians who believe in the sovereignty of God, even if we don't believe that God has actually sent the pandemic as an act of judgment, it is undeniable that he has allowed it to happen. We must therefore ask why.

It is always good to turn to Scripture to see if there are any parallels that might help us to answer such a question. In Isaiah 43 and 44 we have a specific word to the people of Judah, who were nearing the end of exile in Babylon. God first

Will the post-pandemic Church be more like the early Church in faith and practice?

remember the words of catchy melodies and the hymns we learned in childhood. A song helped Israel to remember their history and taught them theology. So, forbidding us to sing is a fundamental hindrance to evangelism, as well as to our personal relationships with the Lord.

reminded them of the great things he had done in delivering them from Egyptian slavery, which was God's greatest act of salvation in their history up to that point. Then he said, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!" (Isaiah 43:18-



20). In other words - 'Forget it! For I am going to do something far greater than that!'

The new thing God was foretelling comes in the next chapter: "For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants" (Isaiah 44:3). This was looking forward to the Messianic Age that began with the birth of Jesus and became a public reality on the Day of Pentecost.

500 years before the birth of Jesus, God intervened in the history of his covenant people and allowed Jerusalem to be destroyed; but he preserved a remnant in exile in Babylon. His purpose was to raise

a redeemed people freed from idolatry, institutional religion and dependence upon an earthly king.

God wanted a people whose only trust was in him, which would fulfil the promised new covenant foreseen in Jeremiah 31:33, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts, I will be their God and they will be my people."

This new relationship with God would be the outcome of God's Spirit being poured out upon the people. After Pentecost, the Gospel spread rapidly across the Roman Empire with little 'ekklesia' (gatherings of believers) sharing their faith with their friends and neighbours. The early Church survived ten periods of cruel persecution in its first 300 years.

So, what can we learn from all this history that God may be saying to the churches today?

Most church buildings are closed, singing is banned and no money is coming in to pay staff or maintain property. Can the institutions survive? If we are right in believing that things are going to get more difficult for Bible-believing Christians in Britain, some kind of underground network for believers might become necessary. Will the post-pandemic Church be more like the early Church in faith and practice? If not, why not - and how will it look? What changes should we be looking for?

■ The Rev Dr Clifford Hill is Prophecy Today UK's Founding Editor. Read his articles at www.prophecytoday.uk



OUR STORY

From 1985 to 2006, Prophecy Today was published in print and grew to become one of the most widely read Christian magazines in the UK. It was an iconic publication renowned for declaring the word of God for our times

In 2015, Prophecy Today was reborn online as Prophecy Today UK, taking a new format but keeping the same vision. Our small but dedicated team is led by Prophecy Today's original founder, the Rev Dr Clifford Hill, and operates under the umbrella of Issachar Ministries, publishing fresh editions each Friday. You can sign up on our website to receive these straight to your inbox, for free!

At Prophecy Today UK, we believe that God is as involved in the world today as he was in biblical times. We also believe that he longs to give Christians understanding about the world and how he is working out his purposes in it.

The next four pages contain excerpts from the contemporary ministry of Prophecy Today UK, which includes commentary on public affairs, teaching articles and book reviews.



Covers of the original Prophecy Today magazine, in print 1985-2006

Every one of our articles published since 2015 is available on our website – find us at www.prophecytoday.uk.

A SAFE PAIR OF DIVINE HANDS

Amos was one of the earliest Literary Prophets. A contemporary of Joel and Hosea, he recorded his burden in “the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.” Through him and other contemporary prophets, the Lord began to remind Israel of the terms of his covenant with them and the consequences of failing to adhere to it (Leviticus 26:1-46).

Amos pointed out that if God was to act righteously in judging neighbouring nations, he had to use the same standard towards his own people. Amos's core burden is expressed from the start of chapter 3 and climaxes in 9:8-10. Chapter nine begins with a vision of God's impending judgment on his unrepentant people.

