

PRESSING ON TOWARDS THE MARK

Those of us who attended the PFI Convention enjoyed the celebration of 40 years of PFI. Over that time we have seen a tremendous growth in the number of indigenous congregations in Israel - from around 2 in 1969 to over 100 now. There is no doubt that God raised up Prayer for Israel, so that He might do a work in that land. Frequently God causes prayer to arise as a preparation for a work to follow. Daniel spent time in prayer before the 70 years of exile ended. Nehemiah fasted and prayed regarding the state of Jerusalem's walls before God caused Nehemiah to return to the land and supervise their rebuilding. It is not for us to take credit, however, for something that the Lord placed upon our hearts, but rather thank God that we are co-workers with God, and all the glory goes to Him.

It is, however, extraordinary that after two millennia so many Jews are turning to the

Lord. After the initial response in those early days following on from Pentecost, few Jews have responded to the gospel. Luther, who so longed to see the Jews turn to the Lord, in the end cursed them for their lack of response. So explicit was his curse upon them that those very words may have sown the seeds that led to the holocaust.

There is a significant incident in the life of Christ when He Himself cursed the fig tree for not having any fruit, and yet it was not the season for fruit (Mark 11:13). To many this will seem irrational behaviour, but the fig tree represents Israel and, as in the parable of the fig tree in Luke 13, Jesus was looking for the fruit of repentance. However, it was revealed to Paul that there was a veil over the hearts of the Jews and a partial hardening of their hearts until the fulness of the gentiles has come into the Kingdom. Then the time for fruit among the Jews would come.

We are beginning to see that happen - at least partially. Our response then to the last 40 years is not to look back with sinful pride, but to realise that there is still more

to be done until “all Israel is saved”. There are many more battles to face - literally - because out of its desperate plight Israel will have only one place to look (not to America for armaments), but to God for deliverance and salvation. We must watch every attempt of the enemy to destroy Israel and cry to God on her behalf. We must pray that other Jews will return to the land that God may have dealings with them there. That is not to say that God cannot save Jews in other countries, but God has made it plain that He will gather them back to the land and give them a new heart. God will also be sanctified through their return (Ezekiel 36), and even in the overthrow of the forces of Magog (Ezekiel 38 & 39). Perhaps that will give too an opportunity for many Muslims to find the Lord, for it will be Muslim nations which will come against Israel.

The purposes of God are never static. He is ever seeking to bring others to Himself. He wants to bring His people to maturity and His Church ready to be the bride of Christ. It means that we need to be constantly aware of what God is wanting to do. This is partly revealed to us by His Holy Spirit as we observe events around us, and partly by His Word.

Many are ignorant of the signs of the times, and therefore are not ready for what might be in store for His Church. Jesus warned that in the world we would have tribulation, but many expect the situation to get better and better with the Church ruling the world. Scripture and present trends ought to make it abundantly clear that the world is going in the opposite direction. Human rights are giving everybody greater rights except it would seem to Christians. Gay rights now dominate the rights of believers so much so that in some professions it is becoming very difficult to be a Christian in the work place. Jesus stated

that before His return it would be like the days of Noah and Lot. In the one case, the world would continue as if God did not exist, or that judgment was coming. In Lot's case, homosexuality was dominant, leading to God's judgment. We ought to be preparing for the return of the Lord with the Church seeking to purify herself to be the bride of Messiah.

In any case, every believer ought to be making progress to maturity. John addressed believers as babes, young men or fathers. Of course in every Assembly of God there will be those who are babes and others who are mature, but if the babes remain babes, then there is something woefully amiss. Unfortunately, because of the lack of teaching many remain in a juvenile state.

Again, Paul would remind us that we need to be changed from glory to glory into His likeness, by the Spirit of God. Where the Spirit is, there is liberty - that is, freedom to change. We need to ask what spiritual growth there is in our own lives and within the Church. We need to pray for God's people to be mature in facing the present situation, and in understanding the Word of God. As believers we need to mature in character, possessing increasingly the character of Jesus. It is not enough to pray for Israel alone, as important as that is, God wants to bring His saints and the Church to maturity. There is more to be done in every department.

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