Even though Amos was speaking over 150 years before the fall of Jerusalem, verse 8 has a finality about it. Assuring them he was watching their sinful nation, the Lord declared, “I will destroy it from the face of the earth.” He continued, “Yet I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob”, thus indicating that a faithful remnant would survive all that was to come.

Then in verse 9, the Lord restated his intention: “I will command, and will sift the house of Israel among all nations, as grain is sifted in a sieve...”. This severe warning was followed with a profound promise to those in Israel who feared him, “...yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground.” This promise was not to the whole nation, but to the few who were still clinging to the Lord.

The promise of Amos 9:9 was directed at those who remained faithful in the midst of a rebellious community. It assured them that no matter how hard the shaking, not even the least genuine believer would be lost in the process.

Amos 9 shows us that the Lord is a God of righteousness who administers justice on the earth, even today. Whilst we often misrepresent his judgments as anger, they are usually inspired by a desire to refine those who believe in him, separating out the wheat from the unbelieving

chaff. Elsewhere the parallel image of the refiner's fire (Isaiah 4:2-6; Zechariah 13:7-9, 14:1-7; Malachi 3:1-6) emphasises the removal of dross from the hearts of those who believe.

Many believers are sensing that the Lord has moved the world into a new phase of history. There is a growing expectation that long-predicted

troubles will quickly increase. No longer can Christians, especially in the West where we have been free from persecution for three centuries, expect not to suffer for Christ. There is a growing sense that our Father's intention in allowing global rebellion to increase is to purify his people prior to his Son's return.



In the parable of the wheat and tares, Jesus promised that at the right time the tares would be taken out of his kingdom first and burned (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). In Amos 9:9 God assured the faithful in Israel that when the whole nation was shaken in a sieve, not even the weakest of them would be overlooked. With the same confidence Jesus assured his disciples that after the unrighteous are removed, all “the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” He concluded, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

Bible quotes from the NKJV.

The full version of this article is available on the Prophecy Today UK website. Search ‘divine hands’

■ Randall Hardy

Jesus is Jewish

Does the Messiah's skin colour matter?

Amidst all the talk arising out of the Black Lives Matter protests about the ethnicity of Jesus – whether black, white, or somewhere in between – many choose to ignore the fact that he is Jewish.

Understandably, different cultures want to present him in their own image, but nevertheless he came first “to his own” (John 1:11) as the long-promised Jewish Messiah, and will return (to Jerusalem) as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David” (Revelation 5:5).

When our Lord began his ministry as a rabbi, he said he had not come to abolish the Law of Moses, but to fulfil it (Matthew 5:17),

and went on to emphasise the importance of every jot of the Law's requirements (v18). He also fulfilled the Jewish feasts, coming to live (or tabernacle) with us, being sacrificed as our Passover Lamb and rising from the dead on the Feast of Firstfruits.

Although Jesus indeed loved everyone, discipleship wasn't dependent on the ethnicity of his hearers, but on their humility. “Blessed are the meek”, he said, “for they will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). Jesus encouraged us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44); this surely applies to the victims of prejudice today, not



least our fellow believers who are being murdered by the thousand in oppressive regimes around the world.

Jesus is Jewish. Focusing on this truth will greatly enrich our faith and ensure we maintain a right perspective on the social and political issues of our day.

■ Charles Gardner



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LAWLESSNESS IN THE LAST DAYS

Are you ready to stand firm?

In recent months, we have witnessed much lawlessness in the streets, both here in the UK and, to a greater extent, in the USA.

In the New Testament, the Greek word translated as 'lawlessness' is 'anomia', which literally means 'a state of being without law'. It refers to a conscious or unconscious disregard of the law of God, as embodied, completed and taught by the Lord himself (Matthew 5:17-19).

Lawlessness is sin (1 John 3:4) and the Lord hates it (Hebrews 1:9; Matthew 7:21-23). It is not solely a question of deeds; the condition of our inner person is just as important. The Lord addressed the scribes and Pharisees, saying "outwardly [you] appear righteous to men, but

inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matthew 23:27-28). As followers of the Lord, our hearts are to be steadfastly faithful to him (Romans 10:10).

As the birth pangs of the end of the age happen around us with increasing frequency and intensity (see Matthew 24:1-8), we should also expect to see an increase in lawlessness (Matthew 24:12). This will eventually lead to the coming of the Anti-Christ, referred to in 2 Thessalonians as the "man of lawlessness" (2:3, 8-9); a man opposed to the Lord in every way.

The Lord warned that this increase in lawlessness will also affect professing believers. As times get harder and persecution gathers pace, the love of many professing

believers will grow cold (Matthew 24:12) and they will cease to obey God. These will exchange love of God and love of their neighbours for love of self when things get difficult. Tragically, they will align themselves with the Anti-Christ by not receiving "the love of the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:10).

Obviously, none of us wants to be counted among that number. So, now is the time to start preparing for what lies ahead. What is the state of our faithfulness and love now? Is it hot, cold or lukewarm (Revelation 3:14-18)? All who are led by the Spirit to repent are invited to a place of renewed fellowship with God, where our sins are forgiven and remembered no more (Revelation 3:20; Romans 4:7; Hebrews 10:17).

The Lord desires to purify for himself a people for his own possession, who are slaves to righteousness and zealous for good deeds (Romans 6:19; Titus 2:14). Therefore, let us resolve to have nothing to do with lawlessness or darkness; for we are, indeed, "the temple of the living God" (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

Bible quotes from the NASB.

The full version of this article is available on the Prophecy Today UK website. Search 'lawlessness'

■ Ben Robinson



The Skies Darken

How can Christians pray for Hong Kong?

At 3pm on 21 May 2020, the skies over Beijing became exceptionally dark. 45 minutes later a lightning storm broke out across the capital city. On that day, at the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) National Congress annual meeting, plans were formulated to impose a new National Security Law (NSL) on Hong Kong.

The NSL became law on Wednesday 1 July, curtailing civil and political freedoms in Hong Kong, forbidding

actions deemed to criticise the CCP and rewarding those who report on their fellow citizens. Within hours, the 300 protesters daring to demonstrate against the new law had been arrested.

The NSL is in direct opposition to the legally binding treaty signed between Britain and China in 1997, which guaranteed autonomy for Hong Kong for 50 years (ie until 2047). It will have a devastating effect on Hong Kong and its people.

But it is no surprise: the CCP has a long track record of ignoring human rights in favour of state control. Since the 1950s, Chinese Communism has caused the deaths of tens of millions of people, with any protests brutally shut down.

China has banned sales of Bible translations other than the CCP's revised version, which removes the first Commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me". Quotes

Continued over

'OUTSIDE IN' - SEEKING TO SERVE 'OUT OF CHURCH' BELIEVERS



In recent years, a growing number of faithful Christians in the UK have become disillusioned with current expressions of Sunday church available to them, or have left altogether.

They are not falling away from the faith, but rather acting in line with their consciences. Unable to find or attend a congregation that affirms the authority of the Bible, they are searching for fellowship in other ways, as they go through a 'wilderness' season with the Lord.

For Christians in this position, **Prophecy Today UK** is pleased to commend 'Outside In', a new area of ministry supporting and connecting believers who are on the 'outside' of current 'church' life but still very much 'in' the Body of Christ.

If you would like more information about this initiative, please e-mail outsidein@issacharministries.co.uk or write to 'Outside In' at Issachar Ministries, Office 5, Shannon Court, High Street, Sandy, BEDS, SG19 1AG.



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from President Xi Jinping's speeches now replace the Ten Commandments that once adorned the walls of many churches, alongside pictures of him and Chairman Mao. Thousands of churches are being closed or bulldozed. One preacher explained that "The Communist Party's ultimate goal is to become God."

This is all well-known, you may say, but what can we do? First, it is important for Christians to understand Marxism, which is alive in the West and is as much a challenge to the Church here as in explicitly Communist countries like China.

Secondly, we can pray alongside and for our brothers and sisters in Hong Kong and China, for the Lord's guidance and mercy for them. Christians in mainland China have

suffered severe oppression under the CCP; Christians in Hong Kong fear a similar fate.

The CCP is setting itself up to be 'god' and is exceedingly oppressive. The Lord has much to say about those seeking to replace him. He hears the cries of the oppressed and the poor. In his perfect time, the Lord will bring their suffering to an end and their persecutors to justice (Psalm 72:1-4; 12-14). The CCP came to power 71 years ago; is it time to ask the Lord when he will be bringing this 'king' down, in the same way he brought the USSR down?

Lord, we pray for your will to be done and your Kingdom to come. Be glorified across the earth!

■ Rachel Hamble

ISSACHAR MINISTRIES UK

Prophecy Today UK is a project of Issachar Ministries, a resourcing ministry which derives its name from the Tribe of Issachar (1 Chronicles 23:32).

Issachar Ministries seeks to provide biblical teaching on current issues by understanding the times, listening to the Lord and knowing what should be done.

Are you able to support Prophecy Today UK financially, or would you like to receive more information about the ministry?

Telephone 07759 042315 (mobile), or fill out the following form and post it to Issachar Ministries, Office 5, Shannon Court, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 1AG.

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REVIEWS

Prophecy Today UK reviews books, DVDs and other resources, both old and new, which we hope will bless your walk with God. Read the full reviews of the books below in the 'Resources' section on www.prophecytoday.uk

Approaching an Open Gate

Stephen Bishop

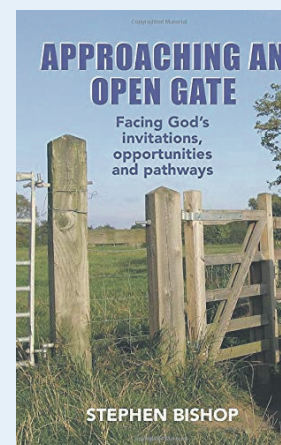
Bible-Bish-Books, 2020, 132pp

£5.99 (paperback). Purchase from Amazon. Also available as an e-book

Bishop's latest book follows his usual format of many short chapters on a common theme, providing material for daily devotions or group discussion. Here the theme is 'gates' and the 35 chapters fall into four sections which reflect the book's subtitle: 'Facing God's invitations, opportunities and pathways'.

The first section explores the times when Jesus said 'Come', and also includes familiar Old Testament passages such as the invitation in Isaiah 55, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters". God's gates offer us opportunities to draw closer to him (eg "Enter his gates with thanksgiving..."). They also challenge us to find the paths beyond them; a gate is an access point, not a destination. Some need a firm push before they open!

You may be surprised how much the Bible has to say about gates. Not least is Jesus's own 'I am' statement that he is The Gate by which his sheep enter into eternal life. Overall, there is plenty of material for the author to explore and present to us for further reflection. ■



Give Up the Purple

Julyan Lidstone

Langham Global Library, 2019, 106pp

£7.99 (paperback). Purchase from Amazon. Also available as an e-book

This book searches for a biblical understanding of leadership which is right for all cultures. It draws lessons from Jesus and the Apostles who subverted the dominant cultural values of their day to raise up servant-hearted leaders.

The author and his wife ministered to Turks, Iranians and Arabs for nearly 40 years, working as church planters and evangelists both abroad and in the UK. The book arose out of concern for how poor leadership hinders the progress of the Gospel. With sensitivity to cultural differences, the author contrasts the humility of Christ with leaders from honour-driven backgrounds who show early fruitfulness but later become dominant, controlling and even abusive.

The intriguing title refers to the purple toga, a symbol of worldly power worn by the Roman Emperor and the cream of the aristocracy. Following the example of Constantine, church leaders began to wear gaudy robes of office to display their supposed supremacy. Despite its Middle Eastern focus, this book is for leaders from all cultural backgrounds as well as for anyone struggling under ungodly authority. It may also inspire prayer for church leaders to seek a less worldly and more Christ-centred ministry. ■

